

[Editor's Note:]

Would That the Sender of This Letter Had Been Clairvoyant

for, he was already pondering the possible happenings of the coming Civil War with the Northern states when he sent this worrisome letter in March of 1861 from Mississippi to Georgia. Trish Kaufmann's fascinating article here causes us to wonder how the author of the enclosure would end up handling what lay ahead. The sender, **Abner G. Semmes**, was hoping to move all the way west to Texas to get as far away as he could from his then current troubles and the chaos in Georgia. Little did he realize what truly lay ahead—*only the greatest watershed period in the history of mankind*. Our commentary to Trish's work discusses just three examples of giant events Semmes would know of.

Contemplating the War To Come — Part I

Figure 1. U.S. star-die entire (Scott U27) posted with an unlisted "Doo-little Stat(ion) Miss" manuscript postmark, an example of U.S. postage used during the Confederate period. When the letter in this cover was sent from Garlandsville, Jasper Co(nty) on Mch 10/61, the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter in Charleston (S.C.) harbor was only a month and two days away. The sender was quite worried.





Patricia A. Kaufmann's

Pondering the Coming of The Great War

Correspondents in the period leading up to the Civil War often anticipated what might be coming during that unsettled period before the first shots were fired and war was certain.

The U.S. star-die entire (Scott U27) in Figure 1 encloses a letter with brief “what to do” musing. The cover is posted with a “Doolittle Stat(ion) Miss” manuscript postmark not listed in the CSA Catalog. It should be listed in future editions in the Independent State and Confederate Use of U.S. Postage section.

Mississippi seceded from the United States January 9, 1861, and was admitted to the Confederacy February 4, 1861, as one of the original states to form the new entity. It was the second state to secede after South Carolina, which abandoned the Union December 20, 1860.

Mch 10/61
Garlandville
Jasper Co Miss

Bro Ben.

I understand
Mr Izard holds in his hands
\$234. of my money subject
to my order. Please get it
& send it to me as soon as
possible, as I may need it
very soon. In fact I may
be in the army of Miss.
before you get this. I am
doing nothing here & am
determined to get away
from this place as soon
as possible. If there is no
war, I will, I expect, go to
Texas to live. I am not
doing as well as I expected
& wish I never had come to
this place. I have lost a
good deal by doing so.

Figure 2.
Enclosed letter
headed “Mch 10/61,
Garlandville, Jasper
Co(nty) Missi.”



Contemplating the War To Come — Part II

People living on small and large plantations across the South in early 1861 had huge investments in cotton farming acreage and in the hundreds of thousands of slaves who ran them. There was hardly a human being in the southern states who didn't fear a massive war, especially after some of the states began seceding from the Union upon Lincoln's election in November of 1860.

that it was in the best interests of those on both sides of the conflict to continue their duties and render all monies to the U.S. Post Office Department until the newly formed Confederate States Post Office Department could assume control over their own affairs, which it did on June 1, 1861.

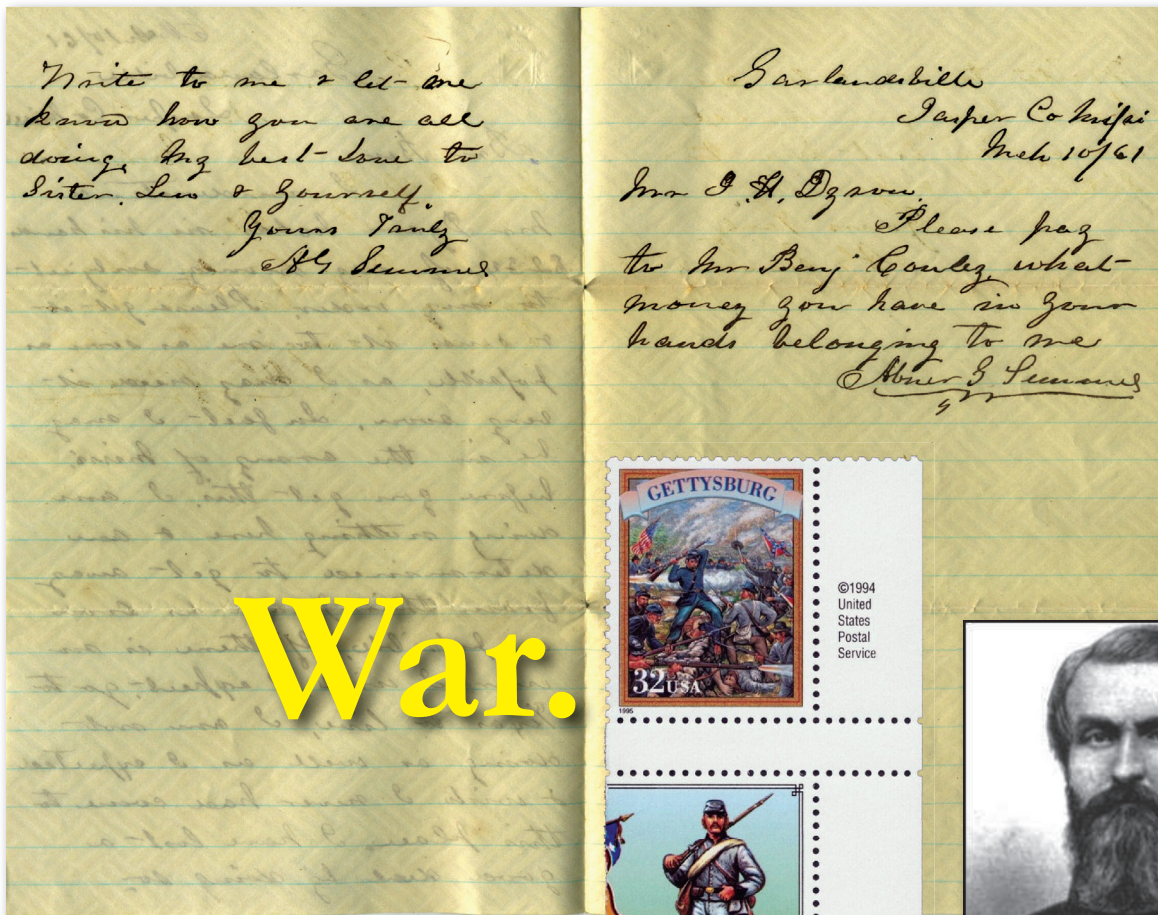
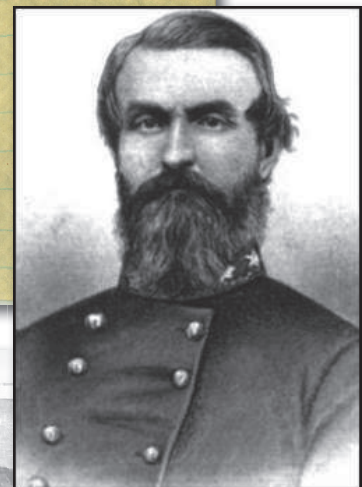


Figure 3. Semmes' signed second page of the letter at left with an attached third page at right instructing Mr. Dyson to pay Conley the money he is holding for Semmes.

War.

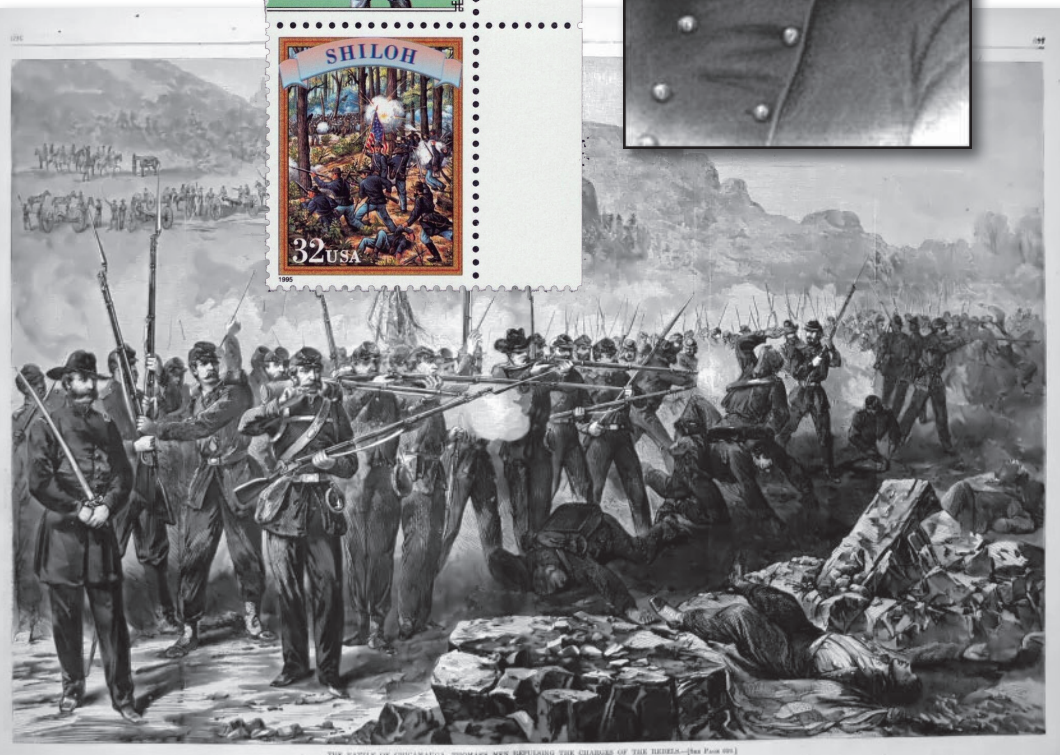


Figure 6. Below) Gen. Paul Jones Semmes, mortally wounded at Gettysburg.



Additional image—the **Battle of Chickamauga**, Sept. 18-20, 1863. The subject of the letter above, **A.G. Semmes**, had become Ordnance Officer of CSA's Bryan's Brigade by that time.

His service beyond Nov. 1861 is not known though an April 1864 report shows him still in Bryan's brigade. It is interesting to follow the CSA career of Semmes, considering his remarks about an impending war in the letter featured in this article.



THE CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA,

To *Lieut. A. G. Semmes* Dr.

OF WHAT ACCOUNT	COMMENCEMENT AND EXPIRATION		TERM OF SERVICE CHARGED		PAY PER MONTH		AMOUNT		REMARKS
	From	To	Months	Days	Dollars	Cts.	Dollars	Cts.	
As <i>ordnance officer</i>	<i>October 1st</i>	<i>Nov. 1st</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>00</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>00</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>00</i>	
For <i>year's service</i>	<i>1864</i>	<i>1864</i>							
Forage for <i>horses</i>									

I hereby certify that the foregoing account is accurate and just; that I have not been absent, without leave, during any part of the time charged for; that I have not received pay, forage, or received money in lieu of any part thereof, for any part of the time therein charged; that the horses were actually kept in service and were mustered for the whole of the time charged; that for the whole of the time charged for my staff appointment, I actually and legally held the appointment and did duty in the department; that I have been a commissioned officer for the number of years stated in the charge for every additional five years' service; that I am not in arrears with the Confederate States on any account whatsoever; and that the last payment I received was from *Capt. S. J. Neal* and to the *30th* day of *September* *1864*.

I, at the same time, acknowledge that I have received of *Mr. J. H. Dyson* the sum of *100* Dollars, on the *6* day of *November* *1864* the sum of *100* Dollars, being the amount in full of said account.

Pay. \$ *100.00*

Forage.

Amount, \$ *100.00*

(Signed Duplicates)

A. G. Semmes
1st Lieut. & Ord. Officer
Bryan's Brigade

Semmes, Abner G.

General and Staff Officers,
Corps, Division and Brigade Staffs,
Non-com. Staffs and Bands,
Enlisted Men, Staff Departments, C. S. A.

(CONFEDERATE)

A. G. S.

CARD NUMBERS.

1. 20.

Figure 5. Confederate Army form attesting to pay money owed for period from October 1-November 1, 1864, for and signed by Lieut. Abner G. Semmes as Ordnance Officer, Bryan's Brigade.

Figure 4. Microfiche record from the National Archives which shows Abner G. Semmes' rank as 1st Lieut. and position as "O.O." (Ordnance Officer).

The subject cover is addressed to Benjamin Conley, Esq. of Augusta, Georgia. The pencil docketing up the left side is that of the sender, A. G. Semmes, who instructs Conley to send \$234 of Semmes' money which Mr. J.H. Dyson is holding for him and to send it to him in Mississippi.

The letter, shown in Figures 2 and 3, is headed "Mch 10/61, Garlandville, Jasper Co(unt) Missi" and includes an attached second page instructing Mr. Dyson to pay Conley the money he is holding for Semmes.

In the main body of the letter Semmes states that:

"I may be in the Army of Missi(issippi) before you get this. I am doing nothing here & am determined to get away from this place as soon as possible if there is no war. I will, I expect, go to Texas to live. I am not doing as well as I expected & wish I never had come to this place. I have lost a great deal by doing so."

Doolittle Flat was a large-scale farming tract, part of the Doolittle Plantation acquired in 1847 by Roger Williams Doolittle. It is roughly just north of Newton, Mississippi, about eight miles from Garlandville.

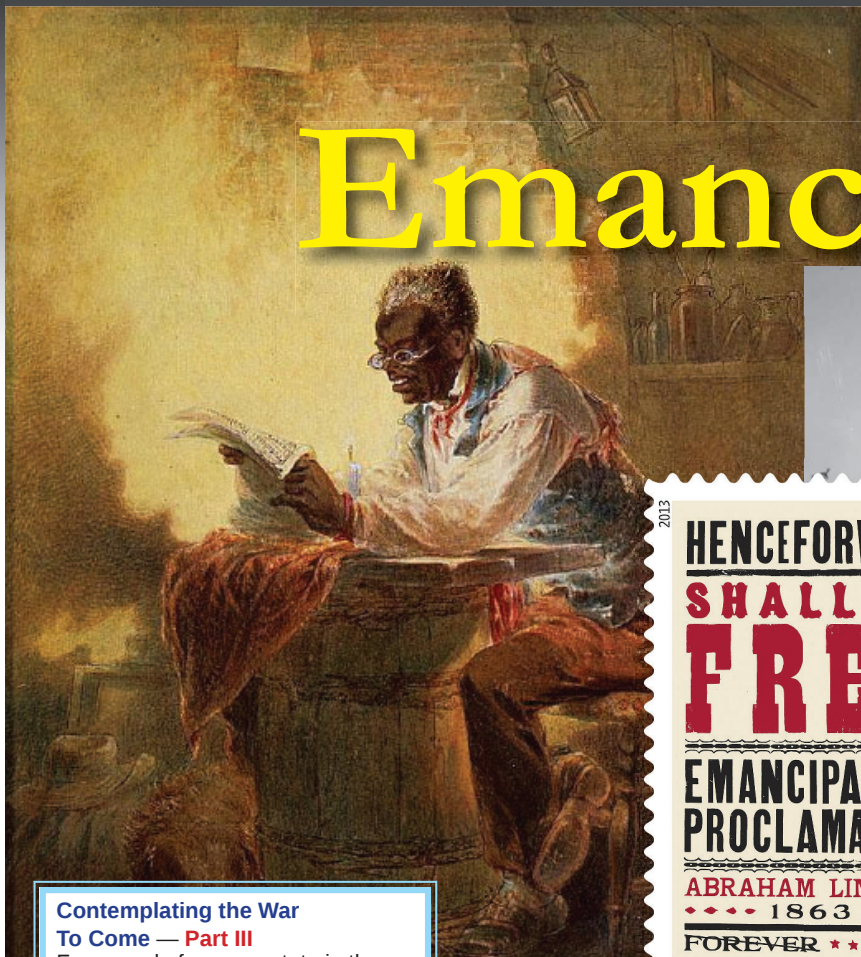
Unsurprisingly, the major crop at Doolittle Flat was cotton, although the orchard and garden produced important crops too. A detailed chronological explanation of the farming cycles and processes may be found at the website of the Newton County, Mississippi, Historical and Genealogical Society.

Authorized November 24, 1860, by the U.S. Post Office Department, there was a post office on the property – Doolittle Station. John G. Blackwell served as postmaster. It did not do business for long; it was discontinued January 21, 1867.

Correspondent Abner G. Semmes did indeed join the Army. He appears on a list of officers dated September 8, 1862, on ordnance duty in the Army of Tennessee, commanded by General Braxton Bragg. A report dated October 28, 1863, shows him commanding Bryan's Brigade, Longstreet's Corps, Army of Tennessee.

Semmes was nominated as brigade ordnance officer by CSA General Paul Jones Semmes Sept. 8, 1862, and appears on Gen. Semmes' May 1-3, 1863, report from Chancellorsville as "Lieut. Semmes, Brig. Ord. Officer" (Vol. 251, p. 836).

Emancipation.



Contemplating the War To Come — Part III

Few people from any state in the North American continent had illusions on what the authentic cause of the Civil War was. That a slave emancipation was coming became crystal clear to both sides in September 1862 when Union forces defeated the Army of Northern Virginia near Sharpsburg, Maryland in the Battle of Antietam. President Lincoln had been waiting for that kind of convincing victory.



September 22, 1862

President Abraham Lincoln issues the *Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation*, declaring that as of January 1, 1863, "all persons held as slaves within any State, or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free."

January 1, 1863

Lincoln now signs the *Final Emancipation Proclamation*, which freed all slaves not residing in specified Union-controlled areas of the Confederacy, and authorized enrollment of African Americans into the military.





The Atlanta, Georgia U.S. Post Office, 1883

Gen. P.J. Semmes (1815-1863) was a cousin of Raphael Semmes, captain of the illustrious merchant raider CSS *Alabama*. His half-brother was Albert Gallatin Semmes (1810-1883), who was an antebellum Justice of the Florida Supreme Court (1851-1853).

Gen. Semmes was mortally wounded in the thigh at the Battle of Gettysburg on July 2, 1863, while leading a charge at Wheatfield. He died of his wounds on July 10, 1863, in Martinsburg, West Virginia.

Goode Bryan (1811-1885) of Bryan's Brigade, was promoted to brigadier general August 29, 1863, to replace the fallen Gen. Semmes. Bryan commanded the brigade during the Mine Run Campaign and in September 1863 traveled with Gen. James Longstreet to Georgia to reinforce the Army of Tennessee, where they fought in the Battle of Chickamauga and the Knoxville Campaign, as well as Cold Harbor and the Siege of Petersburg after they returned to the Army of Northern Virginia.

October and November 1863 military reports show A.G. Semmes as Ordinance Officer of Bryan's Brigade. The November 18, 1863, report reveals a rank of captain, although a subsequent April 7, 1864, inspection report shows Semmes as Lieut. & O.O. of Bryan's Brigade.

The November 6, 1864, report shown in Figure 5 is signed by Semmes as 1st Lieut. and Ordnance Officer. I suspect the supposed promotion to captain by Gen. Semmes was incorrect, as I find nowhere in any of the 85 pages of military records at the National Archives on Abner G. Semmes where he is so referenced.



Benjamin F. Conley, addressee of the subject cover, and a post-war governor of Georgia for two months. President Ulysses S. Grant appointed Conley postmaster of Atlanta, Georgia, in 1883.

Benjamin F. Conley (1815-1886), the addressee on the cover, was Georgia's 32nd governor. He moved to Augusta, Georgia, from Newark, New Jersey, at the age of 15. He served as mayor of Augusta from 1857-1859. Conley was a loyal Unionist who opposed the war. He moved to Alabama, refusing to fight.

Conley returned to Georgia after the war and became a member and president of the Georgia Senate. When Gov. Rufus Bullock resigned from office October 23, 1871, after pressure from state Democrats, Conley assumed the duties of the governorship as mandated by the Georgia constitution, since he was president of the senate at that time. He served in that capacity for only two months until a replacement could be elected.

In 1875, President Grant appointed Conley the postmaster of Atlanta, which position he held until 1883.

Conley was married to Sarah Semmes, the sister of Gen. Paul Jones Semmes. While I did not determine the exact nature of the relationship between addressee and writer, clearly there was one. 📬

Endnotes

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, www.civilwarphilatelicsociety.org

Harold Graham, Doolittle Flat, Newton County, Mississippi, Historical and Genealogical Society, https://www.nchgs.org/html/doolittle_flat.html/ Accessed August 27, 2021.

Gov. Benjamin F. Conley, National Governors Association, <https://www.nga.org/governor/benjamin-f-conley/> Accessed August 27, 2021.

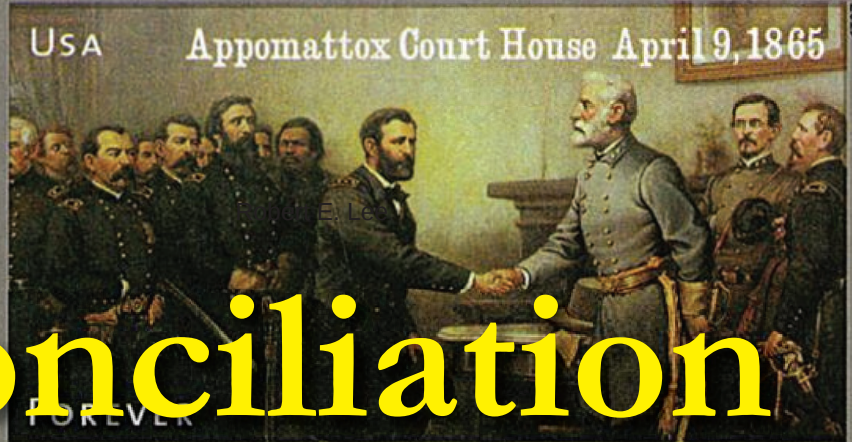
Contemplating the War — Part IV

As the Civil War exhaustingly entered its fourth year in the spring of 1865, few citizens of either side would ever have thought that the end would come in the manner it did. The animosity of both sides to one another still stood between them as the long siege of Petersburg was reaching an end. General Robert E. Lee quietly rode his horse to meet with General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House, Va. In a striking gesture, Grant stipulated to Lee that all CSA soldiers should return home still possessing their horses and arms. That conciliatory gesture set a tone for the future that has never been forgotten.

A Confederate officer quietly writing a letter—perhaps to his family—in a quiet spot near Petersburg, Va., likely in April 1865.



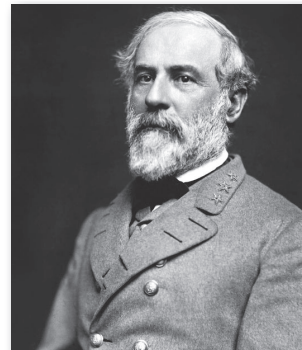
U.S. Grant



Reconciliation



Group of Confederate soldiers and officers of the Army of Northern Virginia waiting to go home—all still in possession of their arms. Note the little freed boy in the foreground.



Robert E. Lee

The Wilmer McLean Home —Scene of the meeting of Generals Grant and Lee

