

The Farwell Brothers of Chicago: a postal and philatelic portrait

By Ken Lawrence

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Two men who built great personal fortunes and significantly influenced the rise of Chicago as a metropolitan center of the United States are largely forgotten today, even by historians who have chronicled those events. Ironically, John V. Farwell's name appears in more stamp catalogs and other philatelic literature than in history books, although the listed items did not exist during his lifetime. His older brother, Charles B. Farwell, chose a career in politics after amassing a fortune in land speculation, as Chicago grew from a cholera-plagued mud hole on the prairie to become the nation's second largest metropolis.

The Town of Chicago incorporated on August 12, 1833, with 350 residents. The state legislature chartered Chicago as a city on March 4, 1837. By the time the 15-year old Charles and 13-year-old John V. Farwell passed through in July 1838, aboard their family's prairie schooner on its way westward to a farm along the Rock River in Ogle County, Illinois, the population had grown to about 3,000 people huddled along the north and south banks of the Chicago River's outlet on the lake, with the two communities connected by rope-drawn ferries.

The Farwell brothers' father Henry had pulled up roots in Big Flats, New York, and followed the setting sun to seek his fortune in the Great West, as today's Midwest was known. Besides their father, covered wagons carried the boys' mother, two other brothers, a sister, an aunt and an uncle to their promised land, from which the Pottawattamie Indians had been evicted just a few years earlier after their disastrous defeat in the Black Hawk War, opening up some of North America's richest agricultural land to white settlement.

Charles Farwell, known to his family and friends as Charlie, migrated to Chicago in 1844. His brother — always called "John V." or "Dutch," never just John or Johnny — followed a year later, after graduating from the Mount Morris Seminary. They arrived on the eve of a great economic expansion. The Illinois and Michigan Canal opened in 1848, which allowed shipping from the Great Lakes through Chicago to the Mississippi River and onward to the Gulf of Mexico. That same year, the Galena & Chicago Union Railroad, Chicago's first rail line, began operation.

As the crossroads for commerce between the East, the West, and the South, and destined to become the nation's transportation hub, Chicago land soared in value. Charles Farwell became rich in the real estate business, then switched to a career in politics while he was still a young man, serving as Cook County Clerk from 1854 to 1862. John V. tried his hand at politics, but as City Clerk he was too honest for his own good, recording proceedings that members of the council preferred to be omitted. After that, he seldom engaged in public political activity, though he was an elector for Abraham Lincoln in 1864, and in 1869 he accepted an appointment from President Ulysses S. Grant to serve as a commissioner for Indian Affairs.

John V., shown in Figure 1, was deeply religious, and became Chicago's leading patron of the Young Men's Christian Association and the evangelist Dwight Moody. He helped build the First Methodist Church in Chicago, and chaired the northwest division of the U.S. Christian Commission during the Civil War. But despite his piety, John V. sometimes resembled the fictional Gordon Gekko of the movie *Wall Street*. At the dawn of his business career in 1850 he confided to his diary, "Men are all greedy for gain, whatever other motives may actuate them. And yet they are never satisfied. Such is the testimony of all who have been successful in courting dame nature." Later in his career, when workers organized labor unions and struck for higher wages and better working conditions, John V. made common cause with his fellow employers, police, and city officials to crush



Figure 1. John Villiers Farwell (1825-1908), Chicago merchant and philanthropist.

their protests ruthlessly.



Figure 2. U.S. Senator Charles Benjamin Farwell (1823-1903), Republican of Illinois.

Charlie, shown in Figure 2, was as given to corruption and drink as John V. was to sanctimony and temperance. He was a member of the Republican National Committee 1870-1872, and served four terms in the U.S. House of Representatives: 1871-1877 and 1881-1883. As a candidate for Congress in 1874, he declined to endorse his party's temperance policy, declaring that he supported everyone's "personal liberty" to consume alcoholic beverages. According to a biographer of Rutherford B. Hayes, he used his influence and spent some of his personal fortune to reverse the outcome of the 1876 election in Louisiana, thus awarding the presidency to Hayes. "The trouble with Charlie," wrote one Republican leader to another in 1887, "he

seems to think that everyone is for sale." Perhaps they were. When the dust settled that year, Charles Farwell was appointed to fill the United States Senate term of John A. Logan from 1887 to 1891, after the popular Civil War general died.

Charlie considered himself realistic and practical, not venal. He liked to quote from memory a Charles Dickens line from *Martin Chuzzlewit* about virtuous lies: “There are some falsehoods, Tom, on which men mount, as on bright wings, towards Heaven. There are some truths, cold bitter taunting truths, wherein your worldly scholars are very apt and punctual, which bind men down to earth with leaden chains. Who would not rather have to fan him, in his dying hour, the lightest feather of a falsehood such as thine, than all the quills that have been plucked from the sharp porcupine, reproachful truth, since time began!”

Wholesale Dry Goods Merchant

In 1846, John V. Farwell went to work as a sales clerk and bookkeeper for the dry goods firm Hamilton & White, which paid him \$8 per month plus board, and a place to sleep at the back of the store. After Hamilton & White refused to give him a raise a year later, he went to work for Hamlin & Day, a competitor, for \$250 a year.

John V. married the love of his life, Abigail Taylor, in 1849. She died just two years later, one month after giving birth to their daughter Abby. Also in 1849 he switched jobs again, taking a \$600 per year salary for two years as a bookkeeper for Wadsworth & Phelps, the principal dry goods firm in Chicago.

Besides Elisha S. Wadsworth and William H. Phelps, the firm had a third partner, Francis B. Cooley. Their partnership ended in 1851 when Wadsworth retired. Phelps was in declining health, but agreed to keep his share of the business with Cooley as buyer and Farwell as manager and eventually a partner. In 1854, John V. married his partner’s sister Emeret Cooley.

In 1856, a 21-year-old man from Massachusetts named Marshall Field came to Chicago and took a job as clerk with Wadsworth & Phelps. When Phelps retired the following year, the remaining partners formed a new business, Cooley, Farwell & Co., with Field remaining as their employee. By 1857 Chicago was the largest city in what was then known as the Northwest. In a period of 20 years Chicago had grown from 4,000 people to more than 90,000.

The Panic of 1857-1858

In 1857 and 1858, a financial panic threatened local businesses when money issued by Illinois banks was shunned outside the state as “stumptail currency” (money of a shady or doubtful character, likened to a contemporary New York swill-milk scandal, depicted by a cartoonist as the issue of a stump-tailed cow).

John V. Farwell devised a plan to survive the crash. He asked his customers to pay either in cash, despite its dubious value, “or wheat at five cents a bushel more than cash buyers would give in their locality,” and then bought more wheat with his cash receipts. He shipped all the wheat to New York, which the New York banking house that held the firm’s note agreed to accept and to sell locally for payment in acceptable currency. (If they had refused, he would either have negotiated a settlement for a fraction of the money owed, or defaulted on the note.)

Farwell's credit was thereafter dubbed "as good as wheat." Other Chicago businessmen followed his example, and displayed their gratitude by naming him vice president of the Chicago Board of Trade. This would not be the last time that Farwell's example lifted the morale of his peers "out of the slough of despondency."

Besides rescuing local business, the crisis gave the clever Farwell a windfall opportunity which he

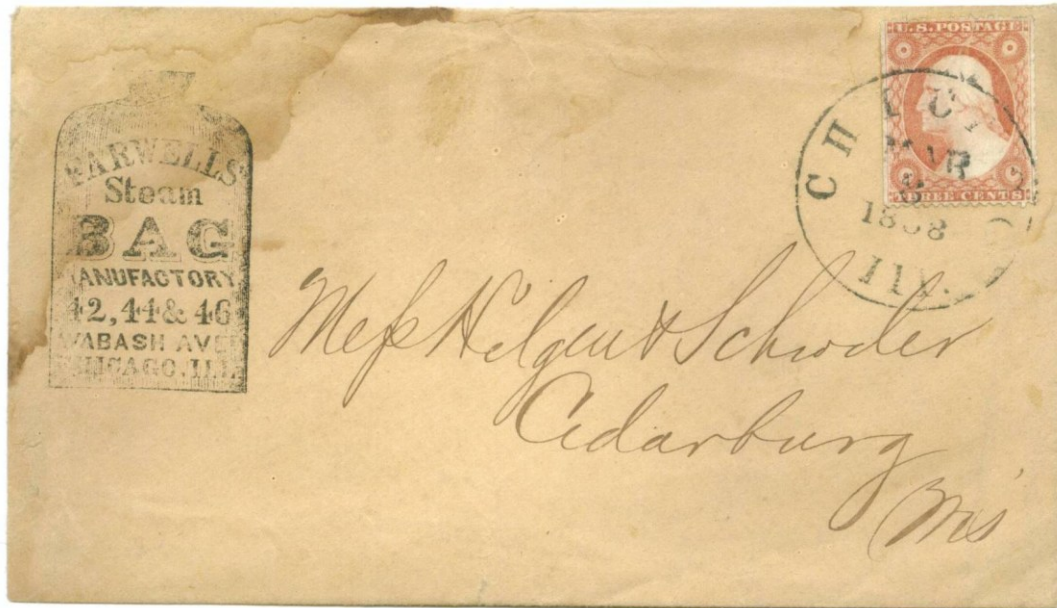


Figure 3. Farwell's Steam Bag Manufactory mailed this envelope on March 3, 1858. The 3¢ George Washington stamp appears to have been affixed by an early mailing machine.

was quick to grasp. He set up a subsidiary business to manufacture and sell bags to pack the wheat for shipment, and sold them to others who copied his plan.

The Figure 3 cover with a Farwell's Steam Bag Manufactory imprint, canceled March 3, 1858, is exceptional, foreshadowing an element of Farwell's place in philatelic history. Vertical cuts along the perforation rows suggest that the 3¢ George Washington stamp, Scott 26, was affixed by an early coil stamp machine, possibly the Figure 4 device invented by Robert Dick, a Canadian whose U.S. patent was granted in 1859 and antedated to 1858.



Figure 4. Dick's Mailer, a device invented by Canadian Robert Dick in 1858, affixed stamps to envelopes mechanically, after the stamps had been cut into strips, pasted together, rolled into coils, and loaded on a reel.

The Civil War

The 1860 Republican National Convention in Chicago nominated Illinois' favorite son Abraham Lincoln as its presidential candidate; the Farwell brothers were among Lincoln's important backers, and when war came, John V.

was among the best known supporters of the Union cause. During the Civil War, he financed the recruitment of the Board of Trade regiment of the Union Army regiment, and he chaired the northwest region of the U.S. Christian Commission.

His activities were so well known that Confederate prisoners at Camp Douglas plotted to escape and to burn the John V. Farwell & Co. store and the headquarters of the YMCA, supported by Farwell's philanthropy and headed by his evangelist friend Dwight Moody. Union soldiers discovered the conspiracy and thwarted it.

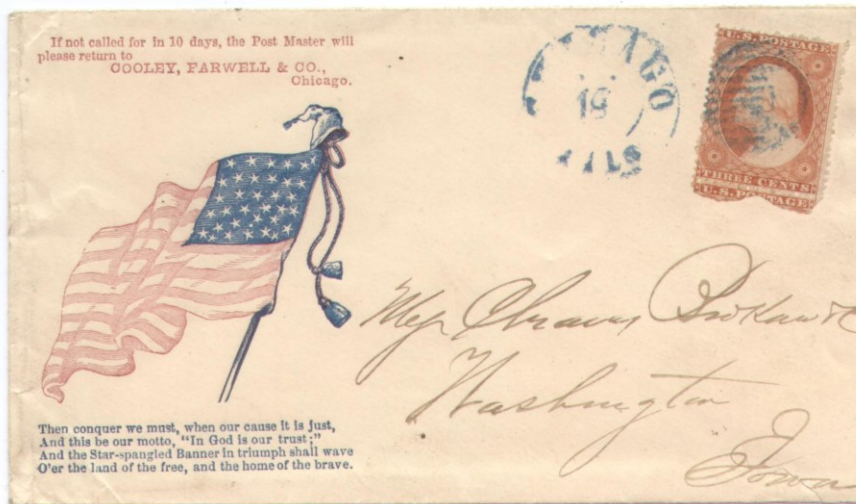


Figure 5. A patriotic envelope imprint used by Cooley, Farwell & Co. early in the Civil War advertised the firm's commitment to the Union cause.

Figure 5 illustrates a Union patriotic cover used for Cooley, Farwell's business mail; the 3¢ Washington stamp of 1857 is Scott 26, which was demonetized in August and September of 1861. The cover was addressed by Levi Z. Leiter, a young man from Ohio who had recently joined the firm as a bookkeeper and was responsible for most of

the firm's mail.

In 1862, Marshall Field became a junior partner in the Cooley, Farwell firm, and when Francis Cooley retired in 1864, the name of the firm was changed to Farwell, Field & Co. The transition is noted on the Figure 6 3¢ Washington stamped envelope, Scott U34, canceled February 19, 1864, a postal stationery replacement for pre-1861 demonetized postage.

John V. Farwell & Co.

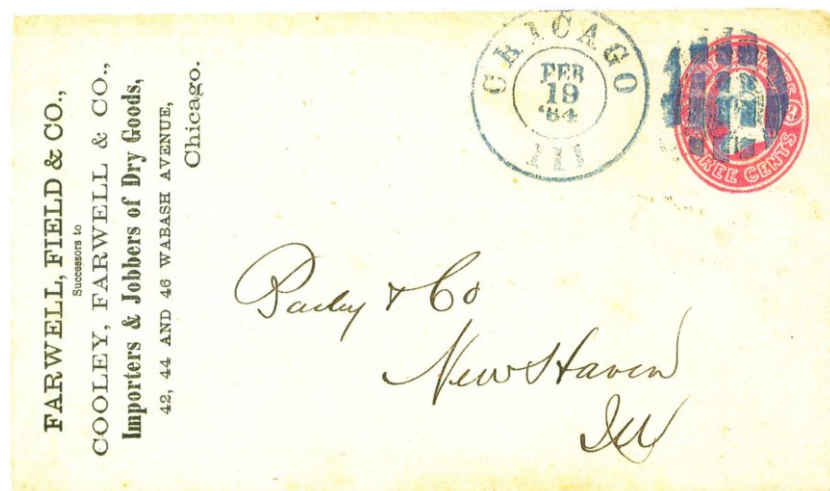


Figure 6. The commercial corner card on this 3¢ Washington stamped envelope documented the transition to the new partnership of John V. Farwell and Marshall Field in 1864.

About a year later, both Field and Leiter decided to leave the wholesale trade and to become partners in a retail dry goods business founded by another pioneer merchant, Potter Palmer. In 1866, yet another legendary Chicago merchant, Aaron Montgomery Ward, got his start in retailing as a clerk for Field, Palmer, and Leiter.

Palmer left his company for health reasons in 1867, later returning to the business world as Chicago's leading hotelier. On Palmer's departure the firm became known as Field, Leiter & Co. until Leiter retired in 1881. After that, the business became Marshall Field & Co., and its proprietor eventually became Chicago's wealthiest man.

With the departure of Field and Leiter, John V. Farwell & Co. became the new name of the largest wholesale

establishment in the West. The Figure 7 receipt, which illustrates the company's Wabash Avenue headquarters building, has an imprinted orange 2¢ Eagle revenue stamp, Scott RN-B20.

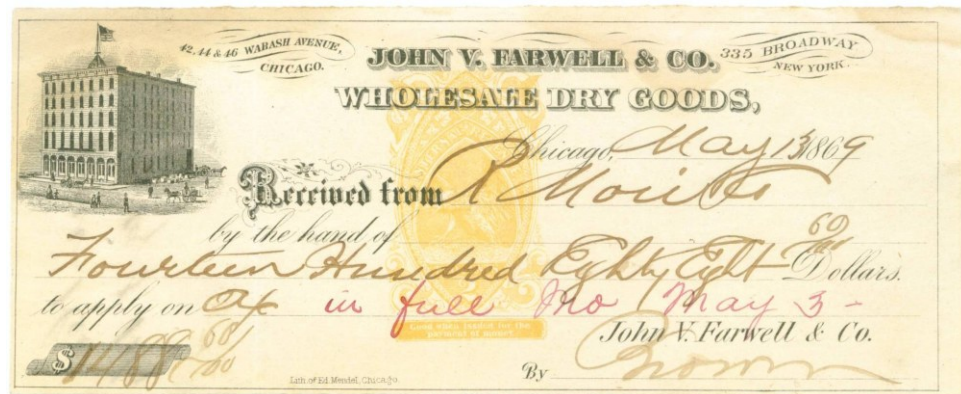


Figure 7. A John V. Farwell & Co. business receipt imprinted with an orange 2¢ Eagle revenue stamp illustrates the firm's Chicago headquarters building.

By 1870, Chicago's population approached 300,000.

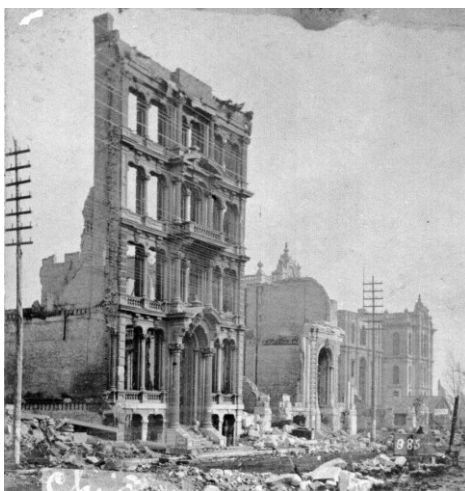


Figure 8. The burned-out building in the foreground was all that remained of Farwell Hall, home to the YMCA and Dwight Moody's ministry, donated to them by John V. Farwell.

The Chicago Fire

On October 9, 1871, Chicago lay in ruins, nearly all of its business district and tens of thousands of homes burned to the ground, leaving one third of the population homeless. Of an estimated \$200 million in property destroyed, about \$10 million consisted of wholesale and retail dry goods, the largest proportionate loss for any commercial sector. The John V. Farwell Co. alone lost property valued at \$1.9 million.

Figure 8 shows the burned-out shell of Farwell Hall, which had been the home

of the YMCA and Dwight Moody's ministry.

Chicago's merchants were summoned to a meeting to decide on a policy concerning their indebtedness. John V. Farwell spoke first, declaring forcefully that Chicago would pay dollar for dollar, nipping in the bud a rumored plan for burned-out businesses to repudiate debts.

Two days after the fire, a *Chicago Tribune* editorial titled "Chicago shall rise again" declared: "Already contracts have been made for rebuilding some of the burned blocks, and the clearing away of the debris will begin to day, if the heat is so far subdued that the charred material can be handled. Field, Leiter & Co., and John V. Farwell & Co., will recommence business to-day."

In many respects, the opportunity for a fresh start after the fire proved to be a bonanza for the city, opening the way for Chicago to become the world leader in architectural innovation and municipal planning. John V. took the lead in relocating and developing an entirely new commercial district to

the south and west of downtown businesses. The *Tribune* dubbed him "the Merchant Prince."



Figure 9. A strip clipped from a company envelope had been mailed postage free, franked by C. B. Farwell, Member of Congress, a partner in his brother's business.

Inter-State Industrial Exposition

To showcase the new Chicago as a phoenix risen from the rubble, and as a marvel of architectural beauty and entrepreneurial vision, Chicago's business leaders convened the

Inter-State Industrial Exposition of 1873. The exhibition hall they erected on the lakefront was bigger than the Crystal Palace that New York had built for its 1853 world's fair.

Charles Farwell was a vice president and member of the board of directors of the exhibition. According to *The Exposition in a Nutshell* guidebook, "he aided the enterprise with his countenance and money." His political connection was surely an asset too. Figure 9 shows his



Figure 10. An exhibitor's admission ticket to the Inter-State Industrial Exposition illustrated the lakefront hall that showcased the rebirth of Chicago business after the devastation of the 1871 fire.

Congressional frank on a cutout from a John V. Farwell & Co. business envelope.

On the evening of September 25, 20,000 people attended the opening ceremony, less than a week after the collapse of Jay Cooke's Philadelphia investment house had brought on the Panic of 1873. The unfortunate timing doomed the fair to a short season, closing less than two months later.

Figure 10 shows an exhibitor's admission ticket. There were no commemorative postmarks for that fair, so the expo datestamp on the ticket is as near to such a collectible as one can find. The Post Office Department had issued this country's first postal cards in 1873, and examples of Scott UX1 bearing a pictorial imprint identical to the one on this ticket are the original exposition postal cards.

The exposition hall hosted concerts, opera, and commercial events until 1891, when it was razed to make way for the new Art Institute building. Although it ran a deficit every year until 1877, city leaders regarded it as an asset that helped restore confidence in business and industry. Besides those benefits, it gave them valuable experience for the world's fair they hosted two decades later.

Chicago continued to grow, exceeding a half million in the 1880 census.

The XIT Ranch

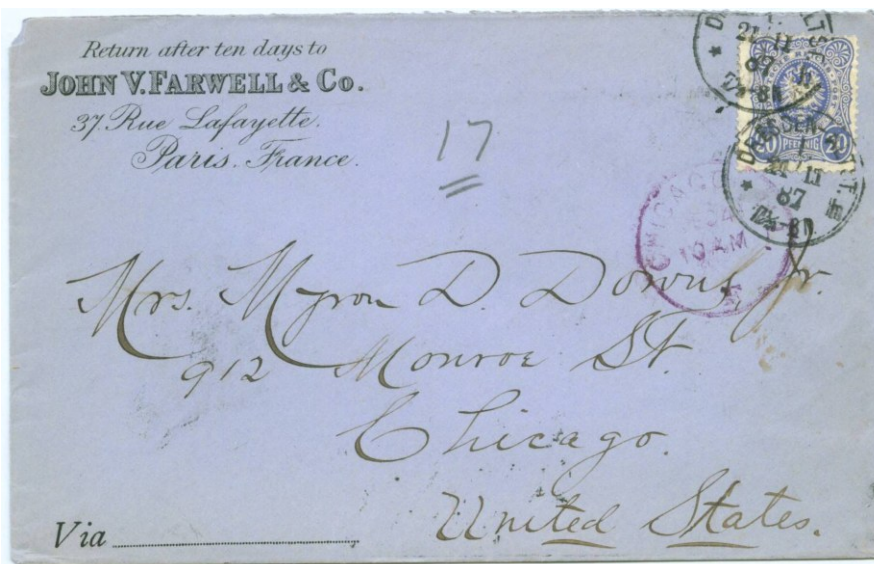


Figure 11. A John V. Farwell & Co. envelope from the firm's Paris, France, office was mailed at Dresden, Germany, to Chicago in 1887.

In 1882, as they entered a time of life when most men would have wished to retire, the Farwell brothers launched the greatest business venture of their lives. They formed a syndicate that contracted with the state of Texas to build its capitol at Austin, the largest state government building in the nation, in exchange for 3,050,000 acres of prime land in the Texas panhandle, approximately the size of the state of Connecticut.

In order to finance that construction, and to develop the land, the Farwells used their business connections in Europe to raise capital. John V. Farwell & Co, had offices in half a dozen European countries. The Figure 11 envelope, from the firm's office in Paris, was mailed at Dresden, Germany, to Chicago in 1887, franked with an embossed 20-pfennig bright ultramarine Imperial Eagle stamp of 1880, Germany Scott 40.

Between 1885 and 1888, European investors purchased about \$10 million in bonds issued by the Capitol Freehold and Investment Co., Ltd., chartered in England. The syndicate's cost to build the

Texas capitol totaled \$3,224,593.45, which worked out to an exchange value of about \$1.07 per acre for the land, and left about \$6.75 million for land improvement.

The real estate acquisition consisted of a continuous parcel spread through ten counties of Texas, beginning at the northwest corner of the Panhandle and extending south adjacent to the New Mexico line for more than 200 miles in an irregular shape about 30 miles wide. Dalhart is the major population center there today.

The Farwells planned to range 150,000 head of cattle on the world's largest fenced ranch, and to sell those herds to Chicago meatpackers, using the income from those operations to service the bonds. No doubt John V.'s friendship with Chicago meat processing tycoon Gustavus Swift enhanced his confidence in the strategy. That would give them time to build towns, roads, and railroads needed to support an agricultural economy, after which they could sell off the land, section by section, as farms.

John V. Farwell named himself managing director of the XIT ranch, as the legendary spread was named. He often spent time there in person, and held church services for his ranch hands. Two of the Texas towns his trust built were named Farwell.

The arrangement worked according to plan. The combination of ranch income and land sales gradually retired the debt. The last of the bonds were redeemed in 1909, and the British company dissolved, leaving about one million acres still owned by the Farwell family.

Haymarket Square Confrontation

While John V. and Charles Farwell were away in the West, labor violence erupted back in Chicago. On May 1, 1886, workers in major U.S. cities held rallies in support of the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions' demand for an eight-hour workday. The movement was strongest in Chicago, where 40,000 went on strike and twice that number marched in solidarity. Two days later, police fired on strikers at the McCormick Harvesting Machine Co. plant, killing two.

Local anarchists called for a rally the following day at Haymarket Square to protest the police violence. The rally began at 7:30 in the evening, and was drawing to a close at 10:30. As police advanced to disperse the crowd, someone threw a bomb that killed a policeman. Police responded by firing their guns at the crowd. Eight policemen and four workers were killed, and large numbers of both were wounded.

Upon hearing the news, the Farwells took a fast train back to Chicago, arriving with federal troops dispatched from Fort Laramie, Wyoming. John V. armed his employees and ordered them to escort and transport police throughout the city in a show of force against the strikers.

In the aftermath, eight men who had organized or participated in the rally were arrested and charged with murder. Newspapers incited public opinion against the defendants. The jury foreman and a leading prosecution witness were employees of Marshall Field, the leading advocate of military force to end the strike.

Despite the absence of any evidence linking the defendants to the killings, the prosecution argued that they were accomplices of killers. All were convicted, and seven were sentenced to death. John V. felt no Christian compassion for them. On August 20, 1886, he wrote to the prosecutor, “It was left to our glorious America to teach them a lesson in how to exterminate this social vermin by chopping off its head, and thus kill the body of the movement.”

After their appeals were denied, Illinois Governor Richard J. Oglesby commuted two of the death sentences, and one of the condemned men took his own life. Four were hanged on November 11, 1887. On June 26, 1893, Oglesby’s successor Governor John Peter Altgeld declared that all the defendants had been innocent, and he pardoned the three who were still living.

Determined to prevent future outbreaks labor-related violence, Charles Farwell sponsored legislation that created Fort Sheridan at the North Shore suburb of Highwood, as proposed by the Commercial Club led by Marshall Field and other business leaders. The fort officially opened on the day that the condemned men were hanged.

The World’s Columbian Exposition

By the late 1880s, several cities were competing for the privilege of hosting a world’s fair to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Columbus’s voyage to America. At first, most observers expected New York City to prevail. That was before Charles Farwell began to flex his political muscles in the U.S. Senate. Chicago was now the nation’s second largest city, with more than a million people.

Charles published “Chicago’s Candidacy for the World’s Fair of 1892” in the November 1889 issue of *The Cosmopolitan* magazine, a lavishly illustrated, appealing portrayal of the city’s charms. That together with his political maneuvering were key factors in bringing home the prize. Congress approved Chicago’s bid the following April.

Because of planning and construction delays, opening of the fair was postponed until May of 1893.



Figure 12. The company changed its name when John V. Farwell Jr. took charge, shown here on a cover bearing a 1¢ Columbian stamp of 1893.

At the beginning of that year, stamps were issued to celebrate the event. On January 3, 1893, the Chicago Tribune reported that the Chicago post office sold 3,000,000 Columbian commemorative stamps on the first day:

“The wholesale department opened at 9 a.m. Three hundred people were waiting at the door. . . . One of the clerks from the First National Bank bought the first lot of

jubilee stamps. He took 6,000 two-centers and the bank began to use them immediately, so that in all probability the first letters sent out with the beautiful pictures went from the First National. Next came Marshall Field's man who bought 5,000 twos. John V. Farwell & Co. were next, and carried off 2,000."

John V. had retired from active management of his dry goods business two years earlier, turning over the management to his son, who had been christened John Cooley Farwell at birth, but as an adult had changed his name to John V. Farwell Jr. This change accompanied a legal reorganization, in which the name of the firm dropped the ampersand, becoming simply the John V. Farwell Company.

Appropriating his father's civic mantle as well as his business title, John V. Farwell Jr. was appointed to serve on the world's fair board of directors. Figure 12 shows a Farwell business envelope imprinted with the new company name, franked with a 1¢ Columbian stamp, Scott 230.

As the younger Farwell took charge of the Chicago firm, the elder Farwell brothers quarreled about their finances. According to the Farwells' Texas representative, James D. Hamlin, they "did not speak to each other for the last fourteen years of their lives." Charles died in 1903; John V. followed him to the grave five years later.

More than a half century earlier, John V. had eerily forecast his own closing act when he wrote as a young diarist in 1850, "The cry is — more — more from morn till eve; from youth to heavy age and then man drops into the grave still hugging his precious store of wealth."

John V. Farwell Co. Private Perforations

Annual sales of wholesale dry goods had soared from nearly \$10 million in 1870 to about \$20 million in 1883, when the company moved to a new eight-story, 400,000-square-foot building at Monroe and Market Streets beside the Chicago River. Sales remained at that level for the next 30 years, but profits began to decline in the 1910s, just as the company came to the attention of stamp collectors.

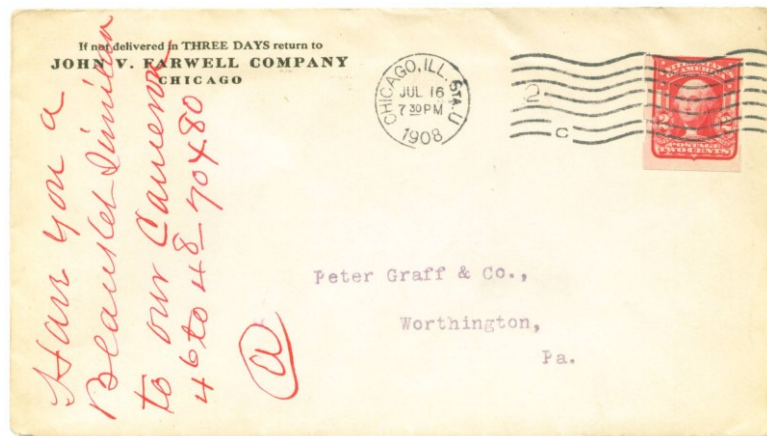


Figure 13. The Farwell Co. used privately coiled stamps with Schermack Type III perforations supplied by Mail-om-eter Co. from 1908 until 1911.

We know the name of John V. Farwell Co. because of proprietary perforations on coil stamps affixed by the firm's high-speed Mail-om-eter mailing machines from 1911 to 1917, which are listed in the Vending and Affixing Machine Perforations chapter of the *Scott Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps and Covers*.

To Farwell, Mail-om-eter's fee of 60¢ added to the face value of every 3,000-stamp coil was a significant expense. A Farwell cover with Schermack Type III perforations supplied by Mail-om-eter Co. is shown in Figure 13. To avoid that cost, Tom Chambers, one of Farwell's salesmen, designed a perforating machine that allowed the company to manufacture its own coils from imperforate sheets purchased at the post office.

The Farwell Company perforated regular 1¢ and 2¢ Washington-Franklin stamps of 1908 (Scott 343 and 344), 1910 (Scott 383 and 384), 1912 (Scott 408 and 409), and the 2¢ Lincoln Memorial (Scott 368) issue, plus 2¢ Washington stamps of 1916 (Scott 482) which were the firm's final proprietary coils. The 1908 and Lincoln coils were philatelic favors not used on commercial mail.



Figure 14. An unused pair of 1¢ Benjamin Franklin stamps shows an early experimental style of John V. Farwell Co. Group 2 perforations, type 3A2.

The August 1911 issue of *Philatelic West* alerted collectors to the new coil variety. "We have received a stamp with 3 large perforations a little above the middle of the stamp and 2 large perforations lower down, almost at the foot of the stamp, with a gap between sufficiently large for two holes. The stamp is on a letter from the John V. Farwell Company, Chicago, canceled June 10th, 1911."

That was actually an example of the second Farwell perforation, known as Group 2, type 3B2. An unused pair of 1¢ type 3A2 from the same group, with the gap equivalent to just one hole, is shown in Figure 14.

Farwell perforations consist of round holes with gauge 10 to 10½ spacing. They are classified according to the way they are grouped and the spacing between groups.

The first experiment employed a single row of six or seven holes, called Group 1. The other styles have either a narrow type A space between groups or a wide type B space. The second experiment, Group 2, has two and three holes, so these can be (from the top) arranged as type 2A3, 2B3, 3A2, or 3B2. The third experiment, Group 3, has three and four holes, with similar choices of arrangement.

Group 4 is the version that became standard, either as type 4A4 or 4B4. Figure 15 shows a 1914 cover with a 1¢ Washington stamp, Scott 408, with Farwell type 4B4



Figure 15. The 1¢ Washington stamp on this 1914 cover has the final production Group 4, type 4B4, Farwell perforations.

perforations. One eccentric row of pins on the standard perforator bar yielded Group 5, with four and five holes in two spacings, considered to be errors. At first the holes were poorly aligned and unevenly spaced, but when Chambers removed the extra perforating pin, he also rearranged the remaining pins to be straight and uniformly spaced.

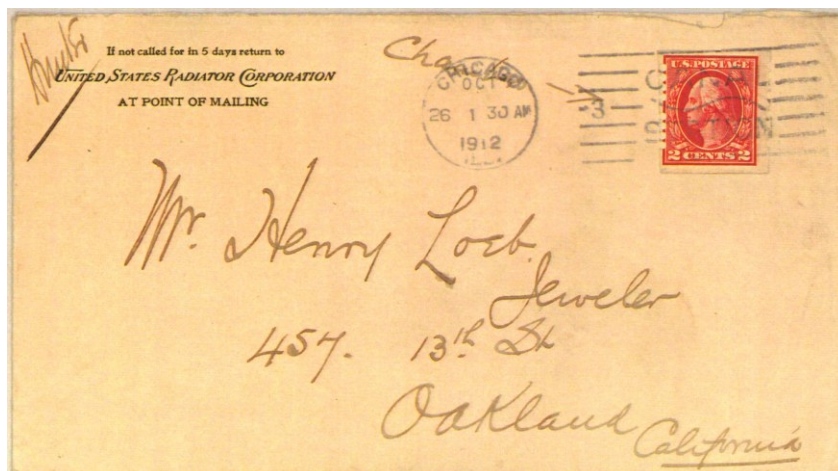


Figure 16. Thomas C. E. Hunter, secretary of the Chicago Philatelic Society, obtained Farwell coils from Tom Chambers, the man who invented and built the perforator, for distribution to stamp collectors, so he labeled them “Chambers.”

Tom Chambers made all varieties of Farwell coils available to stamp collectors and dealers through an exclusive arrangement with

Thomas C. E. Hunter, the secretary of the Chicago Philatelic Society. Figure 16 pictures one of Hunter’s covers mailed to a collector, franked with a Farwell type 4A4 stamp inscribed “Chambers” with an arrow pointing to the stamp.

Confusion as to the name of these unusual perforations continued long after the Farwell Co. had gone out of business. An article about them by F. W. Hitchings in the January 1935 American Philatelist was titled “Notes on the Chambers Company Perforations,” but the Private Perforations chapter of the 1936 Scott catalog listed them under “The Farwell Company.” Hitchings listed all but one of the types we now recognized; Scott omitted a majority of the perforation varieties, but listed Scott 482 at a time when specialist collectors doubted the existence of unwatermarked Farwell coils.

The Bureau of Engraving and Printing began using unwatermarked paper for postage stamps in

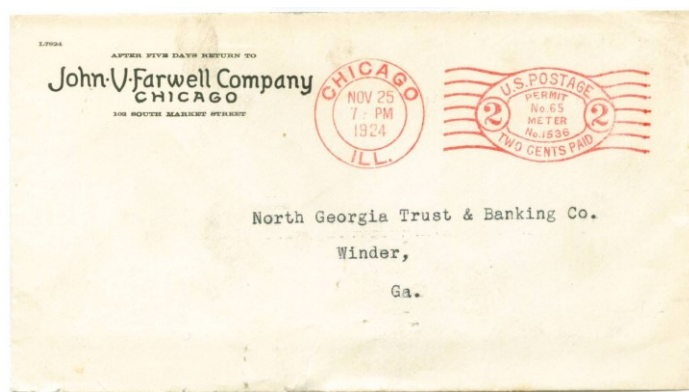


Figure 17. After ceasing the use of privately perforated coils, the John V. Farwell Co. switched to metered postage.

August 1916. No one knows when the first unwatermarked imperforate stamps were issued, because those were simply unfinished sheets from the same printings as perforated stamp, shipped to post offices that served mailing machine users to be privately coiled and perforated.

The earliest documented use of any unwatermarked imperforate Washington-Franklin stamp is a 2¢ Washington coil with Farwell Type 4A4 perforations on a cover canceled October

24, 1916. It was sold as lot 104 in Shreves Philatelic Galleries February 16, 2006, sale of the “Alpha” collection of Important United States 20th Century Earliest Documented Usages. The cover realized \$2,200 plus a 15 percent buyer’s premium.

The firm’s use of privately perforated coil stamps ended in 1917, replaced briefly by ordinary perforated stamps and then by metered postage. A metered Farwell cover from 1924 is shown in Figure 17.

In 1919, John V. Farwell III became manager of the remnants department, but by this time the company’s profits were fading. Retail businesses no longer required jobbers to keep them supplied with fresh stock; manufacturers supplied them directly. In September 1925, the John V. Farwell sold its assets to Carson Pirie Scott & Co., and closed the doors.



Figure 18. This cover pictures the Texas capitol building, for which the state government had swapped three million acres of land to a syndicate headed by John V. and Charles B. Farwell. Their heirs formed the Capitol Reservation Land Trust to liquidate those real estate investments.

After 70 years under various names as one of Chicago’s foremost business enterprises, John V. Farwell’s wholesale dry goods firm quietly disappeared.

The Capitol Reservation Land Trust

With debts retired in 1909 and having ended cattle ranch operations in 1912, the Farwell heirs still owned a million acres of Texas land. To cash out their investment, they formed the Capitol Reservation Land Trust, which leased and sold the property.

The trust’s promotions leaned heavily on the legendary XIT ranch history, and its origin. To enhance that image, the Figure 18 cover pictures the Texas capitol building. Dispersing the land took nearly a half century. The final parcel was sold on January 24, 1963, closing the book on the business legacy of Charles B. and John V. Farwell.

Thanks to Leonard Piskiewicz for the Figure 5, 6, and 16 images.