

Guide to the Henry L. Sholts (38th Iowa Regiment) Letters [1861-1864]

Descriptive Summary

Repository

Kenosha Civil War Museum Archives

Language of Material

Material in English

Extent

.5 Linear Feet

1 manuscript box containing 33 folders

Abstract

This collection consists of 33 letters and letter fragments written by Henry L. Sholts to his wife Martha, during his enlistment in the Union Army from 1861-1864.

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

Photocopies available upon request. Fee required.

Preferred Citation

(Identification of item), The Henry L. Sholts (38th Iowa regiment) Letters Collection, The Civil War Museum, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

Provenance

The Henry L. Sholts Letters Collection was donated to the Kenosha Civil War Museum by the Institute for Civil War Studies, Carroll College, Waukesha, Wisconsin in 2005.

Processing Information

Processed by: Chris Stape, November 2008.

Biographical Note

Born in Allegheny, New York but spending the majority of his life in Fredericksburg, Iowa, Henry L. Sholts enlisted in the Union Army August 14, 1862 at the age of 27. He was mustered into Company C, 38th Iowa Volunteer Regiment with the rank of first corporal September 12, 1862. During his service in the Civil War, Sholts was stationed in Dubuque, Iowa; New Madrid, Missouri; New Orleans, Louisiana; and Brownsville, Texas. Sholts and the 38th Iowa were involved in the battle of Vicksburg, Mississippi—the unit coming under fire for the first time in mid-June, 1863. Sholts and his wife Martha, had two sons, Wayland and

Clinton. Sholts died from typhoid fever March 16, 1864 in Brownsville, Texas and was buried at the Fort Brown National Cemetery there until the Fort was closed. It is likely that Sholts' remains and those of 3000 others were transferred to Alexandria National Cemetery in Pineville, Louisiana in 1911.

Collection Overview

The collection consists of 27 letters and 5 undated remnants of letters written by Henry L. Sholts to his wife Martha in Fredericksburg, Iowa, and Wisconsin. One letter is a formal request for promotion written to the Adjutant General of the Army of the Rio Grande. The letters date from October 27, 1861 to February 2, 1864 and were posted from Camp Franklin, Iowa, Camp 38th Iowa in Brownsville, Texas, New Madrid, Missouri, New Orleans, Louisiana, and Sherman's Landing near Vicksburg, Mississippi. Interestingly, the collection's first letter, in which Sholts describes military camp life, pre-dates his enlistment by 10 months.

The letters contain extensive descriptions of military engagements and every day life in a camp during the Civil War. Of particular note are Sholts' descriptions of the Battle of Vicksburg and the devastating effects of disease on his unit that resulted. Sholts provides accounts of troop movements and tactics, his views and opinions of various leaders and commanders including: Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and William T. Sherman. Sholts also makes mention of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. The letters include lengthy descriptions of New Orleans and Matamoros, Mexico during the war. He also writes about the causes and effects of slavery and the role played by African Americans in the military. In the final dated letter in the collection, written a little more than a month before his death, Sholts formally requests a promotion to company commander in the USCT (United States Colored Troops.) The letters are also notable for the great deal of affection he expresses throughout the letters for his wife, whom he endearingly refers to as "Bub", and his two young sons.

Detailed Container List

Box 1 of 1

Folder 1 of 33: Sholts/ Iowa Letters - October 27, 1861
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated October 27, 1861 from Camp Franklin, Dubuque, Iowa.

Names Mentioned:

- Colonel Brush (possibly Col. Daniel H. Brush), Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood, George Golligan, Elijah Marsh

Noteworthy:

- Description of typhoid fever outbreak.
- Sholts' cousin George Golligan, killed in a recent battle.
- Elijah Marsh discharged due to injuries suffered at Battle of Bull Run.
- Mention of the "Chadwick" company.

- Men suffering from measles, but no deaths.
- Mentions Wisconsin land taxes.
- Discusses battle at "Meaysville" (Maysville), Arkansas near Pea Ridge.

Folder 2 of 33: Sholts/ Iowa Letters - November 23, 1862
(Typed transcription is included.)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated November 23, 1862 from Camp Franklin, Dubuque. Iowa.

Names Mentioned:

- James Potter

Noteworthy:

- Mention of the draft in Dubuque and possible resistance.
- Mention of upcoming battles in Fredericksburg, Virginia and Vicksburg, Mississippi.
- The 32nd Regiment left for Davenport, Iowa; the "Irish Regiment" is due in Iowa shortly.
- James Potter being held at Benton Barracks (Missouri); taken prisoner at the Battle of Shiloh along with the rest of the Iowa 12th.

Folder 3 of 33: Sholts/ Iowa Letters - December 2, 1862
(Typed transcription is included.)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated December 2, 1862 from Camp Franklin, Dubuque, Iowa.

Names Mentioned:

- J.V. Carpenter, General Ambrose Burnside, and General Franz Seigle (Siegel).

Noteworthy:

- Mention that J.V. Carpenter and the 21st Regiment defeated.
- Army of the West as well as the Confederate troops concentrating down the Mississippi River for battle of Vicksburg.
- Army of the Potomac concentrating in the Shenandoah Valley for a battle at Fredericksburg, Virginia.
- Discussion of Sholts' military pay.

Folder 4 of 33: H.L. Sholts / Iowa Letters - December 14, 1862
(Typed transcription is included.)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated December 14, 1862 from Camp Franklin, Dubuque, Iowa.

Names Mentioned:

- General Ambrose Burnside

Noteworthy:

- Mentions the Battle of Fredericksburg.
- Sholts' regiment departing for Cairo, Illinois.

- Urges wife to move to Wisconsin.

Folder 5 of 33: H.L. Sholts Iowa Letters - January 6, 1863 (likely error in date)
(Typed transcription is included.)

Letter from H.L. Sholts to his wife Martha, dated January 6, 1863, from "Camp 38th Iowa, Brownsville, Texas." The letter was likely mis-dated by Sholts. Given the content and location, it was more probably written January 6, 1864.

Names Mentioned:

- General Francis J. Herron

Noteworthy:

- Description of Sholts' military pay.
- Sholts notes his unit is out of the 13th Army Corps and it is again the "Army of the Frontier."

Folder 6 of 33: H.L. Sholts Letters Feb. 4, 1863
(Actual letter is on exhibit. Folder includes typed transcription.)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated February 4, 1863 from New Madrid, Missouri.

Names Mentioned:

- Hiram King

Noteworthy:

- Reference to the "disaster of the 78th".
- Description of gunboats from "Columbus TBB" arriving with the 75th Iowa Regiment to reinforce Sholts' regiment at Island 10 in Missouri.
- Mention of mumps outbreak, reports no cases of small pox due to vaccinations.
- Notes that the Army of the Potomac sent west because Confederate troops of Virginia have moved to protect Vicksburg.
- Description of funeral of "King" (*Hiram King*).

Folder 7 of 33: H.L. Sholts/ Iowa Letters - February 22, 1863
(Typed transcription is included.)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated February 22, 1863 from New Madrid, Missouri.

Names Mentioned:

- Charley P. Snow, Dan Nicholas, James Boswell, Dave, Lee, Jefferson Davis

Noteworthy:

- Describes the Union gun boats *Indianola* and *Queen of the West* running the blockade at Vicksburg.
- Mentions Senate passing a bill emancipating the slaves in Missouri.
- Mention of Tories.

Folder 8 of 33: H.L. Sholts/ Iowa Letters - March 16, 1863

(Typed transcription is included.)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated March 16, 1863, from New Madrid, Missouri.

Names Mentioned:

- Captain Miller (possibly Captain Charles H. Miller), Joseph Hobson, Peter Case, J.V. Carpenter

Noteworthy:

- Mention of Western Union
- Discussion of "green backs" vs. "Iowa money".
- Notes having pay forwarded to Dane County, Wisconsin once wife arrives.
- Mentions expected arrival of "Carpenter" (*J.V. Carpenter*) and his unit, the 21st Iowa Regiment, as well as the 22nd Iowa Regiment.

Folder 9 of 33: H.L. Sholts / Iowa Letters - March 22, 1863
(Actual letter is on exhibit. Folder contains typed transcription.)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated March 22, 1863, from New Madrid, Missouri.

Names Mentioned:

- Alice Newton, J.A. Sholts, and David Benedict

Noteworthy:

- Mention of 23rd Iowa Regiment.
- Mention of 21st and 22nd Iowa.
- Mention of the 1st Nebraska.
- Sholts' camp officially designated a "military post".
- Description of material in camp.
- Notes death of David Benedict.

Folder 10 of 33: H.L. Sholts / Iowa Letters - March 24, 1863
(Typed transcription is included.)

Letter from Sholts to his wife, Martha, dated March 24, 1863, from New Madrid, Missouri.

Names mentioned:

- General Joseph Hooker, Commodore Farragut, Captain Hudson, General Braxton Bragg

Noteworthy:

- Mention of fighting at Vicksburg (Mississippi).
- Mention of slavery.
- Notes that "Old Price" (*USS General Price - a gun boat*) is returning to Missouri.
- Describes poor condition of Confederate troops.
- Notes Confederate raids into Kentucky.
- Notes that Savannah (Georgia) is blockaded.
- Description of Mobile, Alabama being sieged by "Ironclads".
- Charleston harbor under the control of "The Iron Monitors."
- Mention of the conscription law.

Folder 11 of 33: H.L. Sholts / Iowa Letters - April 13, 1863
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife, Martha, dated April 13, 1863, from New Madrid, Missouri. The end of the letter appears to be missing.

Names Mentioned:

- Sergeant Lymon (James Lyman), Corporal H***ing (likely Cpl. Jacob Horning).

Noteworthy:

- Description of a scouting expedition into Tennessee, Kentucky, and Arkansas.
- Mentions rumors of Confederate guerrillas.
- Description of inhabitants of nearby swampland.
- Notes capture of suspected guerrilla.

Folder 12 of 33: H.L. Sholts/ Iowa Letters: May 9, 1863
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated May 9, 1863, from New Madrid, Missouri.

Names Mentioned:

- Jefferson Davis, Colonel (D. Henry) Hughes

Noteworthy:

- Sholts' wife reaches Wisconsin.
- Mention of "Copperheads"
- Describes strength of 38th Regiment.
- Notes Colonel (*D. Henry*) Hughes of the 38th Regiment refused promotion to Brigadier General of the Missouri Militia.
- Description of New Orleans, Louisiana, including architecture, religious institutions, and inhabitants.

Folder 13 of 33: H.L. Sholts: Iowa Letters: May 17, 1863
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated May 17, 1863 from New Madrid, Missouri.

Names Mentioned:

- Alvin A. Brown, Abram Wortendyke, C****an Keely (likely Culman Keeley),

Noteworthy:

- Mentions C****an Keely (*Culman Keely*) and (*Abram*) Wortendyke discharged due to serious illness.
- Description of heavy gambling and drinking in camp and nearby town.
- Description of the use of slaves in the area.
- Describes the effect lack of churches have in New Madrid, Missouri.

Folder 14 of 33: H.L. Sholts/ Iowa Letters-- May 24, 1863
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated May 24, 1863 from New Madrid, Missouri.

Names Mentioned:

- General Ulysses S. Grant, General Robert E. Lee, General William S. Rosecrans, General Stonewall Jackson, General William T. Sherman, General Braxton Bragg

Noteworthy:

- Reports that Ulysses Grant is near Vicksburg and that Haynes Bluff has been evacuated.
- Describes Union mortar and gun boats firing on Vicksburg.
- Mention of the Potomac Army crossing the Rappahannock River to engage "Lee's Army"
- Notes the death of Stonewall Jackson in the battle of Chancellorsville, Virginia.
- Discusses report that General Sherman has taken Haynes Bluff and many prisoners.

Folder 15 of 33: Henry L. Sholts/ Iowa Letters-- May 27, 1863.
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated May 27, 1863 from New Madrid, Missouri.

Names Mentioned:

- General John Pemberton, General Jo Johnson (likely General Joseph Johnston)

Noteworthy:

- Notes outbreak of scarlet fever at home in Iowa.
- Mentions the alleged surrender of Vicksburg.

Folder 16 of 33: H.L. Sholts/ Iowa Letters - June 7, 1863.
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated June 7, 1863 from New Madrid, Missouri.

Names Mentioned:

Noteworthy:

- Sholts' unit relieved by the 24th Missouri.
- Arrival in New Madrid, Missouri of the 20th Iowa and 36th Indiana, along with 2 other regiments and one regiment from Wisconsin.
- Advice to Sholts' son, Wayland, about when to enlist.

Folder 17 of 33: H.L. Sholts / Iowa Letters--June 11, 1863
(*Original letter is on exhibit. Typed transcription is included in folder.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated June 11, 1863 from Sherman landing-- 15 miles up the Yazoo River (*Mississippi*)

Names Mentioned:

- General Ulysses Grant, Jo Jackson (likely Gen. Joseph Johnston), General John Pemberton, S.J. Tisdale

Noteworthy:

- Mentions crossing Big Black River (near Vicksburg).
- Description of tactics in the previous day's Vicksburg battle.
- Notes illnesses caused by unsanitary conditions of the Yazoo River.
- Describes troop build-up for Vicksburg battle.
- Mention of 9th Iowa.
- Describes a captured courier with letter from General Pemberton regarding need for reinforcements.

Folder 18 of 33: H.L. Sholts/ Iowa Letters -- June 17, 1863
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated June 17, 1863 from "rear of Vicksburg".

Names Mentioned:

- Corporal Ben Benedictson (Cpl. Benedict Bendickson)

Noteworthy:

- Mention of crossing the Yazoo River on the ship *Silver Wave*.
- Notes city of Warrenton burned by Union troops.
- Description of food rations.
- Description of coming under Confederate fire for the first time.
- Notes that Corporal Ben Benedictson (*Bendickson*), Company D, 38th Regiment, killed on "picket" the prior day.
- Description of conversations with Confederate soldiers.
- Reference to "Lincoln guns".
- Notes his unit is taking Confederate prisoners.
- Sholts' new mailing address (and unit): Co. C, 38th Iowa Infantry, 2d Brigade, Vandervers Division, Memphis Tenn.

Folder 19 of 33: H.L. Sholts /Iowa Letters--July 13, 1863
(*The right corner of one page of the letter is missing. Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated July 13, 1863 from "Camp 38th Iowa Vicksburg".

Names Mentioned:

- Lieutenant Hod Baldwin (Lt. Horace Baldwin)

Noteworthy:

- Sholts suffering from fever.
- Mentions the taking of Port Hudson, Louisiana.

Folder 20 of 33: H.L. Sholts/ Iowa Letters -- August 17, 1863
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated August 17, 1863 from New Orleans.

Names Mentioned:

- Captain Henry Tinkham

Noteworthy:

- Mention of poor health of Sholts' regiment.
- Mention of possible English and French involvement in the war.
- Report of death of Captain Henry Tinkham at Port Hudson, August 14.
- Sholts' mailing address: Co., "C" 38th Iowa Reg. Inft, 7th Brigade, Herrons Division, 13th Army Corps (Dept of Gulf).

Folder 21 of 33: H.L. Sholts/Iowa Letters -- August 23, 1863
(*Typed transcription included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated August 23, 1863 from New Orleans, La.

Names Mentioned:

- R.W. Kiedder (likely Russell W. Kidder), Jefferson Davis, Colonel Hudnott (Col. Joseph Hudnutt).

Noteworthy:

- Regiment's poor health attributable to disease contracted at Vicksburg; 200 men lost.
- Notes death of R.W. Kiedder (Kidder).

Folder 22 of 33: H.L. Sholts /Iowa Letters -- August 26, 1863
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Two different letters from Sholts to his wife, Martha, dated August 26 and August 27, 1863 from New Orleans.

Names Mentioned:

- J.D. (Julius D.) Keith, General Nathaniel Banks

Noteworthy:

- Description of large army concentrating in New Orleans for a march to Mobile, Alabama.
- Description of Sholts' opportunity of promotion to bodyguard for General Banks with mention of pay and requirements.

Folder 23 of 33: H.L. Sholts/ Iowa Letters - September 6, 1863
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated September 6, 1863 from New Orleans, La.

Names Mentioned:

- Jeff Thompson (General M. Jeff Thompson), General Nathaniel Banks, Osgro (Ozro) Hill, G.J. Tisdale

Noteworthy:

- Discussion of the possible fall of Charleston, South Carolina.
- Mention of Fort Sumter, Fort Moultrie, Fort Gregg, and Battery Wagner.
- Mentions capture of General Jeff Thompson and his staff.
- Sholts offered position as captain of "a negro company" (*USCT: United States Colored Troops*); including pay and requirements.

- Notes death of Osgro (Ozro) Hill and G.J. Tisdale.

Folder 24 of 33: Sholts/Iowa Letters -- September 29, 1863
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated September 29, 1863 from Carrollton, La.

Names Mentioned:

- Jacob Horning, Lieutenant Barrows, Colonel (D. Henry) Hughes, Captain Tinkham (Henry A. Tinkham), Rosencrans (General William S. Rosecrans), Charley Snow

Noteworthy:

- Mentions Confederates concentrating large army near "Chatannga" (*likely Chattanooga*)
- Mention of Rosencrans (Rosecrans).
- Letter includes short message written by Charley Snow.

Folder 25 of 33: Sholts / Iowa Letters - November 25, 1863
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated November 25, 1863 from Brownsville, Texas.

Names Mentioned:

- General Nathaniel Banks

Noteworthy:

- Mentions 13th Army Corps arrival in Brownsville, Texas; 19th Army Corps en route to the Brownsville area.
- Notes General Banks and part of the 13th Army Corps have taken Corpus Christi and Galveston.
- Description of the role played by African-American troops.
- Description of local citizens.

Folder 26 of 33: Sholts /Iowa Letters - December 4, 1863.
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated December 4, 1863 from Brownsville, Texas.

Names Mentioned:

Noteworthy:

- Very brief description of nearby Matamoros, Mexico.
- Mentions capture of Ringgold Barracks, taking almost entire garrison prisoner.

Folder 27 of 33: Sholts/ Iowa Letters - January 3, 1864
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha, dated January 3, 1864 from Camp 38th Iowa Brownsville, Texas.

Names Mentioned:

- Dan Nicholas, Ruben (Reuben T.) Watrous, Charley P. Snow, Abraham Lincoln, General (Francis) Herron, General (Napoleon) Dana.

Noteworthy:

- Sholts explains making extra money by "trafficking in revolvers & watches".
- Mentions a recent message by the President (*Abraham Lincoln--likely referring to the Gettysburg Address*).

Folder 28 of 33: Sholts/ Iowa Letters - February 2, 1864
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Formal letter of request from Sholts to the Adjutant General of the Army of the Rio Grande to be considered for promotion to lieutenant in the U.S. Army Corps D'Afrique, dated February 2, 1864.

Names mentioned:

- Captain Horace C. Baldwin

Noteworthy:

- Addressed on front by Captain Horace C. Baldwin.

Folder 29 of 33: Iowa Letters - Remnant (no date)

(*No transcription of this letter is included. Folder contains a typed transcription of a different letter.*)

A short letter fragment on small paper from Sholts to his wife Martha (no date or location).

Names mentioned:

Noteworthy:

- Notes a soldier's death from measles with a description of the funeral procession through camp.

Folder 30 of 33: Iowa Letters - Remnant (no date)

(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter fragment from Sholts to his wife Martha (no date). Location is presumably Brownsville, Texas and date is possibly late 1863.

Names Mentioned:

- General Taylor (likely Gen. Richard Taylor), General (Napoleon) Dana

Noteworthy:

- Description of Sholts' march through Texas.
- Description of soldiers being rescued from sinking ship.
- Description of arrival at camp in Brownsville, Texas.
- Mention of Battle of Palo Alto, Texas.
- Descriptions of Brownsville and Matamoros, Mexico
- Mention of Brownsville and Matamoros as the center of "Southern smuggling".

Folder 31 of 33: Iowa Letters - Remnant (no date)
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha (no date). The context of the letter indicates it was written in Matamoros, Mexico. In a letter dated December 4, 1863, Sholts seems to reference the current letter as having been written a few weeks earlier. Presumably, the current letter dates to November 1863.

Names Mentioned:

Noteworthy:

- Lengthy description of Matamoros, Mexico, including architecture, inhabitants, and cooking methods.
- Description of seeing many cotton bales smuggled by the Confederacy.

Folder 32 of 33: H.L. Sholts/ Iowa Letters - Remnant (no date)
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha (no date). From the context of the letter, it presumably dates to Spring, 1863 and may have been written in New Madrid, Missouri.

Names Mentioned:

- Nicholas (likely Dan Nicholas), Hod Moulton (Horace Moulton), J.D. (Julius D.) Keith, Charley Snow, General Curtis (likely General Samuel R. Curtis), Jefferson Davis, General Nathaniel Banks

Noteworthy:

- Notes 2 men out of regiment's 900 have died.
- Mention of the 38th Regiment's retaking of New Madrid, Missouri.
- Mentions upcoming battle of Vicksburg.
- Notes that Fort Hondson (*likely Port Hudson, La.*) taken by General Banks.
- Mention of "indian troubles" in Minnesota.

Folder 33 of 33: H.L. Sholts/ Iowa Letters - Remnant (no date)
(*Typed transcription is included.*)

Letter from Sholts to his wife Martha (no date). Sholts mentions recent letters from his wife, one of which was dated January and looks back on some of the tactical mistakes in the Battle of Vicksburg. The current letter almost certainly dates to very early 1864. If so, Sholts was stationed in Brownsville, Texas at the time.

Names Mentioned:

- General William T. Sherman, General Ulysses S. Grant, General McClernard (likely General John McClernand), General Nathaniel Banks, Commodore Floura, General Holland

Noteworthy:

- Mention of local African Americans (unclear if referring to slaves) fleeing north when the weather warms.

- Description of tactical mistakes in the Battle of Vicksburg.