

H.M. Misemer to Wife Martha

March 24, 1865

Manuscript:

HL_MSS_21-07_02 Folder49

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For English 618: Research Methods in English

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December 12, 2022

Introduction to the Series

This transcription and its attendant annotations, explanatory material, 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 for this class include the following:

1. Conduct appropriate, effective, and ethical scholarship.
 - a. Effectively find and use advanced research tools (handbooks, databases, guides, bibliographies, etc.) appropriate to a subject.
 - i. 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.
 - i. 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.
 - i. 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.
 - i. Students will be able to conduct basic editorial work and evaluate the editorial work of others.

All work is presented as submitted 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's resources.

Introduction to Document

This manuscript is a letter written from Henry M. Misemer (signed as H. M. Misemer) to his wife, Martha J. Misemer, dated March 24th, 1865, and sent from Vicksburg, Mississippi.

Henry M. Misemer, born in 1832 as Henry Marshall Misemer, served in Company F of the 3rd Regiment of East Tennessee's Cavalry on the side of the Union soldiers during the Civil War. His first marriage was to Margaret Jane Brown from January 25th, 1855, up until her death a little over two years later on August 31st, 1857. He had one daughter from his first marriage: Mary Elizabeth "Lizzy" Misemer. Henry remarried on February 2nd, 1859, to Martha J. Misemer, then Martha Jane Bogart, who is the recipient of this specific letter. Together, they had three children: Charles F. Misemer, Margaret E. Misemer, and Laura C. Misemer, all of whom a widowed Martha took care of after Henry's passing after 1865 due to the Sultana disaster.

While serving in the Union, Henry is believed to have died on April 27th, 1865, amid the Sultana Disaster as the ship headed towards Union territory. Solomon F. Bogart, Charles H. Bogart, and Levi M. Bogart – Martha J. Misemer's brothers – were also aboard the ship when disaster struck, with only Solomon surviving to return home. The *Sultana* was a commercial steamboat used for transportation and the trade of goods. The Sultana Disaster, caused by the boilers within the ship exploding, remains the worst maritime disaster in United States history ("The Disaster").

At the time of this letter, Henry alongside a majority of soldiers belonging to the 3rd Regiment of East Tennessee's Cavalry, have been captured by Confederate forces belonging to General Nathan Bedford Forrest, and are now staying in Cahaba, a Confederate prison located in Vicksburg, Mississippi. He wrote in hopes to reassure his family of his health and status, along with informing them of his desire to hear from them about how they are doing. Additionally, Martha and their family were living in Monroe County, Tennessee at this time. The letter's contents, Henry's correspondence to Martha, are as follows.

Henry begins by informing his wife, Martha, of his absence of six months in which he and his company have been in Cahaba prison in Alabama, having been captured after the Battle of Sulphur Creek Trestle by Confederate soldiers. He remarks that he is alive and in tolerable help, as is the majority of Company F save for two specific men, before stating that General William Tecumseh Sherman of the Union army – referencing Sherman's March to the Sea – has reclaimed Savannah, Georgia. Henry continues on to document the life within the parole camp, noting that the United States Sanitary Commission is keeping them cared for. Based on word from officers that have passed through Vicksburg, Henry has been told that they, as a company, might not be in Cahaba for longer than a month before being sent to a camp further north, but he expresses doubts with this. Stating that he believes if he was to return home now that he would be too preoccupied with keeping up with the news of the war, he informs Martha that he wishes to hear from her as soon as possible, giving her the address to send letters to. He implores her to give his love to his children, and promises to write to them in his next letter.

Given the personal nature of the correspondence recorded here from a Union soldier to his family, alongside the references made to both historical names and dates belonging to events of the American Civil War – such as the Cahaba prison in Vicksburg, Mississippi and references to the aftermath of the Battle of Sulphur Creek Trestle – this letter is an available resource to those interested in researching the personal everyman nuances of the Civil War, the events leading up to the Sultana Disaster in which Henry passed, or the Misemer family as a whole. Additionally, the script in which the letter is written in and moments of particular language use may be of great interest to those curious about the orthographic and linguistic environment of the mid-1800s, and of those wanting to preserve history in any form.

Editorial Statement

To preface this statement, it is to be noted that this translation is a diplomatic edition, meant to represent the text as closely as possible to the original document. This means that any spelling errors, moments of capitalization, the usage or lack of punctuation, and any linguistic or syntactical instances were preserved to the best of the transcription's ability.

The manuscript scans of this letter totals to two pages, with the first page having a printed letterhead seal of the United States Sanitary Commission, including the quote, "Rally Round The Flag, Boys." Both pages are of a similar status, with the original document presumed to be a front-to-back written letter as some of the writing is reversed but legible on the corresponding pages. The pages are yellowed and stained heavily. The quality of the ink tends to vary, with some sections between written with a heavier hand whereas others appear more faded, more than likely due to aging. In addition, the writing appears to either cave in or slant on the section page, with the sentences appearing compressed together compared to the first page. Both pages show signs of being folded and creased, with one crease running horizontal along the center, representing the paper being folded from top to bottom. Presumably, after this fold, the paper was then folded into thirds which results on the document creases running vertically, dividing the paper into six sections. Along the second, rightmost vertical crease of the first page (thus being the first, leftmost crease on the second), there are several tears, with a highlight of tape being present to keep the paper together. However, overall, despite the compressed sentences and the paper's quality, the letter is preserved and fairly legible.

With Henry M. Misemer's handwriting, the penmanship is clear, legible, and respectively stylish in its calligraphic nature. There are a few unique instances to note of his handwriting, such as:

- There are instances of his *r* and *s* letters having ascenders – represented as a small loop at the top. It appears to be pronounced here, with most loops having a gap in the center.
- There is inconsistent usage of apostrophes. There are some used in two instances of the word, "don't". He uses an apostrophe once when writing "Battalion's" but given the context, there is nothing in the sentence that requires that usage.
- Certain words are either misspelled by modern standards or spelled correctly given the time period of the 1800s, such as "fareing". Given the amount of words that seem to be

misspelled in way of missing a letter, this adds evidence to his disposition during this time in the parole camp, such as: “bin”, “stopt”, “allmost”, and “ansxious”.

- Certain words that are written as one word in modern standards, such as “anything” and “newspapers”, are written as separate words in his script.

In regard to the transcription of the letter, these choices – in an effort to be diplomatic in this transcription – are to be noted:

- Capitalization and general punctuation, such as commas and periods, are inconsistent. This has been preserved as shown in the manuscript, rather than attempting to capitalize proper nouns or the start of sentences, or to mark when a sentence ended with a period.
- Gaps in a line of script are marked with one press of the *TAB* key in the transcription.
- The line breaks have been preserved as shown in the manuscript, ending per line as it did on the original document. This includes words split apart, such as “Battal-ion” – they are marked with a hyphen connecting the two together on their respective lines.
- Words marked out by individual vertical lines are represented as “---” in the transcription.
- For words of unknown origin due to the reading being speculative, it will be represented as “...” in the transcription, with a footnote used as way of explanation.
- For words marked out but still legible, it will be spelled out with a strikethrough.
 - For example: ~~all~~(on the letter’s page 2.)
- With any instances of words or letters being superscripted to fix misspellings or absences in the document, it is represented here by superscripted ^ marking the words or letters.
- Due to the formatting with footnotes, some of a single letter’s page extends on to more than one page on this document. Each individual page of the letter is marked at the top.

Sincere gratitude is due to Western Carolina University’s Hunter Library, in particular their Digital and Special Collections and staff, for the uploading and sharing of the documents used.

Transcription and Annotations

[MS Page 1]

Vicksburg Miss March the 24th 1865¹

My Dear wife after an absence of six months²

from the Federal limes during which time I

have ^bin^ in Cahaba prison Ala a place something³

simmilar to purgatory, I can inform you that

I am yet alive and in tolerable good health

The Boys of Company (F) are all here that

are from our neiborhood except Harvy Brown

and Robert Furgerson they left Cahaba about⁴

the 20th of Nov with a squad of about two hundred

sick and wounded. The Rebs said they were going

to Savannah Georgia for exchange But Sherman⁵

took Savannah and they were stopt at Macon

we have not heard from them since, they were

both tolerable low when they left just able

¹ Given the context of the date mentioned at the start of the letter, Henry would have been included among those captured by Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forest during the Sulphur Creek Trestle on September 25th ("Significance of the Site"). One possible result of this capture would be that Henry was in John Minnis' garrison, a lieutenant colonel of Henry's Company F of the 3rd Regiment of the Tennessee Calvary, that surrendered while defending a nearby bridge to General Nathan Bedford Forest ("John Minnis"). It is noted that most of the regiment was captured at this time, including Henry due to this evidence in his correspondence to Martha ("Battle Unit Details").

² Henry's wife, Martha J. Misemer (born Martha J. Bogart), was born in 1835 and passed in 1882. Together, they had three children, one son and two daughters, alongside one daughter from Henry's first marriage ("Martha Jane Bogart."). Since his capture at Sulphur Creek Trestle, it is likely he has had little to not correspondence since then.

³ The Cahaba prison in Alabama was one of many prisoners of war campus where Confederate forces held Union soldiers during the Civil war (Bryant).

⁴ Harvy Brown and Robert Furgerson were members of Henry's Company F of the 3rd Regiment ("Brown, Henry H", "Ferguson, Robert J").

⁵ On December 10th, the Confederate forces were driven to Savannah as per the parameters of what General Sherman put in place, thus starting his siege. One of his potential stops was also Macon, Georgia, as noted by Henry – this was a source of confusion for Confederate forces as they did not know General Sherman's true goal. The capture of Savannah by the Union is documented to have concluded on December 21st, 1864 (Rhodes, James Ford).

to walk Well we are here in parole camp⁶
four miles from Vicksburg not exchanged but
expecting to be shortly we are fed clothed and
guarded by our own men we have plenty of ever-
thing except money and we don't need but verry
little of that in fact we don't really need any⁷
the United States Sanitary Commission
furnishes paper pens ink news papers books⁸
and allmost any thing ^else^ we call for we can get
passes to go to Vicksburg any time we want to go

⁶ Parole as a status for prisoners of the Civil War meant soldiers could return their homes by promising not to continue serving within the military, representing a method of exchange.. For more information, see the Introduction and chapter 1 of Hesseltine's *Civil War Prisons*.

⁷ The Cahaba prison was noted to have low death rates out of the Civil War prison camps (Bryant).

⁸ The United States Sanitary Commission was a civilian organization authorized by the government meant to support medical and sanitary assistance for Union soldiers. This included providing them with medical equipment and items meant for maintaining daily life, including items meant to keep soldiers up to date on the progress of the war ("United States Sanitary Commission Records").

we are fareing as well as we could wish nothing
to do but cook and eat there is about twenty
five hundred of us here tell all enquireers that
their friends in Company (F) are here and well
a great many Officers have come out from
Vicksburg to see us and ~~all~~ all of them tell
us that they dont think we will have to
stay here more than a Month probably⁹
not more than ten days and that we will be
sent to a parole camp further North and
furlowed home we may get furlowes but¹⁰
I dont believe one word of it neither do I care
--- if I can only get to a healthy place
I am contented to stay away from home
untell my time is out then I can enjoy the trip
and also enjoy home and the company of my family
and friends if I was to go home now I would
study so much about haveing to come back that
I dont think I could enjoy myself and be more
dissadsified than I am now when I did come back
I am verry anxious to hear from home write
to me as soon as possible Direct to Parole Camp
near Vicksburg Miss Company (F) 3rd Battal-

⁹ The unfortunate mention of staying in Cahaba only for a few days up to a month is accurate, as Henry along with his company was transferred to the Sultana ship after being released, meant to return home. This would ultimately lead to his death on April 27th, 1865, a little over a month later ("The Disaster.").

¹⁰ The OED references an alternate spelling of the word "furlough", as "furlowe" ("furlough, v").

-ion (not 3rd Tenn Cav) We ar orgenised in¹¹
Battalion's, men from all states and thrown
to gether and have lost the ... of regiment
and name of state while we stay here, kiss all
of the children for me and tell them that I
will write to them next time¹²

H. M. Misemer

¹¹ Members of various cavalries were present in Cahaba, which explains Henry's denotation of the word "battalion" instead of the traditionally used cavalry ("3rd Tennessee Cavalry Regiment").

¹² Henry was survived by his wife Martha, and his four children. Mary Elizabeth "Lizzy" Misemer from his first marriage, and then his three children with Martha: Charles F. Misemer, Margaret E. Misemer, and Laura C. Misemer ("Henry M. Missimer").

Annotated Works Cited

“3rd Tennessee Cavalry Regiment.” *Tennessee & the Civil War*, 26 Nov. 2016,

<https://tngenweb.org/civilwar/3rd-tennessee-cavalry-regiment/>.

This article details the membership and events of the 3rd Tennessee Cavalry Regiment.

“Battle Unit Details: Union Tennessee Volunteers 3rd Regiment, Tennessee Cavalry.” *National Park Service*, <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-battle-units-detail.htm?battleUnitCode=UTN0003RC>.

This record lists out the areas of interest that the 3rd Regiment of the Union Tennessee Volunteers, of which Henry Misemer was enlisted in, visited and participated in during the Civil War.

“Brown, Henry H.” *National Park Service*, <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-soldiers-detail.htm?soldierId=54696787-DC7A-DF11-BF36-B8AC6F5D926A>.

This record details Henry Brown, of the 3rd Regiment of the Tennessee Cavalry.

Bryant, William O. *Cahaba Prison and the Sultana Disaster*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990.

This book documents life within the Cahaba prison leading up to the Sultana Disaster.

“Ferguson, Robert J.” *National Park Service*, <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-soldiers-detail.htm?soldierId=68F95D9C-DC7A-DF11-BF36-B8AC6F5D926A>.

This record details Robert Ferguson, of the 3rd Regiment of the Tennessee Cavalry.

“furlough, v.” *Oxford English Dictionary*,

<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/75667?rskey=X3d6Gb&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid>.

This entry details the different spelling of the word “furloughed”, referred in the text as “furlowed”.

“Henry M. Missimer.” *Ancestry*, <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/456665:1555?tid=&pid=&queryId=1425c2d0a45bbb63f9b2ad525eeb156e&phsrc=aRP40&phstart=successSource>.

This death record of Henry M. Misemer (spelled Missimer) from *Ancestry* verifies his name, date of birth, and family relations.

Hesseltine, William Best. *Civil War Prisons*. E-Book, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1972.

This book is an in-depth and complex guide to prisons during the Civil War. Personal accounts, records, photos, and other resources are included to bring together a wholistic view of the topic, with an added focus on combating modern propaganda.

“John Minnis.” *American Battlefield Trust*, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/john-minnis>.

This biographical note references John Minnis, a lieutenant colonel of the 3rd Tennessee Calvary. Minnis, during the Sulphur Creek Trestle, surrendered his garrison that was defending a nearby bridge to General Nathan Bedford Forest; it is possibly that Henry was among these men.

“Martha Jane Bogart.” *Ancestry*, <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/family-tree/person/tree/117503005/person/350166559125/story>.

This family tree record of Martha Jane Bogart from *Ancestry* verifies her name, date of birth, and family relations.

Rhodes, James Ford. “Sherman’s March to the Sea.” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1901, pp. 466-474, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1833511>.

This article documents General William Tecumseh Sherman’s military campaign in Georgia from November to December, 1864. It provides ample details about the choices made, conversations had, people involved, and outcomes caused by the historic campaign which proved to be a major victory for the Union army.

“Significance of the Site.” *Sulphur Creek Trestle Preservation Project – Building the Pride*, <http://www.buildingthepride.com/faculty/ssim/abpp/events.html>.

This website details the events of leading up to, during, and after the Sulphur Creek Trestle Battle during the Civil War. There is specific and significant focus on troop position, movement, membership, and interaction between the warring sides during the September 25th, 1864 battle.

“The Disaster.” *The Sultana Association of Descendants and Friends*, <https://www.thesultanaassociation.com/the-disaster>.

This website, in association with the official Sultana Museum, details the events of the Sultana Disaster which occurred on April 27th, 1865. The ship’s demise is partially credited to the overload of people due to paroled Union soldiers being transported home.

“United States Sanitary Commission Records – 1861-1879 [Bulk 1861-1872].” *The New York Public Library Archives & Manuscripts*, <https://archives.nypl.org/mss/3101>.

The New York Public Library has the records detailing the US Sanitary Commission, detailing their purpose and what they did during the Civil War.