

# Operation of the Ship Island and New Orleans Post Offices Under Postmaster John M. G. Parker - 1862 to 1865

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## SYNOPSIS

### Treatment and Importance:

This exhibit examines the postal markings of the Ship Island Union Army Field Post Office and the New Orleans Post Office during the Federal reoccupation used by Postmaster John M.G. Parker from 1862 to 1865.

Covers, shown in chronological order, 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 conformed to them. The exhibit ends with John's letter to his father in Lowell Massachusetts.

### Background:

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, 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, 30<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry. Parker had been postmaster at Dracut, Massachusetts 1847-1849, prior to his appointment at Ship Island by the U. S. POD on February 7, 1862. He was confirmed February 11, and took office upon his arrival on Ship Island on 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 – March 26, 1862. Between March 25 and April 30, Parker put two additional postmarking devices into use: a straight-line *SHIP ISLAND/MISS* made from newspaper type on hand, and several CDS balloon *SHIP ISLAND MISS* handstamps.

When Federal troops landed in New Orleans on May 1, 1862 and reoccupied the Custom House, Butler ordered Parker to transfer 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* CDS balloon handstamp he'd brought from Ship Island in the New Orleans Post Office, between May 13 and May 30, 1862. Ship Island Post Office continued to operate for the benefit of the remaining troops using the straight-line and CDS balloon handstamps.

On June 1, 1862, Parker was appointed Chief Clerk of the New Orleans Post Office by Special Agent Robert K. Scott, Inspection Office, Post Office Department. Agent Scott brought with him a 25mm double-circle CDS *New Orleans LA* handstamp which was placed in service circa June 2. Parker was appointed New Orleans Postmaster February 19, 1863 and served until March 20, 1865 when Robert W. Taliaferro replaced him.

### Philatelic Knowledge; Personal Study and Research:

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

Philatelic knowledge is seen in the discussion of post office rate markings. Personal study and research are seen in the identification of the chaplain, officer, or surgeon who endorsed the cover, as well as the soldier who wrote or received the letter and his regiment, using *ancestry.com*, *fold3.com*, and *state historical websites*.

Since Parker wrote the letter (p. 16) to his father, his writing was compared to the manuscript postmarks. Four are confirmed to be in Parker's handwriting by two well-known postal historians confirmed.

## Rarity and Condition:

The covers shown are all from the Civil War 160 years ago and are in fine or better 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 covers in the exhibit with these postmarks are shown in red (x).

- **Manuscript “Ship Island”** markings, used at Ship Island, Mar. 20 -26, 1862 (26 recorded covers (3)) and at New Orleans, May 5- 17, 1862 (13 recorded covers (2)).
- **“SHIP ISLAND” straightline** marking, always used at Ship Island. March 27-June 5, 1862 (105 recorded covers (9)).
- **“SHIP ISLAND” balloon CDS** marking used at Ship Island, Apr. 30 -May 10, 1862 (16 recorded covers (4)); at New Orleans, May 13-31 (33 recorded covers (1)), and again at Ship Island, June 5-11, 1862 (6 recorded covers (1)).

This census has not been updated as additional material has been discovered in family collections. Ship Island covers are not readily available. The last auction with a quantity of Ship Island covers was the Kelleher Auction of the *Patrick Collection* on November 18, 2020. It has taken me over 10 years to collect the covers shown. Several from the *Patrick Collection* are shown in this exhibit.

New Orleans postmarks used by Parker during the Federal Reoccupation are also shown on the last three pages. There are two different **double-circle date handstamps (25mm (4), 29.5mm (1))** and the **single CDS 22.5mm (1)** as well as two distinct types of **Due 6** markings.

## Presentation:

The **Plan of Exhibit** presents a clear, concise storyline and the sections are evenly balanced and follow the postmark usage timeline at the Ship Island and New Orleans Post Offices.

## Highlights: (with a red box around the covers)

- The 1862 Ship Letter 5¢ rate carried by the three-masted U. S. Steam Frigate *Colorado* (the only one known Ship Island cover from the *Colorado*),
- The rare Phase 3 - Ship Island Large Balloon CDS Marking (one of six known covers).

## 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).

**Huber, Leonard V. and Clarence A. Wagner.** *The Great Mail: A Postal History of New Orleans.* American Philatelic Society, State College, PA, 1949.

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