

CIVIL WAR TREASURES: Growing Weary Diary Outlines Texas Soldier's Battle With Loneliness

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Feature Essay

Spring 2006

Jewett, Leah Wood *CIVIL WAR TREASURES: Growing Weary Diary outlines Texas soldier's battle with loneliness.*

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

Horse Soldier

Collection: Augustus (Lucien) Grow diary and photograph, Mss. 4925, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La. Size: 2 items.

Augustus Lucien Grow was a native of Vermont. The twenty-six-year-old Grow was a resident of Texas when the Civil War began; he joined military service as a private in the 5th Texas Cavalry Regiment, Company A, in September 1861 in San Antonio.

The diary covers the years 1861-1863, and includes brief entries on battles at Valverde, Texas, and Fort Butler and Lafourche, Louisiana. Grow notes troop movements from New Mexico to Louisiana, and describes events associated with the Red River and Lafourche Campaigns. He mentions the Yellow Jacket battalion and the 1st and 2nd Texas Cavalry Regiments and describes picket duty. He also reports fatal encounters between American Indians and Confederate soldiers and frequently refers to illness and death by disease among the ranks.

Grow was captured and recorded his experiences as a prisoner of war. This entry from July 20, 1862, illustrates the despair and monotony of being a prisoner. He notes We eat, drink, and sleep in the same unvaried routine and that is the sum total of our life. Grow was later exchanged.

He also describes federal activity and the destruction of south Louisiana plantations. While near Vermillionville, Louisiana, in August 1863, Grow noted,

The enemy displayed their usual barbarity by burning the buildings on their route. He witnessed another incident at Cheneyville, Louisiana, when Confederate troops held fire on federal troops so as not to endanger the inhabitants of a house; in spite of the danger, a female inhabitant stepped out of the house, waved her handkerchief, and cried out, It does not make any difference, fire on them! Fire on them! His diary provides a sense of circumstances in rural Louisiana as Confederates, Federals, and civilians encountered each other.

While the diary of Augustus Lucien Grow can help flesh out the facts of battles from the Southwest to the Gulf, it is most notable for its illumination of the humanity of its author. A common theme of his entries was his loneliness and hopelessness. On Valentine's Day 1862, he writes: [The] bright hopes of my youth, the prospects of my early manhood are gone. He apparently found some comfort in poetry, as several poems are recorded in the diary.

As with each manuscript collection, census data for post-war years is mined for relevant information. It is always a relief to find names mentioned in the collections, indicating that individuals survived the war. A quick check of the 1870 census shows that Grow was alive and well, married to a native Louisianan named Mary and working as a dry goods merchant in Grant Parish, Louisiana. One hopes that his loneliness was finally, and wholly, abated.

If you are interested in using the Augustus Grow diary and photograph 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.

Leah Jewett is the Exhibitions Coordinator and Civil War Manuscript Archivist at Hill Memorial Library, LSU Libraries' Special Collections.