

**CIVIL WAR PATRIOTIC COVERS
ADDRESSED TO PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN**

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Previously unknown to the philatelic community, almost 50 patriotic covers addressed to President Abraham Lincoln have long reposed among the John Hay papers at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. Covers to Abraham Lincoln exist in collector hands, but these are mostly addressed to him at Springfield, Illinois, before he became President. Until the appearance of the Hay holding, patriotic covers addressed to Abraham Lincoln were not known to exist.

The background is as interesting as the covers themselves. Born in 1838 and raised in Illinois, John Hay graduated from Brown University in 1858. He went on to study law and was admitted to the Illinois Bar in 1861. Law was not his passion, but a choice among different evils. His real goal was to write. He was even something of a poet.

His uncle, Milton Hay, took him into his law office in Springfield, Illinois. Next door was the office of Abraham Lincoln. A good friend was John G. Nicolay, whom Lincoln, after being elected President, selected to be his personal secretary. Nicolay persuaded the President-Elect that John Hay would be useful as an assistant private secretary. Lincoln



Figure 1. Lincoln with his two secretaries. Nicolay is seated and John Hay is standing behind Lincoln.

agreed and thus there came to Hay the chance to play a small role in national politics. Figure 1 shows a photo of Nicolay, Lincoln and Hay, taken in the White House during Lincoln's first term.

Daily relations with the President over more than four years gave Hay an abiding sense of Lincoln's greatness. Shortly after the beginning of Lincoln's first term in office, for reasons we will never know, Hay collected a group of patriotic envelopes addressed to the President. In the ordinary course of business, such envelopes would have been discarded. But evidently Hay saw something of the history of these objects and saved them, along with other Lincoln letters and manuscripts that were



Figure 2. Cover bearing a patriotic flag design, franked with a 3¢ 1857 stamp and addressed to “John Hay Esq., Private Sec’y to Pres. Lincoln.”

eventually bequeathed to his heirs. The patriotic envelopes were part of a large holding of John Hay memorabilia that was presented to Brown by members of his family in 1958.

During his exposure to all the political intrigue that occurred around him, it was a wonder that Hay was able to maintain his reputation for honesty and sincerity. At night he and Nicolay removed to the Willard Hotel, but many were the nights that he worked late at the White House. “The Ancient” and “the Tycoon” were affectionate nicknames Hay used for Lincoln. He saw firmness as well as kindness in Lincoln’s interactions with others, and he was impressed by both qualities.

In March, 1865, Hay was appointed secretary to the American Legation in Paris. He began to write again and today he is best remembered as a man of letters. From Paris he went on to offices in Vienna and Spain. He returned to New York in September, 1870, to become a journalist. For six years he was an editor of *The New York Tribune*. He collaborated with Nicolay to write their definitive 10-volume biography, *Abraham Lincoln, A History*, which was published in 1890, 25 years after Lincoln’s death.

Hay returned to government positions in the State Department, then as ambassador to Great Britain, which soon propelled him into consideration for Secretary of State, a position he accepted in 1898. He was subsequently much involved in American’s China policy in 1900. He died in 1905.

It appears that Hay simply appropriated a group of envelopes addressed to Lincoln during a three-week period in June and July of 1861. This was when patriotic envelopes were surging in popularity. The envelopes bear no markings about their contents or the names of the senders. The actual number of surviving covers is 49, from which the authors have selected 14 to show different and typical uses. All these envelopes are shown by permission of the John Hay Library at Brown University Library in Providence, Rhode Island. The covers have been removed from the Hay holding and are now part of Brown’s substantial philatelic collection.

Figure 2 is the only envelope addressed to Hay himself and it is apparently the only cover docketed (apparently by Hay) with the name of the sender, Moses Smith of Brooklyn, New York. The cover is addressed to “John Hay Esq., Ast. Private Secretary of Pres. Lincoln, Washington D. of Columbia.” The design is a common flag type in red and blue.



Figure 3. Flag patriotic and red Cincinnati FREE postmark, boldly addressed to “Hon. A. Lincoln, President U.S., Washington, D.C.”



Figure 4. Shield and two small flags, with 1¢ and 3¢ 1857 stamps (a carrier use) tied by two strikes of an octagonal “PHILADELPHIA PA JUN 28, 1861” marking and addressed to “Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, Washington D.C.”

The postage was prepaid by a 3¢ 1857 stamp tied by a seven-bar grid. The postmark reads “BROOKLYN N.Y. JUN 18 (1861)”. This is among the earliest covers in the holding. Perhaps this is the item that sparked Hay to assemble his patriotic cover collection.

The cover in Figure 3 shows a large flag in red and blue, boldly addressed to “Hon. A. Lincoln, President U.S., Washington D.C.” The cover also bears a red double-circle “CINCINNATI O. JUN 14, FREE” postmark, since it was then legal to send letters to the President free of postage.

Figure 4 shows the only carrier use among the 49 covers. The 1¢ 1857 stamp carried the cover to the Philadelphia post office and the 3¢ stamp paid the postage from Phila-



Figure 5. Design similar to Figure 4, with the addition of the seal of the state of Maryland. This cover was posted at Tarrytown, Maryland, with a manuscript “free”.



Figure 6. This is one of the choicest designs in the whole group, an overall Capitol showing an officer climbing over the wall of a fort while the cannon fires.

delphia to Washington. The double-octagon Philadelphia postmark clearly reads “JUN 28 1861.” Because the sender used so much space in addressing the cover to Lincoln, the stamps had to cover portions of the patriotic design.

Figure 5 is almost the same design but the central element is the Maryland state seal. The use is also from Maryland; the postmark reads “TARRYTOWN MD. JUNE 28.” So the sender of this cover, from a state whose allegiance was sometimes doubted, showed his loyalty to the country by the envelope he used. Note that he also marked the cover “Free.”

Figure 6 is the only overall illustrated envelope in the entire group. This design is not rare, but it presents a dramatic and very patriotic picture, with a cannon firing in the foreground with the pediment of the national capitol showing behind the blast. The manuscript postmark (“Little Hockmo, O., June 10”) was written far to the left, away from the address

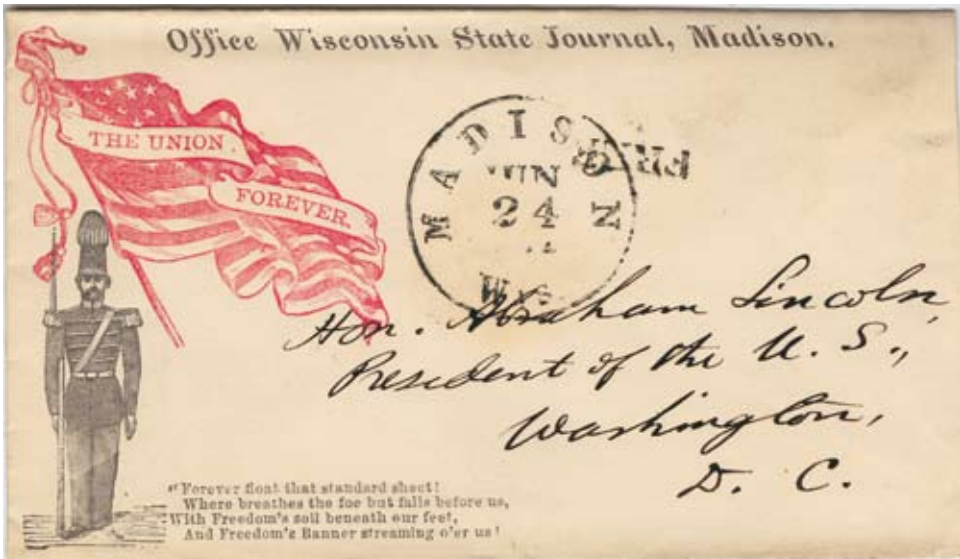


Figure 7. This envelope combines a newspaper corner address (“Office Wisconsin State Journal”) with the patriotic image of a soldier and flag.

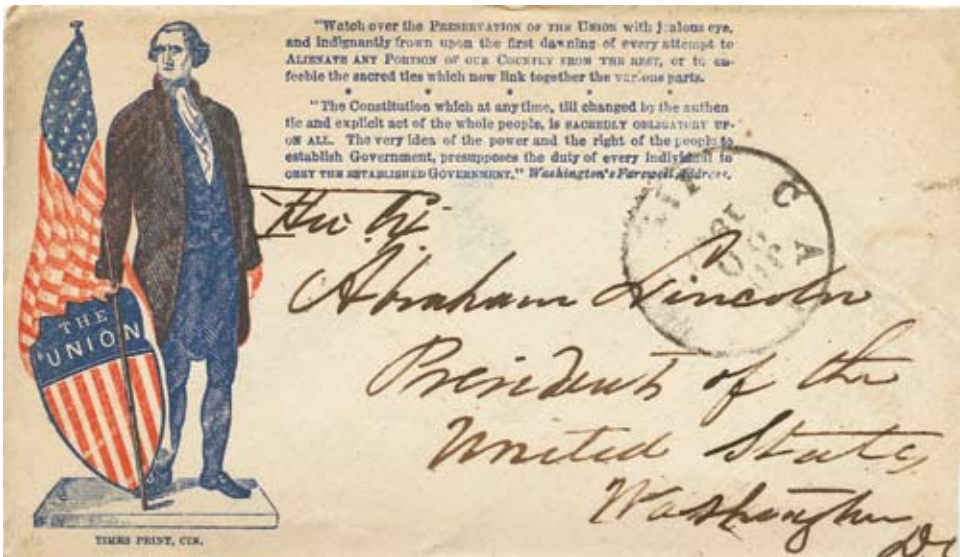


Figure 8. Uncommon view of a standing Washington with prophetic quotations from Washington’s Farewell Address, mailed free from Cairo, Illinois.

and placed so as not to obscure the design. Note that the sending postmaster thought “free” was not necessary.

Figure 7 is also an interesting patriotic cover. Here a standard male design with flag is used as the advertising envelope of a Wisconsin newspaper, the *Wisconsin State Journal* at Madison. This daily newspaper still exists today. The postmarks are a “FREE” and “MADISON WI JUN 24 1861”.

Views of Washington, the loyal patriot, seem appropriate when sent to Lincoln, another great patriot who gave everything, even his life, to his country. The image on the cover in Figure 8 is particularly strong. The printed legend quotes a prophetic passage from Washington’s farewell address, which seems to speak down the decades directly to Lincoln:



Figure 9. A portrait of Washington on horseback, postmarked at New York City and boldly addressed to Abraham Lincoln.



Figure 10. The eagle is a common image on patriotic envelopes. This design shows the national bird surrounded by military symbols, sent to President Lincoln from the small town of Texas, New York, with manuscript "Texas, N.Y., July 8th" and "Free."

"Watch over the Preservation of the Union with a Jealous eye, and indignantly frown upon the first dawning of every attempt to ALIENATE ANY PORTION OF OUR COUNTRY FROM THE REST...." The cover was postmarked at Cairo, Illinois, June 20, 1861.

The design on the Figure 9 cover, showing another view of Washington, here on horseback, seems much less forceful. But this cover shows a bold, dramatic address and a New York July 7 circular datestamp without a "FREE" postmark.

Figure 10 shows an eagle with patriotic symbols, quite a nice view, with a manuscript postmark from "Texas, NY, July 8th, Free."

The eagle on the cover in Figure 11 represents one of the most dramatic of all patriotic cover designs, mainly because the snakes are so realistic. The two heads represent Jackson,



Figure 11. A dramatic battle between the Union eagle and multiple snakes (representing the Confederate states). There are 10 snakes in the fight and two waiting in the rushes. Fort Sumter is seen in the background, along with images of Jackson and Calhoun.



Figure 12. The reverse of the cover shown in Figure 11. The sender thought so much of the cover illustration that he placed the 3¢ 1857 stamp on the back. The stamp is tied “PHILADELPHIA PA. JUL 3 1861.” An interesting text explains the symbolism of the design.

the Tennessee patriot (at left), and Calhoun, the state’s rights spokesman, with a view of Fort Sumter between them. In the 1830s, when Calhoun developed the doctrine that states could nullify federal legislation, Jackson threatened to send troops to South Carolina and privately threatened to hang Calhoun.

So as not to obscure this dramatic tableau, the sender affixed a 3¢ stamp to the back of this cover, which shown in Figure 12. The reverse includes a legend explaining the symbolism of the design: “The destruction of the Snake of South Carolina, Nullification and Seces-

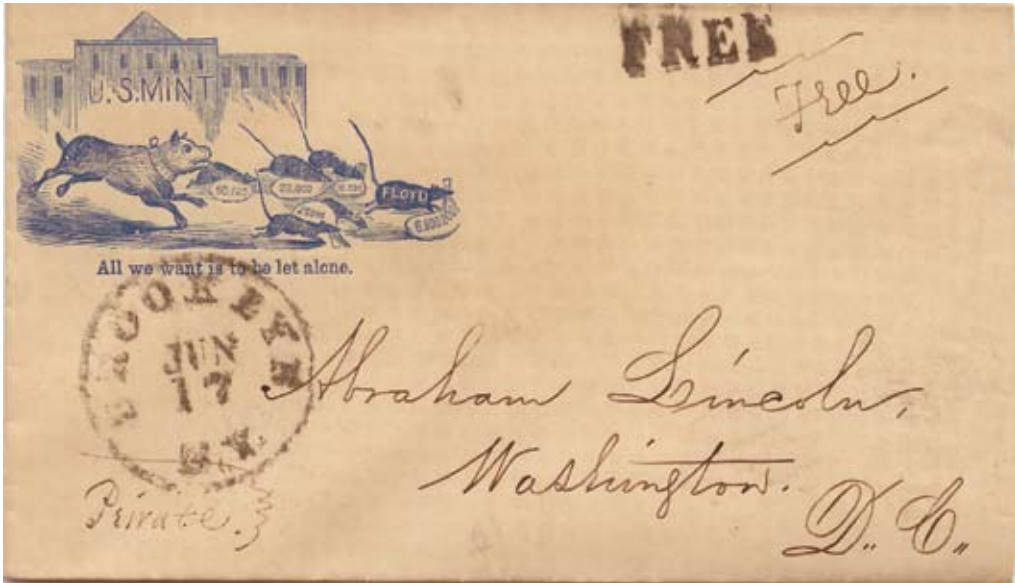


Figure 13. Caricature design showing rats stealing monies from the U.S. Mint. The cover was sent to Washington marked “FREE,” but technically, to merit free franking, it should have stated the title of the addressee.



Figure 14. “The Traitor’s Doom,” a cartoon showing Jefferson Davis being strung up by a group of Union troops. Sent from Gallipolis, Ohio, with a bold, neat address. The sender thought his comments were “important,” but perhaps because he did not want to risk that his letter would go unread, he franked the cover with a 3¢ 1857 stamp.

sion, and all her progeny by the NATIONAL BIRD.” The reverse bears a double-octagon Philadelphia postmark dated July 3, 1861, and the 3¢ 1857 stamp is tied by a seven-bar grid. One has to guess that these covers showing postage paid with stamps contained requests for some favor from the President.

Figure 13 is a caricature type of patriotic cover, showing rats (representing southern

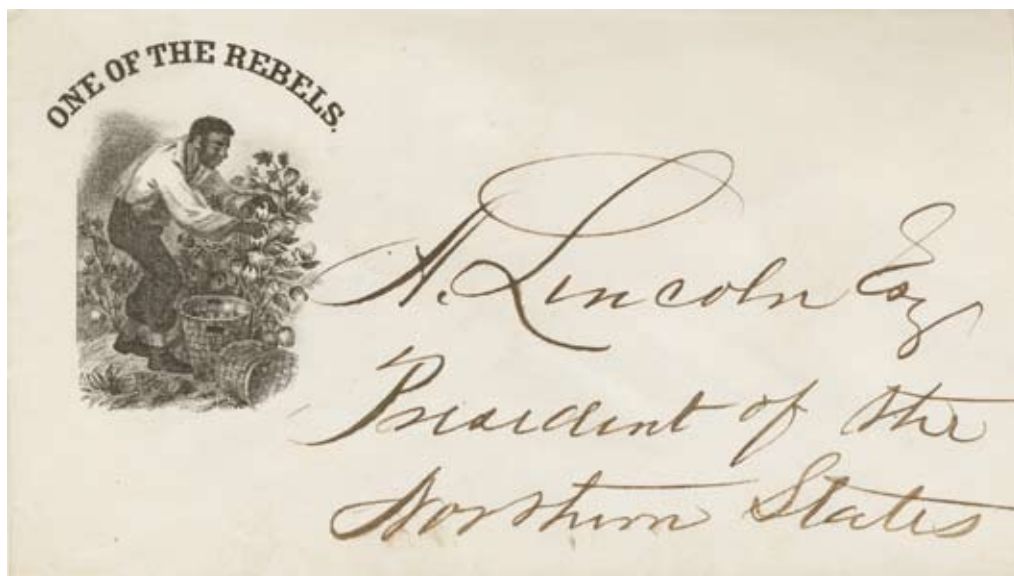


Figure 15. This is certainly the rarest view among the 49 Lincoln covers in the Hay holding. This envelope is part of a large series of these “one of the rebels” types, some of which show named individuals. This unknown black man picking cotton is one of the most interesting. This arresting image and the Lincoln address make a dramatic combination. The absence of postmarks suggests this envelope did not pass through the mails.

politicians) stealing money from the U.S. mint. One rat represents John B. Floyd, a Virginian who was Secretary of War under James Buchanan and went on to become a Confederate General. The dog chasing the rats is General Winfield Scott, then in command of the Union armies. This is another free use, posted at Brooklyn, New York, on June 17, 1861 and bearing both a manuscript and handstamped “FREE.” Technically, to merit free postage, the address should have stated the official title of the addressee.

Many patriotic caricature designs depict people, not animals. Probably the most common of these shows the hanging of Jefferson Davis, as exemplified by the cover in Figure 14. This cover is franked with a 3¢ 1857 stamp datestamped at Gallipolis, Ohio.

Our final cover, shown in Figure 15, is by far the scarcest patriotic design in the entire Hay holding. This is a delicate steel engraving of a black man picking cotton, part of a larger series of “One of the rebels” envelopes, some of which show named individuals. This particular design is not known to the writers in used condition. But the cover in Figure 15 is not postmarked, so there can be no certainty that it passed through the mails. Nonetheless, this superb image on a cover addressed to Lincoln as “President of the Northern States” represents an attractive and highly desirable juxtaposition of visual elements.

The authors believe there are many other interesting covers in archives and libraries that have yet to be noted in the philatelic record. These may never be available to collectors, but we should nonetheless be aware of their existence. ■