

Library Helps Virginians Preserve Civil War Documents in Cyberspace

By [MICHAEL WILLIAMS](#)

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For years, Kent Seabury Rowe of Henrico County has preserved the Civil War-era documents of her ancestors in an acid-free box.

Soon, images of her documents will be preserved in cyberspace.

Rowe's photos, letters and other materials were among about 500 items scanned at the Library of Virginia as part of a digitization project the library is doing in partnership with the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission.

Area residents poured into the state library for the scanning, a statewide effort that began in September.

Library of Virginia archivists Laura Drake Davis and Renee M. Savits are doing the scanning, usually on weekends, with Davis working in the western part of the state and Savits the east. "It's amazing what people have. It just astounds me," Davis said.

So far, they've scanned more than 5,000 documents, all of which will eventually be on display at www.viriniamemory.com/cw150.

"We're so overwhelmed with materials, it's taking us awhile to get them online," Savits said.

Among the diary, photos and other items Rowe had scanned was an April 13, 1865, parole slip that granted permission to her great-grandfather, William James Seabury, to return home after the Confederate surrender. But perhaps the most poignant document was a letter great-great-uncle Kirk Seabury wrote to his father on April 20, 1862.

"Tonight we have orders to go into the trenches within six or seven hundred yards of the enemy's lines and we anticipate a most miserable night both from the rain and annoyance from the enemy," he wrote.

"I do not fear to die except when I think of the judgment ... Pray for me dear Father."

Kirk Seabury died in battle the next day.

Bruce Strong's great-grandfather, Albert Nathaniel Husted, was a New York educator who established a Union infantry company with two other professors. Among the documents Strong had scanned Saturday was a letter Husted wrote to his mother after the Battle of Gettysburg's second day at Little Round Top.

Rowe plans to donate the family documents to a museum someday but, in six to nine months, their images should be accessible worldwide. She said her father, who gave her the family history materials, would be pleased.

"I think it's wonderful," she said of the digital archiving, "because he knew I would be interested and that I would take good care of them."