

# THE BERMUDA PRESS AND THE OFFICIAL USE OF THE GREAT SEAL



*The USS Wachusett saluting her British hosts in St. George's Harbour (Courtesy Bermuda National Trust Collection)*

## *New Historical Discoveries*

*By Daniel J. Frankignoul*

I thought it would be interesting to publish in our CHAB News quarterly the article written by Guy R. Swanson, former Curator of Manuscripts and Archives of The Museum of the Confederacy, and published in the summer 1987 issue of their magazine. Guy Swanson was the gentleman with whom I visited Richmond during an entire day in May 1995, after having presented my lecture “*Prince Camille de Polignac, Major General CSA, the Lafayette of the South*” at the U.D.C. Memorial Building the previous day. That lecture evening was a joint meeting/gathering of the members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and those of the Museum of the Confederacy.

Having written to the museum to obtain its authorization to publish the article, I received the following kind answer from Mr. John M. Coski, Historian and Director of Library and Research: “*I am co-editor of the Museum’s Magazine and also one of the few staff members who remembers your excellent talk about Gen. Polignac at the United Daughters building 15 years ago. I succeeded Guy Swanson in the Library in 1996. I see no problem in allowing it to be reprinted in the CHAB Newsletter, which we have been receiving here for many decades.*”

### **TWO “OFFICIAL USE” OF THE GREAT SEAL OF THE CONFEDERACY**

I discovered several years ago that, on September 8, 1979, an exceptional lot (# 1414) was put up for auction at the famous dealer in rare stamps *J. Kaufmann Inc.* of Washington D.C. It included a set of documents bearing on one hand, an original

yellow seal of the War Department with James A. Seddon's signature, and on the other, a certificate dated February 4, 1865, signed by Judah P. Benjamin, establishing the authenticity of these documents and bearing the only known use (at that time) of the Great Seal of the Confederacy, impressed on a paper disc pasted with silk ribbons. The seal utilized must no doubt have been a copy used as a last resort or one of the paper discs that had been trimmed before shipment from England and handed over to the Confederate authorities by Lt. Chapman C.S. Navy, together with the Great Seal.

The set of documents, established at the beginning of 1865, was to officially sanction the mission of army Lieutenant Bennett H. Young, known as "The Raid on St. Albans" on October 19, 1864, (the Confederates had stolen an amount of \$208,000 in the three banks of that town in Vermont) and endorse a military operation that had been directly organized and dictated by the Confederate States Army. The purpose of this declaration was to prevent the members of the expedition from being considered "terrorists" in Canada.

The document signed by Secretary of War James A. Seddon, dated February 3, 1865, reads as follows: "*Lieut. Bennett H. Young is hereby authorized to organize for special service, a company not to exceed twenty in number, from those who, belonging to the service, are at the time beyond the Confederate States. They will be entitled to their pay, rations, clothing and transportation, but no other compensation for any service, which they may be called upon to render. The organization will be under the control of this Department, and liable to be disbanded at its pleasure, and the members returned to their respective companies.*" "*This above is a true copy of a letter of authority addressed by me as Secretary of War of the Confederate States of America to Lieut. Bennett H. Young of the Provisional Army of the Confederate States on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1864.*"

In the document signed by Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin, he attested that "*I certify that the papers hereunto annexed, signed by James A. Seddon as Secretary of War, are under the seal of the War Department, and as such are entitled to full faith and confidence. In testimony whereof, I, J. P. Benjamin, Secretary of State of the Confederate States of America, have hereunto signed my name and, by authority of the President, have caused the seal of the Confederate States to be affixed. Done at the City of Richmond this fourth day of February, A.D. 1865.*"

Thanks to the precious cooperation of Mrs. Patricia A. Kaufmann, a member of the *Confederate Stamp Alliance*, I was able to come into contact with the purchasers of these exceptional documents, *Harmers of San Francisco, Inc.* who, in September 1979, paid the amount of \$ 6,500 to acquire them.

My thanks are further extended to Mr. Christopher R. Harmer, Executive Vice-President of that company, for his kindness and for the authorization he gave me to reproduce the photographs of the documents in question to illustrate this article. During our exchange of correspondence, he disclosed his hope of having made a good investment and had in mind to keep the documents for a few more years before reselling them with an appreciable profit.

I tried unsuccessfully last year to contact him again, just to enquire what had finally happened to the documents and where they were now. Unfortunately I haven't received any answer to this date.

A second official use of the Great Seal has been discovered more recently, in 1995, as reported by Mrs. Ruth Ann Coski, Library Manager of The Museum of the Confederacy (and the wife of our friend John Coski), in the interesting article she wrote

for the *North-South Traders Civil War* magazine: “*The Life and Times of The Great Seal of the Confederacy.*” According to this article, an imprint of the Great Seal of the Confederacy was made again on February 7, 1865: “*Without its press, the seal could be maneuvered but carefully, using its ivory handle. For years there was speculation it was used sparingly, if at all, in an official capacity. The library at The Museum of the Confederacy is grateful to archivist Michael Musick, formerly of the National Archives, for sharing with us in 1995 a copy of John C. Breckinridge’s appointment as Confederate Secretary of War. Dated 7 February 1865, the appointment bears the impression of the Great Seal, along with the signatures of President Davis and Secretary Judah Benjamin.*” (Ruth Ann Coski).

### **A “CONFEDERATE MUSEUM” IN ST. GEORGE, BERMUDA**

Many fail to realize that Bermuda played a fairly significant role in the American War Between the States. During the war, part of Great Britain (and its Bermuda colony) sided with the South. This may come as a surprise, considering that so many people still believe that the sole purpose of the war was the issue of slavery. However, by that time slavery had been outlawed in Bermuda and Great Britain since more than thirty years. Besides being a shipping transit point between the Confederacy and Great Britain, Bermuda and St. George offered sanctuary to privateers and blockade runners serving the military interests of the Confederacy ... as well as their own.

I was informed several years ago that a “Confederate Museum” had been opened in St. George, the former capital of Bermuda. In December 2009, I wrote to the Bermuda National Trust to enquire on what had become of that museum today.

Built of stone by Gov. Samuel Day in 1699, the Globe Hotel, in which the Museum is located, is noteworthy for its double-span cedar and Flemish gables.

Major Norman S. Walker, a friend of President Jefferson Davis and a former West Point classmate of Colonel Josiah Gorgas, was appointed to supervise the Confederate Ordnance Bureau’s operations in Bermuda and arrived in St. George in February 1863 where he rented an office at the Globe Hotel. After his wife Georgiana and family had joined him a month later, the Walker’s house became the meeting place for Southerners visiting the island en route to England or returning home through the blockade. At the Globe Hotel the four-poster bed in which Georgiana Walker gave birth to her fourth child, was still on display in the 1950s. The bed’s canopy is a Confederate Naval Jack, since Mrs. Walker insisted that “*even if my child could not be born in the South, he would still be born under the Confederate flag.*” She was a prolific correspondent and her letters and diary offer additional descriptions of the blockade running era in Bermuda. The Walkers quickly established themselves in St. George’s society, hosting dinners and parties for Confederate naval officers who called at Bermuda, and at Christmas they entertained most of the Southerners and like-minded Bermudians in town. Colonel Harry St. George Ord, the British Governor of Bermuda, even invited the Walkers at his residence for the Queen’s birthday, an honor denied to most of the island garrison and Royal Navy officers.

After the arrival of Lt. Chapman in Bermuda in 1864, Major Walker believed it was too hazardous to send the cases and the seal press together with the Great Seal of the Confederacy in a single run through the blockade. He further tried three times to send the seal press over to Wilmington harbor in North Carolina, but in vain.

Finally the cases and the press remained in the hands of John Tory Bourne, the son of a lieutenant in the Royal Navy and his South Carolina-born wife. He was the agent for large British shipping companies, including Fraser, Trenholm & Co. of Liverpool (a George Alfred Trenholm Company), the Bee Company of Charleston as well as many other Southern companies. Bourne was also in charge of the South's commercial interests on the island before the arrival of Major Walker.

When he died in 1867, the press was sold at auction with his other effects. In 1888, it was purchased for a few shillings by John S. Darrell who had a brass copy of the seal made by J.S. & A.B. Wyon, the original engravers in London. Darrell's original press and the copy of the seal are now in a private collection in Bermuda.

A copy of the seal and a Victorian press similar to the original one were obtained by the Bermuda Press Ltd. in 1959. On permanent loan to the Bermuda National Trust, this press and seal are now on display at the Globe Hotel. They are currently used to make imprints on aluminum foil, which are sold to visitors of the Museum.

The Bermuda Historical Monuments Trust purchased the Globe Hotel in 1951 and turned it into the "Confederate Museum" in April 1961, exactly 100 years after the first shots of the Civil War were fired at Fort Sumter.

In 1996, the Bermuda National Trust restored the building and because allegedly "*there was a lot of fuss about Confederate flags ...*" the Executive Committee ordered the name to be changed to "Rogues & Runners Museum", indeed politically more correct!

A new exhibition was added, namely "Rogues & Runners: Bermuda and the American Civil War," which explains the boost given to Bermuda's economy by blockade runners during the American conflict. The Trust also published the book "*Rogues & Runners: Bermuda and the American Civil War*", written by Catherine Lynch Deichmann in 2003, which contains a wealth of historical information in addition to interesting documents printed in black and white and in color.

*I am indebted to Mrs. Laurie F. M. Eldridge and Mr. Andrew M. Baylay, Curator & Collections Manager of the Bermuda National Trust, who spared no effort in gathering the above information in Bermuda and sent the requested material to Belgium while authorizing me to publish the illustrations in our CHAB News.*

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