
Building a Civil War Virtual Library: The ASERL Digitization Project

Aaron Trehub, Auburn University Libraries

Discover Auburn Lecture Series

Ralph Brown Draughon Library

Special Collections & Archives Department

February 16, 2012

OR

Bushrod Carter Speaks: The ASERL Civil War Digitization Project

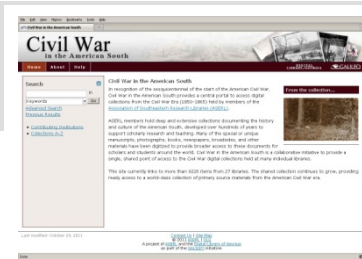
Aaron Trehub, Auburn University Libraries

Discover Auburn Lecture Series

Ralph Brown Draughon Library

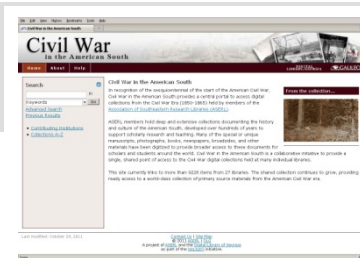
Special Collections & Archives Department

February 16, 2012



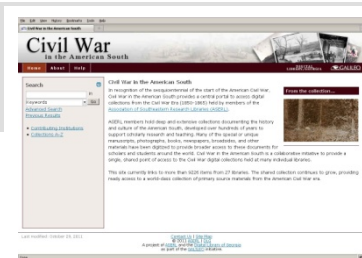
What is ASERL?

- Association of Southeastern Research Libraries
- Founded in 1956 in Miami, Florida
- Based in Atlanta, Georgia for many years; moved to Durham, North Carolina in 2011
- Largest regional library consortium in the U.S., with forty members in ten states
- Mission: to advance the educational and research success of students and faculty at member institutions through collaboration



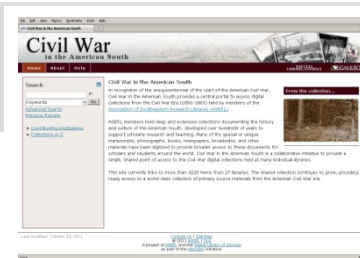
What is a “virtual library”?

- Digital, not physical
- An address on the Web, not a building
- Subject- or region-specific (e.g. AlabamaMosaic or Europeana)
- Provides single-point access to digitized materials from many different libraries and collections
- Basically, a big index that points back to the original items at their home institutions



Who is “Bushrod Carter”?

- Main character in Howard Bahr’s 1997 novel “The Black Flower” (thanks, Ken!)
- 26-year-old rifleman in Gen. Cleburne’s division, John Bell Hood’s Army of Tennessee
- From “Cumberland”, Mississippi
- Matriculated at Ole Miss, where he was suspended for “acting riotously”
- Fought at Shiloh, Stones River, Chickamauga, and Franklin (where the novel is set)



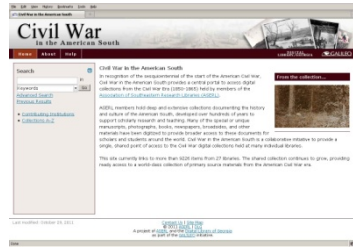
Why this project?

- To mark the 150th anniversary of the start of the Civil War
- To make the rich Civil War-era collections of the ASERL member libraries more visible and accessible
- To extend collaboration among ASERL libraries into the digital realm
- To gain experience building virtual collections that draw on the members' unique holdings



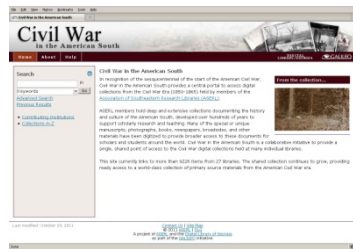
Project timeline: Phase 1 (2008-2009)

- Autumn 2008: ASEERL announces collaborative digitization project to mark 150th anniversary of the American Civil War
- Winter 2009: Formed project teams; began monthly conference calls
- Spring 2009: Identified relevant collections and started entering them into online inventory
- Summer 2009: Drafted specs for scanning and metadata; started digitization work



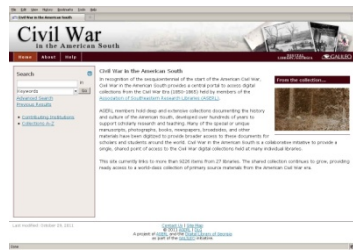
Project timeline: Phase 2 (2010-2011)

- Fall 2009-Winter 2010: Issued software RFP for project portal
- Spring 2010: Evaluated responses to RFP; selected UGA-Digital Library of Georgia
- Summer 2010-Winter 2011: Portal development: uploading, harvesting, testing, branding
- April 2011: “Civil War in the American South” portal ready to go public



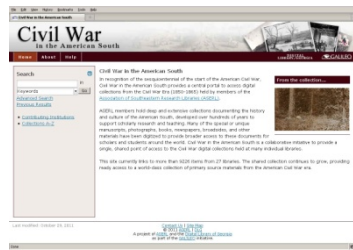
More about the DLG

- DLG = Digital Library of Georgia
- Based at the University of Georgia (an ASERL member institution)
- One of three respondents to ASERL's software RFP
- Experience building subject-specific digital libraries (e.g. Civil Rights Digital Library)
- In fact, the DLG is part of the Georgia virtual library (GALILEO)



A brief technical digression

- ASERL-CWAS uses the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (“OAI-PMH”)
- Allows the central repository at UGA to harvest detailed information (“metadata”) about the items at the contributing libraries and index it all in one place
- The index points **back** to the original items at the contributing libraries or repositories



Facts and figures

- “Civil War in the American South” portal publicly launched on April 4, 2011
- Currently links to over 9,200 items from 27 ASERL libraries (initial goal was 5,000 items)
- Visited over 10,000 times in the period April 2011-January 2012
- Recently added external link to the resource from the Wikipedia entry on the Civil War, to increase visibility



Contributors include...

- Auburn University
- Duke University
- East Carolina University
- Florida State University
- George Mason University
- LSU
- Tulane University
- Universities of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisville, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee
- Wake Forest University



What's in it?

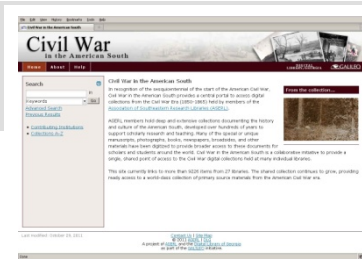
Materials published or created in the period 1850-1865, including:

- Books
- Newspapers
- Maps
- Broadsides and pamphlets
- Sheet music
- Images (daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, etc.)
- Letters, diaries, and manuscripts

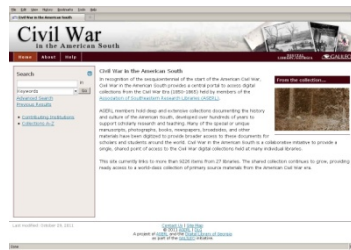


Auburn's contribution (so far)

- Over 120 books published in the years 1850-1865
- Selected by Greg Schmidt in Archives
- Digitized by Lyrasis and hosted at the Internet Archive
- Harvested into ASERL-CWAS using OAI-PMH
- More materials to come, including Auburn's collection of Civil War letters and diaries



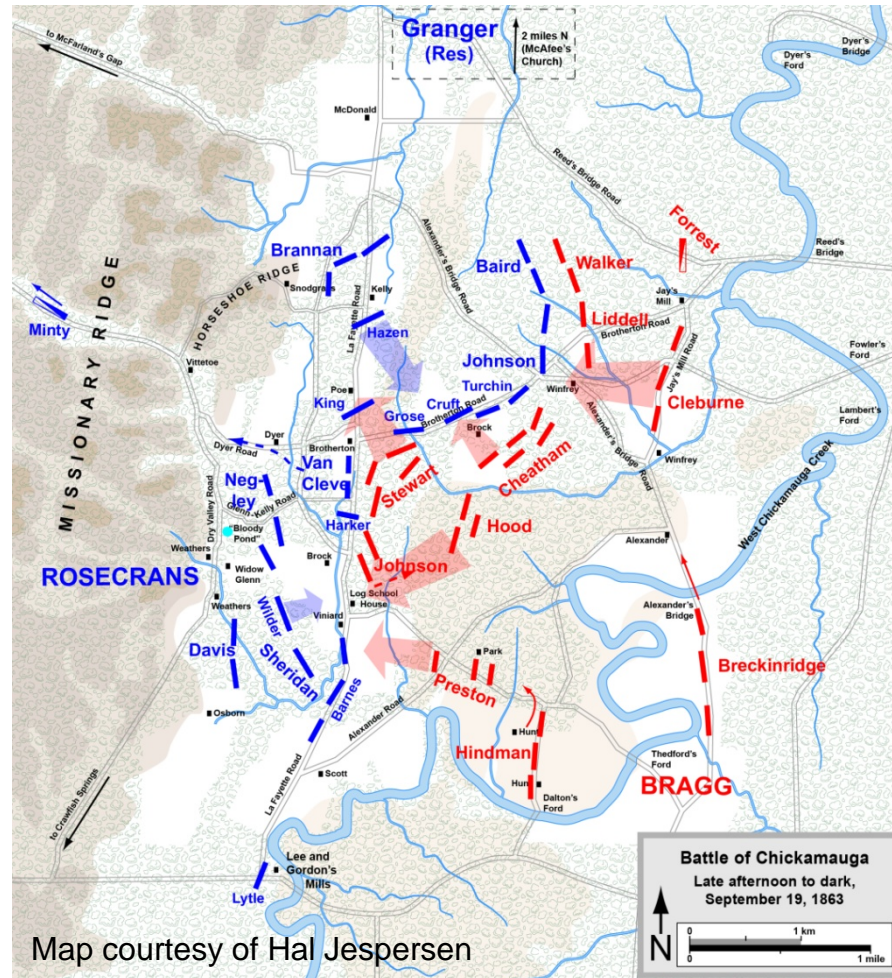
“O, God, O, God, the
Scenes I have Witnessed”
(Edward Summers,
November 1863)



Letters and diaries

- Especially interesting materials
- Unique and irreplaceable
- Give participants' view of events at the time, before revisionism and embellishing set in
- Range from polished and literary to unpolished and unlettered
- Help to understand “how it really was” (“Wie es eigentlich gewesen”—von Ranke)
- Invaluable primary-source teaching resources

Example: Battle of Chickamauga (September 18-20, 1863)



Chickamauga: Hugh Black (6th Florida Infantry, CSA)



could not write to
hear from me
I can't tell you how
I am
Husband Hugh B's

Atlanta, Ga. Sept 24th 64

Dear Wife it is with unbounded pleasure that I write you that I am still alive I am slightly wounded in the hand was wounded on Saturday evening near sundown our Regt acted nobly every company suffered right severely only two killed in my company Thomas Galtin & the Wendrich. Wounded Lieut. Herson right arm James Boykin right breast Thomas Garrison in left thigh broken amputated has since died John Sykes right knee John Cooper in left leg calf Sergeant Walker left side Perry Small in the head severely John E. Pittman left thigh a Samuel C. Kelly

Excerpt: Hugh Black to Mary Black, September 24, 1863

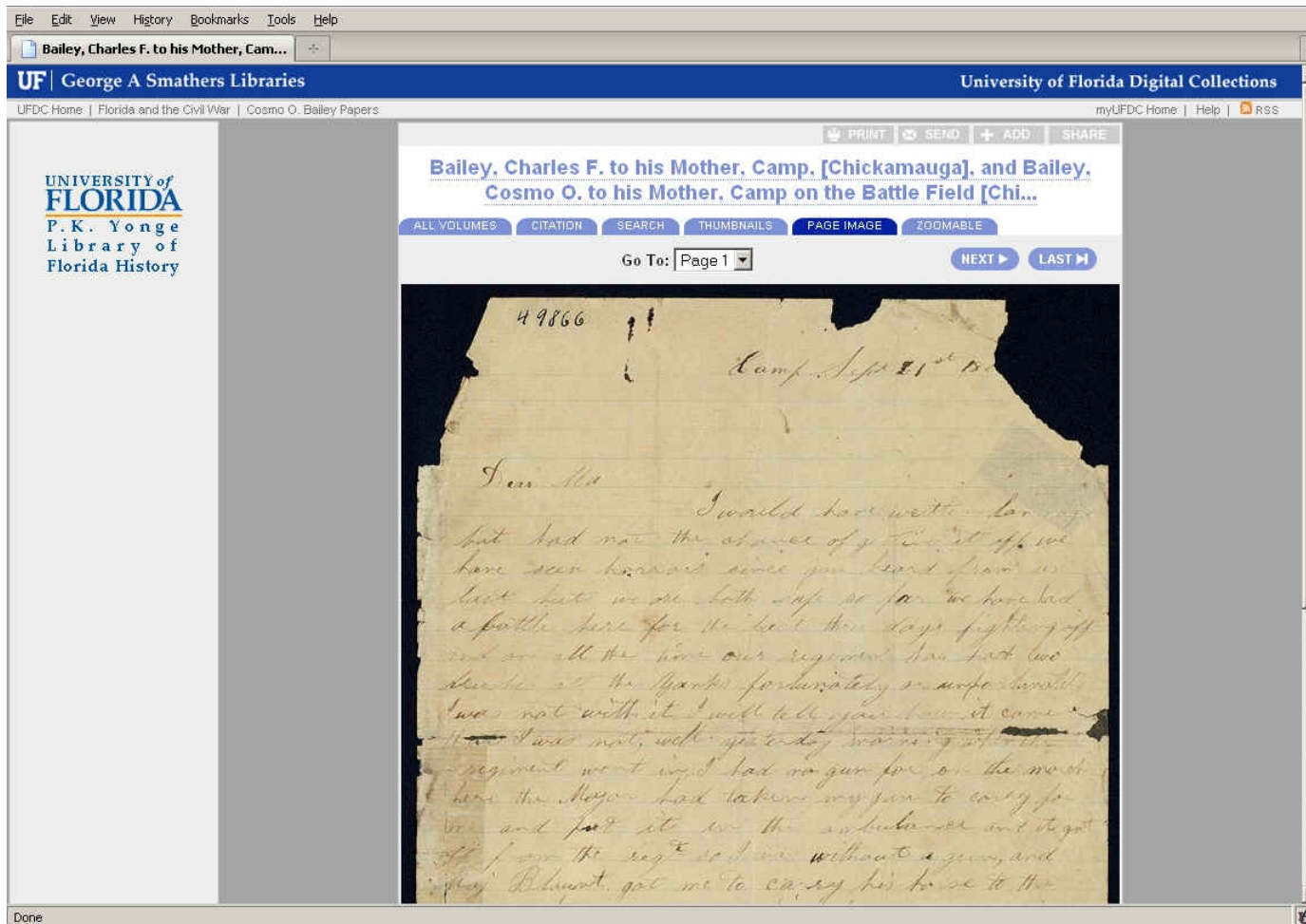
“Atlanta, Ga. Sept 24th/63

Dear Wife it is with unbounded pleasure I seat myself this lovely morning to write you that I am still alive I am slightly wounded in the hand was wounded on Saturday evening[1] near sundown[2] our Regt acted nobly every company suffered right severely only two killed in my company Thomas Gatlin & Nathe Vendrick. [...] **I never was in just such a place before it is strange to me how any one escaped for I assure you that the bullets seemed to search every nook and corner of the field that we were in.”**

1. September 19, 1863

2. Perhaps in Gen. Patrick Cleburne’s evening assault on the Union left. Foote: “‘Old Pap’ [Union Gen. George H. Thomas]...had seen to it that Baird and Johnson, who were posted at the extremity of his line, were braced for the assault he was convinced would be renewed before the day was over. [...] When the sun went down behind Missionary Ridge and no new attack had developed, they began to tell each other he was wrong; until Cleburne exploded out of the darkling woods, directly in front of Baird and Johnson, and proved him emphatically right.” (Shelby Foote, “The Civil War: A Narrative. Vol. 2: Fredericksburg to Meridian” [1963])

Chickamauga: Charles F. and Cosmo O. Bailey (7th Florida Infantry, CSA)



Courtesy University of Florida Libraries

Excerpt: Cosmo O. Bailey to his mother, September 21, 1863

Camp on the Battlefield, Sept. 21st, 1863

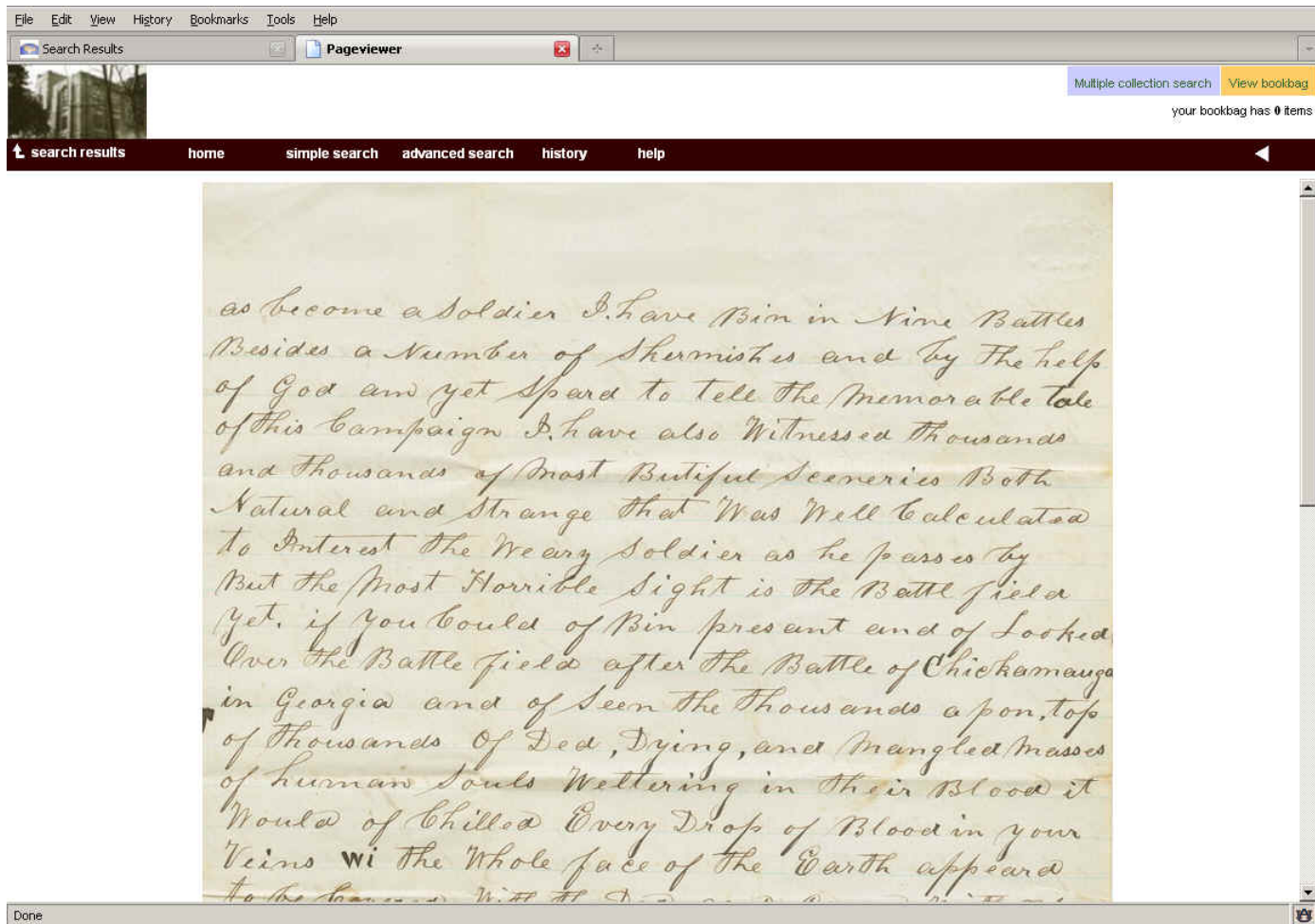
Dear Mother

We are now camped on the field of Battle 7 ½ miles from Chattanooga. The fight commenced on Friday the 18th, with pretty heavy skirmishing. We were in hearing though not engaged and it commenced in good earnest on Saturday. We were not engaged until late in the evening and then for a little while only. We lost one killed and some 14 or 15 wounded. One only was wounded in Co. D and he very slightly. **The 6th Fla. was very badly cut to pieces, losing nearly 2/3 in killed, wounded, and missing.** Yesterday we were expecting it all day and did not fairly get into it at all but we charged up and captured some prisoners and a stand of colors and fired a few shots but night ended the fight. Today we expected to fight again but during the night the yanks left and at last accounts were crossing the Tenn. [Tennessee] river. We are in Buckers [Maj. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner, Sr.'s] Corps, Prestons [Brig. Gen. William Preston's] Division, Triggs [Col. Robert C. Trigg's] brigade. I must close. We are both well. Good bye. I will write more fully concerning things the next I write.

Your Affectionate Son

C.O. Bailey [Cosmo O. Bailey]

Chickamauga: Edward Summers (Co. K, Kentucky Cavalry Regiment, USA)

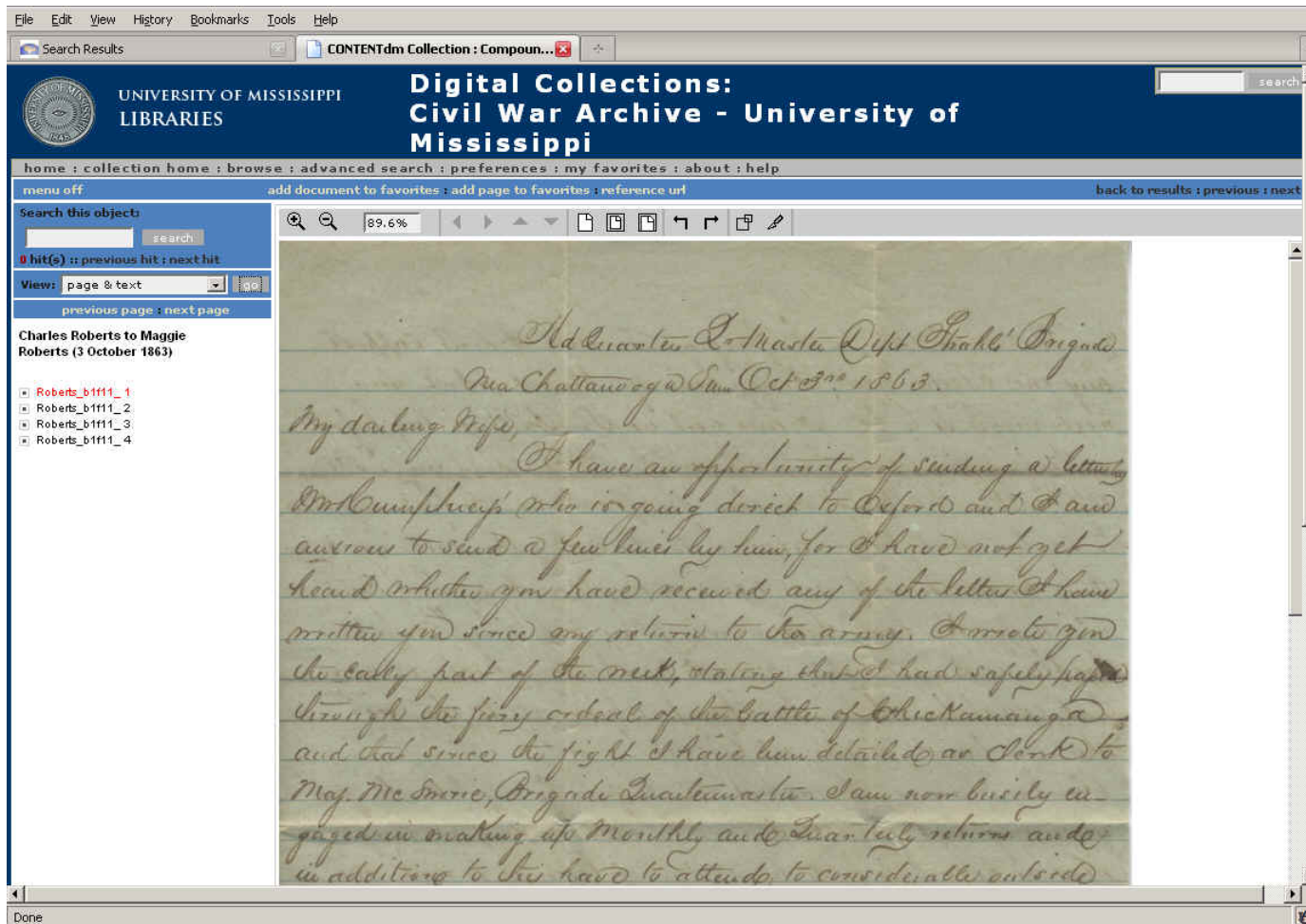


Courtesy University of Tennessee Libraries

Excerpt: Edward Summers to his cousin, November 3, 1863

“[...] I have Bin in Nine Battles Besides a Number of Skermishes and by the help of God am yet Spard to tell the memorable tale of this Campaign I have also Witnessed thousands and thousands of Most Butiful Sceneries Both Natural and Strange that was well Calculated to Interest the Weary Soldier as he passes by But the most Horrible Sight is the Battle field **Yet, if you Could of Bin presant and of Looked Over the Battle field after the Battle of Chickamauga in Georgia and of Seen the Thousands apon top of thousands of Ded, Dying, and mangled masses of human Souls weltering in their Blood it would of Chilled Every Drop of Blood in your Veins wi the Whole face of the Earth appeard to be Covered with the Ded and Gorged with Blood** Many of my Brave Companions fell in that memorable Battle By the Enemies fatal Ball and their Bones are left to Bleach apon the Georgia Plains I am Sorry to Inform you that Our Ded was Not Buried the Enemy took the field and held it”

Chickamauga: Charles Roberts (Stanford's Light Artillery, CSA)

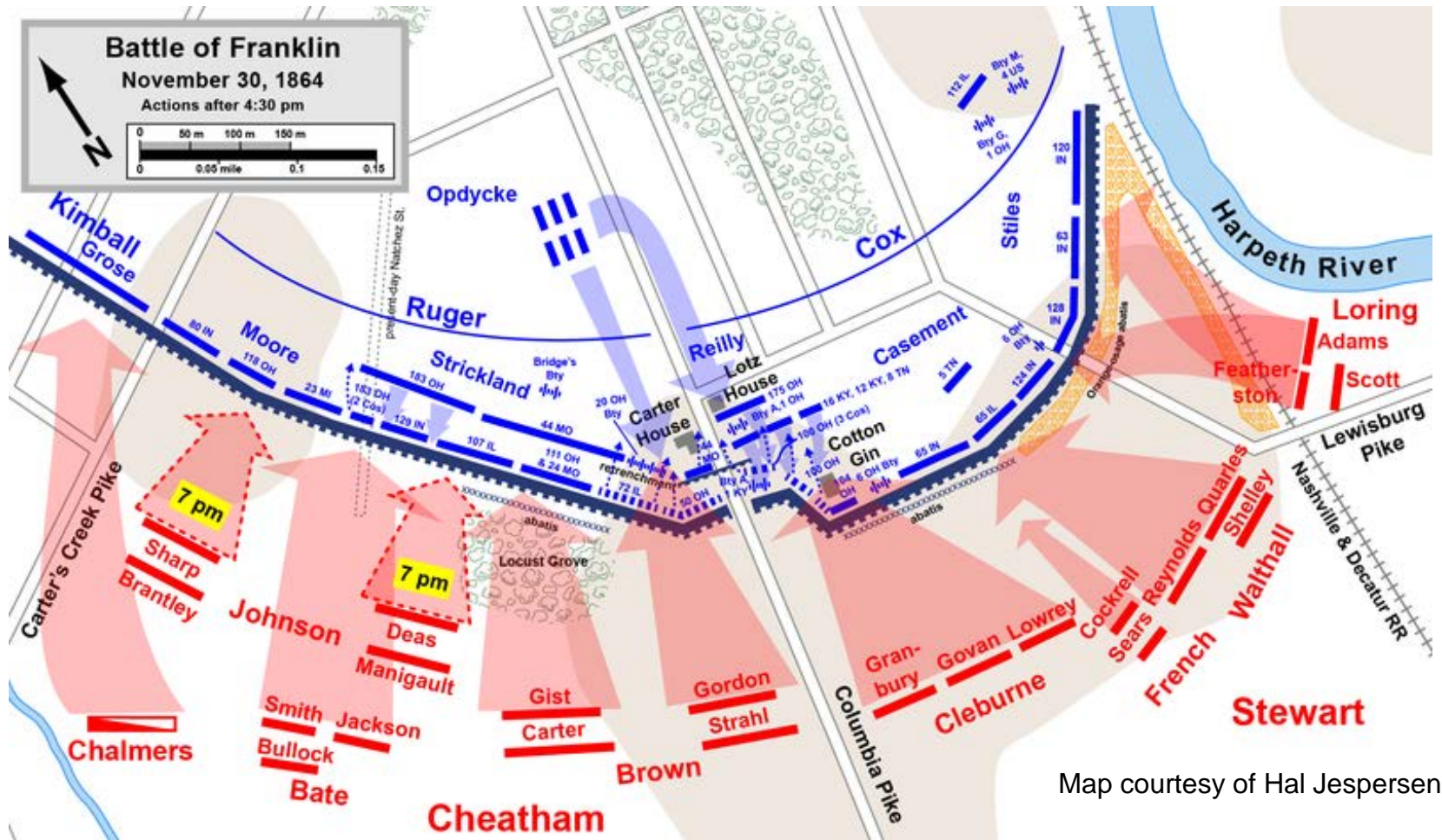


Courtesy University of Mississippi Libraries

Excerpt: Charles Roberts to Maggie Roberts, October 3, 1863

“[...] I have just been conversing with an officer that has lately visited the battlefield of Chickamauga. **He says our dead have been all buried but the Yankees still remain unburied. They are lying about in all directions, black, putrifying and swollen. Their are arrangements being made to cover them with dirt—they are too much decomposed to remove. For miles around you can occasionally find them where they have dragged themselves off out of range of the missles and died.** Many of our own men and of the enemy's were burned to death after they were wounded by the undergrowth and leaves catching fire from the explosion of shells. Considering the exposure and hardships our army has undergone, they are in excellent condition and their is a cool, quiet spirit of determination in the army which Rosencranz [sic] with all his boasted reinforcements will find difficult to overcome.”

Example: Battle of Franklin (November 30, 1864)



Map courtesy of Hal Jespersen

Franklin: Jesse L. Henderson (41st Mississippi Infantry Regiment, CSA)

The screenshot displays a web browser window with the address bar showing "CONTENTdm Collection : Compound O...". The page header features the University of Mississippi Libraries logo and the text "Digital Collections: Civil War Archive - University of Mississippi". A search bar is located in the top right corner. Below the header, a navigation menu includes links for "home", "collection home", "browse", "advanced search", "preferences", "my favorites", "about", and "help". A secondary menu offers "menu off", "add document to favorites", "add page to favorites", "reference url", and "back to results : previous : next".

The main content area is titled "Search this object" and includes a search input field and a "search" button. Below this, it shows "0 hit(s) :: previous hit : next hit". The "View" dropdown is set to "page & text" with a "go" button. A list of document identifiers is visible on the left side, with "JLH_Diary_133-134" highlighted in red. The central part of the page shows a scanned image of an open diary with handwritten text in cursive. The left page is dated "Nov 1864" and the right page is dated "Nov 20 1864". The handwriting describes military movements and actions.

Done

Courtesy University of Mississippi Libraries

Excerpt from Henderson's diary, entry for November 30, 1864

[...] "Wednesday the 30th the Enemy all gone they were several prisners brought in they were left behind stragling and our scouts taken them in out of the wet Orders to move out on the pike halted for the rest of the Corps to come that was left on the other side of [town] taken up line of march about ten oclock towards Franklin arived near about 4 Oclock in the evening formed a line fighting round town very heavey [then] we halted about ten Minutes marched out by the right flank about a half miles fromed a line **Marched in line for about one mile untel we come near the enemy getting very dark by this [time] give us orders not to fire when we [advanced] untel we got to where we had some men in breast work that they had taken the works we marched [in] and [when] we got near the enemy heard us coming they opened a gauling fire into us wich was of great effect but we did not stop for that but went on and [soon] we come to the works & the enemy occupied part of them and our men the other part all on the same lines and we remained in that position untel about three Oclock A.M. when the enemy abandon theirs and left their dead & wounded on the field & then our boys commenced plundering the Yanke knap sacks untel day light & [gathering] up our wounded"**

Franklin: Milton Barnes (97th Ohio Volunteer Infantry, USA)

Franklin, Tennessee
Thursday, December 14, 1864
My very dear wife

I have been at a loss to say "I am safe" after the fight yesterday with Hood at Franklin, one of the most terrific battles engagements of the war, looked back slowly to this place for some days, yesterday while we were getting our trains across the river at Franklin, he came upon us with his whole army, and attacked us with most furious desperation, we were compelled to fall back from our first or outer line, into the main line of works, where our terrified and disorganized battalions were rallied and defended the works with the energy of despair. I have never seen quite so fierce an attack, nor a more gallant defense in all my experience in this war, and while we were compelled to vacate the place, we did it at our leisure after punishing the enemy most severely, our loss is small, there is counted by the thousands. The fight was kept up for six hours when they arose off at 12 o'clock last night we moved out and reached here at noon today. I am entirely exhausted for want of sleep and rest, I must scrawl a few lines along the road, otherwise I am quite well. I have been in command of the regiment for some days back, look to the Brigade.

I can hardly imagine how I escaped. Surely it is the work of that Great Merciful Hand, that has so mercifully sheltered me heretofore, & how thankful I feel. I was very much exposed at one time, but did not realize it until after wards, when we got into our main line of works we were sheltered from the fire very much. Well, my love I am so tired and need rest to body I must ask you to pardon a very short note. Our campaign thus far has been exciting and pretty rough but I have no reason to complain. Our forces are concentrating here in such numbers as to preclude the probability of Hood coming here, we all want him to, or to pass us and go north, his wife destroy him utterly if he does. I will enclose a list of the boys from the two divisions, no company who were killed or missing, which may interest their friends if they care to enquire. You saw your first letter from "at home" was read, but I will narrow it and write from full in a day or two, let me go to sleep dreamt about you & I have lots of things to say next time. Preparations seem to indicate that we will rest, recruit and reorganize here for awhile.

There seems good by and a sweet goodnight to see that yours
Milton Barnes

Excerpt: Milton Barnes to Rhoda Barnes, December 1, 1864

“My very dear Wife,

I have barely a chance to say "I am safe" after the fight yesterday with Hood at Franklin, one of the most terrific little engagements of the war. We had been falling back slowly to this place for some days. **Yesterday while we were getting our train across the river at Franklin he came upon us with his whole army, and attacked us with most furious desperation. we were compelled to fall back from our first, an outer line, into the main line of works, where our terrified and disorganized battallions [sic] were rallied and defended the works with the energy of despair. I have ever seen quite so fierce an attack nor a more gallant defence in all my experience in this war, and while we were compelled to evacuate the place, we did it at our leisure after punishing the enemy most severely.** our loss is small, theirs is counted by the thousand. The fight was kept up for six hours, when they drew off. At 12 o'clock last night we moved out and reached here at noon today. [...] Our campaign thus far has been exciting and pretty rough but I have no reason to complain. **Our forces are concentrating here in such numbers as to preclude the probability of Hood coming here. we all want him to, or to pass us and go north. We will destroy him utterly if he does.”**



What we learned

- Building a multi-institution virtual library is a challenge, but it can be done—with proper preparation
- A bigger challenge is keeping interest and momentum going
- Advertising is key—put the resource where people can see it
- Make it a part of something larger (interviews with historians, family histories, syllabi, etc.)



Next steps

- Keep adding more content through the sesquicentennial period (2011-2015)
- Include content from non-ASERL libraries and archives
- Improve search interface (search by material type, etc.)
- Add (better) tools for user comments and feedback
- Presentations at public history/digital history conferences?
- Social media presence?



Acknowledgments

- The ASERL directors, for their financial and in-kind support of the project
- ASERL Executive Director John Burger, for keeping us moving in the right direction
- Faculty and staff at ASERL libraries, for selecting, digitizing, and creating metadata for their Civil War-era collections
- Toby Graham and Sheila McAlister at the DLG, for creating the ASERL-CWAS portal
- EBSCO Industries, for a gift to support digitization work at the Auburn University Libraries

<http://www.american-south.org/>

Questions/comments to:

Aaron Trehub

Auburn University Libraries

trehuaj@auburn.edu

Skype: ajtrehub
