

Newton, William S., Papers

William S. Newton Papers

1862-1879



Title Statement

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Profile Description

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

Ms.2021.024

Unit Date

1862-1879

Language

The materials in the collection are in English.

Abstract

American Civil War correspondence, official documents, and other family materials related to William S. Newton, an Ohio doctor who from 1862 to 1865 served as assistant surgeon of the 91st Ohio Volunteer Infantry and surgeon of the 193rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry. Also includes transcripts of Newton's Civil War letters to his wife and children.

Creator

Newton, William S. (William Smith), 1823-1882

Extent

0.5 Cubic Feet 1 box

Repository

Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research.

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Source of Acquisition

The William S. Newton Papers were purchased by Special Collections and University Archives in 2017.

Processing Information

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Preferred Citation

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Biographical Note

William Smith Newton was born on February 6, 1823, near the small town of Harmer, in Washington County, Ohio. The town, now part of Marietta, was located where the Muskingum River flows into the Ohio River, with Virginia (now West Virginia) located on the other side to the south. He was the son of Oren and Elizabeth Fuller Newton. His father, Oren, was an important figure in the community and was involved in farming and the grindstone industry. His grandparents were the early Marietta-area settlers Elias and Alice Stimson Newton.

In 1839 sixteen-year-old Newton enrolled in Marietta College's Latin School, which was a preparatory school for younger students. After two years of study in the Latin School, in fall 1841 he advanced to the Marietta Academy, a preparatory school for the college. The following fall, Newton enrolled as a freshman at Marietta College. He completed his freshman year, 1842-1843, but he did not continue with courses or graduate from Marietta College.

Newton demonstrated an interest in medicine and learned from his cousin Robert Safford Newton, who practiced medicine in Gallipolis and was trained in the emerging field of eclectic medicine. Newton observed his cousin treating patients with eclectic methods, which influenced his decision to enroll as a medical student in fall 1843 at the Medical College of Ohio in Cincinnati. Newton graduated in 1845 from the Medical College of Ohio and returned to Harmar. Similar to an apprenticeship or residency, he began working alongside Seth Hart, a doctor in town. By 1850 Newton had his own medical practice in Harmar. In 1854 Newton and his family relocated to Ironton, Ohio. Newton was the eighth doctor in Ironton at that time. He had an active medical practice in downtown Ironton and frequently advertised in local newspapers.

On October 28, 1845, William married Frances Ann Hayward of Gallipolis. They had seven children during their marriage. Three of their children, Oren Hayward (1846-1858), Lewis Garland (May-October 1848), and Fanny Lillian (1857-1858), died before reaching adulthood. In 1862, when William enlisted in the Union Army, they had three children, Edward (Ned) Seymore (born 1850), Valentine Mott (born 1852), and Kate May (born 1860). Another child, John Beverly (born November 9, 1863), arrived during Newton's military service.

Newton took immediate interest in serving the Union as a surgeon. In August 1862, volunteers from the counties of Adams, Scioto, Lawrence, Gallia, Jackson, and Pike organized at Ironton into five companies of the 91st Ohio Volunteer Infantry. Colonel John A. Turley from Scioto County commanded the regiment with Colonel Benjamin F. Coates second in command. The Army appointed George H. Carpenter as surgeon and John B. Warwick as assistant surgeon for the 91st. Newton received his official appointment as assistant surgeon for the regiment on September 17, 1862.

Newton served as assistant surgeon of the 91st Ohio Volunteer Infantry for most of the American Civil War, with only two exceptions. In October 1863 he became acting surgeon for the 2nd Virginia Cavalry and held that role until February 1864 when he returned to service as assistant surgeon of the 91st. Then, on March

18, 1865, he became surgeon of the 193rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry and kept that post until he mustered out with the regiment on August 9, 1865.

As assistant surgeon Newton managed several hospitals (both in seized buildings and in the field), tended to patients, ordered supplies, arranged for the wounded to return home, and informed families of the loss of a loved one. He quartered with officers in tents and houses, and was in close contact with other soldiers, many of whom he knew because of his medical practice.

Although a non-combatant, Newton was part of several significant military campaigns in West Virginia and Virginia. Following the Battle of Cloyd's Mountain in May 1864, Confederates captured Newton and other medical staff, who were then asked to operate on wounded Confederate General Albert Gallatin Jenkins. The operation, amputation of the left arm, was successful, but Jenkins died after an attendant accidentally knocked loose the ligature on a main artery. Thereafter, Newton and the other Union surgeons were sent to Libby Prison in Richmond. After three difficult days at Libby, the surgeons were released. Newton reported ill health due to the imprisonment, but he returned to active duty in July. By that time, the 91st was part of Union General Philip Sheridan's summer campaign in the Shenandoah Valley. Following the Second Battle of Kernstown, Newton and others were dismissed from military service for allegedly straggling behind after the battle. Newton was quickly reinstated following confirmed reports that he had stayed behind in a safe location to avoid capture. Thereafter, Newton managed a large field hospital to care for the many wounded following the Battle of Opequan (Third Battle of Winchester) and the Battle of Cedar Creek.

By 1865, Newton prepared to return to Ohio as a farmer. On August 9, 1865, he mustered out of the Union Army after three years and four months of service. Instead of becoming a farmer, Newton moved to Gallipolis, opened a medical practice, and served as postmaster from 1867-1875. In 1880, Newton secured an invalid pension. He cited that his capture and brief imprisonment after the Battle of Cloyd's Mountain in 1864 led to his poor health. In mid-November 1882 Newton fell ill from stomach pains. In addition to liver damage, he suffered from ulcers and other internal ailments caused by his wartime service. Newton died on Saturday, November 18, 1882, just a few months shy of his sixtieth birthday. He was buried in the Pine Street Cemetery in Gallipolis.

Scope and Content

This collection contains the papers of William S. Newton, documenting the American Civil War experiences of an Ohio surgeon in West Virginia and Virginia from 1862 to 1865. Arranged in four series, the collection includes Civil War correspondence, transcripts of the correspondence, official documents, and other family materials related to William S. Newton.

The bulk of the collection, which is the first series, consists of nearly 170 letters from Newton to his wife and children. His letters document the boredom of camp life, details of battles and skirmishes, and observations on human behavior. Newton's detailed letters cover his living quarters, the extent of southern sentiment in occupied spaces during and after the war, transportation and communication, and the comfort of a good meal. Newton reported on the destruction of the landscape, which had been stripped of anything valuable, including the wooden boards from outhouses. Noteworthy is his description of the role of African Americans in society, both as freed slaves and camp assistants. Newton makes some mention of the politics of the period, especially related to Ohio politics. He provides wartime descriptions of towns such as Charleston, Gallipolis, Fayetteville, Lewisburg, Point Pleasant, and Winchester.

Newton's letters express a deep interest in family affairs. In fact, two of his children, Ned and Mott, visited him in camp. During the day, while he attended to the sick and wounded, his children would fish in nearby rivers and streams for their evening meal. His letters advised on family matters such as buying and selling property back in Ohio, naming his newborn child, urging his teenage son to live an upstanding life through better penmanship, prescribing medicines to remedy illnesses in the family, and preparing a new farm for his return home. His letters convey a deep sense of loneliness, especially for his wife. Several letters include discussion of the challenges of teenage son Ned, who exhibits behavior issues. Newton pens a few letters directly to Ned to reprimand him. Newton also refers to other family and friends including six of his eight siblings, Stephen, John, Oren, Lucy, Mary Frances, and Douglas.

Newton reports on his work as a surgeon. He managed several hospitals (both in seized buildings and in the field), tended to patients, ordered supplies, arranged for the wounded to return home, and informed families of the loss of a loved one. Newton's letters mention taking care of soldiers whom he knew personally from his medical practice. Although a non-combatant, Newton experienced frequent skirmishes with Confederate raiders and was part of several significant military campaigns. His letters describe significant battles in West Virginia and Virginia, most notably the Second Battle of Kernstown, the Battle of Opequan (Third Battle of Winchester), and the Battle of Cedar Creek. Of note, Newton's October 8, 1867, letter to Ohio Adjutant General Benjamin R. Cowen documents his most harrowing moments during the Civil War—Newton's capture by Confederates following the Battle of Cloyd's Mountain in May 1864, his role in operating on wounded Confederate General Albert Gallatin Jenkins, and his brief imprisonment and release from Libby Prison later that month. Other letters describe his working relationships with officers in the 91st Ohio Volunteer Infantry,

especially assistant surgeon John B. Warwick and Colonel Benjamin F. Coates. In fact, Newton purchased a farm from Coates in April 1864.

The second series includes a few letters from other Newton family members written during the Civil War. A third series includes official documents such as pension files and Newton's appointment as postmaster in Gallipolis after the war. Finally, transcripts of the letters from Newton to his wife and children make up the final series.

Keywords

Civil War

Medicine, Military -- History

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

Rights Statement for Archival Description

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Arrangement

The collection is arranged by material type, then chronologically.

Description of Subordinate Components

Series I. William S. Newton Correspondence

Unit Date 1862-1879

Unit Date Apr - Dec 1862

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 1 (folder)

Unit Date Jan - May 1863

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 2 (folder)

Unit Date Jun - Sep 1863

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 3 (folder)

Unit Date Oct - Dec 1863

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 4 (folder)

Unit Date Jan - Apr 1864

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 5 (folder)

Unit Date Jul - Aug 1864

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 6 (folder)

Unit Date Sep - Nov 1864

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 7 (folder)

Unit Date Jan - Jul 1865

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 8 (folder)

Unit Date 1867

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 9 (folder)

Unit Date 1879
box-folder 1 (box)
Container 10 (folder)

Series II. Newton Family Correspondence

Unit Date 1863-1865, n.d.
Unit Date 1863-1865, n.d.
box-folder 1 (box)
Container 11 (folder)

Series III. Official Documents

Unit Date 1867-1871, n.d.

William S. Newton pension file

Unit Date n.d.
box-folder 1 (box)
Container 12 (folder)
Extent [photocopy]

Solomon Hayward pension affidavit

Unit Date 1882
box-folder 1 (box)
Container 13 (folder)

William S. Newton postmaster appointments

Unit Date 1867, 1871
box-folder 1 (box)
Container 14 (folder)

Series IV. Transcripts

Unit Date n.d.

Transcripts (1862-1863 letters)

Unit Date n.d.
box-folder 1 (box)
Container 15 (folder)

Transcripts (1864-1867 letters)

Unit Date n.d.
box-folder 1 (box)
Container 16 (folder)