

A Guide to the James and John Booker Collection

James and John Booker Collection 1861-1864
1861-1864

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Descriptive Summary

Collection Number

11237

Language

English

Extent

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Repository

University of Virginia. Library. Special Collections Dept.

Alderman Library
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia 22903
USA

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

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

Acquisition Information

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Other Civil War Sites on the World Wide Web

Index of Civil War Information on the Web <http://www.cwc.lsu.edu/civlink.htm>

Civil War Miscellany <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/6806/>

Pickett's Division <http://home.ptd.net/~jeff1863/pickett.html>

War Links <http://members.aol.com/histcw/civil.html/>

Biographical/Historical Information

James Booker and John Booker

The twins, John and James, were born to John Booker (1797-1859) and Nancy Blair Reynolds Booker (1796-1859) on October 10, 1840. Nancy and John had been married since November 15, 1824 and had four other children besides the twins: Mary Ann Booker Sparks (1825-1872), Armistead M. Booker (1827-1838), Caroline Booker (1833-1859) and William Booker (1836-1859).

Nancy also had another child --Margaret Benson Reynolds (1815-1867) --from a previous marriage to William Reynolds (March 29, 1814) (Austin).

In the first three months of 1859, typhoid fever struck the Booker family, killing Nancy, John Sr., Caroline and William. James and John were 19 years old. For the next two years, the twins stayed with relatives, including Aunt Kitty and Uncle John Blair, who later moved to Texas in 1860 (James Booker, September 6, 1861).

At the age of 21, James and John enlisted in the Confederate Army, the 38th Regiment of Virginia, on May 24, 1861 in Whitmell, Virginia, in Company D, 38th Virginia Regiment, Infantry (also known as "the Whitmell Guards"). For more information about the regiment see 38th Virginia Infantry. The Booker brothers remained in service throughout the war, and were both promoted to Sergeant sometime before April, 1864 (Gregory, 82).

In March of 1862, James was hospitalized in Richmond with chronic diarrhea, but returned to his company soon after. Both brothers were severely wounded at the Battle of Drewry's Bluff near Petersburg, Virginia, on May 16, 1864 and transferred to Chimborazo Hospital. John received a chest wound and James was wounded in the right thigh. Only James, however, would survive. John died of his wound on August 26, 1864.

After the war, James returned to Pittsylvania County and on October 31, 1867, he married Martha Ann Fulton (?-1923) (nicknamed "Pat") of Pittsylvania County, on October 31, 1867. She was one of the "sweethearts" mentioned in his letters. James and Pat Booker had seven children. They died within two months of each other in 1923. A typed page listing their children and mentioning her relatives can be found with the copies of the typescripts of the brothers' letters.

Chloe Unity Blair

Chloe Unity Blair (1833-1875) was born to Chloe Coleman Blair (1801-1854) and Drury Blair (1801-1864). Her father was Nancy Booker's younger brother, making James and John her first cousins. Chloe Unity had several brothers and sisters, some of whom James and John mention in their letters: Polly Ann, William, and Drury Addison "Addie" Blair, who briefly served in the 38th Regiment with the Bookers.

Unfortunately, all of Chloe Unity's letters to her Booker cousins were either destroyed or are as yet undiscovered. From their responses, however, we can see that both John and James greatly appreciated her letters. They depended upon her for news of the family and they often asked her to "remember" them to different family members. The Bookers also periodically asked their cousin to have their sister Mary forward certain items such as clothing or James' "soldier likeness" (October 4, 1863). Chloe Unity would send them gifts and provisions as well, prompting James to write, "I am under many obligations to you all for send ing us such a fine box it was a great treat to us," (October 4, 1863). James and John are always polite and solicitous in tone to their cousin, and yet the letters also convey warmth and friendship: having lost their parents and two siblings just before the war, John and James may have been especially close to "cousin Unity," who along with their sister Mary may have served as a kind of surrogate mother.

Indeed, when John married Martha Ann Fulton in October of 1867, he became Chloe's step-son-in-law, since Chloe had married Martha's father William Fulton (1821-18?) just a few months before. It is easy to imagine that the two cousins were pleased by this relationship, as their respective marriages unified and tightened the Booker and Blair families which had suffered so many losses during the war years.

The 38th Virginia Infantry: A Brief History of the Regiment

On May 3, 1861, Governor John Letcher called for the men of Virginia to leave their families and occupations and join the Confederate Army. Soon after, the 38th Virginia Volunteer Infantry Regiment was formed, lead by Colonel Edward Edmonds, Lieutenant Colonel Powhatan Whittle and Major Isaac Carrington. During the course of the war, the 38th was assigned to several different brigades, including Smith's, Early's and Armistead's Brigade. There was also considerable turnover of officers, as some were wounded, killed, or not re-elected.

The 38th consisted of ten companies, most of which were organized in Pittsylvania County, VA. Company D, which the Bookers joined, was organized at Whitmell. Its initial leader was Captain Ralph Herndon.

Engagements and Assignments of the 38th Virginia Infantry

- May 5, 1862: The Battle of Williamsburg: Whittle is wounded.
- May 31, 1862: The Battle of Seven Pines: The 38th suffers a casualty rate of 42%.
- July 1, 1862: The Battle of Malvern Hill: The 38th suffers severely with 11 killed, 72 wounded and 11 missing.

- September 15, 1862: The 38th takes part in capturing Harper's Ferry.
- September 16, 1862: The 38th joins the Battle of Sharpsburg.
- July 3, 1863: The 38th is part of Pickett's Charge at the Battle of Gettysburg; Colonel Edmonds is killed; of the 481 members of the 38th who participated in the battle, "40 were killed on the battlefield (8%); 51 were wounded (10%); and 103 were captured (21%)" (Gregory 43).
- May 10, 1864: The Battle of Chester Station; Colonel Cabell is killed; Lieutenant Colonel Griggs is promoted to Colonel of the 38th.
- May 16, 1864: The Battle of Drewry's Bluff; from the 38th, 23 killed and 77 wounded.
- September 3, 1864: Brigadier General George Steuart assumes command of Armistead's Brigade. Desertions are frequent.
- November 17, 1864: The 38th captures the Union line near Petersburg.
- April 1, 1865: The Battle of Five Forks.
- April 6, 1865: The Battle of Saylor's Creek--the 38th's final battle.
- April 9, 1865: Lee surrenders at Appomattox Court House; the 38th is nearby at "Pleasant Retreat," two miles east of the court house.
- April 13, 1865: The 38th breaks camp and heads home.

Scope and Content Information

Scope and Content

This collection consists of ca. twenty-six items, 1861-1864, chiefly the letters of John Booker (1840-1864) and James Booker (1840-1923) of Pittsylvania County, Virginia, to their cousin, Chloe Unity Blair (1839-1875); electrostatic copies of Bible records for the Booker and Blair families; and electrostatic copies of typed transcripts of the letters. The original bound volume of the transcripts was returned to the donor.

Overview of Themes Discussed in the Letters

The letters of James and John Booker give a sense of what life was like for an ordinary soldier serving in the Confederate army. Of course, the Bookers depict the drama of battle --describing gunfire and cannonades, listing the dead and wounded, and giving thanks for their own escapes from death or imprisonment--but the letters are more concerned with the rhythms of everyday life at camp. The Bookers worry over their health and their comrades'; enjoy the plenty or (more often) lament the lack of food and supplies; report on the interactions between civilians and soldiers; and describe religious revivals held at the camp. As the war goes on, the Bookers begin to articulate with more intensity not only what happens to them, but how they feel about it. Whereas John fumes against the elites (officers, politicians, and the wealthy) for evading their responsibilities and mistreating the common soldier, James grows more fatalistic and religious, trusting that his suffering is God's will.

Preparing for Battle

The members of the 38th Virginia spent much of their time drilling, marching, serving picket duty, and speculating about when and where the next battle would be. Indeed, the Bookers seem to devote more energy to anticipating battles than to describing them (perhaps because they did not want to upset their cousin). They acquired much of the information that fueled their speculations from gossiping with citizens and other soldiers. In a letter from 1861, for instance, James Booker predicts that a "hard battle" will break out soon, basing his prediction on a conversation he had with a soldier whose company is located closer to the front (October 8). Sometimes more immediate experiences led the Bookers to forecast a battle, especially when they could see Union troops or hear cannonades and gunfire nearby. Writing from a rain-soaked outpost near Yorktown, Virginia in 1862, for instance, James reports that the Union forces have been "shooting at our men constantly tho it is very cildom thay hit eny of them" (April 19). He predicts that soon a battle will occur that will decide the war, since he has heard that Yankee prisoners "say that thay have got to whip or die here" (April 19, 1862). But in this prediction, as in others, James was disappointed. As the war dragged on, the Bookers stopped assuming that it would reach a speedy conclusion; indeed, by 1864 John came to the conclusion that the "leaden men" were not really interested in achieving peace (March 1, 1864).

Although the Bookers participated in several battles and skirmishes, the most devastating battle for their regiment was Gettysburg (see the section on Regimental History for a complete list of the engagements that the 38th took part in). While participating in Pickett's Charge, the 38th Virginia lost Colonel Edmonds, whom James Booker describes as "one of the best men in service," and many other officers and soldiers (July 11, 1863). The Booker brothers themselves had to scramble to avoid being captured by Union troops; several of their companions, however, "let the Yankees take them" (John Booker, July 11, 1863).

Not only were the Bookers shocked by their experiences in battle, but by chilling events that upset camp routines. In the first weeks of the war, James Booker reports, a young man accidentally shot another soldier

from his hometown and now is "about to grieve himself to death about it" (July 14, 1861). But James passes on an even more shocking story in a later letter: two soldiers were caught conspiring to kill their commanding officer and were executed. In an attempt to "save their souls," the condemned soldiers "gave the Roman Catholic Priest 25 dollars apiece" (December 15, 1861).

Health

More explainable than violence in the camps, but ultimately more destructive, was disease. Illness and disease killed two-thirds of the Southern soldiers who died during the Civil War, so not surprisingly the Bookers often detail the health problems that they and their fellow soldiers were suffering (Robertson 88-89). These ailments include jaundice, typhoid, stomach disorders, fever, and mumps. The Bookers imply that much of the illness is due to the conditions the soldiers must face; sometimes the soldiers lacked adequate shelter, at times they would have to wade rivers and then march miles wearing wet clothing, and often they lacked adequate provisions (John Booker, April 29, 1862). Although sick soldiers were typically sent to the hospital, the men also took care of each other. In the fall of 1861, James and John Booker, apparently just recovering from sickness themselves, were responsible for nursing three members of their company (James Booker, September 6). Several months later, James Booker fell sick with chronic diarrhea and was sent to Greener's Hospital in Richmond to recuperate. While in the hospital, Booker was stuck in a Catch-22: he wanted to get a furlough so that he could recover his health at home, but he did not know where his company was, so he could not get the permission of his commanding officer to return to Pittsylvania. Eventually James re-joined his company, but he did not receive the furlough that he wished for.

Food and Supplies

Although in his first letter James Booker claims that the soldiers get "plenty of good pervision," the Bookers later complained that they often didn't get enough to eat (July 14, 1861). As James writes in 1862, "the rations has bin very scanty a large portion of the time sence we have bin marching" (September 30). But sometimes the 38th Virginia did enjoy plentiful supplies, particularly when they camped in locations where food was abundant. When the 38th Virginia arrived near Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, for instance, James Booker reported that "we can get plenty of milk & butter and apple butter that is verry good" (June 30, 1863). Often civilians would supply soldiers with food, whether because they feared or supported the troops.

Interactions with Civilians

Throughout the letters, the Bookers demonstrate their consciousness of the effect the war is having on the civilians. At the beginning of the war, James Booker describes the friendly exchanges between Southern soldiers and civilians, reporting gleefully from a camp near Winchester that the men have "a fine chance of beautiful young Ladies, and the kindest that I ever saw" (July 14, 1861). Besides providing moral support, Southern civilians would exchange information about the war with the Confederate troops (James Booker, November 24, 1862). Both Southern and Northern civilians would sell or give supplies to Confederate troops. Writing from Winchester, Virginia in 1862, James Booker even claims that he prefers Yankees to Quakers, since "the Yankees will sell us eny thing cheap for the specia" while "the quakers will sell any thing thay have got when the spirit moves them, tho we cant catch them rite half our time" (James Booker, October 17, 1862). Likewise, in Fredericksburg, Pennsylvania, the Yankee citizens treated the Confederate soldiers "verry kind," providing them food without charging them for it, though James suggests that "it is don through fear" (June 30, 1863). While in Fredericksburg, James enjoyed a mutually supportive relationship with a local civilian, guarding his home in exchange for lodging.

Although civilians and soldiers often cooperated with each other, the Bookers realized that the war was damaging the lives of those not directly involved in the fighting. In particular, James argues, citizens who live near the "line of the enemy" "have great deal to see trouble about" (June 14, 1863). Even those areas not yet scarred by the war would soon be, James predicts. As he says of Fredericksburg, Pennsylvania, "this is a verry flourishing looking Country the crops all look fine. it has never felt the affect of the war, though I guess if we stay here long it will feel the affect of it" (June 30, 1863). James especially blames Northern soldiers for looting the homes of Southern citizens, claiming that "the yankees is geting too mean to live" (June 14, 1863). But he admits that some Confederate soldiers likewise have stolen from citizens, disobeying General Lee's orders. Indeed, one woman stormed into the Confederate camp near Kinston, North Carolina, hoping to recover a skillet of soup that had been stolen (June 30, 1863; January 1, 1864). Confederate soldiers also stole over 18,000 dollars from the Quarter Master (January 1, 1864). Despite these incidents, James Booker was offended when Confederate General Seth Maxwell Barton called the members of his brigade "rags and thieves," since "it is not healthy for him to gave honist people such a bad name because some men does wrong" (January 1, 1864).

Morale

Early in the war, James and John Booker seemed to believe that the South would defeat the North swiftly. They contended that the South had a stronger army, and they noted that Northerners "dont unite like our people do," since the Democrats and the Republicans were at odds (James Booker, June 30, 1863).

Soon their hope had begun to fade. Though James Booker longed to return home, by 1863 he no longer believed that the North and South would achieve a quick peace:

"I am a fread it will be a long time first if ever, I think the prosspect for peece is very gloomy now it dont look like eather side is make in any prepperration for Piece, thare are greater preperation for fighten than ever" (September 23, 1863).

John Booker was even more pessimistic, and certainly much more cynical, as he accused the Southern leadership of needlessly prolonging the war:

"I beleave that we mout have hud piece be fore this time if our head leaden men would would have tride" (March 1, 1864).

The Bookers, particularly John, felt that while Southern elites were making decisions that extended the war, the poor were actually fighting most of the battles and suffering the consequences of those decisions. Because the First Conscription Act allowed a drafted man to hire a "substitute" to serve his term in the army, wealthy men could evade service (Current, 396-99). This provision enraged many of the Confederate soldiers, who contended that it placed the burden of the war on those who could not afford to pay for a substitute. Not only did substitution fan class tensions, but it also failed to bring competent soldiers into the army. James Booker mentions that that the substitute for John Millner deserted, and many other substitutes did likewise (August 3, 1862). Some men even made a business of agreeing to substitute for one person, deserting, and then collecting money to substitute for someone else. Although James Booker did not get angry about the practice of substitution, he understood that it weakened the Confederate Army:

"I dont blame no man to put in a substitute if he can, tho I think if it is kept up much long er it will ruin our army" (August 3, 1862).

His brother John, however, was less tentative in condemning substitution:

"I say put every one on equal foottin for this is a rich mans war an a por mans fight, I be leave thare are some of the men that have but in substitute are dooen a great [d]eal of good but the most of them are doo en more harm than good they are just speculaten on the poor people, an soldiers" (December 22, 1863).

Further feeding John Booker's indignation was the distribution of furloughs. According to the First Conscription Act, a "twelvemonth man" was entitled to a sixty-day furlough each year, but neither Booker received a furlough during his time in the army (Current, 396-99). John Booker noted that while officers freely took furloughs themselves, the captain in charge of his company, John Herndon, was "too lazy" to give his exhausted men a break (Decemeber 22, 1863).

As a result of the inequalities and inefficiencies of military adminstration, John Booker believed that soldiers should refuse to re-enlist. In his March 1, 1864 letter, he derides the military pagaent staged by Virginia Governor William "Extra Billy" Smith and Colonel Cabell in an attempt to persuade the men to re-enlist. After commanding the soldiers to line up, the Colonel ordered that the Colors (the flags of the regiment) be borne to the front and asked "all who wer determen to be freemen to step out on the line with the cullars and all who wer willen to be slaves for thare enemyes to stand fast" (March 1, 1864). Angry that he hadn't yet received a furlough, and convinced that re-enlisting would only encourage the Southern leadership to continue the war, John Booker rejected the Colonel's challenge that he re-enlist; two-thirds of the soldiers stood back with him. As he explains, "I dideant inten to reinlist nor I wes not willen to be a Slave for my enemyes and I didnt go on line with the reinlisted, and I dideant wish to bee in eather line" (March 1, 1864).

Religion

Whereas John Booker responded to terrible conditions by getting angry, his brother James turned to religion as a way of making sense of his suffering and connecting with home. As he writes of his homesickness, James Booker occasionally expresses his desire to join his relatives at the religious revivals held at Mount Hermon Baptist Church near Danville, Virginia (August 3, 1862). But he reassures his cousin that revivals often take place in the camp and that many soldiers have been converted. According to James, a sense of gratitude in war-time motivates many of the men to convert: "I think it is time for them to turn after being blesed so plainley as they have bin in the past battles" (October 17, 1862). Likewise, James' faith seems to have strengthened him and given him hope of returning home, whether to Pittsylvania County or to Heaven. In a letter written on New Years Day of 1864, James includes two quotations about coming home to and through

God. Quoting from the third stanza of "Amazing Grace," James writes,

Tis grace that brought me safe thus far And grace will lead me home.

In March of 1864, however, James believed that he might not arrive home safely, at least not home to Pittsylvania, since the spring campaign would soon open and "then we poor soldiers will see a hard time" (March 16, 1864). But James embraced a spirit of Christian fatalism, contending that his life was in God's hands: "If it is the will of [my] maker for me to be cut down in this war I dont ask to be spared for I beleave that he will do what is the best for me, thare is but few things that I would ask to stay in this trouble some world for" (March 16, 1864). After writing this letter, James Booker lived for almost sixty more years, but his twin John died five months later of wounds he received at Drewry's Bluff.

Description of Holdings

c01: Manuscripts

James Booker, [n.p.], letter to Chloe Unity Blair, with an inclusion by A. Blair

Unit Date 1861 July 14

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

4 p.

Scope and Content

Optimistic at the beginning of the war, James Booker praises the "elegant water," "beautiful young Ladies," and "most beautiful country" he finds at the 38th's camp at Winchester. But he notes that one member of the regiment accidentally shot another member from his hometown and now feel terrible. He warns that "cowardly boys" who are avoiding service should beware, since they are likely to be drafted or made to put up breastworks. After salutations and greetings, James indicates where letters should be sent. A. Blair, a relative of James' and possibly Chloe Blair's brother, writes a short note to be included. Blair indicates that he is including a letter that "brother William" received from "brother," who was expecting to go to Manassas. Blair finishes by saying that all are well.

James Booker, [n.p.], letter to Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1861 September 6

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

3 p.

Scope and Content

James Booker complains of not hearing from his family. He mentions being too ill to serve and that he, consequently, works in the hospital. He talks about patients suffering from jaundice and yellow fever and mentions the poor health of James May, Hugh Norton and Josiah Burnett, as well as the death of Billy Pruett from eating "too much beef liver." In spite of their complaints, he notes that the health of the men in camp is improving. He alludes to having received bad news from Texas, and then states that he will probably not come home as long as he is healthy or until peace is declared. The postscript states that James will try to send for things via any returning soldiers.

James Booker, Manassas Junction, Virginia, letter to Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1861 October 8

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

2 p.

Scope and Content

James Booker reports that his company is healthier than it has been for some time. He has heard about fighting at Falls Church the day before, and reports a conversation with a man from the Danville Grays,

who told him that the Yankees are within four miles of his company at Fairfax Court House. From this information, James Booker predicts that a "hard battle" will soon take place. He mentions getting a letter from Addie (perhaps Drury Addison Blair), whose condition is improving.

James Booker, Manassas Junction, Virginia, letter to Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1861 December 15

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

3p.

Scope and Content

This letter is a reply to one or more letters that James had received from his cousin and "sweethearts" a few days earlier. He has just heard that his regiment is about to move into their winter quarters in Gainesville. He will join it when the winter quarters are ready. Meanwhile, the work in his current quarters is lighter and the pay better. He believes the fighting in Centreville will not continue past winter. He mentions meeting a man who had been captured by the Union and who was recently released. According to this man, there are 60,000 sick Yankees in Washington. He also adds that he has heard that two men in Centreville were shot for trying to kill their commanding officer. James closes the letter by asking to be remembered to cousin Eliza Ann Williams and to all the "ladies" at Christmas time.

John Booker, Camp Smith, near Manassas, Virginia, letter to Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1862 February 19

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

3 p.

Scope and Content

Writing from the company's winter quarters near the battlefield of First Manassas, John Booker describes his brother James' sickness, which has left him weak and without an appetite. Other soldiers, including Nathaniel Robertson and Neal Gilbert, have struggled with illness; one, Josiah Burnett, has died. Booker ends his letter by expressing his pleasure at having received his cousin Unity's letter and apologizing that his brother James was unable to write.

James Booker, in Greaner Hospital, Richmond, Virginia, letter to Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1862 March 15

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

3 p.

Scope and Content

James Booker explains why he has been so long in answering Unity's latest letters, stating that he has been in hospital, too ill to write. He had hoped to come home on furlough, but has been separated from his regiment and could not obtain leave. He asks that Unity write to him with the location of his regiment. He also complains about the quality of the food and mentions seeing many acquaintances on their way to the front. He closes by asking his cousin to direct her replies to Greaner's Hospital, care of Surgeon R. G. Banks.

James Booker, Camp near Yorktown, Virginia, letter to Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1862 April 19

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

2p.

Scope and Content

James Booker writes to inform his cousin of the location of his regiment. He indicates that they have been shot at but infrequently hit. He mentions that a man named Tucker, who was wounded in the chin, was the only man from his regiment (he was attached to Captain Carter's Company F) to have been shot. He also notes that many men, mainly Yankees, were killed at last Wednesday's battle and that this evening the Yankees flew a truce flag in order to safely bury their dead. He feels that, because the best of both armies are here, the war will be settled here. He closes by asking that Unity write soon, and direct her letters to him at Yorktown. He also asks her to notify "sister Mary" that Pickney has not yet arrived.

John Booker, a camp near Yorktown, Virginia, letter to Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1862 April 29

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

2 p.

Scope and Content

John Booker describes a new posting and notes that, since leaving the Orange Court House, the troops are living without tents. They stay in the entrenchments every other day and night, and are under constant bombardment by the Yankees. He mentions that there is a good deal of sickness and many are being wounded. Also, he notes that they have elected officers for the next two years. John closes by asking Unity to direct her letter to him at Yorktown.

James and John Booker, [n.p.], letter to Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1862 August 3

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

4 p.

Scope and Content

James begins by apologizing for the tardiness of his letter: he explains that he has been ill. He then discusses the practice of substitution (arranging for a replacement in the army), concluding that it is having a bad effect on the Confederate Army. He also discusses his work assignment and his health. In a separate letter on the same paper, John tells his cousin about his cold and sore throat. He also states that there is currently no fighting, but he can hear the Yankees firing cannonade "down on the river."

James Booker, camp near Hopewell Church, near Winchester, Virginia, letter to Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1862 September 30

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

2 p.

Scope and Content

James Booker writes that he and his brother John are in good health. They have been marching hard but usually have not gotten enough to eat. Booker reports that the general feeling in the camp is that peace will come soon. Four sick conscripts have arrived (and are named). James complains of having to march in wet clothing after crossing bridge-less streams. He also notes that the sick and wounded have been ordered from Winchester to Staunton and thinks that everyone else will be going to Richmond soon. James looks forward to going there since he has not heard from home since leaving Richmond. He greets other family members and mentions that John will write soon.

James Booker, near Winchester, Virginia, letter to cousin, Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1862 October 17

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

2 p.

Scope and Content

Claiming that he would be able to "stand" being a soldier if he received enough to eat, James Booker notes that recently the supply of food has been adequate, but that the men have not gotten enough salt. James Booker notes the illnesses of two men in camp, Bage Pritchett and John Hundley. He compares the entrepreneurship of the Yankees with the more whimsical quality of the Quakers' mercantilism and notes the use of Confederate money and specie to buy provisions. He also describes a month-long religious revival meeting underway in camp.

James Booker, Spottsylvania, Virginia, near Fredricksburg, letter to Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1862 November 24

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

2 p.

Scope and Content

After reporting that he and his brother John are well, James Booker writes that the company has been marching for the past four days and has finally arrived at its camp near Fredericksburg. Many Union soldiers are nearby, and he predicts that the Union troops will soon begin shelling the Confederates. He expects a "hard" battle to commence soon.

James Booker, a camp near Culpeper Court House, Culpeper, Virginia, letter to Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1863 June 14

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

4 p.

Scope and Content

Writing on the Sabbath, James Booker tells his cousin that both he and his brother are well. The members of Company D marched for the past ten days, and they expect to march again the next day, since they are following the movements of the Union troops. A few days previously, the Union had surprised the Confederate cavalry, but the Confederates managed to drive their enemies across the river and take several hundred prisoners. Complaining that "the Yankees is getting too mean to live," James Booker writes that they steal and destroy Southern property, such as meat, corn, and horses. He notes, "I still live in hope of peace soon though I may not live to see it." He observes that at a "very interesting" camp meeting several men, including Captain Herndon, were converted.

James Booker, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, letter to Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1863 June 30

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

4 p.

Scope and Content

James Booker reports that he and his brother John are well. He mentions that local residents seem fearful of the army and that General Robert E. Lee has ordered his troops to respect private property. He describes the flourishing condition of Pennsylvania farms, noting that this part of the country has not yet felt the effects of the war. James perceives disunity in the people's attitude toward the war, comments on

the abolitionists' motives, and mentions that he is boarding at a private house for free in return for guarding the owner's property. He closes by asking that Unity write soon, for the last letter he received was dated the 13th.

James Booker, a camp in Williamsport, Maryland, letter to cousin, Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1863 July 11

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

4 p.

Scope and Content

Writing a few days after Gettysburg, James Booker describes the heavy losses suffered by his division during Pickett's Charge; most of the regiment's officers and many of the enlisted men were killed, wounded, or captured during the assault. James and John Booker escaped harm, though they were nearly taken prisoner by the Union forces. His division has been assigned to escort 5000-6000 Union prisoners to the South. He reports hearing daily of small battles and expects another major battle imminently, although he does not expect his division to be involved because it is on guard in Williamsport, a city where most of the citizens appear to favor the North.

John Booker with inclusion from James Booker, Petersburg, Virginia, letter to Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1863 September 27

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

4 p.

Scope and Content

John Booker writes that he is happy that Chloe enjoyed the revival meeting at Hermon (perhaps the Mount Hermon Baptist Church near Danville), then notes that there is "good preaching" at the camp. He contends that "the prospect for peace is very gloomy now," given that both sides are preparing for war with more intensity than ever. He reports that, despite rumors, Pickett's division will remain in Virginia. The troops are elated at this news, even though they have little more to do than guard camp and drill three times a day. In a postscript, James Booker asks Chloe Unity Blair to send his letter to his sister soon.

James Booker, encampment of the 38th Regiment, near Petersburg, Virginia, letter to Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1863 October 4

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

4 p.

Scope and Content

Apparently upset that he did not receive a furlough, James Booker wishes for the warmth and comforts of home, writing, "there is none of them that knows how to appreciate a blessing until they are deprived of it." Still, he admits, in wartime he should find satisfaction simply in having enough to eat and enjoying good health; but he cannot be satisfied when speculators sell food to women and children at inflated prices. He observes that the married soldiers have sent for their wives and were boarding them at the homes of local citizens. He observes that General Corse's Brigade had been at the camp near Petersburg, but that they were sent to Tennessee. He also mentions writing to his sister Mary, telling her that he did not need clothing, as he received the box that "you all" sent him. The letter closes with a one-page postscript stating that John made a potato pie, and Cousin Tom ate with the two of them. He sends his regards to Cousin Pollie Ann and mentions that Cousin William Blair and Luther are stationed nearby but will be leaving for Chattanooga, Tennessee, within the next two days. He closes asking for Unity to return his "soldier likeness" to him so he can exchange it for a new one.

John Booker, Kinston, North Carolina, letter to Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1863 December 22

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

3 p.

Scope and Content

After observing that letters from home bring him great pleasure, John Booker chastises his cousin for not writing sooner. He notes that "Flem" Gregory has been ill, but is recuperating. Then he launches into a complaint that energizes the letter: Captain John Herndon is too "lazy" to grant the soldiers in his company furloughs, even though it is Christmas time, and even though the men are not doing anything, not even picket duty. So discontented are the soldiers that many say they will not re-enlist. John Booker claims that he opposes desertion, but that the wealthier men who paid substitutes to serve in the army should have to join, while veteran soldiers should receive furloughs. Angered at the inequality, John exclaims, "this is a rich mans war an a poor mans fight." He ends his letter by observing that Memory Inman, another member of the D Company, is heading home to get married.

James Booker, a camp near Kinston, N.C., letter to Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1864 January 1

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

4 p.

Scope and Content

Booker reports that although his regiment had begun to march to meet the Yankees in battle, the Union had attacked --and been defeated by --another group of Confederate soldiers thirty-five miles away. He reports that the winter has been fairly pleasant and that food is cheap and plentiful. Despite such abundance, he notes, soldiers have been stealing food from local residents. He mentions a serious theft of \$18,000 from the Quarter Master; soldiers are suspected of the deed. James expresses concern over General Barton's attitude towards the Regiment. (Barton has said his men come from "rags and thieves.") James complains that after three years of service he has still not received a furlough. He closes the letter with a stanza from "Amazing Grace."

John Booker, [n.p.], letter to cousin, Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1864 March 1

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

2 p.

Scope and Content

John Booker describes the attempt by Virginia Governor William "Extra Billy" Smith and Colonel [Joseph Robert] Cabell to make the men of the 38th Regiment re-enlist. He deplores the strategies they used: calling the men to stand before the "Colors," declaring that any man who wanted to be a slave to the enemy should not re-enlist. John fears that his leaders want to continue to fight at all costs, rather than press for peace; and as long as men re-enlist the war will go on. John also expresses his dissatisfaction with the administration of the Regiment: only the men who re-enlist are granted furloughs, and John has still not received the furlough owed to him in 1862. He mentions that the two new recruits to Company D are receiving their furloughs ahead of him. Changing the subject, John writes of nearby Union activity and says that they have been expecting a raid. Finally, he writes of Memory Inman's court martial and Captain John Herndon's marriage. He closes the letter by apologizing for its angry tone, writing, "I have bin mad all day."

James Booker, Camp near Richmond, Virginia, letter to Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1864 March 16

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

4 p.

Scope and Content

James Booker informs his cousin of his and his brother's good health. He discusses the treatment of prisoners of war, the unavailability of certain types of foodstuffs and the deprivations of civilians due to the war. He further comments on the weather and his coming duty in the field. He laments the lack of correspondence from home and closes his correspondence with salutations and wishes for his family's good health. He apologizes for his poor writing, attributing it to having to finish the letter by firelight.

James Booker, 38th Virginia Infantry Camp, letter to Chloe Unity Blair

Unit Date 1864 April 29

Digital Archival Object

Extent

ALS

4 p.

Scope and Content

James Booker replies to Unity's letters of the 17th and 24th. He mentions that his company has been fishing about 20 miles away and that the Yankees are getting closer and are expected to drive the men out of the fishery. He states that the Yankees are believed to be heading for Richmond. James hopes that "this cruel war" may end soon and "in our favor." He closes with a quotation from *1 John*. The postscript, written on April 30th, states that the rumor that the Yankees are coming may be false.