

# **Solomon “Sol” Bogart’s Letter to Martha Jane Misemer**

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## **INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES**

This transcription and its attendant annotations, explanatory material, and bibliography were prepared by students in ENGL618: Research Methods in English, the required gateway class for the MA in English at Western Carolina University. 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 students. While these students take great care with their transcriptions and annotations, errors are always possible. As these students learn throughout this class, good scholarship requires checking of sources and corroboration by authoritative sources.

It is hoped that the transcription and annotation of WCU Special Collections materials will be useful to the institution, students, scholars, and other patrons and users of WCU's Special Collections materials.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE DOCUMENT

This manuscript is a letter written from Solomon “Sol” Franklin Bogart to his sister, Martha Jane Misemer, wife of Henry Marshall “Marsh” Misemer.

Solomon “Sol” Franklin Bogart was born in July of 1837, in McMinn County, Tennessee. He was one of 13 other siblings (specifically, Sol was the fifth Bogart sibling to be born. His sister, Martha, was the fourth Bogart sibling, just two years older than him). Sol enlisted to join the Union Army in the American Civil War on November 21, 1862, and he became a member of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tennessee Cavalry Regiment, Company F. On September 25, 1864, Sol was involved in the Battle of Sulphur Creek Trestle, where Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest cut a crucial Union supply line and captured most of the Union troops involved in the battle; Sol was one of the men captured, along with his sister’s husband, Marsh. During service, Sol’s regiment lost 2 officers and 8 enlisted men in battle, as well as 4 officers and 532 enlisted men by disease (a total of 546 deaths for the entire regiment). When the war ended on April 9, 1865, Sol and countless other Union prisoners of war were able to begin the process of going home. For Sol, Marsh, two of Sol and Martha’s brothers, 1,964 paroled Union prisoners, 22 members of the 58<sup>th</sup> Ohio Infantry, two former soldiers, and five civilian quartermaster employees, this meant boarding the steamboat *Sultana* on April 24, 1865 sometime after 9:00 p.m.

The *Sultana* was a steam engine which regularly transported passengers and freight between St. Louis, Missouri and New Orleans, Louisiana on the Mississippi River. Following the end of the Civil War, *Sultana* was used to transport Union prisoners of war to freedom. At 2:00 a.m. on April 27, 1865, all three of *Sultana*’s boilers exploded. At the time of the explosion, the steam engine was carrying roughly 2,200 passengers; the carrying capacity for the ship was 376 passengers. All in all, 1,169 people were killed in the explosion. Sol would be one of the survivors. Sadly, Martha’s husband would perish, along with two of her brothers, Levi and Charles.

Sol begins his letter by letting Martha know that he is well with the exception of a bruise on his hip, which he sustained as he jumped overboard following the explosion of *Sultana*. He lets her know that the ship exploded at 2:00 a.m. on April 27<sup>th</sup>; that he swam 8 or 9 miles to shore to safety; and that he has searched newspapers and local hospitals for Henry, Levi, Charles (in the letter he calls him Harrison), and “most of the neighbors[’] boys,” but that their names are not listed among the survivors. He asks her to let Mary (either his wife or his sister) know that he is well and that he will be home in a short time.

## EDITORIAL STATEMENT

This transcription is a diplomatic edition, meaning the text has been transcribed as closely to the original document as possible. This means any spelling errors, grammatical issues, or syntactical issues have been preserved in the transcription. With that being said, here are some characteristics of Sol’s handwriting to take note of:

- There are sections in the letter where Sol has crossed out words. He does this using strikethroughs, which I have indicated with the following symbol: (---). He does a

thorough job of scratching out words he did not intend to write, but if any letters or words are able to be seen beneath the strikethrough, it will be indicated in a footnote.

- The content of this letter is distressing, and Sol's penmanship appears to reflect that. There are areas where he has written letters in a hurried manner, and as such they appear illegible. In these instances, I have used context to try and determine what the letters could actually be; however, since I am uncertain about some of them, any letters I could not discern are indicated with brackets [].

# TRANSCRIPTION

[MS page 1]<sup>1</sup>

horid

Disaster<sup>2</sup>

Memphis Tenn April 30 1865

Mrs MJ Misemer<sup>3</sup> Dear Sister I embrace the present opportunity of writing you a few lines to let you know that I am well at present with the exception of a slight bruise on my hip which I receiv'd from th[e] explosion of the stemer<sup>4</sup> which was blow,d up 1[2]<sup>5</sup> miles abord this place on the morning of the 27 of the month at 2 oclo there was 2308 persons on board<sup>6</sup> and among the last was H M Misemer Lev[i]<sup>7</sup> [&] Harison<sup>8</sup> and the most of the neighbors boys I did not see either of the boys after the alarm comensed the names of all that was saved is in the papers and there is neither of their names there I jumped over board among countless numbers of drownding men and (---) made my (---) way to the bank after hard swimming of 8 or 9 miles

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<sup>1</sup> This letter is written on U.S. Christian Commission Rooms stationery. To see what the header on the stationery looks like, see Figure 1, *Appendix*.

<sup>2</sup> "horid Disaster" is written on the top of the stationery alongside the stationery header above the word "Memphis." It can be viewed in the *Appendix* (same figure referenced in footnote one).

<sup>3</sup> Martha Jane Misemer (September 1835-June 23, 1882).

<sup>4</sup> *Sultana*. See *Introduction to the Document* for more information about the *Sultana* disaster.

<sup>5</sup> It appears that Sol wrote "12 miles." The 2 is unclear, which is why it is in brackets. The *Sultana* actually exploded 7 miles offshore.

<sup>6</sup> There were 2,200-2,400 total passengers on board the night *Sultana* exploded (sources differ on an exact number, but this range is the most accurate count). Most of these passengers were Union soldiers who had recently been released from Confederate prisons at Cahaba, Alabama and Andersonville, Georgia.

<sup>7</sup> Levi Morrison Bogart (May 16, 1842-April 27, 1865), brother of Martha Jane Misemer and Sol Bogart.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Harrison Bogart (March 19, 1845-April 27, 1865), brother of Martha Jane Misemer and Sol Bogart.

I hav bin all over this town in evry Hospital and  
neither of the boys is here they are all lost and  
their Remains to day lay in the bed of the  
Mississippi River horid thought D[J]<sup>9</sup> made his  
escap and is unhurt Martha excuse my Distracted  
leter tell Mary<sup>10</sup> I am well and will be at home  
in a short time I Remain your Brother

Solomon F Bogart

Death<sup>11</sup>

Oh forget me not

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<sup>9</sup> Presumably someone who is friends with Martha and Sol. His second initial is unable to be determined, and since his full name was not written out there is virtually no information to use to find him.

<sup>10</sup> Could be referring to Mary L. Bogart (February 5, 1849-October 15, 1876), sister of Martha Jane Misemer and Sol Bogart, or to Sol's wife, Almarinda Bateman Bogart (February 18, 1849 – December 9, 1936). If he is referring to his wife, perhaps "Mary" was a name they called her to shorten "Almarinda." There are also some records saying his wife is named Mary Baker, but I was unable to find anything definitive to show who he was married to.

<sup>11</sup> The word "Death" has a square drawn around it. To see a picture of this, see Figure 2, *Appendix*.

[MS page 2]<sup>12</sup>

lost lost all

is lost

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<sup>12</sup> This is written on the back of the page. The page itself was folded once horizontally, and then twice vertically, separating the paper into six distinct sections. This is written in the middle section of the top row of folds, indicating that Sol may have written it after folding the letter to place it in an envelope before mailing it to Martha. To see an image of this, see Figure 3, *Appendix*.

## APPENDIX



Figure 1: Header of the stationery Sol used to write this letter

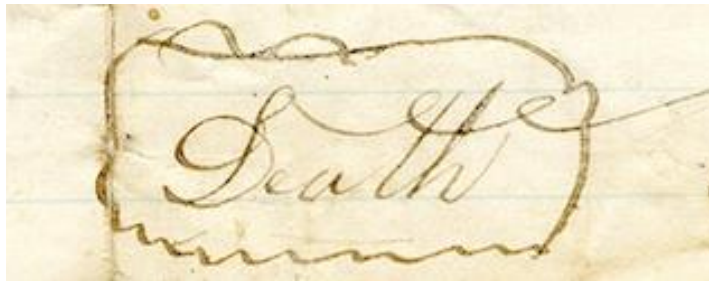


Figure 2: "Death"



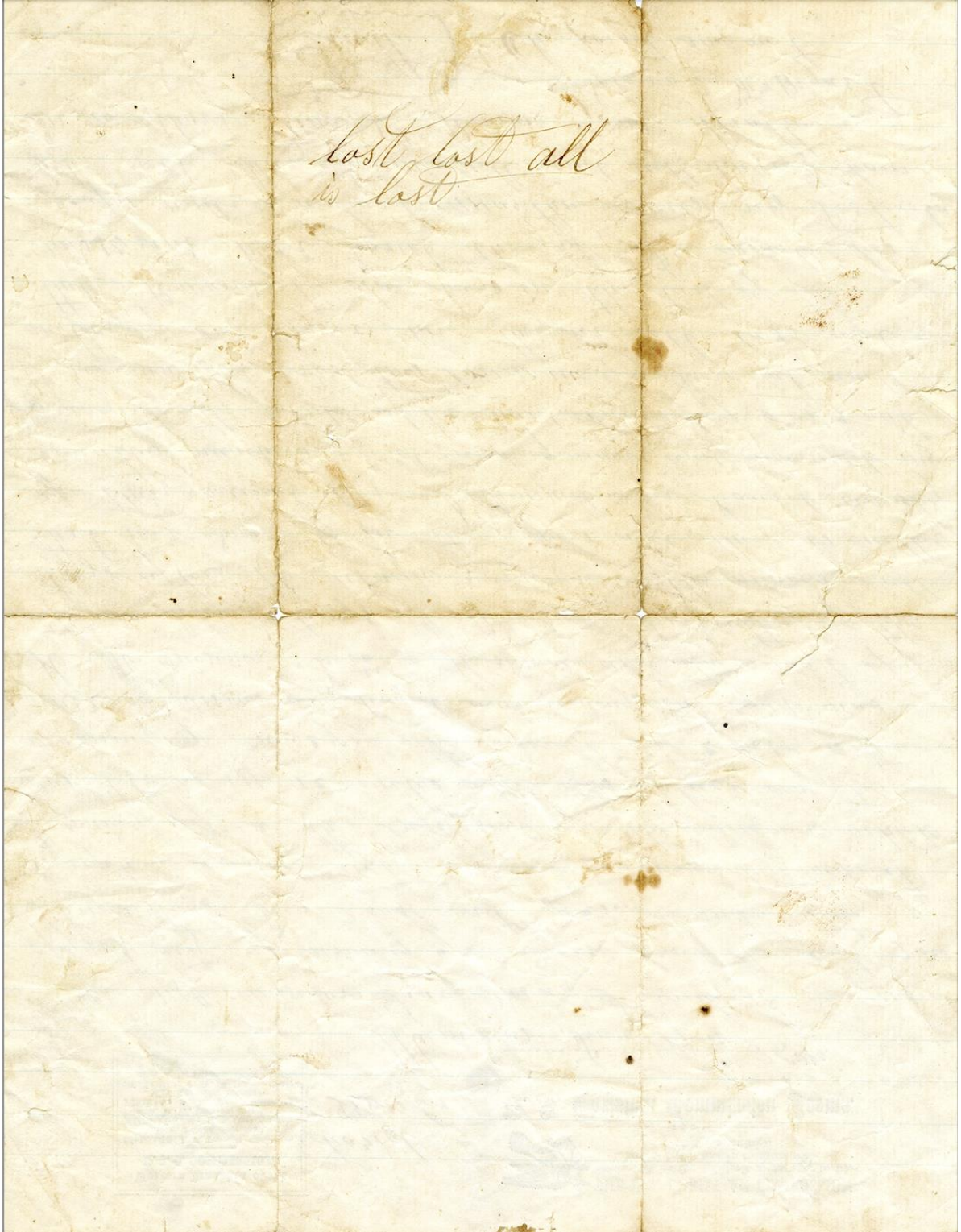


Figure 3: The backside of the letter Sol sent to Martha about her husband and brothers' fates.

## Annotated Bibliography

*Ancestry Library Edition*. Ancestry.com.

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

Bogart, Solomon letter to Martha Misemer. 30 April 1865. Box 2, Folder 53. MSS21-08. McFee-Misemer Collection. Hunter Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC.

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

This book is one of the resources I used to find the details surrounding dates, locations, etc. related to the *Sultana* disaster.

---. *Disaster on the Mississippi: The Sultana Explosion, April 27, 1865*, Naval Institute Press, 2015.

This book is the resource I used to find the details surrounding dates, locations, etc. related to the *Sultana* disaster.

The Sultana Disaster Museum, *The Sultana Association*.  
<https://www.sultanadisastermuseum.com>

The Sultana Disaster Museum has compiled a database which can be used to find the names and other relevant information of the Union prisoners who were on *Sultana*.