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## **Wiley Pope Hale letters**

**Title:** Wiley Pope Hale letters  
**Collection No:** MSS.24  
**Extent:** 0.25 cubic feet  
**Inclusive Dates:** 1842-1847

**Abstract:** The collection comprises nine letters written by Wiley Pope Hale between 1842 and 1847 while a cadet at West Point and serving with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of Tennessee Volunteers during the Mexican War.

**Donor:** John L. Hopkins, June 1991.  
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**Language:** English  
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## **Biographical information**

Wiley Pope Hale was born on September 2, 1821, the only son of Colonel Thomas and Harriet A. Hale (1800-1870). Thomas Hale was born in Franklin County, Virginia, and moved to Jackson, Tennessee, in 1835. He died in Memphis on May 16, 1838, of an illness while returning from a trip to New Orleans. In 1840, Wiley was admitted to the United States Military Academy at West Point, graduating in 1844.

In the late spring of 1846, men from Jackson and Madison County enlisted for service in the war between the United States and Mexico which was declared in May. Wiley Hale mustered into Company F, "The Avengers", of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of the Tennessee Volunteers, in Memphis on June 4, 1846. As first lieutenant and adjutant, Hale fought at Vera Cruz in March 1847 and was mortally wounded at the Battle of Cerro Gordo on April 18, 1847, and died on April 26 at Plan del Rio, three miles from the battlefield.

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## **Scope and contents**

The collection comprises nine letters written by Wiley Pope Hale between 1842 and 1847. All but one were written to his mother, Harriet, the exception being one to Burwell C. Keatts (died 11/13/1866) of New Orleans in 1846. They concern a charge of drunkenness while a cadet at the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1842, and report his activities while serving in Mexico during the Mexican War with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of Tennessee Volunteers from 1846 to 1847, including the attack on Vera Cruz. Transcriptions for four of the letters are provided in the Appendix.

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## **Subject terms**

Hale, Wiley Pope, 1821-1847.

Mexican War, 1846-1848.

Mexican War, 1846-1848--Campaigns & battles--Mexico--Vera Cruz.

United States. Army. Tennessee Infantry Regiment, 2nd (1846-1848)

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## **Inventory**

### **Box 1**

Folder

Correspondence:

- 1 Wiley Pope Hale, West Point, New York, to Harriet Hale, 1842 April 19 (incomplete). See Appendix for transcription.
- 2 Wiley Pope Hale, Camp near Someta, Mexico, on the Rio Grande, to Harriet Hale, Jackson, Tenn., 1846 July 26. See Appendix for transcription.
- 3 Wiley Pope Hale, Camp Tennessee opposite Burito, Mexico, to Harriet Hale, 1846 August 17 (incomplete). See Appendix for transcription.
- 4 Wiley Pope Hale, Camp Tennessee opposite Burito, Mexico, to Harriet Hale, Jackson, Tenn., 1846 September 1. Notes steamship has arrived to convey them to Camargo and 125 men are being sent home on account of illness. Records fight between soldiers from Georgia and Indiana which resulted in around 10 deaths. The Georgians are under guard and will be sent to General Taylor's headquarters for trial. Notes death of Stilwell and illness of Maxey Theus.
- 5 Wiley Pope Hale, Camargo, Mexico, to Harriet Hale, 1846 September 13 (incomplete and damaged). Assures his mother there is no truth to the rumors that he has been drinking and says the suggestion he has refused to give Hiram writing paper is only because the paper belongs to the government not him. Asks his mother not to follow through with her plan to move to New Orleans and wait for his return. Says he has had conversations with General Haskell and is planning to run for the Tennessee legislature when he gets back as well as studying law. Notes he is encamped in Camargo with 3000 others, while General Taylor left for Monterey with 7000 troops. Will probably remain to defend the city against attack from General Canales.
- 6 Wiley Pope Hale, Camp near Camargo, Mexico, to Harriet Hale, 1846 October 3. Records that there was hard fighting at Monterey and General Taylor's army lost about 500 men. The 1<sup>st</sup> Tennessee Volunteers lost about a third of their number. There is now a 60 day ceasefire and Hale's regiment will be sent to Monterey. "We will have a chance yet!" The hardest battle to come will be at Saltillo and Hale predicts his regiment will be there. "Our boys are very bitter against Genl. Taylor for not ordering us up to Monterey before the battle." Notes there are Mexican marauders who killed two of Captain Cook's company of Memphis who were out hunting. Hale was among 60 soldiers who went in search of the killers but could not find them. Notes he can now converse adequately in Spanish. Hopes to participate in one hard battle before he returns home.
- 7 Wiley Pope Hale, Camp of General Quitman's Division, Hacienda Sant Ingracias, near Hidalgo, Mexico, to Harriet Hale, 1846 December 28. Notes his regiment was ordered to join General Taylor at Montemorrelles, leaving Camargo on the 8<sup>th</sup> and arriving on the 18<sup>th</sup>. Immediately ordered to march to Victoria to attack General Urrea there. Taylor took the regular army to reinforce General Worth at Saltillo to face General Santa Anna. General Quitman has five regiments of Volunteers, about 2500 men, to face Urrea's cavalry force of 5000. Hale and his comrades want to attack Urrea to avenge the massacre at Goliad, Texas, ten years before. In Quitman's army are the two Tennessee regiments and soldiers from Mississippi, Georgia, Baltimore, and a "Flying Artillery" company. Have been marching for 3 weeks and are 3 days from Victoria. He is doubtful Urrea will fight and they will

continue to San Louis Potosi to confront Santa Anna. Notes the countryside is “most delightful” with many wealthy Mexicans living in “beautiful white cottages, surrounded by extensive fields of Sugar cane, and groves of orange, lemon, citron, pommegranate and every other description of tropical plant & fruit.”

- 8 Wiley Pope Hale, Ruins of Convent St. Malibrán, 1½ miles from Vera Cruz, Mexico, to Harriet Hale, New Orleans, La., 1847 February 18. See Appendix for transcription.
- 9 Wiley Pope Hale, Camp near Someta, Mexico, to Burwell C. Keatts, Smith, Gorin & Co., New Orleans, La., 1846 July 27. Similar content to letter to his mother, 1846 July 26.

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## Appendix. Transcriptions.

### 1. Wiley Pope Hale, West Point, New York, to Harriet A. Hale, 1842 April 19 (incomplete).

[page 1]

United States Military

West Point N.Y.  
April 19th 1842

My Dear Mother

I have just this moment opened your affectionate letter and I have immediately laid aside my books for the purpose of answering it and I am truly happy my dear Mother that in doing so I am able to relieve your mind from any apprehensions you may have entertained from the certificate of the Engineer Department referred to in your letter. But I am at present so agitated at the thought of what must have been your feelings when you read the report, that I am afraid you will hardly be able to read what I write. In the first place the report of my having used spiritous liquors is entirely false which originated entirely through a mistake of one of the Officers of the Army attached to the Military Academy. It seems that sometime about last Christmas some Cadets had procured some ardent spirits and becoming somewhat merry - and one of them made a good deal of noise at a concert given in the Mess Hall by the West Point Band - an officer happened to notice him from the lower end of the room - supposed him to be myself on account of the Corporal's Chevrons which [page 2] he wore upon his arm. The officer sometime afterwards reported the circumstance to the Superintendent and said that he suspected the person to be Cadet Hale but that he was not certain. Nothing more was said of the matter until about two months after when I learned that the Superintendent had reported it to the War Department - when I immediately repaired to Maj. Delafield and denied the charge and explained everything to his satisfaction. So dear Mother you may feel perfectly at ease on that subject and rest assured that your son never has nor never will dissipate whilst he remains at the Point. As to my demerit I will merely say that you made a slight mistake in reading it for instead of 115 it was only 1 1/5 (one demerit and one fifth part of a demerit) one fifth being added on the demerit of all Cadets for the 2nd year. I have less demerit than anyone in my class - as proof of which I am a Cadet

Corporal and Dick Hays can inform you that no Cadet is ever made a Corporal unless he stands very high in good conduct. I presume I have written enough on this subject - I will proceed with my letter - I was particularly blest with letters by to day's mail - having received beside your kind letter one from my dear grandmother [page3] Woods and one from Mary & George Tate in Missouri - Mother! I could not refrain from shedding tears when I read grand Ma 's letter she seemed so much grieved at the idea of your not returning to V[irgini]a and seems to think I am coming to live with her next summer - she says that she is going to plant a large water melon patch especially for my benefit - the other news contained in her letter was that grand Ma Hale's health was much improved - that Harriet Woods was to be married to Bob Early - Emily Taliaferro was lately married to Ferdinand Claiborne - Dillard was broke all to pieces - Uncle Sam was a candidate again for the Legislature - Poor Jo Peter's health was very bad she said that she did not think he would ever recover - Mrs. Tate wrote me a very friendly and affectionate letter indeed and I was truly glad to hear from her and George - She wrote that poor Henry Tate was no more - which you have heard before. She said that she had lately paid a visit to Mrs. Tomlin who appeared to be quite contented with her situation and was quite cheerful. George added a short postscript to Mary's letter - he said he had succeeded in inventing a machine for thrashing hemp and requested me to make him a perspective [page 4] drawing of it - as he intended to apply to the Legislature of Missouri for a patent - which I expect I shall do when he sends me a description of the machine. Mary requests me to give her a description of my adventures in Texas when I write - she seemed to be under the idea that I must have been heart-broken at Josephine's marriage - and really thinks that I was once in love with Jo. I expect however that she is mistaken there -

I for got to mention that Grand Ma said something in her letter about the division of Grand Pa's estate which I could not make out well-

Tell Sarah I received her profile from Mr. Tomlin - and I take a long look at it every day for I consider it a very striking likeness. Who drew it? tell her I have commenced copying it to paint and will bring it home with me that she might judge how far I have succeeded. I flatter myself that I draw tolerably well - I am very glad that you sent me your permission for without it I could not have come - I have written so far that I find I will have to take another sheet to envelope it - but I fear that I have written already more than you can read - for it is [rest of letter missing]

**2. Wiley Pope Hale, Camp near Someta, Mexico, on the Rio Grande, to Harriet A. Hale, Jackson, Tenn., 1846 July 26.**

[page 1]

Camp

Near Someta Mexico

On the Rio Grande

July 26<sup>th</sup> 1846

Dear Mother

I again avail myself of an opportunity of performing the delightful duty of writing to you. I have now written six letters home and have as yet received one from Sal and one from Alleck Campbell. You can not imagine the pleasure afforded me at the reception of these silent though expressive messengers from home. We marched from Brassos St. Iago four days since and are

now encamped upon the banks of the Rio Grande about half a mile below Someta which was formerly a Mexican Village of some importance, but it is now only a deserted "Rancho" having been attacked, plundered, and destroyed about ten years since by the Comanche Indians. I was very much disappointed at the general appearance of the Rio Grande. It is a very muddy stream about twice the width of the Hatchie River and is very swift. There are no trees upon its banks with the exception of hammocks of low undergrowth called in this country "Musquite Chapparral" which is so thick as scarcely to be penetrable by a man on horseback. [page 2] The land upon the banks of the river is extremely rich and I think will rival the coast of Louisiana in the cultivation of Sugar and Cotton whenever the direction of American enterprise shall tend to this country. The grass of the Prairies and the undergrowth generally have the singular characteristic of belonging to the thorny tribe of plants, so that it is extremely uncomfortable to walk without high boots. Innumerable insects & reptiles of every hue, size and appearance infest our camp. Rattlesnakes are more abundant here than any other place upon the globe. They seldom bite, however, without first being disturbed and not even then without giving warning to the offender with the rattles with which Providence has so kindly provided them. I regret here to say that while at drill last evening, Tom Spurrier was bitten by some very poisonous insect (supposed to be a spider or tarantula) and was during the whole of last night in a very critical situation. He appears to be much better this morning and Doct McKnight says he is entirely out of danger. We set up with him all night. Stillwell has been very ill for about three weeks but is now rapidly recovering. I have not been in the least unwell since I have been upon the Campagne. [page 3] I consider this country one of the healthiest in the world. Had we been encamped at any place near Jackson and had undergone this same amount of privation or hardships, we would undoubtedly have had much more sickness in our Camp.

Jo Freeman, Hiram, Max Theus, Dick Hays, Genl. Haskell, Alex Henderson, Pic, Aleck Greene and all others of the Avengers are in excellent health [missing words] spirits - We were invited last night [missing word] a "Fandango" at a Mexican "Rancho" (missing) six miles from our camp. The ladies [missing] who attended were not as beautiful [as (missing)] our own, but dress with great taste. Red [missing] is their favorite color. We have to [(missing) converse] with them by means of an interpreter as they can not speak a word of our language.

I suppose that you have heard that all the troops who volunteered for six months only are to be disbanded and sent home but as the Tennesseans are for twelve months we will be retained until the end of the war which I think will be about Christmas. The Mexicans are reported to be fortifying themselves at the city of Monterey towards which we will take [page 4] up our line of march in 3 or 4 days. I visited Balie Peyton a few days since at his encampment about two miles below us. He has been unwell and will leave for New Orleans in a few days. Tell Sal that "Legrand Jones is in fine health & spirits . Josh Richardson, Capt Murray, & Lieut Hawkins are all sick. No more at present - Farewell Dear Mother

Your affectionate son  
Wiley

Ned Johnson is here with a stock of goods. he has been appointed Sutler (store keeper) for our Regiment. Ned, Pic, Dick Hays, & myself live in the same tent. Tell Sal to "tell me some more" as Lizzy says. My love to all your affectionate son Wiley

**3. Wiley Pope Hale, Camp Tennessee opposite Burito, Mexico, to Harriet A. Hale, 1846  
August 17 (incomplete).**

[page 1]

Camp Tennessee Opposite Burito Mexico

August 17<sup>th</sup> 1846

Dear Mother,

I would have written to you several days sooner but for the fact that I have been so very busily engaged in assisting in the organization of our Regiment. Before commencing this letter, I must again be permitted to complain of you all for not writing oftener. I have only recieved two letters from home since I have been in Mexico, and I have written regularly once a week. I wrote sometime since to Bob Taylor and to Sal but have not yet received an answer to either. We are still encamped on the banks of the Rio Grande but will leave in a few days for "Camargo" on our way to attack the city of "Monterey" I am happy to inform you of the organization of our Regiment at last. The East Tennessee troops joined us about two weeks since and the election for field officers took place on the 8th inst. I know that you will be rejoiced to [page 2] hear that Genl. Wm. T. Haskell has been elected Colonel of our Regiment. I give below the "Field & Staff" of the Regiment which you can give to Mr. Gates for publication.

(2nd Regiment Tennessee Volunteers

Field

Wm. T. Haskell Colonel Commanding

David H. Cummings Lt. Colonel

(No Major yet elected)

"Staff "

Doct. David McKnight Surgeon

Doct. Enoch P. Hale Assistant Surgeon

1st Lt. Wiley P. Hale Adjutant

1st Lt. Wm B. Davis Quarter Master

Legrand M. Jones Sergeant Major

Isaac Nichol Quarter Master 's Sergeant.)

You will perceive from the above that I have received the appointment of "Adjutant" of the Regiment. I have now the rank and pay of "Captain of Infantry". The gentleman who has been appointed Assistant Surgeon is from East Tennessee, and is a distant relation of ours. I think that he was appointed through my influence. I wish you to send a paper containing the above list of officers to Uncle Sam Hale in Va. The health of [page 3] that part of the Regiment from the Western District is remarkably healthy for this climate, but the East Tennesseans who are principally from the mountains are very sickly indeed. We lost three men in 24 hours out of the East Tennessee Battallion.) We have heard with sorrow and regret of the deaths of Wm. Turley, Thos D Connally and several others, and we all are extremely anxious about the health of our relations and friends in Jackson. We almost fear to open our letters for fear of hearing of the death or sickness of some one dear to us.

(The sick of the "Avengers" are all recovering very fast. Hiram and Maxcy Theus have both

been sick but are now going about again. Stillwell also has recovered. Tom Spurrier who came near dying from the bite of a “tarantula” has entirely recovered.) Tell Mrs. Talbot and Mrs. Jackson that Jo Freeman still continues one of the most healthy and robust members of our company. Jo is one of the best soldiers I have ever seen. All the rest of the company are in good health.

I took a trip a few days since to the city of Matamoros in company of several of the Avengers amongst whom were Max Theus Alex Henderson and Alex. Greene. We [page 4] all marched up to the city a distance of 30 miles on foot. As the weather is extremely hot here we choose the night for our journey. After walking about ten miles from our camp, we heard the noise of "fiddling and dancing" about a hundred yards from our road. We concluded to find out what it meant. We reached the place from which the music proceeded. What a sight was here presented! It was a Mexican Fandango! There were about a hundred Mexican Ladies and gentlemen assembled for a ball! They received us very politely and asked us by signs to participate in their amusements. We remained about three hours dancing with the dark eyed beauties of the Rio Grande and then resumed our march for Matamoros. We found the road very thickly settled with Mexicans who invariably treated us with great respect and kindness. The road however is said to be dangerous to travellers. The Mexican Ladies are not beautiful not half so beautiful as ours. They dress however with great taste and neatness and they remarkably graceful in dancing. They are very fond of waltzing, though we [rest of letter missing]

**4. Wiley Pope Hale, Ruins of Convent St. Malibran, 1½ miles from Vera Cruz, Mexico, to Harriet A. Hale, New Orleans, La., 1847 February 18.**

[page 1]

Ruins of Convent St. Malibran one & half miles from Vera Cruz, Mexico

Feby 18<sup>th</sup> 1847-

Dear Mother-

I am still in the land of the living! I have scarcely time to write you any thing so busy are we engaged now in the siege of this city. You must then excuse me if I give you some of the particulars of the fight so far, in a very brief style – We arrived here with 10,000 men from Tampico on the 7<sup>th</sup> [7 written over 5] inst. On the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> we effected a landing on the beach about 2 miles south of the city. The whole force then encamped immediately on the sea shore where we landed. Just before day-break on the next morning our picket guard was attacked by an advanced party of the enemy, and a brisk skirmish kept up until nearly daylight. At 9 o'clock we took up our line of march to invest and surround the city. The two Tennessee regiments were in the advance- About 2. o'clock we reached the old ruins of St. Malibran which we took possession of- hardly had this been done before the Mexicans opened a heavy fire of Musketry upon us from the neighbouring heights- The fire was kept [page 2] up for several minutes, when Genl Pillow sent the first Regt Tennesseans (Col. Campbell's) to capture a magazine about ½ mile distant which was done in handsome style- The General then ordered the glorious 2<sup>nd</sup> Regt. (Col. Haskell's) to charge the heights and drive in the force which was firing upon us- We gave a shout and commenced the charge amidst a shower of bullets which fell around us like hail- You should have seen our boys as they rushed up that hill with our continual shout of defiance- though the hill side was covered with an almost impenetrable chapparal

(thicket-of bushes) we gained the summit of the height in less than 15 minutes- The Mexicans who had been firing upon us from the height, fled precipitously upon our approach- We gave them a parting fire as they ran down the hill towards the city which was in full view- planted our flags- and gave three cheers for Tennessee & Col. Haskell! Our shouts must have been distinctly heard from the walls of the city- for as the echo died away, a heavy discharge of cannon was poured into us from several forts, which we did not by any means take as a compliment but gave three more shouts as a token of our defiance- It was now nearly sun down and we encamped upon the hill [page 3] although the cannon balls fell around us untill nearly dark – We killed & wounded several of the Mexicans and up to this day have not lost a man from this Regiment. The next morning (the 11<sup>th</sup>) several other Regiments came up the height, when the cannons again opened their deadly fire upon us- The Rifles (the Regiment to which Tom Ewell belongs) came up then & had one man struck dead by a cannon ball- on the same day a poor little drummer boy had his arm taken off with in ten feet of me- I was blind for several minutes from the sand which the ball threw in my eyes- The forts then commenced throwing bomb shells which exploded around without doing any damage untill about 2 o.c. when Capt. Albertis of the regulars had his head shot off- the same shot also taking off the leg of a corporal who was standing near the Capt. The cannonading has been continued from the enemy forts every day since- We have kept possession of hill, sleeping every night upon the sand without tents- and having a shower of rain upon us every night. I regret to say that Capt. Jones accidentally shot himself through the foot, a few days since- the wound, however, is not [page 4] dangerous- he is doing very well- our Regiment was moved from the hill this morning, and have taken a position near an old convent situated upon the Rail Road immediately before the gates of the city- The cannonading is still going on as I am writing- We have become used to it now- It is really a pretty sight to see the bomb shells wending their deadly way through the air upon their message of destruction! Our army now entirely surrounds the city in a few days more we will open our cannon upon their very walls, and Vera Cruz will either be ours or destroyed- The whole American loss so far has only been six killed and fourteen wounded- The loss of the Mexicans has been much greater- Genl Morellos commands the city, and Genl. La Vega the castle- From the view which I now have of Vera Cruz, it is one of the most beautiful cities I have ever seen. It seems to be built of churches and other splendid public buildings- so many are the spires and cupolas which is presented to the observer from without the walls- The castle of San Juan [page 5] D’ullua is a magnificent work- with a spy glass we can see the men in the castle working the cannon- (There goes another cannon at us!) These rascally Mexicans keep such a noise with their artillery that I scarcely know what I am writing – however we will pay them back in the same coin soon- The north wind at sea for the last five days has prevented us from landing our large cannon but it is now becoming more calm, and we have succeeded in landing some to day- I think we will be ready by day after tomorrow to open up the city- Then the fun will be upon our side- I will write you by every chance I get- I want you to look for the “Memphis Enquirer”. Mr. Irvine who is here and is one of the editors of that paper told me a few days since that he had written a very complimentary account of our charge upon the heights in which I am spoken of in a very complimentary manner- I hope in a few days [page 6] to have the opportunity of doing something more- Genl. Pillow has also spoken very highly of Col. Haskell & his officers in his report to Genl. Scott-

I wrote to Sal upon the first day of the fight and once upon our arrival off the city in the fleet-

Give her my best love- My respects to Mr. Keatts Tom & Sam Henderson Ed Johnson and Jo Jenkins

Maj. Bennett who travelled with you & Sal down the Mississippi desires to be remembered to you both- no more now- God bless you dear mother

Your affectionate Son

Wiley