

Civil War Letters from Henry M. Misemer to His Wife Martha

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Folders 27 & 29

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For English 618: Research Methods in English

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Introduction to the Series

This transcription and its attendant annotation, explanatory materials 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 of this class include the following:

1. Conduct appropriate, effective, and ethical scholarship.
 - a. Effectively find and use advanced research tools (handbooks, databases, guides, etc.) appropriate to the 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 submitted as presented 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 resources.

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

Introduction to Document

This document contains two letters written by Henry Marshal Misemer to his wife Martha while stationed around Nashville Tennessee in the spring of 1864. Henry (signed in his letters as H. M.) was a corporal in the United States Federal Army assigned to Company F of the Third Regiment of Tennessee Cavalry Volunteers. According to the National Park Service, the 3rd Tennessee Cavalry regiment was established in Murfreesboro and in Nashville in January of 1863 (“Search for Battle Units”). The 3rd Tennessee Cavalry had an extensive list of battles and engagements in which they were involved; two which the unit participated in were the Battle of Stones River and the Battle of Nashville. The Battle of Stones River was a victory for the Union Army. Through a combination of Confederate disorganization and distention between officers in Confederate command, Union forces prevailed. The battle was fought under the command of Confederate general Braxton Bragg and Union general William Rosecrans. Peter Cozzens writes in his book *No Better Place to Die: The Battle of Stones River*, about the distention and turmoil between Bragg and the officers under his command that they, “were so absorbed with their internecine feud that they neglected what should have been the sole object of their attention, the defense of what remained of Confederate Tennessee against Rosecrans and the Army of the Cumberland (216).

Within his letter, Henry Misener mentions to his wife the smallpox outbreak that was of great concern for soldiers and civilians alike during the war. Smallpox was not the most common of the diseases that soldiers of the Civil war faced. Roughly 68,000 soldiers contracted measles as compared to roughly 12,000 cases of smallpox reported (Emberton). However, soldiers feared

contracting smallpox worse than measles, and with good reason. The mortality rate of smallpox during the war was close to 39% (Emberton).

In addition to referring to smallpox, Misener brings to his wife's attention his intention to return home when he receives a furlough. However, he also tells her that "some of the boys are running away and going home" from his company. He ensures Martha that he will not leave until he is given permission as to not desert his post and risk bringing shame upon himself or his family. In his essay "Desertion, Cowardice, and Punishment", Mark A Weitz provides several possible explanations as to why men deserted as they did. For example, Weitz states, "Many soldiers saw their enlistment as contractual in nature and any perception that the government was not living up to its end of the bargain justified their departure" (Weitz). It is possible that soldiers from Misener's company believed that the government was not "holding up to its end of the bargain" by not giving them furloughs as they saw fit.

Between September 23 and 25, 1864, 550 soldiers from the 3rd Tennessee Cavalry were taken prisoner by General Nathan Bedford Forrest at Athens, Alabama and nearby Sulphur Branch trestle where they guarded the railroad (Potter, 9). Henry Misemer was among these men captured and taken prisoner. Misener would be placed in a union prison camp called Cahaba in Cahaba, Alabama. Conditions were horrible at Cahaba even though the National Park Service claims it to have been "probably the best run of all southern prisons" (National Park War Series). With little to no protection from the elements and "daily rations of 10-12 ounces of cornmeal (including ground corn cobs and husks), and five to seven ounces of bacon or beef" (Potter, 17), prisoners were barely able to scratch out an existence within the camp. On April 27, 1865, freed soldiers from both Andersonville and Cahaba prisons were aboard an extremely overcrowded steam powered river boat called the *Sultana* to transport them back to their homes. According to

Jerry O. Potter, this ship was the third to bear the same name. Each one of the previous ships had suffered ill fate when they either crashed or burned. Naming the third ship the *Sultana* was a “sinister omen” (Potter, 4) that would foreshadow its subsequent destruction as well. At approximately 2:00AM, the ship encountered a malfunction with the boilers and exploded killing many of the passengers instantly. Potter records that “The blast drove boiler fragments, pipes, bricks, and machinery through the upper decks like shrapnel, killing and maiming scores of sleeping passengers” (84). While many passengers were killed immediately by the explosion, others perished in the water trying to swim to safety. Henry M. Misener was one of the 1,169 fatalities of the *Sultana* tragedy.

Editorial Statement

Of these two letters written by Henry M. Misemer to his wife, the first letter is eight pages in length and the second is four pages. The letters are written on paper that has aged over the 158 years to a deep brown color. The letters have been folded to be stored creating harsh creases. Words and lettering along these creases can be faint and difficult to read in certain places of the letters. Misemer also scratched out some of his writing in places throughout the letters. Where the writing is still legible through the scratched-out portions, I chose to include those words within the transcription. There are also throughout the letters, instances where Misemer left out letters that belonged in words and indicated them through a symbol likened to a carrot letting the reader (Martha) know that he added letters where they needed to be. In these instances, I chose to write out the intended word with the letter additions included. Grammar and punctuation are at best sporadic throughout the letters. There are hardly any periods or commas making the letters read as one continuous sentence in some places. There are also several holes

in the pages of the letters often impeding the ease in which the words can be read. Sometimes, the hole will cover the entirety of the word and other times, some letters of the word are legible. This is a diplomatic transcription in that it was done in a manner to maintain the integrity of the letters and to keep them as close to the originals as possible in the hopes of respecting the memory of Henry M. Misener to any of his possible posterity that may come across or use this transcription of his letters. As a diplomatic transcription, this edition retains the spelling irregularities found within the letters. I have also chosen to maintain the line breaks within each page of the respective letters. In the transcription, the words are limited per line in order to maintain these line breaks from the letters.

File 37 (Page 1/8)

Nashville Tenn April 11th/64

My Dear Wife

again I embrace
the present opportunity of addressing
you as I have a chance of sending
a letter by Jack Hill¹ and
nothing affords me any pleasure
only conversing with you
By letter and if I could only
see you and converse with you
face to face I think I would Be
one of the happiest creatures on
Earth But as God has otherwise
ordered it I feel inclined to sub-
-mit to his will hoping that
the , time, will soon come when
we will be permitted to see each
other again and enjoy the sweets
of our first love and of home in
peace and if we meet no more on
Earth may we meet in heaven

¹ Not found, but presumably a courier for Company F 3rd Regiment Tennessee Cavalry

(Page 2/8)

Martha we have moved from
Nashville about Eight miles
on the North Western Railroad
and it is supposed by , some of, our officers
that we will stay here all
summer and drill others think
we only come here to get away
from the small pox the small
pox has nearly ceased to exist
in our regiment But it is raging
in Nashville a good deal our
first Major died with it a week
or two ago² I am in as good
health as I ever was in my life
And all of our Brothers are well
but Lee he had a chill yesterday
Mr. Brient left here last week
for Cincinnati Harve and me
sent by him for the things you
and May sent for But Sol and
Lee couldent get the money
to send for the things Father &³

² See “The Minister of Death” by Carole Emberton. During the Civil War, the mortality rate of Smallpox was around 39 percent

³ Captain Jacob P. Brient: See “Tennessee & The Civil War” Captain of Company F 3rd Regiment Tennessee Cavalry

Solomon Bogart (Sol): Brother to Martha Misener wife of Henry M. Misener

Levi Bogart (Lee): Brother to Martha Misener

Pvt. Harvey Anthony Cochran Sr.: See “Find A Grave”. Pvt. 3rd Tennessee Cavalry

(Page 3/8)

Mary⁴ sent for we have not drawn any money for nearly six months and will not draw any tel about the 15th of May at which time I am going to try to get a furlow to come home there is no chance to get one now, our officers say they wont furlow us tel we draw money so that we can take it home to our families But I think that is only an excuse they think if they dont furlow us we will reinlist as vetterans for the sake of a sixty days furlow or at least that is my notion about it and if I never get a furlow tel I reinlist I will never get one at all some of the boys are running away⁵ and going home I said when I left that I would

⁴ See "Solomon Bogart 1800-1878-Ancestry" Could be in reference to Solomon Bogart's daughter Mary

⁵ See "Desertion, Cowardice, and Punishment" by Mark A. Weitz. Henry M. Misemer implies that he will not leave his post until he is given official furlough and that he wishes to not bring shame of any kind upon himself or family. Desertion would be seen as extremely shameful.

(Page 4/8)

never come ~~home~~-back tel
I could come in day light
with my head up and I am
still in the same notion
yet I never intend to do any
thing that will disgrace you
and my little children and
I know it
Martha I started a letter and
twenty dollars in money to you
the 1st of last October By Cute
Caffey⁶ and last week he brought
it all back to me I sent thirty
seven dollars by Brient to buy
the things you sent for I told
him to not get any Molasses they cost
one dollar and a half per
gallon here and I didnt suppose
you wanted them at that
price If you do write to me
and I will send for them
the first chance I can get

⁶ Name appears to be Cute Caffey in the letter but is difficult to read. No reference found.

(Page 5)

I didnt send for any shoes for
the children I thought I had
better get them here my self
I can get as much rice here as
I want for nothing we have several
hundred pounds coming to our
company and the Boys say I may
have it and well come I will send
you some by Mr. Brient when he
comes back Martha I am well pleased
about you hireing a man to make
a crop this summer and I will
help you all I can to pay him
I dont want you to expose⁷ your
Self more than you can help
if we can only make enough
to keep our little children and
you from starving tel the war
is over I will be satisfied I care
nothing about the destruction
of our property so that we can live

⁷ Expose: To offer publicly, 'put up' *for* (or *to*) *sale*. OED Online.

(Page 6/8)

Martha you said something about
what I owed Johnnie⁸, I dont
know anything about what I
owe him I dont want you
to pay him any thing tel I get
home let him sweat and I will
give him his dues when I come home
you said for me to write him
a letter and tell him that I would
give him his dues I decline writing
for if I make any threats I will
have to suffer for any thing that
is done to him no difference who
does it And I would rather tell
him to his face what I think
of him Oh I had like to have
forgotten to tell you I got a
letter Wm B Misemer⁹
of Riceville McMinn Co Tennessee
the other day, here is what he says
after telling me that his and my
familyes were well Marsh

⁸ Unknown.

⁹ Possibly Henry's brother William Bible Misemer

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you and a good many others
thought I was a reb I have
proved myself clare By the
first men in the country such
As William Porter¹⁰ and others
he requests me to write to him how
I am getting along and says the
Yankies hasent hurt him any
yet if the old third ever gets
in his neighborhood he will be
hurt and badly hurt at that
Tell Father I got a letter
from him and was glad to hear
from him tell him I will write
to him shortly Martha you said
you had learned that the (word rendered illegible due to a hole in the paper)
got hold of a letter broke it
and read it this is a mistake no
one has ever broke a letter of mine
but Sol and he dont brake
them only when im not
here and dont expect to be

¹⁰ Unknown.

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for some time then he brakes
them and answers them
and I do the same with him
some of the boys commenced
brakeing letters last summer
that belonged to others But
I give them to understand
that it wouldnt be healthey
to brake one for me
My dear Martha I want you
to write to me as often as you
can for nothing affords me
as much pleasure as reading
a letter my dear
beloved Martha I want
you to write to me how and
where to direct my letters so
that I can send them By
mail direct your letters to
Nashville Tennessee Company F
3rd E Tennessee Cavalry I remain
your loving husband

H. M. Misemer

Nashville Tennessee April 21/64

Mrs. M. J. Misemer

My dear wife again I embrace
the present opportunity of address-
ing you for nothing affords
me any pleasure except that
of writing to you and why
should I deny myself the
privledge when I know
that my letters affords you
as much pleasure in reading
as they afford me in writing
my dear wife I didnt intend
writing to you at this time as I think it
is verry unsertain about you
getting it Harve Cochran is
to take it, I expect him to
get drunk and loose it. But
Sol is writing to Mary and
I thought you would be disap-
-pointed if she got a letter and

(Page 2/4)

you didnt I have received several
letters from you lately some
by mail and some by hand
they come by hand several days
sooner than by ~~hand~~-mail the last
letter I got was of April the 3rd
and I am getting verry anxio-
-us to get another I want you
to write me ever week if you
can it is the only pleasure
that we can see now but ~~the~~
I hope the time is not far
distant when we will be
permitted to meet again never
more to be parted on this green
Earth ~~never~~-untell it shall
please an allwise God to
call us from time to Eternity
and then may our parting
only be for a short time to
meet again in heaven
my Dear wife you dont know
the pleasure it gives me to

(Page 3/4)

~~know the pleasure it gives~~
~~me~~ know that I have a wife
who puts her trust in God
a wife that prays for me
and all that is mine
who in my absence can
pray for me and my children
and teach them to love and
serve God I now can pray
in faith and I believe I
shall be spared to live to
see peace once more and enjoy
the blessings of home and
the happiness which thy smiles
and kind embraces always
afforded me But if it should
otherwise please God I hope to be prepared
to meet you in heaven. Tell
Father & mother that I desire
an interest¹¹ in their prayers
It is not necessary to ask you to
pray for me for I know you
are already doing so in earnest

¹¹ See OED "Interest": Right or title to spiritual privileges. This could have been said meaning that Henry wishes to be remembered with a special place in the prayers of his father and mother

(Page 4/4)

Martha I sent by Elisha
Brient for the things you sent
for he got them and has
brought them to Nashville
he now has to send to General
Schofield at Knoxville to
get them transported
to Athens which will
take some time he talks
of going back to Cincinnati
to By more goods if he does it
will be some time before he gets
home We drew money
the other day I intend sending you
some By Brent when he comes
There was three men furlowed
out of our company today But it didnt
fall to my lot to get one there is to
be no more furlowing for twenty days

H. M. Misemer

Works Cited

By. "3rd Tennessee Cavalry Regiment." *Tennessee & the Civil War*, 26 Nov. 2016, tngenweb.org/civilwar/3rd-tennessee-cavalry-regiment/.

This website provides information on the unit and officers of the 3rd Tennessee Cavalry

Cozzens, Peter. *No Better Place to Die the Battle of Stones River*. University of Illinois Press, 2015.

This book provides the history of the Battle of Stones River. The tactics and outcomes of the battle are also included within this text

Emberton, Carole. "The Minister of Death." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 17 Aug. 2012, archive.nytimes.com/opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/08/17/the-minister-of-death/?_r=0.

This article provides statistics and history on the smallpox outbreak during the Civil war. It also compared the infection rate of measles to that of smallpox.

"Expose". *Home: Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com/view/Entry/66705?rskey=gxOwRm&result=2#eid.

This source provides several definitions of the word expose.

FamilySearch.org, ancestors.familysearch.org/en/LH95-BMV/henry-marshall-messimer-1831-1865.

This website provides the ancestry of Henry M. Misener. Misener's parents, siblings and children can be found listed here.

"Harvey Anthony Cochran Sr. (1824-1865) - Find a..." *Find a Grave*, www.findagrave.com/memorial/166291719/harvey-anthony-cochran#source.

This website provides information on Harvey Anthony Cochran Sr. believed to be "Harve" in the letters. There is also information on his burial site and tombstone.

"Interest": *Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com/view/Entry/97735?rskey=WiJdxM&result=1#eid.

The Oxford Online Dictionary is a resource that can be used to find the multiple meanings of words. Word origins and semantic changes can also be tracked using this resource.

"National Park Civil War Series: The Prison Camp at Andersonville." *National Parks Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/civil_war_series/5/sec5.htm.

This online resource through the National Park Service provides information on the prison camp at Andersonville and also includes a section on the Cahaba prison camp in which Misener was imprisoned.

Potter, Jerry O. *The Sultana Tragedy: America's Greatest Maritime Disaster*. Pelican Pub. Co., 1992.

This book outlines the *Sultana* disaster in great detail. The author provides great detail on the conditions, overcrowding, negligence, and horror all surrounding the tragedy.

“Search for Battle Units.” *National Parks Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, [www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-battle-units.htm#fq%5B%5D=State%3A%22Tennessee%22&fq%5B%5D=Side%3A%22Union%22&fq%5B%5D=Battle Unit Function%3A%22Cavalry%22](http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-battle-units.htm#fq%5B%5D=State%3A%22Tennessee%22&fq%5B%5D=Side%3A%22Union%22&fq%5B%5D=Battle%20Unit%20Function%3A%22Cavalry%22).

This website through the National Park Service provides information about the different units that were involved in the Civil War. Valuable information the 3rd Tennessee Cavalry can be found here.

“Solomon Bogart 1800-1878 - Ancestry®.” *1800-1878 - Ancestry®*, www.ancestry.com/genealogy/records/solomon-bogart-24-1t9bb9.

This website provided the genealogy of Martha Misener’s brother, Solomon Bogart.

Weitz, Mark A. *Desertion, Cowardice and Punishment - Essential Civil War Curriculum*. www.essentialcivilwarcurriculum.com/desertion,-cowardice-and-punishment.html.

This is an essay about desertion and soldier retention and the punishments if soldiers were accused of cowardice and desertion.