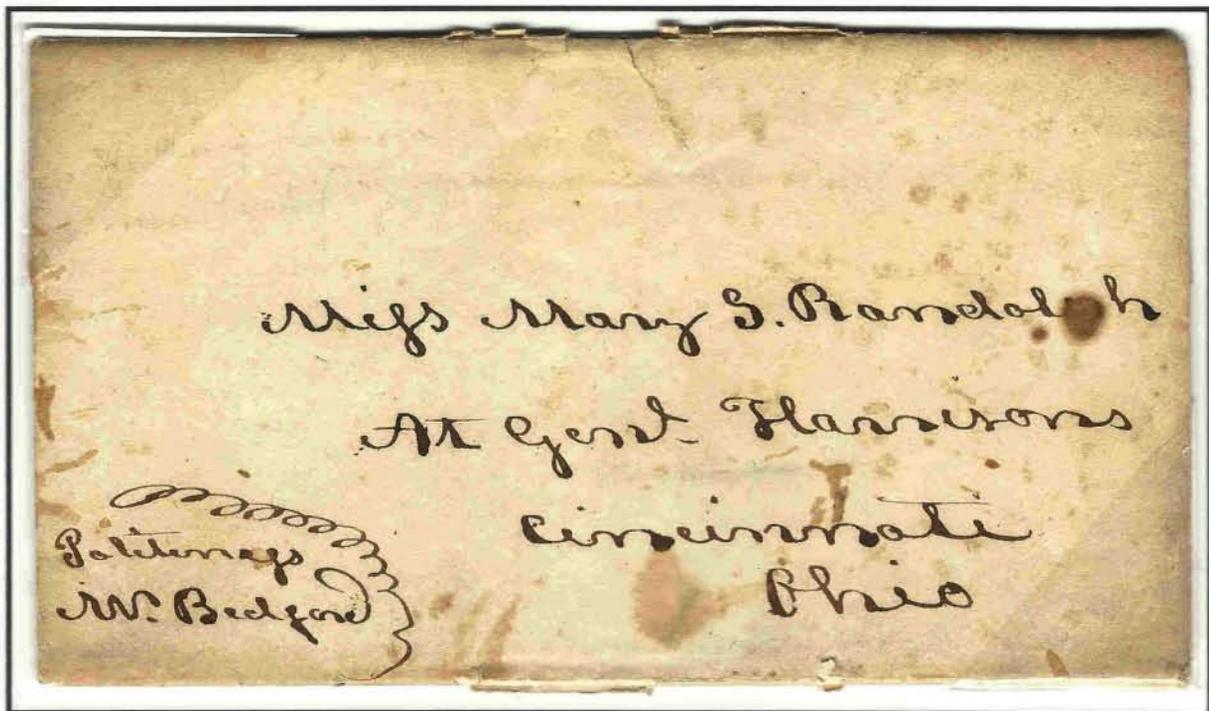


THE EARLY DAYS OF VALUABLE U.S. MAIL

Money and other valuable paper had been sent enclosed in letter mail at the sender's risk since the inception of the United States Post Office. Postal laws specified severe punishment awaiting anyone stealing mail from the postal service. The amount of mail stolen was minimal. However, the loss of valuable letters from the mails were covered in the newspapers of the day like plane crashes are today.

The dichotomy faced by the post office was how to track the safe passage of valuable mail from sender to addressee without marking it in such a way it could be identified by potential thieves. This exhibit documents the compromises made up to 1867 addressing this issue. They came about because of public pressure to better protect the mail and competition from express and freight companies offering more secure services.

This exhibit uses contemporary material from the period 1824 to 1867 to illustrate how the post office coped with this issue prior to the registration fee being paid with postage stamps.



Laurenceburgh (Lawrenceburg), IN December 17, 1825 (by date line)

Letter containing money carried as a "favor" without compensation by a third party outside the mails.

Comments proposing a specific service for the handling of valuable mail, including indemnity against loss, first appeared in the *Postmaster General's Report* issued November 17, 1828:

It may be advantageous to the public and the Department at some future time, for it to become the insurer of moneys transmitted in the mail, being authorized to charge a higher rate of postage in such cases, to idemnify for the risk incurred. To guard against frauds, this responsibility must necessarily be limited to packets mailed at principal offices, under such regulations as shall afford the greatest possible security.

Documenting Valuable Content

The sender was not required to supply any proof that a letter being mailed actually contained a valuable content. Post office practice was not to make any marks on a supposedly valuable letter that might aid in a thief easily identifying it as valuable. All letters mailed at a post office were bundled together regardless of value. These bundles were then sent either to a post office further down the postal route serving the post office or on to a distributing post office where the mail was further sorted traveling on towards its destination. "Lost Letters" were more specifically addressed in the Postal Regulations adopted May 1, 1832 as follows:

CHAPTER XXXIV LOST LETTERS.

Sec. 286. Money, or other valuable thing, sent in the mail, is at the risk of the owner: But, if it be lost, the Department will make every effort in its power to discover the cause, and, if there has been a theft, to punish the offender.

Sec. 287. In every case of loss, the Department should be informed, without delay, of all the circumstances connected with it. Particular care should be taken, to state the name of the office in which the letter was placed - the day on which it was done and whether by the writer himself, or by another person - the names of the writer and the person addressed - the enclosure in the letter - the amount of postage on it, whether paid or unpaid - the office to which the letter was addressed, and whether mailed direct thereto, or to another office for distribution - and the route by which it was sent.

Sec. 288. A loss by mail, unless in a case of robbery, should be kept secret: A publication is sure to diminish the chances of detecting the depredation.

The issue of the true value of some letters was partially addressed by the practice of having the postmaster at the sender's post office provide a signed note attesting to the contents of a letter entered into the mails. Eventually this would be covered in future regulations.

I certify that J. N. Heete deposited, this day,
in the Post office at this place a letter
addressed to Mr. W. Gracy, Macou P. O.
Marengo County Ala. containing two fifty
- dollar Bills on the Bank of Hamburg S. C.
Newberry
10th March 1842 } Tho. Johns
Dep. P. M.

Newberry, SC. March 10, 1842

Manuscript note signed by the postmaster attesting to the fact a patron deposited into the mails a letter containing two fifty dollar bills.

The Philadelphia System

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania developed an increasingly bad reputation for losing supposedly valuable letters. They developed internal procedures to identify and track supposedly valuable letters once received at the post office. Incoming mail was marked with an "R" on arrival and given more careful processing than the rest of the stream of incoming mail. This practice appears to have begun in October, 1845 and continued until the establishment of formal registration procedures July 1, 1855. They also appear to have identified outgoing valuable mail as such.



Trenton, N.J. February 24, 1846 (by date line)
Incoming letter to Philadelphia.



Philadelphia, PA January 14, (year not given)
Outgoing Philadelphia letter.

HOW THE POST OFFICE IDENTIFIED VALUABLE MAIL



Evansville, Indiana December 25, (year not given)
“X” may have indicated this as a valuable letter.

The following newspaper article appeared in the *New York Times* October 20, 1852. It is the most complete description available of how valuable mail was separated from the regular mail for dispatch without letters being marked in a manner indicating their status. It also documents that valuable mail was marked or unofficially registered upon receipt at Philadelphia.

Philadelphia is a discreet, Quakerly matron, and, satisfied with her Mint, she is willing patiently to endure the abominations of her post-office establishment. As the routine in regard to the disposition of mail material is not generally known, I will briefly allude to it.

The letters which are dropped in through the slits from the outside, are taken from the receptacle, and are faced, rated, and stamped. The paid ones are marked accordingly. They are then deposited in a large box, horizontally placed, and furnished with six compartments, superscribed respectively, “odd mails,” “steamers,” “New-York City,” “Eastern,” “Western,” and “Southern.” This is a preliminary distribution, after which they are divided into a number of sections, and cased, that is, put into a number of pigeon-holes, preparatory for their transmission to the different offices. When they are about to be made up, they are taken out of these cases, examined, and way-bills are made out to accompany them. The next step is to put them in wrappers and tie them. The **more valuable mails** [emphasis added] are deposited in canvas bags, which are nozzled and labeled, and then sealed with the seal of the office. These bags are then deposited in ample leather pouches, and locked with the United States mail locks. Thus equipped and secured they are sent on their destination.

When a mail arrives, the following ceremonies are performed. The huge pouches are dragged in and made to disgorge their contents. The letters are collected, and the different packages examined to see if they correspond with the way-bills. A further examination takes place of all letters supposed to contain valuables or money, and all such are carefully put aside to be **registered** [emphasis added]. Money letters which arrive at the office are uniformly registered [Money letters contain bank notes and currency], but **those forwarded are not** [emphasis added], unless a special request to that effect is made. The registration of valuable letters is a very important matter. Upon an average, fifty thousand dollars a day, in bank bills, are registered in this office. A few minor offices in Pennsylvania, but no other large offices in the country, adopt this plan. There should be a public law enforcing the general observation of it.

The New Orleans System

An unofficial registry system appears in New Orleans, Louisiana by August of 1851. An increasing number of registered letters are known both inbound and outbound into 1855. Postmaster Michel Musson established a register of valuable mail, numbered each item when it was entered and provided the addressee a printed notice requiring their signature in order to take delivery of a valuable letter.



Donaldsonville, LA October 15, 1851 (by date line)

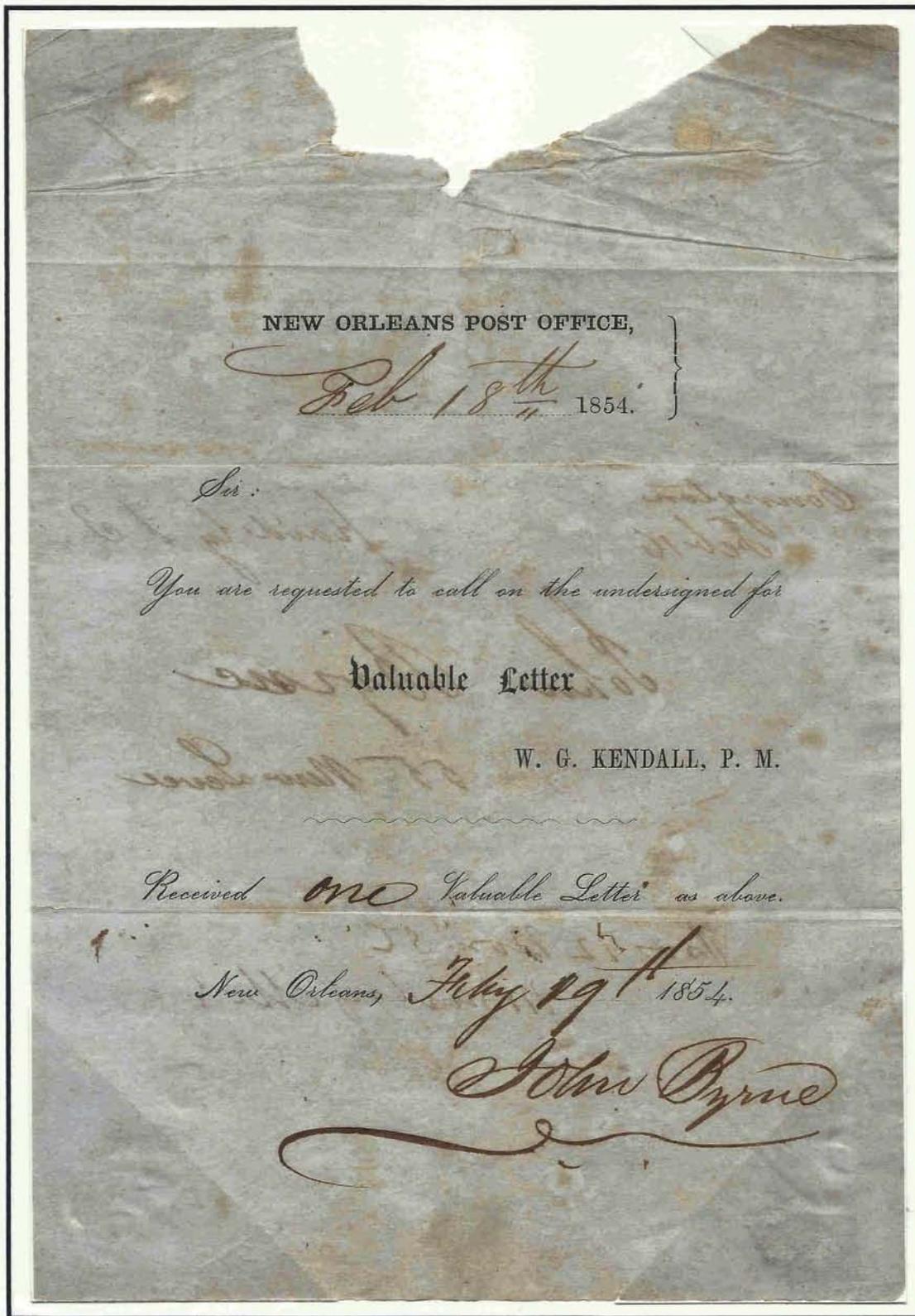
Manuscript "Registered No 197" on letter containing \$450 in bank bills.
Sender also requested collection on three notes totaling an additional \$1,020.



New Orleans, LA March 28, 1854 red REGISTERED hand stamp with manuscript "valuable"

New Orleans Documentation

Form signed acknowledging the receipt of a valuable letter at New Orleans.
This form served as a notice to pick up a valuable letter as well as a return receipt.



New Orleans, LA February 19, 1854
"You are requested to call for a Valuable Letter"

New Orleans Outgoing Items



New Orleans, LA February 11, 1854

Signed "Valuable Letter" form mailed back to sender of the item in first class mail, unpaid.



New Orleans, LA March 24, 1854 (by addressee notation on reverse)

"Valuable" letter dispatched by river from New Orleans.

William G. Kendall succeeded Musson as postmaster April 7, 1853. Unfortunately, his tenure as postmaster ended in a scandal involving the pilfering of unofficial registered mail. He was indicted and tried but not convicted of this crime.

Existence Of Unofficial Registered Mail Finally Recognized



Little Rock, AR October 4, 1853 (by addressee notation
Manuscript "Registered" and "No 320 \$50" applied at the post office of mailing.
Letter verifies inclusion of \$50 in cash from the addressee's father, a friend of the sender.



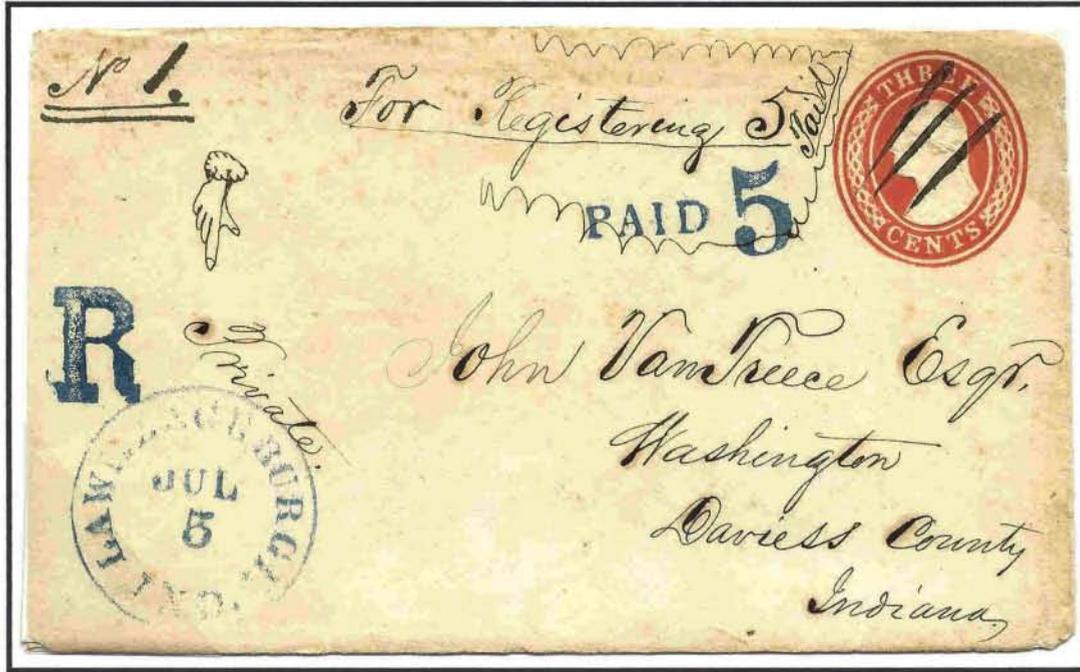
Chillicothe, OH April 14, 1854
Business letter containing \$30 mailed "Registerrd"

Official releases issued by governmental executive branch departments were published in the Washington, D.C. newspaper *The Semi-Weekly Union*. The post office acknowledged it was aware of the existence of an unofficial registry system at some post offices by publishing the following notice June 30, 1855:

Registered Letters - We are advised that postmasters should make no record or marks upon registration letters by which the fact of their containing money or other valuables may be suspected or made known. It had been ascertained that, in some instances, postmasters are in the habit of marking the word "registered" on the outside of such letters, together with the amount of money enclosed. This practice is unauthorized impolitic, and is forbidden by the department.

Registered Mail In The Cash Fee Period

A Number One Registered



Laurenceburgh (Lawrenceburg), IN July 5 (by date line)

Early sender declared valuable first class letter receiving registered service. The five-cent registration fee, payable in cash, became effective July 1, 1855. The "PAID" and "5" rating devices are seen on earlier stampless covers from this post office. Blue ink was used at Laurenceburgh intermittently from 1853 to 1856. The "R" device only known use at Laurenceburgh on this cover.

The New Postage Act approved March 3, 1855 effective July 1, 1855 authorized the Postmaster General to establish a "uniform plan for the registration of such letters" as follows:

Sec. 3. And be it further enacted, That for the greater security of valuable letters posted for transmissions in the mails of the United States, the Postmaster General be and hereby is authorized to establish a uniform plan for the registration of such letters on application of parties posting the same, and to require the prepayment of postage, as well as a registration fee of five cents on every such letter or packet to be accounted for by postmasters receiving the same in such manner as the Postmaster General shall direct: Provided, however, That the registration shall not be compulsory; and it shall not render the Post Office Department or its revenue liable for the loss of such letters or packets or the contents thereof.

Instructions To Postmasters And Notice To The Public were issued May 10, 1855 detailing the forms and procedures for handling registered mail establishing a traceable "chain of custody" documenting the path each registered item took from its sender to addressee. It was silent as to marking an item as being registered. The *List of Post Offices in the United States* dated July 1, 1855 added the following regulation:

Sec. 347. Postmasters are forbidden to mark, or enter of any kind, on registered letters indicating that they contain a valuable enclosure.

How Should Registered Mail Be Marked?

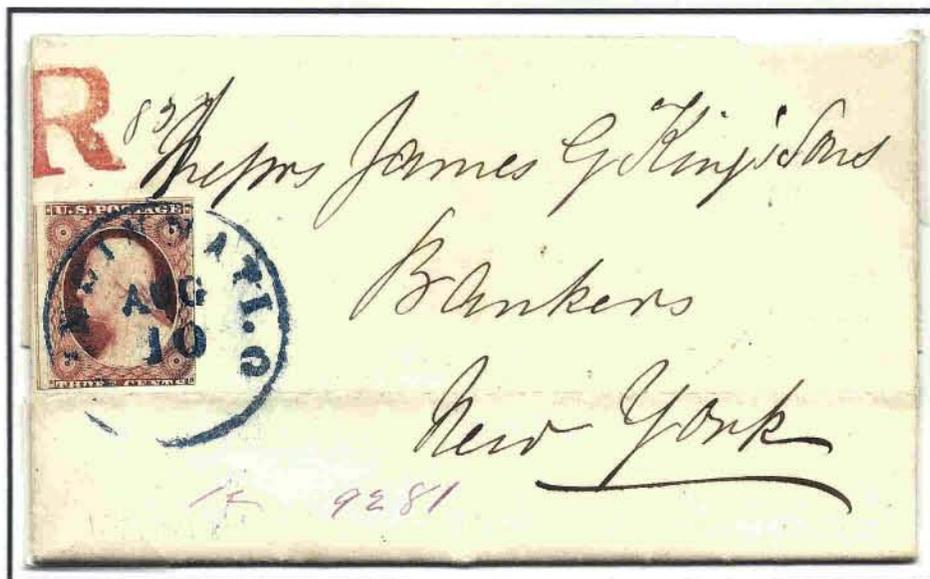


Wilkes Barre, PA July 21, 1855

Manuscript "Registered" marked out but number "56" remains. Addressee note of valuable contents were added after receipt. Was "Registered" considered an improper endorsement?

Postmaster General Campbell issued additional instructions, published in the Washington, D.C. Semi-Weekly Union October 10, 1855 (effective date not given) clarifying the marking requirements on registered mail:

... 2d. All registered letters are, before mailing, to be numbered on the upper left-hand corner; their numbers to correspond with those on the letter bills in which they are entered.



Cincinnati, OH August 10, 1857 (by date line)

Return Registered Letter Bill

RETURN REGISTERED LETTER BILL.

To be filled up, and sent back to this office.

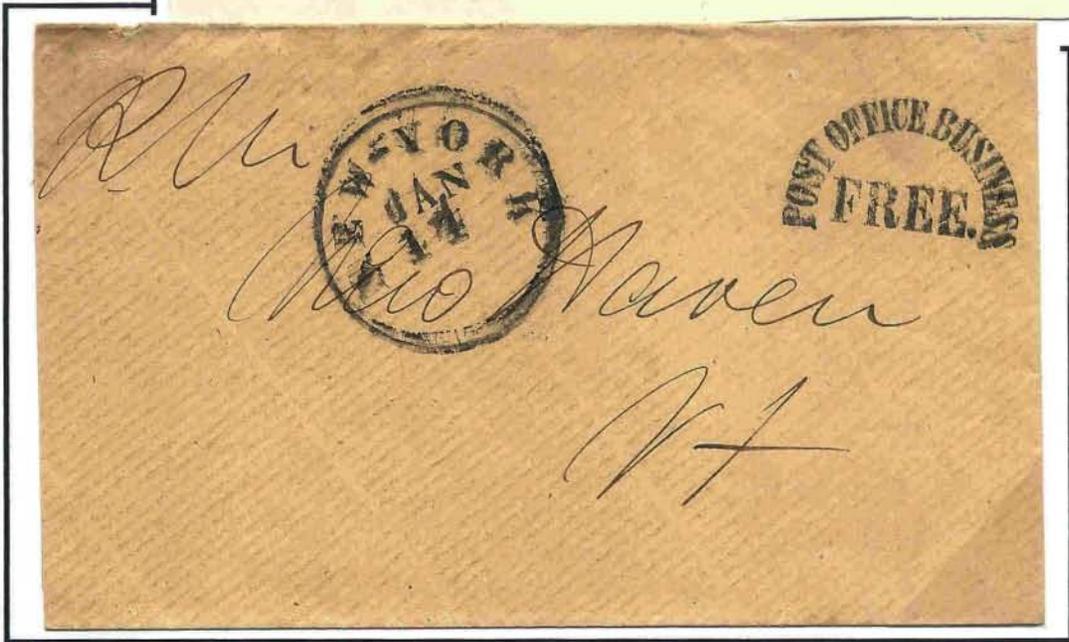
Upon the receipt of the package of Registered Letters to which the annexed bill relates, the Postmaster will make a duplicate bill thereof, by filling up this blank, and mark it correct, if it be found so, or note upon it any error that may be found. He will then enclose it in a sealed envelope, direct it to the Postmaster, and mail it direct to THIS OFFICE.

Post Office, *New York, Jan 13 1856*

REGISTERED LETTERS Received from *New Haven, Ct, Jan 12*

No.	To whom addressed.	Regis-try Fees. Cents.	Originally paid at this office.		Free. No.
			By Stamps. Dolls. Cents.	In Money. Dolls. Cents.	
<i>3104</i>					
<i>3</i>	<i>Henry Bryant</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>3</i>		
	<i>Correct</i>				

W. Colton
Jan P. M



New York, NY January 14, 1856 (by contents)
Return Registered Letter Bill returned to originating post office in this envelope.
documented safe receipt of letter noted thereon.

Money Sent By Registered Mail



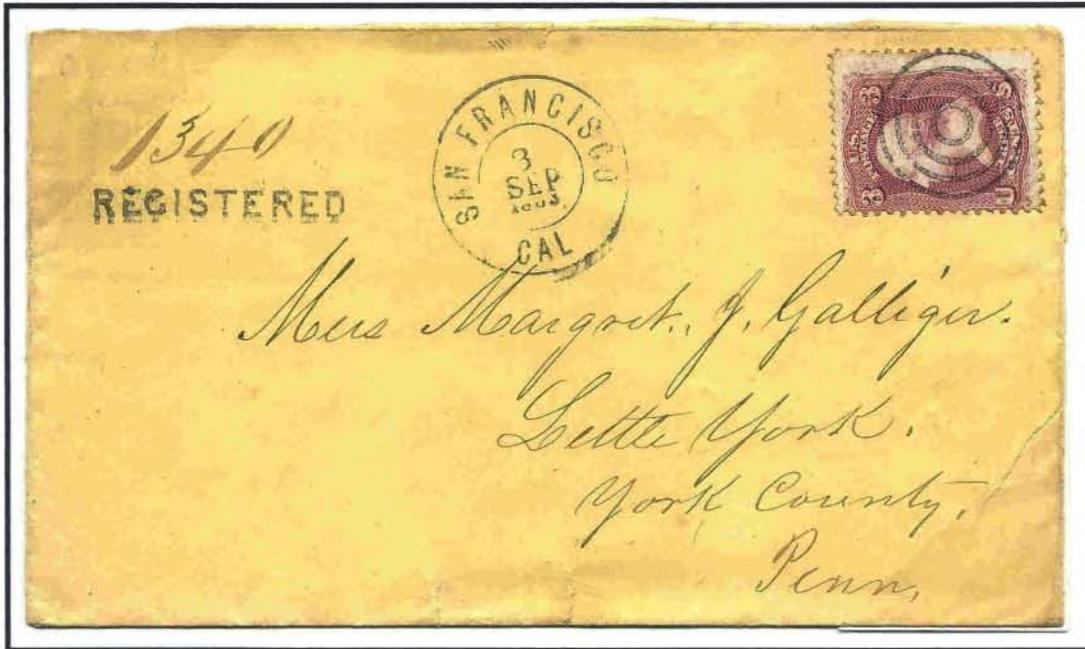
Indianapolis, IN March 20, 1860

Heavy envelope containing money required three units of letter postage. "Money \$4.00" notation added after receipt.

Twenty-Cent Cash Fee Registration Rate July 1, 1863 To May 31, 1867

Detailed instructions prescribing changes to be implemented in the handling of registered mail were issued by Postmaster General Montgomery Blair and published in the April, 1863 issue of *United States Mail And Post Office Assistant*:

Instruction No. 32. ... The registration fee is twenty cents. ... In addition to the registered number in the upper left hand corner of the letter, the word "Registered" should be plainly written or stamped on the face of the same.



San Francisco, CA September 3, 1863



Philadelphia, PA April 26, 1864
Straight-line "REGISTERED" used to obliterate stamp.

Return Receipt Now Goes Directly Back To The Sender Of A Registered Letter

Instruction No. 32 instructed that Registered Return Receipts now be mailed back to the sender of a registered letter. Cornelius O'Brian, Treasurer of Dearborn County, Indiana, received this Return Registered Letter Receipt signed by the Treasurer of Scott County, Indiana confirming delivery of his valuable letter.

RETURN REGISTERED LETTER RECEIPT.	
<p>NOTE.—This return receipt, after being signed by the party to whom the letter or package which accompanies it is delivered, must be immediately enclosed to the Postmaster at the office where it originated.</p> <p>☞ Should the registered letter not be delivered, this receipt must be forwarded with it, in due course, to the Dead Letter Office.</p>	
<p>No. <u>25</u> <u>Mch 14 1864.</u></p>	
<p>Mailed at <u>Laurenceburg. IND</u></p>	
<p>by <u>C. O'Brien</u></p>	
<p>a letter addressed to <u>Treasurer of Scott Co</u> <u>Lexington. Ind</u></p>	
<p>Stamp here the office and date of delivery</p>	<p>Received the above described letter.</p>
<p>Sign here. }</p>	<p><u>John Colvin</u></p>



Return Registered Letter Bill

RETURN REGISTER LETTER BILL.

Letters Received at New York 186

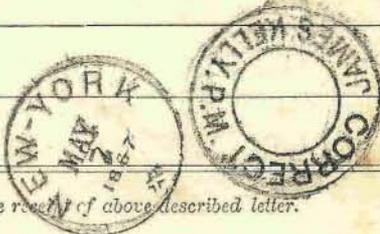
From Brooklyn N.Y.

Mary

NO.	ADDRESS.	FEE.
2	Antonia Hamilton	
	Washington	
	D.C.	10

I hereby acknowledge the receipt of above described letter.

P. M.




New York, NY May 7, 1867 (by contents)

Twenty-Cent Cash Fee Registration Rate July 1, 1863 To May 31, 1867



Lebanon, IL October 26, 1864



Atlanta, GA March 5, 1867
Indistinct Railroad marking with "US" mark.