

CONFEDERATE POSTAL MARKINGS OF PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA

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I first became interested in Petersburg, Va., postal markings solely because the post office used three different colored inks for its postal markings during the Civil War: blue, red and black. That was the beginning of my long journey through Petersburg postal history. Petersburg markings, for the most part, are easily located at reasonable prices. There are, as with most Confederate postal history, exceptions, where some are exceptionally rare and valuable. This article will attempt to explore all known Confederate markings used at Petersburg, as well as my estimation of dates of use and, where applicable, identify those examples that are rare. Correspondence and comments from other Petersburg collectors are always welcome.

Few other Confederate post offices can match or exceed the numbers of varieties of postmarks, both in types and in colors, as that of Petersburg, Va. As such, Petersburg makes for excellent opportunity to study postal marking types and, in some cases, trace the evolution of known types throughout the war years.

What began as a simple cursory study of the several known types of canceling devices used at Petersburg quickly evolved into a full-blown in-depth study spanning many years. As with most forms of Confederate postal history, there are two questions that must be answered, or at least attempted to be answered: 1) What types of postal markings are known, and 2) When were they used? Petersburg did not use a year date in any antebellum or war years circular date stamps, thus, the year of use must be determined by other evidence.

It is unavoidable that new information will surface from time to time and such information will need to be incorporated into this continuing study, but since these types of works must necessarily always be “works in progress,” one must find a point at which the report must be made with the understanding that it may need updating. To that end, the previous research by A.L.T. Tobias¹ was used as a launching pad from which I compiled this work.

The advantage I have today that was not available to Tobias at the time is the availability of computer resources for research. Additionally, many new discoveries have been made since Tobias first began reporting his findings. Had these resources been available to Tobias at the time, I feel confident that this article would not be necessary. But, be that as it may, I have the privilege of building upon the foundation that Tobias built many years ago. Because of the newly discovered information, I found it necessary to re-identify and re-designate the various postmark types to place them in chronological order. Tobias recognized his work as “purely a preliminary, primary study” and his identification numbers were based on chronology at that time.

The periods of use of the various markings described in the following text are based on examination of covers, images and any accompanying descriptions from various sources.

The Petersburg puzzle has been a challenge, to say the least. Timelines of uses had to be constructed and then – and only then – could an accurate picture of the evolving markings be visualized and interpreted. In the end, it is the goal of this research to provide students with the means to identify the various postal markings and to more accurately identify the dates of uses.

The Petersburg, Va., post office utilized a variety of circular date stamps (postmarks), stampless markings and, on rare occasions, auxiliary markings. Many, if not all, of its devices were of prewar origin. Petersburg was also one of several Confederate post offices that utilized different colors of inks for its postal markings throughout the Civil War: first blue, then red and, finally, black. Blue was used for the longest period of time (approximately 3 years, 4 ½ months), followed by red (approximately 4 months) and lastly, black (approximately 3 months).

During the war Petersburg postal markings underwent change and some evolution, both in designs and colors. The following discussion is divided into three headings, each addressing a separate area of the Petersburg postal markings: 1) ink color types, 2) circular date stamp types and 3) handstamp and stampless markings.

One caveat that must be mentioned early in this discussion: Special care must be given when trying to interpret the date used in Petersburg postmarks. Petersburg postmarks are often difficult to read due to either partial strikes, light impressions, smeared or



Figure 1.

blurry appearances. Additionally, the day slugs used in the postmark were often accompanied by filler slugs on one or both sides of the day slug, giving the appearance that a “4” is a “14” (Figure 1, at left). Also, note that often the “L” of “JUL” bears an extra mark giving it the appearance that it is an “E.” Figure 2 (right) exhibits another trait in that there are filler slugs on both sides of the date. This is especially trouble-



Figure 2.

some when dealing with single-digit dates. Another word of caution is that covers are occasionally found with two postmarks bearing dates a day apart. This could have occurred if the clerk forgot to advance the day date for a particular day, or if the letter didn't make the first day's dispatch and it was struck again on the actual day of dispatch.

Petersburg, Virginia, Ink Colors: **Blue**, **Red** and **Black**

Petersburg postmark colors delineate specific periods of use, though the exact time periods of use may shift slightly as new information becomes available. Generally speaking, the time frames of use fall into three categories:

Blue: Beginning of the Civil War through Sept. 4, 1864.

Red: Sept. 5, 1864, through Dec. 24, 1864.

Black: Dec. 25, 1864,* through March 30, 1865.

*The change from red to black may have overlapped on Dec. 24, 1864, or it could have been the clerk failed to change the date slug until later in the day. Petersburg postmarks are sometimes found with incorrect date slugs, most of which were corrected by a second (corrected) dated postmark on the same cover.

The reason for the change in color from blue to red was because of a complaint from the Little River, Fla., postmaster that stamps were not being canceled and the blue ink used at Petersburg did not show on the stamps.² Figure 3 is an excellent example of a general-issue stamp canceled by a blue Petersburg postmark that would be difficult to see if removed from the cover. Either the clerk at Petersburg, or a clerk at another post office applied pen strokes to the stamp to remove all doubt of cancellation.

The red Petersburg postmarks are rarely found in full and clear strikes and are even rarer in any condition other than barely legible. Although not so documented, the illegible nature of the red ink no doubt led to the use of black ink.

Transition from one color ink to the next appears to have been made suddenly at the start of a day and not later during a day. Any examples purporting an overlap of color ink uses must be viewed with skepticism.



Figure 3. A General Issue on cover with difficult-to-see blue cancel (if removed from the cover). The ink defacement removes all doubt about whether the item was canceled.

Postmark Types

I have not maintained or confined my work to the “Type” designations set forth by earlier students, but I have – where appropriate – redesignated the “types” according to each’s chronological order of occurrence. I realize this may cause some confusion or conflict with previously published works in the short term, but in the long run, having the type designations ordered chronologically will make identification more logical.

All of the circular date stamps used in Petersburg have prewar origins; therefore, in this study it should be understood that reference to dates of use refers only to dates of use during the Confederate period. All Petersburg postmarks measure 30mm in diameter. The only exception is that of Type 2a, which became elongated over time due to the bottom of the postmark device becoming separated from the rest of the postmark.

The initial postmarks used at Petersburg contained integral rates, either “3 cts” or “5 cts.” These were used initially as early as 1847 (for the Type 2) and 1851 (for the Type 1). Early in the war (Aug. 1, 1861) the “3 cts” integral rate was removed, and a filler of unknown material was inserted, which resulted in an amorphous blobby shape within the postmark that I refer to as “artifacts.”

Unlike the distinct periods in which colored inks were used, different postmark types were frequently used concurrently, shifting from one type to another, and back and forth over an extended period of time. This makes identifying the year of use somewhat difficult during the blue ink period. Other methods of year-date identification may need to be incorporated, such as docketing, type of stamp used or enclosure. While different postmarks were used concurrently, no occurrences of different postmarks having been used on the same day have been identified.

Important Virginia dates:

Independent State Use of U.S. Postage: April 17, 1861 – May 6, 1861.

Confederate Use of U.S. Postage: May 7, 1861 – May 31, 1861.

Confederate Postage: June 1, 1861 – April 1, 1865.

Confederate Forces Evacuate Petersburg: April 2, 1865.

[TYPE 1] “PETERSBURG Va. / [month / day] 3 cts”

Type 1 (Figure 4) saw very limited use in Confederate Petersburg and known examples are scarce. Confirmed dates of use are: April 17, 1861³ – July 16, 1861.

The integral rate on this device was eventually removed, resulting in the device giving way to Type 1a.

[TYPE 1a] (integral rate removed/artifacts present)

This is the same device as Type 1, except the “3 cts” was removed sometime around September 1861, leaving an amorphous artifact to be printed where the “3 cts” used to be located⁴ (Figures 5-9). Confirmed dates of use include Aug. 1, 1861,⁵ through July 29, 1862.



Figures 5-9 (from above left, left to right). These markings depict the progression of the “artifacts” over time.

Study by way of comparing tracings and computer comparisons of this postmark type has thus far shown that the artifacts can be traced to only one postmark (Type 1). Though the artifacts appear distinctly different on some examples, these are merely changelings, not different postmarks. Careful examination and comparison of the artifacts reveals common traits shared by all.

I find no evidence to support previous research⁶ that the “5 cts” integral rate was removed from the Type 2 postmark to create a similar variety of postmark described herein as Type 1a.

[TYPE 2] (“PETERSBURG Va. / [month / day] 5 cts”)

Type 2 (Figure 10), is identical to Type 1 except for the integral rate being “5 cts”. August Dietz depicted this postmark at least as far back as his 1959 catalog; however, he depicted the “VA” in all capital letters (Figure 11), but this is an error and should have been depicted as “Va.” Perhaps a poor impression commonly encountered with Petersburg postmarks gave the illusion of an all caps “VA.” This was an error that was carried forward in his catalogs as well as into the *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*.⁷



Figure 10.



Figure 11.

Very early on during the life of Type 2 the device began to break/separate at the bottom causing the “5 cts” and part of the rim to drop dramatically. This anomaly shows a distinct progression, or worsening of the problem over time (see Figures 12 and 13, which show how dramatic

the separation became in just two months' time). The majority of Type 2 examples show some degree of the break/separation and I have identified this phase of the postmark as a Type 2a.⁸ Type 2 postmarks without any visible separation are scarce.

Confirmed dates of use of this type include: Aug. 6, 1861, through Dec. 24, 1861⁹



Figure 12 (above and Figure 13 (above right). Type 2a (Dropped "5 cts").

[TYPE 3] "PETERSBURG / [month / day] / Va")

Type 3 (Figure 14) saw the longest period of use, with a confirmed date range of Jan. 10, 1862, through March 1865.¹⁰ This postmark is known in all three colors and was used extensively throughout the war. Beginning around May 1864, the rim of the device became damaged/dented over the "PE" of "PETERSBURG," resulting in the variety Type 3a.



Figure 14.

[TYPE 3a] dented rim

The "dented rim" postmark (Figures 15–19) is a variety of the Type 3 postmark, wherein the device sustained noticeable damage to the rim of the postmark.

Confirmed date range of use: May 25, 1864, through end of Civil War.

Two features identify this stage of the Type 3 device: there is a dent in the rim at the "PE" position of "PETERSBURG," and the shape of the "Va" seems to take on a fancy-like font, almost italic in appearance. It is first observed during the blue period (earliest recorded date of May 25, 1864 – only slightly dented at this time) and throughout the red- and black-ink period. The rim dent/damage appears to have gotten progressively worse over time from just a dent to nearly a break in the rim.



Figures 15-19 (from above left, left to right). These markings showing the progressions over time of the dented-rim variety.

**Tell 'em you saw it in
*The Confederate Philatelist!***

[TYPE 4] “PETERSBURG Va. [month / day]”

This postmark (Figure 20) at first glance appears to be the same as Type 1a, with integral rate removed, but does not exhibit artifacts. Confirmed use date range: Aug. 27, 1862, through July 9, 1864.¹¹

There was a prewar postmark of this type and it is likely that the Type 4 is actually the prewar device and not some variant of the Types 1 or 1a. Although its period of use spans nearly two years, its actual use was rather limited.

[TYPE 4a] Shifted-down Month/Day Slugs

Type 4a (Figure 21) is a variety of the Type 4, wherein the month and day date slugs are found obviously lower than normal within the postmark. Some of the month/day slugs are only shifted slightly downward; others are completely at the bottom. Confirmed use date range: Oct. 10, 1863, through Feb. 6, 1864. The time-period of use may enlarge as more data becomes available.



Figure 21.

Many of the Type 4a postmarks, especially during the month of October 1863, have a prominent filler block marking above the month slug. (Figure 22)



Figure 20.



Figure 22.

Handstamp and Stampless Markings

There are two types of handstamp “PAID” markings known: Type 1 (Figure 23) and Type 2 (Figure 24). The letter “P” in Type 1 is complete, while in Type 2 the bottom of the bowl is not attached to the stem of the “P.” The letters in Type 2 are more widely spaced.



Figure 23 (far left). Type 1, 16.5mm by 4mm.

Figure 24 (left) Type 2, 21.75mm by 4mm.

There are two types of the stampless “5” known: Type 1 (Figure 25) is 13mm by 8mm. The “5” is a very bold sans-serif font. The Type 2 (Figure 26) is 12.5mm by 8mm. This handstamp is a sans-serif fancier font.

Type 1: 13mm by 8mm. Recorded dates of use: June 28, 1861, through May 18, 1862 (Figure 25)

Type 2: 12.5mm by 8mm (Figure 26)

Type 2 was the subject of an article in the *CP*¹² and was described as the “Petersburg-Norfolk 5” because it was first used at Norfolk and around the time of the fall of Norfolk it was transferred to Petersburg where it saw very limited use. Currently, the confirmed period of use is July 4, 1862, through May 29, 1864 (blue ink), and is based upon the dates of the few known examples. Also, one occurrence of Type 2 is recorded in black ink, dated “Dec / 24 [1864]” as a “due” marking on an underpaid cover.¹³



Figure 25 (above).

Figure 26 (above right).

The stampless “10” is found in four distinct types.

Type 1: Encircled “10” (Figure 27). Diameter measures approximately 17mm.

Recorded dates of use: Aug. 16, 1861, and sporadically used throughout the war. Found struck in blue, red and black inks.



Figure 27. Colored inks.

Type 2: The numeral “1” is 8.5mm tall and the number “0” is 9mm tall (Figure 28). Total width is 12.5mm. The cap of the “1” is slightly concave in shape.

Recorded dates of use: June 1862. Only known in blue ink.



Figure 28.

Type 3: The numeral “1” is 9mm tall and the numeral “0” is 8.5mm tall. (Figures 29-30)

Total width is 12mm wide. The cap of the “1” is slanted, but straight (not concave). Total width is approximately 12 mm wide. Only known in blue ink.

[**Note: the slanted cap on the numeral “1” in Type 2 is slightly concave, whereas on Type 3 it is a straight slant (i.e. no curvature)]. The number “1” and “0” in this marking became somewhat out of alignment with each other over time, as well as attained a worn and bold appearance.

Recorded dates of use: March 1862 – September 1864.



Figure 29 (top).

Figure 30 (above).



Figure 31.

Type 4: This is a more recent discovery, with only two examples known so far. (Figure 31)

Approximately 17mm by 12mm. Only known in blue ink. Because of the poor impression, exact measurements were not possible.

Recorded date of use: June 8, 1862.¹⁴

Auxiliary Markings

Straightline auxiliary markings are all quite rare, with “ADVERTISED” and “FORWARDED” being the rarest (only one of each known). The “FORWARDED” marking is shown in Figure 32. The “MISSENT” marking would fall into the “next rarest” category, followed by the “DUE” marking, which would be considered scarce.

Figure 32. This example exhibits an interesting variety of Petersburg markings: The unique “FORWARDED” marking, a manuscript “Forw 10” marking, a Type 3 “10,” a Type 4a CDS with “DEC 18” and a Type 4 CDS with “DEC 19.”



The “DUE” marking measures 14.25mm by between 4.5mm and 5mm (Figure 33). As with many Petersburg markings, quality is often poor, making for difficult accurate measurements. The “DU” is out of alignment with the “E”, giving it an arched appearance. The “DUE” marking is rarely found with a good, clear impression. It is known only in blue ink.

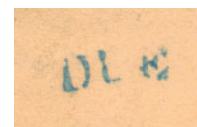


Figure 33.

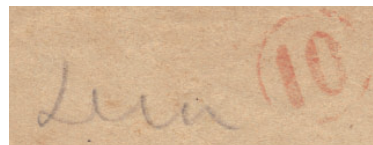


Figure 34.

Confirmed date range of use: May 18, 1862 – June 29, 1864. (Predominately during 1862, with the noted 1864 use being an outlier.)

Manuscript “Due” with red encircled “10” stampless marking (Figure 34).

The encircled “10” is known in blue, red and black ink.

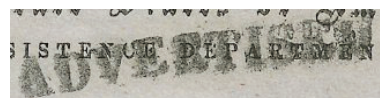


Figure 35.

The “ADVERTISED” marking measures approximately 36mm by 4mm (measurements taken from an image, not from the actual cover, Figure 35).

The only known “ADVERTISED” marking, allegedly from Petersburg, is found on a Subsistence Department semi-official cover bearing a “SEP 21 [1864]” Richmond postmark. It has been reported that there is a Petersburg postmark on the reverse, but I have not seen this cover, so any identifying information is unknown to me at this time. The Richmond postmark date places this cover early into the red ink period of Petersburg postal markings. The black ink period did not come into play until late December 1864, thus, it would appear that this cover would have been at the Petersburg post office for nearly three months before it was marked “ADVERTISED,” but it is certainly possible that the clerk applied the marking using black ink prior to the Petersburg CDS black ink period.

The “FORWARDED” marking measures 38.5mm by 4mm (Figure 36, from the Figure 32 cover).



Figure 36.

The only-known “FORWARDED” marking was a fairly recent discovery. Peter Powell, in his book *Missent, Forwarded, and Advertised Markings of The Confederate States of America*,¹⁵ stated that “Because of its size and importance, Petersburg should have had a full complement of markings.” (This is a reference to the fact that at the time Powell’s book was published no forwarding marking was known from Petersburg. This unique example is in blue ink.

Confirmed date of use: Dec. 19, 1864.

The “MISSENT” marking measures 33mm by 4mm. (Figure 37). The additional marking at the right of “MISSENT” is part of the circular date postmark. The “MISSENT” marking is only found in blue ink. I have recorded fewer than 10 examples.

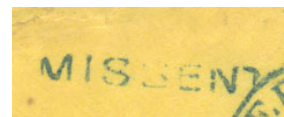


Figure 37.

Confirmed date range of use: June 27, 1861-Oct. 25, 1864.¹⁶

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ENDNOTES:

1. "Petersburg, Virginia C.S.A. Cancellations," by A.L.T. Tobias, *Confederate Philatelist*, Vol. 30, No. 6, November–December 1986, Whole No. 228, page 163.
2. "Archival Discovery Explains Petersburg Color Change," by Stefan T. Jaronski and A.L.T. Tobias, *Confederate Philatelist*, Vol. 33, No. 6, November–December 1988, Whole No. 246, page 217.
3. April 19, 1861, is the earliest date of use I could confirm; however, April 17, 1861, being the first day of Independent State Use of U.S. Postage is the most logical use start date.
4. Tobias theorized that both the Type 1 and Type 2 postmarks had the integral rates removed and artifacts present in the device caused the blobby shapes to appear on the postmarks (He identified these as "Type 1A" and "Type 2A").
5. Tobias lists July 24, 1861, as the earliest-known use.
6. "Petersburg, Virginia C.S.A. Cancellations," by A.L.T. Tobias, *Confederate Philatelist*, Vol. 30, No. 6, November–December 1986, Whole No. 228, page 163.
7. Kaufmann, Patricia A., et al. *Confederate States of America: Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*, Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012.
8. Once the break/separation of the postmark ring appeared, no examples without the break have been found, confirming the likelihood that the Type 2 and Type 2a are variations of the same device, not separate devices.
9. Tobias stated that this postmark was in use from Aug. 16, 1861, until late November 1861.
10. Tobias stated this postmark was in use from Jan. 10, 1862, through March 30, 1865.
11. Tobias stated this postmark was in use from Feb. 15, 1862, through Aug. 11, 1864.
12. "The Petersburg-Norfolk Type 5 Handstamp," by Kevin P. Andersen, *Confederate Philatelist*, Vol. 60, No. 4, Fourth Quarter, Whole No. 387, page 19.
13. (see *CP* Vol. 33, No 6), 7-29-62 Parry correspondence.
14. The second-known example does not have a postmark on the obverse of the all-over advertising cover. It is unknown if the reverse bears a postmark.
15. *MISSENT, FORWARDED and ADVERTISED MARKINGS USED IN the CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA with notes on other auxiliary markings found on Confederate mail*, by Peter W.W. Powell, Published by the Confederate Stamp Alliance (undated).
16. Cover bears two Petersburg postmarks, one being "DEC 18" and the other being "DEC 19" [1864].

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