Letter from John Henry Jenks to Almina Crawford Jenks; July 12, 1863

Jenks, John Henry, 1823-1864

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Dear Wife yours came to hand yesterday, for which I was glad to get, and learn that you are as well as you be, and feel badly about Flora. I do hope it will not affect the sight, I do not recolect just what I paid for the stove but I think it was $16 you will see by turning to Smiths act on the ledger, what it was. I know he made a reduction from the price carried out there, and we paid him in goods, I think you better sell it if you can for it is a bad thing to move, I am glad you find a chance to dispose of the refrig, for that is a bulky thing to cart round sell the sofa if it is possible. If Hiram could sell the bible to advantage I should think it best for you to send it to him for it will not accord with the rest of our furniture, but I don't know as they use bibles in Australia. I don't understand why the pay master has not sent the allotment to the State, he had the money in his hands to do it 6 weeks ago, but it will come in time I suppose you need it before you move, It is a terrible hot day, the sweat pours out at every bone when I sit still in the shade, what should I do if I was up to Harpers Ferry fighting. The 34 and 39 Mass.rgts, have gone up there and our Regt, has their duty to do in the city which takes every well man in camp. I have not been, as I was Sgt. Of the guard the day they went off, and have been since Wednesday, taking the entire charge pricking up my men where I can find them from the sick and cripples, I have one man who goes on crutches guarding 7 prisoners he can sit all the time, I expect they will have an awful battle near Antitum, if Gen Lee dont get across the river and skedaddle Evry thing has been sent up from here that can be spared, 10000 left the city during the night last by rail road, not an hour passed during the night, but what we could here them cheer as as they left the depot, I think their a part of Gen. Dixs army who came in the afternoon. You are getting an enormous force there and it seems as though we ought to do something, if we we do not succeed in capturing them, we shall have the satisfaction of knowing we drove them from our borders. Thus far it has been a loosing game to the Rebels, and I pray that they will see the utter impossibility of sustaining their cause and seek to stop the flow of blood by coming back to their Fathers house a true penitent. I see by the papers the call for drafted men for N.H. is 9000, a large draft I should think, I feel glad I am not there to be obliged to stand a draft again. I now thunders constantly and sounds like distant artillery which I suppose may be going on this very day within 100 miles of here. Don't you think our Regt has been the most fortunate of any that has come out from N.H. If we had gone to the front and been spared I think ere this I might have been promoted, but in our present position promotions come slow, but I
am not particular to rush into battle on your account, but if it were not for you and the children, I should desire to go to the front, I should not fear death, this kind of life has a tending to wear one from the love of life, the Soldier rushes into battle caring little for bullets, and what becomes of him; we have become so used to war that a thousand killed in battle is of little account, hardly worth noticing, still a thousand hearts many be struck at the same time by a poisoned arrow whose wound will never heal. The bullet seeks out among the crowded high in rank, and lays him low; he falls and dies, all covered with glory, and his body is borne off the field, and embalmed and sent home to his loved friends, who bury it under military escort, and great people surrounded by hosts of sympathizing friends, and the bosom companion hardly knows she is a widow in the great whirl of excitement. The poor, lonely, private falls, it may be, in fighting to save the life of his General; his body left on the battlefield to be trampled on by the fierce charger, and advancing foe, and when the days slaughters oer, his body with scores of others, fill one common grave, and the news is borne home through the public press of his being lost on the field of battle. His anxious wife hears of the battle, and seeks the list of the lost, and there sees the name of her only loved one on earth save her children, and hope dies within her bosom, and greater pain does she suffer in her lonely cot, during the sleepless hours of that night then will ever be known to the world.

Monday 11 Oclock. I have been exceeding busy all the morn
So I could not get a chance to write before. We are having a powerful rain which will make a flood if it continues much longer, it may be that the lord is sending it to defeat the Rebels. We did not hear from the army yesterday, but I think there was no battle, it is said that Lee is making a stand to give us battle. Our Gov.
are making great preparations for them, the cars are running night and day, to carry troops, which come from Dixsarmy and Gen. Fosters from N.H. We must have a tremendous force there by this time, it looks to me as though it was to be greatest battle yet fought, for Lee is in a tight place and will make evry effort to get away, and as near as I can learn all our forces this side of Richmond are being sent there, but the Gov. Keep all their councils to themselves, which is wise- before the week closes undoubtedly the greatest battle will transpire that ever was known on this continent, and thousands killed and wounded, but I see no signs of our being called still it is not among the impossibilities, I am still on guard duty, and have been trying to fix the guard tent to make it more comfortable for the prisioners. The rain comes in my tent and wets my bed and evry thing, but I am willing to endure the wet if it will help defeat the Rebels. Our Chaplain has sent in his resignation. Capt. Combs case was to come off to day, with love to you Flora and Henry I must close. Your affectionate Husband, J. Henry Jenks