

Collection #  
M1550  
OM0800

**FIFIELD FAMILY  
COLLECTION, CA. 1860-1916**

Collection Information	1
Biographical Sketch	2
Scope and Content Note	3
Contents	4

Processed by

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## **COLLECTION INFORMATION**

**VOLUME OF COLLECTION:** 1 half size manuscript box, 1 oversize manuscript folder, 1 photograph folder, 1 cased image

**COLLECTION DATES:** ca. 1860-1916

**PROVENANCE:** Gift of Elizabeth Darr M.D., Kansas City, MO; Gift of John David Ouellette, Sanford, FL

**RESTRICTIONS:** None

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**RELATED HOLDINGS:**

**ACCESSION NUMBER:** 2025.0064, 2025.0065

**NOTES:**

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Zacheus Barnum Fifield (August 16, 1842-December 16, 1916) was the son of Thomas Hale Fifield and Alice “Elcy” Carter Fifield. Although Fifield was born in Canada, the family soon settled in Porter County, Indiana. As a young man, Fifield briefly lived in Chicago, Illinois before the Civil War began and he mustered into the Indiana 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry on April 20, 1861. Fifield received four promotions during his service, first Orderly Sergeant on August 16, 1861, then to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant on May 30, 1862, then to 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant and Adjutant on October 1, 1864 and finally to Captain on March 31, 1865. Fifield resigned and was formally discharged on April 21, 1865. While on furlough back home in Valparaiso on February 6, 1864, Fifield married Jane “Jennie” Ketchum (1846-1921). Upon his return from the Army, Zacheus and Jennie stayed in Valparaiso, where Zacheus was elected as the County Auditor. By 1880, the couple and their six children had relocated to St. Paul, Minnesota where Zacheus worked as a tinsmith for the railroad and later as a salesman for a coal company. The couple remained in Minnesota for the rest of their lives.

Dr. Almira Fifield (1833-March 8, 1863) was Zacheus B. Fifield’s older sister. Although raised in Valparaiso, the Fifield family had New England roots and after working as a teacher in Valparaiso for a while, Almira left for Boston, Massachusetts in 1857 to attend the New England Female Medical College. Dr. Fifield graduated in 1859 and returned to Valparaiso. Dr. Fifield wished to use her medical skills to help the cause in the Civil War, even though female doctors were not being recruited. Instead, she applied as a nurse for Zacheus’s regiment, the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana. In 1862, the U.S. Sanitary Commission sent her to a field hospital in Paducah, Kentucky as a nurse. However, her medical skills were soon recognized, and she was put in charge of a surgical ward at Union Hospital. Dr. Fifield died from “congestive chills” while in service and was buried in an unmarked grave in the Old City Cemetery in Valparaiso, Indiana. On June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025, Dr. Fifield’s achievements in medicine and service to her country were recognized with a new gravestone at the Old City Cemetery and an Indiana State Historical Marker.

### Sources:

“Zach Fifield” *The Chesterton Tribune*, 14 December 1916, Page 15.

“Finding Almira Fifield, M.D.”, The Society of Indiana Pioneers,  
<https://indianapioneers.org/finding-almira-fifield-m-d/>

Materials in the collection

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection contains documents and correspondence from Zacheus B. Fifield that were generated during his time serving with the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana Infantry during the Civil War. While most of the collection is letters written by Zacheus, he also retained some copies of orders received as well as his muster rolls, pay records, discharge papers, and certificates of promotion. In addition, there are images of Zacheus and a single portrait of his sister, Dr. Almira Fifield.

Because the Indiana 9<sup>th</sup> was the first regiment to depart from Indiana for the Civil War and Zacheus Fifield served for almost the entire duration of the war, his letters are really a full circle documentation of the experiences of this particular regiment, minus the few months (Dec. 1862-July 1863) he spends with the Pioneer Corps, a construction and engineering brigade. In his letters home in late 1861 and 1862, the lack of infrastructure for the supplies, pay, and transportation of the Union army is apparent in Fifield's comments about lack of hand and foot coverings and wearing through the soles of his boots due to the many miles the regiment has spent marching. He also comments on 6 November 1862 that he is not looking forward to winter quarters in Tennessee, the "interior of the slave states," because the troops "will not be able to procure anything except what the government furnishes to live on." In December 1862, he welcomes his transfer to the Pioneer Brigade because they are tasked with improving army infrastructure while also receiving better rations and clothing. This transfer also comes at a time when Fifield was passed over for a commission, and he regularly comments to his family on the internal politics of regimental leadership. There are a few letters where Fifield is writing to his family in the midst or aftermath of a battle, namely Cheat Mountain, Shiloh, Chickamauga, the Siege of Chattanooga, the Siege of Atlanta, and he sends a particularly grim missive on 31 May 1864 from Dallas, Georgia where he has just seen a member of his regiment killed and two wounded from shelling. "It is a sad sight but I have seen so much of it since this campaign commenced as to not mind it so much, when I stop to consider all the circumstances." Fifield's letters take readers right up through the troops learning the news of General Lee's surrender, "such cheering I never heard before", and shows the weariness of a soldier who had spent four years on active duty. "We are tired of the actual service, the disagreeable life of a soldier while on an active campaign."

While there is currently no known correspondence from Dr. Almira Fifield herself, the course of her decision to put her medical training to use by joining a regiment as a nurse, her subsequent appointment to the hospital in Kentucky, and then the tragedy of the loss of a sibling can be gleaned from the letters Zacheus is writing to his parents and Almira herself. For example, in a letter dated 23 October 1861, Zacheus writes, "I wish you to persuade Almira not to come here for this is no place for a woman." There is also an 8 January 1862 letter addressed to Almira from M.L. McClellan at the U.S. House of Representatives which reports that Miss Dorthea Dix says that Almira cannot be paid by the U.S. Government should she choose to accompany the Indiana 9<sup>th</sup>, but that she could be paid directly from the Regiment. On 28 April 1862, on the battlefield at Shiloh, Zacheus responds to a letter he received from Almira letting him know that she is now an army nurse in Paducah. He seems to be pleased for her and tells her that "Your position as Matron in such a place as Paducah is not as bad as the same position would be in a Regiment." A little less than a month later, 23 May 1862, Zacheus writes to Almira again apologizing to her. "I am exceedingly sorry

that I came so near exposing to the good people of Paducah the fact that you was an educated M.D. I shall try and be more cautious in the future. Yet I don't think the fact would make them think any less of you, do you?" After Zacheus is alerted to Almira's passing, he remarks that he was comforted to hear that she was surrounded by people who cared for her and soon after he writes to reassure his grieving family that they should not worry if they don't hear from him regularly, as they would be contacted if something happened to him.

## CONTENTS

### CONTENTS

Portrait, Dr. Almira Fifield, ca. 1860

### CONTAINER

Photographs,  
Folder 1 of 1

Correspondence, 1860-1861

Box 1, Folder 1

Portrait in Uniform, Zacheus B. Fifield, ca. 1861

Cased Images

Discharge Papers, 1861; 1863

Box 1, Folder 2

Correspondence, 1862

Box 1, Folder 3

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Commission, 30 May 1862

OM0800  
Folder 1 of 1

Orders/Latest By Telegraph, 1862-1865

Box 1, Folder 4

Confederate Currency, 1863

Box 1, Folder 5

Correspondence, 1863

Box 1, Folder 6

Muster Rolls, 1863-1864

OM0800  
Folder 1 of 1

Correspondence, 1864

Box 1, Folder 7

Records of Pay, 1864-1866

Box 1, Folder 8

1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Adjutant Commission, 1 October 1864  
(2 copies)

OM0800  
Folder 1 of 1

Correspondence, 1865

Box 1, Folder 9

Certificate, Auditor of Porter County, 6 March 1866

OM0800  
Folder 1 of 1

Correspondence, 1866-1894

Box 1, Folder 10

Portrait, Zacheus B. Fifield, ca. 1866

Photographs,  
Folder 1 of 1

Zacheus B. Fifield, GAR, ca. 1900s

Photographs,  
Folder 1 of 1

Resolutions of Respect, GAR Garfield Post, 1916

Box 1, Folder 11

GAR Garfield Post Service Records, n.d.

Box 1, Folder 12

Transcriptions of Z.B. Fifield's Civil War  
Correspondence, 1861-1865

Box 1, Folder 13