



The Prexie Era

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Fourth Class Mail

by Bob Hohertz



Earlier this year an eBay seller ran a lot consisting of Prexie covers and pieces, most of which were not pictured. One visible item was an insured cover from H.E. Harris franked with a solo 19-cent Prexie. Its obvious “philatelic” nature apparently didn’t attract any of us, and the lot did not sell. When re-listed I bought it quite inexpensively and was surprised and pleased to find that it included a number of commercial labels with stamps cut from mailings to John F. Lutz, Inc., of Esterly, Pennsylvania.

Lutz and his descendants ran a combination furniture store and undertaking business in Esterly from the late 1800’s until 1960. Their

building complex is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. If you go looking, the community of Esterly is now

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named Saint Lawrence.

One of the Lutz employees was J. Russell Yoder, a stamp collector who made purchases from H.E. Harris and undoubtedly cut the pieces from mailing wrappers to the company I found in the eBay lot. The Harris mailings were dated 1948 and 1949, but as we shall see, the mailings to Lutz ranged from the early 1940's into the later part of the decade. The illustrations shown here provide a sampling of the fourth-class package fragments included.

A number of the mailings were from the Philadelphia Carpet Company, which placed them in fourth-class Zone 1.

This 12-cent mailing on the label shown above must have contained samples (though it isn't likely that an entire shipment of carpets was sent through the mail, if one thinks about it.) It could have been sent during either of two rate periods: from March 26, 1944 until January 1, 1949, or from January 1, 1949 to October 1, 1951. If the former, it weighed from two to three pounds, with the charge being 8 cents for the first pound and 1.1 cents each for the next two pounds, plus a 1-cent minimum surcharge, then rounded up. If sent in the later period it weighed one pound or under.

The mailing for 17 cents (Figure 2) could have occurred any time from 1932 until 1949. If during the earliest period it would have weighed nine pounds (8 cents for the first pound plus 1.1 cents for the next eight pounds,

rounded up,) and after the wartime surcharge went into effect, eight pounds (the previous arithmetic for seven additional pounds, plus the 1-cent surcharge.) The most likely time period was after 1948, where it would have weighed two to three pounds. This conclusion is in light of the one to two pound weight of the 12-cent example – but see the next example.

This 18 cent mailing (Figure 3) could not have been done after the beginning of 1949, as the charge for the first pound then was 12 cents and the increments were 2.1 cents per pound. The steps were 14.2 cents, 16.4 cents, and 18.6 cents, with the fractions of cents always rounded up. Since this puts the mailing earlier, the weight ends up being higher. Prior to the 1944 war surcharge the weight of the shipment would have been ten pounds (8 cents plus nine times 1.1 cents) and after the inception of the

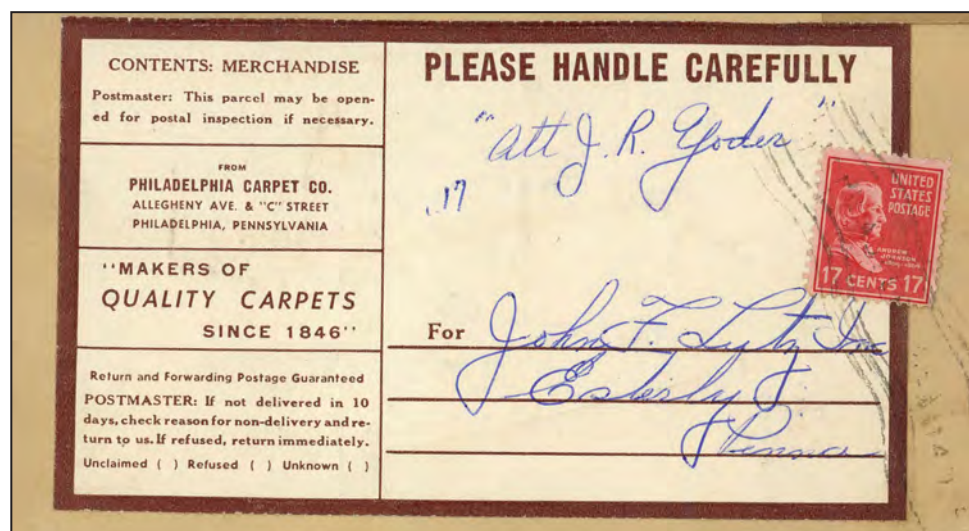


Figure 2.

surcharge, nine pounds (8 cents plus eight times 1.1 cents plus the 1-cent surcharge.) Therefore, a nine pound weight for the previous example would not have been so unlikely.

The package this 17-cent example came from (Figure 4) was mailed from Grand Rapids, Michigan, which was Zone 4. The only possibility is that it was mailed between October 1, 1932 and March 26, 1944, which

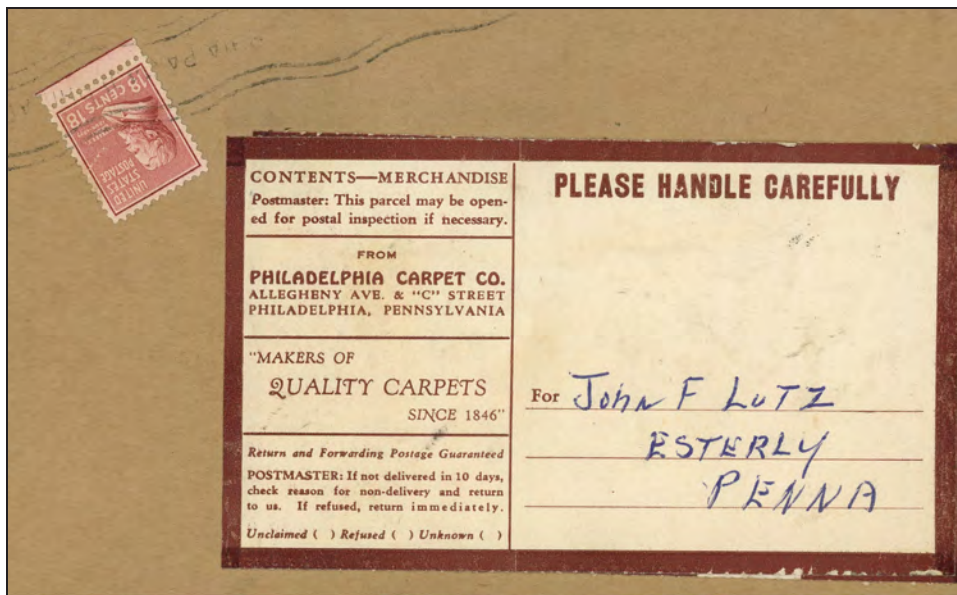


Figure 3.

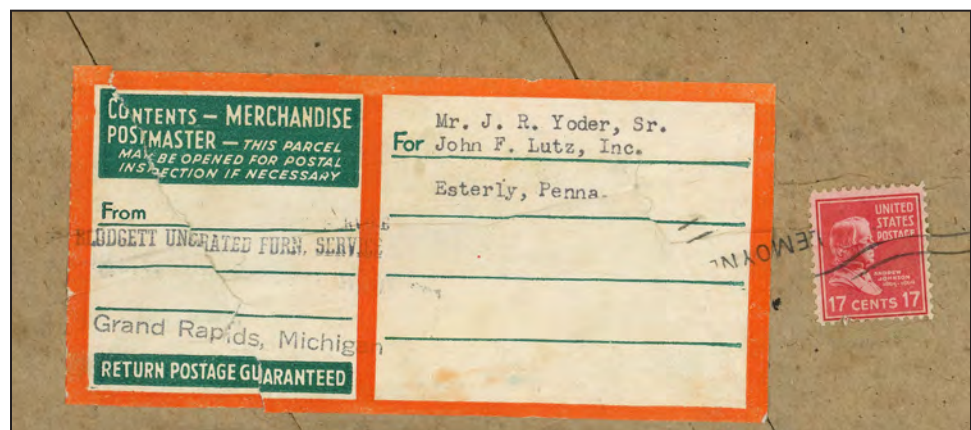


Figure 4.

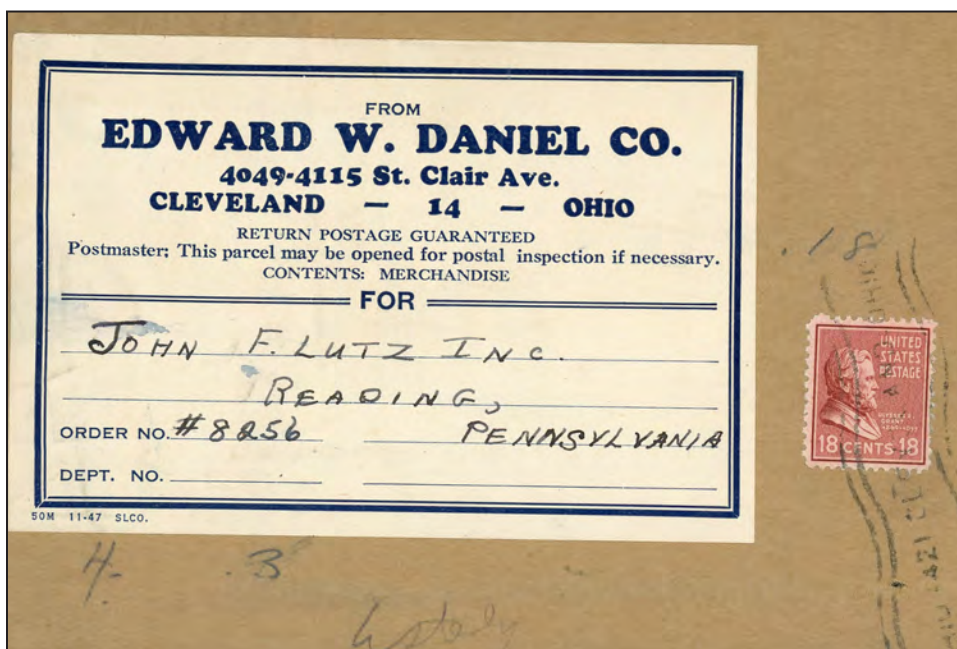


Figure 5.

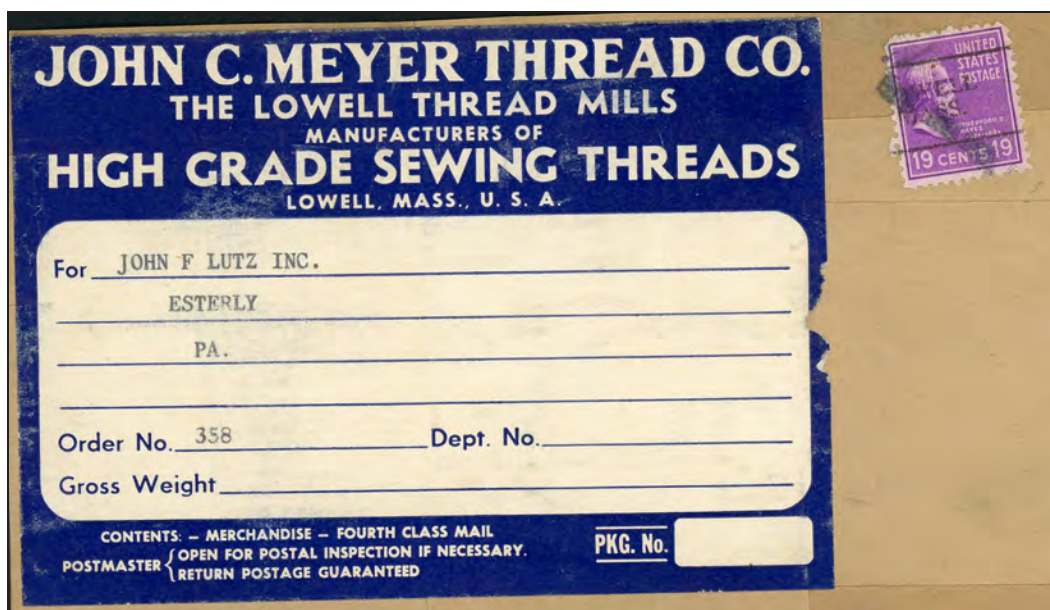


Figure 6.

would give postage of 10 cents for the first pound and 3.5 cents for the next two pounds, for an even 17 cents.

The mailing from Cleveland, Ohio, Zone 4, (Figure 5) could only have been done between March 26, 1944 and January 1, 1949 for 18 cents. Ten cents for the first pound and 3.5 cents for each of the next two adds to only 17 cents, so the 1-cent surcharge is needed to make the total.

One further example is this Zone 4 mailing from Lowell, Massachusetts (Figure 6). No rates before January 1, 1949 would work out, but between then and October 1, 1951 a two-pound package would have cost 14 cents for the first pound and 4.5 cents for the second pound, rounded up to 19 cents.

How nice that an employee of the Lutz firm was a philatelist!

Dickson Preston Prexie Collection Up for Sale at ARIPEX 2015

When thinking about the early Prexie collectors, the names Suffet, Neil, Shapiro, Helbock, and Piskiewicz, immediately come to mind. Dickson Preston should be added to the list.

Dickson started collecting Prexies in 1986, after becoming an APS accredited judge. The Prexies became his first area of U.S. interest. He began exhibiting them in 1991. Because he found his main interest to be in the uses of the stamps, he structured his exhibits by denominations instead of rates. His exhibits were noteworthy by the presence of unusual or peculiar items, like mishandled mail, incorrect

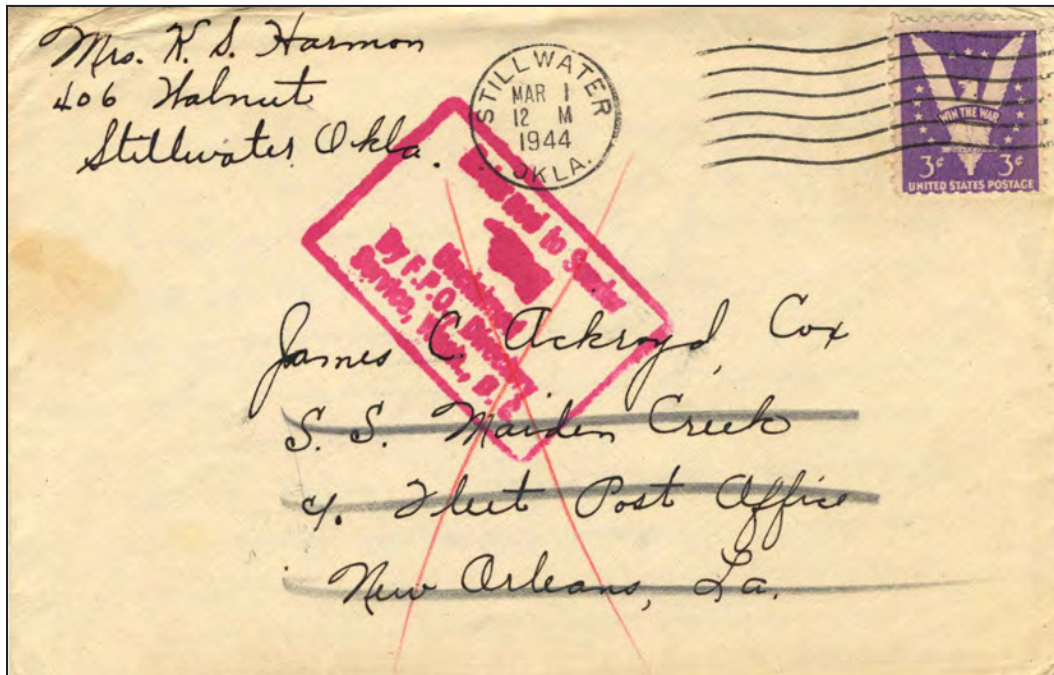
postage applied by postal clerks, and arcane aspects of the postal regulations. Viewers and judges could also count on a touch of whimsy.

Dickson exhibited his Prexies 12 times, winning two vermeils and ten golds, plus numerous special awards, including several USSS Statue of Freedom Awards,

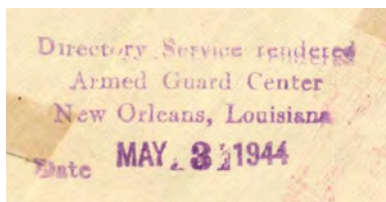
Although the exhibit has now been disassembled and will be sold by Arizona dealer, David Grossblat, starting at ARIPEX 2015, for posterity he has reproduced it in electronic format.

Mail to A Killed Naval Seaman, “Unclaimed”

by Jeffrey Shapiro



Letters from family members were important in maintaining morale during World War II. In this example, the sister of coxswain James C. Ackroyd sent a newsy letter from home to her brother who was serving with the US Navy Armed Guard aboard the freighter SS *Maiden Creek II*. Because the location of ships in World



War II was secret, Ackroyd's mail was sent to it's assigned Fleet Post Office at New Orleans, LA. Markings on both sides of the cover show it was mailed from Stillwater, OK on March 1, 1944 and, after directory service was rendered, as indicated on the back of the cover, returned by the Fleet Post Office on May 3, 1944 **Unclaimed**. This is shown in red on the cover's face.

The SS *Maiden Creek II* was built in 1943 by the Gulf Shipbuilding Corporation at Chickasaw, AL and sold to the Waterman Steamship

Company of Mobile, AL.

On March 17, 1944, while en route to Oran, Algeria from Naples, Italy, as part of Convoy SNF-17 carrying war materiel, *Maiden Creek II* was torpedoed by the German submarine U-371 in the Mediterranean Sea about 30 miles north of Bougie, Algeria. The freighter was crippled by two attacks, killing 11 of the crew of 77. Ackroyd was one of the crewmen who perished and never saw his sister's letter.

The ship remained afloat, and efforts soon began to tow her to Bougie for salvage. However, a violent storm broke the ship in two, and it was declared a total loss. The ship's bell was retained and now is on display at the Connecticut War Memorial, in West Hartford.

The German submarine U-371 was launched in January 1941 and joined the German First U-Boat Flotilla in July 1941. Operating mostly in the Mediterranean Sea, the U-371 participated in 19 patrols, sinking 13 Allied

ships, including the destroyer, USS *Bristol*, and damaging six others. The *Maiden Creek II* fell victim as part of the submarine's 18th patrol.

U-371 met her fate on May 4, 1944 when she

was sent to the bottom 30 miles off the Algerian coast by an Allied submarine hunting operation known as "Swamp." Ironically, this was near the spot where the *Maiden Creek II* had met her fate seven weeks earlier.

Last Prewar Flight of the *Pacific Clipper*

by Bob Hohertz



Figure 1.

This cover was mailed from New York to Auckland, New Zealand on November 19, 1941 at twice the 50 cents per half-ounce airmail rate. It was posted too late to catch the *California Clipper*, which left San Francisco for Los Angeles on November 17, but in plenty of time for the *Pacific Clipper* flight leaving San Francisco December 1.

This flight departed Honolulu on December 4 for Canton Island, where it remained the night of December 5. Stopping at Suva, Fiji, the flight went on to Noumea, New Caledonia, leaving there the morning of December 8 for Auckland. Since by then the International Date Line had been crossed, this was the morning of December 7 in Honolulu. A notation in ink on the cover by its recipient, A. D. Baldwin,

shows that it was delivered promptly: "Arrived Auckland Dec 9th – Japan Declares War."

The tale of the historic round-the-world flight of the *Pacific Clipper* to return home is told in great detail in "Pacific Pioneers – The Rest of the Story" by Jon Krupnick. In effect, flight Captain Robert Ford was told on December 14 that he should not try to return via the Pacific, but go west until he reached New York. This he did, on a route through Australia, Java, Ceylon, India, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, the Belgian Congo, Brazil, Trinidad, and, finally, New York.

Though unintended at the outset, the flight set a record as the first commercial flight around the world.

Diagnosing World War II Covers

by Louis Fiset

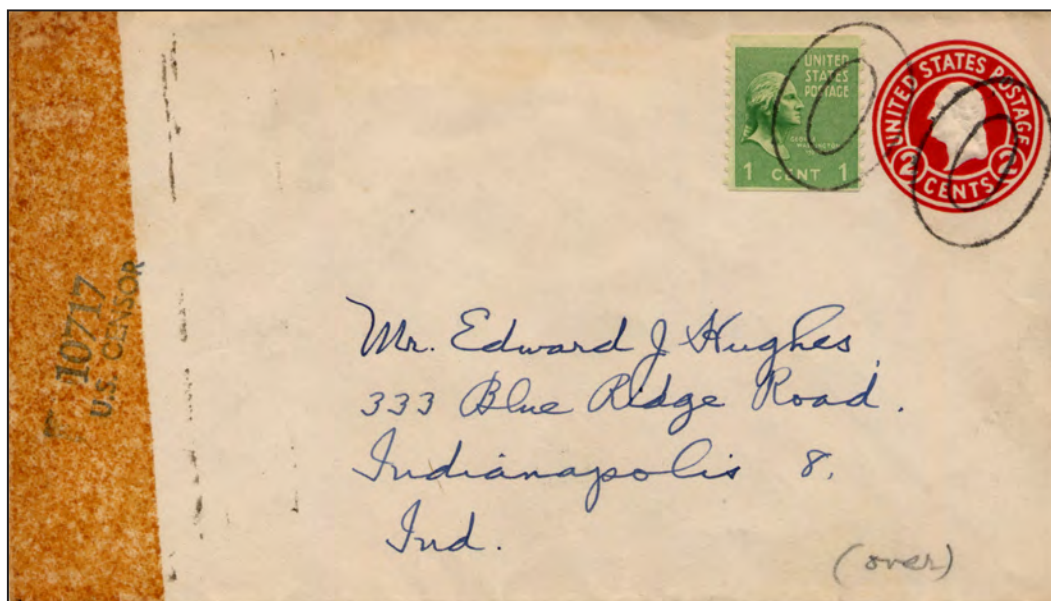


Figure 1.

In a recent Linns publication, Ken Lawrence (November 17, 2014) provides readers with a multitude of resources to analyze covers from World War II, some of which have not been published and/or are difficult to access. Focusing on rates and routes, answers are available, for example, to thorny questions involving airmail service to Australia, and rates and routes to Turkey in 1941.

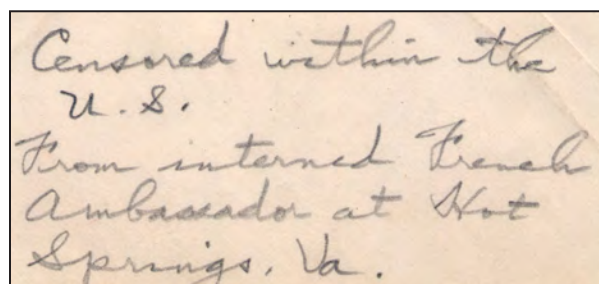
Near the end of his article Lawrence makes the following statement:

“ [N]o single source can tell us everything we want to understand about our covers, and information about wartime mail can be exceptionally challenging to locate.”

This article offers additional resources that extend beyond rates and routes and are accessible to most collectors of World War II postal history. Accompanying Lawrence’s references the resources illustrated here may help bring greater vitality and interest to many of the covers currently residing in our

collections.

Civil censorship markings: Most non-military, international mail was subject to civil censorship, and most countries throughout the world examined incoming and outgoing mail. Broderick & Mayo (1981) continues to be the standard reference on censorship by the U.S. Office of Censorship, even though the catalog is due for a revision. As the example in Figure 1 will show, censor markings can sometimes help date covers for which postmarks are smudged or absent, altogether.



This cover caught my eye because it was a piece of domestic mail that was censored

and with a mute cancel applied. A pencil notation on the back reads: "From interned French Ambassador at Hot Springs, Va." This information likely came from the now missing contents since no direct corroborating evidence can be found on the cover.

From data gleaned from the *New York Times* and elsewhere I have documented the Vichy France Ambassador Gaston Henry-Gaye and his entourage of 93 were detained at the

this correspondence indeed originated with the Vichy ambassador. However, the date range provided by the censor mark provides evidence to support the information on the back of the cover, and adds interest to the story it tells.

Ancestry (ancestry.com): This database is a favorite of genealogists for the wealth of personal information it provides on immigration and travel, vital statistics, military, census, and other data that help unravel the mysteries of

families. Postal historians can learn a lot from this database, as the following example illustrates.

The domestic air-mail cover in Figure 2 also caught my eye because of domestic censorship by the POW Unit in New York (268) and locally (5), and the manuscript notation,



Figure 2.

Cascades Inn, at Hot Springs, Virginia for nearly five months awaiting repatriation on the third exchange voyage of M.S. *Gripsholm*, that left New York harbor on February 15, 1944.

All domestic correspondence of detained diplomats, their staffs, and families, was subject to censorship by U.S. censors. The censor marking on the cover's face was in use by the New York field office's POW Unit from February 1944-June 1945. Likely this cover was sent by pouch from Hot Springs, Virginia to New York, examined by a POW Unit censor, who then placed it in the mail stream at Morgan Annex where it was postmarked with a mute cancel.

Of course, it remains impossible to know if

"Written in English." Also, I knew that PO Box 119, Kenedy, Texas, was an undercover address for an internment camp that held internees brought to the U.S. from Latin America. Here is what I learned from Ancestry about the writer of the letter, Hans Schwerdtfeger:

Hans Schwerdtfeger was a 33-year old, unmarried banker from Hamburg, who had been issued a visa at Medellin, Colombia. He was apprehended in early April and placed aboard the USAT *Etolin*, an ocean liner chartered to the U.S. Army, which departed from Buenaventura, Colombia on April 10, 1942. Bound for San Francisco, it arrived there on April 20. He was accompanied by 460 other enemy aliens who boarded the ship at Callao (265), Guayaquil (44) and Buenaventura (151).

Other sources indicates the contingent left San Francisco by train on the same day, arriving at the former CCC camp on April 21. This was the first group of enemy aliens to arrive. By the end of the month the population stood at 620. When the camp closed on September 18, 1944 and the internees were dispersed to other camps, a total of 2,000 had passed through Kenedy's gates.

Digitized daily U.S. Postal Bulletin (www.uspostalbulletins.com): The U.S. daily

Postal Bulletin has been available to researchers on microfilm for many years. Recently the complete run has been digitized and can be accessed on line at no charge. One advantage is being able to search by key word, a tool that has helped me greatly in my research related to the resumption of mail service at the end of World War II.

For example, between September 6, 1944 and August 28, 1945, the Post Office Department issued 17 directives related to the resumption of service to France, one of three European countries to which mail service resumed while German troupes still occupied parts of the country.

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the value of this easy access to the digitized format. The map, shown here highlighted in red showing the geographic location of first resumed service on September 5, 1944, was produced from text contained in *PB* 18751. It clearly shows the site of the June 6th Normandy invasion area. The non-illustrated, uprated postal card in Figure 3 addressed to Paris was postmarked September 9,

1944, four days after postal card service to Normandy only was first authorized. It was returned to the sender, but then re-posted on September 22, with the RETURN TO SENDER marking

scratched out. The postcard was censored at New York (7734) and Paris (075). According to *PB* 18757, postal card service to Paris resumed



Figure 3.

on September 23, 1944.

Figure 4 shows a letter postmarked Lexington, Kentucky April 29, 1945 and sent by surface to Villé in the department (state) of Bas-Rhin, located in France's northeast region. By now, French citizens in all but three of France's 96 departments, were able to send and receive



postal card and surface letter mail with correspondence in the U.S. However, heavy fighting still existed in the Bas-Rhin area. The map shown here, derived from *PB* 18804, highlights the



Figure 4.

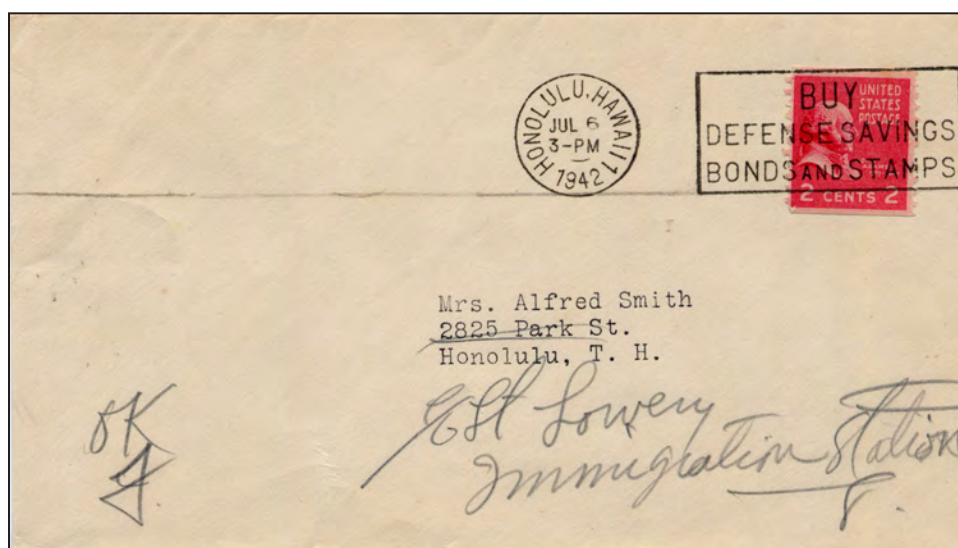
small geographic area in France not yet liberated from German forces. The cover has an enclosure slip attached to the front directing the sender to the daily *Postal Bulletin* of March 9, 1945 (PB 18804), which continued to exclude mail service to Bas-Rhin, Haut-Rhin, and Mo-

linns article. Certainly other databases are easily accessible, such as the *New York Times*, as well as shipping news records inside this and other port-city newspapers that published right up until the U.S. entered the war. Who among us can suggest other resources?

2-Cent Prexies Scarce on Internee Mail

Illustrated here is a cover showing an in-city rate addressed to a German-American naturalized citizen at her home in Honolulu. On December 7, 1941, Susan Smith was arrested by FBI agents as a potential threat to national security. The letter was forwarded to her in care of an army officer in charge of internment operations and censored there ("OK/T").

Because most internees were held in remote



locations, in-city rates rarely applied. Where applicable, the 2-cent Defense Issue stamp was usual. Any internee related mail bearing the 2-cent Prexie is scarce and sought after.