

Primary Source: Enduring Amputation ^[1]

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.

Below are two letters written by Walter Waightstill Lenoir to this brother, Thomas Lenoir, in the spring of 1863, following the amputation of his right leg due to wounds sustained in battle near Fairfax court house in early September 1862.

Feb 25, 1863

Dear Brother [Thomas J. Lenoir]

I am encouraged some and discouraged some about my leg. I have learned enough to know that the best artificial leg will not supply the natural one as well as I hoped, and that I must be more of a cripple when the best has been done for me than I allowed myself at first to anticipate. On the other hand I find myself improving in the use of the temporary wooden leg which Rufus made for me, and I hope that even with it I could get about well enough after practice to see to the management of a farm ...

Your affectionate brother
WW Lenoir

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 ^[2] 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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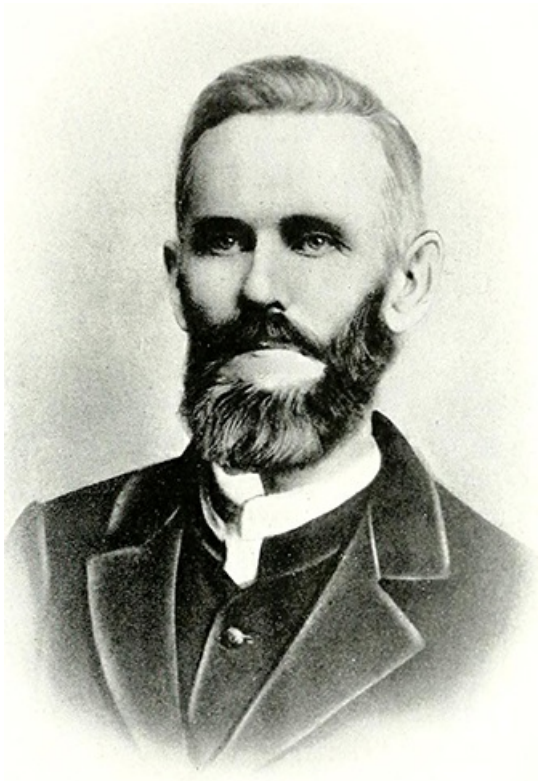
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Walter Waightstill Lenoir

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