

Museum of Rhinebeck History

Celebrating Rhinebeck's Rich Heritage

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Civil War Letters to Rhinebeck

April 12th marks the 150th anniversary of the start of our country's greatest tragedy, the Civil War. The war had a profound impact on Rhinebeck. A tall marble soldier stands sentinel at the Rhinebeck Cemetery, facing the Village from the west side of Route 9 just north of Mill Road. He reminds us of the many young men who joined the Grand Army of the Republic to answer the call--they made up the 150th, the 128th, the 80th, and the 44th NY Volunteers. These men served together at Cedar Creek, Port Hudson, Antietam, and Gettysburg--some returned to Rhinebeck, more did not.

Parents and siblings here in Rhinebeck worried



This monument in the Rhinebeck cemetery was erected in the fall of 1899 by a local marble dealer, H. N. Secor, and was dedicated on Memorial Day in 1900.

about them and were eager to hear from them. The soldiers were equally eager to hear from home. A Rhinebeck school teacher, farmer, and Birthright Quaker (until he later married a Lutheran), Mandeville S. Frost, was not himself a soldier but kept numerous letters he received from acquaintances who were in the war. We are deeply indebted to his granddaughter, Barbara Frost, for her donation of this collection to the Museum shortly before her passing in 2009.

The soldier writing this first letter is among the Union troops from the 128th Regiment who have occupied southern Louisiana. He had expected to be part of the campaign to invade Texas, but for the moment he remains in Baton Rouge awaiting orders. Early in the war, he is full of bravado. (He addresses Mandeville as "Friend" because this is the formal way to address a Quaker.)

Company C, 128th Regiment, Baton Rouge, LA, Sept 21st 1862

Friend Mandeville

We are encamped in a very nice place just outside ... the City [of Baton Rouge], are having it very nice. But there is no knowing how long that will remain so. About two weeks [ago] there was an expedition left New Orleans with 60,000 men for Texas, some by water & some by land. The part that went by water just before they got to their destination, the enemy attacked them & they were repulsed & were obliged to return to New Orleans. The land

force I have not heard from. I suppose the expedition will [do?] it over as soon as possible. We thought that we were going with them until we came to this place. So now I guess we will escape that campaign in the wilderness of Texas, though I would like to go there very much.

You wanted to know if I did not feel rather nervous & frightened when I was fixing a chunk of lead to pierce some Rebel with. I will tell you I remember once of shooting a woodchuck right down behind the barn where the flooring is. And I could shoot a rebel just as cool & content as I did the woodchuck & though the bullets whizzed rather close to my ears, I felt no more fear than I would if I was nowheres near the enemy. If I shot at a man to hit him, I felt required if I didn't hit him the first time, I would load again & try it over & so on until I killed him or else he would leave.

The guerrillas once in a while show themselves to our picket. Then they have to be pretty sly in returning or else they fall into the hands of us Yankees.

Now as for the woman affair, I tell you, there is not a very great many in this place. But there are a few, and some not very bad. I tell you of all the places yet for women is Jefferson City & New Orleans. There is any quantity & all sorts & sizes.

Write soon. Remember me to all the folks & accept this from your friend.

The following letter is undated and the location from which it is sent is not identified. But in the letter, Hiram Frost refers to the Battle of Fredericksburg, which was fought in Virginia between December 11 and 15, 1862. It is remembered as one of the most one-sided

battles of the war. The Union Army suffered terrible casualties in futile frontal assaults on December 13 against entrenched Confederate defenders, bringing to an early end their campaign against the Confederate capital of Richmond. The river which Hiram Frost mentions is most likely the Rapahannock, which flows through the center of Fredericksburg. Steven Mann, who has carefully studied the Frost family genealogy, assumes this was a letter that another family member shared with Mandeville (Hiram was not Mandeville's brother, but more likely a cousin), as often families would share letters with others interested in the progress of the war.

Dear Brother

I now take the opportunity of writing to you to let you know where I am and how I am getting along. I am well at present and I hope that these few lines may find you the same. I have no time to say much as we expect to move soon. Our troops are now fighting on the opposite side of the river. The cannons are now roaring tremendously loud. You could scarcely tell it from thunder. The shells are flying very thick. I went down to the river this morning where I could see them.

I suppose that you heard of the battle of Fredericksburg. They are fighting in the same place. My regiment is the general provost-guard of the army. So we do not have to go into any more battles but mind we have seen our share of fighting since we have been out here, but I have escaped all danger.

No more at present from your brother Hiram Frost.

Farewell, Brother

The friend of Mandeville who sends him the following letter gives a candid and detailed account of one of the boldest campaigns conducted by Union forces in the West. Admiral Porter's goal was to attack the Confederacy from the Southwest by leading troops up the Red River toward Alexandria in central Louisiana. The Union ships reached Alexandria and a landing party occupied the town and awaited the arrival of General Banks's army, delayed by heavy rains. Slowed by low water and obstructions, Porter pushed his vessels up the river. At Grand Encore he left the heavier gunboats behind and continued upstream with three ironclads and three wooden steamers to meet General Banks at Shreveport, Louisiana. They were stopped by a heavy steamer sunk across the channel, and they also learned that General Banks had been defeated and that he was in headlong retreat. Porter had no choice but to withdraw. Falling water and increasing Confederate fire from the riverbank strained the seamanship and ingenuity of the Union sailors in their desperate struggle to avoid being trapped.

Morganza Sea [Louisiana], June 7th, 1864

Friend Mandeville,

Well, Mandeville, there have been many changes with us since I wrote to you. I suppose you have heard of our leaving Baton Rouge & joining the Red River Expedition. Our Brigade (being the 3rd & 2nd Divisions) was left at Alexandria to garrison while the rest of the army went on up towards Shreveport. But they did not get there. They got up about 120 miles when they met a large force of the enemy, and of course a battle took place which continued three days. On the first day's fight, the enemy rather got the best of us. But our army held their ground. There was but part of the army engaged. By the next day the remainder of the army got up, when the Rebs got the worst of it.

Also the same the third day. By this time, the Navy had proceeded some ways ahead of the army & the Enemy had got between the army and the navy on the River.... By this time the river was falling & Gen Banks had to fall back to some point on the river for supplies, and the river was falling so fast that the gun boats were obliged to fall back to save themselves from sticking fast & falling into the hands of the enemy. The army and navy concentrated to Grande Encore, a distance of 20 miles from the battleground at Pleasant Hill. By this time, we got orders to get there and join the army, which we did on the 15th of April. Grand Encore is about 100 miles above Alexandria. We went up on a steamboat. We lay there until the 21st, thinking the river would rise, as it usually does that time of year, that we might proceed up the river towards Shreveport. But instead of its rising, it continued to fall, so that boats could not get up as far as we were to bring us supplies. So of course we had to come farther down the river. I think the Rebs had succeeded in letting the river off, for the oldest citizens say they never saw the river so low at that time of year. On the 21st, we started to march. (Our riding now was played out.) On the 22nd about 10 o'clock, we came to Cain River. There the Rebels were on the opposite side to dispute our crossing. They had artillery planted & fired on us at our arrival. We soon put our artillery in position & returned the fire. They were said to be a strong force. So the Infantry consisting of the 1st and 2nd Divisions of the 19th Corps supported by the 12th Corps [crossed] the River (It being but about 2 feet deep and 2 rods wide) & advanced on the enemy. We skirmished some distance & drove their pickets [back] and then the forces got together and made a charge on them. The bullets flew rather fast & thick for some time, but they came to the conclusion that was no place for them, so they [skedaddled?] leaving their dead & wounded behind, which we took possession of. How many I don't know. Our loss killed and wounded between 250 & 300. One man in our company wounded--Charles Marquet of

Rhinebeck-- wounded in the face—he is nearly well again.



Charles W. Marquet, Company C, 128th NY Infantry, wounded in the Red River Expedition for control of the lower Mississippi, is buried in Rhinebeck Cemetery.

There were 9 wounded in the [128th] Regiment. The Rebs had decidedly the advantage of us as regards to position—they being on a hill, while we had to cross a plain and climb the hill to get where they were....

They got one of our gunboats & transports, which they burned, whilst then they got some of our men—among them was our Lieut Col J P Foster, but he was smart enough to get away from them with a slight wound in his leg. They also got 3 of our mails. I had 5 or 6 letters in it. I suppose they had sport over them, but I don't think any more so than we have had over some of their letters. I have in Baton Rouge with my things a copy of a letter that was taken from them at Donalsonville. It is from a young lady to her lover in the CSA. When I get it, I will send you a copy.

(The Museum regrets having to report we do not have the young lady's letter.)

The soldier continues with a description of the regiment's retreat towards the Mississippi, including a side expedition to hunt guerrillas and destroy bridges and sawmills. Back in camp at Morganza Sea, he reflects on what the future may hold:

My idea is that they are fitting out another expedition...I am quite certain it won't be up the Red River. The Red River expedition can be called a complete failure. Next Spring they may try it over. I think the whole number lost on the campaign is 10,000--nearly all the dead and wounded were left on the field at Pleasant Hill in the hands of the enemy. That was rather rough...

We have marched in all about 200 miles, and I have marched enough to suit me, but if they say, Go farther, Go farther it is. We are about 50 miles above Baton Rouge on the west side of the River. There is not a house to be seen--nothing but tents and steamboats along the levee.

The news...from the Army of the Potomac is rather encouraging. What do you think about the officers of the war and the fall's Election? Remember me to all the folks...Tell all the news...Your friend,

James K. Brown, Company C, 128th Regiment, New Orleans, Louisiana

In this next letter, James K. Brown has moved with his regiment from Louisiana to northern Virginia. He knows the enemy is waiting for spring to attack. The bravado we saw early in the war hasn't entirely disappeared, but his more immediate concern is staying warm. Towards the end of the letter, he mentions, almost as an aside, that one of his brothers was taken prisoner 2 months ago, and that another brother was killed 3 months ago. One has to wonder whether his refusal to react emotionally to those losses in this otherwise upbeat letter is an attempt to be strong for the folks at home or the dulling of emotion required to survive the horrors of war. This late in the war, it was common knowledge that few were able to survive the southern POW camps.

Camp Russell, Virginia, December 19th 1864

Friend Mandeville

For the past two weeks we have been very busy building our winter quarters. We have them about finished & I am glad of it. We had to bring logs about one mile. Each hut is 12 ft long & 6 wide, six inmates in each. Each has a little stove & it is very comfortable. The worst duty we will have to do this winter is Picket, which I dread, but I suppose it will have to be done, so there is no other way than to make the best of it.

The duty is not so hard, but the cold weather is what I look at. I came off yesterday afternoon, don't expect to go on again until 10 or 12 days. The line is about three miles from camp. Each post has a lot of pines around it to break the wind off & we have fires on each. There are four men on a post. There is nothing to watch for but Old Mosby's Guerrillas & they have not troubled us a great deal lately. The Confederate Army is about 20 miles from us & there is no doubt they will stay until spring. Then I think they will have to dig out of this Valley. Dinner is ready & I must stop & eat. We have beans for dinner today.

Dinner is over & I will proceed. I was very glad to hear that Charley Wooden went to see you. I suppose he gave you a correct description of our Campaign...up to the time he was wounded on the 19th of September. Since then we have had two engagements—on the 22nd of Sept at Fisher's Hill and the 19th of Oct at Cedar Creek. In both our army was victorious. I think the last one was the most desperate battle of this Valley. Since we have been in this Valley, Gen Sheridan's army has taken over 70 pieces of Artillery from the Enemy & have not lost a single piece. On Saturday we received the

Glorious news from Gen Thomas 100 guns were fired, all the drums & bands played the National airs & flags were displayed all along the works & the greatest enthusiasm prevailed generally throughout the entire army. We are expecting daily to hear something good from General Sherman.

I think, Mandeville, the South is about played out. Lately they have caught it from every corner, their western army they have boasted of so much—they were going to do such great things in Tennessee—I think it is about annihilated. They have got off of their own dunghill & don't know how to get back.

The boys that were captured on the 19th of Oct have not been heard from yet. My brother William is among them & D H Hanaburgh from Staatsburg. My Brother Joseph was killed on the 19th of Sept at Winchester. There is nothing of any great interest going on around here at present. I hear that William E Ackert is joined in the holy state of Matrimony. Bully for him. That won't be so bad this winter, will it?

**With my best wishes for your welfare and the downfall of the Rebellion, I remain, Your friend
James K. Brown, Co C, 128th Regt**

128th Regimental Flag Restoration

The Hendrick Hudson Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR) will be presenting "One Nation," an exhibition of artifacts marking the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, at 113 Warren Street, Hudson, NY, on Friday, April 15th, from 6 to 9 PM. A donation of \$25 (checks payable to HHC-NSDAR) is suggested, the proceeds to benefit restoration of the flag of the 128th Regt. To reserve, write HHC-NSDAR, Box 344, Hudson NY 12534.

RENDEZVOUS WITH TREASON

The Chancellor Livingston Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution, Museum of Rhinebeck History and Rhinebeck Historical Society proudly present:
THE ANDRE/ARNOLD CONSPIRACY



America loves its heroes, often re-enactors choose to portray the beloved: George Washington, Ben Franklin and John Adams. Come spend an afternoon with our nation's most intriguing anti-hero, **Benedict Arnold** and his accomplice to treason, Major **John Andre** who tried to bring down the cause for American Independence. Chat with our nation's most notorious traitor, Benedict Arnold and ask him why he sold himself to the British. Learn about Major John Andre and his aspirations to rise through the ranks in the King's Army. Actors, *Gary Petagine* and *Sean Grady* bring Arnold and Andre to life in an entertaining, interactive and dramatic program.

Sunday, April 3 at 2:00 pm at the Beekman Arms
\$20 per person, refreshments will be served

Please detach and send with check payable to RHS,
Mail to Marilyn Hatch, 7015 Route 9, Rhinebeck, NY 12572

Name _____

Address _____ Phone _____

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Reservations Required. Checks must be received no later than March 31, 2011

For information call 845-876-6326 or e-mail hatchrhinebeck1@frontier.com

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Enclosed is my tax-deductible check in the amount of \$ _____

Please enclose your employer's form if your employer has a matching grant program (e.g. IBM).

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Please make checks payable to MUSEUM OF RHINEBECK HISTORY and mail to the Museum at the address above. Thank you!

PLEASE MAIL THIS IN ASAP IF YOU HAVEN'T DONE SO YET FOR 2011!

NOTE: If you have family archives that you wish to donate to us, please check below and someone from the Museum will be in touch with you. _____

Beverly Kane Joins Board

Beverly Kane has recently joined the Museum Board. A resident of Mill Road with her husband Neil, Beverly is a native of Rhinebeck whose grandfather and great grandfather both worked at the Grasmere estate. A graduate of Syracuse University, Beverly's professional career has included working for the National Park Service at Hyde Park and working as Director (librarian) in Pleasant Valley and Saugerties Public libraries. She also serves as a trustee of the Starr Library. If you drive by her place on Mill Road at this time of year, you may see her pursuing one of her many avocations, supervising the production of maple syrup.

President's Message

1. Renew your membership. The form for doing so is inside the newsletter.
2. Join us Sunday April 3rd for serious fun at the Beekman Arms. The form for doing that is also inside.
3. The Museum re-opens Saturday, May 14th. Our exhibit will continue and extend last year's focus on the history of the Wurtemberg area of Rhinebeck. We will be open 2-4 PM Saturdays and Sundays through the end of September.
4. Progressive Dinner --Sunday, Sept 18th 4-7 PM, in Red Hook. SAVE THE DATE.

Museum of Rhinebeck History

P.O. Box 816

Rhinebeck, NY 12572

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