

# One of our great American Specialties

Here is a subject philatelists have been enthralled with for over 100 years.



## The Confederate Post

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

### Lordy and Neptune...a tale of friendship and loyalty



23rd New York Infantry mess tent.



"Our Mess" at Beaufort, S.C. April 1862. Both photos from the Library of Congress collection of glass negatives.

Henry Lord Page King (1831-1862), known as "Lordy", and a slave named Neptune Small, Jr. (1831-1907) were only five months apart in age—devoted friends from childhood until death.

The illustrated cover is a mourning cover addressed to "Lieut. H. Lord P. King C.S.A., Oglethorpe Barracks, Savannah, Georgia". It is franked with a U.S. 3¢ 1861 dull red tied with a manuscript cancel of Frederica Ga., April 12th (1861). It is unlisted in the 1986 *New Dietz Catalog*, but will be in the forthcoming CSA Catalog.

Lordy was born to Thomas Butler King and Anna Matilda Page King, one of ten children of wealth and privilege at Retreat Plantation on St. Simons Island, Georgia. Lordy attended Yale and Harvard Law School and practiced law in Savannah in the years prior to the war. When war broke out, the King brothers were quick to sign up. Lordy saw action at the Peninsula, Richmond, Sharpsburg and witnessed the fall of Harper's Ferry.

As was the custom of the aristocratic elite, a body servant accompanied him to the battlefield. That servant was his close childhood companion, Neptune. According to family lore, Neptune, Sr., a carpenter at Retreat Plantation, had chosen the name "Small" after emancipation because he himself was small in stature. His wife was Sukey, a trusted nurse to the slaves in the hospital built by Lordy's mother, Anna King. Young Neptune was chosen as a playmate to the King boys and developed a particularly close bond with Lordy, nearest him in age.

Lordy was the aide-de-camp of Maj. Gen. Lafayette McLaws. On December 13, 1862, during the Battle of Fredericksburg, orders needed to be carried to Brig. Gen. Thomas R. R. Cobb, grandson of Howell Cobb. Lordy accepted the dangerous assignment and paid with it for his life. Cobb was mortally wounded the same day.

When night fell and Lordy had not returned, Neptune's heart was heavy. He crawled across the battlefield in the black of night in an agonizing search for his friend. He found him face down but recognized him by his hair. Neptune found the best coffin he could buy and took Lordy home to Georgia with his horse and personal effects. Lordy was buried in Savannah until the family could give him a burial next to his mother in the family plot at Christ Church Cemetery on St. Simon's Island after the war had ended.

For his bravery and great loyalty, Neptune was told that he could stay home with his wife and newly born child for the duration of the war. Instead, he chose to join Lordy's brother Richard Cuyler "Tip" King, on the battlefield as his servant. Tip was taken prisoner at Nashville in December 1864. After the war, Neptune went home to Retreat Plantation, which had been ruined by the occupation of Union soldiers using it as their island headquarters and Freedman's Bureau—the fields overgrown and the house uninhabitable.

Neptune was granted a parcel of land for his services to the King family and his fidelity during the war. He lived there for forty years after the war as a free man. After his death, Neptune's home on St. Simon's Island became Neptune Park. A live oak tree was planted there in his memory. It was his dying wish that this land overlooking the ocean be forever used as a park. The streets surrounding it bear the names of the King children.

The bond of Neptune and Lordy is one of personal courage, honor and loyalty. Their moving story is chronicled in a book by Pamela Bauer Mueller entitled *Neptune's Honor* written in the mixed voice of the Geechee-Gullah culture. Lordy's campaign diary has been published and his dynamic mother's story in her own words, *Anna: The Letters of a St. Simons Island Plantation Mistress, 1817-1859*. The King papers (1773-1868) are housed in the University of North Carolina Libraries Collection. ☒