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Bell J. Wiley to Mrs. McCormack, 28 August 1957

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Emory University, Ga.,
Aug. 28, 1957

Mrs. H. E. McCormack,
Box 127,
Carthage, Miss.

Dear Mrs. McCormack:

The Robert James McCormack Letters, and accompanying papers came while I was in the hospital. I had to go over, unexpectedly, for a hernia operation. I had only a brief sojourn in the hospital and am now at home getting along splendidly.

During the past three days I have read every one of the 92 letters of your grandfather; also the essays and other material that you sent along with them. I appreciate your kindness in giving me the prints of the war-time pictures of Lt. McCormack and his fiancée, Rebecca White Barfield. I shall return the letters and other materials in a few days - as soon as I become sufficiently mobile to get them wrapped and to the post office. I shall return them by registered mail. I am deeply grateful to you for letting me read the letters.

I found much of interest in the letters. But candor requires me to state that I do not believe ~~that~~ they would make a book which would sell enough copies to pay costs of publication. The letters are focused so closely on matters pertaining to the relationships of the writer and his fiancée that I am extremely doubtful ~~that~~ they would have strong appeal for the average reader. Certainly many other collections of letters that I have read recount more fully and more vividly the routine of camp life, the suspense and excitement of combat and the relations of Confederates with their associates in arms. I am sure that your grandfather would have told much more of his camp experiences if ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ he had not been so much absorbed in affairs of the heart and in assuring his affianced of his devotion to her. His course is understandable, and commendable.

Lt. McCormack was better educated than the vast majority of officers and soldiers and his beautiful script stands in marked contrast to the crude writing of most of the Confederate (and Yankee) letters that I have read. His letters reveal him to have been a thoroughly admirable man and a consistently patriotic and conscientious officer.

I know the great labor involved in the transcribing of the letters and the collecting of information about the writer, the recipient and the regiment in which McCormack served. You are to be commended for your splendid work. I wish that I could tell you that the letters would make a publishable book. But I cannot honestly do so.

This is only one man's opinion and there is no reason why you should not seek the judgement of others. Professor J. W. Silver, Chairman of the History Department, University of Mississippi, is an authority on the Confederacy and an able historian. I believe that he would be glad to read the letters and give you an estimate of their publishability; also Miss Charlotte Capers, Director of the Miss. Department of Archives and History. Whatever the ultimate ~~decisinn~~ decision about publication, I hope that you will some day place the originals in the Department of Archives and History at Jackson.

Sincerely,
Bill L. Wiley