

The John Ellis Wool Papers

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Special Collections
Benjamin F. Feinberg Library
Plattsburgh State University College
Plattsburgh, N. Y. 12901

By
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Introduction

John Ellis Wool was born in Newburgh, N.Y. in 1784. When he was four years old, both his parents died and he was sent to live with his grandfather, James Wool, at Troy, N. Y. At the age of twelve, he left school to pursue a mercantile career. He was successful until disaster struck in 1810, when his store burned to the ground. Left open to pursue other options, Wool seized the opportunity of the War of 1812 to enlist in the military. He recruited volunteer infantry troops from around the Troy area, and was commissioned Captain. Wool proceeded to prove himself a gallant and effective soldier, distinguishing himself at Queenstown and Plattsburgh, an earning promotion from both encounters. By the end of the War of 1812, he held the brevet rank of Lieutenant Colonel, and was determined to carry on the rest of his life in the regular army. Wool was made Inspector General of the U.S. army in 1816, and would continue to rise in rank, all the way to Major General. He was involved in many military conflicts and exercises including, the removal of the Cherokee nation to Oklahoma, the suppression of the Canadian rebellion of 1837¹, the War with Mexico, and the Civil War. He particularly distinguished himself in the Mexican War, and it has been suggested that his brand of military discipline and thoroughness was largely responsible for the victory at Buena Vista.² During the early Civil War years, Wool commanded the Department of the East for the Union, saving Fortress Monroe. He was retired from active service due to old age and infirmity on August 1st, 1863.

¹Led by Louis-Joseph Papineau, the Patriote Rebellion in the Province of Quebec spilled over into Northern New York State in 1837-8. Papineau, an enigmatic politician and revolutionary leader tried to stir up support and recruit others to return with him to Quebec and help overthrow British rule in the Province. The U. S. Army was called in to prevent Papineau's intended actions, and any spread of the rebellion to United States soil.

² William A. Ganoe, *Dictionary of American Biography*, (vol. 10, part 2), 513-4.

This collection of papers spans Wool's military career from the 1830's until after the Civil War when he retired to Troy, and concentrated on supporting industry and innovative technology in his home town. A significant amount of the correspondence (5 Items) is between Wool and historian Benson J. Lossing who was interested in Wool's role in both the War of 1812 and the Mexican War. Original copies of letters produced on Wool's major military campaigns are also included, as well as correspondence dealing with his views on slavery and abolition. The later letters and newspaper clippings suggest that Wool was highly regarded as a prominent veteran, combat soldier and patriot, but did not escape controversy over his attitudes and temperament. However, a seventy-five foot monolith in the center of Troy rightly serves as tribute from the city to one of its most eminent citizen soldiers.

Background Sources in Special Collections

Hinton, H. P. *Military Career of J. E. Wool, 1812-1863.*

Peterson, Charles J., *Military Heroes of the war of 1812 and the War with Mexico* (J. B. Smith & Co., Philadelphia, 1858), section 2, 189-94.

Weise, A. J., *Troy's One Hundred Years* (W. H. Young, Troy, N. Y., 1891).

Weise and Bardin, *The Centennial Manual of the Common Council of the City of Troy, 1876-77: History of Troy, N. Y.* (W. H. Young, Troy, N. Y., 1876).

Contents

The papers of John Ellis Wool are contained in one folder in one box located in the manuscript section of Feinberg Library Special Collections, and consist of sixteen items. The folder contains private correspondence of General Wool between 1830 and 1866, military orders, newspaper clippings, mimeograph and Xerox copies of letters, and original copies of letters signed by Wool. Also included are letters to the General complimenting him on his military campaigns in Mexico.

Box 1 of 1. Item	
1	Correspondence; Brigadier-General Wool to Major-General A. Macomb, Oct. 22, 1830.
2	Correspondence; Brigadier-General Wool to John W. Eaton, Secretary at War, Nov. 19, 1830. Two copies, both signed by Wool.

3	Military Orders; General Wool to the officers of the Army of Occupation, Monterey, Mexico, May 9, 1848. Marked 'copy', but signed by Wool.
4	Mimeograph copy of original signed copy of correspondence; Wool to Philip Roberts Esq. of Beekmantown, N. Y., Jan. 6, 1859.
5	Correspondence; Wool to the Order of United Americans, Feb. 14, 1860. Marked 'copy' and signed.
6	Correspondence, Wool to Benson J. Lossing of Poughkeepsie, N. Y., May 10, 1860.
7	Xerox copy (3/2/1987) of correspondence; Wool to Lossing, May 10, 1860. Different letter to Item 6.
8	Correspondence; Wool to Lossing, May 24, 1861.
9	Newspaper clipping of correspondence; General Wool to John A. Griswold, M. C., Aug. 30, 1863. Date and Newspaper unknown, possibly, Troy Daily Whig.
10	Correspondence; Wool to Lossing, Aug. 31, 1863.
11	Newspaper clipping from the Troy Daily Whig, Aug. 7, 1865; Wool's letter of Aug. 30, 1863, and editorial.
12	Correspondence; Wool to Lossing, Oct. 9, 1866.
13	Newspaper clipping from the National Gazette, 1838, month unknown; article on trial of General Wool.
14	Correspondence; Elisha H. Allen to Wool, April 13, 1847. Marked 'Member of Congress' by Wool.
15	Correspondence; Jas. B. Murray to Major-General Wool, Dec. 27, 1850. Marked 'copy'.
16	Correspondence; J. M. Washington to Major-General Wool, Dec., 1, 1851. marked 'copy'.