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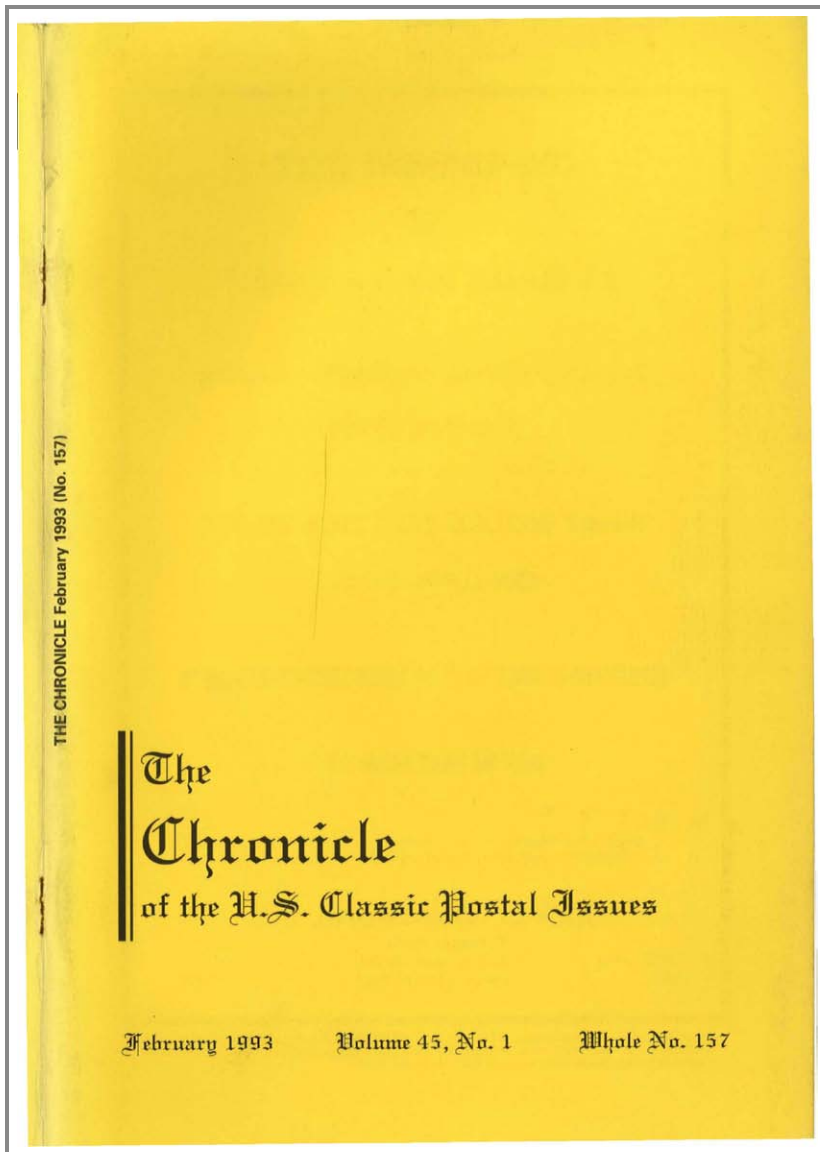


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THE POSTAL HISTORY LEGACY OF MISS HARRIET BUTLER SHAW
JON W. ROSE

Sidney W. Emery, who provided much of the information in this article, is a collector of the 1869 Issue with a very specialized interest in the correspondence of Miss Harriet B. Shaw (Figure 1). Known as "Hat" Shaw because of her fondness for hats, Miss Shaw was a resident of Alfred, Maine, for most of her 91 years before her death in 1933. She was a pioneering mail order dealer whose records consisted primarily of the envelopes she received from customers during the years 1865-1881. Many envelopes bear stamps of the 1869 Issue, often used with stamps from the preceding 1861-67 issues or the succeeding Bank Note issues. It may not be an overstatement to say the Shaw correspondence provides as many as five to ten percent of the 1869 Issue covers known today.

For many years Emery has sought these Shaw covers, and has formed a postal history exhibit of them. Letters flowed into the Shaw residence at 15 South Street, Alfred, Maine, from all over the United States, as well as foreign lands such as Canada, Peru, Brazil and Germany. As many contained money orders or cash, they were sent registered, especially at the 15¢ rate.

What follows is the story of Miss H.B. Shaw, the discovery of her cover cache, and the contributions to U.S. postal history and collectors' holdings brought about by the bookkeeping habits of the super saleswoman.



Figure 1. The home ("Brick Ends") of Harriet B. Shaw, 15 South Street, Alfred, Maine. The shed with dormer windows at far left contained the Shaw correspondence, a postal history legacy (circa 1865-1881) of tens of thousands of covers for today's collectors. Early photo shows local folk with head gear favored by "Hat" Shaw and white fence, now gone. Insert: Miss Harriet B. Shaw as a young woman in her twenties at the start of her pioneering mail order business. Born in 1842, she died in 1933 at the age of 91.

All collectors dream of the "big find," a horde of untouched, old letters or albums full of 19th century stamps, lying forgotten in someone's attic or stored away in filing cabinets of some business.

Sterling T. Dow, a Portland, Maine, stamp dealer, collector and Maine postal historian, was an inveterate seeker of stamp and cover hordes. Sometime in the 1920s Dow got to talking with an antique furniture repairer who worked in a town near Alfred, Maine. Dow asked him if, in his travels, he had ever come upon batches of old letters. Twice the repairman said no, but on a third visit he recalled a horde in a woodshed in Alfred. Through a friend, who happened to be a friend of the woodshed owner as well, Dow was able to secure permission to check the shed.

\$20 A DAY MADE AT HOME! - 40
 Entirely new articles for Agents. Samples
 sent free. Address H. B. SHAW,
 Alfred, Me.
 "I WILL BUY - Stock and Returns"

\$25 A DAY MADE AT HOME! - 33 En-
 tirely new articles for Agents. Samples
 sent free. Address H. B. SHAW, Alfred, Me.

CURE FOR DRUNKENNESS.

Sulphate of Iron three grains; Magnesia ten grains; Peppermint water eleven drams; Spirit of Nutmeg one dram; to be taken once or twice a day, if necessary, for five or six months. This preparation acts as a tonic and stimulant, and supplies the place of the accustomed liquor, preventing the moral and physical prostration which follows the sudden breaking off from the use of strong drink. The above would generally have to be used with the consent of the patient. If it is desired to use a remedy without the knowledge of the patient, take eight grains of Tartar Emetic, and mix in four ounces of Rose Water. Put a table-spoonful into the whole quantity the person is in the habit of drinking in one day; or say a small tea-spoonful to each glass. Be sure and not exceed this quantity.

Figure 2. Some of the advertisements run by H.B. Shaw. Upper left: British Oleon (Persian plum oil) for hair care. Upper right: classified ads seeking agents to sell her products, some of which were fraudulently promoted. Lower left: A sample cure for drunkenness, including sulfate of iron, peppermint water and a shot of nutmeg. Lower right, "Liquid Lightning", a stain remover which claimed to remove almost anything from almost everything.

Upon investigating, Dow discovered bundles and bundles of old letters placed upon the beams inside the shed. The owner had already agreed to sell them to Dow. There were so many, however, that transporting them was a major problem. Dow purchased three large sugar barrels from the town store, filled them with the “covers,” and shipped them to his home by rail. But the barrels were delayed in shipment. Dow was frantic. Finally, he returned to the shed, filled three more barrels and had these shipped by American Express. Both shipments, rail and express, arrived about the same time.

Dow worked on the cover horde all winter, scolded constantly by his wife for “spending money for those dirty old letters which the rats have been running over for years.” Unfortunately, Dow removed many stamps from the envelopes and threw them away, postal markings and all! Cover collecting was in its infancy then, and there was no market for many of them.

These letters all came from the business correspondence of Harriet Butler Shaw, who was active during the years 1865-81. Shaw sold notions, cosmetics and various quaint cure-alls. Among her best sellers were British oleon (Persian plum oil), a hair tonic, and “Liquid Lightning,” a cleaner and stain remover (“instantly removes paint, grease, tar, pitch, and varnish from all articles of wool, silk, cotton, velvet and satin”). Shaw was assisted by her brother, Greene. Potential customers read her advertisements in hundreds of newspapers and magazines (Figure 2).

Among Shaw’s other goods was a foolproof flyswatter (two small blocks of wood), Shaw’s Brazilian Magic Lustre (a polish allegedly containing minerals from Brazilian diamond mines, but actually a cake of brick dust), a \$1 sewing machine (actually a needle, thimble and spool of thread), and various patent medicines.

Offering free samples as inducements, she tried to recruit sales agents for her products across the United States (Figure 2, upper right). Her bookkeeping was the essence of simplicity. When orders arrived, she usually wrote on the envelope the amount of the remittance and noted the date it was received. The envelopes were bundled by date in lots of 100 each (as Dow discovered them).

What did Dow find among what eventually turned out to be some 150,000 covers? Many of the letters were sent registered, and many of these were franked with a 15¢ stamp for the registration rate from 1869-74 (Figures 3 and 4). In all Dow had more than 1,000 15¢ stamps of seven different varieties. This would seem to indicate that the covers spanned a chronological period stretching beyond 1880, but it was not so. The 15¢ stamps

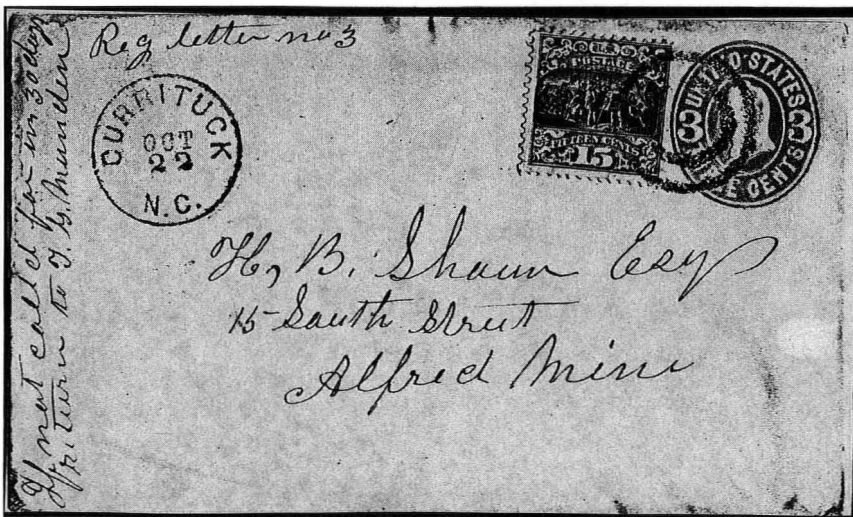


Figure 3. A typical registered letter to H.B. Shaw, Esq. from Currituck, North Carolina, franked with a Type II 15¢ 1869 on a 3¢ pink Nesbitt (Scott’s #U21).



Figure 4. A 15¢ F grill Lincoln and a 3¢ 1869 locomotive pay registered letter rate January 4, 1870, from Kalida, Ohio, to Mr. (!) H.B. Shaw, 15 South St., Alfred, Maine.

included the 15¢ black Lincoln of 1866 (Scott's #77); the 15¢ F grill Lincoln (Scott's #98); the 15¢ 1869s, types I and II (cataloging on cover today \$1,000 and \$750, respectively); and three types of the 15¢ Daniel Webster Bank Note stamps, the National with and without grill (\$1,350 and \$225, respectively) and the 15¢ Continental (Scott's #163, \$250).

Dow recalled that the stamps on covers included more than 50 grilled Bank Notes, more than 100 1¢ 1869s plus 40 strips of three of the 1¢ (Figure 5), a diagonal bisect of the 6¢ 1869, and many bisects of the 6¢ ungrilled Bank Note. But, as Dow reported: "Lamentably, there was not one (bisect) that I could not have made myself. Either they were pen-cancelled or the cancellation did not tie the split to the cover. Too bad."

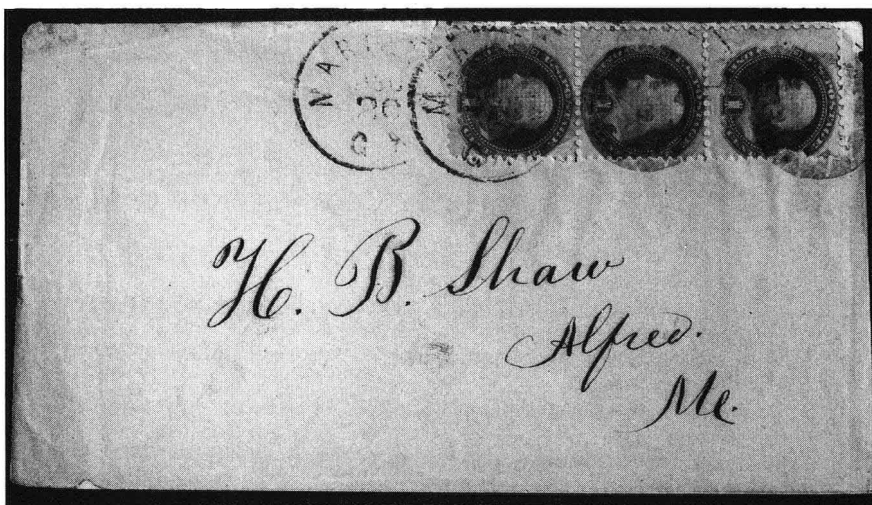


Figure 5. A vertical strip of three of the 1¢ 1869 pays letter rate from Marietta, Georgia, December 20, 1869, to H.B. Shaw. Letter enclosed is from 26-year-old man seeking to become a dealer-agent for Shaw's products. He writes: "If you (Miss Shaw) would like to establish an agency at this place, I would like to be the one appointed, if you have confidence in me so far from you ..."

One of the loveliest 6¢ items was a horizontal strip of three of the 6¢ National with grill. Interestingly, the right hand stamp had a well defined grill, the middle a faint one and the left no grill points at all discernible.

Dow also examined the contents of the envelopes addressed to Shaw and made some choice finds. These included more than 300 unused 3¢ stamps, several 2¢ stamps, and a mint block of six of the 3¢ 1869 (2 x 3). There was also U.S. and Canadian currency, including a number of 3¢ pieces and silver 5¢ coins.

Strangely, Dow did not obtain all the Shaw covers. In 1926 a noncollector uncovered another 30,000 letters. Dow did act as dealer agent in disposing of these. Among the outstanding items were: a cover with a diagonal Black Jack bisect (Scott's #73) attached to a whole copy, both extra fine; two 2¢ 1870 Bank Note bisects (then known as "splits"); two strips of three of the 6¢ 1869; a bisect of the 2¢ 1869 with pen cancel; 23 1869 15¢ Type II covers and two 15¢ Type I covers, all presumably registered usages.

Today H.B. Shaw covers grace dozens if not hundreds of stamp collections, including that of the writer of this article. The Emery collection, which is based on the Shaw correspondence, is notable for its variety. Among its 1869 Issue Shaw covers are: Eight with the 1¢ Franklin, 11 20¢ (including one diagonal bisect), dozens of 3¢ (Figures 6 and 7), one 6¢, four 12¢ and three 15¢. Emery's Shaw covers were mailed from 37 different states and three U.S. territories. Dated covers span a 13-year time frame, July 1868 to February



Figure 6. A. Danner's wholesale grocery and liquor store is illustrated on this 3¢ 1869 cover from Allegheny (City), Pennsylvania, addressed to H.B. Shaw, Esq., presuming Shaw to be a man.

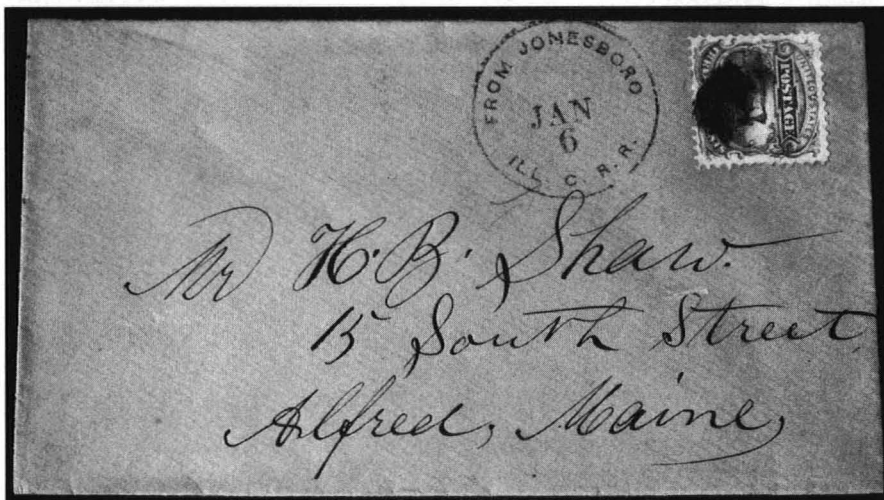


Figure 7. A nicely struck "FROM JONESBORO ILL. C.R.R." postmark enhances this otherwise ordinary 3¢ 1869 cover to Mr. (!) H.B. Shaw, probably January 6, 1870, usage.

1881. New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania are the most common states of origin. The covers include registered pieces showing all four registry rates for the 1868-81 time period: 20¢, 15¢, 8¢ and 10¢, in that order.

This is one of the most interesting postal rate facts about this period. In the space of 13 years the registry rate changed from 20¢ to 15¢ on January 1, 1869; from 15¢ to 8¢ on January 1, 1874; from 8¢ to 10¢ on July 1, 1875, where it remained until January 1, 1893. Covers with the 1869 Issue showing the 8¢ registry rate are uncommon, as they represent very late uses of the stamps. One Emery cover from Iowa shows the 8¢ registry rate plus the 3¢ letter rate, paid by a 2¢ 1869, two 3¢ 1869s and a 3¢ Bank Note stamp.

The Shaw correspondence story has many fascinating footnotes. Harriet Shaw never advertised the fact that she was a young woman, so virtually all the envelopes are addressed to Mr. H.B. Shaw or H.B. Shaw (often with Esquire appended). Miss Shaw had to suspend her operations when she got into trouble with postal inspectors for alleged fraudulent use of the mails.

Harriet Shaw is remembered as “very much a lady, petite, strongwilled and distinctive, and loyal to her Congregational church” by a close neighbor, Miss Evelyn Thompson. Harriet Shaw died on December 22, 1933, at the age of 91, the oldest resident of Alfred, Maine. She died at her home, 15 South Street, left to her by her father. The legacy of her voluminous correspondence ensures her immortality among cover collectors.



Figure 8. Registered (15¢) letter from Charleston, SC, 28 Sept. 1869, to H.B. Shaw, Esq., franked with 15¢ F grill Lincoln and 3¢ 1869 locomotive.