

# THE DEADLIEST THAT EVER DARKENED EARTH

VOICES FROM  
THE CIVIL WAR IN THE  
WALTER HAVIGHURST  
SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

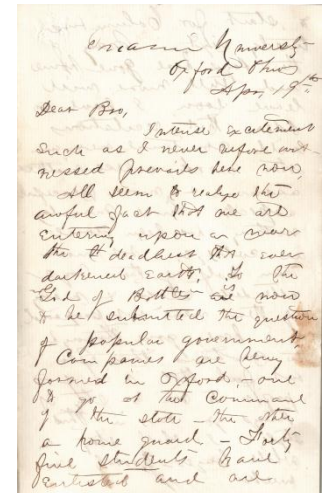
MIAMI UNIVERSITY  
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## Introduction

The Walter Havighurst Special Collections houses a wide array of American Civil War materials, including diaries, letters, official documents, photographs, printed books and ephemera. The items included in this exhibition are generally organized in the following sections: fighting for the Union, Miami University and the war, the rise and fall of the Confederacy, the state of medicine during the war, and the African American experience. Two “spotlight” cases are included in the exhibit: one showcases four diaries kept during the war and the other includes materials related to both Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis. As a complement to our year-long display of pages from *Harper's Weekly* from the year 1861, we have also included a small exhibit on the practice of journalism during the war. As you browse this exhibit you will “hear” the voices of political leaders, Union soldiers, Miami students, Confederate generals and spies, former slaves, African American soldiers, hospital workers, sanitary agents and newspaper correspondents as they tell their own stories and experiences during the war.

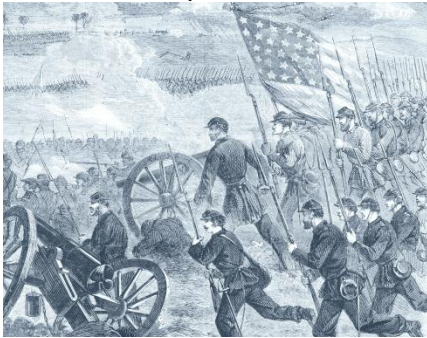
One of our voices from the past, David Basset Snow (1838-1925), was a student at Miami University from 1856 to 1862. From 1862 to 1865, Snow served as a sergeant in Co. K, 83<sup>rd</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry. Snow's letters to his brother Joseph, who was also a Miami graduate, are fascinating for their intelligent insights into the nation's conflict as well as for his beautiful prose. Quotations from his letters in each section of the exhibit provide an eyewitness “narration” of the war. The exhibit title



comes from a letter he wrote at the start of the war when he was still a student at Miami. He writes: "All seem to realize the awful fact that we are entering upon a war the deadliest that ever darkened earth."

### ***Should the Worst Come: Fighting for the Union***

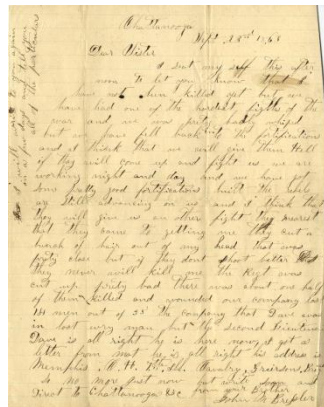
The stories of Union soldiers are told in their own words in letters home to family members and sweethearts. The letters in this section



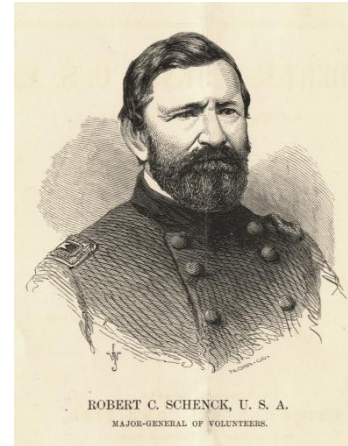
of the exhibit touch on the various concerns of the average soldier: the experience of camp life and of battle, the health and safety of family, and remembrance of better times back home. Perhaps one of the most poignant letters in the collection is a letter from Ohio infantry soldier John M. Bressler to his sister dated

September 23, 1863. Writing home after his regiment's participation in the Battle of Chickamauga, Bressler reassures his sister that he survived the action. "I have not been killed yet but we have had one of the hardest fights of the war and we was pretty badly whipped but we have fell back into the fortifications and I think that we will give them Hell if they will come up and fight us ..." However, he didn't escape the battle unscathed: "The nearest that they came to getting me they cut a bunch of hair out of my head that was pretty close but if they don't shoot better they never will kill me." Goth died several months later of wounds received at Kennesaw Mountain on June 27th, 1864.

In addition to the selected letters of Union soldiers, the bureaucracy of war is on display with documents related to the business of running a large wartime army, including a muster roll and an official record of the distribution of clothing and supplies.



### ***The Boys of the University: Miami and the War***



The Civil War had a profound effect on the daily life and administration of Miami University. There were divided loyalties amongst the faculty, students and alumni and many would choose opposing sides during the conflict. In April of 1861 when President Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers for military service, many Miami students joined the "University Rifles", Co. B of the 20<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Regiment, organized by fellow Miamian Ozro J. Dodds. A vocal Lincoln supporter prior to the war, Miami alumnus Robert Cumming Schenck (1809-1890) offered his services to the President and was appointed Brigadier-General of Volunteers in 1861.

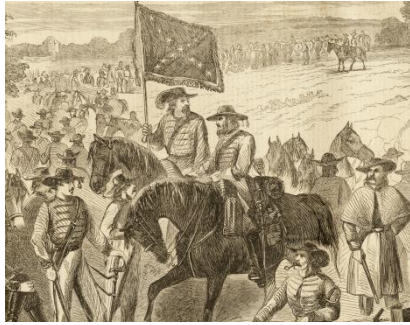
While the war raged on, annual events on Miami University's campus continued. Literary societies such as the Erodolphian Society held their annual debate in 1864 with a decidedly current topic: "That the Rebel States, on their subjugation, should be admitted into the Union in the same status they had before the war." Unpopular opinions and sympathies were an ongoing concern of the faculty and on a few occasions professors and students were dismissed from the University for expressing these views. On June 22, 1861 the faculty dismissed David H. Londenback for "uttering treasonable sentiments, hurrahing for Jeff. Davis and the so called Southern Confederacy".





## Southern Rights, &c: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy

From one Southerner to another, a telegram dated April 18, 1861, reflects the jubilant celebration across the South at the birth of the Confederacy. The telegram's message refers to the previous day's vote by the state of Virginia to secede from the Union. It reads: "An immense meeting called by our Virginia citizens now progressing. Intense enthusiasm great rejoicing. An effigy of



Lincoln on a rail, just passed meeting causing uproarious shouting – city illuminated bands now playing 'old Virginny Shore'."

Drawing mostly from the Samuel Richey Collection of the Southern Confederacy, exhibit materials related to the rise and fall of the Confederate States of America include a leave of absence signed by Stonewall Jackson, a dispatch from J.E.B. Stuart, a letter from Confederate spy Rose O'Neal Greenhow to President Jefferson Davis, and a letter from Davis to Robert E. Lee on the eve of the evacuation of Richmond. Also included is a letter from a Confederate soldier to President Davis on the diminishing fortunes of the Confederacy and its army: "Its morale is at the lowest point compatible with its further existence or coherence as an army. Events may happen any day which will dissolve it like melted snow."

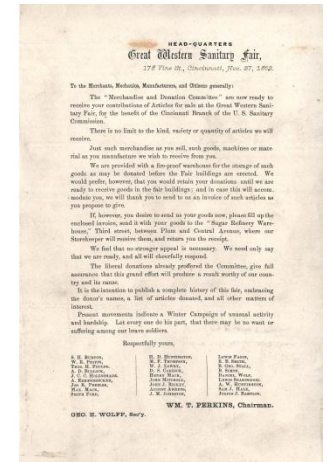


## Doing a Great Work: Medicine in the War



The critical role of women in caring for the sick and wounded is reflected in this selection of documents related to the state of medicine and hospitals during the war. Included in this section of the exhibit is a first edition of Louisa May Alcott's famous *Hospital Sketches*, which chronicled her time as a nurse during the war, and a letter from social reformer and sanitary agent Annie Wittenmyer. Early in the war, Wittenmyer visited hospitals, writing about the bad conditions, and gathering support for improvements. She was particularly influential in introducing the use of "diet kitchens" in army hospitals, ensuring that patients were given the proper sustenance for their recovery. She writes to her aunt about her work: "I am from home most of the time visiting hospitals in the South – I am furnished a pass – a free pass by the Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, which will take me anywhere within our lines free of cost."

The Great Western Sanitary Fair was held in Cincinnati from December 21, 1863 to January 4, 1864, by the Cincinnati branch of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, in order to raise money for the care of the sick and wounded. On display in this section of the exhibit are a call for donations, a receipt issued to Giles Richards for miscellaneous articles donated to the fair's cause, and a circular advertisement for the war memorials, relics and curiosities display at the exhibition hall. Other parts of the fair included an art gallery and a refreshment hall. A lengthy history of the fair was published soon after the event.



## Seeking the Enjoyment of Freedom: African Americans and the War



Soon after the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, freeing the nation's slaves, the first official black regiments were formed in the Union Army. One of the first units was the famous 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. Many African Americans, from the Oxford community and beyond, traveled long distances to join these units. In a document entitled "List of Soldiers in the U.S. Army from Oxford Township, Butler County, Ohio" and dated August 5, 1864,

several African American soldiers are listed along with their regiments and status. Robert J. Jones, who is listed here, was a farmer from Hamilton, Ohio and a private in Co. I of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts. Tragically, he was captured at the Battle of Olustee in Florida and died in a Confederate prison.

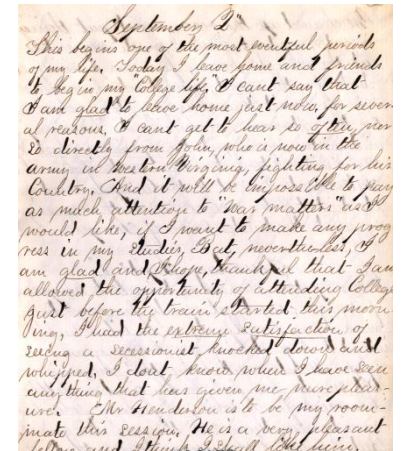
In addition to manuscripts and political cartoons related to the institution of slavery and the status of African Americans during the war, two published autobiographies of former slaves are included in this exhibit. The famous slave narrative by the great leader of the abolitionist movement, Frederick Douglass, was published by fellow abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison in Boston in 1845. An immediate bestseller, it was reprinted several times within a few years of its publication, and was highly influential in winning support for the anti-



slavery cause. In the same tradition as Douglass's narrative, a local Oxford man, Peter Bruner, tells his own story of struggles as a slave and his triumphant path to freedom in *A Slave's Adventures Toward Freedom*. In his introduction he writes: "In this book I have given the actual experiences of my own life. I thought in putting it in this form it might be of some inspiration to struggling men and women. In this great, free land of ours, every person, no matter how humble or how great seems the handicap, by industry and saving, can reach a position of independence and be of service to mankind."

## Civil War Materials Online

As part of the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the American Civil War, this year the Miami University Libraries are creating a digital collection of important Civil War materials housed in The Walter Havighurst Special Collections. The first pieces to be digitized and accessible online are several Civil War diaries in the collection; three kept by Miami students and three by local Ohio community members who took up arms to fight for the Union. The diarists, all of whom served as members of the Ohio Volunteer Infantry, record their impressions and experiences on a variety of topics, including their interrupted college studies, the daily life of a soldier, military engagements and news from the home front. The Falconer, Marshall, Evans, Morrow and Spence diaries displayed in this exhibit are included in the Civil War Diaries collection online.



Over the course of the next year, we will be adding items to the Civil War digital collection from the Samuel Richey Collection of the



Southern Confederacy and other Civil War related manuscript collections.

To access the diaries and turn the pages of history, please visit:

<http://digital.lib.muohio.edu/civilwar/>

The items in this exhibit have been drawn from the wealth of Civil War-related materials in both our print and manuscript collections, including items from the following:

Benjamin and Caroline Harrison Collection

David Basset Snow Collection

Gilbert-Richards Collection

Manuscript Diaries

Miscellanea Collection

Robert C. Schenck Collection (Miami University Archives)

Samuel Richey Collection of the Southern Confederacy

W.A. Hammond Lincoln Collection

Waldo F. Brown Collection

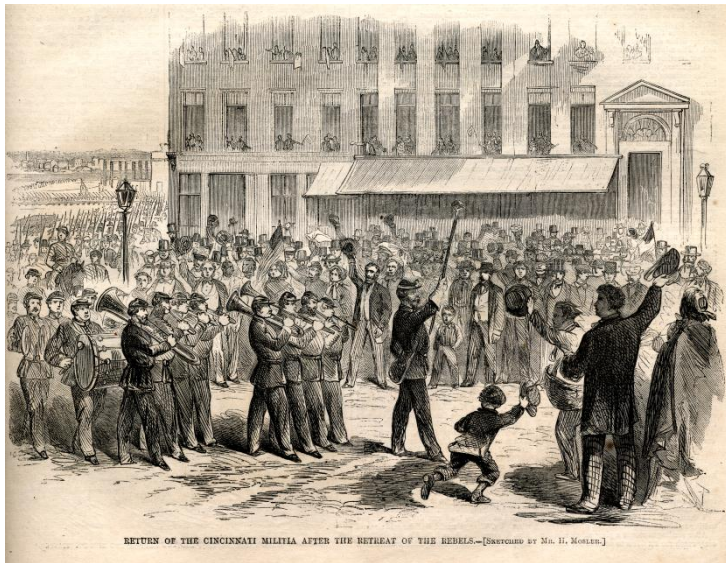


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