

Introduction to Titus Moss Letters

In 1969, Miss Helen Moss of New Haven gave the Cheshire Historical Society the original copies of 30 letters written by her grandfather, Corporal Titus Moss, to her grandmother, Jennette, in 1862-63. Also included were two letters written by Captain Timothy Guilford describing Moss's death at the Battle of Chancellorsville, May 3, 1863, and a copy of letter of condolence to Jennette on the death of their daughter, Emma, in 1864. At the bottom of this letter, Jennette has written a heart-breaking note about Little Emma's death. After nearly 35 years in our files, the letters were transcribed last year by Society member, and now curator, Marshall Robinson.

It is evident that these letters are only a portion of the original Titus Moss correspondence. Although he wrote almost daily after leaving Cheshire in September 1862, there is nothing from Christmas and only one letter from the critical last three months of his life. The collection must have been divided among family members, possibly among his three granddaughters. Nonetheless, the letters we do have give a special picture of a very kind and decent Cheshire man struggling to adapt to the challenges of Union Army life and vitally concerned with the welfare of his little family at home.

The Moss family figured prominently in Cheshire history from its early settlement, especially in area in the west of town along Ten-Mile River known as Moss Farms. The first Moss to come to Cheshire, John Moss, was granted approximately 100 acres of land alongside the Ten-Mile River in 1694 for services to the Crown in settling disputes between the Indians and farmers who were moving to Cheshire from Wallingford.

According to a hand-written note in Society's copy of Old Historic Homes of Cheshire, 1895, the Titus Moss Family lived at 859 Moss Farms Road, a one-and-a-half-story structure built by his grandfather, Joel Moss, in 1795.¹ The house also is pictured in Landmarks of Old Cheshire, 1976, but has since been demolished.

Titus was born on February 8, 1828, the second of seven children of Joel Moss II and Nancy (Upson) Moss. In June 1851, age 23, Titus married Jennette Beecher of Cheshire.² They had two children: Howard, born July 19, 1856, and Emma, born June 22, 1859. Another member of Titus's household was his ward, Carrie, who is often mentioned in his letters. We have no further identification for her. The Moss family were communicants of St. Peter's Episcopal Church.³ In 1857, Titus was elected junior warden of the church, a position he held when he left for military service with the 20th Connecticut Regiment Volunteers in 1862.

¹ See Additional Information at the end of this document (photograph of home at 859 Moss Farms Road). The Society also has a 1943 oil painting of this house in the Exhibit Room.

² Titus's next brother, Julius, married Emerett A. Bartholomew of Wolcott on May 15, 1855. Her wedding dress is on display on the second floor in the Paneled Room.

³ In 1767, another Moss family member, Joseph Moss, gave the land for the church and cemetery.

Corporal Titus Moss Letters, September 1862 – March 1863

After the attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861, the first call for troops by President Lincoln asked for only one regiment from Connecticut. The response was so enthusiastic, that three regiments were formed and sent. According to a paper on "Cheshire in the Civil War," written by Society member Mrs. E.I. Pardee, it was at this time that a group of young men in Cheshire formed a military company called the Home Guards. Their captain was Timothy Guilford, who had previously held office in a militia company in Waterbury.

In July 1862, when President Lincoln issued the second call for "three hundred thousand volunteers for three years," Cheshire's Home Guards resolved to enlist, calling themselves the Russell Rifles, but later becoming Company A of the 20th Connecticut Volunteers. In August 1862, a special Cheshire Town Meeting authorized payment of a \$100 bounty to each volunteer with a family (\$50 for single volunteers).

Company A left New Haven for Washington, D.C. on September 11, 1862 packed in common boxcars. It included 63 men and boys from Cheshire, including Titus and his brother Samuel, and 20 from Prospect. They were kept in Washington until September 29, then ordered to Frederick, Maryland. By some blunder, the company was told to leave their knapsacks in Washington. They waited all night at the depot for transportation and made their bivouac near Frederick without tents or blankets, and with scanty rations. When letters telling of deprivation and hunger reached Cheshire, mothers, wives and sisters rushed to pack boxes of provisions and forward them as soon as possible.

On October 2, the Twentieth was again under marching orders for Harper's Ferry. On November 9, they crossed the mountain into Loudon Valley where they were ordered to build huts and go into winter quarters. While some of the old regiments were provided with comfortable houses with floors, the Twentieth did not get along so well. The privations the men endured are told first-hand in Titus's letters. His close companions were his younger brother Samuel and another Moss, Frank Moss. Both became seriously ill. We know from The Twentieth Connecticut, A Regimental History, that Samuel Moss was discharged for disability on January 27, 1863 and that Frank Moss died at Stafford Court House, March 17, 1863.

According to Mrs. Pardee's paper, during the first winter, Company A was visited at different times by at least nine men from Cheshire. "They usually found the company enjoying a snow storm," she writes. In his letter of November 8, Titus describes the arrival of "Mrs. Moss & Mr. Beedles" (Amos Moss and Benajah Beadle⁴). We know from the letter of January 29 that another visitor was Titus's other brother, Julius.

⁴ Benajah Beadle was the great grandfather of *Curator Emeritus* Edgar Johnson. There is a photograph of him on the wall in the parlor.

Corporal Titus Moss Letters, September 1862 – March 1863

The spring campaign of 1863 opened with the Union Army numbering 124,000 men on the north side of the Rappahannock River. General Lee, with an army of 63,000 was entrenched south of the river. It was now only a little over seven months since Titus had left New Haven. Aside from some skirmishes, the Battle of Chancellorsville, May 1-3, was the first real battle for Company A. It ended disastrously, with the regiment under Colonel William B. Wooster in full retreat. Over 12,000 Union soldiers were killed and another 5,000 missing and wounded. Titus was killed on May 3, the final day of the battle.

Sources:

- The "Twentieth Connecticut" A Regimental History, John W. Storrs, Press of the Naugatuck Valley Sentinel, 1886.
- St. Peter's: An Informal History. Helen E. Bray, Aurora Printing Co., Meriden, 1985.
- "Cheshire in the Civil War," paper written by Mrs. E.I. Pardee, Cheshire Historical Society.
- Old Historic Homes of Cheshire, Connecticut (1694-1894), compiled by Edwin R. Brown, 1895.
- Landmarks of Old Cheshire, The Cheshire Bicentennial Committee, 1976.
- Moss genealogy records from The Morse Society, Cheshire Historical Society, and History of Cheshire, Connecticut (1604-1840), Joseph Perkins Beach, 1912.