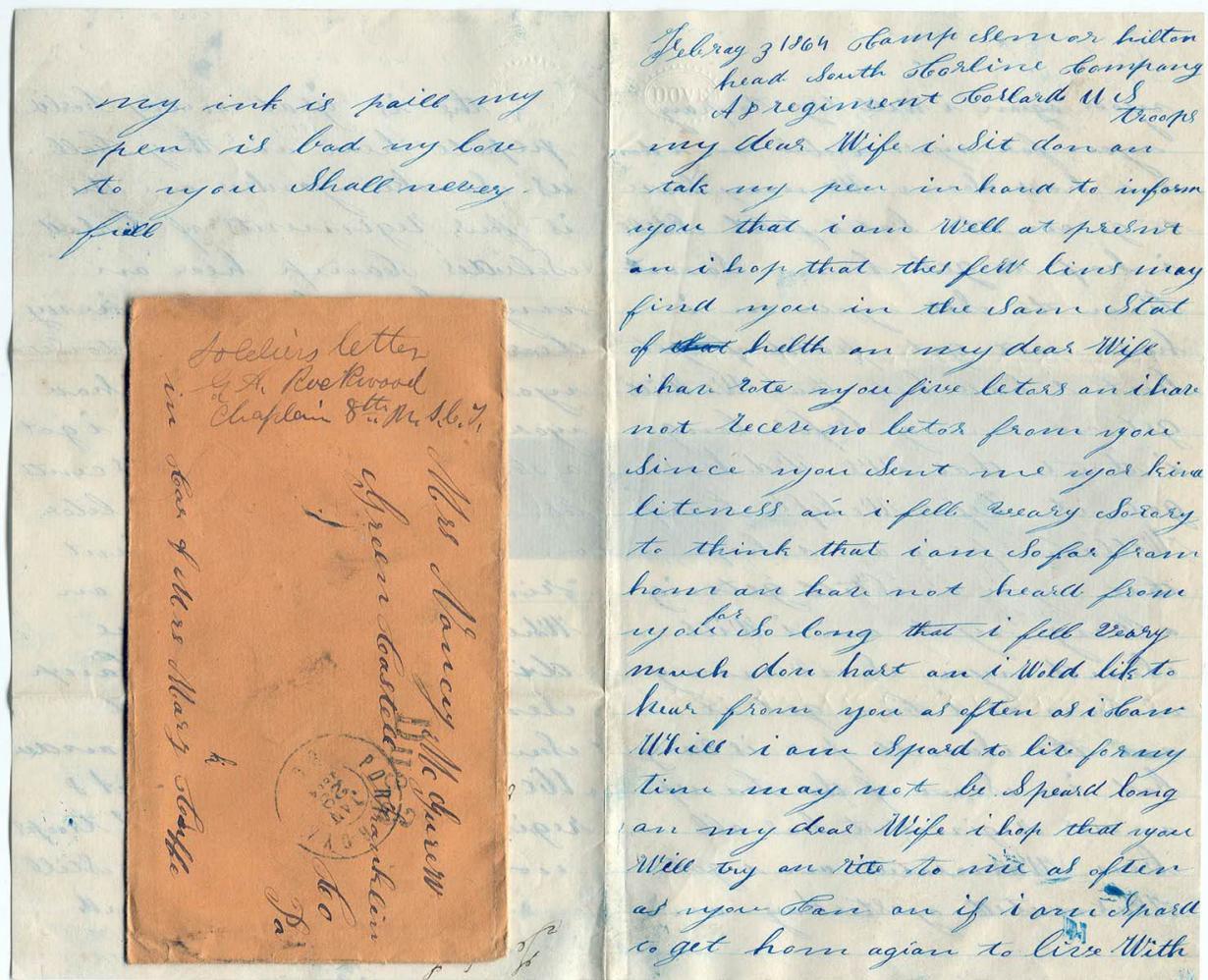


Alexander McGrew



When the late Martha Ziegler and her son G. Fred Ziegler IV gave Allison-Antrim Museum a collection of Ziegler family letters, there was found a particular letter, dated February 3, 1864. The handwriting was impeccable. With over 19 years of reading and transcribing letters, this letter was, by far, the easiest letter to transcribe. It was written by Alexander McGrew, a young man of 28 years. On July 31, 1863, he, along with all other eligible men, registered for the draft, in Chambersburg, PA. Capt. George Eyster, Provost Marshall, registered him, as he did all the eligible men in the south-central Pennsylvania counties of Adams, Bedford, Franklin, Fulton, and Somerset. From page 28 in the registration book, it is learned that Alexander was living in Hamiltonban Township, Adams County, PA. Hamiltonban adjoins the southeast border of Franklin County. He was married and was a laborer. Alexander was born in Pennsylvania and he was the only “colored” person listed on that page. Recruiting for the 8th Regiment Infantry U.S. Colored Troops began in the fall of 1863. According to the U.S. Army records, McGrew was drafted and enrolled, as a corporal, in Chambersburg on August 24, 1863.

you again i Will try to pay
you for your trouble an i don
no how soon We may have
to go on the batel felt still
i hope to get home soon
time to see you an i
have not got paid of yet
but i have hope that We Will
get our money before long
i thout that We Wod have
got it before We left Camp
William Penn an i hope
that you ar still getting
along yet an i Will
send you some money
as soon as i can get it
an the small pox is very
bad in some of the camps
an our regiment had all
ben vaccinated an i got
vaccinated yesterday an

the is grät every body
pepole hear an they shall
us smoke yankees an the
is four regiments of shorlud
solutes Camp hear an
my best love to you my
dear Wife an i long to see
your kind face an i have
your kind letters an i got
a staff for it i paid 75 cents
for it an i wrote you later
on the 28 of Janry an i sent
ring in it for you an
When you write to me
direct your letter Camp
Seymour Hilton head
South Caroline Helix road
Mc Guerr's Company of 8
regiment W. S. Shorlud troops
no more at present but still
reminds you dear husband
Alexander Mc Guerr

The draftees and substitutes of the regiment were organized at Camp William Penn near Philadelphia. In December 1863, Companies A, D, and F left for Delaware to obtain more recruits. On January 16, 1864, the regiment left Camp William Penn for New York, where the men boarded two transport ships and headed for Camp Seymour at Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. Here they stayed, under the command of Brigadier-General Truman Seymour, until February 5 when the 8th Regiment embarked for a campaign in Florida and landed in Jacksonville on the evening of February 7. The 8th USCT Regiment set out on their march the next evening, and until February 19, was successful in a number of encounters against the Rebels. On February 19, 1864, the 8th joined Colonel Hawley's brigade. The Union troops marched from their position toward Lake City, where the Rebels were known to be posted. Confederate General Finnegan, upon learning of the advance on his position, did not wait for the Union brigade to reach Lake City, but instead marched to Olustee, where he surprised the Union forces. The men of the 8th USCT suffered great losses at Olustee. After the battle at Olustee, the 8th participated in the following battles from February 20, 1864 until they were mustered out on December 10, 1865 and were discharged from Philadelphia on December 12, 1865: Bermuda Hundred, Chaffin's Farm, Darbytown Road, siege of Petersburg, Hatcher's Run, fall of Petersburg, pursuit of Lee, and Appomattox Court House. The total loss of men's

lives was: killed or mortally wounded – four officers, 115 men; died of disease – 132 men (total dead, 251); wounded, not mortally – 245 men; captured or missing – 72 men.

Alexander McGrew was a member of Co. A in the 8th Regiment Infantry U.S. Colored Troops. In December 1863, Companies A, D, and F left for Delaware to obtain more recruits. The regiment left Camp William Penn, on January 16, 1864, for New York, where the men boarded two transport ships and headed for Camp Seymour at Hilton Head Island, SC. When McGrew wrote his letter on February 3, 1864, he had been a soldier for five months and one week. Here the regiment stayed until February 5, at which time the 8th embarked for a campaign in Florida. The US Colored Troops landed in Jacksonville, on the evening of February 7, and set out on their march, the next evening. Until February 19, the 8th USCT was successful in a number of encounters against the Rebels. On February 19, they joined Colonel Hawley's brigade and began to march toward Lake City, where the Rebels were known to be camped, under General Finnegan's command. Learning of the advance on his position, Finnegan did not wait for the Union brigade to reach Lake City, but instead marched to Olustee, where he surprised the Union forces. The 8th Regiment U.S. Colored Troops suffered great losses at Olustee. Because Alexander's records had clerical mistakes from the time he was wounded and captured at Olustee and until well after his death, upon muster out of the regiment, I believe the number of total dead is most likely much higher than 251, as stated above.

At the time I started researching Alexander McGrew's story at the end of 2005, some U.S. Army records indicated that McGrew was captured (place and date unknown), and that he was considered absent without leave at muster out on December 10, 1865. It was here that my research came to a momentary dead end.

By 1860, 70% of freemen in the North were educated and Alexander McGrew was one of them, as is evidenced by his impeccable penmanship. McGrew's letter expresses his love for his wife, his longing to receive more letters from her, information about conditions in the camp, including the prevalence of smallpox and vaccination of the soldiers, and the conclusion – a love poem. But... but what happened to Alexander McGrew?

Ralph Archbold visited Greencastle and Chambersburg as Benjamin Franklin on November 20 and 21, 2006, during which time he made a presentation to Allison-Antrim Museum's membership and the public. In his concluding remarks, he said the following to all who were present – young and old, "Your legacy is your story." Archbold encouraged everyone to write down their experiences, whether they be everyday happenings or in response to some event of great note.

As an African American, what is so rare is to have a page from Alexander McGrew's story, in his own handwriting, albeit just a sliver of his whole life. Had he not written a letter to his beloved wife, his name at this point in time (2016) would only be a name on a monument honoring the U.S. Colored Troops, at the African American Civil War Memorial and Museum, in Washington, D. C. Because Alexander wrote a letter on February 3, 1864 to his wife about his day-to-day existence, he unknowingly left his legacy behind, for those of us living in the 21st century, to discover. The other factor which played a part in Alexander's story coming to light in the 21st century is the Ziegler family. Had four generations of Zieglers not kept the letter with

other primary historical archival pieces, the letter would have been lost, thrown out, or knowingly been destroyed in another manner.

In January 2006, Nicholas Carbaugh, grandson of AAMI members Lanny and Mary Jane Carbaugh, became a volunteer for AAMI, under the community service program, for graduation requirements for the GASD. Among other duties, Nicholas took on the assignment and challenge of doing further research on the life and story of Alexander McGrew. Both Nicholas and I knew that the research path may still lead to yet another dead end, and that we may never know what happened to Alexander McGrew.

Nicholas was persistent and used numerous resources. The last frame of his Power Point presentation to the faculty said, "We may never know the fate of Alexander McGrew. We do know he served his country in time of war." In his essay, Nicholas wrote, "I am not sure about my work helping resolve Mr. McGrew's adventures and his end. I hope that the information that I found will assist someone else to dig further. Not knowing the exact details of Mr. McGrew's service time is sad. I think the what, where, and when for anyone is important – to someone, I hope."

Within days after Nicholas gave his final presentation to the high school faculty, he received, in the mail, photocopies of Department of War records for Alexander McGrew, which answered questions and raised more questions. Buried for 140 some years, McGrew's Civil War records, which were 'unearthed' in the U.S. Archives by a researcher, have given us more insight into Alexander McGrew's life and legacy, simply because information was written down and kept.

What we know today is that Alexander McGrew was 5'5" tall and was a laborer in Franklin County when he was drafted into the Civil War at the age of about 28. He was promoted to the rank of corporal and was considered missing in action; it was assumed that Alexander was taken as a prisoner of war during the Battle of Olustee, on February 20, 1864. The Muster Out Roll of Company A, listed McGrew AWOL. According to the war records, found at the Archives, McGrew never received, from the day he was mustered in or at any other time, his due bounty (payment for his service by the government).

Hari Jones, historian and Assistant Director and Curator of the African American Civil War Memorial and Museum, in D.C., was able to explain the importance of other archival records, which were sent to Nicholas. Bounty requests, for arrears payment from muster in to muster out, show that on at least three occasions, twice in 1876 and once in 1881, someone was looking for Alexander McGrew. When McGrew was mustered in, his pay as a private would have been about \$7 per month. On October 12, 1876, a Mr. Ellerbrook contacted the Adjutant General's Office and asked for a "Copy of (McGrew's) trial, if tried," because he was listed as AWOL. The October 16, 1876 reply was, "Exchange, an(d) received a furlough 15th day of March 1865 since expiration of which he has been absent without leave. Company Regiment Records furnish no evidence of trial." Also, on October 12, 1876, a Mr. Pratt sought "Date of Capture, release of death." The reply (dated one year later 10.11.77) from the Adjutant General's Office was, "Prisoner of War Records show him captured at Florida Sta' Feby' 20.64 paroled at N.E. Ferry N.C. Mrch' 4.65 died April 10.65 at Camp Parole Hospital." Four years later, someone else was seeking information on McGrew because an information sheet is dated

May 6, 1881. The casualty sheets and resulting information tell us that Alexander McGrew received a gunshot wound in the left leg, at the Battle of Ocean Ponds, East Florida on February 20, 1864. He was taken to a Confederate hospital in the nearby town of Lake City where the Confederate troops were stationed. Here, he stayed until March 4, 1865, when he was paroled at N.E. Ferry, NC, along with other Union prisoners, in exchange for Confederate prisoners of war. From there, McGrew was sent to Camp Parole Hospital in Annapolis, MD, where he died of his injuries about five weeks later on April 10, 1865. Camp Parole was officially known as the U. S. A, General Hospital, Division No.1. Behind St. John's College, in Annapolis, was a smaller hospital known as U. S. A. General Hospital, Division No.2.

The practice of exchanging prisoners goes back to the War of 1812. This theoretically saved money for both sides because, in the case of the Civil War, neither the Union nor Confederates would be liable for the mounting expenses of prisoners of war, whether wounded in hospitals or those prisoners who were jailed, for extended periods of time.

The questions which still remain are: Who was looking for him? It was most likely his wife Nancy, because Alexander had not been paid anything for his service time from the day he was drafted. Nancy would, also, have been eligible to receive his pension, if she had not remarried after the war and the letter, dated February 3, 1864, was her proof that she was married to Alexander. When Alexander's company was mustered out, his monthly pay as a corporal would have been \$16 per month. From 1876 – 1881, Alexander's accumulated pay, with interest, would have been about \$5,000. After paging through all the Civil War McGrew and McGraw pension applications, there was no Alexander or Nancy McGrew, who matched Co. A, 8th Regiment USCT. Who were Ellerbrook and Pratt? Were they possibly hired by Nancy McGrew; and if so, who paid their professional fees to search for Alexander? Was it possibly George W. Ziegler? Who were Ellerbrook and Pratt? Were they possibly hired by Nancy McGrew; and if so, who paid their professional fees to search for Alexander? How could Alexander have survived for over a year in a Confederate hospital from his injuries, only to die, on free soil in Camp Parole Hospital, April 10, 1865 – one day after Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered to Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, signifying the end of the U.S. Civil War AND signifying that all people of color were free people? Where is Alexander McGrew buried? Since 2007, Lanny Carbaugh and I have been searching for Alexander McGrew's grave. McGrew is not buried in the Annapolis National Cemetery, near where Camp Parole was located. He is not buried in Cedar Hill Cemetery and he is not buried in the graveyard of the A.M.E. Church, on South Carlisle Street. The research continues.

All of the, now 150-plus years old, Department of War records that were “uncovered” in 2006, are now accessible, online through Ancestry.com. Because Alexander McGrew took his quill pen and paper and wrote a letter to his wife on February 3, 1864, we now know important parts of his story – his legacy, which is American history. Otherwise, it's a legacy that would have been long forgotten, by the second decade of the 21st century. Yes, Nicholas Carbaugh, your work helped resolve questions about who Alexander McGrew was and it has and will continue to assist someone else to dig further. You are definitely right Nicholas, it doesn't matter who one is, because “the what, where, and when for anyone is important.” Alexander McGrew made a difference in his daily life and he made a difference for our country when he bravely served as a member of Co. A, 8th Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops.

The transcript of McGrew's letter follows:

For ease of reading, the misspellings have been corrected for printing. McGrew used the word 'an' for periods at the end of his sentences throughout the letter.

“My dear Wife, I sit down and take my pen in hand to inform you that I am well at present and I hope that these few lines may find you in the same state of health an my dear Wife I have wrote you five letters an I have not receive no letter from you since you sent me your kind likeness an I feel very sorry to think that I am so far from home and have not heard from you for so long that I feel very much down heart an I would like to hear from you as often as I can while I am spared to live for my time may not be spared long an my dear Wife I hope that you will try an write to me as often as you can an if I am spared to get home again to live with you again I will try to pay you for your trouble an I don't know how soon we may have to go on the battle field still I hope to get home some time to see you an I have not got paid of yet but I have hope that we will get our money before long I thought that we'd have get it before we left Camp William Penn an I hope that you are still getting along yet an I will send you some money as soon as I can get it an the small pox is very bad in some of the camps an our regiment has all been vaccinated and I got vaccinated yesterday an there is great many colored people here an they call us smoky Yankees and there is four regiments of colored soldiers camp here an my best love to you my dear Wife an I long to see your kind face an I have your kind likeness an I got a case for it I paid 75 cents for it an I wrote you letter on the 28 of January an I sent ring in it for Ann an when you write to me direct your letter Camp Seymour Hilton Head South Carolina Alexander McGrew Company A 8 regiment U. S. Colored Troops no more at present but still remember your dear husband Alexander McGrew my ink is pale my pen is bad my love to you shall never fail”

Alexander entrusted the above letter to Rev. George A. Rockwood, chaplain of the Eighth Regiment. Alexander addressed the letter to his wife in the following manner: “Mrs. Nancy McGrew, Green Castle Franklin Co Pa in care of Mrs. Mary Coffey.” The new scholars listed for 1860 in the Greencastle Presbyterian Sabbath School included a Martin McGrew, a John McGrew, and a Nancy Cooper. I believe that Mary Coffey may have worked for George W. Ziegler, and that may be the reason the letter was eventually kept by the Ziegler family.