

The Totoket Historical Society, Inc.

Civil War Letter from Russell Clark
to
Albert F. Wheaton,
Cpl., Company A, 10th Conn. Vol'n Infantry

Transcribed

by

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Introduction:

The letter transcribed below was brought to our attention by Richard Dwyer, the grandson of Richard and Anna Scholz who operated Scholz's Store located at the intersection of Route 80 and North Street, across North Street from the Atwater Library. The building had been operated as a store from 1850 or earlier until fairly recently. The store was originally built and operated by Russell Clark, the author of the letter. In the 1850 Federal Census Russell Clark was reported as "merchant" although it is reported that this particular store was built only in 1851.¹ Other owners of the store were Ralph Beers who rented the store in 1889 and purchased it in 1909. Between 1920 and 1928 the store housed the Town Clerks Office. Anna and Richard Scholz bought the store in 1928 or 1929. At one time in the 70s or 80s there was a fish market there. The original Scholz's store was located on the other side of Route 80.

The letter transcribed below, written on Sept 8, 1862, is unusual in the sense that it is from a civilian to a soldier rather than from a soldier to a friend or family member. The Totoket Historical Society, Inc. possesses several letters from Union soldiers to friends or family members but this is the only letter we hold from a North Branford resident to a Union soldier.

The letter is fairly easy to read except for two places where I have replaced the letters with a question mark.

Theodore Groom Ph. D.
Chairman, Technology
The Totoket Historical Society, Inc.

¹ The History of North Branford and Northford, by Herbert C. Miller, MD, Bacon Printing Co., Derby, CT, 1982, pg 58

North Branford Ct
Sept 8, 1862

A. F. Weaton Esq
Dear Sir,

Yours of Aug 8th was received in due time, and I was glad to hear from you, that you was full of courage and confidence in our cause, may the day speedily arrive when this infernal rebellion shall be crushed and buried so deep that there will never be a resurrection. I know not how you feel, but I think the time has about arrived when "Old Abe" ought to proclaim liberty throughout the land to all the inhabitants thereof. You know of course more than I can in regards to the Union feeling in the slave states but with what light I have on the subject, I have but very little confidence in it. I think with a proclamation of emancipation the war would soon come to an end. Many of the soldiers in the rebel army would have to go home to take care of their slaves. It is our privilege and duty to strike when the blow will be most effective. Volunteering is going on tolerable well in Connecticut, still we must have a draft. One quota for this town after deducting those in the field is 49. We lack about a dozen. The draft is to come off this week Wednesday.

Perhaps you would like to know who are the recent volunteers, I will give you their names, or what I remember, viz, Charles Frisbee, Thomas Cary Frank Harrison, Wm Falbridge John Adams, Albert Harrison, Merwin Wheaton, Elizur Stone, Henry Palmer, Wm Munson, Willis Gilbert, Sam Harris, Wm Rh??mb, Elizur Page, and 7 others, Irishmen from this part of town.

I would to hear from you any time you have leisure to write, though you need feel (???) obligation to do so in answer to mine.

I hope to see you before many months have passed when we can sing the "Star Spangled Banner," with full and rejoicing hearts. God help you friend Albert, may your life and health be precious in his sight.

Yours truly,
Russell Clarke

A copy of the letter is shown below:

North Branford Ct
Sept 8. 1862
A. A. Weston Esq
Dear Sir

Yours of Aug
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time, and I was glad to
hear from you, that ^{you} was
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It is our privilege and
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Volunteering is going on
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Still we must have a
draft. The quota for this
town after deducting those
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lack about a dozen.

The draft is to come off this week Wednesday.

Perhaps you would like to know who are the recent volunteers, I will give you their names for what I remember viz Charles Crosby, Thomas Cary, Frank Kauris, Wm Fallbridge, John Adams, Albert Kaurison, Merwin Wheaton, Eliza Stone, Henry Salome, Wm Munson, Willie Gibbatt, Sam Harris, Wm Plumb, Eliza Page, and 7 others, I believe from this part of the town.

I would be glad to hear from you any time you have leisure to write, though you need feel under obligation to do so in answer to mine.

I hope to see you before many months have passed when we can sing the

"Star Spangled Banner";
with full and rejoicing
hearts. God bless you
friend Albert, may your
life and health be
precious in his sight.

Yours truly
Russell Clark

Unfortunately a little research reveals an unhappy ending to this short story.

The records of the North Branford Congregational Church show that Albert Frances Wheaton was baptized on October 24, 1835.² That would suggest that he was born very close to that date. Albert F. Wheaton volunteered for the Union Army on October 2, 1861. He mustered in as a Corporal in Company A, 10th Connecticut Volunteers in Hartford. He enlisted for “3 years or the war” and served until Sunday, December 14, 1862 when he was wounded in action in Kinston³, North Carolina. He died in the regimental hospital December 15th, 1862. Albert was therefore 28 years old when killed. He lived only three months after this letter was written. It is probable that he never received the letter and the reason that the letter remained in the possession of Russell Clarke was that it was returned to him unopened. It was apparently found by the Scholzs when they purchased the property.

Albert’s father, Abram Wheaton, being an invalid, filed for Albert’s pension in 1866/67 and was granted said pension in 1871. Albert was never married, had no off spring and therefore his father was the closest relative entitled to the “Widow’s Pension.” Abram Wheaton began receiving the pension of \$8 per month in March 1871.⁴

Albert F. Wheaton is reported as “North Branford’s most famous soldier.”⁵

On December 14, 1862, General John G. Foster left New Bern, North Carolina to strike the Richmond and Wilmington RR. Just outside of Kinston, the Union troops were met by Confederate forces who commanded a superior position. Eventually, the 10th led a successful charge on the enemy position routing them. Of the 366 men that went

² North Branford Congregational Church Records 1769-1845 - Baptisms, Marriages, Deaths. Extracted from microfilm at the Connecticut State Library by Jane Bouley, Branford Town Historian. Totoket Historical Society Accession # 2003-013-003

³ The official documents in the National Archives use both Kinston and Kingston as the name of the town in which Albert F. Wheaton was killed. Kinston is correct.

⁴ Data retrieved from FOLD3, a subscription internet service featuring military records from The National Archives.

⁵ Our Soldiers by Marion Doody Bradley, The Totoket Historical Society, Inc., 1995, pg 19

into battle with the 10th that day, 106 were killed or wounded. Wheaton was one of these.

The sergeant who was carrying the United States flag had his arm shattered. Wheaton took the flag from him, was subsequently shot through the body and died the next day. An account of his last moments (Croffut and Morris 1868)⁶ is as follows:

I did what I could to guard the colors: I'd stand by them to the last. where's the regiment now?" he asked. "It has gone on to do its work," answered the Chaplain. "Glory!" he cried. "If I die," he added, "tell my friends I gave my life for liberty and I'll gladly give another."

For a brief history of some of the actions in which the 10th Connecticut Volunteers were engaged, see:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/10th_Connecticut_Regiment_Infantry

Corporal Wheaton was the subject of a poem by Martha Russell, a noted authoress and North Branford resident. The poem is entitled "Our Color Bearer

Our Color Bearer⁷

"What of Albert?" do you ask me! Albert
who our colors bore.

Through quaking swamps to Beaufort-
by the sluggish Neuse's shore
Where the battle raged the fiercest-
thickest fell the leaden storm

Bearing high the proud old banner,
might be seen his stalwart form.
"Forward 10th!" clear rang the order,
and compact as a rock
Our grim, restless column rushed,

⁶ The Military and Civil History of Connecticut During the War of 1861-65. N.Y., Ledyard Bill, 1868.

⁷ Ibid, Marion Doody Bradley, pg 41

onward to the shock
One prayer for those we cherished,
one deeply indrawn breath
Ah, we reaped an ample harvest
on that fatal field of death.
I was next but one to Albert,
as we fiercely onward pressed.
I heard the cursed Minie ball
that struck him in the breast.
Tom Davis caught the standard
and we left him where he lay
But deeply we avenged him
in that fierce and bloody fray.
Then my turn came- a saber cut
on the right arm-just here
I could not grasp my musket-
they sent me to the rear
Where I found my stricken comrade,
all unconscious of the pain
The dreadful sights and fearful groans
that pierce the heart and brain.
"No hope" the surgeon muttered,
but kindly bade me stay
To bathe his burning lips and brow
and hear what he might say
What sacred word or token he might send
to those who wait
Around the wide old hearthstone,
the tidings of his fate.
A shell came shrieking past us-
his eyes flew open wide.
"How goes the day!" he murmured.
"Tis ours", a voice replied.
"We have whipped the traitors soundly-
full fast they broke and fled."
A flash of joy lit up his face
"Thank God! Thank God." he said.
Then, his poor parched lips moved feebly,
yet though I never stirred
But bent with listening eye and ear,

I could not catch one word.
But knew by the soft radiance
that overspread his face
He was thinking of the dear ones,
in his far off native place.
Perhaps he saw his father's face-
his sister's dear- who knows
Or heard the murmur of the stream
that by their garden flows.
Or saw again his mother's grave
where she sleeps amid his race
Good men and true, each one of them,
in their own day and place. '
Or heard once more the church bell smite
throughout the morning air.
Calling each village household
up to the place of prayer
And joined again the song of praise
to God the wise and just.
In whose great love in life and death,
I know he put his trust.
And so I trust he did not hear
the dreary, gurgling sound
Of crimson lifeblood dripping
from that fearful, ragged wound.
But my heart seemed nigh to bursting
as the slow hours waned away
And I saw the death-damps gather,
the face grow parched and grey.
And I cried "O, friend and comrade
for the sake of God above
Have you no word or token to send
to those you love?"
He looked up as if still seeing the old flag
and faintly cried
"Tell them I redeemed my promise-
I bore it till I died!"

--Martha Russell--

A drawing of Albert Wheaton appeared in the Croffut and Morris reference and was reproduced in the Bradley reference and is replicated below.

