

PERRIGO FAMILY.

Perrigo family letters, 1862-1877

Emory University
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Descriptive Summary

Creator: Perrigo family.
Title: Perrigo family letters, 1862-1877
Call Number: Manuscript Collection No. 635
Extent: .25 linear ft. (1 box)
Abstract: Letters of the Perrigo family which describe the experiences of family members who served in the Union Army during the Civil War.
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Restrictions on Access

Unrestricted access.

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Source

Purchase, 1985.

Citation

[after identification of item(s)], Perrigo family letters, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

Processing

Processed by JCL, April 1985.

Collection Description

Biographical Note

The Perrigo family lived in Burlington, Racine County, Wisconsin, during the nineteenth century. George Perrigo and his wife (name unknown) were the parents of four children: Harriet,

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John E., William, and Sarah. The birthdates of the children are unknown, but during the Civil War, Harriet was married and away from home, John was a Union soldier, and William and Sarah were both at home.

John E. Perrigo belonged to Company H, 22d Wisconsin Volunteers, an infantry regiment of the Army of the Cumberland. He served with support personnel and saw very little battle action. In his first letter (September 26, 1862), he mentions being a drummer, but there is no other mention of that assignment. He spent much of his time on picket and guard duty, and also occasionally cooked for his company.

In September 1862, his regiment was camped in Kentucky, six miles south of Cincinnati, Ohio. In July 1863, the regiment advanced into Tennessee and was camped at Murfreesboro, in an area also called Stones River Bridge. His regiment moved to Nashville in late February or early March 1864, and remained there until May 1864. At that time, the regiment advanced to the front in northwest Georgia, and by summer was camped just outside Atlanta. After the fall of Atlanta, Perrigo was in the march to Savannah. At the time of his last letter (December 27, 1864), Savannah had surrendered and Perrigo had orders to move into South Carolina.

Very little is known about the other Perrigo children. Harriet Perrigo was married and lived in Beaverton, Illinois; her husband's name was James Edward (last name unknown), and they had a baby daughter whose name is also unknown. William Perrigo and Sarah Perrigo were both at home during the Civil War. William, also called "Willie" and "Bill," was apparently working, but his specific job is not known. Sarah was apparently in school during part of this time, but by 1866, she was living in Roscoe, Winnebago County, Illinois.

Lyman Church, also from Burlington, Wisconsin, was a close friend of William Perrigo. He enlisted in the Union army and joined John Perrigo's regiment in Tennessee in January 1864. Like Perrigo, his main duties included picket and guard duty and cooking. After his regiment advanced into Georgia, he was involved in at least one battle. By November 1864, Church had been transferred to an army hospital in Keokuk, Iowa, where he served as "Chief and Medical Nurse." The reason for his transfer is not known, but it is clear that he was unhappy with the change and wished to return to his regiment at the front, even preferring mess duty to his nursing duties. Despite his constant requests for a transfer, the doctors apparently considered Church to be one of the best nurses. He was still in Keokuk at the time of his last letter in February 1865.

Scope and Content Note

The collection consists of the papers of the Perrigo family from 1862-1877. The papers include thirty-five letters written between September 26, 1862 and March 23, 1877. The bulk of the letters dates between 1862 and 1865. These original letters are arranged chronologically. The collection also contains typed, partial transcripts of twenty-five of the letters. These typed transcripts came with the original letters, although their origin is not known. They are arranged chronologically in a separate sequence at the end of the collection.

The majority of the letters in the collection are from John Perrigo and Lyman Church. There are thirteen letters from John Perrigo: nine letters to his sister Sarah, one letter to his mother, one combined letter to Sarah and his mother, one combined letter to Sarah and his brother William, and one letter to a friend Joseph (last name unknown). Perrigo writes primarily of his day-to-day routine. He describes picket and guard duties, the food he has been eating and how small

the rations are, the weather, and his health, but he writes little of specific military actions. In a letter dated July 6, 1863, he notes that General William S. Rosecrans' troops had been fighting the Confederate troops of General Braxton Bragg. In the three letters written after arriving at the front in Georgia (May 1864), Perrigo does recount some battle action. In a letter dated July 24, 1864, he describes having watched a battle from a hill on July 20th. This may well have been the battle of Peach Tree Creek, also known as "Hood's First Sortie." The final letter from Perrigo (December 27, 1864) tells of the surrender of Savannah and of his impending move into South Carolina.

There are ten letters from Lyman Church to William Perrigo written between January 6, 1864 and February 12, 1865. Like those of John Perrigo, Church's letters chronicle his day-to-day routine and include remarks about his various duties and his health; he seems to have had minor illnesses quite often. In a letter dated June 14, 1864, Church gives an interesting account of the fighting in one battle; although he does not give the exact date and place of the battle, it was probably in the Atlanta area near Kennesaw Mountain. After this letter, there is a five-month interval until Church's next letter, written after his transfer to Keokuk, Iowa. The five letters from Keokuk are interesting; Church describes his hard work at the hospital and paints a vivid picture of the suffering and death there. In these letters he constantly wishes to return to his regiment at the front, but the last letter from Church (February 12, 1865) indicates that he was still stationed in Keokuk.

The remaining twelve letters in the collection are from various family members and friends to members of the immediate Perrigo family. Two letters to Mrs. George Perrigo from her daughter Harriet provide useful information about Harriet and her family. There is one letter to William Perrigo from a friend; the remaining nine letters are addressed to Sarah Perrigo. Two of the letters to Sarah are from soldiers: one is from a Burlington resident in the same regiment as John Perrigo, and the other is from a soldier with the 5th Regiment, New York Heavy Artillery, stationed at Harper's Ferry, Virginia. The second soldier letter thanks Sarah for donating needles, thread, and buttons that he had received from the Brothers of the Christian Commission. The other seven letters are to Sarah Perrigo from various friends and these letters describe the personal activities of the writers. In a letter to Sarah (May 11, 1865), however, a friend grieves over the death of Abraham Lincoln; she expresses her opinion that Jefferson Davis was a conspirator in the assassination and hopes that Davis is captured and executed.

Arrangement Note

Arranged in chronological order.

Container List

Box	Folder	Content
1	1	Letters, 1862 September 26 - 26 December 1863
1	2	Letters, 1864 January 6 - 30 March
1	3	Letters, 1864 May 1 - 29 December
1	4	Letters, 1865 January 13 - 23 March 1877
1	5	Transcripts, 1862 September 26 - 28 May 1865
