

John W.M. Appleton (1832-1913), Soldier, Civil War Papers, 1861-1913 A&M 0092

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Title Statement

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Author: Staff of the West Virginia & Regional History Center

Publication Statement

Publisher: West Virginia and Regional History Center

1549 University Ave.
P.O. Box 6069
Morgantown, WV 26506-6069
Business Number: 304-293-3536
wvrhcref@westvirginia.libanswers.com
URL: <https://wvrhc.lib.wvu.edu>



Profile Description

Creation: This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on 2026-06-18 13:25:41 -0400.

Language Usage: Description is written in: English, Latin script.

Descriptive Rules: Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

A&M 0092

Unit ID

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Unit ID

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Unit ID

/repositories/2/resources/2421

Unit Date

1861-1913

Unit Date

1863-1864

Language

English .

Abstract

John W. M. Appleton (1833-1913) was an officer in the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, the Union's first regiment of African American soldiers, during the Civil War. Appleton's letters to his wife, memoirs, military records, and other materials provide a detailed account of his military service with this regiment, including the daily operations and activities of his company, troop movements and engagements, and the challenges facing black troops. Appleton also drew detailed sketches in his memoir and letters that depict the battlefield landscape and his unit's positions, including fortifications, encampments, and quarters. Significant topics include the geography around Charleston, South Carolina; the assault on Fort Wagner and other engagements in the Charleston Harbor in the summer and fall of 1863; the fatigue work and picket duty of the 54th Massachusetts; and the battle of Olustee and related engagements near Jacksonville, Florida, in February and March 1864. Also included are family materials and business papers. The family materials include genealogy as well as books about Hon. William Appleton and Samuel Appleton. The business papers contain a ledger from Appleton's time as an agent with Oriental Powder Mills. See Scope and Content Note for more details. See Historical Note for more information about Appleton.

Creator

Appleton, John W. M., 1832-1913

Extent

1.98 Linear Feet Summary: 1 ft. 11 3/4 in. (1 document case, 2 1/2 in.); (4 flat storage boxes, 3 in.); (1 flat storage box, 4 in.); (1 flat storage box, 3 1/2 in.); (1 reel of microfilm, 1.75 in.)

Physical Location

West Virginia and Regional History Center / West Virginia University / 1549 University Avenue / P.O. Box 6069 / Morgantown, WV 26506-6069 / Phone: 304-293-3536 / URL: West Virginia & Regional History Center

Repository

West Virginia and Regional History Center

Administrative Information

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Biographical / Historical

John W. M. Appleton was born in Massachusetts in 1833. In the early years of the Civil War he served in the Boston Cadet Corps on guard and escort duty and then on garrison duty at the Boston Harbor. In early 1863, Appleton was commissioned as a second lieutenant and appointed one of the first officers of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, the Union's first regiment of African American soldiers. Appleton survived the unit's unsuccessful assault at Fort Wagner, South Carolina, in July 1863, but sustained wounds that kept him out of service for several months. In late November 1863, Appleton was appointed acting assistant inspector for the brigade, and in December he was promoted to major. Appleton suffered from severe sunstroke while on duty at James Island, South Carolina, in July 1864. Complications from his illness forced his early resignation from the 54th Massachusetts in late 1864, but by early 1865 Appleton had recovered sufficiently to perform garrison duties with the 1st Battalion Massachusetts Heavy Artillery. He served with the unit at Fort Warren, Boston Harbor, until the close of the war and mustered out of service in August 1865.

Major Appleton, his wife, Mary, and his young daughter, Mabel, moved to Charleston, West Virginia, when the Civil War ended. Appleton managed an artificial gas plant and later operated a woolen and grist mill. He also remained active in the military through the West Virginia Militia and National Guard and as adjutant general of West Virginia from 1897 to 1901. From 1886 to 1913, Appleton managed the Salt Sulphur Springs Resort in Monroe County. John W. M. Appleton died on his farm in Monroe County, West Virginia, in 1913.

Scope and Contents

SCOPE AND CONTENTS

John W. M. Appleton (1833-1913) was an officer in the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, the Union's first regiment of African American soldiers, during the Civil War. Complications from an illness forced his early resignation from the 54th Massachusetts in late 1864, but by early 1865 Appleton had recovered enough to perform garrison duties with the 1st Battalion Massachusetts Heavy Artillery. Major Appleton and his family moved to West Virginia when the war ended, where he was active in a variety of business pursuits and remained active in the military, attaining the position of adjutant general of West Virginia.

Appleton's letters to his wife, memoirs, military records (series 2, 3, and 4), and other materials provide a detailed account of his military service with this African American regiment, including the daily operations and activities of his company, troop movements and engagements, and the challenges facing black troops. Appleton also drew detailed sketches in his memoir and letters that depict the battlefield landscape and his unit's positions, including fortifications, encampments, and quarters.

Significant topics documented by series 2, 3, and 4 include:

the geography and military installations around Charleston, South Carolina;

the assault on Fort Wagner and other engagements in and around Charleston Harbor in the summer and fall of 1863;

the fatigue work, picket duty, and daily life of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry; and

the Battle of Olustee and related engagements near Jacksonville, Florida, in February and March 1864.

Also included in the collection are family materials and business papers (series 1 and 5). The family materials include genealogy as well as books about Hon. William Appleton and Samuel Appleton. The business papers contain a ledger from Appleton's time as an agent with Oriental Powder Mills.

Series 1. Family Materials, box 1 and box 4, unfolded.

Family materials include genealogical charts and two books: Memoir of Hon. William Appleton Prepared Agreeably to a Resolution of the Massachusetts Historical Society, by Rev. Chandler Robbins (Boston: Printed by J. Wilson and Son, 1863), and Memorial of Samuel Appleton of Ipswich, Massachusetts: With Genealogical Notices of Some of His Descendants, by Isaac Appleton Jewett (Boston: [publisher not identified], 1850), with signature of John W.M. Appleton inscribed. Also includes an oversize family tree (box 4, loose).

Series 2. Correspondence, box 2.

Appleton's personal correspondence includes a ledger of approximately 106 Civil War era letters, primarily written to his wife, dated April 1863 - March 1864. The letters are similar to the memoir, although they do contain some different material. Along with the letter book are seven loose letters, mostly from March 1863, one letter from February 1864, and a program for a Marine Corps band concert directed by John Phillip Sousa.

Major topics of the letters include:

Fort Wagner Assault -- Highlights include a letter written on July 18, 1863, the day of the assault, while Appleton and the 54th Massachusetts waited to attack Fort Wagner. Writing to his wife, Appleton describes the shelling and bombardment before the attack and troop positions for the attack. He also writes his goodbyes to his family. An addition at the bottom of the letter, written shortly after the assault ended, describes early details about the dead and wounded. Appleton was injured in the attack, and in his letter dated July 23, 1863, he assures his family that he is alright, although wounded. These letters are not included in the memoir.

Fortifications and Military Actions -- Includes sketches and descriptions of fortifications and military actions on Folly's Island, Morris Island, and James Island, South Carolina. Also includes sketches, description of fight, and map of the battle at the Battle of Secessionville, SC. Siege of Charleston (fall 1863 and winter 1863/1864) descriptions include information about attacks and garrison duty throughout siege, bombardments of fortifications, and a sketch of Charleston Harbor and Fort Sumter from boat. Additionally, Appleton details the 1863 raids along the Georgia and South Carolina sea coast, and the battle of Olustee and related engagements near Jacksonville, Florida, in February and March 1864, including sketches and descriptions of engagements and camps.

Additional Topics Include -- Racial issues, soldier life, camp life, troop morale, Appleton's promotion to Major, and expeditions and raids against southern towns and plantations. Racial issues include United States Colored Troops (USCT), black soldiers, and contraband slaves. Descriptions of officers' camp life include descriptions of tents, cabins, religious activities, drilling, food, holidays (Thanksgiving and Christmas), firing squad, and funerals. Appleton's promotion to Major is documented by a letter of recommendation, among other material.

Series 3. Memoir, boxes 3a-3b.

Box 3a contains John W.M. Appleton's memoir ledger, which begins with a few letters, then transitions to a memoir which is written in the style of a journal. The memoir describes his service from 1863 to 1865 based on his wartime letters, but he frequently expanded on his descriptions of military activities and events, particularly for operations at Fort Wagner, Charleston Harbor, and near Jacksonville, Florida, during the Battle of Olustee. The memoir also contains excerpts from many of his wartime letters. Additional topics include fatigue work, picket duty, artillery bombardments, desertion, executions, his daily activities and camp life, staff officers and the men in his company, issues related to being a black regiment, including payroll inequality, serving with USCT units in Florida, the reaction to black troops, and his sunstroke and convalescence in a Hilton Head hospital in July 1864.

The memoir includes loose items and items glued to the pages, including photographs of officers and soldiers of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry and of the Appleton family. There are also newspaper clippings, letters, and other correspondence and materials related to the Civil War. Notable among these insertions are two issues of the soldier newspaper *The Swamp Angel*. A microfilm copy of the memoirs is available. See index below for a listing by page number of these loose and attached items found within the memoir ledger. It includes the names of those shown in photographs. The index also identifies, with the designation "no page no.", four loose items whose original location has been lost.

Box 3b contains a framed black and white photograph of Sergeant Major John Wilson, a member of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry. This photograph was originally a loose item in the memoir in box 3a.

Series 4. Military Records, box 4.

Appleton's military records include a bound book of military service records, as well as photographs, commissions, and other materials.

The bound book of military service records of John W.M. Appleton includes his discharge papers; a photograph of Appleton in uniform, which is glued to the discharge papers; commissions for his service with the 54th Massachusetts, including Second Lieutenant, Captain, and Major; commission as Major of the 1st Battalion Massachusetts Heavy Artillery; muster out rolls; and appointment as West Virginia Adjutant General. Also contains newspaper clippings about the 54th Massachusetts and Civil War. Loose items from the bound book include officer commission paperwork; a Shaw Memorial postcard; an obituary clippings for Appleton; and newspaper clippings about 54th Massachusetts and USCTs, Fort Wagner, Florida battles, Charleston siege, and the death of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw.

Photographs include a card mounted photo of Fort Warren, Boston, Massachusetts, ca. 1863, and a photo of Major John W.M. Appleton in 1864.

Also includes two oversize commissions, for quartermaster general and adjutant general.

Series 5. Business Papers, box 5a-5b.

Business papers contain a ledger from Oriental Powder Mills(box 5a). Appleton was an agent of the Oriental Powder Mill, located in Boston, MA, and Charleston, WV. The ledger includes correspondence and records concerning the mill and business transactions, mostly concerning the buying and selling of powder, during the 1870s. This series also includes another ledger containing Trustees Report on Estates of Dr. John Appleton (alternately known as Record Book of Dr. John Appleton of Cambridge, MA kept by his son, John W.M. Appleton, 1875-1912) (box 5b).

Index to loose and attached items in the memoir (Series 3, box 3a):

Page 0; carte de visite photo, Private John Appleton, 1862

Page 3; 3 carte de visite photos, Mrs. Appleton, Captain J.M. Appleton, N.P. Hallowell

Page 7; 3 letters

Page 9; 2 carte de visite photos, Colonel Robert G. Shaw, Surgeon Lincoln R. Stone

Page 30; clipping

Page 43; clipping (loose), illustration of defenses of Charleston

Page 49; carte de visite photo, Captain Russell

Page 51; 2 carte de visite photos, Captain Sam Willard (Mann), Captain Simpkins

Page 53; tintype photo of USCT soldier (contains information on back, but difficult to read due to attachment to memoir book)

Page 55; clipping; 2 carte de visite photos, Adjutant G.W. James, structure

Page 57; clipping; carte de visite photo, Colonel Robert G. Shaw

Page 59; 2 clippings (fragile)

Page 61; sketch; carte de visite photo, Captain George Pope

Page 63; 2 carte de visite photos, Captain Edward N. Jones, Lieutenant Edward B. Emerson

Page 65; clipping

Page 69; photo of hospital; carte de visite photo, Captain Luis Emilio

Page 72; carte de visite photo, William Hallowell; map

Page 73; 3 carte de visite photos, Sergeant Carney with flag, Drummer Henry Munroe, Drummer Miles Moore

Page 74-79; clippings

Page 81; clipping about Colonel Robert G. Shaw (loose)

Page 83; carte de visite photo, Appleton Sturgis

Page 87; 3 clippings (loose)

Page 89; clipping

Page 91; clipping; typescript listing of food rations

Page 95; clipping

Page 103; clipping

Page 104; stereoview photo, Ruins of Cathedral Broad Street

Page 105; 2 carte de visite photos, John Ritchie, C.A. Brigham

Page 111; carte de visite photo, [William] Willie Homans; clipping of tent

Page 113; carte de visite photo, Charles G. Chipman

Page 127; clipping of song lyrics about colored troops

Page 135; sketch of bomb proof

Page 143; carte de visite photo, Willard Howard

Page 144; carte de visite photo, Giles M. Pease

Page 147; sketch of 54th Massachusetts regimental flag; carte de visite photo, E.N. Hallowell

Page 149; typescript (loose)

Page 159; Civil War era note; tintype photo, possibly of R.H.L. Jewett

Page 161; photo of Jacksonville, Florida during Civil War

Page 179; carte de visite photo of unidentified officer

Page 181; carte de visite photo, Henry W. Litchfield

Page 183; photo of signal tower in Jacksonville, Florida

Page 187; typescript of Olustee, Florida battle casualties (loose)

Page 219; sketch of 54th Massachusetts camp at Morris Island, 1864

Page 223; typescript of General Order; carte de visite photo, Robert Newell

Page 225; carte de visite photo, Fort Sumter; Swamp Angel (camp newspaper, May 19, 1864 issue); manuscript note (loose)

Page 227; carte de visite photo, Charles E. Tucker; manuscript note (loose)

Page 228; carte de visite photo, Captain Homans; manuscript note (loose)

Page 231; Swamp Angel (camp newspaper, May 26, 1864 issue)

Page 232; stereoview photo, interior of Fort Sumter

Page 235; carte de visite photo, W.W. Bridge

Page 237; photo of cannon and crew

Page 239; clipping about Charles L. Chandler death

Page 243; carte de visite photo, Tom Appleton

Page 253; 3 carte de visite photos, Major John Appleton (2 of the photos are loose)

Page 257; carte de visite photo, Lieutenant Fred Webster

Page 261; carte de visite photo, Charles E. Briggs [Brigges] (loose)

Page 265; 2 carte de visite photos, Lieutenant Rogers, Charles Hallett; photo of Port Royal House in Hilton Head, SC

Page 267; clipping

Page 269; typescript, Senate Bill granting medals to 54th Massachusetts members

Page 274-280; clippings

Page 281; typescript of letter written by Mary R. Appleton about USCT

Page 282; clipping

Page 284; typescript, Senate Bill granting medals to 54th Massachusetts members

Page 285; General Order No. 50 for raising flag over Fort Sumter in 1865

Page 286-end; clippings about 54th Massachusetts soldiers, casualties and death during the Civil War

No Page No.; letter from George Pope (Oct. 17, 1896)

No Page No.; clippings about the Battle of Olustee (1912)

No Page No.; clipping - "The Civil War Fifty Years Ago" (1913)

No Page No.; Report of Frank Fletcher, showing condition of company after Wagner

Keywords

Boston (Mass.)

Boston (Mass.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865

Charleston (S.C.)

Charleston (S.C.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865

Charleston (S.C.) -- History -- Siege, 1863

Fort Sumter (Charleston, S.C.)
Fort Wagner (S.C.)
Fort Warren (Mass.)
Jacksonville (Fla.)
Massachusetts - History - Civil War, 1861-1865 - Participation, African American.
Morris Island (S.C.)
Morris Island (S.C.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
United States. Army -- African American troops
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Participation, African American
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
African American soldiers -- History -- 19th century
African American soldiers
African Americans
Civil War -- Soldiers, Black
Civil War -- MA 54th. Vol. Inf.
Civil War - Massachusetts 54th Volunteers.
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
Fortification
Olustee, Battle of, Olustee, Fla., 1864
Secessionville, Battle of, Secessionville, S.C., 1862
Oriental Powder Mills (Charleston, W. Va.)
United States. Army. Massachusetts Heavy Artillery Regiment, 1st (1862-1865)
United States. Army. Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, 54th (1863-1865)
United States. Colored Troops
Appleton, Dr. John.
Appleton, John W. M., 1832-1913
Appleton, Samuel.
Appleton, William.
Armstrong, Fredrick.