

One of our great American Specialties

Here is a subject philatelists have been enthralled with for over 100 years.



The Confederate Post

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

The Confederate Post: Caf or Decaf?

Okay, so what's the deal with the coffee cup? Where's the usual photo of a cool Confederate cover?

Well, I have a question to ask you. Do you like your morning cup of coffee caffeinated or decaffeinated? Caf or decaf? Then again, maybe you don't like coffee at all. My husband Darryl likes what I consider an unappealing Mountain Dew[®] to jump-start his day. And, you can probably guess that, yes, it's fully caffeinated – really caffeinated. He doesn't appreciate the difference between a lime green highly carbonated caffeinated can of soda and the 20-ounce thermal “cup o' joe” with which I start my day. And he has a case there. They both result in that same caffeine jolt of energy.

So what's my point? Is your collection “caffeinated” or “decaffeinated”? Do you like your collection with a “kick”, the caffeine buzz, the oomph? Or are you an accumulator who just dumps everything in the desk, the closet, or the safe deposit box and doesn't really work with it, devote time to it and appreciate it?

It is astounding to me how many collections that cross my path are of the decaf variety. The stamps or covers remain on the auction lot or dealer stock pages. Nothing extra has been added to them or prior research has even been thrown away (a grumpy discourse from a prior column). They are not lovingly mounted on exhibit pages with carefully researched descriptions.

And this is not just a matter of money. It's easier to have a dynamic collection if you have deep pockets, although I know many with substantial funds who are also outstanding philatelic students. They can afford to buy the postal history with sexy markings from various countries or across the lines uses with a wild array of fascinating markings.

But there are other ways to give your collection a boost that are both fun and monetarily rewarding. I'm talking about research. The area of Confederate postal history is ripe for research, particularly in what are often less expensive areas of collecting, such as Confederate stampless covers or soldier's dues. Confederate soldiers were allowed to send their mail “due” (it wasn't free, as the recipient paid the postage) because of conditions in the field where postage stamps were not available. Soldier's had to sign their envelopes with name, rank and regiment. This gives current day researchers a step forward toward identification of the sender. Military records are online for nominal charges from several different websites such as the American Civil War Research Database, Footnote or Ancestry. You can use search engines like Google to find the 8th Texas Cavalry, for example, and if you didn't already know it you will find out that the 8th Texas Cavalry was the celebrated Terry's Texas Rangers. Bingo, you already have the beginning of a terrific story to add pizzazz to your cover description.



And all the action isn't just in postal history. What about “fly speck philately” - our cutesy way of saying the study of tiny details in the stamp design? Often, U.S. students think of the Washington-Franklin series when we say “fly speck philately” because the knowledge of the breaks in lines, shading and other variations make all the difference in value. Because of often inconsistent printing processes and the daily mixing of ink, Confederate philately is loaded with fascinating shades varieties. It is not that hard to create a splendid collection of these varieties such as the popular and dramatic “white tie” of the 5¢ typographed Richmond print. It is fun to cull through stamps and covers in the hunt for a missed variety and buy it “cheap”. Many such varieties are not listed in general catalogs such as Scott, as this is a specialized area. Only by study with old Dietz catalogs and the 1929 Dietz opus *The Postal History of the Confederate States of America* do students become adept at discerning such subtle differences. This harkens back to that old nugget of wisdom that “knowledge is power.” Join a specialized society in your area of interest, whether Confederates or some other area, and enjoy the shared information as well as the camaraderie.

Does your collection have pizzazz? Do you enjoy the thrill of the hunt, as well as adding value to your collection? Or enthralling your fellow collectors with the story of the cover you hold in your hand that was addressed to one of the prisoners who participated in the great tunnel escape from Libby Prison in Richmond, or the lady who danced herself to death, or the long-suffering officer who was one of the Immortal 600 prisoners held captive under fire of his own guns in Charleston Harbor? If you like detective novels and investigative journalism, postal history research should be right up your alley. And writing about your discoveries or exhibiting in open competition are also very satisfying endeavors.

It's up to you. Caf or decaf?

Are you ready to join a specialized society in this sesquicentennial year of the Civil War? For a membership application and more information on the Confederate Stamp Alliance, write Patricia A. Kaufmann, 10194 N. Old State Road, Lincoln, DE 19960 or email trishkauf@comcast.net