

C Benjamin, John Forbes (1817-1877) and Diana, Papers, 1850-1876  
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## **DIGITIZED in Civil War collection**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Papers of John Forbes and Diana Benjamin. The papers consist of letters written to family in Liverpool, New York.

### **DONOR INFORMATION**

The John Forbes and Diana Benjamin Papers were purchased from F. H. Sweet by the State Historical Society of Missouri on December 10, 1944.

### **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

John Forbes Benjamin was born on January 23, 1817, in Cicero, Onondaga County, New York. In 1845 he moved to Texas and to Missouri in 1848 where he studied law and began its practice in Shelbyville, Shelby County, Missouri. In 1849 Benjamin went to California but returned in 1850 and was elected a member of the state house of representatives. In 1856 he was elected a presidential elector on the Democratic ticket.

Benjamin entered the Union Army in 1861, attaining the rank of lieutenant colonel in the 2nd Missouri Cavalry. He participated in military operations in north central, northeastern, and southeastern Missouri. He fought in the Battle of Kirksville and was a witness to the aftermath of Bill Anderson's slaughter of Union prisoners at Centralia, Missouri, in 1864.

Resigning his commission on June 3, 1863, he was made provost marshal of the Eighth District of Missouri and in 1864 served as a delegate to the Republican National Convention. He served in the United States Congress from 1865 to 1871, and was appointed chairman of the Committee on Invalid Expenditures. In 1871 he returned to Shelbyville to practice law. In 1874 he returned to Washington D.C. to engage in banking where he died on March 8, 1877. He is buried in a private cemetery in Shelbina, Missouri.

### **SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE**

The John Forbes and Diana Benjamin Papers consist of an M.C. Brady & Co. photograph of John Forbes Benjamin, probably taken while he was a congressman, and letters written to family members in Liverpool, New York, from 1850 to 1876. Only one letter in the collection was written before the Civil War and tells about John Forbes Benjamin's trip to California in 1850.

The majority of the letters were written during the Civil War and relate the experiences of both John and Diana Benjamin in Missouri. In some of the correspondence a good deal of information is provided about Benjamin's capture by a rebel commander, Colonel Green; the capture of Captain Sydnor, a rebel officer at the Battle of Kirksville; and the harshness of the guerrilla warfare then being waged in Missouri. Coming upon the scene of the Centralia

Massacre committed by Bill Anderson, John F. Benjamin gave a first-hand account of what he saw and what he heard.

Only a few of the letters were written after the Civil War and none by John F. Benjamin. His wife's letters mention mostly routine matters of local interest in Missouri and occasionally information about her husband. The letters are arranged chronologically.

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