



# Love amid the Turmoil: The Civil War Letters of William and Mary Vermillion

*Donald C. Elder*

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William Vermillion (1830-1894) served as a captain in Company F of the 36th Iowa Infantry from October 1862 until September 1865. Although he was a physician in Iconium in south central Iowa at the start of the war, after it ended he became a noted lawyer in nearby Centerville; he was also a state senator from 1869 to 1872. Mary Vermillion (1831-1883) was a schoolteacher who grew up in Indiana; she and William married in 1858. In this volume historian Donald Elder provides a careful selection from the hundreds of supportive, informative, and heart-wrenching letters that they wrote each other during the war - the most complete collection of letters exchanged between a husband and a wife during the Civil War. The 36th Iowa was deployed at the Battle of Helena, Arkansas, where it saw its first battle in July 1863; in the abortive attempt on Vicksburg in 1863; and in Steele's successful campaign at Little Rock in 1863. William returned home to recruit new volunteers in 1864 (the 36th had the eighth-highest fatality rate from disease of all the Iowa regiments); he was away when his compatriots were defeated at the Battle of Marks' Mills, Arkansas, during which the regiment suffered so many casualties that they returned to garrison for the rest of the war. At times during the war Mary Vermillion lived with William's parents in Indiana, and the contrast between attitudes toward slavery, African Americans, and secession in Iowa and Indiana adds a good deal of drama to their letters - attitudes in Iowa were not always ideal, but Indiana's were much worse. This additional tension reveals much about the damage suffered by families and communities both north and south. Taken altogether these letters remind us that battles are fought both at home and on the field during wartime and that a strong devotion to such a cause as abolition can allow couples to endure years of separation.

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