

The Civil War Collections at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania

The sesquicentennial commemoration of the American Civil War is drawing deserved attention to Pennsylvania's and Pennsylvanians' involvement in and connection to this tumultuous period, as academics and the general public explore the diverse contributions and experiences of the state and its residents from scholarly or familial perspectives. Of the twenty-one million manuscripts, seven hundred thousand publications, and over five hundred thousand graphic items housed at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, a significant portion are primary and secondary sources pertaining to the Civil War.¹

The Historical Society did not wait until the war's termination to begin collecting or preserving memorabilia related to the conflict. On September 28, 1863, while meeting at the Athenaeum in Philadelphia, the society resolved to approve "the proposed plan of organization of the Gettysburg Battlefield Association" in order to "secure and perpetuate" the site as it appeared during the famed battle itself, "fought on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd days of July, 1863."² The society formed a committee of nine members to meet with the Executive Committee of Gettysburg. It also began to actively collect Civil War material, accepting into its collections a "photographic plan of the battle-field" and "a series of relics from the

¹ Consult the Historical Society's website, <http://www.hsp.org>, and peruse under "Research & Collections" for a wide variety of teaching tools and topical essays on various Civil War related topics the collections, including the "Guide to the Civil War Manuscript Collections at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania" and "Guide to Women during the Civil War." For many years, the Historical Society collected art and artifacts as well as documents as part of its Civil War memorabilia. These items are now in the collection of the Philadelphia History Museum at the Atwater Kent in Philadelphia. HSP's current location at Thirteenth and Locust streets in Philadelphia also has significance to Civil War history as the former site of the Robert Patterson mansion. Patterson (1792–1881) served as an officer in the War of 1812 and Mexican-American War and was major general at the First Battle of Bull Run in Manassas, Virginia, in July 1861. His martial decisions at the battle brought him much censorship and ridicule from his military peers, though he made a staunch defense of his actions. One of the general's son, Brigadier General Francis Engle Patterson, died accidentally during the Civil War by the discharge of his pistol and "was found dead in his tent," at Occoquan, near Fairfax Court House, Virginia, on November 22, 1862. His funeral was held at the residence of his father, at 1300 Locust Street in Philadelphia. Civil War Papers (1861–1902), coll. 1546, box 6, folder 10; Robert Patterson Order Book (May 29, 1861, to July 31, 1861).

² Hampton L. Carson, *A History of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1940), 1:306–11.

battlefield of Gettysburg.”³ On May 11, 1865, Richard Eddy, Historical Society librarian, reported to the press, “I crave the privilege of stating that the Historical Society of Pennsylvania sometime since established a Department of Memorials of the Civil War, which already contains many valuable books and documents—some of which it will, perhaps, be impossible to find elsewhere.”⁴

Today, the Civil War resources at the Historical Society are unique in their type and diversity. Examples include a significant collection of illustrated patriotic cartoons with slogans printed by Samuel C. Upham of Philadelphia to mock or belittle the Confederate leaders and their war efforts.⁵ A particularly unusual item in the society’s manuscript collections is the poem “My Right Arm,” penned by Sergeant Louis J. Boos, who was serving in Company B, Seventieth Regiment, Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry when he lost an arm during the Battle of the Wilderness, in Virginia, on May 7, 1864. An excerpt from his poem reveals the humor as well as the horror of Civil War service, along with the patriotism of its participants:

The knife was still, the surgeon bore, the shattered arm away.
 Upon his bed in painless sleep, the noble hero lay.
 He woke and saw the vacant place, where limb of his had lain.
 Then faintly spoke: Oh let me see, my strong right arm again.
 Goodbye-old arm! The soldier said as he clasped the fingers cold.
 And down his pale but manly cheeks, the tear drops gently rolled.
 My strong right arm no deed of yours, now gives me cause to sigh.
 But it’s hard to part such trusty friends, good bye, old arm, good bye

 I do not mourn to lose you now, for home and native land.
 Oh proud am I to give my mite, for Freedom pure and grand.
 Thank God no selfish thought is mine, while here I bleeding lie,
 Bear, Bear it tenderly away, Good bye, old arm, good bye.⁶

Other documents challenge common notions about the war and remind us that in Pennsylvania, the southernmost Northern state, opin-

³ “The Historical Society—An Interesting Meeting,” *Philadelphia Daily Evening Bulletin*, Sept. 29, 1863.

⁴ “Historical Records,” *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, May 13, 1865.

⁵ Civil War Envelopes Collection, coll. 1605.

⁶ “My Right Arm,” Louis J. Boos, Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry, Civil War Papers, ser. 4, box 7, folder 3.

ions on slavery and Southerners were not monolithic. Lieutenant Colonel Frank T. Bennett, of the Fifty-Fifth Pennsylvania Infantry, recorded in his diary the details of his life as a Union prisoner of war from March 1862 to October 1864. Bennett hailed the hospitality of his captors. He praised Confederate colonel John Cunningham of the Seventeenth South Carolina Regiment of Militia, who “first introduced the bill of secession into the South Carolina legislature” and who treated Bennett and his fellow captives with “many civilities.” “I should like to meet [him] under other circumstances,” Bennett wrote. In an entry dated May 19, 1862, Bennett emphatically expressed his opinion on the driving issue of the war, which was at odds with Northern antislavery sentiment: “I have yet to see the evils of slavery, the sufferings of the slave, and their desire to be freed from their masters. . . . Their condition [is] preferable to that of pauper whites of New England.”⁷ Neither does Bennett’s document conform to the normal idea of what a diary should look like in appearance: paper was evidently a scarce commodity, so his daily journal was written in between the lines of *Lotus-Eating: A Summer Book* (New York, 1852).

The Historical Society’s holdings are not restricted to Pennsylvania regiments or Union concerns during the war, but also include a considerable amount of Confederate material, including correspondence, data on Southern prisoners of war, Confederate army Morning Reports, Southern currency, and many examples of the divided loyalties that existed within such Philadelphia families as the Pembertons, Draytons, and Sinklers.⁸

The Historical Society also holds much material related to the home front and women’s involvement in war efforts. The diaries of Emilie Davis provide the perspective of an African American civilian during the conflict. Journals by Susan Ritter Trautwine MacManus, a Philadelphia Moravian evangelical who aided Union soldiers at Turner’s Lane and other area hospitals, document her belief that what we today call post-traumatic stress disorder could be cured by simply accepting Christ. Family papers document the life of Anna Maria Ross, who nursed

⁷ Frank T. Bennett Diary, 1862, coll. 3041.

⁸ Ferdinand J. Dreer Autograph Collection, Confederate Generals, Civil War series 66–69 (8 boxes); Confederate Officers, Civil War series, 69 (2 boxes); Simon Gratz Collection: Civil War Confederate Generals & Military Letters, case 5, boxes 11–19; case 5, box 29 on the Confederate Navy. See also, Civil War: Confederate Army Morning Reports, box 14B, folder 4b, Society Miscellaneous Collections; Civil War Papers, Miscellaneous Letters: Confederate, box 6, folders 13–15. For correspondence between brothers on opposite sides, see letters of Confederate Brigadier General Thomas Fenwick Drayton and Union brother Percival Drayton, US Navy, in Drayton Family Papers: 1796–1896, coll. 1584, ser. 4, vol. 34, folders 2–5.

wounded soldiers in 1862–63 and died of paralysis on the same day as the dedication of the Cooper Shop Refreshment Saloon Soldiers Home—an institution for which she had tirelessly campaigned and fundraised throughout the Delaware Valley. Particularly poignant are the twenty-six letters by Fannie H. Titus, a nurse at Columbia College Hospital in Washington, DC, to the mother of patient Edwin (or Edward) C. Mullin, of Company F, Thirty-Fourth Pennsylvania Infantry, up to and after the soldier's death on September 13, 1864.⁹

Another significant collection of civilian wartime materials is that of Jacob and Eliza Stouffer, residents of a farm in Guilford Township, Franklin County, Pennsylvania, near the community of Chambersburg. Jacob's journals give details about the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863, President Abraham Lincoln's famed address, the Confederate invasions of Pennsylvania, and the burning of the town of Chambersburg in 1864.¹⁰ In his 122 letters, William Roberts Jr., an aide to future Pennsylvania governor Colonel John W. Geary of the Twenty-Eighth Pennsylvania Infantry, wrote not only about the war and significant battles, but of the home front, giving insights into African Americans as both workers and soldiers within the Union army.¹¹

These are only a few scattered examples of the rich and varied material that awaits scholars and Civil War enthusiasts at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. We invite all to enjoy these hidden treasures during this sesquicentennial of the Civil War.

Historical Society of Pennsylvania

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⁹ Emilie Davis Diaries (1863–65), coll. 3030; Susan Ritter Trautwine MacManus Diaries (1863–64), coll. 1995; LeBosquet Family Papers, Society Collection, Aug. 1862 to Mar. 1863; Fannie H. Titus & Edward C. Mullan Collections, Civil War Papers, coll. 1546; unprocessed material.

¹⁰ Jacob and Eliza Stouffer Journals, 1843–80, coll. 3051, 1 box, 54 vols.

¹¹ Letters of William Roberts Jr. (1861–1864), coll. 3069. See for example, letters dated Apr. 21 and 23, 1864.