

William Wirt Henry (1831-1915)
Family Papers, 1846-1915
Doc 527-528, Size B, C & D

Introduction

This collection contains the papers of William Wirt Henry (1831-1915) of Waterbury and Burlington, Vermont, and his family. Henry was a gold prospector, businessman, Civil War general, Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, mayor of Burlington, and fishing enthusiast. The strength of the collection is in its documentation of Henry's Civil War experiences. The collection was given to the Vermont Historical Society in 2004 by Levi Pease Smith, Jr., a great grandson of W.W. Henry, and his wife Sybil Watts Smith (ms. acc. no. 2004.7). The collection is stored in two document storage boxes and one oversized folder; it consumes 2 linear feet of shelf space.

Biographical Sketch

William Wirt Henry was born on November 21, 1831, in Waterbury, Vermont, the eldest child of James Madison Henry (1809-1863) and Matilda Gale Henry (1811-1888). His siblings were John Francis (b. 1834), who married Josephine Barrett; Delia Maria (1835-1884), who married Anderson Miller (d. 1905); Eliza Betsy (b. 1837); Mary Sybil (b. 1839), married Lyman Hinckley who served as Vermont's Lieutenant Governor in 1872-1873; Sarah Ann (b. 1842), who married Salmon Green; James Edwin (1844-1865), called Edwin, who served as a 2nd Lieutenant in the 17th Vermont Volunteers and was killed April 3rd, 1865, at the Petersburg assault; and George Sylvester (1848-1881), who served in Co. K, 17th Vermont Volunteers in 1864-1865.

William Wirt Henry was married on August 5, 1857, to Mary Jane Beebe daughter of Lyman and Mary (Sherman) Beebe of Waterbury, Vermont. They had five children, Bertram (1858-1859); Mary (Mollie) Matilda (b. 1860), Ferdinand Sherman (1862-1884), who died while a student at the University of Vermont; Katherine (Katie) Beebe (1865-1897), who married the Reverend William Henry Hopkins and whose only child died in 1906; and Carrie Eliza (b. 1869). Mary Jane (Beebe) Henry died November 18, 1871.

William and Mary Jane's daughter Mary (Mollie) married Frederick Salmon Pease of Burlington in 1884. They had seven children, one of which was Julia Pease, mother of Levi P. Smith, Jr., the donor of this collection.

Mary Jane Beebe Henry, William's wife, had a sister Katie, a brother Charles, and a brother Bertram, who died in 1851 at age 18. Mary Jane died in 1871. On December 3, 1872, William married Valeria (Lillie) Heaton, daughter of Timothy J. and Susan P. (White) Heaton of Waterbury.

William's father was a leader in the temperance movement and represented Waterbury in the legislature. William was educated in the schools of Waterbury and

spent one term at People's Academy in Morrisville. William taught school for one winter (1849-50) in Wolcott, Vermont, and then caught "gold fever" and moved to California to seek his fortune. He returned to Vermont in 1857 and joined his father's druggist business, J. M. Henry & Sons. In 1861 he sold his interest in the business and enlisted as a first lieutenant in Co. D of the Second Vermont Volunteers. He was in the first Battle of Bull Run in 1861. He resigned November 5, 1861 and then reenlisted as a major in the Tenth Vermont Infantry. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel in November 1862 and to colonel in June 1864. He was wounded in the battles of Cold Harbor and Cedar Creek. He resigned December 17, 1864, and was made brevet brigadier general in March 1865. In 1892 he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his gallantry at Cedar Creek.

After he returned from war, William rejoined the family business, then known as John F. Henry & Co., manufacturer of patent medicines. The company moved to Burlington in 1867 and added a wholesale drug business to their company. The partnership divided in 1870 to become Henry & Co. (later known as Wells, Richardson & Co.), taking over the wholesale business, and Henry & Lord (later Henry, Johnson & Lord) taking over the proprietary medicine business.

In 1872, William W. Henry and a group of friends traveled to the Laurentian Mountain region of Quebec, Canada on a fishing trip. The trip was so successful, the group returned annually, eventually setting up a permanent camp and finally incorporating as the St. Bernard Fish and Game Club in 1899. Henry was considered the founding father of the organization and remained an honorary member of the club until his death in 1915.

William W. Henry served in the Vermont Senate from Washington County in 1865-1868, and from Chittenden County in 1888-1889. He was mayor of Burlington from 1887 to 1889. He served for seven years as U.S Marshall for the District of Vermont and was a U.S. Immigration Inspector. From 1897 until 1907 he was the American Consul in Quebec.

William W. Henry died August 31, 1915, at the age of 83. He is buried at Lake View Cemetery in Burlington, Vermont.

Additional biographical information is contained within the collection in "The Memoirs of General William Henry, Story of a Green Mountain Boy of the Fourth Generation" (Doc. 527:01). This presents a short narrative of his early years, and of his Civil War service. Another source is "A Vermont Woman's Civil War: The Letters of Mary Jane and William W. Henry" (Doc 527:20) organized by Sybil Watts Smith. Published biographical sketches from other sources have been photocopied and placed in the collection's introductory folder, Doc 527:0.

Scope and Content

This collection covers many but not all aspects of William Wirt Henry's life. The focus of the collection is on Henry's Civil War experiences as communicated back and forth with his wife Mary Jane. The collection also includes some letters from California before that war. Towards the end of his life William spent much time at the St. Bernard Fish and Game Club, a fish and game club located in the Laurentian Mountains in Quebec, Canada, and that is represented here, especially in pictures. There are only two folders containing information on the drug business, except for some letters home when he was on the road selling. There is also a letter which includes an anecdote about antislavery activity in Lawrence, Kansas. As well, there is nothing on his consular service, except a few pictures. The collection also includes a good variety of correspondence from other members of the family, and their children, and an extensive collection of family pictures.

The earliest letters in the collection deal with William W. Henry's life in California, starting in 1851, and the problems of staking out claims, trying to work the claims when there is a shortage of water, shifting into running a store and boarding house until the diggings can be reopened. Some of the correspondence is from William home, some from friends made out there after he returned to Waterbury, and one from Mary Jane Beebe, his future wife.

The Civil War letters start with William's encampment in Northfield, Vermont, and then at Camp Underwood in Burlington, in mid-1861, and then to guard duty in Washington, D.C., where he got the measles and had trouble with lung hemorrhaging. This caused a sixty-day sick leave, and while home he helped raise more troops. Then, in September, he was back in Washington, though there is correspondence with his wife and his brother about the future of his father's drug business in Waterbury. In the spring of 1862 he is out of the army, but in camp in Virginia, selling medicines to the troops, via sutlers and doctors he visits. In the summer of 1862 he is writing from up-state New York, where he is selling drugs for his father's company, but he gets letters from men in his former regiment vividly describing heavy fighting around Richmond, Harrison's Landing, and Chickahomeny, describing who was wounded and who probably captured. They also send him money, asking him to deposit it for them.

By September of 1862 William is back in service, as a major in the 10th Regiment. He is stationed along the north bank of the Potomac for the rest of the year, where he sees action, particularly when Stewart's cavalry raided Chambersburgh, Pennsylvania. By November he is commissioned Lieutenant Colonel, and Colonel the following February. He gets a short leave home in March of 1863, but mostly he continues in picket duty west of Washington. Seventy-nine men present him with a sword and commend him for his service and kindness. He makes a detailed map of where his men are stationed along the Potomac and sends it home to his wife. He has to deal with smugglers bringing goods south into Virginia, raids by Confederates north of the river, and eventually he moves to Harper's Ferry, then to Frederick, Maryland, as the Gettysburg campaign develops. At the height of the campaign he advises his brother-in-law not to bother to pay \$300 to get

out of the draft, as the war is almost over, and later writes that the substitute fee is small compared with what the people of Maryland and Pennsylvania are suffering at the hands of the Confederates.

By the fall of 1863 William is in northern Virginia as the war winds down for the winter. There is a gap of a month in the letters in October, so perhaps he went home on leave. The last letter of the year is November 13th, as he gets a forty-day leave. He is back at Brandy Station by January 12th, describing the mud, boredom, and social life as many officers bring their wives to camp. By March his wife is in camp too. In May the war becomes active again, he talks from Spotsylvania of twelve days of hard fighting, though his unit was lucky again, suffering only three killed, twenty-one wounded. The Army keeps moving southeast, and he speaks hopefully of the war ending in ten days.

William writes to Governor Smith of Vermont, complaining of political interference in the promotions process, and of the Governor's complaints of the lack of regimental discipline. In June he writes from the hospital about the loss of a portion of a finger at Cold Harbor, of a good friend killed, of the falsity of the *Washington Chronicle* reports that he had been killed, of the *Boston Journal* report that he had been hit in the head. He sends home a tracing of his hand, to show what part of his finger he had lost. He tells his wife he was out ahead of his troops when wounded, he speaks highly of the performance of colored troops, that all they need are "good officers to make them fight well every time, and a good cause." Detailed letters and maps showing troop locations, usually delivered in two to three days, illustrate that during the Civil War potentially sensitive military information was sent through the postal system from the battlefield to homes.

In July William's troops are sent to Harper's Ferry again, and are involved in hot fighting against General Early, where the Union forces were overwhelmed, but he is commended by General Lew Wallace and Ricketts for the rear-guard stand. In August he is under Sheridan, near Harper's Ferry. He wants to get out of the Army in the fall, if he can do so with honor. An August letter speaks of the Chicago convention, and whether Lincoln will win, or perhaps McClellan, or even Grant. In August he gets leave, due to bilious fever, but is back in Virginia by late September. In October he is engaged at Cedar Creek, speaking of four bullet holes through his clothing, of how badly his outfit was shot up, and how a third of the men became casualties. It was for action in this engagement, and the retrieving of cannon that had been captured, that he later would win the Congressional Medal of Honor. He finally is discharged from the army in December.

In addition to the letters which provided the account of his action summarized above, this collection contains many of the supporting documents for his service, including commissions, discharge papers, passes, even the pension certificates that show him getting \$11.25 a month for his service, and \$15 a month for the finger wound.

Included in the collection are many other correspondents: Katie Beebe, his sister-in-law, writing about Waterbury events and school life; Edwin and George Henry, with notes of Edwin's war service and death, and their studying business in New York; Katie

Parker, to William and wife, very heavy on religious topics. appeals from a Maryland farmer to support his claims for damages done when the Army was camped on his land; William's son, Ferdinand, living in the south due to poor health, describing having visited his father's battlefield; William's daughter Mollie's *History of the life of Mollie M. Henry in the year 1879*, (she was born in 1860), with extensive editing by Sybil Watts Smith, (Mrs. Levi P. Smith, Jr.), to identify the people Mollie writes about, and to use the newspaper extensively to fill out the events that Mollie refers to, or fails to refer to.

Related Collections

The VHS museum collection includes a Civil War coat and hat belonging to William W. Henry (museum accession numbers 2004.48.1-2). The VHS library has a slide (VHS-S-653) of a painted-over photograph of W.W. Henry and two other Civil War officers in front of a tent; the original photograph is still owned by the Levi Smith family. The VHS FB-19 collection of photographs of Civil War officers includes a photograph of W.W. Henry (FB-19, p. 3). The VHS library collection includes two yearbooks of the St. Bernard Fish and Game Club, 1915 and 1923 (799 Sa22), which include a history of the club written by W.W. Henry

Organization

The collection is organized in five series:

- I. Early Life
- II. The Civil War
- III. Post-Civil War
- IV. Fish and Game
- V. Henry Family

The papers, when given to the Vermont Historical Society, had been well organized by William's descendants. This organization was left largely in tact. The collection also includes a large number of typewritten transcriptions provided by the donor.

Inventory

I. Early life

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| Doc 527:1 | Memoirs of General Henry-Story of a Green Mountain Boy of the 4 th Generation. |
| 2 | Three 1840s compositions |
| MS Size C | 1848 William letter including his anti-slavery views |
| 3 | California letters, 1851-1859 |
| 4 | _____, _____, typed, photocopied |
| 5 | California- 1850s- miscellaneous |
| 6 | Three from William to Mary Jane, rest from Mary Jane to William, 1858-1860 |
| 7 | Condolence letters and poems on Bertie's death, 1859 |

MS Size D Certificate naming William Justice of the Peace, 1860

II. Civil War Period

- 8 Prior to moving South, through July, when sent home
- MS Size C June 24, 1861 *The Daily Times* of Burlington, which lists the members of Company D from Waterbury, 2nd Vermont Regiment
- 9 August-November 1861
- MS Size B September 1861, signatures of those enlisting in Company D, 2nd Vermont Regiment
- 10 January-February 1862, selling medicines to the Army
- 11 May-August 1862
- 12 August-September 1862
- 13 October-December 1862
- 14 January-May 1863
- 15 June-August 1863
- 16 September-November 1863
- 17 January-March 1864
- 18 April-July 1864
- MS Size C June 7, 1864, *Walton's Evening Journal* of Montpelier, includes report of William being wounded in the head and being promoted
- 19 August-December 1864
- MS Size C August 17th 1864 *Rutland Daily Herald*, October 27th 1864
- Walton's Evening Journal* with account of Cedar Creek battle by William
- The Daily Times* of Burlington Dec. 26th, 1864 reporting William has resigned and on returning to Vermont will give the 10th Regiment flag to the Governor, and it includes a testimonial from his fellow officers
- Walton's Daily Journal* of January 10th, 1865, with a 10th Regiment report, including a long account of William's service and bravery, and that he has been recommended for brevet rank of Brigadier General
- The Daily Morning Chronicle* of January 17th, 1865, with an account of Edward Everett's death and his Gettysburg address.
- MS Size D Commissions of William Henry, 1861 as 1st Lieutenant, August 1862 as Major, October 1862 as Lieutenant Colonel, and May 1864 as Colonel
- 20 "A Vermont Woman's Civil War: The Letters of Mary Jane and William W. Henry," compiled by Sybil Watts Smith
- 21 Miscellaneous letters to William from Mary Jane, not originals
- 22 Mustering papers, pensions, promotion recommendations, etc
- 23 1862 Daily Pocket Remembrancer and papers found within it
- 24 Unidentified Civil War officers and other photographs
- 25 General Johnston, Lee engravings, Lee's Farewell Address
- 26 Civil War memorabilia

III. Post-Civil War

- 27 Mary Jane to William-1870; Mary Jane's death and condolence letters

- 28 Miscellaneous correspondence
- MS Size B Memorial Day broadside of a General Henry address; Medal of Honor Legion certificate to William Henry
- 29 Consul General, Quebec
- 30.1 Consul General, Quebec, photos
- 30.2 Photos of W. W. Henry
- 30.3 Obituaries of W. W. Henry

IV. Fish and Game

- 31 St. Bernard Fish and Game Club 1901 club book; *Another Catch* by Arthur Newberry, "Memories of Camp St. Bernard" by Julia Pease Smith
- 32 St. Bernard photos
- 33 St. Bernard photos
- 34 St. Bernard photos
- 35 St. Bernard photos
- 36 St. Bernard photos
- Doc 528:32 Box containing two albums of photos from St. Bernard Club
- Size D General Henry at St. Bernard photo

V. Henry Family

- Doc 528:01 Heirs of Peter Gale, great grandfather of William
- 02 Extract from will of Sylvester Henry, grandfather of William
- 03 James M. Henry and Matilda Gale Henry, parents of William
Includes photograph
- 04 Lyman Beebe, Mary Jane's father
- 05 Mary Sherman Beebe, Mary Jane's mother
Includes photograph
- 06 Katie Beebe
Includes photograph
- 07 Bertram R. Beebe, brother of Mary Jane
- 08 Charlie, brother of Mary Jane
Includes photograph
- 09 Valeria Henry, William's second wife
Includes photograph
- 10 Edwin and George Henry, brothers of William
- 11 Katie Parker letters to Mary Jane and William, 1862-1864
- 12 Ferdinand Henry, 1883-1884
Includes photograph
- 13 "Mollie's Journal, 1879 ("History of the Life of Mollie M. Henry in the Year 1879," typescript with annotations by Sybil Watts Smith)
Includes photograph
- 14 To Mollie, from father and others, 1870s and 1880s
- 15 Mollie Henry Pease 1880s
- 16 To Mollie from Grandmother Heaton (Valeria's mother)
- 17 To Mollie from Lottie Burnett
Includes photograph

- 18 Katie Henry, 1870s and 1880s
- 19 Rev. Herman Hopkins and son Henry Hopkins
- 20 Kate Henry Hopkins photos
Includes photograph
- 21 Delia Henry Miller and Anderson Miller
Includes photograph
- 22 Bettie F. Miller
- 23 Mary Sybil Henry (Mrs. Lyman Hinckley)
- 24 John Henry and Josie Barrett Henry
Includes photograph
- 25 John F. Henry & Co. patent medicines
- 26 Henry, Johnson and Lord Company, patent medicines
- 27 Gales and Galesville, Wisc.
- 28 Letter to S. Warren Hamilton from his grandfather, 1893
- 29 Henry family photographs
- MS size D Group picture of Henry family
- 30 Miscellaneous photographs
- 31 Miscellaneous contents of W. W. Henry donation

Ethan Bisbee
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henry.doc