

Wood Collection Letters

Guide to the David Holton Wood Archival Collection, Private, Company A, 13th Regiment of Wisconsin Infantry Volunteers

DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

Repository

Civil War Museum, Resource Center Kenosha, Wisconsin

Language of Material

Material in English

Abstract

This collection consists of 50 letters mostly written by Pvt. David Holton Wood to his cousin, Miss Hattie Sanborn (Mrs. Hiram Ferris) during and shortly after the Civil War (1861-1865). The contents describe daily soldier life at various camp locations as well as Mr. Holton's personal reflections of eyewitness events and other popular and political topics of his day. The letters also illustrate his sense of personal values and give a sense of his philosophy on the meaning of life.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Use Restrictions

No photocopying please

Preferred Citation

(Identification of item). The David H. Wood Collection, The Civil War Museum, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

Provenance

The David Holton Wood Collection was donated to the Kenosha Civil War Museum through the efforts of letters compiled by direct descendents of Mr. Wood. Ms. Nancy C. Crerar compiled and transcribed the letters in May, 1996.

Processing Information

Processed by Frederick J. (Rick) Holtz, 2011

Biographical note:

From State of Wisconsin Muster Roll: David H. Wood/Residence Janesville, Wisconsin. Pvt. Wood reenlisted as a veteran and was promoted several times reaching the rank of 2nd Lt. on Oct. 9, 1865. He mustered out of the Union Army on Nov. 24, 1865.

COLLECTION OVERVIEW:

The documents trace the military assignments and encampments of Mr. Wood from Camp Maloney (Kansas, 1862) to his arrival back home in Janesville, Wisconsin(1868). The letters themselves create a picture of a young man's character, values, ideals, sacrifices and dreams during the tragic Civil War Period of our nation's history.

COLLECTION LIST:

Doc. #1 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie, dated February 15, 1862, from Camp Maloney, Ossawatimie, Kansas

Noteworthy: Describes Pvt. Wood's parting at Janesville, Wisconsin.
Marching long distances in extreme cold.
A major accident with the supply wagons.
Difficulty of sleeping on the frozen ground without blankets and tents.
Finding long dry prairie grass to use for bedding.
Constant routines of daily marching and difficulties in getting teams to cross rivers.
Catching 2 rabbits, a change of menu.
Spirits are high.
Show my letters to the relatives.

Doc. #2 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie from Ft. Scott, Kansas, March 17, 1862

Noteworthy: Mentions his first experience in going to the burial of a fellow soldier.
Much sickness while in Leavenworth but we are better now.
Have not attended any religious services since leaving home.
Remember us in your prayers.
Since arriving are tired and sore and have little rations to eat.
Rumors we may be heading to St. Louis.
Remembering the merry winter sounds of sleigh bells and the joy of sleigh rides.
Inquires into Laura's condition.

Doc. #3 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie from Ft. Riley, Kansas, April 30, 1862

Noteworthy: Expect to cross the plains of New Mexico.
First time in "Indian Country".
Explored the contents of lone indian grave
Ft. Riley is the prettiest fort we've ever seen.

Doc. #4 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie from Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, May 28, 1862

Noteworthy: Thought we would be on the road to New Mexico by now.
Constant waiting for orders to go to the seat of battle.
Marched 500 miles through Kansas in 4 weeks.

Doc. #5 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie from Moscow, Kentucky, June 18, 1862

Noteworthy: Describes the journey from Kansas to Tennessee.
Notes the change in topography from the flatness of Kansas to the high banks and bluffs, and the difference in the color of rivers as they near Cairo, Illinois.
Notes the taste of coffee has greatly improved.
Sees for the first time rebel fortifications that are now occupied by Union troops.
Describes the many shells and other war artifacts laying about.
My regiment is currently engaged in building a bridge while 4 other companies started for Union City to complete a bridge there.

Doc. #6 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie from Columbus, Kentucky, July 16, 1862

Noteworthy: We left Moscw and returned to Columbus after completing the railroad bridge.
We are continuously fixing miles of track.
Living quarters have improved that include wood platforms, a veranda and even a kitchen off his tent "courtesy of the rebels".
Eating better thanks to the soft bread from local bakers.
Improved menu included corn beef, ham, potatotes, tea and even ice for drinking water.
Orchards are abundant here, ripe with apples.
I am too busy to honor your request to write a letter to your newspaper at this time.

Doc. #7 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Columbus, Kentucky, August 15, 1862

Noteworthy: Been doing a lot of guard duty and laundry.
Maybe going into battle soon.
Our orders while travelling down river is to destroy skiffs or boats that could be used by the rebels in crossing the river.
Attended a burial of a Sargeant in Co. A.
Many boys are on the sick list and the weather is getting colder.
The musicians have improved wonderfully and have been discharged.
Union City has been attacked by the rebels.
We must shoot every man who won't side with the union.

Doc. #8 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn in Milton, Wisconsin (Rock County), October 10th, 1862, from Ft. Henry (Paducah, Kentucky)

Noteworthy: The soldiers are always eager to receive letters from relatives and friends and watch daily for "mail call".
Anticipates the meeting of the new commander, Col. William P. Lyon.
Enjoyed a recent trip 25 miles down the river and 20 miles east into Kentucky seeing 2 villages and dining 3 times.
Colored cooks do the cooking and washing while we often go into the country and trade for sweet potatoes and dried peaches.
The woods supply us with paw-paws, persimmons, hickory nuts, and walnuts.
Excited about President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

Doc. #9 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn in Milton, Wisconsin, November 17, 1862, from Ft. Henry, Tennessee

Noteworthy: Constant rain.
Am sad as we buried another one of our comrades who died of conjestion of the lungs.
Describes his regimental march from Ft. Henry.
Has been scouting with 1200 men as they look for rebel General Morgan.
Brief skirmishes have accounted for the loss of 16 lives by the enemy.
We were complemented by General Ransom.
Glad to be living in a log houise for the winter but could be called out again to scout.
He comments on the residents of the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers.
The surrounding land is poor and barren and the locals are not of first class intelligence.
We march many Sundays. We have no chaplain.
Have not been to a church service since last July.

Doc. #10 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Ft. Henry, Tennessee, December 12, 1862

Noteworthy: He reflects on his school days as the best of a person's life.
He hopes that the cause (the war) that has affected so many lives will end soon before the year is over.

Doc. #11 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Ft. Henry, Tennessee, dated, Jan 6, 1863

Noteworthy: Christmas Greetings to Cousin Hattie.
Describes his Christmas as marching through Camden and then doing picket guard duty.
Have come into contraband (supplies of tobacco and cotton) for trade.
Continuous marching to one point and then back again.
Been in the army a year and haven't got shot yet.
Grateful to the the Lord for keeping him hearty and protected.

Doc. #12 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie from Ft. Henry, Tennessee, February 10, 1863

Noteworthy: Excited to receive 3 letters (one from mother).
Orders to soon relieve soldiers at Ft. Donnelson, Tennessee.
Wondering when our turn will come to fight!
Its cold! I'm shivering!
After the battlewe examined the bodies of dead rebels and their horses.
Noted that buildings still standing are marked well by shells and bullets.
There was a late afternoon attack by the rebels that lasted until sunset.
The night of February 4th, more reinforcment troops from the 22nd Wisconsin Regiment arrived and I recognized many of them that I attended school with.

Doc. #13 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Ft. Donnelson, Tennessee, March 11, 1863

Noteworthy; Writes to explain the reason he is no longer at Ft. Henry.
Boats arrive here more frequently that at Ft. Henry due to much heavy business done on the river by the government.

Doc. #14 of 50: Letter to Miss Hattie Sanborn from Ft. Donnelson, Tennessee, April 30, 1863

Noteworthy: Recommends to his cousin to tell her borders to "enlist".
Reminds her of the hardships of the 13th Reg. since leaving home.
Continuous marching fatigues me.
Camping in the wet and freezing weather.
Has seen much desolation, suffering, and sorrow themselves war has brought to our land.

Second entry to Hattie of May 4, 1863

Noteworthy: It is summer here and the trees have leaved out.
The flowers bloom plentifully.
The regiment remains unusually healthy.
Only 4 deaths have occurred.

Doc. #15 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Ft. Donnelson, Tennessee,
May 29th, 1863

Noteworthy: My sickness you worried about is so light.
By the time you read this Vicksburg, Mississippi
will have fallen.
We all praise the efforts and successes of General
Grant.

Doc. #16 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Ft. Donnelson, Tennessee,
July 17, 1863

Noteworthy: Spent the Fourth of July “quietly” while some soldiers
got drunk.
We rejoiced at the news of the fall of Vicksburg and the
defeat of Gen. Lee at Gettysburg.
We are happy at the retreat of the rebel forces at Helena, Ark.,
and the retreat of Bragg and the advance of Gen. Rosecrans.
We are busily engaged at putting up a “cook house”.
We are now getting plenty of new potatoes, onions, blackberries
ripe apples, and soon ripe peaches.

Doc. #17 of 50 First Entry of a letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Ft.
Donnelson, Tennessee, August 24, 1863

Noteworthy: Two of our men were captured by guerillas probably
when they walked away from camp to a house.
A squad of our men came to the house and followed the
guerillas a short distance but could not overtake them.
Last night one of ours was “drummed out of camp” after
being court-martialed. His buttons were cut off and he
was marched out of camp at bayonet point.
Tomorrow a member of Capt. Flood's battery is to be shot
for aiding rebel prisoners who were condemned to death.

Second Entry of a letter to Hattie Sanborn from Ft. Donnelson, Tennessee, August 26, 1863

Noteworthy: While on guard duty I witnessed the execution of one Henry McLane at 2 P.M. for “desertion and stealing”. The prisoner remained unconcerned as prayers were offered. He sat on his coffin and was executed.

Doc. #18 of 50: First Entry of a letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Stevenson, Alabama, September 18, 1863

Noteworthy: Continuous marching some 130 miles from Columbia.
Glad to rest and cleanse ourselves, and joyful to receive your letters.
Sad to hear of the passing of my mother.
Was hoping to meet her with all of my friends at the war's close.
Expresses his gratitude for all the letters and words of comfort and encouragement he received especially during this time of personal loss.

Second Entry of a letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn, from Stevenson, Alabama, Sept. 22, 1863

Noteworthy: Mentions of being on guard duty twice and having moved camps. The supplies of tents are few and the nights are cold. Under orders to “hold ready” as we may leave on short notice. Much cooler weather now that makes having overcoats in good demand.

Document 19 of 50: A letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Stevenson, Alabama, October 17, 1863

Noteworthy: Mentions the happiness of the return of sunshine after three days and nights of rainy weather.
“Hemmed Up” in a tent makes one want to “ramble for exercise”.
He describes the “splendid topography of the hills, mountains and the Tennessee River” by his camp.
Has an “excellent plan” for seeing such distinguished officers like Gen. Hooker.
Notes the date of the 17th as the second anniversary of our enlistment and cannot believe how fast the time has gone.

Document 20 of 50: A letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Camp Bigney near Nashville, Tennessee, November 20, 1863

Noteworthy: Writes about doing a little of guard duty and marching.
A rebel torpedo destroyed an engine's tender car.
Longing to go back to school in Milton, Wis.
Chides his cousin for pressing Josiah to enlist, saying,
"You will never see him again if he goes to war."
"If he must go, send him cheerfully".
"Wishing you long life".

Document 21 of 50: A letter to Cousin Hattie from Camp Bigney, Tennessee, January 13, 1864

Noteworthy: Received 2 welcomed letters.
Col. Lyon addressed the regiment encouraging veterans to re-enlist.
Realizes that by reenlisting, he cannot attend school next winter in Milton.
"The winter keeps us close to the fires".
"May the termination of the war come soon."

Document 22 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Camp Bigney, Tennessee, March 31, 1864

Noteworthy: We reached this place in good condition with fatigue.
Accounts for the uneventful journey from Nashville, Tennessee to Janesville, Wisconsin (including the changing of cars and taking of meals).

Document 23 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Nashville, Tennessee, April 12, 1864

Noteworthy: Mentions doing heavy train guard and picket duty between Camp Bigney and Louisville, Ky.
Spent a delightfully social evening "singing, playing Author's game, and eating popcorn and apples with the Society of Miss Wagner."

Document 24 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie from Stevenson, Alabama, April 29, 1864

Noteworthy: Mentions this place “has changed greatly since we were here seven months ago.”
Its filled with the confusing noise of many soldiers and countless trains of government supplies arriving to and from Chattanooga, Tennessee.
“There are good and bad men in the army as well as out of it.”

Document 25 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie from Stevenson, Alabama, May 26, 1864

Noteworthy: Mentions the difficulty of corresponding as “ I am moving around so much”

Document 26 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from camp near Whitesburg, Alabama, June 26, 1864

Noteworthy: “Had the good fortune of receiving 4 letters.”
Describes the ten days of marching from Belle Fonte to Love's Landing on the Tennessee River.
Spent the balance of his time doing picket duty at Love's Landing “to keep the enemy from crossing.”
We continue to patrol the river for the rebel army.
Would like to see Laura at the close of her school.
Regards to Cousin Sate.

Document 27 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie at Johnston, Wisconsin (Rock Co.) from Camp Clayville near Whitesburg, Alabama, July 21, 1864

Noteworthy: We had a “scare” when a strong force of rebels crossed the river at Clayville.
We are joined by Companys A, B, and K in our efforts to patrol, picket and protect property.
We are deeper into Alabama than we have ever been.
Our mail is coming from Huntsville 10 miles away.

Document 28 of 50: Letter to Hattie Sanborn from camp near Whitesburg, Alabama, August 14, 1864

Noteworthy: Describes a “typical Sabbath” including rise early, roll call, breakfast, clean guns and knapsack inspection. Then we relieve the old guard. Afternoons are much quieter. Sundays are pretty much like any other day as we perform the same functions. Worshipping is individual. There are no formal services. The blackberries are gone now but we still have peaches and apples. Nothing compares to maple syrup and warm biscuits.

Document 29 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie from Brownsboro, Alabama, October 6, 1864

Noteworthy: Writes about his excursions on a railroad and gunboat. Abandoned camp and marched to Huntsville “where we occupied various posts”. “Confederate Nathan Bedford Forrest broke the peace.” Huntsville remains unsafe with continuing rebel skirmishes. Many in our regiment now seem unfit for duty due to the sickness known as “ague”. “Shaking is fashionable here but I can't be induced to try it.”

Document 30 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Hurricane Bridge, Alabama, November 8, 1864

Noteworthy: Rejoicing at a pleasant day after days of rain. Twenty-five of us live in little huts on high ground and close to the railroad tracks. Our boys saw action on Oct. 20th at Decatur, Alabama. The older soldiers are expected to be “mustered out” on November 28th. Looking forward to voting for Lincoln and Johnson.

Document 31 of 50: Letter to Hattie Sanborn from Brownsboro, Alabama, January 22, 1865

Noteworthy: Had pleasant weather for weeks but today is dark and rainy.
Each day is like the previous one.
“The peace question” has been the main topic of camp talk.
With recent victories at Franklin, Nashville, Savannah, and Ft. Fisher, the Rebellion is weakening.
“Want to see slavery annihilated and the traitors punished.”
I can imagine the snow falling and keeping close to the fire back home.
Home for me is wherever I find shelter.

Document 32 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Brownsboro, Alabama, February 18, 1865

Noteworthy: Just received a supply of candles from “Uncle Sam”.
This date is the anniversary of the veterans furloughs in Janesville, Wisconsin
Those days of no revilles, no roll calls, countless inspections, dress parades allowed us to enjoy civilian life once again, brief as it was.
No current excitement here as “peace has blown over.”
Spring is beautiful here and the ground is dry.
The boys are playing ball with their hats off.
“The Negro has the same right to defend himself as the white man.”

Document 33 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Knoxville, Tennessee, March 26, 1865

Noteworthy: We have been sent from Huntsville, Alabama to guard the trains loaded with supply wagons and ambulances.
Our train ran off the track but we are fine.
Expecting great results from the spring's campaign with a large concentration of our troops at the rebel capital.

Document 34 of 50: Letter to Hattie Sanborn from Camp Hacker near Nashville, Tennessee, May 5, 1865

Noteworthy: The principle rebel armies have surrendered and the Confederate capital has fallen!
President Jefferson Davis and his cabinet are fugitives pursued by our cavalry.
Expresses “profound sorrow” at the death of President Lincoln.
Much looking forward to partaking of warm biscuits and maple syrup!

Document 35 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn while on board the Steamer “Armenia”, June 18, 1865

Noteworthy: There was a “long quiet” at Camp Harbor that was broken by our preparations to move.
Once at the bank of the Tennessee River at Johnsonville, we embarked on the Steamer Armenia.
We are now at Paducah, Kentucky and taking on coal.
We expect to remain on the boat until reaching New Orleans.
We think we may be heading to Texas.

Documents 36 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Green Lake, Texas, August 8, 1865

Noteworthy: Sad when his name is not mentioned to receive a letter.
Describes the extensive Texas prairie (room for all with excellent neighbors and good families).
From the steamship Neptune sharks, porpoises, flying fish and gulls were observed.
Expect our brigade to go soon to San Antonio.

Document 37 of 50: Letter to Hattie Sanborn from a camp near San Antonio, Texas, October 26, 1865

Noteworthy: We left Green Lake marching to San Antonio on October 23rd.
There is “no charm” in military life now that the war is over.
We are all anxious to return to civilian life.

Document 38 of 50:

A reply letter from Cousin Hattie Sanborn to David Holton Wood from Wrightstown, Wisconsin, November 21, 1865

Noteworthy:

Cousin Hattie mentions that she arrived to teach school at Wrightstown, Wisconsin and “found a great deal of sickness all around”. Cousin Laura is the sickest with “Billious Fever.” She explored the town that she would live in permanently the following year. A “Mr. Hawkes” befriended her on her journey to Wrightstown and kept her from becoming homesick. She (Hattie) has also spent time with him (Mr. Hawkes) in the telegraph office where she would learn of how was being mustered out of the 13th.

Document 39 of 50:

A letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Janesville, Wisconsin, January 6, 1866

Noteworthy:

David Holton writes of his “gladness to be home again” and “no tears” that his military service has finally ended. Mentions leaving camp at San Antonio on March 29th, and then marching 29 miles to the Gulf of Mexico to board his ship. The majority of his correspondence reveals his long process of finally making it to Madison, Wisconsin Wednesday the 27th was “notable” for receiving his final pay and discharge from the army. Feels like “running loose” and “enjoying his new found freedom”! Concludes by mentioning he does not think he will make it soon to Wrightstown for a visit.

Document 40 of 50:

A letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Janesville, Wisconsin, February 5, 1866

Noteworthy:

David Holton writes this reflective letter by the comfort of a warm stove mentioning the quiet peacefulness of the home he is enjoying and noting the cold starry evening. He wonders if Hattie is too enjoying the same experience. He closes with his attendance to a lecture by a Mr. Gough given to The Young Men's Association that he found interesting.

- Document 41 of 50: (Note: This correspondence from David to Hattie is missing the top of the greeting)
March 1, 1866, from Janesville, Wisconsin
- Noteworthy: Mentions a “journey into the wilderness” and “will be returning home soon”.
- Document 42 of 50: A letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from David Holton living in Cresco, Iowa,
April 9, 1867
- Noteworthy: Describes his visit to Cresco and the Walker Family.
Mentions his brief meeting with Cousin Laura while the train waited to depart for the trip from Janesville.
He includes mentioning “the beautiful prairie country of eastern Iowa and his small host family.
- Document 43 of 50: A letter to Cousin Hattie from Burlington, Iowa, May 7, 1867
- Noteworthy: Writes Hattie, “Your letter from Cresco followed me to Burlington.”
Describes Dubuque as “the metropolis of Iowa.”
Walked and visited with the workmen of this town.
He ends by describing his several excursions on Iowa steamboats.
- Document 44 of 50: A letter to Hattie from Burlington, Iowa, May 24, 1867
- Noteworthy: He received Hattie's latest letter and her description of the town of Green Bay, Wisconsin noting that Green Bay and Burlington have common “sidewalks”.
He also mentions their “slipperiness” and “disrepair”.
He comments on Hattie's discussion of “a great many mosquitos” in Green Bay.
David brings up his acceptance of the “invitation of joining voices” with “Cousin Hattie, Miss Butz, and Miss Decker”.
He closes by noting his receiving a recent letter from the family in Cresco, Iowa. that all is well.

Document 45 of 50: A letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn (now living in Green Bay, Wisconsin) from Burlington, Iowa, June 11, 1867

Noteworthy: David addresses to Hattie the questions, "Why can't boys be behave as well as girls?"
He exhorts Hattie to deal kindly with the boys even when "boys will be boys."
He mentions he will meet with her soon in Milton, Wisconsin, and will again enjoy Cousin Laura's singing and the eating of strawberries."
He closes by inquiring, "What are the wages for carpenters in Green Bay".

Document 46 of 50: Letter to Hattie Sanborn from Burlington, Iowa, August 2, 1867

Noteworthy: Comments on Burlington city life mentioning "a stop of tourists from Monmouth, Illinois
He observes the playing of a local school house band, and the celebration of suffrage for "coloreds and women".

Document 47 of 50: Letter to Cousin Hattie Sanborn from Burlington, Iowa, September 16, 1867

Noteworthy: Reflecting on receiving Hattie's latest letter, he philosophically comments on the meaning of individual happiness, remembering the memories of life's best moments (good parents, childhood, siblings, and special places to live.
He acknowledges that all these things in life will eventually change and in many cases eventually become lost as one ages.

Document 48 of 50: Letter to Hattie Sanborn from Burlington, Iowa, October 14, 1867

Noteworthy: David comments on "the political issues of the day" affecting the upcoming state elections (taxation, government bonds, and the suffrage question).
He expresses his belief that the voting will "still be done by white males".
He concludes by sharing his belief in Predestination and states that he continues on reflecting about life's meanings the events he has witnessed.
Signs off by telling his wife that all will be well in Cresco.

Document 49 of 50: To Cousin Hattie Sanborn (living in Green Bay, Wisconsin), March 18, 1868, from Janesville, Wisconsin

Noteworthy: David writes of his “taking possession of the old house on February 7th, and “the monumental task of cleaning and refurbishing it.”

March 24th, entry

Noteworthy: He mentions the March thaw and the farmers already plowing as “new buildings are springing up.”
He reminds her of the quick passage of time and that his best years were mentally and physically between 25 and 45 years of age.

Document 50 of 50: A letter to Miss Ella L. Case written by Hattie Sanborn Ferris (now the wife of Hiram Ferris), August 13, 1872, from Milton, Wisconsin

Noteworthy: This written communication is a bridesmaid invitation extended from Hattie to Ella which references David Holton's spoken introduction in which Hattie mentions where and when the wedding is to take place, and a hat she has chosen for her wedding attire.