

PHILATELIC GENEALOGY: CIVIL WAR ENVELOPES AND LETTERS IN NEW YORK

by James R. Miller*

Old envelopes and postcards in postal history collections are a largely unexplored source of genealogical information.¹ This paper presents seven envelopes sent to or from New York during the Civil War with basic genealogical data on the sender and recipient (when available). It also introduces 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.

New York residents served in the military during the Civil War and surviving envelopes from these years let us glimpse their lives and handwriting. Jacob Beeby of Central Square, Oswego County, New York, received an envelope from “H.E. Beeby, 2[nd] Lt, 22[nd] NY Cav, Prisoner of war, Charleston, SC.” [Figure 1] A Jacob “Beebe” and his apparent son Henry are in Central Square in the 1860 U.S. census.² Henry E. Beeby served as a second, and later, first lieutenant with the 22nd New York Cavalry.³ His enclosed letter states he was in good health and especially liked the corn bread he was receiving in prison.⁴ The envelope was sent from a Confederate States of America (C.S.A.) prison in Charleston via Port Royal, South Carolina, where it was postmarked on 13 November [1864].⁵ His capture is cited in a regimental history.⁶ He survived the war and appears with his family in the 1870 U.S. census.⁷ This envelope, made from a sheet of ruled paper, appears to have been sent by a son to his father. As with any source of genealogical information, old envelopes must be studied in combination with other sources before reaching any conclusion. This envelope and Figures 3, 4, and 7 were found in online philatelic auction catalogs from which *Philgen.org* has permission to use photographs.⁸

Mrs. Francis Delong of Poughquag, Dutchess County, New York, received a “Soldiers letter” from the “150th NY V[olunteers]” postmarked in Nashville, Tennessee, on 15 June 1864. [Figure 2] Francis Delong, female, appears in the same household with James R. Delong in Beekman, New York (one mile west of Poughquag) in the 1870 U.S. census,⁹ and James R. and Frances “DeLong” are shown as husband and wife in the 1880 U.S. census.¹⁰ A James Reid “DeLong” of Beekman served as a private with the 150th New York Infantry,¹¹ and this regiment was southeast of Nashville in northern Georgia during June 1864.¹² James R. “De Long,” with service in the 150th New York Infantry, and his widow Frances “De Long,” are listed together in the Civil War invalid and widow pension index.¹³ This envelope, which was sold on eBay®,¹⁴ appears to have been sent by a husband to his wife.

“Serg[ean]t Oliver Williams, 24th New York Battery” received an envelope while he was a “Prisoner of War, Americus, Ga.” [Figure 3] The auction catalog listing states that the enclosed letter was written by Laura, Oliver's wife, from Perry, Wyoming County, New York, on 17 June 1864.¹⁵ Oliver Williams is in Perry in the 1860 U.S. census.¹⁶ He served as a private, and later as corporal and sergeant, with the 24th New York Light Artillery Battery.¹⁷ He was captured at

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Plymouth, North Carolina, in April 1864.¹⁸ Laura asks that her husband write to her and to “trust in Providence.”¹⁹ Oliver Williams died on 25 July 1864²⁰ and is buried in the National Cemetery at Andersonville, Georgia.²¹ The envelope was sent by a wife to her husband one month before he died. Oliver's brother Moses C. (or M.C.) Clark and his wife Hellen had a son Oliver born circa 1865,²² who may have been named for his uncle.

Miss Elizabeth Rake of Monroe, Orange County, New York, received an envelope postmarked in Alexandria, Virginia, on 28 December 1862. [Figure 4] Elizabeth Rake, apparently single, and her apparent brother William are in Monroe in the 1860 U.S. census.²³ A William Rake served as a private with the 124th New York Infantry,²⁴ and this regiment was south of Alexandria near Falmouth, Virginia, in December 1862.²⁵ An online family tree shows that William Rake died at the Battle of Chancellorsville on 3 May 1863.²⁶ This envelope, illustrated with “The Soldier's Dream of Home,”²⁷ may have been sent by a brother to his sister about four months before he died.

Mrs. C.O. Pierce of Bloomingdale, Essex County, New York, received a “Prisoner of War Letter” from “J.H. Pierce, Capt, C Co 118[th] NY V[olunteers]” in Savannah, Georgia, sent by way of Port Royal, South Carolina, on 5 September 1864. [Figure 5] James H. and Olive C. Pierce, apparently husband and wife, are in Bloomingdale in the 1860 U.S. census,²⁸ and Mrs. Pierce is shown as Caroline O. Pierce in the 1880 U.S. census.²⁹ James H. Pierce served as a captain of Company C, 118th New York Infantry,³⁰ known as the “Adirondack Regiment.”³¹ He was missing in action on 16 May 1864 near Fort Darling, Virginia,³² but survived the war. This envelope, which has a C.S.A. stamp showing Jefferson Davis, was sent by a husband to his wife. This and the next envelope appear in a second philatelic auction catalog collection from which *Philgen.org* has permission to use photographs.³³

Mrs. Arvilla Riggs of Stockholm, St. Lawrence County, New York, received a “Soldier's letter” from the 13th N.Y. Cavalry postmarked in Washington, D.C. circa 1863. [Figure 6] An Arvilla S. and her apparent fourteen year-old son Hiram Riggs are in Stockholm in the 1860 U.S. census.³⁴ A Hiram M. Riggs enlisted at age seventeen on 21 May 1863 in the 13th N.Y. Cavalry.³⁵ The regiment served in the Washington, D.C. area from June 1863 until June 1865.³⁶ Hiram Riggs was captured and died on 13 February 1864 while a prisoner in Richmond, Virginia.³⁷ This envelope, which has a U.S. flag with “For the Union” and a Missouri State Seal, may have been sent by a son to his mother.

Cyrus Merrill of Perry, Wyoming County, New York, received a “Prisoners Letter.” [Figure 7] A Cyrus Merrill and his apparent son Julien W. Merrill are in Perry in the 1860 U.S. census.³⁸ Julian Wheaton Merrill served as a private with the 24th N.Y. Light Artillery Battery (the same regiment as Oliver Williams),³⁹ and was captured at Plymouth, North Carolina, on 20 April 1864.⁴⁰ He was a prisoner at Andersonville, Georgia, but survived and was exchanged at Savannah, Georgia, on 14 November 1864.⁴¹ He wrote a regimental history in 1870.⁴² The envelope has a C.S.A. stamp, showing Jefferson Davis, and a U.S. stamp and traveled north via Old Point Comfort, Virginia, in August 1864. This envelope appears to have been sent by a son to his father.

This article shows how postal history can document our ancestors' wartime experiences. Other envelopes relate to our ancestors' political and social interests, work, recreation, and immigrant origins.⁴³ Many more envelope and postcard photos involving New York 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 New York 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.

Notes

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 viewable at <http://philgen.org>, click on NEA and American Ancestors in the Main Menu].
2. 1860 U.S. census, Central Square Post Office, Hastings, Oswego County, New York, p. 13 (written), National Archives and Records Administration [hereafter NARA] series M653, roll 837. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
3. National Park Service [hereafter NPS], Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System [hereafter CWSSS], (<http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/>, accessed 12 September 2010), Soldiers, Henry E. Beeby, 22nd New York Cavalry.
4. Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries [hereafter Robert A. Siegel] (<http://www.siegelauctions.com/>, accessed 13 September 2010), Sale 988, Lot 210. Click on "Power Search," enter 988 as Sale # and 210 as Lot #, then click "Search" to see the catalog listing for the envelope shown here as Figure 1.
5. Robert A. Siegel, Sale 988, Lot 210.
6. Michael G. Burns, *From Rochester to Winchester, The Regimental History of the 22nd New York Cavalry, 1864-1865* (Westminster, Maryland: Heritage Books, 2000), p. 52.
7. 1870 U.S. census, Hastings, Oswego County, New York, p. 73 (written), NARA series M593, roll 1,072. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
8. Robert A. Siegel. 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.
9. 1870 U.S. census, Beekman, Dutchess County, New York, p. 21 (written), NARA series M593, roll 925. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
10. 1880 U.S. census, Hughsonville, Dutchess County, New York, Enumeration District [hereafter ED] 73, p. 4 (written), NARA series T9, roll 826. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
11. U.S. Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles [hereafter USCWSRP], James Reid DeLong, 150th New York Infantry. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
12. NPS, CWSSS, Regiments, 150th New York Infantry.

13. General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934, James R. De Long, New York, Invalid application number 273,343, certificate number 173,925; Frances De Long, Widow application number 565,225, certificate number 373,718, NARA series T288, roll 118. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
14. E-mail message on 14 September 2010 from Craig L. Martin, Proprietor, munchstamps to the author. The 31 July 2010 sale price was \$132.40.
15. Robert A. Siegel, Sale 988, Lot 168.
16. 1860 U.S. census, Perry, Wyoming County, New York, p. 56 (written), NARA series M653, roll 883. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
17. USCWSRP, Oliver Williams, New York 24th Light Artillery Battery. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
18. NPS, CWSSS, Prisoners, Andersonville, Oliver Williams, New York.
19. Robert A. Siegel, Sale 988, Lot 168.
20. Robert A. Siegel, Sale 988, Lot 168.
21. NPS, CWSSS, Prisoners, Andersonville, Oliver Williams, New York.
22. 1870 U.S. census, Perry, Wyoming County, New York, p. 29 (written), NARA series M593, roll 1,119. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*. Oliver's brother is listed as "Moses C." in the 1860 U.S. census (see Note 14 for full citation) and "M.C." in the 1870 U.S. census cited in this note. Oliver, Moses' son, is five years old in the 1870 U.S. Census.
23. 1860 U.S. census, Monroe, Orange County, New York, p. 180 (written), NARA series M653, roll 833. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
24. NPS, CWSSS, Soldiers, William Rake, 124th New York Infantry.
25. NPS, CWSSS, Regiments, 124th New York Infantry.
26. "Our Family Tree," owner: randyreid74, sources cited are U.S. censuses and USCWSRP. See also USCWSRP, William Rake, 124th New York Infantry, Did not survive the war, Mustered out 3 May 1863 at Chancellorsville, Virginia. Both viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
27. Robert A. Siegel, Sale 980, Lot 2559. The illustration's full title is seen on Robert A. Siegel, Sale 845, Lot 100 (use "Image Magnifier" and then "Zoom In" to enlarge and clarify the image).
28. 1860 U.S. census, Bloomingdale Post Office, Saint Armand, Essex County, New York, p. 10 (written), NARA series M653, roll 753. Olive C Pierce is indexed as Olyve C. Prise at *Ancestry.com* for the 1860 U. S. Census.
29. 1880 U.S. census, Saint Armand, Essex County, New York, ED 61, p. 3 (written), NARA series T9, roll 833. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
30. NPS, CWSSS, Soldiers, James H. Pierce, 118th New York Infantry.
31. New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center [hereafter NYSMMVRC], "118th Regiment New York Volunteer Infantry Civil War Newspaper Clippings" [hereafter 118th Clippings] (<http://dmna.state.ny.us/historic/reghist/civil/infantry/118thInf/118thInfCWN.htm>, accessed 14 September 2010).
32. NYSMMVRC, 118th Clippings.
33. Schuyler Rumsey Philatelic Auctions (<http://www.rumseyauctions.com>, accessed 14 September 2010; select Prior Auctions, select Sale 34, scroll down in the Table of Contents to Lots 2846-2861 to locate Lot 2859). Civil War postal history is featured in the catalogs for Sales 29, 32, 34 and 37.
34. 1860 U.S. census, Stockholm, St. Lawrence County, New York, p. 14 (written), NARA series M653, roll 853. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
35. NPS, CWSSS, Soldiers, Hiram M. Riggs, 13th New York Cavalry.
36. NPS, CWSSS, Regiments, 13th New York Cavalry.

37. Historical Data Systems, American Civil War Soldiers, Hiram Riggs, 13th New York Cavalry. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
38. 1860 U.S. census, Perry, Wyoming County, New York, p. 54 (written), NARA series M653, roll 883. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
39. USCWSRP, Julian Wheaton Merrill, New York 24th Light Artillery Battery. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
40. Robert A. Siegel, Sale 988, Lot 123.
41. Andersonville Prison Records (<http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/prisoners.htm>, accessed 10 October 2010), Merrill, J W; State: New York.
42. Julian Whedon Merrill, *Records of the 24th Independent Battery, N.Y. Light Artillery* (Perry, N.Y.: Ladies' Cemetery Association of Perry, N.Y., 1870).
43. Articles on philatelic genealogy are listed by state and viewable from the Main Menu of *Philgen.org* (<http://philgen.org>).

Acknowledgments

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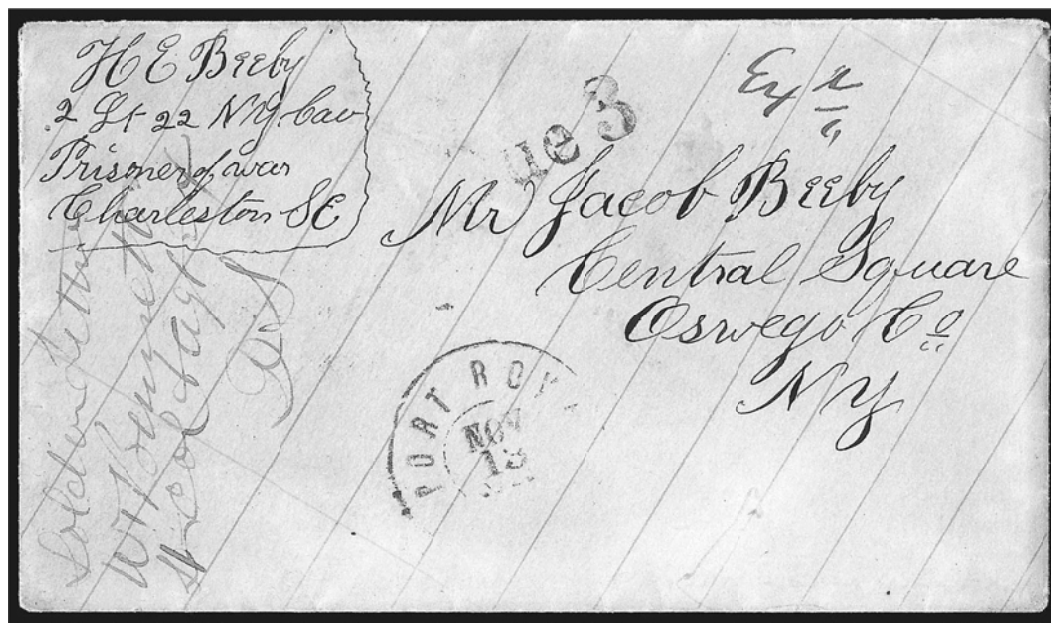


Figure 1 1864 “Prisoner of war” envelope from Charleston, South Carolina, via Port Royal, South Carolina, to Central Square, New York, made from ruled note paper. (Photograph courtesy of Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Sale 988, Lot 210.)



Figure 2 1864 “Soldiers Letter” from the 150th New York Infantry via Nashville, Tennessee, to Poughquag, New York. (Photograph courtesy of Craig L. Martin.)

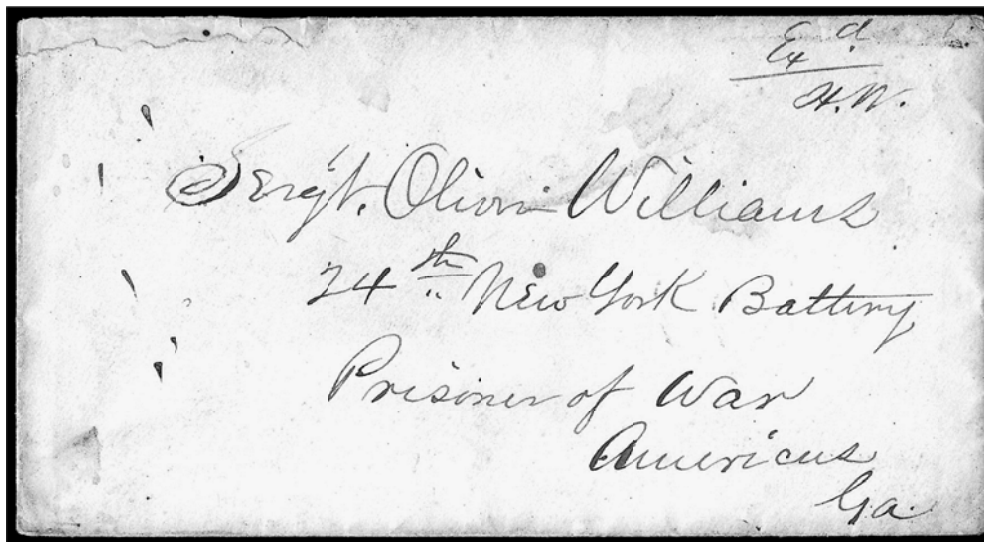


Figure 3 1864 envelope from Perry, New York, to a “Prisoner of War” in Americus, Georgia. (Photograph courtesy of Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Sale 988, Lot 168.)

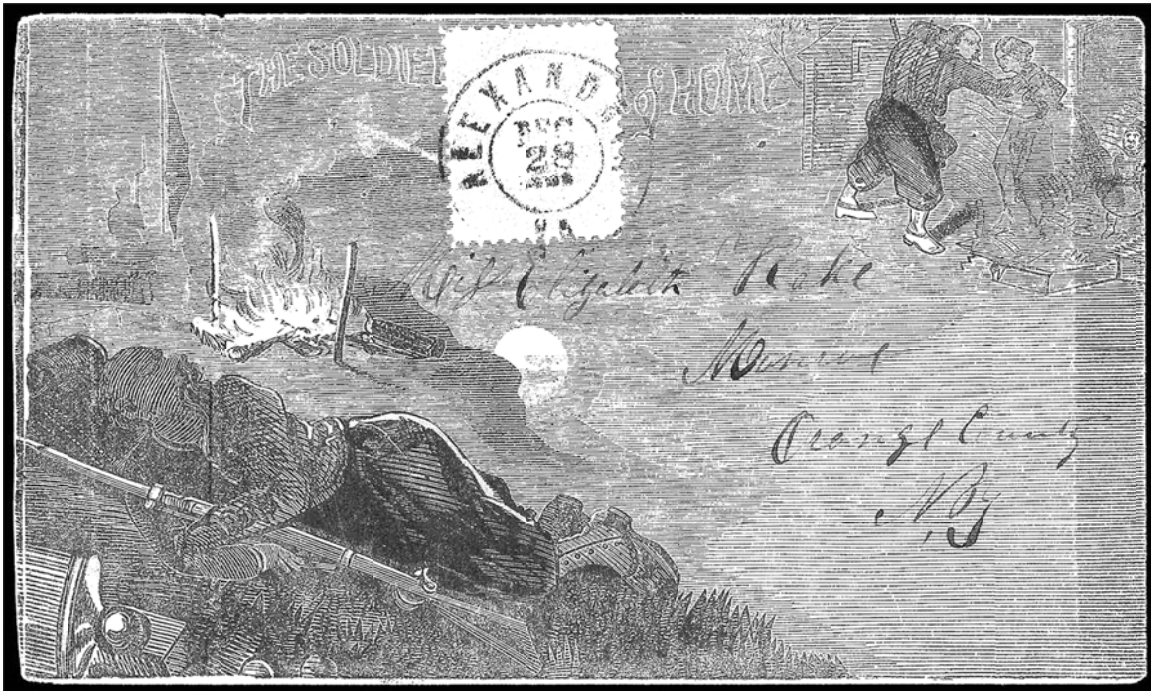


Figure 4 1862 envelope from Alexandria, Virginia, to Monroe, New York, with illustration “The Soldier's Dream of Home.” (Photograph courtesy of Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Sale 980, Lot 2559.)



Figure 5 1864 “Prisoner of War Letter” from Savannah, Georgia via Port Royal, South Carolina to Bloomingdale, New York, with Confederate States of America stamp of Jefferson Davis. (Photograph courtesy of Schuyler Rumsey Philatelic Auctions, Sale 34, Lot 2859.)



Figure 6 Circa 1863 “Soldier’s Letter” from Washington, D.C. to Stockholm, St. Lawrence Co., New York, with a U. S. flag and Missouri State Seal. (Photograph courtesy of Schuyler Rumsey Philatelic Auctions, Sale 25, Lot 451.)



Figure 7 1864 “Prisoners Letter” from Andersonville Prison, Georgia, via Old Fort Comfort, VA, to Perry, Wyoming Co., New York, with U.S. and Confederate States of America stamps. (Photograph courtesy of Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Sale 988, Lot 123.)