

PHILATELIC GENEALOGY Civil War Envelopes Sent to Maine

By James R. Miller

Old envelopes and postcards from postal history collections are a source of genealogical information.¹ This paper presents seven envelopes sent to Maine from 1861 to 1865 with key genealogical data on the sender and recipient to introduce the Philatelic Genealogy website and database <<http://philgen.org>>. The website was launched in March 2009 to begin building a digital archive of envelope and postcard images with genealogical value and to promote an exchange between postal history collectors and genealogists. The site has grown to more than 1,250 envelopes and postcards and currently has forty items sent to or from Maine. Every item includes a photograph (used with the owner's permission) and U.S. census or similar details on the sender and/or addressee.

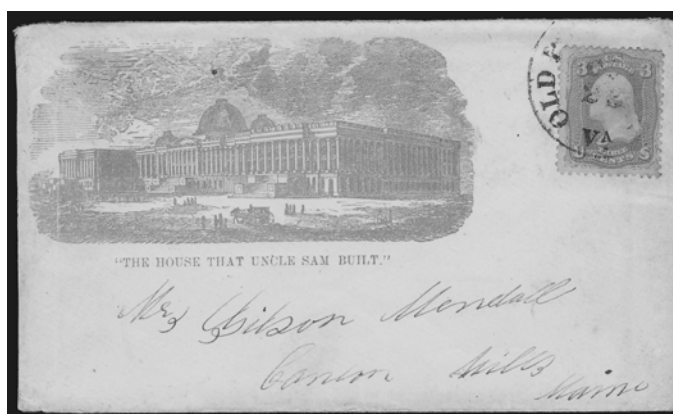


Figure 1: 1861 envelope from Old Point Comfort, Va., to Canton Mills, Maine (Photograph courtesy of Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Sale 869, Lot 3048)

Surviving envelopes from Maine residents serving in the military during the Civil War let us glimpse the soldiers' lives and handwriting. Mrs. Gilson Mendall of Canton Mills (now Canton), Maine, received an envelope postmarked in Old Point Comfort, Virginia, in 1861 (Figure 1). An Elvira (apparently Mrs. Gilson) Mendall and her husband were in Hartford, Maine (about five miles south of Canton), in the 1870 U.S. census.² The auction catalog listing for this envelope states that 23 October 1861 is

¹ James R. Miller, "Philatelic Genealogy: Old Envelopes, Postcards, and Immigrant Origins," *New England Ancestors* 10:2(2009):37-38, and "Philatelic Genealogy Update: An Initial Assessment of the Genealogical Value of Old Envelopes and Postcards," *American Ancestors* 11:1 (2010):45 (both articles viewable at <<http://philgen.org>>, click on NEA and American Ancestors in the Main Menu).

² Gilson Mendall household, 1870 U.S. Census, Hartford, Oxford Co., Maine, p. 186, #40/42.

written on the back of the envelope.³ A Gilson Mendall served as a private and then corporal with the 9th Maine Infantry,⁴ and this regiment was near Washington, D.C., and Annapolis, Maryland, in September and October 1861 before sailing to South Carolina.⁵ This envelope, which has an illustration of the U.S. Capitol with its first dome, may have been sent by a husband to his wife as his regiment moved south. As with any source of genealogical information, old envelopes must be used in combination with other sources before reaching any conclusion. This envelope and Figures 2–4 were found in online philatelic auction catalogs from which *Philgen.org* has permission to use photos.⁶

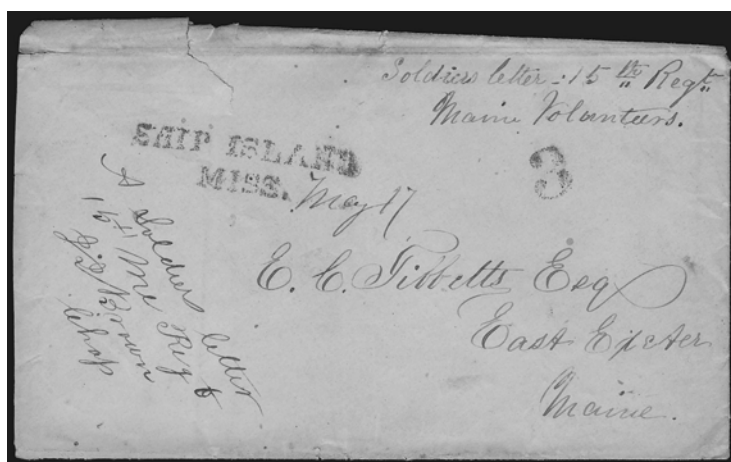


Figure 2: Circa 1862 envelope from Ship Island, Miss., to East Exeter, Maine (Photograph courtesy of Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Sale 870, Lot 1351)

E. C. Tibbetts of East Exeter, Maine, received a “Soldiers letter, 15th Reg[imen]t, Maine Volunteers” from Ship Island, Mississippi, circa 1862 (Figure 2). An Elisha C. Tibbetts and his apparent son Melvin were in East Exeter in the 1860 U.S. census.⁷ A Melvan Tibbetts served as a private with Company H, 15th Maine Infantry,⁸

³ Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries (hereafter cited as Robert A. Siegel) [www.siegelauctions.com], accessed 28 June 2010], Sale 869, Lot 3048. Click on Power Search, enter 869 as Sale # and 3048 as Lot # to see the catalog listing for the envelope shown here as Figure 1.

⁴ National Park Service [NPS], Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System [CWSSS] [www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/soldiers.cfm], accessed 27 June 2010], Soldiers, Gilson Mandell, 9th Maine Infantry.

⁵ NPS, CWSSS, Regiments, 9th Maine Infantry.

⁶ Robert A. Siegel, Sale 870, Lot 1351. Civil War postal history is featured in the catalogs for Sales 795, 801, 815, 822, 823, 834, 840, 841, 845, 850, 860, 870, 874, 875, 907, 933, 950, 954, 966, 980, 981, and 988.

⁷ Elisha C. Tibbetts household, 1860 U.S. Census, Exeter, Penobscot Co., Maine, p. 765, #500/527.

⁸ NPS, CWSSS, Soldiers, Melvan Tibbetts, 15th Maine Infantry.

and his regiment was at Ship Island from March to May 1862.⁹ He survived the war.¹⁰ The envelope was signed by “J. J. Brown, Chap[lain].” A Josiah J. Brown from Whitefield, Maine, served as a chaplain with the 15th Maine,¹¹ and a Josiah J. Brown, clergyman, was in Pittston, Maine (about seven miles northwest of Whitefield), in the 1860 U.S. census.¹² This envelope appears to have been sent by a son to his father.

John Sheahan of Dennysville, Maine, received an envelope via Washington, D.C., from the Richland Jail, Columbia, South Carolina, in 1864 (Figure 3). The envelope was sent by “L[ieutenant] John P. Sheahan, Prisoner of War.” A John and John P. Sheahan, apparently father and son, were in Dennysville in the 1860 U.S. census.¹³ A John P. Sheahan, who served with the 1st Maine Cavalry and then with the 31st Maine Infantry Regiment, was taken prisoner and survived the war.¹⁴ The envelope, which is homemade from a mathematics table, appears to have been sent by a son to his father.



Figure 3: 1864 envelope from Columbia, S.C., via Washington, D.C., to Dennysville, Maine (Photograph courtesy of Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Sale 988, Lot 148)

⁹ NPS, CWSSS, Regiments, 15th Maine Infantry [www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/soldiers.cfm], accessed 27 June 2010].

¹⁰ Melvan Tibbetts, 1890 U.S. census, Veterans Schedules, Mount Desert, Hancock Co., Maine, E.D. 163, p. 2, viewed on www.Ancestry.com.

¹¹ Historical Data Systems, “U.S. Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles” [USCWSRP], Josiah J. Brown, served Maine, viewed on www.Ancestry.com.

¹² Josiah J. Brown household, 1860 U.S. Census, Pittston, Kennebec Co., Maine, p. 206, #207/214.

¹³ John Sheahan household, 1860 U.S. Census, Dennysville, Washington Co., Maine, p. 673, #155/80.

¹⁴ Historical Data Systems, USCWSRP, John P. Sheahan, served Maine, viewed on www.Ancestry.com.

Three other envelopes sent by soldiers from Maine are viewable on <<http://philgen.org>> (search on family name or city; census and military service details shown on each webpage). Benjamin F. Whitten, who served with the 5th and 9th Maine Infantry Regiments, wrote from Libby Prison in Richmond, Virginia, to his father William Whitten in Topsham, Maine, in 1864. Nathaniel A. Robbins of the 4th Maine apparently sent an envelope from Roper Hospital in Charleston, South Carolina, to his sister Deborah W. (Mrs. Alden M.) Cobb in Warren, Maine, in 1864. John R. Day of the 3rd Maine apparently sent an envelope from Charleston, South Carolina, to his wife Mary Day in Vassalboro, Maine, circa 1864. The first and third envelopes in this group were found in philatelic auction catalogs different from Figures 1–4 and from which *Philgen.org* also has permission to use photographs.¹⁵

Abraham Lincoln was assassinated less than a week after Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House in April 1865. Miss Lydia A. Drew of Brunswick, Maine, received an envelope from Lowell, Massachusetts, circa 1865 (Figure 4). A Lydia A. Drew, apparently unmarried, was in Brunswick in the 1860 and the 1870 U.S. censuses.¹⁶ The envelope has a black-bordered box that notes Lincoln's death.

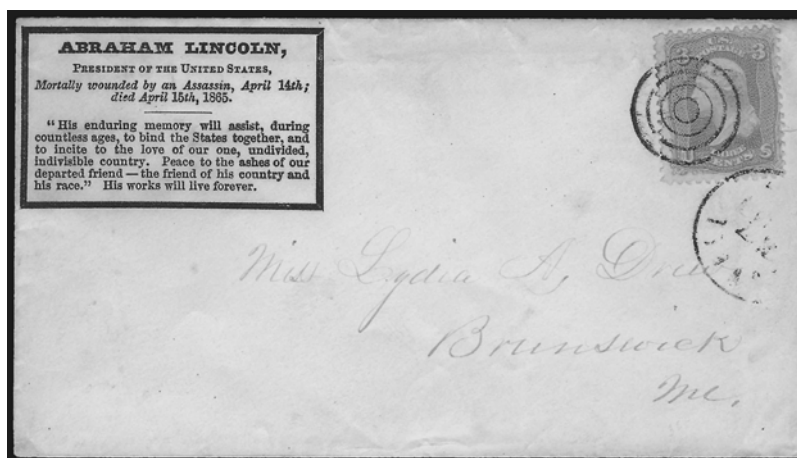


Figure 4: Circa 1865 envelope from Lowell, Mass., to Brunswick, Maine (Photograph courtesy of Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Sale 970, Lot 242)

This article demonstrates how postal history can be used to document our ancestors' wartime experiences. Other envelopes may allow us to determine our ances-

¹⁵ Schuyler Rumsey Philatelic Auctions [<www.rumseyauctions.com>, accessed 3 May 2010]. Civil War postal history is featured in the catalogs for Sales 29, 32, 34 and 37.

¹⁶ Ezra Drew household, 1860 U.S. Census, Brunswick, Cumberland Co., Maine, p. 59, #465/498; Susan F. Drew household, 1870 U.S. Census, Brunswick, Cumberland Co., Maine, p. 60, #160/166.

tors' political and social interests, work, recreation, and immigrant origins.¹⁷ Many more envelope and postcard photographs involving Maine residents are available. Postal history vendors have given *Philgen.org* permission to use thousands of photographs from their websites and archived philatelic auction catalogs, and most have not yet been placed on *Philgen.org*.

At present, genealogists cannot easily locate an envelope or postcard sent or received by their ancestors. Envelopes and postcards for sale and in postal history collections are classified by stamps, cancellations, and other postal markings. The purpose of *Philgen.org* is to present envelope and postcard photographs with details on who wrote and received each item to make them accessible to genealogists. Anyone may place a photograph (with the owner's permission) of an envelope or postcard used in their genealogical research and/or may help add Maine envelope and postcard photographs to the website by contacting the author. Photographs and data posted for each item will be credited to the person and/or their genealogical or philatelic association.

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¹⁷ For examples of other types of information available from postal history, see James R. Miller, "Philatelic Genealogy in Iowa: An Introduction," *Hawkeye Heritage*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2010):cover, 7–14; James R. Miller, "Philatelic Genealogy in Minnesota: An Introduction," *Minnesota Genealogist*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Winter 2009–2010):9–14; and James R. Miller, "Philatelic Genealogy in Ohio: An Introduction," *Ohio Genealogy News*, 41(Spring 2010): cover, 6–9 (all viewable at <<http://philgen.org>>, click on Iowa, Minnesota, or Ohio in the Main Menu).