



The Civil War Post

Patricia A. Kaufmann

Why Use a Magnifying Glass?

Confederate stamp production was substandard. There's no getting around that fact. There are untold numbers of transient varieties that will never be cataloged because they are non-repeating. But these subpar printing varieties are very sought after. Being a specialty dealer gives me a special vantage point. While collectors may see a lot of material, especially with the advent of the internet and fabulous printed auction catalogs, I have the advantage of personally examining the thousands of stamps and covers that cross my desk. This is coupled with serious study, research, writing, editing, authentication and cataloging.

It surprises people that we are still finding new varieties on stamps, not just new postmark listings and such, that we encounter with postal history uses. Some of these stamps are on cover; but how often do you carefully look at the stamps on the covers you collect? This is the reason they make magnifying glasses.

A case in point is shown in Figure 1. This is one of the most common Confederate general-issue stamps (Scott CSA 12), which is tied on cover by a Columbia, S.C., circular datestamp. But closer examination with a loop, as shown in Figure 2, reveals the left side of the design frame as weakly printed to non-existent. It is thus a candidate as an unlisted short transfer.

The Confederate engraved issues have not been studied as carefully as the lithographed or even the letterpress (the so-called typographed) issues. This is likely because there are still full sheets and panes available on the philatelic market, although they continue to be broken up. Students apparently have not seen the necessity of plating them, as has been done with nearly non-existent large multiples on lithographed issues.

The letterpress local Richmond print shown in Figure 3 (Scott CSA 7) reveals an even more dramatic short transfer

at the bottom.

The entire bottom frame is missing, yet the top of the frame of the stamp below it is visible. This is also a candidate as an unlisted short transfer.

The stamp in Figure 4 is a Richmond print on De La Rue paper with a brass rule at the top. The brass rule is listed in the *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*, published in 2012. This handbook is commonly referred to as the *CSA Catalog*. As editor-in-chief of that publication, I continue to methodically keep digital files of



Figure 2. Close-up of Figure 1 Type II 10¢ blue engraved issue showing a short transfer at left.

new listing additions, corrections, better images and so forth, for the next generation of catalog editors.

The variety shown in Figure 4 is listed in the *CSA Catalog* as type 7-L-v2. All such brass rule varieties are listed as unused. None are recorded in the catalog as used. There will be more if people know what to look for.

This instance also shows a transient printing flaw above the "FIVE." While the stamp

Figure 1. Type II, 10¢ blue engraved issue, tied by a Columbia, S.C., postmark on cover.



Figure 3 (below). Short transfer at bottom of a 5¢ letterpress (obsolete “typographed”) issue.

is foxed, it is hard to fight with its scarcity. Foxing, if you are not familiar with the term, describes the disfiguring small yellow-brown spots on paper. The two main causes of foxing are mold and iron contaminants in the paper, primarily a result of high humidity and damp conditions.



Figure 5 (above). Pair of 5¢ blue local prints tied on cover by Tuscaloosa, Ala., circular datestamp.

Figure 6 (right). Close-up of double transfer in “FIVE” and “CONFEDERATE” on the left stamp from Figure 5.



Brass rules are an interesting variety of the Confederate States 5¢ letterpress stamps that appear as thin parallel lines, or sometimes a single line, printed in the sheet margins of some stamps. The technique of attaching brass rules along the outside of the printing plates to relieve pressure at the edge of the printing plate was a method well known to printers of the day. These inner and outer lines are found to be consistently 1mm and 6mm from the edge of the stamp’s design frame. A catalog listing of “none recorded” is an open invitation to search out examples.

Larry Baum usually has his magnifying glass in hand while looking at new purchases. He shared the cover shown in Figure 5 with me, a close-up of which is shown in Figure 6. The left stamp has what appears to be an unlisted double transfer in the lettering, most

Figure 4 (below). Used example of a brass rules variety; none are recorded as used in the 2012 CSA Catalog.



easily seen in the “FIVE” carrying over to “CENTS.” The faint shadow lines are also visible on the lettering at left top in “CONFEDERATE.”

Another reason to break out the magnifying glass is revealed in Figure 7. This 2¢ green lithographed stamp (Scott CSA 3) was among the higher-catalog-value stamps recently offered to me as part of a small off-cover collection. Every one of the higher-value stamps had problems. The collector was shocked when I told him the entire left side of the stamp had been added. It was not the only high-value stamp in the collection that had problems. I did not buy the collection. He did not do his due diligence when he bought the stamps and thus he overpaid.

If you look carefully, you can see there is a clear vertical line visible along the left side. The ink is a lighter, brighter yellow-green, compared to the genuine portion of the design. The narrow drawn-in section is evident when you know where to look.

Figure 7 (below). The left margin has been added to this 2¢ green, with design elements drawn in. See enlarged detail at right.



The magnifying glass is your friend. Use it. I recommend a lighted variety and 10X power. There are many styles and price points.

Had the collector of the CSA No. 3 dipped the stamp to check for faults, he’d also have seen the problem (maybe). Stamps should also be checked for condition issues in direct sunlight and/or oblique light. A good task light, such as an Ott-Lite True Color light, is critical. This is something you should do before you buy, if possible. Sometimes you cannot examine an item in advance, such as when you buy at auction. But it is your responsibility to carefully examine your purchases as soon as they arrive. Don’t take an auction describer’s word that all lots are correctly described. They’re human. They may have made a mistake. Or, like me, succumb to the dreaded copy/paste error. It happens to all of us. It is your responsibility as a

buyer to examine your purchases within a reasonable time after they arrive. Consignors need to be paid in timely fashion. You should not be trying to return items long after the sale.

Properly examining your stamps is part of being a serious collector. It pays dividends in two ways: one, by assuring that you get what you pay for and, two, discovering that potential bonus of an unlisted variety. It's part of the joy of the hunt.

What if you are not into fly-speck philately? I get it. Some collectors prefer to simply fill spaces and simply acquire one example of each catalog number.

Any approach you prefer as a collector is valid. You are collecting for the pleasure it gives you. We all derive satisfaction from different things. But you will still benefit from using the available tools of the trade to protect yourself and your heirs from undesirable surprises, such as that encountered by the seller of the repaired 2¢ green lithograph. Embrace the process. ☐

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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).



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