Postal History Symposium  
*Blue & Gray: Mail and the Civil War*  
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**Postal History Society Talk**

**The Fort Sumter Issue of 1961: A Commemorative in Conflict**  
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Abstract

The centennial of the Civil War afforded the administration of President John F. Kennedy the occasion for announcing the debut of its first series of commemorative stamps—the Civil War Centennial series of 1961–1965. The Post Office Department released the first issue in the series on April 12, 1961, recognizing the one-hundredth anniversary of the war’s opening shots at Fort Sumter, South Carolina. While marking this milestone, the issue landed in the midst of a public and rancorous debate over the nature of the country’s centennial observances and their place in a country experiencing the growth of the civil rights movement.

This presentation will place the Fort Sumter issue in the context of the U.S. Post Office Department’s 1961 commemorative stamp program. A sketch of the controversies surrounding the planned centennial celebrations will provide some historical context for the stamp’s issuance. A survey of the content and presentation of first-day cover cachets will explore how the philatelic community, as a part of this country, reflected the nation’s conflicted views on the nature and meaning of the Civil War.

Taken together, the elements of this survey will illustrate how the history of this commemorative stamp, designed to mark the centennial of the Civil War, itself formed the subject of another chapter in this nation’s long struggle to create “a more perfect union.”