

South Carolina Historical Magazine

Volume 87 Number 3

July 1986

(ISSN 0038-3082)

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY THE
SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
FIREPROOF BUILDING
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA 29401

Contents

| Articles: | Page |
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| "Our Separation is Like Years": The Civil War Letters of Deopold Daniel Louis, edited by Jason Silverman and Susan R. Murphy | 141 |
| The Journal of John Pierpont, Tutor on a Waccamaw River Plantation, edited by Elise Pinckney | 148 |
| History Rides the Winds to Colonial Charleston, by W. Morton Pine | 162 |
| Book Reviews and Notes: | |
| Burton, <i>In My Father's House Are Many Mansions</i> , by Lacy Ford | 176 |
| Iseley, Baldwin and Baldwin, <i>Plantations of the Lowcountry: South Carolina, 1697-1865</i> , by Lawrence S. Rowland | 179 |
| McCusker and Menard, <i>The Economy of British America, 1607-1789</i> , by Peter A. Coclanis | 180 |
| Dudley, <i>The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History</i> , by Clark G. Reynolds | 182 |
| Dillon, <i>Ulrich Bonnell Phillips: Historian of the Old South</i> , by W. Kirk Wood | 183 |
| Perry, <i>Infernal Machines: The Story of Confederate Subma- rine and Mine Warfare</i> , by James David Altman | 184 |
| From the Archives: | |
| "To get as many Slaves as you can": An 1807 Slaving Voyage, by Michael E. Stevens | 187 |
| From the Society: | |
| Recent Manuscript Accessions | 193 |

Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation

(Required by 39 USC 3685). 1. Title of Publication: *South Carolina Historical Magazine*. 1B. 00383082. 2. Date of filing: Sept. 30, 1985. 3. Frequency: quarterly. 4. Address: Fireproof Building, 100 Meeting St., Charleston, SC 29401. 5. Address of publisher: same. 6. Publisher: South Carolina Historical Society; Editor, Elise Pinckney; Managing Editor, David Moltke-Hansen, Fireproof Building, Charleston. 9. The purpose, function and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for Federal income tax purposes has not changed during preceding 12 months. 10. Circulation: total: average, 3500, last, 3500; Paid circulation: average, none, last, none; Mail subscription: average 3200, last 3298; Total paid circulation, average 3200, last 3298; Free distribution, average, 100; last, 50; Total distribution: average, 3300, last 3348; Copies not distributed: average, 200, last 152; Return from News Agents: none; Total: average, 3500, last 3500. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. Elise Pinckney.

"Our Separation is Like Years": The Civil War Letters of Deopold Daniel Louis

Edited by Jason H. Silverman and Susan R. Murphy*

French-born emigré Deopold Daniel Louis was a forty-three-year-old businessman in Orangeburg when the Confederacy passed the first conscription act in American history. Because of his age, he was assigned to Company G of the 11th South Carolina Reserves stationed at Camp Pocotaligo.¹ As a mature man with a family and an extremely prosperous general store,² Louis viewed the Confederate war effort with tempered patriotism. His responsibilities were many and leaving behind his forty-year-old wife, Ann, and his seventeen-year-old daughter, Mary, to manage the business and the slaves weighed heavily on his mind. So concerned about their well-being was Louis that he simply could not enter into his military responsibilities with the fervor and zeal that accompanied the enlistments of scores of younger Confederates. Indeed, throughout his three months of military service the thoughts of his home, family, and business permeated his every action.

Yet, Louis was nevertheless loyal to the Confederate cause. Although eligible, his fealty to the Confederacy and his honor as a southern gentleman prevented him from purchasing a substitute to serve in his place — even as many about him took advantage of this attractive loophole in the Conscription Act.

The late, eminent historian Bell I. Wiley, who read scores of Civil War letters in the process of researching his seminal books on the common soldier, certainly had Deopold Daniel Louis and the thousands like him in mind when he wrote, "Of all the lessons taught by the Civil War, one of the most impressive was the fact that men of forty or over

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¹Camp Pocotaligo was located on the east side of the Pocotaligo River in the northwestern corner of present-day Beaufort County. The Reservists served ninety days and comprised military units that most Confederate states maintained exclusively for their own defense by not requiring the Reservists to serve beyond the state's borders. Louis's term of duty was from November 7, 1862, to February 7, 1863. See National Archives Microfilm Publications, Microcopy #267, *Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations From the State of South Carolina, Roll #253*, (National Archives and Records Service, General Service Administration, Washington, 1958). These service records are housed in the S.C. Department of Archives and History, Columbia.

²The 1860 census for the state of South Carolina reports that the disclosed value of Louis's real estate was \$22,000 while the value of his personal estate totaled some \$70,000. See the *South Carolina Census, 1860*, under "Orangeburg", p. 406, located at the Archives.

cannot be transplanted from the settled ways of civilian life to the strain and exposure of camp without exacting a heavy toll."³

That a "heavy toll" was exacted in the life of Deopold Daniel Louis was readily apparent in the few extant letters that he wrote home to his wife and daughter. Unlike the letters that bespeak of battlefield glory and valor, Louis's letters provide an extraordinary glimpse into the tedium, strain, and anxiety that resulted from his being away from his loved ones and business concerns.⁴ Louis's letters also demonstrate that most men in his situation led two concurrent lives: the one in camp and the one attempting to maintain control over events at home. And, at all costs ties with the latter life had to be maintained.

The four letters are essentially as he penned them. They simply, but poignantly, express the preoccupations of a man trying to be a husband, father, and businessman while serving his country's call.

The editors would like to express their gratitude to James and Eloise Riel of Sumter, South Carolina, for obtaining the Louis letters and bringing these valuable documents to our attention.

Camp Pocotaligo
2 December 1862

My Dear Ann,

Just returned from the Butcher Pen after a [walk] of 6 miles. I had the pleasure of receiving your first lettre from Mr. Bolwing. I assure you nobody knows the gratification receiving lettres from their sweet home being in camp. I am glad to see that you and Mary enjoy the blessings of good health, for my self, I am doing as well as camp life [allows].

Don't trouble yourself about Store keeping much, you know your constitution is very weak. We have, so far, something to go on. I am glad Mr. Nesbitt sent the wheat seed. Tell Henry to take 1/2 Bushel to 1 acre. Send Mr. Nesbitt the amount of indigo he wanted. I know he is a gentleman. We had extremely cold weather, but now the weather changed and it is very warm.

³Bell I Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy* (1943; reprinted, Indianapolis, 1962) p. 245.

⁴Camp Pocotaligo was the scene of very limited action during the Civil War. On May 29, 1862 it experienced some slight skirmishing; on July 9 and 10 Union troops "demonstrated" against the Camp; several more skirmishes occurred near the Camp, in the fall on October 22-23. Not until late in 1864 and in early 1865 was it the scene of renewed skirmishing. Of course, given his term of duty, Louis saw none of this action. See E. B. Long, *The Civil War Day by Day: An Almanac, 1861-1865* (Garden City, N.Y., 1971), pp., 218, 238, 281, 613, 624, 627, 628. See also U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols., (Washington, 1880-1901), series I, vol. 14, pp. 20-25, 114-115, 525, 583; series I, vol. 47 (part I), pp. 191-193; series I, vol. 47 (part II), pp. 54-55.

Our cook, Harry, performs very well. We have in the morning tuff beouf and rice; dinner, rice and beouf; supper, beouf and rice again. We are very well content with that. You know it is help your self [here]. You say yourself [that] hunger is a good sauce [and that is true]. Everyone prays to go home, I see a resolution adopted in the legislature that all the officers of the home guard must consist of men from 45 to 50. Tell Joe Hurley his time is coming to go to camp. Charlie Bull, I suppose, will take to the swamp to hide himself. Hennon returnd Saturday in camp; he is well but trumpets all the time to go home.

Last Sunday was the longest day I spent yet. I could not help my self to return to my tent and studie about home. How sweet the times I spent there last Sunday. In the night we had preaching by Mr. Stuard. Most everybody turned out and we had a good Meeting. It is very refreshing for a soldier, as so many, one uses such a weekend for lounging [and thinking]. Last night we had prayer meetings again and singing until 11 o'clock. A young Mr. Darling from Barnwell, only 17 years old performed.

I thank you for the offer about the bed covering, we have plenty. Send me by Mr. Daniel Salley some paper and envelopes. I believe camp life would kill me if I had to stay one year. It is the toughest time I ever spent in my life. I believe half of our men won't be worth nothing any more.

We had an auction over one wild turkey, and [it] sold for 4 dollars. Privates are not able to get a turkey for 4 dollars with only 11 dollars a month. We have seen some ladies yesterday and cheered them very much. General Walker and staff paid us a visit. I believe our Regiment will burst up, we can [not] get the complement of men to billet up, but all the camp is rumors. Give me an answer soon, again I remain.

your forever devoted husband,
D. Louis

Give my love to relations
and friends.

Dear Mary,

I suppose you know the pleasures of camp life, but for myself I don't fancy it very much. We have a fine young man Lt. Morrison as drill master. You must be surprised what a fine parade we are performing.

We received yesterday a new Regiment from Greenville, 900 men. They stopped in Columbia for 3 days. I stood guard from 9 o'clock, to 9 o'clock some thing I never performed before [as much].

Your devoted father.

Camp Pocotaligo
14 December 1862

My Dear Wife,

I just returned from the Guard after standing eight hours on guard. I heard the news that Philipp Joiner, William Summer and John Felder have to go and bring [back] our runaways [*undecipherable*]. I could not let the opportunity go by to give you a little information about my present situation.

I was very pleased in your last letter to see that every thing goes along very well, but feel very sorry that you are not well. I have been warning you to let the store alone and not to worry yourself. Let business go to ruin, health is the greatest blessing we can enjoy.

I am this morning completely worn out [*undecipherable*]. We had to guard Mr. Jackson Rice, brother of H. B. Rice [of Orangeburg]. The Capt. put him in the guard [house] for not performing his duty, 24 hours with water and bread. The man was indeed sick, he cried like a little baby. I felt sorry for the man [but] we had orders not to speak one word with the prisoner. I went to the Major and told him that the prisoner was sick. The doctor came to examine him and gave him his freedom.

We are expecting big days. I received a letter from Hennon [saying] that he could get for me a substitute for 30 dollars per month, but I refuse to take one [it is not just]. I hope I will get a furlough before many days but I am thankful to get one. Granted our Col. [J. J. Ryan] is very hard on his men, no Regiment about here performs guard except we old Reserves. I received a very long letter from Weaver, he is in very fine spirits and believes before 10 months the war will be at an end. I hope and trust it will be so, but I am afraid the Yankees won't give up.

You must excuse me for such a short letter as I am very much fatigued and very sleepy. I hope that you and Mary will soon have some pleasant times.

Your devoted husband,
D. Louis

Dear Mary, You have to excuse me. I am completely worn out from guard duty.

Camp Pocotaligo
22 January 1863

My Dear Wife,

Nothing revives the separation for a poor soldier more than a letter from his family which gives him a good report from their

enjoyment of health, and the only way to renew our sentiments is by sending lettres one to another. The Lord knows that, and also my pleasure now when I receive your lettre. All the men ask me about health and news from our sweet home.

We have now again beautiful weather. The days here are very warm and the nights cold. We are expecting every day marching orders but we don't know where our future destination shall be. I believe for my choice, old Pocotaligo.

We had yesterday another good sermon delivered by Rev. Mr. Bank of Spartanburg. He is a beautiful speaker and good orator. Mr. Howell Easterling and Daniel paid us a visit this week. They said they came down in the buggy in one day, pretty fast driving, sixty miles per day, enough to kill the horses.

We had this morning after our parade very exciting times, three streets below us one case of smallpox broke out. I tell you the fright was great, but our trust is in the Lord. He will prevent this disease from us. The sick man was carried off to the hospital, and four camps moved away from us like a streak of lightening. Everybody old and young was compelled to be vaccinated. I believe mine will take again after having the smallpox once already.

I feel very sorry for you that you have to undergo so much fatigue, take everything easy and don't worry yourself about nothing [your health is of supreme importance]. Ten weeks [are over], what an awful long time and what a long separation. Someone said today every man and lady must feel this war [every day] and [they] think it will be an improvement for both sexes.

We also received this week for the first time for our ration, bacon, and everything is getting better. Don't send me any more meat skins as I am tired of it. If you see an opportunity send me some cornbread and small molasses cake if you please, also some potatoes. Henry Taylor is absent since the eighth of December; he is playing the gentleman at home and don't care for Patriotism.

How is Sam Clark getting along? [I do hope he is well]. I am sorry Joel Harby could not sell the wool nor indigo. Let me know how much he was offered for both. We old men must be getting very dissatisfied about our situation. We have a great many poor men who will have hardly time to split their rails and make fencing before planting time will catch them. This awful war makes everybody's calculations up. I went to one river one day 7 miles from camp and I seen I suppose 200 wild geese and ducks like our black birds. I suppose 2 to 3 hundred wild game are in abundance in this low country. All the plantations are most in splendid cultivation, some made from 10 to 20 thousand bushels rice, they are selling rice straw 1 1/2 to 2 per hundred.

I hope I won't be disappointed about Henry. I believe the balance of the Negroes don't want Henry as a Driver [he is too mean]. I have been describing the hay scene to Phil Hutto, our Overseer, and he says nobody stole the hay but our own Negroes. I suppose you command the cornhouse keys, thus Emmet sees that the bacon is given out. I think you better let Hanna come over and let the doctor give her some medicine, so she will be some service again.

We had a great many sick men last week, but they are all turned over to the medicine. Ben Simons sold his State Money for 28 dollars on the hundred. If I am lucky maybe this will give some satisfaction for my time lost, you must keep it if you get any — every dollar of State Money. I seen a long letter in the newspaper about the death of James Millhouse and Anson, both died as brave soldiers.

Have you received the veal and honey from Mr. James Nesbett? The direction you asked me is Mr. G. Canon, Fingersville, Spartanburg. The mail will close and receive my love and dreams from your every truly husband.

D. Louis

Give Mary 1000 kisses for me.
My love to all

Camp Pocotaligo
4 Febr 1863

My Dear Wife,

I have to embrace every opportunity to let you know when we are going home, but we are all at one standing. Nobody is able to find out the time. Col. [J. J.] Ryan is in Charleston to get our pay. I will have so much money. I believe I will get on a spree if I ever will see Charleston again.

We have today extremely cold weather. Good times for butchering, I suppose. You will have another frolic this week of it. I am getting very much homesick. It appears to me our separation is like years, but we can't help it, the only remedy is patience.

Henry Rowe is sick and going home on a furlough. Two men of Smith's Battalion are to be shot, one for deserting to the Yankees, and the other for deserting and stealing horses. We also have one of our men in the guard tent for 3 weeks, and all of his wages are to be taken from him. A great many of our soldiers are running away, some are absent or running away from my company. Nothing but honor is keeping me. We heard this morning heavy firing about Savannah.

Tell Henry he must get old Spott horse in good order as many of the Conscripts are wanting him to join the Calvary. A great many are

going in McHickett's Company. I believe if the horse is in order I could get from \$75 to \$100 for him. Also tell Henry to take care of the sheep and cattle, also the pigs and feed them well. I only wish I could get home soon, so I could manage my own business again. My mind is getting worried very much about home.

If you can find out when Lt. D. Salley returns please send me my watch. He is going home on a second furlough and we poor privates only are entitled to one in every 3 months [*undecipherable*]. My time again to go on guard duty. Guard is a time to studie nothing but home. You sit there and every soldier is speaking about home and how many weeks yet before we are getting home.

The wind is getting up and we will have a blustering day. I believe we are very much spoiled over, to be industrious again, I believe soldier life is a very confining and lazy period of life. The little experiences I have had is enough of it. Tell Henry to have corn and peas ground up for old Spott and I believe he will fatten from it. Lt. Salley is about to leave and it is my time for guard.

From your truly devoted husband
D. Louis

Give Mary many kises for me and
my compliments to all.

THE JOURNAL OF JOHN PIERPONT, TUTOR ON A WACCAMAW RIVER PLANTATION

Edited by Elise Pinckney

Soon after his graduation from Yale, the twenty-year-old John Pierpont sailed to South Carolina from his native Connecticut to seek his fortune "in a strange and a distant land." His destination turned out to be the rice-growing area of the Waccamaw River, where he was tutor from 1805 to 1809 for the sons of William ("King Billy") Alston of Clifton and Fairfield plantations.

The Account Book and Journal which the scholar began as he started his career afar is a small leather notebook, well-preserved and legible, which reveals much about the scribe as well as about his contacts in the south.¹

John Pierpont was to become conspicuous on the American scene as a Unitarian devine, poet and abolitionist. The few years in Georgetown County seem but a profitable digression from his New England image. His Journal occasionally uses phrasing that would indicate the budding poet, but his brief observations on the slaves do not here suggest the future reformer. It was not until 1843 that his third volume of verse *The Anti-Slavery Poems of John Pierpont* appeared. But he named his eldest child for William Alston; and he edited two school readers (which he had probably felt the need of when he was a tutor): *The American First Class Book* (1823) and *The National Reader* (1827), which were both classics for years.²

In coming south to teach, John Pierpont was following a trend set by many New Englanders who were Yale graduates. And in a few years he took the Alston boys back to his native area, where soon they entered the University themselves.³

To be tutor in the household of William Alston was a fine opportunity. The planter and his second wife (Mary Motte) had a young family of six children. Their main residence was at Clifton

¹Account Book and Journal of John Pierpont, The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. The editor is grateful to the Trustees of the Pierpont Morgan Library for permission to publish the Journal.

²George Harvey Ganzmer, "John Pierpont," *Dictionary of American Biography* (1934); Abe C. Ravitz, "John Pierpont and the Slaves' Christmas," *Phylon* 21 (1960): 383-86.

³Elizabeth Brown Pryor, "An Anomalous Person: The Northern Tutor in Plantation Society, 1773-1860," *Journal of Southern History* 47, (1981): 364-65; George C. Rogers, Jr., *The History of Georgetown County, South Carolina* (Columbia, 1970), p. 305; Arney R. Childs, ed., *Rice Planter and Sportsman: The Recollections of J. Motte Alston, 1821-1909* (Columbia, 1953), p. 25.