

*“Shall we be  
one strong  
united people...”*

BY MIRANDA RECTENWALD  
AND SONYA ROONEY



Eliot's study at 2660 Washington Avenue as it appeared just after the Civil War. The correspondence and diary entries here were mostly likely written here. (Image: Washington University Library Special Collections)

Born in 1811 in New Bedford, Massachusetts, William Greenleaf Eliot trained at Cambridge Divinity School and was ordained a Unitarian minister in 1834. That same year he traveled to St. Louis as a missionary and became the first Unitarian minister west of the Mississippi. Soon followed by his wife Abby, Eliot spent the remainder of his life in St. Louis, raising a family and becoming one of the city's most influential and respected citizens. He worked tirelessly to better society until his death in 1887. Before the Civil War, Eliot helped found and shape Washington University, strengthened the St. Louis Public School System, and advocated for temperance and women's education.

Eliot was a moderate abolitionist and as the Civil War began he spoke out strongly in favor of the Union. Yet Eliot always insisted that charity, education, and especially relief work such as the Western Sanitary Commission remain non-partisan.

Below are selections from Eliot's personal journals, written during the spring and summer of 1861 as the war's presence progressively increased in St. Louis. These journal entries are part of the William Greenleaf Eliot Personal Papers which are housed at University Archives, Department of Special Collections, Washington University Libraries (online finding aid: <http://library.wustl.edu/units/spec/archives/guides/pdf/wgeliot.pdf>).

Dear Sir  
I am  
pleased to see that the P.S.  
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William Greenleaf Eliot (1811-1887) came to St. Louis soon after his ordination as a Unitarian minister in 1834, founding the Church of the Messiah (now First Unitarian Church of St. Louis), the first Unitarian church west of the Mississippi. At the start of Civil War, Eliot was among a small group who helped keep Missouri in the Union. Eliot co-founded Washington University in 1853. (Image: Washington University Library Special Collections)

Eliot's copy of his letter to St. Louis Public Schools President Edward Wyman. Soon after moving to St. Louis, Eliot was one of the founders of St. Louis Public Schools, and held a life-long commitment to education. (Image: Washington University Library Special Collections)

*May 1861, Eliot drafts a letter to Edward Wyman, President of the Board of Directors for the St. Louis public schools, on the need for education despite the war (Notebook 6, page 15)*

Mr. Wyman, President Public Schools –

Dear Sir, In common with all citizens of St. Louis who feel an interest in the welfare of children, I am much gratified to see that the PS [public schools] will be open as usual in September, and that for doing this you place confidence in the well known ability of our fellow citizens. The greatest evils (of war, especially) of Civil War, consist in the demoralization of Society, especially of the young, and those who labor to prevent this by sustaining Schools & Institutions of learning, are doing the work of patriotism in the most effective manner. Whatever may be the differences of opinion among us as to current events, we can all agree upon the necessity of educating the rising generation. The Divine Savior said, “Lovest thou me more than these? Feed my lambs.” So do we say to all who are proven superior Patriots, Take care of the child! Keep them out of harm’s way. Shelter them from the storm & teach them how to become good citizens.

Having these views, permit me to add that several years ago two of my sons were scholars in the PS [public schools] for a year or more, and in part consider it the [illegible] they received from an Institution ever in difficulty. You may expect from me on 1<sup>st</sup> Oct. if the Sch[ools] are re-opened, the [sum?] of \$50 in answer to your appeal. I do this the more readily, because altho the sum is in itself insignificant, I think that small contributions from many persons, will be the best method of supplying your need.

*Eliot’s original notes for a sermon entitled “Loyalty and Religion” delivered at the Church of the Messiah, August 18, 1861 (Notebook 6, page 36)*

Nothing surprises me more than the sluggishness of this country—the slowest to awake to the immensity of intents involved. I hear the matter treated as if one of local or party intent: “For or against the administration.” Lincoln or anti-Lincoln. Every little side-issue is sought. Every mistake in policy, street-outrage, technical violation of law, etc. Seized upon, & made ground of angry words & treasonable action, - as if the subject of country were one of minor interests, of temporary loss or gain.

Not so. It is the existence or non-existence of our country. The permanence or dismemberment of a Nation. Shall we be one strong united people, the leading nation of the world, or scattered into, no one can tell how many communities, at strife among ourselves, to the scorn and contempt of all nations!

Look back less than 12 months, & what were we then? These United States of America! & True, there had been party conflicts & strifes; rights infringed—wrongs unadjusted—bad laws in existence, good laws unenforced—criminations & recriminations, mobs & violence, threats & denunciations—fanatics at the



Jessie Benton Fremont (1824-1902) had long St. Louis roots. Her father was Missouri Sen. Thomas Hart Benton, so she also spent much of her time in Washington, D.C., where she met her future husband, western explorer John Charles Fremont. Jessie Fremont had great influence on her husband, who was at the time commander of the Department of the West. (Image: State Historical Society of Missouri Photo Collection)

North declared that any Slave State was worse than a pandemonium. Fanatics at the South declaring that Eden / Paradise itself would be an imperfect abode, without the Peculiar Institution. We were not a perfect Nation, but with stains enough upon our escutcheon, weakness & sins enough; with too much boasting, too little self-respect.

*Mid-August 1861, Eliot pens a letter to Mrs. Jessie Benton Fremont, regarding the morale of troops under her husband’s command (Notebook 6, page 55)*

Mrs. Fremont,

Dear Madam. May I take the very great liberty of calling your attention, & thru you, the attention of General F[rémont] to another subject closely connected with sanitary reform & well-regulated hospitals: - in as much as cleanliness is one step to Godliness, & the health of the body is in a great degree dependent upon that of the mind.

I have frequently visited the Camps, both in this state & Illinois, and the troops at the Arsenal, & the Hospitals, and it seems to me that the principal thing wanting in our Army, at this time, is Elevation of moral tone. They [soldiers] need to be inspirited, inspirited with true sentiments of Patriotism & Loyalty. They do not comprehend or feel the grandeur of the work, the Sacredness of the Cause, in which they are engaged. They need singleness of purpose, without which no man can be the soldier of liberty. Some of them are ‘on a frolic’; some are serving for pay; some are led by spirit of adoration;

**EVENING TRANSCRIPT.**  
**FRIDAY EVENING, SEPT. 30, 1861.**

**TO THE PATRIOTIC WOMEN OF NEW ENGLAND.**

Well-knit woolen socks, large size, are urgently needed by the sick and wounded soldiers in the hospitals at St. Louis, and in the neighborhood. Several thousand pairs could immediately be used to great advantage. The exposure of the soldiers at the West is very great. Forced marches, guerrilla warfare, the miasma of low and swampy grounds, (as at Cairo, and in Southern Missouri,) are here added to the ordinary risks of a soldier's life. Our own citizens are manifesting great liberality, but the above article, of good quality, such as *New England women make*, cannot be obtained here, at any price. The army of the West is doing its full share, in defence of the Union. Their sick and suffering appeal to you for aid. A large part of some regiments are natives of New England, and have special claims on your sympathy. All packages and boxes may be directed and sent by Express, to "SANITARY COMMISSION, WESTERN DEPARTMENT, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI," and the freight, if not pre-paid, will be paid here. If sent to the care of Messrs. A. G. FARWELL & Co., No. 8 Central wharf, Boston, they will be forwarded at the least possible expense.

WILLIAM G. ELLIOT,  
 Member of the Sanitary Commission.  
 St. Louis, Sept. 16, 1861.

THE APPEAL to the Patriotic Women of New England, in another column, from the Rev. William G. Elliot, D.D., of St. Louis, in behalf of the Sanitary Commission of the Western Department of the Union army, should meet with a hearty response. Dr. Elliot is one of the most influential citizens of Missouri, and is widely known throughout the country for his zeal in behalf of every good word and work. Messrs. Farwell & Co. of Boston, who will take charge of donations for the West, would gladly receive subscriptions in money, with which to purchase the articles needed by the troops.

Sept. 25.  
 First response from Mannah Karns,  
 100 pairs of knit socks.  
 Heaven bless her.

**HOSPITAL**  
**WANT**  
**AT THE CHESEBUT**  
**A HOSPITAL, corner of**  
**FIVE HUNDRED FIFTH**  
**FIVE HUNDRED FIFTH**  
 Patterns of these garments and are most convenient, may be seen at the office of the **MISSION**, Room No. 9, at **MISSOURI**. The ladies of St. Louis, who are interested in the cause, are requested to aid in the sale of these articles. The demand is immediate! Merchants are invited to go forward. (All marks less.)

*The Sanitary Comm. of the West: Dept. appointed by Gen. Fremont, in pursuance of the general object with which it was established, we respect, make the following statement.*

For the Republican.  
**AFTER THE BATTLE.**  
 BY MARSHALL BYRNE.

After the battle—  
 And loud the gun  
 Belches the tale  
 Of a battle won;  
 A battle won,  
 And the victory ours—  
 Sirew the laurel  
 And twine the flowers.

After the battle—  
 'Tis twice we've won,  
 These bays and laurels  
 We now put on—  
 Twice we have filled  
 These new-made graves,  
 Rather than live  
 Like cringing slaves.

After the battle—  
 Go, ring the bell,  
 Till the land and sea  
 With our anthems swell.  
 Up with the flag,  
 Till it proudly waves  
 Its starry folds  
 O'er a thousand graves.

After the battle—  
 With wild, wild cheers  
 The people are hearing;  
 But why those tears?  
 Why not rejoicing,  
 When all are gay?  
 'Tis after the battle,  
 And ours the day.

After the battle—  
 But who shall know,  
 The tears of sorrow,  
 The depths of woe—  
 How many, how sad,  
 The hearts that wail  
 The deadly path  
 Of the iron hail?

After the battle—  
 And this is all,  
 Save the sombre bier—  
 And the darkened pall  
 That pass away  
 To the silent shore—  
 Silent and lone,  
 Ah! evermore.

ANY "NEW ENGLAND WOMAN," whose heart responds to the appeal of Rev. Dr. Elliot (published in this paper a few days since, in behalf of our wounded and suffering soldiers in St. Louis), and who may have it in her power to send one pair (or more) of "well-knit woolen socks, large size," may have an opportunity of so doing by sending them to No. 11 Semmes street, whence they will be forwarded without delay.

Saturday, Sept. 28th, 1861.

Congress created the United States Sanitary Commission in June 1861 to coordinate women volunteering to aid in the war effort in the Civil War; in Missouri, it was officially authorized by regional commander General John Charles Fremont in September, just weeks before Elliot's letter (pictured here) appeared. One function of women involved in local USSC chapters was to raise money through "Sanitary Fairs," including the Mississippi Valley Sanitary Fair held in St. Louis in April 1864. As this page from his scrapbooks attests, Elliot was a supporter of such efforts from the start of the program. (Image: Washington University Library Special Collections)

some by pure love of fighting; some must go with the current. Those who have an inward conviction of duty, to govern & direct them, are the rare exception. The majority of them are very young men, & are terribly exposed to temptation, in danger of utter ruin by the influences of camp life. What is true of the men is also true, to a part[ial] extent, of the officers, the greater of whom are inexperienced & ~~untrained~~ & will be incompetent (incapable) for a long time to come, to explain that strict military discipline, which (in some degree) takes the place of higher principles [following marked out by Eliot] {& which, in connection with those higher principles of morality & religion, can alone make the thorough soldier & the accomplished officer.} ...

*After the opportunity to speak with Miss Dorothea Dix during her visit to St. Louis in August 1861, Eliot drafted a proposal creating a Sanitary Commission for the West, mirroring the U.S. Sanitary Commission established in the Northeast. (Notebook 6, page 59-60)*

Suggestions submitted Sept. 3, 1861, Sanitary Commission for the Department of the West. With a view to the health & comfort of the Volunteer Troops in and near the City of St. Louis, ~~the appointment of~~ a Sanitary Commission is hereby appointed to consist of Five gentlemen, citizens of St. Louis, who will serve voluntarily & for subject to removal at pleasure. The general duty shall be to suggest & carry out, (under the properly constituted military authorities & in compliance with their orders,) such sanitary regulations & reforms in the Camps and Hospitals as the welfare of the Soldierly may ~~from time request~~ demand. This commission shall have authority, under the direction of the Medical Director, to select, fit up & ~~properly~~ furnish suitable buildings for Hospital use, & also for Brigade Hospitals, in such places & under such conditions as circumstances demand ~~may~~ require. It ~~shall~~ will attend to the selection & appointment of women nurses, under the authority & by the direction of Miss. D.L. Dix, (General Superintendent of the Nurses of Military Hospitals in the U.S.) It ~~shall~~ will cooperate with the Surgeons of the General Hospitals, in providing male nurses, and in whatever manner practicably, by their consent. It shall have authority to visit the different camps, to consult with the Commissioning officers, the Colonels & ~~Med.~~ other officers of the General regiments, with regard to the {best methods of improving the} Sanitary & general condition of the troops, by providing proper means for the preservation of health & the prevention of sickness, by proper management of the culinary department in the camps, by establishing systems of drainage, and whatever other means practicable. It will obtain from the Community at large, such additional means of increasing the comfort & promoting the moral & social well being of the men, in Camp & Hospital, as may be needed & are can not be furnished by Government Regulations. It will from time to time report directly to the Commander in Chief of the Department, the condition of Camps & Hospitals, with

such suggestions as may properly be made by a Sanitary Board. ... The above was copied & adopted by General Frémont, Signed – Sept. 5. 1861. Appointed – James E. Yeatman, George Partridge, J.B. Johnson – M.D., Carlos C. Greely, W.G. Eliot. First Meeting, 3 p.m. at McCreery's Building, Fifth & Chestnut.

*September 8, 1861, Eliot writes to Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase (Notebook 6, Pages 61-62, 64)*

Hon. S. P. Chase –

Dear Sir, Will you permit me again to address you upon public affairs, and to request you to ~~lay~~ place my letter before the President, if you consider it worthy of such regard. My desire is to call your attention to the critical condition of Missouri, and the necessity of a vigorous policy & strong measures to save it from complete utter devastation. The great difficulty is that two thirds of the State are disloyal, and a large part of the remainder inactive. A moral paralysis is on the Union men, and the most diabolical zeal animates the Rebels. They seem determined to force Missouri from the Union, by first making it impossible for Union men to live here, and they stop short of no villainy or wickedness to gain their end. {They know that it is a matter of life & death with them, for if Missouri is made loyal, it will be the same fact be made a free state, and their occupation is gone.} Nothing but a strong army of occupation can hold the state & prevent its social destruction.

A month ago we were at the ~~point of defeat~~ brink of ruin. I have reason to know that an uprising of the Secessionists, aided by large numbers of floating population not belonging to us, in St. Louis, was fully arranged, to welcome the Rebel Armies. The day was fixed, the plans matured. Pillow, Hardee & McCullough, counting confidently on [Union General] Lyon's defeat, expected to march here by the 20<sup>th</sup> Aug. They knew the utter defenseless condition of St. Louis, that we had neither troops, nor ammunition, & no organization of the Union part of the peoples. They knew, by their spies here, that Gen. Fremont had no means of reinforcing Lyon, & were therefore sure of victory. – On this subject ~~by the way~~, great error has prevailed in this city, and perhaps may have extended to Washington. General F. [Fremont] & Major McK. [Justin McKinstry] are surely blamed for not sending reinforcements to Springfield, - when they had none to send ... no one can tell whom to trust. Political, moral & social consideration are so mixed together, that men who ought to be true prove false, and a [illegible] necessary [dwells?] upon the Commander in chief to oversee & [inspect?] by this ~~for~~ himself.

Pardon my intrusion. My whole heart is this cause. The war of Barbarism against Civilization, of Slavery against Freedom, is the great event of the 19th C[entury]. May God protect the right. Yrs. truly, --  
Copied & Sent Sept. 8th 1861