

Thomas H. Brown (1823-1864)
Letters, 1862-1877
MSA 216

Introduction

This is a collection of Civil War letters of Thomas H. Brown (1823-1864), of Ryegate, Vermont, sharpshooter in the United States Army until he was killed in action in 1864. The collection also includes a small group of later letters, mostly from his sons to each other or to his widow. Amelia B. Maver, of Arlington Heights, Illinois, great granddaughter of Thomas¹ gave the collection to the Vermont Historical Society in November 1999 (ms. acc. no. 99.7). Kathryn Maver, great great granddaughter of Thomas, made transcripts of the letters that are included in the collection. The collection is housed in one archival box and consumes .25 linear feet of shelf space.

Biographical Note

Thomas H. Brown was born January 9, 1823, in Ryegate, Vermont. He was the fourth of six children born to Robert and Elizabeth (Heath) Brown. Robert's father Stafford, of Scotch descent, came to America from Ireland in 1800. Thomas was a mechanic by trade. He married Lydia Chandler of Mercer, Maine; she died in 1879. They had three sons, Horace, Warren, and Carlos, and a daughter, Annette.² He enlisted in Company F, U.S. Sharpshooters, for three years on September 20, 1862; he was killed in one of the Battles of the Wilderness near Spottsylvania Court House on May 12, 1864.

Scope and Content Note

The collection consists of about 65 letters written by Thomas H. Brown from the battlefield to his wife or children. The first was written October 23, 1862; the last was penned April 20, 1864. The letters deal with life in camp, battle experiences, and his displeasure with the lack of ministers at the front and the amount of swearing and gambling that went on. Mostly his accounts deal with day-to-day events, but he also describes President Lincoln who came for a visit,³ rumors of Stonewall Jackson's death, and hopes that U. S. Grant could move the war along. There are many financial matters discussed: lack of regular pay, dangers of sending pay home for fear the mails would be robbed, efforts to help his wife financially, feeling that a leave home would be too expensive. Thomas wanted to see the North succeed but wasn't sure fighting was the way to do it. He gave much advice to his children on how to care for the cattle, to help their mother, and to attend school. His spelling was unique, but the letters make powerful reading.

¹ The donor is the daughter of Roscoe M. Brown, who was the son of Carlos H. Brown, who was the son of Thomas H. Brown.

² See Edward Miller and Frederic P. Wells, *History of Ryegate, Vermont* (1913), p. 297-298.

³ "I had the plasur of seen the President of the United Staits last thirsday he is anything but a good lookin Man he has got a nose a long as a rail"

Related Collections

A framed tintype of Thomas H. Brown in his Civil War uniform is part of this collection. It is housed in FB-27 with the Society's other tintypes.

The collection also includes a glass plate covered with stamps. Family tradition holds that the stamps were removed from the letters Thomas sent to his family. The plate is in the museum collection, 1999.44.

Inventory

- MSA 216:1 Letters, 1862
- 2 _____, 1863, January–June
- 3 _____, 1863, July–December
- 4 _____, 1864
- 5 _____, fragments
- 6 _____, typescripts
- 7 Letters written by others
 - John H. Meader, friend of Thomas, to the Brown family, Jan. 15, 1862?
 - Four letters of H. E. Brown, son of Thomas, to brother Carlos, written in the 1870s
 - Letter written on behalf of Carlos to Thomas's wife in 1867
 - Undated letter to "Lydia," probably Thomas' wife, from an unknown correspondent

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