

The Re-Federalization of Confederate Post Offices and Express Companies, 1862-1869

Prior to the American Civil War, the United States mails fully included all the southern states. However, with the dissolution of the Union on December 20, 1860, the eleven seceded states of the Confederacy had to create and operate their own postal system.

When the war ended, the colossal task of re-integrating the South's postal operations into the North's began. Additionally, during the war a portion of Confederate Virginia that was anti-secession had split from the rest of the state and formed the new state of West Virginia. It then was admitted to the Union in 1863, and had to become part of the Federal postal network.

Former Confederate postmasters and other postal employees vied for political appointments and had to swear oaths of allegiance to the victorious Federal government. Mail routes were renegotiated and reopened slowly, with huge changes in personnel, policies, contracts and routes. There were long delays in the new post offices receiving U.S. stamps and federally-approved handstamp devices.

During this tumultuous period, the private Adams Express Co. and its subsidiary, the Southern Express Co., played a role in delivering the mails on both sides of the conflict. However, the capture and occupation during the war of important Southern cities by the Union army presented strategic advantages to absorbing those Confederate mail systems as rapidly as possible.

By contrast, the Re-Federalization of the rest of the Confederacy's mails continued from the war's end in 1865 through virtually all of 1869, even though mail volume was greatly reduced by severe shortages of paper and envelopes. The correspondence that began entering the new Federal mails originated almost entirely from major southern cities, although this exhibit also features smaller cities.

This pioneering study of the Re-Federalization of the Confederate postal system will first be introduced with four pages and then organized as follows:

1. Uninterrupted Federal Operations
2. Re-Federalization of captured Confederate cities
3. West Virginia Statehood: 1863
4. Unclaimed Southern Express Mail
5. Post-War Express Mail
6. Post-War Re-Federalization