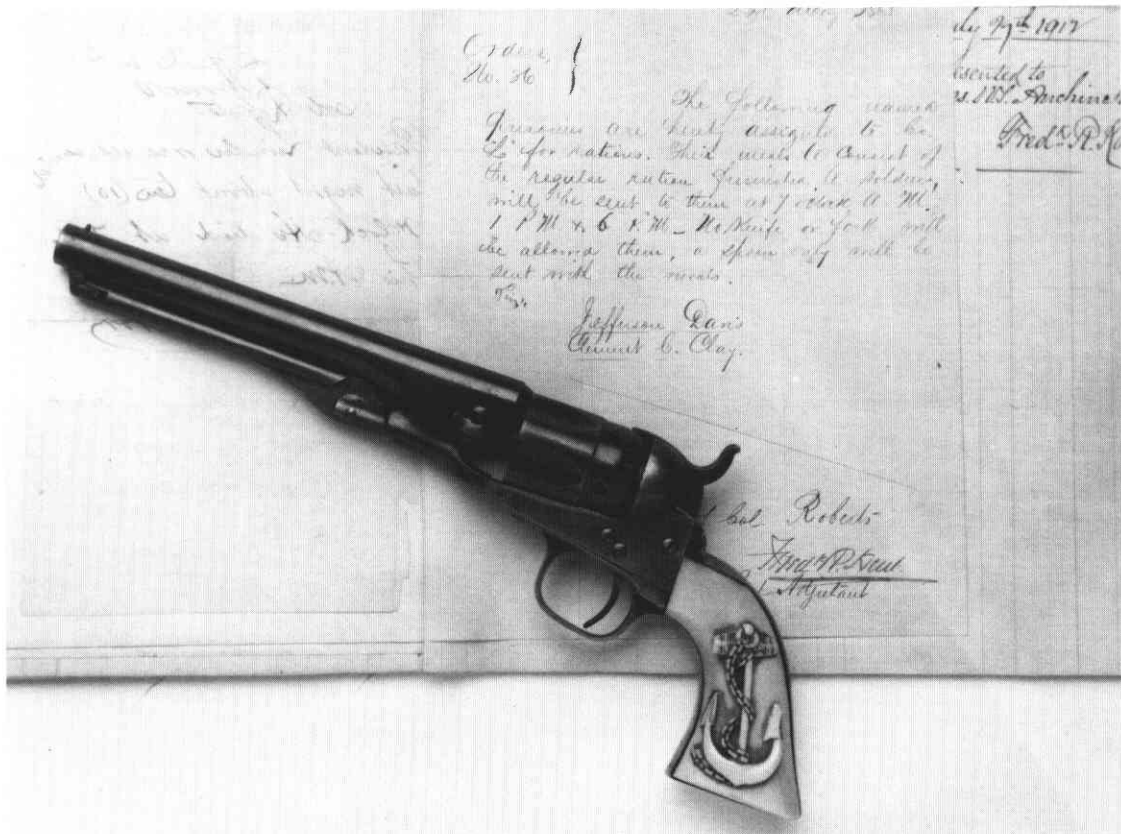




Colt 1860 Fluted Army #2752 on its factory letter.



Lt. Kent's 1862 Police revolver #14096 with Kent's account book.

## The Beginning, The End

Henry A. Truslow

Ours is a wonderful hobby, one which provides hours of joy and excitement either in the hunt for the object of our interest, or in the research for more information regarding that object, or in the sharing of the object with other collectors who are sure to become friends. All of that and more is what I receive from the collecting of antique American percussion revolvers. It always amazes me where, how, and when wonderful treasures from the past show up, seemingly from nowhere. When one of us uncovers, digs up, or gets out of an attic a super antique gun, sword, document, uniform, or whatever, the rest of us have a tendency to exclaim "what luck!" almost in unison. More often than not luck plays a very small role. Items turn up mostly because someone knows of our interest and they bring them to our attention. This is just another reason we should share our collections and knowledge with as many others as we can.

Luck struck me again about a year ago. An uncle had died about ten years ago and out of the blue his oldest son, my cousin, called and said he thought I should have an old revolver that had belonged to his father since no one in the immediate family was interested in it. More about this old revolver later.

I had just purchased a Colt 1860 fluted cylinder Army, serial #2752, with a factory letter stating that it had been shipped to Peter Williams & Co. of Richmond, Virginia, on April 15, 1861, just three days after the firing on Fort Sumter. Surely Sam Colt had little sense of loyalty when it came to arming either side in what would become the bloodiest conflict of our history! I put this revolver at the beginning of my collection of Civil War revolvers and it provides one half of the title of this talk. Other than identifying two other revolvers in this shipment to Richmond, I have not been able to find out much more about this fluted Army.

On the other hand, I have had a field day with my uncle's old revolver. I got to my cousin's house as soon as I could after his phone call and found him to have an 1862 Colt Police with carved ivory grips of a fouled anchor design with serial number 14096, made in 1862. The gun was in great shape, and even more exciting was the fact that it was inscribed: on the backstrap: it reads "Lieut. R.R. Kent 3rd Pa. Artillery - 1863". Lt. Kent was Post Adjutant at Fort Monroe when Jefferson Davis was delivered there as a prisoner. The inscription on the revolver made it easy



to locate service records, pension reports, and other information on Kent. It turned out that Lt. Kent was my grandmother's uncle, which makes this revolver all the more special to me.

As I was about to leave with the revolver my cousin said that I should also have Lt. Kent's diary. I was obviously thrilled. It turned out not to be a diary at all but a descriptive account of an album of CdeV's\*, seventy in all, that showed his "Civil War associates." He compiled these accounts and gave them to his sister on July 27, 1912 in Baltimore.

The CdeV's were of men Lt. Kent served with, including Capt. Sam Hazard, Charles T. Dix, son of General Dix, Captain Barston of Dix's staff, General Potter, Col. Louis Fitzgerald, Maj. Gen. John Foster, General Roberts, to name a few.

One was of the Post Band, about which Lt. Kent wrote the following:

While the Government did not furnish regiments with bands, they allowed musicians to be enlisted as private soldiers with the understanding that additional pay would be given to them by the regiment for acting as musicians and their instruments would also be paid for. This picture is so small I am afraid you will not be able to distinguish the different figures without a glass. Directly in the center wearing a bearskin shako is the Drum Major, an old English soldier. All the rest are Italians. As you look at the picture, the second man from the left with a full black beard was

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\*Carte de Visite: a portrait photograph 2 1/4 X 3 3/4 inches in size.

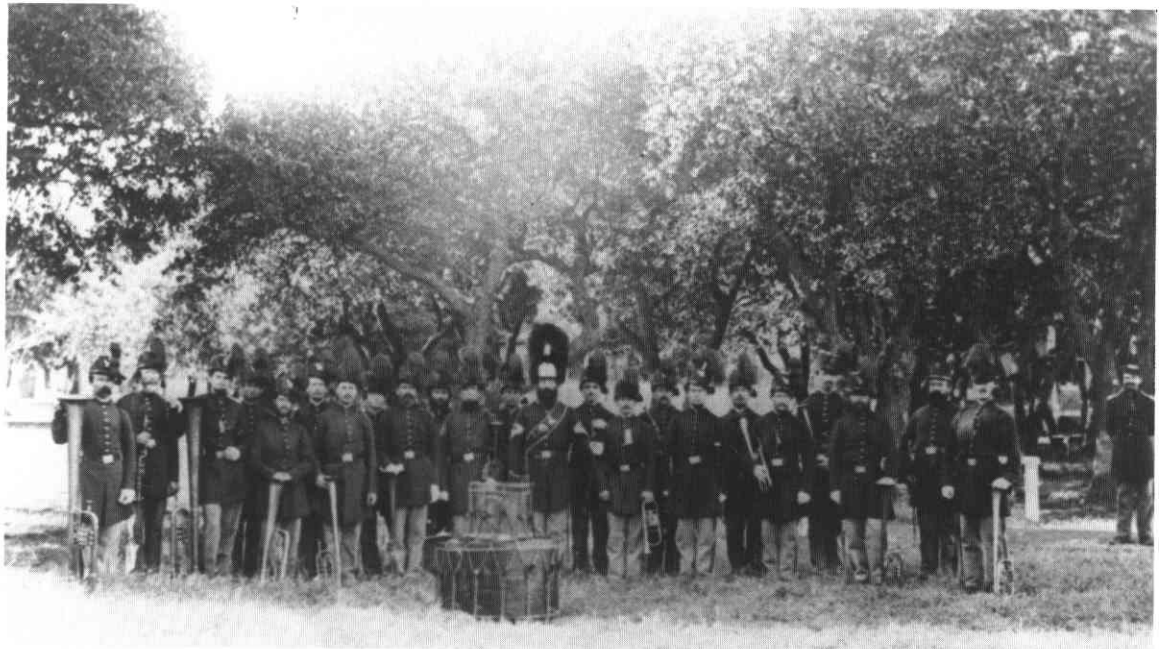


A "CdeV" of Lt. Kent circa 1863.

as I was Treasurer of the post fund from which I paid them their extra. They presented me with an ivory handled pistol.

So now we know the origin of Lt. Kent's Colt revolver. At the end of the account Lt. Kent gives reminiscences of his experiences. One has to do with Gen. Butler:

In November, 1863, General Foster was ordered to the Western Army and General Benjamin Butler relieved him at Ft. Monroe. After he had arrived, he sent for me and said he would not require my services on his Staff, and that I could report to my regiment for duty. This suited me exactly. I did so and was soon after appointed Adjutant. A much more agreeable position than being on Butler's Staff. He was universally disliked throughout the Army, and after he had left his command at New Orleans the comic papers of the North called him "spoons" and caricatured him as getting away with his arms full of family silver, etc., the personal property of citizens who had left the city and whose effects had been confiscated by the Government. In the South he was called Butler the Beast. In the field his services were worthless to the Army and everything he did in a military way was ridiculous. At one time General Grant asked him what his Brigade was doing where it was, and said he might as well be corked up in a bottle for all the good he was doing. After coming to Fort Monroe, he con-



The Fort Monroe Post Band circa 1862.

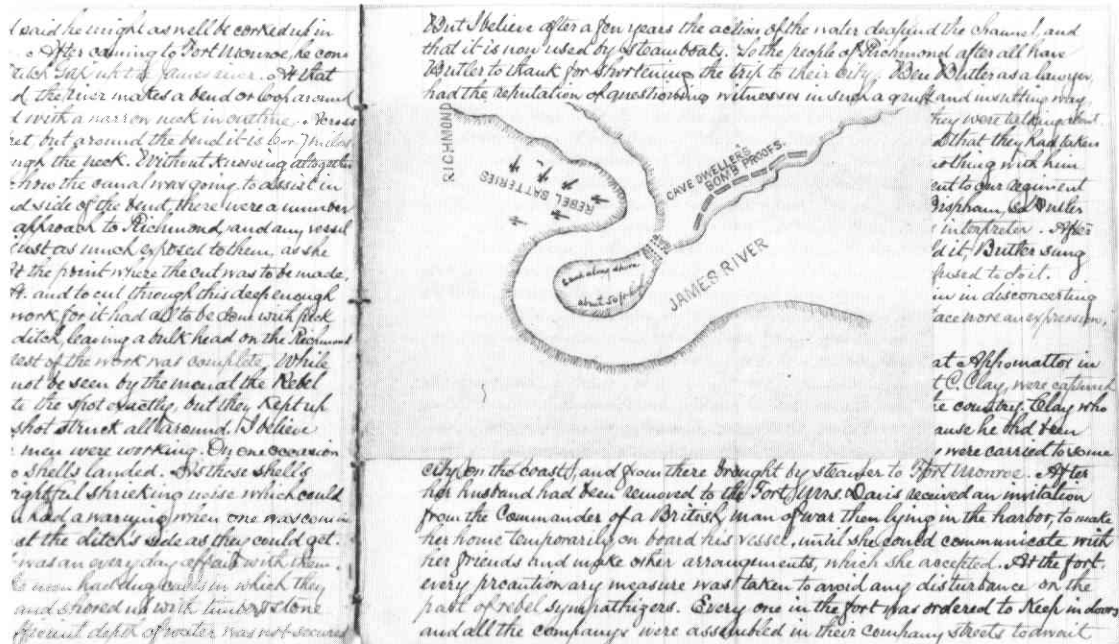
the Band Master. The man near the center holding down a key bugle is Lavella, and the man near the end on the right is Givazonne who played a large baritone horn on which he is resting his hands. I had a great deal to do with them

ceived the idea of cutting through "Dutch Gap" up the James River. At that point - only 3 or 4 miles from Richmond - the river makes a bend around a point, land resembling a gourd with a narrow neck in outline. Across

this neck the distance is about 150 feet, but around the bend it is 6 or 7 miles. Butler's idea was to cut a canal through the neck. Without knowing altogether what his plans were, no one could see how the canal was going to assist in taking Richmond. On the Richmond side of the bend there were a number of Rebel batteries protecting the water approach to Richmond and any vessel going through such a canal would be just as much exposed to them as she would be going around the bend. At the point where the cut was to be made, the land was a bluff rising about 50 feet and to cut through this deep enough to get a channel was a very laborious work, for it had all to be done with pick and shovel. The intention was to dig a ditch, leaving a bulkhead on the Richmond side, which was to be blown out when the last of the work was complete. While the work was going on, the men could not be seen by the men at the Rebel batteries, and they were unable to locate the spot exactly, but they kept up a pretty constant fire and their shot struck all around. I believe not one ever fell into the ditch where the men were working. On one occasion I was there and in the ditch when two shells landed. As these shells came through the air, they made a frightful shrieking noise which could be heard for miles. In this way the men had a warning when one was coming in and they would line up as close against the ditch's side as they could get. It was a new experience for me, but it was an everyday affair with them. Out of the bank on our side of



Lt. Frederick R. Kent in his later years.



A sketch of Butler's failed canal.

the river the men had dug caves in which they lived. "Bomb proofs", the fronts of these were left open, and shored up with timber and stone. The canal was a failure because a sufficient depth of water was not secured. But I believe after a few years the action of the water deepened

the channel, and that it is now used by steamboats. The people of Richmond after all have Butler to thank for shortening the trip to their city. Ben Butler as a lawyer had the reputation of questioning witnesses in such a gruff and insulting way that they became utterly rattled, and didn't

know what they were talking about. On one occasion at Fort Monroe, the provost Marshall reported that they had taken a man who was suspected of being a spy, but they could do nothing with him, as he professed to speak nothing but French. Butler then sent to our regiment to know if we had anyone who could speak French. Joe Brisham. Butler then sent for the man, and Joe acted at the interview as interpreter. After he had repeated to Butler the man's story as he had told it, Butler sung out "tell him he's a liar." But Joe objected to this, and refused to do it. Butler's personal appearance was a great assistance to him in disconcerting witnesses. He was cross-eyed, and very homely, and his face wore an expression about as pleasant as that of a limber jawed bull dog.

Lt. Kent's account goes on to describe Jeff Davis' arrival at Fort Monroe as follows:

Sometime after General Lee had surrendered at Appomattox in April, 1865, Jefferson Davis, with his wife and Clement C. Clay, were captured in the West, while endeavoring to make their escape from the country. Clay, who was an English newspaper man, was taken prisoner because he had been engaged in giving "aid and comfort to the enemy". They were carried to some city on the coast, and from there brought by steamer to Fort Monroe. After her husband had been removed to the Fort, Mrs. Davis received an invitation from the Commander of a British man of war then lying in the harbor, to make her home temporarily on board his vessel, until she could communicate with her friends and make other arrangements, which she accepted. At the Fort every precautionary measure was taken to avoid any disturbance on the part of Rebel sympathizers. Everyone in the Fort was ordered to keep indoors and all the companies were assembled in their company streets to await orders. General Butler had left the Fort sometime before and General Nelson Miles had been sent there with special instructions from the Government in regard to the imprisonment of Davis. He was not landed at the general wharf, but was taken to a small engineers wharf, farther up the beach, and from there through an "outwork" called the water battery into the Fort. General Miles with two or three guards went to the boat to officially receive him from the guard that had brought him there. I was ordered to go

along and in marching up, Miles walked along side of Davis, while I walked behind them ready for any orders Miles should give. At the casemate (which had been used as officers quarters) where he was to be confined, besides the men who were to be his guards awaiting him, was the Post blacksmith, with a 24 lb. ball & chain. When he found that this was to be put on him he became highly indignant, and said that as long as he had life, he would never submit to such treatment. He was then standing by the side of his bed, where Miles nodded to the blacksmith to go ahead. The latter approached him and raising his arm gently pushed him onto the bed. No force was necessary and Davis calmly submitted while the bracelet was riveted around his ankle. This was removed after a few days. Rebels and their sympathizers pronounced it the greatest outrage, but public feeling was very bitter at that time: we had gone through a war costing thousands of lives, the Government had piled up an immense debt, and Abraham Lincoln had been assassinated, and if Davis had been executed instead of imprisoned, I don't think the people of the country would have worried much about it. At the Fort we didn't think Davis had much to complain about. He was not assassinated, he was alive. During the war he did not share the hardships of soldiers in the field, and his imprisonment was nothing at all compared to what they endured. We thought he got off cheap, and he lived afterwards past 80 years of age.

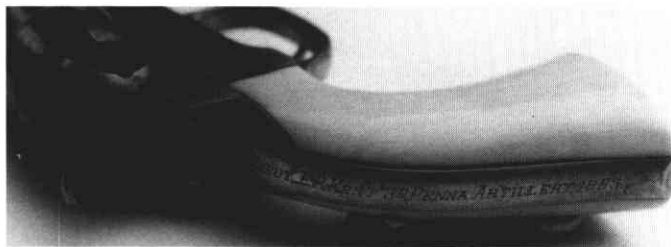
The only other account of Jefferson Davis' arrival at Fort Monroe that I know of was given by Dr. John J. Craven, physician to Davis during his confinement at Fort Monroe from May 25, 1865, to December 25, 1865. Dr. Craven was not present on May 22, 1865, when the prisoner was brought to the Fort. His account relies on the information of others who indicated "The procession into the fort was simple though momentous ... they passed through files of men in blue from the Engineers Landing to the Water Battery Position; and on arriving at the casemate which had been fitted up into cells for their incarceration, Mr. Davis was shown into casement No. 2..." According to Dr. Craven's account, the shackles were not put on until the next morning, May 23rd, and then, after a significant struggle given by Davis, Craven claims it took four soldiers to subdue Davis.

Whichever account is true this old '62 Colt Police Revolver was there at Fort Monroe in 1865 and you can see why I refer to it as "the end".

★★★★★★

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Backstrap inscription of the 1862 Police revolver.