

The Civil War Post

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New Earliest-Recorded Jonesboro, Tenn., Postmaster's Provisional

Jonesborough – or Jonesboro – take your choice. It has been known by both names. The town was founded in 1779, while the area was part of North Carolina, 17 years before Tennessee became a state. It was named after North Carolina legislator Willie Jones, a supporter of the state's westward expansion across the Appalachian Mountains.

The State of Franklin

The State of Franklin – also known as the Free Republic of Franklin, or the State of Frankland – was an unrecognized and autonomous territory located in what is today Eastern Tennessee. Franklin was created in 1784 and named after Benjamin Franklin. It was part of the territory west of the Appalachian Mountains that had been offered by North Carolina as a cession to Congress to help pay off debts related to the American War for Independence. It was founded with the intent of becoming the 14th state of the newly formed nation.

Jonesborough was Franklin's first capital.

After the summer of 1785, the government of Franklin, which was by then based in Greeneville, ruled as a parallel government, running alongside a re-established North Carolina bureaucracy, albeit not harmoniously. Franklin was never admitted into the Union. The extra-legal state existed for a little over four years, ostensibly as a republic, after which North Carolina re-assumed full control of the area in late 1788.

When North Carolina ratified the new U.S. *Constitution* in 1789, it ceded its western counties to the federal government and Jonesborough was placed under a territorial government. Statehood was achieved on June 1, 1796, when Tennessee was admitted as the 16th state of the Union, following a close vote in Congress. Jonesborough is Tennessee's oldest incorporated jurisdiction and county seat of Washington County.¹

The town was renamed "Jonesboro" for a period, but has been changed back to the original spelling. I mostly refer to it in this article as Jonesboro, as that is how the recorded Confederate postmaster provisional handstamped entire appears.²

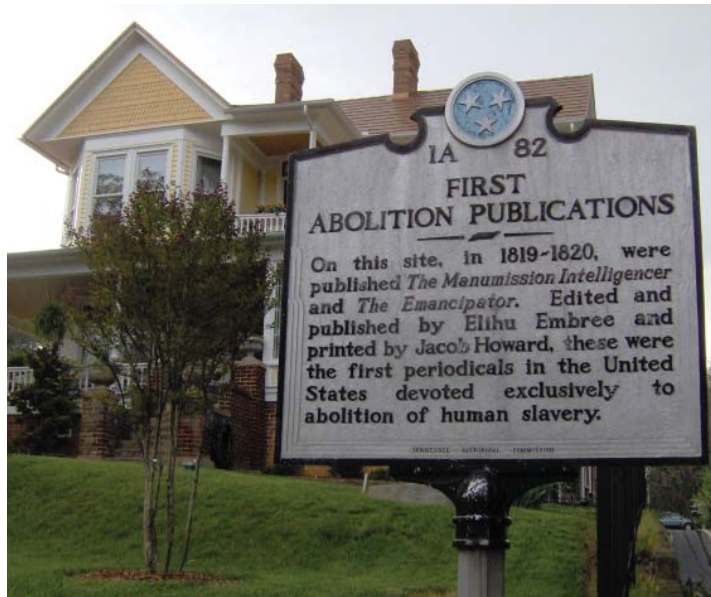


Figure 1. Historical marker in Jonesborough, Tenn., acknowledging site of Embree abolitionist publications.

Jonesboro is often considered to be the center of the abolitionist movement within the states that would join the Confederacy during the Civil War. Elihu Embree printed his publication, *The Emancipator*, from Jonesboro. Publication began in 1820, making *The Emancipator* the first American periodical to be dedicated exclusively to the topic of the abolition of slavery. While Tennessee would later join the Confederacy, most East Tennesseans had Unionist leanings. They were generally subsistence farmers and held

relatively few slaves compared with landowners in Middle Tennessee or the plantation areas of the Delta near the Mississippi River. Figure 1 shows a historical marker noting the site of Embree's publications.

The Jonesboro Provisionals

The Jonesboro, Tenn., provisionals were prepared by impressing a circular brass seal inscribed "J. E. WILLIAMS. / PAID *5* / JONESBORO. T." on envelopes. J.E. Williams was the postmaster at Jonesboro. Figure 2 shows an unusually good impression of the provisional handstamp.

The Crown surveys list 15 examples of the Jonesboro handstamped provisional entire, including five struck in black and 10 in dark blue. Several of these do not have a town datestamp.³ The Confederate Stamp Alliance catalog notes on the

listing that “Addressed covers bearing these provisional markings but no postmark are considered postally used.”⁴

The Crown surveys are a valuable reference, often consulted and quoted. They are a compilation of the censuses of Charles J. Phillips (published in *Stamps*, 1933-38) and Frank E. Hart (published in *Stamps*, 1955-56), as well as Frank Crown’s own work on the provisionals of Georgia (*Confederate Philatelist*, 1972-77). While new discoveries have come to light and are often noted in publications such as this or on the valuable website of Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries (www.siegelauction.com), Crown is the only compilation where all are offered in one place.

Clearly, the town was referred to by either spelling during

are only 10 Jonesboro entires recorded in blue and five in black, as well as a couple / few cut squares. While this newly recorded entire does not have a datestamp, it is docketed Aug. 17, 1861, roughly six weeks before the prior earliest-recorded use.

The letter, the first page of which is shown in Figure 5, was recently separated



Figure 2. “J. E. WILLIAMS. / PAID *5* / JONESBORO, T.” provisional handstamp.

from this cover by a document dealer, but black-and-white photocopies of the originally enclosed letter are still with cover. The cover is addressed to Mrs. Ellen R. Middleton, Lexington, Va. The letter was written by J[ohn] W[illiam] Middleton to his aunt. Middleton’s uncle was J.C. Middleton.

The letter is headed Manassas Junction [Virginia] Aug. 17th, 1861, and the salutation is to “Mrs. Tanquary / My Friend.” The document dealer said these all came from the correspondence of a soldier in the fabled Stonewall Brigade and all had fabulous content.

The letter is addressed to Mrs. Tanquary, not Mrs. Middleton – as the cover is addressed. That gave me pause before researching the subject, pondering whether the letter was from the same correspondence but

was kept with the wrong envelope. Between the content of the letter and the military records of two soldiers, all became clear. And, as is usually the case, revealed a fascinating story to boot.

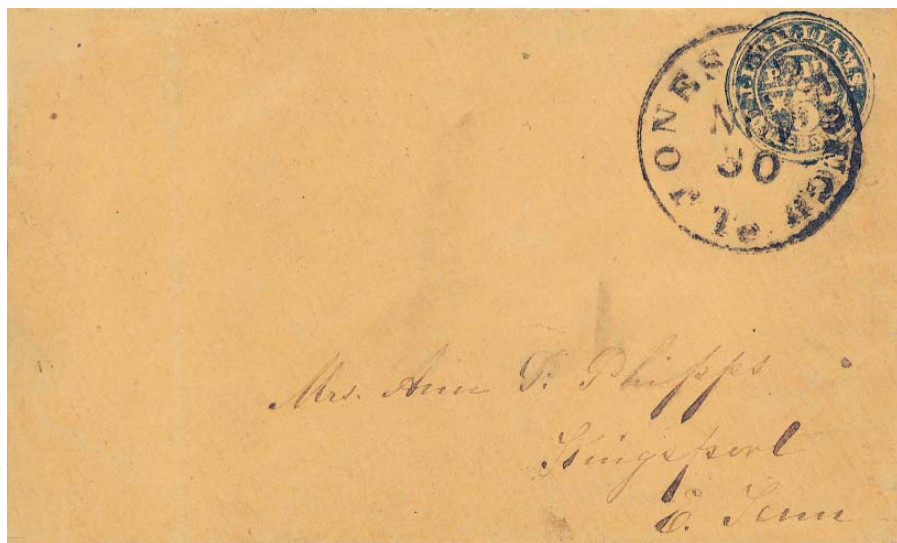


Figure 3. Jonesboro, Tenn., 5¢ blue provisional (Scott 45XU2) postmarked by the Jonesborough / Te. postmark—different spellings.

the war, as the Jonesboro, Tenn., 5¢ blue provisional (Scott 45XU2) is postmarked by the “Jonesborough / Te. // Nov / 30 [1861]” circular datestamp on the provisional entire offered as lot 49 in the Charles Kilbourne Collection of Confederate Postmasters’ Provisionals (Sale 815, Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Sept. 28, 1999). This cover (Figure 3) also passed through the collections of Emerson, Brooks and Lehman. Other Jonesboro provisionals have graced the albums of preeminent collectors such as Ferrary, Caspary, Lilly, Gallagher, Hessel, Needham, Everett, Agre, Hart, Matz and others.

New Earliest-Recorded Jonesboro Provisional

Enter a new contender, shown in Figure 4. Prior to this, the earliest-recorded blue Jonesboro provisional was dated Oct. 7, 1861. The earliest-recorded use for the black provisional is Dec. 24 [1861].⁵ In the Crown census, there



Figure 4. New earliest-recorded Jonesboro provisional, dated Aug. 17, 1861 .

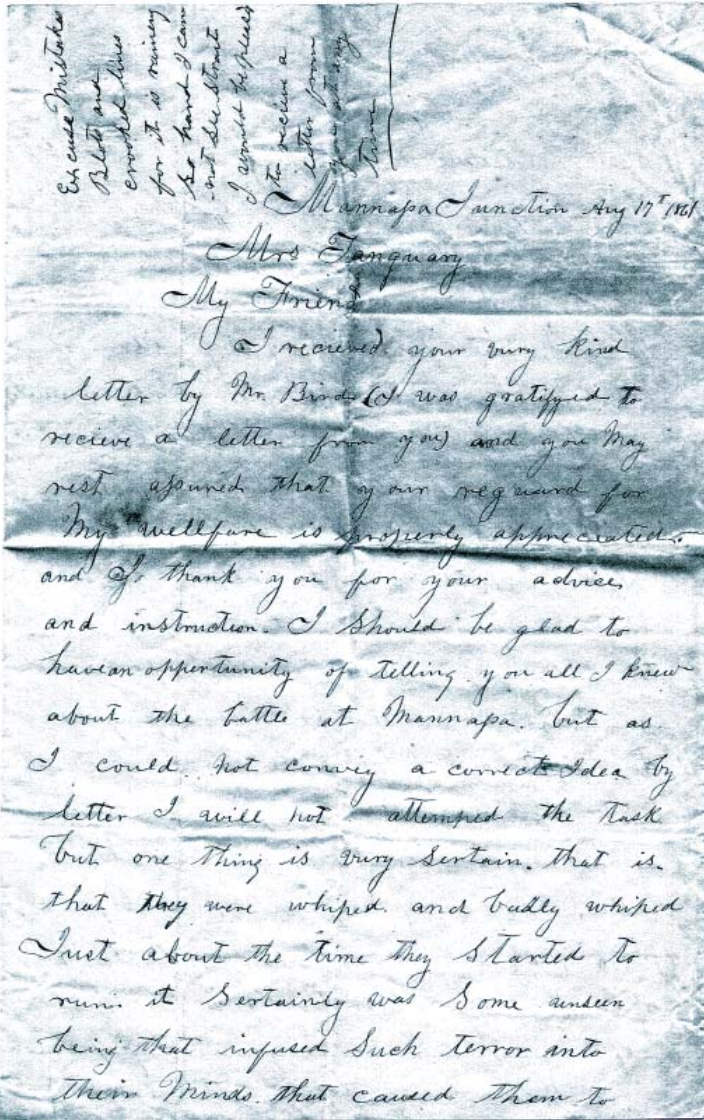


Figure 5. First page of letter in newly recorded Jonesboro entire, addressed to Mrs. Tanquary.

John William Middleton and Alfred Benjamin Tanquary both had ties to Lexington, Va., and Jonesboro, Tenn. – about 225 miles apart.

Middleton and Tanquary served together in the same company – Company H, 27th Virginia Infantry – the first company from Rockbridge County to answer the bugle call of war. Company H was recruited immediately after John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry, organized Nov. 17, 1859. When the shots were fired at Fort Sumter, the company was ordered by Gov. John Letcher to report for duty at Harper’s Ferry. The order was received April 17, 1861, and the company left Lexington promptly at 1 o’clock April 18th. As you read, note the enlistment dates of Middleton and Tanquary – protagonists in our tale.

On the organization of the Stonewall Brigade, Company H was assigned with nine other Companies to the 5th Virginia Infantry Regiment. It was regarded as one of the best companies in the famed Stonewall Brigade, and its men often acted as sharp-shooters for the brigade. The first fight the company

participated in was Falling Waters, and the last was Appomattox C.H., while General Lee was surrendering his army.

John William Middleton

John W. Middleton (1835-1907) was born near Harrisonburg, Va., and listed as a “Gentleman” when he enlisted.⁶ He died at Limestone, Tenn. He was captured at Gettysburg and imprisoned at Ft. McHenry, near Baltimore. He returned to Lexington, Va., at his liberation from prison, married Ann Zimmerman, farmed the Kerr’s Creek Area, and it is said reared a family of 11 children.^{7,8} In later life, he moved with his family to Tennessee.⁹

Middleton enlisted at Lexington, Va, April 18, 1861, for one year. He was signed up by S. H. Letcher, Lieutenant, Staff of General Robert Preston. He was dropped from the rolls as a deserter Dec. 20, 1862. He rejoined from desertion on Feb. 24, 1863, “in arrest.” “Joined from desertion, taken upon the rolls by order Genl. Jackson without trial. Again, AWOL since July 1863 – deserted July 1863 near Gettysburg Pa.” He gave himself up/was captured July 6, 1863, at Gettysburg, received at Fort McHenry, Md., from Nov. 25-30, 1863, Wests Buildings Hospital, Baltimore, Md. He is noted in the Virginia Regimental Series as being wounded in the elbow. He is noted in military records as desiring to take Oath of Allegiance Dec. 3, 1863.

In Middleton’s own words in the military records (NARA)¹⁰ “Was in a volunteer militia co. for 12 months. Served my time out and was conscript in the same co. My Father was arrested by the Rebels as a Union Man. Have a brother, a Lt. in the 4 Tenn. Vols.” (Confederate unit)

In 1864, he was still noted as wanting to take the oath. “Deserted at Millerstown near Gettysburg & gave himself up as above to the Sergt. Maj. of the 6th Regt. Av. Sent to Hospital at Gettysburg on the 8th. Remained till Nov. 17, ’63 then sent here.” “Released at Fort McHenry, Md., during the five days ending May 10, 1865, in pursuance of instructions from Com’y Gen’l of Prisoners, dated Washington, D.C., May 8, 1865,” per Special Order No. 89. Although he enlisted from Lexington, Va., note under remarks, in Figure 6, “Residence Jonesboro E. Tenn.”

(CONFEDERATE.)	
M	27 Va
John W. Middleton	
Capt. Co. H 27th Va. Inf.	
Appears on a	
Roll of Prisoners of War	
released at Fort McHenry, Md., during the five days ending May 10, 1865, in pursuance of instructions from Com’y Gen’l of Prisoners, dated Washington, D. C., May 8, 1865.	
Roll dated Hdqrs. Fort McHenry, Md., May 12, 1865.	
Where captured _____	
When captured _____, 1865	
Remarks: Residence Jonesboro E. Tenn.	
Number of roll: 179	
(50th) <i>W. M. Moore</i> Capt.	

Figure 6. John W. Middleton military record noting his residence as Jonesboro, E. Tenn.

It is clear from other Middleton letters that he did not have a high opinion of his illustrious leader, Stonewall Jackson. Nonetheless, he continued to fight under his commander although he increasingly felt he would not survive.

The following is noted, in part, from a Cowan's Auction description of Middleton letters:

"The Confederate war experience changed quickly from one of revelry to near revulsion for John W. Middleton, a private in the 27th Virginia Infantry in the Stonewall Brigade. Despite being under the command of purportedly one of the greatest military tacticians in US history, Stonewall Jackson, Middleton did not always have a high opinion of his leader. After marching for days, going 36 hours without food, and camping in the snow without fires or tents, John Middleton wrote home, General Jackson has over done the thing this time and... he cannot undue them now Conditions did not get better a few weeks later, and a dreadful drop in enlistments (experienced on both sides of the picket line) forced Jackson to find creative ways to keep his men fighting and combat desertion. One way was to grant furloughs after the men promised to reenlist...I do not think any man ought to sell his privileges for the next two years merely to see home for a few days, commented Middleton (Camp in the woods, January 30, 1862).

"As time passed, Middleton became less optimistic of the South's chances of victory. He wrote, I am convinced that the south will be overrun this summer...I hope they will defer any active measures in this section till my time expires as I do not care about being a martyr for the south. I do not covet the glory gained by battles.

"The pull of home and the desire to live rather than die for a cause he no longer supported forced him to desert the Confederate Army on December 20, 1862. He did, however, return to his regiment on February 24, 1863."

Provisional Letter Content – Pvt. John Middleton to Mrs. [Laura] Tanquary

The letter, signed J. W. Middleton, is headed "Mannassa (sic) Junction, Aug 17th, 1861," and the salutation is to "Mrs. Tanquary / My Friend."

He starts by thanking her for her concern for his welfare as well as her advice and instruction. He does not want to attempt the task of telling all he knows about the Battle of Mannassa (sic), but says one thing is certain, "they were whiped (sic) and badly." His spelling is the familiar "creative" spelling one often sees in soldiers' letters. For the sake of transcription and ease of reading, further quotes will have the spelling corrected.

Of importance to note in the letter is the following,

"I am sorry to hear that Mr. Tanquary is no better than he is but would be equally sorry to see him well, and down

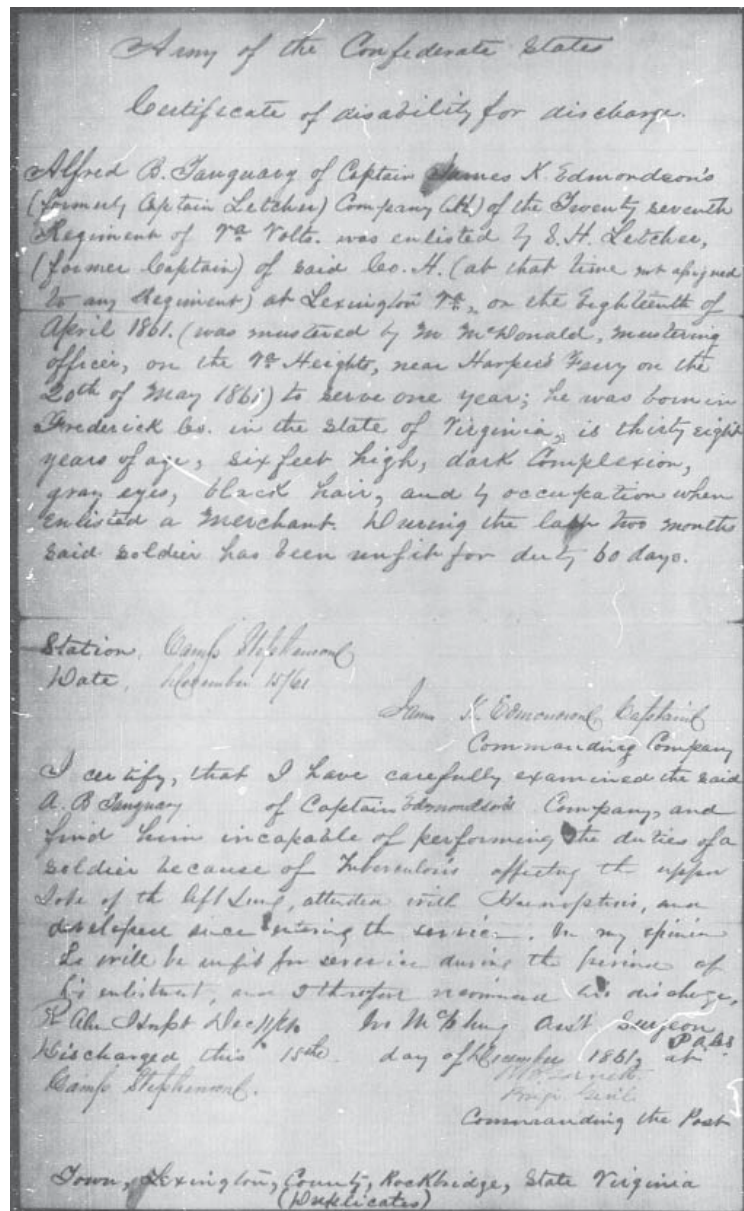


Figure 7. Alfred B. Tanquary certificate of disability for discharge from the Army of the Confederate States due to tuberculosis.

here, for I know he could not stand the exposure that we have to undergo. I made inquiry about the Letter and Certificate sent by Willie Preston, but could hear nothing of it. I suppose Dr. Davidson has received it and, as he is not here, I am at a loss what course to pursue in regard to the matter. I have talked to several officers [and] their advice is to make no effort for a discharge just now, as it would not be granted. To get a discharge, Mr. Tanquary would have to be examined by the Surgeon of the regiment, then by Dr. McGuire, then by the board of Surgeons. I would advise Mr. Tanquary to stay at home upon his furlough until there is an opportunity to get a discharge. If they should be so heartless as to send for him...they cannot compel him to come. The officers in the army care as little about the men as they possibly could. Several men have died here in camp. One applied for a furlough just two days before he died and could not get it."

Fortunately, the Tanquary family apparently took Middleton's advice to heart.

**Alfred Benjamin Tanquary (1823-83)
& Laura L. Farra Tanquary (1836-82)**

Alfred B. Tanquary was a native of Frederick County, Va. Notes for the Diary of Michael Reid Hanger¹¹ show Tanquary was discharged for "disease of the heart" in December 1861, and he was described as a tinner.

Figure 7, however, shows his original Certificate of Disability for discharge from the Army of the Confederate States. He is described as 38 years old, six feet high, dark complexion, gray eyes, black hair and was listed as a merchant when he enlisted (not a tinner).

Dated Dec. 16, 1861, at Camp Stephenson, the company commander, Captain James K. Edmonson, certifies that Tanquary has been examined and found incapable of performing the duties of a soldier because of tuberculosis affecting the upper lobe of the left lung. It is his opinion that Tanquary would be unfit for service during the period of his enlistment and therefore recommends his discharge, which was further signed by an assistant surgeon. The discharge was granted and signed by R. B. Garnett, Brig. Genl., Commanding the Post.

Richard B. Garnett (1817-63) was the first to take over the Stonewall Brigade after the promotion of Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson. Garnett led his brigade at Pickett's Charge at the Battle of Gettysburg. There, he was killed in action and his body was buried in a mass grave with other Confederate dead. It was presumably relocated to Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond later in the 19th century. Garnett's sword was donated by the family to the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond, Va., where it is still on display.¹²

The Hanger diary notes show that Tanquary served as a member of the Lexington Patrol and manufactured wool in Lexington during the war. After the war he turned to making tobacco and was later a merchant in Lexington. Undoubtedly, much of the information in the diary notes came from census information.

In the 1850 census, Alfred Tanquary is shown as a 28-year-old weaver married to J.C. Tanquary with two young children. *Ancestry.com*¹³ genealogy records show he married Mary Jane Coontz and had four children; she died in 1858.

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It also shows he married Mary Shewey, who died in 1859 – they were married and she died within a year after the first wife? Sorry, I'm having a hard time believing that one. And it also (I believe, incorrectly) shows him as having died in 1882 instead of 1883.

Alfred and Laura Tanquary are buried together under the same monument in the Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery, Lexington, Va., Plot A20.¹⁴ On the husband's side of the monument is inscribed, "United upon earth and reunited in heaven." The cemetery is the final resting place of many famous people, both from the Civil War and thereafter.¹⁵

In the 1860 census, Alfred is listed as a 37-year-old tinner and married to Laura (age 24). It shows they were married within the census year. His children by the earlier marriage were listed as 14 and seven years of age in 1860. There is also a female servant, Sarah Harris, listed as living in the household. By 1870, the census shows Alfred as a tobacco merchant with numerous children. In 1880, they are listed as General Merchant and Keeping House. Laura died in 1882 (at 46 years) and he died the following year. Records seem to indicate five children by this marriage, as well as the four from the first marriage.

Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis (TB) killed about 14,000 soldiers during the Civil War. There was no known cure for it at the time. Even today there is no real cure; it can be treated but never cured. Once you get this disease you get it for life.¹⁶

Consumption, phthisis, scrofula, Pott's disease and the White Plague are all terms used to refer to tuberculosis throughout history. It is generally accepted that Mycobacterium tuberculosis originated from other, more primitive, organisms of the same genus Mycobacterium.¹⁷ It has been found in body remains of Egyptian mummies and in pre-Columbian human remains in South America. Hippocrates described it as a pulmonary infection in 500 BC.¹⁸

So what did Tanquary ultimately die of in 1883, more than 20 years after being diagnosed with this deadly disease? Nothing I could find tells us. And I could not find the source for the reference who said Tanquary had heart problems. Undoubtedly, no matter the physical ailment, Middleton surely bought Tanquary a couple decades of extra life with his sage advice to just stay home and not return to camp.

Closing Thoughts

Back to the new earliest-recorded Jonesboro provisional! New discoveries never cease to be recorded. It's all in knowing what to look for, doing the research and sharing that discovery with others. ☰

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Endnotes

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The headstones of Alfred and Laura Tanquary at the Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery in Lexington, Va.

