

Collection: BENTON, HENRY E. Papers
 Fort Fisher, New Hanover County
 1861-1865, 1874-1875, n.d.

Physical Description: 11 items; letters, poems, reminiscence, sketches.

Acquisition: Donated February 27, 1975, by Benton's great-grandson, H. Lamont Whitley, ~~Frederick~~, Fremont, Wayne County.

Description: In April, 1861, Henry E. Benton (1838-1901), son of George Benton of Cumberland County, enlisted as a private for six months with the Fayetteville Light Infantry which was mustered into state service as Co. F., 1st Volunteer (Bethel) Regiment. Mustered out in November, 1861, Benton enlisted the following February as a 1st Sgt. in Co. C., 36th Regiment. After the fall of Ft. Fisher, Benton--a 1st Lt.--was a prisoner of war on Governors Island in New York Harbor. In June, 1863, he had married Emeline M. Whitaker (daughter of Wesley Whitaker of Raleigh) who died in 1873 and was buried in Raleigh City Cemetery. Benton is buried in Maplewood Cemetery in Wilson.

Of the seven Civil War letters, the first is a fragment from Benton to his father, written just after the Battle of Bethel, June 10, 1861. These surviving four pages describe in detail the battle and its aftermath, including a brief description of the action of six volunteers who charged a farmhouse to burn out enemy occupants which resulted in the death of one volunteer, Henry L. Wyatt, the first Confederate soldier killed in action. Another letter of April, 1862, from Benton's father at Rockfish in Cumberland County enumerates the items he is sending at the request of his son (red flannel, tooth brush, tobacco, towels, etc.). Five letters from Benton to his finance/wife, 1863-1865, were written from the Ft. Fisher-Wilmington area and from prison. In the letter from Governors Island, he assures his wife that prisoners are well treated and requests that she send all U. S. money on hand.

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P.C. 1573.1

DESCRIPTION (cont'd)

The 12-page reminiscence [one lower corner of each page is missing] describes in precise detail the fall of Ft. Fisher [January 16, 1865-- "The beginning of the end had commenced..."]. Especially interesting is the account of the explosion of a magazine which killed over 100 Union men. Benton was court martialed because it was believed that the explosion was triggered from Battery Lamb across the river over telegraph lines which Benton had laid between a bombproof shelter near the magazine to the battery. Benton credits the testimony of wounded Gen. William Whiting, who was brought to court on a litter, with saving his life. [Note: Investigations revealed that two plundering sailors had been seen entering the magazine with "lights" just before the explosion.] The memoir further describes the sea voyage to Governors Island and conditions in the prison--food, guards, recreation, privileges, relationships--all in vivid detail. The reverse side of three sketches--of Ft. Fisher (2) and Rockfish community--have poems and philosophical notes expressing longing for "Margaret" and depression at his lack of achievement in life, 1874-1875.

Finding Aids:

Date Card
1861-1865

Geographic Card
New Hanover County - Ft. Fisher

Subject Cards
ROCKFISH, Cumberland County
WAR - Civil War - Battles
- Prison
- Units
WHITING, WILLIAM H. C.
WYATT, HENRY L.

Finding Aid completed 27 July 1976 by Ellen Z. McGrew