

Decades of Distortion:

~~Norman S. Walker – Bermuda Blockade-Run Mail~~

Henry P. Walker – Internal Consular Mail

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The problem with misinformation is that – once published – it may remain mainstream for decades, or even centuries. Such is the case with the “Bermuda blockade covers” allegedly signed by Norman S. Walker.

The Walker covers were comprehensively written up in these very pages more than 40 years ago by Rev. William Parkes in a well-written and heavily cited two-part series titled “Per Walker: Major Norman S. Walker and Bermuda Blockade Mail.”^{1,2}

There was so much accurate and convincing information in the article that a fatal flaw almost went unnoticed until a retraction was published about a year later. But that critical correction was overwhelmingly overlooked for four decades.

I only tripped on the truth with dreadful awareness while on the searchable database of the *Confederate Philatelist* and *Civil War Philatelist* on the society website. I was looking for something else entirely.³

Meanwhile, over the past four decades, knowledgeable postal historians continued to write about the “Bermuda blockade-run covers signed by Norman S. Walker.” Censuses listed them. Catalogs illustrated them. Auctioneers and retailers sold them. Big prices were paid for them. International-level exhibitors showed them as prized treasures in their award-winning exhibits. All perpetuated the misinformation, I assume, totally unaware. And, yes, I was regrettably one of them.

It is distinctly embarrassing to all of us who missed or forgot the retraction of the initial assertion only a year later after Parkes’ original article. I was editor of these pages at the time of original publication, as well as at the time of the retraction. But I probably didn’t see a Walker cover for sale until two or three decades afterward, when the retraction was long forgotten. When the covers did catch my attention, they were sold with information from the original inaccurate article. There was no online database of the society journal at that time, nor any reason to question the original research.

Norman S. Walker

Maj. Norman S. Walker was the senior Confederate agent in Bermuda from February 1863 until June 27, 1864. The yellow fever epidemic caused him and his family to leave the island. His wife and children went to England, while Maj. Walker left for the Confederate States on government business. After an abandoned effort to establish Halifax as a principal port for blockade running, Maj. Walker and his family traveled to Bermuda and eventually returned to England.

Approximately nine or 10 purported blockade covers are recorded with a notation at lower left that has been variously read as “PrWalker” (Per Walker), “AppWalker” (Approved Walker) or “NSWalker” (Norman S. Walker). The endorsement and the address are in identical writing. Although it is similar to samples of Norman Walker’s hand, it is not a perfect match.

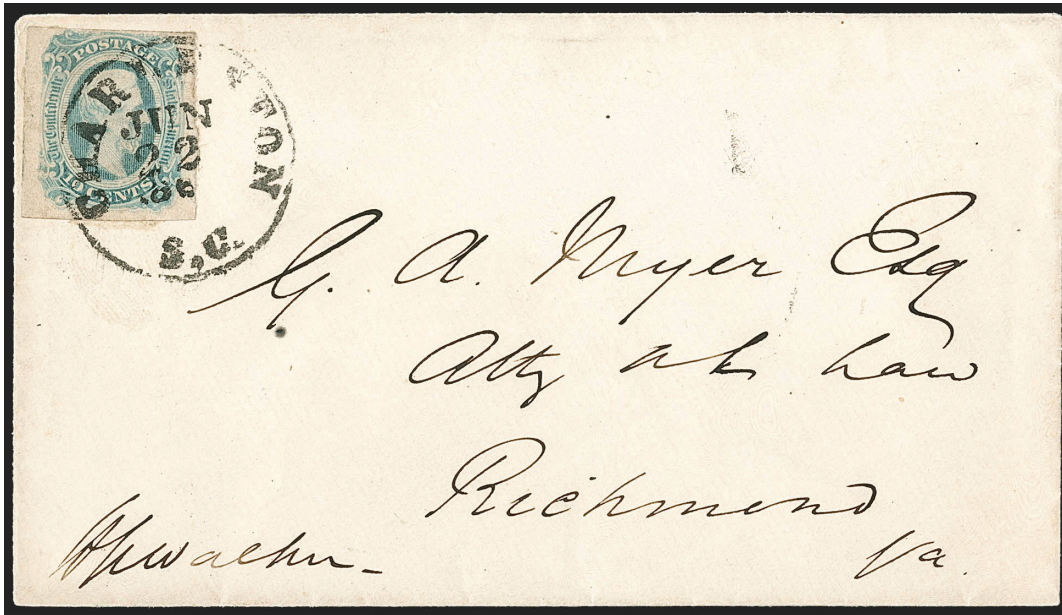


Figure 1. A 10¢ blue (CC CSA 12-AD) tied by a Charleston, S.C., June 22, 186(3) postmark on a cover with the signature of H.P. Walker at bottom left; years ago, it was incorrectly identified as the signature of N.S. Walker as a forwarding marking on a Bermuda blockade-run cover.

Henry Pinckney Walker

The problem is that the covers in question were not from Bermuda, nor were they signed by Norman S. Walker. Rather, they were the correspondence of Henry Pinckney Walker, the Acting British Consul in Charleston, S.C. (1861-63).

Figure 1 is franked with a CSA 12-AD⁴ 10¢ blue Type II, tied by a Charleston, S.C., June 22, 186(3), circular datestamp on a cover with the signature of H.P. Walker at bottom left. I assume it was a return address of sorts, serving no purpose other than making the recipient aware of the letter's origin. The cover is addressed to "G.A. Myer(s), Esq., Atty at Law, Richmond, Va."

Gustavus A. Myers was considered Richmond's most prominent Jewish citizen. Importantly, he was also Unofficial Acting Vice-Consul in Richmond from 1863-65. Myers was never officially appointed by the British, nor accepted by the Confederates.

George Moore was consul from September 1858 to June 1863, when his exequatur was revoked by the Confederate government. He had been in consular service since the 1830s.⁵ Myers held all the consular papers after Moore's revocation.

Myers was said to be the closest friend of Judah P. Benjamin in Richmond. Benjamin was the second Confederate Secretary of War, and also a Sephardic Jew. Myers was a guarantor on the \$100,000 bond for Jefferson Davis in 1867, a facsimile of which is in the Library of Congress. The bond bears the signatures of many famous people of the day, such as Horace Greeley, Cornelius Vanderbilt and others.

The cover shown in Figure 2 is franked with a vertical pair of CSA 12-ADa 10¢ milky blue Type II, tied by a Charleston, S.C., June 1863, circular datestamp on a cover with the signature of H.P. Walker at lower left and, similarly, addressed to Myers in Richmond.

The June-July 1863 period of the Walker covers was when the consular controversy was reaching a head. If Britain recognized the Confederate States officially, it would be considered an unfriendly act toward the United States. Recognition of the Confederacy was considered, but would

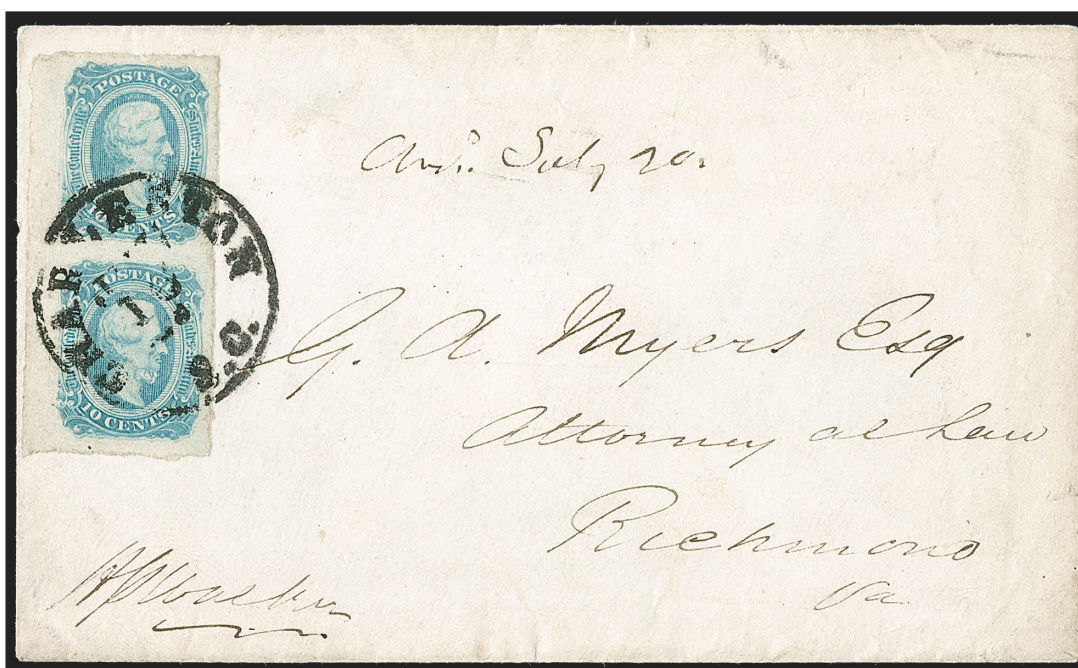


Figure 2. A 10¢ milky blue pair (CC CSA 12-ADa) tied by a Charleston, S.C., June 186(3) CDS on another cover with the signature of H.P. Walker; it is not the signature of N.S. Walker

mean certain war with the United States, loss of American grain, loss of exports, loss of investments and more. In 1863, the Confederacy expelled all foreign consuls for advising their subjects to refuse to serve in combat against the United States.

Exploring foreign relations during the American Civil War is a long and complex topic that makes for interesting reading, should you care to explore it. One source on the subject I have enjoyed is *The British Foreign Service and the American Civil War*, by Eugene H. Berwanger.⁶

The correspondence from Henry Pinckney Walker (1816-90) to Gustavus Adolphus Myers (1801-69) is more than likely consular correspondence. As Parkes speculated in his follow-up article, this is likely another collecting category – Internal Consular Mail; it is not blockade-run mail from Bermuda into Charleston. H.P. Walker was living and working in Charleston, and his letters were sent to Richmond, Va., where Myers lived. Both Walker and Myers were practicing attorneys.

In the South, H.P Walker was generally known as H. Pinckney Walker, while in the official British Diplomatic and Foreign Service Lists, he is shown as Henry P. Walker.

Consular mail would ordinarily have been delivered in a diplomatic pouch or bag, properly identified and sealed. This method was – and still is – used to transport official correspondence, documents and other articles intended for official use. Official mail is not subject to inspection. The Walker-Myers correspondence was sent by ordinary mail, subject to potential inspection, but that does not preclude it from being consular mail, especially considering the nebulous nature of Myers as an unofficial consul in Richmond.

The late Joe Holleman wrote about this roughly a year later in the September-October 1983 issue of the *Confederate Philatelist* in “Per’ Walker Revisited.”⁷ In the same issue, Bill Parkes figuratively fell on his sword with “The Walker Covers; A Reflection on the Re-Assessment,”⁸ with his sincere thanks to Holleman, J.V. Nielsen and others who helped set the record straight.



Figure 3. An incoming blockade-run cover to Charlotte, N.C., via Wilmington, bearing the only recorded use of the oval handstamp "Forwarded by N. S. Walker St. Georges Bermuda."

Rev. Parkes opened his article by stating:

I now know precisely how the surgeon felt when he insisted that his operation was truly amazing, but that sadly the patient had died. Let me immediately affirm my gratitude to Joe Holleman for his research, and for his kindly charity and courtesy in sharing with me his major findings.

Parkes later stated:

*Quite clearly when one sees even one clear specimen of H.P. Walker's signature and then looks at the cover notations **it just has to be** his hand. Joe could not be more right. I was never able to totally satisfy myself that the prefix before "Walker" on the covers was in fact "Per" or "Pr," but could not conceive anything else that it might be. I was so wrong and took others along with me. Covered with sack-cloth and ample ashes yet do I dare to contribute some additional material on Henry Pinckney Walker ...*

As Parkes pointed out in his uncomfortable retraction, the blockade background, the links with the Confederate community in Britain and the Maj. Norman S. Walker "mail service" from Bermuda do have validity. There is one cover recorded with an N.S. Walker handstamp.

Shown in Figure 3 is an incoming blockade-run cover addressed to Charlotte, N.C. It bears the oval handstamp "Forwarded by N.S. Walker St. Georges Bermuda" at top and is endorsed "Per Flora." It was carried by the named blockade runner on Dec. 4, 1863, arriving at Wilmington on Dec. 8 with a "Wilmington N.C. Dec. 9" circular datestamp and manuscript "12" cents due to pay the 10¢ postage rate to Charlotte plus the 2¢ ship fee.

In his retraction article, Parkes said the late J.V. Nielsen cited the source of the Walker/Myers covers as an antique dealer in Charleston "many years ago."

In Conclusion

The only recorded use of the "Forwarded by N. S. Walker St. Georges Bermuda" handstamp is on a blockade-run cover. It shows the proper 12¢ rate, and it bears the ship routing "Per Flora" into the port of Wilmington, N.C. This use clearly demonstrates Maj. Norman S. Walker indeed acted a mail forwarder. To date, there are no other recorded examples.

The covers signed by Henry P. Walker, incorrectly thought to be signed by Norman S. Walker, sadly appear to be standard mail within the Confederate States, although the consular connection makes them far more than typical. It would have been exciting to read the original contents during that turbulent time.

Finding this easily accessible information after nearly 40 years points up how important using the searchable database can be. I commend it to you. It is a huge benefit of CWPS membership; I use it regularly.

I hope this corrects the Walker misconception for another generation of collectors, but am sadly certain the incorrect blockade-run scenario will continue to a lesser or greater degree for all time.

Acknowledgements: My thanks to Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries for downloaded images.

Endnotes

1. Rev. William Parkes, "Per Walker: Major Norman S. Walker and Bermuda Blockade Mail," *Confederate Philatelist*, May-June 1982, pp. 63-77.
2. Rev. William Parkes, "Per Walker: Major Norman S. Walker and Bermuda Blockade Mail," *Confederate Philatelist*, July-Aug. 1982, pp. 95-109.
3. www.civilwarphilatelicsociety.org
4. Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown Jr., Jerry S. Palazolo, *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*, Sumter, S.C., Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012.
5. An exequatur is a written official recognition by a government of a consul, agent or other representative of a foreign state, authorizing the individual to exercise the duties of office.
6. Eugene H. Berwanger, *The British Foreign Service and the American Civil War*, Lexington, Ky., The University Press of Kentucky, 1994.
7. Joseph T. Holleman, "Per Walker' Revisited," *Confederate Philatelist*, September-October 1983, pp. 139-142.
8. William Parkes, "The Walker Covers; A Reflection on the Re-Assessment," *Confederate Philatelist*, September-October 1983, pp. 127-138.

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