

The Filson Historical Society

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Collins-Wilson family

Papers, 1861-1896. 0.33 cu. ft. and 1 ovsh. folder

Capt. Thomas B. Collins Diary, 1864-1865.

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Diary

¹
I was separated from my command at the battle of
Cynthianna (sic) Ky which was about the 13th of June 1864
and with a view to return to the Confederacy set out in the
direction of Lexington. ² The enemy was in hot pursuit and I
eluded them by the fleetings of my horse and by leaving the
main road when I got out of their sight. [In the evening I crossed
the pike about ten miles from Lexington and was proceeding leasurly
when one of the party called my attention to a cloud of dust
rising in the road behind us. There were only five in our party
and there was not a gun or pistol among the whole. [We thought it
best to trust to the speed of our horses and set out at a sweeping
gallop casting a glance back over my shoulder I saw a single horse-
man emerge from the cloud of dust evidently in pursuit. I did
not like the idea of running from one man if we were unarmed and
as we came to a sudden turn in the road I ordered the men to halt
and draw up close by the fence so that we could spring out and
take the daring yankee by surprise. [I could get only one of them to
remain with me. The other three affirmed that there were twenty
soldiers just behind the one we saw and did not stop running until
they were captured by the pickets near Lexington as I learned after-
wards. [One person however remained with me and we awaited about half
an hour for the enemy to come up but from some cause he failed to
do so and we supposed he had come to the conclusion that he could
not catch us and had turned back. We then started on and soon turn-
ed in at a gate and rode through plantations until it began to
grow dark. Feeling that we had escaped pursuit, we secured our

horses in a dense locust grove and went to a house half a mile distant to get something to eat. We happened to arrive in very good time as a guard of Federals were staying near with government stock had called for tea and had just gone as we came up. We were kindly received and after a hearty repast returned to the grove. We had a refreshing sleep during the night and early in the morning moved off some distance from our horses and spent the day in a wheat field.

⁹The next evening after dark we mounted our horses and rode about three miles turned our horses loose in a field of blue grass and set out on foot for the house of a gentleman whom I knew to be friendly. We were kindly received by him and remained in a wheat field near his house for several (sic) days. ¹⁰Having obtained all

the information we could about the roads we determined to cross the Ky. River near Boone's Boro and one evening at twilight we mounted our trusty steeds took the road. We went to sleep several times during the night and when we would awake we could not tell of course how far our horses had traveled or whether we were on the right road or not and would have to stop and enquire the way.

With this exception we got along very well. ¹¹The next morning about daylight I called at the house of a Mr. Whitesides and asked about the road. He informed me and asked my name. I told him I was a son of a Mr. Chenault of Madison. He knew him very well and asked me which one of his sons was I. I was somewhat embarrassed at this but told him some name and he invited me to take break-

fast with him which I declined. ¹²I proceeded toward the river and when we had gone about seven miles discovered a wagon coming over the top of a distant hill and thinking it the head of a Cavalry column we turned in at a gate as if to water our horses. We met

the landlord and conversed with him until we found our mistake. We proceeded then to the river and wishing to avoid the ferry inquired of a lady for the ford which we found quite deep and when we reached the opposite bank had to dismount and pull our horses up out of the river. We gained the top of the hill and being tired left the main road, turned out our horses to graze and lay down to sleep. In a few hours I was aroused by some person calling me and looking around found a person who was an old friend. Never was I more agreeably surprised. He took charge of my comrad (sic) and I proceeded from there to my home alone. Which place I reached about midnight without any incident except passing some yankees on the road.

I will not attempt to describe my feelings on reaching home for I did not feel like one who came in the "pride" of "glorious war" and my home was so changed since I left it. One of the dearest & who ran to meet me a year before with a fond kiss was then in the cold ground sleeping. Oh what would I not have given to bring her back! My own life a thousand times would have been freely given to restore her to life and beauty again. Stop

Remaining here two days we parted and I went to the house of a friend about ten miles distant passing through richmond in the night. I was well received by the enthusiastic rebel and took my quarters in a locust thicket fearing to remain in the house. While waiting here to arrange some plan for passing through to the South some ruffians heard of my wherabouts (sic) and came to arrest me. Had they succeeded then would have been little chance for my life. The evening they came I had gone to the house and taken

tea. Thinking a change would be better I left about ten o'clock that night and went to the house of a person living near.

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Next morning one of the young ladies came to see me from the house I had left and told me that some yankee ruffians had come to the house in the night and guarded the doors until day, that when her mother went to the door she was halted by them and told that the rebel in her house must be given up or they would burn the house and that if a shot was fired at them they would kill her husband. She protested that there was no rebel there but they rudely entered the house and searched it. Their rage was intense when they failed to find me and the (sic) would repeat the search saying they knew I was there and they were determined to have me, but they did not and after giving up the search they went out to the locust grove where I had been staying & caught my horse & took him away. At this news I felt ill at ease in the house and went to the woods and climbed (sic) upon the top of a Mulberry tree where I remained during the day. The next day I determined to go to Canada and try to run the blockade. Setting out at night I walked near home and in a few days took leave of the family again. By walking all night and borrowing a horse next (sic) day and succeeded in reaching the railroad at Lowes Station in time to take the cars and arrived safely in Cincinnati on that evening (the 4th of July).

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There was a splendid display of fireworks that night but I did not take the interest in it that I had done formerly. The next day I went out shopping as I had worn my fathers coat from home

having grown too stout for my old ones which I left there (3)
three years before. I passed by the Museum and called in to
make a short visit. I was standing in a large in the upper portion
of the building when a person of gentlemanly appearance entered
and went to a piece of furniture which appeared to be a small
table. Touching a spring he raised the top and disclosed a case
of jewelry at the same time producing a dice box. By this time a
second person entered and approached the table as if to look at the
display of jewelry (sic). The 1st explained the nature of the
institution and invited him to try his fortune. He began and soon
won a prize worth fifteen or twenty dollars but kept on until
he lost all but just enough to buy one more ticket. He threw the
dice again and the banker exclaimed there you have most ruined
me you have won a six hundred dollar prize and I will pay you
half in gold but before doing so will require you to pay to me
two hundred dollars for the limits prize of my game. The 2nd
said he had lost all his money and could not produce that sum
but told him to pay the prize and he would refund the 2 hundred.
This he refused say he must have the two hundred before he would
pay it. I was about to interfere on the part of the 2nd when he
turned to me and asked if I would loan him the money for a moment
and that if so he would refund and give me half the prize also.
I thanked him but declined his liberal offer and told him I would
loan the sum with pleasure. I thought he was being swindled and
would have done anything for him in my power. I advanced the sum
and he paid it to the swindler who had scarcely begun to count
out the prize money when he made a pause and said perhaps you are

mistaken let me count the dice again and after doing so exclaimed you are mistaken sir in the number and have only won a set of jewelry. My friend seemed to regret it very much but acknowledged his mistake and asked him to give back the two hundred which he refused to do telling him that the mistake was not his fault that the bank never made any corrections. My rage was at its height then as I thought he was grossly imposed upon and he turned to me and said he did not know what to do that he had lost all his money and had none to pay to me. I remarked that I knew what to do and seizing my revolver told the swindler that unless he refunded the money I would blow his brains out. At this moment four or five men came rushing up who had entered the room unnoticed and told me to stop that noise if I wished to save my life. I concluded to take his advice as my friend proved to be one of their party and I was left alone. I bid them good morning and told them I would try and profit by the lesson. They must have suspected my character or thought I was a most egregious fool. For had I not been a Confederate I would have called on the Police for protection but under the circumstances I might have been found out and lost my neck. The next day I proceeded to Canada and reached Toronto about the 7th of July very much discouraged by my mishap and most out of money.

On the 27th of August started to Chicago to the Great Convention. Arrived (sic) and lodged at the Richmond house on the 29th. While there visited Camp Douglass and looked over the prison wall at the Confederate Soldiers. My feelings cannot be described on this occasion as I had a brother and several friends there. As I turned to leave it a grin of satisfaction came over

my face for I thought the clash of arms would soon bring joy
to the hearts of those who were confined there.

Sept 1st I left with a heavy heart for we had been
disappointed in our aim. I went to Ill's and about the 12th
went to Cincinnati the place which had been so unfortunate for
me before. This time it came near being more so for one evening
while walking on the street after dark two persons came up
behind me and placing their arms in mine asked me to "come take
a walk." I looked around and found myself in the hands of two
policemen. A number of others being a short distance behind I
knew escape was impossible and after recovering from my surprise
asked them where we were going. They made no reply. And I
asked what was my offence (sic) but they gave no answer. I
thought I had been informed on by some person and would be hung
as a spy.

I would have given anything in the world for my liberty
then and could have felt no worse under the gallows. One of them
discovered that I had a pair of large pistols on my person and told
the other of it after which they squeezed my hand very hard and I
told them I would go anywhere to meet my accusers for I was
innocent and there was no need of holding me so tight. We soon
reached the Station and I was pushed in. I made a bow to the
chief of Police and one of them rudely pulled up my waistcoat and
took of my pistols at the sight of which the whole party smiled
as if they had found something valuable. My money was next taken (sic)

and everything was carefully examined and set down in a book by
the Chief who then asked for my name and I gave him one for⁴²
the occasion. I told him that was my first appearance before
such an honorable body and I felt prepared to meet my accusers,
that I was a gentleman and guilty of no offence (sic), that in
a free country man was allowed to bear arms for his protection,
⁴³ that I was travelling for my health and was always armed on such
occasions. After studying awhile and asking me a few questions
he apologized for detaining me and offered to give me an escort
to my hotel. Never was an apology more acceptable but I did not⁴⁴
wish the escort. He sent them on with however and when I reached
the hotel asked them to drink and to call around to see me often
that I would be in the city about two weeks.

The next evening after dark I set out for a free land and⁴⁵
arrived once more in safety. About the 10th of Oct I went to
Ogdenburg N.Y. and on the 19th was in a place well known where I
had an opportunity to repay them for robbing and arresting me.

On the 20th I was in _____ at Stanbridge C E. On the 25th⁴⁶
was taken to the St Johns _____ and was removed from there to
Montreal in the first part of November. While here I received
much kindness from the citizens and was called upon by the ladies
frequently and gentlemen of distinction.

⁴⁷
Dec 13 I was released amid the shouts of an excited populace
and the same evening a warrant was issued for our rearrest.

I with another person fled to the North of Terrabone to the outskirts of civilization and remained for a short time with a French family,⁴⁸ where I used to amuse myself by fishing in a lake close by the house. I caught some fine trout by cutting a hole in the ice fishing through the opening. About the 27th we returned to Montreal and remained there until the Eighth of February.

⁴⁹ Feb 8th 1865 I left Montreal on one of the longest and most tedious journeys and one of the severest of my life. We were four in No. Alex Doty, A.P. Bruce, and W.D. Moore besides myself and also a French interpreter and guide. We Travelled in sleighs for 14 days sometimes going all night.⁵⁰ The coldest wind that I ever felt was blowing in my face most all the time and snow storms were frequent in one of the most terrific of which we got lost one night and like to froze to death. We passed along the South Shore to Quebec then on the North to the Saguenay River.⁵¹ Here we abandoned our sleighs and took canoes in which we crossed this river at its mouth and passed down the St Lawrence about three leagues. This river is about six leagues wide here and as the tide comes up so strong from the ocean it does not freeze that near its mouth but was full of floating ice through which we had great difficulty in passing.⁵² We landed and with our snow shoes walked to the house of Reule Roulianne a Frenchman. In a day or two we had an old shanty repaired bought a supply of provisions and furniture and secured the services of an indian to cook for us and & ⁵³ here we led a romantic life for several days and then went to Esconmains about twenty miles distant and stopped with John. E. Barrey Esquire.

Buggenhout
Flandre Orientale
Belgium
Dec. 31st 1865

¹
The restless wings of time have made another circle;
another drop has been added to the dark and fathomless ocean
of the past. It is only about 8 hours now before the new
year mounts the stage & as the old one retires the face
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of the heavens is veiled behind dark clouds as if disdeigning
either to bid him farewell or to smile on the coming of his
successor. But despite the frowns of heaven the dying year will
not soon be forgotten, its mighty events will render it almost
immortal. As I look back upon the deeds of men within that time
I see that much has been done -- whether for good or bad --
³
but let me ask what have I done myself? It seems to me, after a long
pause to study, that "Nothing" would be an appropriate answer,
yes and worse than nothing if possible. I have not been lying in
a torpid state though by any means, my footsteps have been
imprinted upon foreign lands -- yes they have wandered from the
haunts of civilization and sought recreation in the haunts of the
⁴
wild beast and the red man, but if any good has been derived from
it I am not -- as yet -- aware of it. It only seems to me that
there has been a sad loss of time. The days which have sped away
can never be recalled but it seems to me that the loss can be
repaired to some extent if my attention is turned in that
direction and now as the new year sets in I must take a
⁵
resolution to do something every day, and not let a single one

pass which I will regret as lost. Within the last I have been at times dejected, yes most borne down by despondency but I dont feel so now. No I am full of hope, and though as regards myself I am somewhat indifferent as to whether my life will be spared or not, I would like for the sake of my friends and for the accomplishment of a few objects I have in view to live about 12 years longer, and if fortune will assist me just a little I will try to bear my part. I am very much indebted to the bright-eyed goddess already and if she will only continue to smile upon me as she has once done I must succeed -- there can be no other thought with these thoughts then and in this spirit I will greet the new year and if I live to see it pass away as this, then I will know how far my ideas will have been carried out