

Guide to the John W. Miner Letters



**Gettysburg College, Musselman Library
Special Collections & College Archives**

Processed by Matt Gross

MS – 096: John W. Miner Letters

(2 boxes, .54 cubic feet)

[Link to letter transcriptions–Adobe PDF](#)

Inclusive Dates: 1864-1869

Bulk Dates: 1864-1865 and 1869

Processed by Matt Gross, Class of 2010

Provenance: Gift of Mr. Fred Mahar

Biography

John William Miner was born in 1828, to Samuel and Mary (Queen) Miner in Ohio. It is known that prior to the Civil War he served ten years of military service. Before his Civil War service he resided in Wellsville, Ohio with his wife Annie (Canning) and his four children: Charley, Lizzie, Emma, and Carrie. According to records he joined the 7th New Jersey Volunteer Infantry as a substitute on June 23, 1864 at the age of 36. His enlistment in New Jersey was a result of Ohio not offering the proper enlistment materials at the time.

Miner was originally a Corporal of Company K of the 7th New Jersey Volunteer Infantry Regiment of the 3rd Brigade of the 2nd Division of the 2nd Corps of the Army of the Potomac. In mid-October of 1864 he was reassigned to Company C after Company K had been reduced to a mere 18 men. Though Miner states he is a Corporal Lance Sergeant (Sept. 5, 1865) he never achieved the rank of Full Sergeant, and the amount of time he served as Lance Sergeant is unknown (a Lance Sergeant temporarily serves in the position of Sergeant). As a member of the 7th New Jersey he fought primarily around Petersburg, Virginia during the siege of that city. His first battle experience was at the First Battle of Deep Bottom in late July of 1864. The unit was later placed on reserve duty outside of Petersburg where he would witness the Battle of the Crater. Beginning in Mid-August of 1864, his unit participated in a series of engagements at the Second Battle of Deep Bottom, the Battle of Globe Tavern, and the Battle of Second Ream's Station. These actions resulted in the acquisition of a large part of the Weldon Railroad for the Union, gained primarily during the Battle of Globe Tavern. However, heavy combat and defeat at both the Second Battle of Deep Bottom and the Second Battle of Ream's Station left the II Corp under Maj. Gen. Hancock tired and battered. These three battles encompass the most intense combat that Miner would experience during his Civil War service.

Following these engagements his unit spent a month and a half stationed first at Fort Crawford and then at Fort Davis. Mid-October brought the Battle of the Boydton Plank Road in an attempt to further cut Confederate avenues of communication and transportation. With the coming of cold weather, Miner and the 7th New Jersey saw little action and were stationed first at Fort Michael where they began to construct winter quarters at Catlet Station. However, his unit was abruptly pulled from their camps and sent on a series of raids on the Weldon and South Side railroads and into Sussex County

where Miner recounts burning the county capital, Sussex. Upon return from the raids, the 7th New Jersey was stationed at both Fort Green and Fort Warren.

In the beginning of January, Miner left his unit due to a severe case of scurvy and was first sent to a hospital near Petersburg. When his condition did not improve he was sent to City Point, Virginia and finally to Annapolis, Maryland where he stayed in the Division No. 1 General Hospital until early May of 1865. During this time, he continued to keep up with news and his letters are filled with information on national events during the last months of the Civil War. In mid-May, he was transferred to Baltimore and after being moved from Patterson Park Hospital to Hicks General Hospital he was discharged on June 9, 1865.

Around 1869, Miner recollects being cheated out of work in Ohio by his brother-in-law Wilson. Entering into steamboat work, he found the labor to be too strenuous and was laid up for eight days in Nashville after one work trip. He enlisted in the military due to a lack of money and a subsequent need for medical care. Since the infantry was not recruiting at the time, Miner joined Company F of the 4th Cavalry Regiment headed for Fort Griffin, Texas. The unit sailed from New York in April 1869 and arrived at Fort Griffin the beginning of June 1869. The garrison's main duty was patrols to secure the area from Indians and horse thieves to protect the settlers of the area. However Miner's health once again took a downturn. As a result, for the majority of his stay in Texas he was ill and trying to obtain a discharge. The exact date of his discharge is unknown, but it is estimated that he was discharged and traveled home sometime in late October of 1869. John W. Miner died on November 26, 1871. Anna filed for his pension, based on his service in the 7th New Jersey, in 1873.

Scope and Content Note

The bulk of the collection contains the letters of John W. Miner to his wife Anna throughout his service in the Civil War with the 7th New Jersey Volunteer Infantry at Petersburg, Virginia and his service in the 4th US Cavalry at Fort Griffin, Texas. Miner's letters are most valuable when used as a tool to study the perceptions of the Civil War soldier regarding battles and national events.

A variety of information is contained within the letters ranging from personal narratives on camp life to national events news. Some of Miner's most interesting letters are about battles, the election of 1864, and the assassination of Lincoln. Miner's personal opinions are very evident throughout the letters and his love of Lincoln and attitudes towards the Rebels and the Copperheads are noteworthy. One of the most interesting aspects of his letters is his perceptions of casualty numbers after various battles, with most all of the estimates being skewed immensely in the Union's favor.

The only photographs in the collection are of the women of the family, dated 1882, and a reproduction of a photograph of Miner. A number of miscellaneous envelopes, a few undated letters, and a letter to Mrs. Miner from her brother in 1872 are also included. Though a large gap exists between the January and March 1865 letters, the collection is organized in chronological order with sub-series assigned to groups of letters that correspond with events or locations.

Series Description

The collection is divided into two series. **Series I:** Civil War Letters (7th New Jersey Volunteer Infantry) June 28, 1864- June 12, 1865. **Series 2:** Texas Letters (4th US Cavalry) March 12, 1869- October 17, 1869.

[Link to letter transcriptions–Adobe PDF](#)

Box/ Folder

1/1 Inventory

Civil War Letters (7th New Jersey Volunteer Infantry) June 28, 1864- June 12, 1865

1/2 **Enlistment and Journey to the Front: June 28- July 4, 1864**

- June 28, 1864 (Trenton, NJ)
- July 2, 1864 (Camp Tribution, Va)
- July 4, 1864 (Camp Tribution, Va)

1/3 **Entrenching and Lead-up to the First Battle of Deep Bottom: July 7-25, 1864**

- July 7, 1864 (Camp in Virginia)
- July 14, 1864 (Camp in Virginia)
- July 20, 1864 (Camp near Petersburg, Va)
- July 23, 1864 (Camp near Petersburg, Va)
- July 25, 1864 (Camp near Petersburg, Va)

1/4 **Battle of Deep Bottom and Aftermath: July 28-31, 1864**

- July 28, 1864 (Camp near Jones Landing, Va)
 - Discusses initial actions at the Battle of First Deep Bottom
- July 29, 1864 (General Burnside's Headquarters near Petersburg)
- July 31, 1864 (Camp near Petersburg, Va)
 - Discusses role of US Colored Troops under Gen. Burnside

1/5 **Reserve Duty outside of Petersburg: August 2-12, 1864**

- August 2, 1864 (Camp near Petersburg, Va)
- August 3, 1864 (Camp in front of Petersburg, Va)
- August 5, 1864 (Camp near Petersburg, Va)
- August 6, 1864 (Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac near Petersburg, Va)
- August 7, 1864 (Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac near Petersburg, Va)

- August 9, 1864 (Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac near Petersburg, Va)
- August 10, 1864 (Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac near Petersburg, Va)
 - Includes eyewitness account of the Battle of the Crater
- August 12, 1864 (Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac near Petersburg, Va)

1/6 Second Battle of Deep Bottom: August 16-18, 1864

- August 16, 1864 (Camp in Deep Bottom, Va)
- August 17, 1864 (Camp in Deep Bottom, Va)
 - Reports death of Confederate Brig. Gen. Chandler
- August 18, 1864 (Deep Bottom, Va)

1/7 Battle of Globe Tavern and Aftermath: August 21-24, 1864

- August 21, 1864 (Entrenchments in front of Petersburg)
 - Flanked Confederates on the north side of the James and took possession of 12 miles of the Weldon Railroad.
- August 22, 1864 (Camp near Petersburg, Va)
 - Discusses charge on Gen. Warren's IV Corps to their left
- August 24, 1864 (Fort Warren, Va)

1/8 Battle of Second Ream's Station and station at Fort Warren: August 26- September 5, 1864

- August 26, 1864
- August 27, 1864
- August 31, 1864
 - Report of the surrender of Fort Morgan in Mobile, Al
- September 1, 1864
- September 5, 1864
 - Report of the fall of Atlanta
 - Is currently Corporal Lance Sergeant (temporarily serving as Sergeant), hopes to achieve Full Sergeant soon

1/9 Stationed at Fort Crawford, Virginia: September 6-24, 1864

- September 6, 1864
 - Discusses Rebel losses at Atlanta
- September 7, 1864
 - Speculates Sherman joining Grant
- September 9, 1864
- September 10, 1864
- September 11, 1864

- Reports a thousand volunteers arriving daily
- September 13, 1864
 - Report of Grant building a railroad from City Point to intercept Weldon Railroad
 - Report of Gen. Butler digging a canal from the James to the Appomattox to bring guns boats up to Petersburg
- September 16, 1864
- September 18, 1864
- September 20, 1864
 - Discusses reinforcements and predictions of Grant's plans
- September 22, 1864
 - Discusses the Third Battle of Winchester (also known as the Battle of Opequon)
- September 24, 1864

1/10 Stationed at Fort Davis, Virginia: September 29- October 24, 1864

- September 29, 1864
- October 8, 1864
- October 9, 1864
- October 10, 1864
- October 12, 1864
- October 13, 1864
- October 14, 1864
 - Discusses battle involving Sheridan near Strawsburgh (Strasburg, Va)
- October 16, 1864
- October 17, 1864
- October 18, 1864 (dated incorrectly as the 17th)
- October 20, 1864
- October 21, 1864
 - Reports that Brig. Gen. Birney was killed
- October 22, 1864
 - Recollects shelling of Petersburg
 - Discusses an encounter between Sherman and Hood
- October 24, 1864

1/11 Battle of the Boydton Plank Road: October 27-30, 1864

- October 27, 1864
- October 30, 1864
 - Discusses the hard fight at Boydton Plank Road

1/12 Stationed at Fort Michael, Virginia: November 3- 28, 1864

- November 3, 1864

- November 5, 1864
- November 9, 1864
 - Revises his estimate of casualty figures for Battle of Boydton Plank Road
- November 12, 1864
 - Reports Sherman is marching to Charleston
- November 15, 1864
- November 16, 1864
- November 18, 1864
- November 20, 1864
- November 21, 1864 (says Monday 21, 1864)
- November 22, 1864
 - Discusses wounding of Maj. Gen. Edward Canby
- November 27, 1864
- November 28, 1864

2/1 Preparations for Winter Camp at Catlet Station, Va: December 2-6, 1864

- December 2, 1864
- December 4, 1864
 - Discusses 5th Corps fight at Stoney Creek
 - Maj. Gen. Andrew A. Humphreys now 2nd Corps Commander
- December 6, 1864

2/2 Raids of the Weldon and South Side railroads and raid into Sussex County, Virginia: December 14-15, 1864

- December 14, 1864
 - Recollects tearing up railroads
- December 15, 1864
 - Discusses raid into Sussex county

2/3 Stationed at Fort Green, Virginia: December 17-19, 1864

- December 17, 1864
 - Discusses death of his brother
 - Accusations of rebel brutality
- December 19, 1864

2/4 Scouting and return to Fort Warren, Virginia: December 23-26, 1864

- December 23, 1864
- December 25, 1864
 - Discusses victories of Sherman and Thomas
- December 26, 1864

- 2/5 **Stationed at Fort Green, Virginia: December 28, 1864- January 2, 1865**
- December 28, 1864
 - Report on the fall of Savannah, Ga
 - January 1, 1865
 - January 2, 1865
- 2/6 **Illness and admission to hospital at Patrick's Station, Virginia: January 5-18, 1865**
- January 5, 1865
 - January 10, 1865
 - January 12, 1865
 - January 14, 1865
 - January 16, 1865
 - January 18, 1865
 - Report of the fall of Fort Fisher near Wilmington, NC
- 2/7 **Transfer to General Hospital at City Point, Virginia: January 22-24, 1865**
- January 22, 1865
 - January 23, 1865
 - January 24, 1865
 - Report of heavy at battle at Point of Rocks on the night of January 23
- 2/8 **Transfer to Annapolis, Md Division No. 1 General Hospital: March 30- May 8, 1865 (A large gap exists between the January and March letters)**
- March 30, 1865
 - Reports on the Battle of Fort Stedman
 - Report of Sherman and Johnston fighting in North Carolina (Battle of Bentonville)
 - April 4, 1865
 - Reports that Lincoln is visiting City Point
 - April 5, 1865
 - Reports the fall of Petersburg and Richmond
 - Lee being chased on the road to Danville
 - April 6, 1865
 - April 7, 1865
 - April 8, 1865
 - April 9, 1865
 - Reports that the Rebel army is surrounded and must surrender
 - April 10, 1865
 - Reports the surrender of Lee
 - April 12, 1865

- April 17, 1865
 - Reports capture of Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest
 - Discusses attacks on Lincoln and Seward
 - Reports that Johnson was sworn in as President
- April 19, 1865
 - Reports the surrender of Mobile, Al
 - Reports the surrender of Johnston (Johnston negotiated surrender three times before finally surrendering)
- April 21, 1865
 - Reports capture of Mary Surrat in relation to attack on Sec. Seward
 - Mentions the Battle of Franklin
- April 21, 1865 (wrote twice in one day)
 - Includes a poem in honor of Lincoln
- April 23, 1865
 - Reports that President Davis is surrounded with Johnston's Army (Davis was not with Johnston's army)
 - Reports that Mosby surrendered to Hancock (Mosby disbanded his rangers and never formally surrendered)
- April 24, 1865
 - Accompanied by newspaper clipping "A Prayer for Soldiers"
- April 29, 1865
 - Discusses capture and killing of John Wilkes Booth
- April 30, 1865
 - Reports surrender of Johnston (actual date was April 26)
- May 4, 1865
 - Reports that President Davis is trapped and cannot escape to Mexico
- May 5, 1865
 - Reports that over 300 "Copperheads" were arrested and to be tried for the murder of Lincoln
- May 8, 1865

2/9 **Transfer to Patterson Park Hospital in Baltimore: May 15 –June 7, 1865**

- May 15, 1865
 - Report of Jefferson Davis's capture in Georgia
- May 16, 1865
 - Mentions the capture of Davis in women's clothes
- May 18, 1865
- May 24, 1865
 - Mentions the capture of Davis in women's clothes again
 - Mentions the army review
- May 25, 1865
 - Mentions Grand Review in Washington DC

- Reports that Davis is being held in Fortress Monroe
- May 29, 1865
- June 7, 1865

2/10 Transfer to Hicks General Hospital in Baltimore

- June 12, 1865 (accompanied by a letter to Fannie, unknown author)
- June 12, 1865 (appears to have misdated the page)
 - Has received paperwork and is leaving at 9:30 PM to head home

2/11 Undated and Miscellaneous Materials

- Piece of a letter and envelope
 - annotated in pencil Nov '64 on back of envelope
- Torn letter and envelope
 - No date available but was written while at the Division 1 US General Hospital
- Miscellaneous letters, envelopes, and pictures
 - Part of a letter written from Division 1 US General Hospital
 - Writing on piece of newspaper scrap with birthdates
 - Latest date is June 17" /67
 - Writing on back of Stationary ad
 - Dated June 4, 1883 and discusses grave of John W. Miner in Spring Hill Cemetery in Wellsville, Oh
 - Thirteen envelope fragments
 - Some envelopes possess date fragments but lack complete dates
 - Reproduction of a photograph of John W. Miner and a 1882 picture of the women of the family
 - Letter to Mrs. Miner from brother: April 4, 1872

Series 2: Texas Letters (4th US Cavalry) March 12, 1869- October 17, 1869

2/12 Letters from Carlisle Barracks, Pa: March 12- April 8, 1869

- March 12, 1869
 - Discusses some background to this point
- March 21, 1869
- March 28, 1869
- April 5, 1869
- April 8, 1869

- Will leave for April 10th for Fort Griffin sailing from New York to New Orleans and going up the Mississippi to Brownsville

2/13 **Letter in transit to Fort Griffin, Texas, written from Austin, Texas:
May 9, 1869**

- May 9, 1869
 - Has been to Key West, Fort Brown, Tx, Galveston, Harisburgh, Houston, and Brenham

2/14 **Letters from Fort Griffin, Texas: June 3- October 17, 1869**

- June 3, 1869
- June 21, 1869
- June 27, 1869
- July 8, 1869
- August 16, 1869
 - Has gotten scurvy again badly
- August 22, 1869
- August 25, 1869
 - Discusses discharge procedures
- August 29, 1869
- September 5, 1869
- September 12, 1869
- September 19, 1869
- October 3, 1869
- October 8, 1869
- October 17, 1869

[Link to letter transcriptions–Adobe PDF](#)