

# 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

### Louisiana Relief Committee Mail



In May of 1863, Union General Nathaniel P. Banks ordered the deportation of all New Orleans citizens who had refused to take the oath of allegiance to the United States. Approximately 700 families from New Orleans moved to Mobile, Alabama, with little but the clothes on their backs. Prominent citizens of Mobile organized a Relief Committee to supply food, medical care, shelter and transportation for these refugees. The Committee also assumed the job of handing the mail for them. Covers so transmitted are very coveted by Confederate collectors as there are fewer than twenty recorded.

The Louisiana Relief Committee was in operation from June of 1863 until early September of 1864. Communications between the people of New Orleans and their friends and family in the Confederate States were forbidden by the occupying Union. The Relief Committee smuggled letters in small vessels along the Mississippi Sound, a great service to the struggling citizens of New Orleans and obviously not sanctioned by the United States.

Mail from New Orleans to the Confederacy is easily identified by the rare Louisiana Relief Committee manuscript endorsements. The most common endorsement is "Forwarded by the Louisiana Committee at Mobile", but other variants include "(La. Com.)" and "Mailed by La Relief Committee at Mobile." Jules Denis, the Confederate provost marshal, censored the Confederate-bound mail until he was replaced on June 24, 1864 by Colonel Thomas H. Taylor, but no censor markings by Taylor are known. The Committee undoubtedly carried mail from Mobile to New Orleans as well, but none has been identified. Westbound letters were not endorsed, apparently for security reasons. They would have no postal markings since they were hand-carried to New Orleans addressees.

The illustrated cover is franked with a pair of 5¢ blue lithographs tied by a double strike of the Mobile, Ala. double circle cancel dated November 2, 1863. It bears the unmistakable "(La. Com.)" endorsement at upper left. It is addressed to "T.H. Higinbotham, Esq., No. 7 North Warren Street, Mobile, Ala." It is somewhat unusual, but not unheard of, to be addressed with "Esq." in place of

his rank. On the back are penciled numerical columns, but hidden underneath them is a partially faded and difficult to read pen notation at center that is likely the censor marking of Provost Marshal Jules Denis.

Apparently, the Committee paid the postage on such letters as a favor to the senders. Many are found with the proper 2¢ Mobile to Mobile local drop rate, but there are also a number like this cover that bore the standard rate of 10¢ between towns. The stamps likely originated in New Orleans to pay the proper 10¢ rate from New Orleans to Mobile. The cancellation of November 2 is the same as the received docketing on the right side. Covers bearing 5¢ lithographs are quite scarce, as the common Confederate stamps in circulation in late 1863 were the 10¢ engraved issues. There are even three recorded uses of the scarce 10¢ "frameline" on Louisiana Relief covers.

Thomas H. Higinbotham is shown in military records as 1st Sergeant, Company C of the Confederate States 2nd Regiment Engineer Troops commanded by Capt. L. Hutchinson. Higinbotham's residence, not surprisingly, is listed as New Orleans. Other known Higinbotham correspondence in this time frame is sent care of the Quartermaster Department or Capt. Douglas Vass who was the Quartermaster at Mobile during the war from early 1861 until the fall of Mobile.

Mobile fell to Maj. Gen. Edward R.S. Canby, USA, on April 12, 1865. Two days later, at Ford's Theater in Washington, southern partisan John Wilkes Booth mortally wounded President Abraham Lincoln, who died the following day. On May 4, 1865 at Citronelle, Alabama, Confederate Lt. General Richard Taylor surrendered the Department of Alabama, Mississippi and East Louisiana. This included Higinbotham along with the remaining troops in Alabama. Higinbotham was paroled at Meridian, Mississippi on May 11th.

For membership information on the Confederate Stamp Alliance, email Trish Kaufmann at trishkauf@comcast.net or write to 10194 N. Old State Road, Lincoln, DE 19960. Online information is available at [www.csalliance.org](http://www.csalliance.org). ☒