

SENAC, Felix Paymaster, C. S. Navy

The National Archives Confederate Navy files for Felix Senac are very sparse. As noted in the book *Confederate Quartermasters, Commissaries, and Agents*, the story of Senac was written by a descendant, Regina Rapier, with the title *Felix Senac, Saga of Felix Senac, Being the Legend and Biography of a Confederate Agent in Europe*, Bulletin of Art and History, Vol. XI, No. 1, Atlanta, Georgia, 1972, ISBN 0-9600584-1-9, 216pp with genealogies. This book was obtained via an interlibrary loan. A daguerreotype exists which is believed to be of Senac at the age of 38 in 1853. Here follows a short summary on Senac relevant to his history as an issuer of Confederate Treasury notes.

Felix Senac was born of French parents in Pensacola, Florida, on July 28th, 1815, at a time when, in spite of the Louisiana Purchase, Spain claimed sovereignty of Florida in the same year that Andrew Jackson defeated the British at New Orleans. From this heritage Senac became fluent in English, French, and Spanish. The families of Senac and Stephen Russell Mallory, the future Secretary of the Confederate Navy, also later became related through marriage.

Senac became a paymaster in the United States Navy, and on April 1st, 1861 he tendered his resignation. Senac received an offer of a commission with the Confederacy on June 22nd while still a resident in Washington DC. With a professional sense of obligation Senac worked to settle all of his accounts with the U. S. Navy during the period from June 22nd to June 29th. Family lore relates that Senac was arrested in July as a Confederate spy, and while being transported up the Potomac River to stand trial in Washington, he dove overboard, swam to the Virginia shore, and made his way to Richmond where he received his commission.

Senac and his family traveled from Richmond and arrived at Mobile on July 29th, 1861. Official records show that Senac went into active service on August 15th, 1861. Family lore relates that he may have returned in August or September to Washington to settle his accounts, and it may have been at this time that he swam the Potomac to return to Richmond. After giving testimony before an investigating committee of the Confederate Congress in September, Senac received his assignment to report to Stephen Mallory, Secretary of the Navy, at Richmond. He was assigned to the shipyards at New



Daguerreotype of what is probably Felix Senac in 1853 at the age of 38 "before he grew stout." The image is from the book *Felix Senac, Saga of Felix Senac* by Regina Rapier.

Orleans as a paymaster to the contractors who were building the ironclads *Louisiana* and *Mississippi*.

Senac had misgivings about the defenses of New Orleans and thought that the city could be taken, an opinion he shared with Mallory and which Mallory rejected. By April 16th, 1862 the situation had grown dire and efforts were made to launch the *Louisiana* even though her engines were not fully installed and her batteries not fully mounted on deck. During this time Senac was forced to struggle through swamps and bayous to pay the workmen. Senac's prescient prediction of the fall of New Orleans played out while Senac got his family aboard a departing steamer and he left New Orleans with \$600,000. Arriving in Vicksburg, he was reassigned to Jackson, Mississippi. In July he and his family settled in a large, abandoned schoolhouse at Covington, Georgia, a small but busy industrial center about 40 miles from Atlanta. The Senac family made this their home.

A joint resolution of the House established a committee to investigate the fall of New Orleans and Senac was questioned in detail on September 15th, 1862. The committee found no blame in the Navy Department. Documents in the National Archives established that Senac worked as a Paymaster for the C. S. Navy in Atlanta during the period from July 30th, 1862 through June 11th, 1863, and this is the time frame in which Senac's endorsement is found on

Treasury notes [the editor's example of Senac's endorsement was issued May 2nd, 1863].

Senac received a new assignment in Europe as a paymaster for C. S. Navy efforts to procure ships, clothing, and supplies. In early May 1863 the Senac family made the trip to Charleston, South Carolina for travel abroad. The blockade of Southern ports made travel difficult, and by the morning of June 16th the Senac family had arrived by train in Wilmington to board the blockade runner *Eugenie* that night; they outran the Union ships on their way to Bermuda. Upon leaving Bermuda for Liverpool aboard a British merchant ship, they were challenged by a Union warship which demanded that Senac be handed over as a deserter from the U. S. Navy. The British captain refused to hand over Senac, declaring that any repetition of the Trent affair would be an act of war. The Union warship followed but quickly gave up the chase.

Rapier quotes a letter from Secretary Mallory to Captain James Bulloch, a C. S. Navy agent in Liverpool:

"Should you stand in need of reliable assistance in France, you may, I think, derive it from Paymaster Senac of the Navy, who has been ordered to Liverpool to pay officers, etc. He speaks French with purity and elegance, Spanish also, possesses fine business capacity, and is a gentleman of ripe judgment and rare merit."

Senac located Bulloch at the warehouse of Fraser, Trenholm & Company. Bulloch had managed the construction the *Florida* and the *Alabama*, along with other cruisers, and would also take on the construction of ironclad warships. The open manner in which these ironclads were constructed in Liverpool posed a problem for the British government relative to their declarations of neutrality, and it refused to permit the launchings of these ships. Having faced this loss, Bulloch had made arrangements for the construction of ironclads at Bordeaux, France.

Family lore relates that Senac and his daughter, Ruby, were presented at court to Queen Victoria at some time during their stay in London. Later in the winter of 1863-1864 the Senac family made the trip to Paris and were presented to the Empress Eugenie in France. Senac reported as a paymaster to Flag Officer Samuel Barron, the bureau chief in Paris, with additional duties as an agent of the the Richmond Office of Clothing and Provisions. Rapier relates that "it is not clear exactly what Senac did in Paris." His relationship with Henry Hotze, the Confederate secret agent in Paris in charge of

Confederate propaganda activities, was complex. Senac's daughter, Ruby, would eventually marry Hotze. Some of Hotze's motivations are revealed in a Wikipedia article:

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Hotze.

Hotze felt strongly enough about white supremacy in 1856 to translate Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau's essay on the inequality of the human races titled *The Moral and Intellectual Diversity of Races*. Furthermore, when in 1864 Jefferson Davis offered the emancipation of Southern slaves in return for the support of European governments, Hotze was averse to this idea and flatly rejected it.

By the middle of 1864 conditions in the South were dire. Senac and his nephew, Joseph Fry, scoured the shoe factories of Europe, bought clothing, beef, and other foodstuffs, and had them loaded on a new ship built for the Confederacy in Glasgow. Bulloch received \$1,125,000 on September 28th, 1864, \$300,000 of which were funds for payment of officers to be managed by Senac.

The final blow to the Confederate Navy came on February 22nd, 1865 when the Union blockade of Southern ports became complete. The only viable route left to the Confederacy was through Mexico into Texas.

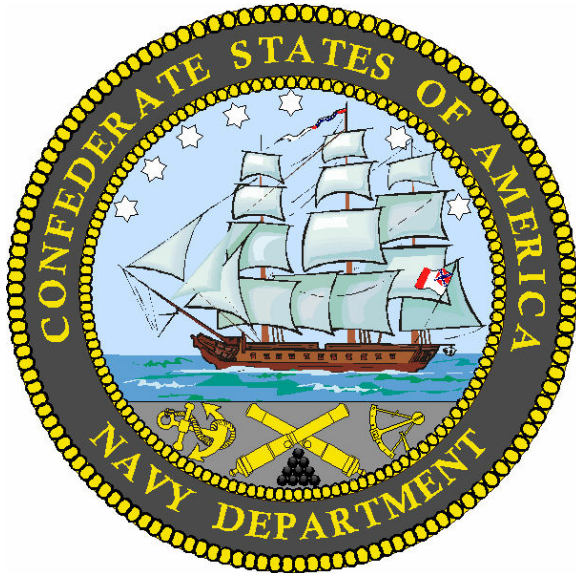
After the close of the war President Johnson issued a proclamation of amnesty for Southern citizens, but a careful reading of the amnesty contained important exceptions, which included "all who are or shall have been pretended civil or diplomatic officers or otherwise domestic or foreign agents of the pretended confederate government..." These exceptions also included those who had resigned from the U. S. Army or Navy, and this made Senac subject to arrest.

Rapier quotes Bulloch as stating that "the Navy department was the only branch of the service showing surplus funds at the end of war." Senac handled significant amounts of funds and it was no secret that Federal agents were after Confederate gold, with Senac perhaps of special interest to those Federal agents. There was also the problem of the *Shenandoah*, a Confederate warship launched expressly to disrupt Union whaling fleets in the North Pacific. The *Shenandoah* was still wreaking havoc with the whaling fleets in August of 1865, long after the war was over. It took the intervention of the British government to inform her captain that hostilities had ceased. A dispatch of August 16th noted that the *Shenandoah* had burned 25 whaling vessels. The *Shenandoah* steamed into the port of Liverpool on November 6th, 1865, where British authorities turned the ship over to the U. S. consul.

November of 1865 found Senac and his family in Wiesbaden, Germany, where they planned to join other Confederate citizens in relocating to South America. This plan came to a sudden end on January 27th, 1866 when Senac died at Wiesbaden at the age of 51. Rapier shows an illustration of his death certificate in Wiesbaden, and this corrects an error in *Confederate Quartermasters, Commissaries, and Agents* on page 645 where website sources had claimed that he died in London in 1866. Soon thereafter, Senac's daughter, Ruby, married Henry Hotze who had accompanied them to Wiesbaden.

This description of Felix Senac supercedes the description in *Confederate Quartermasters, Commissaries, and Agents*. It is fortunate that Regina Rapier took the time to research and write with such insight about Felix Senac and his career with C. S. Navy.

McNeil



Seal of the Confederate States Navy Department

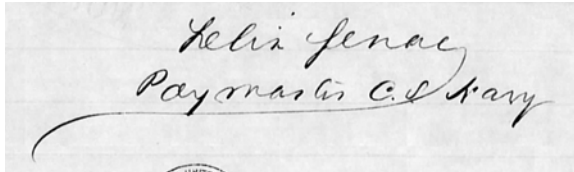
image: Licensed in the Public Domain, via Wikipedia.

List of Confederate Navy Paymasters from the National Archives Confederate Navy Subject File.

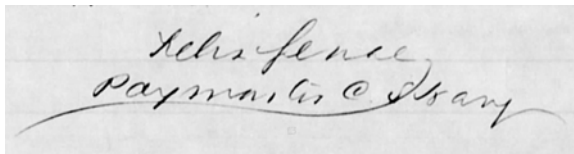
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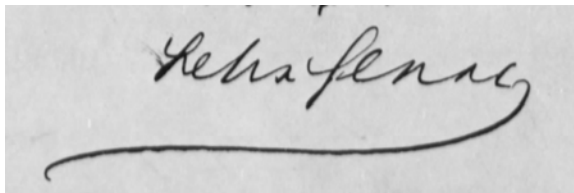
F. Senac's signatures from the National Archives.



The earliest known example, signed on January 31st, 1863, at Atlanta, Georgia, as "Paymaster C. S. Navy."

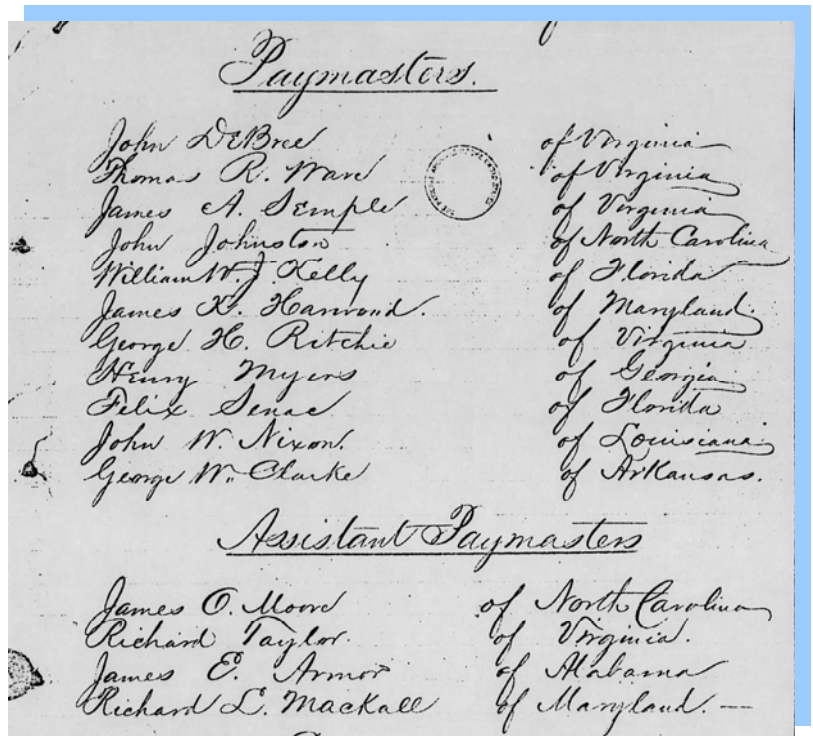


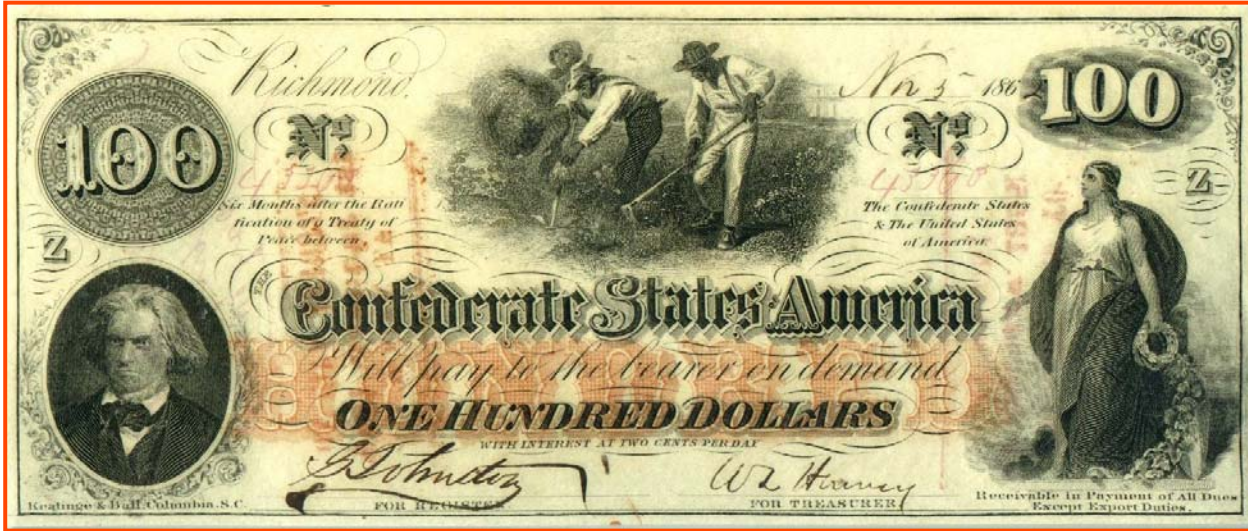
Signed on April 22nd, 1863, at Atlanta, Georgia, as "Paymaster C. S. Navy."



Signed on May 18th, 1863, at Atlanta, Georgia, with no title.

images: Fold3.com





Johnston_Harvey
43363 Z
5 Nov 1862
images: Smith