

# A Guide to the George Williams Civil War Letters

George Williams Civil War Letters 1863-1865  
1863-1865

---

A Collection in the Special Collections Department 11003-d, -e, -f and -g  
Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library  
1997

## History

**Processed by:** Special Collections Department Staff  
**Date Completed:** 1997  
**Encoded by:** Elizabeth Slomba

## Title Statement

A Guide to the George Williams Civil War Letters

**Subtitle:** Williams, George.

**Collection:** 11003-d

**Author:** Processed by Special Collections Dept. staff; machine-readable finding aid created by Elizabeth Slomba

**Sponsor:** Funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

## Publication Statement

**File size:** 15 Kilobytes

**Date:** © 1997 By the Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia. All rights reserved.

**Publisher:** University of Virginia Library

[Conditions of Use](#)

Funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

## Profile Description

**Creation:** Machine-readable finding aid derived from WordPerfect. [Date of source: 1997.]

**Language Usage:** Description is in English.

## Revision Description

**Feb 18, 2004** PUBLIC "-//University of Virginia::Library::Special Collections Dept.//TEXT (US::ViU::01032::George Williams Civil War Letters)//EN" "ViU01032.sgm" converted from EAD 1.0 to 2002 by v1to02.xsl (sy2003-10-15).

**Feb 27, 2004** converted to conform to eadVIVA.dtd by vivastrict.xsl

## Descriptive Summary

**Collection Number**

11003-d, -e, -f and -g

**Language**

English

**Extent**

31 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**

The Williams letters were purchased on May 26, April 26 and November 10, 1992.

**Funding Note**

Funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities

**Preferred Citation**

George Williams Civil War Letters, Accession 11003-d, Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library

## Scope and Content

These four collection consists of a total of 31 items (including ten letters) of George Williams, a Civil War soldier from Monroeville, Huron County, Ohio, to his sister, 1863 & 1865. Williams was a musician in Company B of the 123rd Ohio Regiment and served in Virginia and Maryland. These letters and their typescripts (including multiple photocopies of photographs of Williams in uniform) have been interfiled chronologically with previous #11003 accessions. All letters, with the exception of January 1, 1865, are accompanied either by an envelope, a photocopy of a Williams photograph, or both.

The majority of these Williams letters were written during 1863 and addressed to his sister, Lill (Lillias Williams) while stationed in Virginia (Martinsburg, New Market Heights, Petersburg, and Winchester) and Sharpsburg and Annapolis, Maryland. Williams discusses personal, family, and war news. Members of his and other regiments such as the 55th New Jersey Infantry, the 18th Connecticut, and the 34th Massachusetts Infantry as well as various generals and prominent civilians, are mentioned by name: Benjamin F. Butler [1818-1893]; Ulysses S. Grant [1822-1885]; Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson [1824-1863]; Abraham Lincoln [1809-1865]; William Starke Rosecrans [1819-1898]; Philip H. Sheridan [1831-1888]; and Edwin M. Stanton [1814-1869].

On 3 June 1863, Williams writes to his sister from Winchester, Virginia, with camp news including fact that George Frith was not promoted (see letter of 26 July 1863) but Edward L. Husted was promoted to rank of second lieutenant and quartermaster. Williams describes the accidental death by a gunshot wound to the head of Private Green [Crary Green, 31 May 1863] of Company C, due to discharge of a rifle being cleaned by a member of Company E: "It was a sad affair. The boy that shot him feels very bad about it."

Two days later, 5 June 1863, he informs "Dear Friends" of return of members ("paroled boys") of the regiment captured at the battle of Winchester and tells of an incompetent doctor who is petitioned by the men to resign or else: "I guess he will skedaddle if he dont he will get what he dont want." Williams mentions General Ulysses S. Grant and the impending success of his army [the Vicksburg siege] and the daily arrival of rebel deserters tired of the war and discouraged by the death of Confederate General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson.

On 26 July 1863, while at Sharpsburg, Maryland, Williams speaks well of the memory of a recently-deceased "General Frith" (First Sergeant George J. Frith died as the result of wounds received at the battle of Winchester on June 20, 1863) and describes events and aftermath of the battle of Winchester (Second Winchester, June 13-15, 1863) including the demoralization of the men and lack of discipline (most of the regiment was surrendered to the Confederates). However, nineteen rebel deserters were captured, took oaths of allegiance and were sent to Baltimore. The stationery bears a color figure of a woman holding an American flag captioned "One Flag For The Whole County."

On 14 August 1863, while at Martinsburg, Virginia [now West Virginia] he characterizes its residents as

destitute but Union troops "are living on the top shelf" and sampling an abundance of foods. Williams also notes that "it will soon be a year that I have been working for Uncle Samuel and the happiest year I ever spent take all things in consideration"; the troops have plenty of reading materials, including Harper's Weekly, Frank Leslie's, daily newspapers from Baltimore, and dime novels--fifty are read in camp every day.

Williams comments on distant yet relevant events on 29 September 1863--the XI and XII Army Corps (and the 55th New Jersey Infantry) have passed through Martinsburg by train to reinforce General William Starke Rosecrans [who had retreated to Chattanooga, Tennessee, after his defeat at the battle of Chickamauga]. Most of the 123rd Ohio, including all of Company B except Williams and Joe [Joseph Sallabank], are guarding a bridge forty miles from Martinsburg, but he and Joe "have got two drums and fifes so we make considerable noise."

Williams continued to enjoy himself in Martinsburg as evidenced by his letter to his sister of 12 November 1863. He attends church services with a "Virginia lady" named Florella, has lodgings with a local family, and claims Martinsburg residents think the world of the Union soldiers and are "the finest people" he has ever met. In fact, life is so good in the town that it does not seem like he is in the army, and the food is so plentiful that if she were to see him eat "it would make your eyes water." The troops are well-dressed with paper collars and sutler shirts and musicians wear stripes on their pants; he claims that the 18th Connecticut Infantry is known as "the Mackerels."

At the beginning of 1865 (1 January) he sends New Year's greetings to his sister from Petersburg, Virginia. His regiment is assigned to the Army of the James [1st Brigade, 1st Division, Army of West Virginia attached to XXIV Army Corps] and has been building winter quarters; there is some discussion of family news but he complains: "It is so cold I can't hardly write." By 11 January he is at New Market Heights and sends a description of the construction of camp quarters. There was "great excitement" due orders which offered thirty-day furloughs for one man in ten but this news was replaced with gloom following another order revoking it. General Benjamin F. Butler has been removed from command and it is rumored that he will be replaced as commander of the Army of the James by General Philip H. Sheridan. Meanwhile, Williams complains about delays in arrival of the company's band instruments and praises the band of the 34th Massachusetts Infantry.

His letter of 19 March 1865, written at Camp Holly, Virginia, reports that the regiment is assigned to the XXIV Army Corps, 1st Independent Division, (Army of the James) and its corps badge is a white heart. The corps was reviewed [17 March] by General Grant ("not a very good looking man as some others but that noble countenance denoted a man of good Principle and a perfect gentleman"), Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton ("a Glasseyed old fellow not very prepossessing") and various unnamed generals and ladies ("or they called them so"). Williams continues with news of camp activities, dress parades, an unaccustomed food shortage and hunger which is relieved by the issuing of potatoes and onions, and a lecture by a member of the U. S. Christian Commission.

From Annapolis, Maryland, on 17 April 1865, William describes his capture on 6 April at the battle of High Bridge, Virginia [near Farmville and the Appomattox River], the wounding of Captain [John F.] Randolph, and the regiment's subsequent release and return to Union lines on the 9th after Lee's surrender at Appomattox (during his captivity the rebels took all of Williams' private property and his fife). He mourns the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln [1809-1865] and adds that the regiment is to report to Camp Chase, Ohio, where he expects it will be mustered out.