

## Custodians for Future Generations—Part Two

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Figure 1. An example of one of the Confederate ad covers that uninformed heirs discarded curbside with the trash.

Nine years ago, in my column “The President’s Prerogative” I wrote about the necessity of being responsible custodians for future generations (*The Confederate Philatelist*, vol. 53, no. 3, [2008]: 3). It was a philatelic horror story in which I relayed the circumstances of two major collections that were almost lost to posterity forever.

The first incident concerned part of the collection of the late George N. Malpass, who served on the editorial boards of the 1945 and 1959 *Dietz Confederate Catalog and Handbook*. His mentor was the late, great August Dietz. Malpass wrote hundreds of articles, particularly in the *Weekly Philatelic Gossip* in the 1940s and 50s. He was president of the Confederate Stamp Alliance from 1955–57 and proud of the fact that the *Confederate Bulletin* began under his administration.

The Malpass heir who brought me the amassed jumble of covers—strange, I thought, for such an organized collector—relayed a disturbing story. After the last of the Malpass children died, a cousin who was helping clean out the house rescued this remaining group of materials from where it had been discarded at the curb for trash pickup (fig. 1). Fortunately, the nephew who brought me the collection knew that there was value in the material. Was he ever in for a delightful surprise when I appraised it for six figures!

The second, even more chilling, incident took place when I was called to look at material that non-collectors had recovered from trash bins. When initially approached, I suspected this had to be something of little consequence, but changed my mind when I saw scans of covers worth tens of thousands of dollars each. I was quickly on a plane to personally examine it.

The collection that was so unceremoniously disposed of in dumpsters amounted to hundreds of thousands of dollars of material—great Confederate rarities, Americana, books, autographs, coins, manuscripts from the Middle Ages, stamps, and covers—some on auction lot pages with five-figure price tags—and many of these exceedingly rare. This “garbage refuse” also included gold coins whose intrinsic value even the most dim-witted idiot should have recognized. All of this was tossed in the trash by the indifferent and uninformed heirs.

There is another kind of philatelic tragedy which—while not the same—can result in similar, disastrous consequences: research notes and provenance information collected from decades ago that often are not kept with philatelic material when it is offered for sale, either privately or at auction.

Very recently offered at auction was a sizeable collection that the consignor had acquired over a lifetime from Confederate retail dealers, both past and present, as well as from major auction houses. When originally collected, most of the covers were accompanied by valuable research as well as identifying catalog types, prices, and so forth. Yet at auction, this collection not only had NO information with it, but none of the covers was protected by a cover sleeve. The materials were callously thrown in a box, endangering their condition; some were creased or crushed.

As a longtime researcher and former auctioneer, I can tell you that auction describers do not have the time to meticulously research covers in the way retailers and collectors/students often do. I know that some of the covers from this collector came from me. Yet, at auction, none of my lengthy, detailed descriptions accompanied them. Consequently, the consignor cost himself and the auction house money by not providing that critical information. I guess the flip side of that is that some of us bidders got great bargains. Nonetheless, it makes me cringe.

Also—not surprisingly in view of what I’ve just mentioned—the covers I bought out of that auction were awash with unlisted material (now being recorded for a future edition of the CSA catalog). The collector had not provided the CSA catalog editors with any new types of imprints, patriotics, or other categorized material. Yet this was not an uneducated nor unknowledgeable collector.

Perhaps the collector did not know what the editors wanted nor what to send. Fortunately, other CSA members did not use that as an excuse for not sharing. For example, when working on the recent edition of the CSA catalog, I was

delighted to receive a large, unrequested package from the late Dr. Ralph Brandon. He had taken pains to make color photocopies of his entire—and substantial—collection, accompanied by detailed write-ups, as well as send the materials to me along with a thank you letter. I doled out relevant copies to appropriate section editors, and through the published catalog, the entire hobby benefited from his generosity. Dr. Brandon was a class act, and we owe *him* the thank you.

The take-away here, in case you have not figured it out, is that we all are custodians for future generations. If you are fortunate enough to sell your materials while still alive, send every shred of information you have with them. Leave covers and stamps on your exhibit or album pages if you have them mounted that way.

In addition, I encourage you to leave detailed instructions both with your heirs and with the material itself. Suppose you and your spouse die together in an accident: relating your wishes only to your spouse would not have been enough. The information must be memorialized in your estate in writing, accompanied by specific letters of instruction. I know of at least one collector who is leaving directives that his material be sold at auction. He has stipulated that the auction house must pass along all research to each buyer as a condition of the auction agreement. I applaud this idea.

All of the foregoing information and more was conveyed in the pages of *The Confederate Philatelist* nine years ago. Unfortunately, it appears to bear repeating. We all have a responsibility as caretakers for the next generation that lovingly and eagerly acquire what we hold only temporarily. I urge you to take this obligation to heart and to be virtuous stewards for the good of the hobby as well as the benefit of your own wallet.

### *From the Editor—*

It's been a privilege to read and publish so many well-researched and thought-provoking essays since the beginning of this year. There are more of you out there with philatelic stories to tell—and you know who you are! Your focus might be the technical analysis of the stamps themselves or perhaps narratives about who-when-where-why stamps and covers were used. Educate our readership by submitting an article, short or long. And if you find organizing your thoughts overwhelming, contact me. In addition to polishing up an article for publication, the Alliance has specialists who can help with research questions and fact-checking.

Thanks for your support, and I look forward to hearing from you.

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