



The Civil War Post

Patricia A. Kaufmann

North Carolina Scalawag George W. Swepson

Shown in Figure 1 is a CSA 2-Pa, a 10¢ light blue stamp lithographed by J.T. Paterson. It was used with a brownish grid and matching "MILTON/N.C.//JAN/2" (1863) circular datestamp on a small folded letter from Jno. Wilson to "G.W. Swepson, Esq, Haw River PO, N.C." An intermediate address is crossed out. It is probably Yanceyville, about 24 miles north of Haw River, located between Milton to the north and Haw River to the south. There is also a "Politeness of" manuscript directive at the lower left of the cover. Milton is listed in the *CSA Catalog*¹ as having scarce brown postmarks, although I'm not sure this isn't a black postmark that has



Figure 1. A 10¢ lithographed issue used with a brownish Milton, N.C., circular datestamp on a folded letter to G.W. Swepson in Haw River, N.C.



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Figure 2 (right). Letter contents dated Dec. 30, 1862, from John Wilson to Swepson regarding a textile order.

Figure 3 (below). Undated photo of John Wilson (1796-1875)

Figure 4 (bottom right). Oakwood Cemetery monument of George William Swepson (1819-83).

degraded to brown. Either way, it is a handsome use.

The letter, dated Dec. 30, 1862, from John Wilson (1796-1875), is shown in Figure 2. Wilson, a prosperous merchant and planter, inquires on what terms Swepson can sell him desired textile items. He was looking to buy cloth goods, such as shirting and cotton yarns. A photo of Wilson is shown in Figure 3.

George William Swepson

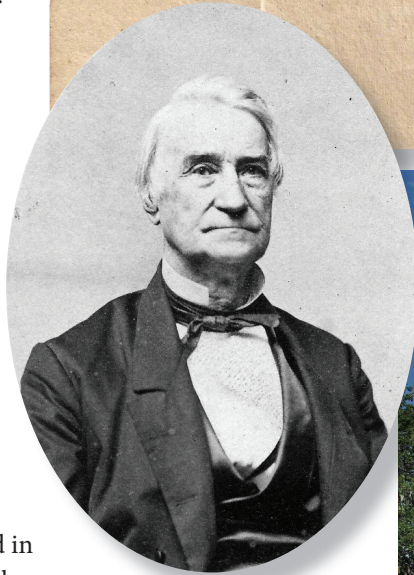
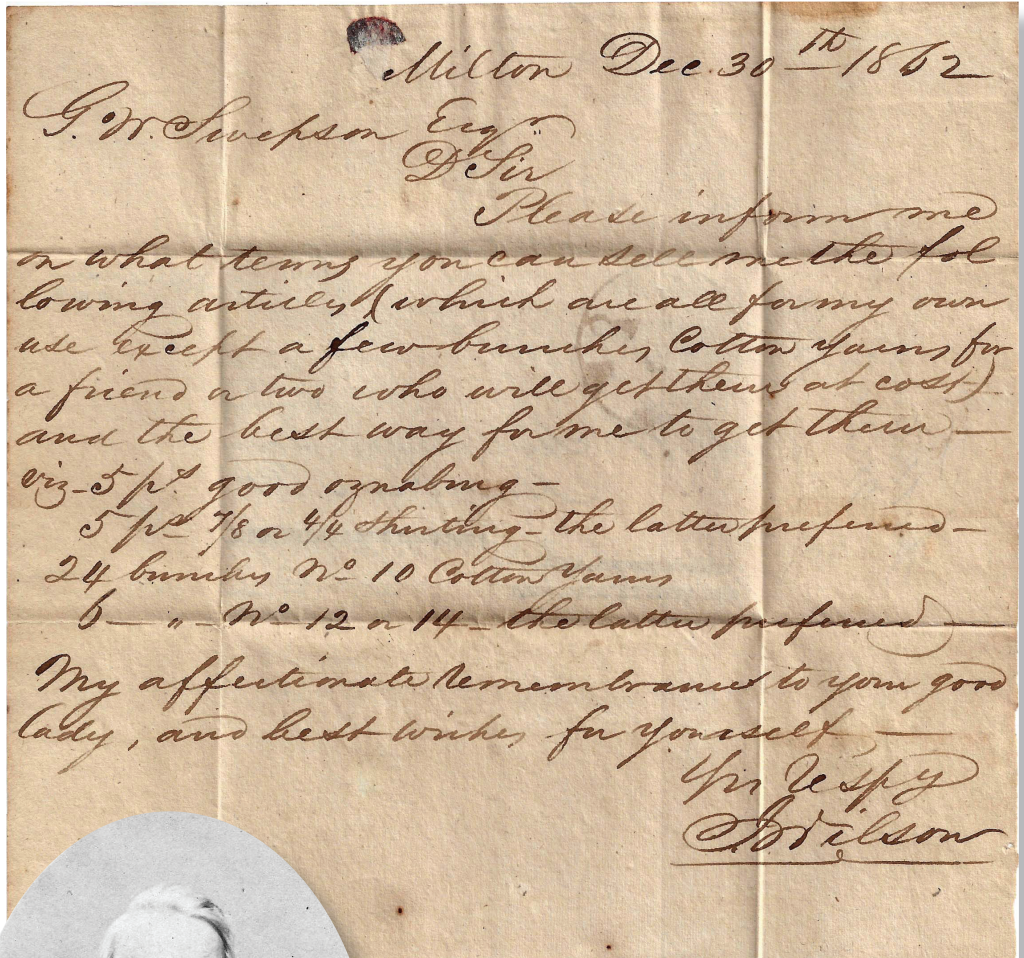
George William Swepson (1819-83) was a successful banker, textile manufacturer and broker. His imposing cemetery monument is shown in Figure 4 at his final resting place in Oakwood Cemetery, Raleigh, N.C.

The town of Swepsonville was named for his cotton mill, built there in 1868. He was also a wholesaler and a land speculator. Swepson used other people's money to finance his projects. He is remembered as one of the greatest scoundrels in the history of North Carolina.

Swepson became so involved in railroad fraud after the war that he was dubbed "Our Boss Tweed." He was responsible for the coining of the term "swepsonize," to signify whatever evil was currently afoot.

The Caswell County, N.C., website² quotes historian William S. Powell:

(George William Swepson) became one of the chief Scalawags of the Reconstruction period. His machinations in railroad bonds contributed in large measure to the financial ruin of the state. He and his Carpetbagger friend, Milton S Littlefield ... displayed open contempt for constitutional restrictions. As president of a railroad, Swepson openly bought votes in elections, and he



gave away railroad stock that had been secured by state bond issues.

A Scalawag is defined as a White Southerner who collaborated with northern Republicans during Reconstruction, usually for personal profit. Webster, in 1868, defined a Scalawag as “a low, worthless fellow.” The term was used derisively by White Southern Democrats who opposed Reconstruction legislation.

A Carpetbagger was a Scalawag’s northern counterpart – those who went South after the war to profit from Reconstruction. Figure 5 displays sheet music on file at the Library of Congress titled *The Carpet Bagger*.

The Republican North Carolina legislature issued a total of \$27.8 million in railroad bonds. Swepson and Littlefield defrauded the state of an estimated \$4 million in bonds intended for a western extension of the North Carolina Railroad. A \$1,000 North Carolina bond is shown in Figure 6.

The shenanigans of Swepson and Littlefield resulted in substantial economic loss to the region while, at times, Swepson’s personal fortune was estimated between \$1 million and \$2 million.

Along with Littlefield, Swepson was indicted for the railroad bond fraud, but was not convicted. It is not known whether Swepson even stood trial. The unconscionable behavior continued. Although, fascinating, it is too lengthy for these pages. Should you be interested, the extensive tale of Swepson’s egregious conduct is easily found online.

The only bright spot in this saga is that he and his wife, Virginia Bartlett Yancey, had no children to suffer the stain of his past sins or to pass on his underhanded genes. ☹️

Endnotes

1. Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown Jr., Jerry S. Palazolo, *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*, Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012.
2. George William Swepson (1819-83), Caswell County N.C., <https://nccha.blogspot.com/2006/11/george-william-swepson-1819-1883.html/> (Accessed August 10, 2022).

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Patricia A. (Trish) Kaufmann was first introduced to Confederate postal history in 1965. She became actively involved in organized philately in 1969, became a dealer in 1973 and today specializes solely in Confederate stamps and postal history. She enjoys hearing from readers and may be reached at [trishkauf@comcast.net](mailto:trishkauf@comcast.net).



Figure 5 (above). Sheet music titled *The Carpet Bagger* (Library of Congress).  
 Figure 6 (below). A North Carolina \$1,000 bond.

