

# Magnus Patriotic Covers

## American Civil War Gems by Norman Hinds

Another of my collecting favorites is Civil War Union patriotic covers. Most of them I bought in the 1970s and 1980s. I stuck to unused items, since used covers—even back then—were expensive. Unused items were available for less than \$1.00 each in quantity. The best reference book is: Weiss, William. *The Catalog of Union Civil War Patriotic Covers*. Published 1995. Hardcover. 850+ pp. 5,000+ cover illustrations. There are over 6,500 different designs identified. I got my enjoyment from them and sold the lot many years ago.

My interest was renewed a couple of months ago when I saw two covers designed and produced by Charles Magnus in an auction. I managed to buy both for \$10.00 each, since that was the minimum bid and there were no other bidders. The two items are pictured below. The first features a bird's-eye view of **Louisville, Kentucky**, paired with the "Soldiers of Old Kentucky" motto—a pro-Union sentiment from the early years of the war—with hand coloring [Figure 1].

The second is from the same series for New York, printed in purple [Figure 2].



Figure 1

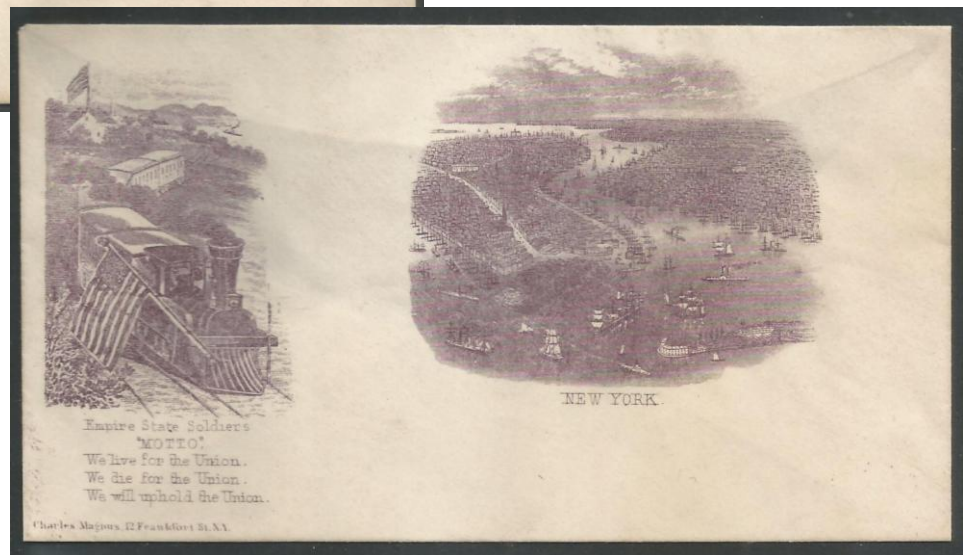


Figure 2

Charles Magnus was a prolific New York–based lithographer, famous for his high-quality “patriotic covers.”

- **Hand-coloring:** Many Magnus envelopes were **hand-colored**. Magnus was known for his superior workmanship and often employed a **stencil process**.
- **The process:** In his workshop, employees would use a “master” colored version as a guide. Each worker would apply a single color by hand through a stencil before passing it to the next person. The most elaborate designs were sometimes hand-painted by Magnus himself.
- **Identification:** You can often tell they are hand-done by looking for slight color “bleeds” or variations where the paint doesn’t perfectly align with the lithographed lines. Magnus also produced versions in **bronze, gold, or silver ink** (as seen in the second example), which were considered premium items.

The second cover:

A **Charles Magnus** patriotic cover highlighting his home base of New York.

#### **Key Features of this Cover:**

- **The “Empire State Soldiers” motto:** The verse on the left (“We live for the Union. We die for the Union. We will uphold the Union.”) was a popular sentiment Magnus used to appeal to soldiers from New York.
- **The locomotive vignette:** The image of the steam engine draped in the American flag symbolizes the industrial might and modern transport of the North, which were crucial to the Union war effort.
- **Bird’s-eye view of New York:** On the right is one of Magnus’s signature panoramic views. He was famous for taking large-scale city maps or prints and shrinking them down to fit the corner of an envelope with remarkable detail.
- **The imprint:** The text “Charles Magnus, 12 Frankfort St. N.Y.” at the bottom confirms this was produced at his main workshop in Lower Manhattan, which he occupied during the height of the Civil War (roughly 1862–1865).

This is a **monochrome lithograph** (likely printed in dark violet, black, or bronze ink).

- **Mass production:** Magnus would print thousands of these in single colors to sell cheaply to soldiers in camp.
- **The “luxury” versions:** The hand-colored versions were the “premium” tier. He would take a print and have his staff apply watercolors using stencils to turn it into a multi-colored work of art.
- **The “Rose of Washington”** -- This is another level of workmanship. I owned one of these in the 1980s. He also did “Roses” of Philadelphia, Canada, New York, New York Crystal Palace, and the Isle of Wight [Figure 3].

The “**Rose of Washington**” is one of Magnus's most famous and collectible stationery designs.

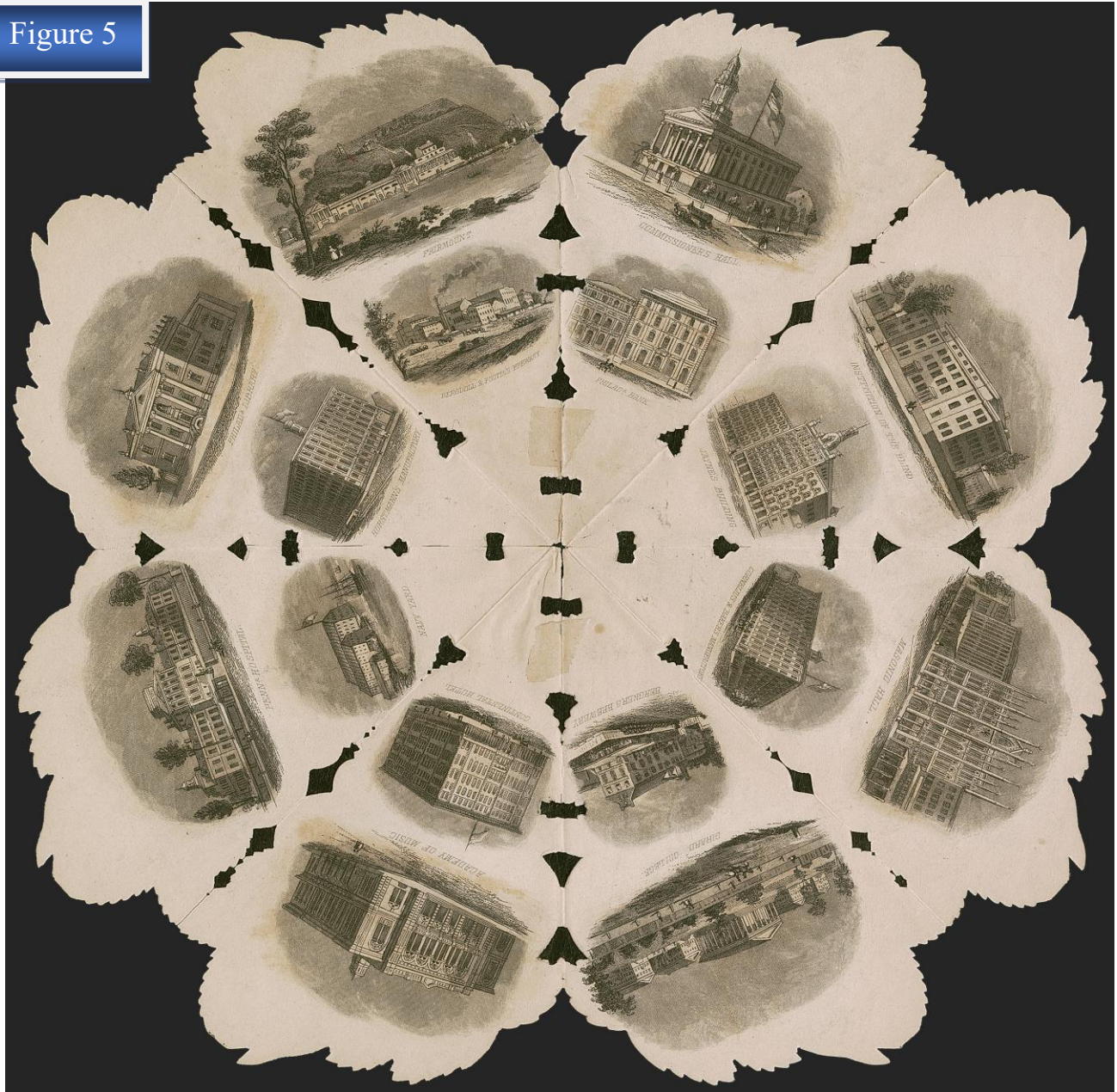
- **The Design:** It typically features a patriotic vignette (often George Washington or Lady Liberty) on the outside.
- **The Surprise:** The "rose" part refers to an elaborate, multi-paneled **fold-out letter sheet** found inside. When unfolded, it opens like a flower to reveal small, circular bird's-eye views of Washington D.C., its buildings, and military hospitals.
- **Historical Context:** These were sold as "souvenirs of the war" to soldiers stationed around the capital to send home to their families.

Figure 3



Another similar one is the Rose of Philadelphia. Below is the main-colored portion [Figure 4 on Front Cover], and the reverse in black/white shows other Philadelphia sites [Figure 5]. A used envelope that houses the work is shown as well. I was watching an auction a month or two ago, and this used item sold for \$6,500 (maybe plus a buyer's premium).

Figure 5



Another beautiful series is his Panoramic Letter Sheets. Below is a used example of the Panorama of Washington [Figure 6]:

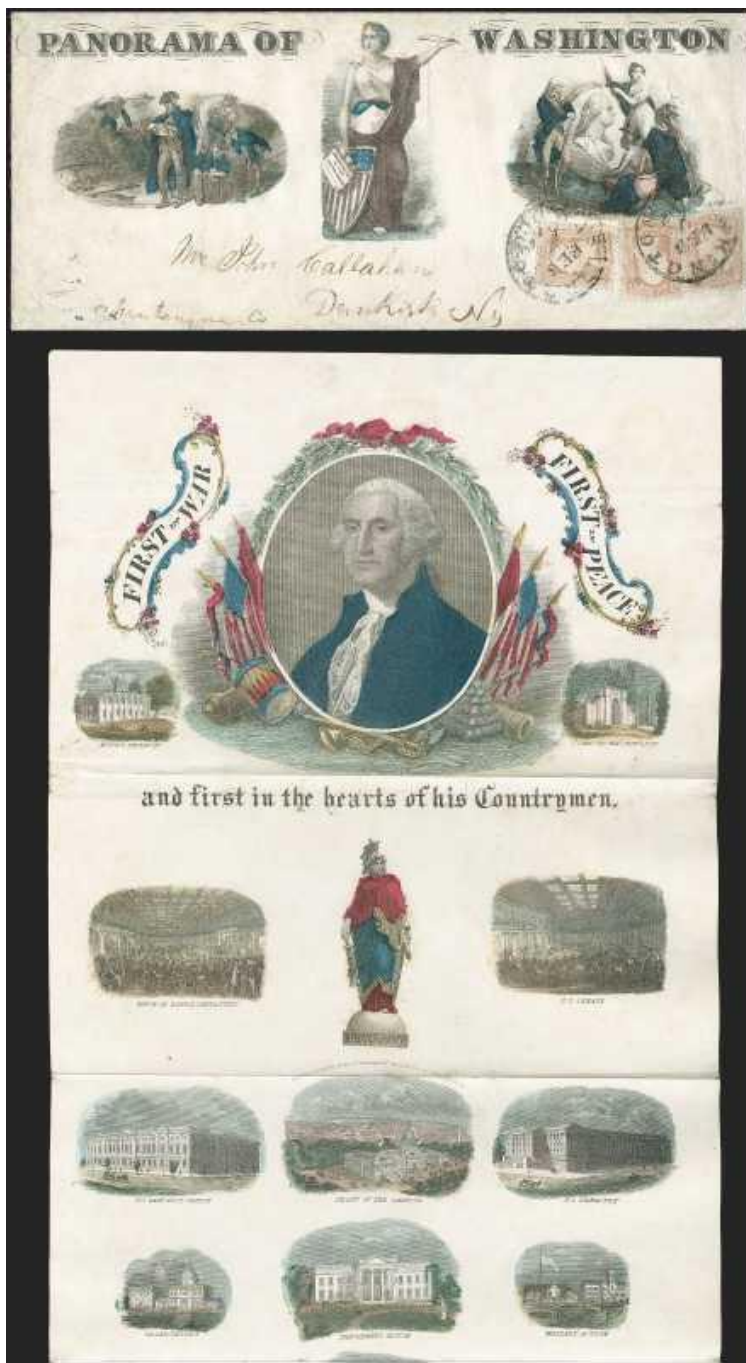


Figure 6

### 1. The Panoramic Letter Sheets (The "Two-Footers")

Magnus produced extraordinary panoramic letter sheets. These were roughly **21 inches long** (about 1.75 feet) and 8.5 inches tall. Shown to the left -- much reduced from full size.

- **The trick:** By using a single long strip of thin paper and folding it multiple times, Magnus created a massive "poster" that the Post Office still legally classified as a **single sheet of paper**.
- **The views:** When a soldier's family unfolded it, they would see a continuous, sweeping bird's-eye view of an entire city (like New York, Washington, or Philadelphia) or a series of connected military camps.
- **Writing space:** The reverse side was left blank so the soldier could write a very long letter on the back of the "map."

One more item: a used Magnus cover with a scene from Philadelphia [Figure 7]. This sold within the past month, but I forgot to note the price.



There is a Rose of Canada for sale on eBay now, listed at \$699.00. The original envelope is included, but it is damaged. Still, it's an intricate, lovely design.

[Magnus Rose Of Canada Unused With Original Envelope EXTREMELY RARE | eBay](#)

There are some very nice used Magnus covers in a May 2, 2026 Matt Kewriga sale, lots 1211–1223. The link is below: [Kewriga Auctions Sale - 10 Page 11](#)

If you want to buy the Weiss book, Phil Bansner has copies for \$140.00.

### **Civil War History — Handbooks**

Weiss, William. THE CATALOG OF UNION CIVIL WAR PATRIOTIC COVERS. Published 1995. HB. 850+ p. 5000+ cover illus. By subject, unpriced numbered catalog/w cross-reference to Walcott nos. Over 6400 different designs, cross-reference by verse. C.

**Literature #791 | Price: \$175.00 | Your Price: \$140.00**

**ADDENDUM:**

**3c Rose (65).** Two, affixed at bottom corners and tied by "Washington D.C. Feb. 18, 1861" circular date stamps on 9½ x 4 in. **hand-colored Magnus "Panorama of Washington" Patriotic** cover to North Sanbornton N.H., original matching enclosure, an 8½ x 32 in. broadside lavishly illustrated with hand-colored Magnus vignettes beginning with a large portrait of George Washington, stamps have straight edges with one slightly cut into, some stamp and cover toning specks, few small cover edge tears, enclosure is fresh and intact **VERY FINE APPEARANCE. AN EXCEPTIONAL MAGNUS DESIGN AND ONE OF THE RAREST PATRIOTICS EXTANT. [Figure 8 & 8A]**

In the Walcott sale, Laurence notes, "I know of only 6 in existence". With 2011 A.P.S. certificate.

Sold in Siegel auction #1379 for \$6K including commission; against an estimate of \$1,500 - \$2,000.

Figure 8





Figure 8A

*Editor's Note: A rare glimpse at some fascinating philatelic history.*