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 Castle (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 Morrison 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 (McCammom 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.
  - 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.
March the 28\textsuperscript{th}/65
Camp near Vicksburg, Miss.\textsuperscript{1}
My Dear wife\textsuperscript{2} I wrote you
a letter the 24\textsuperscript{th} Inst\textsuperscript{3}
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 prison\textsuperscript{4} I
had a very bad cold and
Dysentery\textsuperscript{5}. But I am all
wright now and hope to rem

\textsuperscript{1} Refers to Camp Fisk which was located four miles outside of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Union prisoners were held captive at this camp (Salecker 60).
\textsuperscript{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.
\textsuperscript{3} An abbreviation for instant that refers to “this month” in the context of this letter (OED).
\textsuperscript{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.
\textsuperscript{5} Dysentery is a disease that causes inflammation of the intestine that leads to “mucous and bloody evacuations” (OED).
2

-ain so a good many of
the Boys are takeing sick
since we came here Diarhea
seems to be the only disease
here Harry\textsuperscript{1} has been sick
several days not very bad
Sol\textsuperscript{2} Lee\textsuperscript{3} and De\textsuperscript{4} are all
well I give my best respects
to Betsey Hamilton\textsuperscript{5} and tell
her, Geo, W\textsuperscript{6}, is well and
gone to visit Vicksburg to
day will return tonight
    I understand that
the rebel guerrillas have
been cutting up generally
in East Tenn this winter\textsuperscript{8}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{1} Presumably Charles Harrison Bogart, Martha J. Misemer’s brother. He was enlisted on November 6\textsuperscript{th}, 1862 and belonged to the Third Regiment, Tennessee Cavalry, Company F. He was a prisoner of war since September 25\textsuperscript{th}, 1864 and supposedly died on April 27\textsuperscript{th}, 1865 when the steamboat Sultana exploded (McCammon Appendix).
\footnote{2} Solomon F. Bogart, brother of Martha J. Misemer. Private Bogart enlisted on November 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1862, belonged to the Third Regiment, Cavalry, Company F like his brother-in-law H. M. Misemer, and was mustered out on June 10\textsuperscript{th}, 1865 (McCammon Appendix).
\footnote{3} Levi M. Bogart, brother of Martha J. Misemer.
\footnote{4} Unknown
\footnote{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.
\footnote{6} Unknown, he might be the husband or a relative of Betsey Hamilton.
\footnote{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.
\footnote{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).
\end{footnotes}
I am very anxious to hear what they have done. I learn that they killed Esq. McGaughey of Athens.

I learned it from some Andersonville prisoners that was captured the same time that he was. I also learn from them that H. H. Brown is in Andersonville prison. One train load of prisoners has come here from Andersonville and we are looking for the balance. Ever day there is a strong talk of us leaving here.

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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).
Shortly for some parole
Camp further North¹
I hope that we will be
sent North the water is
very 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 very 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).
I want you to write me a letter about a mile long and tell me about every thing that has transpired since I went to, or rather was taken to purgatory. I would try to discribe 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 paper 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

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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.
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 jobed
with the Bayonette\textsuperscript{1} just
any way But from all
acconts\textsuperscript{2} we were in the
best prison the rebs have\textsuperscript{3}
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

\begin{footnotes}
\item Being jobbed with a Bayonet means to be stabbed with “a short flat dagger” (OED).
\item The spelling was corrected, it is either written as ‘acconts’ or ‘acounts’ 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).
\item Even today it is believed that Andersonville was one of the worst prisons during the civil war. For more information, see Bryant, Hesseltine, McCammon,
\end{footnotes}
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 always pray for them ever time I pray. Tell them that they must be kind to each other and not quarrel and fight. But always love and speak kind to each other.

1 Handwriting unclear, possible meaning: to quarrel
Twenty eight of our regiment died in prison and a good many are still in prison sick two of our Co\(^1\) was left in Jackson\(^2\) sick three died in Cahaba
James Daugherty of Monrae or McMinn\(^3\). J. Harvey\(^4\) & L. Thompson, of Blount\(^5\) County are the names of them that died of Comp\(-\)any (F) Tell James. H. Hicks\(^6\) wife\(^7\) that Jim\(^8\) is all wright him and me are messing together Tell uncle Jo H\(^9\) his Boys are all well H M. Misemer\(^10\)

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\(^1\) 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 11\(^{th}\), 1863 and was imprisoned on September 24\(^{th}\), 1864. He died on November 11\(^{th}\), 1864 at Cahaba Prison (McCammon Appendix).
\(^4\) Private John B. Harvey enlisted on May 1\(^{st}\), 1863 and was taken to prison on September 25\(^{th}\), 1864. He died on November 11\(^{th}\), 1864 in Cahaba Prison.
\(^5\) Private Leonidas M. Thompson, died in Cahaba Prison on January 18\(^{th}\), 1865 of pneumonia (McCammon 155). He was in the Third Regiment, Tennessee Cavalry, Company F. Thompson was enlisted on May 1\(^{st}\), 1863 and captured on September 24\(^{th}\), 1864 (McCammon Appendix).
\(^6\) Private James H. Hicks was in the Third Regiment, Tennessee Cavalry, Company F. He enlisted on April 26\(^{th}\), 1863 and was a prisoner of war since September 25\(^{th}\), 1864. It is supposed that he died on April 27\(^{th}\), 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 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.


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.


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


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


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.


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


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.

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


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.