

This Day in History... June 1, 1861

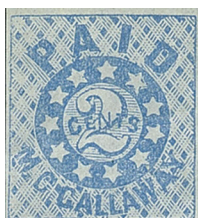
Confederate Postal Service Begins

On June 1, 1861, the Confederate States of America took control of their own postal operations.

As North and South grew closer to war in early 1861, the federal government continued postal service in the South for a limited time. However, US post offices across the South held substantial stamp inventories and the federal government feared they would be used or sold for profit to fund the war. To this end, the US government declared that all existing US stamps would be demonetized (declared invalid) as of June 1, and US postal operations in the South would cease on that day.



*New Orleans Postmaster's
Provisional stamp*



*Memphis Postmaster's
Provisional stamp*

As a result, the Confederate Post Office Department was formed in February 1861. John Henninger Reagan was appointed postmaster general of the Confederate Post Office in March of 1861. Reagan persuaded some of the US Post Office's bureau heads to follow him to the Confederacy. Several brought their records and account books with them.

Reagan was able to establish a Southern postal service within six weeks, but was hamstrung by shortages of ink, paper, and printing companies with the resources to produce sufficient quantities of postage stamps.

When the June 1, 1861, deadline approached and mail service between the two sides ended, the Confederacy lacked stamps. Some postmasters handstamped the word "PAID" on envelopes, while others in major cities like New Orleans produced provisional stamps to keep the mail moving within their region. But the first government-issued stamps did not become available for twenty weeks.

Express companies suddenly found themselves busy carrying mail between the North and South. The US Post Office Department ordered an end to the practice on August 26, 1861. After that date, mail between the Union and the Confederacy had to be sent by flag of truce.

A 5¢ stamp picturing Jefferson Davis was issued on October 16, 1861. It was produced by the Richmond firm Hoyer & Ludwig using stone lithography. In an era before television and the Internet, the 5¢ Jefferson Davis stamp offered some people in the South a first glimpse of the new Confederate president. This also marked the first time a living politician appeared on a stamp used in the US.



*Benedict was both a
teacher and friend to
Margaret Mead.*

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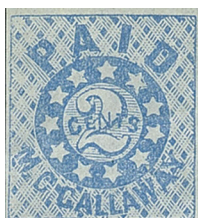
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