

BABB, JOHN D.
John D. Babb family papers, 1862-1865

Emory University
Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library
Atlanta, GA 30322
404-727-6887
rose.library@emory.edu

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Babb, John D.
Title: John D. Babb family papers, 1862-1865
Call Number: Manuscript Collection No. 360
Extent: .25 linear ft. (1 box)
Abstract: Papers of the John D. Babb family of Baltimore, Maryland during the Civil War.
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Restrictions on access

Unrestricted access.

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Source

Gift, 1960 with subsequent additions.

Citation

[after identification of item(s)], John D. Babb family papers, Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

Collection Description

Biographical Note

John D. Babb, Jr., Sergeant in Company B, 5th Maryland Infantry Regiment, was the son of John D. and Wealthy H. Babb, and the brother of Agnes Babb. The family home was at 68 South Charles St., Baltimore, Maryland. John D., Sr. operated a bakery where he employed as many as six workmen. He apparently spent part of his time out soliciting business and Agnes worked, at least part of the time, in the bakeshop as a saleslady. The Babbs were patriotic unionists and

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were opposed to both abolitionism and secession. Their letters reflect the divided allegiance of the Baltimore people and frequently mention the Secessionists as cheering Jeff Davis, circulating false stories about Confederate victories and refusing to be drafted. Also discussed are estrangement of neighbors and enmity between members of churches and other evidences of mutual suspicion and sectional strife. John Jr.'s age and date of enlistment are not given but the latter was probably in January 1862. His father was in his seventies and both parents were ill and feeble. His sister Agnes died in 1864. John Jr. was near Baltimore, at Newport News, Fortress Monroe, Hyattstown and Keedysville, Harper's Ferry, Maryland Heights and Point of Rocks until June, 1863 when he went to Winchester, Va., where he was captured on June 15 and sent to Libby Prison. He apparently was exchanged because he was later wounded in battle. He was in a hospital at Fort Monroe July 13-31, 1864 and apparently remained there until he was discharged.

Scope and Content Note

Correspondence is between Babb and his family and describes his activities in the military, divided allegiances of the people of Baltimore, life in Baltimore during the Civil War; the Babb family's feelings on slavery and the Civil War are also expressed. Of the 192 letters, John D. Babb, Jr. wrote sixty-two (January 31, 1862-February 8, 1864); John D. Sr. wrote thirty (March 17, 1862-August 25, 1864); Mrs. Babb wrote eighteen (March 16, 1862-June 14, 1863); and Agnes wrote eighty-two (March 27, 1862- January 19, 1864). Military documents include a receipt, an honorable discharge, and a pension claim.

Container List

John D. Babb Jr. letters

Box	Folder	Content
1	1	<p>1862, January 31-December 29</p> <p>37 letters, addressed to his parents. The first letter is written from Camp Hoffman, presumably in Baltimore where John Babb's regiment enlisted and remained until March 11. On March 14, he writes from Camp Butler (Newport News). On March 18, he describes the ruins of buildings, furniture, etc., at "General Lee's place" and mentions three Rebel deserters. On April 16, his letter shows a view of the encampment with crosses showing "Where our tents are pitched" and a schedule of a day's "program" from sunrise to 9 p.m. On May 11 he reports that "all the troops" except his own and another regiment were sent to Fortress Monroe and then to Sowels Point where they "captured all the Batteries along the shore." On June 26, he tells of plans to build hospitals at Newport News, Virginia. On July 16, he mentions "carelessness and inattention of our doctors". On July 31, "nearly half the regiment is on the sick list." On August 16, he tells of his determination never to drink again - "to resist all temptation." He had apparently displeased his family by excessive drinking. He has been trying to secure a promotion to Lieutenant. On September 13, he writes (from Hyattstown, Maryland) of leaving Fortress Monroe on September 9. On September 18, he writes from Keedysville, Maryland, and on September 23 - December 29, from Harper's Ferry, Va. and Maryland Heights. A fire at Harper's Ferry is supposed to have been started by prisoners confined there. 75 or 80 members of his regiment are prisoners -- deserters brought back. On October 3, he says, "I wish this war was at an end for I am sick and tired of it, it really seems to me that we are not fighting for our country, but for the freedom of the negroes." He asks his family's opinion of the Emancipation Proclamation which he feels "will do more harm than good."</p>
1	2	<p>1863, January 2 - December 8</p> <p>21 letters, the majority addressed to his parents. From January 2 – 26, letters are written from Harper's Ferry, Virginia. On January 11, he contrasts the accomplishments of the western army and the Army of the Potomac and is critical of Burnside. He describes "the new government Bakery." From February 21 - May 31, John writes from Point of Rocks, Md. On April 20 (letter of April 30) he was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant of Company D. From June 5 - 9, he writes from Camp near Winchester, Va. where he is in charge of his company, the Captain being absent. On June 6, he relates his experiences with a drunken soldier who tried to shoot him and of the mutiny of Company C, the members of which refused to board the cars to go to Virginia, and the later involvement of his own company. July 14 - December 8, his letters are written from Libby Prison, Richmond, Virginia. He was captured at Winchester with his entire regiment on June 15 and sent to Libby Prison on</p>

June 23. He had "no fault to find" with his situation. The "Civilian Commission of the North" sent boxes of clothing. Several of the 5th Regiment's officers died in the prison.

1864, January 5 - February 8

4 letters, from Libby Prison. In his last letter, February 8, he despairs of being exchanged and asks for food and clothing from home.

John Babb Sr.'s letters

1 3 1862, March 17 - December 8

14 letters. Concerned with family matters and advice as to the moral conduct and spiritual welfare of his son. On October 2, he mentions a recent visit with his son and asks, "Why is it that you suffer Stewart to rush again into Maryland, and even into Pennsylvania?...the people are mortified...at the lack of energy or the imbecility of our Managers." On December 8, he gives an amusing account of the visit of an "Odd Fellow" friend of John, Jr.

1 4 1863, January 7 - May 25

6 letters. On January 21, he criticizes the government, management of the war, speculators, "and then," he says, "the everlasting Nigger must take precedence of love of country, of patriotism, and of every principle." On January 28, he says the confusion of the Northern leaders is "more difficult to unravel than would be all the world that ever Niggerdom produced and I think also it would be about as dirty and black a job to undertake." On February 19, he says, "If Traitors and Abolitionists do not humble themselves before the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, there will be many Nebuchadnezzers eating grass or being under it ere this unnatural war is ended."

1864, June 24 - August 25

10 letters. On July 28, mentions visit of his wife to John, Jr. in prison, also mentions a Mr. Marshall, "your benevolent friend". On August 4, he mentions recent illness of John Jr. and the death of "Sissy" his daughter (John Jr.'s sister). On August 9, he tells of sending a "case of Instruments" which "Dr. Dunbar says...are a fit present for a Surgeon General."

Mrs. J. D. Babb's letters

1 5 1862, March 16 - December 16

11 letters. Mrs. Babb's letters to her son are similar in tone and content to those of her husband.

1863, January 1 - June 14

7 letters. On April 17, she mentions John Jr.'s visit home.

Agnes Babb's letters

1 6 1862, March 27-- December 27

51 letters. Agnes's letters are chattier and do not contain the abundance of advice found in her parents' letters. On May 6, she mentions a visit from a secessionist, Mrs. Akers, "the first Rebel" one of her friends had ever seen. On June 9, she mentions her pets, a mockingbird, a red bird and "Bunny." She had already asked John, Jr. to send her a blue bird. On July 2, she writes more about their "secession" neighbors. On September 25, she mentions a "visit from Mr. Bosserman" who, she says, was "imprisoned at Richmond because he would not open his church on Jeff Davis's fast day". Some of her "Secesh friends" seem to be changing their attitudes. On October 25, she says the people "are raving against McClellan." On October 31, she reports the arrest of a "party of Union men" who were meeting in Temperance Hall and who were suspected of being "not just what they should be." On November 3, she says the "Library is only open three days in the week now, and but four or five hours at a time, from ten to three for ladies." On December 9, she writes that she fears the Negroes will never again be so happy as they were on the plantations, that it were "better for them to have a white man for a master."

1 7 1863, January 3 - June 13

23 letters. On March 26, she tells of getting "a beautiful piece of music...called National Beauties...composed of Star Spangled Banner, Yankee Doodle, Columbia the-Gem of the Ocean, and Hail Columbia...the prettiest pieces I ever heard." April 4, she mentions a Mrs. Paris who "was ordered to leave for the South within forty eight hours." On May 5, she reports a visit of a friend to the White House. The friend asked the man at the door if he was the President and he replied "that the people said he was."

1864, January 19

1 letter, undated, 7 letters. Agnes died sometime between June 29 and August 4, 1864, probably before July 18.

1 8 Other individuals, 1843-1864

1 9 Miscellaneous

13 items. Receipt for payment of board at an "Officers General Hospital," dated July 31, 1864; Honorable Discharge, dated November 8, 1864; notification of pension claim, dated May 8, 1865; a list of officers perhaps those in Libby Prison; a visiting card, 7 covers, and a paper 5-cent certificate.