

# The First United States and Brazil Mail Steamship Company 1865-1875

**Purpose:** This exhibit shows the development of the first United States and Brazil Mail Steamship Co. that operated from 1865 until its demise in September 1875. It was the first American steam passenger line to South America. Opened in November 1865, it was by far the largest carrier of mail and passengers to South America until its closing in 1875.

**Background:** As the Civil War drew to a close, Congress was aware that the post-war economy would expand rapidly. International trade would benefit from needs of reconstruction and redirection of expenditures from military to domestic priorities. South American and Caribbean ports were desirable sources for lumber, rubber, hides, sugar and coffee as well as ready markets for American flour, lard and manufactured goods.

Finally, in March 1864, a Congressional committee reported a bill to "authorize the establishment of ocean mail service between United States and Brazil". It proposed steamships of at least 2,000 tons making 12 round trips a year to Rio de Janeiro with intermediate stops at St. Thomas, Bahia, Pernambuco and "such other Brazilian and intermediate port or ports as shall be considered necessary and expedient". The bill was signed by Congress on May 25 1864 and bidding was won by Jose Navarro for \$120,000 per year, but would later be contested and Para added as a stop.

Navarro utilized the Steamships *Havana*, *North America*, *South America* in his first year of operation. After one year he sold out to Cornelius Garrison due to financial issues. Other steamships were later employed comprising *Morning Star* (single contract voyage), *Guiding Star*, *Merrimack*, *Mississippi*, *Erie* (burned on maiden return), and *Ontario*. This exhibit shows examples from every steamship recorded (*Morning Star* is not currently known).

**Exhibit Plan**

- St. Thomas Mail
- Caribbean Transit Mail
- Brazil Mail
- South American Transit Mail

**Exhibit Plan:** Examples of mail carried on the line originating in the United States, St. Thomas, Brazil, South American and Caribbean areas are shown to illustrate the route, postal rates and the various required postage frankings.

## The First Return Voyage of the United States and Brazil Mail Company

### St. Thomas to United States

**NOTICE.**  
**THE STEAM SHIP**  
**"HAVANA,"**  
 will leave this port to-day, at four o'clock, P. M., for Para, Pernambuco, Bahia, and Rio de Janeiro, returning here, on or about the 21st November, for New York.  
 For passage, apply to  
**LAMB & Co.**  
 St. Thomas, 7th Oct., 1865.

*Original Newspaper Advertisement for the first return sailing.*



1865 November 22, St. Thomas to Cincinnati, Ohio carried by USBMC *Havana* on the first northbound return voyage from Brazil to New York arriving Dec. 1st.

*Mail originating in St. Thomas required both DWI and U.S. postage to be fully prepaid. The 3¢ DWI local postage is prepaid by 3¢ 1856 Issue imperforate and US 10¢ steamship rate prepaid by 10¢ 1861 Issue. The 10¢ steamship rate included inland postage, so the 3¢ stationery was not necessary. Envelope restored along top opening.*

### **The Earliest Recorded Mail on the United States and Brazil Mail Company Line**



St. Thomas — United States



St. Thomas to the United States

1866 January 23, St. Thomas to Philadelphia Pa., carried by USBMC *South America* to New York arriving Jan. 29th.

The local DWI postage prepaid by 3¢ 1856 Issue imperforate. New York "Steamship 10" due marking for 10¢ Steamship and inland postage.

**There are Only Eight Recorded Unpaid Covers to United States with 3c DWI Stamp for Local Postage**

**The Maiden Return Voyage of the USBMC South American**

United States to St. Croix, D.W.I.



1869 March 24  
New York N.Y. departing Mar. 24th to St. Thomas by USBMC *Mississippi* arriving Mar. 30th (backstamp).

The U.S. 10¢ rate prepaid by U.S. 10¢ 1868 grilled issue. St. Thomas blue crayon "4" cents due rating for inland postage.

**The only recorded example carried on the Final Voyage of the *Eire* before she burned.**

The USBMC "*Mississippi*" wrecked and was a total loss on May 12th 1869. She had sailed from Para on May 6th and was proceeding north past the island of Martinique. At about 3 A.M. the ship somehow sailed too close to a reef (the Great Pensacola Shoal) just beyond the east side of the island, windward of the town of Francois, and became wedged between rocks. Destruction of the ship by wave action was slow and there was ample time for passengers, baggage and mails to be removed next morning by the rescue ships *Acheron*, *Guyane*, and *Caravelle*. The cargo of coffee and the ship itself were completely lost.



## St. Thomas — United States

## United States to St. Thomas



1870 July 30  
 San Francisco, Cal. to St. Thomas, sent overland by rail, then by USBMC *South America* from New York Aug. 23rd to St. Thomas arriving Aug. 30th. Dec. 22nd. 10¢ steamship rate prepaid by U.S. 10¢ 1869 issue.

**Less than five recorded 10¢ 1869 Issue usages to St. Thomas**

## St. Thomas to United States



1870 April 14  
 St. Thomas to New York City by USBMC *South America* departing Apr. 14th to New York arriving Apr. 21st.

The local 3¢ DWI postage paid in cash. The U.S. 10¢ steamship postage pre-paid by 10¢ 1869 issue tied by "N. York Steamship Apr 21" cds.

*The USBMC "South America" was one of the original steamships of the line along with the sister ship "North America". Among those added later, USBMC "Erie" sailed in 1872, but only made one voyage, burning on her return trip.*



St. Thomas to the United States

Christiansted to United States



1870 December 12  
 Christiansted to Danbury  
 Conn., carried by USBMC  
 Merrimack departing Dec.  
 12th to New York arriving  
 Dec. 21st.

Double-weight local DWI  
 postage prepaid by two  
 3¢ 1866 Issue singles.  
 The U.S. 10¢ steamship  
 postage pre-paid by 10¢  
 1870 issue pair tied by  
 "New York Dec 21"  
 duplex. Restored edges.

The Only Recorded Double-Weight US-DWI Mixed Franking

Frederiksted to United States



1872 March 12,  
 Frederiksted to St. Thomas  
 Mar. 14th. Carried by  
 USBMC Merrimack to New  
 York arriving Mar. 21st.

The local DWI postage  
 prepaid by 3¢ 1866 Issue  
 imperforate. The U.S. 10¢  
 steamship postage prepaid  
 by 10¢ 1870 issue tied by  
 "N. York Steamship Mar  
 21" cds.

The fully prepaid rate by United States and Brazil Mail Company required prepayment of DWI and United States postage using stamps from both countries. U.S. stamps were stocked by the DWI Post Office and forwarders.



**St. Thomas to the United States**

The St. Thomas post office applied a "Franco" framed handstamp to indicate the prepayment of the D.W.I. local postage and U.S. steamship postage. They were seldom used, probably only during times of stamp shortages.



1873 July 14, St. Thomas to New York City carried by USBMC South America. 10c 1870 Issue prepays the 10c steamship rate. Stamp placed over red "10c Paid" manuscript and framed "Franco." struck.

**One of only five recorded "Franco" strikes in black.**



1874 August 13 St. Thomas to New Brunswick N.J., carried by USBMC Ontario departing Aug. 13th to New York arriving Aug. 20th.

The local DWI postage prepaid by DWI 3c 1874 Issue. The U.S. 10c steamship postage pre-paid by 10c 1873 issue tied by New York Steamship cds.

**One of only Three Recorded U.S. 10c Banknote-DWI 3c Bicolor Usages**

**The Earliest Recorded Use of the DWI 1874 Bicolor Issue**

The new DWI bicolor issue of 1874 was designed after the Danish 1870 issue and first placed on sale on January 15th 1874 in denominations of 1c, 3c, 4c and 14c. Only 5½ million stamps were sold over its 28 years of issue (1874-1902).



British RMSP Co. — U.S. Brazil Line

British Guiana to the United States



1868 November 7  
Georgetown, British Guiana to St. Thomas by RMSP Tyne on Barbados and Demerara route. Then USBMC *Mississippi* to New York arriving Nov. 19th.

Prepaid with British Guiana 8¢ and 12¢ to St. Thomas. St. Thomas double-weight red crayon "8" cent due rating updated from "4". New York "Steamship 20" cent due rating handstamp.

Carried on the last return voyage of the USBMC "Mississippi" before her wreck.

United States to Dutch Guiana

1872 February 17  
New York, N.Y. to Paramaribo, Dutch Guiana on USBMC *South America* departing Feb. 23rd to St. Thomas arriving Feb. 28th (backstamp). Then by British RMSP *Conway* to Barbados, then *Messey* to Paramaribo arriving Mar. 12th.

18¢ Treaty rate prepaid by U.S. 6¢ and 12¢ 1870 issue stamps. New York Feb. 23rd exchange cds with 8¢ credit to G.B.



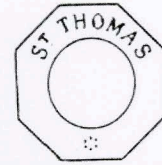
The Only Recorded United States Cover to Dutch Guiana via St. Thomas.

During operations of the first U.S. and Brazil Mail Co. (1865-75), mail was frequently transferred to/from the British Royal Mail Steam Packet network that had extensive connections in the Caribbean.



**U.S. Brazil Line to French Line / British RMSP Co.**

**New York to Guadeloupe via French Line**



Consular Postmark  
Used 1871-77

1874 August 24, New York to St. Thomas carried privately on USBMC *South America* arriving Aug. 31st. French Consul "St. Thomas, 7 Sept" datestamp. Then by French Line E packet to Guadeloupe.

60c single rate from St. Thomas to Guadeloupe prepaid by France 30c pair.

**Haiti via St. Thomas to the United States**



1871 November 4  
Aux Cayes to St. Thomas by private ship. Forwarded by USBMC *North America* departing Nov. 14th to New York arriving Nov. 21st.

The local DWI postage prepaid by 3¢ 1866 Issue imperforate. The U.S. 10¢ steamship postage prepaid by 10¢ 1870 issue tied by red "New York Paid All" cds.

The first U.S. and Brazil Mail Co. (1865-75) also connected with the French mail network that also had strong connections in the Caribbean and South America. These usages are seldom encountered.



British RMSP Co. — U.S. Brazil Line

Puerto Rico to the United States



1867 December 10, Mayaguez, Puerto Rico carried privately to St. Thomas, then carried by USBMC *North America* departing Dec. 15th to New York arriving Dec. 23rd.

The local DWI postage prepaid by 3¢ 1866 Issue imperforate. New York "N.Y. Steamship 10, Dec 23" due cds for 10¢ Steamship and inland postage.

**The Only DWI 3c Classic Cancelled by St. Thomas Datestamp on Complete Cover**

Puerto Rico to the United States

1871 November 9  
Mayaguez, Puerto Rico to St. Thomas by RMSP. Then by USBMC *North America* to New York arriving Nov. 21st.

British 4d postage prepaid by 1d red strip of four, cancelled at St. Thomas with "C51" grids as Mayaguez did not have a post office until late 1872. "N.Y. Steamship 10 Nov 21" cent due rating handstamp.





British RMSP Co. — U.S. Brazil Line

United States to St. Lucia



1869 March 6  
 Baltimore Md. to St. Thomas by USBMC *South America* from New York to St. Thomas arriving Mar. 31st. RMSP packet to St. Lucia.

Prepaid 4¢ printed matter rate by 2¢ 1868 issue pair. Manuscript "1" d postage due in St. Lucia

St. Lucia to United States



1869 January 7  
 St. Lucia privately to St. Thomas. Forwarded by James T. Abbott & Co. bypassing DWI post office on USBMC *South America* to New York arriving Nov. 22nd.

U.S. steamship postage prepaid by 10¢ 1861 issue tied by "Steam/Ship" handstamp.

*During operations of the first U.S. and Brazil Mail Co. (1865-75), mail was frequently transferred to/from the British Royal Mail Steam Packet network that had extensive connections in the Caribbean.*



## British RMSP Co. — U.S. Brazil Line

Trinidad to British Columbia  
via St. Thomas

British 1s 2d Packet Rate

1871 July 7

Trinidad to St. Thomas (7.13 backstamp) by RMSP packet, then by USBMC *South America* departing Jul. 13th to New York arriving Jul. 20th, closed bag overland to San Francisco and then by Cal., Oregon & Mexico Steamship Co. to Victoria.

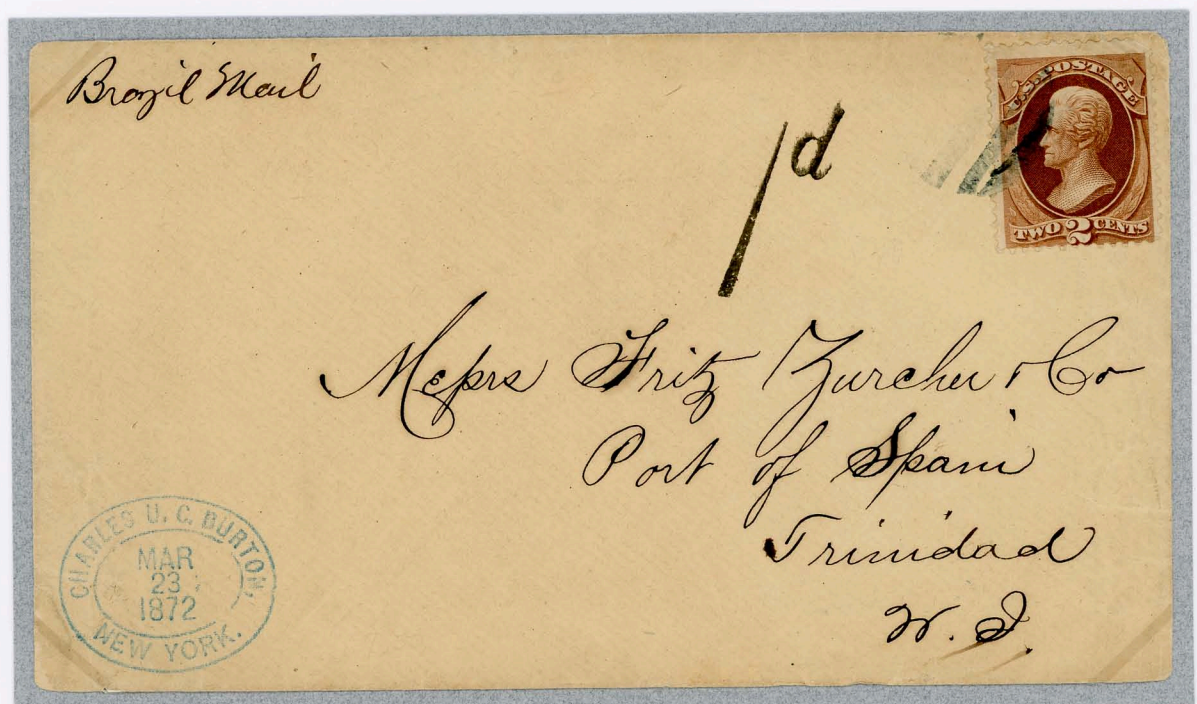
Prepaid at 1 shilling 2 pence British packet rate effective Nov. 1st 1867 plus Trinidad 1 pence local rate with (1d) scarlet and 1s lilac-rose.

**The Only Recorded Trinidad to British Columbia via DWI cover.**

## United States to Trinidad

1872 March 23  
New York, N.Y. to  
Port of Spain,  
Trinidad carried  
by USBMC *North  
America* Mar.  
23rd to St.  
Thomas arriving  
Mar. 30th, then  
by RMSC packet  
to Trinidad.

Prepaid 2¢ per 2  
ounces printed  
matter rate by  
U.S. 2¢ 1870  
issue. Trinidad  
"1d" handstamp  
rating for inland  
postage due.



**One of only Two Recorded U.S. 1870-88 Issue to Trinidad Printed Matter Usages**



## Venezuela Packet — U.S. &amp; Brazil Mail Packet

## Venezuela via St. Thomas to New York



1867 May 9, La Guaira to St. Thomas on packet *Robert Todd* arriving May 12. Then by USBMC *Guiding Star* departing May 15 to New York arriving May 21st.

British post office at La Guaira prepaid red crayon "4d" rating. Venezuela packet postage prepaid by 2r green "Reales" issue (local printing, stone 3) private letter stamp for Venezuela packet postage. New York "Steamship 10" cents due rating handstamp for U.S. 10¢ steamship rate.

*From 1863 to 1867, the private Puerto Cabello Steamship Co. under Captain Robert Todd carried mail from Venezuela to St. Thomas by Venezuelan contract. The route was taken over in 1867 by Jesurun and Zoon, a Dutch firm. It changed hands again, in late 1869, to Cameron, Macauley of St. Thomas until 1870 when the British Royal Mail Steamship Company resumed packet service to Venezuela. Jesurun and Macauley each issued private letter stamps for their service.*



**United States to Brazil**

**10¢ Steamship Rate**

(Effective 10/65 - 9/70)

1867 January 23, New York to Rio de Janeiro carried by USBMC *North America* via St. Thomas Jan. 30th and arriving at Rio Feb. 19th.

Prepaid double the 10¢ steamship rate by two U.S. 10¢ 1861 Issue singles. Brazil blue crayon "200" reis (10¢) due rating.



**15¢ Fully Prepaid Rate**

(Effective 10/70 - 12/76)

1872 July 23, New York to Rio de Janeiro carried by USBMC *Merrimack* via St. Thomas July 30th and arriving at Rio Aug. 20th. Prepaid 15¢ treaty rate by U.S. 15¢ 1870 Issue.



1873 November 23, New York to Rio de Janeiro carried by USBMC *Erie* via St. Thomas Nov. 30th and arriving at Rio Dec. 21st (backstamp).

Prepaid 15¢ treaty rate by U.S. 15¢ 1870 Issue. Restored at top.

**One of Only Two Recorded Examples carried by the USBMC Erie on her only voyage.**

The *Erie* of 3,000 tons was added to the line in 1872, but she was to have a short life as she was totally destroyed in a fire on her first return voyage from Brazil. On the evening of 1 January 1873, shortly out of Para, a fire started in the galley. The burned out hull sank, destroying all mail and cargo, but with no loss of life. Mail is only known from the maiden voyage leg of New York-St. Thomas-Brazil.



## Brazil to the United States

The US Brazil Line stopped in four Brazilian ports: Para, Pernambuco, Bahia and Rio de Janeiro. Examples from Para and Pernambuco are shown below.



1873 August 6, Para, Brazil to New York via St. Thomas, carried by USBMC *Ontario* from Rio to St. Thomas Aug. 13th and arriving in New York on Aug. 20th. Fully prepaid treaty rate of 300 reis (15¢) effective 1870 to 1876. Stamps left uncanceled.



1873 November 1, Pernambuco, Brazil to Boston, Mass. carried by USBMC *Ontario* via St. Thomas Nov. 13th and arriving at New York City Nov. 21st. Prepaid 300 reis rate prepaid by 100 and 200 reis Dom Pedro issue. Red "New York Paid All" transit cds.

The 300 reis fully prepaid Brazil-United States rate was effective October 1, 1870 until December 31, 1876 when Brazil joined the UPU. Previously the rate was prepaid to port only with inland postage due.



Argentina — United States

United States to Argentina



1873 December 23  
New York, N.Y. to  
Cordoba, Argentina,  
carried by USBMC Ontario  
departing Dec. 24th to Rio  
de Janeiro arriving Jan.  
21nd. Then by the *Douro*  
to Buenos Aires.

18¢ per ½ ounce rate  
prepaid by 3¢ and 15¢  
1873 Issue. New York "8"  
cent integral credit to G.B.

Argentina to the United States

1869 October 2  
Buenos Aires to Rio de  
Janeiro on French Packet  
(Line K) *Aunis* on her last  
trip. Then by USBMC *North  
America* to St. Thomas  
departing Oct. 26th and  
arriving Nov. 14th and on to  
New York (11.20).

French postage prepaid in  
Rio. "New York '30' U.S.  
Notes" due cds for double  
the unpaid 10¢ steamship  
rate plus a 1.5 inflation  
factor due to the  
depreciation of paper  
currency.



The Only Recorded Example of this New York "30 U.S. Notes" cds



## Cuba to Argentina via St. Thomas and Brazil



1870 May 17, Havana to St. Thomas on Herrera Line (Spanish) packet arriving May 30th. Forwarded by J. Niles & Co. on USBMC *South America* to Rio de Janeiro arriving Jun. 19th. Then by Tait Line (British) *City of Rio* to Buenos Aires arriving Jun. 3rd. Rio green "460" reis due rating and blue Buenos Aires blue "5" centavos due rating for inland postage.

**The Only Recorded  
Double Rate Example  
of this use**

The St. Thomas Herrera leg was paid cash or on account. Transit from St. Thomas to British post office at St. Thomas exempt from 3¢ local charge.

St. Thomas-Rio de Janeiro by USBMC at double the 10¢ steamship rate paid by U.S. 10¢ 1870 pair.

Rio-Buenos Aires at double the 4d rate paid by G.B. 4d vermilion pair with Rio "C83" cancel.

Buenos Aires blue crayon "3/6" due rate of 3 peso 6 reales.



1871 October 17, Havana to St. Thomas on Herrera Line (Spanish) *Barcelona* arriving October 29th. Then by USBMC *Merrimack* to Rio de Janeiro arriving Nov. 19th. RMSP *Neva* to Buenos Aires arriving Dec. 7th.

A group of about 30 covers are known, sent from Havana to Buenos Aires in 1870-75, of which the first on this page is the earliest.



United States to Uruguay

1871 August 23  
 New York, N.Y. to  
 Montevideo,  
 Uruguay, carried by  
 USBMC South  
 America departing  
 Aug. 23rd to Rio de  
 Janeiro arriving  
 Jun. 22nd. Then by  
 British steamer to  
 Montevideo.

18¢ per ½ ounce  
 rate prepaid by 2¢,  
 6¢, 10¢ 1870 Issue.

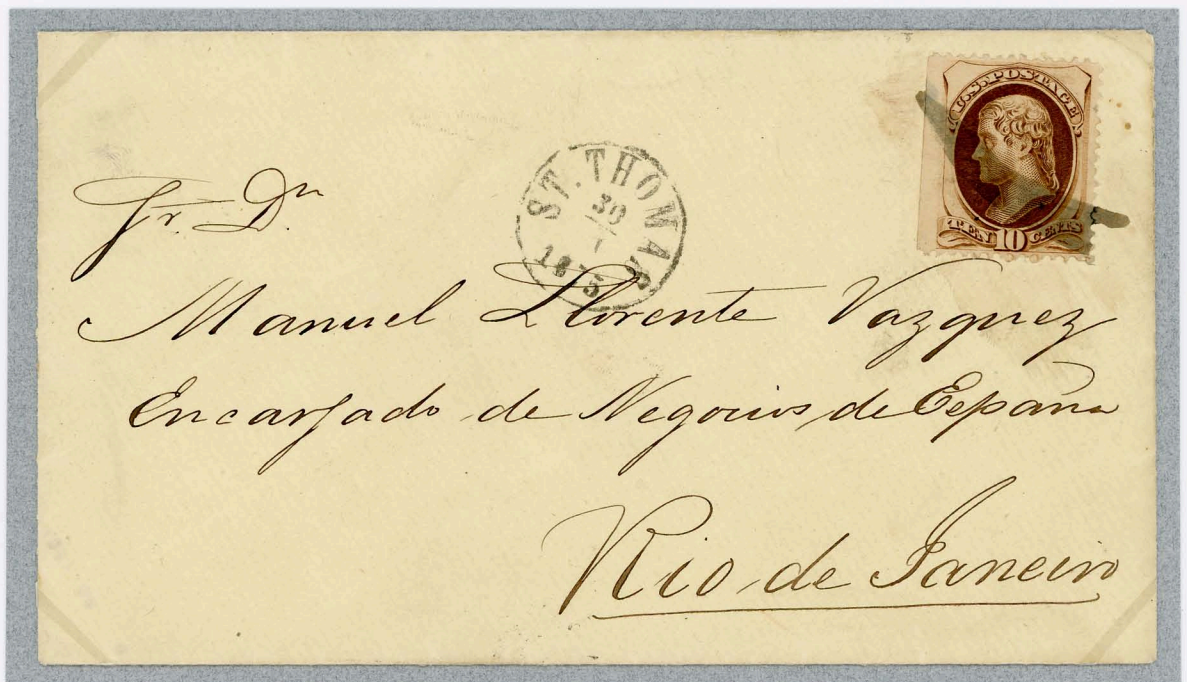


Conclusion

The loss of the Erie in 1872 was symbolic of the commercial state of the company. The Line had been operating with about half the subsidy allowed on other mail contracts and was unable to pay dividends. There were complaints in newspapers and to Congress about poor service. Facing continuing losses, Garrison had urged the Government as early as 1872 to pass a bill renewing the contract with increased subsidy but his efforts received support from neither Postmaster Jewell nor Congress. During the winter of 1873 the Line ceased advertising. The contract expired on September 30th 1875 and the Ontario left September 23rd on its last trip from New York. The demise of the first USBMSC was not solely the fault of its owners or the government, but an inadequate subsidy was the root cause, leading to infrequent service on ships that were slow relative to the competition.

1875 June 30  
 St. Thomas to Rio  
 de Janeiro, Brazil  
 carried by USBMC  
 Ontario departing  
 arriving into Rio  
 Jun. 22nd.

U.S. 10¢ 1873  
 issue prepaid the  
 10¢ steamship rate  
 for passage  
 entirely outside the  
 U.S. New York  
 Aug. 23rd  
 exchange cds with  
 8¢ credit to G.B.



St. Thomas to Brazil on the Fourth to Last Run of the Line