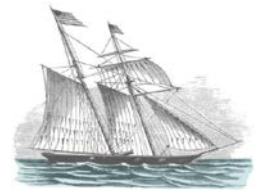


# The British Naval Blockade during the War of 1812



## February 1813 to March 1815

The United States declared war on Great Britain on June 18, 1812. In response, England ordered a naval blockade on November 27, 1812 that was implemented in stages. Local proclamations by the Royal Navy announced the closing by blockade of four successive portions of the coastline:

- February 6, 1813 – Chesapeake and Delaware Bays (“Mid-Atlantic”)
- May 26, 1813 – New York harbor and Long Island Sound to New London (“New York”)
- September 1, 1813 – North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia (“Southern Coast”)
- April 25, 1814 – Northern coastline from Rhode Island to Maine (“New England”)

The blockade of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast was ordered, but was never implemented by local proclamations. The blockade was lifted on March 6, 1815 after news was received in North America that the December 24, 1814 Treaty of Ghent had ended the war.

Mail to or from American ports had four options to cross the British blockade. First, it could be carried on a blockade runner that evaded the blockading fleet under peril of capture or destruction. Second, it could enter or leave via a not-yet blockaded port, and connect with the blockaded area by inland mail routes. Third, because the British still needed flour to feed Wellington’s army on the Iberian Peninsula, a number of merchant ships were licensed to carry supplies, free from interference by British ships. These licensed ships also carried personal correspondence. The fourth method was to send a letter on a cartel ship. Cartels carried returning prisoners of war or official correspondence under a flag of truce, which made them exempt from capture by the British Navy or by privateers.

This exhibit examines each of the four blockaded areas successively. An unusual example carried by cartel ship through the New England blockade is illustrated below.



**Dated Boston August 27, 1814 - addressed to an American prisoner-of-war in England  
Cartel ship *Jenny* left Rhode Island on August 31 - censored at the Admiralty's Transport Office**

## War of 1812 Pre-Blockade

### Cartel Ship - July 1812 to April 1814



The first stage of the blockade began on February 6, 1813. Before that, American ships were subject to seizure in the open seas. Cartel ships with returning POWs and official exchanges were not subject to seizure, and carried mail safely.



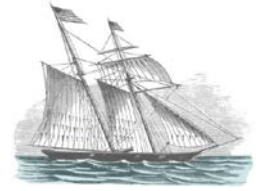
Docketed from England on May 5, 1813 – carried by cartel *Hope* from Plymouth to Boston  
**Censored by Massachusetts Marshal's Office** and posted July 31 in Boston - 12¢ due in NH



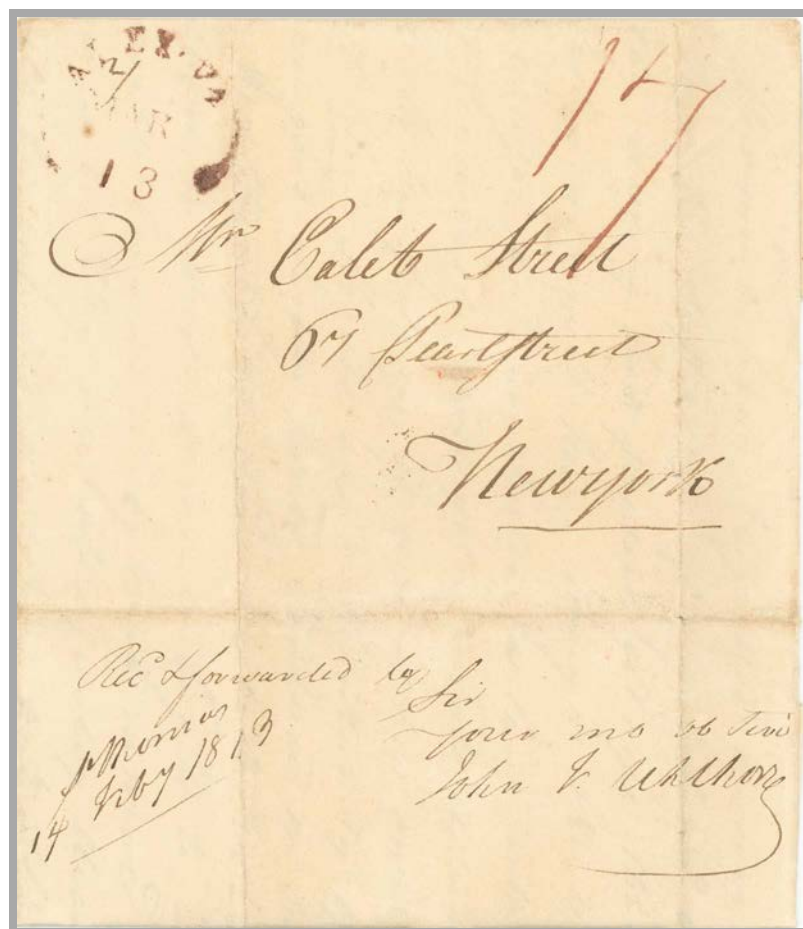
**From prison ship HMS Nassau** June 30, 1813 – carried by cartel *Fidelia* from Halifax to Boston  
Postmarked in Boston on September 2 - 17¢ due to Waldoboro, Maine (no ship fee)

# War of 1812 Blockade of the Mid-Atlantic

## Blockade Runner - February 1813 to March 1815



The British proclaimed the blockade of Chesapeake and Delaware Bays on February 6, 1813. It was lifted on March 6, 1815.

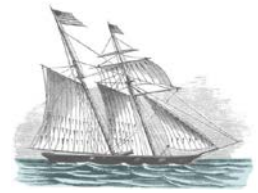


Dated Curacao December 11, 1812 - forwarded from St Thomas on February 14  
Blockade runner through Chesapeake Bay to Alexandria, VA on March 13, 1813  
Rated 17¢ due to New York - no ship fee assessed

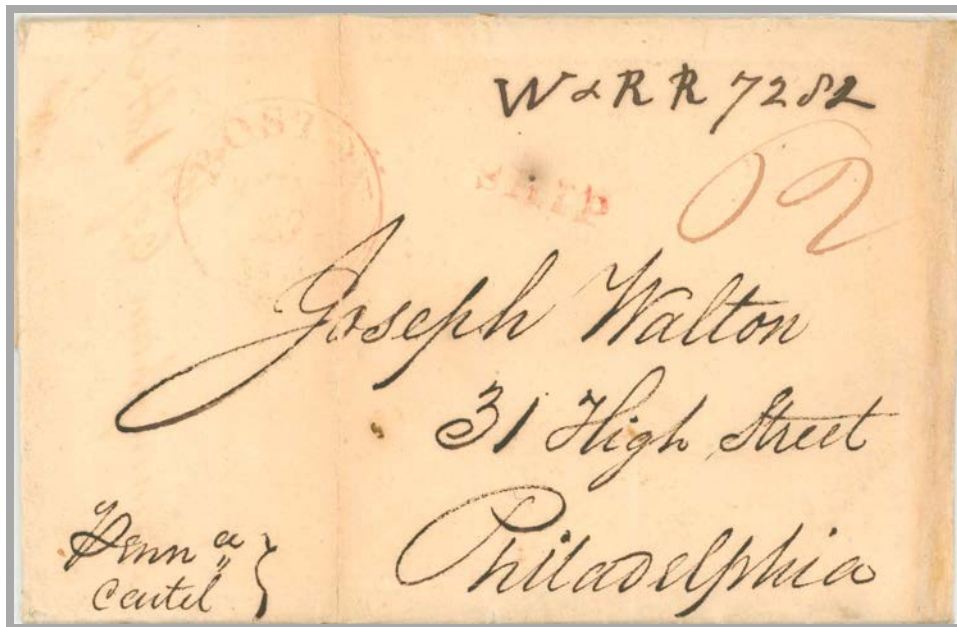


# War of 1812 Blockade of the Mid-Atlantic

## Around Blockade - February 1813 to March 1815



The ship *Henry* left Liverpool on March 18, 1813 with a British license. She was intercepted by HMS *La Hogue* on April 28 and sent to Halifax. With a valid license, she was released on June 18 for Boston. On June 22, she was boarded by the HMS *Tenedos* but proceeded to unblockaded Boston on June 23. Her mail was detained six days in Boston for examination.



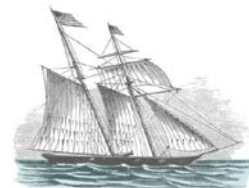
Dated Birmingham, England January 6, 1813 - endorsed to cartel *Pennsylvania* at Liverpool  
**Sent instead on licensed ship *Henry*** - postmarked in Boston on June 29 - triple-weight 62¢ due



Dated St Petersburg 30 November 1812 - sent to London with 3/- due  
Remained February 3 as a triple-weight **Paid Ship Letter** - carried on the *Henry*

# War of 1812 Blockade of the Mid-Atlantic

## Cartel Ship - February 1813 to March 1815



For half of the 2 shillings 2 pence packet rate, the British post office “paid ship letter” service would forward mail by cartel ships to the United States.

The U.S. raised postal rates by 50% on February 1, 1815. These “War Rates” ended on March 31, 1816 and were in effect for only the final month of the blockade. The 2¢ ship fee was not intended to be increased, but this was not clarified until a March 23, 1815 post office circular.



Dated July 8, 1814 in London - postmarked **London Paid Ship Letter** on October 21  
Prepaid 1 shilling 1 pence (half packet rate) - directed by post office to next cartel sailing  
Cartel *San Felipe* left Plymouth on December 2 - arrived in Chesapeake Bay on February 23  
Postmarked at Norfolk for March 2 mail to New York - rated for 33¢ to (30¢ plus 3¢ ship fee)



# War of 1812 Blockade of the Mid-Atlantic

## Cartel Ship - February 1813 to March 1815



A September 17, 1814 postal act authorized ship letters for one-third of packet rates, or 8½ pence. The sender paid the rate and “withdrew” the letter from the post office to place it on a cartel ship. This act was only effective until July 11, 1815.



November 17, 1814 **London Post Paid Withdrawn Ship Letter** - prepaid 8½d  
Cartel *San Felipe* to Norfolk on February 23, 1815 - rated “free” on February 27  
From R.G. Beasley to John Mason regarding release of 157 American POWs



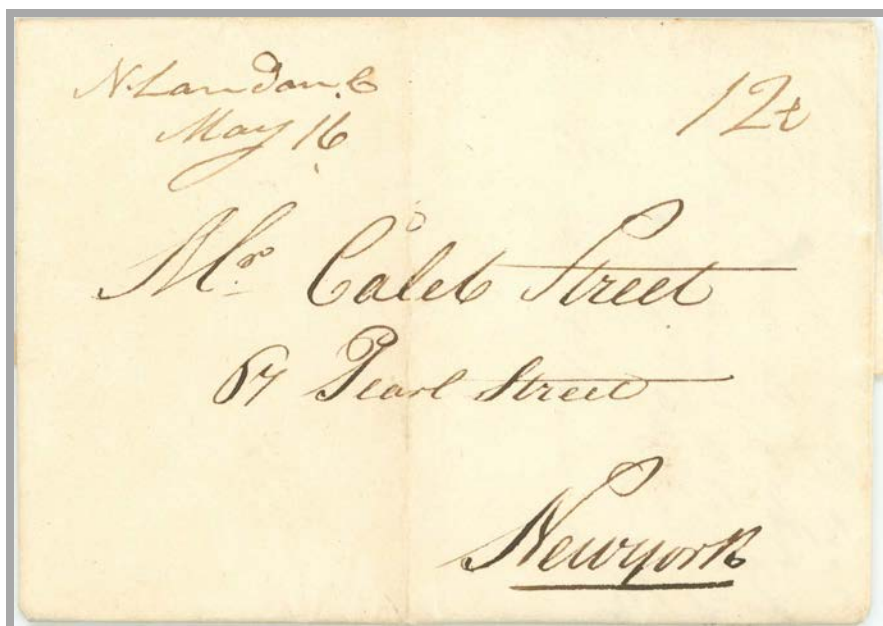


## War of 1812 Blockade of New York

### Blockade Runner - May 1813 to March 1815



The British fleet imposed a strict blockade on New London, Connecticut after Commodore Stephen Decatur's 55-gun frigate *USS United States* took refuge there on June 1, 1813.



Dated in Curacao on March 28, 1814 - sent via St Bart's to run the blockade  
Swedish cartel ship *Carle* left St Bart's on May 1 and arrived off New London on May 14  
Entry denied by HMS *La Hogue* so *Carle* ran blockade under fire from HMS *Sylph* and *Maidstone*  
Postmarked in New London on May 16 - 12.5¢ due (no ship fee) inland postage to New York



**USS *United States* versus HMS *Macedonian***



# War of 1812 Blockade of New York

Around Blockade - May 1813 to April 1814



Neutral ships which left port before the New York blockade notification was received were diverted from blockaded New York by British warships, and were not seized.



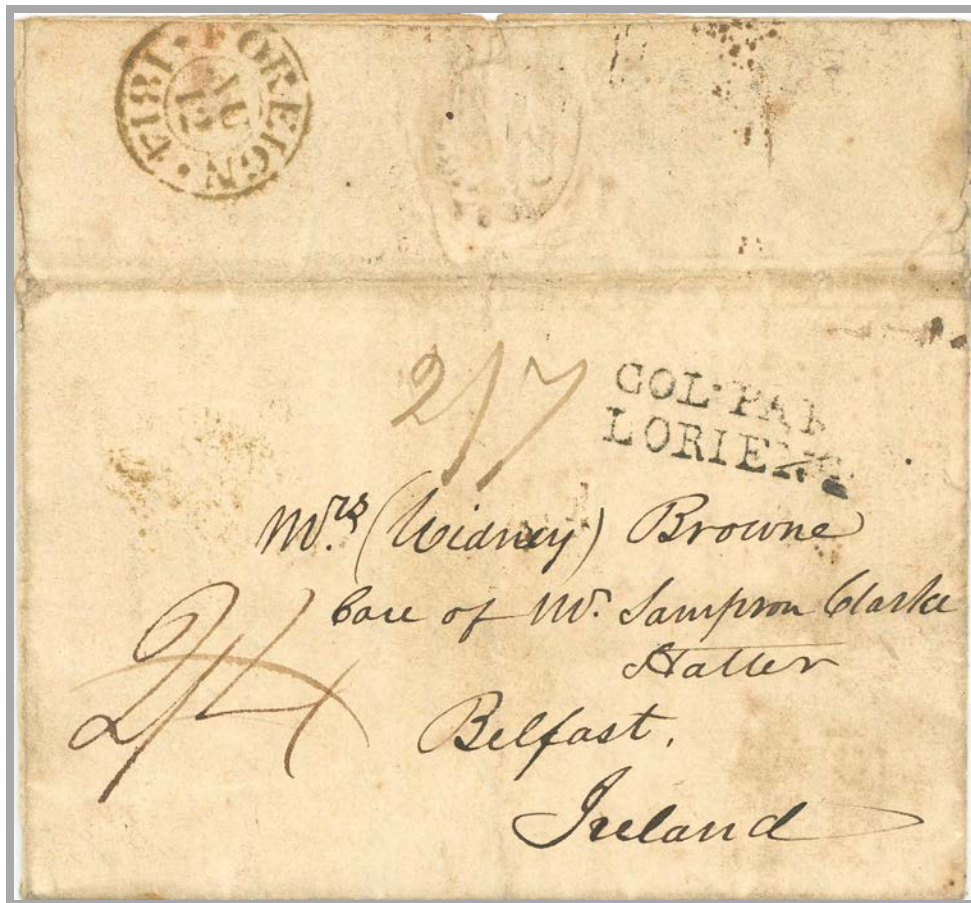
Departed from Bordeaux, France on June 24, 1813 on the schooner *Banyar* for New York  
Chased off Cape Sable (Nova Scotia) by HMS *Poitiers* on July 18 - **threw mail bag overboard**  
**Mail bag recovered by Swedish schooner *Adolphus*** which had left the Azores on July 8  
*Adolphus* had been boarded by HMS *Loire* off Sandy Hook (New York) and ordered to Newport  
*Adolphus* arrived in Newport, RI on July 31 and delivered mail to post office on August 3  
No ship fee indicated - letter held at Newport until the blockade was lifted

# War of 1812 Blockade of New York

Cartel Ship - May 1813 to March 1815



Napoleon abdicated on April 6, 1814, ushering in a restored French monarchy and peace between France and England. This allowed England to turn her full martial attention on the United States.



Dated Washington June 14, 1814 - sent with first dispatches to new French monarchy  
French warship *Olivier* left New York on July 5 and arrived in Lorient, France on July 24  
Marked "Colonies via Lorient" and sent via Calais, France to Dover, England  
Rated 2/7 due at London's FOREIGN office on August 12 (1/2 packet plus 1/5 to Ireland)

## War of 1812 Blockade of the Southern Coast

### Blockade Runner - September 1813 to March 1815



British warships had been harassing American ships off Charleston, SC since July 1812, and the formal blockade began on September 1, 1813. Blockade runners sailed for nearby Spanish Florida to reach transatlantic ships from Havana, Cuba.



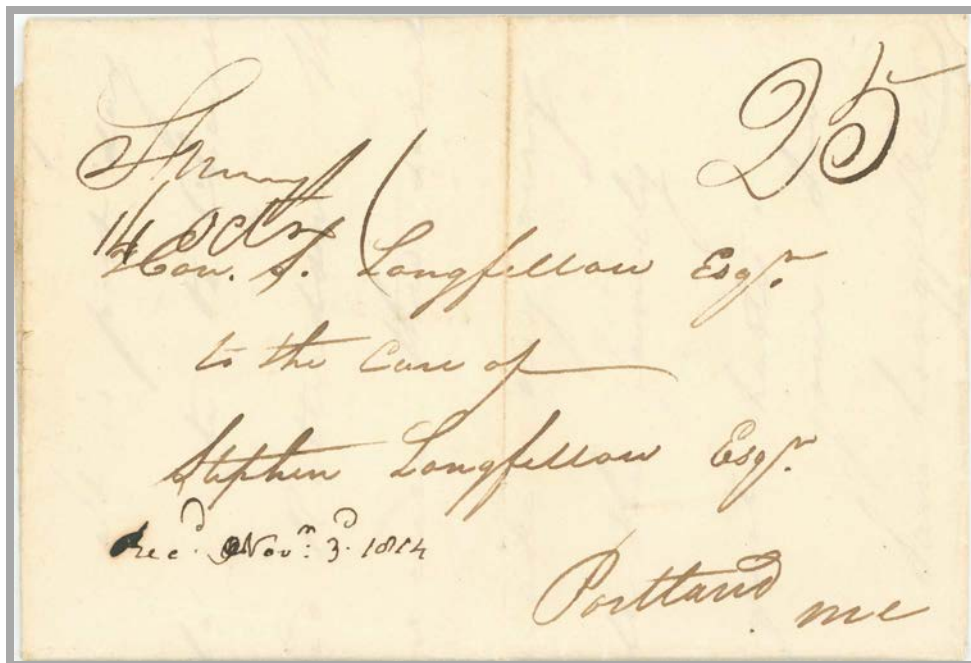
Dated Charleston June 12, 1814 – blockade runner to Amelia Island, Spanish Florida  
Spanish ship to Havana – placed in mails for Cadiz, Spain per red “Islas de Barlovento” marking  
Sent overland from Cadiz to England via Bayonne, France – 2/2 rate per April 1814 GPO Notice  
Passed through London Foreign Office on September 21 – double-rate 6/2 due in Edinburgh



**War of 1812 Blockade of the Southern Coast**  
**Blockade Runner - September 1813 to March 1815**



Dated Fernandina, Spanish Florida October 19, 1814 - blockade runner to Charleston  
Posted in Charleston October 27 - 25¢ due in Portland on November 7



Dated Amelia Island, Spanish Florida October 15, 1814 - blockade runner to St Mary's  
Postmarked in St Mary's, Georgia on October 14 - 25¢ due in Portland on November 3

# War of 1812 Blockade of New England

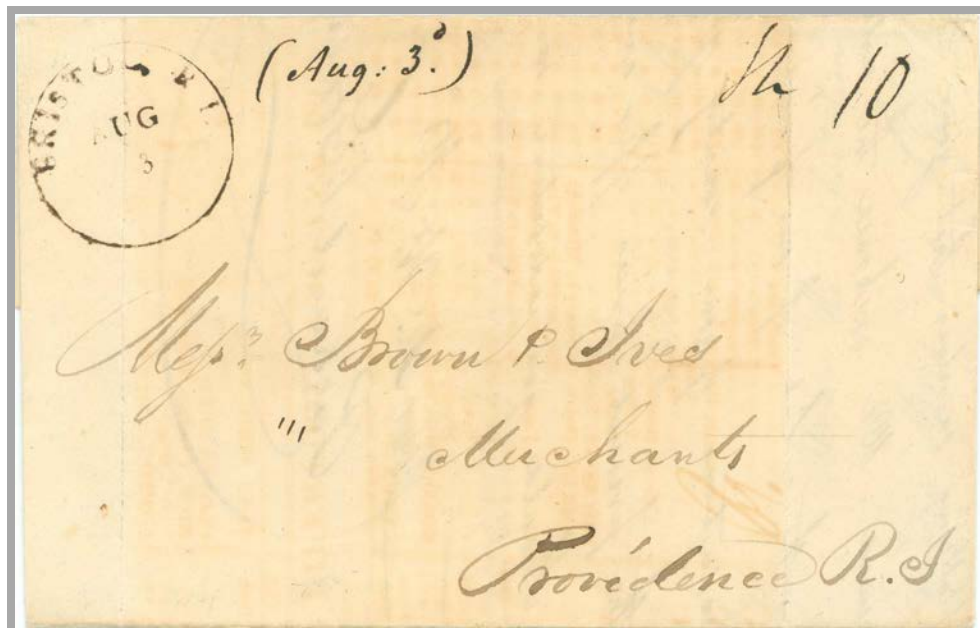
## Blockade Runner - April 1814 to March 1815



The blockade of New England from Rhode Island to Maine was in effect from April 25, 1814 to March 6, 1815.



Dated Gothenburg, Sweden January 6, 1814 - Swedish ship *Fortuna* left April 28  
Entry blocked by HMS *Nymph* - fishing boat carried mail to Boston on June 21 - 14.5¢ due



Dated Havana, Cuba July 6, 1814 - Swedish brig *Christiana* left July 21 for Rhode Island  
Arrived August 1 and posted at Bristol on August 3 - 10¢ due to Providence (8¢ plus 2¢ ship)

# War of 1812 Blockade of New England

Cartel Ship - April 1814 to March 1815



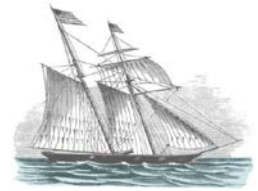
Docketed Le Havre, France December 10, 1813 - ship to America captured by the British  
Examined by G.B. Transport Office - released by cartel ship to Boston on September 6  
**Examined in Boston per oval Marshal's Office marking - quadruple rate 82¢ due**





# War of 1812 Blockade of New England

## Cartel Ship - April 1814 to March 1815



The Melville Island military prison in Halifax harbor was used to house captured American sailors. Their mail was carried by cartel ships to the United States.

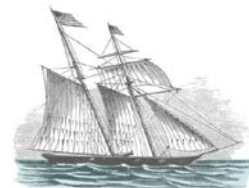


Dated from captured American sailor at "Melville Prison, Halifax" on May 14, 1814  
British cartel schooner *Union* left Halifax on May 18 - arrived at Salem, MA on May 24  
**Examined in Salem per "John Hathorne Jr Dy Marshal" marking**  
Posted at Salem on May 26 - 14.5¢ due (2¢ ship plus 12.5¢ to Maine)  
John Matthews was captured aboard the *Harriot* by the HMS *Dover* on May 29, 1813



# War of 1812 Blockade of New England

Cartel Ship - April 1814 to March 1815



Dated Norfolk, Virginia on August 11, 1814 - forwarded from Boston on August 30  
**Endorsed to Dutch ship *D'Prins Van Orange*** - left Boston under flag-of-truce  
Entered England with "Deal Ship Letter" marking - triple rate 4/6½ due in Scotland