



The Civil War Post

Patricia A. Kaufmann

“The Great Pretender” – The Use of Springfield Facsimiles on Cover by Ne’er-Do-Well J.H. Scruggs Jr.

The *Great Pretender* was a popular song recorded by The Platters in 1955 (Mercury Records) and subsequently covered by numerous other singers and bands, most famously in 1987 by Freddie Mercury, the lead singer of the rock band Queen. More than three decades after The Platters took it to the top of the record charts, it again shot to the top.

Many young listeners in the 1980s never realized *The Great Pretender* was a cover song. If you view the typically outrageous video of the flamboyant Freddie Mercury version on YouTube, you’ll quickly realize that, although the lyrics and melody of the song are essentially the same, the meaning most assuredly is not.

There are abundant “Great Pretenders” in philately. Some of the most dangerous imposters are the Springfield facsimiles produced in 1934 by Howard E. MacIntosh of Tatham Stamp and Coin Company (Tasco) of Springfield, Mass. This set of facsimiles replicated the genuine Confederate stamps cataloged as CSA 1-14 in both the *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History* and the *Scott Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps & Covers*.

MacIntosh chose the intentionally oversized Dietz facsimiles to copy rather than the genuine stamps, although we are uncertain exactly why. Because Dietz wisely placed secret marks on his facsimiles, it is easy to identify them as the source of the MacIntosh products.

Almost 90 years after their first appearance, the Tasco facsimiles continue to be mistaken for genuine stamps in collections, estates, dealers’ stocks, auctions and as submissions for expertizing by the various authentication services. They

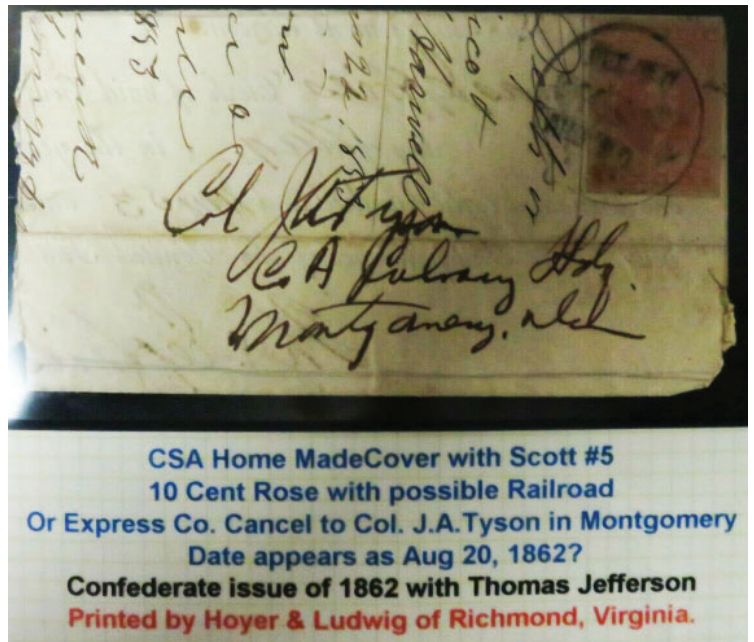


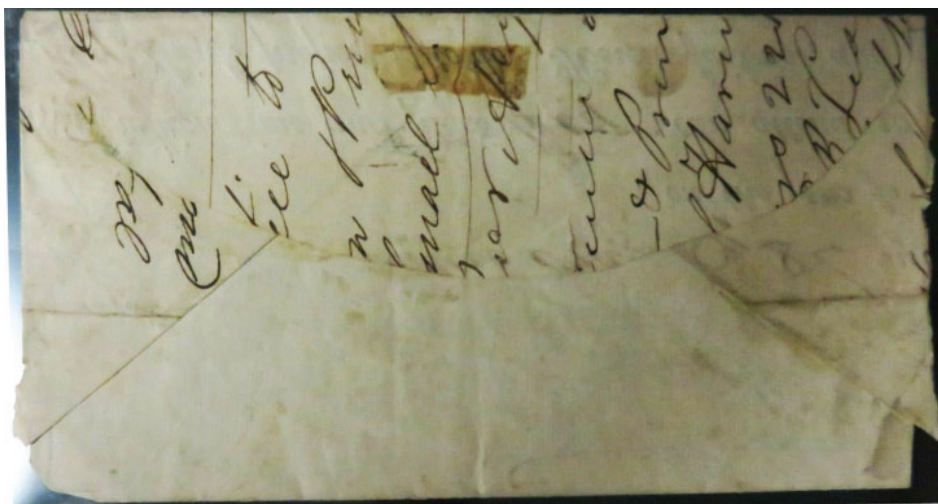
Figure 1. Purported Scott CSA 5 on cover was recently offered on eBay but, in fact, is a fraudulent creation prepared by J.H. Scruggs, Jr. during the early 1940s.

are regularly offered on eBay, usually by those who have little knowledge of Confederates, although I have seen even the most experienced Civil War students deceived by them. When applied to covers and partially covered by fraudulent postal markings, they can be particularly deceiving.

Figure 1 shows a purported CSA 5, 10¢ rose lithograph, used on an adversity cover with a hypothetical railroad or express company cancel (really just a date and nothing remoting suggestive of railroad nor express). The cover is addressed to “Col. J.A. Tyson, Co(m)pany). A Calvary (sic) Hdq. (Head-quarters), Montgomery, Ala.”

Calvary is the hill upon which Jesus was crucified. Cavalry refers to mounted

Figure 2. Back of the Figure 1 fraudulent cover, fashioned from an 1853-dated letter or document.



soldiers – the word that should have been used here. That mistake is not what points to this item being bogus, as it could have been a contemporaneous error. It is noticeable, nonetheless.

The eBay image of the cover is very poor. Figure 2 shows the back of the cover fashioned from an 1853 dated letter or document. It was enthusiastically described as “spectacular” and “superb.” The stamp was described as “orange.” This is not a color that has ever been associated by serious students with this stamp; it is generally described as rose or red. The scarcest genuine shade is carmine.

The seller has been active on eBay since 2009 with 5,155 sales as of May 6, 2022, and 100% positive feedback for the past year. Bidding for the lot started at \$99.99. I wrote the seller to inform him the item was bogus. To his credit, he immediately ended the listing with a reply to me of “Thanks for the info – guess I got took 18 years ago when I bought it.” I suspect he has little experience with Confederate States postal history.

As a long-time collector of spurious Confederates, the cover immediately screamed “SCRUGGS” to me. J. Hubert Scruggs Jr. creations have similar characteristics that are very recognizable. Fortunately, the eBay seller displayed a better closeup image of the stamp, as shown in Figure 3. That easily confirmed my knee-jerk reaction of “Scruggs.”

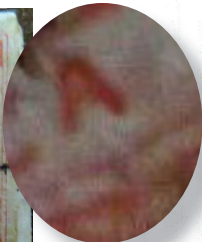
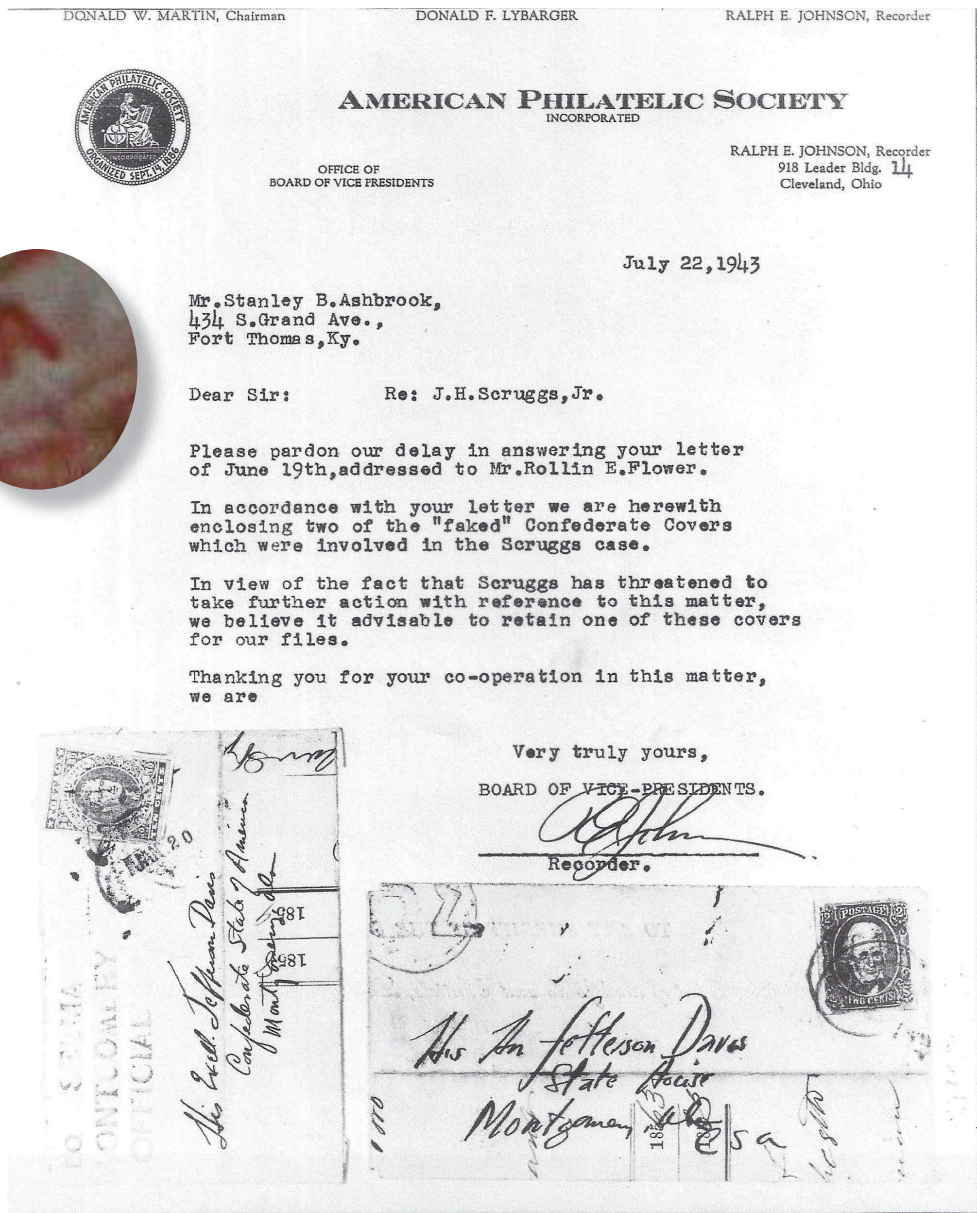
The stamp shown in Figure 4 is a genuine CSA 5. When the genuine and the facsimile are compared side by side, it is easy to see why the average person might be fooled. Fortunately, one of the consistent characteristics of the Springfield pretender is not covered by the postmark, although it came close. There is a dot of color in the colorless oval border below the second letter “A” in “AMERICA” (see Figure 3 detail). The genuine has no such dot.

Scruggs was one of the most notorious disseminators of Springfield facsimiles canceled on cover. As early as 1941, he was doing business as “Alabama Stamps” from Birmingham, Ala.

Figure 3 (below). Closeup image of the Springfield facsimile applied to Scruggs' handiwork.

Figure 4 (bottom). Genuine Scott CSA 5, 10c rose lithographed issue.

Figure 5 (right). July 22, 1943, letter from the APS Board of Vice Presidents, along with photos of the bogus covers presented in the case.



In the summer of 1941, local banker Chancy (also seen as Chauncey) Burton Palmer (1879-1957) of Bradshaw, Neb., received a small selection of covers on approval from Scruggs. He was suspicious of them and forwarded them to Stanley B. Ashbrook for his opinion.

Ashbrook quickly determined they were “rank fakes.” He also discovered Scruggs was a member of the American Philatelic Society (APS) and promptly submitted the fraudulent covers to the APS Board of Vice Presidents with a request that Scruggs be expelled from the society. Scruggs was officially expelled the following year.

In his *Ashbrook Special Service* dated Oct. 1, 1955, Ashbrook laid out the repugnant tale. He indicated others had stated Scruggs was in high school at the time and did not realize the scope of his crime. This was easily disproved by the age listed on Scruggs’ APS membership application. In 1941, he was 35 years old.

In the July 1942 *American Philatelist*, Vol. 35, No. 1, page 674, the following notification was made:

16118 – Scruggs, J.H. Jr. – 1501 S. 21 St., Birmingham, Ala. Said J.H. Scruggs, Jr. has sold and offered for sale, faked Confederate States covers representing them to have been found at their original sources. In fact, J.H. Scruggs, Jr. knew that the stamps placed thereon and the cancellations applied thereto, were not genuine.

The APS Board of Vice Presidents serves as the disciplinary body of the society. It handles member grievances and is empowered to expel or punish members. Coincidentally, I have been chairman of that same APS Board of Vice Presidents for the past six years.

The covers submitted to APS as evidence in the Scruggs case bear the same features as the cover recently offered on eBay. All are franked with Springfield facsimiles, all are fashioned from genuine period documents and all have fake postmarks.



Figure 6. Springfield facsimile of a 2¢ Confederate lithograph canceled on bogus Scruggs creation fashioned from genuine 1863 legal document (author’s collection).

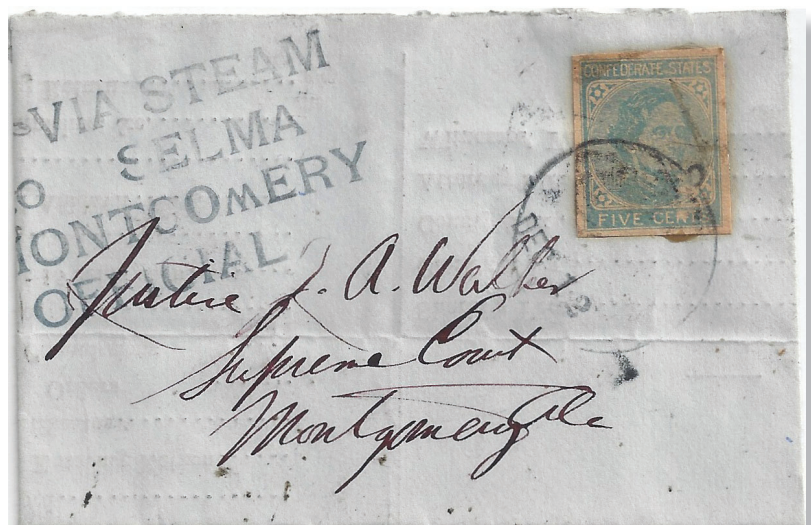


Figure 7. Springfield facsimile of a 5¢ Confederate letterpress (typographed) issue canceled on phony Scruggs creation fashioned from genuine period legal document (author’s collection).

Although the addresses vary, the envelopes are all addressed in the same hand, and all I have personally seen have been addressed to Montgomery, although it is possible there are those addressed elsewhere. Ashbrook indicated that the 1941 correspondence between Scruggs and Palmer proves conclusively that the addresses on the fake covers are the same handwriting.

Ashbrook reprinted the July 22, 1943, letter from the APS Board of Vice Presidents along with photos of the bogus covers in his *Ashbrook Special Service*. The Scruggs case dragged on for two full years. The letter is shown here as Figure 5.

Figures 6 and 7 are two bogus Scruggs covers from my personal collection of horrors. It does not take any special ability to see that they were created by the same hand as the two Palmer/Ashbrook covers. The bold four-line “Via Steam” handstamp appears on one of my covers, as well as one of the APS Scruggs-case covers. Had it been genuine, it would have been a rare and sought-after marking.

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My 2¢ brown red (Scott CSA 8) cover is practically a ringer for the one shown by Ashbrook. The only real difference is that both Ashbrook-illustrated covers are addressed to Confederate president Jefferson Davis.

Ashbrook attempted to get legal charges filed against Scruggs with the U.S. District Attorney at Birmingham for “using the U.S. mail to defraud.” Regrettably, this request was ignored by the authorities.

The sordid story is told in *The Springfield Facsimiles of Confederate Postage Stamps*, by Steven M. Roth, Francis J. Crown, Jr. and Patricia A. Kaufmann. The book presents the fascinating history and controversy that has swirled around these issues, but most importantly, it offers identifying characteristics and large visual comparisons between the genuine Confederate general issues, the “Fac-Simile Die Proofs” created and copyrighted by August Dietz in 1919, and the Springfield facsimiles that were patterned after the Dietz facsimiles and produced by MacIntosh in 1934 without permission (think “firestorm” here). Most of the identifying characteristics are the result of original research and careful examination by the authors and have not been published elsewhere. That book is shown in Figure 8.

I enjoy collecting and studying fakes, forgeries, and fantasies. But I detest seeing unsuspecting collectors being deceived and defrauded.

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Patricia A. (Trish) Kaufmann was first introduced to Confederate postal history in 1965. She became actively involved in organized philately in 1969, became a dealer in 1973 and today specializes solely in Confederate stamps and postal history. She enjoys hearing from readers and may be reached at [trishkauf@comcast.net](mailto:trishkauf@comcast.net).

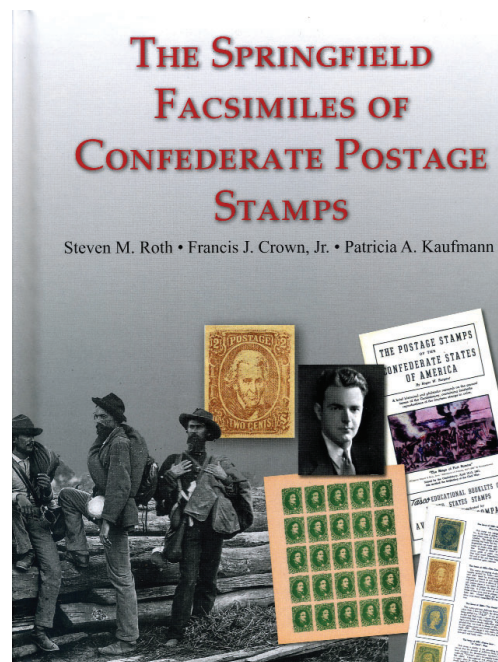


Figure 8. *The Springfield Facsimiles of Confederate Postage Stamps*, by Steven M. Roth, Francis J. Crown, Jr. and Patricia A. Kaufmann



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