

H.M. Misemer to Wife Martha

August 17, 1864

Manuscript:

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For 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.
 - 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 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.

Introduction to Document

This manuscript is a letter written from Henry M. Misemer (signed as H. M. Misemer) to his wife, Martha J. Misemer, dated August 17th, 1864, and sent from Decatur, Alabama.

Henry M. Misemer, born in 1832 as Henry Marshall Misemer, served in Company F of the 3rd Regiment of East Tennessee's Cavalry on the side of the Union soldiers during the Civil War. His first marriage was to Margaret Jane Brown from January 25th, 1855, up until her death a little over two years later on August 31st, 1857. He had one daughter from his first marriage: Mary Elizabeth "Lizzy" Misemer. Henry remarried on February 2nd, 1859, to Martha J. Misemer, then Martha Jane Bogart, who is the recipient of this specific letter. Together, they had three children: Charles F. Misemer, Margaret E. Misemer, and Laura C. Misemer, all of whom a widowed Martha took care of after Henry's passing after 1865 due to the Sultana disaster.

While serving in the Union, Henry is believed to have died on April 27th, 1865, during the Sultana Disaster as the ship headed towards Union territory. Solomon F. Bogart, Charles H. Bogart, and Levi M. Bogart – Martha J. Misemer's brothers – were also aboard the ship when disaster struck, with only Solomon surviving to return home. The *Sultana* was a commercial steamboat used for transportation and the trade of goods. The Sultana Disaster, caused by the boilers within the ship exploding, remains the worst maritime disaster in United States history ("The Disaster").

At the time of this letter, Henry was stationed in Decatur, Alabama, with his company having returned from a skirmish against Confederate soldiers in Courtland, Alabama, which is presumed to have occurred around or on July 25th, 1864. He wrote in hopes to share his news not only with his wife, Martha, but with his children and those among their familiarity in their hometown. Additionally, Martha and their family were living in Monroe County, Tennessee at this time. The letter's contents, Henry's correspondence to Martha, are as follows.

Henry begins by assuring Martha that he received recent letters from her, remarking that he is glad to hear from her. He details that his company has recently made camp after a scouting mission, having returned from a skirmish in Courtland, Alabama. He comments on the personalities of both the Confederate soldiers and the women associated with them, praising the latter for their strong-wills and eagerness to fight, much unlike the men. Changing topics, Henry then informs Martha of two letters and twenty dollars he sent her recently, along with some food sent with Jacob P. Brient's package that was sent to Elisha Brient, and he requests from her to let him know what has or has not been received. Henry then begins discussing familial matters, stating that he is glad his children, Lizzy and Charlie, are in school, and he wants them to study so they can write to him. He remarks that he has written to Martha many times about various topics, not knowing what she has received, and asks her to tell him what she wants to know since he finds himself at a loss of what to write. He changes topic again, noting that his company is still camping in Decatur with uncertainty of when they will leave, which he states will hopefully be within a month or so. The Confederate soldiers discussed, with Henry saying they have fought

well, but many have been captured or killed, whereas no one in Henry's company has been lost. Henry concludes by asking Martha to give regards to Dr. D and their friends. At the end, he apologizes in his postscript, stating that he is out of sorts that current day.

Given the personal nature of the correspondence recorded here from a Union soldier to his family, alongside the references made to both historical names and dates belonging to events of the American Civil War, this letter is an available resource to those interested in researching the personal everyman nuances of the Civil War, the events of the Sultana Disaster, or the Misemer family as a whole. Additionally, the script in which the letter is written in and moments of particular language use may be of great interest to those curious about the orthographic and linguistic environment of the mid-1800s, and of those wanting to preserve history in any form.

Editorial Statement

To preface this statement, it is to be noted that this translation is a diplomatic edition, meant to represent the text as closely as possible to the original document. This means that any spelling errors, moments of capitalization, the usage or lack of punctuation, and any linguistic or syntactical instances were preserved to the best of the transcription's ability.

The manuscript scans of this letter totals to four pages, each page representing the respective presumed front and back of the original two-page handwritten document. The first page is among the most impacted by age, with its instance of yellowing being the most severe. The remaining pages, while showing some signs of discoloration, appear paler in shade. All of the pages show signs of being folded. However, the first page is the clearest in this regard, with a crease bringing together the top and bottom halves of the page, and there is a minor instance of tearing at the rightmost edge of this line. Thankfully, this tear does not impact any legibility. There is a heavy crease showing that the pages were folded to bring together the right and left halves, but the line is barely visible on the top half of the document for any of the pages. Along these respective crease lines, the words are faded – this is most noticeable on the first page again, at the line bringing together the top and bottom halves. In relation to this, the ink is bold, with the words very legible at the beginning of the letter, when noting the date and location, and at the bottom of the first page starting from three-fourths of the way down all the way to the final page. In addition, there are a few instances of ink being smudged throughout the document, largely at the bottom halves of each page, and there are a number of stains, appearing sporadically, alongside words being scratched out with lines of ink.

With Henry M. Misemer's handwriting, the penmanship is clear, legible, and respectively stylish in its calligraphic nature. There are a few unique instances to note of his handwriting, such as:

- There are instances of his *r* and *s* letters having ascenders – represented as a little loop at the top. His lowercase *y* looks very similar to a lowercase *z*, such as in “Lizzy.”

- There is inconsistent usage of apostrophes. There is one being used in the word “get’s”, which would potentially be considered incorrect, but unused in the word “won’t”. He uses an apostrophe once when writing “Brient’s” but omits it the second time it appears.
- Certain words are either misspelled by modern standards or spelled correctly given the time period of the 1800s, such as: “verry”, “liveing”, “feild”, “faught”, and “bayonettes”.
 - One particular instance is the absence of the letter “c” for the word “charged”, as referenced on the letter’s page 2. It was written as “harged.”

In regard to the transcription of the letter, these choices – in an effort to be diplomatic in this transcription – are to be noted:

- Capitalization and general punctuation, such as commas and periods, are inconsistent. This has been preserved as shown in the manuscript, rather than attempting to capitalize proper nouns or the start of sentences, or to mark when a sentence ended with a period.
- Gaps in a line of script are marked with one press of the *TAB* key in the transcription.
- The line breaks have been preserved as shown in the manuscript, ending per line as it did on the original document. This includes words split apart, such as “camp-ing” – they are marked with a hyphen connecting the two together on their respective lines.
- Words marked out by individual vertical lines are represented as “---” in the transcription.
- For words marked out but still legible, it will be spelled out with a strikethrough.
 - For example: ~~and~~ (on the letter’s page 1.)
- With instances of words or letters being superscripted to fix misspellings or absences in the document, it is represented here by superscripted ^ marking the words or letters itself.
- Due to the formatting with footnotes, some of a single letter’s page extends on to more than one page on this document. Each individual page of the letter is marked at the top.

Sincere gratitude is due to Western Carolina University’s Hunter Library, in particular their Digital and Special Collections and staff, for the uploading and sharing of the documents used.

Transcription and Annotations

[MS Page 1]

Decatur Ala wednesday morning¹
August the 17th 1864²
My Dear wife I received yours of³
the 4th & 6th in due time and ^was^ verry
--- glad to hear from you once more
we are all well and are liveing
on the fat of the land we just
got in yesterday off of a scout⁴
our company has only stayed in
camp one night in the last nine
days we went to Courtland last
week ~~and~~ a distance of twenty miles
to have a little fight we tried to⁵
surprise them By going all the way
after knight But they heard of us⁶
and run before we got there we
stayed in Courtland two days and

¹ "Ala" represents "Alabama" as, prior to 1963, state and territory abbreviations were not limited to just two letters ("State Abbreviations").

² On the day of August 17th, 1864, Henry's company – Company F of the 3rd Regiment of East Tennessee's Cavalry – was stationed in Decatur, Alabama, soon to head off on their expedition from Decatur to Moulton from August 17th to the 20th ("Battle Unit Details").

³ Henry's wife, Martha J. Misemer (born Martha J. Bogart), was born in 1835 and passed in 1882. Together, they had three children, one son and two daughters, alongside one daughter from Henry's first marriage ("Martha Jane Bogart.").

⁴ The scout in reference here is presumed to be related to the company's expedition from Decatur to Courtland and Moulton from July 15th to the 28th ("Battle Unit Details"), based on the timeframe he describes.

⁵ Of relevant note, a large battle took place around the time and place Henry references: the July 25th battle in Courtland, Alabama, between the "13th Michigan and 32d Wisconsin Volunteers" (Phisterer).

⁶ The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) does not denote "knight" as a spelling for "night", so this is assumed to be a case of the word being misspelled ("night, n. and int.").

nights and had lots of fun ---
talking to the Rebel women I
tell you they are a ~~heap~~ much
worse than the men they say

that the women of the South
will shoulder their muskets
and march to the feild before
they will give up their Confederacy⁷
we tell them that when the
women get's to fighting that we
will quit Shooting and fight
them with Bayonettes and I⁸
think from their actions that
the most of them about here
would like to go through the
Bayonette exercise verry well⁹
I sent you two letters and twenty¹⁰
dollars last week by Charles,¹¹
Cate, I want you to write whe-¹²
-ther you got it or not also whether
you got the goods I sent with Mr
Brient's goods or not and what¹³
they cost and what Mr Brient

⁷ Women during the Civil War were occasionally known to disguise themselves as soldiers and fight, to say nothing of their loyalty to the cause. See Blanton for more information on women's roles during this time.

⁸ Bayonets were often the last line of defense for soldiers, and were considered a psychological war tactic. See Markowitz for additional insight.

⁹ See McClellan for more information about the use of bayonets during the Civil War.

¹⁰ The \$20 given in 1864 would be worth \$380 (rounded up) in 2022, due to inflation.

¹¹ While Henry and Martha have a son by the name of Charles, the Charles referenced here is to be presumed as Charles Harrison Bogart, Martha's brother, who served alongside Henry in the same company ("Charles H Bogart").

¹² The "C" in Cate shares the same appearance as the "C" in Charles one line above. However, the word "Cate" seems to bear no immediate significance due to no matching family or associated records to Henry or Martha.

¹³ Mr. Brient is presumed to refer to Captain Jacob P. Brient, the captain of Henry's company ("Jacob P Briant"). The spelling of Brient seems to be varied despite accurate records of spouse, birth date, and so on.

harged you for his Trouble I¹⁴
Bought 50 pounds of rice at 19¹⁵
cents per pound and put it in
with Mr Brients goods on the ---

¹⁴ The word “harged” here has no indicated of erasure, yet it is assumed to be a misspelling of the word “charged,” given the context.

¹⁵ The \$0.19 per pound in 1864 would be worth approximately \$3.61 in 2022, due to inflation. Fifty pounds of rice for this same price would be approximately \$180.50 in 2022.

17th of June and marked it
to Mrs H. M. Misemer Athens
Tenn in care of Elisha Brient¹⁶
I want to know whether you got
it or not Tell Lizzy and¹⁷
Charlie that I am glad to¹⁸
hear that they are going to school
and learning so fast I want them
to, ^learn^ ,fast so that they can write
me a letter Well Martha I
have written to you so often and
about so many things and not
knowing whether you have got my
letters or not --- I hardly k^now
what to write if there is any thing
that you want to k^now about¹⁹
let me know and I will try
to Tell you we are still camp-
-ed in Decatur and there is no
telling when we will leave
here I think we will leave

¹⁶ Given the context, Elisha Brient is presumably Jacob P. Brient's wife ("Elizabeth Briant"). She lived in McMinn, Tennessee, whose county seat is Athens ("McMinn County, TN").

¹⁷ Lizzy refers to Henry's daughter from his first marriage to Margaret Jane Brown, Mary Elizabeth "Lizzy" Misemer ("Mary E Missimore"). The spelling of Misemer seems to be varied despite accurate records of parents and family, their birth date, and so on.

¹⁸ Charles refers to Henry and Martha's son, Charles F. Misemer ("C. F. Missimore").

¹⁹ The word "know" is missing its "n" twice before being spelled properly a third time, which might be a reference to the "out of sorts" state that Henry notes in the postscript of this letter.

here this fall perhaps in the course
of a Month we are not needed²⁰

²⁰ Within a month's time, Henry's company was against General Nathan Forest at a skirmish in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about the Sulphur Creek Trestle and Henry's company, see the extensive history regarding The Battle of Sulphur Creek Trestle ("Significance of the Site").

here the rebs are so wild
that they wont fight us unless
we slip up on them and then
they fire once and run when
we first come here the rebs were
pretty bold and faught well But
we have weaned them we have
caught a good many of them
and killed a few R And have²¹
never lost a man since we come
here Give my respects to
Dr D and all enquireing²²
friends Tell Dr D to write²³
to me and give me all the
news

Your Devoted

Marsh

P.S. you must excuse my short
and scattering letters for I am
out of sorts to day

H.M.M

²¹ For a list of skirmishes predating this letter, see National Park Service's documentation of the 3rd Regiment, Henry's company ("Battle Unit Details").

²² The OED has the word "inquiring" spelled based off the form of "enquer", as per Middle English spelling ("inquire | enquire, v."). Henry is assumed to be adopting this spelling or is spelling the word phonetically.

²³ Dr. D is presumed to be referencing Ezekiel Daniel, a local doctor who Martha married on March 28th, 1872, after Henry's passing due to the Sultana Disaster ("Ezekiel Daniel").

Annotated Works Cited

“Battle Unit Details: Union Tennessee Volunteers 3rd Regiment, Tennessee Cavalry.” *National Park Service*, <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-battle-units-detail.htm?battleUnitCode=UTN0003RC>.

This record lists out the areas of interest that the 3rd Regiment of the Union Tennessee Volunteers, of which Henry Misemer was enlisted in, visited and participated in during the Civil War.

Blanton, DeAnne. “Women Soldiers of the Civil War.” *Prologue Magazine*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1993, <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1993/spring/women-in-the-civil-war-1.html>.

This article by Blanton details women’s roles in the Civil War, up to and including their means of fighting by ways of disguise. It details facts that go against stereotype.

“C. F. Missimore.” *Ancestry*, <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/19416009:7667>.

This census record of C. F. Missimore (otherwise known as Charles F. Misemer) from *Ancestry* verifies (a spelling of) his name, date of birth, and family relations.

“Charles H. Bogart.” *Ancestry*, <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/425171:1555>.

This military record of Charles H. Bogart from *Ancestry* verifies his name, date of birth, and family relations.

“Elizabeth Briant.” *Ancestry*, <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/19353653:7667>.

This census record of Elizabeth Brient (spelled Briant) from *Ancestry* verifies her name, date of birth, and family relations.

“Ezekiel Daniel.” *Ancestry*, <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/2658205:1169>.

This marriage record of Ezekiel Danial from *Ancestry* verifies his identity as well as his marriage to Martha Jane Bogart. Martha remarried after Henry’s passing.

“Henry Marshall Misemer Family Letters, 1861-1878 (bulk 1863-1865).” *Tennessee State Library & Archives Catalog*, 2012, [https://tnsla.ent.sirsi.net/client/en_US/tnslapublic/search/detailnonmodal/ent:\\$002f\\$002fSD_ASSET\\$002f0\\$002fSD_ASSET:20140/ada?qu=henry+misemer&d=ent%3A%2F%2FSD_ASSET%2F0%2FSD_ASSET%3A20140%7EASSET%7E0&h=8](https://tnsla.ent.sirsi.net/client/en_US/tnslapublic/search/detailnonmodal/ent:$002f$002fSD_ASSET$002f0$002fSD_ASSET:20140/ada?qu=henry+misemer&d=ent%3A%2F%2FSD_ASSET%2F0%2FSD_ASSET%3A20140%7EASSET%7E0&h=8).

This page documents the Misemer family letters during the Civil War.

“Inflation Calculator.” U.S. Official Inflation Data, *Alioth Finance*, 21 Nov. 2022, <https://www.officialdata.org/>.

The online calculator, offered by Alioth Finance, allows for calculations and inflations rates between a set number of years. This was used to calculate inflation differences with monetary funds mentioned in the letters.

“Jacob P. Briant.” *Ancestry*, <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/19353652:7667>.

This census record of Jacob P. Briant (spelled Briant) from *Ancestry* verifies his name, date of birth, and family relations.

“Limestone County, AL | Sep 23-Oct 2, 1864.” *American Battlefield Trust*, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/civil-war/battles/fort-henderson>.

This article details the battles that occurred near Fort Henderson, located by Athens, Alabama, from September 23rd to October 2nd, 1864.

Markowitz, Mike. “Knife on a Stick: The Rise and Fall of the Bayonet.” *Defense Media Network*, 10 Jan. 2022, <https://www.defensemmedianetwork.com/stories/knife-on-a-stick-the-rise-and-fall-of-the-bayonet/>.

This article details the history of the use of the bayonet.

“Martha Jane Bogart.” *Ancestry*, <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/family-tree/person/tree/117503005/person/350166559125/story>.

This family tree record of Martha Jane Bogart from *Ancestry* verifies her name, date of birth, and family relations.

“Mary E. Missimore.” *Ancestry*, <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/19416008:7667>.

This census record of Mary E. Misemer (spelled Missimore) from *Ancestry* verifies her name, date of birth, and family relations.

McClellan, George B. *Bayonet Exercise*. Philadelphia: T. K. and P. G. Collins, Printers, 1852. <http://www.drillnet.net/Bayonet.htm>.

This electronic upload is the official manual by George B. McClellan, who was the commanding general of the U.S. army during the Civil War. In this manual, he documented bayonet tactics for armies to use and study.

“McMinn County, TN.” National Association of Counties, https://explorer.naco.org/?county_info=47107.

The National Association of Counties details every county in the United States, including information such as: population, county seat, location, and so on.

Phisterer, Frederick. "Statistical Record of the Armies of the United States." *North Carolina Digital Collections*, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/collection/p15012coll8/id/7759/rec/1>.

This electronic upload of Phisterer's book details statistics during the Civil War. He details the numbers, specific members, and organizations of the armies involved, as well as a chronological record of the battles that occurred in the United States during this time.

"State Abbreviations." *United States Postal Service*, <https://about.usps.com/who/profile/history/state-abbreviations.htm>.

The United States Postal Services details a list of state abbreviations, both outdated and current.

"Significance of the Site." *Sulphur Creek Trestle Preservation Project – Building the Pride*, <http://www.buildingthepride.com/faculty/ssim/abpp/events.html>.

This website details the events of leading up to, during, and after the Sulphur Creek Trestle Battle during the Civil War. There is specific focus on troop position, movement, membership, and interaction between the warring sides during the September 25th, 1864 battle.

"The Disaster." *The Sultana Association of Descendants and Friends*, <https://www.thesultanaassociation.com/the-disaster>.

This website, in association with the official Sultana Museum, details the events of the Sultana Disaster which occurred on April 27th, 1865. The ship's demise is partially credited to the overload of people due to paroled Union soldiers being transported home.