



# U.S. Philatelic Classics Society

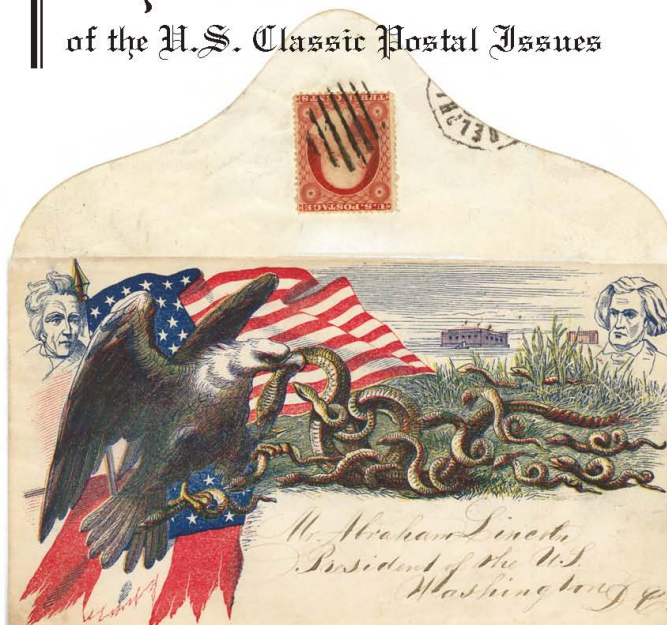
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Author(s): Heinrich Conzelmann

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## The Chronicle of the U.S. Classic Postal Issues



3¢ 1857 stamp tied by Philadelphia 7-bar grid on the backflap of a striking patriotic cover addressed to President Abraham Lincoln. From an archival discovery of 49 patriotic covers mailed to Lincoln in June-July 1861 and found among the John Hay papers at Brown University. Article by James Milgram and Thomas Greene in our Stampless section, page 273.

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# Table Of Contents

items marked with \* cannot be viewed as an individual PDF document

[Click here to view the entire Volume: 61 No: 4 Chronicle: 224](#)

## Starting Page

<a href="#">Front Cover</a> (1 page)	Front Cover
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: H.R. Harmer, Inc.	Inside Front Cover
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: Regency Superior	265
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: James E. Lee	266
<a href="#">Masthead</a> (1 page)	267
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: Rupp Brothers	268
<a href="#">Table of Contents</a> (1 page)	269
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: American Philatelic Society	270
The Editor's Page	
<a href="#">In This Issue</a> (1 page) <i>Michael Laurence</i>	271
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: Philatelic Stamp Authentication and Grading	272
Prestamp and Stampless Period	
<a href="#">Civil War Patriotic Covers Addressed to President Abraham Lincoln</a> (9 pages) <i>James W. Milgram M.D., Thomas E. Greene</i>	273
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: Heritage Auction Galleries	282
Carriers and Independent Mails	
<a href="#">Mystery Pen Markings of Cheever &amp; Towle</a> (4 pages) <i>Gordon Stimmell</i>	283
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: Kristal Kare, Inc.	286
1847 Period	
<a href="#">The Turner Correspondence</a> (4 pages) <i>Gordon Eubanks</i>	287
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc.	291
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: Stanley M. Piller & Associates	292
1861-1869 Period	
<a href="#">Fancy Cancels from Union-Occupied New Bern, North Carolina</a> (3 pages) <i>Michael C. McClung</i>	293
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: David Feldman, S.A.	296
1869 Period	
<a href="#">Four Newly Reported 1869 Covers to Norway</a> (4 pages) <i>Jeffrey M. Forster</i>	297
Bank Note Period	
<a href="#">Death Throes of the New York Foreign Mail Fancy Cancellations: 1875-1877</a> (9 pages) <i>Nicholas M. Kirke</i>	301
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: Greg Sutherland	309
Officials	
<a href="#">Production Plate Varieties and the Nature of Opaque Inks, with Notes on the Post Office 'Scummy' Printings</a> (14 pages) <i>George G. Sayers</i>	310
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (2 pages) Advertiser: Smithsonian, Spink Shreves Galleries	312
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: Leonard H. Hartmann	325
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: Columbian Stamp Company Inc.	328
Book Review	
<a href="#">The Postal History of U.S. Stamp Collecting, 1862-1899. Part 1</a> (15 pages) <i>Steven R. Belasco</i>	329
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: Gary Posner, Inc.	344
Foreign Mails	
<a href="#">Conflict between Thurn &amp; Taxis and Prussia Over Prussian Closed Mail</a> (8 pages) <i>Heinrich Conzelmann</i>	345
<a href="#">A Nantucket Prepaid Ship Cover</a> (4 pages) <i>Douglas N. Clark</i>	352
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: Daniel F. Kelleher Co., Inc.	356
The Cover Corner	

<a href="#">Answer to Problem Cover in Chronicle 223</a> (2 pages)	357
<i>Greg Sutherland</i>	
<a href="#">Problem Cover for This Issue</a> (1 page)	358
<i>Greg Sutherland</i>	
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: Purser and Associates	359
<a href="#">Index to Advertisers</a> (1 page)	360
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: United States Stamp Society	360
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: Schuyler Rumsey Philatelic Auctions	Inside Back Cover
<a href="#">Display Advertisement</a> (1 page) Advertiser: Robert Seigel	Back Cover

## **CONFLICT BETWEEN THURN & TAXIS AND PRUSSIA OVER PRUSSIAN CLOSED MAIL**

**HEINRICH CONZELMANN**

In 1852, the United States and Prussia signed a postal convention to establish a direct service between both countries in closed mail bags via England, which is commonly known as the Prussian closed mail. It took only a short time until the new service was accepted by correspondents in the United States and all parts of the German Austrian Postal Union (GAPU), and the service attracted a large part of the total correspondence between the two countries. Commercial letters usually were sent in the Prussian closed mail since the service was much faster than the routing via Bremen, an advantage that was well worth the higher postage fee.

In general, covers from the different German States sent to the United States in the Prussian closed mail are quite numerous. Some origins (or destinations), such as Mecklenburg-Schwerin or Braunschweig, are scarce because of the small exchange of mail by any routing. Covers from GAPU members with larger populations are common, including covers posted shortly after the U.S.-Prussian Convention went into effect on 1 October 1852.<sup>1</sup> One exception, however, was during the 1850s when Prussian closed mail covers posted within the Thurn & Taxis postal district to the United States are absent, even though a substantial number of covers were sent via Bremen or in the British open mail. The following article explains this strange situation and illustrates a few covers with unusual ratings based on the events that took place.

There are good sources that provide the background and details of the U.S.-Prussian Postal Convention of 1852; therefore, only the rate structure and the basic accounting are repeated here.<sup>2</sup>

The total Prussian closed mail postage for a single-rate letter of ½ oz. or 1 Loth was set at 30¢, which was equal to 13 silbergroschen (Sgr.) in the Northern German States and 45 kreuzer (Kr.) in the Southern German States. The transit postage through England and Belgium was paid for by weight of the closed bag, and it was assumed that four letters averaged one ounce. This resulted in the following breakdown of the 30¢ rate: 30¢ = 5¢ internal U.S. postage + 18¢ packet and British postage + 2¢ Belgium transit fee + 5¢ internal GAPU postage. On letters from the GAPU to the United States, Prussia received only the internal postage of 5¢. The British and Belgian transit expenses were paid by the U.S. postal administration. In the opposite direction, Prussia paid the Belgium transit postage and the United States continued to pay the British transit postage. Therefore, on unpaid letters from the United States to the GAPU, the U.S. exchange offices debited Prussia 23¢ for a single-rate

<sup>1</sup> Karl Christian Sautter, "Der preußisch-amerikanische Postvertrag von 1852," *Archiv für Post und Telegraphie* Nr. 9, Berlin, September, 1920, pp. 281–94. The U.S.-Prussian Convention went into effect on 1 October 1852 in Prussia; the earliest covers to Europe were sent from New York 30 October 1852 on the Collins Line steamer *Baltic*.

<sup>2</sup> George E. Hargest, *History of Letter Post Communication Between the United States and Europe 1845 – 1875* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1971), pp. 85–87; and Richard F. Winter, *Understanding Transatlantic Mail, Volume 1* (Bellefonte, Penn.: American Philatelic Society, 2006), Chapter 4.

letter and credited 7¢ for a paid one. In the opposite direction, Prussia debited the United States 5¢ on an unpaid single-rate letter and credited 25¢ on a paid one.

An important aspect of the U.S.-Prussian Convention was that both parties agreed on a uniform rate of 5¢ (equivalent to 2 Sgr. or 6 Kr.) for the internal German portion to all parts of the GAPU and, with respect to the U.S. portion, to any location in the United States. In the negotiations with the United States, Prussia acted for all the members of the GAPU. Unfortunately, the GAPU Convention to which most of the various German postal administrations had agreed, established three zone rates for internal postage depending on the distance between the origin and point of delivery: 1 Sgr. or 3 Kr. for less than 10 miles (one German mile was equivalent to 4.61 U.S. miles); 2 Sgr. or 6 Kr. for 10 to 20 miles; and 3 Sgr. or 9 Kr. for larger distances. This postage was retained by the sending postal administration. For letters from foreign destinations, the exchange office that received the mails from outside the GAPU was defined as the sending office. For the Prussian closed mail, the exchange office was Aachen (the travelling office located on the Cologne-Verviers railroad). As a result, Prussia received the GAPU part of the postage for letters from the United States. Prussia had signed the convention with the United States before all the members of the GAPU had accepted the uniform internal rate of 2 Sgr. implemented in the Prussian closed mail rate. This caused a problem because some of the GAPU postal administrations were not willing to accept the reduced postage and receive only 2 Sgr. instead of 3 Sgr. on outgoing letters to the United States. In most cases the internal GAPU postage to Aachen was 3 Sgr.

In his very detailed and interesting paper about the Prussian closed mail based on original sources, Karl Christian Sautter explained the problems at the beginning of the U.S.-Prussian Convention period, with particular emphasis on the relations between Prussia and the Thurn & Taxis Post.<sup>3</sup> In this same paper he provided the original explanation for the short paid letters described in an earlier *Chronicle* article.<sup>4</sup> The following paragraph is a somewhat shortened translation of this part of his paper:

Not all the states of the German Austrian Postal Union welcomed the convention between Prussia and the United States. The southern postal administrations (Bavaria, Baden, Württemberg, and Thurn & Taxis) didn't join the convention and used mainly the routing via France. The Hanse towns of Hamburg and Bremen, which transmitted a substantial part of the Scandinavian correspondence to the United States, preferred to send letters in the open mail via England [*Comment: in addition to the direct Bremen mail*]. Because letters from the United States to or via the German States were commonly placed in the Prussian closed mail by the U.S. exchange offices if the sender had not expressly endorsed them for another routing, the volume of the correspondence in the Prussian closed mail from the United States (10,000 letters per week) was much larger than in the opposite direction (1,500 letters per week). This unbalanced ratio of letters from and to the United States was a detriment as far as the United States portion of the postage was concerned. [*Comment: Since the open mail letters from Germany were paid only to the U.S. border, and most of these letters were sent on British steamers across the Atlantic, the United States had a significant financial loss in not receiving the sea postage. Had the letters been sent in the Prussian closed mail, the ratio of letters carried by British or American packets would have been more equal.*] Therefore, the U.S. postal administration complained about the situation and asked for an explanation. The Prussians made a new attempt to convince the southern states, the Thurn & Taxis Post, and the Hanse towns to join the convention. Finally, all but Thurn & Taxis agreed to participate at the Prussian closed mail convention rates. Thurn &

<sup>3</sup> Sautter, *op. cit.*, pp. 288-89

<sup>4</sup> Heinrich Conzelmann, "Part Paid Covers in the Prussian closed mail," *Chronicle* 181 (February 1999), pp. 58-67.





**Figure 1. Unpaid letter from Frankfurt (11 November 1854) to Ebenezer, New York ("near Buffalo"). The sender endorsed letter for the Prussian closed mail, but Thurn & Taxis charged 47 Kr. and sent letter through Aachen in the British open mail.**

Taxis refused because they insisted on the 3 Sgr. GAPU postage, which (according to the GAPU Convention) belonged to the sending office, whereas Prussia and the United States had agreed on a reduced rate of 2 Sgr.

Letters posted at Thurn & Taxis post offices and sent via Aachen to the United States were always charged 3 Sgr. for the internal GAPU postage. In response, the Prussians expressly prohibited such letters from being sent in the Prussian closed mail. Senders within the Thurn & Taxis postal district who wanted their letters to be included in the Prussian closed mail had to send their letters under cover to friends in Prussia, to be posted at Prussian offices. The merchants in Frankfurt particularly complained about this situation to the Postal Commission of the Senate in Frankfurt, but without any success. Nevertheless, the situation escalated. An intensive, very sharp, and contentious correspondence between Berlin (Prussia) and Frankfurt (Thurn & Taxis) resulted, which lasted for years. On 19 April 1855, the Thurn & Taxis Post sent a letter to the Prussians with the offer to terminate its resistance if Prussia would compensate for the loss of the Thurn & Taxis postage caused by the reduced GAPU postage of 2 Sgr. Thurn & Taxis proposed that half of the GAPU postage, which Prussia received on Prussian closed mail letters from the United States and addressed to the Thurn & Taxis district, should be paid to Thurn & Taxis. However, Prussia refused that proposal. It took until 1859 before Thurn & Taxis accepted the conditions of the U.S.-Prussian Convention of 1852.

The following examples of covers will demonstrate the consequences of the conflict between Prussia and the Thurn & Taxis Post.

The cover in Figure 1 was sent from Frankfurt on 11 November 1854 to the town of "Ebenezer/near Buffalo/near New York." The sender endorsed the letter, "Via Ostende pr. Liverpool/Pr. Prussian closed mail," wishing explicitly that the letter should be included in the Prussian closed mail. However, the post office at Frankfurt charged 47 Kr. (divided into 38 Kr. or 10  $\frac{3}{4}$  Sgr. foreign and 9 Kr. GAPU postage), which was the rate for the British



**Figure 2. Unpaid Prussian closed mail cover from New York City (9 November 1852) to Heilbronn, Württemberg. Aachen marked 45 Kr. debit to Thurn & Taxis. Frankfurt Thurn & Taxis office increased debit to the 47 Kr. British open mail rate and applied “Aus Amerika/ueber Preussen.”**

open mail via Aachen to the U.S. border.<sup>5</sup> This is one of the letters mentioned by Sautter. Since Thurn & Taxis charged 9 Kr. or 3 Sgr. GAPU postage, the exchange office at Aachen had to send the letter in the British open mail. Because Thurn & Taxis refused to join the U.S.-Prussian Convention, the sender had to pay 47 Kr., which is 2 Kr. more than the 45 Kr. Prussian closed mail rate. In addition, the addressee had to pay 5¢ U.S. inland postage. The total postage for the letter was about 6¢ higher than if it had been sent in the Prussian closed mail, and there was no advantage for the correspondents.

Aachen sent the letter to London (14 November transit marking) and credited 1 shilling British and packet postage to England. Although the packet postage was prepaid for carriage by a British steamer, the letter was sent on the next possible departure, the Collins line steamer *Baltic*, which arrived in New York on 26 November.<sup>6</sup> Since this was an American contract steamer, the sea postage of 16¢ was credited to the United States (marked in red manuscript within the New York marking).

For a short period from the beginning of the U.S.-Prussian Convention to January 1853, Thurn & Taxis charged an additional transit fee on unpaid letters from the United States, which was not in accordance with the Convention. Two examples are shown in Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2 illustrates a very early unpaid folded letter sent in the Prussian closed mail from New York on 9 November 1852 by the Cunard steamer *Niagara* and addressed to Heilbronn, Württemberg. New York struck the typical exchange office marking for British packet service with a 23¢ debit to Prussia. Aachen (24 November transit marking on reverse) marked in blue ink the 45 Kr. Prussian debit to Thurn & Taxis (equivalent to 13 Sgr.

<sup>5</sup> Technically, Frankfurt may not have ignored the endorsement since Article I of the 1852 Anglo-Prussian Convention used the term “Prussian closed mails” to refer to mail carried in closed mail bags through Belgium.

<sup>6</sup> All sailing dates are from Walter Hubbard and Richard F. Winter, *North Atlantic Mail Sailings 1840–75* (Canton, Ohio: The U.S. Philatelic Classics Society, Inc., 1988).



Figure 3. Unpaid Prussian closed mail cover from Baltimore (11 January 1853) to Goeplingen, Württemberg. Aachen marked blue ink 1 fl. 30 Kr. debit to Thurn & Taxis (90 Kr.) for a double letter. Frankfurt increased rate to the British open mail rate of 1 fl. 34 Kr. (94 Kr. marked in red ink above Aachen debit). Postage due at destination (red crayon, upper right) included 2 Kr. additional for delivery.

or 30¢), which was also the amount that should have been collected from the addressee. On the way to its destination the letter had to pass through the Thurn & Taxis postal district and was handled by the Thurn & Taxis Oberpostamt in Frankfurt on 25 November (dated marking on reverse). The Frankfurt office crossed out the 45 Kr. Aachen debit and marked 47 Kr. in red ink (typical for Frankfurt) above the Aachen debit, as the increased amount to be collected from the addressee. To explain the rate change, Frankfurt struck the marking “Aus Amerika/ueber Preussen” (“from America via Prussia”). The Thurn & Taxis Post did not accept the new Prussian closed mail rate of 45 Kr., but adjusted it to the 47 Kr. open mail rate to collect for its own profit the additional 2 Kr. The marking “Aus Amerika/ueber Preussen” is known in 1851 and 1852 on covers sent via Bremen or via England in the open mail, but it is very uncommon on a Prussian closed mail cover.

A second cover (outer letter sheet only), which shows the same treatment, is illustrated in Figure 3. The cover was posted in Baltimore on 11 January 1853 and was sent to Goeplingen, Württemberg. In contrast to the letter in Figure 2, its weight was above ½ oz. and accordingly New York debited Prussia 46¢ for two rates. The cover was sent by the Cunard steamer *Asia* to Liverpool. The closed bag was opened in Aachen on 28 January and marked in blue ink for a collection of 2 x 45 Kr. = 1 fl. 30 Kr. (1 florin [fl.] = 1 gulden or 60 Kr.). Again the letter passed through the Thurn & Taxis office in Frankfurt (29 January marking on the reverse), where the rate was increased to two times the British open mail rate, 2 x 47 Kr. = 94 Kr. (marked in red ink just above the Aachen debit marking), which was converted to 1 fl. 34 Kr. (magenta ink). The addressee in Goeplingen had to pay 1 fl. 36 Kr. (red crayon, upper right), which included two additional kreuzer for local delivery.

I have recorded very few additional covers via Frankfurt showing the same increase of the Prussian closed mail rate to the British open mail rate. One interesting cover (Schuyler Rumsey Auction, Sale No. 27, Lot 66) was sent from Philadelphia to Heilbronn, Württemberg, in the first Prussian closed mail to Europe carried by the Baltic on 30 October 1852.





**Figure 4. Unpaid letter from New York City (25 April 1853) sent by mistake to Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and marked for 5¢ postage due, but returned and placed in Prussian closed mail to Württemberg. Aachen marked 45 Kr. debit to Thurn & Taxis and Württemberg added 2 Kr. for local delivery. Thurn & Taxis did not increase the rate.**

I have also seen another cover addressed to Bavaria.<sup>7</sup> This cover was sent by the New York & Havre line steamer *Humboldt* on 15 January 1853 and arrived in Frankfurt on 2 February 1853. Covers that arrived a few days later do not show this rate adjustment. A Prussian closed mail cover from Washington (19 January 1853) to Württemberg, which arrived at Aachen on 6 February 1853, shows simply the 45 Kr. Prussian closed mail rate.

Some covers that show the 47 Kr. marking appear to be the rerated covers discussed in this article but they are not. Figure 4 illustrates this so the reader may avoid confusion in evaluating other similar covers. This unpaid letter (outer letter sheet only) was posted in New York City on 25 April 1853, marked for 5¢ postage due, and mistakenly sent to Williamsburg, New York.<sup>8</sup> The letter was sent back to New York City on 27 April, where New York struck the typical exchange office marking for British packet service with a 23¢ debit to Prussia. The letter was included in the Prussian closed mail sent on the Collins Line steamer *Arctic* to Liverpool. The closed mail bag was opened at Aachen on 12 May (red datestamp on reverse) and marked for a collection of 45 Kr. in the typical blue ink of the Aachen exchange office. The addressee in Württemberg paid 47 Kr., but this was not the fee increased by Frankfurt (no red ink marking). Instead it was the addition of 2 Kr. for local delivery in Württemberg. Note that the value underlined in Württemberg is 45 Kr. (marked at Aachen) and not the 47 Kr. marked at Frankfurt that was shown in Figure 2. This 47 Kr. is in red crayon and was marked in Württemberg.

It is possible that after a while the Prussian postal administration learned of this discriminatory treatment of the Prussian closed mail letters by Thurn & Taxis Post and took remedial measures. The cover in Figure 5 shows the Prussian answer. The cover was sent unpaid from Baltimore on 17 March 1853 to Hersfeld, Kurhessen, which was in the Thurn

<sup>7</sup> Private communication in 2008 with Martin Camerer, Hoechberg, Germany.

<sup>8</sup> Williamsburg was located immediately across the East River from Manhattan in the New York borough of Brooklyn.



**Figure 5. Unpaid Prussian closed mail cover from Baltimore (17 March 1853) to Hersfeld, Kurhessen. The most unusual 47 Kr. Prussian debit was in anticipation of Thurn & Taxis surcharge. Postage due at destination was 13¾ Sgr. plus ¼ Sgr. local delivery fee.**

& Taxis postal district. The debit marking of the New York exchange office, dated 19 March to coincide with the sailing of the Collins Line steamer *Pacific*, and the absence of any British transit markings prove that the cover was sent in the Prussian closed mail. As with the examples shown above, Aachen should have applied a 45 Kr. debit to the Thurn & Taxis Post. This time, however, Aachen marked a 47 Kr. debit to Thurn & Taxis in the blue ink. Aachen anticipated Thurn & Taxis' increase of the 45 Kr. rate to the British open mail rate, cancelling the profit for the Thurn & Taxis Post. The addressee had to pay 13¾ Sgr. (equivalent to 47 Kr.) and ¼ Sgr. for delivery, which was marked in magenta ink.

Since I have no record of another Prussian closed mail cover to a Thurn & Taxis destination with Aachen's debit to Thurn & Taxis of 47 Kr., it might be concluded that this "Retaliatory Period" was very short. Prussia and Thurn & Taxis might have agreed quickly after this to apply the appropriate 45 Kr. rate on unpaid letters that arrived from the United States in the Prussian closed mail. However, on letters to the United States, the Thurn & Taxis Post insisted on the 9 Kr. GAPU postage. As a result, all the letters originating in its postal district and sent via Aachen were placed in the British open mail and not the Prussian closed mail. As already mentioned, the Frankfurt merchants complained about this unfavourable situation, but they had to wait until 30 July 1859, when Thurn & Taxis joined the U.S.-Prussian Convention without reservation. A Frankfurt cover from the period after this date is shown in Figure 6. It was posted on 6 July 1860 and was addressed to Brookline, Massachusetts. In contrast to the cover in Figure 1 it was properly prepaid the Prussian closed mail rate. The postal clerk wrote "6/39 – 11" in red ink to show a prepayment of 6 Kr. GAPU postage and 39 Kr. (equivalent to 11 Sgr.) foreign postage. Aachen credited 25¢ to the United States and New York confirmed proper prepayment of 30¢ on 28 July. The cover was carried by Inman Line *Vigo*, an American contract steamer.

Since there are only a few covers known during the early months of the Prussian



**Figure 6. Prepaid letter from Frankfurt (6 July 1860) to Brookline, Massachusetts. Similar to Figure 1, but sent after Thurn & Taxis joined the U.S.-Prussian Convention and therefore properly paid the “6/39” or 45 Kr. Prussian closed mail rate; the foreign portion of 11 Sgr. was also indicated. The New York marking showed 30¢ was paid.**

closed mail to or in transit through the Thurn & Taxis district, it would be helpful to find additional covers. Perhaps Society members can add information. There are still questions to be answered. How long did this “Retaliatory Period” last? Did Prussia debit 47 Kr. on covers addressed to the Thurn & Taxis district even earlier than the one example shown, but not on transit covers to Württemberg? A report of any other covers from this most interesting period may increase our knowledge.

I want to thank Richard F. Winter for his detailed editorial and critical review of the manuscript and also for adding a cover (Figure 4) to point out the difference between the Thurn & Taxis rate adjustment and the local fee applied in Württemberg.■

## NANTUCKET PREPAID SHIP COVER

DOUGLAS N. CLARK

The cover that is the subject of this article is unusual because of the way it was treated as a prepaid ship letter, payment being sent along with the letter. The story of the journey traveled by the cover reveals other aspects significant enough to become part of this article. The cover is not exactly a new discovery. It was in the collection of Tahiti postal history formed and exhibited by Melissa (Mrs. Gene) Scott. It appeared in the auction of that collection held by the H. R. Harmer firm in Zurich on June 6 and 7, 2008.

### Origin

Illustrated in Figure 1, the cover was sent from Tahaa, an island near Bora Bora in the Society Islands, by E.R.W. Crouse, a British missionary. It is dated January 16, 1845.

The notation on the reverse, signed by “Geo. N. Chapin, Acting Consul,” indicates