

1.

Our small town of Jefferson, Wisconsin is midway between Milwaukee and Madison.

Alfred J. and Harriet Maydole Church were 28 and 26 years of age respectively when these letters were written. They had been married 7 years and had two sons, Frank 5 and Charles 3.

Two more children were born after the war. James in 1867 and Mary in 1870. James was my Father.

1st letter

Head Quarters
Eighteenth Regiment, Wisconsin
Volunteers
Camp Trowbridge
Milwaukee, March 28th, 1862

Dear Wife,

I will write a few lines to let you know that I am well but I did not feel very well the first or second days, but I feel very well now and dear I hope this will find you the same and the dear little children. O how I would like to see you all. We are getting ready to go tomorrow. They are making out a list of men of families to send to Madison today so you will not have any trouble in getting your money. It is \$2 apiece for the children instead of \$1 so you will draw nine dollars a month. They are paying off the men today. Get along as well as you can. We will come out all right yet.

2nd letter

April 14, 1862
Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee

Dear Wife,

You may think it strange I do not write to you, dear but I have lost my paper and everything except what I had on the morning of the battle. But thank God I am unhurt, altho I had a very narrow escape. My cap was shot off my head and torn all to pieces but I am alive. I am not well. I have had the diarrhea very hard and that old pain in my back but I hope to be better soon. O dear, if you could see the sorrows of the battle field after a battle you never could see another. It is the hardest fought battle ever fought. I will write you a long letter in a few days as soon as I can get some paper and stamps and envelopes. I think we will leave here in a few days. I hope so for Tennessee is not country for northern men.

Our regiment is all out to pieces. We have not a field officer left.

I am a great ways from home now. They did not let us stop at St. Louis but sent us south. We got here in time to be in the hardest fought battle ever fought in the United States. Our regiment was placed clear in front of the whole army, but the Colonel is dead to pay him for calling us a well drilled regiment. But it is all for the best. I made two bite the dust. I have a good deal to tell but I must wait until I get home. I will write again soon.

2nd letter continued.

I have lived years in a few days. I am not sorry I came for I have seen a great deal.

It is very warm here today. The trees are all leaved out and the fruit trees are in blossom. How is it there with you? It has rained most all the time here. I am very tired and must stop. I am in my tent on the battlefield where I did my first fighting. My knapsack is held on my knees. So Farewell, dear wife,

Write soon

God bless you

A J Church

3rd letter

April 15, 1862
Pittsburgh Landing
Tennessee

Dear Wife and Children,

I will try and write a few lines to you to let you know I am alive but not well. If you could see me now you would laugh. I am sitting on my blanket in the tent and writing on a drum head. We are camped on the old battle ground where one of the bloodiest battles ever known on or in the U. S. was fought. Dear, it was a trying time to us all. The enemy was within 10 rods of me before I heard the word "retreat." There were but 5 of us on the field when the captain told me to run, and I did run I tell you. The balls flew around me like hail stones. My cap was all shot to pieces on my head.

My dear wife, if I could see you it seems that it would be all I ask but it can't be now. I hope it will not be long before I can see you and the babies. God bless them. I am very weak at present. I have had the diarrhea 6 or 7 days. We got here on Saturday noon at the landing and marched $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles and pitched our tents, then I had to go out on picket guard $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the camp and was out all night. I had only just got into camp in the morning when the firing began. I had no supper, breakfast or dinner. I came across George Crist and he gave me 2 crackers. I see George and Thomas Phillips every day. They camp a little ways from here. Private Bennett is a coward and all the company says so. He is on his way to Jefferson. He was not in the fight at all. When the firing started he was taken suddenly ill, and left the ranks. You may tell this but don't tell who or how you got it. I hope I will have some money before long to send. The Governor of Wisconsin is here to see the Wisconsin troops. He had to shed tears when he addressed our regiment. He said it was but a fragment of the regiment that he saw take the boat at St. Louis and he is right. He has reorganized our regiment and appointed new field officers. I do not know what he intends to do with us but we will know soon. There will be another big fight in a few days. There are about 250,000 men here now and more coming every day. It is some 2 miles from here to where they are going. The rebels fought like devils in this battle "The Battle of Pittsburgh Landing" it is called.

3rd letter continued

You will see accounts of it in the papers. I shall have some long yarns to tell you when I come home, if I ever do come. I will send some money if I can get some. It is hard work to get stamps and paper. Stamps are 5 cents and paper 5 cents for 2 sheets.

4th letter

April 22, 1862

My dear Wife,

I will now write a few more lines to you. I have tried to get some money but it is impossible. There is not any to be had. But I will get it in a few days. My health is better than it was. I was over and took dinner with Dibble and Bill Baker, R. Sanborn and Web Colborn. They are all well. I saw Frank and Hank Kelsey. They are well. I was glad to see the boys. They were in hearing of our guns when we were fighting but the woods was so deep they could not get to us. We have had a very rainy time of it. The sun shines out fine today. Dear, I hope they will send us back but I can't tell yet. The Governor was drowned down in Savannah. He was stepping from one boat to another and fell in. It was sad news to the soldiers. He had some of our papers with him. Merv has been sick but he feels better today. How I wish I could send you some money. I might send you the \$5 I have but dear, I want a little by me. I wish you would send me a stamp when you write for they are hard to get here. Kiss the babes for me. I wish I could kiss you all but we must live in hopes. You must have everything done that you want dear. I will have money soon and you will get yours soon.

5th letter

May 9th, 1862

Pittsburgh Landing, West Tenn.

You want me to tell you how I felt in the battle. I will. We got to our camp ground Saturday night the 5th and I was one selected to go out on picket guard that night. I was very tired but the captain wanted 10 of the best and bravest men in his company and I must go. I tell you it was no time for play that night. I was so near the enemy I could hear them talk and walk but it was so dark I could not see them. I did not sleep much that night. We had just got into camp in the morning when the cry "to arms" came ringing through the camp. I was soon in the line of battle and I must say I was surprised at myself for I was as cool as if I were at home going out to chop some wood. I was in the front ranks and when the enemy came up and fired on us I took good aim at them and fired and loaded my gun and looked up and they were within a few yards of me. They were yelling as loud as they could yell and it made me mad. There was a savage looking rebel with a sword in one hand and a revolver in the other coming right for me and I took good aim at him. Down he went. Then I heard for the first time the word "retreat." The captain said to run for your life. I looked around and they were all gone but the Captain, myself and 2 others and then I did run. Then for the first time I began to be scared. It was not of being shot but of being taken prisoner. But God saw fit to spare me both. With the balls flying around

7th letter

July 2, 1862
Keokuk, Iowa

THE TREE OF LIBERTY

Traitor, spare that tree!

Touch not a single bough!

In youth it sheltered me,

And I'll protect it now.

Dear, dear Wife,

I can't wait any longer for an answer from you so I must write again for I am getting lonesome and tired of this place. I am about the same. I gain a little but very slow. O how I wish you were here love, but I must content myself and hope for the best. I think we will be sent to the state of Wisconsin before long. There was an agent here a few days ago and took down our names, where we live and our disease. He is from Wisconsin and has gone on down the river. He will be back in a few days. I wish he would come and take us all home. I don't think I will ever be able to go into the army again. I would rather be there than here. I'm penned up like a hog to fatten. We can't go out of doors only 1 hour every evening and it makes hard feelings among the soldiers. The water is very poor. It is Mississippi water and a man can't get rid of this disease as long as he drinks it. Tell Mrs. Morritt I wish I had a drink (of her water). I have not heard from the Regiment since I left. John Currier wrote for our descriptive roll but they have not come yet. We cannot get any pay until we get them and I don't know as we can then. They say the bank will take them at 5 cents discount on a dollar. They may have mine if I can get the money on it. There are 900 sick here in these 2 hospitals. There are 700 in this one and they expect 500 more every day. The doctor says he can't give any furloughs or discharges under 3 weeks. I don't know how it will be then. I know if I could get my discharge soon I would be at home where my heart is. Every day and night my thoughts are of little Charley and Frankie. God bless them. How I do want to see them. Tell them Pa has not forgot the knife yet. He will fetch one when he comes and kiss them for me. Give my love to Mother Maydole. Tell her I am trying to be a good boy so she will give me something good to eat when I get home. I wish I could be there for dinner today.

8th letter

I was weighed yesterday and I weighed 100 lbs. I don't think you would know me if you should meet me on the street. Henry has not sold that lot yet, has he? We must have that. The 12th of this month I will have 4 months pay due and if I get a discharge I shall get all the money. If a furlough, only 2 or 3 months pay which will be \$52 to say nothing about my work in the kitchen. \$52 for 4 months. We have to walk down 4 pairs of stairs to meals. That is a hard task but if I don't go down to my meals I can't go out in town and I would rather go 1 mile than to keep shut up here in this hole day and night. Oh, if I ever get to be my own nigger once more I shall know how to prize it. Well, I have been down to dinner. I will tell you what we had. Bean, soup, bread and molasses, corned beef, boiled ham and potatoes. That is good food for a sick man. Those that have this diarrhea, their doctors don't care anything about. They try to keep him so sick or just sick enough to keep him here so they can make their \$100 or \$125 a month for doctoring him.

Heading of 8th letter.

A nation of freemen that moment shall fall
When these stars shall be trailed on the ground.

11th letter

July 31, 1862
Keokuk, Iowa

Dear, dear Wife,

I received your kind but I think rather cool letter last night. I had made up my mind you were sick for I did not get an answer as soon as I have before. My love, I am very sorry to hear you are so unwell. I hope this will find you in better health and dear little Charley. It makes me homesick but it is no use of being so for I expect I shall have to stay here until I die or they see fit to send me home or to the Regiment. I am not so well as when I last wrote but I feel better this morning. I got a letter from Cal three days ago. They were all well. Old Mr. Blake is here from Minneapolis. He looks bad. He was tickled to death to see me. His son-in-law died last night at 5 o'clock. The old man feels bad and I feel bad for him. He says he has had luck in sons-in-law.

My dear, you say you shall go up to A. E. Avery's to spend the winter for you cannot support the family. My God, am I to blame for that? If I could get a cent of money I would send it to you. I don't see why you don't get your money from the State. There is something wrong. Had Cad got her money? I have not got my discription roll yet. I received the letters but no roll. I think you had better let Henry have the cow. Go to Mother's and board. I shall have money by and by and will send all she asks if she will take you and take care of you. You can nail up the house or rent it or do what you please with it so you can get a place to stop until I get home, if I ever can, but I think I shall in time. Do not work any more love, for my sake, but go and board if you have to sell everything we have. The U. S. is paying us enough to keep a family. If they can't I will run away and go and take care of mine myself. I am too nervous to write today. Tell Avery's folke when you write them Charles Atkins is here. He and I are together most of the time. He is a fine fellow but I am afraid if he doesn't go home soon he never will. They are having the small pox in the hospital. I have been vaccinated but it didn't work. I shall try it again for I don't want that.

Write me soon and let me know how you are getting along. I shall be very anxious to hear from home, excuse this short letter. Give my love to all.

From your affectionate husband,

A. J. Church

13th letter

August 13, 1862
Keokuk, Iowa

The food is such that I can't eat it but it is no worse for me than many others here. I think I may get out of this hospital as soon as the excitement is over. I can get my discharge if I will pay \$20 for it. I don't know what to do. I want to go home to my family bad enough but I don't feel like paying \$20 for it. I think they

13th letter continued

will give me one before long but I can't tell. I have been to dinner. I will tell you what I had. Baker's bread, boiled beef and little potatoes. What kind of food is that for a sick man?

If you can get the lot for \$20 you may try to get it. If I get my discharge and all my money I don't think I shall keep that place long for I want more land. I want an acre of land and then we can raise all our garden stuff. You can do as you like about it but if we had the other lot we could sell or trade it to a better advantage. Oh love, I must tell you of my adventure the other day. I was taking a walk and stopped to get a drink at a well. A lady came out. I asked her for a few of her tomatoes to eat. She told me to go and help myself. When I got back to the well she made me go into the front room and stay till after supper. It was a good one, and she told me to call again. So you see, I have found a friend here. She is a soldier's wife. Her husband is a Lieutenant. They are fine folks. I shall call again soon.

14th letter

Keokuk, August 20, 1862

I was in hopes Wisconsin would not have to draft but I am afraid she will. There are great times in this city. There are a lot of new soldiers coming in here, new recruits. They are fine looking men. I hope they won't have to go through what I have been through. I am getting homesick for I have been sick so long. I want to go home and see my family and see if it will improve my health. They are sending off a lot of soldiers to their regiments every day. There are not half as many here in the hospital now that there were three weeks ago. I am very sorry to hear Father is keeping that rum shop but you need not have any fears of my visiting that or any other whiskey shop.

From your ever true husband

A. J. Church

15th letter

August 26

I have a great deal of pain in my side and breast. The doctor says I have got the dyspepsia. I think that is not all that ails me. My back is getting very lame.

You may think me foolish for being lonesome in this big city where the drum and fife are going all day long and boat loads of new soldiers are coming every day but, my love, it all has no charm for me. I am away from the one I love. If she, my Batty, were with me then it would be different but here I am alone and sick.

I had a letter from Cal yesterday. (Cal is his brother). I wish he had sent me a dollar to buy me something to eat. Everything is very cheap in this city. You can get 12 nice apples for 5 cents. There are plenty of melons and everything you can think of in the market to sell but it does me no good. It makes me feel bad. If you have more than you need, please send me \$1.

Sept. 12, 1862

I got \$47.65 for 3 months pay. I'm paid up to the 1st of July. I will send you \$10 in this letter and \$10 in the next and so on until I send \$35 or \$40.

I don't want you to go up to Avery's yet on account of the Indians. They are getting very bad up in the northern part of that state so the papers say.

Keokuk, October 6, 1862

Dear, dear Wife,

I received your kind letter today and was glad to hear you were a getting better. I have been very anxious to hear from you since you last wrote. I am about the same. I was very sick a few days ago but am better today. As long as I stay in the hospital I will never be any better. I wish I could be home with you. I think with your kind care and a good doctor I might get well but I am here and like to stay a while, I don't know how long, love. If I had money I would send for you to come to see me but I have none. My discription came the day I wrote you last but I can't get any money until the first of September on account of the pay roll not being made out right. Darn the fools of clerks in this hospital. Isn't that too bad, dear when we want it so badly? Well, when it does come in there will be more of it but we need it so much. If I had a little to buy me something to eat in town I would like it. I don't know but Cal will send me some altho I did not ask him to. The boys are all up tonight. There is great excitement. The citizens are all under arms. They are afraid the rebels are a coming to take this town. They took one 5 miles below here and they went down from here, drove them out, took 52 prisoners, a lot of horses and other things. I wish the rebels would come and take this place. I might as well be a prisoner of war as one in the hospital. The boys are swearing about not getting their money. I thought I could spend the evening with more pleasure staying in and writing you than going out with the rest of the boys. I saw old Mr. Blake today. He is very bad off. He says he wont live a week. I told him not to talk so, he would be better in a few days. John C. is getting as fat as a hog. I do not hear anything from my Regiment. I don't know but what they have been taken by the rebels. There was a report there was a large company of Rebels marching to Corinth. I guess the 18th will have some fighting to do. Tell Carry I wish her much joy with her little girl but wish it had been a boy. She will have to try again. I wish I could see my little pills. They would not know their Pa. I have not had a shave since I left home and my whiskers and mustache are very long. If Cal sends me some money I will have my likeness taken and send to you. If A. E. Avery would manage any way to get me out of here we would go and stay with his family this winter and next summer. I am entitled to my discharge by law. I have been away from my Regiment most 4 months now and I don't think I will ever be able to go to it again. I wish you would write me something about father and what he is doing. I would like to hear. I would write to him but I have no money to pay postage. My side and back pain me so I must close. Give my love to all my inquiring friends. Tell Mother Maydole I have got my testament read most through and when I have it done she must send me a big custard pie.

October 6, continued.

Well it is getting dark, love and I will close by sending my love to all and all my heart to yourself. Kiss the little ones for me but don't let any one kiss you for me for I want all of them myself. Ain't I piggish?

Your husband

True forever,

Alfred J. Church

They are ringing the fire bell for the men to get their guns and fall in the ranks. Oh, there is fun here now.

Write soon, my dear, for it is all the pleasure I have, getting letters from you.

21st letter

September 13, 1862

Beloved Wife,

I will try and write a few lines to let you know I am alive and that is about all. I feel as if I am going to have the ague. I can't write today, my love. How I wish I could come home to you. I am homesick with all the rest. That makes it bad. I had all my money stolen from under my head so you see I have not a cent to help myself to anything. Oh, if I had a couple of dollars to buy me something to eat it would not be so bad. Don't blame me my dear, I left my pants under my pillow and went down to the back house about 12:00 o'clock at night and that is the time it was done. I had an examination today. The doctor gave me some medicine and told me I must not go out today. I have been quite sick. I'm some better tonight. I have sent \$35 to you. Did you get it all? The doctor did not tell me what he is going to do with me. I wish I could find out.

Keokuk, October 29, 1862

Dear, dear Wife,

I received a letter from you last night and I was glad to hear you were all well. I am the same. I did not write sooner for I wanted to find out what they were a going to do with me. I had my fate decided last night. I am to go home as soon as I can get my discharge. I don't know how long it will be before I will get it. The paymaster will be here to pay off discharges, that will be good for me. Oh, how I long to clasp to my heart my love and little ones. God speed the time. You go to Mr. Young and tell him to let you have what you want for yourself and the children and I will be home soon and pay him. Tell him as a friend I ask it of him. I have not one cent now. As for the cow, if she is dry let some farmer take her to winter. I hope it will not be very cold when I get home so I can fix up our little home. Oh, why didn't they let me go a month ago but I am not gone yet. I am very sorry that money did not get home but there are a number in the same fix. I have lost \$22 out of \$47. That is hard

October 29 letter continued.

but I will try to get along. If you do not go up to Averys and the house is cold go to Mother Maydole's and stay until I come home and I will fix the house so we can live in it and not freeze. I go home by way of Madison to get that state money. Don't make up your mind I am coming home for the fate of a soldier is uncertain. I hope I may soon see you again. Give my love to Mother and Father Maydole and all the rest of my friends.

Write as soon as you get this.

Your ever true husband

A. J. Church

Newspaper clipping included with one of the letters.

I'll Tell Pa When He Comes Home.

A friend of ours, who had taken great pride for several years in cultivating a full crop of hair upon his face, was called away from home some time since. While absent, an inexperienced barber spoiled his whiskers in trimming them, which so chagrined him that he directed the barber to make a clean sweep of it by shaving whiskers and mustache both off. The barber obeyed, and our friend's face was as smooth and delicate as when in his teens. He returned home in the night. Next morning his little girl did not recognize him on waking up. Looking over at her mother, and seeing, as she supposed, a stranger in bed, she remarked in her childish simplicity, "Mister, get out of there; I'll tell my Pa when he comes home!"

17th letter

September 4, 1862

I have been down to the river to see the 19th Regiment start for the field of battle. I hope they have better luck than ours did. There were a good many wet eyes there. Fathers, Mothers, sisters, brothers and dear, dear wives parting with those most dear to their hearts, perhaps for the last time. It was a scene I did not care about stopping long to see so I started for my room and am trying to write to you.

There has been a change made here of Sargents. Dr. Hughes, the head doctor of all the hospitals, was turned out today and Dr. Miller of St. Louis has taken his place. I hope he will do better for the sick soldiers. There will be a change in things here I think. Those who are able to go to their regiments will be sent there and those who are not will be sent home. If I was able to go to my Regiment I would go and stay by them until our union is saved or lost. It looks dark at present but I think all will come out right yet and peace restored to all.

OHIO, CLEVELAND, OHIO
1396 UNDERMILL BLDG.
N. B. BETZOLD

September 11, 1862

You speak of John Bennett in your letter. Do you think I would

18th letter continued.

do as he has done? No, dear, never. I want only my Hatty while I live if God sees fit to take her first I don't want to stay long after. If I go first she can do as she likes but it is my last request that my children never have a step-father to bring them up. You may blame me for this but I will not give my reasons now. I will tell you if we ever meet again and I hope we will, dear, before long. There are so many soldiers wives home here to see them it makes me want to see you dear, very much. But we are poor, love and must save our money for the sake of the little loved ones we have in our charge. Young folks have tough times now-a-days. Yes, my love, there is a happy time in store for us. We have got through our tough times dear and came out winners for which I will try and make you the happiest of wives if I can by my love and action to you. I hope I can come home soon and prove it to you for I don't believe you will believe me by my writing it but it is nevertheless true.

I tell you things look very dark at present. The Rebels are back to where they were one year ago. It is too bad to have so many lost to gain that ground and have it lost again. They will have possession of that part of Tennessee in which we put so hard to gain. I hope they will not but things look bad. This war will not end until slavery is abolished and all the slaves sent out of the country.

Write often love, I must close.

Your ever true husband

Alfred J. Church

P. S. August 30th letter. Have you heard from Cynthia Brown lately? The Indians are raining ned up there. The 3rd Minnesota Regiment went up yesterday to fight the Indians. I hope they will kill every one of them.

What the encyclopedia has to say about the Civil War.

AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

A conflict lasting four years in the United States of America between 11 States of the South, which asserted their right to leave the Union, and the States and Territories of the North, which were determined to maintain the Union. The Southern States contained slightly over half the population of the Northern States which remained in the Union. At the opening of the conflict, an independent government, the Confederate States of America was set up. The Civil War began when the guns of the South fired on the Federal Fort Sumter, Charleston Harbor, South Carolina on April 12, 1861, and ended with the surrender of General Lee at Appomattox, Virginia on April 9th, and of General Johnston at Greensboro on April 26, 1865. Approximately 4,000,000 troops took part in the war, which resulted in the preservation of the Union, abolition of slavery, and many important social and economic changes.

Excerpts from Harriet E. Church to her husband Alfred J.

Dearest Husband,

July 15, Jefferson,
Wisconsin

I received your kind letter yesterday and was very glad to hear that you are better than when you wrote before. I have been mourning for you as dead. Mr. Colburn went to Mother's and told her that your name came in his paper on the list of those that died in the hospital and he did not find out his mistake for five hours so you may see for yourself that I have been a widow in earnest and God alone can describe my feelings and what seemed the worst to me was that you should die down there away from your family and be buried. I should never know how or where. Oh, dear one, you don't know how dearly your wife does love you but it is useless to tell you of it for you have been convinced of it in a great many ways.

I went down to the cars Saturday to see the company start for Madison. There were 100 of them. It was a sad sight. I never want to witness it again.

Oh, Alf you don't know how hard I have worked this summer. I am going to tell you how I earned the dollar I sent to you. I went over to Stebb's tavern and ironed for two days and did chamber work for a half day.

You think you shall go back to your Regiment. I don't want you to. I want you to come home. I have almost a good mind to take the money that you sent and come out to see you for it seems as if I must see you before long. If we did not need the house fixed so much I would. I think we had better get the lot and then have the house raised up and a cellar fixed under it. Father thinks it will cost twenty dollars. Can we afford it? Write and tell me. I shall put every cent that you send me into the house after the lot is paid for.

I have had a great many messes of green peas out of the garden. Now I wish, my dear, that you could be here and help me eat them. If you get your pay I would like to have you send me your likeness if you don't feel too poor.

A letter from brother Cal Church in Minneapolis says, "We are all going up in the timber blackberrying in the morning to be gone three days. I want to make some wine out of raspberries. We have 42 gallons of cranberry wine, 5 of currant and now we are after raspberries for the same."