

United States 90¢ Stationery

Reay and Plimpton Issues / Source Material and Usages

History

High value stationery was progressively introduced by the US Post Office starting in 1861 and culminating with the first 90-cent value in 1870. Modern collectors, thinking of letters, find 90-cent envelopes to be illogical. There were very few items of such weight to justify a high postal rate in a small envelope, particularly after lowering of foreign postal rates coinciding with the General Postal Union (GPU) on July 1, 1875. Given the practical culture of the US Post Office in the 1800s, suspicions of a legitimate purpose only come from a lack of knowledge of the postal services of that period.

High value envelopes were not intended for actual letters as correspondence would almost never reach that tariff level based on the limited size of the envelopes. Rather, the 90-cent envelope functioned as a “parcel” envelope which traveled with parcels. Like parcel cards and forms commonly used in Europe, envelopes allowed for an easier process of sorting parcels in the distribution systems of the day. The envelope was preferred in the US postal system of that period as it could also carry documents accompanying a parcel.



Havana, Mexico
11 March, 1886

Study

Before the creation of a parcel post service with lower tariffs, parcels were sent at letter rates, both domestically and overseas. In such cases, it was easy for a parcel to exceed the 90-cent tariff: 9 ounces for foreign mail between 1875-1907 (at 5¢ per half-ounce); 15 ounces for domestic mail from 1861-1883 (at 3¢ per half-ounce) and 45 ounces for domestic mail from October 1, 1883 into the early 20th century (at 2¢ per ounce). As private parcel services opened for business (the PO monopoly only applied to letter mail), PO sorting systems changed and postage rates fell, eliminating the need for higher value envelopes. This resulted in the last printings of high value envelopes in 1894 with the latest known usage in 1915.



Red D Line S(team) S(hip) 1/28/86., N.Y.

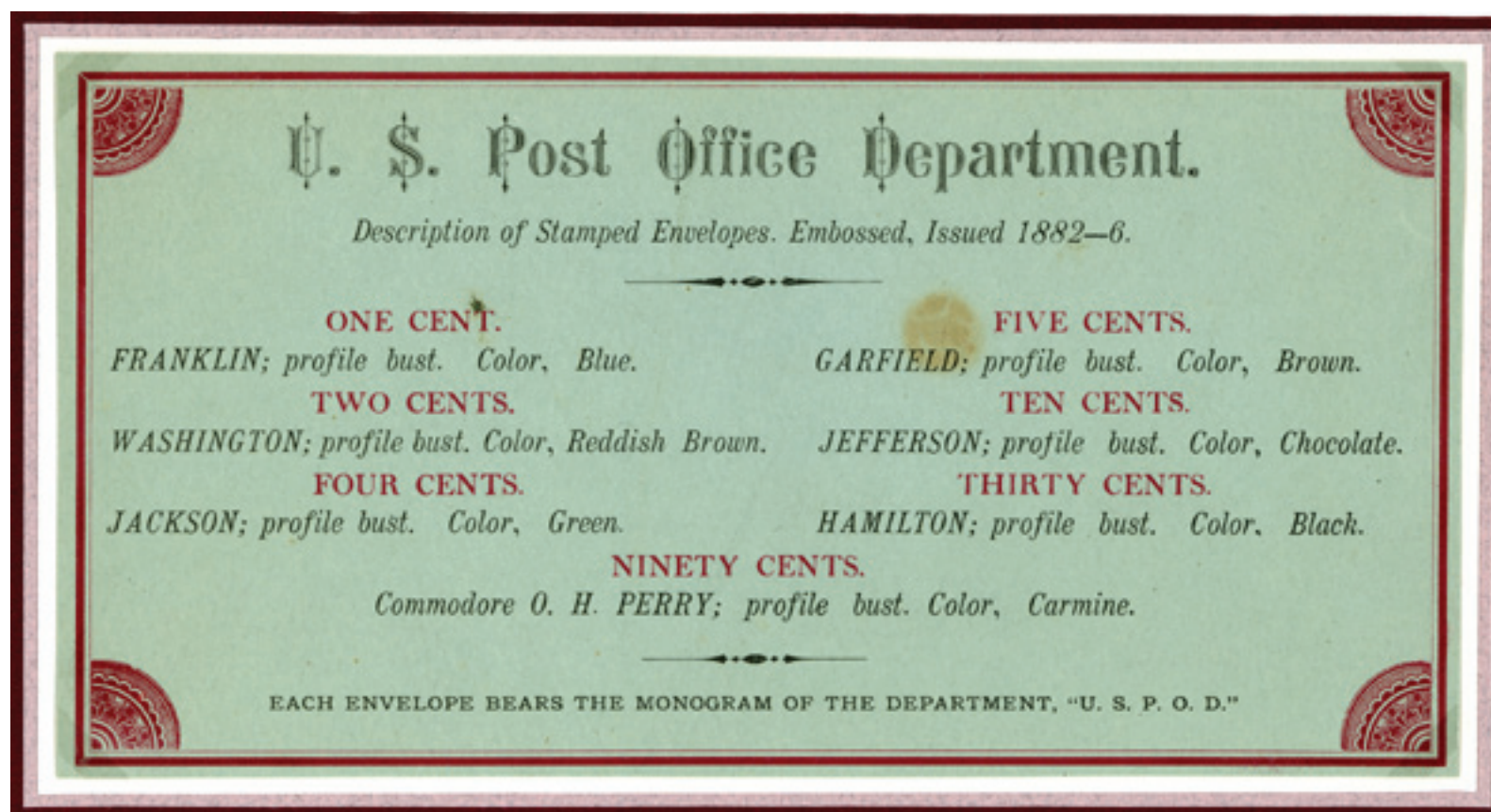
These envelopes, when used for parcels, typically contain two or more sets of numbers on their face: a registration number and a parcel number. The parcel number was an easy identifier for a “bin room” function as the parcels were moved in transit and ultimately called-for by the addressee at the post office of destination. The few surviving 90-cent covers, went primarily to Europe: Germany, France and Sweden; none are known to South America. Virtually all used examples are legal and extra-large sizes. ‘Printed to private order’ envelopes were produced in 1888 for a so-called stamp dealer ‘consortium’. None were postally used and they are omitted from this exhibit.

Facing Slip

Exhibit Content

Essays, paper samples and specimen envelopes illustrate printer proposals, many of which are unique. Both domestic and international usages of actual issues are rare.

Fewer than 35 of the 90-cent postally used envelopes are recorded of which half are shown. Given the variety of colors of embossed stamps as well as different papers and envelope sizes, most examples stand as rarities in American philately.





Exhibitor records nine different colors/shades

Only recorded example of essay with manuscript note



Type Identification

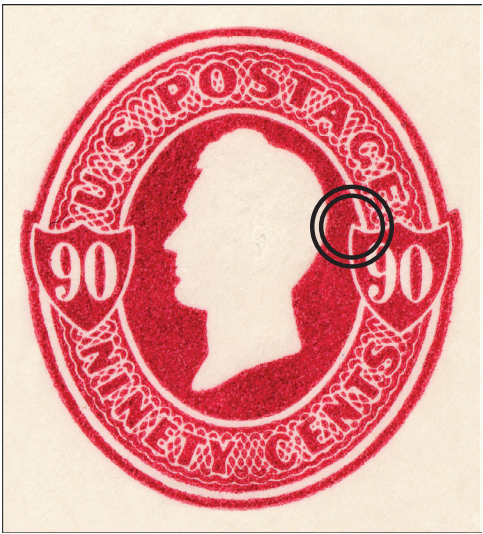
Design and Watermark Differences



Reay printing



Shield design differences



Plimpton printing



Watermark 2



Watermark 5



Watermark 6



Watermark 7

1870-1874
George H. Reay
Watermark 5

Specimen



Reay Specimen Envelope

1870-1874
George H. Reay
Watermark 2

Specimen



Two recorded examples of a specimen Reay envelope with watermark 2.

1870-1874
George H. Reay
Watermark 2

Usage



Watermark 2



Baltimore, Md. to München, Germany, 20 February, 1893, registered (10¢).
Backstamped München, 3 March, 1893.

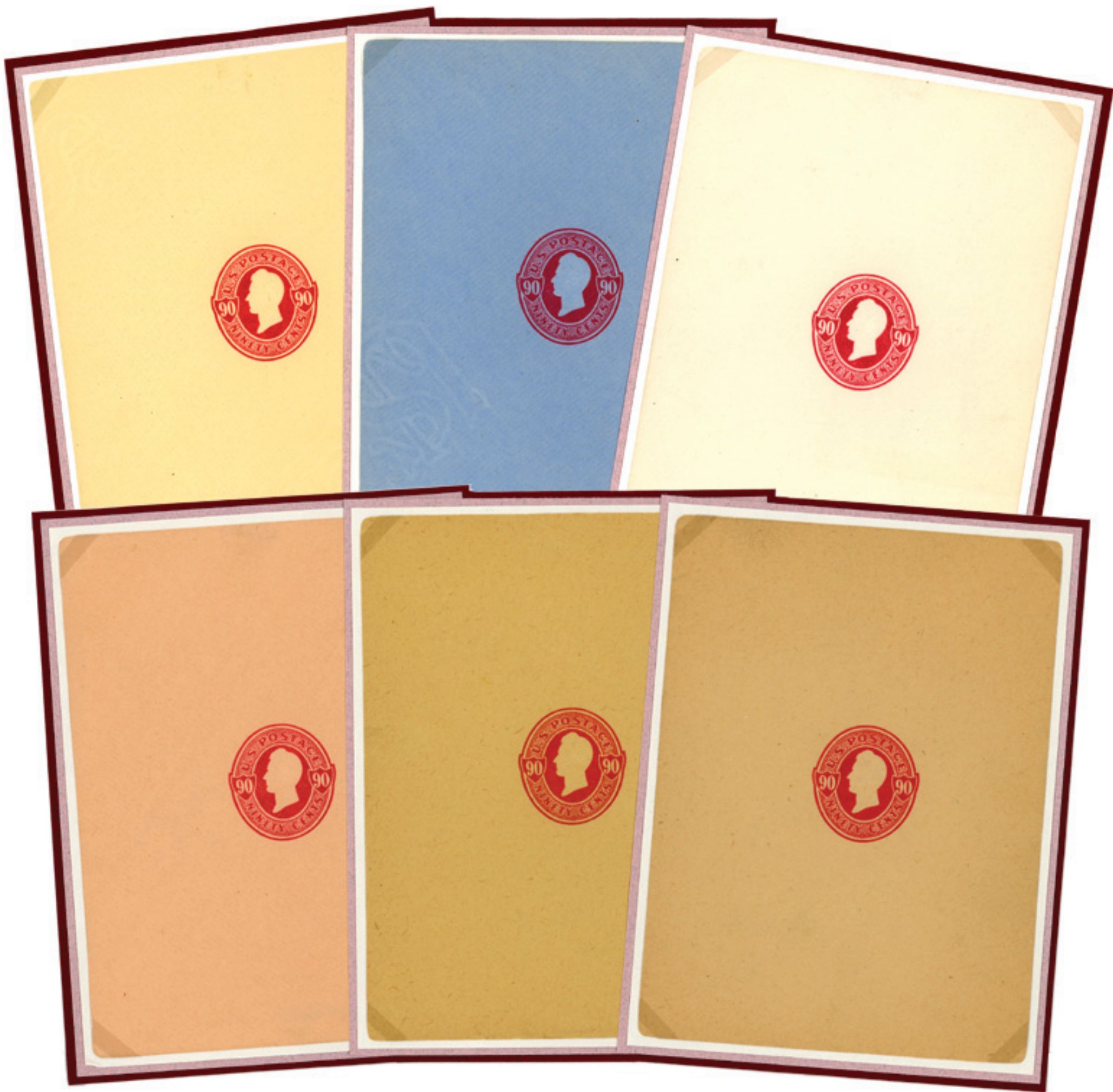
Only recorded example of a postally used 90¢ Reay envelope on cream paper.



Scan of rear

1874-1903
Plimpton Manufacturing Company
Watermark 7

Bidder's Paper Samples



1874-1903
Plimpton Manufacturing Company
Watermark 7

Bidder's Paper Samples



First, second and third quality paper samples.

1874-1903
Plimpton Manufacturing Company
Watermark 6

Specimen



Bluish paper specimen.

1874-1903
Plimpton Manufacturing Company
Watermark 5

Government Frame Sample Used as Postage

The Post Office Department used special wooden frames containing samples of actual envelopes which were hung in the lobbies of Main Post Offices. These envelopes had information as to paper quality and quantity purchase price specially printed on them for the benefit of Post Office patrons.



Watermark 5
Unlisted on this
value in catalog



Philadelphia, Pa. to Paris, France, 12 February, 1889, registered (10¢).
Backstamped Paris, 26 February, 1889.
(faded indicia color due to sunlight exposure in post office lobby)

Quality and
Price imprint

Only recorded example of a postally used 90¢ Frame Sample.



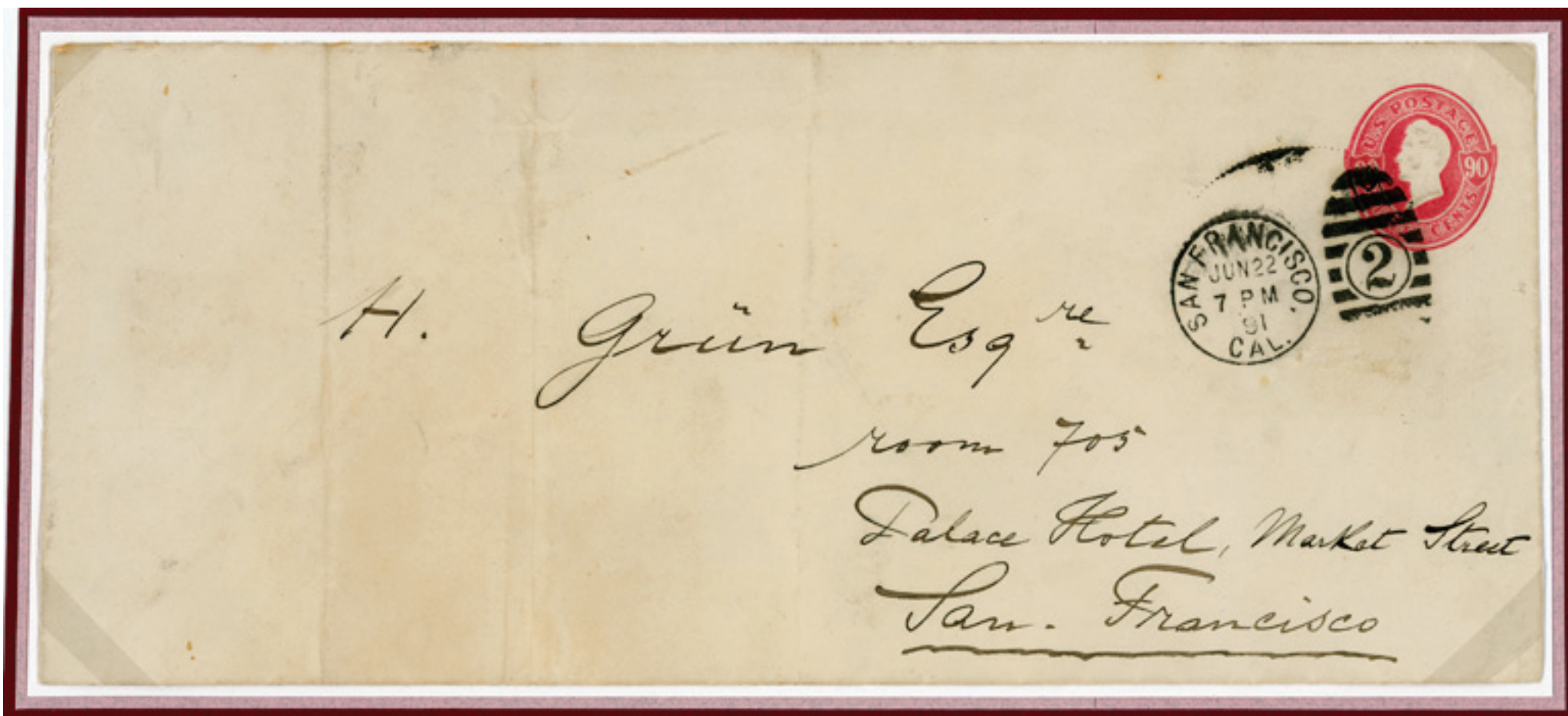
Scan of rear

1874-1903

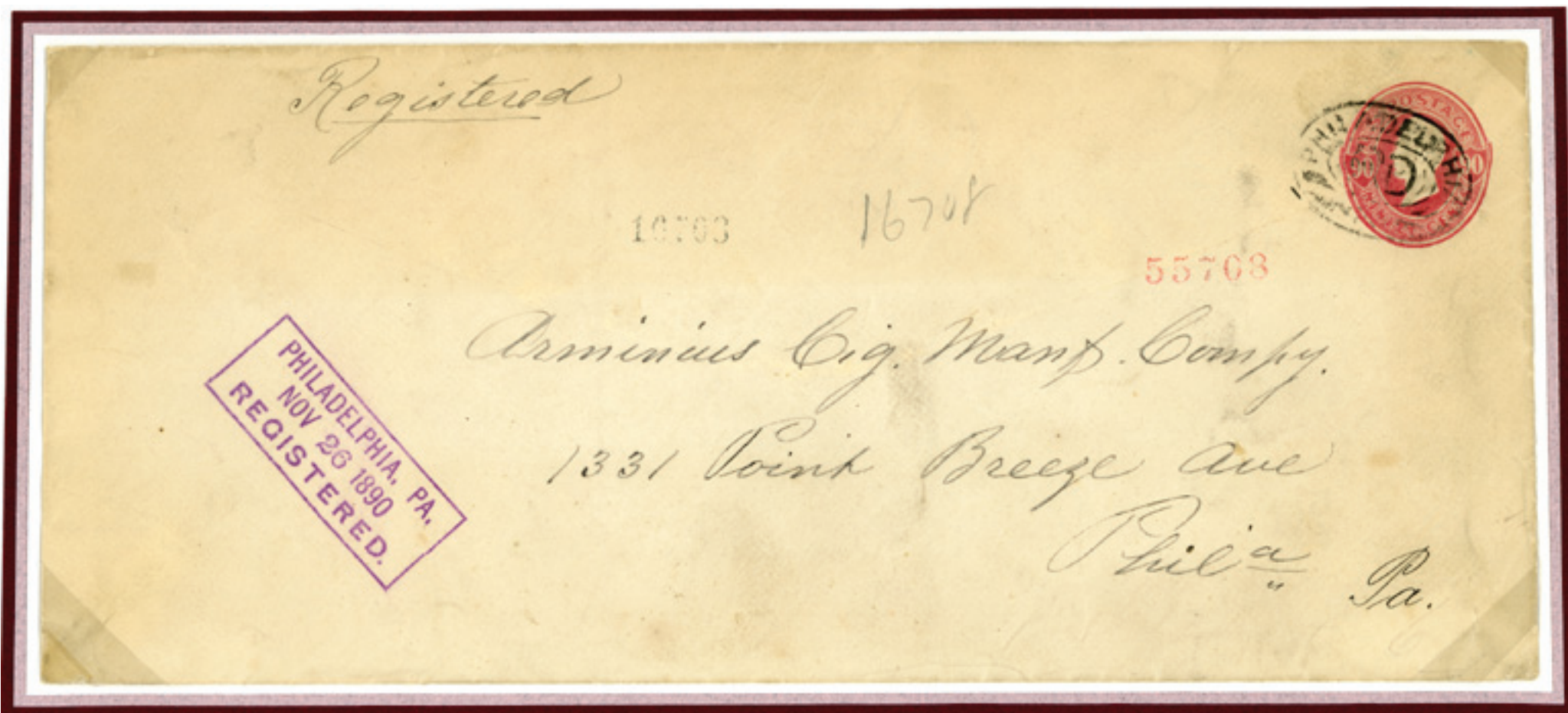
Plimpton Manufacturing Company

Watermark 6

Usage



Local use within San Francisco, Ca., 22 June, 1891.



Local use within Philadelphia, Pa., 26 November, 1890, registered (10¢).

1874-1903

Plimpton Manufacturing Company

Watermark 6

Usage



New York, N.Y. to Paris, France, 14 April, 1886, registered (10¢).
On board S.S. Fulda, via England.



San Francisco, Cal. to Paris, France, 23 April, 1887, registered (10¢).

1874-1903

Plimpton Manufacturing Company

Watermark 6

Usage



Philadelphia, Pa. to Leipzig, Germany, 26 March, 1888, registered (10¢).
Backstamped Leipzig, 9 April, 1888.



Galveston, Tx. to Leipzig, Germany, 21 November, 1889, registered (10¢).
Backstamped Leipzig, 6 December, 1889.

1874-1903

Plimpton Manufacturing Company

Watermark 6

Usage



Chicago, Il. (World's Fair Station) to Zürich, Switzerland, 12 August, 1893, registered (10¢) - missing label.
Backstamped Zürich, 25 August, 1893.



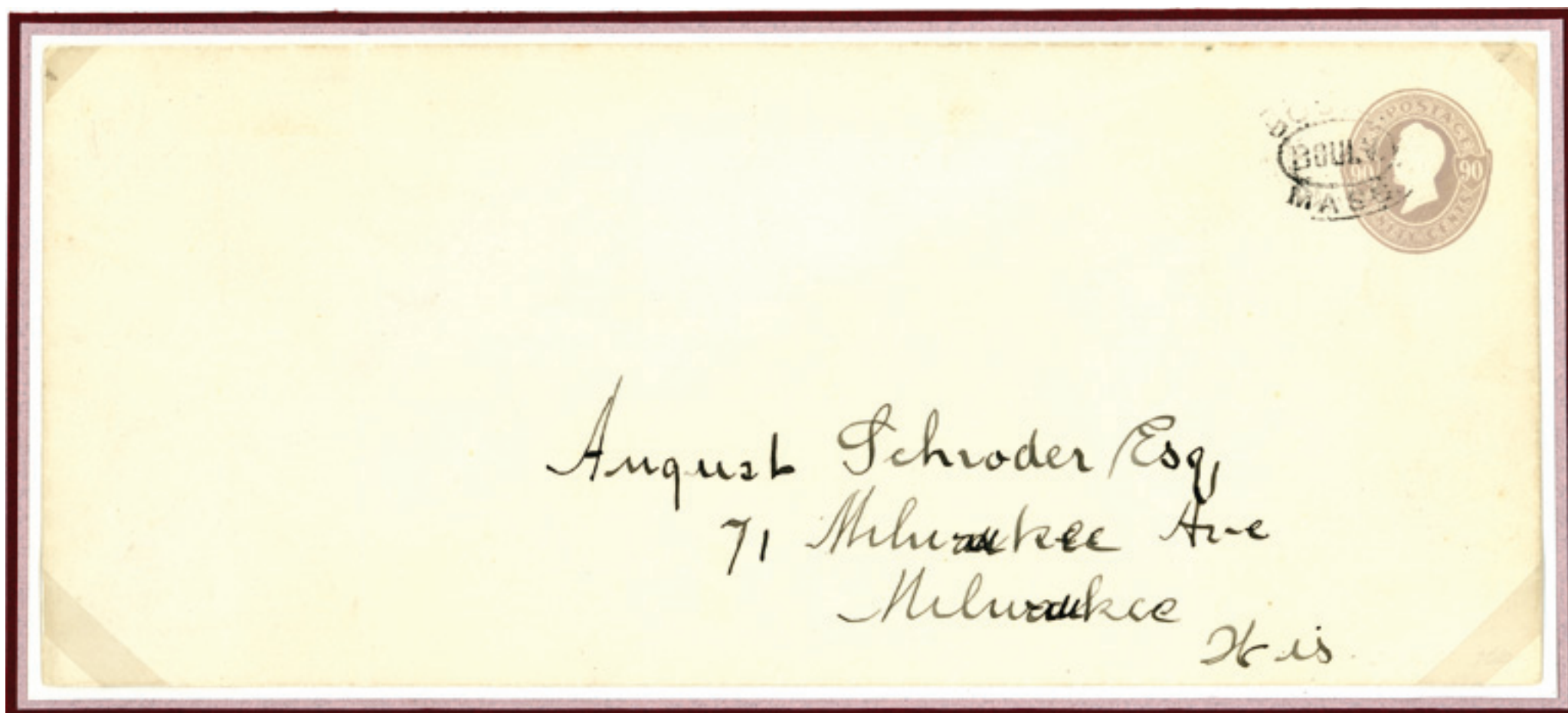
New York, N.Y. to Mons, Belgium, 12 December, 1907, registered (10¢) - missing label.
Backstamped Mons, 22 December, 1907.

1874-1903

Plimpton Manufacturing Company

Watermark 7

Usage



Boston, Ma. to Milwaukee, Wis., circa 1887, parcel post cancel.



Fort Smith, Ar. to Bovey, Mn., 21 April, 1915, registered (10¢), return receipt requested (free).
Single line "Return Receipt Demanded", Backstamped Bovey, Mn., 23 April, 1915.

1874-1903

Plimpton Manufacturing Company

Watermark 7

Usage



New York, N.Y. to Bucarest, Romania, 21 February, 1891, registered (10¢).
Backstamped Bucarest, 3 March, 1891.



Chicago, Ill. to Neumünster, Germany, 28 March, 1908, registered (10¢).
Forwarded to Wiesbaden, Germany.
Backstamped Neumünster, 8 April, Wiesbaden, 9 April, 1908.

1874-1903

Plimpton Manufacturing Company

Watermark 7

Usage



New York, N.Y. to Düsseldorf, Germany, 4 November, 1890, registered (10¢).
Backstamped Düsseldorf, 13 November, 1890.



New York, N.Y. to Düsseldorf, Germany, 12 November, 1890, registered (10¢).
Backstamped Düsseldorf, 20 November, 1890.



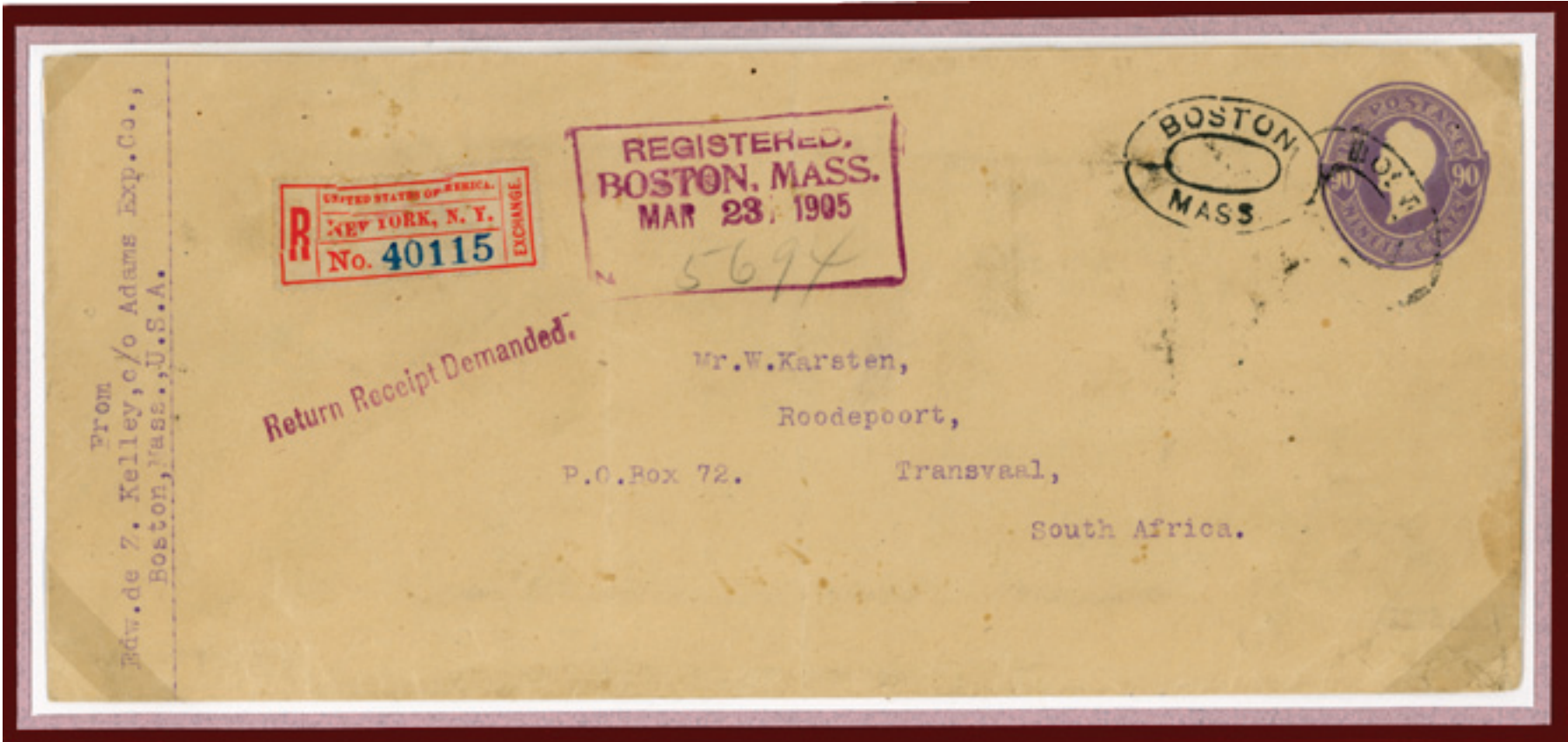
New York, N.Y. to Aix la Chapelle, Prussia, 19 November, 1890, registered (10¢).
Backstamped Aix la Chapelle, 30 November, 1890.



New York, N.Y. to Aix la Chapelle, Prussia, 1 December, 1890, registered (10¢).
Backstamped Aix la Chapelle, 13 December, 1890.



Newton, Ma. to Java, Dutch Indies, 12 March, 1906, registered (10¢).
(Domestic registration mis-charged 8¢), Return receipt demanded (5¢).



Boston, Ma. to Roodepoort, Transvaal, South Africa, 23 March, 1905, registered (10¢), return receipt demanded (5¢).
Backstamped New York, N.Y. Registry 24 March, 1905, Roodepoort, South Africa 20 April, 1906.