



Figure 1: A Confederate cover sent from Bentivoglio, Virginia, to Fredericksburg, Virginia, where it was marked with the month “MAR” to advertise it in the local newspaper as an unclaimed letter awaiting pickup at the post office.

## Unique Confederate ‘Advertised’ Handstamps from Fredericksburg, Virginia

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

American mail and newspapers were closely connected from inception. The postal system delivered newspapers and the newspapers alerted readers to unclaimed mail with published lists of letters remaining in the post office. If the mail was not claimed in a specified amount of time, it was sent to the Dead Letter Office. Once there, any valuables were removed and the rest of the letter was destroyed.

Originally, mail was delivered to the post office and recipients went there to collect it. Consequently, post offices were social gathering places, especially for rural residents who might only get to town once a week or less. Conversely, local urban businesses might send employees to the post office daily or even multiple times a day. Most often, town post offices handstamped unclaimed letters with straightline “ADVERTISED” markings, especially in urban Virginia centers such as Charlottesville, Danville, Petersburg, and Richmond. All advertised markings during the Confederate period are scarce.

According to Fredericksburg postal historian Keith E. Littlefield, Ph.D.,<sup>1</sup> lists of letters were typically posted once a month and repeated once each week.

The earliest list of letters for Fredericksburg located by Littlefield was for January 29, 1767, showing 98 letters waiting to be claimed from the Northern Neck to the Valley of Virginia, a 100-mile radius.

In the late 1700s, if the letters were not picked up within three months, they were sent to the General Post Office Department in Philadelphia as “dead” letters—an innovation of Benjamin Franklin, the first U.S. postmaster general.

Littlefield also reveals in his Fredericksburg postal history opus that, periodically, a list of letters was also posted in the local Fredericksburg paper for Falmouth, Port Royal, Tappahannock, and Bowling Green, which were subordinate in the local urban hierarchy.

The town of Fredericksburg took the simple straightline handstamped “ADVERTISED” one step further by handstamping the month the letter was advertised in the paper. Typically, there was an extra two cents collected to pay for the newspaper advertising.

I have only recorded two such covers from Fredericksburg, as shown in Figures 1 and 2. They are not listed in the *2012 CSA Catalog*<sup>2</sup> but have been



**Figure 2:** A second recorded cover that advertises an unclaimed letter awaiting pickup, but this time with “OCT.”

documented and saved for future editors. Each is unique in that different months are used to denote advertising for unclaimed mail in the local newspaper.

The Figure 1 cover is franked with a left sheet margin copy of the ten-cent greenish-blue Jefferson Davis Type II (Scott CSA 12c), used on cover with the manuscript postmark of Bentivoglio, Virginia, dated February 9. It was addressed to “Mrs. Martha W. Ashby, Fredericksburg, Virginia, in the care of Counselor Cole, Esqr.” The handstamped straightline “MAR” was used to denote the month it was advertised on the list of unclaimed letters in the local paper.

Figure 2 shows a second Fredericksburg advertised marking on a cover bearing a ten-cent blue Jefferson Davis Type I (Scott CSA 11) tied by a partial strike of a “RICHMOND VA SEP 24 (1864)” circular datestamp, Powell Type 6p.<sup>3</sup>

Addressed to Miss Nannie C. Alsop, Fredericksburg, Va., it was advertised in the Fredericksburg newspaper as indicated by the “OCT.” straightline handstamp. The blue “FARMVILLE VA SEP 27” was apparently a routing postmark, doubtless to avoid enemy troops on the usual direct route. Farmville is southwest of Richmond, while Fredericksburg is north. It is an interesting routing demonstrating wartime necessity.

### **Fredericksburg Postmaster Reuben Triplett Thom**

Reuben Triplett Thom (1782-1868) was first appointed postmaster of Fredericksburg on June 26, 1840, by President Martin Van Buren. He served continuously for the U.S. Post Office until appointed



**Figure 3:** The Fredericksburg, Va., five-cent blue (Scott 26X1) postmaster’s provisional. **Figure 4:** The Fredericksburg, Va., ten-cent red (Scott 26X2) postmaster’s provisional.

Confederate postmaster in 1861, by then 78 years old. Thom ran a dry goods store, but the post office was integrated into his residence on the first floor. He was also the local steamboat agent.

The Thom name is familiar to serious students of Confederate philately who know that he issued two provisional adhesive stamps in September 1861 in two denominations and colors, a five-cent blue (Scott 26X1, Figure 3) and ten-cent red (Scott 26X2, Figure 4). They were printed on the thinnest of bluish pelure paper. Richard Calhoun records 40 covers used with the five-cent stamp but none with the ten-cent.<sup>4</sup>

Fredericksburg doubtless produced many challenges for the postmaster, who handled the mail from before the beginning of adhesive postage stamps through the great trials of the Civil War.

My thanks to Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries for the use of the stamp images.

## Endnotes

- 1 Keith E. Littlefield, *From New Post to Princess Anne Street: The Postal History of Fredericksburg, Virginia 1657-1990*, (Annandale, Va.: Beehive Books & Virginianna, Hastings, Littlefield & Erskine, 2022) p. 18.
- 2 Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown Jr., and Jerry S. Palazolo, *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History* (Sumter, S.C.: Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012)
- 3 Peter W. W. Powell, *Confederate States of America, Markings and Postal History of Richmond, Virginia* (Louisville, Kentucky: Leonard H. Hartmann, 1987)
- 4 Richard L. Calhoun, *The Confederate Postmaster Provisionals of Virginia* (Henrico, Va., Virginia Postal History Society, 2011) pp. 28-33.

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