

Transcribed by Terry Crooks.

The original letter is in the Porter Family Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections,
University of Rochester Libraries.

Camp of the 108th N.Y.S.V.
Elk Run Va¹
Sept 4th ,63

Dear Father

Generally in writing to you I content myself with a few lines devoted either to business or to an assurance of my continued good health. Today I am mindful of the fact that my anxious family has for more than a week pined for one of my gladdening epistles. Such being the state of things my humanity prompts me to write a cheering word and relieve their anxious minds. The fact of my having chosen you, from all the rest, to be the recipient of my favor was rather accident than design resulting from Mother's providing me with paper and envelopes already directed. After this long introduction you will perhaps think as I do upon receiving such effusions that the writer has run ashore for material and wants to make you think that by filling his paper he has written you a letter. In this instance luckily it is not the case. Since writing home last I have seen considerable of Virginia and trust that I shall be smart enough to impart the result of my investigations in a manner which will be at least readable. Before proceeding to Virginia and its Inhabitants let me write a few words with reference to H Hamilton and once for all get the subject of his clothes off my mind. Last Saturday just as I was giving up all expectation of seeing him he rode into camp accompanied by Dr. Lord of his Regiment. They both took dinner with me and returned to their command at four P.M. Hank took his things with him and was very glad to get them. He reports Port well and progressing.²

About a week ago, I was sent out with a party to scour the country for deserters, suspicious looking individuals etc. Among other things I considered it my duty to bring into camp all the horses I found that bore any marks of Uncle Sam's ownership upon them, and in consequence had quite an amusing time with one family which could not appreciate the joke. I came upon the house about breakfast and after giving some of the boys permission to go in and get something to eat began looking around on my own hook. I soon found two horses branded U.S. These I ordered the boys to unhitch and lead away when we were all ready. They were just preparing for this when out rushed the old woman threatening dire vengeance on any one who dared touch her horses. I tried persuasion threats etc. but to no purpose. So long as I confined myself to words she was firm in her determination to die with her horses. When I ordered her off however I shewed my determination of enforcing it, she took the other tack and tried an appeal to my feelings. This was no go and she had to see her horses taken away by the ruffianly Yankees as she called us.

I visited a good many places while on this scout and was more than ever convinced of the miserable and degraded condition of the people. When you see white people they are on small farms and present the appearance of miserable white trash. The sole representatives of the grand plantations are in general a negro woman with a large number of children, most of whom bear unmistakable indication of a large admixture of white blood in their origin. Talk about the comfort of slaves, but a year or twos life in such huts as they inhabit would I think convince any body of the contrary.

Sunday night we got orders to march at daylight with 60 rounds cartridges and three days rations. We left camp bright and early and after marching due south for about seven hours were very glad

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to find that we had reached our point of destination for the day at last. This we found to be Hartwood church a ruined building on the Warrenton road about five miles from Falmouth. Here we camped for the night and remained without tents they having been left behind until Thursday (yesterday) afternoon. The weather is quite warm any lying out in the sun without covering is anything but pleasant, still managed to pass the time and did not really have such a bad time of it. The boys scoured the country for provisions but with the exception of one calf I believe they were unsuccessful. I came in for my share of that made one very fair meal. The rest of the time I came down a peg or so and once more put up with soldiers fare. As regards the object of this expedition and its results you are doubtless better informed than I am.

We hear nothing as yet from our conscripts but expect to get a few before long. There is a great dearth of reading material in camp and if you will recommence sending the paper I will be much obliged. I have just paid .75 for a pair of socks and wish mother would improve the first opportunity of sending me a few pair. Another shirt like those I got at Occumpaugh's [sp?]³ would come in play and if she has time I wish she would get one and send to me by some of our Regt.

Much love to all

Your affect. son

Sam.⁴

Notes:

¹ Elk Run, Va.- After the failed pursuit of Lee's army from Gettysburg, the 2nd Corps settled down north of the Rappahannock in the area around Warrenton Junction. Elk Run is approx. 10 miles south of Warrenton Junction.

² Henry Hamilton, now 1st Lt. Co.I, 140th NY (July, 1863)

Dr. Mathias L. Lord, Assistant Surgeon, 140th NY (Feb.12,1863).

Porter Farley, Sam's cousin in the 140th NY.

³ E. Ocumpaugh, 71 Main Street, Rochester, a clothing / laundry retail business.

⁴ This letter is interesting since it reveals a hardening approach by Sam as he moves through the war. The "Scout" was really a euphemism for a forage expedition with the presence of an officer to create some semblance of legitimacy. Sam's comments about the 'miserable white trash' sound almost clinical and detached as if he were examining a specimen of bacteria. His tale of the old lady and the horse has almost a bemused indifference to it.