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National Postal Museum Acquires Rare Confederate Printing Plate

The Smithsonian's National Postal Museum has acquired from The Franklin Institute a Confederate postage-stamp printing plate that was confiscated during the Civil War. The printing plate contains 400 5-cent Jefferson Davis stamp images typographed in copper and weighs about 10 pounds—nearly 100 pounds with the backing plate. The copper plate was ordered by the Confederate States of America and manufactured by De La Rue & Co. of London in 1862. The federal vessel *Mercedita* captured the British ship *Bermuda* between Bermuda and Nassau April 27, 1862, and as part of the contraband, the printing plate was brought to Philadelphia and sold. It was never used to print stamps by the Confederacy.

The Confederate printing plate was acquired by The Franklin Institute in 1954, when it was actively building a philatelic collection. Subsequently, the institute has deaccessioned and disposed of most of its postal-related objects, finding that philately is no longer consistent with its educational mission.

“This spectacular acquisition will be a centerpiece in the display case of the three-dimensional objects from the National Philatelic Collection to be featured in the new William H. Gross Stamp Gallery,” said Cheryl R. Ganz, chief curator of philately. “The 5-cent plate provides a wonderful connection to the first philatelic object ever collected by the Smithsonian Institution—a pane of the Confederate States of America’s 10-cent blue Jefferson Davis stamp.”

“It is appropriate that the Smithsonian’s National Postal Museum was able to acquire the historic captured Confederate printing plate at the beginning of the commemoration of the Civil War Sesquicentennial,” said Trish Kaufmann, past president of the Confederate Stamp Alliance. “Its significance to American postal history cannot be overstated.”

The acquisition, preservation and display of this spectacular object are made possible by Vince and Becky King of Denton, Texas.

The National Postal Museum is devoted to presenting the colorful and engaging history of the nation's mail service and showcasing one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of stamps and philatelic material in the world. It is located at 2 Massachusetts Avenue N.E., Washington, D.C., across from Union Station. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (closed Dec. 25). For more information about the Smithsonian, please call (202) 633-1000 or visit the museum website at www.postalmuseum.si.edu.

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