

## THE U.S.-GERMAN POSTAL TREATY RATE OF 1909-1915:

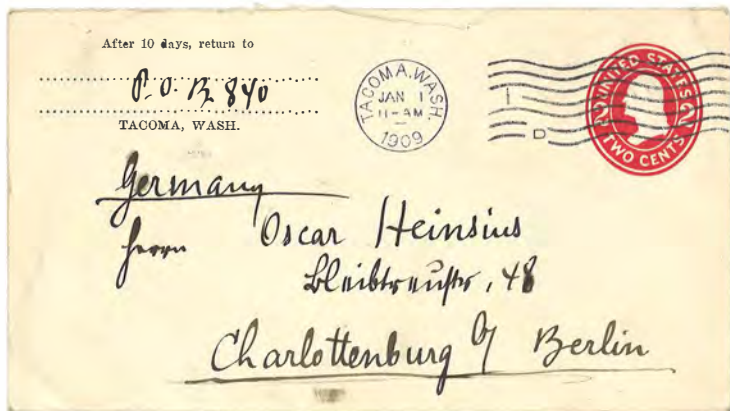
### CREATING CONFUSION BUT SAVING MONEY

The U.S.-German Postal Rate Treaty of 1909-1915 was in effect from January 1, 1909 through February 4, 1915. This rate reduced the first class letter rate for letters sent to Germany from the normal UPU rate in effect during this time period, 5 cents per ounce and 3 cents for each additional ounce, to a straight 2 cents per ounce. But there was a catch, unlike 20<sup>th</sup> Century reduced-rate mail sent to other countries: the letter had to travel on a ship going directly from the US to Germany. If the ship carrying the letter stopped at any port outside the United States prior to reaching Germany, the regular UPU rate, not the treaty rate, applied. Until the outbreak of WWI, the ships of the North German Lloyd Line ("NGL") and the Hamburg-American Line ("HAL") provided direct service between the United States and Germany. After the outbreak of WWI, only lines from neutral countries provided direct service to Germany.

One would expect that, to avoid confusion, the Post Office would have required that first class letters be endorsed to be carried by a ship travelling directly from the United States to Germany in order to qualify for the treaty rate. But that was not the case. No such endorsement was required to take advantage of the treaty rate. The absence of any such endorsement sometimes caused confusion on the part of postal workers. Nevertheless, use of the treaty rate saved the sender of the letter three cents. A penny in 1909 would be worth almost 28 cents today. Thus, the sender of a treaty rate letter saved the equivalent of almost 84 cents in today's money for each letter sent.

#### FIRST DATE OF RATE

Letter Sent to Germany at the Treaty Rate Mailed on the First Day of the Rate, January 1, 1909

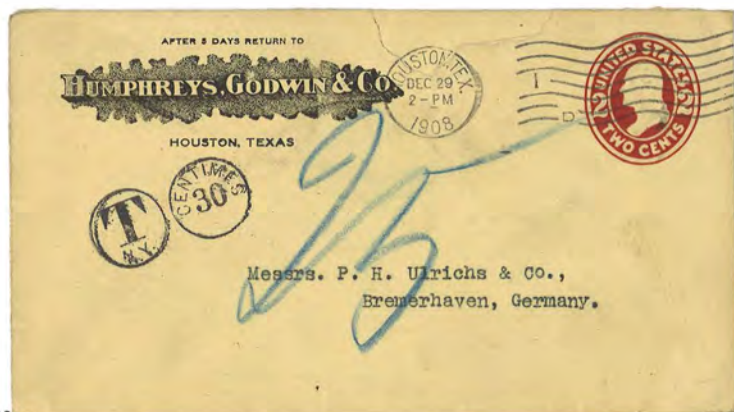


CONFUSION

Postal clerks were sometimes confused by the new treaty rate. Below is a double rate letter sent from Boston on January 12, 1909, shortly after the rate took effect. Even though the letter is endorsed "by German Lloyd Steamer," the postal clerk initially treated this letter as a single weight letter underpaid by one cent, marking the letter postage due. The clerk then realized their mistake and obliterated the postage due marking.



Confusion also existed amongst the public about the treaty rate. The letter below was mailed on December 29, 1908, three days before the treaty rate took effect, and was charged postage due.



ADDING HAWAII

Initially, the treaty rate only applied to the Continental United States. On August 1, 1909, the treaty rate was extended to include letters mailed from Hawaii. Below is a treaty rate letter sent from Naalehu, Hawaii on Oct. 12, 1911. This post office was open only between 1909 and 1916.



Below is a letter sent from Lahaina on June 16, 1909, shortly before the treaty rate took effect in Hawaii.



## POST CARDS

The treaty rate did not lower the rate for post cards sent from the U.S. to Germany, which remained at two cents. Nevertheless, post cards could be sent at the treaty rate when postal regulations required that the post cards be treated as a letter. Below is a leather post card sent from Friend, Nebraska in June, 1911. Leather post cards did not meet UPU specifications for "post cards" and thus were treated as "letters." This "post card" treated as a "letter" was full paid at the treaty rate, and thus was not charge postage due.



Below is a post card sent at the UPU regular post card rate. It is a first day cover of the two cent Lincoln commemorative, issued on February 12, 1909.



## MORE CONFUSION

Confusion on the part of postal clerks continued, particularly when a letter was not endorsed to be carried by a ship travelling directly to Germany. Letters addressed to Germany franked with identical amount of postage could be treated differently. Below is a letter sent from New York on September 1, 1913. It was franked with a pair of two cent parcel post stamps, which became valid to pay regular postage on July 1, 1913. It was treated as a double weight treaty rate letter and was not assessed postage due.

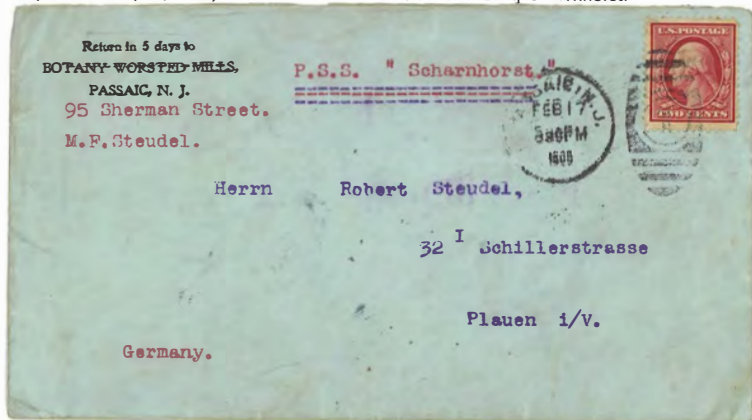


Below is a letter sent from New York on January 2, 1914. It was franked with a single four cent Washington stamp. It was treated as an underpaid single weight non-treaty rate letter and was assessed postage due.



AVOIDING CONFUSION

To avoid confusion on the part of postal clerks, the best practice was to endorse the cover to travel on a specific ship that was sailing directly to Germany. Below is a single weight treaty rate cover sent from Passaic, New Jersey on February 17, 1909, endorsed to be carried on the NDL ship Scharnhorst.



Below is a quadruple weight treaty rate cover sent from New York in September, 1913, endorsed to be carried on the NDL ship Kaiser Wilhelm Der Grosse.



REGISTERED MAIL

During the treaty rate period there were two different fees for registered mail. From January 1, 1909 through October 31, 1909, the registration fee was eight cents. Below is a letter sent from New York on May 29, 1909 franked with a pair of five cent Washington stamps paying the single weight treaty rate and registration fee.



From November 1, 1909 through the end of the treaty rate period, the registration fee was ten cents. Below is a letter sent from New York on September 25, 1911 franked with a pair of six cent Washington stamps paying the single weight treaty rate and the registration fee.



AVOIDING CONFUSION – REGISTERED MAIL

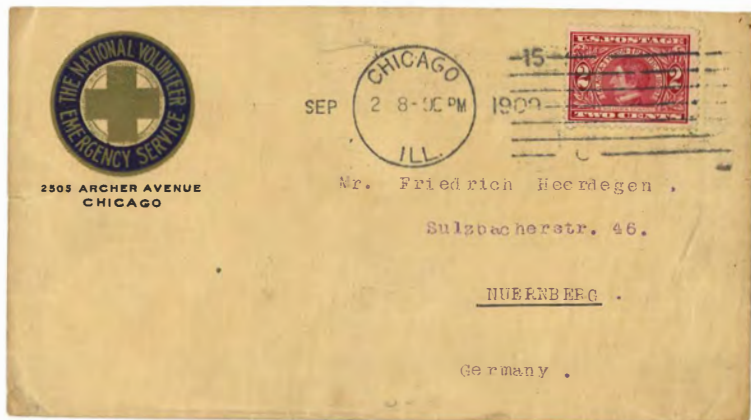
Neither of the registered letters shown above are endorsed to be carried by a ship traveling directly to Germany. The best practice was to include such an endorsement. Below is a two cent Washington postal envelope, updated with a ten cent Parcel Post stamp, paying the single weight treaty rate and registration fee, sent from New York on December 1, 1913. It is endorsed to be carried via the NDL or HAL ship Kronprinzessin Cecilie. The ten cent Parcel Post stamp shows the German postal steamer Kronprinz Wilhelm, which provided treaty rate service to and from Germany.





### SAVING MONEY

Saving money on postage for letters sent to Germany was important for certain types of organizations, such as charities and government agencies, where budgets were limited. Below is a treaty rate letter sent from Chicago on October 8, 1909 by the National Volunteer Emergency Service.



Below is a treaty rate letter sent by the Department of Interior in Washington, D.C. on March 22, 1913. This is a penalty envelope uprated with a two cent Washington stamp. Letters sent abroad on official government business other than official post office business required postage.



SAVING MONEY FOR THE FATHERLAND

Individuals working at German Consulates in the United States would have been shirking their duty to their employer had they not taken advantage of the treaty rate when sending mail back to Germany. Below is a single weight registered treaty rate letter sent from the German Consulate in Seattle, Washington on March 31, 1910. Note the two different types of registration etiquettes.



TREATY RATE MAIL FROM THE SHIP CARRYING THE TREATY RATE MAIL – SPECIAL DELIVERY

The letter below was mailed at the U.S. post office on board a German postal steamer traveling directly from the United States to Germany. These seapost offices were manned by U.S. postal clerks on eastbound voyages and thus required payment of postage in U.S. postage stamps. This letter appears to have been rated a double weight treaty rate letter, with special delivery service in the United States. After being transported to Germany, it would have been carried on the first German postal steamer leaving Germany for the United States after the ship arrived in Germany. No special delivery service was available until the letter arrived in the United States.



FORWARDED MAIL – US DOMESTIC MAIL FORWARDED TO GERMANY

During the entire treaty rate period, the U.S. domestic first class letter rate was two cents per ounce. Because the treaty rate was the same as the U.S. domestic rate, in theory a letter sent domestically within the U.S. and forwarded to Germany via the treaty rate would not be charged any postage due. Below is a letter sent from Grand Rapids, MI on October 19, 1909 to one Mr. H. Bamber in Philadelphia. Mr. Bamber had apparently departed for Germany by the time the letter arrived, and the letter was forwarded at the treaty rate, without any additional postage due.



FORWARDED MAIL – U.S. TO GERMANY FORWARDED TO OTHER TREATY RATE COUNTRIES AND U.S. TO OTHER TREATY RATE COUNTRIES FORWARDED TO GERMANY

The treaty rate applied only to mail sent directly to Germany from the U.S. Mail sent to third countries and then forwarded to Germany, even mail to third countries which had the same treaty rate with the United States as the U.S.-German treaty rate, was charged postage due for the difference between the treaty rate postage paid in the United States and the regular UPU letter rate. Below is a letter sent from New York to Great Britain on May 14, 1914 at the U.S.-Great Britain treaty rate of two cents per ounce for first class letters. The intended recipient had departed for Germany by the time the letter arrived. The forwarding agent readdressed the letter to Germany and added the postage necessary to pay the difference between the U.S.-G.B. treaty rate and the UPU regular first class letter rate.



Below is a letter sent to Germany from Nazareth, PA on March 8, 1911 at the treaty rate. The letter was forwarded to London, and someone in Germany added the postage necessary to pay the difference between the U.S.-Germany treaty rate and the UPU regular first class letter rate.



THE OUTBREAK OF WWI

Upon the outbreak of WWI, most German postal steamers either sailed back to Germany or took refuge in neutral ports. The outbreak of WWI did not stop the delivery of treaty rate mail to Germany. Below is a cover mailed from Cleveland, Ohio on July 30, 1914, just before WWI broke out. It is franked with a single two cent Washington coil stamp paying the treaty rate. The cover was censored in Köln, Germany.



TREATY RATE MAIL SENT AFTER THE OUTBREAK OF WWI

Because German mail steamers were not sailing after the outbreak of WWI, direct mail steamer service from the U.S. to Germany was possible only via ships from neutral countries such as Holland, Norway, and Sweden. Below is a treaty rate letter sent to Berlin, Germany from Boston, MA on August 12, 1914, after the outbreak of the war. Although addressed to Berlin, at the lower left the sender wrote "c/o Thos. Cook & Son, London, England." Due to the war, mail service between Germany and England had been suspended. Thus, the German PO returned the letter to the sender.



Below is a treaty rate letter sent by the U.S. Patent Office on November 16, 1914. Had the letter not traveled directly from the U.S. to Germany, it undoubtedly would have been detained by the British, who were not shy about inspecting and detaining mail bound for Germany when neutral ships stopped in England carrying such mail.



THE LAST DATE OF THE RATE – SUPPLEMENTARY MAIL

The last date of the treaty rate was February 4, 1915. By this date this rate had outlived its usefulness, given the outbreak of war. On this date the ship Oscar II departed New York for Germany, carrying the last bags of mail sent under the treaty rate. Below is a letter sent from Hoboken, N.J. on that date, a mere ten months before Hoboken's most famous native, Frank Sinatra, was born. It is franked with two copies of the two cent Washington stamp, paying the supplementary mail treaty rate for a one ounce letter.

