

Guide to the Caroline Quarlls / Allen Watkins Underground Railroad Collection [1880]

Descriptive Summary

Repository

Kenosha Civil War Museum Archives

Language of Material

Material in English

Extent

1 binder with 3 letters, 4 envelopes

Abstract

The collection consists of three letters written by Caroline Quarlls and Allen Watkins to abolitionist Lyman Goodnow in 1880. The letters describe Quarlls' and Watkins' life in slavery and eventual escape to Canada on the Underground Railroad.

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

- Requests to research the Archives collections must be made 24 hours **in advance** to the curator.
- Collection is open for research on-site at the Kenosha Civil War Museum during business hours: Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- Patrons must sign-in with a curator before use and adhere to Archives rules while utilizing the collections.
- The Civil War Museum reserves the right to accept or deny any research request.

Use Restrictions

Special Note: Due to the fragile nature of the original Caroline Quarlls and Allen Watkins letters, only high-resolution scanned copies will be made available for research.

Preferred Citation

(Identification of item), The Caroline Quarlls / Allen Watkins Underground Railroad Collection, The Civil War Museum, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

Provenance

Acquired from the Lyman Goodnow family in 2005.

Processing Information

Processed by: Chris Stape, November 2008.

Biographical Note

Caroline Quarlls is one of the most celebrated travelers of the Underground Railroad. She is the first known fugitive slave conducted through the Wisconsin network to freedom. Born in St. Louis, Missouri, Quarlls was forced to do house work for her owner, Charles R. Hall, who would at times beat her. On July 4, 1842, at age 16, Quarlls fled her master's home in St. Louis with \$100 and a small bag of clothes. She traveled by steamboat to Alton, Illinois then

by stagecoach to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Pursued by agents of her owner, she was hidden by abolitionists in towns throughout southern Wisconsin including Milwaukee, Pewaukee, Waukesha, Spring Prairie, and Burlington. In early September 1842, Lyman Goodnow of Waukesha agreed to take her to Chicago despite bounties being offered for her return. They then traveled across Indiana and on to Detroit, Michigan. She crossed to freedom in Canada and was left in the custody of a missionary.

Quarlls eventually married Allen Watkins, another escaped slave. Watkins was born in Richmond, Virginia and raised in Kentucky. He had been married previously, fathering 5 children. His wife, herself a slave, was sold and taken from the family and her grief over the separation drove her to suicide. When Watkins learned that he too was to be sold, he stole a boat to cross the Ohio River where he met abolitionists who transported him to through Ohio and Michigan, and finally into Canada.

Caroline and Allen lived in Sandwich (now Windsor) Ontario, Canada, and in a letter to Goodnow, Quarlls mentions having 6 children--3 boys and 3 girls. Quarlls was last heard from in a letter dated April 27, 1880.

Almost all that is known of Caroline and Allen is taken from the letters in this collection and from Goodnow's account of their experiences in a book written in 1880 titled, The History of Waukesha, Wisconsin.

Collection Overview

The Caroline Quarlls / Allen Watkins Underground Railroad Collection consists of 3 manuscript letters written in April, 1880 by Caroline Quarlls and her husband Allen Watkins, to Lyman Goodnow. The letters are in response to a series of letters sent by Goodnow in early 1880. Thirty-eight years after helping Quarlls escape slavery into Canada, Goodnow wrote to her in Sandwich, Ontario without so much as an address. The postmaster in Canada was able to locate Quarlls, and this collection contains her responses to that first letter and a second in which Goodnow asked about her life. The third letter, written by Quarlls husband, Allen Watkins, is similar in scope. The letters address Caroline and Allen's experiences during their captivity, their meetings with abolitionists and travels throughout the Midwest on the Underground Railroad, their move to freedom in Canada, and the lives they made for themselves afterward.

The collection also includes 4 envelopes. Two are addressed to Goodnow by Quarlls, and one by Watkins. A fourth envelope presumably held the letters for storage over the years.

The letters in this collection were used by Goodnow for his contribution to a history of Waukesha, Wisconsin, and shortly thereafter disappeared. They were discovered by a Civil War researcher in 1998.

Detailed Container List

Letter 1 of 3: Caroline Quarlls to Lyman Goodnow, April 17, 1880 from Sandwich (now Windsor), Ontario, Canada.
(Letter is currently on exhibit.)

Includes Caroline's response to receiving a letter from Goodnow 38 years after their last conversation. In it she notes that she is still residing in Sandwich where she and Goodnow parted after her escape. She asks future letters be addressed to Caroline Watkins.

Letter 2 of 3: Caroline Quarlls to Lyman Goodnow, April 27, 1880 from Sandwich (now Windsor), Ontario, Canada.

This letter includes Caroline's answers to a series of questions asked by Goodnow in preparation for a local history book he was writing. Among the more notable points are:

- Caroline explaining her marriage to another escaped slave (*Allen Watkins*).
- Watkins' first wife (also a slave) committing suicide when sold away from her children.
- Caroline attending school in Canada and learning to read and write.
- She notes escaping from Alton (Illinois) to Milwaukee by stagecoach.
- Caroline speaks of her 6 children.
- She briefly describes how she made her escape from slavery.

Letter 3 of 3: Allen Watkins to Lyman Goodnow, April 24, 1880 from Sandwich (now Windsor) , Ontario, Canada.

This letter is apparently a response to a request from Goodnow for information about Allen's life. Among the more notable points are:

- Allen notes being born in Richmond, Virginia and being raised in Kentucky.
- He describes his marriage as a slave, having 5 children, his wife being sold, and his "dissatisfaction" with their separation.
- Allen describes his decision to escape and the methods he used to do so, including close calls with his pursuers.
- Mentions "abolitioners".
- He describes his entry into Canada from Detroit, Michigan.

Envelopes:

The collection also includes 4 envelopes.

- Three envelopes: addressed to Mr. Lyman Goodnow and postmarked from Sandwich, Ontario.
 - Presumably these are the envelopes that originally carried the 3 letters. Two appear to be addressed by Caroline, and one by Allen.
- One envelope: "Letter from the negro slave--Caroline Quarles."