

Figure 1: A 10-cent greenish blue, Type II, (CSA 12-ADc) tied on cover by a Columbia Mine, Ga., circular datestamp with a manuscript date of July 28.

## A Confederate Cover From Columbia (Gold) Mine, Georgia

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

What may be a surprise to many is that Georgia has been a Mecca for gold mining since the 1820s. And a cover from Columbia Mine, Georgia, used in the Confederacy is a bit of a gold mine itself!

Shown in Figure 1 is what is purported to be, according to the late William G. Bogg, the only Confederate use from Columbia Mine, Georgia. I have scoured auction catalogs and come up with no other. I also checked with Georgia postal history students and, although one thought he had seen another, he could not produce evidence to that effect.

The cover initially came to light via Robert Dickson many years ago when he acquired part of the J. Belknap Smith correspondence. It bears a CSA 10-cent bluish green Archer & Daly Type II stamp and the cover is addressed to Mrs. John H. Jones in Augusta, Georgia.

One of the first miners in the territory was Jeremiah Griffin, a wealthy local farmer, who bought out the interest of two traveling Englishmen who had discovered gold on nearby lands. By purchasing 3,000 acres that adjoined his claim, Griffin soon had a virtual

monopoly that shut out would-be competitors. Griffin later became a mining engineer and invented the gold stamp mill. It was erected on Little River about 1832. This invention was the forerunner of the gold mining mills of later years, and today the original stamp mill is housed at Yale University.<sup>1</sup>

A small book, titled simply *Gold Book*, located on the shelves of the Probate Court office in Appling, relates to the gold fever of 1832 when people could buy a chance in the unique land lottery of Georgia.

The prize was a hoped-for gold mine located on lands predominantly within the former Cherokee Indian reservation of northern Georgia.

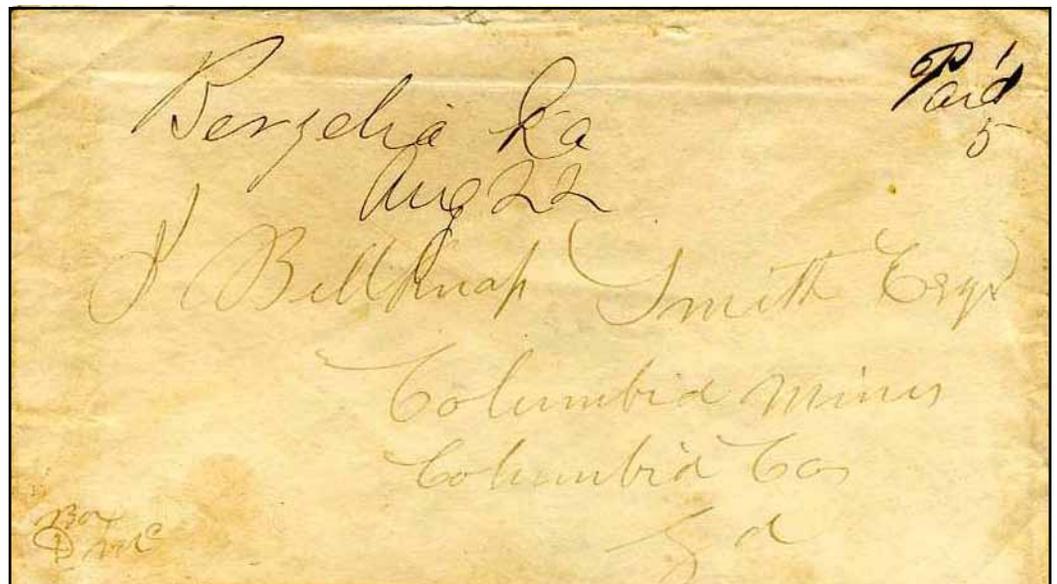
In time, a branch mint would be built at Dahlonega, Georgia, for the manufacture of gold coins. Columbia County native Ignatius Few had a hand in helping to choose the architects for this project.

Unfortunately, in the 1840s, after Griffin had enlarged his plant, he was accidentally shot and killed in a mishap with his own gun while returning from Alabama on his horse. Shortly thereafter, his enterprise was bought out by the Columbia Mining Company.



Figure 2: This mixed franking bears singles of the CSA five-cent blue lithograph and CSA five-cent London typograph issue, both tied by Atlanta, Georgia, July 9, 1862, circular datestamps on a cover addressed to, 'Mr. J. Belknap Smith, Columbia Mines, Ga.'

Figure 3: Confederate cover addressed to J. Belknap Smith at Columbia Mines from Berzelia, Ga, August 22, 1861, with a matching manuscript 'Paid 5.'



Gold was first found in the Columbia vein in 1823 and from that time until the beginning of the Civil War, the property was worked continuously by private methods, on a more or less extensive scale. Just preceding the Civil War, 120 slaves were employed on this property in mining and milling 10 tons of ore per day.

By 1830, when 6,000-10,000 people were engaged in gold mining, Georgia had become the foremost gold-producing state—a position it maintained until the late 1840s.<sup>2</sup>

This undertaking worked on a huge scale until the machinery was confiscated by the Confederate government during the Civil War and all the work came to a standstill. Also, about this time the mint was closed in Dahlonega.

Many Southern miners had previously left in 1849 for the more lucrative gold fields of the west, namely California. Nevertheless, early postal records reveal

that there was a post office operating at the Columbia Mines site until it was discontinued June 22, 1866, with Benjamin Brownhead serving as postmaster.

Total production of Georgia gold from 1823 to 1944 was worth about \$17,945,000. This indicates a production of about 868,000 troy ounces, or about 36 tons, the current value of which is more than a quarter-billion dollars.<sup>3</sup> Six of the eight counties in the east-central district of Georgia have a history of gold mining. The Columbia Mine was one of the more extensive lode mines in the state. Total production prior to the Civil War was about two million dollars (four tons).

Joseph Belknap Smith (1802-1916) was a speculator and one of the founders of the Columbia Mining Company. His papers are housed in the Duke University libraries. Found there are schedules of property belonging to the Columbia Mining Company containing lists of slaves and their values; contracts for



**Figure 4: The Columbia Mine circa 1915.**



**Figure 5: Oscar William Dent and Vernon Dent in the steel shop at Columbia Mine, circa 1925.**

hiring slaves and freedmen; land deeds; advertisement for an apparatus of Edward N. Kent for separating gold from foreign substances; correspondence of Smith and one of his partners, George Wood, about their copper mines in Tennessee; a ledger (1860-1873) containing valuations of the mine and mill properties of Smith and his partners and the amount of the Confederate soldiers' tax and war taxes for some of the Civil War years.

The mixed franking cover in Figure 2, bears singles of the CSA five-cent blue lithograph and CSA five-cent London typograph issue, both tied by Atlanta, Georgia, July 9, 1862, circular datestamps on a cover addressed to, "Mr. J. Belknap Smith, Columbia Mines, Ga."

Figure 3 is another Confederate cover addressed to J. Belknap Smith at Columbia Mines. It is a stampless cover with manuscript postal markings from "Berzelia, Ga, Aug 22" and a matching "Paid 5," which dates it to 1861.

Berzelia was a community in Columbia County

that has pretty much faded away. It was about six miles east of Harlem, located on the former Georgia Railroad. It was one of the original stops on the rail line when it came through the area in 1837. Originally known as Bowery, it lasted more than 100 years.

U.S. mail service at Bowery was established July 19, 1833, with Hezekiah Magruder handling the initial postmaster duties. The name of the community was officially changed to Berzelia in 1837.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the years, other gold seekers have tried their skills around the area with varying degrees of success. It was soon learned that once the gold bug had bitten, it was hard to let go.

Probably the last local gold boom was during the Great Depression years of the 1930s, when the Hamilton Mine of McDuffie County was worked for a while by William Fluker.

A noted geologist, Fluker was a lecturer on the speaker's circuit at many conventions and gatherings in that field. He was the general manager of the Columbia

Mining Company in 1899. In the early 1900s, reports and letters were sent out looking for investors and interested buyers for its property and equipment. Not surprisingly, the investors found gold mining a very volatile venture.

Figure 4 shows the Columbia Mine circa 1915. Oscar William Dent and Vernon Dent are shown in Figure 5 using the steel sharpener in the steel shop at Columbia Mine, circa 1925.

The J. Belknap Smith family and the William Fluker family rest in fenced-in graves in a small cemetery on the Wilkes County side of Little River, where once they crossed over for their gold-digging ventures.

Gold fever has periodically reawakened, with the lure of that profitable strike just around the corner. Only a fortunate few have found that elusive pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Most were farmers who continued their agricultural pursuits while supplementing their incomes with unpredictable gold mining.<sup>5</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 Charles Lord, "Columbia County once gripped by 'gold fever,'" *The Columbia County News-Times*, posted March 21, 2010. [http://newstimes.augusta.com/stories/2010/03/21/opi\\_570651.shtml](http://newstimes.augusta.com/stories/2010/03/21/opi_570651.shtml) Accessed November 24, 2016.
- 2 Vernon J. Hurst, *Gold in East-Central Georgia*, Atlanta: University of Georgia, 1990, p. 1.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 Staff writer, *The Augusta Chronicle*, "Berzelia community fades away." [http://chronicle.augusta.com/stories/1999/12/10/met\\_277081.shtml#.V-rE3sn66kl](http://chronicle.augusta.com/stories/1999/12/10/met_277081.shtml#.V-rE3sn66kl) Accessed September 27, 2016.
- 5 Lord. *The Columbia County News-Times*.

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Figure 1: Newly reported Washington, D.C., Substation No. 4 special delivery marking dated May 17, 1895. (Courtesy, John Donnes)



Figure 2: Washington, D.C., Station No. 51 special delivery marking dated October 2, but no year date. (Courtesy Clarence A. Stillions)

## Additional D.C. Station Special Delivery Markings Reported

By Dennis H. Pack

Two new Washington, D.C., special delivery handstamps have come to light since the publication of my "Special Delivery Markings Used at Washington, D.C., Sub-Stations" in the Third Quarter *La Posta*. One is from a substation; the other is from a station.

A special delivery cover from Washington, DC, Substation No. 4, dated May 17, 1895, was provided by John Donnes. "SPECIAL DELIVERY" is entirely in capital letters. It is the second earliest reported marking, and it was sent to a local address. This cover is the ninth reported Washington, D.C., substation special delivery marking from six substations.

The original article showed and described a special delivery marking used at Washington, D.C., Station No. 57 after all substations were changed to numbered stations March 31, 1902. Clarence A. Stillions submitted a cover with the same type of

station special delivery marking, but from Station No. 51. All of the text is in uppercase letters, except "No.," but it appears that an additional handstamp has been impressed over the marking that has the station name in capital and small letters. It has a handwritten date of "10/2," but no year date. The two-cent Washington stamp was initially issued Nov. 12, 1903, so the cover was mailed after that. The cover was sent to a local address. This is the second reported marking of this type.

The original article asked: How many substations used the special delivery markings and were they ever applied to letters for delivery outside Washington, D.C.? Six substations are reported as having used the markings, and all of the covers were sent to D.C. addresses. Readers are encouraged to e-mail scans of Washington, D.C., substation cards or covers with special delivery markings to me at: [packd@hbc.com](mailto:packd@hbc.com).