



No. 93 Spring 2021

The Prexie Era

Publication of the USSS 1938 Presidential-Era Committee

Louis Fiset, Editor/Publisher
lfiset@outlook.com

Prexie Local Letter Uses

by Albert “Chip” Briggs

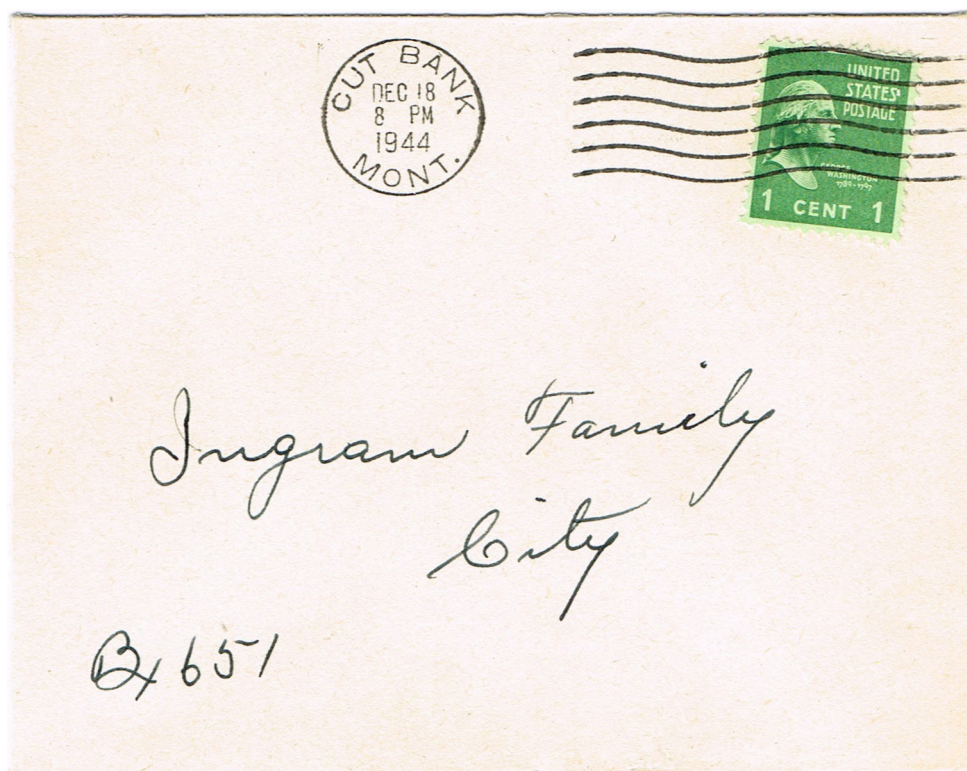


Figure 1. Non-carrier local letter from Cut Bank, Montana.

The phrase “local letter” refers to a letter both mailed and delivered within the service area of a single post office. This type of mail has existed since the mid-19th century. Two distinct types of local letter mail have been in use but are no longer available today. The first type, carrier office local letters, refers to mail deposited at a post office for delivery by a mail carrier to an

addressee within the service area of that same post office or mailed from and to an address within the same post office and delivered by a post office mail carrier. The second type, non-carrier office local letter, describes mail dropped off at a post office for the addressee to pick up there. Patrons of non-carrier post offices typically had a post office box. In fact,

non-carrier office letters are frequently referred to as “drop” letters.

At the beginning of the Prexie era, rates charged for local letters were two cents per ounce for carrier office mail. This service was eliminated on March 25, 1944. Non-carrier office letters cost one cent per ounce until January 1, 1952 when it was raised to two cents per ounce, then raised again on August 1, 1958 to three cents per ounce. Non-carrier local mail service discontinued on January 6, 1968. While some covers may appear to be a local letter use, the only way to be certain is to consult the *United States Postal Guide*. The Guide contains alphabetical listings of all post offices in each county of every state. Post offices lacking carrier delivery have a notation

showing the number of post office boxes at that facility. This notation is in the form of a capital “P” followed by a number. Another source of this information in the Guide is the listing of post office classifications (first, second, or third class). In this alphabetical arrangement by state, a post office name followed by a capital “F” denoted offices having city, or carrier delivery.

Non-Carrier Local Letters: Figure 1 illustrates the one cent per ounce non-carrier office rate in effect at the beginning of the Prexie era. This example, used in December 1944 in Cut Bank, Montana has a very minimal address: Ingram Family; City; Bx 651. This is typical of address information found on these covers, in this case specifying only the post office box



Figure 2. Two cents per ounce non-carrier local letters from Stayton, Oregon and Entiat, Washington.

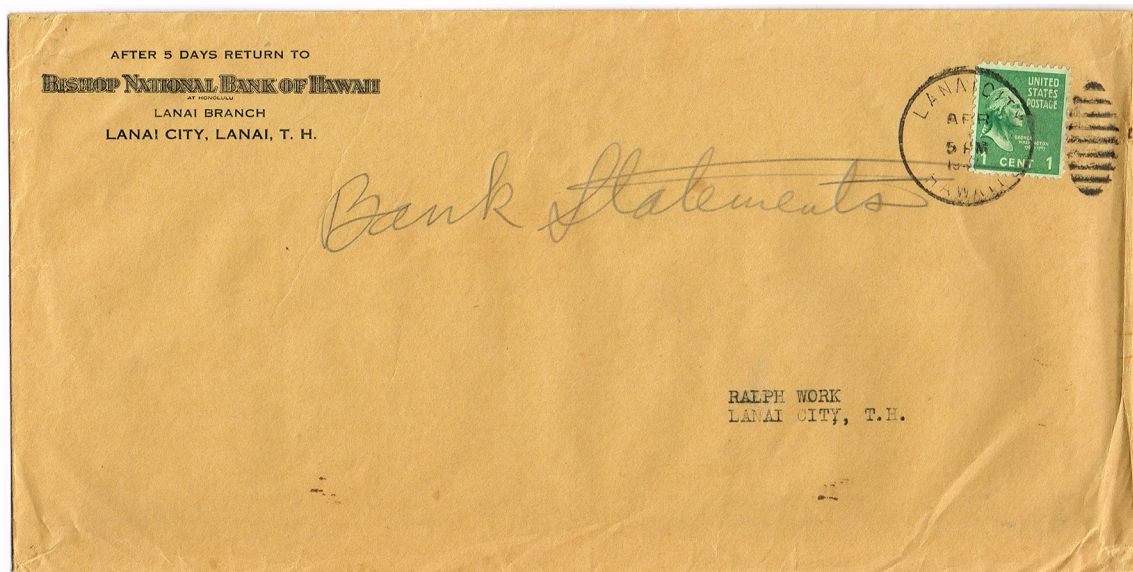


Figure 3. Non-carrier local letter in Lanai City, Hawaii.

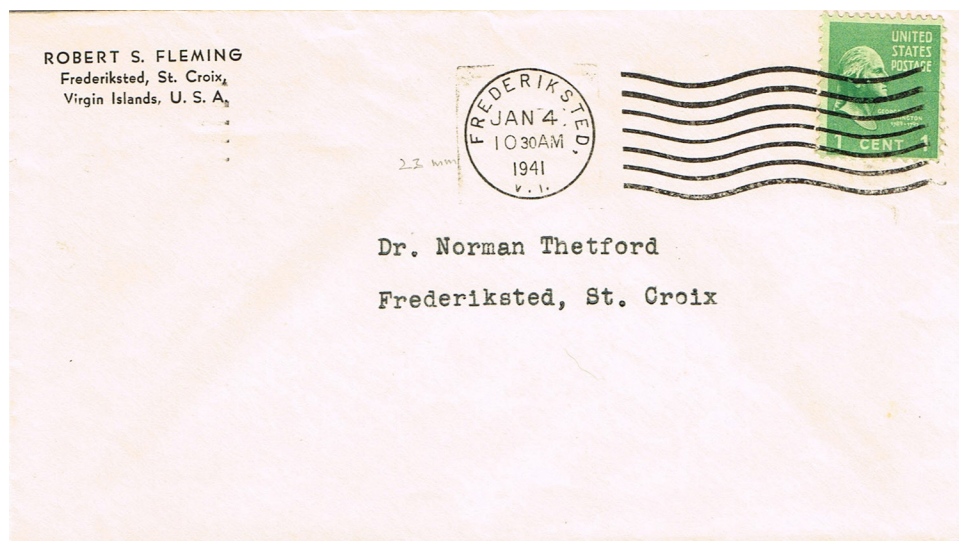


Figure 4. One cent per ounce non-carrier local letter use from St. Croix.

number. The 1941 *United States Postal Guide* documents Cut Bank, located about 30 miles south of the Canadian border, to have 912 post office boxes available for patrons.

The rate for non-carrier local letters increased to two cents per ounce on January 1, 1952, as reflected in the covers shown in Figure 2. These covers, from Stayton, Oregon and Entiat, Washington also show the paucity of addressee information.

Just as in the continental United States, local letter uses may be found from various

possessions and territories. The same postal rates applied. Figure 3 illustrates a non-carrier use in 1942, in Lanai City, Hawaii. Lanai City was developed to provide housing and support for employees of the Dole pineapple plantations. In fact, at one time James Dole owned the entire island of Lanai.

Similarly, Figure 4 is an example from the U. S. Virgin Islands, in 1941. This cover was in use within the Frederiksted, St. Croix post office.

One of the most scarce uses of non-carrier local letters may be seen in Figure 5. This

Figure 5. Heart Mountain Relocation Center non-carrier local letter.

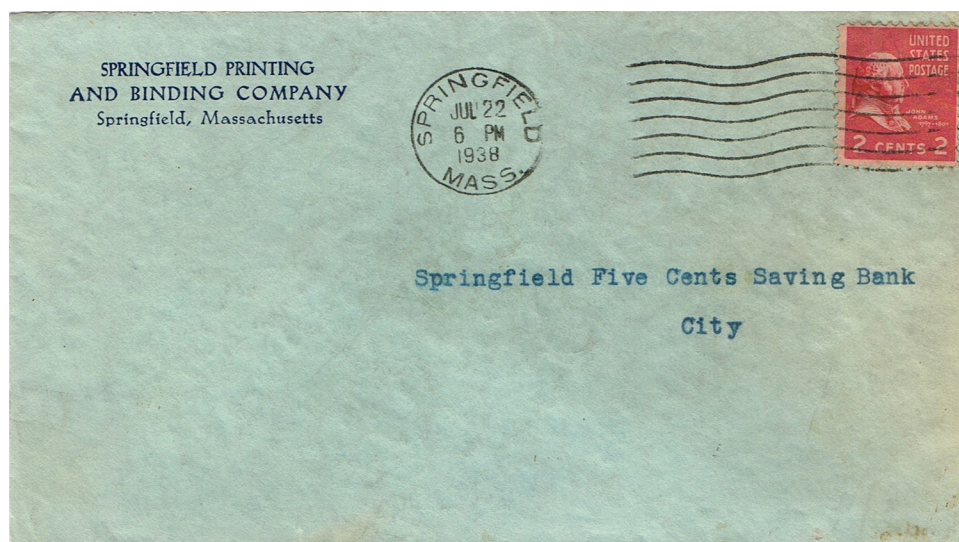


Figure 6. Early carrier office local letter use from Springfield, Massachusetts.

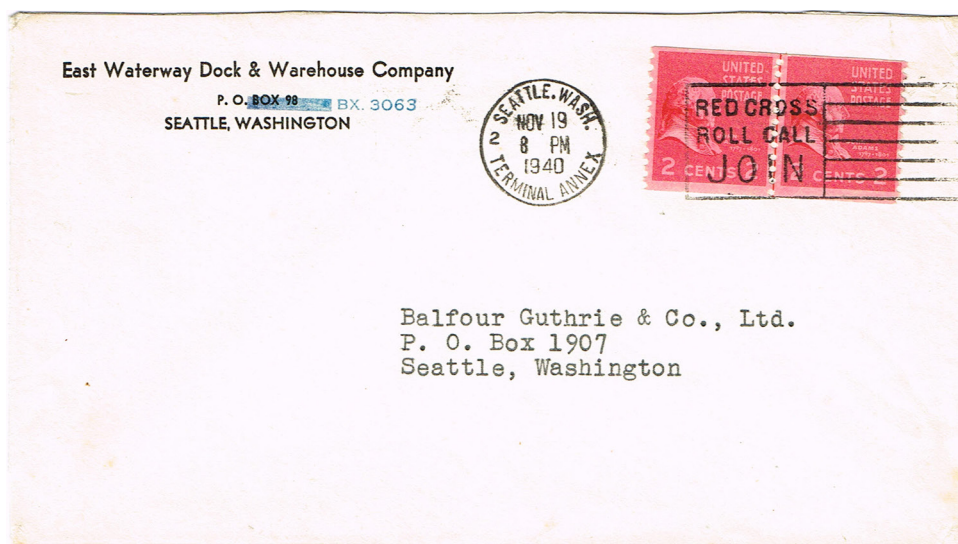


Figure 7. Double weight local letter from Seattle.

cover was accepted at the one cent per ounce rate for mailing within the Heart Mountain Relocation Center. There is a Heart Mountain return address, a February 8, 1945 Heart Mountain machine cancel, and addressed to the Community Christian Church, Block 22, Local. Heart Mountain Post Office, a branch of the Cody, Wyoming Post Office was the only relocation center branch office to accept the one cent per ounce non-carrier local letter rate. The reason was that mail was delivered by relocation center residents, not employees of the Post Office Department.

Carrier Office Local Letters: When the Presidential Series was issued in 1938, a letter

weighing less than one ounce could be mailed for two cents if placed in the mails within the delivery area of the post office serving the addressee and provided said post office had carrier service. This two-cent local letter rate ended on March 25, 1944. Figure 6 shows an early example of this rate from Springfield, Massachusetts, while a double weight cover paid by a horizontal coil line pair is seen in Figure 7.

The San Juan, Puerto Rico Post Office offered carrier delivery, as shown in Figure 8.

Two unusual covers with a naval connection are illustrated in Figures 9 and 10. The first

Figure 8. Carrier office local letter within San Juan, Puerto Rico post office in 1938.

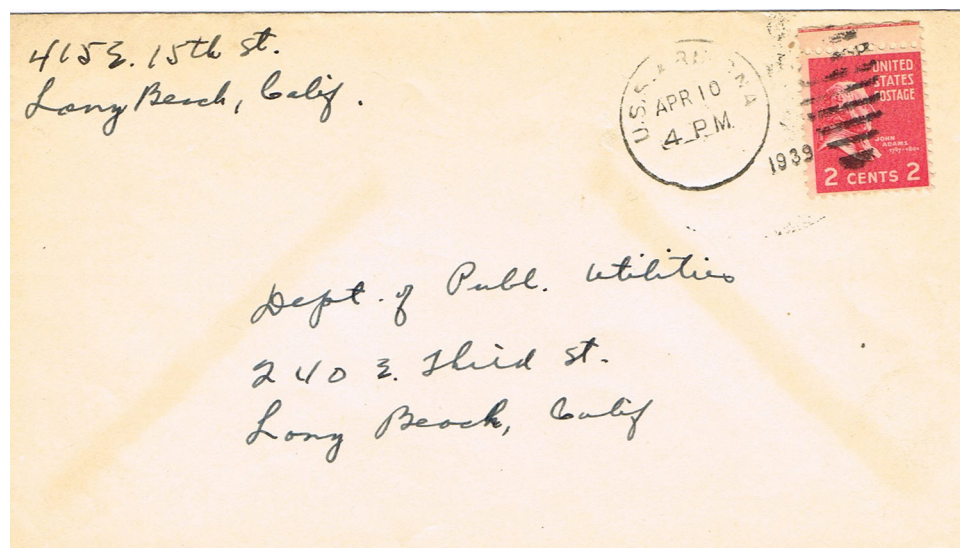
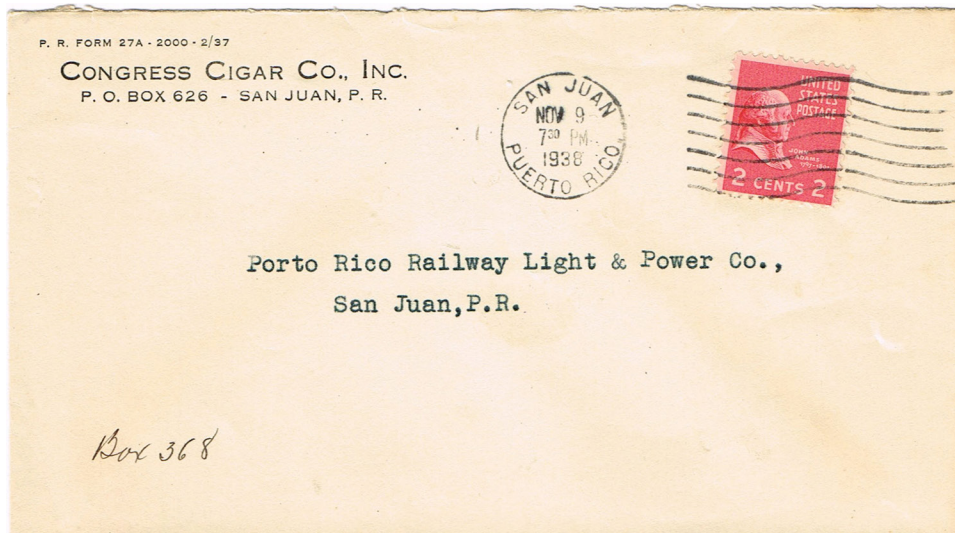


Figure 9. USS Arizona local letter.

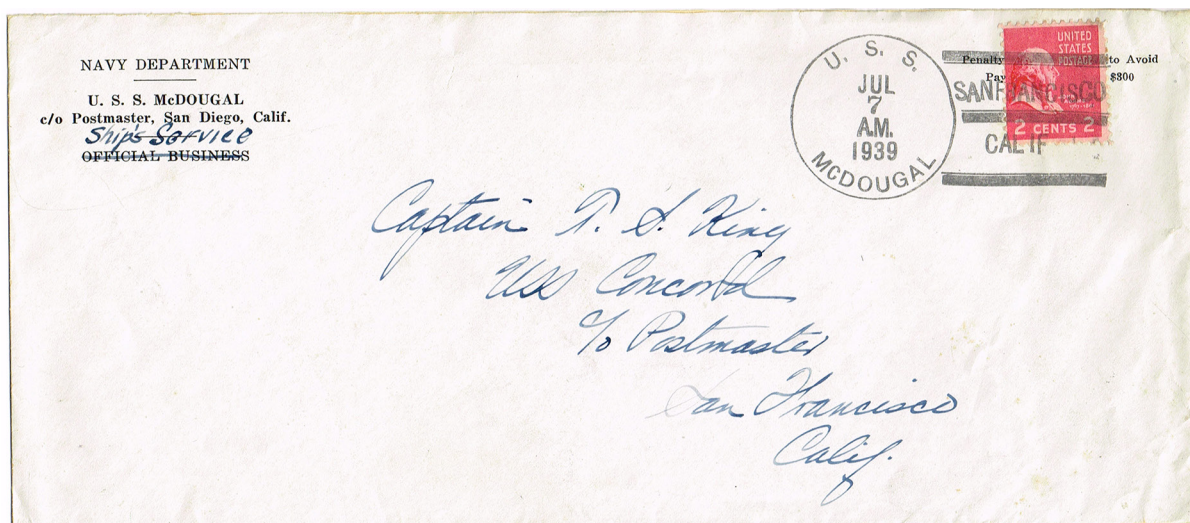


Figure 10. Ship-to-ship local letter in San Francisco.

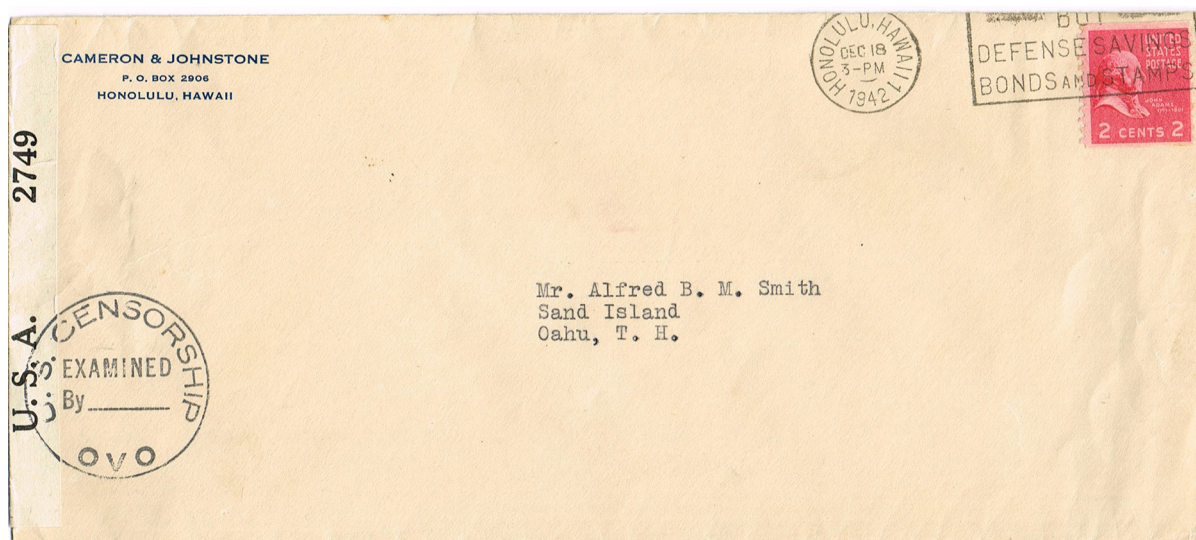


Figure 11. Local letter to German-American internee at Sand Island.

was postmarked April 10, 1939 on board the battleship USS *Arizona*. The ship was in port at Long Beach, California; a crew member was perhaps making a bill payment or application for utility service to the Long Beach Dept. of Public Utilities. While docked at Long Beach, the writer took advantage of the two-cent local letter rate. The Figure 10 cover, instead of a ship-to-shore local letter, is a ship-to-ship local letter. A crew member from the USS *McDougal*, a destroyer in port at San Francisco, mailed a letter on July 7, 1939 to the Captain of the USS *Concord*, a light cruiser, also at San Francisco. Notice the San Francisco, California location

between the killer bars of the ship's cancellation device.

Alfred Smith and his wife Susan were naturalized American citizens with strong pro-Nazi sympathies. They were arrested on December 8, 1941 and detained at various internment camps in the early part of the war. They were paroled in 1943. Figure 11 is a carrier office local letter from a public accounting firm in Honolulu, Hawaii to Alfred Smith during his detention at the U.S. Army's Sand Island internment camp. Sand Island is a small island located at the mouth of the harbor and entirely

within the city limits of Honolulu. Thus, this letter, franked with a two-cent horizontal coil, was entitled to the local letter rate.

Another carrier office internment camp use is shown in Figure 12. This letter travelled 200 miles all for the two cent per ounce local letter rate. This August of 1942 letter originated at the Manzanar, California relocation center built months after the war began to incarcerate Japanese Americans. Each relocation center had a post office that operated as a branch

of a parent post office. Letters originating at branch post offices in the centers intended for delivery within the service area of the parent post office were eligible for the two cents per ounce carrier office letter rate. While examples have not been found from every camp, postal patrons at all centers were able to mail letters in this manner.

The table in Figure 13 shows the names of the branch and parent post offices of each relocation center.¹



Figure 12. Local letter from Manzanar Relocation Center to Los Angeles.

Figure 13. Table listing branch and parent post offices of World War II relocation centers.

Table 9.1

WRA Relocation Centers, Peak Populations, and Branch Post Offices, 25 March 1942 through 30 April 1946

<u>Relocation Center</u>	<u>Peak Pop.</u>	<u>Parent Post Office</u>	<u>Branch Post Office</u>	<u>Branch Established</u>	<u>Branch Closed</u>
Central Utah	8,130	Delta, UT	Topaz	1 Sep 1942	30 Nov 1945
Gila River	13,348	Phoenix, AZ	Rivers	1 Jul 1942	15 Dec 1945
Granada	7,318	Lamar, CO	Amache	15 Sep 1942	30 Nov 1945
Heart Mountain	10,767	Cody, WY	Heart Mountain	1 Aug 1942	18 Nov 1945
Jerome	8,497	Dermott, AK	Denson	16 Oct 1942	31 Jul 1944
Manzanar	10,046	Los Angeles, CA	Manzanar	25 Mar 1942	30 Nov 1945
Minidoka	9,397	Twin Falls, ID	Hunt	1 Sep 1942	30 Nov 1945
Colorado River	17,814	Phoenix, AZ	Poston	13 Apr 1942	15 Dec 1945
Rohwer	8,475	McGehee, AK	Relocation	1 Oct 1942	30 Nov 1945
Tule Lake	18,789	Tulelake, CA	Newell	16 Jun 1942	30 Apr 1946



Figure 14. Local letter originating in Chile, censored at Miami, posted in New York.

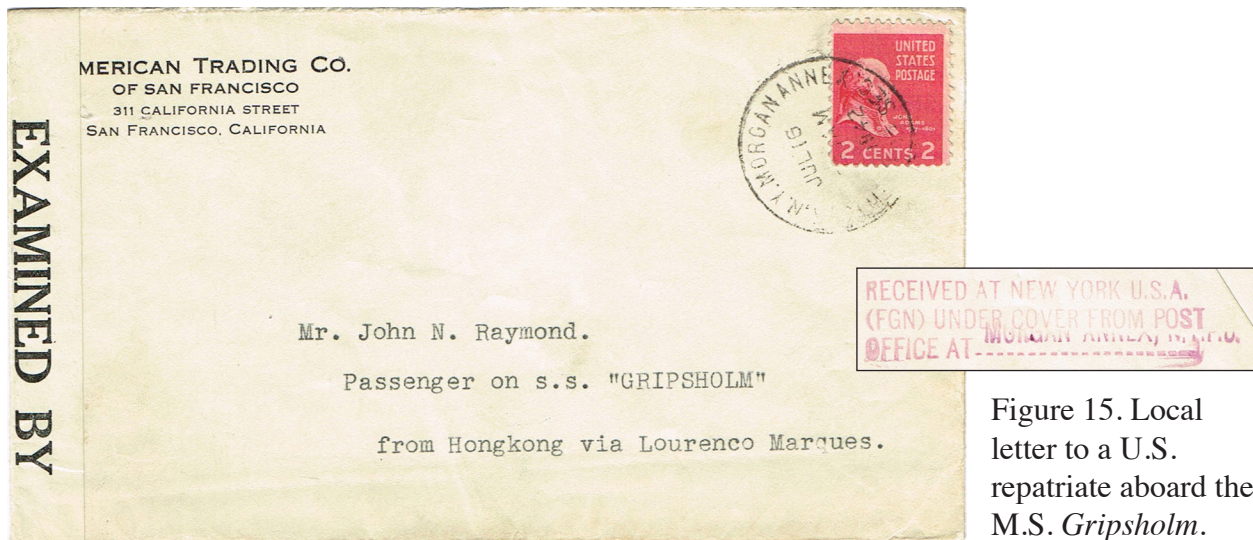
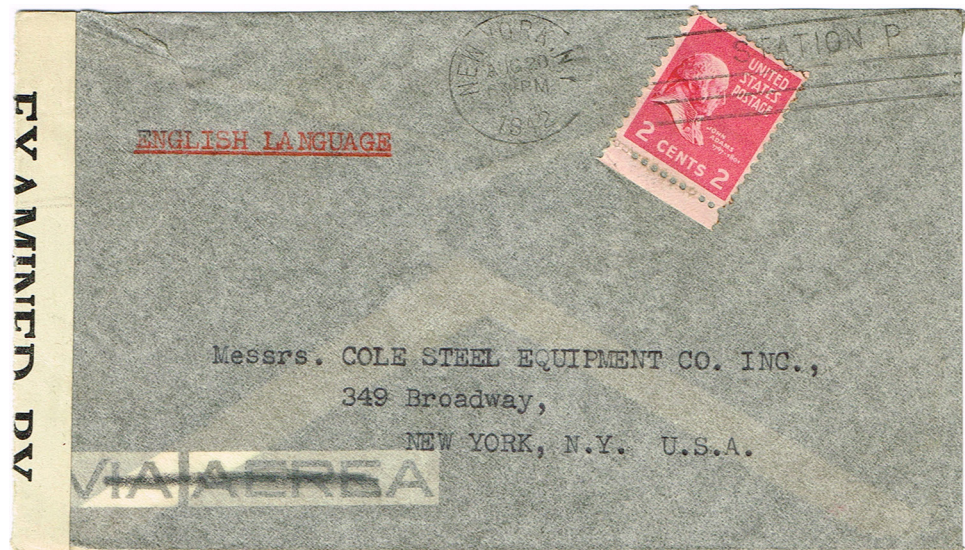


Figure 15. Local letter to a U.S. repatriate aboard the M.S. *Gripsholm*.

Two additional carrier office local letters that travelled a great distance may be seen in Figures 14 and 15. The first cover originated in Valparaiso, Chile. It is franked with a two-cent sheet stamp and tied by an August 20, 1942 New York machine cancel for delivery to a steel equipment company on Broadway Avenue. Transmitted under separate cover and censored in Miami, Florida, this cover was not placed in the mail stream until it reached New York.

The other long distance local letter was mailed under separate cover in San Francisco to a person being repatriated from the Far East aboard the MS *Gripsholm* in 1942. This letter

to a confirmed passenger was censored in Chicago and resealed with censor tape number 3083. It reached New York and bears a violet hand stamp on the reverse attesting to that fact. It was postmarked July 16, 1942 and held for the arrival of the *Gripsholm* which docked in New York on August 25th.

While the rate for a local letter did not reach three cents until 1958, there was an occasion to find many local letters franked with three cent stamps in the early 1940's. This only occurred in Newark, New Jersey. The United War and Community Chest, a charitable organization, was holding a fund drive. As part of this drive letters soliciting donations were to be

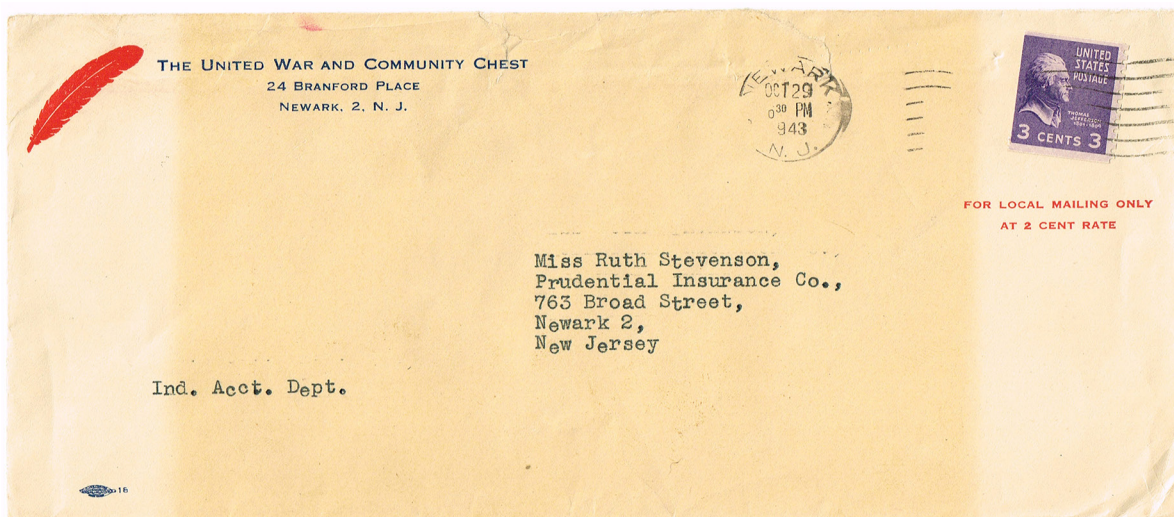


Figure 16. Pavey Envelope Company cover.

No. 241 GALLOWAY-WEST CO., AMHERST, WISCONSIN PATRON <i>Fred Shanklin</i> MONTH OF <i>May</i> 16 - 31 1943	Milk Delivered	Test	Pounds Butter Fat	Price Paid for Butter Fat	Amount Due
	3184	4.6	146.5	72	105 48
	Hauling @ 10 Cwt.		3 18		
	Butter Taken 10 Lbs.		4 90		
	Skim & B. Milk		1 60		
	Cheese				
	Advance				
	Orders				
	Powder				
	Strainer Pads				
	Calf Food				
	Hog Supplement				
	39¢ Tax		10		
	Total Deductions				
	Amount Due				95 70

Price paid per cwt based on your test *3.31*
 Actual Trucking Cost *15* cents per cwt.

Figure 17. Privately carried local letter.

mailed both in Newark and the surrounding area. 50,000 envelopes were printed by the Pavey Envelope Company of Newark, 15,000 intended for local use. Three cent stamps were inadvertently applied to the envelopes intended for local mailing, a mistake that would have cost the charity an extra \$150.00. As a solution to this dilemma, the Post Office agreed to refund \$150.00 to the charity but insisted the printer add the endorsement "For local mailing only at 2 cent rate" in red underneath the three cent stamps already on the envelopes. In the end everyone was happy, the Community Chest avoided unnecessary postage costs and, despite

their three-cent franking the specified envelopes bearing the red imprint were valid only within the Newark Post Office service area.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing and difficult-to-find local letter uses is correspondence carried privately outside the mails. The Postal Laws and Regulations state that letters could be transmitted by private means provided they were franked with the proper amount of postage as if being delivered by the Post Office Department. Figure 17 shows a cover franked with a two-cent horizontal coil and tied with a non-standard straight-line Amherst, Wisconsin

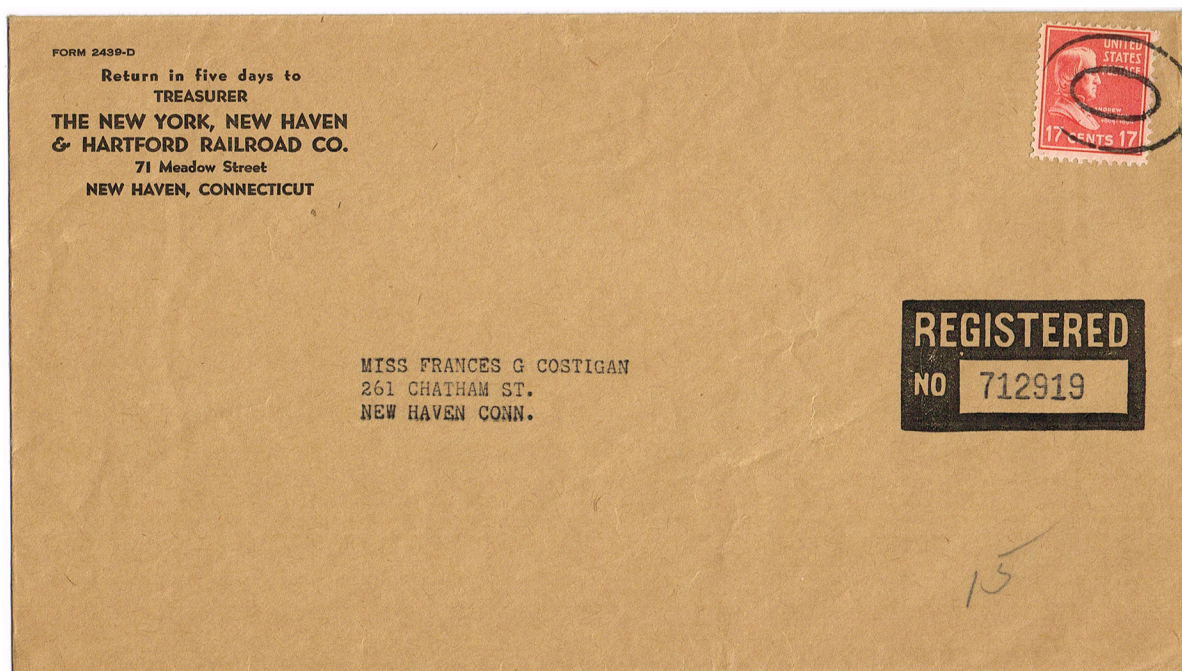


Figure 18. Registered local letter.

cancel. From the dairy Galloway-West to dairy farmer Fred Shanklin in May of 1943, this cover contained payment for milk and butter fat as well as test results regarding butter fat content and quality. This envelope would have been carried by an employee of the dairy, likely on their scheduled rounds, and delivered to the dairy farmer. It still required proper postage just as if mailed at the post office.

Relationship with Other Services: Virtually all postal services available for first class mail were available for local letter mail. Local letters could be sent registered, insured, certified, special delivery and return receipt could be requested. The cover in Figure 18 illustrates a registered local letter mailed December 18, 1942 from the treasurer of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railway Co. to a resident in New Haven. The postage paid on this letter mailed and delivered within the New Haven Post Office included the two cents local letter rate plus 15-cent minimum registration fee.

Another registered local letter, this one double weight (2 x 2 cents), is the subject of Figure 19.

A single, 22-cent Grover Cleveland stamp pays the four cents local rate, 15 cents minimum registration fee, plus three cents return receipt fee. This is a 1940 use.

Special delivery service for local letters is a seldom seen use. In the Fall of 1939, the San Francisco Local of the American Communications Association went on strike. Western Union messengers were members of this union; as a result delivery of telegrams in San Francisco suffered. To get around this loss of messenger delivery men due to the strike Western Union paid the Post Office Department for special delivery of telegrams.

The cover in Figure 20 is a postal artifact of this strike-breaking attempt by Western Union. The 12-cent Zachary Taylor stamp pays the two-cent local letter rate plus 10 cents special delivery fee then in effect. The reverse has a 9:00 PM October 1, 1939 special delivery postmark. Despite being a window envelope, there is a straight-line San Francisco, Cal. hand stamped address beneath the window and a hand stamped directive beneath the corner card

specifying special delivery, with instructions to leave under the door if no response.

A resident of the Bronx posted the cover in Figure 21. This letter was a double weight local letter with special delivery service requested. The letter was sent in response to a help wanted advertisement in the *New York Times*. This March 12, 1940 use of the 14-cent Franklin Pierce stamp is a very seldom seen franking and combination of fees.

The 40-cent franking on the 1938 cover in Figure 22 is certainly high and somewhat

unusual for a local letter. Postage included not only the 15-cent minimum registration fee but a 23-cent fee for return receipt showing the address where delivered. These fees plus the two-cent local letter rate were paid by the eight 4 ½-cent White House stamps plus single four-cent James Madison stamp.

Local letter rates for mail at non-carrier post offices continued until well beyond the era of the Presidential Series. Carrier office service ended on March 25, 1944. A last day of service cover is shown in Figure 23. This New York City cover is postmarked at 2:30 PM on March

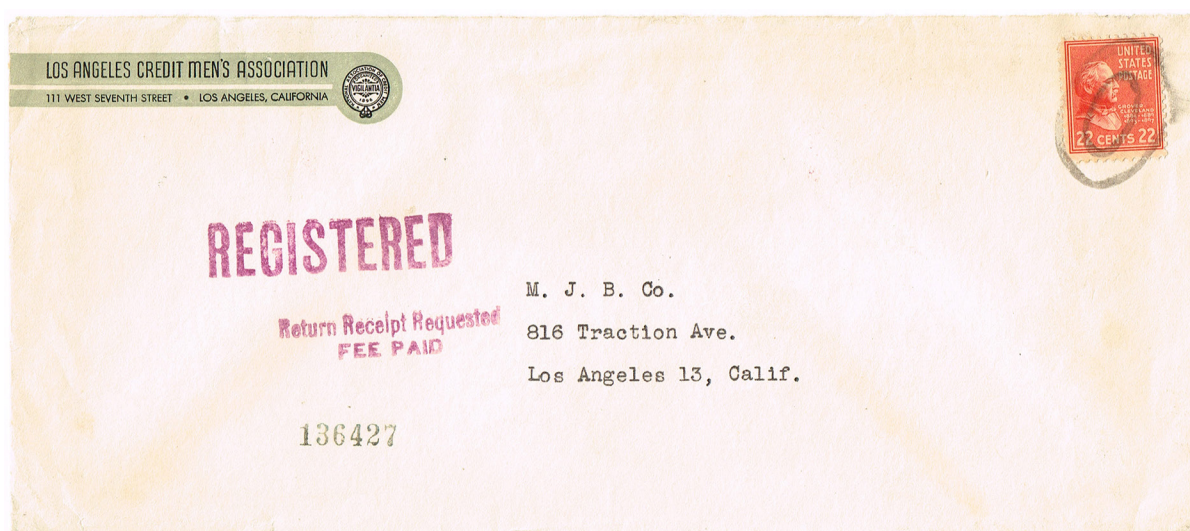
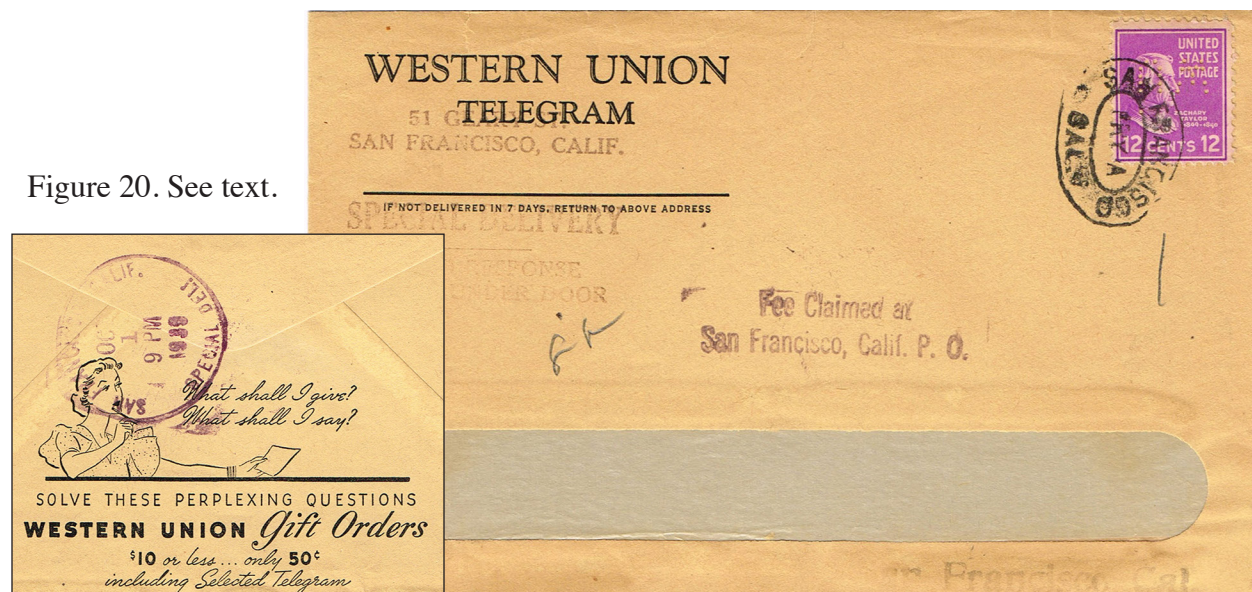


Figure 19. Double weight registered local letter.

Figure 20. See text.



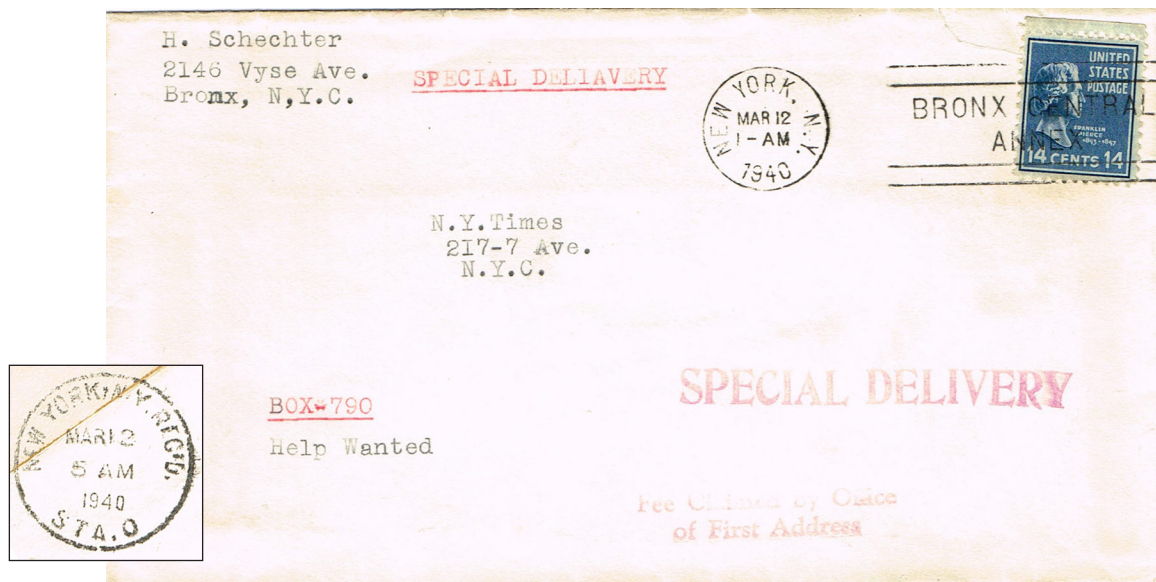


Figure 21. 14 cent stamp paying double weight local letter plus special delivery.

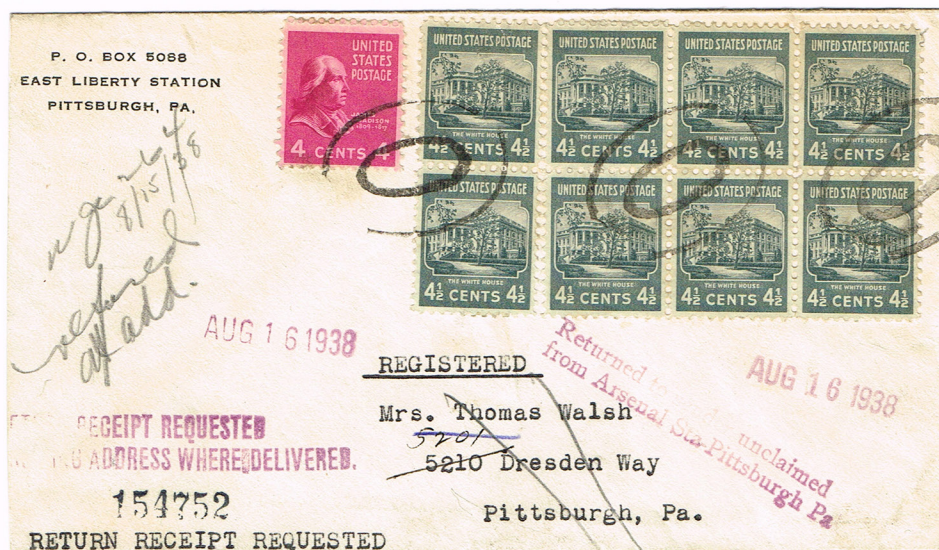


Figure 22. 40-cent franking on a registered local letter.

25, 1944 and paid by a horizontal pair of the one cent George Washington coil stamp.

Forwarding: When the addressee of a letter intended for local delivery had moved out of the service area of the post office of mailing, the letter was assessed postage due and forwarded at the prevailing first-class letter rate, in most cases three cents. The cover in Figure 24 was mailed in Springfield, Massachusetts and addressed to a resident there. The addressee had relocated to Leominster, Mass. so the letter was charged one cent postage due for the

difference in carrier local letter fee and standard first-class postage. It was then forwarded on to Leominster.

The two-cent circular die stationery cover in Figure 25 was mailed May 30, 1938 in Bristol, Tennessee to an addressee in Bristol, Tenn. Unbeknownst to the sender, the recipient lived in Bristol, Virginia and the letter was assessed one cent postage due, received a second Bristol, Tenn. machine cancel on May 31, 1938 and was forwarded on to Bristol, Va. The one-cent George Washington sheet stamp applied for

forwarding postage dodged cancellation.

Queens County Local Letter Rate: A local letter rate mentioned in *U. S. Domestic Postal Rates* by Beecher and Wawrukiewicz deserves special mention. A two cents per ounce local letter rate between post offices in Queens County, New York is referred to. The specific legislation authorizing this rate (Figure 26) does not mention Queens County by name. It states that any county with a population of one

million or more persons contained within the limits of a city was eligible for this local letter rate between post offices. Queens County was the only county qualifying for this rate at the time. Kings County met the population criteria but only had the Brooklyn Post Office. New York County and Bronx County also met the population requirements but were serviced only by the New York Post Office. Queens County had (and still has) four separate post offices: Long Island City, Flushing, Jamaica, and Far

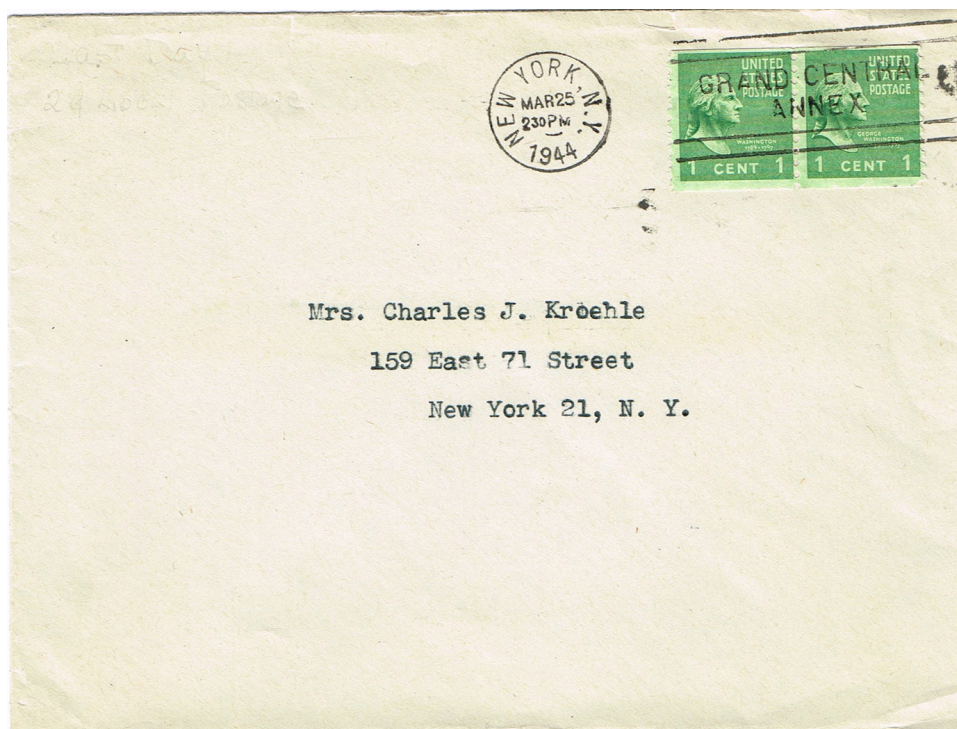


Figure 23. Last day of carrier office local letter service.



Figure 24. Forwarded local letter.

Figure 25. Letter forwarded from Bristol, Tenn. to Bristol, Va.

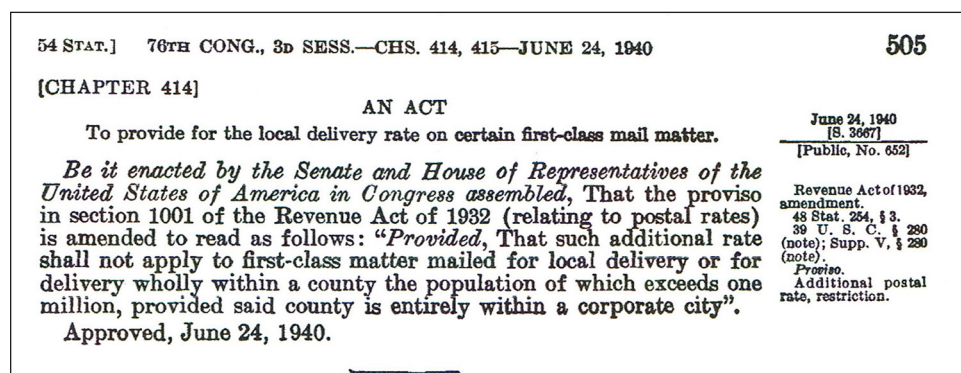
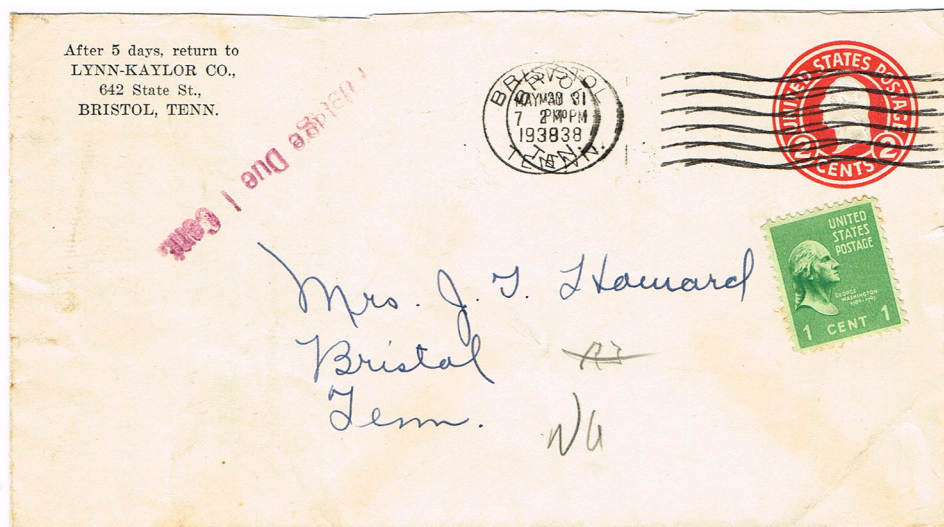


Figure 26. Legislation authorizing local letter rate between different post offices in counties of one million or more persons contained within a city.

Rockaway. The legislation meant that a local letter could be sent between any two of these four different post offices in Queens County for two cents. Unfortunately, no examples have yet been reported.

A surprisingly wide variety of local letter mail can be found, with some examples exceptionally scarce and interesting. Territorial uses, internment camp local covers, privately carried local letters, single frankings paying

multiple services, and covers mailed between post offices in Queens County, New York as well as any post-August 1, 1958 local letter would be a “local jewel”.

Endnote

1. Louis Fiset. *Detained, Interned, Incarcerated: U.S. Enemy Noncombatant Mail in World War II*. (Chicago: Collectors Club of Chicago, 2010), p. 158.

Prexie Era Now Online, Searchable by Key Word

The Prexie Era has been updated to the current issue on the USSS website. The entire run may now be searched by keyword and has been bookmarked for title and author. Each new issue will be uploaded after being sent out to subscribers. Individual issues and the entire run can be downloaded to your desktop. You need not be a USSS member to access *The Prexie Era*. Open the USSS website, click on RESOURCES and scroll down to *The Prexie Era*.