

J. A. Means Letters

J.A. MEANS TO MELANCTHON E. CHAPIN

Murfreesboro Tenn,

March 7, 1864

Dear Nephew:

As I did not have an opportunity of talking with you any while at home I am going to surprise a little by monopoliseing [sic] all the chatting for a short time myself If I had seen you I intended to have told you something about the Country down here the effects of the war the character of the inhabitants And something about our Fortress etc. As I did not see you to tell you these things I will do it as well as I can on paper; it will be but [illegible] however as my descriptive faculty is very poor – You would have to see it to have a clear and correct idea of it

The land in this part of Tennessee appears to lie very high; the surface is a little undulating but not hilly – none between this and Nashville near so much as between your house and the West road You could stand on any of the sleight swells and you can see in all directions untill [sic] the horizon touches or seems to touch the earths [sic] surface West and South of us it gets hilly and some places mountainous long before we get to Chatanooga [sic] the mountains get quite high and the country except in the valleys very barren –

The State seems to be based on a great lime Stone rock. The bottoms of the creeks and rivers seem to be solid lime stone in many places the sides of the streams are walled with the lime stone. The lime Stone cropps [sic] out of the surface all over the Country on the top of the highest land and in the lowest valleys – in these places scrubby bushes grow and grape vines and on the higher land cedar There is a great deal of cedar all over this part of the State

The soil is a rich lime Stone highly colored with iron rust, it in many places is as red as spanish [sic] brown paint and looks some like it The water is all very hard the creeks and springs are very much alike very poor for washing purposes The country is very productive for corn oats cotton and middling good for wheat very good for vegetables sweet potatoes etc.

The labor is nearly all performed by slaves the white men only showing the darkies how they ought to work. The slaves work just as if they did not care whether the work was

done or not – it is altogether out of the question to hurry them at any thing even at eating they must have half an hour at least They are very ignorant and think they do right when they take all the time from their masters and unless they think they are going to get money for their work are not to be relied on – but they like money as well as white folks –

Then is the poor class of white folk people who are feeling the effects of this war terribly Very many are making their way to some of the Northern States with scarcely sufficient to cover their nakedness Very slovenly and dirty – Many of this class were induced to go into the rebel army and fight for slavery and when once in the army their families were left to get their living as best they could Many are now deserting and getting their families and making their way North where they expect to get something to eat and wear –

The War has made every thing here unsettled and uncertain. Farmers when they put in a crop of grain or cotton dont [sic] know who will gather it The armies must live and are obliged to get their living sometimes from the country through which they pass And then soldiers are not particular enough about leaving enough for the families to live upon And if the Soldiers have an idea that they have been helping our enemies they generally when our army first advanced burnt all their buildings and compelled them to go south of our lines – They are not so severe in this part of the State now – Nearly all the buildings between here and Nashville have been burnt only chimneys show where buildings once stood –

there dont [sic] seem to have ever been much fruit but I think the only reason is they never took any pains to plant the trees I think it would be good for fruit the climate is so very fine –

As this is my last page I must stop that subject and tell you about our Fortress It is principally on the South side of Stone [sic] River it is composed of Redouts [sic] and Lunette – a redout [sic] is a square enclosed by a heavy embankment generally higher and inside the cuter lines being Lunette these last are of different angles or shapes but always have two fronts something like this

[image: hand drawn picture of redoubts and lunettes with numbers]

and are generally so constructed that the guns of one will rake the ditch out side of the other as a gun placed in the NE corner of No 1 would command the ditch of the NW angle of No 2 and so all round – the redouts [sic] inside are mounted with heavy seige [sic] guns and Mortars effective at 5 miles and can be used without endangering the men in the Lunette – Cut side of the embankment there is a ditch 10 or 12 ft wide and from 4 to 6 deep – there is a platform inside for sharp shooters to stand on when the

enemy comes within range of small arms – We are encamped inside of these Fortifications and of course feel secure while we remain in our present position; there are 150 acres inside for us to maneuver upon

I guess you will be glad that I am compelled to stop this long letter for want of room if so you must just tell (me) to be brief next time

Give my love to your Father Mother Sister Uncles Aunts and Cousins and then write me a letter

Your aff [sic] Uncle

J A Means

M [illegible] Chapin

CAPTAIN JOHN A. MEANS –

born near Pittsburg, Pa., February 1, 1811; common school education; learned trade of tanner and currier; November, 1833. came to Ohio, teaching school in Springfield; 183[illegible]; engaged in farming in Northfield; in 1837 was deputy surveyor of Portage county; February 9, 1838, as captain of Northfield Rifle Company, did special guard duty at the execution of David McKisson, at Ravenna, as elsewhere detailed, being afterwards promoted to colonel of the regiment; elected clerk of Summitt county in 1860; August, 1862, leaving office in charge of his son, Nathan, entered the army as captain of Company C. 115th Regt., serving till close of the war; detailed as assistant topographical engineer, department of the Cumberland, surveying and mapping a large district of Middle Tennessee and fitting up Soldiers' Cemetery on Stone [sic] River battlefield; signal office last battle near Murfreesboro, Tenn.; (other military services detailed elsewhere; 1869 re-elected clerk of courts, serving full term; 1873-1877 Akron's City Clerk. In 1837 Mr. Means was married to Miss Eliza Chapin, who bore him six children, two dying in infancy. William S. drowned while father was in the army; Rebecca (the first Mrs. Sumner Nash[illegible], died 1869; Nathan, the eldest, died in Akron 1886; Elvira, the youngest, married to Rev. W. B. Marsh, now of Springfield, Ohio. Mrs. Means dying in 1879. Capt. Means subsequently married Mrs. I. C. Walton, with whom, in the 81st year of his age, he is now happily living in Tallmage. [sic]

[image: picture with caption: Captain John A. Means]