

**Guide to the George S. Geer Papers, 1862-1866  
Catalog Number MS010**

**The Library at The Mariners' Museum**

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## DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

**Repository:** The Library at The Mariners' Museum

**Title:** George S. Geer Papers, 1862-1866

**Catalog number:** MS010

**Accession number:** [None]; A2005.20 (Martha Geer photograph).

**Physical Characteristics:** 91 items

**Language(s):** English

**Creator(s):** George S. Geer

## SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection features the Civil War correspondence of George S. Geer to his wife from 1862 to 1866. Geer wrote the majority of these letters, while serving on board the U.S. Navy ironclad USS *Monitor*. During that time, he wrote 82 letters to his wife describing events on board the ironclad. In his letters home, Geer writes of the Battle of Hampton Roads, the fall of Norfolk, the Peninsula Campaign, the flight of African American slaves and use of contrabands, and the refit of the *Monitor* at the Washington Navy Yard. More remarkably, his letters paint a detailed portrait of common events and everyday life on board the *Monitor* from her embarkation from New York in March 1862 to her sinking off the North Carolina coast on December 31, 1862. For a detailed description of Geer's correspondence while serving on board the *Monitor*, please see *The Monitor Chronicles: One Sailor's Account*. The collection also contains a cartes de visite photograph of Martha Geer and articles and obituaries of George Geer.

## ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

### Accession number

[None]; A2005.20 (Martha Geer photograph)

### Accession date

1997; 2005

### Restrictions:

Collection is open to all researchers.

### Publication Rights:

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### Preferred Citation

George S. Geer Papers, 1862-1866: MS010

The Library at The Mariners' Museum, Newport News, Virginia

### Note to Users

Due to the fragile and rare nature of the collection, researchers are requested to handle the materials with caution and in accordance with proscribed archival practices. When using these materials, please preserve the original order of the collection.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL SKETCH**

According to U.S. Military pension records and his published obituary, George Spencer Geer was born in 1836 in Troy, New York. His father was Gilbert Geer and little is known of Geer's early life in Troy except that he worked for his father's stove foundry. On October 3, 1858, Geer married Martha Clark Hamilton in New York City. At the outbreak of the Civil War, George and Martha Geer were living in an apartment in the Lower East Side of New York with their two young children. Unemployed and in debt, George Geer, enlisted in the United States Navy on February 15, 1862. The Navy accepted him as a first-class fireman and he was first posted to the USS *North Carolina*. Geer was transferred to the USS *Monitor* by February 20, as his name appears on the ship's roster sent to the Navy Department on that date.

George Geer served on board the *Monitor* from February 1862 to her sinking on December 31, 1862. While serving on the *Monitor*, Geer participated in the Battle of Hampton Roads and in support of the Peninsula Campaign. In May 1862, Geer was promoted to "Engineer Yeoman." On January 19, 1863, Geer was appointed an Acting Third Assistant Engineer and reported the same day to the USS *Galena*. He served on the *Galena* until May 25, 1863, when he was detached from the ship and granted a leave of absence. On June 3, 1863, he was ordered to proceed to Port Royal, South Carolina. By the end of June 1863, he was attached to the U.S. Storeship *Vermont* and was appointed Acting 2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant Engineer on June 1, 1864. He continued to serve on the *Vermont* until August 18, 1864. Geer was then ordered to the USS *Philadelphia* and remained with the ship until he was detached from the U.S. Navy on August 25, 1865. On December 1, 1865 he was honorably discharged from the U.S. Navy.

After the Civil War, Geer served as an engineer on several commercial steamships. However, by 1886, he was living in Troy, New York with his family. In that year, Geer was elected Charity Commissioner. He held this post until 1889, holding the position of president of the board for one year. George and Martha Geer had six children: William C. Geer, Gilbert M. Geer, Frank H. Geer, George W. Geer, Martha S. Geer, and Mrs. Charles Sexton. Geer was a member of the John A. Griswold G.A.R. Post (New York GAR Post 338) and was an honorary pallbearer at the funeral of John Ericsson.

In 1890, Geer became the superintendent of the Bradley Mines at Stono, South Carolina. Two weeks prior to his death, George Geer was stricken with what was called at the time "swamp fever" and admitted to the St. Francis Xavier infirmary in Charleston, South Carolina. There he died on October 9, 1892. His remains were interred in Oakwood Cemetery in Troy, New York. On January 31, 1924, Martha C. Geer died in Troy, New York.

## **SERIES DESCRIPTION**

The papers are in two series. The material in Series I are arranged in ascending chronological order. In addition, family members have donated a photograph of Martha

Geer and biographical materials on George and Martha Geer. The biographical materials have been placed in folder 2 and the photograph in Series II. Series II is arranged in alphabetical order.

**Series I: Correspondence, 1862-1866.**

Arranged chronologically. This series is comprised of letters from George S. Geer to his wife, Martha, while serving on board the USS *Monitor*, USS *Galena*, and USS *Vermont* during the U.S. Civil War.

**Series II: Photographs, 1862.**

Arranged alphabetically. This series is comprised of a photograph of Martha Geer dating from 1862.

**FOLDER LISTING**

**BOX 1: CORRESPONDENCE; PHOTOGRAPHS**

**Folder 1      Finding Aid**

**Folder 2      Background Information**

Contains newspaper articles, obituaries, photocopies of correspondence, and photographs of George and Martha Geer's gravesites.

**Folder 3      Correspondence, February [March] 1862**

**February [March] 2, 1862: USS *Monitor***

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer describes the mechanical problems on board the *Monitor* preventing her from sailing from New York Harbor; conditions on board the ship; comparisons of the *Monitor* with the USS *North Carolina*; home-sickness; pay and shore leave problems; and his desire to have his mail directed to the *Monitor*. (The letter is dated February, however, it actually dates from March 1862).

**[MS10.01.03.01]**

**Folder 4      Correspondence, March 1862**

**March 10, 1862: USS *Monitor*, Fortress Monroe, VA.**

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer describes his role in the battle between the *Monitor* and CSS *Virginia*; conditions on board the *Monitor* during the battle; the *Monitor's* voyage from New York to Hampton Roads; lack of sleep; visits of dignitaries to the ship; and his desire for a copy of the New York *Times* article on the battle.

**[MS10.01.04.01].**

**March 15, 1862:** USS *Monitor*, Hampton Roads.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer describes the Battle of Hampton Roads; the visit of the Assistant Secretary of the Navy; preparations for the reappearance of the *Virginia*; and personal financial and family matters. [MS10.01.04.02]

**Folder 5      Correspondence, March 1862**

**March 18, 1862:** USS *Monitor*, Hampton Roads.  
Six-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer presents a detailed description of daily life on board the *Monitor*; waiting for the *Virginia* to reappear; and weather conditions. He advises his wife on methods to get around governmental “red tape” so that she can receive his pay. [MS10.01.05.01]

**March 24, 1862:** USS *Monitor*, Hampton Roads.  
Six-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer recounts waiting for the *Virginia* to reappear; fear of residents and troops in Hampton Roads over the possible return of the *Virginia*; the Battle of Yorktown; the build up of troops in Norfolk; pay issues; and censorship of the mail. [MS10.01.05.02]

**March 26, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer describes his personal financial problems; waiting for the *Virginia* to reappear; the steady stream of official Army and Navy visitors to the *Monitor*; the frustration of the *Monitor* crew at not being allowed to harvest oysters right under their ship; and the orders that stopped the Captain of the *Monitor* from attacking the *Virginia*. Geer also discusses the continued build up of troops and his desire to see Captain Worden return to the *Monitor*. [MS10.01.05.03]

**March 30, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Fortress Monroe.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer describes the condition of his clothing; personal financial issues; his feelings in waiting for the *Virginia* to reappear; the *Virginia* being in dry-dock; and the visit of a “Contraband” to the *Monitor*. The “Contraband” told of damage and fatalities aboard the *Virginia*. [MS10.01.05.04]

**Folder 6      Correspondence, April 1862**

**April 2, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Hampton Roads.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer complains of the lack of clothing, ill-fitting clothing; the shortage of paper; and the tedium of waiting for the *Virginia* to reappear. [MS10.01.06.01]

**April 6, 1862:** Hampton Roads.

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of the booming of canons at the beginning of the Battle of Yorktown; lists the number of casualties from the Battle of Yorktown; and the need for doctors. He further describes the visit of General George McClellan to the *Monitor*; a new type of artillery shell containing a liquid inside that burns on impact; McClellan's drive on Yorktown and Norfolk; and that the *Virginia* fired 50 shells toward Sewell's Point. [MS10.01.06.02]

**April 7, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Hampton Roads.

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of the shortage of writing paper; installing a steam pump in the *Monitor*; the movement of the USS *Galena* and two gun boats up the James River; General McClellan's push to Richmond; and the desertion of Confederate forces from Norfolk. He describes President Lincoln's visit to the *Monitor* and the possibility of the President ordering the ship to Norfolk to prevent Confederate forces from destroying the Navy Yard. He also gives a detailed description of the food served aboard the *Monitor*.

[MS10.01.06.03]

**April 8, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Hampton Roads.

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer responds to his wife's fear of the possibility of the *Monitor* sinking. He describes the roles of other Federal vessels in the battle with the *Virginia* and actions of the *Virginia* at Sewell's Point. [MS10.01.06.04]

## Folder 7

### Correspondence, April 1862

**April 13, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Hampton Roads.

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his wife's new house; the Battle of Yorktown; and the feeling on board the *Monitor* that the *Virginia* was taunting them. [MS10.01.07.01]

**April 16, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Hampton Roads.

Six-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer gives a detailed description of life on board the *Monitor*; problems with "whiskey and rum" on board the ship; morale; absence of the *Virginia*; the Battle of Yorktown; and his wife's living conditions. [MS10.01.07.02]

**April 21, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Hampton Roads.

Three-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer describes living conditions on the *Monitor*; the Battle of Yorktown; the absence of the *Virginia*; problems with mail service; and stormy conditions in Hampton Roads. [MS10.01.07.03]

**April 24, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Hampton Roads.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer describes the USS *Galena*; the absence of *Virginia*; daily life on board the *Monitor*; weather conditions; the shortage of paper; and family matters. [MS10.01.07.04]

**Folder 8 Correspondence, May 1862**

**May 3, 1862:** Hampton Roads.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer complains about the mail service and the need for paper and envelopes. He describes the sound of gunfire coming from Yorktown; haircuts; and daily life on the *Monitor*. He states that he believes that the rebellion is drawing to a close. [MS10.01.08.01]

**May 11, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Norfolk, VA.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer describes the shelling of Sewell's Point; the sailing of the *Monitor* to Norfolk; the destruction of the Norfolk Navy Yard by Confederate forces; and the destruction of the *Virginia*. He complains about the mail service and the need for postage stamps. [MS10.01.08.02]

**May 15, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, 8 Miles from Richmond.  
Ten-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer describes the sailing of the *Monitor*, *Galena*, *Rostick*, and *Port Royal* toward Richmond. He gives a detailed account of the destruction suffered by the *Galena*; the exchange of prisoners; misuse of "flag of truce;" City Point; life on board the *Monitor*; the lack of supplies; and plantations on the James River. [MS10.01.08.03]

**Folder 9 Correspondence, May 1862**

**May 20, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, City Point, VA.  
Twelve-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer states that he was promoted by Engineer Isaac Newton to Engineer Yeoman and placed in charge of supplies for the engine room. He describes Confederate attacks; prisoners of war; the evacuation of City Point; Contrabands; and the turning away escaping slaves from the *Monitor* due to the lack of space. Geer states that the *Monitor's* cook was contraband whose former master owned a large farm nearby. According to Geer, the *Monitor's* cook former master was a Confederate Colonel who owned nearly 100 slaves. Geer also states that there are 5 to 10 former slaves had replaced deceased Federal sailors on the *Galena*. [MS10.01.09.01]

**May 20, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, City Point.

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer presents a detailed description of daily life on board the *Monitor* for a crewman including food, washing, personal hygiene, and punishments. [MS10.01.09.02]

**May 21, 1862:** City Point.

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer describes the new flag officer; weather conditions; swimming in the James River; prisoners; mail call; war trophies; and the advance of the Federal army toward Richmond. He states that the *Monitor* will be sent to the Washington Navy Yard for repairs once Richmond falls. [MS10.01.09.03]

**Folder 10 Correspondence, May 1862**

**May 24, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, City Point, James River.

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer states that the *Monitor* is out of provisions, and that McClellan's army has caught up with the Federal fleet in the James River. He describes the treatment of contrabands on board the *Monitor*; states that another contraband has come on board; and states that he is against the contraband idea. [MS10.01.10.01]

**May 24, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Up James River.

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer gives a detailed description of the food, methods of cooking, and types of supplies aboard the *Monitor*. [MS10.01.10.02]

**May 26, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River.

Two-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer states that there is little news; that he sent his wife money; and reassures her that he is safe on the *Monitor*. [MS10.01.10.03]

**May 29, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, City Point, VA.

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer describes Masonic meetings on board the *Monitor*; the contents of a package he received; the jealousy of crewmembers over his promotion; the lack of provisions; and states that of the 40 members of the crew, only eight are Americans. [MS10.01.10.04]

**Folder 11 Correspondence, June 1862**

**June 2, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River.

Two-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer states that the *Monitor* is with a group of seven to eight ships heading toward Richmond. He tells of the *Monitor's* engine breaking down 10 mile above City Point

and states that he believes the ship to have bad luck. In his opinion, Captain Worden took all the luck with him. [MS10.01.11.01]

**June 4, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, City Point.

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer states that the *Monitor's* engine is still inoperative; that they are waiting for parts from New York; and that the *Monitor* is due to go to the Washington Naval Yard for repairs as soon as Richmond falls. Geer describes repairs to the *Monitor's* engines. He also describes the engines and the turret engine. He states that the ship has been re-supplied and reassures his wife that he is safe. [MS10.01.11.02]

**June 5, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*.

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer gives a detailed account on how the sailors on the *Monitor* dress; the type of clothing worn and its uses; washing of clothing; sleeping accommodations; and temperatures on board the ship. He states that the Captain is the most hated man on board and describes him as drunk most of the time, a coward, and prays that some rebel will shoot him. [MS10.01.11.03]

## **Folder 12 Correspondence, June 1862**

**June 9, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Up James River, City Point, VA.

Eight-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his desire for an appointment to Third Assistant Engineer and that he would like to take the engineers exam. He gives an account of the way in which contrabands procure food for the ship; states that contrabands continue to come to the ship in an attempt to escape the local plantations; and states that he saw the body of an escaped slave floating in the river. He also writes of bathing practices; his toothache; financial issues and family matters. [MS10.01.12.01]

**June 13, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River, City Point.

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer complains of the improper ventilation of the ship and the buildup of heat. He gives temperature readings within the ship including the galley, engine room, and berth deck. He also describes the delivery of mail to the ship and states that the *Monitor* is likely to be sent to the Washington Naval Yard to be decommissioned. [MS10.01.12.02]

## **Folder 13 Correspondence, June 1862**

**June 16, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River, Pull and Be Damned.

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer describes skirmishes of Confederate and Federal on shore and involving the *Galena*; foraging

expeditions; and a rumor that General George McClellan will attack Richmond. [MS10.01.13.01]

**June 18, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River, Pull and Be Damned. Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer describes a foraging expedition; Confederate sharpshooters; the butchering of pigs; and meals on board the ship. He also writes that there is no news on General George McClellan's march toward Richmond. [MS10.01.13.02]

#### **Folder 14 Correspondence, June 1862**

**June 21, 1862:** Pull and be Damned, James River, USS *Monitor*. Three-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer presents a detailed description of an attack on the steamer *Jacob Bell* by Confederate sharpshooters. He writes of his loneliness; that he under the care of the ship's surgeon for a knee injury; and questions why there has been no attack by General George McClellan on Richmond. [MS10.01.14.01]

**June 23, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, City Point. Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer describes City Point and the surrounding area and states that he is under the ship surgeon's care for a knee injury. He writes of a fire on board the *Monitor* that started in the deck timbers around the galley smoke stacks and states that they have been having trouble with the *Monitor's* engines and that they are in need repair. [MS10.01.14.02]

**June 26, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, City Point. Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of the preparation for a possible attack on Fort Darling; that the *Monitor* will not be sent to the Washington Navy Yard until Richmond is taken; and that he longs to be with his family. [MS10.01.14.03]

#### **Folder 15 Correspondence, July 1862**

**July 1, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River, City Point. Six-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his petition to the Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, to take the engineers examination. He states that he and half the crew are sick; tells of his lack of respect for the Captain (William Jeffers); and that General George McClellan's forces are retreating. He describes an expedition of the *Monitor* up the Appomattox River towards Petersburg. The purpose of the expedition, according to Geer, was to burn railroad bridges. During this expedition, the *Monitor* shelled both sides of the bank and had to be towed back to City Point by a tug. [MS10.01.15.01]

**July 5, 1862:** James River.

Two-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes that he is under the care of the ship's surgeon for Hepatitis. [MS10.01.15.02]

**July 8, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River, VA, Harrison's Bar.

Six-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes that he is improving but is still ill. He states that the *Monitor* has been repaired and is in good order; gives detailed descriptions of a fleet of schooners and steamboats used for hospitals; the evacuation of wounded Federal troops from a house and brought on board the *Monitor*. [MS10.01.15.03]

**Folder 16 Correspondence, July 1862**

**July 12, 1862:** Harrison's Landing, VA.

Six-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes that he is improving through the use of medicine and a diet of light food, but is still ill. He states that the *Monitor* is stationed in front of General George McClellan's headquarters; gives an account of the retreat of McClellan's forces; states that Commodore Charles Wilkes has replaced Commodore Louis Goldsborough; and that he has no word on his expected promotion. He tells his wife that the *Monitor* crew learns more about the war from the press than from participation. [MS10.01.16.01]

**July 15, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River, VA, Harrison's Landing.

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer states that Federal forces occupy the home of President William Henry Harrison. He writes that he is worried over financial issues and family matters at home. [MS10.01.16.02]

**July 18, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River, Harrison's Bar.

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes the *Monitor* is on General George McClellan's left flank; states that the ship will remain in the James River until either Richmond is taken or a new monitor type ship is completed; and describes the condition of food on board the ship and gambling. Geer states that he is sending money and stamps with this letter and that he is worried about financial issues at home. [MS10.01.16.03]

**July 20, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River, Harrison's Bar.

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes that the heat of the iron deck of the *Monitor* burns through the crew's shoes; describes the weather; and relates that his wife has taken on the job of a "washer woman." [MS10.01.16.04]

**Folder 17      Correspondence, July 1862**

**July 23, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River, Harrison's Bar, VA. Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his attempts to procure a promotion; scouting expeditions; and discusses General Ambrose Burnside and General George McClellan's possible attempts to attack and take Richmond. [MS10.01.17.01]

**July 27, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River, Harrison's Bar. Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer requests his wife to send more items for resale aboard the *Monitor*, especially silk thread. He writes of financial problems and describes drawings and plans of the CSS *Richmond*. [MS10.01.17.02]

**July 29, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River. Two-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his financial problems; requests more items for his burgeoning on board retail enterprise; and states that smoke has been spotted up river and that he is fearful that it may be the *Richmond*. [MS10.01.17.03]

**July 31, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River, Harrison's Bar. Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer describes the response of the Federal fleet to the smoke spotted up river; states that the *Richmond* has been completed and is ready to sail; that the *Monitor's* engines and boilers need to be repaired or replaced; that a new law, in effect September 1, will legalize the bringing on board, of any U.S. Navy ship, of liquor; and the return of wounded Federal soldiers and prisoners through the lines. He also writes of his financial problems and the cost of coal. [MS10.01.17.04]

**Folder 18      Correspondence, August 1862**

**August 3, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River, Harrison's Bar. Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his burgeoning on board retail enterprise; requests more silk thread for resale; attempts to procure a promotion; the despair of the *Monitor* crew on hearing of the new law banning alcohol on board US Navy ships; and the ironclad *New Ironsides*. [MS10.01.18.01]

**August 5, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Harrison's Bar, James River, VA. Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his on board retail enterprise; the Battle of Malvern Hill; Confederate prisoners of war; exchange of prisoners; proposed draft in New York; rumors that the USS *Monitor* will be relieved once a "new monitor" arrives; and a detailed description of food on board the *Monitor*. [MS10.01.18.02]

**August 10, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his on board retail enterprise; rumors on the construction of “new monitors”; foraging parties; loading coal on board; proposed draft in New York; and the temperature on board the *Monitor* being so oppressive forcing the crew to sleep out on the open deck. [MS10.01.18.03]

**Folder 19 Correspondence, August 1862**

**August 13, 1862:** James River, VA, US Steamer *Monitor*.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his on board retail enterprise; the need for more silk to sell; the proposed draft in New York; foraging parties; and a detailed description of the meals served on board. He states that the captain is ordering large quantities of alcohol for the ship before the new statutes banning the transport of alcohol onto a U.S. Navy ship come into effect. [MS10.01.19.01]

**August 15, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River, Harrison’s Bar.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes that the *Monitor* will have a new captain, Thomas H. Stevens, and that outgoing commander, William Jeffers, will be going on Ordnance duty. Geer states that the old captain (Jeffers) is not fit to command and alleges that Jeffers has “Southern sympathies.” He also writes of foraging expeditions; financial issues; rumors that the Federal fleet is to move to Richmond; and requests that his wife send him a photograph of herself. [MS10.01.19.02]

**August 17, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River.  
Two-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his on board retail enterprise; the need for more silk to sell; that General George McClellan’s forces are not attacking Richmond and have left the area on board ships; that the new captain has not yet arrived; and gives a detailed description of gambling on board the *Monitor*. [MS10.01.19.03]

**August 20, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of the arrival of Captain Thomas H. Stevens; the assignment of Albert Campbell as acting engineer; the reassignment of engineer Isaac Newton to the Iron Clad Commission in New York; the puzzlement of the crew as to the location of General George McClellan’s forces; a rumor that the *Monitor* would be heading to Jamestown Island; and problems with the *Monitor*’s turret. He also describes his on board retail enterprise and the need for more silk to sell; financial and family issues; and the effect of the draft in New York on family and friends. [MS10.01.19.04]

**Folder 20 Correspondence, August 1862**

**August 24, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River, Harrison's Bar. Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his on board retail enterprise; the need for more silk to sell; Martha Geer's visit to Troy, New York; coaling the ship; respect for the new captain; the repainting of the *Monitor* in a "light lead" color; and states that he has not been off the ship since she left New York. [MS10.01.20.01]

**August 27, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, James River, City Point. Three-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his on board retail enterprise; the need for more items to sell; the return of the *Monitor* to City Point; a possible attack on Fort Darling; rumors about Federal army movements; gambling on board the ship; and family and financial issues. [MS10.01.20.02]

**Folder 21 Correspondence, September 1862**

**September 1, 1862:** Newport News, VA. Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer describes a skirmish near City Point in which the *Monitor* fired six shells destroying a Confederate Colonel's house. He states that the *Monitor* then left City Point for Harrison's Landing and then on to Newport News. Once in Newport News, Geer states that members of the crew repaired the boilers and were granted shore leave. Geer asserts that this was the first time he had been off the ship since the *Monitor* left New York. He gives a brief description of the area around Fortress Monroe; writes of his on board retail enterprise; the need for more silk to sell; and tells of financial and family issues. [MS10.01.21.01]

**September 3, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Newport News. Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of financial issues; describes the wreck of the USS *Cumberland*; the drowning of the wardroom steward; and the receipt of a letter from Isaac Newton (former acting chief engineer). According to Geer, Newton wrote that John Worden would command one of the "new monitors" and that the *Monitor* will go to the Washington Navy Yard within the next few days. [MS10.01.21.02]

**September 7, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Newport News. Three-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his on board retail enterprise; the need for more silk to sell; financial issues; and that he is homesick. [MS10.01.21.03]

**September 10, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Newport News.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his on board retail enterprise; the need for more silk to sell; thefts on board the ship; financial issues; and homesickness. He states that Captain Thomas Stevens is leaving the *Monitor* and will be replaced by John P. Bankhead. [MS10.01.21.04]

**Folder 22 Correspondence, September 1862**

**September 13, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Newport News.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his on board retail enterprise; the need for more silk to sell; financial issues; the *Richmond*; Federal army setbacks; and describes the visit of the captain and party of the *New Ironsides* to the *Monitor*. Geer states that the new captain is on board and that Captain Thomas H. Stevens was relieved of duty due to “drunkenness” on board the *Monitor*. According to Geer, the officers and crew of the *Monitor* signed a petition to the Navy Department denying the charges against Stevens. [MS10.01.22.01]

**September 17, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Newport News.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer gives a detailed description of shore leave and states that the *Monitor* will go to the Washington Navy Yard once relieved by another iron clad ship. [MS10.01.22.02]

**Folder 23 Correspondence, September 1862**

**September 21, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Newport News.  
Three-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his loneliness and of being homesick; his friendship with the cook (Moore); and a sailing trip with one of the officers to the wreck of the *Cumberland*. [MS10.01.23.01]

**September 24, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Newport News.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his on board retail enterprise; the need for more silk to sell; financial and family matters; and that all is going well on board the ship since engineer Isaac Newton and captain William Jeffers left. [MS10.01.23.02]

**September 27, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Newport News.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes that the *Iron Sides* arrived in the morning; compares the *Ironsides* to the *Galena*; and states that the chief engineer of the *Minnesota* inspected the *Monitor*. He tells of his on board retail enterprise; the need for more silk to sell; thanks Martha for her portrait (see folder 32); and outlines plans to obtain a commission. [MS10.01.23.03]

**Folder 24      Correspondence, October 1862**

**October 25, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Washington Navy Yard. Three-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his return from leave; his attempt to receive a commission; states that he requested recommendations from Captain John Bankhead and Lt. Samuel D. Greene; and talks of desertion if he does not receive a commission. He describes the *Monitor* in dry dock and the firing of 15-inch guns. [MS10.01.24.01]

**October 29, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Washington Navy Yard. One-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes that he received a letter of recommendation from acting engineer Albert Campbell for promotion and states that Lt. Samuel D. Greene forwarded the letter to Commodore Charles Wilkes, who signed the letter and sent it to the Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles. [MS10.01.24.02]

**Folder 25      Correspondence, November 1862**

**November 2, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Washington Navy Yard. Three-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of repairs to the *Monitor*; experiments by the Navy Department on the *Monitor's* engines; that he has one of the battle flags of the ship; and describes the naming of the Dahlgren guns on the *Monitor*. He states that one gun was named for John Worden and the other for John Ericsson; that Worden and Ericsson's names were engraved on the guns; and that the origin and history of every shot mark were engraved on the ship. [MS10.01.25.01]

**November 7, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Washington Navy Yard. Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes that the crew is now living aboard the ship; describes improvements made to the ship; states that he met with the Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Fox concerning his commission, and states that the *Monitor* is short twelve men due to discharge and desertion. [MS10.01.25.02]

**November 11, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Newport News. Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes that the *Monitor* is back on the James River off Newport News; that the trip from Washington to Hampton Roads was uneventful; describes life on board the ship, and writes of financial and family matters. [MS10.01.25.03]

**Folder 26 Correspondence, November 1862**

**November 16, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Hampton Roads.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer describes chores on board the *Monitor*; the washing of clothing; the condition of food supplies; and expresses anti-immigrant and foreign-born sentiments. [MS10.01.26.01]

**November 19, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Newport News.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of rumors of his possible promotion; financial issues; and the removal of General George McClellan. He states that McClellan's removal is fine as long as the War Department does not replace him with General John C. Fremont. [MS10.01.26.02]

**November 29, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Newport News.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of harvesting oysters; financial issues; employment opportunities abroad, especially in Guatemala; his on board retail enterprise; the need for more items to sell; and that there is still no word on his commission. [MS10.01.26.01]

**Folder 27 Correspondence, December 1862**

**December 3, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Off Newport News, VA.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his on board retail enterprise; the need for more silk to sell; shore leave; and family matters. He describes the launch and repair of the ironclad USS *Passaic* and newspaper accounts of losses by General Ambrose Burnside's forces. Geer states that John Griswold, a family friend, has been elected to Congress and may be able to expedite his commission. [MS10.01.27.01]

**December 17, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Newport News.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his on board retail enterprise; the need for more silk to sell; the condition of food on board the *Monitor*; family matters; and his doubts on whether the North can win the war. [MS10.01.27.02]

**December 28, 1862:** US Steamer *Monitor*, Hampton Roads, VA.  
Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes that the crew is preparing the *Monitor* for travel by sea; states that he does not know where the ship is headed; states that the ironclad *Passaic* is present; that they are expecting the USS *Montauk*, USS *Weehawken*, and USS *Patapsco* to arrive; and that engineer Albert Campbell was injured during the preparations and removed from the ship. He describes Christmas celebrations on board the ship. [MS10.01.27.03]

**Folder 28 Correspondence, January 1863**

**January 2, 1863:** US Steamer *Rhode Island*.

One-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of the sinking of the *Monitor* and that 16 men from the ship are missing.

[MS10.01.28.01]

**January 6, 1863:** US Steamer *Rhode Island*, Hampton Roads.

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of the sinking of the *Monitor*; the loss of 12 crewmen and 4 officers; the loss of 8 crewmen of the USS *Rhode Island*; and that he lost all of his possessions with the ship. He states that he is worried about his next posting and that engineer Albert Campbell was in the hospital in Norfolk when the *Monitor* sank. [MS10.01.28.02]

**January 8, 1863:** US Store Ship *Brandywine*, Hampton Roads, VA

Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes that the *Monitor* crew has been transferred to the USS *Brandywine*; that there is still no word from the Navy Department as to the fate of the crew; and that crewmembers of the *Monitor* are not receiving adequate care. He states that the crewmembers of the *Monitor* are sleeping on deck with no blankets or coats and that they have yet to receive supplies or money.

Geer writes of his thoughts on the night of the sinking. [MS10.01.28.03]

**January 13, 1863:** US Store Ship *Brandywine*, Hampton Roads.

Four-page letter addressed to his brother, Gilbert. Geer gives a highly detailed description of the sinking of the *Monitor* to his brother; states that he has lost all of his possessions; that he has been treated poorly by the Navy Department; and describes living conditions on board the *Brandywine* for the crew of the *Monitor*. [MS10.01.28.04]

**Folder 29 Correspondence, January 1863**

**January 14, 1863:** US Store Ship *Brandywine*, Hampton Roads.

Two-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer informs Martha that he has received her letters; that he has not yet received word from the Navy Department as to the disposition of the *Monitor* crew; and describes living conditions on board the *Brandywine* for the crew of the *Monitor*.

[MS10.01.29.01]

**January 17, 1863:** *Brandywine*.

Two-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer describes living conditions on board the *Brandywine* for the crew of the *Monitor* and that he has not yet received word from the Navy Department as to their disposition. He states that the paper she sent him has been stolen and that he hopes to be sent home soon. [MS10.01.29.02]

**January 25, 1863:** US Store Ship *Brandywine*, Hampton Roads. Four-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of the boredom of waiting; drawing clothing and supplies from the purser; financial issues; and the promotion of *Monitor* crewmember Richard Anjur to Masters Mate. He describes in great detail his experiences with lice infestation. [MS10.01.29.03]

**Folder 30 Correspondence, February-December 1863**

**February 2, 1863:** US Steamer *Galena*, Off Newport News. One-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes that he has been transferred to the *Galena*; that he has seven days leave to travel home; and that he has been promoted to Third Assistant Engineer. [MS10.01.30.01]

**June 30, 1863:** US Ship *Vermont*, Port Royal, SC. Four-page letter addressed to his mother. Geer writes that he has been transferred to the USS *Vermont*; that he is in charge of the condensers and supervises nine firemen; states that there are plans to attack Charleston; and that he has visited the local areas. While on shore, Geer gives a detailed description of the deserted plantations and the remaining African Americans. He states that most of the African American men have been “taken by the army” leaving the women and children to tend the fields. He also describes graft by Federal government agents sent to distribute supplies to the former slaves. Geer expresses his negative views of the former slaves. [MS10.01.30.02]

**December 2, 1863:** US Ship *Vermont*, Port Royal. Four-page letter addressed to his mother. Geer writes of his health; the sinking of the ironclad *Weehawken*; his desire to be transferred to a “sea going” vessel; and his attempts at promotion to Second Assistant Engineer. He states that the health of the crew is bad, with many afflicted by scurvy. [MS10.01.30.03]

**Folder 31 Correspondence, 1864-1866**

**October 2, 1864:** US Steamer *Harvest Moon*, Port Royal, SC. Four-page letter addressed to his mother. Geer writes about his just completed leave; transfer to the USS *Harvest Moon*; trips to Fort Wagner and Fort Greg; firing on Charleston; skirmishes with Confederate forces; preparations for the attack on Charleston; and that Confederate prisoners of war are being guarded by African American troops. [MS10.01.31.01]

**June 9, 1865:** Flag Ship *Philadelphia*, Charleston Harbor.  
Two-page letter addressed to his wife, Martha. Geer writes of his arrival on the USS *Philadelphia*, after being on leave; describes problems with the mail; gives a detailed description of Savannah; and states that his name has been submitted for an honorable discharge. [MS10.01.31.02]

**March 23, 1866:** New Orleans.  
Three-page letter addressed to his mother. Geer writes that he is employed on the steamship SS *Savannah* as First Assistant Engineer. [MS10.01.31.03]

**Folder 32      Photograph, 1862**

**1862:** Troy, New York.  
Cartes de Visites of Martha Geer. [MS10.01.32.01]

**MATERIALS REMOVED**

None

**SOURCES CONSULTED**

**Primary:**

Martha C. Geer Pension File, Certificate 9508, Approved Navy Dependents Pension Files (M-1279), National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

**Secondary:**

Daly, Robert W., ed. *Aboard the USS Monitor: The Letters of Acting Paymaster William Frederick Keeler, U.S. Navy, to His Wife, Anna*. Naval Letters Series: Volume One. Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1964.

Marvel, William, ed. *The Monitor Chronicles: One Sailor's Account*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000. [Produced in conjunction with The Mariners' Museum, this work is based on the George S. Geer Papers, 1862-1866: MS010].

**SUBJECTS**

*Galena* (Ironclad ; 1861)

Geer, George S.

*Monitor* (Ironclad ; 1862)

[United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Personal narratives.](#)

*Virginia* (Ironclad ; 1861)