Confederate Treasury – the Final Disposition
Marshall P. Waters III, PhD, Washington, GA

Introduction

The government of the Confederacy abandoned its capital at Richmond, Virginia, on Sunday, April 2, 1865, initially moving to Danville, Virginia. Some Confederate documents and records had already been relocated farther south anticipating such an event. On the morning of April 2, the Confederate Secretary of the Navy, Stephen Russell Mallory, sent a dispatch to Captain William Harwar Parker CSN (U.S. Naval Academy Class of 1848), Superintendent of the Confederate Naval Academy aboard the CSS Patrick Henry (formally a civilian side wheel merchant steamer Yorktown) in the James River south of Richmond. The order, by Mallory to Parker, was to “Have the corps of midshipmen, with the proper officers, at the Danville depot to-day [sic] at 6 P.M., the commanding officer to report to the Quartermaster of the Army”.1 This started a 33-day odyssey of the Confederate treasury which ended on May 4, 1865, in Washington, Georgia.

Incorporated January 23, 1780, Washington is about 90 miles due east of Atlanta. It is the county seat of Wilkes County being named for English parliamentarian and publicist John Wilkes. Washington was home to a number of notable Confederate political and military figures. Robert Augustus Toombs, the Confederacy’s first Secretary of State and later Brigadier General, had his home here (built c. 1797). Brigadier General Edward Porter Alexander (U.S. Military Academy Class of 1857), who was General James Longstreet’s Chief of Artillery, was born and raised here (home built c. 1808). The Assistant Secretary of War, John A. Campbell, was born in Washington in 1811.

It was here in this small east central Georgia town that the final distribution of the Confederate treasury took place. It was here that the last Confederate cabinet meeting took place – what was left of it. It was here that the final official act of the Confederate Government was conducted. It was here that the last order of the “Lost Cause” was made. And, it was here that the government of the Confederate States of America ended when Jefferson Davis fled south and the remaining cabinet members dispersed.

Captain Parker commanded sixty midshipmen aged 14-18 of the Confederate Naval Academy. He also had a small staff of instructors. After receiving the dispatch from Mallory, Parker sent for his Executive Officer and Commandant of Midshipmen, Captain James Henry Rochelle CSN (U.S. Naval Academy Class of 1848). Parker directed Rochelle to carry out Mallory’s order. Parker then made his way to the Confederate Navy Department at Richmond where he learned that the government was to abandon the city that very night. He immediately returned to his ship, rescinded the order to Rochelle, and took charge. Everyone in Parker’s command – the midshipmen, instructors, and wives – was to be at the Danville depot at 6:00 p.m. except Lieutenant James W. Billups CSN and ten midshipmen. They were left behind to burn the CSS Patrick Henry.
Captain Parker’s small command was charged to guard the Confederate treasury, the assets of six Richmond, Virginia, banks, and sundry records/documents of the Confederate government in its movement south. Due to the haste at which the Confederate government left Richmond, the treasury was not actually counted, but Parker, and others, estimated it to be in the neighborhood of $500,000\textsuperscript{2} – about $10 million today.

The treasury contained silver and gold coin, silver and gold bullion, 600-700 million dollars worth of Confederate Treasury notes, 16-18,000 pounds sterling in Liverpool, England, acceptances, a chest of silver jewelry donated by women of the Confederacy for the purpose of building an ironclad, and the floor sweepings of the Dahlonega, Georgia, mint.\textsuperscript{3} In addition, there were millions of dollars of Confederate paper money, bonds, and other government documents. The Senior Treasury Teller, Walter Philbrook, and his assistant clerks had actual charge of the money, but Captain Parker’s midshipmen provided for its protection.

The assets of the six Richmond, Virginia, banks (Bank of Virginia, Bank of Richmond, Bank of the Commonwealth, Exchange Bank, Farmer’s Bank, and Trader’s Bank) traveling with the treasury was counted. It totaled $450,000 ($9 million today) of silver and gold coin.\textsuperscript{4} The specie was packed in socks, $5,000 each, placed in wooden kegs and then sealed. Each bank’s respective officer was in charge of its assets and traveled with them. The Confederacy’s Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, Judge William Wood Crump, was the senior civilian official of the party.

These bank assets, although reportedly kept separate from the Confederate treasury, were also guarded by Parker’s midshipmen to Washington, Georgia, where it was held in the Bank of Georgia Branch on the town square. Known locally postwar as the Heard house, it was probably placed there on April 23 – or soon thereafter, but before April 28. This money was not disturbed until May 24, 1865, when it left Washington, Georgia, for return to Richmond, Virginia, by way of Abbeville, South Carolina. The disposition of this money is a separate story however, for bank officials reported a midnight robbery seventeen miles from Washington near Chennault, Georgia, on the night of May 24-25, 1865. The next day bank officials reported $251,029.90 stolen.\textsuperscript{5} A portion of this amount was later recovered, but the midnight raid netted robbers about $179,000 – $3.6 million today. These gold and silver coins remain missing to this day.

**Chronology of Events Surrounding the Confederate Treasury**

On the evening of April 2, 1865, Captain Parker’s armed midshipmen guarded the treasure train at the Danville Station amidst ruffians, thieves, and deserters. The City of Richmond burned in the background. Ship’s magazines in the James River, including Parker’s *CSS Patrick Henry*, exploded sending ordinance skyward. Near midnight, on what was to be the last train south, the assets of six Richmond, Virginia, banks (hereafter referred to as “bank assets”) and the Confederate treasury moved from Richmond to Danville, Virginia, arriving mid-afternoon on April 3.

At Danville, Virginia, from April 3-6, the train containing the treasury and the bank assets moved onto a railroad siding where treasury clerks exchanged Confederate paper
money for silver coin at the rate of $70 to $1. Near 6:00 p.m. on April 6, Parker was ordered by Mallory to move the treasury and bank assets by rail to Charlotte, North Carolina, and have it stored in the mint there. Before leaving, the treasury was counted for the first time by Senior Teller Walter Philbrook. It contained $327,022.90.6

The treasury arrived at Greensboro, North Carolina, on April 7, where $39,000 was paid out to Major General Joseph E. Johnston CSA and his soldiers at the rate of $1.15 each. In addition, $35,000 was removed and taken with President Jefferson Davis and the Cabinet. (These monies were separated from the Davis party near Sandersville, Georgia, on May 6, 1865, and moved to Florida.) At no time did Davis have any treasury funds in his possession—nor were any recovered from him by federal troops when he was captured at Irwinville, Georgia, on May 10, 1865.

On April 8, the treasury and bank assets arrived at Charlotte, North Carolina, and were stored in the former U. S. Mint where Parker turned it over to the proper officers. He tried to telegraph Mallory to report the completion of his orders but found that the lines were down between Charlotte and Salisbury, North Carolina. He assumed, incorrectly as it turned out, that Major General George Stoneman USA had captured Salisbury. Fearing that federal troops would soon arrive and take possession of the treasury and bank assets, Parker, without troops for defense, without orders, and on his own initiative, decided to move it farther south. He considered that Macon, Georgia, might be his final destination.

Jefferson Davis’ wife, Varina, and her children were at Charlotte, and Parker feared that they might be captured. He convinced her to accompany him and his midshipmen at least to Abbeville, South Carolina. Parker, his midshipmen, Varina with her children, and ninety or so additional naval personnel, mainly from Portsmouth, Virginia, under the command of Captain (Father) John B. Tabb CSN, reloaded the train and departed Charlotte on April 11.

Serviceable rail lines ended at Chester, South Carolina. The treasury and bank assets arrived late in the day on April 12 and were transferred to wagons. Parker then headed for Newberry, South Carolina. He declared martial law, published regulations relating to their march, and made every man carry a musket. Ladies and children rode in ambulances while all others walked—unless sick. In the worst of traveling conditions, the party made only about five miles and went into camp at a crossroads “meeting house”.7 The meeting house was Woodward Baptist Church. Parker slept in the pulpit, Varina and children, along with the guards, used the floor—while still others bivouacked on the ground outside the church. The command left early the next morning for Newberry.

Near sunset on April 13, Parker’s command went into camp for the night between Chester and Newberry. The owner of a neighboring plantation house was none other than Lieutenant Edward C. Means CSN. Parker knew Means. They had served together as midshipmen aboard the USS Yorktown. Ladies and children were taken to his plantation house and made comfortable for the night. Parker sent a courier ahead to Newberry with instructions to arrange for a train of cars to move to Abbeville, South Carolina—45 miles distant. After a march of twelve hours, the treasury and bank assets arrived at Newberry
on the afternoon of April 14. Here it was unloaded from the wagons, then loaded onto “the cars”, and the command left immediately for Abbeville.

Parker’s command arrived at Abbeville near midnight of April 15 and spent the night onboard the train. Varina and her children went to the home of Armistead Burt, a former U.S. Congressman and friend of Jefferson Davis. Next morning a wagon train was formed again, treasury and bank assets loaded, and Parker set off for Washington, Georgia – 40 miles distant. Varina and her children remained at the Burt home. Parker “lightened ship” as they say in the Navy, by discarding books, stationery, and Confederate money along the way.

The wagon train crossed the Savannah River on a pontoon bridge near Vienna, South Carolina, on April 16, and landed just south of Lisbon on the Georgia side. There the party went into camp for the night. These sites are now under the water of the Clarks Hill Lake on the Savannah River. The dam site is 18 miles northwest of Augusta, Georgia.

Parker’s command arrived at Washington, Georgia, in the afternoon of April 17, only to learn that Major General James H. Wilson USA had already captured Macon. According to Parker, the treasury and bank assets were transferred from the wagons to a local house – this was most likely the Heard house on the public square. The ladies, including Parker’s wife, were accommodated with rooms at a local tavern. After a day of deliberation as to where to go next, Parker decided on Augusta, Georgia. The next day the treasury and bank assets were removed from overnight storage at the local house, loaded onto wagons and then onto train cars at the depot in Washington for the trip to Augusta by way of Barnett. Expecting a fight at any time, the ladies were left at Washington.

The treasury train arrived in Augusta on April 18 but was not unpacked. Seeking their protection, Parker met with senior Confederate commanders at Augusta. Due to the impending fall of Augusta, neither Confederate General Birkett D. Fry CSA nor Commodore William Hunter CSN would offer any hope of protection for the treasury. On April 23 Parker decided to turn the money over to Jefferson Davis himself, whom Parker correctly assessed was moving south to Abbeville. Parker then returned to Washington by train on April 23.

While Captain Parker was in Augusta trying to determine what to do next with the treasury and bank assets, his brother, Foxhall A. Parker, Jr., as Commander of the Potomac Flotilla, was trying to prevent John Wilkes Booth and David Herold from successfully crossing the Potomac River after the assassination of President Lincoln. Parker heard the news of Lincoln’s assassination while in Augusta.

NOTE: In 1863, the two Parker brothers indirectly faced each other in Charleston Harbor – William Harwar Parker as Executive Officer in the CSS Palmetto State and Foxhall Alexander Parker, Jr. as Commanding Officer in the USS Wabash. Commodore Foxhall Parker, Jr. later became the Superintendent of the U. S. Naval Academy at Annapolis. William Parker became President of Maryland Agricultural College at College Park, Maryland (University of Maryland).
Upon Parker’s return to Washington, the treasury again was removed from the train and loaded back onto wagons to be taken to Abbeville. Judge William Wood Crump, Assistant Secretary of the Confederate Treasury and senior civilian with the party, had the bank assets separated from the treasury and deposited in the Bank of Georgia Branch located on the public square – the Heard house. (The Heard house was demolished in 1904 to make way for the new Court House on the public square; however, a local bank building, one block from the square on East Robert Toombs Avenue today, is an almost exact replica.) Parker’s command again formed a wagon train, picked up their wives, and departed for Abbeville on April 28.

On the road back to Abbeville near Chennault, Parker met Burton N. Harrison, Jefferson Davis’ private secretary, Varina, and her children heading for Washington in an ambulance. After a day’s march, Parker’s group went into camp on the Georgia side of the Savannah River. As before, the wagon train crossed the Savannah River on a pontoon bridge south of Lisbon and landed near Vienna. The wagon train arrived at Abbeville the afternoon of April 29.

There was no news as to the whereabouts of Jefferson Davis or what remained of his cabinet. Parker decided to sit tight. He had the treasury unloaded from the wagons and stored in a warehouse on the public square. He ordered an engine to be at full steam ready to run the treasury back to Newberry in the event federal troops threatened. At 3:00 a.m. on April 30 Captain Peek, officer of the guard, alerted Parker that “The Yankees are coming”! All hands were immediately called to duty; the treasury was hurriedly removed from the warehouse and loaded onto the waiting train for the run back to Newberry. At sunrise everyone was on the train and ready to move. However, two scouts then reported that it was actually not “The Yankees” but the advance guard of Davis’ escort. The Davis party arrived at Abbeville at 10:00 a.m.

On arrival with Jefferson Davis, Navy Secretary Mallory ordered Parker to transfer the treasury to the Acting Secretary of the Treasury, John H. Reagan, who then instructed that it be delivered to Brigadier General Basil W. Duke. By Mallory’s order, Parker then disbanded the Corps of Midshipmen from their duty as guards. The ninety naval personnel that had augmented the midshipmen at Charlotte on April 11 immediately left for home. For the midshipmen, their 30-day sojourn had ended. These young men were virtually threadbare and shoeless, having walked from Chester to Newberry, South Carolina, then from Abbeville, South Carolina, to Washington, Georgia, and back during the period from April 12 to April 29. The midshipmen left Abbeville in detached parties. Some left too early to receive the meager pay arranged by Parker on May 4.

It should be noted that the weight of $250,000 in silver dollars is 9,555 pounds. From April 8 to May 2, the treasury and bank assets were loaded then unloaded from train cars to wagons, from wagons to train cars, and from wagons to different storage locations at least eleven different times by the midshipmen and the other naval guards.
Captain Parker enlisted in the U. S. Navy as a midshipman in October 1841 at the age of fifteen. In 1845, he entered the first class of the U. S. Naval Academy at Annapolis and graduated in 1848. He became the Superintendent of the Confederate Naval Academy in 1863. His naval career was now at an end, and his duty was finished. He took his parole at Washington, Georgia, although he was actually in Abbeville. He returned to Norfolk, Virginia, in company with his executive officer, Captain Rochelle, and their wives.

At 11:00 p.m. on May 2, Jefferson Davis, with a small escort party, departed Abbeville for Washington, Georgia, as his wife and children were in Washington. Separately, with over 4,000 or so cavalry in tow, the Confederate Secretary of War, Major General John C. Breckinridge, ordered the treasury unloaded from the train ready to run to Newberry, back onto wagons, and then departed for Washington, Georgia. As before, the wagon train crossed the Savannah River on a pontoon bridge near Vienna landing just south of Lisbon on the Georgia side. The group went into camp near the Mrs. J. D. (Susan) Moss house in Lincoln County, Georgia. The Moss house was about three miles from the pontoon bridge and the first house after that point on the Old Washington Road.

Near Mutiny

On the night of May 3-4, 1865, in camp after crossing the Savannah River, a mutiny of sorts broke out within cavalry units accompanying the treasury. Soldiers had not been paid and strongly voiced the opinion that the treasury would probably not make Washington before the federal troops seized it. At this point the treasury contained about $253,000. Breckinridge was able to mediate a compromise and agreed to pay out $108,322.90 from the treasury to the cavalry at the rate of about $26 each. The payout was made from a parlor window of the Moss house. Major E. C. White rode ahead to Washington for authorization to do so. Payouts from the treasury required prior authorization, but it was not done in this case. Quartermaster-General Alexander Robert Lawton granted authorization after the payout occurred.

Amazingly, this payout included twenty First Ohio Cavalry under the command of Lieutenant Joseph A. O. Yeoman USA. They were posing as Confederate cavalry and moving with President Davis and his escort party. Lieutenant Yeoman and his men later applied for, and received, a portion of the reward money for the capture of President Davis.

Breckinridge also left the chest of silver jewelry donated by women of the Confederacy for the purpose of building an ironclad at the Moss house for safekeeping. This chest was discovered and seized by Brigadier General Edward Augustus Wild USA in late July when his 156th NY Infantry terrorized the countryside around Danburg (about twelve miles NNE of Washington) and Chennault looking for the stolen bank assets of the robbery took place near midnight of May 24, 1865.

After riding virtually all night from Abbeville, Jefferson Davis arrived in Washington in late morning of May 3. As luck would have it, Burton Harrison, Varina and her children, and several servants, departed the previous day from Dr. Fielding Ficklen’s home – on South Alexander Avenue. While in Washington, Davis held his last cabinet
meeting (for those few present), issued the last official order (to Major Raphael Moses CSA to carry $40,000 to Augusta for distribution to returning Confederate soldiers), and conducted the last official act of the government of the Confederate States of America (appointed Captain Micajah Clark CSA as Acting Treasurer).

On the morning of May 4, with a small loyal escort, Jefferson Davis departed Washington in an effort to overtake his wife and children. With the departure of Davis, the Confederate Government effectively ended at Washington, Georgia.

**Final Payout from the Confederate Treasury**

Not long after Davis and his small group departed, the wagon train carrying the Confederate treasury arrived at Brigadier General Basil Duke’s camp about a mile NNE from Washington’s public square. At this point the treasury contained about $144,700. Under the shade of an elm tree, Captain Micajah Clark, now the Acting Treasurer, dispensed what remained in the treasury to various cabinet members, officers, soldiers, naval personnel, and others in service of the Confederate government – $56,116. Captain Clark’s last payment was $86,000, in gold and bullion, to Lieutenant Commander James A. Semple CSN. Semple was to have transported it to Charleston or Savannah to be shipped to Bermuda, Nassau, or Liverpool, England, for deposit on account of the Confederate Government. Miscellaneous expenses, though not reported, probably amounted to about $2,600. In 1881, Clark published a complete accounting of the Confederate Treasury payouts at Washington, Georgia.\(^{10}\)

The $86,000 given to Semple intended for deposit on account of the Confederate Government in England, never made it out of the country. Semple, in company with Edward M. Tidball, a naval purchasing agent who worked for Semple, stashed the treasure in the false bottom of a carriage and took it to Augusta, Georgia. At Augusta, Semple met up with William F. Howell, another naval purchasing agent and brother of Varina Davis. Semple gave Tidball $27,000 and Howell $25,000\(^ {11}\). Semple took the remaining $34,000 to Savannah and distributed various amount to friends for safekeeping – which he retrieved over the years\(^ {12}\). Tidball went home to Winchester, Virginia, in 1865 and bought a parcel of land in 1867 and farmed\(^ {13}\) – most probably using these assets given to him by Semple. Howell took Varina, her children and their mother, and moved to Canada with the assets given to him by Semple.

The 600-700 million dollars worth of Confederate Treasury notes were burned by Major Raphael Moses CSA on the town square at the direction of Acting Secretary of the Treasury, John H. Reagan. Both Reagan and Breckinridge witnessed this event. The 16-18,000 pounds sterling in Liverpool, England, acceptances were taken from Reagan by federal troops when he was captured at Irwinville, Georgia, on May 10, 1865.

The floor sweepings of the Dahlonega, Georgia, mint and the chest of silver and jewelry went missing. The Confederate treasury was thus paid out completely at Washington, Georgia. The stolen – and still missing – Richmond, Virginia, bank assets of silver and gold coin is another story.
1 Recollections of a Naval Officer, William Harwar Parker, United States Naval Institute, Annapolis, MD, 1985, page 373 (Originally published in 1883)


7 Ibid, page 547

8 Recollections of a Naval Officer, William Harwar Parker, United States Naval Institute, Annapolis, MD, page 379, 1985 (Originally published in 1883)


12 Ibid, page 177

13 Ibid, page 175