

## Guide to the George F. Towle Diary, 1861-1865

### Administrative Information

**Title and Dates:**

George F. Towle Diary, 1861-1865

**Repository:**

New Hampshire Historical Society

30 Park Street

Concord, NH 03301

603-228-6688

<https://www.nhhistory.org/>

**Collection Number:**

1980.015

**Author of Finding Aid:**

Sandra Wheeler

**Creator:**

Towle, George F., 1835-1900

**Language:**

The materials in this collection are in English.

**Extent:**

1 volume ; 0.13 linear feet

**Abstract:**

The George F. Towle Diary, 1861-1865, is a Civil War diary/memoir, which details Towle's journey from Texas, where he enjoyed his life as a land surveyor and part-time Texas Ranger, through his four years of service with the 4<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire Regiment.

## Access and Use

### **Acquisition Information and Provenance:**

The George F. Towle Diary was a bequest of George F. Towle, gift of Charles A. Brooks, executor, on July 23, 1900.

### **Processing Information:**

This collection was processed by an unknown person at an unknown date. The finding aid was written by Sandra Wheeler in January 2022. This finding aid follows the standards set forth by *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*.

### **Access Restrictions:**

Available for research.

### **Location:**

The collection is housed at the New Hampshire Historical Society in Concord, New Hampshire.

### **Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements:**

This collection consists of a diary, which requires a book cradle for use.

### **Copyright/Conditions Governing Use:**

For permission to reproduce or publish materials from this collection, please contact the New Hampshire Historical Society. Users are responsible for following all copyright and intellectual property laws.

### **Preferred Citation:**

George F. Towle Diary, 1980.015. New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, NH. Date accessed.

## Collection Overview

### **Biographical Information:**

**George Francis Towle (1835-1900)** was born on August 4, 1835 at Lee, New Hampshire, the son of George W. and Ann M. (Moseley) Towle. George seems to have spent his childhood and adolescence in Portsmouth, NH. In 1854, he was a cadet (student) at Western Military Institute of Tennessee, probably located in Nashville, Tennessee. It is not clear why he was sent there, but his father, George W. Towle (1810-1887) in the 1850 census was listed deputy sheriff for Portsmouth, so it was perhaps a family with military interests (more about George W. Towle below).

Before 1861, George F. Towle was living in Bandera, Texas, near what is now San Antonio, working as a land surveyor and part-time Texas Ranger. Upon hearing of the declaration of war in 1861, he began the journey back to New Hampshire to enlist in the Union forces. His account of the trip forms the first 20 pages or so of his diary.

He was mustered in as a First Lieutenant in the New Hampshire 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Volunteers in the fall of 1861 and promoted to Captain in January, 1862; at discharge he was a Lieutenant-Colonel. The first part of his service was as part of the force occupying St. Augustine, FL, where he was Provost Marshal. There followed several engagements around Charleston, SC. (Beaufort, Folly Island, Morris Island, Fort Wagner, Fort Gregg.) He was appointed part of the staff (Inspector General) of New Hampshire General Alfred H. Terry (1827-1890), a man he admired and was to serve under again in his post-Civil War career in the regular U.S. Army. The 4<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire was involved in many actions in and around the Raleigh, VA, and Wilmington, NC, area (battle of Drury's Bluff, Siege of Petersburg, capture of Fort Fisher, capture of Wilmington, capture of Richmond, etc.) For details see the history of the 4<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire Regiment. His duties consisted of inspecting the troops, posting pickets, carrying messages between generals, etc. After the fighting was over and before he was mustered out in the fall of 1865, he served as a Parole Commissioner for General Johnston's army, issuing paroles to former Confederate troops and officers.

Soon after being mustered out, he apparently returned to Portsmouth, for in December 1865, he married Alexandrine Chase (1833-1898) there. In early 1866, at the request of General Terry, he was appointed First Lieutenant in the 19<sup>th</sup> U.S. Army Infantry. His long army career, much of it on Terry's staff, was spent in the south and southwestern U.S.

He and his wife had no children, and they did not appear in the 1870 or 1880 censuses, perhaps because his posts at that time were in Indian Territory and forts in Texas and Colorado. After his retirement around 1888, it is unclear where they lived. In December, 1898, a year after his wife's death in Boston, he was in Paris, from where he applied for a passport to visit England. He died in London in June 1900.

George F. Towle's father, **George W. Towle (1810-1887)**, was born in Epping, NH, and married Ann Morton Mosely (1815-1887). George F. was their only child. In 1850, the census listed George W. as a deputy sheriff for Portsmouth; according to his obituary, he was also a jailer and deputy U.S. Marshall. George W. also served in the Civil War, mustering into the 10<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire Volunteer Infantry Regiment in September 1862. According to his son, he recruited 400 men for this regiment and sent them off, then recruited 100 more and led them as Captain. He was mustered out in June 1865. The 1870 census listed him as a clerk in the Navy Yard at Kittery, ME, and in 1880 he was retired. He and his wife both died in Chicago in 1887, while visiting their son.

### **Collection Scope and Content Note:**

An 1896 note written by George F. Towle (1835-1900) accompanying his Civil War diary says, "I would request that it be not examined, but stored away for an indefinite time till long after the actors in that war have passed away..." There was good reason for his request, for the diary (actually a memoir, written as a diary and clearly with the diary at hand) is unsparing in its criticisms of the courage and ability of many of the officers and men with whom he served, both those in the armed forces as a whole and those from New Hampshire.

Approximately the first twenty pages of the diary describe his journey from Texas, where he enjoyed his life as a land surveyor and part-time Texas Ranger, to New Hampshire to enlist.

During his subsequent 4 years of service, Towle's regiment (4<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire) was first in Florida and South Carolina, then in Virginia and North Carolina, where it participated in many engagements with Confederate troops. The "Places" section below lists those he describes most fully.

The "diary" is written partly in hindsight, for he occasionally mentions meeting people after the war, or relates their later experience, but it is written as a day-to-day diary and is full of detail about events, battle sequences, armaments used, forts taken, daily routine, and interactions with other soldiers and civilians. He often describes people and relates conversations; his account is lively and colorful. It is also highly opinionated: he has little use for most officers. Many of those from New Hampshire he thinks are political appointments and without military understanding or capability when not actual cowards. Others he judges on what he observes of their behavior and decision making. Whenever he criticizes an officer or fellow soldier he is specific about what the failure is and describes the event or occasion that led him to form the opinion.

The diary contains characterizations of people common among Union troops in the time in which it was written. For example, he disparages people such as Rufus Saxton (1824-1908), who recruited Black soldiers and formed Black regiments, and refers to northern civilian volunteers who travelled to the Beaufort and Port Royal, SC, area to try to prepare formerly enslaved people for freedom as "Gideonites" and "weaklings." Also, like some others in the army, Towle thought those in the navy had a more luxurious life and were reluctant to participate in battle.

Towle includes no narrative about his personal life except to note a few visits to his father, serving in the 10<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire Regiment, when both regiments were stationed in Virginia. The diary ends when he is demobilized and does not discuss what it was like to return, though he laments that he ended the war in a worse financial position than he entered it because he is unable to return to Texas after having served in the Union army. He is rather bitter about this, and includes copies of letters of recommendation for promotion from General Terry that were not acted upon by New Hampshire officials during the war.

### **Arrangement:**

This collection consists of one diary.

### **Contents List**

Volume 1      George F. Towle Diary, 1861-1865

### **Subject Terms**

#### **People:**

Ames, Adelbert, 1835-1933  
Badger, William, 1826-1897  
Bell, Louis 1837-1865  
Birney, David Bell, 1825-1864  
Butler, Benjamin F. (Benjamin Franklin), 1818-1893  
Cockrill, Mark S., 1838-1919

Cox, Jacob D. (Jacob Dolson), 1828-1900  
Dahlgren, John Adolphus Bernard, 1809-1870  
Gillmore, Quincy Adams, 1825-1888  
Grant, Ulysses S. (Ulysses Simpson), 1822-1885  
Hawley, Joseph R. (Joseph Roswell), 1826-1905  
Hunter, David, 1802-1886  
Kilpatrick, Judson, 1836-1881  
Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865  
Marston, Gilman, 1811-1890  
Montgomery, James, 1814-1871  
Paine, Charles Jackson, 1833-1916  
Pennypacker, Galusha, 1844-1916  
Saxton, Rufus, 1824-1908  
Schofield, John McAllister, 1831-1906  
Seymour, Truman, 1824-1891  
Sherman, William T. (William Tecumseh), 1820-1891  
Terry, Alfred Howe, 1827-1890  
Towle, George F., 1835-1900  
Towle, George W., 1810-1887  
Vogdes, Israel, 1816-1889  
Whipple, Amiel Weeks, 1817-1863

**Organizations:**

Texas Rangers  
United States. Army. New Hampshire Infantry Regiment, 4th (1861-1865)  
United States. Army. New Hampshire Infantry Regiment, 10th (1862-1865)

**Subjects:**

Diaries  
Military life  
Slavery  
Travel  
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865

**Locations:**

Bandera, TX  
Beaufort, SC  
Bentonville, NC  
Bermuda Hundred, VA  
Drewy's Bluff, VA  
Fernandina, FL  
Folly Island, SC  
Fort Fisher, NC  
Fort Gregg, SC  
Fort Wagner, SC  
Morris Island, SC  
Petersburg, VA  
Pocotaligo, SC  
Raleigh, NC

Richmond, VA  
St. Augustine, FL  
Wilmington, NC

**Occupations:**

Soldiers

Related Materials

Archives

George F. Towle Correspondence, 1976.051 (m)