

BY VICTOR S. DUNN, CG

Confederate Civilian Records



Genealogists with Southern ancestors that lived during the Civil War often explore military records of their ancestors that fought in that war. However, they often neglect to examine activities of their Confederate civilian ancestors. The National Archives in Washington, D.C., has an extensive, well indexed set of records regarding Confederate civilians that originated both from Confederate and Union sources. These records are an excellent source for placing your civilian Confederate ancestors in social context.

Following the Civil War, there were a number of claims cases filed by Southern citizens claiming compensation for property losses inflicted by Union forces. The Treasury and Justice departments, Southern Claims Commission (discussed below), Court of Claims and congressional claims committees who processed the cases could disallow them if they could prove the claimant was disloyal to the Union. Disloyalty could be established based on an individual providing goods or services to the Confederate government. Accordingly, many of the day-to-day records concerning citizen's interaction with both the Confederate government and Union forces occupying the South were arranged and indexed to prove disloyalty to the Union and save the United States government a great deal of money.

The Confederate Coyles

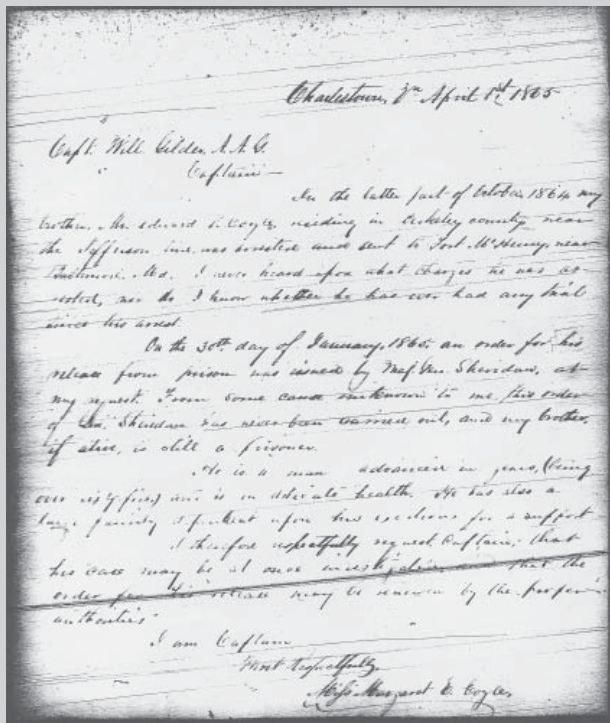
To illustrate the use of this information, we will explore records generated by the Coyle family of Jefferson and Berkeley Counties, Virginia. Both counties became a part of the new state of West Virginia in 1863 and lie in the Shenandoah Valley, which experienced a great deal of military activity during the Civil War. The primary

focus will be on the family of Edward V. Coyle. According to family documents, Edward was born in 1801 and was therefore too old to serve in the Civil War, but four sons did serve in the war. Edward also had several brothers who were too old for military service, but the older generation is memorialized in civilian records, as will be shown.

Union Provost Marshal's files

Although these records originated from the Provost Marshal's files of the Union Army, they are part of the National Archive's Collection of Confederate Records, Record Group (RG) 109, since they deal with Confederate citizens. These records contain a wide variety of information, including arrests and trials of individuals who were charged with being disloyal to the United States government. Researchers will also find claims for compensation for property confiscated by Union forces, oaths of allegiance, and passes issued to civilians to cross into enemy lines.

The series is broken down into two groups. The first, *Union Provost Marshal's File of Papers Relating to Individual Civilians* (M345B), is arranged alphabetically by surname. It also contains a partial index to the second series, entitled *Union Provost Marshal's File of*



Edward Coyle entry, Union Provost Marshal's File of Papers Relating to Individual Citizens, *National Archives Microfilm M345, Roll 60 (Cov-Coz)*.

Charlestown, Va April 1st 1865
 Capt. Will. Gilden, A. A. G.
 Captain—

In the latter part of October 1864 my brother Mr. Edward V. Coyle residing in Berkeley county near the Jefferson line was arrested and sent to Fort McHenry near Baltimore, Md. I never heard upon what charges he was arrested, nor do I know whether he was ever had any trial since his arrest.

On the 30th day of January 1865 an order for his release from prison was issued by Maj. Gen. Sheridan, at my request. From some cause unknown to me, this order of Gen. Sheridan has never been carried out, and my brother, if alive, is still a prisoner.

He is a man advanced in years, (being over sixty-five) and is in delicate health. He has also a large family dependent upon his exertions for a support.

I therefore respectfully request Captain that his case may be at once investigated and that the order for his release may be reviewed by the proper authorities

I am Captain
 Most Respectfully,
 Miss Margaret E. Coyle

Papers Relating to Two or More Civilians (M416), which is arranged chronologically.

To locate information on the Coyle family, we first examine the *Individual Civilian's* file (M345) under that surname and find several listings for Edward Coyle. Included in Edward's listings is a letter written by Miss Margaret E. Coyle requesting the release of her brother Edward V. Coyle, who was imprisoned at Fort McHenry near Baltimore. Margaret indicated that Edward would have been over 65 years if he was still alive and was in delicate health with a large family to support. The letter dated 1 April 1865 stated that Edward had been arrested and taken prisoner in the latter part of October 1864.

The *Individual Civilian's* file was also examined for Edward and Margaret's brother John M. Coyle, who was a known Confederate sympathizer. Included in his file was an oath of allegiance dated 27 April 1865. The file also contains correspondence indicating that some tobacco and cotton goods owned by John were confiscated, but later returned to him.

Further study under Edward Coyle's listing in M345 leads to documents in the *Two or More Civilian's* file (M416). These records indicate that Edward, who is listed as a political prisoner of war, was captured at Winchester, Virginia, on 5 November 1864 and was charged with "harboring guerillas." Another document in this series indicates that Margaret's letter to release her brother must have been successful since a 9 May 1865 letter from the War Department indicated that Edward Coyle, along with several other citizens, was to be released upon taking the oath of allegiance.

The research then advanced a step further into Record Group 393, Part 1, Entry 2419 "Lists of Rebel Prisoners and Deserters and Citizens Arrested—Middle Military District November 1864–1865," which contained a listing of political prisoners confined in Fort McHenry on 15 April 1865. Included in the listing was Edward Coyle with a notation stating "Very Disloyal."

The Confederate Quartermaster General's Department records

The Confederate congress established the Quartermaster General's Department (QGD) in February 1861. It was created to procure supplies for the army and for transportation of supplies and personnel. To provide for the Confederate army, the QGD purchased and impressed supplies from civilians. Letters to the QGD and registers of claims for services and supplies are indexed in *Index to the Letters Received by the Confederate Adjutant and*

Inspector General and by the Confederate Quartermaster General, 1861–1865 (M410).

The M410 index was examined for members of the Coyle family. While nothing was located for Edward, there was a listing found for his brother James T. Coyle. Under the “Quarter Master Department Register of Claims 1861-1863,”¹ there is a claim listed for Coyle that notes a wagon and harness were impressed into public service by the Confederate army at Harpers Ferry on 22 October 1861.

Southern Claims Commission

In 1872, Congress established this commission to compensate Southern Loyalists who furnished stores and supplies for the United States Army and Navy during the Civil War. These claims often contain depositions by neighbors, family members, and former slaves concerning an individual’s loyalty to the Union during the war. A number of African Americans, both free blacks and former slaves, entered claims. To determine if your ancestor filed a claim, consult the *Consolidated Index of Claims Reported by the Commissioner of Claims to the House of Representatives, 1871–1880*. The index includes state of residency of the claimant and indicates if a claim was allowed, disallowed, barred (due to lack of evidence submitted prior to the deadline), withdrawn, or dismissed. To determine the county residency of the claimant, researchers should consult Gary Mills, *Southern Loyalists in the Civil War: The Southern Claims Commission* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, Inc., 1994).

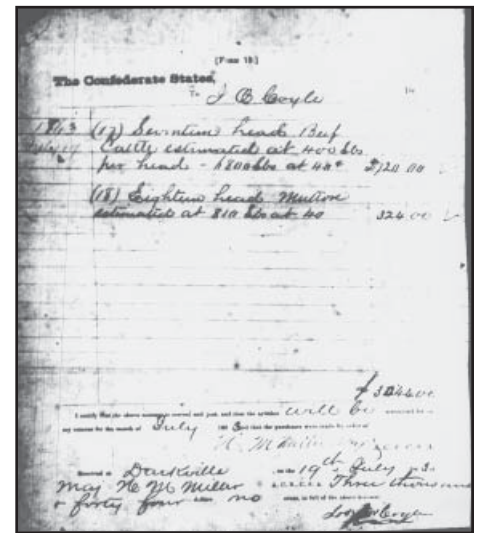
The allowed and disallowed claims contain the most genealogical information since they contain the claimants’ petitions, depositions

by relatives and neighbors, and investigative reports prepared by the Treasury Department regarding the claimant’s loyalty to the government. Information found in the depositions may allow researchers to extend ancestral lines, especially if this information is combined with other sources. For example, when Sylvester Thompson, born about 1812, made a deposition in his Lee County, Virginia, claim,² he stated that his nephew John Colson served in the Union Army. Sylvester’s parentage was established by combining this statement with data found in marriage records and court and probate documents.

Barred claims contain less documentation but any claim filed by an ancestor should be examined. The disallowed and barred claims have been filmed and are available as *Barred and Disallowed Case Files of the Southern Claims Commission, 1871–1880* (Microfiche M1407). Disallowed claims are filed by report number and then by office number (listed in the alphabetical index in the first 4 sheets of fiche), and barred claims are filed alphabetically.

Approved claims have been microfilmed for the following states: Alabama (M2062), Georgia (Microfiche M1658), Virginia (M2094), and West Virginia (M1762). The remaining approved claims for the states of Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas must be accessed at the National Archives Building located at College Park, Maryland.

The Coyle family’s ardent support of the Confederacy would imply that they would likely not have an allowed claim. However, the estate of William Crow, administered by



Joseph O. Coyle entry, Confederate Papers Relating to Citizens or Business Firms, National Archives microfilm M346, Roll 204 (Coxe-Craf)

his son-in-law John M. Coyle, was allowed a claim. Included in the claim was a statement by Henry Mitchell, who was a former slave of William Crow. He stated that Crow’s only heirs, Mary A. Crow and Albina S. Coyle, were “strong for the Union.” Mitchell indicated that the women would send things to the hospitals when the Federal troops were encamped in the area.

Confederate Papers Relating to Citizens or Business Firms (M346)

This microfilm group consists chiefly of receipts and documents relating to goods furnished or services rendered to the Confederate government by private citizens or business firms. Many of the files in this series concern the provision of forage, food, slave labor, horses, wagons, building supplies, or those who provided services, such as hauling supplies or provisions, transporting prisoners, building or repairing equipment, or grazing livestock. The vouchers and papers in this series are arranged alphabetically.

Once again, this record set documents the Coyle's ardent support of the Confederate cause. Edward V. provided hay, beef cattle, and, curiously, an iron safe. Edward's son Julius provided corn and hay. Brother John M. provided horses, corn, and bacon while another brother, Joseph O. provided beef, mutton, and hay.

Other records

Conscription records exist for the state of Virginia. Included in these records (RG 109, Chapter 1, various entries) are registers of individuals, including some free Negroes who were exempted from military service, and often lists name, address, and reason for exemption. Some of the registers contain more detail data including age, complexion, and hair and eye color. Limited conscription records also exist for the state of Mississippi.

The National Archives holds records of prisons operated by both the Confederacy and the Union. If you believe your civilian ancestor may have been imprisoned either by the Confederacy for Union sympathies or by the Federal Government for rebel allegiance, check with

National Archives personnel about records that may be available for prisoners in those institutions. Researchers that are unable to visit the National Archives can e-mail at <<http://www.archives.gov/contact/>> or phone at 1-866-272-6272. 🌳

Resources

Beers, Henry Putnam. *The Confederacy: A Guide to the Archives of the Government of the Confederate States of America*. 1968. Reprint, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2004.

Bethel, Elizabeth. Preliminary Inventory of the War Department Collection of Confederate Records. Record Group 109. 1957. Reprint, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1993.

Descriptive Pamphlets for M345, M346, M410 and M416 available at the National Archives and Records Administration Web site at <<http://www.archives.gov/research/order/orderonline.html?microfilm>>.

Eales, Anne Bruner and Robert M. Kvasnicka, editors. "Records of Civilians During Wartime." In *Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives of the United States*. 3rd ed. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2000.

Washington, Reginald. "Records of the Commissioners of Claims." In *Black Family Research: Records of Post-Civil War Federal Agencies at the National*

Archives—Reference Information Paper 108. Revised 2004. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2004.

Notes

1. Chapter 5, volume 43, page 8, line 42.
2. M2094, roll 26.

Victor S. "Vic" Dunn, CG, is a professional genealogist and proprietor of Virginia Ancestry at <www.virginiaancestry.com>. He researches Virginia, West Virginia, and Maryland families and specializes in brick-wall solutions, military records, land records, and platting. He is currently serving as vice president for the Shenandoah Valley Genealogical Society. Dunn is a contributor to major genealogical publications including feature articles in National Genealogical Society Quarterly, Northern Virginia Genealogy, Magazine of Virginia Genealogy, and Virginia Genealogical Society Newsletter. He can be contacted by e-mail at <victor.dunn@virginiaancestry.com>.



Exploring the Convergence of Genealogy and Technology

New! Digital bi-monthly magazine delivered by e-mail as a PDF

Annual subscriptions are US\$20

Visit www.digitalgenealogist.com for more information