

Overton and Company—Independent Mail, 1844-1845

PURPOSE

The purpose of this exhibit is to illustrate the postal services offered by Overton and Co., a minor competitor against the US Post Office for intercity delivery in comparison Hale & Co., American Letter Mail Co., and others. Such companies are called the Independent Mails. An analysis of its postal history reveals that Overton's was able to maintain business operations despite intense competition from other private companies. It survived by acquiring the agents and offices of other companies, offering "cheap postage rates" between cities, and providing early local address delivery which the other independent mail companies did not do.

HISTORICAL ASPECTS

Public demand for lower postage rates in the 1830's and 1840's created an opportunity for entrepreneurs such as Harnden & Co. and Hale & Co. to establish businesses which provided superior intercity customer service at lower costs. Others soon followed, including the above-mentioned companies, Pomeroy & Co., Jerome & Co., Brainard & Co., and others. The US government ended the independent mail company operations as of June 30, 1845.

Overton and Co. was founded on July 3, 1844 in New York, and operated between New York and Boston by steamer and railroad for a fee of five cents per letter, much less than the US rate of 18 3/4 cents. It rapidly expanded service to other cities and then added local intra-city delivery service in New York and Boston. Overton later acquired Damon & Co. and Wyman & Co. Early in June 1845, Davenport & Co. took over operations in Boston, while the City Mail Office delivered locally in New York during June 1845.

SIGNIFICANCE

In contrast to other independent mail companies, Overton's offered local address delivery service for an additional two cents at its inception. Its intercity rate varied from five to six cents, and the two cents local delivery charge is shown with both rates, for a total due of either seven or eight cents. Conjunctive arrangements among the private mail companies were used during this time, and several examples are shown for Overton's.

Overton & Co. successfully competed with larger companies for independent and local mail delivery services, but never attained their level of success. Surviving covers are much less common than those of the larger companies, and the material shown here would be extremely difficult to duplicate.

New research and information is indicated by italicized type. The significance of a cover is highlighted in bold blue type.

EXHIBIT PLAN

This postal history exhibit is organized in approximate chronological order, with covers providing similar service placed in sections noted at upper left. The exhibit depicts a postal history of a small independent mail company from 1844 to 1845.

Although newspaper advertisements appeared in New York on July 3, 1844, the earliest recorded cover is that of July 13, 1844 with a Boston forwarded oval to New York with a manuscript "2" for local delivery. The cover below is the second earliest known cover for Overton and Co. and shows a black or blackish-red handstamp, as though the handstamp device had some black ink on it then was hit onto a red ink pad. *Subsequent handstamps of this kind were in red from NYC, while those from Boston were in black, with singular exceptions.*



July 23, 1844.

Philadelphia to Providence via NYC

SECOND EARLIEST OVERTON COVER

EARLIEST NYC LETTER RECORDED AND THE SECOND DAY OF OPERATIONS FROM PHILADELPHIA

Ms. "6" intercity rate

This is the only example of a blackish-red oval handstamp color known to exhibitor.
(The 5c rate was only available between NYC and Boston.)



The Boston to New York route was the only Overton route advertised for 5 cents postage, undercutting competitors Wyman & Co. and Hale & Co. who charged 6c or 6 1/4c. Local delivery in New York City was an additional 2 cents. The upper cover is 5 cents prepaid and 2c due as indicated by the pencil "Paid" and crayon 2, while the lower cover is due 7 cents.



August 26, 1844
Boston to NYC

An early local delivery cover, with red "2" in crayon to street address
Black Boston oval and red New York oval



August 30, 1844
Boston to NYC

Black "5" collect and red crayon "2" making "7" for local delivery
Earliest recorded black "5" handstamp

5

The 5c rate from Boston to New York was prepaid as indicated by the PAID handstamp on these covers.



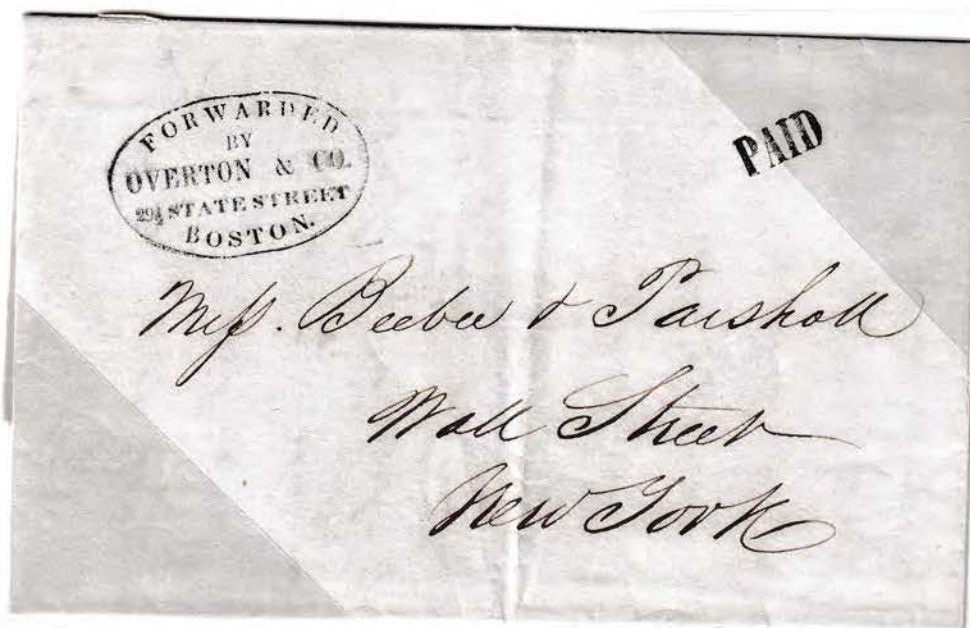
September 17, 1844

Earliest reported use of the PAID handstamp

Boston to NYC

Black Boston oval, black Boston PAID handstamp and red NYC oval.

PAID

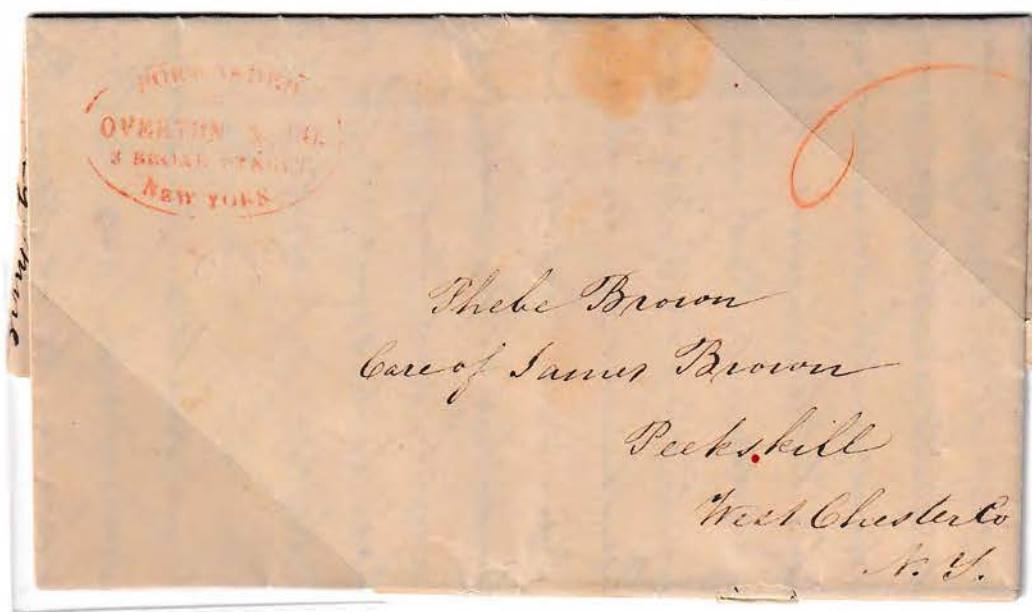


October 12, 1844

Boston to NYC

Black Boston oval and black Boston PAID handstamp.

Overton & Co. acquired Damon & Co. early in August of 1844, and forwarded mail from New York to northward points via the Hudson River connections that Damon had established. These letters required 6c postage as the 5c rate only applied on letters from Boston to New York.

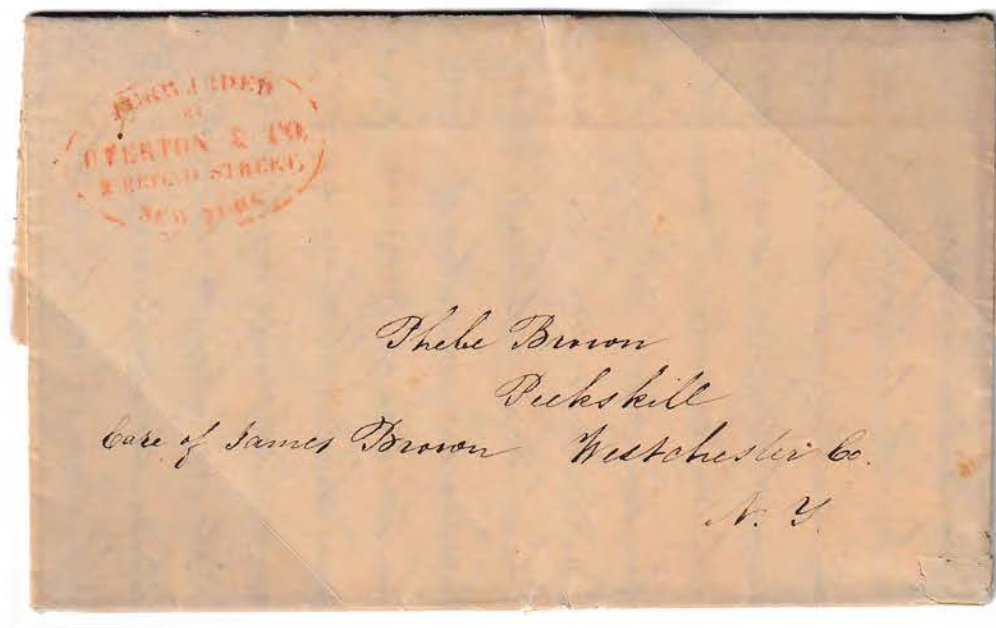


August 9, 1844
NYC to Peekskill NY

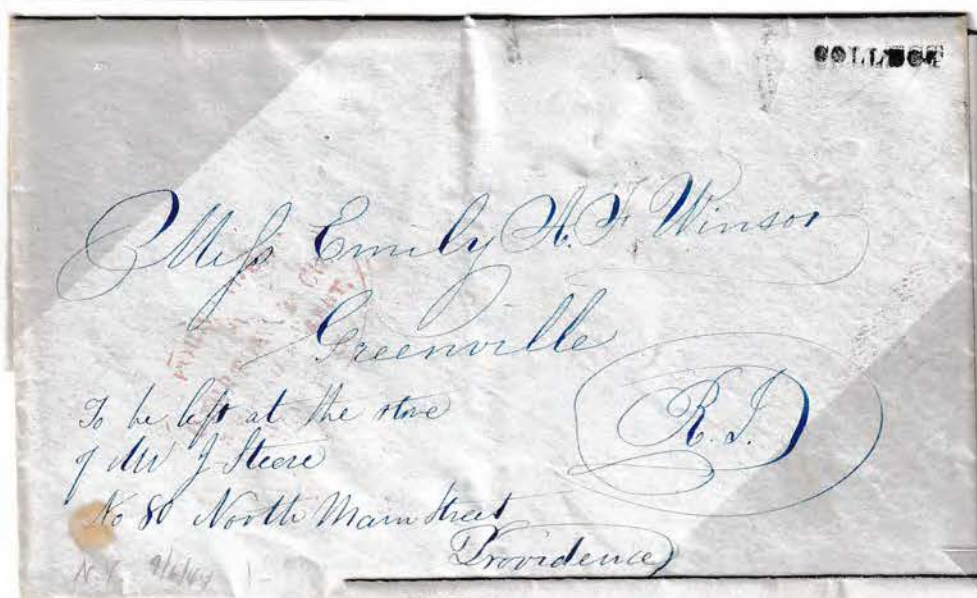
This is the earliest use of Overton & Co. up the Hudson River known to the exhibitor

It may be the earliest use of the red NYC forwarding oval

September 18, 1844
NYC to Peekskill NY
Via the Hudson River



Sometimes Overton & Co. handed over a letter to the American Letter Mail Company for delivery outside of Overton's area, a conjunctive courtesy in the independent mail era.



COLLECT



September 6, 1844
NYC to Providence
Red NYC oval
Black ALMCo Collect
Six cents due



PAID

October 14, 1844
NYC to Concord via Boston
Black Boston oval
Red ALMCo Paid
Six cents paid



6



October 29, 1844
Boston to Philadelphia
Black Boston 6c collect
handstamp
Red ALMCo Philadelphia
receiving handstamp

INCOMING LETTERS FOR LOCAL DELIVERY

Overton & Co. effectively advertised its intercity and local city delivery services as demonstrated by these letters from Providence and Pine Orchard to New York with the street address included by the sender.



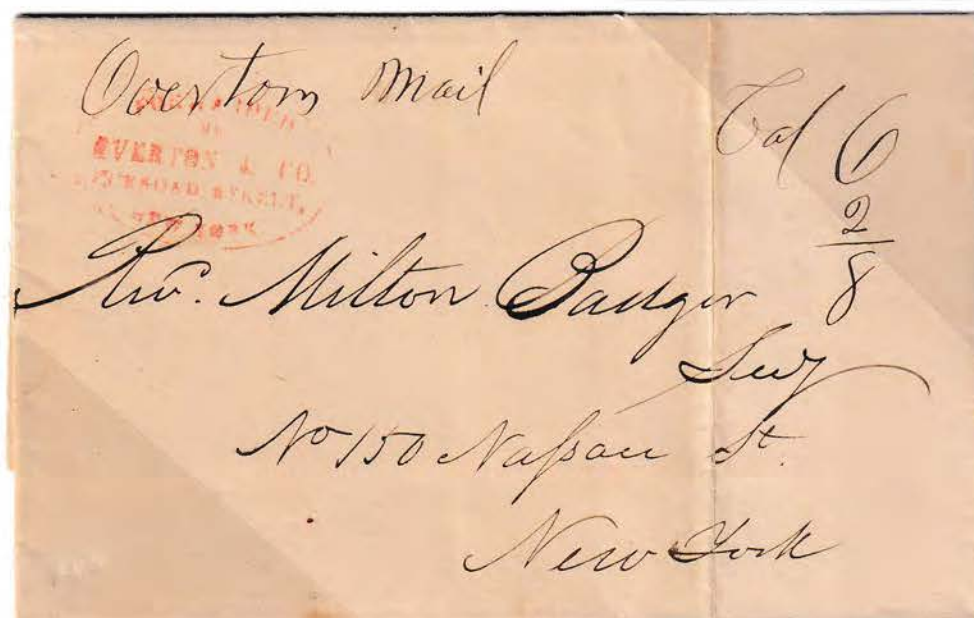
September 23, 1844

Providence to NYC

Due 6c for intercity carriage and 2c for local delivery = 8c due

Red New York oval applied on arrival

Received September 24



October 3, 1844

Pine Orchard to NYC

Due 6c for intercity carriage and 2c for local delivery = 8c due

Red New York oval applied on arrival

Carried down the Hudson River

The red PAID handstamp is likely the same as that used by Pomeroy & Co., which handed over some service to Overton's early October, 1844. The exhibitor has recorded **six** covers with the red PAID handstamp used with Overton's ovals.

October 1, 1844
 NYC to Boston
 Earliest recorded use of the
 red NYC PAID handstamp
 Black Boston oval

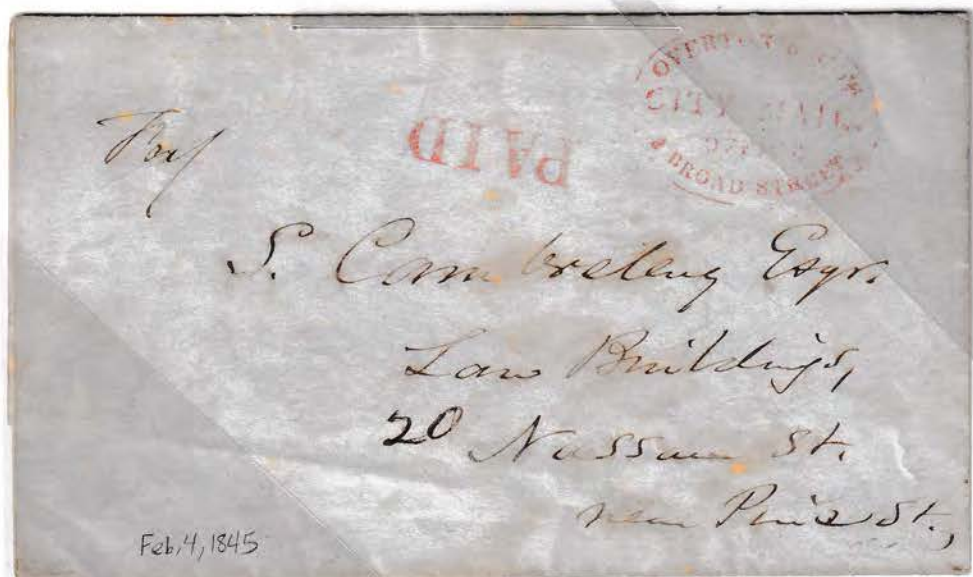
PAID



No date
 Upstate New York to NY
 Red NYC City Mail oval
 Red NYC PAID
 "Paid 2 Cts" and "Express"
 Unknown independent mail
 company carried to NYC



February 4, 1845
 Chelsea Square (Boston) to NYC
 Red NYC City Mail oval
 Red NYC PAID



The private independent mails competed with the US Post Office for intercity delivery, and conjunctive use with the USPO is unusual because it exposed the private post to legal challenge. This letter from Peekskill, NY was carried down the Hudson River by Overton & Co. which had no means to transmit it to Quaker Town, NJ (officially established as Franklin Township on April 7, 1845, but popularly known to this day as Quaker Town.) Quaker Town was almost due west of New York City. Overton & Co. placed no revealing handstamp on this letter when it was received in NYC, and handed it over to the US Post Office which carried it to Quaker Town. The 6 1/4c rate was prepaid to Overton, but the letter was due 10c to the post office on delivery.



October 15, 1844

Peekskill NY to NYC via the Hudson River by Overton and then to Quaker Town, NJ by the USPO

ONLY KNOWN USAGE TO THE EXHIBITOR BY OVERTON & CO. "TO THE MAILS"

The sender paid Overton & Co. 6 1/4 c to transmit this letter, but when it entered the mails, it was re-rated 10c due in manuscript and the 6 1/4 rate obliterated

OVERTON & CO'S CITY MAIL OFFICE

Incoming intercity mail for NY local address delivery

Overton & Co. introduced a new NYC handstamp at the end of 1844 that gradually replaced the forwarded New York oval used initially. The address was the same at 3 Broad Street, but the company name was changed to Overton & Co.'s City Mail Office.



December 6, 1844
Hudson to NYC
EARLIEST KNOWN USE OF THE CITY MAIL HANDSTAMP
Pencil "8" and "Coll" indicating intercity rate of 6c plus 2c for local delivery Via the Hudson River



December 24, 1844
Boston to NYC
BLACK "5" STRUCK TWICE FOR DOUBLE RATE
Manuscript "P" Overton's Exp

5



March 7, 1845
Philadelphia to NYC
American Letter Mail Co. to Overton's
Pencil "8" indicating intercity rate of 6c plus 2c for local delivery



The City Mail handstamp was used for local delivery in New York throughout 1845.

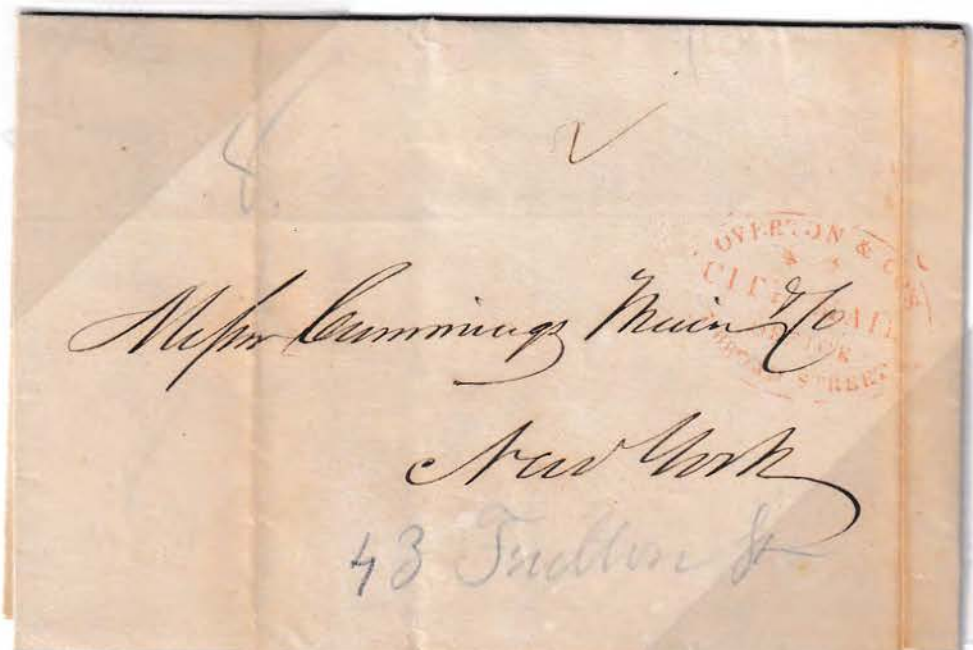
January 1, 1845
Concord, NH to NYC
Ms. "Paid 6" for
incoming mail to NYC
Black PAID applied by
the Boston office



February 25, 1845
Boston to NYC
A late use of the
Boston 5c rate



May 21, 1845
Providence to NYC
Ms. "2" and "8"
Local address added



The City Mail handstamp used only for intracity local delivery in New York is uncommon. The exhibitor records **five** examples, these being the two earliest.

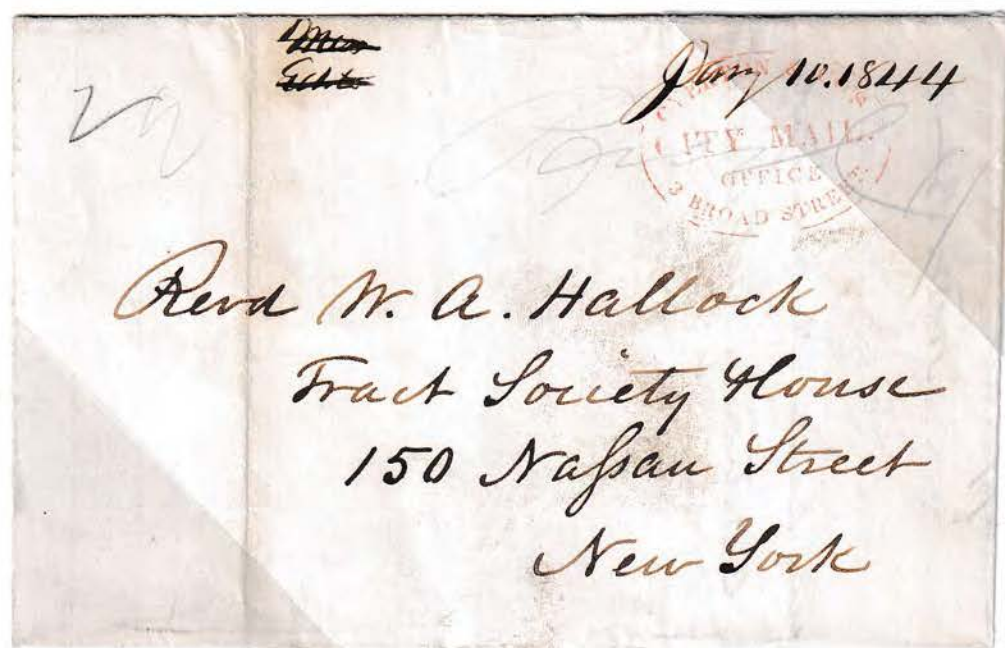


December 24 1844

NYC local use

Earliest known strictly intra-city local use by Overton & Co.

Manuscript "2"



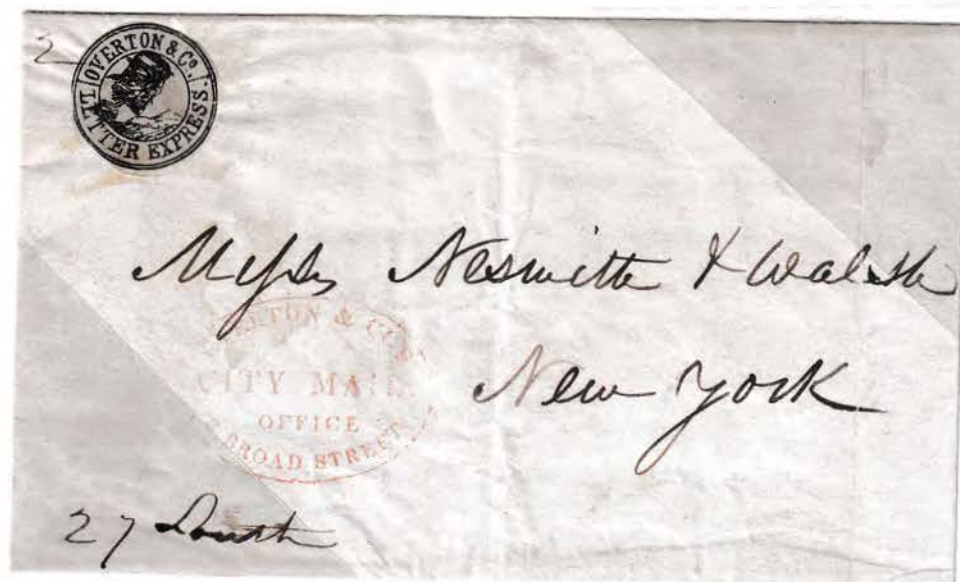
January 10, 1845

NYC local use

Pencil "2", pencil "2 Paid"

An adhesive stamp is known used on 21 covers from July 29, 1844 until June 30, 1845, the last day of business for independent mail companies.¹ Covers seems to originate in Boston and advertisements from July 9, 1844 indicate that stamps were for sale at Davenport & Co., Overton's office in Boston. *The exhibitor believes they were sold only in Boston.*

Docketed December 20, 1844
Boston to NY
Black Boston PAID on stamp
Manuscript "2"
Local address added in pen



Docketed February 26, 1845
Black Boston PAID on stamp
To local address in NY

PAID

¹ Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries sale 830, lot 370.

These are some of Overton & Co.'s final covers before ending his intercity services. The dark red color of the Boston and numeral due handstamps strongly suggest these may be the first covers processed by Davenport & Co.



May 30, 1845

Boston to Concord, NH

Dark red handstamps likely used by Davenport & Co.

One of two recorded uses of "6" in red

Possibly delivered by Cheney & Co. to Concord



6



May 31, 1845

Boston to NY, double rate

To local address

Dark red handstamps likely used by Davenport & Co.

Double the 5c rate from Boston to NYC

5

Perhaps seeing the end of the independent mail period drawing close, Davenport & Co. who had been Overton's agent in Boston, took over the Boston office on or around June 1, 1845. They used a distinctively darker red ink than Overton, and the earliest example of their similar oval handstamp is June 2.



June 6, 1845
Concord NH to NYC

Latest known use of Overton oval handstamp by Davenport, after the Davenport handstamp came into use on June 2

Initially handstamped with "6" for postage due, it was overstruck by the PAID handstamp and "Paid 6" was noted in manuscript for emphasis
Manuscript "2" for local delivery amount due



June 16, 1845
Boston to NYC

One of five known examples of the Davenport handstamp

The ink on the Davenport oval and "5" handstamps is the dark red shade used by him, contrasted with the red shade of Overton
Pencil "7" for total due to addressee



The US Congress lowered inter-city postage rates and eliminated private competition effective July 1, 1845. Overton and others either went out of business or changed their business operations to alternate venues. It is believed that City Mail Co. was Overton's private local delivery company that operated for a brief period in NYC after the private intercity posts were made illegal by the government. Some private city posts, such as Boyd's and Swart's, continued to operate in opposition to the post office, or perhaps one could say were tolerated by the postmaster in NY.



August 2, (1845)
Charleston SC to local address in NYC
Charleston large block "10" for rate
over 300 miles



August 25, 1845
Boston to local address in NYC
Manuscript "2" due for local delivery
Perhaps bootlegged to NYC