

# Quaker Charity

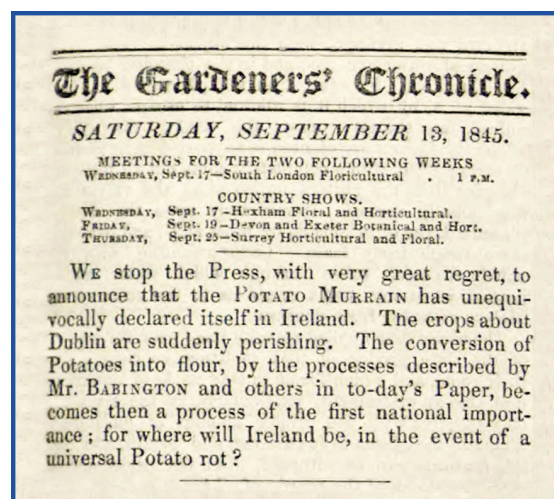
## During Black '47

Ireland's annual potato harvest takes place in late August to early September. The infamous potato blight first appeared in 1845 causing a partial failure of the crop. There was no major loss of life that year. The majority of the population had been reduced to living on as small as a quarter of an acre of land, and the potato was their only sustenance. They knew what to do for there had been several periods of food shortages previously in the century. The strategy was to pawn all possessions and use the money to help their families survive until the next harvest. The highly anticipated next crop of 1846 was a total failure. The Irish were then faced with the horror of inescapable starvation.

One of the religious tenets of the Society of Friends, or Quakers, is the performance of humanitarian deeds for the greater good. Once the situation became obviously harrowing, Dublin Irish Quakers led by Joseph Bewley and Jonathan Pim established the Central Relief Committee (hereafter CRC) to organize and disseminate the donations that began to pour in. They had no idea of the magnitude or duration of the calamity before them. The CRC worked closely in concert with London based Quakers and the Quakers of the General Relief Committee (hereafter GRC) in New York City, several of whom were blood relatives.

The first full year of operation of the CRC was 1847, often referred to as Black '47. Early on the overwhelming volume of mail caused them to move their headquarters from 57 William Street to a larger venue at 43 Fleet Street. Several interesting philatelic situations occurred during the course of their correspondence. This exhibit presents an overview of the Quaker effort during that year. All of the following items, arranged chronologically, are of historical importance; philatelically significant items are framed in red.

*... where will Ireland be in the event of a universal Potato rot?*



*One of the first reports of the potato blight from the Gardeners' Chronicle of 13 September 1845.*

## First Quaker Excursion ~ Soup Kitchens Established

Many British that felt that the published newspaper accounts of the early days of the Irish famine were greatly overstated. Just prior to the establishment of the CRC, William Forster, a leading English Quaker, took it upon himself to begin an excursion into Ireland. The object of the journey was to distribute aid already collected and accurately report back to the Dublin and London Quakers on the conditions encountered. He served a major function by recruiting correspondents for the CRC. Traveling by mail car Forster found that the newspaper accounts were "...by no means exaggerated."

This letter was written by one of Forster's traveling activist companions, Joshua Harvey, M.D., a member of the CRC. It gives an accounting of aid distributed by Forster, in particular several 'boilers' (iron caldrons) for local soup kitchens. A historically significant enclosure gives a specific outline for the standard operation of a Quaker soup kitchen. Harvey mentions that he has written in advance to the Postmaster of Sligo asking him to hold any mail directed to Forster until the group gets there.



Ballina to Dublin March 16-17, 1847

16 March 1847 — datelined Ballina and directed to William Todhunter, who was the head of the CRC Seed Distribution Sub-Committee; stamped with a seriffed 27.5mm **BALLINA/MR16/1847** double arc circular postal marking.

17 March 1847 — an orange-red 29mm **1/PAID/MR17/1847/A** arrival handstamp applied in Dublin; ms / pen slash indicating Uniform Penny Postage Rate of 1840, ms *J.P.* apparently refers the letter to Jonathan Pim, CRC Co-Secretary.

NB — As the head of the CRC Seed Distribution Sub-Committee, the above addressee William Todhunter initiated the scheme of utilizing the British mail system for dispersal. Some 40,903 small landholders received grants of agricultural seeds resulting in an estimated 9,652 acres of crops producing 193,040 tons of food in 1847. He also served on the Clothing Committee, and even spent three months on the CRC leased trawler *Erne* in search of suitable locations for Irish fisheries on the Western coast.

William Forster acting on behalf of his friends places in the hands of Sam Bourne, Sam O'Donnell & Frederic Garry - Rosspod -

30 Bags of Rice  
 45 Bags of Biscuit  
 15 Barrels of Indian Meal  
 15 Bags of Peas -

To be distributed amongst 60 families of the most destitute of the poor in their neighbourhood, under the following regulation, & in the following proportions -

L. Bourne, S. O'Donnell & F. Garry each to nominate 20 families of the whole 60 so nominated to be approved by the whole Com<sup>tee</sup> & the list so approved to be signed by all three members of the Com<sup>tee</sup>.

The distribution to take place thus -  
 one Meal, one Rice & one Biscuit of the Meal. Father & mother each one quart - all above 15 years each one pint & all under 15 years half a pint -

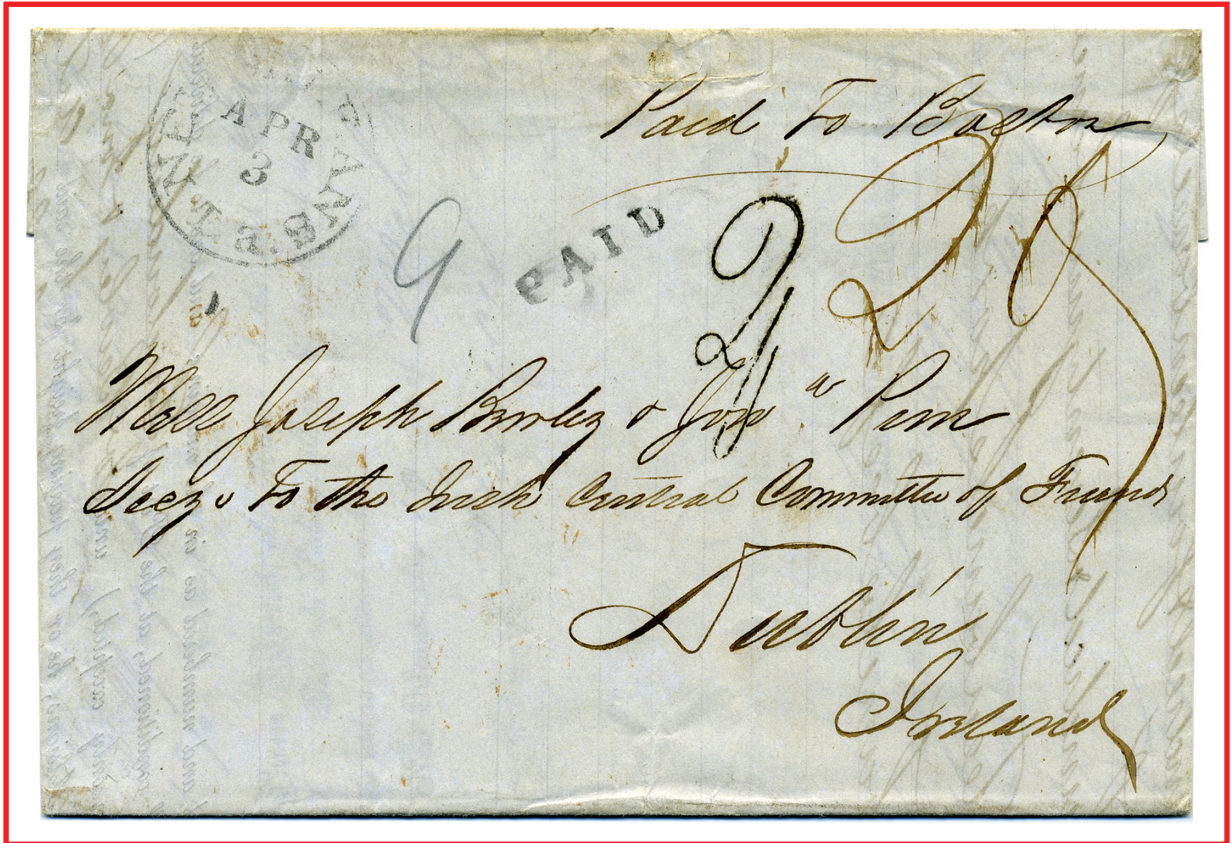
of the Rice - half the above quantities  
 of the Biscuit - father & mother each 3 - all above 15. Each all under 15 - 1

The Peas to be divided - 5 Bags to each of the members for soup Kitchens in their respective localities - but not to be used for any other purpose -

Enclosure within folded letter datelined Ballina, March 16, 1847, to William Todhunter of the CRC.

## The American Response

U.S. Vice President George Mifflin Dallas called a political mass meeting on February 9, 1847, to establish a national organization for the coordination of aid to Ireland. Senators, Congressmen, and members of the Supreme Court joined to hear Daniel Webster deliver the keynote address. It was resolved that mayors of major seaports from Boston to New Orleans, led by New York and Philadelphia, were to set up local committees as hubs to accept and organize the shipping of contributions. Every American city, town, and village was encouraged to form its own local relief committee — and this spider-webbed organization actually worked. As a result of the meeting, the Society of Friends (Quakers) were selected as major participants in the delivery of aid to Ireland.



*New Orleans to Dublin via Boston and Liverpool April 3 - May 15, 1847*

19 March 1847 — dated Bill of Lading from Cincinnati of contributions of foodstuffs to be shipped on the Barque *Envoy* sailing from New Orleans to Londonderry.

3 April 1847 — Posted with **NEW ORLEANS/La/APR 3** cds and **PAID** handstamp struck; manuscript *20* indicating the U.S. internal rate for a double weight letter traveling over 300 miles; manuscript *Paid to Boston*.

1 May 1847 — *RMS Cambria* departed Boston.

14 May 1847 — *RMS Cambria* arrived in Liverpool where it received a black 2/- (Tabcart M72) double rate handstamp and a 25mm transit AMERICA/LIVERPOOL/MY 14/1847 backstamp.

15 May 1847 — orange-red 28mm 2/MY 15/1847/C received backstamp applied in Dublin.

20

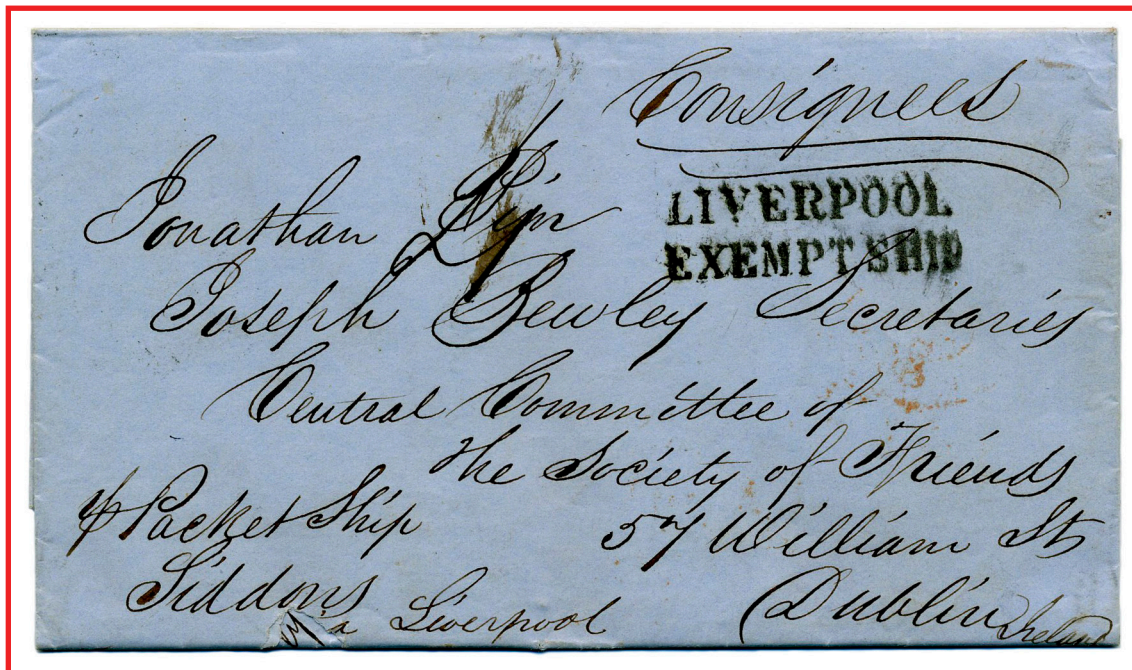


*V.P. George Mifflin Dallas*

## Diaspora Aid Homeland

Often quoted in Irish history books,  
this letter from GRC Committee Chairman Myndert van Schaick speaks for itself:

*...I have promised two old Irish gentlemen who came to this room abounding in sympathy and thankfulness, that I would say to you that a letter has been received from Thomas Swanton of Cranlieth, Co. Cork, representing the extreme destitution and misery of the large Parish of Skull. East Skull, a half parish, 6 miles long and 8 broad, containing 8,000 inhabitants is particularly recommended to your attention. Though we clearly see the danger and the impropriety of interfering with your system by giving special instructions, yet less than this I could not promise to two gray haired old men...*



*New York to Dublin via Liverpool April 30 - May 30, 1847*

29 April 1847 — datelined New York from the Office of the Quaker Irish Relief Standing Committee to the CRC. This letter was endorsed **Consignees** and *Packet Ship Siddons via Liverpool* and was handed directly to the ship purser.

30 April 1847 — The Quaker owned *Siddons* embarked from New York on this date.

29 May 1847 — stamped on arrival at Liverpool with **LIVERPOOL/EXEMPT SHIP** (Tabcart Type EXSL1, in use 1840-1864) marking. The manuscript 4 postage due is the reduced rate of 2d for the Master's gratuity plus 2d for double rate postage from Liverpool to Dublin. Under 3/4 Victoria C96 para 35, Consignees letters paid no Ship Letter rate, and no Inland Rate if addressed to the port of entry. The Post Office was allowed to recover the cost of the Master's gratuity and could charge Inland Postage at the prepaid rate if addressed elsewhere. On the reverse is a Type S16 truncated box 29 MY 1847/LIVERPOOL/SHIP handstamp.

30 May 1847 — crossed the Irish Sea via smaller vessel, an orange-red 27mm 8/MY 30/C Dublin backstamp was added.

## Domestic Correspondents

Local relief committees were organized throughout all of Ireland. To assist in the orderly distribution and the assessment of the effectiveness of relief aid, the CRC relied on correspondence from the local chairmen. They were large landowners or clergy, without regard to religious denomination. The sender of this letter, Chairman of the Moneygall Relief Committee (County Offaly) Rev. William Minchin, was both landowner and clergyman. Notably, he was the landlord for the Kearney family, who are the **direct ancestors of U.S. President Barack Obama**.

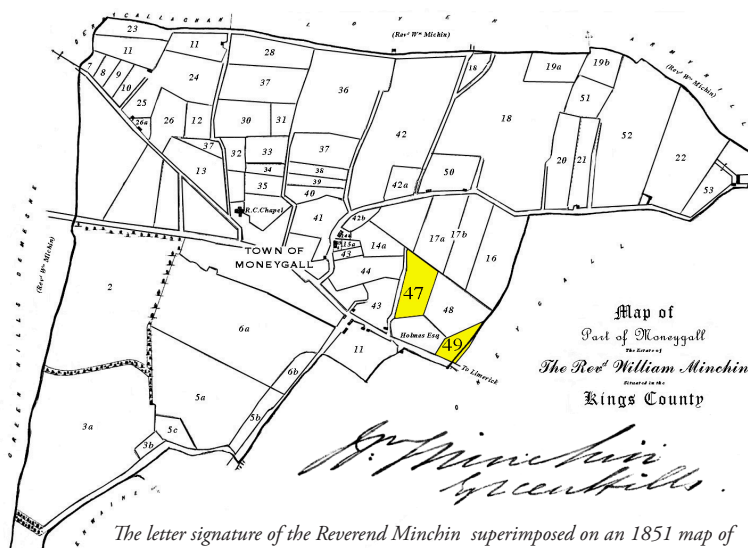
Rev. Minchin writes about an 80 gallon 'boiler' (iron caldron) which was used in the local 'soup kitchen' that was proving insufficient to serve his district population of 163 families with 1,021 people. Here he asks that the Quakers donate another larger capacity boiler as they were doing elsewhere throughout the country at that time..



Moneygall to Dublin April 9-10, 1847

9 April 1847 — datelined Moneygall Relief Committee; ms *Paid* indicating prepayment; backstamped with a black seriffed 27.5mm MONEYGALL/AP9/1847 double arc postal marking.

10 April 1847 — an orange-red 29mm 3/PAID/AP10/1847/A arrival handstamp applied in Dublin; / pen slash indicates the Uniform Penny Postage Rate of 1840.



The letter signature of the Reverend Minchin superimposed on an 1851 map of part of his estate in Moneygall with the Kearney family parcels highlighted.

## The Mail Ship Race and Rate War

It was a common practice at the time to send duplicate letters of transatlantic business on different ships, as in this case. Ironically, the original of this letter was sent on the maiden voyage of the first U.S. contract mail ship, and its copy was sent on the first British transatlantic mail ship, which had been launched seven years earlier in 1840.

The British Cunard Line enjoyed a virtual monopoly on transatlantic mail, which it ran out of Boston up to this time. The British government was more than unhappy when the US planned to inaugurate its first contract mail service with the maiden voyage of the Ocean Line's *USMS Washington*. On board was VIP passenger the First Assistant US Postmaster General Selah Hobbie, who was on assignment to negotiate a new postal treaty with the British.

The British newspapers hyped a race between the *USMS Washington* and the British ship *RMS Britannia*, albeit an unfair one. Both vessels embarked on June 1, 1847 — the British ship from Boston destined for Liverpool, the American ship from New York to Cowes

(Southampton) and then on to Bremen. The *Britannia* beat the *Washington* by two full days. Reviewing the *Washington's* first arrival the Illustrated London Times correspondent remarked, "In point of size she looked like an elongated three-decker, with only one streak round her; but about as ugly a specimen of steam-ship building as ever went through this anchorage..."

While the ships were en route the British Post Office mandated that all mail carried by their new American competitor would be subject to a **Discriminatory Packet Letter Rate** of 1/- (24¢), not the Ship Letter Rate of 8d (16¢), and any US prepayments should be ignored. This new policy initiated the twelve month long Discriminatory Rate Period.

The Irish Relief Association of Nashville, Tennessee, had collected \$1,000 for Irish relief. Their letters were sent to the CRC by the Quaker firm of Brown Brothers, working with the GRC in New York, converting American dollars into a draft for £ 204.15.9. The contribution was to be eventually divided among six specific Irish towns: Muff, Newcastle, Monaghan, Holestone, Armagh, and Banden.

Original Letter via *USMS Washington*



New York to Dublin via Southampton June 1-17, 1847

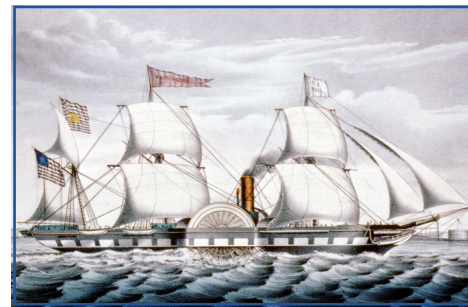
22 May 1847 — datelined New York, endorsed *pr Washington Str.*

1 June 1847 — red 30mm **NEW-YORK JUN 1** circular datestamp with matching **PAID** [arc] struck, the *Washington* embarks, Frederick Hewitt Commander.

15 June 1847 — *USMS Washington* arrives at Cowes (Southampton), all mailbags ordered to London unopened.

16 June 1847 — U.S. prepayment refused, **Discriminatory Rate of 1/-** (24¢) applied, an orange-red unpaid letters 24mm XC/16 JU 16/1847 morning processing mark placed on reverse; the *Washington* leaves for Bremen.

17 June 1847 — crossed the Irish Sea via smaller vessel, an orange-red 27mm 2/JU 17/1847/D arrival backstamp was applied at Dublin.

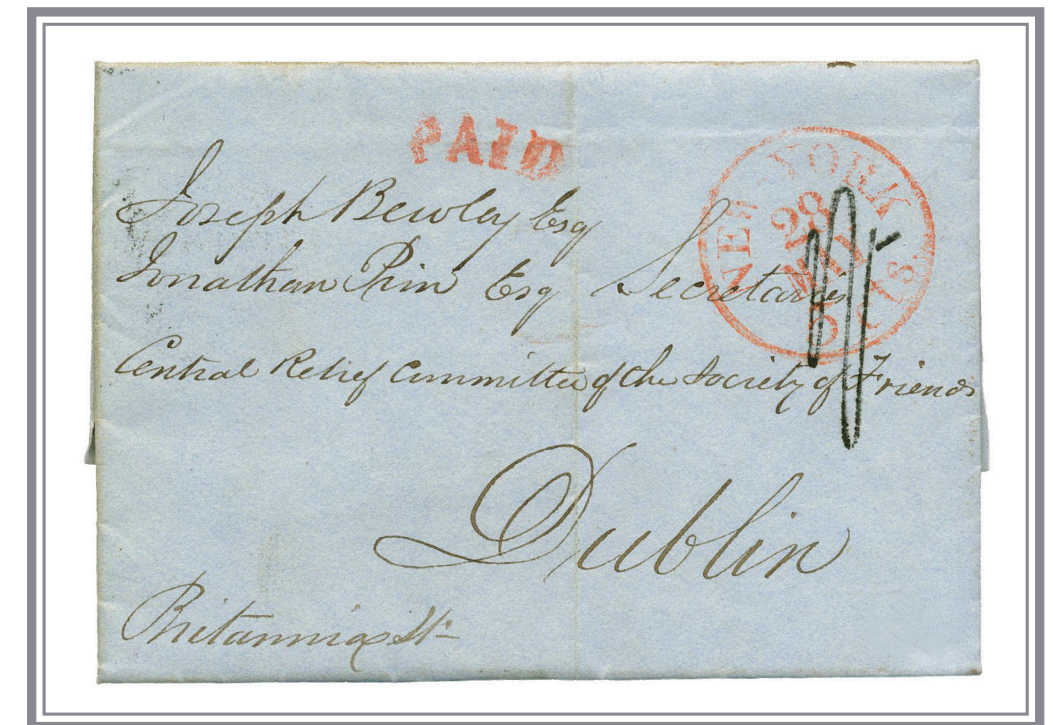


*USMS Washington*



*RMS Britannia*

Copy Letter via *RMS Britannia*



New York to Dublin via Liverpool May 28 - June 17, 1847

22 May 1847 — datelined New York to the CRC in Dublin.

28 May 1847 — The letter, endorsed *Britannia Str.*, was posted at New York, a red 30mm **NEW-YORK/28 MAY/5cts.** was applied paying the 1845 under 300 miles rate from New York to Boston. A red **PAID** in arc handstamp was also struck.

1 June 1847 — The *RMS Britannia* sailed from Boston for Liverpool.

13 June 1847 — The *Britannia* arrived at Liverpool and a black 25mm **AMERICA/LIVERPOOL/ JU 13/1847** transit backstamp was struck. The letter was rated at one shilling due, the transatlantic **Packet Letter rate**, shown by the black ¶ handstamp.

17 June 1847 — crossed the Irish Sea via smaller vessel, an orange-red 27mm 3/JU 17/1847/(C?) arrival backstamp was struck at Dublin.

# The Macedonian Affair

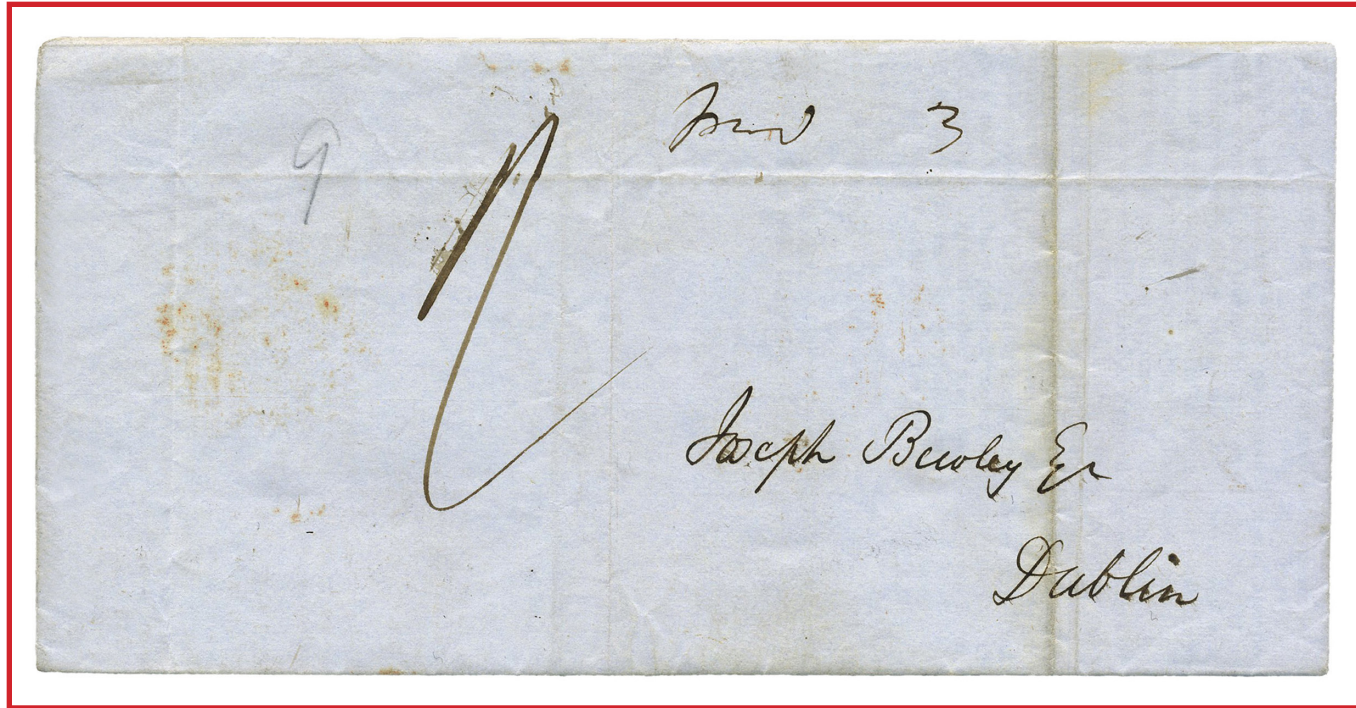
As the public consciousness was being raised about the plight of the Irish, the retired ship captain Commodore George C. De Kay volunteered to make a charitable voyage without pay. He became the first and only man in history to receive Congressional approval of the loan of a U.S. ship, two actually. He was to command the *USS Macedonian* from New York, while the *USS Jamestown* would be commanded by Robert P. Forbes from Boston. The voyage of the *Jamestown* was completed in a flawless forty-seven days; the *Macedonian* had a different fate.

At first members of the GRC were verbally supportive of the De Kay effort, but after numerous delays and complications, none of which were De Kay's fault, their support for the plan was withheld. The GRC turned over the booking of relief ships to Quaker Robert Minturn, who tried to avoid delaying the time-sensitive cargo and seems to have preferred to use Quaker owned shipping.

The Committee published a circular (left) explaining that they had never actually formalized a relationship with De Kay. A man of integrity and considerable pride, De Kay defended his besmirched honor by persevering with his plans for the *Macedonian*. He announced in the press that he would continue to accept donations and proceed despite any difficulties. He in truth pledged most of his family fortune to do it.

True to his word on July 16, 1847, with some help from the Boston committee, the *Macedonian* arrived in Cork where De Kay was greeted as a hero. A twenty-one gun salute was sounded and the Commodore was treated to a grand celebratory banquet in his honor.

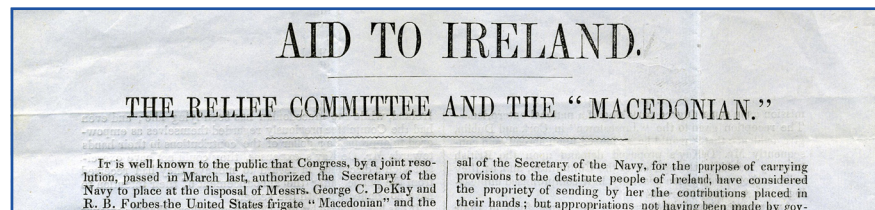
Ironically, both of these Discriminatory Rate items traveled on the maiden voyage of the *USMS Washington*: the GRC printed circular (left); Bill of Lading signed by George C. De Kay one month in advance of his humanitarian *Macedonian* relief voyage arrival (right).



New York to Dublin via Southampton/London June 1-17, 1847



New York to Dublin via Southampton/London June 1-17, 1847



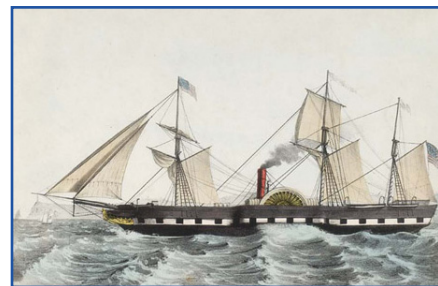
31 May 1847 — printed date General Relief Committee circular to Joseph Bewley, Secretary of the CRC, disavowing ties with George De Kay and the *Macedonian*.

1 June 1847 — absent pmk strongly suggests having been handed to the ship's purser, avoiding U.S. Mail, while the less convincing ambiguous manuscript *paid 3* may indicate the prepayment of the March 1847 printed circular rate; the *Washington* embarks.

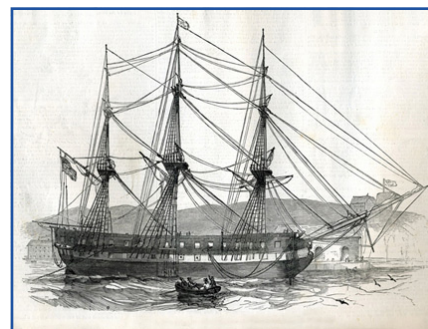
15 June 1847 — *USMS Washington* arrives at Cowes (Southampton), all mailbags ordered to London unopened.

16 June 1847 — **Discriminatory Packet Letter Rate of 1/-** (24¢) applied, an orange-red 24mm NC/16 JU 16/1847 unpaid morning processing mark placed on reverse; the *Washington* leaves for Bremen.

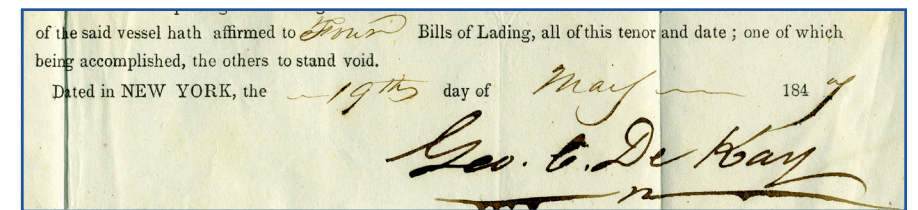
17 June 1847 — crossed the Irish Sea via smaller vessel to Dublin where an orange-red 27mm 2/JU 17/1847/D backstamp was added.



USMS Washington



USS Macedonian at Cork Harbor



19 May 1847 — Bill of Lading signed by George C. De Kay, dated in New York, letter front endorsed *pr Steamer Washington*.

1 June 1847 — red 30mm **NEW-YORK JUN 1** circular datestamp with matching **PAID** [arc] struck, the *Washington* embarks, Frederick Hewitt Commander.

15 June 1847 — *USMS Washington* arrives at Cowes (Southampton), all mailbags ordered to London unopened.

16 June 1847 — U.S. prepayment refused, **Discriminatory Rate of 1/-** (24¢) applied, an orange-red 24mm XC/16 JU 16/1847 unpaid morning processing mark placed on reverse; the *Washington* leaves for Bremen.

17 June 1847 — crossed the Irish Sea via smaller vessel to Dublin where an orange-red 27mm 2/JU 17/1847/D backstamp was applied.

## Loans to Fishermen

The Society of Friends took a serious review of their relief efforts. They determined that granting loans to ‘industry’, such as manufacturing, agriculture, and fisheries, would result in more effective long range benefits for the population than their soup kitchens, which were serving the short term immediate needs.

Starting in January 1847 loans were given to the destitute Claddagh district fishermen in Galway. To survive the famine the fishermen nationwide had pawned their equipment, which they had traditionally done during previous food shortages (1816, 1817, 1822, 1831, and 1842). This current situation, however, persisted much longer than anyone anticipated. The Quaker loans proved successful in some locales.

This letter was written by Thomas Bunbury from Spiddal House, about ten miles west of the Claddagh, and acknowledges the receipt of a letter of credit for £20 from the CRC to be loaned to local fishermen in want of a larger boat.



*Galway to Dublin July 26-27, 1847*

26 July 1847 — datelined; Blue **GALWAY/JY26/1847** double arc postmark struck with appropriate diamond shaped barred numeral obliterator **232** handstamp tying 1D Red (HG).

27 July 1847 — orange-red 28mm Dublin 1/JY 27/1847/A circle arrival handstamp applied.



*Spiddal House*



## Plea for Winter Clothing

Contemporaneous accounts often described the Irish as being very badly clothed, and even as “naked walking skeletons.” Because their bodies were losing such great amounts of weight, their clothes didn’t fit, that is, if they had any clothes at all that were not pawned. Hand-me-downs were nonexistent since older siblings were actually getting smaller, not larger.

In this letter the Lady of the Manor Catherine McDermott expresses her concern for what might befall the wretchedly poor children in her district during the upcoming winter and pleas for more clothing from the CRC.

Interestingly, the letter is addressed to 20 Upper Bridge Street where the Quaker run wholesale linen business of Edward Allen & Sons operated. No doubt the firm was involved with the Clothing Sub-Committee of the CRC.



*Ballyfarnon to Dublin via Boyle October 25-26, 1847*

24 October 1847 — datelined Alderford House (Alderford Townland, Kilonan Civil Parish, Boyle Poor Law Union, Boyle Barony, County Roscommon) to CRC Clothing Sub-Committee.

25 October 1847 — Black Receiving House N°1 hs and Italic two line *Ballyfarnon/Boyle* struck on address panel; Blue double arc **BOYLE/OC 25/1847** dispatch handstamp; Boyle barred diamond **70** tying 1D (HH, Plate 69).

26 October 1847 — orange-red 28mm Dublin 7/OC26/1847/A circle received backstamp struck.



*Alderford House, Ballyfarnon, Boyle, Ireland, as seen in 2018.*

## Coffin Ships

Some ships on the Liverpool-New York leg would stop in Cobh to pick up Irishmen fleeing certain starvation in their homeland. They did this to simply help turn a profit and earned the derisive moniker 'coffin ships'. Steerage conditions below in the cargo hold were so deplorable that many people died en route. We have found records that show 25 people died of fever and/or small pox during one such voyage in February 1849 aboard the Packet Ship *Cambridge*. Many of the other 313 passengers were placed in quarantine upon their arrival in New York. Incidentally, the Black Ball Line which owned the *Cambridge* was founded by a group of New York Quaker merchants headed by Jeremiah Thompson, and included Isaac Wright, his son William Wright, Francis Thompson and Benjamin Marshall. All were Quakers excepting Marshall.



New York to Dublin via Liverpool October 15 - November 12, 1847

15 October 1847 — datelined New York from the GRC to the CRC. The letter is endorsed *Consignees* and *Packet Ship Cambridge*. A duplicate of this letter was sent via the steamer *Hibernia*.

11 November 1847 — arrived at Liverpool where a black Type S16 truncated box 11 NO 1847/ LIVERPOOL/SHIP handstamp was applied to the reverse. The **LIVERPOOL/EXEMPT SHIP** (Tabcart Type EXSL 1, in use 1840-1864) marking was struck on the front. Along with it is the large script 3 postage due handstamp, which represents the reduced rate of 2d for the Master's gratuity plus 1d for postage from Liverpool to Dublin. As stated previously, consignees letters paid no Ship Letter rate, and no Inland Rate if addressed to the port of entry. The Post Office was allowed to recover the cost of the master's gratuity and could charge Inland Postage if addressed elsewhere.

12 November 1847 — crossed the Irish Sea via smaller vessel to Dublin where an orange-red 27mm 8/ NO 12/1847/C arrival backstamp was added.

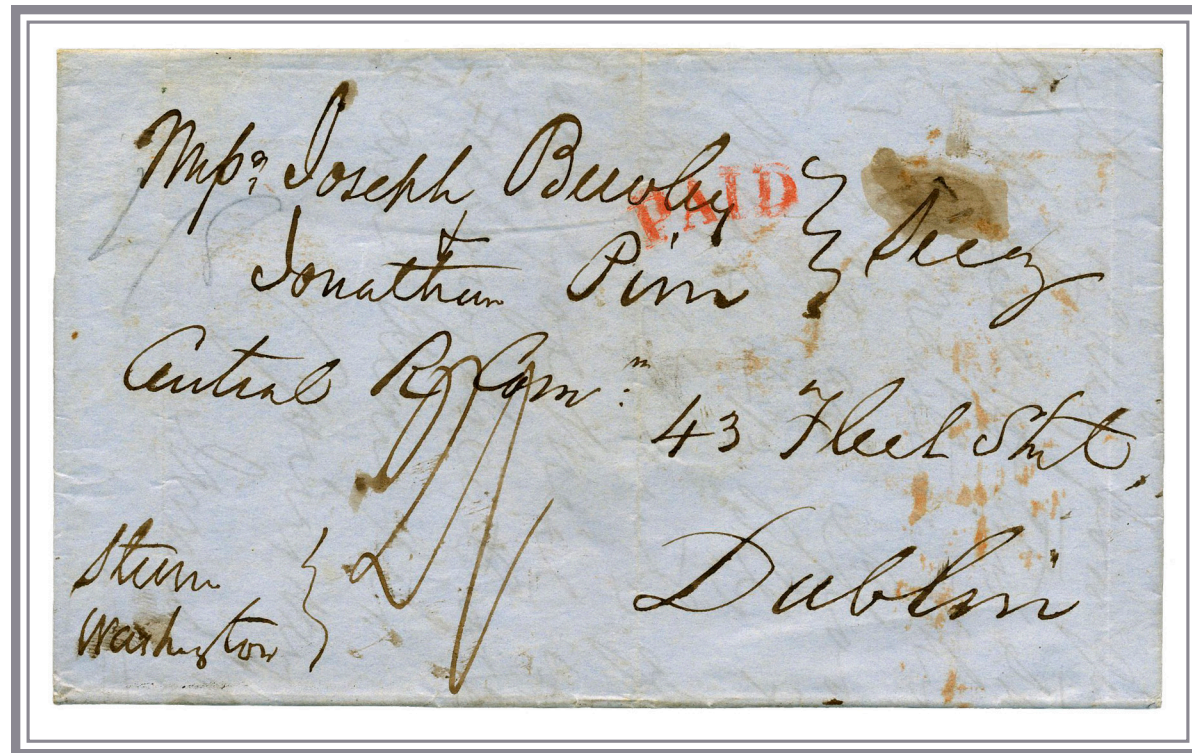
## Dwindling Donations

The letter at the left was carried on the second voyage of the *Washington*. As with the maiden voyage, on arrival at Southampton the British letters were rated the Discriminatory Packet Letter Rate, not as Ship Letters. The letter gives the CRC in Dublin a Bill of Lading for a shipment sent via the Packet Ship *Queen of the West*, and of donations by the citizens and Odd Fellows Society of Niles, Michigan. A postscript on the reverse notes *The Queen of the West sailed yesterday*.

The copy letter at the right contains two separate letters written on the same wrapper thereby saving

postage costs: the first is a duplicate of the previous featured example sent on the *USMS Washington*; the second was written seven days later entirely in the hand of James Reyburn, GRC treasurer who succeed Myndert van Schaick, giving a Bill of Lading for the *Queen of the West*, and mentioning a small parcel soon to arrive on the Packet Ship *Cambridge*. Treasurer Reyburn writes here, "The receipts of provisions and money are now drawing to a close and the first of November may enable our committee to make a final report of our doings in aid of the suffering Irish," with the view of the GRC publishing its accounts.

Double Rate Original Letter via USMS Washington



New York to Dublin via Southampton/London September 23 - October 10, 1847

23 September 1847 — datelined New York and contained enclosures necessitating double the 24¢ US Packet to-the-port rate. The 48¢ was paid in cash, as shown by the barely visible manuscript 48 at the upper left and the red **PAID** arc handstamp strike. The letter, endorsed *Stmr. Washington*, departed from New York on this date for Bremen via Southampton on the second outbound passage of the ship.

9 October 1847 — The *Washington* arrived at Southampton. An orange-red 23mm JX/9 OC 9/1847 transit backstamp indicating midday processing was applied at London after arriving in a closed bag. 2 shillings (2/- in manuscript) was charged for a double Packet Letter. This was equivalent to 48¢ US, thus a double Packet Letter charge was assessed twice.

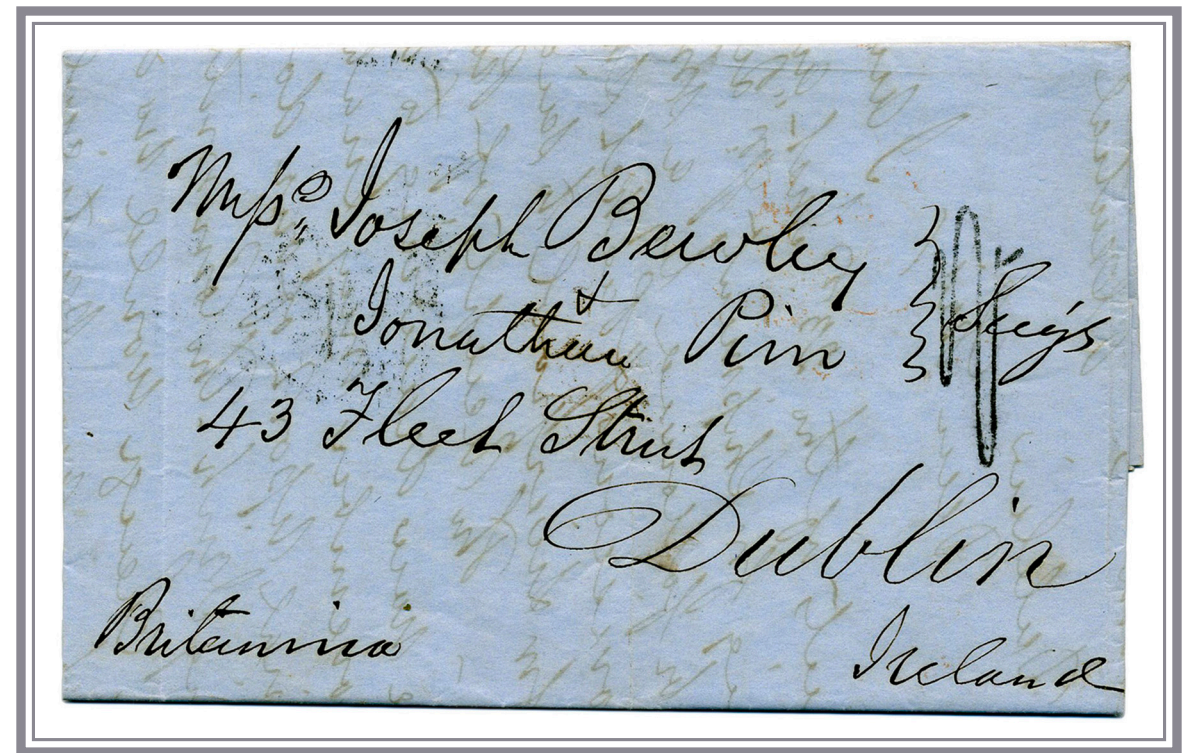
10 October 1847 — crossed the Irish Sea to Dublin via smaller vessel where an orange-red 27mm 7/OC10/1847 arrival backstamp was struck.

48

Rate Markings - Left

Rate Marking - Right

Single Rate Copy Letter via RMS Britannia



New York to Dublin via Boston/Liverpool October 1-17, 1847

23 September 1847 — datelined New York, a copy of the previous item.

30 September 1847 — second letter datelined New York; indistinct red Forwarders oval backstamp.

1 October 1847 — *Britannia* sails from Boston for Liverpool; no U.S. postal markings.

16 October 1847 — The *Britannia* arrived at Liverpool where a black 25mm AMERICA/LIVERPOOL/OC 16/1847 transit backstamp was struck. The letter was rated at one shilling due, the transatlantic Packet Letter rate, shown by the black **PAID** handstamp.

17 October 1847 — crossed the Irish Sea via smaller vessel, an orange-red 27mm 1/OC 17/1847/C backstamp struck upon arrival in Dublin.

## Emigration

*There are some distressing cases  
where families consist only of females & children,  
the men having gone to America  
with the intention of sending for their families to follow in the Spring.*

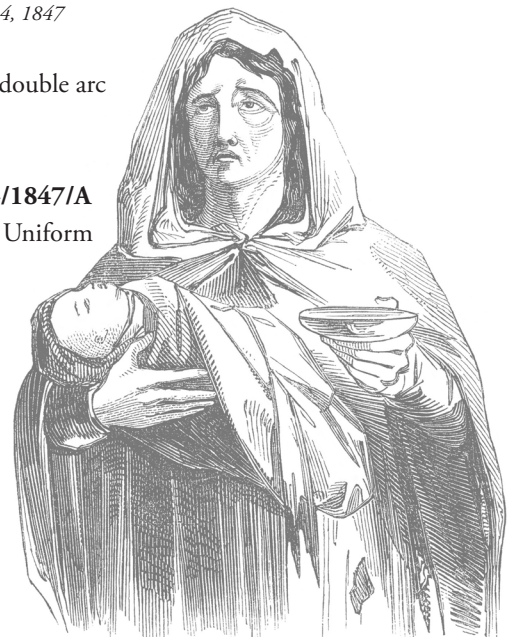
Caroline A. Bloxham of Tamlaght, Portglenone (Co Londonderry), and wife of Anglican Reverend Mark Bloxham, wrote the above begging for charitable aid from the CRC.



Portglenone to Dublin December 23-24, 1847

23 December 1847 — datelined Portglenone (Co Antrim); Blue double arc **PORTGLENONE/DE 23/1847** dispatch handstamp.

24 December 1847 — orange-red 28mm Dublin **1/PAID/DE24/1847/A** received circle handstamp; *P/* pen slash and ms *paid* indicates the Uniform Penny Postage Rate of 1840 was met.



Illustrated London News - February 13, 1847