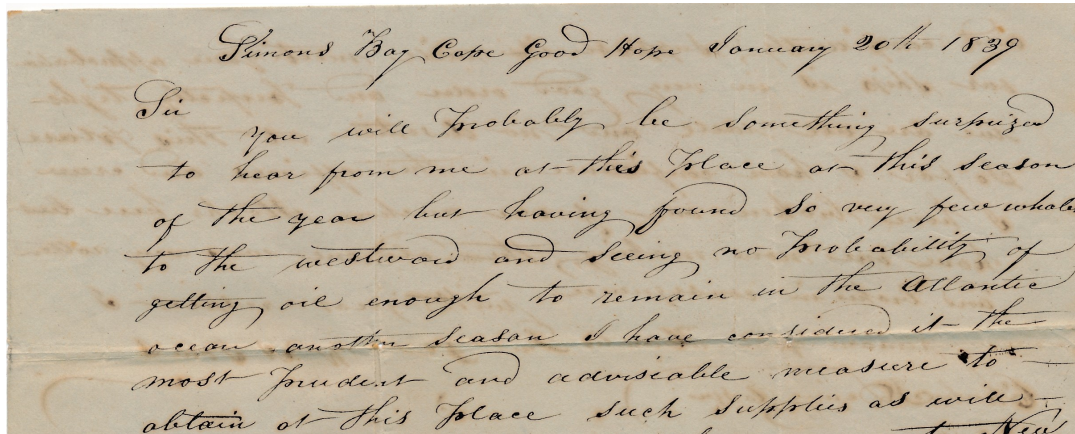


Excelsior!

September 2021

Whole No. 34 New Series



The start of an 1839 letter by a Sag Harbor whaling ship's captain writing from a South African port.

Thar's a Letter from Far Away

Folded Letter Mailed from a Whaling Ship at the Cape of Good Hope to Sag Harbor, Long Island

I first illustrated this ship cover in a 1988 issue of the journal of the now defunct Long Island Postal History Society, which was subsequently folded into the Empire State Postal History Society. Here is a slightly varied version of the original, including a brief history of the whaling ship Hamilton, its captain, William A. Jones, and the ship's owner and manager, Charles T. Dering. Society members can access most LIPHS journals and newsletters through the ESPHS website (<https://www.esphs.org/journals/long-island-postal-history-society>).

By Daniel M. Knowles, MD

The folded lettersheet in this article – datelined “Simons Bay, Cape Good Hope, January 20, 1839” – was written by ship Capt. William A. Jones and addressed to Charles T. Dering, of Sag Harbor, Long Island, about 21 miles west of Montauk on the tip of the island. The letter was docketed “Ship Hamilton” in a different hand on the reverse.

The Hamilton was owned and managed by Dering and set sail from Sag Harbor under Jones on August 9, 1838 to pursue whaling in the



A cover addressed to Charles T. Dering, of Sag Harbor, was written by Capt. William A. Jones in January 1839 while at the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa.

South Atlantic, according to “A History of the American Whale Fishery: From its Earliest Inception to the Year 1876,” by Alexander Starbuck.

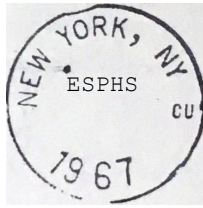
The ship returned to Sag Harbor on May 7, 1840 with 150 barrels of sperm oil and 2,200 barrels of whale oil.

This letter was written by Jones while on board the Hamilton. As was the custom, the letter likely was transferred to another whaling ship – one that was returning to New Bedford, Mass. – that Jones encountered in Simons Bay (sometimes spelled “Simon’s”), South Africa.

After 1799, private ship letters arriving from the high seas on vessels without mail-carrying contracts were received and postmarked by the post office at the port of arrival, where they were placed in the United States mail. Upon arriving in the port of New Bedford, this letter was placed in the post office, where the postmaster hand-stamped it with the New Bedford manuscript circular date-stamp and “SHIP” marking in red ink, and placed it in the mail for delivery.

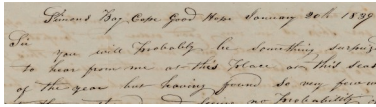
The April 1 postmark, which is 10 weeks after the letter was writ-

WHALING, PAGE 18



Excelsior!

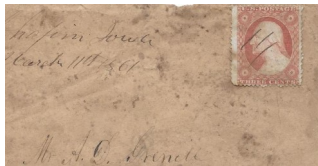
Contact: ESPHS
P.O. Box 482
E. Schodack, NY 12063-0482
www.esphs.org
www.facebook.com/
EmpireStatePostalHistorySociety



Dr. Daniel M. Knowles: A letter penned in 1839 by the captain of a whaling

ship makes its way to New York City and on to Sag Harbor.
Front cover and Page 18

Robert Bramwell: Continuing research into the postal history of Schenectady leads to the discovery of that community's likely first postmaster.
Page 3



Jim Petersen: A cover from Troy took a short trip, disappeared for more than three years, then entered the mailstream again from more than 1,000 miles away. **Page 7**



Charles J. DiComo, PhD: A cover carried by ship in 1834 from the Caribbean to New York City shows an earliest known use of a circular

date cancel. **Page 8**

Mark Fonda: A close examination of two similar stampless covers and their contents from Saratoga Springs reveal much about early education and other topics. **Page 11**



Minutes: Minutes from the annual members and board of directors meetings. **Page 17**

Society details: Officers, directors and contact information. **Page 17**

Cover Story: Ellen Rose gives us an update on the early use of the Utica blue oval cancel. **Back cover**



President's Message

September 2021

Dear Members:

In this issue of the Excelsior! you will see the minutes from our annual Members Meeting and Officers and Directors Meeting, both of which were held on June 26, 2021, via Zoom. There was good turnout by our members and leadership; with dynamic and productive discussions as we planned for the future and growth of our society.

A key item of from the Members meeting was the 2021 election of officers and directors. While nominations are still open – and I would like to hear from anyone interested – the current nominated slate follows:

President – Charles J. DiComo, PhD, 2-year term
Vice President – David Przepiora, 2-year term
Director – Brian Levy, 3-year term
Director – Jeff Stage, 3-year term
Director – Steve Kennedy, 1-year term

A key item from the officers and directors meeting was a focused discussion on the rising cost of printing our publications, which will continue to eat away at our Treasury. So, as to continue to communicate with our membership in print four times a year, and not

raise our annual dues; and maintain our social media presence via our **ESPHS.org** website and Facebook page, the board unanimously voted to print only two issues of the Bulletin per year (June and December) and maintain publishing the Excelsior! twice a year (March and September). This is effective immediately, thus the solo Excelsior! in this mailing.

Another item discussed at both meetings was the possibility of renewing the society's auction. I am pleased to inform all that Bob Bramwell is doing his due diligence and will report back to the officers and directors later this year.

Finally, I am pleased to report that the ESPHS has joined the Mid-Atlantic Federation of Postal History Societies, formed in 2020, to promote interest in postal history through the collaboration of postal history organizations, such as the Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Ohio postal societies. I am pleased to serve on the Mid-Atlantic Federation's Board of Directors representing the ESPHS.

Now, on to the September Excelsior! I know you will enjoy this issue – please consider writing a piece or two on your favorite subject.

Sincerely,

Charles J. DiComo, PhD
President, Empire State Postal History Society

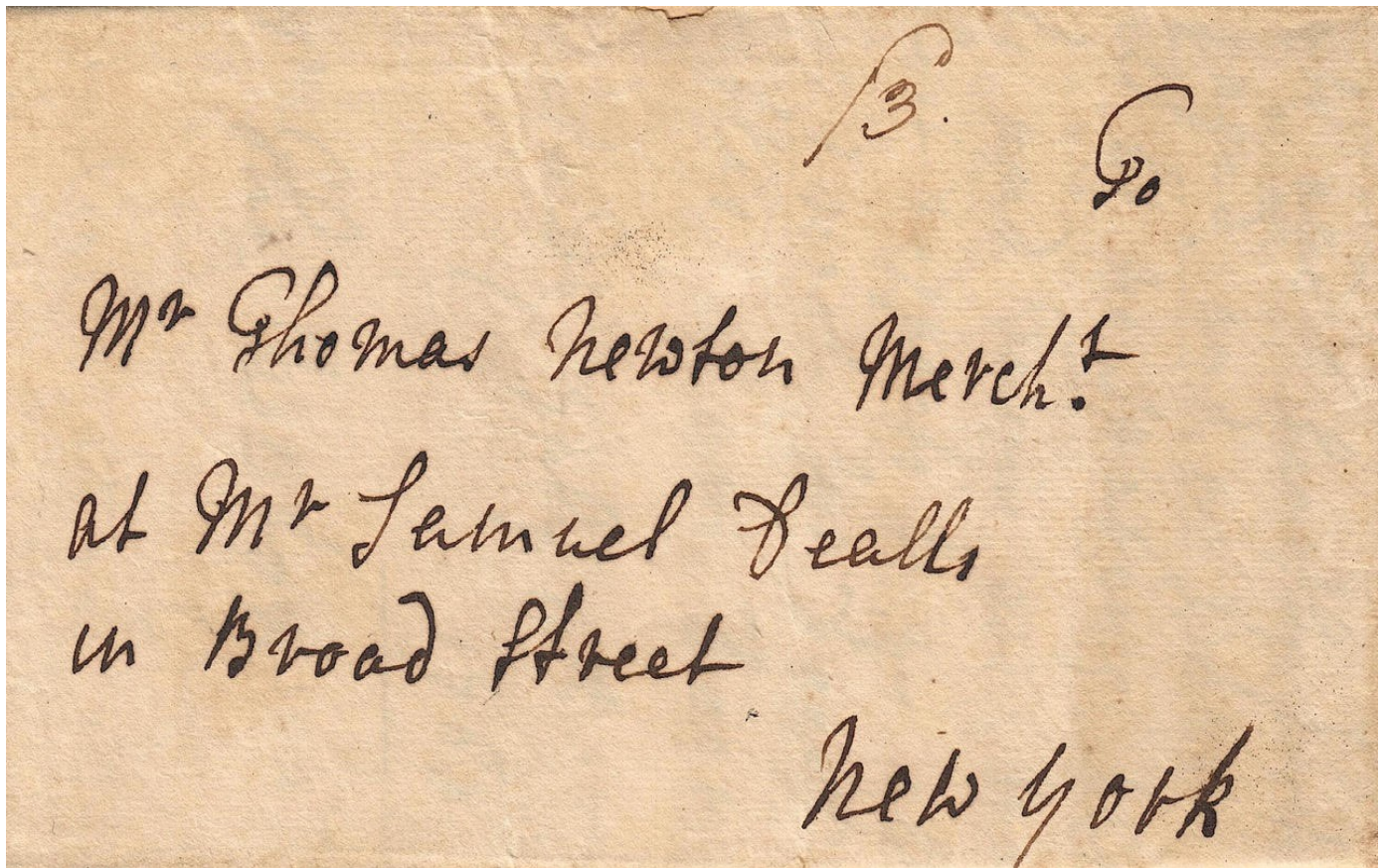


Figure 1. The earliest recorded letter entering the Royal Post mails through the Schenectady Post Office, which opened April 3, 1763. This single letter to New York City was rated 3 penny-

weights (at top), in accordance with Queen Anne's rates for inland delivery within the North American colonies.

SCHENECTADY'S FIRST POSTMASTER

Strong Evidence Implies That
John Duncan Took Post in March 1763

By Bob Bramwell

Schenectady merchant John Duncan was appointed in late March of 1763 to be the first postmaster of that town in the British Province of New York. Duncan's appointment was the result of a strenuous effort by Sir William Johnson, through New York City Postmaster Alexander Colden, to obtain mail service by the Royal Post to his estate located to the west of Schenectady.

Sir William created a record of this effort through letter books, recording the essence of every letter he wrote or received during his life on the New York frontier.

The presence of itinerant portrait painter Thomas McIlworth in Schenectady at that time also plays a part in John Duncan's postmastership.

McIlworth is a key figure in this study and I will

soon look at his roles in connection with Schenectady. Shown here is the cover [Figure 1] of a folded letter-sheet. The postage rate was applied by Postmaster John Duncan, though it was addressed by McIlworth, who also wrote the letter.

McIlworth closes his letter to merchant Thomas James Newton [Figure 2], stating the person to whom the letter was written – "Mr. Tho. Newton" – along

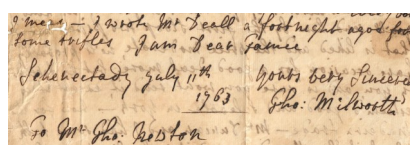


Figure 2. Thomas McIlworth closed his letter of July 11, 1763 with the sentiment, "I am, Dear Jamie, Yours very Sincerely," indicating that a form of Newton's middle name James had become McIlworth's personal manner of address.

with the place and date written, "Schenectady, July 11, 1763," which is recognized as the earliest known to have entered the British North America Post from a Schenectady post office.

Part of this and other postal history investigations often involve distinguishing between "hands," which is the term for the appearance of a person's penmanship, the quill

used and the ink chosen. Shown is a dateline from a different letter dated October 9, 1763 from Duncan to Thomas Newton. On the next page [Figure 3], we see the difference in the "hand" between Duncan and his

SCHENECTADY, PAGE 4

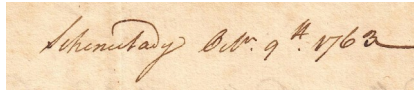


Figure 3. The dateline of a letter dated Oct. 9, 1763, shows John Duncan's "hand" makes the number "3" quite similar to the "3" postage rating on the July 11 letter, which was written by Thomas McIlworth.

SCHENECTADY, FROM PAGE 3

clerk, McIlworth.

So, what do we know about Duncan? In an 1879 address, Schenectady Judge John Sanders described the businessman and early Schenectady postmaster as follows:

John Duncan came to Schenectady in 1755. He was possessed of a good capital, and opened an extensive mercantile establishment on what is now the northwest corner of Washington Avenue and Union Street. He was the pioneer of a new style of merchants and a new mode of trade at Schenectady. Soon after his location here he formed a partnership with James Phyn, of London, and they became extensive wholesale and retail merchants and forwarders, extending their business far and wide over the Northern lakes. None can claim more justly giving an early impe-

tus to the to the mercantile prosperity of Schenectady than the great firm of Duncan & Phyn.

The prosperity of his house and a robust business relationship with the wealthy and influential Sir William Johnson convinced Alexander Colden, New York's postmaster, that Duncan being postmaster of Schenectady perfectly fit the model of an 18th century British postmaster.

The Role of Thomas McIlworth

Here's where Thomas McIlworth, the artist and eventual aid to Duncan, comes in.

Research published by Schenectady County Historical Society Trustee Ona Curran in 2007 provides not only a catalog of McIlworth's colonial portraiture, but details of his search for new patrons between his 1757 arrival in New



Figure 4. A portrait of John Duncan by Thomas McIlworth, 1762. The portrait hangs at The Henry Ford in Michigan. (Courtesy of The Henry Ford, Dearborn, Michigan)

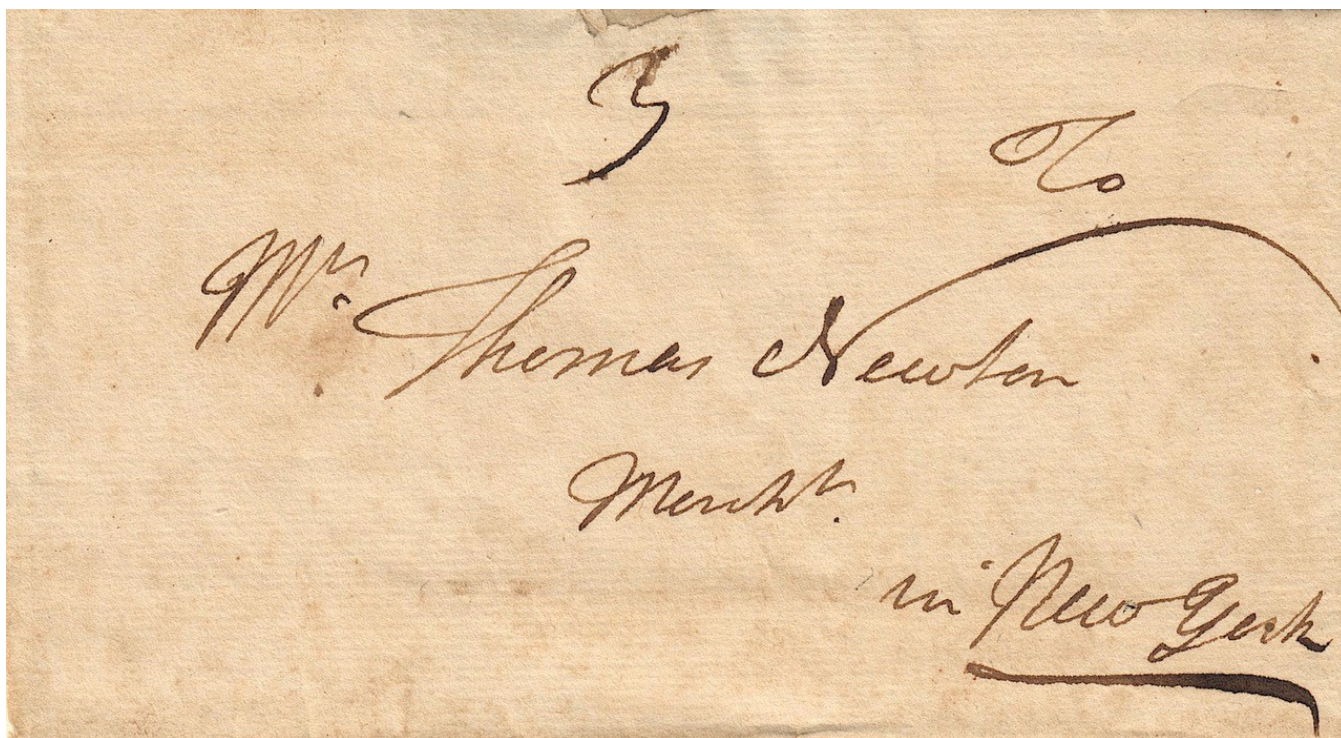


Figure 5. This cover was entered into the mails by Thomas McIlworth in his function as postal clerk. He marked the postal

rate of 3 dwts (pennyweights), but without the symbol looking like the very fluid lower case “d” seen on the July 11 letter.

York City from Scotland and his migration up the Hudson River to his arrival in Schenectady.

Intent on becoming a portraitist in his own right, he worked among polite society of that town for about five years. We have important evidence of McIlworth’s work as an artist.

First, a copied portrait of Sir William Johnson from a lost 1763 original by McIlworth has resided for many years at the New York Historical Society Museum and Library. Ona Curran’s catalog pointed me to similar-era portrait of Duncan by McIlworth that is held by The Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan [Figure 4].

As the number of potential clients declined, McIlworth gradually moved up the Hudson River, eventually arriving at Albany and Schenectady, where he developed enough commissions to feel comfortable. Somehow, he came to live and work in Duncan’s orbit.

McIlworth brought to Schenectady a thorough knowledge of Madeira wines, popular among Virginia and Philadelphia gentry, and friendship with New York wine importer Thomas James Newton. His relationships with Duncan and Sir William developed when they sat for him, Duncan in 1762 and Johnson in 1763.

There also is philatelic evidence of McIlworth’s close relationship with Duncan, such as from a letter penned July 30, 1763 by Duncan [Figure 5]. McIlworth marked the postal rate of 3 dwts (pennyweights), but without the symbol looking like the very fluid lower case “d” seen on the July 11 letter. It was rated by merchant Duncan in his function as postmaster.

The interior messaging [Figure 6, next page] also fea-

tures McIlworth’s personal addition to his friend, Newton.

Duncan closes the letter with the statement “... Accept of my thanks for your kind letter & in the meantime send me two Pipes of the best Madeira you have on as reasonable terms & oblige, Dear Sir, Your Most Obedient Servant.” As postal clerk, McIlworth would fold and rate the letter as we have seen, but as wine clerk to merchant Duncan, McIlworth puts his personal friend-to-friend closure to “Dear Jamie.”

That addition impressed me as proof that McIlworth acted as more than just a postal clerk to Duncan.

Duncan seems in this case as having handed an unsealed letter to McIlworth, either knowing or not caring that McIlworth would, or might, add a personal note. McIlworth basically taught Duncan most of what the latter knew about the Madeira trade which Duncan & Phyn was now profiting from through Newton.

McIlworth also was a resource serving Duncan as a clerk in the business. He was still painting portraits, although not at a level that could support his wife, who might have died in 1766. McIlworth migrated from Schenectady to Montreal in 1767, where he died in 1768 or 1769.

Establishment of Schenectady Post Office

William Johnson was born about 1715 into a very minor noble Irish family. He was retained by his more noble uncle, Admiral Peter Warren, to settle and manage Warren’s substantial lands to the west of Schenectady on the Mohawk River.

Young Johnson arrived there in 1738, and quickly estab-

SCHENECTADY, FROM PAGE 5

lished himself as a successful trader and advisor to the Mohawk people, one of the dominant Iroquois nations.

Shortly after his arrival, European royal conflicts spilled over into English and French colonial strife.

William quickly organized his settlers and Mohawk warriors into a small but effective fighting force. This strife, under many names, disrupted both communication and supply until early 1763 when the mature, wealthy and elevated Sir William Johnson was finally able to turn attention to bringing reliable supply and postal service to his frontier estate. For both of these, he would rely on Duncan 25 miles away in Schenectady. With the support of several influential patroons, Sir William was quickly successful.

Following his death in July 1774, Johnson's vast accumulation of papers and his "calendarized" letter books were preserved by provincial, and later state, governments. In the 1920s these documents were catalogued and published. Now they are digitized.

From Sir William Johnson's letter book entries of 1763, I extracted what relates to the establishment of a British post office in Schenectady [words and references in brackets were added by the state librarian for clarity]:

1763 Letter Book

[6.226]

Feb 14; Schenectady; John Duncan, inclosing notice regarding width of [mail] carriages [6:223] and draft of a memorial for the establishment of a post office.

[6.230]

Feb 16; Schenectady; John B. Van Eps about arrangements for forwarding letters.

[6.242]

Mar 7; New York; Alexander Colden [postmaster], considering postal service for benefit of Schenectady [6:226] and advising employment of messenger to carry Schenectady and Mohawk River mail from and to Albany.

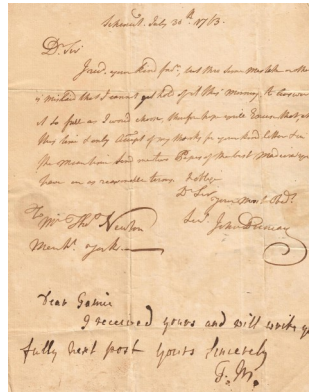


Figure 6. Here is the full folded business letter as shown in Figure 5. It was written July 30, 1763, by merchant John Duncan during negotiations with merchant Thomas Newton, the subject being wines of the Island of Madeira.

[7.7]

Mar 26; Schenectady; John Duncan to [Sir William Johnson] on new postal arrangement [6:242].

[7.17]

Apr 4; New York; Alexander Colden on Schenectady mail service.

John Duncan's Service as Postmaster

Reading Sir William Johnson's parsing of John Duncan's three letters held by the New York State Library at Albany on the subject of mail service, convinced me that Duncan volunteered himself to become postmaster of Schenectady as another service to his biggest customer.

In 1763, Albany had a post office managed by Henry Van Schaack, who would lose the postage generated by the unpaid mail coming into Schenectady and its delivery area. So perhaps it was not surprising that Sir William dealt with Alexander Colden, postmaster of New York City and son of Cadwallader Colden, then serving his second term as royal governor of New York Province instead.

It took Sir William a scant two months to accomplish his objective, as the first delivery by post rider was noted to arrive on April 3. I have no reason to doubt that "Postmaster Duncan" accommodated postal operations within the

secure confines of Duncan & Phyn, at the northwest corner of streets then-named Handelaers (aka Trad-ers) and Niskayuna.

I also have no reason to doubt that Schenectady's delivery included Sir William Johnson Hall, as there were complaints about irregularities within the first few years that surfaced in Sir William's letter books. Albany postmaster Van Schaack replied to one criticism by return letter of Feb. 24, 1766, saying the irregularities resulted when letters posted at Schenectady arrived at Albany after the post rider had left for New York; that he detains those letters for the next post and should not be held responsible.

The Sir William Johnson papers also provide insight into the question of how long the Duncan postmastership lasted. In 1767, letters from both James Phyn and John Duncan arrived at different times indicating that their partnership could, or would, be dissolved. On November 6, 1767, Duncan "retired" from Duncan & Phyn, which emerged as Phyn, Ellice and Company with Alexander Ellice joining in partnership with James Phyn and bringing along his four younger brothers. Whether this was the end of Duncan's appointment, or his ability to operate a post office, is unclear.

Duncan migrated to New York in 1755 as a lieutenant in the 44th Regiment of Foot. It was not until 1761 that he left the army and entered commerce. He remained loyal to the Crown.

While the 1765 Stamp Act gradually built "Cause of Liberty" vs. "Loyal to the Crown" tensions that eventually produced Revolutionary Reality, one thing John Duncan did was to purchase a tavern from Charles Doyle in about 1772 located near a British military barracks on then-Niskayuna Street. We all know that in provincial times a tavern was the first place you would expect to find letters waiting to be picked up for the price of a pint of ale. Knowing that King George's postal presence in the American colonies were fated to be shut down

in full by December 31, 1775, I'm left wondering whether Duncan's tavern might have been its last gasp.

About the Author: Bob Bramwell was born in Schenectady. When his 1957 interest in stamp collecting was satisfied in 2006 he saw one letter meant to be carried from a school teacher in the trenches outside Petersburg, Virginia in 1864 to his wife in Potsdam, New York that was mistakenly bagged to Schenectady and so marked when it got there. Cover contents became his postal history focus and you all have been asked to live with it in every one of his Excelsior! articles since then. Bob can be reached at rbramwell@nc.rr.com.

Author's Notes and Resources

"Sir William Johnson, 1st Baronet, American Colonist" (last updated 2018), editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. Sir William Johnson, 1st Baronet, (born 1715, Smithtown, County Meath, Ireland – died July 11, 1774 near Johnstown, N.Y.), pioneer in the Mohawk Valley, New York, whose service as colonial superintendent of Indian affairs was largely responsible for keeping the Iroquois neutral and even friendly to the British in the latter stages of the struggle with the French for control of North America [which ended Feb. 1763].

"History of the county of Schenectady, N.Y., from 1662 to 1886" (1886), by George R. Howell and John H. Munsell, assisted by local writers. W.W. Munsell.

"Thomas McIlworth, Colonial New York Portrait Painter," (2007), by Ona Curran; Art Book Press.

"Calendar of the Sir William Johnson Manuscripts in the New York State Library" (1906), Richard E. Day, Compiler, New York State Education Department.



This well-traveled cover was mailed November 18, 1857 from Troy to Rock City Mills, about 32 miles away in Saratoga County. Eventually, the cover wound up much farther away in the Midwest and traveled once again back to Saratoga County.

Turned Cover Takes An Unusual Trip

By Jim Petersen

Here is the tale of an unusual turned cover that took a long trip, both in its mileage and the time interval before its reuse and return trip New York state.

This cover's journey began in November 1857. The buff-colored envelope from George F. Nesbitt & Co. with the embossed 3-cent red Washington carries a 32-millimeter circular date cancel of Nov. 18 from Troy, N.Y.

The cover is addressed to C. Kilmer, Rock City Mills, Saratoga County, New York. Rock City Mills was an early name for Rock City Falls. The Rock City Mills Post Office was in existence from Aug. 16, 1849 to June 18, 1860

Turned Cover's Total Mileage

Trip 1: Troy to Rock City Mills: 32 miles

Trip 2: Chapin, Iowa to Rock City Falls: 1,158 miles

Total: 1,190 miles
Mileage based on current mileage per MapQuest

after which the name changed to Rock City Falls, which is still in operation.

We can only speculate as to who wrote the letter or its contents that originated from Troy. By using the internet and the website Find-A-Grave, I hoped to identify the recipient, C. Kilmer. Using my parameters, I found five possible individuals linked to this intriguing cover.

Two of the individu-

als were easy to eliminate, but interestingly, three men remained as good candidates. One was born in Rock City Falls and is buried in Greenridge Cemetery, Saratoga Springs. The other two are buried in the Rock City Falls Cemetery. They are Cyrus Kilmer, Chauncey Kilmer and Charles Kilmer. It seems possible that these three men were related to each other.

Find-A-Grave offers very little information for Cyrus, only reporting he was born in 1811, died on August 15 in an unknown year and is buried in the Rock City Falls.

Chauncey Kilmer has quite a bit more information. He was born March 23, 1816 in Rock City Falls and died November 11, 1901. He is

TROY, PAGE 10



Figure 1. A large sheet – shown here at half size – comprised two pages of correspondence. It was folded and sent on March 19, 1834 from the Caribbean via schooner.

Mail From the Caribbean Carries an Earliest Known Use

By Charles J. DiComo, PhD

This interesting oversized 19th-century cover [Figure 1] originated in the Caribbean and includes an earliest known use cancellation.

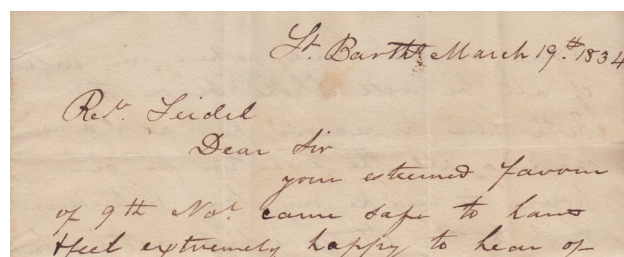
The letter penned on paper the size of a modern giftbox – that's 14½ inches by almost 12 inches when fully opened – was written over two pages on March 19, 1834 by Isabella Naylor at Saint Barthelemy Island (St. Barts), the Caribbean, to the Rev. F. Leidil,

of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

Ms. Naylor is responding to some previous correspondence in which she offers thanks for an “esteemed favour,” which may include support of “a darling child in a strange country” [Figure 2]. Intentions of a trip to the States is mentioned.

The stampless cover [Figure 3] started its journey to the United States on the same day it was written when it was dispatched aboard the schooner James Hooper. The letter arrived on April 1, about two

Figure 2. Below, part of the contents of the letter, written by a woman, thanks a minister in Pennsylvania for his help. Figure 3, at right, the business part of the folded lettersheet. It is addressed to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and was transported by ship from St. Bart's to New York City harbor. Folded, it is 5½ inches by 3 inches.



weeks later, according to a shipping report published by the New York Commercial Advertiser.

Upon arrival in New York City Harbor, the ship captain brought any mail he carried, including this letter from Naylor, to the Post Office as his first action.

The postal clerk added a 30-millimeter circular date cancel in red of “NEW YORK / APL 1” along with the handstamp “SHIP,” indicating an incoming ship letter. The clerk denoted postage due of 14½ cents at upper right, which included 12½ cents inland postage, for the 80 to 150 miles from NYC to Bethlehem, plus a 2-cent incoming ship fee.

The month use of “APL” for April, instead of



Figure 4. A second cover – this one from New York City addressed to Augusta, Georgia – shows the same date from New York City as the letter from St. Bart's. Both use “APL” as the abbreviation for April.

APR, is an earliest known use of this abbreviation.

There is handwritten docketing by the recipient at upper left of “[Ms.] Naylor / Apr 4 1834 / and 16 — ” The paper is watermarked with a clear “WEBSTER / 1828.”

Unrelated to this cover from St. Bart's is another use of the APL month from New York on a cover to Augusta, Georgia [Figure 4].

Who were the people linked to this cover and letter of concern from St. Bart's? “Please take her size with a string that I may know how tall she has grown,” Ms. Naylor writes [Figure 5].

A search online came up with almost no information on the Rev. F. Leidel or Isabella Naylor. However, there were a couple of links to the Rev. C.F. Leidel, of the Moravian Seminary for Young Ladies at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, including a letter written to him in 1830. Could this reverend be the same person? More investigation needed.

References

Spared & Shared 8 web page: <https://sparedshared8.wordpress.com/2015/07/17/1830-john-yates-to-rev-c-f-leidel>.

DiComo, PhD, Charles J., “A Patron's View of the Bad Management at the U.S. Post Office Department in 1840,” *Excelsior!* Sept. 2018, Whole No. 28 NS, pp. 3-7.

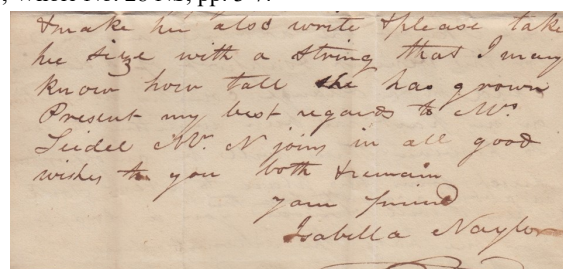


Figure 5. A sweet note is included about a child in the letter from St. Bart's.

TROY, FROM PAGE 7

buried in Greenridge Cemetery, Saratoga Springs. He married Mary Jane Ashman in 1840, the union of which led to four sons and one daughter. There is an obituary written by The Saratogian newspaper that is included with his Find-A-Grave entry if any readers wish to learn more about Chauncey.

The final possible candidate is Charles Kilmer. He was born in 1828 and died in 1903, no day or month was given for his birth or death. He, too, is buried in the Rock City Falls Cemetery. He was married to Julia Parks with at least one child born to the union.

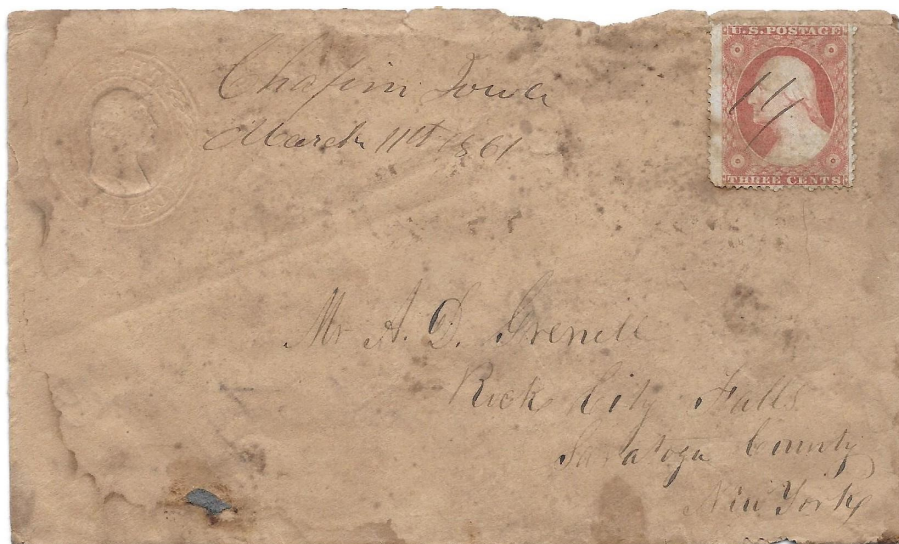
Of the three candidates, I'm leaning toward Chauncey as the C. Kilmer the Troy cover is addressed to based on some of the information that follows.

Sorry New Yorkers, but the turned (Chapin) side of the cover was the reason for me to bid on and purchase this cover, being a native Iowan, the president of the Iowa Postal History Society and a collector specializing in Iowa covers bearing stamps of the 1851-57 issue.

The other side of the cover is even uglier than the Troy side. At the top, in manuscript is "Chapin Iowa, March 11th 1861." This is a little less than 3½ years since it had left Troy. The postage was paid by an 1857 3-cent Washington perforated stamp. It is addressed to Mr. A.D. Grenell, Rock City Falls, Saratoga County, New York. The indent from the embossed Washington that paid the original postage is clearly visible at top left.

Chapin is small town in the northern part of Franklin County, in north-central Iowa. It was platted in 1858 by Josiah B. Grinnell who founded the town of Grinnell. He named Chapin for his wife's maiden name. A post office was established there on February 29, 1860, a little more than a year before this letter was sent. Today it has a population of less than 100.

Again, with the aid of Find-A-Grave, A.D. Grenell can be identi-



The same cover as shown on Page 7 four years later made its way from Iowa to Rock City Mills – now called Rock City Falls – in Saratoga County.

fied as Alvah Denison Grenelle. He was born May 6, 1799, in Greenfield, Saratoga County and died March 23, 1885, in Rock City Falls, with burial in the Grenell Road Cemetery, Milton Center, Saratoga County. The Saratogian of March 26, 1885, had a short notice of his death showing his name as Alvah D. Grenell (also spelled Grenelle). He was married to Eliza Keeler Grenelle. They had seven children, but it is the sixth child, Edward Chauncey Grenelle, that I feel is important to this narrative.

Find-A-Grave again offers information about Edward Chauncey Grenelle. He was born July 16, 1837 in Milton, Saratoga County. He died January 6, 1914, in Hampton, Franklin County, Iowa. He is buried in the Hampton Cemetery. Hampton, located near the center of the county, is the county seat for Franklin County. He was married to Linnie Alice High Grenelle in 1882 and they had at least two children.

Part of a short obituary at the website mentions that Edward Chauncey Grenelle came to Hampton in 1878, was active in municipal affairs and even served as mayor at one time, although I cannot find when he served. Prior to coming to Hampton it could be assumed that he lived somewhere near Chapin at least in 1861. Is it possible that his father, Alvah Grenell, knew Chauncey Kilmer and named his son Edward Chauncey in part after his acquaintance from New York?

Again, it's hard to tell where the cover originally sent from Troy resided for nearly 3½ years before its return journey from Chapin. It would seem possible that Edward Chauncey took it with him when he moved to Iowa, but why? We can guess at some of the letter's likely content. Edward, in writing to his father, would be informing him about his health, weather conditions in Iowa and, if he's farming, details about livestock or what kind of crops he's putting in. A lot of my Iowa letters from this time, 1861 and in winter or spring would tell how the sleighing has been.

This cover has hopefully found its final resting place; with me.

Note: My thanks to Dr. Charles DiComo for pointing out this cover, for New York postal historians and for my Iowa gem of New York-Iowa postal history. I also would like to thank Charles for supplying the information on Rock City Mills and Rock City Falls.

About the Author: Jim Petersen is a retired Iowa pharmacist now living in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He is the president of the Iowa Postal History Society and a frequent contributor to the group's quarterly, the Bulletin. His main collecting interest is early Iowa postal history from its territorial era up through the 1869 issue. He has a strong emphasis on the 3-cent 1851 imperf and 1857 perforated issues used in Iowa as well as Civil War patriotic covers used out in Iowa.



Figure 1. A cover from educator Hannah Hodgeman, of Saratoga Springs, dated October 27, 1846. Hodgeman sent a letter to Sarah Armstrong, a potential student in Jerusalem, Virginia. The rate of 10 cents to send a letter more than 300 miles is shown by the large manuscript numerals in red ink.

Stampless Covers Gush with Potential

Mail from sibling educators in Saratoga Springs reveals interesting slices of life during antebellum America

By Mark Fonda

How many ways can correspondence from days gone by touch a postal historian? Oh, so many, as demonstrated by the two similar covers that illustrate this article.

The covers certainly link to postal and local history and 19th century education in the United States. But by looking closely at the contents we find much more, including sentiments of true friendship over many miles, the professionalism and possible desperation of

running a business, a specialized writing method meant to conserve paper and save on postage costs, threads to a famous pre-Civil War race rebellion, women's issues and a contemporary link to a lauded woman educator who was later celebrated on a modern postage stamp.

That's a lot to find in a couple of common-looking covers from a small 1840s village!

Let's start with the covers shown here [Figure 1, 2].

SARATOGA, PAGE 12

Figure 2. Hannah Hodgeman wrote a second letter to Ms. Armstrong 18 months later, on May 6, 1848. It has similar markings as the 1846 letter, though the rate of "10" is now in purple ink. Both were serviced by Saratoga Springs Postmaster Thomas J. Marvin.



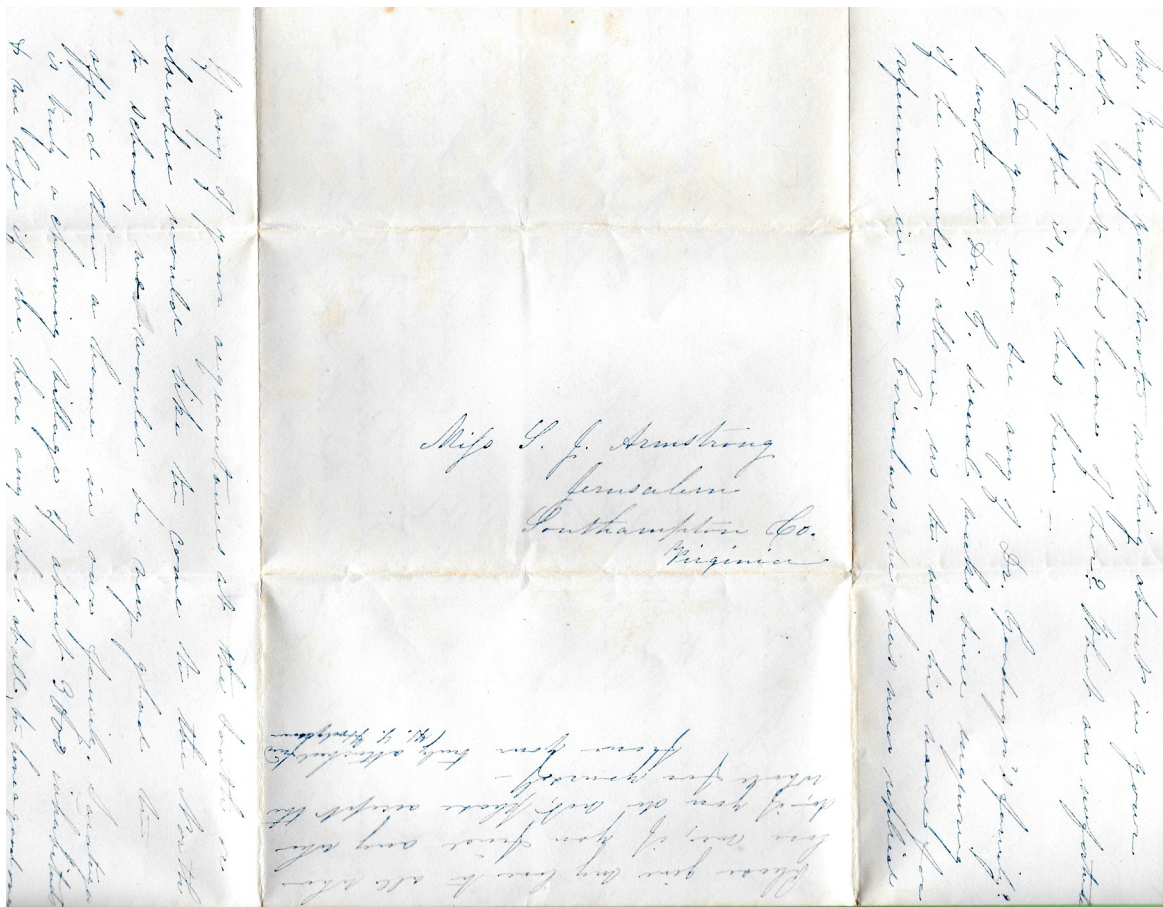


Figure 3. The 1846 letter from Hannah Hodgeman to Ms. Armstrong. Hodgeman wrote the letter in blue ink a four-page attached stationery. The letter was folded,

addressed and was intended to be sent as a folded stampless letter. Below, the start of the letter with a fold and additional manuscript above it.

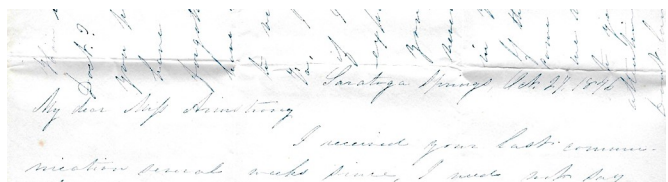
SARATOGA, FROM PAGE 11

We have two stampless covers – dated Oct. 29, 1846 and May 6, 1848 – in identical script with enclosures of folded letters and commercial circulars. Both were sent by Miss Hannah Hodgeman, from Saratoga Springs, north of Albany. Both are addressed to Miss Sarah J. Armstrong, of Jerusalem, Southampton County, Virginia.

Thomas J. Marvin, who the Hodgeman sisters name as a reference, is known as the Saratoga Springs postmaster from May 15, 1843 to Oct. 14, 1849. Marvin applied circular date cancels 1¼ inches in diameter in blue to both letters. Using the same manuscript, Marvin added the rates of “10” at upper right to show the amount of postage paid on both covers. The postage paid accommodates a distance of more than 300 miles. The ink is in red on the earlier cover and in purple on the 1848 cover.

There are remnants of wax seals on the flaps of each envelope.

Now, the true unraveling begins of these simple covers. Let’s start with a few of the obvious things we



can learn from the letters and enclosed leaflets.

The 1846 cover’s contents include four pages of a letter on blank cream paper 7 inches by 9½ inches and includes a full address to Ms. Armstrong in the center of one of these pages. Clearly it was intended to go through the mail as a lettersheet. Instead, though, it was placed in an envelope along with the enclosure – a professionally printed description of the Hodgeman sisters’ new Boarding and Day School for Young Ladies. Perhaps with the school opening just a few days hence, this flier had just come off the press, necessitating the envelope [Figure 3].

Hannah Hodgeman and her sister, Nancy, had recently moved with their parents from Stillwater in the southeast corner of Saratoga County on the Hudson River about 15 miles northwest to the “delightful village” of Saratoga Springs, writes Hannah in the first letter.

“This was very sudden ... many of our friends think it a strange move for us to make. Our particular object in doing so was to get (removed) from Stillwater, a village that presents natural beauties enough but where inhabitants are far from being intelligent, social or anything which would render a residence among them desirable.”

Much of the letter is conversational and familiar and could have just as easily been written with the same language today, 175 years later, though more likely sent by email or text.

Hannah acknowledges their friendship and how “delighted” she was to receive a letter from Ms. Armstrong that made her feel like a “true friend.” Ms. Hodgeman inquires about mutual acquaintances, including a note that Ms. Armstrong had previously resided in New England.

The letter offers a very detailed account of the social life in Saratoga and the wondrous healing environment of mineral springs, forests and fresh streams. (The letter makes no mention of horse racing. Historians can date standardbred racing in Saratoga to about 1847, but the thoroughbred racetrack didn’t open until 1863.)

Eventually, Hodgeman gets to a primary point.

“Are you determined to remain in Va. another year or shall you return to New England?” Hannah asks of Ms. Armstrong, and suggests that she should strongly consider continuing her education in the Hodgeman sisters’ school.

Hodgeman implores Ms. Armstrong to use the enclosed flier to promote the school to her friends and even says her family would

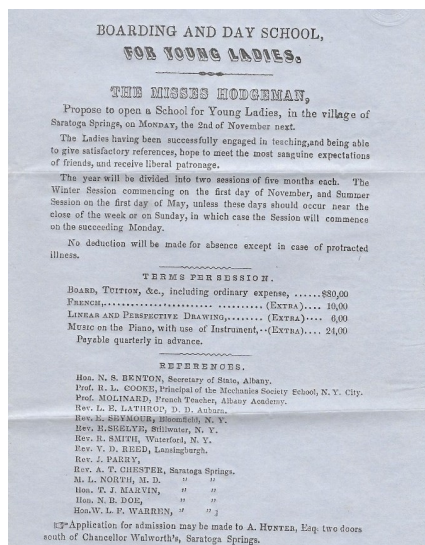


Figure 4. Detail of an enclosure in the 1846 cover offers information about the “boarding and day school for young ladies.”

open their home to students’ parents who wish to accompany their daughters north.

The flier offers several details about the school, noting that it will have a winter session beginning Nov. 2 and a summer session beginning on or about May 1. Fees are listed as board and tuition, \$80 per session; \$10 extra for French; \$6 extra for linear and perspective drawing.

More than a dozen references are listed, several of them being clergy, teachers and educators.

Among the references are M.L. North, M.D., of Saratoga Springs, who is president of the Saratoga County Medical Aid Society; and Nathaniel S. Benton, of Albany, secretary of the state of New York (1845-1847) [Figure 4].

The letter and enclosure sent us off to research a bit about 19th century education in the U.S. and in New York, in particular.

The importance of education in New York state dates back to four years before the ratification of the Constitution in 1788.

The Regents of the University of the state of New York were created by statute May 1, 1784.

The common school law of 1812 helped to create a statewide system of public schools. And in 1853, a general law authorized one or more common districts to form a union free school district which helped established large school districts and high schools.

Early on, the educational system for young women was particularly focused.

“Women’s education placed great emphasis on ... religious and moral education,” according to a “History of Women’s Education in the U.S.” And, aiming at preparation for life, “since a woman’s chief occupation was homemaking ... these two, religious and domestic training, constituted the central objectives. Whereas any other minor studies would simply be used to better religious and domestic training.”

During these growing years, however, seminaries and private academies – such as those created by the Hodgeman sisters – filled the void for families that wanted older children and teenagers to receive a well-rounded education, more likely obtained through private schools than the low-funded public system.

Saratoga Springs saw several such institutions come and go.

The first documented private school in Saratoga Springs was Union Academy, which opened in 1830, and “was expected to instruct in English grammar, geography, rhetoric, composition, logic, vulgar arithmetic, mathematics, moral and

Figure 5. In May 1848, Hannah Hodgeman wrote another letter to Ms. Armstrong. This time, Hodgeman enclosed her school's new introductory advertisement, now for the Saratoga Springs Female Institute. Here is a detail from the four-page enclosure, which measures 7 ½ inches by 9 ¾ inches and was enclosed in the cover shown in Figure 2.

SARATOGA, FROM PAGE 13

natural philosophy, Latin, Greek and Hebrew," according to "Saratoga Springs: A Centennial History."

The schoolhouse was on Church Street,

just north of where the Commercial Hotel eventually stood.

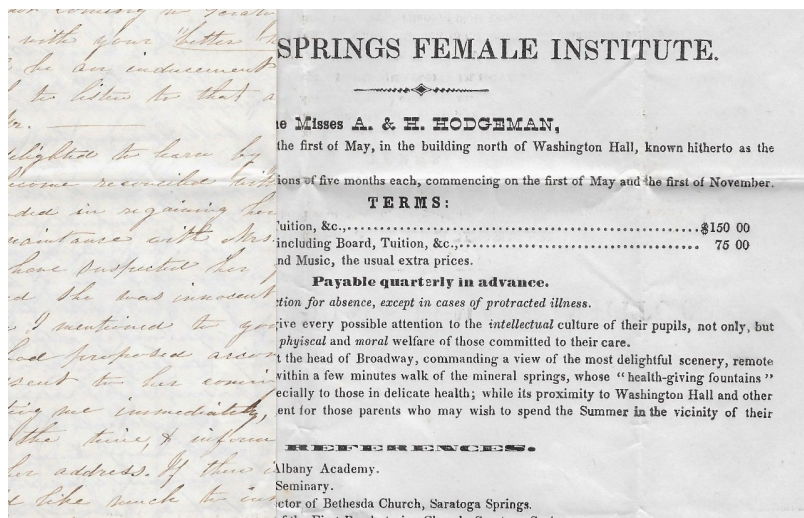
Several individuals taught students in their homes during these years, historians write.

A girls' school was the first to receive widespread recognition, according to "Saratoga Springs: A Centennial History." The Wayland sisters – the misses Anna and Sarah – opened their school in 1830 or 1831. They were daughters of a Baptist pastor and sisters of Francis Wayland, president of Brown University.

The school was on the southwest corner of Broadway and Washington Street, once site of the Grand Union Hotel, which was razed in 1953, according to the "Centennial History." (As the hotel expanded, the schoolhouse was actually moved in 1875 to Putnam Street).

Classes at the Wayland school included botany, arithmetic, ancient geography, grammar, along with reading, reciting, poetry, drawing maps and Parker's exercises. This last one was more formally known as Richard Green Parker's "Exercises in Rhetorical Reading." Further explanation is found in the book's somewhat clunky subtitle: Particularly designed to familiarize readers with the pauses and other marks in general use, and lead them to the practice of modulation and inflection of the voice.

The Saratoga Springs Institute for Boys began in



1833 and Elijah K. Bangs bought it a few years later (sources disagree when). The school was in a former Methodist meeting house on the southwest corner of Broadway and Rock Street, which eventually became the Broadway House. Bangs taught for a couple years, left for a year, but returned in 1839, adding a girls division in 1842, and taught through 1845, according to the "History of Saratoga County, N.Y."

As Bangs departed, the Hodgeman sisters took over the Broadway House and opened its school for girls in 1846.

Some things certainly changed in the time lapsed between Ms. Hodgeman's two letters.

The enclosure in the second letter includes a cover page describing the school, now called the Saratoga Springs Female Institute. The back of the main page is blank, either because the letter writer feared that ink on the back might spoil the look of the school description, or she wanted the main page available to be cut away and shared with others [Figure 5].

A second page, attached to the main page with the school description, carries the start of Ms. Hodgeman's letter [Figure 6, 8], which shows an example of a full page of unusual crossed, or cross-hatched, lettering. The manuscript was written first letter down the length of the paper. After she reached the bottom, Ms. Hodgeman turned the paper 90 degrees clockwise and continued the narrative.

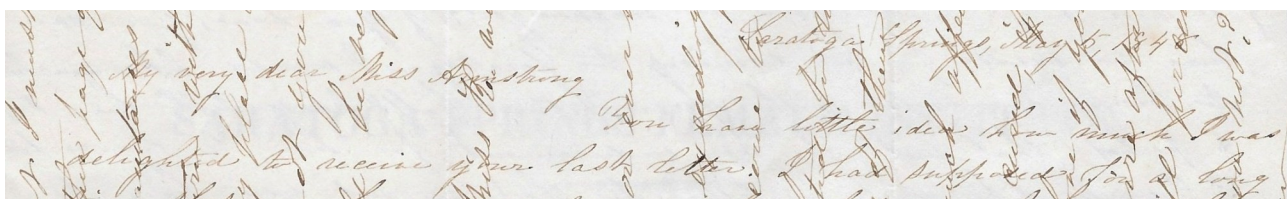


Figure 6. The start of Hannah Hodgeman's 1848 to Sarah Armstrong starts "My very dear (Miss) Armstrong ..." The

letter writer decided to save space with the cross-hatching technique. (See Figure 8 for full cross-hatch letter.)

REFERENCES.

Prof. MOLINARD, French Teacher, Albany Academy.
 Miss MARY LYON, Mount Holyoke Seminary.
 Rev. P. E. MILLEDOLER, M. D., Rector of Bethesda Church, Saratoga Springs.
 Rev. A. T. CHESTER, D. D., Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Saratoga Springs.
 Rev. L. E. LATHROP, D. D., Auburn.
 Hon. T. J. MARVIN, Saratoga Springs.

"I wish this sheet had four pages instead of two but as it has not I must make the best use I can of what I have," she writes at the start of the cross-hatch along the left side of letter's first page.

Hannah says she was delighted to receive Sarah's last letter which made her feel like a "true friend."

It appears that Ms. Armstrong is now married. "In your last epistle you had mentioned you had not yet changed your name," writes Hannah. "I would like very much to become acquainted with your better half," whom she notes as "Mr. _____?"

Hannah again writes about mutual acquaintances with a focus about the troubles of one in particular.

"I had very much delighted in your last letter that Mrs. Vaughn had become reconciled with most of her relations and had (therefore) succeeded in regaining her position in society."

Whatever problems Mrs. Vaughn had paled in comparison to the racial turmoil that had bloodied the countryside where Sarah Armstrong was living.

Southampton County, Virginia, was the site of a bloody slave uprising and retaliation just 17 years earlier. In August 1831, Nat Turner, 31, a slave, led a rebellion of about 100 enslaved and free blacks against the residents of Jerusalem and surrounding area. About 60 men, women and children, mostly white, were killed. The state militia quelled the rebellion within a few days, though it was two months before Turner was captured. Turner and 55 others were executed. Approximately 120 slaves and free blacks were slain by the militia.

Hodgeman doesn't make any specific reference to the rebellion, but there is a slight air of concern about the living conditions for Armstrong, now just a generation prior to the Civil War.

Ms. Hodgeman again invites Sarah to visit and also asks her to pass around the enclosed circular to "any acquaintances you think would like to come north to attend an excellent [underlined three times] school. We have several young ladies boarding with us from this state. We would like to have them from a distance."

As for making sure a teenage girl from the South

Figure 7. An enclosure promoting the Saratoga Springs Female Institute includes Mary Lyon as a reference. Lyon founded Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (now Mount Holyoke College) in South Hadley, Mass. in 1837. The U.S. Postal Service issued a 2-cent bright blue Mary Lyon definitive on Feb. 28, 1987.



could make it safely to northern New York, Ms. Hodgeman assures a safe journey. "I will meet them at their homes and accompany them to Saratoga ... you are aware that I am quite an independent traveler."

The school's new circular – now printed on a larger sheet of 7 ½ inches by 9 ¾ inches on buff paper has some interesting changes; the general price per five-month session has dropped \$5 to \$75 and there is a greater description of the environs:

"The Seminary is beautifully situated in the village, and yet within a few minutes walk of the mineral springs, whose healthy-giving fountains render it particularly attractive to all, especially to those in delicate health ..."

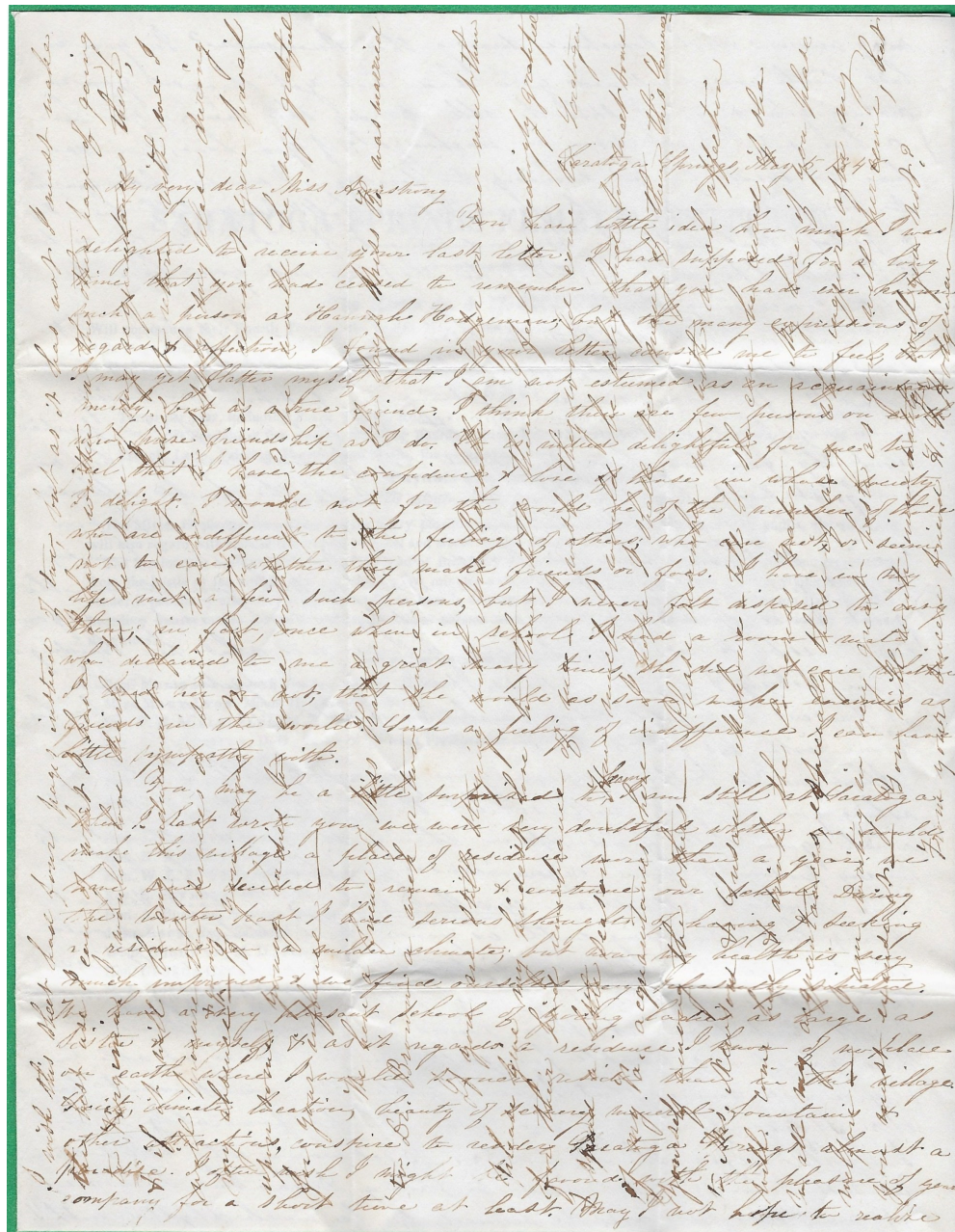
Several names of the school's references are the same as in the first circular, such as Prof. Molinard, a French teacher at the Albany Academy, Dr. North and several clergymen. But one new name stands out: Miss Mary Lyon, of Mount Holyoke Seminary [Figure 7].

Mary Mason Lyon (1797-1849) was an American pioneer in women's education, first establishing the Wheaton Female Seminary in Norton, Mass. in 1834. Today, it is Wheaton College. In 1837, Lyon established Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (now Mount Holyoke College) in South Hadley, Mass. She served as its first president for 12 years. She valued intellectual challenge and socioeconomic diversity.

In her letters Hannah states that she is unsure if

SARATOGA, PAGE 16

Figure 8.
The full page
of cross-
hatched
writing by
Hannah
Hodgeman,
of Saratoga
Springs, in
her 1848
letter to Sa-
rah Arm-
strong, of
Jerusalem,
Virginia.



SARATOGA, FROM PAGE 15

she and her sister will remain in Saratoga, but eventually vows she will.

So what happened to the Hodgeman sisters and their school?

“Despite the letters [shown here] dating to the late 1840s, I could not find the sisters in the 1850 Census in Saratoga, so perhaps the school had closed by then,” commented Lauren Roberts, Saratoga County historian.

Well, that’s the world of postal history. There are always those answers that seem to be lost to time.

Unless, of course, another cover pops up that might answer those questions.

Resources

“History of Saratoga County, NY” (1878), by Nathaniel B. Sylvester; Everts & Ensign, Philadelphia.

“A History of Women’s Education in the U.S.,” Vol. II (1966), by Thomas Woody; Octagon Books (purchased in 1968 by Farrar, Straus & Giroux).

“Saratoga Springs: A Centennial History” (2015), edited by Field Horne; Kiskatom Publishing, Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

The Saratogian, Saratoga Springs, Oct. 26, 1954.

History of the University of the State of New York and the State Education Department, 1784-1996 (www.nysl.nysed.gov/edocs/education/sedhist.htm#orig), N.Y. State Education Department.

University of Pittsburgh’s online catalog of 19th Century Schoolbooks (<https://digital.library.pitt.edu/collection/19th-century-schoolbooks>).

Lauren Roberts, Saratoga County Historian, Ballston Spa, N.Y.

Saratoga County NYGenWeb Page, coordinated by Heritage Hunters of Saratoga County, NY (<http://saratoganygenweb.com/sspostmasters.htm>).

Minutes of the Annual Members Meeting, 2021

Following is a copy of the Minutes of the annual members meeting of the Empire State Postal History Society held June 26, 2021 via Zoom.

Meeting was called to order at 3:30 p.m. by President Charles J. DiComo with the following in attendance; Charles J DiComo, PhD, Bob Bramwell, Stefan Jaronski, Glenn Estus, Steve Kennedy, Larry Laliberte, Michael Clark, George DeKornfeld, Jeff Stage and Larry Rausch.

No business was conducted, but a discussion led by Bob Bramwell on bringing back the society auction used up most of the meeting time. A consensus of the attendees was in favor of restarting the auction as a way of unifying the society. Bob will take into consideration all the opinions ex-

pressed.

President DiComo then informed the group that an election of board members needed to be completed and presented the slate nominated:

President – Charles J. DiComo, PhD, 2-year term

Vice President – David Przepiora, 2-year term

Director – Brian Levy, 3-year term

Director – Jeff Stage, 3-year term

Director – Steve Kennedy, 1-year term

Nominations are still open

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 PM to begin the directors meeting.

Minutes of the Annual Board of Directors Meeting, 2021

Following is a copy of the Minutes of the annual Board of Directors meeting of the Empire State Postal History Society held June 26, 2021 via Zoom.

Meeting called to order by President Charles J. DiComo at 4:00 p.m. with the following members in attendance: Charles J. DiComo, David Przepiora, Brian Levy, George DeKornfeld, Jeff Stage, Larry Laliberte, Heather Sweeting and Bob Bramwell.

Motion made to wave the reading of the minutes of June, 2020, Seconded and carried.

Treasurer's report given by DeKornfeld, as of 2020 our financial balance was \$46,131. It was then brought forward that our printing costs were rising

and would continue to eat away at our balance. A long discussion began and options presented. It was settled with a motion to reduce the *Bulletin* to two issues – June and December – and that *Excelsior!* would remain with two issues in March and September. Seconded and carried.

President DiComo informed the board that a new "Mid-Atlantic Federation of Postal History Societies" is forming and we should consider joining as a founding member. Motion was made to join the new federation and donate \$100.00 for that purpose. Seconded and carried.

Discussion again took place about renewing the society's auction. There

was a consensus that if Bob Bramwell renews our auctions, it should be up to the consigners to write the descriptions for their consignments and we should open the auctions to the members of the new federation.

President DiComo informed the board that we were looking forward to having a in-person meeting, possibly at the APS. Brian Levy suggested that we have a meeting in downstate NY and he would see about having the meeting downstate in conjunction with a philatelic show.

Adjourned at 5:30 PM

Prepared by David Przepiora | VP, Reviewed/Edited/Finalized Charles J. DiComo, PhD | President July 25, 2021

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Membership in the ESPHS: Please write to the secretary at the heading address or print and mail the application found on the society website. Dues are \$20 per year (\$25 for non-U.S. addresses), for applications dated from January to June. For applications dated July to December terms are for 1 ½ years with a fee of \$30 (\$35 for non-U.S. addresses). Advertising is accepted. For ads, please contact the society secretary.

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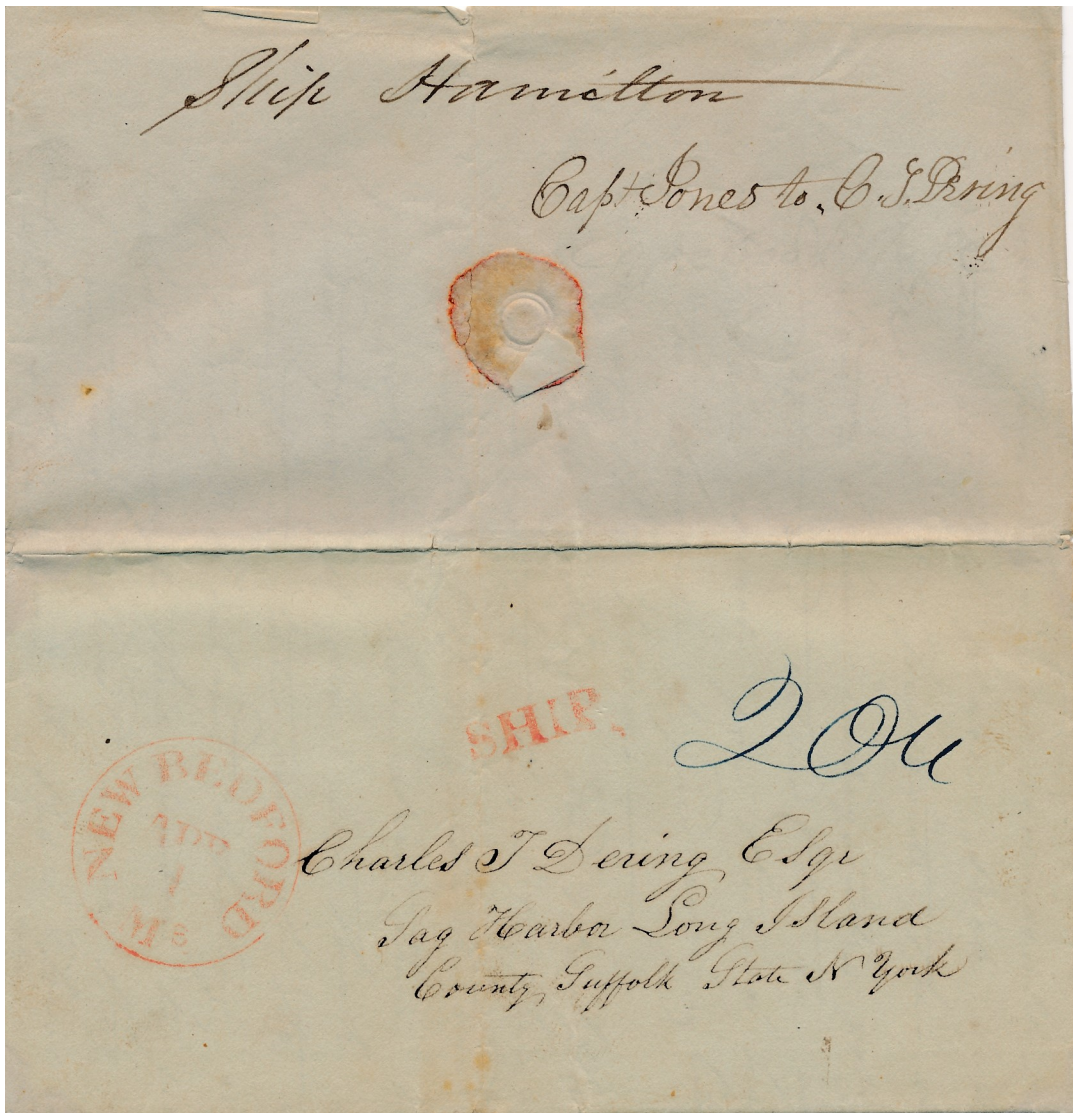
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Part of a cover addressed to Charles T. Dering, of Sag Harbor, was written by Capt. William A. Jones on January 20, 1839 aboard the Sag Harbor whaler Hamilton while it was at the Cape of Good Hope, near Simonstown, South Africa. Jones likely encountered a ship returning to the U.S. and handed it to that ship's captain for delivery. It was postmarked April 1 upon its arrival in New Bedford, Mass.

obtain on this place such supplies as will
enable me to prosecute the voyage to New
Zealand I have consequently got some provisions
and water and intend (to be in the season)
to sail direct for there I have drawn on you
for the amount I find necessary of supply my
crew at this place
I have 147 whales and 130 lbs of sperm oil it is
probable that the ship to the westward may
do something this month and may have just
from what I did not think it advisable to
remain there late enough to take any part
of the whaling I have not done
whales enough this season to give me this or
any thing I should want that I should not
take to New Bedford I shall probably go into the
strights of Cuvier as I am informed by the Capt-
ain of a ship now here from St. Pauls that whalers
come well with sperm there or take them at
the coast of America and if not quite the coast shall
the next southern summer which would bring me
16 months out from home but the probability is
at New Zealand will be my destination

A detail from Capt. Jones' letter.

WHALING, FROM PAGE 1

ten, is an indication of the length of time it took for this letter written at sea to get to a U.S. port.

The postage rate, according to the Postal Act of March 3, 1825, was 18¾ cents for a letter traveling between 150 and 400 miles, the distance between New Bedford and Sag Harbor. The Postal Act of March 2, 1799 established that a ship fee of 2 cents be added to the postage for ship letters conveyed by the receiving post office to another place. The 2-cent ship fee brought the total postage to 20¾ cents, which is indicated in manuscript in blue ink as the amount to be paid by the recipient, Dering in this case.

In the letter, Jones writes of his failure to find sufficient numbers of whales in the Atlantic Ocean and consequently his decision to head for New Zealand in hopes of improving his fortunes. He also writes of the difficulty in finding adequate provisions at the Cape of Good Hope but is relieved that the ship remains in good shape, everyone is well and there have been no desertions while in port there. Desertions during whaling voyages were not uncommon, according to "Sag Harbor: The Story of an

Text of letter datelined

'Simons Bay, Cape Good Hope'

January 20, 1839

Sir,

You will probably be something surprised to hear from me at this place at this season of the year but having found so very few whales to the westward and seeing no probability of getting oil enough to remain in the Atlantic ocean another season, I have considered it the most prudent and adviseable measure to obtain at this place such supplies as will enable me to prosecute the voyage to New Zealand. I have consequently got some provisions and water and intend (to be in the season) to sail direct for there. I have drawn on you for the amount. I find every kind of supply very dear at this place.

I have six whales and 130 bbls. Sperm. It is probable that Ships to the westward may do something this month and next but judging from what I have seen there and Ships I have heard from, I did not think it advisable to remain there late enough so to lose any part of the New Zealand whaling. I have not seen whales enough this season to fill one Ship.

If anything should occur that I should not take New Zealand, I shall probably go late into the Streights (Straita) of Timor as I am informed by the Captain of a Ship now here from St. Pauls that Ships have done well with Sperm there or take the N.W. Coast of America and if not full, the Coast of Chili the next Southern Summer which would bring me 16 months out from home (Sag Harbor). ...

Our ship is in very good order and perfectly tight. We are all well and no desertion at this place So Far. I have confidence in the officers and crew. I have broken one of our anchor Stocks here but have one now making, the old one was very rotten and broke in consequence.

With great respect, I remain your,
Humble Gent. Ye
W.A. Jones

Charles T. Dering, Esqu.

American Beauty."

Actually, two ships named Hamilton sailed out of Sag Harbor. The cover illustrated here was written aboard and sent from the so-called "Little Hamilton," a 322-tonnage ship built in 1816 that joined the Sag Harbor whaling fleet in 1836 with Dering as its owner.

This ship made six whaling voyages between September 26, 1836 and April 29, 1848. It sailed the South Atlantic, the Pacific Ocean, the South Seas, the Crozet Islands (in the southern Indian Ocean, 1,500 miles off the coast of Antarctica) and the northwest coast of the U.S. These six voyages garnered 1,425 barrels of sperm oil, 8,743 barrels of whale oil and 32,300 pounds of whalebone. The Hamilton, like so many other Sag Harbor whaling ships, sailed for California in 1849, never to return.

Jones was one of many ship captains to command whaling voyages out of Sag Harbor. Jones, according to Starbuck, commanded the American on whaling voyages commencing in 1829, 1830, 1832 and 1834 for owner S&B Hunting & Co.; the Hamilton in 1836 and the voyage linked to this letter in 1838; and finally, the Alexander in 1843, for which he was the owner and manager.

Dering began his whaling career in partnership with an in-law and future famous author, James Fenimore Cooper. They purchased and outfitted the whaling ship Union for a voyage to the east coast of Brazil. However, that and two additional voyages by the Union between 1819 and 1822 lost money. Cooper left the whaling industry when he became a successful author. Dering went on to become a prosperous owner and manager of many Sag Harbor whalers. He died in 1859 at the age of 68.

Whaling had already become the principal industry in Sag Harbor several years prior to 1839. By that time, there were 13 arrivals and 29 departures of whaling vessels annually. More than 1,000 men and boys were employed on the whaling ships and in whaling-related industries. The latter included ship builders, blacksmiths, coopers, caulkers, carpenters and sail makers as well as shipping and warehouse clerks.

The Sag Harbor whaling industry started around 1760 and peaked in 1847 when 32 arrivals brought 3,919 barrels of sperm oil, 63,712 barrels of whale oil, and 605,340 pounds of whalebone worth \$996,413. However, the industry crashed just two years later as a consequence of increasing whale scarcity, the lengthening of the voyages, the increasing expense of outfitting whaling ships, financial losses sustained by the owners and the 1849 California gold rush.

The lure of gold attracted hundreds of adventurous Sag Harbor and other Long Island whaling captains, seamen, and others to depart for California. The exodus left inadequate numbers of men to staff the whaling ships. Many of these men sailed their ships to San Francisco, deserting them once there, most of the ships and many of the men never to return.

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"Long Island Cover Corner: The Saga of a Whaling Captain," Daniel M. Knowles. Long-Island Postal Historian (1988).

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"Whales and Whaling: Sag Harbor NY" (1975), by George A. Finckenor. Pages 34, 109. Publisher William Ewers, Sag Harbor, N.Y.

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COVER STORY



An 1838 Utica cover bears a blue oval postmark along with a fancy scrollwork “FREE.” Below, the letter’s dateline. Could this be the earliest known use of this type of handstamp?

By Ellen N. Rose

For a little more than 20 years, from 1829 to 1850, Utica used a double oval handstamp with diamond ornaments, its most notable postmark applied to its stampless mail.

During those years there were slight variations in the size of the mark, measuring as much as a millimeter. This occurred as handstamps wore out and were replaced.

The use of this handstamp reported in red and orange begins in 1829 and runs through the end of May 1845. Its use in black is only reported only in 1831. The handstamp is found in blue for regular letter mail service following rate changes that became effective on June 1, 1845.

Listings for Utica’s oval handstamps are in the American Stampless Cover Catalog. But listings provide only a range of dates for the various colors of this handstamp and are grouped together without reference to the earliest reported use for each color.

However, the blue oval was clearly used as early as 1838 on mail sent free of charge to postmasters. Shown is a folded letter with a blue oval handstamp dated August 19, 1838 to the postmaster of Sconodoc, which is in Oneida County about 25 miles west of Utica. The letter is dated August 18.

This lettersheet appears to have been posted seven years before the blue handstamp was used on regular stampless mail service. This lettersheet could very

A close-up photograph of a handwritten dateline in cursive script on a yellowed piece of paper. The text reads 'Utica Aug. 18. 1838.'

well show the earliest known use of the blue oval handstamp.

The blue oval also was applied to mail with the 5- and 10-cent 1847 issues – the United States’ first official postage stamps – and the 3-cent 1851 issue.

The blue double oval featured here measures 31mm by 23mm. That is the size of the handstamp as reported in the American Stampless Cover Catalog. However, several blue ovals in my collection date between April and August 1846 measure 32mm by 23mm. Those that are black and red consistently measure 31mm by 23mm.

This slight 1mm difference may be the result of the pressure exerted in applying the handstamp. The blue double ovals applied in 1846 appear to be struck with more ink because of hand pressure. That may account for the additional 1mm in their size rather than the use of a slightly larger handstamp.

About the Author: I was born and raised in Utica, though I have lived in New Jersey with my philatelist husband Bob for more than 50 years. a number of years ago. I decided to collect my hometown’s postal history and have shown a one-frame exhibit of Utica’s hand-stamped postal markings used during the stampless period at a number of American Philatelic Society-sponsored shows.

Reference: American Stampless Cover Catalog, Vol. I, 5th edition (1997), editor David G. Phillips, David G. Phillips Publishing Co.