

McDaniel Express – Uncovering a Forgotten Confederate Local Delivery Service

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Figure 1 – Undated cover with no postal markings addressed to S. C. Laurens C. H. with notation “in care (care) of McDaniels express.”

The cover in Figure 1 came into my possession as a recent auction purchase. The cover caught my attention as it was very plain with no postal markings showing that the cover was hand-carried outside the postal system, was undated, and had the notation “in care of McDaniels Express” at the lower right with “care” misspelled. At first glance, the cover seemed to be a real puzzle. What in the world was McDaniels Express? I had never heard of McDaniels Express or had ever seen any references to such a service either before, during, or after the war. This intrigued me. I set out to do as much research on the cover as I possibly could in an attempt to solve this puzzle. There was not very much to go on, but the original cover in Figure 1 gives three very important pieces of information.

- 1) The name of the addressee – Mrs. Margret Box. The sender is not named. There is no enclosure.
- 2) The home of the addressee – Laurens Court House, South Carolina.
- 3) The name “McDaniel” is very likely associated with the same town.

The first logical step to take in conducting the research is to do an Internet search on “McDaniel(s) Express” and see if anything turns up. The Internet search was not particularly helpful. Next is to try and discover if there are any other covers known with this same or similar notation. I was able to find only one other cover referencing “McDaniel Express” found in the archives of Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries (Figure 2). This second cover turned out to be very important and supplied several missing pieces to the puzzle.



Figure 2 – CSA #5 Richmond, Va., AUG 11, 1862. Addressed to Mrs. Margaret Box, Laurens C. H., S. C., by Dr McDaniel Express. (Image Courtesy Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries Archives.)

The cover in Figure 2, which appeared in a Siegel Auction in 2014 and whose whereabouts today is not known, gives us more information when combined with what the cover in Figure 1 tells us.

- 1) The addressee is the same in both covers, but the handwriting is different. Mrs. Box’s first name has a slightly different spelling (Margaret vs Margret).
- 2) We now know that McDaniel was a physician.
- 3) McDaniel Express in Laurens Court House, South Carolina, was a wartime local service.

This cover from Richmond is the only other McDaniel Express cover that I was able to discover.

We can now find out more information by using Internet sources of information such as the Federal Census of 1860¹, Find-a-Grave², and simple Google searches. These sources are indispensable for gathering information on the people of the time.

The addressee of the two covers, Margaret Box (1841-1925), was the wife of William Irby Box (1839-1865). They were married in 1859. William Box, a shoemaker, entered service as a private in Company C 3rd South Carolina Infantry Battalion 11/1/1861. Since he was a skilled shoemaker, he was detailed to make shoes for the army in Richmond. He died in 1865 in Richmond presumably from disease. Private Box sent the cover in Figure 2 home to his wife and was familiar with the local McDaniel Express delivery from the Laurens Court House post office. Amazingly, I was able to find on a website called *Private Voices*³ an archive of the wartime letters from William to his wife, Margaret, but none from Margaret to William. The archive contains 2 undated letters and 23 dated letters between April 1862 and October 1864 including a letter dated August 10, 1862 which very likely was the letter from the cover in Figure 2. Only transcripts of the letters are available on the Internet and no images of the original letters and no covers. The transcripts retain the original spelling, which was very phonetically creative, and did not contain punctuation. This leads me to believe that Private Box did not address the cover in Figure 2 but that someone else addressed it for him. The cover in Figure 1 is more likely to be in Private Box's handwriting because of the misspellings and the fact that he spelled his wife's name as "Margret" in the letters. Because of the number of letters in the archive, there must be other covers that have the "McDaniel Express" notation from this correspondence yet to be discovered.

The Federal Census of 1860 lists a physician, Dr. Robert McDaniel (1818-1879), in Laurens Court House, Laurens District, South Carolina¹. What is interesting is that he is listed on the census with a personal worth of \$6,500 and a property value of \$18,500 which is a total of about \$1,000,000 in buying power in today's money. Far more than what would be expected of a simple practicing physician at that time. He is listed as owning 14 slaves on the Federal Slave Census of 1860³. The only possible explanation is that he must also have had either a large farm or a small plantation and needed the slaves to work the land for him. The McDaniel family was a large and wealthy plantation family in South Carolina. The money must, therefore, have been family money. Dr. McDaniel was also the Laurens Court House postmaster with his appointment dated in 1860 and carried into the Confederate period⁴. Laurens District was plantation country. These facts lead us to the only plausible explanation which is that Dr. McDaniel set up some sort of a local express service to deliver the mail to the outlying plantations and farms perhaps using one of his slaves. The closest analogy would be the well-documented "Millway Carrier"^{6,7} associated with the New Market, South Carolina, post office. Some of this is, of course, speculation. These conclusions are certainly reasonable based on the known facts.

Even the most unassuming cover can tell a significant story. All one has to do is put in the effort to research the cover. Only then can these stories be discovered. Perhaps other covers with the "McDaniel Express" reference will be found, and more information will be discovered. Or perhaps the service was very short lived. Right now, this is all the information that we have.

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Endnotes:

1. Federal Census of 1860
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/7667/?redirectFor=db.aspx> (requires an ancestry subscription)
2. Find-a-Grave <https://www.findagrave.com/> (free Internet access to the website)
3. William Irby Box – Private Voices <https://altchive.org/node/11022> (free Internet access to the website)
4. Federal Slave Census of 1860
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/7668/records/90096519> (requires an Ancestry subscription)
5. Postmaster Appointments
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1932/records/1310182> (requires an Ancestry subscription)
6. Krieger, Richard, “Identity of Millway Carrier Uncovered (Part 1)”, *The Confederate Philatelist*, May-June 1988, Pages 83-91.
7. Krieger, Richard, “Identity of Millway Carrier Uncovered (Part 2)”, *The Confederate Philatelist*, July-August 1988, Pages 123-130