

**FROM FADING LINES**

BOOK ONE

**THE CIVIL WAR ERA**

American History:  
Stories from Inscriptions in  
Vintage Autograph Albums

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CHAPTER 3  
POTTERS, APOTHECARIES & THE  
CRINOLINE CAPER



Discovering contraband in the lady's crinoline

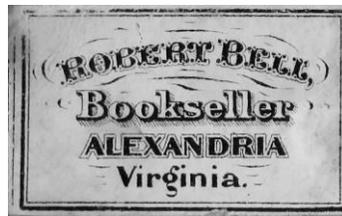
Smuggling Confederate medical contraband in women's petticoats was widely publicized in a story that ran in northern periodicals<sup>1</sup>. The incident was linked to two pharmacists whose signatures appear in their sister's autograph album<sup>2</sup>. They were members of the family of a celebrated Alexandria, Virginia potter.

## THE ALBUM



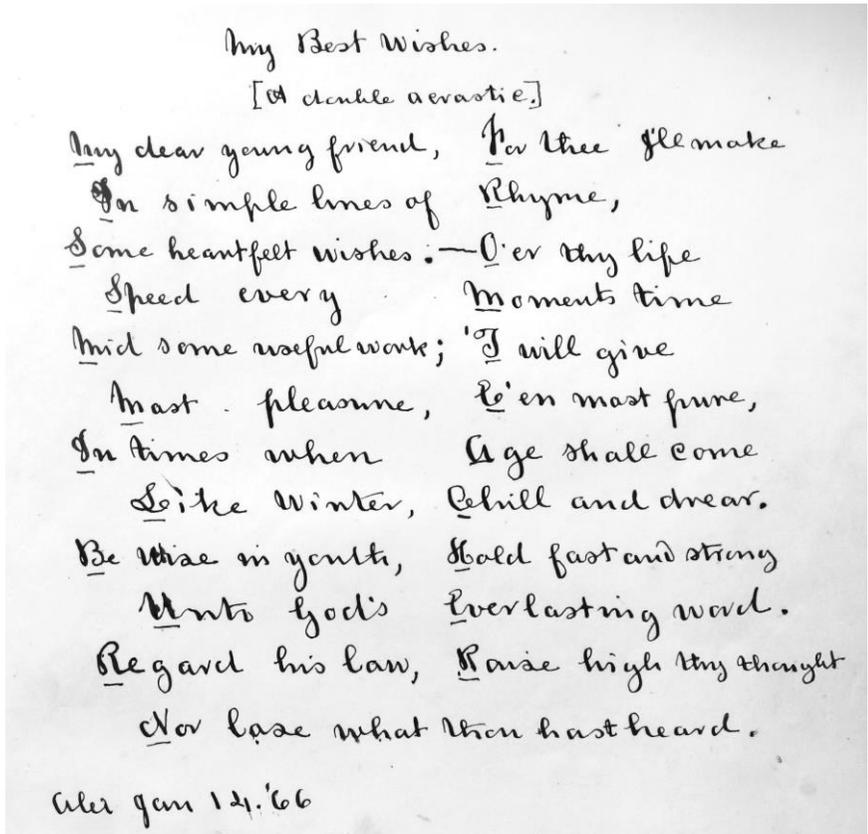
MONNIE MILBURN'S album 1865

The album was purchased from Alexandria bookseller Robert Bell, and presented to Monnie in 1865 by her father, Benedict C. Milburn.



*Decr 25<sup>th</sup> 1865.*  
*A Present to,*  
*Monnie Milburn,*  
*from her Papa.*

Monnie's teacher inscribed this unusual double acrostic spelling out  
"MISS MILBURN FROM TEACHER".



## THE MILBURNS OF ALEXANDRIA

Benedict C. Milburn was born in the year 1805 in St. Mary's, Maryland, on the western shore of Chesapeake Bay. At the age of seventeen he made his way up the Potomac River to Alexandria, Virginia, to apprentice in the pottery business. In 1828 he married Thirza Coad, also from St. Mary's. They had a large family, three daughters and seven sons.

The first daughter, Ann, died in infancy. The second, Sarah Florence, born in 1846, married a dry goods merchant in Alexandria. Two of the sons followed their father into the pottery business, producing stoneware that is highly collectible today. Four others trained as pharmacists. Margaret Jane “Monnie” Milburn, born in 1852<sup>3,4</sup>, was the youngest member of the family.

## **THE WILKES STREET POTTERY**

The Milburn business was a successor to two previous potters who produced stoneware at the Wilkes Street Pottery, Alexandria. The first, starting in 1810, was John Swann, whose wares were mostly sold through a china merchant, Hugh Smith. Swann started with plain brown jugs and jars and later employed blue decoration using cobalt. Smith took over in 1825 and continued until 1841, when Milburn purchased the business. He was very successful; his brushed blue cobalt decorations became more and more elaborate. The Milburn family continued the business until 1876.

## **THE MILBURN APOTHECARIES**

Four of the Milburn brothers trained as druggists (also termed pharmacists or apothecaries). At the age of 17, in 1848, the eldest, John Alexander Milburn, first entered the drug business with a local pharmacist. By 1851 he opened his own business in Alexandria. Five years later, his brother, Joseph Parker Milburn, opened a drug store, in which John was also a partner, under the famous Willard’s Hotel, on Pennsylvania Avenue, in the center of Washington. A third brother, Washington Clinton Milburn, was apprenticed to the drug store business in 1860; after the Civil War he purchased his own drug store in Washington. The fourth brother, James Clinton Milburn was training as a pharmacist when he enlisted in the Confederate States Army in 1862. After the war, he operated a grocery store in Alexandria..



A page of Monnie's album with her brothers' signatures in hand-drawn rectangles, representing "visiting cards".

John A. Milburn signed "*Jno A Milburn*".

Washington Clinton Milburn signed "*Wash'n C. Milburn*".

James Clinton Milburn signed "*J.C. Milburn*".

## ALEXANDRIA DURING THE CIVIL WAR

The original District of Columbia, formed in 1790 for a national capital on the Potomac River, was in the shape of a square, with its corners at the four points of the compass. At that time the Federal District measured 10 miles on each side, totaling 100 square miles. The existing city of Alexandria<sup>5</sup> was at the southernmost corner of the square, across the Potomac and just six miles downstream from the Nation's new Capital city, Washington. In the 1830s, the

District's southern territory of Alexandria went into economic decline partly due to neglect by Congress. The city of Alexandria was a major market in the American slave trade and pro-slavery residents feared that abolitionists in Congress would end slavery in the District, further depressing the economy. Alexandria's citizens petitioned Virginia to take back the land it had donated to form the District, and in 1846, Congress agreed to return all the territory that had been ceded by Virginia.

Thereafter, the District's area consisted only of the land originally donated by Maryland; the southern boundary was the Potomac River. Thus, when the Civil War began, Washington was vulnerable to Confederate attack across the river from Virginia. The morning after May 23rd, 1861, when Virginians had voted to secede from the Union, thousands of federal troops from Washington poured into Alexandria to seize the city. During the War a string of forts was built to the west and north to afford protection to Washington from Confederate forces, which controlled the rest of Virginia. Alexandria became a busy Union supply depot. Citizens had to obtain permits to travel outside the city. Business owners had to take an oath of allegiance to the federal government in order to obtain a license to continue to operate. Those Alexandrians who had not fled lived under martial law. Southern sympathizers had plenty of opportunity to make mischief.

## **TWO OF THE MILBURN SONS GO TO WAR**

While John and Joseph Milburn remained in Alexandria during the war, operating their pharmacy businesses, their brothers Washington and James went off to war, both seconded to the Medical Department of the Confederate States Army.

Washington C. Milburn<sup>6</sup> had been a member of the local "Alexandria Riflemen," Virginia Militia. He enlisted at Alexandria in the 17<sup>th</sup> Virginia Infantry, Pickett's Division of the C.S.A. on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1861. Initially a regimental hospital nurse, he became a

regimental hospital steward (equivalent of a sergeant major) for the duration of the War. His younger brother James Clinton Milburn<sup>7</sup>, enlisted in the same regiment on May 29<sup>th</sup> 1862 at Richmond, Virginia and served as a field hospital nurse. The regiment suffered massive casualties during the conflict, but both brothers survived and were paroled at Appomattox Court House, Virginia. On Wednesday April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1865. When they left Appomattox<sup>8</sup> for home, they were two of only 48 enlisted men and officers left of the more than a thousand who had been members of their regiment.

### **THE “QUININE AND CRINOLINE ESCAPE”**

The ladies' crinoline of the mid-nineteenth century consisted of one or two petticoats worn over a lightweight steel skirt-shaped structure. It was sometimes referred to as a cage-crinoline. It was perfect for hiding contraband, and there were many Civil War stories of women smuggling anything from weapons and munitions to food and medical supplies across enemy lines.

One such lady was Louisa Berryman Buckner, daughter of a Virginia planter, and niece of Montgomery Blair, Postmaster General of the United States, and a member of President Lincoln's cabinet. In late October 1862, she embarked with two companions on a grand adventure. With her were her mother Louisa Hipkins Turner, and twenty-three year-old Marcus Buck Hobson Bayly, whose father had a mansion in Washington and a plantation in Virginia. Although they had powerful Union connections, the Buckner and Bayly family sympathies were decidedly southern.

The party traveled to Washington from Virginia ostensibly to buy food and supplies. They were confident that their high-level connections would assist them. During their visit to Washington they stayed at the home of Louisa Turner's daughter and son-in law, a naval officer, Benjamin Gallaher. The two ladies went to call upon Blair, from whom they secured a personal gift of \$500, and a note certifying that they were loyal citizens of the Union, and that the

goods they were carrying were for their own personal use. A similar note from President Lincoln himself attested to their good character.

While the ladies were so occupied, Bayly visited three druggists, including J.P. Milburn & Co., which was operated by Joseph Parker Milburn and his elder brother John. Bayly purchased from each of the pharmacies small quantities of medication, acquiring a total of 120 ounces of quinine, the drug used to treat malaria, which medication was in extremely short supply in the south. The motivation was profit. A virtual monopoly on the supply of the drug was held by the Philadelphia firm of Powers & Weightman, which imported the raw ingredients from Brazil. An ounce of the quinine that Bayly purchased for \$5.25 sold for seventy dollars in Richmond, Virginia. The druggists also made a tidy profit; they received from Bayly twice the market value. For the return journey, Louisa Buckner had arranged to modify her crinoline skirt, with special pockets made of waterproof oiled silk in which to hide the quinine.

In the meantime, a black servant in the Gallaher household, aware of the plan to smuggle contraband medicines, alerted detective authorities of the names of the people involved and that their destination was in Virginia. The next day the party left Washington by wagon, intentionally taking a route to avoid Union pickets. When they reached the Union-controlled Fairfax, Virginia Courthouse their wagon was seized and searched, but no contraband found. They were almost at their destination when they were stopped again, and this time the crinoline was searched, the quinine discovered, and the suppliers identified. A few days later the *Washington Evening Star* newspaper reported on the affair and on the arrest of the pharmacists:

“Messrs. Kidwell of Georgetown, Peale of Alexandria and Milburn of this city were yesterday arrested and sent to Old Capitol Prison for selling these parties the contraband medicines, knowing as is alleged, where they were to be carried.”

Mrs. Turner was released immediately after the arrest and allowed to continue to her home. Her daughter, Louisa, was released a few days later having signed an oath of allegiance to the Union. The young man, Buck Bayly, stayed in jail for six weeks until he too signed the oath. Ultimately the druggists were exonerated, although in fact the proprietors of all three businesses had close southern ties. Eventually, the newspaper printed a retraction, saying, "Young clerks or storeboys, only, were implicated."

## **THE MILBURN BROTHERS AFTER THE WAR**

After the Civil War, the Milburn Pottery<sup>10</sup> business produced primarily undecorated jars and jugs; very little decorated stoneware was produced at the Wilkes Street location. Benedict Milburn died in April 1867, and his son Stephen took over the business for the years 1867-1871, and was succeeded by William Lewis Milburn, who ran the pottery until it closed in 1876. Milburn stoneware is nowadays highly prized by collectors; individual pots can sell for upwards of a thousand dollars.

Before he took over the pottery in 1871, William Lewis Milburn, together with his brother James Clinton Milburn, operated a grocery business in Alexandria for a number of years, with assistance from their youngest brother, Ethelbert W. Milburn. Three of the brothers, Joseph Parker, Washington C. and John A. Milburn, continued in the pharmacy business in Washington D.C. All three were active members of the American Pharmaceutical Association, as noted in their respective obituaries in 1874<sup>11</sup>, 1891<sup>12</sup> and 1896<sup>13</sup>. The death notices of Joseph and John Milburn make it clear that they were seen as honorable members of the Washington community, and highly regarded within their profession. There is no mention in the obituaries of the crinoline and quinine affair!

## “MONNIE” MILBURN, OWNER OF THE ALBUM

In 1872, Margaret Jane “Monnie” Milburn married a northern veteran of the war, Arthur P. Whitney of Saratoga, New York. He had served the New York Heavy Artillery Regiment of the Union Army. The couple met when he came to work in Washington D.C. as a US Government Clerk after the war. They had three children of whom the youngest, Paul Clinton Whitney in 1894, at the age of eleven, inscribed his mother’s album with these words:

*To mother  
 What can make me happy here?  
 Nothing like the love of Mother.  
 What can drive away my fear?  
 Nothing like the love of mother.  
 Paul Whitney*

Three years later, Margaret Jane “Monnie” Milburn Whitney<sup>2</sup>, passed away. She is buried in Rock Creek Cemetery, Washington, D.C.

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### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> *Frank Leslie’s Magazine*, November 12, 1862

<sup>2</sup> Monnie Milburn’s Album:

Publisher:	Leavitt & Allen, New York
Dimensions:	8 X 6 ¼ inches
Covers:	Brown Leather over boards. Gilt-stamped “LEAVES OF FRIENDSHIP:” within a floral frame. Spine stamped “ALBUM”.
Pages:	Title Page “LEAVES OF FRIENDSHIP”. Pastel pages, some with engraved illustrations, gilt edged.
First entry:	1865

<sup>3</sup> [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com): memorial to Margaret Milburn Whitney. birth July 16, 1852, burial in Rock Creek Cemetery, Washington D.C.:

<sup>4</sup> [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com): Cutter family tree: Benedict Colbert Milburn family & life.

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- <sup>5</sup> The Washington Post: "The Federal Occupation of Alexandria in the Civil War changed and spared the city." Brady Dennis. Apr 7, 2011.
- <sup>6</sup> www.findagrave.com: memorial to Pvt. Washington C Milburn cites Civil War military service. Birth Dec 30, 1840 / death Aug 7, 1891.
- <sup>7</sup> www.findagrave.com: memorial to James Clinton Milburn cites Civil War military service. Birth Jan 14, 1844 / death Sep 9, 1912.
- <sup>8</sup> www.myheritage.com: History of 17<sup>th</sup> Virginia Infantry Regiment Company H, The Old Dominion Rifles.
- <sup>9</sup> The story told here might have ended with the death of the album's owner, were it not for an article with the title "Crinoline and Quinine" written by William Page Johnson, II that appeared in the Fall of 2012 issue of "The Fair Facs Gazette," Published by the Fairfax, Virginia Historical Society.
- <sup>10</sup> Alexandria Archaeology Museum: *Alexandria Stoneware: The Wilkes Street Pottery*.
- <sup>11</sup> Am. Jour. Pharm: May 1, 1874; obituary of J. Parker Milburn. Died Washington March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1874
- <sup>12</sup> Proceedings of the American Pharmaceutical Association: *Report of Committee on Membership*, July 1892: Obituary of W.C. Milburn. Died August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1891.
- <sup>13</sup> American Pharmaceutical Association: *Record 1896, Minutes of Second Session*, obituary of John A Milburn.