

The Civil War Post

Patricia A. Kaufmann



Col. Henry H. Cumming; Father of the Augusta Canal

A top sheet-margin pair of 5¢ blue lithographed issues, Confederate Stamp Alliance No. 4,¹ franks the cover shown in Figure 1. The large sheet margin wraps over the top of the cover by a couple of millimeters. The cover is tied by a Richmond, Va., 1862 circular datestamp (either March or May) and is addressed to Col. H.H. Cumming, Augusta, Ga., with a manuscript directive at lower left “For E.C.H.”

Henry Harford Cumming

Henry H. Cumming (1799-1866), shown in Figure 2, was a lifelong resident of Augusta, actively involved in the legal, social and economic affairs of that city during the antebellum period.

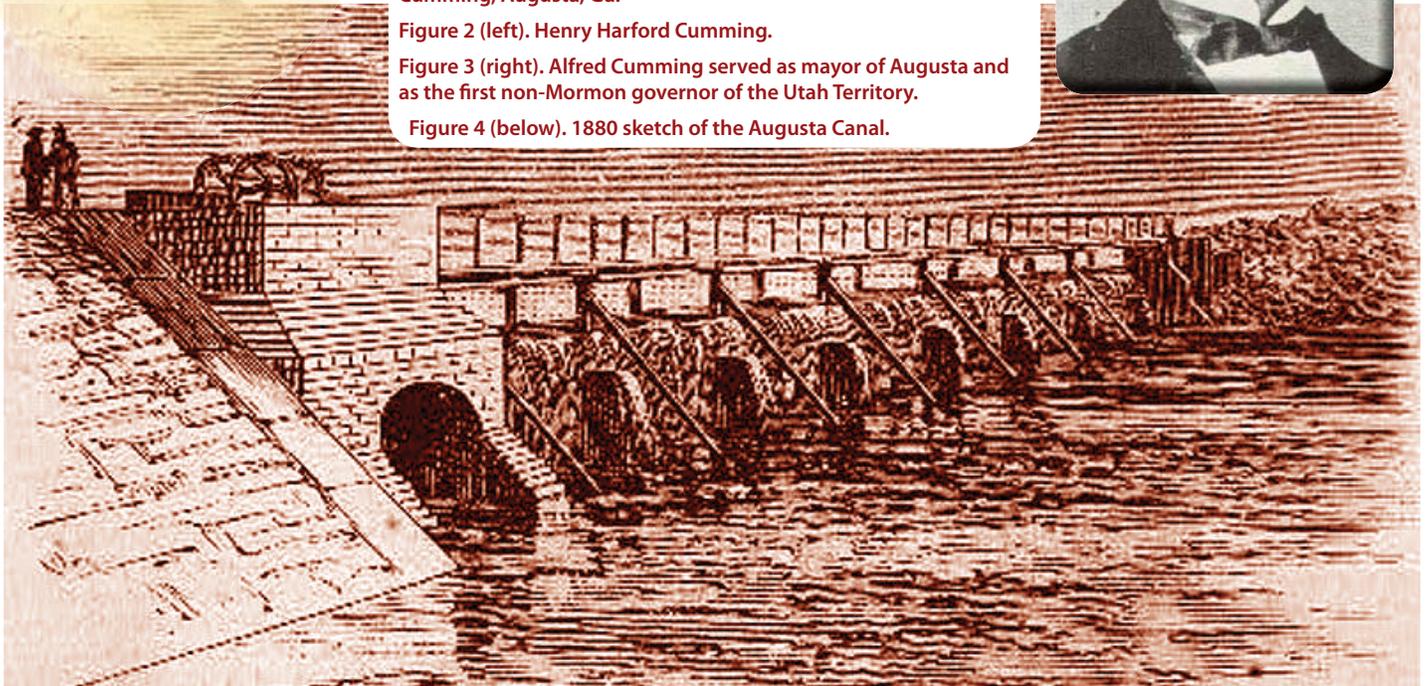
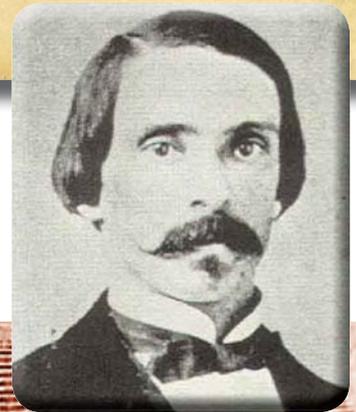
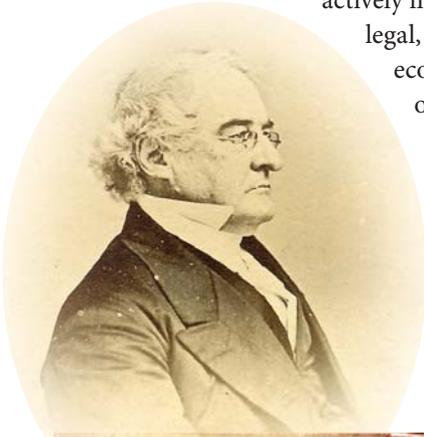
He was born into a prominent and accomplished Georgia family. His father, Thomas, served as the city’s first mayor after Augusta’s incorporation in 1789. Henry was

Figure 1 (above). Franked by a pair of 5¢ blue lithographs and tied by Richmond postmark, this cover is addressed to Col. H.H. Cumming, Augusta, Ga.

Figure 2 (left). Henry Harford Cumming.

Figure 3 (right). Alfred Cumming served as mayor of Augusta and as the first non-Mormon governor of the Utah Territory.

Figure 4 (below). 1880 sketch of the Augusta Canal.



the grandson of Joseph Clay of Savannah, a member of the Continental Congress and a former deputy paymaster general for the Continental Army during the American Revolution.

Henry Cumming's brother, Alfred, Figure 3, also served as mayor of Augusta and as the first non-Mormon governor of the Utah Territory. Another brother, William, was offered the position of quartermaster general of the U.S. Army twice – in 1818 and in 1847 – and gained national notoriety when he fought two politically motivated duels with George McDuffie in 1822.

Henry Cumming was appointed by John Forsyth, U.S. minister to Spain, as an attaché for the American legation to that country. He turned down the post, choosing instead to stay in Georgia to marry Julia A. Bryan of Hancock County.^{2,3} It clearly was the right decision, as Henry and Julia were married for 40 years and produced eight children.

Although interested in Augusta's commercial condition and engaged in several business pursuits, Cumming was by profession an attorney. He began practicing law in 1822 in partnership with George W. Crawford, a future governor of Georgia and secretary of war under President Zachary Taylor. Cumming's civil activities were propelled by a strong sense of civic duty. His ability to persuade others rested, in part, on his considerable standing in the community.

Today, we would say Henry was a "mover and shaker," a term coined more than 100 years ago by Arthur O'Shaughnessy in his 1873 poem, *Ode*. This poem has been set to music multiple times and quoted repeatedly over a century's time, including the reference to "Movers and Shakers."⁴ It is often referred to by its first two lines, "We are the music makers, And we are the dreamers of dreams." Online you'll find it as a quote from fictional candymaker Willy Wonka, but he is quoting O'Shaughnessy.

Henry Cumming is best remembered as the father of the Augusta Canal, which began construction in 1844. A group of prominent and wealthy citizens had looked at the canal in Lowell, Mass., and their interest led to the creation of the Augusta Canal project, submitted by Cumming, who conceived and promoted it. Cumming envisioned the canal as a solution to the economic downturn of the 1840s.

Augusta had been, for years, an important commercial and market center for the rich cotton lands surrounding the city. The collapse of cotton prices with the depression of 1837 left Augusta in perilous economic shape. Cumming believed the power provided by a canal would enable Augusta to develop a manufacturing base and diversify the city's economy. It would also enable the city to compete with northern industry.

Because no one individual had sufficient capital to underwrite such a project, a group of men, led by John Pendleton King, made the canal a reality. King was an attorney, a planter and politician, as well as a former U.S. senator. They incorporated a canal company and raised \$500,000.⁵

On Nov. 23, 1846, water was first released into the Augusta Canal. The first level of the canal was complete. The second and third levels were completed in 1848 and brought the full length of the canal to nine miles. In 1849, ownership of the canal was transferred to the city of Augusta. Figures 4 and 5 show the canal in an 1880 sketch and as it appears today.

By the early 1850s, Augusta boasted textile mills, a sawmill, a gristmill and other factories because of the canal. The construction of the Confederate Powderworks along two miles of the canal after the outbreak of the Civil War illustrates the canal's significance to Augusta and the South.

The canal played a large part in the thinking of Col. G.W. Rains in building the Confederate Powderworks, also known as the Augusta Powderworks, in Augusta.

More than 2,750,000 pounds of first-quality gunpowder– the majority of the powder used by the Confederacy – was produced there before its closure on April 18, 1865. The Augusta Powderworks produced enough gunpowder to fully meet the needs

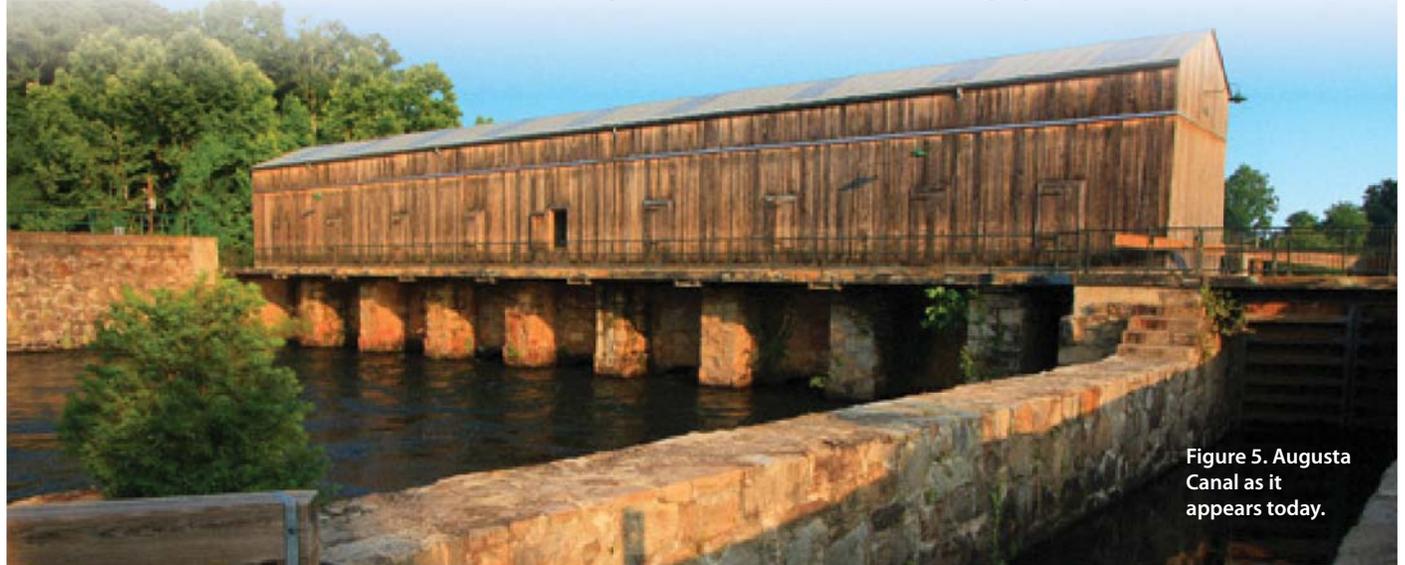


Figure 5. Augusta Canal as it appears today.

of the Confederate armies and still retained a surplus of 70,000 pounds at the end of the war.⁶ It has been said the Confederacy never lost a battle for lack of powder.

Other war-related industries also sprang up along the three levels of the waterway. Augustans considered their city “the heart of the Confederacy.”

The 150-foot obelisk chimney (Figure 6) still stands on the Augusta Canal and is one of the most recognizable features in the Augusta skyline.⁷ It is the only remaining structure from the original Confederate Powderworks. Although the massive structure was seized and dismantled after the war ended, Col. Rains asked in 1872 that the obelisk chimney be spared, as he had designed it to “...remain a monument to the Confederacy, should the Powderworks pass away.”

I did not find evidence of why Cumming was addressed as colonel unless it was simply an honorary title as a sign of respect, which was not unusual in Southern culture at the time.

There is record of a soldier named Henry H. Cumming who served as a private in Company A, Georgia 2nd Battalion Local Defense Infantry (State Guards).

Figure 6. Obelisk chimney on the former site of the Confederate Powderworks, the only remaining original structure.

It is not a certainty that this is the same Cumming, but is mentioned, should that be the case. I did not find a son by that name, but Henry seems rather old to have served in any military capacity, even if only in a local group.

Illustrative of his character was his vocal opposition to an 1859 Georgia law that permitted local courts to sell free African-Americans with “lawless” reputations into slavery.

Cumming publicly denounced the law as

arbitrary and unjust during a period of powerful southern whites’ heightened sensitivity to attacks on slavery or southern racial subjugation.

Cumming did not favor Georgia’s immediate secession upon Abraham Lincoln’s election as U.S. presi-

dent. He did, however, support the Confederacy once Georgia left the Union. At the end of the war, Cumming recognized that sectional divisions had to be healed. Accordingly, he assisted in writing public resolutions that offered loyalty to the new government, expressed dismay at Lincoln’s assassination, and thanked occupying troops for maintaining good relations with Augustans. Henry Cumming died in 1866.⁸

After the war, the city decided to enlarge the canal at a cost of \$173,000.

Figure 7. Main sign for the Augusta Canal Discovery Center, 2014.



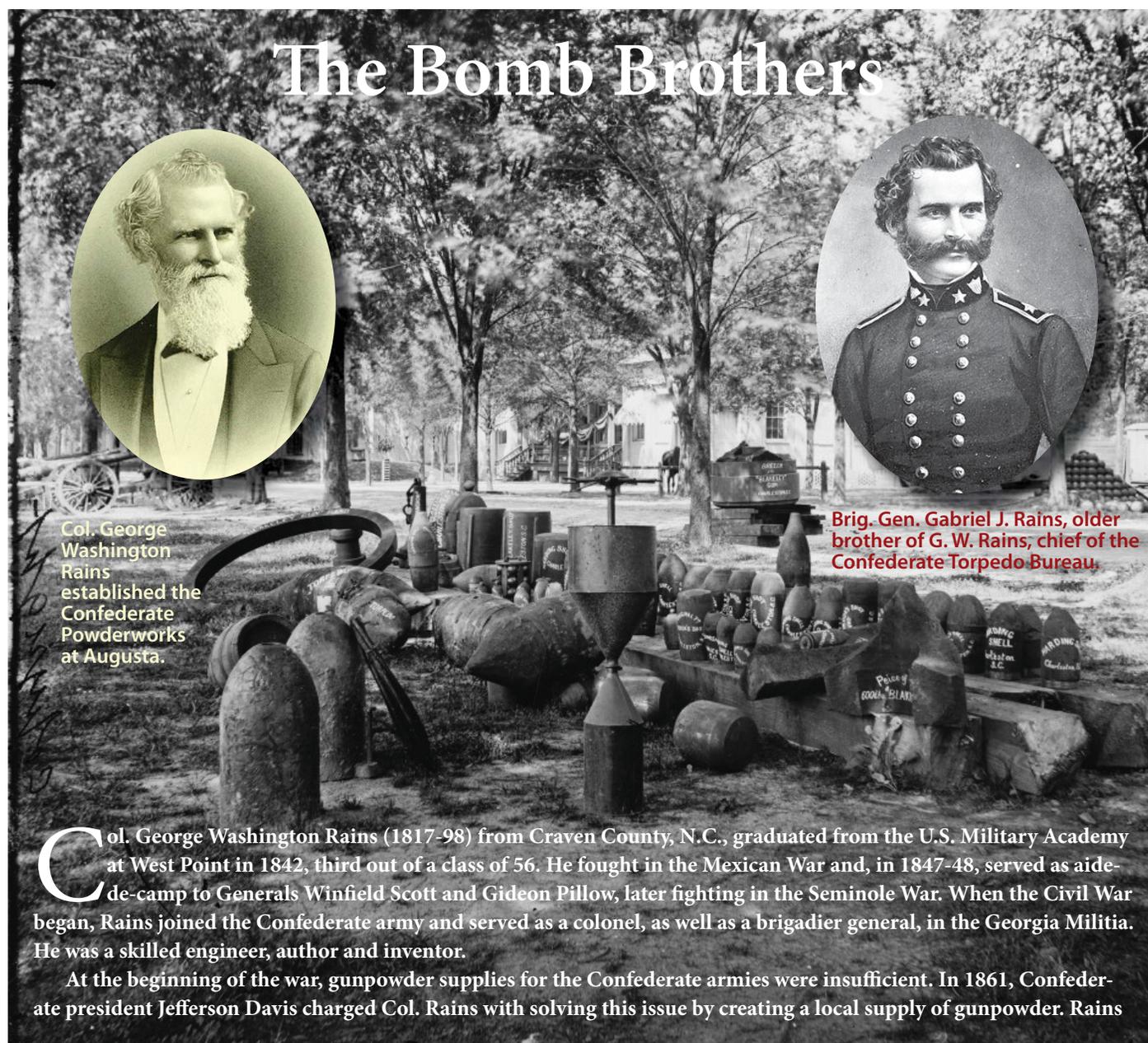
Green and Company, contractors, brought in more than 200 Chinese workers in May 1872. After the enlargement was completed in 1875, it left the canal much as it is today. The canal is nine miles long, 11 feet deep, 106 feet wide at the bottom and 150 feet wide at the surface. Instead of the original 600 horsepower, it is now capable of producing 14,000 horsepower.

Figure 7 shows the main sign for the Augusta Canal Discovery Center, installed in 2014. It is said that the enlarged canal is outdone only by the Suez Canal.⁹

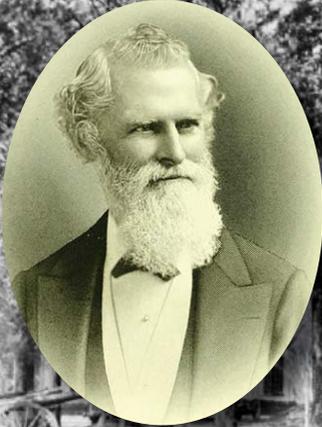
The author enjoys hearing from readers and may be reached at trishkauf@comcast.net. 

Endnotes

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8. Connolly
9. Woodard



The Bomb Brothers



Col. George Washington Rains established the Confederate Powderworks at Augusta.



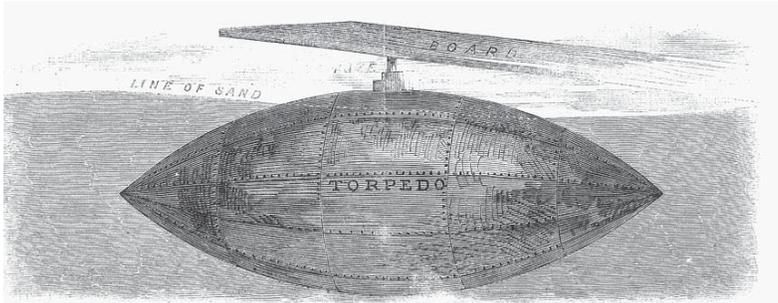
Brig. Gen. Gabriel J. Rains, older brother of G. W. Rains, chief of the Confederate Torpedo Bureau.

Col. George Washington Rains (1817-98) from Craven County, N.C., graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1842, third out of a class of 56. He fought in the Mexican War and, in 1847-48, served as aide-de-camp to Generals Winfield Scott and Gideon Pillow, later fighting in the Seminole War. When the Civil War began, Rains joined the Confederate army and served as a colonel, as well as a brigadier general, in the Georgia Militia. He was a skilled engineer, author and inventor.

At the beginning of the war, gunpowder supplies for the Confederate armies were insufficient. In 1861, Confederate president Jefferson Davis charged Col. Rains with solving this issue by creating a local supply of gunpowder. Rains



Examples of a water torpedo (above, from the Charlestown Inlet) and a "land torpedo (below), an early form of land mine.



age might have been done had the Confederacy been willing to put effort and money into torpedo defense earlier in the war. Perhaps Rains' greatest accomplishment in the use of explosives occurred on Aug. 9, 1864, when two of his agents exploded a bomb at the wharfs of Ulysses S. Grant's supply base at City Point, Va., causing a high loss of life and \$4 million in damages.

Together, brothers George and Gabriel Rains were known as the "Bomb Brothers." ☰

chose the flat lands by the Augusta Canal as the most suitable site for making the much-needed gunpowder. The Confederate Powderworks, established by Rains, was the second largest gunpowder factory in the world during the 19th century, producing 3.5 tons a day.

Confederate Brigadier Gen. Gabriel J. Rains (1803-81) was the older brother of Col. G.W. Rains. He also attended West Point. At the outbreak of the Civil War, he resigned his commission and offered his services to the Confederacy.

The older Rains invented an early land mine and developed two underwater mines as well. He was in command of the Torpedo Bureau in Richmond, charged with the production of various explosive devices. He was formally appointed head of the newly created Torpedo Bureau June 17, 1864, and remained in that position until the close of the war. To some, he is regarded as the "father of modern mine warfare."

Rains' torpedoes were a great success. They provided an effective deterrent to Union naval attack, and they sank about 58 Union vessels. Greater damage



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