

# *Postal History Place:* **United States Postal History-1**

**By Seymour Dunbar**

*(From The Stamp Specialist #3, 1940, with some new images\*\*)*

Seymour Dunbar is well known for his study and writings on United States Postal History as exemplified by means of letters mailed by people. One of his exhibits is entitled "An Historical Portrayal of the People's Use of the United States Postal System for a Century, Linked with some of the Working Methods of the Postal System." The letters and postal stationery collected by Mr. Dunbar play an important part in the telling of his story for he believes that a Philatelic Exhibition should be in truth a Museum of History whereby the visitor may gain a view of the progress involved. Mr. Dunbar has displayed his exhibits in various parts of the United States with considerable success and encouragement.

A letter, and particularly a pioneer letter, that has traveled between two points in the United States has, in certain important particulars, an unmistakable significance. It is crowded with interesting facts, historical and otherwise: Governmental purposes, Governmental methods, human plans, human mistakes, scientific facts, geography, and information concerning past and present national and international affairs.

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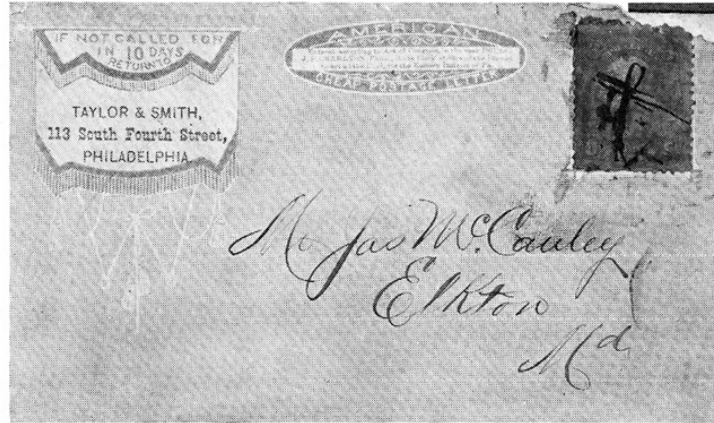
It is the constantly and rapidly growing realization of those facts, and an appreciation of the importance and interest and value of those facts, that has resulted, during recent years, in the tremendous increase in the search for old covers; in their systematic collection and thoughtful study; in the increasing space given to them by exhibitions; and in the attention given to them by visitors to the exhibitions—particularly by adult and thoughtful visitors.

No other country even remotely approaches the United States of America in the richness or the quantity or the immense historic value of its old letter-sheets and envelopes. That such is the case is due to several facts. The period at which the nation was organized; the wide variety of methods and vehicles by which a vast territory was overrun; the diverse geographic conditions of

\*In Part I is shown a group of letters portraying the manner in which people have always used the Postal Service to express their own independent methods and habits and purposes, in disregard of, or addition to the Official and necessary Governmental routine of the Service.

\*\* Due to the unique nature of many of these pieces and their relative lack of value, it was not possible to locate them or to find similar pieces; nevertheless this article offers much information, supplemented by the original images from this 1940 article. JFD.

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A used example of Charlton's Letter Sheet of 1861. Sent from Philadelphia to Eikton, Maryland. The copyright notice reads: "Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1861 by J. P. Charlton, Phila., in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the U. S. for the Eastern District of Pa. American Cheap Postage Letter." The height of the letter-sheet, when unfolded, is about 9 inches. After the message is written the sheet is folded up and sealed by a curved flap at the top. Few are known.

Another example, with "Lipman's Postal Card" corner card. Per Wikipedia, "John P. Charlton was an American printer and stationer from Philadelphia, Pa., who is often credited as the inventor of the private postal card, which he copyrighted in 1861 together with Hymen Lipman....Charlton invented the private postal card



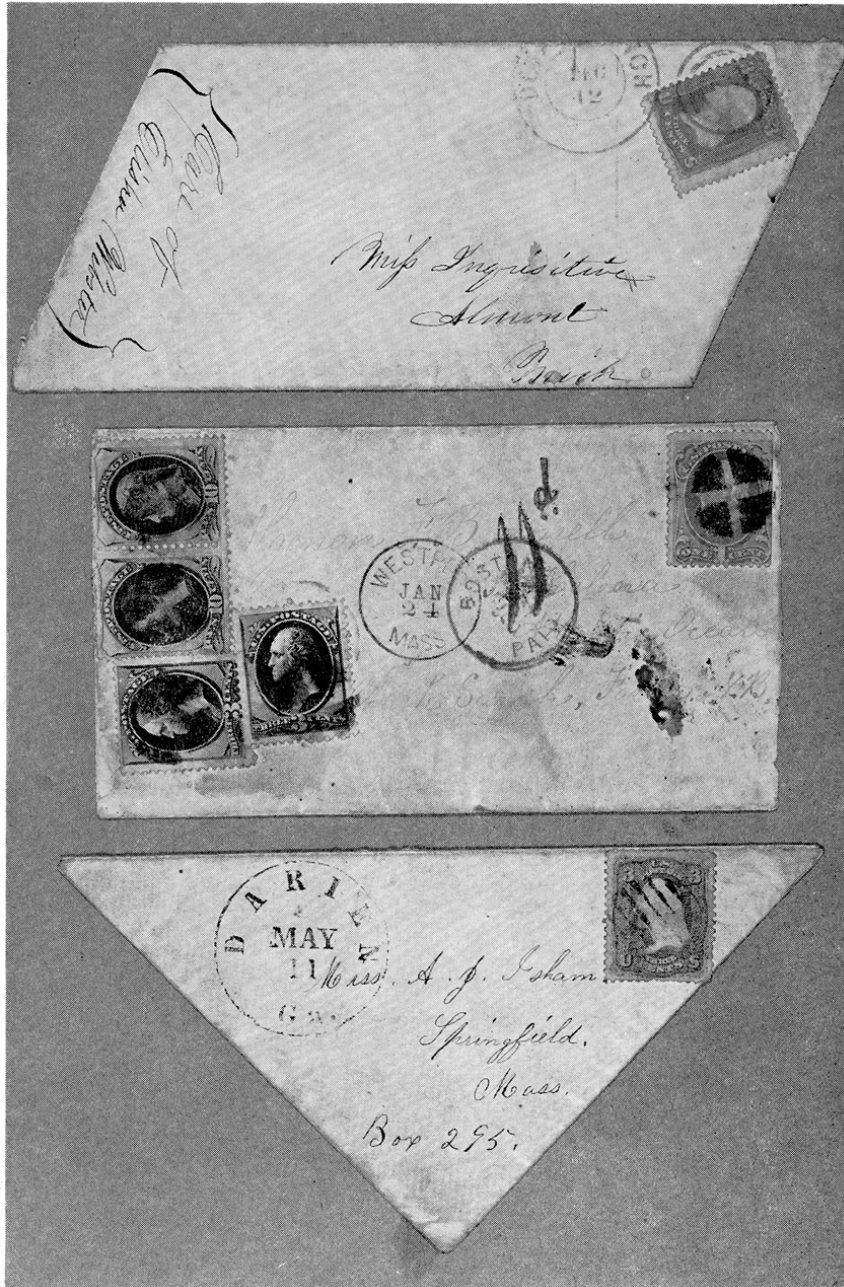
around...1861 ...He copyrighted and patented the idea in the same year...later transferred the rights to the idea to his friend and fellow printer Hymen Lipman who was also credited for the invention and who printed the postal cards with a decorative border and a small print reading 'Lipman's Postal Card. Patent Applied For.' Lipman's cards were also the ones that were first known as 'post cards'."

that territory; the persistent mania for overland movement that has always characterized the population; the equal mania for keeping in constant touch with one another by written messages; the many stampedes due to mineral discoveries; and the wars in which we have been engaged; have all contributed to the creation of those treasures. And, although perhaps three-fourths (or more) of our past personal and business correspondence has been lost, there still remains a priceless part of it, and no more old letters are being destroyed (if we hear about their existence in time).

It is literally true that millions of us are today searching for them and, when they are found, are preserving them in a fitting manner, accompanied by careful notations and explanations concerning their historical significance.

As one consequence of the search that has been going on during recent years; and the quantities of old letters that have been brought to light; and the

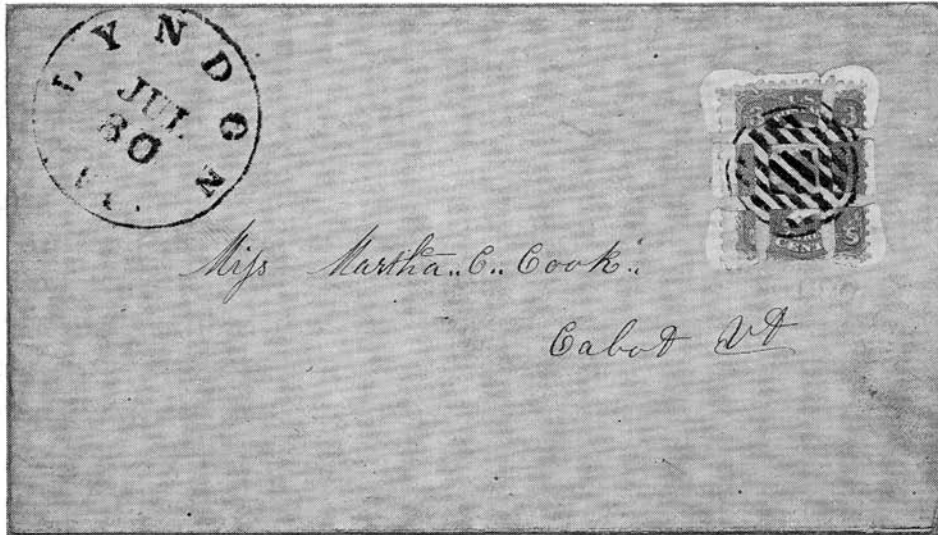




**Top:** A rhomboid envelope of 1864. Sent by a Union soldier who was in St. Mary's hospital, Detroit. Dated December 11. The letter-paper, which has a blue-printed border, was manufactured to fit the envelope, and was sold with the envelope.

**Middle:** Letter addressed to the Atlantic Ocean. (The "St. Helena" line is the equivalent of the street number on a local city letter.) Sent from Westport, Mass., on January 24, 1873. Original postage, 27 cents. This is a whaling ship letter. At that period whalers from eastern America usually touched at St. Helena during some phase of the voyage. In this case the "Sarah" had evidently been there and gone, for St. Helena collected 11 pence more of postage and entrusted the letter to another ship that might encounter the "Sarah" and deliver the letter. Sometimes such a letter wandered about for a year or two, being handed from one ship to another, before it reached the whaler to which it was addressed.

**Bottom:** A triangular envelope of 1868, with its enclosed letter. The letter is dated at Pine Hill, Georgia, on May 6, and is postmarked at Darien on May 11. Sent to Springfield, Mass. These triangular envelopes were made by Proctor & Clark, of Boston, about 1866.



The celebrated "Lattice-Window" envelope of 1859, of which perhaps four other copies are recorded. This copy was discovered by Henry Baer, Esq., of New York, among the correspondence of an old Vermont family. It is postmarked at Lyndon, Vermont, on July 30, (probably 1861) and addressed to Cabot, Vermont. This envelope was patented on June 19, 1859, and the patent notice is embossed beneath the window. In using this envelope the stamp was placed on the letter itself, inside the envelope, in such a manner as to insure its cancellation through the window, as here shown. The lattice bars of the window are a part of the texture of the envelope.

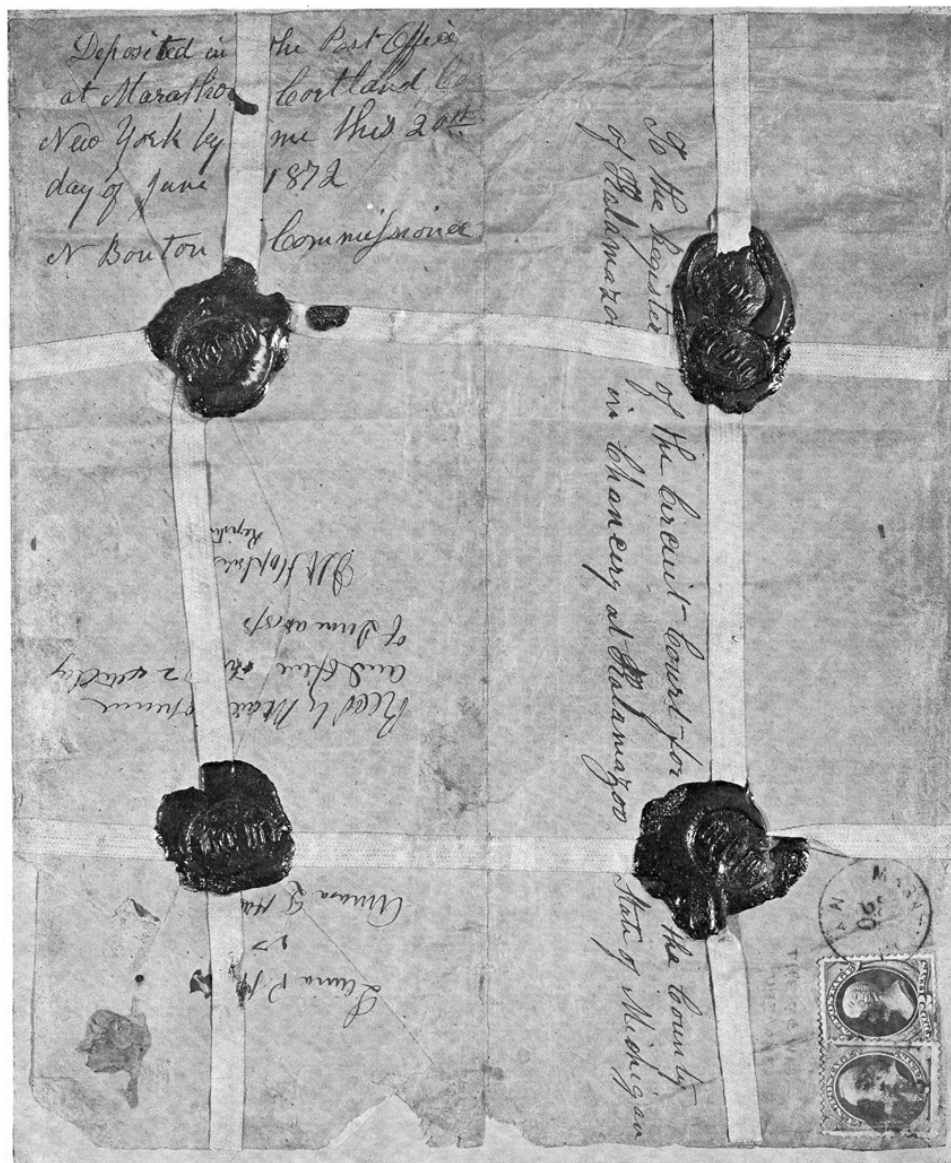
resultant careful study of them, a certain new and better understanding of our pioneer correspondence has been attained.

Heretofore—and until rather recently—all but a few wise collectors and commercial dealers in such things have more or less lumped everything of the sort together as miscellaneous old letters that do not possess any common attributes, and they have failed to perceive that those "old letters" are—in a certain sense—sharply divided into two general sorts, or classes.

It is true that collectors of them have, of course, long featured certain small or large specialized groups such as Civil War patriotic letters; Western Express letters; ship letters; and such things, but there is also a very clearly defined dividing line that cuts across the entire quantity of our pioneer correspondence and separates it into two definite and easily identified groups.

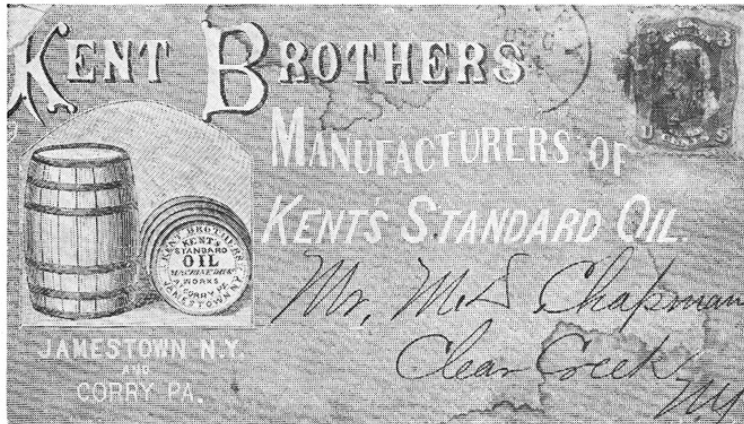
The pioneer letters that are illustrated (with accompanying notes) as a part of this article, and that originated during the period between 1833 and 1906, all belong, without exception, to one of the two significant groups here referred to, no matter how diversified in character they may be in other respects.





**A Ribbon-and-Seal envelope.**

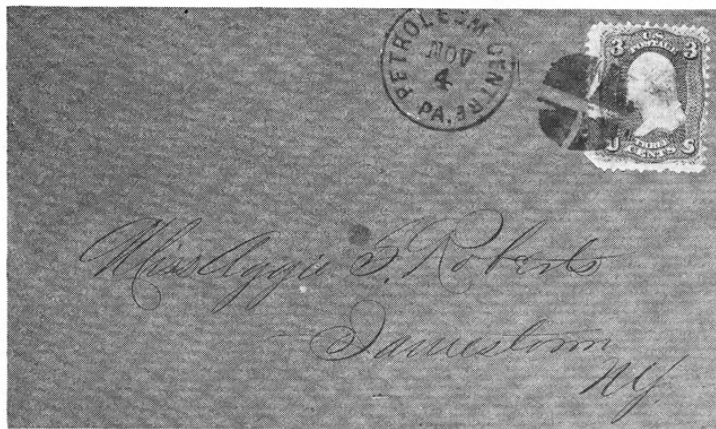
A very fine and elaborate example of the "Ribbon-and-Seal" method of mailing legal papers to a court that must receive them as legal evidence. Sent from Marathon, New York to a Court of Chancery at Kalamazoo, Michigan. Has the signed certification of mailing on June 20, 1872; and the signed receipt and certification of opening and filing on June 24. Size of original, 8½ inches high; 10¼ inches wide. (The use of a 7-cent stamp on domestic mail, as here happens, is about 50 times as unusual as on letters to Germany and Austria, for which purpose that denomination was created.)



**"Standard Oil"** enters the economic history of the nation. A copy of Kent Brothers envelope of 1861. Dated December 14. Sent from Corry, Pa.,

It will be observed, after a study of these letters, that in no case whatever does a single one of them owe its unusual interest or importance or historical value, in any degree, to a basic quality imparted to it by United States governmental methods or official handling. The interest and importance and historical value and striking personality of each of them is entirely due to a quality or qualities imparted to it by the private person or persons who created it. Governmental or other official significance, as an element either creating or adding to our present appreciation of these letters, is completely lacking. The Government did nothing but fix the routine postage rate, sometimes add a date, and carry them in an inconspicuous way.

In other words—as indicated in the title to this discussion—these letters are typical examples of pioneer correspondence in which the methods and habits, ideas and purposes of the people who wrote and sent them completely dominate the letters, fixed their historical value and present desirability in our eyes. The official Governmental routine of the Postal Service did not contribute an iota to the fundamental value that is now inherent—and obvious—in these relics.



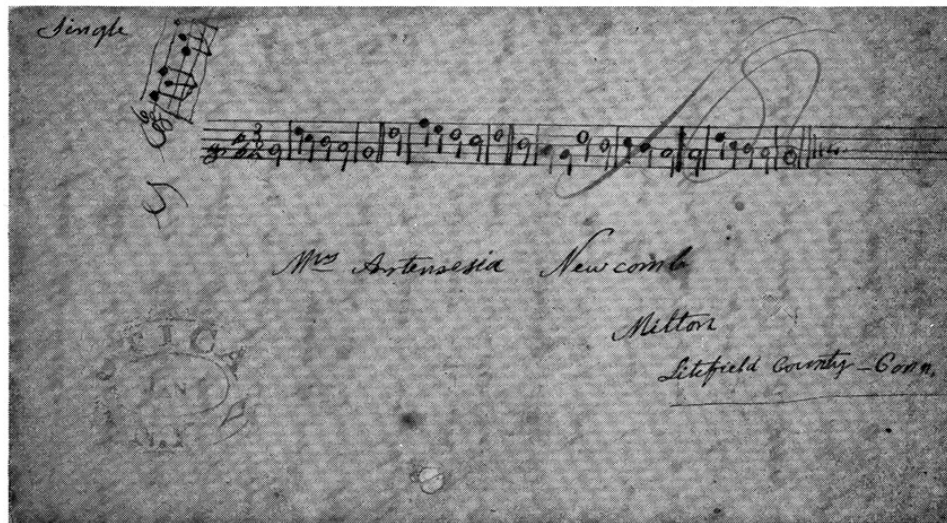
An historic "Petroleum" letter from Petroleum Center, Pa., Nov. 4, 1861, sent to Jamestown, N. Y.



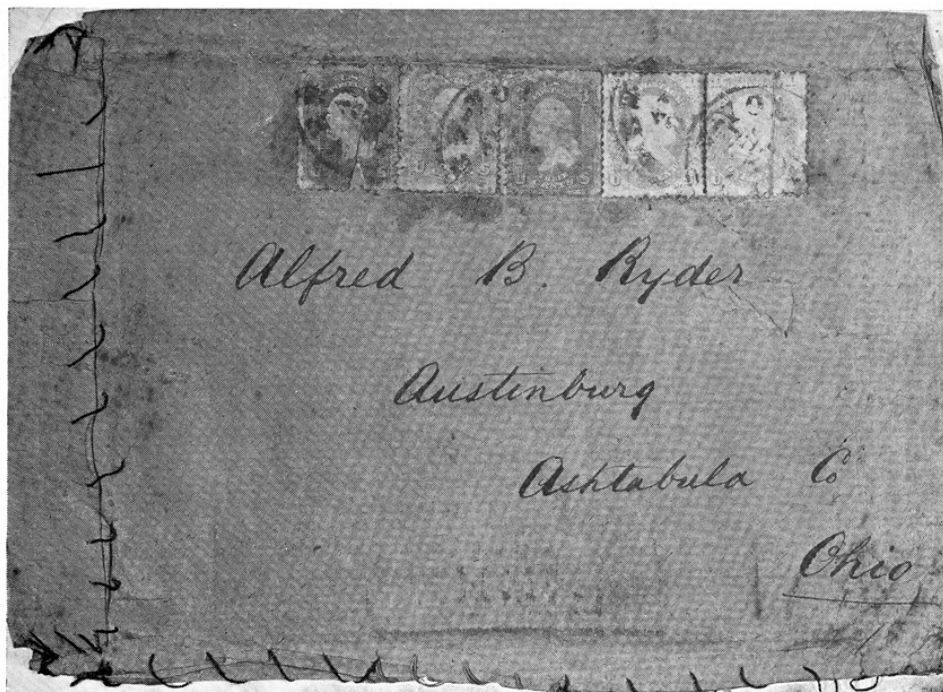


A "Death" letter of 1846. This illustrates the method used for the external announcement of such news before the introduction of envelopes and black borders. All "Death" letters were sea'ed with black wax. Sent from Paterson, New Jersey, to New York City.

Those facts, then, clearly indicate and define the two broad groups into which our pioneer correspondence is divided. The distinct cleavage between the two groups will be still more apparent in a subsequent and complementary article accompanied by illustrations in which another and very different group of letters is shown whose values of every sort were created by qualities for which the Government or Postal Service was solely responsible, and with which the creators of the letters had nothing whatever to do.



A letter-sheet of 1833 with manuscript music as part of the address. Sent from Utica, New York, to Milton, Connecticut. Date: January 4. Postage, 18 $\frac{3}{4}$  cents. Perhaps the only recorded letter with that strange characteristic.



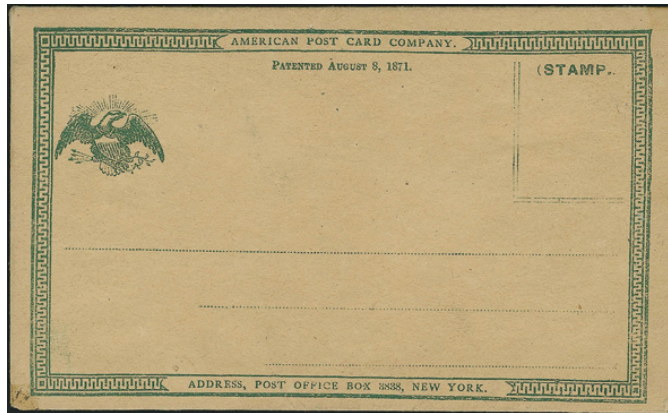
A Northern home-made envelope of the Civil War days. Constructed of coarse brown wrapping paper, and crudely sewed into envelope shape by heavy black thread. The whole thing strongly suggests masculine manufacture. Sent from New York City, August 30, 1864, to Austinburg, Ohio. Size: 5 $\frac{1}{4}$  inches high by 8 inches wide.

Such character-division of our own pioneer letters as is here pointed out is virtually unique in the world's postal history. In the letters of no other country but ours can there be found such a constant and similar separation into two distinguishable groups, one of which, of immense size and interest, owes its undoubted and great historic value to elements consciously and purposely contributed by the people as private individuals, with no official help whatever from the Government involved. All those of us who have for years studied letters of foreign origin will agree that it is most unusual to come upon alien letters in which the official handling is completely submerged—so far as interest and historic value is concerned—by the purposes and acts of those who wrote the letters.

That such a situation arose in this country, and became so strikingly manifest, is without doubt due to the pronounced traits of individuality, personality and independence that have always characterized this people.

Those members of the already large and rapidly growing army of cover-collectors among us who chance to read this and the closely related discussion will, no doubt—and to their own advantage and greater enjoyment—bear in mind

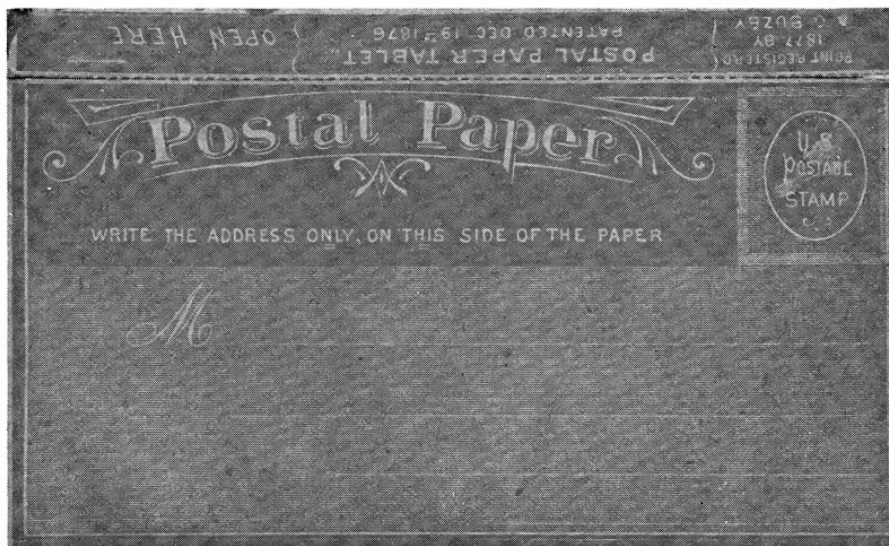




An example of the post-card patented on August 8, 1871, by the American Post Card Company, of New York City. The post-card idea was later adopted by the Government. In using this patented card the message was written on the inner side of the lower panel, which was then turned up and sealed by the curved segments at the top and sides. Height when opened, 6  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches; width, 6  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches.

the broad classification of pioneer items which this and a succeeding article seek to emphasize.

Probably the earliest single group of our pioneer letters that discloses the personality, habits and purposes of those who wrote them is the group known



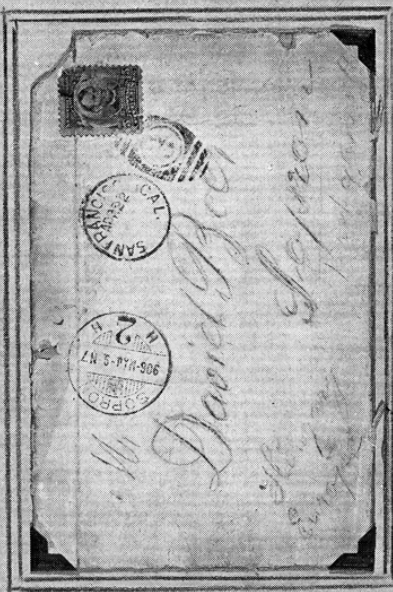
A specimen of Buzby's "Postal Paper" of 1876-1877. The wording on the turn-over strip reads: "Postal Paper Tablet Patented Dec. 19, 1876. Print Registered 1877 by A. C. Buzby. Open Here." The entire inner side is ruled with blue lines for the letter. The bottom panel was then folded upward, and the turn-over strip (which is gummed) was turned down, thus sealing the message. Height, when open, 6  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches; width, 6 inches.



A LETTER  
FROM THE SAN FRANCISCO EARTHQUAKE:  
SCRAWLED WITH A PENCIL  
ON THE FRAGMENT OF A PASTEBOARD BOX.

THE GOVERNMENT  
 DECLARED STAMPS TO BE  
 UNNECESSARY:  
 BUT THIS GROUP  
 EITHER POSSESSED OR  
 FOUND A STAMP.

— 0 —  
 UNITED STATES TROOPS,  
 UNDER THE COMMAND OF  
 GENERAL FUNSTON,  
 TOOK CHARGE OF THE  
 WRECKED AND BURNED CITY.



POSTMARKED: "SAN FRANCISCO APR. 22."  
 RECEIVED AT SOPRON, HUNGARY,  
 ON MAY 9, 1906.

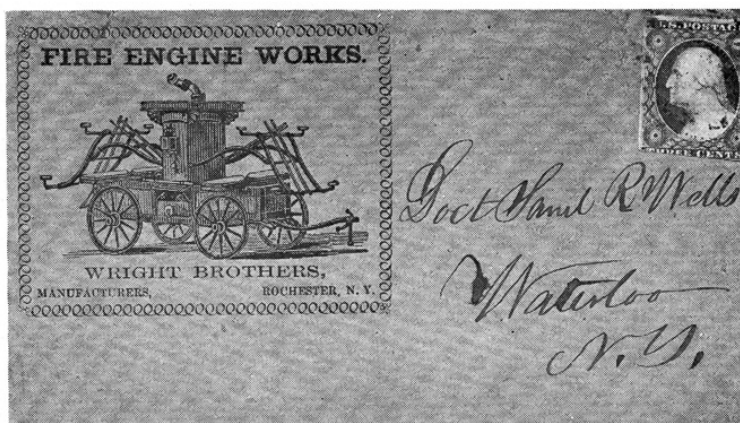
TRANSLATION  
 OF THE  
 MESSAGE:—

— 0 —  
 "WE  
 "ESCAPED  
 " WITH  
 " OUR  
 " NAKED  
 " LIVES."

(SIGNED) ADOLPH  
 SOFIE  
 ANTON.

A page from the Seymour Dunbar Collection of Historical Covers





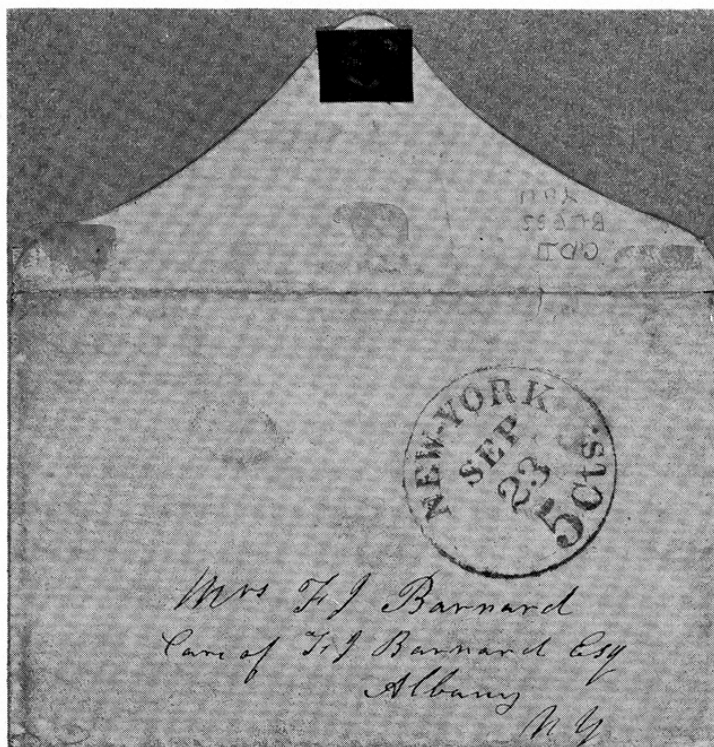
A copy of the "Fire Engine" envelope of 1851. It was used by the Wright Brothers of Rochester, New York, prominent makers of the famous pioneer hand-power fire engine universally employed until the steam fire-engine was invented and introduced in Cincinnati about six years later. This envelope sharply emphasizes the fact that with the introduction of envelopes, the whole Postal Service was transformed into an Advertizing Bill-Board.

as "Locals." Locals, of course, derive all their interest of every sort from the fact that no Governmental influence or operation touched them. The existence of every letter carried by a "local" is solely due to the fact that the writer of it impressed his own personality upon the message by his deliberate choice of the means for its transmission. Our Civil War patriotic envelopes—both of the North and the South—are another and later group that had its origin and its historic interest and value in the emotions and purposes of the people rather than in Governmental purpose and handling. [I was unable to locate this collection. JFD.]



A copy of Kintner's "Greeley Caricature" envelope of 1872, emphasizing his subterranean whiskers, that came up and cascaded over his collar. Kintner copyrighted the envelope in the office of the Librarian of Congress, for use during the Presidential campaign. The envelopes were made at 417 Broome Street, New York, by Kintner's Novelty Manufacturing Company.

In the building up of a collection of United States covers the conclusions I have reached are based on an uninterrupted experience and search of forty-eight years. I began in 1891. I have no doubt that I have examined about a million covers—possibly more—and from that number I have selected seven or eight thousand. Practically every one of them so chosen was chosen for a specific purpose; to illustrate a particular fact or point, historic circumstance or condition connected with the organization and development of our Postal Service and—especially—the people’s use of that service. As has long been known, and has been rather widely published throughout the country in recent



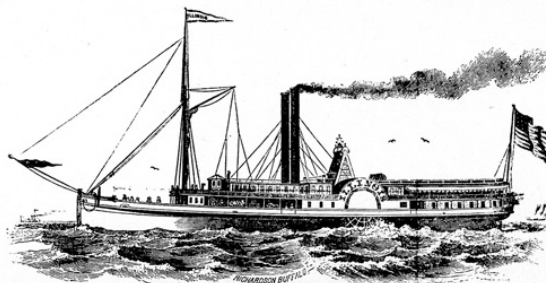
**An example of the "Love-seal" letters of about 1845. This seal reads: "God bless you." Such seals, of various colors and many wordings, were printed and sold in sheets of about two dozen, and were cut up for use. Sent from New York City to a woman in Albany.**

years, the collection is destined to go eventually, intact, to a great educational institution for future study and exhibit.

Although practically all the regular issues—excepting inverted centers and other freaks or accidents and the early ninety-cent stamps—are represented on the covers, I have always preferred, and constantly sought for, covers that possessed a significance beyond the mere presence of the stamps. I have tried to build up an historical and educational record for the future that would, in the shape of pioneer correspondence, illustrate both the manners and whims and fads of the past generations, and their mass-reactions to the events and condi-



## BUFFALO AND CHICAGO



### STEAM PACKET ILLINOIS, C. BLAKE, MASTER.

The pictorial letter-sheet of the Buffalo and Chicago steambot "Illinois." Mailed at Milwaukee on November 7, 1844. (Written on Nov. 3.) Addressed to Franklinville, New York. Postage, 25c cents. Height of page, 10 inches; width, 8 inches. Such sheets were supplied to the passengers during the voyage.

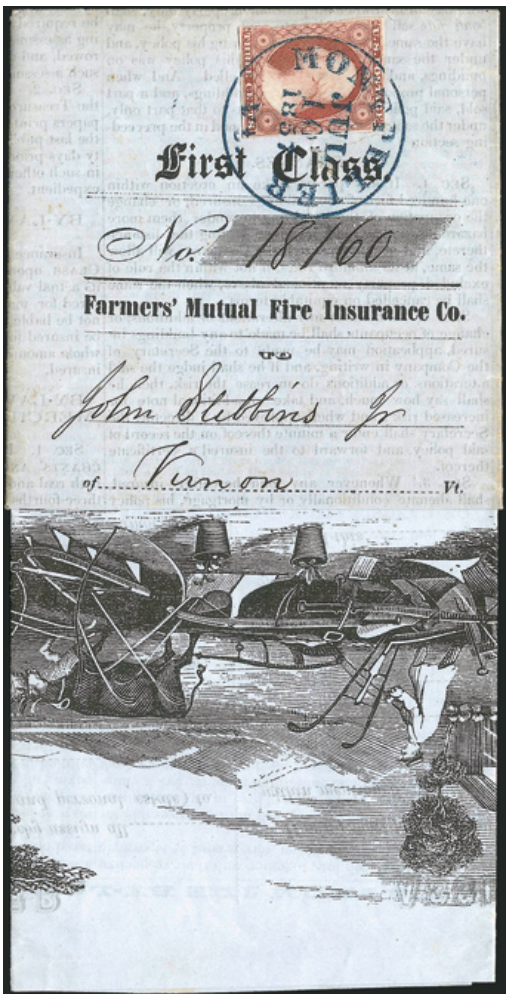
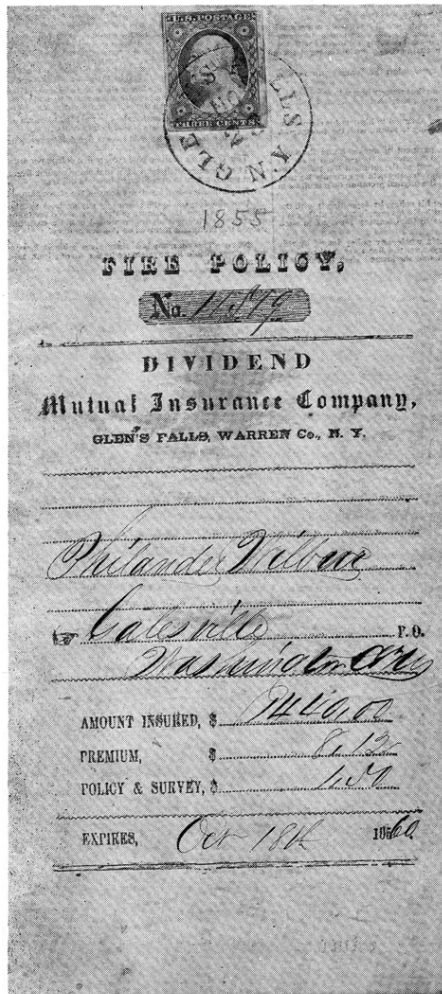
tions with which they were surrounded. No other available relies of the past compare, in importance and usefulness, to envelopes, for the purposes here mentioned.

I have long seen—and still see—a tendency and sometimes a fierce determination on the part of some cover collectors to insist on "small neat covers,"

A wrapper printed for use on just one special transcontinental express train; namely, the "Jarrett and Palmer Express of June 1, 1876." For this famous train the Baltimore Sun newspaper prepared these wrappers for a mail-bag containing copies of the Baltimore Weekly Sun in which was printed a story entitled "The Great Wheel." The train left New York City at 2 A. M. on June 1, and arrived at San Francisco at 9 A. M. on June 4 (which was 12.14 P. M., New York time.) The distance travelled by the train was 3314 miles. The average speed was 40.29 miles per hour. Elapsed time, 82 hours, 14 minutes. (Today, by air, the elapsed time is about 16 hours.) \*



[\* In 2013, the in-air time is less than 5 hours. JFD.]



For a dozen years, during this period, insurance policies were often mailed in this manner. It saved the cost of envelopes, and the labor of addressing the envelopes. This fire policy was sent from Glens Falls, N. Y., to Gatesville, New York.

An illustrated Farmer's Mutual Life Insurance Co. insurance policy depicting a plow and farm scene, to Vernon Vt., with a 3c Type II, Sc. 11A, tied by a blue "Monpelier Vt. Jul. 10, 1857" circular date stamp.

and to avoid the larger sized covers; those that are identified as "business" or "legal-size" covers. I am entirely sure that attitude is a mistake. Why? Because at least half of the nation's mail—especially since envelopes came into use—has consisted of those large letters, and, in necessary consequence, no collection of covers which does not contain such covers can be a true and honest or complete picture of the use of our postal service. For many years—as an example—legal documents for use as evidence in courts of law were sent, with elaborate precautions, in large envelopes. One such cover is illustrated in this article. They are all extremely interesting.



Another phase of cover collecting in which thoughtless prejudice is certainly carried to an unreasonable extreme deals with the matter of cancellations which do not happen to “tie” the stamp or stamps to the envelopes. In early days, fortunately, postmasters did not engage in the artificial and “philatelic manufacture” of covers. So if a pioneer cover found today is in the actual condition, so far as postal handling is concerned, in which it was treated by the postmaster with his hand stamp, it is perfect. Every one familiar with such matters knows that in the early days a vast number of letters passed out of the offices with the postage not tied. A collection of covers which purports to portray early conditions, but which rigidly and systematically excludes such examples of pioneer mail, is historically dishonest. Its upbuilder catalogs himself as more concerned with commercialism than with truth and sincerity.

Again, that section of a collection devoted to cancellations should certainly contain a little group of the most atrocious pioneer smudge cancellations possible to find. Examples of that quaint sort not only demonstrate the conditions of handling that once existed, but also serve to emphasize, by contrast, the beauty and interest of many fine and noted cancellations.

There are two outstanding groups of pioneer covers that cannot be properly illustrated in an article like this, because a correct portrayal of such covers demands the use of vivid colors. During the period before the introduction of envelopes, when all missives consisted of stampless letter-sheets, a certain proportion of those letter-sheets were made of brilliantly colored paper very different in appearance from the plain white or pale blue stock ordinarily in use and now found in quantities. Some of those colored sheets were bright green; some were lavender; some were vividly red; some were pink; some were orange; some were brown. Letters of that sort cry aloud for representation in a cover collection—and once in a while (with luck) that demand can be gratified.

Then, after envelopes came into use, and in the decade after 1860, there arose two popular fads during which colored envelopes of identical color and texture achieved nation-wide use. One was a short-lived fad for envelopes of a bright orange-brown color; and the other craze—of longer duration and country-wide—was for envelopes of a very violent reddish-purple color. These purple covers were of rather small size.

Several other envelope fads swept the country between 1850 and 1870, and all require representation in a cover collection. Probably the most peculiar of them were the attempts to popularize the “rhomboid” envelopes, with their accompanying and made-to-order writing paper; and the “triangle” envelopes. Examples of each are here shown. Some of the triangle envelopes were manufactured by Proctor & Clark, of Boston, and bear the name of their maker.

Still another group that calls (though usually in vain) for inclusion in a representative collection of pioneer letters are the rare covers that were patented by individuals or firms. Four of these strange things are here pictured. They are the card of the American Post Card Company; the Charleton “Letter Sheet” of 1861; Busby’s “Postal Paper” of 1876; and, most extraordinary of all, the famous and curious rarity known as the “Lattice Window Envelope” of 1859. A stamp-booklet was also patented and made in Buffalo, and widely used, years

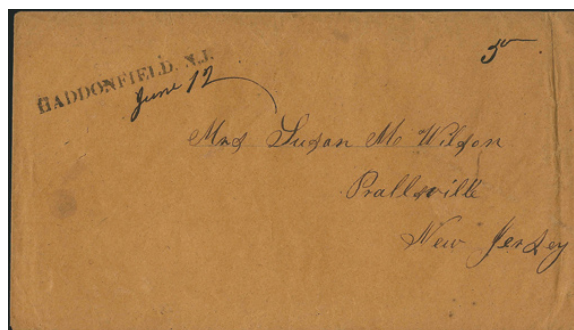
In addition to those mentioned on page 15 and pictured on pages 3 and 4, this example of a triangular shaped envelope to New Orleans bears a 3¢ Type III (Sc. 26) tied by a blue "ST" (Steamship Texas) in Star with Circles fancy cancel.



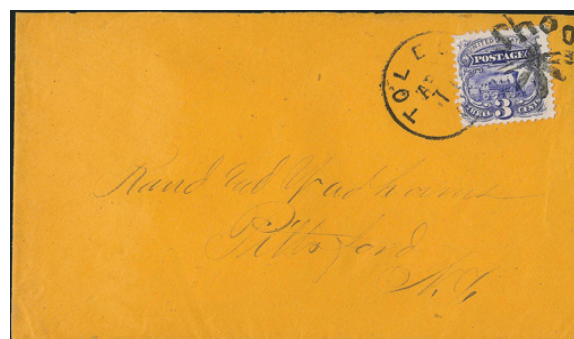
A green folded letter from Havana, Cuba to New York via Charleston, S.C. with a Charleston Feb. 26 (1849) c.d.s. This cover also bears a rare "12-1/2" handstamp, one of only two covers known with this Charleston rate marking used on contract steamship mail.



A circa 1830 brown stampless folded letter with a straight-line "Haddonfield, N.J." handstamp.



An example of an orange cover, this one to Pittsford, N.Y. with a 3¢ 1869 Pictorial (Sc. 114) tied by a scarce "Shoo" Fly fancy cancel and "Toledo O. Apr. 11" c.d.s.





before the Government adopted the booklet idea. That pioneer stamp booklet had printed brown covers of thin cardboard, and could contain, between its pages, nearly a hundred stamps.

The strange things that are here pictured—these postal fossils that once burdened the mail-carriers on their daily rounds—and which have at last attained, for us and for all the future, the well-deserved rank of Museum Exhibits, came into existence not through any plan or purpose of the Government, but as a consequence of ideas and notions that germinated first in the minds of the American people. They and their relatives should be sought and systematically collected and assembled, and treated with the nature of their origin always in mind.

In Part 2, to appear soon, there will be shown A Group of Letters and Allied Material Illustrating the Official Methods of the Government, the Emergency Actions of Individual Postmasters, and the Whims and Ideas of Postmasters, in Organizing, Developing and Operating the Postal Service.

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