

Fort Anderson
Newbern, NC
April 27, 1863

Dear Sister,

Your letters and mothers, of April 12th and 17th together with 3 packages of papers arrived yesterday and I am taking the opportunity of thanking you for your kind remembrance of me. I really had to smile when I read of the strange story that came to your ears in regard to my coming home, although I regretted that you should have been caused unnecessary sorrow. Verily the fools are not all dead yet or such a report never would have been started.

I was glad to hear that you were well and had got safely moved into your new house, but it would certainly seem very strange to me to go back and find you there where I used to spend so many hours in other company. Life, however, is full of changes and this is only one of them.

Just at present there seems to be no changes here, for every thing is as still and calm as if there was no war. Our troops have driven the enemy from Washington and in doing this have secured the whole country around us and cleaned out all the guerillas so that they make no more nightly excursions to our picket lines and for several days not a gun has been fired in earnest. There is some talk that the "Old Brigade" is going to Plymouth and that we shall have to leave our fort and go with them but nothing certain about it. (Plymouth is on the sound, 100 miles from here),

I had rather stay here I think, for I can get to church occasionally, and our mail is quite regular and we have more privileges here than we could at Plymouth. The city of Newbern is a very pleasant place indeed to dwell in. It was founded many years ago and its first settlers as a matter of course in this hot climate went in for shade and wherever there was a chance for a tree to grow, it was planted. Years have rolled away since these trees were planted and those who put them there have gone to their silent home, but though "they rest from their labors" their works do follow them for these trees grow old and gray spread their branches far and wide. In some instances completely shading the streets. There is one street that it is almost impossible for the sun to shine into for near half a mile it is like walking in a bower. You would fall in love with it if you were here though I rather imagine it might surprise you to see the leafy venue of the trees and find the door yards of flowers and roses in full bloom.

Yesterday I went to church. Do you want to know how we go to church here? I will tell you. After morning inspection which takes til noon, I write a pass and go to the 1st. Sergt. To see if I can go to church-yes-. Then I get the Co commander to sign it. Then going to the adjutant I assume the position of a soldier, touch my hat respectfully, and ask, "will I be allowed to attend church today" "yes" and then he signs my pass which now reads as follows omitting date.

Sergt. Whipple of Co. I has leave of absence from camp until 4 p.m. and pass to
Newbern
A. B. Commanding Co
D. C. Adjutant
92nd NY

What if I should not return at 4 p.m.? The provost guard of Newbern would pick me up and place me in "durance vile" until the next morning and then send me to camp and then unless I had a good excuse for my absence you might hear at the next dress parade something like the following,

"Sergt. John E. Whipple of I Co., for unsoldier like conduct on the 26th of April 1863 is hereby reduced to the ranks. By order of etc..

So you see it is no easy thing to get to church in the army and if you have any duty to do on the Sabbath of course you can't go no how. But I went to church and to a Negro church at that. About 150 of them present, all dressed decently, and some fashionably. The Officers and soldiers occupied the galleries and the congregation the space below. Several of the females sported hoops and crinolines that would have done credit to whiter skins than theirs, but which evidently excited the wrath of the woolly headed sexton who declared that "de sisters as wore them big frocks musent crowd into dem seats any more." Whereas one "called lady" indignantly declared that she didn't have on a big frock. "Oh no sister" said the sexton, "I didn't mean you, cause I knows you is always trim". The question of "big frocks" being settled, an unusual amount of singing took place, after which came a stirring exhortation to repent of their sins and come forward and be prayed for. "It will do no good for me to pray for you" quoth the preacher, "unless you pray for yourself. You mjust come and kn eel down here and repent of your sins yourself for God has declared every tub must stand on its own bottom." This appeal seemed to have the deserved effect for in a few minutes several of the "Tubs were standin on their own bottoms" and floundering around in the most approved style, crying and grieving as though their hearts would break. Some commenced a see-saw motion side ways, others rolled their head back and forth or stamped with their feet. Two of the sisters on their knees, threw their arms wildly in the air and struck each others shoulders, many a hearty blow, while an old dame hard by seemed rocking another to sleep in her arms. But the oddest motion of all was that of wench who placing both hands on the bench before her in a stooping posture spent her time in shifting from one foot to the other a sort of a hip a-ty hop motion easier imagined than described, but very laughable withal. You will bear in mind that all this time they kept singing "with all their might and main" and every motion kept time with the music, changing only as the tunes changed. In the galleries soldiers snickered and laughed, Corporals with two stripes say, "here is fun." Lieutenants with one bar, Captains of the army looked down and sneered at it. Captains of the navy looked up and smiled at it, and everybody seemed well pleased, and rated it a fine thing, this some negro meetings. But all this made no difference with the worshippers who seemed totally oblivious of our presence, and only intent upon their great work of saving souls. I noticed that when they prayed every one of their number, men and women and children all knelt and when they sang all found it in it and there was an earnestness of purpose apparent in their countenances as well as their words, which

kept me quite sober in spite of the great propensity for laughing. I wished to stay until the meeting closed but fearing that I might miss the boat left the church and was soon gliding over the peaceful waters of the Nevse to my home in camp. And we will now suppose supper eaten, dress parade finished, and bed time come and will bid you

Good night

John