

Historical Notes to accompany letter dated:

02/16/62: 010

Historical Notes

In reading the Civil War "letters home" from Lt. Cyrus Hardaway to his mother in New Berlin/Pittsfield, several illusions about 19th century military life are quickly dispelled. Unlike twentieth century wars in which Americans have fought in battlefields far from home and family, the American Civil War was fought at locations only a few hundred miles away. As a result, families and friends participated in the personal life of soldiers by sending packages, parcels, and personal items.

From details in several prior letters, it is readily apparent that mail/parcel service between New Berlin/Pittsfield and Berdan's Instruction Camp outside Washington, D. C., was surprisingly efficient. By comparing Hardaway's letters to his mother, and his responses in his next letter to her, it appears that an entire "round trip" letter cycle could occur within 10 days. Additional evidence of this quick delivery is seen in the February 16, 1862 letter. Hardaway and his friends are enjoying Herkimer cheeses and home made butter and blackberries. Granted that the season is winter and that the month is February, but the presence of such perishables suggests rapid mail and parcel delivery service. Hardaway is appreciative of this home grown local food and these latest additions allow him to state that, ". . .we are liveing now on the fat of the land. . ."

Hardaway's letters frequently contain amusing anecdotes or incidents about the "solder's life." In his February 9 letter, he mentions that the "boys go out forageing once in a while and milk all the cows they happen to find." Equally interesting is the fact that he and his friend "Harrington" will send their clothes home some time this week. In all probability he is referring to winter or extra clothes and not some sort of laundry service. It is further evidence of the psychological proximity felt by soldiers to their home towns.

Harrington is in all probability Henry Harrington of New Berlin. His granddaughter still resides in New Berlin and is a tresured resource person. If you do not know who Henry Harrington's granddaughter is, perhaps a quick trip to the the local New Berlin library and some personal historical research will reward you with the identity of this New Berlin citizen.