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Postal History Place: **War Rate Covers of 1815-1816**

By Stanley B. Ashbrook

(From STAMPS Magazine, Nov. 10, 1951, with images added)

In my opinion, there are a few very outstanding events in the postal history of this great nation of ours, and covers connected with these events can be gathered into a collection which will not only prove a very safe philatelic investment but one of absorbing interest.

I firmly believe that any collection of our 19th Century stamps, both off and on cover, can be made much more interesting if same had a well rounded out showing of covers of the pre-stamp period. I will list the historical postal events which I have in mind as follows:

One—The “War Rate” covers of 1815-1816. Postage rates raised by 50% to help defray the cost of the War of 1812.

Two—The “U.S. Express Mail” of 1836-1839. The first Pony Express,—the first “Fast Mail”, (U. S.).

Three—The first Trans-Atlantic Mail by Steam Vessels—covers of 1840 and the early forties.

Four—The “Retaliatory Rate” covers of 1848. When Britain, in 1847, tried to stifle our attempt to establish an American Packet Service across the Atlantic, the U. S. Congress passed the famous “Retaliatory Act,” which made it expedient for Britain to sign a postal treaty with us.

Five—The “Pony Express” of 1860-1861. The first fast mail to the Pacific Coast.

Of course there are many other milestones in our postal history which can be included, but I consider the above five, as probably the most interesting, and covers directly connected with the above event can form the prelude to a collection that will not only be of interest to the advanced philatelist but to anyone who has a love for the history of this nation.

I will explain why I have found what I call the “BIG FIVE covers” so extremely interesting as a postal history study.

[Note: In this SNO article we will cover only the War Rate covers of 1815-1816. JFD.]

One—The War Rate covers of 1815-1816. As stated above, postage rates were raised by 50% by Act of Congress, effective February 1st, 1815, to help pay for the War of 1812 with Britain. Prior to the effective date, the rates of postage were governed by two factors, viz.—the length of miles a letter was to be transmitted, and second, the number of sheets of paper the letter contained. The following was the mileage scale:

40 miles	8¢
90 miles	10¢
150 miles	12-1/2¢
300 miles	17¢
500 miles	20¢
over 500 miles	25¢

For example, if a letter was to travel between 150 and not over 300 miles, 50% was added to 12-1/2¢, making the rate 18-3/4¢. The “Ship Rate” had formerly been 6¢ but with 50% added, 9¢ was charged. Such a rate applied only to letters addressed to a port of entry. When addressed to an office beyond, then 2¢ was added to the regular rate. For example, 12-1/2¢ plus 50%, plus 2¢ Ship Fee—a total of 20-3/4¢ due on delivery.

One can get an idea as to how many different combinations are possible, but suppose a letter had two sheets of paper, then it was a case of 2 times 12-1/2¢ plus 50%, and if such was a “Ship Letter” 2¢ was added, making a final rate of 39-1/2¢ due.

*Portsmouth N.H.
Feby. 1 (1815). Dark
green oval date-
stamp and matching
“Paid” with manu-
script “15” applied
on the first day of
the 1815 War Rate
on a folded letter to
Salem Mass.*

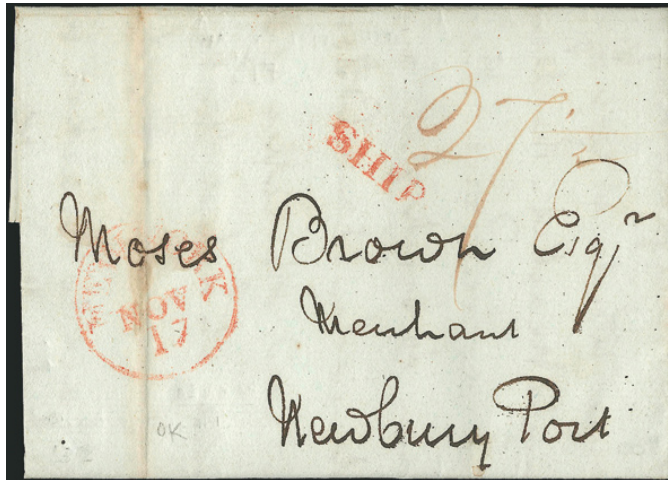


Petersg. Va. Apr 4
 (Petersburg, Va.).
 Circular postmark
 on 1815 folded letter
 sheet to Bolling Hall
 (Goochland Co.),
 mistakenly sent
 to Bowling Green,
 Virginia and for-
 forwarded, "18-3/4"
 rate (12-1/2¢ in the



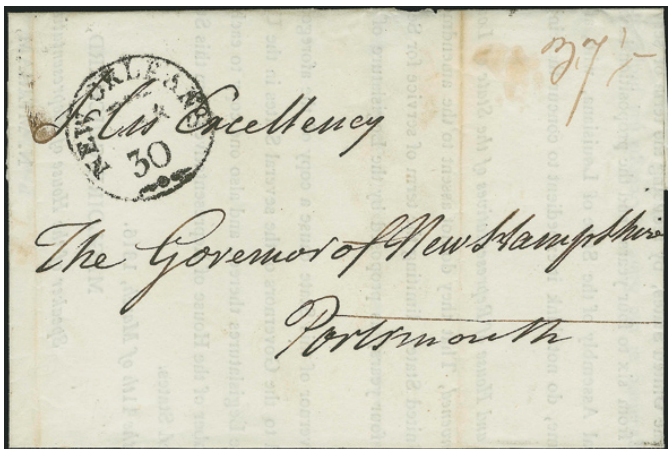
90-150 miles zone rate for a single sheet of paper plus 6-1/4¢ war rate tax) additional "18-3/4" due summed to "37-1/2" cents manuscript due just under the initial rate marking. The war rate tax was initiated 1-Feb-1815 and eliminated effective 31-Mar-1816.

New-York Nov. 17.
 Red circular date-
 stamp with match-
 ing "SHIP" straight-
 line and "27-1/2¢"
 War of 1812 sur-
 charge rate on
 1815 folded letter
 from Charleston
 S.C. to Newbury-
 port Mass., a scarce
 War surcharge on
 a ship letter (15¢
 plus 50% plus 2¢
 ship captain's fee)



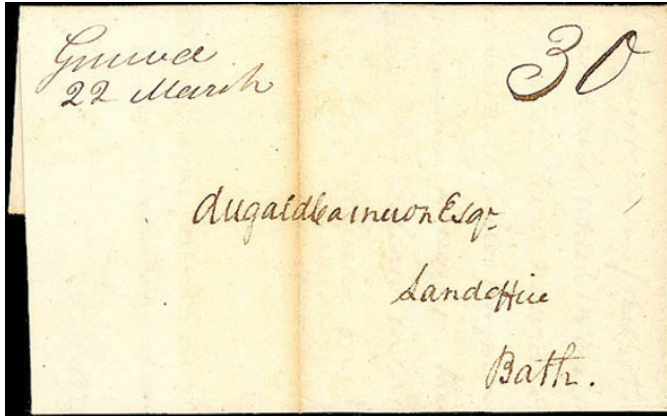
[Note: my math tells me 15¢+50%+2¢=24-1/2¢. Perhaps a reader can clarify the rate for this cover. JFD.]

New Orleans Mar.
 30 c.d.s. on 1815
 folded printed no-
 tice to the Governor
 of New Hampshire
 in Portsmouth, with
 manuscript "37-1/2"
 War rate (25¢ plus
 50% surcharge).
 Contents discuss
 a motion to reduce
 term limits of U.S.
 Senators from six



years to four and that Louisiana's House and Senate reject the motion.

Geneva (New York)
22 March manu-
script postmark on
1815 folded letter
to Bath Maine, with
matching "30" rate
representing the
20¢ per sheet of
paper in the 300-
500 miles postal
zone, with a 50%
surcharge.

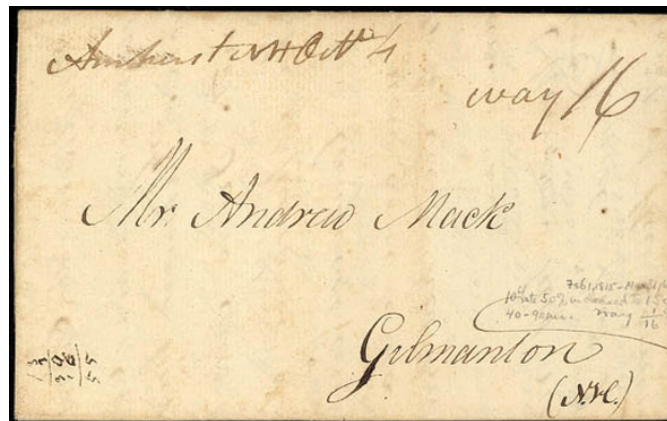


A cover from New
York to Burlington,
Vermont, forward-
ed to Haverhill,
New Hampshire
with the 1815
war rate forward-
ing usage totaling
"48-3/4¢" (12-
1/2¢+50%+30¢).



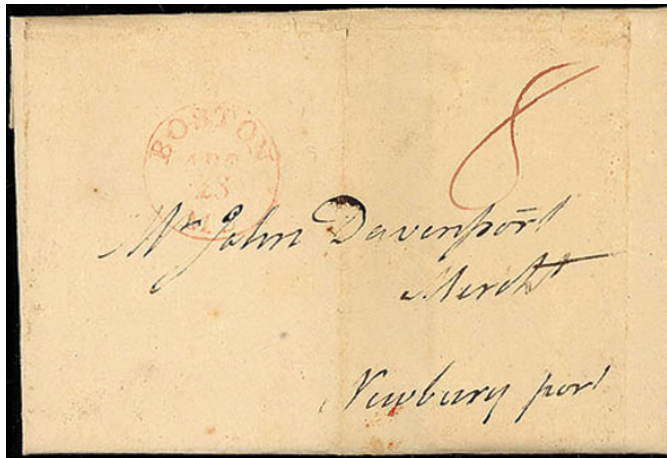
I might also mention that we find War Rate covers marked "Way" and these were charged with a "Way fee" of 1¢, thus 12-1/2¢ plus 50%, plus 1¢, or a total of 19-3/4¢. I believe that the combination "War Rate-Way" covers are quite rare, at least I have run across very few, but after all, I am a mere novice as a specialist.

Amherst, N.H./Oct.
4 manuscript post-
mark and "Way
16" rate (10¢ +
50% =15¢ postage
+1¢ way) on 1815
folded letter to Gil-
manton, N.C., letter
regarding friend's
misfortune in the
war... "We had an
account, some time
since, of his being
priss'd aboard of a
British man of War,
which he confirms.
After he made his
escape, he was em-
ployed as a common
sailor... After the
declaration of war,
he was taken prison-
er and committed
to Dartmoor Prison
and remained there
until Peace was
established."



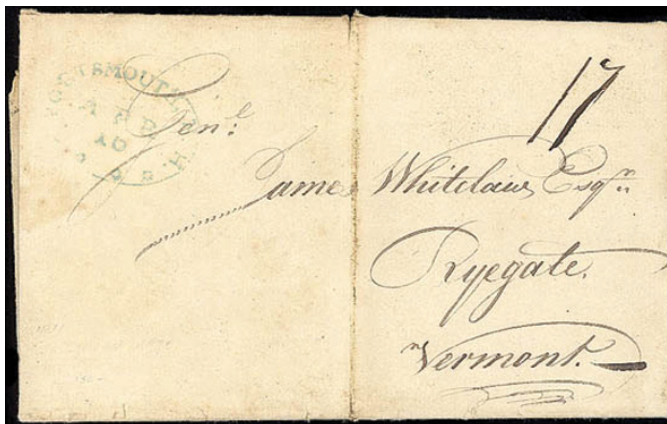
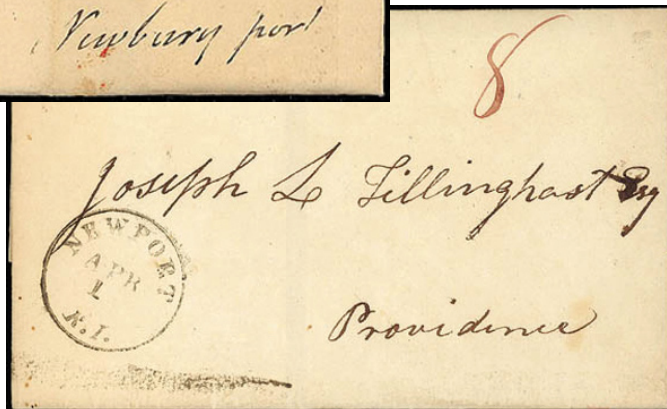
One who goes after War Rate covers in a really serious manner attempts to show all possible combinations commencing first with 8¢ plus 4¢, 10¢ plus 5¢, 12-1/2¢ plus 6-1/4¢, 17¢ plus 8-1/2¢, 20¢ plus 10¢, and 25¢ plus 12-1/2¢.

The War Rate was repealed as of March 31st, 1816 and on April 1st, 1816, postage rates reverted back to the old scale, so it is well to note that the “War Rate” was only in effect for 14 months, and this accounts in part for the scarcity of these covers. They are truly Philatelic Americana.



1816 Restored Rate cover to Newburyport, Mass., with red Boston April cds and manuscript “8” rate, paying the under 40 miles rate.

First Day of Restored Rate cover to Providence with Newport/R.I./Apr 1 (1816) circular date stamp and manuscript “8”, the restored rate of 8¢ for not over 40 miles.



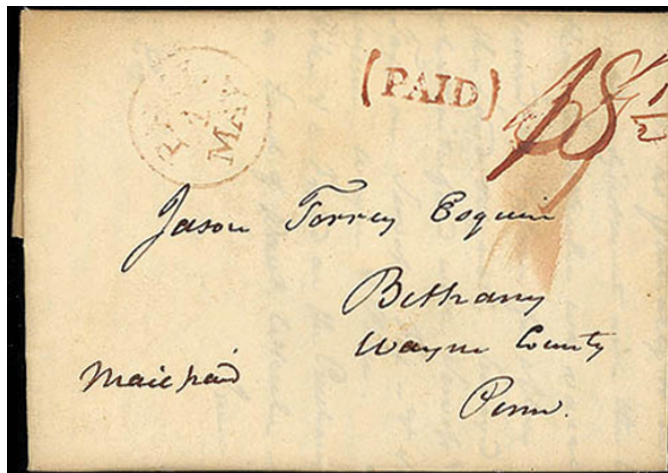
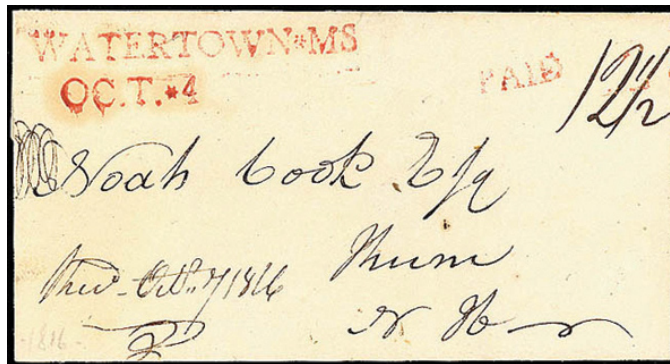
Portsmouth, N.H., Apr 16 blue oval date stamp on 1816 folded letter to Ryegate, Vt., with manuscript “17” for 300-mile restored rate.

The April, 1816 covers are known as the “Restored Rate” covers and examples are, I believe, extremely rare. As stated, the old rates went back into effect on April 1, 1816, but they were only in effect for the brief period of 30 days, because Congress established a new scale of rates effective May 1st, 1816.

The new rates, effective on May 1, 1816 were as follows:

30 miles 6¢
 80 miles 10¢
 150 miles 12-1/2¢
 400 miles 18-1/2¢
 over 400 miles 25¢

1816 folded letter sheet with “Watertown*MS/OC.T.*4” red two-line date stamp, matching straight line “Paid” and manuscript “12-1/2” new rate for 150 miles



Phil(adelphia)/May 1 red c.d.s. and matching “(Paid)” handstamp with manuscript “18-1/2” rate on 1816 folded letter to Bethany, Pa. the first day of the new rates.

It is customary in a specialized collection of War Rate covers to subdivide them into the following classes:

- (A) The War Rate
- (B) The Restored Rate
- (C) The New Rates of May 1816.

It is interesting to note that the rates effective on May 1, 1816 remained in effect through June 30, 1845, and effective July 1st, 1845, rates were governed by weight—1/2 ounce being the single rate, and was charged 5¢ up to 300 miles and 10¢ for distances in excess.

There is another very interesting class of War Rate covers, and as far as I am aware, they have never been mentioned or explained in the American philatelic press. The particular class to which I refer, are covers from Britain during the approximate period of August 1814 to September 1815. These covers bear a large British marking which reads as follows:



“POST PAID WITHDRAWN SHIP LETTER LIVERPOOL” with date in center with crown above. [Shown here] is a tracing that I made and, while not perfect, it is approximately correct. I have noted this marking in both red and black. Years ago I sent several covers with the marking

to my old friend, the late Prof. Robert F. Chambers of Providence, R. I., and inquired if he had an explanation of the marking, “Post Paid Withdrawn Ship Letter.” In reply, he stated he had noted it on covers in his collection, and had long been puzzled regarding the real meaning.

A year or so ago I got in touch with Alan W. Robertson, of England, and he furnished me with information which was approximately as follows:

“In the early part of the eighteen hundreds, the British Post Office Department was losing a large amount of revenue by letters being sent illegally by private ships to various parts of the world, senders paying no postage to the Department. As I understand, all mail by law, was required to be deposited in the Post Office.

“Around the middle or late summer(?) of 1814 a service was offered by the British P.O. Department to those who wished to send their letters by a private ship of their own choosing. A special rate of one-third of the normal Packet Rate was offered to those who would bring their letters to the ‘Ship Letter Office,’ (with which a number of the larger

ports were equipped). Senders paid their ‘one-third’ and were handed back their letters stamped: ‘Post Paid Withdrawn Ship Letter,’ with the name of the port, date, etc. Thus complying with the law, senders were then free to take their letters and hand them over to the captain of any ship in the harbor. This eliminated a possible delay by waiting for a ‘regular packet’ to sail. Their conscience and the Post Office’s revenue were then clear and legal. A fee was paid the Ship Captain for the conveyance of the letter.’

The plan had small success as a conscience stirrer, and it was abandoned along about August or September of 1814. According to Mr. Robertson, the packet office ports using this marking were Liverpool, London, Margate, Queensborough, Ramsgate, Plymouth, Devenport, Portsmouth, Bristol and Greenock. No doubt there were others which have not been recorded.

Covers from Britain arriving in this country during the months of February to August 1815 inclusive, are very interesting as they are a combination of—

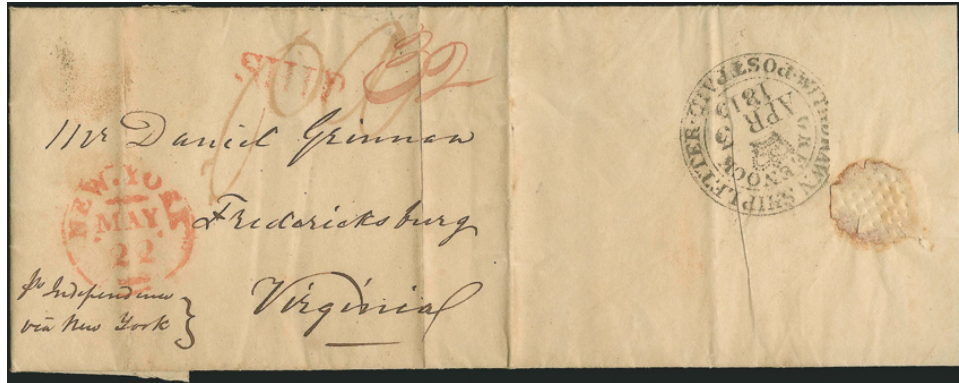
- (1) Paid—Withdrawn British Ship Letter
- (2) U.S. Ship Letter
- (3) War rate.

Needless to add, such covers are probably scarce.

Shown here is a typical example of the above combination—a “Ship Letter” into the Port of New York from Liverpool in April 1815. To left is a red pen “P,” the British for “Paid”—In the center



is a red pen “9” for “nine pence,” the sum paid the Ship Letter Office at Liverpool and to right is the New York due marking of “9”—the War Rate of 6¢ plus 50% (Ship Letter Rate for a letter addressed to a port of entry). The Withdrawn marking in lower left [of the cover on page 8, from the original STAMPS article] is a tracing of this marking which is on the back of the cover (in red).



This folded open cover to show front and back bears an unusually clear backstamp of the “Withdrawn Ship Letter/ Post Paid/ Greenock/ Apr. 3, 1815” marking on the back of the cover to Fredericksburg Va., also with manuscript “Pr. ‘Independence’ via New York” (lower left on the front), red “New-York May 22” circular datestamp, matching “Ship” handstamp, red manuscript “32” (upper right on the front) War Surcharge Rate (20¢ plus 50% and 2¢ ship fee), also large “PO” in red manuscript (top center on the front).

The front of an April 19, 1815 folded printed Prices Current to Providence, R.I.. On the front is a red “Ship” handstamp and a manuscript “7” rate crossed out and re-rated to “9” for the war surcharge. On the reverse (not shown) is a “Liverpool Post Paid Withdrawn Ship Letter” red backstamp.



A faint strike and a computer enhanced copy of a red Liverpool Post Paid Withdrawn Ship Letter FE 11, 1815 datestamp on the back of a folded printed Prices Current to Providence R.I. The front, not shown, bears a manuscript “27” surcharge rate and a red New York circular datestamp.



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