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AJHS-NEA Spotlight

**American Jewish Historical Society–
New England Archives at NEHGS**

Adolphus Strassman and His Civil War Diary

The Adolphus Strassman (alias Rich) Collection is one of the oldest held at the American Jewish Historical Society–New England Archives. The collection contains material related to Civil War veteran Adolphus Strassman (1848–1923). Included are several certificates and photographs, correspondence, a G.A.R. medallion, a wallet with calling cards, and Strassman’s small leather-covered diary, kept from January to September 1865.¹

Adolphus was born on March 7, 1848, in Ungvár, Hungary, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (now Uzhhorod, Ukraine), to Isaac and Rosa (____) ____.² (The surnames of both of Adolphus’s parents are unknown.)

Adolphus arrived in New York on July 7, 1857.³ In the 1860 census he was enumerated in Fall River, Massachusetts, with his stepfather Henry Strausman, his mother Rosa, and two younger half-siblings, Henrietta and James.⁴

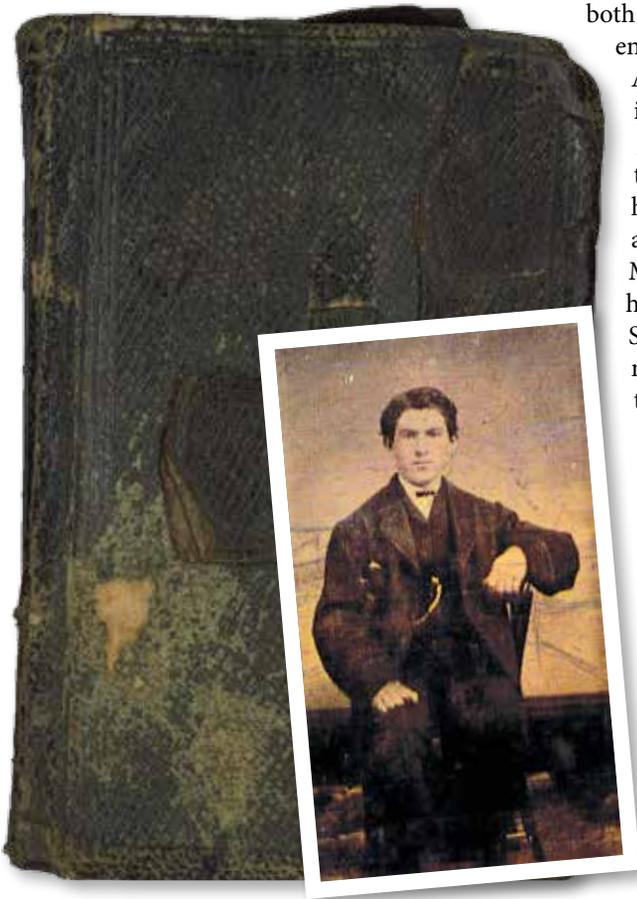
On November 23, 1863, 15-year-old Strassman joined the Union Army.⁵ Correspondence in the collection from 1961, written by Dorothy (Streetman)

Winters, a grand-niece,⁶ provided an explanation for his enlistment. “He was only 13 when he enlisted, but he was a big boy and fibbed about his age. He wanted the bounty they were paying then, for his family—They were grief stricken when they learned about it.”

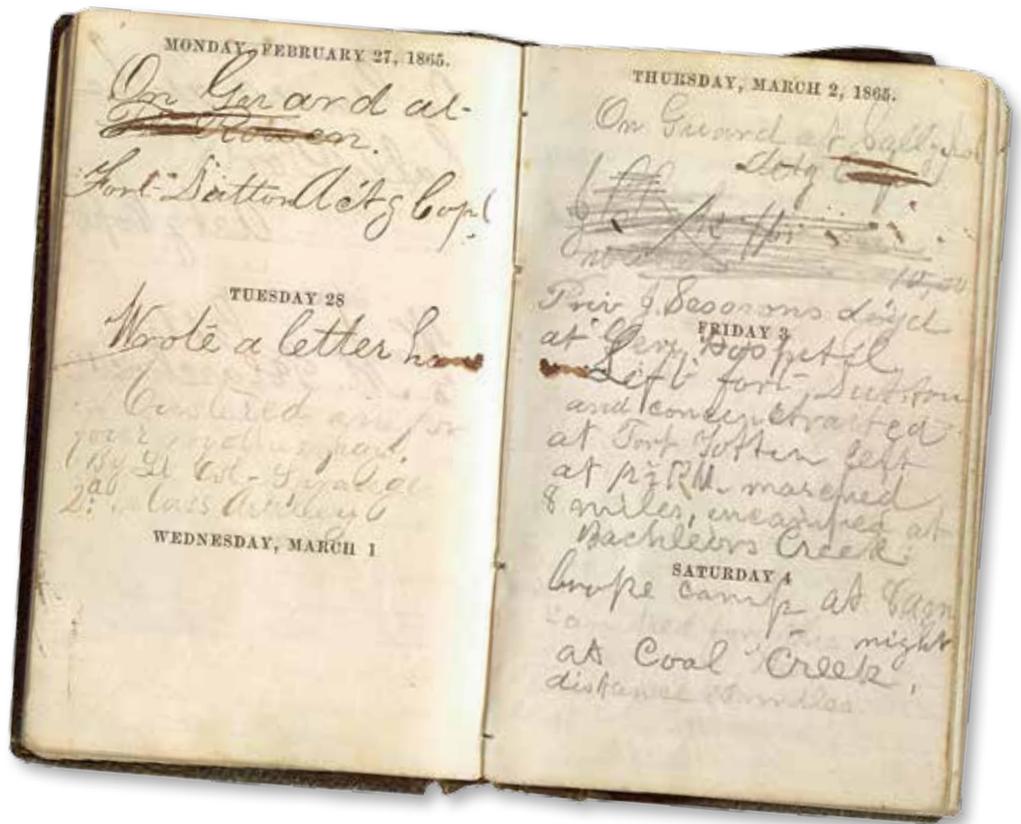
Strassman served as a Private in the 2nd Regiment of the Massachusetts Volunteer Heavy Artillery, Company I, under Captain John D. Parker, Jr. This regiment was formed on July 28, 1863, in Readville, Massachusetts; Company I was mustered in on December 11, 1863. The regiment was headquartered at Norfolk and Portsmouth, Virginia, until May 1864, when it moved to the New Bern, North Carolina, area and remained there until July 1865. Adolphus Strassman’s diary was written while the regiment was in and around New Bern.⁷

In his diary, Strassman wrote about performing guard duty at Fort Rowen, Fort Dutton, and Kinston, North Carolina. He was present at the Battle of Wyse Fork in Kinston on March 7 to 10, 1865, when Confederate troops tried to stop Union forces from moving further up the rail line to unite with General William Tecumseh Sherman and open a supply route. The battle, which involved 13,000 Union and 12,500 Confederate troops, was a Union victory.

Following are the entries from March 1865, the month of the Battle of Wyse Fork. (Punctuation and capitalization have been added for readability, but spelling has been preserved in its original form. Soldiers’ names have been verified in *Massachusetts Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines in the Civil War*.⁸)



Adolphus Strassman as a young man, and his 1865 Civil War diary.



On guard at sally port. Actg copl.

Priv. J. [Jarius A.] Sessions died at Gen. Hospital. Left Fort Dutton and concentrated at Fort Totten. Left at 12½ P.M. Marched 8 miles. Encamped at Bachleors Creek.

Broke camp at 8 A.M. Camped for the night at Coal Creek, distance 10 miles.

Consolidated into General [Edward] Harland's 1st Brigade 2nd Div. Encamped side of the Rail Road.

Left camp at 9 A.M. and went into camp at 3 P.M. Marched 9 miles.

A letter from home and a paper. Left camp at 10 AM. Encamped within 3 miles of Kingston. Heavy firing on the left.

Left camp at 9 A.M. Took a position on the Rail Road and supported a Battery moved two miles toward the left. Heavy guns [illegible] and artillery firing. Througning up breastworks all night. Two men wounded Wittiker [William W. Whitaker] & [James] Crook.

Rose at 3 A.M. Heavy musketry all night. Constant firing. Heavy attacks on our lines at 6 A.M. repulsed on all points. Constant firing all day straining our works. Pvt Damsly [Joseph Dempsey] wounded.

Attacked our lines again and repulsed. Gen. [Jacob Dolson] Cox defeats the left wing of the Rebel army. Captures 700 prisoners and one Gen. Constant firing. Two men of Co. M. Wounded 2 of Co. F. one of Co. B.

All quit during the night. The Rebels retreat towards Kingston. Making a raid on a house. Got some molasses.

Entries from Adolphus Strassman's diary.

All quit along the lines. Wrote a letter home. Maid another forage. Got some chicken and potatoes. Wrote a letter home.

Nothing of interest. Moved towards the right about.

Left camp at 9 A.M. Encamped opposite Kingston. The city surrendered by the civil authorities.

Crossed into Kinston over in pontoons at 8 P.M. Encamped ½ mile out of the city.

All quit along the lines.

All quit. Bringing rails to build breastworks.

All quiet. Carrying logs to build breastworks.

Carrying logs. On guard over the rations.

Working on the breastworks till sun down. Co. "C" M[en] left camp for Washington hill 1 mile outside of Kinston.

Moved a half mile towards the left outside of the city. All of Gen. [John M.] Schofield & [Darius] Couches troops left for Goldsboro.

Nothing of interest.

Michial Cunningham Watch. 10.00

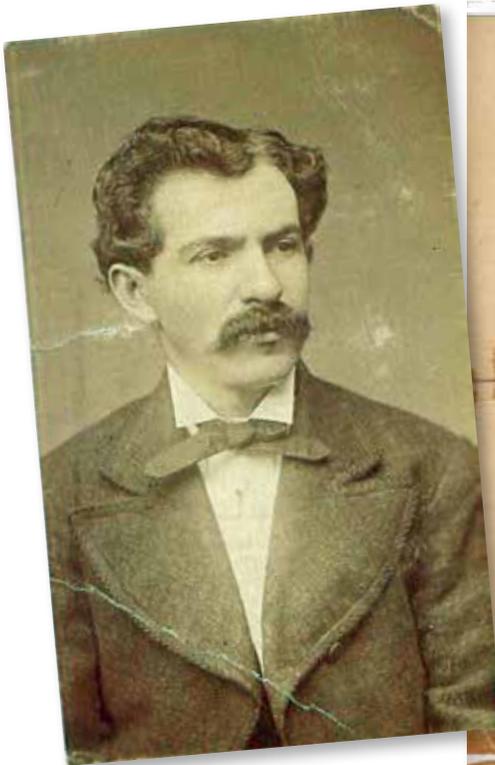
All quit. 900 hundred Rebels came in. Capture by Gen. [W.T.] Shermans army. Received a letter from S. Palmer.

Wrote 2 letters. One home and one to A. Strassman. Saw Gen. [illegible] Scherman going to Newberne.

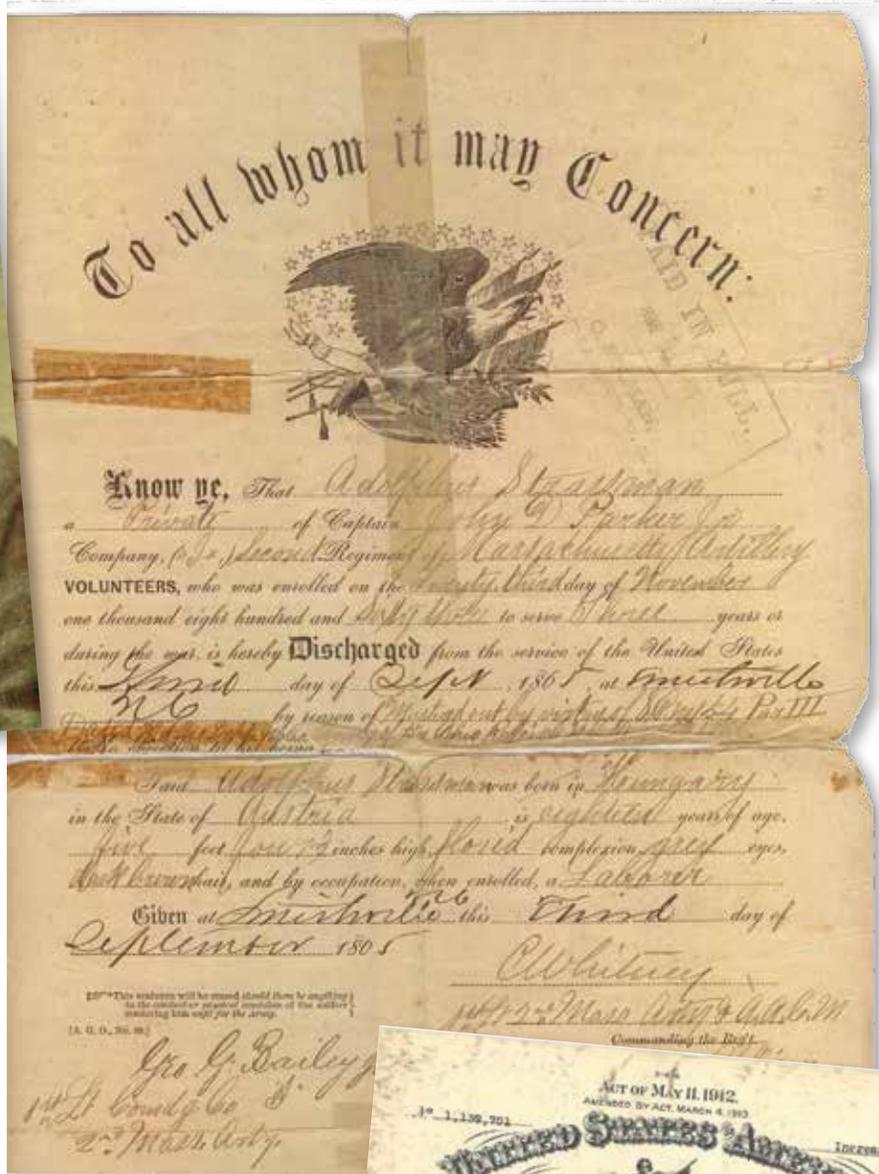
On picket one half mile from Kinston. Actg Corporal.

Nothing of interest.

Wrote a letter to S.P. On guard at the Capts Quarters. Actg Corp.



An undated tintype of Adolphus Strassman, his 1865 discharge certificate, and his 1915 pension certificate.

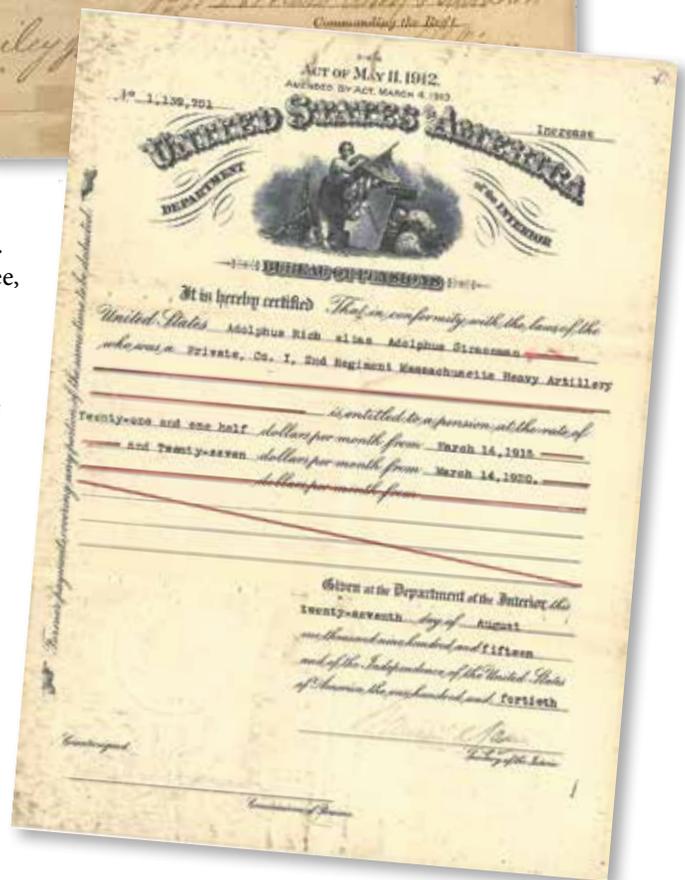


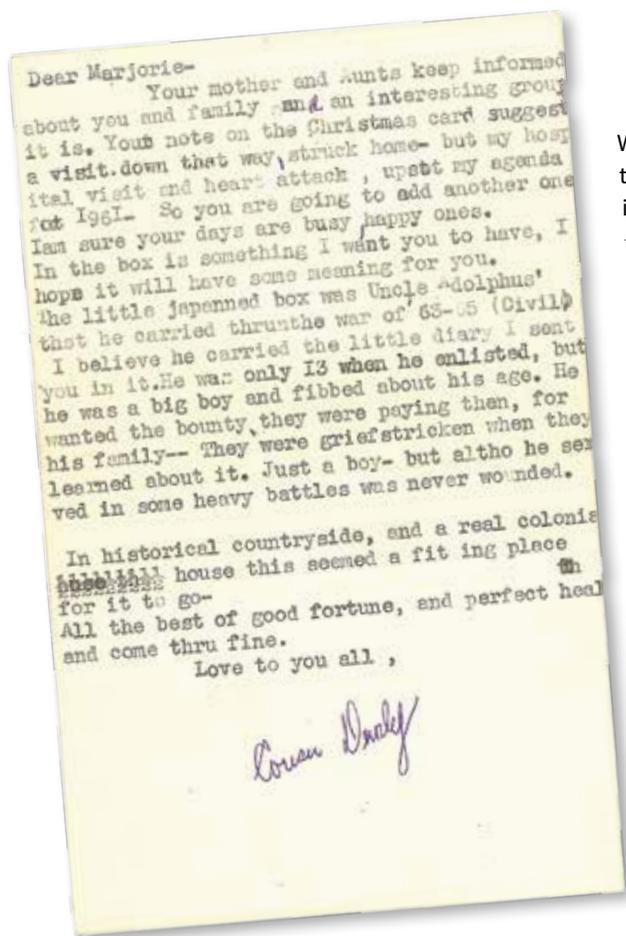
After serving for almost two years, 17-year-old Adolphus Strassman was discharged on September 3, 1865, in Fayetteville, North Carolina. The last two entries in the diary are dated September 22 and 23, 1865: "Recd payment in full and left for home. Slept in Boston" and "Arrived in Fall River at 10 A.M."

Sometime after his military service ended and before the 1870 census, Adolphus Strassman apparently adopted the surname Rich. No documentation has been found to explain the significance of this assumed surname.

Over subsequent decades Adolphus Strassman alias Rich worked as a clerk, a druggist, and a real estate agent. He lived the remainder of his life in Fall River but, interestingly, was initiated

into the Masonic Lodge, No. 123, in Petersburg, Tennessee, on July 3, 1882. He joined the Mount Hope Lodge in Fall River, on August 8, 1901, and later served as the Worshipful Master of that Lodge.⁹ He was also a member of the Massachusetts G.A.R., and belonged to the Richard Borden Post #46 in Fall River.¹⁰ Adolphus Strassman alias Rich apparently did not marry; his Massachusetts death record listed him as single.¹¹ His obituary noted that he "had a wide acquaintance throughout





When Dorothy (Streetman) Winters gave “Uncle Adolphus’s” collection to a relative in 1961, she provided an account of how he came to serve in the Civil War.

the city.”¹² He died on November 14, 1923, in Fall River and was buried from his sister’s New York home,¹³ in Cypress Hills Cemetery, Brooklyn.¹⁴

After Adolphus Strassman’s death, his diary and other items were passed to a family member, perhaps directly to Dorothy (Streetman) Winters, whose account of his enlistment was quoted previously. In 1961, Mrs. Winters sent the materials from “Uncle Adolphus” to a younger relative named Marjorie

with an accompanying note. “In the box is something I want you to have, I hope it will have some meaning for you. The little japanned box was Uncle Adolphus’ that he carried thru the war of 63–65 (Civil). I believe he carried the little diary I sent you in it.” In 2005, Margery Benjamin of Boston donated the Adolphus Strassman Collection to the American Jewish Historical Society.

For more information on this collection or any other collection at the American Jewish Historical Society–New England Archives please contact us at reference@ajhsboston.org.

Many thanks to Chief Genealogist David Allen Lambert whose research uncovered much information about the life of Adolphus Strassman alias Rich. ♦

Notes

- ¹ For more on the Adolphus Strassman Collection, see ajhsboston.org/2011/06/17/adolphus-strassman-collection/. A finding aid is available at digifindingaids.cjh.org/?pID=1484961.
- ² In the inside back cover of his diary, Adolphus Strassman wrote his birth year as March 1847 and his birthplace as Sampater or Sarnpater, Hungary. (This placename has not been identified.) His 1872 naturalization petition lists his birthdate as 7 March 1848. (With the exception of the date in the diary he seems to have used 1848 as his birth year.) His Mason membership card lists his birthplace as Ungvár, Hungary (and gives a 7 March 1849 birthdate), *Grand Lodge of Massachusetts Membership Cards, 1733-1990*. Online database. *AmericanAncestors.org*. New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2010. (From records held by the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Massachusetts.). His death certificate lists his father’s name as Isaac and his mother’s name as Rose; *Massachusetts Death Records, 1923*, Fall River, 26:183. Further information about Ungvár can be found at the Yivo Institute of Jews in Eastern Europe website (yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Uzhhorod) and JewishGen KehilaLinks (kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/uzhhorod/).
- ³ Adolphus Rich petition for naturalization, 26 April 1872. Record supplied by National Archives–Boston.
- ⁴ Henry Strausman household; 1860 U.S. Census; Fall River, Ward 3, Bristol County, Massachusetts; roll M653_491; page 186; viewed on Ancestry.com. Henry and Rosa Strassman had three additional children by 1870: Henry, Fanny, and Sarah. Henry Straussman household; 1870 U.S. Census; Fall River, Ward 3, Bristol County, Massachusetts; roll M593_604; page 436B; viewed on Ancestry.com.
- ⁵ Adolphus Strassman discharge certificate, 1866. Adolphus Strassman Collection, AJHS-NE; *Massachusetts Adjutant General, Massachusetts Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines in the Civil War*, vol. V (Norwood, Mass.: Norwood Press, 1931), 745, lists his age at enlistment as 18, giving credibility to the family story.
- ⁶ Dorothy (Streetman) Winters was the daughter of Henry Strassman/Streetman (b. 1861), Adolphus Strassman’s half-brother. Henry Streetman household, 1900 U.S. Census; Toledo, Ward 10, Lucas County, Ohio; roll 1298; page 5A; viewed on Ancestry.com.
- ⁷ The Civil War Archive: Union Regimental Histories, Massachusetts, civilwararchive.com/Unreght/unmaarty.htm#2ndhvy.
- ⁸ *Massachusetts Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines in the Civil War*, vol. 5 (1932).
- ⁹ *Grand Lodge of Massachusetts Membership Cards, 1733-1990* [note 2].
- ¹⁰ A. Dean Sargent, *Grand Army of the Republic: Civil War Veterans, Department of Massachusetts, 1866–1947* (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, 1992). CD-ROM.
- ¹¹ The 1920 census lists Adolphus Rich as a widower but other details in this enumeration were wrong—a Maine birthplace for him and his parents—and no other evidence of a wife can be found. Adolphus Rich household; 1920 U.S. Census; Fall River, Ward 4, Bristol County, Massachusetts, roll T625_683; page 7A; enumeration district 61; viewed at Ancestry.com.
- ¹² “Another Civil War Vet Dies,” *Fall River Evening Herald*, November 15, 1923, p. 4.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ *Massachusetts Death Records, 1923*, Fall River, 26:183 [note 2].