

Finding Treasures

Civil War Prisoner of War Covers are Key Treasures of the Past.

Fred Schmitt



Salisbury Prison, N.C. Incoming folded letter datelined July 4th 1862, addressed to "Capt. A.H. White. 5th N.Y. Cavalry/ Prisoner of War/ Confederate Military Prison Salisbury N.C."



Andersonville, Ga. (Camp Sumter). Wallpaper cover to Lewiston Me. with "Exd. H.W. In Extremis" examiner's marking applied by Camp Commandant Capt. Henry Wirz at top, endorsed "from prisoner of war"



Camp Oglethorpe for Officers, Macon Ga. Small folded letter from prisoner datelined "Prisoners Camp, Macon Ga. June 6 1864", prisoner's endorsement on front, censored "Ex WS" (W.S. Scott, 1st Sgt. 5th Ga. Infantry)

Covers shown are from past sales of the Robert A. Siegel auction firm. We are grateful for their kind offices.

Back when I was a young stamp collector in high school (where I belonged to a pretty active junior stamp club, by the way), I ran across a somewhat puzzling cover that was franked with a single stamp from the United States and another single stamp from the Confederate States of America. The cover was not in a collection, but was owned by a family I knew—so it has yet to be discovered by anyone with any philatelic background.

Of course, I had never seen anything like it. At that time in my life, I was much more interested in collecting stamps rather than anything related to postal history (stamps on cover). I asked the family who owned the cover if I could take it to a local stamp shop where I knew there were some very astute philatelists who hung out there on Saturdays.

When I carefully pulled the cover out of a notebook I was carrying, I quickly got the attention of the owner of the shop and some of the customers as well. Collectively, they gave me their opinion of the cover: it was an envelope from a father in South Carolina to his son who was a Confederate States of America army soldier at Johnson's Island Union prison camp in Ohio. Both the stamps on the cover and the cover, itself, were in really good condition and the guys at the shop estimated the value of the cover at over \$300.

Today, that same cover might go for over \$1,500! The collecting of Civil War era prisoner-of-war covers is a popular specialty among postal history collectors—and I have long since learned that postal history from either side during the Civil War goes up in value like an old-fashioned share of stock from General Motors. Some P.O.W. covers, like the one from the famed Ander-

sonville, Georgia, Confederate prisoner shown above can bring as much as \$25,000! I am not kidding. (There are only a handful—perhaps ten—covers known from that prison and such Andersonville covers are clearly the gems of Civil War philately.)

I know, of course, that it's next to impossible to find 140 year old covers in family attics and shoeboxes these days. But it is important to point out that some postal history is just as formidable an investment as one can find these days. I have one friend who told me that when the stock market dropped so precipitously in 2008, he took comfort in knowing that his collection of Civil War era covers would not only hold its value, but probably go up!

P.O.W. covers from the 1860s are among the most exciting items one can collect in this great hobby! ✉