



Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society, Inc.

Daniel Gates Merritt – Letters from the Civil War

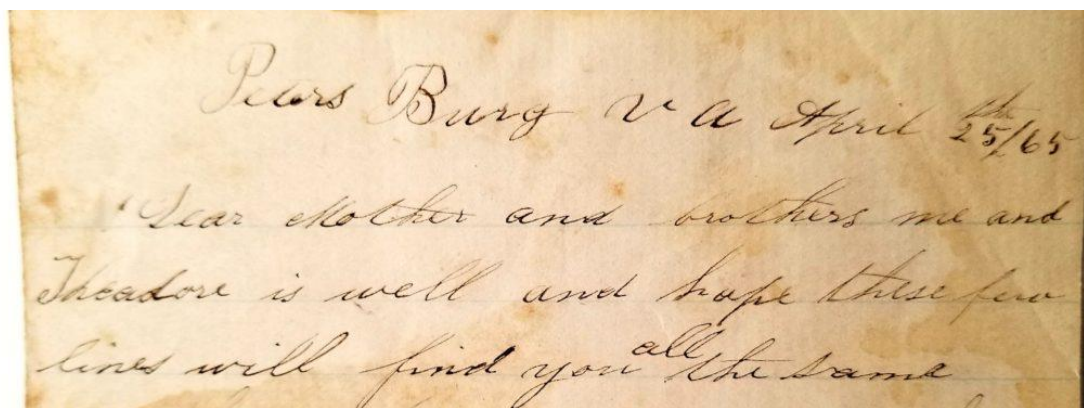
by Joanne Mason

(Note: A version of this article was first published on July 22, 2018 on the blog Dot Blossoms. It is reprinted here with permission.)

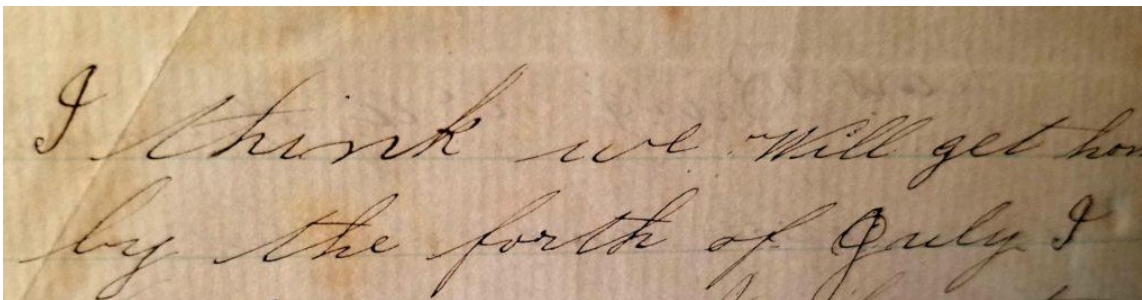
I knew I had a few Civil War soldiers in my family tree, and today I was able to put a name with — well, not a face — but some handwriting and some stories.

Daniel Gates Merritt was my 4th great-uncle. Born in Patterson, New York in 1841, he entered the military in September 1864. On April 25, 1865, he was in Petersburg, Virginia, writing home to his parents, William and Esther Jane (Mabie) Merritt.

Here are some snippets. Please note that I have retained Daniel's spelling and grammar:



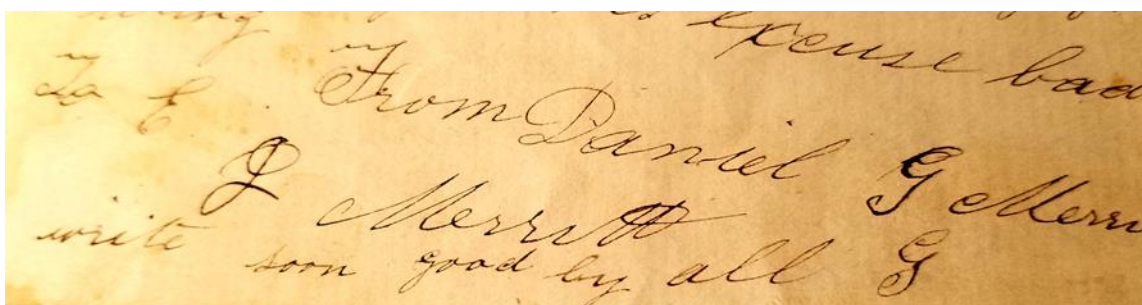
Dear mother and brothers me and Theodore is well and hope these few lines will find you all the same. [Daniel had an older brother named Theodore, but I don't know if his brother is the same Theodore mentioned.]



I think we will get home by the forth of July. I hope we may.

He also wrote:

There is plenty of tobacco hear where we are. It is a tobacco factory. There is over 2 ton of leaf hear now. The boys has had all the plug tobacco they wanted.



I'm not sure whether Daniel made it home by the Fourth of July, but he was mustered out of military service on July 13th, so he was probably close. Sadly, he passed away in 1869, a few weeks before his 28th birthday.

As I read this letter, I realized that it was written just ten days after President Lincoln was assassinated. On the day it was written, Lincoln's funeral train was traveling through Daniel's home region in New York, heading up the east side of the Hudson River. It passed through Tarrytown, the place of Daniel's enlistment, to Albany, before it swung due west on its way to Springfield, Illinois.

Also on that day, John Wilkes Booth was hiding out at a farm about 75 miles away. He was killed on April 26th.

And Daniel's newborn niece, Carrie Jane Cowl, was just two days old. She grew up to become my great-great grandmother.

Resources:

The Lincoln Highway National Museum & Archives (link no longer available)

[Mr. Lincoln and New York](#)

[Indiana Historical Bureau](#)

The Lincoln Inaugural Train of 1861 and The Lincoln Funeral Train of 1865 (link no longer available)

[Surratt Museum](#) (provides map and timeline of John Wilkes Booth's escape and capture)