Hugh H. McIntyre (1844-1906)
Civil War Letters, 1862-1865
MSA 528

Introduction

This collection is composed of the Civil War letters of Hugh Henry McIntyre (1844-1906) of Randolph, Vermont, for the period 1862, when he went into the 10th Regiment Vermont Volunteers, through 1865, when he was discharged. The letters were donated to the Vermont Historical Society by Hugh Henry McIntyre (1923-2009), grandson of the author, in 2008. The transcripts of the letters in the collection were made by Henry Blodgett McIntyre. The collection is housed in one flip-top archival box and occupies .5 linear feet.

Biographical Sketch

Hugh Henry McIntyre was born, the son of James and Charlotte (Blodgett) McIntyre, on August 10, 1844 in Randolph, Vermont. He was the fourth of five children: Hamden Wallace (1834-1909), Elizabeth Chandler (Temple) (1836-1914) Abigail Parmly (1839-1889), Hugh Henry (1844-1906), and Benjamin Griswold (1846-1886).

Hugh H. McIntyre was educated at “Conant’s School,” most likely the grammar school and later normal school under the direction of Edward Conant, in Randolph Center, Vermont. Just before his eighteenth birthday in August 1862, he enlisted in the 10th Vermont Volunteers. After a year of service, he transferred to the Army Signal Corps, remaining with them until the end of the war. After the war, he graduated from Georgetown Medical Department in 1868 and also studied law at Boston University in 1875-1876. He married Emma Lucy Miller of Pomfret, Vermont, in 1871, and they had two children: Marion (1875-1916) and Henry Blodgett (1877-1956). Much of his working life was spent in Alaska, as an agent of the State Department dealing with regulations of the fur seal industry.

Scope and Content

The collection is composed of the Civil War letters home of Hugh Henry McIntyre of Randolph, Vermont, from 1862, when he went into the 10th Regiment Vermont Volunteers, through 1865, when he was discharged. Hugh McIntyre’s military career can be divided into four sections documented in these letters. At the start, he was in the Vermont infantry, later shifted to the Army Signal Corps, and then became ill and spent some months in a hospital in Washington. At some point his illness ended and he assumed duties as a hospital orderly. He spent his last months in the army serving as an orderly, sometimes wishing he could be released back to the Signal Corps and sometimes expressing happiness with his situation.

His letters illustrate how much his knowledge of the war increased as his service changed. During his first year of service, his letters are full of rumors about where and when his unit would move and how the war was progressing. Once he entered the Signal
Corps, he was assigned to Grant’s headquarters with the Army of the Potomac and became much better informed about troop movements, victories and defeats.

The first year his service was in Maryland (guarding the Potomac, the C&O Canal, etc.). In June 1863, his unit moved to Maryland Heights, opposite Harper’s Ferry; then, in July he is in Frederick, Maryland, and Antietam, and then down to Warrenton, Virginia. At this time he writes:

“For anything we have seen of slavery yet I think the niggers are just where they ought to be. They are a greatly inferior race and are just where they should be. All the negroes we have seen in the north are the smartest kind. Come to take the common plantation nigger and they don’t know anything comparatively, but that is no sign that they should be abused any more than our cattle are abused. But they are a curse to a man to have them around him and a curse to the south.”

Pay is also mentioned in McIntyre’s letters from his first year of service with the Vermont Infantry. He entered the service on August 12, 1862, but doesn’t receive his first pay until January 8, 1863. His next pay of $52 for four months comes on April 30.

His letters also express very anti-McClellan views. Indeed, he is critical of many officers, though usually not his own. He feels they are paid too much, they drink too much, and that all officers should first serve as enlisted men. There is one description of General Meade’s officer’s son falling off his horse, drunk, and having to be carted off in a stretcher, too drunk to walk: “I say give the officers the same pay as privates with such rations and see how long the war will prosper.”

McIntyre’s letters describe his reasoning for finally deciding to move to the Signal Corps as including several points: 1) his weapon will be a pistol, not a heavy rifle; 2) he will travel by horse, not foot; 3) he will always be stationed on the highest ground (to see long distances) and not in the swamps; 4) he will be in a small group of 6-8 men and one officer; and 5) he will have a better chance at promotion (though this never happens). He also describes the equipment they carry in the Signal Corps, including three flags (red, black, and white) six feet square for signaling ten miles or more, three flags four feet square for under ten miles, three flags two feet square for short distances, and two copper tubes containing wicking for torches for signaling at night.

Of potential interest, letters numbered 106 and 107 describe of the Battle of the Wilderness and letter 109 Grant’s battles at Salem Church. Letter 110, written near Cold Harbor, describes pickets on either side of the river, where “by mutual consent arms were stacked and both parties went into the river to bathe, exchange knives for tobacco and having a peaceable time generally. Yesterday they were more reserved and perhaps today are as ready to shoot one another as ever.” From these letters, he was very much in the thick of some of the heaviest fighting of the war.

At Petersburg, his signal post is high in a pine tree, from which he can see three Confederate signal posts “are taking messages from some of them nearly all the time.” His tower is 35 feet high, and he can signal with General Butler’s headquarters at Point of
Rocks as Butler’s tower is 125 feet high. Part of his job was to carry messages two miles to the nearest telegraph station, where they could be forwarded to Meade and Butler.

In August 1864, he gets sick and is sent back to Washington to Campbell Hospital. For a long time he could eat little and lost weight but gradually recovered and was required to do light orderly work. He evidently made good friends with some of the doctors, who decided he was a good worker and an interesting person to have around. He spends the rest of his military career in Campbell Hospital, caring for the sick and wounded, doing laundry, and cooking for the men and officers.

Many men in the hospital were furloughed so they could go home to vote, a twenty day furlough with the government paying their transportation. McIntyre writes that he “was sorry to hear that McClellan was nominated at Chicago. He will get more soldier votes than any man they could run.” There is a break in the letters between October 29 and November 20, 1864, indicating that he was also able to go home.

On February 12, 1865, he writes that he went to the President’s Reception and “had the honor to take Old Abe by the hand and receive a gracious bow from his amiable spouse who was present in all the glory of a fresh coat of paint on the cheeks, looking lovely.” In March 1865, he went to Lincoln’s inaugural and couldn’t hear the speech but went to the reception in the evening. His letter of April 18, 1865 describes a somber city after Lincoln’s death, writing “we lost the best man in the republic” and “the South lost their best friend when they killed Old Abe and perhaps they will see their error before Johnson gets through with them.” McIntyre also describes Lincoln’s funeral procession.

By the end of the war the hospital has 1100 patients and orderlies and as the war winds down it gradually clears out. McIntyre does not have much to do during this period and is bored, but finally gets discharged and writes his last letter on June 26, 1865.

Hugh McIntyre’s letters reveal a clearly intelligent gentleman; they are thoughtful, often with a nice touch of humor, and seem to indicate someone who must have gotten on unusually well with his fellow men and officers.

Most of the letters have been transcribed and numbered, with the exception of those dated February 25, 1863, December 14, 1863, and March 21, 1864.

**Related Collections**

Additional letters of Hugh H. McIntyre to Hiram A. Huse during the period 1866-1873 are in the Huse Family papers (Doc. 559: 14-16).

The library includes two McIntyre family genealogies: “Descendants of Hugh McIntyre, 1754-1837” (Misc. File Add) and “Records of some of the descendants of Hugh McIntyre, 1745-1837, with intermarriages” by Ralph W. Putnam (MS 929.2 M189h).

Hewitt family letters of Pomfret, Vermont, also came with this gift.
Inventory

MSA 528:01  Letters 1-39, August 1862 to March 1863
02  Transcripts of above letters
03  Letters 40-71, March 1863 to August 1863
04  Transcripts of above letters
05  Letters 72-109, August 1863 to May 1864
06  Transcripts of above letters
07  Letters 110-142, June 1864- December 1864
08  Transcripts of above letters
09  Letters 143-164, January 1865-June 1865
10  Transcripts of above letters

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