

# *A Star is Born*

The Smithsonian's

McKinney, Texas

Southern Letter Unpaid

By Vince King



Fig. 1

Being a native of McKinney, Texas, I am always interested in obtaining special postal history items from that north Texas community. During a February 2009 discussion with TPHS member and auctioneer Charles Shreve, he alerted me to a McKinney cover he had seen in a collection that the Smithsonian National Postal Museum had recently obtained. My interest instantly peaked when Charles told me it was a Confederate cover that had been struck with the rare “SOUTH LETTER UNPAID.” handstamp. Within a few weeks of contacting Cheryl Ganz, curator for the museum, I was sent a scan of the cover shown above (Fig. 1).

## Provenance of the Cover

In April of 2008, the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum received a well-known stamp collection from the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia. The Harry L. Jefferys collection, which includes numerous philatelic rarities, was bequeathed to the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia in 1948 by insurance executive

H.L. Jefferys, where it was stored for decades. Last year the Franklin Institute determined the collection no longer supported its mission of science and technology-based education and reached an agreement to transfer it to the National Postal Museum.

The Harry L. Jefferys collection consists of U.S. stamps, proofs and essays and is particularly strong in the 1851-1857 issue. The collection includes full panes of the 1-cent and 3-cent 1851 issue and the 12-cent 1857



The CSA Star of McKinney

issue, as well as scarce positions of the 1-cent 1851 issue, including positions 7R1E and 99R2. The collection includes a 3-cent 1851 issue with double impression and a 4-cent Schermack Type III coil single. Also included are several printing errors, including plate position No. 2 of the 1918 inverted Jenny airmail stamp. However, most important to Texas postal history enthusiasts, the collection contained a small bundle of covers . . . which included the McKinney Southern Letter Unpaid example.

## The Southern Letter Unpaid Marking

On June 1, 1861, the United States Postal Service ceased all operations in the seceded states and the Confederate Postal Service took over all the existing US post offices within the CSA. Of course, many letters were already in transit when operations ceased. These letters were franked with ‘old US stamps’ either in the form of adhesives or postal stationary entires. In Louisville, KY, a major PO distribution hub for mail into the North, letters from the Southern States were held for a period of time.

By a dispatch dated June 24, 1861, J.J. Speed, the postmaster at Louisville, was advised to treat “letters from the South for the loyal states [i.e. to the North] as unpaid . . .” He was also directed to **remove all old stamps** found on the envelopes!!! Of course the latter was an impractical request considering some 4,000 to 5,000 letters had been held. As a result, Mr. Speed decided to ‘cancel’ the letters rather than remove the stamps and created a special handstamp for the task which was designed to notify destination postmasters that postage was to be collected.

A distinctive handstamp reading “SOUTH LETTER UNPAID.” (SLUP) in two straight-lines resulted. It was used in conjunction with a companion “DUE 3” device to accomplish the task at hand and both were struck in the characteristic greenish-blue ink used at the Louisville PO.<sup>1</sup> The matching Louisville, KY double-circle datestamp was also usually struck with the SLUP handstamp; however, Siegel Auction Galleries censuses note there is a pattern suggesting that the earliest mail processed out of Louisville was not marked with the datestamp.<sup>2</sup>

## The McKinney, Texas SLUP Cover

The SLUP originated on an 1860 3¢ Red star-die entire addressed to Bryantville, Garrod Co. [sic], KY and posted at McKinney, TX on May 31, 1861. It was obviously in-transit when postal operations were severed between North and South and impounded when received at Louisville, KY. Sometime in late June or early July 1861 it was struck with the SLUP handstamp and released for delivery to Bryantville due 3 cents.

After arrival at Bryantville, it appears the recipient was no

longer at that location and the letter was forwarded to Frankfort, KY. The forwarding was paid with a 3¢ 1857 issue tied by a Bryantsville, KY cds dated Jul 25 (1861). While these stamps had been demonetized, they were valid for postage in the 'US' until new issues became available in August of 1861.

This cover is not only a rare and desirable example of US and CSA postal history, but is certainly one of the most striking and important Texas items extant. It is also one of only two covers recorded from Texas which contain the scarce SLUP marking.

### Confirming the McKinney Star Killer

My interest in the Smithsonian cover stems from another direction. Several years ago, I acquired a McKinney, TX 3c Red star-die entire from Gordon Bleuler's CSA collection which had been posted Feb. 20, 1861 after Texas seceded from the Union. (Fig. 2). It was struck with a single "star killer" on the indicia of the entire. In addition, the postmaster had also struck the reverse 13 times with the same device creating a visibly stunning cover. Gordon had always "waxed poetically" on how this cover was perhaps a handstamped Independent State patriotic cover, created by the postmaster at McKinney. He surmised the 13 stars represented the 13 potential 'Southern states' that would soon comprise the Confederacy (Kentucky and Missouri included).<sup>3</sup>

However, when I obtained the cover, my focus was on the star killer. I wanted to make sure that all of the strikes on the reverse identically matched the strike on the front and had not been fraudulently added. Digital scans of the cover and markings convinced me that all 14 strikes were indeed authentic and placed from the same device.

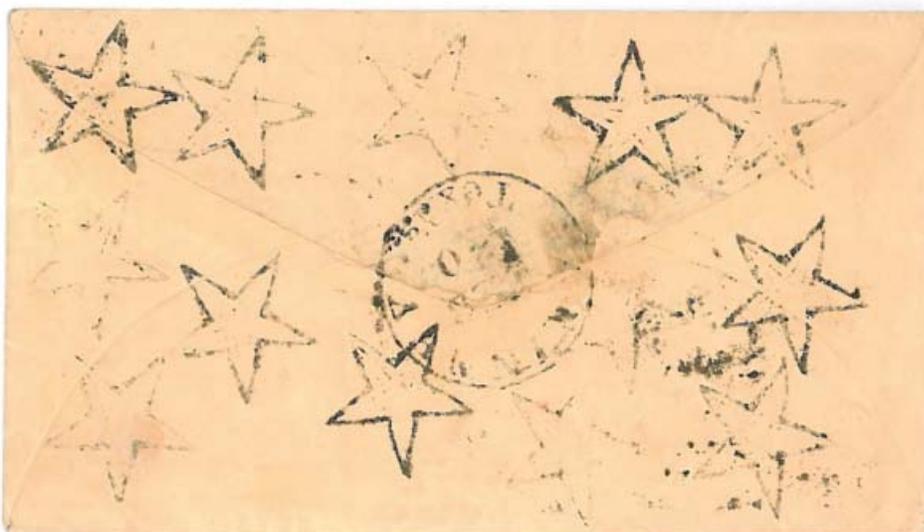
Unfortunately at the time this was the only recorded example of the device, and I had no way to confirm the existence of the star killer . . . until this year. With the appearance of the McKinney SLUP cover at the Smithsonian, I can now confirm that this killer did exist and was used during early 1861. It is amazing that the only two recorded examples adorn such gems of Texas postal history.

### The Smithsonian's National Postal Museum

The National Postal Museum is devoted to presenting the colorful and engaging history of the nation's mail service and showcasing the largest and most comprehensive collection of stamps and philatelic material in the world. It is located at 2 Massachu-



Fig. 2



setts Ave. N.E., across from Union Station. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., except Dec. 25. For more information visit the museum's web site at

[www.postalmuseum.si.edu](http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu)

I can attest by personal experience that the museum staff is very 'collector friendly.' They have been very cooperative and prompt answering requests for information. They are tremendous assets to our hobby. Special thanks to Chief Curator of Philately Cheryl R. Ganz and Research Chair Thomas Lera for their help in preparation of this article.

### Endnotes

- 1 *The New Dietz Confederate States Catalog and Handbook*, 1986; Skinner, Gunter and Sanders, page 206.
- 2 Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries Sale 764, Lot 2300, lot description; <http://www.siegelauctions.com>, accessed 30 July 2009
- 3 *Texas Postal History Society Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 2, June 1981, 'Texas Gems' by Gordon Bleuler, pages 7-9.