

(Lincoln, Abraham – Election of 1860 – the beginning Civil War) Rockwell, William W., **Collection of Letters Describing Campaign Events in New York City During the Election of 1860 – Wide Awake Torchlight Parades, Pro-Union Rallies, and Meeting President-elect Lincoln, the Secession Crisis and the beginning of Civil War, 1860-1861**

24 letters, 84 manuscript pages, in very good, clean and legible condition.

An interesting group of correspondence written mainly by William W. Rockwell, to his parents, describing the charged political atmosphere in New York City during Lincoln's 1860 campaign for the presidency and the run up to Secession that winter and the spring of 1861. 19 letters by William Rockwell from New York to his parents, four from his parents, and one from a family friend in New York with whom he boarded.

Rockwell was a young man, a native of Pittsfield, Berkshire County, Massachusetts, who had gone to New York seeking employment in a mercantile house. Rockwell was a member of a politically prominent family, his father Julius Rockwell, was a Massachusetts judge, and his uncle David Davis (1815-1886), was a future Supreme Court Justice. Rockwell was a Unionist, a Lincoln supporter as was his father, Julius, who abhorred slavery – which he termed the “national sin.”

William Rockwell was an enthusiastic supporter of Republican politics and the grass roots “Wide Awake” movement, provides keen observations and vivid eyewitness accounts of the campaign season of 1860. His letters describe the great torchlight marches in New York City of September and October 1860. He records his reactions to the arrival of the *Star of the West* at Fort Sumpter during the Secession Crisis, Rockwell also describes his personal meeting and handshake with President-elect Lincoln at the Astor House in February 1861. Rockwell describes a Wide-Awake torch light procession in Brooklyn and confidently predicts Lincoln's prospects in New York, he confidently reports on the scale of the demonstrations, Union meetings at Cooper Institute. The letters also describe Rockwell's efforts to work his way up at his employer's store, and the economic uncertainty caused by the Secession Crisis.

The final letter in the archive, written by Julius Rockwell, dated April 15, 1861, at the outbreak of the war, mere days after the bombardment of Fort Sumpter, reflects on the gravity of the moment and relief that “*we have been saved at last from having the institution of domestic slavery fastened upon us as a national sin.*”

Rockwell's letters offer a unique and vivid depiction of the Wide-Awake movement and the secession winter through the eyes of a young Lincoln partisan. First hand accounts of the torch-light processions and pro-Union rallies in New York City and opening days of Civil War.

Sadly, Rockwell did not survive the war whose leadup and beginnings he chronicles. Rockwell was among the first rush of men to enlist in the Union Army. He enlisted for a three-month term in April 1861 and subsequently re-enlisted to continue serving until December of 1861. He died of disease contracted while on duty in Louisiana on December 3, 1863.

Sample Quotes:

“Brooklyn, July 18, 1860 Wednesday Eve

Dear Mother,

... I am fairly domesticated in New York & like it very much. I find all of the comforts of a home at Mr. Taylors, including one comfort new to me & which I look back on with wonder that I could have gone

without it so long vis, enough to eat. Mr Taylor & myself spend our evenings reading & playing chess & backgammon & I enjoy it very much... thank C. Livingstone for the Eagle ... I have been here 6 weeks & received 1 copy ... I have shaken hands with Japanese Torrey, boarded the Great Eastern, been to the 7 regiment encampment on Staten Island, seen the Chicago Zouaves ... I succeeded in obtaining after much trouble time & expense, of one of the Japanese princes a coin the like of which was never seen out of Japan before, it is a round piece of silver about the size of a cent & is 1301 years old. ... the prince told me with tears in his eyes never to part with it out of the family... there are two Democratic meetings in the city tonight one led by Danl S. Dickenson & one by his Honor Mr. Mayor Ferdinand ...

Tell Father I have purchased a likeness of Lincoln & hung it in our office, I set it looking at the iron railing today & when I came back it was in threads... W.W. Rockwell..."

"New York Sep. 8th '60

Dear Father,

... I expect I shall commence boarding pretty soon as Mrs. Taylor will soon be home. I am looking for a place at present, I have enjoyed it at Mr. T this summer. I continue to get on nicely at the store. ... We had a great torch light procession over in Brooklyn last week. Sen. Willson spoke & it went of very well. I think N. Y. safe for Lincoln (don't let my opinion get into the papers, it might discourage the Union men & give the Boston Courier a chance for one of its sharp articles ... Wm. W. Rockwell..."

"New York, Sept. 17th, 1860

Dear Father,

... Lincoln's prospects look well in this state now, I saw the republican torch light procession last Wednesday night, over 5000 torches in a line, over a mile long, the 3d of Oct we expect to have one 10 miles long & 50,000 torches. The Union men had a mass meeting at the Copper Institute and had quite a large turn out, I see by the papers this morning that Douglas has found his mother and he found her well, business is good & we have had a very good season, we do a business of about \$ 3,000,000 a year and make about \$ 150,000 less expenses about \$ 25,000 so you see it is a paying thing ... W. W. Rockwell"

"New York Sept 19th '60

Dear Father,

... I have spent more perhaps than I ought to since I came to N.Y. for every thing was new to me, and like others I wanted to see the sights, having seen them I think in future I shall try and be more economical ... Garibaldi is going it in Italy, but I am afraid that if he goes near the pope, Napoleon will have a finger in the pie. If Lincoln is elected you had better sell your mountain farm (eggs & all) for property is to decline 50 pr c at least that is the opinion of the N. Y. Herald this morning. Hoping that in such a case you will give me the first chance to purchase ... Wm. W. Rockwell"

"New York Oct 3 '60

Dear Father,

I do not know where this will find you, but I expect at home. I infer from not seeing your name in the paper, that you did not attend H.R.H. ball, you should have gone & given Mother an opportunity to

dance with the Prince. ... I am now established in boarding & like it very well I have got a very good place on Clinton St. near Mr. Taylor's I pay \$5 a week for board, washing & lights extra, we have meat for breakfast but none for supper Business is rather dull at present, but we expect a change after election. I think Sec. Cobb must have rather crowed when he made his recent avowals of disunion, I see by the Eagle that our house was lighted up on the occasion of the Wide Wake parade. I suppose that means, gas turned on, I shall have to loose my vote this year, if I stay here & they have threatened to challenge me if I come to Pittsf. One less for Lincoln, however I suppose that don't debar me from having a government contract, I would like bailing the river opposite the navy yard, to make a dry dock, at so much a quart, I suppose I can depend on your influence. Our trade in the woolen department has been very good for the last month ... Wm. W. Rockwell"

"New York Oct 4th '60

Dear Mother,

Or grand Republican demonstration is over, and the Union is safe, I can assure you that it was a sight worth seeing, 15000 men in procession, 4 miles of troches & 30 bands of music. It was rather more of a turnout than Pittsfield could furnish. I came over from Brooklyn about 8 o'clock & with Mr. Taylor & Mr Peet marched up Broadway it is estimated that over 300,000 people trod on that street on the occasion. We stationed our selves in front of the New York Hotel, opposite the Republican Head quarters. The Hotel afore mentioned is the Head quarters of Democracy & I can assure you that there was cheering & hissing enough for the entire campaign. I cheered till I made myself hoarse, the procession was about two hours in passing a given point, altogether it was a beautiful sight & one to be long remembered. ... Wm W Rockwell"

"Pittsfield, Massachusetts [n.d. circa January-February, 1861]

My Dear E –

... Dr Todd gave us a sermon this P.M. upon the National sins for which we are about to be punished treatment of the Indians, Drunkenness, Breaking the Sabbath, Atheism and lastly oppression - He treated upon all but the last, which is to be presented on Fast day, which will be the memorable day of our existence he thinks. He will give us his views of the subject which has lain upon his mind forty years ever since he used to discuss it in Yale College. Julius was so affected that he laughed right out in church, much to my chagrin – Don't you pity Old Abe, having to mount the throne amid such a din and flourish of trumpets- I think he had better be inaugurated on the way by any justice of the peace he may happen to meet. I hope Wheatland is in order to receive Buchanan, and that a room is built in his cellar that he may hide himself the old traitor!

The times look rather dark up here. Platner & Smith's failure also Mr. Hurlburt & one or two more in Lee have made every business man keep a sharp look out. The Banks think they are all safe. Our Bank especially ... L.F.R." [Lucy Forbes Walker Rockwell]

"New York Jany 10, 1861

Dear Father,

I arrived safe in New York Monday night at 11 o'clock, having [sic] had a very pleasant and safe passage. Talcott came down with me. Since I have arrived I have paid all of my debts, but have heard nothing about salary as yet. ... I see by the bulletins (12o'clock) that the Star of the West is safely in

Charleston harbour & is landing troops at Fort Sumpter, we have no further particulars ... Wm. W. Rockwell"

"New York Jan 22, 1861

Dear Father,

... I am afraid I shall not get the salary I expected this year. I find that owing to the times somewhat, and to the remaining of one of the salesmen on our floor, who I expected would leave on the first of Jany... he stays because our folks dislike to discharge any body in these times, however I do not expect he will stay a great while... Have you read Philips speech yet, if that man would look at things in a little different light he might aspire to any office in the United States. I wish I knew as much as he did. ... I enclose you an article taken from todays Herald, you will see it is quite a change from what would have found in it two weeks ago Wm. W. Rockwell" [Clipping is present]

"New York Jany 25th, 1861

Dear Mother,

... I am getting into society in fine style, through the kindness of Mrs T a Mrs Colton inquired the other day of Mrs T who that young man was who sat in their pew in church so often. When told she said she knew his mother quite well ... she is the wife of Colton the Atlas man, she has invited me to call and see her, so I am going one of these days ... Last Wednesday night I went to see Rainey having won a ticket from Mr Taylor, I invited Mrs T to go. He held forth in our (Brooklyn) new Academy of Music, and gave quite a pleasant entertainment ...

We are having quite a little excitement here on account of arms destined for the South, being seized A Southerner was arrested yesterday, for having his pockets rifled, the thief escaped ... Wm W. Rockwell"

"New York, Feb. 22nd, '61

Dear Mother,

... I was enabled to give Uncle Abe a hearty shake of the hand when he was her Wednesday, and saw Mrs L and the LI [Little Lincolns?] at the Astor house. I tried hard to find Uncle David but did not make out to do it. Lincoln is a better looking man than his pictures represent. He reminds me strongly of Frank. I suppose you see all about his Journey in the papers, the Herald gives the best account of it I have seen ... Wm. W. Rockwell..."

"New York Mch 5th, 1861

Dear Father,

...at present business of any kind is down and looks dark, but remember it is always darkest just before day – Lincoln's speech is interpreted in many different ways here, and all think they understand just what it means ... Wm W Rockwell"

"Pittsfield April 15, 1861

My Dear Sister,

... The country is in a pretty lamentable condition; but in the good Providence of God we have been saved at last from having the institution of domestic slavery fastened upon us as a national sin. This is now a fact accomplished – a great danger passed. We are in the breaches but we have I believe a President that will do as well as any man can, and Providence certainly don't mean to destroy us, if it had, it would have permitted the slave power to have become predominant. But the coming years are to be full of interest, and although there are parties in the free States, they seem now to be of necessity coming and acting together upon this question. The South have pushed matters further than I thought they would but this only shows the necessity of making our stand now. It was not made a moment too soon. It has not been made too firmly, I trust it will be fiercely sustained throughout... J. Rockwell"

Sold.