The Standardization of American Mail Order, 1860-1900

Sarah Johnson, Ph.D.

sj3551@gmail.com
Addressed to John Larwill, Wooster, Ohio, 1c stamp

Warshaw collection, circulars were folded, addressed on backs; 1847 Stamps issued to pay for postage; 1855 Compulsory prepayment of postage; 1861 4 lb pkg admitted, .01/oz under 1500 miles, .02/oz over 1500 miles; 1863 3 prepaid classes of mail
Pkgs less than 4 lbs allowed in mail 2/27/1861; Ralph Hower “to stimulate sales...Macy as early as 1861 advertised gloves to be delivered by mail (63 ct/pair; 69ct by mail) NY Herald ads 1/21/1861; 11/7/1861
B. Altman receipt for gloves to Nassau, NY
A.T. Stewart Catalog Cover detail, ca. 1862

In 1863, mail is divided into 3 classes, prepaid, with money orders coming in 1864
James McCreery ad in Harper’s Bazar, 10/2/1869
p. 639, specifies price list before the use of the term catalogue in 1875
Lord & Taylor ad in Harper’s Bazar, 4/22/1871

p. 255, specifies sending orders by mail, COD, or by express. The 3 prepaid classes of mail were revised in 1872, 1873, 1874, 1876, 1879; by 9/19/1874, AT Stewart, “the recent change in the Postal laws...enable our friends, customers, and strangers at any point in the US or territories to purchase dry goods.”
Macy’s catalog 1877—lack of illustrations, reduced size

Technologies exist to illustrate catalogs, especially w/print runs twice a year but the marketing acumen doesn’t evolve until the late 1870s. Retailers insisted on the 2nd class rate for catalogs; they grew in size from mid-1870s (30-40 pp), to 150-180 pp in the 1880s and hundreds of pages in 1890s to compete with direct marketers.
Catalog Covers, the Middle Class & Stock Imagery

Bronner & Co, Buffalo, NY 1888
“Orders by mail carefully and promptly attended.”
American Express’s Personal Shopping Service

An order form from July 1878, “…the leading merchants of large cities, to fill orders at a discount off retail rates, which rates would in most cases be paid by the purchaser if made in person or ordered through the mail. Such discount will in all cases be allowed on cost of purchase, the Company making no charge except for carriage of the property.”
Women’s magazine format, Spring 1882

The first S&C Quarterly published Spring 1882, p. 30 “…Not so many yers ago, ladies living away from the great centres of trade, were at least a season behind in the style of their garments. Now they need no longer wait…this shopping by mail is the practical result of overcoming space and time…at .50/yr, the subscription price of the 1/4ly covers but a small fraction of the cost of publishing & mailing.”
12/17/1878 Stern’s to Consumer post card
Verso, Notification of shipment of package
R.H. White’s 1883 mail order department

“a large room where all retail orders sent by mail are filled—receipt of letters averaging one thousand per day,” difficult to quantify though used in marketing rhetoric, Jordan Marsh cited a 100% annual increase in mail order for ten consecutive years in Fall 1881 catalog. By 1895, Kaufmann’s in Pittsburgh specified 43,000 orders ranging from .10-hundreds of dollars.
April 5, 18__.  

Messrs. A. T. Stewart & Co.,  
New York.  

Dear Sirs:  

Enclosed find Post Office Order for $25, for which please send, by American Express, the following goods:

2 Lancaster Table Spreads ($3.50), $7.00  
4 prs. Alexandre Kid Gloves ($2.50), No. 6½, Brown, Green, Yellow, Black, 10.00  
8 yds. Calico, Brown, with small figure (25c.), 2.00  
12 " " White, " " pink dot " 3.00  
2 Linen Handkerchiefs (50c.), 1.00  
4 prs. Ladies’ Cotton Hose (50c.), No. 9, 2.00

$25.00

Direct to

Hill’s Manual of Social & Business Forms, 1882

p. 86, Mail ordering covered in etiquette books
To LORD & TAYLOR:

From LORD & TAYLOR, NEW YORK.

M.

Samples are enclosed herewith in obedience to your request. Please make a first choice, and if there be two satisfactory samples make a second choice also, to save time in case your first choice is gone when the order is received. Keep half of each sample chosen to compare the goods with when received; pin the other halves on the enclosed Order where indicated thereon; write in the blank under “List of goods,” the quantity of each article wanted and the cost of the same in the money column; enclose with the order remittance of the sum total of the order, and mail in the envelope enclosed herewith. When an order cannot be filled to the satisfaction of the buyer the money is returned. If too much money is sent the excess is returned.

Remit by check, P. O. order, registered letter, or by draft on New York. [As a matter of fact there is very little risk in sending by mail small sums in money or stamps; we receive them continually and rarely hear of a loss; and of parcels of goods sent by mail not one in a thousand goes astray. Still we advise the sure ways when not too inconvenient. Goods are sent C. O. D. if desired; but this is a somewhat more costly mode of remitting.]

If some of the samples herewith are quite to your taste please ask for samples again, and specify what you want more particularly as you will doubtless be able to do. In asking for samples state whether high-priced, low-priced, or medium; green, grey, or medium; colors, shades, etc., etc.

Prices are invariable except as goods are marked down with the lapse of the season, in which case absent buyers have the same advantage as those present, exactly.
*WHEN ORDERING PLEASE USE THIS BLANK FORM.*

In ordering samples, please use a separate sheet, giving name and P.O. address.

**Messrs. STERN BROTHERS,**

32, 34 & 36 West 23d Street, New York City.

Please forward to M

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

State whether to ship by Mail or Express.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Enclosed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of pages in Catalogue</th>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Number or Description of Articles</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Total Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

May we substitute in case any selection has been sold?
Lord & Taylor,
Grand Street Store,
Grand and Chrystie Streets,
New York.

O. R. Crook
Franklin
Franklin Co.
Jordan, Marsh’s illustration of the mail order process

Jordan, Marsh, S1884, ifc“"To our patrons is respectfully dedicated this, the Spring number of the eighth volume of our semi-annual dry goods catalogue. Like its predecessors, it has been designed and compiled for the benefit and assistance of our out-of-town patrons, whose names out-number the population of the majority of the large cities in the United States."
Shopping By Mail
and Express
7 Buildings
Devoted To
Importing & Retailing
of
General and High Grade
Dry Goods, Millinery,
Fancy Articles etc.
Illustrated Catalogue
Mailed Free.
Daniell & Sons
Broadway and Eighth St., N.Y.
Postal legislation & Direct Marketing Assn.

The debate continues...