

E. JOHN ELLIS DIARY
Mss. 2795

Inventory

by
Luana Henderson

Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections
Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library
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Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University

2006

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SUMMARY

Size	3 items, 2 v.
Geographic Locations	Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, Tennessee, Johnson Island, Ohio.
Inclusive Dates	1862-1865.
Languages	English.
Summary	Memoirs and diary related to the Civil War activities of Ezekiel John Ellis include a political speech and incomplete work of fiction and are accompanied by a transcript, research manuscript and photograph.
Access Restrictions	None
Arrangement	Memoirs entitled <i>A Retrospect</i> and speech are cited by page number; prison diary is cited by date.
Copyright	Physical rights and copyright are retained by the LSU Libraries.
Related Collections	E. P. Ellis and Family Papers, Mss. 663. E. John, Thomas C. W. Ellis and Family Papers, Mss. 136. Buck-Ellis Family Papers, Mss. 4820. John Hamilton and Harriet Boyd Ellis Papers, Mss. 4092.
Citation	E. John Ellis Diary, Mss. 2795, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
Stack Location	C:97; H:14; Mss.MF:E

BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL NOTE

Ezekiel John Ellis, attorney and congressman, was born Oct. 15, 1840, in St. Tammany Parish, La., to Ezekiel Parke Ellis and Tabitha Warner Ellis. He received his early education in Covington and Clinton, La., and later attended Centenary College at Jackson, La., graduating in 1858. He studied law at the University of Louisiana in New Orleans (now Tulane University) obtaining his law degree in 1861. At the onset of the Civil War, he enlisted in the Confederate army as a first lieutenant and was later promoted to captain in the 16th Louisiana Infantry Regiment, Army of Tennessee. His regiment participated in the Confederate Heartland Offensive. He was sent to Johnson Island, Lake Erie, Ohio, after his capture at the Battle of Missionary Ridge in February of 1863. He remained a prisoner at Johnson Island for the duration of the war and was paroled in June of 1865. After the war he returned to Amite, where served as editor to the *Amite Daily Wanderer* until 1866, and then moved to Covington to open a law practice. Ellis was an active member of the Democratic Party, serving in Louisiana State Senate (1866-1870) and the United States House of Representative (1875-1885). He also held the position of chairman of the Committee on Mississippi Levees and was a key figure in the Wormley House Conference that helped resolve the disputed election of 1876 in Louisiana. After leaving Congress, he resumed the practice of law in Washington, D.C., where he died April 25, 1889. Ezekiel John Ellis married Josephine Chamberlain in Adams County, Miss. on June 29, 1869. They had three children, Lillian (1868-1958), Harvey Eugene (1875-1955), and Thomas Stephen (1870-1944).

Martina Hamilton Ellis Buck (1898-1996), great granddaughter of Ezekiel Park Ellis, was an educator in Tangipahoa Parish, La. After graduating from Newcomb College, New Orleans in 1920, she taught at Hammond High School in Hammond, La., where she later accepted a position as a history professor at Southeastern University. She was married to Carroll Buck (1893-1975), an attorney in Amite.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection is comprised of the two volume Civil War memoirs and diary of Ezekial John Ellis, as well as a typed transcript and a research manuscript by Martina Buck Ellis in which she presents an edited version of the diary and a biography of Ellis composed from his memoirs. A copy print of a Civil War photograph shows E. John Ellis in his Confederate uniform in Ringgold, Ga., in 1862, and newspaper clippings attached to the cover pertain to the Confederate call to arms and the constitution of the Confederate States of America.

Volume one of the diary begins with a retrospective account by Ellis of the events leading up to the Civil War and his service in the war before his capture and imprisonment at Johnson Island in 1863. This portion of the volume is entitled *A Retrospect* (p. 1-72), wherein he describes his political views, the development of Confederate military forces, his military service, battles in Mississippi, Georgia, Kentucky, and Tennessee, and his capture at the Battle of Missionary Ridge. Ellis wrote the account while imprisoned at Johnson Island. It serves as an introduction to his prison diary, which begins February 1, 1865, and continues into volume two (April-July 1865). In the diary, Ellis documents his daily observations and experiences as a prisoner of war and describes his trip back to Louisiana after his release. During his imprisonment, he read a great deal, and his entries exhibit an extensive knowledge of history and an appreciation of poetry. Additionally, his personal thoughts reflect his grief and distress over the war. In a later political speech recorded in the diary (ca. 1865, v. 2 pp. 205-217), Ellis considers the justification for war, the defeat of the Confederate States, and the political environment after the war. Also included is an incomplete work of fiction (Oct. 19, 1865, v. 2, pp. 58-67) concerning a Louisiana planter at the onset of the Civil War.

Note: There are no transcripts for political speech or work of fiction.

TOPICAL DESCRIPTIONS

Note: Entries are described by subject matter and organized thereunder by location in the volumes.

I. Politics and government.

1. A *Retrospect*: E. John Ellis explains why he supported John Bell, the Constitutional Union Party candidate for president in 1860 (p.1), states that Abraham Lincoln's election provoked the South and his hostility toward the slave states (p. 2), and describes the political events which led up to the war (4-5). He recounts the excitement and jubilation among Southerners at the onset of the Civil War (p.2-4), and expresses his personal views on secession (p. 4-5). He comments on the Monroe Doctrine and remarks that the Mexican War was no test of American military strength (p. 8). He later refers to "copperheads" as sensible men (p. 72).

2. *Diary*: Ellis speaks positively on an essay concerning states rights and secession (Feb. 9), feels that the South must fight against the Lincoln administration (March 3), and comments on the character of the administration and its government (March 9). He also questions Lincoln's political logic in a prisoners exchange plan (Feb. 11). He expresses a sense of futility at the surrender of the Confederate Army and explains that the South must take a conciliatory attitude (April, pp. 1-2). He is uneasy about the nation's future (April pp. 11-12), and with the capture of Jefferson Davis, is certain that the U. S. government must use a conciliatory policy toward the South (May 17). He doubts whether a nation can govern when men are forced to swear allegiance (June 11). He expresses contempt for assassins regarding President Abraham Lincoln's death, and he tells of the prisoners' reaction to the news (April, pp.6-8). Ellis often discusses the amnesty oath offered by the Federal authorities and the moral dilemma it presents (April pp. 10-11, May 1, 2, 5, 6, 7). He waits for news on the President's proclamation on amnesty and pardons (May 26), which he considers ambiguous, but justifies taking the oath because the Confederate Army has surrendered (May 30). Letters from his father, Ezekiel Parke Ellis, and brother, Thomas C. W. Ellis, urge him to take the oath. Although originally opposed to the war, he claims he fought out of a sense of duty to the State of Louisiana (June 5). He applies for amnesty (June 6), takes the oath and is released (June 13).

3. *Speech*: In his speech E. John Ellis criticizes Southern politicians for deciding to secede, therefore causing the war. He claims that the cotton trade continued with the North during the war (p. 206), and he speaks on the dissolution of civil laws and the establishment of military law (p. 207), and state rights (p. 209). He adds that currency and economic policies contributed to the loss of the war (p. 211), and he offers his

opinion of Jefferson Davis (p. 215). Ellis ends his speech urging support for Henry Allen (p. 216-217).

II. Military activities.

1. A *Retrospect*: In his memoirs E. John Ellis discusses his early days in the army (pp. 5-12) and formation of his regiment at Camp Moore (pp. 5-7, 10-12). He offers descriptions of several officers, including Colonel Preston Pond, Jr., Lieut. Colonel Enoch Mason, Major Daniel C. Gober (pp. 10-11), Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard (p. 26-27) and Gen. Johnston (p. 27). He describes Gen. Braxton Bragg (pp. 27, 32) and a speech the general made during battle (pp. 42-43). He reflects on Lieut. Colonel W. E. Walker's attributes and grief felt over his death (p. 38). He also comments on Gen. Breckenridge leadership qualities (p. 63-64). He details the order and organization of the regiments (pp. 16, 25, 27-28, 37, 66), and the reorganization of troops under Gen. Polk and Gen. Buckner (pp. 31-32). He reports on shortages of water, supplies and clothing (p. 26), discipline meted out to soldiers for pillaging, (pp. 29-30) and disobeying orders (p. 36). Other entries pertaining to discipline include the arrest of Colonel Gober for refusing to order his men to work after a strenuous march (p. 36), Ellis's defense of accused mutineers in court martial proceedings, and his personal views on appropriate military discipline (pp. 54, 66).

Ellis describes the events at Fort Sumter which led up to the war (p. 4); he reports on the 16th, 17th and 18th Louisiana regiments in New Orleans, La. (p. 13), the surrender of Fort Donelson (p. 17) and preparations for Corinth, Miss. (pp. 18-22). He recounts the Battle of Corinth (pp. 22- 25), weakened Confederate forces (p. 25, 28), skirmishes (p. 28), the movement of troops from Corinth to Tennessee (pp. 29-33) and disease among the troops (pp. 19-20, 25, 31, 36, 53). Additionally, he discusses his own illness and recuperation at Ringgold, Ga. (pp. 51-52), participation in a murder trial (p. 53) and social activities in Ringgold (pp. 52-53) and Mobile, Ala. (p. 54-55). He speaks on the surrender of the Union garrison at Munfordsville, Ky. (p. 33), Battle of Perryville, Ky. (pp. 34-36), the march to Chattanooga, Tenn. (pp. 36-38), and mentions destruction of cotton by a planter to prevent confiscation (p. 29). His account of the battle at Murfreesboro, Tenn. (pp. 39-49), details the number of troops, field positions and military maneuvers; he also writes about helping and comforting wounded prisoners (pp. 45-49). His narratives also include the march to Chattanooga, Battle of Chickamauga, Ga. (pp. 55-65), including the battle at Lookout Mountain summit and events leading up to his capture at Missionary Ridge (pp. 65-69).

2. *Diary*: Entries concerning war news and events are mostly mentioned in passing and are based on information obtained from Union newspapers and the prison grapevine. They relate to the evacuation and destruction of Charleston, N.C. (Feb. 21, 22), rumors of Gen. William T. Sherman's defeat (March 1, 6), Gen. Philip Henry Sheridan capture of Gen. Jubal Anderson Early, Gen. Johnson's resumption of command (March 6, 8), Gen. Braxton Bragg's victory over Gen. John Schofield (March 14, 16), and defeat at Fort Stedman (March 28). Ellis suggests that stories of Confederate losses and Union

victories are fabricated by the North (March 28, 30). Desertion among the Confederate troops near the end of the war disturbs Ellis (April 9), and he praises the superior military spirit of the Union army (April pp. 9-10).

3. *Speech:* Ellis speaks of the hardships suffered by soldiers (p. 206), and he criticizes the Confederate conscript law as demoralizing to the military (p. 210). He explains that the shortages of food, supplies, disease, and lack of pay added to military losses and desertion (p. 211). He refers to several Civil War battles, military tactics and the mistakes made by the Confederate government when describing the fall of Richmond, Va., Robert E. Lee's surrender (p. 212-213), and valor of the Southern armies led by Southern generals (pp. 208, 210).

III. Prison activities.

1. *A Retrospect:* The first reference to prisoners concerns the denial of adequate care by Union authorities to a wounded Confederate soldier for his refusal take a loyalty oath (p. 62). The final pages of Ellis's memoirs begin to reveal life as a prisoner of war. He gives details of his capture and names fellow captured officers and their regiments (68-69). He recounts his transfer from Nashville to Johnson Island, including a short stay at a prison in Louisville, Ky. (70-72). He tells of passing a note to a bystander and receiving clothing, blankets and shoes for himself and fellow prisoners from the ladies of Nashville (p. 70-71). Ellis describes the layout of the prison, living conditions, and the reception the new prisoners received (p. 72).

2. *Diary:* Entries reflect Ellis's experiences, observations and concerns while imprisoned. Topics include filthy conditions at the prison, meal preparations, menial work boredom, and socializing with fellow prisoners, with several references to the exchange (Feb.) and parole (March) of prisoners. He writes about the camaraderie among the prisoners and mentions being friendly with a Union lieutenant (Feb. 21). He also tells of tending the prisoners' graveyard (May 4). In his final days Ellis expresses his disdain for guards with no war experience shooting at prisoners who were out after curfew (June 1), the joy of a bath in Lake Erie (June 7), Aurora Borealis (June 11), the conflicting rumors concerning release (June 7) and the announcement of the release of all prisoners (June 9-11). While imprisoned, Ellis writes of suffering from a fever (Feb. 6), a severe headache and fever (March 26), bedbug infestation (June 6) and killing a rat (June 9). After his release Ellis describes the trip back to Louisiana by train and steamer along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers (June 14-July 4). He comments on a tornado hitting the steamer *Missouri* while he was onboard causing a three day delay (June 18). He also remarks on the location of military positions, Civil War battles and destroyed towns along the Mississippi River (June 28-July 2).

IV. African Americans.

1. *A Retrospect:* Most references to African Americans pertain to Ellis's servant, Stewart, who accompanied Ellis (pp. 31, 38, 51-52, 56, 65- 67). Other references include

Lincoln's plan to arm African Americans (p.4), their sense of loyalty to Southerners (p. 5), a sick slave (p. 52), and the bodies of three African Americans who had been run over by a train (p. 54). He remarks on their innate submissiveness to white Southerners (p. 70), and he comments that Northern states fought for abolition, but the South for independence (4-5).

2. *Diary:* Ellis briefly expresses a desire for news about the Ellis family slaves (Feb. 18) and declares that slavery is no longer an issue for him (April p. 12). Additionally, he considers the use of six hundred African American Union troops to hold the battle lines at Fort Stedman a tactical mistake (March 28). After his release he observes the friendliness between a white woman and an African American (June 14), freedmen working along the banks of the Mississippi River (July 1), a freedman who supported the Confederacy (July 2), and a crowd of African Americans and Union soldiers on the bank of the river (July 2).

3. *Speech:* Men who owned a certain number of slaves could avoid the military draft and slavery was at stake (p. 210). He claims the war was fought for the wealthy slaveholders (p. 210).

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CONTAINER LIST

<u>Stack Location</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
C:97	1	1	Transcript, undated.
		2	Research manuscript, undated.
		3	Civil War photograph, 1862 (copy print).
<u>Stack Location</u>		<u>Volume</u>	<u>Contents</u>
H:14		v. 1	Memoirs, <i>A Retrospect</i> : diary, Feb.-March 1865; clippings, undated.
		v. 2	Diary, April-July 1865; work of fiction, Oct. 19, 1865; political speech, undated.

Mss.MF:E

E. JOHN ELLIS DIARY
1862-1865

Mss. # 2795
LSU Libraries Special Collections

Guide to Collection Microfilm

Reel 1 Series I., Memoirs, Diaries (1865) (Volumes 1, 2)
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