



## The Journal of the Empire State Postal History Society

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# EXCELSIOR!

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## HOW RARE?

By: George McGowan

As collectors of postal history, we are always seeking new items for our collections. If we find something rare, that is just icing on the philatelic cake. I wonder if we are missing something that may be rare and we are overlooking it.

Below are a few examples of the auxiliary marking "missent". Perhaps a missent item from Brooklyn is not very rare, but how about a missent item from a small rural post office? How many letters went to Gainesville, Wyoming Co., in error? One a week? One a month? If the answer is one a month, I would consider that a rare cancel when you ask yourself how many have survived to make it into our collections?



Will collecting New York "missent" becomes as popular as New York Star cancels, New York Postmaster cancels or New York RFD cancels? Time will tell.

***THE 3<sup>RD</sup> NEW YORK VOLUNTEER CAVALRY ASSOCIATION:***  
**The Story of Two Rochester, New York Covers**  
**By: George DeKornfeld**

The 3rd Regiment, New York Cavalry was organized by Companies at Rochester on July 17, 1861. Also known as 'The Van Allen Cavalry' in honor of its first Colonel, James H. Van Allen (**Figure 1**), this Civil War Regiment served under him as part of the defenses of Washington, DC starting in 1861 as part of the Army of the Potomac.



**Figure 1.** Colonel, James H. Van Allen

In 1862, the 3rd was moved to North Carolina and in 1863 to Virginia. By the time they merged with the 1st New York Mounted Rifles to form the 4th Regiment Provisional Cavalry on July 21, 1865 they had seen more than their fair share of military action in battles such as Evan's Mills, Wilmington and Roanoke. Mustered out in 1865, the 3rd had lost three officers and 45 enlisted men in battle and one officer and 150 enlisted to disease.

So it was that this past May found me happily sitting at a dealer's table, coincidentally yet appropriately at ROPEX in Rochester, where I came across two 1887 covers that because of their Pointing Hand markings immediately had me reaching for my wallet. Both, as can be seen from their corner cards, came from the same mailer, *S. C. Pierce, Secretary, 3d N. Y. Vol. Cav. Association, Rochester.*

Let's start the dissection with an item common to both covers. Our Secretary, Samuel C. Pierce, enlisted at Rochester on August 20th of 1861 at the age of 22 and was mustered in as a 1st Lieutenant, Company H, 3rd Regiment. Promoted to the rank of Captain, Company K in 1862, he was taken prisoner during the Wilson Raid at Ream's Station, Virginia in June of 1864. Following three unsuccessful escape attempts, Samuel was paroled in January of 1865 and was transferred to Company B where he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in March. He was mustered out at Norfolk, Virginia on July 12, 1865.



**Figure 2.** Front of a circular mailed from Rochester, N.Y. to Spencerport, N.Y.

Our first cover seen in **Figure 2** is franked with a one-cent large Benjamin Franklin Bank Note paying the circular rate and is addressed to a William H. Sigler, Spencerport, New York. William was twenty-five years old when he enlisted at Brockport on August 16, 1862 where he was mustered in as a Private, Company M, a rank he kept until he was mustered out, also at Norfolk, on June 7, 1865.



**Figure 3.** The rear of the envelope showing a Spencerport, N.Y. arrival marking.



Not at Spencerport, the cover was forwarded to East Hamlin, New York where it also couldn't be delivered so it was returned to sender at Rochester. Beginning in December of 1884, all mail matter (except First Class which could be returned free) could be returned to its sender for an additional fee equal to the original postage. The rating for this cover's return remains unanswered up to a point. There is a possibility that the circular was assessed one-cent postage due upon being forwarded since *due 1 ct.* was written on the cover in the same blue pencil as the *fwd.*, but since this charge couldn't be collected at East Hamlin, a one-cent Postage Due stamp was affixed there and a single fee (or even both forwarding and return fees both) was collected back at Rochester. The back of this envelope is shown in **Figure 3** where a Spencerport arrival marking can be seen that dates our cover.



**Figure 4.** Front of another circular mailed from Rochester, N.Y. to Xenia, Ohio.

Our other circular seen in **Figure 4** was mailed to Xenia, Ohio but the addressee is not listed in the rosters of either the 3rd Volunteer Cavalry or the 1st Mounted Rifles so if there is a connection to these units, it remains unknown. Regardless, this cover also couldn't be delivered and was returned to Rochester but in this case without a Postage Due affixed. The consensus on Richard Frajola's Philamercury Message Board is that the clerk in Xenia errantly applied the *Unclaimed* handstamp and (correctly) the Pointing Hand and placed the cover back into the mail stream. Richard mentioned that oftentimes postage due mail was returned in bulk where a stack of returned letters would only have the postage due stamps applied to the top cover of a batch possibly explaining why this envelope had none affixed, or that a Due was affixed but fell off over time (although there is no indication of that on this cover; usually one can tell if this were the case by seeing gum remnants).

The back of this cover is shown in **Figure 5** where a Rochester arrival marking can be seen. Note also the set off of a one-cent Postage Due just to the left of the CDS, and a Bank Note stamp in the upper left corner, both of which likely occurred during extended storage of this cover at the Cavalry Association.



**Figure 5.** Rear of envelope showing a Rochester, N.Y. receiving circular date stamp.

As far as the Cavalry Association itself goes, little information could be found about them online, but most certainly this was the Veteran's Association for the 3d Cavalry. Emily Morry of the Local History & Genealogy Division, Central Library of Rochester and Monroe County was kind of enough to reply to an inquiry and wrote:

*"Your assumption seems to be correct. The 3d Volunteer Cavalry Association appears to have been a veterans' association. I found two articles in old issues of the Rochester Union and Advertiser newspaper that have led me to this conclusion. The first article from June 17, 1891 (**Figure 6**) discusses a reunion of veterans of the 3d Cavalry in Rochester, which makes mention of an upcoming "election of officers." An article in the same paper the following day (June 18, 1891), discusses this election of officers of the 3d Cavalry and the list includes Col. S.C. Pierce as Secretary (**Figure 7**). That is the same name that appears as secretary of the 3d Cavalry Association on the envelope you sent a photo of. So, although the word "association" is not explicitly mentioned in either article, I think it is safe to assume that these veterans of the 3d Cavalry (including Col. Pierce) were being elected to positions in a veteran association."*

So, there it is. Two nifty covers along with the usual cooperation and collaboration between postal history experts, collectors, and historians have made for another enjoyable adventure, and that's what this hobby is all about!

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Figure 6.

**DAY, JUNE 17, 1891.**

**THIRD NEW YORK CAVALRY**

**SURVIVING MEMBERS ENJOYING THEIR ELEVENTH ANNUAL REUNION.**

**The Veterans in Attendance—An Interesting Programme—A Letter of Regret From an Old Commander Relating Prison Experiences.**

The eleventh annual reunion of the surviving members of the Third New York Cavalry is in progress this afternoon at the New Osburn House. The following is a list of the veterans and their friends in attendance:

James A. Aills, Syracuse; T. Averill, Lakerville; W. C. Barber and wife, Albion; John Benson and wife, Middleport; J. A. Benack, Troy; H. P. Brewster and son, Irondequoit; Elijah Collister, Rochester; M. W. Coon and wife, De Ruyter; J. A. Carpenter, Lockport; F. E. Cohen, Sawyer; E. P. Clark, wife and son, Baldwinsville; William H. Cornell and family, Suspension Bridge; Mrs. C. L. Doty and son, Syracuse; J. M. Evans, Utica; C. E. Foote, Kalamazoo, Mich.; John H. Gultch, Syracuse; John C. Gnascoln, North Hamlin; J. O. Green, Ray; S. M. Hood and wife, Knowlesville; J. Hamilton and daughter, Rochester; E. W. Blossom, Sterling, Ill.; Thomas Smith, Rochester; John Sutphin and wife, Brockport; W. H. Quackenbush and wife, Holley; H. P. Todd, Spencerport; C. M. Webster and wife, Parma; H. C. Whitman and son, Oneonta; L. C. Wells; Howell, Mich.; L. M. Wooden, J. M. Wilson, Rochester; A. Williamson, Preble; S. H. Smith, Lockport; John Bisgood, H. H. Smith, M. H. Smith, Rochester; H. A. Cooley, Lockport; Geo. Kutz and wife, C. M. Griffin, Rochester; John Byron, C. Meyer, Rochester; D. Gossert, Waynesboro, Pa.; C. J. Humphrey, Chicago; E. H. Jewell and wife, Homer; H. J. Knapp and wife, Fayetteville; Frank Kingsley, Rochester; J. S. Kenyon, W. H. Low and family, Syracuse; Wm. Dinahart, Copake; M. Leyden, wife and daughter, Rochester; E. C. Markham, Chicago; Charles Noble and family, Spencerport; J. B. Pettengill, Knowlesville; S. C. Pierce, Rochester; James Roberts and family, Albion; H. D. Ransier and wife, Menominee, Wis.; G. W. Reynolds and wife, Bushnell's Basin; C. R. Jordan, Middleport; A. L. Kasuff, Cleveland, O.; M. M. Sperry and family, Rochester; H. G. Spafford, Spencerport; M. L. Scoville, Mt. Morris; John Jenkins, Rochester; S. S. Hills, Knowlesville; George Bourne, Brockport; George Rockfellow, Brockport; B. N. Hurd, Syracuse; James R. Chamberlain, Rochester; Frank Griswold, Holley; E. N. Gillette, Oak Orchard Creek; George Dayo, Brockport; H. Epple, Spencerport; John Sparr, Batavia; E. B. Wood and daughter, Rochester.

Dinner was furnished by Landlord Almy at 12 o'clock, and soon afterward the boys adjourned to the hall for business. Officers will be elected and Col. Pierce will read an essay on his capture and experience in rebel prisons. Music will be furnished and impromptu speeches will be made. Numerous letters of regret were read from those members unable to attend. Among these letters was one from Gen. A. V. Kautz of Washington, D. C., who was commander of one of the cavalry divisions under Sheridan.

Figure 7.

**Cavalrymen's Reunion.**

At the afternoon session of the Third New York Cavalry at the New Osburn House yesterday the following officers for the ensuing year were elected: President, Henry J. Knapp, Fayetteville; vice-presidents, Company A, C. A. Webster, Parma; company B, H. D. Ransier, Menominee, Wis.; company C, M. H. Smith, Rochester; company D, C. E. Foote, Kalamazoo, Mich.; company E, George C. Gibbs, Stamford; company F, F. E. Cahoon, Carlton; company G, H. C. Whitman, Oneonta; company H, John H. Wilson, Rochester; company I, A. W. Wood, Brewerton; company K, Daniel Gossert, Waynesboro, Penn.; company L, C. H. Miller, Dayton, O.; company M, John Bisgood, Rochester; chaplain, Rev. Robert Garry, Lockport, and J. B. Pettengill, Knowlesville; secretary, Col. S. C. Pierce, Rochester; treasurer, Maurice Leyden, Rochester.

A committee consisting of B. N. Hurd and H. H. Smith, were appointed to prepare resolutions on the deaths of the year. They reported as follows:

Since our meeting one year ago several of our members whom we have been accustomed to meet at our annual reunions, have been summoned by the Grand Commander to make their final report. They have received the reward promised those who have fought the good fight. As the years go by and comrade after comrade falls out of our ranks, we do not forget them, but ever keep their memory green in our hearts.

The matter of time and place of the next meeting was left with the secretary and treasurer.



## ***A BRIEF LOOK AT FREE FRANKING DURING THE STAMPLESS PERIOD WITH EXAMPLES FROM NEW YORK STATE***

**By: George McGowan**

“On December 8, 1775, Charles Thomson, Secretary of all the Continental Congresses made the following entry in the Rough Journals of the Continental Congress, ‘On motion made, RESOLVED, that all letters to and from Delegates of the united Colonies, during the sessions of Congress, pass and be carried free of postage, the members having engaged upon their honor not to frank or enclose any letter but their own’ (1)

Thus began a long, sometimes controversial, always interesting history of free franking in the United States. Eventually, free franking privileges would be extended to Presidents, Presidents Secretaries, Widows of Presidents, Postmasters General, Assistant Postmaster Generals, 2nd Ass’t P.M.G. Contracts, 3rd Ass’t P.M.G. Finance, and various executive, legislative, military officials, and soldiers. (2)

Critics of the free franking privileges called it financially wasteful, said it was open to widespread abuse, claimed incumbency advantage, and accused users of carrying on unofficial business. On the positive side, “The postmaster free frank bolstered the post office as the focus of commerce and intelligence. Before the 1845 restriction of his franking privilege to official business, the postmaster could receive newspapers (since 1799, and restricted to one daily newspaper or equivalent since 1825) and send and receive letters and packets weighing less than 1/2 ounce (since 1794) free of postage” (3)

The many postal reforms started the 1840’s included franking privileges. Over the following years up to the present, restrictions were lifted, granted, and lifted again for various individuals and officials and probably will be modified again in the future.

**Figure 1.** Free franking privileges for postmasters included both letters from, and to the individual. Most “free” letters addressed to postmasters had nothing to do with official business. Pictured here is an 1844 folded letter from



Schenectady to the postmaster at Charlton, (Saratoga Co.), J. A. Sweatman, Esq. concerning delivery of a small packet, truly official business. Notice the PM of Charlton is a lawyer. It was not unusual for lawyers with political connections to get themselves appointed P.M. Their business correspondence then could pass through the mail “free”.



**Figure 2.** An 1843 folded letter from Silas Wright, Albany, to Oswego, marked "free". He was a US Senator at this time, (1843). Silas Wright was in the New York State Senate from 1824 to 1827, a US Senator from New York from 1833 to 1844 and 14th Governor from New York from 1845 to 1846.



**Figure 3.** A "free" 1817 folded letter from the Commissioner of the Revenue to United States Attorney Roger Skinner at Albany. The letter was forwarded to Sandy Hill, (Washington Co.). The letter concerns "a delay in the appointment of a Deputy District Attorney for this quarter".



**Figure 4.** An envelope from Erastus Corning I MC (Member of Congress) to a Joseph Bates, Potters Hollow, (Albany Co.). The postmark is Albany, Oct 4, 1859. Erastus Corning I was born in Norwich, Ct. in 1794, founder of the Albany State Bank, was Mayor of Albany from 1834 to 1837, and a member of Congress from 1857 to 1859 and 1861 to 1863. He is responsible for the joining of ten small railroads into the New York Central Railroad.

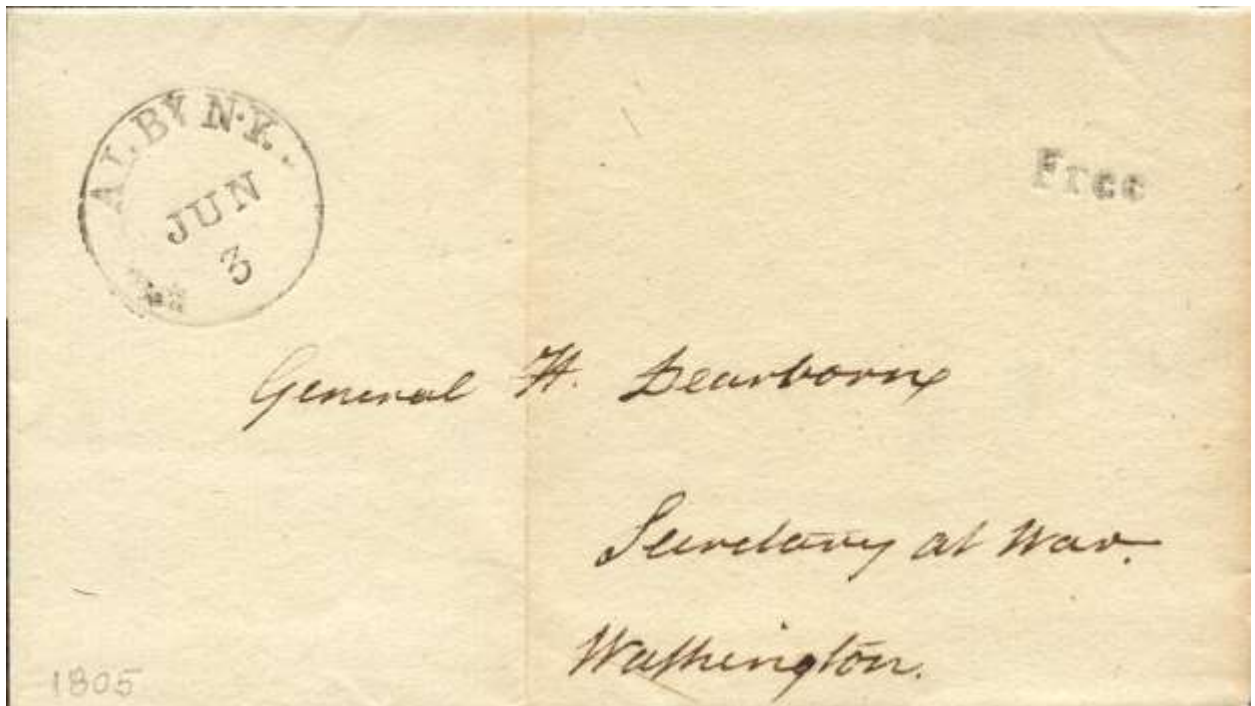


**Figure 5.**

This folded letter is marked “military”, and signed free, Rufus King, adj. gen. At this time, 1842, Rufus King was the Adjutant General of New York. The letter pertains to a National Military Convention to be held in Baltimore. This Rufus King was born in 1814 and died in 1876. He was a graduate

of West Point, and during the Civil War was commander of a division in I corps, Army of the Potomac. In 1862 he began to experience epileptic fits and was replaced by Abner Doubleday. He subsequently resigned his commission. He was later appointed minister to the Roman Papal States. His father, also Rufus King was Federalist candidate for Vice President in 1804 and 1808 and candidate for President in 1816.





**Figure 6.** This 1805 folded letter from ALBy N.Y. is stamped “free” and addressed to General H. Dearborn, Secretary at War, Washington. Henry Dearborn was Secretary of War under Thomas Jefferson for eight years. During the War of 1812 he was a Major General in the US Army.



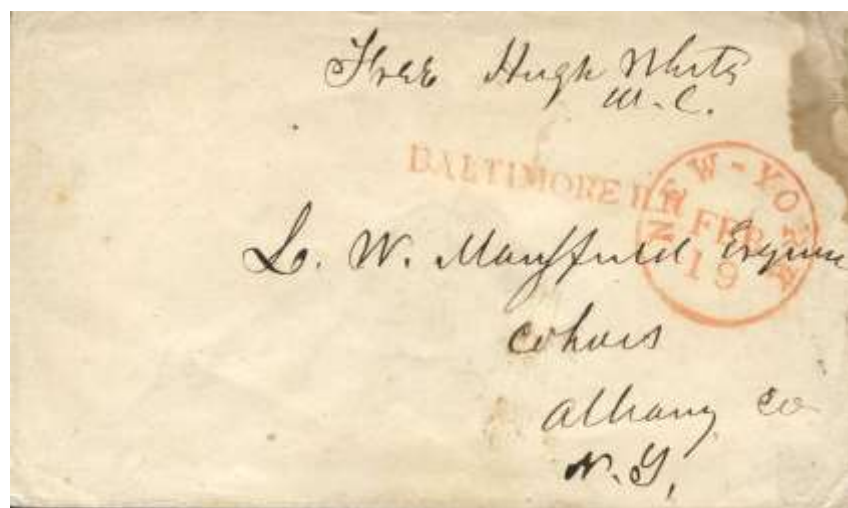
**Figure 7.** This 1816 folded letter has a straight line cancel from Whitehall (Washington Co.) and is franked “free” John Bliss, PM. It is addressed to Captain Adam Partridge, US Engineers, West Point. The letter is from one friend to another.



**Figure 8.** This folded letter is from Oswego, is stamped “free” and is signed W. Duer, MC. It is addressed to Ambrose Jordan, Atty. Genl. William Duer (1805 - 1879) moved to Oswego in 1836 and entered the New York Assembly in 1840. He became a member of Congress in 1847 - 1851 as a Whig. From 1851 to 1853 he was consul to Chili, appointed by President Fillmore. Ambrose L. Jordan became a New York State Senator in 1826 and served until 1829. In 1845 he was leading counsel for the defense in the Anti-Rent War trial. He was the first New York State Attorney General elected by popular ballot under the new state constitution. He rests in Hudson, NY.

**Figure 9.**

This envelope is signed “free Hugh White M.C.” Hugh White was born in Oneida Co. in 1798 and died in Saratoga Co. in 1870. He was a Representative from New York from 1845 to 1851. The letter, probably originating in Washington, DC, traveled via the Baltimore Railroad to

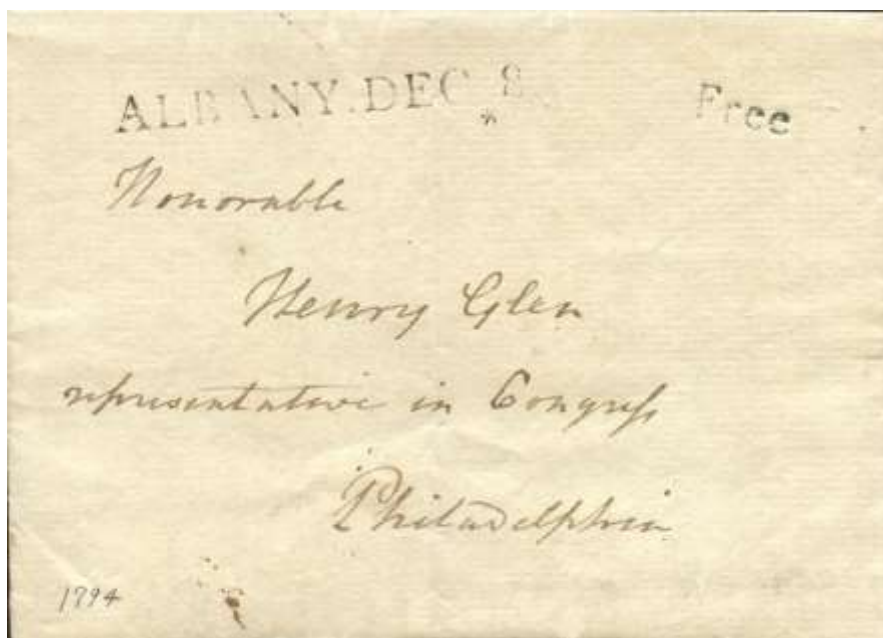


NYC and then on to Cohoes, (Albany Co.). This Railroad marking is frequently seen on covers addressed to points beyond New York City.





**Figure 10.** Postmarked Washington DC, this folded letter is signed free, N. P. Tallmadge. Nathaniel Pitcher Tallmadge was born in Chatham, (Columbia Co.). He was United States Senator from New York from 1833 to 1839 and 1840 to 1844. He later became the 3rd Governor of Wisconsin Territory.



**Figure 11.** This 1794 folded letter is posted “free” because it is addressed to a “representative in Congress” one Henry Glen. He was a Federalist representative from New York’s 8th District. Born in Schenectady, he served as deputy quartermaster general during the Revolutionary War. He served in the Congress from 1793 to 1801.




**Figure 12.** This folded letter is stamped “free” and is addressed to the Honorable John Van Allen. Born in Kinderhook, (Columbia Co.) Van Allen served as a member of the US House of Representatives from 1793 to 1799. He rests in North Greenbush, (Ren. Co.).

References:

- (1) Stevens, Theodore A., American Stampless Catalog 3rd edition, 1978 page 273
- (2) IBID pages 274-276
- (3) DeBlois, Diane and Harris, Robert Dalton, Postmaster as Commercial Agent

5TH ANNUAL





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## ***DETERMINING POSTMARK SCARCITY:*** ***Not to be Regarded as a Definitive Treatment***

**By: Douglas Penwell**

Any collector of postal history that has been active for some time has a good idea of what is available in their collecting area and what is scarce. Town cancel collectors, especially those wishing to acquire a marking from a set of specific towns (or geographic area), pay particular attention to this (these) metric(s).

There are several ways to approach or approximate the concept of scarcity. Each consideration or metric will be given a brief overview.

1. Years of operation for a post office.
2. Postmaster compensation.
3. Mail routes and frequency of dispatch.
4. The (political) nature of postmaster appointments.
5. The ways in which postal history was and is saved or archived.
6. The economic development in a given state, county, town or other area.
7. Businesses seeking to reduce their postage costs.
8. The proximity of a larger post office or one in a more easily accessed location.

**Years of operation:** This is probably the most frequently used scarcity metric, and as any other one can be, potentially misleading. In a town with a long period of operation or one that continues to operate today, the number of surviving artifacts from that office may be small. In contrast, a discontinued post office (DPO) with a short period of operation may have had a large quantity of mail saved. Any collector can cite examples of these criteria from their collecting specialty. In some cases, the factors leading to the discontinuance of a small post office could or could not have had a correlating effect on the number of postal history items that were postmarked there or continue to survive today.

Gaps in the dates of operation can be a problem. Some people regard these different periods as worthy of collecting, specifically in trying to obtain a postmark that falls within each individual period. This writer regards gaps of less than six months to be subject to interpretation. It is more likely that a postmaster appointment was delayed in being recorded than that the office actually ceased operation. The farther back in time a post office was established, the longer it took for Washington to be notified that the office was in existence. This may have included the name of the postmaster that had been appointed and the exact date. With our modern quartz and atomic regulated clocks and an increase in the knowledge of what calendars and time pieces tell us, we are much more conscious of “exact time” than they were. There may be no way to tell when a post office was established or who served as postmaster with a high degree of confidence. We are completely dependent of old records, many of which predate any form of electronic communication. Of course, the letter books from an office would be instrumental in resolving any discrepancies. Also, of course, the vast majority of them are not available.

Checklists showing dates of operation (some with arbitrarily assigned scarcity values or rankings) are widely used today. As late as the 1980's, there were no such guides in common use. Various collectors may be familiar with the LaPosta checklists, first published for Western

States. Later on, these were collected together in regional guides (there were a total of eight published) with post offices listed alphabetically regardless of state. Many stamp and cover dealers use these as a pricing guide, especially when they are not familiar with a given market. The prices in these guides are largely subjective, and may not be an indicator of any objective measure of scarcity.

**Postmaster compensation:** This information is available in Official Registers of the US Government and were typically published biennially. Prior to 1830, they may be found with the distance from Washington DC. In some cases, the postmaster may have been compensated less than \$10.00 for an entire year! This information does have value after 1856 when prepayment was made compulsory. In the pre-adhesive era, this data can be very misleading as the majority of small town mail was sent collect. Since PM compensation was based solely on actual revenue at the originating office, all mail sent collect would be excluded from that total. Sadly to say, a great volume of mail could be sent collect and the only way anyone will ever know is when an actual cover shows up someplace. Many institutional holdings contain entire political, family or business correspondences that will never become available in the philatelic marketplace. The apparent scarcity derived from having never seen a marking from a particular post office may be entirely skewed when this factor is taken into consideration.

**Mail routes and frequency of dispatch:** The location of a post office in geographic terms is also a major factor in determining scarcity. If an office was on a contract route that only had mail pickup infrequently, patrons may have chosen to have their mail carried to a larger office with daily dispatches. Any letter writer within a small or reasonable distance from a large city would probably make this calculation. This will be discussed again in the last category. It is also possible for the writer of a letter to add to the letter right up to the time the mails closed at their local post office. This author has seen references to this practice in numerous 19<sup>th</sup> century pieces. Considering the charges for postage that were based on distance in the pre-adhesive period, fitting in as much as possible made great financial sense. A good way to determine the relationship between the place a letter was written and where it was (chosen to be) mailed from would be the heading of the letter. If you have access to a correspondence, you might be able to establish a definitive relationship between the closest office accessible and the one most frequently used.

**The (political) nature of postmaster appointments:** Postmasterships were considered part of the political spoils system. When a different party took control of Congress or the White House, local men that had been loyal to the party coming into power could be expected to be rewarded. A local business owner could be highly motivated to seek a postmastership if drawing patrons to his business would be aided by having the post office at the same location. Although no reference to post office size has been directly correlated with these political practices, the limits on compensation of \$2000.00 per year were greatly above the median income well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Accordingly, larger post offices would naturally have the greatest competition. A postmaster at a smaller post office may have had his eye on “moving up” to a larger office with greater economic potential.

How could politics affect scarcity? The post office was a social gathering place especially in smaller towns. There may have been no other place to meet (except the local church). Social standing and politics may have also affected the way people in the community viewed their local postmaster. It is not unreasonable to conclude that in some cases a patron may have preferred to have his mail handled by an individual with similar political or religious views, or perhaps even a similar measure of social status. This writer has read several letters where the

local residents were attempting to remove a local PM. Their chances of success would have largely been a matter of political influence.

**The ways in which postal history was and is saved or archived:** Many collectors have been puzzled when finding multiple examples of markings from a discontinued office, or the lack thereof (especially in certain periods) from offices that continue to operate to the present day. If one is familiar with PM compensation, in many cases there are records that show a postmaster might have collected hundreds of dollars in a single calendar year. If there was a local business, this could have provided a great incentive for correspondence to be saved. The same can be said about family correspondence. Any collector of NY State material has seen examples written to the NY State Comptroller in Albany or perhaps to the Canal Department. Collectors of Otsego County should surely be familiar with the H. Scott correspondence (he was a banker in Cooperstown). Since only a small fraction of letters has been saved, we will never know the exact reasons for the decision to save or to destroy a letter with any high degree of accuracy.

Then there is the educational or institutional archive. In some cases, the majority of items from a local post office or specific geographic area may have been from a limited number of families or correspondences. If these items were or are donated to a college, university or local historical society, the number of items available to the philatelic marketplace could be limited, extremely small or non-existent. This is more accurately labeled apparent scarcity or relative scarcity. It is not uncommon to see very little from a certain place only to have a large discovery come along at some point. One must be careful not to assign value based on limited information. Some items are held back, making the relative scarcity appear much greater.

**The economic development in a given state, county, town or other area:** Letters were the only means of long distance communication prior to the invention and development of the telegraph. Even then, telegrams would still be written communication with the travel time and distance *merely diminished* by wires. Whether for business or personal reasons, the written word (in a classic sense, not including the way we write today) was essential. All information was transmitted that way and as an area developed, so would the means of communication. As a given area increased in population, so too would the amount of mail coming out of that area. As written previously, compensation to the PM was dependent on the volume of *paid mail* originating from a given P.O. Economic development would directly affect the financial means of support for a local post office. This does not consider the factors that could either promote the continuing operation of a smaller local P.O. or lead to its' discontinuance. Local historians could provide better insight into those factors.

**Businesses seeking to reduce their postage costs:** Many postal historians are familiar with the establishment of post offices in the 1890's whose operation was very short-lived. It is however, largely unknown that many businesses established post offices on their premises with the outright goal of reducing their postage expenses. This writer is familiar with several offices in Monroe County associated with the thriving nursery (horticultural) businesses there. If your employee was designated as PM, you could either deduct their compensation from that provided by the Post Office Department, or have it go back into the business entirely. Many of these small offices were forced out of business with the advent of Rural Free Delivery (RFD) service. It would be useful to learn about the way the RFD carrier interacted with the postmaster at the office to which he (or she) was attached. Did the local PM have any influence with selecting rural carriers?

**The proximity of a larger post office or one in a more easily accessed location:** As written in an earlier paragraph, proximity to a post office and the frequency of mail dispatches



could be a major factor in deciding where to place your letter(s) into the mails. The weather could also be a significant factor here. If the weather was cold, wet or hot, why not let your local PM handle your mail in these adverse conditions? Of course, we must consider what an individual letter writer was thinking and how important it may have been to get the information to the recipient. Our standards of comfort are vastly different from the majority of 19<sup>th</sup> (or early 20<sup>th</sup> Century) letter writers. We can make a call or send a text or e-mail from the safety of our homes, a luxury they did not have. If a writer sent his letter from a larger post office, this obviously would contribute to making markings from smaller post offices much scarcer. Please see the category about frequency of dispatch, certainly a significant consideration if you wanted to get the news to a family member with the greatest speed possible.

The considerations and ideas discussed in this article may or may not have an effect on pricing in the philatelic marketplace. Without going into the problems with conventional theories concerning supply and demand, if an area is popular or a dealer / auction house can convince a buyer that an item is scarce, the price may be much higher. There are many “economically advantaged” collectors in the market that can influence prices for the average collector. This author leaves it to the collectors for a given geographic area to determine which factors they wish to consider when determining the relative scarcity of any particular item of postal history.

In the late 1990’s, this author wrote an article in the *American Philatelist* entitled “Pricing Postal History”. What was written then still holds true today. In any given market, if there is much competition or the collector is known to the leading dealers, it may be wise to find another specialty.

We have all picked up things thinking they were scarce, only later to discover the item in question may have been much more common than originally thought.

Some postal historians start a “new” collection without making anyone aware of this change in area of focus. In this way, they can accumulate material without anyone knowing what the new specialty is. Another method is to have a friend purchase something for you.

This article was influenced, to no small extent, by discussions with Robert Dalton Harris of *aGatherin*. His publication on postal contracts and routes in New York State is a valuable publication that has been largely ignored and overlooked. This writer is thankful to Mr. Harris for the many discussions that led to the publication of these ideas.

The writer of this article encourages discussion about the topics covered here, with an eye on making the determination of scarcity an easier task. Please e-mail with comments and questions.

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## **1808 CHENANGO HAND CARRIED LETTER**

**By: David E. Williams**

Over the past six or seven years, I have been lucky enough to purchase many covers for my Broome County, New York collection and web site. Since I have been working on an exhibit *The Postal Markings of Binghamton, New York During the Stampless Period: 1830 – 1863*, covers from Binghamton were given the most attention to detail, while others were just mostly set aside for further examination.

This past winter I decided it was time to go through a mass of around 200 covers in the “set aside” pile, scan them, enter them into my county database and put the most interesting on my web site. That was when I ran across this seemingly unremarkable folded letter seen in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** Front of the folded letter. Note the lack of postal markings.

After scanning the front of the letter, I opened it and started to notice some interesting details. The letter was datelined “Chenango June 8<sup>th</sup> 1808. It was sent to a Richard Harrison, Esquire in New York City by a gentleman by the name of Balth’ DeHaert. The sender’s name jumped out at me. Balthazar DeHaert was hired in 1794 by William Bingham of Philadelphia to oversee Bingham’s lands on both sides of the Susquehanna River in New York State, purchased in 1786. These lands included the area of the present day Broome County and Binghamton (which was named after William).

Seeing the DeHaert name also reminded me that I possess another folded letter from him to a different gentleman in Philadelphia datelined Chenango, Nov. 24, 1799. This letter bears a controversial early circular date stamp of Union, NY, which I continue to research, and a manuscript “25” both of which would indicate that it travelled through the mail stream; but that story is reserved for a later time.

Back to our current letter, the lack of postal markings would indicate that it was hand carried to its recipient in some way outside the mail stream. The letter itself offers the answer as to how this letter was transported. An image of the letter can be seen in **Figure 2**.

Richard Harrison Esq.  
 Dear Sir,

Chenango June 8<sup>th</sup> 1800

As W. Lawrence Mersereau is going to New York to settle a debt due from the estate of the late Joshua Mersereau Esq. due to Columbia College, I must beg leave to introduce him to you as he may require your advice and assistance therein. He will particularly inform you of the situation of himself and brother Cornelius with respect to that debt and I must request particularly that you will use your endeavours to get justice done with regard to what he will state to you.

I am D.<sup>A</sup>S.<sup>n</sup> with great respect  
 your most obed.<sup>t</sup>  
 humble Ser.<sup>t</sup>  
 Balth. De Haert

**Figure 2.** Contents of DeHaert's letter to Richard Harrison, Esq.

The letter reads:

"Richard Harrison Esq  
 Dear Sir,

"Chenango June 8<sup>th</sup> 1808

As W. Lawrence Mersereau is going to New York to settle a debt due from the estate of the late Joshua Mersereau Esq due to Columbia College, I must beg leave to introduce him to you as he may require your advice and assistance therein. He will particularly inform you of the situation of himself and brother Cornelius with respect to that debt and I must request particularly that you will use your endeavour to get justice done with regard to what he will state to you.

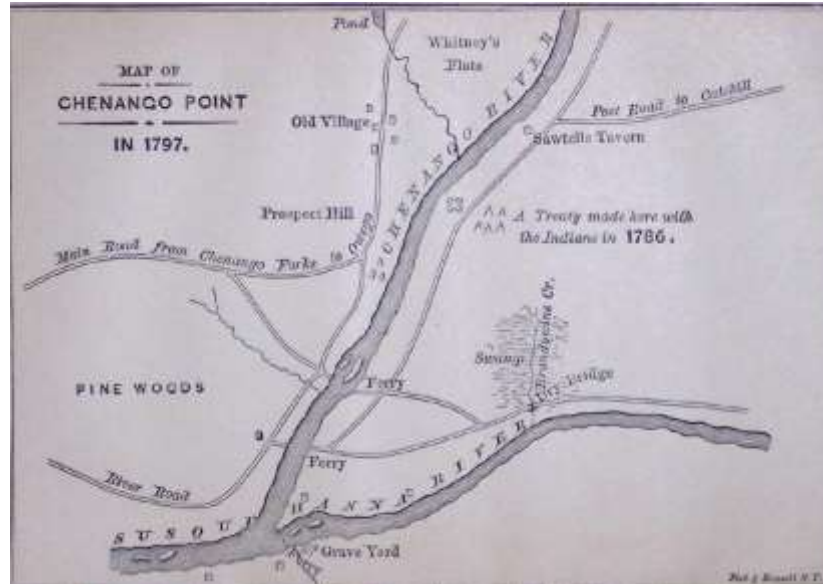
I am

D.<sup>A</sup>S.<sup>n</sup>

with great respect  
 your most obed<sup>t</sup>  
 humble Ser.<sup>t</sup>  
 Balth. De Haert"

It seems pretty obvious that this letter was carried by W. Lawrence Mersereau to Mr. Harrison and served as a means of introduction of the first party to the second. So now let's examine this correspondence from a geographical and postal history perspective.

By the date of this letter, we can determine that it was sent from Broome County, since Broome County was taken off of Tioga County on March 28, 1806. The next question becomes where is Chenango in Broome County. There was a Chenango post office, but it was not established until January 30, 1855.



Examining a map of Chenango Point from 1797, we see on the west side of the Chenango River the “Old Village”. This is the original village established around 1887 by the Whitney family. Whitney established a post office here in 1795 or 1796 under the name of Union. By 1800 Joshua Whitney had laid out a new town at the confluence of the Chenango and Susquehanna Rivers. The Union post office was moved downriver, becoming the Chenango Point post office on April 1, 1803. It remained as Chenango Point when Broome County was formed until it became the Binghamton post office on May 29, 1830.

So why would the dateline of the letter say “Chenango” instead of “Chenango Point”? By 1808, most of the important businesses (mills, stores, bakeries, courts and law offices) had relocated to the new village established in the area of the joining of the Susquehanna and Chenango Rivers. However, the old village resided in what was then known as the Town of Union, while Chenango Point was located in the Town of Chenango.

So it is possible that Mr. DeHaert used Chenango to denote the township rather than the post office. A second possibility is that he simply used the name of the old village. Research by Broome County historians has made note that early residents used several different names for this early settlement. Chenango Point, Union, Chenango and Binghamton were often used coincidentally by residents. What really matters to us postal historians is the significance of finding a new item to add to our collections and trying to solve the puzzles presented by such a piece.

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## ***AN ALBANY NY PATENT CANCEL***

**By: George McGowan**



According to Fred Schmalzriedt, we in the philatelic world call any cancel using scarifying, cutting or mutilating of the postage stamp; thus giving the surface greater ability to absorb the canceling ink, a patent cancellation. In fact, with the many patents awarded for all kinds of postmarking devices preventing the reuse of postage stamps, it is a mystery that the term “patent” should be restricted to one type of instrument (Richard Graham).

As the time approached when postage stamps were mandatory for all mail, (Jan 1st. 1856) some postal employees became obsessed with the possibility that large numbers of stamps would be cleaned and reused. In 1859, Marcus P Norton of Troy, NY patented the first of his many duplex style hand stamps that were intended to solve this problem. Curiously, in his 1863 annual report, Postmaster General Montgomery Blair wrote that it wasn't believed “the department ever suffered any considerable loss from the use of washed or restored stamps.” With the introduction of grilling, in 1867, patent cancels fell out of favor.



**Figure 2.** The Albany cancel described herein is believed to be a later (1862) Norton patent #37,175, (Delf Norona). The key to this device is a small cylinder in the center of the cork which is intended to cut out a small portion of the stamp. This is an example of this cancel. Looking closely one can see the removed piece is still attached.

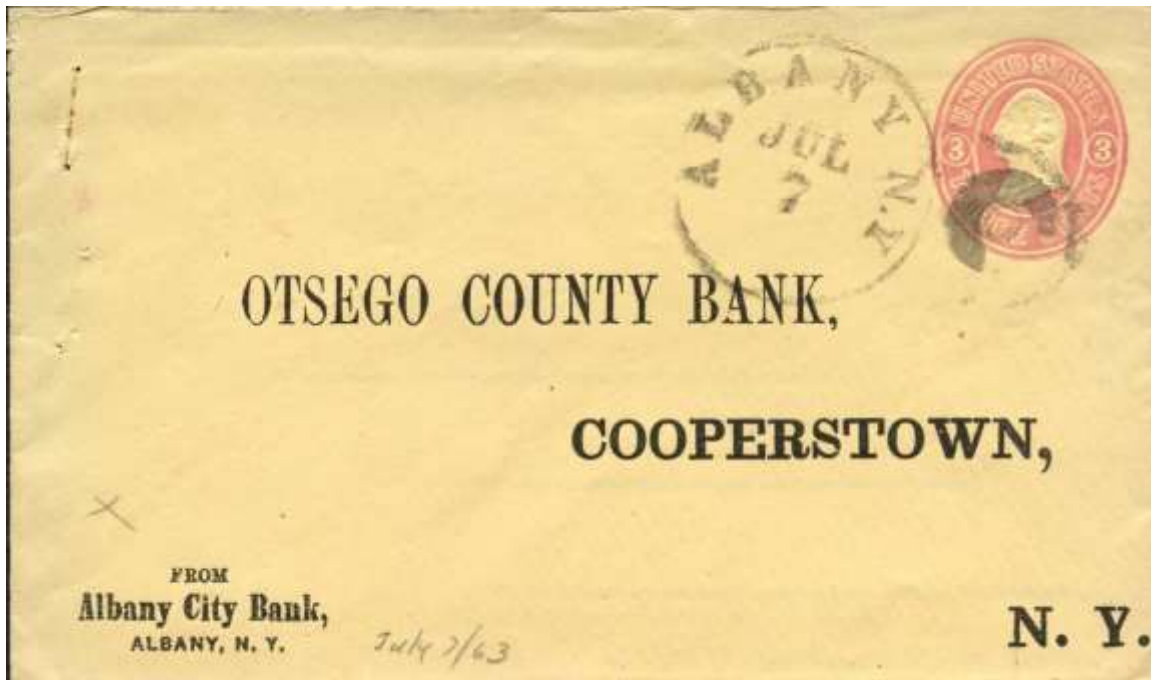
Here are some of my observations after inspecting dozens of this patent cancel. Most are used in 1863. Buffalo and Rochester used a very similar cancel during the same period. The cork



wear was substantial (and expected). Examples have complete spheres (with the cylinder in the middle) to four part quartered spheres, to various rosettes. The cylinder intended to cut the stamp dulled easily. I have seen only one example cut correctly and only two examples with a minor “dent”. This can be seen in Figure 3. I also suspect that if the cylinder was projecting a bit far, the public would frown if their contents were delivered holed.



**Figure 3.**



**Figure 4.** An example showing some of the metal rim supporting the cork. (seen also on Figure 1)

Seen below are some additional nice examples of this patent cancel.



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## ***POST OFFICE OFFICIAL BUSINESS***

**By: David Williams**

As I mentioned in an earlier article, that pile of some 200 Broome County “set asides” contained some interesting items. One such item is seen in **Figure 1**. It is addressed to the Postmaster at Chenango Forks, New York. Of real interest however is the manuscript notation at the top right of the folded letter; “Auditor office / P.O.D.”.



**Figure 1.** Front of a letter sent by the Post Office Department to the Chenango Forks postmaster.

In today’s world, one might be very concerned to be receiving a piece of mail from the government that had any implications of an audit. After all it is close to the tax deadline! So exactly what reason would the Post Office Department be auditing the Chenango Forks postmaster?

Before we delve into the contents of said correspondence, let’s make a final observation about the front of the letter. There are no town or rate markings denoted. The lack of rate markings makes sense. We should know that at the time of this mailing mail sent by or to postmasters could be sent at no charge. However, the fact that this letter originated with a government agency is more likely the reason for being sent free of charge and without some kind of “FREE” designation.

Okay, so let us now open the letter and examine the contents. A scan of the inside appears in **Figure 2** on the next page.

The top of the letter simply states “**POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT**”. The date is seen as “Oct 1837” and the salutation reads “To Postmaster at *Chenango Forks N.Y.*”. The opening paragraph tells us the purpose of the letter. It was to inform the postmaster that he was required



to forward his quarterly accounts to the department with two days of the close of each quarter; in this case 30<sup>th</sup> of September.

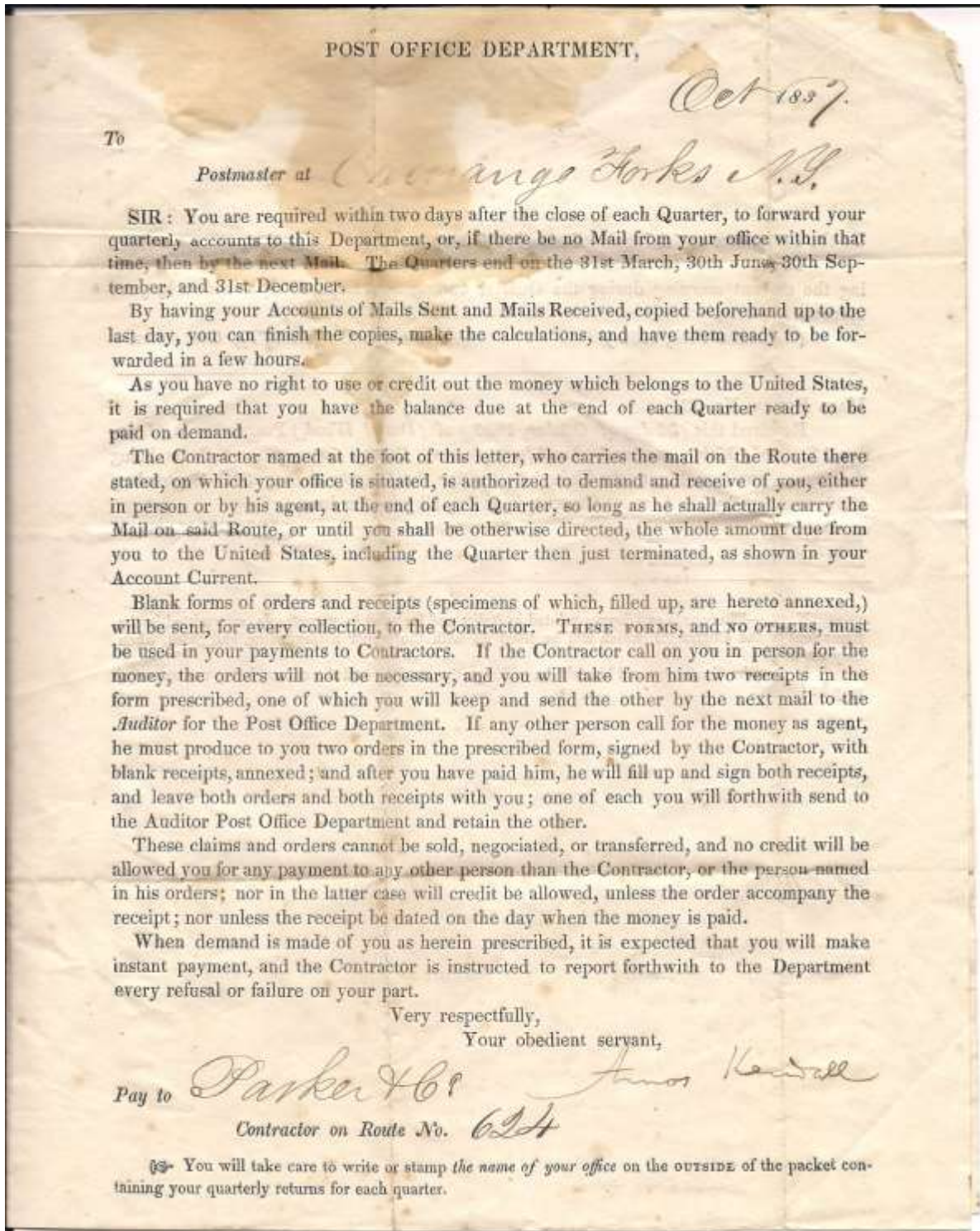


Figure 2. The content is a document dealing with quarterly accounting procedures.

The next paragraph of substantial interest is the fourth paragraph. It states:

*“The contractor named at the foot of this letter, who carries the mail on the Route there stated, on which your office is situated, is authorized to demand and receive of you, either in person or by his agent, at the end of each Quarter, so long as he shall actually carry the Mail on said Route, or until you shall be otherwise directed, the whole amount due from you to the United States, including the Quarter then just terminated, as shown in your Account Current.”*

The following three paragraphs indicate the procedures for payment and reporting thereof by both the postmaster and the contractor. The letter is signed by Amos Kendall.

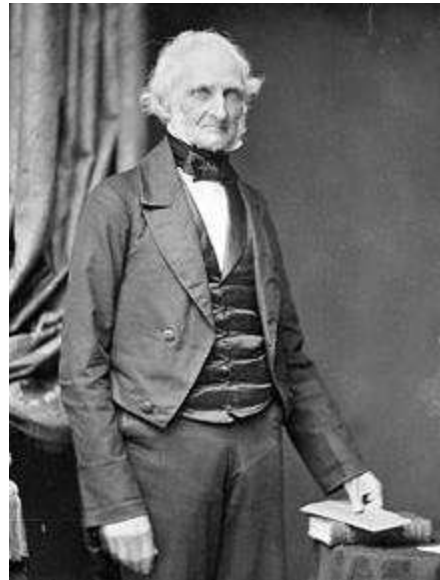
The next line states who the contractor was and what postal route he held the contract for. The postal route also tells us the route that the Chenango Forks post office was on. In this case it was Route No. 624. The contractor for this route was Parker & Co.

A search of the *United States Official Postal Guide* for 1837 shows that the postmaster of Chenango Forks at that time was John B. Rodgers. John Rodgers was the first postmaster of Chenango Forks, having been appointed upon the establishment of the post office on September 1, 1825. Records show he served as postmaster for thirty years. Mr. Rodgers was also a representative from Broome County to the New York State Assembly in 1844.

So who was the sender of this letter, one Amos Kendall? It turns out the Mr. Kendall was appointed Postmaster General of the United States on May 1, 1835 by President Andrew Jackson. Due to extremely poor health, he submitted his resignation to President Martin Van Buren effective May 18, 1840.

**Figure 3.** Amos Kendall by Matthew Brady

According to information found on *Wikipedia*, Postmaster Kendall, during his stint in office, worked to eliminate corruption in the Post Office Department. However, his political side could be seen through his manipulation of operations within the Post Office. In one case he saw to it that western newspapers (which supported Jackson) were delivered faster and received better service than eastern ones. He also allowed postal workers in the deep south to refuse to deliver abolitionist literature, even though he had no legal basis for doing so. After leaving office he was sued on several occasions by postal contractors over his manipulation of postal operations. He lost one Supreme Court case, but a later case ruled that he was not personally responsible for any debt owed. Later, in 1857, he founded what would become Gallaudet University for the deaf.



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## ***LETTER TO THE EDITOR***

As Editor of *Excelsior!* I received an email from member Lewis Ellman regarding an article in the March 2015 *Excelsior!* written by Peter Peloquin entitled “I Did Not Follow the Letter of the Law”. Ellman took issue with some of the contents of the article and followed up with some insightful comments and clarifications as to the postal regulations. Below are the more pertinent comments from his email edited for brevity.

“First some background. As many people may remember there was a spate of mail bombs late in the last century (Unabomber, etc.). Even though most people only heard about the most egregious ones it was happening country wide. The USPS Inspection Service, along with the FBI and local police, was tasked with investigating and coming up with procedures to discourage potential bomb mailers. Finding some common attributes among the cases, they proposed, and the USPS adopted a number of hopefully protective measures.

Pertinent to this article was that mail bombs usually weighed over a pound (16 ounces), had no or a phony return address, were posted with stamps and not identifiable by another method such as meter or indicia. To counter this, procedures were set out for all mail over 16 ounces to be brought in person to a postal clerk at a Post Office under the assumption that a potential bomber would not want to be remembered or otherwise identified by a security camera. Also mail without a return address, so called “anonymous” mail, was not to be picked up and a removable sticker stating why to be put on it over the address. This is so that someone could not successfully slip in a potential bomb package with someone else’s mail.

These regulations were for the safety of the postal workers and the public in general. Mass mailings were done many times to all postal patrons explaining this. All collection boxes were to have an explanatory sticker and all Post Offices have posters on the subject in their lobbies and even the Priority Mail item pictured in the article on its left side #4 explains the proper procedure.

Now to be a little more specific to the article in question, a Flat Rate Priority envelope can contain almost any weight for the flat rate of the \$4.05 stamp used and during the proper time period. Considering what he indicated was inside it could and most likely did weigh over 16 ounces. However, the postal carrier carries no scale to verify the weight and since it was NOT an “anonymous” piece, as it had a return address that matched where the carrier picked it up from, there was no obvious reason not to collect it with the other mail. All mail collected at local Post Offices, either by drop box or by mail carrier, gets gathered together for processing at a distribution center with no separation done, unless accepted and cancelled at the Post Office window. It looks like when finally processed at the distribution center it was weighed, found to be over 16 ounces and with un-cancelled stamps, so obviously not properly brought by the mailer to a Post Office window clerk for acceptance, so a removable sticker was applied, once again explaining the proper procedure and the piece was sent back to the sender for proper mailing. This should have been back the next day so the premise that it took a week is also suspect to me.

Anyway, the postal employees handled the item as appropriate and it was the mailer who by ignoring the rules (even if printed right in front of him on the mail piece) was ultimately responsible for any delay.”

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## COVER OF THE ISSUE

By: David Williams



I was fortunate to be able to add this unusual mourning cover to my Binghamton exhibit last year. It is the first time I had seen a stampless cover from Binghamton that featured markings in two different colors on the same cover.

According to research by the late ESPHS member, Chester Wilcox, the 31mm circular date stamp (CDS) in blue, with "B" close to "N" and with the day over the month is seen as early as February 16, but no year noted. I have a cover dated April 19, 1851. Wilcox reported a latest date of August 12 (no year date), while I have in my possession a cover dated November 22 (again, no year date).

The 27mm PAID 3 in circle in red was not recorded by Wilcox. I now have two in my possession. The earliest is dated July 21 with no year indicated, while the latest is the August 5, again with no year date as seen above.

This cover is most assuredly from August 5, 1851. The main reason is that the prepaid rate of 3 cents per half ounce for up to and including 3,000 miles became effective on June 30, 1851. Prior to that, rates were either 5 cents for under 300 miles or 10 cents for over 300 miles. Could it be later than 1851? Possibly, however all known uses of blue ink from Binghamton, whether they be for CDS markings, "FREE" markings, or "5" and "10" rate markings are from the year 1851.

So, why did the postmaster use both blue and red ink to cancel this cover? Is it possible that the PAID 3 marking was applied when the sender paid the postage and the CDS was applied at a later time or day? If I were the one paying the postage, I would want to be sure my letter was marked as paid to insure the recipient, evidently grieving, was not burdened to pay the collect postage, which would have been 5 cents. The town marking could have been applied later along with other letters going out on August 5.