

Finding aid for the Sterling family papers Collection 238

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

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Summary Information

Repository	Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
Creator	Sterling, Daniel L, 1823-1914
Title	Sterling family papers
Date [bulk]	Bulk, 1864-1865
Date [inclusive]	1864-1972
Extent	0.21 Linear feet One box
Language	English
Abstract	<p>The Sterling family papers contain original Civil War era letters, written by soldier Daniel L. Sterling of the 1st Michigan Engineers and Mechanics, Company D; dated January 30 1864-September 18, 1865. The letters were addressed to wife Fidela and children Ella (Ellen), Mary, Wellington and Emily Sterling, who remained in Lowell, Michigan during the war. Copies of Daniel L. Sterling's military and medical records, and application for pension, obtained from the National Archives, are included. The post-war part of this collection consists of Daniel L. Sterling's descendant's correspondence, birth and death certificates, cemetery records and specifically A. Wellington Sterling's mementos. There are seven photographs included in the collection. One is of Daniel L. Sterling, the other six are unidentified, but presumed to be the Sterling family.</p>

Biographical/Historical note

Daniel L. Sterling was born in Lima, New York on November 5, 1823. Between the years 1853 and 1857, he, his wife Fidela and two daughters, Ellen and Mary, moved to Lowell, Michigan. Sterling farmed there for several years, and children Wellington and Emily were born in 1857 and 1860 respectively.

On December 19, 1863, at the age of forty, Daniel L. Sterling enlisted with the 1st Michigan Engineers and Mechanics, Company 2, mustering in Grand Rapids MI, on January 5, 1864. He was employed as an artificer, or a mechanic and carpenter.

During his consignment with the union troops he remained with his regiment for the entire time, with the exception of two hospital stays. While at camp, he worked as a cook, took roll call, held religious meetings and helped run a sawmill. His duties generally ran parallel to the tasks of his company. While away, he wrote regularly to his wife and family in Lowell, MI. His letters report on what he had seen and done, different cities, architecture, flowers, financial, farm advice to his wife and reported on the general attitude among the soldiers.

In Nashville, Tennessee, on September 22, 1865, Sterling was discharged and returned to Lowell. Son Milton was born in Lowell on October 21, 1866.

Daniel's wife died in 1887 and he eventually moved in with his daughter Ellen and son-in-law Lewis Merriman, remaining in Lowell until his death on September 14, 1914.

Daniel L. Sterling's eldest daughter Ellen married Lewis Merriman and had two children, their names are not known. D.L. Sterling's second daughter Mary married a "Stowe", her husband's first name is not known. Son Wellington D. Sterling married Mary L. Sterling, who was born in 1857. They had (as of 1900) three children, Ura L. Sterling (1883), D. Lawrence Sterling (1889), and Lena P. Sterling (1891). D.L. Sterling's third daughter, Emily, married a Merriman, her husband's first name is not known. Milton J. Sterling married Belle B. Sterling and had two sons, Warren W. Sterling (1893) who married Ethel L. Sterling, and (A.) Wellington Sterling (1899).

(A.) Wellington Sterling is linked to Daniel L. Sterling through these intermediate generations. A. Wellington Sterling was born on February 22, 1899, the grandson of Daniel L. Sterling. He grew up in Kalamazoo, Michigan and sometime during the course of his life he and his brother Warren W. Sterling moved out to the San Pedro, California area.

He lived there, alone and destitute, apparently being taken care of by neighbors Dan and Renee McElroy. He died on November 4, 1972, with the McElroy's purchasing his gravestone, which is inscribed "OUR GRANDFATER".

A. Wellington Sterling is buried beside his brother Warren W. and sister-in-law Ethel L. Sterling in Green Hills Cemetery.

Scope and Contents note

This collection includes original Civil War letters written by Daniel L. Sterling while he was stationed in South Carolina, Chattanooga, Washington DC, Louisville and Nashville, he also marched with Sherman. Sterling, as an older soldier, however, does not report of the battlefield, but rather of cities, architecture, flowers, crops and attitudes within the camps and his general duties. His letters date between January 30, 1864 and September 18, 1865, with a gap occurring between September 18, 1864 and January 23, 1865. These letters compose the bulk of the collection.

There is one non-Civil War letter written by Daniel L. Sterling to his grandson in October of 1911.

Other family correspondence is between Wellington D. Sterling and Milton J. Sterling in 1887, and between Emily Merriman and A. Wellington Sterling in 1942. There are certificates and documents for A. Wellington Sterling (including his food stamps and Medical identification number), Milton J. Sterling, Belle B. Sterling, Warren W. Sterling and Ethel L. Sterling.

Other correspondence records problems of Warren W. Sterling's tenants, letters from friends of A. Wellington Sterling, and a letter for A. Wellington Sterling's neighbor, Renee McElroy from State Senator Joseph M. Kennick.

Graphics include two greeting sketches. An autograph book and poem for A. Wellington Sterling are also included.

This collection spans from 1864-1972. The two main periods are from January 30, 1864 to September 18, 1865, and December 11, 1970 to November 13, 1972.

All Civil War letters are transcribed, numbered and photocopied.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

Library purchase, Charles Apfelbaum (rare book seller), accession number P1999.019

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

Coll. 242, GRPL Civil War Documents Collection: This collection contains small accessions of original or photocopied Civil War materials, and also provides cross references to other GRPL archival collections where Civil War holdings can be found.

Controlled Access Headings

Family Name(s)

- Sterling, Lowell (Mich.)

Genre(s)

- letters (correspondence)

Geographic Name(s)

- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History
- United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Personal narratives

Documents - Usage Copies

Collection Inventory

Documents - Usage Copies		
	Box	Folder
Civil War Letters	1	1
Letter Transcriptions	1	2
Military and Medical Records	1	3
1870 Census, 1900 Sound-ex.	1	4
Photocopied Letters: Wellington D. Sterling to Milton J. Sterling, Daniel L. Sterling to Grandson	1	5
Original Documents		
	Box	Folder
Civil War Letters (28 pieces, in 26 plastic sleeves. Appear to be 25 letters plus fragments, 7/2/2007) Formerly 238-1-6 Letters move to Safe 7/2/2007	S8	x
Original Letters: Wellington D. Sterling to Milton J. Sterling, Daniel L. Sterling to Grandson.	1	7
Envelopes: Fragment, mailed From Ypsilant MI; Zendex, Dubin CA.	1	8

Photographs

Birth Certificate: A. Wellington Sterling.	1	9
Greeting Sketches: Warren W. Sterling, Ura Mae Sterling.	1	10
Death Certificates: Milton J. Sterling, Belle B. Sterling.	1	11
Letter from Angie E. Miller to Warren W. Sterling, envelopes.	1	12
Autograph Book from Emily Merriman, Poem to Mr. Wellington Sterling.	1	13
Letter and Envelopes to A. Wellington Sterling from Joe and Dottie Spurgeon. Envelopes, scraps of paper.	1	14
A. Wellington Sterling's Food stamps, Medical Identification Card, Automobile Registration Card.	1	15
Letter to Renee McElroy from California State Senator Joseph M. Kennick.	1	16
Green Hills Cemetery Records; Memoriam booklet of A. Wellington Sterling.	1	17
Photographs		
	Box	Folder
19th Century Photographs (3), including D.L. (Daniel L.) Sterling	1	18
20th Century Photographs. (4)	1	19