

The John S. Harrison Civil War Letters, 1860-1865

Repository: Lawrence History Center

Accession Number: 2011.039

Creator: John H. Freeman

Quantity: 1 Nonstandard Box

Processed By: Meghan Bailey

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Access: The original letters have been restricted for preservation reasons. Copies and transcriptions are available for research.

Provenance

Originally the collection was given to Charles Matthews by Arthur Dudley. Mrs. Harnow (formally Mrs. Charles Matthews) donated the letters to the Wayland Historical Society, which then donated the letters to the Lawrence History Center on March 3, 2011, in time for the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. Joanne Davis, manager at the Wayland Historical Society, said the letters were owned by the organization for more than 50 years, but were only rediscovered after a room was cleaned.

Biographical Note

The history of the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery Regiment, formerly known as the 14th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, spans from 1861 to 1865. John S. Harrison was enlisted in Company F, the Scott Grays of Lawrence, which was raised by Captain Samuel Langmaid. The men enlisted in Company F came from Lawrence, Lowell, and other adjacent towns. The original lieutenants were Joseph W. Kimball, Follansbee, William Batchelder Greene, and Henderson. The company made visits to various towns in Maine and Massachusetts, and on December 18, 1861, went to Washington, DC. Their orders were to relieve Company G at Fort Runyon, VA in order to perform garrison duty in defense of Washington. In May of 1862, the company occupied tents at Fort Scott, VA, which commanded a view of the Potomac and Washington. During the holidays, entertainment was provided in the form of a ball as well as minstrel shows and amateur theatricals performed by the Soldiers' Dramatic Society at Fort Craig, VA and Fort DeKalb, VA. The first death of the company was James Garland, who died of typhoid fever on January 20, 1862. In the spring of 1864, the Union was on heightened alert and the company was made aware that it might need to fight. It wasn't until May 10, 1864, that they, along with Company D, were ordered out as skirmishers. The companies entered the battlefield, where Eleazer Washburn was killed and fifteen others were wounded. At the close of the war, there was a grand parade in which John S. Harrison and other members of the company took part.

John H. Freeman, the recipient of the letters in this collection, was born in Lawrence, MA in 1846. His mother, Maria E. Freeman, was born in 1824 in Maine, and his father, Nathan Gardner Freeman, was born in 1815 in Vermont and worked as a machinist. John Freeman had five siblings: Gardner A. (born in 1849), Charles J. (born in 1850), George W. (born in 1856), Francis E. (born in 1858), and Ella R. (born in 1859). John Freeman worked as a carpenter in the mills and possibly in a school. He married Clara Cleveland of Maine in July, 1870, and, in 1875, married a second time to Ameritt A. Vidito (her name is also listed as Amelia in the 1880 Census). Ameritt was born in 1856 in Nova Scotia to Aria and Susan. John and Ameritt lived in Methuen on Arnold Street and had five children: Everett (born in 1878), Wendell (born in 1882), Chester (born in 1884), Wilbur (born in 1888), and Blanche (born in 1892).

John S. Harrison, who wrote the majority of the letters in this collection, was born in 1844 in England to John and Fannie Harrison. At the time of his enlistment into the military, Harrison was 19 years old and a musician. Harrison was a member of the 14th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment. In a letter from Harrison dated September 24, 1863, he indicates his regiment has been changed to the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery Regiment by order of the War Department. However, the American Civil War database indicates that Harrison enlisted in Company F on July 5, 1861 and mustered out on July 8, 1864. Harrison was an operative serving on the Union side. During the war, the Lawrence City Directories reported that Harrison was employed in gents furnishing goods, and then, after the war, in fancy dry goods. On December 13, 1870 Harrison married Lizzie A. Marsden. Both were 26 years old and lived in Lawrence. The marriage certificate notes that Harrison worked as a loader. On June 14, 1873, at the age of 29, Harrison died of consumption.

Henry A. Dow, who wrote four of the letters in this collection, was born in 1843 to Betsy Cameron and John Dow, a master joiner, and had two siblings, Parker S. and Dophana P. During his life, Dow lived in Marshfield, MA; Washington, DC; and Cabot, VT as a farmer and carpenter. He married a woman named Isabel, and they had four children: Guy N. (born in 1871), Lee (born in 1873), Lilian (born in 1879), and Myrta (born in 1879). Dow died on March 10, 1932, of influenza and is buried at the Elm Street Cemetery in Cabot. He served in the 8th and 13th Vermont Infantries during the Civil War.

Whitfield T. Angus, who wrote three of the letters in this collection, was born in 1842. He enlisted in Company A of the 3rd Massachusetts Heavy Artillery Regiment on November 30, 1863. During the Civil War, he served as a private and an operative. He mustered out on September 19, 1864, in Philadelphia, PA. On October 8, 1864, he enlisted in the Navy and was promoted to full seaman. Angus mustered out again on August 12, 1865.

Wallace Bailey, who wrote four of the letters in this collection, may have served in the 4th Massachusetts Regiment Heavy Artillery. However, little information is known about Bailey. In his letters he often refers to John H. Freeman as his brother, but it is unclear if they are related.

Unfortunately, no information concerning I.F. Batchelder could be found.

Scope and Content Note

The bulk of the letters in this collection were authored by John S. Harrison of Lawrence, MA, while he was enlisted in Company F, Massachusetts 1st Heavy Artillery Regiment, formerly known as the Massachusetts 14th Infantry Regiment. These letters were written between 1861 and 1864. The other letters were written by Henry A. Dow, Whitfield T. Angus, Wallace Bailey, Clara E. Critter, and I.F. Batchelder. Many of the letters were written while their authors were stationed at different forts, including Forts Albany, Runyon, Scott, DeKalb, Whipple, Craig, Corcoran, and Barnard, all in Virginia. Henry A. Dow writes from the U.S. General Hospital in Montpelier, VT, where many of the sick and injured were sent. The male writers were enlisted in the following regiments: Company A, 3rd Massachusetts Heavy Artillery Regiment; 17th Massachusetts Unattached Heavy Artillery; Company A, 4th Massachusetts Heavy Artillery Regiment; and the 8th and 13th Vermont Infantries. All letters are addressed to John H. Freeman.

The letters offer a description of the daily life of soldiers stationed at various forts during the Civil War. Subjects include: living and working conditions, love interests, the weather, a description of the barracks, experiences on the front, homesickness, reports of fort artillery, brigade drills, and references

to friends living in Lawrence. John S. Harrison refers to Harriet Beecher Stowe's son, Frederick William Stowe; Lieutenant-General Ulysses S. Grant; Stonewell Jackson; and President Lincoln. Harrison's letters dating in the later half of 1862 and into 1863 detail his thoughts on the politics of, and battles involving, General George Brinton McClellan on the Potomac, General Ambrose Everett Burnside, New York Governor Horatio Seymour, and the New York City draft riots of July, 1863.

Series Arrangement:

Series I. Civil War Letters, 1860-1865

Inventory:

Series I. Civil War Letters

Box 1

Scope and Content: Series I includes the following 82 letters. Authors' spelling mistakes are included in the transcriptions and question marks [?] indicate illegible words.

| Author | To | Date | Location |
|---------------|------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| John Harrison | Sabbath School seniors | 12/30/1860 | Sanbornton Bridge, NH |
| John Harrison | Soldiers | 08/28/1861 | Fort Albany, VA |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 12/17/1861 | Fort Albany |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 12/23/1861 | Fort Runyon, VA |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 12/27/1861 | Fort Runyon |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 02/11/1862 | Fort Runyon |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 02/19/1862 | Fort Runyon |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 03/27/1862 | Fort Scott, VA |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 04/02/1862 | Fort Scott |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 04/08/1862 | Fort Scott |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 04/27/1862 | Fort Craig, VA |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 04/28/1862 | Fort Scott |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 05/08/1862 | Fort Scott |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 05/12/1862 | Fort Scott |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 05/22/1862 | Fort Scott |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 05/29/1862 | Fort Scott |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 06/03/1862 | Fort Scott |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 06/25/1862 | Fort Scott |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 06/30/1862 | Fort Scott |

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|---------------|--------------|------------|-------------------------|
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 07/30/1862 | Fort Scott |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 08/06/1862 | Fort Scott |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 08/12/1862 | Fort Scott |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 08/21/1862 | Fort Scott |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 09/10/1862 | Fort DeKalb, VA |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 09/18/1862 | Fort DeKalb |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 10/14/1862 | Fort Fallingast, VA [?] |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 10/22/1862 | Fort Albany |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 11/02/1862 | Fort DeKalb |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 11/19/1862 | Fort DeKalb |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 11/29/1862 | Fort DeKalb |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 12/10/1862 | Fort DeKalb |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 12/16/1862 | Fort DeKalb |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 01/02/1863 | Fort DeKalb |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 01/11/1863 | Fort DeKalb |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 02/14/1863 | Fort DeKalb |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 02/24/1863 | Fort DeKalb |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 03/06/1863 | Fort DeKalb |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 03/14/1863 | Fort DeKalb |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 04/03/1863 | Fort DeKalb |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 04/15/1863 | Fort DeKalb |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 05/18/1863 | Fort DeKalb |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 06/21/1863 | Fort DeKalb |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 07/24/1863 | Fort Whipple, VA |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 08/01/1863 | Fort Whipple |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 08/12/1863 | Fort Whipple |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 08/18/1863 | Fort Whipple |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 08/26/1863 | Fort Whipple |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 09/02/1863 | Fort Whipple |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 09/18/1863 | Fort Whipple |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 09/24/1863 | Fort Whipple |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 10/25/1863 | Fort Whipple |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 11/17/1863 | Fort Whipple |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 11/24/1863 | Fort Craig |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 12/03/1863 | Fort Craig |

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|--------------------|--------------|------------|-----------------------|
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 12/15/1863 | Fort Craig |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 12/22/1863 | Fort Craig |
| Henry A. Dow | John Freeman | 01/03/1864 | Montpelier, VT |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 01/14/1864 | Fort Craig |
| Clara E. Critter | John Freeman | 01/15/1864 | Orange, VT |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 01/20/1864 | Fort Craig |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 02/11/1864 | Fort Craig |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 02/18/1864 | Fort Craig |
| Whitfield T. Angus | John Freeman | 02/20/1864 | Fort Independence, MA |
| Whitfield T. Angus | John Freeman | 03/02/1864 | Fort Independence |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 03/02/1864 | Fort Craig |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 03/09/1864 | Fort Craig |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 03/24/1864 | Fort Craig |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 04/01/1864 | Fort Craig |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 04/14/1864 | Fort Craig |
| Wallace Bailey | John Freeman | 09/03/1864 | Gallops Island, MA |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 09/23/1864 | Fort Corcoran, VA |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 10/03/1864 | Alexandria, VA |
| Wallace Bailey | John Freeman | 12/06/1864 | Fort Whipple |
| John Harrison | John Freeman | 12/08/1864 | Alexandria, VA |
| Henry A. Dow | John Freeman | 12/23/1864 | Montpelier |
| Henry A. Dow | John Freeman | 01/21/1865 | Montpelier |
| I.F. Batchelder | John Freeman | 01/22/1865 | Boston, MA |
| Whitfield T. Angus | John Freeman | 2/26/1865 | Vernon River, GA |
| Wallace Bailey | John Freeman | 03/28/1865 | Fort Barnard, VA |
| Henry A. Dow | John Freeman | 04/09/1865 | Winchester, VA |
| Wallace Bailey | John Freeman | 05/10/1865 | Fort Barnard |
| John Harrison | Unknown | Undated | Unknown |