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Article: Cut Down Postal Stationery from the 1861 Era

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What's going on here? 12¢ Washington on 30¢ Nesbitt envelope, posted at Boston in 1866 and franked to pay two times the 21¢ French-mail rate to Switzerland. But all 30¢ entire envelopes are business size and this one is small. Chip Gliedman explores the origin of this and two other similar entire envelopes in our 1861 section on page 134.

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CUT-DOWN POSTAL STATIONERY FROM THE 1861 ERA

CHIP GLIEDMAN

The October 2010 auction of the Raymond Vogel collection by Siegel Auctions in New York allowed me to acquire the unusual 1866 cover to Switzerland shown in Figure 1. Following the auction, Editor-in-Chief Michael Laurence approached me with the comment “We need more coverage of postal stationery in the *Chronicle*—please write an article about this correspondence.” I will admit to very limited knowledge of the whys and hows of postal stationery, but I took this as a challenge.

The Siegel catalog described the item as follows:

Lot 2196. 12¢ Black (69). S.e. at right, tied by circle of V’s cancel on 30¢ Green on Buff entire (U72) to Vevey, Switzerland, refolded from legal to letter size by the sender prior to use, red “Boston Br. Pkt. Paid Mar. 14” circular datestamp, endorsed “Per French Mail, Str. Asia” at upper left, 1866 French transits, red crayon “36” credit, transit and receiving backstamps.

This entire is one of a several known, all from one Boston writer to correspondents in France (Marcon) or Switzerland (Davis), including a 1¢ 1861 on 20¢ entire (ex Ishikawa) and 3¢ on 12¢ entire (1995 Rarities Sale). All were originally large envelopes, skillfully refolded before mailing by someone whose preference for small-size covers nicely anticipated modern collecting tastes.

My research for this article turned up some interesting facts about these three covers, but still leaves a number of questions unanswered. This article will share some of what I



Figure 1. 12¢ 1861 stamp on a reduced 30¢ entire envelope (U72), paying twice the 21¢ French-mail rate to Switzerland. Originally legal sized, this envelope was substantially reduced by the sender before he mailed it.

learned; I hope it will prompt filling in the remaining holes.

The stamped envelopes of the early 1860s were printed by George F. Nesbitt & Co. of New York under contract to the United States government. The round design of the indicia for the denominations of 10¢ and higher causes these issues to be known as “pumpkins.” While unused entire covers come to the market on a regular basis, commercially used examples of the higher-value denominations are much less frequently seen.

The higher-value denominations of the 1861 and 1863 stationery issues were only issued on legal-sized envelopes. In this specific case, the 30¢ value of the 1863 issue (Scott U72, UPSS catalog 140) appears on envelopes whose dimensions are 104 x 249 millimeters (about 4.3 x 9.8 inches). But the Figure 1 cover, as mailed, measures 83 x 133 mm (about 3.25 x 5.25”). An examination of the back of the cover, which is illustrated in Figure 2, shows the original fold 21 mm from the bottom, confirming that this cover was, in fact, refolded down from its issued size.

This cover entered the mails in Boston, with the 12¢ adhesive and the 30¢ stationery combining to pay twice the 21¢ (per ¼ oz.) rate via French mail to Switzerland. The cover was so endorsed at the upper left, also indicating that it was to be placed on the Steamer *Asia*. The Cunard steamer *Asia* departed Boston on March 14, 1866¹ and the Boston exchange office datestamp of this date indicates that this cover was onboard as the sender intended. The Boston exchange office applied the red crayon “36” indicating that 36¢ of the postage was to be credited to Great Britain for transatlantic carriage and for further onward transport by the French.

At the Boston exchange office the cover was placed in a sealed bag which was carried unopened via Liverpool to Calais. There, the cover received the French entry datestamp (with the date of February 29, 1866, applied in error instead of March 29). The French also noted that it was a double-weight letter (manuscript “2” at the upper left), and marked the letter as paid to its destination (boxed “P.D.”). The cover then proceeded by train to Switzerland acquiring a transit datestamp of March 30 from the mobile sorting station (“Ambulant”) and a similar receiving datestamp in Vevey.

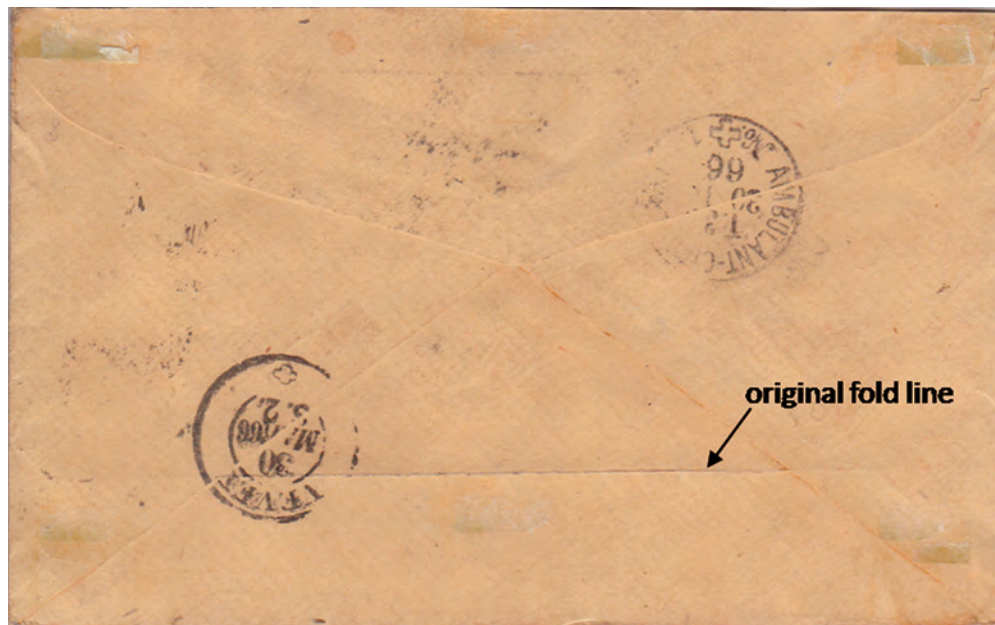


Figure 2. Reverse of the Figure 1 cover. The original fold line suggests how drastically the envelope was reduced.



Figure 3. 1¢ 1861 stamp on a 20¢ entire envelope (U43), also substantially reduced before mailing, paying the 21¢ French-mail rate to Switzerland. From the same correspondence as Figure 1.

While the routing and markings on this cover are by no means unusual, the use of high-value postal stationery along with an adhesive stamp is less common. As the lot description points out, this is one of three similar entire envelopes that were reduced by their sender before being posted. A review of the other two covers is instructive.

The first of the pair, shown as Figure 3, was last seen at auction as lot 378 in the Christies auction of the Ishikawa collection, held in New York in 1993. Addressed to the same recipient in Vevey, this is a reduced 20¢ entire envelope with a 1¢ 1861 stamp, paying the single 21¢ rate by French Mail. The datestamps on the face indicate that it left the Boston exchange office on October 31, 1865, for New York, where it was placed on the November 1 sailing of the Cunard *Scotia* bound for Liverpool. Since the 1861 20¢ entire envelope (Scott U43, UPSS 99) was issued only in the size of 100 x 241 mm (about 4 x 9 1/2 inches), this cover was also reduced prior to mailing.

Both these covers are addressed to the same recipient, who, upon closer examination, is actually E. G. Daves, rather than Davis, as described in the auction catalog. Edward Graham Daves (1833-1894) was a North Carolina-born, Harvard-trained lawyer who taught Greek at Trinity College in Connecticut until 1861 when he went to Europe and “for ten years remained abroad giving instruction to English youth on the shores of Lake Geneva, or traveling with his pupils.”² As Vevey is on the north shore of Lake Geneva, there is little doubt that Professor Daves was the recipient of these two covers. A photo of Daves is shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Edward Graham Daves

The third cover of the set was last seen in Siegel’s 1995 Rarities of the World auction,



Figure 5. 3¢ 1861 stamp on a 12¢ entire envelope (U42), also substantially reduced before mailing, paying the 15¢ treaty rate to France. Sent to a different recipient but from the same sender as the covers shown in Figures 1 and 3.

where it was lot 158. Shown in Figure 5, this is a 12¢ entire envelope (Scott U42, UPSS 98) used with a 3¢ 1861 stamp to pay the 15¢ (per ¼ oz.) treaty rate to France. Like the covers in Figures 1 and 3, this cover is folded down from its original 97 x 226 mm size (about 4 x 9 inches).

The addressee of this cover, Jules Marcou (1824-1898), not Marcon as originally described, was an eminent Swiss-American geologist. Marcou spent two years studying the geology of the United States and Canada, and returned to Europe for a short time in 1850. In 1853 he published a *Geological Map of the United States, and the British Provinces of North America*.³ Traveling with the Pacific Railroad Survey, Marcou made the first geologic observations of the Grand Canyon and surrounding area in 1856.⁴ Marcou also had connections with the Boston region. In 1861, he returned to the United States, where he assisted Louis Agassiz in founding the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University.

Early in his geological career Marcou had made significant contributions to the paleontology of the Jurassic Period limestones (200-145 million years before present) in the Jura Mountains of Switzerland. It was probably in recognition of that work that his grave in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is marked with a large replica of a fossil Jurassic ammonite.

In addition to his geologic works, Marcou was also a known philatelist of his time. He is mentioned in Brian Birch's *Biographies of Philatelists and Dealers*.⁵ He wrote under his own name and with the pseudonyms "Albis" and "Amateur des Montagnes Rocheuses" when publishing articles in *Le Timbrophile* in 1868-70. His comments questioning the genuineness of the newly discovered 20¢ St. Louis Bear provisional stamp were a hot topic in the February 1, 1870 issue of *The Stamp-Collectors Magazine*.⁶

Fortunately, Marcou the philatelist did not remove the stamps from all of his correspondence, leaving us with some fascinating postal historical artifacts. Two other covers addressed to Marcou, bearing 10¢ 1869 stamps, are reproduced in Michael Laurence's *Ten-Cent 1869 Covers, A Postal Historical Survey* as figures 1-3 and 9-4.⁷ Other covers to Marcou from this period are also known.

Looking over the three covers that started this exploration, we see that they all were sent by French mail. As Laurence points out in his book, the French mail system at that

time, with its high rates, tiny weight increments and conservative practices was looked upon with scorn and frustration by both mailers and U.S. postal officials.⁸ While the sender of the three postal stationery pieces in this study may have wanted to share these unusual items with like-minded colleagues in Europe, the extra weight of the standard large-sized envelopes, perhaps triggering the next rate increment, may have been what prompted him to reduce them to a lighter weight prior to mailing.

Alas, here the information on this set of covers comes to an end. While the research has provided a bit of background, a number of questions remain:

Are there any more of them? One each of the 12¢, 20¢ and 30¢ denominations makes one wonder if there might also be comparable 24¢ or 40¢ versions lurking unrecorded.

Who is the missing connection in Boston/Cambridge who created and mailed these three covers? While Harvard University is a common connection shared by the recipients, we still know nothing of the sender.


Was there a philatelic connection between the sender and the recipient that precipitated the use of postal stationery rather than just stamps?

How did these covers come to the market? Were they independently retained and later sold individually? Or were they in some way reunited for a time?

I would appreciate any further information that anyone can provide. And I would like to thank Bruce Baryla, Porter Venn, John Barwis and the participants on Richard Frajola's Board for Philatelists⁹ for their help in piecing together the information provided.

Endnotes

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