

# A Volunteer's Experience at Ohioana

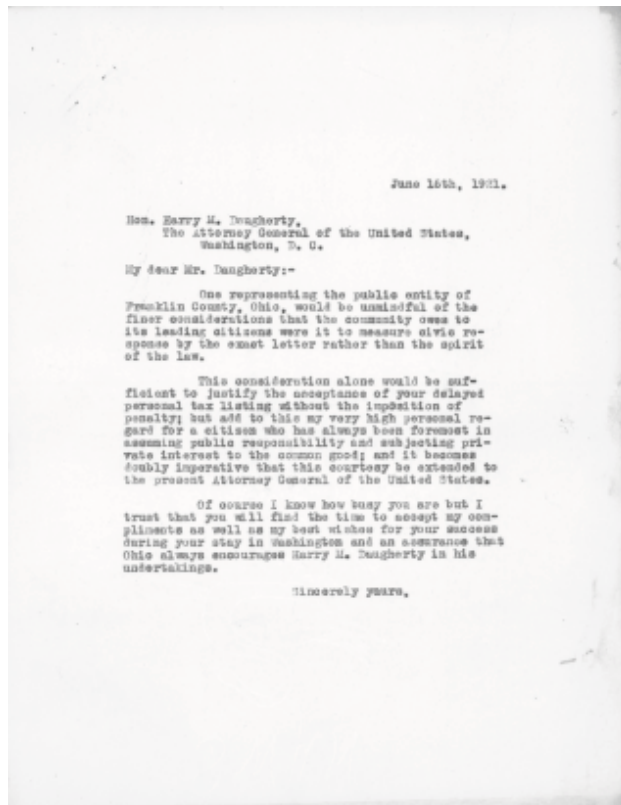
by Jerri Williams Lawrence

For 5 hours every Friday, I delve into the private lives and concerns of worthy Ohio citizens, encapsulating for preservation personal letters and writings that extend as far back as the 18th century.

Among the many documents are family letters written during the Civil War, personal letters from the 1800's between politicians, both local and federal, letters of authors, friends and relatives, sharing gossip, seeking favor or giving thanks.

History does repeat itself, an Ohioan appointed as Attorney General during Harding's term of office dictates a letter of apology to the Ohio county auditor concerning his overdue taxes, assuring him that a check is in the mail—and later he sends a note of thanks

to the auditor for kindly waiving the penalty usually invoked for late payment. The auditor's flowery response to the Attorney General's thank you note brings a smile: "One representing the public entity of Franklin County of Ohio would be unmindful of the finer considerations that the community owes its leading citizens were it to measure civic response by the exact letter rather than the spirit of the law. This consideration alone would be sufficient to justify the acceptance of your delayed personal tax listing without the imposition of penalty; but add to this my very high personal regard for a citizen who has always been foremost in assuming public responsibility and subjecting private interest to the common good; and it becomes doubly imperative that this courtesy be extended to the present Attorney General of the United States. Of course I know how busy you are but I trust that you will find the time to accept my compliments as well as my best wishes for your success during your stay in Washington and an assurance that Ohio always encourages Harry M. Daugherty in his undertakings.

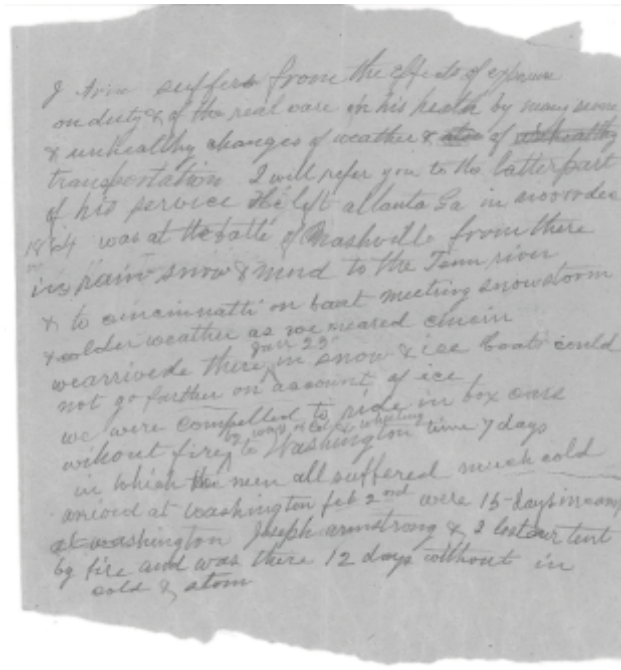


Letter from H. Sage Valentine to Attorney General Harry Daugherty, June 16, 1921.

exact letter rather than the spirit of the law. This consideration alone would be sufficient to justify the acceptance of your delayed personal tax listing without the imposition of penalty.” (H. Sage Valentine, June 16, 1921)

The ongoing dispute between powerful management and the lowly worker is chronicled in a personal letter congratulating the Boston Chief of Police on his tough crackdown against policemen who in 1921 tried to unionize because of their inadequate pay and inhumane working conditions.

Loud and angry objections from Columbus officials & contractors abound when in the spring of 1916 Washington issues building contracts to a Cleveland firm for a military depot that is to be built in Columbus. Many letters in duplicate & triplicate pass between Columbus and Washington D.C. until officials in Washington tell Columbus officials to “cease and desist” in their cries of favoritism and unfair treatment, that the Cleveland contract is unequivocally final.



Part of a letter from Union Soldier John Moore to his father, 1865

One thinks of the plight of today’s soldiers when reading a letter written by a Union soldier to his father. He describes the terrible winter conditions plaguing his comrades in the winter of 1864/65: “[We] left Atlanta Georgia [December] 1864, [fought] at the Battle of Nashville. On January 22, 1865, awoke with blankets covered in snow... ..travelled from there

to the Tennessee River, meeting snowstorms and colder weather as we neared Cincy where we could go no further because of the river ice. We were compelled to ride in boxcars without fire by way [of] Columbus to Wheeling to Washington, 7 days, in which men all suffered much cold. We arrived in Washington City Feb. 2 and were 16 days in camp [there]. Febru-



Rebecca S. Nichols circa 1851

ary 5th tent caught fire and burned. ...12 days without tent in cold and storms [before] leaving Feb. 18th on boat for Fort Fisher [Wilmington, N.C.] with men and horses all crowded together on one deck, arrived there Feb. 22nd.” (John Moore to his father, 1865)

Recently, a group of personal letters written to Rebecca S. Nichols during the 1840’s & 50’s intrigued me because of the poetic style & tone. Researching the unknown names, I discovered what Ohio history buffs already know—that, in the mid-1800’s, Cincinnati was regarded as the literary center of the West. Some of these individuals seeking response or favor from Ms. Nichols were statesmen, lawyers, entrepreneurs and authors. Ms. Nichols, known at the time for her poetry, was published in various journals as well as the *Cincinnati Herald*, and a volume of her work appeared in 1851, *Songs of the Heart*

*and the Hearth Song.* (In the Ohioana Library Archives).

One of her correspondents was Nicholas Longworth of Cincinnati, a nationally known horticulturist who made his fortune growing grapes and making wine. Another, Otway Curry, a Marysville farmer, lawyer, editor, and legislator as well as a popular poet of the time, wrote what is claimed to be the “most popular campaign song” ever written in “the history of the politics of our country.” “The Log Cabin Song” written in 1840 was inspired by a large delegation of citizens from Marysville, Ohio who wanted to show their support for William Henry Harrison, known as the “Log Cabin” candidate, during a mass convention to be held in Columbus. Early in February of 1840, the group started work on the cabin made of “Buckeye” logs and then, on February 21st, transported the finished product to Columbus; they embarked the day before the convention and arrived the next afternoon, hauling it by wagon through Plain City and West Jefferson, continuing on the “National” road to the State House. Curry’s “Log Cabin Song” was sung at the Columbus Convention to the tune of “Highland Laddie.”

Each week I anticipate the insights, gossip, whimsy, and information I stumble upon as I preserve a portion of Ohio history. Lucky me.