

Charles Cummings (1821-1864)
Papers, 1857-1873
MSA 28 & Size D

Introduction

The papers of Charles Cummings (1821-1864), a Brattleboro newspaper editor and publisher, consist chiefly of letters he wrote to his wife during the Civil War, 1862-1864. The papers were the gift of Mrs. Ralph H. Kingsley in 1971; they were delivered to the Society by Rev. Prescott Wintersteen. The papers are housed in one Hollinger box and one oversized folder; they consume .5 linear feet of shelf space.

Biographical Note

Charles Cummings was born at Royalston, Massachusetts, February 6, 1821. He studied medicine, and in 1847 received a medical diploma from the Vermont Medical College in Woodstock, Vermont. He practiced his profession in Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire, for three years. Cummings moved to Brattleboro in 1850 and found work as an accountant. In 1852 he became co-publisher of *The Semi-Weekly Eagle*. In 1853 and 1854 he was co-publisher of *The Brattleboro Eagle*. Cummings founded *The Vermont Phoenix* "New Series" in 1855. A year or two later he bought the old name of *Phoenix*, which had been abandoned by the owners in favor of *the Republican Statesman*. In 1855 he was appointed Clerk of the Vermont State Agricultural Society, a position he held until 1861. In 1858, Cummings was elected Clerk of the Vermont House of Representatives and was re-elected three more times to the post. Cummings married Elizabeth Reynolds of Boston, Massachusetts on June 27, 1857. The union produced two children, a boy, Charles, and a girl, Lizzie.

Cummings enlisted as a private in Company E, 11th Vermont Regiment, and was chosen first lieutenant of Company E on August 14, 1862. He was elected lieutenant colonel of the 16th Vermont Regiment on September 27, 1862. On February 9, 1864, he transferred to the 17th Vermont Regiment where he remained until his death in the fall of 1864.

The facts surrounding Cummings death are somewhat muddied. The *Daily Free Press* of October 14, 1864, reports that Cummings was wounded on September 30, 1864. On October 21, 1864, the *Vermont Phoenix* described Cummings as having been wounded and taken prisoner on Friday September 30, 1864. The same article states: "A letter from Dr. Edson, Surgeon of the regiment received by Mrs. Cummings on Monday, the 10th inst., says that a Petersburg paper states that Col. Cummings was found among the dead on the battlefield." His obituary, published on October 31, 1864, contains a statement that his last words were "Save the colors boys," but there were no eyewitness reports to verify that the colonel issued these colorful last words. Copies of these articles are in Folder 0.

Scope and Content

The bulk of the Charles Cummings papers consists of letters he wrote to his wife during his service in the Civil War. The dates of these letters are from October 28, 1862 to his last letter dated September 30, 1864. One letter by Lt. Cummings written to his daughter Lizzie on May 2, 1864, survives. One exceptionally interesting letter dated October 2, 1864, sent to Mrs. Cummings reports him as wounded and captured by the enemy. Although reported to have been “killed in action” there is no official notice of his death in this data.

The collection also includes a prenuptial agreement between Charles Cummings and his future wife, Elizabeth B. Reynolds, written on January 26, 1857; an account book kept by Mrs. Cummings while her husband was away, including a list of the dates she sent letters to him; two modern photographs of the slave quarters at “Eschol,” Greenville Sound, Wilmington, North Carolina; an art educational drawing book from 1873; and genealogical notes on the Reynolds, Littlefield, Joy, Sprague, and Warren families.

Publications & Transcriptions

The letters in this collection have been transcribed by Eric Ward. Two copies of the transcriptions are located in folders 9 and 10. Four of Cummings letters to his wife were published in *A War of the People: Vermont Civil War Letters*, Jeffrey D. Marshall, ed. (University Press of New England, 1999).

Related Materials

The Vermont Historical Society museum’s collection includes an oil portrait of Charles Cummings (A-131) and his Civil War field desk (72.15.1). A portrait of a child who may have been Cumming’s daughter Lizzie that had been given to the VHS at the same time as the other Cummings materials was returned to Prescott B. Wintersteen in 1972. A framed photograph of Charles Cummings which was mentioned in the donation correspondence in 1971 could not be found in the VHS collections in 1999. The VHS photo collections include a portrait of Cummings; it is on page 136 of the scrapbooks in FB-19 (negative number VHS-2150).

Inventory

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|----------|--|
| MSA 28:1 | Letters from Charles Cummings, October - December 1862 |
| 2 | _____, January - February, 1863 |
| 3 | _____, March-April, 1863 |
| 4 | _____, May- June, 1863 |
| 5 | _____, July-October, 1863 |
| 6 | _____, February-April, 1864 |
| 7 | _____, May-June, 1864 |
| 8 | _____, July-September, 1864 |
| 9 | _____, typescripts by Eric Ward, in binder |

- 10 _____, _____, in folder
MS Size D Confirmation as election as First Lt. of Company E, 11th
Regiment, signed by Gov. Frederick Holbrook, August 14,
1862
Confirmation as election as Lt. Col. 16th Regiment, signed by
Gov. Frederick Holbrook, Sept. 27, 1862
- 11 pre-nuptial agreement, 1857
- 12 photographs, slave quarters, "Eschol," Greenville Sound,
Wilmington, North Carolina, (modern photographs)
- 13 *American Text Books of Art Education* by Prof. Walter Smith,
Free-Hand Drawing, Number 6, 1873
- 14 miscellaneous expense lists
- 15 genealogical notes: Reynolds, Littlefield, Joy, Sprague, and
Warren families
- 16 addressed envelopes
- 17 account book, Elizabeth B. Cummings, 1862 & 1864, includes list
of dates she sent letters to Charles Cummings

Susan Harris
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cummings.doc