



BHC-MSS 0025
Guide to the Papers of Sargent Willis McDonald
By Meg Rinn
September 2018

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Willis McDonald

Title: Papers of Willis McDonald

Dates: June 1863-April 1865

Quantity: ½ manuscript box

Abstract: Willis McDonald served in Connecticut's 17th regiment during the American Civil War, and acted as the regimental historian. He recorded both his own accounts and that of other men in the regiment of major events such as Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. The scant correspondence offers light into his own personal experiences of the conflict.

Language: English

Repository: Bridgeport History Center

Biographical History

Willis McDonald was born in Brooklyn, 1842, the son of William McDonald and Mary Willis. He had two sisters, and was raised in a deeply religious Methodist Episcopal family. Around 1858, Willis moved to Norwalk, Connecticut, and began to pursue learning the carpenter trade.

McDonald enlisted in the Connecticut 17th regiment as a private in late August or early September of 1862. Remaining with the 17th, he saw some of the roughest fighting in the war, including that of Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, the Barlow March, Blocher's Knoll, and participated in siege operations at Morris Island, among others. Willis also acted as the regiment's historian and record keeping, meaning that much of the 17th's experiences were recorded at his hand.

He left the army with the rank of sergeant. He married Mary E. Cole on April 1866, not long after he left the army in 1865. The two had three children together. McDonald's career after the Civil War's conclusion saw him enter the book printing business in New York City.

Willis McDonald died on February 27, 1919 in Amityville, New York and is buried at Pinelawn Memorial Park in East Farmingdale, New York.

Scope and Content Note

Small in number and ranging in dates, this collection offers a small insight into McDonald's personal experiences of the Civil War.

Arrangement note:

Chronological, save last item which without a year, may or may not be from the Civil War era.

Administrative information:

Provenance: Gift received in 2015. (Accession #201.31)

Preferred Citation:

Papers of Willis McDonald (BHC-MSS 0025), Bridgeport History Center.

Names and Subject Tracings

Personal Names

McDonald, Willis.

Corporate Names

Connecticut Volunteer Infantry Regiment, 17th (1862-1865).

Subject tracings

American Civil War--United States.

American Civil War--United States--Collected Correspondence.

Connecticut--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.

Connecticut--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Regimental histories.

Detailed box and folder listing

Box 1

1. Letter, November 7, 1862
2. Letter, December 19, 1862
3. Letter, January 4, 1863
4. Letter, January 4, 1863
5. Letter, February 22, 1863
6. Letter, April 2, 1863
7. Letter, July 22, 1863
8. Letter, October 7, 1863
9. Letter, July 26, 1864
10. Letter, November 1864
11. Envelopes, April-November 1864
12. Letters, undated
13. Letter, May 3, no year, with an obituary clipping