

**"CHARGE" AND "CHARGED" MARKINGS:
BILLING POSTAL CHARGES TO A BOX-HOLDER'S ACCOUNT**

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Introduction

I do not know when personal boxes within post offices were first devised, but they appear to have existed since the early years of the 19th century. Diane DeBlois cited one Thomas Brown as claiming he originated the idea while a clerk at the Richmond, Virginia, post office in 1810.¹ But other references show that New York had 144 private mail boxes in 1804. There is evidence that certain post offices had boxes as early as 1800; boxes were considered a threat to the compensation afforded to private carriers who delivered mail for a 2¢ fee. Alvin Harlow wrote that New York had 900 such boxes in 1825.² I have not seen any reference to personal post office boxes in the 18th century.

Post office boxes, frequently no more than pigeonholes, were rented to post office patrons, with the rent retained by the postmaster who owned them. Postmasters were responsible for their costs and maintenance. There is no provision or regulation involving personal post office boxes in the early Post Office Department laws and regulations. Nonetheless, rent for such boxes appears to have been charged quarterly to patrons of specific post offices. At a later date, some offices billed patrons monthly.

These post office boxes must be differentiated from the post office letter boxes—which the British call pillar boxes—used to collect mail deposited by the public. Red cylindrical Royal Mail letter boxes are familiar sights to tourists in England. These large boxes can be traced back to the 1650s in France and Belgium and existed in other European countries at later dates. Such letter boxes were owned by the various postal services.

During the early days of stampless mail, in order to send and receive letters and newspapers, you had to wait in line at a post office until you could receive personal service from a postmaster or his assistant. This is similar to what patrons encounter in a modern supermarket as they wait for personal service at the delicatessen counter.

Somewhere a postmaster (or one of his patrons) got the idea that outgoing letters on which the postage was to be prepaid could be charged against the personal account the postal patron established when he rented his post office box. In fact, this practice was illegal. In the 1832 *Postal Laws and Regulations (PL&R)*, Chapter 5, Section 63 states very clearly: "You are not authorized in any case to give credit for postage." In this same *PL&R*, Chapter 13 deals with "Box Letters"—but this was a term for what are more commonly called drop letters, sent and received at the same post office. There was a 1¢ postage charge on such letters at this time and earlier.³ The prohibition on giving credit for postage is repeated in Chapter 23, Section 172 of the 1847 *PL&R*.

Regulations notwithstanding, it is clear from the evidence of many surviving covers that from the 1830s up until 1855 (when stamps were required on all mail), many patrons, at many different post offices, charged outgoing prepaid letters against their post office box accounts.⁴ Charge to box usage appears to have been common at most larger post offices. Not only do surviving covers bear evidence of this practice, but quarterly or monthly invoices and receipts also survive, sent by postmasters to patrons showing postage charged to their individual box accounts. Specific examples are presented below. Charging to a box was obviously a choice available to many individual postal patrons and firms.

The 1843 *PL&R* acknowledged this situation, called for an accounting, and stipulated that box rental revenues over \$3,000 annually should accrue to the Post Office Department, not to the individual postmasters. Section 202 of the Act of May 18, 1842 provided:

[I]n addition to returns now required of postmasters at New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New Orleans, and the other several cities of the Union, each and every year hereafter, to render a quarter-yearly account to the Postmaster General...of all emoluments or sums by them respectively received for boxes, or pigeonholes, or other receptacles for letters or papers, and by them charged for to individuals, or for the delivery of letters or papers at or from any other place in either of said cities...and if, from such accounting, it shall appear that the net amount received by either of the postmasters at either of such cities, for such boxes, and pigeon-holes, and other receptacles for letters and papers....shall exceed three thousand dollars in any one year, such excess shall be paid to the Postmaster General for the use and purposes of the Post Office Department..."

This regulation of course applied only to the largest post offices, those with hundreds of boxes and substantial box-rental revenue. The upper and lower portions of an 1858 listing of 52 such cities, as published in Executive Document 97 from the House of Representatives in 1858, is shown in Figure 1. New York City topped the listing with \$25,572 in box-rental revenue; San Francisco was number two with \$18,110. By this time the \$3,000 ceiling had been lowered: All box-rental revenue over \$2,000 went to the treasury. But

Exhibit of box rents collected at the principal post offices in the United States for the year ending June 30, 1857; and of the amounts received by postmasters therefrom in addition to their compensation derived from commissions on postages set forth in the Biennial Register of the Secretary of State; also of the amounts paid into the treasury after deducting expenses, and the amounts received by postmasters as aforesaid.

Post offices.	Box receipts.	Expenses.	Received by postmasters.	Paid into treasury.
Albany, New York	\$2,804 01	.....	\$2,000 00	\$4 01
Auburn, New York	445 63	.....	445 63	.....
Boston, Massachusetts	9,872 07	.....	2,000 00	7,872 07
Baltimore, Maryland	3,454 17	.....	2,000 00	1,454 17
Buffalo, New York	3,572 42	.....	2,000 00	1,572 42
Bangor, Maine	977 50	\$8 48	969 02	.....
San Francisco, California	18,110 44	.....	2,000 00	16,110 44
Sacramento, California	5,414 00	.....	2,000 00	3,414 00
Stockton, California	1,156 59	.....	1,156 59	.....
Troy, New York	1,152 00	.....	1,152 00	.....
Toledo, Ohio	1,406 50	.....	1,406 50	.....
Trenton, New Jersey	656 92	.....	656 92	.....
Wheeling, Virginia	790 40	.....	790 40	.....
Washington, Dist. of Columbia	1,945 59	.....	1,945 59	.....

Figure 1. Sections of a congressional document from 1858 detailing annual post office box-rental revenues at various post offices.

ownership of the boxes for the most part remained in the hands of the postmasters. The *Postal Guide* of April 1875 discussed this specifically:

The Post Office Department neither owns, erects, nor repairs letter boxes in post offices, except when the building is owned by the United States. Any postmaster may put up boxes in his office. These boxes are his private property, but the revenues thereof must be accounted for to the Department.

Manuscript post office charge to box markings

Paid letters that show evidence of being charged to a post office box account are very common. Stampless covers with a manuscript "paid" applied in the handwriting of the sender, and which also bear PAID postal markings, are numerous. While some of these letters were certainly charged to a box account, there is no way of verifying this. In any in-



Figure 2. Manuscript charge to box markings are common. This montage shows representative covers, with the charge notations encircled in green. The texts read as follows: 1. "Paid 53," indicating a charge to that box number; 2. "Double Paid"; 3. "Pd. I.A.G.G."; 4. "Ch Box 30"; 5. "Paid Ch E. Yates" and 6. "Charge postage single to my a/c B.M.M."

stance, it could be that the writer wanted to designate, in a batch of letters bound for the post office, those letters to be prepaid. A letter without a "paid" notation would be sent due.

However, many letters show markings written by senders that indisputably indicate that the postage was to be charged to a box account. Figure 2 shows a montage of six such covers, with the salient manuscript notations encircled in green. The charge notations are as follows. 1. "Paid 53," indicating a charge to that box number; 2. "Double Paid" (this could be one of the ambiguous markings discussed in the previous paragraph); 3. "Pd. I.A.G.G."; 4. "Ch Box 30"; 5. "Paid Ch E. Yates" and 6. "Charge postage single to my a/c B.M.M." This last example is about as specific as it gets.

Cover examples

Figure 3 is an example of the way fee being charged to a post office box account. Note the handwritten “R.M. pd Single” at lower left, in the same bold script as the address. The Figure 3 cover bears no town postmark but the postmaster applied manuscript postmarks “Dec 15,” “way,” “Paid,” and “11.” The letter within is dated 1832. This cover was charged to the sender’s post office account but given to a mail carrier rather than dropped off at the post office. Thus the postmaster charged a way fee of 1¢ and added that to the regular letter postage that was charged, 10¢ for a distance of 30-80 miles. A similar cover (not shown) exists in the same handwriting and with a charge to box marking, sent to the same address. Not a way cover, this is postmarked “Middleburgh June 1th” (1832) with “Paid” and “10.” In both cases the recipient was Richard Van Rensselaer, a member of Albany’s founding family.

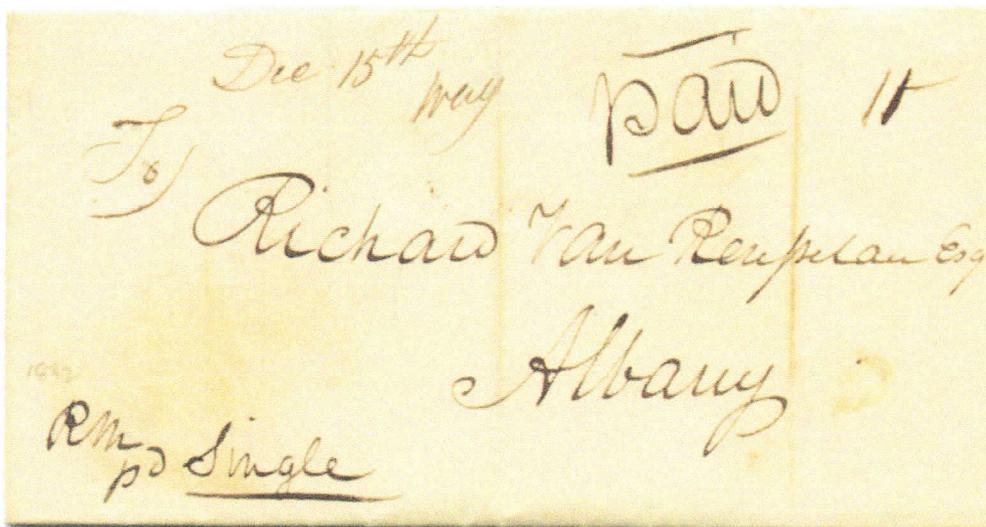


Figure 3. This 1832 cover to Albany shows the way fee being charged to a post office box account. The prepaid postage totaling 11¢ (for a letter traveling 30 to 80 miles plus the 1¢ way fee) was charged to the box account of “R.M.” at Middleburgh, New York.

Some of the largest charges to post office box accounts involve prepaid covers that traveled via the government Express Mail of 1836-1839. Figure 4 shows a cover from New Orleans to New York City on which 75¢ postage was charged to Box 779 in New Orleans. This would be triple the 25¢ rate for an express letter traveling over 400 miles. The postmarks are “NEW ORLEANS La. SEP 5” (1837), “PAID” and “75”. This cover predates the time when prepayment of express mail postage was required.

Figure 5 shows an equally interesting express mail cover, sent from Washington, D.C. to St. Louis, with a charge to box endorsement applied by the Executive Department of the federal government. The cover is routed “Express Mail” at upper left and the bold manuscript notation at upper right reads “Charge Indian Affrs. C. A. Harris.” The postmarks are two handstamps—“WASHINGTON CITY D.C. MAR 15” (1838) and “PAID”—and a manuscript “75,” again for triple the 25¢ rate for an express letter traveling over 400 miles. Normally such a cover would have been sent as a free frank, but free mail was prohibited under the Express Mail regulations. By this time all Express Mail letters had to be prepaid. This letter was carried over the mid-western and far-western branches of the express; the latter service existed for only six months. Prior to November 1, 1837, this cover could have been sent unpaid.

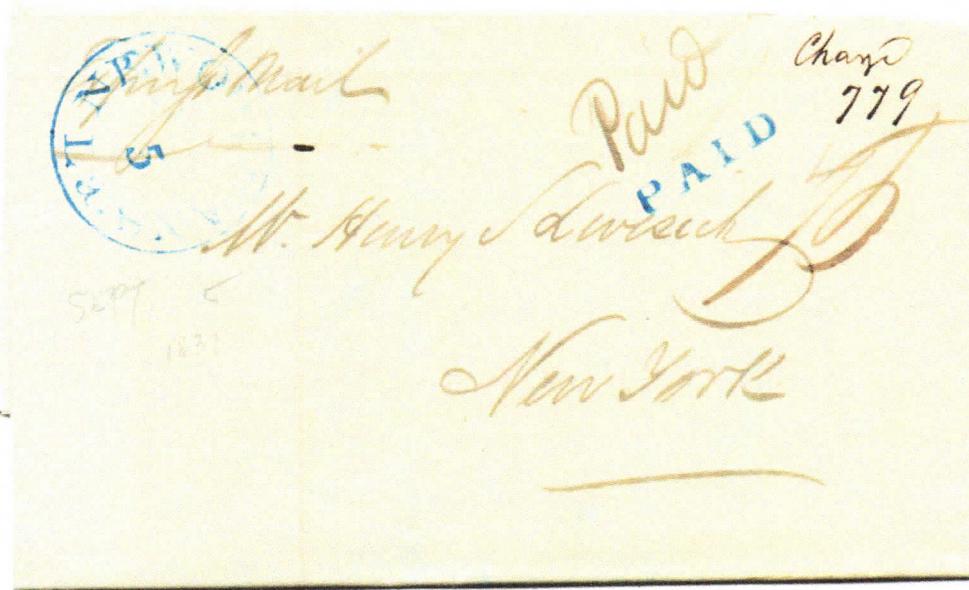


Figure 4. Express Mail letter to New York City with 75¢ postage (triple the 25¢ rate for a distance over 400 miles) charged to box 779 at New Orleans, September 5, 1837.



Figure 5. Express Mail letter with red "WASHINGTON CITY D.C. Mar 15" [1838], "PAID" and "75," sent to St. Louis over the mid-western and far-western branches of the express, with postage charged to the account of the Indian Affairs Department.

Figure 6 shows a turned cover with both uses on the same side of the address sheet. The initial use, showing a charge to a box for the prepaid double rate, was sent by a law firm in Waterford, New York, to a deputy sheriff at Seneca Falls, New York. The manuscript notation "Paid K.S./2" at lower left (subsequently scratched out) indicates the postage was charged to a box account in Waterford. The original postmarks were "WATERFORD N.Y. MAY 24" (1843), "PAID" and "37½." The "2" could indicate a box number, but since the



Figure 6. Turned cover with both uses on same side of the address sheet. The initial mailing, a double rate from Waterford, New York, was charged to a box account (“Paid K.S./2”, subsequently scratched out, at lower left). The second use (upside down) shows the unpaid single rate returning part of the original document to the sender.



Figure 7. Stampless cover with “ALFRED MAINE JAN 1,” “PAID” in box and “5” in circle, from the 1845-1851 rate period. The sender noted “Paid 5” in addition to “Ch E.S.S.”—an abbreviated message requesting the postmaster to charge the postage to a specific box account. The three red Alfred markings are all quite distinctive.

letter consisted of two sheets, could also indicate the double rate (2 x 18¾¢ for a distance of 150-400 miles).

The second use (upside down on the address sheet in Figure 6) was rated as an unpaid single letter. The sheriff kept one sheet of the mailing and returned the other to the sending law firm, certifying that he had served the document on two defendants in a legal case. The circular datestamp for the second use reads “SENECA FALLS, MAY 27” and the returned missive was rated “18¾” postage due for an unpaid single-rate letter.

The cover in Figure 7 does not fit into the previous types of charge to box uses because there is no mention of a specific post office box number. However, in small towns some patrons were well known to the postmaster. This cover shows only the notation (at



Figure 8. Sent on the third day of the new 1851 rates, this letter was incorrectly rated “5” due, then corrected to the new rate with the oval “PAID 3”. The instruction to charge the account of a post office box holder is very specific: “Charge Drawer No. 75.”

upper right) “Ch E. S.S.” but the “Paid 5” is in the same flowery handwriting as the address. The postal markings are “ALFRED MAINE. JAN 1” (with fancy decorations within the circle), “PAID” in a box and “5” in a large circle, all rather distinctive postmarks. The 5¢ charge for prepaid postage dates this cover between 1846 to 1851. Another cover, not illustrated, bears the notation “ch to act. Mid. Beckwith” on a letter addressed to sender’s mother in Litchfield, Connecticut. The postmarks are a blue “ANNAPOLIS Md. APR 18” and “PAID 3” in arch. This would have been the Annapolis, Maryland, post office account of a midshipman at the United States Naval Academy.

The cover in Figure 8 was sent from Detroit, addressed to the treasurer of the Michigan Central Railroad Company in Boston, shortly after the rate change of July 1, 1851, when prepaid letters were charged 3¢ and unpaid letters were charged 5¢. This cover bears a blue “DETROIT Mich JUL 3” circular datestamp and “5” in a small oval, over which was struck a larger dark blue “PAID 3” in an oval. The “5” was obviously applied in error, and the postmaster corrected it with the darker “PAID 3”. The manuscript notation at upper left reads “Charge Drawer No. 75.”

Bills for post office boxes

As was mentioned in the introduction, invoices sent to postal patrons for the rental of post office boxes are another source of information about post office box accounts. I can only speak from the experience gained from the post office bills that I have seen; other bills are illustrated in DeBlois’ article cited earlier. A bill from Petersburg, Virginia, for “postage on Letters and Papers, including Box,” from the second quarter of 1821, indicates that G. A. Russel was charged \$19.90 against his box account. This is shown in Figure 9. A second bill, for the fourth quarter of 1821, totaled \$43.46. Note that the postmaster charged 5 percent interest on the unpaid balance. This is very significant because few letters as early as 1821 show charging to box accounts as documented by notations on the letters. It is entirely possible that most of the unpaid postage represented postage due on letters received.

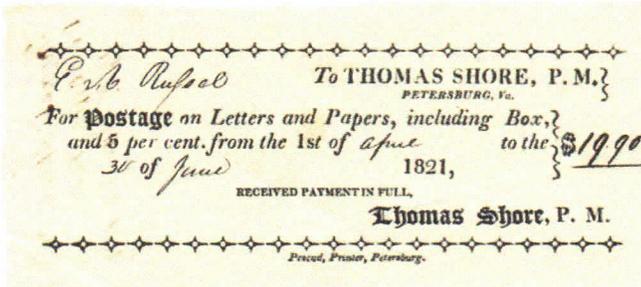
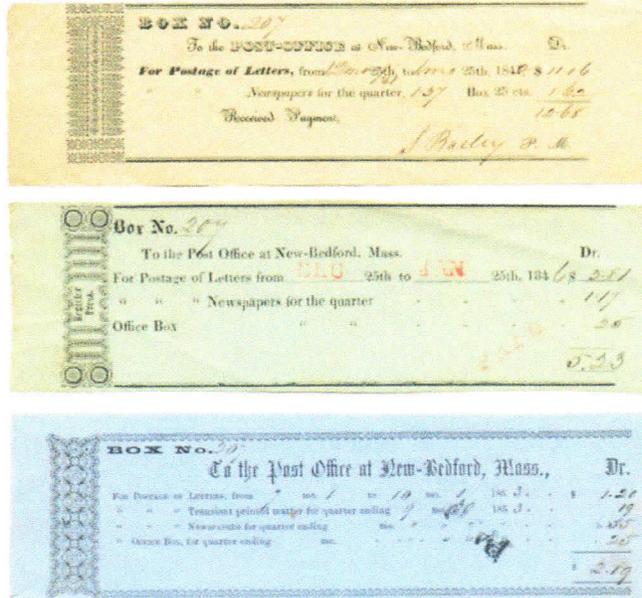


Figure 9. Receipted invoice for payment of a post office bill from Petersburg, Virginia, for the second quarter of 1821, showing that almost \$20 in postage was charged to this customer's post office box account.

Figure 10. Receipted quarterly post office bills for Box 207, New Bedford, Massachusetts, from the years 1841, 1846, and 1853, showing ever decreasing sums for charged postage. This is a very small sampling, but it suggests how dramatically postal charges diminished during this era of postal reform. The actual box rental was 25¢ per quarter.



In other words, there is no evidence from the invoices that charged postage represented prepaid letters sent out by the box holder.

I own a set of 110 paid invoices for the account of the Marine Bank, post office box 207, at New Bedford, Massachusetts, between 1841 and 1853. These were listed in my *American Philatelist* article cited earlier. This office sent monthly bills until 1851 when the frequency of billing was changed to quarterly. Examples from 1841, 1846 and 1853 are shown in Figure 10. The amounts invoiced in the five earliest bills are \$11.70, \$13.68, \$11.06, \$12.74 and \$17.62 (monthly). The box rent was 25¢ each quarter. However, as the years passed the amount invoiced diminished. Five consecutive bills from 1846 showed amounts of \$2.81, \$5.04, \$2.96, \$4.02 and \$5.14. Note from Figure 10 that the postmaster used the month stamp and the straightline PAID handstamp from his postmarking set. The last five invoices, which are quarterly bills except the first which is monthly, show amounts totaling \$.27, \$.95, \$1.38, \$1.20 and \$.35. Thus we see from this one sequence of invoices that a diminishing amount of postage was charged to this account during the years 1841-1853, an era when postal charges were steadily shrinking.

The invoice shown in Figure 11, from the post office at Burlington, Vermont, shows no entry for letter postage for the 1843 quarter in question. This box holder, "Hyde & Peck," must have sent all letters unpaid or prepaid in cash. He was charged 23¢ for newspaper postage and 25¢ for box rental. A "Quarterly Bill" from the Providence, Rhode Island, post office for Box No. 97 for the month of December, 1848, lists postage as \$7.14, newspapers (quarterly) \$1.75 and box rent of 50¢, all due January 1, 1849. Newspaper postage

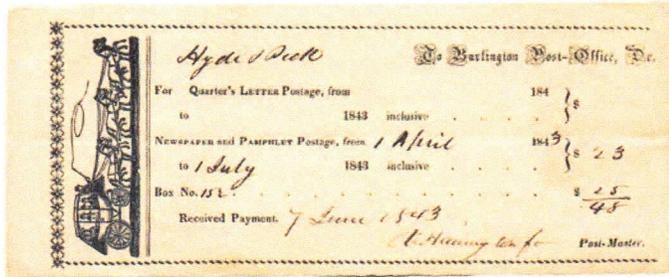


Figure 11. This illustrated post office receipt from Burlington, Vermont, shows that that on 7 June 1843 the local firm of "Hyde & Peck" paid quarterly box rental of 25¢ and prepaid newspaper postage of 23¢.



Figure 12. Receipted post office bill from Hanover, New Hampshire, in 1859, showing no charged postage. Stamps were required on all mail by this date. Quarterly box rental remained 25¢.

was paid in advance. A bill from Vergennes, Vermont, dated April 1, 1851, invoices Mr. A.W. Hoyt "Postage for Quarter ending April 1, 1851, \$2.48". An 1856 invoice from Bath, New York describes only postage for the quarter, at \$3.72.

Figure 12 illustrates an invoice from the Hanover, New Hampshire post office in 1859. This shows no entry for charged postage. By this time postage stamps were required on all letters, so one should not expect postage to be charged. An even later invoice, from Taunton, Massachusetts, lists only 6¢ cents for "Postages" for the first quarter of 1863. Another bill from the Albany, New York, post office, dated December 22, 1867, lists "For Letter Postage up to," "For Newspaper ditto" and "For Drawer ditto." The "up to" in the Letter Postage line is crossed out and "Stamps, \$15.00" has been added. So in this case the box holder charged his purchase of postage stamps against his box account. It should be noted that most of the post office bills described here are actually receipts for payment, signed by the postmaster or marked "PAID".

This sampling of a few invoices suggests that the practice of charging postage to the box account peaked in the years 1820-45, with the amount of charged postage decreasing during the early years of postal reform (1845-1850) and then diminishing almost to nothing after stamps were required. However, the practice of charging postage was widespread during the Paid 3 stampless period, so we should not generalize too much from this limited sampling of post office bills. As will be shown subsequently in this article, the postage billed on these invoices could represent both sent mail and received mail.

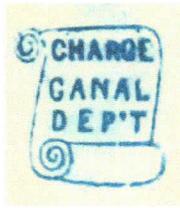
Handstamped and printed charge to box markings

A very small number of businesses and private individuals created handstamped box markings.⁵ Those markings that appear on stampless covers are listed in Table 1 (next four pages) with illustrations of the markings shown opposite the data. The markings are listed alphabetically by the name of the town in which they were applied (which is rarely mentioned in the markings). The tabular data shows the text of the marking, a description of the marking (its size in millimeters and color information), and date information. The number in the Reference column ("REF") is keyed to the illustration on the opposite page.

With the exception of the 1807 listing from Providence, which might not be a box marking, all the listed handstamped charge to box markings are from the 1840s and 1850s.

TOWN	TEXT OF MARKING	DESCRIPTION	DATE	REF
Albany, N.Y.	CHARGE CANAL DEP'T	fancy scroll, 20x21, blue	1850s	1
Albany, N.Y.	CITY BANK PAID ALBANY	oval, 15x12, black	1853	2
Albany, N.Y.	PAID E C & Co. BOX 100.	circle, 19, black	1850	3
Albany, N.Y.	CHARGE E.C. & Co. BOX 100.	circle, 18, black	1852	4
Albany, N.Y.	MECHANICS & FARMERS BANK PAID	double circle, 21, red, blue	1851-52	5
Albany, N.Y.	Paid, 71, B. P. J.	straight line, 33x3½, red	1852	6
Albany, N.Y.	PAID. G.W.PLATT POSTMASTER ASSEMBLY	fancy scroll, 27x25, red	1853	7
Boston, Mass.	CHG. H.W. & Co.	straight line, 45x6, red	1840	8
Boston, Mass.	PAID GROCERS BANK	oval, 35x24, red	1849	9
Boston, Mass.	PAID AT THE BANK OF N. AMERICA	double oval, 35x23, red	1850s	10
Boston, Mass.	PAID, T.L. ROBINSON & CO. BOSTON.	printed double oval, 30x20, black	1850s	11
Boston, Mass.	ADJUTANT GENERAL'S Office, MASS.	shield in fancy frame, 28x31, red and black	1855	12
Brooklyn, NY	P.K. WEITZEL BROOKLYN	oval, 25½x16, black	1852	13
Buffalo, N.Y.	DRAWER C PAID	double circle, 18, red	1850	14
Buffalo, N.Y.	PAID/PATCHIN/ BANK	octagon, 23x8, blue	1851	-
Catskill, N.Y.	PAID 34	2 straight lines, 8x5, red	1850	15
Chambersburg, Penn.	Whig Office: CHAMBERSBURG, PA., Circulation, 2,200. Paid 3 cts.	printed cornercard, 45x40, red	1854	16
Charleston, S.C.	CHARGE BOX 625 H & CO.	straight line, 37x3½, blue	1858	17
Chicago, Ill.	GEO. SMITH & CO., CHICAGO, PAID	double circle, 20, blue	1850s	18
Cincinnati, Ohio	CHARGE CITY INS. COMP.	double oval, 29x23, black	1850s	19
Cleveland, Ohio	PAID CHARGE WEDDELL HOUSE	oval, 21x16, blue, black	1850s	20
Columbus, Ohio	Charge C. Ins. Co.	negative lettering, 16x13, red	1845	21
Columbus, Ohio	CHARGE C. INS. CO	rectangle with fleuron, 15x13, red, black	1840s	22
Columbus, Ohio	CH. City Bk.	fancy frame, 19x12½, red, black	1848	23
Columbus, Ohio	CHARGE TREAS. STATE	rectangle, 15x16, red	1853	24

Table 1. Handstamped charge-to-box markings found on stampless covers. These markings were created by mailers and applied to outbound covers to indicate that the local postmaster was to prepay postage and charge the mailer's box account.



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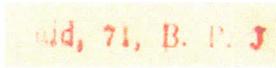
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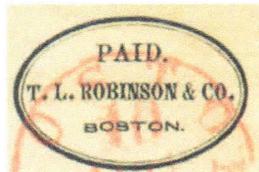
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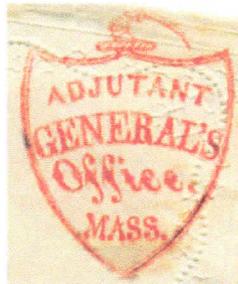
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TOWN	TEXT OF MARKING	DESCRIPTION	DATE	REF
Corning, N.Y.	CHARGE W. & T.	circle with star, 20½, black	1853	25
Geneva, N.Y.	DDH, also PAID 3 in circle	oval, red, 24x17	1853	26
Hartford, Ct.	PAID. CONN. RIVER BANK	triple oval, 28x18, red	1852	27
Indianapolis, Ind.	Chg S. & B. several styles exist	printed fancy script, 16x5,	1857	28
Meridian, Ct.	PAID/ M. B'K	rectangle , 16x9½, red	1853	29
New York, N.Y.	ASTOR/ HOUSE/ PAID	circle, 27, red	1844	-
New York, N.Y.	AMERICAN LEGAL ASSOCIATION. matching separate PAID	oval, 50x30, red	1850s	30
New York, N.Y.	CYRUS W. FIELD & Co., NEW-YORK can have additional Paid	oval, 33x18, blue, red	1850-52	31
New York, N.Y.	LAW MAGAZINE OFFICE separate PAID	oval, 43x24, red	1853	32
New York, N.Y.	PAID AMERICAN BIBLE UNION NEW-YORK	oval, 47x33, red	1854	33
New York, N.Y.	CROTON MILLS PAID	printed and illustrated, 30x21, blue, black	1855	34
Newburgh, N.Y.	PAID BOX 33	straight line, 21x4, red	1846	-
Providence, R.I.	J B W, matching PAID	straight line, 25x7, red	1807	35
Providence, R.I.	LXXXV can have PAID in black	fancy banner, 18x9, red	1850s	36
Richmond, Va.	CIRCULAR— Charge Auditor's Office.	printed straight line, 47x2	1854	37
Rochester, N.Y.	PAID/POWERS BANKING HOUSE/ ROCHESTER, N.Y.	oval, 39x25½, black	1855	38
Springfield, Mass.	PAID WESTERN BANK	2 straight lines, 23x8, red	1850	39
Tivoli, N.Y.	Paid/Charge/9th Brigade, 3d Division, N.Y.S.T.	printed 2 lines, black	1853	40
Unknown	Paid—Charge	printed straight line, 22x3	1850s	41
Washington, D.C.	SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.	double oval with fleuron, 31x18½, red	1840s	42
Watertown, N.Y.	Chg. B.R. B'k	oval, 20x9, red	1845	-



25



26



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Chg. S. J. B.

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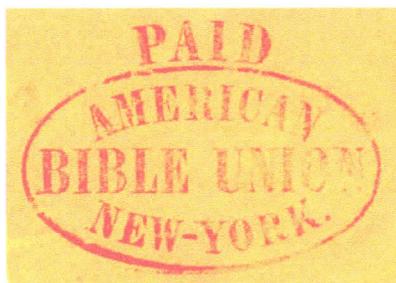
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CIRCULAR—Charge Auditor's Office.

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Paid.
Charge

9th Brigade, 3d Division N. Y. S. T.

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Paid—Charge
dec

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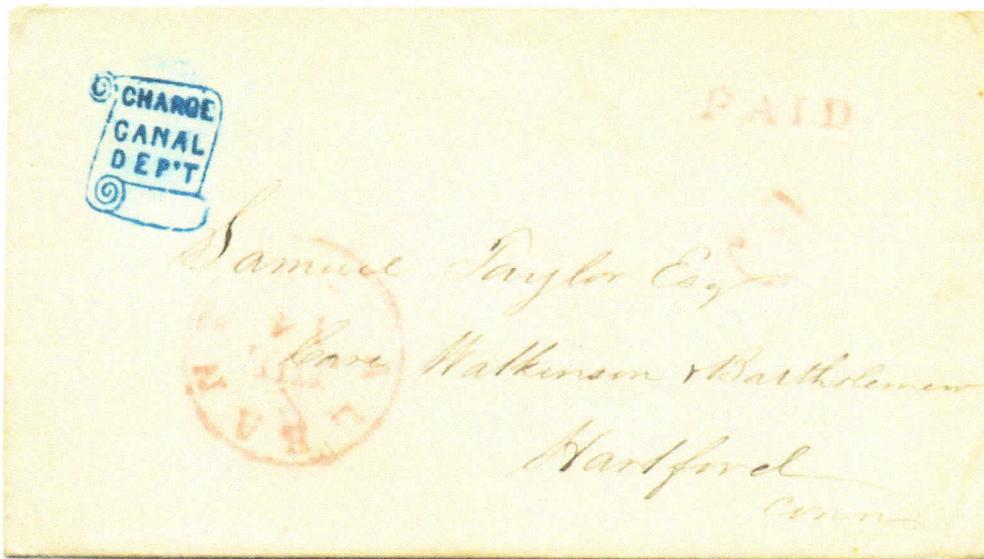


Figure 13. “CHARGE CANAL DEP’T” framed in a blue scroll, indicating prepayment was to be charged to a branch of the New York state government. The year date of this cover is not known, but the PAID and 3 handstamps indicate the 1851-55 era, when stamps were available but not yet required and postage could still be prepaid in cash.

In addition to these handstamped markings, there are a small number of printed markings; these are also included in Table 1.

Figure 13 shows an attractive example of a handstamped charge to box marking from Albany, New York. This indicates that postage was to be charged against an account maintained by the Canal Department of the New York state government. The wording of the marking leaves no doubt as to its significance on this cover. The PAID and 3 handstamps indicate the 1851-55 era, when stamps were available but not yet required; prepayment could still be made in cash. Charge to box uses with Paid 3 stampless markings are common from many cities and towns during this transitional period. The postal markings on the Figure 13 cover are the same as would have been applied to an envelope presented at the post office by a patron who prepaid the postage in cash.

Figure 14 depicts a cover with a cornercard of the Weddell House in Cleveland, Ohio. The small black oval handstamped marking at upper right—“PAID, CHARGE WEDDELL HOUSE”—leaves little doubt. This marking indicated that the postmaster was to charge this letter against the account of the hotel. The patron would have settled separately with the hotel and was saved the necessity of going to the post office personally to mail the letter. This oval charge marking is known both in black and blue, and three different cornercard envelope types from the hotel have been recorded. Again, the Cleveland integral “3 PAID” indicates the transitional 1851-55 era.

Charge to box handstamps exist on covers franked with 1847 stamps. Figure 15 shows a cover with a 5¢ 1847 stamp with red grid and a red “SPRINGFIELD Ms SEP 14” circular datestamp. The cover also shows a double straightline “PAID WESTERN BANK” applied above the stamp in a different shade of red. This marking also exists on stampless covers and is listed as such in Table 1. In the case of Figure 15, the postmaster applied a stamp to pay the postage instead of using a handstamped stampless marking. This cover has a certificate of authenticity from the Philatelic Foundation.

This brings us to a marking well-known to collectors of 1847 stamps, the red (sometimes blue) ovals of the Cyrus W. Field Company. Most exhibition collectors present this



Figure 14. Envelope with ornately illustrated corner cachet for Weddell House, a Cleveland hotel. The black oval “PAID CHARGE WEDDELL HOUSE” instructed the Cleveland postmaster to prepay the cover and charge the hotel account. As in Figure 13, the Cleveland integral “3 PAID” indicates the cover dates from the transitional 1851-55 era.

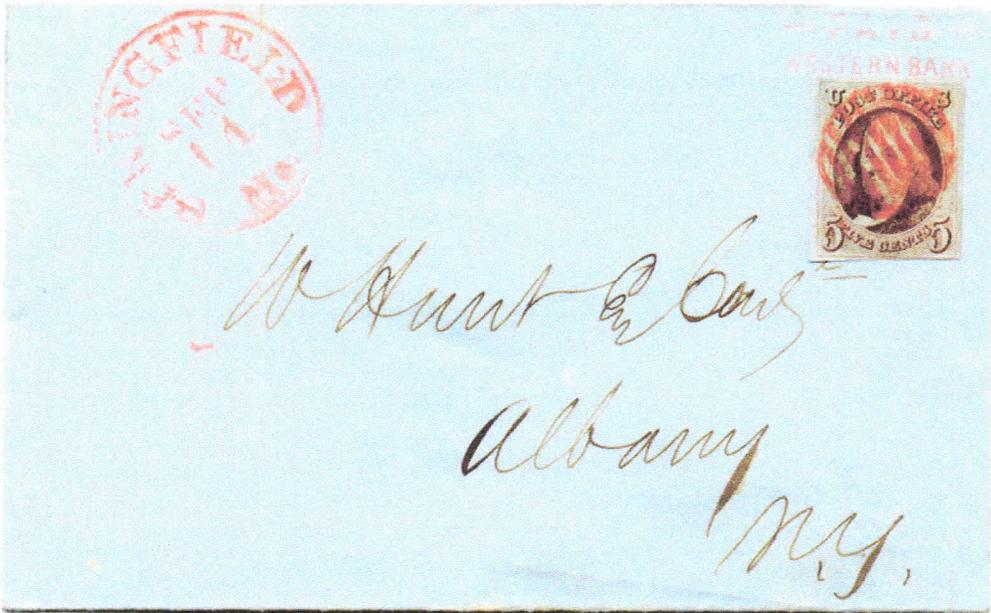


Figure 15. Charge to box marking on a 5¢ 1847 cover. Note the faint handstamp “PAID WESTERN BANK” struck just above the stamp. Instead of using a stampless marking, the Springfield postmaster applied a 5¢ 1847 stamp and debited the bank’s account.

marking as a handstamped corner advertising cachet. I believe that this is wrong, at least in some cases, when the double-oval marking (“CYRUS W. FIELD & Co./NEW-YORK”) is intended to alert the New York post office to prepay the postage and charge it to the

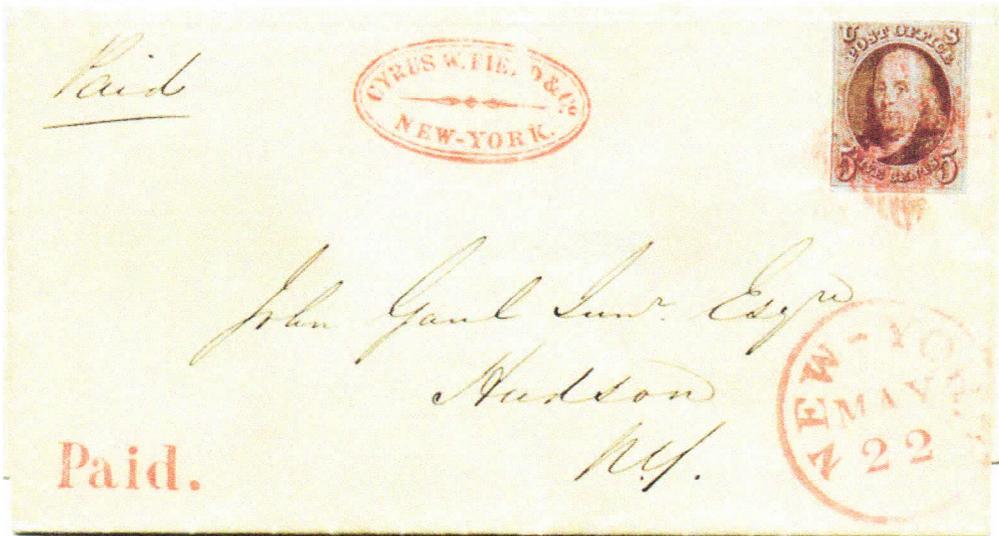


Figure 16. Red double oval “CYRUS W. FIELD & CO.” with matching red “Paid.” The period on the “Paid.” distinguishes this as a privately created marking. The New York postmaster affixed the 5¢ 1847 stamp and charged the box account of the Field firm.

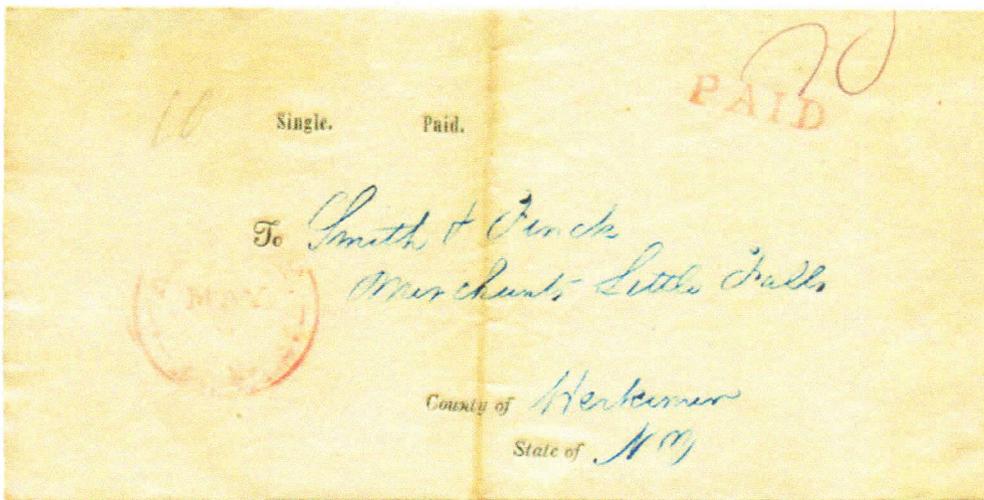


Figure 17. Printed bankruptcy notice from 1843, with attached printed address leaf. Note that the words “Single” and “Paid” were printed as part of the preprinted address. It seems reasonable to assume this was part of a larger mailing and that the Albany post office charged all these letters to a box account. Postal markings are the red “ALBANY N.Y. MAY 5” and “PAID” and the manuscript “10” indicating the 30 to 80 mile rate.

company’s account. Figure 16 is an example. This cover shows the company oval in red, but it also shows a distinct “Paid.” in the same color ink at lower left corner. The cover bears a “NEW-YORK MAY 22” circular datestamp and the 5¢ 1847 is tied by the common red square grid killer. I believe the private “Paid.” marking is linked to the oval company marking and that both markings are charge to box markings. I have never seen this oval, either in red or blue, on an unpaid stampless cover. A cover with the 3¢ orange brown stamp (Scott 10) dated January 19, has the same red markings of the Field firm and the

Figure 18. Partially printed address with printed "CIRCULAR Charge Auditor's Office," a very specific charge to box designation. Postmarked blue "RICHMOND Va. MAR 9" and "PAID 1".

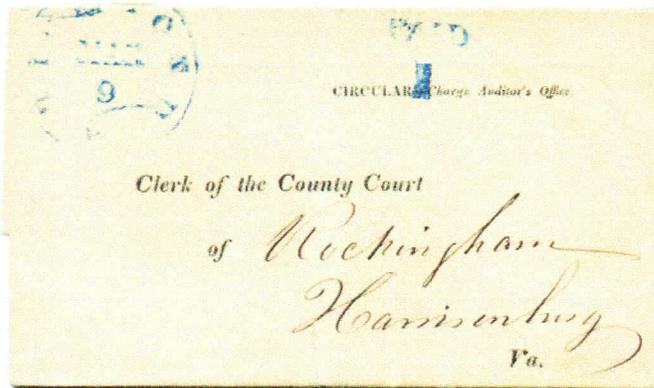


Figure 19. Addressed to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, this 1854 publisher's envelope bears the printed corner cachet of a political newspaper. The "Paid 3 cts." in the corner imprint indicates this is a charge to box notation. Blue "CHAMBERSBURG Pa. MAR 1" (1854) and "PAID 3".

same "Paid." handstamp; also a manuscript "Paid" in the same handwriting as the address. The placement of the red oval on the Figure 16 cover, at top center above the address, is not a position that would have been used for a return address. Many prepaid covers from the 1850s may have been charged to a box account, but they lack the markings to confirm this. And it is worth noting that handstamped box markings with both box numbers and the initials of the box holder have been seen from Canada from the 1850s.

Printed charge to box markings

Figure 17 shows an 1843 printed notice about a bankruptcy case, sent from Albany to Little Falls, New York. Both the message within and common portions of the address ("Single," "Paid," "County of" and "State of") were printed simultaneously. If this represents a charge to box use, it is the earliest preprinted example. It seems reasonable to assume this was part of a larger mailing and that the Albany post office charged all these letters to a box account.

The cover in Figure 18 is a printed notice sent at the 1¢ circular rate. The postal markings are the "RICHMOND Va. MAR 9" [1854] circular datestamp and "PAID 1". Portions of the address are preprinted as is the directive at upper right, which reads "CIRCULAR—Charge Auditor's Office." There is no doubt that this indicates a specific box account. What is unusual about this cover is the specific language about the postage charge. Other covers exist with a simple printed "Paid."

Another unusual cover with printed reference to paid postage is the cover in Figure 19. This 1854 publisher's envelope bears a printed red corner cachet: "Whig Office: CHAMBERSBURG, PA. Circulation 2,200 Paid 3 cts." The "Paid 3 cts" notation in this imprint renders it a printed charge to box notation. There are a small number of similar printed circulars with the paid postage rate printed on the front. These are all charge to box uses. They can also be considered as a form of precanceled envelope.



Figure 20. Illustrated printed charge to box marking from Croton Flour Mills, here in black, although blue is more common. This circular is unaddressed and never passed through the mails. An enlargement of the ornamental imprint ("CROTON MILLS PAID" surrounding a sheaf of wheat) is shown at left. Courtesy of Arnold Selengut.



One of the most spectacular of these is the ornamental "CROTON MILLS PAID" imprint that appears on circulars distributed by Croton Mills, a flour mill established in 1843 at 203 Cherry Street in lower Manhattan. An example of the circular is shown in the black and white photo in Figure 20, provided by Arnold Selengut. An enlarged color view of the Croton Mills imprint from this circular, unquestionably a charge to box marking, is also shown. This example is unusual because it is printed in black; most are blue. The Figure 20 circular is unaddressed and never passed through the mails. Examples with postal markings show that 3¢ postage was paid.

Registration charged to box

Examples of charge to box mail after 1855 are unusual, because by then stamps were required to pay postage. However, extra fees such as the registration fee could be charged to a box account. A number of registered covers survive that show such usage. Two are shown here. The first, presented in Figure 21, is a 3¢ 1853 entire envelope with a blue "CHARLESTON S.C. NOV 15 PAID" circular datestamp. The label affixed to the upper left corner reads "REGISTERED/FROM HAVILAND, HARRAL & CO., DRUGGISTS." The postmaster wrote the registered number ("987") right on the label. Official registration

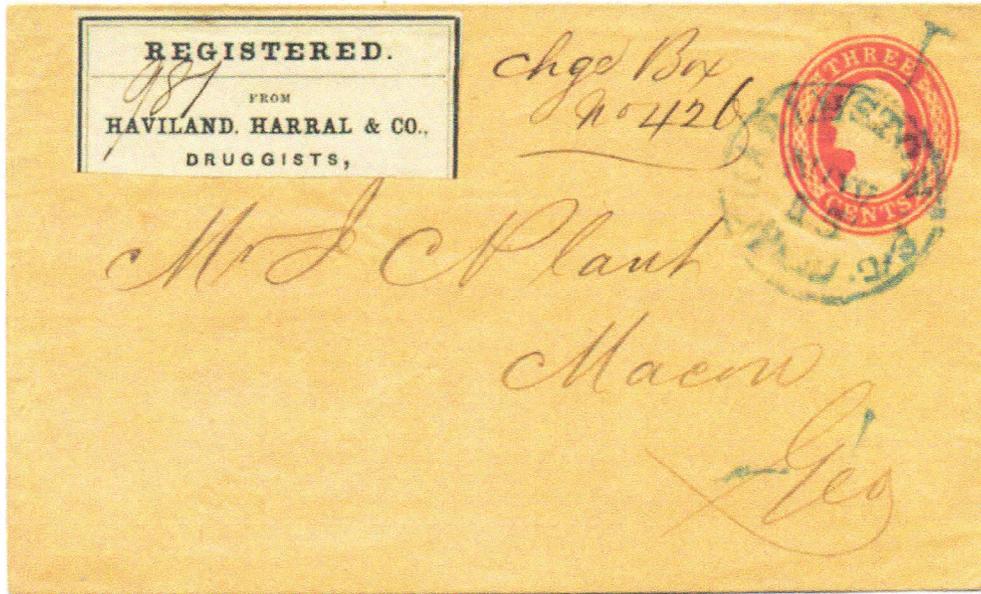


Figure 21. This 3¢ entire envelope bears a privately created “REGISTERED” label to which the postmaster added the registry number (“987”). Per the manuscript endorsement at top center, the registration fee of 5¢ was charged to box 426. Blue “CHARLESTON S.C. MAY 13 PAID”; the year date is uncertain, but it must be 1856 or soon after.

began in 1855 with a 5¢ fee to be paid in cash. Per the manuscript directive at top center on the envelope (“chge Box no 426”) the registration fee for this letter was charged to a post office box. On the back flap of the envelope is an embossed advertisement for the same druggist with a Charleston street address. To justify printing a special label, the Haviland, Harral firm must have sent out registered letters fairly frequently. But this is the only known example of this label; in fact, it is the only known example of any private registered label from the classic period.

The second registered cover, shown in Figure 22, is also very unusual, but here both the postage and the registered fee were charged to a box account. The sender, a merchant firm in Wetumpka, Alabama, wrote “Register & chg Box [?].” The box number is covered by the stamp. Since the stamp is *over* this notation, the stamp had to have been applied later. The postmark is blue double circle “WETUMPKA ALA JAN 25 1861”. This is an independent statehood usage of this postmark, from the period after Alabama seceded from the Union, and prior to its joining the Confederacy. The cover has an authentication certificate of the Confederate Stamp Alliance verifying this. To the right of the corner cachet is the number “6” which would be the registration number. So the box holder was charged 3¢ for the stamp and 5¢ for the registration fee. At the left is written “Encd \$15.00”.

Not shown here but worth notice is a cover franked with a 3¢ 1861 stamp, posted at Kingston, Rhode Island, on November 14, 1865. This bears a sender’s notation “Register & ch 80” and a manuscript registration number (“No. 7”) in a different handwriting. Since this cover dates from the era when the registration fee was 20¢ (payment required in cash), that amount would have been charged against the boxholder’s account.

Inbound postage charged to recipient’s box account: the “charged” uses

The uses discussed so far involve outgoing mail sent prepaid, with the postage charged to the mailer’s post office box account. This was by far the most common type.



Figure 22. Perforated 3¢ Washington stamp on a registered cover from Wetumpka, Alabama, postmarked January 25, 1861, with both the stamp and the 5¢ registration fee charged to a box account. This is an independent state use, from the time after Alabama seceded from the Union but before it joined the Confederate States.

But there is second and much scarcer category of charge to box mail. This involves incoming mail that was received unpaid. Some postal patrons arranged with their postmasters that incoming unpaid letters were to be charged to the recipient's post office box account. Differing from the charge to box markings in the first category, which were all private

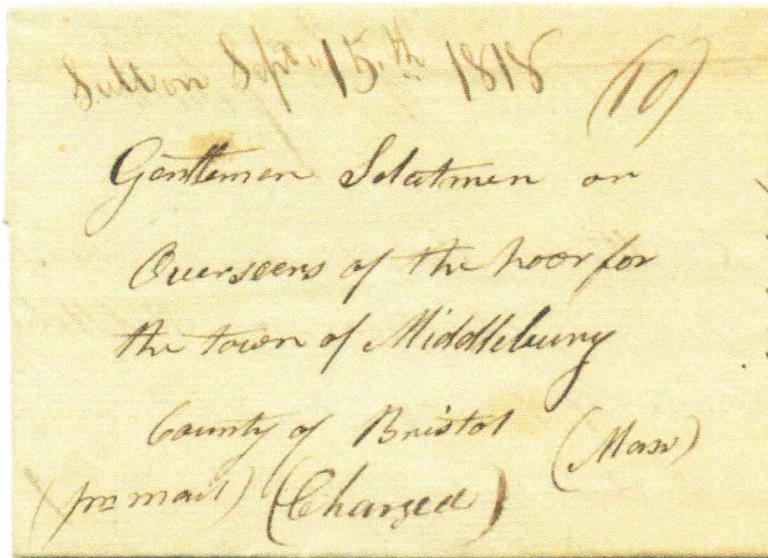


Figure 23. This cover shows a very early example of incoming postage charged to a box account. "Sutton Sept 15th 1818" with "10" due postage addressed to Middlebury, Mass. The Middlebury postmaster noted "(Charged)" in a different handwriting from the address.

markings, charged markings of this second category were postal markings, invariably applied by a postmaster. The typical abbreviated form for the first category (prepaid outgoing mail) was “chg”. The abbreviated form for the second category (unpaid incoming letters) was “chd” (indicating “charged”), in the past tense. This can be confusing.

Almost all “charged” uses are designated by manuscript notations. The earliest I have seen appears on the cover in Figure 23, sent from Sutton to Middlebury, Massachusetts on September 15, 1818. Note the “Charged” below the address, which I believe was applied by the Middlebury postmaster to indicate a charge to the account of the local Overseers of the Poor. Note also the parenthetical notation at lower left: “poor mail”. I have a similar cover, not illustrated, with red handstamped “E. BRIDGEWATER MASS. FEB 22” [1819] and a manuscript “6” sent to “Commissioners of the Poor, Middleborough, County of Plymouth” with “(Charged)” in manuscript across the top of the cover.

Figure 24 shows a very interesting cover on which the postage charged was the forwarding fee to another address. The letter is an 1841 printed circular with no writing inside. But in 1841 circulars had to pay regular postage. The letter was sent paid from New York City to Plainfield, Connecticut. There a forwarding notation was applied with the new address at Central Village. But instead of the usual due charge for forwarding, the cover is marked “Paid fd 6” with a blue manuscript “Chgd” demonstrating that the additional postage was charged to the post office box account of the addressee, a business firm. This is the only cover of which I am aware where a “charged” notation appears on a cover that also shows postage prepaid. No doubt the addressee company arranged with the postmaster at Plainfield to forward mail with a charge to their Plainfield box account. The contents of this cover are an early piece of junk mail, a printed message claiming a new method of producing synthetic olive oil from lard.



Figure 24. An early piece of junk mail, this printed circular with red “NEW-YORK AUG 3” (1841) predates circular postal rates. It was originally sent prepaid, with “PAID” and manuscript “12½”, to Plainfield, Connecticut. From there it was redirected to Central Village, with forwarding postage charged to the addressee’s box account in Plainfield. The Plainfield postmaster used blue ink to differentiate the “Chgd” marking.



Figure 25. “LEXINGTON Va. MAR 3” (1850) and “5” in yellow-orange ink to Wilmington, Virginia. The manuscript “chd” under the address is a postal marking, indicating the 5¢ postage due was charged to the recipient’s box account. The initials at lower left might appear to be those of the sender, but they cannot represent an outbound charge to box indicator since the “5” handstamp clearly indicates this letter was sent unpaid.



Figure 26. Cover to Brooklyn, New York, from “TUSCUMBIA Ala. MAY 10” (1836) with 25¢ postage due for the over 400 mile rate. At Brooklyn the cover was handstamped “CHARGED” to indicate that the due postage had been debited to the addressee’s box account. Remarkably, this is the only recorded handstamped “CHARGED” marking.

Figure 25 shows a very unusual yellow “LEXINGTON Va. MAR 3” (1850) and matching “5”. At the very bottom is “Chd”. Note that charged notations may be small; they are frequently overlooked. A very late appearance of “chd” appears on a 3¢ 1861 cover (not shown) with a “DUE 6” representing overweight unpaid postage at the penalty rate of 1863.

But the latest marking I know of showing use of a charge account is from 1973, on a cover shown to me by Warren Bower. This cover bears a two-line handstamp "POSTAGE DUE PAID/FROM CHARGE ACCOUNT." While this differs slightly from the uses discussed in this article, the principle of charging postage is the same.

Occasionally, charged incoming letters bear the postal marking "Chg" without the "d". An example is an 1835 cover with "FITCHBURGH, MASS. JUL 2" and manuscript "10" representing unpaid postage. Across the top of the cover the postmaster wrote "Chg July 3."

Handstamped charged markings

Only one handstamped "CHARGED" postmark has been reported, a red 25x4 millimeter straightline used at Brooklyn, New York in 1836. Figure 26 shows an example on an incoming unpaid cover from Tusculumbia, Alabama, rated for 25¢ postage due and "CHARGED" to the addressee's box account. I have seen four examples of this handstamp. There is also a cover addressed to New York with a similar handstamp, but I do not think New York used a "CHARGED" postmark.

Confederate States uses

Though the practice appears to have all but ceased in federal territory by 1861, both charge and charged uses were revived in the Confederate States of America, possibly because of the scarcity of small change and hard currency. Manuscript charge to box markings are seen occasionally on many types of Confederate covers. Figure 27 shows a nice cover to New Orleans, from the famous Carroll Hoy correspondence, struck with the bold "PAID 5" straightline woodcut marking from Canton, Mississippi. A handwritten "Chge Box 36" appears at upper left.

An example on an official government envelope is shown in Figure 28. This envelope bears the imprint "Confederate States of America, Subsistence Department." The Richmond circular datestamp reads "JUN 25 1861" and the cover is marked with a Richmond "PAID 10" in circle postmark. At top center is the directive to "Charge Box 655."

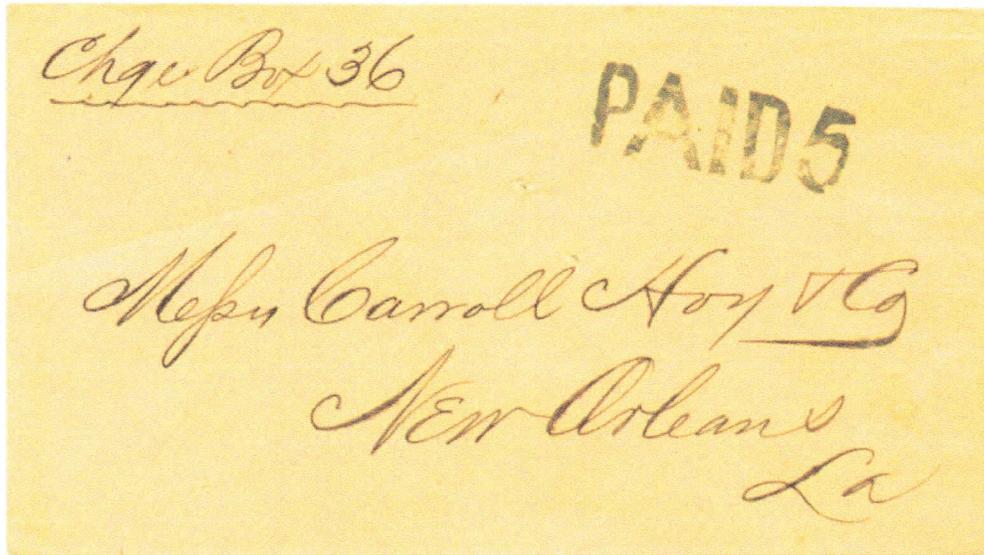


Figure 27. This Confederate charge to box cover lacks a town marking, but the bold "PAID 5" woodcut handstamp is from Canton, Mississippi. Per the manuscript notation at upper left, "Chge Box 36," the postage was charged to the sender's box account.



Figure 28. Confederate States of America official imprinted envelope of the "Subsistence Department," sent from Richmond with manuscript charge directive "Charge Box 655."

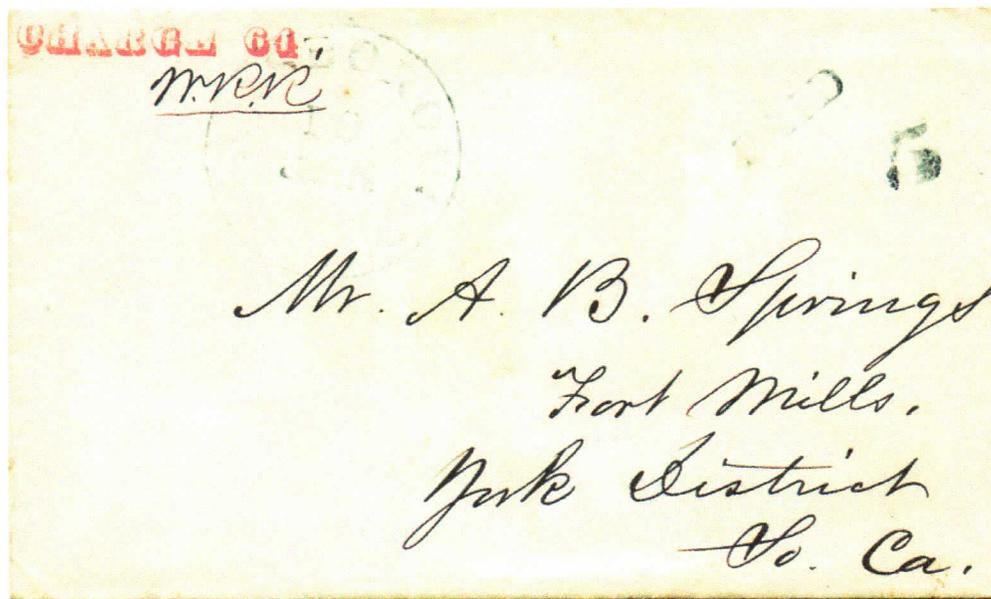


Figure 29. At upper left on this cover is one of few handstamped charge to box markings from the Confederacy, a straight-line "CHARGE 64" with unusual shaded lettering, used at Winnsborough, South Carolina. The 5¢ rating dates this cover from 1862.

There are even a handstamped Confederate charge to box markings. A cover showing one example, addressed to Fort Mills, South Carolina, is illustrated in Figure 29. The postmarks are "WINNSBOROUGH S.C. 10 JAN," "PAID" and "5" so the cover must date from 1862. Note at upper left the red straightline "CHARGE 64" in shaded letters with the additional manuscript initials "W.R.R." I have seen another example from this same correspondence.

The last marking in this discussion is also one of the most unusual. This is a black shield handstamp used at the Jackson, Mississippi, post office: "CHARGED TO BOX".⁶ Fewer than five strikes of this marking have been recorded. An example is shown in Figure



Figure 30. “CHARGED TO BOX” in a shield with “DROP 2 CENTS” in a circle, both on a Confederate cover from 1862, dropped at the post office in Jackson, Mississippi, and addressed to Governor John Pettus.

30, on a cover, with a circular “DROP 2 CENTS” marking, addressed to the governor of Mississippi. This is the only “CHARGED” handstamped Confederate marking known and this is the best-struck example. The original letter, dated August 3, 1862, was written to Governor John Pettus.

I would be very interested in learning of additional charge to box markings.

Endnotes

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5. Milgram, James W., “Postage Charged to Post Office Box Accounts,” *Chronicle* 138 (1988), pp. 90-98.
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