One of our great American Specialties

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





A First Day Cover – Virginia Secedes April 17, 1861



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A first day cover in any area of classic postal history holds a higher place than a similar cover of a common date. In CSA philately, there are numerous very collectible "First Days." Every Southern state that seceded from the Union produced a First Day. If that state subsequently joined the Confederacy, it produced another collectible First Day. There was also the First Day of the Confederate Post Office (June 1, 1861) and the First Day of the 10¢ rate (July 1, 1862). On and on.

Dates of battles are also collectible. For example, The Battle of the Crater was part of the Siege of Petersburg that place on July 30, 1864, between the Confederate Army of Northern Virgina under Gen. Robert E. Lee and the Union Army of the Potomac, commanded by Maj. Gen. George G. Meade under the direct supervision of Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant. Thus a July 30, 1864 dated cover from Petersburg is more desirable than another less historically dated cover.

Clearly, in the collecting of Confederate material, it is important to know your dates. The dates of secession have been published with conflicting dates for years. For the first time, secession dates have been researched "from the ground up" from original state congressional documents.

This new table of secession and supporting documentation will be published in the forthcoming CSA Catalog slated to be published in 2010 or 2011.

State legislatures would enact an ordinance decreeing or authorizing secession; it might or might not refer the matter to the state's voting citizens; and, the matter might or might not be presented to the governor for his approval. All of this makes dating a tricky matter as to exactly which date is the "true" date of secession.

This cover shows a Scott #26, 3¢ dull red just tied by the tail of a squiggle pen cancel and matching manuscript cancel of Bealeton (Virginia) April 17 (1861). On April 17, 1861 an Ordinance of Secession was passed by the Virginia legislature and on May 7, 1861 Virginia was accepted into the Confederate States of America.

You might ask just how it is that we can determine that this 1857 issued U.S. stamp was used in 1861. Ordinarily, the answer would be "we can't." But in this case, we are fortunate that it contains a letter headed "Edgewood April 16th, 1861" with a salutation to "My dear Churchill." Not only does it have an 1861 date, but says in part, "I have become perfectly disgusted with politics, I have no faith in the (Secession) Convention or the people of the State or I fear a majority are against."

The cover is addressed to "Dr. Jno C. Gordon, Trevillians Depot, Louisa, Va." Dr. John Churchill Gordon was appointed an Assistant Surgeon in the 38th VA Infantry on June 12, 1861 only a week after marrying Mary Beall Pegram. They eventually had ten children. Post-war, he practiced medicine in various locations in Albemarle County, Virginia.

Bealeton grew up as a Depot of the former Orange & Alexandria Rail Road, since renamed Southern Rail Road. The area was a major traveling point during the Civil War and saw many skirmishes related to nearby engagements. Bealeton lost importance with the decline of rail road travel and became a bedroom community of Manassas.

Important dates add both interest and value to your collection.

For information on the Confederate Stamp Alliance, see the society website at www.csalliance.com or write Trish Kaufmann, 10194 N. Old State Road, Lincoln DE 19960. ►