“Absolutely Fireproof”
By Michael Wing

Hotel covers provide an ideal medium for the establishments to flaunt their elegance and attractions. The lavish illustrations and descriptions are a large part of what makes collecting such covers so appealing. Overblown advertising claims may, however, clash with objective reality. Rarely has this been more clearly demonstrated than in 1946 in Atlanta.

On December 7 of that year, the Winecoff Hotel at Peachtree and Ellis Streets was filled to capacity with 280 guests occupying its 15 floors. A fire, already well advanced on several lower floors, was discovered at around 3:00 AM. By dawn, 119 people, including the hotel’s owners, would be dead in the worst hotel fire in U.S. history. The fire, in all its horrid detail, has been the subject of numerous articles, reports and at least one book. The tragedy made international headlines and an iconic photo [Figure 1] taken by a Georgia Tech student won the Pulitzer prize.¹

Figure 1. Daisy McCumber was among 65 injured in the Winecoff fire. She survived the jump from the 11th floor with serious injuries and lived another 46 years.

A cover from the Winecoff [Figure 2] is unremarkable in appearance, but noteworthy in that its sole advertising claim is the tragically ironic boast, “Absolutely Fireproof.”

The Winecoff’s claim to be “Absolutely Fireproof,” was technically true, and the hotel met all fire safety standards of the day. The hotel, according to then current engineering standards, was fireproof in that its exterior construction, steel supports, floors and walls were of non-combustible material.

However, the Winecoff had wood doors and transoms, carpets, furniture and up to five layers of wallpaper — all combustible. With a single, central staircase, a situation was created in which the structure became a sort of chimney causing the fire to progress rapidly upward through the central shaft with increasing intensity. The absence of other safety features, that are now standard, also contributed to the high death toll.²

Figure 2. “Absolutely Fireproof” Hotel Winecoff 1942 advertising cover.
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Articles for Publication

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1946 had been a deadly year for hotel fires in the United States even before the Winecoff blaze. In June, hotel fires in Dubuque, Iowa and Chicago had killed eighty people. The Winecoff fire was the tipping point that resulted in the first national fire codes that have greatly reduced the frequency and deadliness of hotel fires that claimed so many lives in the first half of the twentieth century.3

The fear of hotel fires was a valid one in the first decades of the twentieth century, especially in Atlanta. Eight years before the Winecoff tragedy, in 1938, the Terminal Hotel on Mitchell Street burned to the ground killing thirty-five, the worst hotel fire in the United States in four years. The Terminal Hotel had a brick and masonry exterior, but the inside construction, by contrast, was entirely wood framed.

Covers of the Terminal [Figure 3] did not display the fireproof claim. The Terminal had been constructed immediately after a two-block wide fire in 1908 destroyed the original Terminal Hotel along with thirty adjacent buildings.4 The destruction of that earlier blaze was memorialized on a contemporary postcard [Figure 4].

Figure 3. Terminal Hotel advertising cover.     Figure 4. May 8, 1908 Terminal fire postcard.

While most hotels of the era did not make the claim of being fireproof, the Winecoff’s claim was not unique. The prominence of hotel fires in the news of the day motivated hoteliers to calm the fears of potential guests. This was clearly seen on Georgia’s coast early in the century.

On Tybee Island, to the east of Savannah, the beach front Hotel Tybee, constructed in 1889, burned on the night of July 31, 1909. Ocean breezes fanned the fire that quickly reduced the sprawling wood frame structure to ashes. Fortunately, none of the hundred or so guests were injured.5 A new, larger and sturdier Hotel Tybee was constructed on the site within two years and promptly began to display the “Absolutely Fireproof,” claim on its covers, [Figure 5] apparently to distinguish itself from its fire vulnerable predecessor. The new structure survived for more than a half century until demolished by its owner.

Figure 5. “Absolutely Fireproof” Hotel Tybee 1916 advertising cover and 1911 photograph.
The structure of the Winecoff survived, confirming its fireproof claim albeit not in a way that would have mattered to its guests in December 1946. The Peachtree Hotel opened in the Winecoff building in 1951, and operated until 1967. After remaining vacant for decades, and after extensive renovations, the Ellis Hotel opened in the building in 2007. The Ellis remains in operation as a highly rated boutique hotel occupying what is still a prime downtown Atlanta location. On the coast, the modern Hotel Tybee operates on the same site as the original 1889 building.

The covers of a significant minority of hotels in Georgia and the rest of the country displayed the fireproof claim before the Winecoff blaze and it is assumed that most which did so, such as the large Piedmont Hotel in Atlanta and the historic De Soto Hotel in Savannah [Figure 6], indeed were fireproof by the standards of the day.

Figure 6. “Fire Proof” Piedmont and DeSoto Hotel covers

While improved fire safety codes were a direct result of the Winecoff fire, the tragedy also left an impression on postal history. The once common practice of asserting the fireproof claim on hotel covers was widely, if not universally, discontinued after the Winecoff tragedy.

Endnotes

2. Ibid.

Unlisted Confederate Cover – Danielsville, Ga.

While visiting Atlanta in August during the Americover 2018 Convention, Doug and Nancy Clark, our Society’s President and Treasurer respectively, spent some time at Emory University.

In Emory’s rare book room, they found an unlisted Confederate cover from Danielsville, Ga., shown here.

Shelton Oliver, the addressee, was the pur-chaser of William H. Crawford’s plantation, which encompassed the present town of Crawford, Ga.
Double Rate, Underpaid, and Forwarded
By Francis J. Crown, Jr.

The cover at Figure 1 is unusual because it is double rate, underpaid, and forwarded. The different rates date the cover to the period 30 June 1851 to 1 April 1855. During this period, the rate for a single letter was 3¢ if prepaid and 5¢ if not prepaid. A single letter was defined as a letter weighing one half an ounce or less. Letters weighing more than half an ounce were charged the single rate for each half ounce.

This cover was mailed from Kingston, Georgia with the postage prepaid by the red circular “PAID / 3” marking. On arrival in Atlanta, it was determined either by weight or the size of the envelope that it should be charged the double letter rate. Postage for the first half ounce had been prepaid at Kingston. However, postage for the second half ounce was not prepaid so the letter was marked “Due 5” (in manuscript, to the left of the PAID / 3 marking). Since Howell Cobb had left Atlanta for Athens, the letter was forwarded. The charge for this was 10¢ for an unpaid double letter. This made the total postage due 15¢.

We know from the rates that the cover was mailed between September 1851 and September 1854. Howell Cobb was governor of Georgia from 5 November 1851 to 8 November 1853. Thus, the letter was mailed in either September 1852 or 1853.

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More information will be mailed to Society members.
Stone Mountain, Ga. CSA Covers
By Ted O. Brooke

Editor’s Note:
The covers presented in this article are from the collection of Georgia Postal History Society member Henry “Hank” Cooger, Cumming, Ga. The author, Ted Brooke, also a member and resident of Cumming, is a friend and Georgia postal history colleague of Hank Cooger.

ranked with a Confederate general issue 10-cent Jefferson Davis (#11d), the Stone Mountain, Ga. cover in Figure 1 is addressed to “Miss S. Emily Forman, Oak Bowery, Ala.” A pencil notation on the lower reverse of the cover shows “Stone Mountain, Ga. Benfreer (?), CSA 1255”. The earliest dated cancellation of this issue is April 21, 1863. The cover has no contents or return address.

Figure 1. CSA Stone Mountain mailing to Miss Emily Forman.

The Post office in Oak Bowery, Alabama, was established in 1837 shortly after the creation of Chambers County in 1832 and was discontinued in 19081. Although the writer of the envelope and lost enclosure is not known, it was posted in Stone Mountain, Georgia on September 18, [no year]. Stone Mountain in DeKalb County, Georgia, had a post office established in 1834 to date.

Some of the Confederate soldiers who had surrendered at Vicksburg, Mississippi in July 1863 were in Stone Mountain from September 15 to September 27, 1863, as found in selected excerpts of September 1863 from the diary of Robert M. Magill, 39th Georgia Volunteer Infantry, Co. “F”, Army of Tennessee, Catoosa County, Georgia2.

Tuesday, 15th – Remained all night in depot at Acworth; left 6 a.m.; in Atlanta at 12 m. Orders to strike tents; left Atlanta 6 p.m.; at Stone Mountain 8 p.m.
Wednesday, 16th – Moved out to camp near town. Went up on mountain, composed of almost solid rock; about half mile high; nearly as round as a potato hill; out on a plain, no other hills near. Grand view from the top. Once a tower there, but it had fallen down.
Saturday, 19th - Heard there had been some fighting on Pea Vine creek, near West Chickamauga, supposed to be general engagement.
Sunday, 27th – Marched from Stone Mountain to Decatur.

The writer of the mailing to Miss Forman was most likely a Confederate soldier and probably a relative or friend of a relative of Emily Forman. She only had one brother, Robert Howard Forman, who was born on 27 March 1838 in Alabama. Robert was a Private in Co. B, 8th Confederate Cavalry Regiment, Capt. Falkner’s Company. He enlisted in Chambers County, Alabama, on 25 July 1861. He was captured at Shelbyville, Tennessee, on 22 June 1863 and was sent to Camp Chase, Ohio, and transferred from there to Fort Delaware, Delaware, from where he was released on 14 June 1865. Robert had a dark complexion, black hair, black eyes and was 5’ 10” tall3. He is buried in the Forrest cemetery, Gadsden, Etowah County, Alabama, deceased on 26 March 19134. The writer was perhaps a friend of her brother who had been captured in June 1863.
The addressee, Miss S. Emily Forman (Susan Emily Forman), was born about 1840 in Alabama and died on 13 June 1915 in Mobile, Mobile Co, Alabama, at age 75, a daughter of Joseph H. & Margaret Bostwick Forman. She is shown as “Emily Forman”, age 11, in the 1850 census of Chambers County, Alabama. She is shown as “Emily Forman”, age 20, in the 1860 census of Chambers County, Alabama. In the 1870 census of Chambers County, Alabama, she is shown as “Ella J. (sic) Forman”, age 18 (sic). She is shown as “Emily S. Forman”, age 41, single, school teacher, in the 1880 census of Chambers County, Alabama. She is not located in the 1900 or 1910 census indexes and she is last found in the 1915 Mobile, Alabama City Directory as “Susan E. Forman, b(boards) at 352 Congress”. Susan (“Susie”) E. Forman died on 13 June 1915 in Mobile County, Alabama. She remained unmarried her whole life and it is assumed that she was buried in Mobile County, Alabama, although no grave marker has been found for her and Mobile newspaper records have not been searched for her obituary notice.

Figure 2 presents a Farmville, Va. Soldiers Due 10 cover with a May date addressed to “Mr. W. A. Hadden, Stone Mountain, Georgia.” At the top, an endorsement shows “Private R. J. Hadden Co. E 7th Ga. Regt.” A pencil notation on the front is “Gen. Geo. T. Anderson’s Brigade, Farmville, Va.”

The addressee, W. (William) A. Hadden, was born on 16 February 1828 in South Carolina, a son of Jonathan N. & Catherine G. Hadden. He is shown as William A. Hadden, age 21, in the household of J. M. & Catherine G. Hadden in the 1850 census. He is shown as “Wm. A. Hadden”, age 30, in the household of Jonathan N. & Cathrin (sic) Y. Hadden in the 1860 census. William A. Hadden married Sarah E. Gholston on 28 March 1867 in DeKalb County. He is found as “William A. Hadden”, age 42, in the 1870 census and age 52 in the 1880 census. William Hadden deceased on 1 March 1884 in Stone Mountain and is buried at the Sheppard cemetery in Pine Lake, near Stone Mountain, DeKalb County, Georgia. William A. Hadden is not found to have had any military service.


He married Miss Sarah E. Brown on 27 February 1867 in DeKalb County. He is shown as “Robert J. Hadden”, age 30, in the 1870 census. He married Mary E. Mahaffey on 8th (or 9th) April 1876 in DeKalb County. In the 1880 census he is shown as “Rob’t. J. Hadden”, age 39, a carpenter. He deceased in 1894 and is buried at Indian Creek cemetery in Scottsdale, Dekalb County, Georgia.

It is, of course, unfortunate that the contents of both covers have been lost. Any further comments about these items are invited.
“This Business is Driving Me Nuts!”
By Bill Baab

The sad story of a 19th century Augusta, Ga. commercial photographer definitely reflects an expression with which most of us are familiar: “This Business is Driving me Nuts!”

When it comes to obtaining historic, postally used covers from firms in Augusta, Lamar Garrard (Georgia Postal History Society member) has the “Magic Touch.” His latest find (purchased by the writer), is an 1886 cover [Figure 1] from Corman’s Art Gallery, No. 712 Broad Street (“ONE FLIGHT OF STAIRS TO THE RECEPTION ROOM”).

My friend, Joseph M. Lee III, a native Augustan now residing in Covington, Georgia, has been researching Augusta’s photography industry from its 19th century start through the early 20th century.

Figure 1. APR 15_86 AUGUSTA, GA. Advertising Cover, Cormany's Art Gallery.
He provided the following information about “Cormany” and the Augusta Art Gallery.

His full name was Montgomery Cormany, born in Michigan between 1859 and 1869, according to census and other records. The 1880 Census lists him as a 21-year-old Ypsilanti, Michigan photographer.

[Editor’s Note: A January 3, 2015 posting on acesttery.com provides the following: My great grandfather Montgomery Lawrence CORMANY was born in Allegan, Michigan in 1859. According to the 1880 census he lived with his mother Elinor in Michigan. On September 15, 1880, he married Adele FORBES in Ypsilanti, Michigan. As far as I know, Montgomery was always a photographer. They had two small children and divorced about December, 1893.]

Cormany shows up in Augusta, Ga. in 1882 when he purchases a half interest in C.B. Wade’s Gallery and the business name is changed to Wade & Cormany. In March 1883, Cormany bought out Wade and changed the name to Cormany, 706 Broad Street. In November of that year, he moved his new Art Studio and Photographic Rooms over E.D. Smythe’s crockery store at 712 Broad.

In January 1887, he placed an advertisement in The Augusta Chronicle stating he was leaving Augusta and would be succeeded by Henry Platt. In February and April 1887, there were ads for Platt, Artist and Photographer, Successor to M.L. Cormany. But Cormany didn’t stay away from Augusta for long, or else he never left!

In September of 1887, an ad noted that E.B. Peddinghaus had joined Cormany’s Art Gallery for the winter and was in charge of the photographic department. The ad said M.L. Cormany will devote his entire attention to portraits. An article on Oct. 2, 1887 stated the same thing. But Cormany is not listed in the 1887 Augusta City Directory.

On June 2, 1888, there is an ad for The Augusta Art Gallery, formerly Cormany’s, with Peddinghaus listed as artist. Meanwhile, Cormany had returned to the Midwest and is listed as a Realtor in Duluth, Minnesota in the 1890-92 Duluth City Directory. In the 1890 census for Princeton, Minnesota, Cormany’s occupation is listed as attorney-at-law.

In the 1920 Census, Cormany is listed as an inmate in the Fergus Falls, Minnesota Hospital for the Insane [Figure 2]. In the 1930 Census, he is listed in the Willmar State Asylum in Willmar, Minnesota [Figure 3]. Cormany died there on June 7, 1941.
End Note

My friend, Joseph Lee, said he has a Cormany CDV (carte de visite) in his collection of Lee family photos [Figure 4].

“It is a baby picture of Mary Lou Heckle (Fletcher). She is my grandmother on my mother’s side of the family. Her parents had the photo made in May, 1883 when she was just six months old, so she was one of Cormany’s first customers.”

Figure 4. Cormany CDV of Mary Lou Heckle (Fletcher).

Longstreet Ga. Revisited
Letter to the Editor

Terry Shaw’s article in the Summer, 2018 issue of Georgia Post Roads (“Longstreet, Ga?”) explored how numerous Internet resources available to postal history collectors and historians can be used in attempts to decipher markings on covers and cards. Such resources can indeed be very valuable.

However, sometimes the results can be confusing and really don’t provide a final answer. Such was the case with the “Longstreet” markings on the postal card Terry highlighted in his article [Figure 1].

Where was/is Longstreet? In Georgia? Between Peachtree City and Newnan, southwest of Atlanta or further south in Bleckley county? When did the Longstreet post office operate?

Various Internet resources provided conflicting “answers.”

Figure 1. Longstreet postal card.

Terry’s article prompted a Letter to the Editor from Society member Frank Crown providing a recommendation for another internet resource to consult about Georgia cities and counties: Georgiainfo, An Online Georgia Almanac (https://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu). It was from that resource that the answer to the Longstreet mystery was solved.

Georgiainfo was created in 1996 by Ed Jackson - current Vice President of the Georgia Postal History Society - with the assistance of Charles Pou – current Society member. The website was hosted by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government from its inception until 2008, when it moved to the Digital Library of Georgia, hosted by GALILEO and the University of Georgia Libraries.
Frank Crown’s Letter to the Editor

I enjoyed Charles (Terry) Shaw’s article in the Summer 2018 issue of Georgia Post Roads about searching for the town of Longstreet, Georgia. His point about exercising caution when using the Internet for searches is well taken. I would go one step further: don’t depend on current sources to provide dependable information on small Georgia towns from over 100 years ago.

A valuable resource I have found for such searches is in the backyard of all Georgians: GeorgiaInfo. This web site has a wealth of information on Georgians, Georgia and Georgia cities and counties. One of the most useful sources on this site is “Historical Atlas of Georgia Counties.” Save yourself some time and Google the site directly.

I quickly checked for Longstreet, Georgia and found it for the period that matched the post card in Shaw’s article. It was located, not in Bleckley County or between Newman and Peachtree City. [Editor’s Note: The possible locations for Longstreet in Bleckley County, Ga. or between Newman and Peachtree City, Ga. were two of the “answers” provided with original Internet searches conducted by Terry Shaw and Steve Swain.] Rather, it was in Pulaski County as seen on the map below. The town must have been quite small as it does not appear on all maps of the period.

The Longstreet post office was established on 11 March 1850. It was discontinued after the war but reestablished after 1869.

Map of Pulaski County from the George Cram Railroad and County Map of Georgia, 1885 (reprinted from https://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/histcountymaps/.)
Georgia on Covers
By Francis J. Crown, Jr.

Figure 1. Cover mailed from Griswoldville, Georgia to Scuppernong, North Carolina on 10 July and forwarded from Scuppernong (light postmark at upper left) to Healing Springs, [Virginia]. The envelop is reduced at both the right side and bottom.

Griswoldville is most famous as the site of the only sizeable military engagement between Confederate forces and General Sherman’s army on his march across Georgia. However, Griswoldville’s history is more than a single battle.

In 1815, Samuel Griswold moved south from Connecticut and settled in the new town of Clinton, Georgia. He began his career as a clerk and soon became a dealer in tin-ware which he produced. In the early 1820s, his fortunes turned sour due to debts. But, by a stroke of luck, he had the opportunity to look at a new cotton gin purchased by a local planter. After examining the gin, he decided he could make a better one. Soon he and his son were producing cotton gins. His machines soon gained a reputation as sturdy, reliable gins and by the 1830s he was the largest producer of cotton gins in the United States. He also began to expand his business to include an iron foundry, smithies, and a carriage shop.

In the early 1850s, Griswold moved his operations from Clinton to a new site about ten miles south on the Central of Georgia Railroad. Thus was born Griswoldville. At the new town, Griswold’s industrial activities continued to prosper and grow. In addition to the gin factory and iron foundry, he added a saw mill, grist mill and a soap and candle factory.

With the outbreak of war and diminishing demand for cotton gins, Griswold switched his operations to armaments. Early on, he produced pikes for the State of Georgia. By May 1862, Griswold had partnered with Arvin Gunnison to produce a pistol patterned after the Colt Navy revolver for the Confederate government.

On 22 November 1864, forces of the right wing of Sherman’s army clashed with Confederate forces at Griswoldville. The battle resulted in significant Confederate casualties that did nothing to curtail Sherman’s march.

Reference