

The *Fascination* with Confederate Postal History

Patricia A. Kaufmann

A SPECIAL ARTICLE BY ONE OF THE
MOST HONORED AND WORLD-RECOGNIZED
SPECIALISTS IN CONFEDERATE PHILATELY.

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Do you love United States postal history? Or do you just love American history in general? What could be a more American topic than the story of the great conflict that ripped apart our country in the 1860s? In future editions of **Kelleher's Collectors Connection**, I will bring you examples from this fascinating and challenging area of collecting.

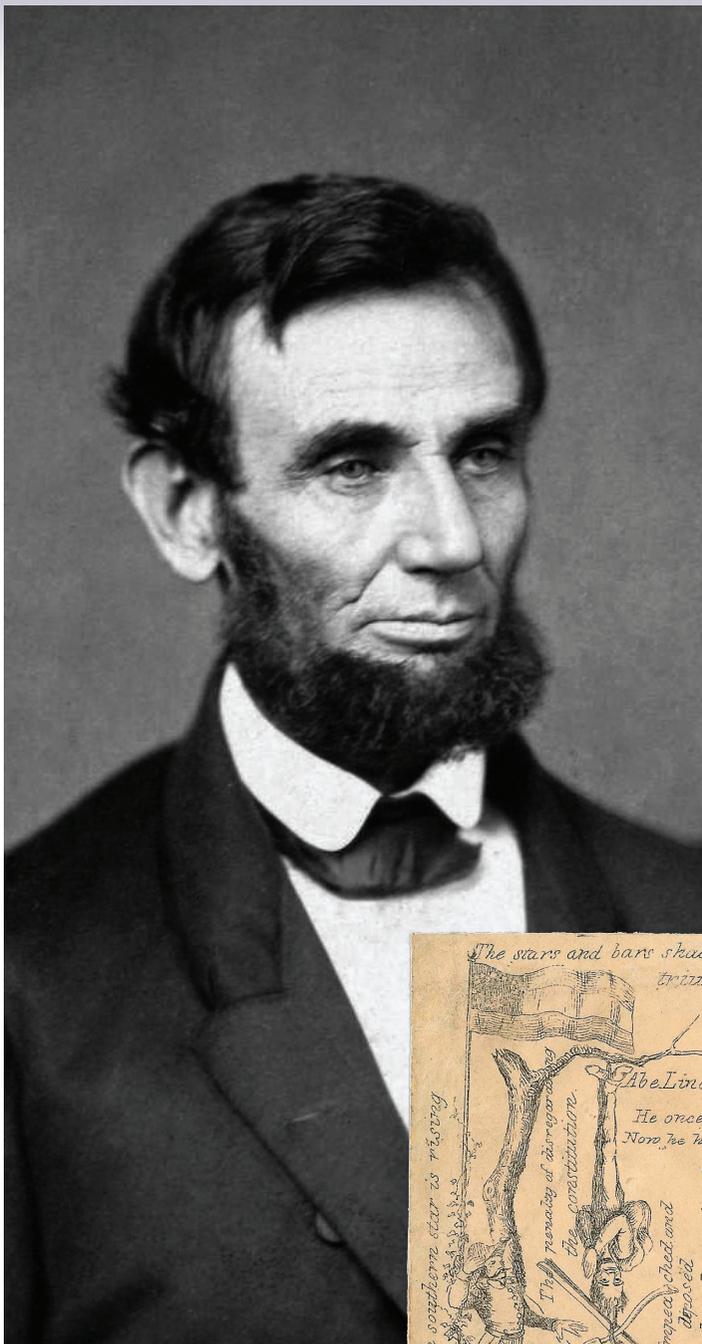
The Civil War has appropriately been called the War of Brother against Brother. Indeed, my research and dealings over the past five decades have easily borne that out in the covers and letters I have handled as both a collector and a dealer. There were countless families who had friends and family members on both sides of the struggle; they continued to correspond during the war by Flag of Truce mail. Much of the postal history that is considered "Confederate" is also very much "Union." Some examples are civilian flag of truce mail, prisoner of war mail, blockade-run mail, express company mail, smuggled mail and prize court mail. Such mail traversed the borders in the mail systems of both North and South.

Union President Abraham Lincoln (Next page—Figure 1) and his wife Mary Todd Lincoln had strong ties to the South. Lincoln was born

in Kentucky and Mary Todd was born into a wealthy slave-holding family in Lexington, Kentucky. Confederate President Jefferson Davis (At Left—Figure 2) was also born in Kentucky. He graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and fought in the Mexican and Indian Wars. He served as U.S. representative and Senator from Mississippi before the Civil War, as well as U.S. Secretary of State under Franklin Pierce. Davis' wife, Varina Howell, was a native of Natchez who had been educated in Philadelphia and had family ties in the North.

No matter what your philatelic interests, you will likely find it represented within the period of operation of the Confederate States postal system, as well as many more unique situations caused by the war. It was a postal system that started from scratch along with the creation of the Confederate States of America, although many rules and regulations from the prior United States Post Office Department were enacted by default if no specific change was made by the Confederate Post Office Department.

During the Confederate period, there are stampless covers, postmasters' provisionals, general issues, essays and proofs, imprints – official, semi-official and state, army camp markings, Indian Nations,



The first photograph taken of President Abraham Lincoln with his new beard—showing him as virtually youthful. At right, one of the rare, famous “Hanging Lincoln” patriotic covers that circulated in the Confederacy early in the war.

army camp markings, colorful patriotic covers, advertising covers, college covers, Way mail, railroad markings, inland waterway mail, carrier services, private express mail and so much more that is more directly caused by the war.

The first collectible section of the war is Independent State Use, from the time a state seceded until the time it joined the Confederacy. The date traditionally accepted in both philatelic and academic circles as the founding date of the Confederate States of America is February 4, 1861. The process began with South Carolina’s secession on December 20, 1860, and proceeded step-by-step through February 8 when the assembly of delegates from the seceded states approved a Provisional Constitution. Beginning on February 4, 1861, and continuing through March 11, 1861, the founding delegates—among other matters—adopted a Provisional Constitution, elected a provisional President and Vice President, created a Post Office Department, confirmed John H. Reagan as the Postmaster General, and adopted a Permanent Constitution.

In 1860, there was no precedent in US history or jurisprudence to guide a state if it wanted to secede from the Union. Consequently, each state and territory which eventually comprised the Confederacy created its own procedures to bring about secession from the United States and to effectuate its application for admission into the CSA. Beyond these legislative steps, the states moved in uncharted waters. Because the process of secession was novel and often fueled by political and emotional catalysts, not all states adhered to their own legally mandated prerequisites to achieve secession. Some states strictly followed their own procedures; some states skipped one or more prescribed steps; and, some states followed the required steps, but not in the stated order. In



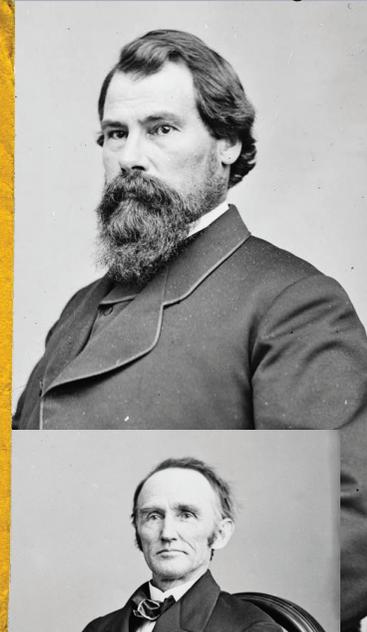


Figure 6.

Figure 4.

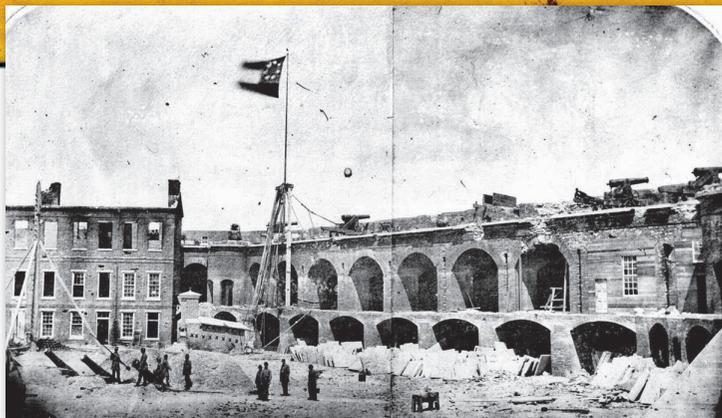
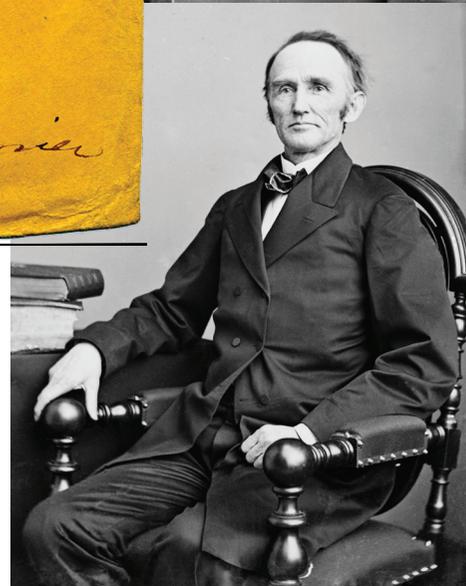


Figure 3.



the end, however, each state concluded that it had sufficiently complied with its own legal requirements to achieve secession.

In order to ascertain the actual dates of secession and admission for each state, the editors of the 2012 *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History* re-examined the secession and admission processes of each state compared to prior editions of the *Dietz Catalog* where dates of secession inexplicably changed from volume to volume over the decades and the same criteria was not used across all states.

The Confederate States Post Office Department [CSPOD] evolved from laws, regulations, practices and procedures, bookkeeping and accounting systems, and official forms that had existed and been used by the United States Post Office Department [USPOD] prior to the creation of the Confederacy. Until June 1, 1861, when the CSPOD took control of its own postal operations, the USPOD provided postal services in the seceded states and, thereafter, the Confederate States. In doing so, US Postmaster General Montgomery Blair (Figure 3) imposed

a specific condition on approximately 1,200 postmasters in the seceded states.

The postmasters were specifically required to agree, in writing, to be personally responsible for all stamps and stamped envelopes shipped to them. As a consequence, some Southern postmasters were reluctant to order new United States stamps and consequently prepared their own local adhesive stamps or handstamped envelopes that we refer to as postmasters' provisionals.

In the midst of the transition period from the secession of South Carolina to the date that the CSPOD took over its own affairs, the first shots of the war were fired at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, on April 12, 1861 (Figure 4). Yet still the USPOD provided services within Southern states and Southern postmasters remitted appropriate monies to Washington.

On May 13, 1861, Confederate States Postmaster General John H. Reagan (Figure 5) issued a proclamation announcing that on June 1, 1861, the CS Post Office Department would take over all postal opera-



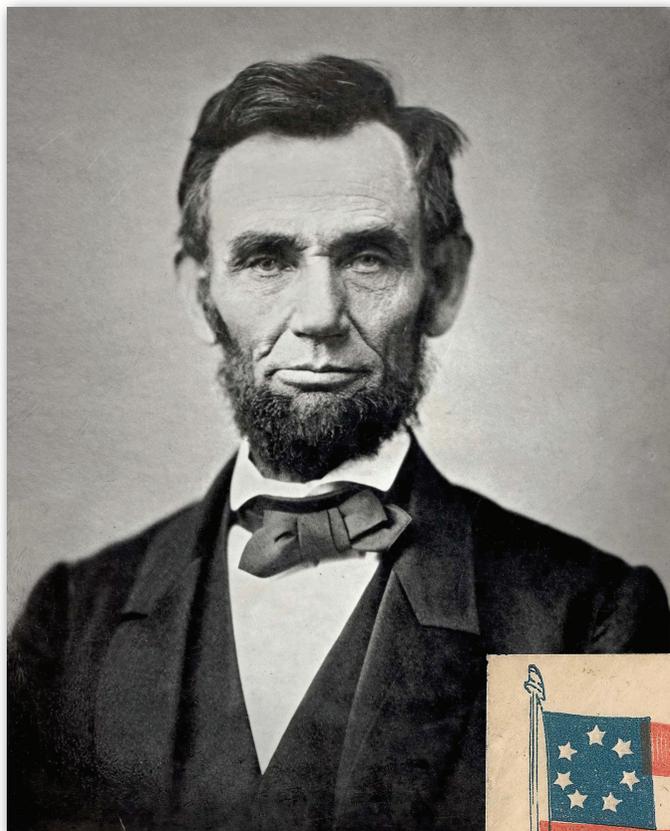
tions in the Confederate States. He requested all postmasters remain in their positions and report their names and the name of their office to Richmond so new commissions could be issued. He also urged all postmasters to settle their financial accounts with Washington. The USPOD continued services in the seceded states and the Confederacy until May 31, 1861.

Many aspects of Confederate postal history are very challenging. For example, the cover in Figure 6 is an Independent State Use, yet it is dated June 20, 1861, after the Confederacy took over its own postal affairs. You may initially wonder why, but history tells the tale. Although the Tennessee legislature passed the Ordinance of Secession on May 6, 1861, it required a popular referendum, which did not occur until June

8, 1861. Thus Tennessee presents an unusual circumstance.

The cover illustrated in Figure 7 is a bona fide first day cover. It is postmarked February 4 [1861] on a 3¢ star-die entire. We know that it was used in 1861 because it is literally the only date it could have been used. These US postal envelopes were not issued until August 1860 and in August 1861, they were demonetized – a process by which the stamps and postal stationery were rendered invalid. Done to prevent their use by postmasters and postal patrons within the Confederate States.

In May 1861, US PMG Blair ordered all postmasters to return their inventories of old stamps to Washington and any letters received from the secessionist states, utilizing old stamps, were to be treated as unpaid and held for payment of postage.



An older Abraham Lincoln in a photograph taken by Matthew Brady in the final year of his presidency. Note how he has aged since the photograph on page 28 was taken in 1861.



An extremely rare example of the Nashville, Tenn. 5-cent postmaster's provisional stamp on a 7-star patriotic cover—a form of cover highly sought after by CSA specialists for its quality as an exhibition item. Image courtesy Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries.



Beginning in August 1861, the redesigned US postage stamps were issued. Figure 8 shows the U.S. 1861 3¢ rose stamp that is most commonly seen on Civil War correspondence in the North.

The cover shown in Figure 9 immediately captures the attention of knowledgeable Confederate postal historians for several reasons. The initial reason is that it was postmarked New Orleans, Louisiana, on June 1 [1861] and thus represents the First Day of the Confederate postal system, a coveted date for the exhibitor. However, it also immediately evokes questions. The cover is franked with a US 3¢ 1857 stamp. This was the first day of the Confederate postal system and should properly have received a 10¢ Confederate rated postal marking or even a 5¢ marking, although it was overweight and thus 5¢ would

have represented an underpaid use.

Effective June 1, 1861, the new postal rate in the Confederate States was 5¢ per half-ounce under 500 miles and 10¢ over 500 miles. US stamps and envelopes became invalid in the Confederacy on June 1. The New Orleans cover in Figure 9 represents a use that escaped the new Confederate postage rate.

Thus, from the very beginning, there are two uncommon types of mail within what is defined as Confederate postal history: Independent State Use and Confederate Use of US Postage. This is a challenging and fascinating area to collect. If you pay attention to the dates of secession and admission into the Confederacy, it makes for tantalizing potential "finds" in that dealer stock of 1860-1861 US covers.

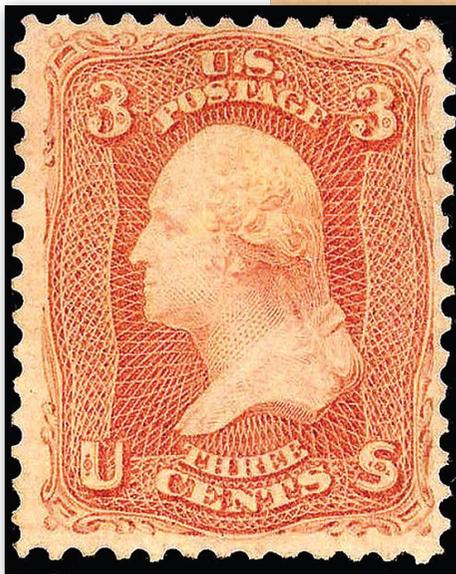
Figure 7.



Figure 9.



Figure 8.



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