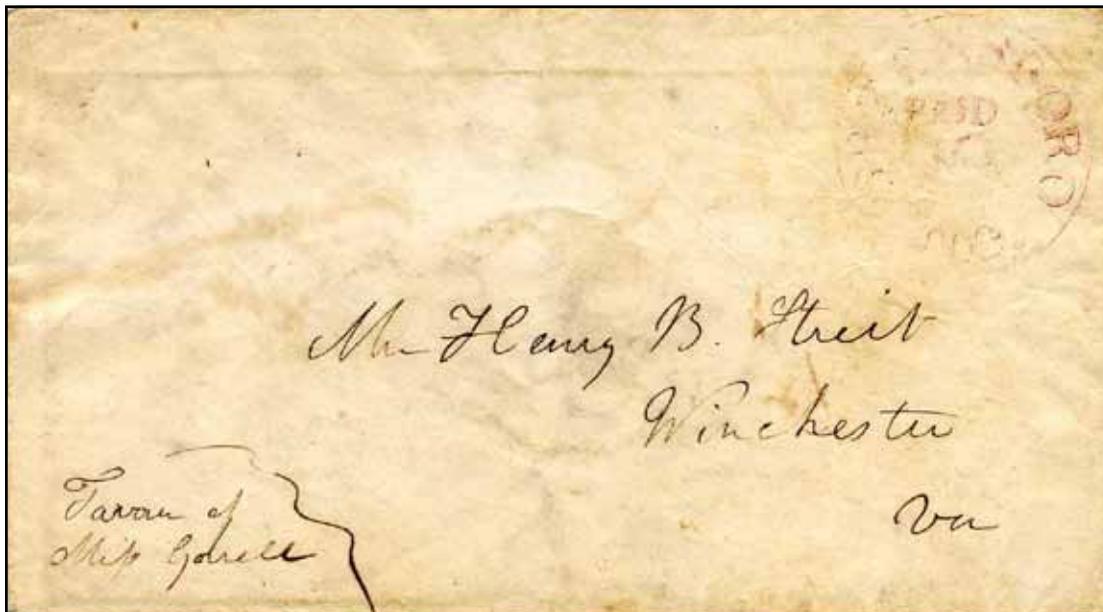


Confederate Collectanea



A Greensboro Postmaster's Provisional Not Used for the Purpose Intended

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

In Figure 1, the red Greensboro, North Carolina, provisional marking is struck lightly in the upper right hand corner of the envelope. It was prepared and sold in advance by Postmaster James E. Thom, who succeeded U.S. Postmaster Branson G. Graham in 1861 and served until the end of the war. Neither a date nor postal markings appear on the cover and it did not pass through the mails.

In the lower left hand corner is a thank you endorsement "Favour of Miss Gorrell," a common indication of hand delivery sometimes seen as "courtesy of," "urbanity of" or similar wording.

There is a split among Confederate students about how to refer to this sort of use. While clearly the cover was used, the provisional itself was not used for the purpose intended. Thus, one school of thought is that it should be classified as "unused," while the other is that it is "used."

There is merit to both schools of thought. I polled a half dozen prominent postal historians

and it was virtually an exact split as to how to refer to this set of circumstances.

CSA Certificate #05782 describes this cover as "CSA SC 32XU1 (10¢ red Greensboro, N.C. provisional) not postally used but carried outside the mail."

The back of the cover has the familiar pencil notations of the late Jack E. Molesworth, who called it "Probably the only unused (Scott) #32XU1 known – unlisted unused." Whichever side you come down on, this is the only one I have seen where the provisional was not used for the purpose intended.

Ralph Gorrell (1803-1875) of Greensboro was an attorney, businessman and Whig state legislator whose papers may be found at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Gorrell was appointed a depositary at Greensboro by the Confederate Treasury Department during the Civil War. He also was the Guilford County clerk and "master in equity" for many years, until the position was abolished in 1868.

Gorrell had two daughters, ages 14 and 17 per the 1860 census, one of whom obviously carried the subject cover. The addressee, Henry B. Streit (1802-1863), was a prominent merchant in Winchester.

Henry Clay Gorrell, one of Gorrell's sons, was captain of Company E, 2nd North Carolina Regiment. He was killed in action on June 21, 1862 near Richmond. Henry was noted in military records as a 22-year old druggist.

Porter and Gorrell [drug] Store was a fixture in Greensboro originally established as Porter's Drug Store by William Clarkson Porter in 1854. It had many name changes over the years as Porter's partners changed.

Porter was "Uncle Clark" to William Sydney Porter (born 1862), better known as O. Henry, the most popular short story writer of his era. He wrote his first short story from prison under a pen name. He used several pseudonyms, but after serving three years for embezzlement of bank funds, the former bank teller chose to write as O. Henry. Whether he was guilty of embezzlement, or simply an inept bookkeeper, is a matter of historical debate.

Guilford County residents voted 2,771 to 113 against secession in February 1861, but North Carolina withdrew from the Union on May 20, 1861 and Guilford County had little choice but to follow. Six local military units served.

Just as Nathanael Greene (for whom the town was named) chose the Greensboro area in 1781 to fight the British, Confederate Gen. Joseph E. Johnston selected the town as an appropriate place to engage Gen. Sherman in battle in 1865. Fortunately, Lee's surrender at Appomattox on April 9 made that fight unnecessary.

At the time of the war, Greensboro had a population of about 2,000. Although there were no battles in Greensboro, about 90,000 people were in the area during the last days of the war. These included refugees from battle zones in eastern North Carolina, wounded soldiers arriving by train for care in makeshift hospitals and both Confederate and Union troops. Confederate President Jefferson Davis and his cabinet arrived in Greensboro by train on their retreat from Richmond after Lee's surrender, thus briefly making it the seat of government.

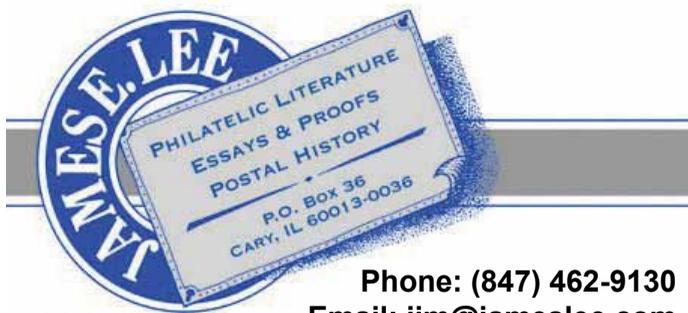
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