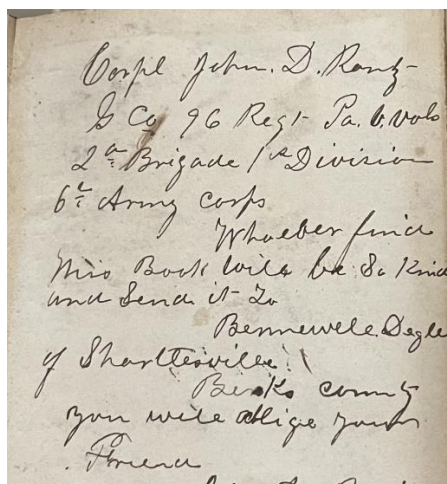


Guide to MS-289:

John D. Rentz Civil War Diary



Gettysburg College, Musselman Library
Special Collections and College Archives

MS-289: John D. Rentz Civil War Diary

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Size

1 box, 0.18 cubic feet

Location

Special Collections

Dates

Inclusive: 1862 – 1900

Bulk: 1863 - 1864

Provenance

This collection was purchased from Ian Brabner Rare Americana and received on May 1, 2017.

Biographical Note

John D. Rentz was born on August 30, 1845, in Berks County, Pennsylvania, to John Rentz (-1880) and Catherina Degler (1821-1893). He had two younger sisters, born in 1847 and 1849. His youngest sister died in 1860.

On October 5, 1861, John D. Rentz enlisted as a private in Co. G, 96th Pennsylvania Infantry, at age seventeen. Rentz served with the regiment until he was mustered out on July 17, 1865, as a Corporal.

In 1867, Rentz married Ellen Malinda Mengel (1848-1905). Their son, Irvin Clayton (alternately written as Calvin) Rentz was born November 6, 1867. The family lived in Shartlesville, Berks County, Pennsylvania, where Rentz worked as a carpenter. Ellen Malinda Mengel Rentz died on March 17, 1905. By 1910, John D. Rentz was living with his son at 224 Bloomingdale Avenue, in Radnor Township, Pennsylvania. He died on November 17, 1906, and was interred at the Freidens Union Cemetery in Strausstown, Berks County, Pennsylvania.

Historical Note

The 96th Pennsylvania Infantry was originally attached to Slocum's Brigade, Franklin's Division, in the Army of the Potomac, before eventually being attached to the 2nd Brigade, 1st Division, of the 6th Army Corps. The regiment participated in a wide array of engagements with the Army of the Potomac, including the Battles of Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg,

Spotsylvania, Petersburg, and Cedar Creek. The regiment was mustered out of service on October 21, 1864.¹

Scope and Content Note

John D. Rentz's Civil War diary chronicles the time he spent with the 96th Pennsylvania Infantry between December 26, 1863, and September 6, 1864. The diary details a wide array of information pertaining to his life with the regiment and the progress of the Civil War.

Rentz's pension letter is very simple, merely asking for B. Penrose's assistance with securing a renewal of his pension.

The "Rebel letter" written by Margaret Jones to Joseph King is also simple, providing a few details about the rainy weather, the progress of the crops, and expressing Jones's desire to see her brother.

The 3-page manuscript, written for the Patriotic Order of the Sons of America, an organization once associated with the Know-Nothing Party, conveys a high level of concern about "foreign competition" (pg. 1). The author is unknown, but the handwriting does resemble John D. Rentz's handwriting.

Subjects

Civil War, Pennsylvania, Infantry, Union, Union Army, 6th Corps

Series Description

This collection is divided into 4 Series. **Series 1:** John D. Rentz Civil War Diary and Tax Receipt **Series 2:** John D. Rentz Pension Letter **Series 3:** "Rebel letter" to Joseph King **Series 4:** 3-page manuscript about foreign labor

Box list

Series I: John D. Rentz Civil War Diary

1-0 Finding Aid and Research Materials

1-1 John D. Rentz Civil War Diary, Dec. 26, 1863 – Sept. 6, 1864

Non-Commissioned Officer ten cent tax receipt

Series II: John D. Rentz Pension Letter

¹ "96th Pennsylvania Infantry Regiment." Accessed June 9, 2022. <http://civilwarintheeast.com/us-regiments-batteries/pennsylvania/96th-pennsylvania-infantry/>.

1-2 John D. Rentz letter dated Apr. 12, 1900, to lawyer B. Penrose, asking for assistance in securing a re-issuing of his pension

Series III: "Rebel letter" to Joseph King

1-3 Letter dated May 31, 1862, from Margaret Jones to her brother Joseph King; letter marked as "Rebel Letter" by John D. Rentz and kept as a souvenir of war

Series IV: 3-page manuscript about foreign labor

1-4 3-page post-Civil War manuscript of a speech written for the Patriotic Order of the Sons of America

Sources

John D. Rentz family tree profiles, accessed through Ancestry
FindAGrave profile for John D. Rentz and Ellen Malinda Mengel Rentz
Pennsylvania, U.S., Civil War Muster Rolls, 1860-1869

Related Collections

Burlew Letters; MS-129

Charles L. Rees[e], 95th Pennsylvania Infantry, Co. K.; CWVFM-147

Colonel William Brisbane Papers' MS-162

Frederick H. Kronenberger Papers, Company G, 2nd Regiment New Jersey Volunteers; MS-015

History of the Fifteenth Regiment New Jersey Volunteers; Processing as of 6/9/22

History of the 49th Pennsylvania Volunteers: a correctly compiled roll of the members of the regiment and its marches, from 1861 to 1865; E527.5 49th .W47 1898

History of the 121st New York state infantry; E523.5 121st .B47 1921

Additional Information

The 96th Pennsylvania Volunteers in the Civil War by David A. Ward

Contact Information

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