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



The Confederate Post

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

“...any attempt to coerce seceding states would unite them all in one day”



There were two main categories of mail before the Confederate Post Office Department took control of its own postal operations on June 1, 1861. The first is Independent State Use before the Confederacy was formed or before a specific state joined the already formed Confederacy. The second category is U.S. postage used in the Confederacy, after a state joined the Confederacy, but before June 1, 1861. Before that, by mutual agreement, the United States Post Office Department continued to operate all postal services in the seceded states.

When South Carolina seceded from the United States, it invited other southern states to also secede and to meet with it. On February 4, 1861, thirty-seven delegates from six states met in convention at Montgomery, Alabama, presented their credentials, and assembled. Louisiana was one of those states.

The illustrated item is part of the area of Confederate collecting wrapped up in this secession period history and the birth of the Confederacy. The outer folded lettersheet is franked with a U.S. 3¢ dull red, Scott #26, tied by a Lake Providence, La. February 7 (1861) circular date stamp and addressed to New Hampshire with the original letter from H(iram). B. Tebbetts.

Tebbetts writes two pages headed the same date saying, in part, “Of political troubles I need not speak as you probably hear enough of them. Our Union is dissolved and this no longer admits of a question. The great question now before the people is this: shall we have war or not. The entire Southern States are not united in the secession movement, but any attempt to coerce seceding states would unite them all in one day. It is folly to talk about a forced Union, it must be voluntary or not at all.”

Hiram Bradbury Tebbetts was born February 2, 1812. He received a degree from Boston (Harvard) Medical College in 1836. He was first a physician and thereafter, a planter in Louisiana.

Tebbetts’ obituary in the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal noted, “He never took any part in secession or in acts subsequent thereto. He suffered great loss on account of the war and underwent many personal perils, being situated between the two armies. At the close of the war, he returned North and settled in Concord, N.H.”

The following military report puts the unfortunate Tebbetts in the middle of harrowing military action.

*HEADQUARTERS POST AND DEFENSES,
Goodrich’s Landing, La., September 1, 1864.*

COLONEL: On the morning of August 26 a party of 200 guerrillas made a raid upon the plantations about this place which

are leased by Tibbetts (sic) & Co. They killed two scouts after they had surrendered; carried away one white overseer and a young man by the name of Webster, clerk for the same firm; both the overseer and Mr. Webster were murdered by them as soon as they reached Bayou Tensas. Cavalry was immediately sent in pursuit, but did not overtake them. These highwaymen are commanded by a man named Lee, and although they are guerrillas, and commit the most abominable atrocities, they are permitted to remain near and co-operate with the regular rebel forces under General Harrison. He is really responsible for all their acts. As the people on Bayou Macon have many times petitioned Harrison to allow this Lee to remain near them, as their protector. I sent 230 mounted men under Maj. C.H. Chapin, Third U. S. Colored Cavalry to pay them a retaliatory visit. He accomplished all that I desired, and returned to this post yesterday. I forward herewith a copy of his report to me. I hold a certain Doctor Richardson as a hostage for young Webster in accordance with General Orders, No. 4, dated headquarters Military Division of the Mississippi, November 5, 1863. In accordance with General Orders, No. 6, headquarters District of Vicksburg, May 12, 1864, I intend to seize all the movable and valuable property of secessionists living on Old River thirty miles above this post.

Trusting that my action in this matter meets the approval of the major-general commanding,

*I have the honor to be, colonel, your very obedient servant,
A. WATSON WEBBER,*

Colonel Fifty-first Regiment U. S. Colored Infantry, Comdg.

Lake Providence, in the northeast corner of Louisiana, was in the heart of the cotton kingdom of the Mississippi Delta and over the years untold thousands of bales of cotton were shipped out via riverboat from this area. During the war, thousands of Union soldiers camped on the banks of the lake. General U.S. Grant began one of his attempts to bypass the Confederate stronghold of Vicksburg here, by digging a canal to connect the lake and Bayou Macon to the Mississippi River. He hoped to use the waterways to allow steamboats to safely steam around Vicksburg without coming under the guns of the Confederate batteries there.

This ordinary looking cover from Tebbetts and his pertinent letter help reveal the rich history of the times when virtually everyone had a story to tell. ☒