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Letters from Elmira's Trunk

An Indiana Family in the Civil War



Hugh and Elmira Scott and family c. 1890. This picture was likely taken in front of their farmhouse in Benton County where they settled soon after their marriage. Tucked away in the attic in Elmira's domed trunk were letters written to them from family and friends from 1850 until Elmira's death in 1920. Elmira would be pleased that the letters she carefully preserved are presented here as a legacy for future generations.

edited by
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and
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To
William Landen Bridge
(1917–2002)
who preserved this part of the past.

Cover Photograph: Chattanooga, Tennessee, vicinity. Federal camp
by the Tennessee River, 1864. (Library of Congress, Prints &
Photographs Division, Civil War Photographs, LC B8171-2672.)

“Our men captured John Morgan’s wife...”

Henry C. Jeffries (c1837–1865)

Henry C. Jeffries, son of Elizabeth Catey and Milton Jeffries, enlisted in Company I, 30th Indiana Volunteer Infantry, on September 24, 1861, along with his brothers Frank and Allen. He was in and out of hospitals for the remainder of 1861 and all of 1862. By January 1863, he was back with his regiment, which was on detached duty at Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Henry wrote from there on March 24 and again on April 26. His letters are full of interesting war news and he did not hesitate to voice his opinions of both Union and Confederate generals.

Henry was wounded and taken prisoner at the Battle of Chickamauga on September 19, 1863. He was imprisoned at Richmond, Virginia, from where he was paroled on April 16, 1864. His final letter of July 8, 1864 was written from a hospital near Annapolis, Maryland.

Individuals mentioned in Henry’s letters include:

- *His cousin Charles Catey*
- *His cousin Naomi Catey Barnett and her husband Ham*
- *His brother Allen Jeffries*
- *His cousins Allen and John Rippey*

Camp Fortifications

Murfreesboro, Tennessee

Tuesday, March 24th, 1863

Dear Respective Cousins,

I now take the present opportunity of writing you a few lines to let you know that I am enjoying good health at the present time and I hope these few lines may find you enjoying good health when this letter reaches you and your folks.

I have nothing of importance to write to you this afternoon.

Our men had quite a fight last Saturday. Our men killed 350 and took 500 prisoners. The Rebels got up and skedaddled away faster than they come up. There was 20 of our men wounded and one or two killed. The Rebels were mounted. Our men got some of their horses.⁹⁷

I will tell you something about what our men is doing here. Our Brigade is throwing up breastworks and building forts.⁹⁸ When we get the fortifications finished, they will look nice. They will be put up so that we can mount 160 siege guns. I think if the Rebels come up, we will give them a warm reception.

The Rebels make a charge every day or two on our picket lines, but they get back pretty quick. I look for a big battle here pretty soon if Fredricksburg is evacuated.

The health in camp is good at the present time and the boys are in good spirits. We are camped on the east side of Stone[']s]

⁹⁷ Forces under Colonel Albert S. Hall left Murfreesboro on the 18th on a reconnaissance; on the 20th, they were engaged by Confederate forces under General John Hunt Morgan at Vaught's Hill, near Milton, Tennessee. This would actually have been on Friday, not Saturday as Henry states. (CWSAC Battle Summaries, The American Battlefield Protection Program: <http://www2.cr.nps.gov/abpp/battles/tn014.htm> [June 19, 2000].)

⁹⁸ These large earthen works would be called Fortress Rosecrans. It would eventually encompass 200 acres on both sides of Stone's River and consist of a series of lunettes enclosing four interior redoubts with blockhouses. Z. B. Tower, Inspector-General of Fortifications, Military Division of the Mississippi, writes, "This fortress could not be taken except by siege, if properly garrisoned and well defended." (*Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, Series I, Volume XLIX/2 [S# 104], p. 502.)

River. We have got as nice a camp as I ever saw. We have got small cedar trees set out in front of our tents.⁹⁹

Some of the boys are writing, some reading, some playing cards, but they are not allowed to bet when they play cards. It is raining here today. It has been nice weather here for about three weeks I believe, at the present time.

I do not know what regiment that Charley Catey is in. I would like to know. I have wrote two or three letters to you and never received an answer. Probably you have wrote but I did not get them.

Tell Ham and Naoma they must write to me and I will answer.

I will give you my address:

Henry C. Jeffries
Co. I. 30th Ind. Regiment
2th [sic] Brigade 2th [sic] Division
McCook's Corps

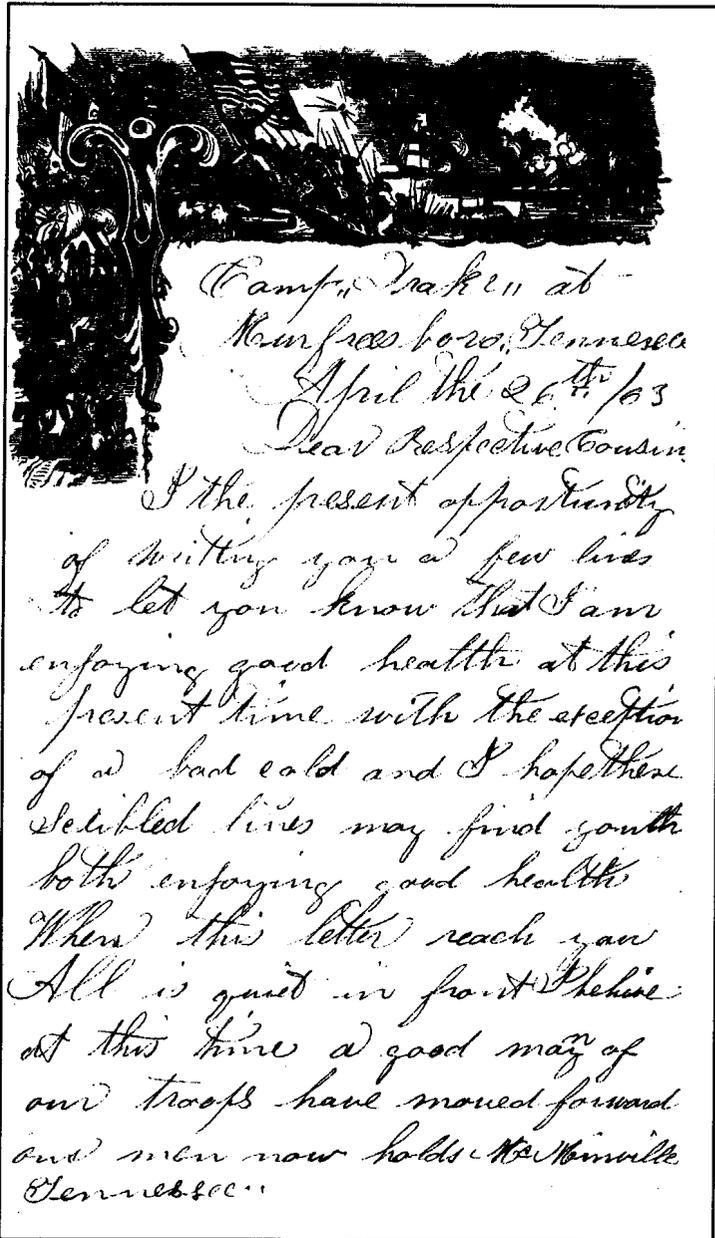
I still remain your affectionate Cousin

H. C. Jeffries

to H. M. Scott and Elmira Scott

I cannot get any stamps here. Excuse all mistakes and bad writing. Write soon.

⁹⁹ "...every rude improvement was encouraged by the company officers." (Volo, p. 134.)



Henry's April 26th letter to his cousins in Benton County.

Camp Drake at
Murfreesboro, Tennessee
April 26th, 1863
Dear Respective Cousins,

I [take] the present opportunity of writing you a few lines to let you know that I am enjoying good health at this present time with the exception of a bad cold and I hope these scribbled lines may find you both enjoying good health when this letter reaches you.

All is quiet in front I believe at this time. A good many of our troops have moved forward and men now holds McMinnville, Tennessee. Our men captured John Morgan's wife at McMinnville.¹⁰⁰ I wish they had captured John Morgan, the old traitor. But still John Morgan does not amount to much. Let him be where he will. He has done as much harm to the Rebels as he has done to us.

We are still working at Murfreesboro, putting up breastworks and building forts. We have several large guns mounted here. We calculate to hold this place let what come may. I guess if the Rebels come to take this place, some of them will get war-heads or we will, one or the other. Our brigade is here on

¹⁰⁰ After a brief and romantic courtship, General John Hunt Morgan had married Mattie Ready of Murfreesboro the previous December and moved her to McMinnville, thinking it was safe enough for her there. (Ramage, James A., *Rebel Raider: The Life of General John Hunt Morgan* [Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986], p. 147.) There are conflicting accounts of Mrs. Morgan being captured. A biography of General Morgan says she was captured on the Sparta road, but later released when her identity was known (Metzler, William E., *Morgan and His Dixie Cavaliers* published by the author, 1976, p. 45), but an item appearing in *The Lafayette Daily Courier* (Vol. XIV, No. 87, May 25, 1863, p. 3, c. 1) gives the following account: "During the recent expedition under Gen. Reynolds, resulting in the capture of McMinnville, Tennessee, in which the 72d participated, Capt. Robinson and Lieut. Asschaffenburg were among the first to enter the town, and learning that the wife of the gallant Morgan was in the place, secured her arrest. Among the "goods and chattels" of that lady, which were "confiscated," was two elegant parasols which are now in the possession of Capt. Robinson, and will be in a few days on exhibition at the Bee Hive." The Bee Hive was a Lafayette dry goods store on the South side of the Square. (*Business Directory with a Key to the Illustrated Map of the City of Lafayette 1862-63*, Burk & Brother's Publishers.)

detached service. I do not know how long we will stay here at this place. I wish we would stay here all summer or till the war is over.

The health of the troops here is good. The boys are in good spirits and are spoiling for a fight. But Old Rosey¹⁰¹ holds his own counsel and does not let everyone know what he is going to do. He will strike the blow when he gets ready. Rosecrans is the best general that we ever had. He is worth six Buells.¹⁰² This Army is dressed best now than it has ever been before. Old Rosey is the man to suit me. All the boys likes him and they will fight for him.

Rosey makes the officers tow the mark. They do not play off with him like they did with Buell, the old traitor.

Allen is at Camp Denison, Ohio. He went to Camp Denison on January the 4th. Allen is getting better. He is able to go round. Allen Rippey is sick at the hospital in Nashville, Tennessee. Allen has something like a cancer on his leg. John Rippey is at his regiment. The regiment is at LaVergne, Tenn.¹⁰³ I received a letter from you today and was glad to hear from you and hear your folks was well.

I must stop writing for this time, hoping that you will write soon as this letter comes to you.

I still remain your Cousin

H. C. Jeffries

Co. I. 30th Regt.

Indiana Volunteers

I send my best respects to all both old and young.

¹⁰¹ General William Starke Rosecrans was affectionately known as Old Rosey.

¹⁰² Negative public opinion had led to General Don Carlos Buell's dismissal as Commanding General, Army of the Cumberland, and the appointment of General Rosecrans in his place. (Boatner, p. 96.)

¹⁰³ The first Allen he mentions is his brother. The second one is Allen Rippey, his cousin, who was serving with his brother John Rippey in the 74th Indiana Infantry, currently encamped at LaVergne, near Nashville, approximately 15 miles from Henry.

Camp Parole, Hospital Ward 4

Near Annapolis, Md.

July 8, 1864

Dear Cousin,

It is with pleasure that I take the present opportunity of writing you a few lines to let you know that I am enjoying good health at the present and I hope these few lines may find you enjoying good health. I am still at Camp Parole and I do not know how long I will stay here at this camp. I think that I will stay here until my time is expired, if the Rebels does not run me away from here. I see in today's papers that they are [with]in one mile of Fredrick City [Maryland]. Fredrick is about 80 miles from this place. I do not want to be taken prisoner again. I had rather die than to go back to Richmond again.

It has been a beautiful day, but rather too warm and dry to suit me, but still it has the appearance of rain this afternoon. I hope it may rain and cool the air. I think it will be a great help to the wounded soldiers if it rains. A small shower rain is a great help to wounded, that is if it don't rain too much.

I still hear that Sherman is a-getting along fine in Georgia. I expect to hear that Atlanta is taken pretty soon. I cannot tell when Grant will take Richmond and Petersburg and I think no one else can tell how soon it will be taken.

I got two month's pay yesterday.

As I have not written to you for sometime, I thought that I would write you a few lines to let you know that I am well, but still [have] to walk on crutches. I think that I will be able to walk without them pretty soon, if nothing happens more than I know of at the present.

I have not had any letters from old Kosciusko¹⁰⁴ for sometime. I don't know why they do not write to me. I would like to be with my regiment. I am tired of laying around doing nothing. I tried to get to go to my regiment and they would not let

¹⁰⁴ Kosciusko County, Indiana was home to many of the Catey and Jeffries families.

me go because I was wounded. I like soldiering very well in the U.S., but I do not fancy soldiering in the Confederate States, especially where Jeff Davis¹⁰⁵ has to board them.

I will write more the next time. I send my best respects to all, both young and old. I shall stop writing, hoping that you will answer soon as convenient. I still remain your affectionate cousin,

H. C. Jeffries

Co. I. 30th

Address: H. C. Jeffries

Camp Parole Hospital

H. Ward 40

Near Annapolis, Md.

Excuse all mistakes.

Henry C. Jeffries

Postscript

Henry was mustered out September 29, 1864 at Indianapolis. By family tradition, he died on the day he arrived back at his home in Leesburg, but his actual date of death is November 21, 1865.

¹⁰⁵ Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America.

"We mourn..."

John Catey	Eva Brittain
Wilson Catey	Stacey B. Catey
Mary Catey	E. R. Carpenter
Winfield Catey	Henry Catey

Letters from family and friends on the home front were also found in Elmira's trunk. Some of these letters are quite long and informative of the weather, crops, or cattle, but they always end with a bit about which soldiers had been heard from or questions about those that have not. Although the war, and the loved ones away fighting it, would have been upmost in their minds, they hesitate to dwell on it and do not express their emotions or fears. We include here only pertinent parts of these letters.

Stacey writes often to the "Pine Creek Settlement," as two of Elmira's sisters and their husbands had also settled in Benton County near Hugh and Elmira on Pine Creek. [See picture on page 96.] Stacey himself owned land adjacent to Hugh, and Charles had been working there for his father at the outbreak of war.

From Wayne County, Elmira's brother John Catey sends news of some of the local soldiers who have joined up, and