

A Guide to the Leesburg Civil War Collection, 1861-1865

Leesburg Civil War Collection 1861-1865
1861-1865



A Collection in the Thomas Balch Library M 075
Thomas Balch Library
2006
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History

Processed by: Elizabeth E. Preston

Title Statement

A Guide to the Leesburg Civil War Collection, 1861-1865

Subtitle: Leesburg Civil War Collection

Collection: M 075

Author: Elizabeth E. Preston

Publication Statement

Date: © 2006 By Thomas Balch Library. All rights reserved.

Publisher: Thomas Balch Library

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Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from MS Word, created by Elizabeth E. Preston, 30 July 2012

Language Usage: Description is in English

Revision Description

2013-11-21 Converted to schema conforming EAD by dtd2schema.vh.xsl.

Descriptive Summary

Collection number

M 075

Language

English

Abstract

This collection consists of nine manuscript letters and seven *cartes de visite* (CDV). The collection was brought together by Ben Byrnes, a former resident of Leesburg. He began acquiring items in the late 1990s, but purchased the bulk of the collection after 2009. Several of the letters have transcriptions provided by manuscript sellers. Six of the letters were written by soldiers who had been present at the Battle of Ball's Bluff. Three letters concerning Jonas Fuller were included in the collection because Fuller died in Leesburg. Six *cartes de visite* are of Union soldiers who were present at Ball's Bluff. The seventh CDV is of Milton M. Rogers, a Confederate officer who enlisted in Leesburg. The collection also includes two packets of biographical information on the authors of the letters and the subjects of the *cartes de visite*. Byrnes gathered much of this information from internet sites and from information provided by manuscript sellers.

Collector

Ben Byrnes, Cumberland Gap, TN

Repository

Thomas Balch Library

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection open for research.

Use Restrictions

Physical characteristics and conditions affect use of this material. Photocopying not permitted. Visual materials may require special handling.

Acquisition Information

Ben Byrnes, Cumberland Gap, TN

Processing Information

Elizabeth E. Preston, 30 July 2012

Preferred Citation

Leesburg Civil War Collection, 1861-1865, (M 075), Thomas Balch Library, Leesburg, VA.

Accruals

2012.0096

Alternative Form Available

None

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Ball's Bluff National Cemetery Plat, 1871 (OM 013); Civil War Letter, Leesburg, VA 23 June, n.y. (SC 0090); Civil War Research Collection, 1859-1865 (SC 0095); Elijah V. White's Ball's Bluff Address, 1887 (SC 0023); REHAU, Inc. Head Office Master Plan, Historical and Archeological Investigations at Fort Evans, April 1998 (SC 0030). Please see the online catalogue for published items on the Battle of Ball's Bluff and Leesburg in the Civil War.

Bibliography

AncestryLibrary.com. www.ancestrylibrary.com. 1850 and 1860 U.S. Census Records (accessed 2 July 2012). History of the One hundred forty-first regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1862-1865

The Battle of Ball's Bluff "The Leesburg Affair:" October 21, 1861

Leesburg Civil War Collection, 1861-1865 (M 075), Thomas Balch Library, Leesburg, VA.

A Little Short of Boats: The Battles of Ball's Bluff and Edward's Ferry, October 21-22, 1861

Town of Leesburg. "Leesburg and the Civil War: 'A perfect sneering nest of Rebels' (1861-1865)."
<http://www.leesburgva.gov/index.aspx?page=597> (accessed 6 July 2012).

Official Record of the War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies

Other Finding Aid

PastPerfect catalogue records

Technical Requirements

None

Historical Information

Confederate forces occupied Leesburg, Virginia in the fall of 1861. In response to skirmishes near Harper's Ferry and Union troop movements across the Potomac River in Maryland, Confederate forces left Leesburg on 17 October 1861, only to return two days later. Major General George McClellan (1826-1885) began probing along the Potomac in an effort to discover why the Confederates had evacuated the town. McClellan ordered Brigadier General Charles P. Stone (1826-1887), encamped across the river near Poolesville, MD, to stage a "slight demonstration" and gauge the Confederate reaction.

The demonstration elicited little visible effect, and Stone ordered a reconnaissance patrol to determine any Confederate reaction. About twenty men from the 15th Massachusetts Infantry crossed the river as night fell on 20 October. There they found what they took to be a Confederate camp, but was really a stand of trees. Stone responded to the mistaken intelligence by ordering a raid on the camp, to take place early the next morning.

On 21 October, Colonel Charles Devens (1820-1891) led 300 troops from the 15th Massachusetts across the river while Stone led a smaller group across several miles south at Edward's Ferry. Devens found no enemy camp and quickly reported the mistake, requesting new orders. The new orders were to move towards Leesburg as a reconnaissance. A serving U.S. Senator from Oregon, Colonel Edward Baker (1811-1861), had recently joined the Union forces in Maryland during a Congressional recess and was given command of a brigade under Stone. Stone ordered Baker to Ball's Bluff to make a full report of the situation. En route, Baker crossed paths with one of Devens' messengers, who reported that Devens had engaged the Confederates. Baker ordered more troops to cross the Potomac; as there had been no plan for a full attack, however, there were very few boats available, and the crossing was painfully slow. Approximately 1,720 Union troops crossed from Maryland into Virginia.

The fighting continued sporadically for much of the day, and intensified significantly in the afternoon. Fresh troops from the 17th Mississippi arrived late in the day and broke the Union line just before dusk. The Confederates held the high ground of Ball's Bluff, forcing many Union soldiers into the river. The Union suffered 223 dead, including Colonel Baker, 226 wounded, and 553 captured. The Confederacy suffered 36 dead, 117 wounded, and 2 captured.

The Union loss at the Battle of Ball's Bluff resulted in an investigation by a Congressional Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. General Stone was accused of instigating a battle without proper preparations, leading directly to loss of life and the battle. Stone appeared before the committee on 5 January 1862 and testified; he was arrested in February and imprisoned for seven months with no formal charges. Stone was eventually released, and returned to duty.

Over the course of the Civil War, Leesburg changed hands more than 150 times. The town suffered frequent raids and skirmishes, and the constant flow of soldiers brought sickness and deprivation to the people.

Scope and Content

This collection consists of nine manuscript letters and seven *cartes de visite* (CDV). The collection was brought together by Ben Byrnes, a former resident of Leesburg. He began acquiring items in the late 1990s, but purchased the bulk of the collection after 2009. Several of the letters have transcriptions provided by manuscript sellers.

Six of the letters were written by soldiers who had been present at the Battle of Ball's Bluff. Three letters concerning Jonas Fuller were included in the collection because Fuller died in Leesburg.

Letter 1: William Stone (b. 1842) to his brother on 15 October 1861. At the time of writing, Stone was a private in Company C of the 19th Massachusetts Infantry, and was encamped at "Vaughn's (Vaughan's) Battery near Edward's Ferry." He had enlisted in August in Boston, and this was his first letter home since leaving Massachusetts. Much of the letter is spent describing daily activities of the soldiers and his duties as Secretary of the Post. He discusses the economy of camp life and relates the story of a payroll mistake that left him with extra money. He says that "Gold and silver is pretty plenty around here now" among the soldiers, and that local houses are hard pressed to keep up with the demand for food. Stone goes on to describe a local plantation, which he says has the "appearance of shabbiness and inattention," though the household is quite "aristocratic" and holds a number of slaves. Stone then describes a "turning out" of the company the night of 14 October, caused by Confederate movements on the other side of the river. Stone served throughout the Civil War; he was commissioned into the 9th Veteran Reserve Corps in August 1863 and into the 7th Veteran Reserve Corps in March 1865. He was wounded three times, including at Gettysburg, and survived the war.

Letter 2: George Gray (b.1824), written to his son Arthur (b. 1847) on 6 November 1861 from Camp Benton, near Poolesville, MD. Gray, from Waltham, MA, enlisted in August of 1861 as a wagon driver in Company I of the 20th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. At the time of the letter, Arthur was 14 years old. Gray's letter is full of fatherly advice, and encourages the boy to keep his belongings in good order and to do well in school. He talks about the "five good brass bands within hearing" of the camp and about the men he has seen whom he knows from home. He asks that Arthur send him paper and word of how things on the farm fare. George Gray survives the war.

Letter 3: Danforth H. Green (1837-1870) on 15 November 1861, at Camp Bates, near Poolesville, MD. Green signed his letter "Danford," but all official documents and publications have his name as "Danforth." Green mustered into Company D of the 3rd New York Cavalry after enlisting in Maryland, NY. His letter is addressed to his "Distant Cousin," but Green makes it clear that he is writing to his whole family. He discusses food in the camp, and mentions that he buys food from local slaves to supplement his diet. Green writes of having seen one fight, probably the Battle of Ball's Bluff, and brags that he "felt as cool as I would drinking a glass of Jacob's cider." He also mentions that General Stone and "all of the Colonels . . . have gone to Washington to hold a council of war." Green ends the letter by instructing all his kinsmen to write to him as soon as possible. Green survived the war.

Letter 4: Mansfield P. Hatch (b. 1834) to "Mr. Merrill," written 16 November 1861 from Washington, D.C. Hatch, a musician with the 20th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry band, enlisted in September 1861. His letter is full of details of camp life, including football, attempts by Confederate troops to get wheat and straw from an island in the Potomac, and the papers he had managed to acquire. He asks that Merrill prompt people to write him as he does not "know what to do with myself these long evenings." Hatch deserts and reenlists several times, and survives the war.

Letter 5: Charles Devens (1820-1891) to Nathan Hayward, dated 12 January 1862. Devens was a colonel when he wrote the letter. He enlisted at that rank in May 1861 in Worcester, MA and was commissioned into the Massachusetts 3rd Battalion Rifle. He was later commissioned into the 15th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry and was eventually promoted to Major General. Prior to his military career, Devens earned a law degree from Harvard. He practiced law in Massachusetts, served as a state senator (1848-1849) and as a U.S. marshal (1849-1853). After he mustered out, Devens returned to his law practice, served as a judge and became attorney general of the U.S. (1877-1881). Devens died on 7 January 1891. Nathan Hayward (1830-1864) was a graduate of Harvard, and enlisted as assistant surgeon in the 20th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry in July 1861. He was promoted to surgeon soon after. Hayward served throughout the war, and was captured at the Battle of Antietam (Sharpsburg) in September 1862. Hayward survived the war, but died in a cholera outbreak in 1866. In this letter, Devens seems to be rebuking Hayward and questions his honor. It appears that statements from Hayward's writings had been published, and Devens says that even Hayward admitted that they were false. Hayward refused, however, to retract the statements, even under threat of court martial. It is unclear what the statements concerned. Given the date of the letter, however, it is possible that they had to do with the congressional investigation into General Stone's conduct during the Battle of Ball's Bluff.

Letter 6: Jonas Fuller (d. 1862) to his father, Ransom Fuller (1819-1886). Fuller enlisted in Bradford County, PA as a Private in Company A, 141st Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry in August of 1862. He spent much of his time in the army at Camp Prescott Smith in Arlington, VA. Fuller is the author of two letters in this collection, and the subject of one additional letter. The first letter, written at Camp Prescott Smith, was addressed to his father on 28 September 1862, not long after his enlistment. In it, Fuller describes his guard duty and expresses concern that his father was examined and found fit to serve, leaving him vulnerable to a draft. Also included in the letter is a note from William Blocher (1835-25 October 1862) to Ransom Fuller. Blocher enlisted with Jonas Fuller and also served in Company A, 141st Pennsylvania Infantry. He also expresses surprise that Ransom was found fit to serve, but doubts that there will be a draft. Blocher goes on to give a brief description of daily life in the regiment. Blocher dies of disease the following 25 October 1862

in Washington, D.C.

Letter 7: Jonas Fuller to his parents, 8 October 1862. Fuller was again writing from Camp Prescott Smith. He describes his daily routine, which consists mainly of drills. He tells his parents that his regiment has orders to have two days of rations on hand at all times in case they are ordered to march. The uncertainty of Fuller's situation is clear when he writes that they "may stay here 2 months and we may leave in 24 hours." Fuller also describes exploring a house while on advance guard, saying "I never saw the like in Bradford it had been a perfect paradise. The wall was marble and the rooms that were papered went ahead of everything that ever was in Herrick, or ever will be." This letter includes a postmarked envelope addressed to "Mr. Ransome Fuller."

Letter 8: Joseph H. Hurst (1836-1896) to Ransom Fuller, 2 November 1862. Hurst enlisted as a sergeant with Jonas Fuller in August 1862. His residence was listed as Bradford County, PA, and it appears that he was known to the Fuller family. Hurst served throughout the war and mustered out in 1865. He rejoined the army in 1867 and served until he retired in 1893, reaching the rank of captain. In this letter, Hurst wrote to Ransom Fuller to relate the details of Jonas Fuller's unexpected death. The 141st Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry has left Camp Prescott Smith and moved to Poolesville, MD in October. On Friday, 31 October, they marched to Leesburg. During that move, Hurst says, Fuller began complaining and found it difficult to complete the march. It was clear that Fuller was quite ill the next morning, and the camp doctor diagnosed him as suffering from "Pernicious or Congestive Fever." Hurst writes that he was "not sensible from 3 o'clock in the afternoon until he died" at 2:30 am 2 November 1862. Hurst details the burial arrangements and the disposition of Fuller's personal belongings, and tells of Leesburg women who laid flowers on his body and offered what help they could. It is clear that Hurst was deeply touched by the actions of the women and by the death of his friend.

Letter 9: Horace A. Derry (1838-c. 1925) to his mother, Mary Derry (b. 1809), 7 January 1863, Stanton Hospital, Washington, D.C. Derry enlisted in Company D, 20th Massachusetts Infantry in August 1861. He was captured during the Battle of Ball's Bluff and held as a prisoner of war. He was paroled on 19 February 1862. Derry was wounded at Fredericksburg on 11 December 1862, and was eventually discharged for these wounds in April 1863. In the December following his discharge he married Stella Mabery, whom he mentions several times in this letter. The letter was written on 7 January 1863 from Stanton Hospital in Washington, D.C., where Derry was recovering from the gunshot wound he received in Fredericksburg. He describes the placement and severity of the wound, as well as the treatment he received in camp and in the hospital. Derry tells his mother that many men are dying of their wounds after losing limbs.

Six *cartes de visites* are of Union soldiers who were present at Ball's Bluff. The seventh CDV is of Milton M. Rogers, a Confederate officer who enlisted in Leesburg.

M_075_001: Anthony Earle (1839-1913). Earle enlisted in August 1861 as a private in Company D, 15th Massachusetts Infantry. He was taken prisoner at the Battle of Ball's Bluff. Earle served in several regiments over the course of the war. He signed this photograph as a 1st lieutenant in the 61st Massachusetts Infantry.

M_075_002: Charles Lawrence Pierson (1834-1920). Pierson enlisted as a 1st lieutenant in the 20th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry in July 1861. He was captured at the Battle of Ball's Bluff and exchanged on 27 January 1862. He was wounded at Spotsylvania and Weldon Railroad, and was promoted to brigadier general (by brevet). This CDV is not dated.

M_075_003: Paul Joseph Revere (1832-1863). Revere was the grandson of Paul Revere. He enlisted at Boston and was commissioned as a major in the 20th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry in July 1861. Revere was promoted to brigadier-general (by brevet) in 1863. He was wounded and taken prisoner at the Battle of Ball's Bluff, wounded again in battles at Antietam and Gettysburg. Revere died of wounds received at Gettysburg on 3 July 1863. The CDV is not dated.

M_075_004: Milton M. Rogers (1838-1889). Rogers enlisted in April 1861 at Leesburg. He mustered into Company C of the 17th Virginia Infantry. In May 1862 he was commissioned into Company A of the 38th Virginia Light Artillery. Rogers was taken prisoner at Suffolk, VA in April 1863. The CDV is inscribed on the verso, "For Mrs. M. with much love, M.W.R." and "Mr. Milton Rogers married a daughter of Uncle Billy and Aunt Ruth." M.W.R. is Molly White Rogers, the wife of Milton Rogers and daughter of William Rogers. The image is undated.

M_075_005: CDV, Charles Pomeroy Stone (1826-1887). Stone graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and served in the U.S.-Mexican War. He continued in active military service until he retired in 1856 and worked in banking. Stone was recalled to the army in 1861 and was made a colonel of the 14th U.S. Infantry and a brigadier-general of volunteers. He took command of division in the Potomac River valley, and was the commanding officer during the Battle of Ball's Bluff. Stone was interrogated by a Congressional Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War in January 1862. Though never charged, Stone was detained in prison for seven months. After the end of the Civil War, Stone worked as an engineer for a mining company in Virginia. In 1870, he went to Egypt and became the chief of the general staff of the Egyptian army. Stone returned from Egypt in 1883 and took up his work as an engineer. He died in New York City in 1887. The CDV is undated, inscribed to Colonel [John S.] Clark (1823-1912), and is signed "Chas. Stone, Col 14th Inf. BG vol."

M_075_006: CDV, Bernard Barton Vassall (1835-1894). Vassall mustered into service in August 1861 at Oxford, MA as a 2nd lieutenant with the 15th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. He was captured at the Battle of Ball's Bluff and held prisoner at Richmond, but was eventually exchanged. Vassall left the military in November 1862. He returned to Worcester County, MA, married, and worked as a civil servant until his death in 1894. The CDV is signed but undated, and was inscribed to "Lt. F W [Francis Warren] Polley" (1837-1899).

M_075_007: CDV, Horace M. Warren (1842-1864). Warren, a resident of South Reading, MA, enlisted in April 1861 as a private in Company B, 5th Massachusetts Infantry. He also served in the 20th, 50th, and 59th Massachusetts Infantries over the course of the Civil War. Warren was wounded at Ball's Bluff and Totopotomy Creek, and died of wounds received at Weldon Railroad on 19 August 1864. By the time of his death, Warren had reached the rank of major. The undated CDV notes that Warren died "while acting in the capacity of assistant Adjt. Gen'l."

The collection also includes two packets of biographical information on the authors of the letters and the subjects of the *cartes de visite*. Byrnes gathered much of this information from internet sites and from information provided by manuscript sellers.

Arrangement

Chronological and alphabetical

Contents List

Box 1

Folder 1: William Stone to his brother (ALS, 19 pages, includes transcription), 15 October 1861

Folder 2: George Gray to his son Arthur (ALS, 4 pages and envelope, includes transcription), 6 November 1861

Folder 3: Danforth H. Green (ALS, 4 pages, includes transcription), 15 November 1861

Folder 4: Mansfield P. Hatch to Merrill (ALS, 2 pages, includes transcription), 16 November 1861

Folder 5: Charles Devens to Nathan Hayward (ALS, 2 pages, includes transcription), 12 January 1862

Folder 6: Jonas Fuller and William Blocher to Ransom Fuller (ALS, 4 pages, includes transcription), 28 September 1862

Folder 7: Jonas Fuller to his parents (ALS, 4 pages and envelope), 8 October 1862

Folder 8: Joseph H. Hurst to Ransom Fuller (ALS, 6 pages, includes transcription), 2 November 1862

Folder 9: Horace A. Derry to Mary Derry (ALS, 6 pages, includes transcription), 7 January 1863

Folder 10: Anthony Earle, CDV

Folder 11: Charles Lawrence Pierson, CDV

Folder 12: Paul Joseph Revere, CDV

Folder 13: Milton M. Rogers, CDV

Folder 14: Charles Pomeroy Stone, CDV

Folder 14: Charles F. Emery Stone, CDV

Folder 15: Bernard Barton Vassall, CDV

Folder 16: Horace M. Warren, CDV

Folder 17: Biographical and historical information on the cartes de visite collection

Folder 18: Biographical and historical information on the letters

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