

## Mail Handling During the Prelude to the American Civil War December 20, 1860 – June 1, 1861

**Purpose:** To illustrate how mail was handled during the prelude to the American Civil War, specifically from the secession of South Carolina on December 20, 1860 to the establishment of the Confederate postal system on June 1, 1861.

**Background:** South Carolina seceded from the Union December 20, 1860. Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Mississippi quickly followed. These six Independent States created the Confederate States of America (CSA) February 4, 1861. The CSA formed its own Post Office Department (POD) February 21. John H. Reagan was appointed CSA Postmaster General March 6. The Union continued to operate the postal services within these Independent and later Confederate States in the belief that the South would rejoin the Union. However, growing conflict led the USA to formally suspend its postal operations in the CSA effective May 31. The CSA initiated its own postal system June 1.

Scope and Organization:	Pages	Content
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**Rarity:** Surviving covers from this period are uncommon and often in poor condition due to the harsh wartime conditions that ensued after June 1, 1861. The covers exhibited here are among the finest examples extant that illustrate mail handling during this period.

**Keys:** **Red border:** Important / rare cover. **Blue border:** Newly recorded item. **Cert:** Certificate from PF, CSA.

### South Carolina Voted Unanimously to Secede from the Union December 20, 1860



December 20, 1860 Charleston, SC to Huntsville, AL, paid with USA Star Die entire.  
The USA POD continued to operate South Carolina's postal service despite its declaration of independence.

## Post-Secession Use of the USA Postal System Independent State Use

Pre - June 1, 1861

USA Postmaster General Blair continued the services of the USA POD in the seceded Independent States and in the Confederate States until May 31, 1861. This was intended to entice the seceded states to rejoin the Union by showing good will and also to protect Northern businesses owed money by Southern customers.

Independent Statehood ran from the date the state seceded through the day before it joined the CSA.



Cert

April 28, 1861 Richmond, VA to Prospect, VA.

Confederate 7-Star Flag patriotic envelope franked with USA 1857 issue 3 cent adhesive.

Virginia seceded from the Union April 17, 1861 and joined the CSA May 7, 1861.

**Listing example for this Confederate 7-Star Flag patriotic design in the 2012 CSA Catalog.**



January 21, 1861 Savannah, GA to Marion, AL.

"Free Trade" propaganda slogan patriotic envelope franked with three 1857 issue USA 1 cent adhesives.

Georgia seceded from the Union January 19, 1861 and joined the CSA February 4, 1861.

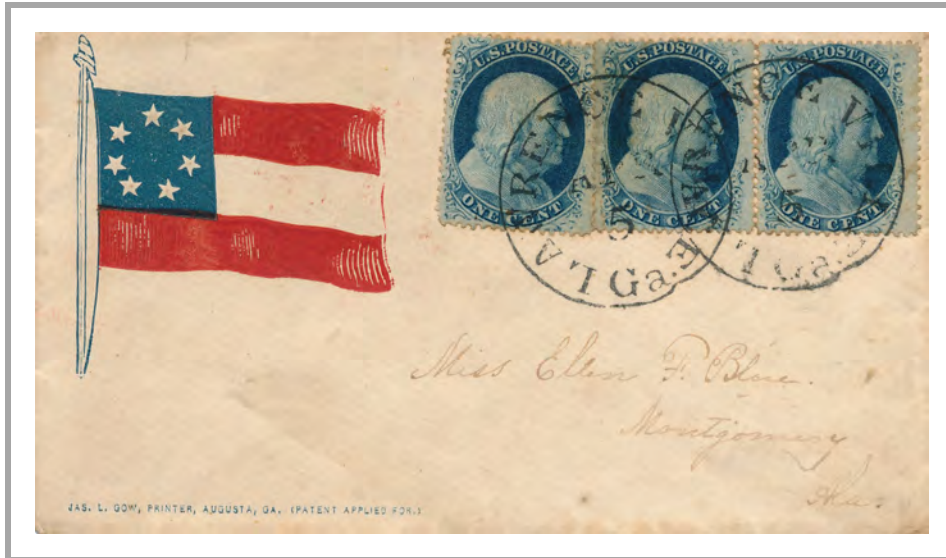
**Georgia was an Independent State for only 16 days.**

## Post-Secession Use of the USA Postal System Confederate Use

Pre - June 1, 1861

The Confederate period commenced the date the seceded state joined the CSA through May 31, 1861.

### Georgia Joined the CSA February 4, 1861



April 5 (1861) Lawrence Ville, GA to Montgomery, AL Confederate 7-Star Flag patriotic envelope franked with three USA 1857 issue 1 cent stamps.

**Very early Confederate patriotic envelope, prior to the fall of Fort Sumter April 12, 1861.**

### Louisiana Joined the CSA February 4, 1861

April 20, 1861  
Shreveport, LA to New Orleans, LA franked with USA 1857 issue 3 cent stamp and carried by the Steamer Grand Duke.

**The Steamer Grand Duke was later outfitted as a gunboat and used to transport Confederate troops.**





**Post-Secession Use of the USA Postal System  
Confederate Use**

**Pre - June 1, 1861**

**Alabama Joined the CSA February 4, 1861**



“Confederate States of America Post Office Department” imprint envelope posted March 26 (1861)  
Montgomery, AL to Galveston, TX franked with USA 1857 issue 3 cent adhesive.  
Period pencil docketing indicates the contents were from CSA Postmaster General John H. Reagan.

**Earliest recorded use of a CSA Post Office Department imprint envelope.**

**South Carolina Joined the CSA February 4, 1861**

May 11, 1861  
Charleston, SC to  
London, England.  
USA 1860 issue 24  
cent adhesive paying  
the British mail rate.

This letter slipped  
through the USA  
naval blockade of  
Charleston Harbor  
initiated  
May 10, 1861.



### Registered Mail

The CSA Post Office Department did not provide for registered mail services. The only Confederate registered letters are those transmitted using the USA postal system prior to June 1, 1861.



March 23 (1861) Early Grove, MS registered letter to Jackson, MS franked with USA 1857 issue 3 cent stamp,  
"Registry fee 5 cts" paid in money.

**One of only 2 recorded Confederate registered covers; both used the USA Postal System.**



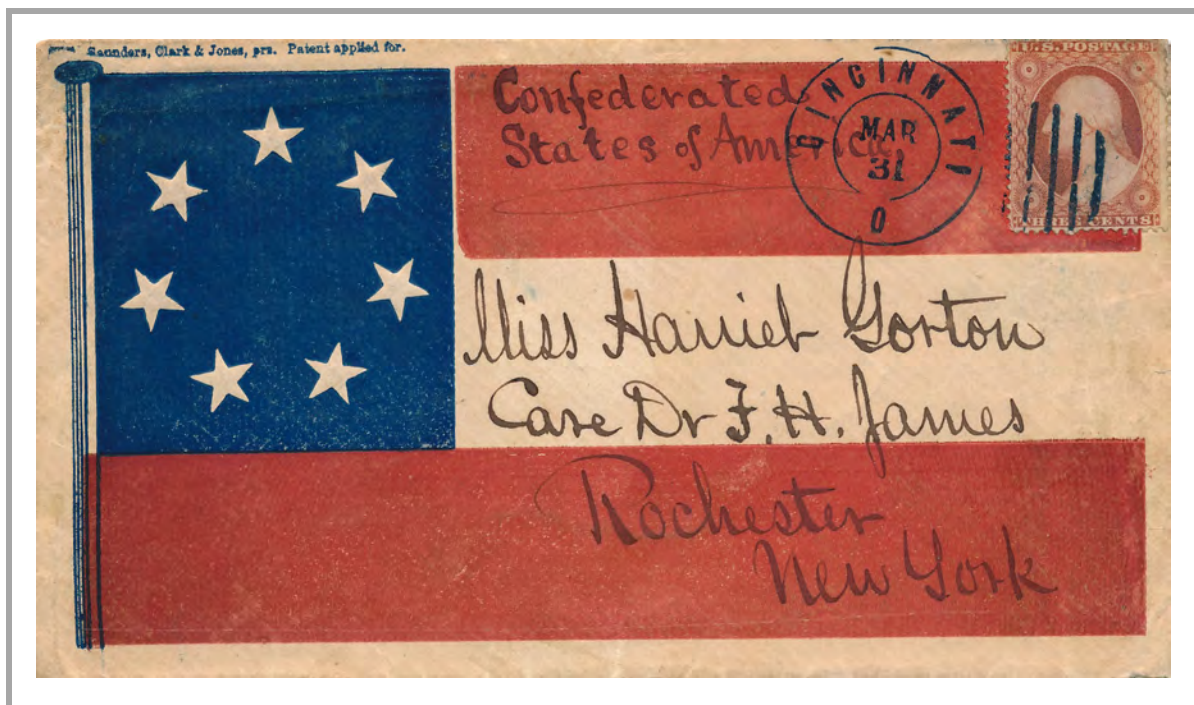
## Patriotic Fervor

Patriotic fervor swept through the country following Southern secession and creation of the CSA. The artful illustrated envelope developed in the North spread to the design of pro-Union and pro-Confederate patriotic envelopes. Initially, Northern printers even printed envelopes bearing the Confederate flag for sale in the CSA.

### Southern Sympathizers in the North Used Pro-Confederate Envelopes to Express Their Emotions

Confederate 7-Star Flag  
patriotic envelope  
May 21 (1861)  
Kansas, MO  
(border state)  
to Philadelphia, PA.

Cert

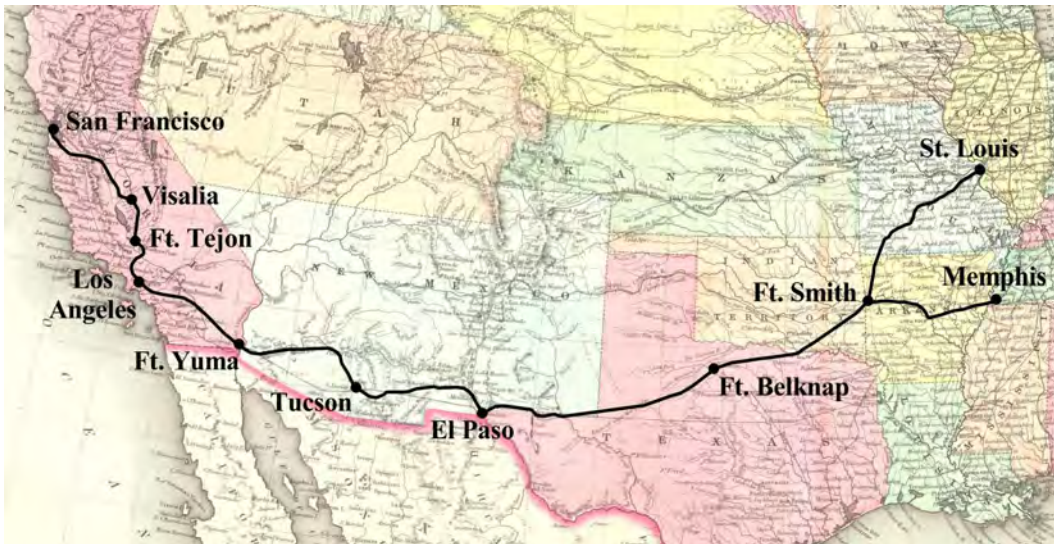


Confederate 7-Star Flag patriotic envelope with "Saunders, Clark & Jones, prs." imprint. Notation "*Confederated States of America*", March 31 (1861) Cincinnati, OH to Rochester, NY.

**A very early pro-Confederate patriotic envelope, posted 12 days before Fort Sumter fell.**

## Butterfield (Southern) Overland Contract Route

The Butterfield (Southern) route running from St. Louis or Memphis to San Francisco via Arkansas, Texas and Arizona was contracted by the POD to serve as the principal overland mail route beginning September 15, 1858. However, Texas seceded from the Union February 1, 1861. USA Army forts in Texas, through which the Butterfield route passed, surrendered to the CSA February 18. Confederate sympathizers began confiscating Butterfield's horses and equipment from the Texas stations. On March 2, the USA Congress approved a Post Office Appropriations bill discontinuing the Butterfield route mail service. USA Postmaster General Blair awarded the mail contract to the Overland Mail Company March 12, moving mail service to the Central Overland Route. Butterfield's horses and equipment were transferred north for the Central Overland Route.



The Butterfield (Southern) overland mail route bifurcated at Fort Smith into dual eastern termini at St. Louis, MO and Memphis, TN.

Walske & Frajola:  
“Westward Expansion”



Cert

Hand painted Four Horse Stage illustrated railroad propaganda envelope directing carriage “OVERLAND--via--LOS ANGELES” by the Butterfield Route February 28, 1861 Benicia, CA to Neponset, MA.

**The latest reported cover carried over the complete Butterfield Route.**



## Central Overland Route

## The Pony Express

The Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company initiated the Pony Express April 3, 1860 to demonstrate the superiority of the much shorter Central Route, hoping to acquire a lucrative government mail contract. It began operating jointly with the Overland Mail Company April 15, 1861. When the Butterfield (Southern) route was abandoned because of Southern secessions Blair contracted with the Overland Mail Company March 12, 1861 to carry mail over the Central Overland Route, from St. Joseph, MO to Placerville, CA effective July 1, 1861. At that point the Pony Express became a government mandated premium postal service operated by the Overland Mail Company in conjunction with their daily mail service. The Pony Express was terminated October 26, 1861, two days after the Overland Telegraph line was completed.



The Central Overland Route is outlined in blue and red and the Butterfield (Southern) Route in green.

Walske & Frajola:  
"Westward Expansion"

## West to East



Cert

Sent eastbound June 19 (1861) from San Francisco "Per Pony Express". The express fee was paid with a \$2 Pony Express stamp, and placed in the USA mail in St. Joseph, MO, postmarked July 2 (1861), the 10 cent Star Die entire paying the "Over the Rockies" rate, for delivery to New York City.



## East to West



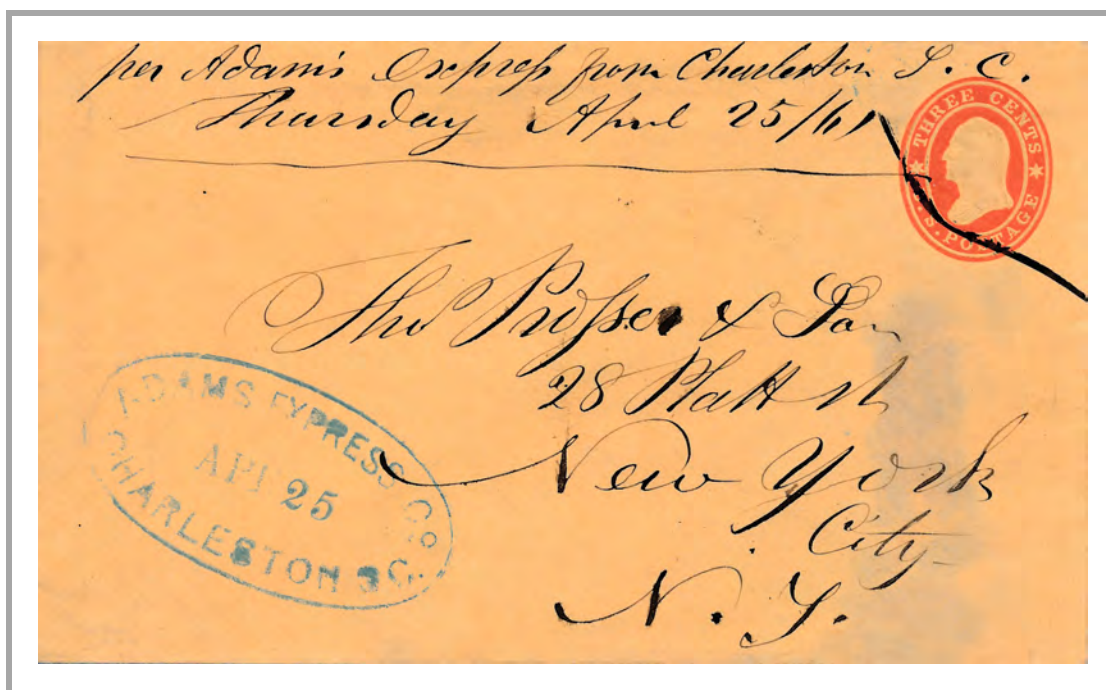
Cert

Carried privately by American Express (Money Package label on the back flap) from St. Louis, MO to St. Joseph, MO where it was date stamped by the Pony Express agent September 5 (1861), the \$1 per ½ ounce express fee paid in cash, the obligatory USA 10 cents postage paid with USA adhesives, and carried westbound by the Pony Express for delivery to San Francisco, CA.

**The unique Pony Express cover bearing an American Express money package label and 1861 issue 1 cent and 3 cent adhesives paying the obligatory government 10 cents postage.**

## Precursor Private Express Company Across-the-Lines Mail

The Adams Express Company anticipated the disruption of government mail service between the North and South following South Carolina's secession on December 20, 1860. They increased their letter carriage in early 1861 and escalated it when Lincoln announced the Federal blockade of Southern ports April 19, 1861.



April 25, 1861 cover carried northbound outside the mails "per Adam's Express from Charleston S.C., Thursday April 25/61" to New York City, likely by rail because of the Southern blockade.



May 17, 1861 cover carried northbound from Charleston, SC outside the mails by Adams Express to New York City where hand stamped "NEW YORK, PAID, CITY DELIVERY 1ct. MAY 23" for carrier delivery.

**The only known combination of the Adams Charleston office and New York City carrier date stamps.**



## Suspension of Government Mail Service Across-the-Lines

USA Suspension of Southbound Mail via Washington, D.C. - Richmond Post - May 23, 1861

Federal troops occupied Alexandria, VA May 23, 1861, resulting in closure of the Washington, DC-Richmond, VA postal route. On May 24 USA Postmaster General Blair ordered the discontinuation of USA mail to Richmond and the diversion of all letters addressed to the seceded states to the USA Dead Letter Office (DLO) in Washington, D.C. Blair suspended all USA postal operations in the CSA effective May 31, 1861.



Cert

May 28, 1861 carrier usage from New York City to Virginia diverted to the USA DLO. Returned to the sender (address written on the left) June 4, 1861 hand stamped "DUE 3 cts" for return postage due.



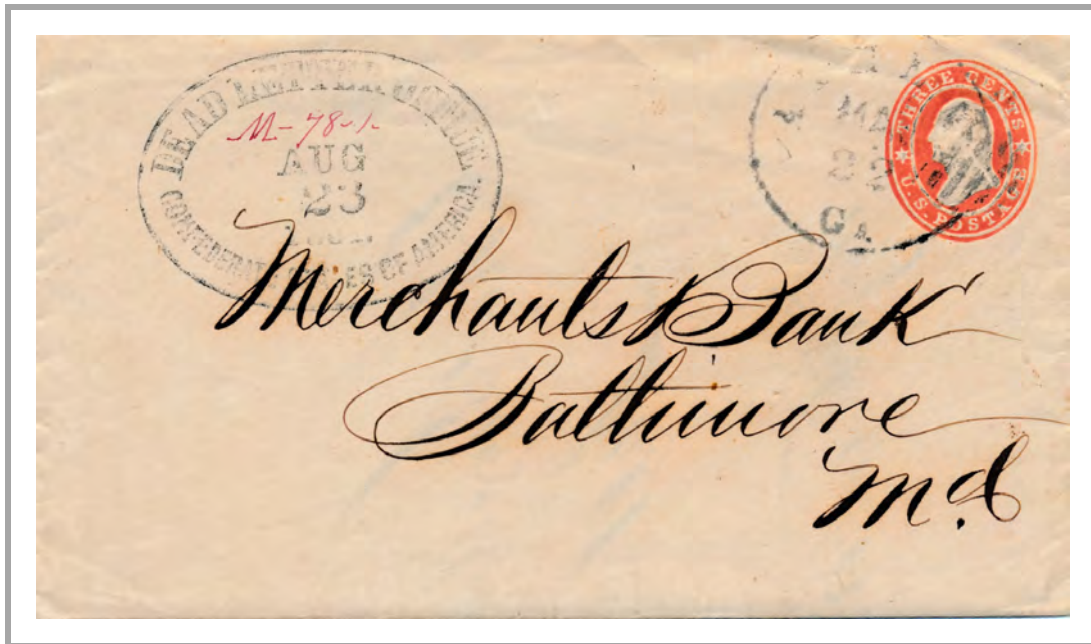
May 22, 1861 Charing Cross, England to Richmond, VA, arriving in New York after the Washington, D.C.-Richmond postal route was closed. Received debit and date handstamps and then returned to England, where hand stamped "SENT BACK TO ENGLAND WITHOUT A REASON FOR NON-DELIVERY".

Docketing "Recd. Feb. 19, 1862" suggests this letter was subsequently sent by a blockade runner.

**Suspension of Government Mail Service Across-the-Lines**  
**Suspension of Northbound Mail via Richmond-Washington, D.C.**

**May 24 - May 31, 1861**

CSA mail northbound to the USA was diverted to the CSA Dead Letter Office (DLO) in Richmond, VA beginning May 24, 1861 and continuing up until June 1, 1861, when the CSA postal system was established. Northbound mail was sent via the Nashville, TN-Louisville, KY route after June 1.



May 22 (1861) Athens, GA northbound but diverted to the CSA DLO, which applied the magenta record keeping notation "M-78-1". Released from the DLO and returned to the sender August 23, 1861.



May 21 (1861) Newberry C.H., SC northbound but diverted to the CSA DLO which applied the red record keeping notation "B-97-1". Released from the DLO and returned to the sender August 17, 1861.

**These CSA handstamp and manuscript DLO markings were used concurrently  
between May 24 and May 31, 1861.**

**Fewer than a total of 10 handstamp and manuscript examples are recorded.**

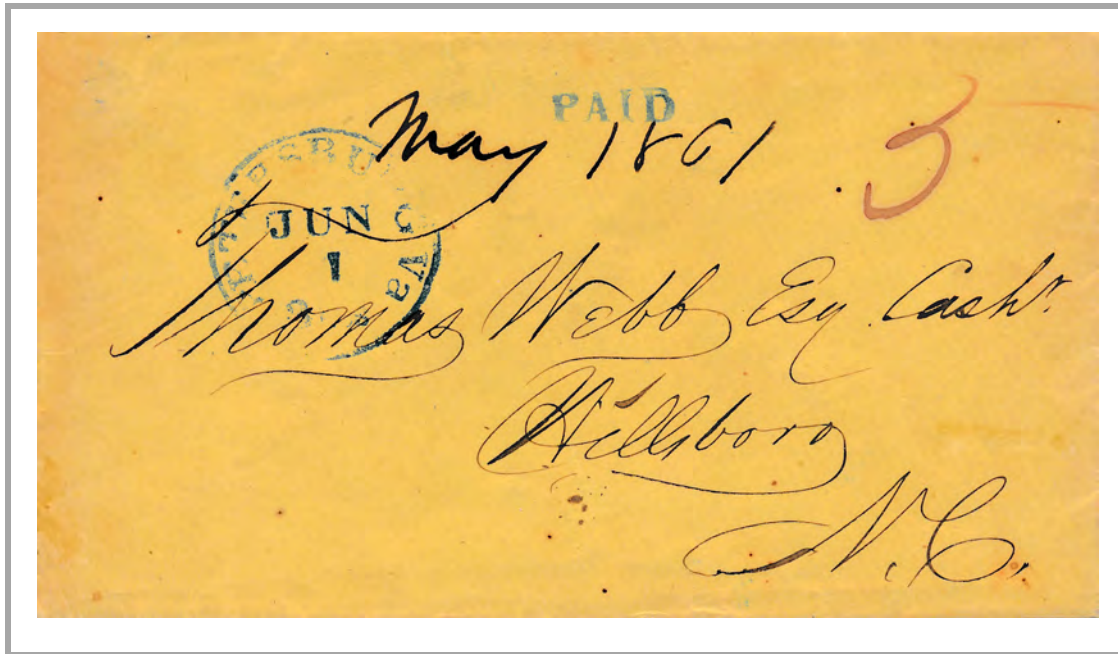


**Establishment of the CSA Postal System  
First Day of the CSA Postal System**

**June 1, 1861**

The CSA initiated its own Postal System June 1, 1861. USA stamps and postal stationery were no longer valid.

CSA Postal Rates: 5 cents per ½ oz. for regular letters traveling less than 500 miles  
10 cents per ½ oz. for regular letters traveling more than 500 miles  
2 cents for drop letters (no weight restrictions)



June 1, 1861 Petersburg, VA to Hillsboro, NC.

Pre-Civil War USA integral 3 cent rate CDS and matching PAID handstamp used in conjunction with manuscript "5" to indicate CSA 5 cents postage paid. Docketed "May 1861".



**Cert**

June 1 (1861) Griffin, GA to Limestone Springs, SC, 5 cents CSA regular letter postage prepaid.

The address "Republic of South Carolina, Confederate States of America" and the lack of a CSA adhesive to pay the postage establishes the year as 1861.

## Establishment of the CSA Postal System Postmasters' Provisionals

June 1, 1861

Sporadic shortages of stamps began to occur in some Southern post offices following secession. In addition, Confederate stamps were not yet available when USA stamps and postal stationery became invalid in the CSA June 1, 1861. In response, some Southern postmasters revived the use of pre-stamp era handstamps to indicate postage paid or due. Other postmasters began to issue provisionals: hand stamped envelopes with control marks or postmaster signatures prepared in advance of sale, press-printed envelopes and adhesives, all of which could be sold to postal patrons in advance of mailing to facilitate payment of postage. More than 90 Confederate postmasters prepared provisionals. Most postmasters' provisionals were used until CSA POD-issued adhesives became available in October 1861 but some were created or used later in the war. Postmasters' provisionals were considered acceptable to pay postage only when mailed from their town of origin. Their use was to cease when CSA POD-issued stamps became available.



Savannah, GA pre-Civil War hand stamped "PAID" and "10", accompanied by a rosette control mark, which indicates provisional status.

Postmarked the first day of the Confederate postal service, June 1, 1861.

**The earliest recorded example of a Confederate postmaster provisional use.**

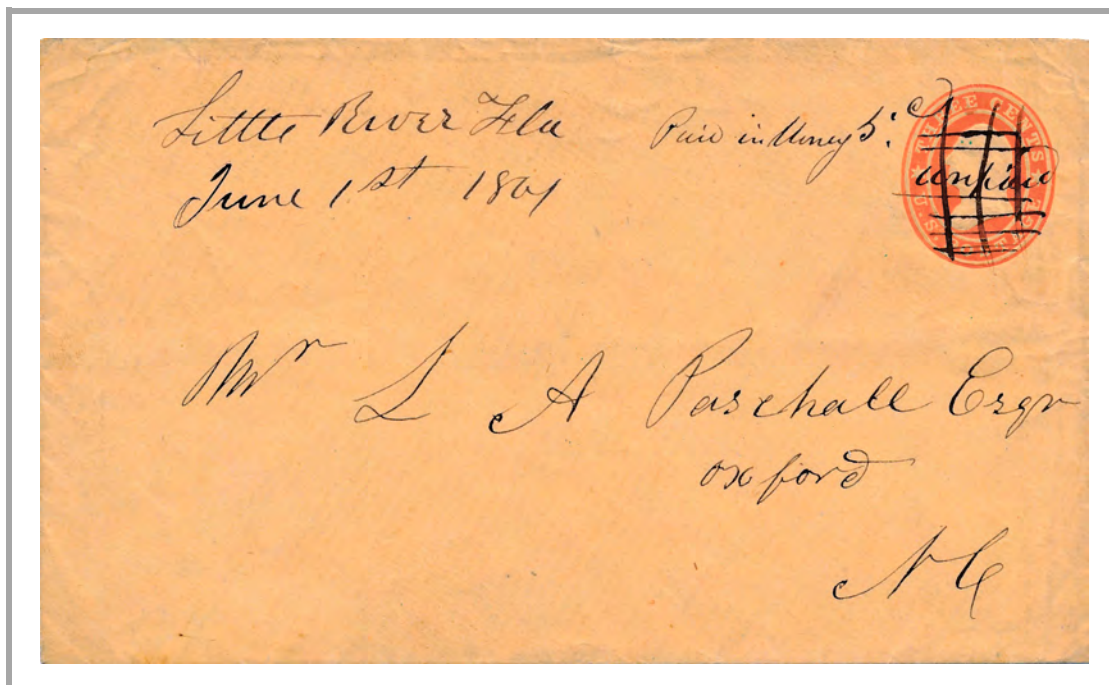


Confederate "Old Stamps Not Recognized"



Cert

Letter dated May 31, 1861, franked with USA 1857 issue 3 cent stamp, brought to San Jacinto, TX post office June 4. The stamp was not recognized and not cancelled by the CSA postmaster. The CSA postage was "Paid 5 cts" in money and the letter posted "June 4" to Galveston, TX.



June 1, 1861 Little River, FL to Oxford, NC.

USA Star Die entire invalid in the CSA effective June 1, 1861.

Indicia obliterated by pen strokes, marked "unpaid". "Paid in Money 5 c" indicates 5 cents CSA postage paid.

**Establishment of the CSA Postal System  
Illegal Acceptance of USA Postage**

**June 1, 1861**

USA Postmaster General Blair's order suspending mail service in the seceded states after May 31, 1861 did not prohibit transportation of Southern letters in the USA mail, provided they reached a USA post office. However, USA postage stamps and postal stationery were no longer valid in the CSA effective June 1, 1861.



**Cert**

June 1 (1861) New Orleans, LA to Cadiz, KY franked with USA 1857 issue 3 cent adhesive.

The Confederate New Orleans postmaster accepted the USA postage, did not assess the correct CSA postage, and routed the letter northbound to Louisville. There, hand stamped "DUE 3", representing additional postage due for a double weight letter, and delivered at Cadiz, KY.

The thick enclosure outline (right side) is consistent with a double weight letter.

**The only known cover franked with USA postage accepted by the CSA as postage paid  
on June 1, 1861, the first day of the CSA postal service.**