

The Confederate Paymaster's Property Becomes the National Colored Home

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

Although Civil War Washington, D.C., was the capital of the Union, its inhabitants had a robust population of Southern sympathizers. These Southern allegiances were strongest in the Georgetown section, which was long a separate city within the District of Columbia. It began as a tobacco port in 1751 and was dominated by a few leading families.¹

Georgetown was part of Maryland until 1801, when it became a municipality within the District of Columbia. It was not until 1871 that Congress incorporated Georgetown as part of the city of Washington.²

Richard Smith Cox (1825-1889) was the son of John Cox who was the mayor of Georgetown from 1823-1845 and grandson of John Threlkeld, an earlier Georgetown mayor. From 1802-1871, the mayors of Georgetown were elected to one-year terms with no term limits.³ John Cox was an importer, a banker and a slave owner.⁴

Richard Smith Cox, shown in Figure 1, became a clerk in the Paymaster-General's Office of the U.S. Treasury Department circa 1847. From his father, he inherited 55 acres of which approximately 45 acres were in Washington County and about 10 in Georgetown. There, Cox built a large two-story brick house he named Burleith. Burleith is a place name of a small village near the larger Kilmarnock, Scotland. This was apparently the third home of that name, the others built in roughly the same location by earlier family members.⁵

The 1860 census in Washington, D.C., showed Richard S. Cox as married, age 35, born in Washington, D.C., and with \$40,000 in real property and \$25,000 in personal property. The 1870 census of Loudoun County, Virginia, showed him as a married 45 year-old farmer with \$100,000 of real property and \$5,765 of personal property.

In early 1861, just before the inauguration of President Lincoln, Richard Cox was commissioned a colonel in the 8th Regiment of the District of Columbia Militia, sworn to defend the United States.

On March 4, 1861, the Georgetown Volunteer Battalion, under the command of Col. Cox, had the distinction of escorting the carriage carrying President Buchanan and President-elect Lincoln.⁶

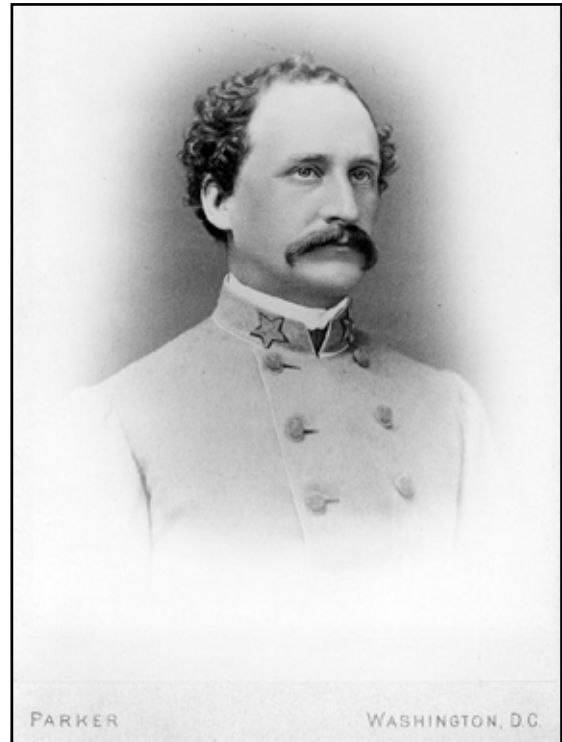


Figure 1: Richard Smith Cox (1825-1889), in an undated photograph, probably taken after the Civil War.

During April 9-27, 1861, Lincoln called on the District of Columbia Militia for the defense of Washington. Thirty-four companies were sworn in to serve for three months. Richard S. Cox was among those who did not report for duty and the newspapers announced his resignation, which was accepted April 25, 1861.

Richard Cox's wife, Mary Lewis Berkeley, was a Virginian whose four brothers had all become Confederate officers. His brother, Thomas Campbell Cox (1829-1882), did not make the same choice. Rather, he took a position in Lincoln's State Department.

On June 10, 1861, Virginia Governor John Letcher commissioned Richard S. Cox as "Paymaster with the rank of Major in the Active Volunteer Forces of the State." The original commission is still in family hands. Obviously, he had more than just the requisite experience from his U.S. job. He became a major on the staff of Confederate Gen. George Washington Custis Lee, the eldest son of Gen. Robert E. Lee.⁷

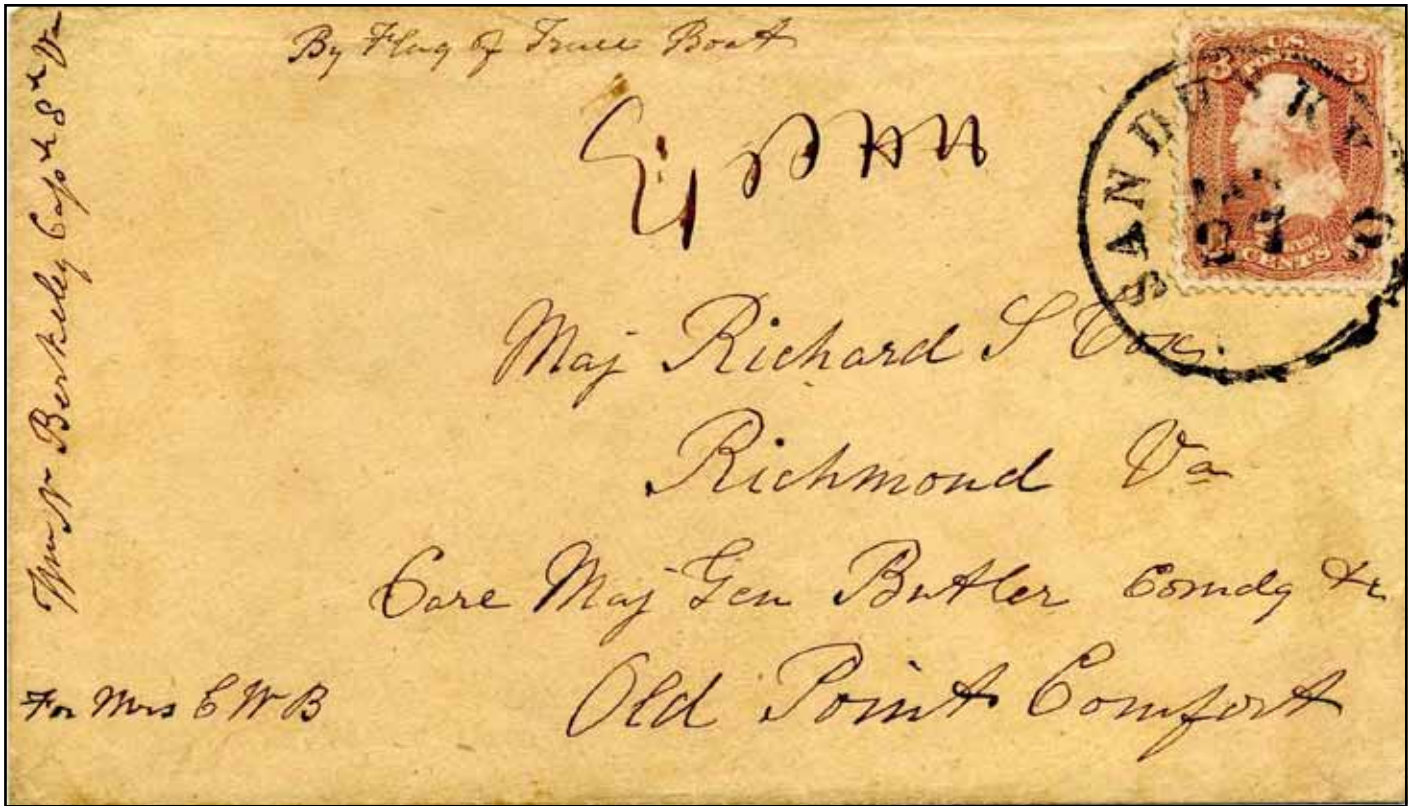


Figure 2: A Johnson’s Island prisoner of war cover addressed to “Maj. Richard S. Cox, Richmond, Va., Care Maj. Gen Butler Comdg Old Point Comfort” from one of his brothers-in-law, a captain in the 8th Virginia Infantry.

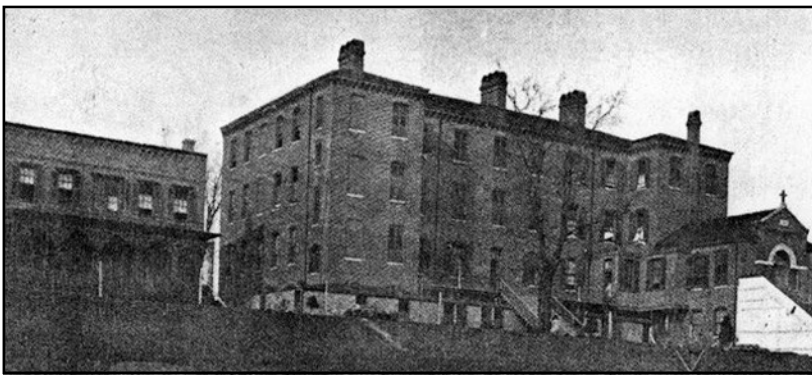


Figure 3: The House of the Good Shepherd, circa 1898. The building at the left, which was used by the institution as a laundry, may have been Richard S. Cox’s home, Burleith, which had served as the National Colored Home during the Civil War.

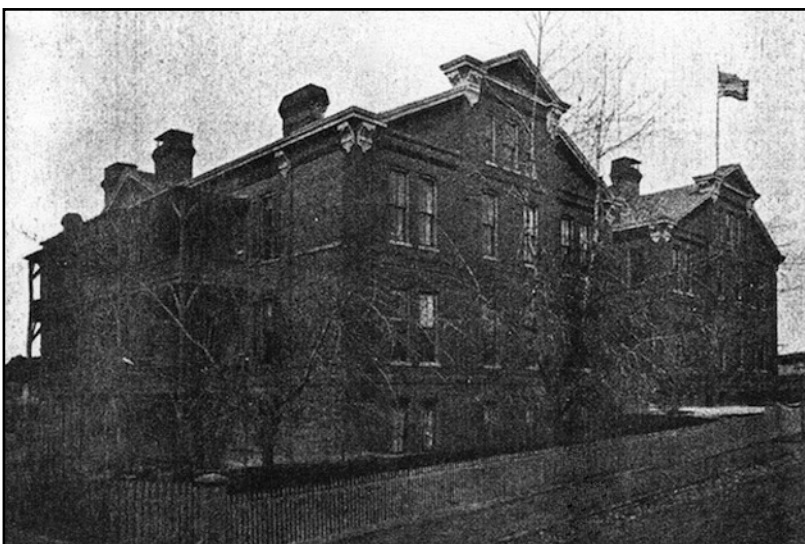


Figure 4: The National Colored Home at 2458 Eighth Street, the building that replaced the hastily erected 1866 frame structure. (Late 1800s photo from the *Report on Charitable and Reformatory Institutions of the District of Columbia*, 1898, pp. 126-28.)



Figure 5: Edwin McMasters Stanton (1814-1869), Secretary of War under Lincoln.

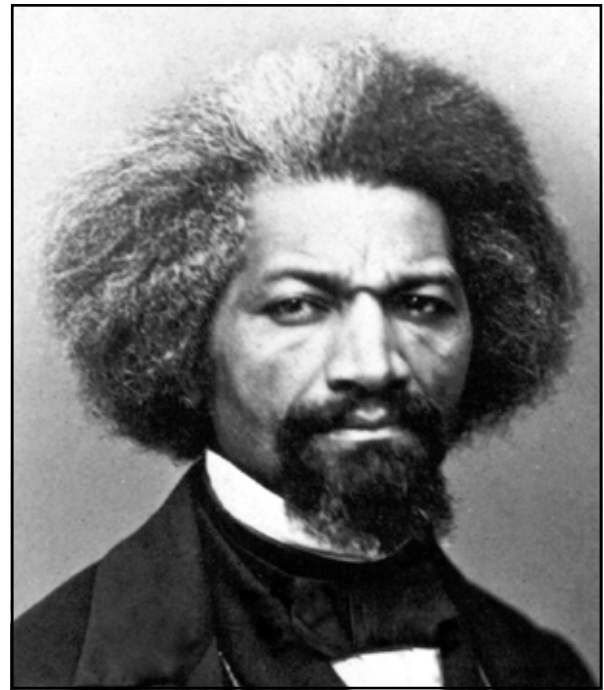


Figure 7: Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), African-American social reformer and statesman.

Dallas Weekly Herald (Texas), 3 February 1866, p. 2

We notice in a Washington dispatch of Jan. 13th., that the President recently had an overwhelming visit from a committee of ladies, headed by Mrs. Senator Trumbull, in all about two hundred and fifty, who presented a petition, and vehemently urged him to reject the application for pardon of R. S. Cox, of Georgetown, late of the rebel army. These ladies are of a society entitled the National Colored Home Association. They state that Cox is a large landholder in the district. Their society has erected on his lands buildings, on which are housed a large number of colored people, and they ask that if Cox be pardoned at all it shall be on the condition that he give to their association ten acres of land and the buildings thereon, now occupied by the association.

Figure 6: A clipping from the February 3, 1866, *Dallas Weekly Herald* (Texas), concerning Richard Cox's application for a presidential pardon and the petition against it by the National Colored Home Association.

Figure 2 shows a Johnson's Island prisoner of war cover franked with a three-cent rose 1861 tied by a Sandusky, Ohio, January 21, [1864] cds. It is addressed to "Maj. Richard S. Cox, Richmond, Va., Care Maj. Gen Butler Comdg Old Point Comfort" with manuscript examined markings and manuscript "By Flag of Truce Boat." The mandated soldier endorsement at left is of "Wm. N. Berkeley Capt. 8th Va."

William Noland Berkeley (1826-1907) enlisted as a private at Aldie, Virginia, on May 12, 1861, and mustered into Field & Staff of the Virginia 8th Infantry. He rose through the ranks to major. He was taken prisoner at Gettysburg, where he was wounded in the thigh. He was confined at Johnson's Island in 1863, but was released. He was subsequently taken prisoner at Sailor's Creek, Virginia, and yet again confined to Johnson's Island April 9, 1865, until he was paroled June 27, 1865. He was a brother-in-law to Cox, one of his wife's four brothers who served in the Confederate army.

Thomas C. Cox did what he could to protect his absent brother's interests. When some of Richard's property was sold for taxes Thomas bought it in to prevent its loss. But as his brother had left a loyal district to bear arms against the Union, Thomas Cox could not prevent Secretary of War Edwin Stanton (Figure 5) from seizing Richard's property.

Stanton put Burleith at the disposal of an organization of Northern women that cared for fugitive slaves, the National Association for the Relief of Destitute Colored Women and Children. On June 1,



Figure 8: Dr. Charles Burleigh Purvis (1842-1929), African-American surgeon and medical educator instrumental in the development of Howard University's medical department.



Figure 9: James Wormley (1819-1884), African-American entrepreneur, hotelier and philanthropist; he was born free.

1863, 64 former slaves, most of them children, took up residence at Burleith, Richard Cox's former home.

On June 30, 1865, at Fairfax Court House, Virginia, former Confederate paymaster Cox renewed his allegiance to the United States Constitution and shortly thereafter he applied for pardon. Not surprisingly, the National Association for the Relief of Destitute Colored Women and Children strongly protested his pardon. In their 1865 annual report, they stated that nearly \$3,000 had been expended on the premises, while every care was taken to keep the property in good condition.

Figure 6 is a clipping from the February 3, 1866, *Dallas Weekly Herald* (Texas) that shows that news of the Cox application spread clear across the country.

Despite their protests, Cox was pardoned in June 1866 and made efforts to secure an order for the restitution of Burleith. The National Colored Home was moved to a new location at 2458 Eighth Street, in a frame structure hastily erected in 1866.

Figure 4 shows the more stable structure that replaced the original one at that location.

Between 1872 and 1879, the National Colored Home acquired its first black trustees—Frederick Douglass, social reformer, abolitionist, orator, writer and statesman (Figure 6); Dr. Charles B. Purvis, of Freedmen's Hospital (Figure 7); and Washington hotelier and philanthropist James Wormley. Douglass became the first African-American nominated for vice president of the United States.

What a remarkable turn of fate that the National Colored Home was initially housed within Burleith,

the home of Confederate Paymaster Richard S. Cox, son in a slave-holding family.

Endnotes

1 James H. Johnston, "The Divided Capital," *Opinionator*, *New York Times*, August 31, 2012. http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/08/31/the-divided-capital/?_r=0; Accessed April 5, 2015.

2 Georgetown Historic District, Washington, DC, National Park Service <http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/wash/dc15.htm>; Accessed May 10, 2015.

3 Lists of mayors of Washington, D.C., Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_mayors_of_Washington,_D.C.; Accessed May 10, 2015.

4 Carlton Fletcher, John Cox Notes, Glover Park History. <http://gloverparkhistory.com/estates-and-farms/cedars/john-cox/>; Accessed May 10, 2015.

5 Carlton Fletcher, *Origins of Burleith*, Glover Park History. <http://gloverparkhistory.com/estates-and-farms/burleith/burleith-history/>; Accessed May 10, 2015.

6 "Inauguration of Abraham Lincoln-The Order of Procession," *Star*, March 4, 1861.

7 Richard Helm-Adrienne Scott family database. <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=richhelm&id=I5626>; Accessed April 5, 2015.

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