



Figure 3: A local prisoner-of-war drop cover franked with a two-cent Black Jack from Alex Gobble, incarcerated in the Old Capitol Prison, to Professor B.S. Hedrick.

## A Black Jack Use from the Old Capitol Prison

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

### United States and Confederacy Issue Stamp with Same Portrait

The United States two-cent Black Jack (Scott 73), shown in Figure 1, is a popular stamp with U.S. collectors and has been the basis of more than one important collection, as well as many articles and even books. Collectors of Confederate postal history are equally interested in this issue, although it is seldom encountered on Confederate mail.

The earliest recorded use of the Black Jack is July 1, 1863, on an off-cover stamp and July 6, 1863, on cover.<sup>1</sup> By that July 1, 1863, date the Civil War had been raging for more than two years and it would be less than two years until Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to Gen. Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House.

In 1863, the one-cent U.S. carrier fee was abolished. The new Black Jack stamp paid the two-cent rate per one-half ounce for local or drop letters and a new third-class rate for newspapers, periodicals and a wide variety of other mail matter, at a rate of two-cents per four ounces or fraction thereof.

The stamp pictured the seventh U.S. President,



Figure 1: Mint, never hinged top sheet margin copy of the U.S. two-cent Black Jack from the Alan B. Whitman collection sold in 2009. (Courtesy Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries)



Figure 2: An unused example of the Confederate two-cent 'Red Jack' from the author's stock.

Andrew Jackson (1767-1845). Jackson was born in the Waxhaws region that straddles North Carolina and South Carolina (exact location unknown) but considered himself a South Carolina native.

Figure 4: The letter enclosed in the prisoner of war cover from Alex Gobble thanking Professor Hedrick for providing books for Bible class.

Old Capitol Prison  
Washington City, D.C.  
January 21<sup>st</sup> 1864

Prof. B. S. Hedrick

Dear Friend,

I am happy to inform you that your present gift of books directed to me for the use of our Bible Class has been received. I hereby tender to you my and also the class's sincere thanks for the same. May God abundantly reward you for the same shall be our prayer.

I am well at this time and would be glad you would call and see me at any time that you can make it convenient.

Very Respectfully,  
Alex Gobble

He represented Tennessee in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate before being elected by a landslide to become president in 1828.<sup>2</sup>

The Confederacy used the very same portrait for its two-cent stamp<sup>3</sup> as the United States. It is alleged that when the South got news of the North issuing a stamp depicting one of their own heroes, they printed one with the same portrait. Not surprisingly, the Confederate issue is known as the two-cent "Red Jack" and is shown in Figure 2. The Confederate version is imperforate, as are all the Confederate general issues except for a small number that were experimentally perforated.

The only way this popular stamp can be found on a piece of Confederate mail is if it crossed the lines into the Confederacy from the United States (technically

prohibited, but not infrequently disregarded) or was addressed to, or from, a Confederate prisoner held in a U.S. prison to a city or town in the North.

If we were to split straws, the latter is a completely U.S. postal use, but it is eagerly and traditionally collected by Confederate collectors due to the Confederate prisoner connection. Such uses are cataloged in the 2012 *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History* as well as the predecessor Dietz catalog series.

They are also studied and cataloged in specialized volumes such as *Prisoners' Mail from the American Civil War* by Galen D. Harrison and *Civil War Prisons and Their Covers* by Earl Antrim.

Figure 3 shows a cover bearing a two-cent Black Jack on a local prisoner-of-war drop cover franked



**Figure 5: The Old Capitol Prison, Washington, D.C. Negative by William R. Pywell (1843-1886); positive by A. Gardner (1821-1882). (Library of Congress photo)**

with a two-cent black tied by Washington, D.C. January 22, 1864, double-circle datestamp and duplex target cancel. It is addressed to Professor B.S. Hedrick, Patent Office, Washington City, D.C.

This stamp is seldom seen on covers with any connection to the Confederacy. The handstamped examined marking is *CSA Catalog Type PWH-02 Type A*,<sup>4</sup> one of the scarcer handstamped censor markings overall, although it is the most common of the five recorded types from Old Capitol Prison.

The original letter, shown in Figure 4, is from prisoner Alex Gobble and datelined “Old Capitol Prison, Washington D.C. January the 21st/64” in which he thanks the recipient for sending him some books for Bible class.

**Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick (1827-1886)**

Professor B.S. Hedrick was an educator, chemist, and anti-slavery leader born in Salisbury, North Carolina, in 1827. He attended the University of North Carolina and was first in his graduating class.

The president of UNC recommended Hedrick to former governor William A. Graham, secretary of the U.S. Navy, for a clerkship in the office of the *Nautical Almanac* in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Graham made the appointment and, while in Cambridge, Hedrick took advanced courses under prominent scientists at Harvard College. Although offered a position as professor of mathematics at Davidson College in 1852, Hedrick declined it, deciding instead to return to his alma mater when the opportunity arose.

In January 1854, the University of North Carolina appointed him to the chair of analytical and agricultural chemistry. When he entered upon his duties at UNC in 1854, he took no part in the constant discussions of the subject of slavery but, in 1856, an article by Hedrick



**Figure 6: Rose O'Neal Greenhow, one of the famous tenants imprisoned at Old Capitol as a Confederate spy in 1862, with her daughter “Little Rose.” (Library of Congress photo)**

was published in the *North Carolina Standard* in which he opposed slavery and endorsed John Fremont and the Republicans. Professor Hedrick was brought up in a family and community in which anti-slavery feeling was common and his life in the North had strengthened his belief that slavery was evil.

The Hedrick papers housed at Duke University show that he was dismissed from the university in 1856 for these opinions.<sup>5</sup> In the papers at Duke, one



**Figure 7: The November 10, 1865, execution of Henry Wirz, commandant of the Confederate Andersonville Prison, near the U.S. Capitol moments after the trap door was sprung at the Old Capitol Prison in Washington, D.C. Note the soldier springing the trap, the men in trees and the Capitol dome beyond. (Photo by A. Gardner, 1821-1882, courtesy, Library of Congress)**

letter from Mary Ellen Thompson Hedrick recounts UNC students burning Hedrick in effigy. For his own safety, Hedrick was warned against traveling in North Carolina until after the presidential election.

For a time, Hedrick lived in New York, where he was employed as a chemist and then as a clerk in the mayor's office. He also lectured and taught at such institutions as Cooper Union.

In 1861, he went to Washington, D.C., to seek a job with the newly elected Republican government. There he was successively appointed assistant examiner, examiner, and chief examiner in the Chemical Department of the U.S. Patent Office, remaining with that agency until his death.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Alexander J. Gobble (also Goble, Gabel)**

Alex Gobble served in Company K, 15th North Carolina Infantry during the Civil War. He enlisted July 15, 1862, at Wake County, North Carolina, as a private. He was taken prisoner September 14, 1862, at Crampton's Gap, Maryland, and imprisoned at Fort Delaware from which he was exchanged November 10, 1862.

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He is listed in military records as AWOL in November 1862. He was returned to duty in May 1863. He was taken prisoner again October 14, 1863, at Bristoe Station, Virginia, which resulted in his imprisonment at Old Capitol Prison in Washington, D.C.

On February 3, 1864, he was transferred to Point Lookout Prison, Maryland. He was exchanged in May 1864. Yet again he was captured April 2, 1865 at Hatcher's Run, Virginia, only days away from Lee's surrender to Grant at Appomattox. He was confined at Hart's Island in New York Harbor where he took the Oath of Allegiance on June 19, 1865. He was undoubtedly very glad to be done with the war and his various prison accommodations.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Old Capitol Prison**

Old Capitol Prison received its name because for four years (1815-19) it had housed Congress after the Capitol burned in the War of 1812. It had been a private school, boarding house and hotel before being turned into a jail in July 1861. It was used to house many who were arrested after President Lincoln suspended habeas



Figure 8: Genuine cover to which a fake W.P. Wood examined marking was applied.



Figure 9: Genuine W.P. Wood examined marking from the cover in Figure 1.



Figure 10: Fake W.P. Wood examined marking from the cover in Figure 8 with the defining characteristics circled.

corpus in May 1861. What is commonly referred to as Old Capitol Prison really consisted of two distinct buildings locally known as Old Capitol and Carroll, the latter so named from its having been the property of the distinguished Carroll family. The site is today occupied by the U.S. Supreme Court Building.

For most of the war, W.P. Wood was superintendent of the prison, although he was relieved late in the war by G. Weest.

Old Capitol held a wide assortment of prisoners, e.g., political prisoners, Confederate prisoners of war, and suspected Confederate spies. Many famous prisoners were inmates there, such as Rose O'Neal Greenhow (Figure 6) who took her eight-year old daughter, "Little Rose," to jail with her and continued to use the young girl as a subversive courier during the

five months of her imprisonment. In due course, Mrs. Greenhow was deported to the Confederate States, traveled to Richmond and took up new tasks.

She sailed to Europe to represent the Confederacy on a diplomatic mission to France and England from 1863 to 1864. Off Wilmington, North Carolina, near Fort Fisher on October 1, 1864, the USS *Nippon* chased her returning ship, the British blockade runner *Condor*, aground.

Greenhow knew that if she were captured again, she would return to prison. She was carrying important Confederate dispatches and \$2,000 in gold for the cause. Against the captain's better judgment, insisting that she be taken ashore, she boarded a small lifeboat that overturned in the mountainous surf. The weight of the gold in her reticule (small netted handbag)

pulled her under, and her body washed ashore the next morning. Greenhow was given a hero's funeral and buried in Oakdale Cemetery in Wilmington, North Carolina, her coffin wrapped in the Confederate flag.<sup>8</sup>

Also an inmate at Old Capitol was "La Belle Rebel," Belle Boyd, a 19 year-old Confederate spy, as well as the dashing Confederate raider General John Hunt Morgan and the Lincoln assassination conspirators, some of whom were hanged in the jail's courtyard on July 7, 1865. The list of illustrious inmates is lengthy.

On November 10, 1865 Heinrich Hartmann Wirz, better known as Captain Henry Wirz (ultimately Major), was hanged there after an agonizing incarceration and trial while he awaited news of his fate. Wirz was commandant of Camp Sumter, more popularly known as Andersonville Prison, and widely considered a scapegoat for war crimes due to the ghastly prison systems, which exhibited appalling conditions in both North and South. The Wirz execution is shown in Figure 7, a well-known photo in the Library of Congress.

### **Fake W.P. Wood Examined Markings**

The W.P. Wood handstamped "examined" marking used on the cover in Figure 1 was the target of a faker's skill. These covers have been around for a number of years and were discussed by prisoner-of-war student Galen Harrison<sup>9</sup> in a 2001 article in *The Confederate Philatelist*, official journal of the Confederate Stamp Alliance. Harrison has cataloged approximately two dozen of them to date.

The majority of these fake covers bear the common three-cent rose 1861 issue (Scott 65) with a Washington, D.C., postmark and are addressed to Northern addresses. Of the initial twenty suspect covers that Harrison examined, none of them had the original enclosures while many of the known genuine covers do have enclosures. There was a lot of mail from Union soldiers stationed in Washington during the war. These covers are relatively inexpensive and dressing up a common cover with a scarce prison examined marking proved too tempting for some enterprising philatelic swindler.

Three of the recorded fake handstamps are on envelopes with various Confederate stamps and Richmond postmarks to make them appear as though they were through-the-lines inner envelope uses.

The general instructions promulgated by individual Union military commanders in charge of exchange points were that letters were limited to personal matters and be limited to one page in length. The envelopes were to be endorsed by the prisoner and Confederate postage had to be prepaid or sent "due" for the recipient to pay (only for soldiers).

Letters were to be enclosed in an outer envelope

with proper U.S. postage applied and were to be addressed to the commander at the exchange point. Similar instructions were implemented by the Southern commanders for northbound flag of truce mail exchanges. Thus the outer envelope was usually discarded at the exchange point and the inner envelope with contents would continue on its way in the Southern postal system with the appropriate postage. Covers that were not discarded and bear the postage of both Union and Confederacy are much scarcer and more desirable.

The cover shown in Figure 8 bears one of the dangerous fake W.P. Wood examined handstamps. These turn up at auction, on eBay and in unsuspecting dealer stocks. If you are interested in this area of collecting, it would pay you to know what to look for before buying.

The following are the characteristics of the Old Capitol Prison fake handstamp.

- The W.P. Wood handstamp is well struck and in an upright position on all of the recorded covers. On the genuine covers, the handstamp is often partially struck and at various angles or even upside down. The subject Black Jack cover is a perfect example of this.

- The fake handstamp has a distinct break in the outer frame above the "A" in "PASSED." This is an important constant on all of the fakes. The break is not present on the genuine handstamps.

- There are also distinct differences in the lettering of the handstamp between the fake and the genuine, particularly in the words "MILITARY PRISON."

- There is a short horizontal bar just preceding the "S" in "SUP" that is constant on all the fakes. The bar is not present on the genuine handstamps.

- The letters on the fake handstamp have a thicker, more mottled appearance than the genuine.

Figure 9 shows a close-up of the genuine W.P. Wood handstamp used on the subject Black Jack cover while Figure 10 shows the fake version of that handstamp applied to the cover in Figure 8.

### **Conclusion**

Old Capitol Prison covers are popular with Confederate collectors because the examined markings are varied and unusual and the background stories of correspondents are often fascinating. Galen Harrison records 94 covers known in his Civil War prisons opus.<sup>10</sup>

While the W.P. Wood examined marking presents a potential threat to collectors, it is not hard to recognize if you know the characteristics presented in this article.

### **Endnotes**

1 Chad Snee, ed., *2014 Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps & Covers*, Sidney, Ohio: Scott Publishing Company, 2013, p. 26.

- 2 University of Virginia, *the Miller Center. American President: A Reference Resource.*, <http://millercenter.org/president/jackson/essays/biography/2> Accessed May 2014
- 3 Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown Jr., Jerry S. Palazolo, *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*, Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012, pp. 339-40.
- 4 Kaufmann, *et al*, p. 491.
- 5 Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick, *Guide to the Benjamin Hedrick Papers, 1848-1893*, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University Libraries. <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/hedrickbenjamin/> Accessed May 2014.
- 6 J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton, Henry McGilbert Wagstaff, editors, *The James Sprunt Historical Publications: Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick*, Vol. 10, No.1, Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina, 1910.
- 7 Civil War Soldier Records of North Carolina "Go," <http://www.censusdiggins.com/nc-civil-war-go.htm> Accessed May 2014.
- 8 Ishbel Ross, *Rebel Rose, Life of Rose O'Neal Greenhow, Confederate Spy*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954. pp. 268-72.
- 9 Galen Harrison, "Fake Old Capitol Prison Covers," *The Confederate Philatelist*, Vol. 46, No. 5, Whole No. 324, pp. 156-64.
- 10 Galen D. Harrison, *Prisoners' Mail from the American Civil War*, Gerald V. Stewart Educational Trust Fund of the Confederate Stamp Alliance, 1997, pp. 116-18.

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