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**Ely Family Letters**  
**1862-1864**  
MssCol 6159

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## Summary

<b>Main entry:</b>	Ely family
<b>Title:</b>	Ely family letters, 1862-1864
<b>Size:</b>	.4 linear feet (1 box)
<b>Source:</b>	Anonymous gift, 2004
<b>Abstract:</b>	<p>The Ely family letters consist of fifty-seven letters to Elizabeth Ely Fowler (1834-1887) from her brothers Edgar and Charles, and her sister Emilie. The letters chiefly document the military experiences of Edgar and Charles Ely as Union soldiers during the American Civil War. They include accounts of the Battle of Fredericksburg, the Battle of Gettysburg, camp life, picket duty, illness, and injury. Letters from Emily concern life at home in Madison, Connecticut during the war.</p>
<b>Access:</b>	Apply in the Special Collections Office for admission to the Manuscripts and Archives Division.
<b>Preferred citation:</b>	Ely Family Letters, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.
<b>Alternate formats:</b>	Typed transcripts of the letters are included in the collection.

## **Related materials note**

Edgar S. Ely Papers  
Pearce Civil War Collection  
Navarro College  
Corsicana, Texas

## Biographical note

Edgar, Charles and Emily ("Emilie") Ely were three of the seven surviving children of Elias S. (1809-1888) and Hester (1812-1881) Ely of Madison, Connecticut. Elias was a farmer. Three of the Ely children fought in the Civil War, on the side of the Union.

Edgar (1837-1896) enlisted as a private on July 30, 1862 and joined the Company G of the 14th Connecticut Infantry on August 20, 1862. He was promoted to corporal on October 1, 1863 and mustered out on May 31, 1865. He remained a farmer in Connecticut and married Jane M. Brown.

Charles (1839-1912) enlisted with the 27th Connecticut Infantry on September 9, 1862. He served initially as sergeant and acting orderly and was promoted to a 2nd lieutenant on May 11, 1863. He resigned on June 4, 1863. He married Mary G. Darling and they lived in Columbus Ohio, where Charles was a teacher for the deaf (circa 1870). The family then moved to Frederick City, MD, where Charles served as the Principal and Superintendent of the Maryland Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb (c. 1880-1910).

## Scope and content note

The Ely Family letters consist of fifty-seven letters sent to Elizabeth Ely (1834-1887), (Mrs. Theodore Fowler) from her brothers Edgar and Charles, and her sister Emilie. The letters span September 1862 to December 1864. The letters from Edgar and Charles describe life as a soldier during the Civil War while the three letters from Emilie, a young teenager at the time, describes domestic life in Madison, Connecticut. Typed transcripts of all letters are included in the collection as are photocopies of the original letters from 1862-1863.

Edgar's letters, forty-two in number, span September 9, 1862 to December 26, 1864. His first letter is written from Fort Ethan Allen, Fairfax, Virginia. He then travels throughout Maryland and Virginia and arrives for battle at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Injured at Gettysburg, he convalesces in Newark, New Jersey. Edgar then spends fall 1863 to spring 1864 camping with his division near Stony Mountain, VA before traveling through Virginia. His last letter is written from Petersburg, VA.

Edgar writes descriptively of the life of a soldier describing life in camp, marching formations, picket duty, fighting in battles, homesickness, and spiritual questions that arose during war. He writes of his loneliness and longing to receive more letters from home, and makes requests for food, stamps, and thread. Most notably, he gives an account of his participation in the Battle of Gettysburg during which his unit charged a house and barn that held Rebel sharpshooters. Edgar was shot through his right calf, yet still entered the house and managed to drive the Rebels out. He then walked one mile until an ambulance picked him up. This was an unusual letter, for Edgar normally only briefly mentions what happened in battles when writing to his sister, instead writing to her more on matters of daily life and of spiritual concerns. Edgar encouraged her to open her heart to God and Jesus Christ, only to later write that he was losing strength in his own belief in God.

Charles' twelve letters span September 28, 1862 to May 24, 1863. He describes his duties as acting orderly and the daily events of camp life. As a soldier in the Battle of Fredericksburg and gives a detailed account of the fighting and the men who were killed. Often ill with fever and an unidentified "lameness," Charles spent a great deal of time in various Army hospitals. He details the medical care he received in them as well as his feelings of helplessness in being unable to serve his country. He writes often of feeling depressed at being away from home and then being left behind by the members of his regiment who were able-bodied enough to continue fighting.

Both brothers often mention third brother, Willoughby Ely (1841-1882). Willoughby enlisted on October 2, 1861 with Company A, 10th Connecticut Infantry. He was promoted to Full Corporal on August 13, 1862 and mustered out on October 7, 1864.

The three letters from Emilie Ely (1848-1865) are brief, for the most part discussing domestic issues, the effect of the draft on the town of Madison, and the interruption of her schooling when her teacher enlisted.

## Arrangement note

The Ely family letters are arranged in chronological order.

**Container list**

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
1	1	1862
1	2	1863- Jan - Apr
	3	1863- May - Dec
	4	1864- Jan - Aug
	5	1864- Sep - Dec