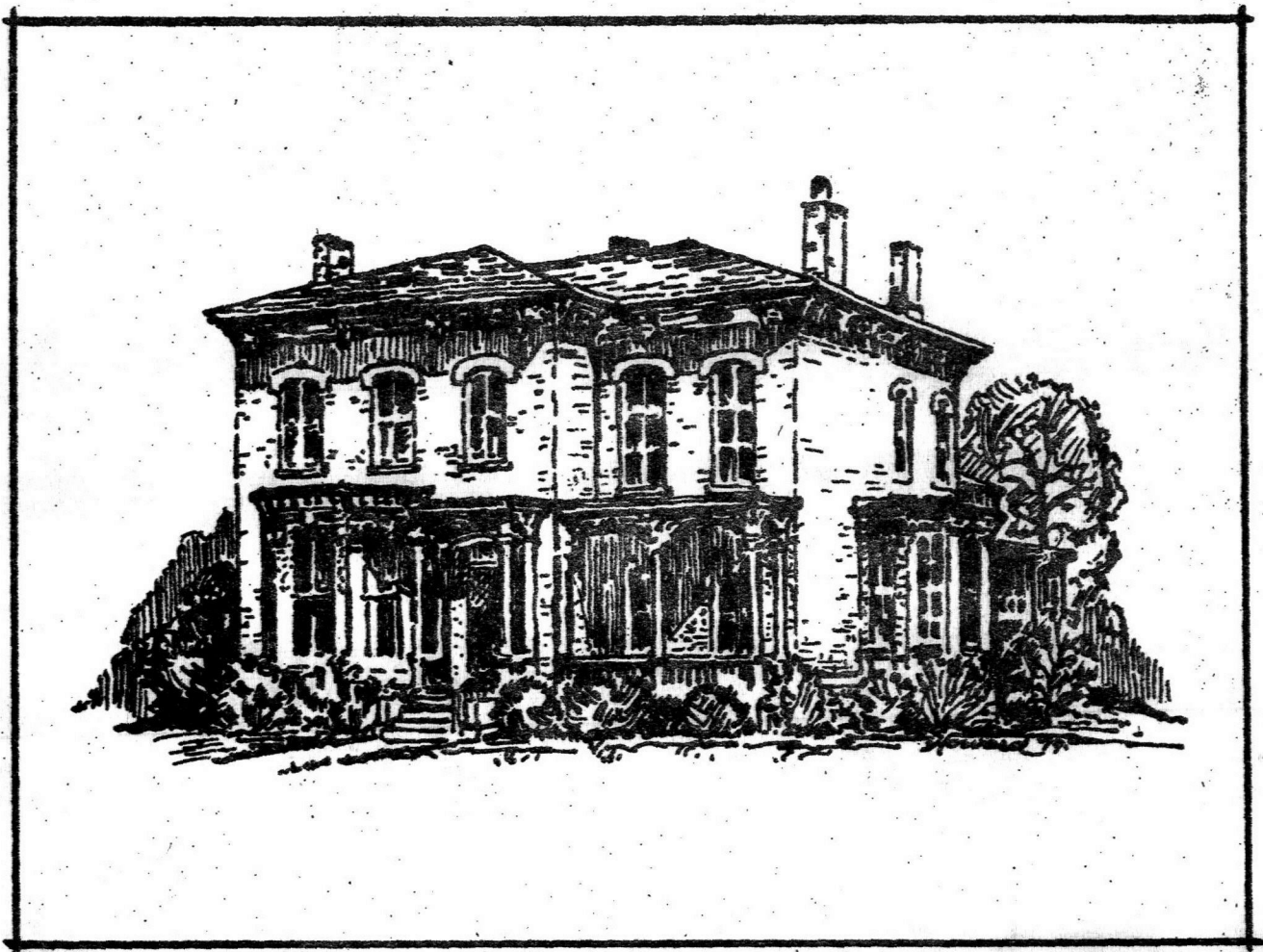


Feb. 1984

YPSILANTI GLEANINGS

PAST SCENES and OLD TIMES

YPSILANTI HISTORICAL SOCIETY PUBLICATION



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GLEANINGS



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VETT NOBLE OF YPSILANTI: A Clerk for General Sherman

Edited by Donald W. Disbrow

SYLVESTER ("VETT") NOBLE of Ypsilanti, Michigan, was a lowly and sometimes impudent clerk in the Union army. The home town people disappointed him in being less concerned with him than he thought they should be. Yet, in the youthful outpourings he sent to his family he managed to record shrewd observations of the kaleidoscopic war-time scene; and he proved to be not unimportant after all, for he just happened to be one of William T. Sherman's few headquarters clerks during his campaign in the Carolinas in 1865.

Because Private Noble of Ypsilanti had a happy flair for capturing quite well the nuances in both army and home relationships in a time of great national tragedy, his letters are much more than the boastful yawps of a lonesome nobody in uniform. For in them he discerned the major issues of the Civil War, and he could do so all the better as he himself grew from an immature army goldbrick to a proudly seasoned though still lowly functionary on the spot where important history was being made.¹

As was certainly typical of most volunteer soldiers, Vett Noble belonged to a family that was almost totally unfamiliar with military life. Before Sylvester, the only ancestor with any military service at all was Captain Thaddeus Noble, who was an armorer in a Connecticut regiment during the French and Indian War. So, without doubt, the Noble clan was eager enough to get all the details from their son, the first member of the family in more than a century to shoulder arms and march off to the defense of his country.² His father, Alonzo Miletus Noble, born in 1817 in Otisco, New York, was too old for Civil War service, and consequently devoted himself to the daguerreotype business in Ypsilanti. He also ran a livery stable and seems to

¹ Dates of Noble's letters not given in the text are footnoted. Unless the name of another respondent is furnished, all citations refer to letters written either to Noble's mother, Elizabeth Stone Noble, or to his sister, Irene Elizabeth ("Dott") Noble, or to both (he wrote most of the letters to his mother). The Sylvester C. Noble Papers belong to the Ypsilanti City Historical Museum.

² Lucius M. Boltwood, *History and Genealogy of the Family of Thomas Noble of Westfield, Massachusetts* (Hartford, Conn., 1878), p. 387.

(The Noble Home & Livery was at 212 S. Huron)

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have made enough money to purchase a new house and barn, a result of improved business conditions and the profits he received from the horses and mules he sold to the army. He made money, too, from his daguerreotypes, in sharp demand from families who wanted likenesses for absent husbands, sons, and brothers during the war.

Vett Noble's volunteer enlistment papers describe him as twenty years old; a farmer by occupation; five feet, ten inches in height; with black eyes and black hair. The medical officer who examined him signed a statement that "[he] in my opinion is free from all bodily defects and mental infirmity." Noble was mustered into the 14th Michigan Infantry at Ypsilanti on February 13, 1862, and apart from detached service, he remained with the regiment until it was mustered out of service on July 18, 1865, at Louisville, Kentucky.³

Young Noble showed a healthy interest in telling his family all about the army. In the early months of his service he was quite fascinated with the subject of army discipline, or rather the lack of it and he was proud of those instances when he was able to outwit the military system. Only a few days after Ulysses S. Grant's standoff with the Rebel forces at Shiloh, the 14th Michigan reached the battle site. Vett sat down in the field a mile and a half from enemy troops to tell his family about Brigadier General John Pope's unaccountably harsh reaction to soldierly high jinks.

The boys find that to do any thing against orders is harder dealt with here, than in the old barracks. Gen Pope ordered that no soldiers must shoot off his gun in camp. This morning there was 5 tied up to a tree so tight that they could not move head, hand nor foot, & have got to stay there forty eight hours with nothing but one cake of hard bread to eat & one pint of water to drink a day, just for snapping caps on their guns.⁴

After dysentery forced him to miss the minor engagements in which the 14th participated at Farmington, Mississippi, as well as Henry Halleck's bloodless occupation of Corinth, Vett wrote home from Camp Farmington about further army escapades. In one instance he and a friend were innocent victims of a roundup of gamblers. They were brought in with more than a gross of gamblers under the orders of General James D. Morgan. Vett could have gotten ten days fatigue duty, but his captain may have vouched for his honesty, for the matter was mentioned by him no more.⁵

Private Noble continued to exhibit his angle psychology when the regiment left Big Springs for Tuscumbia, Alabama. In a somewhat

³ Sylvester C. Noble's enlistment papers in 14th Mich. Inf. Regt. file, in Records of the Michigan Military Establishment, at the Michigan Historical Commission Archives, Lansing. Noble was born March 27, 1842, in Ann Arbor.

⁴ Apr. 2, 1862.

⁵ May 9, 1862.

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smug letter to his mother, he described his carefree association with the army as it marched.

Last Monday morning at $\frac{1}{2}$ past 5, our Brigade started from our old Camp at Big Springs & our Regt with knapsacks on our backs. Some were foolish enough to trudge on with them. I only carried mine about 3 miles & fell out of ranks & stayed with my things most all day, while others (at least some) would throw theirs away just to keep up. I waited until it was cool & then carried it 2 or 3 miles further, stayed all night, & in the morning, I coaxed the wagon master to put my things onto the wagon.

Then you see, I could travel, but I did not care to catch up, because it is a great deal easier traveling out of ranks than in, as you can stop whenever you please. Well, Jimmy Sargent & I completed our march of 60 miles on Saturday morning. But didn't we see sights, have fun & do just as we were a mind, have everything to eat we wanted etc., saw thousands on thousands of acres of corn & more Peaches & Blackberries than all of father's horses could draw at a 1,000 draughts, melons that 4 couldn't eat to save their lives, milk all the cows we came to, eat all the peaches & apples we wanted, roasted & boiled corn, made succatash etc. We couldn't get any bread, so when we got hungry for a change we would go into a house, about dark & call for supper. They would set some of the niggers about getting it. We would eat supper, lodge & get breakfast. Ask them what the bill was, tell them to charge it to Uncle Samuel, say good morning & leave.

Some splendid country here in the state, some of the plantations through here are just old nice, very nice houses, large, square, white ones with green blinds, & the lawn, beats anything I ever saw, even in Detroit city, & such nice little houses for the slaves, two rows making a pretty little street just swarming with little sons of Africa. We are on one side of a right-smart little town, about as large as two Salines, & as pretty as six of them.*

In September, 1862, Vett was on the march from Tuscumbia. On the twenty-eighth he wrote his mother from Nashville and routed the letter through Confederate lines north of the city via a discharged soldier returning to his home under a flag of truce. On October 9, he forwarded still another letter north in the same manner. As enemy troops in the vicinity of Nashville had been seriously harassing Union supply lines, Vett had reason to be exultant over a recent Yankee victory. He described a sharp night encounter with the enemy at Lavergne in which he took part: "Why: we've had a fight, *we* have; don't you believe." Vett gave an account of the five Union regiments that routed the Rebels and captured troops and supplies as well as hay and corn. It was his first fight and that old carefree, nonmilitary mood captured him after participating in such a splendid engagement. It seemed to call for a celebration, and his sister was privileged to be the first to hear of it.

* July 28, 1862.

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The way back was a direct road & only 15 miles—& after coming about 4 of it two of us fell out & went to a secesh house & demanded a dinner (a good one we got too). We then told him to have a team hitched up & take us to town. It came like pulling teeth but he saw that it was no use & told his niggers to bring us a six mule wagon. Hadn't come more than $\frac{1}{2}$ mile before we had 31 onto it.

Private Noble escaped a good deal of foot slogging, guard and picket activity, and work details when his captain made him a clerk. He made out his first payroll soon after the regiment left Ypsilanti for the front. From Farmington he wrote on May 24 that his social position in the army was rather exalted for a lowly private as he took his meals with Captain Edward Nixon, the commander of Company F; Mrs. Nixon; the chaplain; and Lieutenant Calvin C. Porter (both Nixon and Porter were from Grand Rapids). A company clerk's life was certainly for him even though he received only \$13 a month, the wages of a private (at that time, there was no special provision in the army's table of organization for a clerk). All could not have been roses, however. In December, 1862, when Noble was detailed as a clerk at Headquarters, 7th Division Army Corps, in Nashville, he was quite happy with the change. Vett had discovered what lowly army clerks have always known—that their proximity to commissioned officers makes them especially vulnerable whenever the question is one of values as determined by the army's social scale. As enlisted men away from line duty, they always miss the camaraderie of their fellows and often find the demeaning contacts with some of their officers a rather hard substitute. In Vett's case, he was particularly pleased to get away from his commanding officer, whom he excoriated in a letter home.

He is disliked by every one in his regiment, laughed at every where he goes & one other thing that is heard whenever he is seen anywhere—that is gobbling. He got into a little scrape with a boy about a couple of turkeys last summer while on the march from Tuscumbia & ever since then everybody in the whole Brigade gobbles whenever he is around, which makes him feel like daggers and look daggers too.⁷

Vett's scorn for the captain carried over to the captain's wife.

Mrs. Nixon. Yes, she is another pretty subject for contemplation. It is perfectly scandilous to think of how she has been with the army all the way from Ypsilanti, been right in camp all the time, doing no good (which she might if she had only kept herself in the right place, the Hospital), not even cooking for herself & the Captain. Kept a horse at the expense of the Government, rode a horse all the way from Pittsburg Landing to here, through the most circuitous route, besides all the riding she done while in camp. And only a few days after arriving in Nashville have a baby. There's the flat of it. It cost the Captain \$31 for beer the next day.⁸

Apropos of army wives, Vett wrote to his mother about the matter

⁷ Dec. 15, 1862.

⁸ Jan. 9, 1863.

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some months later, September 11, 1863, when he was on special duty at Franklin, Tennessee.

I have had a very unpleasant job this morning. A Lieutenant had his wife here for some time, and after a reasonably lengthy visit Col. Mizner told Lt. he had better send her home and she didn't go, and yesterday Col. G.W.G. got a letter from Col. M saying that Mrs. Devereaux must leave, so my order was written to that effect and the Lieut came up here and told Col. G.W.G. he wouldn't obey it, and by the means was placed in arrest & confined to quarters inside the Fort on the other side of the river while his wife is on this side. Col. Mizner telegraphed back this morning for Col. G.W.G. to direct "her" to be ready to go on the noon train, and if she desired, to give her an escort of a "Corporal and 3 men."

Well I wrote the order and had to carry it to her "rough but honest." No woman have any business in the army. Col. M is the only one that has ever had any effect on Mrs. Nixon. She stuck and hung to the army like sixty, had a baby etc. but Col. Mizner told her to go or he would send her "a she went." Col. Mizner is the man after all, though some think him dreadfully strict, but the 14th Regt Mich Inf Vols is a better Regt by 200 per cent than the day he took command.

Vett felt none too secure on detached duty. His old nemesis, Captain Nixon, kept thumbing regulations in order to find authority to promote him from private to corporal and return him to Company F for duty as clerk. Vett wrote home that the captain even spoke of making him a sergeant if he would come back to the company. If Vett is to be believed, he had something on the captain and could have gotten him dishonorably dismissed from the service, but he never intimated what it was that gave him so much freedom to talk back to his company commander. Nixon (if we are to believe the private) always responded to Vett's strong talk by imploring him to return to the company. Noble's detached service with Brigadier General James D. Morgan at division headquarters kept him out of the reach of the captain, who may well have been trying to lure him into a position where Nixon as company commander might then have had the impudent soldier court martialed. In any case, whenever Vett did have to return to Company F for duty, it was perhaps his good fortune that Nixon was never at the time his commanding officer.

Vett owed his job to Sergeant Major Wallace Phillips of the 14th Michigan, who in April, 1863, recommended Noble for the top enlisted position of sergeant major itself. Soon Vett was to become acting sergeant major while Phillips, serving as the acting adjutant, waited for his own official commission. In his capacity as acting sergeant major, Vett had to assign details, prefer charges against soldiers derelict in their duty, and perform in the best spit-and-polish manner. In May he was officially promoted and, accordingly, sewed on his sergeant major's chevrons. He wryly commented regarding this metamorphosis

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of a recruit goldbrick into the number-one enlisted man of the regiment: "It don't embarrass me as much to give a command or make the boys toe the stretch, as at first."

As sergeant major, Vett Noble could appreciate the importance of army discipline. And now at long last he was even proud of the staff officers of the 14th under whom he served, saying of them:

The men will begin before long to appreciate discipline and drill, something the 14th were total strangers to until within the last two months since the new Col [Henry R. Mizner] and Lt. Col. [George W. Grummond] have come to take things into their hands. They are thorough going men.⁹

Back in Ypsilanti the very pleased Noble family begged of their young hero that he tell them all about his duties, for such details would be grist for the mill that processed the family's propaganda for home town consumption. Accordingly, Vett obliged.

I get up between 7 & 8 o'clock regular every morning. (early isn't it) i.e. I get up before I eat my breakfast every day—make out Regtl. Morning Report—make out the details for the day—Pickets, couriers—Forage Train guard—Fatigue parties—Videttes etc etc do little odd jobs, write orders or something of the kind—At 10¹/₂ A.M. mount guard, which takes an hour—put up the mail—send off the couriers—eat my dinner—sit & have a good smoke. Then as a general thing have a little spare time which I use up as follows—wash up, put on my "boiled shirt," black my boots, order my steed & cut a dash around town [Columbia, Tennessee]. Am sure to ride past all the houses where lives the pretty girls. How do you like that for a program so far? . . .

It isn't every afternoon I have to myself but I get out of the Office every opportunity. Should die sure if cooped up all the time—Evenings I get out considerably too—call on the ladies, hear music, read ec ec. Have been to Church most every Sunday since stopping in Columbia's Presbyterian.¹⁰

Vett's letter also sheds light on what he called "the slew of Reports and Returns" that were his responsibility.

Now, without question Vett was a busy man. The carefree days were gone. Each day he had to tell all the companies what the orders were. There were compensations, however, such as the knowledge that the Noble family in Michigan (and his mother's family, the Stones of Penn Yan, New York) were really proud of him and that the Ypsilanti girls who had ignored him before the war might now consider him quite eligible. With evident satisfaction, Vett described his uniform.

⁹ May 15, 1863.

¹⁰ Nov. 8, 1863. In addition to Mizner, there was still another officer of the 14th Michigan regarded highly by his superiors. Maj. Gen. Lovell H. Rousseau, commander of the District of Nashville, in reporting Jan. 30, 1864, to Brig. Gen. William D. Whipple, assistant adjutant general, Dept. of the Cumberland, upon the fine administrative work of Col. Mizner, added: "His troops, generally led by Maj. Thomas C. Fitzgibbons, a very efficient and gallant officer, have captured, I believe, more armed rebels than he has men in his regiment." *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Ser. II, XXXII, 268.

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First a nice white shirt (from Ma), paper collar, neat little necktie, a very nice fine blue black vest (present from Lt. Magill) & in the pocket of it a \$30 watch & to it a gold chain, a good Government Jacket (regular round about) with Sergeant Major chevrons (stripes) on the sleeves, something in this shape of light black cloth [see page 39] on each arm, hair just as I always wore it at home (shingled), nice military (officer's) cap, sky-blue pants with a stripe of dark blue 1 & 1/2 inches wide down either leg & the boots that father sent me. I tell you I look gay.¹¹

This letter has two interesting references. One is to the boots his father gave him. Alonzo Noble, the livery stable proprietor and photographer in Ypsilanti, had sent these boots some weeks before, and though Private Noble could boast they were the envy of the troops, red boots were not regulation. But as sergeant major he wore them, apparently as a privilege of rank accorded him by the regimental commander. The other reference was to Lieutenant Arthur E. Magill, who was the regimental adjutant. Magill had begun his military career as a corporal in the Confederate army, where he rose to become an aide to a general. For some reason he had deserted the Confederates to join the 14th Michigan. A special friend of Vett's, Magill was teaching him the fine points of army clerking so that the new sergeant major might someday qualify for a commission as adjutant, whenever Magill should win his captain's bars. Once when Magill went on a trip north, Vett in the best apple-polishing manner implored his sister to see that the lieutenant was given a hero's welcome if and when he stopped off at Ypsilanti to visit the Noble family. "Give him a nice dinner, do things up in style, give him a few turns on that piano, etc.," were his instructions.¹²

Leadership made demands on Vett which in the end showed that he had never quite made his peace with the army's hierarchical system. When he discovered that Colonel Henry Mizner on occasion could display a nasty temper toward him he regretted that he had ever sought promotion. However, he managed to weather Mizner's first violent outburst, but only after he had taken a knife and had begun to cut off his chevrons. As the colonel had no ready replacement for him, Mizner calmed down. The episode had resulted from brigade headquarters' reprimand of Mizner for tardy morning reports. The chastened Mizner had with some heat upbraided Noble, who already on his own had arrested the three derelict first sergeants. The rumpus blew over, and a month later Vett could report that once again he was a solid favorite with Colonel Mizner. He even began to have visions of a commission

¹¹ June 12, 1863.

¹² June 7, 12, 1863. John Robertson, *Michigan in the War* (Lansing, 1882), p. 877, makes this notation: "MAGILL, ARTHUR E., Grand Rapids. First Lt., 14th If'y, Nov. 18, 1861. Capt., June 4, 1863. Resigned July 14, 1864, and honorably discharged."

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should the war last. But the good feelings on the part of the colonel proved evanescent; in less than four months a special order, dated November 14, 1863, broke Sergeant Major Sylvester C. Noble to the rank of private. He had been the top enlisted man for only eight months.

Vett coolly took his revenge a few weeks later, however, when as a clerk private detailed to the provost marshal's office in Columbia he was invited to a civilian party. Colonel Mizner was also at that party and the colonel received a lesson in what the code of a civilian army really meant.

Last Wednesday night there was a large champagne supper given by the citizens. We three clerks were invited as belonging to the Provost Marshal's office. The Col and several more shoulder straps were there and the clerks were all the enlisted men that were there. We ate our oysters etc. when Col. M- gave the Capt (Pro Marshal) to understand that he did not like to associate with his Privates and the Capt told us so and asked us to go. The other two went and I stayed just to bother him, and finally freed my mind on the subject of my being of as much consequence as any live man at a social gathering of the kind. The Capt persuaded but it was no go. They couldn't order me, for I was invited there by the same parties that they were and all rank of course had to be waived. I stayed until the last dog was hung and had to laugh to see how mad the Col got but damn't say a word to me & next day when I saluted him and he was obliged to salute in turn.¹³

An afterglow of spite toward Mizner prompted Vett to write home about another unpleasant encounter. This time it was a friend of his who had a run-in with the colonel. Jim, the friend, was also a clerk. The colonel refused him a horse to go seven miles to his company to get the men to sign furlough papers. At this, Jim simply declined to walk the distance. With evident relish, Vett told the story to his family.

Col. got his back up immediately and told Jim with plenty of oaths that if he didn't shut up he would kick him 16 feet out into the road. Jim said no more but came away, had got about $\frac{1}{2}$ way across the street when off went his hat, turned around to pitch into somebody, but saw that it was the Col. They had but few words as some of the Colonel's female friends were passing and he bareheaded, but Jim told him he was no gentleman, and that's all whether enough or not. I would have struck him I believe had I been in Jim's place, for when an Officer begins to curse a man, both are of equal rank.¹⁴

Let us call that Vett's Law—"When an Officer begins to curse a man, both are of equal rank." It does not seem to have come to light before or since, and only Mrs. Noble and her daughter Dott were privileged to hear of it firsthand when their Vett enunciated it so clearly. Somehow, it never caught on in the army!

Though Vett could valiantly uphold the rights of enlisted men, he nonetheless appreciated the necessity for strict discipline when the

¹³ Dec. 5, 1863.

¹⁴ Jan. 23, 1864.

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occasion called for it. As an instance of this, he witnessed a dramatic threat to military authority that involved Colonel Mizner himself. The event occurred when the regiment marched from Franklin to Columbia, Tennessee, in the fall of 1863.

We arrived at Spring Hill a hamlet like place about mid-way from Franklin to this place when one of the men was censured by the Col for some misdeemeanor and he gave the Col saucy insulting language, then was ordered in arrest. The penalty of his offense was to walk the remaining 11 miles. He laid his hand on the hammer of his gun and swore to the Col that if he was punished he would have satisfaction—Finally the man's insubordinate language resulted in his getting shot, and he died in a few moments. This of course made everyone's spirits as heavy and gloomy as the weather all the way through. It is the first instance of the kind in the annals of our Regt and nobody who saw it and thinks the matter over can blame the Col. one mite.¹⁵

But Vett's mother had read newspaper reports that did not square with her son's account of the episode, and, smarting at the disgrace of her son's reduction in rank by the same colonel, was willing to make something of the matter. In reaction to the press censure of the colonel, Vett sharply let his mother know just where his own loyalty lay.

Michael Flynn was shot for insubordination at Spring Hill, a small village 11 miles from Columbia. A coffin brought and his remains brought through, buried next day with all honor. Col Minzer was ordered to Nashville, his case investigated and he cleared. He would do the same thing over again tomorrow under like circumstances and so would I were I the commander of the forces and placed the same as he was. Are you satisfied with my explanation. I saw the whole thing and know. The Niles Republican wasn't there.¹⁶

Vett Noble's appreciation of discipline was matched by a corresponding change in his attitude toward the civilian population of the South. His initial delight in foraging at the expense of the rebel home folks was balanced later by his genuine respect for the southern people he came to know, people he admired for their zest for social life. His love affairs with various young ladies seem to have been chivalrous and filled with a full measure of innocent fun and merriment. Whatever the true story of these romances (soldiers do not tell everything in letters home), the girls and their mothers welcomed his visits in the best tradition of southern hospitality.

¹⁵ Oct. 16, 1863.

¹⁶ Dec. 3, 1863. Also see *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune*, Nov. 7, 1863. There seems to be no mention of the matter in Mizner's dispatches recorded in *Official Records*. Helen H. Ellis, "Robertson's Michigan in the War: A Review Article," *Michigan History* (June 1966), p. 184 takes note of the episode: "Colonel Henry R. Mizner of the Fourteenth Infantry shot and killed a soldier for refusing or misunderstanding a minor order. The soldier, Michael Flynn, is listed in the published *Record of Service* of his regiment as dying on October 15, 1863, but with no mention of the shooting."

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But this happy fraternization was slow in coming as a perusal of some of his letters will show. Within the first fortnight after his regiment left Ypsilanti in 1862, Vett wrote his family (April 28) from Farmington, Tennessee ("In the woods 1½ miles from the rebels"). He told of headquarters being set up in an evacuated farm house.

Left all their live stock behind, turkeys, chickens, geese, cattle & horses except the ones they rode away Soldiers killed everything they could lay their hands to. I help't kill a two year old heifer, fat & pretty, skinned it & cut it up and gave Gen Payne one quarter, took a 15 gallon kettle & had some soup, & it was good I tell you after eating bacon & hard tack 2 or 3 weeks. Another man of our Co killed two pretty fat hogs & brought them into camp.

Somewhat later (June 7), still at Farmington, he confided in his diary that the army authorities were trying to stop the men from looting. They were allowing the soldiers to take up fences for wood, but "whatever else we got we had to press or cramp & keep it kind of shy (our officers didn't care as long as we gave them some & kept it out of sight)."

Later that summer (August 15), while in Tuscumbia, he wrote his sister that he had been on picket duty which afforded him the chance to live off the land. "They are confiscating all the cotton, mules & niggers they can get ahold of if their owners act anyway suspicious Dott, we have lots of fun here, cramping from the Secesh, milk their cows, eat their peaches, etc. etc."

A few days later he described a night roundup they made of a few Confederates at the edge of Florence, Alabama. He told of one southerner surprised in his cellar while drawing wine. When they returned to town, the party went to the hotel.

[Here we] got the "Widder" [Richmonds] up and made her get us all some supper & I tell you she done her best, for she had a son leave for the C.S.A. only the day before & was afraid she would be left destitute by confiscation if she didn't toe the scratch. Everything came onto the table hot & watermellons & oranges to top off on, but what good tea she had.¹⁷

On this raid, Vett temporarily acquired a colored servant:

I myself individually confiscated (or rather he came of his accord) a darkie to fetch water, cut the wood etc. for our squad . . . They come in from the country every day, lots of them, run away from their overseers & are glad to work for board & clothes with freedom.

Concerning the same subject, he wrote his Aunt Adelia Noble of Ann Arbor, Michigan, from a new camp near Florence.

About colored men. We take them & let them help us. The Capt is allowed one & each Lieut one & four for the Company cooks making 7

¹⁷ Aug. 20, 1862.

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to each Co. besides the Staff Officers, & what the Quartermaster wants for teamsters etc. etc. There are lots of them come in every day—fed, clothed, & Freedom given them for what little they help about bringing water & wood & washing for us.¹⁸

From beleagured Nashville in the fall of 1862, young Noble boasted to his mother of hoodwinking one of the rebels whom he claimed had overcharged the Union soldiers for buttermilk.

About 3 o'clock in the morning the orderly & I goes over & milks the Secesh's cows (4) & gets two pails full of sweet milk which pays us for giving 10 cents for butter milk. Have done so now 4 times. Good joke on him, the old rebel. He thinks we are just the nicest fellows he has come across. Don't know that it is us that milks his cows, but the General [Brigadier General James S. Negley, their new commander] told us all that when the citizens charged more than a reasonable price for anything to take what we wanted & so we do.¹⁹

Throughout 1862 the 14th Michigan moved around Tennessee and northern Alabama with such frequency that Vett had little occasion to become well acquainted with the southern girls—at least he did not write home about any social life. Early in January, 1863, he mentioned Nashville dancing parties and referred to Caroline Stanton, a beauty from New York. Soon afterward he met another pretty girl at a party and saw her picking flowers the next day (March 24). Vett was always proud of his ease in getting to know the girls, explaining, "I stopped to have a little talk with her as a natural consequence. She gave me a very pretty bouquet." Although she invited him to a party she was giving, he had to work at his clerical duties that evening until past midnight, and so missed the chance to socialize. It irked him as he had planned to go in his white shirt "with its 5c paper collar."

In May, the 14th Michigan was gone from Nashville and Vett wrote his mother about camp activities at Brentwood, Tennessee.

I have been enjoying myself hugely for about a month ever since we left Nashville. The camp is more quiet. These Irishmen can't get whiskey as freely as there. I have just enough work to do to keep me feeling well, and every day there is something exciting turns up to keep everybody in good humor. At night as soon as it is dark there is two or three violins a guitar and a flute going, and with singing one manages to pass away time very pleasantly. It is the Drummer boys that play. They have so light work during the day that they would rather play than not. The Colonel [M.W. Quackenbush of Owosso] is very fond of music, so he has them at his tent nearly every night & they are in there now, playing and singing "Kitty Wells" . . . I can play no musical instrument, nor dare put on boxing gloves with anyone for fear of my poor nose . . . [but] when they come to the jumping business I beat them all.²⁰

Lonely camp life in the woods gave way to garrison duty in Frank-

¹⁸ Sept. 1, 1862.

¹⁹ Sept. 28, 1862.

²⁰ May 8, 1863.

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lin, Tennessee. Vett wrote home on July 7, 1863, that the 14th with a new colonel in command (Henry R. Mizner of Detroit) was the only infantry on hand. The town (Vett estimated it as half the size of Ypsilanti) was obviously hostile and the Union troops investing it were on the alert "for fear of being gobbled up." The colonel had already detected and sent to Nashville under guard two rebel spies. But there was one solace in General Rosecrans' telegram to Mizner, reporting the fall of Vicksburg. Mizner had not yet heard that Robert E. Lee had been turned back at Gettysburg.

Six weeks later (August 23) Vett happily wrote about a success for the 14th Michigan, the capture of the rebel marauder Dick McCann. By this time Vett was becoming quite partial to the local girls and their chagrin over the capture of a local Confederate hero did not escape his attention.

Our Company of Mounted Infantry captured the other day with the help of a company of the 1st Mo Cavalry the famous I. Dick McCann as you will see by our "Sentinel" of yesterday if you get it . . . He was as notorious and more so according to their rank than the Marauding John Morgan that was caught in Ohio. Both are from this section of the country having bothered our Dept for about 9 or 10 months. Great favorites in and around Franklin especially with the fair Secesh-siding community, who used to praise them up to the top notch whenever anyone spoke of them and I just bother them the worst kind about their *both* being captured. I told one of them the evening the Scouts went out, that they were gone after McCann and would get him too, but I couldn't make her believe it. She said "Dick" was too sharp, and the next evening I saw her over at the Provost Marshal's office and had another confab about it and had hardly through with conversation when the guards came marching down the St with the prisoner "Dick" with the rest. She acted as though she were sorry a little but would say nothing—but "I don't care." "It's mean."²¹

During the summer of 1863 Vett seems to have fallen in love with a beautiful Franklin belle. He wrote his mother on July 23 that he had gotten some of the boys from the band to accompany him with string instruments to serenade at her house this girl who caught his fancy.

It was quite dark and about $\frac{1}{2}$ past 11 o'clock, but the Miss knew who it was by my having a linen coat on, [he was then in his glory as the sergeant major] and a magnificent bouquet was handed out the windows—had a magnolia blossom right in the centre done up with a satin ribbon, and this morning I took the ribbon off the blossom and found a card inside the flower, with the following, "Will Mr Noble except [*sic*] these flowers with the compliments of Miss Sallie Reams. And many kind thanks for the nice Serenade. Call." & I call this evening.

On August 1 he wrote his mother that he saw "mi honey . . . Miss

²¹ The Nashville *Union*, as cited by Robertson, *Michigan in the War*, p. 344, tells the story of McCann's capture.

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Sallie . . . She's 'just old pie' well and hearty and as social as a kitten." A fortnight later he was telling his sister how Miss Sallie sent a Negro boy with a basket of flowers and fruit. It included a note that read: "Let these flowers remind Mr Noble of our lovely country and his little Southern friend, Sally Reams." To which, Vett replied by card, "My heart is too full for utterance." To his sister Vett confided his rather unmilitary thoughts.

Oh! I'm just already to fall head over heels in love with her. She is as handsome as a picture, 14 years old, plays on piano and sings splendidly. Ain't I just having the gayest time here in Franklin? Hope we will stay until the war is over. I thought we were in a pretty place at Brentwood and we were, but no ladies around where a person could go and spend an evening occasionally as here, and have none to molest. You see there is none here but our Regt and as Southern people all like favors they just more than do their prettiest for us and some have done the agreeable more than they expected, for some very dear attachments have been made with a few of the Regt. One man of Co "H" married as you will see in the "Sentinel" I sent. Billy [Buskirk of Ypsilanti] too is going in heavy for a little fun while he has a chance, has found a girl out on the picket line that looks and acts a good deal like you and he thinks she is another of you all over.

Oh! I forgot to mention the music. I took over to my "honey" last night 2 violinists, 1 guitar player and a viol player. The boys sat in the large hall and played while we sat in the parlor and—I suppose you have some idea of what is done on like occasions. Can hardly call it having a conversation, but mixed up all sorts of stuff, then she would play and sing etc. etc. to numerous to mention.²⁷

Vett felt that his mother would appreciate the social qualities of Sallie and her folks, for Mrs. Noble herself had visited Vicksburg before the war. Her son reminded her (August 10) that "Southern people are more warmhearted, more social than Northern. I think it must be on account of the climate. . . ." But the gay interlude at Franklin had to end, and Vett sorrowfully wrote about the regiment's move to Columbia, a larger town twenty-four miles to the South.

It was like leaving home, coming away from Franklin, and I done better when I left there than I did in Ypsilanti for I went around and bid all my acquaintances good bye and so much was thought of our Regiment that many a tear was shed upon our leaving . . . I would be willing to go back there to Franklin tonight afoot if I could only stay until the war was over . . . I'm going back to Franklin to live some day—see if I don't. ²⁸

²⁷ Aug. 14, 1863. Col. Mizner later claimed an important first: "At Franklin in the Court House, upon the Square, I caused the first Union meeting held in the South, addressed by Military Governor Andrew Johnson . . . [and] Parson Brownlow." Mizner, "The Fourteenth Michigan Infantry, the Battle of Murfreesboro, Tennessee; the Battle of Jonesboro, Georgia; and Incidents of Army Life," 31-page pamphlet, 1898, in papers of Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, Michigan Commandery Records, 1865-1951, Michigan Historical Collections, University of Michigan.

²⁸ Sept. 8, 1863.

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With the rest of the brigade in Alabama under Brigadier General James D. Morgan, Colonel Mizner and the 14th Michigan were left to hold both Franklin and Columbia. Eight companies were stationed in Columbia with two others in Franklin. Up ahead General Rosecrans was fighting to hold ground won from the Confederates. Vett reported from Franklin on September 26:

The great—and to be decisive—battle now on the program at Chattanooga occupies everybody's attention. Besides we are continually pestered with guerillas in this country—keep picking them up every day or two

The Regiment is now all mounted except about 100. Its just fun to see the boys press horses—not one horse has been taken as drawn from the Government. These scouting parties bring in all the horses they come across in the country. The next day the old women & men will come in to get them back, take the oath and then only get receipts for their animals. That shows the stability of Tennesseans principles. Will take the oath of allegiance to the United States for a poor old blind horse or mule if they think there is any chance of getting it back but except in cases of extreme necessity none are given back.

News just rec'd from the front by telegraph are favorable and General Rosecrans has nearly *all* the Southern Confederacy to whip and I am as confident of his success as that I am now writing.

Having advised his family about the certain success of Rosecrans' campaign (and turning out to be a poor prophet for his troubles), Vett directed his attention to a matter that was bothering him considerably. He proceeded to roundly scold his mother for her unfavorable comments about his southern girl friends.

About the ladies. My waiting upon one so much younger than myself I think perfectly excusable as I suppose you know in a climate so widely different from Michigan as this people mature some two or three years younger than there—besides, she is agreeable society—an excellent performer on the piano, not afraid to build a fire or set the table although she has plenty of servants—she is in fact a *lady* and of refinement. My object in calling upon her is to break the monotony of an every day soldier's life—*she knows* what the object is and makes it as agreeable as she can—in regard to the one so much older than myself I will say that there was not a years difference and will ask the same question I used to—Who would you rather have me go with than her? Who in the neighborhood was there to go with to places I went. You know—that no thought of *marriage* ever entered our *minds*, neither of us. The same in regard to the one so much younger than myself. Are you satisfied?

He had been in Franklin over two weeks, having been sent back by Colonel Mizner to act as adjutant for Lieutenant Colonel Grummond, who was commanding the two companies in the rear. Here, in a fine brick home, he and Grummond's orderly occupied one part of the house while that officer had the other large room. But proximity to Sallie soon ended, and on October 16, Vett was writing home again

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from Columbia. Mizner's eight companies at Columbia had been ordered to evacuate for fear of being "gobbled up" by a superior force. After burning commissary stores, Mizner took his troops through mud and rain back to join his smaller force at Franklin, where the companies from Columbia had no quarters for four days. Vett explained:

In the meantime the Colonel went to Nashville and told General Granger that it was folderol leaving this town after getting it so well fortified. So night before last at 11 o'clock (marching orders always come at night) packing up began and at daylight were to come back to Columbia. . . . We left not Franklin until 10 oc.A.M. It just poured rain all the way through . . .

So, it was good-bye to Sallie once again. Apparently, however, Vett was not really in love with Sallie so much as he was in love with the idea of being in love. He was playfully reassuring to his mother.

Ma, there are some very fine young ladies here in Columbia and I am to do the same here that I did at Franklin. If you haven't got any one picked out for me to live my life with, and don't object, why, I'll pitch in for somebody down here, with a large plantation and plenty of rocks and-and-marry her. If you *have*, tell me & I will lay over any such plans.

But within a few days (October 21), he was writing that Columbia just was not the same as Franklin when it came to girls. His plaint made it clear that military occupation was the less onerous to the soldiers when the women they met were the more sociable.

Wish I were back there [in Franklin] now. It is pretty lonesome here, there being but 2 or 3 places in town where they will receive Federal soldiers. They either are "not at home" or they will grossly insult one to the face, though several of the latter kind have been put in jail for 24 hours. The men keep mum, but the *women* (I can't call such *ladies*) will turn up their noses & pull aside their dresses when passing a soldier & some of *them* get insulted too when they cut up any such capers if the English language can express an insult to such.

Nevertheless, in a few week's time Vett could report a new interest. He now was visiting at the home of a Mrs. Kirby ("a very nice lady by the way") and calling on her daughter. Letters home never mentioned the Kirbys after that, however. His clerical duties took him now and then to Franklin. He explained on January 20, 1864, that whenever he stopped overnight in Franklin he visited Miss Sallie: "I was down and stayed three days awhile ago. Mrs Reams is as nice a lady as I know of anywhere, and Sallie! Oh! just as sweet as a peach (ha-ha)."

By then Vett was a private again after his eight month's stint as sergeant major. In December, 1863, as a lowly enlisted man he was detailed to serve in the provost marshal's office in Columbia. On January 16, 1864, he was on a new assignment in Nashville, under his old friend, Arthur E. Magill, the adjutant and now a captain. A good

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clerk, Vett kept out of the ranks because of the demand for his talents. With a dash of humor, he alluded to his professional qualifications.

If my right hand holds good—if it don't I will write with my left, that falling I will try my toes. I'm bound to write. Say Ma, wasn't I born writing? I am with a pen in my hand or behind my ear all the time now and I believe I shall die in the same fix.²⁴

In January, 1864, the 14th Michigan became a veteran regiment as over four hundred men had reenlisted.²⁵ But Vett had no intentions of signing up for three years more just for the enjoyment of a two weeks' furlough. He made out furlough papers and wrote up muster rolls for Captain Magill and then in February for Captain Edward Nixon, his erstwhile nemesis and the man the brigade used to gobble at. When "a greenhorn," Captain Caspar Ernst of Nuncia, took over the provost marshal's office in Columbia, Vett and his fellow clerks worked him for an unauthorized free pass for each one of them to go to Franklin. They even got the careless captain to sign for five-dollars worth of tobacco from their sutler, but when Ernst found out about the jokes going too far he good-naturedly but firmly confiscated the tobacco.²⁶

On April 30, Vett wrote home from Kalamazoo, Michigan. He was returning to the South from a month's furlough home, the entire 14th Michigan having been treated to the same privilege in two separate relays. Apparently Vett sent no letters home after one on February 29 from Columbia until he wrote from Kalamazoo, and thereafter he scarcely mentioned what had happened at home. It was back to the front and invariably his life in the army was to remain the principal concern of his letters.

Writing from Bridgeport, Alabama, on May 10, he reported that he had drawn a gun in Nashville. He saw little chance in the future for clerical details, now that the army was on the move. But four days later he found himself again with pen behind his ear in the provost marshal's office, under a Captain Galeski, whom he described as a very jolly Pole. On May 19, Vett wrote that his duties as provost clerk would soon end, since the regiment was planning to move to the front. On June 1, from Kingston, Georgia, he gave a foot soldier's view of moving toward the front, which was still forty miles ahead. He was now under Major General William T. Sherman, and until the war

²⁴ Jan. 23, 1864.

²⁵ June 15, 25, 1864. Col. Mizner later reminisced how he had been authorized to mount the regiment from the country, securing seven hundred horses "for which my Quartermaster gave certificates, to be settled as the Government might thereafter direct." Mizner, "The Fourteenth Michigan." As a mounted infantry unit, the 14th was issued suitable equipment, including revolvers and a hundred Spencer rifles.

²⁶ Feb. 10, 1864.

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ended his family in Ypsilanti would be hearing of life under a general whom Vett would even compare to Napoleon as the world's greatest.

Vett wrote that he had lost ten pounds from marching, was a lithe 140 and feeling the better for it. He was getting plenty of rough fare: meat, coffee, sugar, milk, and hard tack. But as the troops closed in on Kenesaw Mountain, Georgia, they were out of tobacco and consequently were directing all complaints at the poor sutler for not having a load of it on hand.²⁷

It was during a lull in the fighting at Kenesaw Mountain that Private Noble by the sheerest coincidence came across men from Franklin, Tennessee, his favorite southern town. Vett, writing from near Marietta, complained that it was too hot for campaigning but he found plenty to write home about.

We (Yanks) beat all creation digging. There is about 6 lines of heavy breastworks facing the Rebs and nearly every 24 hours brings another one to light. The last one is so close to their's in some places that one can toss a stone into the other, not more than 20 feet between two armies. It is beyond comprehension—I don't see & yet I *do* see how it is done without losing more men—it is done & yet if a man shows his head, it has a bullet into it right quick.

While the truce of the day before was in effect, Vett met the Confederates from Franklin.

I went out & talked with the Greybacks the day that the dead & wounded were being taken care of, saw most of their leading Genls. & talked with them, saw men that lived at Franklin, Tenn. & whose families I am quite intimately acquainted with. They haven't had letters for most a year, so I told them all the news and am going to write to F-- to tell them the news & let them know that nearly all their friends are well, for I know they are anxious. *Sallie* happens to have no relations in the army, so she can't have a chance to mourn their loss etc. but I saw her "*sweetheart*." That will tickle her I know.²⁸

At Kenesaw Mountain, Vett told of a truce violation that the Yankees were successful in pulling off without detection.

The other day when both parties were out between works burying dead our men dug several extra holes and at night took barrels and cracker boxes filled with dirt and keeping them before them worked up into the extra graves, right close up to the Rebs, and keep digging until the hole was big enough for more—throwing the dirt towards rebs for bank, and in that way corrected their trench with others and at daylight presented a formidable work right under their noses.

After Sherman got past Kenesaw Mountain, Vett wrote from near Atlanta, a city he could view from the vantage point of a tall tree. He was back with the regimental adjutant, again detailed as a clerk. The brief career as a foot soldier was over, as it turned out. On July 29 he

²⁷ July 2, 1864.

²⁸ Sept. 13, 1864.

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wrote that Atlanta was nearly surrounded, and he referred to the Confederate change of leadership in the field.

The Rebel Army has got a new commander, one that suits us to a T. His name is Hood. His policy unlike Johnston's is to stand & is "going to drive the Yankees back across the Chattahoochie River or annihilate their army in the space between" to use his own (as repeated by rebel prisoners) expression. That is what is to be the destruction of his own troops.

On August 6, Private Noble was detailed with a supply train of the 1st Brigade, 2nd Division. He now had little to do but play cards ("old Hedge") with the sutler ("I beat him every time"). He described the supply line, fifty miles of wagon trains besides thirteen pack mules and seven horses for each regiment, all bringing in provender from Louisville with Nashville a stand-by storage base. His new hero, General Sherman, came in for praise as Vett let his mother know how little the people at home realized what war really meant.

And Genl Sherman knows all about it (the supply line) for he orders it kept straight and when he can put his finger right onto it, besides watching the Rebs and knowing all about their movements. I tell you "without hesitation and without fear of contradiction" that it is no child's play, and people north have no more idea of what is going on and how it is done than nothing in the world. All they know of War is by the high prices of everything—the death of a relative or near friend. The rest they are innocent of.

It was but a few days later (August 9) when Vett let Ypsilanti know about the deaths of a couple of local boys following a regimental charge on August 7. "Billy Elwell and Hank Carpenter both from Ypsilanti bunked together and have been as inseparable almost as the Siamese twins." Among the wounded was Billy Buskirk, who was sent to a rear base hospital in Nashville; Buskirk was Vett's best friend in the regiment and was also from Ypsilanti. Vett's family interceded, at his request, with Mrs. Elwell, the dead boy's mother, and she allowed Vett to keep Billy's pen ("a first rate one").

After his return from furlough, Vett had hoped all along that he might be detailed to Sherman's headquarters. His chances went a glimmering when General John W. Palmer ("our gallant Gen.") was transferred, and Private Noble was returned to the 14th Michigan again, or as he put it, "[to] this miserable God-forsaken Regiment." But he continued to clerk, and once again for Colonel Henry Mizner, who he reported was acting more gentlemanly toward him than ever before. The colonel went further than that, Vett related. "He yesterday made me a present of a very nice checked woolen shirt price when new \$6. He had not worn it twice."²⁸

²⁸ Aug. 15, 17, 1864.

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In the heavy fighting just preceding the fall of Atlanta, Vett was a busy soldier. He summarized the time during which he had not been able to write home: "It has been march, work and fight for the last two weeks. I am in the Adj't's office and such a rush of work you can't imagine." On September 1, when the 14th Michigan earned its brightest laurels and yet suffered its slightest losses for heavy action, Vett was subjected to a new kind of experience. This was the occasion when, to quote the official account in John Robertson's *Michigan in the War*:

The Regiment, in command of Colonel Mizner charged and carried a line of rebel works at Jonesboro, capturing four pieces of artillery and caissons, a rebel general and staff, the colors of the 1st Arkansas (rebel), and 300 men. The loss of the 14th was two killed and twenty-eight wounded.³⁰

Vett wrote about his own actions during the battle.

I having no gun, helped the Surgeon to take care of the wounded on the field & when Capt of Co "K" [Harbaugh] got wounded I was sent to rear with him to Hospital, where I remained all night working hard, helping the surgeons at their work of caring for wounded men. 4 tables were kept busy at the Hospt from before dark till yesterday when I came back to the Regt. . . . Atlanta was occupied by Genl Slocum U.S.A. yesterday at 11 o.c.A.M. The Confeds having evacuated the night previous after exploding vast magazines and blowing up 80 car loads of ammunition.³¹

The elusive objective Atlanta theirs, now the men in camp could relax. Vett treated the Nobles of Ypsilanti to a bit of army humor.

I washed and scrubbed at myself about half an hour in the creek this morning and guess I will be obliged to go through the same operations for several mornings to come, before I come out myself again. I had been berating some unknown personage for some weeks past for "realizing" (as I supposed) my two shirts but can you judge of my surprise when this morning with the help of the Sgt Maj I washed enough dirt off my back

³⁰ Robertson, *Michigan in the War*, p. 348. Col. Charles M. Lum, 10th Mich. Inf., acting commander of 1st Brigade, 2nd Div., 14th Army Corps, in his report gave credit to Mizner's 14th as the first unit to break into enemy lines, driving the Confederates from their artillery and capturing same. OR, I, XXXVIII, 654. Col. Mizner later returned some Mexican War trophy spurs taken from Gen. D. C. Govan, commanding a brigade of one of the divisions from Hardee's corps. Govan surrendered to First Lieut. Patrick Irwin of Ann Arbor (later captain and Medal of Honor winner). Mizner and Govan exchanged pleasant letters in 1898. Mizner had remained in the army as a captain and had taken part in Indian fighting in the West. He was retired as a brevet brigadier general in 1891. Mizner, "The Fourteenth Michigan." For an interview with Mizner, see *Detroit Free Press*, Aug. 2, 1914. Mizner was born in 1827 in Geneva, New York, and came to Detroit with his parents when he was nine. For his obituary, see *Detroit Free Press*, Jan. 5, 1915.

³¹ Sept. 3, 1864. Maj. Gen. Cox in his volume on Sherman's campaigns made frequent references to trenches in the Kennesaw Mountain engagement, Jacob D. Cox, *Atlanta* (New York, 1963), V, 116-129.

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when I found I had the identical shirts on which had become so effectually concealed beneath what I supposed to be my body instead of three months accumulation of dirt that I thought I had lost them. Hurrah for hurrah! Two shirts ahead.²⁸

After a few weeks of rest in Atlanta, Vett went to Kingston to join the 14th, which was girding for its next campaign. Vett was now one of Sherman's famous "bummers," and he described the next venture, writing later from near Savannah.

We started from Atlanta, after burning it, with 11 days rations the 16th of November, lived on the country, had plenty of flour, meal, sweet potatoes, molasses, fresh pork etc. etc. never lived so high on a march in the Army. The army swept a "row" about 40 miles wide through the country, as near as I can judge, and what the inhabitants, who never felt the war before will now find to live on I cant see²⁹

When Sherman took Savannah, the fortunes of Private Noble took a turn for the better. He was, for some reason unexplained in his letters, picked as one of the few clerks in Sherman's headquarters. Naturally, he was rather proud to report all the implications involving this new assignment. For instance, he had to get a special order from General Sherman himself so that one of the lieutenants of the 14th Michigan could finally consent to give him his detached service papers (January 17, 1865). For his old outfit, he had only this to say: "I have had heaps of trouble getting clear of the Regt but now they may kiss my foot. That is the amount of harm I wish them."

From now on until his discharge Vett was Sherman's man. His hero-worshipping attitude never thereafter abated. In his first account (January 17) of his new relationship with the general Private Noble stressed the point that the great man was so very human after all.

When the General feels good he is real funny. I went over this morning to write off some letters for him. I knocked and he said "Come in! Ah! Clerk how are you?" speaking very fast, says he take a drop of that "Madera" and pitch in. I am in a hurry "going out to see some ladies." His tone of voice, his grin and the "by-jerks" way he had of talking nearly set me into a laugh, but I got through with but a *smile*."

. . . Genl. Sherman is some. He has military control of eight states and all the U.S. troops that in them are. I expect we will next turn up at Charleston or in the vicinity of Richmond next time we come to light after having made a break from here.

²⁸ Dec. 15, 1864.

²⁹ Vett's letters at the time he joined Sherman's headquarters reveal that there was bad blood among the staff officers of the 14th Mich. This is borne out by correspondence between some of these officers and John Robertson, adjutant general of Michigan, and Gov. Austin Blair. After Col. Mizner departed, there was a power struggle that was quite bitter between Lt. Col. Grummond and Maj. Fitzgibbons: see letters in 14th Mich. Inf. Regt. file, in Records of the Michigan Military Establishment, at the Michigan Historical Commission Archives.

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In this letter Vett purred with pride as he described the superior qualities of western over eastern troops in the Union army and supplied a humorous vignette that showed why the great general was so popular with his enlisted men.

Some of the Army Corps are moving and in all probability this week will see the last of Sherman's Army in Savannah, at least for awhile. A Division from the eastern army under Command of Gen'l Grover arrived today to garrison the place which doesn't please our boys much as they think they have earned the right to garrison this city etc., but Gen'l Sherman thinks that his Army is composed of too good soldiers to be left in the rear as garrison and intimates that such business is all that the Eastern army is capable of doing. They are called the "4 acre," and "band-box" men, because they have done all their soldiering on so small a space of ground and are in camp nearly all the time and put on lots of style, new clean clothes, white gloves and collars, draw full rations, get butter and all the good things issued to them and know not what the real trials and hardships of soldiering are, hence, our boys call them "band box" or "parlor" soldiers.

Besides if the Gen'l should leave any of his Divisions here the rest would grumble and say that he showed partiality, but he thinks so much of them that he wants them all with him and wouldn't trade one of his Divisions for a whole Corps of the Potomac Army.

Bully for "Uncle Billy." He's cute I tell you, and funny sometimes too. One of his foot-orderlies yesterday thought to take a ride and asked the Gen'l for a couple of hours absence. The Gen'l just for fun asked him what mischief he was up to now, said he knew the pranks of these boys. Orderly said he was going to the stable and get a carriage to take a ride. He then asked him if he had his lady engaged, if not would he take him? Oh! yes the orderly was just tickled to death at the very idea of driving Gen'l Sherman out. Well they went out, the Gen'l letting the orderly go where he pleased and seemed to enjoy himself hugely. They finally came on the outskirts of the city upon some very strong rebel fortifications. The Gen'l looked at them and grunted two or three times and finally haw! hawed! right out. It amused the orderly and he liked to have killed himself laughing at the General, who turned round and spoke as he always does very dry and blunt, "What are you laughing at?" "I was laughing because you did" says the orderly. The Gen'l with another laugh and a glance at the breastworks said, "I was laughing to think how nice I fooled 'em"—meaning the Rebs.

My description of it is worth nothing. You ought to hear the orderly tell it with a mimic of the general's manner and voice. I could hardly eat my dinner today when he was telling it.

With the South Carolina campaign in the offing, the new headquarters clerk had some predictions based on his own sure knowledge of Union army psychology.

[Well] . . . trudge along all day devastating the country, as you may rely upon for South Carolina, when our troops get loose in it. They all hold a particular grudge against the one leading State of Secession and the one least harmed by the U.S. so far—but my! if a man says *boo!* he will rue the day he met Shermans army for they are "up to snuff" and will take

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his last grain of flour, last cow, last horse, last hog—drop of molasses, honey, and burn his house if he says boo twice.³⁴

Aside from one letter Vett wrote his mother from Pocotaligo on January 31, none of his letters that was sent from South Carolina is extant. But in that particular one, he did write of the march about to be undertaken.

Tomorrow morning at daylight we leave here and as communication will close its doors upon us when we are away from here I will write one more short note before going behind the cloud from the sight of the world. I thought the last chance of a mail had left but Gen^l Sherman wrote a letter to his wife tonight and proposes to send it over to Gen^l Hatch, commanding a Division of the Dept of the South and who does not accompany our army, only guards what it leaves. He will when we are far enough up country again open his own line and send our mail. It may not be in a week or ten days, but it will be one more letter from Vett anyway.

Although his next letter in the collection is March 14, 1865, fully six weeks later, and carries a North Carolina dateline, Private Noble did have something to say about Columbia, South Carolina, in a much later letter (April 20). He responded to a query of his mother that showed what was on her mind.

How in the world should such a thought enter your head as "saving silver from the sacking of Columbia?" Though the "bummers" proper had nothing to do with anything, only grub, houses and such were not touched until after the whole city was on fire and such stuff taken because it would have been in the ruins otherwise. I cant keep it to myself any longer I see—so here is "whats the matter."

I have got a splendid silver teapot for you, been used of course but yet it is a nice one. I did have a lot of trinkets, knives, forks and spoons, goblets etc. all silver, but the mess kept growing larger . . . so most of the things are in use by mess as mess property . . . I had a dozen silver plated dessert knives, quite nice. I broke into them and I guess all will go, some of the forks are lost, spoons ditto, goblets getting jammed up etc etc but the teapot I laid away.

When the army was resting after the capture of Fayetteville, Vett furnished a homey picture of his hero, "Uncle Billy."

There is a Band playing in front of the quarters. Some Band or other serenades the General most every night. He sits on the opposite side of the desk from me now, and forty bands might be making the nicest music in the world and he wouldn't know they had been playing. He is a queer old coon, but cant he just settle the Rebels? He has so much on his mind that his orderly has to tell him when to put on clean shirts etc. Wouldn't think of anything else . . .³⁵

After several letters, all containing superficial comments about the military campaign, Vett wrote his sister from Goldsboro, North Caro-

³⁴ Mar. 24, 1865.

³⁵ Apr. 11, 1865.

VETT NOBLE

lina, on March 29. Commenting that his own birthday was over and gone two days before, he set down a reflective analysis of his situation in life and the limitations he had brought on himself for not going on to college when he could have done so. It was such a letter an American soldier might well have written in the closing days of World War II, before the G.I. Bill was passed.

Here I am 23 years old and know scarcely more than my A.B.C.'s—never get done anything for myself or others save for the cause of my country which thousands and hundreds of thousands have done the same—living entirely upon the favor of one of the best of fathers and not taking the advantages of education etc. offered me—with the will I ought. I know nothing! Mere nothing. I must though. A man with ability makes himself known in this world while such as I are *not* of enough importance for the world to acknowledge the existence of. It may always be so, but I now regret not having studied to the utmost of my ability when nothing on earth was to hinder me but *worthless friolity*.

I can now see the worth of knowledge and the all controlling power of it while I am merely a nonentity still old enough to be *something*. Regrets are useless but cost nothing. I propose if not getting into business to study some yet.

But such retrospection was rare with Vett, for most of the time he was observing the scene before him. The Sherman brothers came in for some close scrutiny in another letter home from Goldsboro (March 31). The general and his brother, Senator John Sherman from Ohio, had returned after William Tecumseh's visit with Ulysses S. Grant at City Point.

Their features are a good deal alike but the General's hair is sandy—or tow color—while Mr's is dark—now almost grey—both are very tall and of slight build, look as if they were dried, like old shrivelled up men, won't get fat! Their brain is far stouter than their body.

Writing from Smithfield, North Carolina, Vett explained that Sherman's headquarters served six corps (the 10th, 14th, 15th, 17th, 20th, and 23rd) plus Kilpatrick's cavalry. He boasted of his own importance within the intricate army system.

I write the orders for movements that they are to execute, a privilege that only 2 Privates and perhaps 5 or 6 Maj Genls only, with a Staff Officer or two know anything about the worth of.³⁶

When General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox on April 9, Vett was with Sherman's headquarters at Raleigh. He saw at first hand the excited interplay of events between Sherman and Joe Johnston (who had been restored to his command after Hood was relieved), and he shared the bewilderment that officers and men alike felt when the authorities in Washington refused to accept the lenient

³⁶ Apr. 2, 1865.

CIVIL WAR HISTORY

surrender terms Sherman had tendered the Confederates. The assassination of President Lincoln and the threat of any vengeance that was quelled by Sherman's quick counter-moves were events Vett reported to his family from the vantage point at the Raleigh headquarters located in the North Carolina governor's mansion.²⁷

As events crowded fast upon each other at the war's end, Vett, so close to headquarters gossip, reacted angrily against Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, General Henry Halleck, and other Washington politicians seeking to injure his hero, "Uncle Billy" Sherman. Writing in the field outside Hanover Court House, Virginia, on May 12, Vett responded to the public furor over Sherman's allegedly "soft-on-the-South" posture.

I am glad you stick up for Sherman! Let them tear. I believe and most sincerely hope that he will come out at the *head of the heap yet!* You see he is a political man—having held a seat in Senate²⁸—as well as military, and Secretary Stanton is afraid to let his (Sherman's) popularity get too high because he might accidentally be our next President.

Sec'y acknowledged the Gen'l's ability in a military view and let him work upholding him till the war was finally finished by him and now wishes to lower him the public favor lest he would be President, or some other high official. The "N.Y. Herald" takes its cue from Stanton & the rest of them go it after the "Herald."

But the General has written a scorching of an official report of 33 foolscap paper pages (I copied it at Richmond). It will perfectly annihilate Gen'l Halleck & some others. I presume you read the "Memorandum" of negotiations for peace between the Gen'l and Joe Johnston, as it was published as was *not* the letter accompanying it to Washington. Said "Memo" was sent to ditto on purpose to be criticized, changed etc. to suit and was not an usurpation of power or anything of the sort on the part of Gen'l Sherman. Gen'l Grant knows what is what and everything will go off all right I guess. He (Sherman) can't (be) relieved from command as yet and I reckon won't be. I'll go my last cent that he is and will *be known to be the best Gen'l in the wide world* but when—if it is at all—his last report is published won't Gen'l Halleck wilt! I think he will and Mr. Stanton will feel quite shaky too!

On May 23 Vett wrote to his mother from Washington. This particular missive represents the last of the collection, and it was a fitting end because the war was over and Vett saw it all unwind in glorious triumph.

Last Saturday I went over to the Reg't and yesterday (Monday) morning I had my Discharge Papers before noon, had my money \$331.55. Wandered around this little city of Washington till night. Got tired went to the theatre. Then went to hotel and stayed there until this morning

²⁷ Apr. 13, 18, 20, 1865.

²⁸ Noble was confused on this point. William T. Sherman never held political office and would have been insulted by this allusion. His brother, John Sherman, was senator from Ohio.

VETT NOBLE

fast asleep. Found HdQrs about 4 P.M. They had moved since Saturday into town from near Alexandria--after tiring myself out looking at the Review of the Army of the Potomac.

Genl Sherman's Army is to be reviewed tomorrow. I couldn't think of going off and miss seeing the whole of this Grand Affair the equal of which the world never yet saw and it will probably [be] some time before another such is seen.

I have seen the Capital, Treasury Dept. War and Navy Depts, Patent Office ec.ec. Also President Johnson and more Secretary's than you could shake a stick at, of war and Asst's Navy ditto . . . Seen everybody and Everything but the last of the Review and then I will come home . . . The writer expects to be in Ypsilanti June 1st.

Good Bye

Vett

Thus he is left there in Washington, the next day ready in all ecstasy to see General Sherman and his army honored after its great campaigns from Chattanooga to Atlanta to Savannah to Raleigh and now marching down Pennsylvania Avenue. After that, what else was there left but to come back to Ypsilanti?²⁰

²⁰ Sylvester C. Noble died in 1916 (interred in Green Lawn Cemetery, Columbus, Ohio). After the war, in 1867, he married Lois Hinckley, daughter of Sherman and Orpha Hinckley of Pittsfield, New York. She died in 1870, age 21, leaving no children. In 1860, he married Clara Adelaide Crosby, and had a family of five children. In 1867, after his Civil War service, he was a city clerk in Ypsilanti. In 1876, he was serving as a bookkeeper in the office of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad, living in Houston. Interestingly enough, Leroy Charles Noble, a cousin from Ann Arbor, was at that time also employed by the same railroad as a master mechanic. Also, Vett's younger sister Gertrude (born in 1863), then Mrs. Jacob E. Van Riper, lived in San Antonio, Texas. Thus, Vett's promise to move South after the war turned out to be a true forecast, and he seems to have used his powers of persuasion to get some of his relatives to join him.



Kashville Tennessee
February 14th 1863.

Dear Mother

Anxiously, again to-day I examined the mail for our Regiment as it came through the Post Office. but after the last letter went into the bag and I had seen none with my address upon, in familiar (or any other in fact) hand writing. I drew a long breath and said, "well! let her wait they will come some day" and I went at my work again. I have been very busy for about a week I had my recording all up even, when the A. A. Genl. got a new set of books for 1863. and I had from January 1st all the records over again into the new books. besides what kept coming in, and still keeps coming in. though I think if I keep pretty steady at work all day tomorrow. I will have every thing up, fair and square. the weather to-day has been warm and nice, but Oh! how muddy. I had no idea it was so awful muddy until this evening I went over to the Company and it being very dark. I couldn't keep out of the mud & consequently I got my feet wet. while over there I drew me an india rubber blanket, a genuine one. I think it will be a very good investment if I happen to be traveling anytime and it rains. there was some over there a few weeks ago but they were only oilcloth. I told the orderly I didn't want one of those. but if ever he could get his eye onto any that were genuine, just to freeze to one of them for me. & I being a very particular friend of his, he did just as I requested. Ma it is '1/2 past 11' at the present time and I ought

**NEW
MEMBERS**

Yale Averill
101 Greengside
Ypsilanti, Mi. 48197

Mary C. Blomquest
651 N. Ivanhoe
Ypsilanti, MI. 48197

Janice Bradley
1338 Nicolet
Detroit, Michigan 48207

Joe Decker
3207 Hayes
Ann Arbor, Michigan

William and Eileen Ealy
1587 S. Congress Apt. 35
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197

Robert E. Ely
464 North Mansfield
Ypsilanti, MI. 48197

Christine M. Falahee
1419 Gregory #11
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Madeleine Falahee
906 Hillside Ct.
Ypsilanti, MI. 48197

Mrs. Blanche Kissan
P.O. Box 326
Longwood, Fla. 32750

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2804 Cranbrook
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

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Box 122
Pinckney, MI 48169

Robert & Caryl Ristau
520 Kewanee
Ypsilanti, MI. 48197

Joe Sesi
550 Cliffs Dr.
Ypsilanti, MI. 48197

Duane & Mary Shields
7401 Valley Forge
Brighton, MI. 48116

Andrew Smith
52 S. Summit
Ypsilanti, MI. 48197

George & Mary Bloom
3841 Hillside Dr.
Ypsilanti, MI. 48197

Thomas Mishler
260 Brookside
Ann Arbor, MI. 48105

National Bank of Ypsilanti
133 W. Michigan
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197



220 North Huron

Acquisitions

Helen Smallidge



Remington Electric Typewriter

Lucile Langworthy Estate



Photographs

Catherine Blake

Wedding Dress, Afternoon
Dress, Currier & Ives
Lithographs

Foster Fletcher

Linen tableclothes and napkins

Virginia M. Bury

Quilt with handpainted pieces

Scott Kunst

Black lace trimmed umbrella

Mary Pappas

Spats - Taupe color

Ruth Boughner

Book holder - Prayer Rug

Prof. Paul Hubbell

World I Soldiers Helmet
Canteen - Machine Gun Clips
Officer's Rank Spike
Dog Tags
1963 Letter from Royal Greek
Embassy

Ruth Reynolds

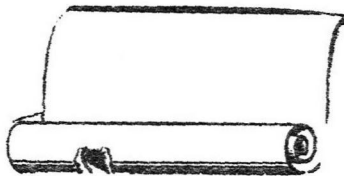
William Roger's 1847 Silver
Plate - Service for
6

Rene' Burgess

Oil Cup

Don and Lucy Gridley

Cherry Pitter
Stone Tool
Book - American Guide
Chart - 5000 yrs. History of
Mankind
Map of Solar System and Outer
Space



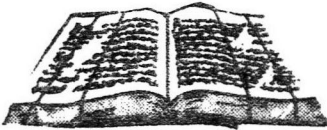
Acquisitions

Marion Hamilton



Letter opener with ruler on other side

Bly Quigley

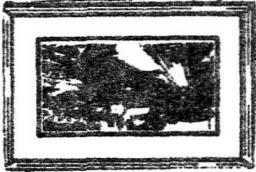


Picture of Helen Pease
Group Picture: Helen Pease, Lorinda Clifford, Clara McAndrew, Edith Jones Shaefer
Confederate \$50.00 bill

Dolph and Ann Thorne

Book- Daily Thoughts for Daily Thinkers

Standard Printing

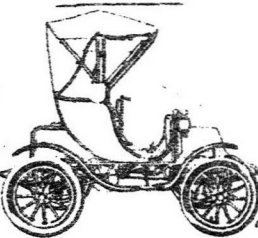


6 Post cards: First Cement Bridge - East Cross
State Normal School- Ypsi
Ypsilanti High School
Central High School
Huron River
Horticultural Gardens, M.S.C.

David Flowers

Letters dated July 25, 1841, August 29, 1841 from John W. Flowers to his wife.

Foster L. Fletcher



Book - "Automobiles of America"

Mrs. B. L. Barnett

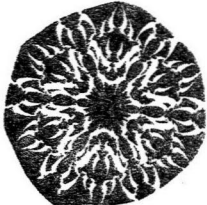
4 Post cards -
Entrance to Prospect Park
Gymnasium, Normal College
Cleary Business College
Michigan Central Station

AUTOMOBILES, Clarence Hornung, 1901
Ford runabout, 1919 Chevrolet coupe, Saababakos, Cadillac, Reo, Packards, Pierce-Arrow.

James Genco

Eaglehead Saddle 1840-1850

Gertrude Campbell



Clipping from newspaper "Spelling Ypsilanti"

Gertrude Nanry

Red and Blue woven throw
Quilt rack
Linen doilie

To The Members:

The Ypailanti Historical Society is now embarked on another new year, which already gives indications of being a busier and better year than last year.

I must apologize to all of you for your failing to receive the notice of our Annual Meeting held in January. Due to a misunderstanding at the Post Office, the notices did not get sent. However, those who did attend, gave enthusiastic support to our reports, and enjoyed each others company.

Again this year, the Historical Society will conduct the "Trash and Treasure" Sale during the Heritage Festival. Therefore, with Spring housecleaning coming up, keep it in mind, and bring your unwanted saleables to the Musuem during office hours - 9 - 12 each work day.

I am currently working on the establishment of several very much needed committees to better administer our affairs and take some of the burden off the few who have been so faithful and worked so hard to make our Society and our Museum what they are today. We will be calling people for assistance, but would like volunteers for the following working committees:

Membership	Public Relations
Program	Gleanings
Finance	



Your help will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

David Gauntlett
President



NOTICE OF DUES

It is again time for the yearly dues - 1984. If you have not already paid your dues, please mail or bring to the Museum at 220 N. Huron Street.

Thank you.



SPECIAL THANKS

To Jim Genco and Harold Williams.

Jim has rearranged and labeled the Artifacts in
the Civil War Case.

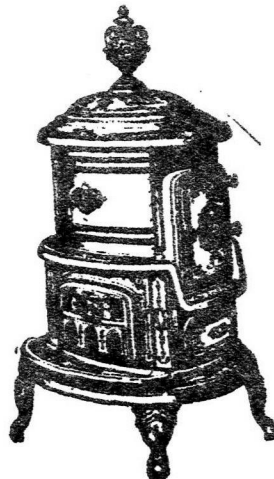
Harold is in the process of identifying the
Arrow Heads.

SPECIAL REQUEST FROM OUR MEMBERS

We are asking for donations to finance a new heating system in the Museum. We have applied for a Grant and need to raise \$12,000.00 in matching funds.

The new system will give us climate control and give us more space for the preservation of the vast historical material we have.

Any gift can be used as a tax deductible item.



MUSEUM ACTIVITIES

Our Valentine Exhibit has been admired, and has brought many comments about remembrances of long-ago childhoods. As a part of Valentines Day activities, Towner House had a program on February 11, in which children made Valentines to give them ideas. Thirty children visited our Museum to study our exhibit.

On February 16, a special tour was given to thirteen people from The Ypsilanti Senior Citizen Center who showed great interest in our Museum. We were pleased to have them visit us.



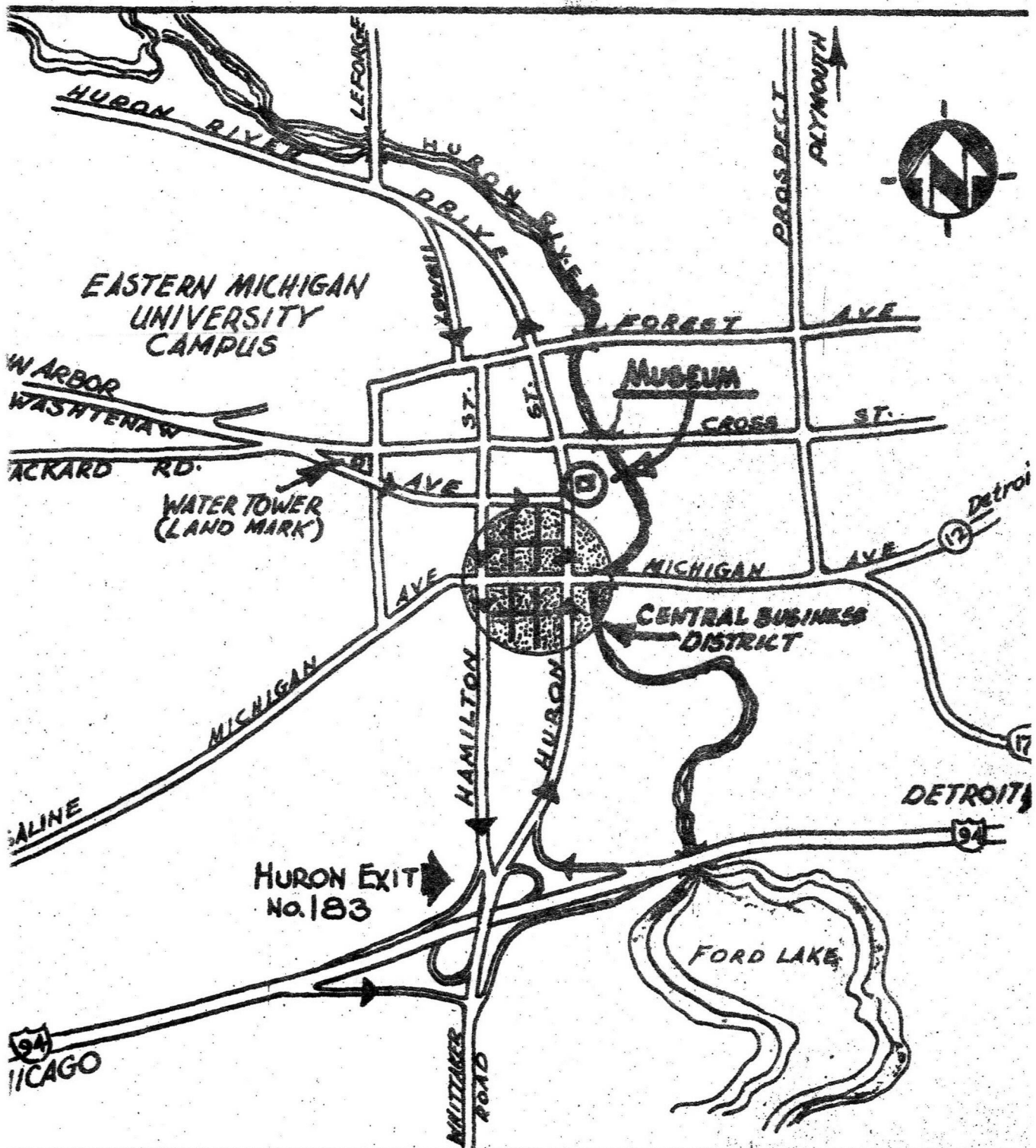
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N E E D S

We need and would like to receive any of the following articles for the enhancement of our Museum and to help in making our Museum more complete in exhibits and furnishings --

1. Old lamps - especially a nice parlor lamp.
2. Antique ~~Churn~~.
3. Old store counter and cases.
4. Wash Bowl and Pitcher.
5. A large quilt rack to hold at least ten quilts.
6. Any old tin, pressed glass and china.



Upsilon Historical Museum
 220 North Huron Street - Upsilon-Michigan
 Zip Code 48197 Phone (313) 482-4990
 Foster Fletcher, Historian - Museum Hours -
 Fri. Sat. & Sun. 2-4 P.M.
 Archives - By Appointment