

Cyrus Thomas (1836-1900)
Civil War Letters, 1862-1865
MSB 109

Introduction

This collection contains the Civil War letters of Cyrus Thomas of Sudbury, Vermont, for the period 1862-1865, along with transcriptions created by the donors. The collection was donated to the Vermont Historical Society by Charles and Sally Allen of Lenox, Massachusetts, in August 2016. Charles is the great great grandson of Frederick Allen and his wife, Harriet August Thomas, sister of Cyrus Thomas. The collection is stored in a flat archival box and consumes 1.25 linear feet of shelf space.

Biographical Notes

Cyrus Thomas was born July 1, 1836, in Sudbury, Vermont, to Zebina and Polly Holmes Thomas. He began higher education at Middlebury College in 1860 but enlisted in the Vermont Volunteers in August of 1862 and mustered into Company B of the 11th Vermont Infantry Regiment on the first of September the same year. He rose in rank from Sergeant to Quartermaster Sergeant and eventually received a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in Company D of the same regiment. During his service, Thomas sustained wounds during the Battle of Cedar Creek on October 19, 1864, and then again at Petersburg, Virginia, on April 2, 1865. He stayed with the regiment until he mustered out on June 7, 1865.

Middlebury College lists Thomas as a member of the Class of 1864; in fact Thomas mentions in one of his letters his desire to be at the commencement. It is not clear how he attended college and fought in the war at the same time, but he had a classical education and seemed to have an appetite for learning. Thomas received his secondary education at the Brandon Seminary, Brandon, Vermont, and on several occasions asked his father to send him books, including his copy of Virgil and his book of Greek grammar.

At age 18, (circa 1854) Thomas converted to the Baptist religion through his association with the Reverend C. A. Thomas, D. D., of Brandon, Vermont. After the Civil War, Cyrus attended the Alton Theological Seminary in Alton, Illinois, and was ordained in July of 1869. He served as pastor of four churches in Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and back to Illinois where he passed away in 1900. He and wife, Angeline Whipple Thomas (b. 1830), are buried in a cemetery in Marseilles, Illinois.

Cyrus often wrote about his older brother, Horace Holmes Thomas, also a Civil War veteran and Middlebury College graduate, Class of 1857. Horace served as a 1st Lieutenant and Assistant Adjutant General of the 3rd Division, 2nd Army Corps. A document from Middlebury College also lists him as a Brigadier General and Quartermaster General of Tennessee and private secretary to Governor Browlow until 1869.

Scope and Content

This collection contains 38 letters written by Cyrus Thomas (1826-1900) of Sudbury, Vermont, during his service with 11th Vermont Volunteers during the Civil War. Also included are transcriptions created by the donors and one letter written by Daniel Holmes (1837-1913) to his aunt, Cyrus's mother, Polly Holmes Thomas.

The letters of the collection are mostly written to family members including Thomas's parents and siblings. He often mentions other soldiers in his unit and those in other units his parents may have been familiar with. The donor of the collection has provided endnotes that further identify the individuals mentioned in the letters.

In his early letters, Thomas reports that he has been stationed in the Washington, D. C., area as part of a defensive perimeter of forts and encampments. His duties in Washington allowed him plenty of free time to pursue other interests. He toured the city, went to the theater, and forged new friendships among the civilian population.

Thomas describes the commissary giving the soldiers two doses per day of a whiskey and quinine mixture to fight malaria. Thomas was assigned to issue the mixture and thus was relieved of guard duty and work parties.

Thomas read several books including *Among the Pines*, *South Carolina in Secession Time*, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and recommended them of this younger brother Frank (William Franklin Thomas) to help him along with his education. Cyrus feared Frank would eventually enlist to fight the war and he encouraged Frank to remain in school.

In many of his letters, Cyrus told his parents he had never been happier in his lifetime than during his service in the Vermont Volunteers. He mentioned happiness several times and also wrote about his weight gain through muscle mass and the friendships he made through his service and duty stations.

An additional summary of the letters is in Folder 0.

Organization

The donor of this collection arranged the letters using key numbers made from the last digit of the year Cyrus Thomas wrote the letter followed by a dash and a letter number. Each year's letters have been organized chronologically; letters with multiple pages have the key number followed by a lower case letter. A large photo album style book contains the original letters and envelopes and a three ring binder has transcriptions of the letters as well as end and genealogical notes.

Inventory

MSB 106:01 Cyrus Thomas letters, in binder
:02 _____, transcriptions.
 Binder includes biography; end notes; genealogy and family notes in
 Appendix A; military notes in Appendix B.

Harry Harrington
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ThomasCyrus.doc