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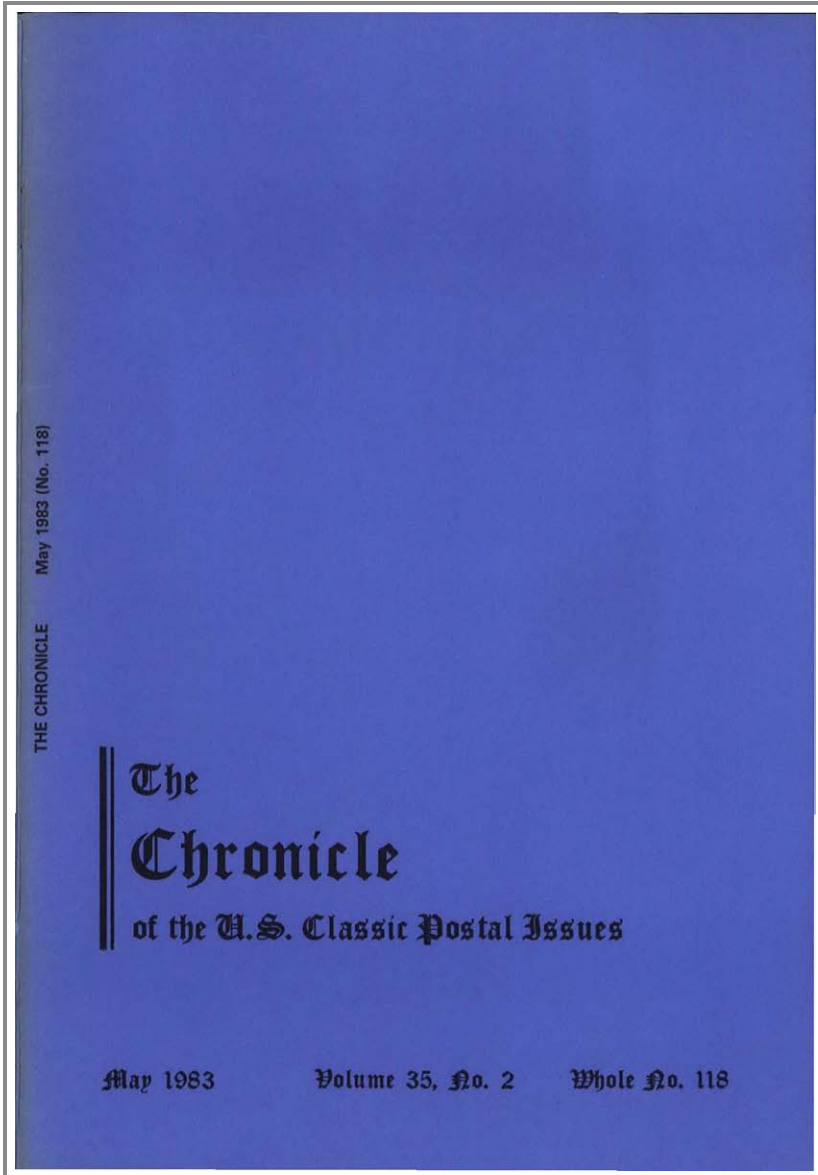


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THE ALEXANDRIA POSTMASTER'S PROVISIONAL STAMPS

PHILIP T. WALL

(Continued from *Chronicle* 117:12)

THE UNIQUE ALEXANDRIA STAMP ON BLUE PAPER

No proposal of marriage is as well known in the world of philately as the one received by Miss Jannett H. Brown in Richmond, Virginia, shortly after Thanksgiving in 1847. Her fiance, a Mr. Hough of Alexandria, enclosed his proposal in a buff envelope and probably very carefully affixed a stamp, sold him by the local postmaster, near the upper right corner of the envelope. The stamp was a Type I Alexandria Postmaster's stamp printed on blue paper rather than the normal buff paper. We now refer to the envelope containing this proposal of marriage as the Alexandria Blue Boy cover.

Little is known of the Hough family except they had a daughter, also named Jannett, who later married a Dr. Fawcett of Alexandria. After Mrs. Fawcett became widowed she somehow learned that her neighbor W. F. Lambert had sold an Alexandria stamp (Copy #3 shown in Figure A) for a large sum of money. This caused her to look through some of her parents' correspondence in the fall of 1907, at which time she found the Blue Boy cover. In a matter of weeks the cover was sold to Worthington for \$3,000 (rather than \$5,000 as is sometimes reported) with Mrs. Fawcett netting \$2,850 after paying a Philadelphia stamp firm a 5 percent commission. In 1916 the cover passed into the collection of Gibson who in turn sold it to Caspary in 1922. This cover was lot 4 in the first Caspary sale held in 1955 and went to Lilly for \$10,000. When Siegel sold the first part of the Lilly collection in 1967 this cover was lot 3 and sold at \$18,500 to Boker.

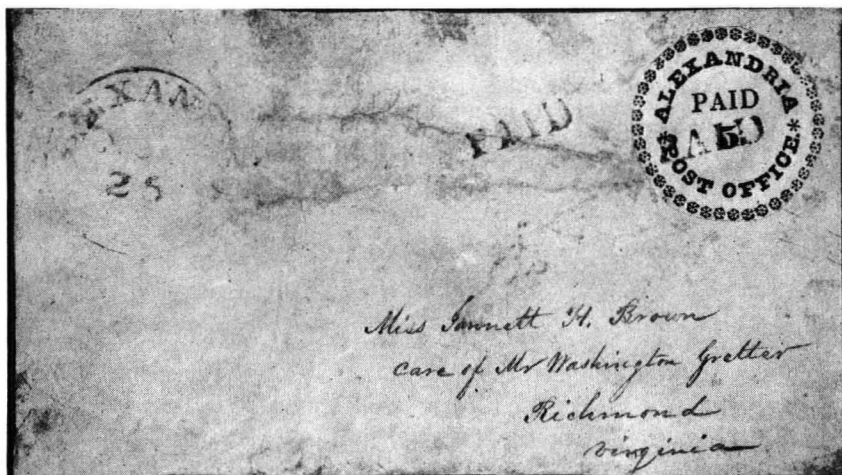


Figure G. Type I on cover. The stamp is on blue paper — the famous Blue Boy cover. Ex Caspary, ex Lilly.

After the Lilly sale the Boker collection of U.S. Postmasters' stamps was undoubtedly the finest in existence, but evidently he soon grew tired of this collection because in the early 1970s he began selling this material privately with the greatest part being sold in Europe. It has been reported in the philatelic press that the first European owner of this cover was a Georg Normann. Mr. Normann in turn has now sold the cover to another European, rumored to be a German, for approximately \$1,000,000. David Feldman, a prominent dealer based in Geneva, Switzerland, has acted as agent the last two times the cover was sold.

So much for the history of the cover and who has owned it during the past 75 years. Now

Figure H. Close-up of Blue Boy stamp, showing small black PAID cancel.



let us examine the cover itself.

The envelope is faintly postmarked Nov 25 and the proposal of marriage is dated 1847. I have never seen a photograph of the cover in which the postmark was clear enough to enable me to determine if it reads Alexandria, D.C., or Alexandria, Virginia. For reasons that will be pointed out later, the postmark should read Alexandria, D.C., notwithstanding the fact that in November 1847 the city of Alexandria had again been a part of the state of Virginia for more than a year. This cover is different from the other four Alexandria covers in several respects. First, it is the only Alexandria cover postmarked after the 5¢ and 10¢ 1847 general issues were placed on sale. A few other postmasters' stamps were used after the 1847s were issued. The Blue Boy is the only Alexandria cover that has black postal markings. Three and probably all four of the other covers have red postal markings. Whereas all of the other Alexandria covers have a boxed 5 rate marking, the Blue Boy cover does not have this rate marking. The absence of this rate marking bothers me but not nearly so much as does something else. The illustration of the cover in the Caspary Auction Catalog includes an enlargement of the actual stamp (Figures G and H). By comparison of these two photographs the PAID marking on the stamp appears to differ from the PAID marking on the cover. The left arm of the "A" on the stamp is thin whereas the left arm of the "A" in PAID on the envelope is heavy. The "D" on the stamp is virtually square whereas the "D" in the PAID on the envelope is rectangular in a vertical manner. Realizing that sometimes our eyes can play tricks on us, I decided to take measurements of the two PAID strikes with a millimeter scale in order to verify these visual differences in the letters of the two strikes of PAID. These measurements indicate a variation of 0.5-0.8mm. between the PAIDs on the photograph in Plate II of the 1937 edition of *Postmasters' Provisional Stamps* by Luff which may or may not show the cover in its exact size.

In researching postal markings shown on covers bearing adhesive stamps issued between 1845 and 1855, I have found it extremely helpful to study stampless covers of the same period. I wrote to Creighton C. Hart for information as to who might have written previous articles on Alexandria postal history. Mr. Hart reminded me that Thomas O. Taylor of Pennsylvania had written an article in the May 1966 (SIPEX) issue of the *Chronicle* (Whole #52) on the early postal history of the District of Columbia including Alexandria. I strongly recommend this article to persons interested in the early postal history of the District of Columbia. I wrote to Mr. Taylor who kindly answered all of my questions, made copies of his complete files for me and loaned me representative samples of his large collection of Alexandria stampless covers. All of his covers show a rate marking except a few that are marked FREE. Except for two boxed 5s, the numerals are all free standing and in black through April 18, 1846. Between that date and July 13, 1846, the color of the ink used for postal markings was changed to red. It is my belief this change took place sometime before May 9th as the cover shown in Figure F has red postal markings; and I believe its use was in 1846 rather than in 1847 since the Alexandria Post Office was again using black ink by the latter date. By July of 1846 the Alexandria Post Office was regularly using a boxed 5 rate marking. The small PAID that appears on the Blue Boy stamp is identical to the PAID on a

stampless cover dated October 6, 1847, and the postmark with the heavy left arm in the "X" of Alexandria (illustration 95 in the Taylor article) is identical on both covers. I do not find the larger PAID found on the Blue Boy envelope in use after 1845, but the marker could have remained in the Alexandria Post Office for a number of years. Sometimes the black ink used for the PAID marking was in the same shade as the black used for other postal markings, and at other times it was in a color that can best be described as blackish-brown — more brown than black. Neither Mr. Taylor nor myself can understand the use of this blackish-brown ink, but it is obviously of a fugitive nature; and it may have been another color when it was used 135 years ago.

The Taylor records show the latest use of the Alexandria, D.C., postmark to be June 12, 1848, and the earliest Alexandria, Virginia, postmark to be June 26, 1848. The description of the Blue Boy cover in the Caspary catalog indicates the postmark is "Alexandria, Va. Nov 25," but I think this is probably in error as an obvious mistake was made in describing the other two Alexandria covers in the Caspary collection as having Virginia postmarks whereas the illustrations in the catalog show the postmarks to be Alexandria, D.C., rather than Alexandria, Virginia. Did the Alexandria Blue Boy stamp originate on this cover? Probably yes. But the questions I have raised suggest that this important cover should be studied by competent experts. There may be a reasonable explanation for the absence of a rate marking, but I cannot ever recall seeing a stampless cover of the 1845-51 period, or a cover bearing the 1847 issue with two different PAID markings. Does anyone have a theory as to how this could have happened?



Figure I. This is how the Blue Boy cover looked when it was in the Worthington collection, about 1915. The abraded spots at the top of the envelope are defects in the photo, not in the cover.

Certainly the Blue Boy cover in its present form has been subject to some type of restoration. Its appearance when in the Worthington collection is shown in Figure I. Note the very wrinkled condition of the envelope, also the appearance of the top and bottom edges. Compare this photo with that from the Caspary sale catalog (Figure G). Perhaps the envelope was dampened in an effort to smooth it out, and it may have been pressed, and refolded or reduced. The bottom edge has been trimmed or folded as the bottom loop of the "g" of "Virginia" has been cut off. A water stain now runs horizontally across the envelope and through the lefthand PAID. The stamp appears to have been lifted and replaced in a different, higher spot. Its relationship to the postmark and the PAID has changed, as may be proven by laying a straight edge across the markings. These changes may be the result of legitimate preservation measures, but they do indicate that some alteration has taken place.

THE ALEXANDRIA COVER WITH THE MISSING PROVISIONAL

In the May 1964 issue of the *SPA Journal* there appeared a most interesting article written by Charles B. Tebbs entitled "An Alexandria Provisional Carried the Letter, But Who Has the Stamp?" Space does not permit my quoting this article verbatim, but in summary it tells the story and shows a photograph of a letter mailed at the Alexandria Post Office on September 9, 1846, by Robert Patton and addressed "For James H. Causten Esq., Washington, Dis. Col." At one time a provisional stamp had obviously been affixed to the cover. This letter was originally discovered in 1879 by Theodore J. Pickett, the son of the addressee's law partner who wrote up his find in a letter to the editor of the *Philatelic Monthly* (published in Philadelphia by L. W. Durbin) in that publication's August 1879 issue.

The photograph in the 1964 article shows a faint Alexandria postmark in which the date cannot be deciphered, a straight line PAID and a boxed 5. These are described in the *Philatelic Monthly* as being red and the stamp as being black on brown paper. In all probability Pickett was referring to a stamp on buff paper when he used the term brown paper. The 1879 publication shows a cut of the stamp on the cover discovered that year, and the stamp is very definitely a Type I (Figure A).

Mr. Tebbs reports that the cover with the stamp missing was rediscovered in the basement of a home in Alexandria in 1960. Author Tebbs then proceeds to develop the theory that since the off cover 1X1 that was in the Caspary collection could not be the missing stamp — the ex-Caspary stamp shown in Figure A has a small part of a red postmark at the right, whereas the missing stamp passed through the mails without being cancelled as the postmark on the cover in question was some distance to the left of where the stamp had been affixed — then the ex-Ferrari copy must have been the stamp that at one time was on the letter addressed to Mr. Causten. He attributes this to the fact that Ferrari was not especially fond of covers and probably removed the stamp himself, considering covers to be too cumbersome for his collection.

This is an interesting theory, but unfortunately it could not be true. First of all, it is most unlikely that any folded letter that Ferrari would have discarded in Paris before the turn of the century would have ever found its way back across the Atlantic and have become buried for 60 to 70 years in the basement of a house in the city in which it originated. Secondly, and most important, is that while the cover found in 1879 bore a Type I stamp (Figure A), the ex-Ferrari copy is a Type II stamp (Figure B).

FAKES



Figure J. Originally a stampless cover from Washington, D.C., to Front Royal, Virginia, to which someone has added a fake provisional stamp. Ashbrook photo courtesy of Ezra D. Cole.

There were several fake Alexandria stamps, including some unused blocks of four,

submitted to the Philatelic Foundation almost a quarter of a century ago. These were rather crude and would deceive no one who had ever seen a photograph of a genuine stamp.

A half century ago there was an enterprising young stamp dealer in central Pennsylvania who apparently had a bright future ahead of him and whom I will call Mr. J. He allowed himself to be carried away by his desire to make money and faked a number of U.S. Postmasters' provisional items. He was arrested, tried, found guilty and sentenced to a term in the Federal penitentiary, although I do not believe he ever served any time behind bars. Shown in Figure J is one of Mr. J.'s fake covers. The purported provisional is in the center of the cover with either a second provisional or postmark at the right. There is a faint Washington, D.C., postmark at the left which would lead me to believe this was originally a stampless cover, that went from the nation's capital to Front Royal, Virginia, and to which Mr. J. later added the Alexandria markings.

There may be other fake Alexandria Postmasters' covers, but I doubt they would deceive any well informed collector or dealer. Should any additional Alexandria stamps or covers be discovered, they should be authenticated before being purchased.

THE ALEXANDRIA LISTINGS IN THE 1983 SCOTT U.S. SPECIALIZED CATALOG

The Scott 1983 *Specialized Catalog of United States Stamps* lists the Alexandria stamps as follows:

	(Unused)	(Used)
1X1 5¢ buff, type I	35,000	17,500
a. 5¢ buff, type II	35,000	17,500
on cover (I or II)		30,000
1X2 5¢ blue, type I, on cover		<hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/>

At this time there are no recorded examples of unused 1X1 Type I stamps and no recorded examples of used 1X1 Type II stamps. It would be theoretically possible for the owner of the cover addressed to Leesburg, Virginia, (Figure D) to remove the uncanceled stamp from the cover and in so doing presumably increase the value of his property by \$5,000. However, I cannot imagine anyone being this foolish. It would take an even more foolhardy act for the owner of the cover on which the name of the addressee has been removed (Figure F) to remove that cancelled stamp in order to have a cancelled off cover Type II stamp. For these reasons I am recommending to the Editor of the Scott *U.S. Specialized Catalog* that until such time as additional off cover 1X1s are discovered, the catalog listings be changed to read as follows:

	(Unused)	(Used)
1X1 5¢ buff, type I		17,500
a. 5¢ buff, type II	35,000	
on cover (I or II)		30,000
1X2 5¢ blue, type I, on cover		<hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/>

There appear in the 1983 catalog beneath the listings of prices and cancellations the following paragraphs:

The few copies of Nos. 1X1 and 1X1a known on cover are generally not tied by postmark and some are uncanceled. The price for "on cover" is for a stamp obviously belonging on a cover which bears the proper circular dated town, boxed "5" and straight line "PAID" markings.

No. 1X2 is unique. It is cancelled with a black straight line "PAID" marking which is repeated on the cover. The cover also bears a black circular "Alexandria Nov. 25" postmark.

The only correction that I feel should be made to the first paragraph is that the reference to copies known on cover be changed to show that all of these copies except one are uncanceled. The second paragraph should be changed to read as follows:

No. 1X2 is unique. It is cancelled with a small black straight line "PAID" marking. An apparently different and larger "PAID" marking is on the cover which does not have the customary boxed "5" marking. The cover also bears a black circular "Alexandria Nov 25" postmark.

CONCLUSION

I hope readers will not think me unduly critical of the Blue Boy cover, but I do think there are certain unusual aspects of this cover that have apparently never been discussed before. I invite criticism and further discussion of my comments on this important cover. Anyone having more current information as to the whereabouts of any of the seven recorded items is encouraged to contact me.

As is usually the case, this article could not have been written without the assistance of many other people. Dr. Stanley M. Bierman of California has furnished me with much information from his library pertaining to the past history of the Alexandria stamps and covers. I hope I have previously mentioned in this article all of the other contributors to the story, but, if not, I hope they will forgive this oversight on my part.

ONCE MORE, WITH FEELING

Editor's note: Calvet Hahn has sent a rebuttal, reproduced in part below, to my comments in February on the 5¢ New York cover with Wilmington & Raleigh R.R. postmark. To save space and redundancy my responses are enclosed in square brackets. Unless new evidence appears, this should end, though not settle, the discussion, except for Charles Towle's remarks in the railroad section in this issue. S. M. McD.

In commenting on the 9X1 cover, Mrs. McDonald makes two points regarding the postmarks: 1) she does not consider the difference between the subject cover's cds and Remele's W7c sufficient to condemn the cover. Obviously I and others disagree. The difference is in part philosophical. In the past I have repeatedly cited Sperati's advice from his *Philatelic Sans Experts* that an item should be examined as though it is bad with evidence gradually overcoming the initial presumption. Mrs. McDonald approaches from the other end assuming an item is good until proven bad. [Alas, I cannot so casually discard the long tradition of Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence.]

2) This 9X1 cds does not match the fake cds's she has recorded on 1847 covers. This viewpoint is a minority one not shared by most experts. For example, Herbert Boch has no patience with expertizing that examines the fakes and thus concluding because the item doesn't match it is good. He insists as did the late Edwin Mueller that comparison with the genuine is the sole test . . . [This involves a misrepresentation of my statement.]

Mrs. McDonald makes a third unrelated point that this letter was prepaid. I don't believe it was. I believe the item could well have been an out of the mail item to which both stamps and a cds were added. Note that the letter was docketed as received 3/1 on it but that the omitted table shows that by mail from Weldon requires it be received 3/3, additional evidence that this was not genuinely postmarked on the Wilmington & Raleigh. Carried out of the mail there were other trains and services between NY and NO that do make delivery possible, but not from NY or Weldon under U.S. mail contract service. [It seems bizarre that an invisible and perhaps misread docketing notation is given more weight than other aspects of the cover.]

CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION SERVICE

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