

Figure 1. Union patriotic with flag and cannon design bearing notation "Chg A. Box 54." The postmaster applied a 3-cent 1861 stamp and postmarked the envelope: "STATESVILLE Ohio [?] 15."

Charge and Charged Postal Uses in the Confederacy

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Prior to the Civil War different postmasters supported a system to pay postage by charging it to a post office box account. These boxes, or pigeon holes before there were locked boxes, were rented by the postmaster to individuals. The rent for a post office box account went to the postmaster, not to the Post Office Department.

I have written a number of articles about box accounts and postal markings and have shown that there are two different uses.¹ The more common use was to charge the payment of postage to a particular box account: CHARGE uses. For unpaid letters arriving at a post office, the postmaster could charge the due postage to the box account if this was the arrangement made with the addressee: CHARGED uses to the box account. These uses all show either manuscript or handstamped marks put on the letter by the sender, not the postmaster. Thus, there is great variety in the wording and format.

The much less common markings are those applied by a receiving postmaster to indicate that the postage was charged to an account. These were almost always short manuscript notations such as "Chgd or Charged" with a box number.

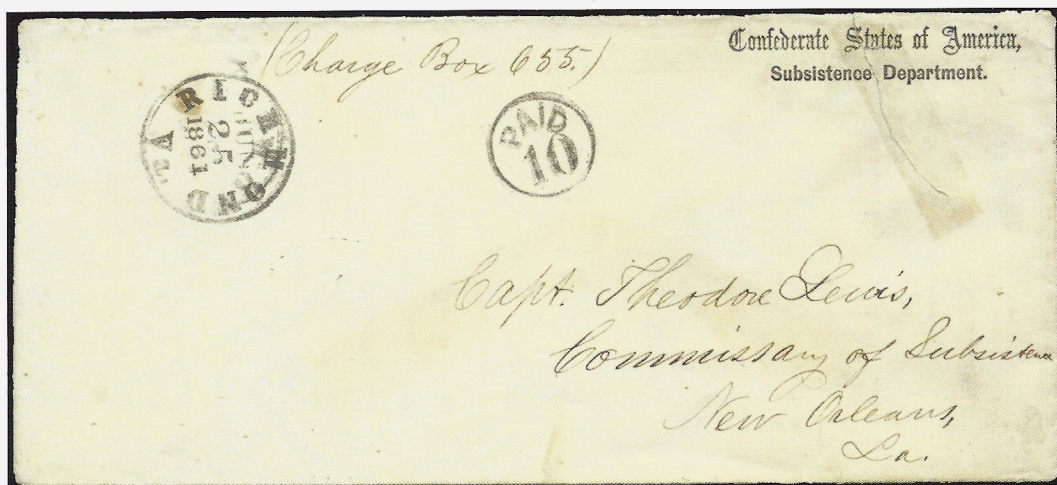


Figure 2. Semi-official envelope, Confederate States of America Subsistence Department, with manuscript "Charge Box 655/" and handstamped RICHMOND Va. JUN 25 1861 and PAID 10 to New Orleans.

The vast majority of covers bearing these markings before the Civil War are stampless covers dating from before the wide use of postage stamps. While there are examples of these covers known from the stamp period, the use was quite uncommon once stamps were available. Figure 1 shows a Union patriotic cover with notation "Chg A Box 54." The postmaster applied a three-cent stamp, canceled it, and charged someone whose name began with an "A" and who held box account #54. The practice of charging incoming postage to a box account, however, was quite common at many post offices. The patron was charged once a month or less frequently via a post office bill. Such covers may bear no markings because the postmaster usually did not mark "charged" on letters.

In 1860, before the war, few covers bear any type of notation about charging for postage, either "charge" for paid letters or "charged" for unpaid letters. In fact, unpaid letters were rare after 1855 when postage payment by stamps was mandatory.

In the North this remained true. But in the Confederacy, perhaps due to a lack of available coins, the charge-to-box use was revived for both private individuals and government agencies. Figure 2 shows a semi-official printed envelope with "Charge Box 655" and prepaid postage with postmark RICHMOND Va. JUN 25 1861, which shows the box charge use just a few weeks after the formation of the Confederate Post Office Department. This appears to be an official use.

The newly discovered Richmond post office bill shown in figure 3 is addressed to an army hospital, the Alabama Hospital, and bills "to amount Postage to date" 64 cents and 10 cents on October 1, 1862. A further notation states that this was paid on November 12, 1862. The reverse of this bill, however, shown in figure 4, reveals that the total paid was \$6.90, so there must have been prior charges put

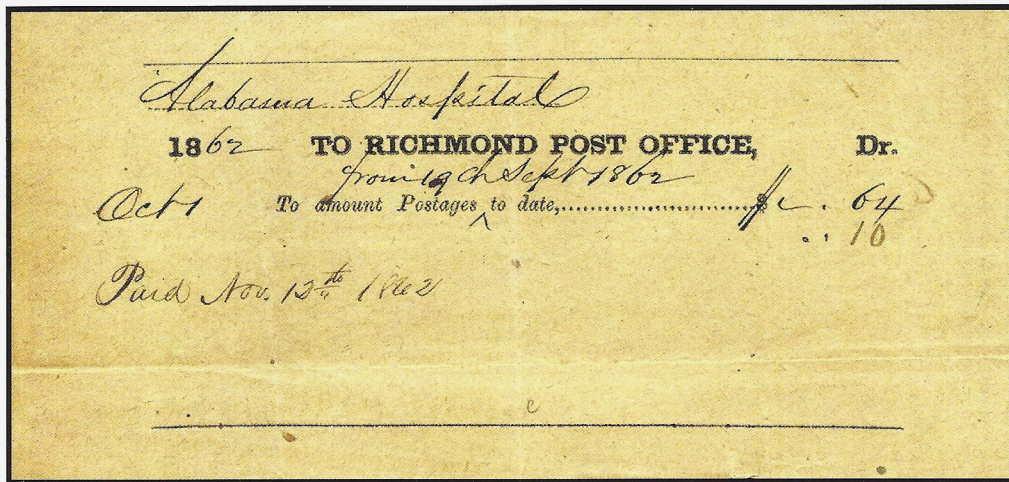


Figure 3. Post office bill from Richmond Post Office to the Alabama Hospital dated "Oct. 1, 1862", for unpaid postage from Sept. 19, 1862. The bill was marked paid on November 12 of that year.

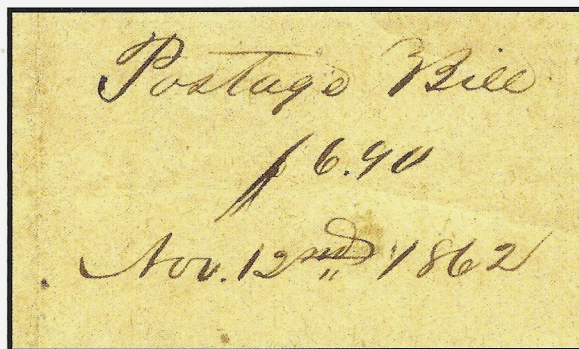


Figure 4. A portion of the reverse side of the bill in figure 3 showing that \$6.90 was paid for postage.

on the account before this billing. Since letters from CSA soldiers could be sent postage due, this bill is probably not for soldiers' mail although it is possible that some bills were for mail sent between soldiers with due postage at Richmond. Only soldiers could mail their letters postage due.

The only handstamped Confederate charge handstamp is shown in figure 5. I have seen two examples. The first is a marking in red that reads "CHARGE 64" in shaded lettering with manuscript initials "W. R. R." It was postmarked WINNSBOROUGH N.C. 10 JAN with PAID and 5. (The handstamped charge markings will be a new section of *The American Stampless Cover Catalog*, which is in preparation.)

Even more unusual is the second example shown in figure 6, the printed "Charge Box 25" on a stampless semi-official cover, with imprint "Official Business

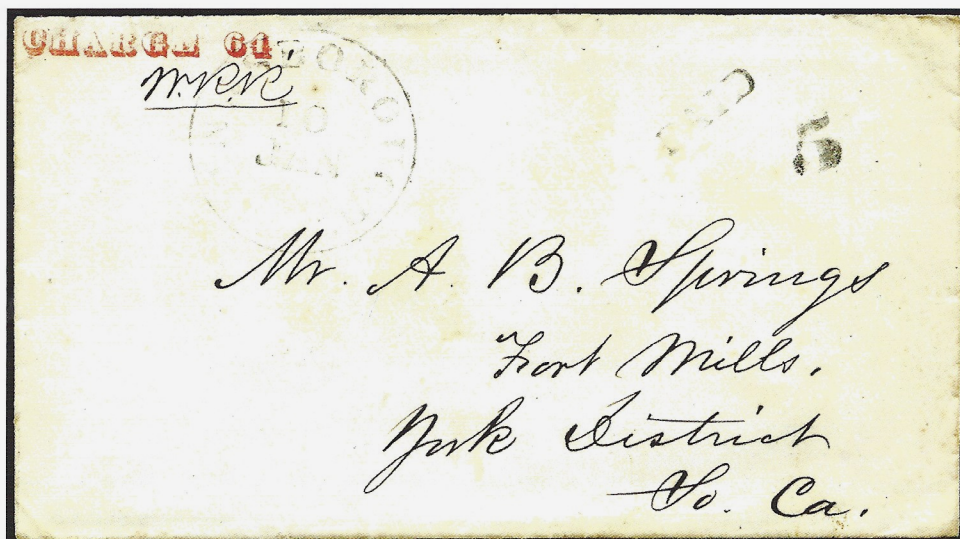


Figure 5. CHARGE 64 in shaded red lettering with manuscript initials of sender on cover, postmarked WINNSBOROUGH, N.C. 10 JAN, PAID, and 5, which would be an 1862 use.

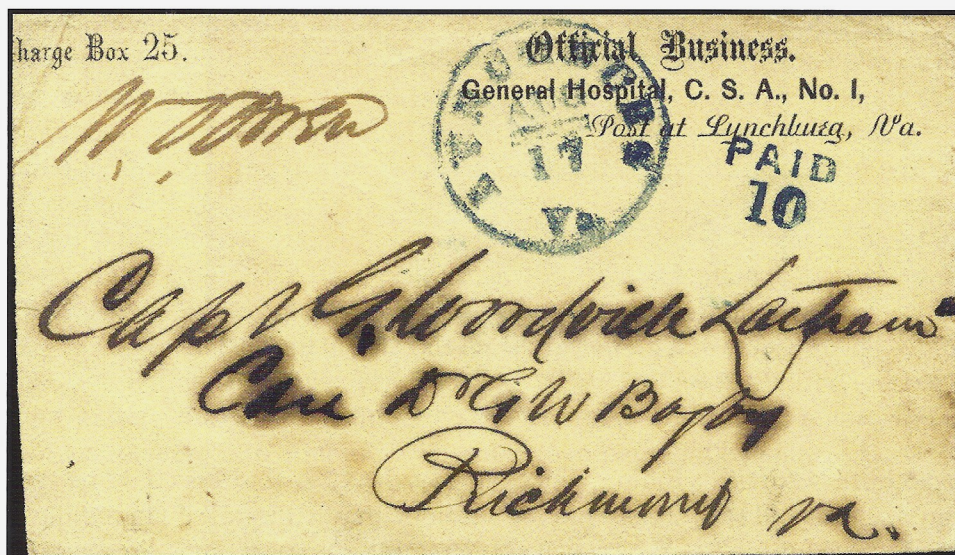


Figure 6. Printed Charge Box 25 on semi-official cover from General Hospital No. 1 in Lynchburg with blue LYNCHBURG Va. AUG 17 and PAID 10.

General Hospital C.S.A. No. 1, Post at Lynchburg, Va." The cover bears a blue LYNCHBURG Va AUG 17 and PAID 10 to Richmond. Printed charge notations are very rare.

There is also only one handstamped charged marking. An example is shown in figure 7, addressed to then Mississippi governor John Pettus. The cover is a drop use and bears DROP 2 CENT in a circle plus a shield handstamp CHARGED TO BOX. A second example, with postage stamps, is shown in figure 8.



Figure 7. Stampless drop cover with DROP 2 CENTS and a shield CHARGED TO BOX addressed to Mississippi governor Pettus at Jackson.



Figure 8. Pair of 5-cent blue CSA #7s tied with TUSCALOOSA AL. APR 9. Separate DUE 10 in arch format (probably overweight) was postmarked CHARGED TO BOX at Jackson.

Illustration from Bennett Auction, September 2011

Notes

1. See "Charge it to My Post Office Account," *American Philatelist*, vol. 89 (1975): 613–22; "Postage Charged to Post Office Box Accounts" *Chronicle of the U.S. Classic Postal Issues*, vol. 40, no. 138 (1988): 90–8; and "'Charge' and 'Charged' Markings Billing Postal Charges to a Box-Holder's Account," *Chronicle of the U.S. Classic Postal Issues*, vol. 65, no. 239 (2013): 211–35.