



U.S. Philatelic Classics Society

Volume: 20 Number: 3 Year: 1968 Chronicle: 59

Article: G.B.D. and Banks' Division Markings

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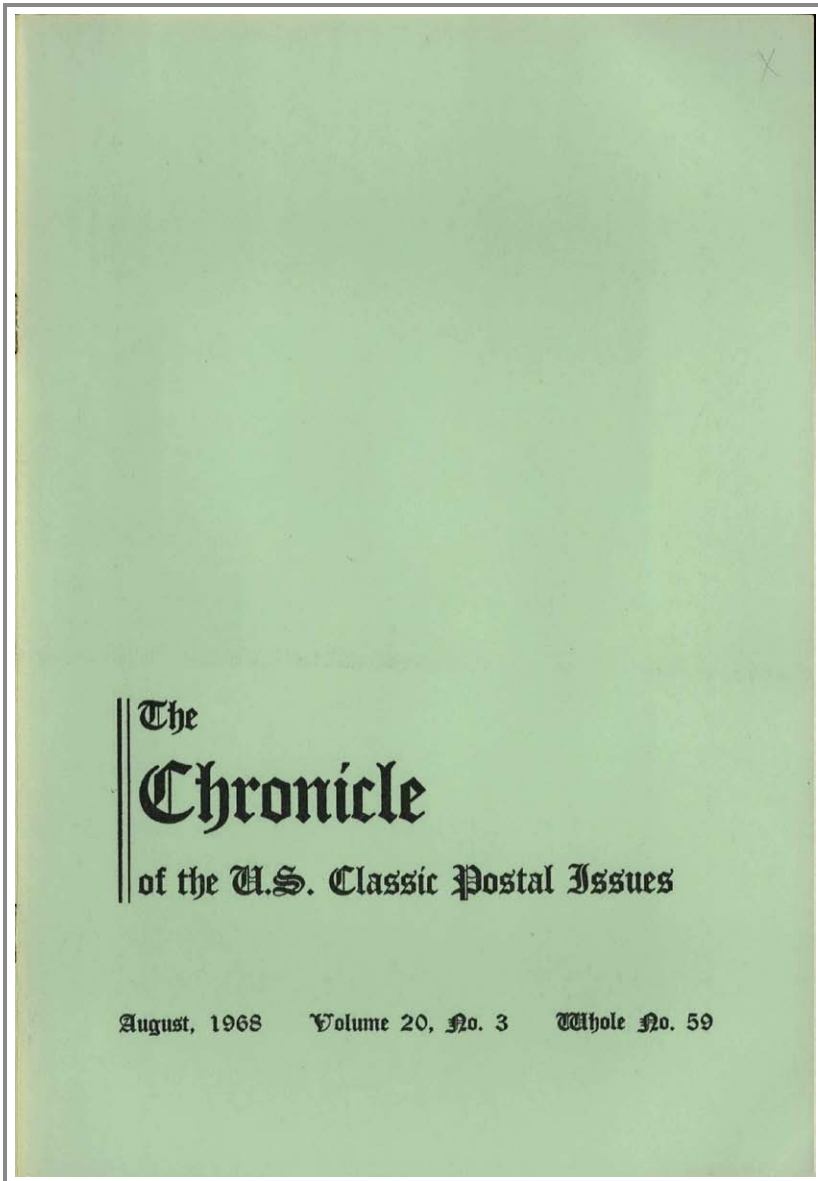


Table Of Contents

items marked with * cannot be viewed as an individual PDF document

[Click here to view the entire Volume: 20 No: 3 Chronicle: 59](#)

Starting Page

Front Cover

Inside Front Cover

Front Cover (1 page)	
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc.	
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Robson Lowe Ltd	81
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Jack E. Molesworth, Inc.	82
Masthead (1 page)	83
Table of Contents (1 page)	84
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: William A. Fox	85
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Edelman's	85
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Melvin W. Schuh	85
1847 Period	
1847 Covers From Chicago (4 pages)	86
<i>Harvey M. Karlen</i>	
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: U.S.A. Stamp Co.	89
1851-61 Period	
Members' Exhibits of the 1851 - '60 Issue at WESTPEX (2 pages)	90
<i>Tracy W. Simpson</i>	
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: E. N. Sampson	91
1851-61 Period	
San Francisco DUE 4 on Local Letter (1 page)	92
<i>Tracy W. Simpson</i>	
Cunard Mail from Boston to Nova Scotia (1 page)	92
<i>Tracy W. Simpson</i>	
Largest Circular Townmark (2 pages)	92
<i>Tracy W. Simpson</i>	
Revision of the Ashbrook 1ct Books (1 page)	93
<i>Tracy W. Simpson</i>	
Perforated Stamps with Plate Number (2 pages)	93
<i>Tracy W. Simpson</i>	
Early First Week Combination (1 page)	94
<i>Tracy W. Simpson</i>	
Unofficial Perforations on 1851 Issue (1 page)	94
<i>Tracy W. Simpson</i>	
1851 - '60 Blocks in the Lilly Sale (2 pages)	94
<i>Tracy W. Simpson</i>	
New York City 1853 Year Dated Postmark (1 page)	95
<i>Tracy W. Simpson</i>	
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: New England Stamp Co.	95
1851-61 Period	
Newly Reported Markings Associated with U.S. Mails (1 page)	96
<i>Tracy W. Simpson</i>	
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Juliard Classics	97
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Henry M. Spelman 111	97
Classified (1 page)	97
1861-1869 Period	
Editorial (1 page)	98
<i>Richard B. Graham</i>	
G.B.D. and Banks' Division Markings (8 pages)	99
<i>Richard B. Graham</i>	
Ship Rates and the New Orleans Post Office in 1862 (1 page)	107
<i>Richard B. Graham</i>	
Addenda [railroad markings] (2 pages)	108
<i>Richard B. Graham</i>	
The Transatlantic Mails	
Depreciated Currency Covers. Part I (6 pages)	110
<i>George E. Hargest</i>	
The Cover Corner	
Answer to the Problem Cover in February 1968 Issue (1 page)	116
<i>J. David Baker</i>	

G.B.D. and Banks' Division Markings

RICHARD B. GRAHAM

On May 16, 1861, Mr. Nathaniel Printice Banks, the "Bobbin Boy" of Massachusetts, erstwhile Member of Congress and Speaker of the House, no less, was appointed to be a Major General of Volunteers of the Union Army. This appointment of a prominent "rags to riches" politician led to a great many events of note, most of which were not beneficial to the Federal cause. To the collector of Civil War postal history, though, the appointment of Banks is most gratifying, for it led to what is probably the only completely, obviously bona-fide group of Army Field Post markings of the Union armies. While many other markings probably could be called Field Post, with varying degrees of accuracy, such are not obvious as none are worded so that they can be called nothing else.

The first of these markings appeared in Sept. 1861, and the last in late 1862. The group consists, as recorded by the Period Editor, of a manuscript and five handstamps, one of which was used in two different colors and in two periods separated by three months.

TABLE 1

Marking Type	Description	Color	Early Date	Latest Date
M/S	M/S "GBD"		Sept. 12 (1861)	Sept. 16 (1861)
I	S.L. (2 lines)	Black	Sept. 20 (1861)	Oct. 18 (1861)
II	Double Arc (Oval)	Black	Oct. 20 (1861)	Oct. 31 (1861)
III	Large Arc/ w. S.L. date	Black	Nov. 2 (?) (1861)	Dec. 2 (1861)
III	Same as above	Blue	Mar. 4 (1862)	Mar. 14 (1862)
IV	Circle, 32½ mm 4½ mm letters	Blue	Mar. 20 (1862)	Aug. 17 (1862)
V	Circle, 33½ mm thin, 5 mm letters	Blue	Sept. 9 (1862)	Nov. 26 (1862)

All of these markings are shown on Plate I. The letters "G.B.D." stand for General Banks' Division, and the last two examples of these markings used openly announce their meaning. Fig. 1 shows a cover bearing the first type of these markings.



Figure 1

Type I on a McClellan overall patriotic in blue. The marking is struck diagonally across McClellan's face and the black PAID in the upper right corner (Paid 3¢ ?) are the only markings on the cover and are not easy to see on the original. Used Oct. 18, 1861, when Banks' Headquarters were located in Maryland, across the Potomac from Harpers Ferry.

G B D. PAID

G B D

G B D

OCT. 18

2

OCT. 31

NOV 18

1

3

4



5

DUE
3
6



7



8



9



10



11



12



13



14



15



16



17

PLATE I

Some historical background is required to understand the Banks markings. The Army of the Potomac, the most famous or at least the most written about Northern army, had not yet been formed when Banks was appointed to field command. In fact, major command elements were called "Departments" and this designation will be found in corner cards of covers dating throughout the War.

Domestic Postal Markings

PLATE I

Item	Description	Used With Scott No.	Colors
1.	Type I G.B.D. (Gen Banks' Division) marking. See accompanying article.	Various	Black
2.	PAID marking used with first three types of G.B.D. markings.	None	Black
3.	Type II G.B.D. marking.	Various	Black
4.	Type III G.B.D. marking.	Various	Black or blue
5.	Type IV Banks' Division marking, early state.	61	Blue
6.	Due marking used with Type IV Banks' Division marking.	None	Blue
7.	Type IV Banks' Division marking, late state.	61	Blue
8.	Due marking used with Type V Banks' Division marking.	61	Blue
9.	Type V Banks' Division marking, early.	61	Blue
10.	Type V Banks' Division marking, late.	61	Blue
11.	New Creek Station, Va. marking used on Soldiers' letters, 1861 and 1862. New Creek Station is now Keyser, W.Va.	—	Black
12.	New Creek Station, 1862-3	61	Black, blue
13.	Due marking used with item 12.	—	Blue
14.	New Creek Station, W.Va. marking used in 1863-5. West Virginia became a state in 1863.	61	Blue, black
15.	Huttonsville, Va. marking used on soldier's letter in 1861. Huttonsville is now in W.Va.	—	Black
16.	Manassas, Va. marking used in 1862. This post office, formerly Tudor Hall, Va., was only open during the summer of 1862 in the years 1861-5.		
17.	Harpers Ferry, Va. (now W.Va.) marking used in 1862.	61	Black

Banks had been appointed to command the Department of the Shenandoah just two days before the first Battle of Bull Run or Manassas. The defeat of the Northern army caused much stir, including the organization of the Army of the Potomac under General McClellan, which was ordered on August 17. As part of this order, Banks' Department of the Shenandoah was transformed into a *Grand Division* of the Army of the Potomac. (Corps organization, which is also designated on many corner cards and patriotics, did not take place until the following March.) At this time, Banks' headquarters were at Harpers Ferry, and his troops were known as Banks' Division, in the usual style of such designations, until long after the official designation as a division had been abolished.

Col. Harvey E. Sheppard, who is an authority on Virginia and Confederate postal history, once told the writer a story as to how the Banks Division post office came into being. Banks, fresh and enthusiastic as a military commander, naturally expected to move from his position at the head of the Shenandoah Valley to capture Richmond by a flanking approach from the west. Being a natural politician, he sought popularity with his troops, or perhaps he was genuinely interested in their welfare—in any case, he desired that his command would have as good mail service as possible during its drive on Richmond. So, through his political connections—both Banks and Montgomery Blair, the Postmaster General had been Democrats at one time or another—Banks had a postmaster appointed for this purpose.

Whether the story is based upon fact or where it came from, originally, is not known to the Period Editor. However, the story fits known and recorded facts rather well.

According to the Appointment Books of the Post Office Department in the National Archives, one Roscoe E. Houghton was appointed on Oct. 10, 1861 to be a Special Agent of the POD at the Headquarters of General Banks' Division

of the U.S. Army. He was authorized to sell postage stamps and stamped envelopes but was to receive no pay as an agent.

As may be noted in the small section of P.L. & R. revisions which appeared in the 1862 *List of Post Offices in United States* (See *Chronicle* No. 58, page 67, item Chapter III), Route Agents did not have the authority to either sell stamps or receive prepayment in money, at least. While every regiment in Federal service had its military postmaster, whose duty was to collect and distribute mails and transmit and receive these from higher authority, actually the only representatives of the Post Office Department were a few special agents who made arrangements regarding the army mails, and were authorized to reestablish certain important post offices in captured southern towns as required and reopen the few mail routes needed to service these. During the war, the Federal armies carried all their own mail to Post Office Department receiving points such as Cairo and Washington, and all this was done without expense to the Post Office Department. So, Houghton was probably an aide or similar member of Bank's Headquarters staff and his being given authority to sell stamps and to use a unique origin marking device was unusual.

Actually, Houghton was probably operating as a postmaster before his appointment, for covers with manuscript and the first type of handstamped "G.B.D." markings with September dates exist. An example of the manuscript marking was shown as Figure 4 on page 21 of *Chronicle* No. 47. Figure 1 of this article shows an Oct. 18 (1861) date, which is the latest usage of this particular marking recorded by the writer, and was used just about a month after the earliest usage.

Why did these markings read "G.B.D.," rather than the more obvious "Banks' Division," as the later markings read? In Elliott Perry's *Pat Paragraphs*, No. 34, on page 995, Mr. Perry commented as follows:

"It is understood that the soldiers of Banks' Division were not permitted to mention a town or other address in their letters and the postmarks do not indicate where they were used. The supposed reason was to prevent the Confederates from learning the whereabouts of an important division of the Union army which shuffled around in Maryland and kept an eye on Harper's Ferry and another on other crossings of the Potomac River. As an example of Yankee ingenuity this must have given the southern boys a great laugh. Other sources of information kept the Confederates so well informed that they undoubtedly knew as much about the location and movements of Nathaniel P's men as he did. To put the matter conservatively, the 'concealment' practiced by the soldier's mail organization of Banks' Division seems to have reached the absolute pinnacle of futility."

Again, while Mr. Perry's comments are based upon an authority unknown to the writer, it is worth noting that most—nearly all, in fact—of the covers of 1861 date which have enclosures are datelined in such a way as to make their geographic origin somewhat obscure, and many do not indicate that writer's military unit. Also, noting Mr. Perry's story, it would seem that this is a very early reflection of the same basic idea that has led to the usage of military A.P.O. markings which also show only a post office designation and no location.

Plate I and Table I show all the Banks' Division markings recorded by the writer and the earliest and latest dates he has noted. Reports of any new examples of these markings or extensions of dates would be much appreciated. At one time, the writer wondered if the reason for the frequent changes of types wasn't because of equally frequent captures of Banks' mail wagon. After all, Banks' command wasn't often called "Stonewall Jackson's supply depot" or some such phrase, for nothing. However, there is no record of Banks' headquarters ever being taken, so probably the post office wagon, which was with the headquarters, was never taken.

The first two types of markings, shown in Figs. 1 and 2, possibly were set from newspaper type or other loose type in some sort of holder. It is possible that the type fell out of the first instrument or it got broken, and the same type was used in a different form for the second form, Type II, which is on the cover of Fig. 2. The Type I markings are a simple straight line G.B.D.; in the Type II markings, these same letters or letters very similar are set in an arc with the date similarly

arranged below forming an oval. Additionally, the "B" in the oval marking is apparently inverted. The oval marking was only in use about ten or eleven days, according to our records, although this could be extended to two weeks without overlapage.

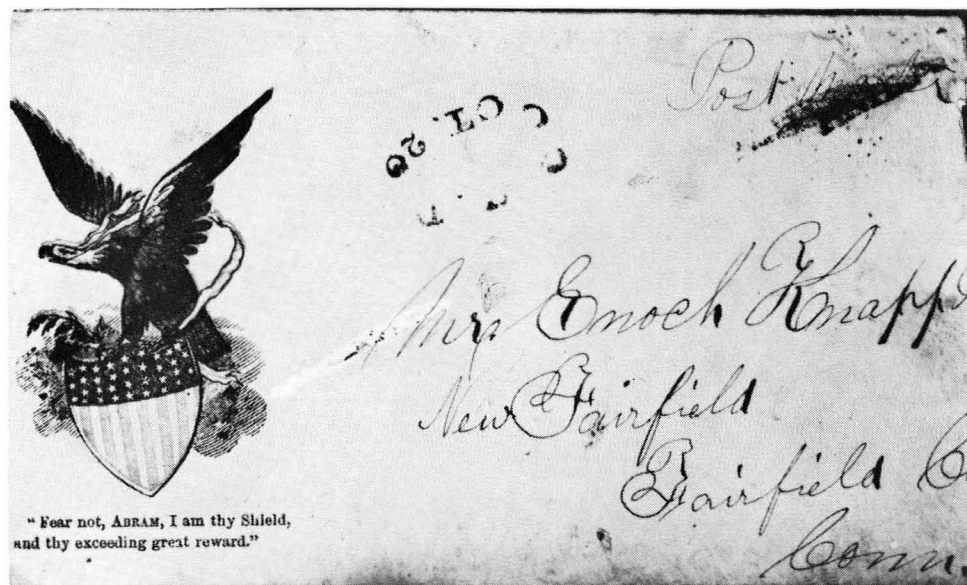


Figure 2

Type II used with a PAID marking. The PAID was marked out because the cover is addressed to (really the wife of) a postmaster who was permitted to send or receive mail free at this time. Banks' Headquarters were then near Darnestown, Maryland, between Harpers Ferry and Washington.

Neither of these two markings are usually struck well so that all letters show clearly, which is a further indication that the handstamper was a home made affair. Fig. 3 shows the third type of "G.B.D.," and this marking was actually used for two separate although rather short periods. It was used in November, 1861 with a few early December usages known. Then, Banks' Division markings disappeared from the scene entirely until the following spring, and it is assumed the troops were more or less in winter quarters and more prosaic Maryland town markings appeared upon their mail. In March, 1862, the Type III marking again appeared, this time in a rather pretty blue ink. Interestingly enough, the Banks' Division markings may be dated by color—all 1861 usages are in black and the 1862 in blue and we know of no exceptions. The 1862 tenure of the Type III marking was very brief, the earliest recorded being March 4, and the latest March 14, with March 10 also recorded. The marking could have been used over a more extensive period, as the earliest date we have recorded for its successor, Type IV, the first of the round Banks' Division markings, is a possible March 20 (or Mar. 26?).

Before leaving the 1861 markings, a few words should be said regarding the methods of indicating prepayment that were used with these covers. Both Figs. 1 and 2 are stampless covers and we can speculate as to whether Postmaster Houghton had as yet received any of the supply of stamps he was authorized to sell on Oct. 10, 1861. In each case, the cover was simply hand-stamped with a small S.L. "PAID" with no indication of the amount paid or any other comment. In the case of the cover of Fig. 2, the "PAID" was marked out as it was addressed to a postmaster's wife, and, no doubt, the writer indicated the letter would go free by writing "Post Master" in the U.R. corner of the cover. As a matter of interest, Mr. Enoch Knapp (the addressee) was appointed to be postmaster of New Fairfield, Fairfield County, Conn. on April 21, 1861 and served in that capacity until July 8, 1870, according to records in the National Archives.

Most of the Type I and many of the Type II markings are on covers without

stamps but having only the neat, small black PAID as may be seen on the covers of Figs. 1 and 2. All of the first three types are known with 3¢ 1857 stamps and also with 3¢ 1861's, including the pink and allied shades. Covers with various

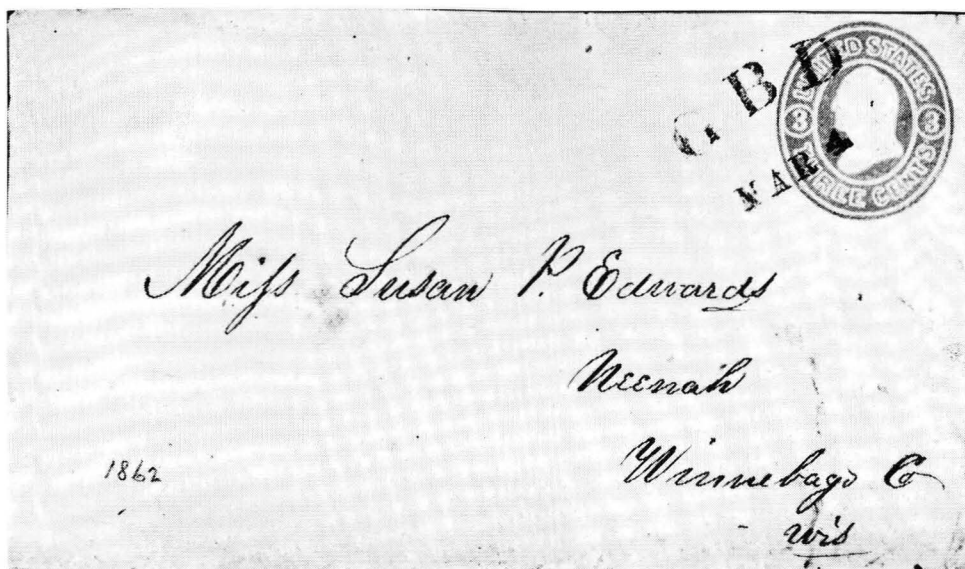


Figure 3

Type III used on a 3¢ pink stamped envelope, March 4, 1862. Banks' Headquarters were at Charlestown, Va. (now West Virginia) on this date.

types of free franks are far more frequent than would normally be expected and soldier's letters possibly less common.

Figs. 4 and 5 show the last two types of Banks' Division markings of which we are aware. They are very similar, although the second of the two, Type V will average slightly larger, running from 32 to 33 mm (both are very slightly out-of-

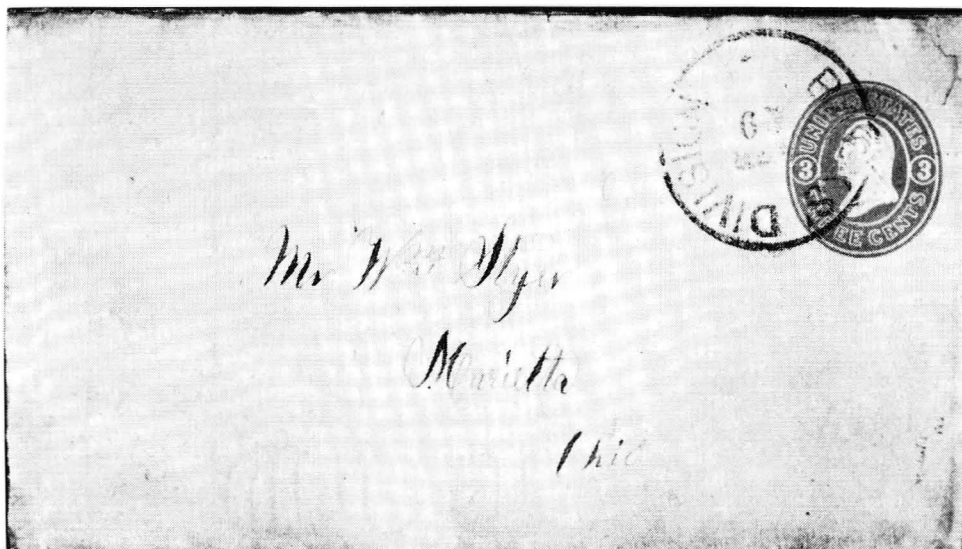


Figure 4

Type IV on the first lettersheet, Scott's U36. Used April 29, 1862 when Banks' Headquarters were then at Harrisonburg, Va., which was as far south as the marking was probably ever used in the Valley. There is no letter on this lettersheet, it having evidently been used as an envelope. This fact has probably disappointed more than one owner.

round), while Type IV runs 31½ to 32 mm, approximately. The letters of Type V are also larger, running 5 mm against 4½ mm for Type IV. The easiest way to tell the two apart is that most Type IV are worn and have rather heavy circles, while Type V only began to show wear when it disappeared and the letters are

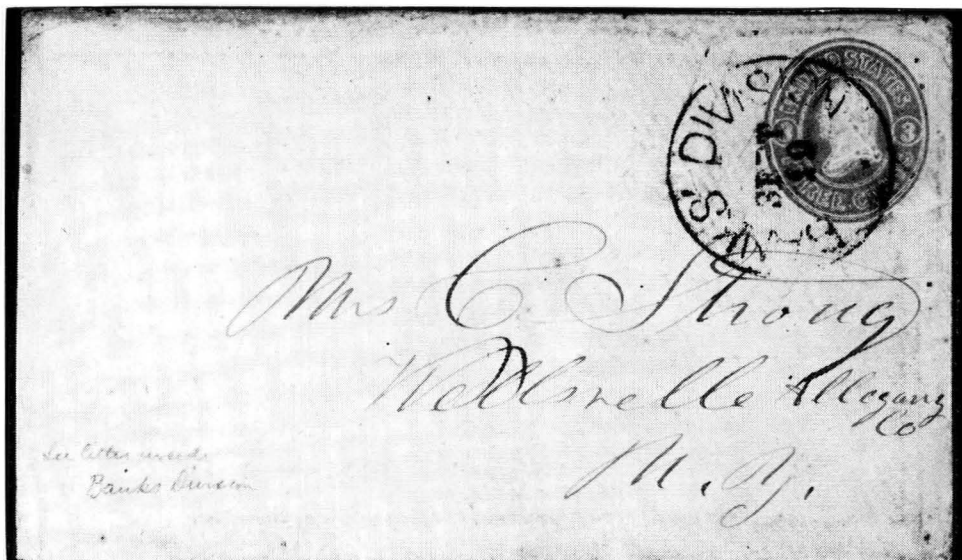


Figure 5

Type V used on a cover with contents, showing the 12th Corps Headquarters (where this post office was assigned) were then near Harpers Ferry. A very sharp and clear example of the strike. Collection of the late Mr. Henry A. Meyer.

thin and "spidery" in appearance. The "D" of "DIVISION" is also a sure indication of which marking one is examining, the Type V "D" having a curved front bar and rounded corners which give it a rather unusual appearance.

Type V appeared in early Sept., 1862 and disappeared in either late November or early December, of 1862. Banks disappeared from the area of usage somewhat before this, having been assigned elsewhere Sept. 12, 1862.

All the G.B.D. and Banks' Division markings were used at various Federal army headquarters in the field in Maryland and at the head of the Shenandoah Valley. The reason for the discontinuance of the markings is probably explained by the following letters:

Post Office
Head Qrs 12th Army Corps
near Sandy Hook, Md.
Oct. 22d 1862

Maj. Gen N. P. Banks,
Comd'g forces, etc—

Sir:

I have the honor to request that you will forward me by mail, the commission I received last November from the P.O. Dept. as agen't for selling Stamps to "Banks Division (sic) and which I gave you at the time I received it; hoping you will see fit to comply with my request I remain

Your Obedient Servant
Roscoe E. Houghton
P.M. "Banks Division"

and some eight days later:

Post Office
Hd. Qrs. 12th Army Corps.
near Sandy Hook, Md.
Oct. 30th/62

Appointment Office
P.O. Dept.
Washington, D.C.

Sir:

On the 10th of last October a commission was sent Special Agent to sell stamps to "Gen. Banks Division." On the late retreat it was destroyed with property belonging to these Head Qrs. Therefore I would request you to forward me a copy or "artificial copy" of the same, by doing so you will greatly oblige.

Your Obdt. Servt.
Robert E. Houghton
P. M. "Banks Division"

The first of the two letters came from the Banks papers which are in possession of the Library of Congress, and are through the courtesy of that institution. The second letter, which obviously contains misprints and errors, is taken from a clipping given us some years ago and the source was not revealed, although we suspect Phil Ward's column in Mekeel's. In any case, we also suspect these two letters are an example of Postmaster Houghton's "digging up a dead cat" which cost him his job. Banks who had made the original request, had left the scene and probably wasn't too keen having his name coupled too closely with the major defeat of Second Manassas (this is the "late retreat" to which Houghton refers in the second letter). "Banks' Division," which had gone through many phases since it could have been properly called by that title, was now the 12th Army Corps and was a part of the Army of the Potomac. No doubt the Post Office Department saw no reason why the 12th Corps should have any different postal setup than the rest of the Corps of the Army of the Potomac, which was provided with a wholly military—and effective—mail system. So, we doubt the commission was renewed.

Most of the markings of Banks' Division have been dated from enclosed letters, and the information given here extracted from the Official Records and many other sources, which are rather far afield from philately. The writer has compiled a fairly complete record of all the units which could have used the Banks' Division post office—and also has been recording such units when determinable from their enclosed letters or soldier's letter endorsements who actually used the post office with the Banks' Division markings. Interestingly enough, the longer the office existed, the more it was used by units having no relation to Banks' troops or those of the 12th Army Corps. Although we once intended to publish the compilation, too complete a military history is required to use it properly. However, for those interested, the Period Editor will answer inquiries regarding covers with unit designations—where the units were located at the time the cover was sent, and any other data obtainable, provided a photo of the cover or at least a good Xerox of cover and contents are sent with the request.

We would also appreciate information extending the record of markings and the dates they were used. Most of the material and data used in this article came from the late Mr. Henry A. Meyer, George N. Malpass, Carl Albrecht, Len Persson, Scott Gallagher and Arthur H. Bond. Mr. Meyer took many photographs, including all used with this article, and Mr. Bond dug out some rather vital data from the National Archives. In addition, Colonel Harvey Sheppard gave us the story already quoted and submitted covers.