

Mobile, Alabama CSA Provisional Issue



When the Confederate States of America (CSA) took control of their post offices on June 1, 1861, prepayment was required on most mail, even though stamps would not be available until October. This forced customers to visit the post office to prepay postage in cash. As a convenience, Mobile postmaster Lloyd Bowers was one of the first to issue what are now known as Postmasters' Provisionals. Most cities issued hand-stamped envelopes for this



service. Mobile was one of only three cities to create adhesives that were printed by stone lithography. Two similar stamps were issued: a 2¢ black and a 5¢ blue. One of only two copies of the 2¢ stamp showing any portion of an imprint is shown above. The 5¢ stamp above is also a corner copy showing the final portion of the imprint. Sheet margins of any size have always been known to be exceptionally rare. Imprint copies seldom show any more than the very top portion of the letters in the imprint. In fact, only two other copies show any complete letters, with only one of the two in private hands.

The exhibit begins with unpublished earliest recorded use data. Intended use information is discussed with one of two stamps accepted for prepayment outside of Mobile. A few plate varieties are shown with printing and reconstruction data. A thorough rate study illustrated with outstanding examples consumes ten pages. The exhibit concludes with a few extraordinary uses and the latest recorded uses of both provisional stamps.

July 14, 1861

**Probable
earliest
recorded
use**



The earliest recorded use is listed as July 2, 1861 in one catalog and elsewhere as July 15, 1861. However, no single digit July use or earlier has held up under scrutiny. A so-called JUL 3 copy in this collection looks like JUL 2 and is perhaps the original listing copy. It is docketed as being received July 27 in South Carolina. Other covers from the same correspondence and time frame were received in four or five days, so this poor strike is almost certainly JUL 2x. A so called JUN 24 use, in this collection and illustrated in an auction catalog, is actually NOV 24 and a reported JUL 12 use, also in this collection and illustrated in an auction catalog, is clearly DEC 12. In fact, July 14 is the earliest use this writer has been able to document. There are two July 14 uses shown in the exhibit with over twenty later uses in July in the collection or documented. The large number of July uses beginning July 14 makes a lone earlier July 2 use unlikely.

The earliest recorded use of the 2¢ stamp (shown later) is August 5, 1861, at least several weeks later than the 5¢ stamp. The 2¢ stamp was used for a longer period, about sixteen months after the 5¢ stamp.

Intended use and accepted for prepayment outside of Mobile

Nearby New Orleans was the first city to issue adhesive provisional stamps. After complaints from postmasters in the surrounding area where the stamps were not valid for use, New Orleans added the phrase “Usable Exclusively in the New Orleans Post Office” as an imprint in the margin.



Tapling Collection, scan of photograph at 75%

A top sheet margin pair from the Tapling Collection in the British Library in London (illustration above) shows a similar imprint above Mobile 5¢ provisional stamps. It reads in part: “[exclus]ively at the Mobile Post Office.” Only one other top imprint copy is known from Mobile (shown later). Due to their scarcity, it is possible the top imprint was also added to the Mobile pane after the initial printing.

Since Mobile provisional stamps were only valid for use at Mobile, almost all copies are cancelled with the black double circle Mobile postmark, which had been in use since late 1859 and always included a year slug.

Only two stamps were postmarked and accepted for prepayment outside of Mobile



Postmarked Claiborne, Alabama, January, 1862 5¢ rate to Shelby Springs

Claiborne is about 90 miles north of Mobile at mile marker 146 on the Alabama River. The other non-Mobile use was postmarked in Montgomery, Alabama, a little further up the Alabama River.

Pane layout and reconstruction

With far fewer than 100 copies extant, reconstruction of the 2¢ pane is probably not possible. Using repetitive and consistent printing marks on 5¢ stamps, such as those detailed below, about thirty blocks ranging from strips of three to pane margin blocks of ten have been reconstructed. Until recently, none of this had resulted in a determination of the pane size, much less the number of panes, stones or printings.



No cross-bar
in *A* of *PAID*

**Unlisted
variety**

Miss J. J. Hardison



Vertical line through
O of *POST* above
right as well as all
three stamps in the
strip of three on the
piece at bottom left.

Far right stamp is a
typical imprint copy
showing only the top
part of the letters.

Information is based on access to almost 300 5¢ stamps, including fifty-six multiples. The largest multiples are two strips of four (one vertical and one horizontal), with only three strips of three recorded (all horizontal).

Rate study: 5¢ single letter rate under 500 miles

From June 1, 1861 through June 30, 1862, postage on single letters not exceeding 500 miles was 5¢. Single letters could not exceed one-half ounce in weight.



July 18, 1861

To New Orleans

Scarce and unusually large (12 mm) sheet margin copy



October, 1861

To Port Gibson,
Mississippi

About two
dozen corner
card uses have
been recorded

10¢ double letter rate under 500 miles

Double rate letters weighed between ½ and 1 ounce and required 10¢ postage when carried less than 500 miles. This rate was good through June 30, 1862.



November 8, 1861

Last five letters in OFFICE in a slightly different position than Tapling pair

The only top imprint copy in private hands



August 27, 1861

Trial separation

Only two multiples recorded with trial separations

The Mobile 5¢ provisional is the only CSA provisional that had any form of perforation, official or unofficial. Another strip from this same correspondence shows the same vertical razor cut between stamps.

10¢ single letter rate over 500 miles

From June 1, 1861 through June 30, 1862, postage on single letters exceeding 500 miles was 10¢. Single letters could not exceed one-half ounce in weight.

November 9, 1861

5¢ pair placed over
demonetized 3¢ star die
to North Carolina



December 17, 1861

**Only recorded
bottom imprint
pair**

Addressed to the
Vice President of the
CSA in Richmond

The bottom imprint reads “Eng. & Pri. by W. R. Robertson Mobile.” It appears below three adjacent stamps in at least four different positions, two of which are higher or nearer to the pane than the other two.

15¢ triple letter rate under 500 miles

The 15¢ rate was only available in the confederate period before the rate increase on July 1, 1862. It was used for letters weighing between 1 and 1½ ounce traveling under 500 miles.

Only three triple rate letters have been recorded.



August 15, 1861

Walker, Mead & Co. was listed as a cotton factor in the 1861 Mobile city directory



August 7, 1861

Addressed to the court clerk, probably contained several depositions

20¢ quadruple letter rate under 500 miles

Quadruple rate letters weighed between 1½ and 2 ounces and were carried less than 500 miles. Postage was also 20¢ on double weight letters carried 500 miles or more, although none have been recorded.

August 27, 1861

Two vertical pairs to Beersheba Springs, Tennessee, a popular summer resort about 450 miles from Mobile.



This vertical strip of four was recently used to help prove that the 5¢ Mobile provisional pane is only five stamps high.

July 20, 1861

The largest recorded 5¢ multiple and only vertical strip of four



Mr. A.S. Nelson of Greensborough, Alabama was the father of Judge Robert S. Nelson. Robert, who was very interested in Alabama history, was an early stamp collector known as “the old stamp hunter from Selma.”

2¢ drop rate: 3¢ overpayment and correct payment

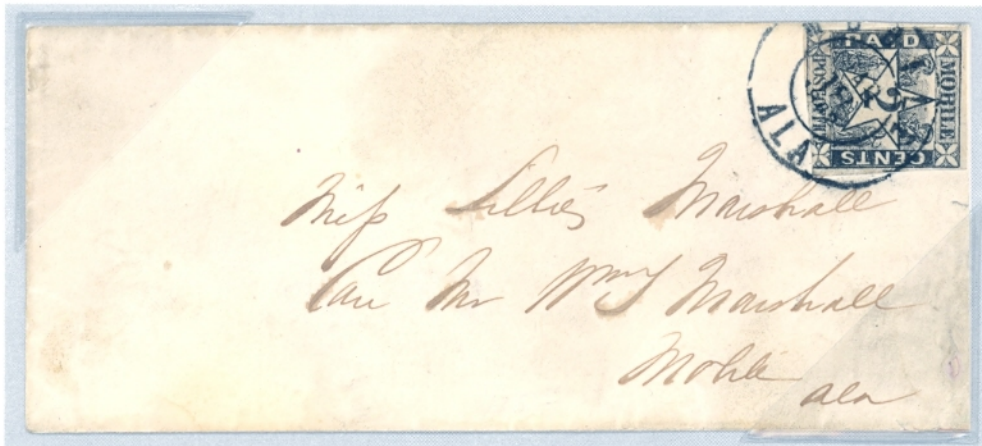
The drop letter rate became 2¢ on June 1, 1861 and remained 2¢ throughout the confederate period. Drop letters were not rated by weight, so there was only a single, 2¢ drop rate.



July 22, 1861

Only recorded drop rate overpayment using the 5¢ stamp

The 2¢ stamp has not been recorded used before August, 1861



March 18, 1862

Several drop letters from Mobile during the war period were addressed to this young lady, including these two.

Stamped covers arriving in Mobile carried on board steamboats are sometimes described as overpaid drop letters. However, in this case, it is very unlikely that the top cover originated outside of Mobile and contained such an early use of the 5¢ Mobile provisional.

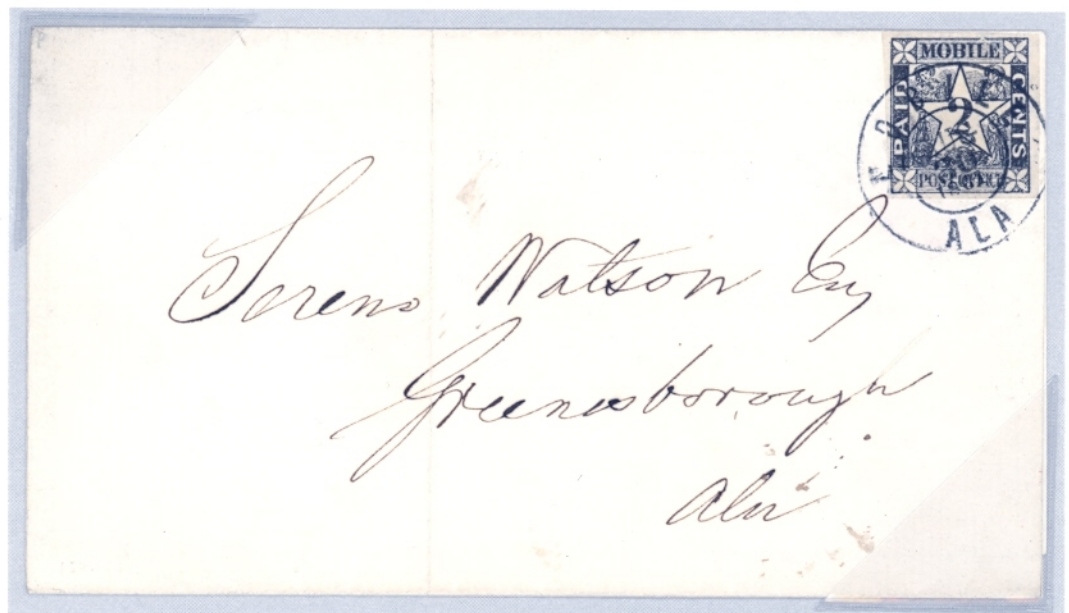
2¢ circular rate and 2¢ wrapper rate

Printed circulars and prices current not containing a personal message could be sent for as little as 2¢, depending upon their weight. Postage for printed matter bundled by a wrapper also started at 2¢.



Undated, probably 1862

Homemade, unsealed envelope contained a circular or handbill not exceeding three ounces



August 30, 1861

Docketing indicates this wrapper contained an enclosure dated August 28, 1861.

Only single rate wrapper recorded

Only two wrappers bearing Mobile provisionals have survived.

4¢ double rate circular and 6¢ triple rate wrapper

Circular rates followed a different weight progression than regular letters: 2¢ for the first three ounces with 2¢ more for each additional ounce or fraction of an ounce.

One of only two double rates and the only recorded triple rate.

September 7, 1861

The largest recorded 2¢ multiple is a pair.

Only two pairs recorded on cover



1862 triple rate wrapper to Pensacola

2¢ stamps used for single letter rate: 1¢ overpayment of 5¢ rate

Although issued primarily for drop letters and circulars, 2¢ stamps were valid for any postage rate, including single and double letter rates.

Only three uses of the 2¢ stamp paying the higher rates are recorded.

Earliest recorded use of the 2¢ Mobile provisional stamp.



August 5, 1861

1¢ overpayment of the 5¢ single letter rate

Convenience overpayment from Mobile to Rock Mills, some 280 miles distant in Randolph County.

The earliest recorded use of the 2¢ Mobile provisional stamp has long been listed as August 10, 1861. This cover is five days earlier.

It is ironic that the earliest recorded use of the 2¢ provisional is an overpayment of the 5¢ rate. Only four other August 1861 uses of the 2¢ stamp are recorded, so it was almost certainly not printed and available for use as early as the more common 5¢ stamp.

Due 5¢ uses for forwarding and possibly weight

Forwarded letters were charged postage to the new destination. Postage rates could also be adjusted at any time during the journey if it was determined the letter was over weight or traveling more than 500 miles.



July 14, 1861

Either the postmaster at Grove Hill did not accept the Mobile 5¢ stamp as evidence of prepayment or this was overweight and consequently underpaid

Probable earliest recorded use

The postmaster at Grove Hill, which is less than 80 miles north of Mobile, postmarked this cover almost two weeks after it was mailed in Mobile. This was almost certainly the first confederate use of a stamp he had encountered and he may have written to Montgomery, the closest distributing post office, to seek guidance.



August 27, 1861

Postal markings from the originating city, Mobile, the forwarding city, Beersheba Springs, Tennessee, and the final destination, Huntsville, which added the scarce *DUE/5*

Extraordinary uses: mourning cover and patriotic sticker uses

Once postmaster provisional stamps were available in Mobile, prepayment was evidenced on virtually all outgoing mail by the use of one or more of these stamps. In fact, use of brand new PAID 2, 5 and 10 handstamps in Mobile was limited to the first few weeks of the confederacy, only until provisional stamps were available.



August 13, 1861

Mourning cover to
a music dealer in
New Orleans

October 30, 1861

Southern Confederacy
patriotic sticker tied
by Mobile postmark.
These stickers were
used in several cities,
including at least one
in Texas.

**Any sticker tied by a
postmark is scarce.
Only recorded use with
a Mobile provisional.**



The seven star confederate flag represented the six states that formed the CSA as well as Texas, which was the first state to join. Similar to US flags, the number of stars increased as did the number of states in the CSA.

Origin outside of Mobile: private express and military uses

Mail carried into Mobile privately or by the military could be franked with provisional stamps when entering the mail stream at Mobile. These uses are very uncommon.

January 17, 1862

PAID and manuscript
Paid 5¢ applied at Fort
Morgan to indicate cash
had been received. Taken
to Mobile post office where
cash was delivered, stamp
applied and the cover
entered the postal system.

Very late use.



Originated in Troy, New
York on June 5, 1861.

Returned to dead letter office.
Resent July 8 by private
express via Louisville.
Arrived Mobile and entered
the mail on July 15. Missent
to Woodville and
forwarded to Mooresville.

Very early use, right sheet
margin pair.

An unusual North to South returned letter resent by express which was further delayed by a postal clerk who misread the destination address and sent it to Woodville, a few miles east of Huntsville, instead of Mooresville, which is just a few miles west of Huntsville.

Latest recorded uses of the 2¢ and 5¢ Mobile provisional stamps

Supplies of the 5¢ provisional stamp apparently ran out in late 1861, as only a few uses are recorded in 1862. Thus, the 5¢ stamp was in use for less than six months. The much less common 2¢ stamp is usually not year dated, but is known to have been used well into 1863, giving it an almost two year period of use.

January 18, 1862

**Latest recorded
use of 5¢
Mobile stamp**



May 5, 1863

**Latest recorded use
of 2¢ Mobile stamp**

Even though this envelope is considered a ladies cover (due to the size and glazed embossed designs), it was definitely not sent by a lady. The secretary of the Committee of Safety, John Reid, was seeking information from Adolph Renaud, the bookkeeper at Ela, Ayers & Co., a saddlery. His letter reads in part:

“I am instructed by the committee to notify you that Wm. Turner & B. Goubils have given information that you have refused to receive Confederate Treasury Notes in payment for debts due you. I am also directed to ask you if the charge made is true.”