

One of our great American Specialties

Here is a subject philatelists have been enthralled with for over 100 years.



The Confederate Post

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

More close calls.



The restored corner of a prisoner of war cover with the U.S. 3¢ (Scott No. 65).



Last month, I wrote about some “near misses” of precious postal history being literally dumped in the trash by unknowledgeable heirs. In discussing this issue with others, it was no surprise that I have heard other horror stories. It seems we all have one or two such tales. One collector told me of examining a phenomenal family correspondence decades ago and commenting to the owner that many covers had charred edges. Indeed, the sharp-eyed collector had rescued them from a fire where they were being burned (see above)—but who knows what was lost first! Sometimes letters are saved and rare and valuable covers are thrown out with the garbage.

Pictured in this column is an 1861 U.S. 3¢ rose, Scott #65, which in used condition off cover catalogs a mere \$3.00. The cover? It is in my retail stock. Before it was lost for all time, someone realized the tragic mistake and restored the corner to the cover – a Camp Douglas prisoner-of-war use with postal and examined markings of both sides.

The cover was from a Southern soldier incarcerated in that Chicago prison. It went through-the-lines via flag-of-truce at Fortress Monroe and from there to Richmond where it was handstamped with a Confederate DUE 10 marking and eventually arrived at its destination in Taylorsville, NC. While much of the value was destroyed, it was certainly not reduced to the mere pittance an off-cover U.S. 3¢ rose would fetch. Non-collectors often mistakenly equate “old” with “valuable” and “stamps” as the only things in which philatelists are interested. It makes the postal historians among us cringe.

And it seems that I am not personally immune to such tragedies. I have been passionate about Confederate postal history for over forty years and, obviously, my elderly parents were well aware of the possibility of value in certain material.

Late last fall, as my 90-year old father lay dying in a hospital in Denver, he told me of four Andersonville prisoner-of-war letters that he said were somewhere in their house – hidden in among jars of nuts and bolts in the basement he told me, the valuable covers long ago discarded by a family member. He related the story of a distant relative in an Iowa Infantry company during the Civil War who was captured and refused to let his leg be amputated by surgeons, saying that he preferred to die than live without his leg. He apparently did survive the war.

This Iowa prisoner and others in his regiment were taken by rail to the most infamous Civil War prison at Andersonville, Georgia. During the trip, my father said, the prisoners pried up the floorboards of the railroad car with his crutches and dropped through to escape while the train was moving slowly. As he seriously injured, my relative was unable to escape with his comrades.

I’ve been through virtually every inch of that house, but those elusive letters are thus far nowhere to be found. I had heard the story from my dad before years ago, but have never seen the letters and likely never will. My loss, my family’s loss, a loss to future generations of Civil War buffs.

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