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Document: *Letter from Annie Welsh to Thomas Welsh, July 1, 1863*

Transcription:

Columbia, July 1st 1863

My Dear Husband

I have just received your letter of the 18th announcing your arrival in front of Vicksburg. It is nearly two weeks since I received the one written from Memphis. I am delighted to hear that you are well. I hope you will be able to stand the heat. It is very warm here, it must be very hot there.

I suppose you have heard by this time of the invasion of Penn^a by the Rebels. I suppose you have felt some uneasiness about us when you heard they were as near to us as Wrightsville but hope the time is past now for them to come to Columbia, but the dear old bridge had to be sacrificed.

I guess there never was a time when Columbia was in such a state of excitement as the last ten days. Last week, all week, droves of horses, mules and cattle, and teams of all descriptions kept passing through town, coming from Franklin, Adams, and York Counties going, a great many of them, they did not know where. On Saturday last, it was distressing to witness old and young, black and white, with all they were able to move, and a great many with nothing at all but what they had on, come crowding through and into our town. And so they kept coming all of Saturday night. Those who came in in the evening brought the news that York had surrendered at five o'clock that evening, so then we knew what to expect by the next evening. Indeed a great many expected that they would be in Columbia by midnight, but I thought I knew enough about war to be pretty sure that they would not try it till the next day, so I made sure of another good night's sleep.

On Sunday morning things seemed pretty quiet. We went to church, the children went to Sunday School in the afternoon, but it seemed to me everybody else were spending the time in packing up. People seemed surprised at me that I did not seem frightened but I thought it best to keep cool. The children begged of me to pack up but I said I would not till I heard the guns, but would not leave home unless they shelled the town. Then I would have sent the children out to Aunt Mary's till it was over but would have stood my ground myself. But I did not believe they could do much harm for I supposed they had nothing with them but light artillery.

But I could not persuade many to think so with me. People were leaving in all directions. I will mention some out our street [*editor's note: Walnut St., between 2nd and 3rd*] – McDonnalds, Mrs. Mullison, Barbers, our colored neighbours of course, all in the row where we used to live, Mrs. Appold & children, Jennie Wall & children, Ziglers, on the other side, Bookers, Beckers, Carters, Strines, Hagmans, both families Merrels, Herrs, Benny, pattons and I believe it was all over town like in our street. So I was told, but I remained at home so I did not see myself and I believe Mrs. Hook and I were the only women that stayed at home. Nearly everyone else that staid in town was in the streets. Late in the afternoon we heard they (the Rebs) were in the neighbourhood of Wrightsville and a fight was expected every moment. So about six o'clock we heard the booming of



LancasterHistory

cannon. Then we knew that the Ball had commenced. My only fear was that they would not succeed in retreating and getting the torch applied to the bridge in time, but they succeeded well. Some of the Rebels rushed in and tried to extinguish the fire but could not succeed.

Persons that came over from Wrightsville since say that they [*editor's note: the Rebels*] were very much disappointed. They thought we would not have spunk enough to burn the bridge. They tried to flank our little force and capture them, and fifteen minutes more would have done it.

I am sorry to say that my old native town [*editor's note: Wrightsville*] was disgraced by some females (they were not ladies, of course) who fired out of the windows at our men when they were retreating and it was said greeted the Rebels with flowers.

When you read an account of this in the Press or any of the Philadelphia papers do not believe one word it may say about the part the City Troop took in the fight. They were not across the bridge at all. They did nothing but ride about Columbia and are doing nothing but that yet. The Press says too that there were no Volunteers from Columbia, but two Companies of Coloured men. This is a falsehood, too.

We had plenty of boarders for a day or two till the soldiers got supplies. I was not afraid of anything but my money, and think I put it in a safe place against thieves or fire.

The children did not want to go to bed on Sunday night at all. Effie and Lill [*editor's note: ages 8 and 5*] I sent up to Aunt Lizzie's to stay all night. Mrs. Hook, and I walked down to Front Street to see the fire. It was a Magnificent but awful sight. Mrs. Hook would have much rather seen the Rebels come into town than to see the bridge burnt. She made fun of our soldiers, calling them cowards for retreating. I believe she would have been pleased if they had been captured. She was very anxious that Columbia should be surrendered.

We are all well. Lill was sick yesterday but is well again today. Blant [*editor's note: age 3*] is making wooden guns and bullets to shoot the rebels. He was out front the other day when he saw some soldiers down the street. He called to one of the girls to bring his flag quick. The rebels were coming and he wanted to hurrah for them. I heard a number of people wish that Gen^l. Welsh were here to command. I said I wished too he was, if he had his own men with him, but would not want you to command these greenhorns and take the blame for all their blunders.

Mr. Appold wants to know if you would be willing for him to have what the boat made last summer for the services he has done you. If you are satisfied he says he will be. He says it will be but a few dollars over a hundred, and he had to furnish all the money that was needed and had much trouble with the boat. He seemed anxious to have it settled. He hailed an old boat Captain and made him come up to the house to pay me a bill. It was 8 dollars, but he would pay but five, saying he had paid Mr. Wright some.

Our building of course is stopped for there is no business going on. All the stores in town are closed. Dr. McCorkle told me last night there were 40 miles of cars at the lower end of the road. It is reported today that the Rebels have retired from in front of the intrenchments at Harrisburg. I hope Gen. Mead will give them battle in Maryland. Perhaps that will draw them away from Penn^a. What do you think of the change in Commanders?



Samuel and Mary are in Phil^a. Samuel is sick and I suppose he went to consult Physitions there about his disease, which is of the heart. The brick wall to our kitchen is nearly done.

I have spun this out longer than I expected, so I think I will close. I hope you will soon return to Ky, or better to our home. Oh but we would be rejoiced to see you. Remember me to all the boys. Mathew Cowden's sister Annie was in town last week. She came to see me. She was very anxious to see Lillie; she said Math had written so much about her. But she was in school. I was going to take her to see her on Saturday, but she went home at noon of that day. When I saw her, she expected to stay till this week. I do not know what is going to become of Jim. Since this excitement, he is not home a quarter of his time night or day. Do you think he would have to be on guard every night? He tells me so I know. Mr. Stacy thinks he is not doing as he should as he was here several times to inquire after him. I told him this morning he would lose his place. He said he did not care.

Yours truly

Annie

Analysis: Wiggin

This letter from Annie Welsh to her husband, Brig. Gen. Thomas Welsh, contains a wonderful describing the chaos surrounding the burning of the Columbia-Wrightsville bridge. Gen. Welsh was at Vicksburg at the time, commanding the 1st Div. of the 9th Corps in support of Gen. Grant.

Scope and Content:

Handwritten letter to Thomas Welsh from his wife, Annie in Columbia, Lancaster County. Letter describes the approach of the Confederate army to Columbia; the fleeing of citizens from York County acrosss the bridge; the reactions of various people in Columbia; her determination to stay in Columbia; and the terrible site of seeing the river bridge on fire. See MG0828 SeriesE F04 for related envelope. Note: General Welsh was at Vicksburg at the time, commanding the 1st Division of the 9th Corps in support of General Grant.

