



**Patricia A. Kaufmann**

With the vast resources of the Smithsonian  
National Postal Museum and Arago

# The French Family of Soulé and Their War with *the* War



**R**oughly 20 years ago, fellow CSA Catalog editor Jerry Palazolo and I were recruited by the Smithsonian National Postal Museum (NPM) to write up the Confederate States section of Arago, the name of the online portion of NPM scheduled to be unveiled at the Washington D.C. 2006 World Philatelic Exhibition.

The Confederate section of Arago was

one of the first to be added to that online resource. This is because the National Stamp Collection originated in 1886 with the donation of a partial pane of 10¢ Confederate postage stamps by M.W. Robertson. The collection grew slowly until 1911, when the Post Office Department began to transfer more than 200,000 stamps and postal operations artifacts. To organize this acquisition, the Smithsonian hired Joseph



Figure 2. The author remarks that she, "... gets twinges of nostalgia every time I enter the historic lobby, shown in Figure 2, with its imposing rosette ceiling and marble floors where now elegant dinners and galas are held."



Large enough by the time of the early 20th-century cities, the view at left is a historical photograph of a busy city street where the wealthy class often held their social gatherings.

Leavy as the first curator. By 1914, Leavy had placed more than 14,000 stamps on display. Today, that number has grown to roughly six million.

The Smithsonian's National Postal Museum is dedicated to the preservation, study and presentation of postal history and philately. The NPM houses one of the largest and most significant philatelic and postal history collections in the world and one of the world's most comprehensive library resources on philately and postal history.

From 1908 until 1963, the collection was housed in the Smithsonian's Arts and Industries Building on the National Mall. In 1964, the collection was relocated to the National Museum of History and Technology (now the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History), and its scope expanded to include a vast holding of postal history and artifacts from well over 150 years of stamp production.

The Smithsonian National Postal Museum was

urged into existence by Gordon Morison, the late Third Assistant Postmaster General, when the U.S. Postal System established as a separate entity on November 6, 1990. Its location near Union Station in Northeast Washington opened to the public in July 1993.

That historic City Post Office building, Figure 1, personally holds many memories for me. As a young woman, I lugged countless armloads of registered mail from Kaufmann auctions to that very building in the 1970s and 1980s after hours when it was still a working post office. It was the only post office in the city that was open 24 hours a day. I was often there into the wee hours of the night after a big sale. Initially, all those registered receipt books were handwritten – something I do not remember fondly. No one wanted to be behind me in line. They still don't.

I get twinges of nostalgia every time I enter the historic lobby, shown in Figure 2, with its imposing rosette ceiling and marble floors where now



me of the Civil War to begin to have beautiful suburbs New Orleans' Esplanade Avenue, at mid-century, es were taking up residence. Also shown here are other scenes in the city in the early 1860s.



Photos above and at left: A street scene in downtown New Orleans in the early 1870s. Left: An overloaded steamboat holds tens of thousands of dollars in cotton bales on the New Orleans dock in the early 1860s.

elegant dinners and galas are catered. I was privileged to be on the NPM Council of Philatelists during the construction and lead-up to the opening of the spectacular William H. Gross Gallery, one of the highlights of my philatelic life.

### J. W. Hincks Correspondence

But I'm straying off-topic with reminiscences. When Jerry Palazolo and I undertook the daunting task of writing online descriptions for Arago to represent the National Stamp Collection, we understandably tackled the assignment by dividing the work in half. We each wrote our half, then read and commented on the descriptions of the other as needed, checking for accuracy and clarity for the reader. It fell to Jerry to research and do the initial write-up of a small and fascinating correspondence addressed to the J.W. Hincks family of New Orleans.

John W. Hincks was the Secretary of the New Orleans Mutual Insurance Company. The Hincks family was relatively well-off at the outbreak of the Civil War.

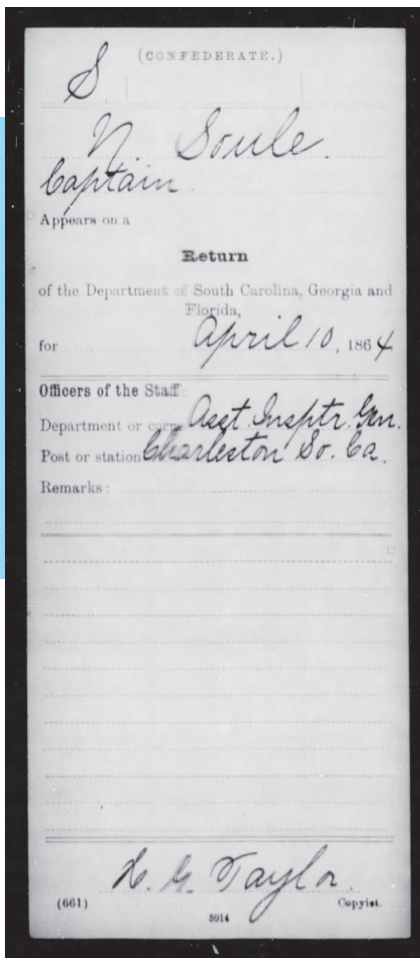
In early 1863, U.S. General Nathaniel P. Banks ordered the death penalty for persons convicted of supplying arms to the enemy and the deportation for all registered enemies who refused to take



Figure 1. The National Postal Museum holds millions of historic items such as the images of New Orleans you see here in this article that relate to the city's large well-spring of postal history. They are now held in the former Washington, D.C. Main Post Office, now the NPM, at 2nd and Massachusetts Avenue -shown here.

the oath of allegiance of the United States in the formerly-held Confederate territory.

Presumably, John Hincks signed the Oath since he and his daughters remained in New Orleans. Two of his sons were Confederate soldiers. Henry Anatole is listed in military records as Sgt. A. Hincks, Louisiana Militia, Orleans Guards Regiment, Company D, Army of the Mississippi. Joseph A. Hincks is listed as J.A. Hincks, South Carolina Artillery, Manigault's Battalion, Company D.



**Figure 3. Military record showing N. Soule as Assistant Inspector General of the Department of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, posted at Charleston, S.C.**

Joseph Hincks enlisted on May 7, 1864, and was detailed to Confed-

erate Major General Samuel Jones at the army's headquarters as a First Class Clerk. In this particular capacity, Hincks was sometimes able to censor his own outbound flag-of-truce mail, as well as take advantage of his contacts at the Federal command posts.

Port Royal Sound is located along the South Carolina coast line between the Sea Islands of Port Royal (to the north) and Hatteras (to the south). The Battle of Port Royal was one of the earliest amphibious operations of the war November 3-7, 1861. They remained under Union control during the remainder of the war.

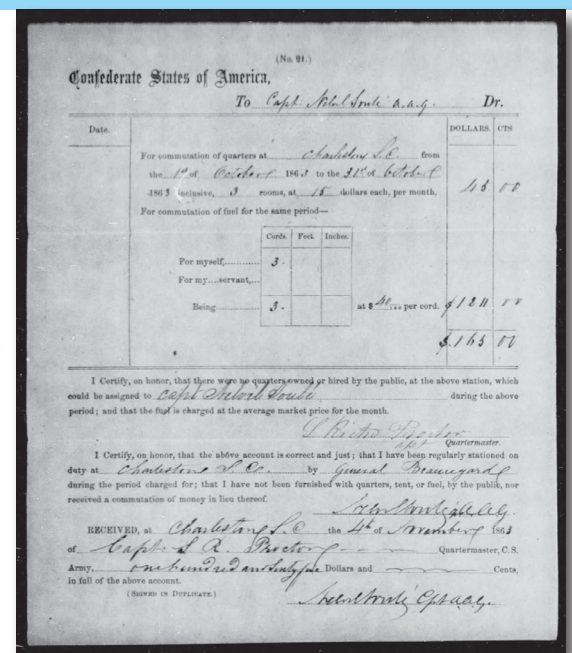
Hincks' knowledge of the constantly changing military developments along the Atlantic coast allowed him to alter his mailing methods, thus ensuring a substantial number of his letters to family in New Orleans got through successfully. The NPM holds 35 covers, as well as individual letters, to his father and sisters, Lida and Lucille. Some of the covers, all viewable online through Arago at NPM, are blockade-run uses and some went through Mobile.



**Figure 5. The Soulé family tomb in Saint Louis Cemetery Number 2 in New Orleans.**



**Figure 6. Close-up of names listed on the Soulé family tomb.**



**Figure 7. Nelvil Soulé's signature on the bottom of a commutation of quarters.**

### Captain Nelvil Alfred Soulé and the Honorable Pierre Soulé

One of Hincks' contacts was Captain Nelvil Soulé (1821-1878), Assistant Adjutant General, Department of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida (CSA). He was stationed at Charleston where he examined and forwarded several Hincks letters.

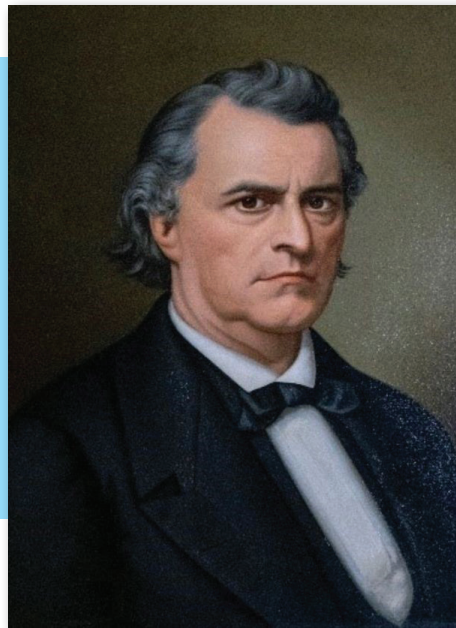
Although I was familiar with the Hincks correspondence because of Arago, it was Soulé, one of the examining officers, and his esteemed father, who captured my attention when one of the Hincks covers found its way to me recently.

Nelvil is shown in military records both as Assistant Inspector General and Assistant Adjutant General; he signed documents in both capacities. Figure 3 shows his position as Assistant Inspec-



**Figure 8. Portrait of Pierre Soulé with his young son, Nelvil.**

General Pierre Gustave  
Toutant-Beauregard, CSA



**Figure 9. Oil painting of Pierre Soulé.**

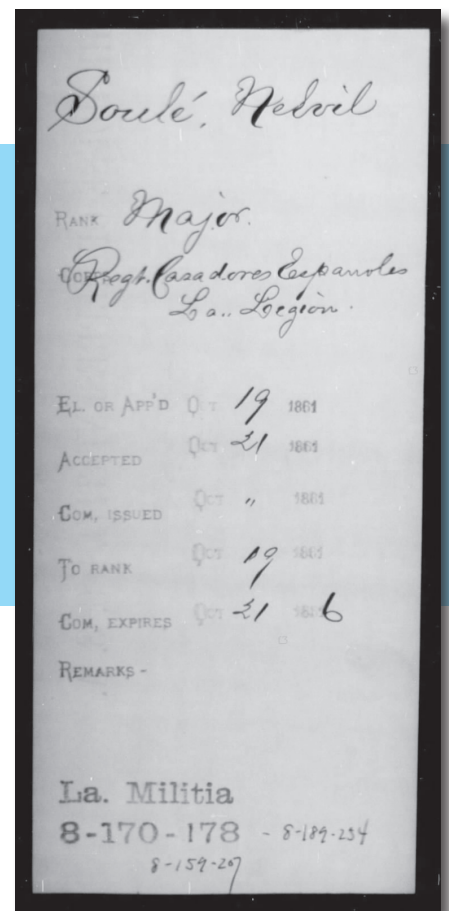


tor General  
at Charleston  
April 10, 1864.  
The mostly  
handwritten  
record in Fig-  
ure 4 reveals  
a (brief) rank  
of Major in  
an early 1861  
Louisiana Mi-  
litia record in  
the Regiment

of Casadores Espanoles. All regular Confederate military records show him as captain.

The name in contemporary newspapers and on the family tombstone clearly show Soulé as Nelvil, but his name is also incorrectly noted as Neville, Nelville, and Nebril. This misspelling is the often-seen victim of both misinterpreted handwriting and phonetics, coupled with a name unfamiliar to most native English-language speakers.

Figure 5 shows the family tomb in Saint Louis Cemetery Number 2 in New Orleans (SOC plat Square 2 St Patrick Aisle [Alley 3-R] M32), while Figure 6 shows a close-up of the family names.



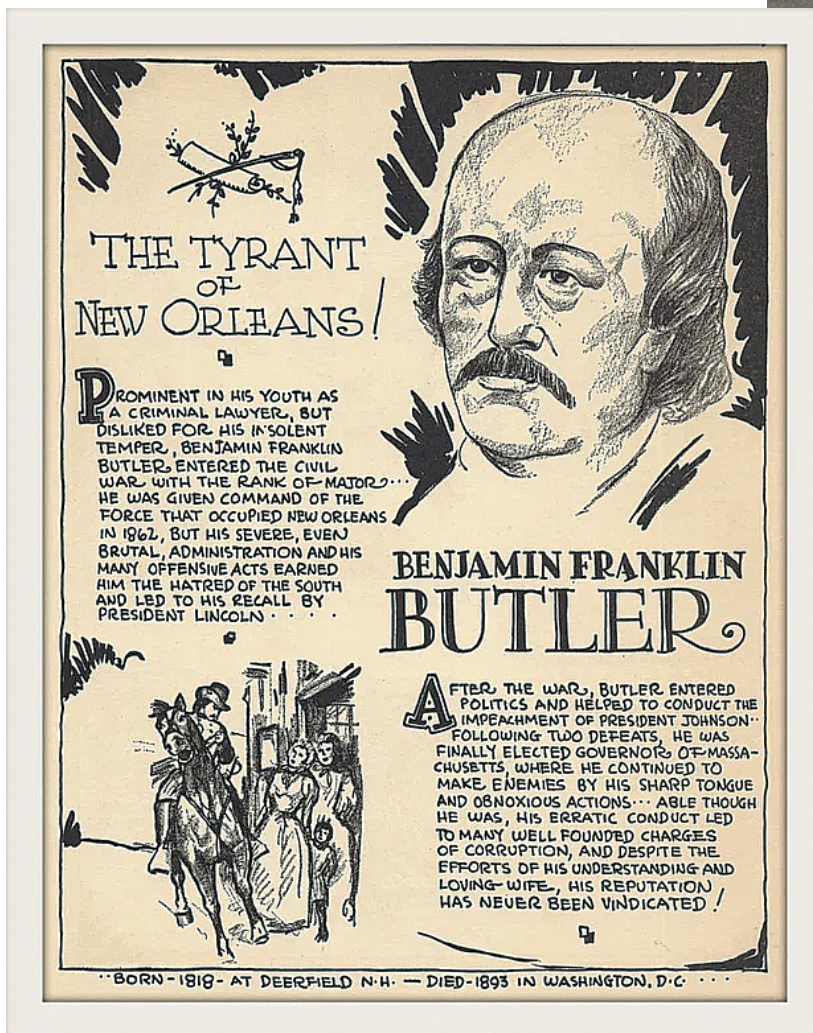
**Figure 4. Louisiana Militia record showing Nelvil Soulé with the rank of Major in the Regiment Casadores Espanoles, Louisiana Legion.**

Nelvil is listed about three-quarters of the way down from his father, the Honorable Pierre Soulé.

That is also the way Nelvil's name is recorded on official papers in military records, and the way he signed documents, as clearly shown on the bottom of the commutation of quarters document in Figure 7.

Nelvil's father, Pierre Soulé (1801-1870), was born in Castillon-en-Couserans, France. He is pictured in Figure 8 with his young son, Nelvil and in a contemporary oil painting in Figure 9. He studied law in Paris but was forced to flee to Haiti in 1826 as a troublemaking political dissident, exiled for revolutionary activities. Finding no appropriate opening in Haiti, he sailed for Baltimore or New York (conflicting sources) and from there to New Orleans, where he made his new home. After studying English and American law, he rose rapidly and was associated with most of the celebrated civil and criminal cases in Louisiana courts.

It is said Soulé was more notable for his origi-



nality, power, and brilliance as an advocate than for his wisdom as a jurist. He was a Democratic Senator from Louisiana in the U.S. Senate in 1847 and from 1849-1853. A folded letter of the period sent with his congressional free frank is shown in Figure 10. From 1853-1855, he also served as U.S. Minister to Spain.

Pierre Soulé was author of the Ostend Manifesto, a document written in 1854 that described the rationale for the United States to purchase Cuba from Spain while implying the U.S. should declare war if Spain refused. This stemmed from fear of a slave revolt in Cuba like that in Haiti, as well as a desire to expand U.S. slave territory.

The Ostend Manifesto proposed a shift in foreign policy, justifying the use of force to seize Cuba in the name of national security. It resulted from debates over slavery in the United States, manifest destiny, and the Monroe Doctrine.

Manifest destiny was the belief that American settlers were entitled to conquer and control

North America. It was a 19th century ideology used to justify dispossession and genocide against Native Americans.

The Monroe Doctrine was a U.S. foreign policy position that opposed European colonialism in the Western Hemisphere. It held that any intervention in the political affairs of the Americas by foreign powers was a potentially hostile act against the United States.

Surprisingly, Pierre Soulé opposed secession. He predicted the calamities secession would bring, as well as the defeat of the South, although he declared he would abide by the decision of his state. He was one of the few from the Deep South who campaigned for Stephen Douglas against secessionist delegates.

Pierre tendered his services to the Confederate government but, in failing health, he soon returned to New Orleans and remained there until the city fell to the Union in April 1862. He was arrested and taken to Fort Lafayette, New York Harbor, where he was imprisoned for several months. Upon release, he went to Nassau, Bahamas. In autumn 1862, he ran the blockade at Charleston and tendered his services to General P.G.T. Beauregard. After serving on Gen. Beauregard's staff for a time, Soulé went to Richmond in 1863 and was commissioned Brigadier General to raise a foreign legion, but that plan was not implemented.

Dated at Richmond September 15, 1863, Figure 11 shows the signature of Pierre Soulé signing for

**Union Flag Officer David G. Farragut ran his fleet past Forts Jackson and St. Philip on April 24, 1862, before capturing New Orleans the following day.**

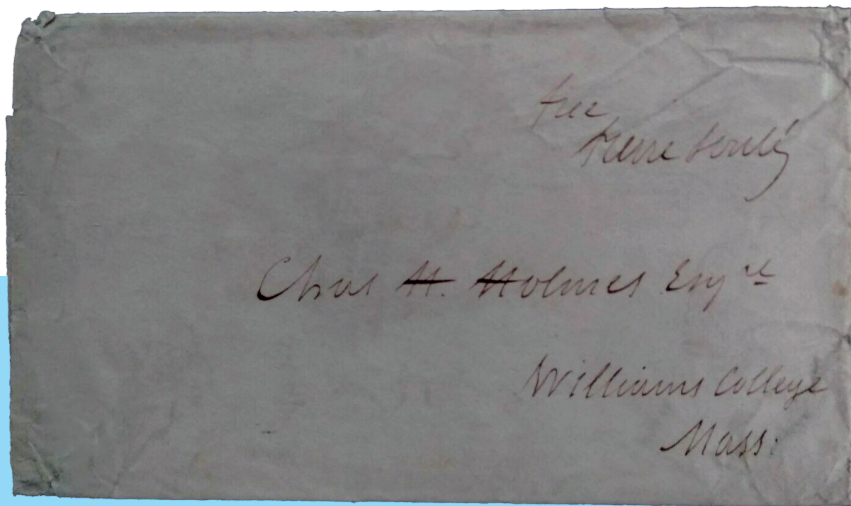
receipt of 1 English saddle and other equestrian equipment for his son, Capt. N. Soulé. This is during the period both men served on the staff of Gen. Beauregard. Figure 12 (next page) shows Nevil's appointment on September 2, 1863, and that it was delivered to his father, Hon. P. Soulé, who was acting as volunteer aide-de-camp.

Soulé's eloquence was acknowledged by statesmen Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, political giants of the day. After the war ended in 1865, Soulé went into exile in Havana, Cuba, later returning; he died in New Orleans in 1870.

### The Civil War Postal History

The J.W. Hincks covers at NPM are a fascinat-



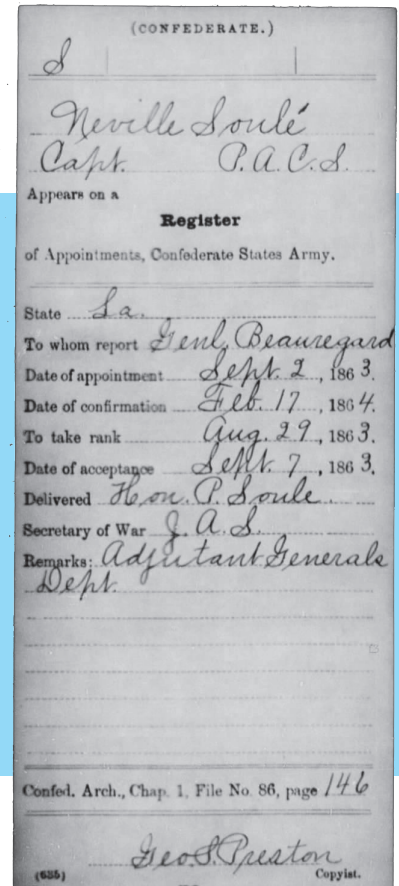


**Figure 11.** Pierre Soulé signing for receipt of one English saddle and other equestrian equipment for his son, Capt. N. Soulé while both were serving on the staff of Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard.

ing mix of blockade-run and flag-of-truce mail. Only four of the Hincks envelopes have the examined markings of Capt. Nelvil Soulé. I had never seen a Hincks cover outside the NPM collection until the one shown in Figure 13, nor had Jerry Palazolo. Yet between us, we have more than a century of Confederate postal history experience. I am unaware of any other Civil War Hincks covers in private hands.

The cover is addressed to “Miss Lucile Hincks, Care Jno. W. Hincks, Esq., Secty New Orleans Mut. Ins. Co., New Orleans, Louisiana.” Contents docketing indicates the letter, from one of the two brothers, was written “28 Aout / 64” (Aout=August in French). It is numbered “No 51” in pencil in the Hincks letter sequence. Covers in the museum collection show similar numbering. Letter numbering is a typical wartime practice by correspondents as letters are often delayed or lost in the confusion of troops movements and battle.

**Figure 10.** Congressional free frank of Pierre Soulé circa 1850.



**Figure 12.** The appointment of Capt. Nelvil Soulé to the staff of Gen. Beauregard delivered to his father, Hon. Pierre Soulé.

The envelope was signed in magenta ink “Appd N. Soulé, Cpt AAG” showing it was examined and approved. This is Nelvil Soulé’s signature. At far left, a second “Apprd, N.S., Capt & AAG” is noted in a different hand and ink.

The cover is franked with a U.S. 1861 3¢ rose (Scott US 65) and postmarked by a duplex of Port Royal, S.C., Sep 1 '64. It appears to have been handled as a favor through the lines at Port Royal where it entered the U.S. mail system and remained there all the way to New Orleans. The well-connected people in Charleston called in favors through the local Confederate censor (Soulé) who evidently had connections in or near Port Royal. This is supposition and there is virtually no way to prove this was done in an unofficial capacity.

The use in Figure 14 is shown courtesy of NPM. The envelope is from one of the Hincks brothers to their father. It shows the same magen-



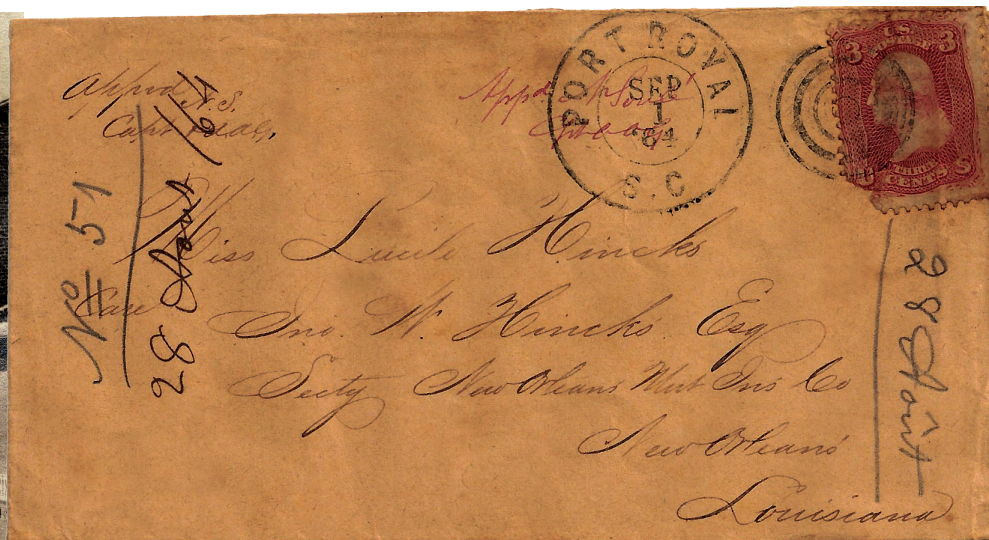


Figure 13a. Interesting street scene in New Orleans circa 1861.

Figure 13. The only recorded Hincks Civil War use in private hands; it was examined by Capt. Nelvil Soulé and entered the U.S. mail stream at Union-occupied Port Royal S.C.

ta examining ink “ex N. Soulé, Capt. AAG.” The cover is dated a month earlier than the first-described use, July 25, 1865.

Figure 15 is another cover shown courtesy of NPM. This use is from one of the Hincks brothers to his sister, Léda. The October 1, 1864, letter was examined in Charleston by Capt. Nevil Soulé and his approval penned to the left of the stamp. It was then transferred to Port Royal by some means of which we are not totally sure and put aboard a U.S. naval ship bound for New York, where it was marked with a New York Oct 7 (1864) duplex cancel and entered the U.S. mail. The 1861 3¢ stamp (Scott US 65) carried it to occupied New Orleans. It is “No. 62” in the letter sequence.

#### Old Charleston Jail and Capt. Nelvil Soulé

One of the many historically significant buildings within the Charleston Old and Historical District is the Old Charleston Jail, constructed in 1802 and operating until 1939. Prisoners held there ranged from high-seas pirates to the first alleged female serial killer in the United States (Lavinia Fisher). Most importantly to postal historians, it also housed Union prisoners of war as well as Confederate prisoners.

Shown in Figure 16-18 in photos dating from

1870 to today, the Old Jail is today a travel destination with opportunities such as the “Charleston Haunted Jail Tour.” I saw the Old Jail a decade ago by horse-drawn carriage tour. One of Capt. Nelvil Soulé’s duties as Assistant Inspector General was to inspect the Charleston Jail. Figure 19 shows filing notations on the outside of a letter signed by him and dated December 14, 1863. His name and title are directly under the strike of the bold Rebel Archives double oval.

The one-page content shown in Figure 20 was directed to Lieut. Col. Alfred Roman (1824-1892), Inspector General’s Office, pictured in Figure 21. Roman served on the staff of Gen. Beauregard as both Aide-de-Camp and Inspector General. He was the son of Andre Bienvenu Roman who served as the 9th, and again as the 11th, governor of Louisiana.

In Capt. Soulé’s impassioned letter, he indicates he is reporting on the state of the clothing of the (Confederate) military prisoners confined in said jail, the duration of their imprisonment, and the cause of their incarceration. As far as cleanliness, there was no cause for complaint, but...

*“Military prisoners have no blankets, no shoes, no clothing; they seem to be entirely forgotten by their*

*company commanders. So much so, that some of them have been confined for months without trial. According to the laws of the country, every man has a right to a speedy trial. One could hardly believe that he is under the control of a liberal government were he to cast a glance on the list of men incarcerated for the last four months without charges, waiting for a trial, for a sentence.*

*"The condition of things, as it will more fully appear by the statement hereto annexed & made part of this report, baffles all description.*

*"Respectfully submitted,*

*Nevil Soulé*

*Cpt Asst In General"*

Capt. Soulé writes a similar much longer letter on January 3, 1864, citing the commissary in charge neglected his duty. The distribution of rations was entrusted to two prisoners who stole the government rations and offered them for sale in the jail. He goes on to relate many other indignities such as no blankets and the lack of wood for fire in the dead of winter.

Figure 22 shows the first of many pages from Exhibit D annexed to his letter. It details the needs of individual soldiers awaiting sentencing, trial, or any charges at all. Virtually all men needed clothing and blankets.

He also reports many of the men are confined on charges of which they may be innocent. He recommends discharge from jail in specific cases. The letter is lengthy, and the complaints are many. They have severely impacted the morale of the men.

Capt. Nelvil Soulé was a man on a mission. His reports appear heartfelt, like someone who cares. Soulé's examined markings are also known on mail out of the Old Jail and other important flag-of-truce mail from the "Confederate 50" aboard the USS Dragoon off Hilton Head, predecessors of the well-known "Immortal 600." The so-called Immortal 600 were held as "human shields" on Morris Island in Charleston Harbor under direct shelling of their own forces in retaliation for Union prisoners being held in Charleston under shelling from U.S. forces.

### **Epitaph**

According to the *Quachita Telegraph* (Monroe, Louisiana), Nelvil died at age 46 of "an incurable

malady of many years duration." One source identified the malady as softening of the brain. Known as encephalomalacia, the brain's tissue softens due to hemorrhage or inflammation after cerebral infarction, cerebral ischemia, infection, craniocerebral trauma, or other injury.

Nelvil's only son, Pierre, predeceased him by only two months at the age of nineteen. To worsen the sting of Nelvil's last days, his daughter, Margerite, died at the tender age of six years, from the "prevailing scourge," two weeks after her brother. Yellow fever was likely the cause of death for young Pierre as well, although the newspaper accounts did not specify.

Yellow fever killed 4,000 in New Orleans. The deadly scourge was largely attributed to the drinking water. New Orleans in the years after the Civil War was one of the largest, smelliest, and most illness-ridden cities in the United States. Streets were littered with waste of every description and stagnant water was everywhere. It became a city of epidemics.

The deadly epidemic of 1878 spread as far as Memphis, killing almost 20,000 people across the Mississippi River valley. At the turn of the century, mosquitos were discovered to be transmitters, as they found a perfect breeding ground in the poor drainage system of New Orleans and elsewhere.

It was a wretched end for Nelvil Soulé, who took up the gauntlet as an advocate for those incarcerated at the Charleston Jail during "the late unpleasantness."

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Figure 17. The back of the Old Charleston Jail. (Courtesy Library of Congress)



The Sea Islands of Port Royal Sound along the coast of South Carolina.

Figure 14. A use from one of the Hincks brothers in Charleston, S.C., to their father in Union-occupied New Orleans. It bears the censor markings of Capt. Nelvil Soulé. (Courtesy Smithsonian National Postal Museum)

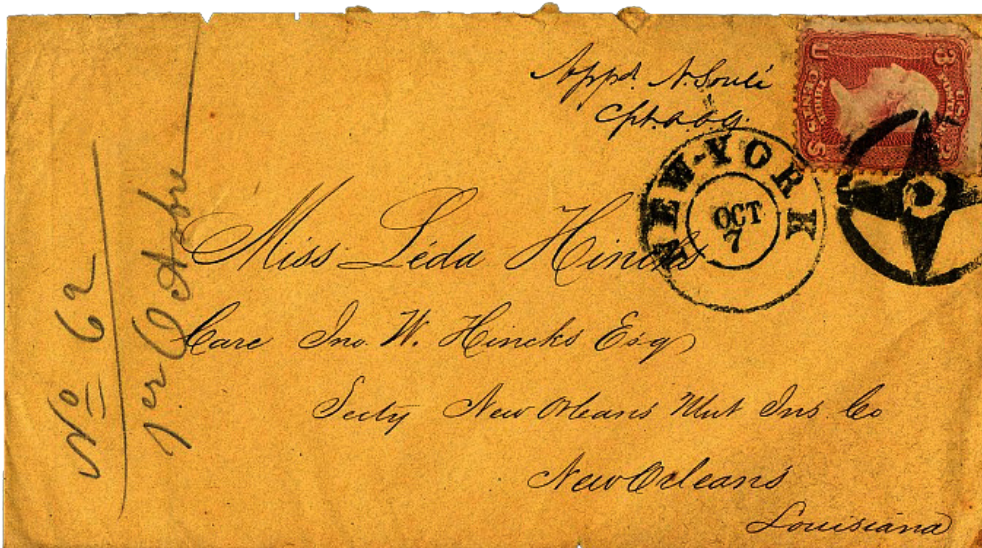
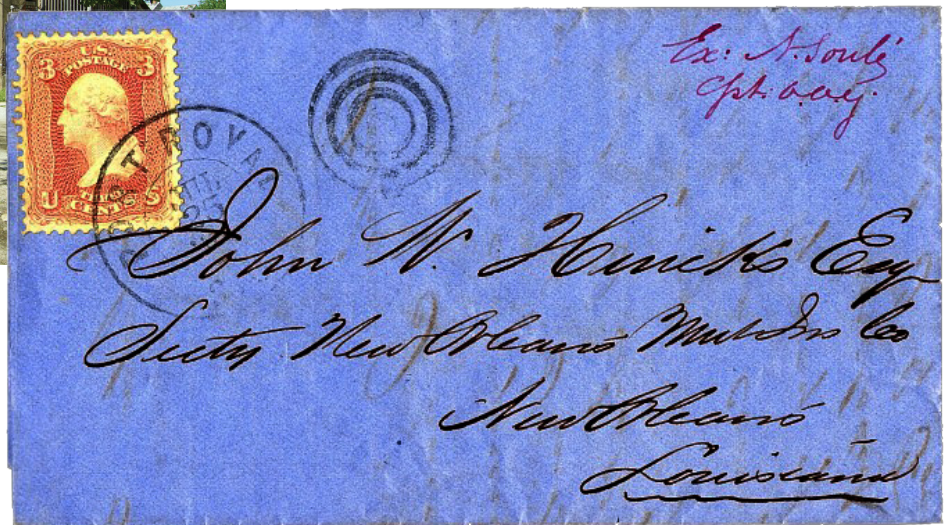


Figure 15. This October 1, 1864, letter was examined at Charleston by Capt. Nelvil Soulé then transferred by unknown means to Hilton Head or Port Royal where it was put aboard a U.S. naval ship bound for New York where it entered the U.S. Mail. (Courtesy Smithsonian National Postal Museum)