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August 31, 2015
Raymond H. Fogler Library, Special Collections
Orono, Maine

An Introduction to the Paul W. Bean Collection on Digital Commons

The Paul W. Bean Collection is an assortment of letters, diaries, and other printed or written paraphernalia from the American Civil War (1861-1865). While the period of the war itself is the main focus of this collection, a mixture of post-war documents produced by soldiers or organizations commemorating the war are also included. These selections were chosen to present researchers with the opportunity to observe change over time in regards to how soldiers and society looked back on this tumultuous period of unmatched violence and bloodshed. In respect to selection, it seemed necessary to take the liberty to include only a partial selection of correspondence between the Lemont Family and their son Frank Lindley Lemont during his tour of duty with the 5th Maine Volunteers Regiment (among others) due to the massive scope of the Bean collection as a whole. While eventually it is hoped that the collection will be completely digitized and organized for the use of researchers at their discretion, these particular letters should prove very useful even in partiality.

There are several things which should be noted regarding the methodology used in creating this particular collection. Some are points of style and liberties taken to create a very specific viewpoint that is intended to make the reading of these documents easier and better for the researcher. Others points regard the format of the website and what constraints influenced the process creating this online collection. Unfortunately, these obstacles are harder to change in order to better aid researchers in finding exactly what might be needed to further intellectual knowledge of the Civil War.

Digital Commons is geared more towards modern research and academic work rather than the preservation of historical collections. As such, it provided a unique opportunity to explore and test the boundaries of what is and is not possible for creating a digital repository of documents for the easiest and richest use. Some of the more important things to note when using the Bean collection include that the site does not necessarily sort documents in chronological order according to month, date, and year. Only after one selects a document does it provide further information such as creation (or publication) date, location of creation, description and comments, and other relevant metadata. Therefore the relevant postal date or creation date of the materials has been included in the description of these items, along with a date in the item title to better differentiate documents from one another. Included at the bottom of each document description is the box number and folio where the document is located in the collection.

The bulk of documents scanned and digitized are part of the Lemont Family Letters, correspondences written by numerous members of the Lemont family to Frank Lindley Lemont and his responses from the battlefield. These are not the only letters available in the Bean Collection; in fact there are several other extensive folios including the correspondence of Charles Warner to his family spanning the entire war. The reason for this particular selection is simply that it represents some of the richest data available to researchers. This is not to say that other documents in the collection are less important; on the contrary, many of these documents are extremely rich in their own right and will prove useful to any number of future academic projects. It is simply that their correspondence is the densest and easiest to digitize for immediate

consumption by the intellectual community which reflects the broadest scope of the Lemont letters, and also in turn the rest of this collection.

One of the other things which should be noted is that within this collection of letters and documents are a small handful of biological historical materials preserved in the folds of letters and diaries by both the Lemont family and some of the other diarists within the Bean Collection. While by themselves they seem perhaps trivial or insignificant they have been digitized nonetheless to preserve the character of the items and allow the researcher to assign significance to these actions.

Great care was taken to describe the contents of these documents as thoroughly as possible without completely rewriting the letters or documents verbatim. It is intended to be a helpful guide in letting researchers decide what is and is not relevant to their research as quickly as possible. Some of these descriptions are perhaps somewhat informal and a tad creative. However, Paul W. Bean diligently prepared typewritten transcripts of numerous letters and diaries within the collection as a whole. Documents which have these transcripts have been included together in one whole PDF file for the benefit of the researcher, with the entirety of the letter and envelope (if included) scanned first and then the transcript following. Though some researchers might dislike this particular format (arguing that such an inclusion ruins the research experience, or perhaps even arguing that the transcript should follow a different format, with a transcript following each section of letter) this choice was made so as to allow researchers the opportunity to view Bean's personal choices and thoughts on the handwriting in each letter. It was also constructed very specifically to allow researchers to read the letters without being influenced by Bean's transcript, but they have the opportunity to consult it if they wish.

Every digital file save for a few of the longer ones has a companion version that utilizes common features in word processing computer programs to better construct the transcript as close to the letter as possible which are also text-searchable. The modern transcription may reveal some nuances in the document that Bean may have missed when he typed them nearly fifty years ago. In any case it is hoped that the researcher will be able to use the updated version to do far more in-depth word searches to find specific data that may or may not be obvious in the included description or in Bean's transcript. Those transcripts currently uploaded to the site alongside these documents are for the most part a searchable version of Bean's typewritten transcript taken directly from the PDF file and edited using OCR technology in Adobe Acrobat. Aside from a few places in which it appeared to be necessary to change certain words or elaborate semi-undecipherable handwriting as noted in Bean's transcript, the integrity of the original typed manuscript remains intact.

These represent the broadest issues and important points of interest for the researcher. Much as there are more than likely a number of problems or stylistic choices that exist with this collection, as in many others, hopefully these points will either clarify or present at least a decent explanation of the current format. If there are any questions, comments, suggestions, or concerns with the creation or presentation of this digital collection, do not hesitate to contact Fogler Library Special Collections or the creator of this collection.

With Sincere and Humble Regards,

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