



A ‘Too Good to be True’ Trap

So, you are not a collector of Confederate States stamps but you know how to use a Scott catalog. You see an eBay listing — two listings, actually — described as the common and modestly-priced Scott CSA 11, 10¢ blue Jefferson Davis stamp. But the two listings don’t mention the obvious frame lines on two sides of each stamp, one a used example and one unused. Nor are the listings run “as is.” These stamps might be real sleepers — the much rarer “frameline” issue, Scott CSA 10. Incredible bargains ... or not. Will anyone else notice and bid? Or will you get lucky?

The CSA 10 “Frame Line” issue was printed with the same printing plates that printed the CSA 11. Thus, it bears the identical design but is bordered by frame lines, which were burnished out in order to print the CSA 11 stamps. Catalog values are for examples showing parts of lines on at least three sides.

The price difference between CSA 10 and CSA 11 is enormous. An unused CSA 11 catalogs a measly \$18, while an unused CSA 10 catalogs a whopping \$5,500, the most valuable of the Confederate general issue stamps. Unused stamps showing all four frames are exceedingly rare, with only two recorded. The one sound example is valued at \$35,000.

A used CSA 11 catalogs \$20, while a used CSA 10 catalogs \$2,500. Used frameline stamps showing all four frames sell for approximately three to four times those values.

With these price disparities, it is no wonder that the common issues are a target for manipulation. A ruler and a



Figure 1. Used 10¢ blue Jefferson Davis (Scott CSA 11) with frame lines drawn in on two sides in an attempt to make it appear to be the much rarer Scott CSA 10.



Figure 2. Unused 10¢ blue Jefferson Davis (Scott CSA 11) with frame lines drawn in on two sides in an attempt to make it appear to be the much rarer Scott CSA 10.

blue-ink pen are seemingly all that is needed to ensnare the unwary bargain hunter. I have a reference collection littered with such examples. They even include CSA 12, another Jefferson Davis stamp that was printed on a different printing plate with a different, but extremely similar, design which identification often confounds newer Confederate collectors.

Recently, I saw what I considered laughable fakes offered on eBay, such that I saved images of both examples for my digital reference files. Why laughable? Because the frame lines were clearly added in a too-wide line of turquoise-blue ink that had spread slightly due to the porosity of the stamp paper. The fraudulent lines are thicker than the genuine engraved lines as well as being the wrong color, which should be a deep blue. To my eye, the duplicitous lines are blatantly turquoise and uncharacteristically bulky with feathered ink.

But such things are in the eyes of the beholder. What seems so obvious to me, a student with decades of experience in this field, is not so obvious to others without the same familiarity with the subject. I was trying to show my non-collecting husband why these are bogus. The color looked the same to him. And he had the advantage of seeing an image enlarged many times its actual size on my computer screen. To me, it is glaringly different. To him, not so much. But he is not a philatelic student, although I inflict bits of information on him from time to time that I think he might find interesting.

Figures 1 and 2 show the used

and unused stamps offered on eBay in November 2023. Figure 3 shows a genuine frameline stamp, sold as lot 169 in the 2022 Siegel Rarities sale, for comparison. Note how narrow the genuine frame lines are on the genuine stamp in relation to the thick penned lines on the bogus stamps.

So what happened to these two pretenders on eBay?

By coincidence, the successful buyer of the used eBay example emailed me to see if his purchase was a genuine frameline stamp. I told him I might be able to help him if I saw a scan or he might have to submit it for formal expertization if it was not readily apparent to me from a scan. An obvious fake with drawn-in frames can usually be easily identified from a scan. A genuine frameline stamp should always be viewed with oblique light falling across the frames to determine whether the ink is appropriately raised on the paper, an indication that it is engraved, as was the stamp design. Most genuine issues only show parts of the potential four frames.

The Springfield facsimiles done by TASC0 (Tatham Stamp Company of Springfield, Massachusetts) in the mid-1900s tellingly have four complete frames and “Curtis Collection” printed in the tiniest letters below the frameline at lower left. When someone on the phone excitedly tells me they have a 4-frame frameline, it is virtually certain they have Springfields. These knock-offs are also not engraved (ink raised on the paper). They are a flat printing and very dull in appearance. They should fool no one ... but do all the time.

The eBay buyer told me he just bought the frameline stamp and did not have it yet; he would send a scan once received. Then I remembered the two stamps I had saved scans of from eBay only the day before. I sent him the two images and asked if either was the stamp he had just bought. Sure enough. Good guess, Trish. He bought the used one.

The bogus used example drew 17 bids from three separate “nibble” bidders who fought each other to a higher price. The successful bidder paid an uncomfortable \$419 for this bogus item.

Not the great bargain for which he had hoped.

As I write this, the seller currently has a 100% feedback score with 11,218 lots sold, 166 followers, 25 years of collecting experience, and 23 years selling on eBay. His offerings include many classic U.S. issues. The seller correctly described the lot as a CSA 11 but made no mention of the frame lines added to the stamp. Whether he did not realize the difference between CSA 10 and CSA 11 is anyone’s guess, although he is an experienced seller of classic U.S. period stamps.

The buyer corresponded with the seller ahead of the successful purchase and the seller indicated he knew nothing about Confederate stamps. Although he listed the stamp as a CSA 11, he told the then-potential buyer he had no idea what catalog number it really was; he was selling it as is.

Fortunately, the seller immediately agreed to refund the purchaser’s money, despite that “as is” conversation. Whether he offered to refund the purchase price of the other bogus frameline is not known. It sold for \$202.50 with nine bids submitted by six individual bidders.

It was described as unused with some gum and a bad crease. The used stamp was described as sound. The condition of the lots appears to be accurate and there was cordial correspondence ahead of the lot closing concerning whether it might be CSA 10 instead

of CSA 11. Nonetheless, it seems to me an “either/or” description and an eBay sales listing of “as is” would have been better stated from the start.

This was a learning experience for the buyer. He is fortunate he easily got his money back. When buying on eBay, or anywhere, do your homework ahead of time and Caveat Emptor. If it seems too good to be true, it probably is.

At least this tale has a happy ending.

I’ve purchased many a collection where either collectors or their heirs had to be given disappointing news as to either inaccurate stamp identification or overstated condition status of some of their treasures. Don’t be one of them.

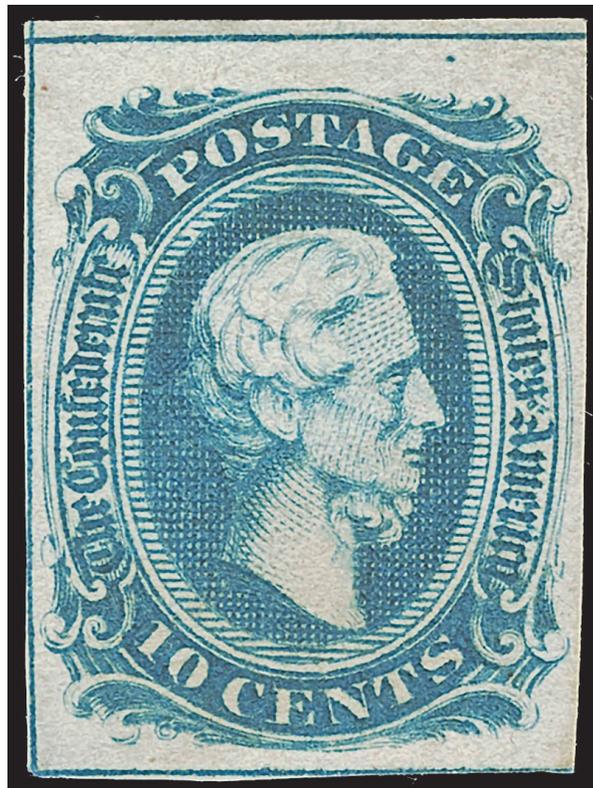


Figure 3. Genuine unused 10¢ blue “frameline” (Scott CSA 10) sold in the 2022 Siegel Rarities Sale. (Courtesy Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries)

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or anywhere, do your
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