



HISTORY

TOWN OF JUPITER

By Richard Procyk

10/06/2005



A Special Love Letter

A few years ago in recognition of Valentine's Day we offered this love letter written by a soldier during the Civil War. With the nation at war, reprinting this moving letter appeared timely for Valentine's Day.

Major Sullivan Ballou wrote his last words of love to his wife 144 years ago but never had a chance to send his letter to his wife, Sarah. He wrote it a week before he died in the Civil War's first Battle of Bull Run; later it was found among his personal property.

Ballou was one of the 600,000 soldiers, Union and Confederate, to die in the Civil War, as he was hit when he rode at the head of his Rhode Island unit. A cannonball shattered his leg, and he died the same day, July 21, 1861.

Ballou a lawyer, had a bloodline that linked him to four presidents: Millard Fillmore, James Garfield, Calvin Coolidge and George Bush. He married Sarah Hart Shumway in 1855 and had two sons, Edgar and William.

He received a hero's funeral at Swan Point Cemetery in Providence where he lies today. Next to his is Sarah, who lived another 55 years and died at the age of 80. She never remarried.

Major Ballou's letter to his wife, July 14, 1861:

My very dear Sarah:

The indications are strong that we shall move in a few days, perhaps tomorrow. Lest I should not be able to write again, I feel impelled to write a few lines that may fall under your eye when I shall be no more...

I have no misgivings about, or lack confidence in the cause in which I am engaged and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how strongly American civilization now leans on the triumph of the government and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and sufferings of the Revolution. And I am willing, perfectly willing, to lay down all my joys in this life to help maintain this government and to pay that debt...

Sarah, my love for you is deathless, it seems to bind me with might cables that nothing but omnipotence could break; yet my love of country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me irresistibly on with all these chains to the battlefield.

The memories of blissful moments I have spent with you come over me and I feel most gratified to God and to you that I have enjoyed them so long. And hard it is for me to give them up and burn to ashes the hopes of future years when, God willing, we might still have lived and loved together and seen our sons grown up to honorable manhood around us. I know, but few and small claims upon divine providence but something whispers to me, perhaps it is the wafted prayer of my little Edgar, that I shall return to my loved ones unharmed.

If I do not, my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you and when my last breath escapes me on the battlefield, it will whisper your name. Forgive my many faults and the many pains I have caused you. How thoughtless and foolish I have often been. How gladly I would wash out with tears every little spot upon your happiness...

But, oh Sarah...if the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you; in the gladdest days and in the darkest night...always, always, and if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my last breath, as the cool air fans your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by. Sarah, do not mourn me dead; think I am gone and wait for thee, for we shall meet again...

Ballou's letter, after all these years, still shines like a beacon of light on Valentine's Day and especially when our troops are overseas, remember...to know that love is all there is, is all you have to know.

Support the Loxahatchee River Historical Society and the Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse by stopping at the visitor center gift shop, Jupiter Lighthouse Park, for books on our history, collectibles and Lighthouse tours (561) 747-8389.

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