

Part II of A Newly-Discovered (and hugely  
correspondence revealing a unique private  
service for southern forces and their families  
Northern Neck along the most battle-torn r

# Dodging Billy Yank and the Rappahannock P

*[Editor's Note: 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. This rare and exciting find came with a treasure trove of fabulous Civil War soldier's letters. The story continues from Part I in Issue No 23 of this magazine.]*

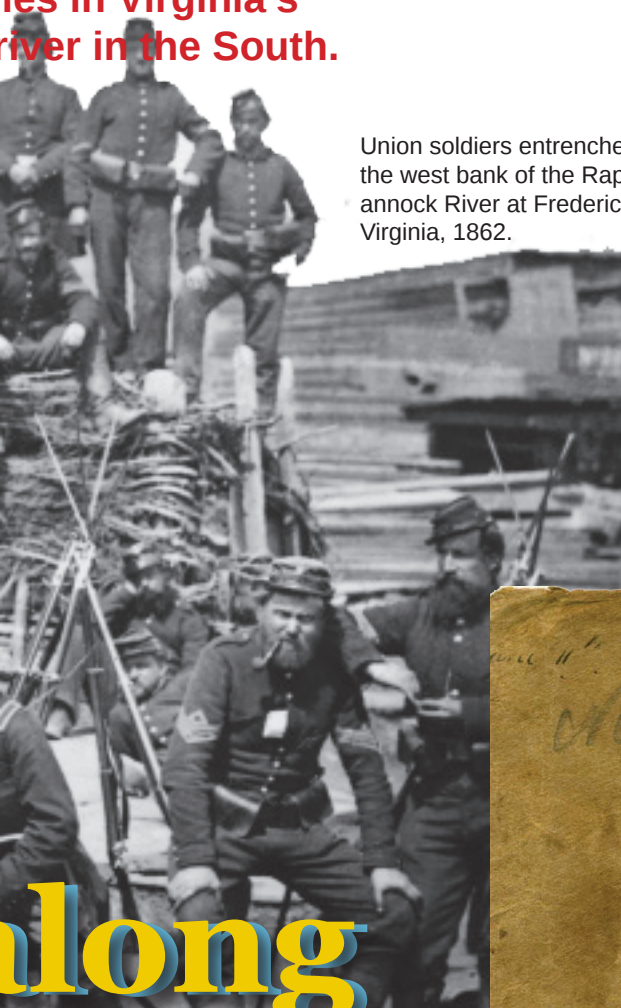
## Acknowledged Mail Carriers

Many names are diligently acknowledged as courtesy mail carriers, soldiers or facilitators in Henry Basye's

letters. Short quotations are extracted and offered here-with from mostly very long letters which were often full of exceptional battle content. This list began in Part I; it continues below.

**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. Davenport's. 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

important)  
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 ies in Virginia's  
 river in the South.



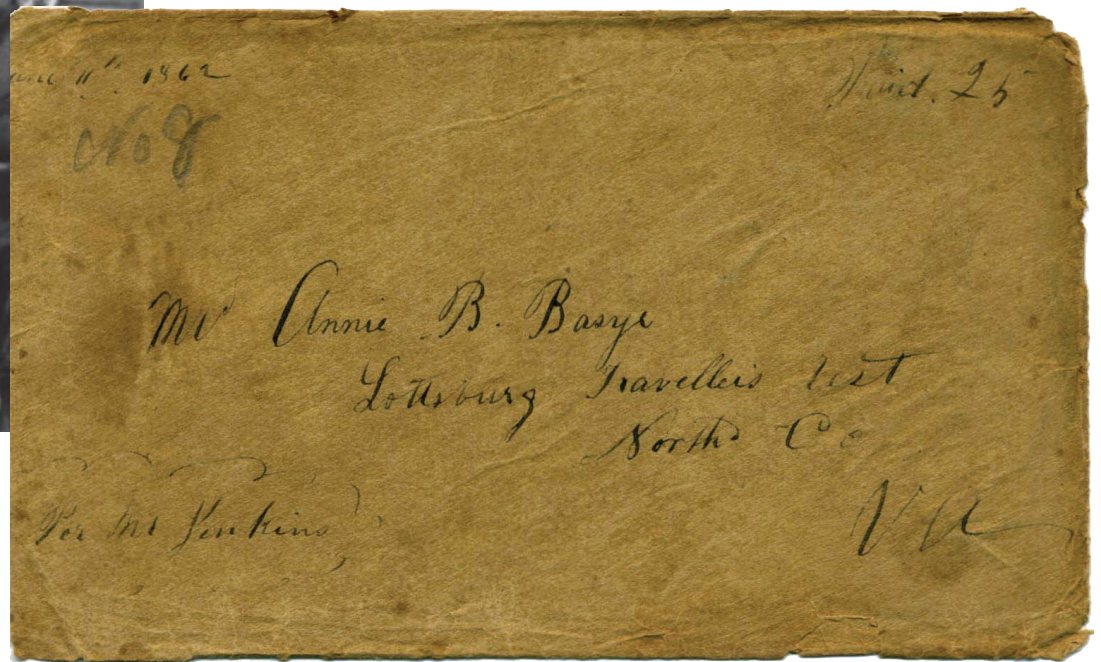
Union soldiers entrenched along the west bank of the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg, Virginia, 1862.



By Patricia A. Kaufmann

# along Part II

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



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."

The way Henry phrases it and addresses Monroe with the last name of Corbin, it appears Monroe might have been one of the few blacks who fought with arms within the regiment. In later letters, he is listed as a "servant" (slave) of Richard Corbin (owner of Moss Neck Plantation near Fredericksburg), who was in Company C and killed at Culpeper C.H. Sept.13, 1863.

It's possible that Monroe may have been the product of a white master and a slave woman and thus took the last name Corbin. While blacks did serve in some Confederate units, their names were not on the rosters, as it was against Confederate Army regulations. *The New*

*York Times* reported on July 11, 1863, "After the battle of Gettysburg in July 1863...reported among the rebel prisoners were seven blacks in Confederate uniforms fully armed as soldiers."

• **R.J. Mitchell** – September 24, 1862, letter, saying he sent her a letter by Mitchell on September 16. "Old

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

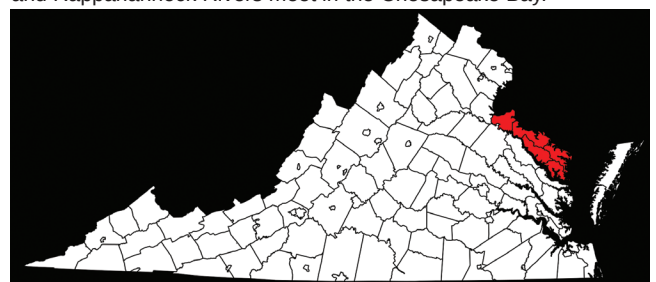


Figure 16.  
Winchester, Va.,  
handstamped  
soldier's Due 10  
sent Sept. 25,  
1862, from Henry  
to Annie Basye



Stonewall pitched into Harpers Ferry that morning so severe that the Yankees surrendered with 8,000 Yankees and 2,000 negroes and we did not lose a man...I am one of the wagon guards...we are going to start for Martinsburg tomorrow." This letter was mailed in Winchester, Va., on September 25, 1862 with a handstamped soldier's Due 10 (CSA catalog type G<sup>6</sup>), as shown in Figure 16. Confederate soldiers were allowed to send mail home postage due with the addressee paying the postage (not free of charge).

- **Monroe (slave to Richard Corbin)**, Daniel Garland, Claybrook – October 12, 1862, letter relating, in part, "I never got the letters you sent by Monroe. He went to the Yankees and carried both letters and boots...Either Daniel Garland or Claybrook will carry this letter home."

- **D.B. Barry**, Mr. Claybrook, Mr. Bouie – undated but, from contents, appears to be shortly after October 19-20, 1862, Antietam Campaign. Letter is headed "at Camp near Martinsburg, W. Va." Barry wrote on the back of the envelope to Annie and said the letter was to be delivered two weeks before but for the neglect of Mr. Claybrook and that Henry is well. He did not (I assume) know the contents of the letter in which Henry says, "I don't think you will have time to make a pair of pants to send up by Claybrook. They don't allow him but 15 days to go and come. That won't give him but one or two days to stay home. He may get home and be ready to start back before you get this letter unless he sends it to his house by Ed or someone else does...I sent you a letter by Mr. Bouie."

- **Frederick Claybrook**, Joe (no last name – could be slave or friend), George (slave) – March 13, 1863, letter

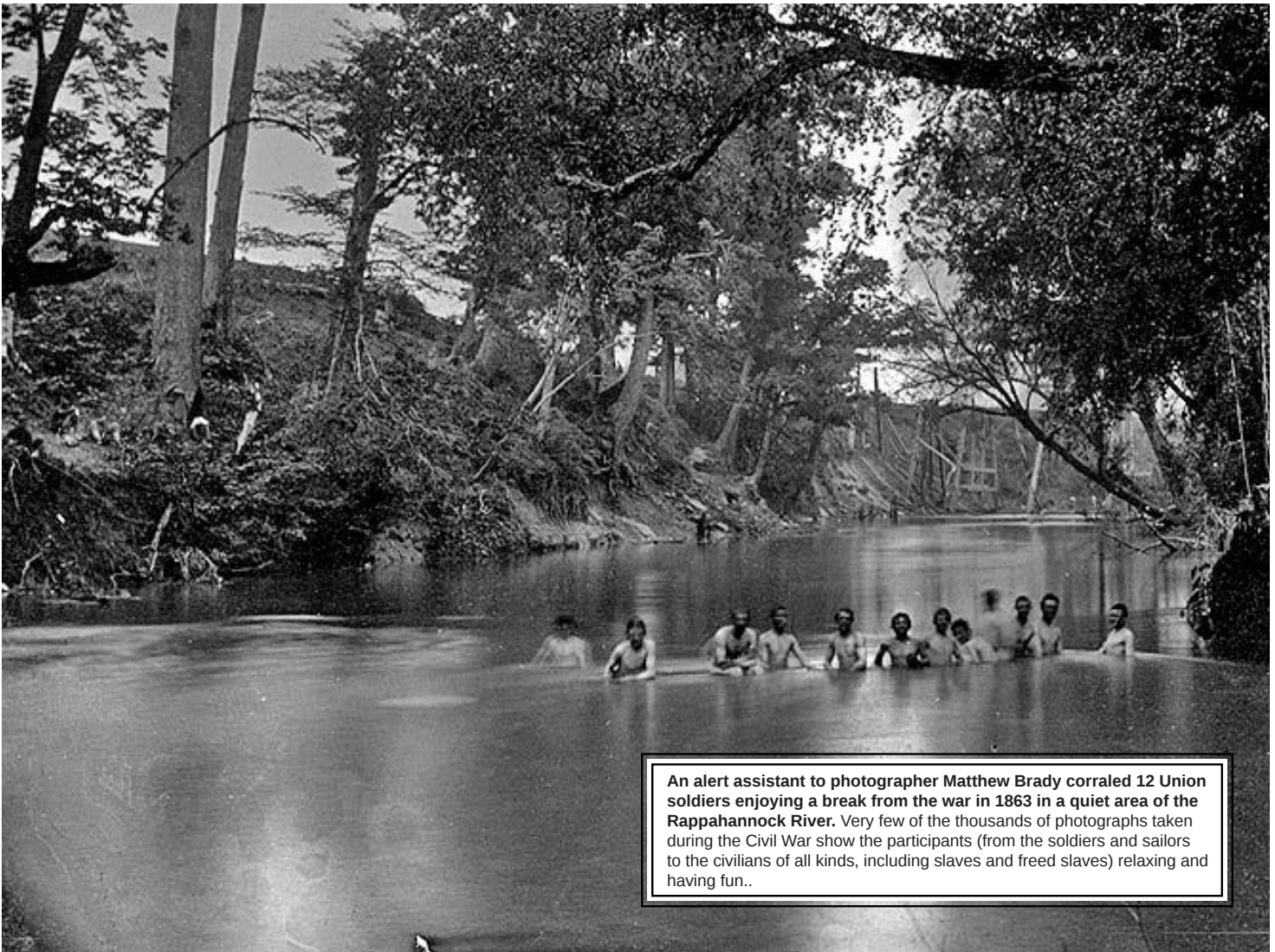
- **Littleton Michel** – April 16, 1863, letter in which he says, "Tell your pa not to let any blockade (coastal blockade runner) be landed on his shore. If he does and the Yankees find it out, they will destroy everything on the land. They found out that James Hurst let some be landed on his shore, and they went there and broke... his farming utensils, and everything else they could find, and also carried off his Negroes, horses, cattle and hogs."

- **Eppy Norris**– April 18 and 20, 1863, letter in which he spells the name "Norrice." Henry's spelling wasn't the best but the first name really is Eppy, as confirmed in other sources.

- **L.D. Michel**, Thornton Sampson "who lives within one mile of Heathsville" per Henry Basye April 22, 1863 – "[Your pa] sends his letters (by) private couriers as he does not think the mail will get through. You can send letters to me if you can get them to L.D. Michel's and he will send them across the river to Montague's post office." Montague was in Essex County on the southern side of the river.

- **Mr. Hall** – May 10, 1863, letter in which he has heard Stonewall Jackson lost an arm and that General (J.E.B.) Stuart took charge of Jackson's men.

- **Captain Cox** – May 11, 1863, letter written in anguish, in which he relates in all caps, "I MUST TELL YOU THAT STONEWALL JACKSON DIED THIS MORNING ABOUT 4 O'CLOCK FROM HIS WOUND IN THE ARM. HIS PLACE CANNOT BE SUPPLIED IN THIS CONTINENT. THERE IS SOME TALK OF STUART TAKING HIS PLACE AND IF HE DOES IT CANNOT BE FILLED, FOR HE IS TO BE COMPARED TO



An alert assistant to photographer Matthew Brady corraled 12 Union soldiers enjoying a break from the war in 1863 in a quiet area of the Rappahannock River. Very few of the thousands of photographs taken during the Civil War show the participants (from the soldiers and sailors to the civilians of all kinds, including slaves and freed slaves) relaxing and having fun..

JACKSON AS I WOULD. IN FACT HE IS NOT WORTHY TO TIE JACKSON'S SHOE. He was wounded by his own men... I would have rather any other man in the army be killed except R.E. Lee himself and myself." It is clear he idolized Jackson and even nicknamed his second child (his first son) "Stonewall."

- **Bill (no last name given, possibly a slave, but letters carried to/from Annie by Bill)** – May 12, 1863, letter screaming, "THE DEATH OF JACKSON IS CONFIRMED, THE PAPER CAME OUT ON THE 11TH IN BLACK. He died on the 10th of May at 3 and one-half o'clock P.M. His death has done our cause more harm than the loss of 20,000 men."

- **George Conway V** May 13, 1863, letter saying he is sending this letter by George Conway, their cook. "Our rations are very small and you can send back by George anything you think I would like."

- **George (slave)** – May 14, 1863, letter. At first, I thought this must be George Conway, but it is clear from the letter content that it is George, a "servant."

- **John Toles, Joseph Gulick** - June 5, 1863, letter

noting Toles as a member of their company who was a substitute for only one month. Gulick is apparently a soldier on furlough.

- **Captain Cox** – June 19, 1863, letter
- **Charles Carter** – June 24, 1863, letter
- **Albin Tapscott** – June 26, 1863, letter
- **Dick (presumably his brother)** – August 9, 1863, letter headed Culpeper Courthouse in which he says Dick is going home after a horse and will carry this letter. "Annie, the Yankees have got (his brother) Octavous. They got him in Maryland...and a great many others in the 40th...I want to get two Negro women and employ Octavous and Joe R. to ----- so I can raise a stock of mulatto boys. They are the greatest hands for that I know."
- **Jim (Joe Moone's slave)** – August 11, 1863, letter
- **Walter Pierce** – August 21, 1863, letter
- **Captain Cox** – September 4, 1863, letter
- **Dr. Harding (soldier going home); L. Hall (also, a soldier going home)** – September 4, 1863, letter
- **Captain Cox; Johnson** (no other info but was from his mother) – September 18, 1863, letter

- **Henry Norris** – October 5, 1863, letter in which he says Norris is from Baltimore and is in his company. This time it is spelled properly.

- **Tip Web** (probably Webb), J. Moone, Dr. Bill (no last name) – December 27, 1863, letter

- **Robert Edwards of Company K** – June 3, 1864, letter headed Ashland and describing Battle of Cold Harbor. He also asks Annie to write him by (brother) Dick who is home trying to get his horse. He wants Dick (presumably, Basye) to bring him his pistol.

- **Westmoreland, William Walker** – June 18, 1864. “Going to try to send this by one of the Westmoreland boys.” Later in the same, he says, “This letter will be left with William Walker.” Both statements may be correct.

- **Captain L. Cox** (9th Va. Cavalry) – Culpeper C.H., Va., June 19, 1863. Also mentioned are F. Barnes or R. Carter if Cox does not go. He mentions that he sent a letter by William Carter the day before. He also says that he has not received the letter sent by her by Mr. Rock.

- **Mr. Hastings** handled Annie’s letter to Henry of June 29, 1864, and Dick (likely his brother, Richard Basye) took it to Henry. W[illiam] Carter – “I am going to send this letter down [by] W. Carter one of our company. He is going to start home this evening.”

- **Charles Turner** – July 6, 1864. See aforementioned letter earlier in this article.

These are by no means all the Basye letters nor mentions of all mail facilitators, but it is a reasonable nucleus. Not all Basye letters have passed through my hands. Many letters went to manuscript collectors and not to postal history students. Some of the earliest mail conveyors mentioned were later noted as killed in battle. From this list, it would be relatively easy (but time consuming) to flesh out their profiles from military records.

In the article on Jenkins Express in the *Confederate Philatelist*, the aforementioned mail handlers are listed alphabetically. Articles are available on the Confederate Stamp Alliance website at [www.civilwarphilatelicsociety.org](http://www.civilwarphilatelicsociety.org) although the most recent issues are only available to members.

To be clear, none of these men who unofficially handled the would be recognized in a philatelic catalog except for Mr. Jenkins, who was formally paid for his services. Nonetheless, slave deliveries are a popular collecting area. Together, all names help paint a picture of how mail was moved during the war. Virtually all mail was transported while dodging Union patrols.

### Henry Basye and Family

I found the Basye family name with many inventive spellings in census and military records. Some variations were Basey, Besye, Baisey, Bayse, Basy, Basge, Bassie, and Bassey. Variations are attributable mostly to phonetic spelling, illegible handwriting, and poorly

educated clerks.

The name Basye is French. The family emigrated to France in about the 13th century from that part of northern Spain inhabited by the Basques near the Bay of Biscay. The Basyes were Huguenots who came to this country in the mid-1600s; a portion of them settled in Northumberland County, Va.

Henry Basye first saw the light of day in Northumberland County March 5, 1835, the son of William Falcon Basye, Sr. (about 1790-1846) and Harriet Caroline Deshields Basye (about 1801-1870), who were married January 20, 1820.

I had trouble verifying the birth years of Henry’s parents, particularly the father. One source showed him as



Figure 17. Period map of March 17, 1863. L

Figure 18. Fugitive slaves fording the Rappahannock





the Battle of Kelly's Ford,  
Library of Congress

Rappahannock River during the war. Library of Congress



born in 1790 and another declared he was born three decades earlier in 1760, which would have made him more than 40 years older than his wife.

William Falcon Basye, Sr. was a lieutenant in Attwell's Company, Virginia Militia, in the War of 1812. Most soldiers in that war were in their twenties and thirties, with a few outliers, so the 1790 date seems more logical to me.

### Battles along the Rappahannock

It has been asserted that more pitched battles were fought along the banks of the Rappahannock River than any other river in this country.<sup>7</sup> Fortunately for citizens of the Northern Neck, these battles were more often on the southern side of the river.

The Anaconda Plan, a blockade set up by Union General Winfield Scott to

stop the flow of supplies into the South, took effect in 1861. The Rappahannock River was blockaded. Hundreds of Union gunboats plied the Chesapeake Bay, opening fire on any vessel that ventured too far from shore. Union raids were conducted on plantations for food in an area rich with natural resources, crops and livestock; they also took slaves. The Northern Neck had no real home guard to protect the area. Control of the river changed hands many times during the war, as it did in many regions.

Some of the most famous battles of the war were fought along the banks of the Rappahannock with tens of thousands of troops. Figure 17 maps the well-known Battle of Kelly's Ford fought March 17, 1863. Library of Congress

Some 10,000 African-American slaves escaped across the river to Union lines and freedom. Figure 18 shows fugitive slaves fording the Rappahannock during the war. Library of Congress

### Northumberland County Post Offices

Few U.S. post offices existed in Northumberland County even before the war. In the 1861 register of U.S. post offices in Northumberland County are listed Burgess's Store - Elizabeth B. Burgess, postmaster; Lottsburg - L.S. Winstead, postmaster; Heathsville C.H. - Gustavus B. Campbell, postmaster; Union Village - Warren P. Hill, postmaster, and Wicomico Church - Edgar Blackwell, postmaster. The same U.S. post offices are listed in the July 1, 1862, corrected register but no postmasters are listed.

In a search of almost 1,000 Confederate Post Office Department records, I could not find a mail contract that included the aforementioned post offices for the years 1861-62 because one of the two books of postal contracts for Virginia is missing from the digital records. But I did find the relevant 1863-77 records.

The Warsaw, Richmond County, Va., Confederate mail contract is dated May 15, 1863, and signed by CSA Postmaster General John H. Reagan along with Richard H. Mothershead, James V. Garland and Lewis S. Lamkin. It names Mothershead as contractor for transporting the mail on route number 2408 from Warsaw, Va., by Oldham's Cross Roads, Union Village, Lottsburg, Heathsville and Wicomico Church to Kilmarnock and back, twice a week.

Maintaining control of the area was unquestionably challenging. There was for a while a railroad bridge over the Rappahannock River at Tappahannock as well as a simple pontoon bridge, which was doubtless the usual mail route.

### Federal Census Records - Basye

In the 1850 federal census, the Harriet Basye household is recorded as Harriet Basye (age 49), Richard (12),



Figure 19. Gravestone of William Falcon Basye, Roseland Cemetery, Reedville, Va.



The great Rappahannock River at sunset.

Octavus (10), Josephine (8), Mary (6), Henry Tolson (40 – black), and John Thomas (15 – black). Son Henry, our correspondent, appears to be missing from the mix, as does older brother William Falcon Basye (1829-1864) who was likely the eldest brother to whom all the work fell in the wake of his father's death in 1846.

In the 1850 slave census, William Basye, Sr. (who is apparently really "Jr." to the 1790 born Basye) is shown as the owner of 42 slaves (31 male, 11 female) ranging in age from 1 to 60. Harriet Basye is noted as owner of 8 slaves ranging in age from 1 to 63. None of her slaves match the ages of the two blacks recorded as living in her household; perhaps they were free black servants or mulatto with last names.

William Falcon Basye ("Jr.") was born to William Falcon Basye ("Sr.") in 1829. He is buried in Roseland Cemetery, Reedville, Va., Figure 19 shows his gravestone. The names should more accurately be I, II, and III. This is not the first time I've encountered this sort of naming nightmare. In the federal 1840 census records for him, there are 28 persons in his household, 10 of whom are free white persons and 18 slaves.

In the 1860 census, the "Henry Basye household" con-

sisted of Annie's parents W.W. Harding (the actual listed head of household, age 50) and Rebecca A. Harding (58), as well as Annie Basye (listed as Ann, 20), Henry Basye (23) and Henry W. Travers (40). Travers may have worked the farm with Harding. Brother Richard Basye is shown as living nearby.

In the 1860 census, the Harriet C. Basye household lists Harriet as 57, L. Octavous (19) as carpenter, Novella J. (16) and Mary M. (15).

Twenty years later, in the 1880 census, Henry "Baisey" (sic) is listed as age 44, Annie as 38, Novella M. as 16, Falcon Wm. as 11 and Harry D. as 3-years old.

Also in 1880, "L. Octavus Baisey" is listed nearby as a 40-year old carpenter whose wife is named Willie; she was only 17. Although variously spelled Octavus, Octavius, Octavous, and Octavious, the name I found on their son's birth certificate is Octavus, although Henry's letters spell it Octavous. The father (L.O. Basye) is listed as 49-years old and his wife as Wilmeth (Willie) Settle Crowther (maiden name), age 28. His parents were verified as William Falcon Basye, Sr. and Harriet Caroline Deshields, thus Octavous is the younger brother of Henry Basye.



Former contraband, now freed slaves, standing on the Potomac River landing at Alexandria, Va. in 1863.

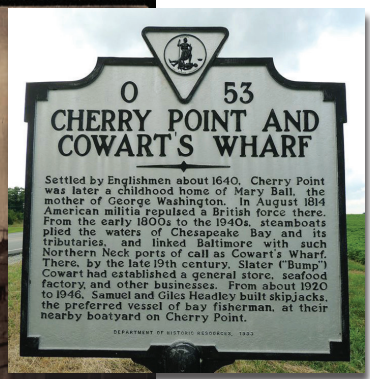


Figure 20. Historical highway marker at Cherry Point, the transit point to Lottsburg on Henry's letters to Annie Figure 21. Historical highway marker at Cherry Point, the transit point to Lottsburg on Henry's letters to Annie

Moving into the twentieth century, the 1910 federal census, lists Henry as a farmer and Annie as keeping house. They are shown as being married for 50 years with their home still in Lottsburg, Northumberland County, Virginia, with six children, only three of whom are living. Son Harry Deshields Basye (age 30) is shown residing in Henry's household along with his wife, Iola (age 25). In his 1956 newspaper obituary, Harry Basye's home is noted as Travelers Rest Farm, Cherry Point. Figure 20 shows a highway marker at Cherry Point, the transit point to Lottsburg on Henry's letters to Annie.

Henry Basye died January 2, 1916, from organic valvular heart disease as shown on his death certificate in the Virginia death records.<sup>8</sup> The recorded years of birth and death vary depending on the source, but the death certificate is presumably accurate and that is the source used herein.

Anna (Annie) Ball Harding was born Feb. 17, 1840, and died May 29, 1915, of stomach cancer at their home in Cowarts, Va. as reported on her death certificate.

### Closing Thoughts

The Basye correspondence illuminates the beginning of Henry and Annie's life together during a time of na-

tional tragedy—a married life which began more apart than together. The 1910 census confirms their love endured. Their correspondence provides postal historians with two covers from a hitherto unrecorded express service from the Chesapeake Bay region and a treasure trove of first-hand accounts from a soldier in the ranks.

*Trish Kaufmann was first introduced to Confederate postal history in 1965. She became active in organized philately in 1969 and became a full-time dealer in 1973, today specializing in solely in Confederate stamps and postal history while continuing to maintain an enthusiastic connection with organized philately.*

### Endnotes

<sup>6</sup>Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown, Jr., Jerry S. Palazolo, Editors, *Confederate States Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*, 2012, Confederate Stamp Alliance, [www.csalliance.org](http://www.csalliance.org).

<sup>7</sup>Clark B. Hall, "The River's Role in the War," *The Fords of the Rappahannock*, American Battlefield Trust. <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/fords-rappahannock/> Accessed May 30, 2020.

<sup>8</sup>Virginia Department of Health; Richmond, Virginia; Virginia Deaths, 1912-2014.