

Alson H. Blake (1841-1921)
Papers, 1855-1921
MSA 278

Introduction

The papers consist of letter-books, letters, and diary excerpts of Alson H. Blake of Milton, Vermont, from 1855-1865. Blake's account of his imprisonment at Andersonville, Georgia, during the Civil War and the list he compiled of Vermonters who died there are included in the papers. The papers, except for the letter-books, are photocopies. The collection was given to Vermont Historical Society by Drew R. Tillotson, great-grandnephew of Alson Blake, and Constance C. Berry in 1983 (ms. acc. no. 83.44). The collection is housed in one archival flip-top box and consumes .5 linear feet of shelf space.

Biographical

Alson H. Blake (1841-1921) was born in Milton, Vermont, the son of Chester A. Blake (b. 1817), a farmer, and his wife, Ann (Garlick) Blake (1816-1899). He studied bookkeeping in Poughkeepsie, New York, in 1860.

Blake enlisted in the 9th Regiment of Vermont Volunteers, Company F on May 29, 1862 as a corporal. He was captured by rebel troops on February 2, 1864 and imprisoned in Wilmington, North Carolina. He was later transferred to Andersonville Prison in Georgia, and finally released in April, 1865. He was mustered out on May 23, 1865. Blake wrote that only he of the nine men captured with him survived the terrible ordeal. During his imprisonment at Andersonville he was able, through his work in the dispensary, to compile a list of Vermont soldiers who died there.

Blake married Frances C. (Franky) Granger, the daughter of William and Lucy Granger, on September 21, 1865, and in 1867 they moved to Volga City, Iowa, where he established a dry goods store. The Blakes later moved to Manchester, Iowa, where he died in 1921.

Scope and Content

The papers consist of letter-books, letters, diary excerpts and Civil War memoirs that belonged to Alson H. Blake of Milton, Vermont. Blake served in the 9th Vermont Volunteers from 1862 to 1865 and was imprisoned the last months of his service in Andersonville Prison in Georgia. In a 1921 speech he recalls this ordeal (MSA 278:10). As a dispensary worker at Andersonville, he was able to compile a list of Vermonters who died there; a copy of this manuscript is in the collection (MSA 278:9).

The papers consist in large part of letter-books kept by Blake containing copies of letters received by him and his family between 1855 and 1865. Prior to his army service, the letters from family and friends concern local news and gossip. Wartime letters

contain news from the home front and, while he was imprisoned, requests for information about Vermont soldiers at Andersonville. The contents of the four letter-books are described by the appraiser in Folder 0.

Most of the letters in the papers were written to Blake by his father after Blake joined the army (1862-64). Chester Blake writes news of his family and the farm, as well as the Vermont war effort. The letters are transcriptions as are the few diary excerpts in the papers.

The miscellaneous items include a photocopy of an 1871 Milton, Vermont, map with the Blake farm delineated and a photocopied portrait of Alson H. Blake, ca. 1920.

Organization

The papers are arranged in four series:

- I. Letter-books
- II. Letters, transcriptions
- III. Diary, excerpts
- IV. Miscellaneous

Inventory

I. Letter-books

- MSA278:1 Letter-book, 1855-60
- 2 _____, 1856-61
- 3 _____, 1861-65
- 4 _____, 1862-65

II. Letters

- 5 Letters to, transcription, 1858 – Feb. 1862
- 6 _____, _____, June – Dec. 1862
- 7 _____, _____, 1863 - 1864

III. Diary

- 8 Diary excerpts, transcription, 1862-65

IV. Miscellaneous

- 9 Lists of Vermonters who died in Andersonville Prison, manuscript and printed, photocopies, 1865
- 10 Speech about Andersonville imprisonment, photocopy, ca. 1920
- 11 Map of Milton, Vt., *Beers Atlas of Chittenden County*, photocopy, 1871
- 12 Portrait, photocopy, ca. 1920
- 13 Memorial certificate, photocopy, 1921

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