

**AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY
MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS**

NAME OF COLLECTION:

Rickard, James Helme, Civil War Letters, 1864-1866

LOCATION(S):

Mss. boxes "R"

SIZE OF COLLECTION:

one manuscript box

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON COLLECTION:

History of Providence County, ed. By Richard M. Bayles; Rhode Island U.S. GenWeb Genealogy & History Project (<http://www.rootsweb.com/~rigenweb/>); Pomfret, CT Vital Records; Civil War Service Records.

SOURCE OF COLLECTION:

Gift of Jonathan Rickard, 1998

COLLECTION DESCRIPTION:

James Helme Rickard (1838-1914), son of George and Sarah (Helme) Rickard, was born in Abington, Conn., in 1838. Before the Civil War he worked as a teacher and grocer, and after went into business in Woonsocket, R.I. He also worked as a newspaper reporter and contractor, and served in the local militia. In 1874 he married Abbie Smith Weld (1847-1917), the daughter of Seth Lothrop and Abby Short Smith Weld. Captain Rickard died on 6 May 1914, and was buried in Union Cemetery, North Smithfield, R.I.

In 1862, Rickard enlisted in the 18th Connecticut and served in this regiment until 1864, when he was commissioned as a captain in the United States Colored Troops. He resigned from the army in 1866. In 1894, he published his Civil War memoirs, "Service with Colored Troops in Burnside's Corps."

This collection contains letters, for the period 1 January 1864 to 7 January 1866, written by Rickard to his family (parents, brother George S., and sisters Lizzie E. and Sarah H.) in Abington. These letters detail his participation in the 1864 and 1865 campaigns of the Armies of the Potomac and the James.

Rickard and his African-American troops guarded the train lines and ambulances at the battles of the Wilderness and Spottsylvania (8 May 1864) and Cold Harbor (4 and 9 June 1864). During the siege of Petersburg, he participated in the Battle of the Crater (31 July 1864). When Richmond fell, he entered the city with his troops (2 and 3 April 1864). But for the most part, his African-American regiment was kept out of the front lines and assigned either patrol or fatigue duty.

In summer 1865, Rickard was sent to Brownsville, Texas, to be in readiness for war in Mexico. Troops were moved to the Mexican border to enforce the Monroe Doctrine and drive the Emperor Maximilian out (21 November 1865). Rickard's letters conclude on 7 January 1866, although his much-desired resignation from the army was not accepted until 24 March 1866.

The letters frequently mention contemporary events, such as state and national elections and the consequences of the Draft Act. He was apparently an enthusiastic reader of newspapers, as well as a strong Republican partisan. The letters discussing the assassination of Abraham Lincoln (20 and 25 April, and 11 May 1864) are among the few that display any emotion. Rickard's attitude toward the war varied from predictions of a quick finish to the "Cold Harbor Syndrome" described by historian James McPherson. His letters make clear, however, his understanding that he had a role to play in a world-transforming event.

Also included in the collection are two command-related memoranda and an invitation to a Connecticut ball, among other items.

American Antiquarian Society
MANUSCRIPTS DEPARTMENT

JAMES HELME RICKARD CIVIL WAR LETTERS, 1864-1866
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