



Figure 3

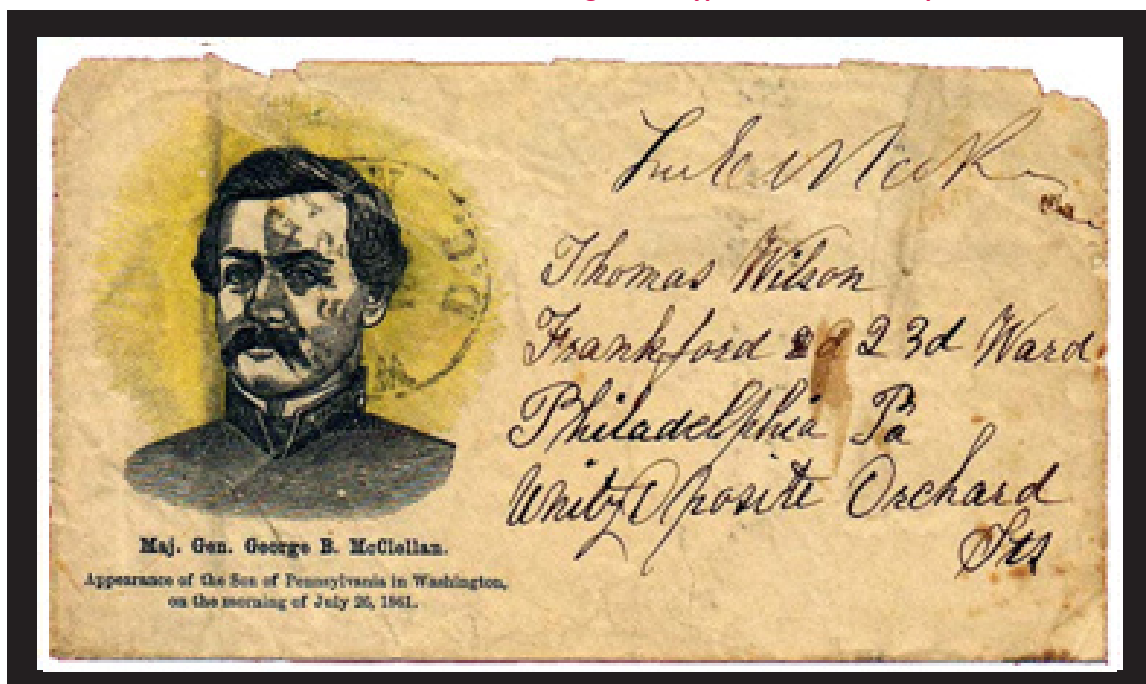
## “Lincoln’s Renowned Rebel Exterminator”

By **James M. Schmidt**

It’s funny how two or more hobbies can collide to form an entirely new one. Such it was when no less than five of my special interests – Civil War history, bottles, patent medicines, postal history, and 19th century ephemera – combined in the form of collecting Civil War patriotic covers featuring bottles and/or medicine themes. It’s an especially good time to feature these covers in the pages of this magazine as the country is presently commemorating the 150th anniversary of the war.

Civil War “patriotic covers” (Figure 1) - that is, envelopes printed with mono- or multi-color images and/or slogans - have long been treasured and collected by philatelists and people interested in Civil War ephemera or postal history. The covers have also recently attracted interest from scholars who study postal history, 19th century art and popular culture, politics, political sloganeering and propaganda, and other related fields.

Figure 1 – Typical used Civil War patriotic cover..



Besides their practical use for the mail, the images were intended to personalize, inspire, educate, amuse, anger, and elicit other emotions in wartime. It is estimated that between 10-15,000 different covers were designed and published by more than 200 different printers, North and South, and sold by mail, in stores, by traveling salesmen, by camp settlers, and other means (Figure 2).

As with bottles, the cost of acquiring patriotic covers depends very much on rarity and desirability. William R. Weiss, Jr., expert collector and author of the premier catalog of Civil War patriotic covers, states that prices for unused covers start around \$5 and range into the hundreds of dollars. "Used" covers (addressed, stamped, and cancelled during the war) can run into the thousands of dollars. Mr. Weiss is confident that few fakes exist, but does acknowledge that some firms do sell reproductions as stationery, for living history displays, etc. (1).

Many of the images on the covers - of politicians, famous generals, and battle scenes - are readily familiar to us even today. However, some of the iconography or symbolism may be lost on a modern audience, yet was readily understood by Americans in the mid-19th century. Like any kind of art (and, indeed, that is what these covers are: many of them simple, but many more elegantly engraved and/or hand-colored), some of the images had a deeper meaning. To aid in interpretation of the covers, I highly recommend Steven Boyd's *Patriotic Envelopes of the Civil War: The Iconography of Union and Confederate Covers* (2010). (2)

The surprise - as I started collecting - wasn't that there was a need to specialize; with thousands of covers, there is a plethora of categories to choose from (Weiss has categories

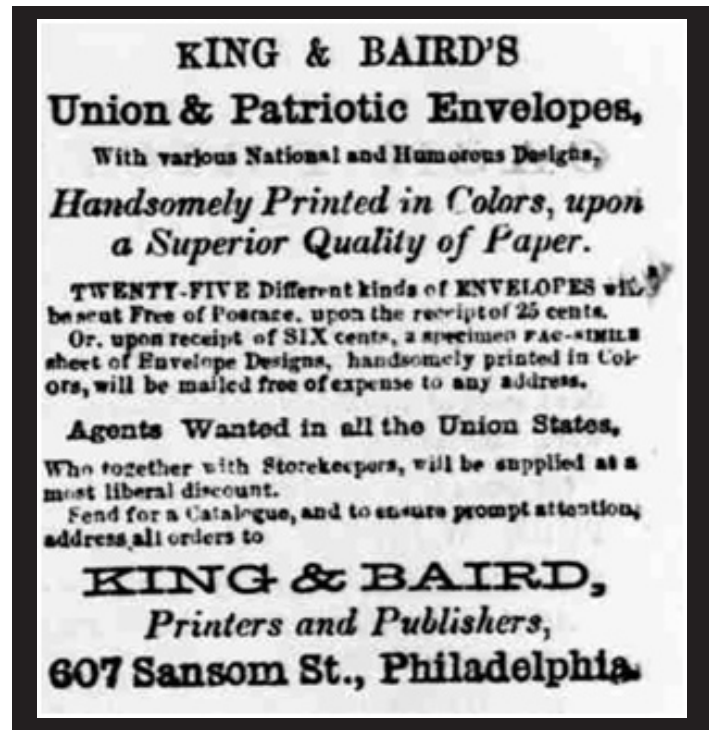


Figure 2 – Typical newspaper advertisement for wartime patriotic envelopes from *The Big Blue Union*, Marysville, Kansas, Feb. 21, 1863.

of famous people, scenes, army corps and regiments, caricatures, animals, flags, male and female icons, and much more; each with subdivisions). The surprise is how many examples I have found that fit my rather narrow category; I continue to find new examples in online auctions, published catalogs, archival collections, and other sources.

In this article, I share some covers from my own collection

Figure 4

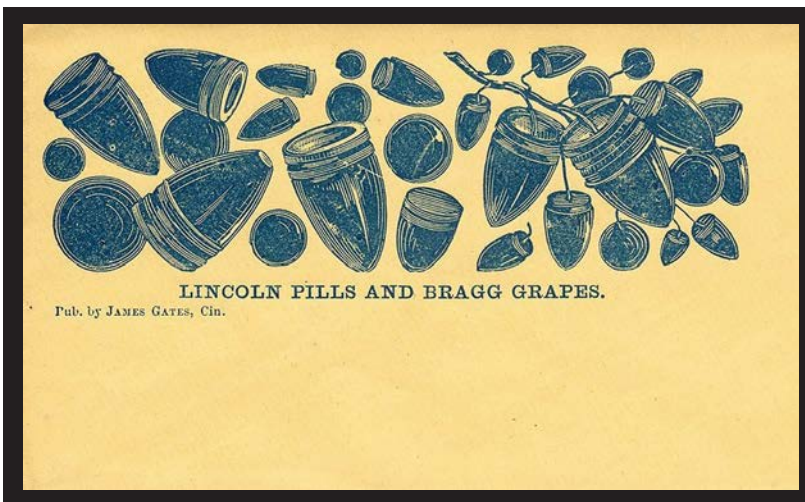


Figures 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, and 11 – Collection of James M. Schmidt



Figure 5

In a nicely engraved, multi-color cover (**Figure 3**), a beardless Lincoln appears in a red-and-white lab coat and blue star-filled cap. He is surrounded by “remedies” to Southern secession, with cleverly-named proprietary/patent medicines, including “Lincoln’s Renowned Rebel Exterminator,” “Scott’s Extirpation Powders,” “Butler’s Mineral Pills,” “Schenk’s Volatile Pills” (Scott, Butler, and Schenck were generals in the Union army), “Pure Refined National Elixir of Liberty,” and others. If you look closely, you’ll notice the likenesses of “Jeff Davis” and “(P.G.T.) Beauregard,” hanging by nooses and preserved in jars on a shelf.



Another popular national image was “Uncle Sam.” In **Figures 4 and 5** he appears in covers featuring another clever “medicine” (“Uncle Sam’s Infallible Remedy for all Rebel-ious Complaints”) or holding a bottle labeled “Davis” as he stands over a snake labeled “Secession.”

**Figures 6 through 9** carry a theme of “pills” or “Lincoln’s pills,” a common moniker for bullets, balls, shot, and shell during the Civil War, given their resemblance to the shape of a pill. An example can be found in a letter from an Ohio soldier:

“We crossed the stream and took shelter under the opposite bank just in time, for the rebel line dropped into a ditch about twenty-five feet in front of us. We were not long in giving them some of Lincoln’s pills and they returned Jeff’s best.” (3)

Likewise, lines in a poem written by an Indiana soldier state:

*At New Hope Church and Dallas Hills  
We gave them more of “Lincoln’s pills”;  
And with an aim that always kills,  
To show them we have “powder drills.”* (4)

Given that the abolition of slavery was an important aim of the Civil War, it is not surprising that African-Americans – free and enslaved – appear in patriotic covers. **Figure 10** is an example of just such a cover, again with a medical theme. The “Black Drop” cover features a caricature of an African-American “bottled up” (enslaved) with the text: “A popular medicine used by the C.S.A. aristocracy, that cannot be obtained in any Northern apothecary shop, being com-pound-ed exclusively on the sacred soil.” “Black Drop” is a reference to an actual period medicine composed of opium, vinegar, spices, often

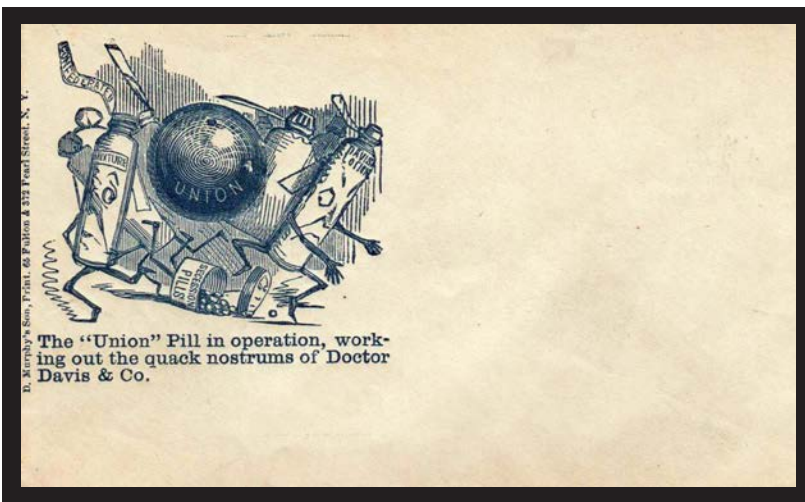


Figure 7

(as well as covers in other collections I’d like to add to mine). Why not start with a favorite: “Lincoln as Pharmacist.” Indeed, Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis were popular subjects on patriotic covers as they personified their respective nations (on Union covers, Davis is generally lampooned and caricatured; likewise, Lincoln on Confederate covers).

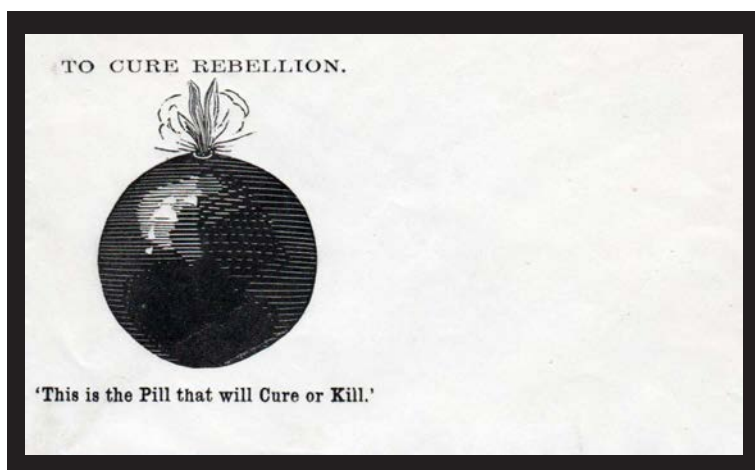


Figure 8

*patriotic covers, but I hope this sample has given readers a flavor for the art and meaning to be found in these interesting pieces of history.*

Biography: Jim Schmidt lives in Columbia, Missouri. He is a research scientist by training and profession. His bottle-collecting interests are geared towards 19th century ephemera and correspondence related to medicines and cures. He can be reached at: schmidtjamesm@gmail.com

#### References

- (1) William R. Weiss, Jr., *The Catalog of Union Civil War Patriotic Covers* (1995); also see his collecting guide at: <http://www.ebay.com/gds/COLLECTING-CIVIL-WAR-PATRIOTIC-COVERS-/10000000001923381/g.html>
- (2) You can read my interview with Dr. Boyd here: <http://civilwarmed.blogspot.com/2011/01/picture-is-worth-thousand-words-part-ii.html>
- (3) *History of Knox County Ohio* (1881)
- (4) *A History of the Thirty-First Regiment of Indiana Volunteer Infantry* (1900)

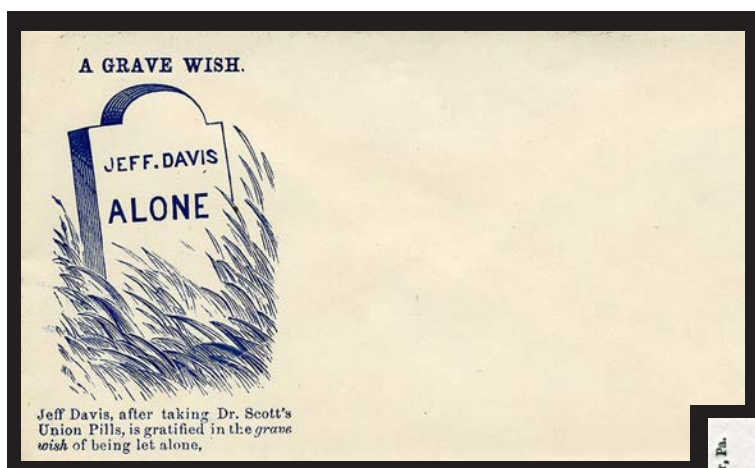


Figure 9

with sugar, that went by several proprietary names

While the cover features a message sympathetic to abolition, it also uses a cartoonish image of an enslaved African-American, an all-too-common practice in the Civil War era, even in the North. Indeed, some covers used even more explicit racial epithets or dehumanizing imagery (a sad practice carried in medicine, bitters and other bottle-related advertising into the 20th century). Other patriotic covers featured African-Americans in a realistic and humane manner.

I will close the article with another favorite of mine.

**Figure 11** features the "Secession Physic Cure" with engravings of "powder," "Union Bitters," and "Dr. Scott's Pills" and the verse:

#### **SECESSION PHYSIC CURE**

*To cure secession and its ills  
Take Dr. Scott's Cast Iron Pills  
Well mixed with powder of saltpetre  
Apply it to each "Fire Eater"  
With Union Bitters, mix it clever,  
And treason is warned off forever  
There are other bottle- and medicine-related Civil War*

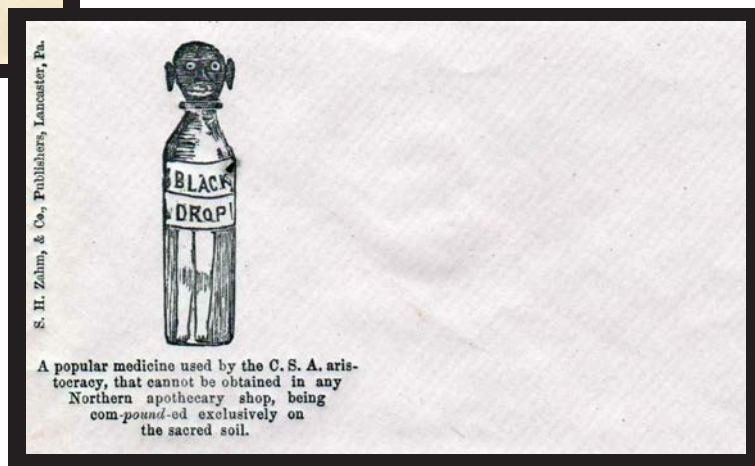


Figure 10

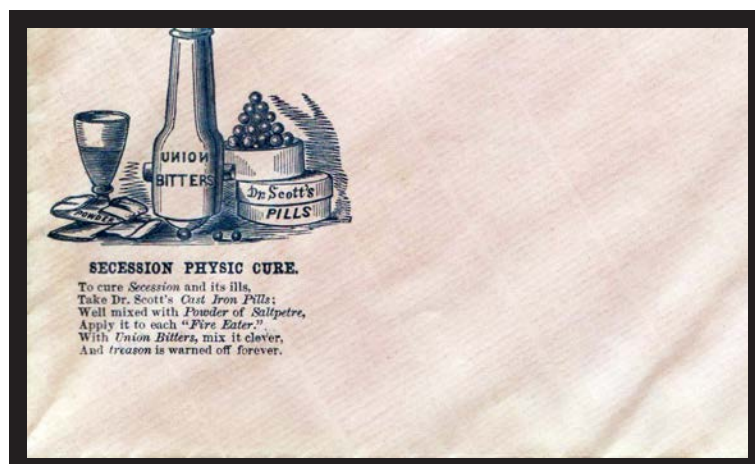


Figure 11