

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

Custodians for Future Generations

[Editor's Note: *This is something of a horror story. At the request of your editor, our respected Confederate States of America columnist is using her space this issue to address a critical issue in philately—one that must be of concern to each of us in our hobby. What is most appalling is that, due to legal constraints, Trish Kaufmann is not able to elaborate more on the circumstances behind this story.*

In a great many ways, the viable future of philately is tied to this story. For unless we are continually vigilant in protecting—and making others such as family members understand—our treasured collectibles, many of the great items of philately just might disappear, or at the very least, deteriorate in condition.]

As a dealer in Confederate stamps and postal history, I have bought a lot of Confederate material in the past few years and handled numerous collections—some major, some minor. In so doing, I have found an incredibly frightening trend, which probably has always been the case, but seems particularly alarming to me of late.

I have had multiple experiences recently which, for numerous reasons, I can not detail here. But I desperately feel the need to address the issue that has been disturbing me. Over the years, I have heard of several “near misses” by heirs of collectors, including several thousand covers from the late George Malpass.

George N. Malpass was a passionate collector of both Union and Confederate material for six decades. His philatelic interests began in 1915 and he soon became infatuated with the postal history of the Civil War, particularly patriotic envelopes. His collection of stamps, covers, autographs, and manuscripts was one of the most comprehensive ever assembled, at one time numbering over 12,000 items. He joined the Confederate Stamp Alliance in 1937 and served on the editorial boards of the 1945 and 1959 *Dietz Confederate Catalog and Handbook*.

His mentor was the late great August Dietz. Malpass wrote hundreds of articles, particularly in *Weekly Philatelic Gossip* in



the 1940s and 50s. He was president of the Confederate Stamp Alliance from 1955-57 and proud of the fact that the *Confederate Bulletin* began under his administration. It was the precursor to today's *Confederate Philatelist*. In 1953, he won the grand award at the SPA convention in Tampa, FL and was widely known and respected during that era as an exhibitor and premier researcher.

In 2004, a Malpass heir came to me for advice, having no idea what his material was worth. The first shock was mine when I casually asked the name of his “late uncle who had boxes of Confederate covers”. I reacted with an involuntary gasp. I was simply flabbergasted that he could have literally thousands of covers from a prominent collector who had died decades before.

I am ordinarily an early morning person, but I was so excited by the Malpass material that I stayed up until 2 am poring through it—very unusual for me. I got up again only three hours later at 5 am, unable to sleep. I spent close to 37 hours straight examining it and, in particular, simply sorting it. One thing that amazed me was that it literally looked as if someone had thrown it up in the air and then swept it together in a heap like a giant game of “52-Pickup.”

Malpass was meticulous and kept inventories and voluminous notes, yet I would find a box of common unused Union patriotics with a spectacular Confederate item mixed in. Sets were broken up and scattered. Union material comprised 70% of the material, although I didn't know that right away in my intuitive hunt for Confederates. I spent hour upon hour just sorting through myriad



boxes of flamboyant and rare patriotic, incredible soldiers' letters full of battle details, historical cartes-de-viste, colorful Civil War songsheets, an incredible selection of gorgeous Roses of Washington and covers with designs that I had never seen before in forty years of experience with Civil War material...and on and on. I was in postal history heaven!

The heir had left the material with me to examine for three days. We touched base several times by cell phone as my work progressed and he and his wife enjoyed the Delaware beaches and surrounding areas. When I mentioned how strange it was that the covers were so unorganized, he astounded me by revealing that when the last of the Malpass children died, this remaining batch of stamps and covers was literally rescued from where it had been unceremoniously dumped on a curbside trash heap while he was helping clean out the house. Wow! What a tragic loss that would have been to postal history. Fortunately, he knew that there was some value to the material. He just had no idea how much. Was he ever in for a pleasant surprise.

But the most chilling incident with which I was involved was only about a year ago when I was called to look at material that had been recovered from trash bins by non-collectors. When initially approached, I thought this was probably just first day covers or something of little consequence, but I quickly changed my tune when I saw scans of select covers worth tens of thousands of dollars each. The actual story is far more horrifying than I am able to share with you for legal reasons, but the fact is that what probably amounted to hundreds of thousands of dollars of material—Americana, books, autographs, coins, manuscripts from the Middle Ages, stamps, covers (some on auction lot pages with five-figure price tags (duh) and many of these exceedingly rare—were literally tossed in the garbage by the indifferent and uninformed heirs. These included some great Confederate rarities; I am uncertain exactly what has been lost. This unceremonious “garbage disposal” even included gold coins that even the most dim-witted idiot should have known had intrinsic value.

As a careful custodian of history, I was appalled. The people literally recovered this material from dumpsters along with the garbage, but were intelligent enough to recognize the inherent value. They began to sift through the trash on a regular basis, continuing to harvest from this source for months – a veritable mountain of valuable material that literally filled the space of a garage to the ceiling. Who knows what they did not rescue!

Not the only kind of horror...

Second to this horror, is another kind of tragedy which, while not the same, may have similar consequences. I have always been a researcher by nature and truly enjoy the process. What I find disturbing is that research information from decades ago is often not kept with the material. Thus I am “reinventing the wheel” whenever I describe a cover for my stock. The auction describers either don't have the information or have thrown it out—a thought I abhor.

A case in point was the recent purchase of a prisoner-of-war cover which seemed so very familiar, yet I was having trouble finding information about the incarcerated soldier who mailed it. In researching another POW cover with a similar problem, I tripped across an article written about the first cover in *The Confederate Philatelist* in 1980 when I was editor of those pages. Not only was a copy of the article not kept with the cover, none of the information on the prisoner—not even his name—was kept. The cover only showed the addressee, a civilian, and it was not even easy to determine from which prison it was sent. The rediscovered *CP* article answered all of my questions.

Another example is a prison cover which was described in an auction catalog as “one of only two known,” yet there are no prison markings on the cover to ascertain this. I am reasonably well read in my area of specialty and yet this information was not at all apparent to me. Why oh why aren't we keeping important information with our precious material?

I personally have large notes of instruction on what to do with my research files—some of which represent decades of work—if I die unexpectedly. I guarantee that I'll be rolling in my grave if that research—let alone actual covers, stamps, or literature—is thrown in the trash when I pass on. I encourage you to leave very detailed instructions with your heirs and with the material itself. It could be that you and your spouse die together in an accident, thus what you told her/him may not be enough; it must be memorialized in your estate in writing with specific letters of instruction. I know of at least one collector who is leaving directives that his material be sold at auction and he has stipulated that the auction house must pass along all research to the buyer as a condition of the auction agreement.

In the case of the late George Malpass, his only daughter was well aware of the value, but when she died, the next tier of heirs was—for the most part—clueless. Fortunately, there was one great-nephew who knew and rescued the material from the trash heap—although he had no idea what it was worth. I rendered him virtually speechless with a six-figure appraisal. ☒