

# The Eastern Independent Mail Companies of 1844-1845: Determined Competitors to the Post Office.

Presentation by David Snow  
April 9, 2016



This presentation explores how a handful of private mail companies forced the Post Office Department to reduce its rates and become competitive.



# Prior to July 1845, U.S. Postal Rates were excessively high and complicated

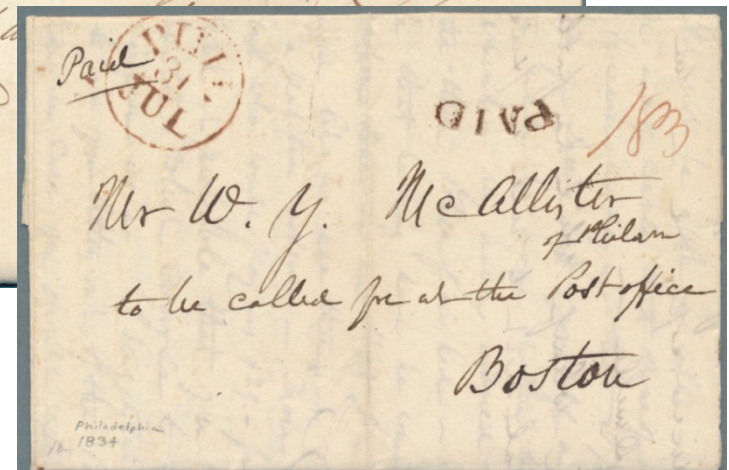
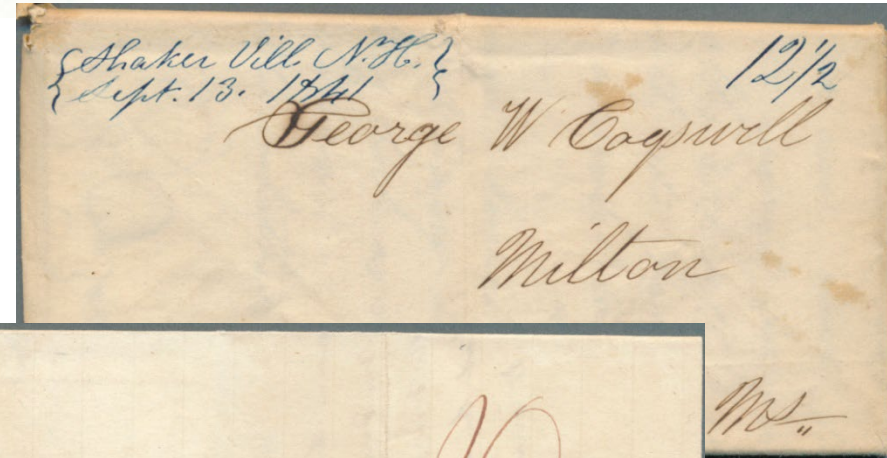
Act of April 9, 1816  
Effective May 1, 1816  
Zone Rates for Single Letters

Not over 30 miles . . . . .	6 cents
30 to 80 miles. . . . .	10 cents
80 to 150 miles . . . . .	12-1/2 cents
150 to 400 miles. . . . .	18-1/2 cents
Over 400 miles. . . . .	25 cents



1804 Spanish 1 real  
worth 12-1/2 cents

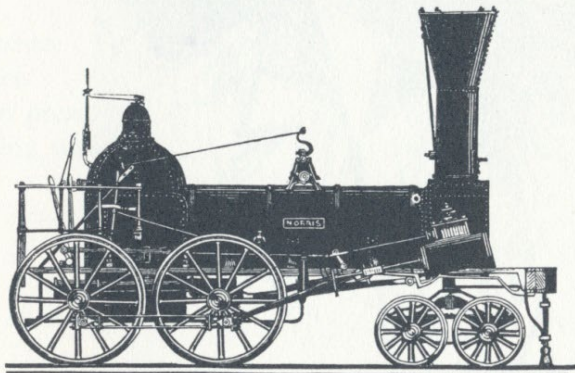
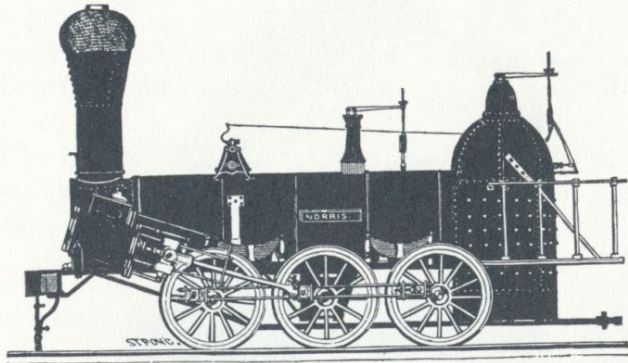
← Raised to 18-3/4 cents by Act of 1825,  
to fit currency (equal to 1-1/2 Spanish reales )





A Revolution in Transportation, thanks to the successful application of the steam engine on both land and sea. This reduced transit times significantly.

**NORRIS' LOCOMOTIVE WORKS,**  
BUSH HILL, PHILADELPHIA, Pennsylvania.



MANUFACTURE their Patent 6 Wheel Combined and 8 Wheel Locomotives of the following descriptions, viz:

Class 1,	15 inches	Diameter of	Cylinder,	× 20 inches	Stroke.
" 2,	14	"	"	× 24	" "
" 3,	14½	"	"	× 20	" "
" 4,	12½	"	"	× 20	" "
" 5,	11½	"	"	× 20	" "
" 6,	10½	"	"	× 18	" "

With Wheels of any dimensions, with their Patent Arrangement for Variable Expansion. Castings of all kinds made to order: and they call attention to their Chilled Wheels, for the Trucks of Locomotives, Tenders and Cars.

NORRIS, BROTHERS.

Norris Locomotives of 1844;  
note lack of enclosed cab for engineer

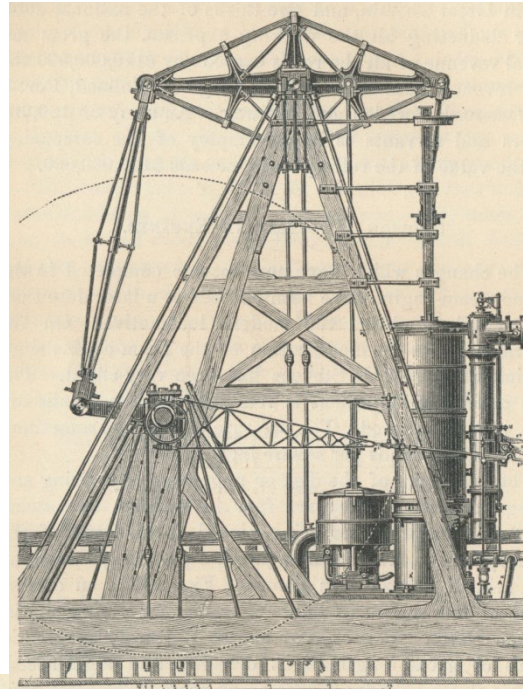


FIG. 130.—Beam-Engine.

Massive walking beam steam engines propelled side-paddlewheel boats shown below on the Hudson River, enabling them to travel upriver against strong currents

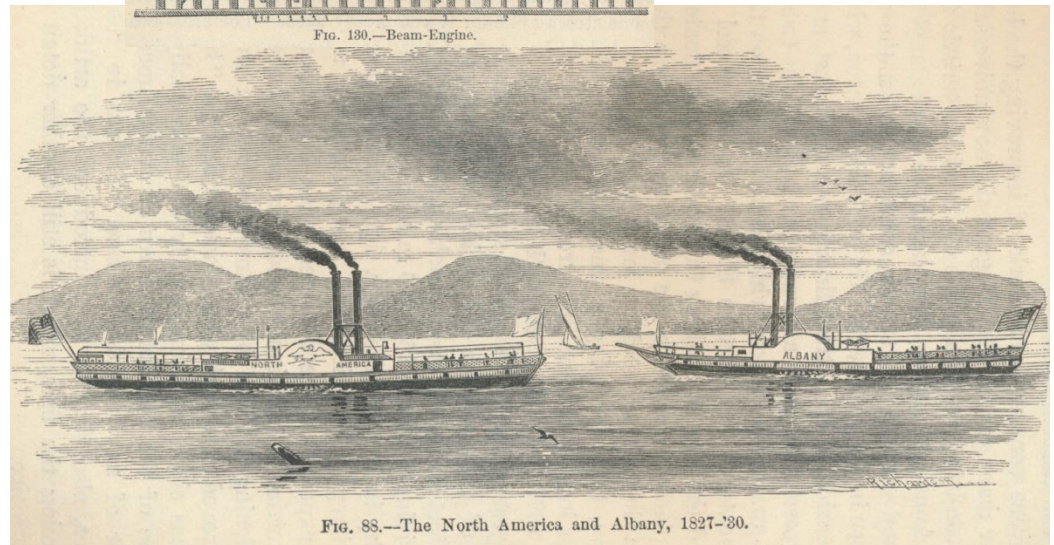
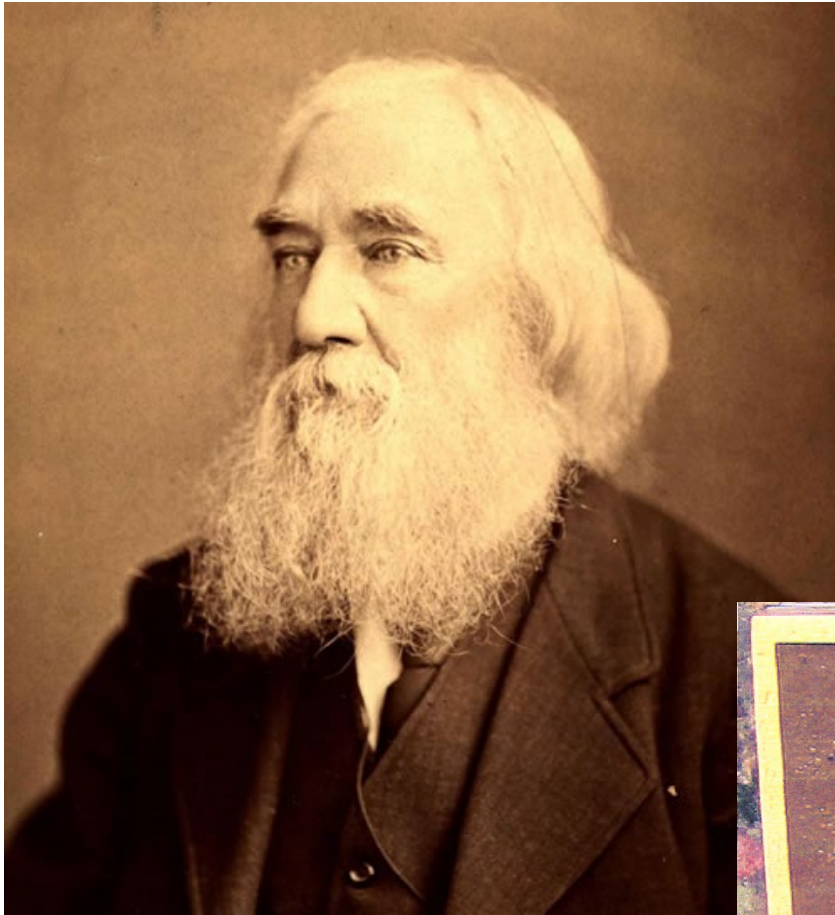


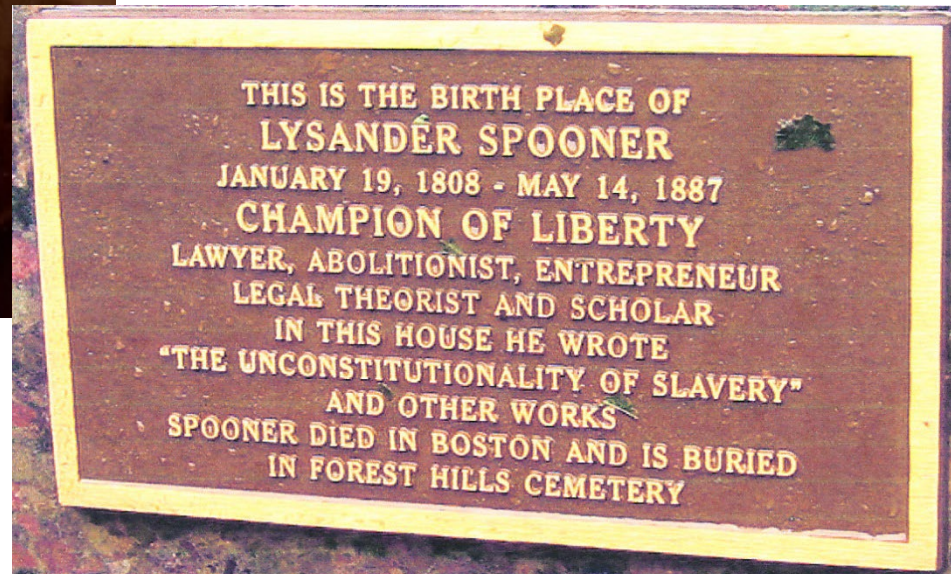
FIG. 88.—The North America and Albany, 1827-'30.



Lysander Spooner, 1808-1887, Founder of the American Letter Mail Co.  
Attorney, Reformer, Abolitionist, Entrepreneur, Anarchist



Spoooner's birthplace in Athol, Mass.






**Spooner's Pamphlet:  
"The Unconstitutionality of the Laws of Congress,  
Prohibiting Private Mails"**

- The extortion also of money from individuals in the populous portions of the country, in order to support the present expensive mode of carrying mails to the less populous portions, is, in one respect, like "filching from one his good name"-it is robbing one without enriching another. If the business were open to free competition, there probably is not a man, who lives fairly within the limits of civilization, that would not receive his letters at less cost than he now pays.



American Letter Mail Co. Broadside dated at New York, Jan. 20, 1844  
Service between New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Baltimore

# AMERICAN Post Office.

 **The AMERICAN LETTER MAIL COMPANY**, have 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 6 1-4 cents for each half oz. letter, payable always in advance.

Stamps, twenty for a dollar.

The Company design to make their Establishment a permanent one.

They will carry only Letters.

Their purpose is to carry Letters by the most rapid conveyances, and at the cheapest rates, and to extend their operations, as fast as patronage may justify, over the principal routes of the country, so as to give the most extensive facilities for correspondence that can be afforded at an uniform rate of postage.

The Company design also, (if sustained by the public,) thoroughly to agitate the question, and test the constitutional right, of free competition in the business of carrying letters. The grounds on which they assert this right, are published, and for sale, [at the offices.] in pamphlet form.

**Letters containing money will not be received.**

Until further notice, letters, on arriving at their destination, unless promptly called for, will be delivered by carriers, or deposited for delivery in the Government Post Office.

**The Mails for Philadelphia, will be closed at 1-2 past 8 A. M., and 1-4 past 4 P. M. Those for Boston at 1-2 past 3 P. M.**

**Mails will commence running from New-York, to Boston and Philadelphia, on Tuesday, the 23d. inst. P. M. ; from Boston on Wednesday, from Baltimore on Thursday.**

**Office in New-York, 36 Wall-st.; Philadelphia, 109 Chesnut-st.; Boston, 12 State-st.; Baltimore, under the Museum Buildings, Culvert-st.**

**Refer, in New-York, to Josiah Howe, Esq., 58 Merchant's Exchange, Silas Jones, Esq., 60 Wall-st., P. M. Irving, Esq., 15 1-2 Wall-st.**

If the Public approve the enterprise, they are requested to give it their support from the outset.

**LYSANDER SPOONER.**

NEW-YORK, JANUARY 20, 1844.

TRIBUNE JOB PRINTING ESTABLISHMENT 160 NASSAU, AND 7 SPRUCE ST.—J. A. FRAETAS, PRINTER

At first, all mail had to be prepaid; stamps were issued that sold 20 for a dollar, or 6-1/4 cents for each half ounce letter.

This prepayment requirement lasted from Jan 24 to Apr 11, 1844, when collect letters were at last accepted; then prepayment was optional, either in cash or with stamps affixed.

This 5 cent prepaid rate per half ounce, regardless of distance, was considerably less than the government mail rate at that time.



American Letter Mail Co. Small Eagle Stamp; the first adhesive stamp issued by any of the Eastern Independent Mail Companies of 1844-45

EDU Jan 25, 1844 from Philadelphia, Jan 25 from Baltimore



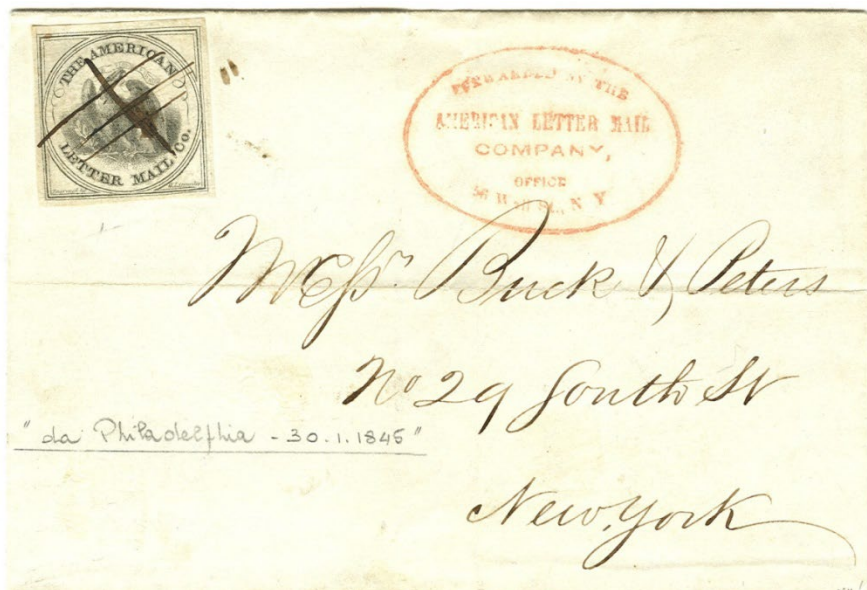
1<sup>st</sup> printing, thick paper,  
brownish gum



2<sup>nd</sup> printing; thin paper



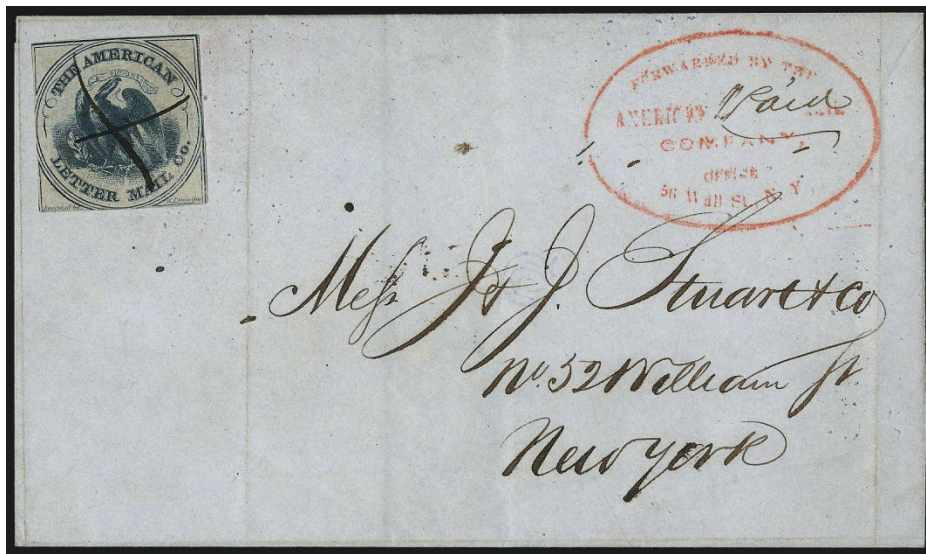
# American Letter Mail Co. in operation from Jan. 1844 to end of June 1845



Phila. To NYC Jan. 30, 1845



Phila. to Boston Feb. 4, 1844: earliest known multiple



Phila. To NYC Jan. 15, 1845

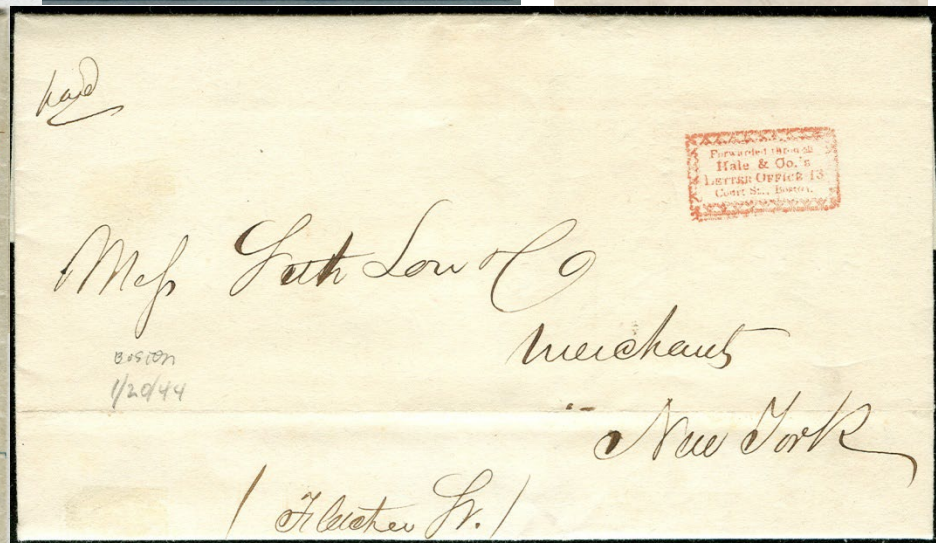


The rare blue stamp

Courtesy Robert A. Siege Auction Galleries, Inc.

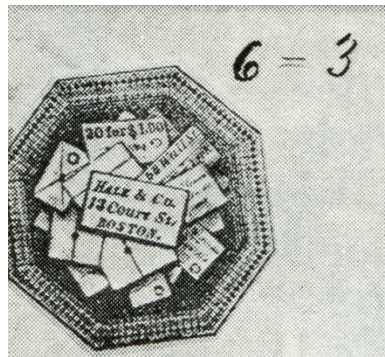


# Hale & Co. starts in late December 1843: Boston to NY Route





# Hale & Co. in operation up to June 30, 1845

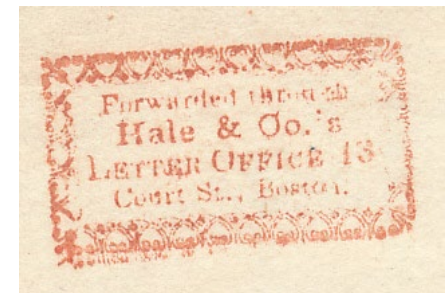
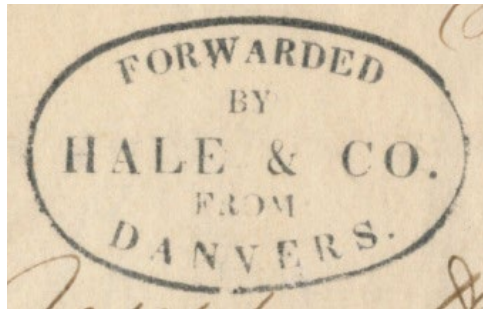
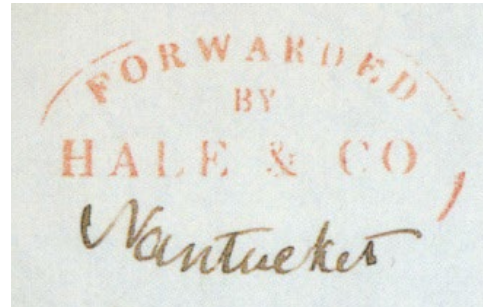


Mysterious number  
markings from Boston  
Sept.-Oct. 1844



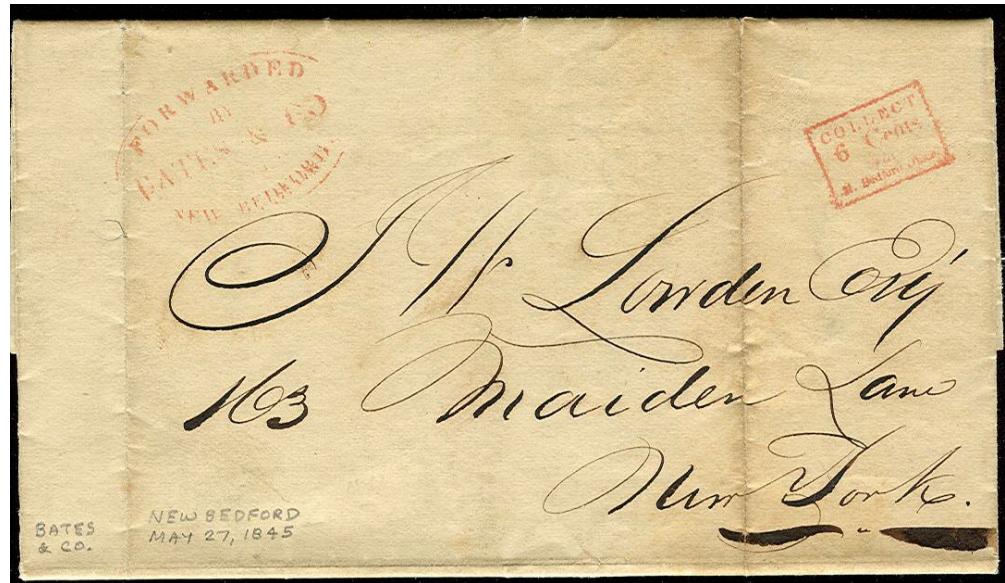


# Hale & Co.: office markings known from 28 different cities



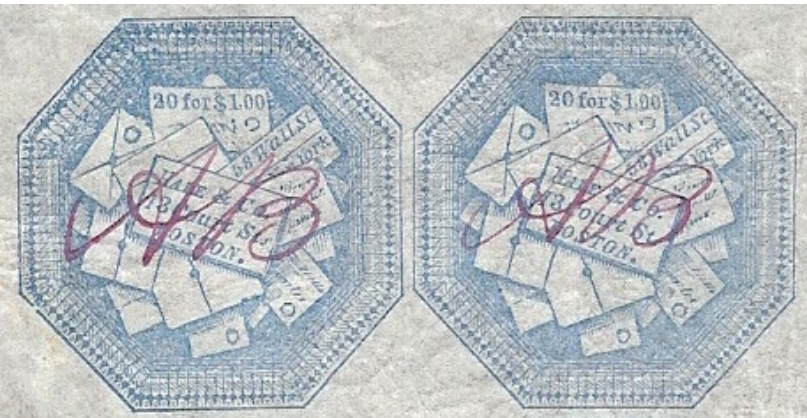


## Bates & Co. started July 1844



Offices in New Bedford, Mass.  
and New York City. 21 letters  
known from July 1844 to May 1845

Amos Bates was also Hale's agent  
in New Bedford; delivered letter  
Mail for both companies



"AB" initials on Hale stamps,  
as a precancel





# Pomeroy's Letter Express started June 1844



George E. Pomeroy  
(1807-1886)

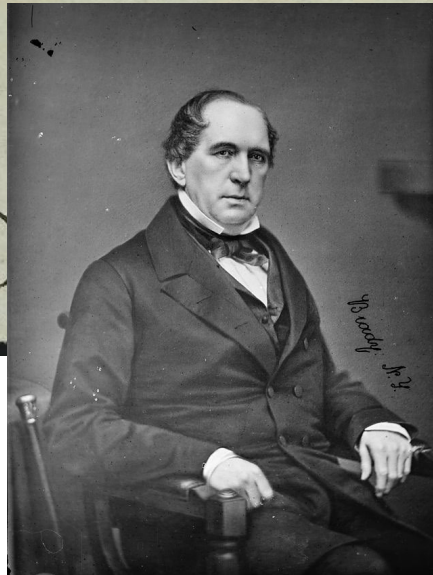




Earlier operation: Pomeroy & Co. Express Oct 27, 1843 NYC to Albany  
To Erastus Corning, President of the Utica & Schenectady Railroad.

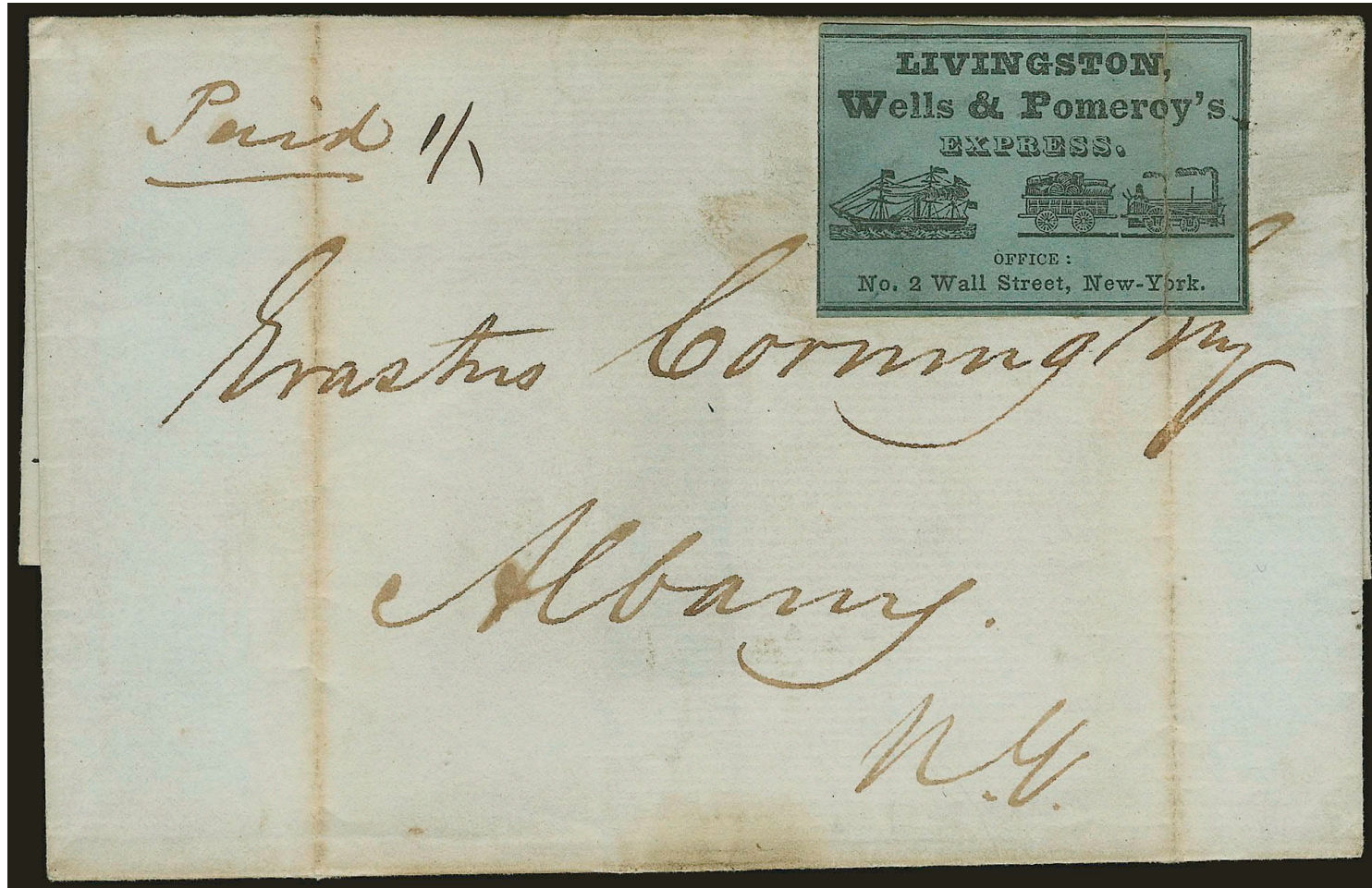


Erastus Corning  
(1794-1872)



Courtesy Robert A. Siegel  
Auction Galleries, Inc.

Livingston, Wells & Pomeroy's Express, Nov. 22, 1844  
This is an example of a (package) Express Letter

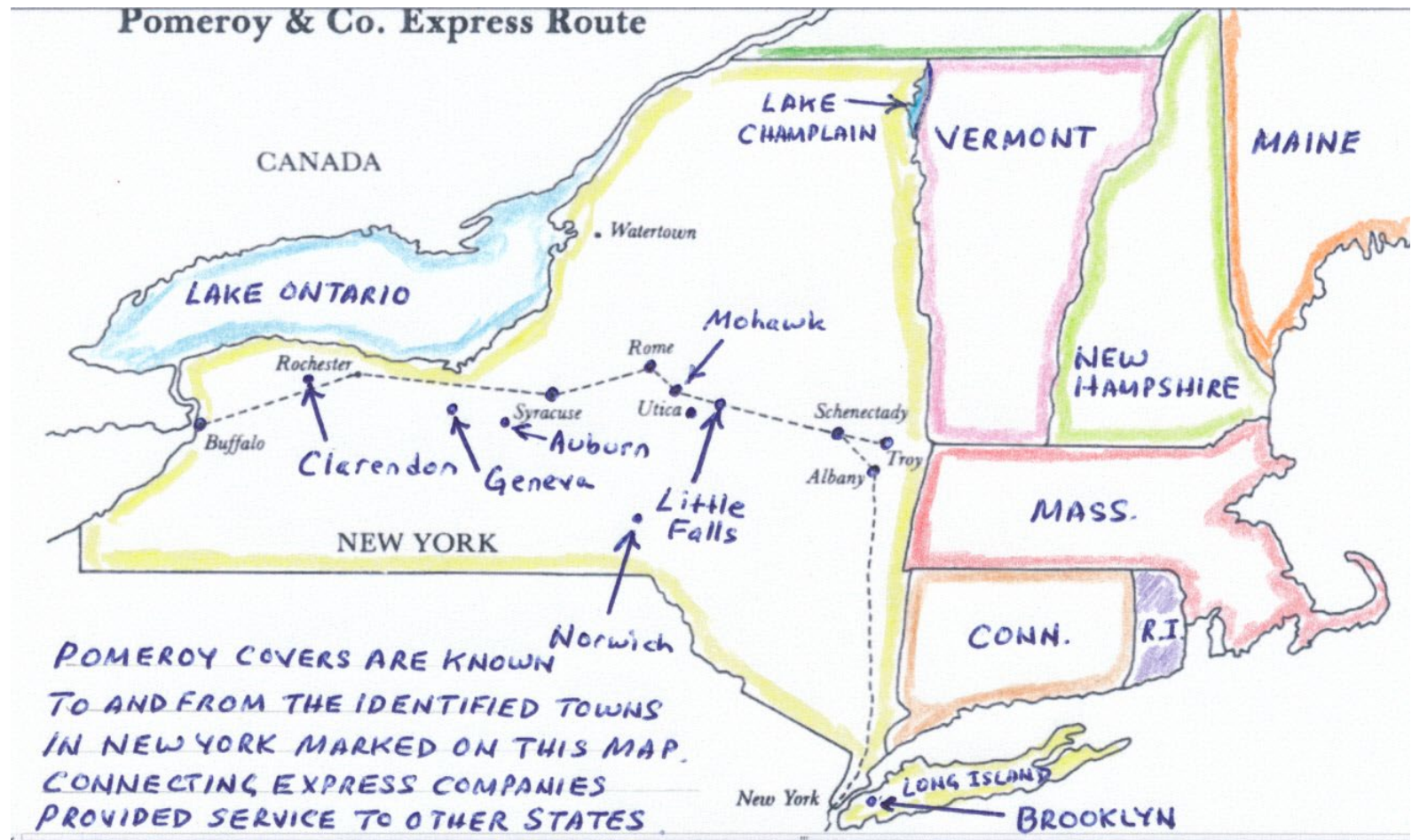


Courtesy  
Robert A. Siegel  
Auction Galleries, Inc.

New York to Albany; this letter accompanied a package. Note the "Paid 1/ (one bit)"  
Express letters were usually marked in bits (12-1/2 cents) rather than cents



# Pomeroy Route Map



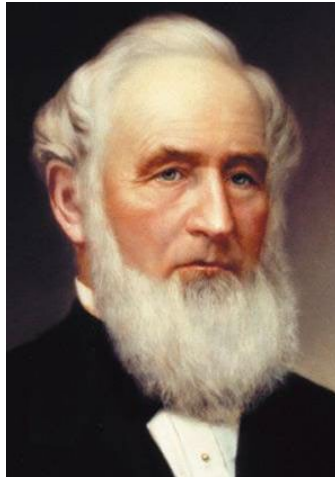
# Pomeroy's Letter Express history June 26, 1844 to Aug. 12, 1844

- Pomeroy's Letter Express was an instant success: in retaliation Postmaster General Charles A. Wickliffe took Pomeroy to court. In July 1844 the U.S. District Court decided the case in Pomeroy's favor. Finally, by invoking penalty clauses in the mail contracts with the railroads upon which Pomeroy was dependent, the government was able to stop Pomeroy's mail carrying activities. On August 9, 1844 Pomeroy announced the official closing of his letter mail service, and on August 12 it was announced that Pomeroy stamps could be redeemed for cash at the offices of the parent package express firm, Livingston, Wells & Pomeroy.





# Wells' Letter Express started June 1844: Buffalo to Chicago



Henry Wells (1805-1878)

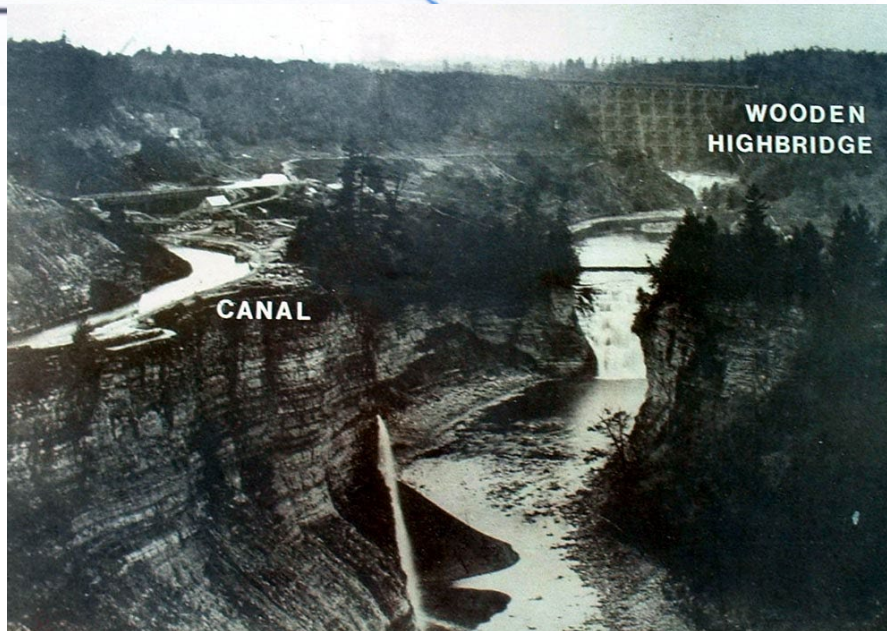


Detroit to Buffalo NY Nov. 1, 1844





# Hoyt's Letter Express started July 1844 Genesee Valley Canal, NY



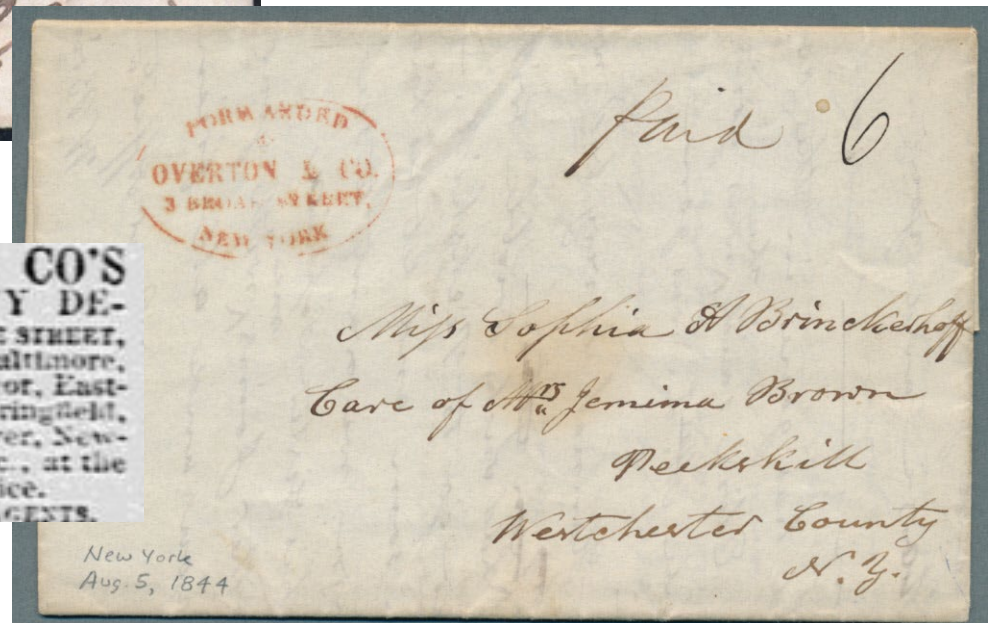
Courtesy Robert A. Siegel  
Auction Galleries, Inc.



# Overton & Co. started their New York to Boston route July 1844



Courtesy Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc.



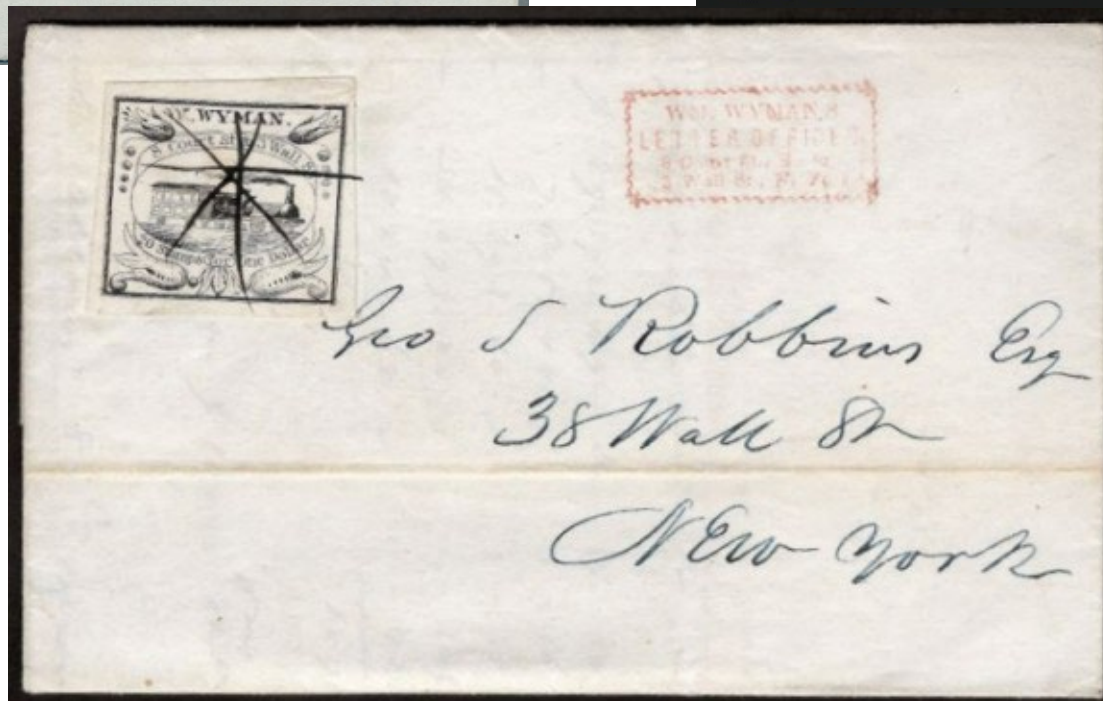
**LOW POSTAGE. OVERTON & CO'S**  
GENERAL LETTER EXPRESS AND CITY DE-  
SPATCH POST—OFFICE, BRAZER'S BUILDING, 29 1-2 STATE STREET,  
BOSTON. Letters forwarded to New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore,  
Albany, Providence, New Bedford, Buffalo, Portland, Bangor, East-  
port, Concord, Manchester and Portsmouth, N. H., Springfield,  
Pittsfield, Worcester, Fitchburg, Towns on the North River, New-  
ark, N. J., principal places in the British Provinces, &c. &c., at the  
LOW RATES OF POSTAGE. For a list of Towns, apply at Office.  
S14-5 DAVENPORT & CO., AGENTS.

Overton ad, Daily Atlas (Boston)  
Sept. 16, 1844

Overton sold their business to Davenport on or about June 1, 1845



# William Wyman's Letter Mail July to Dec. 1844





Hartford Letter Mail started Aug. 1844, and closely worked with Hale



Stamps in two different colored papers known: yellow and pink. Yellow stamps used from Hartford, CT to New York City and points south.

The very rare Pink stamps are known on letters from Hartford to Boston.

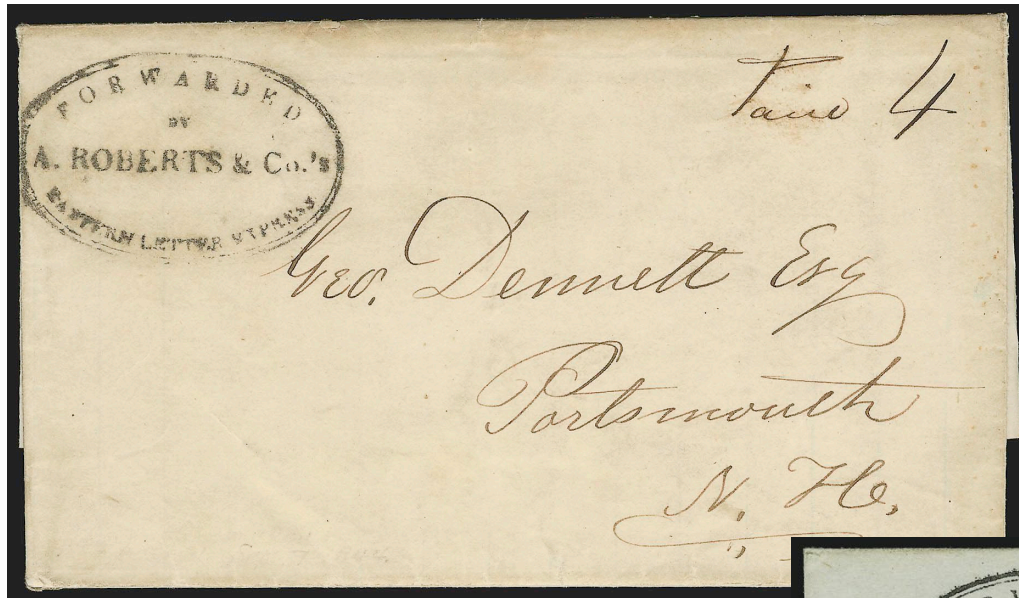
Stamps sold for 5 cents each.  
Precancels: "South" or "Southern"  
"East" or "West" to denote the  
direction letter was to go from  
Hartford. All stamps were only  
used from Hartford.



Courtesy Robert A. Siegel  
Auction Galleries, Inc.



# Andrew Roberts & Co.'s Eastern Letter Express, started July 1844



10 letters known, dating from August to October 1844

## LETTER EXPRESS OFFICE.

[POSTAGE REDUCED.]

**A.** ROBERTS & Co. Boston, will convey letters speedily and faithfully from this place throughout New England, and to the cities of New York, Philadelphia, &c. at from four to six cents postage. Double letters at double rates.

Office at No 2, State street, at the Bookstore of  
**CHARLES WHIPPLE.**  
Newburyport, Aug. 30, 1844. Gtawlm

## A. ROBERTS & CO.

**R**ESPECTFULLY inform the public that they will on and after the 17th inst. (until the law prohibits) run a **CHEAP INDEPENDENT LETTER EXPRESS** between **THIS CITY** and **PORTLAND**, at the following rates:

Letters for Lynn,	3 cents.	G. Marsh,	Agent.
" " Salem,	3 "	Mr. Chandler,	"
" " Newburyport,	4 "	Mr. Pike,	"
" " Portsmouth,	4 "	Mr. Morse,	"
" " Saco,	5 "	Mr. Gurney,	"
" " Portland,	5 "	No 7 Exchange Building.	

**Pay in advance.**

Principal Office in Boston, **A. ROBERTS & CO.**  
22 Devonshire street.

Leaves Boston at 2 o'clock, P.M., daily.

" Portland at 3½ o'clock, P.M., daily.

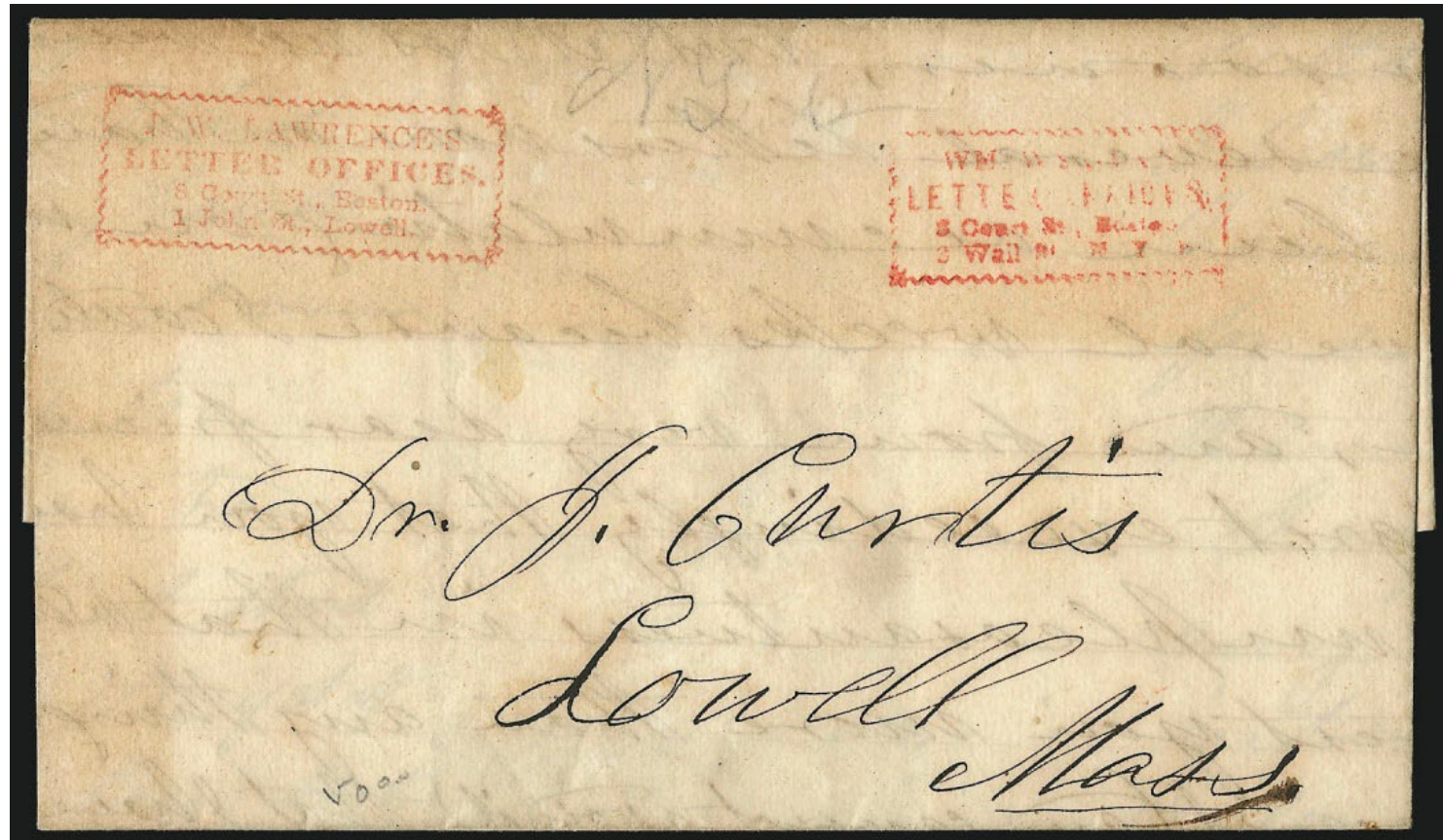
A special messenger will be sent daily.  
July 16 1844





# J.W. Lawrence's Letter Offices, started in June 1844

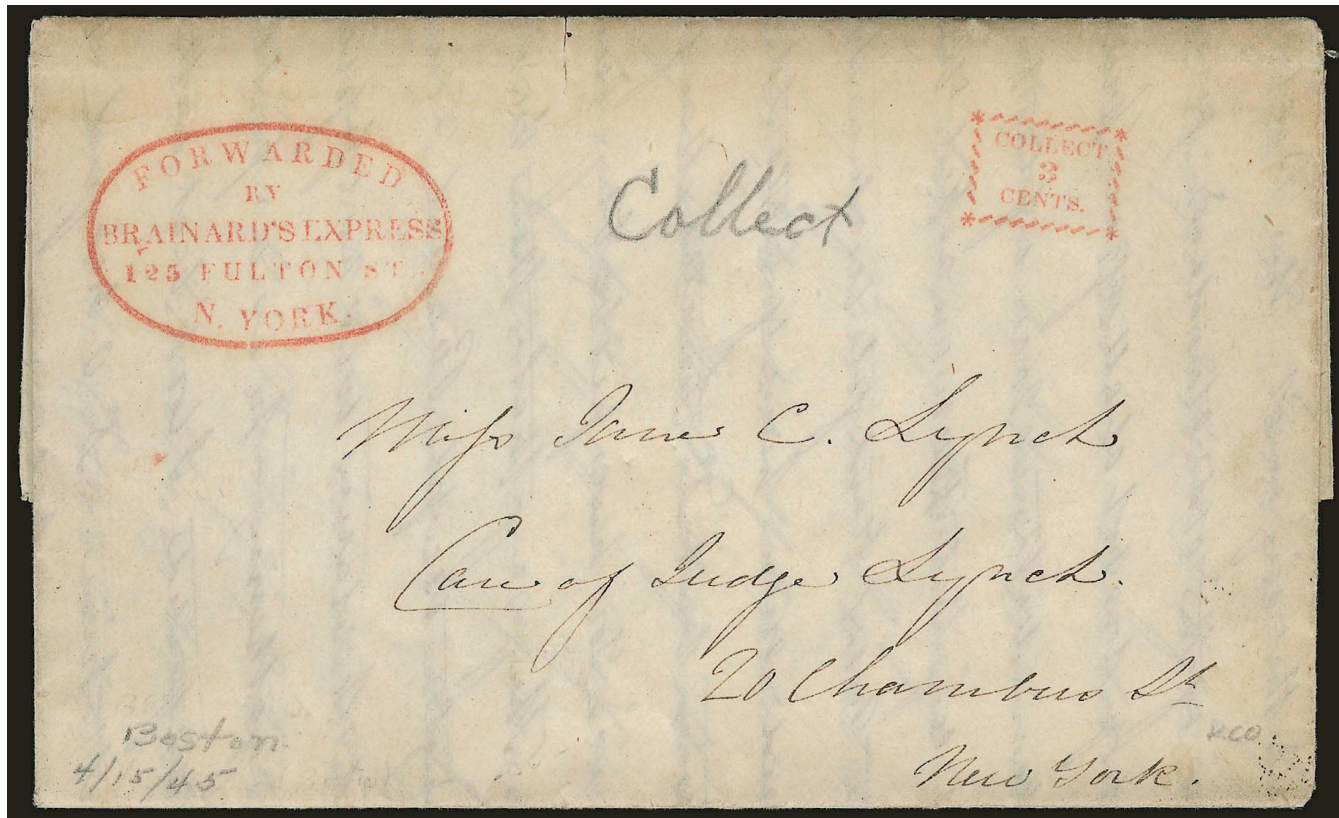
4 letters known dating from August to November 1844



New York City to Lowell, Mass. Aug 27, 1844  
conjunctive use with Wm. Wyman's Letter Offices

Courtesy Robert A. Siegel  
Auction Galleries, Inc.

## Brainard's Express: Letters known only from April to June 1845



Courtesy Robert A.  
Siegel  
Auction Galleries, Inc.

Operated between Boston and New York City. Offered the lowest rate (3 cents) on that busy route; competitors charged 6 cents collect, 5 cent prepaid by stamps. Not to be confused with Brainard & Co.



# Brainard & Company, operated along Hudson River, Albany-Troy-NYC July 1844 to June 1845

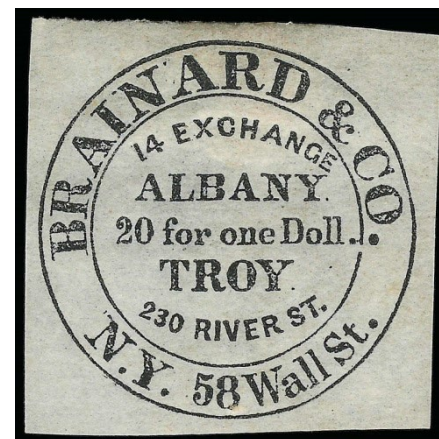
Brainard & Co. had close working relationship with Hale & Co. Oddly enough, no Brainard ads have been found. Two types of stamps issued; black on white and blue on white



Troy to NYC May 18, 1845



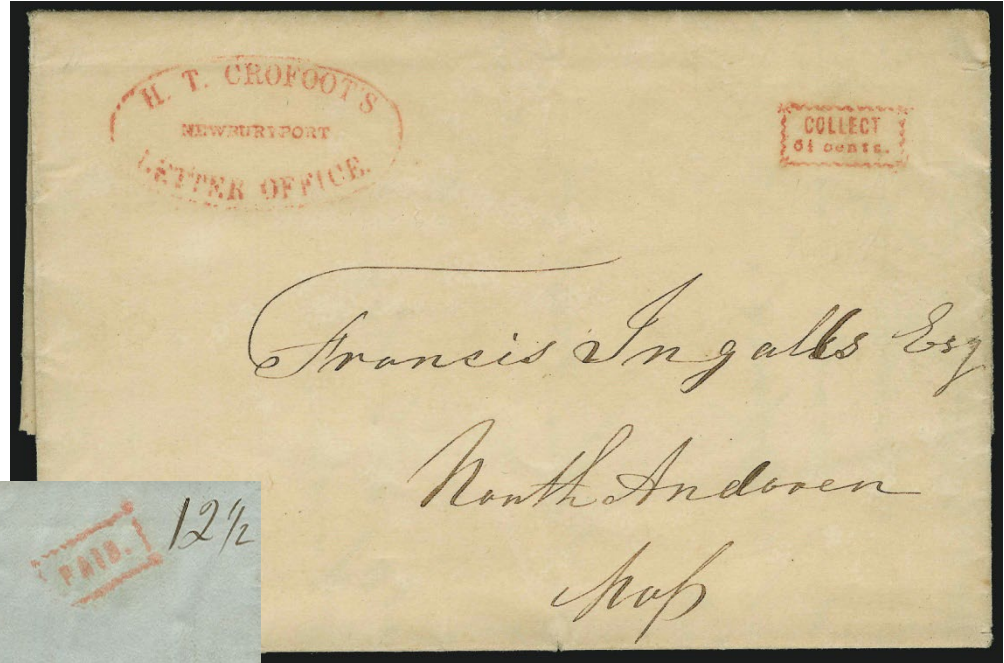
Albany to Philadelphia Sept. 9, 1844



Courtesy Robert A. Siegel  
Auction Galleries, Inc.

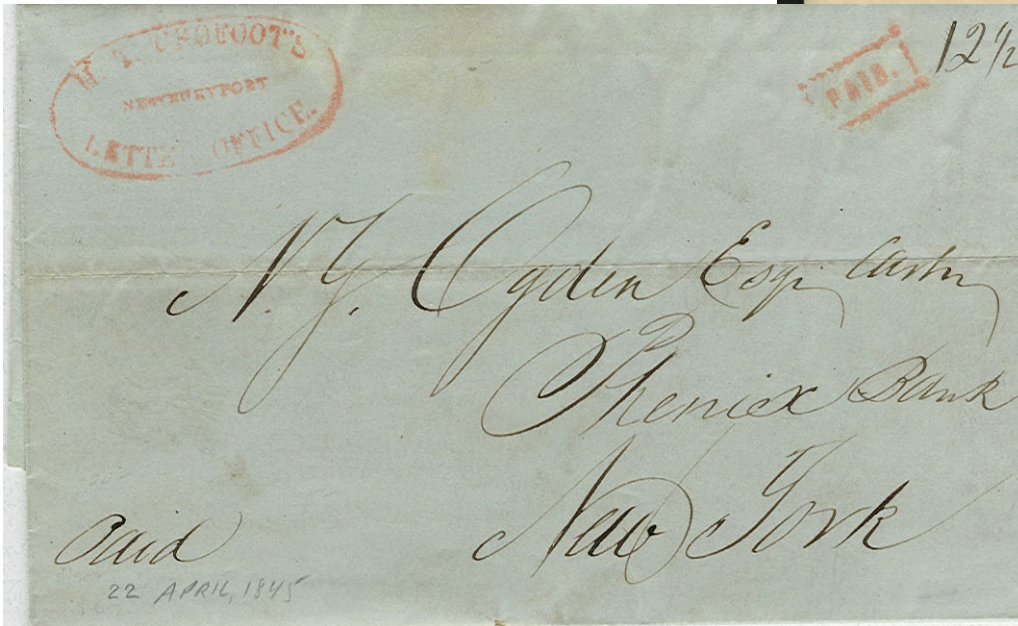
# H.T. Crofoot's Newburyport Letter Office

Established by Hosea T. Crofoot July 1844, from Newburyport to Boston and points between. Surviving letters known as late as April 1845. Worked with Hale & Co.



Newburyport to North Andover,  
Mass. Nov. 4, 1844

Courtesy Robert A. Siegel  
Auction Galleries, Inc.



Newburyport to New York Apr 22 1845



Davenport & Co., very few letters known, all dating from June 1845



Comparison of Davenport handstamp to that of Overton; Note same address



Courtesy Robert A. Siegel  
Auction Galleries, Inc.

Bridgewater Mass. To New York via Boston, June 16, 1845

Founded by Hart Davenport in July 1844, as agent for Overton & Co. for 11 months, Boston to New York route. Davenport took over Overton's office on or about June 1, 1845, and started to use its own handstamp, very similar in design to Overton's marking.



## Conjunctive uses

The network of railroad and waterway routes used by the Independent Mail companies covered a vast territory, from Baltimore to Nova Scotia, and from New York City to Chicago and beyond to Michigan and Minnesota. There was broad cooperation to link routes between cities served by different companies. A letter carried by more than one firm is known as a **conjunctive usage**. Some conjunctive usages represent a relationship between a feeder route served by a small firm or agent, such as Hoyt or Burbank in western New York State, and a principal route operated by one of the larger firms, such as Pomeroy or Wells. Hoyt's role as an Independent Mail operator was essentially dependent on Pomeroy.



Boston to Albany, Hale/American Letter Mail Co. use June 24, 1844



Unknown origin along the Genesee Valley Canal To New York City, Aug. 8, 1844

Courtesy Robert A. Siegel  
Auction Galleries, Inc.



## Conjunctive Usages, Continued

- Some conjunctive usages reflect a relationship of equals among the major Independent Mail firms. For example, to carry a letter between New York City and Detroit, Pomeroy's Letter Express and Wells' Letter Express worked together, with Pomeroy carrying the mail between New York City and Buffalo, and Wells handling the mail between Buffalo and Detroit. The total postage was shared equally.
- There is no source documentation for the agreements between companies, but surviving letters show evidence of fee-sharing, including a clever method of using each other's stamps to credit postage to the company next in line.



Originated west of Albany, Aug. 1844. Handled by Pomeroy, Hale, Crofoot in succession.

Courtesy Robert A. Siegel  
Auction Galleries, Inc.

# Epilogue

- An Act of Congress was passed in March 1845, effective July 1, 1845 which banned the independent mail companies from transporting mail between cities. This Postal Act reduced the zones to two, reduced the rates to 5 cents and 10 cents, and applied them to weight rather than the number of sheets of paper which composed a letter.

