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Papers, 1858-1865, 1895. SC 331, Folder 5 [unpublished]

Taylor, Henry Clay, 1838?-1864
[s.l.]: [s.n.], [unpublished]

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Copy of a letter allegedly written in blood and smuggled out of Libby Prison in a coat button. The original blood-written letter is said to have been deposited in the Fond du Lac Museum, because Henry Clay Taylor became a leading citizen of that city. (Gave Taylor Park there).

According to Bob Hall, Taylor's son and a former SHSW anthropologist, he went to Fond du Lac to see the letter once, and the people there had no record of ever having received it.

Sibby Prison, Richmond Va.

Nov. 17 1863.

Dear Father & Mother,

I have an idea that I can let you know my situation in Sibby but you will observe it has to be done on a very fine scale, but here goes— my clothing is very good. I was lucky enough to have on a heavy pair of pants, coat, and vest when I was captured, and Cap. Ewen and myself have three blankets between us so we sleep very comfortable (on the floor) it is not a very soft bed but we have got pretty well used to it. — But the Prison ration is what troubles me. The officers are divided off into messes of thirty each and the rations per. day are as follows: Ten lbs. meat, one and a half qts. rice, one half loaf of bread, a little salt, vinegar and pepper, this is all each mess gets, and we mix it up ~~and~~ to gether and make a soup of it, we have a mess fund and buy a few vegetables to put in the soup, and ~~also~~ we buy rye to make coffee but it is a poor substitute, when we first came here we had good wheat bread, sent to us, but ~~now~~ now we have corn bread, and I know if you had some of it you would soak or boil it ^{before} for your hog — The meat ration is getting to be very regular, ~~four~~ days in the last two weeks we did not get meat. Twice we have had sweet potatoes in the place of meat. (one potato to a man) yesterday we had no wood to cook with, and to day (it is now 12 o'clock) there has nothing come in, not even potatoes, — My half dollar I traded for confederate money, got four dollars for it and put it into the mess fund. Milt had a little money, but it was taken away from him when he came here. — We eat, drink, sleep, and ~~so~~ ^{so} forth in the same room, we have roll call once a day, we are not allowed to put our head out of the window, we are allowed to ~~use~~ use tobacco but if we happen to spit on the floor or out the window we are liable to be put in the cell. the room that we are in is very full you can hardly put your foot down after we get laid down for the night, with out stepping on some one. now I have given you as good an account of how we live and are treated here as I can on this sheet, and now I will tell you how you can help us. The boxes that we get are ^{not} ~~in~~ fact very close. They only open the box and look into it, they do not open any of the packages. You can send us money in a package or in a sealed can mark the can or package with a cross, a box will come through quicker than a letter, and if money was sent in a letter it would be taken out. I sent for that fifty pounds of butter so that I would have enough to trade for some wheat bread, I hope it will be here before the contents of my box is gone, we received our box on the 13th and were very much pleased with the things, you were very thoughtful in the candles, tobacco, and onions.

I wish you had some of the money that is due me from the U. S. (nearly seven hundred dollars now) to pay for the things I send for. I feel ^{that} you have done more than enough for me all ready, but I can not help myself now, but if God spares my life until I can come home to you once more free. I will repay all. my health is good. There is a few cases of scurvy in the Prison, but I am sure I can keep clear of that, there is no more prospect of exchange now than there was when we first came here. I shall make a short visit home when I do get out. we will probably remain a few days in Washington to get our pay. Tell Mrs. Lowry I will remember her for that can of jam, it is very nice. I will send this out by one of the Surgeons. And send an other letter which will bear inspection, in which I will give you a list for another box - you can write long letters. Both of yours ^{are} received, but are very short. This is the smallest piece of business I ever done.

Love to all,

Henry.

copy of letter of

James Coffey of Uncle Henry's
Lewis Prison letter that came in Coat button

It seems many prisoners did this
trick but the "Rebs" got onto it
and crushed all the Coat buttons of those
going out.

Libby Prison Richmond Nov 17th 1863

Dear Father & Mother

I have an idea that I can
tell you know my situation in Libby, but you will observe
it has to be done on a very fine scale - but here goes
My clothing is very good. I was lucky enough to have on a
heavy pair of Pants, coat & vest when I was captured - and
Capt Owen & myself have three blankets between us, so we
sleep very comfortable on the floor, it is not a very soft
bed but we have got pretty well used to it. But the ^{Prison} Rations
~~for day~~ is what troubles me. The Officers ^{are} divided off
into messes of thirty each, and the rations for day are
as follows. Ten pounds of meat, one and a half qts. of rice,
one and half loaf of bread, a little salt, vinegar & pepper, -
This is all each mess gets, and we mix it up together and
make a soup of it. We have a mess fund and buy a
few vegetables to put in the soup. ^{and we also buy sugar to make coffee} When we first came here
but it is a poor substitute. we had good wheat bread served to us, but now we have
corn bread, and I know if you had some of it you
would soak or boil it, before you fed it to your hog -
The meat ration is getting to be very irregular, four days
in the last two weeks we did not get meat. Twice we
have had sweet potatoes served in place of meat (one
potatoe to a man) Yesterday we had no wood to cook
with, and to day (it is now 12 o'clock) there has nothing
come in, - not even potatoes. - my half dollar, I traded
off for confed. money. got four dollars and put it into the mess ^{fund}

Meitt had a little more, but it was taken ^{away} from him when
he came here. We eat drink sleep and — in the same
room. We have a roll call once a day. we are not allowed
to put our heads out of the window, — we are allowed to use
Tobacco, but if we hapen to spit on the floor, or out of the
window, we are liable to be put in the cell — The room that
we are in is very full; you could hardly put your foot
down, after we get laid down for the night, without stepping
on some one. Now I have given you as good an account
of how we live and are treated here, as I can on this sheet
and now I will tell you how you can help us —
The Boxes that we get, are not inspected very close —
They only open the box and look into it, they do not open
any of the packages. — You can send us money in a
package or sealed Cann. Mark the Cann or package with
a Cross. A Box will come through quicker than a
a letter, and if money was sent in a letter, it would be
taken out. I sent for that fifty pounds of Butter so that
I would have enough to trade for some wheat bread. I hope
it will be here before the contents of my box is gone —
We recd. our boxes on the 13th and were very much pleased
with them, you was very thoughtful in putting in the Candles,
Tobacco & Onions. I wish you had some of the money
that is due me from the U.S. (nearly \$700. now) to pay
for the things that I send for. I feel that you have done
more than enough for me already, but I cannot help my-
self now, but if god spares my life until I can
come to you once more, free. — I will repay all —
My health is good, — there are a few cans of Scurvy

in the Prison, but I am sure I can keep clear
of that, There is no more prospect of exchange
now, than there was when we first came here -
I shall make a short visit home when I do get out. We will
be detained a few days in Washington to get our pay. -
Tell Mrs Lowery I will remember her for that can of Jam,
it is ~~very~~ very nice. I shall send this out by one of the
surgeons, and another letter that will bear inspection - in
which I will give a list for another box. you can write
longer letters. Both of yours are recd., but are very short.
This is the ^{Smallest} smallest piece of business I ever done
Love to all from ————— Henry

The foregoing was written on a piece of paper $3\frac{1}{2}$ by $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches
and brought out in a Military Button

* A Silver piece, a present from his Mother, with his name
engraved on it

Sibby Prison Richmond Va.
Dec^r 17th 1863

Dear Brother

It is a dark rainy day, in R-d
and I can hardly see to write, and I am
in no mood to write, the third mail
came in to Sibby Yesterday, without
bringing me a letter, that I was
disappointed I need not say, it seems
that every one got a letter but myself,
I cannot think but that some of you
have written but it is very strange
that I do not get them, I have rec^d the
box with letter, &c all right, I am well
have enough to eat, drink, and to wear
for the present, my bed is rather hard
but I can stand it, I hope to god our
government will do something about
exchange before long, have you rec^d
the message I sent by the Dr: I wish June
would write to me, are the little ones all well
Love to all friends, and accept this
with much love from
my last stamp on this Henry

Asa B. Taylor Esq
Hond. Du. Soc
Wisconsin

Libby Prison Richmond Va

Dec 17th 1863

Dear Brother

It is a dark rainy day in R-d, and I can hardly see to write, and I am in no mood to write - The third mail came into Libby Prison yesterday without bringing me a letter, That I was disappointed I need not say, It seems that every one got a letter but myself. I cannot think but that some of you have written, but it is very strange that I do not get them, I have rec^d. the box of Butter &c. all right, I am well - have enough to eat, drink, & ^{to} wear for the present. My bed is rather hard but I can stand it. I hope to God our government will do something about Exchange before long. Have you rec^d. the message I sent by the Dr^s. I wish Jane would write to me; are the little ones all well? - Love to all friends, and accept this with much love from

Henry

My last Stamp on this }

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Copy of letter from Henry
 to Agro Dec. 17th 1863

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From Henry
 to Agro
 Dec. 17th
 1863
 Copy

Libby Prison Richmond Va
Sunday Dec 27th 1863

Dear Father & Mother

Your last letter of Dec 6th was rec^d last Monday, also one to Mitch from the Co. I have been waiting until we rec^d the box before I wrote, well the box came to hand yesterday all right, and I think we have enough provision now to last us until we are Exch^d we have a good winters supply, at any rate. Well how did you pass Christmas? we had a very good dinner, roast beef & chicken, and I presume that I felt better, yesterday morning, than I did two years ago. — Your suggestion in regard to my money matters is good, and if the present meeting of the Commissioners does not affect an exch^d I will authorize you to draw my pay, I have written two or three times, my papers that I left I Saint Adams (Salus), and it seems you have only got a part of them, my Commission & Muster paper, were in a package with the Sergt's warrant, & discharge, I can get duplicate copies of them, if they are lost, but I would like to have you write to Adams and see if he has got them. — The items of news from home, I will not comment on, now, remember me to Mrs Lowrey, Gould, Fuller, & all friends whose is Mollie Berry now? she has a cousin, live in Libby, have you rec^d the message I sent by Dr Corfo? Love to all, I hope to be with you before long. Yours W Berry,

Bridgport Wis

Dec. 12th 1863

J. M. Taylor Esq.
D^r Sir

Yours of the
6th is now before me in which
you ask me to send the
Button in which the Note
was secreted, I would gladly
do so but it is impossible
On arriving at Washington we
threw away our clothing, having
first cut the Buttons off that
contained letters, and when
here opened them sent them
to their different destinations,
and threw the Buttons away
considering them of no account
Respectfully Yours
J. C. Case

Budjapart Crawford & His
Dea. Lth 1863

J. M. Taylor Esq^r
Dr Sir

Enclosed you
will find a Note which I succeeded
in bringing out of Libby Brown
secreted in a Button for
Henry Taylor he is well and in
good spirits Trusting this will
reach you safe

I remain

Yours most respectful

Dr. Coffey

Wth R. J. W. Vol

Fond du Lac Wis. Dec. 6th 1863

Dear Sir

Your favor with a note enclosed from my son is recd. for which you have my hearty thanks. I have another favor to ask of you; I would like very much to get the Button in which that note was secreted. I would give a whole set for that one - can you send it to me? If so I will be under renewed obligations to you. ~~I have written out the note in common hand, and it makes full 2 1/2 pages on letter paper. The note and the Buttons I would like to possess for keepsakes~~

Very truly yours

J. M. Taylor

Doct. Casse Corp

Surg. 1st Reg. 1st Wis. Inf.

Bridgport Crawford Co
Wis

Copy

Libby Prison Richmond Nov 17th 1863

Dear Father + Mother

I have an idea that I can let you know my situation in Libby, but you will observe it has to be done on a very small scale. but here goes. My clothing is very good. I had ~~the good~~ was lucky enough to have on a heavy coat, pants + vest when I was captured - and caps. Ewan + myself have three blankets between us, so we sleep very comfortable on the floor. It is not a very soft bed, but we have got pretty well used to it. But the Prison Rations is what troubles me. The Officers are divided off into Messes of thirty each, and the rations for day are as follows; Ten pounds of meat one and a half qts of rice one half loaf of bread, a little salt, vinegar, and pepper. This is all each mess gets, and we mix it up together and make a soup of it. We have a mess fund and buy a few vegetables to put in the soup, and also buy Dye to make coffee, but it is a very poor substitute. When we first came here we had good wheat bread served to us, but now we have corn bread, and I know if you some of it, you would soak, or boil it before you fed it to your Hog. The meat rations is getting