

**Guide to the Aaron S. Oberly Letters, 1861, 1864-1865
MS0011**

**The Mariners' Museum Library
at
Christopher Newport University**

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DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

Repository: The Mariners' Museum Library

Title: Aaron S. Oberly Letters

Inclusive Dates: 1861, 1864-1865

Catalog number: MS011

Physical Characteristics: 29 letters (correspondence)

Language: English

Creator: Oberly, Aaron S.

BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL SKETCH

A Medical Inspector in the United States Navy, Aaron S. Oberly was born April 7, 1837, in Pennsylvania. Little is written of his early life. On July 1, 1861, he was appointed an Assistant Surgeon, from Connecticut, and commissioned on July 30th, 1861. He was attached to the receiving-ship USS *Ohio*, the USS *Boston*, and to the frigate USS *Sabine* in 1861. From 1862 to 1863, he was assigned to the gunboat USS *Kineo*, stationed with the West Gulf Blockading Squadron. Oberly was present during the bombardment and passage of Forts Jackson and St. Phillip (1862), the passage of the batteries at Port Hudson by Farragut's fleet (1863), and the engagement with batteries at Grand Gulf. While serving on the steamer *Santiago de Cuba*, Oberly was present during two bombardments of Fort Fisher, in December 1864 and January 1865. He was commissioned as Surgeon on June 19, 1865, and did tours of duty in Mound City, IL, to the West Indies in the sloop *Narragansett*, to the South Atlantic in the sloop *Portsmouth*, and in the ironclad *Dictator* as part of the North Atlantic Fleet in 1874-75. After several appointments on shore, he again served shipboard on USS *Powhatan* in 1880-81 and on USS *Richmond*, from there becoming the Fleet Surgeon of the Asiatic Station in 1881-84. He retired in January 1889 from causes incident to exposure on the Asiatic Station.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection features the correspondence of Aaron S. Oberly to Miss Maria A. Woodford from 1861 to 1865. Oberly wrote the bulk of the letters in this collection, while serving on board the USS *Santiago de Cuba*. While one letter dates from 1861, the bulk of the letters are from 1864-1865. The letters are deeply personal, expressing Oberly's passion and love for Maria. However, they also contain information on the movements and activities of the Union blockade fleet and life on board ship. Oberly's collection of letters reflects the style of communication of the period and attitudes about the roles of men and women.

The letters are organized into file folders. They are arranged chronologically.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Accession number

unknown

Accession date

unknown

Restrictions

Collection is open to all researchers.

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Preferred Citation

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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.

RELATED MATERIALS

Transcriptions in Microsoft Word format of many of the letters in the collection are available for consultation in the Library. Transcripts may be converted to portable document files at patron request.

Other collections of letters by Dr. Aaron S. Oberly can be found at the Auburn University Library's Special Collections and Archives department (http://books.google.com/books/about/Guide_to_the_Aaron_S_Oberly_papers.html?id=lks9twAACAAJ), at the University of Florida's Smathers Libraries in the Special and Area Studies Collections (<http://web.uflib.ufl.edu/spec/manuscript/guides/oberly.htm>), and in the University South Caroliniana Manuscript Collections at the University of South Carolina (<http://library.sc.edu/socar/uscs/1999/oberly.html>).

FILE GUIDE

BOX 1

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|-----------------|--|
| Folder 1 | Finding Aid |
| Folder 2 | Background Information |
| Folder 3 | Correspondence, 1861 September 23, 1861: U.S. Frigate <i>Sabine</i> , Chesapeake Bay 4-page letter addressed to dear friend Maria. Writes a newsy letter about the sailing trip to Fort Monroe from Portsmouth Harbor. Postscript mentions that he arrived and expects to remained anchored there for a week or more. Mentions a cannon salute, seeing vessels on the Chesapeake Bay, reading from the ship's library, and singing. [MS11.01.03.01] |
| Folder 4 | Correspondence, February 1864 |

February 26, 1864: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Norfolk, VA.
4-page letter addressed to “dearest” (Maria). Informs her that they are changing station and to address him at Hampton Roads instead of Norfolk. Had church on ship and “to wile away spare moments” is reading “Hints on the Formation of Religious Opinions.” Expresses affection and longing for her. [MS11.01.04.01]

Folder 5

Correspondence, October 1864

October 28, 1864: Chesapeake Bay. Writes from aboard the *Adelaide* and then from Fort Monroe.

4-page letter spanning October 28 through October 29, 1864, not addressed, but meant for Maria. Details his journey from home to Hampton Roads. Says there are soldiers and several ladies on board the *Adelaide*, speculates about his assignment, notes that writing is difficult, and that he misses her. The next day he writes that he reported to Rear Admiral Porter on board the *Malvern* and was assigned on board the *Santiago de Cuba*, which he learned was set for hospital duty along with several others of her class for the forthcoming conflict. Says there is a large fleet at Hampton Roads where the battle pending was postponed for Army reinforcement, and that Gen. Grant captured nearby railroad. [MS11.01.05.01]

Folder 6

Correspondence, November 1-15, 1864

November 11, 1864: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Norfolk, VA.

4-page letter addressed to Maria. Writes with extensive expressions of affection and love. Mentions his health, the weather, and his lack of work. [MS11.01.06.01]

November 13, 1864: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Norfolk, VA.

4-page letter addressed to Maria. Shares more thoughts on their friendship and his feelings about her. Expects to sail for Wilmington once repairs are done and 50 tons of coal are loaded. Says coal will last about sixteen days at which time they need to be back to Norfolk, the only place to refill. Mentions an accident where a sailor broke his leg and was transported to the Naval Hospital. Attended church service on shore. Witnessed the burning of a large building in Portsmouth. [MS11.01.06.02]

Folder 7

Correspondence, November 16-30, 1864

November 17, 1864: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Hampton Roads, VA.

4-page letter addressed to Maria. Headed to Wilmington immediately to intercept blockade runners. Expect to be back to at Norfolk by Dec. 10th. Mentions rats and mousetraps, having a cold, the gossip in New Haven, and joy at receiving her letters. [MS11.01.07.01]

November 23, 1864: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, “Somewhere in the Atlantic”

4-page letter addressed to Maria. Writes details about chasing blockade runners and suffering from seasickness. Describes his Thanksgiving Day and Captain Glisson who dined with them. Expresses deep emotion about his feelings for her. [MS11.01.07.02]

Folder 8

Correspondence, December 1864

December 4, 1864: No ship or location stated.

2-page letter addressed to Maria. Travelling from Wilmington to Norfolk. Mentions fishing, and eating with the Captain. They got New York newspapers from stopping the steamer *Arago* on her way to Port Royal. [MS11.01.08.01]

December 7, 1864: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Norfolk, VA.

4-page letter addressed to Maria. Anchored at the Navy Yard Wharf “to coal and repair.” Received three letters from Maria. Writes at length about his affection and feelings for Maria. [MS11.01.08.02]

December 11, 1864: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Norfolk, VA.

2-page letter addressed to Maria. It is his last opportunity to send a letter for a several weeks. Expecting to join the fleet at Hampton Roads. Success of expedition is dependent on good weather and so he hopes it is pleasant. [MS11.01.08.03]

December 30, 1864: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Norfolk, VA.

3-page letter addressed to Maria. Responds to Maria’s Dec 26th letter, urging her to take good care of her health and expresses his desire to care for her. Mentions that the *Santiago* is still taking in coal and munitions of war for the fleet. [MS11.01.08.04]

Folder 9

Correspondence, January 1865

January 22, 1865: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Norfolk Navy Yard, VA.

4-page letter addressed to Maria. In port for repairs after a “glorious victory.” Thinks he may be reassigned to the *Minnesota* due one of its medical officer’s injury. He’s been attending two sick officers in Norfolk, requiring a welcome four-mile walk to and from the Naval Hospital. Mentions that the officers go to a theater in the city in the evenings. [MS11.01.09.01]

January 26, 1865: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Norfolk Navy Yard, VA.

2-page letter addressed to Maria. Ice on the Chesapeake Bay delaying the Baltimore boat and mail. Called on women at the home of the Virginia Lt. Governor who is related to the Captain’s family. [MS11.01.09.02]

January 27, 1865: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Norfolk Navy Yard, VA.

4-page letter addressed to Maria. Expresses joy at her determination not to see a doctor for her ill health but wishes he could attend her. Says there is

record cold temperatures and monotony on the ship. Comments on the bloomer costume promoted by Dr. Mary Walker and shares his thoughts on a woman's role. [MS11.01.09.03]

January 29, 1865: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Norfolk, VA.
4-page letter addressed to Maria. Writes of his love and affection for Maria. Mentions that Captain Glisson's wife is staying on board under his care. He was assigned the job of "caterer for the boardroom mess" and says "were there some one experienced I would transfer the position, but as my own welfare is involved, I will try and satisfy the hungry family." [MS11.01.09.04]

Folder 10 Correspondence, February 1865

February 1, 1865: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Norfolk, VA.
3-page letter addressed to Maria. Writes of his love and that he attempted to obtain a week's leave. The ship is to be moved into the dry dock for repair—"a week in dock and a week to coal will about make us ready for sea." [MS11.01.10.01]

February 5, 1865: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Norfolk, VA.
4-page letter addressed to Maria. In order to move the ship into dry dock, the buckets on the paddle wheels had to be removed. About fifteen or twenty vessels are at port needing repairs. Rumors indicate they will go to the Gulf of Mexico next. Discusses his thoughts on the roles of men and women. [MS11.01.10.02]

February 16, 1865: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Norfolk, VA.
2-page letter addressed to Maria. Left Baltimore day before with about seven hundred passengers on board. Most of the officers are on shore and one resigned while he was away. [MS11.01.10.03]

February 22, 1865: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Norfolk, VA.
4-page letter addressed to Maria. Expecting to go to sea soon. Mentions the Captain, the executive officer and the paymaster and that there are two medical officers on board. [MS11.01.10.04]

February 28, 1865: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Hampton Roads, VA.
4-page letter addressed to Maria. Mentions that he served as recorder for a summary court martial and wrote nearly fifty sheets of official paper. Addendum dated March 1 states that a boat loaded with officers and guests going ashore capsized. [MS11.01.10.05]

Folder 11 Correspondence, March 1-15, 1865

March 3, 1865: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Hampton Roads, VA.

4-page letter addressed to Maria. Disappointed in Maria's brief letters and urges her to write with more expression of love and devotion. Mentions her brother and a mutual friend's interest in their affairs. [MS11.01.11.01]

March 5, 1865: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Hampton Roads, VA.
4-page letter addressed to Maria. Justifies writing on a Sunday. Expounds on his love and longings for her. [MS11.01.11.02]

March 7, 1865: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Hampton Roads, VA.
4-page letter, plus note, addressed to Maria. Talks about his health and how her letters are essential to his well-being. [MS11.01.12.03]

March 10, 1865: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Hampton Roads, VA.
4-page letter addressed to Maria. Writes with more passion about his feelings. Talks about news of friends and family. Captain Glisson informed him that either he or Dr. Murphy would be detached from the *Santiago* in about a week. [MS11.01.11.04]

March 12, 1865: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Hampton Roads, VA.
4-page letter addressed to Maria. Told about some non-routine activities – listened to a sermon, boarded the monitor in order to visit Dr. Lewis. Chatted with Mrs. Farguhar, the wife of the Executive Officer. She and the Captain's wife have been on board for two weeks. Received his picture she sent and requested more. [MS11.01.11.05]

Folder 12

Correspondence, March 1-15, 1865

March 15, 1865: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Hampton Roads, VA.
4-page letter addressed to Maria. Partially torn. Indicates that Charleston trip was postponed and that he has no news about his or Dr. Murphy's detachment. Mentions that Mr. Farguhar was granted a week's leave only minutes after his wife had departed for home. [MS11.01.12.01]

March 19, 1865: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Hampton Roads, VA.
4-page letter addressed to Maria. Briefly mentions that Dr. Murphy's orders for detachment were received but that Captain Glisson requested that he remain on board until after an upcoming trip to Charleston, Savannah and Havana was completed. [MS11.01.12.02]

March 20, 1865: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Hampton Roads, VA.
4-page letter addressed to Maria. Long and expressive love letter. [MS11.01.12.03]

March 22, 1865: USS *Santiago de Cuba*, Hampton Roads, VA.
3-page letter addressed to Maria. Expects to sail for Baltimore the next day. Wishes she could be on the voyage with him to Charleston, Savannah and Havana as no letters will transpire between them for the next couple of weeks. [MS11.01.12.04]

SOURCES CONSULTED

Hamersly, Louis Randolph. *Biographical Sketches of Distinguished Officers of the Army and Navy*. New York: L. R. Hamersly, 1905.

SUBJECTS

Adelaide (Sidewheel steamer : 1854)

Sabine (Frigate : 1858)

Santiago de Cuba (Cruiser : 1861)

Oberly, Aaron S.

United States-History-Civil War, 1861-1865-Personal narratives