

**Albert Harris (1841-1905)
Papers, 1862-1869
MSA 490**

Introduction

This collection is composed of letters and two diaries of Albert Harris (1841-1905) of Saint Johnsbury, Vermont, including letters and a diary from his 9 months service in the 15th Vermont Volunteer Regiment. The collection also includes a small number of letters written by family members for the same period. The collection was originally housed in two folders (MSS 20 #79-80) but is now housed in one archival flip top box. It consumes .25 linear feet of shelf space.

Biographical Note

Albert Harris was born April 3, 1841, in Saint Johnsbury, Vermont, the son of James and Almira (Locke) Harris. He served in Company K, 15th Vermont Volunteer Regiment from August 28, 1862 to August 5, 1863. After his discharge he traveled west and arrived in Saint Louis, Missouri, where he joined the Quartermaster Corps and worked throughout the midwest and west, gathering men for enlistment in labor battalions and buying and moving cavalry horses from Saint Louis by boat to Nashville. In August, 1864, he moved to Little Rock, Arkansas and became a supervisor of a labor battalion.

At the end of the war, he traveled to New Mexico to mine for gold, and then moved on to California, where he worked for the Spring Valley Waterworks in the San Francisco Bay area, as well as spending a short time working on a ranch in Vallejo, California. In 1869 he traveled to White Pines, Nevada to mine for silver. By 1870 Harris had returned to Saint Johnsbury, Vermont. He married Lucy A. Powers of Lunenburg, Vermont on June 6, 1878. He remained in Saint Johnsbury, working as a farmer and general agent until his death on June 14, 1905.

Albert's sister, Delia Harris, was born in Saint Johnsbury in 1835, and married John E. Forrest on January 18, 1869.

Scope and Content

The bulk of the collection consists of letters written by Albert Harris to his family, primarily his father, James Harris, and his brother, Edwin Harris. He also writes occasionally to his sister Delia.

The first folder contains letters written while Albert is serving in the 15th Vermont Volunteer Regiment in Virginia. He writes of camp life, troop movements, Thanksgiving, and sickness in the camp. He also comments on visitors to the Regiment and on sightseeing in Washington, D.C. Some of the incidents he writes about include Stuart's raid on Burke Station, a massive regimental snow ball fight, a suicide, and General

Stoughton's capture. Also included in the folder is Harris' diary for 1863, which gives details of his daily routines.

The next three folders contain letters written during Harris' travels in the south and west following his discharge from the service. While in Saint Louis, Harris writes of his work as a recruiter of laborers (he includes a copy of a labor contract, used as stationary), and his ambitions to make money, either as a stock trader or through gold mining. In a letter dated April 16, 1864, he mentions Forrest's attack on Fort Pillow.

After his move to Little Rock, Arkansas in August, 1864 his letters contain more news of the war, and of politics. He writes of the formation of an expedition to Texas and its aftermath, the arrival of refugees in Little Rock, and, in a letter dated March 12, 1865, the ambush of a Union patrol. As well, he writes of the effect of peace on Little Rock, the town's reaction to Lincoln's assassination, and the Fenian raids. An underlying theme of many of his letters is the draft and how he plans to avoid it, eventually saving \$800 to buy a substitute. Folder 2 also contains Harris' diary for 1864 which records his destinations and the weather.

At the end of the war, Harris leaves Arkansas on a Quartermasters Expedition to New Mexico, carrying supplies, and eventually winds up in Pino Altos, New Mexico digging for gold in 1867. His letters describe the hardships of life in the mining camp and include a description of chili tea, used to combat colds. By the end of April, 1867, Harris decides to go on a prospecting trip in the mountains of Arizona, near Fort Defiance. He describes the trip in detail in a letter written June 28, 1868, and includes a description of meeting Navajos at one of their campsites.

After failing to find any ore, Harris moves on to California, first to San Bernardino to try some more prospecting, and then to the San Francisco Bay area, where he finds work in the Spring Valley Waterworks. In a letter dated October 25, 1868, Harris describes the effects of the Hayward Fault Earthquake. By the end of December, Harris has moved on to work at a ranch in Vallejo, Solano County, California, where he writes of farm work and meeting with another Saint Johnsbury, Vermont resident. His final letter, dated January 30, 1869, and written in Elko, Nevada, describes the town and his plans to go prospecting in White Pine, Nevada.

Folder 5 contains letters written to and from family members. The bulk of the letters are addressed to Delia A. Harris, Albert's sister and were written mainly by her mother, Almira (Locke) Harris and by relatives, William Locke and family of Boston and Upton, Massachusetts and the Stoker family of Unionville, Ohio. The letters contain family news, news of the war, and politics. Letters written by Joseph Stoker, a Harris relative, include comments about Copperheads in Ohio, about the draft, and about the injustice of the bounty system.

Folder 6 contains miscellaneous items such as two recommendations written for Albert Harris, and envelopes removed from the letters.

Related Collections

A carte-de-visite was removed from one of Albert's diaries and placed in F-PO-HAR.

Inventory

- MSA 490:1 Civil War letters and diary, 1862-1863
- 2 Saint Louis, Mo. and Little Rock, Ark. letters and diary, 1863-1864
 - 3 Little Rock, Ark. and New Mexico letters, 1865-1866
 - 4 New Mexico and California letters, 1867-1869
 - 5 Miscellaneous correspondence, 1862-1869
 - 6 Miscellaneous items

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