

Magnus Illustrated Envelopes Related to North Carolina

by Maurice M. Burse

During the Civil War, envelopes bearing patriotic cachets were available to both Union and Confederate soldiers and civilians. Covers from both sides are eagerly sought, and even unused envelopes are also of much interest.

There were numerous manufacturers of these envelopes. Perhaps the most prominent publisher of envelopes for the Union was Charles Magnus (Figure 1), of New York City. His company used steel, copper, and stone engraved plates and hand or stencil coloring; most hand-colored envelopes were prepared by his employees, but he even hand-colored some of his best envelopes himself. Several hundred basic designs of his envelopes exist, and besides the hand-colored envelopes many of these can be found in different single colors — gold, silver, bronze, red, etc. — or in mixed colors. Many bear his company's imprint; many do not. He also printed envelopes for other publishers, and other printers imitated his work. One must be careful in ascribing designs to his company.



▲ Figure 1 A portrait of Charles Magnus, from *The American Philatelist* for September 1949.

Julian Carl Magnus was born in Elberfeld, Germany, in 1826. His family immigrated to the United States in the late 1840s. In 1850 he and his brother Carl Emil established a printing business in New York City, basing it upon a successful German-language newspaper, the *Deutsche Schnellpost*. He also anglicized his name to Charles around this time. About 1854 he began to advertise one of his earliest engraved products, a hundred views of American and Canadian cities, bridges, national buildings, and monuments, as oil color prints. Thereafter he produced many prints, song sheets and song books, stationery, maps, and finally the product in which readers will have the most interest, patriotic envelopes. He died in New York City in 1900. After his death a warehouse full of his stock and even several of his printing plates were purchased and made available, bit by bit, to collectors. His company's work is considered superior to that of Currier and Ives in printing technique, but inferior in artistic creativity.

Several of the Magnus envelopes have ties to North Carolina, illustrating scenes of significant battles or maps of the theater of action here. This article illustrates some of these envelopes. The Magnus North Carolina collection shown is not quite complete.

Figures 2 and 3 show two multicolor envelopes illustrating scenes from the Union capture of Roanoke Island on February 8, 1862. The battle was fought as part of General McClellan's grand strategy, and was part of the Burnside Expedition to occupy the Atlantic coast of the Confederacy. There were several Union units involved in the successful attack on

Roanoke Island: the ninth New York (Hawkins' Zouaves, the first body in New York to volunteer) and the twenty-first Massachusetts. Officers of the latter unit always claimed that the contribution of the Zouaves was



◀ Figure 2 Hand-colored Magnus envelope: Gallant Charge of the Hawkins Zouaves at Roanoke Island. 1. No. 6. C. Magnus, 12 Frankfort St. N.Y.



◀ Figure 3 Hand-colored Magnus envelope: Gallant Charge of the Hawkins Zouaves at Roanoke Island. 2. No. 7. C. Magnus, 12 Frankfort St. N.Y.

Figure 4 ▼
Hand-colored Magnus envelope: Battle at Newbern N.C. 2. No. 9. C. Magnus, 12 Frankfort St. N.Y.

overrated, but Colonel Rush C. Hawkins, the Zouaves' commander, wrote a widely publicized article shortly afterward in which he described the Zouaves' heroic role in breaking the Confederate line, and so the regiment became famous. According to Captain Charles F. Walcott of the 21st Massachusetts volunteers, "...with our two flags in plain sight upon the parapet, the fort full of our men, and the last running rebel well out of sight, the 9th New York came running up the narrow corduroy road by the flank, and with a great shout of 'Zou Zou' swarmed into the battery for all the world as if they were capturing it." But Hawkins had the attention of the Union, and so the Magnus envelopes romanticized his "victory." Earlier, Colonel Hawkins had been severely reprimanded and replaced for a while as commander of the Zouaves when a Union attempt to take Roanoke Island had failed, on October 5, 1861. Perhaps his horn blowing was in reaction to the smarting from that episode.

From this point forward reference will be made to Walcott, Grant, and Weiss. "Walcott" is the standard name used for the publication by Robert Laurence of George Walcott's enormous collection of Civil War patriotic covers in 1934, two years after the death of the latter. Part of Walcott was extended by Robert Grant in 1971. The Grant work was given the title Volume 1, as he intended to publish more volumes; but these were never produced, and so there is only a Volume 1. William Weiss's 1995 compilation of Union patriotic covers supersedes and is much more extensive than Walcott, or even Grant's extension of



Walcott. The hand-colored envelope in Figure 2 is Weiss SC-MB-150, but is not listed in Walcott. The cover in Figure 3 is Weiss SC-MB-152, and Walcott L-709.

The spelling of New Bern as "Newbern" is adopted here because it is the one used on the envelopes. During the Civil War, the name was spelled in several ways.

Charles Magnus often supplied his envelopes to customers in sets, typically sets of twelve. Prior covers in this particular Magnus series show battle scenes from one of the battles at Winchester, VA, and the engagement between the Monitor and the Merrimac. Another hand-colored design of this Magnus series, No. 9, (Figure 4) shows a scene from the battle of Newbern on March 14, 1862, in which the Burnside Expedition captured that city for the Union and occupied it until peacetime.



◀ Figure 5 Bronze Magnus envelope: Battle at Newbern N.C. 2. No. 10. C. Magnus, 12 Frankfort St. N.Y.

Walcott L-713V, but carries the enumeration No. 12 instead of No. 11 or No. 9, respectively. These four covers complete the designs of known Magnus covers identified directly on the cover as illustrating aspects of the battle of Newbern. It is not known if the illustrations are taken from actual recorded scenes or are fanciful.



◀ Figure 6 Bronze Magnus envelope: Battle at Newbern N.C. No. 11. C. Magnus, 12 Frankfort St. N.Y.

The final Magnus cover showing a battle in North Carolina is reproduced in Figure 8. Some Magnus covers appear to have been produced in sets of twelve, and this cover, listed in Weiss as SC-MB-177 and unlisted in Walcott, is in a different set from the preceding ones. It shows the battle of Fort Thompson, March 14, 1862. Fort Thompson, a fourteen-gun sod installation on the

This design is listed in Weiss as SC-MB-156, but is not listed in Walcott. The same design printed in bronze, except for the numbering as No. 10 instead of No. 9, shown in Figure 5, is unlisted in Weiss. Weiss instead lists a printing in black as SC-MB-157a. The design is again unlisted in Walcott. As noted above, Charles Magnus often printed the same design in different inks.

A further bronze design, No. 11, (Figure 6) shows another scene from the battle of Newbern. This design is similar to Weiss SC-MB-158a, Walcott L-710, which bears the printed number 10. Finally, No. 12, another bronze printed envelope (Figure 7), shows the aftermath of the battle, with a mounted officer in conversation, a wounded soldier, and corpses in the foreground, and troops moving rapidly toward the city of Newbern in the background. This design is similar to Weiss SC-MB-159a, Walcott L-711V, and to Weiss SC-MB-155a,

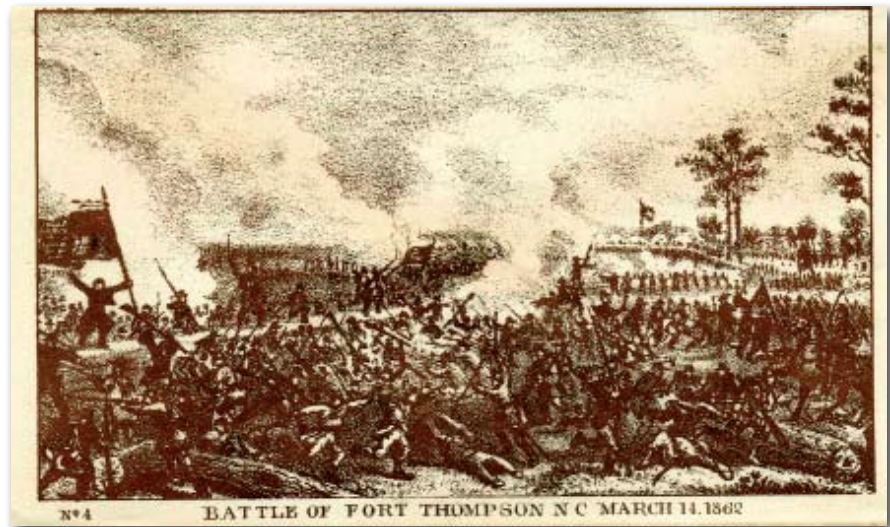
Neuse banks six miles below Newbern, was the only part of the defenses of Newbern whose line Colonel Lawrence O'B. Branch, 33rd North Carolina Infantry, would defend. Curiously, it may have been named for Major W. B. Thompson, possibly 1st North Carolina Artillery, who supervised its construction. Ten of the fort's guns bore on the river, and three of the remainder on the land approaches to the city, so that it was not able to withstand the land attack that overcame it. Major William G. Lewis, 33rd North Carolina Infantry, who participated in its defense, complained a few days later in a letter to his cousin about the "miserable manner in which our works were constructed. Major Thompson, who has failed in every work he has ever undertaken, made the greatest failure of all, in the construction of those works. They are a disgrace to any engineer." (On the other hand, General Branch's defense line had a break, accidentally unguarded by guns and defended by an untrained militia battalion, and it was here that the Union



forces broke through.) The conquest of Fort Thompson was the first stage of the battle of Newbern. Yet the envelope was produced as part of another set from the previous ones. It is listed in Weiss as SC-MB-177 but is unlisted in Walcott.

The next two covers are of another type, one that was also popular during the Civil War: illustrations of military heroes. Figures 9 and 10 illustrate a bust of General Reno and a map of northeastern North Carolina that includes some, but not all, of the important battle sites of this period. The hand-colored cover is unlisted in Weiss or Walcott; a similar

▲ Figure 7 Bronze Magnus envelope: Battle at Newbern N.C. No. 12. Chas. Magnus, 12 Frankfort St. N.Y.



▶ Figure 8
Bronze Magnus envelope: No. 4. Battle of Fort Thompson N.C. March 14, 1862. Weiss attributes this design to Magnus even though there is no imprint on the envelope.



cover printed in bronze is PM-219 in Weiss, but unlisted in Walcott. General Jesse L. Reno had first fought in the War with Mexico, at Vera Cruz, and then had assignments in Washington, DC, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Utah, gaining much experience in ordnance. At the beginning of the Civil War, he was promoted directly from captain to

◀ Figure 9 Hand-colored Magnus envelope: Gen. Reno. Chas. Magnus, 12 Frankfort St. N.Y.

Figure 10
Bronze Magnus envelope: Gen. Reno.
Chas. Magnus, 12 Frankfort St. N.Y.

brigadier general – his West Point connections helped – and was one of three commanders of brigades under General Burnside which participated in the battles of Roanoke Island, New Bern (where he commanded the troops that broke through the Confederate line), and South Mills in North Carolina. One of his subordinate officers in this campaign was the self-aggrandizing Colonel Hawkins previously mentioned, who caused him not a little annoyance. Later in 1862 he lost his life at the Battle of South Mountain, MD, three days before Antietam. He was eulogized as a “soldier’s soldier.” The city of Reno, NV, was named for him, and his son Jesse W. Reno was one of the first inventors of the escalator.

Another Union general who appears on North Carolina envelopes is Benjamin F. Butler. Butler had been a U.S. Representative from, and later Governor of, Massachusetts, and managed to get an appointment as a Major General in the Union Army. With that kind of military training, he was not entirely effective as an officer. For example, at the beginning of the war (June 1861) he lost the battle of Big Bethel, VA, to Colonel John Magruder, C.S.A., who commanded a much smaller force. He was removed as commanding officer at Fortress Monroe in the same month. Ben Butler was detested by the Southerners who felt his wrath, and is still known among them as “Beast” Butler.



In North Carolina he planned the early attack on Hatteras in August 1861 and took formal possession of Fort Hatteras, becoming a Union hero. By 1862 he was in the lower Mississippi, where he is remembered for his infamous General Order No. 28, in which he stated that any woman in New Orleans who insulted or showed contempt for any Union officer or soldier should be regarded and treated as a “woman of the town plying her avocation,” and for burning the University of Alabama to the ground, allowing a professor to rescue only one book from the University Library. He was relieved of that command too. By November 11, 1863, he was in command of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina, where his heavy hand and brutal order earned him a continuing hatred of the citizens. He was in command of the Army portion of the joint Army-Navy expedition against Fort Fisher and Wilmington in late 1864 and early 1865, retreating from the first attempt on the fort—the unsuccessful first attempt has been called a fiasco—so that he was replaced by Major General Alfred H. Terry, who led a successful second attempt a few days later.



Figure 11 Green Magnus envelope:
Maj. Gen. Butler and map of eastern
North Carolina. Chas. Magnus, 12
Frankfort St., N.Y.

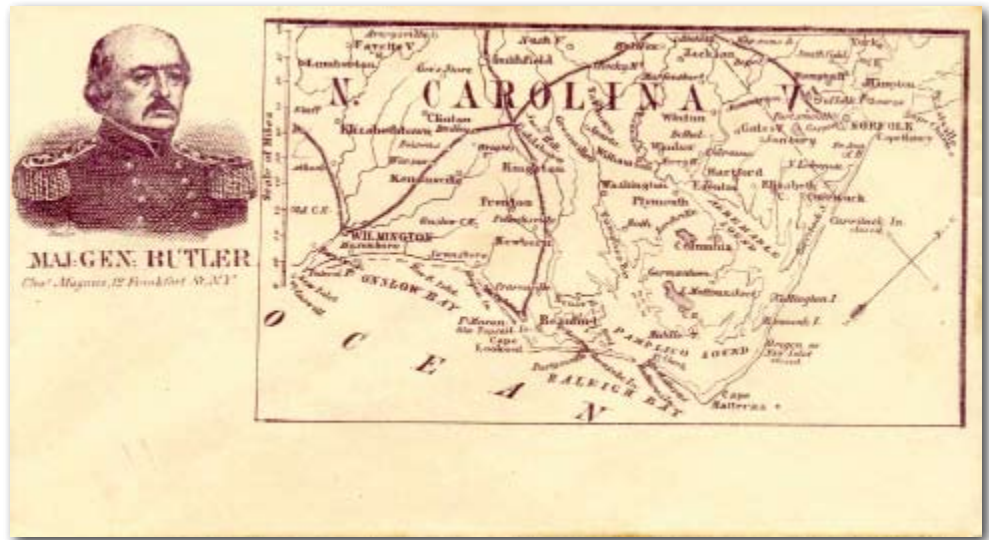
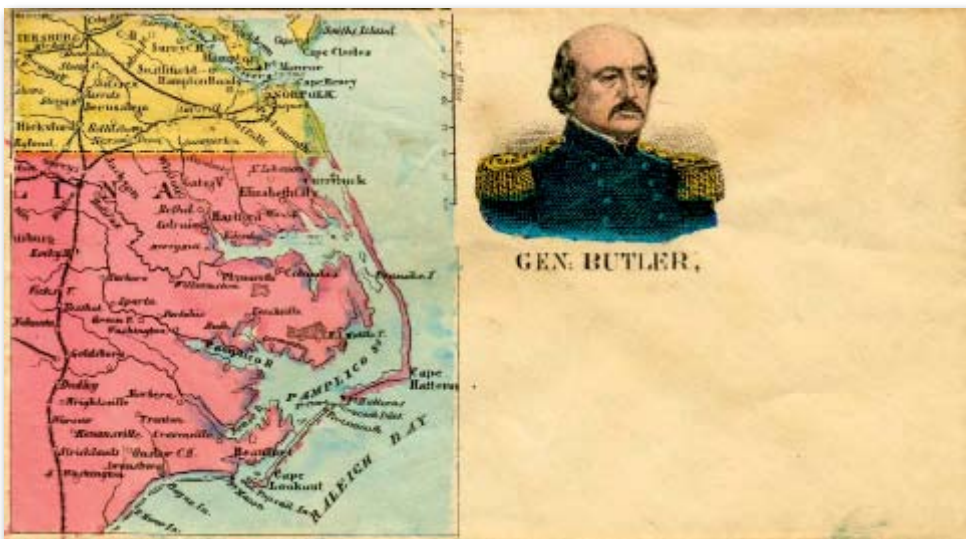


Figure 12 ▶
Violet Magnus envelope, otherwise
identical to Figure 11.

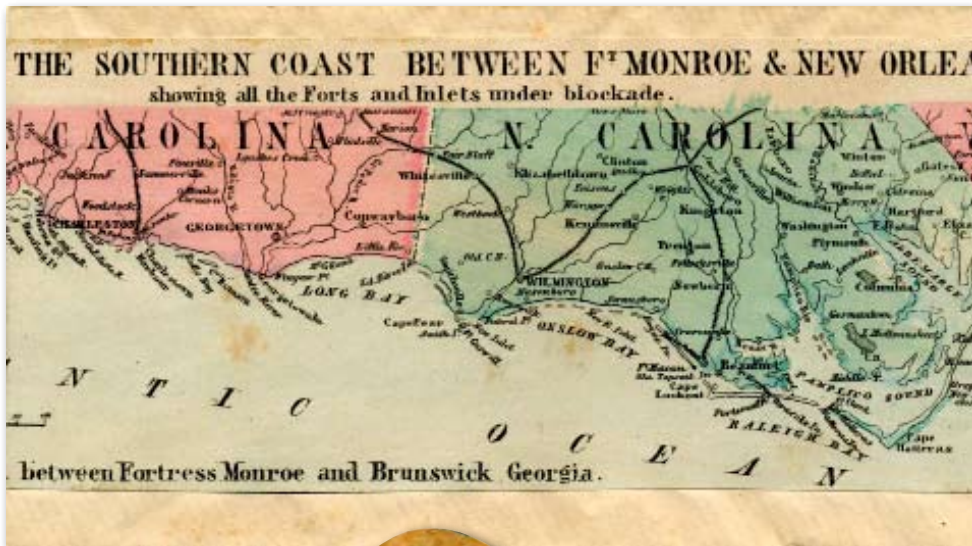
The covers with General Butler and maps of North Carolina surely were produced in the aftermath of his victories at Hatteras, when he was at the height of his popularity in the North. Figures 11 and 12, unlisted varieties of the bronze-printed Weiss PM-75 by Magnus, unlisted in Walcott also, are printed in green and violet. The map of the North Carolina coast is oriented with northwest at the top of the map, and stretches from the below the Cape Fear River to the Chesapeake Bay. This kind of orientation in old naval maps is not uncommon.

The other Benjamin Butler cover (Figure 13) is hand-colored. The portrait of General Butler is the same as on the previous two envelopes, but the map is oriented with north at the top and is to a different scale. It is listed as PM-74 by Weiss and is unlisted by Walcott.

Finally, a cover by an unknown printer is shown in Figure 14. It is listed in Weiss as Magnus-like, i.e., likely made by Magnus, with the number NW-120, but is not listed in Walcott. It consists of a long, thin map of the Atlantic coast from the Chesapeake Bay to St. Simon's Island in Georgia pasted onto a plain envelope so that the map is folded around the envelope. Weiss calls this kind of envelope an add-on, and notes that "it is possible they were post-war, but as they are so rare, it is not an important point anyway." The North Carolina and South Carolina coasts, from Collington Island to Port Royal, make up the portion of the map on the front, so that it is included in this article. (Collington Island, also spelled Colington, Collintons, and Colleton) is in Roanoke Sound, and was named for Sir John Colleton, one of the Lords Proprietors of the Colony of Carolina.) Figure 15 shows the back side of this envelope and demonstrates the folding of the long map around the original envelope so that



◀ Figure 13 Hand-colored
Magnus envelope: map of
southeastern Virginia and
eastern North Carolina and
Gen. Butler.



◀ Figure 14 Envelope in the style of Magnus: The Southern Coast between Ft Monroe & New Orleans showing all the Forts and Inlets under Blockade. Coast Chart between Fortress Monroe and Brunswick Georgia.



▲ Figure 15 Reverse of envelope showing the pasted coastal map folded around the ends of the envelope and onto the reverse.

regions north and south of the area on the front appear.

These envelopes show almost all the designs by Charles Magnus related to North Carolina. I am also aware of another, Weiss ST-243 (unlisted in Walcott), which shows an American flag, a female figure with angel's wings, and a devil supporting the Great Seal of North Carolina, but I have not seen this envelope.

There are also printings of the designs shown, but in different colors or in the numeral in the lower left corner. Thus, Figure 2 is also known in bronze (Weiss SC-MB-150a, unlisted in Walcott), and Figure 3 is known in bronze (Weiss SC-MB-152a, unlisted in Walcott), as well as

with the enumeration No. 8, both hand-colored (Weiss SC-MB-153) and bronze (Weiss SC-MB153a). Both of these are Walcott L-709V. Likewise, Figure 4 is known as No. 9 in bronze (Weiss SC-MB-156a) and as No. 10 both hand-colored (Weiss SC-MB-157) and in black (Weiss SC-MB-157a), all unlisted in Walcott. Figure 5 is known enumerated as No. 10, hand-colored (Weiss SC-MB-158, Walcott L-710) and in bronze (Weiss SC-MB-158a, Walcott L-710V); Figure 6 is known enumerated as No. 11, hand-colored (Weiss SC-MB-159, Walcott L-711) and in bronze (Weiss SC-MB-159a, Walcott L-711a).

In addition, the General Reno cover (Figures 8, 9) is known in gold (PM-219a). Another General Butler cover similar to Figures 10 and 11 is in bronze (Weiss PM-75, Walcott L-368V); and others like Figure 12 in violet (Weiss PM-74a) and black (Weiss PM-74b), both unlisted in Walcott.

These last varieties either do not represent changes in designs or at most have only the minor change of the number in the lower left corner. There are also a few other covers by other

printers, but Charles Magnus produced more than twice as many as all the others combined.

Because of the exigencies of war, printers in the South made many fewer illustrated envelopes than printers in the North. A very few are known from North Carolina printers, and, because of the limited availability of inks, they are quite plain when compared to Northern covers like the ones shown here. ■

I thank Ellen S. Peachey, American Philatelic Research Library, American Philatelic Society, Bellefonte, PA, for the portrait of Charles Magnus, from the September 1949 issue of *The American Philatelist*. I also thank Tony L. Crumbley for his suggestion that I prepare this article, and for his encouragement.

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