



Figure 1: An outbound blockade-run cover “per ‘Wild Pigeon.’”

Per ‘Wild Pigeon’ The Caroline Carson Correspondence

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

The Figure 1 cover bears a rare example of a ship-name endorsement on outbound blockade-run mail. The manuscript directive at top is, “per ‘Wild Pigeon.’” The “Feb. 1st 1863” pencil docketing provides the origin date. This cover had to have arrived after April 1, 1863, based on the use of the “5” in circle postage due marking for British packet mail.

Ship-name endorsements on outgoing mail are very rare. Prior owner and keen student Steven Walske could not find the *Wild Pigeon* recorded anywhere as a blockade-running steamer. If anyone could have unearthed that information, it would likely have been Walske. The cover’s provenance includes the collections of Morris Everett, J.V. Nielsen, and James Myerson.

However, there was a small schooner named *Wild Pigeon* that was inadvertently rammed and sunk by the USS *Hendrick Hudson* (formerly the famed Confederate blockade-runner *Florida* of the East Gulf Blockading Squadron.¹) while on a blockade-running trip between Havana and Florida on March 21, 1864. That is likely the noted vessel.

Blockade-Run Mail

President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a blockade of Southern ports on April 19, 1861, and the Union Navy moved to implement that order to comply with the daunting task of securing 3,500 miles of Southern coastline with a very thin supply of available vessels.

Confederate congressional acts authorized the postmaster general to arrange for the exchange of mail with foreign governments, but the Union blockade of Southern ports and failure of foreign governments to recognize the Confederacy prevented such efforts. There were no formal postal arrangements. Thus, mail continued to be delivered by blockade runner, express company, or illegal favor by travelers.²

Most outgoing mail was delivered to a forwarding agent at a neutral port, who entrusted the captain of a blockade runner to deliver the mail to a foreign port.

Captains of domestic vessels were entitled to a fee of two cents per letter., but the two-cent fee was not always assessed. Captains of foreign vessels were not entitled to a fee. Such covers can only be identified by the port of arrival postmark, a ship marking and

Figure 2: The Dean Hall Plantation House in 1939, before it was relocated. (Library of Congress)



the amount of postage due. Incoming mail from a foreign port was to be annotated “Ship,” but this was not always done either. Domestic postage was required to be paid on all incoming and outgoing international mail.³

Jane Caroline Petigru Carson

The subject cover was illustrated in the July-August 1989 *Confederate Philatelist*. It was addressed to Mrs. Caroline Carson, (in care of) E. E. Detmold Esq., 40 Trinity Building, New York.

Caroline Carson (1820-1892) was the widow of William Augustus Carson (1800-1856), a citizen of South Carolina and owner of Dean Hall, a Cooper River rice plantation.

The west side of Dean Hall, as photographed by Thomas T. Waterman in June 1939, is shown in Figure 2. It was initially constructed in 1827 and named for Dean, Scotland, homeland of the first owner, Alexander Nesbitt, and was originally known as Nesbitt House. The house eventually fell into disrepair and was relocated to Beaufort County to avoid demolition in the 1970s.⁴

Caroline was the eldest daughter and second child of James Petigru, a prominent Charleston attorney who lost a great deal of money in the Panic of 1837, forcing him to sell his land holdings, his rice plantation and most of his 137 slaves. Because of these losses, her high-strung and selfish, hypochondriac mother (who was also a morphine addict), Jane Amelia Postell Carson, pushed her daughters to marry for wealth. Caroline married Carson, a man twice her age.⁵



Figure 3: Mrs. William A. Carson (Caroline Petigru) by Thomas Sully. (Gibbes Museum of Art)

A charming portrait of Caroline was painted by Thomas Sully in 1841 (Figure 3). It hangs in the Gibbes Museum of Art in Charleston, South Carolina. From this portrait, it is clear that she was a beautiful young woman.

Unfortunately, William Carson was an abusive alcoholic. He and Caroline separated in 1850, six years before his death, which was as much as one could reasonably expect in those days. She defied conventional Charleston expectations by living apart from her husband. In ill health, and a committed Unionist, Mrs. Carson left South Carolina in 1861 to live in New York, where she had long sought medical advice and where she was an active socialite.⁶

Caroline supplemented her meager inheritance by painting portraits, miniatures, and landscapes, as well as tinting photographs. In 1872, after her health improved and her sons were grown, she moved to Rome, where she joined an active Anglo-American art colony. She died there two decades later and is buried in Campo Cestio, the Protestant (Acattolico) Cemetery, also known as Cemetery for Non-Catholic Foreigners. One of the walls of the cemetery is the ancient Aurelian wall that surrounded Rome.⁷

From Italy, Caroline Carson wrote hundreds of expansive letters to her younger son in America. These were gathered and edited in a book, *The Roman Years of a South Carolina Artist: Caroline Carson's Letters Home, 1872–1892*, ably edited by award-winning history professors, authors, and editors William H. and Jane H. Pease.⁸

Susan Dupont Petigru King-Bowen

Caroline’s younger sister, Susan Dupont Petigru King-Bowen (1824–1875), shown in Figure 4, was a socialite and novelist.

At nineteen, Sue also married for money, first to Henry King (1819-1862), who was shot in the stomach



Figure 4: Susan Dupont Petigru King (1824-1875) from the Caroline Carson photo album. (South Carolina Historical Society)

during the Battle of Secessionville in June 1862 and died from his wounds. She subsequently remarried C.C. (Christopher Columbus) Bowen (1832-1880), a captain in the Confederate Coast Guard who was court-martialed and dishonorably discharged.

He accumulated a long list of charges. Accounts of Sue and C.C. Bowen's many scandals make for salacious reading. Sue was the more homely of the two sisters, but that did not hinder her activities. She was the focus of considerable gossip in social circles due to a lifetime of scandalous behavior that eventually caused her to be shunned by Charleston aristocracy.

Endnotes

- 1 USS *Hendrick Hudson*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Hendrick_Hudson/ Accessed September 20, 2020.
- 2 Steven C. Walske, Scott R. Trepel, *Special Mail Routes of the American Civil War: A Guide to Across-the-Lines Postal History*, Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2008.
- 3 Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown Jr., Jerry S. Palazolo, *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*, Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012.
- 4 Cypress Gardens, SC Picture Project, <https://www.scpictureproject.org/berkeley-county/cypress-gardens.html/> Accessed September 20, 2020.
- 5 Susan Petigru King, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susan_Petigru_King#Scandals/ Accessed September 20, 2020.

- 6 Jane Caroline Petigru Carson, South Carolina Encyclopedia, <https://www.scencyclopedia.org/scel/entries/carson-jane-caroline-petigru/> Accessed September 20, 2020.
- 7 Caroline Petigru Carson, Find A Grave Memorial 20173784, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/30173784/caroline-carson/> Accessed September 20, 2020.
- 8 William H. Pease and Jane H. Pease, eds., *Caroline Petigru Carson, The Roman Years of a South Carolina Artist: Caroline Carson's Letters Home, 1872-1892*, Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2003.

(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)

A Side Note

Special mail routes were used to exchange letters between correspondents in the Confederate States and those across military lines or frontiers separating the Confederacy from the rest of the world.

Together, Steven C. Walske and Scott R. Trepel wrote, *Special Mail Routes of the American Civil War: A Guide to Across-the-Lines Postal History* in 2008, which was published by the Confederate Stamp Alliance. This book is different than most because it examines the postal routes used, as opposed to simply the postal markings.

Not only are the postal markings beautifully and clearly presented, the appendices are invaluable to the avid researcher, and even the casual postal historian. They include censuses of precursor private express covers, across-the-lines private express covers, blockade-run covers, and CSA internal private express covers, as well as the 1860 listing of Adams Express offices and agents, a summary prison listing, and transatlantic sailing tables for blockade-run mail. The bibliography is extensive. .

The content of the Walske-Trepel book was initially slated to be part of the 2012 CSA catalog. Since it was submitted far ahead of general catalog completion, it was made a stand-alone volume. The valuable special mail routes content was streamlined and shortened in the catalog. This important, award-winning work is still available through the Confederate Stamp Alliance at www.csalliance.org at half the price at which it was initially offered. I highly recommend it to any postal historian interested in the mails of the Civil War, both North and South.—**Patricia Kaufmann**