

One of our great American Specialties

Here is a subject philatelists have been enthralled with for over 100 years.



The Confederate Post

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

General John Pegram, husband of Hetty Cary.



“Hetty likes them that way: gilt-edged with stars!”

June is the month of weddings, so it seems only fitting to devote this edition to the nuptial event of the Richmond social season, although it took place in winter 1865. The city was war-weary and ready for diversion.

Born in Baltimore in 1836, Hetty Cary was related to two of Virginia’s “first families,” the Randolphs and the Jeffersons. When the Civil War began, Hetty gave her wholehearted support to the Southern cause, and didn’t hide it, even when among Union soldiers. On one occasion, she waved a smuggled Confederate flag from a second-story window as Federal troops marched through Baltimore.

An officer of the passing regiment allegedly pointed Hetty out to his Colonel, asking, “Shall I have her arrested?” The Colonel looked at her and replied, “No, she is beautiful enough to do as she pleases.”

Hetty was forced to choose between leaving home or being imprisoned for harboring Confederate sympathies. She and her sister smuggled drugs and clothing through the blockade and escaped to Richmond where they resided with their cousin, Constance Cary.

Hetty Cary was courted by so many Confederate generals that it led her cousin to gibe, “Hetty likes them that way: gilt-edged with stars!” On January 19, 1865, Richmond society was treated to the wedding of this belle, widely acclaimed to be “the handsomest woman in the Southland”, and gallant young Brigadier General John Pegram, one of Virginia’s most eligible bachelors. The cream of Confederate society, including President and Mrs. Davis, jammed into historic St. Paul’s Episcopal Church for the ceremony.

Hetty’s cousin recounts the details in *Recollections Grave and Gay*. She recalls, “Two days before...Hetty had come, bringing her bridal veil that I...might ...see it tried on her lovely crown of auburn hair. As she turned from the mirror to salute us with a charming blush and smile, the mirror fell and was broken to small fragments, an accident afterward spoken of by the superstitious as one of a strange series of ominous happenings.”

While the congregation awaited the arrival of bride and groom, they speculated uneasily upon the cause of the long delay. Mrs. Jefferson Davis had sent the President’s carriage to drive them to the church. Instead, a shabby old hack drove up to deliver the disconcerted couple who explained that, upon setting out, the President’s normally gentle horses had reared violently, refusing to go forward. They had been forced to send for another vehicle,

almost impossible to secure in Richmond at that time.

Constance continues, “When the noble-looking young couple crossed the threshold of the church, my cousin dropped her lace handkerchief and, nobody perceiving it, stooped forward to pick it up, tearing the tulle veil over her face to almost its full length, then, regaining herself, walked with a slow and stately step toward the altar. As she passed there was a murmur of delight at her beauty, never more striking. Her complexion of pearly white, the vivid roses on her cheeks and lips, the sheen of her radiant hair, and the happy gleam of her beautiful brown eyes seemed to defy all sorrow, change, or fear. John Pegram, handsome and erect, looked as he felt, triumphant, the prize-winner - so the men called him - of the invincible beauty of her day.”

Three weeks later, to the day, Gen. John Pegram was buried. He was killed leading a charge at Hatcher’s Run on February 6, 1865, only a short time before the War ended. Hetty had been his fiancée for three years, but his wife for less than three weeks.

For information on the Confederate Stamp Alliance, write Trish Kaufmann, 10194 N. Old State Road, Lincoln, DE 19960, e-mail trishkauf@comcast.net, or visit csalliance.org.

Acknowledgement: Thanks to Frank Northcutt for his information and portraits. ☒



Two Confederate covers addressed to Hetty Cary during the War Between The States. She had many suitors.