

Enduring amputation

Walter Waightstill Lenoir to Thomas Lenoir, April 8, 1863, in the Lenoir Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

As you read...

Walter Waightstill Lenoir was born in 1823 into the wealthy Lenoir family. He attended the University of North Carolina and practiced law in North Carolina before the Civil War. Although Lenoir opposed slavery and disagreed with secession, he joined the Confederate army in January 1862. In September 1862, Lenoir was injured and his right leg was amputated. He returned to his family and moved to Haywood County, where he became a farmer. In 1883, he was elected as a representative to the North Carolina Assembly and served one term.

It is estimated that about 30,000 Union troops had a limb amputated, and it is probable that as many Confederate troops suffered a similar fate.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is Lenoir's tone in this letter? Can you tell how he feels about having an artificial leg?
2. What were some of the limitations of Lenoir's "new" leg?

Dear Thomas

My leg is finished at last, and I have been using it for over a week. It is, I suppose, as good as they make 'em,' but it is a wretched substitute for the one that I left in Virginia. It will take me a good while to become enough accustomed to it to know how it will do, as the skin and flesh where the weight is received will have to become hardened by degrees. At present I can't walk near as well with it as I could with the one Rufus made me; but as I learned that others had the same difficulty at first in using such legs I will not get out of heart yet. I will have to make up my mind however to take very little exercise and to do very little work, which goes hard when I think how much I ought to do. I am greatly pleased to find that I can ride with ease, though I will have to have a gentle and sure footed horse to ride in safety. I can sit, too, much more comfortably with the new leg than I could with the old one.

Your Brother
WW Lenoir

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