

A Letter to Martha Jane Misemer by her
Husband Henry Marshall Misemer

March 28th, 1865

HL_MSS_21-07_02 Folder 50

Transcribed and Annotated by Victoria Marth

For ENGL 618: Research Methods in English

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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.
 - 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 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.

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

Introduction

The transcribed manuscript is a letter from Henry Marshall Misemer to his wife Martha Jane Misemer. The letter is dated March 28th, 1865, when the Union soldier H. M. Misemer, is imprisoned. H. M. Misemer (spelling variant: Misener) enlisted on April 26th, 1863 in the Third Regiment, Cavalry, Company F. On September 24th, 1864 he was captured and then imprisoned in Cahaba Prison by the Confederacy (McCammon Appendix). The Third Cavalry surrendered on September 24th, 1864 under the commanding of Col. W. Campbell to Major General N.B. Forrest at Athens, Atlanta (McCammon 134). Amongst the Union soldiers taken prison on that day were 150 men of the Third Tennessee Cavalry (McCammon 135). When H. M. Misemer writes this letter to his wife, he is currently held captive at a camp near Vicksburg, Mississippi; presumably Camp Fisk (vgl. Salecker 60). Prior to that he must have been at Cahaba Prison since he mentions that he was sick when he was there.

H. M. Misemer begins his letter by telling his wife that he has been anxiously waiting for a letter from her but that none has reached him so far. Furthermore, he wants to provide updates twice a week from now on. H. M. Misemer states that he is well even though many other prisoners are sick. Next, he provides Martha with information on the wellbeing of people both of them seem to know, including her brothers, Solomon Franklin Bogart and Levi Morrisson Bogart, as well as other soldiers. Henry Misemer also provides updates on the war during the winter in East Tennessee and reports what he has learned from prisoners who came to Camp Fisk from Andersonville prison. The Union soldiers imprisoned in Camp Fisk are supposed to go to a Camp farther North; presumably Camp Chase, Ohio, where the steamboat Sultana should have taken the prisoners from Camp Fisk (McCammon 154). In this camp, the prisoners were supported by The Sanitary Commission. They were provided with utensils to write letters, for personal hygiene, thread, tin cups, newspapers etc.

Additionally, H. M. Misemer notes that he would like to report everything else that has happened in captivity but that he would prefer to tell his wife about it in about a week rather than writing her an elongated letter. He also asks to get updates from home. He then jumps back to the conditions at the camp, noting that they were either treated tolerably or miserably and that people were physically abused or killed with bayonets. Henry Misemer continues the letter by sending regards to their children. He wants them to be good children that to not fight with each other and

reminds them to pray to God. After that he reports how many of their regiment died in prison or fell sick. He also provides names.

H. M. Misemer does not only share personal stories and desires but also focuses on the conditions in the different prisons and camps during the Civil War. He directly compares his experience from Cahaba Prison to the live in Camp Fisk and to what he has heard from Andersonville Prison. Therefore, this letter is of interest for historians and researchers that focus on the Civil War or the conditions in Confederate Prisons. Since several names of people were listed, this manuscript might also be of interest to individuals who do genealogical research.

Editorial Statement

In general, the manuscript is in good condition. This letter was written on two thin sheets of paper with blue lines on it. The paper itself is blue to grey and the ink that was used is black. There are some spots where the paper appears to be yellow, for example, at the fold. Both pages measure 6.2 inches (height) x 7.5 inches (width) and have been folded several times. It appears that the paper was folded to fit into an envelope or notebook. It was folded in half once and then folded again along to the same edge. This time, however, not in the middle, but to fold over a third of the paper. Then one of the sides was slightly turned in. The arrangement of the pages that were paginated is notable since it suggests that each sheet of paper was folded separately. One piece of paper contains page four and page one on the one side and page two and three on the backside. The second sheet has page eight and five on the front and pages six and seven on the backside. Additionally, H. M. Misemer did not waste any space by leaving a margin on the pages when he wrote to his wife.

This transcription is a diplomatic edition. Thus, the letter was digitalized and as little changes as possible were made. The sentence structures, spelling mistakes and grammar errors were therefore incorporated in this transcribed and annotated version. Unless the word was not severely misspelled or not recognizable anymore, it was not annotated. Furthermore, the letter and its content were not interpreted, the annotations were made by referencing other scholars.

H. M. Misemer's handwriting is legible, yet there are some notes on it. If one reads the letter, one might have problems with:

- The “e” and the “c” look similar to each other since the “c” is written with a squiggle. See the word “Vicksburg” for an example of it.
- The lower case “p” is easily mistaken for a combination of the letters “fr”, see “prison” for an example.
- Henry Misemer hardly uses punctuation markers, such as commas and periods, which is why the reader has to read the letter carefully in order to understand the content.
 - o When he shortens a name he tends to put points or commas after it but he does not do that throughout the whole letter.
- Some words, such as “Bayonette” are capitalized for no apparent reason.
- The verb to be is often not adapted to the subject, for example, “was” is used instead of “were”
- There is no apostrophe in the word don’t
- When H. M. Misemer forgot a letter or a word he puts a carrot (^) where the missing component is supposed to be and writes it above it.
- Instead of the word until or til the word “tel” is used throughout the manuscript.
- By writing “Tenn” Misemer means Tennessee
- If a word is written at the end of a line and does not fit anymore the next syllable is written in the beginning of the following line. The hyphen is usually put in front of the syllable in the beginning of the next line.

Because of the lack of punctuation markers in the letter it was decided to put footnotes directly after the word or phrase they refer to. This should make it easier for the reader to look at the footnotes immediately. Otherwise, there would have been an accumulation of information at the scarce periods.

Some words in the letter were scratched out, mostly because of a rewording of the sentence or because the word did not fit in the sentence (yet). This is shown by using the ~~strike-through~~ function of Microsoft word and not annotated every time.

Transcription

[MS page 1]

1 March the 28th/65

Camp near Vicksburg. Miss.¹

My Dear wife² I wrote you

a letter the 24th Inst³

and I am so anxious

to hear from home that

I write you again and

will continue to write

about twice a week tel

I hear from you I am

weell and harty and have

been ever since I was

captuerd except about

two weeks while in

Cahaba prison⁴ I

had a very bad cold and

Dysentery⁵. But I am all

wright now and hope to rem

¹ Refers to Camp Fisk which was located four miles outside of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Union prisoners were held captive at this camp (Salecker 60).

² H. M. Misemer's wife is Martha J. Misemer; her maiden name was Bogart. They were married on 2/9/1859. For further information see documents HL_MSS_21-07_02_61 and Ancestry.

³ An abbreviation for instant that refers to „this month“ in the context of this letter (OED).

⁴ Cahaba Federal Prison in Alabama was a prison during the Civil War where Union soldiers were held captive. It was known to be frequently overcrowded but less than five percent of the prisoners died, which is a low number compared to the other Civil War prisons. (Bryant 1-3). Apparently, H. M Misemer spent at least two weeks there before he came to Camp Fisk.

⁵ Dysentery is a disease that causes inflammation of the intestine that leads to “mucous and bloody evacuations” (OED).

[MS page 2]

2

-ain so a good many of
the Boys are takeing sick
since we came here Diarhea
seems to be the only disease
here Harry¹ has been sick
several days not very bad
Sol² Lee³ and De⁴ are all
well I give my best respects
to Betsey Ha^milton⁵ and tell
her, Geo , W⁶, is well and
gone to ~~visit~~⁷ Vicksburg to
day will return tonight

I understand that
the rebel guerrillas have
been cutting up generally
in East Tenn this winter⁸

¹ Presumably Charles Harrison Bogart, Martha J. Misemer's brother. He was enlisted on November 6th, 1862 and belonged to the Third Regiment, Tennessee Cavalry, Company F. He was a prisoner of war since September 25th, 1864 and supposedly died on April 27th, 1865 when the steamboat Sultana exploded (McCammon Appendix).

² Solomon F. Bogart, brother of Martha J. Misemer. Private Bogart enlisted on November 21st, 1862, belonged to the Third Regiment, Cavalry, Company F like his brother-in-law H. M. Misemer, and was mustered out on June 10th, 1865 (McCammon Appendix).

³ Levi M. Bogart, brother of Martha J. Misemer.

⁴ Unknown

⁵ Possibly Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton, a wedding guest of Martha and Henry Misemer. For further information see the documents HL_MSS_21-07_02_61 of the same collection.

⁶ Unknown, he might be the husband or a relative of Betsey Hamilton.

⁷ Presumably scratched out since Geo W. was very likely a prisoner and did not get to "visit" the town since he was not a free man.

⁸ In 1865, Federal troops and guerilla bands were active in East Tennessee (McDonough 208). Guerrillas are small groups that act independently in a war (OED).

[MS page 3]

3

I am verry anxious to hear
what they have done I
learn that they killed
Esq¹ MCGaughey of Athens²
I learnd it from some
Andersonville prisners³
that was capteerd the same
time that he was I also
learn from them that
H. H. Brown⁴ is in Anderson
-ville prison one train load
has come here from
Andersonville and we are
looking for the balance
ever day there is a strong
talk of us leaveing here

¹ Abbreviation for esquire which was used “as a title accompanying a man’s name” and might highlight a higher social status (OED).

² Unknown

³ Andersonville prison was in Andersonville, Georgia and was used as a Confederate military prison in 1864 and 1865. It was well known that the conditions in this prison were bad and therefore, the death rate was high (Cole xi-x).

⁴ There was a Harvy H. Brown in the Third Regiment, Tennessee Cavalry, Company F. He enlisted on April 26th, 1863 and was mustered out on June 12th 1865 (McCammon Appendix).

[MS page 4]

4

Shortly for some parole

Camp further North¹

I hope that we will be

sent North the water is

verry bad here and I fear

a great many will be

sick if we stay here long

The people of Vicksbu

-rg and surrounding Country

are verry kind to us them

and the Sanitary Commis

-sion² have furnished us in

paper envelopes pens Ink

Postage stampes tobacco pipes

combs towels handkercheifs

thread tin cups news papers

testaments³ and many other thing

¹ Presumably, this would have been Camp Chase in Ohio, where the steamboat Sultana was supposed to take the prisoners from Camp Fisk near Vicksburg (McCammon 154).

² A civilian organization, founded in 1861, that provided “medical care and personal items to the soldiers” (Salecker 65).

³ This might refer to bibles, since they consist of the Old and the New Testament (OED).

[MS page 5]

5

I want you to write me
a letter about a mile long
and tell me about every
thing that has transpired¹
since I went to, or rather
was taken to purgatory²
I would try to disscribe
the place and our treat-
-ment to you but I dont
think I could do the sub
-ject justice on less than
a quire of paper³ and
you will have to wait
tel I see you I think
if I was at home that
I could tell you all in about
a week

¹ Possible misuse of the word transpire, meaning what has happened while he was gone (OED).

² Figurative meaning of „a place of temporary suffering“ (OED) that H. M. Misemer uses instead of prison.

³ A quire of paper is “a set of four sheets of parchment or paper folded in two” (OED). This letter was written on two sheets of paper.

[MS page 6]

6

a part of the time we was
tolerable well fed and well
treated and a part of the
time nearly starved and
kicked about and jobbed
with the Bayonette¹ just
any way But from all
accnts² we were in the
best prison the rebs have³
it is allmost a heaven
compared with Anderssonvi
-lle Georgia

Tell the children that
I want to see them verry
bad and hope that they
are ~~good~~ all good children

¹ Being jobbed with a Bayonet means to be stabbed with “a short flat dagger” (OED).

² The spelling was corrected, it is either written as ‘accnts’ or ‘accounts’ and should probably be ‘accounts’. In this context it is used like the phrase “by all accounts” which means that this is the generally prevailing opinion (OED).

³ Even today it is believed that Andersonville was one of the worst prisons during the civil war. For more information, see Bryant, Hesseltine, McCammon,

[MS page 7]

7

and that they must not
forget to pray to God to
protect them and make
them good children and
pray for Pa that he may
be a good Pa and get
home again to live with
them and pray with
them and for them
Tell them that I allways
pray for them ever time
I pray Tell them that
they must be kind to
each other and not quarel¹
and fight. But allways
love and speak kind to each
other

¹ Handwriting unclear, possible meaning: to quarrel

[MS page 8]

8

Twenty eight of ^{our} ^ regi-
-ment died in prison and
a good many are still in
prison sick two of our Co¹
was left in Jackson² sick
three died in Cahaba
James Daugherty of Monrae
or McMinn³. J. Harvey⁴ &
L. Thompson, of Blount⁵
County are the names of
them that died of Comp
-any (F) Tell James. H.
Hicks⁶ wife⁷ that Jim⁸ is all
wright him and me are
messing together Tell uncle Jo
H⁹ his Boys are all well H M. Misemer¹⁰

¹ Abbreviation for company. Referring to Company F of the Third Regiment, Tennessee Cavalry.

² A city in Mississippi (Salecker 60).

³ Private James Daugherty belonged to the Third Regiment, Tennessee Cavalry, Company F. He enlisted on September 11th, 1863 and was imprisoned on September 24th, 1864. He died on November 11th, 1864 at Cahaba Prison (McCammon Appendix).

⁴ Private John B. Harvey enlisted on May 1st, 1863 and was taken to prison on September 25th, 1864. He died on November 11th, 1864 in Cahaba Prison.

⁵ Private Leonidas M. Thompson, died in Cahaba Prison on January 18th, 1865 of pneumonia (McCammon 155). He was in the Third Regiment, Tennessee Cavalry, Company F. Thompson was enlisted on May 1st, 1863 and captured on September 24th, 1864 (McCammon Appendix).

⁶ Private James H. Hicks was in the Third Regiment, Tennessee Cavalry, Company F. He enlisted on April 26th, 1863 and was a prisoner of war since September 25th, 1864. It is supposed that he died on April 27th, 1865 when the steamboat Sultana exploded (McCammon Appendix).

⁷ James H. Hicks' wife is unknown.

⁸ Jim appears to be a nickname for Private Hicks.

⁹ Unknown

¹⁰ Henry M. Misemer belongs to the Third Regiment, Tennessee Cavalry, Company F (Ancestry).

Works Cited

Ancestry. Ancestry Library Edition. <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>.

Ancestry is a useful tool to do genealogical research since it provides information about individuals. This includes birth and death dates as well as important dates, such as a marriage, and sometimes the profiles of family members are linked.

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

This book provides information on Civil War prisons, amongst them are the Cahaba Prison and the Andersonville Prison. Furthermore, the Sultana disaster, the explosion of the steamboat Sultana with prisoners on it, is discussed.

Cole, Donald W. "Foreword". *Andersonville Prison: Lessons in Organizational Failure*, edited by Joseph P. Cangemi & Casimir J. Kowalski, 1992, pp. xi-x.

The collection of essays explains why Andersonville Prison was worse than many other Civil War prisons.

Hesseltine, William B., editor. *Civil War Prisons*. The Kent State UP, 1962.

This book focuses on the conditions in several prisons and camps during the Civil War. Amongst them are Andersonville Prison and Cahaba Prison.

McCammon, Charles S., editor. *Loyal Mountain Troopers: The Second and Third Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry in the Civil War: reminiscences of Lieutenant John W. Andes and Major Will A. McTeer*. Blount County Genealogical and Historical Society, 1992.

The book focuses on the stories of the Second and third Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry, to which H. M. Misemer belonged to. The appendix consists of the "Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Tennessee, of the Military Forces of the State, from 1861 to 1866" and lists the names of the soldiers, their rank, their age, when they were enlisted and mustered and remarks.

McDonough, James L. "Tennessee and the Civil War." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 3, 1995, pp. 190-209. *JSTOR*.

The journal article provides an overview of the war in Tennessee and reports on the rebel guerrillas mentioned by H. M. Misemer.

Misemer Civil War Letters, 1861 - 1900, MSS 21-07.2. McFee - Misemer Civil War Letters, MSS 21-07. Hunter Library - Special Collections. Box 2, Folder 61.

This is a letter from the same collection as the letter that was transcribed and annotated in this document. It contains several legal documents that provide personal information about the Misemer family.

Oxford English Dictionary (OED) Online, Oxford UP, <https://www.oed.com>.

The online dictionary was used to explain words and phrases, such as inst., dysentery, guerrillas etc., in the letter.

Salecker, Gene E. *Destruction of the Steamboat Sultana: The worst Maritime Disaster in American History*. Naval Institute Press, 2022.

This recent publication relies on primary sources to explain the reasons for the Sultana disaster. The journey of the prisoners to and from Camp Fisk near Vicksburg is also reported.