

## Confederate Collectanea



Figure 1: A stampless soldier's cover canceled Red Fork/Ark//Dec/21 [1862], with a manuscript "Due 10" endorsed by (Private) Williamson Sellers, Co (A), 17th Regiment, Texas Cavalry, to his brother Madison Sellers in Nacogdoches, Texas.

## An Arkansas Post Adversity Cover Made from a Slave Census Reveals a New Stampless Listing for Red Fork, Arkansas

By Gen. Patricia A. Kaufmann

The Figure 1 folded letter is a triple treat. First, it is a new Confederate Arkansas stampless listing. That was confirmed by Dr. Bruce Roberts, who maintains the Arkansas Postal History website and census at <http://www.arkph.com/> and is no stranger to these pages.

But this new listing status is not the only reason that the folded letter is special.

The long three-page folded letter was written on an oversized printed 1850 slave census form with columns for the names of slave owners, number of slaves, age, sex, color, whether fugitives from the state, number manumitted (manumission is the act of an owner freeing a slave), and whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane or idiotic.

Figure 2 displays the slave census form fully open and two of the three pages of the letter. This is quite unusual and desirable, to say the least.

Figure 3 shows the first page of the letter, which is headed "Camp Ark. Post, December the 18, 1862, Ark. County" and is addressed to Williamson's brother, Madison, in Nacogdoches, Texas.

He begins by stating that he, "Came Down the Ark. River on the Ark. Boat to Reinforce (sic) the Ark. Conscripts."

His spelling is "inventive" throughout, as was common with those in the ranks. I added punctuation, which was pretty much nonexistent, but left the spelling as written.

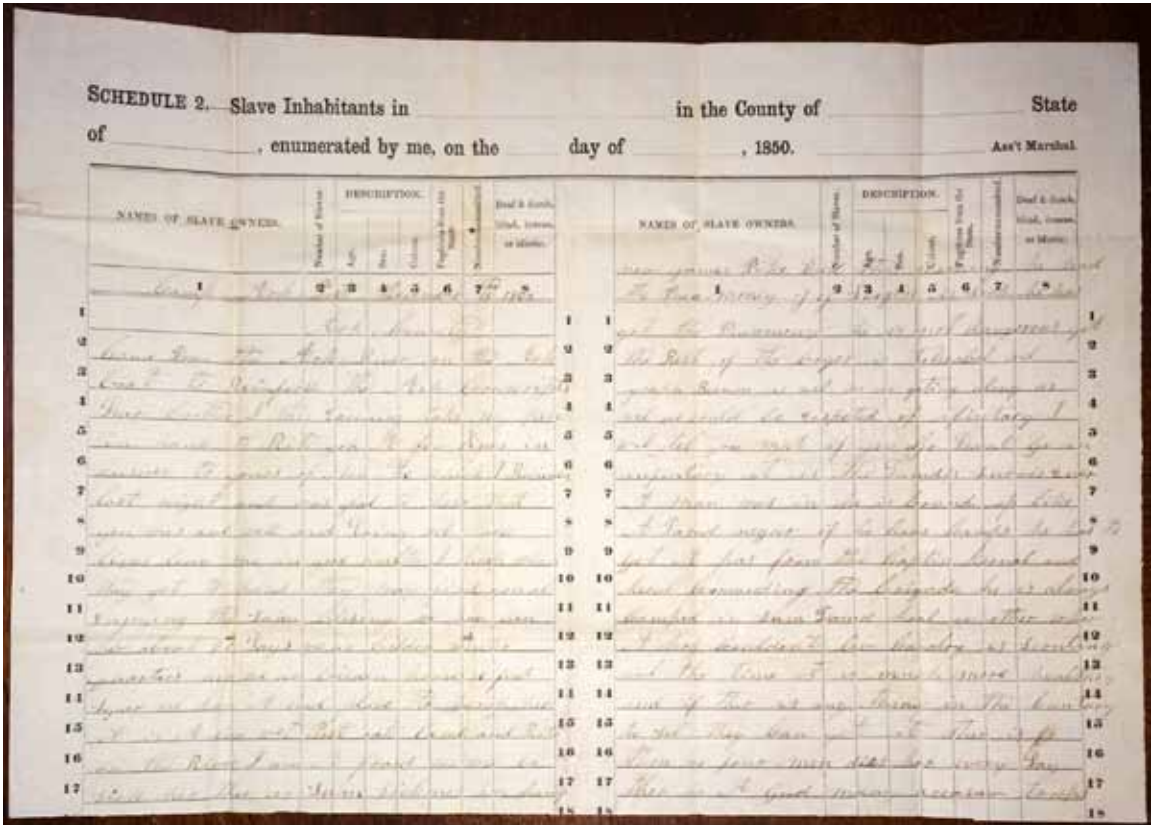


Figure 2: This slave census form was used as writing paper by Pvt. Williamson Sellers.

Williamson declares himself in good health but fears he will get sick because of the river water, as there has been sickness in camp. He mentions some who have died of pneumonia.

He says, "I wil tel you Mat if you Go, Dont Go in infintary it is the Darndis survis ever a man was in. He is bound up like A Damd Negar if he leavs Camps he has to Get A pas from the Captin Kernal and Keral Comanding the brigade he is always Camped in Sum Damd hoal or other wher A hog couldint liv. Cavalry is scouting awl the time it is much more healthey and if ther is any thing in the cuntary to sel they Can get it ther is three or four men dies her every Day."

**Arkansas Post**

Less than a month after Sellers wrote his brother, he was fighting for his life in the Battle of Arkansas Post, also known as the Battle of Fort Hindman, the Union victory that led to Vicksburg.

Confederate ships used Fort Hindman as a base to launch troublesome raids on Northern shipping. The Union commanders knew they

needed to deal with this onerous problem before attempting an assault on the river fortress of Vicksburg. Union gunboats battered Fort Hindman from the river as the infantry attacked overland. The nearly 5,000 Confederates, approximately 25 percent of the Confederate force in Arkansas, were outnumbered and outgunned. They surrendered on January 11, 1863. It was a catastrophic loss for the South.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 4 displays a Currier & Ives print of the bombardment and capture of Fort Hindman.

Figure 5 shows the USS *Rattler*, a wooden stern-wheel steamer built in November 1862 as the *Florence Miller* ("tinclad" gunboat No. 1) and purchased by the U.S. Navy in December 1862. She was the lead vessel in the attack on Fort Hindman.

**Company A, 17th Regiment Texas Cavalry**

The 17th Texas Cavalry, to which Sellers belonged, was organized in the spring and early summer of 1862 and mustered into service in the Confederate Army on March 15, 1862.

SCHEDULE 2.—Slave Inhabitants in \_\_\_\_\_

of \_\_\_\_\_, enumerated by me, on the \_\_\_\_\_ day

NAMES OF SLAVE OWNERS.	Number of Slaves.	DESCRIPTION.			Fugitives from the State.	Number unannounced.	Deaf & dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic.
		Age.	Sex.	Colour.			
	2 <sup>0</sup>	3	4	5	6	7 <sup>0</sup>	8
Camp Ark. Post				December		18	1862
				Ark. County			
				Came Down the Ark. River on the Ark			
				boat to reinforce the Ark. Conscript			
				Dear Brother I this evening take my pen			
				in hand to write you a few lines in			
				answer to yours of the 26 <sup>th</sup> which I received			
				last night and was glad to hear that			
				you was well and doing well these			
				lines leave me in good health I hope when			
				they get to hand they may find you all			
				enjoying the same blessing we have been			
				her about 20 days we are hidden winter			
				quarters her we are hidden house 10 feet			
				square we have a good place to camp here			
				it is a low wet Post oak land and Post			
				on the River I am afraid we will be			
				sick her there is some sickness in camp			

Figure 3: The first page of the seller's letter with the heading: "Camp Ark. Post, December the 18, 1862, Ark. County."



Figure 4: Currier & Ives print of the bombardment and capture of Fort Hindman, Arkansas Post, on January 11, 1863. (Courtesy Library of Congress)



Figure 5: The USS *Rattler*, the flagship of the Mississippi Squadron,

The regiment was arranged into six companies of about 1,000 men from Cherokee, Smith, and Red River. On April 24, 1862, the regiment was dismounted and sent to Arkansas where it was assigned to First Brigade, Second Division, Trans-Mississippi Department.

On May 24, 1862, the unit was reorganized into nine companies, and the commanding officer, George F. Moore, was relieved of command and was replaced with James R. Taylor.

The 17th Cavalry's first engagement was on January 11, 1863, where the majority of the unit members were captured. The men that were taken prisoner were transferred to Fort Delaware via Camp Chase in Ohio. On April 29, 1863, they were exchanged for Union prisoners and returned to service in the Confederate Army.<sup>2</sup>

This wonderful historic use serves to show that fascinating finds continue to be made a century and a half after the war ended.

### Acknowledgement

My thanks to Brian M. Green for his contribution to this article.

### Endnotes

- 1 Sam Smith, "The Battle of Arkansas Post, Stepping Stone to Vicksburg. Civil War Trust," <http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/navy-hub/navy-history/the-battle-of-arkansas-post.html>, Accessed April 7, 2015.
- 2 Matthew K. Hamilton, "Seventeenth Texas Cavalry," Handbook of Texas Online. Published by the Texas State Historical Association. <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/qks11>, Accessed April 7, 2015.

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