

# The Cover Story by Bill Johnston

## Civil War Postal Markings

of

### Winchester Virginia



Winchester, located in the northern region of the Shenandoah Valley of the Commonwealth of Virginia, was first settled in 1738. By 1860, the town had become an agricultural and a commercial hub. If civil war was to come, the town would become a valuable prize. History shows that this occurred. During the war, the town was often in a “no mans” region. Some historical sources state that the town changed hands ninety-six times between the northern forces (USA) and the southern forces (CSA). Often northern soldiers would come into town for a few hours and arrest southern sympathizers, or southern soldiers would be in town for a few hours and expel northern sympathizers to the northern states.

The town was unusual in that the postal systems of the USA (United States) and the CSA (Confederate States) continued to operate. The postmaster for the USA was Charles Chase, and the postmaster for the CSA was G. B. Graves. These men were believed to be friends. When an opposing force would come to town, it is suggested that one postmaster would surrender the canceling devices to the other postmaster and go into hiding. This contact between postmasters is supported by covers having the same type and colors of strikes for both postal systems.

Virginia voted to leave the union on April 17, 1861, and the southern government assumed operation of the postal system for the Commonwealth of Virginia on June 1, 1861.

A major northern force occupied Winchester from March 12 to May 24, 1862 and again from June 4 to September 2, 1862. A major southern force controlled the town from September 3 to December 13, 1862, and the northern forces controlled the town Dec 14 1862 - June 14, 1863. The last known northern postal activity is June 1863. The last major army occupation was the southern forces in August and September of 1864. The latest known southern postal activity is in September 1864. After September 1864, the town was mostly in a “no mans” land until the end of the war.

The three types of strikes of Winchester during the war years were:

DCW: Double circle with wide spacing between the letters in the word Winchester (**Figure 1 & 2**)

DC: Double circle with smaller spacing between the letters in the word Winchester (**Figure 3 & 4**)

SCL: Single circle large. (**Figure 5 & 6 on front cover**)

All three of the strikes were on northern and southern postage with all types in black and blue-green colors. Each of the three strikes for each postal system is illustrated below.

The basic postal rate for the northern states was three cents, and for the southern states it was five cents until July 1862 and then ten cents thereafter.

References:

Roger U. Delauter, Jr., *Winchester in the Civil War*, 2nd ed, Lynchburg, VA: H. E. Howard, Inc. 1992  
Robert Lisbeth, editor, *Virginia Postal Markings and Postmasters Colonial - 1865*. Virginia Postal History Society. 1984.

## Illustrations of DCW for Both Postal Systems



**Figure 1:** Southern Patriotic (June 1861) with the wide spacing DCW



**Figure 2:** Northern Patriotic with the wide spacing DCW and blue green strike (July 1862) of the Monitor and Merrimack

## Illustrations of DC for Both Postal Systems



**Figure 3:** Northern Patriotic with the DC and blue green strike



**Figure 4:** Southern usage of DC (Oct 1862) in black to Roswell, Ga with a green grid receiving cancel