



The Civil War Letters of Alexander McNeill, 2nd South Carolina Infantry Regiment

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During the American Civil War, Alexander “Sandy” McNeill, a southern merchant, served in the Secession Guards, Company F, and Second South Carolina Regiment from April 17, 1861, to May 2, 1865. Within three weeks after the war began at Fort Sumter, McNeill wrote his first epistle to his long-time friend, Almirah Haseltine “Tinie” Simmons, in a campaign to win her heart and hand in marriage. The 29-year-old McNeill proclaimed in that letter, “I have always esteemed you as a friend and now I feel stealing over me a feeling which tells me that you are now held in higher estimation than that of a friend.”

Civil War historian and documentary editor Mac Wyckoff adds context to the correspondence, more than two hundred letters that encompass the entire duration of the war. With the exception of three breaks in communication, McNeill wrote to Tinie four to five times a week and persisted to the last week of April 1865, more than two weeks after General Robert E. Lee had surrendered at Appomattox Court House, Virginia. In general, letters written during the final six months of the war are hard to find as are many other primary source materials for the waning war.

While this is among the largest and fullest Civil War collections, it is the literary quality of McNeill’s letters and wide variety of topics reported that distinguish it from others. In frequent and lengthy missives, McNeill opened his heart and mind to Tinie, his fiancée and then wife. He fulsomely reported his experiences and thoughts on a soldier’s life during this war, describing combat, camp life, the building of winter quarters, the marches, company election of officers, weather, food, and morale. McNeill chronicled his experiences at First Manassas (Bull Run), Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Chickamauga, and other battles. A man of sophisticated opinions, McNeill voiced his personal views on political, religious and military events, and the names of fellow soldiers he liked and disliked—all illuminating his deep, dynamic character.

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