

JULY 2024

Tender Civil War letters from a young soldier are a new addition to the Scott House archives

In 1862 and 1863, a Union Army soldier wrote long letters home to his wife, sharing his day-to-day life. He described the tedium and uncertainty as the troops trained and then prepared for engagement and he always spoke of his longing to be back with his family.

Edwin Darling Pickett left for military service around Sept. 1, 1862; on July 1, 1863, Sgt. Pickett died of wounds suffered in the first day of fighting at Gettysburg. He was 28.

The Ridgefield Historical Society recently received a collection of his letters, the gift of Jean B. Gerrity of Madison, in memory of her mother Ann Piccirillo Zaccaria, from whom she'd inherited them. The historical society is grateful to Ms. Gerrity for placing this piece of Ridgefield history where it will be available for study in the years to come.



At a pre-Memorial Day ceremony in 1997, American Legion members placed flags at the gravestone of Sgt. Edwin Pickett in Titicus Cemetery. From left were Doug Clewell, Fred Layda, Rick DeWald, and Richard Klahn. —Scott Mullin photo

In one of the first letters in the collection, Pickett is stationed at Fort Marshall in Baltimore where his unit, the 17th Connecticut, Company G, was posted. “darling wife,” he begins, then explains he’s rushing to get the letter into the mail. He had time to write because he’d gotten a doctor’s order for a day off from the brutal training that he and his fellow soldiers were enduring.

When I have more time to write I will tell you all about how business is managed here. I believe our Col is a rascal and is backed up by a lot of Capt. and they are trying to make all the money they can off of it. We get 7 hour drill every day but Sat & Sunday. It will kill the men, it is hot and the men are weak and can’t stand it.

After thus sharing his opinion of the regiment’s officers (for his wife’s eyes only, he warned), he promised to do his utmost to get through his service and make his way home.

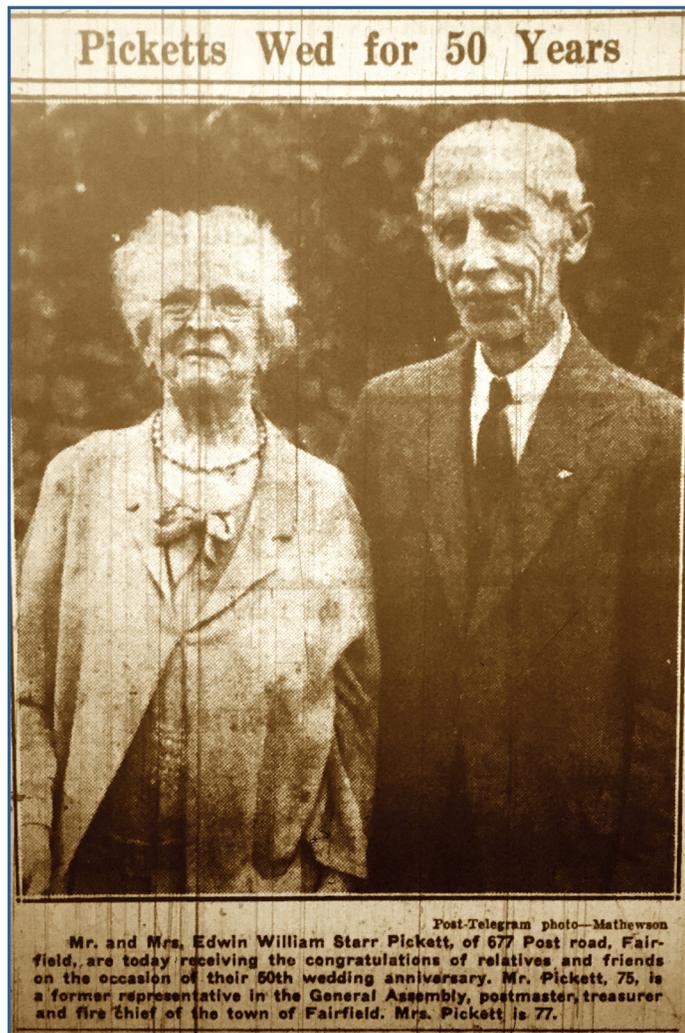
Bless you Darling, for the first time I was homesick last night. I wanted to see you all. I need not tell you I cried.... You know Darling how much I love you and Willie and how I long to see you. I thought if we had to leave here I would keep all right to march if they get me down. I’ll bet they will be smarter than I am. It is about mail time so my dearest goodbye for the present. Love to all and remember me as your affectionate husband.



Barlow's Knoll after first day's battle, Gettysburg, July 1, 1863

Edwin Darling Pickett was born in Ridgefield in 1835, a son of Rufus H. "Boss" Pickett and his wife, Betsey Parsons Pickett. "Boss" Pickett was a noted furniture-maker in town; his first shop was on Main Street, opposite today's Christian Science church, and he later worked from a building on Market Street. The Pickett home was on the north corner of Main and Market Streets.

In 1857 Edwin Pickett married Sarah Chickering Harrington — a descendant of a Revolutionary War captain — in Taunton, Mass., and four years later, they had a son, Edwin William Starr Pickett, known



Edwin William Starr Pickett (1861-1937), and his wife, Leonora (Kelley) Pickett, of Fairfield, Conn. He was the young son, "Willie," that Sgt. Pickett wrote about in his letters home.

as Willie. At the time Eddie Pickett left for the Army, Sarah was expecting their second child; that baby, Fannie Belle Pickett, died at birth on Feb. 26, 1863.

Sarah and Willie were living with the elder Picketts while Eddie was away.

The 17th Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry was organized at Bridgeport in August 1862. Edwin D. Pickett was mustered in as a corporal in Company G on Aug. 9; most of the company came from Ridgefield and Redding. By Sept. 1, the regiment was headed south. In another early letter from Fort Marshall, he describes how the new recruits were getting along, learning how to be soldiers.

...We have to drill very hard but the men learn fast and after 2 or 3 months they will let up on us. I don't mind it when I am well. I am very well now but the boys who swallow medicine don't get up very quick. Aaron Lee is better, he has been sick 2 or 3 weeks and if he had not been strong as a horse, they would have killed him. Their medicine is opium or calomel [a purgative, called also mercurous chloride].

We call our tent home for want of a better home, we have things in good shape: a good board floor, the box I had from home set up on the side with a shelf in it. For our closet, a gun rack to keep our rifles in (by the way guns are useful furniture in this camp) a box for water pail & wash basin & shoe brushes and taking it through we are in the best shape of any tent on our street and not wishing to be under any one on a name, we have it called "Uncle Abe," and they can't go ahead of the President.

By the end of November, Pickett was in Virginia and had been promoted to sergeant. He sent a reassuring letter to his wife, who was undoubtedly seeing reports of battles there as well as the President's efforts to get the Army to move. (Around this time, Lincoln had replaced General McClellan with Major General Burnside.)

I ended my letter of Thursday very abruptly because I had to go on picket, but I went and I was on a "grand post" in an old log house out on the Leesburg Pike a mile & a half from camp we was under cover and had a good time there was 12 men 3 corporals & 1 Lieut of the 25th Ohio who was a very pleasant man & there we staid and had a comfortable time.

....You must kiss the dear little boy for his Papa and tell him I want to see him very much.

You must give my love to all the folks and tell them I am sorry I could not be at home Thanksgiving for I missed my dinner and I have no recollection of being away from home [on] Thanksgiving before. I am to the bottom and must close for to night and I may have time to write a little to morrow but I hardly think I shall, with all the love of my heart I remain your Ever Loving husband

Ed Pickett.

A sweet kiss for my own Darling.

Ed P.

I think I will put in one of the acorns I found at Manassas Junction.

Sunday morning. I wish I was with you to day

Wed. Morning. Bless you darling how I wish I could step in and see you I guess you are washing up your breakfast dishes and once in the while you stop to talk to mother or she runs in to talk with you. It is a beautiful morning but I am not in love with "the Sunny South of Maryland." My Maryland is a specimen Everything looks mean to what I am used to seeing I believe I could improve on anything that is made in Baltimore. Darling take good care of yourself and the babies I dreamed I was home last night and saw you and a dear little one. Don't show this for it is for you and no one else. I have not time to write much or I would string this out

In an undated letter, but probably February, 1863, Sgt. Pickett writes to his wife and shares his longing for home and family.

There is no date on the following short note, but it's believed to be from February 1863, when Sgt. Pickett knows that his second child may be born.

Weds. Morning. Bless you darling how I wish I could step in and see you I guess you are washing up your breakfast dishes and once in the while you stop to talk to Mother or she runs in to talk with you. It is a beautiful morning but I am not in love with the Sunny South if Maryland. "My Maryland" is a specimen. Everything looks mean to what I am used to seeing I believe I could improve on anything that is made in Baltimore. Darling take good care of yourself and the babies I dreamed I was home last night and saw you and a dear little one. Don't show this for it is for you and no one else. I have not time to write much or I would string this out until noon. But you know my Darling how much I love you and how I pray for your protection. And if we have to go where I cannot write often and regularly you will know it is because I can and not because I don't want to. I suppose if we leave here the mail conveniences will be as good as they are here. But I hope to hear from home as often as the mail reaches us in the field and shall look for my dear letter tomorrow. I must close now Darling, so goodbye for the present and remember as your devoted husband Ed.

Late in June 1863, the 17th Connecticut was back in Maryland, after having been part of the Chancellorsville Campaign (April 27-May 6). They were unsure of what would come next or where the action would be, although there were indications of Confederate movement. Three days

before the battle at Gettysburg began, Sgt. Pickett wrote to his wife, Sarah:

My Own Darling,

I wrote you yesterday that I would write again today. We changed camp yesterday and are now about the same distance from the town only in a different direction. We lay along side the Hagerstown road and hear the Rebs are marching up towards Chambersburgh Pa. If so we may move soon, but we may stay here 10 days and may not stay an hour. This is a good union town: out of 800 votes only 8 was for the C.S.A. the rest for U.S.A. I am very well and enjoy myself as well as I can away from my own dear ones. If I could only come and stay with you I would willingly march all the way.

...I have in my hand the last letter I rec'd from you. Bless you darling for such dear letters they do me so much good. I suppose you get all the news from the papers we don't get any papers now and don't know what is going on in the world. I hope it is time that Vicksburgh is surrendered. It seems as if it could not hold out much longer at any rate. I would give a great deal to see and hear our boy perform as I think he must be very funny sometimes.

...I heard a church bell ring this morning for the first time in over 8 months. It did sound good I tell you and I wanted to go to church again. I don't know what Hooker is doing but it is the general oppinion that the Rebs are in a bad scrape and can't get out again for we are after them sure now. You say I don't know how you want to see

me. I can imagine by my own feelings some I can tell you for my heart and thoughts are with you all the time and many times a day do I ask for blessings to rest upon you.

This a most beautiful country and a great deal of grain is almost ripe. The inhabitants are rejoiced to see us for they heard the Rebs was coming to destroy their grain and they did not know of our coming until we marched into town. Many had hid their horses and after we come they got them out again. I wish I could see you and tell you all for I can talk faster than I can write, if anything I can talk faster than I used too when I was home. It is hard writing sitting flat on the ground and I can't write very good. I wrote a short note to Stan yesterday as I thought he might like to hear what had become of me. Our 1st Lt has gone to the Hospital in Georgetown and I guess he will resign as he said he meant to as soon as he could get to Washington. He is not here and sent in his papers and they would not accept of his resignation but I guess he will go now at any rate. If he does I shall expect a chance. If so it will be by my own exertions and no thanks to any one. I have much to write and could fill another sheet but I will try to write again in a few days and let you keep track of me. Kiss my dear boy for me and tell him Pa Pa loves him. Write as often as you can. I am in hopes we will not have to go into Virginia again for if we are successful in this I think we will come home. Give my love to all, tell Wm to write to me, are they raising any new troops in Mass. Good my Darling a lot of good hearty kisses and all the love of my heart I am as ever your true and loving husband.

Among the 3,155 Union soldiers who died at the Battle of Gettysburg was Sgt. Edwin D. Pickett, who succumbed to his wounds on July 1 after a fierce fight at a place later known as Barlow's Knoll. It was so called for Brig. General Francis Barlow, who ordered the 11th Corps to take the raised ground, then saw his troops overrun by Confederate forces and pushed back into Gettysburg.

According to Charles Pankenier in his book, "Ridgefield Fights the Civil War," Eddie Pickett was now a first sergeant. "As 'orderly,' he was entrusted with running the company in the absence of its captain, and in preference to the lieutenants who were his nominal superiors." As Company G advanced to the fighting on Barlow's Knoll, Pankenier wrote, "They were led by the flags that were the symbol of regimental honor — and a high-profile target," Pankenier said. "Years later a comrade would recall: 'Here Orderly Edwin D. Pickett was shot down while grasping the regimental colors, being the third bearer, who had carried them to the death.'"

Word of Sgt. Pickett's death was received in Ridgefield on July 6. His brother, Rufus Starr Pickett, known as Starr, went to Pennsylvania to retrieve his brother's body and, according to Anna Resseguie's diary on July 12, "searched some time among the dead at Gettysburg before he was found; his blanket was wrapped about him, his watch and pencil given by Starr, were in his coat sleeve." Miss Resseguie, daughter of the innkeeper at what is now called the Keeler Tavern, also reported that at the July 12 funeral, "a long procession of pedestrians, as well as carriages, followed his remains to the grave." "Sergeant Edwin D. Pickett ... was a favorite with the men, and much esteemed in Ridgefield, where

Seldom has a whole community been more deeply afflicted, than was Ridgefield when it became known just after the battle of Gettysburg that Edwin D. Pickett lost his life on the first day of that mighty contest. His regiment was in the advance, and bravely withstood the fierce onset of the enemy. In this struggle he fell mortally wounded, and in a few hours breathed his last. His body was brought home for interment, and his funeral services took place in the Congregational church on Sabbath afternoon, July 12th. In such general esteem was he held that services were suspended in the Methodist and Episcopal churches, that all might unite in a last tribute of respect to his memory. Many, also, from neighboring places, to whom the deceased was well known, came to show their sympathy for the bereaved, and their appreciation of the personal character and patriotism of the dead. The church was appropriately decorated with national flags draped with mourning, and the emblem of our Union also covered the coffin. The funeral ceremonies were under the direction of Messrs. George Keeler, H. K. Scott, Ebenezer Jones, S. S. Hurlbutt and E. W. Keeler. Rev. Clinton Clark, the pastor, conducted the services, assisted by Rev. Mr. Ford, of the Methodist church.

The solemnity of the scene cannot soon be forgotten. It was evident that no idle curiosity attracted that throng to the house of worship. The hush of the audience, the subdued demeanor, the tearful eye, all bore witness to the high regard entertained for the fallen soldier; and as the pastor spoke of his consistent christian character, his manly virtues, his ardent love for country, no one could say that the words uttered were those of vain adulation.

As the procession was escorting the remains to their last resting-place, a significant and touching incident occurred. Near the late residence of the deceased, a flag with sable drapery was suspended over the street through which the procession was to move. A large number of citizens on foot preceded the hearse, and as they passed beneath the flag, every head was reverently uncovered in honor alike of the departed, and of our beloved country. Who can doubt that at that moment new resolves were formed by all who participated in, and witnessed this movement—resolves to emulate the character of him who on that Sabbath was going to his rest; resolves to stand by that "banner of the stars," and, if need be, to perish in its defense.

he lived. On the Sunday of his funeral, the churches suspended other services, and united in the tribute to his high personal character and his manly virtues. To his children he left the legacy of an unspotted name and a record of noble deeds." (The Military and Civil History of Connecticut During The War of 1861-65)

The Ridgefield Historical Society archives also contains a letter from Aaron W. Lee to his father in Ridgefield, describing the battle and its aftermath. A member of Company G, he was wounded at Barlow's Knoll and made his way to a makeshift hospital in Gettysburg, where Sgt. Pickett lay nearby.

I had just drawn a good sight on a strapping big Reb and fired

The procession passed on to the place of burial, and loyal hands lowered the soldier into his grave. His father and mother, his brother and sisters, his wife and child, bade him a last farewell, and returned to their desolate home. And yet not desolate. He who has promised to be the God of the widow and the father of the fatherless; He who sustains the nearest and tenderest relations to suffering humanity; He who never permits the faithful service of his children to go unrewarded, will be in that abode of sorrow, to cheer, to comfort and to bless.

When the last call for volunteers was made, Mr. Pickett felt that his duty to his Government required him to take the field. He enlisted in the 17th Regiment, C. V., and was soon made Orderly Sergeant of his company. As a soldier he maintained an upright character, and sought to honor God in the camp as well as at home. Thrown for the most part among strangers, he soon won the esteem and confidence of all. His memory will be cherished, while life lasts, by his fellow-soldiers, for he was unsparing in his ministrations to all who needed a cheering word, or a deed of kindness. He died as he had lived—and we love to repeat the terms which alone express what he really was—a true christian, and a patriot. He left the richest of all legacies to his young wife and infant boy—the legacy of an unspotted name, and of a record of noble daring, and a noble death.

"Coronets of gold for him,
Were all too little recompense;—hereafter
A crown of stars is all his own."

HIERONYMUS.

RIDGEFIELD, July 16th, 1863.

and got hit myself at the same time. I looked around and seeing a barn close by I took my rifle for a crutch and drew myself for it. Here I saw Col. Harris of the 75th. § He said they had taken the Alms house for a Hospital and I stopped there and in a few minutes the Rebs came in and took us prisoners. Edwin D. Pickett must have been wounded about the same time as I was. I did not think he would die that night. I lay down within six feet of him. The next morning I woke up and spoke to him but got no answer. I went to him and found him dead.

Sgt. Lee was freed by Union forces and eventually transferred to a military hospital in Philadelphia, where he wrote the letter describing the battle. He returned to Ridgefield after the war and lived until 1890.

It was Sgt. Lee who suggested the new GAR (Grand Army of the Republic, an organization for Civil War veterans) post be named for his fallen comrade, and for many years the Edwin D. Pickett Post of the GAR was a major organization in Ridgefield. In 1884, it played host to the Connecticut GAR reunion that included a parade of 400 Civil War veterans down Main Street, watched by some 2,000 people.

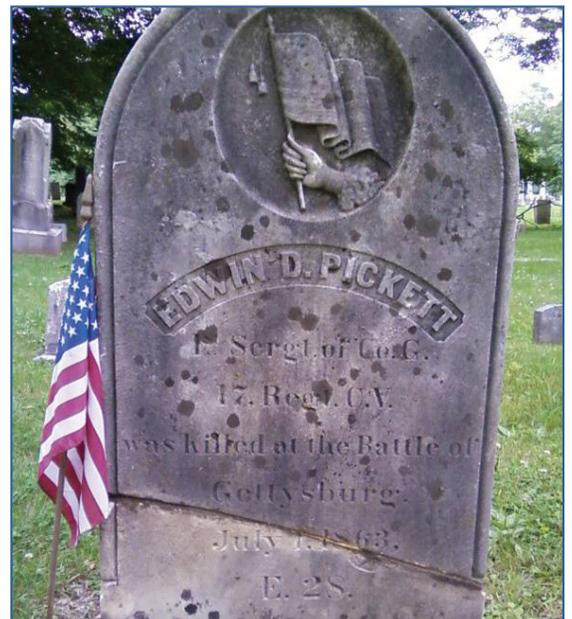
Sgt. Pickett's son, Willie (Edwin William Starr Pickett, 1861-1937), grew up and later made his home in Fairfield, where he dealt in real estate and insurance. Sgt. Pickett's widow, Sarah Chickering Harrington Pickett, married Jacob Hall Fuller in 1874; she died in 1901 and is buried in Hampton, Windham County, Conn.

The grave of Sgt. Edwin Darling Pickett is in the Hurlbutt Cemetery in the Ridgefield cemetery complex; the weathered stone, once-broken and repaired, features a bas relief medallion of a hand holding aloft the flag of the United States.

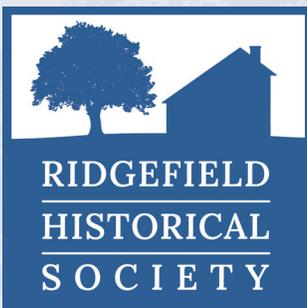
Sadly, the Ridgefield Historical Society has no image of Sgt. Pickett, but his letters create a vivid picture of a young man who loved his family deeply and had great plans for their future.



Sergeant Aaron W. Lee
Co. G 17th Regiment Conn. Volunteers
1830-1890



Sergeant Edwin Darling Pickett
Co. G 17th Regiment Conn. Volunteers
Killed at the Battle of Gettysburg • Age 28



Ridgefield Historical Society

Scott House, 4 Sunset Lane | Tuesday to Thursday, 1-5pm

203-438-5821 ridgefieldhistoricalsociety.org

Peter Parley Schoolhouse, West Lane | Last Sundays, 1-4 p.m., May-October

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