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Thomas Nast "Civil War Christmas" (Harper's Weekly - January 1863)

http://www.sonofthesouth.net/Civil_War_Christmas.htm

CHRISTMAS IN THE CIVIL WAR

by Kevin Rawlings
(Historynet.com)



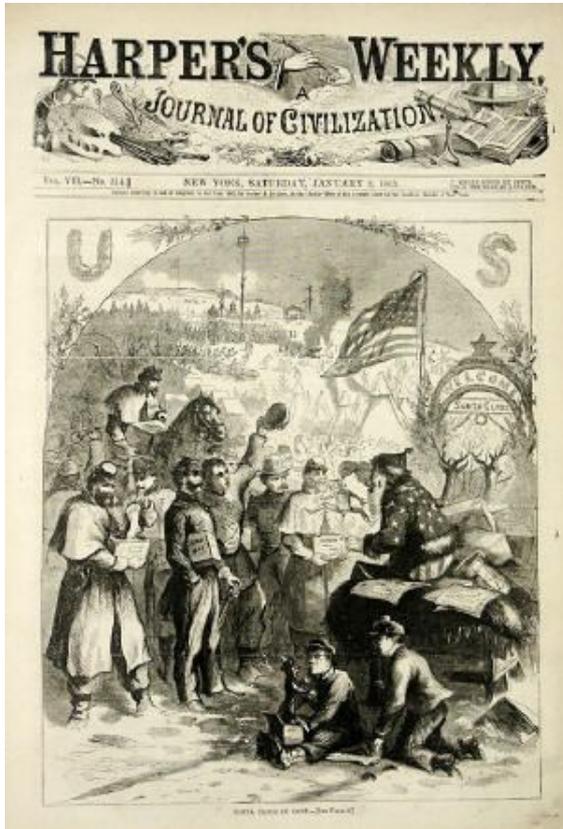
Thomas Nast was in a quandary and his deadline was fast approaching. The editor of Harper's Weekly, Fletcher Harper, wanted Nast to draw a "special Christmas picture" for the newspaper's front page, a scene that linked holiday celebrations to the ongoing war effort. Nast, however, had a serious

case of illustrator's block and had no idea what to draw.

Nast discussed his predicament with his sister Bertha, a New York City schoolteacher who was visiting at his house. The two reminisced about their early childhood holidays in their native Germany. They talked about the differences between the German Pelznikel and the American Santa Claus, and Bertha mentioned that her class loved to prepare for Christmas each year by reading Clement Clarke Moore's "A Visit From Saint Nicholas" (known today as "Twas the Night before Christmas").

The conversation inspired Nast. After his sister went home, he worked feverishly through the night. The next morning, he delivered the finished drawings to the newspaper. The Christmas

edition of Harper's Weekly for 1862 hit the streets on January 3, 1863. The front page showed a wondrous holiday sight: Santa Claus, dressed in a patriotic Stars and Stripes outfit, visiting soldiers in camp to distribute Christmas gifts from his sleigh.



A flurry of activity surrounds Nast's Santa. A soldier opens his Christmas box to find a fully loaded stocking, while a comrade behind him gets a meerschaum pipe. In the foreground, a sprung jack-in-the-box surprises two drummer boys. In the background, soldiers chase a greased pig while others climb a greased pole to reach a cash purse nailed to the top. Some play football; others prepare company Christmas dinners. The fort on the hilltop pays tribute to Santa's arrival with an artillery salute.

An article inside the issue titled "Santa Claus Among Our Soldiers" explained the images on the cover as well as those in "Christmas Eve," Nast's illustration on the center spread. "Children," the article cautioned, "you mustn't think that Santa Claus comes to

you alone." In a blatant product promotion, the piece tells how Santa Claus has brought a stack of Harper's Weeklys for the soldiers, "so that they, as well as you little folks, may have a peep at the Christmas number."

So it was that Harper's readers got their first look at what would become a Yuletide institution. Every year until his departure from Harper's in 1886, Nast would create an elaborate Christmas drawing to delight children and adults alike. And in the early years of his Harper's career, during the Civil War, Nast would standardize the basic image of Santa Claus that we relish to this day.

The Nast Santa Claus played a prominent role in all the wartime holiday centerfolds and annual Christmas issues except the 1864 illustration "The Union Christmas Dinner." Leaving the foreground to an image of Abraham Lincoln welcoming Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee back into the Union, Santa Claus and his sleigh and reindeer team appear in silhouette before a rising moon behind the word Christmas. For a Christmas issue titled "Santa Claus and His Works" for 1866, Nast drew Santa Claus in his workshop and gave him a permanent address at the North Pole so no other country could claim him and use him for propaganda, as Nast himself did during the Civil War.

Many of today's American Christmas customs are rooted in the early 19th century. Perhaps ironically, they came to maturity during the Civil War, when violence, chaos, and staggering personal losses seemed likely to drown out the choruses of "peace on earth." And artists such as Nast who helped fire America's imagination about how Christmas should be observed also documented what Christmas was like in the war-torn 1860s. Nast, Winslow Homer, Alfred Waud, and some illustrators forgotten to history created visual chronicles of the spreading influence of many holiday traditions we enjoy today, including Santa Claus,

Christmas trees, gift-giving, caroling, holiday feasting, and Christmas cards. Homer and Nast drew scenes of the wartime practice of sending Christmas boxes filled with homemade clothes and food items to soldiers at the front.

Christmas boxes like the ones Homer and Nast pictured gave their recipients a much-needed mental and physical boost. When in 1861, for the first Harper's Christmas cover of the war, Homer drew overjoyed soldiers reveling in the contents of Adams Express boxes from home while a nearby sutler's tent stands devoid of customers, he captured a genuine experience of the men in uniform.

John Haley of the 17th Maine, for instance, was working with a road crew the day before Christmas. As his body toiled, his mind focused anxiously on a parcel he expected from home. "It is rumored that there are sundry boxes and mysterious parcels over at Stoneman's Station directed to us," Haley had written in his diary. "We retire to sleep with feelings akin to those of children expecting Santa Claus. We have become very childish in some matters—grub being one of them."

On Christmas Day, Haley returned from his work detail to his tent. He wrote that he had endured the day's work only by virtue of the "anticipation of what was in store in our boxes." Then he had to endure a practical joke from his tentmate:

"On returning to camp, I was informed by my tentmate that there was no parcel at the station bearing my name. My mental thermometer not only plummeted to below zero, it got right down off the nail and lay on the floor. Seeing this, my tentmate made haste to dive under the bed and produce the box, which he had brought from the station during my absence, and in a few minutes we were discussing the merits of its contents. Most of the men have been remembered, and any that have not received something from home are allowed to share with their more fortunate neighbors."

Henry Kyd Douglas, formerly of Confederate Lieutenant General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's staff, was wounded in the Battle of Gettysburg and captured. Confined to Johnson's Island Prison, Ohio, as Christmas 1863 approached, Douglas received several boxes containing items to make his confinement more bearable. Again, a practical joke finds its way into the story:

"There came a carload of boxes for the prisoners about Christmas which after reasonable inspection, they were allowed to receive. My box contained more cause for merriment and speculation as to its contents than satisfaction. It had received rough treatment on its way, and a bottle of catsup had broken and its contents very generally distributed through the box. Mince pie and fruit cake saturated with tomato catsup was about as palatable as "embalmed beef" of the Cuban memory; but there were other things. Then, too, a friend had sent me in a package a bottle of old brandy. On Christmas morning I quietly called several comrades up to my bunk to taste the precious fluid of...DISAPPOINTMENT! The bottle had been opened outside, the brandy taken and replaced with water, adroitly recorded, and sent in. I hope the Yankee who played that practical joke lived to repent it and was shot before the war ended."

In the Christmas 1863 issue of Harper's, a Nast drawing titled "Christmas Furlough" showed the family members from the previous year's centerfold reunited, the husband and father home from war on a 30-day furlough. To be home for the holidays was the burning desire of every soldier. And as Sergeant A.R. Small jotted in his diary, some men used every ounce of creativity they could muster to make their request for a holiday furlough persuasive:

Applications for furloughs have been frequent of late, that Sergeant-Major

Maxfield sent up his application, based on Deuteronomy, 20th chapter, seventh verse:

"And what man is there that betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? Let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in battle and another man take her."

If approved, he says he shall ask for an extension, referring to Deuteronomy, 24th chapter, fifth verse:

"When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go to war, neither shall he be charged with any business; but he shall free at home one full year, and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken."

Much to his surprise, Small obtained his leave while the applications of two officers were rejected.

The most beloved symbol of the American family Christmas, the decorated Christmas tree, came into its own during the Civil War. Christmas trees had become popular in the decade before the war, and in the early 1860s, many families were beginning to decorate them. Illustrators working for the national weeklies helped popularize the practice by putting decorated table-top Christmas trees in their drawings.

It was only a matter of time before the Christmas tree made its way into military camps. Alfred Bellard of the 5th New Jersey remarked about the arrival of the newly popular Christmas icon to his camp along the lower Potomac River.

"In order to make it look much like Christmas as possible," he wrote, "a small tree was stuck up in front of our tent, decked off with hard tack and pork, in lieu of cakes and oranges, etc."

Sergeant Albert C. Harrison of the 14th New Jersey described for his mother a holiday dinner he attended near Fredericksburg, Maryland, the day after Christmas 1862.

"I must tell you about their Christmas tree," he wrote. "It was a splendid one. I saw some nice ones in New York when I lived there but I saw none equal to that."

That same year, Union officer Walter Phelps, Jr., of the 22d New York, wrote to his wife to ask about the family's first Christmas tree.

"I presume Christmas must have been quite an occasion with you, more particularly as the Christmas tree was in vogue—" he wrote, "did Annie enjoy it—and how did the matter pass off?"

Notable residents of Richmond, during the final Christmas of the war, momentarily threw off the dark veil of impending doom and put on a merry holiday face for a gathering of children at St. Paul's Episcopal Church. President Jefferson Davis himself hosted the party with his wife Varina, and their children. Alice West Allen, age 11, and her siblings, who had been sent to Richmond as Major General Philip Sheridan's men destroyed their native Shenandoah Valley, attended the event. She wrote that they had been invited to see "a Christmas tree given to President Davis' children."

"The tree was a lovely holly laden with homemade candles and dolls made out of hickory nuts and Canton flannel; then there were cotton and Canton flannel rabbits, dog and cats, and numerous other presents all homemade, as was everything on the supper table—home-made coffee, tea, sugar, and everything. I never saw anything that looked so pretty to me."

Varina Davis committed her memories of the affair to paper three decades later.

"When at last we reached the basement of St. Paul's Church," she wrote, "the tree burst upon their view like the realization of Aladdin's subterranean

orchard, and they were awed by the grandeur."

Her husband apparently even surrendered his normally prickly demeanor to the cheerful holiday spirit:

"The orphans sat mute with astonishment until the opening hymn and prayer and the last Amen had been said, and they at a signal warily and slowly gathered around the tree to receive from a lovely young girl their allotted present."

The President became so enthusiastic that he undertook to help in the distribution, but worked such wild confusion giving everything asked for into outstretched hands, that we called a halt, so he contented himself with unwinding one or two tots from a network of strung popcorn in which they had become entangled and taking off all the apples he could when unobserved, and presenting them to smaller children....

Those soldiers who could not come home for Christmas touched base with their loved ones through letter-writing. And in the soldiers' letters, it is common to find mentions of Santa Claus. Lieutenant Robert Gould Shaw of the 2d Massachusetts Infantry (before he became commander of the famous 54th Massachusetts Colored Regiment) penned a letter to his mother while on guard duty in Frederick, Maryland, on Christmas morning 1861. He recounted his holiday misadventure of trying to eat breakfast in the presence of the sleeping sergeant of the guard and proceeded with a tongue-in-cheek explanation for why he had not seen Santa Claus overnight:

"It began to snow about midnight, and I suppose no one had a better chance of seeing Santa Claus; but, as I had my stockings on, he probably thought it not worth his while to come down to the guard-tent. I didn't see any guard's stockings pinned up outside their tent, and indeed it is contrary to army regulations for

them to divest themselves of any part of their clothing during the twenty-four hours."

Christmas Eve 1862 found Union Brigadier General John Geary in Fairfax Station, Virginia, nearing the end of his convalescence from a wound he had received at Cedar Mountain in August. He took some time to offer holiday and fatherly advice to his daughter at home in Pennsylvania:

"My Dear Little Pet,

On this Christmas Eve I have no doubt you have been enjoying yourself, perhaps with the toys of the season, eaten your nuts and cakes, hung up your stockings in the chimney corner for old Kris Kinkle, when he comes along with his tiny horses, "Dunder and Blixen" and his little wagon to fill in Lots and Gobs of sweet things, sugar, candy sugar plums, and if you please, sugar every thing. Well, When I was a little boy, a good many years ago, I was fond of such things myself. And when I look back, they were indeed the happiest days of my life. Enjoy them my little "Pet"—they come but once. The boys, I mean the two Willies, are getting too old for the enjoyment you can have. When ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise. I wish you a Merry Christmas and many of them. I must close. There is a lot of soldiers at my door giving me a serenade and I must give it some attention.

Your affectionate Papa"

By 1863, the Union blockade of the Southern coasts had made it nearly impossible for Santa Claus to visit homes in the South; scarcity of goods and the consequent high prices put both store-bought presents and raw materials for homemade gifts out of the financial reach of many Southern consumers. Quite a few mothers explained to their children that even Santa Claus would not be able run the formidable blockade.

Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas of Augusta, Georgia, told how a simple act of faith on the part of her children caused her to dig deeper for a holiday offering on Christmas Eve:

"I have written so much that it is now after 9 o'clock and yet I have said nothing of Turner's and Mary Bell's party which we gave them last week in lieu of the Santa Claus presents. Mary Bell has been told that Santa Claus has not been able to run the blockade and has gone to war—Yet at this late hour when I went upstairs Thursday night of the party I found that the trusting faith of childhood they had hung their little socks and stockings in case Santa Claus did come. I had given the subject no thought whatever but invoking Santa Claus aid I was enabled when their little eyes opened to enjoy their pleasure to find cake and money in their socks—Jeff was delighted."

Sallie Brock Putnam devoted some lines in her memoirs to Christmas in Richmond during the third year of the war. She plotted the course Santa Claus needed to follow to avoid the blockade to bring presents to Southern children and Christmas boxes to soldiers in the field:

"Another annual revolution in the cycle of time brought us again to the Christmas season, the third since the bloody circle of war had been drawn around our hearts and homes. For days preceding the festival the anxious little ones, who had learned to share the cares and troubles of their elders, peered curiously into the countenances of mothers and fathers, for an intimation that good old Santa Klaus had not lost his bravery, and that despite the long continued storm of war he would make his way through the fleet at Charleston or the blockading squadron at Wilmington, and from foreign countries, or perchance across the country from Baltimore, he would pick his way, flank the numerous pickets on the lines, and bring something to drop in their new

stockings, knitted by mother herself. Sometimes the simple present that brought happiness to the child was purchased at the expense of some retrenchment in the table-fare for the week, or with the loss of some needed article of comfort in clothing. But the influence of childhood is magical. The children find their way to our hearts, and unloose the purse-strings when all other inducements fail. The Christmas-box for the soldier in the field was not forgotten; but it was, less bountifully supplied than when the first Christmas dinner [was] dispatched to him to be shared with his comrades in his soldier's tent. Santa Klaus once more generously disposed of socks and scarfs and visors, to the husbands, brothers, sons, and lovers in the army."

For the Confederate soldier away with the army at Christmas, there was no cure for the nearly incapacitating homesickness the holidays inspired. In a letter to his wife in 1863, soldier Philip H. Power found moving words for some of that lonely feeling:

"I do not care to celebrate Christmas until I can do so with my children—and my wife—when will that holiday come...? I hope the children enjoyed themselves yesterday—I thought of them when I first awaked, and their stockings—Fortunate for them they were in Richmond where something could be had from Santa Claus."

Santa Claus apparently had a much easier time visiting homes in the North than those in the South that Christmas. According to a letter Sarah Thetford sent to her brother George, Santa arrived in Michigan dressed in a buffalo coat "with presents fastened to his coat-tail...[and] a corn-popper on his back." She continued that she had "often heard Santa Claus described, but never before saw the old fellow in person."

Sometimes Santa Claus worked behind the scenes of wartime savagery to

bring a bit of Christmas cheer to those who otherwise had little reason to celebrate. Following Union Major General William T. Sherman's capture of Savannah, Georgia, and presentation of it as a Christmas gift to Lincoln in 1864, about 90 Michigan men and their captain in turn gave a token of charity to Southern civilians living outside the city. On Christmas Day the soldiers loaded several wagons full of food and other supplies and distributed the items about the ravaged Georgia countryside. The destitute Southerners thanked the jolly Union Santa Claus as the wagons pulled away under the power of mules that had tree-branch "antlers" strapped to their heads to turn them into makeshift reindeer.

By late 1865 the country was starting to reunite as the horrors of war and the shock of Lincoln's assassination faded into memory. That December brought the first peacetime Christmas in five years. Most soldiers had been mustered out of the military and were home to celebrate the holiday with their families. Of course, many others had never returned home.

In the South, Christmas was being rediscovered after four years of deprivation. In the North, shops beckoned passersby with window displays full of tempting goods. And Nast illustrated another Christmas issue for Harper's Weekly with Santa Claus as the centerpiece attraction, though he took a disturbing poke at the beaten South: part of the image showed the heads of several Rebel generals lying at the feet of "Ulysses the Giant Killer" Grant.

On the second page of the issue, however, there appeared a poem titled "By the Christmas Hearth" that was more in line with the nation's hopeful spirit of reunification. The last stanza especially captures the cheerful holiday mood and eagerness of the American people to put the turbulent conflict behind them:

“Bring holly, rich with berries red,
And bring the sacred mistletoe;

Fill high each glass, and let hearts
With kindest feelings flow;
So sweet it seems at home once more
To sit with those we hold most dear,
And keep absence once again
To keep the Merry Christmas here.”

<http://www.historynet.com/christmas-in-the-civil-war-december-1998-civil-war-times-feature.htm>

http://www.sonofthesouth.net/Original_Santa_Claus_.htm

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THE ANDERSON ZOUAVES

from the manuscript of
Pocket History of the Anderson Zouaves
Volume 2: In Pen and Press
Edited by David Sanders

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In celebration of the Regiment's 150th Anniversary, the ZOUAVE! is pleased to present material from the upcoming 2nd Volume of the Pocket History of the Anderson Zouaves.

The ZOUAVE! will feature copy from this manuscript to celebrate the history of the Regiment, as a lens to commemorate the 150th anniversary milestones of the Great Rebellion.

Sidney and I Attended the Theater

[2 December – 4 December 1861]

Monday 2nd [December 1861]

The captain was kind enough to give us a pass for Washington today. We walked to the city. Sidney and I attended the theatre at night and were arrested by the patrol and finally lodged in guardhouse.

Tuesday 3rd

Well here we are confined with about one hundred and fifty prisoners. I think we shall be released though this morning. I guess when they catch me again they will know it.

Wednesday 4th

Received a pass from the Provost Marshall today at two o'clock and returned home glad to escape from the loathsome station house.

Tierney, J. (2007). *1861 Civil War Diary of Private Alfred Covell Woods*. 62nd NYSV Co. I Homepage.

A Very Dangerous Promotion

[30 December 1861]

Camp Tenalby, Dec. 30, 61.

Dear Cousin Henry, your most welcom letter reached me last evening and i was glad to hear that you all are enjoying the Blessings of health, and sutch a merry Christmas and i wish you all a Merry New Year. I have spent my Christmas in my Camp altha i had Four Invitations to go out and take Dinner with the Farmers that I have got acquainted with since I have been out here, and i dont think that i will Enjoy New Years Enny better. But it is my own fault. I have taking a very Dangerous Promotion on my self Witch is Color Sargant to Carry those Glorious Stares & Stripes in the Battlefield Witch our Fore Fathers Handed down to us. As long as Life Lasts and i keep my Censes . . . answer this as soon as you get it for in less than two weeks we wil be in the Battle Field and i want you to write Before I go, for it may Be the last that will pass between us, so good bye

From your Cousin in love and Friendship
Ensign Abram T. Perine Anderson's
Zouaves Co. C

Kerr, M. (1955) *In love and friendship*.

The letters of Abraham T. Perine, ensign of the Anderson Zouaves. 62nd NYSV Co. I Homepage

1862

New York Eating House [Early 1862]



Built in 1840, the first church (and Sabbath School) in Tennallytown was the Mt Zion Methodist Church pictured above as it appeared in 1862 (from a sketch in the *History of the 9th & 10th Rhode Island Volunteers*), on the corner of River Road and Murdock Mill Road, about 100 yards from the intersection with the Rockville Road.

Early in 1862 "rough New York troops" (the Anderson Zouaves) took the church over and the Methodist congregation were forced to resume worshipping in each others' homes. The Anderson Zouaves had posted a hand-made sign above the door which read "New York Eating house".

The Anderson Zouaves used the church as a guardhouse and in the process "...tore out the pulpit, and destroyed the Sabbath School library..." On taking over the building in June 1862, the Rhode Island regiment's Quartermaster-Sergeant Lysander Flagg sent to the Methodist Sabbath School in Pawtucket R.I. and the Baptist Sabbath School in Central Falls who immediately sent a large collection of their own books to the little Sabbath School in Tenallytown.

Interestingly, R.W. Chappell of the 9th R.I. Volunteers passed on a local story (unconfirmed) that the old church which the Anderson Zouaves had rechristened "New

York Eating house" was the last building in which John Brown preached in on his way to Harper's Ferry in October 1859!

Helm, J.B. (1981). Tenleytown, D.C.

New York Eating House. Anderson Zouaves – Research.

Payment of Troops [6 January 1862]

Arrangements have been made to pay all the troops up to the 1st of January. Orders for preliminary musters were issued several days ago.

Allotments of soldiers

The Commissioners for New-York to receive the allotments of soldiers are visiting the camps, about Washington with great success. Company G, of the Anderson Zouaves, allotted over \$600 to their families, much of which will be payable within a week. Other companies, composed of a different class, have allotted largely more. If this liberality of the soldiers is maintained, the destitute families In New-York City will soon be in receipt of a quarter of a million dollars monthly.

New-York Times, Monday, January 6, 1862, p.3.

Anderson Zouaves Newspaper Clippings. 62nd NYSV Co. I Homepage

Oh! How I Wish Drunkenness Might Be Abolished [14 January 1862]

National Battery
Chain Bridge
Jan 14th, 1862

My Dearest Aunt...

...Oh! how I wish that drunkenness might be abolished (in the Army especially) as it causes

so much trouble. I never could relize before the awful effects that the use of Ardent Spirits can produce. I am a Non Commissioned Officer now (a Corporal) and I believe my sobriety was all that ever gained me this promotion. Why there is scarcely a day when it comes my turn to be Corporal of the Guard but I have to confine some one (through the Captain's orders) from being intoxicated or disobeying orders...

...In Haste your Affectionate Nephew,
Alfred C Woods
Address as usual
I have just heard we attack the foe tomorrow

Letters of Alfred Covell Woods. 62nd NYSV Co I Homepage

Men Make Hogs of Themselves [16 January 1862]

Extract from the *Letters of William Peck Allcot, Company "D", Anderson Zouaves. Camp Tennallytown near Washington D. C Jan 16th 1862.*

"...Give my love to Thomas please tell him I received his letter which I will answer as soon as I can tell him I have answered all his letters but the last one which was Three I directed them as he told me to and it is verry strance if he did not get them I receive the News Papers most every day so I can read what is going on around me I do not think thear will be an advance in some time of the Army under General McClellan but when thear is one rest assured nothing will stop him from carreing his planes in excecution. We will be payed off in a verry short time then for a Jolly day amunkes the Boys of our Regiment. As for me I hardly care wether some of the Men in our Regiment gets eney money or not I will tell you the reason of this ensted of sending thear money home to thear folkes they spend it for Rum which tell Pa I never tutch in no way shape or manner it panes me to see men make hogs of themselves by getting drunk and God nowes I have seen anuff of it since I have been in the army We spent a verry nice

New Years in Camp every thing passing off will with out eny acsident the Day was one of the Beauterfulles I ever witnessed..."

William P. Allcot Papers, 1861-1864. Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary

Letters of William Peck Allcot, Company "D", Anderson Zouaves. 62nd NYSV Co. I Homepage

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NEWS IN BRIEF

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Alfred Covell Wood's Collection

Received at member Bill Lincoln's email account from the Manuscripts and Special Collections New York State Library Cultural Education Center

From: NYSED MSCOLLS
<MSCOLLS@MAIL.NYSED.GOV>
Subject: Alfred Covell Woods Diaries,
62nd NYSV Co. E.
To: pikenshot@yahoo.com
Date: Friday, 18 November, 2011, 9:56

Having recently discovered that one of your member organizations, *62nd NYSV Anderson Zouaves Company I* have posted transcriptions of the diaries on their website, it is requested that information could updated to indicate that the original manuscript diaries of Alfred Covell Woods are now held by the New York State Library, Manuscripts & Special Collections Department.

They were donated to us by Mr. Greg Furness, who had acquired them from an Ebay sale. Attached is a draft of of our finding aid to the Alfred Covell Woods Papers. Our plan is to eventually post the finding aid online and the transcriptions of the diaries that Mr. Furness has so kindly provided us.

We appreciate you interest in New York State history, particularly its role in the Civil War. If you have any questions

or comments, please feel free to contact us.

*Manuscripts and Special Collections
New York State Library
Cultural Education Center, 11th floor
Albany, NY 12230
(518) 474-6282*

mcolls@mail.nysed.gov

<http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/mssdesc.htm>

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ZOUAVE! is a publication of the Living History Resource Group. Unless otherwise stated, all content is produced by the editor, David Sanders.