

John B. Strange letterMS.0153

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1840 June 23

Title Statement

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Descriptive Summary

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Unit ID

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Unit Date

1840 June 23

Language

English

Creator

Strange, John B. (John Bowie), 1823-1862

Extent

1 items

Physical Location

Manuscripts stacks

Repository

Virginia Military Institute Archives

Administrative Information

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Preferred Citation

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Biographical / Historical

John Bowie Strange was born in 1823 in Fluvanna County, Virginia to Gideon Alloway Strange and Harriet J. Magruder. When VMI opened its doors to cadets on November 11, 1839, Strange was one of the small group who enrolled that first day. He had the additional distinction of serving as the first cadet sentinel assigned to guard duty, replacing the militia guard that had previously been charged with guarding the stores held in the Lexington Arsenal.

Following his graduation on July 4, 1842, Strange pursued a career in education, serving as a teacher, as Principal of Norfolk (Virginia) Academy, and as Superintendent of the Albemarle (Virginia) Military Academy. Strange married Agnes Gaines in the early 1850s and the couple had four children: Agnes, Henry (VMI Class of 1873), Willoughby, and James (died in infancy).

During the Civil War, Strange served as Colonel of the 19th Virginia Infantry Regiment. He was killed at the Battle of South Mountain (Maryland) on September 14, 1862 and is buried at Maplewood Cemetery in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Scope and Contents

Strange's letter to his sister Anne M. Strange was written just a few months after the Institute's opening day, and is one of the oldest personal cadet letters still in existence. Strange mentions several aspects of cadet life that were common during the pre-Civil War era, including that: Final examinations were given orally rather than as written tests, presided over by faculty and the VMI Board of Visitors, and open to the public Summer furlough was not automatic, and many cadets stayed at the Institute throughout the year, going into a summer encampment on the Parade Ground from late June until the beginning of the next academic session Obtaining extra clothing and other goods from home was a serious matter to most cadets

Keywords

Virginia Military Institute—Cadet life—1840-1849

Virginia Military Institute—Class of 1842

Virginia Military Institute—History—19th century

Virginia Military Institute—Buildings, structures, etc.

Virginia Military Institute—Curricula

Correspondence

Smith, Francis H. (Francis Henney), 1812-1890

Description of Subordinate Components

Letter to Anne M. Strange

Unit ID /repositories/3/archival_objects/5272

Unit Date 1840 June 23

Language English

Scope and Contents

Written from VMI, Lexington, Virginia. Letter regards cadet life.

Keywords

Virginia Military Institute—Buildings, structures, etc.

Virginia Military Institute—Cadet life—1840-1849

Virginia Military Institute—Class of 1842

Virginia Military Institute—Curricula

Virginia Military Institute—Academics—History—19th century

Correspondence

Smith, Francis H. (Francis Henney), 1812-1890

Transcription

Virginia Military Institute June 26, 1840

Well Sister Anne I have passed my examination and as you all are anxious to hear the result of the same, I have concluded to write to you. I received your letter the other day, but as you predicted I had not time to answer it before my examination which ended on Saturday last. There were a great many people at the examination, as a public invitation was given through the papers which I have not doubt you saw, but notwithstanding we nearly all passed. Two were sent off, the names of whom I think it best not to mention. Six were turned back to go over the same course next year, as for me I passed fifth, i.e. my general standing including Mathematics, French and conduct. I expected to pass higher, but at the examination I got a very hard principle to demonstrate and for that cause I suppose the others got the start of me: but if I can always pass as well, I need not grumble.

The Board of Visitors have selected the other cadets. I believe they are required to repair here by the twentieth of next month, as we expect the camps about that time, and if we are disappointed in getting them, I know not where they will take up their lodgings as there is not room for them here, but there will be by next September as they are building a house across from the Institute for the Steward, who now occupies four rooms. The Institute is improving rapidly. The Principal Professor has his house adjoining it [words missing].

Adjutant intends having his put up on the [words missing] to the Principal's this summer and then the old [word missing] will make quite a display.

About half of the Cadets are going home this summer I believe, and stay until the fifteenth of July, then I believe the remaining half have the same privilege, that is when they return. Two of my roommates, Messrs. Winn & Pendleton, intend leaving on Friday next if they can get off, they have both obtained permission.

Anne permit me to ask you to make me those drawers, socks & c. which I wrote to you about at least a month since. I was astonished Sister Anne that you did not attend to my letter. I thought that you knew that I have no opportunity of having them made here, so I will be glad if you will make me four pr. of drawers, about half doz. pr. of cotton socks, and also some sewing appurtenances as this is the only opportunity I expect you will have before next summer. You can get Brother to fix them up in a small bundle and send it to Capt. Winn's by one of the little boys. I have no doubt but that you are very busy making the Negroes summer clothes but if you do not send me the things I request, you will disappoint me very much. I am afraid you pay too much attention to your numerous beaux to think of much else, but I dare say it is a good plan after all, if you can succeed. And as for Hatty, I suppose she has become quite the Bell, if she visits much, which I suppose [she does] every chance she can get. I am not astonished [missing] Brother not going with you all to Miss [missing] wedding, that he might not like to [illegible] in such circumstances. I judge that he had rather more important business to attend to at the house, as this is a very busy season of the year with farmers, and the latter may be the only reason for his not going.

I have not received a letter from Sister lately. I am sorry to hear that she is disappointed in making you all a visit this summer. I reckon she would like very much to see O. Hill once and a while. Have you heard from Uncle Billy lately? I would be glad to hear from him and his family, whether he intends taking up his abode in Missouri or not.

I suppose the Dr. is still living with you all. You did not mention him in your letter. I wonder he did not go with you all to the [B___] but I reckon he was most too lazy.

I have concluded not to come home until next summer, as I do not expect I could get off now if I wished, as the Guard duty would be too hard on the Corporals. I shall have to go on Guard every third night after Messr. Winn & Pendleton leave and if I were to leave the remaining two would have to go on every other night, which would be very hard to sit up half the night so often these short nights. I send with this letter a copy of the Regulations as it is your request. I wish you had sent me a copy of my circular as I asked you. I hope however [you will send] a copy of it yet. I have never heard from [missing] them yet. I have gotten only one letter from Uncle since I have been here. I wonder he does not [write] to me oftener.

I believe that I have written all that I can think of at present, and perhaps more than will be interesting; therefore I must conclude. Give my [best] love to all and believe me your affectionate Brother, J. B. Strange.

P. S. I wish you not to mention to any one that any have been sent off or turned back. Our debating society is improving very fast, and our Library is increasing very fast. The Board of Visitors made us a present of five dollars each for the purpose of buying books. I'll be glad if you make my drawers rather tighter than [are now], or fix them in such a manner that I can tighten them for we have to wear our pants very tight and if the drawers are not as likewise I can't get the pants on.

N. B. Tell Brother I think it would be best if [missing] send me two or three pr of shoes if can [missing] good ones from Palmyra, for this is [missing] the dearest place I ever saw [missing] have to pay [missing] dollars for very common shoes. No. 6 fits me. J. B. S. You may think that we are required to wear shoes of a

peculiar kind, but if they are tolerable high quartered that is all that is necessary.

Note below the address: This letter was misplaced and consequently it has never been sent to the person to whom it was directed.