

USING GENEALOGY TO SOLVE POSTAL HISTORY CONUNDRUMS

Patricia A. Kaufmann

The use of genealogy is often crucial to proving the postal identity of a postal item or its delivery. A perfect example is the inexpensive item shown in Figure 1.

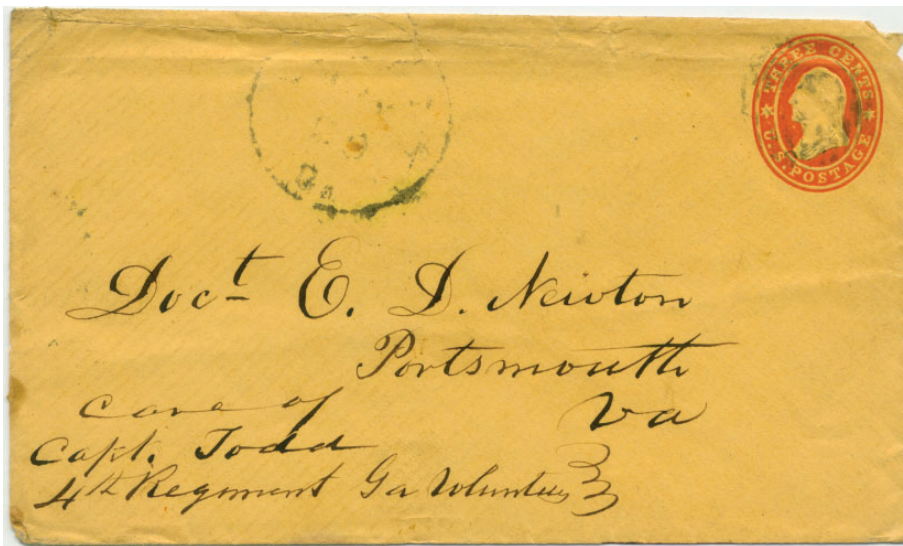


Figure 1. Virtually indecipherable postmark on U.S. 3¢ star-die entire – provable through genealogical research as a Confederate use of U.S. Postage.

After more than 50 years looking at Confederate postmarks, I suspected the indistinct postmark was likely that of Athens, Ga., from the visible “Ga.,” the relatively fewer number of letters in the marking, as well as my familiarity with correspondents from that area.

The Scott U27 3¢ star-die entire is tied by a grid with a faint matching circular datestamp at left. The envelope is addressed to “Doct. E.D. Newton, Portsmouth, Va. Care of Capt. Todd, 4th Regiment Ga. Volunteers.” When I first saw the cover, I knew it was either an independent state use or a Confederate use of U.S. postage.

The period during which United States stamps were lawfully used in the seceded states is divided into two periods: the independent statehood period (except in the case of Tennessee) from the date seceded through the day before it joined the Confederacy; the Confederate States period began the day a state joined the Confederacy through May 31, 1861, the day before the Confederate Post Office Department took over its own operations and U.S. stamps were no longer valid for postage in the Confederacy.

This is a Confederate use of U.S. postage. You may ask how I could possibly know the identity of the faint town postmark or the weakly-struck date, making it impossible to read. That is where genealogy research helps verify this beyond all question.

Figure 2 (above). Signature of Dr. Edwin D. Newton while in Georgia 4th Infantry.

Figure 3 (right). Military record card showing Dr. Newton in the P.A.C.S (Provisional Army of the Confederate States) as a surgeon.

The addressee is Dr. Edwin Dorset Newton (1835-1917), a son of John Hamlin Newton (1800-89), who was a businessman and manufacturer from Athens, Ga. His mother was Mary *Jordon* Newton. Dr. Newton's sister was Ann Olivia *Newton* Cobb, also known as Mrs. Lamar Cobb. Lamar was a son of the illustrious Howell Cobb who was president of the Provisional Congress of the Confederate States and a Confederate major general. The Newton family home was in Athens, Ga., confirming my suspicion that the postmark was likely Athens. Further family research corroborated this.

A very lengthy medical and military biography of Dr. Newton is available on the Find A Grave website.¹ He is buried in Oconee Hill Cemetery, Athens, Ga. There is an excellent photo of him on the website but, alas, it is small and only screen resolution, unsuitable for print publication. The inscription for him on the large family tombstone reads "Edwin D. Newton, Surgeon in Lee's Army, 1861-1865." His signature, from military records, is shown in Figure 2.

Many of the Civil War medical biographies for this valuable web resource were written by CWPS member Dr. F. Terry Hambrecht, including this one. Terry was one of the founders of the National Museum of Civil War Medicine. This non-profit

Newton E. D.
P.A.C.S.
**General and Staff Officers,
 Corps, Division and Brigade Staffs,
 Non-com. Staffs and Bands,
 Enlisted Men, Staff Departments, C. S. A.
 (Confederate.)**

Surgeon | *Surgeon*
CARD NUMBERS

1	44370659	18
2	47519299	19
3	46604557	20
4		21
5		22
6		23
7		24
8		25
9		26
10		27
11		28
12		29
13		30
14		31
15		32
16		33
17		34

Number of medical cards herein *0*
 Number of personal papers herein *0*

BOOK MARK: _____

See also _____

museum is in Frederick, Md., a worthwhile daytrip from Gettysburg, Antietam, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and more.² Terry has long been my “go-to” source for all things having to do with Civil War medicine, stretching back decades to my auction house days in Washington, D.C.

U.S. star-die envelopes were first put into use in August 1860, but they had a short useful postage life. This postal stationery was printed by George Nesbitt of New York City. The embossed stamps are known as “star-dies,” due to the small stars at either side of the bust of George Washington on the indicia. To prevent their unauthorized use, these envelopes were demonetized by the U.S. Post Office Department in the South on June 1, 1861. They were demonetized in the Union from August 1861 forward. This short window of postal opportunity is very helpful to modern postal history students trying to date specific uses.

Newton received his medical degree from Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia in 1859. Thereafter, he interned at the Alms House in Baltimore, Md.; he began the practice of medicine in Athens, Ga., in 1860. He served as surgeon and assistant surgeon in the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia during the American Civil War.

Dozens of pages of military records for Newton are housed in the National Archives and Records Administration. Figure 3 illustrates a record card showing Newton in the P.A.C.S (Provisional Army of the Confederate States) as a surgeon for General and Staff Officers, Corps, Division and Brigade Staffs, etc.

He was appointed Assistant Surgeon from Georgia April 27, 1861, as shown in Figure 4. He was ordered to report to the 4th Georgia Infantry, positively dating this cover as a

(CONFEDERATE.)

N

Edwin D. Newton
Asst Surg Med Dept.

Appears on a **Register**
of Appointments, Confederate States Army.

State *Geo*

To whom report *4 Ga Regt.*

Date of appointment *Apr 27*, 1861.

Date of confirmation _____, 1861.

To take rank _____, 1861.

Date of acceptance *Apr 27*, 1861.

Delivered *Montgomery Ala*

Secretary of War *L.P. M.*

Remarks: *Resigned June 12, 1861*

Confed. Arch., Chap. 1, File No. 86, page *305*

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Figure 4. Newton was appointed assistant surgeon from Georgia April 27, 1861, as shown in military records.

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Confederate Use of U.S. Postage. The cover clearly shows the 4th Georgia Infantry in the address.

The record card further confirms the Secretary of War as L.P.W. (Leroy Pope Walker), who was the first short-lived holder of that position until September 1861. It indicates the appointment was delivered in Montgomery, Ala. The Provisional Congress of the Confederate States of America sat in Montgomery until May 21, 1861, when it adjourned to meet in Richmond, Va., on July 20, 1861.

The June 1863-dated record shows that Newton is to report directly to Gen. R.E. Lee. The Secretary of War by that time was James A. Seddon. Newton's appointment to surgeon was made Feb. 19, 1863, with his confirmation on Jan. 30, 1864.

Newton's military records read like a tour of Southern battlefields and hospitals from several named hospitals in Richmond to Gordonsville, Yorktown, Fredericksburg, Winchester, Orange C.H., the Wilderness, Murfreesboro, Petersburg, back to Richmond and, ultimately, Appomattox – the last hurrah for the Army of Northern Virginia. Dr. Newton surrendered at Appomattox April 10, 1865, and was paroled.

After the war, Newton practiced medicine in Athens, Milledgeville and Atlanta, Ga. He is also shown as a druggist in Rome, Ga., in 1870. He never married.

Newton's military records were invaluable in targeting the date of this use. Genealogical research is not done just for social interest. It is invaluable in the postal history quest. And, yes, it is often interesting as well. But that is simply the bonus.

Endnotes

1. Hambrecht, F.T. & Koste, J.L., Biographical register of physicians who served the Confederacy in a medical capacity, June 28, 2013. Unpublished database., Dr. Edwin Dorset Newton, memorial ID 146883007, www.findagrave.com/memorial/14683007/edwin-dorset-newton, accessed Nov. 9, 2021.
2. National Museum of Civil War Medicine, www.civilwarmed.org/about/history/ accessed Nov. 9, 2021.

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