

# Weisiger, Oscar F., Civil War Letter

Oscar F. Weisiger Civil War letter

1865 May 25

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## Descriptive Summary

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1865 May 25

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English

**Creator**

Weisiger, Oscar F., 1820-1886

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## Administrative Information

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## Preferred Citation

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## Biographical / Historical

Oscar F. Weisiger (1820-1886) was a businessman in Richmond, Virginia. During the Civil War he was a Confederate officer. On January 20, 1863 he was serving as a Captain, Assistant Quartermaster (superintendent of clothing depot in Richmond).

## Scope and Contents

This collection consists of one letter (dated May 25, 1865) from Oscar F. Weisiger to Q. M. Ward, a business partner in Big Lick (now Roanoke), Virginia. This detailed letter provides an eyewitness account of the last days of the Civil War in Richmond, Virginia, the capital of the Confederacy. The letter describes: Evacuation of the city Extensive fire Occupation of the city by federal troops and the troops' treatment of former slaves Problems Weisiger faces in attempting to reestablish his mercantile business Discussion of Weisiger's relationship with northern creditors.

## Keywords

Correspondence

United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Home life

Virginia—History—Civil War, 1861-1865

Richmond (Va.)—History—Civil War, 1861-1865

## Description of Subordinate Components

### Letter to Q. M. Ward

**Unit ID** /repositories/3/archival\_objects/5465

**Unit Date** 1865 May 25

**Language** English

### Scope and Contents

Written from Richmond, Virginia. Letter provides an eyewitness account of the last days of the Civil War in Richmond, Virginia.

### Keywords

Correspondence

Richmond (Va.)—History—Civil War, 1861-1865

United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Home life

Virginia—History—Civil War, 1861-1865

### Transcription

Richmond May 29th, 1865

Dear Ward, It was with much pleasure that I received your letter of the 16th inst. for I have longed wished to hear from you, and should have written if there had been any way of sending a letter.

The night of the 2d ultimo will be memorable to all who were residents of this city. The evacuation was not thought of even by the President who was attending service at St. Paul's. At 12 o'clock a dispatch was received from Genl. Lee and handed to the President, while in church, to the effect that his- Genl. Lee's - line, had been pierced in two places and that unless he could reinstate them, it would be necessary to evacuate the city that night. It was then reported throughout the city. Hearing these reports, I started down to the office and on my way saw Genl. Ewell who informed me that the report was true and that Richmond would be evacuated that night at 12 o'clock.

I hurried down to the office and went to work with what force I could collect to box up and ship off the goods on hand. I worked all night but to little purpose, for what goods were sent to the Danville depot

remained there until Monday morning and were either consumed by the fire or stolen. Such a scene I never saw before and hope never to see again. The most perfect confusion and disorder reigned. The troops from the North side of James River were passing from 12 o'clock Sunday night until 7 o'clock Monday morning, the last had scarcely crossed the bridge before the Federal troops entered the City. I cleared my house of every article, what I could not distribute to the troops while passing, I distributed to the citizens at large. It is fortunate that I did so for in a few hours the building was consumed by fire. The order as I understand it was to fire the Warehouse which was done early Monday morning and from that hour until late in the evening the fire raged with great fury. The explosion of the Powder Magazine was most fearful, and by it, I regret to say that some 10 or 12 paupers lost their lives.

I cannot begin to describe to you the terrors of that day. It can only be likened to my conception of the Judgement Day. At no time during the war did the fiercest artillery duel equal in bursting of shell the firing of the Laboratory. Every second there was a discharge of shell from early morn to late in the evening to the great danger of the lives of all who lived in the direction of the building. Fortunately no one was injured by the explosion of shell to my knowledge. I scarcely know how to describe to you the extent of the fire so that you will understand it. However I will do the best I can.

The whole business part of the City from 9 to 15th St. is in ashes. The houses on both sides of Cary St. from 9 to 15th St. and all of the houses on the cross streets to the river including Warwicks Mill and all of the houses around the Basin, the Petersburg depot and all the houses under Gambill's Hill to 5th St. including the state armory, the houses on Main St. from 9th to 15th St. with the exception that on the east side of Main the fire was stopped at Mitchell & Tyler's house, the houses on the west side of Main were destroyed to the Traders Bank which is opposite to Hening's Store. All of the houses between Main & Bank streets and on Bank were destroyed. The fire then extended up Franklin Street on the west side to Dr. Cunningham's and on the east side to 2 houses above Dr. Reid's church, burning the Church and Lecture room. The houses on the south side of Governors St. were saved, but those on the north side were burned. All of the bridges were destroyed. It will be necessary for you to see the ruins to fully understand the extent of this fire.

The result has been just what I predicted three years ago, that when Richmond was given up it would be the death blow to the Confederacy. did not think however that it would follow so soon. Since the occupation of the City by the Federal Troops the most perfect order has prevailed. They have no respect for the Negro, and make them toe the mark in every respect. The Negro is nothing like so free as before, except in name. They are kept in very strict discipline, not allowed to stand about the streets, and all made to work.

Danacott had returned and is living out with, and managing for his cousin Miss Sheppherd. He is a strange fellow, why he does not marry the woman I cannot divine. I have no doubt they have been engaged to be married for 15 years. He has now left his own place and taken the management of her affairs. His health is good. I have not heard from Clarkson since the evacuation. I fear with you that he is in a bad fix.

You are mistaken in supposing that Kent Paine & Co. and others are worth more than they were before the war. I understand that they will not be able to pay their debts, and this is the case with few exceptions of nearly all of the merchants in the city. Merchants have lost more than any other class by the fire.

In relation to our business affairs, I do not agree with you that we have "fallen to rise no more." In relation to our Northern indebtedness I think it can be settled for 20 or 25 % and I would like very much to see you and have a talk with you on this subject. I think if we can raise 10 or 12,000 dollars, we can pay our whole debt and the sooner some arrangement is made the better. I have been advised to this course by merchants who have recently returned from the North and know the feeling of the merchants there. If this can be done it will be certainly best for both of us.

I do not know what your views of business are for the future, whether you will embark in the Mercantile business again or not, but as for myself I must get to doing something as soon as prudent to do so. I feel like going to work with renewed effort and regain what is lost. In the first place I would like to be free from our old debts and then I shall be ready for any business that might offer. I hope to see or hear from you soon. I would come up to see you, but I have not the money to spare at present. I was only left with six dollars of available funds, though since the evacuation I have not been idle. I have been buying a few goods at auction and reselling, and have made and have made a few dollars which has enabled me to get along without drawing rations from the Northern Government, though very many of our best citizens have had to do so, and many who were able before the evacuation. As to Mr. Warwick, I do not think he has ever drawn rations- if so I have never heard of it.

I have had some few calls from our Northern Creditors. Mr. Merchant was in, but said nothing about business, nor did I to him. He only remained two days. A gentleman of the house of O. R. Tweedy & Co. of New York called on me. He had in his possession a letter written by you in May 1861, which was very bitter. He stated that the house was very much hurt at receiving such a letter (he is not a partner). I regret myself the writing of the letter to that house for the reason that I believe the Members of that concern to be conservative and had been very kind to us. A few days since, a gentleman called on me from Boston who had with him the a/c [account] of W. Lovejoy & Co. I told him the [word eligible] of affairs as well as I

could, what losses were sustained, etc. He seemed to sympathize with us as well as others in the same condition and hoped that all would be well. So far as I have seen the disposition [of] all Northern Creditors is kind. I enclose you a letter received from a concern in Hartford, Ct. If you can do so, you will come down at an early day- if not please write me and give me your views. I think the sooner we take some step to arranging our debts the better.

My family are all well and join in kind regards to Mrs. Ward & yourself. Yours truly, O. F. Weisiger