



# An Impossible Use

I have many covers in my reference collection that just don't seem to make sense. The cover in Figure 1 is one such.

The subject cover is franked with an 1861 3¢ rose (Scott 65) with a cancel of pen squiggles and the manuscript postmark of "Stanardsville Va. February 24th 1861." Note the similar curlicue at the end of the double-line postmark that matches the markings on the stamp.

Virginia did not secede from the Union until April 17, 1861. In February, Virginia was not yet part of the Confederacy, to which it was admitted on May 7, 1861. However, the stamp on this cover was not issued until August 1861. The common stamp in use during February 1861 was the 1857 3¢ dull red (Scott 26). The inescapable conclusion is the stamp does not belong on the cover.

You might question whether the postmaster just wrote the year date wrong. It is somewhat early in the year so one might think that could be a remote possibility, although improbable nearly two months after the turn of the calendar year. The difficulty with that theory is that the rate changed from the 3¢ charged by the U.S. to the increased 5¢ Confederate rate on June 1, 1861, when the Confederate Post Office Department took over its own affairs. Thus, no other year during the war would fit that scenario, as they would necessarily be franked with Confederate stamps, and have Confederate markings and rates — not U.S.

It is interesting that this is an adversity cover fashioned from a printed military form, as shown in Figure 2. It is well before when we think of most homemade wartime uses.

## Stanardsville, Virginia

Stanardsville was listed with a population of 330 souls in the mid-1800s, not much different from today, although the current population numbers range upwards

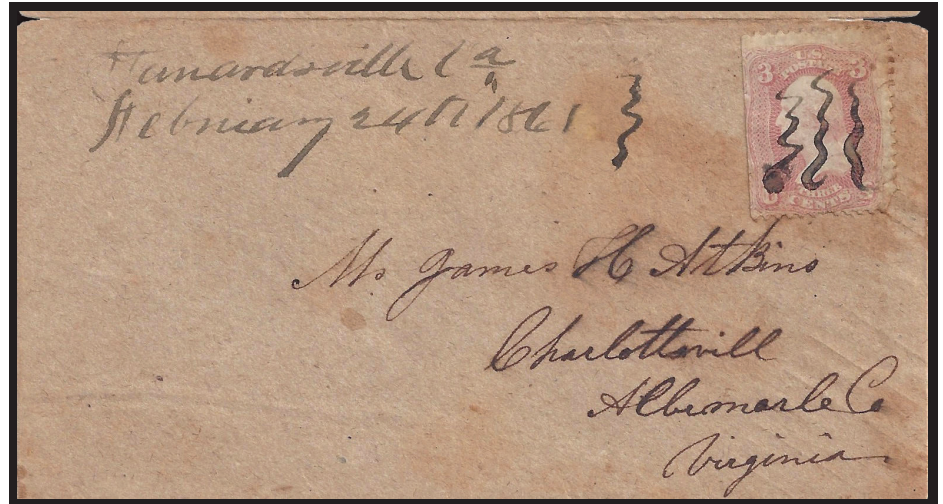
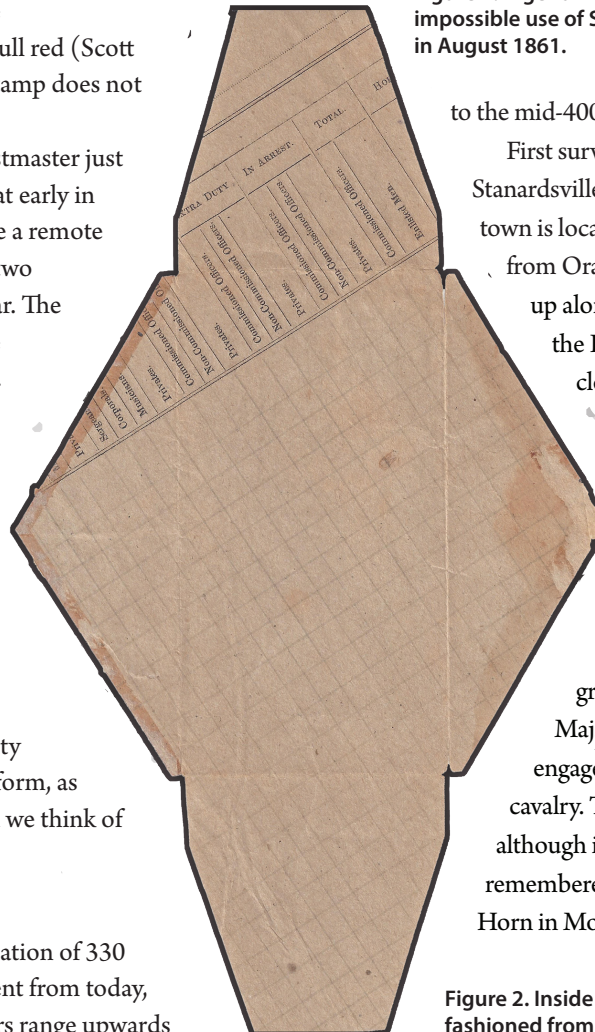


Figure 1. A genuine cover postmarked February 1861 with an impossible use of Scott 65, which was issued six months later in August 1861.



to the mid-400s according to what source is consulted.

First surveyed by the Stanard family in 1794, Stanardsville was incorporated that same year. The town is located in Greene County, which was formed from Orange County in 1838. Stanardsville grew up along the transportation routes crossing the Piedmont region. The town sits on a hill close to the Blue Ridge Mountains and Shenandoah National Park. Despite its small size, it had hotels, taverns, restaurants, and shops of all kinds. It was a thriving commercial gateway to the Shenandoah Valley. The town has served as the county seat since 1838.<sup>1</sup>

Stanardsville had its encounter with grander history on March 1, 1864, when Maj. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart's Confederate cavalry engaged Brig. Gen. George A. Custer's Union cavalry. The locals call it the Battle of Stanardsville, although it was but a brief encounter. Custer is best remembered as being killed at the Battle of Little Big Horn in Montana in 1876.

Figure 2. Inside of the envelope shown in Figure 1, fashioned from a printed military roster.

## Stanardsville Postal Markings

I referred to the *Virginia Postal History Society Catalog* (VPHS catalog) to compare Stanardsville postmarks. The listings for Stanardsville from that catalog are on page 415, shown in Figure 3. Most of the recorded postmarks are manuscript markings.<sup>2</sup>

George W. Price was appointed postmaster on July 30, 1815. The U.S. postmaster's position did not change hands until after the Civil War when Joseph W. Ham was appointed on September 29, 1865.

In the 1860 census is listed G. W. Price, age 66, born in Virginia about 1794. His home in 1860 was listed in Greene County, Va., with the post office of Stanardsville. His occupation was listed as farmer with a personal estate valued at \$46,070 and real estate valued at \$6,875; it is the highest net worth listed on that census page. His inferred spouse was Fannie Price, page 68.

Comparison of the postmaster's handwriting is a close match to the sixth example dated August 21, 1861, with the long cross-stroke on the "t" of the town name. Price's handwriting is represented in all examples since he was postmaster for such a lengthy period. The pen squiggles after listings 1, 2, and 5 are the same nature as the ones on the subject stamp and cover. Listings 3 and 4 are circle datestamps of 26 mm and 37 mm diameter. Initially, the 1863 wartime handwriting in listing 7 did not appear to my eye to be Price's, but that can be attributed to his aging.

Richard L. (Rick) Calhoun has spent a lot of time with postal archive records transcribing Virginia postmaster appointments from the mind-numbing appointment books. He found that George Price continued to serve as a Confederate postmaster, appointed August 1, 1861. Oddly, Rick found Price was appointed by the U.S. Post Office Department on October 27, 1851, instead of July 30, 1815, as the VPHS catalog shows. My initial thought was that 1815 and 1851 numbers were transposed, but the different day and year do not support that.

The postmark images for Stanardsville in the VPHS catalog begin in 1836, the same year George Price bought William Hill Stanard's house and 274 acres, which lay to the north of the northernmost edge of town. This information is recorded on the application of Stanardsville Historic District to the National

Register of Historic Places,<sup>3</sup> which also references Price's store on Main Street. The Price store may have housed the post office, although this is speculation on my part.

## Dramatis Personae

The addressee on the subject cover is James H. Atkins of Charlottesville, Virginia. Atkins enlisted in the Confederate Army as a private on March 15, 1862, in (J.M. Carrington's) Charlottesville Light Artillery, (Stonewall) Jackson's Division, Valley District, Department of Northern Virginia (later the Army of Northern Virginia). Atkins was promoted to corporal April

30, 1863. At enlistment, he was described as standing 5'10" tall and having a fair complexion, grey eyes, and light hair. He was taken prisoner May 12, 1864, at Spotsylvania Court House, Virginia. Figure 4 shows one of Atkin's military records with dates of enlistment in Carrington's Company and his date of capture.

James McDowell Carrington (1838-1911) was 22 years old when he enlisted as a captain the same day James Atkins volunteered. Carrington attended Virginia Military Institute (VMI) for six weeks. He also attended Washington College (now Washington and Lee University) in 1855 and the University of Virginia (UVA) 1856-1860. Carrington practiced law after the war.

At enlistment, Carrington was described as 6'1" tall, having a light complexion, grey eyes, and dark hair. Carrington was promoted to major on April 15, 1864. He was taken captive at Spotsylvania the same day as Private Atkins. Both men were confined at Fort Delaware, but Carrington went on to become one of the "Immortal 600," placed under fire of their own guns on Morris Island in Charleston Harbor. Atkins escaped

that fate because all of the "600" were Confederate officers, while Atkins was enlisted.

In a biographical sketch of Carrington that was part of a postwar news story announcing his election to president of the Confederate Veterans Association, it was noted that his father was Gen. Edward C(odrington) Carrington and three of his paternal great uncles were officers of the Continental Army. His illustrious pedigree continued as the article cited five of his uncles were governors of the state of Virginia: Patrick Henry, James Preston, James McDowell, and the 2 governors Floyd.<sup>4</sup> Carrington's mother

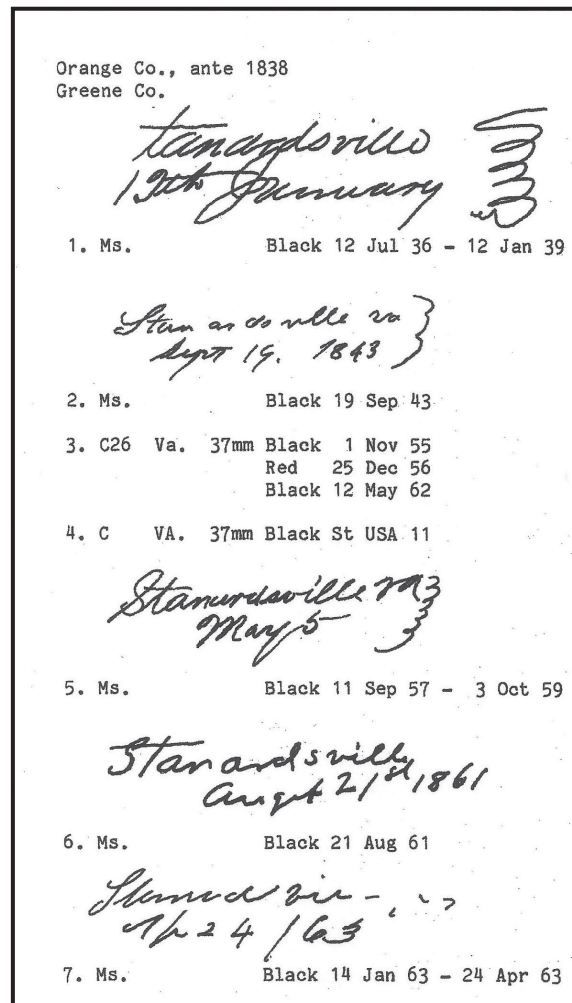


Figure 3. Stanardsville postal listings from page 415 of the "Virginia Postal History Society Catalog."



(Confederate.)  
 a | Capt. Carrington's Co., Va. Light Artillery. | Va.  
 Jas. H. Atkins  
 5<sup>th</sup> Corp. | Capt. James McD. Carrington's Co. Light Artillery, Cutshaw's Batt'n.  
 Appears on  
 Company Muster Roll  
 of the organization named above,  
 for Oct 31 1864 to Feb 28, 1865.  
 Dated Feb 28, 1865  
 Enlisted: Mch 15, 1862.  
 When: Mch 15, 1862.  
 Where: Charlottesville  
 By whom: Capt Carrington  
 Period: War  
 Last paid: Capt Lane  
 By whom: Capt Lane  
 To what time: Dec 31, 1863.  
 Present or absent: Absent  
 Remarks: Captured May 12, 1864.  
 Captain Carrington's Company Virginia Light Artillery was organized March 16, 1862. It served in various field battalions of reserve artillery which were composed of independent batteries from various States.  
 Book mark:  
 (642) Frank Copyist.

was Elizabeth Henry Preston Carrington, daughter of Brig. Gen. Francis Smith Preston and Sarah Buchanan Preston, also the daughter of a general officer. The impressive lineage goes on and on.

### Consequent Deductions

So how is the illogical 3¢ stamp on the subject cover explained? I examined the stamp and cover with ultraviolet light and a strong task light both front and back, but found no irregularity other than damp stains along the right side of the cover. Comparing the pen squiggles on the stamp to the VPHS Catalog listings, it is apparent this stamp originated on a Stanardsville cover. But was it *this* cover?

I believe, more likely than not, that stamps from the Atkins correspondence fell off more than one envelope over time and were long ago replaced on the wrong covers by persons unknown. Those who restored the stamps to the covers likely had no philatelic knowledge and would not have realized this was an impossible use because the stamp on the cover was not issued until six months after the cover was mailed.

#### Endnotes

1. About Stanardsville, Town of Stanardsville, <http://www.stanardsville.org/about/> (Accessed January 26, 2024)
2. Robert L. Lisbeth, Compiler and Editor, Virginia Postal Markings and Postmaster, Colonial-1865. (Virginia Postal History Society, 1984)
3. National Register of Historic Places registration form, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service. [https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/VLR\\_to\\_transfer/PDFNoms/302-0012\\_Standardsville\\_HD\\_2004\\_Final\\_Nomination.pdf](https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/VLR_to_transfer/PDFNoms/302-0012_Standardsville_HD_2004_Final_Nomination.pdf) (Accessed January 26, 2024)
4. "Confederate Veterans Association Announces Officers," Evening Star, Washington, D.C., Saturday, December 22, 1906, p. 6. <https://www.newspapers.com/paper/evening-star/13589/> (Accessed January 26, 2024)

Figure 4. One Private Atkins's military records showing he was enlisted by Capt. Carrington.

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