

Forwarded Markings on Stampless Covers

by James W. Milgram, M.D.

This article is an overview of the handling of mail that was forwarded in the period before the use of stamps was compulsory in the United States; a second article in the next issue will cover mail that was missent. This period was also largely before delivery to specific addresses so that mail was addressed to the post office. People traveled and changed positions and the mail had to follow them. When the mail went between two post offices as an effect of forwarding, a second postal fee was due for the additional distance the letter was carried. Usually this was unpaid, but occasionally a postal patron had left money to pay for such forwarding.

On the other hand, a missent letter was an error on the part of some postal employee either misinterpreting the address or putting the letter into the wrong mail sack. So such letters were marked Missent and were not charged for the additional distance between the receiving post office and the final correct post office. Since a missent letter was always forwarded, some markings read Missent and Forwarded. Covers with the two words together make a third category of marking applied to forwarded mail.

Forwarded markings were at first handwritten. However, beginning in the 1820s and continuing to the 1850s and even afterwards, handstamped markings were used by certain larger towns. This article will discuss early and interesting examples with manuscript markings and provide a listing of the handstamped varieties.

Private Forwarding

Figure 1 is an example of a private forwarder's handstamp, one from Panama during the Gold Rush period. This letter was written in Lima, Peru in the 1850s and was sent by private ship to Panama. The steamship rate for a letter from the west coast of Panama was 30 cents, which included domestic transit. This cover shows the use of "Forwarded by" a specific company, a private forwarder, similar to other express company markings which are listed under private forwarders in *The American Stampless Cover Catalog* Volume 2.



Figure 1: "FORWARDED BY CORWINE BROTHERS & Co. PANAMA N.G." The cover also bears a strike of the rare "PANAMA" marking.¹ There is a black "STEAMSHIP 30" from New York to reflect the west coast rate from Panama with final address in Boston. Letter datelined: Lima, September 9, 1850 from J. M. Mur to H.P. Daland, Messrs. Williams & Daland, Boston, Mass.

Privately-Arranged Forwarding

Figure 2 is a Revolutionary War soldier's letter describing a battle. Colonel Edward Hand arranged to have word to his wife sent from New York. The one shilling postage was paid in Philadelphia, presumably by addressee Joseph Shippen Junior, addressed as "Secretary in Philadelphia" (he was secretary to Pennsylvania Governor Richard Penn). Then Shippen sent the letter to Lancaster, its destination and his home town. If Mrs. Hand had moved to a different location, then the letter would have been truly forwarded by the post office.

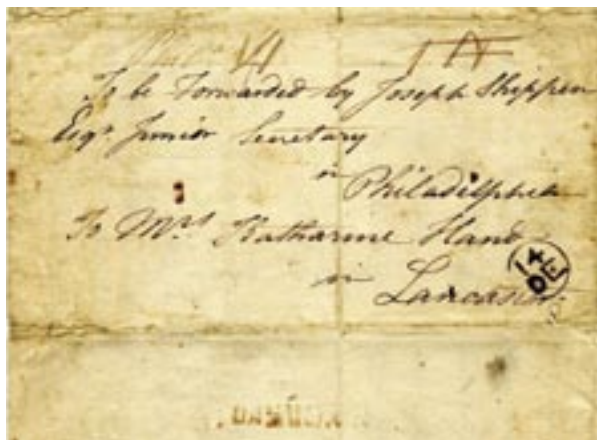


Figure 2: Letter datelined Camp on Prospect Hill, November 10, 1775. The first postmark, straight line "N. York Nov 1" in red, is on the reverse of the cover, and the one shilling was the charge to Philadelphia, where the "1 // " was crossed out and a manuscript "Phila 4" (pennies) was added with a Bishop's mark "14/DE." The cover was addressed to Joseph Shippen to be forwarded to Mrs. Katherine Hand in Lancaster. Two postages were paid, once in Philadelphia and then again in Lancaster.

Twice-Forwarded

Figure 3 shows an 1800 cover which was forwarded twice – resulting in the presence of three of the first circular postmarks used in the United States.



Figure 3: Letter datelined Philadelphia, April 13, 1800 from William Dabney to Mr. Charles Young, "Of Phila." Care of Mr. William Dabney, Merchant, Charleston, So. Carolina. It was mailed April 13, handstamp "PHI 13AP" with 25 cents due on receipt. It was re-posted at Charleston with the early circular handstamp "CHARL. SC MAY 2" in black with a new postage due of 12 ¹/₂ cents (meaning that the original 25 cents was paid in Charleston by the Wm. Dabney firm). But in Savannah it was forwarded a second time, "SAVANNAH GA MAY 6" with another 12 ¹/₂ cents due, totaling 25 to be collected from the addressee, now care of Mr. Grimes, in Augusta, Ga.

1815 War-Rate Forwarding

After the War of 1812 the postal rates were raised 50% for over a year. The cover in Figure 4 demonstrates these rates on a rare territorial forwarded use.



Figure 4: Letter written by George Graham datelined Washington City July 13, 1815 postmarked “WASHN. CITY JUL 14” and rated 37 ¹/₂ cents due (25 cents for distance over 500 miles plus 50% war surcharge) to Major Richard Graham, St. Louis, Missouri Territory. The postage was paid and the letter remained with postmark “St. Louis Augt. 27” to Washington, Kentucky, and rated 30 cents (20 cents for distance 300 to 500 miles plus 50%). The crossing out of “Forwarded” implies the letter was first taken out of the mail before remaining.

Express Mail Round Trip

Figure 5 is a cover from the Express Mail of 1836-1839 which made a full round trip, New York to New York, by being forwarded.²



Figure 5: Letter written by R.W. Ardell datelined New York, May 22, 1838, and marked to be carried “Express / Paid Single” rated 75 cents, in manuscript, handstamped “PAID” “NEW-YORK MAY 22” to Mr. Charles C. Peck, care of Carradine & Newman, merchants in Natchez, a town above New Orleans but not on the express line. From Natchez, it evidently was carried out of the mails to Cincinnati where it was re-posted “CINCINNATI O. JUN 15” with “25” cents postage due to New York, care of R.C. Wetmore & Co.

Forwarding through U.S. Consul

Figure 6 is a most unusual forwarded cover, originating in Beirut and forwarded via the U.S. Consul in Malta to relatives in various American communities, the sender trusting each would forward to the others, as one did in addition to entrusting it to a railway agent.³



Figure 6: Letter written by G. B. Whiting datelined Beyroot [sic], April 24, 1841 to Caleb C. Ward or Dr. J. B. Jackson, Newark, New Jersey, “fav’d” by Rev. S. Hebard. Forwarded through Malta (manuscript marking of the U.S. Consul, Wm. B. Andrews on the reverse) on a private ship to New York where it received the markings “NEW-YORK OCT 12” “SHIP” and red manuscript “8” for the two-cent ship fee and six cents postage. It was forwarded subsequently by J. B. Jackson (who signs under the Consul), and by “RAIL ROAD” (one of the earliest railroad postmarks) through Albany “ALBANY N.Y. OCT. 29” in care of a new addressee, John Whiting, at Canaan Corners, New York. There is a purple manuscript “6” over the “8” for this stage of the journey.



Figure 7: “Printed Circular” about a public library in Milwaukee, April 1846, with printed “PAID.” Mailed to the governor of Rhode Island, Charles Jackson, at Providence (blue “MILWAUKEE Wis. MAY 13” and “PAID” with a manuscript “2”). At Providence, it was forwarded (“Ford”) to Bristol (Governor Jackson’s term expired May 6) marked with “2” cents due.

Forwarded Circular

A special postal rate was introduced in 1845 for printed matter or circulars. This two cent rate is to be compared to the 5 cent regular postage rate for under 300 miles and 10 cents for over that distance during the July 1845 to March, 1847 period. The cover in Figure 7, a very rare example of a forwarded circular, is a territorial circular mailed from Wisconsin Territory, preprinted on its face with "Printed Circular." and "PAID."

Forwarded Unofficial Registered Mail

Figure 8 is the only forwarded piece of registered mail seen by the writer during the unofficial period of registered mail (1845-1855).



Figure 8: A registered letter from David H. Mans, Franklin Furnace, March 5, 1847, handstamped "DANVILLE Pa. Mar 5" and "PAID/5" to Matthew D. Mans, Spring Garden Exchange, Vine Street between 11 & 12 streets in Philadelphia, during the Unofficial Registration Period. The letter indicates it enclosed \$10 in cash. At Philadelphia, the postmaster perhaps knew the addressee was traveling, so the original markings were obliterated and it was handstamped with large blue "R" and "Ford 5" back to Danville without a Philadelphia datestamp.

Forwarding after Advertising

Advertising in the newspaper was prescribed for locating an unknown addressee after a lapse of time.⁴ If unsuccessful, the letter would be sent to the Dead Letter Office. If the advertising was successful, the letter could be forwarded to a different location. Figure 9 is an example of a letter from England forwarded several times (on each occasion, marked with a manuscript forwarding designation), including a period when it was advertised. The origin of the letter was a town in England.

Double Rate to California and Beyond

In the early 1850s the rate to and from California was six cents for paid letters and ten cents for unpaid letters. Cities such as Boston and New York had some special postmarks for California mail because they handled such a large volume. Figure 10 illustrates an envelope from the period 1851-1855 with markings for a double rate letter, paid over 3,000 miles and unpaid under 3,000 miles.



Figure 9: Letter written by Mary Rawlstone Doveridge, May 22, 1850 mailed at Uttoxeter [England] May 24 to William Daniel Rawlstone at Gilberts Ville, Otsego County, New York. Transport was by packet boat,⁵ with a red manuscript “P 11” to indicate prepayment of both British and American postage. A large red “5” handstamp indicating British credit in cents and a red circular “BR. PACKET JUN 6 PAID 24” were applied at New York before transmission to Gilbertsville. With a “GILBERTS VILLE June 10” cds it was re-addressed to Cooperstown, with a manuscript “Ford 5.” Rawlstone was unknown there, so the letter was advertised: manuscript in red “ad 2” cents, adding up to “7” cents due. Apparently the advertising elicited intelligence that Rawlstone was to be found where he had originally been addressed, so the letter was forwarded back to Gilbertsville, “COOPERSTOWN July 15” cds, manuscript “Forwarded 5” adding up to “12” cents due.



Figure 10: Cover addressed to Alfred G. Gray in San Francisco during 1851-1855 when the California rates were 6 cents and 10 cents for paid and unpaid letters, while distances under 3,000 miles were 3 and 5 cents. Rated at Boston red “BOSTON JUL 3” and red “12” (for double weight) with separate “PAID.” Forwarded from San Francisco to Sonora, black “SAN FRANCISCO CAL 14 AUG” and a black “5” cents due, crossed out to 10 cents when double weight was discovered.

Post-1855 Forwarding: No Penalty for Postage Due

In 1855 the rate was changed to just three cents and all postage had to be prepaid. But forwarded letters often still incurred unpaid postage to be collected from the addressee (see Figure 11). This was an issue with Civil War soldiers so legislation was enacted to allow soldiers' letters to be forwarded free. Letters from the soldiers still had to pay additional postage.⁶



Figure 11: Post-1855 cover addressed to Lucien B. Eaton in Andover, Mass. Mailed July 23 from South Hadley with 3 handstamps in a pale ink: the circular date stamp "SOUTH HADLEY Mass. JUL 23" "PAID" and a "3". At Andover, the forwarding information of Sutton N.H. was added along with manuscript "Fwd" and blue cds "ANDOVER MASS JUL 27" and blue "3" for the postage due.

Handstamped Forwarded Markings

Most large cities apparently had "forwarded" handstamps. Figure 12 demonstrates a fairly early use in 1835 from Buffalo to Toledo; there are only a few markings this early.



Figure 12: Letter written by Laurence Grennell datelined New Bedford, December 3, 1835 to Joseph R. Williams, care of Smith & Macy, Buffalo. Mailed with red "NEW BEDFORD Ms DEC 4" and rated 25 cents in manuscript. The writer indicated "Steam Boat" for passage on Long Island sound to New York. At Buffalo, a blue handstamped "FORWARDED" in rectangular frame plus manuscript 18^{3/4} added to the original 25 cents sent the letter on to Toledo, Oh.

The Salem, Massachusetts postmaster handstamped the cover in Figure 13 “Forwarded” and crossed out the “PAID” handstamp but continued the rate handstamp “5” of the office of origin.



Figure 13: Letter written by Henry C. Fuller and D. Gilbert of New Haven to Joseph B. Felt (Author of a History of Salem that was reprinted throughout the 1840s). Presumably the men just guessed Mr. Felt would be living in Salem and posted it there: red “NEW HAVEN CT. JUN 17” with “PAID” and “5”. Red handstamped “Forwarded” from “SALEM Ms 20 JUNE” to Boston by crossing out “PAID”.

The cover in Figure 14 shows an unusual spelling for a handstamp, “FORWD” in red from Princeton, N.J. in 1843.⁷



Figure 14: D. P. Watson’s Postmaster free frank from “NICHOLASVILLE KY SEP 25” (1843) and “FREE” in black on a letter addressed to Charles Hodge in Princeton N.J. The cover was forwarded, also free, with “PRINCETON N.J. OCT 2” and “FORWD” handstamped in red to the Rev. M. B. Hope in Philadelphia. Dr. Hodge was a well-known Princeton Theological Seminary professor; Rev. Hope was a colleague.

Catalog of FORWARDED handstamps on U.S. Stampless Covers⁸

(Milledgeville, Ga.) FORW.D [D over period], red, S.L. 22x3.5, early 1840's
(Chelsea, Ms.) FORWARDED, red, S.L. 37x3.5, 1850
(Salem, Mass.) Forwarded , red, S.L. 28x3.5, 1848
(Newark, N.J.) FORWARDED, black, S.L. 43x4.5, ?
(Princeton, N.J.) FORW.D [D over period], red, S.L. 26x3, 1843
(Princeton, N.J.) Same, black, S.L. 26x3, 1854
(Buffalo, N.Y.) FORWARDED, blue, rectangle 40x6, 1835
(New York, N.Y.) FORWARDED, red, S.L. in rectangle, 36x6, 1836
(New York, N.Y.) FORWARDED, red, S.L. 42x7, 1849
(Troy, N.Y.) FORWARDED. , red, S.L. 32x4.5, 1842
(Troy, N.Y.) FORWARDED., blue, S.L. 31x4, 1845
(?) FORD.3. black, S.L. 35x7.5, late 1850's
(Cleveland, Ohio) FORWARDED, red, S.L. 50x5 , late 1840's
(Cleveland, Ohio) FORWARDED, black, S.L. 50x5, 1852
(Gambier, Ohio) FORWARDED and 6, red , S.L.35x3, 1842
(Philadelphia, Pa.) FORWARDED. , blue, S.L. 41x4, 1845
(Philadelphia, Pa.) FORWARDED, blue, S.L. in octagon 54x5, 1848
(Kingston, R.I.) FORWARDED, green, S.L. 24x2, 1842

Editors' Endnotes

- ¹ Theron Wierenga, *The Gold Rush Mail Agents to California and their Postal Markings 1849-1852* identifies the straight line "PANAMA" to be from a handstamp wielded by A.B. Corwine as Despatch Agent, a position to which he was appointed December 6, 1849. The cover in Figure 1 is calendared as number 5 of 20 known (only one other bearing the Corwine forwarded handstamp) by Wierenga. See "Panama – Two Mysteries" *PHJ* 139 (Feb. 2008) pp 22-27.
- ² Milgram includes a chapter on forwarded express mail, pp 138-150, in his monograph, *The Express Mail of 1836-1839* (Collectors Club of Chicago 1977). Its first illustrations depict two other 1837 letters addressed to Peck from New York. On May 19 an "Express / Single" directed to Mobile Alabama is forwarded to Montgomery May 24. The second illustration depicts a double weight letter inscribed "Express via N.O. / Paid" which covered the same path and same dates as Figure 5.
- ³ Charles Towle, *U.S. Route and Station Agent Postmarks* (Mobile Post Office Society 1986) identifies (plate 92 and page 183) the "RAIL-ROAD" in arc 1838-1841 with the railroads between Albany and Buffalo, and that it is to be found applied at the "post offices in Albany, Utica and Syracuse, probably due to lack of space on trains."
- ⁴ Alex L. ter Braake, *The Posted Letter in Colonial and Revolutionary America* (American Philatelic Research Library 1975) publishes Benjamin Franklin's chart of postages (pocket) and instructions to postmasters ca1754 (B42-B47). The postage chart shows a matrix of rates among places on the Grand Line of Posts from New Hampshire to Virginia (New York to Philadelphia, 2 shillings), while cross posts and alternative routes are given their own matrices and postages (Philadelphia to Lancaster 2 shillings). Franklin's instructions are particular about undelivered letters: "one Month after you have received them, you are to take a List of Names of the parties to whom the same are directed, and their Places of Abode, and publish it in one or all the News-Papers printed in your Province, if the Printers thereof send any of their Papers in his Majesty's Mail. And all those Letters which remain undelivered two Months after such Publication, you are to send to the General Post-Office in Philadelphia, as Dead Letters."
- ⁵ Walter Hubbard and Richard F. Winter, ed. Susan M. McDonald, *North Atlantic Mail Sailings 1840-1875* (US Philatelic Classics Society 1988) identifies the Cunard steamship *America* as having departed Liverpool May 25, 1850, arriving in New York June 6.
- ⁶ "An Act to Amend the Laws relating to the Post Office Department passed June 12 1866 (Sec. 1) That, from and after the first day of July, 1866, prepaid and free letters shall be forwarded, at

the request of the party addressed, from one post office to another without additional postage charge; and returned dead letters shall be returned to the writers thereof free of postage.” With Additional Instructions pertaining to “Advertised Letters. Under an order of the Postmaster General issued December 5, 1867, the allowance of pay for advertising unclaimed letters in newspapers is prohibited at all post offices when any publisher can be found willing to do the work without charge, ... When no newspaper, at a first class office, can be found to publish the said list under this regulation, the postmaster will report the fact to the 3rd Assistant Postmaster General. Under no circumstances will pay be allowed at other than first-class offices.” In *List of Post Offices of the United States*, Washington 1868, pp xvii-xix.

⁷ Postal regulations were definite: “Orders to forward letters should be in writing and filed by you.” Instructions, Sec 143 in *Laws, Instructions and Forms for the Regulation of the Post Office Department*, Washington 1832. Written orders on file with the postmaster governed the forwarding of letters.

⁸ Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz, *The Forwarding of Mail by the U.S. Post Office Department, 1792-2001* (James E. Lee 2001) catalogs forwarded handstamps in an appendix. For the stampless period, Wawrukiewicz depicts 5 forwarding handstamps and tabulates another 6. Of these, Milgram captures less than half. Taken together - Milgram’s 18 plus 6 from Wawrukiewicz - 24 distinct stampless period forwarding handstamps have been identified.

Dr. James W. Milgram, an orthopedic surgeon, is very active in The Collectors Club of Chicago. He has collected covers and letters since high school, and has written several books focusing on 19th century illustrated stationery - his most recent, *Federal Civil War Postal History* was reviewed in *PHJ* 143; and his supplement to “Vessel-Named Markings on United States Inland & Ocean Waterways 1784-1899” appeared in the 3 issues of *PHJ* 2007.

COVER ILLUSTRATION: The 1860 painting by George Elgar Hicks, *The General Post Office, One Minute to Six*, depicts a scene that was described in great detail by William Lewins in his 1864 book *Her Majesty’s Mails: A History of the Post-Office, and an Industrial Account of Its Present Condition*. W.H. Bidwell, editor of *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, New York, September 1864, quoted Lewins’s description in a piece reprinted from the *British Quarterly*, “The English Post-Office,” and a second edition of Lewins’ book in 1865 added detail: “Approaching the great hall of the General Post-office [St. Martin’s le Grand] through one of the three-columned porticos, we post our letter, and as it is now nearly six o’clock p.m. we stand aside for a few minutes only, to witness one of the most stirring sights in the metropolis.... As if it had been waiting for the opportunity to pass some hidden barrier, an impetuous crowd suddenly enters, and letters and newspapers at once begin to fall in quite a literary hail-storm. The huge slits gaping for letters all the day, must now be widened, or the consequences would undoubtedly be serious among the hurrying crowd of people. Just at this period the windows over the newspaper-boxes used to be thrown open, and newspapers and bags were hurled with great force, and sometimes, fury, into the sorting-room on the same floor. Now a capacious shoot is thrown wide open, which carries the newspapers deposited in it to a room underneath. This immense aperture no sooner opens its maw than it is surrounded and besieged by men and boys of all ages and costumes alike pushing, heaving, and surging in one great mass, who seek to feed the thing with heaps of papers, which fly thicker and faster than the driven snow. ...” And the pandemonium intensifies until the last moment, when the postal windows slam shut. (See review of *Posting It*, page 49.) Original 89 x 135 cm. ©Museum of London.