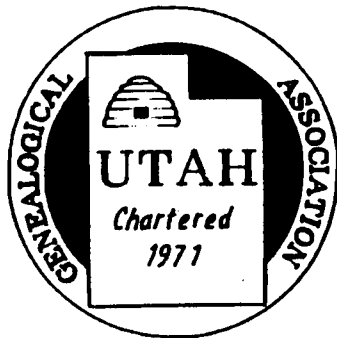


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Libby Prison Autograph Book

January - February 1864



UTAH GENEALOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Monograph Series, no. 1

INTRODUCTION

During the winter of 1864, two hundred and eighty-two Union officers held captive by Confederate forces in Richmond's Libby Prison entered name, rank, unit, and home address into a small notebook owned by fellow prisoner Alexander Addison Taylor. Lieutenant Taylor and many of his comrades had been swept up seven months earlier in the Federal rout at Winchester. Others were taken in major battles such as Gettysburg and Chickamauga or in smaller actions through 1863 and the first weeks of 1864. They hailed from twenty-one different states including a surprisingly large pro-Union contingent from the state of Tennessee. Brought together by unfortunate circumstances, these officers carefully signed Taylor's notebook to create a personal record of their imprisonment.

Signing autograph books was one of the few legitimate diversions available to Union officers in Libby Prison. Planning for escape was another! Several of the officers who signed Taylor's book had been busily digging a fifty-foot long tunnel under the wall for some time and during the night of February 8-9, 1864 more than one hundred prisoners managed to slip out from under the "nose" of Rebel guards. Lt. Colonel Frederick F. Cavada did not attempt the tunnel break-out, but rejoiced at "...how the grand escapade could have been effected without detection."¹ Although about fifty were eventually recaptured, this escape was among the largest and most successful of the Civil War.

The Taylor Autograph Book is a remarkable document in part because of this connection - perhaps only coincidental - with the tunnel escape. The signers of Taylor's book constituted a small but significant proportion of the Libby Prison officer population in early 1864. It included several of the most prominent escape leaders - William Grosvenor Ely and Abel D. Streight - and distinguished field officers such as Colonel Louis Palma Di Cesnola, who later (1879) became Director of the Metropolitan Museum of New York, and Brigadier General Neal Dow. Some signers did not live to see the end of the war. William H. Bender, Barnabas N. Mann and David W. McCully were among those who died in Rebel prison camps before the end of 1864.

Alexander A. Taylor escaped in October 1864 and rejoined his regiment the following month. On March 16, 1865 he was promoted to Captain and mustered out shortly thereafter. Fortunately, the autograph book also survived and Taylor eventually had it bound to protect the fragile, weatherbeaten pages. The cover title reads: "Property of A.A. Taylor, Captain 122nd O.V.I.; Autographs of Prisoners of War, Libby Prison, Richmond, Va., Jan. 1864."² Taylor and fellow prisoner Ross W. Anderson were among those who occasionally joined to celebrate the anniversary of their liberation and may well have looked through the old autograph book from time to time recalling difficult days in Libby.³

Taylor died on May 10, 1908 after a long, prosperous career in civic and banking circles in his native Cambridge, Ohio.⁴ The autograph book was purchased by scholar-philanthropist William Pendleton Palmer in March 1925 for the growing Civil War collections of the Western Reserve Historical Society. The old, faded volume remains carefully preserved among the Society's manuscript collections.

On the following pages, the Taylor Autograph Book officers are listed in alphabetical order with name, rank, unit and home residence as originally signed. The number order in which the signature was entered is in parentheses following the signature data. Additional information gathered from research in various published sources is provided below along with reference to the titles consulted. A full bibliography of sources is provided at the end.

In some cases, incorrect or conflicting data was provided by the works consulted. When such is the case, I have noted the discrepancy--usually in parentheses--following the entry. The references cited should not be regarded as a fully comprehensive body of source material on the officers listed. Information concerning these men should be available in many additional sources. Among the best are veterans' service records maintained by the National Archives. Military Service Records Division of the National Archives (Washington, D.C. 20408) will send you NATF Form 26 upon request. Data provided in this article should help you to fill out this form completely.

Footnotes

¹Frederick F. Cavada, *Libby Life: Experiences of a Prisoner of War in Richmond, Va., 1863-64* Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1865, p. 174.

²Alexander A. Taylor, *Autograph Album*, January 1864. 1 volume and clippings. Mss. 1209. The Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio. A. A. Taylor did not achieve the rank of captain until after his escape and this would support the contention that the cover of his autograph book was prepared sometime after the war. However, Taylor's signature in the book itself indicates the rank of captain. Several of the officers who signed this book assumed a higher rank in anticipation of promotion. Signatures in the autograph book were entered well into February 1864 as some of the signers were captured as late as February 2nd. Neal Dow dated his signature February 6, 1864 - some two days before the tunnel escape.

³*Ibid.* Clippings from local (Cambridge, Ohio) newspapers accompanying the Autograph Book indicate March 1, 1865 as the date of release for Taylor and Ross W. Anderson. This is at variance with published sources which date Taylor's escape as October 1864 and Anderson's release as March 15, 1865.

⁴Cyrus P. B. Sarchet, *History of Guernsey County, Ohio* (Indianapolis: B. F. Bowen & Co., 1911), pp. 904-07.

Abbreviations

Adj.	-	adjutant	I.	-	infantry
Arty.	-	artillery	Inf.	-	infantry
Brig.	-	brigadier	Ifty.	-	infantry
Capt.	-	captain	Infy.	-	infantry
Cav.	-	cavalry	Lt.	-	lieutenant
Cavy.	-	cavalry	Lt. Col.	-	lieutenant colonel
Co.	-	company or county	Pvt.	-	private
Col.	-	colonel	R.Q.M.	-	regimental quartermaster
Corp.	-	corporal	Sgt.	-	sergeant
			V. or Vol.	-	volunteer

AN ACCOUNT

OF THE

ESCAPE OF SIX FEDERAL SOLDIERS

FROM PRISON AT DANVILLE, VA.:

THEIR TRAVELS BY NIGHT

THROUGH

THE ENEMY'S COUNTRY TO THE UNION PICKETS

AT GAULEY BRIDGE, WEST VIRGINIA,

IN THE WINTER OF 1863-64.

BY

W. H. NEWLIN,

Lieutenant Seventy-Third Illinois Volunteers.

CINCINNATI:

WESTERN METHODIST BOOK CONCERN PRINT.

1869.

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CSL

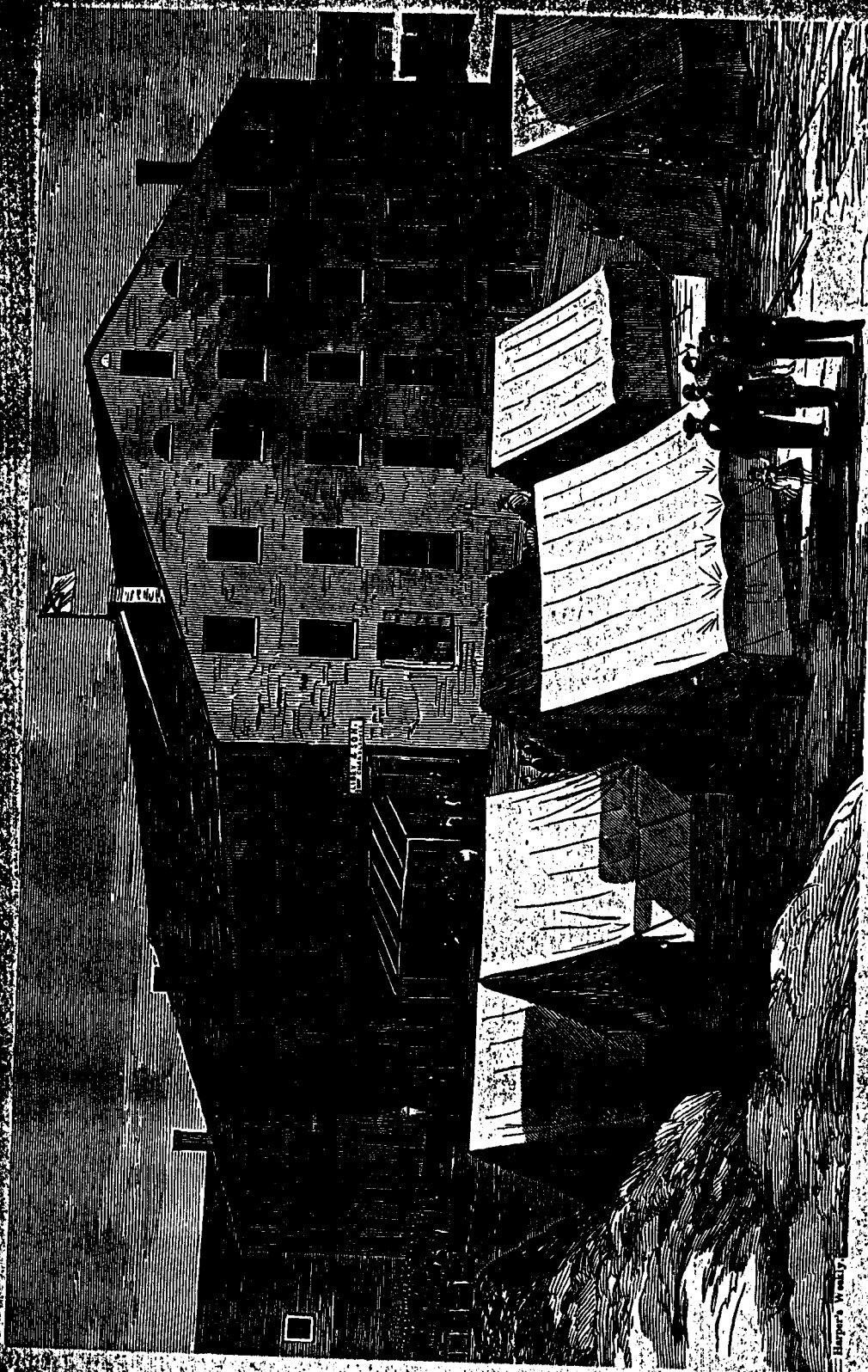
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The Libby



Chronicle



LIBBY PRISON, AUGUST 23, 1863

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