

THE HISTORY IN POSTAL HISTORY

LAURENCEBURGH, INDIANA - 1806 TO 1829

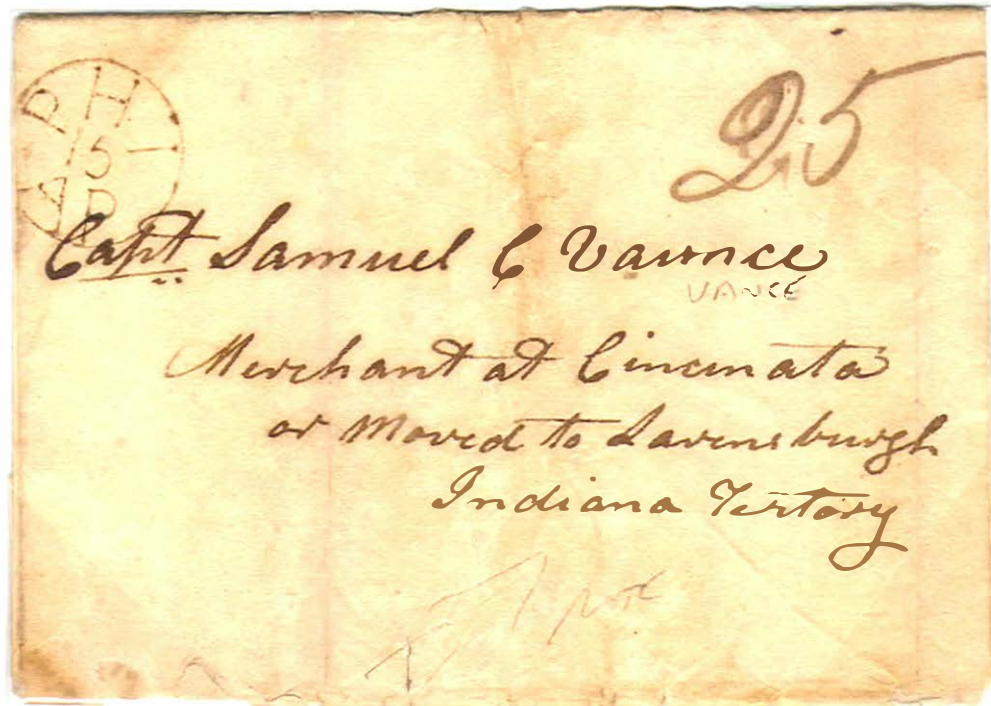
Folded letters are a primary source of contemporary historical information in addition to what they tell us about the early postal system. Letters carried outside the mail system demonstrate the limits of the postal system in meeting the needs of its patrons. This is especially true for letters related to early Indiana settlements. Laurenceburgh, now known as Lawrenceburg, Dearborn County, was the first major town to sprout in southeastern Indiana. It quickly developed into the major commercial center on the then eastern edge of unsettled western lands. Its early postal history items reveal historically significant information.

Before There Was A Post Office

Letter from Philadelphia, PA

April 14, 1806

Twenty-five cent rate for one sheet traveling over 500 miles.

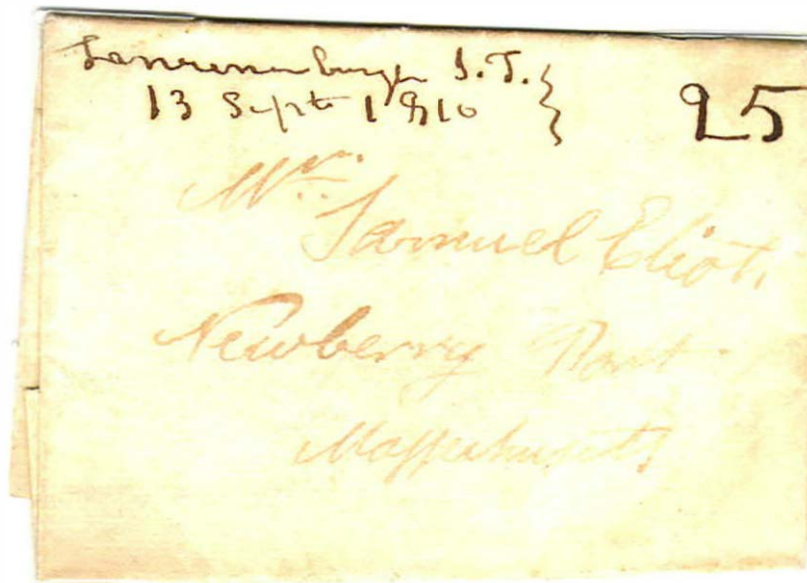


Folded letter sent to [Revolutionary War] Captain Samuel C. Vance a "Merchant at Cincinnati". [Cincinnati, Ohio] "or Moved to Laurenceburgh Indiana Territory" [Territory]. Westward mail service into Indiana ended at Cincinnati until the Laurenceburgh Post Office opened November 26, 1806. Vincennes and Jeffersonville post offices which opened earlier received mail once a week overland via Louisville, Kentucky.

Mr. Vance had moved to Laurenceburgh prior to 1806. The *1885 History of Dearborn, Ohio, and Switzerland Counties in Indiana* comments he was also a government surveyor plating the City of Lawrenceburg (name used by the post office from 1829 to 1894) purchasing the first tracts of land in the city July 23, 1801 and that the town was named in honor of his wife's maiden name of Lawrence. Lawrenceburg became the county seat of Dearborn County when it was organized January 24, 1803. However, the name of the post office was not corrected until June 6, 1829. This presented a problem when using its first circular date stamp device first seen on May 23, 1820.

The letter above requests Mr. Vance make immediate settlement on an overdue account related to his old Revolutionary War unit. Two other former officers were concerned they would have to repay this debt as they were guarantors on the note.

Territorial Stampless Folded Letter
Laurenceburgh, IN **September 13, 1810**
Twenty-five cent rate for one sheet traveling over 500 miles.



Opened November 26, 1806, Laurenceburgh was the official spelling for this post office until June 6, 1829 when it was changed to "Lawrenceburgh". James W. Hunter became postmaster at that date. This post office adopted its current spelling of "Lawrenceburg" August 3, 1894.

Postmasters serving at the Laurenceburgh, Indiana Post Office were James Dill, appointed November 26, 1806, followed by Isaac Dunn on November 25, 1811 (December 11, 1811?). Baker lists Samuel Vance as being appointed October 1, 1811 but his actual service in office for less than two months is in doubt. Baker also lists James Dill being again appointed October 2, 1815. We find no evidence of a break in service for Isaac Dunn until James Hunter assumed the office. These conclusions are based upon reviewing local documents from the nineteenth century and USPO records.

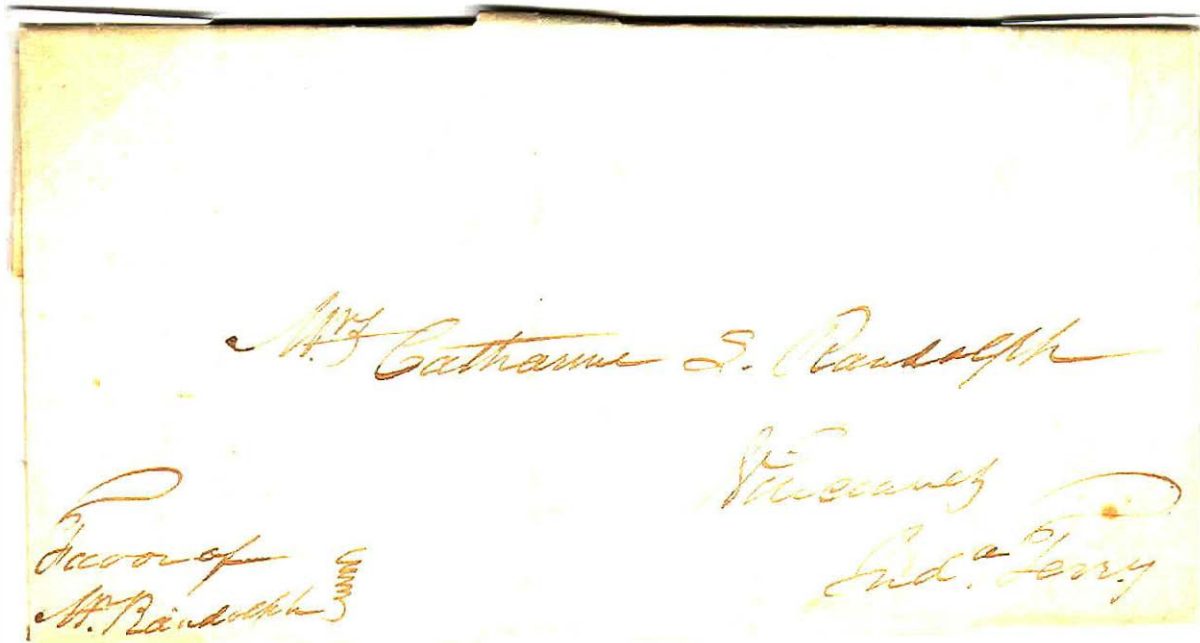
Letter from Dr. Jabez Percival, the first "physician and surgeon" to settle in Laurenceburgh, to Mr. Samuel Eliot concerning a legal action Eliot had pending in the next circuit court. He wrote:

I am confident ... Thomas's attorney is going to attempt to prove that the suite is going on without your directions if you cannot get [get] here you may Rite [write] Directions to Mr. Dill to Conduct the business for you he keeps the post office he Does as much [much] business as any attorney at this time ...

**Territorial Stampless Folded Letter
Carried Outside The Mail**

Laurenceburgh, IN

March 17, 1811



Family letter carried as a "favor" by "Mr. Randolph" to his wife. At this time there was no direct route from Laurenceburgh to Vincennes. The mails went either to Cincinnati, Ohio or Frankfort, Kentucky where it was held to meet another route to Louisville. From there it traveled the weekly mail route to reach Vincennes. Mr. Randolph could provide much faster, and possibly more certain, delivery service.

Family letter of news and encouragement to Catherine from her "sister", Mary M. Vance, and "elder brother", Lawrence Vance. Catherine is with child. Mary, who has children, writes:

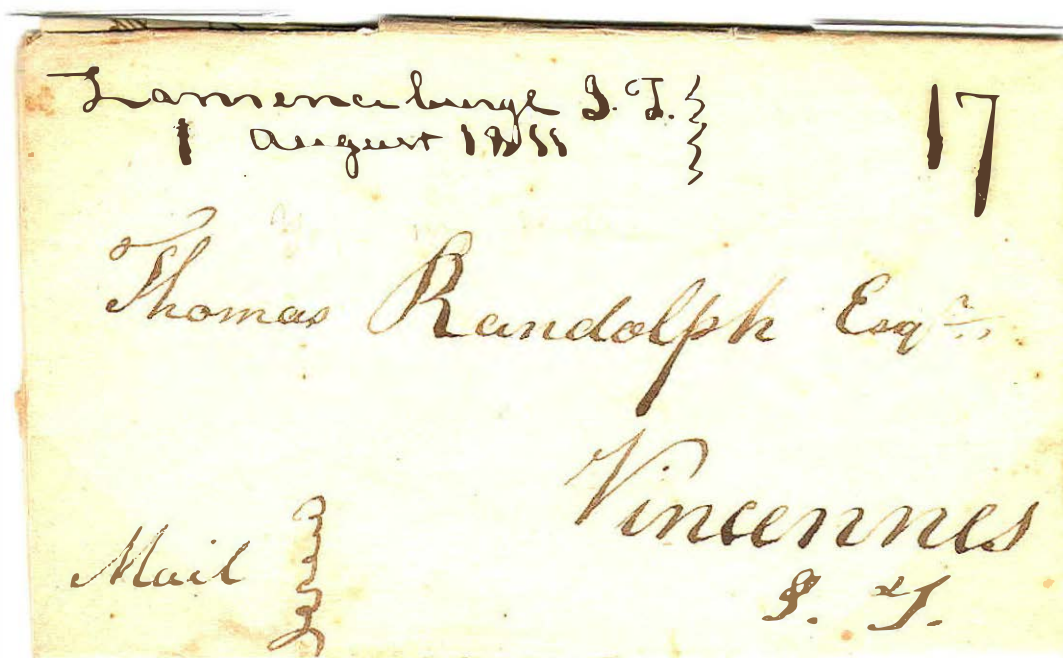
I feal [feel] at times so - overwhelmed with toil and anxiety, that I forget the many favours [favours] I daily receive from a kind providence; my children all enjoy fine health, myself tollarable [tolerable], my little boy grow's finely and is very good; — from what I learn from Mr. R. your trouble is about to commence (pleasure you think I suppose) that of nursing and carressing [caressing] the dear pledge of your connubial affection ...

Territorial Stampless Folded Letter

Laurenceburgh, IN

August 1, 1811

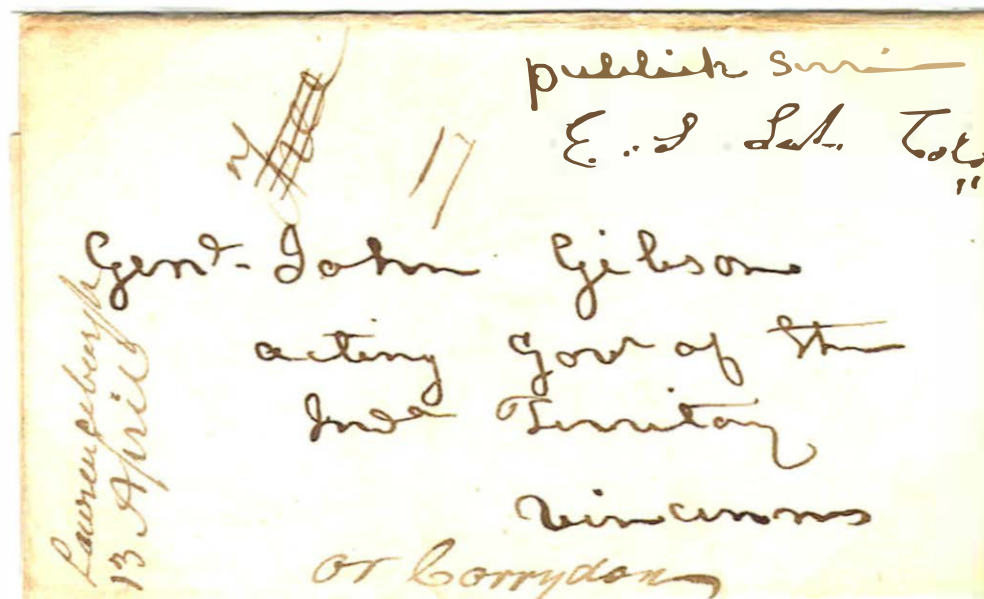
Seventeen cent rate for one sheet traveling over 150 up to 500 miles.



Catherine Randolph, wife of Thomas Randolph, Attorney General of the Indiana Territory, proved wise in her humbly offered opinion. The territorial capital moved from Vincennes to Corydon on May 1, 1813. Later, after becoming the first state capital December 11, 1816. Corydon lost this honor to the new, more centrally located city of Indianapolis in 1824. She wrote:

On the subject of yr. [your] purchasing Jone's House I give it as my serious opinion that it would be most prudent not to purchase it, as I believe Vincennes will not be our permanent place of residence. The seat of Government will be the most lucrative [lucrative] place in the Territory, to one of yr. [your] profession [lawyer], so that (I think) the best plan for you to follow, will be to postpone purchasing a House until [until] that is permanently [permanently] fixed.

Territorial Stampless Folded Letter
Laurenceburgh, IN **April 13, 1813**
"Public Service" free frank, (denied).
Seventeen cent rate for one sheet traveling over 150 up to 500 miles.



Postmaster Isaac Dunn appears to have been correct to not allow this letter to go without postage under Mr. Smith's signature. Patrons regularly attempted taking very broad license with the franking privileges during this era. The alternative address reflects the pending move of the seat of territorial government May 1, 1813.

Lieutenant Colonel Enoch Smith commanded the Third Regiment of the territorial militia. During this period of the War of 1812 it manned block houses on the edge of the Indian lands near what is now Brookville, Indiana. He wrote:

It appears to be the general opinion of all persons in this quarter whos [whose] opinion [opinion] are worthen [worthy] of regard that it will bee [be] better ef [if] necessity requires their Servis [service] to keep men already Drafted in Servis [service] on Duty for the period of three Mounths [months] ...

Laurenceburgh began receiving mail by Route No. 106 in 1814. It was an intermediate stop on this weekly Cincinnati, Ohio to Louisville, Kentucky trek over what passed for roads but were mostly old Indian trails on the Indiana side of the Ohio River. Laurenceburgh was also the starting point for Route Number 110 to Salisbury, Wayne County, Indiana.

Statehood Period Stampless Folded Letter
Laurenceburgh, IN **June 10, 1818**
Court papers sent free



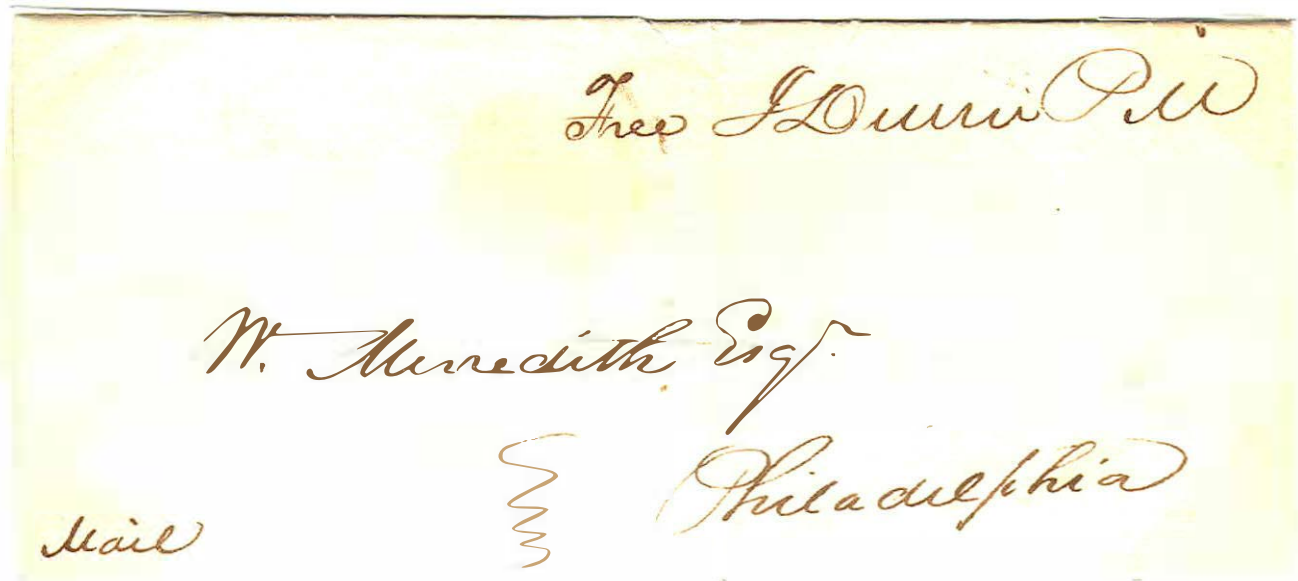
State of Indiana Superior Court May Term 1818 assignment of errors written by Reuben Kiddes, attorney, sent from Laurenceburgh to Vevay. John F. Dufour at Vevay was both the postmaster and court clerk. Isaac Dunn was the postmaster at Laurenceburgh who let this letter pass without postage.

Postmaster's Free Frank

Laurenceburgh, IN

May 22, 1820

Postmaster's free frank



Wrapper for an unknown document sent to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Contents probably were not post office related business. It would not have been uncommon for a postmaster to use his franking privilege for personal mail during this period.

Earliest Known Handstamp Cover

Laurenceburgh, IN

May 23, 1820

Revolutionary war pension correspondence sent free



Earliest known example of the only handstamp canceling device reported from Laurenceburgh. Note the abbreviation for the town name is "LAWRG.IN." which did not match the official spelling for this post office. This may be why it was only used sparingly until mid 1828 shortly before the official name change. This device was used well into the 1840's and sporadically thereafter with various color inks. Only two early red ink examples have been reported between 1820 and 1822. It did not replace the routine use of manuscript marking until 1825.

Manuscript Cover Sheet

Laurenceburgh, IN

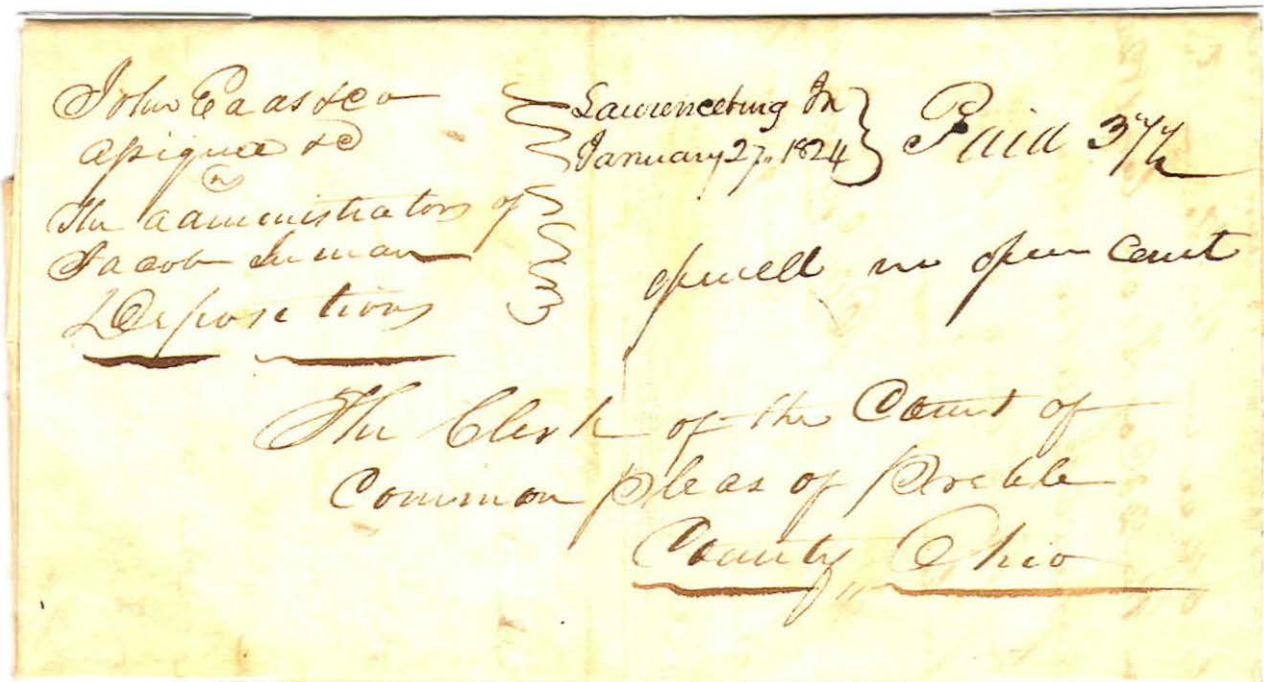
March 29, 1823

\$1.00 postage appropriate for
eight sheets traveling between
80 and 150 miles.



Cover page from
a document sent to
the Clerk of the Court of
Common Pleas, Circleville, Ohio.
Contents were probably an affidavit.

Manuscript Laurenceburgh with full date
Laurenceburgh, IN **January 27, 1824**
 Thirty-seven and one-half cent triple rate for three sheets traveling
 between 80 and 150 miles.



John Casco
 apique & } Laurenceburgh In } Paid 3 1/4
 The administrators of } January 27, 1824 }
 Jacob Sherman }
 Depositions } opened no open Court

The Clerk of the Court of
 Common Pleas of Noble
 County Ohio

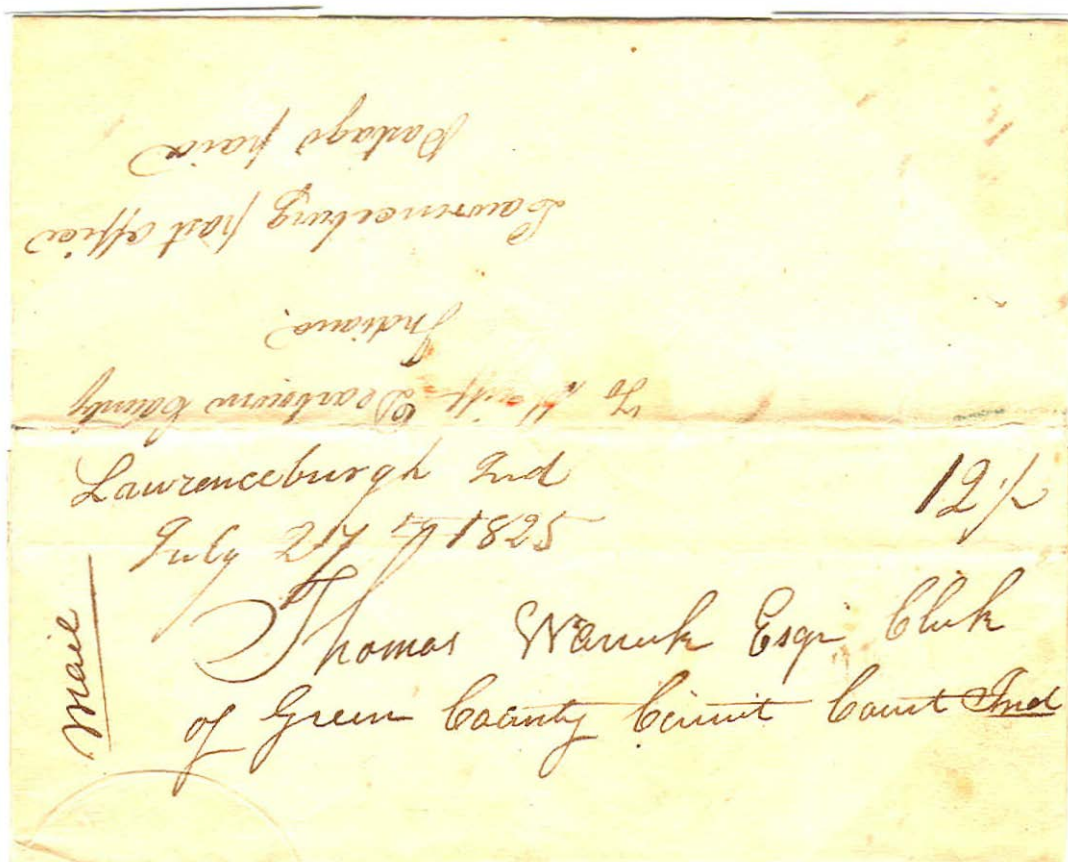
Lengthy full sheet legal document, which had an enclosure. The Justice of the Peace, Danl. Hagerman transcribed the signed depositions he took sworn under oath from John Deneson December 22nd and H. A. Reed on December 23rd concerning a disputed business debt. Justice of the Peace Danl. Hagerman certified the two depositions in a signed statement on December 23rd. Former postmaster James Dill then Clerk of Courts of Dearborn County certified that Danl. Hagerman, before whom the enclosed depositions were sworn and subscribed, was at the time of swearing and still at the time of certification a Justice of the Peace for Dearborn county "and full faith and credit are due to all his official acts as such." To which he "hereunto affixed the seal of our Said court" on December 29, 1823. It was mailed almost a month later.

**Turned Letter First Carried Outside The Mail Then Returned
Manuscript Laurenceburgh with full date**

Laurenceburgh, IN

July 27, 1825

Twelve and one-half cent rate for one sheet traveling between 80 and 150 miles.



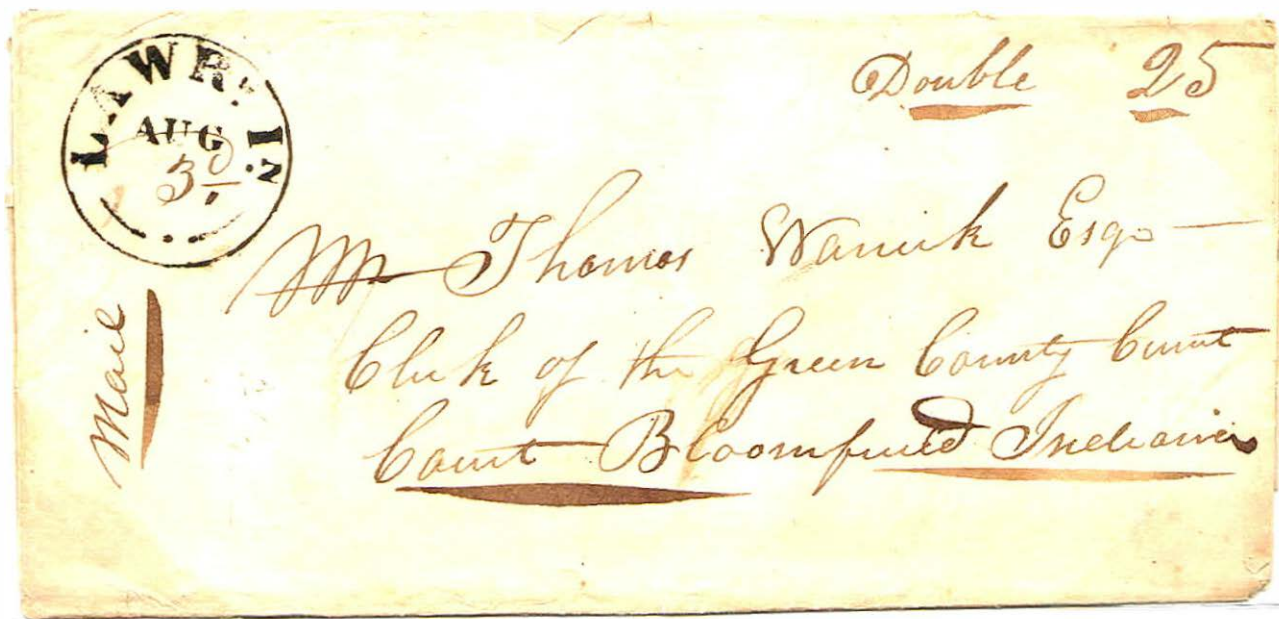
June 18, 1825 legal warrant sent to the "Sheriff Dearbourn County Indiana Laurenceburg Post Office Postage Paid" by the clerk of courts of Greene County Thomas Warnick at Bloomfield, Indiana. The Bloomfield post office had just opened May 28, 1825. There is no Bloomfield post office notation or date posted. It appears this item was carried outside the mail to Laurenceburgh. It was mailed back to the "Greene County Circuit Court, Ind" again without reference to the Bloomfield post office July 27 twelve and one-half cents postage collect.

Circular Date Stamp - Black Ink

Laurenceburgh, IN

August 3, 1825

Twenty-five cent double rate for two sheets traveling between 80 and 150 miles.



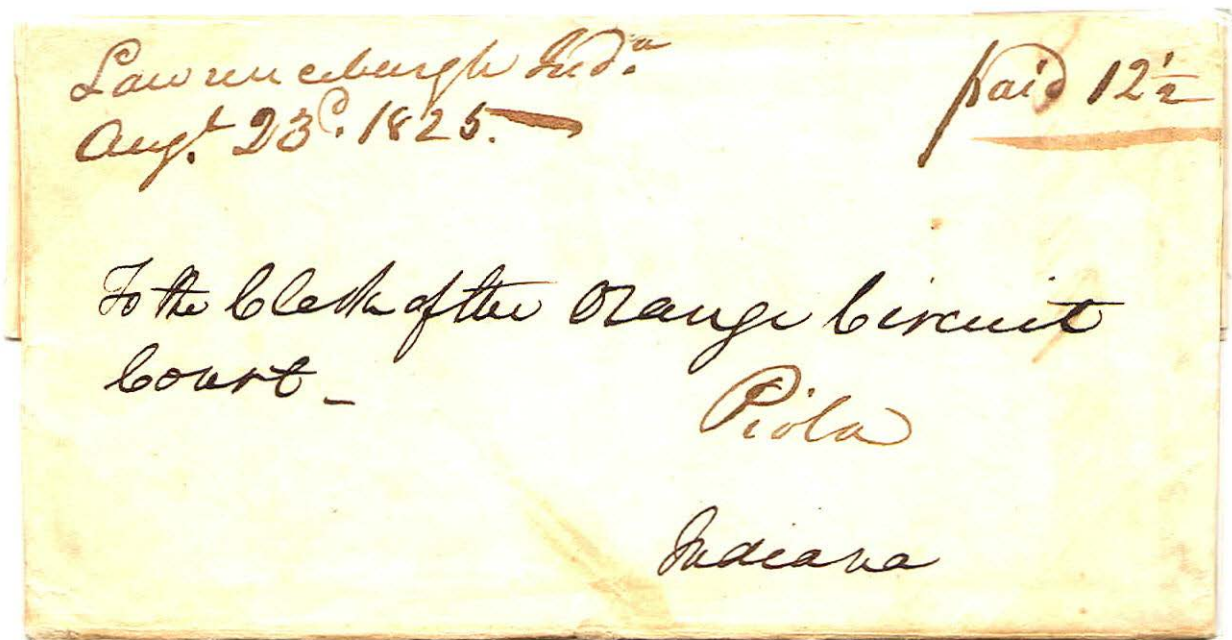
Same device seen used with red ink 1820 to 1822. Earliest reported use in Baker of this device with black ink. Known covers indicate this device was regularly used with various color inks from 1828 into late 1849. Very long-lived device considering the next reported device appeared in May of 1846.

Manuscript Laurenceburgh

Laurenceburgh, IN

August 23, 1825

Twelve and one-half cent PAID rate for one sheet traveling between 80 and 150 miles.



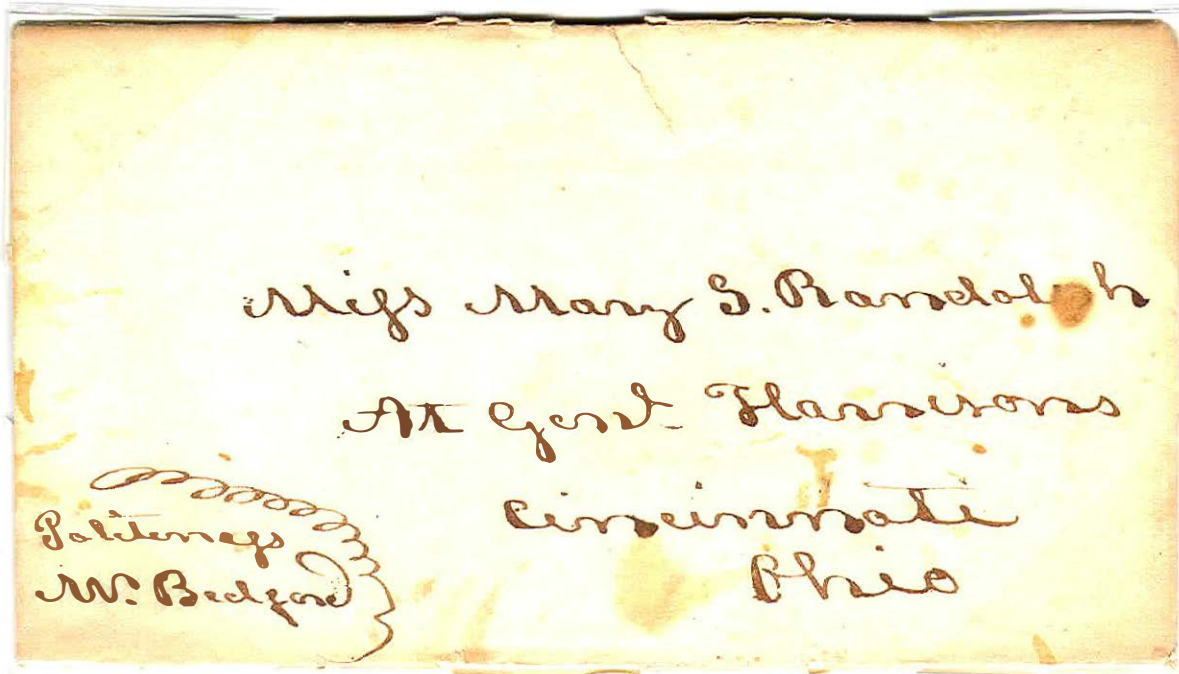
Lengthy legal document sent "Paid" to the clerk of the Orange County Circuit Court at "Piola" [Paoli]. Indiana bears a manuscript cancel twenty days after the reappearance of the first circular date stamp on a letter. The circular date stamp device was NOT consistently used until 1828. Manuscript cancels continue to occasionally appear on letters from Laurenceburgh and later Lawrenceburgh well into the 1830's. A few are known from the 1840's.

Contents of this document make for rather dry reading. Another business deal gone bad has wound up in the courts. You get to read many boring letters to find the gems.

Letter Carried Outside The Mail

Laurenceburgh, IN (dateline)

December 17, 1825



Personal letter carried outside the mail by the "politeness" of a Mr. Bedford from Laurenceburgh to Mary S. Randolph who was visiting Governor Harrison in Cincinnati (North Bend) Ohio. It is not clear if the money was inside this note or hand delivered by Mr. Bedford.

I send by Mr. Bedford Five dollars for you I wish you to get your self a pair of High Laced boots or shoes...

P.S. Give my respects to Mr. Harrison & family and Remember me to W. Henry Harrison ... and burn this letter A. H. Dill

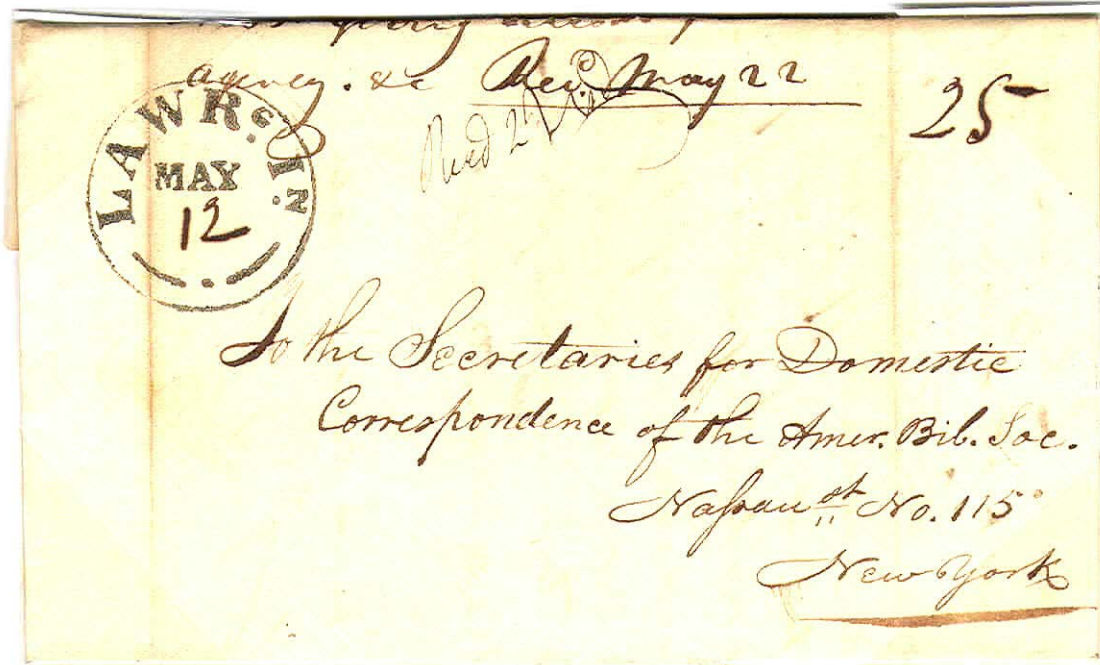
Thankfully, Mary did not consign this letter to the stove. Many other important early folded letters met their demise as starter fuel .

Circular Date Stamp - Black Ink

Laurenceburgh, IN

May 12, 1828

Twelve-five cent rate for one sheet traveling over 400 miles.



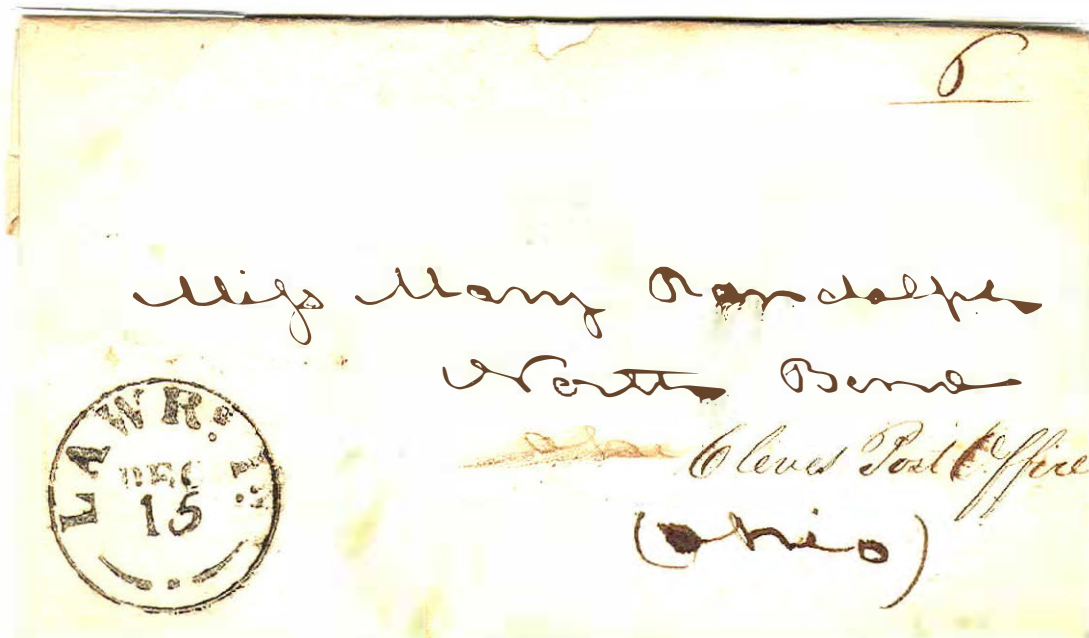
Lengthy report written by E. R. Fairchild concerning the status of American Bible Society Chapters in most of the established counties of Indiana. The current condition of the chapters ranged from healthy and active to declining.

At Brookville the seat of the Franklin Co. Soc. nothing could be done. I need however forty Dollars in part pay for books formerly received by that Society.

Mr. Fairchild appears to have been on a journey checking upon the society's affairs in Indiana.

In the course of a few days, I shall leave this to return to the City of N.Y.

Circular Date Stamp - Black Ink
Laurenceburgh, IN **December 15, 1828**
Six cent rate for one sheet traveling less than 30 miles.



A short personal note from James Dill in his later years, dateline December 7, mailed to Mary Randolph at North Bend, Ohio. This may indicate she was staying with the W. H. Harrisons or other family in the area. Either there was no more convenient way for Mr. Dill to send this gift or he was comfortable with the security of the mail service on such a short route. Full text follows:

My Dearest Child,

I enclose you a five dollar note, a part of my earnings, since I came here; would to god [scratch out] I could make it five thousand, instead of \$5_ you may possibly have need of a trifle, ["until I" scratched out] before I return; and use it economically, you will never want, or wish for any thing in the reach of your adopted Father so long as he lives; and he now cares little about life, except to see you and Betsy well settled

ever yours
James Dill
7 Dec 1828

Mary S. Randolph

Thankfully, again, Mary did not burn this or many of her letters. The bulk of her correspondence remains in private hands today. This exhibit concludes with the hope others acting as the current stewards of similar material will share the history within their postal history collection with others.