The Richard P. Paddison Papers

Civil War enthusiasts will know the warm and often amusing account by Richard P. Paddison which James Sprunt quotes at length in his "Chronicles of the Cape Fear River" in the chapter on Confederate Heroes. Mr. Paddison relates some of his experiences in the Wilmington area during those eventful years of 1861 through 1865, giving a particularly bright and vivid picture of the early war zeal and of the Federal occupation. Knowing this account and the fact that Richard Paddison was a constant resident of this area during the entire war, it was with great enthusiasm that we heard of the existence of a carefully preserved bundle of letters and papers belonging to him and now in the possession of Joel Cook Pretlow.

Richard Porson Paddison was born July 11, 1839 in Leesburg, Loudoun County, Virginia, and at the age of 12 was apprenticed to an apothecary in Harper’s Ferry. At 17 he ventured into the world, first to Alexandria and then to Boston, but returned south to North Carolina in December, 1860. When war became a reality, he enlisted in Sampson County in Captain Frank Faison’s Company, assigned to the 29th N. C. Regiment, and came with them to Fort Johnston at Smithville. At the organization of the 61st Regiment in August, 1862, Paddison was transferred to Company A of that Regiment and continued serving in the fortifications of the lower Cape Fear as a hospital steward with the rank of private and then sergeant. By Special Order #24 from Richmond, dated January 29, 1863, James Seddon, Secretary of War, appointed Richard Paddison Hospital Superintendent, and he was transferred to Military Hospital #4, at the corner of Front and Dock Streets in Wilmington. He remained in this position until final discharge in June, 1865. Following the war, Richard Paddison married Mary Elizabeth Simpson. Their daughter, Annie Edith, kept her father’s Civil War mementos, and handed them on to her son, Joel Cook Pretlow.

The Paddison papers, comprising 29 items, were lent to us to copy with the apology that they probably contained “little of value.” On the contrary, each item proved to be of inestimable value, in that they corroborated information we had, gave us much new information about the hospital, and rounded out a picture of a most delightful young man.

His sense of humor is evident from the List and Account of Pay and Clothing, which includes a rather elaborate form listing the description and particulars of the young soldier. In the space under Occupation, instead of listing apothecary, he has penciled in “Interior Decorator.”

Although only one of the 19 letters in the collection is written by Mr. Paddison, there is much to be inferred about him by his relationship to the young men who wrote him.

The first group of letters is from Roscoe B. Heath of Petersburg, Va. John Heath, we think was a surgeon, evidently journeyed from Smithville to Wilmington during the yellow fever epidemic, contracted the disease, and subsequently died at the Fort Caswell Hospital in early October, 1862. Richard Paddison wrote to John’s brother, Roscoe, following the death, and from that time through February, 1863, went to considerable trouble to follow the instructions of the Heath family, even to the purchase of a tombstone and installation of a grave enclosure at Smithville, for which he was reimbursed thirty-nine dollars. The following letter, dated October 13, 1862, and addressed to Mr. Richard P. Paddison, Hospital Steward, Caswell Hospital, is the first of six Heath letters:

“My kind friend,

I received this morning your letter in relation to the last illness and death of my brother John and enclosing an inventory of his effects. I thank you very much for this letter, and his family desire me to express their gratitude to you for your attentions to him in his last sickness. I witnessed your attachment to him, and know you did whatever you could for him.

I want you to thank the other nurses in my names and especially Mrs. McClelland, if she was there.

Now about the inventory. The clothing, caps, and shoes which he did not actually wear during his sickness, if well aired and kept until cool weather, in these scarce times, might be of use to somebody, and I give them to you to make such disposition of as you think proper. Perhaps, it would be well to give some of them to the nurses, who attended him, if they desire it. The other things I want carefully preserved. After carefully airing them, I wish you to pack them with his books, and papers (I want every sort of paper with his writing on it preserved) in his trunk valise and traveling bag, and kept in a safe place until the winter, when I will give you further directions about them. If you should be ordered away from your post, I wish to give these things to Col. Wm Lamb of Fort Fisher, or to Capt Robert Lamb, ACT Quartermaster at Brunswick Point, to keep for me.

My brother was in the habit of wearing a little gold locket, containing lady’s hair, which he carried in the

(Continued on page 2)
he talked about in his rational moments, if he mentioned any of his family, or made any requests, whether he thought he was going to die, or said anything about dying. My good friend, write me as much as you can of these things. We would be glad to know all.

We thank you for what you have done, and hope you will find time to comply with this last request.

Very truly yours
Roscoe B. Heath"

Four letters are from Sterling C. Eve, Medical Department, who between March and August, 1864, was shunted about from hospital to hospital, in Wilson, N. C., Orangeburg, S. C., and the Officers Hospital and Jackson Street Hospital in Augusta, Ga. Eve’s letters show Paddison’s unceasing kindness to his friends, in sending them items which came through the blockade, and in lending them money when they were in need. On March 13, 1864, Eve writes:

“If you have not already sent my cloth [for uniform] you will please send it by Dr. Latchwell. Don’t forget trimmings.”

On June 23, he writes from Orangeburg:

“I visited Columbia a few days since for the purpose of drawing my pay but there was no money in the Dept. They owe me about $900 now and as soon as I collect it will remit you the amount you so kindly loaned me.”

And finally on August 17:

“Accompanying this letter you will find ten dollars in gold—the amount that you kindly loaned me while passing through Wilmington and for which you will please accept many sincere thanks—Also please accept twenty dollars in Confederate money for the loan of it.”

Two other letters show Paddison again doing favors for his friends. One begins to wonder how he found the time, with the pressure of his duties as the superintendent of the biggest and best equipped hospital in the state. However, it does not seem that Paddison was put upon by his friends, since they seem anxious to retain his respect.

The letter from P. Frederick, dated July 20, 1864, from St. Georges, Bermuda, is so interesting, that it is quoted in full:

“Dear Dick—

This leaves me well, but not in much spirits. I left the beautiful place of 'Nassau' on the inst. come to this beautiful spot to save the quareantine at Wilmington, and behold we are stuck here for twenty one days, and cant tell how much longer anyway the Ship is going up to an island used as a place of quarantine, and there are all the passengers on board will be landed and await the liberty of the Dr. in Charge. I am one of the passengers, am going to wait the coming of the 'Flamingo' Atkinson Cpt. This ship is going to Halifax and from there to Wilmington if she is not captured on his passage; which I hope she will not be for I will be ruined. I invested all the money I have, and sent it on her. Dick there is a trunk on her with something for nearly every one in the Confederacy, and I mean to trouble you with the disposal of them. I will send you the bills and you will see how they go. Four bbls of alcohol which will be consigned to Tom J. Johnson Com, merchant. Six cases of liquor to Street in the office, one case and cask to W. Norris Chief of Signals leave this in Mr. Seixas, care. They are all marked properly. I will be over soon. My love to Henry and Gabe. Respectfully, P. Fredericks.”

R. F. Lewis writes Paddison on September 13, 1864, from the Howards Grove Hospital, Richmond, recalling pleasant times in Wilmington:

"I know you are enjoying the mullets, oysters and C by this time. As you were getting ready to cast your net..."
into the waters when I left Wilmington. I expect to enjoy very few of either fish or oysters this winter."

And again, a request:

"Dick, if you have received the package from below will you do me the kindness to send it to me by mail . . . Let me hear from you occasionally, nothing would give me more pleasure than to receive and answer your letters. I have always considered you among my best friends and I hope, that this feeling may never be otherwise."

Among the papers are two hospital records of great interest. One pertains to the Fishery which was run for the Military Hospital, establishing the fact that such was operated. The listing of expenses from September to December, 1863, gives an idea of the cost of fishing nets and illustrates the fluctuation of the price of salt within a short period. The second is a list of supplies issued to the hospital from January 1 to 31, 1865, giving us evidence of the type of food available, as well as the census of the hospital.

There are also a number of orders made out during the occupation of Wilmington: specifying the house to which the Confederate Hospital was moved—the Bunting house on the corner of Fifth and Mulberry [Grace] Streets; requesting three Federal ambulances to convey the twenty patients to that house; and a pass which would indicate that Mr. Paddison was working land near Wilmington to grow food for his patients.

The only letter in this collection written by Richard Paddison is dated January 17, 1865, from Wilmington, informing his father of the capture at Fort Fisher of his brother, John:

"My dear father,

As it has been a long time since I have written to you I do it perhaps for the last time in Wilmington: for I suppose before this will reach you, you will have heard of the fall of the Forts below this place. The Yankees took Ft Fisher on Sunday night at half past Ten o'clock, & last night our troops blew up all the forts below that point. I think this is the hardest blow the Confederacy has yet received.

Johny was captured Battery Buchanan just below Fisher he was not hurt. I have seen some men who saw him when he was captured. the facts of his capture are these when Fisher surrendered—the officers at Buchanan evacuated the Battery and all hands had got in the Boats, when the commanding Officer said he wanted to send a dispatch
and called for an operator of whom there was several and
Johnny volunteered to go back and send it which he did
with the Officer, while he was sending it the Yankees
took the Bateri, the Officer made his escape but Johnny
stuck to his post obeying his orders and consequently was
captured.

I will look out for him there is no doubt but the Yanks
will be here in a few days and I will have to remain here
with the hospital and in that way I can look after him
I have plenty of money that is I have enough for my use
I have six hundred dollars in gold and that will take care
of both of us for some time."

One of the most interesting letters was written from Charles-
ton, June 3, 1865, by E. A. Gibbes, presumably a patient re-
cently discharged from the hospital, and possibly a member
of Hagood’s Brigade. This letter which tells of Gibbes’ journey
home from Wilmington, and of the state of affairs in Charles-
ton at that time, would undoubtedly be of great interest to
his descendants:

"Dear Paddison,

After a tedious and boisterous voyage, I arrived here
on Monday Morning. On the morning we left Wilming-
ton, we did not proceed further than Smithville, where
we anchored opposite the wharf, and remained until eight
o’clock in the afternoon of Saturday, the weather being
too stormy to proceed to sea, a perfect gale was blowing
out the bar the whole time. We did not then come direct
to this place, but as there had been so much delay the
Captain determined to carry his prisoners directly to Port
Royal, and passing by the harbour of this place we ar-
ived on Sunday Morning at Hilton Head. Remaining
there all that day, we were transferred to another steamer,
which brought us back to this place on Monday. I
found Singleton rather a clever fellow, and of much assist-
ance to me, tho’ inclined to be lazy. The girls were the
dirtiest things on board, and attracted much attention
by their singular appearance, they were however of service
to me also, for by their means, I was able to get in the
lady’s cabin, and that part of the boat where only men,
who had lady acquaintances were admitted. Singleton they
excluded but took me amongst them. They were all sea
sick, as the sea was very rough. Sarah, (the short hair
girl,) is rather a good hearted girl, and disposed to do
any service, she is requested, and no mock modesty about
her, but the woman with the sick child is a miserable
wretch. I was the only person of the entire party, who
had any money, and in consequence of the length of time,
three days, we were all out, all the rations were exhausted,
and I had to feed them all. I found the caddies of milk you
gave me of great service especially to sick children. I took
leave of them all at the wharf of this place, and have not
seen, or heard of them since. My grey overcoat was not
much of a favorite with the Yankees on board; they did
not know what to make of it. Since my arrival nearly
all of my negroes belonging to the city have been to see
me, and are quite profuse in their offer of services. I have
been robbed of all my furniture, both here, and in the
country, but none of my buildings have been burnt. My
houses on the Edisto are the only ones standing, all my
neighbors have been burnt out. This is uncomman favor
for me, but the place was stripped of all valuables, cat-
tle killed and eaten, mules stolen, and my silver, I mention-
ed as having been buried since 1861, was dug up, and
stolen, $16,000 worth: some negroes betrayed it. All my
houses on this place has been returned me, and the farm
I spoke to you of also, but the articles I had placed in
the house all stolen. In short I have lost all movable prop-
erty, but retained real estate. The banks have all failed.
I have not been in the country, or to the farm yet, as I
have no horse, and the place too far to walk, except farm
where I will visit in a few days. . . . My agent informs me
he wrote a most important letter to me addressed Wil-
lington, N. C. Would you be so kind as to enquire for it,
and forward to this place, as it is of consequence I shall
have it. I hope I shall also have the pleasure of soon hearing
from you. You must allow me here again to return you
my sincere thanks for your kind attention to me whilst
in Wilmington, and I hope I may have it in my power at
some future time of reciprocating it. My stay here is
uncertain, but I think it will be some months before I
will be able to get into the country when communica-
tions will be open. Many of my houses have been struck
with shells and require repairs, I must see to it, and I have
still to go into the country, etc. Let me know how your
farming, etc. gets one, and believe me to be ever truly
Yours

E. A. Gibbes"

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