

## SOME CIVIL WAR

# Wallpaper Newspapers

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WALLPAPER NEWSPAPERS were among the singular results of Civil War pressures on the South. Most of the American paper mills of the 1860s were located in the North, and as the war progressed paper became scarcer and scarcer in the land of the Confederates. Eventually, in an effort to continue the publication of their newspapers, Southern editors printed them on any substitute for newsprint they could obtain. Ledger paper, tissue paper, brown wrapping paper—all were used. And in some states, notably Louisiana and Mississippi, the most common substitute was wallpaper. At least thirteen different newspapers printed on wallpaper are known.<sup>1</sup> They were issued in 1862, 1863, and 1864, sometimes by Southern editors, and in a few instances by Union soldiers.

Most widely known of the Civil War wallpaper newspapers is the *Daily Citizen* of Vicksburg, Mississippi, issues of which appeared on June 18 and 20, and July 2 and 4, 1863. It is the last of these numbers which is of greatest interest not only to bibliographers and students of the Civil War, but to

Minnesotans in general. It appeared on the very day that Union troops, including the Fourth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, took over the city of Vicksburg, and it is more than likely that men from the Minnesota regiment helped to issue it. Some copies, obtained on the spot by Minnesotans and kept as mementos by members of the Fourth, eventually were added to the Minnesota Historical Society's treasure chest. In all, the society has no fewer than four originals and fifteen facsimile reproductions of this rare Civil War item. Among them is at least one apparently unique copy that has never before been listed or described.

The Fourth Minnesota under Colonel John B. Sanborn entered Vicksburg on July 4, 1863, with Grant's victorious Army of the Tennessee. It has been reported that the Minnesota troops were at the very head of the column, having earned that place by bearing some of the heaviest fighting.<sup>2</sup> One

<sup>1</sup>For a list of such papers, see Clarence S. Brigham, "Wall-paper Newspapers of the Civil War," in *Bibliographical Essays*, 205-209 (Cambridge, 1924).

<sup>2</sup>Alonzo L. Brown, *History of the Fourth Regiment of Minnesota Infantry Volunteers*, 244 (St. Paul, 1892); E. U. Russell to Calvin R. Fix, August 30, 1905. In a copy of the letter in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society, Russell, who was captain of Company A of the Fourth Minnesota, recalls that he was "(by two paces) the first man of the line to enter the city" of Vicksburg.

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of the first duties of Sanborn's men was the seizure of the city's printing establishments, where the forms necessary for the parole of prisoners could be printed. Among the plants seized, doubtless was that of the *Daily Citizen*.

When the boys in blue entered the newspaper plant, they found still standing the type for the issue of July 2, which had been printed on wallpaper and distributed two days earlier. Sprinkled through its columns were remarks that reflect wishful thinking about the Yankees who were knocking at the gates of Vicksburg. "The Yanks outside our city," reads one item, "are deserting daily and are . . . cussing Grant and abolitionists generally." Another announces "That the great Ulysses—the Yankee Generalissimo, surnamed Grant—has expressed his intention of dining in Vicksburg on Saturday next, and celebrating the 4th of July by a grand dinner," adding tauntingly that "Ulysses must get into the city before he dines in it. The way to cook a rabbit is 'first catch the rabbit.'"

This, the victors believed, called for a retort. Quickly they reset part of the last column, concluding with a note dated "July 4th, 1863." In it they announced that "The banner of the Union floats over Vicksburg," and that General Grant "has dined" there. Then, after remarking that "This is the last wall-paper edition, and is, excepting this note, from the types as we found them," they predicted that the sheet would "be valuable hereafter as a curiosity."

This hybrid issue of the Vicksburg *Citizen* has indeed become a collectors' item of interest and value. Facsimiles are legion. Most of them are poorly printed and easily recognized as imitations. Some are plainly labeled. Among them are several contemporary copies that closely resemble the original. To distinguish between them and the authentic edition, certain identifying marks have been listed. Among them are typographical errors, variations in punctuation and types, changes in spelling and wording, and the like.<sup>3</sup>

THE JULY 4 edition of the *Citizen* is known to have been printed on wallpaper of at least three different patterns. One design consists of a large dark red brocade pattern on a cream background; the second features a small flower and leaf design in bright blue; the third is distinguished by a rather drab diamond-shaped lattice of yellow-green flowers and leaves. The Minnesota Historical Society's collection includes four authentic copies of the *Citizen*—one each printed on wallpaper of the first and third patterns, and two on the second. Of the latter, one was obtained at Vicksburg by Colonel (later General) Sanborn himself. Across the blue pattern of the wallpaper, he wrote: "This copy I got July 5th 1863 in Vicksburg J. B. Sanborn."<sup>4</sup>

The society also has a copy of the issue for June 18 printed on wallpaper of the third pattern. On it is a brief note signed by Thomas P. Gene, in which he records that he "received this paper from a rebel officer in command of a flag of truce boat that came across the river to our lines from Vicksburg on the 25th."

It is surprising that of the fifteen facsimile reproductions of the July 4 sheet in the Minnesota Historical Society's collection, only two fit any of the descriptions presented by the writer who has compiled the most extensive list available.<sup>5</sup> Although it includes no fewer than twenty-two items, this extensive list fails to mention thirteen facsimiles of the *Citizen* owned by the society. Among them is at least one of special interest. Since it has not been noted elsewhere, it seems worth while to describe it here in some detail.

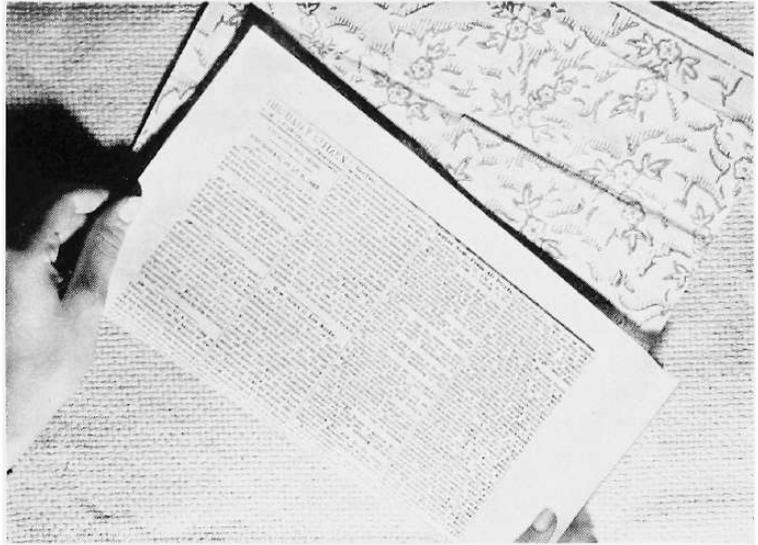
At first glance, this issue appears to be an authentic original of the *Citizen* for July 4.

<sup>3</sup>Nine identifying features are listed by Henry S. Parsons in an article on "Wall-Paper Editions of the Vicksburg 'Daily Citizen,'" in the *Magazine Antiques*, 25:97 (March, 1934).

<sup>4</sup>This copy and a facsimile are among the Sanborn Papers owned by the Minnesota Historical Society. All other copies of the Vicksburg wallpaper newspaper owned by the society are in its newspaper collection.

<sup>5</sup>Brigham, in *Bibliographical Essays*, 208.

A newspaper  
printed on  
blue flowered  
wallpaper



PHOTOGRAPH BY EUGENE D. BECKER

Type and format are identical with the known originals; all identifying marks are present. But curiously enough, this example contains errors not to be found in authentic originals. Among them is a typographical error in the masthead. Furthermore, it is printed on wallpaper of a pictorial pattern, totally unlike any used for known authentic copies. Printed in shades of brown and blue is a picture of a family group in a rural setting. This view, showing a man with a hoe, a woman holding a child, and a dog, alternates with clusters of morning glories, and both designs are framed with elaborate scrollwork.

Evidence that the Minnesota Historical Society acquired this example at an early date is to be found in marginal notations. There, in the handwriting of J. Fletcher Williams, the society's librarian, is the date "Apl 11, 1864." Apparently this was written on the day the item was received, to serve as an accessions record. Following it, in another hand, is a note which reads: "Col Donaldson to the Minn. Hist Society." Doubtless this was the Robert S. Donaldson who served as captain of Company C of the Fourth Minnesota during the siege of Vicksburg. Since he became colonel of another regiment on July 27, it seems likely

that he acquired his copy of the *Citizen* before that date.

From available evidence it thus appears that the Donaldson copy was printed on the *Daily Citizen* press while Union troops were stationed in Vicksburg. Why a copy so much like the authentic originals should have been struck off is the real problem. The errors that do not occur in the known originals need explaining. Could this have been a proof, pulled after the final paragraph was reset and only partially corrected before the complete edition was run off? A comparison with the original issue of July 2 might provide the answer to this question. Unfortunately, however, the present writer does not have access to a copy of the earlier issue, since it is not available in Twin City libraries.

The last word remains to be written on the subject of Civil War wallpaper news sheets. Some future bibliographer doubtless will solve this knotty problem. When he undertakes to do so, he will find of more than ordinary interest the Minnesota Historical Society's extensive collection of the Vicksburg *Daily Citizen*—the souvenir sheet which boys in blue from the North Star State doubtless helped to issue on Independence Day of 1863.



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