The pictorial marking on the cover in Figure 1 has fascinated collectors for well over 100 years. The marking certainly has the look of the 5¢ black Danville provisional envelope of the same design. But is it an authentic provisional or a fake?

To answer this question it is best to go back to what I believe is the first mention of the 5¢ black “Southern Confederacy” Danville provisional envelope. The Philatelic Record for November 1881 contains a lengthy record of the meeting of the Philatelic Society of London held earlier in the month. Some 12 pages into the minutes there are a few paragraphs regarding an example of the 5¢ black Danville provisional envelope that had been provided for inspection by Mr. Seebeck of New York. The conclusion was there was “little or no doubt” as to the specimen’s authenticity.¹ The envelope’s history was described as follows:

_During Col. Payne’s tenure of office [as Danville postmaster], he improvised a 5 cent stamp, borrowing for the purpose a woodcut block used by Charles S. Maurice, of Danville, in his business of shoe manufacturer, which was imprinted on buff and white envelopes, and in lieu of Mr. Maurice’s address, bore the printed legend, “Southern Confederacy, Danville, Va. Paid. W. B. Payne, P.M. 5.”²_

A few months later Le Timbre-Poste chronicled some new Confederate provisionals that were seen in the Ferrary collection. Among them was a 5¢ black Danville envelope described as: “Envelope with ‘PAID W. B. Bayn [sic] P. M. in circle, on white and chamois [buff] envelopes.”³ This was the same type envelope described earlier in the Philatelic Record.

This new provisional did not make the pages of the 1882 Moens catalog. However, it was listed and illustrated in Henry Collin’s 1885 Price Catalogue of Postage Stamps and in Scott’s 1886 catalog (48th edition).⁴ By this time the 5¢ black Danville provisional was accepted by most as an authentic item.

The one notable exception was C.H. Mekeel, who listed it in his 1889 catalog, but in the next edition noted they were “considered more or less doubtful.” It wasn’t until 1895 that Mekeel finally “gave them the benefit of the doubt” and priced them in his catalog.⁵

I found the first mention of the 10¢ red Danville “Southern Confederacy” envelope in James A. Petrie’s 1889 price list of U.S., Confederate, and foreign stamps.⁶ The 10¢ envelope was priced at $25. This is the same price Petrie was asking for other items in the price list now considered fakes and attributed to him. Curiously the 5¢ envelope is not included in the price list.

The next mention of the 10¢ envelope was in the 1893 edition of the Moens catalog.⁷ You might say they were listed in spades. The 5¢ black envelope is listed on three varieties of paper, while the 10¢ envelope was listed on six varieties of paper! The six color varieties tell us at least six different examples of the 10¢ envelope were known by 1893.

Apparently, dealers and catalog editors quickly concluded the 10¢ red envelope was nothing more than a fake or fantasy, as it was never listed in major U.S. catalogs. The most specialized
catalog of the period reflects this attitude as it denounces the envelope with the statement, "the counterfeits include 10 cents but that value is not known among the originals."9

Another 20 years passed before the 10¢ envelope appeared again. This time one or more examples were in the sale of the Ferrary collection. At least one is listed with the caveat that it is not guaranteed.9 In the 1935 sale of the George Walcott collection there is a 10¢ red on orange envelope illustrated and described as from the Ferrary sale, but nothing is mentioned about its authenticity. Instead there is a note, that Charles J. Phillips stated only one other was known to exist.10

In 1931, August Dietz published his first specialized catalog of Confederates. In the section on press-printed provisional envelopes he commented that the Ferrary collection contained a number of the 10¢ Danville envelopes of the same design as the 5¢ envelopes, "but these are believed to be fakes." He repeated this comment in the 1937 and 1945 editions of his catalog.

However, Dietz added a caveat in the 1945 edition, "a definitive statement is reserved pending further research."11

Although the comments on the 10¢ envelope in the Dietz catalogs were very limited, Dietz continued to seek recognition of the 10¢ envelope in other publications. In 1941 he used his experience as a printer to advance the premise that it was not possible to reset the type in the same or new shoe dealers cut to match that of the 5¢ envelope. The only difference between the two envelopes was the substitution of the value "10" for the "5."12 He suggested further research was needed.

Dietz advanced the same argument again in 1947 but added that the addressees on two of the envelopes, Mrs. Lou V. Woodson and Mrs. Agnes Hill, were confirmed as residents of Pamplin’s Depot before and during the war.13 However, this information was gleaned from older residents of the town and may not be reliable. My own check of census records revealed no residents with the names noted by Dietz. However, census records are not always reliable.
By 1959 Dietz's argument in favor of the 10¢ envelope began to waver. He wrote that the 10¢ envelope was “probably genuinely prepared as a provisional.” However, “it apparently was not sold as such as all known copies show evidence of having had adhesive stamps attached.”

The 1986 New Dietz Catalog continued Dietz's argument that the 10¢ envelope was prepared by changing the denomination in the cut, but for some reason they were never sold.14

The comments in the 1959 Dietz catalog and the 1986 New Dietz Catalog about the 10¢ envelopes being printed as provisionals, but never issued or sold, certainly caught on. In the 1989 auction catalog of the Weill Brothers stock there are two pages that describe and illustrate 11 examples of the 10¢ red envelope. They are all described as an “unissued provisional (unlisted in Scott; noted in Dietz).”15

The 2012 CSA catalog also has a note about the 10¢ red envelope. It merely states there is no conclusive proof it was used during the Confederate period. When it was prepared is not mentioned.16

The history of the 10¢ Danville envelope reveals several interesting facts. The first mention of the envelope was in a price list of the notorious Confederate faker, James A. Petrie. This alone is enough to cast the envelope in a cloud of suspicion. The listing of six different types in the 1893 Moens catalog makes one wonder if the envelopes originated in Europe. The use of envelopes with the stamps removed or the upper-right corners removed was not like Petrie. He was more professional in his work. Perhaps on one of his trips to Europe he purchased a group of the 10¢ envelopes and brought them back to the United States for sale. Finally, the fact that none of the major U.S. catalogs ever listed the 10¢ envelope is a sign knowledgeable dealers of the period were not convinced the envelope was authentic.

Finally, there is Dietz's argument that the typographic (letterpress) settings in the 5¢ and 10¢ envelopes were the same, with the only difference a substitution of the value. Yet, there are very noticeable differences. Why Dietz missed these differences we will never know. Perhaps he did not have an example of both envelopes at hand to make a good side-by-side comparison.

Figure 2 shows comparative images of the 5¢ and 10¢ Danville provisional markings. The most noticeable difference between the two is the word “PAID.” In all examples of the 5¢ envelope the word has a crude bow or hump with none of the letters in alignment. On the 10¢ envelope the word is straight, and all letters are in alignment with each other.

On the 5¢ envelope a line drawn from the bottom of the “S” to the bottom of the “N” of “SOUTHERN” is either horizontal or slopes slightly upward from left to right. On the 10¢ envelope the word “SOUTHERN” has a slight curve that slopes slightly downward from left to right.

On the 5¢ envelope the letters “FE” in “CONFEDERACY” are not in alignment with the other letters in the word. On the 10¢ envelope all the letters are in alignment.

Finally, the base of the letter “N” in “SOUTHERN” is almost horizontal on the 5¢ envelope despite the word being curved. On the 10¢ envelope the base of the letter follows the curve of the preceding letters.

There are many other differences that become more noticeable as images of the two markings are enlarged. However, the differences noted here are enough to prove Dietz’s argument was invalid. There is no doubt that a competent typesetter prepared a completely new setting for
the 10¢ envelope. Postmaster Payne certainly did not need to go to the expense of having separate settings made for each value when a simple substitution of the value would accomplish the same thing. Further, if they were prepared during the war why weren't they used? Postmaster Payne would have paid for them, so he needed to sell them to recoup his costs. This is all strong evidence against the idea that the 10¢ envelope was prepared during the war. If not prepared during the war, then the 10¢ envelope is nothing more than a fantasy of the 5¢ envelope. This is also supported by the fact that the major U.S. stamp catalogs did not list the 10¢ envelope even though it was known fairly early.

Many times, especially in the past, new items are chronicled and accepted as authentic with little or no investigation of their origin. Unless the item is challenged soon after its discovery, it begins to develop a pedigree of its own that is more and more difficult to challenge. The 10¢ red Danville envelope is somewhat different. It was not announced through the philatelic press as most new finds. Instead, the early mention is in a Petrie price list. This was followed several years later by a single foreign catalog listing six paper varieties of the envelope. In the United States it was discredited by dealers and was never included in a stamp catalog, except as a footnote that it was fake. It was only through the efforts of Dietz in the 1940s and 1950s that the 10¢ envelope even gained some acceptance as a relic of the Confederate period.

The single thread that has given the 10¢ envelope a place in Confederate philately, was that it was prepared during the Confederate period, but never sold. There is no evidence to support this claim. To the contrary, the evidence indicates the 10¢ red Danville envelope was prepared after the war and is truly – as mentioned – nothing more than a fantasy value of the 5¢ black envelope.
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ENDNOTES:


2. Ibid.


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