

**Book Review: *Wanted-- Correspondence: Women's Letters to a Union Soldier*. Nancy L. Rhoades and Lucy E. Bailey, editors.** Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2009. 410 pages. <<http://www.ohioswallow.com/>>. Reviewed by Daniel H. Reigle for Cincinnati Civil War Roundtable [www.cincinnatiwrt.org](http://www.cincinnatiwrt.org).

The heart of this book is a collection of 168 letters written to Lieutenant Edwin L. **Lybarger**, 43rd OVI, between 1862 and 1867. A unique aspect of this collection is that all but ten were written by women, most of whom **Lybarger** knew, but a few of whom were women who responded to his placement of "write to a soldier" newspaper advertisements that he placed to request correspondence.

The letters were found by **Lybarger**'s granddaughter, Nancy Rhoades, in a small wooden chest passed down through the family to her. She discovered them only after her own retirement from the College of Wooster (Ohio), and was stunned to find that these were not letters written by her grandfather, but that "These were letters from GIRLS!" Ms. Rhoades' co-editor, Dr. Lucy E. Bailey, saw the project through to completion after Ms. Rhoades' death in 2007, and a biographical sketch was written by Ms. Rhoades' niece, Jennifer L. Wilke.

Born in 1840, Mr. **Lybarger** grew up in Millwood, Union Township, Knox County OH. He enlisted on 25 Nov 1861 in the 43rd OVI, Company K. He was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant on 5 Dec 1862, and to 1st Lieutenant as regimental Quartermaster on 18 Nov 1864. The 43rd was part of Fuller's Ohio Brigade with the 27th, 39th, and 63rd OVI regiments. During the Confederate attempt to recover control of Corinth MS in October 1862, **Lybarger** was wounded in the knee, requiring three months to recover in hospitals at Corinth and Paducah KY. In 1864-1865 as a veteran volunteer, **Lybarger** and the 43rd OVI served throughout the Atlanta Campaign, the March to the Sea, and the final Carolina Campaign. He mustered out on 13 Jul 1865, and returned home to study law in Mt. Vernon OH. He married one of his primary correspondents, Sophronia "Phrone" Warren **Rogers** in 1867, and had a long career that included merchandising, sheep and wool production, banking, and Republican party politics. As a member of the Ohio state legislature, he sponsored the legislation that created Ohio State University, and as an active member of the GAR, he was elected Commander of the Department of Ohio in 1896. He died in 1924. Larry Stevens' *Ohio in the Civil War* website includes three images related to **Lybarger** in the Files section of the site's Message Board: an image of his GAR calling card; an image of the 1917 Ohio Brigade Reunion booklet; and a photograph of Mr. **Lybarger** as president of the reunion organization. <<http://groups.google.com/group/ohio-in-the-civil-war-/files>>

There is much to learn from these letters, and anyone who wants a better understanding of the experiences of their ancestors, both the veterans and their relatives and friends, will benefit from reading these letters. However, an unexpected bonus in the book is the extensive "introduction" to the letters written by Lucy Bailey. In this case, "introduction" does not adequately describe Dr. Bailey's 117-page analysis of the letters themselves, because she actually develops several themes at length: the culture of letter-writing at the time of the war; correspondence as an integral part of the war effort; correspondence as romantic work; the importance of photographs and photographic technology; women and education; and Ohio's Civil War involvement and experience. Having earned her Ph.D. at Ohio State and now teaching at Oklahoma State, Dr. Bailey ties many specific letters into each one of these larger issues, adding to the value of reading the letters themselves and making the book of interest to a much broader range of readers and researchers.

There is unique value in these letters for anyone researching the genealogy and/or the military history of the specific soldiers of the Knox-Holmes-Coshocton area or of the 43rd OVI, as there are references to other soldiers and units on nearly every page. For example, Fannie **Meredith** on 14 Sep 1862 relates visiting Delia **Shroyer** and the **Deal** family, who "feel very bad about Nute, did not get any letters yesterday ... They do not know but what he is dead but think if he was dead some of you would have written about it" (pages 117-118.) According to the *Ohio Official Roster*, Newton **Shroyer**, age 18, 43rd OVI, Company K, died of disease on 21 Sep 1862 at Jackson TN, and was buried in Chattanooga National Cemetery. A later letter from Adelia painfully relates that "We sent for Newton's clothes and they came. O what a horrible sight to look upon and to think that was all that was left of the once merry-hearted bright eyed Boy, my Dear Brother, it is dreadful to contemplate, but alas how frail is life" (page 130.)

This is a valuable book and an important collection of letters, joining *Affectionately Yours: The Civil War Home-Front Letters of the Ovid Butler Family* (Barbara Butler Davis, Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 2004) among the very few such published sources.