

Gettysburg College
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special collections

Guide to MS-043:

George Washington Beidelman Collection



Gettysburg College, Musselman Library
Special Collections and College Archives

Kevin Kuy, April 2002

Karen D. Drickamer, April 2013

MS-043: George Washington Beidelman Collections

Processed by Kevin Luy, April 2002

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Size

1 box, 0.28 cubic feet

Dates

Inclusive: 1841-1870

Bulk: 1860-1864

Provenance

Purchased June 2001 from Charles Apfelbaum

Purchased March 2013 from Raymond DeStefano

Biographical Note

George Washington Beidelman was born in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania on March 26, 1839 and raised there by his mother and father, Jacob Beidelman, a local lawyer and businessman. George's first known employment was with the *Star*, a Bloomsburg newspaper. Feeling he had learned all he could there, he moved to Norristown, Pennsylvania to apprentice under the printer of the newspaper, the *Watchman*. Around 1858, he relocated to Philadelphia where he worked as a bellman and salesman. Unable to find a suitable position, he placed himself under the tutelage of Charles T. Bonsall, a Philadelphia lawyer, in March of 1861.

On May 21, 1861, he enlisted as a private in Company C of the 71st Pennsylvania Volunteers and remained a private for the duration of his service. George trained at Fort Shuyler near New York City, and then camped near Washington, D.C. and Fort Monroe. George experienced his first gunfire when his regiment crossed the Potomac in September of 1861. Sickness and a subsequent trip to the hospital kept him out of the 71st Pennsylvania's first battle at Ball's Bluff, Maryland. When he returned to the regiment, he marched up the Peninsula, but saw no action. His first battle experience came immediately following the Battle of Fredericksburg, when his unit was attacked while on picket duty in late December 1862.

George also saw action at the Battle of Gettysburg. He was shot in the right leg during the fight and was sent to a hospital in Philadelphia. While recovering from this injury, he was ordered to Chelton Hills, Pennsylvania, where he worked for the Quartermaster and Commissary Department and later worked in the adjutant's office. He died March 14, 1864 after contracting typhoid pneumonia.

George's regiment, the 71st Pennsylvania (nicknamed the "California Regiment"), was recruited predominately from the Philadelphia area by Senator Edward Baker. The Oregon Senator was

commissioned by President Lincoln to recruit a regiment and was the unit's first Colonel. Originally the regiment mustered in both Pennsylvanians and New Yorkers and was treated like a regiment in the regular army. It was not until after the unit's first major fighting at Ball's Bluff that it was officially recognized as a Pennsylvania unit.

The 71st participated in many significant battles from the war's beginning to its end. In its first engagement, Ball's Bluff, it suffered a devastating defeat, losing about sixty percent of its men. In 1862, the regiment fought in the Battle of Fair Oaks, the Seven Days Battle and the Battle of Antietam. That year's final conflict was Fredericksburg, where the 71st was forcefully attacked while positioned at the extreme front of the Union line where they again suffered heavy casualties. The unit was present at the Battle of Gettysburg, situated in close proximity on the Angle on the battle's third day, and fought in the Wilderness and Cold Harbor. The 71st Pennsylvania was mustered out of service on Jul 2, 1864.

Scope and Content Note

The George W. Beidelman Collection holds its most significant information in letters written by George to his father, Jacob. In these letters, George shares his political opinions, religious beliefs, and camp-life descriptions. The core of the collection is the correspondence from August 1, 1862 until November 18, 1862, in which George writes diary-like entries to his father, recounting each day's activities. Accounts of the fighting at Ball's Bluff and Fredericksburg are the most detailed battle descriptions. However, the collection's strength is in George's astute observations regarding camp life and the political aspects of the war.

In addition to letters written by George to his father, the collection includes letters to George from his father, brother, friends and fellow soldiers; various Army and United States Government documents pertaining mostly to George's death; a newspaper clipping of a letter to the editor written by George; and the creative writings of George.

The collection is arranged chronologically with the bulk of the material being from 1860-1864.

Box List

Box 1

1-1 Inventory

1-2 1841-1858 (5 ALS and 1 item; Norristown: political/physical description of Norristown, apprenticeship, 1857 snowstorm, "Kansas question")

- Feb 12, 1841 - (1 p) McConnellsville, PA: to Jacob Beidelman, Appointment to PA Militia
- Feb 14, 1854 - (1 p) California: letter to Mary Beidelman
- Jun 28, 1856 - (7 pp) Norristown, PA: to father
- Jan 31, 1857 - (4 pp) Norristown, PA: to father
- Mar 25, 1857 - (4 pp) Norristown, PA: to father

- Feb 27, 1858 - (2 pp) Norristown, PA: to father
- 1-3 January 10, 1860 – October 18, 1860 (5 ALS; 1126 Girard St., Phila.: religious atmosphere, Harper’s Ferry incident, 1860 election politics)
- Jan 10, 1860 - (12 pp) to father
 - Mar 26, 1860 - (8 pp) to father
 - Apr 18, 1860 - (2 pp) to father
 - Jun 29, 1860 - (2 pp) to brother
 - Oct 18, 1860 - (6 pp) to father
- 1-4 March 29, 1861 – June 26, 1861 (6 ALS; Ft. Shuyler, New York: motivation to enlist, formation of the 71st PA, Senator Edward Baker, camp life)
- Mar 29, 1861 - (5 pp) to father
 - May 15, 1861 - (4 pp) 1126 Girard St., Phila.: to father
 - May 23, 1861 - (1 p) from Jas. A. Seiss to Rev. James Schook asking for “favorable regard” for GWB at the time of his enlistment
 - Jun 5, 1861 - (6 pp) Fort Schuyler, New York: to father
 - Jun 18, 1861 - (4 pp) to George from Sterling Bonsall
 - Jun 26, 1861 - (2 pp) Fort Schuyler, New York: to father
- 1-5 July 5, 1861 – July 12, 1861 (5 ALS; Fortress. Monroe, Virginia: his life insurance plan, march through Philadelphia)
- Jul 5, 1861 - (1 p) note from Sterling Bonsall
 - Jul 9, 1861 - (4 pp) Hampton, VA: to father (transcription included)
 - Jul 9, 1861 - (2 pp) disposition of insurance policy written by George
 - Undated - (1 p) Note to father about life insurance policy
 - Jul 12, 1861 - (3 pp) Norristown: letter from H. L. Dotterer
- 1-6 July 25, 1861 – August 14, 1861 (4 ALS; 3 from George’s friends, home front opinions of war, camp life and fellow soldiers)
- Jul 25, 1861 - (3 pp) Philadelphia: from Andy
 - Aug 9, 1861 - (2 pp) Philadelphia: from J. B. Wilson
 - Aug 14, 1861 - (6 pp) near Washington, D.C.: to father
 - Aug 14, 1861 - (4 pp) Philadelphia: from E. H. Ryan
- 1-7 August 16, 1861 – September 17, 1861 (4 ALS; 3 from his friends, rumor of move to “other side of Potomac”)
- Aug 16, 1861 - (1 p) from Sterling Bonsall
 - Aug 20, 1861 - (1 p) Philadelphia: from Mary H. Griffitts
 - Aug 27, 1861 - (4 pp) near Washington, D.C.: to sister
 - Sept, 17, 1861 - (4 pp) from Sterling Bonsall

- 1-8 September 26, 1861 – October 30, 1861 (5 ALS and 1 fragment; Ball's Bluff account, construction of Ft. Baker, first action, George's illness)
- Sept 26, 1861 - (6 pp) near Chain Bridge, Va.: to father (transcript included)
 - Oct 2, 1861 - (1 p) note from Sterling
 - Oct 22, 1861 - (2 p) Near Poolesville, Md.: to father (transcript included)
 - Oct 24, 1861 - (4 pp) Camp near Poolesville, Md.: to father (transcript included)
 - Oct 30, 1861 - (1 p) 1126 Girard St. Philadelphia: to father
- 1-9 December 4, 1861 – February 28, 1862 (4 ALS; Camp Observation, Maryland: recovery, camp life, Chaplain, Harper's Ferry)
- Dec 4, 1861 - (4 pp) Camp Observation near Poolesville, Md.: to father
 - Jan 27, 1862 - (4 pp) Camp Observation: to father (transcript included)
 - Feb 23, 1862 - (4 pp) Camp Observation: to father
 - Feb 28, 1862 - (2 pp) Harpers Ferry: to father
- 1-10 March 11, 1862 – April 7, 1862 (3 ALS; 2 ALS from friends or family, life in Philadelphia, public opinion, march south)
- Mar 11, 1862 - (4 pp) near Winchester, Va.: to sister
 - Mar 26, 1862 - (4 pp) Philadelphia: salutation Dear Bro Beidelman, unsigned
 - April 7, 1862 - (4 pp) Norristown, Pa.: salutation Friend George, unsigned
- 1-11 April 10, 1862 – May 3, 1862 (5 ALS; Chesapeake Hospital, Fortress Monroe, Va.)
- Apr 10, 1862 - (1 p) Camp Hamilton, Va.: from Edwin Ryan
 - Apr 19, 1862 - (1 p) Camp Winfield Scott, Yorktown, Va.: from Captain Chas. S. Mewlin, paymaster
 - Apr 21, 1862 - (4 pp) Fortress Monroe, Va.: to Mrs. John Jones, sister
 - May 2, 1862 - (1 p) Camp Hamilton, Va.: from Ned (Edwin Ryan)
 - May 3, 1862 - (1 p) from Captain Chas S. Mewlin
- 1-12 May 18, 1862 – June 9, 1862 (3 ALS; St. Joseph Hospital, Phila: details of illness)
- May 18, 1862 - (1 p) St. Joseph's Hospital. Phila.: from Dr. J. S. Marbourg to Jacob Beidelman
 - May 26, 1862 - (2 pp) from Sterling Bonsall to Jacob Beidelman
 - Jun 9, 1862 - (1 p) note from a friend (LeRita)
- 1-13 August 1, 1862 – August 12, 1862 (3 ALS; Day-by day accounts: Rations, Ball's Bluff info, Camp Curtin, religion, reasons for fighting, draft, fellow soldiers, Company C update, sutler and paymaster, McClellan's resignation)
- Aug 1, 1862 - (7 pp) Camp Curtin, Harrisburg, Pa.: to father
 - Aug 1-7, 1862 - (8 pp) to father
 - Aug 8-12, 1862 - (8 pp) to father (transcript included)

- 1-14 August 15, 1862 – September 14, 1862 (3 ALS; Day-by-day accounts: Peninsular Campaign, life on the march, Yorktown, Va., coffee, officers of the 71st, camp life, newspapers, political commentary, President Lincoln’s visit to camp, effect of war on civilians)
- Aug 15-22, 1862 - (8 pp) to father
 - Aug 23-Sept 6, 1862 - (12 pp) Newport News, Va.: to father
 - Sept 7-14, 1862 - (8 pp) Near Rockville, Md.: to father
- 1-15 September 15, 1862 – October 7, 1862 (3 ALS; Maryland Campaign. Day-by-day accounts; picket duty, Battle of Antietam, bodies, destruction, pay day, mail service, requesting another box)
- Sept 15-20, 1862 - (9 pp) Near Boonsboro, Md.: to father
 - Sept 21-28, 1862 - (10 pp) Near Sharpsburg, Va.: to father
 - Sept 29-Oct 7, 1862 - (13 pp) Harpers Ferry, Va.: to father
- 1-16 October 8, 1862 – October 15, 1862 (3 ALS; Harpers Ferry, Va.: Day-by-day accounts, camp life, cutting wood, picket duty, Jeb Stuart, Charlestown)
- Oct 8-14, 1862 - (8 pp) Camp Bolivar Heights, Va.: to father
 - Oct 14, 1862 - (1 p) to father
 - Oct 15-21, 1862 - (12 pp) to father
- 1-17 October 22, 1862 – November 6, 1862 (3 ALS; Harper’s Ferry: Army movements, rumors, food and rations, “Stonewall” Jackson, McClellan’s farewell address, Army chaplains, Burnside vs. McClellan)
- Oct 22-28, 1862 - (4 pp) to father
 - Oct 23, 1862 - (2 pp) to father
 - Oct 29-Nov 6, 1862 - (8 pp) Harpers Ferry, Va.: to father
- 1-18 November 7, 1862 – November 18, 1862 (2 ALS; Fredericksburg, Va: snow and cold, McClelland, and Burnside, on the march, lack of newspapers, Howard)
- Nov 7-14, 1862 - (6 pp) in Bivouac, near Rectortown, Va.: to father
 - Nov 18-25, 1862 - (4 pp) near Fredericksburg, Va.: to father
- 1-19 December 4, 1862 – December 14, 1862 (4 ALS; Fredericksburg, Va.: Battle account, construction of winter quarters)
- December 4, 1862 - (2 pp) Camp near Falmouth, Va.: to father
 - December 6, 1862 - (2 pp) Camp near Fredericksburg: to brother
 - December 12, 1862 - (1 p) from Sterling Bonsall to Jacob Beidelman
 - December 14, 1862 - (2 pp) Fredericksburg battlefield: to father (transcript included)
- 1-20 December 21, 1862 – December 29, 1862 (2 ALS; Camp near Falmouth, Va: Falmouth, skirmish, picket duty, defense of Gen. Burnside)
- December 21, 1862 - (2 pp) Camp near Falmouth, Va.: to father
 - December 29, 1862 - (2 pp) to father

- 1-21 February 14, 1863 – March 4, 1863 (2 ALS; Camp near Falmouth, Va.: Heath, camp life)
- Feb 14, 1863 - (4 pp) to father
 - Mar 4, 1863 - (3 pp) Camp near Falmouth, Va.: to father
- 1-22 July 4, 1863 – August 21, 1863 (3 ALS and 2 items; Hospital: Wounded at Gettysburg, losses and prisoners, hospital conditions)
- Jul 4, 1863 - (3 pp) Hospital, Battlefield of Gettysburg; to father
 - Undated - (1 p) To all whom it may concern
 - Jul 8, 1863 - (1 p) U.S. Hospital, Chestnut Hill, Phila.: to father
 - Jul 14, 1863 - (3 pp) to father
 - Aug 21, 1863 - (1p) Hospital discharge orders
- 1-23 October 10, 1863 – February 11, 1864 (2 ALS and 1 newspaper clipping; Chelton Hills: letter to editor regarding slavery, new job in adjutant's office)
- Oct 10, 1863 - (1 p) Newspaper clipping of a letter to the editor sent by the author supporting the abolition of slavery
 - Nov 24, 1863 - (2 pp) Headquarters, Camp William Penn: to father
 - Dec 16, 1863 - (2 pp) to father
- 1-24 January 5, 1864 – February 11, 1864 (3 ALS; Camp William Penn.: Weather, health, arrival of a box with photographs and peaches, photos sent, another cold)
- Jan 5, 1864 - (2 pp) to father
 - Jan 30, 1864 - (2 pp) to father
 - Feb 11, 1864 - (3 pp) to father
- 1-25 March 11, 1864-May 16, 1864 (4 ALS and 1 items; George's death, letters of condolence)
- Mar 11, 1864 (1 p) Head-Quarters Camp "William Penn", Chelton Hills, Pa: from A. W. Davis to Jacob Beidelman
 - Mar 23, 1864 (2 pp) Phila.: from Sterling Bonsall to Jacob Beidelman
 - Apr 5, 1864 (4 pp) Phila.: from Geo Henderson, Jr. to Jacob Beidelman
 - May, 16, 1864 (3 pp) Uniontown, Pa.: from George and Elizabeth Beidelman to Jacob Beidelman
 - (1 p) Proof of Loss Required, Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company
- 1-26 1867-1870 (4 documents; Retrieval of George's bounty and back pay)
- Oct 17, 1867 - (2 pp) letter from H.H. Laughlin to Jacob Beidelman
 - Oct 1, 1868 - (1 p) Treasury Department form for Jacob Beidelman
 - Oct 20, 1868 - (1 p) note from Geo. W. Ford to Jacob Beidelman
 - May 19, 1870 - (1 p) note from EB French to Jacob Beidelman

- 1-27 Miscellaneous (8 items; Poetry and prayer penned by George, American Mechanic's funeral dirge, letter fragments, cdv of George Washington Beidelman)
- 1-28 Compiled Military Service Records (11pp).

Contact Information

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