

H.M. Misemer to Wife Martha

September 19, 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 September 19th, 1864, and sent from Athens, 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, amid 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 Athens, Alabama, not having spoken via correspondence with his wife, Martha, for a little over three weeks, dating his last letter to mid-August. He wrote in hopes to share his news with his wife and family about the recent occurrences among the company, including skirmishes and battles fought, while also checking in on their status due to their proximity to the conflict. 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 marking how long it has been since he has been able to write to Martha, going on to exclaim that he was very overjoyed to receive her recent most letter to him. This relief stems from Martha and his children remaining safe despite a recent string of raids – one of which occurred near where Martha and his family lives. Henry continues to explain that his company recently had the opportunity to help drive out "Wheeler," General Joseph Wheeler of the Confederacy, remarking that his company potentially could have captured him. Henry note that General Rousseau, known for being in pursuit of Wheeler but never capturing him, has cemented his reputation as someone denounced for these shortcomings. Henry notes that he has not seen much of the fighting personally, having stayed in camp to tend to his lame horse. He continues on to document the progress of the enemy, noting that Wheeler and others are heading their way after a brief crossing over the Tennessee River below the city of Decatur. He concludes that he and his company are well, and he promises to write to her soon.

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 – such as General Wheeler (Confederacy) and General Rousseau (Union) – this letter is an available resource to those interested in researching the personal everyman nuances of the Civil War, the events leading up to the Sultana Disaster in which Henry passed, 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 three pages, all of which are very similar in presentation. The pages are yellowed, almost tinted a beige-like cream color, with the color of the ink appearing to look like a deep red, similar to pink in some places due to the ageing of the letter. All of the pages show signs of being folded in a similar manner, with two creases running horizontal representing the paper having been folded into thirds. This divides the paper into three vertical sections. On the third page, there is a minor tear along the top most corner of the second section, but thankfully it does not impede upon any legibility. The writing along the crease lines is still legible, showing minor to medium fading, and the overall script has few instances of ink being smudged with only a few stains upon the parchment. At times, the letters appear to have been written by a shaky hand – for instance, the two “G” when writing “Gen. Granger”, the first appears to have a curve in its ascender that is absent from the second. However, overall, despite the light ink and occasional shaky handwriting, this letter is remarkably preserved.

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 small loop at the top. It appears to be pronounced here, with most loops having a gap in the center.
- There is a complete absence of apostrophes.
- Certain words are either misspelled by modern standards or spelled correctly given the time period of the 1800s, such as “captureing”. Given the amount of words that seem to be misspelled in way of missing a letter, this adds credence to his presumably rushed handwriting, as seen in: “ben”, “orderd”, and “Decator”.
 - The latter is noteworthy as he recently has spelled it correctly as “Decatur.”

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 “com-pany” – 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 any 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.
- 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]

Athens Ala Sep the 19th 1864¹

Mrs. M. J. Misemer²

My Dear wife after an absence³

of about three weeks I attempt

to address you again though I

have nothing of importance to⁴

communicate I received yours

on the 7th inst yesterday it was the⁵

most satisfactory letter I have ever

got and I was much rejoiced to

hear from you and happy to learn

that the raiders had missed you ent-⁶

-irely I supposed that they had taken

every thing you had and you dont

¹ The September 19th date is of important note, as on September 25th, Henry would be included among those captured by Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forest during the Sulphur Creek Trestle. One possible involvement would be that Henry was in John Minnis' garrison, a lieutenant colonel of Henry's company that surrendered while defending a nearby bridge to General Nathan Bedford Forest ("John Minnis").

² Henry's wife, Martha J. Misemer (born Martha J. Bogart), was born in 1835 and died in 1882. Together, they had three children, one son and two daughters, alongside one daughter from Henry's first marriage ("Martha Jane Bogart").

³ Henry notes that there has been an absence of three weeks since he has last addressed Martha and his family. This length of time, from early to mid-August to the date of Henry's letter, saw his company - Company F of the 3rd Regiment of East Tennessee's Cavalry - in Decatur, Moulton, Florence, and - by the time of this letter - Athens, Alabama, during the Sulphur Creek Trestle Battle Site ("Battle Unit Details"; "Significance of the Site").

⁴ This absence of anything important to share is assumed to be related to Henry's company being broken up into detachments to better operate for scouting, skirmishes, and battles ("3rd Tennessee Cavalry Regiment"). It could very well be an instance of him either being humble or secretive to not cause Martha concern, but given that later on he states he stayed behind due to his lame horse, it is possible that he did not see much action at this time.

⁵ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "Inst" refers to "instant", denoting the current calendar month ("instant, adj. (and adv.)"). By saying that he received Martha's letter the "7th inst yesterday", he is noting that he received her letter on the 7th of September; *inst* is just a manner of shorthand, in this circumstance.

⁶ This is assumed to be one of General Wheeler's many raids, including one that occurred on August 18th, 1864, at Chattanooga, Tennessee, a relatively short distance away from Henry's home of Monroe County ("Wheeler's Rebel Raiders").

know how thankful I am to
God for his protection in protecting
you and my little children in my
absence our regiment ~~and~~ is camped
at Athens again have been here 5
or 6 days our regiment had the pleasure
of helping to drive old Wheeler out⁷

⁷ One instance of “Wheeler being driven out” is that along the Nashville and Chattanooga railroad lines, guarded by the Union Infantry brigades that were stationed at key areas, resulted in General Wheeler being unable to destroy or cause any significant damage due to his lack of horse artillery (“Significance of the Site”).

of here Wheeler went in
six miles of Nashville our
forces met him and drove him
down through here and could
have captured him if they had
have tried General Rousseau⁸
has ben censured a good deal for
not captureing him our forces
got behind and before him and
had them scared into fits report
say they was crowding up together
like wild hoggs when Rousseau
asked Gen Granger to fall back
he done so and let Wheeler out.⁹
our papers have ben silent on the
subject I was not with the seg-
-ment after Wheeler my horse was
lame and I stayed in camp there¹⁰
was three of our regiment killed
or captured By Wheeler one Captain
and two privates one Cap- and thirty

⁸ General Robert S. Granger was a major general in charge of brigades along the Nashville and Decatur railroad line during August and September of 1864, having chased General Wheeler and his raid throughout the summer and towards the start of the fall, but when pursuing the Confederate forces through Lawrenceburg, Tennessee on their way to Rogersville, Alabama, General Granger gave up and returned to Athens, Alabama ("Significance of the Site").

⁹ General Rousseau asked General Granger, in the late summer of 1864, to recall the 2nd and 3rd Tennessee Union Cavalries to move to north Alabama ("Significance of the Site").

¹⁰ "Lame" is referring to "of a person or animal being disable or impaired" ("lame, *adj.*"), noting that Henry was stuck without a useful resource during this time.

five men out of Com EVG were¹¹
ourderd out on a scout and six

¹¹ Based on the context, “EVG” – as noted by the Oxford English Dictionary – is shorthand for “evening” (“evn, n.”).

hundred rebs surrounded them
and orderd them to surrender
but they went to fighting and
all but three cut their way out
and have come back to camp it is
reported that Wheeler Forest and¹²
Roddy are crossing the Tenn River¹³
below Decator and are coming
This way I dont believe it our com-
-pany have gone to see to day if
they do come the will see fun
before they get out of here I think
I am glad to hear that the
old rebs in East Tenn are getting
their rorights I must close¹⁴
for the beares of this is ready
to start to Tenn and will leave
this at Athens Tenn This¹⁵
leaves all the Boys and my

¹² Wheeler, Forest, and Roddy are respectfully Confederate General Joseph Wheeler, Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forest, and Confederate General Phillip Roddey (otherwise spelled at Roddy); all of these men had been involved in the Athens area, overseeing and organizing raids against the Union barrages and key protected landmarks, with record of General Forest and Roddy starting prior to General Wheeler but not reaching the same amount of impact (“Significance of the Site”). Previously, General Forest attempted a raid on Memphis, Tennessee (Holmes, Jack D. L.).

¹³ By September 14th, Confederate General Hood prepared for another attack from General Wheeler’s troops as General Wheeler crossed over the Tennessee River (“Significance of the Site”). By the time of this letter and given the proximity of the locations, it is possible Henry’s company could have been informed of this.

¹⁴ This word appears to be making “rorights” but the handwriting is of the first letter is slightly smudged and compressed. It could potentially be “xorights”, but that is also an unused word.

¹⁵ Given the context of this letter and the timing of the date written, Henry’s departure from Athens is presumed to be his final instance of remarking about camp before being captured during the Sulphur Creek Trestle Battle by Confederate troops (“Tennessee Civil War Battles”).

Self well I will write

again soon I remain as ever

Your own Marsh

Annotated Works Cited

“3rd Tennessee Cavalry Regiment.” *Tennessee & the Civil War*, 26 Nov. 2016,

<https://tngenweb.org/civilwar/3rd-tennessee-cavalry-regiment/>.

This article details the membership and events of the 3rd Tennessee Cavalry Regiment.

“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 visited and participated in during the Civil War.

“evn, *n.*” *Oxford English Dictionary*,

<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/57460561?redirectedFrom=evg#eid>

This entry details the definition of the shorthand word “evn”, derived from “evening.”

“instant, *adj.* (and *adv.*)” *Oxford English Dictionary*,

<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/97038?rskey=RZUvby&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid373239>.

This entry details the definition of the shorthand word “inst”, derived from “instant.”

“John Minnis.” *American Battlefield Trust*, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/john-minnis>.

This biographical note references John Minnis, a lieutenant colonel of the 3rd Tennessee Cavalry. Minnis, during the Sulphur Creek Trestle, surrendered his garrison that was defending a nearby bridge to General Nathan Bedford Forrest; it is possibly that Henry was among these men.

Holmes, Jack D. L. “Forrest’s 1864 Raid on Memphis.” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1959, pp. 295-321, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42621448>.

This article documents General Forrest’s raid on Memphis, Tennessee, during 1864.

“lame, *adj.*” *Oxford English Dictionary*,

<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/105263?rskey=aMeHdo&result=4&isAdvanced=false#eid>.

This entry details the definition of the word “lame”, referring to “disabled or impaired.”

“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.

“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 and significant focus on troop position, movement, membership, and interaction between the warring sides during the September 25th, 1864 battle.

“Tennessee Civil War Battles.” *National Park Service*, <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/tennessee.htm>.

This webpage provides a list of recorded Civil War battles that took place in Tennessee, noting who took place, where it occurred, and when. There is a typo on the webpage, remarking that it is “Texas’s” battles, but the link and the tab bar state “Tennessee.”

“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.

“Wheeler’s Rebel Raiders.; Capture of a Train Kilpatrick in Pursuit of the Rebels.” *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/1864/08/22/archives/wheelers-rebel-raiders-capture-of-a-train-kilpatrick-in-pursuit-of.html>.

This NYT article preserves a newspaper clipping of August 22nd, 1864. There is a mention of a raid caused by General Wheeler on August 18th that occurred near Chattanooga, which is a close location to Henry’s family in Monroe county, Tennessee.