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## MS-060: Henry N. Bemis Diaries

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## MS-060: Henry N. Bemis Diaries

### Description

The Henry N. Bemis collection consists primarily of two diaries kept by Bemis during the Civil War. The first diary runs from July 17th, 1862 to March 14th, 1864 while the second diary runs from March 17th 1864 to July 4th 1864. Both diaries contain frequent entries detailing the events of each day. Also included in the collection are two tintypes, a photograph, and Bemis' discharge from service. The two tintypes are most likely images of Bemis and his wife, Georgia A. Bemis.

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### Keywords

Civil War, Wartime Diaries, 15th Massachusetts, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Cold Harbor, Union Army

### Disciplines

History | Military History | United States History

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**Library**  
*special collections*

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Guide to MS-060:

Henry N. Bemis Diaries



Gettysburg College, Musselman Library  
Special Collections and College Archives

Stephen Light  
September 2004

## MS-060: Henry N. Bemis

Processed by Stephen Light  
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### Size

1 box, 0.28 feet

### Dates

Inclusive: 1864

### Biographical Note

Henry N. Bemis (1837 - sometime after 1880) was born in Ashburnham, Massachusetts, the son of Abel Bemis and Rebecca Richardson. The beginning of the Civil War found Bemis making a living as a farmer in Worcester, Massachusetts. On July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1861 he and his brother, Charles H. Bemis, were mustered in Company D, 15<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, as privates.

In the regiment's first action—the battle of Ball's Bluff on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 1861—Bemis was taken prisoner. He probably was sent to a prison in Richmond for a time before being released on parole in February of 1862. In July of 1862, Henry reported to a camp for paroled prisoners in Annapolis, Maryland to await exchange. He rejoined the 15<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts in October of 1862, but in November was transferred to Battery I, 1<sup>st</sup> United States Artillery. He served with Battery I until his three year term of enlistment expired. During this time he was engaged in many major battles of the Eastern Theater, including Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Cold Harbor. He was discharged on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1864. In 1865 he married a woman named Georgia A. \_\_\_\_\_. The couple had three sons, Frederick, Edward, and Walter. He died sometime after 1880 and is buried in Hope Cemetery in Worcester, Massachusetts.

The 15<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry had a very tragic history in the Civil War, serving in all the major battles of the Army of the Potomac from Ball's Bluff through to the siege of Petersburg. At the battle of Ball's Bluff it lost over 300 men, many captured or drowned in trying to swim across the Potomac River to safety. At the battle of Antietam in September of 1862 the regiment was outflanked and lost fifty percent of its men in just a half hour in the West Woods. It was heavily engaged again at Gettysburg, where its Colonel George H. Ward was shot and killed. It served in Grant's 1864 overland campaign, and after the battle of Cold Harbor was reduced to only 5 officers and 70 men. On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1864 in the battle of Jerusalem Plank Road the regiment was surprised and all but one officer and 5 enlisted men were captured. The remnant of the regiment was attached to the 20<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts.

The start of the Civil War found Battery I, 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. Artillery stationed at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The battery was sent east and equipped to serve as light artillery for the Army of the Potomac, and remained with the army for the entirety of the war. At Gettysburg the battery was stationed near Ziegler's Grove, and lost heavily in helping to repel Pickett's Charge. After the battle of Bristoe Station, the battery was

made into a horse artillery unit and served with the cavalry. It was present at the battle of Trevillian Station, one of the largest cavalry battles of the war.

### Scope and Content Note

The Henry N. Bemis collection consists primarily of two diaries kept by Bemis during the war. The first diary runs from July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1862 to March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1864 while the second diary runs from March 17<sup>th</sup> 1864 to July 4<sup>th</sup> 1864. Both diaries contain frequent entries detailing the events of each day. Also included in the collection are two tintypes, a photograph, and Bemis' discharge from service. The two tintypes are most likely images of Bemis and his wife, Georgia A. Bemis. The photograph is unidentified.

The diaries for the most part do not offer detailed descriptions of battle (with some exceptions, such as the entry describing Gettysburg). Instead, they often provide a glimpse into the life of a Union soldier when not in battle. Bemis details the hardships of life in the Union army: the stop and go nature of marches, living on short rations when supplies could not get through, the brutal weather that the soldiers often endured with no shelter, the time and effort spent taking care of the horses that draw the artillery. One looking for a source with spectacular battle descriptions may be disappointed, but one looking into the everyday life of a Civil War soldier will find a great deal in these two diaries.

### Box List

#### Box 1

- 1-1 Diary, July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1862 – March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1864 - 132 pages
- 1-2 Diary, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1864 – July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1864 - 72 pages
- 1-3 Discharge from Service, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1864
- 1-4 Two tintypes and one photograph
  - Tintype images are likely Henry N. Bemis and Georgia A. Bemis
  - Photograph is unidentified

### Contact Information

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