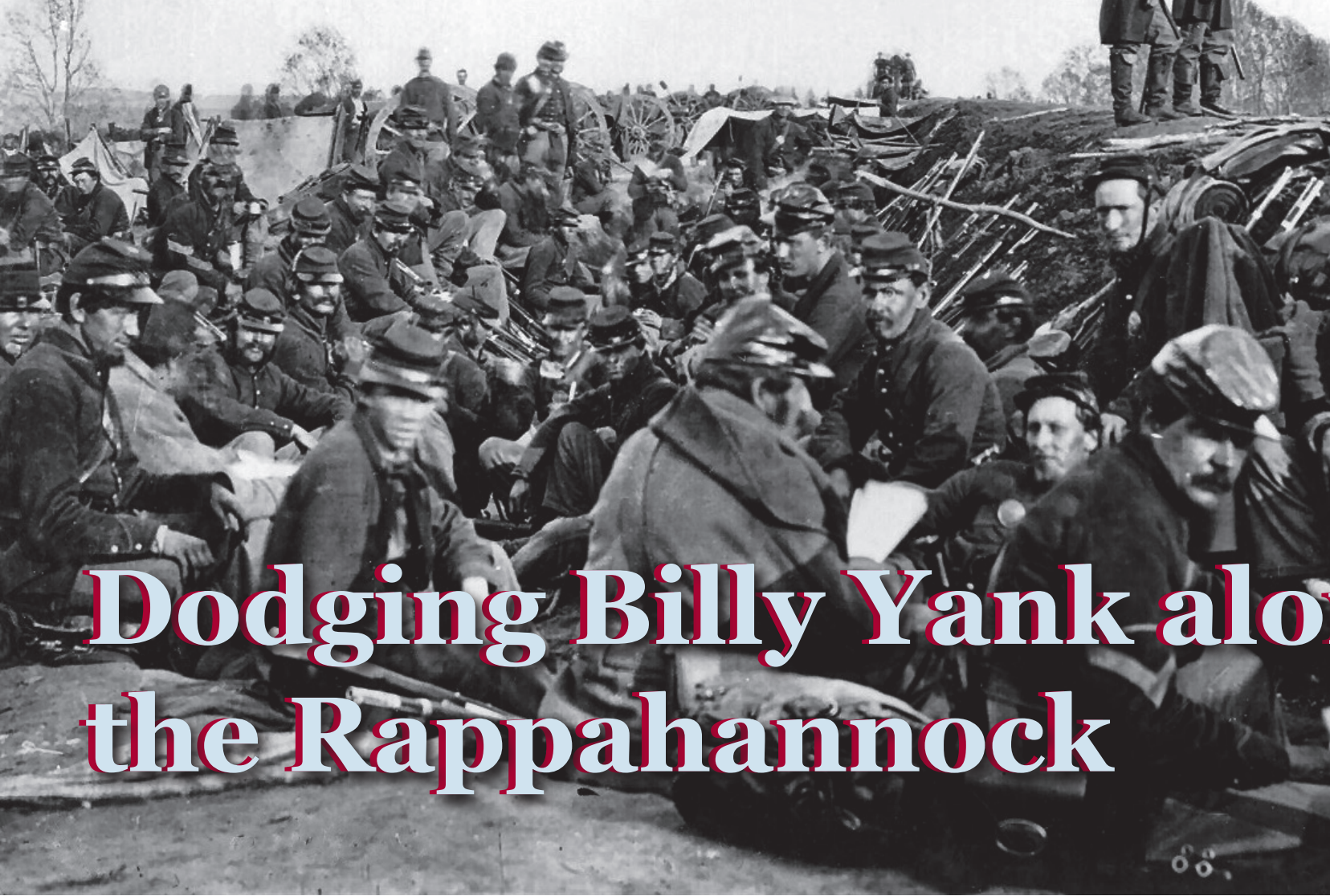


A Newly-Discovered (and hugely important) correspondence reveals a unique private express mail service for southern forces and their families in Virginia's Northern Neck along the most battle-torn river in the South.



Dodging Billy Yank along the Rappahannock

While clandestine exchange of mail is known to have existed between the North and South in the Chesapeake Bay along the river borders of Maryland and Virginia, no express company mail in that region has been identified and recorded until now. The Neck was under Union control for most of the war, although the residents were decidedly Southern with a large population of slaves.

Announcement of this new express was made in the third quarter 2020 issue of the *Confederate Philatelist*, quarterly journal of the Confederate Stamp Alliance. This rare and exciting find came with a treasure trove of fabulous Civil War soldier's letters.

Geographical Background

Before 1600, the Chickacoan Indians lived on the peninsula known as the Northern Neck of Virginia for at least ten thousand years. Figure 1 shows its location within the State of Virginia.¹ Two large tributaries, the Potomac and the Rappahannock Rivers, meet in the Chesapeake Bay to form the peninsula known as the Northern Neck.

From first grammar school history lessons, Americans recognize the names of Captain John Smith and Chief Powhatan. In 1607, Capt. Smith explored the Potomac River and, a year later, the Rappahannock River. As other settlements began to expand around the first permanent English settlement of Jamestown, the more distant Northern Neck became an unofficial reservation

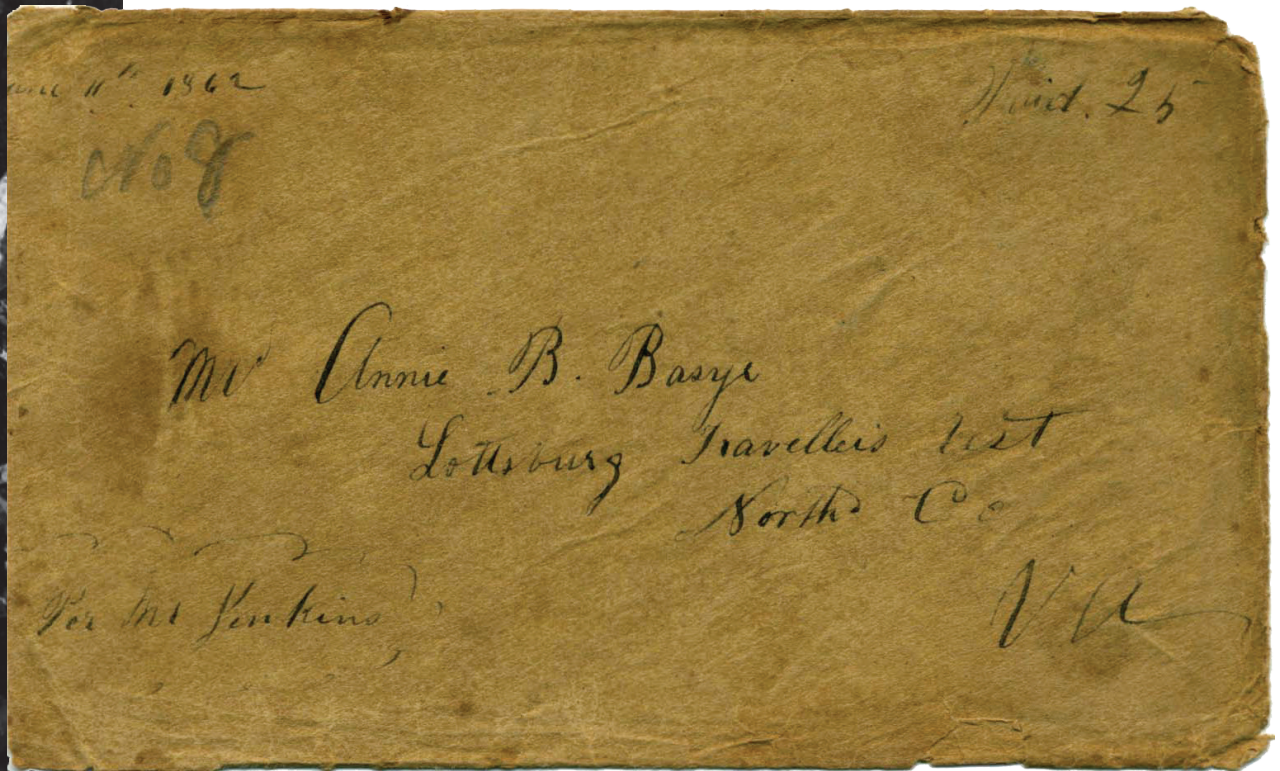


Union soldiers entrenched along the west bank of the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg, Virginia, 1862.



By Patricia A. Kaufmann

Figure 2. Cover carried across the Rappahannock River by Jenkins Express from Private Henry Basye to his wife in Lottsburg, Va., for 25¢



for the Chickacoan people. Northumberland County was created October 12, 1648, from the Indian District of Chickacoan.²

More often, the Chickacoan are referred to as Powhatan Indians, the overall designation for a confederacy of nations who spoke the now extinct Virginia Algonquian language. Their first contact with Europeans appears to be between 1559-1561.³

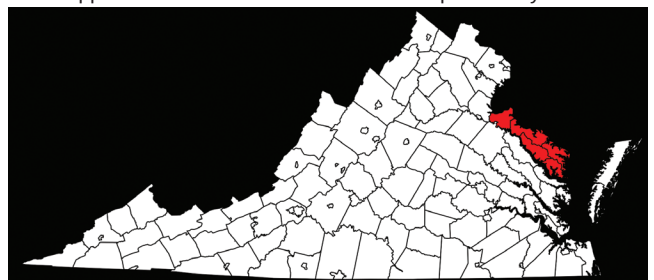
These civilized natives of the Tidewater Virginia region built huge settlements and cultivated the land of the Northern Neck, but they were considered savages by their conquerors and they were pushed inland into the forests, virtually driven out of existence.

The Northern Neck encompasses the counties of Lancaster, Northumberland, Richmond, and Westmore-

land. King George County is included by some as part of this area. For hundreds of years, Northumberland remained a county largely isolated from the rest of the state due to the lack of a road network.

This northernmost peninsula of Virginia became the ancestral home for some of America's greatest colonial

Figure 1. Northern Neck of Virginia, a peninsula where the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers meet in the Chesapeake Bay.





rider into the Rappahannock.

I take this chance to write you a few lines by Mr. Jenkins, if he can get home safe. He is the man who brings letters to us. I saw him the other day. He told me that he would carry this letter to Lottsburg. You can get it when he calls for it...**This man Jenkins charges 25¢ a piece every letter that he brings or carries so I told him that if he would carry this letter to you and bring an answer that I would give him a half dollar and he said he would do so by this means.** I can get a letter from you every time that I send one to you. I don't think that I shall get more than one in a month unless you can send me one now and then by some other way. But if we cross the James River you will not hear from me for two or three months or it may be longer...I am going to send you the same amount (\$20) by Mr. Jenkins if he will carry it to you...I am afraid to put it in the letter because if Yankeys (sic) cross him he would have to throw his letters away and maybe he could keep the money. He can fool me if he has a mind to do so. Fifty cents is a big price to pay for a letter but I will give \$5 for every one that I get from you...Your very affectionate husband Henry Basye

In military records at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), shown in Figure 4, Hen-

ry Basye is listed as a 28-year old private who enlisted March 27, 1862, and mustered into Company D, 9th Virginia Cavalry Regiment. They were known as the Lancaster Cavalry because they hailed from Lancaster County, Northern Neck of Virginia.

Henry was present on all rolls until May 1864 at which time he was either noted as sick or away without leave (AWOL) through the final roll on October 20, 1864. There is no further record. However, this correspondence—both letters and postal uses—proves he was still in the field, no matter what the military records may show.

Henry's letters are mostly quite long, and many have superb first-hand battle content. They are generally written in pencil and on any piece of paper he could obtain. At least one letter is written on three different types of paper and others, such as Figure 5, are penned on lined pages torn from a small 3 ½" x 5 ½" binder.

The correspondence was sold by an elderly Basye family member roughly a decade ago and it mostly, if not all, has been disseminated in the marketplace. The lot was acquired from family members more than 1,000 miles from Northumberland County and longer than 150 years after Henry wrote to Annie.



The beautiful, yet rugged, Rappahannock River of Virginia's Northern Neck. Sometimes shallow and easy to cross, yet usually treacherous for individual riders, especially at night.

I was fortunate that the purchaser, although not a philatelist, was someone I've dealt with off and on for the last few decades. He suspected there was postal history significance to the penciled express designation and accompanying description of mail conveyance in the letter; thus he asked my opinion. I was given first opportunity to buy out of the lot, which is historically exciting, as well as postally significant.

The second express use, shown in Figure 6, is also addressed to Annie in pencil. In ink is noted "Politeness of Mr. Jenkins" and "Paid 25cts" with a penciled "No 13" to indicate the number in the series. It is directed to "Mrs. Annie B. Basye Travellers Rest, Cherry Point, Lottsburg, Northd. Co. Virginia." Occasionally, the envelopes are addressed to her given name of Anna, or even Anne, but usually Annie.

Traveler's Rest and Cherry Point appear to be more of a routing directive with Lottsburg as the final destination. It is not certain exactly where Jenkins crossed with his precious cargo of letters. The crossing likely varied depending on the location of Union troops patrolling known river crossings.

The enclosed letter is dated "July the 16th 1862," about a month after the first express use. Figure 7 shows the first page of the letter.

In this second 6-page express letter, Henry relates in part:

I take this opportunity to write you a few lines by Mr. Jenkins. He is here this morning and says he is going down tomorrow. We are now on this side of Richmond about 9 miles at the time that Charles Betts left. We were on the south side of Richmond about 30 miles but after the Yankeys were driven back under their gunboats, we fell back on this side. The big fight at Richmond

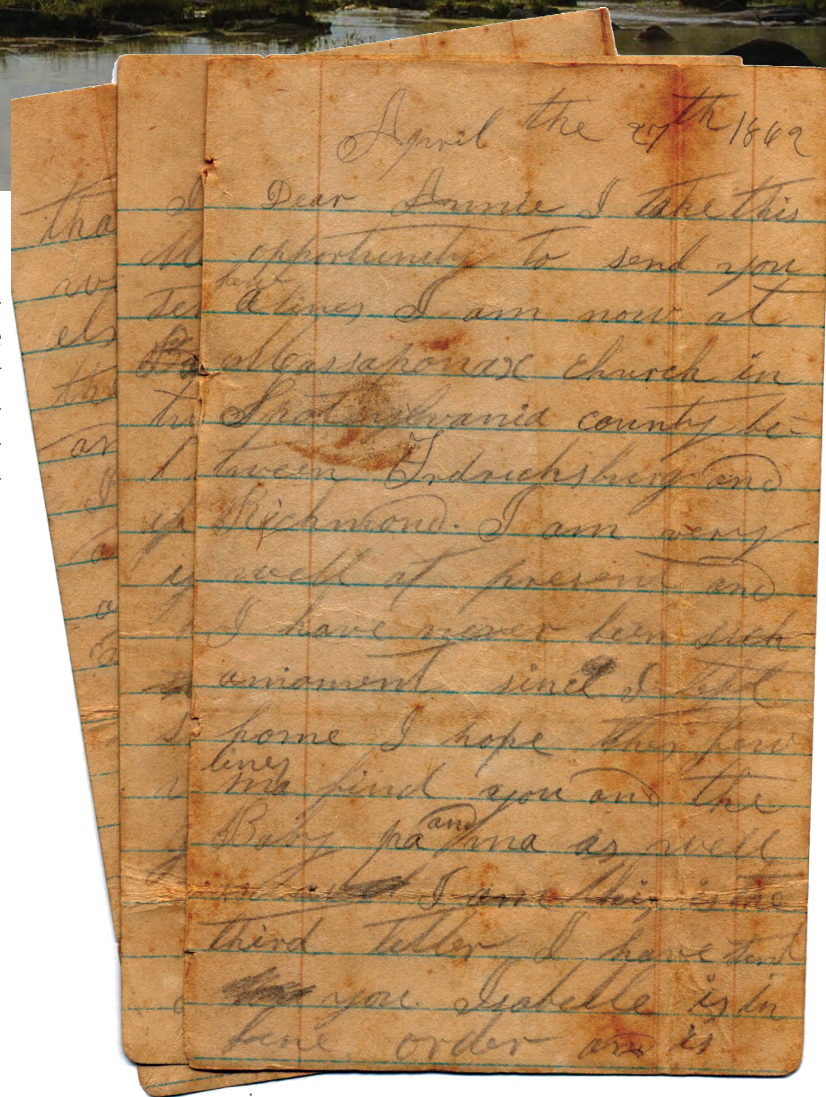


Figure 5. One of Henry Basye's letters, written on pages torn from a small binder

that you speak of is over, for this time we have flogged the Yankeys bad and have driven them away from Richmond about 35 miles and but for the gunboats we would have captured McClelland's whole army...I had rather be up here two to one than to have the war down home and be there myself. It is the best thing that ever happened for the northern neck leaving it unprotected. **I tell you that it is an awful thing for an army to pass through a country, friend or foe.** Our colonel (W.H.F.

"Rooney" Lee) is a son of General (Robert E.) Lee. Our regiment stands very high in the estimation of General Lee. You know that he is the boss dog of the boneyard and he stands very high in my estimation. I don't think there is a better General in the world than he...We have not seen (brother) Octavous since the last battle was fought...I was close to brother William the other day but did not see him. He was in the same battle I was in. His battery took the Yankeys battery. Dick (a third brother, Richard) is well; I saw him today.

Basye Brothers as Noted in the Express Letter

Louis Octavous Basye (1838-1895), one of Henry's brothers, served as a private in Company F, 40th Regiment Virginia Infantry and rose to 3rd Sergeant. He was captured at Falling Waters, Md., July 14, 1863, during the retreat from the Battle of Gettysburg when Lee's men could not cross the Potomac due to rain-swollen rivers and the loss of a pontoon bridge at nearby Falling Waters to a Union cavalry raid. Octavous was exchanged at Baltimore on March 3, 1864. Henry's letters spell his brother's name Octavous, although I found it spelled many different ways.

Figure 8 shows Octavous' parole dated May 2, 1865, at Heathsville, Va. (Northumberland County) in which he is described as age 25, 5'8" tall with gray eyes, light brown hair, and dark complexion. Figure 9 is his Oath of Allegiance, which he signs as L.O. Basye.

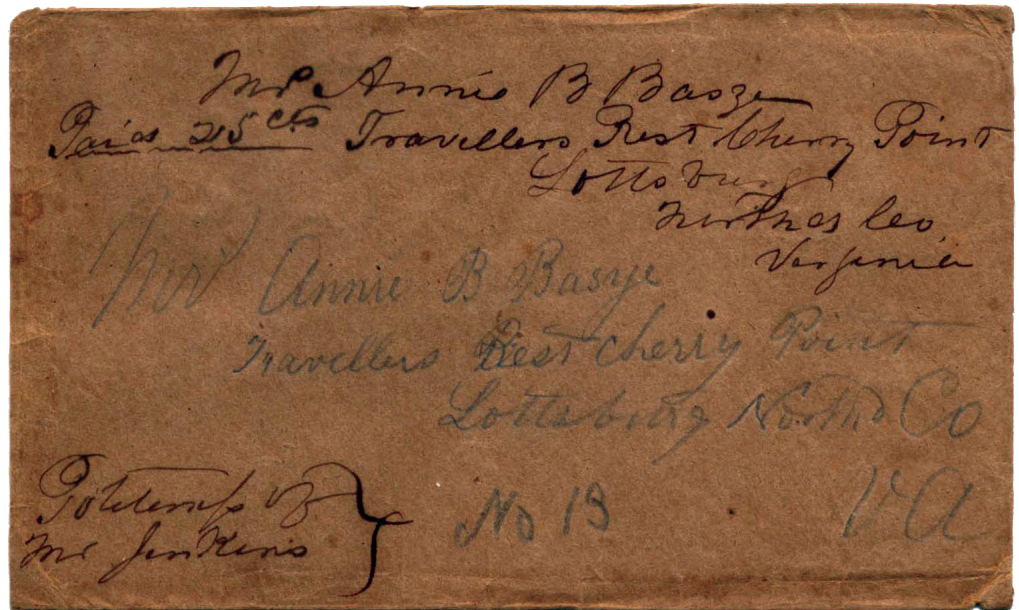
William Bayse (1829-1864), Henry's older brother, enlisted the same day as Henry. He also served as a private in Company D, 9th Regiment Virginia Cavalry, Capt. Meriwether Lewis' Company of "Lancaster Cavalry," General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. He was listed as sick from October 19, 1862, though January 1863. He was present at the final roll on October 20, 1864.

Brother William's Oath of Allegiance is shown as Figure 10 and his parole is dated/handstamped the same day as his brother Octavous (Figure 11). William's physical description is close to his younger brother's at 5'7 1/2" tall with hazel eyes, brown hair and ruddy complexion.



William Henry Fitzhugh "Rooney" Lee, CSA general and son of Robert E. Lee, as referred to in one of Henry Basye's letters at left.

Figure 6 (Below). A second express use sent "Politeness of Mr. Jenkins" and "Paid 25cts" directed to Annie B. Basye at Travellers (sic) Rest, Cherry Point, Lottsburg, Northd. Co. Virginia.



Richard (Dick) Basye, a fourth brother, served as corporal, then 2nd sergeant in Company K, 9th Regiment Virginia Cavalry ("Richmond County Cavalry") – the same regiment but a different company.

Figure 12 reveals a July 20, 1863, letter stating that Dick's horse was killed in action near Upperville, Va. Dick was paid \$700 for the horse and \$75 for equipment.

Also of note in this letter is the mention of General

Robert E. Lee and his second son, Colonel Rooney Lee, who was promoted to Brigadier General in 1862 and Major General in 1864. He had his own illustrious military career. He was one of the first commanders of Virginia's 9th Cavalry Regiment.

The Basye Correspondence

In most cases, Henry reports exactly how he is transmitting his letters—by a named slave, a soldier on furlough, by the post office, etc. On postally carried letters sent “due,” he usually signs his name and rank as required, but not on covers entrusted to friends, servants or other private carriers.

In more than one letter, Henry warns Annie not to put anything in her letters that she does not want others to see because all letters are opened and read. He says he has much more news he could tell her but is not allowed to do so.

As one would expect, Henry's letters detail both sad and horrific details of battle to the extent allowed. They also express his fears when he hears the Yankees have been to Northumberland and Lancaster counties and robbed houses, taken silverware and jewelry from the ladies, stolen their clothes, burned barns with last year's crops in them, and stolen hundreds of Negroes, horses and livestock. (May 1863 letters). This includes losing at least some of his own slaves, three of whom are mentioned by name.

Gus. A. Betts is listed on the regimental rolls as regimental postmaster for the 9th Virginia Cavalry, Army of Northern Virginia.

Gustavus A. Betts (1929-1907) enlisted the same day as Henry and William Basye. He was from Heathsville and enlisted at age 32. Like Henry, Gus Betts was ill much of 1864. Other Betts men noted were Lt. Oliver H. Betts and Luther A. Betts, serving in the same company. Henry mentions all the Betts men at one time or other.

Figure 13 shows a surgeon's certificate dated August 26, 1863, in which Regimental Surgeon (Lt. Col.) James S[helton] Gilliam (1806-1889) is of the opinion that Henry Basye is unable to perform actual cavalry duty because of an injury received several years ago which affects his kidneys and his bowels. This was written the month following the Gettysburg Campaign. But Henry clearly continued serving in the army in other ways.

Sometimes Basye did not add his name and unit on postally carried mail, as shown by Figure 14, a Petersburg, Va., soldier's [due] 10 (CSA catalog type K). It was possibly omitted to disguise troop movement.

In the July 4, 1864, letter, he tells Annie, in part:

Grant will celebrate the 4th by shelling Petersburg. I will send this letter by mail as there is no running the blockade to home like there used to be before we crossed the James River.

July the 16th 1862

Dear Annie I take this opportunity to write you a few lines by Mr Jenkins he is here this morning and says he is going to ~~inform~~ ^{inform} we are now on the side of Richmond about 9 miles at the line that Charles Betts left we were on the north side of Richmond about 30 miles but after the yankees were driven back under their gun boats we fell back on this side the big fight at Richmond that you speak of is over for this time we have ~~driven~~ ^{driven} the yankees back and have driven them away from Richmond about 35 miles and that for the gun boats at us would ^{have} captured McDowell's body among I did not see Charles Betts when he left home he thought the fighting ^{was} over but when you get your news he found that the fight was not settled and he was so badly scared that he would not stay until we left the battle field at the Henry not ~~in~~ within 40 miles of the battle field.

Figure 7. First page of the letter in the July 16, 1862, Jenkins Express cover

The letter specifically states in July 1864 that Basye is using postal mail because “there is no running the blockade to home like there used to be” (Jenkins Express).

At that time, Grant was 1½ miles from Petersburg. Grant ordered the citizens of Petersburg to move that day, as he intended to destroy the town. Two days later on July 6, 1864, sent in the same envelope, Henry writes:

I am in Petersburg today. The Yankees are throwing shells in town but they are not doing much harm. They have been killing women and children. Our brigade is 10 miles south from here...Grant did not celebrate the 4th of July by shelling the town of Petersburg nor did he eat his dinner in Richmond...Charles Turner has 15 days to scout in the Yankey lines to get a horse. He says if he gets one soon he is coming home and if he does he is coming to see you and bring a letter from you to me.

Contemporary water-color hand-painted stereoscopic photos of fugitive slaves fording the Rappahannock River during the war. Library of Congress



Entered according to act of Congress, in the year 1862, by Alexander Gardner, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Columbia.

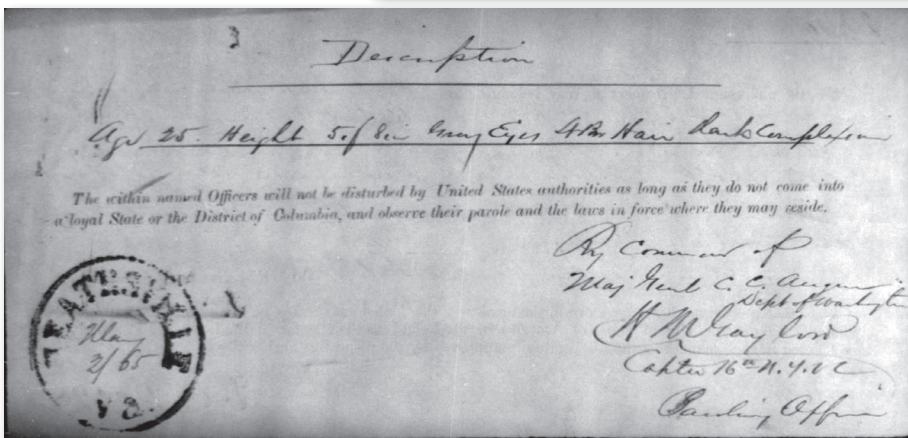


Figure 8. Louis Octavous Basye's May 1865 parole

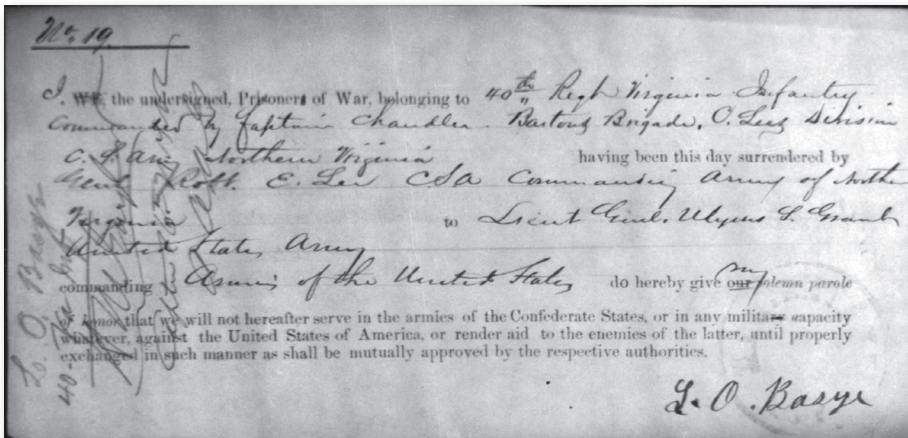


Figure 9. Octavous Basye's Oath of Allegiance which he signs as L.O. Basye

An example of one of Henry's closing signatures is shown in Figure 15, which ends his letter with, "god bless you and family your affectionate Husband Henry Bayse."

Who was Jenkins?

I searched period newspapers for announcements of Jenkins' express service, but without success. From the Basye letter content, it appears Jenkins most logically hailed from Lottsburg or very nearby.



Plan of Battle of Rappahannock Station, Virginia: fought near a similar battle at Kelly's Ford on Novr. 7th, 1863, slightly northwest of this map.

July 20th 1863

The Confederate States
 To Robert Basye Esq

I enclose herewith in a trunk 11.00
 Equipments 15.00
 for one

It is my duty that the horse of Dick
 Basye killed in action on the 21st
 of July 1863 near Appomattox
 is a brown & white and
 valuation of the horse
 Equipments lost -
 \$11.00 with Capt. C. C. August
 Co. 4th Va. Cavalry

Received at Appomattox Va
 31st day of July 1863 by Maj
 Charles Francis Smith U.S.
 Army the sum of seven hundred
 & seventy five dollars in full
 of the above account

Robert Basye 2nd

Figure 12. Letter showing reimbursement for Dick Basye's horse which was killed in action July 20, 1863 (NARA)

No. 4

I, the undersigned, Prisoners of War, belonging to the 9th Regt Virginia Cavalry
 Capt. Basye by Col. Hunt being
 having been this day surrendered by
 Major Genl Robt E. Lee Comdg Army Northern Va. C.S.
 to Genl. Wm. S. Grant
 U.S. Army
 do hereby give my solemn parole
 that we will not hereafter serve in the armies of the Confederate States, or in any military capacity
 against the United States of America, or render aid to the enemies of the latter, until properly
 exchanged in such manner as shall be mutually approved by the respective authorities.

Wm Basye
 57 1/2 Regt

Figure 10. William Basye's Oath of Allegiance

ESTABLISHED
 May 2/65

The within named Officers will not be disturbed by United States authorities as long as they do not come into
 a loyal State or the District of Columbia, and observe their parole and the laws in force where they may reside.

Chf Commr
 Maj Genl C. C. August
 Camp Dept. Wash, D.C.
 Wm Basye
 Capt. 16th Regt

Figure 11. William Basye's May 1865 parole

My first thought was that he was either a civilian with time to travel or that he was a member of the 9th Virginia. There were three men named Jenkins in the 9th Virginia Cavalry, but none seemed to fit the profile. He was undoubtedly a local man who knew the residents as well as ways to dodge Union patrols to get across the river.

In the 1860 federal census, there were only two men named Jenkins. One was 59-year old oysterman Samuel "Jenkins" who seemed unlikely for the task. The other was his 17-year-old son, who appears a much more like candidate.

In 1850, Joseph, the brother of young Samuel, was then recorded as 12 years old but I found no details on him. In the 1870 census, Benjamin Jenkins is recorded as a 24-year-old farm laborer living in the household of Ann Harding, but the age seemed too young. William Jenkins was listed as a 61-year-old oysterman in the 1880 census, so he was in his forties during the war, but I found no other details on him. There were 36 men named William Jenkins in Virginia, but none fit the profile. And so continued the process of elimination.

Samuel Jenkins is found in the military records listed as a 19-year-old oysterman who enlisted as a private

March 1, 1862, and was mustered into Company G, 40th Virginia Infantry. He was in the same regiment as Octavous Basye. He was experienced on the water and could presumably elude Union patrols.

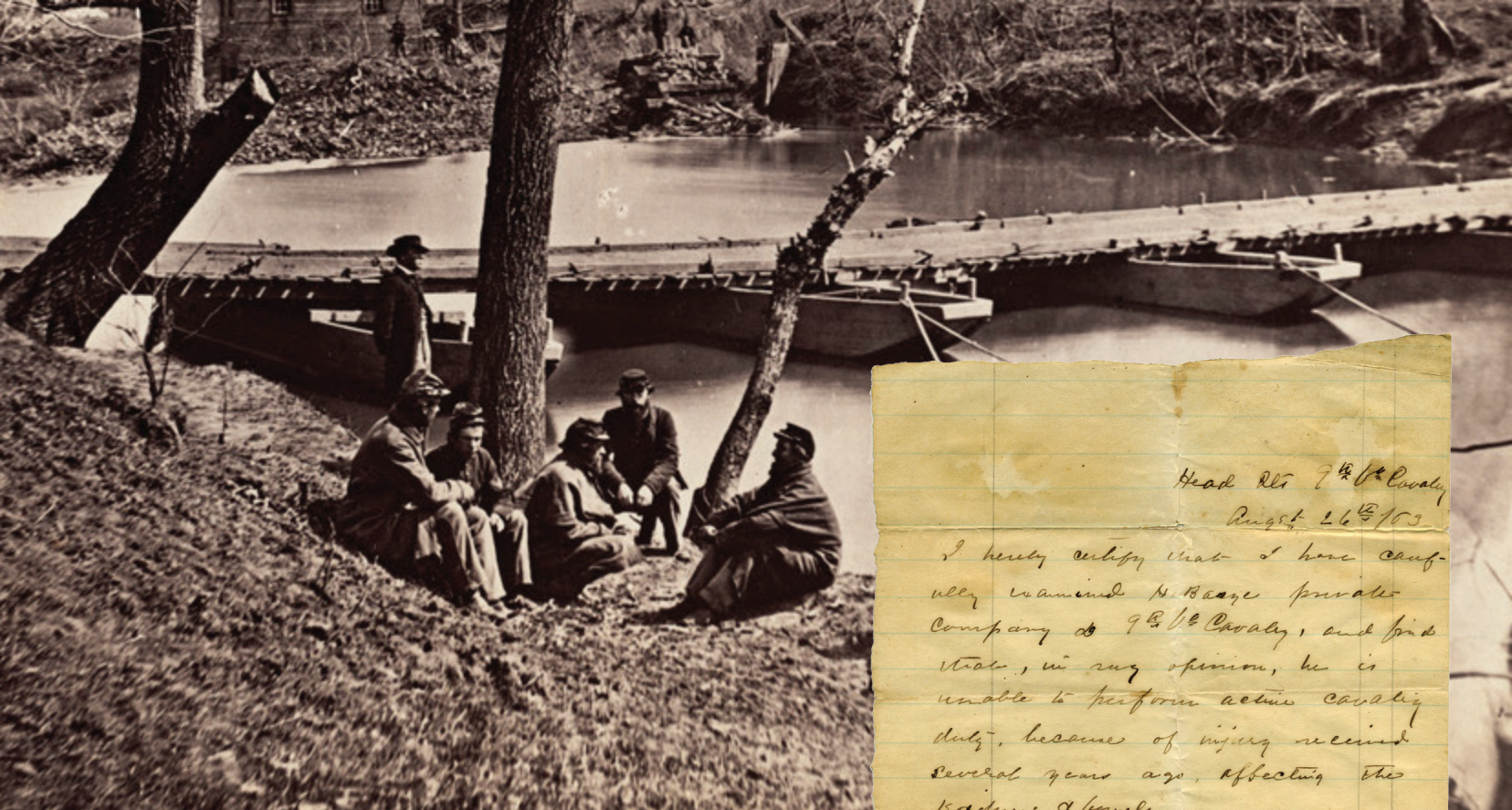
While there were other Jenkins noted in the 40th Va., none were from Northumberland. According to the Virginia Regimental Histories Series, Samuel Jenkins died of disease June 7, 1864, but I could not find that mentioned in the NARA records. That is not uncommon, however; military records are inconsistent at best.

While there is no positive proof that the express carrier was Samuel Jenkins, I find him a strong candidate. Neither are there indications of any express use later in the war, which is consistent if he died in mid-1864.

Acknowledged Mail Carriers

Many names are diligently acknowledged as courtesy mail carriers, soldiers or facilitators in Henry Basye's letters. Short quotations are extracted and offered herewith from mostly very long letters which were often full of exceptional battle content.

The 9th Virginia Cavalry participated in the most famous engagements of the war with Army of Northern Virginia generals Robert E. Lee, J.E.B. Stuart, and



A pontoon bridge on the Rappahannock River, 1863. Erected on mostly a moment's notice, these portable bridges were a boon to both fast-moving troops and horse and rider on missions of express, intelligence and mercy. Such as Mr. Jenkins.

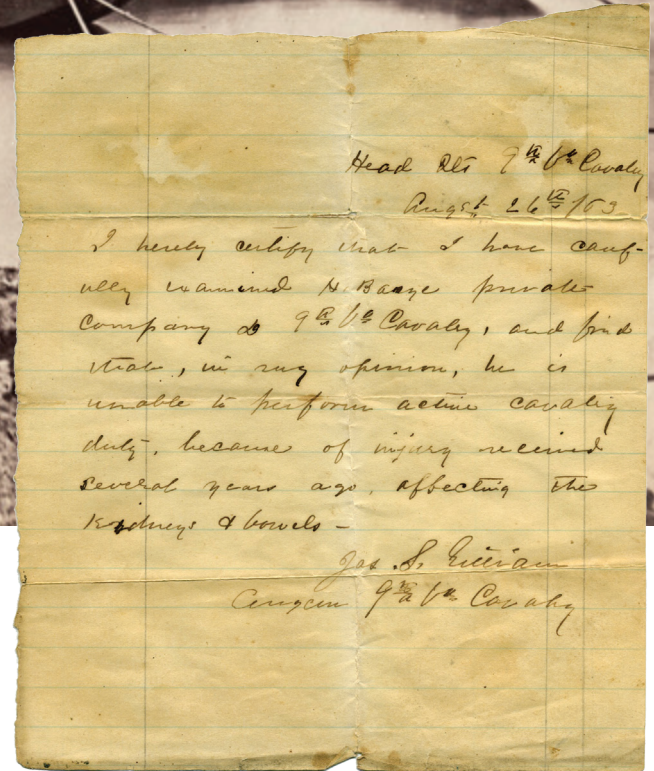


Figure 13. Surgeon's certificate (NARA) dated August 26, 1863, stating Henry Basye is unable to perform actual cavalry duty

Stonewall Jackson – a stellar cast of characters. If quoted in full, the letters would easily fill a fascinating book. But to postal historians, the carrier names are equally important.

Chronologically, the following list mentions those carrying letters to or from Lottsburg. There are sometimes references to more than one person carrying one letter from origin to destination. There are also multiple people mentioned in some letters because he not only records the letter being sent but also those who carried earlier letters or letters he received from Annie.

- **George Cox** – April 27, 1862, letter saying he is sending the letter by Cox because all other communication is cut off.

- **Lieutenant Pierce's servant (slave), Jo Beacham, Joseph Hazzard, Samuel Rice and Mrs. Rice, Mr. Mitchell, and Mr. Bass** – April 28, 1862, letter saying he is sending a letter home with "one of our servants...you must put stamps on it so that if the servant don't get it, it will come by mail." Also mentioned are a long list of others. Henry explains the complex passing of letters from one Lottsburg citizen to the next until the mail ultimately made its way across the river and letters were posted at the Montague post office in Essex County.

- **Charles Turner, Alpheus Barnes, Thornton Sampson, William S. Cralle, James Coles** – May 2, 1862, letter

headed Sycamore Bottom which says someone reported that he and Gus Betts were dead or taken prisoner, but that is not so. He specifically mentions some of the mail is transported by sick soldiers sent home on furlough.

- **Mr. Tapscott, W.S. Cralle** – May 13, 1862, headed Camp Hicks letter. "Send [your letter] to Heathsville to W.S. Cralle and Mr. Tapscott will call there for it and bring it to me."

- **T.C. Cox, Samuel L. Straughn, C. Tapscott** – May 20, 1862, letter. Tapscott is identified in the letter as a member of his company.

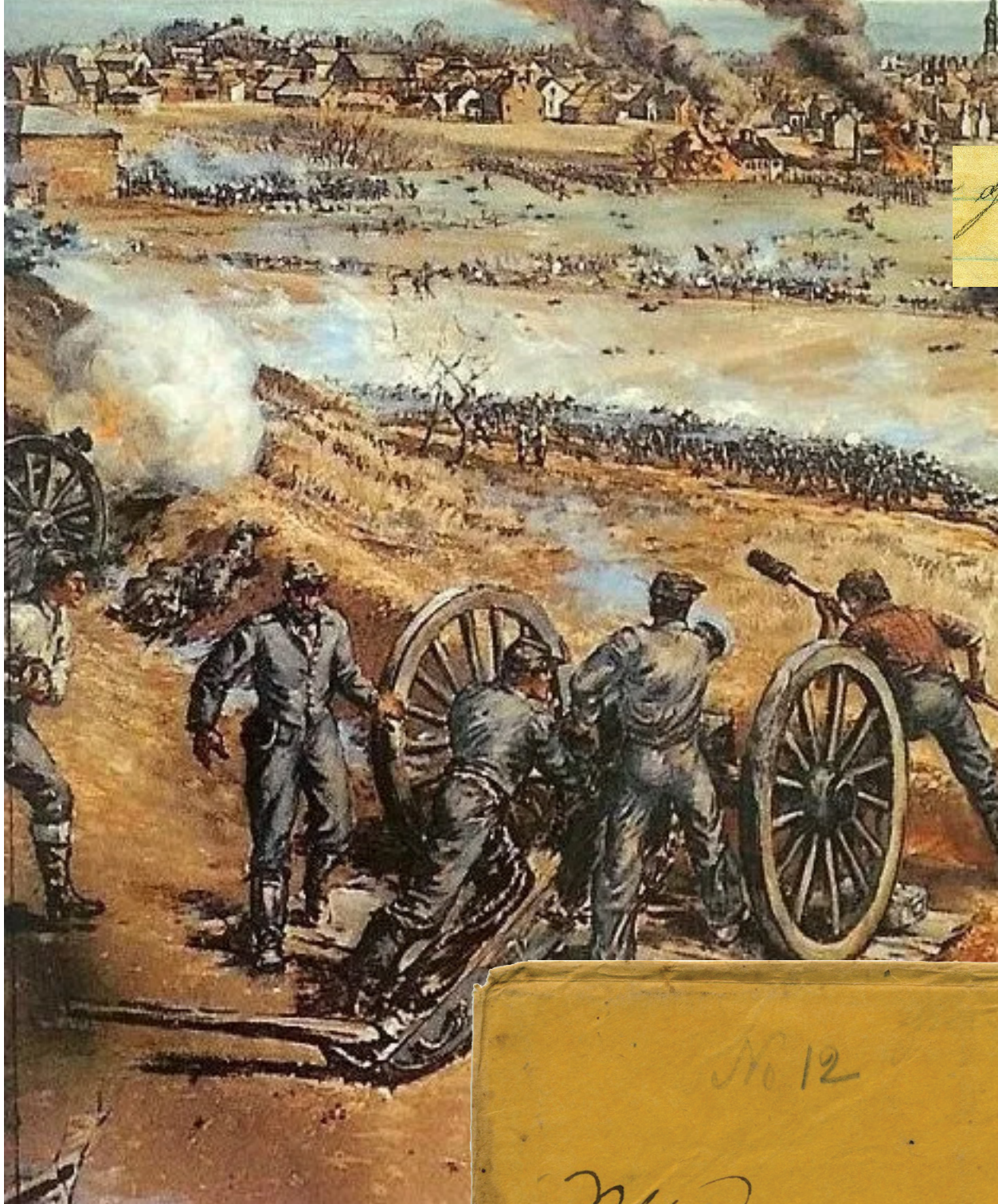
- **W. Walker, Mr. Jenkins** – June 20, 1862, letter in which he describes capturing a schooner loaded with large stores of confectionary goods and everything an army could want, also long detailed battle descriptions. "We did the most brilliant things that have been done since the war began...Richard Basye killed two Yankeys at one shot with his double barrel gun, as for my part, I was detailed to attend to wounded...I sent your \$40 by Mr. Jenkins and also a letter...tell the colored ones howdy."

• **A.J. Brent, Mr. Jenkins, W.S. Cralle** – July 4, 1862, long letter saying he received the letter she sent by Mr. Jenkins. He describes in detail the Seven Days Campaign in front of Richmond, the awful Gaines Mill battle of June 28 and more.

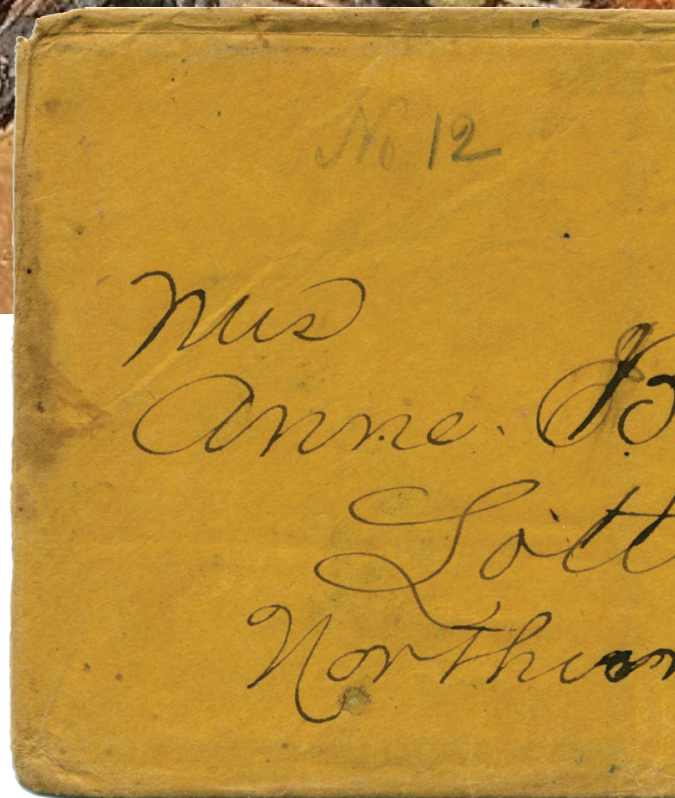
He names many in the regiment who were killed or wounded and says he can't begin to name them all. "I did not carry arms on that battlefield (Gaines Mill). I was close but not in range of the guns... They had 75,000 and we had 60,000...I never heard such noise in my life...They cut our men down like cutting wheat but we cut them down like a moving machine... It was a dear bought victory. This is the day George McClellan said that he would dine in Richmond. He did not miss it by much...I saw Octavous is alive and well in spite of being in the fight... Richard Basye is well at this time."

Henry was then assigned to move the wounded back. Gaines' Mill was the largest of the Seven Days battles and the only clear-cut Confederate tactical victory of the Peninsula Campaign.

• **Monroe Corbin** (slave belonging to Richard Corbin, the only Corbin I could find listed in the 9th), Frederick (slave) – August 3, 1862, letter saying "I send you a few lines by Monroe Corbin, a black man that belongs in our company. He is going to start home today. He has a wife at Mrs. Daven-



A view of the Confederate defenses from atop Marye's Heights at the Dec. 1862 Battle of Fredericksburg with the entrenched artillery in the foreground supporting infantry further downhill behind a stone wall. [Image from HistoryArch.com]



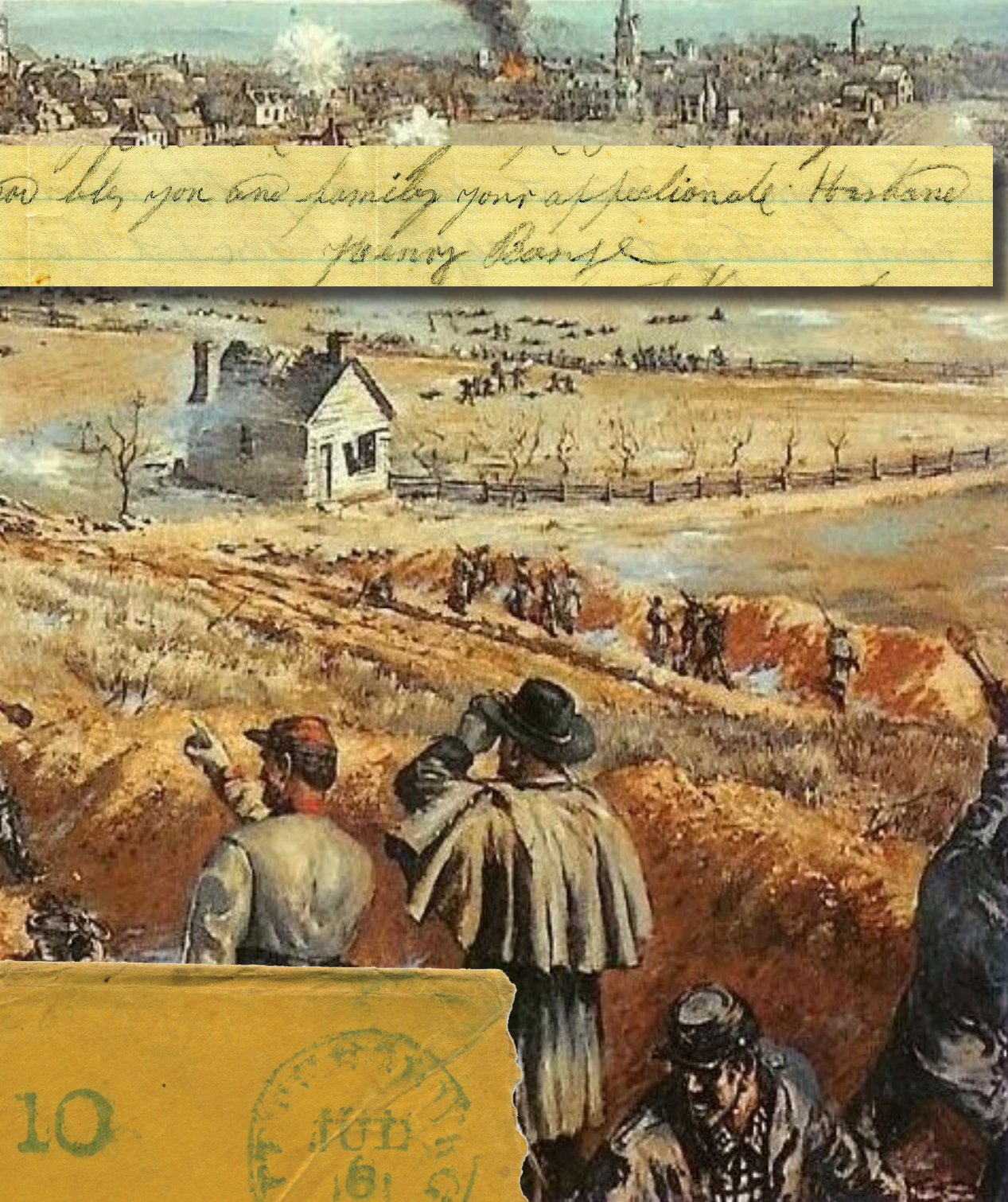


Figure 15. Manuscript message (below left)

ports. She lives in Heathsville in front of Ma's house..." Says he wants to send his horse Isabelle home to swap for another (Kate) because she is white and is a good mark for a Yankee to shoot. She is also difficult to keep clean, she is so very tall that he can't dismount as quickly as he'd like and she is so high strung she frets herself all to death at times. "Monroe will take this letter to ma's; she will send it to you as soon as she can by Frederick."

Endnotes

1. Bill Draper, "The Northern Neck of Virginia," My Generations. http://billdraper.net/html/body_northern_neck.html/ Accessed May 30, 2020.
2. Northumberland County, Virginia, Genealogy, Family Search. https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Northumberland_County,_Virginia_Genealogy/ Accessed May 30, 2020.

3. *Native Americans Post-Contact, Chesapeake Bay: Our History and Our Future*, Mariner's Museum. <https://www.marinersmuseum.org/sites/micro/cbhf/native/nam013.html> / Accessed May 30, 2020.
4. Ancestry.com. Virginia, Select Marriages, 1785-1940 [database on-line], Pg. 137 Ln. 35, Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc, 2014. Accessed May 30, 2020.
5. Ibid.

[This article will be completed in our next issue due to be placed into the mails to our readers in November, 2020.]

Figure 14. Petersburg, Va., soldier's [due] '10' use. Note the bold and fancy handwriting in the address to Mrs. Anne B Basye with the first "y" crossed out