

CIVIL WAR TREASURES:New Englanders in New Orleans

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Feature Essay

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Hyer, Francis C. *CIVIL WAR TREASURES:New Englanders in New Orleans.*

New Acquisitions in the Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries' Special Collections

News from the Bayou State to the Bay State

Collection: Frances C. and N. F. Hyer Letters and Newspaper Clipping, Mss. 3916, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La. Size: 3 items.

The term "Civil War manuscripts" usually conjures up images of the letters and diaries of soldiers and generals, who are either fighting feverishly on the front line or evading endless ennui in camp with various forms of entertainment. But materials in this category also include letters from civilians--both to soldiers and to other civilians--that reveal the varied and complex experiences of those standing on the sidelines of the conflict. This is the case with a small collection of letters written by Frances C. and N. F. Hyer.

Originally from Massachusetts, Mr. and Mrs. Hyer lived in occupied New Orleans in 1865. Mr. N. F. Hyer, a civilian, was employed with the Office of the Chief Engineer of the Union Army. One of the letters in the collection is written from Mrs. Frances C. Hyer to her married daughter, Mrs. Emily J. Elliot of Massachusetts. Business and politics are the primary subjects of the letter.

An excerpted transcription follows:

New Orleans

July 7, 1865

"...Political matters here are at present in one magnificent jumble. Governor Wells has so far strayed from the republican path that real union and liberty loving people desire to be ruled yet a little longer by the military, a petition to that effect has been or is to be sent to Washington.

Business here I believe is reviving somewhat and the city continues quite healthy. The fourth of July was celebrated here quite generally. First Governor Wells's party made great preparation - the committee of arrangement made several long columns of names in the newspaper among whom were quite a proportion of returned rebels, who are paroled prisoners, in fact, and others of more than doubtful secesh proclivities. The union republican party could not stand this, so they got up another celebration, which was successfully held in the rotunda of the unfinished custom house on Canal Street.

The oration was given by Gen. Banks - it was long, logical, patriotic, reasonable, eloquent, spiritual, and couched in chaste and elegant phrase. It is a production which will have its effect upon the entire civilized world. Banks as you know has heretofore made himself odious to the generally Union people, but those who heard him on that day acknowledge that they did not know what was in him - it was the right thing at the right time.

For my part, I feel so well pleased with him that I have determined to allow his picture to remain in my album. I had determined to discard it before...

...There seems no danger at present or in the future in going out to the woods. The scale is quite turned, it is popular to be loyal."

Larger issues of gender, race, politics, and the economy can not be explained with one letter written by one person in one place at one particular time. However, taken with other letters from similarly situated individuals, one letter can enrich the existing body of knowledge on the Civil War.

If you are interested in using the Frances C. and N. F. Hyer letters or other collections in the Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, visit LSU Libraries Special Collections online at www.lib.lsu.edu/special for visitor information.

(Image from "Presentation of a Flag to the Thirteenth Connecticut Regiment by Loyal Ladies of New Orleans." *Harper's Weekly*, August 2, 1862, p. 493.)

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