

## MSS. Collection #34

**Charles R. Abbott Papers, ca. 1898-1904. ½ box (15 folders), ca. 52 items.**

NOTE: The numbers cited in parentheses, e.g. 1:5, refer the researcher to the Series#:Folder# in which that name/topic will be found.

### INTRODUCTION

The bulk of the Charles R. Abbott Papers focus on Abbott's tour of duty during the Spanish-American War; he was Acting Hospital Steward for the 3rd Calvary in the U.S. Army. Dating from 1898-1904, the collection contains correspondence, military records, photos, and personal accounts not only of his military involvement, but also local Greensboro events. Though small in size, the collection gives researchers a glimpse of popular culture around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Of particular interest is Abbott's diary (3:1), which illustrates American perceptions of foreign cultures as well as his duties as hospital steward. During his stay in Japan, he writes, "I thought at Kobe the Japanese was an ugly person, but no, they are now in my estimation a bewitching and charming class of people" (pp. 19-20). His military records include a one-page portion of Schedule 1, Census of Military and Naval Population from 1900 and a list of requirements for enlisting recruits into the hospital corps (4:1). The correspondence consists primarily of letters from local singer and childhood sweetheart, Grace Clary (2:1-2:7), and female friends, who wrote to him while in the service. The letters tell of daily life in Greensboro and show support for Abbott. Another letter serves as a reference to "testify to his attentiveness to business" (2:9). The photographs are mostly portraits of Abbott in uniform as well as several unidentified women (1948.359.1-10).

**Arrangement:** The Charles R. Abbott Papers are organized into five series by document type. Within each series, items are organized alphabetically and chronologically. The series are: **Advertisements, Correspondence, Diary & Fragments, Military Papers, and Photographs.** The photos are part of the general photograph collection.

**Provenance:** This collection was presented to the Museum in 1948 by Miss Rosa Abbott. Also included in the Museum's collections is Abbott's uniform (1948.358).

### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Little detail is known about Abbott or the Abbott family. Charles was born in 1877. His father, Jesse T. Abbott -- a machinist at Sergeant Manuf. Co. (d. 1909) -- was from Virginia and his mother from Alabama. The Abbott's lived at 319 E. Lindsay St., just down the street from First Presbyterian Church, where Jesse served as a deacon. Charles worked at the Southern Railway Co. in 1898 (2:9) before going into the Army, and is listed as a "clerk" in 1903 and as a "drug clerk" in the 1905 city directory. There were numerous Abbott children, including his sister Rosa, who became a prominent educator in turn of the century Greensboro.

Abbott enlisted in the Army in early 1898 and became an Assistant or Acting Hospital Steward for the 3rd Calvary, and was first stationed in Cuba; he eventually went to the Philippine Islands in July 1899, after the outbreak of the Spanish-American War (April 1898). The love-letters written to him by Grace Clary -- apparently his child-hood sweetheart and noted local singer, who grew up next door at 323 E. Lindsay -- suggest that Abbott (who, as seen above, worked as a drug clerk) had an alcohol problem. Upon returning from Cuba, Clary gave him a choice: drinking or her. He answered by re-joining the military in 1899. During his second stint, his drinking became worse and he did not adjust well to civilian life when he was discharged from the Army. He died in his home on October 21, 1905, from an overdose of laudanum or opium he took for lingering pain after a dental visit. Clary eventually married a local manufacturer and lived on Cypress St before moving to Irving Park. She died at home in 1956.

**Biographical Sources:** Schlosser, Jim. "War Letters Soldier's Story is of Love and Loss" *Greensboro News & Record*. July 4, 1998. See also: Muster roll, Hosp. Corps. (4:1); *History of First Presbyterian Church*, p. 324; city directories, as mentioned.

### **SCOPE & CONTENT NOTE**

This collection documents a part of the Spanish-American War military experience of Charles R. Abbott of Greensboro. The 1901 diary (Series 3), and diary fragments, offer the most detail on his service as a hospital steward for the 3rd Calvary in the Philippine Islands, including a visit to Japan.

There are three letters (2:1) written home by Abbott, telling of his early training, but the majority of letters are those written from women friends, with comments on their sense of patriotism for Abbott's service in the war. The letters from Grace Clary (2:3-7) of Greensboro are of particular note: although primarily love letters, there is information concerning Greensboro and her music training (she became a noted local singer), and insight into Abbott's life and alcohol problem (see 1902 letter from Clary). The 1900 letter from Lucy Coffin (2:8) is a particularly newsy one concerning happenings in Greensboro, and mentions Grace Clary and Rosa Abbott's (sister of Charles, and later a local educational leader) educational attainments.

### **SERIES DESCRIPTIONS**

#### **1. Advertisements. 1 folder (1 item). 1904.**

The back page of this 1904 *Foley's Family Almanac* includes an ad for Foley's Honey and Tar, sold at J.D. Helms' Drug Store at 310 S. Elm St. in Greensboro.

#### **2. Correspondence. 11 folders (ca. 35 items). 1898-1902.**

Three letters from Charles R. Abbott to his family in Greensboro (April-June 1898) document his military training in Chickamauga, Georgia, and aboard the transport ship *Berkshire* in Tampa Bay and the Gulf of Mexico, as they prepared to sail for South America.

Except for two letters of reference from his former supervisor at Southern Railway (W.E. Coffin), the remaining letters are from girl or women friends of Abbott. A young girl from Evansville, Minnesota, Minnie E. Anderson, writes a patriotic letter to Abbott, apparently at his request after he passed through her town on a troop train headed to the west coast, in August 1899.

The letters from Lucy Coffin and Nellye Fowler of Greensboro are in response to letters from Abbott, and they offer news of friends and happenings back home. The Coffin letter is particularly interesting, with mentions of work on the city hall for the new Grand Opera House, a new jail, and comments on Grace Clary and other happenings in town. The letters from Grace Clary are the most extensive and, although primarily love letters, they offer some information and insights into family life and life in Greensboro, courtship and male-female relationships, and Abbott's apparent alcohol problem.

### **3. Diary. 1 vol. (1901, 22pp.) & Fragments (1899, ca. 14pp.)**

The 1901 diary is a bound volume (spine is loose) – “Char R. Abbott/Hosp. Corps. U.S.A.,” during his time aboard the *Hancock* in 1901, May 3 to June 9. It is basically an on-board record of events, with on-shore comments when he left the ship, with observations of the Philippine Islands, and from Manila to Nagasaki, Japan. The diary fragments include several pages of “Notes of my experience & trials since leaving U.S. for Manila, P.I.,” from July to Aug., 1899. There are also several pages detailing some of his duties as Steward.

### **4. Military Papers. 1 folder (5 items). 1898-1900.**

This miscellaneous group includes orders, reports, a letter from his mother inquiring of Abbott's health/whereabouts, a map of the Alaska/Yukon area where their ship fueled in route to the Philippines, and a Hospital Corps muster roll from Luzon, which lists Abbott and related statistics.

### **5. Photographs. 1 folder (10 items). ca. 1900.** Filed with photo collections: 1948.359.1-10

A miscellaneous group of family photographs, including 2-3 images of Abbott in uniform, and unidentified portraits (probably Abbott's sisters (including Rosa?), and possibly images taken on Lindsay Street, one (48.359.10) is identified as “Sallie and Grace.”

**FOLDER LISTING**

<b>Series</b>	<b>Folder</b>	<b>Contents</b>	
1	1	Advertisements (1904)	
2	1	Correspondence	-- Abbott, Charles R. (1898)
	2	“	-- Andersen, Minnie E. (1899)
	3-7	“	-- Clary, Grace (1898, November-1902)
	8	“	-- Coffin, Lucy (1900)
	9	“	-- Coffin, William E. (1899)
	10	“	-- Fowler, Nellye (1900)
	11	“	-- Jeannette (1899-1900)
3	1	Diary	-- 1899 (fragments); 1901
4	1	Military Papers	-- Miscellaneous (1898-1900)
5	1	Photographs (ca. 1900)	

**Index to Charles R. Abbott Papers (ca. 1898-1904)**

Note: The numbers following the name/subject entry -- e.g., 1:1 -- Series#:Folder# (or, if no ":", Series only) that name/topic can found.

**Abbott, Rosa:** 2:8

Abbott, Mrs. Jesse T.: 4:1

Alaska: map, 4

Alcoholism: 2:7

Andersen, Minnie E.: 2:2

**Business:** J.D. Helms' Drug Store advertisement (1904), 1

**Chickamauga, Georgia:** military camp (1898), 2

Clary, Grace: 2:3-7, 2:8, 5

Coffin, Lucy: 2:8

Coffin, William E.: 2:9

**Dating & courtship:** 1898-1902, 2:3-7

***Foley's Family Almanac*** (1904): 1

Fowler, Nellye: 2:10

**Greensboro:** Fall fair (1900), 2:8;

Grand Opera House (1900), 2:8;

New city jail (1900), 2:8;

Observations on (c. 1900), 2:3-7, 2:8, 2:10

**J.D. Helms' Drug Store** (311 S. Elm): 1

Japan: diary observations (1901), 3

**Philippine Islands:** diary observations (1899; 1901), 3

**Southern Railway Co.** (Greensboro): 2:9

Spanish-American War: training, 2:1; transportation, 2:1, 3; Manila, 3; Philippine Islands, 3

**USS *Berkshire*** (1898): 2

**USS *Hancock*** (1901): 3