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Suggested Citation:

“A Civil War Letter.” Trans. and submitted by Joe Mode. *Tennessee Ancestors* 16, no. 1 (April 2000): 38-44.

A CIVIL WAR LETTER

*Transcribed and submitted by Joe Mode
Knoxville, TN*

Editor's Note: The following letter was written by Mrs. H. G. Scovel of Nashville, Tennessee, to a Mrs. Perry of Glen Falls, New York.

Nashville
April 1st 1862

My Dear Mrs. Perry,

Your welcome letter reached me yester-day; the third only which I have received since our mail facilities have been renewed. Its being unexpected made it the more welcome. I assure you we know now how to value correspondence. Where shall I begin to answer all you will wish to know? You may believe we feel like a bird--let loose; free once more to speak, write or sing. Would that I possessed the faculty of description, that I might graphically delineate some of the scenes, comic as well as tragic which have transpired. But your heart would sicken at many of them! Especially the atrocities committed by some of the soldiery--the Texas Rangers and Kentucky cavalry that remained after the retreating army from Bowling Green passed through on their way to Murfreesborough. That week of terror can hardly be described as it really was. Never again do we expect to experience the same joy or rather transport which took possession of us when the two Gunboats were announced in sight followed by 15 or 20 Transports. There was a foreshadowing of the same when the news came of the fall of Fort Donelson 8 or 9 days before; but our joy at that time was interrupted by the fear the Confederates might make a stand at Nashville and that

consequently the city be destroyed. Oh that Sunday! Will I ever forget it, or anyone else who was here?

We had gone to church as usual in the morning. Gould had taken 2 or 3 of the children to his church and I with John for an escort had gone over to the Edgefield Pres. church on foot (for I usually rode over in our buggy) to hear Dr. Hendrick who was the only preacher I cared to hear since Mr. Hays departure, for he was not in the habit of introducing politics or confederacy either into his sermons or his prayers.

Now here let me digress and say that on Saturday, the day previous--was one of dark hue for the Union folks: on every side we met those who were disposed to exult over the victories they supposed from telegraphic despatches--they were gaining at Fort Donelson. I met Mrs. McKee for instance, she raised her hands exclaiming, "We have got them now." A little while after I encountered Mrs. Ramage exclaiming "Have you heard the news from Donelson? We are going to annihilate them; they are being cut to pieces and driven into the river. Poor fellows, I feel sorry for them but I hope to God every one of them will be killed; that is our only safety; then the next thing is to exterminate our enemies at

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home." "Ah, have we many of them" said I. "Yes plenty right here in our midst" she replied, meaning Union Folks, but I pretended not to take her meaning at all and she passed on. The next Monday was the day for examining all Union men and taking down in writing their reasons for not joining the military companies. Such was Saturday and now I will go back to my history at the close of the preceding page. Sunday morning came bright and clear; one buggy being out of order John and myself walked over the bridge--which by the by was the last crossing I made over that beautiful structure now all gone--straggling squads of soldiers and army wagons seemed to be quite common on our way and at length we stopped one of them to inquire if there was any news. The reply was that the confederate army was falling back upon Nashville: This we had been hearing for several days.

We got safely to church. Dr. Hendrick took for his text the 2nd verse of 31st chap. of Jeremiah. "The people who were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness." In the midst of the sermon a rustling on the stairs caused me to turn--for I was in the choir--and there was Gould and Mary Louisa. The latter came immediately and put her head to my ear, saying "Ma, we have come for you, the churches in the city have all dismissed, Fort Donelson is taken and Gov. Harris had ordered all of the women and children out of the city. Pa says you must hurry out for we will have to cross the bridge quickly." By this time the people in the church seemed to get looking about as though they suspected something in the wind. We got softly down stairs and met Hugh Douglas coming in at post haste. He went immediately to the pulpit and whispered to Dr. H. who rose and said he hoped all would be calm and trust in the Lord: and they would dismiss. By this time

some were crying and some asking what was the matter? Some seemed to anticipate the evil and ask where shall we go? What shall we do? All seemed to be as panic stricken as if Buell was actually at their very doors. We got near Matthew, just as along came a co. of confederate cavalry; so on we went, each one trying to hurry and yet every one cautioning the other not to go too fast over the bridge for fear so many horses would cause it too rapid vibration. We found the city all excitement; some urging the burning of the city; others desirous of its surrender. Every Hack, Omnibus, Baggage or Express wagon, everything and anything which would carry a family or their luggage was on the go; and those who could not get a conveyance started on foot. Many of our first citizens went without knowing where they were going and never stopped to ask, until they found a first stopping place. We had not been home long before a colored woman closely veiled called John at the back gate telling him she heard 3 men on the square in close conversation, one saying he would kill Scovel at first sight; so she came to tell him not to go from his house; but he had already gone to see how Minnie stood the excitement for her baby was only about 3 weeks old and I had begged him to go up to Mrs. Pesin's--where they were boarding and see her and tell her what we were going to do, or rather that we were not alarmed and were not going to leave the city unless it should be shelled. This was about 2 o'clock and then the authorities had not determined to surrender but it was only a few moments after and we heard all was decided and no resistance was to be made. This was joy-ous news; just then the Brigades of Breckenridge, Hindman and Bowman came from Bowling Green via of the suspension bridge and Market St. retreating toward Murfreesborough. All

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sorts of talk afloat; some for burning as they went and some threatening vengeance on the first one who should fire a dwelling. All was such uncertainty when night came we resolved to watch all night by turns. I read until 12 and then wrote till 2 in the morning (to Mother) then dozed in my chair till (?) o'clock when I called up Gould and retired myself. But nothing occurred of an alarming kind during the night, although at intervals we could hear the hoofs of the cavalry horses. Before breakfast on every street might be seen men, women and children carrying pork, bolts of domestic goods of every kind used for clothing and shoes in all quantities. These were being thrown from windows and carried out of the doors of the large building of Enoch Ensley's near the bridge and also the one where Plummer kept by the Hotel both of which had been taken for the commissary departments. The rush of the crowd was so great at last they closed the doors and stopped distributing, for as the Federals were not yet in sight and Pillow and Floyd had arrived they concluded they would try and get off some to Murfreesborough instead of giving all away to the crowd. Commotion among the people and havoc by the soldiery seemed most of the order of that day and when night came, fear came also with it for none felt safe with the remaining troops of Texas Cavalry and Kentucky Morgan men. Gould sat up most of the night and awoke me at about 3 o'clock saying there was a very great light by the upper wharf. We sent John off to see and it was the burning of the Steamers James Johnson and Wood both of which were being converted into Gun-boats. Morning came and no Federals yet arrived. Floyd deciding for the burning of the bridges as soon as the pickets should come in sight. Turpentine was poured over the timbers and all ready for the occasion.

All sorts of rumors afloat in town; but the bridges remained unburnt until Thursday morning at about 6 o'clock. It was a beautiful sight yet one that vexed me more than any other I have witnessed during the whole confederation. On Tuesday all sorts of impressments were made; under the guise of authority (but without law). For instance--a man was moving his family and furniture. Along would come another and say to him, "We want your horse and wagon to carry pork to and from the wharf, or to Murfreesborough, we must have him for the government." They would perhaps dump all of his furniture by the side of the road or street, and after leaving him and his family helpless would maybe take that very horse and wagon to carry bacon to their own homes from the commissary stores.

At another time when they had permitted nearly a boat load to be carried from the wharf by those who would take their shoulders full and unload at some corner near by leaving another to watch it; Pillow and Floyd finding that Buell was not quite as near as they supposed, gave orders for every piece of it to be taken from those who had possession, and soldiers were sent in every direction to catch every person and impress them to carry the pork and place it in their army wagons to go to Murfreesborough. At one time they had John M. Bass and at another Curran McNairy and everyone imaginable. In one instance the soldiers brought a gentleman whom they met dressed in fine broadcloth, with white gloves on. It is said Floyd was standing by and called one of his soldiers to hold the gentleman's gloves as being incompatible with pork packing. Such dodging of officers and all sorts of maneuverings to avoid being sent to the pork as was going on for several days would furnish material for Harper's or any other work for no little time to come. On Tuesday P.M.

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along came Dick Kerley with 3 other soldiers purporting to have an order from some Col. Howard. "Mr. Scovel, we have come for your horse we want to go into the country as far as Gen'l Hardings to impress horses." "I want him myself," said Gould. "We will return him by morning or at midnight," said Kerley. "You cannot have him," said G. "But we will, here is an order from Col. H." "Who is Col. H.? Go with me and I will see him myself," said G.--They went together, meanwhile one of the soldiers stationed himself at the stable as a guard and the other remained by the back porch talking with me. At length, the guard sung out to the other one to hurry or he would break open the stable door and take the horse anyhow. The one I was talking with acknowledged there was no validity in the order of the Col. but that they must have the horse; and he thought we had better give him up with a good grace than to have him taken any how. He also said he could not say he thought we would ever see him again and they might as well have him as the Federals. I told him the Federals had a plenty of horses they would not want him. They began to get very impatient and in the meantime the other one left me for the stable also. I immediately slipped into the house and put one of Colts revolvers into my pocket and started off for the stable too, hoping to talk with them so as to occupy the time and prevent their taking the horse before G. got back. As I got near the side door of the stable they were trying to pick the padlock but on seeing me desisted. I begged, I entreated, I told them he was doubly valuable to me because he was too gentle for a trooper and was so cat-like I could drive him anywhere any and everywhere I pleased. They said they cared not for his qualities they only wanted any horse. By this time G. came with Kerley and said that

there was no such Col. to be found and a lawyer had said the order was only a formal request, therefore he would not consent for their having him. They said they did not care they would have him anyhow. Now said G--if you take him you do it at your peril. The surliest one then said "now we will take him and keep him too because you demur." Gould started off saying he would see Gen'l Floyd. In the meantime I talked and argued to employ the time, but Providence so ordered that I forgot I had put a pistol in my pocket; or I might have stationed myself in the door and said "now you have to take that horse over my body if you take him at all" but instead I used all my argument in vain; and they broke open the door and away they took Tobe. Oh how the tears would come. After they had gone around me flocked all the children. One said, Ma, I wonder if they will treat Tobe mean or give him plenty to eat. Bettie was the only one whose cries could find no cessation for a long time. At length, Gould came, after trying twice to find Floyd; he at the 2nd time accomplished his object. He found Floyd at the St. Cloud and went in saying "Gen'l., do you permit your soldiers to break open the stables of private individuals and take out horses?" "No, sir," said he, "Tell me who has done it and I will have them arrested and placed in irons." He obtained from him a written order to the same effect and home he came; then we waited till near 1 o'clock at night, when off he started with John for Squire Farris' office where were the quarters of their company and where I told him I thought they would be likely to come first on their arrival from Hardings. (Young Farris was Capt. of the Company.) After getting there he found no one but a soldier half asleep and from him learned they were expected in soon; shortly they came whistling and hurraing; Gould walked out and sure enough there was

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Tobe. He walked up and took hold of his bridle, "but stop" said Kerley "we must have him to go 3 miles further." "Not another jile" said G. "We will see" said Kerley grasping the other rein. Gould drew from his pocket the order of arrest from Floyd; and Kerley wanted to take it but G. said no; if he was not satisfied to hear him read it he could go unsatisfied. Kerly then said to his comrade "Let Mr. Scovel have the horse, he is a responsible man." And off he sneaked. Home they came with Tobe and for the rest of that week we were obliged to secrete him a Shankland's stable for they were inquiring at all of the Livery stables for him and every other horse which could be found. Of dozens or hundreds of others who were stolen in the same way, no one else of whom we have heard ever got theirs back; Providence very signally blessed us in this respect. I might tell you of many ridiculous as well as interesting little incidents con-nected with this history of the week of terror and although I find I have now filled too much space of this sheet with one so unim-portant yet it is a sample.

It rained very hard that night of Tobe's return but as we were some of us watching every night Gould went to the stable with Bruno our dog and wrapping himself up remained there till morning when we sent the horse to Shankland's. The next night all of the good guns of the Armory at the Capitol were burned at this the North end of the building; all of these things were very exciting and no one seemed to feel secure, fearing every thing or anything might come next. Early the following morning followed the burning of the bridge. Oh, could you now see how desolate all now at that locality appears, when so much of interest once was, to find only two ferry boats, now plying and they rather small affairs too, it would make you sad I know for you have

often enjoyed the walks over that suspension bridge.

By the by, this reminds me that you will be ready to ask what became of Mr. Matthews family? Well Jo was one of the Confederate Lieuts. and I believe was taken prisoner at Fort Donelson. His father's fam-ily left for some country locality on hearing of the approach of the Federals, and I hear their house was rented to Floyd or some of the Confederate officers awhile before the panic; indeed now I have no idea whether they have returned or not since some of the inhabitants are making up their minds that there was not cause for so much fear of the Federals after all; and some are now coming home who once thought they would never live under Lincoln rule. Others--Gen'l Barrow--for instance, who said he was not going away unless he was sent to some Fort north as a prisoner. Sure enough yesterday we heard, he together with Gen'l Harding had been arrested and sent to our Penitentiary--for treason--in signing the article which passed Tennessee out of the Union. We heard Byrd Douglas was also arrested but not certain of his case. By the by did you ever see the notice of Gould's arrest as a Union man at the instance or on the Complaint of Byrd Douglas? Sometime about the 1st week of Nov. Gould was crossing the Square and B. D. called to him saying "Dr., come in." He generally calls G. Dr. Scovel; at his invitation G. went in and sat down, and D. said "I hear there are some Union men in town and you among the number. Now, Sir, my advice to you would be to leave." Gould replied, "Mr. Douglas, I have as good a right to tread the sacred soil of Tennessee as you or any other man; and more than that I am doing more for the interest of Tenn. now than the whole set of you secessionists put together; and more still I expect yet to see the Stars and

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Stripes floating over that capitol before 6 months pass by." D. replied, "Before that happens I hope you will be dead." When Gould found he was getting bitter he left him. The next day or so he was summoned by the Dept. Sheriff to appear before the Confederate Court. Judge Humphrey presiding; after raking and scraping all they could they held him to bail in the amount of 10,000 Dollars that he should do nothing against the interests of the Southern Confederacy. Sam Scott and Shankland went his securities. We all tell him now his prophecy has come true, he ought to take B. D. by the collar and lead him in sight of the Capitol and tell him he should look at that flag. Gould was the only Union man here who was arrested for mere expression of opinion. There are plenty here who would gladly have aided in hanging G. because he never feared to coolly express his Union sentiments. He has dozens of times been told he ought to leave. Turner Foster told him so to his face also. I expect many of these secessionists are now quaking in their shoes since the work of arrest is commenced. I will send you the proceedings of the Court in G's case--if you did not see any of the papers containing it, for all of the trial was published. You can have no idea of the bitterness of feeling which exists here toward those like us who have dared to hang out a Union Flag. Indeed we hear the ladies have determined to have no visiting or interchange of sociality with Union peo-ple. I must tell you one instance; you know old Capt. Driver. Well, his own brother will not speak to him when he meets him. A few days since he met Mrs. Tom Smith on the street and she said "Capt. Driver, don't you ever dare to speak to me again." "Madam," he replied, "I consider it no hon-our to speak to a traitor."

George Cunningham's handsome residence is now occupied by Gen'l. Buell; or

rather since his departure by Gen'l D--and V. K. Stevenson's by some of the staff officers (and etc.). The first use made of the parsonage of the 2nd Church since Mr. Hays left has been as the quarters of the Provost Marshall Matthews. Mr. Bassett's family are strong Union; though no private residences have hung out the Flag and retained it out but Glowens on Union St.,--and ourselves. Mrs. McEwen took hers in because her neighbors made such a fuss and Robb's folk, or rather Nancy C., (her aunt) had one out for a day or so. Ours has been out till the weather has faded it quite badly. I hear Mrs. Jim Hamilton says she will try and raise a subscription to get us a new one. I wish I had room here to tell you how she opened her door and ordered me out of her house because the last time I called on her, in the course of conversation I expressed it as my opinion that there were more Union men in Tenn than Secessionists if they dared to speak out. The scene was a rich one for a painter; but the "Yankee" as she called me, moved not; and because I was immoveable her rage was the more apparent and she called her little negro to call her big one to put out the Yankee that did not know enough to go when she was sent. Her husband was not in at the time and I told her as I had come more particularly to see him on business--for the Orphan Asylum--I did not intend to leave until I had accomplished my objective. She has made herself a laughing stock at any rate through all of the Confounderace. Mrs. Dr. Porter gave her the best dressing she every got some months before. She told her before a number of ladies that it would not do for the daughter of an emigrant Yankee school teacher to call in question the Loyalty of a daughter of Felix Grundy and she told her more than that, never to speak to her again until she made due apology for her words.

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But I find I am spinning on the 12th page of my foolscap, and yet am no nearer done than when I commenced. The hour is more than bed-time. No night finds me other than weary, with excitement and also fatigue; for here we have had four sick soldiers here at our hospital up in your old room; two of them however left convalescent, on yesterday morning. All (Indianans) but for one wound-ed one from Illinois; wounded at Fort Donel-son. Gould attends to his wounds entirely. I can tell you he is also over busy. I can as-sure you I was very, very glad to hear from your own pen that you were all well and to receive a letter from one whose departure gave me so much pain. I told Mrs. Mott to tell you how disappointed I was when you left without seeing me. Indeed I was grieved, but all is forgiven as you may rest assured I should not have given you this long epistle.

If your patience is not exhaust-ed in reading it, and you do not fear the infliction of another by replying to it, do write me again soon. Give much love to all; Mrs. Perry, Carry, Hattie, and all who have any interest in me. Tell Mr. Perry that Edward Cone has a situation in the P.O. He returned from Cincinnati with his wife (Miss Roach that was) a few weeks ago.

Much love to yourself from your true friend,
Mrs. H. G. Scovel.

Elizabeth is yet at Dwight, Illinois.

Mary Louisa and Anna particularly and the children generally desire me to give their love to Mr. Perry and yourself and Carry.

Mr. Scovel and Minnie desire to be remembered to you all.

Notes

Early in 1862 the Confederates held two forts just south of the boundary line between Kentucky and Tennessee--Fort Henry on the Tennessee River and Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River.

On February 2, 1862, Commodore Foote and troops under General Ulysses S. Grant attacked Fort Henry by gunboats. In command of Fort Henry was General Lloyd Tilghman. With only about ninety men to work guns bearing on the river, he was forced to surrender. The remaining Confederates in the rifle pits then retreated to Fort Donelson.

In command at Donelson was General Floyd, who was assisted by two Generals: Buchner and Pillow. On the 13th of February, Grant and his men began their attack. The fighting lasted for four days, with the victory at one moment in the Union hands, and the next in the Confederates. This skirmish explains why the people in Nashville had ambiguous beliefs concerning which side was winning.

Finally the Confederate commanders came to the conclusion that neither victory nor escape was possible, that Grant was too strong, and that nothing remained but to surrender. At his acknowledgement, Floyd and Pillow, with the aid of two small steamboats, succeeded in escaping with about 1,200 officers and men by the river road during the night.