Benjamin F. Whitten Papers

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2023

Contact information: https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact

Catalog Record: https://lccn.loc.gov/mm2009085476

Additional search options available at: https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms010278

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2011
Revised 2023 September

Collection Summary

Title: Benjamin F. Whitten Papers
Inclusive Dates: 1848-1945
Bulk Dates: 1861-1883
ID No.: MSS85476
Creator: Whitten, Benjamin F. (Benjamin Franklin), b. ca. 1836
Extent: 750 items
Extent: 3 containers plus 1 oversize
Extent: 1 linear foot
Language: Collection material in English
Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
LC Catalog record: https://lccn.loc.gov/mm2009085476
Summary: United States Army officer. Correspondence, family papers, military records, financial and legal records, and miscellaneous items relating primarily to Whitten's service in the Union Army during the Civil War.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People
Whitten family.
Whitten, Abigail--Correspondence.
Whitten, Benjamin F. (Benjamin Franklin), approximately 1836-

Organizations
United States. Army. Maine Infantry Regiment, 9th (1861-1865)
United States. Army. Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, 54th (1863-1865)

Subjects
African Americans--Education.
Cold Harbor, Battle of, Va., 1864.
Freedmen--Southern States--Social life and customs.
Frontier and pioneer life--Nebraska.
Morris Island, Battle of, S.C., 1863 (July 10-September 7)
World War, 1914-1918.
World War, 1939-1945.

Places
Bermuda Hundred Region (Va.)--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.
Fort Wagner (S.C.)
South Atlantic States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Campaigns.
South Carolina--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Campaigns.
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--African Americans.
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Participation, African American.
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Prisoners and prisons.
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Songs and music.
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.
Virginia--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Campaigns.

Titles
Benjamin Franklin Whitten papers

Occupations
Army officers.

Acquisition Information

The papers of Benjamin F. Whitten, United States Army officer, were purchased by the Library of Congress in 2007.

Processing History

The papers of Benjamin F. Whitten were arranged and described by Michael McElderry in 2010. The finding aid was updated in 2023 by Maria Farmer as part of a division-wide remediation project by the Inclusive Description Working Group.

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of Benjamin F. Whitten is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Benjamin F. Whitten are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Benjamin F. Whitten Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

Benjamin F. Whitten of Topsham, Maine, born circa 1836, enlisted with the Ninth Maine Volunteer Infantry Regiment in Union service at age twenty-five in 1861. While stationed at Camp Harding near Washington, D.C., the regiment was assigned to General William T. Sherman's expedition to capture Port Royal and in November 1861 arrived at Hilton Head, South Carolina, where camp was established until January 1862. In February, the Ninth Regiment was garrisoned on Fernandina Island off the coast of Florida for the remainder of the year. From July to September 1863, Whitten participated in the siege of Fort Wagner on Morris Island, South Carolina. In the Spring of 1864, the regiment was transferred to the Army of the Potomac, and in May, fought in the Bermuda Hundred Campaign. Later in May, Whitten also fought in the Battle of Cold Harbor where he was taken prisoner on June 1, 1864. Whitten was paroled on March 12, 1865, and the Ninth Maine Regiment was mustered out of service on July 13, 1865. From 1868 to 1885, Whitten made unsuccessful attempts to homestead near Dakota City and Wakefield, Nebraska. By 1907, Whitten had relocated to the West Coast and lived in San Diego, California, from 1908 to 1911.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Benjamin Franklin Whitten (born circa 1836) span the years 1848-1945, with the bulk of the material dating from 1861 to 1883. The collection contains correspondence, family papers, military records, financial and legal records, and miscellaneous items relating to the Civil War service of Whitten, who enlisted with the Ninth Maine Volunteer Infantry Regiment in 1861, and his family and friends. The papers contain a comprehensive archive of wartime letters written by Whitten from the field and in camp and as many return letters from his mother, father, sisters, and other family members and friends from home. In particular, Whitten's letters provide vivid descriptions of the military campaign against Fort Wagner on Morris Island, South Carolina, in the summer of 1863, as well as other actions and encampments along the southeast Atlantic coast in 1862 and 1863. Whitten describes community life among formerly enslaved people in the South, commenting on music, education, and the recruitment and performance of Black soldiers, including his observations of the

heroism of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment, one of the first Black military units organized in the Civil War, during the siege of Fort Wagner. Whitten saw further action at Bermuda Hundred and Cold Harbor, Virginia, where he was taken captive as a prisoner of war, June 1, 1864.

In addition to Whitten's battlefield letters, the papers also contain military and post-war records pertaining to his army service including regimental orders, ordnance and clothing returns, invoices, and related documents. Letters exchanged with his wife, Abigail, and other correspondence continue Whitten's personal story through the last decades of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth, including his several unsuccessful attempts at homesteading in Nebraska. Letters and documents pertaining to other family members and their descendents as well as other correspondents date from 1848 to 1945 and include letters from American servicemen from both of the twentieth century's world wars.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged alphabetically by type of material.

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1	Correspondence
BOX 1	Whitten, Benjamin F.
BOX 1	1853-1865
	(7 folders)
BOX 2	1866-1885, 1907-1911, undated
	(4 folders)
BOX 2	Others, 1849-1853, 1861-1869, 1907,1918-1919, 1940-1945
BOX 2	Family papers
BOX 2	Whitten, Abigail (wife)
BOX 2	Correspondence, 1869-1870, 1880, 1890
BOX 2	Letters exchanged with Benjamin F. Whitten, 1870-1872, 1882
BOX 2	Whitten family correspondence, 1848-1853, 1861-1871, 1885-1899, 1905, 1913-1915
BOX 2	Financial and legal records, 1851-1871, 1879, 1897
BOX 3	Military invoices, orders, and miscellaneous records, 1862-1867 *See also Oversize*
	(2 folders)
BOX 3	Miscellany, 1864-1866, 1910, 1941 *See also Oversize*
BOX 3	Photograph, tintype, undated
BOX 3	War pensions, 1882-1883
BOX OV 1	Oversize
BOX OV 1	Military invoices, orders, and miscellaneous records, 1863-1864 (Container 3)
BOX OV 1	Miscellany, 1864 (Container 3)