

Guide to the George F. Shepherd Papers, 1857-1901

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Summary Information

Title: George F. Shepherd Papers

Inclusive Dates: 1857-1901

Creator: Shepherd, George F., 1835-1865

Call Number: Eau Claire Micro 6

Quantity: 1 reel of microfilm (35 mm)

Repository: This collection is managed jointly by the Wisconsin Historical Society, Library-Archives Division, the Eau Claire Area Research Center, and the Stevens Point Area Research Center.

Archival Locations: UW-Eau Claire McIntyre Library / Eau Claire Area Research Ctr. ([Map](#))

Abstract: Papers, 1857-1901, of George F. Shepherd, an Eau Claire County, Wisconsin immigrant farmer from Guernsey, England, who served in Co. F of the 25th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry. Included are Civil War letters to his wife Martha concerning camp life, his stays in hospitals, and his concerns for his family, farm, and finances; letters from Martha's family in Guernsey, 1858-1866; legal and biographical data, including Martha's obituary; and photographs.

Note: This collection is available only on microfilm. Duplicate copies are at both the Eau Claire and the Stevens Point Area Research Centers.

Language: English

Search Terms/Subject Terms

- United States. Army. Wisconsin Infantry Regiment, 25th (1862-1865). Company F
- British Americans—Wisconsin
- United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Hospitals
- Wisconsin—History—Civil War, 1861-1865

Biography/History

A merchant seaman, George F. Shepherd obtained his discharge at Dublin, Ireland in April 1857, and with his bride of thirteen months, Martha (Polly) V. (Fluere) Shepherd, emigrated from their native Guernsey (an English island off the coast of Normandy, France) on May 3, 1857, his twenty-second birthday. They settled in Mackford, Green Lake County, Wisconsin, but in October 1858, bought forty acres near Augusta, Eau Claire County, Wisconsin from Aurora and Catharine Dille of Mackford. Within three years they owned the rest of the S1/2 of the SW1/4 of section 12, T25N, R7W in the Town of Otter Creek (Town of Bridge Creek at time of purchases in 1858 and 1861). They retained title to this property throughout their lifetimes.

Shepherd declared his intention to become a United States citizen on November 2, 1860, and on December 30, 1863, enlisted in the 25th Wisconsin Infantry Volunteers (Co. F). Very little is known of his life other than for the years 1864-1865 which he documented in letters to his wife while in the army. Apparently, Shepherd's health was such that he was not equal to the rigors of service and he spent many weeks in hospitals or "sent to the rear" because of a variety of debilitating illnesses. Eventually, on May 3, 1865, his thirtieth birthday, Shepherd succumbed to dysentery and complications contracted while with Sherman's Army on his march to the sea, or more probably in the Carolinas.

Throughout these years, Martha Shepherd continued to manage their farm in Thompson Valley and to raise their two children, Charles G. (October 27, 1860-May 13, 1883) and Laura M. (February 16, 1862-June 16, 1947). About five years after Shepherd's death, Martha married William Foster, who apparently died prior to 1875. (Foster also had been born in England.) Martha lived the rest of her life with her daughter Laura and her son-in-law James Flick near Augusta, Wisconsin. Martha Shepherd Foster died on December 19, 1901.

Scope and Content Note

The bulk of the George F. Shepherd Papers are the Civil War letters Shepherd wrote to his wife. There are also a very few of her letters to him, and one letter from Shepherd's brother, Amos W. Shepherd, Co. A, 2nd Minnesota Cavalry, Fort Ridgely, Minnesota, to Martha. Included also are eleven letters from Martha's family in Guernsey, most of them written by her sister, Cathrine Fluere, 1858-1866; and records, 1859-1873, such as deeds, Shepherd's Certificate of Discharge from the ship Amulet, April 13, 1857, his declaration of intention to become a citizen of the United States, November 2, 1860, and notification of drafts sent to Martha V. Shepherd for extra pay due her during Shepherd's period of service from the Volunteer Aid Fund. Filed with the papers are some biographical notes, a copy of Martha Shepherd Foster's obituary from *The Eagle* (Augusta, Wisconsin), a photograph of Martha in her coffin, a tintype of George Shepherd in the uniform of the Union Army, and some manuscript poetry saved by Martha Shepherd during Shepherd's absence during the Civil War.

After Martha Foster's death in 1901 the letters were in the custody of her daughter, Laura Shepherd Flick. At her request they became the charge of Mrs. Frank (Verna) Scott, possibly a descendant of Martha Shepherd's sister-in-law, Mrs. Charles Scott. Before her death, Mrs. Scott sent the letters to a sister in Montana, Mrs. Bessie Temple, who gave them to her niece, Mrs. Harry Fristad, in 1967. Early in 1971, Mr. and Mrs. Fristad, retired Augusta, Wisconsin area farmers, arranged with Dr. Frederick Kremple of Wisconsin State University-Stevens Point to loan the letters to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for copying. Microfilming was decided upon as the optimum method of reproduction for the collection due to the faded and deteriorating condition of some of the documents.

The collection is organized in four categories: Letters from the Isle of Guernsey, 1858-1866; Civil War

Letters, 1862-1866 and undated; Records, 1857-1873; and Miscellaneous - biographical information, photographs, and poetry. Each category is arranged chronologically.

The Civil War letters are those of one of the common denominator of American immigrant farmer pressed temporarily into military service for the Union cause. As such, they are of special interest. Although idiosyncrasies of spelling and syntax add to the difficulties inherent in reading faded, often penciled, letters, these obstacles do not obscure the value of the letters for the researcher concerned with the Wisconsin Infantry Volunteer, the soldier in Sherman's Army, the mid-nineteenth century immigrant, and/or the Wisconsin pioneer farmer.

The letters reveal Shepherd's concern for the problems of the family and the farm with which he left his wife, his personal fears, discomforts and illnesses, his opinion of the hospitals in which he was confined and the battles in which he fought. In one letter (December 24, 1864) Shepherd details his respect and affection for General "Billy" Sherman and the privations of that march to the sea. He writes poignantly of his longing to return to his family, realistically in regard to his wife's management of their farm and financial responsibilities, and, on occasion, descriptively of the country through which he passed.

In a letter dated December 21, 1864, Shepherd writes of the capture of Savannah, Georgia. On April 24, 1865, he mentions the shock of Lincoln's death as he had earlier alluded to a universal interest in the question of McClellan versus Lincoln in the presidential election of 1864.

Shepherd's reasons for enlisting, whatever they may have been, very probably did not include a dedication to the cause of the Negro of whom he wrote:

...the Black Buggers...I see so many of them that I hate the name of them...running a long in the rear with he wagon trans by the hundreds...eating up our reashens....(August 30, 1864)

and

...to Se and to Smell the old Batle fields to Se the dead horses and muels and men Not A half Covered you tell them that Love negers to go and Live_with them I don't Love the negrow nar the Contery the Live in....(July 19, 1864)

Whatever patriotic fervor he felt was sorely tried by the realities of army life. Shepherd's letters are a sad chronicle of frustration and distress punctuated with religious pronouncements to sustain him in the ordeal.

An early letter, September 24, 1858, written by relatives in Guernsey is filled with the questions of those contemplating emigration. Later Guernsey letters detail little pieces of news and tragedy of family and old friends, the current status of a family business, and the prospects and cost of living on the island.

Administrative/Restriction Information

Acquisition Information

Loaned for microfilming by Mr. and Mrs. Harry Fristad, Stevens Point, Wisconsin, 1971.

Processing Information

Processed by Joanne Hohler, 1971.

Contents List

Eau Claire Micro 6 Reel 1	Letters from the Isle of Guernsey, 1858 September 24- 1866 May 1
Reel 1	Civil War Letters, 1862 January 20-1866 June 3; undated
Reel 1	Records, 1857 April 13-1873 April 16
Reel 1	Miscellaneous - Biographical Information, Photographs, and Poetry
