On the 20th of December, 1860, the Legislature of South Carolina passed ‘an ordinance, to dissolve the Union between the State of South Carolina and other states united with her under the compact entitled, “the Constitution of the United States of America.”’ The action of this State was rapidly followed by Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and Louisiana. In conformity with a resolution passed by the legislation of Mississippi, a Congress of the seceded States was called for, which was at once responded to by several States, and met fifteen days later at Montgomery, Ala. This Congress represented South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida and Texas, but the members from the latter State did not arrive in time. On the 3rd of February a provisional constitution was adopted, which was the same as that of the United States with some alterations and additions, on the succeeding day Jefferson Davis was elected President of the Confederate States. On the 11th of March, the permanent Constitution was adopted by Congress, and amongst its clauses we find one providing that the Post Office Department must pay its own expenses from its own resources after the first day of March, 1863.

The Post Office Department was now organized, with John H. Reagan as P.M. General, but the chief work devolved upon H. St. George Offutt, who from his long connection with the Post Office department, was eminently fitted to perform the difficult task. Mr. Offutt occupied the position of Chief Clerk of Auditors office at the secession of South Carolina, but relinquished that position to join the confederacy, although his native State (Missouri) did not leave the Union. The valuable library of postal works, (the only complete one in the U.S.) which he took with him, must have been of incalculable benefit in starting such a complicated machine as a post office department for a large country; however, on the 1st of June, 1861, we find the department prepared with everything necessary for the successful operation of the offices contained within its territory.

The following gentlemen occupied the principal positions in the new department:

John H. Reagan, Post Master General.
B. Fuller, Chief Clerk.
H. St. G. Offutt, Chief of the Contract Bureau.
J.L. Harrell, Chief of Finance Bureau.
B.N. Clements, Chief of appointment Bureau. *
Bolling Baker, Auditor.

** Chief Clerk in charge of the inspection office, under Postmaster-General Holt before the war.**

The official seal of the department was of the following design: Four horse stage is the foreground, with steamer in the distance, seven stars above; this is surrounded with the inscription, CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT, which is enclosed by an engine and twelve cars, forming a circle round the whole; it is about three inches in diameter, and is embossed on green glazed paper with scalloped edge.
Most of the old U.S. Postmasters were retained on their taking the oath of allegiance to the Confederate States, and in one case at least, a competent man was allowed to keep his post without taking the prescribed oath; the few Union men who held office at the south, were compelled to retain their office till a new appointment could be made. A majority of the postmasters remitted the full amount due to the United States Post office department up to the 31st of June, and returned all the stamps and post office property that was in their charge; others less honorable, either kept the property, or turned it over to the Confederate department. Subsequently the department issued a circular, ordering all postmasters to send all U.S. property, stamps, &c., to Richmond, where they were utilized in various ways, but this was not till after the war began.

Circulars of instruction were now issued to the different postmasters, but unfortunately I have only succeeded in obtaining about twenty, although I have gone to great expense and trouble, in endeavoring to find those missing. I annex extracts from the principal ones.

EXTRACTS from a PROCLAMATION issued by J.H. REAGAN on the 13th May, 1861.

"Whereas, by the provisions of an Act, approved March 15th, 1861, and amended by the first section of an Act, approved May 9th, 1861, the Postmaster General of the Confederate States is authorized, on an d after a day, to be named by him for that purpose, to take entire charge and direction of the postal service in the Confederate States; and all conveyance of mails within their limits, from and after such day, except by authority of the Postmaster General thereof, is thereby prohibited:

Now, therefore, I, John H. Reagan, Postmaster General of the Confederate States of America, do issue this, my proclamation, notifying all postmasters, *** that on and after the 1st day of June next, I shall assume the entire control and direction of the postal service therein; *** and the said postmasters are required to forward to this department without delay, their names with the names of the offices of which they are postmasters, (giving the State and County,) to be directed to the chief of the appointment bureau, Post Office Department, Montgomery, Alabama, in order that new commissions may be issued under this government: and all postmasters are herby required to render to the Post Office Department at Washington, D.C., their final accounts and their vouchers for postal receipts and expenditures up to the 31st day of this month, taking care to forward with such accounts all postage stamps and stamped envelopes remaining on hand, belonging to the post office department of the United States, in order that they may receive the proper credits therefor (sic) in the adjustment of their accounts, *** until a postal treaty shall be made with the government of the U.S. *** Postmasters will not be authorized to collect U.S. postage or mail matter, sent to or received from those States; and until supplies of postage stamps and stamped envelopes are procured for the pre-payment of postage within the Confederate States, all postage must be paid in money, under the provisions of the first section of an Act, approved March 1st, 1861.

EXTRACT of LAW, APPROVED March 15th, 1871.

LETTER POSTAGE – "For every single sealed letter, and for every manuscript or paper of any kind, upon which information shall be asked for, or communicated in writing, or by marks or signs,
conveyed in the mail for any distance between places within the Confederate States of America, not exceeding five hundred miles, five cents, and for any distance exceeding five hundred miles, double that rate; **and all drop letter or letters, placed in any post office not for transmission, but for delivery only, shall be charged with postage at the rate of two cents each; and in all the foregoing cases the postage must be prepaid by stamps.”

NEWSPAPER AND PRINTED MATTER – “All newspapers published within the Confederate States not exceeding three ounces in weight, and sent from the office of publication to actual and bona fide subscribers within the Confederate States, shall be charged with postage as follows, viz: The postage on the regular numbers of a newspaper, published weekly shall be ten cents per quarter; papers semi-weekly, double; three times a week, treble; six times a week, six times the amount; daily papers seven times the amount.” – Papers weighing more than three ounces were charged in proportion, printed matter other than books, two cents for three ounces, and two cents for every additional ounce. Books not weighing over four pounds, two cents per ounce for any distance, “and upon all newspapers, periodicals and books as aforesaid, published beyond the limits of the Confederate States, there shall be charged postage at double the specified rates.” Publishers could exchange one copy of each paper, with each one free of postage. “All newspapers, unsealed circulars, or other unsealed printed transient matter, placed in any post office not for transmission, but for delivery only, shall be charged at the rate of one cent each.”

FRANKING PRIVILEGE – This privilege was abolished with the exception of the post office department, who were not required to use stamps on official business.

PAYMENT OF POSTAGE IN MONEY – SECTION 1 provides that payment for postage can be made in money, “until postage stamps and stamped envelopes can be procured and distributed.”

LETTER REGISTRATION – The registration of letters was not allowed in the Confederacy, and the old U.S. law on the subject was accordingly repealed. In Mr. Offutt’s opinion, the government ought to take all the precaution possible to prevent any letters being lost or stolen, consequently it was a swindle to take more money for doing what they ought to do in every case.

MAIL MATTER BY EXPRESS CO’S – SECTION 5 allowed express companies to carry letters, provided that the required number of stamps had been affixed.

SOLDIERS AND SAILORS were allowed to post letters unpaid, the postage to be collected on delivery.