Figure 1: Confederate cover franked with CSA 1 and sent to W. A. Wilson, care of Cpt. N.A. Pratt, Jordan Grays, Savannah, Georgia.

Dr. Nathaniel Alpheus Pratt Jr. and the CSA Nitre and Mining Bureau

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

The Figure 1 cover is franked with the 5-cent green Scott CSA 1 bearing a portrait of Confederate President Jefferson Davis. It is the first of the Confederate general issues stamps.

The stamp is canceled by a handstamped PAID in an oblong box and the cover is postmarked with a Talmage, Georgia, May 26 [1862] circular date stamp. The envelope is a small commercially made cover addressed to, "W.A. Wilson, Care Cpt. N.A. Pratt of the Jordan Grays, Camp Jackson, Savannah, Ga."

While I had little luck researching the addressee, W.A. Wilson, I was immediately captivated by the significant history of Pratt and thus dropped all attempted research on Wilson.

Dr. Nathaniel Alpheus Pratt Jr. (1834-1906) or Dr. Nat Pratt,[1] as he was more familiarly called, was the son of Reverend Nathaniel Alpheus Pratt, DD, (1796-1879) the founder of the Roswell [Georgia] Presbyterian Church and beloved pastor thereof for more than 40 years.

He graduated from Yale College in 1820 and studied for the ministry at Princeton Theological Seminary.[2] Dr. Pratt's mother was Catherine Barrington King Pratt (1810-1894).[3]

The Pratt family is of English origin and is traced back in direct line through Connecticut and Massachusetts to Hertfordshire in England, where the records show it to have been established since the Middle Ages.

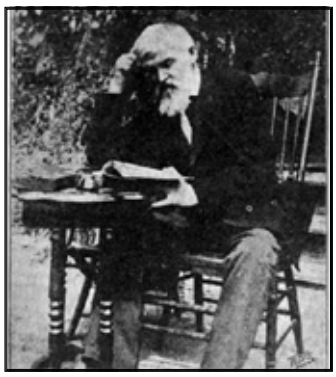


Figure 2: Dr. Nathaniel Alpheus Pratt Jr. (1834-1906) in an undated photo taken in his later years.

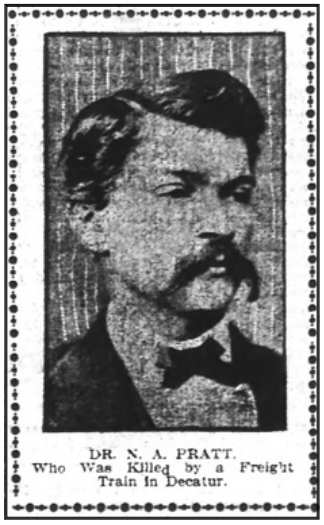
I frequently check the Find a Grave website for brief biographical sketches, but often find them laden with misinformation.

In the case of the Pratt family, it is actually *The Atlanta Constitution*[4] that appears to have gotten things all wrong. All records I found, as well as the gravestone, show Pratt as born in 1834. The newspaper stated that he was born in 1833. It also shows that he organized the Baldwin Blues, which is also incorrect.

He instead organized the Jordan Grays from Baldwin County. It states that he held the rank of captain but does not mention that he was promoted to lieutenant colonel of cavalry.

Dr. Pratt was born at Darien, McIntosh County, Georgia, on January 25, 1834. In 1852, he graduated from Oglethorpe University, from which institution he received both a baccalaureate degree and also a master of arts. For more than a year after his graduation, he remained at the university as a member of its faculty.

After his graduation from Savannah Medical College in 1856, he followed up his scientific studies at the Lawrence Scientific School of Harvard University as a pupil in geology, chemistry, and engineering. He never practiced as a medical doctor. His entire life was devoted to scientific pursuits; he had the advantage of receiving his scientific instruction from the most distinguished men of the day.



DR. N. A. PRATT.
Who Was Killed by a Freight Train in Decatur.

Figure 3: The photo of Dr. Pratt with a headline run on the front page of the November 1, 1906, *The Atlanta Constitution*.

After Dr. Pratt's death, a manuscript found in his desk gave a complete record of his life work from graduation up to a period of six years preceding his death. From this record we learn that, from 1858 to 1861, he was professor of chemistry in Savannah Medical College.

In 1861 he was installed as a professor of chemistry and geology at Oglethorpe University, but the outbreak of the war sidetracked him into the service of the Confederacy. He was one of the best chemists in the South, a pioneer in fertilizer development as well as mining and manufacturing.[5]

On November 28, 1861, Dr. Pratt organized the Jordan Grays, in honor of the Honorable Leonidas Jordan, a cultivated planter and landowner of great wealth, who equipped the company. Dr. Pratt became the Jordan Grays' captain.

Immediately after organization, they were ordered to the coast at Savannah but, in the course of a few months, the Confederate States government, recognizing Dr. Pratt's unusual scientific ability, detached him for service in the Confederate States Nitre & Mining Bureau. The commission assigned him was that of assistant chief, with the rank of lieutenant colonel of cavalry.

As the chief scientific observer of the bureau, his services were largely used in the investigation of the natural resources of the South, particularly in connection with war materials and supplies. One of the interests of the Nitre & Mining Bureau was the manufacture from animal matter of nitrate of potash to be used in the production of gunpowder.

Dr. Pratt served in this capacity throughout the war, his headquarters was at the Nitre & Mining Bureau in Augusta, where an extensive chemical laboratory had been established and was maintained by the Confederate States government.[6]

Figure 5 shows a semi-official cover with the imprint of the "Confederate States of America, War Department, Nitre and Mining

Was in Good Health.

Though well along in years, being 74 years old, Dr. Pratt was in the best of health before his death and had remarked to his wife only a few days ago that he was feeling so well that he believed he could live to be 90 years old, if nothing unforseen happened.

He was born at Darien, Ga., January 25, 1833, and at the beginning of the civil war entered the service of the confederate army as captain of the Baldwin Blues, a company which he organized. However, before he saw active service he was recalled and put in charge of the Nitre and Mining Bureau at Augusta, which manufactured gunpowder for the confederate government. Here he had the rank of captain, holding the position of chief chemist for the confederacy. He served in this capacity through the war.

After Lee's surrender he followed his profession and a few years later discovered the phosphate beds in South Carolina and some time after entered the modern fertilizer business, building the first sulphuric acid and fertilizer works in the south.

In 1868 he established the Etiwan Fertilizer Company, and in 1884 was elected chemist of the state of Georgia, serving four years. On his retirement he started the Georgia Chemical Works, in Kirkwood, which was the only plant of the kind in north Georgia at that time.

On severing connection with this manufactory he operated his own laboratory in Atlanta, and was identified with mining and manufacturing interests as an expert until he retired from active business life, six years ago. Since then he has remained at his home in Decatur, where he was killed yesterday.

Four children and his wife, whom he married as Miss Julia Stubbs, in Milledgeville, her home, on November 14, 1855, survive him. He had been married 51 years, celebrating a golden anniversary last November.

The children are N. P. and George L. Pratt, of the N. P. Pratt Laboratory; Miss Fannie L. Pratt, of Baltimore, Md.; and Mrs. J. S. Kennedy, of Decatur.

The funeral services will be conducted at 3 o'clock this afternoon at the residence of Mrs. Kennedy, in Decatur, with Dr. J. G. Patton, pastor of the First Presbyterian church of that place, officiating. The interment will be at the Decatur cemetery. The following will act as pallbearers: G. B. Scott, C. M. Candler, W. E. McCalla, Edwin P. Ansley, E. H. Wilson, Dr. Wiley S. Ansley, B. F. Boykin and J. W. Caldwell.

Figure 4: Page 3 of the November 1, 1906, *Atlanta Constitution,* announced the death of Dr. Pratt.

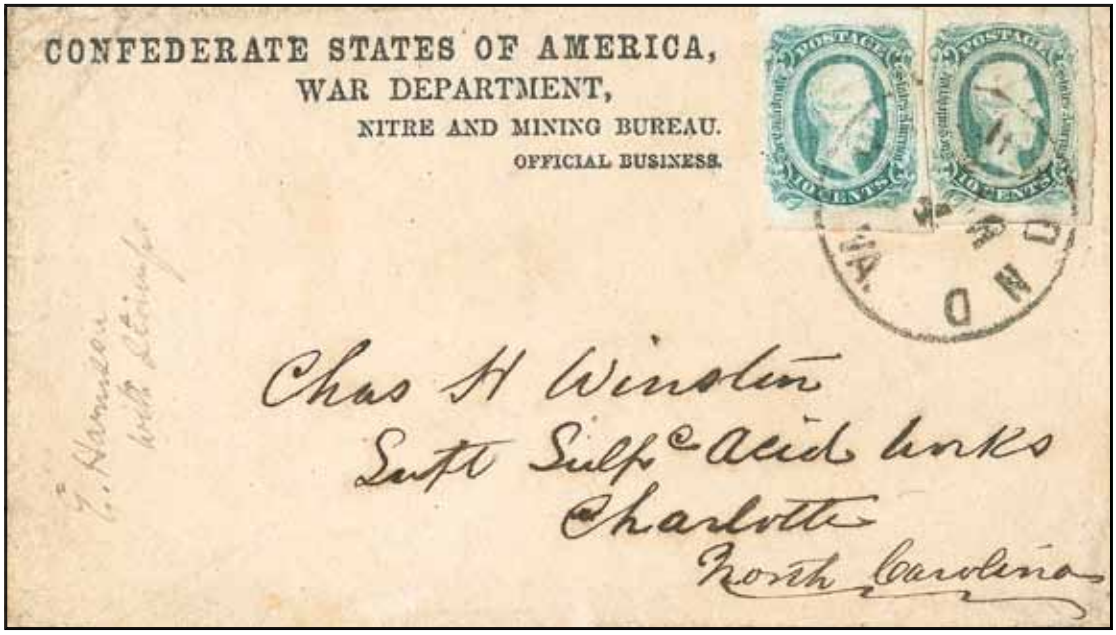


Figure 5: A semi-official cover with an imprint of the Confederate Nitre and Mining Bureau. ***(Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries)***

Bureau, Official Business." It is addressed to the superintendent of sulphur and acid works in Charlotte, North Carolina. Nitre (or niter) is also known as saltpeter and was a key ingredient in gunpowder and other explosives. It was mined in caves in various places in the South.

Tom Lera has studied these imprinted covers extensively. His article about CSA Nitre and Mining Bureau imprinted envelopes appeared in the July-August 2001 *The Confederate Philatelist* and won the CSA Writer's Award for that year. Both his article and his one-frame exhibit are hosted on my website under both articles and exhibits. It won the CSA Trustees' Award for Research.[7]

The South Carolina phosphate mining industry began after the Civil War and dominated world production in the 1880s. Mining began in late 1867 on plantations near Charleston after gentlemen-scientists Francis S. Holmes and St. Julien Ravenel and chemists Nathaniel Pratt and C.U. Shepard discovered that local "stinking stones" contained unusually high amounts of bone phosphate of lime (BPL).

Agricultural chemists had recently discovered that high-BPL phosphate rock was ideal for modern fertilizers, and South Carolina had the largest supply in the southeast.

Holmes and Pratt established the Charleston Mining and Manufacturing Company (CMMC) and quickly bought mining rights to several Ashley River plantations. In 1868, Pratt and Christopher G. Memminger organized the Etiwan Phosphate Company in Charleston, South Carolina, and erected the largest sulfuric acid works in the United States.[8]

Dr. Pratt was also an inventor, credited with patents on several chemical processes, as well as a geologist who mapped mineral deposits all over the South.

He lived all over the southeast, from Florida to Virginia, but lived out his final years in Decatur, Georgia, where he was ultimately struck and killed by a fast-moving Georgia Railroad train.

Nathaniel Palmer Pratt (1858-1942), son of Dr. Pratt, was born in Milledgeville, Georgia. In 1878 he graduated from Washington & Lee University, just two years after his father resigned from the position of chair of applied science.

N.P. Pratt was a chemist and engineer and, also like his father, was an ambitious entrepreneur. He founded the N.P. Pratt Laboratory in 1879, at the age of 21. It would take another decade or so for the N.P. Pratt Laboratory to engage in any serious work.

Biographies of N.P. Pratt suggest that his company was not founded until 1890. By 1900, he held at least a half-dozen patents for the manufacture and production of various chemicals, including sulfuric acid. His patent became the worldwide standard for many years.

According to *Drugs and Pharmacy in the Life of Georgia, 1733-1959*, the Pratt Laboratory was one of the first to manufacture and sell liquid carbon dioxide, which would be used in the newly popular soda fountains.

This connection to soda would result in a very successful career for Pratt's cousin William Pratt Heath, who was Pratt's chief chemist for many years, and would later go on to work for Coca Cola. Pratt Engineering (and, prior to 1909, Pratt Laboratory) not only produced manufacturing equipment, but also built dozens of complete factories around the state, country, and world, including factories in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Brazil. A 1907 view of the N.P. Pratt Laboratory is shown in Figure 7. [9]

Clearly, the lineage of Pratt men was a cut above and their work and discoveries added much to the post-

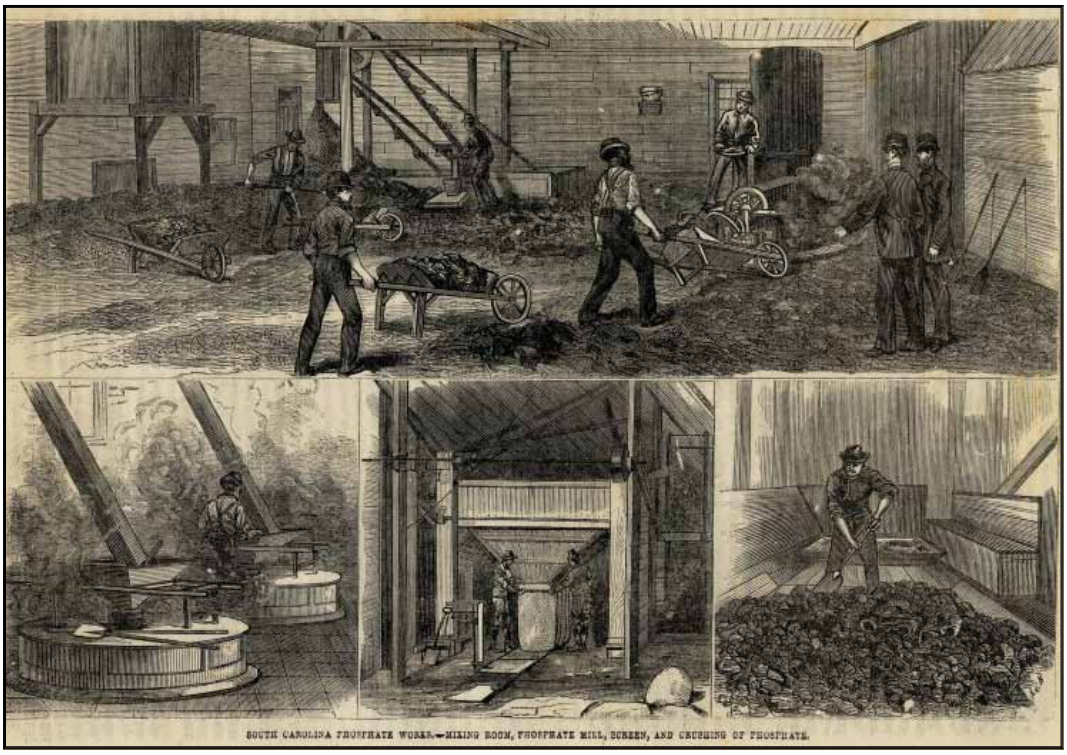


Figure 6:
Phosphate mining as shown in an 1880s *Leslie's Illustrated Weekly.*

Figure 7:
The N.P. Pratt Laboratory. (From *Louisiana Planter, 1907*)

war development of the South. If the discovery that was to benefit his fellow men brought him profit, it was all in the day's work for Dr. Nathaniel Pratt, but the discovery was the thing worthwhile. His sons honorably followed in his footsteps.

For information about the Confederate Stamp Alliance and/or a membership application to join like-minded Civil War postal historians, write to the author at: Trish Kaufmann, 10194 N. Old State Road, Lincoln DE 19960 or e-mail *trishkauf@comcast.net*.

Endnotes

1 Find A Grave Memorial #50260583
2 Find A Grave Memorial #11001219
3 Find A Grave Memorial #11001213
4 *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 1, 1906, pp. 1, 3.
5 William J. Northen and John Temple Graves, editors, *Men of Mark in Georgia: A Complete and Elaborate History of the State from Its Settlement to the Present Time, Chiefly Told in Biographies and Autobiographies of the Most Eminent Men of Each Period of Georgia's Progress and Development, Volume 5*, A.B. Caldwell, 1908, pp. 107-111.
6 Lucian Lamar Knight, *A Standard History of Georgia and Georgians, Volume IV*, Chicago & New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1917, pp. 1888-1892.
7 Thomas Lera, "Semi-Official Imprinted Envelopes of the CSA Nitre and Mining Bureau," *The Confederate Philatelist*, July-August 2001, pp. 113-137. *http://www.trishkaufmann.com/files/CSA_Nitre_and_Mining_reduced- size.pdf*
8 Shepherd W. McKinley. *History: Phosphate in S.C.*, Statehouse Report, June 12, 2015. *http://www.statehousereport.com/2015/06/12/history-phosphate-in-s-c/ Accessed July 31, 2015*
9 Helen P. Trimpi, *Crimson Confederates: Harvard Men who Fought for the South*, Knoxville, Tenn: The University of Tennessee Press, 2010, pp. 239-240.

(Patricia (Trish) Kaufmann is a fulltime dealer specializing solely in Confederate States stamps and postal history. She began collecting in the mid 1960s and has been a professional philatelist since 1973. E-mail: trishkauf@comcast.net*)*