

Robert M. T. Hunter: Lawyer, Statesman & Prisoner (1830-1887)

Purpose:

The purpose of this exhibit is to examine the entire career of Robert Mercer Taliaferro Hunter of Virginia through philatelic covers. His career encompasses the pre-Civil War, Civil War, and post-Civil War eras. Covers are analyzed in terms of manuscript markings, circular date stamps & postage, names & addresses, handwriting, and notes & directives.

Challenge Factors:

The main challenge was to find sufficient material related to a single historical figure, Robert M. T. Hunter. Given his lengthy political career, there is considerable correspondence related to Hunter (e.g., as described in two books noted below: M. Hunter 1903; R. Hunter 1918). Unfortunately, original correspondence is almost entirely in the hands of library and museum collections, the vast majority being at the University of Virginia Library & the Virginia Museum of History & Culture. Thus, it is very difficult to find Hunter letters in the public domain. However, page 7 of the exhibit does display a stampless cover with contents. This exhibit consists of those limited covers that could be obtained, which otherwise have unfortunately been separated from their letters.

Presentation:

The material presented begins with his time as a Virginia lawyer, next as a member of the Virginia House of Delegates, follows him through the US Congress (first as a representative from Virginia, being the youngest Speaker in the history of the US House of Representatives, and later as Senator), then as CS Secretary of State and Senator (also as a representative from Virginia), as a political prisoner after the war at Fort Pulaski in Georgia, and concludes with the post-Civil War period back home on his Virginia farm in Essex County. For each position, some key research is presented.

Organization:

The philatelic material in this exhibit is organized chronologically, first by his position (e.g., lawyer, Senator, prisoner, etc.), and then within position, by date of usage. Some of the material is political (typically with free franking), and some is family-related (e.g., when his son R. M. T. Hunter Jr. was a student at the University of Virginia, as well as correspondence with his wife Line in Loyds Virginia).

Highlights:

This is most likely the first philatelic exhibit of an important Virginia historical figure, Robert M. T. Hunter. And it is certainly the first time that covers have been gathered throughout his entire career, including Hunter's time as lawyer, Virginia statesman, US statesman (House & Senate), CS statesman, political prisoner, and

post-war life. Even the correspondence volumes cited below (M. Hunter 1903; R. Hunter 1918) do not cover the entire breadth of his personal and professional life.

Annotated Key References:

Conroy, J.B. (2014). *Our One Common Country: Abraham Lincoln and the Hampton Roads Peace Conference of 1865*. Guilford CT: Lyons Press. [A detailed account of the unsuccessful attempt to end the war in early 1865; Hunter was one of three Confederate Commissioners debating Union Commissioners Lincoln & Seward.]

Hunter, M.T. (1903). *A Memoir of Robert M. T. Hunter*. Washington: Neale Publishing Co. [A description of his life written by his daughter Martha along with a selection of letters.]

Hunter, R.M.T. (1918). *Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter, 1826-1876*. Washington: American Historical Association. [A strong collection of many of his letters, papers and addresses, as well as letters sent to him, all arranged chronologically, although content is almost entirely prior to the war.]

Malavasic, A.E. (2017). *The F Street Mess: How Southern Senators Rewrote the Kansas-Nebraska Act*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. [Discussion of a powerful group of Southern Senators who lived together, Hunter included, and essentially controlled the Senate prior to the war.]

Rittenburg, T. (2019). *The Brilliance of a Meteor: The Life and Times of Robert M. T. Hunter of Virginia*. Self-published. [Excellent modern biography of Hunter's entire life.]

Simms, H.H. (1935). *Life of Robert M. T. Hunter*. Richmond: Byrd Press. [The only other biography of Hunter, with many interesting details, although now somewhat dated.]