

# **Ann Arbor's First Postage "Stamp"**

**A Change in Perspective**

**by Cary E. Johnson**

References: John Allen and the Founding of Ann Arbor: Russell Bidlack, 1962  
History of Detroit & Wayne County: Silas Farmer, 1890  
All Aboard! A History of Railroads in Michigan: Willis Dunbar, 1969

# Convenient Prepayment to Mail Letters

## First World Wide Postage Stamp



The idea of an adhesive stamp to indicate prepayment of postage was part of Rowland Hill's 1837 proposal to reform the British postal system. A companion idea which Hill disclosed on 13 February 1837 at a government inquiry was that of a separate sheet which folded to form an enclosure or envelope for carrying letters. At that time postage was charged by the sheet and on the distance traveled.

The **Penny Black**, the world's first official adhesive postage stamp, was issued by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland on 1 May 1840, for use from 6 May.

# Convenient Prepayment to Mail Letters

## First United States Postage Stamps



**5¢ Red Brown Franklin**  
About 3.6 million issued  
(1847-1851)

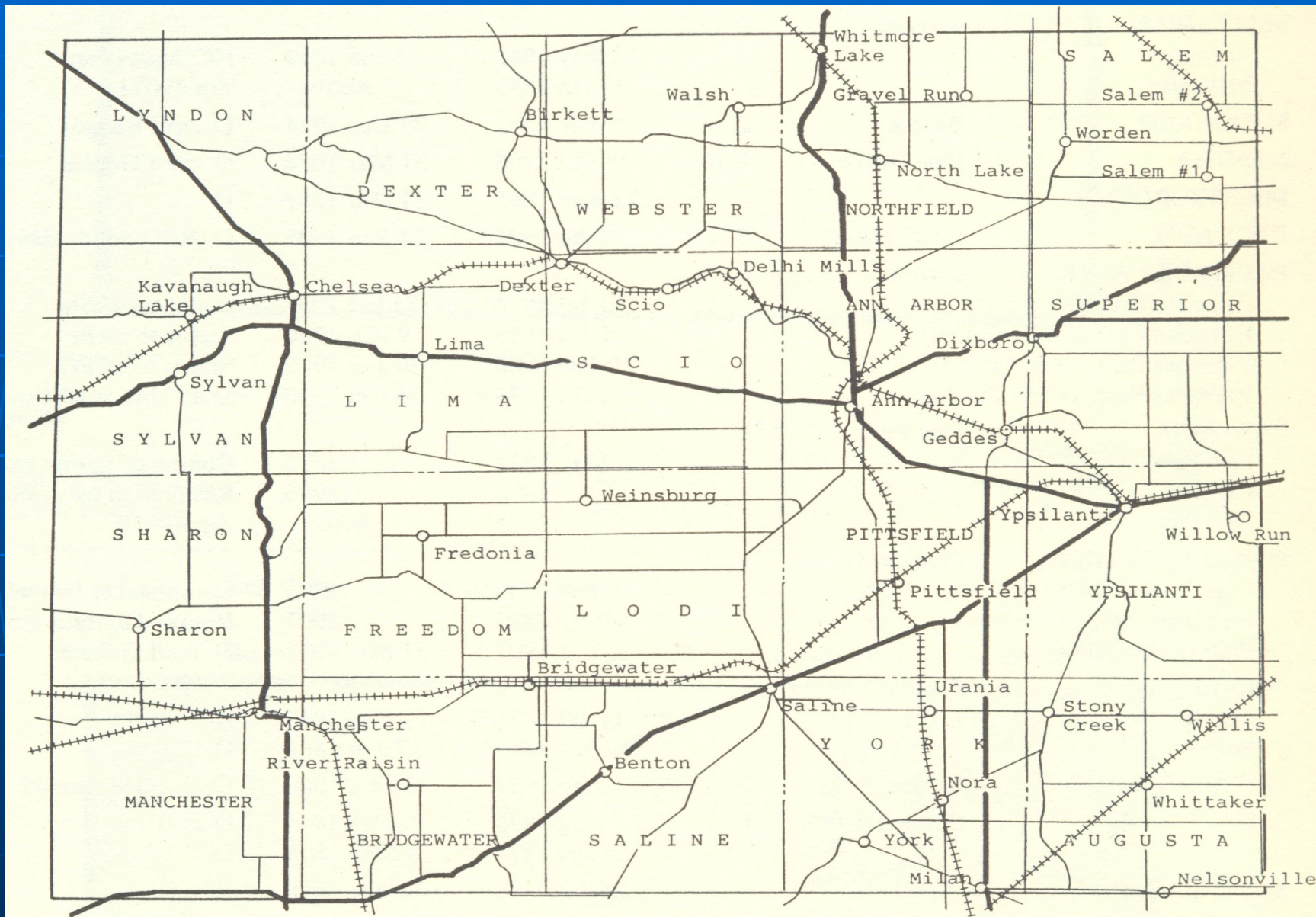


**10¢ Black Washington**  
About 864,000 issued  
(1847-1851)

**1847 Domestic Letter Rate: under 300 miles per 1/2 oz., 5c and over 300 miles per 1/2 oz., 10c**

The 5c and 10c stamps of 1847 were the first adhesive postage stamps authorized for issue by the U.S. Post Office Department, in response to a law passed on March 3, 1847. The law was to take effect on July 1, 1847 and made illegal the use of postage stamps not authorized by the Postmaster General.

Although these stamps were scheduled to be sold to the general public on July 1, they were only available at the New York City Post Office, followed by Boston, on July 2. Distribution progressed to other post offices, most often by postmaster request.



## Washtenaw County and Townships circa 1882

*Ellis:Michigan Postal History - The Post Offices 1805-1986*





**Earliest recorded use of 1847 stamp issue used from Ann Arbor, October 11, 1847**

The Ann Arbor postmaster did not request or receive 5c stamps until June of 1849.

The stamp on the above letter was cancelled by multiple horizontal pen strokes since Postmaster George Danforth had no specific canceling device.

At this time (1847) in Michigan, the first issue postage stamps were only available in Detroit and this 5c stamp was brought to Ann Arbor by the sender.



A pair of the 5c issue for ½ oz. or less sent over 300 miles, May 12, 1850

Ann Arbor never received a supply of 10c stamps and no “on-cover” examples are recorded. A 7-bar closed-grid killer was now available for Postmaster Caleb Clark to cancel the stamps.

**The reduced 5c and 10c postal rates first took effect on July 1, 1845 and came about in a most interesting way.**



# The Rest of the Story



Government postal letter rates of the 1840s were high compared to the transport of general freight and were based on the number of letter sheets (not weight) and the distance traveled. The general public was not pleased and resentment grew!

6c	less than 30 miles per single letter sheet
10c	31-80 miles
12½c	81-150 miles
18¾c	151-400 miles
25c	over 400 miles (Ann Arbor to New York for the above letter)

Rates based on the Spanish real (12½c) which circulated more abundantly than U.S. coins

# **“Friendly” Competition**

- Postal Laws & Regulations: Illegal for individuals to “take up, receive, order, dispatch, carry, convey or deliver any letter or letters, packet or packets, other than newspapers, for hire or reward...”
- Methods were found to circumvent the Government postal rates such as to underline letters of words in the newspaper to form a letter and send at the lower newspaper rate or send a package of letters by a private express company.
- The Government gave railroad owners full warning that their mail contracts, a lucrative source of income, could be canceled unless space and passage were denied to the independent letter carriers.
- Postal inspectors attempted to prosecute violators and took an agent of Adams & Company Express to trial by jury in November of 1843.
- The judge ruled that under postal law, it was illegal for anyone to set up a stagecoach or other company to transport the mail, but the law had not forbidden commissioned passengers from carrying mail. Based on this loophole, the Express Company was found not guilty.
- As a result of this test case, a number of private companies were rapidly organized to carry letters in direct competition with the U.S. Postal Service and did so, often with direct delivery to the addressee at ½ the Government postal rate or less.



# “Friendly” Competition

- Lysander Spooner organized his own postal service: American Letter Mail Company, and ran an advertisement on the front page of the New York Daily Tribune:

“American Post Office- The American Letter Mail Company has established post offices in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Boston, and will transmit letters daily from each city to the others-twice a day between New York and Philadelphia. Postage 6¼ cents per each half-ounce, payable in advance always. Stamps 20 for a dollar.”



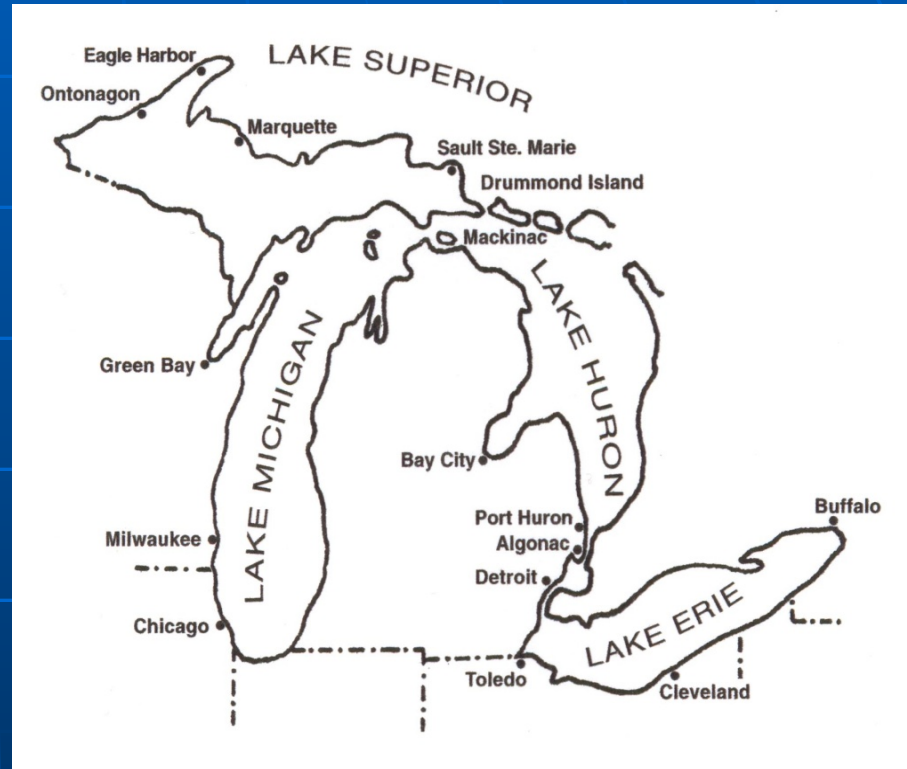
- The gauntlet was thrown down and the Post Office Department let out a howl that echoed in the halls of Congress.
- One of Spooner's agents was arrested and found guilty of transporting letters in a railway car over a post road of the United States. He was fined but....
  1. The judge advised the jury that owners of conveyances were not liable under law if, unknown to the owners, a letter carrier brought mail onboard a train or steamboat.
  2. A not guilty verdict was sustained by the U.S. District Court which also expressed doubt that the Government had the right to monopolize transportation of the mail!

# Express Companies in Michigan

- First private express company in Michigan was located in Detroit, operated by Charles H. Miller & Co.
- Operated westward from Buffalo to Detroit, Chicago and intermediated ports via steamboat beginning with the navigation season of 1843.

## EXPRESSES.

Messrs. Miller and Co. of Buffalo, have established an express between Buffalo and Chicago, in connection with Pomeroy and Co's express, from Buffalo to New York. Miller & Co's Express will run three times a week. By this arrangement, a chain of intercommunication will be formed, from Bangor, in the State of Maine, through Boston, Albany, Buffalo, &c. to Chicago. The establishment of this line will be important to business men in the West, as it is designed to furnish a safe and expeditious carriage of packages, orders and remittances. It will also give the news from the East, generally, in advance of the mails.





# Pomeroy-Miller & Co. Express Conjunctive



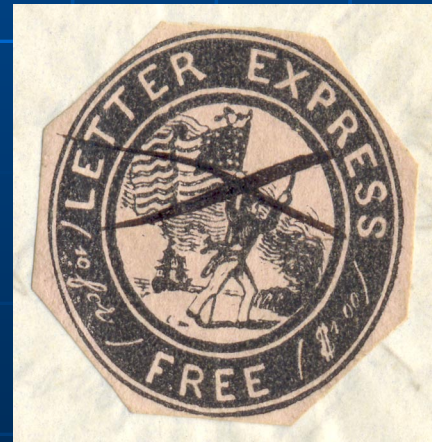
- September 9, 1843 packet of 8 letters/documents sent prepaid via Pomeroy & Co. Express from New York (stamp applied) via train to Buffalo. Only recorded Miller handstamp at Buffalo and earliest known westbound express cover to Michigan.
- Transferred to Miller & Co. Express and carried by steamboat on Lake Erie to Detroit and via Central R.R. to Ann Arbor by a ticket-holding Express Agent. The Ann Arbor Express Agent for Miller & Co. was Flavius J.B. Crane.
- Miller & Co. Express operated from March 1843 until January 1844 and was briefly taken over by Pomeroy before final take over by Wells & Co. Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit and Chicago Express on February 22, 1844.

# Wells & Co. Express

- On February 22, 1844, Wells & Co. Express was formed by Henry Wells, William Fargo and Daniel Dunning to serve Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago and intermediate ports by steamboat during the regular navigation season.
- The company took over the failed business controlled by Miller & Co. Express.
- Detroit office opened in late July or early August, 1844 in C. Morse's Michigan Book Store, 127 Jefferson Ave.
- The letter carrying portion of the Company was called the Letter Express. 6¼c and 12½c stamps (black on pink and black on green)) were issued by July of 1844 for transport of letters anywhere on their route between Buffalo and Chicago. Wells connected with Pomeroy Express (closely linked and eventually taken over by Wells) at Buffalo for service to Syracuse, Albany and New York City.
- Rate was 6¼c for each letter sheet and enclosure, such as bank drafts, from Detroit to Buffalo, 12½c to New York, shared with Pomeroy, 18¾c to Philadelphia or New England States when a third independent carrier was needed.
- Discounted rate (5c and 10c) for stamps was available only with purchase of 20 or 10 stamps for \$1. Bisected (1/2) stamps were allowed.



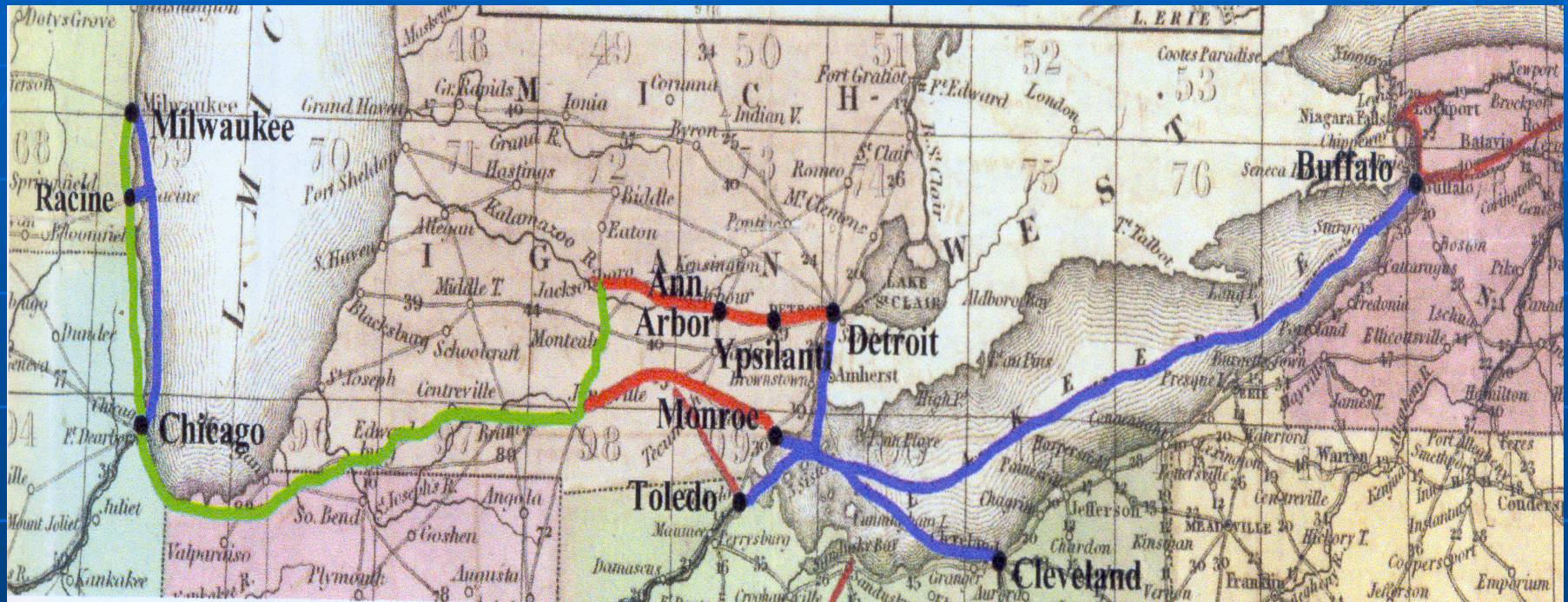
6¼c Goddess of Commerce



12½c Perry's Naval Victory



# Wells & Co. Operations up to 1845



Blue: Waterway  
Green: Stagecoach  
Red: Railway

# Wells & Co. Letter Express

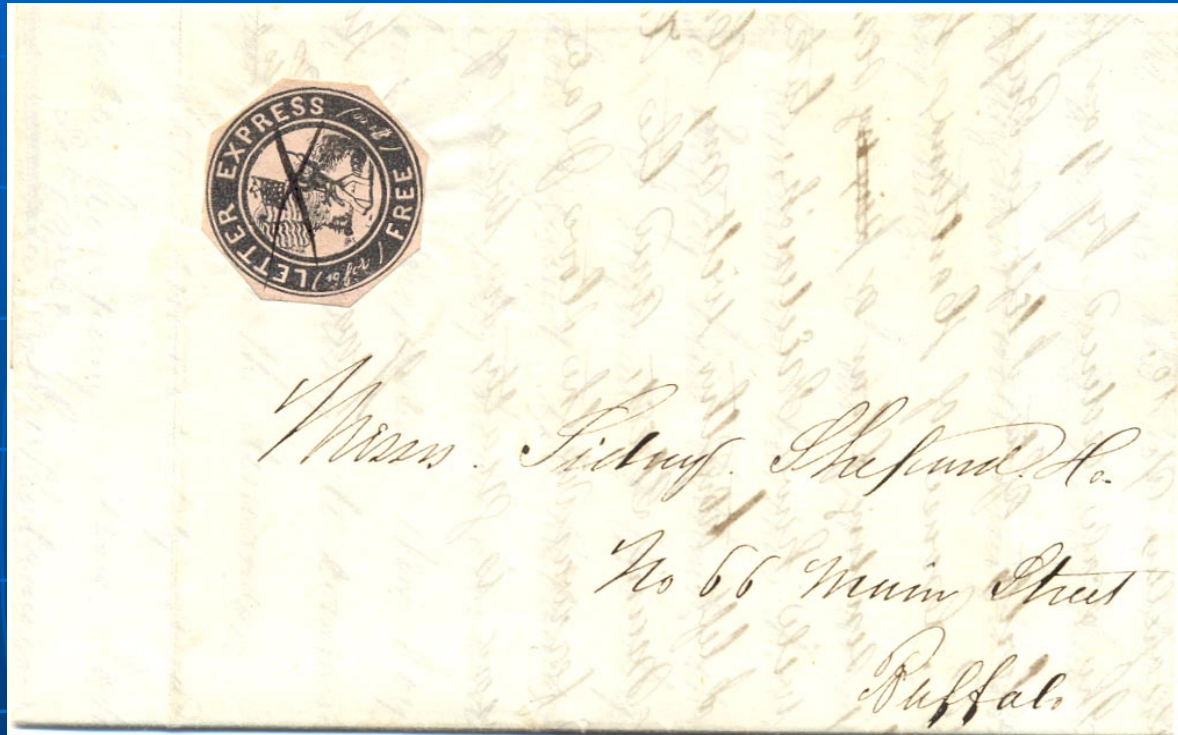


August 3, 1844 Single rate 6¼c stamp, Cleveland to Detroit by steamboat PFC  
Black on green printing Earliest known Wells Letter Express usage west to Detroit.

Letter to William Woodbridge indicating his election as honorary corresponding member of newly formed Cleveland Horticultural Society.  
He had resigned as Governor of Michigan in 1841 to become Senator (1841-1847).  
If mailed by the post office, it could have been sent FREE to a U.S. Senator.  
Detroit Express Agent was Daniel Dunning.



# Wells & Co. Letter Express



August 31, 1844 Double rate 12½c stamp (enclosure), Detroit to Buffalo by steamboat.

Letter to Sidney Shepard & Co., Stove and hardware dealer from his brother at their Detroit store at 40 Woodward Avenue.

Detroit Express Agent was Daniel Dunning.

# Wells & Co. Letter Express

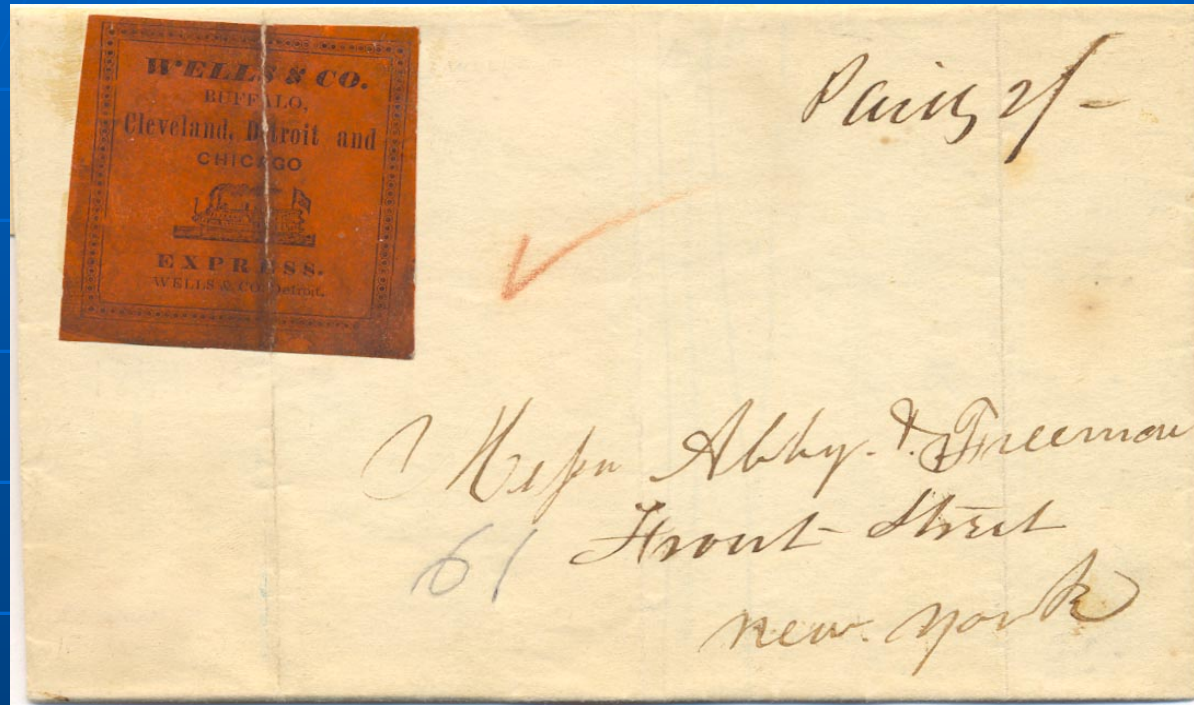


October 29, 1844 Single 6¼c letter sheet rate, Detroit to Buffalo. PFC

Detroit Express Agent was Daniel Dunning.



# Wells & Co. Regular Express



December 7, 1844 Paid 2/- (2 reales, not shillings; 1 real to Pomeroy) Detroit to New York

The Letter Express (partner with Pomeroy & Co.) from Detroit to Buffalo to New York (steamboat to Buffalo) had ended for regular “mailable” letters per announcement from Wells & Co. on November 11, 1844 due to pressure on the steamboat carriers who would otherwise lose their mail contract. 2 reales or bits (25c for cover sheet and bank draft) was ½ the rate of the U.S. Postal Service (50c for 2 pieces) and delivery was faster with direct delivery to 61 (added at New York) Front Street. Orange crayon 2 indicates 2c payment to delivery service (Boyd's City Express) which was included in the regular Express fee. The Post Office did not have free carrier delivery in New York and required 2c per letter vs. mail pick up from a post office box.

Detroit Express Agent was Daniel Dunning.

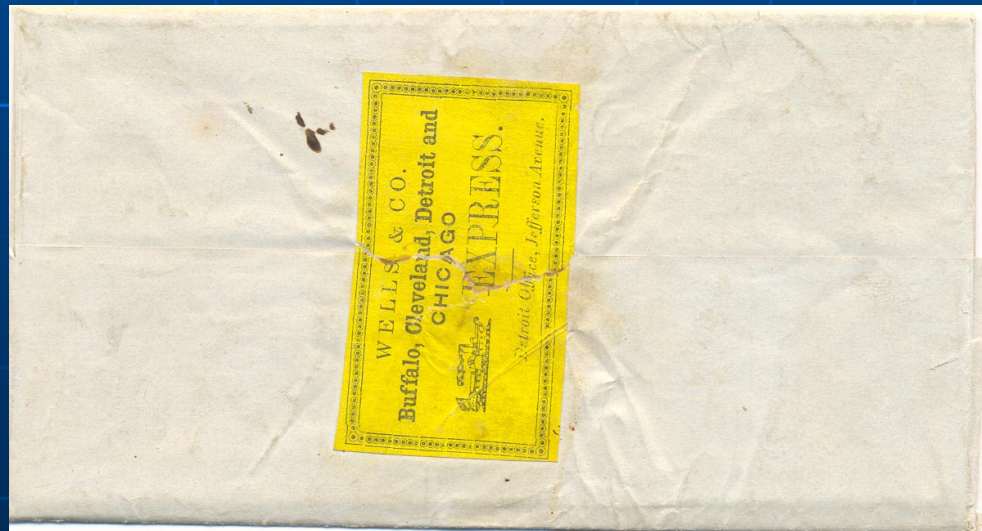
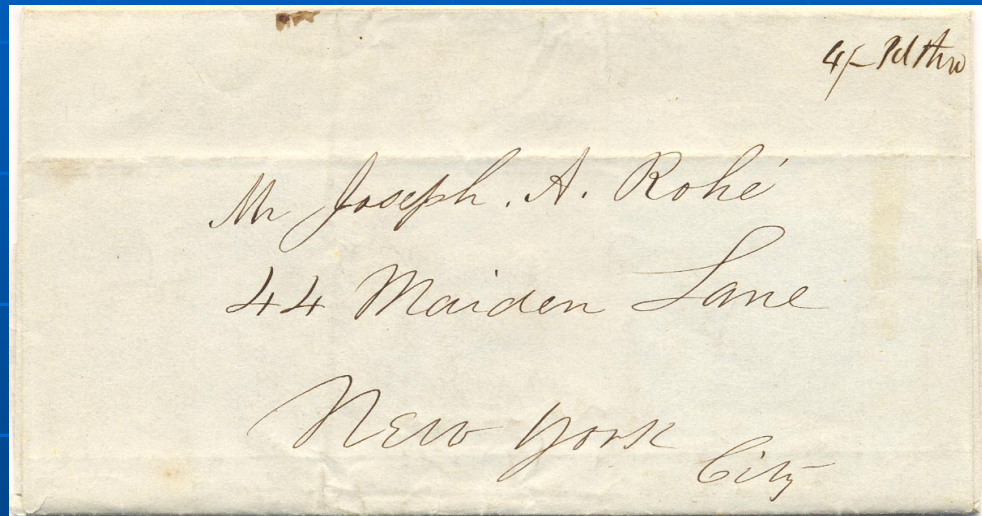
# Wells & Co. Regular Express

June 27, 1846 Express Money Letter (\$100), from Detroit with delivery to 44 Maiden Lane, New York.

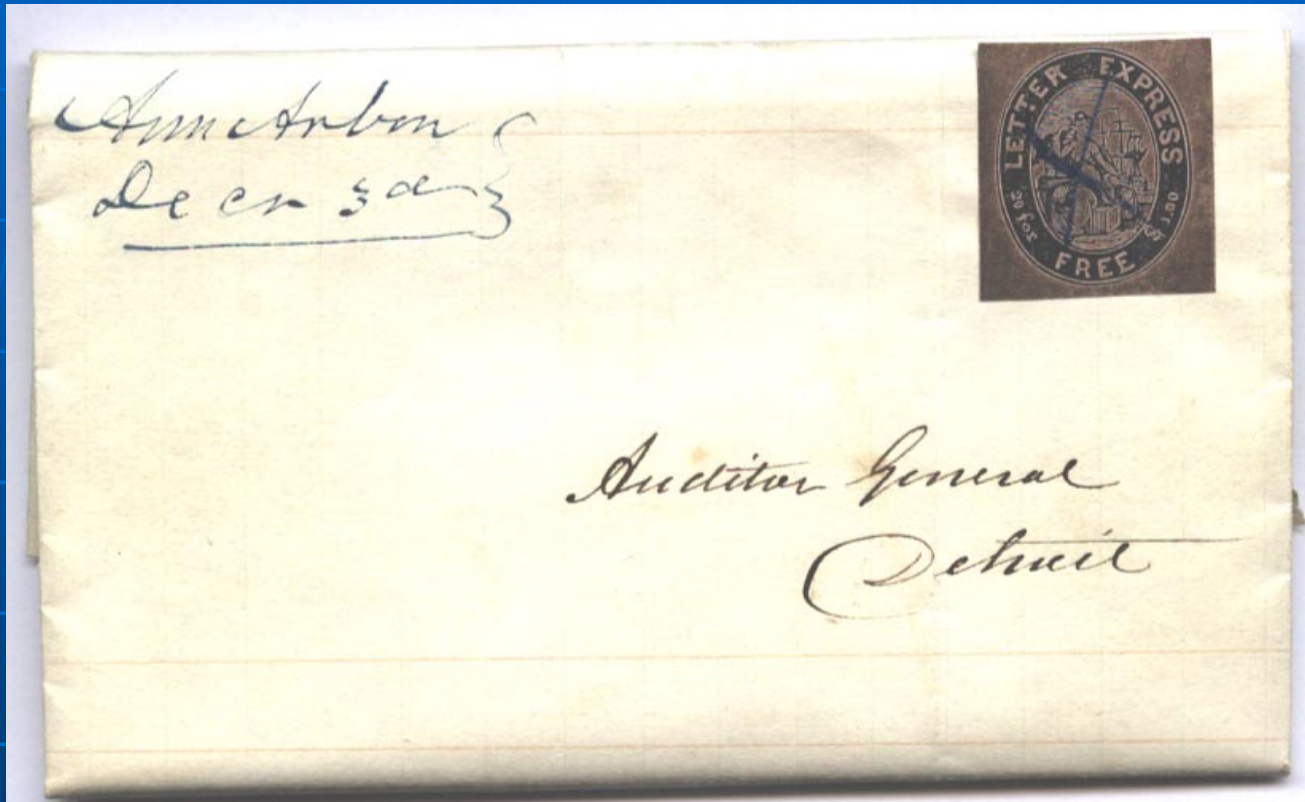
Paid 4 reales (50c) through to New York by Wells Express which had now taken over Pomeroy; 2 reales Express fee and 2 reales for insurance.

Detroit Express Agent in 1846 was William G. Fargo.

Office moved from the Morse's Bookstore to the basement of the Farmers & Mechanics Bank on Jefferson Ave as seen on the Express label.



# The Ann Arbor Connection



December 3, 1844

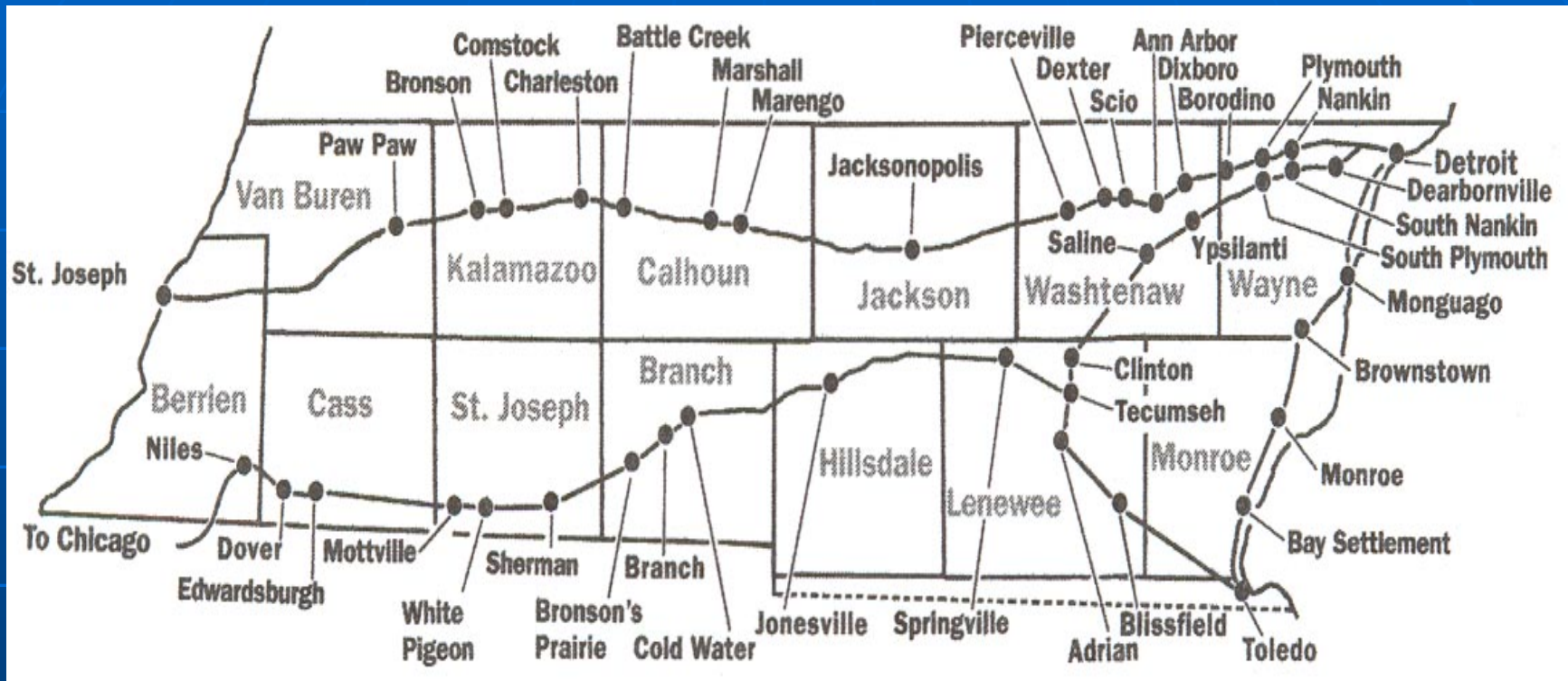
Single 6¼c rate

Ann Arbor to Detroit

Other Michigan examples of Letter Express service only known by steamboat transit to and from Detroit with steamboat mailable letter service ended voluntarily by Wells on November 11, 1844. Letter and tax report sent by E.W. Morgan, prominent Ann Arbor attorney. "Stamp" is NOT tied.

Is this letter a previously unreported inland Wells Letter Express usage carried by the Central RR?





## Primary Post Roads/Routes in 1844

Old River Road: Detroit-Toledo

Chicago Military Road: Detroit-Chicago

Detroit and St. Joseph Road

Tecumseh and Toledo Road

Central RR became a post road in October, 1844

Private letter carriers were outlawed from using Post Roads



# 1845 Wells & Co. Advertisement

## Detroit City Directory



### WELLS & CO'S.

#### Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit and Chicago Express.

The Proprietors of this Express, will receive and forward daily, specie, bank notes, packages, parcels and bundles of goods, packages of law papers, invoices and bills of lading, and will attend to the collection and payment of notes, bills and accounts, and such other business as may be intrusted to their care.

This Express connects with Pomeroy & Cos. Eastern and Canada Expresses at Buffalo, and by this arrangement packages &c. can be forwarded from Detroit as soon, and often in advance of the mails, to Cleveland, Erie, Buffalo, Batavia, Rochester, Canandaigua, Geneva, Auburn, Syracuse, Oswego, Sackett's Harbor, Ogdensburgh, Utica, Schenectady, Troy, Albany, New-York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington, and various other towns and villages on the line; also, to Toronto, Hamilton, Kingston, Montreal and all the important places in the Canadas. Unsealed orders will be forwarded free to any of the above places, and returns made by first express. Merchants, Booksellers, and others, wishing to order small lots of goods from the east, will find this a cheap and expeditious way to get them on. Careful and competent messengers will accompany each express, with responsible agents, at the different towns on the route. Making this as safe a method for doing business as can be offered to the public. An express will leave Buffalo for Chicago three times a week, and will receive and deliver packages at the intermediate places, on the upper and lower lakes.

The Express leaves Detroit every Monday morning for Buffalo, Albany, New-York and Boston, through on the American side, touching at all the intermediate points on the route. On the opening of navigation the Express will leave for Chicago three times per week, through on the Central railroad.

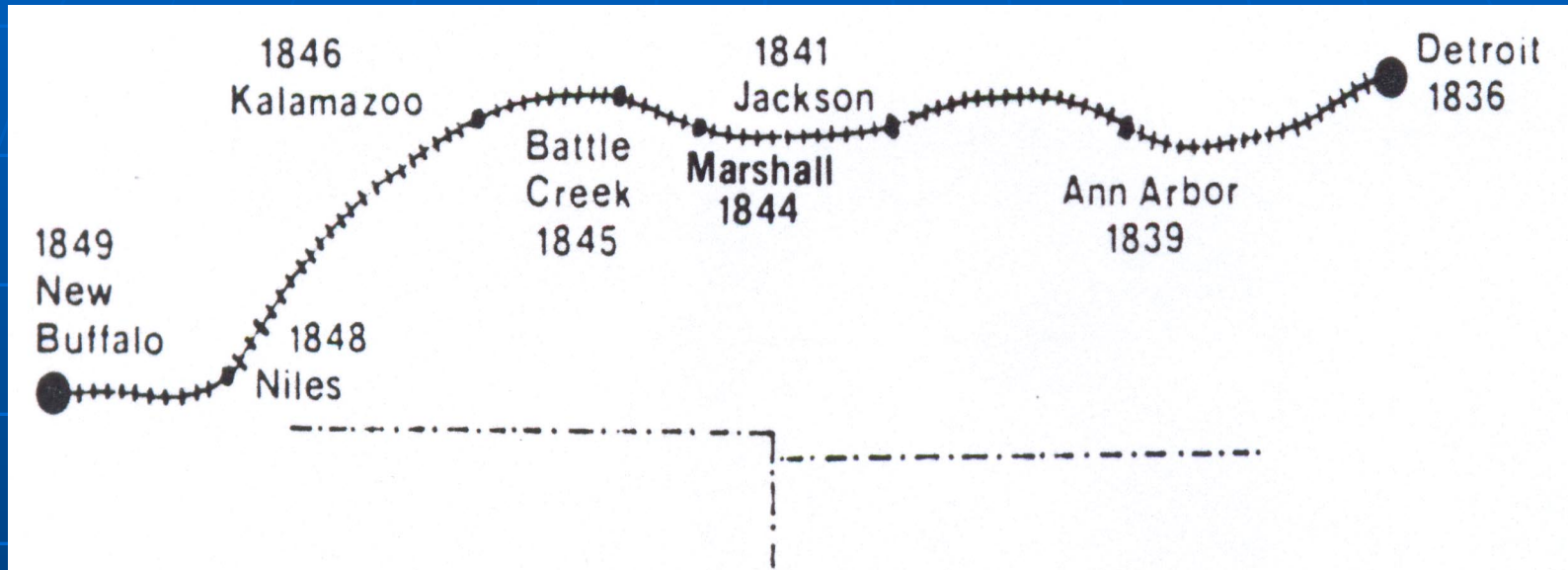
Packages and parcels should be handed in on Saturday to ensure their going each week.

#### PROPRIETORS.

HENRY WELLS, partner Pomeroy & Cos. express, Buffalo.  
D. DUNNING and WM. G. FARGO, late messengers of Pomeroy & Co.

WELLS & CO. Office at Morse's Bookstore.

# Building of the Central RR



Main line completion Detroit to Dearborn, January, 1838; Ypsilanti, February 3, 1838, Ann Arbor, October 17, 1839; Jackson, December 29, 1841 and Marshall on August 10, 1844. First railroad mail contract (Detroit to Marshall) received in October, 1844.

Regular operations and passenger service began late in February, 1838, following completion of the main line to Ypsilanti.

Central RR was sold by the State and became the Michigan Central RR, March 28, 1846.



# Ann Arbor Express Office

**WELLS & CO'S EXPRESS,**

**T**HE Proprietors having extended their Express Line as far as Marshall, on the Central Rail Road, passing through all the different villages upon the line of this road, will receive Packages, Parcels and Bundles of Goods, packages of Law papers and Bills of Lading, and will attend to the collection and payment of Notes, Bills and Accounts and such other business as may be entrusted to their care. The Express connects daily from Detroit with the Eastern Expresses passing through all the important places on the Lake and Rail Road route through New York.

WELLS & CO. Detroit.  
Apply to F. J. B. CRANE,  
46 Agent, Ann Arbor.

**Wells & Co. Express.**

**T**HE Proprietors of this Express having extended their Express line as far as Marshall, over the Central Rail Road, passing through all the different villages upon the line of this Road. will receive and forward, three times per week, on this route, Packages, Parcels, and Bundles of Goods, Packages of Law Papers, and Bills of Lading, and will attend to the collection and payment of Notes and bills of accounts, and such other business as may be entrusted to their care. The Express connects daily from Detroit with the Eastern Expresses, passing through all the important places on the Lake and the Rail Road route through the state of New York.

WELLS & CO. Detroit.  
B. VERNOR, Agent, Marshall.  
The Agent leaves Detroit on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and Marshall, on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, on the Central Railroad.

- With the completion of the Central RR to Ann Arbor in 1839, Miller & Co. had opened an Express Office in 1843, operating to Detroit and Buffalo.
- Wells & Co. took over Miller's routes and operations in February, 1844.
- Wells & Co. Express began advertisements in the Ann Arbor newspaper, the *Michigan State Journal* on August 28, 1844 and in the *Marshall Statesman* on September 5, 1844. Description of Letter Express avoided.

Source: Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor; Michigan State Archives, Lansing



# Wells & Co. Express Offices

## 1847 Michigan Express Offices:

Detroit

Monroe

Ypsilanti

Ann Arbor – Agent, F.J.B. Crane

Marshall



Battle Creek

Jackson and other smaller towns  
not listed

Michigan Central RR had reached  
Battle Creek by 1847

**WELLS & COMPANY'S EXPRESS,**  
*THIRD ST.,... Cincinnati,*  
Opposite the Life and Trust Bank.

**PROPRIETORS.**  
HENRY WELLS,..... } Buffalo, N. Y.  
WM. G. FARGO,..... }  
J. V. VREDENBURGH,..... Cincinnati, O.  
D. DUNNING,..... Detroit, Mich.

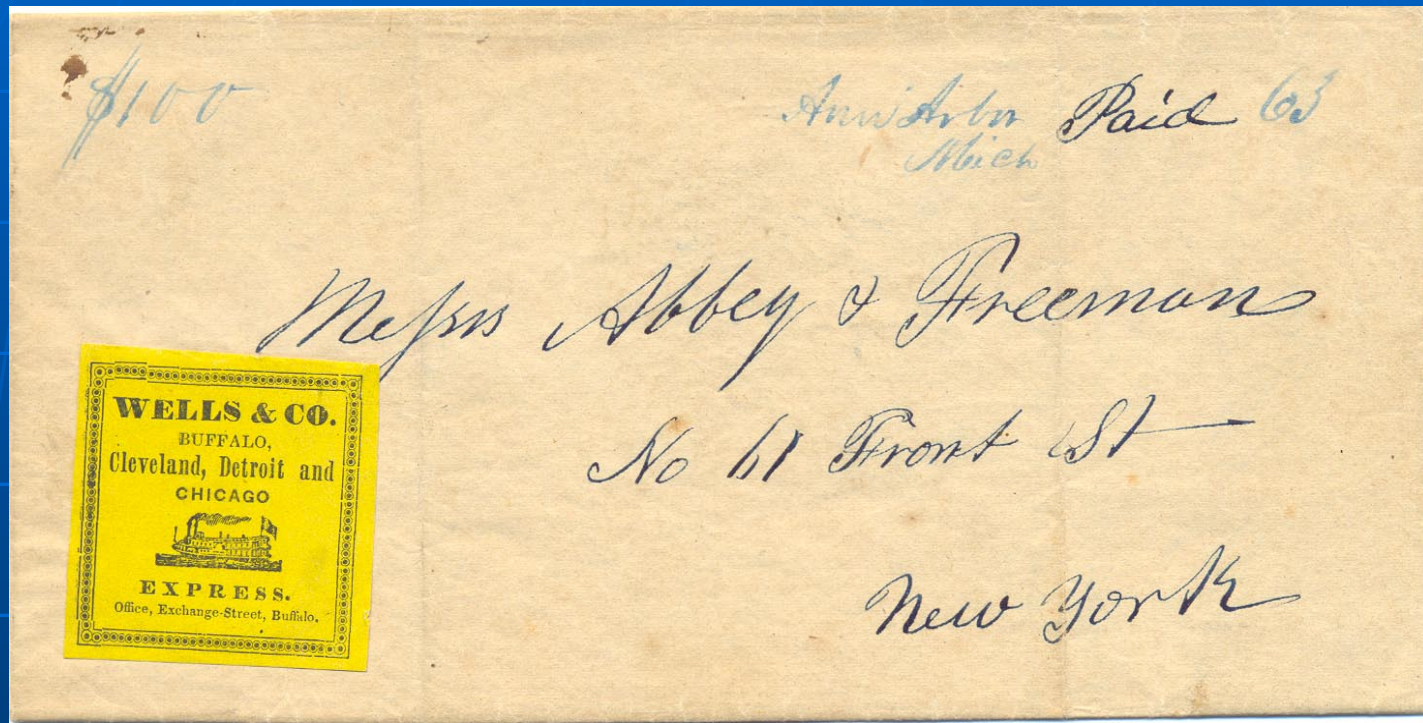



**Packages**  
**RECEIVED AND FORWARDED**  
TO THE FOLLOWING  
AGENCIES & OFFICES.

WELLS & CO,.....	BUFFALO, N. Y.
G. A. FRENCH & CO,.....	DUNKIRK, "
O. D. SPAFFORD,.....	ERIE, PA.
J. H. THOMAS,.....	ASHTABULA, O.
S. S. HOWARD,.....	CONAUT, O.
M. L. ROOT & CO,.....	FAIRPORT, O.
H. STEELE, Jr.,.....	PAINESVILLE, O.
M. C. YOUNGLOVE,.....	CLEVELAND, O.
FLEECHARTY, WRIGHT & CO,.....	HURON O.
HOLLISTER & BOALT,...	SANDUSKY CITY, O.
WATKINS & CO,.....	TOLEDO, O.
J. H. RILEY,.....	COLUMBUS, O.
O. KITRIDGE,.....	DAYTON, O.
B. H. FURNACE,.....	SPRINGFIELD, O.
K. WINNIE,.....	MT. VERNON, O.
WOOSTER BANK,.....	WOOSTER, O.
WELLS & CO,.....	DETROIT, MICH.
J. C. COLE,.....	MONROE, "
B. FOLLETT,.....	YPSILANTI, "
F. J. B. CRANE,.....	ANN ARBOR, "
B. VERNOR,.....	MARSHALL, "
WM. BROOKS,.....	BATTLE CREEK, "
S. JOHNSON,.....	RACINE, WIS.
P. C. HALE,.....	MILWAUKIE, "
HUTCHINSON & WHEELER,...	SOUTHPORT, "
A. H. & C. BURLEY.....	CHICAGO, ILL.

**From BUFFALO by**  
**LIVINGSTON & WELLS'**  
**To N. YORK, BOSTON, & PHILADELPHIA.**

# Ann Arbor Express Office



Ann Arbor \$100 Express Money Letter to New York      December 17, 1844  
Central RR to Detroit, steamboat to Buffalo; Pomeroy Express to New York

Paid 5 reales (63c): 2 reales (25c) Express fee, 3 reales (37½c rounded to 38c) insurance with delivery to 61 Front Street by Boyds City Express included. Wells label added at Buffalo office. 1 real fee paid to Pomeroy for conjunctive service to New York.



## Building the Case: Evidence

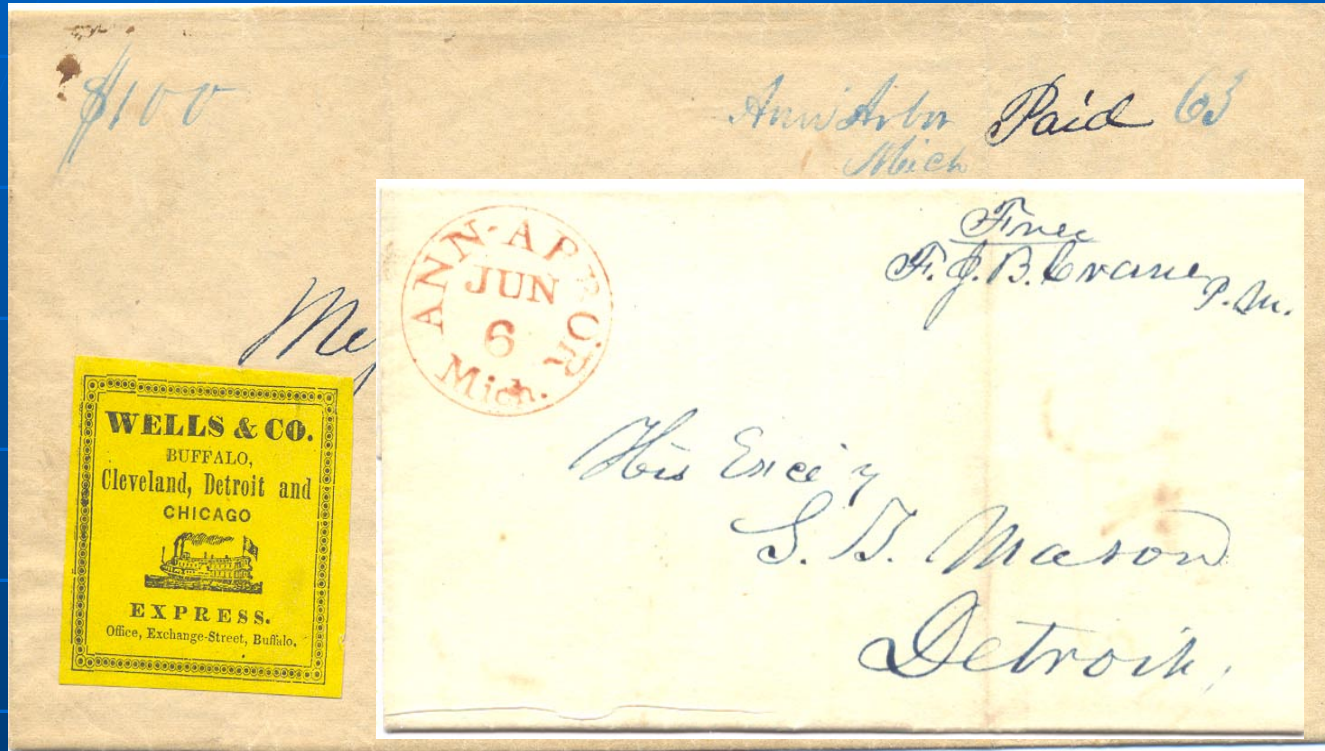


Flavius J. B. Crane was postmaster of Howell: 1836-1839  
Post office was in the Eagle Tavern  
Traveling PM Free frank used in Ann Arbor, June 6, 1838.

Flavius was postmaster of Ann Arbor from April 9, 1847 - May 2, 1849.



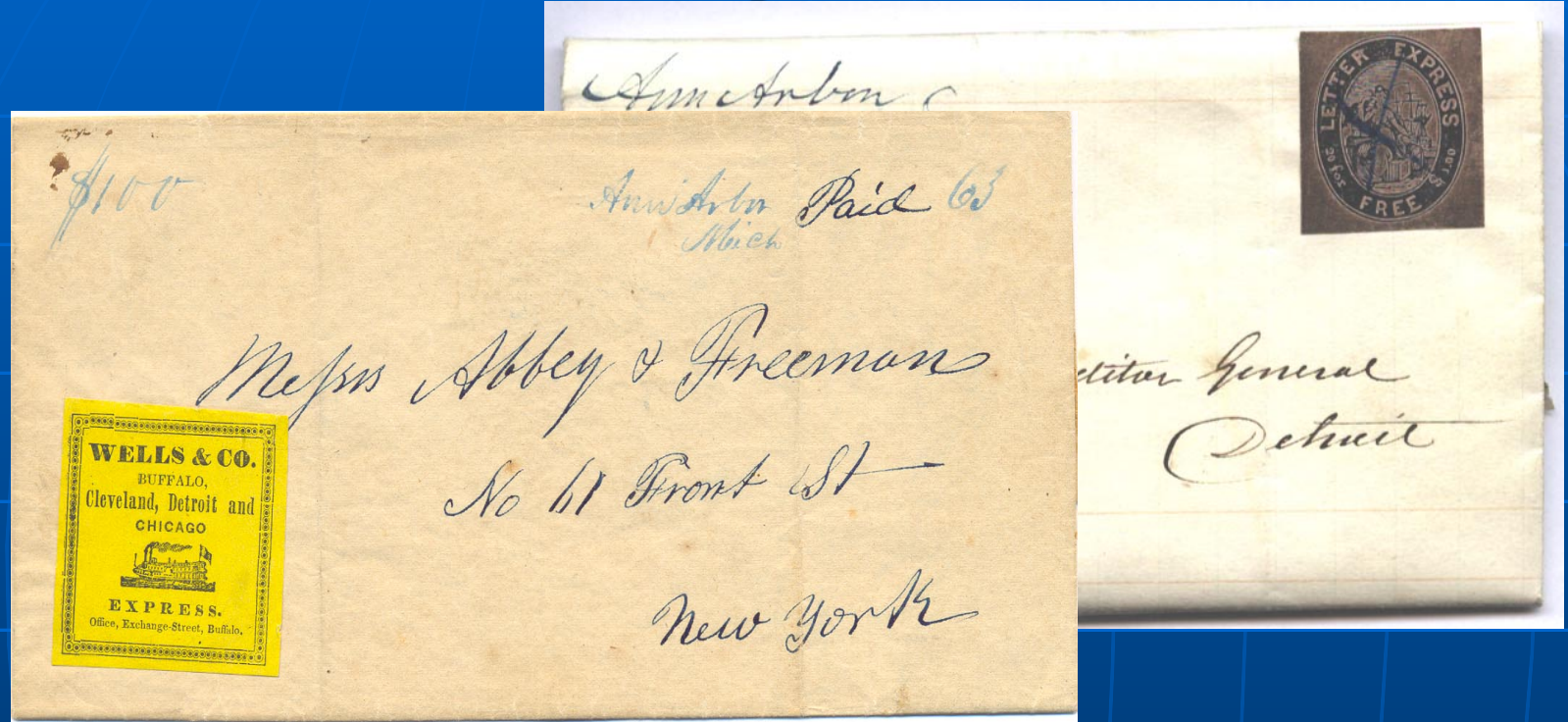
# Ann Arbor Express Office



Flavius J. B. Crane was the Express Agent in Ann Arbor in 1844 and his handwriting from Free frank to Stevens T. Mason matches the Wells Money Letter. "Paid" was written by the sender.

Crane moved to Ann Arbor in early 1840s and opened a dry goods and grocery store at No. 1 Hawkin's Block at the SE corner of Main and Huron. His Express Agent operations were there, rather than at the train depot northeast of town.

# Ann Arbor Express Office



Crane's handwriting is a match with town manuscript marking on the Letter Express cover.

Wells & Co. Express Agent road the train from Marshall to and from Detroit, carried the Express bag as a ticketed passenger and received/delivered Express items to/from Agents at intermediate offices to avoid conflict with the Post Office Department per the previous court rulings.

Crane was responsible to meet the specific agent trains in Ann Arbor, Monday through Saturday.

Genuine PF Certificate obtained.



# Additional Evidence Inland Letters



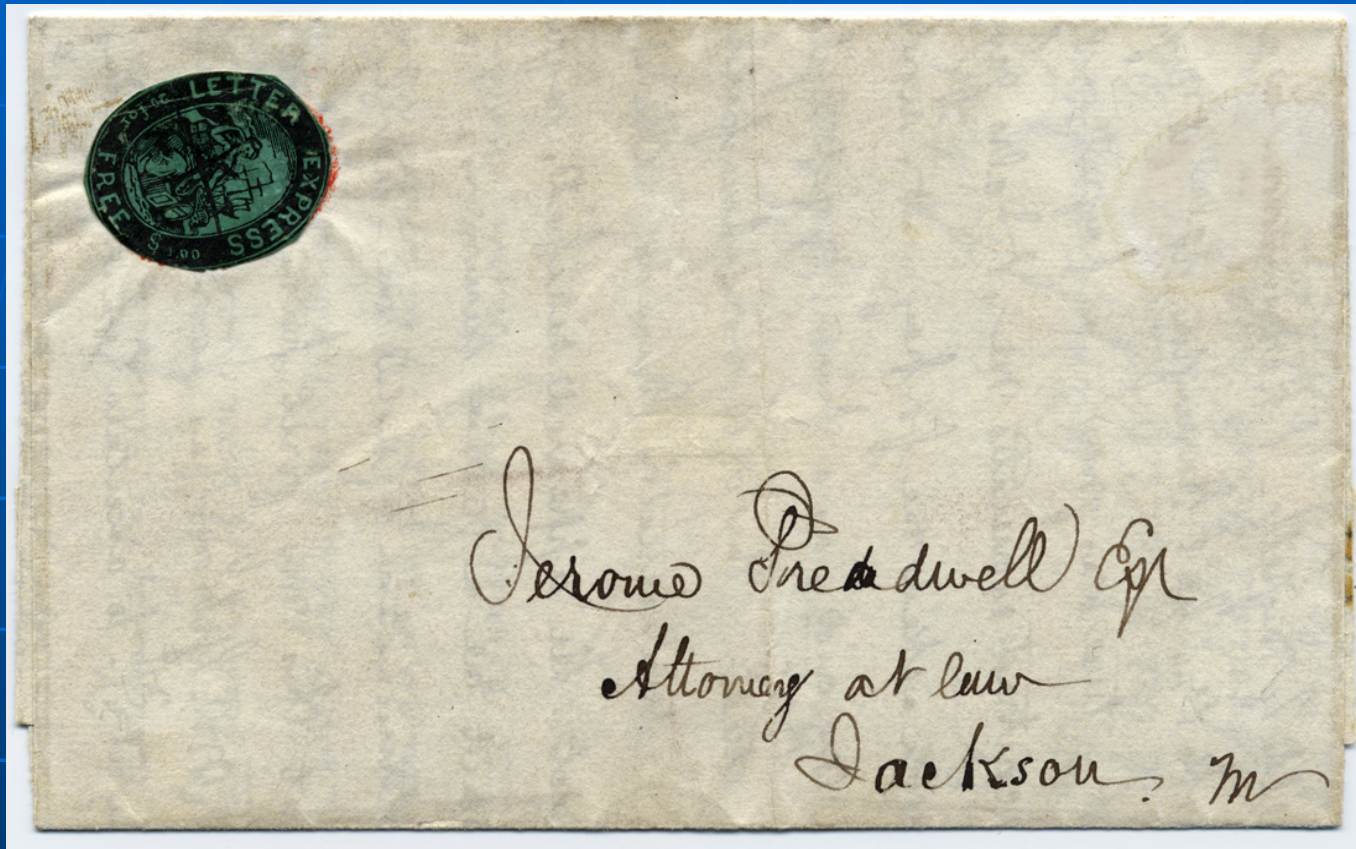
November 8, 1844

Marshall to Detroit, Michigan

Pair of 6 ¼ Letter Express stamps for letter plus enclosure and the second of three known examples to be carried by train within Michigan. If Express Agent was caught, RR at risk of loosing the mail contract from the Post Office Dept. which began in October, 1844.



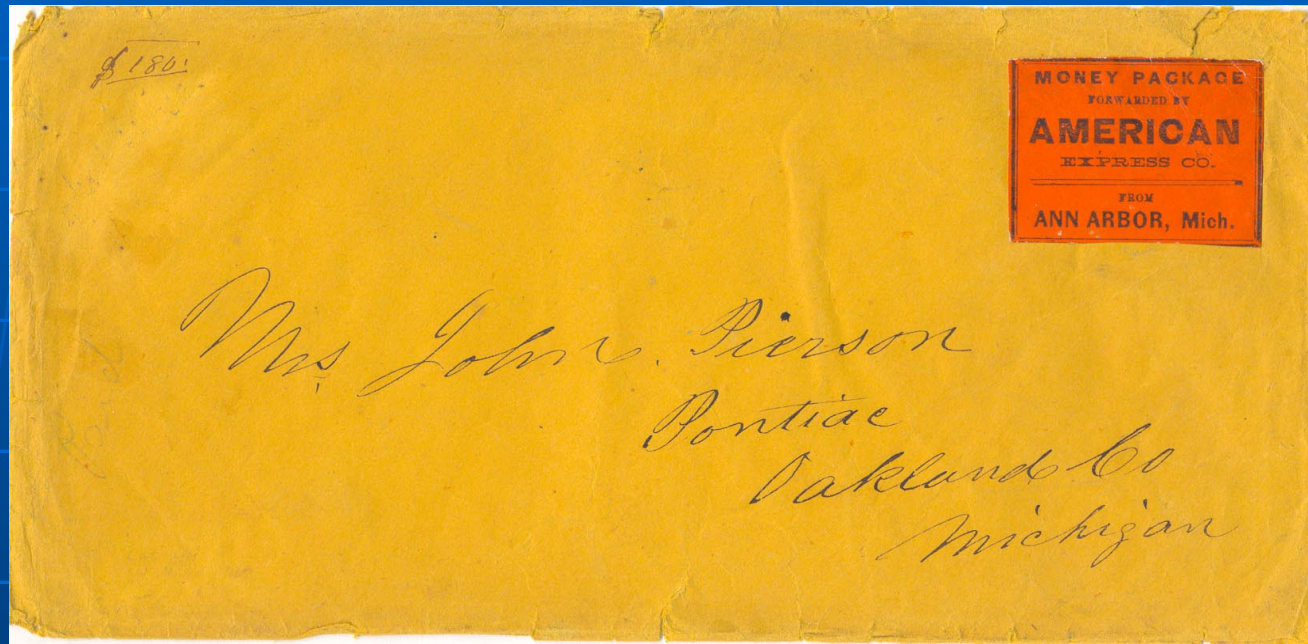
# Additional Evidence: Inland Letters



February 18, 1845 Detroit to Jackson, Michigan Only known westbound example  
Carried by Wells Express Agent as paid passenger on the Michigan Central RR

Latest known use of the Letter Express stamp (outlawed by Act of Congress, July 1, 1845) which is attached with a wax wafer and the third of three known to be carried by train within Michigan. All other recorded usages were carried by steamboat. Genuine PF Certificate.

# Ann Arbor American Express Co.



\$180.00 Money Package April 1862 Ann Arbor to Pontiac, Michigan  
Carried by American Express on Michigan Central RR to Detroit and then by  
Detroit & Milwaukee RR to Pontiac. Fee plus insurance about \$1.50

American Express was formed in 1850 from the merger of Wells, Butterfield  
& Co. and Livingston, Fargo & Co. with 800 offices east of the Mississippi by  
1862.

Wells Fargo & Co. was formed in 1852 to operate in the western country.



# Ann Arbor's and Michigan's First Postage Stamp?



A



B

Act of March 3, 1845, effective July 1, 1845, reduced the regular Government postage rates to 5c and 10c, with thanks to “friendly” competition AND

Independent carriers were outlawed and fines up to \$50 per letter were levied.

Lysander Spooner; however, continued the fight and dropped his private letter rate to 3c which eventually forced the Post Office rate reduction to 3c, effective July 1, 1851.