## The Civil War Post

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## 20¢ Bisect Pays 10¢ Eastbound Trans-Mississippi Rate

Federal victories at New Orleans in April and Memphis in June 1862 effectively closed the Mississippi River to normal Confederate commerce. This caused a major disruption of the mail across the river.

The first Confederate government Trans-Mississippi express mail route was approved by the Confederate Congress on May 1, 1863, with a set rate of 40¢ per half-ounce. It took several months to establish the route and make arrangements for the necessary

services. Recorded uses range from October 1863 to April 1865. There are fewer than 200 recorded express mail covers and, of those, fewer than 50 are eastbound.

Trans-Mississippi express mails were explained in detail in 1961 by Lawrence L. Shenfield in *Confederate States of America, The Special Postal Routes*. A detailed pictorial census and follow-up addendum was written by Richard Krieger in *Trans-Mississippi Mails after the Fall of Vicksburg*, published 1984, and still heavily referred to today by students, dealers and auctioneers. Most recently, Steven Walske and Scott Trepel offered up-to-date information on the topic in *Special Mail Routes of the American Civil War: A Guide to Across-the-Lines Postal History*, published by the Confederate Stamp Alliance in 2008.

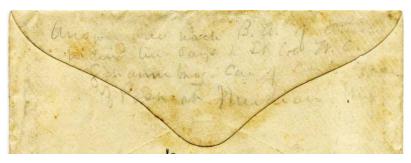
The illustrated Scott CSA 13d, a 20¢ green diagonal bisect, is tied with a pen stroke on a small commercially made envelope addressed to "Mrs. Adèle Allston, Society Hill, S. Ca. or Morven N. Carolina." The stamp was severed to make the 10¢ Trans-Mississippi rate (Figure 1).

How incredible is it that, in those days, you could address a letter to someone in two different states – in this case North or South Carolina – and manage to have the letter arrive safely in the hands of the addressee? The subject letter was sent by Col. Benjamin Allston to his mother. He also had a sister named Adèle, who went by the name Della. The Allstons were well-known wealthy rice planters and had a half-dozen plantations



Figure 1. Scott CSA 13d, 20¢ green diagonal bisect, tied with a pen stroke on a small commercially made envelope to "Mrs. Adèle Allston, Society Hill, S. Ca. or Morven N. Carolina." The stamp pays the 10¢ Trans-Mississippi rate.

Figure 2. On the back flaps of the Figure 1 cover is a routing note, "Ans[wer] me back B.A. (Benjamin Allston) of Austin (?) within ten days to Lt. Col. W. C. 8th Army Brig. Comd. Officer at Post at Meridian."



in both North and South Carolina. There are numerous Trans-Mississippi covers from the Allston correspondence.

In very light pencil on the back flaps of the subject cover is the pertinent routing note, "Ans[wer] me back B.A. (Benjamin Allston) of Austin (?) within ten days to Lt. Col. W. C. 8th Army Brig. Comd. Officer at Post at Meridian" (Figure 2).

This cover was most likely sent before the official express service began or, alternatively, it was a regular 10¢ rate, as the regular rate was still valid but it did not receive priority handling. The express rate did not replace the regular 10¢ letter rate for letters directed across the Mississippi. Soldiers' due letters were not authorized to be carried in the Trans-Mississippi express mail. Such regular 10¢ Trans-Mississippi uses are listed in the CSA catalog as TMW-07 Eastbound and TMW-09 Westbound.

Owing to the note of urgency on the back flaps, I believe this use was most likely before the formal express mail service began. The Confederate 20¢ stamp was issued June 1, 1863, thus likely dating this use between June and October 1863.

Shown in Figure 3 is a copy of Allston's 1865 parole, housed in the National Archives, and signed by Col. Benjamin Allston in what is clearly the same hand as the address panel of the cover to his mother.

A pair of CSA No. 13 pays the Eastbound 40¢ express rate from Georgetown, S.C., on cover addressed to "Col. Ben Allston, P.A.C.S. Genl. E.K. Smith, Shreveport, La., Via Meridian, Miss.," with manuscript directive at lower left "Ppd. 40 cents." This is Krieger census number E35, formerly owned by Larry Shenfield and Richard Corwin. The photo is courtesy of Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries (Figure 4).

Col. Benjamin Allston (1833-1900), was born in Charleston, S.C. He was an 1853 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy and served in the U.S. Cavalry 1853-57. After the war, he was engaged as both a rice planter and Episcopal priest in the towns of Prince George, Winyah, Georgetown, Union and Winnsboro, S.C.

Ben Allston enlisted as a 1st lieutenant in the Confederate Army on March 10, 1861. He was commissioned into the Alabama 4th Infantry Sept. 15, 1861, later commissioned into Field & Staff of the 5th Virginia Cavalry. He was promoted to Major on June 20, 1861, then to Colonel and Assistant Inspector General May 15, 1862. He was paroled April 15, 1865, by which time he was Inspector General on the staff of General Kirby Smith, Trans-Mississippi Department. One family source notes that he

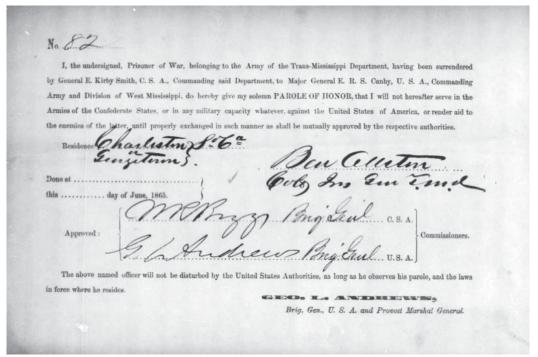


Figure 3. Col. Ben Allston's signed parole of honor, June 1865.

Figure 4. A pair of 20¢ green pays the eastbound 40¢ express rate on a cover addressed to "Col. Ben Allston, P.A.C.S. Genl. E.K. Smith, Shreveport, La., Via Meridian, Miss."



was Chief of the Secret Service as well, although I have been unable to verify that in a quick search of Confederate records.<sup>2</sup>

Benjamin Allston was the son of Robert Francis Withers Allston (1801-64) and Adèle Petigru Allston (1810-1896), shown in 1850 portraits by Flagg in Figures 5 and 6.<sup>3</sup>

His father was the 67th governor of South Carolina. The elder Allston graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1821; he resigned from the army less than a year later. Robert Allston accumulated many plantations by the time of his death, but with the devastation of the Civil War and heavy taxes, Chicora Wood was the only plantation of which his wife Adèle was able to retain ownership. When they returned to Chicora after the war, they found the house in shambles. Federal officers told the former slaves the Allstons would not return and the slaves could take over the house and remove its contents.

Towards the end of his life, R.F.W. Allston purchased the Morven Plantation in Anson County, N.C. He owned approximately 4,000 acres of improved land and some 9,500 acres of pasture, marsh and timberlands, as well as hundreds of slaves at the time of his death in 1864. Allston served as a presidential elector of the Confederate States in 1861 and a member of the Soldiers' Board of Relief. Adèle Petigru (Allston) Vanderhorst (1840-1915) was the sister of Col. Benjamin Allston (1833-1900), not to be confused with her mother, also named Adèle.

The Allston Family Papers (1730-1901) are housed at the South Carolina Historical Society. Elizabeth W. Allston Pringle wrote a lovely family tribute, *Chronicles of Chicora Wood*, in 1922. It is available online through Project Gutenberg and traces antebellum memories through to the death of her father, the challenging war years, including Sherman's advances and beyond.

The Allstons lost much of their fortune during the Civil War, as did many gentile Southern families.

After the war, Adèle Allston made a living by running a small boarding school at their Charleston home, Russell House, called Mrs. R.F.W. Allston's Boarding and Day School for Young Ladies. She and her daughters taught classes in English, French, literature, music and math. The school also provided "moral, intellectual and physical training." Mrs. Allston closed the



Figure 5. Adèle Petigru Allston (1810-96), 1850 portrait by George Whiting Flagg. Courtesy Gibbes Museum, Charleston.

Figure 6. Robert Francis Withers Allston, 1850 oil painting by George Whiting Flagg. Courtesy Gibbes Museum, Charleston

school in 1869 and retired to Chicora Wood, doubtless with poignant memories of a more peaceful time.<sup>4</sup>

## **Endnotes**

- 1. Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown, Jr., Jerry S. Palazolo, Editors, Confederate States Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History, 2012, Confederate Stamp Alliance, www.csalliance.org.
- 2. Joseph A. Groves, MD, The Alstons and Allstons of North and South Carolina Compiled from English, Colonial and Family Records with Personal Reminiscences also Notes of Some Allied Families. Franklin Printing and Publishing Company, Atlanta, Ga., 1901, pp. 64-65.
- 3. Elizabeth W. Allston (Elizabeth Pringle) Project Guttenberg EBook of Chronicle of Chicora Wood, www.gutenberg.org/files/56736/56736-h/56736-h.htm#ALLSTON/ Accessed Feb. 26, 2019.
- 4. Plantation-owners Biographies, https://haygenealogy.com/hay/patriots/civilwar/plantationbios.html

