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Author(s): Jeffrey M. Forster

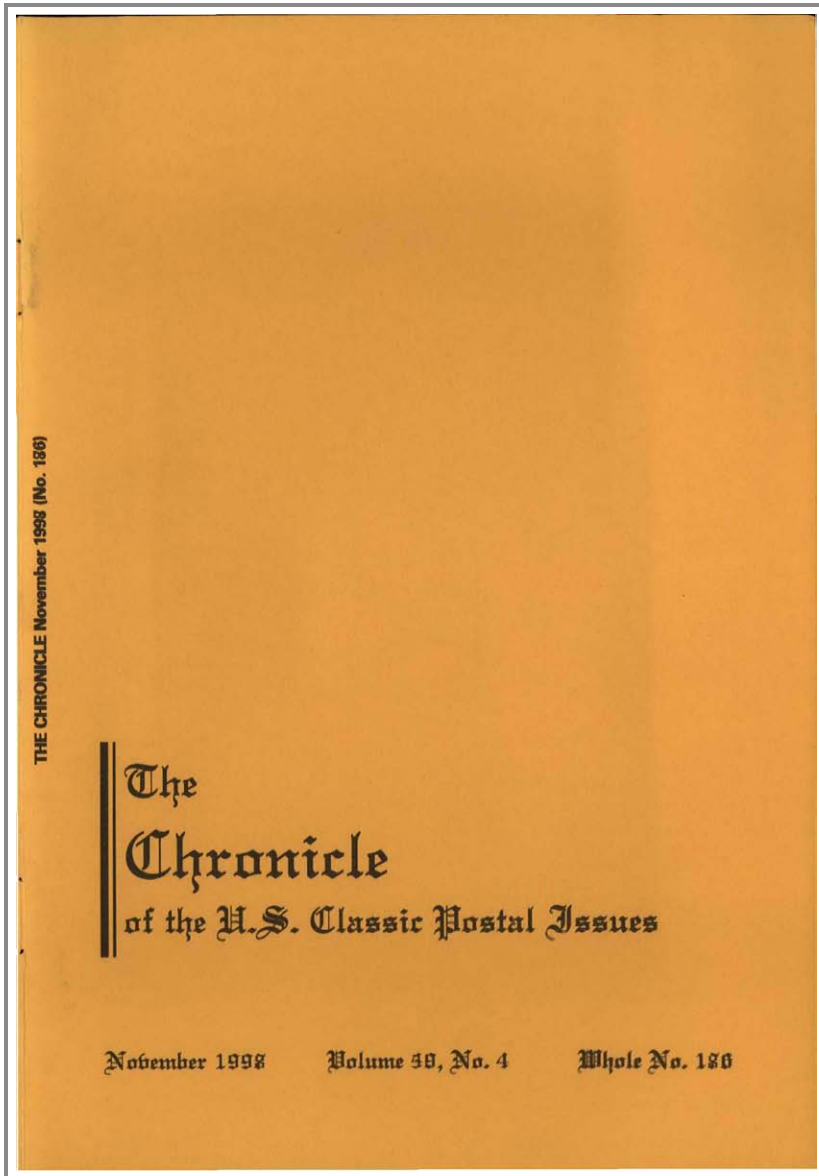


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THE TWO CENT LINE OFFICE RATE BETWEEN U.S. AND CANADA
JEFFREY N. FORSTER

This article is being written to update and clarify information regarding the two cent rate between the United States and Canada as well as to shed further light on the use of the cross-border rate between Canada and the United States in the 1869 time period.

As has been pointed out by Susan McDonald¹ and most recently by Richard Graham in his *Linn's* column,² it is inappropriate to call this two cent rate a "ferriage rate." The covers between the United States and Canada using this two cent rate pass between a pair of exchange offices for cross border mail as established on April 6, 1851 under an agreement between the United States and Canada. During the period when the treaty was in effect (1851-1875), Graham writes that nearly 50 U.S. and about the same number of Canadian post offices were paired up with one another as exchange offices.³ My research discloses that during the 1863-1869 time period there were only approximately 15 such pairings between exchange offices.

Let me digress and describe what actually is a ferriage rate. Mail between American and Canadian post offices separated by the Niagara or St. Lawrence Rivers had to be ferried across as no bridges existed. It became the custom of the Canadian postmasters to levy a ferriage charge for this service, which was retained by the postmasters. Prior to January 12, 1829, the ferriage charges were collected for the sole benefit of the Canadian border post offices; from the above date until their termination on March 6, 1837 for the benefit of the Deputy Postmaster General. This fee was 2d (2 pence) for a letter entering or leaving Canada except via Kingston which was charged a 3d fee.

The two cent rate discussed here is a two cent line office rate which is an overland rate not a ferriage rate. It is a special cross-border rate and line office is the best description or terminology for characterizing this rate.

Historically, this line office rate is not well known. *The United States Mail and Post Office Assistant* of August 1863 states:

It is not generally known that two cents covers the entire postage on a letter, without regard to weight, passing in the mail between certain offices in Canada and others in the United States, located at short distances from each other. These exceptions to the usual letter rates between the two governments are embraced in the postal treaty of 1851. And yet many correspondents most interested in this fact seem entirely ignorant of it, and have been in the habit of affixing ten cent stamps to this class of letters [the rate in 1863 was ten cents between the United States and Canada and in 1869, the rate was six cents prepaid, but ten cents for unpaid letters].⁴

The following is a partial list of the paired line offices which existed during the treaty period:

¹Susan M. McDonald, "A Dual Purpose Cross Border Marking," *Chronicle* Vol. 43, No. 2 (Whole No. 150)(May 1991), pp. 79-80.

²Richard B. Graham, *Linn's Stamp News*, columns of November 24, 1997 and February 24, 1986.

³For an excellent summary of the development of the exchange offices and a listing of the initial (1851-52) office pairs, see Hubert C. Skinner, "The United States-British North America Cross-Border Mails: Their Unique Aspects, Peculiarities and Markings, Including Cancels Designed to Kill Postmarks," Part 1, *Chronicle* 179:190-91.

⁴*The United States Mail and Post Office Assistant*, Collectors Club of Chicago reprint, August 1863 [U.S. Mail].

Sault Ste. Marie Michigan
 Port Huron, Michigan
 Detroit, Michigan
 Black Rock, New York
 Lewiston, New York
 Youngstown, New York
 Cape Vincent, New York
 Morristown, New York
 Ogdensburgh, New York
 Fort Covington, New York
 Derby Line, Vermont
 Swanton, Vermont
 Newport, Vermont
 Robbinston, Maine
 Calais, Maine
 Houlton, Maine

Sault Ste. Marie Canada
 Port Sarnia, Canada
 Windsor, Canada
 Fort Erie, Canada
 Queenstown, Canada
 Niagara, Canada
 Kingston, Canada
 Brockville, Canada
 Prescott, Canada
 Dundee, Canada
 Stanstead, Canada
 Phillipsburgh, Canada
 Mansonville, Canada
 St. Andrews, New Brunswick
 St. Stephens, New Brunswick
 Woodstock, New Brunswick

At first, the exchange offices were all on opposite sides of a river, where connection was made by ferry. Because of this, the rate was known as a "ferriage rate." Later other exchange offices were established separated by only a short land distance, with the invisible but surveyed international border between them. Thus, the same rate was termed the "border exchange-office rate." Nonetheless, when the rate was over land, ferriage was inappropriate and remains inappropriate to describe this two cent rate between the two countries and between the two paired line offices.

As mentioned above, the rate was by letter, not by weight. Inhabitants of the above-named towns could exchange letters for two cents each up to a weight of 4 oz., above which they would be considered packets and charged the regular rate of postage. (Hence, there was some weight limitation.)

The rate continued until February 1875 when the new postal convention between the United States and Canada became effective,⁵ and thereafter the domestic rate of three cents per half ounce applied while the special two cent line office rate was abolished.

In sum, when the Postmasters Generals of the two countries agreed, they created line office pairings so that correspondence between adjacent post offices in the two countries could be carried out at a much lower rate. However, the lower rate did not work between two towns which were *not* paired together.

The two cent line office rate commenced at different times in the different line offices in the 1850s, but by 1869, New Brunswick was no longer a separate country, and had become part of Canada.

Although there were three line office pairings to New Brunswick (Calais, Maine to St. Stephen, N.B., Robbinstown, Maine to St. Andrews, N.B., and Houlton, Maine to Woodstock, N.B.), most of the 1869 usages exist between Houlton and Woodstock.

The following is a list of the various covers between the United States and Canada/New Brunswick showing the two cent cross-border line office rate with 1869 stamps. Where other data is known, I have included that in the far right column.

Date	From	To	Franking	Other Data
10/25/1869	Houlton, ME	Woodstock, NB	2¢ 1869	"Paid 2" (Coll. Club. Phil. November 1958)
01/28/1870	Houlton, ME	Woodstock, NB	2¢ 1869	"Paid 2" (Wunsch Coll.)

⁵*U.S. Mail*, February 1875.

02/11/1870	Houlton, ME	Woodstock, NB pair	1¢ 1869	"Paid 2" (E. Coulter Coll.) (Lot 95 Juhring Sale, Germany, October 25, 1978)
03/15/1870	Houlton, ME	Woodstock, NB	2¢ 1869	"Paid 2" (Mack Coll.)
04/19/1870	Houlton, ME	Woodstock, NB	2¢ 1869	"Paid 2" (Leggett Coll. at Interphil) Greene Sale Lot 372, Feb. 1975
04/29/1870	Houlton, ME	Woodstock, NB	2¢ 1869	"Paid 2" (Brookman,, Vol. II, Pg. 159)
05/16/1870	Houlton, ME	Woodstock, NB	2¢ 1869	"Paid 2" (J. Forster Coll.) (Figure 1)
09/17/1869	Houlton, ME	Woodstock, NB	2¢ 1869	"Paid 2" (Lot 116 Juhring Sale Germany, October 25, 1978)
Date Unknown	Houlton, ME	Woodstock, NB	2¢ 1869	"Paid 2" (Vic Russ Auctions, lot 1091, November 27-29, 1987)

As one can see, the 1869 usages are dominated by a single two cent stamp (113) on the letter from Houlton, Maine to Woodstock, New Brunswick. All of the letters are addressed to the same lady at Woodstock, Miss Alice Belyea, and many of them use a very decorative lady's type of envelope. All of them have a black "Paid 2" marking on the front, and each of the covers that this author has personally viewed has on its reverse a "Woodstock, N.B." receiving mark in black with the date within the circle of the receiving postmark.

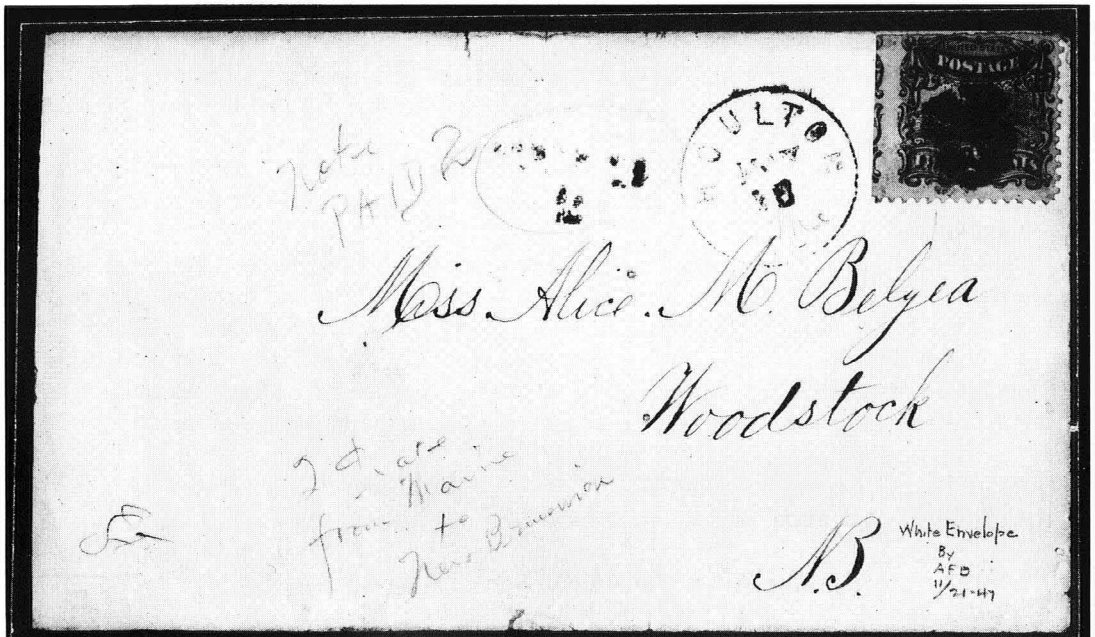


Figure 1. Two cent line office rate on May 16, 1870 cover from Houlton, Me. to Woodstock, N.B.

The distance between Woodstock and Houlton is approximately ten miles or so⁶ and this short distance between these pair of line offices is typical of the other line offices and points out the reason for the lower rate between correspondents of the paired post offices. The normal rate for cross border covers until 1868 was ten cents, either prepaid or unpaid. In 1868 the rate was reduced to six cents when prepaid, but was still ten cents for unpaid letters. Therefore, the savings would be significant to correspondents between these matched paired line offices.

Letters between these offices, neither originating nor addressed beyond, had this special line office rate of just two cents. Thus, to refer to these covers as "ferriage rate" covers is not appropriate. (Except where a ferry made the connection between post offices prior to 1837).

In conclusion, I hope that this article has clarified how this rate came to be and how it was used, in addition to providing a complete listing of those covers with 1869 usages. If any readers have additional covers featuring this same line office rate with 1869 stamps affixed to them, I would be most happy to include them in a follow-up listing.⁷ □

⁶Referring to my map of Maine, I determined that Houlton is located in the eastern part of Maine, about five miles west of the line separating the U.S. from New Brunswick, and that the town of Woodstock is directly to the east, about 10 miles distant on the left bank of the St. John River.

⁷The author is indebted to Richard Frajola for his assistance in providing further understanding of this two cent rate, as well as for his comments and other input used in this article.

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