

Ship Island Postal Markings: 1861 to 1865

SYNOPSIS - Background:

Ship Island was first occupied in September 1861 by personnel from the blockade vessel *U.S.S. Massachusetts*, as a prelude to the assault, capture, and occupation New Orleans. Colonel Edward F. Jones landed on December 2, 1861.

On March 20, 1862, General Benjamin Butler arrived on Ship Island with his troops, among whom was his brother-in-law John M. G. Parker, who had been postmaster at Dracut, Massachusetts 1847-1849. The U.S.P.O.D. appointed him Ship Island postmaster February 7, and confirmed him February 11. He took office upon his arrival on the island March 20, 1862.

Postmaster Parker set up the Ship Island Post Office in an Army field tent, and used a *SHIP ISLAND MISS.* manuscript postmark from March 20 to March 26, 1862. Between March 25 and April 30, Parker put two additional postmarking devices into use: a straight-line *SHIP ISLAND/MISS* handstamp made from newspaper type on hand, and a CDS balloon *SHIP ISLAND MISS.* handstamp.

When Federal troops landed in New Orleans May 1, 1862 and reoccupied the Custom House, Butler ordered Parker transferred to a post near the city. He appointed him Acting New Orleans Postmaster for the military provisional government, which meant he was now effectively postmaster of two post offices.

Parker used the *SHIP ISLAND MISS.* balloon handstamp he had brought from Ship Island in the New Orleans Post Office between May 13th and May 30th, 1862. Ship Island Post Office continued to operate for the benefit of the remaining troops. With the use of the straight-line and CDS balloon handstamps.

Treatment and Importance:

This exhibit examines the Ship Island postal markings from 1861 to 1865. Covers have been selected for their postmarks and post office markings. In some cases, the post office regulations are discussed to show how the corresponding covers conform to them. The exhibit ends with Ship Island becoming a Prisoner of War Camp and the use of a Fake Ship Island Military Prison handstamp

Highlights: Especially important items are framed in RED

- **One Straight-line Handstamp used as a postmark with manuscript date, another to cancel the 3¢ Scott #65 stamp.** Only one example known by this author with a **complete straight-line handstamp cancel.** (Title Page). There are partial straight-line handstamp cancels known. (Page 7)
- **1862 Ship Letter 5¢ rate** carried by the three-masted U. S. Steam Frigate *Colorado*. **Only one known Ship Island cover from the *Colorado*.** (Page 7)
- **Phase 3 - Ship Island Large Balloon CDS Marking.** **One of six known covers.** (Page 13)
- **Red Double Oval Examined / Ship Island Handstamp.** **One of three known.** (Page 16)
- **Fake Military Prison Handstamp, Type 2 with No Border.** **One of three known.** (Page 16)

Philatelic Knowledge - Personal Study and Research:

The postal history of Ship Island and New Orleans during the Civil War provided interesting research material and resulted in many articles in the *Chronicle* written by Richard Graham and James Milgram, MD between 1973 and 2005. There are covers in this exhibit from both of their collections.

Philatelic knowledge is seen in the discussion of post office rate markings. Personal study and research are seen in the identification of the chaplains, officers, and surgeons who endorsed the covers, as well as the soldiers who wrote the letters and their regiments, found using *ancestry.com*, *fold3.com*, and *state historical websites*.

Rarity and Condition:

The covers shown are all from the Civil War 160 years ago and are in good condition with all postal markings legible. In 1989 Richard Graham, a Ship Island historian, prepared a census of known Ship Island covers (Graham - Reference 3). The number of exhibit covers with these postmarks are shown with are shown in **RED**.

- **Manuscript Ship Island**, used at Ship Island, March 20 – 26, 1862, on 26 recorded covers (**exhibit - 4**). Used at New Orleans, May 5 to 17, 1862, on 13 recorded covers. (**exhibit - 3**).
- **Straight-line Handstamp, SHIP ISLAND/MISS.** used at Ship Island March 27 – June 5, 1862, on 105 recorded covers (**exhibit - 10**). **Four of the ten straight-line markings** are shown on Soldier Letters certified by a Chaplain or Field Officer.
- **CDS SHIP ISLAND/MISS. Balloon Handstamp used at Ship Island** April 30 – May 10, 1862, on 16 recorded covers (**exhibit - 3**). Used at New Orleans May 13 – 30, on 33 recorded covers (**exhibit - 2**), and again at **Ship Island** June 5 - 11, 1862, on 6 recorded covers (**exhibit - 1**).

Ship Island covers are not readily available. The last auction with a quantity of these covers was the Siegel's Auction of the *Van Koppersmith Collection*, Sale 1306 December 16, 2023, of which are shown in this exhibit. It has taken me over 15 years to collect the covers shown.

Presentation:

The **Plan of Exhibit** presents a clear, concise storyline and the sections are evenly balanced and follow the postmark usage timeline found on Page 3. Individual page headers follow the organizational outline found on Page 1. The exhibit has been completely revised based on judges' comments after NAPEX June 2025.

Selected References:

Richard B. Graham

- "Part One - Ship Island, Mississippi, 1861 - 62," 1973. *Chronicle* No. 78, Vol. 25 (2).
- "Part Two - Ship Island, Mississippi, 1861 - 62," 1973. *Chronicle* No. 79, Vol. 25 (3).
- "Ship Island, Mississippi, in the Civil War: Complex Postal History," 1989. *Chronicle* No. 142, Vol. 41 (2).

James W. Milgram

- "Federal Reoccupation Postal Markings - Ship Island, Mississippi," 1989. *Chronicle* No. 142, Vol. 41 (2).
- "The Postmarks of Ship Island, Mississippi: A Civil War Enigma," 2005. *Chronicle* No. 208, Vol. 57 (4).

Teresa Arnold-Schriber and Terry G. Schriber

- *The Rosters and History of the Civil War Prison SHIP ISLAND, MISSISSIPPI*. McFarland & Co., Jefferson, North Carolina, 2008.

Leonard V. Huber & Clarence A. Wagner

- *The Great Mail – A Postal History of New Orleans*. American Philatelic Society, 1949. pp 111-114.

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