

Albert W. Clark (1842-1921)
Civil War Diary, 1862-1863
MSA 371:15

Introduction

This collection consists of a single 123-page manuscript Civil War diary kept by Albert W. Clark of Georgia, Vermont, for the period October 4, 1862 through July 13, 1863. The diary was purchased by the VHS in 2004 (ms. acc. no. 2004.23).

Biographical Note

Albert Warren Clark was born in 1842, in Georgia, Vermont, the son of Rufus King Clark (1815-1883) and Elvira Augusta (Hinckley) Clark (1820-1904). Albert had a brother, Orrin Landon Clark, born in 1846, and a sister, Mary Haskell Clark, born in 1850. Albert married Nellie Spencer on July 1, 1869. She died December 10, 1881, and in 1884 Albert married Ruth Pirie. During the Civil War he served with Company E, 12th Vermont Infantry Regiment, as a private and later as sergeant, and was mustered out of the service, with the rest of the regiment, shortly after the Battle of Gettysburg. After his Civil War service he went to the University of Vermont, graduating in 1865. He went on to earn degrees from two theological schools, and was ordained as a Congregational clergyman in 1868. After serving as a minister in Gilead, Connecticut, from 1868 to 1872, he moved to Prague, Bohemia, where he served as a missionary, and established a home for “unfortunate women.” He published a number of works, including his 1897 *Twenty-five Years Labour in Bohemia*. He remained in Bohemia until World War I when he returned to the United States and settled with his family in Boston, Massachusetts. He died June 7, 1921.

Scope and Content

Albert Clark was clearly a well-educated and observant soldier, and his brief daily comments make very good reading. The writing in the diary is small, and he made use of symbols for common words throughout, but his meaning is clear within the context of the sentence. The symbols he used will be illustrated in a sheet included with this collection, though often he wrote in such haste or so small that the symbols seemed to change over time. He was mustered into the service October 4th, 1862, going by train to Bellows Falls, and on the 7th he headed to the war via two engines and 25 crowded cars. At New Haven they boarded a boat to New York City, and then by train again to Washington, D.C. He was most observant, commenting on the fact the tracks were double, that telegraph poles ran along the track, and that friendly folk offered them apples when the train stopped. He mentioned how much better they were treated going through Baltimore than the Massachusetts troops had been treated a year before.

For most of October 1862 he was stationed in Washington, “within sight of the dome”, engaged in training, with a funny account of his tiny tent, his feet sticking out for the rain and wind, and his visits to points of interest, including the cemetery containing

the graves of Clay, Calhoun, and J. Q. Adams, and the interesting things he saw at the Smithsonian. He speaks of the city being overflowing with troops, with army mule teams driven by “contraband,” with visits to friends in a near-by Vermont cavalry unit, and with his joy when he could finally acquire the lumber to make a floor for his tent.

October 30 1862, they cross into Virginia, with many inspections and reviews, though each Sunday found him in church or a campground open-air meeting. He buys a pig, eats well, including “fat secesh chickens”. Heavy snows come in early November, and he gets bricks to build a stove. Rain and snow and mud and cold and disease are constant topics of his writing, plus good food, or lack thereof. A good example of his writing style is his entry for November 11, 1862: “Went into the woods with the boys and got out lumber for our winter quarters. . . . On our return from the woods we came over a hill and the prospects were truly splendid. Fertile hills and vales, dotted with camps and forts for many miles on either side. The Potomac was spread out before us. . . . The broad Potomac was whitened with busy sails carrying munitions of war all conspired to render the landscape delightful in the extreme” (symbols replaced by actual words). On December 4th he writes, “Thanksgiving Day in Vermont and at Camp Vermont my box came from home filled with good things.” He visits Mount Vernon, seeing the “keys to the Bastille, an old globe, a harpsichord presented as a wedding present,” and many other items of interest.

The December 6th entry mentions ‘a small whiskey ration $\frac{3}{4}$ gill was furnished us. It became my duty to draw and distribute the same to Co. E boys” and goes on to say it was the first time he had anything to do with whiskey. “But the circumstances seemed to render it necessary.” December 8th one of his men was “deranged for most of the time and died”, their first casualty. December 9th “eve read president’s message”, December 11th “per order Brig. Gen. Stoughton now commands our brigade.” Next day “at 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ a.m. our brigade was called up and at 5 started bag and baggage. Fortunately I was detailed as sergt. of the guard and as such went with the teams and loaded up our knapsacks on the baggage trains. With tired limbs and sore feet we encamped for the night near Fairfax Ct. – a most sour filthy insignificant place.” Dec. 17th picket duty at Bull Run, “passed many old fortifications. . . . Boys visited old encampments and they found old gun bbls., bayonets, sabers, etc.” Dec. 18th saw his first action, “sixteen our cavalry were surprised and taken last night. Some of our boys fired on.” “Anderson became scared and fired (at a dog).” By late December Clark shifted from pencil to pen, which makes reading the diary easier.

Jan. 29th 1863 “The 12th Vt. Vol. received pay from date of enlistment. Recd. \$35.10. I paid my debts and recd. amounts due me- very nearly.” He is required to take the embalmed body of a soldier to Alexandria, to be sent home, “hired some colored men carry body of McColiff”. April 9th, “About 10 p.m. I was almost asleep but was roused ‘report’, ‘muskets’, ‘guards’, the bugle sounded alarm; order ‘fall in’ given and all was an uproar for a few moments, boys soon sent back to quarters. It seems some cavalryman was stealing hens from a woman near camp. She cried ‘murder murder, guards guard’. One foolish guard fired, and others followed suit, and so a whole force and post was alarmed.” In hospital he had the life of Themistocles read to him. By May they are on

the move, to Warrenton Junction where they faced a cavalry attack, “scores” of contraband taken, later to Rappahannock Station to guard a railroad bridge, then back to Manassas Junction, where Moseby’s raiders attack a train. June 8th he is at Union Mills, and receives six months pay, \$102, and “pd. my debts and vice versa”, and sends his father \$70. “Saw a man whose arm and leg were mutilated by a shell, he lay on the battlefield about two days, he was placed on our train en route to Alexandria. Saw room full of legs and arms of the wounded and amputated; the floor was still red with human blood.”

June 16th “troops ad infinitum are moving all around us. Some of the Rebs entered Penn. today. Standing on a little eminence near camp I could trace the movements of the army corps by the clouds of dust rising above the trees in the dim distance.” His regiment keeps shifting north, via Frederick City, Maryland. July 1st “Gen. Stannard with the 13th, 14th, and 16th marched on one road to Gettysburg while Col. Blunt with the 12th and 15th was ordered to march by another road to Gettysburg, there to rejoin the Brigade. When within three miles of G. where fighting was raging and parted (?) by a piece of woods, and according to orders put our muskets into good fighting trim, and we did so, expecting to be in a fight within three hours. Just at this moment Gen. Sickles and staff rode up and ordered the smaller Reg. to go to Westminster, 30 miles distant. 12th numbering 15 guns less than 15th Reg. were ordered to rear guard the train. 15th Reg. ordered to pick up stragglers. Stuart’s cavalry with a battery lay in wait and captured our train four and one half miles long. Col. ascertaining Stuart’s whereabouts took another road and thus passed him. Stuart then came up in our rear, finding a large Reg. of infantry was to oppose him he skedaddled.” On July 2nd he writes, “the fighting at Gettysburg has been terrific all day. Passing over a hill I could see the lines of battle, with smoke three miles long on each side. Over two hundred cannon were roaring at the same time. While passing a burning ammunition wagon several shells burst within four or six rods of us, in consequence of severe diarrhea, pain in my bowels, and I was not able to march for the entire distance.”

After the battle his regiment took Confederate prisoners to Baltimore, on July 5th, on the 6th he visited the Washington Monument, and on the 7th started for Vermont, as the term of enlistment of the Regiment had expired. On the 13th they turned in their guns, he received \$65.33 in State pay, and thus the diary ended, except for various end notations, including the dimensions of the capitol building, figures on the British economy, and a few word-for-word repetitions for entries made earlier. The diary, though small, is a treasure, written by a most observant and thoughtful man.

Inventory

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