

Northampton, Ms. Pretender—Massachusetts, not Mississippi

Patricia A. Kaufmann

Stamps canceled Northampton / Ms. seem to keep beating a path to my door. So far, all of them have been four-margin, 20-cent green George Washington issues (CSA Catalog #13).¹ And all of them are foolers. The good news is that I am an avid collector of Confederate fakes, forgeries and fantasies. I not only learn from them and use them as teaching tools, it also serves to get them off the market.

The CSA Authentication Service has dealt with this deceiving postmark more than once over the years and universally expressed the opinion that the stamps are genuine, but the postmarks were fraudulently added. Yet they have fooled experienced collectors and dealers and continue to do so.

One might expect this postmark to be listed in the Confederate fake book by Peter Powell and John Kimbrough, published in 2015.² But, while the stamp is Confederate, the postmark shows “Ms.” which does NOT stand for Mississippi.

“Ms.” is the abbreviation for Massachusetts and thus not covered by a volume devoted to Confederate fakes. If the authors had included every US postmark used to deceive Confederate collectors, from Giovanni (Jean) de Sperati alone they would have to have included the cancellations of Cincinnati / O., Detroit / Mi, Middlebury / Vt., and New York, which all appear on Confederate Sperati creations. Obviously, neither geography nor history were a Sperati strong suit. What precipitated this article was the appearance of such an item in a European collection of Confederates recently sent to me for evaluation. One four-margin CSA 20-cent green, tied on piece, had the unmistakable NORTHAMPTON / Ms. // AUG / 16 postmark. Every Northampton, Ms., cancel I’ve seen has had that same date. Huge red flag! (fig. 1).

Accompanying the European collection, there were numerous certificates. Some were from the CSA and the Philatelic Foundation, as well as opinion letters from luminaries such as Lawrence Shenfield, the first chairman of the CSA Authentication Committee. But it is not surprising that a number of certificates were of European origin. And most were decades old, some going back to the 1950s. A 1994 Georg Bühler certificate states that the aforementioned subject is genuine and in very fine condition. It also does not make mention of the all-important state designation of “Ms” (fig. 2).

Georg Bühler is a German auction house in Berlin, founded in 1949 and still actively running auctions. But their expertise is clearly not in Confederate States.



Figure 1. Genuine CSA 13 tied on piece by bogus NORTHAMPTON / Ms. AUG 16 postmark.

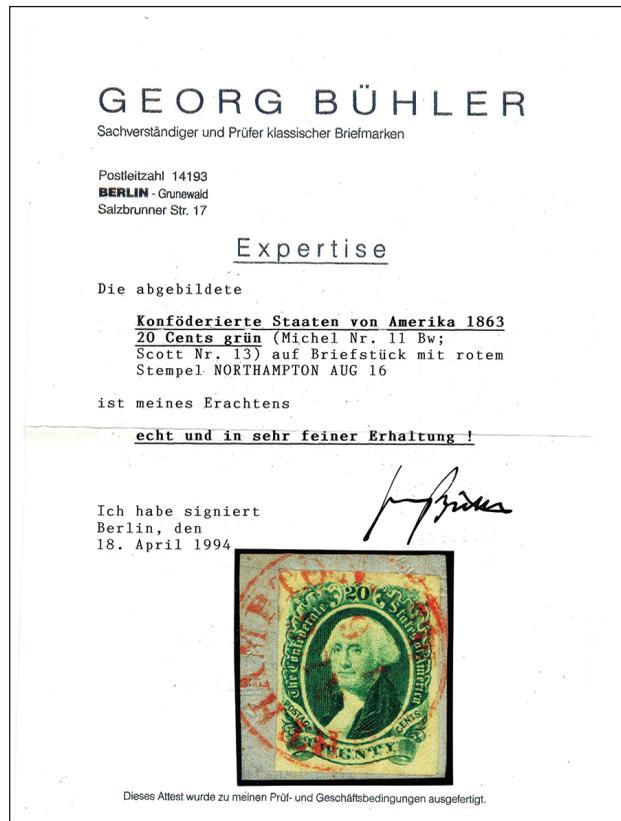


Figure 2. Georg Buhler 1994 certificate for the stamp shown in figure 1, opining it to genuine.

A veritable twin to the aforementioned stamp resides in my fake collection, still on the stock page with scribbled protests of a late well-known dealer in Confederates. On the page, said dealer objects to the two certifying agencies which both gave this item bad certificates in 2002. They were the CSA Authentication Committee (CSAAC, cert. #04143) and Professional Stamp Experts (cert. #82085).

I was the Recording Secretary of the CSAAC at the time and remember how incensed he was at that opinion. After his death, I obtained much of his reference collection, which contained numerous contested items such as this. For that matter, I have my own file of opinions with which I disagree. I suspect we all have those little accumulations, to a lesser or greater degree. It's part of what makes our hobby so interesting (figs. 3 and 4).

Note that the orientation of the somewhat blurry red strike in figure 2 is virtually identical to the one in the Buhler certificate. The dealer asserted this to be a cancellation from Morton, Miss. The abbreviation for towns in Mississippi during the Confederate period was generally MISS. Occasionally a town used "Mi." I know of none which are abbreviated "Ms." Overlays of Morton postmarks from the period did not match up with the cancellation in question. It was clearly not from Morton, Miss.



Figure 3. Genuine CSA 13 tied on piece by bogus NORTHAMPTON / Ms. AUG 16 postmark.

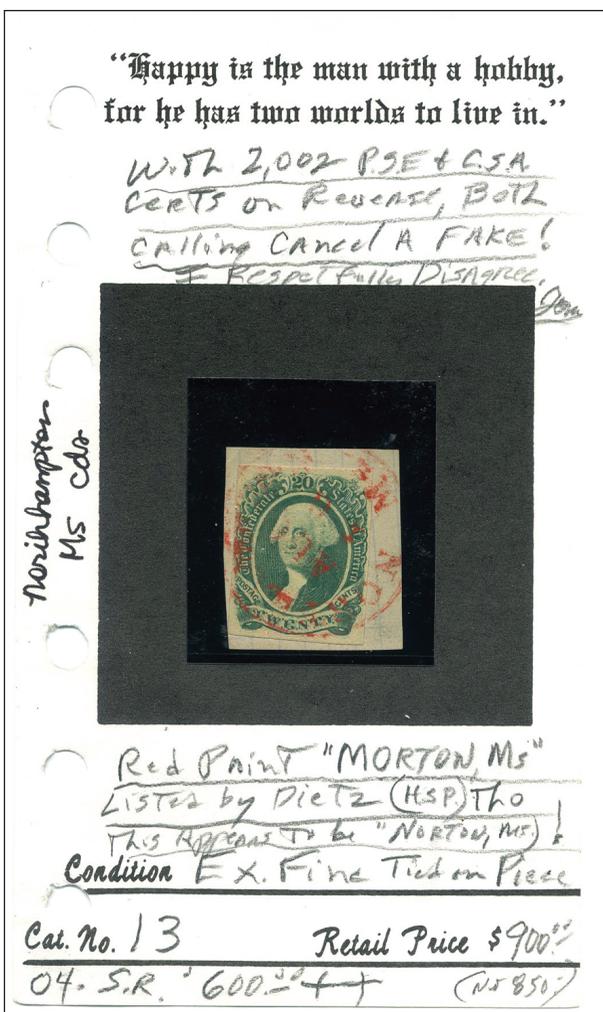


Figure 4. Genuine CSA tied on piece by bogus NORTHAMPTON Ms. AUG 16 postmark believed by submitter to be MORTON / Miss.

In a February 6, 2002, letter addressed to me as Recording Secretary, after receipt of the opinion that the cancel was fraudulent, he states:

The town is difficult to decipher even though it has sufficient clear letters. I am of the opinion that this pmk. is from “Morton, Ms.” even though the first letter appears to be a clear “N”, which could have been a mistake when that town cancel was made, by hand from cork . . . there is a possibility that this is “Norton, Ms.”, which is not listed in PL&R (Postal Laws and Regulations) or anyplace else I can find, but without further research, the fact it is not listed does not make it fraudulent. Also, I have yet to see a faker who uses an unknown postmark.

He went on and on and protested the determination, after which he sent it to PSE and received the same opinion by a different group of examiners. Of course, this is not an unknown postmark; it just isn’t a Confederate postmark.



Figure 5. CSA 13 canceled by bogus NORTHAMPTON / Ms. AUG postmark struck in black.

05585 21 February 2011

Authentication Service

We examined the enclosed item submitted by the applicant, which is pictured below and described as:

CSA Scott 13 (20¢ green) canceled by partial [F]ORT HAMP[TON] Alabama postmark.***

We are of the opinion that:

It is a GENUINE 20¢ green (CSA Scott 13) with a FRAUDULENT NORTHAMPTON / Ms. cancel. There are several minor thins in Washington's head.***

For the Authentication Service

Chairman

Submitted by: Patricia A. Kaufmann

Not valid without embossed seal

The validity of this certificate can be verified by contacting the Confederate Stamp Alliance Authentication Service.

Figure 6. CSAAS certificate for figure 5 submission as [F]ORT HAMP[TON] ALA postmark, but determined to be bogus NORTHAMPTON Ms.

Enter contender number three, this time with a black version of the same circle datestamp. It was submitted to the CSA Authentication Service (CSAAS) as [F]ORT HAMP[TON], ALA, which is how it was sold to me. I was the submitter and an opinion was rendered that it was a fraudulent Northampton, Ms. cancel, my "old friend." It also had a prior PSE 2001 as "no opinion" (figs. 5 and 6). On a personal level, having the advantage of three stamps in my possession at the same time, I also see evidence of mostly erased but typically characteristic European script on the verso.

At least one more CSA 13 with a Northampton, Ms., postmark was offered on eBay in 2011 as item 260731368005. It, too, has an AUG date.

The postal abbreviation for Massachusetts was Ms. Based on a brief search of the Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries website, circular datestamps similar to the one

used to cancel these Confederate issues are known from as early as the 1840s to at least through the Civil War period, as well as dates potentially before and after.

Key points in determining the fraudulent nature of these items:

- There was no town of Northampton in Mississippi, nor any other Confederate state.
- Ms. was the postal abbreviation for Massachusetts, not Confederate Mississippi.
- The subject postmarks of Northampton, Ms., are all dated AUG 16 or AUG with no day visible.
- All subject stamps thus recorded have been 20-cent green.
- The three Kaufmann-viewed subjects all appear to be of European origin, as determined from markings on the backs of the stamps.

A used 20-cent George Washington issue catalogs roughly ten times as much as an unused example. It is little wonder that it is a target for fakers. Consider yourself forewarned.

For recording purposes, I would be interested in hearing of any other examples you may encounter. You may contact me at trishkauf@comcast.net.

NOTES

1. Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown, Jr., Jerry S. Palazolo, eds., *Confederate States Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History* (n.p.: Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012). www.csalliance.org.
2. Peter W. W. Powell, John L. Kimbrough, MD, *Confederate States of America Philatelic Fakes, Forgeries, and Fantasies of the 19th and 20th Centuries* (self-published, 2015).