

Bugle Call: How A Mississippi Private Came To Be Buried In Rhode Island

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Review

BUGLE CALL

How a Mississippi private came to be buried in Rhode Island

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Rolston, Les *Lost Soul: The Confederate Soldier in New England*. Ancestry, ISBN 916489884

Samuel Postlethwaite, a private in the 21st Mississippi Infantry, served the Confederate States from the beginning of the Civil War until his severe wounding at Malvern Hill in 1862. Following the War he resided in Mississippi and eventually moved north to live with the Greenes, his relatives in Rhode Island. Postlethwaite died in August 1876, a year after his arrival in New England. A marble block inscribed "S.P." once marked his grave. In **Lost Soul**, Les Rolston credits Sam as the only Confederate soldier known to be buried in Rhode Island.

Genealogists and historians alike will be disappointed by this book. The lack of adequate source citation is frustrating and the author's initial research methodology (writing letters to newspapers, universities, and historical societies throughout the South asking if they knew of a Samuel Postlethwaite) is inefficient. A quick check of the *Consolidated Index to Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers*, available on microfilm, would have shown that the sole Samuel Postlethwaite who served in the Confederate military was in the 21st Mississippi Infantry.

The claim that Postlethwaite is the only Confederate known to be buried in Rhode Island is erroneous. Numerous Confederates living in Rhode Island, several of whom are also buried there, are accidentally listed among the Union veterans and widows enumerated in the 1890 *Special Schedules of the Eleventh Census*. Albert W. Babcock stated he was a Confederate postmaster in Florida and a blockade runner. He is buried in Swan Point Cemetery, the same cemetery where some of Postlethwaite's relatives are buried.

Additional errors of fact are readily apparent. Rolston described Elmer Ellsworth as being killed for lowering a Confederate flag over Washington, D.C., when he actually was killed in Alexandria, Virginia, on the day Union troops captured that city. Kanawha, according to Rolston, entered statehood as West Virginia at the time of Virginia's secession in 1861, when in fact West Virginia did not become a state until 1863. What connection Samuel Postlethwaite's military service had with Ellsworth or Kanawha, or even the resignation of General Winfield Scott, eludes this reviewer.

Unfortunately, Rolston offers nothing new, with the exception of family letters and papers. The inclusion of numerous general discussions of the War distracts readers from the more interesting part of the book: the story of Samuel Postlethwaite and his kin. Greater concentration on the Postlethwaite family, their interactions with their Northern relatives after the War, and the author's efforts to ensure a proper marking of Sam's final resting place would have made for a more readable and useful biography.

Craig R. Scott is a Certified Genealogical Records Specialist who specializes in military records in the National Archives. He is a frequent lecturer on military research methodology at national genealogical conferences.