

AS MINNESOTA PREPARES to commemorate the Civil War sesquicentennial in 2011, the Minnesota Historical Society's collections have gained important items documenting the experiences and thoughts of those involved in the conflict. One such item is a letter from William Dinsmore Hale to his parents, dated July 22, 1862.

In it, Hale details the "terrible" surrender of the Third Minnesota Regiment under the "coward" Col. Henry C. Lester at the battle of Murfreesboro, as well as Hale's brief

time as a prisoner of war and ensuing parole.

Returning to Union lines, he spent one night having "crawled into a comfortable corn crib & found a nice place with my dress coat for a coverlid & a corn cob for a pillow."

Hale then describes his Confederate adversaries in terms only a worthy combatant might use:

"The physique of the men is good, compares favorably with ours. They are excellent riders & can live

in the saddle. . . . They rode 50 miles to attack us and then some of them returned that whole distance, stopping but to feed a half hour & eat a bite. . . . Now of the treatment we received—Really as surprising as any part of this whole business!—Men and officers treated us like gentlemen. Kindly, generously, *dividing* their scanty piece of bread & meat with us, walking to let a sick & wounded 'Yank' ride."

Hale had enlisted as a private, had been promoted several times, and was performing the clerical duties of adjutant at the time of the surrender. A native of Maine, he had lived in Minnesota since 1859 and would return to become an important lumber and railway businessman, a member of the Minneapolis board of education, and, eventually, Minneapolis postmaster. He died in 1915 en route to a vacation in Hawaii.

Through the generosity of members and friends of the MHS, this letter, along with dozens of additional letters, maps, and other documents, was purchased at the recent New York auction of the collection of Floyd E. Risvold.

—Duane P. Swanson, curator of manuscripts



Sgt. Maj. William D. Hale, about 1861, and an excerpt of his 1862 letter (MHS collections)



MHS COLLECTIONS

**About the Cover**

Pike Island, at the confluence of the Mississippi and St. Peter's (Minnesota) rivers, features prominently in Edward K. Thomas's painting, "Fort Snelling," about 1850. At that time, the island belonged to Pelagie Faribault; the Dakota gave it to her in an 1820 treaty that, primarily, transferred land for the fort to the U.S. government. For more about this French Dakota woman, her island, and what her story can tell us, see the article beginning on page 48.



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