

# Almost a Revolutionary cartel cover

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**C**ARTEL ships are ships of one belligerent sailing under truce to a port of their enemy, typically returning prisoners of war or carrying proposals for discussion. A *cartel cover* is a cover addressed to someone in enemy territory sent via a cartel ship. Normally, mail service between belligerents was suspended, so a cartel ship provided a means of sending mail.

The cover illustrated in Figure 1 was dated at Quebec, and addressed to Concord (Massachusetts) on 24 September 1782, during the American Revolutionary War (19 April 1775–3 September 1783; the first battle was fought at Concord). According to the docketing on front, it arrived on 3 November. There are no postmarks, and the endorsement on the front of the cover is wrong. Fortunately, some of the letter itself deals with how it is going to get to its destination, although there are still questions. This little note is really a request for information on any aspect of this item.

Figure 2 shows the opening paragraph.



Figure 1. Quebec–Concord during the Revolutionary War (September 1782)

No postmarks, but endorsed *Pr the ship Blacket/John Roxby master*.

The letter reads as follows.

Quebec 24 Sepr 1782 [to] Miss Ann Rumsey, Concord

Dear Miss

I wrote you on the 20th of June last, by my son James, who went from this [place as a] passenger in the ship *Live Oak*, bound to New York, under cover to Brooke Watson Esqr, and enclosed you a copy of your late father's will, which I hope before this you have received, as I have just heard that the *Live Oak* is taken and carried into Boston, to which I refer you.

I now enclose you a second copy of his will. This goes by my worthy friend Capt John Roxby master of the ship *Blacket*, a cartel bound to Boston with prisoners from this place, and from thence he expects to go to England, if he should, I would advise you to take a passage with him.

He has promised me to accommodate you with a passage in his ship, I believe him to be a gentleman of honour, and I think that you may safely trust yourself with him, provided there is no other Lady going passenger. I think it will be necessary for you to go to London, as your father's original will is there in the hands of Mr Richard Forman at the Office of Ordnance Tower, who is one of the executors to his will, and as I am informed has between three to four thousand pounds sterling of your money in his hands, which I suppose is before interest.

Miss Ann Rumsey  
Concord  
Quebec 28<sup>th</sup> Sept<sup>r</sup> 1782

Dear miss

I wrote you the 20<sup>th</sup> of June last, by my son James, who went from this passenger in the ship *Live Oak* bound to New York, under cover to Brooke Watson Esq<sup>r</sup>, and enclosed you a copy of your late Father's will, which I hope before this

Figure 2. Introductory paragraph of the letter

You ought to carry with you proper vouchers, of your being the daughter of the late Mr Benjamin Rumsey, and the same person that is mentioned in his will, and the heir to whole Estate.

I wish you in possession of all the property that your father has left you, and a good husband to crown your happiness—I am Dear Miss, your most . . . Constant Freeman

PS I desire Mr Richard Forman by the fall fleet, and acquaint him that I have sent you a copy of your father's will, and the advice that I have given you to go to London.

[second PS] Quebec 28th October 1782 [postscript added over a month later] The ship *Bracket* [of] Captain Roxby was ordered to New York. I therefore send this by the ship *John*, Captain Philipppson, I am . . . CF

Initially we read that the letter was to go to Boston by the cartel ship *Blacket*, consistent with the endorsement on the outside; however, according to the second postscript (made over a month after the letter was originally dated), the ship was ordered to go to New York (then still under British control) instead, and the letter would go by the *John* instead.

At the end of the war, the *Blacket* (still under Roxby) evacuated loyalists, including former slaves, from New York to Halifax (NS) and Quebec [BL]. It is also mentioned in [C] as having delivered flour from Cowes (UK) to Quebec in 1782. Likely it departed to New York after arriving at Quebec, as mentioned in the letter. After the war, it appears to have been involved in the slave trade, although this is unclear. I could not find a shred of information about the *John* or its Captain Philipppson, and any help (on any aspect of the cover) would be appreciated. The question arises as to whether it was a cartel ship, or simply smuggled the letter to the addressee (the latter was suggested by Richard Frajola).

## References

[C] <http://www.customscowes.shalfleet.net/1779-1783.htm>

[BL] [http://blackloyalist.com/canadiandigitalcollection/documents/official/black\\_loyalist\\_directory.htm](http://blackloyalist.com/canadiandigitalcollection/documents/official/black_loyalist_directory.htm) and [http://blackloyalist.com/canadiandigitalcollection/documents/official/black\\_loyalist\\_directory2.htm](http://blackloyalist.com/canadiandigitalcollection/documents/official/black_loyalist_directory2.htm)