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MS-161: Ellen Wild Letters

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MS-161: Ellen Wild Letters

Description

The Ellen Wild Letters Collection contains 21 letters, primarily featuring letters written in 1862 to 1865. The majority of the letters come from 1862, but several also come from her time following the Civil War. The letters recount Mrs. Wild's time during the Civil War, waiting for news from her husband as well as surviving on the home front. She recounts Edward Wild's adventures during the war, his life in camp, and his numerous woundings and ailments. Mrs. Wild discusses her husband's involvement in North Carolina as well as with the free African Americans. She briefly mentions the Battle of Gettysburg and defends Joseph Hooker's actions at the Battle of Chancellorsville. She gives her opinion about how the Civil War could be ended; saying that all that was required was the defeat of Robert E. Lee. In 1864, she follows Edward, taking residence in Norfolk, Virginia while her husband reports to Benjamin Butler. Mrs. Wild comments on Butler's actions during this period of the war, and makes short mention of the battles occurring around Petersburg and Richmond. She continues to write about Edward Wild's service in the American Army, noting his actions in Virginia as well as his state of mind during the late stages of the war.

Following the American Civil War, letters from 1891 and 1892 recount Mr. Wild's life during Reconstruction in Massachusetts. The letters pick up just a few months after Edward's death, with many recounting the decisions Mrs. Wild had to make for herself as well as the struggles of living without her husband. She must decide what to do with the body of her husband as well as locating and processing his will to receive his estate. The will had been lost in Canada, and her letters recount her finding it once more with the help of her friends and Edward's wartime contemporaries. Throughout these years, she is very ill, weak and fragile in the aftermath of her husband's death. She also is taking care of her cousin Katy Wild, who is slowly dying of Pancreas cancer. Mrs. Wild goes into detail in almost every letter about Katy's condition, with the series of letters ending before Katy passes. This group of letters talks about life after the Civil War and the affects Mrs. Wild can still see from it, even from the state of Massachusetts.

Many years are missing in the series, including everything from 1866 to 1890. Several letters from each year are missing as well, and there is no continual narrative throughout. There are no replies back to Ellen Wild, just the letters written by her but she manages to answer many of the questions raised in a previous letter.

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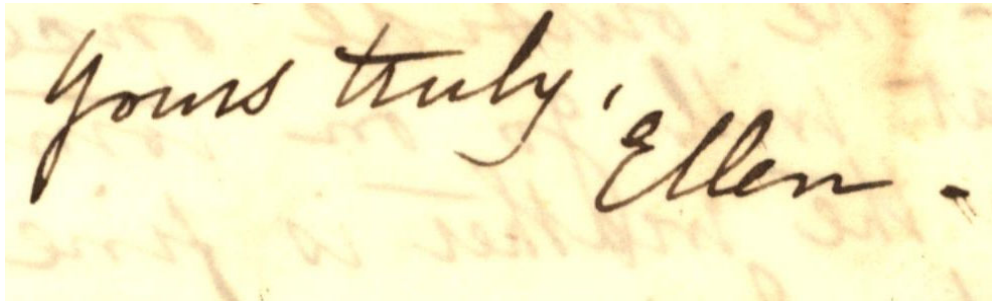
Keywords

Civil War, Battle of Seven Pines, Roanoke Island, Benjamin Butler, Norfolk, Army of the James, Boston, letters

Disciplines

Cultural History | History | Military History | Women's History

**Guide to the
MS-161: Ellen Wild Letters**



**Savannah Rose '17
Fortenbaugh Intern 2016
April 2016**

MS – 161: Ellen Wild Letters

(1 box, .5 cubic feet)

Location: 5/F/7

Inclusive Dates: 1862-1892

Bulk Dates: 1862-1865

*Processed by: Savannah Rose '17 Fortenbaugh Intern
April 2016*

Provenance

Purchased in 2014 from Denning House Antiquarian Books & Manuscripts

Biographical Note

Frances Ellen Sullivan was born in January 1829 in Boston, Massachusetts to parents John Whiting and Marian (Dix) Sullivan. Early on in life, Frances grew up using her middle name Ellen as her preferred name. In 1855, she began courting Edward August Wild. The couple was married on June 12, 1850 by Reverend A. L. Stone in Boston, traveling across Europe and the Middle East following their nuptials. Edward Wild was born on November 25, 1825 and grew up in Brookline, Massachusetts. A raging abolitionist since childhood, Wild picked up the medical profession but continued to live an adventure filled life. During their honeymoon, the Wild's visited Constantinople where Edward gave his medical skills to the Turks fighting in the Crimean War. At the outbreak of the American Civil War, Wild enlisted as an officer of Massachusetts regiments. During the Battle of South Mountain, Wild sustained an injury that required the amputation of his left arm. Once he returned to combat, Wild helped to free African Americans in North Carolina eventually leading his own brigade of Colored Troops throughout the rest of the war. Throughout the Civil War, Ellen Wild wrote to her husband who often forgot to write her back. Ellen cared for Edward during his numerous wounds and eventually moving around with the army to be closer to her husband.

After the Civil War, the Wilds continued to travel across the United States. Edward, now unable to practice medicine due to his war injuries, picked up mining in order to create a trust fund for his wife. Ellen remained in Massachusetts while Edward lived in Nevada to carry out the mining. Edward died on August 28, 1891 in Columbia, South America. Ellen Wild had to decide what had to be done with her husband's remains, deciding to leave them in South America, never seeing her husband's grave. Following Edward's death, Ellen lived permanently in Brookline, Massachusetts where she took care of her cousin Catherine H. Wild who was slowly dying of pancreas cancer. Ellen also dealt with the finalization of her husband's will, dealing with how to receive his estate as the will had temporarily gone missing. Ellen faced a serious illness

immediately following her husband's death, but survived to live until October 3, 1923. Frances Ellen Wild died at 95 years old from "hypertrophy of heart," and "old age," and is buried in the Walnut Street Cemetery in Brookline, Massachusetts.

Scope and Content Notes

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Following the American Civil War, letters from 1891 and 1892 recount Mr. Wild's life during Reconstruction in Massachusetts. The letters pick up just a few months after Edward's death, with many recounting the decisions Mrs. Wild had to make for herself as well as the struggles of living without her husband. She must decide what to do with the body of her husband as well as locating and processing his will to receive his estate. The will had been lost in Canada, and her letters recount her finding it once more with the help of her friends and Edward's wartime contemporaries. Throughout these years, she is very ill, weak and fragile in the aftermath of her husband's death. She also is taking care of her cousin Katy Wild, who is slowly dying of Pancreas cancer. Mrs. Wild goes into detail in almost every letter about Katy's condition, with the series of letters ending before Katy passes. This group of letters talks about life after the Civil War and the affects Mrs. Wild can still see from it, even from the state of Massachusetts.

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Subjects

Civil War (1861-1865)

Wild, Edward A.

Wild, Ellen
Battle of Seven Pines
Free African Americans
Roanoke Island, North Carolina
Butler, Benjamin
Norfolk, Virginia
Army of the James
Boston, Massachusetts
Brookline, Massachusetts

Series Description

This collection is divided into one Series in chronological order.

Box List

Box 1

1-0 Finding Aid and Biographical Information

Series 1: Ellen Wild Letters

1-1 1862

8 letters. Edward's war service as well as woudings. Her life on the home front during the American Civil War.

1-2 1863

1 letter. Mention of Edward's involvements in North Carolina as well as with freed African Americans.

1-3 1864

1 letter. Her opinion on the Civil War as well as her life following her husband into Virginia during his military service.

1-4 1865

1 letter. Edward's military service during the final year of the war in Norfolk, Virginia.

1-5 1891

3 letters. Her life following Edward's death and life in Reconstruction and Massachusetts.

1-6 1892

7 letters. Her ailments and the disease of her cousin. Ellen finds herself dealing with the troubles her husband left behind and finds ways to improve her health and spirits following her husband's death.

For more information about (Collection Name)

Casstevens, Frances H. *Edward A. Wild and the African Brigade in the Civil War*.
Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2003.

More letters from Ellen Wild can be found here:

<https://sparedshared9.wordpress.com/2015/05/08/1862-ellen-to-mary/>