

## Guide to the Thomas B. Leaver Letter Books, 1861-1862

### Administrative Information

**Title and Dates:**

Thomas B. Leaver Letter Books, 1861-1862

**Repository:**

New Hampshire Historical Society  
30 Park Street  
Concord, NH 03301  
603-228-6688  
<https://www.nhhistory.org/>

**Collection Number:**

1915.006

**Author of Finding Aid:**

Sandra Wheeler

**Creator:**

Leaver, Thomas B., 1840-1862

**Language:**

The materials in this collection are in English.

**Extent:**

2 volumes ; 0.17 linear feet

**Abstract:**

The Thomas B. Leaver (1840-1862) Letter Books contain handwritten transcriptions (probably made by his sisters) of letters he wrote to various family members while serving in Company B, 2<sup>nd</sup> New Hampshire Volunteer Regiment in Virginia and Maryland from his enlistment in 1861 to his death in June 1862. They describe the details of camp life and its tedium and hardships; a short hospitalization in the General Hospital on E street in Washington, DC; being found innocent in a court-martial; battle experiences at First Bull Run; the siege of Yorktown; and battles of Williamsburg and Fair Oaks.

## Access and Use

### **Acquisition Information and Provenance:**

The Thomas B. Leaver Letter Books were a gift of Ms. Leaver on September 7, 1915.

### **Processing Information:**

This collection was processed by an unknown person in an unknown year. The finding aid was written by Sandra Wheeler in April 2022. This finding aid follows the standards set forth by *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*.

### **Access Restrictions:**

Available for research.

### **Location:**

The collection is housed at the New Hampshire Historical Society in Concord, New Hampshire.

### **Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements:**

The materials in this collection are bound and require a book cradle for use.

### **Copyright/Conditions Governing Use:**

For permission to reproduce or publish materials from this collection, please contact the New Hampshire Historical Society. Users are responsible for following all copyright and intellectual property laws.

### **Preferred Citation:**

Item title, Thomas B. Leaver Letter Books, 1915.006. New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, NH. Date accessed.

## Collection Overview

### **Biographical Information:**

Thomas B. Leaver (1840-1862) was the son of Mary B. Leaver (1810-1878, born in Wales) and Thomas Leaver (1814-1847, born in England). Thomas B. was born in the Bahamas, West Indies, along with his older brother, Henry (1838-1901). His other siblings, Sarah (1841-1933), Anne (1844-1927), and William (1845-1908) were born in Rhode Island. Thomas Leaver, Sr. was a Church of England clergyman who moved from Rhode Island to serve as Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Concord, New Hampshire, in 1846 and died just a year later. His widow seems to have run a boarding house on Wall Street in Concord for the rest of her life. It appears that she did this with the assistance of her daughters (who remained unmarried) and a servant brought from the West Indies: Phyllis Smith (1821-1904), born in Africa, who was brought to the United States as a free woman; census records indicate that she was literate.

Thomas B. Leaver was a printer's apprentice who enlisted in Company B, Second New Hampshire Volunteer Regiment on May 11, 1861 and served until his death on June 28, 1862 in Barrington.

**Collection Scope and Content Note:**

Most of the Thomas B. Leaver (1840-1862) letters concern his everyday life in the New Hampshire Second Volunteer Regiment, Company B (also known as “The Goodwin Rifles” after the weapons they carried) during the Civil War. He described the hard work of daily camp life and its routines, privations, camaraderie, and brushes with military discipline. His unit was involved in several engagements (First Bull Run, siege of Yorktown, battles of Williamsburg and Fair Oaks) and he told his family what he saw, heard, and felt during them. He recorded the attitudes of his fellow soldiers towards various commanding officers, emphasizing how important it was that they be thought of as brave and worthy of respect. He knew many of the men in his company from his previous civilian life and his letters show how tight knit the “Concord Boys” were. Perhaps because a free Black woman lived and worked with and for his mother, he noticed what enslaved Black people (mostly men) did and described his interaction with them.

Although Harriet Dame was in the area in which Leaver served and he apparently knew her, he specifically told his mother that he had not seen or talked with her. He did recount visits from President Lincoln and New Hampshire dignitaries when they occurred.

Leaver enlisted as a private and was a sergeant when he died, so his letters are a view of the war from the ranks. Although he shared rumors heard by the men, he had no knowledge of larger tactics, troop movements, or high-level decision making.

Readers learn little about his family. One of his sisters traveled to England during the time of these letters, but information about why or what she was doing there, or any reports she might have sent home about the attitude of English friends to the war are absent. Similarly, although Phyllis Smith (1821-1904), a free Black woman, lived with his family in Concord, there is no information about her apart from Leaver’s inquiries about her health.

Several of Leaver’s letters appeared in the local Concord newspaper, the Independent Democrat, and the print versions were pasted into the letter books. Whether his sisters in any way altered or edited his letters when they transcribed them is unknown.

**Arrangement:**

The volumes are arranged chronologically.

**Contents List**

Volume 1      Thomas B. Leaver letter book, 1861 May 9-1862 February 3  
Volume 2      Thomas B. Leaver letter book, 1862 February 24-June 24

**Subject Terms****People:**

Boyden, George, 1833-1889  
Burnside, Ambrose Everett, 1824-1881  
Colby, Abiel, 1833-1862

Hale, John P. (John Parker), 1806-1873  
Heintzelman, Samuel Peter, 1805-1880  
Hooker, Joseph, 1814-1879  
Leaver, Thomas B., 1840-1862  
Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865  
Marston, Gilman, 1811-1890  
McClellan, George B. (George Brinton), 1826-1885  
Naglee, Henry M. (Henry Morris), 1815-1886  
Parker, Henry E. (Henry Elijah), 1821-1896  
Rollins, Edward Henry, 1824-1889  
Smith, Phyllis, 1831-1904

**Organizations:**

United States. Army. New Hampshire Infantry Regiment, 2nd (1861-1865)

**Subjects:**

Bull Run, 1<sup>st</sup> Battle of, Va., 1861  
Courts-martial and courts of inquiry  
Fair Oaks, Battle of, Va., 1862  
Health  
Military discipline  
Military life  
Slavery  
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865  
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Hospitals  
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Personal narratives  
Williamsburg, Battle of, Williamsburg, Va., 1862

**Locations:**

Bladensburg, MD  
Centreville, VA  
Concord, NH  
Doncaster, MD  
Fair Oaks, VA  
Point Lookout, MD  
Washington, DC  
Williamsburg, VA  
Yorktown, VA

**Occupations:**

Soldiers