

Salem, Mississippi
Postmaster's Provisional Adhesive – New Discovery
Jerry S. Palazolo and John L. Kimbrough MD



Figure 1: Folded Letter with homemade PAID 5(ms) adhesive initialed “G. N. D.” addressed to Gov Pettus in Jackson, Miss. Manuscript postal markings “Salem Mi Mch 24.”

Discovering something entirely new and significant in the world of Confederate philately is now almost unimaginable. Especially when that discovery has never been seen before, or even known to exist, decades after the Civil War concluded. However, that is precisely what occurred when this 1862 cover from Salem, Mississippi, was presented to the Civil War Philatelic Authentication Service (CWPAS) by Cherrystone Auctions for certification as a newly discovered postmaster's provisional. (Figure 1)

The cover, a complete folded letter, has manuscript postal markings “Salem Miss Mch 24 (1862)” and is addressed to Gov Pettus in Jackson, Mississippi. Affixed to the folded letter is a makeshift homemade adhesive, which is a rectangle cut from blue-lined notebook paper with a PAID handstamp and manuscript “5”. Prominent on the cut rectangle are the manuscript initials “G. N. D.” (Figure 2)



Figure 2: Enlargement of the adhesive showing the initials “G. N. D.” and the PAID “5” rate.

This article will explain the researched history of the cover, as is currently known, and the process involved in the authentication and certification of a newly discovered postmaster's provisional.

Preliminary Research

The subject cover originated from a very old collection belonging to a collector, Lucius B. Dabney, Jr., from Vicksburg, Mississippi, and referred to as the Dabney Collection. Dabney died in 2022 at the age of 96. He was an active collector for decades, but he was not a joiner -- not even the Confederate Stamp Alliance as the Civil War Philatelic Society was then known. This writer (JSP) was able to view what turned out to be hundreds and hundreds of his pre-war and Confederate covers "after the fact" when they were offered at auction in 2024. The sale went largely unnoticed by major Confederate collectors. This writer (JSP) did not know about the sale until a few days after it was completed, and the co-writer (JLK) never knew about the sale at all. This Salem, Mississippi, cover was not in the sale as the auction house contact stated in a telephone conversation (JLK) that the cover was held out separately because it appeared to be something special and needed further research.

The vast majority of the material in the auction of the Dabney Collection consisted of Mississippi related covers of which most appeared to have originated from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Many were addressed to various state government officials or departments before, during, and after the Civil War. Almost all the covers that this writer (JSP) saw retained their original contents. Of the hundreds of items this writer (JSP) viewed in person as well as in PDF format, all appeared to be perfectly genuine. None appeared to have been altered in any manner. Virtually every cover or folded letter was mounted with old stamp hinges on homemade card stock pages. As far as is known, no collector still alive was ever fortunate enough to have viewed the entire collection. None of these Mississippi covers in the Dabney Collection had ever previously been offered on the philatelic market. This leads to the belief that the covers were acquired privately by Dabney directly from the state archives.

It is well-known in certain circles that as recently as the 1970s, and possibly into the early 1980s, items were routinely "liberated" from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Some, but not all, of these stolen items contained the original contents. Once discovered, the thefts from the archives were generally kept quiet and not publicized so as to avoid adverse publicity and embarrassment. Better security measures were instituted, some stolen items were returned, and no one was ever charged.

The covers in the Dabney Collection all appear to pre-date the organized thefts from the archives. Most likely these covers were freely given to Dabney as favors. None of the examples that this writer (JSP)

viewed appeared to have any great historical significance or autographic value and all appeared to retain their original contents. Dabney's items were most likely dispersed during the late 1950s and early 1960s when the philatelic value of covers and folded letters without stamps were of little commercial value.

Before delving into the authentication process for the subject cover, it is essential to understand more about the town of Salem, Mississippi, itself and about the individuals connected to the cover — the sender, the recipient, and most importantly, the postmaster. Salem, Mississippi, was located in far north Mississippi in Tippah County between Ripley and Holly Springs near the Tennessee border. The part of Tippah County where Salem was located is now Benton County. Salem was founded in 1836 and incorporated in 1837. During the years before the war, Salem, located in plantation country, prospered. The Civil War devastated the town, causing the residents to relocate elsewhere and leading to Salem's eventual extinction as a town. Salem, Mississippi, of Civil War days cannot be found on a modern map of Mississippi. Today, there is virtually nothing left at the town's former site except the remnants of some very old structures.

A post office operated in Salem 1837-1870.¹ Salem is included in the 1862 listing of post offices in the United States.² Salem does not appear in the Confederate catalog. Despite a thorough search, no other examples of a Confederate period cover from the Salem, Mississippi, post office could be found. Eight pre-war Salem, Mississippi, covers from the 1840s and 1850s are known to the writers, one of which is illustrated. (Figure 3) No post-war covers could be identified.



Figure 3: Pre-war Nesbitt Postal Stationery with manuscript "Salem, Miss Aug 6" used in the mid 1850's.

The letter itself is extremely interesting. (Figures 4a and 4b) The letter addresses the proposal for a new firearm design, described as a “gang gun,” which features multiple barrels intended for use against advancing infantry lines. The top of the letter sheet has a crude drawing of the proposed gun with five barrels. As a historical note, Leonardo da Vinci proposed a similar type of gun, albeit more complex, in the early 16th century. This design can be found in da Vinci's notebooks, although he never constructed a working model.³ A transcript of the letter follows.

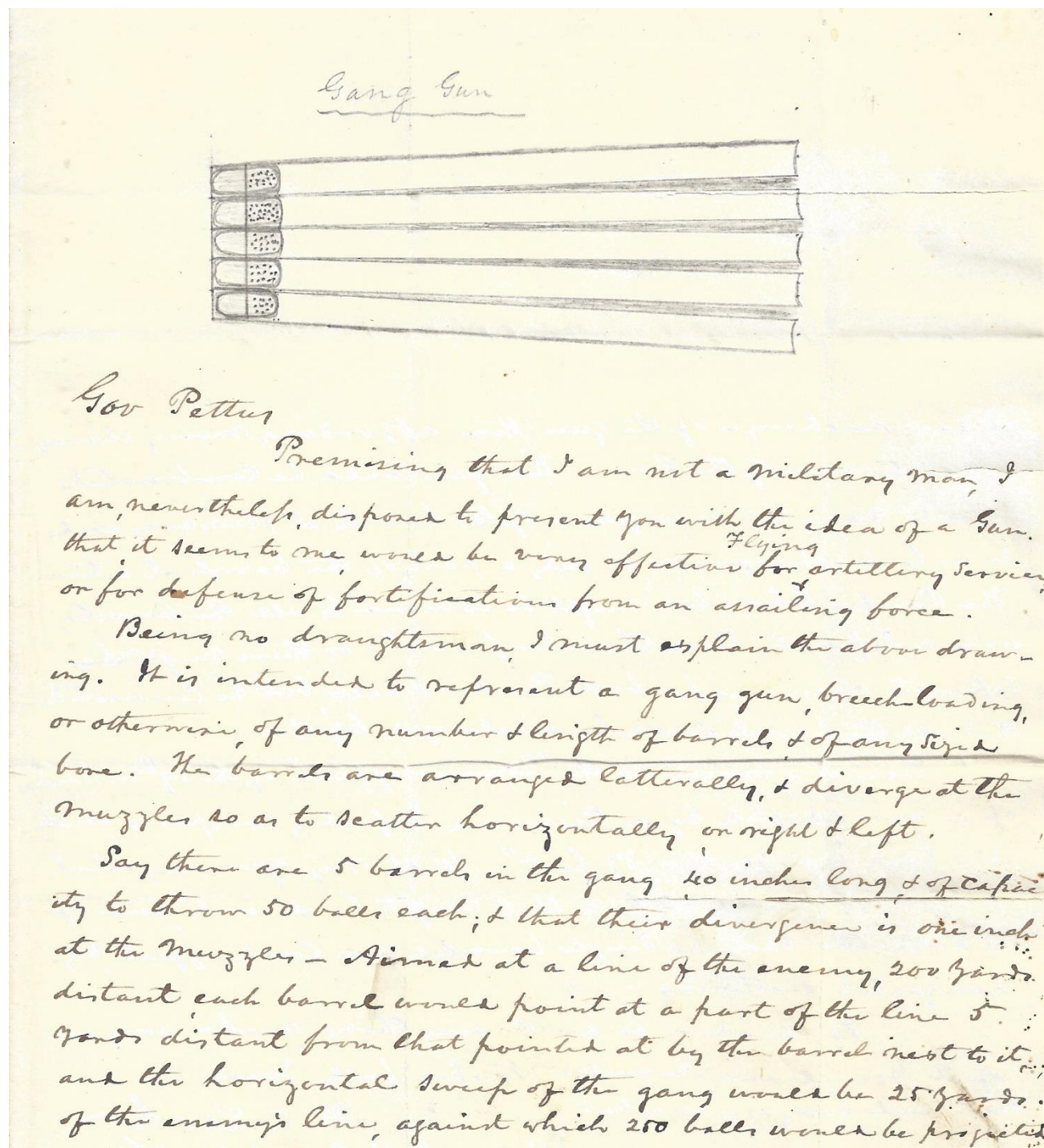


Figure 4a: First Page of the letter with the drawing of the proposed “gang gun.”

at each discharge of the gun thus affording many chances for each man of the line. The gun could be constructed so as to vary the divergence of the barrels at pleasure, and so as to discharge all or only a part of the barrels at a time. The Powder Chamber might be common to all the barrels, with a Separate Ball Chamber for each; or there might be separate chambers for both Powder & ball but so connected that all the barrels could be discharged together.

There is a notice in the "Mississippian" of the 19th instant of a gun adopted by a Richmond Infantry Company which it is said "will scatter 37 feet" With my gun any extent of scattering could be had that might be desired and of a kind too that no single barreled gun could effect, viz: horizontal scattering.

If the idea is worth any thing make any use of it you please. The gun can shoot single balls as well as shot

Respectfully Yours
H. J. Leach
Salem, Miss. March 22 1862

Figure 4b: Second Page of the letter with the signature and date block.

Gov Pettus

Premising that I am not a military man, I am, nevertheless disposed to present you with the idea of a gun that it seems to me would be very effective for flying artillery service for defense of fortifications from an assailing force.

Being no draughtsman, I must explain the above drawing. It is intended to represent a gang gun breechloading or otherwise of any number & length of barrels & of any sized bore. The barrels are arranged laterally & diverge at the muzzles so as to scatter horizontally on right or left.

Say there are 5 bands in the gang 40 inches long and of the capacity to throw 50 balls each; and that their divergence is one inch at the muzzles – Aimed at a line of the enemy 200 yards distant each barrel would point at a part of the line 5 yards distant from that pointed at by the barrel next to it and the horizontal sweep

of the gang would be 25 yards of the enemy's line against which 250 balls would be projected at each discharge of the gun thus affording many chances for each man of the line. The gun could be constructed so as to vary the divergence of the barrels at pleasure and so as to discharge all or only a part of the barrels at a time. The powder chamber might be common to all the barrels with a separate ball chamber for each; or there might be separate chambers for both powder and ball but so connected that all the barrels could be discharged together.

Here is a notice in the "Mississippian" of the 19th instant of a gun adopted by a Richmond Infantry Company which it is said "will scatter 37 feet." With my gun any amount of scattering could be had that might be desired and of a kind too that no single barrel gun could effect viz: horizontal scattering.

If this idea is worth any thing make any use of it you please. The gun could shoot single balls as well as shot.

Respectfully yours,

F. T. Leak

Salem Miss March 22 1862

The signature line of the letter, as well as the receiving docketing on the cover, identifies the sender and precisely dates the letter to March 22, 1862. These are the people directly related to the cover —

- 1) Francis Terry Leak (1802-1863), the sender, is listed as a very wealthy cotton plantation owner in Tippah County near Salem on the Federal Census of 1860.⁴ There is no documentation that he was an engineer or a gunsmith. There is no documentation that his proposal for a "gang gun" was ever taken seriously.
- 2) The addressee, John J. Pettus (1813-1867), was the 23rd governor of Mississippi (1859-1863).⁵
- 3) The postmaster of Salem, Mississippi, at this time was George N. Dickerson. He was appointed postmaster in 1860 and served until 1866. (Figure 5) On the Federal Census of 1860, Dickerson is listed as a successful merchant residing in Salem, Mississippi.⁶

Postoffice established at SALEM on February 15, 1837 *
Discontinued on January 20, 1870

<u>POSTMASTERS</u>	<u>DATES OF APPOINTMENT</u>
Wilson L. McAlister	February 15, 1837
Daniel Hunt	July 6, 1839
Thomas Toombes	May 11, 1842
Joseph F. Ayres	April 22, 1846
John M. Redus	September 21, 1847
Thomas G. Toombes	February 9, 1849
William T. Fuller	September 16, 1850
Joseph A. Crawford	November 29, 1851
Samuel Scott	January 20, 1852
George N. Dickerson	January 25, 1860
John T. Ivie	December 10, 1866

Figure 5: Information concerning the Salem, Mississippi, postmasters. (*A Postal History of Mississippi Stampless Period 1799-1860 Volume II* by Bruce C. Oakley, Jr., Magnolia Publishers: 1980.)

Authentication and Certification Process

The identification and certification of a true Confederate postmaster's provisional cover and/or adhesive is dependent on fulfilling a rigid definition with important criteria that had been developed decades ago by Confederate philatelists prior to the publication of the first Dietz catalogs. The definition as published in the current Confederate catalog is:

*Postmasters' Provisional — Locally prepared stamps and envelopes printed, handstamped or marked in manuscript with a value for postage. These were prepared in advance and sold by the postmaster for local use as postage stamps and postal stationery.*⁷

The key to the definition is that the adhesive or the stationery must have been prepared and sold in advance with the proper postage rate. In order to recognize the validity of the postal items prepared in advance, often, but not always, the postmasters would use a “control” mark which was either a special handstamp or the postmaster's signature or manuscript initials on the envelope or the homemade adhesive.

Comparing these criteria to the subject cover, the following conclusions can be made:

1. The subject cover is of the proper period showing proper paper, ink and style with the letter clearly dating the cover to March 1862. The historical context is correct. The people involved with the cover are easily identified and researched.
2. The cut rectangle made from blue-lined notebook paper and affixed to the folded letter is period paper and clearly locally prepared for use as a makeshift adhesive. The handstamp PAID is consistent with other generic handstamp PAID marks of the period. The manuscript “5” is consistent with the Confederate postal rate for less than 500 miles in March 1862. Salem, Mississippi, to Jackson, Mississippi, was less than 500 miles.

3. The manuscript initials “G. N. D.” are entirely on the adhesive not tying the adhesive to the cover. This indicates with a high degree of certainty that the initials were applied to the makeshift adhesive in advance of use. The initials are those of the identified Salem, Mississippi, postmaster, George N. Dickerson, and used by the postmaster as a control mark. To verify that the initials are indeed those of the postmaster, one can compare the handwriting of the postal markings on the cover to the handwriting of the initials on the adhesive confirming that the same person wrote both. (Figure 6)
4. There are other postmasters that used homemade postmasters’ provisional adhesives of this type with or without manuscript initials or signature. Other similar items are cataloged from Bridgeport, Ala., Greenwood Depot, Va., Hillsboro NC, Jetersville, Va., and Unionville SC.⁸

After thorough research and verification that all the necessary criteria required of a postmaster’s provisional have been met, the CWPAS has confidently certified the discovery of a previously unknown postmaster’s provisional adhesive, 163 years after it was used. (Figure 7)

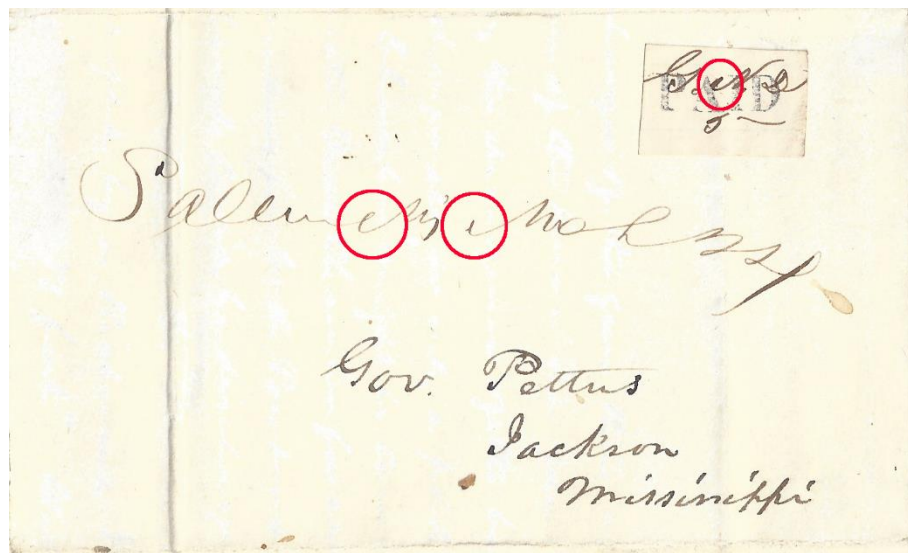


Figure 6: Comparison of the handwriting of the initials on the adhesive with the handwriting of the postal markings. Attention is drawn to the distinctive initial loop of the “N” in the initials on the adhesive to the initial loop of the “M” in the postal manuscript. One can see that the same person wrote the two manuscripts.

Our thanks to Patricia A. Kaufmann for her review of the article and for laying the groundwork necessary to include this newly discovered Confederate postmaster’s provisional in the *Scott Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps and Covers* and future editions of the Confederate catalog.

Civil War Philatelic Authentication Service

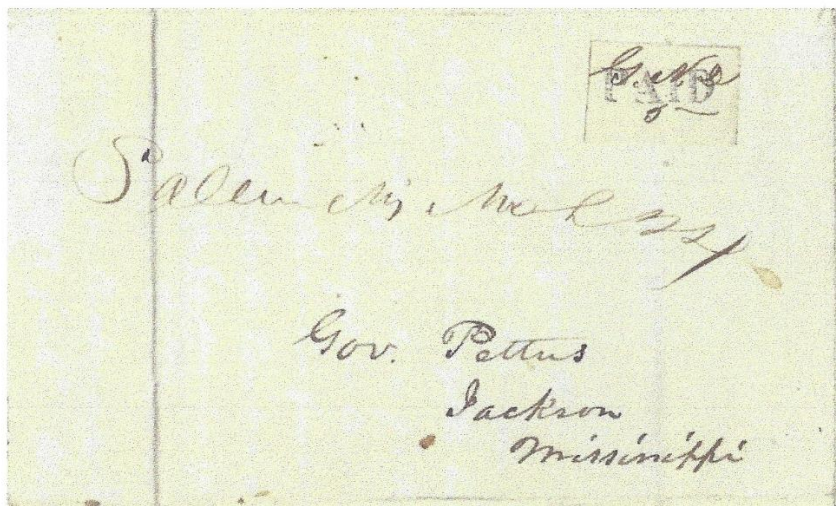
We examined the item submitted by the applicant that is described and illustrated below:

Local postmaster's homemade provisional adhesive cut from blue-lined notebook paper with a handstamp PAID and "5" (manuscript) and the postmaster's handwritten initials as a control mark affixed to folded letter and tied by a file fold. Manuscript postal markings "Salem Mi(ss) Mch [March] 24 [1862]." Addressed to Gov. Pettus, Jackson, Mississippi.

We are of the opinion that:

The folded letter and the affixed homemade local postmaster's provisional adhesive paying a proper 5c rate are all **GENUINE** as described. Previously unknown, unrecorded, and uncatalogued Confederate postmaster's provisional. The Salem, Miss., Confederate postmaster is identified as George N. Dickerson [G. N. D.]. Minor reinforced splits in the file folds.

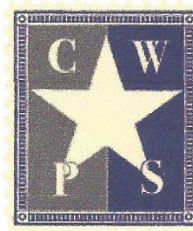
Numbers are CSA Catalog (CC) or Scott Catalog (SC) numbers.



For the Authentication Service

Chairman: John L. Kimbrough MD

Submitted by: Cherrystone Auctions



Not valid without embossed seal.

The validity of this certificate can be verified by contacting the Civil War Philatelic Authentication Service.

Figure 7: Issued CWPAS Certificate #06504.

Endnotes

1. Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salem,_Mississippi
2. Wierenga, Theron, *List of Post Offices in the United States 1862*, Government Printing Office, 1862. Reprinted by Theron Wierenga 1981.
3. <https://www.leonardodavincisinventions.com/war-machines/leonardo-da-vinci-machine-gun/>
4. Federal Census of 1860.
5. Wikipedia [John J. Pettus - Wikipedia](#)
6. Federal Census of 1860.
7. Kaufmann, Patricia A., Francis J. Crown, Jr., Jerry S. Palazolo, *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*, Confederate Stamp Alliance: 2012, Page 514.
8. Kaufmann, Patricia A., Francis J. Crown, Jr., Jerry S. Palazolo, *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*, Confederate Stamp Alliance: 2012, Pages 256, 273, 275, 278, 309.