

Civil War Letters in the Collection of the Weston Historical Society

George Crosby to Alonzo Fiske, 1864

[Editor's note: The Weston Historical Society would like to thank John Saylor, Weston High School Class of 2011, for his transcriptions of the letters of George Crosby and Samuel Patch. The letters are addressed to Alonzo Fiske, the selectman in charge of recruiting soldiers to meet Weston's enlistment quotas.]

February 10, 1864, Camp at Rappahannock Station

Friend Fiske,

I write to you these few lines hoping to find you in good health as it leaves me at present [,] thank the lord. I have been a long time getting here. I was 7 days coming from Boston to Alexandria [Va.] and we had a strong guard withs [sic] us just the same as if we were conscripts. When we got to Alexandria we were put in the soldiers rest. It is a large building built expressly for the soldiers that are travelling backwards & forwards. We were there about 2 weeks and then we were sent to our regiments. We have been here about 4 days. We have very comfortable log huts to live in. We have plenty to eat. We have a drill about 3 time [sic] a week and we have a very good set of officers and a good captain. I am very well satisfied with my battery. We have 6 10-pound guns and 156 men when the battery has its compliment. Men are afraid to list for this battery because it has the name of a fighting battery. Where we are camped there is a burying ground all around us where a lot of our soldiers buried there [sic]. There was a great battle fought there. We expect to be in the winter quarters until about March. It is not so cold here as it is in Boston. Our camp is within 30 yards of the Rappahannock River. I am in very good health and spirits and I hope you are the same [,] thank the lord for it. I am going in with the intention of seeing this rebellion put down before next fall. I am going to try my best to do it. I think my battery can do its share. Soane is getting along very well. He is very well satisfied with his place. Give my best respects to all my friends in town and may they all have success and happiness. I have no more to say at present. From your most obedient servant

George Crosby



Ambrotype of William H. Carter, who died at Winchester, Virginia, September 19, 1864, mortally wounded, at age 24. (Collection of the Weston Historical Society)

April 3, 1864, Camp at Rappahannock Station

Friend Fiske,

I take pleasure in writing to you a few lines hoping to find you in good health as it leaves me at present— thanks be to the almighty for his goodness [.] we have had some very cold weather here for the last weeks but we have some very good log huts here and that keeps the snow and rain out [.] as soon as the fine weather comes on we will commence marching[.] I like the battery very well[.] I have learned a good deal of the drill since I have been in the battery[.] sometimes we would have no drill for a week on account of the bad weather[.] our Captain is a fighting man so he intends to put us through the mill this summer[.] all of the men in the battery are good fighting men and I guess the[y] will show us a good example in battle [.] I guess that I will do my share of the fighting this summer.

I came out here with the intention of fighting and I mean to go through with it to the end if the lord will only spare my health [.] I think that we have a good commander Gen. Grant[.] he intends to put down this rebellion this coming campagin (sic)[.] doane is getting along very well [.] he seems to like the battery as well as all the rest so I should like to know if he is credited to the quota of Weston or to the quota of boston[.] I don't know as I have any more to say at present from your most obedient and obliging servant

George Crosby, 5th Mass Battery, Washington DC

[Editor's note: Crosby's next letter, dated May 11, 1864, describes the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House. This was the second major battle in General Ulysses S. Grant's 1864 campaign. Following the bloody but inconclusive Battle of the Wilderness, Grant's army moved southeast, attempting to lure General Robert E. Lee into battle under more favorable conditions. Elements of Lee's army beat the Union army to the critical crossroads of Spotsylvania Court House and began entrenching. Fighting occurred on and off from May 8 to May 21. In the end, the battle was tactically inconclusive, but with almost 32,000 casualties on both sides, it was the costliest battle of the campaign.]

May 11, 1864, Near Spotsylvania Court House, 45 miles from Richmond Va.

Friend Fiske,

I take the pleasure of writing you a few lines hoping to find you in good health as it leaves me at present [.] thank the lord for his 3rd of May. Now on the 4th day it has been hard fighting. We have lost in killed & wounded about 12,000 men including prisoners we have taken from the Rebels about 7,000 prisoners during the battle. It is a horrid sight to see the poor fellows that are brought off from the battle field some of them Blown all to atoms by the balls & shells. It is impossible to say how long the battle may last [.] the rebels say that Gen. Lee intends to fight until the last man is killed. But the [sic] can talk as they like for they have a hard man to whip that is Gen. Grant. We are in position about 1,800 yards from the Rebels. They have got the best of us for they are in the woods and we are in the plain. We have been Shelling them since yesterday. My Battery lost 3 men this morning by the Bursting of shell from the Rebels. This Battle is to be the hardest fought battle of the age. By the time this Battle is over there will be but very little left of the Army of the Potomac. There are 4 Army Corps fighting [.] about 120,000 men. The Rebels estimate their army about 90,000 men. The prisoners that we have taken are glad that they have been taken. The Rebels are very strongly fortified. They will not make an attack in Beginning of the day [.] but they will wait until night and if they gain a victory they can fortify at night.

I dont know as I have any more to say at present!

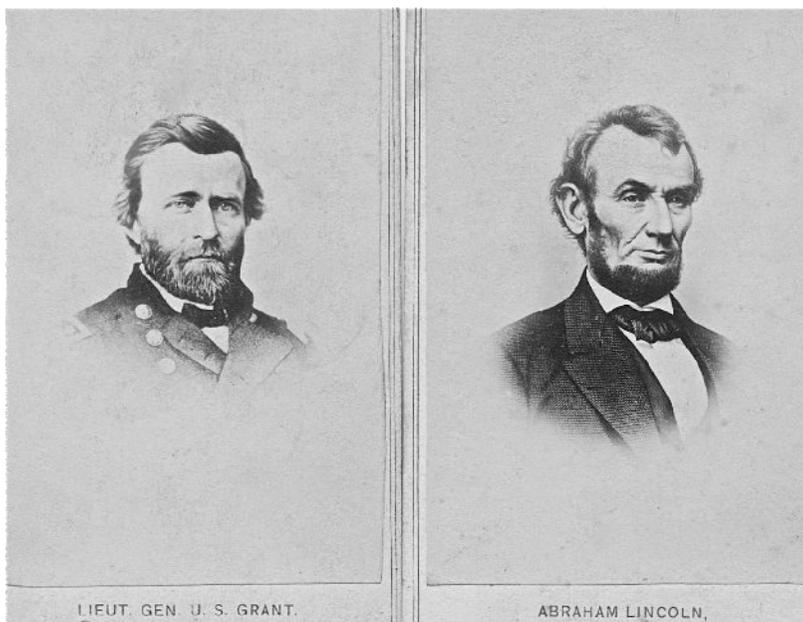
Yours most Obedient Servant, George Crosby

May 17, 1864, In position near Spotsylvania Court House, Va.

Friend Fiske,

I take the pleasure of writing to you a few lines hoping to find you in good health as it leaves me at present [,] thank the lord for his goodness. We have had A Battle since I wrote to you last. Today is the only day that we have had to rest since the Battle commenced. This is the 12th day of the Battle. We drove the Rebels on Sunday about 2 miles and captured 1 Battery & 700 prisoners. We are expecting the Rebels to attack us tonight. The Rebel pickets are deserting as fast as they put out. They say that they are getting short of provisions. We have the principal part of their supplies off. They cannot hold out very long for they have a large army to fight. I dont know as I have any more to say at present. From your most Obedient Servant

George Crosby
5th Mass. Battery, Washington D.C.



Carte de visites of Lieut. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant and President Abraham Lincoln. Cards with photographs of prominent persons became very popular during this period and were traded among friends. (Collection Weston Historical Society)

Samuel Patch to Alonzo Fiske, 1864-65

Samuel Patch, a married 25-year-old carpenter, enlisted in 1862 as a three-years man in Weston's first quota of 17. Patch was rapidly promoted from Private to non-commissioned officer; 2nd Sergeant, Color Sergeant, First Lieutenant and finally Captain.

Beginning in the summer of 1864, Patch was involved in a series of battles around Petersburg, Virginia, popularly known as the Siege of Petersburg. In this case, rather than a classic siege of a single city, the campaign involved nine months of trench warfare in which Union forces commanded by Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant assaulted Petersburg unsuccessfully and then constructed trench lines that eventually extended over 30 miles from the eastern outskirts of Richmond to the eastern and southern outskirts of Petersburg. Petersburg was crucial to the supply of Confederate General Robert E. Lee's army. Numerous raids were conducted and battles fought in attempts to cut off the railroad supply lines through Petersburg to Richmond. Many of these raids resulted in the lengthening of trench lines, overloading dwindling Confederate resources. Lee finally yielded to the overwhelming pressure and abandoned both cities in April 1865, leading to his retreat and surrender at Appomattox Court House. The Siege of Petersburg foreshadowed the trench warfare that was common in World War I, earning it a prominent position in military history.

In the letter below, Samuel Patch talks about the capture of Weldon Railroad. This battle was fought from August 18 - 24, 1864, as part of General Grant's fourth offensive during the Petersburg campaign. The Union victory resulted in the capture of one of General Robert E. Lee's most important supply lines.

Bleaks Station, Va Aug 30th 1864

Mr. Fiske,

Sir. Once more I will improve the oportunity (sic) of writing a few lines to you, although I do not expect I can tell you much news as you have undoubtedly seen better accounts in the papers of the transactions here than I am able to give. Since I returned to the Regiment we have had plenty to do, for some time the Regiment was detached from the Brigade as engeneers (sic) for the Division but is now releived (sic) from that duty and we are with the Brigade again.

I suppose you have learned before this time that Henry Tucker is missing; he has not been seen since the battle of the 19th. The last time any one in the company saw him was about half an hour before our Division was engaged.

Camp near White Station on Sept 25th 64

My Dear Sir

Thrs your favor of the 21st is at hand I am greatly indebted to you for having
 instructed me and giving me the information
 you did not have not yet procured much of my out
 fits and would gladly receive those things which you
 mentioned in your letter as a present from the Regt.
 If you wish to send them I think the best way would
 be to forward them by post. I will send you in
 reply a few packages as small as possible in convenient
 wrapped in strong paper and wrapped being shipped
 only. If you desire to do this I would direct the
 package to Capt John L. Smith Co. C. 1st Regt Mass
 All things packages of that description will not be forwarded
 by mail if directed to a Commissioned officer.
 If you should wish to send them by express send them
 of Adams ordering to City Point in my name.
 If you prefer them direct sent to the Regt but to
 City Point by order of the Regt they might never
 reach. You wished to know the date of my com-
 ing back. I left the 17th and took command of
 the Company on the 20th. Hoping to hear from
 you again I am your O.C.

Samuel Patch
 1st Lieut. Comp. Co. C.

1864 letter from Samuel Patch to Alonzo Fiske, written from the front lines. Note the neat handwriting despite wartime conditions. (Collection Weston Historical Society)

When the Regt. passed into the wood, Henry must have been behind and as we took a different direction I think he must of mistaken his way and got into the rebel lines before he was aware of it. A large portion of the enemys (sic) forces that were in that vicinity came around in our rear and picked up quite a number of stragglers from our Corps.

Henry has the advantage of us I think for he has probably got into Richmond and that is what we can't do very easy [,] at least the prospect is slim at present.

We have done one good thing, that is in capturing the Weldon Rail Road. We have got that sure and the rebs can't get it back again although they have made two or three desperate attempts to recapture the road and drive us from our position.

The last time we were attacked by the enemy was on the morning of the 21st the fight was not a long one but it was a hard one for the Johnes, they paid deer (sic) for their trouble and accomplished nothing. I went over the field a short time after the battle and it was astonishing to see what work our artillery made among them, the ground was completely strewn with the dead and wounded. We took quite a large number of prisoners and for once met with but small loss on our side. This has been a very long and hard campaign. It is hard to tell when it will end, and for my part I hope it will not end untill (sic) we accomplish the object for which we have fought so long and hard to gain.

I suppose that there will be some exciting times this fall as both the draft and election are to take place. I understand that you have succeeded (sic) in getting men so there will be no draft in Weston. I think Weston has been very fortunate during the whole war. I guess that the selectmen have been pretty active in performing their part of the work.

Everything is very quiet along the lines now and has been for several days with the exception of the regular morning and evening canonadeing(sic) in front of Petersburg. We are strengthening our lines every day, building Forts and Breastworks at all points, and by apperences (sic) I think it is intended that these lines should be held at all hazzards (sic).

I have heard it reported several times that Gen Burnside's was to have another command, if that is so I think we shall stand a good chance to have this department, for wherever he goes I think he will take the old 9th Corps with him. I am pretty sure that we cannot get into a much worse place than we have had since this campaign commenced.

We are having very pleasant weather here now and are enjoying ourselves as well as could be expected under the existing circumstances. Our work is not as hard just now as it has been for some time past. I miss Henry very much for we were together most of our leisure time. Henry was a good soldier and never failed to do his duty, he did not ask any man to take his place nor do his work.

Daniel Williams and Charles are both here now. They are engaged in the sutler business [an army camp follower who supplies provisions to soldiers] and I guess are doing pretty well. It is very plesant (sic) to have our old schoolmates so near, and I enjoy it much. I pass a good portion of my leisure time with the boys and it makes it appear not like home but next to it. Well as it is almost dark I will close for the night and finish some other time.

Thursday September 1st, 64 [SAME LETTER]

I will try now and finish my letter as I have a little leasure (sic) time. Everything remains quiet in front of our corps and yesterday we advanced our outer picket line about one hundred yards without any opersition (sic). Scouts have been out near a mile in front of us and found the rebel pickets posted on the Railroad. Our line is as far advanced at this point as they intend to have it at present, unless there is a move made at some other place. We have to turn out at daybreak every morning now and man the works, as they some (sic) expect an attack here, but I pity the grey back that ever attempts to cross the field in front of our works, for it would be sure death to him.

When you see Father tell him I am well and shall write to him again soon. I think I have made out a pretty long letter this time, although it is not a very

interesting one, perhaps the next may be better. Hoping (sic) this may find you enjoying the blessing of health I remain yours,

Sergt Sam

In 1864, the Town of Weston sent Patch an entire set of officer's equipment including a sword, sash, and belt, as an expression of their favor. The delivery of this gift, and Patch's appreciative response, are printed below.

Letter from C.H. Williams to Alonzo Fiske, Oct 24, 1864, from near Poplar Grove Church

Dear Sir

After receiving your favor, I sent to Washington and have delivered to L. Patch the Package containing Sword Belt &c It would have thrice paid you, could you have seen his countenance light up with joy to know his friends at home remembered him so kindly. He is a brave fellow, and a smart officer beloved by all in the regiment. . . [C.H. Williams]

Camp 35th Mass Vol Infty
Before Petersburg VA Dec 29th/64

Gentlemen,

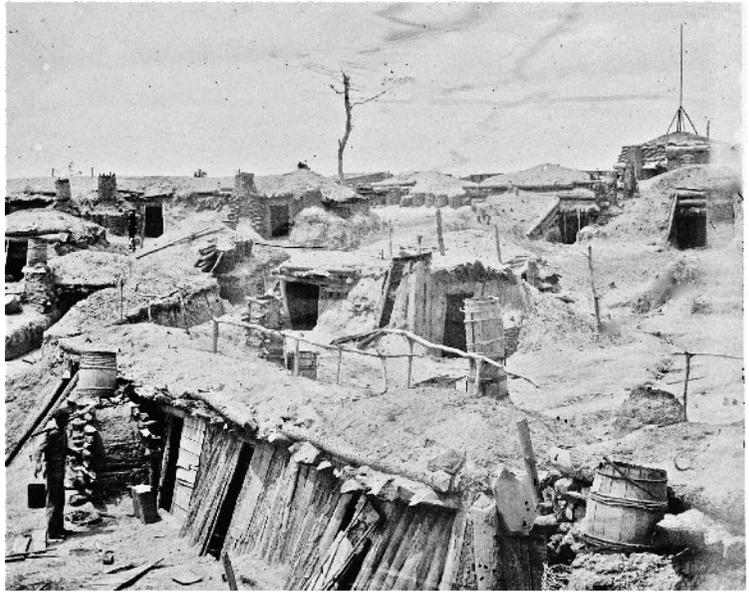
I hasten to improve this opportunity and acknowledge (sic) the receipt (sic) of the valuable present, which you have presented me. It was indeed a great surprise to me and I know not in what way to reply. In fact it is beyond my power to find words by which to express my feelings.

I can only say that you who have presented me with this substantial (sic) mark of your regard have my most earnest and sincere thanks. . . .

Gentlemen, the sword which you have presented me I prize above all, and if it should be my fortune to return to my home and friends, it shall ever be preserved in remembrance of those who so kindly gave it. Let me assure you my friends, that sword shall never be sheathed with dishonor: but whenever drawn while acting in the defense of our country's rights, it shall remind me of my home, and its loved associates, and give me new courage and strength to more faithfully perform the duties before me. . . .

Written to the citizens of Weston by Samuel Patch, first lieutenant Co C, 35th Mass Vol

View of the trenches at Fort Sedgwick, also known as Fort Hell because of the constant gunfire from rebel lines.



The growing Union siege lines were remarkable for the diversity of forts constructed along them. By the spring of 1865, Federal engineers had built 31 forts at Petersburg. Radiating from the forts, in a seemingly aimless pattern, were the breastworks. Samuel Patch wrote from Fort Sedgwick, which was notable because its close proximity to Confederate batteries made it a prominent target. It became known as Fort Hell because it was subjected to constant shelling. Scarcely a day passed without witnessing a heavy artillery duel, as the two armies lay opposite to each other. Patch's letter tells of Union and Confederate soldiers exchanging papers or trading between the lines during the day, out of sight of their officers. Shelling would begin again at nightfall.

Fort Sedgwick Va March 21 1865

Mr. Fiske,

It is some time since I have written to you, and I believe I promised to write and let you know how we were getting along and how we were situated. We are now in Fort Sedgwick, generally called Fort Hell and I think it comes about as near that as anything on earth could for if the other place is any hotter (sic) than it was here for about two hours this afternoon, I for one don't care about going there. I believe I never saw mortar shells piled into one place any faster than the rebs put them into this Fort this afternoon.

We have been in the Fort about a fortnight, there is one mor (sic) regiment besides ours here. Our principle duty now is picket duty, and guard duty in the Fort. The whole garrison consists of two Regiments and two Batterys only. The position of the picket line that we occupy is not over three or four hundred yards from the Fort and directly in front of it, the picket line of the enemy in our front is not over seventy-five yards from our line. So near that the men can talk with each other easy. They very often meet between the lines and exchange papers or trade for tobacco and other things. There is no picket fireing (sic) here in the daytime but just as soon as it becomes dark they commence to pelt away at each other, and keep it up until day light, then the first thing you would see would be our boys and the rebs trying to get a chance to exchange papers or trade without the officers seeing it. The rebel officers will not allow the men to have any talk together if they can prevent it but they can't see all that is going on. We very often have circulars given to us when on picket, to send into the rebel line in any way that we can, the last time I was out I sent several into their lines, and as I have some now I will enclose a copy although I presume you have seen the same order in the papers. I wish you could of come out to the army this winter for a visit—I think you would have been well paid for your trouble, for there is no place where a man can form so correct an idea of what war is as before Petersburg. You would be supprised (sic) to view the country for miles and miles around here.

I do not think that the hard fighting will be altogether in this section in the coming campaign, in fact, it is no use for us to undertake to carry the works in our front; neither can the enemy brake (sic) our line, it would be nothing but slaughter to undertake anything of the kind. Don't you think that things begin to look a little more favourable (sic) for a close of the war? I do think that the thing will play out in less than one year more, and it looks to me as though this summer would wind up the fighting part of it. They might just as well cave in first as last for they have got to come to it sooner or later. Hoping (sic) to hear from you soon. I am very Respectfully, S. Patch

If you are interested in further reading about the Civil War experiences of soldiers, in this case from Sudbury, serving in the 35th Massachusetts and other regiments, check out *From Your Loving Son" Civil War Correspondence and Diaries of Private George F. Moore and His Family*, by Mary Ellen Hoover, Elin Williams Neiterman, and E. Dianne James, available from the Sudbury Historical Society, www.sudbury01776.