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A CONJUNCTION OF FEATURES, AND AN UNUSUAL REVERSION
FRANK MANDEL

An item has recently come my way that embodies in one place two of the subjects I have discussed in this section: the use of stencils as postmarks, and the unusual combination of manuscript townmarkings and handstamped rating marks.

The large elaborate stencil markings used at Sherwood Corners, N.Y. in the mid-1840s are well-known to collectors of stampless covers. They are scarce, but not particularly rare, come in at least three different colors (green, blue and lilac) and are not difficult to acquire. Figure 1 illustrates a typical example, used May 6, 1845, not too long before the important rate change of that year.

The man behind this unusual method of postmarking mail was the postmaster, Allen Thomas, who held the post for many years. The record from the Official Registers during the period of consideration in this article is as follows:

	Compensation	+	Net Proceeds	=	Total (Gross) Proceeds
1843	\$103.61		\$209.72		\$313.33
1845	68.40		88.71		157.11
1847	69.72		72.73		142.45
1849	65.62		87.37		152.99
1851	68.42		90.98		159.40
1853	49.28		37.78		87.06

Figure 2 illustrates a free frank of Mr. Thomas datelined Jan. 21, 1845, done in the same brownish red ink, with which he also dated and rated a few of the stenciled covers from his tenure. His frank shows several of the identifying characteristics of his manuscript postmarks: note the fancy turns in the letter "T" of "Thomas" and "F" of "Free," also the line under the whole franking.

The village in which the office was situated was a busy little place in Cuyuga Co., Scipio Township. The population was in decline due to western migrations. Its philatelic prominence is largely due to the survival of correspondence from its Quaker inhabitants (population only about 80 in 1860), and primarily the Howland-Talcott correspondence, much of which was once owned by collector Dick Lounsbury.

Soon after the 1845 rate change, postmaster Thomas seems to have abandoned the use of his pretty stencil in favor of postmarking covers entirely in manuscript. He cannot be blamed. Using a stencil device could only have been very cumbersome, at best, and quite messy at worst. Figure 3 is one of his manuscript productions, dated Nov. 25, 1847.

In 1850 the name of the office was shortened to "Sherwoods." Figure 4 illustrates another manuscript postmark, showing this shortened version, dated May 7, 1851.

About this time, and for only a brief period, Mr. Thomas seems to have rediscovered his old stencil device, and either cut away or masked out the lower portion, producing an arc-shaped marking "Sherwoods N.Y." This configuration is much scarcer, with perhaps only a half-dozen surviving examples, in greenish blue or bluish green. One of these, remarkably, ended up on a cover with a 5¢ 1847 stamp, used just before the rate change, in 1851. Figure 5 illustrates this scarce arc stencil, with typical manuscript date and rate, probably used August 7, 1851. (Collect rate. Note the fancy turn in the "5.")

The availability of postage stamps perhaps suggested to Mr. Thomas that he abandon his well-worn stencil in favor of postmarking entirely in manuscript, as that would also be the easier method of simultaneously canceling those adhesives. Figure 6 illustrates just such a use, canceling a 3¢ 1851 on April 30, 1852.

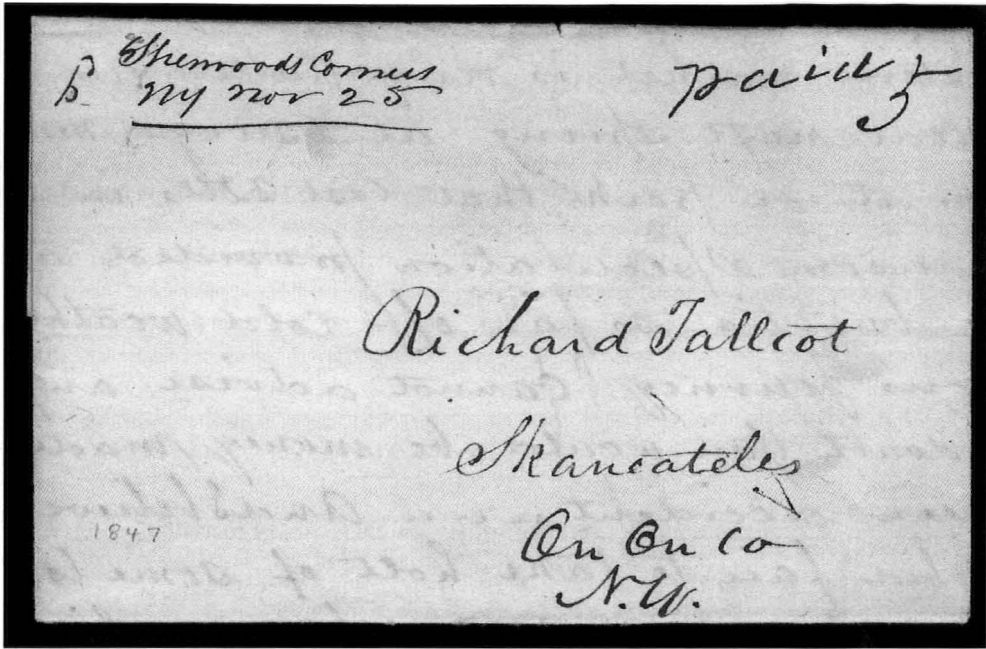


Figure 3. Manuscript "Sherwood Corners," "Paid 5," Howland-Tallcot correspondence, dated Nov. 25, [1847], to Skaneateles, N.Y. This is a large commercial correspondence between Quakers, providing an excellent picture of their transactions in land and produce.

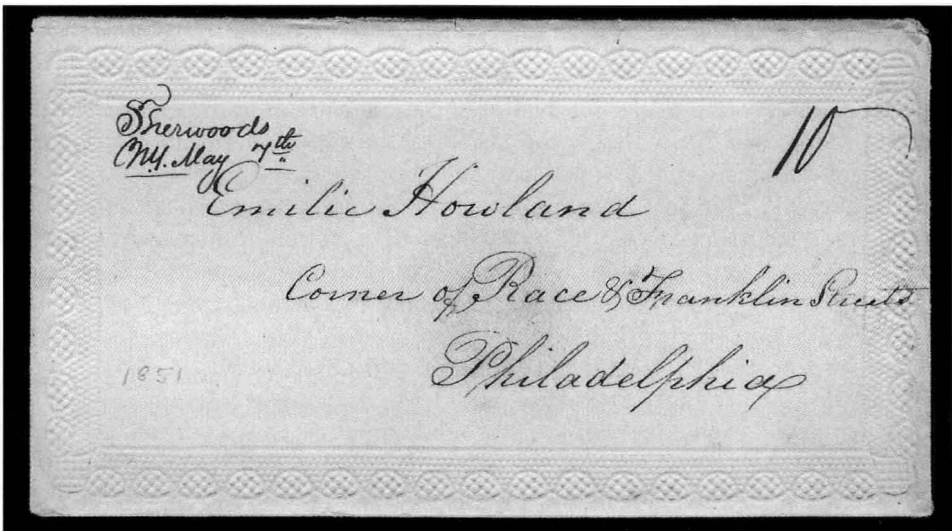


Figure 4. Manuscript "Sherwoods N.Y.," "10" collect, dated May 7, 1851, to a young lady attending a Quaker school in Philadelphia, chatty letter from a dotting aunt, on an embossed lady cover. Postmaster Thomas has adapted his townmarking admirably to this petite article. The official name had been shortened in 1850.

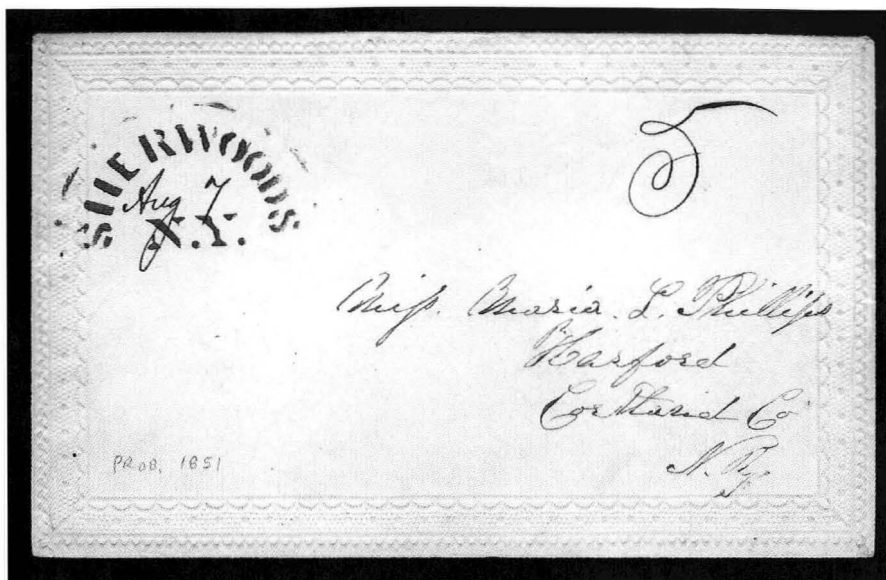


Figure 5. The scarce "SHERWOODS N.Y." stencil in arc configuration, created by modifying the circular stencil used in the mid-1840s, approximately 34 x 20 mm., probably sent Aug. 7, 1851, to Harford, N.Y., on an embossed lady cover, manuscript "5" collect rate.

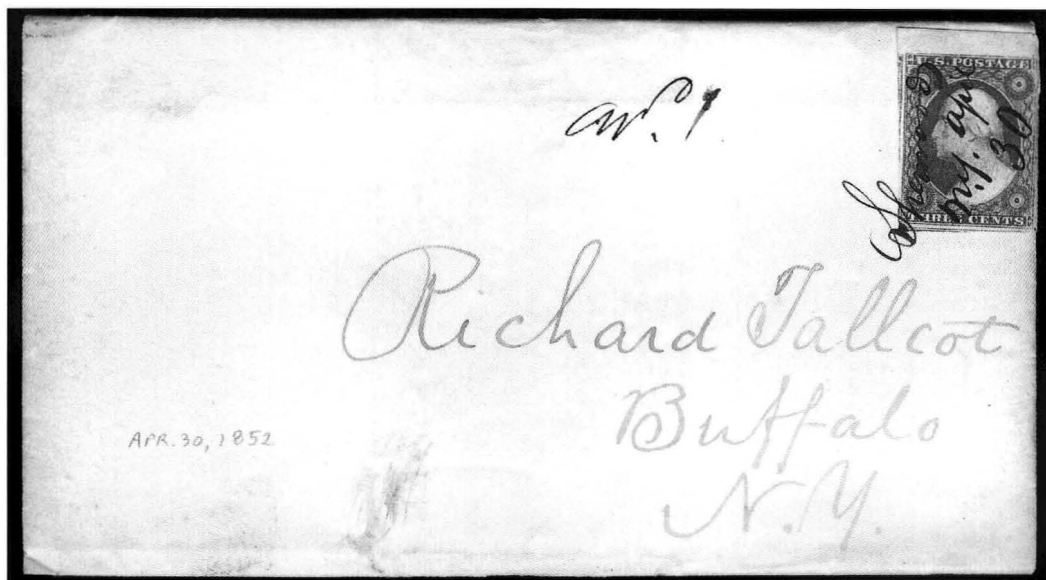


Figure 6. Manuscript townmarking "Sherwoods N.Y. Apr. 30" which simultaneously cancels 3¢ 1851 stamp, brownish carmine shade, used Apr. 30, 1852, Howland-Tallcot correspondence, to Buffalo, N.Y.

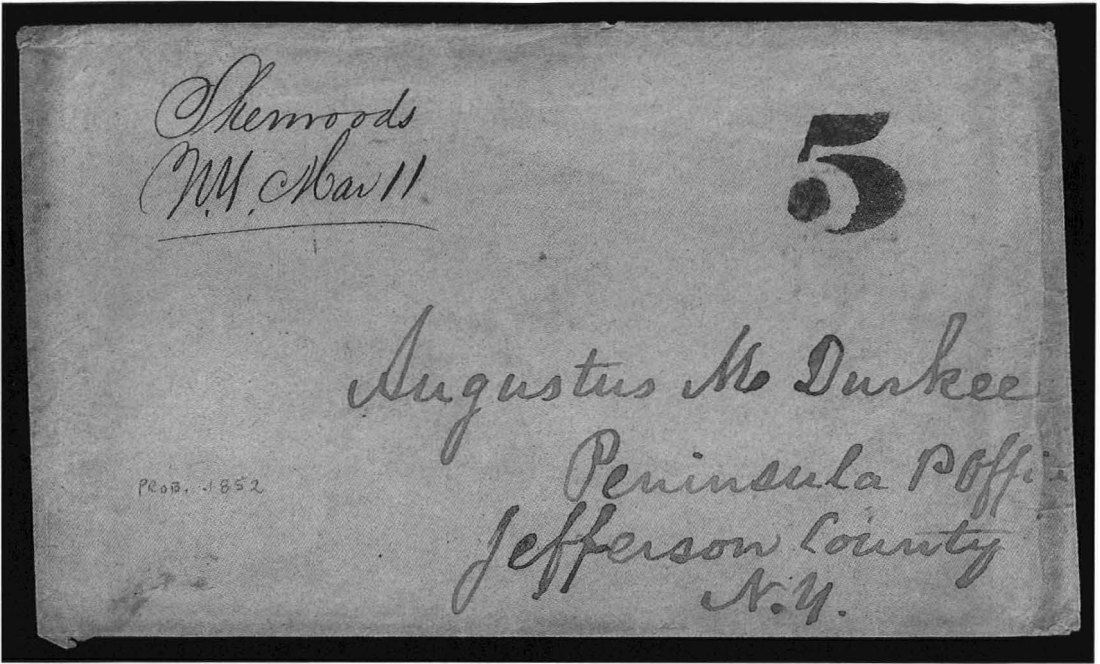


Figure 7. Extremely unusual combination of manuscript "Sherwoods N.Y. Mar 11" and a bold greenish blue stencil "5," approximately 16 x 16 mm., on a brownish envelope, to "Peninsula P Office," N.Y. This latter office was officially called Point Peninsula and operated between 1838 and 1941, so is of little value in dating this use. My guess is that this is an 1852 cover.

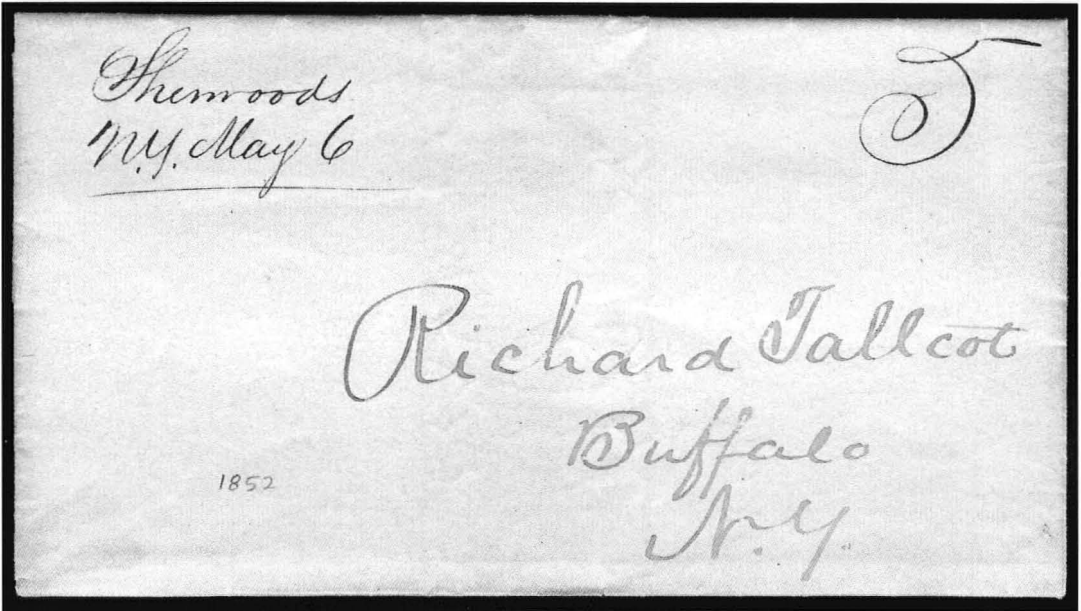


Figure 8. Another letter from the Howland-Tallcot correspondence with beautiful clear manuscript markings "Sherwoods N.Y. May 6" and "5" collect, used in 1852. Postmaster Thomas seems to have given up on stencils for good.

We now come to the most curious reversion of all, and the principal subject of this article. Figure 7 has the townmarking in the well-evolved manuscript style, complete with Mr. Thomas' idiosyncratic turns and line, and a large greenish blue "5" which is unmistakably stenciled, in three segments. This combination is many magnitudes scarcer than its handstamped counterpart, which is, as I have maintained in earlier writings, unusual. I am not sure why the postmaster did something so awkward. Presumably he had his pen in hand, and could have easily applied it in rating the cover. Did he want something that would really stand out in sharp contrast to the ugly brown color of the envelope? This stencil rate has not been previously seen or recorded by me, though the 5¢ rate was around as early as 1845. However, stencil kits were readily available, and it would not have been difficult to make up or adapt a device in short order. I do not think, considering its scarcity, that it was a successful experiment. The cover's contents are missing, unfortunately, but my guess is that it dates to March 11, 1852.

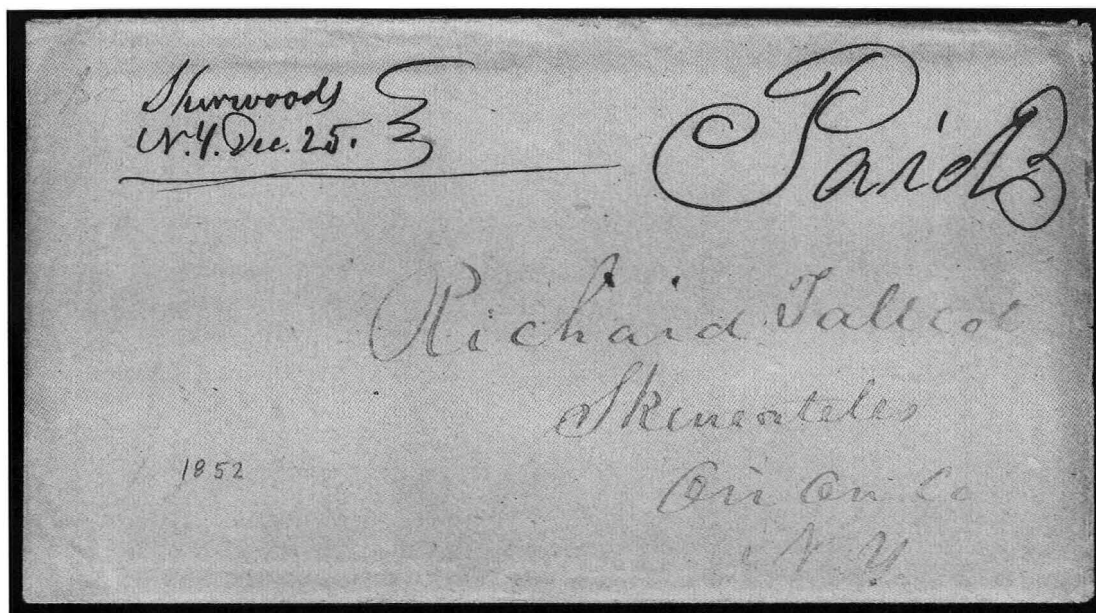


Figure 9. A prepaid letter with markings all in manuscript, "Sherwoods N.Y. Dec. 25" and "Paid 3," Howland-Tallcot correspondence. Postmaster Thomas continued using manuscript markings until he introduced Zevely-manufactured handstamps at some time between March and May 1854.

Figure 8 shows that by May 6, 1852 Mr. Thomas was again postmarking his mail entirely in manuscript, with his usual flourishes. And by Christmas Day of the same year (Figure 9), the concept of prepayment of postage had finally crept into the Howland-Tallcot correspondence, giving Mr. Thomas the opportunity to create a particularly bold and vigorous "Paid 3," all in manuscript, again on an ugly brown envelope. It would be a coup to discover a stenciled "Paid 3" used during this period, wouldn't it?