

J.R. CROCKETT – SOLDIERS EXPRESS LINE

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Figure 1. A folded letter franked with a 10¢ Jefferson Davis (CSA 12-KB) tied by an indistinct circular datestamp to Chappell Hill, Texas.

Upon careful examinations, sometimes the most common-appearing covers can arouse postal history interest. The folded letter shown in Figure 1 is franked with a 10¢ dark blue Jefferson Davis (CSA 12-KB), tied by an indistinct circular datestamp. It is headed Fort Bankhead, Sunday, Dec. 25, 1864, and is addressed to J.E. Wallis, Chappell Hill, Texas. It is signed by Henry A. Lander(s), Co. "D" 20th Texas Infantry.

Military records show the writer as Sgt. Henry A. Landers, who enlisted at Dallas, Texas, with assignment to the 15th Texas Cavalry. However, it shows him as "Detailed as extra duty man to carry horses back to Texas, July 24, '62." Then "Absent" and "Was not captured at Ark(ansas) Post supposed to be in Trans-Miss. Department" (20th Texas). Later records just state "Absent, in Trans-Mississippi Department."

As you might suspect, the topic of interest is contained in the two-page letter, shown in Figures 2 and 3. It begins ordinarily enough with reference to Christmas Day and military rumors, noting:

"It would take Barrels to hold the Whiskey that has been swallowed down on Galveston Island during the past two days. Many Rumors flying around during the past week in regard to 'New Movements,' such as 'the evacuation of the Island,' 'Troops all going east of the Miss. River,' etc. These 'rumors' are credited by a few from the fact that all of the Guns (save one from each) have

been taken away from Fort 'Sidney Sherman,' and 'Magruder.' I do not (Nor is it known outside of the Official Circle) know why these Guns were taken away, or where they are going. I only know that they are being removed at night and that they go up the R. Road."



Figure 2 (above). Page 1 of letter headed Fort Bankhead, Sunday, Dec. 25, 1864.

The letter continues with details about going out to the farthest "Yank vessels" in rough seas, and going aboard. It identifies specific vessels that have been captured or lost at sea.



Figure 3 (right). Page 2 of letter signed by Henry A. Lander(s), Co. "D" 20th Texas Infantry.

The heading of the letter threw me. I knew of Fort Magruder and supposed that "Fort Bankhead" might be a nickname for Fort Magruder, since it was named for Confederate General John Bankhead Magruder (1807-71).

Gen. Magruder succeeded Brig. Gen. Paul Hébert as the Confederate commander for the District of Texas, arriving on Oct. 10, 1862, before taking command Nov. 29. He planned and participated in the Jan. 1, 1863, recapture of Galveston, although it was only a temporary dispersal of the Union blockading fleet. A born soldier, he was known as "Prince John" to his army friends for his flamboyant behavior. He is shown before the Civil War in full uniform, in Figure 4.

Quick internet searches did not produce any information on Fort Magruder, other than it was abandoned in early 1864. Landers was writing on Christmas Day 1864, so my first thought was incorrect, Fort Bankhead could not be Fort Magruder. See Figure 5 for a Texas historical marker revealing the timeline.



Figure 4. Gen. John Bankhead Magruder, nicknamed "Prince John" by his army friends for his flamboyant ways.

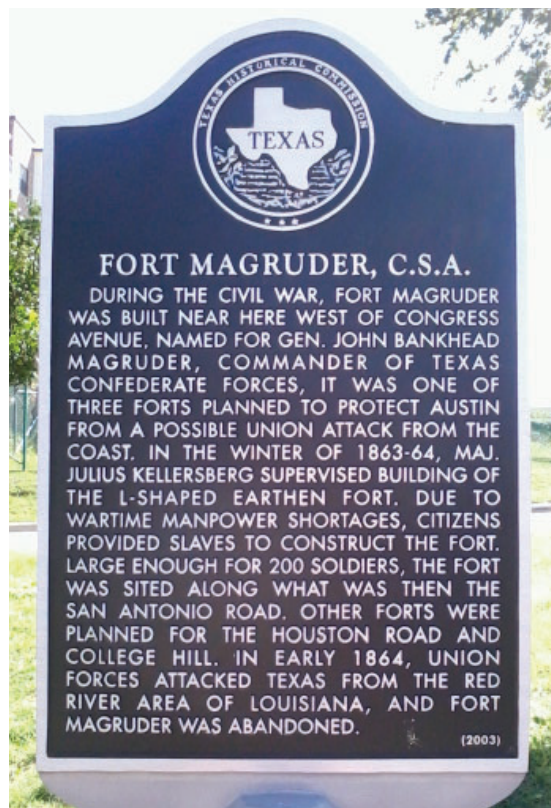


Figure 5. Fort Magruder, Texas, historical marker.

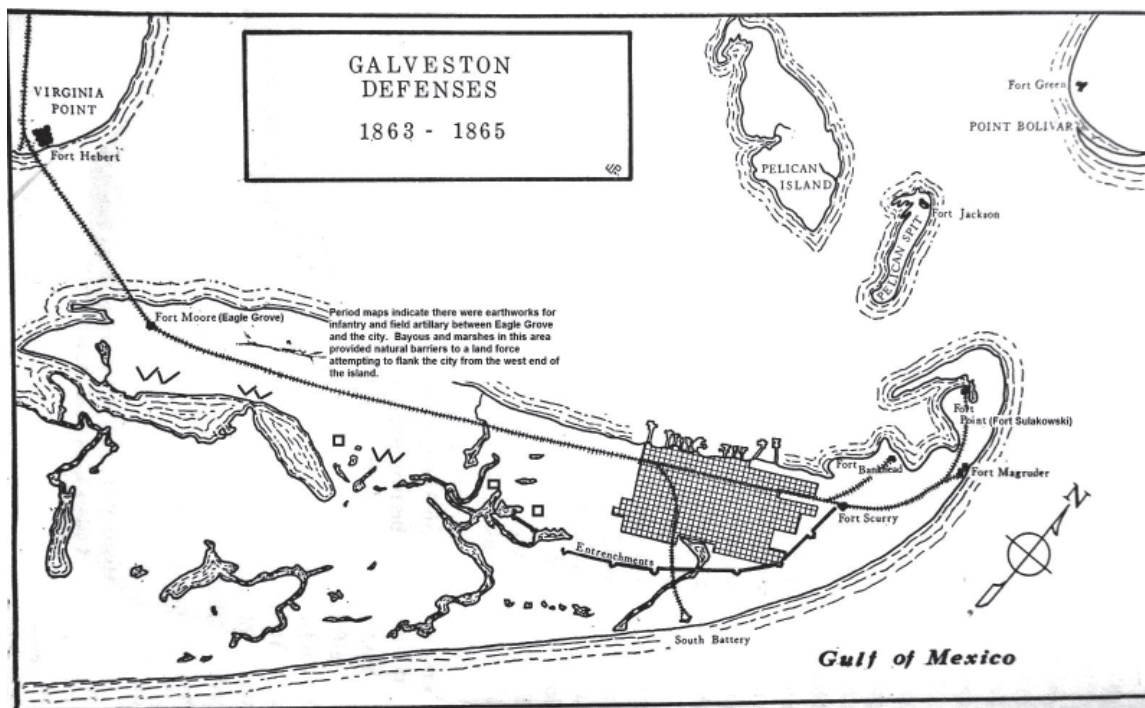


Figure 6. Map of embankments forts defending Galveston, including Fort Bankhead and Fort Magruder.

I shot a quick email to the always-helpful Vince King, one of my go-to Texas postal historians. His reply was fairly immediate, explaining that there were a series of earthen embankment batteries near Galveston referred to as forts. The mostly bored soldiers who were defending Galveston gave names to these embankments, one of which was Fort Bankhead. They are shown in Figure 6 on a map from the *Southwestern Historical Society Quarterly* article “Texas Coastal Defense, 1861-1861,” by Alwyn Barr, July 1961. Unsurprisingly, Fort Bankhead was directly across from Fort Magruder.

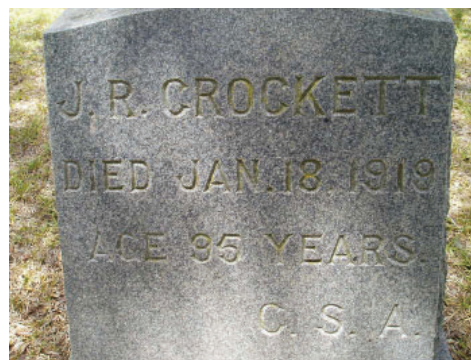


Figure 7. Gravestone of J.R. Crockett, a rider on the Texas Soldiers Express Line.

J.R. Crockett

The postally interesting part of this Texas letter is near the end on the second page:

“J.R Crockett leaves us tomorrow. He has been detailed on Soldiers Express Line, and will run the Hilltown Road. He got Surgeons Certificate of disability for field service, & I do not know a man who is more able to carry a musket than J.R.”

John Richardson Crockett (1823-1919) was born in Decatur, Ala.¹ I’d love to say that he was somehow related to Davy Crockett, of Alamo fame, but there is no evidence of that. Crockett’s gravestone is shown in Figure 7.

A carte de visite portrait of J.R. Crockett is shown in Figure 8, done by Moses Cadwell in Flatonia, Texas. Moses Cadwell and his twin brother, Aaron, also served in the war. Moses fought in the last battle of the Civil War at Palmetto Ranch. The brothers partnered in photography after the war. Moses’ son, Fred B. Cadwell, also worked as a photographer.²



Figure 8. John Richardson Crockett, carte de visite, by Moses Cadwell Flatonia, Texas.

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SCHEDULE 1—Free Inhabitants in _____ in the County of North State
of Texas enumerated by me, on the Twelfth day of July 1860. A. V. Biggins Ass't Marshal.
Post Office Black Jack

Dwelling-house— lot or other place where the person resides.	Family numbered in this order of enumeration.	The name of every person whose usual place of abode on the first day of June, 1860, was in this family.	Description.		Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each person, male and female, over 15 years of age.	Value of Real Estate Owned.		Place of Birth, Naming the State, Territory, or Country.	Married within the year.		Whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict.		
			Age.	Sex.		Value of Real Estate.	Value of Personal Estate.		Male.	Female.			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	10/25	J. Edward	19	M					Pa				
2	10/26	J. W. Stirling	26	M	Blacksmith	200	700	Germany					
3		Mary	18	F					Pa				
4		Joseph	5	F					Pa				
5	10/27	John Stirling	18	M	Self-employment			Germany					
6	10/28	William Stirling	34	M	Blacksmith	500	1400	Pa					
7		John	11	M				Pa					
8	10/29	James Lewis	25	M	Black		600	Pa					
9	10/30	J. B. Bartlett	35	M	Farmer	600	1225	Pa					
10		John	33	F				Pa					
11		Willie	12	M				Pa					
12		Samuel	10	M				Pa					
13		J. B.	6	F				Pa					
14		M. B.	3	F				Pa					
15		John W.	12	M				Pa					
16	10/31	Robert Bartlett	21	M			1400	Pa					
17	10/32	Charles Park	62	M	Farmer	3280	1110	Pa					
18		Martha	55	F				Pa					
19		John	20	M	Labourer			Pa					
20		Anna	16	M				Pa					
21		J. B.	12	F				Pa					
22	10/33	William Park	24	M	Farmer		150	Pa					
23	10/34	Benjamin Park	21	M			250	Pa					
24		M. B.	32	F				Pa					
25		James	17	M				Pa					
26		Martha	13	F				Pa					
27		Francis	11	F				Pa					
28		William	9	M				Pa					
29		Strawberry	6	M				Pa					
30		J. B.	4	M				Pa					
31		J. B.	2	F				Pa					
32	10/35	James L. Park	37	M	Farmer		300	Pa					
33	10/36	J. W. Bartlett	35	M			2150	2000	Pa				
34		M. B.	24	F				Pa					
35		J. B.	12	M				Pa					
36		M. B.	11	F				Pa					
37		M. B.	9	F				Pa					
38		M. B.	5	M				Pa					
39		J. B.	2	F				Pa					
40		M. B. Bartlett	5	F				Pa					

No. white males, 12 No. colored males, _____ No. foreign born, _____ No. blind, _____
No. white females, 17 No. colored females, _____ No. deaf and dumb, _____ No. insane, _____
No. paupers, _____ No. convicts, _____

I hereby declare that the above is a true and correct copy of the original as the same appears in the original book of the Census of 1860.

26 *Civil War Philatelist*

Crockett's obituary from the *Gonzales Inquirer*, dated Jan. 23, 1919, is published online at his Find A Grave memorial. It states:

"J.R. Crockett Venerable Veteran Passed Away

"J.R. Crockett, the venerable father of J.G. Crockett, and one of the oldest Confederate veterans in the state, responded to the final roll call Saturday Jan. 18, 1919, at 8 p.m. at the home of his son in this city. Mr. Crockett was nearly 95 years old and had he lived, he would have celebrated his 95th birthday in two months.

"He had been quite sick with a severe cold for several days, but the immediate cause of his death was heart failure.

"Surviving him are the one son and two daughters, Mrs. Hyatt and Mrs. Williams of New Mexico, and a number of grandchildren. His wife passed away last May.

"The remains were taken to Flatonia his old home, Sunday accompanied by Mr. Crockett, W.H. Clark and W.E. Ferguson, and the funeral was held there Sunday afternoon.

"Mr. Crockett was one of the veteran newspaper men of the state, having been editor of the Flatonia Argus for a number of years. For several years he and Mrs. Crockett had made their home in Gonzales with their son.

"A tribute from the U.D.C. Chapter that accompanied the remains to Flatonia was a handsome floral cushion made by Mrs. W.J. Bright and a large potted lily was secured by Mrs. W.C. Franks at the request of Flatonia friends.

"His was a useful life as well as a long one and it may be truly said of him "Well done thou good and faithful servant enter into the joys of thy Lord."

The *Flatonia Argus*, the oldest newspaper in Fayette County, Texas, is still in circulation. It was established in 1875 by Col. Pocohantas E. Edmondson and passed through a number of hands before Crockett took the reins.

Military records show J.R. Crockett's service as a private in Company B, 20th Regiment Texas Infantry, also known as Elmore's Regiment Texas Infantry. In Figure 10, he appears on the regimental return of February 1865 under "Absent enlisted men accounted for" as "On detached service on Soldiers Express Dec. 23, '64." Another similar document shows him on the Soldiers' Express Line Dec. 9, 1864, as well.

Soldier's Express Line

Edward H. Cushing, familiar to Confederate postal history students as the originator of Cushing's Express, was also an owner and the editor of the *Houston Weekly Telegraph* as of 1856. He was as much a forwarder of the mail as an express operator.

(Confederate.)
20 Texas.
J. R. Crockett
Co B, 20 Reg't Texas Infantry.
Appears on
Regimental Return
of the organization named above,
for the month of Feb., 1865.
Commissioned officers present and absent:
Station
Remarks:
Alterations since last return among the enlisted men:
Date, 1865.
Place
Remarks:
Enlisted men on Extra or Daily Duty:
Absent enlisted men accounted for:
On detached service on
Soldiers Express Dec. 23, '64.
The 20th (also known as Elmore's) Regiment Texas Infantry,
with ten companies A to K, completed its organization by the
election of field officers May 14, 1862. Many of the former mem-
bers of the 5th (Nichols') Regiment Texas Infantry enlisted in
this regiment.
J. Bay
(644) Copyist.

Figure 10. Regimental return shows J.R. Crockett as, "On detached service on Soldiers Express Dec. 23, '64."

For an in-depth look at Cushing Express, as well as much other Texas postal history, I direct you to Frank Crown's in-depth article in the 2022 *Congress Book*, titled "Edward H. Cushing: His Express and the Mail," which won the 2023 August Dietz Award in Sarasota at the annual meeting. There are extensive appendices not only of Cushing labels types, but mail forwarded by Cushing, departure date tables, and a list of mail carriers and other individuals who handled Trans-Mississippi mail. Much of this is derived from careful gleaning of the newspapers of the era.³

On page 1 of the March 22, 1864, issue of the *Houston Weekly Telegraph*, Cushing expressed his opinion on how mail service could be improved to and from soldiers in Texas and Arkansas.

"The Soldier's Express Arrangement, put in operation by Gen. Magruder, is a capital thing. It is attended to by soldiers not fit for duty, exclusively, who run on all the roads and take charge of all packages for soldiers. The office in Houston is at Mr. Jas. Bailey's. There is another matter that might well be added to this. It is the establishment of a soldier's mail with a soldier's letter office at Houston. At present, if we may believe what the soldiers say, not half the letters they write ever reach their friends, nor half their friends write ever reach them. If now there were a general letter office in Houston, to which all letters should be sent for assortment for all the Texas troops in the (Trans-Mississippi) department, furnished with a few disabled soldiers as clerks, letters might be assorted and put up in packages for each regiment, and sent by these soldiers' express messengers to their destination, and in this way their delivery be secured. In like manner letters could be sent here to be mailed, and being assorted, could be placed in the post office, thus saving the postmaster the labor which he is unable to furnish, and securing the dispatch of the letters(.) We notice the importance of such an office from the fact that hundreds of letters are sent to our care to be forwarded to both officers and men in all parts of the army from the Mississippi to the Rio Grande. We cheerfully forward all such, but th(e)re an office provided for the business, the run of the regiments could be better kept, and all letters be sent through it."

From the facts we know from Crockett's military records, Cushing was on target concerning soldiers who were not fit for field service acting as mail carriers.

In Summation

Although there is much more to discover, we know there were a goodly number of disabled soldiers and veterans who transmitted mail in the Trans-Mississippi area. The problem for postal historians is trying to identify the postal items as such. Connecting the dots is not easy.

It is clear from Landers' letter to Wallis that he didn't think much of Crockett's disability as an excuse for detached service. Nor was Edward H. Cushing impressed with the Soldiers' Express Line mail system.

Endnotes

1. John Richardson Crockett, Find A Grave Memorial 15337767, www.findagrave.com/memorial/15337767/john-richardson-crockett (Accessed April 17, 2023)
2. Unidentified Flatonia Photos, Fayette County History, www.fayettecountyhistory.org/flatonia_unidentified.htm (Accessed April 17, 2023)
3. Francis J. Crown Jr., *The Congress Book* 2023, "Edward H. Cushing: His Express and the Mail," The American Philatelic Congress, 2022, pp. 54-118.