



Researching Confederate States Stamps and Postal History

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History and Postal History

I was first introduced to Confederate postal history in 1965. I was fascinated. By the end of the 1960s, I had joined APS and the Confederate Stamp Alliance (CSA). Immediately, I was actively engaged in organized philately in its many aspects. But my favorite endeavor has always been researching and writing about the postal artifacts of the American Civil War, an area which offers so many fascinating philatelic topics.

I love history. Simply put, history is the study of the past. The people of the past, the decisions they made, why they made them, and the consequences of those decisions. It is not only interesting, but the perspectives of the past have a lasting impact on the future.

Continuity and change are inevitable. The causes and effects of our past have an unmistakable importance to the course of our future. The study of our past is crucial. The expectation is that we learn from mistakes of the past or, as conventional wisdom asserts, we are destined to repeat them.

“A Dirty Word”

The title of this article includes “Confederate” because that is mostly what I research and write about – the stamps and postal history of the Confederate States of America during the American Civil War (1861-65). But the word Confederate has become toxic to the general public.

The Confederacy is equated with slavery, racism, bigotry, and all manner of other evil things. Hardcore Confed-

erate history advocates object to the word “toxic” used to describe the current public view. But that is the present-day association as we witness public gatherings of neo-Nazis who wave the swastika flag and the Confederate battle flag together at the same rally.

It is no wonder some equate the Confederate States to Nazi Germany. Lest you scoff at that notion, let me relate a phone call I received only yesterday. A woman called to

see if I did appraisals. I told her that I only appraised stamps from the American Civil War (I didn’t even say Confederate) and thus was likely not the right person to help her. She countered with – and I quote, “like Hitler?” Wow! I was thunderstruck. We are trapped by this undesirable association. The scholarly pursuit of the topic of the Confederate postal system is caught in the cross-fire. It should not be so - but it is.

This unsettling conversation could be proof of how poorly educated the general public is about history or geography – or simply say much about how easily the study of the history of the Confederacy can be dismissed because of negative associations. But the average philatelist is, more often than not, a lover of history and more knowledgeable about our past than the general public. Philatelists and postal historians must educate wherever possible as

we study Civil War stamps and the handling of the mail during this turbulent period.

We know that removing statues and symbols won’t make history go away, or erase the impact of the past on us

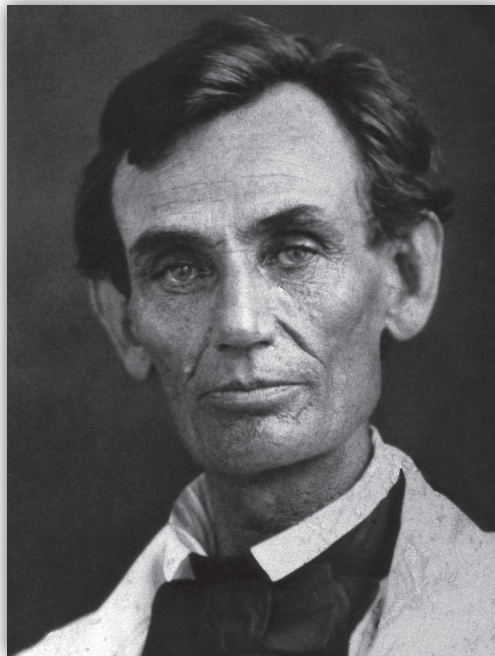


Figure 1. Senatorial candidate Abraham Lincoln in 1858, dressed in a white coat during the Lincoln-Douglas debate.

today. So I do not aim to eradicate the word “Confederate” from all philatelic dialogue. What else would you call the Confederate States of America Post Office Department? Replace it with some euphemistic alternative? I think not.

From a historical perspective, we should harken back to the warning from Abraham Lincoln in his “House Divided” senatorial campaign speech in 1858, in which he famously stated, “A house divided against itself cannot stand,” drawing from the Bible in which Jesus states, “And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand” (Gospel of Mark 3:25). Similar language is found in other books of the Bible, as well as in other Lincoln speeches (Figure 1).

It is approaching Thanksgiving as I write this in post-election 2020 – an election as yet unconceded. We are dealing with a global pandemic, dire economic conditions, and nationwide unrest over police brutality and systemic racism. We are struggling to find a unified way forward in our deeply divided county. My hope is that we as a nation can cease the “them” or “us” mindset and just get along. We are all Americans. Right. Left. North. South. Americans all. Postal history offers a bridge to our divides via providing greater understanding about historical events. As postal historians, we seek to illuminate through philatelic research. To be clear, study does not equate to advocacy; study leads to insight.

Civil War Philatelic Society

The members of the Confederate Stamp Alliance voted on November 21, 2020, to change the name of the society to the Civil War Philatelic Society. The trustees brought it before the membership late last fall, but the name change was more than five years in the making. The vote passed with 85% voting “yes” to change the name – decidedly a mandate.

The CSA was established in 1935, over 85 years ago. The words “Fraternity, Research, Cooperation” waved in a scroll at the top of the publication’s masthead banner with “Non-sectional” and “Non-political” below it.

For the vast majority of members, it has never been about politics. It is not now, nor has it ever been, about glorifying the South and the Lost Cause, although there are doubtless a few relics among the membership who did feel that way. They have likely resigned by now – and that’s fine with me. Removing the word Confederate from the society



Figure 2. From the 2019 Civil War Symposium: The Civil War – a Postal System Divided.

“Study does not equate to advocacy; study leads to insight.”

name eliminates the unfortunate stigma of the word while retaining the association with the significant postal history of the period.

The Alliance was comprised of members with a profound interest in the history of the divided postal system during the American Civil War. But the perceptions of the world have changed, and the majority of members wisely agreed that the time had come to embrace the Northern side, as well as the Southern.

In the past, only half the story was told. Broadening the scope to include the full range of Civil War postal history is such a logical – and potentially exciting – thing to do. We are now unified to research and study the intricacies of a divided postal system. This society unification also facilitates an understanding of how postal systems seek to unify correspondents and promote communications across enemy lines. In that regard, the Civil War was no different than any other wartime period, but CWPS now enables postal historians to explicate the valor of postal employees across enemy lines.

The great success of the Civil War Postal Exhibition and Symposium (Figure 2), held in Bellefonte in October 2019 at the American Philatelic Center, is one sure indicator of the wisdom of this realignment. Talks and exhibits offered perspectives from both sides of the war. Dealers offered stock with a full range of material from the period. There was enthusiastic involvement even from the international philatelic community.

Many Confederate students already collect the postal history of the North. There has not been a philatelic organization dedicated to the full scope of the postal history of this time period, which is important for us to understand in so many ways. This is in contrast to numerous philatelic societies that span both sides of a conflict, such as the World War I and World War II study groups.

The first quarter 2021 *Civil War Philatelist* includes the perfect article to inaugurate the newly retitled publication. It is written by Dr. Daniel M. Knowles, already a student and exhibitor of the postal history of both the North and South. It offers detailed new information about the Pioneer Express Company, a relatively obscure express service that served both the South and the North.

In Scott English’s January AP column, he astutely observed,

“History needs perspective and focusing on one aspect of the Civil War, rather than the whole story, fails to teach. Stamp collectors are some of the most important historians because we preserve the direct connections between people and tell their stories.



Figure 3a. Murfreesboro, Tennessee, soldier's cover from Lt. J.A. Hall to his father, Major Bolling Hall

By transitioning to the CWPS, the Society opens the door to collectors of Union philatelic material and postal history from the same era.”

Philatelic Research and Primary Sources

I write regularly for five philatelic journals, which range from specialist publications such as the now renamed *Civil War Philatelist*, to more general philatelic publications. Obviously, technical articles addressing such topics such as “fly-speck philately” are submitted to specialist publications, while more universal topics with social import are more appropriate for broader audiences. At every stamp show I attend, someone who does not collect Civil War material tells me how much they enjoy my articles and how much they learn from them. Some are even interested enough to begin a Civil War collection.

Readers and fellow philatelic authors often ask what I consider the most important sources of information when I research a particular topic. Foremost, it is crucial that researchers use primary sources.

A primary source is an artifact, document, manuscript, or any source of information that was created at the time under study. Obviously, postal artifacts are primary sources. I am often able to contradict official documents of the Civil War period with dated covers and letters in a soldier's own hand. Or I am able to help fill in a gap of information such as troop locations as indicated by postmarks or content, the rank of the soldier at a specific time, the correct spelling of his name, which is so often incorrect in official records due to poor handwriting, phonetic spelling and other errors.

Secondary sources such as articles, books, and websites provide interpretations of primary sources and were created by someone who did not experience first-hand that which you are researching. Newspaper articles, even though they are contemporaneous documents, are also secondary sources. Hopefully, secondary sources contain quotes, images,

and proper identification of primary sources so researchers can verify the facts and analyses. Sadly, some journals do not include endnotes or sources, which makes it harder for researchers.

Primary Sources are Valuable

There are countless reasons to study the postal history of the Civil War and the war itself. It is unparalleled in American history. It brought an end to slavery and unified the United States. Many have and will continue to argue that the war was not fought over slavery, but primary sources – indeed, philatelic primary documents – prove otherwise to anyone who conducts thorough research.

A few years ago, I wrote a monograph entitled *Independent State Mail and Confederate Use of U.S. Postage,*

How Secession Occurred; Correcting the Record. Over the years, Civil War buffs have been bombarded with misinformation about the important secession dates for the Confederate states. These incorrectly stated dates bled into philatelic publications and online sources and, unfortunately, they continue to be repeated.

The referenced monograph presents the secession and admission processes for each state, researched from the actual laws in place for each state at the time. EVERY state secession document specifically references slavery as the major reason for secession. In every case. From primary sources. Yet the die-hard Lost Cause aficionados still protest that slavery was not the main cause of the war. I respectfully disagree.

Part of the postal history that is considered “Confederate” is also very much “Union.” This was never truer than in the days that led up to the American Civil War and those after the first shots were fired, but before the Confederacy completely took over its own postal affairs on June 1, 1861.

The Confederate States Post Office Department (CSPOD) had to reorganize to become its own entity, but evolved from laws, regulations, practices and procedures, book-keeping 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. Many local postmasters, if they supported the Southern cause, were also reappointed as postmasters to the CSPOD, bringing with them their knowledge and experience.

Under the Confederate Constitution, for postal matters not specifically addressed by Confederate statutes or regulations, the United States Postal Laws and Regulations in effect in November 1859 (1859 US-PL&R) applied to Confederate mail, unless the 1859 US-PL&R conflicted with Confederate law. These legal documents are also primary

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sources that provide the researcher with context to understand the philatelic material in their collections.

ALL Sources Are Suspect

Are all primary sources accurate? No, unfortunately they aren’t. Both then and now, people misspeak or have the wrong information when they are writing letters or relaying information. Thus, even primary sources should be double checked, if possible.

In the third quarter 2020 issue of *La Posta*, I related my struggle trying to confirm the proper identity of one person, Bolling Hall. I was researching a soldier’s cover addressed to “Maj. Bolling Hall, Montgomery, Ala.” (Figure 3a).

One of my principal primary sources is the military records housed in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), which are conveniently accessed online through Fold3.com by paid subscription. This is not a reasonable choice for everyone, but for someone who uses it regularly, it is a superb tool. Nonetheless, such records still need to be approached with caution.

If you have the name of the soldier and his unit, as you do with the endorsement on Confederate soldiers’ mail, you have access to their military records from NARA. The Confederate records are far more detailed than the U.S. records, which tend to simply list names and military units on index cards. Not very helpful. You already knew that from the cover at hand.

Civil War military records are mostly handwritten. Names are often spelled phonetically, making it necessary to check records for how the researcher thinks they *might* be spelled, as well as how they are actually written by the soldiers themselves. Often, the best source is the subject cover.

Sometimes records for the same person are spelled multiple ways – two, three, or even more variations. Some immigrants changed the spelling of their names; thus the son might have spelled the name differently than the father or brother, even when they served in the same unit. Or maybe the handwriting is difficult to comprehend, or the microfilm record overexposed and impossible to read.

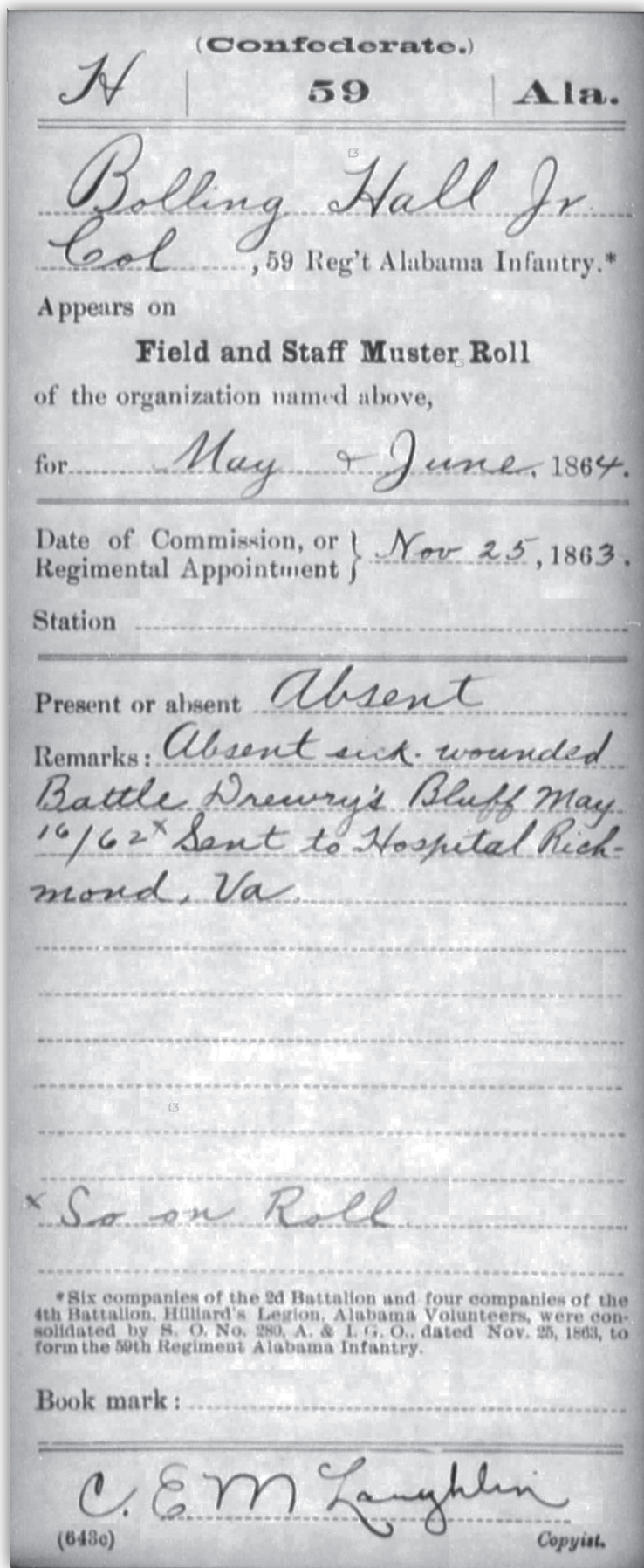


Figure 3b. Page from Bolling Hall III’s service record showing showing him as Bolling Hall, Jr., which is how he identified himself, although not technically correct.

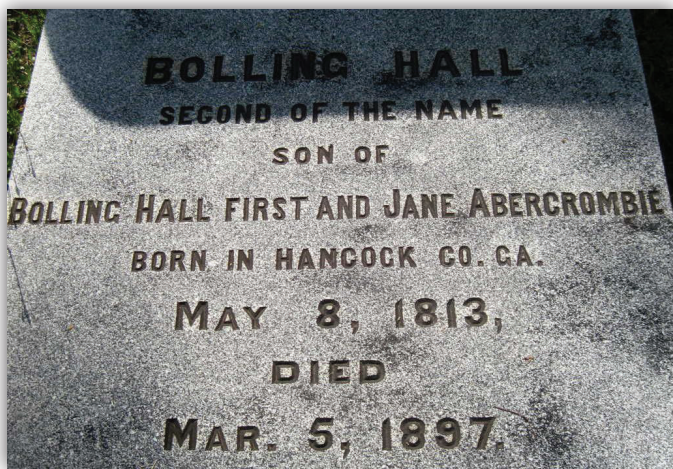


Figure 3c. Gravestone of Bolling Hall II (1813-1897), son of Bolling Hall First and Jane Abercrombie Hall, misleadingly referred to in his day as Bolling Hall, Sr.



Figure 3d. Gravestone of Bolling Hall III (1837-1866), son of Bolling Hall II (1813-1897) – also known as Bolling Hall “Jr.” but clearly defined herewith as Bolling Hall III.

The problem with the Hall family research began with the military records – something you would think might be clear. It wasn't.

During the Civil War, military records cited Bolling Hall III as “Bolling Hall, Jr.” serving in the 59th Alabama Regiment (Figure 3b). I finally concluded, with corroboration of both the Hall family papers and gravestones (Figure 3c-d), that “Junior” was actually Bolling Hall III, son of Bolling Hall II, who was at that time referred to as Bolling Hall, “Sr.” I repeatedly found the signatures of Bolling Hall III as “B. Hall, Jr.” – even on letters to his own father who was, more accurately, Bolling Hall II.

One might logically think that the first Bolling Hall would be referred to as “Senior” and Bolling Hall II as “Junior.” But no. Bolling Hall II was confusingly referred to as “Senior” and Bolling Hall III as “Junior.” It's enough to give one a throbbing headache.

There is little wonder at the confusion over a century and a half removed. But the gravestones and birth records relate the proper information. Connecting the dots was only possible after carefully sorting dates, the repeating family names (both male and female), reviewing actual correspondence, and family gravestones.

So, you may be thinking, information on gravestones must be accurate. They were engraved shortly after the time of death, right? But I have an unfortunate personal experience that disproves that. It's a story I've told before.

A few years ago, I was searching the Find A Grave website (another useful resource) and decided to virtually visit the gravesite of my late husband, John Kaufmann. I'm pretty sure my mouth literally fell open in disbelief.

I was married to John when he died on his 47th birthday. I personally ordered the headstone with all the proper information thereon inscribed and regularly visited the gravesite when it was still in Virginia near my home. So, imagine my complete astonishment when, almost three decades later, I found the headstone had been reengraved with the wrong date of death!



Figure 4. Cover addressed to “Mr. Charles E. James, Va.” with no town destination. Routed through Point of Rocks, Maryland, “in the care of Mr. Dutton” (manuscript at lower left) where de facto postmaster John B. Dutton handstamped it four times to show he had handled it. Up the left side is the Provost Marshal examined censor marking at Point of Rocks.

This happened because after I remarried, my in-laws requested that I allow his remains to be moved to New Jersey so he could be buried with family. After both his parents died, my former siblings-in-law had one headstone redone with the information for all three together. But – whoops – they got John’s death date wrong by a full decade. I had it reengraved at my expense. On behalf of both family and future historians, I just could not let that go.

Caveat Emptor! I could not even trust something I *knew* was correctly done by me personally. Verify and reverify is all I can say. I’ve seen other incorrectly inscribed gravestones over the years as well. The reason why they are wrong is generally impossible to ascertain and rarely do we actually know why such mistakes were made.

I frequently find multiple dates of birth/death for the same person. I’m regularly forced to write “sources vary” for whatever “fact.”

Genealogical Research Often Has Postal History Importance

Why is genealogical research important to postal history?

We often need to find out about the correspondents before we can figure out the maneuverings of their mail. Most collectors find this sort of research both a challenge and a lot of fun.

One of my favorite Civil War research topics is covert mail, specifically mail smuggled across the lines into enemy territory. Arguably, one of the most important projects I’ve worked on is the story of two towns on either side of the Potomac River – Waterford, Virginia, and Point of Rocks, Maryland – and the man who united them by an underground postal system: John Biddison Dutton. Dutton created his own “J.B. Dutton” straightline handstamp to mark processed and censored mail.

I don’t remember how or from whom I acquired my first J.B. Dutton straightline handstamped cover but, from my notes, it must have been around 1979. Over the next few decades, I worked sporadically on this research project and acquired photos and photocopies of J.B. Dutton covers from others who knew I was interested (Figure 4). Strong genealogical research was needed to ferret out the story of the highly unusual postal machinations.

What attracted me to the Dutton uses was that mail was being directed during the Civil War from the North through the Union stronghold of Point of Rocks, Maryland, to Waterford, Virginia. My initial assumption was that Waterford was in the South, but that has proved to be somewhat inaccurate. Much like Winchester, Waterford was held by Confederacy or Union on any given day and both U.S. and Confederate post offices operated there, although there were by far more Union than Confederate.

It is remarkable that this covert mail system set up by J.B. Dutton was with the knowledge and permission of the U.S. provost marshal, high ranking military leaders, cabinet members and the U.S. Post Office Department. I am unaware

of any other case where the same man handled the mail as *de facto* postmaster on both sides of a war-torn divide, making sure the mail was neutrally delivered to citizens on opposing sides. There are, however, ways the two postal systems cooperated both in this and other wars. Flag-of-truce mail is the most obvious example. Bilateral postal cooperation during wartime is an important aspect of postal history.

This intriguing cross-Potomac mail route will be the focus of a monograph being published this year as part of the La Posta Publications series. It includes original research gleaned from trips to the involved towns and meetings with multiple local historians, substantial research in the National Archives and Records Administration, Southern Claims Commission, Library of Congress, local newspapers of the period, and countless publications, conversations and emails. It offers information literally gleaned over the past few decades as to the original mail routes, postal carriers and far more.

Helpful Resources for Civil War Philatelic Research

There are pages of resources and links in many places online, including my own website. (<https://www.trish-kaufmann.com/resources-and-links>) While there will be an overlap of other sources, it’s always worth scanning for new sources and developing your own list of “go-to” resources.

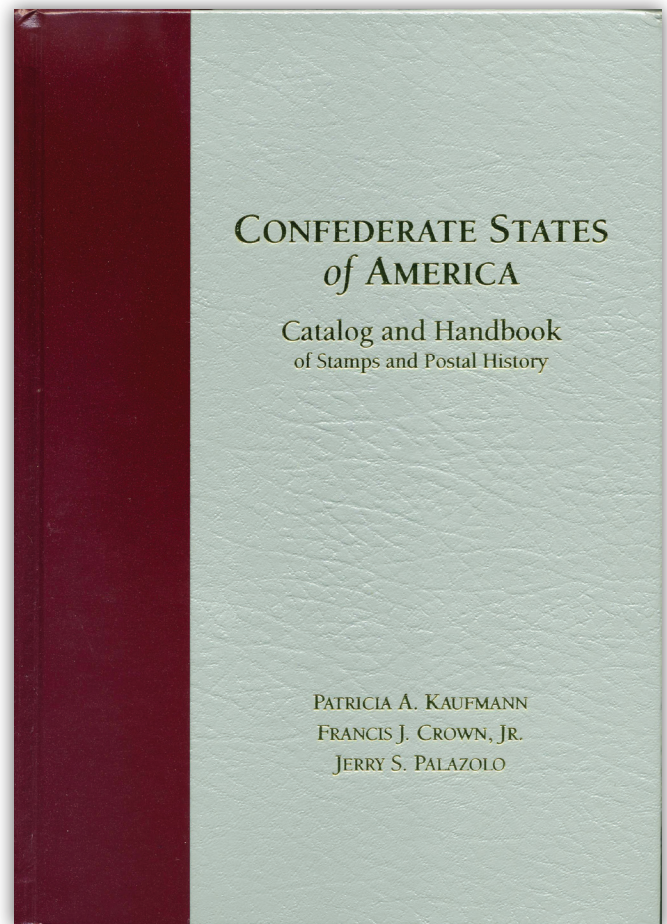


Figure 5. *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History* edited by Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown, Jr., and Jerry S. Palazolo, 2012.

On my website is a link to Mike Ludeman's Portals, a fantastic resource which is so much more useful than just stumbling around in the Library of Congress and National Archives (NARA) entry points. Mike has documented official Confederate post office related records and publications which are present on the internet in digital format and kindly shared them with fellow researchers, for which researchers are most grateful. There are three portal files: one focuses strictly on NARA records, the second is Library of Congress records, and the third is a reorganized group of the foregoing. Links to PDF files may be found at NARA Portals, Library of Congress Portals, and Portals by State (and more). A fourth portal is also provided to the USPOD Postal Laws and Regulations. All are highly recommended for passionate researchers.

The Civil War Philatelic Society (CWPS) <https://www.civilwarphilatelicsociety.org> has an excellent and growing list of resources which will eventually include all Confederate Stamp Alliance periodicals. It includes searchable and browsable versions of the *Confederate Philatelist*, one of America's oldest and most respected philatelic journals. For those newer to Confederate philately, there is a section devoted to Confederate basics, as there is on my website as well, but with totally different content on my website under Confederate Stamp Primer Online.

The Confederate Stamp Alliance (now CWPS) was formed in 1935 but there was no official publication until 1956. Prior to this time information was disseminated through the pages of *Stamp and Cover Collecting*, and *Stamp and Cover Collectors Review*, both commercial publications of August Dietz. After the last issue of *Stamp and Cover Collectors Review* in 1939, Dietz began publishing a leaflet he called the *Confederate Bulletin*. Dietz stated it was published in the interest of collectors and students of Confederate postal issues. It kept members abreast of events and also served as an addendum to the *Dietz Catalog*. Currently, the CWPS website includes most of the August Dietz published periodicals in digital format, beginning with the *Virginia Philatelist* in 1897.

Other digitally scanned periodicals date back as early as 1865 (*How to Detect Forged Stamps* by Thomas Dalston, which includes the then-known Confederate fakes). The CWPS website includes scanned versions of books, monographs, auction catalogs, stamp catalog, exhibits, collections of fakes, periodical archives postmasters' provisional cen-

sus, and far more.

The current "bible" of Confederates is Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History edited by Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown, Jr., and Jerry S. Palazolo (Figure 5). Obviously, no research on Confederates is complete without consulting this 2012 catalog first, published by the Confederate Stamp Alliance (now CWPS). It is now long out of print, available only in the deluxe edition or on the second-hand market, but there is hope that it will be offered on the CWPS website in the near future, probably only to members. Some catalog updates have already been offered in the society journal.

Takeaways

Be suspicious of decades-old articles and books. While they offer valuable information, researchers need to confirm that nothing published since then has not contradicted nor added to the topic in question. Peer review is advised if your research is of lasting value.

Do not trust a solitary source, no matter how seemingly accurate. Confirm and verify — again and again.



FOR FURTHER READING

Recommendations from the APRL research staff:

Collector's Guide To Confederate Philately. Kimbrough, John L.; Bush, Conrad L. (Fort Walton Beach, FL : C.L. Bush, 2005). G3860 .K49c 2005

Confederate States of America: Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History. Kaufmann, Patricia A.; Crown, Francis J., Jr.; Palazolo, Jerry S. (Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012) Kaufmann Room

Confederate Use of Patriotic Covers during the Civil War 1861-1865. Walker, John H. (London: Royal Philatelic Society London, 2018). IP70060

The Confederate Philatelist. Confederate Stamp Alliance. (Confederate Stamp Alliance, 1956-Present). JOURNAL Confederate Philatelist

The Author

Patricia (Trish) Kaufmann was first introduced to Confederate postal history in 1965, became active in organized philately in 1969, and became a full-time dealer in 1973. Today, she specializes solely in Confederate stamps and postal history. Trish enjoys hearing from readers and may be reached at trishkauf@comcast.net. She will be happy to provide information on how to join the Civil War Philatelic Society.

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Carriers and Locals Society



The Society's mission is to encourage the collecting and study of United States carriers and locals.

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Its principal areas of interest are:

- U.S. official and semi-official Carrier services
- U.S. Independent Mail Companies
- U.S. Local Posts of the 19th century
- U.S. Eastern Expresses of the 19th century
- Fakes and forgeries of U.S. Carriers and Locals
- U.S. and Canadian fantasy stamps of the 19th century

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