

NUCMC Catalog Record

- Creator: Willson, Lester S. (Lester Sebastian), 1839-1919.
- Title: Lester S. Willson diaries.
- Date Created: 1863-1865
- Extent: 2 v. and laid in documents (.2 linear ft.)
- Location: Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University--Bozeman
- Biographical Data: Lester Sebastian Willson was born in Canton, N.Y., on 15 June 1839. His parents, Ambrose and Julia Willson had at least two other sons, Davis and George. Lester enlisted as a private in the Company A, 60th New York Volunteer Infantry during the Civil War and spent the early months guarding the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in Maryland. He rose quickly in rank, receiving a warrant as second sergeant 9 Sept. 1861; lieutenant 3 Oct. 1862; first lieutenant and adjutant 17 Nov. 1862; captain 2 Aug. 1864; lieutenant-colonel 1 Oct. 1864; and colonel 17 May 1865. He saw combat at Antietam and Chancellorsville, where he was wounded in May 1863, but returned to his regiment after Gettysburg where he remained for the rest of the war. At the war's end Willson was breveted a brigadier general and administered the Soldier's Home in Albany, N.Y. In 1867 he moved to Montana Territory to join his brother Davis in the mercantile business at Bozeman. Willson entered into a partnership with Loren W. Tuller and Charles Rich at Bozeman, eventually replacing both men to become a sole proprietor. He also served in the state legislature and with the state militia. He married in 1869 Emma D. Weeks and the couple had three children; George (who died as an infant), Lester Eugene, and Fred Fielding. Lester S. Wilson continued to operate his business until his death on 26 Jan. 1919.
- Summary: The first volume of Willson's diaries contains entries made from 3 July 1863 to 5 Sept. 1864, with substantial gaps. Willson's terse entries describe his final days at Canton, N.Y., recuperating from a wound he received at Chancellorsville up to his reunion with the 60th New York Infantry in northern Virginia on 11 July 1863. The diary resumes on 26 June 1864 as Willson's regiment prepared to move on Confederate positions guarding the approaches to Atlanta through their subsequent capture of the city. These entries cover in some detail the construction of field works and battle actions at Peach Tree Creek. The second diary begins on 3 Nov. 1864 and ends on 2 May 1865, again with substantial gaps. Willson records his experiences on Gen. William T. Sherman's march from Atlanta to Savannah on the Georgia coast. The actual

surrender of Savannah was not recorded by Willson, but the subsequent march from that city to Columbia, S.C., received many entries. The diary concludes with the 60th New York on their campaign into North Carolina and the surrender of the Confederate army of Gen. Joseph E. Johnston. Willson describes the logistics of marching with Sherman's army, the destruction of property by Union troops, and the liberated slaves who accompanied the army. As a staff officer, Willson also touches on the arguments and in-fighting among officers on matters of promotion and command organization. A folder of laid-in material from the second diary consists of numerous receipts for the shipment of bodies home from the front, regimental record notes, and an original hand signed battle report by Col. Abel Goddard, 60th New York Infantry, for his regiment's part in the battle of Resaca, Ga., on 15 May 1864. Officers mentioned most frequently in Willson's diaries include Goddard, Col. David Ireland, 137th New York Infantry, and Capt. Loren Tuller, 60th New York Infantry.

Subjects:

Ireland, David, d. 1864.
Sherman, William T. (William Tecumseh), 1820-1891.
Tuller, Loren W. (Loren Wellington), 1839-1914.
Willson, Lester S. (Lester Sebastian), 1839-1919 -- Diaries.
United States. Army. New York Infantry Regiment, 60th (1861-1865)
United States. Army. New York Infantry Regiment, 137th (1862-1865)
United States. Army -- Military life.
United States. Army -- Officers -- Diaries.
Atlanta Campaign, 1864 -- Personal narratives.
Resaca, Battle of, Resaca, Ga., 1864 -- Personal narratives.
Sherman's March to the Sea -- Personal narratives.
Sherman's March through the Carolinas -- Personal narratives.
Soldiers -- United States -- Diaries.
Georgia -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Personal narratives.
New York (State) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865.
North Carolina -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Personal narratives.
South Carolina -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Personal narratives.
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Personal narratives.
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- African Americans.
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Destruction and pillage.

Other creators:

Goddard, Abel.