

# American Letter Mail Company: Study of its Operations

Purpose: to explore the operations of the ALM Co. through a study of the letters that it carried 1844-45. Significant covers outlined in red

Scope: to show examples of each of its three different stamps on cover, plus collect and paid stampless covers, and to show the hand-stamped markings of its three major offices: Boston, New York and Philadelphia. Uses will also be shown from/ to its smaller offices in Maryland (Baltimore), New York, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Maine. Conjunctive uses with other mail companies will also be shown.

Background Information: The ALM Co. was established by Lysander Spooner in January 1844. At first, all mail had to be prepaid; stamps were issued from the beginning that sold 20 for a dollar, or 6-1/4 cents for each half ounce letter. This prepayment requirement lasted from January 24 to April 11 1844, when collect letters were at last accepted; then prepayment was optional, either in cash or with stamps affixed. By July 1844 offices with conjunctive partners were opened throughout New England to extend its reach. Due to government pressure Lysander Spooner sold his company to new owners in the summer of 1844; they issued the large eagle stamp that August. The company was eventually shut down along with all the other independent mail companies effective July 1, 1845 by Act of Congress. Judging by the large number of recorded covers (about 600), ALM Co. was the second largest Independent Mail Company, after Hale & Co., and was the first to issue stamps (the small eagle design) in January 1844 to facilitate prepayment of mail.

For more information see "Eastern Independent Mail and Express Mail Companies 1840-1845" by The Eastern Independent Mail Company Study Group, edited by Michael S. Gutman, 2016, Chapter 1, The American Letter Mail Company by John D. Bowman.



Small Eagle Stamp with red PAID cancel from NY



Large Black Eagle Stamp with usual "X" pen cancel

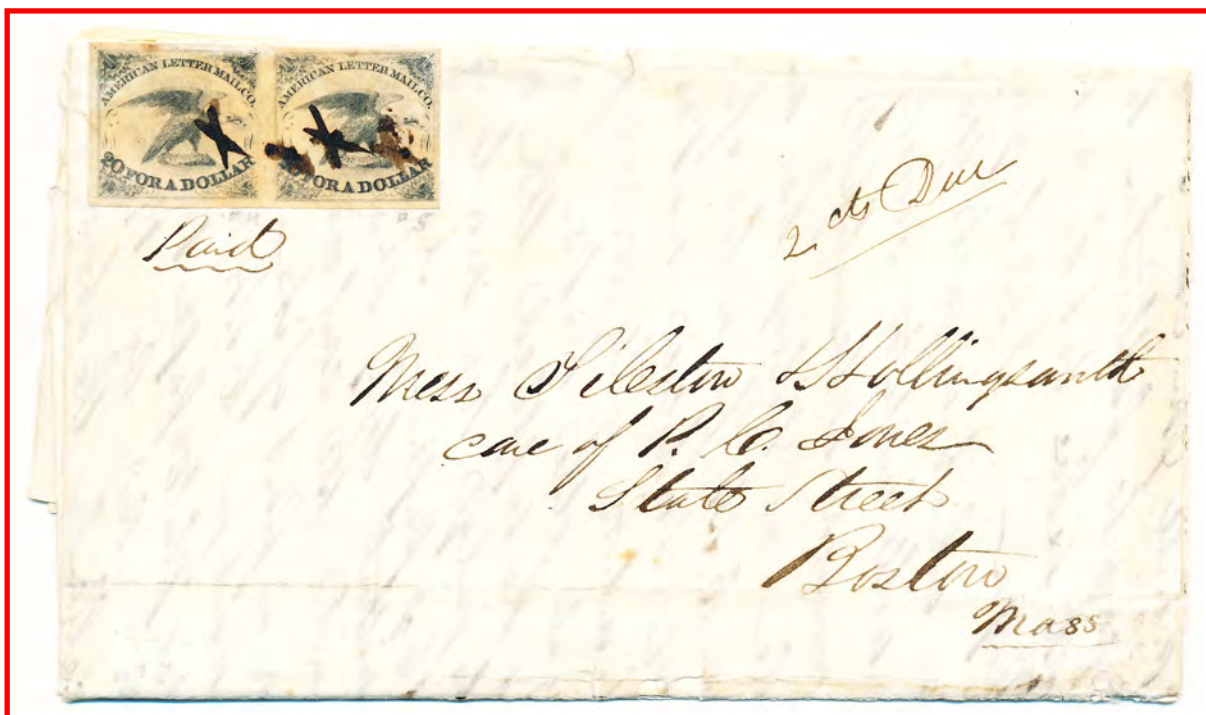


Large Black Eagle Stamp with rare blue initials "TBS" of agent Trueman B. Shew of Philadelphia office. Shew was a daguerreotypist who worked at 116 Chestnut; ALM Co.'s office was at 109 Chestnut.



New York Feb. 23 1844 to Philadelphia with usual red brush ink cancel of that early period

## ALM Co. Early Uses of the Small Eagle Stamp



Philadelphia Feb. 4 1844 to Boston. The earliest of the five recorded multiples of the small eagle stamp on cover (all pairs). "2 cts Due" marking for local street delivery charge.

Cert



Red "Field of Stars" cancel undated cover to New York. This fancy cancel is only known on letters destined for New York and was applied when received there. All known uses date from February to March 1844.

# ALM Co. Rare use from Baltimore Feb. 29 1844 to Philadelphia



The Baltimore office of the ALM Co. was in operation only for a short time in early 1844. It was established on January 25, 1844, but had a short life due to pressure from the government and the public trial of its messenger John C. Gilmore, who was refused passage by the Camden & Amboy Railroad from Baltimore to Philadelphia and suffered confiscation of his valise containing the letter mail he was carrying. ALM Co. announced the closure of their office in Baltimore, and suspension of all service south of Philadelphia on March 13, 1844. Only five covers are known originating from Baltimore; this is the latest known use.



Note the street address given in pencil at upper right: "41 So. First"

Enlargement of Stamp  
Scale: 3:1  
Rotated 90 degrees

The manuscript inscription on this stamp is perhaps just doodling by the recipient, William R. Thompson. Thompson was a member of the "The Friendly Sons of St. Patrick" and of the Hibernian Society for the Relief of Immigrants from Ireland" in Philadelphia. The Society's records indicate that he was a prominent grocer in Philadelphia for many years and Director of the Mechanics Bank. Thompson was born in Ireland and lived on the south side of Spruce Street above Seventh. James C. Thompson likely was his relative and letters of administration of James' estate after his death were given to William, which may provide a clue as to the inscription on this stamp.



## ALM Co. Uses of Small Eagle Stamp



Boston June 24 1844 to New York. The three-line handstamp was the first ALM Co. office marking used, earliest known use is May 30 1844, in this case used as a receiving marking. The red PAID cancel on the stamp, applied upon arrival in New York, is the EKU of that marking. Note the "Single" endorsement at lower left to indicate a single letter sheet.



Boston to Belfast, Maine, circa August 1844. Only two other ALM Co. covers are known going to this city, all from the same attorney's correspondence. This is a conjunctive use of ALM Co. and Gilman's Express. It is not unusual for the secondary company receiving the letter to not mark it with their handstamp, especially if it was the smaller of the two. ALM Co. did not maintain their own offices in the Penobscot Bay area of Maine, where Belfast is located, and used Gilman's Express as their conjunctive partner. Gilman's agent at Belfast was H.N. Lancaster. The routing from Boston would have been by railroad as far as Portland and then steamship to Belfast.

# ALM Co. Boxed Collect Markings From Boston and New York



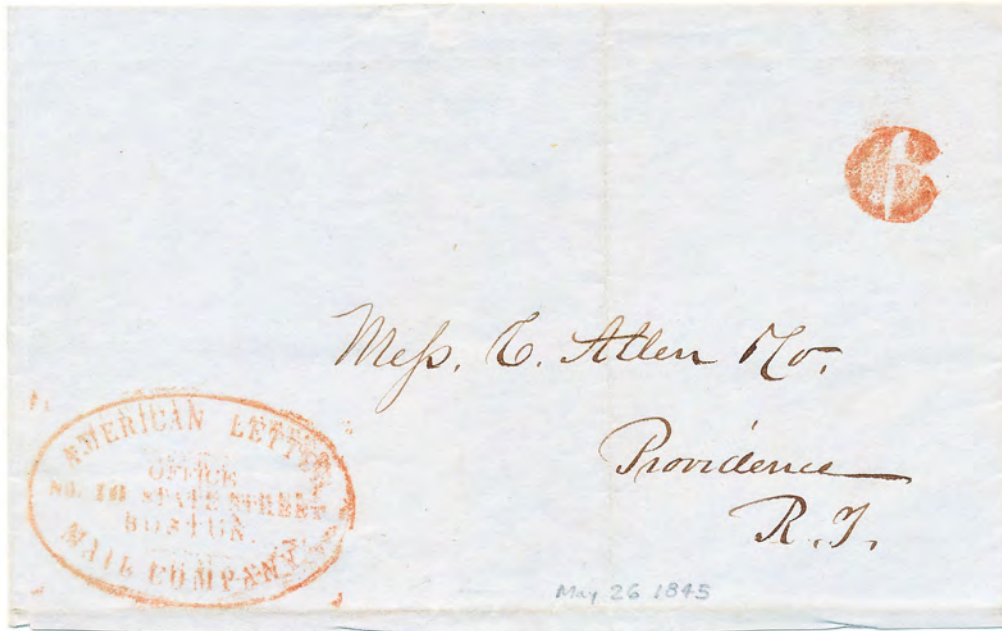
Cert

Boston June 1 1844 to Philadelphia. "Collect 6-1/4 cts. Boston Office" fancy red boxed marking. Very early use of "Forwarded By American Mail Co. No. 56 Wall St.—N.Y." (EKU May 30 1844) SL marking, used in transit.

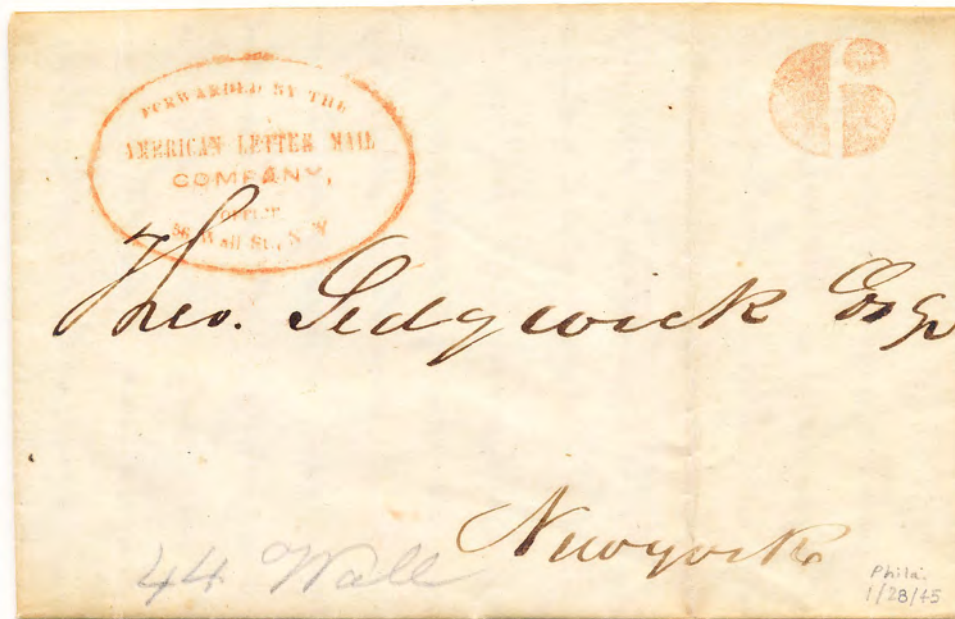


New York Aug. 19 1844 to Philadelphia. Fancy red boxed "Collect 6-1/4 cts. New York Office" marking, Red "Forwarded By American Mail Co. From No. 109 Chestnut Street Philadelphia" circular marking (first month of use) applied at destination. It was very common practice for ALM Co. to apply office marking at destination, rather than at origin, sometimes in transit.

## ALM Co. Numeric Collect markings from Philadelphia



This cover is a bit of a mystery; it is docketed May 26 1845 without an origin, addressed to Providence, R.I. The "6" collect marking is recorded as originating in Philadelphia; the red oval 16 State Street Boston office handstamp is probably a transit marking. The cover likely traveled by train from Philadelphia to Providence; why it was diverted to Boston, 50 miles NE of Providence, is unknown, perhaps it was misrouted.



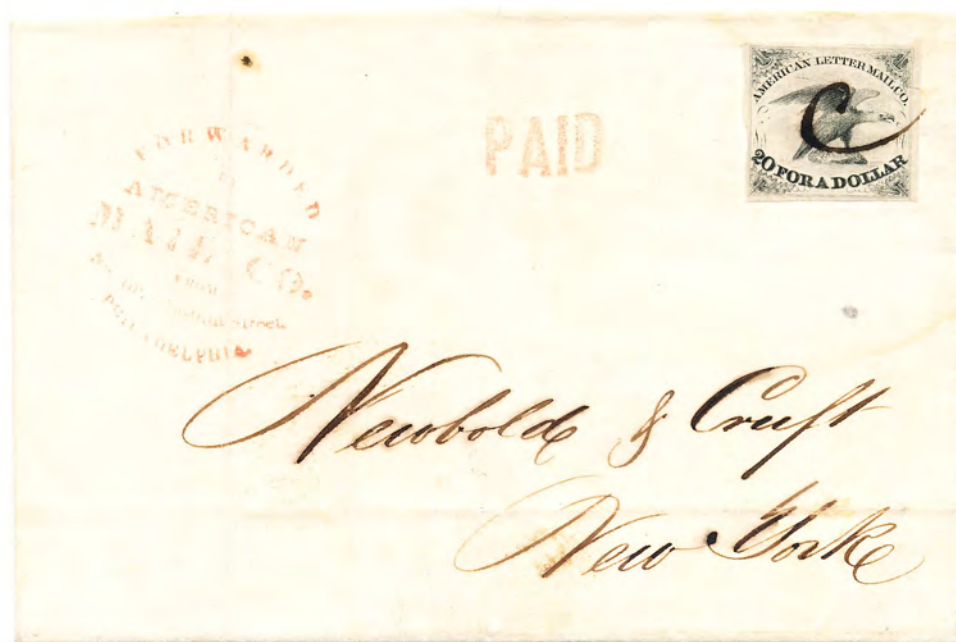
Philadelphia Jan 28 1845 to New York, large "6" marking applied in Philadelphia. Red oval New York marking applied at destination. Note the "44 Wall" street address written in pencil for local delivery; 2 cents extra charged, not always marked as such.



# ALM Co. Uses of Small Eagle Stamp with 109 Chestnut St. Philadelphia circular marking



Cover of unknown origin docketed Aug. 12 1844 to Philadelphia. The 109 Chestnut Street Philadelphia circular marking, applied at destination in this example, is known only used from Aug. 5 to Nov. 8 1844. The office had moved to 101 Chestnut Street on Sept. 26, 1844, and this marking was replaced by a different device.



Cert

Philadelphia Sept. 5 1844 to New York, with manuscript "C" cancel on stamp (perhaps standing for "cancelled") to New York, with red "PAID" marking applied in Philadelphia. Both of these markings had a short service life of only a few months.

## ALM Co. Collect Covers from New York and Boston



William C. Bouck (1786-1859)  
13<sup>th</sup> Governor of New York  
1843-1844, Democrat

Brooklyn, N.Y. Sept. 6 1844 to Albany. Rare Hale/ ALM Co. conjunctive use, addressed to N.Y. Governor William C. Bouck. Probably privately carried from Brooklyn to New York City, especially in the absence of any Boyd's City Express markings The boxed collect marking was applied by the American Letter Mail Co., which had its office at 56 Wall Street, very close to the Hale & Co. office at 58 Wall Street. It is theorized that this letter was at first posted at the American Letter Mail Co. office in New York, but for some unknown reason it was then handed off to Hale & Co., who then applied their New York oval office marking. American Letter Mail Co. and Hale & Co. were bitter competitors on the same major routes, and usually did not cooperate with each other. Only one other letter with ALM Co. markings is known addressed to Albany, and it also bears Hale & Co. markings from New York, and is shown on the last page of this exhibit.

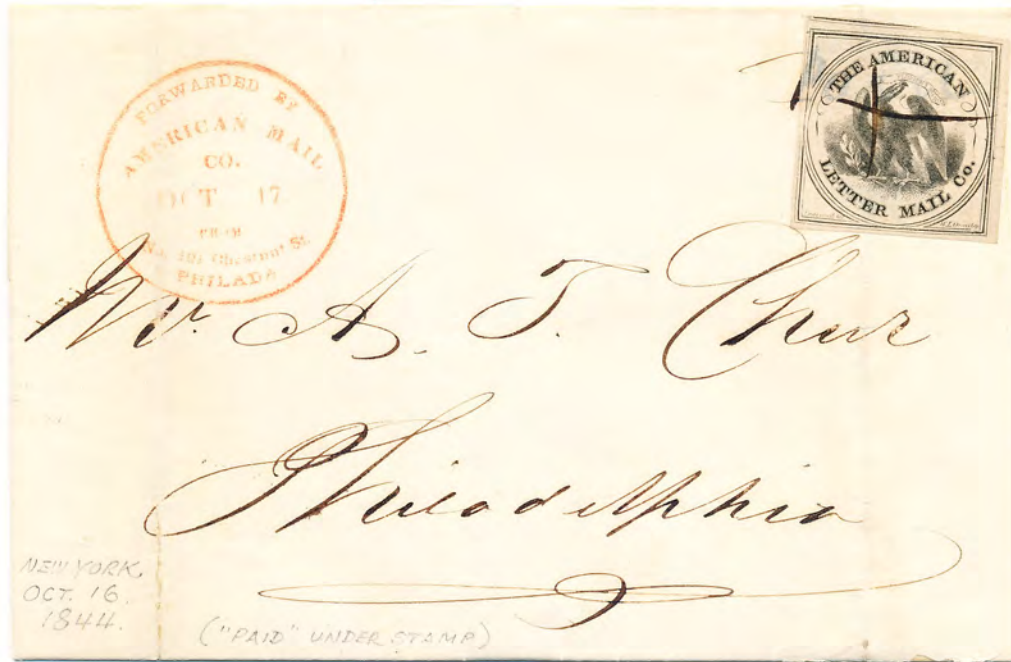


Boston Aug. 12 1844 to Philadelphia, with both originating office and destination office (109 Chestnut St.) markings



## ALM Co. Use of Large Black Eagle Stamp

ALM Co. founder Lysander Spooner, weary of fighting government lawsuits, gave up the struggle and sold out his letter mail operation to new owners in either June or July 1844. The new ownership issued the Large Eagle stamp shortly afterwards (EKU Aug. 7 1844) to replace the previous Small Eagle stamp. The identity of the new owners is unknown.



New York Oct. 16 1844 to Philadelphia, where circular office was struck at destination. Under the stamp is written "Paid"



Philadelphia Jan. 30 1845 to New York, where the red oval 56 Wall St. New York Office marking was applied at destination  
Ex-Caspary

# ALM Co. Use of Large Black Eagle Stamp on a Intriguing Letter

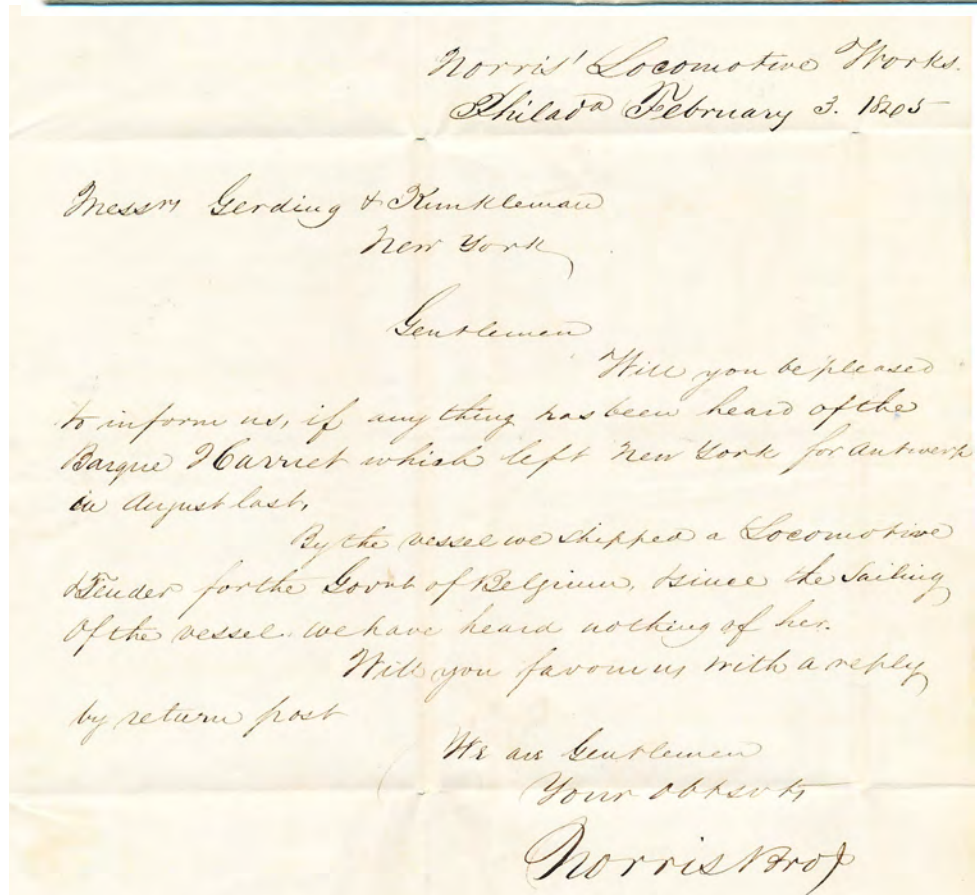


Norris locomotive and tender from 1840s similar to the one described in the letter.

Philadelphia Feb. 3 1845 to New York, from Norris Locomotive Works. Stamp is affixed by red sealing wax wafer, and has "X" pen cancel.

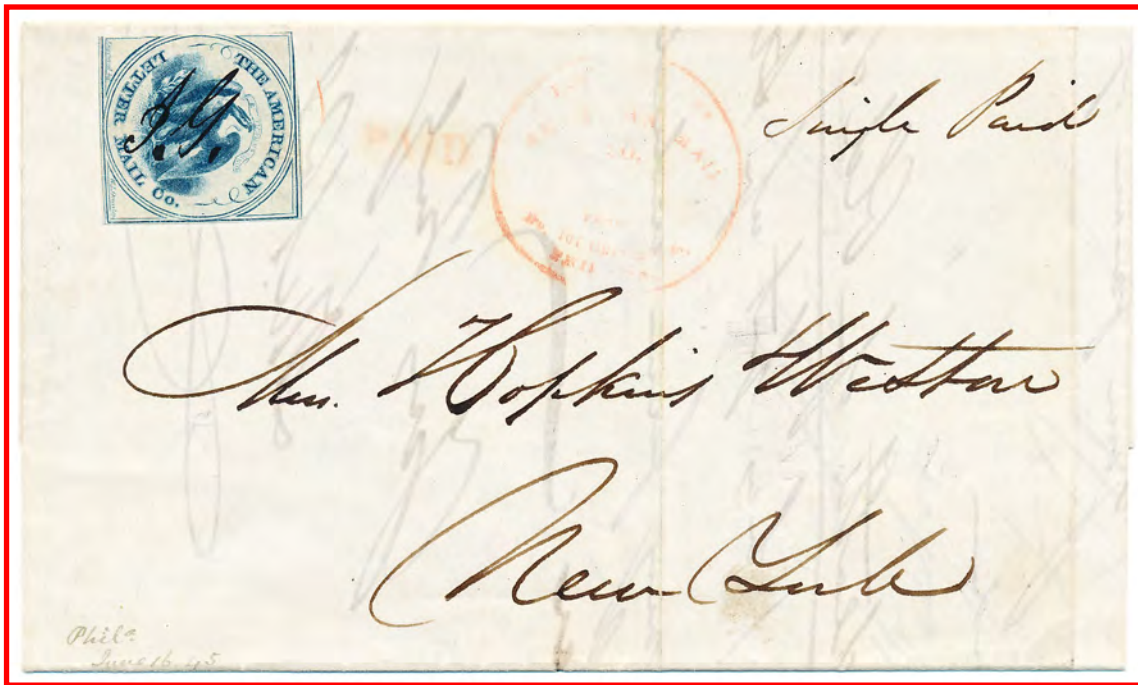


Letter is in regard to a shipment of a locomotive & tender on board the barque "Harriet" bound for Antwerp in August 1844 for the Government of Belgium, and "since the sailing of the vessel we have heard nothing of her." In 1985 marine archaeologists found a mysterious barnacle-encrusted but well-preserved sunken locomotive and tender from the 1840s sitting upright on the ocean floor five miles off the coast of New Jersey at a depth of 90 feet. Could this be the missing Norris train shipped from New York?





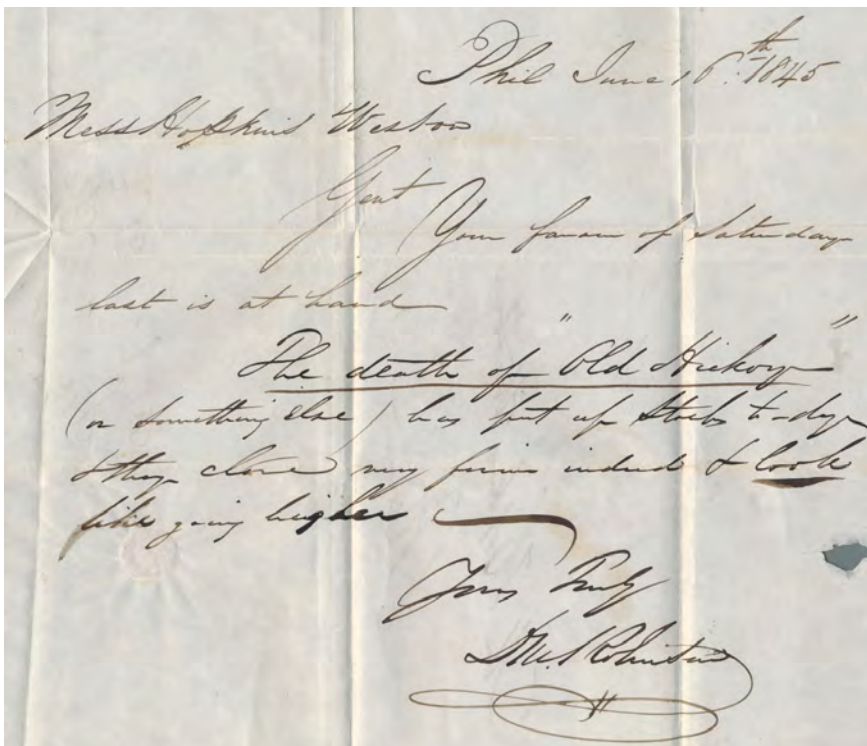
# ALM Co. Use of the Rare Blue Large Eagle Stamp



Large Blue Eagle Stamp Philadelphia June 16 1845 to New York, Hopkins Weston correspondence. Red 101 Chestnut St. Philadelphia office circular marking and red PAID marking. "J.G." initials of agent John Grey.

cert

One of twelve genuine recorded covers bearing the rare blue eagle stamp of American Letter Mail Co., dated from August 1844 to June 1845. Eight of the recorded covers are addressed to Hopkins & Weston in New York, such as this example.



Scale: 2:1 rotated enlargement of stamp

Letter mentions "The death of 'Old Hickory'" (or something else) has put up Stock today & they close my firm indeed & look like going higher." Former President Andrew Jackson (known as "Old Hickory") had died eight days earlier, on June 8, 1845, at his Hermitage plantation, near Nashville, Tennessee.



## ALM Co. Letters from Providence and New Haven Offices

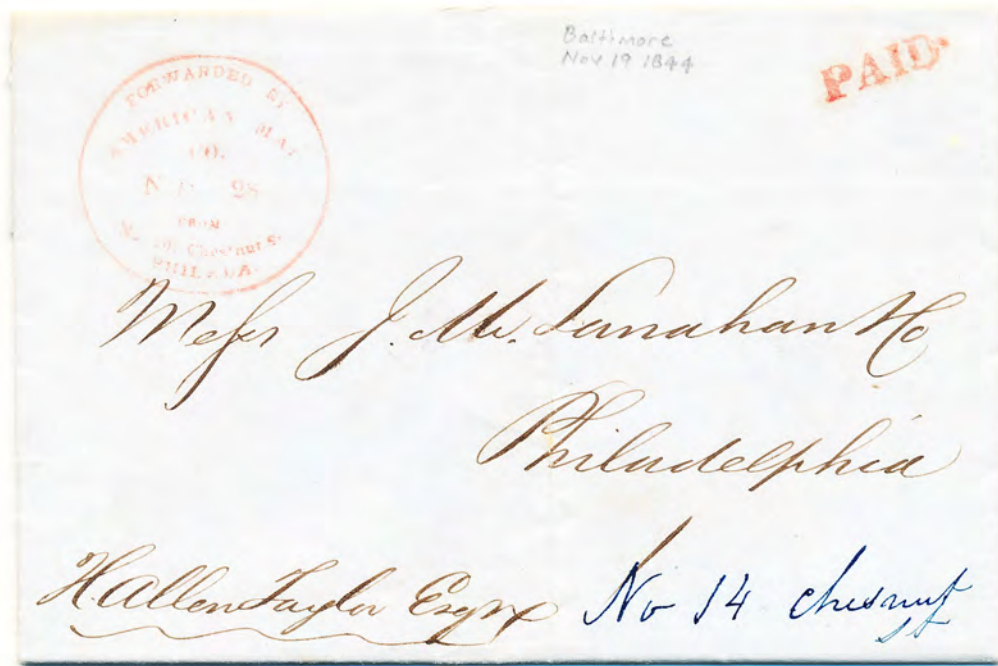


Providence June 2 1845 to Boston, evidently collect, with the scarce 16 State Street Boston office red oval marking struck on arrival. The Providence office, which was first advertised on June 20, 1844, did not use any handstamps. ALM Co. had offices in six cities in Rhode Island, and 15 letters are recorded originating from the state.



New Haven CT Feb 3 1845 to New York, with PAID and 56 Wall St. New York office red oval markings struck on arrival. Note pencil "Paid" notation. No handstamp markings are known from the New Haven office, which was first advertised on July 25 1844.

## ALM Co. Stampless Paid Covers



Baltimore Nov 19 1844 to Philadelphia. ALM Co.'s Baltimore office closed early in 1844 so this letter evidently was privately carried to the ALM Co. office in Philadelphia, marked with the red circular office marking dated Nov. 28 (nine days later). Likely a local use only, pre-paid letter to a street address, not transported by ALM Co. between cities. The red PAID handstamp is known used at ALM Co.'s Philadelphia Office. The delivery fee was likely 2 cents. Transcript of letter, which is very revealing as to how it was transported:

*Baltimore Nov. 19 1844 Messrs. J. McLanahan & Co.*

*Gentlemen,*

*Allow me to introduce to you my friend H. Allen Taylor Esq. attorney at law, he is on a visit to your city with a view of becoming acquainted with your merchants, he is a young gentleman of high respectability and any attention you may show him will be thankfully acknowledged by yours very truly, Robert Barry. Turn over (in blue ink)*

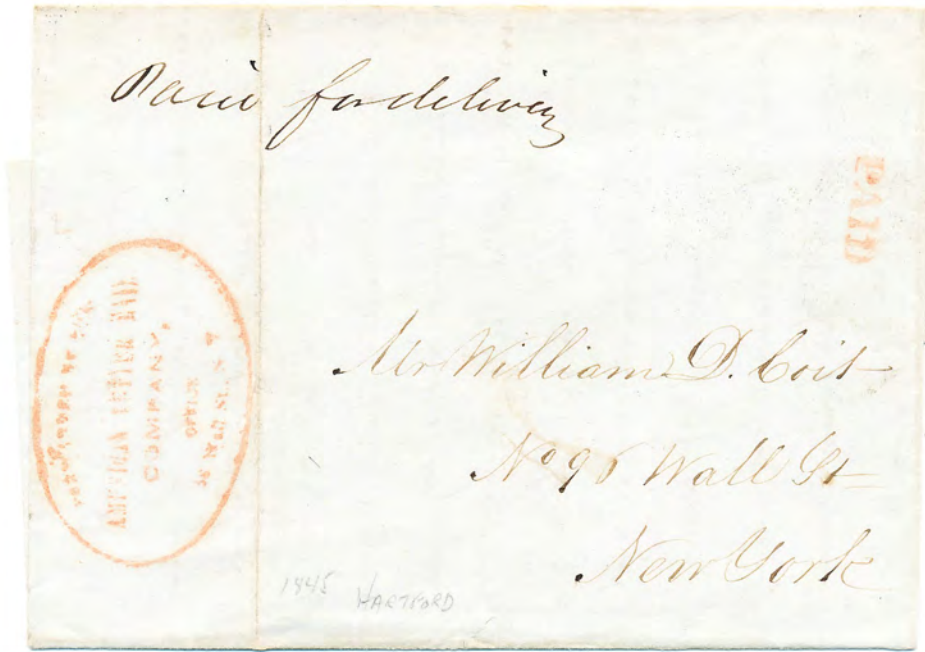
*(in blue ink) Gentlemen,*

*Circumstances prevent my having the pleasure of delivering this letter for you in Person, I have therefore taken this mode of offering my services to you and your friends, in any legal transactions you or they may have in Baltimore. Respectfully, H. Allen Taylor*



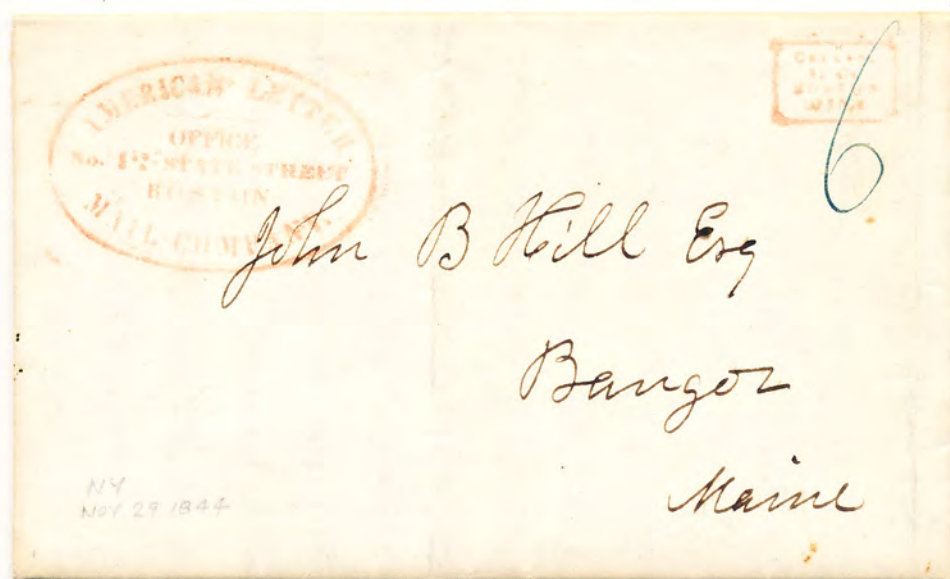
New York Dec 3 1844 to Boston, marked on arrival with 12 State Street Boston office red oval marking. The 14 x 4mm black PAID marking is of a style unrecorded by Bowman at any office.

# ALM Co. Two uses from Connecticut and one to Maine



Hartford CT 1845 to New York, where at destination the 56 Wall St. New York office red oval marking and PAID markings were applied. Note ms. directive: "Paid for delivery". The Hartford office was first advertised on July 25 1845; no marking are known.

New London CT Nov 21 1844 to Boston, where the 12 State Street Boston office red oval and red boxed "Collect 6 -1/4 cts. Boston Office" markings were applied. The ms. "6" marking may have been applied at origin. ALM Co. is not known to have had an office in New London.



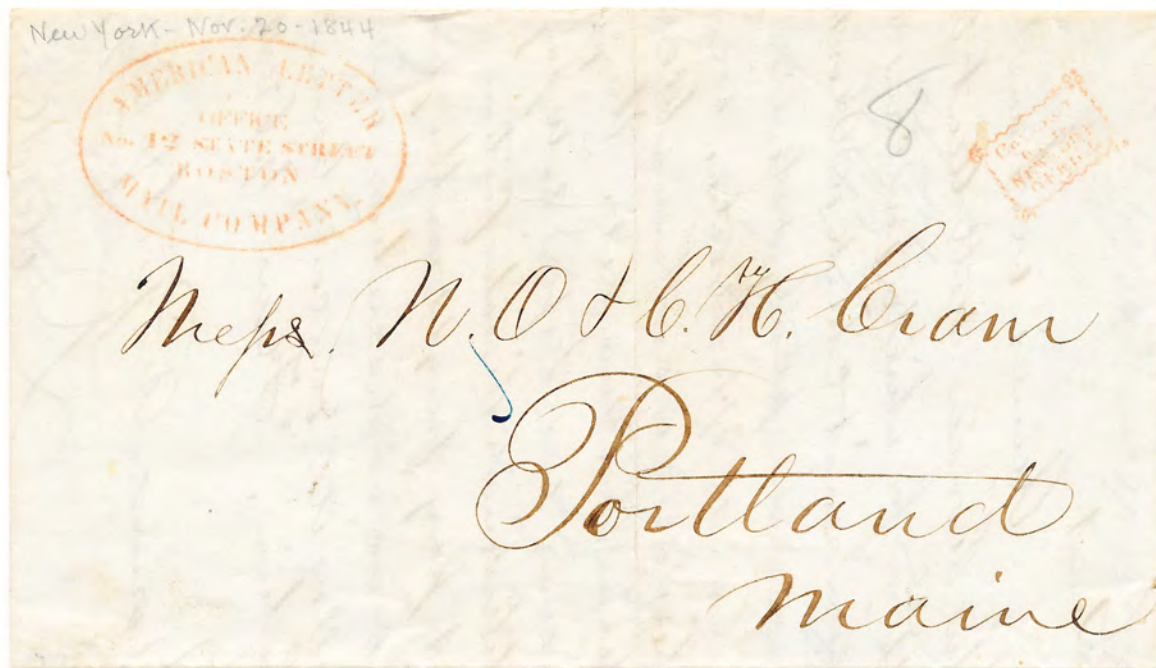
New York Nov. 29 1844 to Bangor ME. Transit markings were struck in Boston; 12 State Street Boston office red oval and red boxed collect markings. The ms. "6" marking may have been applied at origin in New York. ALM Co.'s office in Bangor was first advertised on June 20 1844.



## ALM Co. Uses from and to Maine



Bangor, Maine Apr. 17 1845 to Boston, scarce conjunctive use of Gilman's Express and ALM Co. Gilman's Express applied the distinctive "PAID" 10 x 3 mm handstamp in their Bangor office. Gilman delivered this letter to their Boston office and then handed it off to the ALM Co., who applied their oval receiving office handstamp. The addressee, Attorney Charles T. Russell, picked up his fully prepaid letter at the ALM Co. office at 16 State St. rather than at the Gilman's Express office at 9 Court St., perhaps for convenience.



New York Nov. 20 1844 to Portland, ME. While in transit ALM Co. applied their red oval 12 State Street Boston office marking. The fancy red boxed "Collect 6-1/4 cts. New York Office" was struck at origin. The "8" written in pencil indicates 6 cents fee between cities plus 2 cents carrier delivery charge = 8 cents total due. The Portland office was first advertised on June 20, 1844.

## ALM Co. final uses in last month of operation June 1845



South Reading, MA June 11 1845 to New York. South Reading (now known as Wakefield) is not known to have had a ALM Co. office. The nearest office was in Boston, 15 miles to the south. Scarce 16 State Street Boston office red oval and red PAID markings. Note the pencil "86 Pearl" indicating local street delivery.



Boston June 24 1845 to Albany, NY via New York City. Rare conjunctive use of ALM Co. and Hale & Co. This is one of two known ALM Co. and Hale & Co. conjunctive uses, this use born out of necessity during the last few days of both companies' operations before they were shut down by the government effective July 1, 1845. Normally these two competitors never cooperated with each other. The other conjunctive use, also to Albany, is shown on page 8 of this exhibit. The letter originated in Boston and was given to ALM Co., who applied their oval 16 State Street Boston office marking and rated it 6 cents collect with their numeric handstamp. By late June 1845 the ALM Co. office in Albany had already shut down, so ALM Co. passed this letter to Hale & Co. at their New York office for transmission to Hale's Albany, N.Y. office which was still open at this late date. Hale & Co. applied their New York originating office oval marking, and also their boxed collect six cents marking directly over the ALM Co. "6" marking. The recipient paid 6 cents collect charge to Hale & Co., whether he paid the additional six cents due to ALM Co. is unknown.