

A Guide to the Charles H. Thurston Correspondence

Charles H. Thurston Correspondence 1850-1986
1850-1986

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Descriptive Summary

Collection Number

10706

Language

English

Collector

Elizabeth Wooldridge Korner, Ann Wooldridge Skinner, William Lawrence Wooldridge, and Thomas Clayton Wooldridge

Extent

ca. 139 items

Repository

University of Virginia. Library. Special Collections Dept.

Alderman Library
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia 22903
USA

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection is open to research.

Use Restrictions

See the [University of Virginia Library's use policy](#).

Acquisition Information

This collection was a gift to the Library on November 26, 1986, from Mrs. Elizabeth Wooldridge Korner, Germantown, Maryland; Mrs. Ann Wooldridge Skinner, Marietta, Georgia; Mr. William Lawrence Wooldridge, Westport, Kentucky; and Mr. Thomas Clayton Wooldridge, Los Angeles, California. It was given in memory of William Perry Wooldridge and Lawrence Johnson Wooldridge, the father and grandfather of the donors.

Funding Note

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Preferred Citation

Charles H. Thurston Correspondence, Accession 10706, Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library

Scope and Content

This collection contains ca. 139 items, 1850-1863, 1882 & 1986 (one Hollinger box, 0.5 shelf feet), chiefly letters written by Charles H. Thurston, a Confederate soldier in Company H, Seventh Louisiana Volunteers("Crescent Rifles"), [William Henry Talbot] Walker's Brigade, [Jubal P.] Early's Division, [Thomas J. "Stonewall"] Jackson's Corps, the Army of Northern Virginia. Thurston was a great-grandson of Anne Scott Jefferson (a sister of Thomas Jefferson) who married Hastings Marks.

Charles Thurston was born on October 21, 1840, in Evansville, Indiana, the son of Thomas Gates Thurston(1800-1853) and Diana Moore Gwathmey(1811-1893). Four years after his birth the family moved to his mother's birthplace, Louisville, Kentucky; at one point they settled in Sabine County, Texas, where his father owned a salt factory. Thurston was employed as a pilot on a houseboat, *Ida*, on the Tensas River from 1857 to 1858; during 1858 to 1861 he worked as a shipping clerk in Trinity, Louisiana, and became head clerk at the Mansion House Hotel in Natchez, Mississippi.

He joined the Louisiana Crescent Rifles in New Orleans during April, 1861. Two months later he enlisted as a private in the Confederate Army at Camp Moore, Louisiana, and was assigned to the Seventh Louisiana. He participated in several battles and was briefly held by Union forces after the battle of Winchester(May 25, 1862) but apparently escaped or was exchanged. In July, 1862, he was declared unfit for duty and ordered to the rear. Thurston died on July 22, 1862, aged twenty-one, from injuries suffered during a train derailment near Danville Station while traveling from Richmond to Lynchburg, Virginia, and was buried on the Daniel Stewart Farm in Farmville. In an 1862 clothing and pay account inventory Thurston was described as having "gray eyes, brown hair, dark complexion" and being five feet eight inches in height.

Thurston's war letters, 1861-1862 (ca. twenty-six items), are usually accompanied by electrostatic typescripts. In them he describes camp life, marching, picket duty, his desire for an officer's commission, and his participation in the battle of First Bull Run(July 26, 1861). Other battles discussed include: the Santa Rosa Island Raid (October 16, 1861); the attempt by the Confederate ironclad ram *Manassas* to break the Federal blockade at Head of Pass on the Mississippi River, and the defeat of the Sixth New York(Zouaves) commanded William Wilson(October 16, 1861); Ball's Bluff(October 28, 1861); Fort Donelson(February 25, 1862); and Shiloh (April 10, 1862). Also present are letters containing descriptions and impressions of various towns and Confederate army camps: Huntsville, Alabama(June 17, 1861); Bristol and Grand Junction,

Tennessee(June 17, 1861); Lynchburg (June 17 & August 8, 1861); Camp Moore(June 3, 1861); Camp Pickens, Manassas Junction, Virginia(June 24, 1861); Camp Bienville, Centreville, Virginia(September 15, 1861); Camp Reserve(October 28, 1861); Camp Florida, Centreville(November 18-19 & December 15, 1861); and Camp Carondelet, Manassas(December 26, 1861). The Washington Artillery of New Orleans, the Sixth, Eighth, and Ninth Regiments of Louisiana Infantry and [Chatham R.] Wheat's Louisiana Battalion("Tigers") are also mentioned.

The letters also discuss other war-related events such as: railroad transportation of Confederate troops (June 17, 1861); speculation on whether Kentucky would remain in the Union (September 15, 1861); the shelling of Arlington Heights and General George B. McClellan's camp (September 22 & 28, 1861); the sighting of a Union observation balloon (October 20-21, 1861); praise of Confederate ironclads (October 21, 1861); the Trent Affair (November 8, 1861); life in winter quarters in "Growler's Den" and Camp Carondelet (December 15, 1861); and the evacuation of Nashville, Tennessee(February 25, 1862).

Of special interest is Thurston's recounting of his removal of a toe from a dead Union soldier to send home (November 18-19, 1861) and the execution of two members of the Louisiana Tigers by a firing squad of twenty-four men for threatening two officers of the Seventh Louisiana(December 15, 1861).

Prominent contemporaries mentioned in the correspondence include Pierre G. T. Beauregard, Braxton Bragg, George Bibb Crittenden, Jefferson Davis, Albert Sidney Johnston, Robert E. Lee, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Overton Moore, Richard "Dick" Taylor, David Emanuel Twiggs, Williams Henry Talbot Walker, and Chatham R. Wheat. In addition, there is correspondence with various Confederate officers and citizens: A. J. Ashford(Confederate army surgeon); A. Henning(2nd lieutenant, New Orleans Hansa? Guards); James J. Irby, who is characterized as "the wealthiest citizen in Lynchburg" (August 8, 1861); and, W. R. Harper(captain, Company H, Seventh Louisiana).

A typescript copy of entries from Thurston's "special pocket notebook" (1857 & 1861-1862) is with this collection and contains diary entries, poetry, notes on activities, comrades killed or wounded, army camps, and battles associated with his regiment. Several documents pertaining to the location of Thurston's grave are among these papers including a February 14, 1863 explanatory letter from a M. Rennick to Thomas G. Thurston regarding his brother's death.

Charles Thurston's antebellum papers, 1850-1860, are comprised of correspondence with his mother, Diana Thurston, his brother [and brother-in-law?] Thomas G. Thurston and John R. Wooldridge, his sister Mary Thurston, and various acquaintances. Most were written by Thurston during his sojourns in Trinity, Louisiana(1859-1860), and Natchez, Mississippi(1860-1861) and discuss a drought and an epidemic; temperatures of 106 degrees Fahrenheit in Natchez and 96 degrees in Evansville, Indiana (June 28, 1856); yellow fever in New Orleans(August 10, 1860); the activities of a black slave, Ann, who is allowed to visit her husband in August, 1860; the cleaning and fixing of Thurston's teeth (May 22, 1860); having a daguerreotype made of himself (June 25, 1859); and general comments about his life, ship arrivals and departures, and family matters.

Miscellaneous materials include receipts, poetry by Diana Thurston, a register, an 1850 autobiography, and an electrostatic typescript of Thurston's account of his employment on the Ida with lists of plantations, farms, and overseers on the Macon Bayou and Tensas River, two 1882 letters from D. Wooldridge, Chismville, Arkansas, to her grandmother (Diana Thurston) describing an outbreak of typhoid fever and the closure of schools due to the lack of teachers; and a "12 Generation Pedigree Chart" relating to members of the Wooldridge, Gwathmey, Jefferson, Wilson, Clark and associated families. Items are single-folded and arranged chronologically.