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**CIVIL WAR PATRIOTIC COVERS**  
**JAMES W. MILGRAM, M.D.**

Civil War patriotic envelopes are certainly the most interesting type of illustrated envelopes which have ever been produced in the United States. The development of the technology of lithography resulted during the decade before the war in a wide variety of illustrated paper of many types. Books and newspapers of this and subsequent decades contained drawings of both figures and events. Although photography had been invented, its reproduction in the printed media was almost 50 years away.

It was during the 1850s that envelopes became the common usage for letters; prior to that period the letters themselves were folded and sealed. So both envelopes and the letter paper were available for illustrating with printed pictures.

Collectors first see a large volume of illustrated stationery during the presidential elections of 1856 and 1860. Variety was produced by the use of different colored papers; in addition to white, there were yellow, orange, blue and buff hues in common usage. The sizes of envelopes varied too. Inks in red, blue and green were available, as well as more rare colors like bronze and gold. Purple became a popular ink with certain printers during the Civil War.

German printers utilized the cheap labor available in New York and Baltimore to produce hand-colored prints. The most famous of these are the larger prints by Currier and Ives, but the firms of Kimmel, Sasche and Magnus extended the technique first to letter-sheets in the 1850s and then to envelopes in 1861.

It was the South that first produced patriotic sentiment stationery with independent state designs and then Confederate States of America designs after that entity was created. The number of stars kept changing from 7 to 11 as additional states seceded from the Union. The question of who printed these envelopes is still an open one. I will go on record with several opinions: 1) that all patriotic envelopes were printed during the period of the Civil War; 2) that most patriotic covers of southern sentiment that are known postally used were printed in the South; 3) that northern printers in 1861 and 1862 made some designs with pro-southern sentiment for the souvenir trade, a few of which exist postally used, particularly from Baltimore; and 4) the huge number of Union designs, estimated at over 10,000 different, were printed largely in 1861 and 1862. Some of these topics will be discussed in more depth in a forthcoming two-part article in *The Confederate Philatelist*.

The reason for this article is the availability of a new book/catalog, *Civil War Patriotic Covers Postally Used*, which has been produced as an auction catalog by Nutmeg Stamp Auctions of Danbury, Connecticut (softbound \$75, hardbound \$150). Prior to this new publication, collectors had the old 1934 auction catalog of the George Walcott collection prepared by Robert Laurence, and a 1995 catalog of mostly unused Union envelopes, shown in black and white, written by William Weiss, Jr. Andrew Levitt and his staff are to be congratulated for this full color production with adequate size reproductions to identify the varieties in the designs. This is one person's collection for the most part, that of Dr. Jon E. Bischel, who built a collection of 5,700 used covers that was larger than that of Walcott.

With so many envelopes to illustrate, the staff responsible for the catalog cleverly grouped the covers with overlapping in groups of two or three so most of the designs which are to the left on the majority of the envelopes are shown in full. Since in an overlapping set of three one envelope is shown in full, the choice of which of the three is fully shown was made to depict the most interesting design or usage. This did result in the loss of reproduction of some postmarks, but even the stamps of most of the covers can be seen.



Figure 1. Black Magnus portrait of Col. Daniel Chaplin with postal usage "GEORGETOWN, D.C. NOV 15, 1863," a design created later in the war.



Figure 2. Multicolored Kimmel design for Seventh N.Y. National Guard with usage showing 1¢, 3¢ and pair of 12¢ 1861 stamps to Vienna.

Thus the catalog can be used like the Walcott sale catalog as a reference for the designs of patriotic covers. The price estimates serve to show rarity and desirability factors. I highly recommend the book both for its beauty as well as its utility to anyone even if they only occasionally collect patriotic covers.

The choice of how to categorize the designs, particularly the more plentiful Union designs, has always been a problem because there is such a variety of different subjects shown. Civil War patriotic envelopes were produced by different printers with different capabilities all over the country. There is a high degree of originality in many of the designs. Some were printed for general sale, but others were intended for specific military units or entities, or even particular persons. Businesses sometimes adapted the patriotic designs into their corner cards, or they added corner cards to already existent designs. The text on these envelopes, those that bear any text, can be above or below the illustration, or it can be incorporated within the design. In addition, there may be a printer's imprint, sometimes on the reverse of the envelope.

The Nutmeg Stamp Auctions book separates the varieties according to the categories used by Robert Laurence, who was a well-known dealer at the time the Walcott catalog was prepared. Thus when an envelope depicts an identifiable person, it is grouped under those designs showing individuals by name rather than in the "male designs." And use of the male, female, flag, shield and cannon categories is restricted to covers showing only those elements in the design and only if there is no more dominant feature.

The two problem areas are the designs prepared for particular regiments and the cartoons. The former is nicely treated by dividing the designs by states alphabetically and then subdividing types by increasing numbers in the name of the regiment. Later in the Civil War Lincoln and his staff did away with state regiments, so units joined United States army corps. However, much of the patriotic envelope fervor was past by the time of a national army, so there are fewer patriotic designs of this type. The state regiment designs are classified by regiment according to the regiment's name even if the envelope depicts George Washington. To collectors of these envelopes, the regimental designation is more important than the design, so I agree with this. Also the same design may be used by several regiments, most commonly the view of the capitol or a Washington design found on the reverse side of many envelopes.

The caricature designs are the most difficult to classify. This is the most diverse group, and there are lots of varieties because some publishers copied the designs of others. They are all grouped together in the Walcott catalog. Weiss separated some varieties (devils, animals, etc.), but he left a huge group of human figures without any breakdown. I don't think the divisions in the Nutmeg Stamp Auctions catalog help one to find a specific design. A cross index of these designs with the first line of text listed alphabetically would help a great deal. Because there are so many caricature designs not known in used condition, the Weiss listing remains more definitive.

This is also the situation for the most desirable types of hand-colored overall or multiple design covers by Charles Magnus. Many designs are known postally used in tiny numbers, while they exist in mint condition in large numbers. Magnus printed designs in black, blue, red, violet, green, bronze and, rarely, gold inks. And he had a large staff which handpainted some of these with water colors, mostly the black printings, but also some other colors. These hand-colored covers are among the most sought types by collectors and demand the highest prices. Levitt's catalog contains not only Bischel's Magnus covers, but others from another exceptional collection. Shown in color for the first time in large numbers, they are an outstanding feature of this catalog. In Figure 1 is a very rare Magnus design which bears in my opinion the most handsome officer depicted on patriotic covers, Col. Daniel Chaplin of the First Maine Heavy Artillery. This same frame exists with portraits of Secretary of State Seward and Secretary of War Gideon Welles, both of which bear printed Magnus imprints. Although the particular cover shown in Figure 1 is not



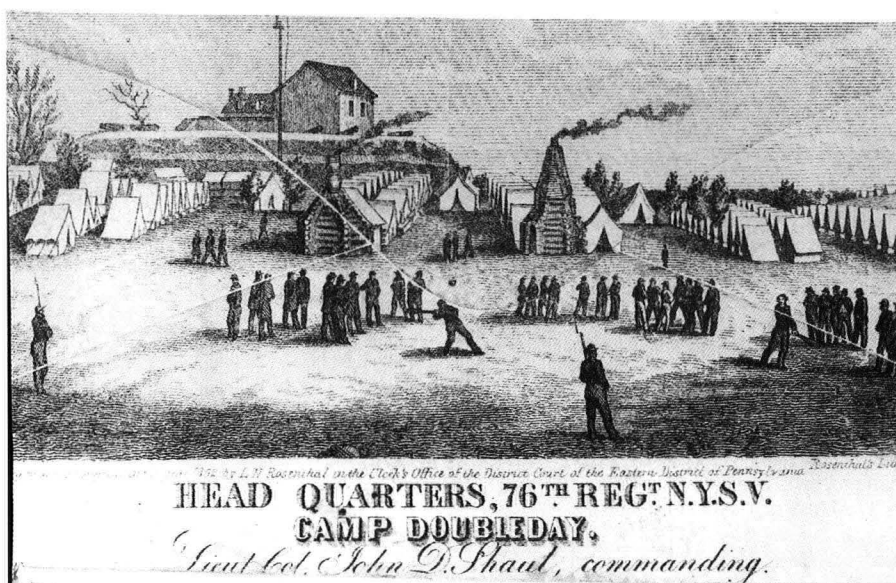


Figure 3. Legal-sized envelope by Rosenthal showing soldiers playing baseball in camp of 76th Regiment of N.Y.S.V. There is a stamp postmarked at Washington on the reverse.

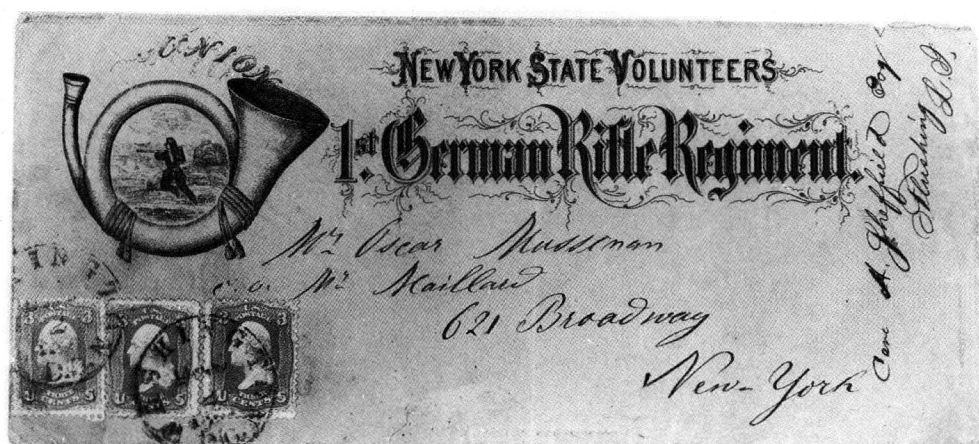


Figure 4. Legal-sized envelope with design for First German Rifle Regiment. The stamps are both pink and rose pink varieties.

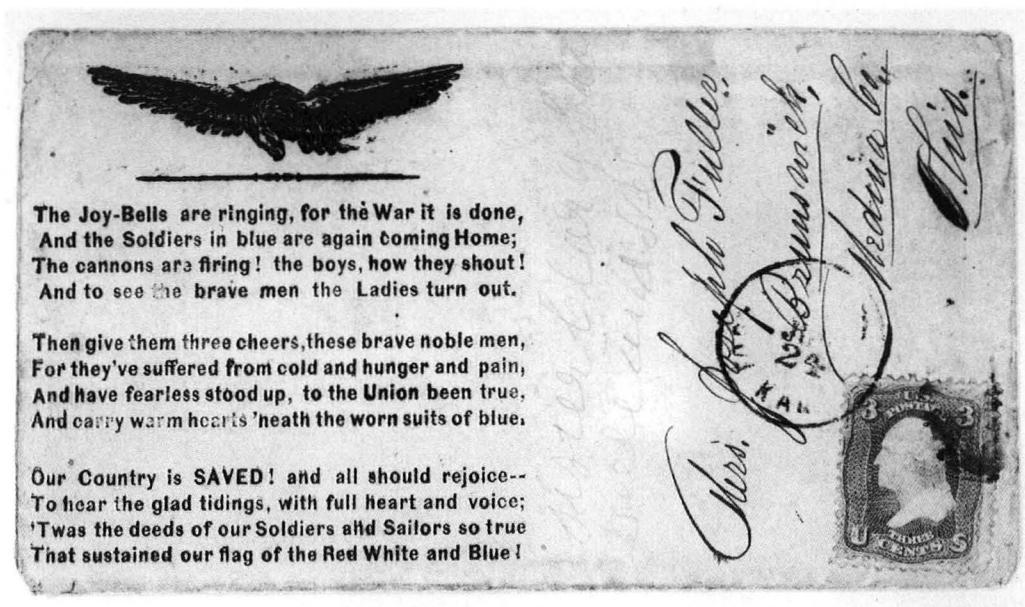


Figure 5A. Front of envelope showing poem "The Joy-Bells are ringing, for the War it is done . . . Our Country is SAVED and all should rejoice . . .," 3¢ stamp tied Fort Scott, Kansas.

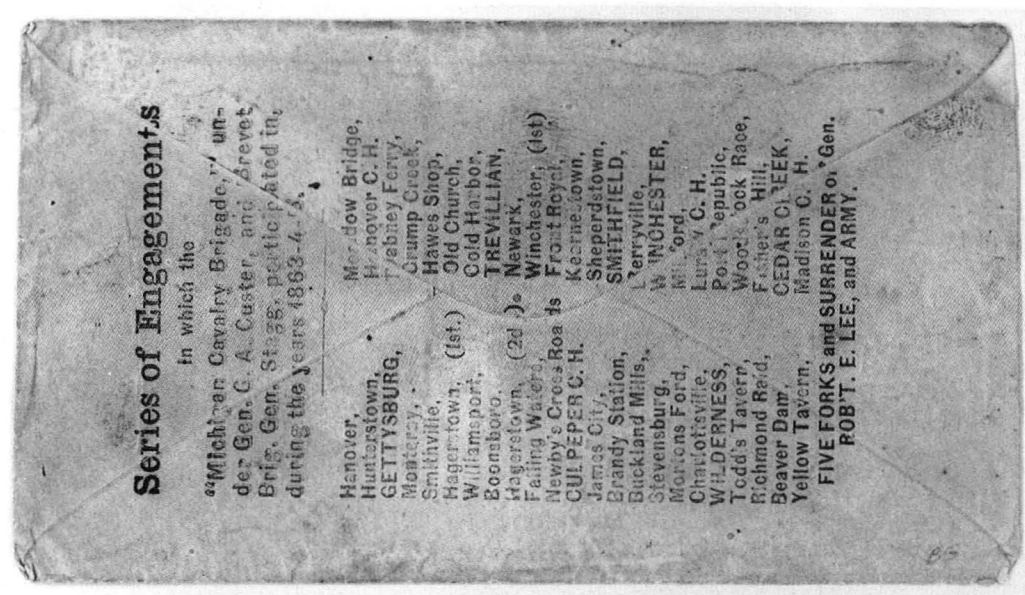


Figure 5B. Reverse of envelope listing engagements of the Michigan Cavalry Brigade under General Custer during 1863, 1864 and 1865, including Lee's surrender.



hand-colored, it is typical of the black designs that were so modified before being sold. Since Chaplin was not promoted to colonel until August 1862, this is an example of a later printing after the early flood of covers.

Before Magnus became the dominant company in printing this type of illustrated stationery, another New York printer, Frederick Kimmel, also produced stationery of even higher quality. Both firms produced city views in the 1850s on large sheets. At the beginning of the Civil War in 1861 Kimmel manufactured 36 different varieties of patriotic designs which were handpainted with a variety of inks or sold in black without coloring. My favorite amongst these is the 7th Regiment National Guard design shown in Figure 2. This cover ranks as one of the finest patriotic covers known because of its beautiful design with multiple stamp foreign usage. It is from the famous Angell correspondence of patriotic covers with foreign usage and was sold at the Katherine Mathies sale in 1971.

A Washington printer, L.H. Rosenthal, sent an artist to the camps of soldiers stationed around Washington early in the war. He produced large envelopes with matching letter stationery of individual regiments, all very rare because of the small number originally printed. In Figure 3 is a detail from the center of an envelope of the encampment of the 76th Regiment of New York State Volunteers, Colonel Abner Doubleday commanding. The soldiers are playing a new game, baseball, which became quite popular in later years!

I remember some years ago at AMERIPEX, the famous show in Chicago, going to the booth of Robert A. Siegel and seeing on display there the envelope shown in Figure 4. Not only is it extremely artistic, but it was being sold as three copies of pink stamps so the price was quite high. It is typical of the unusual and often unique patriotic designs that are depicted in this auction catalog.

Finally there is the cover shown in Figures 5A and B. This is a design printed after the war was over, the only one of this type of design I have ever seen. It was sent from Fort Scott, Kansas in July 1865. The reverse shows the series of engagements of the Michigan Cavalry Brigade under General G.A. [George Armstrong] Custer of Indian War fame. The very last is "Five Forks and Surrender of Gen. Robt. E. Lee and Army." □

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