

## Wickesberg Collection Letters

Guide to the Sargeant Charles Wickesberg Archival Collection, Company H., 26<sup>th</sup>  
Infantry of Wisconsin Volunteers

### DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

#### Repository

Civil War Museum, Resource Center Kenosha, Wisconsin

#### Language of Material

Material in both English and German

#### Abstract

The collection consists of a introductory family history background and 21 letters originally written in German and then translated into English. The letters are addressed to his “brothers and sisters” between October, 1862, and September, 1864, in his service in the Union army.

### ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

#### Use Restrictions

No photocopying, please

#### Preferred Citation

(Identification of Item). The Sargeant Charles Wickesberg Collection,  
The Civil War Museum, Kenosha, Wisconsin

#### Provenance

Translation from the German script by Ingeborg (Mrs. Ernst) Wolferstetter of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The historical notes were completed by Dr. Donald Woods, Director of Libraries, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The Charles Wickesberg letters were compiled and published by Alfred Wickesberg of Milwaukee, Wisconsin in May, 1961.

#### Processing Information

Processed by Frederick (Rick) Holtz, 2012

#### Biographical note:

Charles Wickesberg enlisted in Company H., 26<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Wisconsin Infantry Volunteers on August 15, 1862, in the city of Sheboygan, Wisconsin for a term of 3 years. He was officially mustered in on September 17, 1862, in Milwaukee. On March 15, 1863, Private Wickesberg was promoted to corporal and then sargeant on January 1, 1864. He was wounded on the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg July 1, 1863, and again at Resaca, Georgia on May 15, 1864, at age 23. He died of his wounds on May 16, 1864. Sargeant Wickesberg is buried in grave #570, Section K, The National Cemetery, Chattanooga, Tennessee. Sargeant Wickesberg was twenty one years of age when he enlisted, had blue eyes, brown hair and was 5 feet 10-1/2” tall. In the beginning of document letter section there is a picture

of him taken in his uniform as a private.

Charles was born in Germany on January 11, 1841, the oldest of 4 children and with his family emigrated to America in the late 1840s, settling in rural Sheboygan County, Wisconsin. Charles took up carpentry and a broken love affair prompted him to join the army. His younger siblings were all born in the United States after the family migration and Charles letters are written in German. At the time of his enlistment Charles was 21 years of age, had blue eyes, brown hair and stood 5 feet, 10 and one half inches tall.

The Wisconsin 26<sup>th</sup> Infantry was organized by Colonel William H. Jacobs at Camp Sigel in Milwaukee and was mustered into service on September 17, 1862. The company was made up mostly of men of German birth or or German parentage. The regiment, a little over 1000 strong, left Milwaukee on October 6, 1862, and proceeded to Fairfax Courthouse, Virginia, joining up with the 11<sup>th</sup> Army Corps under General Siegl. The regiment was then assigned to the Second Brigade of the Third Division.

Charles's 26<sup>th</sup> Regiment was engaged in continuous marching or fighting until the fall of Atlanta on September 2, 1864 that accounts for a lapse of over three months between his death and the notifying letter from his captain.

#### COLLECTION OVERVIEW

As previously mentioned the collection contains 21 translated letters from Charles to his family

Doc.#1 of 21: To his family from Milwaukee, dated, October 3, 1862.  
Received marching orders to go to possibly Detroit or Washington.  
All are happy and healthy. In poetic license, Charles expresses his faith in Divine Protection from Jesus from all harm and exhorts his family to continue to be strong in their Faith.

Doc.#2 of 21: To his family from Washington, D.C., dated October 16, 1862.  
Describes his journey by train to Washington, D.C. and then his march to Fairfax Courthouse, Virginia.  
Hears a speech from a visiting Carl Schurz.  
Met and paraded before General Franz Siegl.  
Needs new postage stamps to write letters home.

Publisher's Notes: The 26<sup>th</sup> arrived on November 3, near Manassas Gap Railroad at Gainsville, Virginia to establish a temporary depot of supplies. "Throughout Gap" also known as "Thoroughfare Gap" was used by General Stonewall Jackson to go to Manassas Junction after the August

Battle of Cedar Mountain. In this area on November 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, there had been engagements between Pleasanton's Union cavalry and Stuart's Confederate cavalry. At this time preparations were underway for Union General Burnside to take General McClellan's place as head of the Army of the Potomac

Doc.#3 of 21: To his family from Thoroughfare Gap (near Manassas Junction) dated November 4, 1862).

Describes his 26 mile march.  
At his new encampment they hear the thunder of cannons daily.  
Cavalry drove out the enemy.  
We may soon be advancing.  
Write as soon as possible.

Doc.#4 of 21: To his family from Stafford's Courthouse, dated December 25, 1862.

Describes an 8 day march to Fredericksburg arriving to late to take part in the battle.  
It was a senseless slaughter of our troops, all for nothing.  
Outpost duty is how we celebrate Christmas.  
Hope we will be home for Christmas by next year.  
Need more family members to write.

Doc.#5 of 21: To his family from Stafford's Courthouse, dated January 1, 1863.

We celebrated New Year's eve with our Captain as General Crisanowski gave our regiment a barrel of whiskey.  
An enemy cavalry had attacked a small town but were eventually driven back.  
Recently received a gift of flower and molasses and baked cakes. They tasted good even with the eggs missing.  
Hope to get my wages soon.

Doc.#6 of 21: To his family from Stafford's Courthouse, dated January 18, 1863.

Thought we would have our money by now.  
If we could our regiment would go to Washington and hang Lincoln.  
I see a lot of suffering. The doctors we have are torturers.  
The generals and other officers are getting all the liquor while the rest of us get none.

Parents, you have written that you sent the Botschafter to me, yet I have not received it! (A Botschafter is a church newspaper.)  
Papa, please send postage stamps.  
The gripes of these soldiers are familiar stories to me.

Doc.#7 of 21: To his family from Stafford's Courthouse, dated March 7, 1863.

Just received your letter of February 23<sup>rd</sup>. Glad all are healthy. We currently have plenty to eat (as much as we can swallow). We have a chaplain too but I never heard him speak except when someone gets buried.  
Did you know that I am now a corporal?  
We have very changeable weather here.

Doc.#8 of 21: To his family from Stafford's Courthouse, dated May 21, 1863.

It was reported that Schurtz's division and the entire 11<sup>th</sup> Corps ran away in wild flight even before the enemy fired a shot. Not true!  
Corporal Wickesberg gives a true account of what he saw blaming General Howard for the defeat.  
We did not get the reinforcements or supplies we needed!  
All the papers write lies!

Publisher's Notes: The 26<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin bore the brunt of the rebel attack at the Battle of Chancellorsville. Confederate General Stonewall Jackson's army surrounded the federal army perimeter of General Hooker's troops who were completely unprepared. The ferocity of the rebel attack caused the 26<sup>th</sup> to finally fall back after a brave stand. While General Joe Hooker was wounded and demoralized, the German soldiers were blamed for not having held their lines, and they smarted under the stigma of defeat up through the 3 days Battle of Gettysburg the following July.

Doc.#9 of 21: To his family from the USA General Hospital, West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, dated July 6, 1863.

Carl Wickesberg tells his family the reasons for his hospitalization, describing his wound. He describes the conditions of the last 3 weeks, the heavy marching, deluge of rain and the ever present hunger that he and the men of his company experienced.

He briefly describes the town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, mentioning the kindnesses of the town citizens.

He describes the heavy amount of fighting, the bullets and shells flying all around him.

He mentions that the heavy fighting and carnage continued for three whole days and he cannot write any more about it.

Hopes he can get home for a furlough soon to see everyone.

Publisher's Notes: The 26<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin arrived at Gettysburg early on July 1<sup>st</sup> making a brave stand north of the town. Still feeling the defeat at Chancellorsville, they were determined to establish a reputation as a fighting regiment. They were outnumbered but held until the 119<sup>th</sup> New York on their left was turned and an orderly retreat made. They fell back across an open field under heavy fire, and after passing through the town, took a position of rear guard along a stone fence while the army took up its position on Cemetery Hill.

Doc.#10 of 21: To his family from the U.S.Army Hospital, West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, dated July 14, 1863.

Charles writes that his wound is getting better and that he recently visited the city of Philadelphia.

He was impressed with its size and the number of flags flying in celebration of the Union victory at Vicksburg, Mississippi.

He describes the hospital, the numbers of convalescing soldiers and admires the hospital's organization.

He talks about the presence of a most beautiful fountain and the nightly playing of a band he looks forward to hearing.

He also mentions the availability of patients to borrow and read books, play games, and view pictures through a stereoscope. And there are volunteers to come in and regularly play the piano.

Charles mentions that he is happy and pretty healthy, and would still like to get home on a furlough but states "those things don't happen much around here."

Doc.#11 of 21: To his family from West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, dated July 28, 1863.

Charles writes that he just received the family letter addressed on the 17<sup>th</sup> and that he is in good spirits. He mentions that there is not much to tell “as one day is much like the next”.

He comments on the food being bad, that he did not have bread recently, and that his trips to the city are fewer and his passes are reduced to 6 hours.

He states that Philadelphia “is so big one can get lost in it”, and if he gets back later than his pass allows, he has to spend time in the guardhouse. He mentions that “now we are being treated like prisoners not wounded people.”

Everyone cannot wait to get out of here.

Charles wishes the war would end soon so he can come home.

He closes by mentioning the heavy amount of rain in the area making it hard for farmers to do the upcoming harvest.

He postscrips by thanking the family for the \$3 he received.

Doc.#12 of 21: To his family from camp near Warrenton Junction, dated September 11, 1863.

He tells his family he is now back with his regiment, feeling much better that he is finally out of the hospital.

“Not much happening here as the army is standing still now”, “just battles between the cavalries”.

Mentions the regiment getting paid twice now.

Not much else to write about.

Doc.#13 of 21: From camp near the Tennessee River, dated October 2, 1863

Charles describes his week's journey traveling on the railroad, meeting up with Rosecrans' army, and traveling through many states he had never before seen.

He mentions at this writing the regiment is about 30 miles from Chattanooga, noting the very warm weather now.

Very little else to write about.

Publisher's Notes: On September 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> the Corps transferred from the Army of Tennessee and October 2<sup>nd</sup> arrived at Bridgeport, Alabama. On October 27<sup>th</sup> the regiment crossed the Tennessee River and helped repel an enemy attack on Confederate General Geary at Wauhatchie. The Battle of Chickamauga was fought on September 20<sup>th</sup> and the Union army under Rosecrans was pushed back to Chattanooga and now bottled up by Braxton Bragg's troops and now starving. General George Thomas' famous stand at Chicka held the rebel army back until Rosecrans could reform his beaten troops at Chattanooga.

Doc.#14 of 21: To his family in camp from Bridgeport, Alabama, dated October 17, 1863.

Charles reports he has not felt well the last few days and the army is currently on half rations.

He describes his crackers as “having worms in them” and that nothing is fresh including the coffee or bacon.

With only a few pennies left most everyone is buying bread when they can.

Took a 35 mile train ride and were “packed in like sardines.”

Mentions a rebel attack on a hill above the railroad and “our guards were so afraid, they hid without firing a shot”!

Charles includes in his writing a request to have his family send a pair of boots because they are too expensive here and are not of good quality.

Among other items he would like sent are 2 wool shirts, a scarf, a handkerchief and a towel. He also gives instructions on how they should be packed and sent.

Finally in a postscript he specifically requests Charles Schmitt of Sheboygan to make his boots.

Doc.#15 of 21: To his family from camp at Lookout Valley, dated December 19, 1863.

Charles comments upon receiving the family letter

of November 30<sup>th</sup> and expresses his gratitude both for his family's well being as well as his own health. He writes of preparation by possibly General Grant to review the troops and that the rebs could see all the movements.

He mentions that enemy began firing on the afternoon of November 23 near Chattanooga but they did not get near the city until 3PM.

Charles records the Union victory at Lookout Mountain on November 24, and that Missionary Ridge was taken the following day forcing the retreat of Braxton Bragg.

In their retreat the rebels destroyed ammunition and everything "running as fast as they could".

He reports of the capture of prisoners after his march to Knoxville and subsequent marches to Athens and Philadelphia.

Charles continues in his writings to mention that rebels left 300 of their sick and wounded soldiers behind at the Tennessee River.

Continuous rain throughout the marches while procuring food from the local population.

Wants to know if the family received his money.

Publisher's Notes: General Grant arrived in Chattanooga on October 23<sup>rd</sup> taking command from General Thomas. As supplies began arriving down the river, offensive action begun at the Battles of Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge on November 23-25<sup>th</sup>. The result was Braxton Bragg's army was dislodged and routed. According to regimental histories, the 26<sup>th</sup> took active part in these battles, but acted chiefly as a reserve force.

Doc.#16 of 21: To his family from Lookout Valley, dated January 17, 1864

Writes of receiving the latest family letter of December 19<sup>th</sup>.

Mentions the Tennessee weather is like April or May up north as there has been little snow and frost.

Did not participate in the Battle of Chattanooga.

Mentions Longstreet's army had given Burnside a lot of trouble until reinforcements forced Longstreet to retreat to Chattanooga.

The 4 week march resulted in many soldiers walking barefoot and getting sick.  
Continue to survive with the food we get from local farmers or food we captured from the enemy.  
Confederates allowed 42 of their cars and 2 locomotives run off a high bridge and into a river. They also left a hospital with 300 sick and wounded behind for us to care for.  
We're now in our winter headquarters and guarding the railroad.  
Have still not received the box.  
Have not gotten any money for two months.  
Would you send me \$10 dollars?  
I pray the war will be over soon.

Doc.#17 of 21: To his family from Lookout Valley, January 24, 1864.

Charles mentions that he received the last letter dated January 9<sup>th</sup>, and is happy that are all well. Again Charles compares the warm weather he is having with what his family is experiencing back home.  
He would like to go to "Old Abe" and "ask him for a furlough" so "I can build a new house for you."  
Charles concludes by mentioning the large number of copperheads here and not many girls to marry.

Doc.#18 of 21: To his family from Whiteside, Tennessee, dated April 10, 1864.

Charles writes to his family that he still has not received his box as did 5 or 6 others in camp concluding "they must all be lost".  
He tells his family to go to the express office and try to get a refund.  
It rains all the time. We have been on picket duty. The poor are trying to get food any way they can and some are getting caught stealing from inside stored supplies.  
The peach trees are in full blossom here.  
If we stayed here over the summer, we would have plenty of food to eat.

Doc.#19 of 21: Remarks on the Back of A Letter From the Wisconsin State Treasurer to Charles Wickesberg addressed to his family. (Note there is no date nor location given of where this was written).

The note indicates that Charles Wickesberg is now a sergeant since the first of January. He is requesting his family send him "5 yards of blue ribbon, one half inch wide, but no silk." He also asks them to "take a newspaper or an American church newspaper (Boebachter) and pack it in there, and put a 2 cent stamp on it, and it will reach me".

Doc.#20 of 21: To his family from Lookout Valley, Tennessee, dated May 1, 1864.

Charles writes, "We just received our orders to march and are off to the front tomorrow."

The 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Corps have ceased to exist and so our regiment has been assigned to another brigade. Our brigade has 5 regiments with 3 music bands, and its nice to listen to the music as we do our field practice.

In any case by the end of the week we have to deal with the rebels.

The trees down here are "in their full green dress". My address is, Company H, 26<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Wisconsin Volunteers, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 20<sup>th</sup> Division Army Corps, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Publisher's Notes: In preparation for the Atlanta Campaign, the 26<sup>th</sup> was transferred to the Third Brigade, Third Division, of the Twentieth Army Corps, and moved by Snake Creek Gap to Resaca, Georgia. On May 15, the 26<sup>th</sup> Regiment attacked through a valley of heavy pines near Resaca that by now had been heavily fortified under Confederate General Johnston. It was in this attack that the enemy fire was heavy and the 26<sup>th</sup> were forced to turn back to its own lines. In this battle Sargeant Charles Wickesberg was killed.

Doc.#21 of 21: From Captain Karl Schmidt, Company H, 26<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Wisconsin Volunteers to Mr. Charles Wickesberg, Howard's Grove.

Enclosed I send you the death certificate of your nephew "who had to die to soon". I did not know Charles's father's address and I have sent the necessary papers to Washington where the father can assert his claims. By the way, your nephew owes \$6 to a sargeant of my company, which was lent to him to purchase a watch. He would be grateful if you could send him this sum.  
Balance sheet of wages and expenses enclosed.