

THE TEXAS POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY JOURNAL

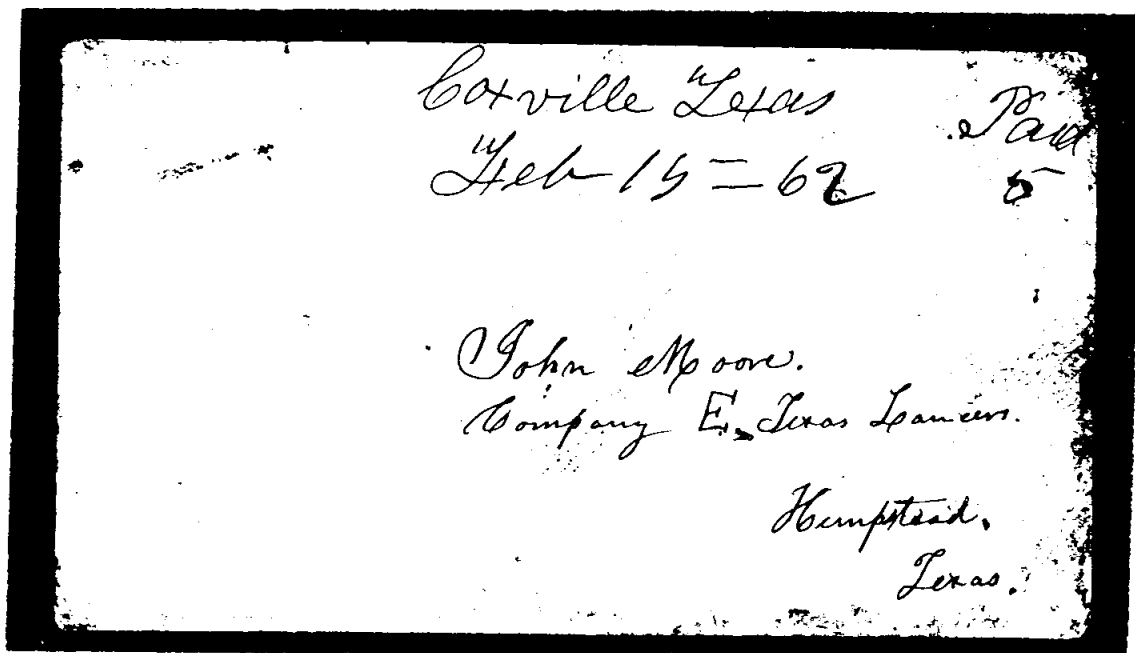


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Our thanks to Jim Alexander for the picture of the CSA-Usage
Coxville, Texas cover which appears on the front cover of this issue
of the Journal.

THE TEXAS POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Dues \$7 per year, payable to Secretary-Treasurer

Affiliated With:

President:
Nonie Green
2401 Colorado
San Angelo, TX 76901

Vice-President:
Norman A. Cohen
P.O. Box 29543
Dallas, TX 75229

Secretary-Treasurer:
Jim Alexander
5825 Caldwell
Waco, TX 76710

Journal Editor:
John Whitehead
P.O. Box 966
Longview, TX 75606



PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Our meeting in Austin in March was a successful one. We appreciate the hospitality offered to us by Austin Stamp Club in providing a room for our use.

There were several matters brought before the membership. A decision was made to have a special issue of the journal as our Sesquicentennial project. Some of you will be asked to write an article for this issue and at this time three commitments have already been made.

Future meetings were discussed as to time and place and prior input from members appeared in the pages of the last journal. It was decided that one meeting would be held each year and in conjunction with some stamp exhibition or event. Our next meeting will probably be in San Antonio at Texpex in the spring of 1986.

The nominating committee proposed the following slate of officers:

President - Nonie Green
Vice-President - Fred Ekenstam
Secretary-Treasurer - Jim Alexander

Nominations may also be made by petitioning the society secretary in writing with a written statement from the individual nominated expressing a willingness to be placed on the ballot. Ballots will be submitted to members in the fall for the election.

As soon as their prospectus for Texpex is ready in San Antonio, I urge you to write for one and enter an exhibit in this all important event to show what Texas Postal History means at this Sesquicentennial Celebration of our State.

EDITOR'S COMMENT

Our thanks to William H. Emery and Jack Milbing for their fine article on John Charles Black and the 37th Illinois Regiment, which for a time occupied

Brownsville during the Civil War. This article was first published in the Illinois Postal Historian, and is reprinted by permission.

To those of you who have an idea for an article for the TPHS Journal, NOW is the time to write it! We are in great need of material for inclusion in the next issue of the Journal. So please do not put it off any longer.

You will notice that there is included in this issue of the Journal a short article about an interesting letter (at least your editor found it interesting, since he wrote the article!). Perhaps other readers have come across information in letters which you would like to share with the rest of us. If so, write it up and send it to me. The same goes for your covers - if you have one that you find attractive, unique or unusual, send me a photograph or a good copy of it, and it may appear on the front cover of the TPHS Journal.

The point of all the above is every member can do something. We need to enlarge the number of contributors to the Journal, and spread the load more evenly among the membership. Every one of you has something to contribute - so why not do it now?

EXPLOITS OF THE 37TH ILLINOIS REGIMENT
AND JOHN CHARLES BLACK

By William H. Emery and Jack Hilbing

(Reprinted by permission of the Illinois Postal Historian)

The mourning cover illustrated in this article (Fig. 1) bears the postmark, Danville, Illinois and is addressed to Colonel Charles Black, of the 37th Illinois Regiment, Brownsville, Texas. The small black border that outlines the envelope served to warn Col. Black that the contents carried a message of sadness and grief; perhaps notifying him of the death of a close family member. While the contents of this envelope were destroyed, the envelope itself provides clues to an exciting and interesting chapter of the Civil War. It is the purpose of this article to demonstrate that such postal covers are like keys to a lock; they can open fascinating historical doors and reveal insights not found in the standard historical treatments.

This cover has relatively little monetary value, yet to us it acted as a spark that ignited the imagination and suggested questions about Col. Charles Black, the 37th Illinois Regiment, and what the Union forces were doing in Brownsville, Texas during the Civil War.

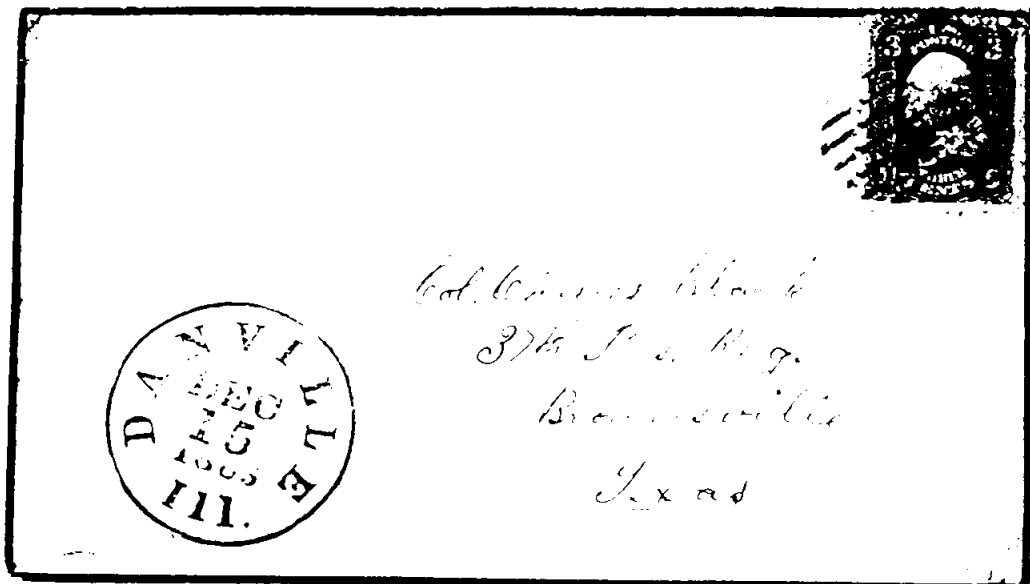


Figure 1. DANVILLE/DEC/15/1863/ILL.

John Charles Black

John Charles Black was born January 27, 1839 in Alleghany City, Pennsylvania.¹ After the death of his father John Black in 1847, the family moved to Danville, Vermilion County, Illinois. It was in Danville that Mrs. Black raised her four children, and where John Charles completed his high school training. In 1858 John Charles entered Wabash College at Crawfordsville, Indiana where he remained through his junior year. On April 12, 1861, the day Fort Sumter was attacked, he enlisted as a private soldier in the Montgomery Guards of Crawfordsville. Within days his company was mustered into three month service as Company I, 11th Indiana Infantry and J. C. Black was made its sergeant-major. Later that summer, after being mustered out of the 11th Indiana Regiment, he returned to Danville and engaged in recruiting a company for three years service. This company, known as Company K, was mustered into service with the 37th Illinois Infantry Regiment at Camp Webb, Illinois.

37th Illinois Infantry

The 37th Illinois Infantry Regiment was organized by Col. Julius White and mustered into service on September 18, 1861.² Made up entirely of volunteer state militia it numbered just over one thousand men and officers. The regiment was formed into ten companies, with most of the volunteers coming from the northern half of Illinois. Approximately 300 recruits came from Cook County, 200 each from Rock Island, and Lake Counties, and 100 each from Vermilion, Stark and La Salle Counties.

Shortly after organizing, the unit was moved to St. Louis, where it was reviewed by General John C. Fremont and attached to his Army of the Frontier. Troop activities of the 37th Illinois were carried out primarily in the western theater of the Civil War, where it played a significant role in several major battles.

Battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas

By early October, 1861, General Fremont's army began a move to drive the rebel forces under Confederate General Sterling Price out of Missouri and southward toward Little Rock. General Fremont, enjoying a vast superiority in men and firepower, forced General Price to retreat slowly in the direction of Little Rock. The over caution of Fremont, together with alleged corruption by some of his subordinates were cited by President Lincoln as reason for the summary dismissal of the general from command on November 2, 1861. The Army of the Frontier returned, with troops intact, to St. Louis.

Under Major-General Henry W. Halleck, appointed to replace General Fremont on November 9th, the push south resumed. This southward movement was climaxed when opposing forces met March 7th and 8th, 1862, at the Battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas.³ In this battle, Colonel Julius White commanding a brigade composed of the 37th Illinois, 59th Illinois, and the Peoria Battery held a hotly contested portion of the battlefield against superior Confederate forces. It was in this attack that, then Major Charles Black was severely wounded in the right arm. Despite his wound, Major Black continued to command his company until ordered to leave the field. The Battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas was one of the first major battles in the West, and while some historians have labelled it a tactical draw, strategically it turned out to be a major victory for the Union. It virtually cleared southwest Missouri of Confederate troops, and gave some assurance of peace to the people of that state.

Battle of Prairie Grove, Arkansas

A second major battle, in which the 37th Illinois Regiment participated, occurred December 7, 1862 at Prairie Grove in the extreme northwest corner of Arkansas, just west of Fayetteville.⁴ Confederate General Thomas C. Hindman determined to attack the army of General James G. Blunt. However, before the attack could take place General Blunt was reinforced by two divisions of General Francis J. Herron's Army of the Frontier. These two divisions reached the battlefield by forced marches just as the attack began. According to a report submitted by Lt. Col. Black to Col. Wm. McE Dye, commander of the brigade, the 37th Illinois had marched 109 miles in three days to the support of General Blunt, arriving just as the initial cannonade began.⁵ Reporting on the same action at Prairie Grove, Col. Wm. McE Dye stated the following:

"Lt. Col. John Charles Black, 37th Illinois, with the ardor of youth and the discretion of riper years, gallantly moved his regiment under heavy fire with perfect order, and continued in command after being severely wounded, until, exhausted by suffering, he was obliged to turn the regiment over to Major H. N. Frisbie, who by his skill and coolness, gained for himself and the regiment a reputation worthy of the state from which he hails."⁶

During the night of December 7th, the Confederate Army retired across the Boston Mountains toward Fort Smith, leaving the field of battle to the victorious Union troops.

The 37th Illinois Regiment spent the winter and spring of 1862-63 attached to the Army of the Frontier, marching from point to point in Missouri and Arkansas. The rapid marching qualities of the regiment gained for them the nickname, "The Illinois Greyhounds".

Battle of Chalk Bluff, Arkansas

On May 2, 1863 the 37th Illinois participated in the Battle of Chalk Bluff on the St. Frances River in northeast Arkansas. It was at this battle that Col. Black received yet another citation for bravery. Brig.-Gen. Wm. Vandever in a report to Maj.-Gen. Samuel R. Curtis states;

"Colonel John C. Black, 37th Illinois Volunteers, brought a portion of his brigade gallantly into action this morning, and deserves special mention for his services. I regret to announce the loss today of Lieutenant Joseph Eaton, of the 37th Illinois Volunteers, killed by the premature explosion of one of our own shells."⁷

From northeastern Arkansas the troops of the 37th were ordered into the trenches surrounding Vicksburg, Miss. They remained as participants in this siege until the city surrendered on July 4, 1863.

Following a number of minor engagements, the regiment was ordered on August 13, 1863 to proceed to New Orleans. On September 4th in New Orleans, the 37th Illinois Regiment was reviewed by General Ulysses S. Grant before embarking to Morganzia, Louisiana and taking up the pursuit of Confederate General Dick Taylor and General Thomas Green.

Battle at Morgan's Bend, Louisiana

The 37th Illinois, assisted by parts of the 19th Iowa and 26th Indiana regiments, forced a battle near Morgan's Bend, Louisiana on September 30, 1863. In this battle, Union troops numbering only 1200 men defeated more than 3000 rebel troops and put them to flight.

The Rio Grande River Expedition

After the fall of Vicksburg, the Confederacy was split into two parts. Some Union officers like General U.S. Grant, General Nathaniel P. Banks and Admiral David G. Farragut urged their superiors to initiate an offensive against Mobile, before starting a movement against Texas. However on July 24, 1863, General-in-Chief, H. W. Halleck wrote to Maj.-General Banks, commanding the 19th Army Corps that, "Texas was much the most important."

General Banks' first attempt to take Texas was on September 5, 1863 at Sabine Pass. This action lasted only forty-five minutes, with the loss of the expeditions three gunboats. Union ships carrying the troops retired back to New Orleans.

A second expedition, of considerably larger size, started from New Orleans on October 26th. This expedition was commanded by Maj.-General Napoleon J. T. Dana. Included in the expeditionary force was the veteran infantry unit; the 37th Illinois Regiment commanded by Colonel Black.

Landing at Brazos Santiago, near the mouth of the Rio Grande River on November 2, 1863, they encountered but slight resistance. By November 6th, the Union troops had pushed the 30 miles upstream to the City of Brownsville. General Dana established Brownsville as his headquarters, but directed a major part of his force to move northeast along the Texas coast to occupy Pt. Isabel, Corpus Christi, Aransas Pass and Pass Cavallo.

Meanwhile, the 37th Illinois was chosen to move up the Rio Grande River approximately 100 miles to Rio Grande City. Colonel Black reporting to the Adjutant General of the 13th Army Corps wrote,

"In pursuance to instructions of the major-general commanding, I reported to Col. E. J. Davis for orders, November 22, and in conformity therewith, embarked with seven companies of my command on board the steamer Mustang, at 12m., November 23rd. The remaining three companies, under Major Payne, accompanied the land forces in wagons."

"On the 26th day of November, I informed Colonel Davis, by express, that it was nearly impossible to proceed in anything like reasonable time, and that the steamer lay at the foot of a long reach or bar, only 18 inches deep, and 6 feet in length. He sent back word for me to await the arrival of the infantry and captured cotton where I was. The infantry reached us on the 28th, in company with the calvary, which passed on. I awaited the arrival of the cotton impatiently for two days, and then sent out a detachment under Lieutenant Day of Company E, to look for it. He found that part of the train had only come 8 miles from where it started. By dint of

much exertion he succeeded in reaching the boat with the cotton, 82 bales in all, about noon of the 1st of December, and the next morning at dawn we started on the return trip."8

During February 1864, the three year enlistment of most men in the 37th, was completed. They promptly re-enlisted and were re-mustered on February 28th, receiving a thirty day furlough to visit their homes for the first time in three years.

After their return from furlough the 37th operated in Tenn., Louisiana, Florida and Alabama, but their only major fighting occurred April 9, 1865 in the storming of Fort Blakely and the seizure of Mobile, Alabama. This was the same day that General Robert E. Lee surrendered his army to General U. S. Grant at Appomattox, Virginia, effectively ending the Civil War.

However, the end of military service for the 37th Illinois was nearly a year away. On June 28, 1865, they again embarked aboard a steamer, and for the fifth time ploughed the Gulf of Mexico. Arriving in Galveston on the 1st of July, they found themselves part of the Federal force that would assist in the Presidential reconstruction of Texas.

On May 15, 1866, these veterans of eleven major battles, innumerable skirmishes, and nearly five years of military duty, were mustered out of U.S. service in Houston, Texas. They reached Springfield, Illinois on May 31st, where they received final payment and discharge.

Thus ends the saga. The Illinois hero who rose from sergeant to Brigadier-General, a volunteer militia which proved themselves in battle after battle, and a small innocuous postal cover that revived the tale of their exploits.

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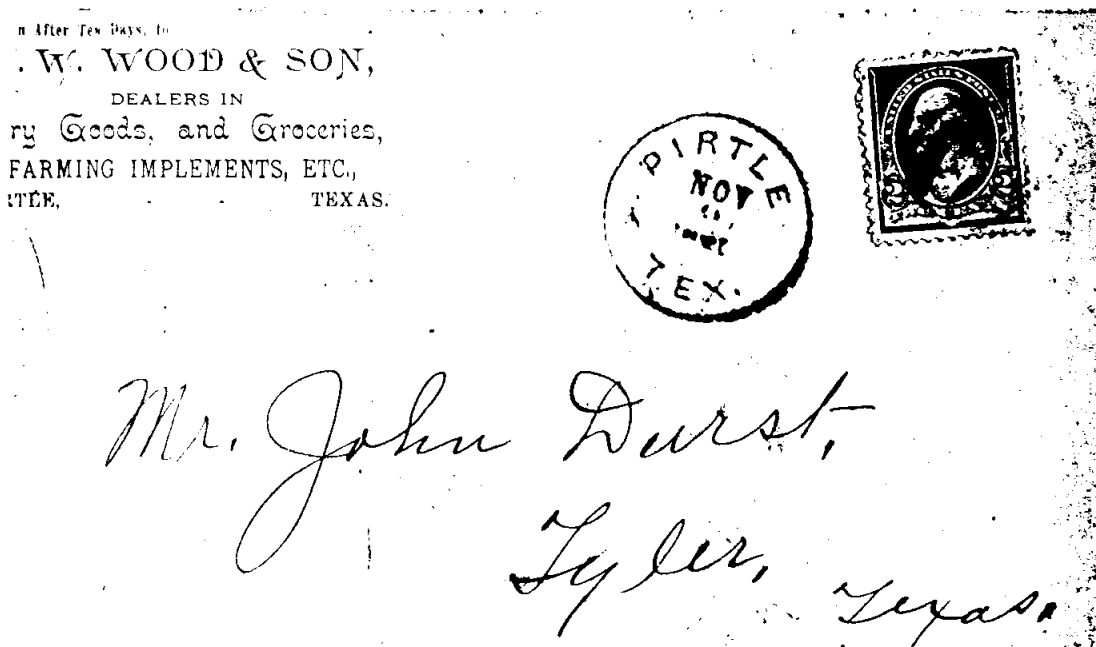
THE HORSE WITH A PROBLEM

by John A. Whitehead

When I first got interested in collecting Texas postal history, several years ago, it was because this seemed to be a natural combination of two interests of mine - philately and Texas history, particularly East Texas. As I got deeper into my collecting, I found that there were other things about postal history that made it an even more enjoyable hobby (to me) than just collecting stamps.

One of these unexpected benefits I found was that the letters contained in some of the covers that I acquired gave an insight into the daily lives of the ones who wrote these letters. Some letters discuss matters of historical importance as seen from the viewpoint of an ordinary person of the time. Others were written to the folks back home by travelers passing through the area, and describe the writer's impression of the country and people. And then there are those letters dealing with the day to day lives of the writers, concerning business affairs or filled with small talk, family matters or gossip. I have found that these can be informative of local affairs and sometimes even humorous - which brings me (finally) to the letter which is the real subject of this article.

In 1980 I bought the cover illustrated in Figure 1, below, from a fellow TPHS member. It initially interested me because it is from Pirtle, Texas, which was a small community in northern Rusk county. Also, it is backstamped with a fancy Overton, Texas postmark. The cover is addressed to John Durst in Tyler, Texas, who owned a good bit of land in East Texas. I have seen several other letters addressed to John Durst, most of them being offers to purchase various tracts of land from him. This letter, however, is in reply to an inquiry made by Mr. Durst about a horse which he had recently purchased. Apparently, Mr Durst acquired a horse from a Mr. B. L. Bradford, only later to discover that the horse had a "very annoying" habit. Mr. Durst then contacted a prior owner of the horse, B. C. Kelly, to find out just what the horse's problem was. This letter is Mr. Kelly's answer - and his inquiry as to just how much Mr. Durst had paid for this horse with a problem.



J. W. WOOD & SON,

Dealers in

Dry Goods, Notions, Groceries, Boots, Shoes,

»»»Hats, Caps and Farming Implements.»»»

Pitts. Texas. 11/9th 1891

Mr. John Durst

Tyler, Texas.

Dear Sir,

I am duly in receipt of your letter of recent date asking me about the "stump sucking" horse you purchased from B. L. Bradford. I owned the horse nearly five years, he was a ~~stumping~~ sucking colt when I got him, and all during the time I had him, I don't think the habit injures him in the least, as I had no trouble to keep him fat, and rode him a great deal. While the habit is very annoying yet I do not think it hurts his constitution in the least, He is a fine little horse otherwise, being young, and a fine harness and saddle horse, I want to know how much you gave Bradford for the horse, and

 J. W. WOOD & SON, 

Dealers in

Dry Goods, Notions, Groceries, Boots, Shoes,

»»»Hats, Caps and Farming Implements.»»»

Pitts., Texas, 189

I promise to keep it confidentially
if you so desire, I have no motive
in asking this, only to learn the facts
about the sale of the horse,
yours truly,
B. C. Kelly,