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Love Letters from William Stringfield to Maria Love

Introduction:

William Williams Stringfield was born on May 7, 1837 in Nashville, TN. He served as a captain with the Thomas Legion in the south during the Civil War. After the war, Stringfield built his home in Haywood County, NC (Western Carolina University). He married Maria M. Love on January 2, 1871 in Haywood County (North Carolina County Registers of Deeds).

This group of letters is addressed to Maria M. Love from William Williams Stringfield. Written in 1865 after his time as a Civil War soldier, Stringfield uses the first letter to assure Love of his affection. He also proposes to her in the letter. His language focuses on “wooing” Love and assuring her that they would have a happy marriage. Stringfield’s second letter addresses Love’s request to postpone their wedding. He attempts to convince her to reconsider because there is still plenty of time before the set date. He assures her of his love and admiration for her, and he requests that she write him back.

The first letter is written on fiber-based lined paper and has two vertical folds and one horizontal fold. The letter takes up four pages and the original page, before folds has 16 x 20 dimensions. It is written as a type of booklet. The first page looks like a standard sized page, while the second and third pages fold out into a longer landscape oriented page. The fourth page is written on the back section of the booklet. The edges are worn and the paper is yellowing. There are some wrinkled spots that suggest that the letter was read many times. The creases on

the pages are especially worn on pages three and four; so much that there are holes and tears where the paper was folded. Stringfield's signature barely fits on the fourth page.

The second letter is also written on on a fiber-based lined paper with 8 x 10 dimensions. This paper is a thicker grade than the paper of the first letter. It also has an emblem embossed in the upper left corner. The page appears to have been torn from a notebook or split from a wider piece of paper. It has three vertical folds and one horizontal fold. It spans two pages. The second page is written on the back of the first page. The close of the letter is cross-written on the top of the first page in the vacant white space. The pages of this letter are also yellowing, but it is considerably less-worn than the first letter probably because of the higher grade paper.

Stringfield's writing is mostly legible. His hand notably slants to the right. His individual characters contain several loops that add to the elegance of his penmanship. Some letters to note include the cross bar of his "t" is usually placed very high on the ascender, and sometimes, misses contact with the ascender altogether. Instances of double "s" in words are written like a "ps." His style is very emphatic, and he relies heavily on underlined words to convey his point.

For my edition of these letters I have tried to provide the most readable account possible. I have standardized spelling throughout the letters. There are moments when Stringfield commits spelling errors, but there are also moments when specific letters in words are not clear. To avoid confusion, the spelling has been corrected. Stringfield's punctuation is not always clear. There are times when his periods and commas are almost identical. I have used context clues to standardize punctuation to the best of my abilities. I have not, however, added punctuation where it is lacking. Instead of writing the word "and," Stringfield uses an ampersand. I have maintained his use of this symbol when it is used. His paragraph breaks are also difficult to discern. At times they are just long breaks between words in the text. He also uses the standard indentations for

paragraphs. At other times the indentations are positioned very closely to the margins of the page. Where Stringfield has underlined words for emphasis, I have italicized them. In instances where he underlines words twice, I have italicized and underlined the words. Stringfield also misuses apostrophes throughout his letters. I have included them where they are necessary, and I have omitted them where they were used unnecessarily. I have also standardized capitalization of proper nouns where it is missing and maintained any capitalization that Stringfield has included in his letters. My transcriptions of the letters themselves do not retain Stringfield's line breaks, but I have indicated page breaks within this edition in bold font. I have also attempted to keep the formatting of Stringfield's postscripts true to the original document.

## Stringfield Love Letters Transcription

**Letter 1 Page 1**

Asheville No. [6a?]

July, 8<sup>th</sup> 1865.Miss M.M. Love<sup>1</sup>

My very dear Lady

Since you fully understand me a suitor for your heart and hand, I cannot think it improper to address you thus.

Indeed I conceive it altogether my duty to give you as full an insight as possible into my character, and to acquaint you with the governing impulses of my nature, my station in life and family, connections. As to my own private character and the respectability of my family, I can only say that I do not wish to shun the strictest scrutiny. I can refer your friends to the best families of west N.C. & E. Tenn<sup>2</sup>. and to some of your own kindred, with whom I have spent much time during the last three years.

I met you first, as you may remember, over four years since, at your sister's in E. Tenn.<sup>3</sup> I had heard of you often, and *always* in praise, before it was my pleasure to form your acquaintance, and I can truly say that my expectations were more than realized.

I was *very much* pleased with you, the more I saw of you, heard of you, and *thought* of you, the more I liked, respected,

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Melvina Love. According to The Annals of Haywood County, Stringfield "married Maria M. Love, a daughter of James R. Love of Waynesville" (474).

<sup>2</sup> Stringfield was born in Nashville, Tennessee, but spent his childhood in Strawberry Plains, Tennessee located on the borders of Jefferson, Knox and Sevier Counties (Annals of Haywood County) (Tennessee State Map). He moved to North Carolina in 1872.

<sup>3</sup> Likely the home of Maria's sister Sarah, known as Sallie, who was married to William Holland Thomas, the commander of Stringfield's unit during the Civil War (Godbold 104).

**Letter 1 Page 2**

and admired, and the more I became satisfied that you were an object worthy of my love – worthy the admiration and love of the noblest and bravest of the land.

My admiration ripened into *love*, and but for the *very cold* reception my advances met with, I should have followed you to your “mountain home”<sup>4</sup> and declared my passion then and there.

Very soon afterwards however, the late terrible war commenced<sup>5</sup>. I was a young man, and I felt it my duty to respond to my country’s call. I thought of *you*, of the other loved ones at home, I thought of property, of health, of limbs, *of life, of Honor* – but I felt it my *duty* to sacrifice all *but* honor for my state and section<sup>6</sup>. I felt that I would be *unworthy of the love of a noble woman* were I to shrink.

I volunteered as a private – served twelve months as such, was afterwards promoted to officer of honor and trust<sup>7</sup>. I passed through many sanguinary conflicts, through much hardship<sup>8</sup> and encountered many strong temptations, but a merciful and ever ruling Providence<sup>9</sup> carried me safe through all. I now return to those I love a wiser

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<sup>4</sup> Research was unable to corroborate the “mountain home.” It is likely somewhere in Western North Carolina or Eastern Tennessee.

<sup>5</sup> Stringfield is referring to the Civil War (1861-1865).

<sup>6</sup> His unit during the war. He became a part of the Walker’s Battalion, Thomas Legion that served in Virginia and Western North Carolina during the war (Brown 377). This unit was also known as the Sixty-Ninth Regiment of North Carolina Infantry (The Annals of Haywood County).

<sup>7</sup> Stringfield became a Major and was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel on March 6, 1865 (Brown 377).

<sup>8</sup> Stringfield was captured in Knoxville, Tennessee in May 1865. He was released after 24 days after taking an Oath of Allegiance, presumably to the Government of the United States and its Constitution (Brown 377).

<sup>9</sup> This is likely an allusion to the God of the Bible based on context clues and Stringfield’s capitalization of the word.

**Letter 1 Page 3**

and better – yet *sadder* man, unscathed in all except *Property* – that is mostly gone.

Now that I present myself before you as a suppliant for you love and favor, what have I to offer in exchange for so priceless a gem?

I come with a full knowledge of my own frailties & flaws of character – weakness of mind – ungainliness of person, but I come as I think with a heart full of manly love.

I come as a man to woo a woman, I come as an *honest* man wishing a noble, virtuous, beautiful and accomplished *wife*! I come because I love you above all women on earth, because I know you are worthy of my soul, because I believe that *if you will love me I can & will* make you happy through life. My love is higher, deeper and broader than a mere *boyish* passion for a pretty girl. I come to you my dearest Maria with a *man's* love, seeking a *woman's* true love in return. Let me hope and pray that I woo not in vain – give me some hopes, some assurances that you are not entirely indifferent towards me, that *before all others* I am kindly thought of by you. With such

**Letter 1 Page 4**

assurances as these I'll be happy. I can face the stern realities of life cheerfully with bright anticipations of future bliss. I do not close my eyes to the fact that the future is clouded with many dark shadows – not *shadows* altogether, either, but *real trouble* to those of us who so warmly espoused the cause of the South in the late war. *My* determination is to hope and pray for *strength* and *true manhood* to overcome all trial and difficulties. I am satisfied that *married* life, between kindred spirits, will not be conducive of more trouble than the corresponding strength and spirit of endurance and forbearance given to the partners by a kind & ever ruling

Providence<sup>10</sup>. If dark shadows *do* close around – *love, confidence* and *honest toil* will dispel them and usher in “joy *unspeakable*”<sup>11</sup> and happiness unalloyed.

Those my dearest Lady are some of the sentiments of my heart, not very elegantly expressed – but *honestly* so I trust. Think of them *and of me* with as much leniency and forbearance as possible. I have much more to say if you will permit me to write again. I hope you will. I hope to be allowed to visit you soon and often, but wish to prevent as far as possible your becoming an object of “village gossip”.

With renewed assurances of love & esteem I am truly yours

William. W. Stringfield

## Letter 2 Page 1

Asheville July 31<sup>st</sup> 1866,<sup>12</sup>

Dearest Maria

I am very sad to think that I will soon have to leave you. You are uppermost in my mind & heart all the time.

I wish – oh so much! that we had parted for the last time till our hearts are made one before the *world!* I wish that instead of going *alone* to Tenn<sup>13</sup> you were going with me as my loving bride – my sweet solace and affectionate companion. But these wishes are useless now, I must content myself to *wait*. But *how long* dearest one must I wait? how long shall my lonely

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<sup>10</sup> Likely a reference to the God of the Bible based on context clues and Stringfield’s capitalization of the word.

<sup>11</sup> From 1 Peter 1:8 “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (Bible Gateway KJV).

<sup>12</sup> Over a year after the first letter of this edition.

<sup>13</sup> Tennessee.

heart count the tardy hours that separate us? In our conversation last evening, you said that you hoped I would agree to postpone our marriage<sup>14</sup> beyond the time I have heretofore named – early this winter – I do hope you will not insist on this. If possible I would hasten rather than delay, I would speed the time rather than delay an hour. I ask you again, do not let matters of minor importance cause you to hesitate.

I want no parade or pomp when we are united – it will be a happy – a blissful hour to me, and I trust so to you, but it will

### **Letter 2 Page 2**

be a *sacred* and *holy* hour, an hour in which our *united* hearts shall call a *Savior's*<sup>15</sup> blessing upon ourselves – an hour in which we should hope to receive the kind wishes of living friends mingled with the spiritual blessing & prayers of dear departed loved ones. Do you not believe that we are watched over by Christian loved ones gone before? I certainly do. The images of my dear sainted father and angel mother are ever at hand to rebuke me for my many wicked thoughts and deeds. Notwithstanding all this however I feel my great depravity – my unworthiness. I feel the *Continued* watch of a sweet Christian woman as my *help*<sup>16</sup> – my *comforter*, my *Companion*. I want someone – *you* – to twine a pure hearts affection around my faulty life. I want you to raise my heart *up* – purify – chasten – Then why need we wait? Why defer longing when *our* hearts are united and beating alone for each other?

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<sup>14</sup> According to the marriage license from North Carolina County Registers of Deeds, Stringfield and Love were not married until 1871, five years after he wrote this letter.

<sup>15</sup> A possible allusion to Ephesians 5:21-33, especially verses 22- 25, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband in the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Bible Gateway KJV).

<sup>16</sup> Likely a reference to Genesis 2:18, “And the Lord God said, It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Bible Gateway KJV).

Tell me my precious one, why *need* we wait longer? November is a long while off. *December* is longer. I do not doubt your love – but *you know* that the longer delayed the more uncertain. Some of your friends will oppose to the bitter end – everything will be done against me that *can* be done – once married we are *safe*.

**Letter 2 Page 3 (written cross-line to finish<sup>17</sup>)**

Write me a good long letter in reply to this. Speak *freely*, for my heart is *all* yours – tell me what you think – trust me *fully* – for I have trusted you. Write me a good loving letter – no eye but my own shall ever scan its precious pages, have it ready when I call Wednesday – tomorrow evening.

Good bye

Your devoted

William

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<sup>17</sup> The end of this letter is cross-written on the top of page one in the available white space. Stringfield makes this section extremely readable.

Works Cited

Allen, William C. *The Annals of Haywood County of North Carolina 1808-1935*. [s.l. : s.n.], 1935. Print.

Provided a timeline of Stringfield's life including his marriage to Maria M. Love.

Brown, Matthew M. and Michael W. Coffey. *North Carolina Troops 1861-1865 A Roster Vol. XVI Thomas's Legion*. Raleigh: Office of Archives and History, 2008. Print.

An account of the members of Thomas's Legion and their ventures. It provides information about Stringfield's experiences during the war.

Godbold Jr., Stanly E. and Mattie U. Russell. *Confederate Colonel and Cherokee Chief: The Life of William Holland Thomas*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1990. Print.

This book details Stringfield's unit from the Civil War. It provides helpful information about Stringfield's connections and how he met his wife.

*King James Version*. Bible Gateway. Web. 6 Dec. 2015.

Used Bible Gateway to find the quoted section of the letter in the common Biblical version of Stringfield's time.

North Carolina County Registers of Deeds. *North Carolina, Marriage Records, 1741-2011* North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC. Microfilm. Record Group 048. *Ancestry.com*.

Web. 4 Dec. 2015.

A microfilm of W.W. Stringfield and Maria M. Love's marriage license. Includes the date and witnesses.

Tennessee State Map. *State of Tennessee Government*. State of Tennessee. Web. 5 Dec. 2015.

A state map of Tennessee used to determine the location of Strawberry Plains where Stringfield grew up.

Western Carolina University. "William Williams Stringfield." *Western Carolina University*.

Western Carolina University, 2015. Web. 29 Nov. 2015.

This cite provided crucial biographical information for William Williams Stringfield. It was very helpful in the process of decoding his letters. It also led to the helpful sources found in WCU's Special Collections.

## Appendix

William Williams Stringfield to Maria M. Love: Letter 1 Page 1

Asheville N.C.  
July, 8th. 1865.

Miss M. M. Love

My very dear Lady

Since you fully under-  
-stand me a Letter from your heart and hand, I  
cannot think it improper to address you thus.  
Indeed I conceive it altogether my duty to give  
you as full an insight as possible, into my character,  
and to acquaint you with the growing impulses of  
my nature, my station in life, and family con-  
-nections. As to my own private character and  
the respectability of my family, I can only say  
that I do not wish to show the strictest scrutiny.  
I can refer your friends to the best families of west  
N.C. & E. Tenn. and to some of your own kindred,  
with whom I have spent much time during the  
last three years. I met you first, as you  
may remember, over four years since, at your  
sister's in E. Tenn. I had heard of you often,  
and always in praise, before it was my pleasure  
to form your acquaintance, and I can truly  
say that my expectations were more than realized.  
I was very much pleased with you,  
the more I saw of you, heard of you,  
and thought of you, the more I liked, respected

William Williams Stringfield to Maria M. Love: Letter 1 Page 2

and admired, and the more I became satisfied that you were an object worthy of my love - worthy the admiration and love of the noblest and bravest of the land.

My admiration ripened into love, and but for the very cold reception my advances met with, I should have followed you to your "Mountain home" and declared my passion then and there. Very soon afterwards

however the late terrible war commenced, I was a young man, and felt it my duty to respond to my Country's call. I thought of you, of the other loved ones at home,

I thought of property, of health, of limbs, of life, of Honor - but I felt it my duty to sacrifice all but Honor for my State and Section. I felt that I would be unworthy the love of a noble woman were I to shrink.

I volunteered as a private - served twelve months as such, was afterwards promoted to offices of honor and trust. I passed through many sanguinary conflicts, through much hardship and encountered many strong temptations, but a Merciful and overruling Providence carried me safe through all. I now return to those I love a wiser

William Williams Stringfield to Maria M. Love: Letter 1 Page 3

our letter - yet sadder man, unscathed in  
 all except Property - that is exactly gone.  
 Now that I present myself before you  
 as a Suppliant for your love and favor,  
 what have I to offer in exchange for so  
 precious a gem? I come with a full knowledge  
 of my own frailties, flaws of character - weakness  
 of mind - irregularities of passions, but I come  
 as I think with a heart full of manly love.  
 I come as a man to woo a woman,  
 I come as an honest man wishing a  
 noble, virtuous, beautiful and accomplished  
 wife! I come because I love you above  
 all women on earth, because I know you  
 are worthy of my love, because I  
 believe that if you will love me  
 I can & will make you happy through  
 life. My love is higher, deeper and broader  
 than a mere boyish passion for a pretty girl.  
 I come to you my dearest Maria with a man's  
 love, seeking a woman's love in return.  
 Let me hope and pray that I over not in  
 vain - Give me sure hopes. Some  
 assurances that you are not entirely  
 indifferent towards me, that before all others  
 I am kindly thought of by you. With such

William Williams Stringfield to Maria M. Love: Letter 1 Page 4

assurance as there I'll be happy. I can  
 face the stern realities of life cheerfully with  
 bright anticipations of future bliss. I do  
 not close my eyes to the fact that the future  
 is clouded with many dark shadows - not shadows  
 altogether either, but real troubles to those of us  
 who so warmly espoused the cause of the South in  
 the late war. My determination is to persevere,  
bring <sup>for</sup> strength and true manhood to overcome  
 all trials and difficulties. I am satisfied that  
married life, between kindred spirits, will not be  
 conducive of more trouble than the corresponding  
strength and spirit of endurance and  
forbearance - given to the parties by a kind  
and obedient Providence. If dark shadows do  
 close around - love, confidence and honest toil  
 will dispel them and make in "joy unspunkable  
 and happiness unalloyed".  
 These my dearest Lady are some of the  
 sentiments of my heart, not very elegantly  
 expressed - but frankly so I trust. I think of  
 them and of me with as much leaning  
 and forbearance as possible. I have  
 much more to say if you will permit me  
 to write again. I hope you will. I hope to be  
 allowed to visit you soon and often, but wish to prevent as far as  
 possible your becoming an object of "village gossip".  
 With renewed assurances of love & esteem I am  
 Truly Yours  
 William W. Stringfield



William Williams Stringfield to Maria M. Love: Letter 2 Page 2

be a sacred and holy hour, an hour  
 in which our united hearts shall call a  
Blessing upon ourselves - an hour  
 in which we should hope to receive the kind  
 wishes of living friends - mingled with the  
 spiritual blessing & prayers of dear departed  
 loved ones. Do you not believe that we  
 are watched over by christian loved ones  
 you before? I certainly do. The messages  
 of my dear sainted father and angel mother  
 are ever at hand to rebuke me for my  
 many wicked thoughts and deeds.  
 Notwithstanding all this however I feel my  
 great depravity - my unworthiness. I feel  
 the continued want of a sweet christian woman  
 as my help - my comforter, my companion. I  
 want some one - you - to twine a pure hearts  
 affection around my faulty life. I want  
 you to raise my heart up - purify -  
 chasten - then why need we wait?  
 Why defer longer when <sup>our</sup> hearts are  
 united and beating alone for each other?  
 Tell me my precious one, why need we  
 wait longer? - November is a long while off -  
 December is longer. I do not doubt your  
 love - but you know that the longer delayed the  
 more uncertain. Some of your friends will oppose the  
 bitter end - every thing will be done against me that can  
be done. - all manner we are safe.