

# Excelsior!

April 2025

Whole No. 41 New Series

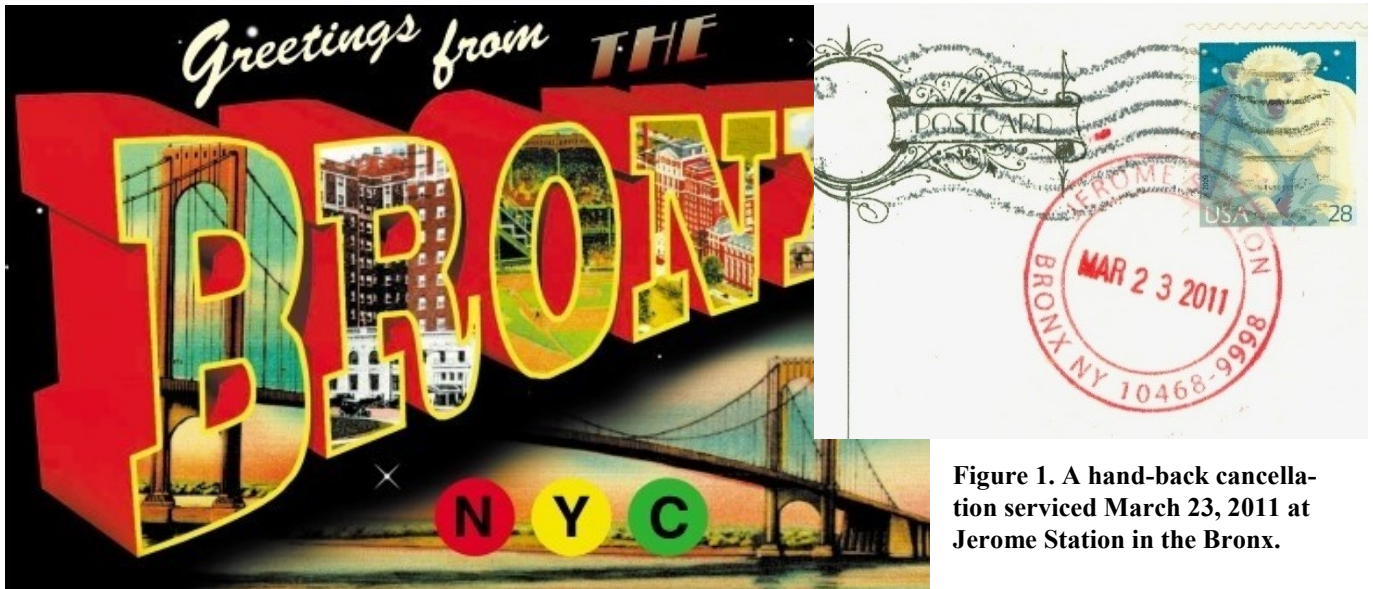


Figure 1. A hand-back cancellation serviced March 23, 2011 at Jerome Station in the Bronx.

## The Hunt for a Williams Bridge – Jerome Post Office – Cancellation

By Thomas X. Casey

It was easy in 2011 to get a postal cancellation (**Figure 1**) at the Jerome Postal Station, 2549 Jerome Avenue, across the street from St. James Park at 191st Street, in the Bronx. The post office was constructed in 1951.

I also wished to have a cancel from an earlier Jerome Station. From January 14, 1929, the Jerome Station was located a couple long blocks away at 2426 Jerome Avenue, just under the Fordham Road subway station (**Figure 2**). It was an older post-Civil War cancel I sought.

The only lead I had was from an Empire State Postal History Society Bulletin dated June 1985 with an article about Williams Bridge, by Martin Margulis. The Duden & Co. postal card provided a Williams Bridge



Figure 2. The Jerome Postal Station, 2426 Jerome Avenue, Bronx, c. 1940.



# Excelsior!

The Journal of the Empire State Postal History Society

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**Thomas X. Casey:** Our author grew up in the Bronx and has a keen interest in tracking the history of the post offices there. He shares the story about his quest for a 19th century postal cancellation from one of those post offices: Williams Bridge / Jerome. **Cover, Page 6.**

**Charles J. DiComo, PhD:** An stampless lettersheet from 1839 that traveled from Philadelphia to France, via New York City, presents several intriguing markings along with links to some high end spirits. Salut! **Page 3.**

**New Book:** Longtime postal history researcher Terence Hines explored his home county so much that he had enough to write a book. Hines offers the postal ins and outs of Putnam County. **Page 9.**

**National Air Mail Week 1938 Revisited:** Excelsior! published an article last fall that focused on a small New York town's involvement with a national celebration of the 20th anniversary of airmail. This issue offers a look at more special event covers created in more than a dozen New York communities of NAMW 1938. **Pages 11, 12.**

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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.

## LETTER

### Fixing some date errors

Where did the list of postal history dates in the last Excelsior! come from? A couple are wrong, and at least one I have a question about:

First, regarding the 1811 attribution of the Post Office Department going to steamboats. At least on the

Hudson, that didn't happen until later in the decade, probably 1815.

The July 1, 1842 date for first general issue stamps going on sale in NYC. If this is supposed to be 1847, there is a question of whether they were actually sold on that date. I have found no newspaper evidence of their being placed on sale. The

earliest known use is postmarked July 2.

The 1862 date for the start of free city delivery is not right. The end of the fee period for city delivery was June 30, 1863, so the earliest date was July 1, 1863.

**Thomas Mazza**

**Editor's note:** Apologies, and thanks for setting us straight.





Figure 1. The obverse of a folded letter from Philadelphia to Cognac, France, 1839.

# À Votre Santé

From Philly to NYC to France – All for a Brandy!

By Dr. Charles J. DiComo

I recently acquired the 1839-dated stampless folded letter (SFL) shown (**Figure 1**) for my decades-old research study on the use of the New York City (NYC) circular date stamp (CDS) in which April is abbreviated with an “APL” as opposed to the more common “APR.”

The letter entered the mail on April 23 in Philadelphia, where a clerk added a weak strike of the blue “PHILADEL APR 23 PA.” circular datestamp. There is a matching blue octagonal “PAID” to the right and the rate of 12.5 is handwritten. This was the correct



Figure 2. The original marking from Philadelphia in light blue and the “APL,” for April, marking applied in New York City.

U.S. inland fee for a letter traveling between 80 and 150 miles (**Figure 2**).

The letter was received in NYC, where the clerk added the uncommon “NEW-YORK APL 24” circular datestamp in red at the bottom.

Here, “APL” was used to abbreviate “April” instead of the more common “APR”). This type of a New York City circular datestamp (with the very low month/date aligned with the “N” and “K” of New York), which is indicative of foreign mail.

The letter was placed in a mail bag, carried by the Union Sailing vessel *Ville de Lyon*, which departed on April 25, 1839 from New York City Harbor.

After a 27-day transatlantic voyage, the *Ville de Lyon* arrived in Le Havre, France. The mail bags were unloaded and sorted, and then a red-orange, **COGNAC, PAGE 4**



Figure 3. The red-orange marking applied after the letter's arrival in France.



COGNAC, FROM PAGE 3

double-circle “Outre-Mer Le Havre 22 MAI 39” cancellation was applied below the blue Paid box (**Figure 3**).

The folded letter was then on its way overland via railway to Paris, where the blue, double-circle “Paris 15/ (60)/15 23 MAI 39” was applied on the reverse (**Figure 4**). The letter continued via rail to its final destination of Cognac. Upon arrival, the clerk struck the black, double-circled “COGNAC (45) 25 MAI 39” on the reverse.

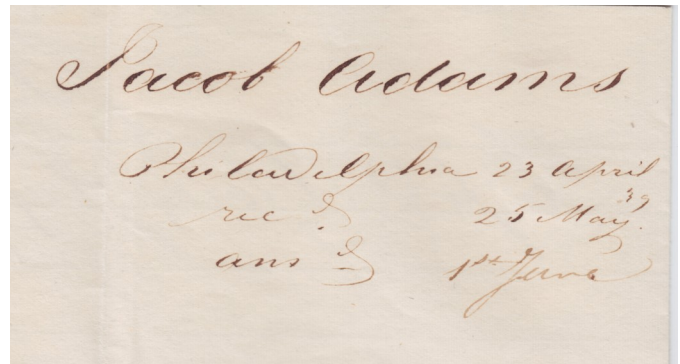
The recipient paid 13 decimes to collect this letter and docketed on the rear flap the following (**Figure 5**): “Jacob Adams Philadelphia 23 April, rec’d 25 May, ans’d 1 June.”

The contents (**Figure 6**) discuss the sale of Otard Dupuy & Co. brandy from either La Rochelle or Bordeaux in France to the writer, Jacob Adams, of Philadelphia.

Otard, also known as Château de Cognac, is a French cognac house founded in 1795 by Jean-Baptiste Antoine Otard (**Figure 7**).



**Figure 4.** The entire folded lettersheet laid out (left) and the final marking made at Cognac.



**Figure 5.** Jacob Adams’ hand notation.

The company has remained in the hands of the same family since its establishment. The firm is based in the Château des Valois (Château de Cognac), Cognac, Charente, its home since 1796. James Otard fought alongside Louis XIV of France and was named a baron in 1701.

Philadelphia 23 Apl. 1839  
Messrs. Otard Dupoy & Co  
Cognac

Dear Sirs

I duly received your favor of the 29 January. I have made insurances on the Brandy by vessel or vessels from either La Rochelle or Bordeaux. I am informed the Russian Brig Navigator sailed about the 9 March from Bordeaux & being of heavy Sailor. I do not look for her until the beginning of May. Whenever she arrives I will immediately remit you a bill on thy friends C. (Yardien) & ( ) Loubot for the whole amount. I much regret that opportunities offer so seldom for vessels coming from either Bordeaux or La Rochelle. I could sell your Brandy at the rate of 25 to 30 half pipes every month and at a fair profit. It will not sell unless it comes direct to Philadelphia. I hope soon to make some arrangements more pleasing to both parties and receive Brandy by every opportunity.

With sincere regards, I remain your obed. Servt.

Jacob Adams



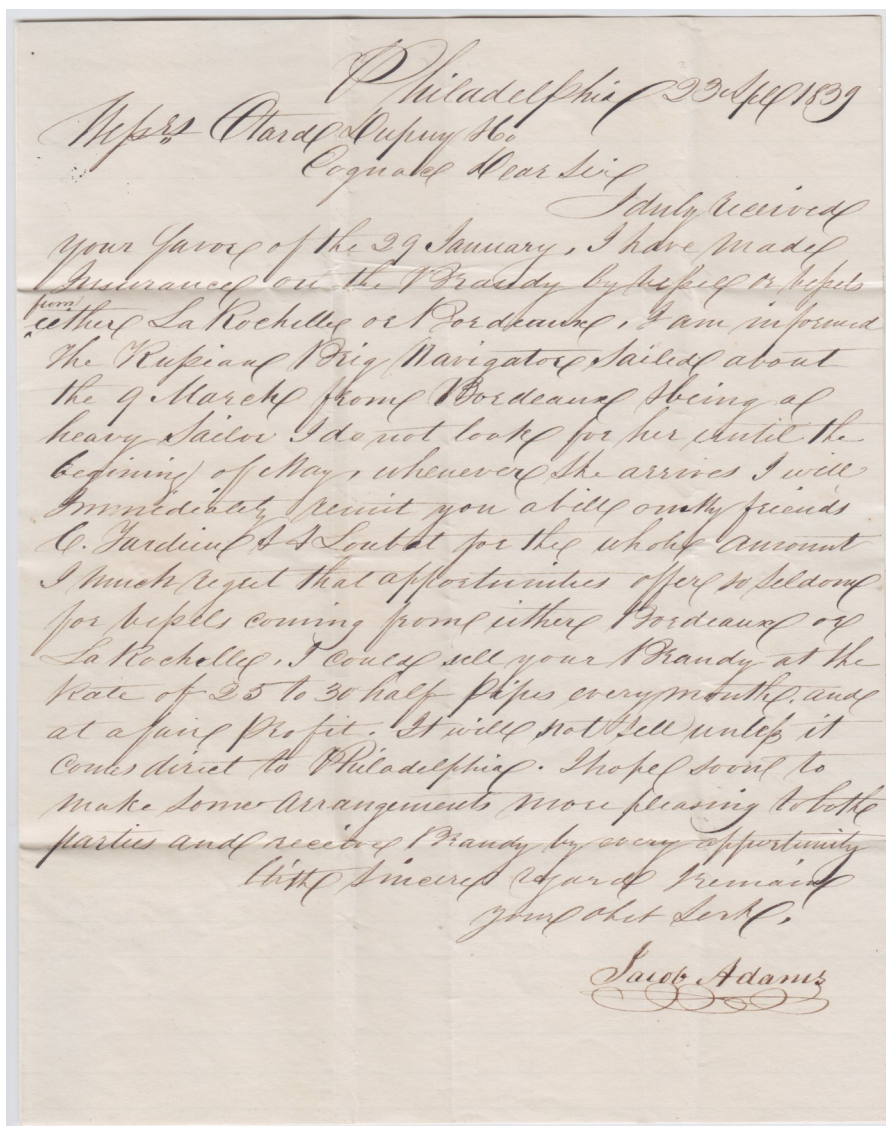


Figure 6. The full handwritten letter from Jacob Adams, of Philadelphia.

It was his great-grandson, Jean-Baptiste Antoine Otard, born near the town of Cognac, who created the cognac trading house bearing his name in 1795. The family-owned vineyards around the town of Cognac and were already distilling and ageing “eaux-de-vie.”

The following year, he brought the Chateau de Cognac, built in the 10th century to protect the villagers from Norman invaders, as a base for his business. The cellars of the chateau, which can be visited, are still used for storing and ageing the casks of cognac.

In closing, my decades-long studies of the NYC “APL” postal marking have brought me much joy as I search for new varieties, new cities, and new destinations. One never knows where your research will take you. In



Figure 7. A bottle of Baron Otard “Princes de Cognac.”

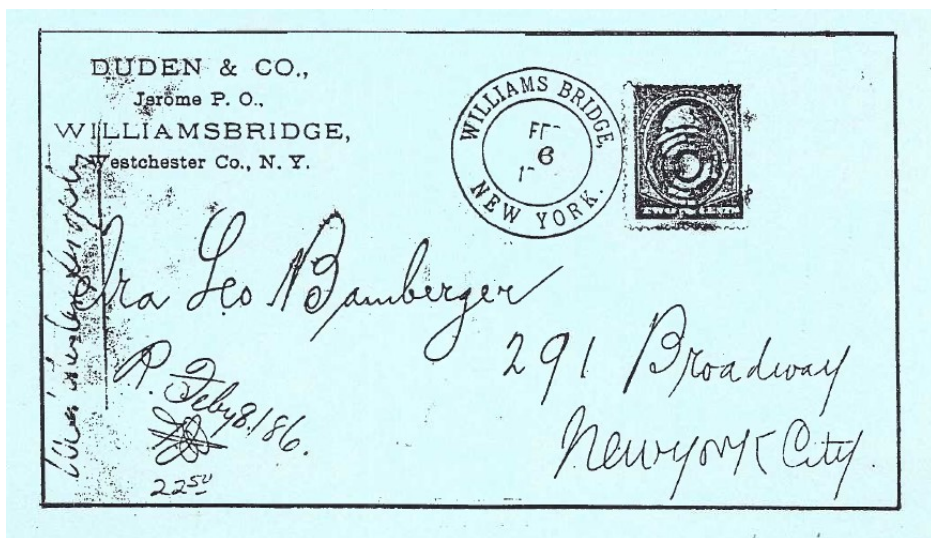
this case, my recent acquisition of this letter took me on a three-week journey from Philadelphia, across the Atlantic Ocean, through Europe via rail, to the Otard House, where Château de Cognac has been distilled for centuries. And all from the comfort of my easy chair!

### Acknowledgement

I wish to thank Richard F. Winter for sharing his vast knowledge on transatlantic mail, routes and rates. Any errors or an omission is the author’s responsibility. I can be reach at [charlesdicomo@gmail.com](mailto:charlesdicomo@gmail.com).

**Translation:** Our main headline — À Votre Santé — is a French toast meaning, “to your health.”

**Wanted:** Your knowledge, your interests, your articles. The Excelsior! needs all types of submissions. Share your passion, even if it’s just about a single cover. Contact the editor or president for details.



**Figure 3. A Duden & Co. postal card with an 1886 Williams Bridge cancellation (From the Martin Margulis collection).**

#### JEROME, FROM PAGE 1

address and Jerome post office notation (**Figure 3**).

As a quick aside, Duden & Co. was established in 1883 by Herman Duden and manufactured lace goods. It acquired numerous machines to make the thousands of punch cards necessary to make linen patterns. I am sure the firm made its own postal cards with the same equipment.

From its establishment, and until 1929, the Jerome and Williams Bridge post offices were located east of the Bronx River, at Gun Hill Road.

The bridge that crosses the Bronx River was built in the 1690s and identified on many Revolutionary War maps as The Williams Bridge, which became the local name. Many descendants of farmer Williams are prominent during events of 1776. Typical of street names and signs in the Bronx, letters and spaces are dropped to save money. Williams Bridge Road became Williams-bridge Road and Throggs Neck on the street signs it is the Throgs Neck Bridge. Thankfully, the post office located at 3630 E. Tremont Ave,

Bronx is still Throggs Neck.

Before we get back to all the postal history, let's cover a little personal history. As a boy growing up in the Bronx, I was a collector of coins, bottle caps, marbles, rocks and, yes, nails. You never know when a nail would come in handy.

I became a stamp collector just after my 17th birthday in 1968. In my senior year at Cardinal Hayes High School, it was announced the Bronx General Post Office (GPO) was hiring what were called "Hayesmen" (the unofficial nick-

name for us students) during the Christmas rush to box mail. The Bronx GPO is located at 558 Grand Concourse, one block from my school and across the street from the subway station at 149th Street.

My parents were concerned about working until 9 p.m., but since my father worked nights with the Typographical Union, it was agreed that working late was in the Casey DNA. I was allowed to work my last week near my home at the Wakefield Post Office, boxing and delivering mail until Saturday, January 4, 1969.

That summer through 1972, I worked at the James A. Farley GPO at 421 Eighth Avenue, with stops at the Morgan and FDR stations. During my early years (1973-2001) with the Department of the Treasury, I became hooked on Bronx postcards.

By 2009, I became curious about when and where Bronx post offices were located, since many were in danger of closing. (I hope to cover the 1791 King's Bridge post office in the future.) I started visiting every Bronx post office and used a postcard I designed with my nephew, Aleksandr Gembinski, for hand-back



**Figure 4. A detail from the 1868 Beers map of Wakefield locates the Valentine/Briggs Store & Post Office, east of the Williams Bridge. The John Williams farm was along the Bronx River.**



cancellations.

In 2022, my wife and I moved to St. Augustine, Florida, and my 6,578 unique postcards were donated to the landmarked Huntington Free Library in the Bronx. I became more interested in the address side of the postcard than the image.

Let me go back here and review a little more history.

In December 17, 1773, Paul Revere departed Boston, on one of his many postal rides, en route to Philadelphia, via the Boston Post Road. He crossed the Williams Bridge and stopped at King’s Bridge on his way into Manhattan. So, I start with the Williams Bridge post office.

First, though, there is just one more complication about Bronx post offices. In 1874, New York City annexed the towns of Kingsbridge, West Farms, and Morrisania from Westchester County. In 1895, the Eastern Towns completed the annexation, and in 1898 the Bronx became a borough. During this time, the Bronx post offices were identified as part of New York County until becoming a separate county on January 1, 1914.

From the 1868 map of Wakefield and compilation by Thomas Mazza, it is noteworthy that postmasters Briggs and Valentine controlled var-

**Williams Bridge – Jerome (1) – Williams Bridge**  
(presidential office from July 1, 1895)

Established : August 16, 1849  
Discontinued : May 11, 1852  
Reestablished : December 2, 1853  
Name changed to Jerome : February 8, 1869  
Name changed to Williams Bridge : December 4, 1884  
Located in New York county : July 1, 1895  
Discontinued : December 13, effective December 31, 1895, became station N (Williams Bridge) of New York

Postmaster	Date of Appointment	Fiscal Year	Postmaster Compensation	P.O. Dept. Receipts
Benjamin Valentine, Jr.	16 August 1849	1851	39.43	53.14
Daniel Tier	28 July 1851			
Benjamin Valentine, Jr.	10 January 1852			
John T. Briggs	2 December 1853	1855	49.99	26.58
		1857	35.98	17.26
		1859	43.54	59.58
		1861	155.51	-----
		1863	52.49	26.72
		1865	29.33	24.61
		1867	110.00	67.91
		1869	105.00	16.78
George F. Briggs	Jerome (8 February 1869)		35.00	6.83
	8 April 1874			
	5 April 1877			
Robert M. Turck	Williams Bridge			
	4 December 1884			
	19 January 1885			
	19 September 1889			
	6 February 1891			
	8 May 1894			
John E. Burke	15 November 1895			
Robert M. Turck				
Robert S. Seabold				
Morris White				
Elizabeth Heilman				
John Knewitz				

**Figure 5. U.S. Postal Service records of the Williams Bridge – Jerome postal station. (Courtesy Thomas Mazza.)**

ious properties, including stores, post offices, telegraph and railroad lots, and homes (Figure 4).

Postal records do not confirm that the Williams Bridge Post Office was continually opened throughout its history. However, based on the local control of communication by businessman and politicians, it would appear

that there were no closures (Figure 5).

On September 25, 1866 the Jerome Park Racetrack opened west of the Bronx River and one year later, the first Belmont Stakes Race was held (Figure 6).

The racetrack was named after its founder and financier, Leonard W. Jerome, and his partner, August Belmont Sr. Central Avenue was laid out from the Central Bridge, later renamed the Macombs Dam Bridge, reaching the racetrack and beyond.

Kate Hall, also known as Mrs. Leonard W. Jerome, was so enraged that Central Avenue was to be renamed after a local alderman, that she arranged to have poles with bronze Jerome Avenue signs erected along the avenue at her own expense. Jerome Avenue is

**JEROME, PAGE 8**



**Figure 6. “Opening Day at Jerome Park,” from Appleton’s Journal.**

### Excitement at Williamsbridge.

Considerable unpleasant feeling has been created among the residents of Williamsbridge and its immediate vicinity in reference to the name of the place. Those persons who live on the east side of the Bronx River, including the settlement known as Olinville, a short time ago made an application to the Postmaster-General to change the Post Office name to Jerome, on the ground that letters intended for Williamsbridge were frequently sent to Williamsburg, L. I., especially when the word Bridge was written in an abbreviated form. The inhabitants east of the Bronx were likewise desirous to have their locality designated by a shorter and more euphonious name. The Postmaster, in compliance with the wishes of the petitioners, changed the Post Office name to Jerome, and subsequently the station of the Harlem Railroad was changed in like manner. No sooner, however, had a signboard bearing the new name of Jerome been hoisted at the railroad depot than the residents on the west side of the river presented a counter petition to the Harlem Railroad officials to go back to the old name of Williamsbridge, and they congratulated themselves that their petition had been favorably acted upon. Yesterday morning a good deal of amusement was occasioned on seeing the two signboards "Jerome," "Williamsbridge" going up one over the other. Which name will be recognized on the railroad time tables, and by the conductors and brakemen on the passing trains remains to be seen.

Figure 7. New York Times article of February 4, 1870.

#### JEROME, FROM PAGE 7

the official divide between the east and west sides of the Bronx.

It seems Williams Bridge mail was being sent to Williamsburg in Brooklyn and the carriage class on the West Bronx petitioned the name change to identify with the racetrack. On February 6, 1869, Jerome was formalized.

However, according to a New York Times story published February 4, 1870 not everyone agreed with the change (Figure 7).

"Considerable unpleasant feeling has been created among the residents of Williamsbridge and its immediate vicinity in reference to the name of the place," the article begins. The article continues to note how residents and postmasters on each side of the Bronx River disagreed about the community's name, with East-Siders going with "Jerome" and West-Siders sticking with Williamsbridge.

While researching newspaper articles, I found a side-note about an Elizabeth Heilman, a woman of power in

The Chronicle, 12 July 1894

### Williamsbridge.

Who is this?

"The town of Williamsbridge, N. Y., is controlled politically by a woman 'boss.' She is Mrs. Elizabeth Hellman, and is known as 'Queen Elizabeth.' She is postmistress, deals in real estate, is a lobbyist at Albany, is a notary public and has made Williamsbridge a good, bustling town out of the sleepy village it was. Incidentally she has made \$150,000 during the past four years. She is a comely widow, 'fair, fat and forty.'"

Figure 8. Mrs. Elizabeth Heilman, was a rich and politically powerful force, long before woman had the right to vote. Locally she was known as Queen Elizabeth and became "postmistress" May 8, 1894.

1894, that doesn't have great bearing on this tale, but has postal ties and is certainly interesting (Figure 8).

Searching for an example of a Jerome, New York cancel is complicated further because on September 5, 1895, Schoharie County established a Jerome post office. Apparently, the name was attributed to its first postmaster, Jerome Hubbard. The Schoharie County Jerome Post Office was discontinued September 30, 1909 (Figure 9).

Therefore, when reviewing Jerome, N.Y. cancels, care has to be made to determine if it was from Schoharie County, Jerome Avenue west of the Bronx River, or Jerome, east of the Bronx River.

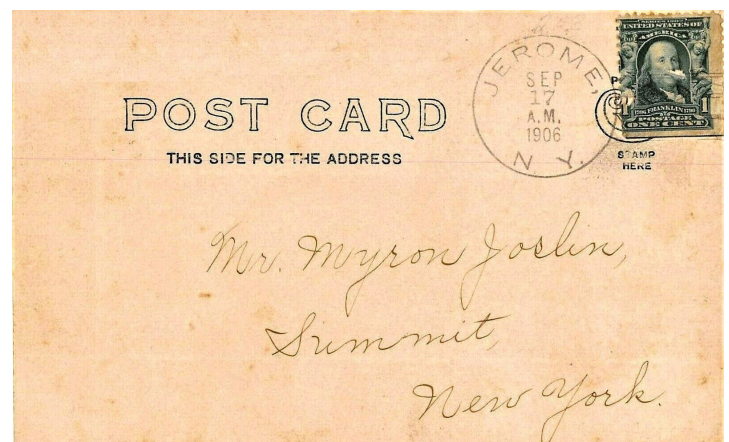


Figure 9. A postcard mailed September 17 from Jerome, Schoharie County.





**Figure 10.** Above, the post office at 3455 White Plains Road, c. 1940 along with the announcement of the postal station's move to 715 Gun Hill Road, Bronx, shown in 2024.

In 1954, The New York Times announced that the Williamsbridge station post office would move from 3455 White Plains Road to 715 Gun Hill Road, diagonal from the old building (**Figure 10**). This would take place on Tuesday, April 27, meaning that the post office celebrated 70 years at one current location.

There are a variety of cancellations from Williamsbridge – sometimes, as noted earlier, spelled two words

#### **Bronx Postal Station to Move**

*New York Times (1923-Current file); Apr 23, 1954;  
ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times  
pg. 29*

#### **Bronx Postal Station to Move**

**The Williamsbridge Station of the New York Post Office will move from its present quarters at 3455 White Plains Road to 715 East Gun Hill Road, the Bronx, on Tuesday, Acting Postmaster John H. Sheehan announced yesterday.**



as Williams Bridge – from over the years. Shown are a variety dating from 1902 to 1943 (**Figure 11, next page**).

After many years of searching, I acquired my holy grail for Jerome on November 12, 2024 for \$32.85 from an auction on eBay. Many of the dealer's items are listed for less than a dollar, but I knew I would be in for a battle.

**JEROME, PAGE 10**

### **New book explores postal service of Putnam County**

Postal historians who collect and study New York state now have another resource at their fingertips.

“Postmasters and Post Offices of Putnam County, New York” (2024) is a monograph created by Terence Hines, a philatelic collector, researcher and author, and resident of Putnam County.

The Hudson Valley county borders Dutchess County to the north, Connecticut to the east, Westchester County to the south and the Hudson River to the west. West Point is just across the Hudson in Orange County. The county seat is Carmel.

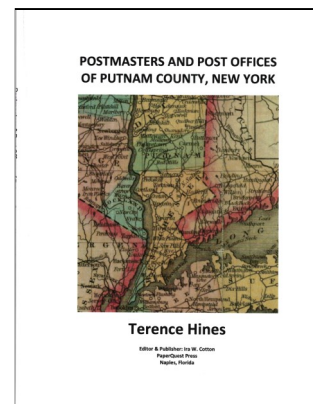
Putnam County was formed in 1812 from Dutchess County and is named for Israel Putnam, a hero in

the French and Indian War and a general in the American Revolution.

The publication includes information on all of the 35-plus post offices that have ever operated in the county, including a list of postmasters through 2023. Also included are compensation reports on postmasters from 1816 through 1911.

The book includes an alphabetical list of postmasters, assistant postmasters and officers in charge, and the years they served. The list offers more than 425 names of prominent Putnam County citizens, making the book of interest to genealogists, as well as postal historians.

A final section describes typical postal routes by which mail was distributed from the 1830s to the 1940s. Portions of several postal route maps are shown in color.



The 52-page book measures 8 ½ inches by 11 inches and is available from PaperQuest Press (PaperQuest-Press.com). The cost is \$15 for perfect binding, \$17.50 for coil binding, plus shipping and tax. You can also reach PaperQuest Press by writing to 3685 Pleasant Springs Drive, Naples, FL 34119; email: PaperQuestPress@yahoo.com.



While I am a novice in the knowledge of all postal markings, one thing was certain, the postal card with a pre-stamped 1-cent black Liberty Head had a clearly canceled, purple ink, double circle date stamp of June 5, 1883 from the Jerome Post Office, New York with a purple five-point star cancellation (**Figure 12**).

PRIVATE MAILING CARD AUTHORIZED BY ACT OF CONGRESS OF MAY 10, 1908.  
(POSTAL CARD - CARTE POSTALE.)

SEP 26  
8-30A  
1908  
MASS

Miss A. L. Heaney

WILLIAMSBURG  
SEP 26  
1908  
N.Y.

U.S. POSTAGE  
ONE CENT

CARD  
NEW YORK  
SEP 18  
7 PM  
WILLIAMSBURG

Add. Only

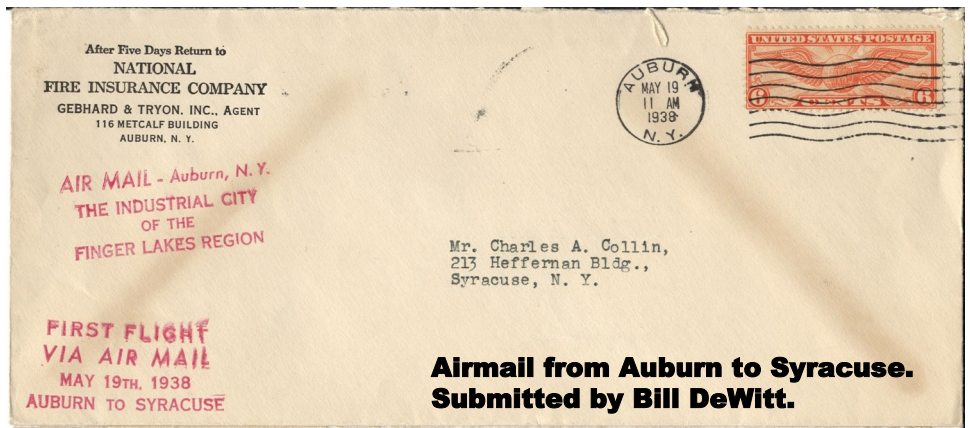
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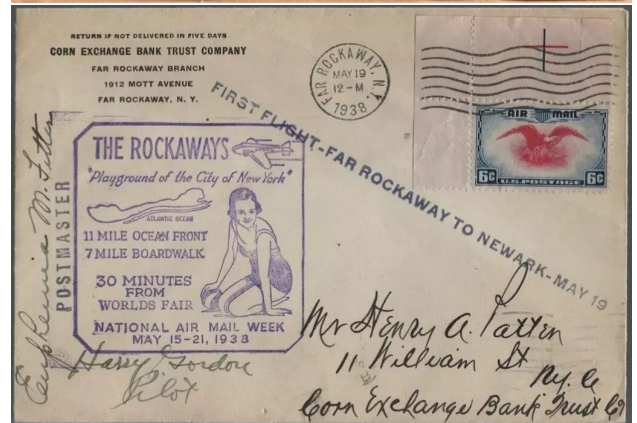


## NATIONAL AIRMAIL WEEK 1938

As we suggested in the last edition, this month we share some of our favorite covers from National Air Mail Week 1938 (NAMW). It was a promotion to celebrate the 20th anniversary of official U.S. airmail and millions of people took part by sending cards and letters by mail. To make it even more interesting, many municipalities, social groups and commercial entities participated by creating special cacheted covers. Shown on these next two pages are covers from New York communities. The variety is interesting.



**Airmail from Auburn to Syracuse.  
Submitted by Bill DeWitt.**



**More NAMW  
covers on  
back page!**

First column, from top: Poughkeepsie, submitted by Larry Laliberte; special flight from Brooklyn; local grapes on a Fredonia cover. Second column, from second down: Albany salutes a Glenn Curtiss flight; the postmaster and pilot signed a cover from Far Rockaway; Rye honored Amelia Earhart with its first-ever local airmail; Niagara Falls pictured the falls.



## NATIONAL AIRMAIL WEEK 1938



Clockwise, from above, Massena hails its role in the aluminum industry; someone obliterated the Poughkeepsie cachet while adding a Vassar College rubber stamp; Red Hook used red ink; a World's Fair cachet honors the first Wright Bros. plane; and Lockport went all philatelic, honoring its 1846 hometown postmasters' provisional postmark.

The New York City cachet (left) includes planes flying near the Statue of Liberty along with the names of two promoters of NAMW:

Postmaster General James Farley and NYC Postmaster Albert Goldman. The Utica cachet (above) shows the city seal, featuring a Native American (Iroquois) in a village, noted by "Unundadages," which was a fording spot at the Mohawk River.