

**Sterling Family
Correspondence, 1861-1863****SC18904**

QUANTITY: 1 box (0.25 cubic ft) : 52 items
ACCESS: Open to research
ACQUISITION: See Provenance Note
PROCESSED BY: Nicholas Webb, Student Assistant, State University of New York at Albany, June 2008

Biographical and Genealogical Note:

William Henry Sterling was born December 4, 1828, in Philadelphia, the son of a prosperous iron manufacturer who had emigrated from Ireland. Records indicate that he attended West Point (United States Military Academy) in 1849 and settled in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he worked as a clerk, the following year.

He had returned to Philadelphia by May 1861, at which time he enlisted for service in the Union Army, enrolling as Second Lieutenant of Company G of the 1st U.S. Army Infantry Regiment. During the summer of 1861 he served at Army posts in New York City, first at Fort Columbus and later at Fort Lafayette, and by September he had been promoted to First Lieutenant and Adjutant of his regiment.

On October 1, 1861, William married Matilda Louise (“Tillie”) Farquhar, the daughter of Edwin Yorke and Anna Virginia Farquhar. Tillie was born in Pottsville, Pennsylvania on January 14, 1841. Her family would later move to Philadelphia, where her father was a practicing attorney and real estate developer.

William Sterling was transferred to the military base at Plattsburgh, New York in May 1862, and was joined by Tillie soon after. They remained there until February, 1863, when William was transferred to the base at Annapolis, Maryland. At Plattsburgh William was largely responsible for the operations of the base while Colonel Waite, the commanding officer, was away on special assignment as a member of a court-martial panel in Saint Louis. Later, William served in a number of administrative posts in the South, including numerous military commissions and the Louisiana Freedmen’s Bureau. In 1870 he was honorably discharged from the Army.

After a brief stint in Philadelphia, William and Tillie relocated to Plainfield, New Jersey, where they would spend the rest of their lives. From 1878 to 1881 William served in various positions under former General George McClellan, who had been elected governor of New Jersey in 1878. In his final years he received a veteran’s pension; he died of pneumonia on January 30, 1918. Tillie died on October 15, 1920.

Scope and Content Note:

The 52 letters in this collection are divided into two categories. Twenty letters, dating from June 1861 to September 1862, were written by William Sterling to his fiancé (and eventual wife), Tillie Farquhar. The remaining thirty-two letters, which date from July 1862 to February 1863, were written by Tillie Farquhar Sterling to her mother in Philadelphia.

Sterling's letters are primarily love letters in which he discusses how he adores Tillie and longs to see her again. They contain relatively little information about Sterling's day-to-day activities as a military officer, although one letter (Folder 1, Item E) describes a harrowing night spent dealing with a shipment of recently captured prisoners of war.

Tillie's letters to her mother consist mostly of wishes for her mother's well-being, gossip about her siblings, and descriptions of her social life in Plattsburgh. They contain incidental details about life on the home front during the early years of the Civil War, as Tillie worries over the possibility of a Confederate invasion of Pennsylvania and has harsh words for Northerners who are insufficiently devoted to the Union cause. These letters also provide a glimpse of Tillie's religious convictions. In November 1862 she experienced a religious conversion and began attending services at the local Episcopalian church.

Provenance Note:

The New York State Library purchased these papers from Charles Apfelbaum, a vendor then situated in Valley Stream, New York in May 1986. The papers were accessioned and catalogued in December 1988 and December 1994 respectively. The finding aid was compiled in June 2008 along with substantial revisions to the catalog record. An additional group of papers of the same Sterling family is held the University of Maryland Library, Archives and Manuscript Division.

Document List:

Folder	Description
1	<p>William Sterling to Tillie Farquhar Sterling – 1861 (6 items)</p> <p>a) June 29, 1861 – Fort Columbus b) July 2, 1861 – Fort Columbus c) July 23, 1861 – Fort Lafayette d) July 27, 1861 – Fort Lafayette e) August 27, 1861 – Fort Lafayette f) September 18, 1861 – Fort Lafayette</p>
2	<p>William Sterling to Tillie Farquhar Sterling – May 4, 1862-May 10, 1862 (10 items)</p> <p>a) May 4, 1862 – Albany, N.Y. b) May 4, 1862 – Albany, N.Y. c) May 5, 1862 – Albany, N.Y. d) May 6, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. e) May 6, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. f) May 7, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. g) May 7, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. h) May 8, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y.</p>

	<p>i) May 9, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. j) May 10, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y.</p>
3	<p>William Sterling to Tillie Farquhar Sterling – May 11, 1862-September 12, 1862 (4 items) a) May 11, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. b) May 12, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. c) May 13, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. d) September 12, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y.</p>
4	<p>Tillie Farquhar Sterling to Mother – July-September 1862 (10 items) a) July 15, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. b) July 18, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. c) August 5, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. d) August 19, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. e) September 2, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. f) September 15, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. g) September 18, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. h) September 19, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. i) September 23, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. j) September 26, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y.</p>
5	<p>Tillie Farquhar Sterling to Mother – October 1862 (6 items) a) October 1, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. b) October 3, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. c) October 17, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. d) October 21, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. e) October 24, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. f) October 28, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y.</p>
6	<p>Tillie Farquhar Sterling to Mother – November-December 1862 (7 items) a) November 4, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. b) November 7, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. c) November 11, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. d) Thanksgiving Day [November 27, 1862] – Plattsburgh, N.Y. e) December 5, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. f) December 19, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. g) December 26, 1862 – Plattsburgh, N.Y.</p>
7	<p>Tillie Farquhar Sterling to Mother – January-February 1863 (9 items) a) January 19, 1863 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. b) January 26, 1863 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. c) January 27, 1863 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. d) January 29, 1863 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. e) February 2, 1863 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. f) February 4, 1863 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. g) February 5, 1863 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. h) February 10, 1863 – Plattsburgh, N.Y. i) February 11, 1863 – Plattsburgh, N.Y.</p>