



Finding Aid for

MILTON RUSSELL PAPERS, 1773 - 1900

Accession 37.109

Finding Aid Published: January 2025

Benson Ford Research Center
The Henry Ford
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OVERVIEW

REPOSITORY:	Benson Ford Research Center The Henry Ford 20900 Oakwood Blvd Dearborn, MI 48124-5029 www.thehenryford.org research.center@thehenryford.org
ACCESSION NUMBER:	37.109
CREATOR:	Cole, Sella Russell (Collector)
TITLE:	Milton Russell Papers
INCLUSIVE DATES:	1773-1900
BULK DATES:	1861-1900
QUANTITY:	0.6 cubic ft. (2 boxes)
LANGUAGE:	The materials are in English
ABSTRACT:	Milton Russell was a Lieutenant in the Union Army during the American Civil War (1861-1865). This collection contains correspondence, prints, photographs, certificates, and publications. This collection contains items from 1773 to 1900, with the bulk dates being 1861 through 1900.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

ACCESS RESTRICTIONS:	The collection is open for research.
COPYRIGHT:	Copyright has been transferred to The Henry Ford by the donor. Copyright for some items in the collection may still be held by their respective creator(s).
ACQUISITION:	Gift to The Henry Ford, 1937.
RELATED MATERIAL:	Related material held by The Henry Ford: There are 3D items in the museum holdings. Researchers interested in this material should contact the Benson Ford Research Center staff in advance at research.center@thehenryford.org. See NOTES for further information. Related collections beyond The Henry Ford:
PREFERRED CITATION:	Item, folder, box, accession [37.109], Milton Russell Papers, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford
PROCESSING INFORMATION:	Collection processed by Regina Parsell, August 2024.
DESCRIPTION INFORMATION:	Original collection inventory list prepared by Regina Parsell, August, 2024, and published in January, 2025. Finding aid written by Regina Parsell, August 2024, and published in January, 2025. Finding aid prepared using Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS) and local guidelines.

BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL NOTE

Milton Russell was born in 1836 in Hendricks County, Indiana. IN 1857, he married Harriet Harlan, and two years later they welcomed their daughter, Sella, into the world. In October 1861, Russell enlisted in the Union Army to fight in the American Civil War as 1st lieutenant in Company A of the 51st Indiana Volunteer Infantry. In August 1862 he was promoted to captain. During his time with the 51st, Russell was involved with the pursuit of Confederate General Braxton Bragg through Kentucky in the summer and fall of 1862. By December 1862, Russell and the 51st had arrived in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. This set the stage for the Battle of Stones River, a defining moment in Russell's career as captain.¹

On the evening of December 29, 1862, Russell and 200 handpicked men from Company A set out on a mission to assess where the Confederate army was on the other side of the river. This information was vital to developing an attack strategy for the following morning, when the division was expected to cross the river and attack the enemy. Russell roused his troops and crossed the frigid water. As they neared the opposite shoreline, they were greeted with gunfire from the Confederate soldiers lying in wait "not over forty steps from [their] front."² Making a split-second decision that had major implications on the future of his career, Russell gave his troops the command to press forward. After emptying their own rifles, Russell's troops fixed their bayonets and charged into the enemy line, driving them back 400 yards. Reflecting on this later, Russell noted, "Had the charge proved a failure I would have been court-martialed for exceeding my orders."³ It was for this courageous endeavor that Russell earned the Medal of Honor in 1897.

Following this Russell and the rest of the 51st Infantry continued fighting under Colonel Abel Streight, who eventually had to surrender to Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest on May 3, 1863. The officers of the 51st Infantry, including Russell, were then sent to the infamous Libby Prison in Richmond, Virginia. Russell was among the prisoners who escaped Libby Prison in February 1864 but was recaptured and sent to other Confederate military prisons at Macon, Georgia, and Charleston and Columbia, South Carolina. After being a prisoner of war for 18 months, Russell finally escaped and made his way to General William Tecumseh Sherman's troops in Millen, Georgia. Russell was present for General Sherman's March to the Sea in November 1864.⁴

After the war, Russell returned to civilian life, settling with his wife and daughter in Des Moines, Iowa where he became a grain merchant. He died in 1908, and is buried in San Francisco Columbarium in San Francisco, California.

¹ Head Miller, Jeanie. "Milton Russell: Uncommon Valor in the Civil War." Living History, 2008.

² American Civil War Research Database. Accessed August 19, 2024. <https://www.civilwardata.com/>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Head Miller, Jeanie. "Milton Russell: Uncommon Valor in the Civil War." Living History, 2008.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Milton Russell Papers is a collection of photographs, letters, certificates, and publications assembled by Sella Russell Cole, daughter of Milton Russell. This collection contains materials that date from 1773 to 1900, with the bulk of materials covering the 1860 to 1900. The collection is arranged into three series, **CORRESPONDENCE**, **CERTIFICATES**, and **PHOTOGRAPHS & PRINTS**. There is an accompanying section of 3D objects, clothing, medals and walking sticks that have been cataloged and stored separately, for more information contact the staff at the Benson Ford Research Center.

This collection was gifted to The Henry Ford by Sella Russell Cole. It was her wish that these materials from her father be made available for research and so that his memory may continue to be honored as it was in life. This collection relates to American Civil War history and is important to telling the story of a recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor.

The **CORRESPONDENCE** series which contains letters sent to Milton Russell related to his military service and afterward recognition. Researchers should note that this series includes the letter sent notifying Russell of his being awarded the Congressional Medal of honor.

The **CERTIFICATES** series includes two certificates awarded to Milton Russell related to his military service and his Congressional Medal of Honor.

Finally, the **PHOTOGRAPHS & PRINTS** series includes three photographs of Milton Russell, and a lithographic print of Libby Prison. These materials are related to the 3D objects associated with the collection. Researchers interested in this material should contact the Benson Ford Research Center staff in advance at research.center@thehenryford.org.

ARRANGEMENT

This collection is arranged into three series: Series 1. **CORRESPONDENCE**, Series 2. **CERTIFICATES** and Series 3. **PHOTOGRAPHS & PRINTS**. The items are then arranged in order based on their object id. Some materials in this collection have been dispersed into other collections, researchers interested in this material should contact the Benson Ford Research Center staff in advance at research.center@thehenryford.org.

SUBJECT TERMS

Names, Personal and Corporate
Russell, Milton F., 1836-1908
Medal of Honor

Geographic
Richmond (Va.)
Libby Prison

Indiana

Genre and Form

Certificates

Correspondence

Newspapers

Photographs

CONTAINER LIST

Box no.	Description
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Box 1

CORRESPONDENCE

Letter, 1880 (object id 37.109.26)

Letter, From Senator W.B. Allison to Milton Russell, June 14, 1877 (object id 37.109.27)

Letter, To Milton Russell Notifying Him of Congressional Medal of Honor Award, 1897 (object id 37.109.36)

PHOTOGRAPHS & PRINTS

Lithograph, Libby Prison as it Appeared on August 23, 1863 (object id 37.109.2)

Portrait, "Captain and Mrs. Milton Russell, Taken on His Return from the War," 1865 (object id 37.109.12)

Photographic print, Portrait of Milton Russell, Circa 1900 (object id 37.109.38)

Cabinet Photograph, Portrait of Congressional Medal of Honor Recipient Milton F. Russell, circa 1900 (object id 37.109.41)

Box 2

CERTIFICATES

Certificate, Medal of Honor Award to Milton Russell, 1887 (object id 37.109.29)

Certificate, Medal of Honor Legion Certificate to Milton Russell, October 9, 1897 (object id 37.109.42)

NOTES

3D items within museum holdings listed out below. Researchers interested in this material should contact the Benson Ford Research Center staff in advance at research.center@thehenryford.org.

3D Items

Souvenir Tree Limb Containing Battlefield Bullet, 1861-1865 (object id 37.109.18)
Souvenir Tree Limb Containing Battlefield Bullet, 1861-1865 (object id 37.109.40)
Trunk used by Captain Milton Russell during the Civil War, circa 1860 (object id 37.109.1)
Sash, undated, (object id 37.109.5)
Strap, undated, (object id 37.109.6)
Lamp, undated, (object id 37.109.7)
Stitching Awl, 1855-1875 (object id 37.109.8)
Collar (Neckwear), undated, (object id 37.109.9)
Coin, 1863 (object id 37.109.10)
Cane (Walking Stick), Walking Stick Commemorating Battle of Shiloh, 1865-1895, (object id 37.109.11)
Wood (plant material), undated, (object id 37.109.15)
Medal of Honor, Congressional Medal of Honor Awarded to Captain Milton Russell, 1897, (object id 37.109.16)
Saber, undated, (object id 37.109.19)
Hatchet, undated, (object id 37.109.21)
Cane (Walking Stick), undated, (object id 37.109.28)
Coin, 1862, (object id 37.109.30)
Coin, 1863, (object id 37.109.31)
Dollar, 02, June 1862, (object id 37.109.32)
Two Dollars, 11, July 1862, (object id 37.109.33)
Gavel (Ceremonial mallet), Souvenir Gavel from Libby Prison Museum, 1889-1899, (object id 37.109.34)
Shaving Mug, 1870-1885, (object id 37.109.35)
Medal of Honor, Medal of Honor Legion, Second Class, Awarded to Captain Milton Russell's daughter, Sella Russell Cole, 1897, (object id 37.109.39)

Related Materials

Walking Stick (object id 31.379.1)