

Civil War Letters from Henry M. Misemer to His Wife Martha

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Folders 27 & 29

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For English 618: Research Methods in English

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## **Introduction to the Series**

This transcription and its attendant annotation, explanatory materials and bibliography was prepared by students in ENGL 618: Research Methods in English, the required gateway class for the MA in English degree program at Western Carolina University (WCU). The learning outcomes of this class include the following:

1. Conduct appropriate, effective, and ethical scholarship.
  - a. Effectively find and use advanced research tools (handbooks, databases, guides, etc.) appropriate to the subject.
    - Students will be able to use a wide variety of such tools and evaluate those tools.
  - b. Find appropriate advanced research (print and electronic scholarship) and apply that research to specific disciplinary questions or issues.
    - Students will be able to find a variety of scholarship, evaluate both the appropriateness and rigor of that scholarship, and incorporate that scholarship correctly and effectively.
  - c. Develop accurate bibliographies and reference citations.
    - Students will be able to annotate, abstract, and cite materials following standard MLA format.
2. Understand the process by which the texts we use are made available.
  - Students will be able to conduct basic editorial work and evaluate the editorial work of others.

All work is submitted as presented by the graduate students. While they take great care with their transcriptions and annotations, errors are possible. As they learn throughout this class, good scholarship requires meticulous research and corroboration by authoritative sources. Our objective is to provide transcriptions and annotations of WCU's Special Collections materials that will be useful to the institution, students, scholars, patrons, and all users of our library resources.

If you wish to submit an emendation or correction for this document, please email Dr. Brian Gastle (bgastle@wcu.edu)

## **Introduction to Document**

This document contains two letters written by Henry Marshal Misemer to his wife Martha while stationed around Nashville Tennessee in the spring of 1864. Henry (signed in his letters as H. M.) was a corporal in the United States Federal Army assigned to Company F of the Third Regiment of Tennessee Cavalry Volunteers. According to the National Park Service, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tennessee Cavalry regiment was established in Murfreesboro and in Nashville in January of 1863 (“Search for Battle Units”). The 3<sup>rd</sup> Tennessee Cavalry had an extensive list of battles and engagements in which they were involved; two which the unit participated in were the Battle of Stones River and the Battle of Nashville. The Battle of Stones River was a victory for the Union Army. Through a combination of Confederate disorganization and distention between officers in Confederate command, Union forces prevailed. The battle was fought under the command of Confederate general Braxton Bragg and Union general William Rosecrans. Peter Cozzens writes in his book *No Better Place to Die: The Battle of Stones River*, about the distention and turmoil between Bragg and the officers under his command that they, “were so absorbed with their internecine feud that they neglected what should have been the sole object of their attention, the defense of what remained of Confederate Tennessee against Rosecrans and the Army of the Cumberland (216).

Within his letter, Henry Misener mentions to his wife the smallpox outbreak that was of great concern for soldiers and civilians alike during the war. Smallpox was not the most common of the diseases that soldiers of the Civil war faced. Roughly 68,000 soldiers contracted measles as compared to roughly 12,000 cases of smallpox reported (Emberton). However, soldiers feared

contracting smallpox worse than measles, and with good reason. The mortality rate of smallpox during the war was close to 39% (Emberton).

In addition to referring to smallpox, Misener brings to his wife's attention his intention to return home when he receives a furlough. However, he also tells her that "some of the boys are running away and going home" from his company. He ensures Martha that he will not leave until he is given permission as to not desert his post and risk bringing shame upon himself or his family. In his essay "Desertion, Cowardice, and Punishment", Mark A Weitz provides several possible explanations as to why men deserted as they did. For example, Weitz states, "Many soldiers saw their enlistment as contractual in nature and any perception that the government was not living up to its end of the bargain justified their departure" (Weitz). It is possible that soldiers from Misener's company believed that the government was not "holding up to its end of the bargain" by not giving them furloughs as they saw fit.

Between September 23 and 25, 1864, 550 soldiers from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tennessee Cavalry were taken prisoner by General Nathan Bedford Forrest at Athens, Alabama and nearby Sulphur Branch trestle where they guarded the railroad (Potter, 9). Henry Misemer was among these men captured and taken prisoner. Misener would be placed in a union prison camp called Cahaba in Cahaba, Alabama. Conditions were horrible at Cahaba even though the National Park Service claims it to have been "probably the best run of all southern prisons" (National Park War Series). With little to no protection from the elements and "daily rations of 10-12 ounces of cornmeal (including ground corn cobs and husks), and five to seven ounces of bacon or beef" (Potter, 17), prisoners were barely able to scratch out an existence within the camp. On April 27, 1865, freed soldiers from both Andersonville and Cahaba prisons were aboard an extremely overcrowded steam powered river boat called the *Sultana* to transport them back to their homes. According to

Jerry O. Potter, this ship was the third to bear the same name. Each one of the previous ships had suffered ill fate when they either crashed or burned. Naming the third ship the *Sultana* was a “sinister omen” (Potter, 4) that would foreshadow its subsequent destruction as well. At approximately 2:00AM, the ship encountered a malfunction with the boilers and exploded killing many of the passengers instantly. Potter records that “The blast drove boiler fragments, pipes, bricks, and machinery through the upper decks like shrapnel, killing and maiming scores of sleeping passengers” (84). While many passengers were killed immediately by the explosion, others perished in the water trying to swim to safety. Henry M. Misener was one of the 1,169 fatalities of the *Sultana* tragedy.

### **Editorial Statement**

Of these two letters written by Henry M. Misemer to his wife, the first letter is eight pages in length and the second is four pages. The letters are written on paper that has aged over the 158 years to a deep brown color. The letters have been folded to be stored creating harsh creases. Words and lettering along these creases can be faint and difficult to read in certain places of the letters. Misemer also scratched out some of his writing in places throughout the letters. Where the writing is still legible through the scratched-out portions, I chose to include those words within the transcription. There are also throughout the letters, instances where Misemer left out letters that belonged in words and indicated them through a symbol likened to a carrot letting the reader (Martha) know that he added letters where they needed to be. In these instances, I chose to write out the intended word with the letter additions included. Grammar and punctuation are at best sporadic throughout the letters. There are hardly any periods or commas making the letters read as one continuous sentence in some places. There are also several holes

in the pages of the letters often impeding the ease in which the words can be read. Sometimes, the hole will cover the entirety of the word and other times, some letters of the word are legible. This is a diplomatic transcription in that it was done in a manner to maintain the integrity of the letters and to keep them as close to the originals as possible in the hopes of respecting the memory of Henry M. Misener to any of his possible posterity that may come across or use this transcription of his letters. As a diplomatic transcription, this edition retains the spelling irregularities found within the letters. I have also chosen to maintain the line breaks within each page of the respective letters. In the transcription, the words are limited per line in order to maintain these line breaks from the letters.

File 37 (Page 1/8)

Nashville Tenn April 11th/64

My Dear Wife

again I embrace  
the present opportunity of addressing  
you as I have a chance of sending  
a letter by Jack Hill<sup>1</sup> and  
nothing affords me any pleasure  
only conversing with you  
By letter and if I could only  
see you and converse with you  
face to face I think I would Be  
one of the happiest creatures on  
Earth But as God has otherwise  
ordered it I feel inclined to sub-  
-mit to his will hoping that  
the , time, will soon come when  
we will be permitted to see each  
other again and enjoy the sweets  
of our first love and of home in  
peace and if we meet no more on  
Earth may we meet in heaven

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<sup>1</sup> Not found, but presumably a courier for Company F 3rd Regiment Tennessee Cavalry

(Page 2/8)

Martha we have moved from  
Nashville about Eight miles  
on the North Western Railroad  
and it is supposed by , some of, our officers  
that we will stay here all  
summer and drill others think  
we only come here to get away  
from the small pox the small  
pox has nearly ceased to exist  
in our regiment But it is raging  
in Nashville a good deal our  
first Major died with it a week  
or two ago<sup>2</sup> I am in as good  
health as I ever was in my life  
And all of our Brothers are well  
but Lee he had a chill yesterday  
Mr. Brient left here last week  
for Cincinnati Harve and me  
sent by him for the things you  
and May sent for But Sol and  
Lee couldent get the money  
to send for the things Father &<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See “The Minister of Death” by Carole Emberton. During the Civil War, the mortality rate of Smallpox was around 39 percent

<sup>3</sup> Captain Jacob P. Brient: See “Tennessee & The Civil War” Captain of Company F 3rd Regiment Tennessee Cavalry

Solomon Bogart (Sol): Brother to Martha Misener wife of Henry M. Misener

Levi Bogart (Lee): Brother to Martha Misener

Pvt. Harvey Anthony Cochran Sr.: See “Find A Grave”. Pvt. 3rd Tennessee Cavalry



(Page 3/8)

Mary<sup>4</sup> sent for we have not drawn any money for nearly six months and will not draw any tel about the 15th of May at which time I am going to try to get a furlow to come home there is no chance to get one now, our officers say they wont furlow us tel we draw money so that we can take it home to our families But I think that is only an excuse they think if they dont furlow us we will reinlist as vetterans for the sake of a sixty days furlow or at least that is my notion about it and if I never get a furlow tel I reinlist I will never get one at all some of the boys are running away<sup>5</sup> and going home I said when I left that I would

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<sup>4</sup> See "Solomon Bogart 1800-1878-Ancestry" Could be in reference to Solomon Bogart's daughter Mary

<sup>5</sup> See "Desertion, Cowardice, and Punishment" by Mark A. Weitz. Henry M. Misemer implies that he will not leave his post until he is given official furlough and that he wishes to not bring shame of any kind upon himself or family. Desertion would be seen as extremely shameful.

(Page 4/8)

never come ~~home~~-back tel  
I could come in day light  
with my head up and I am  
still in the same notion  
yet I never intend to do any  
thing that will disgrace you  
and my little children and  
I know it  
Martha I started a letter and  
twenty dollars in money to you  
the 1st of last October By Cute  
Caffey<sup>6</sup> and last week he brought  
it all back to me I sent thirty  
seven dollars by Brient to buy  
the things you sent for I told  
him to not get any Molasses they cost  
one dollar and a half per  
gallon here and I didnt suppose  
you wanted them at that  
price If you do write to me  
and I will send for them  
the first chance I can get

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<sup>6</sup> Name appears to be Cute Caffey in the letter but is difficult to read. No reference found.

(Page 5)

I didnt send for any shoes for  
the children I thought I had  
better get them here my self  
I can get as much rice here as  
I want for nothing we have several  
hundred pounds coming to our  
company and the Boys say I may  
have it and well come I will send  
you some by Mr. Brient when he  
comes back Martha I am well pleased  
about you hireing a man to make  
a crop this summer and I will  
help you all I can to pay him  
I dont want you to expose<sup>7</sup> your  
Self more than you can help  
if we can only make enough  
to keep our little children and  
you from starving tel the war  
is over I will be satisfied I care  
nothing about the destruction  
of our property so that we can live

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<sup>7</sup> Expose: To offer publicly, 'put up' *for* (or *to*) *sale*. OED Online.

(Page 6/8)

Martha you said something about  
what I owed Johnnie<sup>8</sup>, I dont  
know anything about what I  
owe him I dont want you  
to pay him any thing tel I get  
home let him sweat and I will  
give him his dues when I come home  
you said for me to write him  
a letter and tell him that I would  
give him his dues I decline writing  
for if I make any threats I will  
have to suffer for any thing that  
is done to him no difference who  
does it And I would rather tell  
him to his face what I think  
of him Oh I had like to have  
forgotten to tell you I got a  
letter Wm B Misemer<sup>9</sup>  
of Riceville McMinn Co Tennessee  
the other day, here is what he says  
after telling me that his and my  
familyes were well Marsh

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<sup>8</sup> Unknown.

<sup>9</sup> Possibly Henry's brother William Bible Misemer

(Page 7/8)

you and a good many others  
thought I was a reb I have  
proved myself clare By the  
first men in the country such  
As William Porter<sup>10</sup> and others  
he requests me to write to him how  
I am getting along and says the  
Yankies hasent hurt him any  
yet if the old third ever gets  
in his neighborhood he will be  
hurt and badly hurt at that  
Tell Father I got a letter  
from him and was glad to hear  
from him tell him I will write  
to him shortly Martha you said  
you had learned that the (word rendered illegible due to a hole in the paper)  
got hold of a letter broke it  
and read it this is a mistake no  
one has ever broke a letter of mine  
but Sol and he dont brake  
them only when im not  
here and dont expect to be

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<sup>10</sup> Unknown.

(Page 8/8)

for some time then he brakes  
them and answers them  
and I do the same with him  
some of the boys commenced  
brakeing letters last summer  
that belonged to others But  
I give them to understand  
that it wouldnt be healthey  
to brake one for me  
My dear Martha I want you  
to write to me as often as you  
can for nothing affords me  
as much pleasure as reading  
a letter my dear  
beloved Martha I want  
you to write to me how and  
where to direct my letters so  
that I can send them By  
mail direct your letters to  
Nashville Tennessee Company F  
3rd E Tennessee Cavalry I remain  
your loving husband

H. M. Misemer

Nashville Tennessee                      April 21/64

Mrs. M. J. Misemer

My dear wife again I embrace  
the present opportunity of address-  
ing you for nothing affords  
me any pleasure except that  
of writing to you and why  
should I deny myself the  
privledge when I know  
that my letters affords you  
as much pleasure in reading  
as they afford me in writing  
my dear wife I didnt intend  
writing to you at this time as I think it  
is verry unsertain about you  
getting it Harve Cochran is  
to take it, I expect him to  
get drunk and loose it. But  
Sol is writing to Mary and  
I thought you would be disap-  
-pointed if she got a letter and

(Page 2/4)

you didnt I have received several  
letters from you lately some  
by mail and some by hand  
they come by hand several days  
sooner than by ~~hand~~-mail the last  
letter I got was of April the 3rd  
and I am getting verry anxio-  
-us to get another I want you  
to write me ever week if you  
can it is the only pleasure  
that we can see now but ~~the~~  
I hope the time is not far  
distant when we will be  
permitted to meet again never  
more to be parted on this green  
Earth ~~never~~-untell it shall  
please an allwise God to  
call us from time to Eternity  
and then may our parting  
only be for a short time to  
meet again in heaven  
my Dear wife you dont know  
the pleasure it gives me to



(Page 3/4)

~~know the pleasure it gives~~  
~~me~~ know that I have a wife  
who puts her trust in God  
a wife that prays for me  
and all that is mine  
who in my absence can  
pray for me and my children  
and teach them to love and  
serve God I now can pray  
in faith and I believe I  
shall be spared to live to  
see peace once more and enjoy  
the blessings of home and  
the happiness which thy smiles  
and kind embraces always  
afforded me But if it should  
otherwise please God I hope to be prepared  
to meet you in heaven. Tell  
Father & mother that I desire  
an interest<sup>11</sup> in their prayers  
It is not necessary to ask you to  
pray for me for I know you  
are already doing so in earnest

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<sup>11</sup> See OED "Interest": Right or title to spiritual privileges. This could have been said meaning that Henry wishes to be remembered with a special place in the prayers of his father and mother

(Page 4/4)

Martha I sent by Elisha  
Brient for the things you sent  
for he got them and has  
brought them to Nashville  
he now has to send to General  
Schofield at Knoxville to  
get them transported  
to Athens which will  
take some time he talks  
of going back to Cincinnati  
to By more goods if he does it  
will be some time before he gets  
home We drew money  
the other day I intend sending you  
some By Brent when he comes  
There was three men furlowed  
out of our company today But it didnt  
fall to my lot to get one there is to  
be no more furlowing for twenty days

H. M. Misemer

## Works Cited

By. "3rd Tennessee Cavalry Regiment." *Tennessee & the Civil War*, 26 Nov. 2016, [tngenweb.org/civilwar/3rd-tennessee-cavalry-regiment/](http://tngenweb.org/civilwar/3rd-tennessee-cavalry-regiment/).

This website provides information on the unit and officers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tennessee Cavalry

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This book provides the history of the Battle of Stones River. The tactics and outcomes of the battle are also included within this text

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This article provides statistics and history on the smallpox outbreak during the Civil war. It also compared the infection rate of measles to that of smallpox.

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This source provides several definitions of the word expose.

*FamilySearch.org*, [ancestors.familysearch.org/en/LH95-BMV/henry-marshall-messimer-1831-1865](http://ancestors.familysearch.org/en/LH95-BMV/henry-marshall-messimer-1831-1865).

This website provides the ancestry of Henry M. Misener. Misener's parents, siblings and children can be found listed here.

"Harvey Anthony Cochran Sr. (1824-1865) - Find a..." *Find a Grave*, [www.findagrave.com/memorial/166291719/harvey-anthony-cochran#source](http://www.findagrave.com/memorial/166291719/harvey-anthony-cochran#source).

This website provides information on Harvey Anthony Cochran Sr. believed to be "Harve" in the letters. There is also information on his burial site and tombstone.

"Interest": *Oxford English Dictionary*, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/97735?rskey=WiJdxM&result=1#eid](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/97735?rskey=WiJdxM&result=1#eid).

The Oxford Online Dictionary is a resource that can be used to find the multiple meanings of words. Word origins and semantic changes can also be tracked using this resource.

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This online resource through the National Park Service provides information on the prison camp at Andersonville and also includes a section on the Cahaba prison camp in which Misener was imprisoned.

Potter, Jerry O. *The Sultana Tragedy: America's Greatest Maritime Disaster*. Pelican Pub. Co., 1992.

This book outlines the *Sultana* disaster in great detail. The author provides great detail on the conditions, overcrowding, negligence, and horror all surrounding the tragedy.

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This is an essay about desertion and soldier retention and the punishments if soldiers were accused of cowardice and desertion.