

H.M. Misimer's Letter to Martha Misimer  
August 8, 1864

HL\_MSS\_21-07\_02 Folder 46

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For English 618: Research Methods in English  
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## Introduction to the Series

This transcription and its attendant annotations, explanatory material, and bibliography was prepared by students in ENGL 618: Research Methods in English, the required gateway class for the MA in English degree program at Western Carolina University (WCU). The learning outcomes for this class include the following:

1. Conduct appropriate, effective, and ethical scholarship.
  - a. Effectively find and use advanced research tools (handbooks, databases, guides, bibliographies, etc.) appropriate to a subject.
    - Students will be able to use a wide variety of such tools and evaluate those tools.
  - b. Find appropriate advanced research (print and electronic scholarship) and apply that research to specific disciplinary questions or issues.
    - Students will be able to find a variety of scholarship, evaluate both the appropriateness and rigor of that scholarship, and incorporate that scholarship correctly and effectively.
  - c. Develop accurate bibliographies and reference citations.
    - Students will be able to annotate, abstract, and cite materials following standard MLA format.
2. Understand the process by which the texts we use are made available.
  - Students will be able to conduct basic editorial work and evaluate the editorial work of others.

All work is presented as submitted by the graduate students. While they take great care with their transcriptions and annotations, errors are possible. As they learn throughout this class, good scholarship requires meticulous research and corroboration by authoritative sources.

Our objective is to provide transcriptions and annotations of WCU's Special Collections materials that will be useful to the institution, students, scholars, patrons, and all users of our library's resources.

If you wish to submit an emendation or correction for this document, please email Dr. Brian Gastle ([bgastle@wcu.edu](mailto:bgastle@wcu.edu)).

## INTRODUCTION TO THE DOCUMENT

This document is a transcription of a letter written July 13, 1864 and sent by Henry M. Misemer, also known as H. M. Misemer, to his wife Martha J. Misemer. Misemer was from Monroe County east Tennessee. Prior to the American Civil War, he was a farmer, and his land was valued at \$1000. During the civil war he served in the Union's 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of the Tennessee Calvary in Company F. He was a Trumpeter, Private, and Corporal. East Tennesseans, like Misemer, did not align themselves with the Confederacy and instead opposed a receding from the Union. Slavery had been all but abolished in East Tennessee, with most of its residents being too poor to afford slaves. Misemer and Margaret J. Brown married on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1855. They had one daughter together, Mary E. Misemer. Margaret would die in August 1857. Martha J. Bogart was married to H. M. Misemer on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1859. They had 3 children together, these were Charles F. Misemer, Margaret E. Misemer, and Laura C. Misemer. The East Tennessee community was largely devout Christians, due in some part to the sizable Quaker community that moved there in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This letter was written outside of Decatur, Alabama when the Union was having difficulty properly distributing its soldiers and resources to its soldiers. The Tennessee Calvary attempted to re-organize itself, and the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> regiments of the Tennessee Calvary were merged in April. Misemer's family seemed to struggle financially, so in his letters he addresses their finances and how he will take care of their family. When Misemer is not discussing his family's finances he writes about some of the daily activities he partakes in within the camp, his thoughts on where he is and what is doing, his encounters with some of his friends in the camp (Like Lee and Harvey), and how he badly misses his family.

One of the most notable pieces of information about Misemer is that he was tragically killed in the Sultana disaster a little under a year after this letter was written. The Steamboat ferry, Sultana, exploded in April of 1865 killing nearly all on board. Not long after this letter was written Misemer was captured by the Confederacy and made a prisoner of war. He was sent to Cahaba Prison. He was released from prison when he was on the Sultana. The Sultana disaster would end up killing most of the 3<sup>rd</sup> regiment of the Tennessee Calvary. Misemer, his brothers, and most of his friends in the company unfortunately never got to see their families. The Sultana Disaster continues to be one of the largest maritime disasters.

## EDITORIAL STATEMENT

This document was written on thin paper that has yellowed over time. Despite the paper's age, it has been preserved well. These letters were the last correspondence from Misemer to his wife Martha, so she took special care to not damage them in any way. The paper has been folded three times.

When Misemer incorrectly writes a word he often marks it out with his pen. Some of these mark-ups have faded over time from what may be water damage, but I have done my best to decipher what these mark-ups are. If you look closely at these markings, you can generally tell what was originally written. I have chosen to indicate these marked-through words ~~like this~~. Misemer sometimes adds words above the line. I have indicated this throughout the letter <sup>like this</sup>.

Misemer generally can have somewhat legible handwriting but many times he will forget to dot his "I"s, or he will try to make an "S" too small which can make it resemble both a "P" or a "G" depending on the situation. Misemer also uses little punctuation in his letters. He does use it occasionally when abbreviating someone's name, you can find this when he says, "G. W. Maxwell", but other than this, punctuation is not often found in his letters. It is uncertain how much education Misemer received as a farmer in rural Tennessee, which may explain why his writing is generally quite legible but spelling and punctuation are inconsistent.

The occasional changes in the darkness of the ink and the varying moods he seems to shift between suggest that he starts a letter and throughout the day as he thinks of other things to say he adds them to the letter.

This transcription is a diplomatic edition, meaning that I have transcribed the document as closely to the original as I can. Any grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, or syntactical issues have been preserved.

# TRANSCRIPTION

[MS page 1]

Decatur Ala Monday morning August 8<sup>th</sup>/64

Martha. J. Misemer

My dear wife I received a letter from you last night of July 28<sup>th</sup> and was truly glad to hear from you and very much surprised to hear that you had not reed a letter from me for so long I have written a letter to you every week since I left Nashville and will continue to do so as long as I can send them By mail I think I have got four letters from you since I left Nashville I would write you a long letter this morning if I had time but we are ordered to start a foraging<sup>1</sup> at half past seven and consequently I haven't time Martha I thought I wouldn't send you any money By Charles Cate<sup>2</sup> but you say your children is naked and I can't stand that I send

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<sup>1</sup> Foraging in this context means "To rove or hunt about as in search of supplies" (Oxford English Dictionary).

<sup>2</sup> The "Charles Cate" that Misemer is likely referring to here is Robert C. Cate. Robert served in the Union as a Private of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of the Tennessee Calvary. Robert served in both Company H and Company F (National Park Service).

you Twenty dollar's<sup>3</sup> and I want  
you to clothe my little children  
with it or use it in anyway you

[MS page 2]

please Charles Cate lives in  
Mcminn<sup>4</sup> Close to Dicksons factory<sup>5</sup>  
dont be uneasy about me being  
out of money I have plenty to do  
me until we draw. I got them socks  
and sold two pr<sup>6</sup> of yarn ones for \$1.00  
apiece in fifteen minutes after I got  
them you need not be afraid  
of me braking the sabbath unless  
I am compelled to do so our officers  
pay no attention to sunday and  
of course I have to obey them when

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<sup>3</sup> In April of 1864, Misemer created a bill of goods for his purchase of needed supplies. You can find a scan of this bill of goods within this collection of letters, it is titled: (HL\_MSS\_21-07\_02\_38). He spends \$6.75 on his list of supplies, which was approximately half of his month's pay at the time. This would be enough money to buy his children clothes and likely a small amount of food. This letter was written not long after the pay increase went into effect within the Union. Even with the pay increase, Misemer is sending over a month's pay to his wife Martha. In a previous letter, (HL\_MSS\_21-07\_02\_43), Misemer is either mis-informed about how much he is getting paid or is trying to consul her by lying about how much he is making. It can be inferred then, that Misemer is sending this large sum because he is attempting to alleviate Martha's concerns about their finances, or that he has rarely had this much money on hand at one time and is unaware as how to properly manage it.

<sup>4</sup> McMinn is a county found in Eastern Tennessee.

<sup>5</sup> There is insufficient evidence and proper scholarship has not been conducted so it is challenging to determine where Misemer is referring to. William Dickson was a wealthy Irish merchant and Greeneville's Tennessee first postmaster who built a mansion that at one time became a tobacco factory, according to the mansion's website. However, during the writing of this letter it apparently was a school. There are no records of a factory in Greeneville, Tennessee referred to as "Dickson's Factory" other than it at one time this mansion being used as a tobacco factory. It is more than likely that the information regarding this mansion is not factually sound, there is almost no documentation about the property other than on the mansion's own website, and the mansion has no citation attached to the facts it claims. It appears that Dickson's descendants run the mansion which is now a museum so it seems likely that the information they have published on their website may not be entirely true. If what they claim is entirely true, this could be a colloquial name used by locals for the mansion Dickson built as it is quite large or possibly a factory that he was known to have worked with.

<sup>6</sup> Most likely an abbreviation of "Pair".

the command me to do anything on  
the sabbath but I dont think I am  
accountable when I cant help it &  
I try to keep the sabbath holy I  
also try to keep from sinning as mu  
-ch as possible<sup>7</sup> & a man has to be more  
on his guard here than at home  
But he can live a christian here as  
well as at home if he will try  
Martha I have ben trying to keep you pos  
-ted about the movement of our army and  
I expect that is the reason why my letters  
dont reach you<sup>8</sup> hereafter my letters  
will be short let your yours be the same way.

H. M. Misemer

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<sup>7</sup> Between 1790 and 1820 Quakers had begun moving into Eastern Tennessee. The Quakers were openly abolitionists, and they had a strong influence on the local communities' attitudes towards slavery. East Tennessee accepted it's new Quaker residents, but the rest of the state strongly opposed them and their anti-slavery views. This and disagreements being had within the Quaker doctrine would lead to the eventual downfall of the Quaker's influence on Tennessee and much of the abolitionist movement that had been started there (Ingle). However, some of their influence was still felt at the time this letter was written, with slavery being almost entirely abolished in East Tennessee (Goodheart). In a similar vein, Misemer's devout Christian beliefs echo many of the Quaker's, and it can be inferred that Misemer, or his family had been involved with the Quaker community at one time, if not directly then indirectly.

<sup>8</sup> Letters were known to be intercepted by both the Union and Confederacy. If soldiers disclosed information that could endanger their Companies, they would delay the letter being sent (Boatner).

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ancestry.com. *1860 United States Federal Census*.

These were the census records of H. M. Misemer and his family in 1860. It gave me information as to where Misemer lived, what he did for a living, and who his family was.

Boatner, Mark M. et al. *The Civil War Dictionary*. D. McKay. 1959.

This book discusses almost anything related to the civil war. It was a helpful resource to look into, if none of the books I had about the civil war had the information I was looking for this usually did.

Goodheart, Lawrence B. "Tennessee's Antislavery Movement Reconsidered: The Example of Elihu Embree." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 3, 1982, pp. 224–38. *JSTOR*.

This article details the effects of abolitionist movements within Tennessee.

Ingle H. Larry. *Quakers in Conflict: The Hicksite Reformation*. 1st ed. University of Tennessee Press. 1986.

This book gives greater context to the conflicts happening within the Quaker community in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, why they were happening, and how they affected the communities they were in.

National Park Service. *Soldier Details*. U.S. Department of the Interior. NPS.

This was used to obtain detailed records for all civil soldiers mentioned in this document.

*OED Online*, Oxford University Press.

This was used as a reference for terms that needed an explanation as to what they meant in the context of Misemer's letters.