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This indicated that letters brought in by the RMSP Co. steamers at Mobile would be charged only the regular United States inland rates with no ship letter fee. The earliest cover that I have recorded that shows the absence of the 2¢ ship fee has a Mobile circular datstamp of 21 August 1849.

I estimate that this letter finally arrived in New York about 14 May 1849, three months after it was posted in Genoa. Had the letter crossed the Atlantic in the normal manner by steamship from England to New York, it would have arrived by the Cunard steamer on 25 March 1849. The *Herald* editor would have had his correspondence much sooner; however, I would not have such an interesting and unusual cover to report. To date, this is the only cover that I have recorded carried by an RMSP Co. steamer into Mobile from the European mainland.¹¹ All RMSP Co. covers by way of Mobile are scarce and those carried across the Atlantic, quite scarce. □

¹¹I have recorded almost four dozen covers by RMSP Co. steamships into Mobile, mostly from locations in the Caribbean. Only two covers from Liverpool and this one from the Kingdom of Sardinia crossed the Atlantic on RMSP Co. steamships.

**BOOK REVIEW: EARLY ROUTINGS OF THE ROYAL MAIL
STEAM PACKET COMPANY, 1842-1879
RICHARD F. WINTER**

Early Routings of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company 1842-1879, by Phil J. Kenton and Harry G. Parsons. Published by The Postal History Society (in Great Britain), East Grinstead, England. 471 pages plus 25 pages of introductory text and table of contents. Five chapters, six appendices, and a bibliography. Over 100 illustrations of covers, post office notices and circulars, route maps, and pictures of steamships. Hardbound. UK£40 (about US\$60) not including postage (about \$9.75 by surface mail and about \$21.75 by air mail) from Patrick Frost, 20 Gleave Close, East Grinstead, West Sussex RH19 3XD, England; in the U.S. from Leonard Hartmann, P.O. Box 36006, Louisville, KY 40233 at \$80 postpaid.

This most important and long-awaited reference book has finally been published. It provides much-needed data on the voyages of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company (RMSP Co.) vessels to and throughout the Caribbean. For more than ten years Phil Kenton and Harry Parsons have been assembling data on the very complex operations of the RMSP Co. steamers. These steamships transported mails to and from and called at nearly all British and French West Indies islands as well as Cuba, Haiti, Puerto Rico, Danish West Indies, Nicaragua, Columbia, Venezuela, The Bahamas, British Guiana and British Honduras. The Kenton/Parsons team collected data from the microfilm records of at least 46 different newspapers housed in the Public Record Office Kew, the British Library at Colindale, and other locations. Additional sources that they used included the British Post Office archives and the Admiralty log books of Royal Navy Receiving vessels at Jamaica. Sadly, co-author Harry Parsons died just before the finished book left the printers; however, he was alive to see the proof copies and understand that this monumental work was nearing completion.

Organizing the data was a very difficult task. Many vessels went out from England with mails and did not return immediately, but operated as mail vessels on the RMSP Co. branch routes, often for many months before returning to England. The daunting task facing the authors was to figure a way to assemble all the voyage data that they had gathered in a logical and orderly manner. The scheme they chose was to arrange the data by government mail contract, which effectively put the information in chronological order. Within each contract the sailing tables have been organized in an unusual but effective manner.

Each chapter is devoted to a single RMSP Co. mail contract. The chapter begins with the pertinent dates of the contract, a listing of each branch route under the contract with the ports of call for each branch, and the scheduled monthly dates at each terminus. Next are listed all subsequent revisions to the contract, which mostly effected the branch routes. At the beginning of each contract section there is a copy of the government notice to the public about the new mail service. Included in these notices were the postal rates for letters. Next follows the authors' route maps showing the main trunk and all the branch lines. These route listings and maps are important to understand the data that comes next, the sailing tables. The first tables under each contract section show the main trunk line voyages outbound from and inbound to England. Next follow the data for the individual branch routes arranged in the order that the routes were shown in the route maps. All the sailing dates for one year are shown for all routes before proceeding to the next year of the contract. Whenever there is an important revision to the contract, the authors show the data in the same manner, post office notice, route map, and tables. For example, under the first contract, which went into effect on 1 January 1842, there were major route revisions in October 1842 and July 1843. The 78 pages of data that the authors have provided under this first contract list all the voyage information they were able to find under this contract and its revisions until it was replaced, effective 2 November 1847. Four more chapters follow with sailing data under subsequent contracts through the year 1879, arranged in a similar manner. Not all port arrivals and departures have been recorded as information was not found for some ports, but the information which has been recorded is presented in an easy-to-use fashion. In addition, the authors have avoided potential confusion with dates by using three letter designations for the month. At the top of each page, the year of the sailing data is shown clearly.

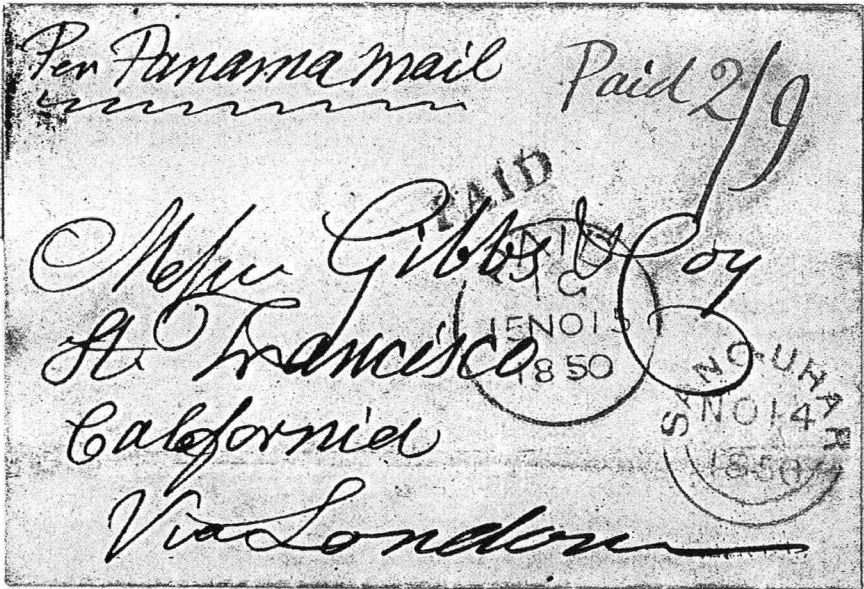


Figure 1. 13 November 1850, Sanquhur, Scotland to San Francisco, endorsed "Per Panama Mail" and prepaid 2s9d for all transit fees to destination by the West Indies route. Letter carried from Southampton on 18 November 1850 to Chagres by the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company steamship *Trent*.

Let me show the utility of the book with a cover example from my own collection. The letter, pictured in Figure 1, originated in Sanquhar, Scotland on 13 November 1850 and was addressed to San Francisco. It was endorsed "Per Panama Mail" so I know it was sent by RMSP Co. steamer to the Caribbean and not by transatlantic packet to New York. The November 1850 date puts the letter under the third contract, found in Chapter 3. On page 122 I find that my letter departed Southampton 18 November 1850 on the steamer *Trent*, which took the letter to Madeira (25 Nov.), St. Thomas (13 Dec.), Santa Martha (18 Dec.), Carthagen (19 Dec.), and Chagres (20 Dec.). Chagres was the terminus of this RMSP Co. trip. If my letter had been addressed to Havana instead of San Francisco, it would have been transferred at St. Thomas, according to the route map on page 121, to branch route 3. On page 126, we find that the branch steamer *Conway* departed St. Thomas on the day of arrival of *Trent*, 13 December 1850, for Puerto Rico (13 Dec.), Jacmel (15 Dec.), Jamaica (16 Dec.), and Havana (20 Dec.) en route to the branch terminus at Belize.

This book has very little text aside from the contract and instructions reproduced in the appendices, but primarily contains sailing tables. At the beginning of the book, the authors have devoted 16 pages to topics related to the basic operations of the RMSP Co. These include some information about the ships, hazards at sea, sailing conditions and health in the West Indies, regulations relative to passengers, rules to be observed on board, cargo and freight, and cost and handling of the mail. After this, the book quickly gets to the heart and importance of its content, the sailing tables. Sprinkled throughout the tables are attractive and important examples of covers carried by the RMSP Co. steamers, each with a brief description of the pertinent voyage(s).

There is so much data in this book that it is easy to extract incorrect data. You may find that you have used the wrong table or the wrong part of the right table. I know this from experience because I made a number of mistakes when I first started using the tables. The data is all there, however, just be very careful when trying to extract dates from the tables.

I can not stress enough the importance of this book for collectors and students worldwide. A very large gap in the published information related to steamship operations in the Caribbean, at least those of the RMSP Co., has been closed with this new book. No serious philatelic library should be without a copy. The Postal History Society in Great Britain has published a very fine product in this book. The authors forever will be remembered for their colossal efforts in bringing this data to the fingertips of interested collections and students everywhere. □

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