

*Mike*

**CIVIL WAR CORRESPONDENCE OF  
PRIVATE WILLIAM F. CHITTENDEN,  
CO. D, 154th NEW YORK VOLUNTEER INFANTRY,  
AND HIS WIFE,  
MARY J. (WHEELER) CHITTENDEN,  
YORKSHIRE, CATTARAUGUS COUNTY, NEW YORK.**

Transcribed from the originals in his collection by:

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## INTRODUCTION

William F. Chittenden was born in Yorkshire, Cattaraugus County, New York, on September 5, 1835. He married Mary Jane Wheeler in Yorkshire on November 18, 1857; the ceremony was performed by the Rev. Thurston T. Horton of the First Baptist Church of Yorkshire. To them were born three children: Hiram Martin (October 25, 1858), Clyde C. (August 19, 1860), and Ida Lunette (June 16, 1864).

Chittenden was a farmer in Yorkshire; his place was on the current Cattaraugus County Highway 55, between the intersections of the Pleasant Valley and Keller Roads. According to the 1860 United States census, his real estate was valued at \$1,000 and his personal property was worth \$200.

Chittenden enlisted at Yorkshire on August 5, 1862, to serve three years; he was enrolled by Harrison Cheney, who recruited each and every man of what became Company D of the 154th New York Volunteers. Chittenden was 26 years old and stood five feet, ten inches tall. He had a light complexion, blue eyes, and light hair. He was mustered in as a private of Company D, 154th New York, on September 24, 1862. His letters tell the story of his rather brief service with the regiment.

According to Second Lieutenant John Mitchell of Company D, "[Chittenden] was sent from the Regiment while at Thoroughfare Gap [Virginia] on the 17th November 1862 on account of sickness and has never been able to do duty since. Previous to that he was a good Soldier, prompt & ready for duty always." As Chittenden himself details in his letter of December 1, 1862, he was troubled first by chronic diarrhea and then by fever. When Chittenden applied for a pension in 1863, he cited the testimony of his former first lieutenant, Marshall O. Bond: "At the time of his enlistment Chittenden was apparently healthy and strong. . . .He done his duty faithfully until about November 10th, 1862, when he was attacked with a Pulmonary difficulty, caused by exposure to a severe snow storm, and. . .he never recovered sufficiently to do service." Company D's muster rolls state he was absent sick in a general hospital from November 19, 1862.

After leaving the regiment, Chittenden's next letters were addressed from Harewood Hospital in Washington, D.C. Medical records state he was treated for typhoid fever there from November 19, 1862, to January 10, 1863. On the latter day, he was granted a sixty-day furlough, and he returned home to Yorkshire. He reported back to the hospital on March 10, 1863, and remained at Harewood until April 3, 1863. The muster rolls state he returned to duty with Company D on April 12, 1863, but was sent to the Second Division, 11th Corps hospital at Brooks Station, Virginia, less than two weeks later, on April 24 (although his letter of that date indicates he arrived there before then). From that hospital, Chittenden was discharged on account of his

disability on June 3, 1863. On the discharge, Surgeon R. Thomain declared Chittenden was incapable of performing duties because of "Phthisis Pulmonalis; he has been under treatment since last November and unfit for duty; both lungs are far advanced in disease, rendering the patient completely prostrate. He is in fact in the last stages of consumption. I am satisfied he will never be able to perform any military [duty] whatever."

As mentioned above, Chittenden applied for a pension in 1863; he was granted an invalid pension and admitted to the rolls on April 11, 1864, with his \$8 per month stipend retroactive to June 3, 1863, the date of his discharge. In September 1865, his pension was reduced to \$6 a month. He was dropped from the pension rolls in 1867, and applied for reinstatement in 1879.

Little is known about Chittenden's postwar life. By 1904 he was residing in Lansing, Michigan. William and Mary were living at 110 East Mount Hope Avenue in Lansing when he died on June 2, 1923. Mary Wheeler Chittenden died at Lansing on September 13, 1924.

Two of Mary's brothers served in the Civil War and figure in the Chittenden letters. John H. Wheeler enlisted at age 21 on September 15, 1861, at Albany, to serve three years, and was mustered in as a private in Company H of the 44th New York Volunteer Infantry on September 20, 1861. He was mustered out with his company on October 11, 1864, at Albany, New York. Edgar Wheeler was 18 when he enlisted to serve three years on February 25, 1862, at Yorkshire. He was mustered in as a private of Company K, 105th New York Volunteer Infantry, on March 9, 1862. Edgar was reported to have been wounded at the Battle of Second Bull Run in August 1862 (according to William Chittenden's letter of November 2, 1862, Edgar lost a thumb). He was discharged for disability on October 18, 1862, at Washington, D.C.

Some of the most dramatic and emotional passages in the Chittenden Civil War correspondence begin in December 1862, when Mary reluctantly informs William that their two young sons, Hiram and Clyde, are sick with diphtheria. Readers of the letters are happy to learn that the two youngsters survived, to be joined in 1864--about a year after their father's return home--by baby sister Ida. While nothing is currently known about the later lives of Clyde and Ida, Hiram Martin Chittenden attained prominence in his adulthood and has been well chronicled.

Hiram was appointed to the United States Military Academy at West Point by Congressman Henry Van Aernam--the former surgeon of the 154th New York who is mentioned occasionally in the Chittenden wartime letters. In a letter of December 21, 1891, Van Aernam reflected on his appointment of Chittenden to the Academy: "His home was on 'Blue Hill' Machias--Graduated here [from the Ten Broeck Academy at Franklinville, New York]--was a year at Cornell. When I was in Congress I sent him to West Point; standing no. 4, in a graduating class of 37--which started out with 139--102 falling out by the way, during the four years at West Point! After graduating at West Point, Lt. Chittenden as well as all the other Cadets, graduating No. 1 to 5, both

inclusive (Engineer corps) had a Post Graduate course at Willett Point, N.Y. Harbor, of one year studying Projectiles, and Offensive and Defensive military Engineering. He is a very capable, bright fellow, and doubtless will make an able soldier in his place, if, or when opportunity presents-- I don't think he has the instincts of a Soldier of the line in the field, in time of war,--but he is a very capable, scholarly, pleasant man--writes some for the magazines--and was the best soldier material at my command when I named him for West Point. It has made a great change in his life certainly--from milking cows on his father's poor farm on 'Blue Hill,' to his present position in charge of improving and embellishing the greatest Park in the world [Yellowstone National Park]is indeed a change! The Government must think there is something in him for he was sent to Europe, to inspect Parks and some Fortifications where he spent nearly a year on the mission."

Indeed, as Dr. Van Aernam indicates, Hiram M. Chittenden rose to high stations from his humble roots. A biographical sketch in the *Dictionary of American Biography* (edited by Johnson and Malone) describes him as a military engineer and historian, and details his career: Student at Cornell; graduate of West Point with high honors; graduate of the Engineer School of Application; engineer officer of the Department of the Platte; a developer of the road system in Yellowstone National Park, and chronicler of that place; Spanish-American War veteran; federal commissioner of Yosemite Park; author of several works of engineering and history, including a classic history, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*; president of the port commission of Seattle, Washington; and brigadier general of the army. He died in Seattle on October 9, 1917. For more complete details of his life, see the sketch in *D.A.B.*, which concludes with this estimation of his accomplishments:

*Chittenden was a man of the highest character. He had great energies, an exceptional intensity of purpose, and unflagging industry. Despite his somewhat dignified reserve he was genial and companionable. In the field of engineering, wherein his chief interests were the [Yellowstone National] Park, flood control, and the storage of waters, he was known as a "practical idealist"--one whose imagination and vision were guided by a matter-of-fact regard for the attainable with the means at hand. To his work as a historian he brought an eager spirit of inquiry, a critical judgment, and a passion for exactness; and to these were added a rare art of presentation.*

Despite Dr. Van Aernam's somewhat disparaging comments about Chittenden's upbringing, it seems safe to say his character was well-molded by his parents, judging from the deep love and conscientiousness of their wartime correspondence.

Mark H. Dunkelman  
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