

**L.M. Bogart's Letter to Martha Misemer**

**June 16, 1864**

**Manuscript:**

HL\_MSS\_21-07\_02\_41

Transcribed by Hannah McLeod

English 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 to the Document

This manuscript is a transcription of a letter written June 16, 1864 from Levi Morrison Bogart to his sister, Martha Jane (Bogart) Misemer, during the United States Civil War.

Bogart was born in late 1841 or early 1842 and baptized May 16, 1842, in Athens, McMinn County, Tennessee, to father Charles Harrison Bogart and mother Caroline Breazeale. He had 12 brothers and sisters by his parents Charles and Caroline (known to have survived infancy). Levi was the sixth of those children. During his time in the Union forces he served with his brothers Solomon Franklin Bogart, five years his senior, and Charles Harrison Bogart, three years younger than Levi.

Levi's sister Martha married Henry Marshall Messimer on Feb. 9, 1859. In addition to his own brothers, Levi served alongside Martha's husband Henry and Henry's brothers, Philip and Felix Messimer.

These men served in the 3rd Regiment of the Tennessee Cavalry. Available records show Bogart's enlistment date as Jan. 12, 1864, however, the first letter in this collection from Levi to his sister Martha (HL\_MSS\_21-07\_02\_29) places him in Vicksburg, Mississippi, on Feb. 14, 1863. It is likely that Bogart volunteered for Confederate forces prior to enlisting in the Union army. Tennessee voted to secede from the Union in June of 1861, largely in response to the attack on Fort Sumter on April 12 and President Lincoln's April 15 call for 75,000 volunteers to squash the southern rebellion.

Levi Bogart is listed as a soldier in the 43rd Regiment of the Confederate Tennessee Infantry, Gillespie's 5th East Tennessee Volunteers. This regiment was organized at Knoxville, Tennessee, in December, 1861. Its members were recruited from Polk, Rhea, Meigs, Bledsoe, Hawkins, Roane, Jefferson, McMinn, Bradley, and Hamilton counties. Bogart was born in McMinn County and his family are listed as residents there in both the 1850 and 1860 censuses.

The regiment moved to Virginia, Kentucky, and then Mississippi. It fought at Champion's Hill and Big Black River Bridge. The men were then captured in the fight for Vicksburg, when the Confederate officer in control, Brigadier General John C. Pemberton, surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant and his forces after a 47-day siege. All enlisted Confederate soldiers were paroled, put under oath not to fight again until legally exchanged.

Levi's first two letters in this series, also to Martha, place him in Vicksburg, on the Confederate side of the war, during the spring of 1863. Records show he enlisted in Union forces in January of 1864.

In this letter from June 16, 1864, Bogart is writing from Camp Thomas, near Nashville, Tennessee.

Bogart begins the letter with an apology for not writing more, recalling that he promised his sister he would write to her when left home. He describes why writing has become more difficult during his time at war — lack of writing practice and lack of supplies. He goes on to suggest that little of note is happening that is worth writing home about, and that while some of the “boys” he is with make up tales to relay home, he would do no such thing.

Next Bogart describes some of the more exciting things that have occurred since he left home. First, he tells of attending a Catholic mass for the first time ever while in Nashville. He describes some of the rituals of a Catholic mass in detail and admits to his sister that he found much of it comical. Bogart tells his sister he has also observed Jewish people worshiping near the encampment where he is staying and gives his opinion on the matter.

After that, Bogart tells his sister that he has observed that Black folks are being educated. He offers her his opinion on the matter and asks what she thinks of the idea.

Lastly, Bogart tells Martha that while he could write more, he is in the sun and it is hot out so he won't. He tells her that the next day he will leave for Pulaski near Bridge Port, Alabama.

This document is of particular interest for many reasons. Bogart is a young, southern Appalachian man fighting for the Union forces during the Civil War. In this letter he freely offers his opinions regarding his first experience in a Catholic church and his observance of Jewish people worshiping. Bogart himself was baptized Presbyterian at Mars Hill Presbyterian Church in Athens, McMinn County, Tennessee. He also offers his opinion on the education of Black folks in the south in 1864.

While his opinions should not be extrapolated to stand for any group during this time period, whether male, young, Caucasian, Presbyterian, working class, or other, they do offer a rare glimpse into the opinions of a common man at the intersection of race and culture during the Civil War Era of United States history.

## Editorial Statement

L.M. Bogart's handwriting is at times difficult to interpret. In the letter dated June 16, 1864, he admits to not writing frequently which has made writing more difficult. Indeed, in earlier letters from this collection, Bogart's handwriting is much more standardized, clean and easier to decipher. Any words that could not be confidently transcribed have been noted.

This transcription is a diplomatic edition; it has been transcribed as closely to the original document as possible. Spelling errors, grammatical issues, underlined words, and other irregularities have been preserved. Bogart almost never separates sentences with commas or periods, nor does capitalization indicate breaks in phrases, sentences, or thoughts. Some marks that appear like commas or periods seem to denote word separation for words that were written especially close together. Those marks are indicated in this transcript by the separation of words with periods instead of spaces.

Listed below are regular or semi-regular features of Bogart's penmanship in this letter:

- The ampersand is almost always used in place of the word "and," with few exceptions.
- Bogart denotes dates by writing out the month, writing the number of the day of the month, followed by a superscript "th" (always a "th," even when the number would require an "st" or "rd") which is underlined and beneath it has two short, vertical, parallel lines. This is denoted in this document with a standard superscript <sup>th</sup>. Next comes a looping forward slash, followed by the last two digits of the year, i.e., 63.
- When inserting a word into a line that was already written, Bogart places carrots on both sides of the word. This is denoted with the word placed where it was indicated in the sentence, with carrots on both sides of the word.
- Instead of a single dash for words that are split at the end of one line and the beginning of the next, Bogart uses two lines that appear like an equal sign (=)

[MS page 1]

Camp.Thomas.Tenn<sup>1</sup> June 16<sup>th</sup> 64

Mrs. M.J. Misemer<sup>2</sup>

My.Dear.Sister

As an oportunity presents its self to convey you a letter  
I shall try & write you a few lines I have bin verry ung =  
rateful to you. for I promised to write to you when I left  
home & I ^think^ this is the second time I have wrote.<sup>3</sup> you scolded  
me for not writing to you the last time you wrote to me  
& I never replied & I fear most affectionate sister you  
will think hard of me for not writing to you, I have  
just lay about & indulged in my laziness till I cant  
write to do any good & then I've got no pen. Marsh<sup>4</sup> has  
just come in & loant me his pen so I think I can  
come a little better speede I am actually ashamed of  
my writing, I know I could write when I left home  
but I cant do any good now, I will tell you one reason  
of it I have bin writing with a Gold pen<sup>5</sup> all the

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<sup>1</sup> According to National Park Service Battle Unit Details, the 3rd regiment of the Tennessee Cavalry was ordered to Nashville, Tenn., February 27, and on duty there till June. This information, coupled with Levi's account, later in the letter, of visiting the Catholic institution of Nashville places Camp Thomas in or around Nashville, Tennessee.

<sup>2</sup> Martha Jane Misemer, Levi Bogart's elder sister, was born in 1835 and married Henry Marshall Misemer in 1859. They had three children, Charles, Margaret, and Laura. Martha's husband Henry died, like Levi, in the Sultana explosion in 1865. Martha remarried to Ezkiel Daniel in 1872. She died in McMinn County, Tennessee, in 1882.

<sup>3</sup> There are two other letters from L.M. Bogart to his sister Martha in this collection of letters making this letter at least the third time he has written to her. (HL\_MSS\_21-07\_02\_29, HL\_MSS\_21-07\_02\_30)

<sup>4</sup> Marsh likely refers to Henry Marshall Misemer, Martha's husband and Levi's brother in law, with whom Levi was serving.

<sup>5</sup> Could be referring to a fountain pen, made of metal with a gold dipped nib, which increased in use throughout the 1850s.

time till I cant write without one & I'm not  
able to buy one, Sister will you forgive me for being  
So inconstant to you & not you alone but Father and  
Mother it looks, hard to ask your pardon without pleading  
not guilty though you must grant it & I'll try & write to  
you again in the coarse of a month or six weeks and  
you must return the same compliment that<sup>6</sup> I would  
write more than I do but their is no use of it their  
is only six of us boys here & I think a letter from

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<sup>6</sup> The first two letters of this word are scribbled and written over top of one another. Within the context, "that" seems the most likely word used, but it is not fully clear.

me every month or even quarterly you may think you  
are doing well if I could make things that dont occur and  
write them like some of the boy I would write oftener  
well I suppose I could make up a gassy tale & write  
but then its to tedious for me to undertake & to let  
tales alone a letter once a month satisfies me very well  
Well I have seene a few things since I left home  
that would seeme sorter Gassy to one that never saw  
it on the fashion I went to the Catholic Church one  
Sunday to meeting & of all the scenes I ever saw  
in a church was right there their was Christ & him  
Crucified & every thing else,<sup>7</sup> image that the Bible ever  
had reference to & every member that come in would  
bow & smite their brests with their wright hand and  
So on till the congregation gathers then the old priest  
(comes)<sup>8</sup> out in sack cloth & takes a bowl of water & a brush  
and throws water in every bodies face<sup>9</sup> in the house,that  
is cauled the holy water & now you may guess I am  
a holy man since I visited the Catholic institution of

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<sup>7</sup> After the word “else,” there appears to be the comma symbol Bogart uses intermittently throughout his letters, followed by an uncharacteristically small capital ‘I’. Bogart’s writing is particularly jumbled at this point in the letter. It appears he is trying to say “there was Christ crucified & everything else I imagine that the Bible ever had reference to.”

<sup>8</sup> The word “comes” is written vertically in the margin of the letter enclosed in parenthesis.

<sup>9</sup> Asperges, the rite of sprinkling holy water, now most common during the easter season, can be performed at the beginning of Catholic mass throughout the year. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal highlights this option, “from time to time on Sundays, especially in Easter Time, instead of the customary Penitential Act, the blessing and sprinkling of water may take place as a reminder of Baptism.” According to Lawrence Johnson’s book *The Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Elements of the Order of the Mass*, the rite known as Asperges was celebrated before Sunday Mass up until the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council, 1962-1965. The act was popularized during the middle ages and became solidified practice in 18th century monasticism as a sign of sanctification. (Johnson) and (General instruction of Roman Missal)

Nashville<sup>10</sup> you know Martha that I was raised to behave  
well in a church but I could not keepe from laughing  
a little when they commence acting the fool that way  
they pray as often in public as any body buy they  
all pray at the same time & the thunder<sup>11</sup> of it is they  
Sing their prayre they always told me to sing and  
pray but they pray & sing all at the same time

Well their is another peculiur kind of worship  
right close to our Encampment the Jewish stile

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<sup>10</sup> There were at least two Catholic churches in Nashville in 1864, but there could have been more. St. Mary's Catholic Church of the Seven Sorrows, the second cathedral of the Diocese of Nashville, was completed in 1847 and is still standing today. The Catholic Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary was completed in 1859. According to the church's records, this church was commandeered by Union troops in 1864, the same year this letter was written. The church record states that "... upon their departure, little remained of the church's acquired elements of worship and decoration. A singular silver paten was all that remained of the furnishing. Rebuilding and restoration soon began." While it does not seem likely that regular Mass would have continued during the Church of the Assumption's occupation, it is not entirely out of the question. Bogart may have attended Mass at one of these churches.

<sup>11</sup> This word is likely either thunder or wonder, spelled "wunder." The first marks of the word appear to be either a "th" without the "t" crossed, or a capital "w" that is quite scrunched.

of worship they gather to an old shed once every two weekes  
with all sorts of musical instruments & have a real hoe  
down Bull dance<sup>12</sup> I think thats about as disgusting a  
thing as my eyes ever witnessed but I reckon they think  
its the wright way to do Gods servises well I shall not  
consume time to make any further explanations about  
the Jews though their is one more subject I wish to  
introduce thats the Niggers being educated<sup>13</sup> are you for  
it or not why I can tell you whats the fact Martha  
when I go to town I just see the Niggers paceing the  
the streetes to and fro with their Books on their arms some  
with spelling Books some with Arethmetics & other  
kinds of Books owing to their progress what think  
you about it I dont fancy it much myself & I dont  
think you will for you told me every since I can  
recollect that we wer just alike & I believe its so  
Well Martha I've wrote pretty near three sides of paper up &  
could write as much more if I could have the patience  
but the day is hot & I am in the sun & then I cant

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<sup>12</sup> In 1864, Nashville, there were at least three Jewish congregations. The oldest of those, began in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Garretson on South Summer street (now 5th Avenue south) during the 1840's. This congregation split in 1861. Another congregation was chartered at some point in 1864. The oldest was called Khal Kodesh Mogen David, the resulting congregation when it split in 1861 was called Khal Kodesh Ohava Emes, and the third that existed between 1864-1875 was called Khal Kodesh B'nai Yeshurum. The oldest, now referred to as Ohabai Sholom Jewish Temple Nashville, is still in existence. According to its archivist Mitzie Russell, services were held in Douglas Hall until the synagogue was built during the 1870s. Russell's opinion is that Bogart was not observing a Jewish worship service, Shacharit Shabbat, because these occasions tend to be subdued and reverent. She says Bogart's description would be very offensive to the Jewish Community. This aligns with the opinion he shares next.

<sup>13</sup> In 1858, Tennessee laws were codified. In those laws, schools were for white children only. This law relating to schools remained in effect until the school law of 1867, whereby children of color were legally provided with educational facilities. (White, 224)

Although the laws of 1867 provided for the free, universal education for children in Tennessee, the real-life application of that law was not so simple, and many counties refused to provide for the education of children of color (White, 81-91).

keepe my minde on one thing long enough to write  
it we are going to leave here tomorrow for Pulaskie<sup>14</sup>  
near Bridge Port Alabama or at least we are ordered to  
go & I suppose we will leave        Well I have wrote enough for  
this time we are all well that is we are in tolerable good  
health we have all bin sorter puny Brownings<sup>15</sup> has  
had a verry bad spell but we are all on the mend  
hopeing these lines will find you all well I close,

L.M Bogart

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<sup>14</sup> Pulaski, Tennessee is close to the southern border of the state which borders Alabama. Bridgeport, Alabama sits in the northeast corner of the state and is about 100 miles southeast of Pulaski.

<sup>15</sup> Unknown

## Annotated Bibliography

*Ancestry Library Edition*. Ancestry.com.

Ancestry provided most of the information used to find names, dates, places of birth/residence and other biographical information.

Catholic Church and International Committee on English in the Liturgy. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. Office of Pub. Services United States Catholic Conference 1982.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal provided information about the rite of Asperges, or the sprinkling of holy water at the beginning of a Catholic Mass.

Daniel, Larry J. *Conquered: Why the Army of Tennessee Failed*. University of North Carolina Press, 2019. Online edn, North Carolina Scholarship Online, 2020.  
<https://doi.org/10.5149/northcarolina/9781469649504.002.0008>, accessed 1 Dec. 2022.

This book provided information about Tennessee's secession from the Union and other relevant military history for the time period.

Johnson, Lawrence J. *The Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Elements of the Order of the Mass*. FDLC, 2011.

*The Mystery of Faith* provided information about the history of the rite of Asperges and the probable regularity of its use in Catholic churches in the 19th century.

Ohabai Sholom, Jewish Temple, Nashville. [Templenashville.org](http://Templenashville.org).

Ohabai Sholom's website provided most of the information about the Jewish community in Nashville during the 1860s. Mitzie Russell, in charge of the congregation's archives kindly provided insight on community at the time and content of the letter in regards to Jewish worship.

St. Mary's Catholic Church of the Seven Sorrows. [Stmarysdowntown.org](http://Stmarysdowntown.org).

This church's website provided information about the construction of the Catholic church in Nashville and its existence in 184 when Bogart attended a Catholic Mass in that city.

The Catholic Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. [assumptionnashville.org](http://assumptionnashville.org).

This Church's website provided information about the date of its construction and occupation by Union forces.

*The Tennessean*, 17 May 1860, p. 3.

This edition of *The Tennessean* had information about Isaac Garretson's suicide attempt, and described him as a prominent member of the Jewish Community in Nashville. Using he and his wife's name (also mentioned) I was able to find information about the oldest Jewish congregation in Nashville, still in existence today (Ohabai Sholom), as well as two other Jewish congregations that were likely in existence in 1864 and could have been the one referenced by Bogart.

U.S. National Park Service. [Nps.gov](http://Nps.gov).

The National Park Service provided information about troop movements and action throughout the civil war for both Union and Confederate sources.

White, Robert H. *Development of the Tennessee State Educational Organization 1796-1929*. Southern Publishers, 1929.

This book provided information regarding educational opportunities for Blacks in Tennessee prior to, during, and after the Civil War.