

WILMINGTON BLOCKADE COVER FIND

Rodney L. Kelley

This past winter a year ago I purchased a group lot of Confederate covers in an auction. It contained an all-over shaded advertising cover on the Royal Victorian Hotel, Nassau, Bahamas (Figure 1). A Wilmington postmark dated March 20 ties a pair of No. 7s to the cover and to the left of the stamps is a stamped "2," indicating the incoming blockade runner Captain's letter fee (Figure 2).

Mrs. Washington Reed (Octavia Murdaugh Reed), the addressee on the envelope, was the wife of Washington Reed, who joined the Signal Corps at Norfolk, Va., on March 12, 1862, at the age of 39. On Aug. 23, 1862, he was detailed to the Navy Department by Special Order 197, Section 6. He served as a clerk to the naval store keeper at the Confederate States Navy Yard at Charlotte, N.C.

The Charlotte Navy Yard was furnished with machinery and equipment evacuated from the Gosport Navy Yard in Norfolk, Va., beginning in May 1862. In addition to becoming a major facility, the yard included a gun-carriage shop, a laboratory and a torpedo shop. A large forge shop was built containing the largest steam hammer in the South, where propeller shafts were forged for all the Confederate ironclads. The yard supplied solid shot, shell and torpedoes to all the ships and shore batteries manned by the Confederate Navy.

Construction of the Royal Victoria Hotel (Figure 3) began in 1859 as a government project at a cost of 6,000 pounds; it was completed in 1861. With the subsequent wealth, which came as a consequence of the war, the government decided to finish and furnish the hotel much more

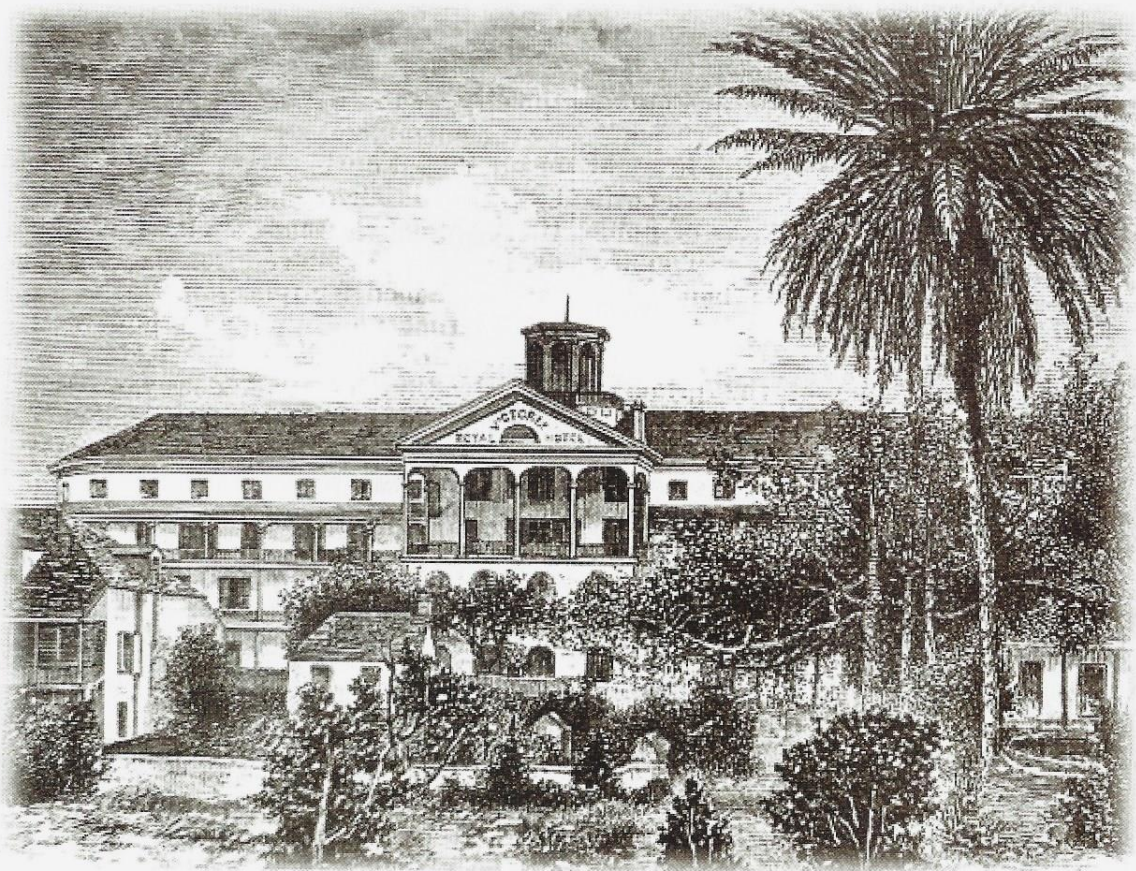
elaborately than at first planned. No expense was spared with



Figure 1. The author's subject cover..



Figure 2. Enlargement of "2" marking from Figure 1 cover.



Royal Victoria Hotel, opened in 1861

Figure 3. The opulent Royal Victoria Hotel in Nassau, Bahamas.

the furnishings and service. The social life of Nassau centered in the Royal Victoria Hotel. The hotel was crowded with blockade runners, Confederate agents, their wives and war correspondents. Dances were held to celebrate the safe return of a “runner.”

There are three other covers addressed to Mrs. Washington Reed and Washington Reed that ran the blockade into Wilmington. All are addressed in the same handwriting as this cover. Definitely more research remains to be done.

Author’s Acknowledgements: Thanks to Steve Walske for verifying my cover and to Trish Kaufmann and Steven Roth for reviewing my article.

Bibliography:

1. Violet G. Alexander, *The Confederate States Navy Yard at Charlotte, N.C. 1862-1865*, The Library of Congress, Class E591 Book A37, Page 2.
2. Thelma Peters, “Blockade-Running in the Bahamas During the Civil War,” A paper read before the Historical Association of Southern Florida at its meeting of May 5, 1943, Page 27.
3. Steven C. Walske and Scott R. Trepel, *Special Mail Routes of the American Civil War: A Guide to Across-the-Lines Postal History*, Appendix E, pp. 251, 254.
4. Accessed Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers on Fold3 for Washington Reed on March 31, 2018.