



My Dear Molly: The Civil War Letters of Captain James Love

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The Missouri History Museum archives are bursting with collections that provide firsthand accounts of both historic and everyday moments, but when archivist M. E. Kodner came across the James Love letters, she knew she had discovered something extraordinary. *My Dear Molly* consists of the 166 letters that St. Louisan James Love wrote to his fiancée, Eliza Mary “Molly” Wilson, during his Civil War service. The letters discuss the war, including activities in Missouri, battles, Love’s life as a soldier, and his time in a Confederate prison, in addition to detailing the love story of James and Molly. Spanning the entire Civil War period, the letters give a full account of both the ongoing conflict and the many different aspects of Love’s life, making *My Dear Molly* a unique contribution to our literature of the time period.

The book opens with a prologue describing Love’s life before the war, including his immigration to the United States from Ireland, his early career, and a trip to Australia he took in the 1850s. The body of the text consists of his letters and is divided into three sections: Love’s early service with the Fifth US Reserve Corps, most of which was spent in Missouri; his service with the Eighth Kansas Infantry, which includes descriptions of military life and battle, ending with him being wounded at the Battle of Chickamauga and taken prisoner; and his years in various Confederate prisons and his attempts to escape. Each portion of the book begins with an introduction to place the letters in their historical context and to briefly explain the events and people that Love mentions in his letters. It concludes with an epilogue describing his final, successful escape, his life with Molly after the war, how the letters came to the Missouri History Museum, and Kodner’s discovery of her connections through family friends to James and Molly’s descendants. *My Dear Molly* is a remarkable, riveting volume that will add much to our knowledge of the Civil War period—its battles and conflicts as well as the experiences of ordinary Americans like James and Molly.

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