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A Reminiscence of Stephen Crane
by Paul Sorrentino, Assistant Professor of English, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

News of the Syracuse University Libraries and the Library Associates
A Reminiscence of Stephen Crane

BY PAUL SORRENTINO

John S. Mayfield (1904-1983), a curator of rare books and manuscripts at Syracuse University from 1961 to 1971, assembled a small, but noteworthy, collection of material by and about Stephen Crane (1871-1900), one of the University’s most famous students. Mayfield himself published several articles on Crane, including three in the Syracuse University Library Associates Courier, which he edited from 1962 to 1970. Judging from Mayfield’s own notes, one can conclude that he intended to publish, perhaps in the Courier, the following brief reminiscence of Crane.

The reminiscence was written by Samuel Riggs on the recto of the frontispiece in a copy of The Red Badge of Courage (New York: Appleton, 1900). Riggs served in Cuba during the Spanish-American War and later became a prominent Rockville, Maryland, lawyer. The note recounts Riggs’s meeting Crane in late July 1898 at Chamberlain’s Hotel in Old Point Comfort, Virginia:

During the Summer of 1898 my Regt 1st Md. Infty was stationed at Fort Monroe Va. Among the sick and wounded, brought from Santiago, Cuba, came Stephen Crane, the author of this book. I met him one afternoon at the ‘Chamberlain’ and carried him to the ‘Casemate Club’ and there gave him the first Mint Julep he ever had in his life. We became good friends and I saw him often during his stay at Old Point Comfort (Fort Monroe). He had gone to Cuba as a correspondent of the New York World but lost his job owing to the account he sent in of the misconduct of the 71st New York while under fire at Santiago.

Sam'l Riggs of Rockville
Capt 1st Md. Infty


2. News article, Montgomery County Sentinel (Rockville, Maryland), 23 December 1943.
Riggs's reference to Joseph Pulitzer's New York World contains a once popularly held misconception: although Crane did lose his job with the newspaper, he did not write a story that got him fired. In the 16 July 1898 issue of that paper, p. 1, an unsigned dispatch accused the officers of the New York 71st Regiment of cowardice during battle.
William Randolph Hearst's rival New York Journal promptly condemned the World for slander and lack of patriotism. Pulitzer tried to offset bad publicity by starting a fund for a memorial to the 71st, but he failed to raise much money. In the midst of the circulation war between Hearst and Pulitzer, Don Carlos Seitz, business manager of the World, arranged to have Crane fired. Although Sylvester Scovel, head of the World staff in Cuba, most likely wrote the dispatch,\(^3\) Seitz seemed bent on using the occasion to denigrate Crane's integrity as a reporter. Instead of defending himself, "Crane very likely shrugged his shoulders at the accusation so as to shield his friend Scovel from blame".\(^4\) Later, Seitz attacked Crane in print for ignoring his job as a correspondent in Cuba and accused him of writing the dispatch.\(^5\) Crane, however, could not have written it, for the dispatch was cabled from Port Antonio, Jamaica, on 15 July, two days after Crane had arrived at Old Point Comfort.

Instead of shirking his duty, as Seitz had charged, Crane submitted a number of memorable dispatches during his service in Cuba. His contemporaries recognized his valor and reportorial skills. Marine Corps Captain G. F. Elliott wrote the Secretary of the Navy that he had "requested [Crane] to act as an aid if one should be needed. He accepted the duty and was of material aid during the action, carrying messages to fire volleys, etc., to the different company commanders."\(^6\) Major Charles McCawley wrote Crane personally: "I, in company with all my brother officers, have always looked back with pleasure and pride upon your service with us in Cuba, for you were the only outsider who saw it all, and we regard you as an honorary member of the [Marine] Corps and hope you will always have the same affection for us as we have for you."\(^7\) Fellow journalist Richard Harding Davis declared that "the best correspondent is probably the man who by his energy and resource sees more of the war, both afloat and ashore,

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7. Stallman, Stephen Crane, 372.
than do his rivals, and who is able to make the public see what he saw. If that is a good definition, Stephen Crane would seem to have distinctly won the first place among correspondents in the late disturbance. . . . Mr. Crane easily led all the rest [in] his power to make the public see what he [saw]." Seitz probably disliked Crane because of an incident involving Crane's friend and fellow correspondent, Edward Marshall. When Marshall was seriously wounded on 24 June while covering a battle, Crane selflessly took down and cabled his friend's dispatch to Marshall's editor at the rival Journal. Following Crane's dismissal from the World, the Journal hired him to report the same war, and he sailed at the end of July for the Puerto Rican campaign.