

## Research Complications: The Family of Bolling Hall

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

Recently, I received an e-mail from a colleague extolling the virtues of a person whom he declared to be a great researcher. The researcher had found a photo of a tombstone. My correspondent mentioned that the tombstone not only cited the deceased's father, but his sister as well. I immediately surmised that this was not the case.

Figure 1 shows the gravestone of James Abercrombie Hall (1840-1868). It cites the deceased as the son of "Bolling Hall 2nd" and Mary Louisa Crenshaw Hall (1819-1858). This is not the sister, as my correspondent forcefully asserted. Rather, this is the mother, as clearly noted by the maiden name Crenshaw. The sister was Mary Louisa Hall (1843-1863). Both were named Mary. Such a mistake can snowball out of control if care is not taken.

As I wrote this article, multiple e-mails were coming in where my correspondent still declared the Mary noted on the gravestone to be the sister and not the mother. Sorry. I'm not believing that the deceased is the son of his father and his sister! That would be called incest—and not likely to be inscribed on a gravestone. Both the mother and sister were named Mary, but simple logic tells you the Mary on the gravestone is not the sister. After a flurry of further edifying e-mails, he finally believed me.

By coincidence, the cover I was in the process of researching when that e-mail exchange took place was from the same correspondence. The gravestone inscription helped me resolve a problem I was struggling with as to the multiple names of Bolling Hall, their children, and their relationships to each other.

Figure 2 shows a Confederate soldier's cover postmarked with a Murfreesboro, Tennessee, December 11, 1862, circular datestamp. It bears a matching curved "DUE 10" (*CSA Catalog*<sup>1</sup> Type D) and is addressed to "Maj. Bolling Hall, Montgomery, Ala."

The envelope is endorsed along the left side with the mandated "Lieut. J. A. Hall, Co. K, 24 Ala Regt." Confederate soldiers were allowed to send their mail postage due, which was not free of charge. Such letters were generally sent to family or friends who were quite



Figure 1: Gravestone of James Abercrombie Hall (1840-1868), son of Bolling Hall II (1813-1897).

happy to pay the postage to hear from their loved ones on the battlefield.

I tend to use a combination of primary sources and try not to take only one source as "gospel." My principal primary source is the military records housed in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) that are conveniently accessed online by paid subscription through *Fold3.com*. This is not a reasonable choice for everyone, but for someone who uses it regularly, it is a wonderful tool. Nonetheless, it is not without problems.

If you have the name of the soldier and his unit, as you do with the endorsement on Confederate soldiers' mail, you have access to their military records from NARA. The Confederate records are far more detailed than the U.S. records, which tend to simply list name and unit on index cards. Bleh—not very helpful. You already knew that from the cover at hand.

Confederate records can sometimes have dozens of original microfilmed documents in one soldier's file. But occasionally, they too only have an index card or minimal information. Every case is different, but many files are very detailed. The higher the rank of the soldier, the more information is likely to be included.

Civil War military records are mostly handwritten. Names are often spelled phonetically, making it necessary to check records for how the researcher



Figure 2: A Murfreesboro, Tenn. soldier's cover from Lt. J.A. Hall to his father, Major Bolling Hall.

thinks they might be spelled, as well as how they are actually written by the soldiers themselves. Often, the best source is the subject cover.

Was the name Ashcroft or was it perhaps Ashcraft? That one letter may make all the difference and you should check every spelling or variation you can think of. Sometimes records for the same person are spelled multiple ways with two, three, or even more variations. Some immigrants changed the spelling of their names, thus the son might have spelled the name differently than the father. Yet they may have served in the same unit. Or, maybe the handwriting is just impossible to comprehend, or the microfilm record too washed out to read.

### James Abercrombie Hall

James Abercrombie Hall (1840-1868), the sender of the subject cover, was a son of Bolling Hall II and Mary Louisa Crenshaw Hall. James is shown in military records enlisting as a lieutenant in Company K of the 24th Alabama Infantry. There are 38 pages in his file, including his promotion to captain. He is noted as receiving the Medal of Honor for his service at the Battle of Murfreesboro per General Order 131/3 issued October 3, 1863.

Figure 3 shows the applicable NARA file card. I could not easily find any further information on this award, but the information is doubtless out there for another diligent researcher.

So, how do I know his middle name was Abercrombie when it is simply J.A. Hall on his military records and on the cover in hand? Sometimes it is as simple as a Google search, which is ever widened as more information is obtained. Occasionally, my most fascinating information has begun simply with a Google search—the simpler the better.

Another of the places I often check is *findagrave.com*. While it does not always have what I'm looking for, it is a great resource. Note that the gravestone in Figure 1 gave James' middle name as Abercrombie, which was further confirmed by family history sources. But one has to be cautious when using this or any source.

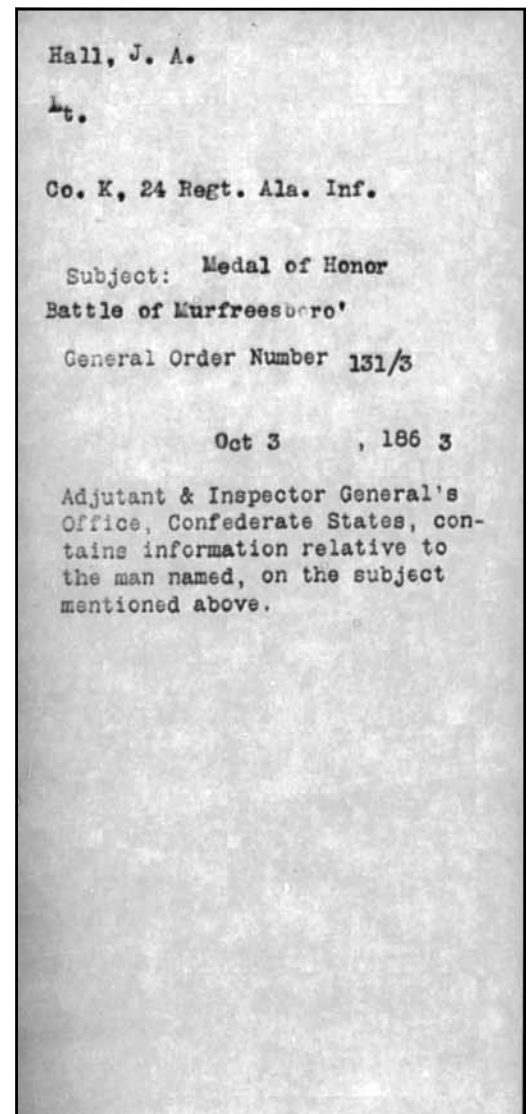


Figure 3: Military service record card for Lt. J.A. Hall showing “Medal of Honor/Battle of Murfreesboro.”

### Bolling Hall

Bolling Hall (1767-1836)<sup>2</sup> was born in Virginia and was the first of a line of sons with that name. He was married to Jane Abercrombie Hall (1781-1841). Note her maiden name, which (as often) is James' middle name—a sure sign I was on the right track.

The Find A Grave website lists 11 children from their union. Bolling Hall was a U.S. congressman who served in the Revolutionary War at the age of 16.

From there, he emigrated to Georgia, serving in both the Georgia and U.S. House of Representatives. After leaving Congress, Hall moved to Alabama, establishing an Autauga (now Elmore) County plantation he called “Ellerslie,” which still stands and is included on Alabama’s Register of Landmarks and Heritage. Figure 4, from Find A Grave, shows his gravestone and Figure 5 shows hers.



Figure 4: Gravestone of Bolling Hall (1767-1836), the first in a line of sons of the same name.

### Bolling Hall II

Bolling Hall II (1813-1897) was born in Georgia to Bolling Hall (the first) and Jane Abercrombie Hall. He graduated from the University of Georgia in 1831, when he was only 18.

In 1834, he was admitted to the bar in Montgomery, Alabama; however, he decided to become a planter rather than practice law. He was appointed inspector general of the Alabama State Militia in 1835, and he served in the Creek War of 1836 as adjutant of the 1st Regiment with the rank of major. This is rank on the subject cover and how he was known.

He was a member of the Alabama House of Representatives from 1849-1854. Although initially an opponent of secession, when the Confederacy was formed, Hall became a supporter. Figure 6, shows the Bolling Hall II gravestone.<sup>3</sup>

Bolling Hall II married Mary Louisa Crenshaw (1819-1858) with whom he had five sons who fought for the Confederacy: Bolling III, Crenshaw, James A., John E., and Thomas B. Hall, as well as other children. Figure 7, shows their mother’s gravestone.<sup>4</sup>

In the winter 1962 *Alabama Historical Quarterly*, the “Five Confederates: The Sons of Bolling Hall in the Civil War,” article doubtless reveals more information on the Hall brothers’ military exploits, but I did not search for it.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 5: Gravestone of Jane (Abercrombie) Hall (1781-1811), wife of Bolling Hall (1767-1836) and mother of the Bolling Hall line.



Figure 6: Gravestone of Bolling Hall II (1813-1897), son of Bolling Hall First and Jane Abercrombie Hall, misleadingly referred to in his day as Bolling Hall Sr.

### Bolling Hall III

Bolling Hall III (1837-1866) served in Field & Staff, 59th Alabama Infantry, Gracie’s Brigade, Johnson’s Division, Anderson’s Corps, Army of Northern Virginia with the rank of colonel.

He also had service in Company C, 6th Alabama Infantry, and served as a lieutenant colonel in Company E, Hilliard’s 2nd Alabama Infantry. His gravestone is shown in Figure 8.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 7: Gravestone of Mary Louisa Crenshaw (1819-1858), wife of Bolling Hall II (1813-1897).



**Figure 8: Gravestone of Bolling Hall III (1837-1866), son of Bolling Hall II (1813-1897)—also known as Bolling Hall “Jr.”**

His initial military record lists his occupation as “student.” What a jump from student to full colonel! This may have been graduate school since he was not of undergraduate age. I did not search for confirmation; this is only speculation.

In the Bolling Hall family papers, published online, there is an August 3, 1864, letter of recommendation from James Lawrence Pugh of Eufaula, Alabama, to Gen. Cooper, recommending Col. Bolling Hall Jr. (actually Bolling Hall III) for promotion to brigadier general due to his “conspicuous gallantry on the field” who “has been twice wounded in battle and is an experienced, cultivated soldier and gentleman who has the confidence of his men and the officers under whom he has served.”

There is a similar plea to President Jefferson Davis from Benjamin Fitzpatrick on September 4, 1864, in which he said:

*He (Hall) was in the Battle of Chickamauga & commanded the 2nd Battalion of Hilliard’s Legion as Lt. Col.—having since been made a full Col. He led the desperate charge on what was called by some ‘Battery Hill’ – Our flag you remember was pierced by eighty balls in that charge. The flag bearer, on account of his gallantry, was promoted to the office of Lt. by Your Excellency on your visit to Chickamauga after the battle. Col. Hall’s Batt. carried the works, he himself being shot down & severely wounded in the act of taking the works. On recovery from his wounds, he returned to the Army & lost his leg in one of the late seven fights near Drewry’s Bluff. He is highly educated, no defect of character, prudent & sagacious.*

The letter continues with further praise, although the promotion apparently never occurred.

(CONFEDERATE.)

56 | 59 | Ala.

Bolling Hall Jr.  
Col. 59th Ala Regt

Appears on an  
**Inspection Report**  
of Gracie’s Brigade, Johnson’s Division, Department of North Carolina and Southern Virginia, commanded by Brig Gen A. Gracie, Jr.

Report dated Petersburg Va  
Aug 8, 1864

Date of muster of organization into service | 1864

Term of service

Absent commissioned officers accounted for:  
By what authority By order Gen. Drewry off, Wounded.

Date May 16, 1864

Remarks:

Inspection Report B, No. 11; inclosure 10.

J. E. Murphy  
(604) 609 Copyist.

**Figure 9: Page from Bolling Hall III’s service record on which he is listed as Bolling Hall, Jr.**

(Confederate.)

H | 59 | Ala.

Bolling Hall Jr.  
Col. 59 Reg’t Alabama Infantry.\*

Appears on  
**Field and Staff Muster Roll**  
of the organization named above,  
for May & June, 1864.

Date of Commission, or Regimental Appointment } Nov 25, 1863.

Station

Present or absent Absent

Remarks: Absent and wounded Battle Drewry’s Bluff May 16/64 Sent to Hospital Richmond, Va.

Season Roll

\* Six companies of the 50th Battalion and four companies of the 6th Battalion, Hilliard’s Legion, Alabama Volunteers, were consolidated by S. O. No. 285, A. & L. G. O. dated Nov. 25, 1863, to form the 59th Regiment Alabama Infantry.

Book mark:

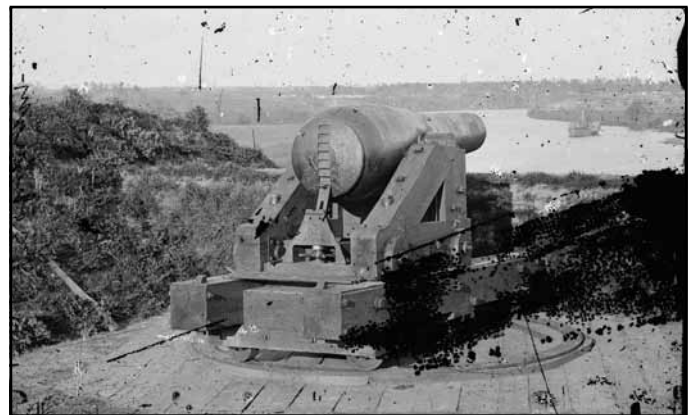
C. E. M. Laughlin  
(641c) Copyist.

**Figure 10: Page from Bolling Hall III’s service record showing he was wounded at the Battle of Drewry’s Bluff.**

Figure 9 shows Bolling Hall III’s service record clearly listed as Bolling Hall Jr. on this and all associated files. Figure 10 records him as wounded at the Battle of Drewry’s Bluff on May 16, 1862.

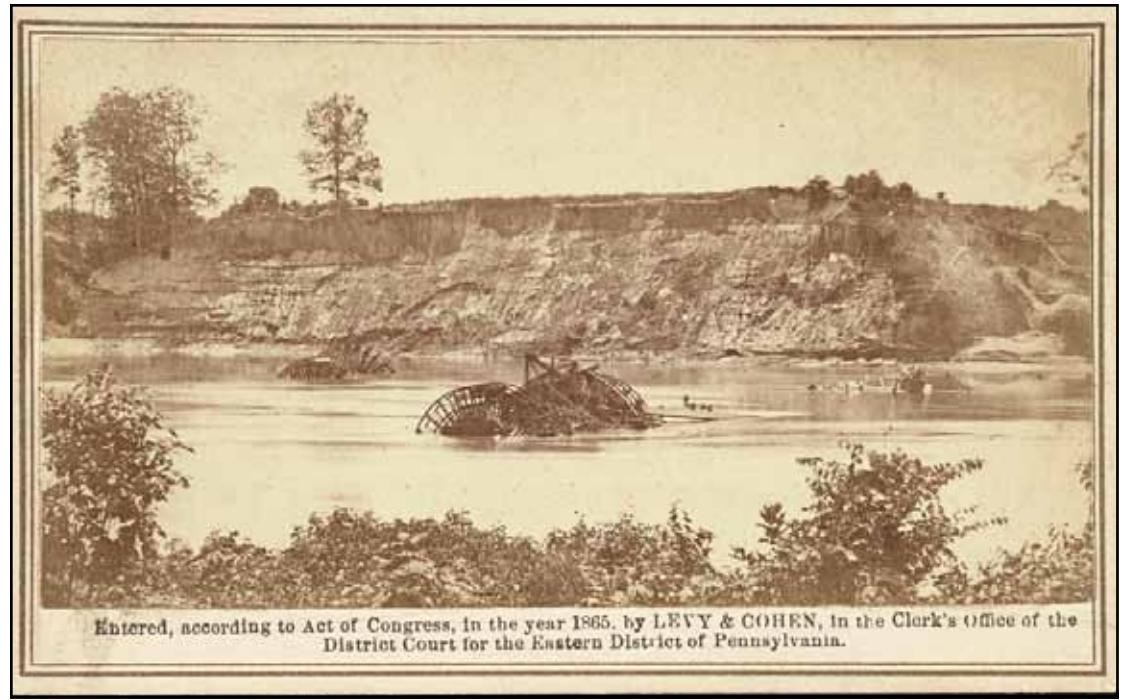
Two years later, another record confirms a gunshot wound to the right leg on May 17, 1864, again at Drewry’s Bluff, sometimes called the “Gibraltar of the South.” His leg was immediately amputated.

A columbiad gun at Fort Darling, Drewry’s (sometimes seen as Drury’s) Bluff, Virginia, on the James River is shown in Figure 11. The negative is on file at the Library of Congress, a great source for period photos. A columbiad is a large-caliber,



**Figure 11: A columbiad gun at Fort Darling, Drewry’s Bluff, Virginia, on the James River. (Library of Congress)**

**Figure 12: Drewry's Bluff fortification ruins in the middle of the James River, photographed in 1865 by Levy & Cohen, Philadelphia. (Library of Congress)**



smoothbore, muzzle-loading cannon capable of firing heavy projectiles at both high and low trajectories, which made it an excellent seacoast defense weapon. Another photo of fortification ruins in the middle of the James River is shown in Figure 12.

Hall III was paroled at Augusta, Georgia, on May 18, 1865, and died February 3, 1866, from complications with his battle wounds.

The photo in Figure 13 shows him to be a handsome young man. The three stars on each side of the uniform collar indicate the rank of colonel-commandant.



**Figure 13: Col. Bolling Hall III (1837-1866), who identified as Bolling Hall Jr.**

### **The Research Problem**

The problem with the Hall family research began with my main source—the military records—something you would think might be clear. It wasn't. I had not yet found the Hall family papers.

During the Civil War, military records cited Bolling Hall III as “Bolling Hall, Jr.” serving in the 59th Alabama Regiment.

I finally concluded, with corroboration of both the family papers and gravestones, that “junior” was actually Bolling Hall III, son of Bolling Hall II, who was at that time referred to as Bolling Hall “Sr.”

I repeatedly found the signatures of Bolling Hall III as “B. Hall, Jr.”—Even on letters to his own father who was, more accurately, Bolling Hall II.

One might logically think that the first Bolling Hall would be referred to as “senior” and Bolling Hall II as “junior.” But no. Bolling Hall II was confusingly referred to as “senior” and Bolling Hall III as “junior.”

There is little wonder as to the confusion over a century and a half removed. But the gravestones and birth records relate the proper information.

The true lineage may seem quite obvious to readers who see the gravestones illustrated in this article. But it is not obvious when starting with only a printed page and someone who is referred to in the official records as “Jr.” and signs his name as “Jr.” when he was both born and buried as “the third.” Connecting the dots was only possible after carefully sorting dates, repeating family names (both male and female), reviewing actual correspondence, and family gravestones.

### **Bolling Hall Family Papers, 1785–1923**

Much of the Hall Civil War correspondence is online in the Alabama Department of Archives and History Digital collections in the Bolling Hall family papers, 1785–1923, making it possible to occasionally associate specific letters found online with covers in collectors' hands.<sup>7</sup> Usually exciting for postal historians, this connection makes history come alive.

The finding aid is extremely helpful, as it provides links to letters that appear online. The finding aid states that the five sons together wrote more than 150 letters to their father about their experiences and observations during the war. The children are unmistakably identified, e.g., “Thomas B. Hall, sixth child of Bolling Hall (1813-1897).” Excellent. This I clearly understand. Thank you.

### All Sources are Suspect

You may think from this story, the answer was found in the information on the Bolling Hall gravestones. That is partly true. It was a huge help.

I have told the following story in print once before in another publication, but I’ll give you the “Cliffs Notes” version for those who never read it.

A few years ago, I was searching the Find A Grave website and decided to virtually visit the gravesite of my late husband, John Kaufmann. Was I ever in for a shock!

I was married to John when he died on his 47th birthday. I personally ordered the headstone with all the proper information thereon inscribed and regularly visited the gravesite when it was still in Virginia. So, imagine my absolute astonishment when almost three decades later I found the headstone had been re-engraved with the wrong date of death!

This happened because, after I remarried, my in-laws requested that I allow his remains to be moved to New Jersey so he could be buried with family. After both his parents died, my former siblings-in-law had one headstone redone with the information for all three together. But—oops—they got John’s death date wrong by a full decade. Wow. I had it corrected at my expense. On behalf of future historians, I just could not let that go.

*Caveat Emptor!* I couldn’t even trust something I knew was correctly done by me personally. Verify and reverify is all I can say. I’ve seen other incorrectly inscribed gravestones over the years as well. The true story is usually a nightmare to unscramble and rarely do we actually know why the mistakes were made.

### Postal History Importance

You may incorrectly think this discussion is just about genealogical research. Why is this important to postal history?

If you follow the trail of figurative breadcrumbs (in this case, the soldiers’ records), you may also be able to track the troop movements (if properly identified) to a scarcer use, such as West Virginia...or a piece of mail posted on the last day of a specific battle (important to some collectors), or of the sender’s life, or something of a covert nature, and beyond.

These scenarios, and far more, can be very

important to postal historians. We usually need to find out about the correspondents before we can figure out the maneuverings of their mail. Collectors find this fun.

The biggest piece of advice I can give is to use multiple primary sources. Do not trust a solitary source, no matter how seemingly accurate.

The chronicle of Bolling Hall “Jr.” as written in his own hand, as well as in official military records, is a perfect example of what and why research can go wrong and mistakes are perpetuated in print. Or misinterpreted, as with the “sister” on the J.A. Hall gravestone, who was in fact his mother. Confirm and verify with as many primary sources possible.

In other cases, usually with nonprimary sources, I’ve often found multiple dates of birth/death for the same person. Sometimes I’m forced to say, “sources vary” for whatever “fact.”

I’m not perfect. I, too, make mistakes. I’ve thrown out completely written articles when I (fortunately) realized the information in them made no sense and simply could not be correct. I try to have enough time to let my columns “marinate” at least overnight.

Reading what you wrote first thing the next morning is often a game changer. If deadline time allows, it is also helpful to have a trusted colleague review your work before it is sent for publication.

But don’t expect your peer reviewer to do your work for you. They may point out inconsistencies, but it is up to you to revise and clarify.

Confirm and verify—again and again.

### Endnotes

- 1 Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown, Jr., Jerry S. Palazolo, Editors, *Confederate States Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*, Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012.
- 2 Bill McKern, Bolling Hall, Find a Grave Memorial 34126819. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/34126819/bolling-hall/> Accessed May 14, 2020.
- 3 Bill McKern, Bolling Hall II, Find a Grave Memorial 34137628 <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/34137628/bolling-hall/> Accessed May 14, 2020.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Charles T. Jones, ed., “Five Confederates: The Sons of Bolling Hall in the Civil War,” *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 24 (winter 1962).
- 6 Bill McKern, Bolling Hall III, Find a Grave Memorial 34138068. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/34138068/bolling-hall#source/> Accessed May 14, 2020.
- 7 Bolling Hall Family Papers, 1777-1929. <https://archives.alabama.gov/findaids/v3459.pdf> Accessed May 14, 2020.

*(Patricia (Trish) Kaufmann, Lincoln, Delaware, was introduced to postal history in 1965 and quickly became engrossed in research and writing. She became a fulltime dealer in 1973, today specializing solely in Confederate States postal history. She enjoys hearing from readers and may be contacted by e-mail at: trishkauf@comcast.net)*