

Excerpts from the Diaries of Caroline Barrett White

The following transcription is of excerpts from the [diaries of Caroline Barrett White](#) focused on news during the Civil War. Truncated entries have been noted by ellipses, but the omission of full entries for individual days has not been notated. Editorial additions and explanations are given in brackets.

November 1860

Tuesday 6th This has been election day, & from all appearances now the Republican Candidate for President has received the majority of votes; if so, great rejoicing will take place here at the North where freedom is appreciated & enjoyed. And very grateful ought our hearts to be that so encouraging a step toward the curtailment, if not the abolition of Slavery has been taken by our Country. It has been a fitful day – rainy in the morning & showery till towards night – Jamie left this morning for Auburndale. We have had a nice visit from her. Hurrah for Lincoln! Frank comes home this evening...

March 1861

Monday 4th This has been the day of the inauguration of our new President, Abraham Lincoln – and I hope he has been installed peacefully in the chair of state. Every one waits eagerly to see the inaugural address

Tuesday 5th ...The inaugural of Mr. Lincoln is what might be expected of the man. Short, right to the point, & all right as to matter. May the Lord bless his reign.

April 1861

Friday 12th Political news still exciting - but this issue still in suspense – it seems as though war was inevitable – Poor rent & distracted America! I wish that it was best to let the Slave States go – or possible to let them go & have nothing further to do with them – They are a plague spot – on the face of the earth.

Sat. 13th The sad, yet decisive news of the commencement of hostilities by the Southern Rebels has arrived – Fort Sumpter [sic] was attacked yesterday morning, and Anderson replied – firing kept up through the day – Charleston reports say, with very little effect on the part of Sumpter – but that a breach was effected by the rebels on the fort. It has seemed most sad and fearful to read the reports of this fratricidal quarrel – but – “May the God of battles protect the right” - & out of evil bring forth good. It has been a rainy day – but – quite warm – the grass has grown so fast it seems as though we could almost hear it.

Sunday 14th Warm windy day – alternate clouds and sunshine. I went to meeting this morning. A stranger preached – a young man – gave us a very good sermon from Gal. 6 ch. 7 v. ... Mr. Williams says the report is, that Fort Sumpter is taken and Anderson a prisoner – I wish I knew how far to believe reports – but I suppose we only get the enemy’s report – and cannot judge much of the actual truth. But it is very dreadful - & Slavery is the cause of all the present fearful state of things. Gathered my first hyacinth from the garden this eve. I have written a letter to dear Frank this eve.

Monday 15th We are indeed in the midst of fearful things – the reports of yesterday are but too true, I fear. And the President has issued a proclamation, calling for the immediate mustering of 75,000 troops to put-down the rebellion – and protect the Federal Government – He seems to be calm & firm – and evidently knows what he is about. God speed the right! ...

Tuesday 16th I have devoured the evening's Transcript and been made indignant over some of the dispatches from Charleston – they show what barbarians the Southerners are – The prompt [uprising?] of the North to answer the requisitions of President Lincoln is as gratifying as the course of the South is exasperating. It is vain to imagine what a few days may bring forth in the history of our country. It has been a wild tempestuous day – dreary & cold – and I “have felt it in my bones” and in my spirits. I begin to grow impatient in regard to Frank – I have not heard a word from him, and he has been gone five days – it seems strange.

Thursday 18th Cold windy weather – Great excitement all over the country – Troops pouring into US [?] rendezvous – Papers full of exciting reports

Saturday 20th I went to Boston this P.M. with Charley to do a few errands – but the streets were so crowded that I did not accomplish much – Intense excitement pervades all classes – I saw one of the Companies who are to start tonight for the [?] of war – but, much as I had desired to see some of them, it was too much – I could only hurry away & choke down the rising tears as a picture of whole scene – the parting, the hardships, the conflict, the probable death of but too many of them, swept through my mind – Oh the horrors of war! And it seemed to me that the faces of the soldiers were very sad – as though they were weighing the probable chances of it being the last time they would march through the streets of beloved New England cities or towns. The news of a terrible scene in Baltimore during the passage through that city of the Sixth Regiment from Mass. was received today – two mass. men killed – several wounded – also a number of killed & wounded among the mob. This is the first blood shed in the defence of our liberties – on the sons of Mass. as on the 19 of Apr. 1775 – fell the first blow. May the God of battles be our Avenger –

Tuesday 30th It has been a lovely day – there has been a good breeze all day – this eve we have had a little shower – Mr. Maynard our neighbor has hoisted a fine flag from his house tonight – and I have finished my decoration, & Frank & I have put them up in the parlor – they are pretty I think. Frank ventured out this P.M. went to Boston in [tram?] cars, to get N.Y. papers – Nothing very special in regard to the war. I had a letter from Sister Lucy today.

May 1861

Monday 13th Dull day – rained some – Nothing particular to record – Nothing new from the seat of war.

Saturday 25th News came today of the surrender of Col. Ellsworth at Alexandria where he had just been hauling down a secession flag – from the Marshall House – was shot on the stairs as he

was descending. It is a great loss to the country at this time, as he was a thorough military man.¹ Federal troops now hold Alexandria....

Sunday 26th ...There's a rumor today – that quite a battle has been fought at Sewall's Point. No particulars – Howard & Sarah were here this evening. Wrote to Jamie

Monday 27th My little Charlie Fred's birthday – five years old – Mrs. Fred Guild & Mrs. Woodward called this P.M. It has been a showery day – The war rumors of yesterday are pronounced a hoax today – It is too bad...

Tuesday 28th Very windy last night & through the day. I went into town this morning in the nine o'clock train with Mr. Davis – we attended the meeting of the Church Antislavery Soc. At Tremont Temple – Rev. J. G. Fee opened the exercises with prayer - & Rev. J. Blanchard, President of Wheaton College, [?] preached the sermon from Text 94th psalm 20th verse – “Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?”...

June 1861

Tuesday 11th Pleasant weather – Frank is hay making – the lawn will look beautiful when well shaven. F. & I rode to the village for a newspaper this eve - & it contains a very sad account of a defeat of the Federal forces, in attempting to take a battery at Great Bethel – the troops were under the command of Brig. Gen. Peirce – who it appears lost his presence of mind – There was also a misunderstanding of signals, occasioning [?] to loss of life – [?] said that there were over twenty killed, & a hundred wounded – Lieut. Grebble was among the killed.

Wednesday 12th One of the loveliest summer days - Frank & I have driven into town, since tea...to buy a N.Y. newspaper – but were too late to find the places where they are to be had open. There have been contradictory rumors in the papers today – but nothing of importance that seems to bear the impress of truth. ...

Friday 21st ...I gathered “lots” of strawberries - & we have eaten most of them – They are delicious with nice cream. I am alone tonight – dear Frankie having started for New York this P.M. I am lonely without him. Hope he will have a safe journey – Have been reading in the Atlantic the last article of the lamented Col. Theodore Winthrop who was killed in the Great

¹ Before the war Colonel Elmer Ellsworth (1837-1861) was a law clerk in Chicago and the leader of a local militia, the Cadets of the National Guard. A self-taught student of military tactics and training, he was particularly interested in the Zouaves, an elite French fighting force named after Algerian troops who were known for their flashy and exotic uniforms and acrobatic and ferocious fighting style. Ellsworth trained his cadets in this style, and the regiment, known as the Chicago Zouaves, became a national sensation as they toured the country during the summer of 1859 performing their drills. In 1860 he took a job in Abraham Lincoln's law office in Springfield, Illinois, and became very friendly with the soon-to-be president. He accompanied Lincoln to Washington in 1861, and, just three days after Fort Sumter was fired upon, the 24-year-old went to his native state of New York and recruited the New York City firemen to be his regiment—the 11th New York Volunteer Regiment, better known as the Fire Zouaves. On May 24, the day after Virginia ratified secession, his regiment entered Alexandria to help occupy the city. His first action, on an impulse, was to take down a large secession flag over the Marshall House that had been taunting the troops in Washington for weeks. Accompanied by only seven men, including four Zouave soldiers, he succeeded in taking the flag down, only to run into the hotelkeeper on the way out, who shot Ellsworth dead at point-blank range. Ellsworth instantly became the [Union's first martyr](#).

Bethel affair – It is quite a spirited acct. of Camp life in Washington.² I feel sad that so talented a man must have been sacrificed in such a needless, as it appears, manner – unlucky affair!

July 1861

Friday 19th ... The war news is very exciting tonight – an action has taken place at “Bull’s Run” – three miles from Manassas – in which there was some loss of Federal forces – but we have not full details – Oh! war! war! dreadful war!

Monday 22nd A dark day! as it brings tidings of a terrible defeat of McDowell’s splendid column of (some say) eighty thousand men – near Manassas Junction Va. It is too dreadful to believe – I hope further particulars will show the facts in a brighter light. If it is true, then I believe the Lord has something in store for us, for which we are to be prepared by this bitter lesson. Perhaps to waken us to a truer sense of our obligations to the colored race – for the strengthening of whose bonds this shameful strife was undertaken. To set up a kingdom whose “chief corner stone” is human slavery! To make beasts of burden of men women & children! And more – For where will the friend be found – who, if his ox or horse stray from, or even break from one field into another, where there is prospect of better pasturage, will deliberately whip it to death, or burn it alive? Slavery has often done this its human victim. A dark day indeed! The loss of life is fearful – but might have been expected, if consequent upon it, victory had crowned the sacrifice – but such a loss in such a defeat!

Tuesday 23rd The dreadful tiding of yesterday are somewhat modified, as people begin to recover from the shock - & examine into the true state of things – first reports are generally exaggerated – but at best the result is a terrible defeat. The loss of life, & [injury?] is not so great as at first reported – many missing ones having straggled in – Frank and I went down to Aunt Davis this eve – there I get almost exasperated – they are so friendly to the South & Southern Institutions –

September 1861

Tuesday 17th I feel rather dispirited in regard to public affairs – The President failing to sanction Fremont’s Proclamation unconditionally - & his, Fremont’s rumored resignation – put me under a cloud. I wish Government would recognize the issue between freedom & slavery.

October 1861

Wednesday 30th The great fleet sailed from “Hampton Roads” yesterday morning – so says the newspaper – fifty vessels led by the “[?]”. It must have been a fine fight. Miss Potter has been here today – I attended the sewing circle this evening at the [?] – had a pleasant time enough – commenced knitting Army socks this eve –

November 1861

² Before the war Theodore Winthrop (1828-1861) was a rising writer, having already published two travel books. He joined the New York Seventh Regiment after the surrender of Fort Sumter, the enlistment for which was only thirty days. He wrote articles for *The Atlantic* about his time in the regiment and the raucous camp life in disorganized Washington, to which White refers here. Once his enlistment was up he stayed on as General Benjamin Butler’s secretary at Fortress Monroe. He was killed in this first disastrous attempt to engage the Confederate Army in the field near Big Bethel Church, several miles from the fort.

Wednesday 27th I attended, with Frank, Wendell Phillips' lecture on the War at Munic Hall, Boston, this eve.³

December 1861

Saturday 28th Frank & I drove down to J. W. May's this evening - & there saw an evening paper which contained the official reports of the surrender of Mason & Slidell to the "protection of the English flag" - by our government, in a most humiliating manner - I have never seen Mr. May so "cut up" as the expression is, by any thing in my life - & as for Frank he is burning with wrath - & no wonder. It seems like a horrid nightmare to me - I cannot realize it - The National Honor trampled in the dust [?] Depart in arms one could bear - if all had been done that could be done - but to voluntarily surrender the Nation's Manhood - is too much to be borne by freemen calmly I hope there will rise a cry from the Atlantic to the Pacific - so long & so loud - that it shall rouse the drowsy senses of the leaders in the base act - and terrify them into taking the side of Justice & right - & deter them from any further acts of craven meanness - "There is a God"

July 1862

Thursday 3rd It was a wild night - I was up and down nearly all night with Willie who was feverish all night - & very restless - he is much better today. Weather bright this evening - but oh such dreadful tidings from Richmond. The Grand Army of the Potomac has been routed I should think from all acct. which are not official - but I doubt if we know the worst. What can be done now - is worse than appears -

Friday 4th A beautiful day it has been - but a gloom seems cast over everything by the tidings of the disaster before Richmond. Davis said the news is a little more favorable today - but I shall believe nothing till we get some more reliable information. I sent a letter to dear Frank this P.M. Shall hope to hear from him tomorrow. [?] sent off some very pretty fireworks this evening - the children have enjoyed the day very much - they know nothing of National trouble - and it is well.

August 1862

Sunday 31st The sun never shone on a more lovely parting summer scene than it has done today - "so calm so still" - but never perhaps were the hearts of this people more thoroughly exciting with terrible certainties - and terrible suspense. The terrible certainty of those suffering thousands of our noble martyrs lying on the [?] field - has made the day one of untiring industry in all this vicinity among all classes to relieve as far as possible that suffering.⁴ The Congregations that assembled in the morning for public worship were immediately dismissed after a prayer & benediction - & the day has been devoted to preparing supplies for the hospitals - bandages - [?] - garments of various kinds - wines - jellies &c. Loads of material have been got off today. Tonight there is acct. of another furious engagement yesterday - much more unfavorable to our cause than Friday's fight. Oh! When will these horrors cease. It is most likely that this lovely summer day - the last, has been looking down on another bloody contest - The

³ Wendell Phillips (1811-1884) was a famous abolitionist and orator who, during his lifetime, rivaled William Lloyd Garrison in his prominence as the voice of the antislavery movement. Throughout his career he also acted as an activist for women's suffrage, temperance, prison reform, and Native American rights.

⁴ White is referring to the Battle of Second Manassas (Second Bull Run), which took place in Manassas, Virginia, from August 28 to 30, 1862.

crisis is at hand – “to be or not to be” “that is the question” – May the Lord not utterly forsake us – but turn the hearts of the people to obey His statutes, & His commandments – to repent in sackcloth and ashes for the crimes of the past – The hours will drag heavily till this suspense is ended.

September 1862

Saturday 20th Mrs. Maynard came in soon after breakfast this morning with the sad intelligence of the death of Lt. Col. Wilder Dwight – who was wounded in the Wed. battle – I do feel it to be a sad loss to the Community – and his poor mother! How she will bear the shock I do not know – Wilder was dearer to her than any other living being I believe – they seemed to be twin souls – She is away from home - & can not have reached him while living – and I fear none of the family were able to so – ...

January 1863

Thursday 1st The new year has dawned beautifully – may this first day be a type of the prosperity that shall accrue to us as a nation during the course of the year – We are anxiously waiting to learn of the Proclamation of Freedom to thousands of bondmen – which it is probably has been fulminated this day by the President.

Monday 5th ...The war news is any thing but encouraging Oh! What is to be the end of all this?

July 1863

Saturday 4th The day has passed very pleasantly – we have been at home all day – Frank has devoted himself to the boys - & they have been very happy. But best of all – there float to our ears rumors of successful resistance to the invaders, who threaten to destroy the Army of the Potomac on Penn. Soil – I hope it may be true – but I dare not rejoice – lest my joy be turned into mourning – by contradictory reports tomorrow –

Monday 6th Julia & I went to Boston this morning. The good news is confirmed – a complete victory has been won – Oh! How cheering – ⁵

September 1864

Wednesday 7th ...Frank has read to us the versions of speeches & resolutions, of the great Fanueil Hall meeting held last night in honor of the recent victories, naval & military – By Farragut & Sherman – There have been rejoicings all over the Country – firing of guns & ringing of bells! – “The star spangled banner – long may it wave” – Mobile! & Atlanta!

November 1864

Tuesday 8th Rainy still – dull times at home – but the Lords of Creation have had excitement enough I reckon – it being Election day – Frank has done his duty - & I hope it will prove that the majority of the people of this nation have done the same – It seems a solemn day to me – a national crisis – the fate of the Country, it seems to me hang on the result of this day’s voting -

⁵ Julia is White’s sister, Julia Maria Barrett White (1826-1889), who was married to Frank’s brother, Samuel Charles White (1820-1886). The battle they’re waiting to hear news from is Gettysburg.

Wednesday 9th As far as can be judged by returns the republicans have been triumphant all over the country – with the exception of one or two states. At any rate Massachusetts, God bless her, has left a clean record for law & liberty – Rice, (A.A.) and Mr. Hooper Rep. to Congress, were elected by a large majority when it was thought beforehand the vote would be a very close one – It is a very gratifying state of things - & many rejoicings have been held over it -

April 1865

Monday 3rd A glorious day – the morning news was good – and it seemed that our forces were sweeping all before them – but about noon came the intelligence that Petersburg was evacuated - & Richmond taken – Flags were flying in all directions – bells were rung & guns fired at noon & at sunset – and it seems impossible to realize the greatness of the victory. It will take time to digest it, & to rightly estimate its importance – now all is excitement joy & wonder – Frank Charlie Fred & I started for Boston at half past nine, A.M. where after looking at the Bulletin Board – I parted from the two...God be praised for this day's cheering news –

Monday 10th Hurrah! Hurrah! “Sound the loud timbrel o’er Egypt’s dark sea” – Early this morning our ears were greeted with the sound of bells ringing a joyous peal - & a paper sent home by Frank announced the glad tidings that Gen. Lee had surrendered with his whole Army to Gen. Grant! Surely “This is the Lord’s doings, & it is marvelous in our eyes” – The city has been given up to rejoicings all day & this evening there was to have been a great illumination – with music fireworks & such other demonstrations as are usual in a time like this – but a steady rain will dampen the ardor of the jubilee, I fear – April 9th! Will long be remembered as a day of triumph – just one week ago came the thrilling intelligence of the Fall of Petersburg & Richmond - & today the greater triumph still of the surrender by Gen. Lee of the Army of Northern Virginia – This crowns a week unparalleled in the annals of this war - & I doubt if a parallel could be found in all history. The booming of cannon & the pealing of bells, the blazing of fire works at this moment, announce that rain is no conqueror of enthusiasm – I wish I could be near to join in the general jubilation – it is stupid enough to be sitting alone in a quiet room – where only the faint echoes of a city’s burst of joy reach me – Ah! Well! I can be grateful to the Lord who has made bare His Arm to save this people - & who has brought them through great tribulation – through sufferings not to be described – through battle fields, red with the blood of the best of their sons – to see this belated day – step by step has He led this people up even higher & higher – on to the great plans of righteousness – justice & freedom - & now the dawn of peace begins to illumine the horizon – soon we hope to be merged in the effulgent day – I think we ought to know what patriotism means – and shall realize more fully than ever what it is to have a Country – and our children will have an inheritance greatly to be desired. Let our starry banner wave – from sea to sea and no slave shall look upon its glorious folds – no chains shall clank beneath it – but every where, & to all people, of every color, shall it be the loved emblem of liberty.

Saturday 15th⁶ The darkest day I ever remember – This morning the sun rose upon a nation jubilant with victory – but it sets upon one plunged in deepest sorrow – [?] the glad morning light had merged into full midday – came the shocking intelligence that our beloved President Abraham Lincoln was dead – shot by a brutal assassin – last evening – as he was sitting cheerfully chatting with his wife & other friends in a box at the theatre – he lingered unconscious till about eight o’clock this morning - & died without a word or sign – Secretary

⁶ This entire entry, which spans three pages, is outlined in a box of very dark lines, indicating mourning.

Seward was also attacked near the same time by another, or the same blackhearted traitor's hand, as he lay on his sickbed - & also two sons & one or more attendants were wounded, in endeavoring to stop the murderer from reaching the Secretary's room - & the [?], (Sec.) & his son Frederic both lie in an unconscious & critical condition - Later in the day came rumors of having secured the murderer - who it is affirmed Miss Laura Kieve to be J. Wilkes Booth; Oh! where will treason end? & What shall we do with such as fall into our hands. The Vice President has been inducted into the Presidential chair - & assumed the reins of government. The rapidity with which events crowd upon one another is perfectly bewildering. Frank is away & it [?] hard to be alone - Mrs. Goddard came in in the morning - I went down to Mr. May's & to Fred's this P.M. & this eve, since tea, sister Caroline has come out to spend Sunday with me - & Miss J. Goddard has been in - So "I have had supporters. I sent a letter to Frank this P.M. When will our cup of punishments be drunk to the dregs? Merciful Father, help us.