

THE FILSON CLUB HISTORY QUARTERLY

Vol. 30

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY, APRIL, 1956

No. 2

POSTSCRIPT TO THE BATTLE OF MILL SPRINGS

BY CASSIUS M. CLAY

Paris, Kentucky

As an addenda to the article entitled "Zollicoffer and the Battle of Mill Springs" by R. Gerald McMurtry, published in the October, 1955 issue of *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, pp. 303-319, there are here presented the letters of a Union officer who participated in at least part of the battle.

Green Clay, the writer of these letters, was a young man in his twenty-third year. That the letters have been preserved is due to the methodical habits of his father, Brutus J. Clay (1808-1878), whose papers and correspondence have been handed down intact to the writer of this article. It is pure accident that some of these letters survive, since in several cases the writer requested his father to destroy them. Due to the lapse of time—more than 90 years—there can be no impropriety in publishing them now.

The following information about the writer of these letters is taken from his college class records.¹ Green Clay was born near Paris, Kentucky, February 11, 1839. His father, Brutus J. Clay, at the time the letters were written was a member of the Kentucky House of Representatives from Bourbon County; and in 1863 was elected as a Unionist to the 38th Congress, where, by reason of his prominence in agricultural affairs, he was appointed Chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture². He was a brother of Cassius M. Clay, Minister to Russia in the Lincoln and Johnson administrations, who, upon his appointment in 1861, had taken his nephew, Green Clay, the writer of these letters, with him to Russia as Secretary of the United States Legation.

Later in 1861, the young man returned to Kentucky "as a bearer of dispatches"; and by personal intercession with Secretary Seward was granted by the latter leave of absence to enter the Union Army, which he did just in time to participate in the battle of Mill Springs, as an aide to Brigadier General A. Schoepf.³

Clay's service with the Union forces was terminated by the expiration of his leave of absence from the State Department. Since the letters themselves carry forward the story, and they convey better than any condensation could the "feel" of the Civil War period, vanished along with negro slavery which it ended, the letters will be allowed to speak for themselves.

Brutus J. Clay being in Frankfort for the session of the legislature, the first is a letter home:

Washington, D. C.
Dec. 1, 1861

Dear Aunt Ann:

As you will be expecting, I write to let you know I can't be at home before Saturday morning. There is such a rush of business in advance of the meeting of Congress, that it is very difficult to have an interview with any of the heads of the Depts. I saw Mr. Seward last night, & will find no difficulty in accomplishing what I want. The boy that goes with me I want him to have one good suit of jeans—the coat of tolerably good length—& the pants sufficiently long—not like those Isham wore to town with me the other day, 6 or 8 inches too short. He had better also have a round-about of some sort of heavy "cassimere"—and probably pants too, if convenient. I would prefer Isham—or if it suits you better, I will take "Hancin"—Mingo's son—I will be at home however some 3 or 4 days before leaving, may be longer—XXX

Yrs. truly,
Green Clay

In due course, the dutiful addressee, who was both the boy's aunt and stepmother⁴, forwarded the above to her husband in Frankfort with the following letter of transmittal:

Thursday evening

My Dear Husband:

I wrote to you on yesterday, but today received a letter from Green. He said he could not possibly get home before Saturday night, but I will enclose his letter so you will see what he says about the boy. And I wish you as soon as you receive this letter to write me word whom I must get ready to go with him, for I shall be much hurried to get one ready and would like for you to say who is to go as soon as possible. As you gave him the liberty of selecting from the plantation he will not expect to be opposed in his second choice but I did not expect you would consent for Henson to go. I am still expecting hourly Mr.

Anderson for the sheep. We are all well, and all hands shucking corn. Tom went to Madison today for the sheep. Please let me hear from you by the time Green gets home.

Yrs.

Ann M. Clay

The reply to this letter is missing, but from the following, it appeared that neither of the colored boys suggested could be spared at that time from their farm duties.

Paris, Ky.

Dear Pa:—

I sent Tom over to Nicholasville this morning—Will overtake him there tonight by railroad—I have every thing I desired—I expect to join the General Sunday.

Will write you as soon as I arrive.

Yr. aff. son,

G. C.

Friday, Dec.—

Would like to have come down before going, to see Grand Ma⁵ etc.—but had not the time. My love to all.

Junius B. Holloway, the writer of the next letter was a nephew of Mrs. Brutus J. Clay⁶, who was on leave from the Union Army because of a minor hospitalization:

Paris, Ky.

Dec. 15th, 1861

Brutus J. Clay,
Frankfort, Ky.

Dear Uncle:

I have been intending to write to you for several days knowing you would like to hear from home. Green left on Friday. He has by this time reached his brigade. He was fortunate in getting off so early, as he may have the pleasure of witnessing a battle this week. It is rumored that Gen'l Marshall is now in possession of Prestonsburgh. I hope Gen'l Buell will at once impede his progress. The Secessionists about here are again getting very bold. I have been to Paris once, or twice since you left. You can see them assembled in cliques all over the town. I think it would be advisable to send another regiment here. Frank Colchord is back here again, and a very strong Secessionist. One of them bid Green good-bye—Wished him "Every *Personal* success, but his brigade, a thorough drubbing, and himself a very fleet horse in the first engagement." I have concluded not to accept

the transfer, but to join my company at Washington as soon as my toe admits of it. I will have a better chance of distinction with the Army of the Potomac. My leave of absence has been extended until I am able to walk well. Everything about the farm is going on very well. Anything I can attend to about the farm I will be very happy to do it. Ed Garrard⁷ was here a few days ago—He is very anxious to join the Army. I believe he is expecting you to get him some position. Should anything of importance transpire I will inform you immediately. Hoping to hear from you soon, I remain

Very Respectfully
Your nephew,
Junius B. Holloway

P.S. The family are all well and send their love.

J. B. H.

Hd. Qrs. 1st Brigade
Somerset, Ky., Dec. 17, '61

Dear Pa:—

I arrived Sunday. The Gen'l. gave me quite a warm welcome. I find my situation etc., very agreeable. We are now in very comfortable qrs.—at a house in the town—

There is no chance of a fight for some days yet. Whenever it may come on we feel quite confident as to a favorable result.—I will write you every few days to let you know of our movements—

The Gen'l is a stirring man—When he does move you may expect success—tho there is no doubt that the enemy outnumber us at present—There was a little picket skirmish a day or two ago—I rode out this evening with the Gen'l to our advance pickets

Yrs. Affec'y
G. Clay

Hd. Qrs. 1st Brigade
Somerset, Ky.
Dec. 28, 1861

Dear Pa:—

Yr. letter of a day or two back is recd. We are very much annoyed with the officiousness of the newspaper correspondents, who say some things that are true & to our detriment but mostly they give exaggerated camp-rumors. We are in no fix for an advance as yet without reinforcements, especially cavalry in which, tho the most advanced brigade in the field, we are greatly deficient. Still we must soon either

advance or fall back for forage etc. is becoming very scarce—I go tomorrow to Lebanon to see Gen. Thomas on official business—We have a fair chance to make an advantageous fight, should we receive concert of action from Columbia—Zollicoffer I believe will not attack, tho we are always ready for him—His cavalry sometimes make a very bold dash close into our lines, which we find ourselves unable to return in the absence of cavalry of our own—We however paid our compliments to him the other day in force—Drove in his pickets, & confounded him considerable as to the object of our movements—So with the exception of an attack of the enemy on us, there is I think no very great probability of a battle soon—without Gen'l Buell makes some different arrangements—Yet we can tell but little more about it than you—The order of today may be countermanded tomorrow & so it goes.

Affectionately
Yr Son Green C.

My love to all—tell Aunt Ann she must write—I have met with some relatives of ours here by the name of Milton⁸—

G.C.

It is strange, I have not heard from Uncle Cash since I arrived home—

The next letter is enclosed in an envelope marked "Somerset, Ky. Jan 7th—Paid 3" and bears on the reverse "P.S. Please send a few letter stamps, as we have none here at Somerset."

Hd. Qrs. 1st Brig.
Somerset, Ky.
Jan 6/62

Dear Pa:

You are interested in our movements, so I will make it convenient to write a line or two every few days. The roads are becoming almost impassible & action now is not only our desire, but to a great extent, our existence. Gen'l Thomas, if this weather does not prevent, will allow us a programme in two or three days—He had sent to the General a very *strange* dispatch, in contemplation of a movement—But as yet no concert of action is arranged—There is no doubt but what Zollicoffer has been reinforced by Crittenden, with very few troops however.

The health of the Camp and all is very good, probably better than could be expected under the circumstances—I wish Aunt Ann would

consider whether she could spare Isham? I *may* conclude to send Tom home—However I will not give you nor her any trouble about it.

Affect'ly Yr. Son G.C.

P.S. These little scraps that I may write you, you will please burn—

Hd. Qrs. Somerset, Ky.

Jan 10 — 1862

Dear Pa:

We are still at this place, but will advance now very soon. Gen. Schoepf has submitted 2 or 3 times a plan—for himself to cross the river & get in the rear—let Gen. Thomas advance from Columbia & thus make a sure thing of entrapping Zollicoffer & his entire command. But tho. meeting with the approval of Gen. Thomas Gen. Buel objects to it. So the plan that is now to be pursued is for an advance on this side of the river, & I have no doubt it will but result in driving him across—& *that is all*. We tho with inferior numbers are to attack in front. Gen. Thomas is now this side of Columbia in force—and a few days will decide the result—

But remember if Zollicoffer escapes by recrossing the river it will not be the fault of Gen. Schoepf—

We have in camp now 2 prisoners—who were of Crittenden's command & joined Zollicoffer about 10 days ago. With such reinforcement he can now no doubt number from 9 to 10 thousand—

We have now only about 2 days' rations & the roads are about impassible—The telegraph is expected to be completed to this place tomorrow or next day, still this will not bring us rations—

We will probably, however, soon join Gen. Thomas' provisions.

Yr. Son, G. C.

[marked] For *your perusal alone*.

The next letter is after the battle which occurred on Sunday, January 19th. It was written in pencil.

On cars from
Nicholasville
Wednesday 22.

Dear Pa:

I have been on the spur ever since the battle & for two days before—So have not had time to write you until this opportunity—A *complete* victory on our side. The enemy showed great weakness in anticipating our movements by his own move—leaving his entrenchments & marching out 8 miles to meet us—Gen. Thomas's column met them first &

repulsed them with considerable loss on both sides—but the enemy lost 2 to our one—After the first repulse they fought bravely—I suppose such a complete rout never was known to *any army*.

They fled panic stricken for 8 ms. to their entrenchments—leaving knapsacks—guns—wagons & 2 pieces of artillery on the road—We came up in close pursuit—shelling them 2 or 3 times—until we finally commanded their entrenchments—& shelled them from 2 points—they only replied with 6 guns—The night closed upon us—& we lay upon our arms under their entrenchments until morning—& at daylight threw a few shells into their entrenchments, receiving no reply—We marched up—& were soon in possession of their entire works.

They had crossed the river during the night—leaving every thing, 10 pieces of artillery—several hundred head of cattle and horses, besides several 100's wagons—Left everything, their private baggage & all. They had winter qrs. for 15000 men, log huts—

We took positions in their encampment & shelled some tents on the other side of the river—but found no one there—

Their last order was by their Comd'g Officer for them to disperse & save themselves as best they could—

So this army was scattered to the winds and will not be again organized—

Zollicoffer was killed in the first engagement by Col. Fry of 4th Ky—

I have not time to give you further particulars—You will find them authenticated in tomorrow's "Journal."

The battle commenced on Sunday morning—We occupied their entrenchments on Monday morn.—

I myself was not in the first & severest engagement—but came up soon afterwards & participated in all the rest—

I am on my way to Louisville by order—I have in my possession the enemy's flag captured—which is to be presented to Gen. Buell^o—

Steamboat & barges were first shelled by us & afterwards burned—

Details not yet made out—Our *estimated* loss 60 to 80—Enemy's 130 to 150—probably not very correct—We have about 40 prisoners—4th Ky. Col Fry & 10th Indiana suffered most—Only 4 Regs. in first engagement. Enemy estimated 10000 infantry, 1800 cavalry & 16 pieces artillery—

I expect to be in Lexington Friday night & will leave for Somerset Saturday morning—

If Aunt Ann can spare Isham I wish she would send him to the Broadway Hotel Friday night—with *one suit* of good clothes & my *valise*.

Will send Tom home—The General may ask for my appointment as his Adjutant General (not certain however & you must say nothing about it). In such case must I accept & resign my position as Sec. of Legation? I see Uncle C[ash] is to be recalled¹⁰—& I have heard nothing from Cameron¹¹—

I hope you will make this out (written on the cars).

Write to me at Lexington Broadway Hotel by Friday night

Yr. Son.

G.C.

Hd. Qrs. near Somerset, Ky.

1 mile fr. Waitsboro, Feb. 1, 1862

Dear Pa:

We left Somerset with intention of going to Monticello—thence in direction of Knoxville, Tenn.—The roads are so bad (for 9 ms. this side of Monticello impossible we understand)—we are now brot. to a halt. Part of our forces are across the river at Waitsboro & part on this side—the river very high & still rising—we have just recd orders from the division commander to remain where we are & await further orders—on acct. of the impossibility of provisioning us over such terribly bad roads. So I presume for some weeks now there will be a truce to all advance movements on the part of our wing of the army.

The weather has been very rainy & bad now for 2 or 3 weeks—And from the exposure lately I have been quite unwell for 2 or 3 days—but feel almost well this morning. Our Hd. Qrs. are now at the house of Mr. Owens & we are very comfortable.

The enemy are completely dispersed. A few only gathered together at Knoxville leaving wagons & etc all along the road, even far beyond Monticello. They left a good many sick at Monticello & letter from Crittenden asks for them mercy at our hands, which of course would be the case without his request. There will be a resignation of 2 or 3 officers in the 38th Ohio Regt. in our Brigade—& say to Ed. Garrard if you see him, I will try to obtain for him, if I can, the position of Lt. Colonel or Major, either of which I suppose he would accept. I have been very much tempted to try to obtain the position for myself, & join the army permanently; but will follow your advice & remain with Gen. Schoepf until March—then will decide as to going back to Russia. I recd a letter a few days ago from the State Dept., saying that the change of Ministers would not interfere with my leave of absence & that if I should desire it, they would even extend my leave of absence to suit my wishes—Anyhow I should prefer to receive a letter from Mr. Cameron inviting me to remain in the position before I decide as to the matter—

Aff'tely, Your son

G. Clay

The next letter is from Junius B. Holloway on official stationery, "Head-Quarters Department of Ohio. Louisville, Ky.," to which Holloway apparently had meanwhile reported.

March 3, 1862

Hon. B. J. Clay,
Frankfort, Ky.

Dear Uncle,

I received your letter this morning. There is nothing now here, except that Buell is beyond Nashville. You may expect to hear of a bloody battle very soon, either at Columbus, or Murfreesboro. Columbus is not evacuated by the "Rebels," but they are reinforcing very heavily. If they remain at Columbus 10 days, their entire command will be bagged by ours for us. We have heard nothing from Gen. Buell today. Green is in Nashville. I have had Mr. Harkins's application placed on file. I am told there is no vacancy for the appointment of a wagon-master, but that there may be one. My solicitations were kindly received. I think if a vacancy occurs soon, he will stand a good chance of getting it. I applied for a position for Ed Garrard, but without success. Tell Ed the War will be over any how before he could get ready. I will give Mr. Harkins's case my special attention. I enclose you a letter from Lucius Desha to Gen. Buell. I send it because I know you will enjoy it. Do not show it to any one—burn it as soon as you read it.¹² We have quit issuing passes to Bowling Green and Nashville, by order of Gen. Buell—I suppose for the reason that they are about to fight again. I will keep you posted in regard to the movements of the Army. 30 Rebel prisoners have just reached here from Southern Kentucky—They are miserable looking fellows. Give my love to Cash—Green never told me why he gave out going to Washington—He spoke of resigning his position in Russia—But, I advised to hold on to it, knowing that you are opposed to his going into the Army permanently¹³.

Affectionately
Your nephew,
J. B. Holloway

Three final letters written on the letterpaper of the "Metropolitan Hotel, Washington City" show that young Clay, when March came around, decided to return to Europe. In making this decision he yielded to what obviously were his father's wishes.

Washington, D. C.
Sunday Mch 23 '62

Dear Pa:

I called upon Mr. Seward last evening. Mr. Cameron had desired to select his own Sec. of Leg.—The Dept. refused to remove

me for this purpose, without it was my wish. Mr. C[ameron] got a little "crusty" about it, & said he would not go then. Mr. Seward thinking it might be more agreeable to me concluded to vacate a position of same rank & salary & so if I desire, will transfer me to the Court of Turin (the new Republic of Italy), where I shall have greater advantages of climate & improvement. But he says I can retain the other position if I want to, Mr. C[ameron] notwithstanding. Of course I have no hesitation about choosing Turin to St. P[etersburg]—And will call tomorrow morning at the Dept. & be transferred, immediately—Will then write Mr. Cameron a very polite note, informing him of my vacation of the position and place it in his service. The circumstance shows that the administration are not much inclined to humor Mr. Cameron, and as they do not like for such things to get out, you will please consider the repetition I have written, as made to you alone—

This consideration shown me by the Govt. I consider very complimentary—and gratuitous too, I appreciate it the more. Mr. S[eward] told Mr. C[ameron] I had done "so well" I should not be removed. Mr. Seward by standing up for a young man, even where it would place him in collision, with those high in State & even to the prevention of Mr. Cameron accepting his mission—has made me his firm friend, as far as all personal feelings can go—and to him I am much indebted. Mr. S. also said if I desired to remain in the Army longer, I could do so & resume my position after another campaign, but this will be too much trouble and expense now. I am *grateful to Uncle Cash—beyond measure*—but must say, it is more honor to be free from the favor of nepotism, in any *public* position.

I will write to Aunt Ann in a day or two. Tell Sid¹⁴ I will also write to him soon—when you see him—show him this letter, so that he may know of my movements.

Yr. Aff. Son
Green Clay

Monday, Mch 24 - '62

Dear Pa:

I wrote you a letter yesterday—but left it open so that I could enclose this, this morning. I have just returned from the Dept. Have been transferred to *Turin*. But as it will require the confirmation of the Senate, my papers will not be ready by the 26th, the day I expected to sail. So I shall have to await the next Cunard steamer & sail from Boston Apr. 2nd. In meantime I will leave tomorrow morning for Harpers Ferry to see Sister Martha¹⁵—As I shall go to Turin the Dept. desires me to go as soon as convenient. Mr. Marsh, the minister, is

a man, whom I will find at once agreeable & improving. He is no politician, but an excellent scholar & fine linguist. I am pleased with the change.

Mr. Seward wrote me some two weeks ago at Louisville offering to make this change if agreeable to me. But I did not receive his letter—if forwarded to me at Paris, you can open it—and need not send it to me.

My address will now be "U.S. Sec. of Leg. at Turin, Sardinia"—But should you desire to write to me before I leave, direct to "St Nicholas Hotel, New York," & I will get it as I pass through.

Your Affect. son
Green Clay

Folded on the same letter sheet was the third letter, as follows:

Dear Aunt Ann:

As you will see from my letter to Pa, that I shall go to see Sister Martha, if I can get thro., on the R. R. as I understand it is now nearly or quite completed to H[arper's] Ferry—Will deliver your letter. etc.—& write you after my visit.

I remember the morn. I started Isham sent to me to get some money he had placed in my valise—I did not have time to attend to it. When I unpacked it I saw nothing of the money—Ask him where he put it & may be he can find it—

Affectionately, G. C.

Young Green Clay's return abroad ended his military career and prospects of preferment in the Union Army. He remained as Secretary of the Legation to Italy throughout the War, first at Turin and later at Florence (after the Italian capital had been moved to that city). After his return to the United States he became a cotton planter in Mississippi, where his father had a large plantation. Upon his father's death in 1878, he inherited this, together with lands in Audrain County, Missouri,¹⁶ where he later established his permanent residence, and died at Mexico in that county, October 31, 1912.¹⁷

FOOTNOTES

¹ Green Clay graduated from Yale, 1859; and from the Harvard Law School, 1861. At Yale he was active in various undergraduate affairs and a member of the Senior Society of Skull and Bones. *History of the Class of 1859, Yale College, a Record of Fifty-Nine Years*. The Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor Co., New Haven (1914), pp. 50-52.

² Cong. Globe. 1st Sess., 38th Cong., Vol. I, p. 18.

³ At the time he entered the Union Army, he held a commission as colonel in the Kentucky militia, having been appointed as such by Governor Magoffin in 1859.

⁴ Brutus J. Clay was twice married (1) to Amelia Field, who died July 31, 1843 and (2) to her younger sister, Ann Maria Field.

⁵ Mrs. Sally Dudley (1776-1867), who after the death of her first husband, General Green Clay (1757-1828) of Madison County, had married Jephtha Dudley, the widower of one of her sisters.

⁶ Junius B. Holloway (named for his uncle by marriage, Brutus J. Clay) was a son of Colonel William Holloway and his wife Elizabeth Field.

⁷ Edward Garrard was a son of Charles T. Garrard, of Bourbon County, who was a cousin of Brutus J. Clay, their mothers being sisters. Charles T. Garrard was a grandson of Governor James Garrard of Kentucky.

⁸ We have been unable to identify this reference.

⁹ A Louisville press dispatch quoted in *Decennial Record, Class of 1859 Yale College*, The College Courant Print (1870), gives further particulars about this captured flag, viz.: "Clay—Green Clay, of Bourbon County, Ky., aid to Gen. Schoepf, has just arrived, bringing a splendid silk rebel flag, bearing the inscription: 'Presented to the Mountain Rangers, Captain Ashford, by Mrs. W. D. Chanderoyne.'"

¹⁰ In January, 1862, Cassius M. Clay was recalled as Minister to Russia, in order that his post might be given to Simon Cameron, Lincoln's first Secretary of War. Upon Cameron's resignation, Clay was re-appointed to the Russian post, returning there early in 1863 and serving until the end of the Johnson administration. *Memoirs of Cassius M. Clay*, Brennan & Co., Cincinnati (1886), Vol. I, pp. 299, 315, 451.

¹¹ Simon Cameron, whom Lincoln on January 12, 1862, had appointed minister to Russia.

¹² This injunction was apparently observed, since the letter is missing from the Brutus J. Clay correspondence. Lucius Desha, a member of the Kentucky Constitutional Convention of 1849, was at the time a member of the Kentucky House of Representatives from Harrison County. In July, 1862, he was arrested by the Federal authorities and thrown into military prison for "having given aid and assistance to the rebel, John Morgan, and his guerrilla band, in the engagement at Cynthiana, July 17, 1862"—a charge from which he was exonerated by the Kentucky House of Representatives. See Collins' *History of Kentucky* (1882 ed.) Vol. II, pp. 105, 109, 120.

¹³ Only a few months before, a younger brother of Green's, Ezekiel F. Clay had joined the Confederate forces, in which he later saw distinguished service; but that, and the resulting complications for his father (who was a strong Unionist) make a story outside the scope of the present article.

¹⁴ Sidney R. G. Clay (1828-1899), a first cousin of the writer of this letter.

¹⁵ Green Clay's only sister, Martha Irvine, in 1860 had married Henry B. Davenport, of Charlestown, Virginia, who saw service in the Army of Virginia. Charlestown was in an adjoining county to Harper's Ferry.

¹⁶ By his first marriage Brutus J. Clay had one daughter, Martha Irvine (1832-1908), and three sons, Christopher F. (1835-1897), Green (1839-1912), and Ezekiel F. (1840-1920) and by his second marriage an only son, Cassius M. (1846-1913). Before the Civil War and while those parts of the country were still sparsely settled, he had acquired a cotton plantation in Mississippi, as well as a 1900 acre farm in Audrian County, Missouri.

¹⁷ For further particulars, see *History of the Class of 1859, A Record of Fifty-Nine Years*, *ibid*: "He had a large farm in Salisbury township, and was one of the leading farmer-stockmen of that part of the state. While in the South he had been a member of the Mississippi legislature, and after he became a resident of Missouri he was twice elected to the legislature of that state, the first time in 1891, as senator, the second time, in 1902, as member of the House of Representatives, to complete the unexpired term of a deceased son, Rhodes Clay. He was also for many years, and at the time of his death, chairman of the Audrian County Democratic Central Committee, and was one of the most prominent and influential citizens of the Country and the state."