

L.M. Bogart's Letter to Martha Misemer

April 21, 1865

Manuscript:

HL_MSS_21-07_02 Folder 51

Transcribed by Hannah McLeod

English 618: Research Methods in English

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12 Dec. 2022

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 from Levi Morrison Bogart to his sister, Martha Jane (Bogart) Misemer, on April 21, 1865 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.

This letter is written on paper with the letterhead of the United States Christian Commission, an organization that provided religious and social support to Union forces during the Civil War, in the form of supplies, medical services, and religious literature. The paper is stained and fragile, but largely intact.

This letter was written 12 days after Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, signaling the near end of the Civil War, six days after President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, three days before Union soldiers were loaded onto the steamboat Sultana to be taken upriver and released, and four days before the Sultana exploded en route, killing Bogart and 1,168 others, including several members of his family. This is most likely the last letter that Bogart wrote to his sister Martha.

In this letter Bogart tells his sister that writing is difficult due to lack of supplies and lack of writing practice. He also tells her that he has had a difficult time since he was captured. Bogart was captured along with his regiment in the battle of Sulphur Creek Trestle in September of 1864, after which he was taken to Cahaba Prison in Dallas County, Alabama. Later he was sent to a parole camp in Vicksburg, Mississippi, to await official exchange and/or transfer home.

This letter will be of particular interest to scholars of the Civil War, especially those interested in the explosion of the steamboat Sultana, the pattern and use of unconditional surrender throughout the war, Cahaba Prison, and the parole and exchange of prisoners of war. Levi Bogart was part of a regiment that had to surrender unconditionally to Nathan Bedford Forrest and his troops, he was subsequently imprisoned at Cahaba, then sent to a parole camp in Vicksburg, Mississippi, but never made it home.

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 by separating words with periods instead of spaces.

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

- 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” which is underlined and beneath it has two short, vertical, parallel lines. This is denoted with a standard superscript th. Next comes a looping forward dash, followed by the last two digits of the year, i.e. 63.

Parole, Camp, near Vicksburg¹, April, 21th, 1865

Mrs. M. J. Misemer² My

Sister Martha I shall try to write you a few lines
to day as I think im due you one Im in
a bad fix for writing I've got no pen & its bin
so long since I wrote any I cant get my mind
fixed on any thing I want to writ I have
got back into Gods country again I saw
a pretty hard time since I was captured³ but
I'm all right again I'm not exchanged yet⁴
nor cant tell when I will be though I hope
it wont be long if I had a chance I would run
off and join the Regiment exchange or not but
I've got no money and therefore I cant help
myself. Well Martha I know you would
like to have along letter from me but I cant
write any thing I want to we are four
miles out from Vicksburg in camp

¹ At this point in time the war is drawing to a close. Thousands of Union soldiers recently released from Cahaba and Andersonville prison camps in Alabama and Georgia were staying at a parole camp near Vicksburg, Mississippi, waiting to be released to Northern States.

² 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.

³ The 3rd Regiment of the Tennessee Cavalry was captured during the Battle of Sulphur Creek Trestle for the Sulphur Trestle Fort in Northern Alabama by Nathan Bedford Forrest and his troops in September 1864. Sulphur Trestle Fort protected a 300-foot stretch of railroad above a narrow creek. The day before the battle, Forrest and his troops had garnered surrender from Union troops at Fort Henderson in Athens, Alabama. The Sulphur Trestle Fort stood about 12 miles north of Athens. During the siege, the fort was under the command of the 9th Indiana Cavalry's Maj. Eli Lilly. After barraging the fort throughout the morning of September 25, Forrest sent an emissary to demand unconditional surrender. While Lilly chafed at the threat of violence contained in the demand for unconditional surrender, after conferring with other officers in the fort, he did surrender. Forrest burned the fort and trestle so it could not be used by the Union and took 800 Union soldiers prisoner, Bogart among them. Forest sent Black soldiers to Mobile, Alabama, to work as enslaved manual laborers, white officers to Enterprise, Mississippi, to await parole, and white enlisted men to Cahaba Prison. (Silkenat, 165-166)

⁴ During the Civil War, prisoners of war were often paroled, this involved being sworn under oath not to fight again until officially exchanged.

the health of the boys is pretty good considering
their hardships while in prison⁵

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after I get strate again and my mind sorter
settled I will try and do better in the writing
line I have seen too much in the past
six months to do any good writing I dont
care any thing about trying to tell you
any thing about my trials in prison
it would⁶ only render you unhappy
as I think and to try to give you any
history of the thing would be verry tedious
in kact⁷ it would be verry near a matter
of imposability to discribe the place
all the boys of our company has got
through except Harve Brown⁸ & Han Pearson⁹
I want you to write to me & give me
the news all thats took place sinc I hered

⁵ Cahaba Prison was a prisoner of war camp in Dallas County, Alabama, established in May or June of 1863. This is the prison to which the surviving troops of the 3rd Regiment of the Tennessee Cavalry were sent after the Battle at Sulphur Creek Trestle when the troops were captured after surrendering. While prisoners of war during the Civil War faced extreme hunger, violent treatment and disease, Cahaba Prison had a lower death rate than several other Confederate prisoner of war camps. Of the 41,000 people imprisoned at Andersonville, Georgia, one third died. The average mortality rate in Confederate prisons was 15.5 percent, in Union prisons it was 12 percent. By contrast, the average mortality rate at Cahaba Prison was 3 percent. An estimated 147 of the 5,000 people imprisoned there died. Conditions at Cahaba were still very difficult for prisoners at Cahaba due to lack of food, contaminated water, rats, lice, and other infestations. By October 1864, when Bogart and his fellow captured troops would have been at Cahaba, it was the most overcrowded prison in North or South. It is estimated that each person had about 7.5 square feet of space to live. (Cozzens, 54-57)

⁶ After the word 'would' it appears that Bogart begins to write the word 'only' but begins with 'ol' and then starts over to write the word correctly.

⁷ Bogart has clearly written "kact" here, but perhaps meant to write the word fact.

⁸ A Harvey Brown is listed as a private in company F of the 3rd Tennessee Cavalry, captured in Athens, Alabama, held in Cahaba Prison, exchanged April 1, 1865, and mustered out June 12, 1865. (Civil War Prisons)

⁹ A William Pearson is listed as a private in company F of the 3rd Tennessee Cavalry, captured in Athens, Alabama, held in Cahaba Prison, exchanged April 1, 1865, and mustered out June 12, 1865. (Civil War Prisons)

from you direct your letters to Parole Camp
near Vicksburg Co F 3d Batt.

Yours Truly

L M Bogart

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.

Civil War Prisons. Civilwarprisoners.com.

Civil War Prisons is a searchable database for prisoners of war during the Civil War. It provided information that corroborated L.M. Bogart's stint in Cahaba Prison, as well as that of "Harve Brown" and "Han Pearson" mentioned in Bogart's letter.

Cozzens, Peter. "Survival in a Alabama Slammer." *America's Civil War*, vol. 24, no. 1, Mar. 2011, pp. 54–59. *EBSCOhost*,
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=aph&AN=56676866&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

This essay provided information and statistics about Cahaba Prison, where Bogart and the 3rd Tennessee Cavalry were imprisoned after their capture in northern Alabama.

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.

Silkenat, David. "Worse Than Murder: Ulysses S. Grant, Nathan Bedford Forrest, and Unconditional Surrender." *Raising the White Flag: How Surrender Defined the American Civil War*, University of North Carolina Press, 2019, pp. 139–67. *JSTOR*,
http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469649740_silkenat.8. Accessed 01 Dec. 2022.

Information about the battle of Sulphur Creek Trestle for the Sulphur Trestle Fort, and the resulting capture of the 3rd Regiment of the Tennessee Cavalry, among other regiments, and their imprisonment at Cahaba Prison. This article also provided background information about Nathan Bedford Forrest's penchant for demanding unconditional surrender based on phony insinuations of greater numbers, or the threat of untold violence if unconditional surrender were not accepted. The known treatment of

Southern Unionists and Black Union Soldiers by Forrest and his men made enlisted men hesitant to surrender under conditions that would normally call for it.

The Sultana Disaster Museum. Sultanadisastermuseum.com.

The Sultana Disaster Museum provided information about the steamboat Sultana, its movement and final explosion in the Mississippi River.

U.S. National Park Service. Nps.gov.

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