

Thomas, Henry Goddard, Letters and Memoirs

Henry Goddard Thomas Letters and Memoirs

1868-1889



Title Statement

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

Ms.1991.073

Unit Date

1868-1889

Language

The materials in the collection are in English.

Abstract

Henry Goddard Thomas was born in Maine and entered the American Civil War as a private yet rose to the rank of brigadier general by the war's end. After 1862 he was involved with the recruitment and organization of Black troops in the Union Army. He commissioned several troops, in particular the 79th and 19th U.S. Colored Infantries. He remained in the U. S. Army after the war and retired in 1891. His collection consists of twenty-two letters to Thomas from friends and relatives. Many of the letters refer to the Freedmen's Bureau and the newly freed slaves' attempts to establish schools and churches.

Creator

Thomas, Henry Goddard, 1837-1897

Extent

0.1 Cubic Feet 1 folder

Repository

Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech

Administrative Information

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Source of Acquisition

The collection was purchased by Special Collections and University Archives in October 1991 and November 1992.

Processing Information

The processing, arrangement, and description of the Henry Goddard Thomas Letters and Memoirs was completed in 1993.

Preferred Citation

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Biographical Note

Henry Goddard Thomas was born in Portland, Maine, on April 4, 1837. At the age of twenty-one he graduated from Amherst and then studied law and was admitted to the Maine bar. He was enlisted in the 5th Maine as a private in April 1861 and was commissioned captain in June. This command fought at the battle of First Manassas, after which, on August 5, 1861, Thomas accepted a commission as a captain in the newly authorized 11th U.S. Infantry. He was on recruiting duty until the summer of 1862 and did not join his regiment until autumn.

Thomas's principle contribution to the war effort was the recruitment and organization of Black troops, with whom he was associated with until the end of the war. He was commissioned colonel first of the 79th U.S. Colored Infantry and then of the 19th Colored Infantry, taking command of the latter on January 16, 1864. Thomas is said to have been the first officer of the Regular Army to accept a colonelcy of Black troops. (681) He was assigned to Ferrero's IX Corps's division of Black troops at the beginning of U.S. Grant's Overland campaign and was present during all of the battles incident thereto, including the battle of The Crater. On November 30, 1864, Thomas was made a brigadier general of volunteers and transferred to Benjamin F. Butler's Army of the James, where he commanded a brigade of four Black regiments in the XXV Corps.

At the end of the war, Thomas was brevetted through all ranks to that of brigadier general, U.S. Army and major general of volunteers, but he was mustered out of volunteer service in January 1886, as a captain of the 11th infantry, a grade which he occupied for the next decade. He became major of the 4th Infantry in 1876 and two years later transferred to the paymaster's department with the same rank. On July 2, 1891, he went on the retired list.

Henry Goddard Thomas was also a man of considerable social standing as he had ties with the Virginia Governor Shelby, and his father and brother also appear to be quite active in the North in the same activities as Thomas. In politics the General was a member of the Grant and Colfax Club.

On January 23, 1897, Thomas died in Oklahoma City. His remains were returned to Portland for burial.

Scope and Content

From the letters to Henry Goddard Thomas one can gather that the General was a respected individual for

his involvement with the Black community. As an activist Thomas received various letters from individuals seeking to help educate people recently emancipated. Thomas was particularly active in the construction of churches for the Black community as well as instruction for Black ministers. Louis Hensen writes to thank the General for money for the construction of a Methodist church and informs him of the construction progress. A letter from Byron Greenough updates the progress of one such organization, the Institute for the Instruction of Colored Ministers in Virginia and Southern States. A letter from Rev. Commodore D. Hurt commends the work that government has done for the education of Black people and updates the General on the status of a Black school in Russell County, Virginia.

Some letters also express the frustration of Thomas's peers over the treatment of Black people. The letter from P. S. Reeves dated June 17, 1868, relates a story involving "Regulators" and a Black school teacher in Danville. An interesting letter from G.R. Rosselton, dated December 24, 1869, includes a brief synopsis of slavery in America.

Keywords

Civil War

Local/Regional History and Appalachian South

United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865

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Arrangement

This collection is arranged by type, then chronologically.

Description of Subordinate Components

Letters

Unit Date 1868-1869, 1871, 1873, 1878-1880, 1884, 1889

folder 1

Williams at Ft. Wood, NY, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date February 10, 1868

General Physical Description note 1

P.S. Reeves in Danville, KY, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date June 17, 1868

General Physical Description note 2

P.S. Reeves in Danville, KY, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date June 18, 1868

General Physical Description note 3

Edward Hillipp in Lebanon, KY, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date June 19, 1868

General Physical Description note 4

P.S. Reeves in Danville, KY, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date June 28, 1868

General Physical Description note 5

Benjamin H. Osborn in Danville, KY, Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date September, 1868

General Physical Description note 6

P.S. Reeves in Paducah, KY, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date September 7, 1868

General Physical Description note 7

Thomas' Brother Bill in Portland, ME to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date September 17, 1868

General Physical Description note 8

S.A. Nesbith in Wytheville, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date September 25, 1868

General Physical Description note 9

Brian Greenough in Portland, ME, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date December 25, 1868

General Physical Description note 10

R.L. Lacy in Lynchburg, VA, at the Bureau of Refugees, Freedman, and Abandoned Lands, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date January 27, 1869

General Physical Description note 11

Reverend Commodore D. Hurt, Russell County, VA, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date April 7, 1869

General Physical Description note 12

R.B. Moorman, Salem, VA, to Henry Goddard Thomas in Dakota Territory

Unit Date August 4, 1869

General Physical Description note 13

L.C. Henson in Wytheville, VA, to Henry Goddard Thomas in Dakota Territory

Unit Date August 4, 1869

General Physical Description note 14

G.R. Rossitor in Marietta, OH, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date December 24, 1869

General Physical Description note 15

Eliza Roach in Scotland, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date October 4, 1871

General Physical Description note 16

Professor Rossitor in Marietta, OH, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date February 15, 1873

General Physical Description note 17

From Rudolph Tucker in Wytheville, VA, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date December 4, 1878

General Physical Description note 18

MLD of Columbus, MD, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date March 14, 1879

General Physical Description note 19

Receipt from Kinsburg and Draper, St. Paul, MN, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date September 18, 1879

General Physical Description note 20

E.F. Huntington in Boston, MA, to Henry Goddard Thoma

Unit Date September 6, 1880

General Physical Description note 21

F.C. Young in Denver, CO, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date January 26, 1880

General Physical Description note 22

Receipt for Thomas' subscription to the Army and Naval Journal

Unit Date January 1884

General Physical Description note 23

Henry William Clifford in Portland, ME, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date January 30, 1889

General Physical Description note 24

Invitation from E.F. Trouy in Manchester, NH, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date February 1, 1889

General Physical Description note 25

John Deering of Saco, ME, to Henry Goddard Thomas

Unit Date March 26, 1889

General Physical Description note 26

Henry Goddard Thomas Memoirs

folder 1

Scope and Content

Twelve handwritten pages of Thomas' early war experiences in the 11th U.S. Infantry. Most incidents concern Captain Cooley and Lieutenants Head and Huntington.