

Martha Jane Misemer's Letter to Philip Misemer

June 18, 1865

Manuscript: HL_MSS_21-07_02 Folder 55

Transcribed by Morgan Winstead

Western Carolina University

ENGL-618: Research Methods in English

Dr. Brian Gastle

December 12, 2022

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 Martha Jane Misemer to Philip Misemer, the brother of her late husband, Henry Marshall “Marsh” Misemer. Marsh was one of the passengers of the steamboat *Sultana* who perished following its explosion.

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.

Martha begins the letter by thanking her brother-in-law for the relationship he had with her late husband, as well as for the love he has for the “Federal Government” (i.e., the Union). She goes on to tell him that she has a letter for him in her possession, which her husband wrote for him prior to his death. Martha outlines the basic facts surrounding her husband’s imprisonment and death. On September 25th, 1864, Henry was captured in battle and taken to a prison in Cahaba, Alabama, where he was held until March of 1865. From there, I was sent to Vicksburg, Mississippi, where he landed on April 4th, 1865 to be transferred home following his parole. On April 25th he was boarded onto the steamer *Sultana*; on the 27th, *Sultana* exploded and Henry was one of the men who died, along with two of Martha’s brothers. Martha asks Phillip to “shed one sympatheyeing (sic) tear” with her for the fate of her husband and her two brothers. She then talks about two of Phillip and Henry’s brothers, Bill and John, who are Confederate soldiers; she suspects that they celebrate her sorrow over the loss of her husband. Next, Martha refers to a letter Phillip sent Henry in which he asked if he was a Christian. Martha tells Phillip about Henry’s religious devotion, and says she knows he is in Heaven. Lastly, she asks Phillip to pray for her as well as her and Henry’s four children: Mary Elizabeth, Charlie Frankling, Margaret Ellen, and Laura Caroline. Laura, Martha writes to Phillip, never got to meet her father; she was born after he had left to go to war.

The Misemer family was, interestingly, divided during the American Civil War; Henry fought for the Union, while two of his brothers fought for the Confederacy. It can be assumed that Phillip supported the Union both because he still has a relationship with Martha and because she praises his love for the federal government (i.e., the Union).

Martha would go on to marry a man named Ezakiel Daniel in 1872. She had one other child, a daughter, in 1875. She died in McMinn, Tennessee in 1882, when she was 47 years old.

EDITORIAL STATEMENT

This manuscript is written on paper which has yellowed with age.

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 Martha's handwriting to take note of:

- In place of the word “and,” Martha uses a symbol that closely resembles a plus sign (+). For easier understanding, I have used an ampersand (&) rather than a plus sign.
- Some words in the letter are written above words, as if Martha ran out of space to finish writing a word and chose to fit it on the same line rather than carrying it to a new line. Any words that are written above the line are indicated with the symbol (^), with the word written above the line within brackets. For example: presbyte[^rian] means “presbyte” is on the line, while “rian” is written slightly above the line.

TRANSCRIPTION

[MS page 1]

Athens Tenn June 18 / 65

To Mr Philip Misemer¹

Dear Brother although unseen
by me you are endeared to from
the relationship existing between
you & my husband; & the love
that I find you have for the
Federal Government; I have a
letter in my possession written
by you to Mr Misemer² while
he was at Nashvill Tenn; You
doubtless have heard of his fate
but permit me to relate the
sad story to you again to day
he was capt on the 25 of last
September by the Rebble Gen
Forest³ sent to Cahauaba Ala
confinded in prison until Marc⁴
then sent to Vicksburg landed
there the 4 day of Aprile⁵; went

¹ Phillip Pleasant Misemer (1806-1885).

² Henry Marshall "Marsh" Misemer (April 12, 1831 – April 27, 1865).

³ On September 25, 1864, there was action at Sulphur Branch Trestle between the Confederate cavalry under Major General (MG) Nathan Bedford Forrest (Confederacy) and Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) John Minnis (Union). The battle resulted in a Confederate Victory and a majority of the Union soldiers who fought there were captured and imprisoned.

⁴ Cahaba, Alabama. This was a Confederate prison for Union Prisoners of War, which was intended only as a temporary place of confinement but eventually held more than 2,000 Union soldiers. Henry was imprisoned in Cahaba following his capture in 1864.

⁵ Vicksburg, Mississippi. Henry was held as a prisoner in Cahaba, AL, and when that prison became overcrowded there were negotiations to transfer prisoners to Union-held Vicksburg. According to Gene Salecker's Disaster on the

on th board the steamer

[MS page 2]

Sultanna⁶ on the 25 day of Apr
& on the 27 she exploded 6 miles⁷
above Memphis & he & 2 of my
brothers were lost⁸ & to day their
remains lie buried beneath the
horrid waves of the Mississippi
Will you nod shed one sympa-
theyeing tear with me for the
loss of one who was all of earth
to me; you have two brothers⁹
her both are rebs John¹⁰ in parti-
cular has said a great deal about
the Federals; he has never been
in my house since Mr. Misemer
left home & Bill¹¹ has been once

Mississippi: The Sultana Explosion, April 27, 1865, a “neutral exchange camp [was] set up four miles from Vicksburg and officially designated a “parole camp,” but it unofficially became Camp Fisk” in honor of Colonel Archie Fisk, who suggested that the Union soldiers under parole come there until they were transported (27).

⁶ *Sultana*. See *Introduction to the Document* for more information about the *Sultana* disaster.

⁷ *Sultana* actually exploded 7 miles from the shore of the Mississippi River.

⁸ Levi Morrison Bogart (May 16, 1842 – April 27, 1865) and Charles Harrison Bogart (March 19, 1845 – April 27, 1865).

⁹ John Bible Misemer (1810-1892) and (most likely) William Bible Misemer (1821-1892). The Misemers were divided in their stance during the Civil War, with Henry being part of the Union and John and Bill being part of the Confederacy. It is unclear which side of the war Phillip was on, but given Martha’s mention of his “love for the federal government,” he probably supported the Union.

¹⁰ John Bible Misemer (1810-1892).

¹¹ This is most likely William Bible Misemer (1821-1892). In the Misemer family tree, the six Misemer children are listed. Four of them are men, and two are women. Since Martha is talking about two of Phillip and Henry’s brothers here, one of whom is named John, I have assumed that “Bill” is short for “William,” since the only other brother she could be referring to is named Jacob; “William” is the closest name to “Bill.”

only & that directly after he left
& he was only trying to find out
where he was I do not suppose
that either of them care – but
perhaps rejoice; at my sorrow;

I also
find from the reading of your

[MS page 3]

letter that you are a christian
& also that you had an interest
in the [^future] welfare of my Darling
husband & tis consoling to me to
day to think that this is so to
feell that he had & still has
one brother who thought & cared
for his soul let me answer this
sentence of your letter (Marshall
are you a christian¹²) Yes he was
a christia of the first order his
works & conversation told this day
by day he acknowledged himself
a Christian 2 years before he
left home joined the presbyte[^rian]
church & lived an upright¹³
whilst at home worshiped God

¹² This must be referring to a letter Phillip previously wrote Henry that he was unable to respond to due to his death.

¹³ In a religious context, this word means to adhere to or follow correct moral principles and/or to look upward to God for guidance.

in his family around his own
fire side & his many letters to
me after he left home tells
me still that he was a child
of God & to day he is an inhab
-itant of one of those bright shining

[MS page 4]

Planetts above; And now I ask
you to pray for me & my little
children which are 4 in number
Mary Elizabeth¹⁴ Mr Misemers first
child [^ 9 years old] & Charlie Frankling¹⁵ 5 years
old Margaret Ellen¹⁶ 4 years old
& Laura Caroline¹⁷ 2 years old Laura
never saw her Pa she was born
3 months after he left home
was just 2 years to a day frome
the time he left home until
he was lost this leave us well
Will you be kind enough to
respond if so address M.J Misemer
Athens Tenn

Truly Yours

M. J Misemer

¹⁴ Mary Elizabeth Misemer (1855-unknown). Mary was Henry's child from his first marriage to Margaret Jane Brown (1826-1857). Henry married Martha in 1859, two years after his first wife's death.

¹⁵ Charles "Charlie" Frankling Misemer (1860-1910).

¹⁶ Margaret Ellen Misemer (1861-1922).

¹⁷ Laura Caroline Misemer (1863-unknown).

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.

Hesseltine, William Best. *Civil War Prisons*. Kent State UP, 1972.

I used this resource to find information on Cahaba, the prison Henry was confined in following his capture by the Confederacy in 1864.

Misemer, Martha Jane letter to Phillip Misemer, 18 June 1865. Box 2, Folder 55. MSS21-07. 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.

Salecker, Gene. *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*.

“Upright, adj. and n.” *OED Online*, Oxford UP, 2022, www.oed.com/view/Entry/220082.e

To see what the religious connotations of ‘upright’ written on page three of the manuscript, I used the Oxford English Dictionary.