



# Guide to the Henry J. H. Thompson, 1862-1865

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This collection guide was produced in **December 2025**.

This PDF version was created on **April 3, 2026**.

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## Summary

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**Collection Title:**

Henry J. H. Thompson papers, 1862-1865

**Creator:**

Thompson, Henry J. H., 1832-1901; Thompson, Lucretia E., 1838-1910

**Abstract:**

Henry J. H. Thompson (1832-1901) was a private soldier in the drum corps of Company B, 15th Regiment of the Connecticut Volunteers during the American Civil War. The collection consists of letters between Thompson and his wife, Lucretia E. Thompson, as well as small diaries discussing his daily life and observations while his unit was stationed in Washington D.C., throughout Virginia, and the vicinity of New Bern, N.C.

**Extent:**

0.2 Linear Feet (1 box)

**Language:**

Materials in English.

**Collection ID:**

RL.13178

**Permalink:**

<https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/m1xx7m>

**Preferred Citation**

[Identification of item], Henry J. H. Thompson Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

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## Background

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**Scope and Content**

The collection consists of letters between Henry J. H. Thompson and his wife, Lucretia, as well as two diaries kept by Henry while in service as a musician with the 15th Connecticut Volunteers in the American Civil War.

Thompson's letters home date every 3-4 days and thus offer a fairly comprehensive look into his daily life and outlook while enlisted in the Union army. The diaries contain a few lines per day between 1864 April 19 and 1865 July 4, and tend to report weather and his routine activities. Thompson discussed his camp activities, daily routine, diet and rations (he reports frequent lack of food), clothing, health and sickness, and weather. Thompson describes his work in the drum corps, which often extended to other camp maintenance duties such as cleaning, construction, and medical aide and transport. He was very interested in Southern agriculture; a sample of cotton he collected for Lucretia is included in the collection. Thompson describes the Battle of Fredericksburg (1862); the seige of Suffolk (1863); and the conditions and people of New Bern, N.C. (1864-1865). He expressed his candid opinions to his wife openly: he opposed to Abraham Lincoln's 1864 re-election, and believed that the war was prolonged for officers' personal gain. He expresses a negative view (with racist and derogatory language) of freed Black Southerners. He also repeatedly expresses dismay and aversion to the "uncivilized" and "loose" morals of his fellow soldiers and most women he observed. He often notes the presence of prostitutes among the camps, and relays stories of men falling ill following sexual relationships with Southern women. In one letter from Suffolk, Virginia, he writes: "we have a nasty view in front of our tent now, in about 10 rods there is 4 or 5 bad houses the women stand out days all printed up seeking whom they may devour" (1863 April 25).

Upon arriving in North Carolina, he found the residents to be amoral, "wild," and "uncivilized," noting "the women are a curious set they smoke chew tobacco and rub their gowns with snuff" (1863 October 13). Some letters from the spring of 1864 document the yellow fever epidemic of New Bern, which spread from the town to the army's camp. He includes a list of deaths from yellow fever in his 1864 diary. Thompson also described the Union's preparations for the battle of Kinston, N.C.; the battle itself, which resulted in many casualties; and subsequent "riots" by freedpeople in Kinston which were violently suppressed by the Union troops.

Thompson's overall tone is a blend of morose anxiety and uncertainty. He writes of missing Lucretia, and often uses pet names and fond salutations for her. The collection's letters are frequently overlapping; Henry would use Lucretia's letters as paper to return correspondence, and there are crosshatched letters. The result is that Lucretia's letters are much harder to read; most appear to be local news from Connecticut, and greetings or updates from their family and friends. Many letters are numbered indicating an order from when sent. Henry also regularly used any available scrap of paper for his letters; some are on army passes or other repurposed envelopes.

The collection also contains one photograph, which is a portrait of a seated doll with a second photograph of a cut-out bearded man's head glued on top. It is not clear whether this is Henry's face.

## **Biographical/Historical**

Henry J. H. Thompson (July 5 1832-December 17 1901) was a private who enlisted as a musician in Company B of the 15th Regiment of the Connecticut Volunteers during the American Civil War. He joined the regiment August 25, 1862 and served through the end of the Civil War, mustering out June 27, 1865. While enlisted, Thompson's unit participated in the Battle of Fredericksburg (Dec. 1862), the seige on Suffolk, Va. (May 1863), and a skirmish at Kinston, N.C. (March 1865). They spent most of 1864 and 1865 stationed in New Bern, N.C., and endured a yellow fever epidemic in the city in spring 1864.

Thompson's wife, Lucretia E. Cooper Thompson (1838-1910), spent the war at their home in Fair Haven, Connecticut. Following the war, Thompson returned to Connecticut and worked as a carpenter and farmer. He and Lucretia had one son, Henry Ellsworth Thompson, in 1866. Henry J. H. Thompson died Dec. 17, 1901, and was buried in North Haven, Connecticut; Lucretia died in 1910 and is buried with him.

Sources cited: "Fifteenth Regiment Infantry," Record of service of Connecticut men in the army and navy of the United States during the War of the Rebellion. Hartford, Conn. : Press of the Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1889.

"Henry J. Thompson" obituary notice, Morning Journal-Courier, New Haven, Conn., 1901 Dec. 19.

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## **Arrangement**

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Collection is arranged chronologically.

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## **Administrative Information**

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### **Publication Statement**

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## Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

## Use Restrictions

The copyright interests in this collection have not been transferred to Duke University. For more information, consult the Rubenstein Library's Citations, Permissions, and Copyright guide.

## Acquisition Information

The Henry J. H. Thompson Papers were received by the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library as a gift in 1944, with an addition in 1955.

## Processing Information

Processed by Meghan Lyon, December 2025

Accessions described in this collection guide: 1944-02-01; 1955-08-02

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## Names and Subjects

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- United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Personal narratives
- United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Military life
- North Carolina -- Description and travel
- Virginia -- Description and travel
- Soldiers -- Diaries
- Husband and wife -- Correspondence
- Yellow Fever -- North Carolina
- Band musicians
- Prostitution
- Freed persons -- United States -- Social conditions
- Soldiers -- United States -- Correspondence
- North Carolina -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865
- Fredericksburg (Va.), Battle of, 1862
- New Bern (N.C.)
- Sexual ethics for women -- 19th century

- United States. Army. Connecticut Infantry Regiment, 15th (1862-1865)
- United States. Army -- Military life
- Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865

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## Collection Inventory

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Papers, 1862 March-December	Box 1
Papers, 1863 January-June	Box 1
Papers, 1863 July-December	Box 1
Papers, 1864 January-June	Box 1
Papers, 1864 July-December	Box 1
Diary, 1864 April 19-December 31	Box 1
Diary, 1865 January 1-July 4	Box 1
Papers, 1865 January-June	Box 1
Papers, undated, approximately 1862-1865	Box 1

### Scope and Contents

Includes letters and fragments which have no clear date. Also contains some other materials, including a cartoon of soldiers ogling a woman (with accompanying note from Henry to Lucretia: "we have some of these damsills that attract attention down here... Troop beat off"; a sample of cotton; and an undated 19th century photograph of a manbaby (a man's bearded head affixed onto a doll's posed body).