

Mail Handling Across the Union and Confederate Lines: May 24, 1861 Through August 26, 1861

Synopsis for the Judges (Prepared June 21, 2026)

Purpose: To explain mail handling across the Union and Confederate lines by government and private carriers between the United States (USA) closure of the Washington, DC - Richmond, VA postal route May 24, 1861 and the USA termination of all communication with the Confederate States of America (CSA) August 26, 1861.

Background: South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia and Louisiana seceded from the Union and formed the CSA February 4, 1861. Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina and Tennessee subsequently seceded and joined the CSA. Washington, DC – Richmond, VA and Louisville, KY – Nashville, TN remained the only North – South postal routes after Tennessee seceded. The USA closed the Washington, DC - Richmond route May 24. Mail addressed to the seceded states being carried on this route was diverted to the USA Dead Letter Office (DLO) in Washington, D.C. CSA mail northbound to the USA was diverted to the CSA DLO in Richmond, VA between May 24 and 31. The USA suspended postal service in the seceded states May 31. The CSA initiated independent postal operations June 1. The USA prohibited postal communication with the CSA June 7. The USA closed the Louisville, KY – Nashville, TN route June 12. Three private express companies, American Letter Express, Adams Express and Whiteside's Express, initiated private transport of mail across-the-lines for a fee in addition to USA and CSA government postage. President Abraham Lincoln terminated all communication with the CSA August 26, 1861.

Philatelic Importance: The series of events that occurred between May 24 and August 26, 1861 progressively and significantly diminished mail transmission across-the-lines. Consequently, surviving covers in quality condition from this period are very scarce. The philatelic importance of this exhibit lies in the selection of the very few surviving covers of high quality, including only recorded uses, which illustrate and explain each successive event affecting across-the-lines mail transmission during this brief time frame.

Scope and Organization:

Page 1: Title Page and Exhibit Outline

1-3: Washington DC – Richmond Route Suspended May 24

4: USA Suspended Southbound Mail June 7

USA Suspended Louisville – Nashville Route June 12

5: Louisville Created "Southern Letter Unpaid" Handstamp

6: Precursor Private Express Company Mail Pre-June 15

7: American Letter Express Company

8-12: Adams Express Company

13: Whiteside's Express Company

14-15: Southern Express Company

16: USA Suspended All Southbound
Mail August 26

Red Borders: Significant cover. **Blue Borders:** Newly recorded item. **Cert:** PF or CWPS certificate.

Treatment: The exhibit pages explain the series of events during the May 24 to August 26, 1861 time frame in chronological order. At least one cover illustrating each action taken by the USA and the CSA and the roles played by the private express companies during this period is shown. Pages 1-3 illustrate the impact of the closure of the Washington DC – Richmond, VA postal route on across-the-lines mail from May 24 - 31, 1861. Page 4 shows the result of USA suspension of southbound mail to the CSA effective June 7 and closure of the Louisville, KY – Nashville, TN route June 12. Page 5 shows the creation and application of the Southern Letter Unpaid handstamp by the Louisville postmaster. Pages 6-13 show the role played by the three private express companies, American Letter Express, Adams Express, and Whiteside's Express, that carried mail across-the-lines. Pages 14 and 15 show the creation of the Southern Express Company from the Adams Express Company and its role in across-the-lines mail carriage. Two covers that could not be transported across-the-lines because mail transmission was suspended August 26 serve as the final exhibit page.

Difficulty of Acquisition: The time period of this exhibit, May 24 through August 26, 1861 is extremely short. Surviving well-preserved examples of covers mailed during this time period are encountered very infrequently. Acquisition of the uniformly high-quality examples and the only recorded examples included in this exhibit required relentless and aggressive pursuit at auction and through private treaty for 20 years. They were acquired among stiff competition from some of the best Civil War postal history collections brought to market during that time, including those of Brandon, Erivan, Kilbourne, Kramer, and Walske, among others.

Provenance: Many covers exhibited here previously resided in the great postal history collections formed by Birkinbine, Green, Haas, Knapp, Shenfield, and Weatherly, among others.

Rarity and Condition: 8 of the 26 postal artifacts included in this exhibit are 1 of 3 or less, and 5 are the only, recorded examples, of that artifact or its postal use. The story told by this exhibit is only possible because of these 8 postal artifacts. Claims of number recorded, the finest known, etc., are supported by the exhibitor's study of philatelic auction house databases, 40 year collection of auction catalogs, complete runs of the *Chronicle* and the *Civil War Philatelist*, and the personal records he developed researching this topic.

Personal Studies: The exhibitor's discoveries and published research are indicated on exhibit pages 2, 15 and 16. The publication citations are *Confederate Philatelist* 65: 28-29, 2020 and *Chronicle* 289: 19-30, 2026.

Selection Criteria for Exhibit Inclusion: The covers included here were selected because they represent the finest, or are among the finest, known examples, and in some instances the only recorded example.

Selected Material Highlights: Ten of the extremely difficult-to-acquire covers critically important to explain and illustrate mail handling across-the-lines during this time period and which are included in this exhibit are:

1. "Southern Letter Unpaid" handstamp applied in Louisville on 2 Northbound covers (Page 5).
2. The better of 2 recorded America Letter Express Jenkins and McGill hand stamped covers (Page 7).
3. Adams Express Company Instructional Notification to the Public (Page 8).
4. One of 3 across-the-lines express covers bearing a Memphis, TN 5 cent provisional (Page 9).
5. One of 3 recorded Civil War Prisoner-of-War covers carried by Adams Express (Page 11).
6. Cover carried across-the-lines by Adams Express and placed into USA mail to Germany, franked with 1860 30 cent stamp (Page 12).
7. One of 2 recorded covers bearing the Whiteside's Express label (Page 13).
8. Original notification of the formation of the Southern Express Company (Page 14).
9. Only recorded cover bearing the Southern Express Company handstamp (Page 15).
10. Only recorded example of the "NO MAIL SERVICE" handstamp (Page 16).

Exhibitor's Knowledge and Expertise: The exhibitor is a recognized expert in Civil War and Confederate postal history. He has published original research in the *Chronicle*, the *Confederate Philatelist*, the *Civil War Philatelist*, the *Collectors Club Philatelist* and *La Posta*. He has been invited to speak at the USPCS, the Collectors Club, the 2019 Civil War Symposium, NAPEX 2021, GASS 2024 and at BOSTON 2026. His published research is cited on the exhibit pages. His multi-frame exhibit "The Development of the Confederate States of America Postal Service from Secession to Appomattox" received the Grand Award at NAPEX 2019, NOJEX 2019, BALPEX 2021, OKPEX 2023, CHICAGOPEX 2023 and St. LOUIS EXPO 2025. His single frame exhibit "United States Demonetization and Transition to the 1861 Design Stamps" received the Grand Award at St. LOUIS STAMP EXPO 2024 and the 2024 Single Frame Champion of Champions award.

Exhibit History: This exhibit received the single frame Grand Award at WESTPEX 2026.

- Bibliography:**
1. Kaufman PA, Crown Jr FJ, Palazolo JS: Confederate States of America: Catalog of Stamps and Postal History, Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012.
 2. Kimbrough JL, Bush CL: Collector's Guide to Confederate Philately. Second Edition, 2011.
 3. Knowles, DM: A Quintessential Northbound Across-the-Lines Cover. *Confederate Philatelist* 65: 28-29, 2020.
 4. Knowles, DM: "Mails Suspended" Markings Applied During the American Civil War. *Chronicle* 289: 19-30, 2026 (Journal Front Cover Illustration).
 5. Walske SC, Trepel SR: Special Mail Routes of the American Civil War: A Guide to Across-the-Lines Postal History, Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2008.

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7: American Letter Express Company

8-12: Adams Express Company

13: Whiteside's Express Company

14-15: Southern Express Company

16: USA Terminated All Mail Conveyance
Across-the-Lines August 26

Red Borders: Significant cover. **Blue Borders:** Newly recorded item. **Cert:** PF or CWPS Certificate.

Rarity and Condition: Only small amounts of mail were transported successfully across-the-lines by government and private carriers between May 24 and August 26, 1861. Surviving covers in quality condition are scarce. Those exhibited here are among the finest known examples, several of which are the only recorded use

USA Suspended Southbound Mail via Washington, DC - Richmond, VA.

May 24, 1861

Federal troops occupied Alexandria, VA May 23, 1861, closing the Washington, DC - Richmond, VA postal route. Mail addressed to the seceded states carried on that route was diverted to the USA DLO starting May 24, 1861.



May 28, 1861 carrier usage
New York City to Virginia
diverted to the USA DLO.
Returned to the sender
(address written on the left)
June 4, 1861
hand stamped "DUE 3 cts"
for return postage due.