



The Confederate Post

By Patricia A. Kaufmann



Confederate Mail to a Centuries Old French Winery



Figure 1. Confederate use of strip of three of 5¢ brown (Scott US 30A) tied by New Orleans / La // 16 Mar [1861] circular datestamp on folded letter to Monsieur H. Séguineau de Lognac, Château de Portets, Gironde, France.

The folded letter shown in Figure 1 bears a strip of three of the 5¢ brown (Scott US 30A) tied by a March 16 [1861] circular datestamp of Confederate New Orleans, Louisiana, during the period of Confederate use of U.S. stamps before the Confederacy was able to take over their own postal affairs on June 1, 1861. The inside of the folded letter, which is written in French, is shown in Figure 2. The sender's embossed company name appears at the upper left of the lettersheet.

The cover is addressed to Monsieur H. Séguineau de Lognac, Château de Portets, Gironde, France, from F. de Fuentes & Co. in New Orleans. It bears New York and French transit markings, as well as a blue Fuentes double oval business handstamp at lower left. Fuentes & Co. were importers and commission merchants.

Van Dyk MacBride authored an article in *The American Philatelist* decades ago in which this cover was illustrated and the philatelic aspect of it discussed. What attracted me, however, was the fact that it was addressed to what is still today a major French winery with a centuries-old history that can trace its winemaking origins to roughly 2,000 years ago.

Its rich soil composition and geographical location made Portets the birthplace for the Grand Wines of Bordeaux. Portets is the old-

est vineyard of the appellation. The Romans, after conquering the area, wanted to reap its potential and thus decided to plant vines brought directly from Italy. Portets was the first location chosen for the initial trials. The Roman author Pliny the Elder, in his work *Naturalis Historia*, tells us that the Graves wine was well regarded by the Gallo-Romans for its quality. Portets wines have been praised throughout history by kings, popes, parliamentarians and philosophers. All understood that from this particular terroir came an exceptional wine. A terroir is the natural environment in which a particular wine is produced, including factors such as the soil, topography and climate. Today, Portets represents this viticultural community with 900 hectares (2,224 acres), which constitutes one-third of the AOC (appellation d'origine contrôlée) Graves.

Château de Portets is an elegant building that still today borders a courtyard with stunning views of vineyards and river. The château is shown in Figure 3 and a bottle of their fine wine in Figure 4. In the 13th century, the property belonged to the barons of Montferrand Gascq and then to the family Séguineau Lognac, the addressee of the subject letter.

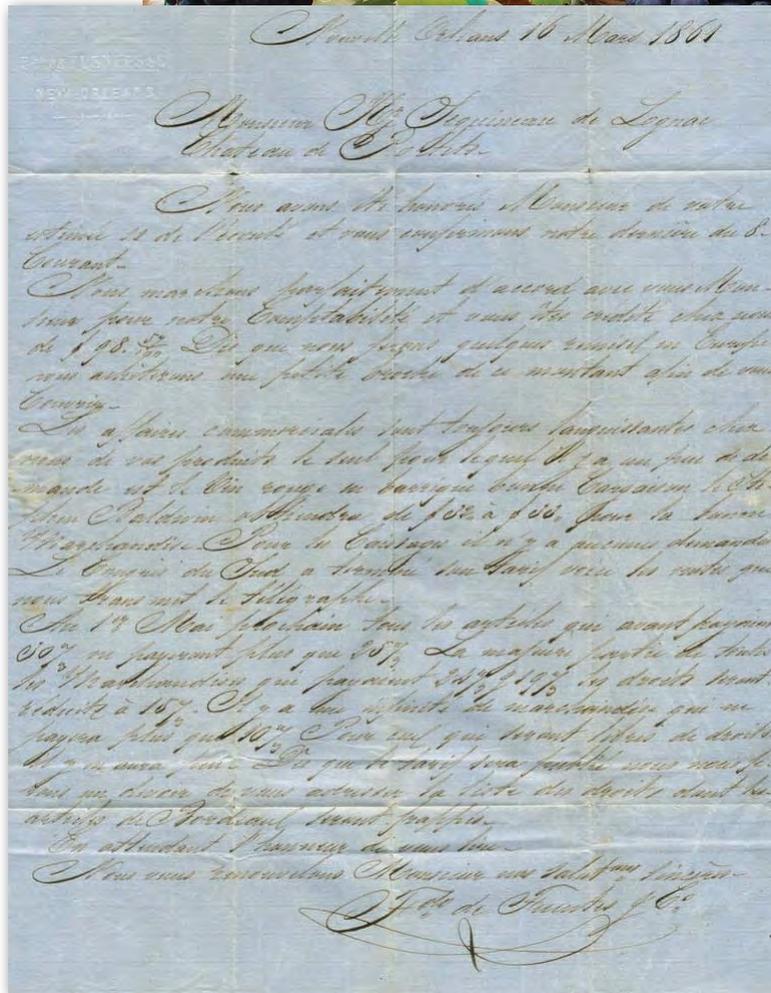
Portets is an important town in the south of Bordeaux in the Graves; home to forty wineries in the area. It owes its name to its



Figure 3. Château de Portets as it appears today, courtesy Château de Portets.



Figure 2. Inside of the folded letter, written in French, to Monsieur H. Séguineau de Lognac.



location “port of the East,” downstream from Bordeaux on the Garonne River. It was frequented by barges of old, which transported barrels to the quay of Chartrons. Until the 16th century, the successive barons of Portets exercised their rights to the land of Château de Portets, a fortified castle. In 1587, the Château de Portets belonged to Guillaume of Gascq, the Baron of Portets. His family would remain head of this lordship for the next two centuries. The last living representative of this ancient family would cede their property to Valdec of Lessart just before his death in 1781. Valdec of Lessart then sold the property four years later to the Séguineau of Lognac family. The latter would remain the owner of the chateau until the end of the 19th century.

The story of the chateau and current owners began in 1956 when Jules Théron acquired the property. He was an agronomy engineer, as well as the President of the General Advice Board for the Oran area of Algeria. The buildings of the chateau were in a dreadful state of disrepair, having been abandoned after their occupation by the Germans in World War II. With the help of his

son Jean-Pierre, an agronomy engineer as well as oenologist, Jules Théron invested considerable time and energy to restore the dilapidated chateau to its former splendor. Agronomy is the science and technology of producing and using plants for food, fuel and land reclamation. An oenologist is to winemaking what a philatelist is to the study of postage stamps.

Today Marie-Hélène Yung-Théron, the granddaughter of Jules Théron, continues the tradition of stewardship that started with Séguineau de Lognac, which was renewed by Jules Théron. The chateau and its surrounding vines magnificently dominate the river banks of the Garonne.

Information about the Confederate Stamp Alliance (CSA) or a membership application may be obtained from the author at trishkauf@comcast.net or 10194 N. Old State Road, Lincoln DE 19960. The CSA is devoted to the study and dissemination of information about the stamps and postal history of the Confederate States. ✉

Primary source: www.chateaudoportets.fr/en/