

Terrill-Porterfield Families, Papers regarding the Civil War and Other Material A&M 3496

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1716-1994



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Abstract

Digital and microfilm copies of papers of the Terrill family of Hot Springs, Bath County, Virginia, a family divided by conflicting sympathies during the American Civil War; and papers of the Porterfield family, featuring primarily those of George A. Porterfield, who married Emily Cordelia Terrill, and who commanded a Confederate force that was defeated at Philippi in western Virginia on June 3, 1861 in what became known as the "Philippi Races." There is an addendum of original copies of five William Henry Terrill letters dating from the Civil War. See scope and content note for details.

Creator

Terrill family

Extent

0.56 Linear Feet Summary: 6.75 in. (2 reels of microfilm, 1.75 in. each); (15 DVDs in index card box, 3 in.); (5 items in 1 folder, 0.25 in.)

Extent

55.1 Gigabytes 723 .tif files

Physical Location

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Repository

West Virginia and Regional History Center

Administrative Information

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Biographical / Historical

William Henry Terrill (1800-1877) was a lawyer and legislator from Bath County, Virginia. A staunch secessionist, he served as the provost marshal for his home county. Terrill had eight children with his first wife, Elizabeth Pitzer, five of whom survived into adulthood. All four of Terrill's sons served during the Civil War in some capacity. George, James, and Philip fought for the Confederacy, while William choose to remain loyal to the United States. Of the four, only George survived the war.

George Parker Terrill (1828-1884[?]) was the eldest child of the Terrill family. He graduated from the Virginia Military Institute in 1849. He then went to medical school at the University of Pennsylvania and received his degree in 1853. Although ill health and the urging of his father prevented him from seeing action with the Confederate Army, he did serve in the 157th Virginia militia with the rank of Colonel. During the war he also served as a recruiter and a post surgeon.

Emily Cordelia (Terrill) Porterfield (1832-unknown) was the only surviving daughter of the Terrill family. She married **George A. Porterfield (1822-1919)**, a colonel in the Confederate Army who commanded a Confederate force that was defeated at Philippi in western Virginia on June 3, 1861 in what became known as the "Philippi Races".

William Rufus Terrill (1834-1862) was the only member of the Terrill family to side with Union during the Civil War. He graduated from West Point in 1853. He served as an artillery officer in the US Army, first fighting in Florida against the Seminole Indians (1853) and then taking a position as a mathematics instructor at West Point (1853-54). He returned to active military service and was stationed along the Kansas-Missouri

border during "Bleeding Kansas" (1854-55). He later served as an assistant in the United State Coast Survey (1855-1861).

In August 1861, William was commissioned as a captain in the 5th Regiment of Artillery. He went on to command an artillery brigade in the Army of the Ohio at the Battle of Shiloh. In September 1862, he was appointed to the rank of Brigadier General and was placed in command of the 33rd Brigade in the Army of the Ohio. William was mortally wounded by a shell fragment at the Battle of Perryville (Oct. 8, 1862) and died later the same day. William was later buried at West Point National Cemetery.

James Barbour Terrill (1838-1864) graduated from the Virginia Military Institute in 1858. He then went on to study law at Washington College and later practiced law in his native Bath County. Before the war, he had been serving as a major in the Virginia militia. When the Civil War began, James enlisted as a Major in the 13th Virginia Infantry Regiment and shortly thereafter was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. James and the 13th Virginia participated in many of the war's major battles. After the Battle of Fredericksburg, James was appointed to the rank of Colonel. James and his regiment fought with Union forces at Bethesda Church, near Mechanicsville, Virginia on May 30, 1864. During the fighting, James was shot twice and died on the battlefield. The next day, unaware of his death, the Jefferson Davis and the Confederate Senate approved James' promotion to the rank of Brigadier General. James was buried by Union troops, but was later disinterred and reburied at an unknown location by his father.

Philip Mallory Terrill (1842-1864) was a student at the University of Virginia when the Civil War began. He left school to enlist the Confederate Army, joining the 25th Virginia Infantry. He later served in the 62nd Virginia (Mounted) Infantry and 12th Virginia Cavalry. He was mortally wounded at the Battle of Cedar Creek near Winchester, Virginia on November 12, 1864 and died shortly thereafter.

The Terrill family gained a measure of national attention due to a **Harper's Weekly** article written by editor Richard Dana, which fabricated a story that William Henry Terrill had all his fallen sons buried together and placed a monument over the grave inscribed with the words "Only God Knows Who Was Right". Most accounts of the Terrill family refer to this story, either as a legend or citing it as fact.

Scope and Contents

Digital and microfilm copies of papers of the Terrill family of Hot Springs, Bath County, Virginia, a family divided by conflicting sympathies during the American Civil War; and papers of the Porterfield family, featuring primarily those of George A. Porterfield, who married Emily Cordelia Terrill, and who commanded a Confederate force that was defeated at Philippi in western Virginia on June 3, 1861 in what became known as the "Philippi Races."

There is extensive correspondence of the Terrill family for 1845-1868 documenting antebellum life at "Rose Hill," William Rufus Terrill at West Point, and the impact of the Civil War, among other topics; Terrill correspondents include the father, William Henry, as well as children William Rufus, Phillip Mallory, George Parker, and Emily Cordelia.

Highlights of the George A. Porterfield papers include correspondence relating to his participation in the Mexican-American War (1847-1848), and an order book (beginning on June 8, 1861) recording his efforts to have convened an investigation into the defeat at Philippi.

There are also miscellaneous family papers and clippings regarding the genealogy and history of the Terrill and Porterfield families, as well as related families (Mayos, Tabbs, Carringtons, and Cabells), slave records, and clippings regarding the Civil War in western Virginia (including one authored by George A. Porterfield dating from 1878).

Note to researchers: The digital and microfilm copies are not a one-to-one match. Certain documents are present in one form but not the other. Please review both the digital and microfilm versions to see all available material.

Addendum of 2011/03/24 contains five original copies of letters from William Henry Terrill to his son George Parker Terrill, all written during the Civil War. Three of the letters date from 1861; two from 1865. Topics include the military service of William Henry Terrill's sons; the effect of the war on the family personally; the sale, purchase, and keeping of slaves; and Terrill's support for the Southern cause, among others. Please note that William Henry Terrill is referred to as "Terrill" throughout the following; all other persons with the surname of Terrill are referred to by their first names. (1861, 1865; 5 letters consisting of 14 leaves and 27 pages)

The letter of 11 June 1861 from the addendum regards Terrill's service to the Confederate army as a "high private". Terrill complains of the conduct of a Colonel Smith. He also writes of the appointment of his sons James and Phillip as officers within the Confederate army. Terrill writes at length of the decision of his son William to side with the Union and how this has separated him from the family. Terrill also discusses the court martial of his daughter Emily's husband, George A. Porterfield, for his role in the Battle of Philippi. Terrill cautions George not to join the army, on account of his poor health.

The letter of 14 July 1861 regards news about Philip, who has been involved in fighting, and concern that he may have been killed. Terrill mentions a Colonel Heck who, like Philip, fought with Union troops near Beverly, (West) Virginia. Terrill also mentions his plans to travel to Charlottesville and Winchester. He writes of the justness of the Confederate cause and of the state of the military conflict.

The letter of 15 November 1861 regards the political and military situation in the South. Terrill predicts famine and scarcity due to the South being cut off from major agricultural suppliers. He is also concerned for his own financial situation. Terrill writes that he regrets he is too old to fight, but is comforted by the service of his sons. He also writes of his distress concerning William fighting for the North.

The letter of 30 January 1865 regards the purchase and keeping of slaves as well as the necessity of thrift during wartime. Terrill regards George's recent purchase of a slave and his employment of a private teacher for his children as too expensive. He provides much advice about slaves and maintaining a household. Terrill directs George to remember the example of his mother, who managed with few servants. He predicts the end of slavery by the time that George's children are grown. Terrill expects that the war will end soon, though he is still confident in a Confederate victory. He writes of politics and of his expectation that France and England will intervene in the war.

The letter of 10 February 1865 regards slaves, household management, and family news. Terrill mentions George's recent sale of two slaves and argues that he should have gotten a better price for them. He is concerned for his current situation, thanks George for sending money, but is determined to remain at home and resolved to resist the North until the end of the war. Terrill wishes to send copies of his tributes to James and Phillip to his brother, from whom he has had no news; he requests that George make copies and send them to various members of the family. Terrill expresses concern that George may join the army.

Keywords

Bath County (Va.)

Civil War battles - Philippi.

Mexican War, 1846-1848

Slaves and slavery.

Porterfield, George A.

Terrill, Emily Cordelia.

Terrill, William Henry, 1800-1877

Porterfield family

Terrill family