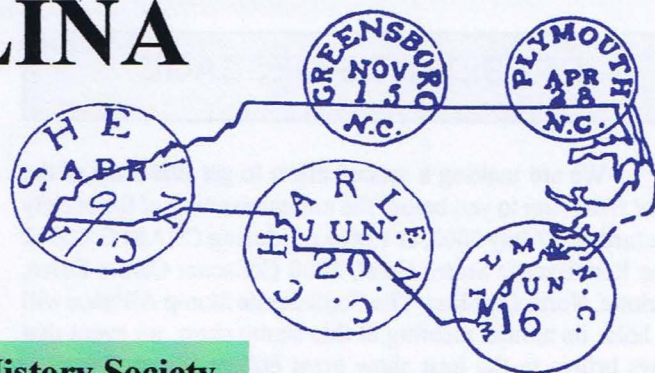


# NORTH CAROLINA POSTAL HISTORIAN

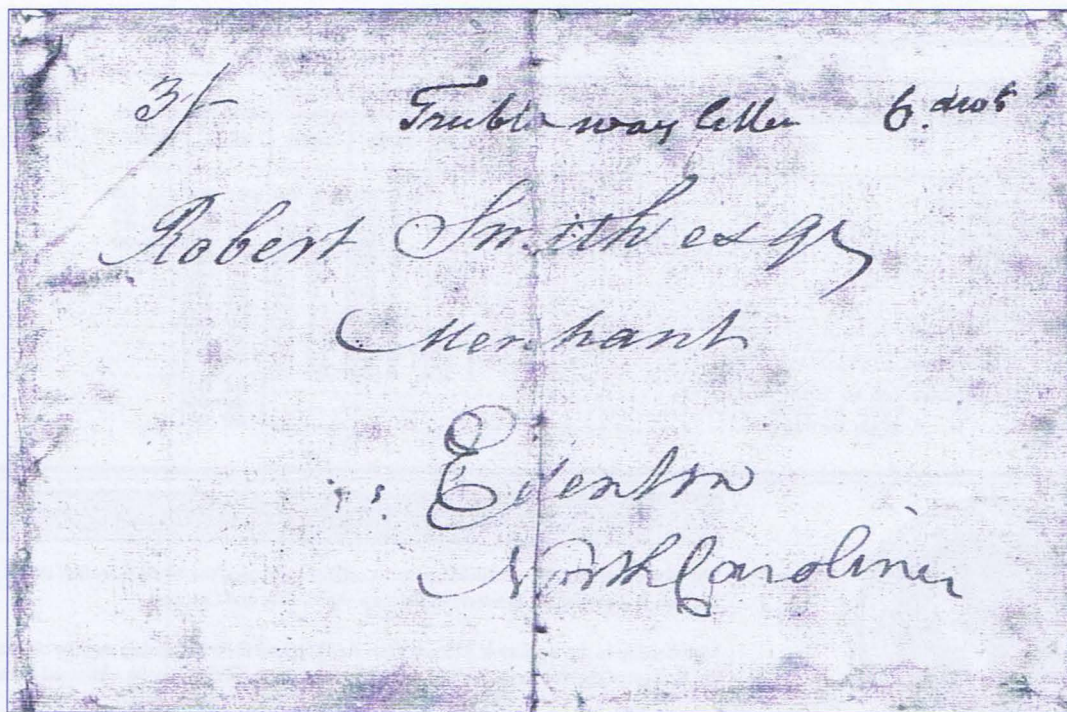


The Journal of the North Carolina Postal History Society

Volume 21, No. 2

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Whole 79



## THE WILLIAM HOOPER LETTER

PHILA AUG. 6: 1776

TO MR. ROBERT SMITH, MERCHANT, NEWBERN, N.C.





## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We are making a special effort to get this issue of the *Postal Historian* to you before the annual meeting of the society on Saturday, 27 July 2002, at 1:00 p.m., during CHARPEX 2002 in the Renaissance Suites Hotel, 2800 Coliseum Centre Drive, Charlotte, North Carolina. The Confederate Stamp Alliance will also hold its annual meeting at this stamp show, an event that always brings to the host show great collections, well-known collectors, and a good bourse. I hope that you will be able to attend the stamp show and join us at this meeting. The Board of Directors will meet before the annual meeting at 11:30 AM. Just a reminder, our speaker at the annual meeting will be Galen Harrison of Kernersville, who will talk about "North Carolina Prisoner's Mail and Related Topics."

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As always, I welcome your comments and suggestions for improving the society. Please feel free to call me at home (3360545-0175), send an e-mail message, or write to me. Both my e-mail address and mailing address appear in this issue.

Dick Winter

## FYI

The chart below is from *Branson's North Carolina Business Directory for 1897*.

POSTAGE.		U. S. OFFICERS.				
Scale of Depreciation of Confederate Currency.						
MONTHS.		1861	1862	1863	1864	1865
January,			\$ 1 20	\$ 3 00	\$21 00	\$50 00
February,			1 30	3 00	21 00	50 00
March,			1 50	4 00	23 00	60 00
April,			1 50	5 00	20 00	100 00
May,			1 50	5 50	19 00	
June,			1 50	6 50	18 00	
July,			1 50	9 00	21 00	
August,			1 50	14 00	23 00	
September,			2 00	14 00	25 00	
October,			2 00	14 00	26 00	
November,			2 50	15 00	30 00	
December,		\$ 1 10	2 50	20 00		
December		1 15	2 50	20 00		
December	1st to 10th inclusive,				34 00	
"	10th to 20th,				42 00	
"	20th to 31st,				49 00	



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## North Carolina Postal Historian

The North Carolina Postal Historian is the official journal of the North Carolina Postal History Society. It is published quarterly in January, April, July and October.

Membership in the Society is \$15 per year. Applications for membership may be obtained from the Treasurer. Submissions for the Postal Historian or inquiries may be addressed to the editors.

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# THE WILLIAM HOOPER LETTER

by Richard F. Winter

On 6 August 1776, William Hooper wrote a short letter from Philadelphia to his friend in Edenton, merchant Robert Smith. This letter recently achieved some public notoriety both here and in England. The story of the Hooper letter will be of interest to North Carolina postal historians.

The story begins on 24 August 2001, when a researcher for Granada Television, London, England, contacted the North Carolina States Archives. One of the programs sponsored by the Granada Television network is called "Fortune Finders." As explained by Jim Wise, writing a feature article in the *Herald-Sun* of Durham on 8 September 2001 about the Hooper letter, it is one of a new series in England that encourages viewers to describe possessions they believe may be of value. The program's staff selects those items that appear interesting, and attempts to value the items. Those that can be authenticated and appraised are made a part of the show, in which owners are confronted with the taped appraisals and authentication of their possessions. About the time of the American 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations in the summer of 2001, the host of "Fortune Finders" asked viewers if they had any items from the war with America. Mr. Anthony Ewell of East Sussex, England, whose family had been watching the program, contacted Granada Television and said that he had an old letter from that period that had been in the family for generations. Granada researchers thought that this might be an item for their show and decided to evaluate the letter. They first tried British manuscript experts, but found little interest in a revolutionary war letter from America for reasons unclear to me. Next they contacted a few North Carolina experts at institutions such as the North Carolina State Archives and the University of North Carolina. Apparently, these contacts were simultaneous and without letting each know the other had been contacted, a sort of "shot-gun" approach. The contacts stressed that this was a potentially exciting manuscript that they wished authenticated, and that they were operating under a fairly tight time schedule. A follow up telephone call to the State Archives and a fax transmission of the manuscript along with a transcript of the letter on the same day established that Granada Television was primarily interested in having the manuscript appraised. They realized that the Hooper letter had to be examined to be authenticated, and they would be willing to fly an expert from North Carolina to England, or they would come over to the States to record on tape the appraisal and authentication of the item. Assistant State Archivist, Jesse R. Lankford, Jr., advised the Granada researcher that the State Archives staff would be happy to authenticate the item, but that their policy would not permit appraisal. The telephone discussion ended with the Granada researcher promising to call back after further discussion with a supervisor. That return call was never made. It was only by accident that the Mr. Lankford learned many weeks later what happened to the Hooper letter.

When contacted at the same time by the Granada researcher, Tim Pyatt, Curator/Director of the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, gave a similar response regarding appraisal. He did provide, however, the name of a manuscript appraiser in North Carolina used by the university. That appraiser was Dr. John L. Sharpe III, of Hillsborough, retired curator of rare books at Duke University. Dr. Sharpe assured the Granada supervisor that he could authenticate the Hooper letter and that he would also provide an appraisal of the item. In the first week of September 2001, Helen McGrath, the "Fortune Finders" director, brought the Hooper letter to Hillsborough for Dr. Sharpe's inspection. Two days were spent visiting Dr. Sharpe, and a number of historical sites in Hillsborough, including the home of William Hooper, the author of the letter. A local crew was hired to video tape the authentication and appraisal of the Hooper letter. This was conducted at the Nash-Hooper House in Hillsborough, William Hooper's permanent residence after the British burned his Wilmington house, in January 1781. Then the letter and program director returned to London with the video tape of the session in Hillsborough and a check for \$24,000 from an American manuscript dealer to present to the owner, Mr. Ewell, when the program aired in London. As it turned out, during the TV showing Mr. Ewell declined to accept the check, perhaps feeling that the letter was worth more. To this day, he has not made a decision to sell the letter. All this time, the N.C. State Archives staff awaited a call from Granada Television to follow up on their original request for authentication assistance.

In describing how he authenticated the letter, Dr. Sharpe said that he used both external and internal evidence. He was familiar with the type of paper used at the time of the Hooper letter. He evaluated that this letter was written on paper of the right size and quality of the period. It bore the watermark of a Dutch paper maker and a "countermark" of King George III, paper that was made for the British market in America, in this case Philadelphia. The signature on the letter was authenticated with other Hooper letters. The ink used on the letter was that which was expected for the period. The history of the period and events discussed in the letter were consistent. According to Dr. Sharpe all the internal and external details of the letter fit, including a postscript written on the back of the letter after it was sealed, "Hewes is very well," a reference to Joseph Hewes whose frail health would have been of concern to friends back home.

According to William S. Powell's *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, William Hooper participated



in the First Continental Congress, which met in Philadelphia on 20 September 1774. As delegate from North Carolina he was one of the youngest of the 50 delegates. Along with Richard Henry Lee and Patrick Henry, he was considered one of the orators of that Congress. Before the close of 1776, he had attended three Continental Congresses, four Provincial Congresses in North Carolina, and four Provincial Assemblies along with numerous meetings of the Wilmington Committee of Safety. He was usually made chairman or member of any committee with important resolutions or addresses to compose. He served on Thomas Jefferson's committee to compose a Declaration of Independence. During the Third Continental Congress, which convened at Philadelphia on 10 May 1776, Thomas Jefferson's committee completed the Declaration of Independence, which was voted and declared on 4 July 1776. William Hooper, along with fellow North Carolina delegates, Joseph Hewes and John Penn, signed the document on 2 August 1776, along with 53 other delegates, just four days before the Hooper letter was penned.

### The William Hooper Letter

The text of the William Hooper letter is quite short, but the contents as well as the postal history of the letter are of great interest. The text reads:

My dear Sir

I waited in Expectation that before this Gen<sup>ls</sup> Washington & Howe would have been brot in Contact - that has not yet happened tho it is expected every moment. Howe receiving reinforcements every day thousands flocking to Washington - the day that tries their mutual Strength will be the most important which America ever saw - May God prosper the American Arms & give success to the Cause they fight for - Clinton is arrived with all his Strength at Staten Island - 12000 Hessians expected every Hour - Britain this is thy last Effort if thou dost not succeed him - thou art fallen - Me thinks I feel his tottering to his very basis - May she be dissolved in eternal ruin rather than the Cause of liberty should sink to her efforts-

I intended to have wrote you a long letter but the express calls for this Inclosed you have the latest paper which gives you the lie of the day.

I am yours with Esteem

Wm

Hooper

Phila Aug. 6: 1776

The front of the folded letter is shown in Figure 1.(See Cover) 6 August 1776, letter from William Hooper in Philadelphia to Robert Smith in Edenton, carried privately to

Wake Court House. Forwarding agent at Wake Court House sent letter privately to New Bern, where it entered the North Carolina mail system going to Edenton. Letter due 6 pennyweights of silver at destination for triple rate from New Bern to Edenton.

An examination reveals that the letter did not enter the colonial postal system at Philadelphia. There are no postal markings of Philadelphia on the letter. Both Philadelphia and Edenton, North Carolina had post offices established under the British colonial postal system. (See the front cover of *North Carolina Postal Historian*, Volume 20, No. 3, Fall 2001, for a color picture of the only known example of a British colonial marking of another North Carolina post office, the New Bern post office.) As the British abandoned the postal system with the breakdown of British authority in each of the colonies, the Americans continued the post system as best they could. However, the post was not reliable and few people used it. Most letters were entrusted to the private carriage of friends by favor or servants. Important communications were often sent by express. The expresses were individuals under trip or long term contract to carry communications and return with replies to specific locations. Expresses were the means by which Governors communicated and directives to or reports from military units were conveyed. The expresses were usually a faster and safer means of conveying letters. They traveled when there was mail to be carried instead of awaiting the next infrequent post rider. They also traveled to places that were not on the regular post roads.

The last line of the Hooper gives a clue to the start of a rather circuitous route that the letter took from Philadelphia to Edenton. Reference was made to an express calling for the letter. I do not know who was the express rider or under whose charge he was to deliver the letters he was carrying. This particular express went to Wake Court House because of another notation on the letter, which I will describe shortly. The reason for an express rider going to Wake Court House is far from clear since there was no government council meeting there at the time, nor was Wake Court House a particularly important location for state-wide functions except that it was the location of the county court house. Many years later, of course, Wake Court House would become the state capitol of Raleigh. Perhaps there were military units awaiting instructions from Philadelphia. Whatever the reason, the letter went to Wake Court House by private courier.

On the reverse of the letter is the endorsement of an agent in Wake Court House, Thomas Jones, who handled the letter and the date of his action (see Figure 2). He wrote, "Wake Court House 23<sup>d</sup> Aug<sup>r</sup> 1776/Recvd & forwarded by D(ear) Sir, your/Obt Svt Tho. Jones." I can not tell to whom the letter was given, but it must have been a trusted person going to New Bern for the next marking is that of the New Bern postmaster. Across the back of the letter on the side is a marking that shows that the letter entered the North Carolina post, which was taken over from the British by the Americans in North Carolina when British Governor Martin abandoned his role as Governor in early June 1775. New Bern postmaster Richard Cogdell wrote "New Bern 3 Sep" in a familiar small script style that has been noted on other



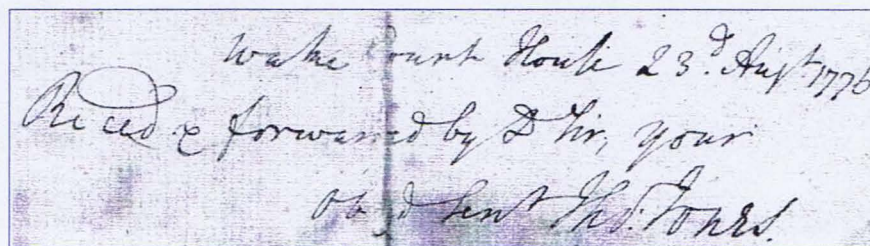
letters handled at the New Bern post office (see Figure 3). This was his marking to indicate the date that he was forwarding the letter in the post from New Bern, 3 September 1776. In the same hand across the top of the letter above the address he wrote "Treble way letter 6dwt." This notation was the postage due to be collected at the letter's destination of Edenton. At the time and for many years to come, most letters were sent through the post unpaid with postage due at destination. The sending postmaster wrote the amount due based on his understanding of the distance the letter would travel and the number of sheets of paper in the letter. If he did not write that the letter was paid, the amount shown was the postage due. Postmaster Cogdell indicated that the letter was a treble rate (required three rates) and that it was a "way" letter, one that had been given to a contract post rider en route to New Bern. The mail carrier was required to deliver the letter to the first post office he reached after receiving the letter. The source of the letter to the North Carolina mail system was indicated by the term "way," that is, it came from along the way. A manuscript numeral "3" was written in the upper left corner, probably by William Hooper, to show that three rates were required. The letter must have contained two additional sheets of paper as enclosures to require a triple rate. At least one of those sheets would have been the newspaper to which Hooper referred in his letter. The rate for a single letter in 1776, one sheet of paper weighing under one ounce and going 60-100 miles, was 2 dwt. (two pennyweights of silver). Since the distance between New Bern and Edenton was 93 miles on the post road connecting them, the rate marked on the letter was 3x2 dwt or 6 dwt. Because the value of currency varied from colony to colony, currency measurement was in pennyweights and grains of silver, where 1 pennyweight was equal to 24 grains of silver.

The postal markings on this letter, therefore, confirm that the letter was in the North Carolina mail system for a portion of

its transit from Philadelphia to Edenton via Wake Court House and New Bern. This is an important letter from a postal history as well as a historical prospective. I have recorded less than a dozen letters before 1777 that show any evidence of being handled in the mail system of North Carolina. The letter also demonstrates that the famous oval NEW-/BERN handstamp, used in 1770 and mentioned earlier, was no longer in use in 1776. Because it was a marking of the British office in New Bern, it may have been removed when the British controlled government failed in North Carolina. Or it may have been damaged and no longer of use. With only one example of the marking known, it is not possible to define the period of use.

One curious docketing notation is on an inside portion of the folded letter sheet. Recipients of letters often made a notation of who sent the letter and its date. When letters were folded for filing this notation was readily viewed so the letters would not have to be opened to see from whom and when they were written. The docketing on this letter reads "6<sup>th</sup> Augt. 1776/William Littlejohn." The letter writer's name is clearly William Hooper. The only reasonable explanation of the Littlejohn name in the docketing is that the letter recipient made a mistake in writing the name of the sender, confusing it with the name of another prominent merchant in Edenton, William Littlejohn.

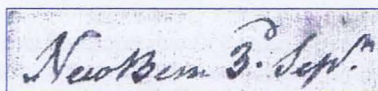
Had not the State Archives received the initial request for authentication assistance of the William Hooper letter and shared the fax of the letter with me, I would not have know of the letter's existence, nor been able to evaluate the letter's postal use. On a recent trip to England I met with Mr. Ewell and examined the William Hooper letter first hand. It is an outstanding example of colonial North Carolina postal history. With the kind permission of Mr. Ewell, the story and the letter can be shared with others interested in North Carolina postal history.



Wake Court House 23<sup>rd</sup> Aug 1776  
 Recd & forwarded by D<sup>r</sup> Sir, your  
 Obedt Serv<sup>t</sup> Thos Jones

**Figure 2.**

Manuscript endorsement on the reverse of forwarding agent Thomas Jones at Wake Court House on 23 August 1776.



New Bern 3<sup>rd</sup> Sep.

**Figure 3.**

Manuscript postmark of New Bern postmaster, Richard Cogdell, who wrote his postmark sideways on the reverse of the letter, "New Bern 3 Sep. (1776)."



## Way Mail of North Carolina

By Tony L. Crumbley

There arose a demand for mail carriers to pick up mail from patrons between post office stops, especially in the earliest days of the U.S. Postal System. In the Postal Act of 1794 the Postmaster General set a rate of 2 cents for letters picked up by carriers and delivered to post offices for further delivery.

This two cent fee was paid to the carrier in addition to the normal postage. The carrier was allowed to keep this two cent fee for his personal services. Many carriers chose not to charge the fee as it was not mandatory for them to collect it.

The two cent way fee stayed in effect until the Postage Act of 1825 when the rate was set at 1 cent per letter. The Postal Act of 1855 re-established this rate at 1 cent where it stayed until 1863. The Act of March 3, 1863 which went into effect June 30, 1863 abolished all carrier and way fees. North Carolina at that time was in the Confederacy and following Confederate postal regulations.

The February 9, 1861 Confederate Postal Act states that all law in place in the United States of America on November 1, 1860 and not inconsistent with the Constitution of the Confederate States be and stay the same in the Confederacy unless altered or repealed by Congress.

New letter rates were established for the Confederacy on March 15, 1861 and revised effective July 1, 1862. These Confederate rates do not cover way letters thus one can assume the Union way rates stayed in effect in the Confederacy.

It is known, however, that many Union and Confederate letters were carried by the carriers for no fee. They carried them as a favor to the patron. These were marked "Way" as a means of determining where the letter entered the mail because the letter rate was determined by the miles carried, thus the point of pick up could effect the rate.

Just how rare are North Carolina way covers? In the author's collection of nearly 1,000 stampless covers, there are only 10 way covers and there are only 4 in his 400 Confederate covers. This should be a good indication that they are quite scarce, but it would seem they would be much more common. Perhaps this is an indication the postal carriers took their jobs very seriously, and got to know individuals along their route. Another possibility is their schedules were so erratic the customer could not guess the time the time the carrier was passing, so the mails could not be given to him. In any case, the following covers show the examples of these way markings.

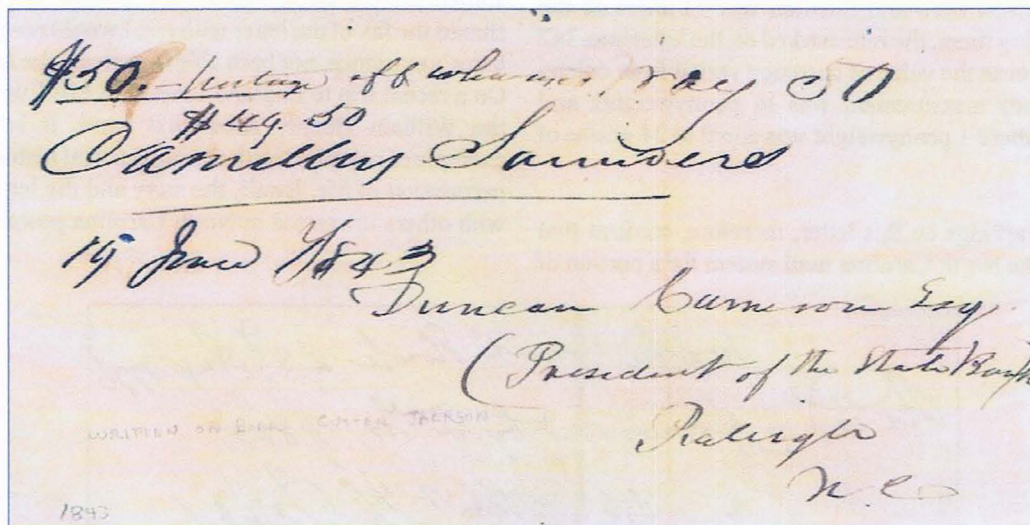
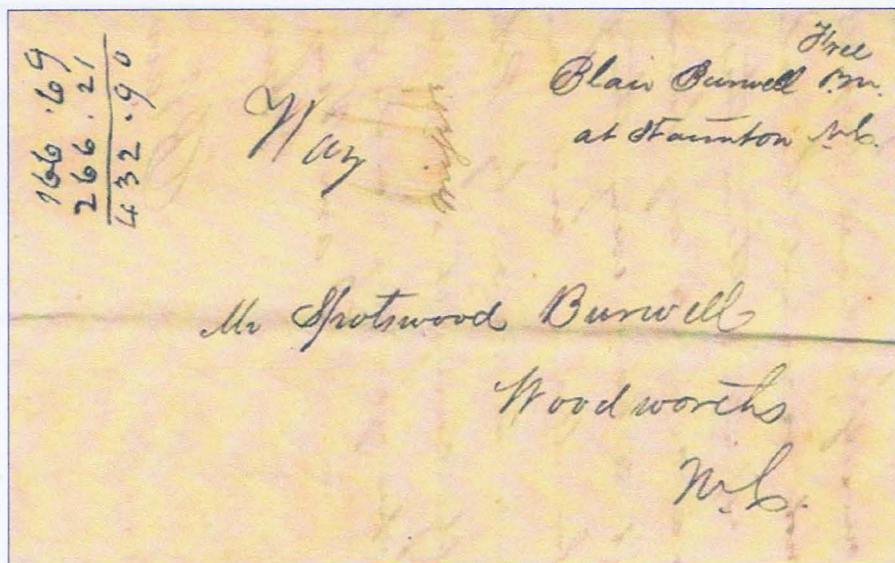


Fig 1. On board cutter *Jackson* - June 19, 1843, Way 50

The Act of July 2, 1836 set the carrier fee at no more than 2 cents. The ship rate in effect was 2 cents based on the Act of March 2, 1799. The Act of April 9, 1816 set the postage rate at 25 cents for single letter over 400 miles.

The note on this envelope indicates \$50 was enclosed and 50 cents was to be deducted to pay postage of 50 cents. There is no indication a way or carrier fee was paid for the double letter rate or the ship rate. The letter was delivered to Raleigh.





**Fig 2. (Henderson NC) May 16,1845 - Blain Burnwell Postmaster Free**

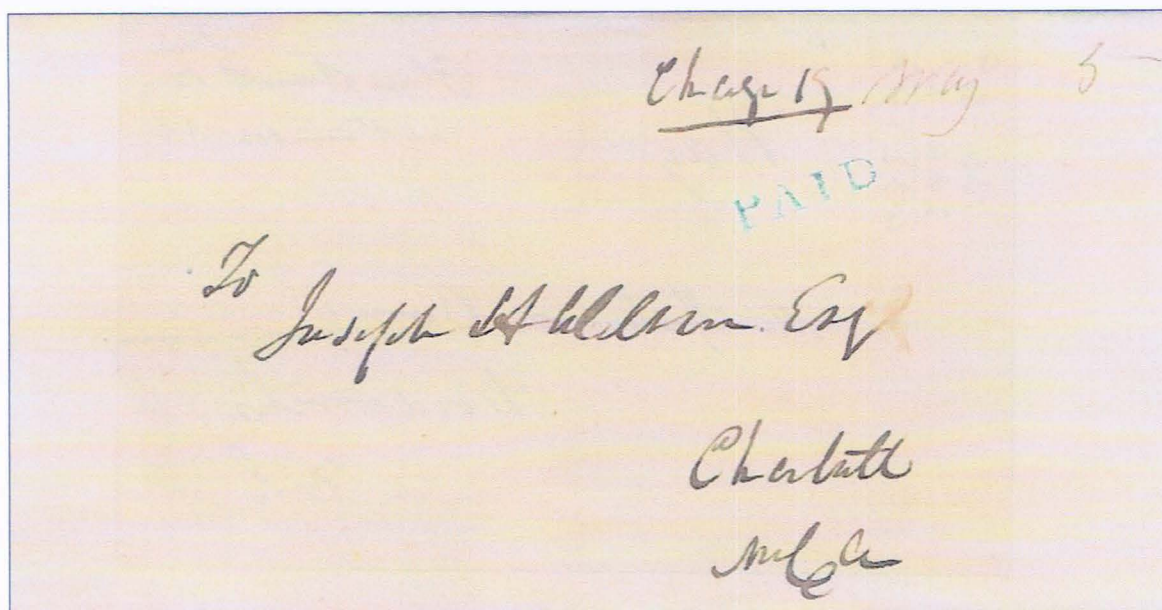
Way letter was given to the carrier who marked it "Way" and sent it on. This was an unneeded marking. Postmaster Burnwell was the Postmaster at Staunton from 1843 to 1845. While visiting Henderson the Postmaster wrote his father in Woodworth and utilized his franking privilege.



**Fig 3. Asheville, NC, September 1, 1846, Way 5 + 2 cents**

This letter appears to have entered the mail in Asheville carried to Charlotte and taken by carrier to its recipient, Mr. Wilson. The 5 cents rate was postage and the 2 cents add on was the carrier fee. The way marking and 2 rate most likely were added in Charlotte by the Postmaster.

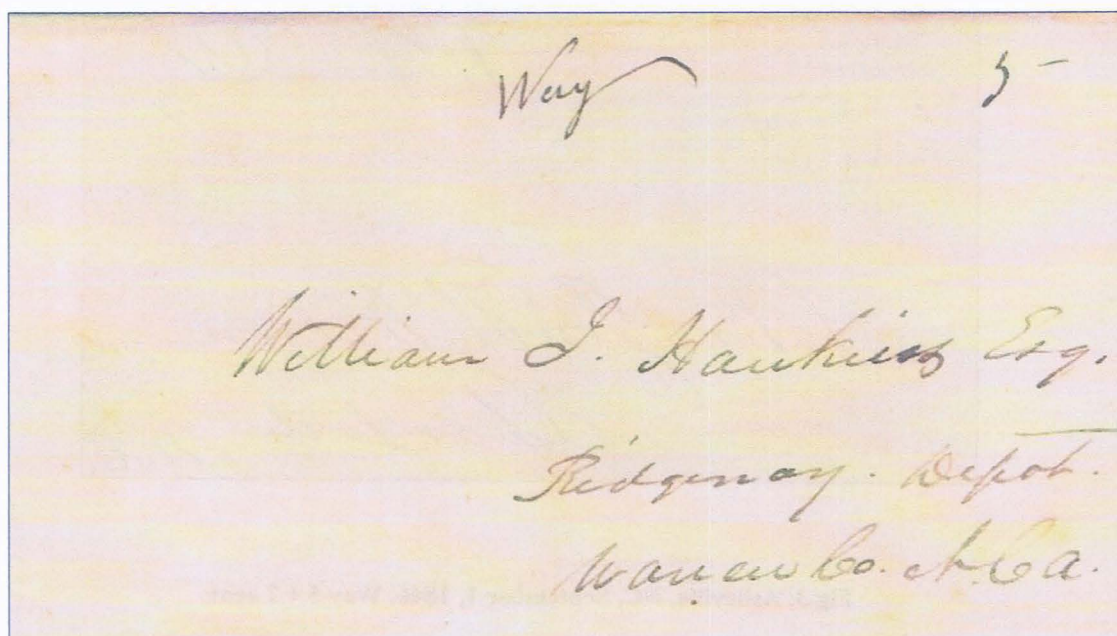




**Fig 4. (Salisbury, NC), May 28, 1850, Way 5, Paid**

The Act of March 3, 1845 set the postage rate at 5 cents for letters carried under 300 miles. This letter was written in Salisbury and given to the carrier for delivery in Charlotte. He marked it "Way 5", the postage rate with no indication of a way fee.

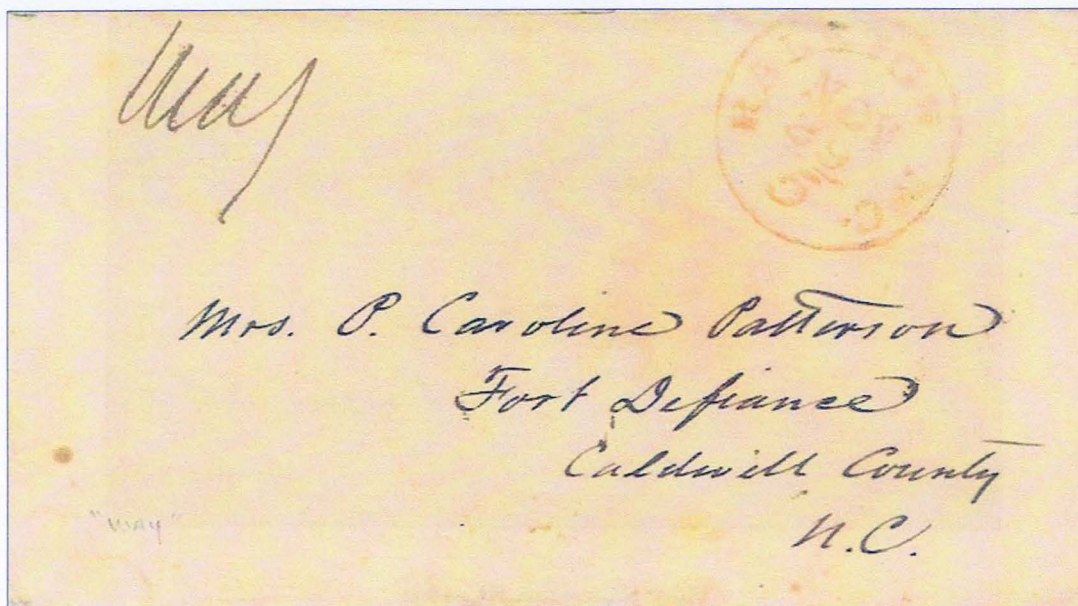
The Charlotte Postmaster handstamped it paid upon receiving it, an indication the carrier had been paid the rate. The "charge box 19" was applied in the hand of the writer with intent of carrying it to the Salisbury post office before giving the letter to the carrier.



**The Fig 5. (Jackson, NC), August 2, 1851, Way 5**

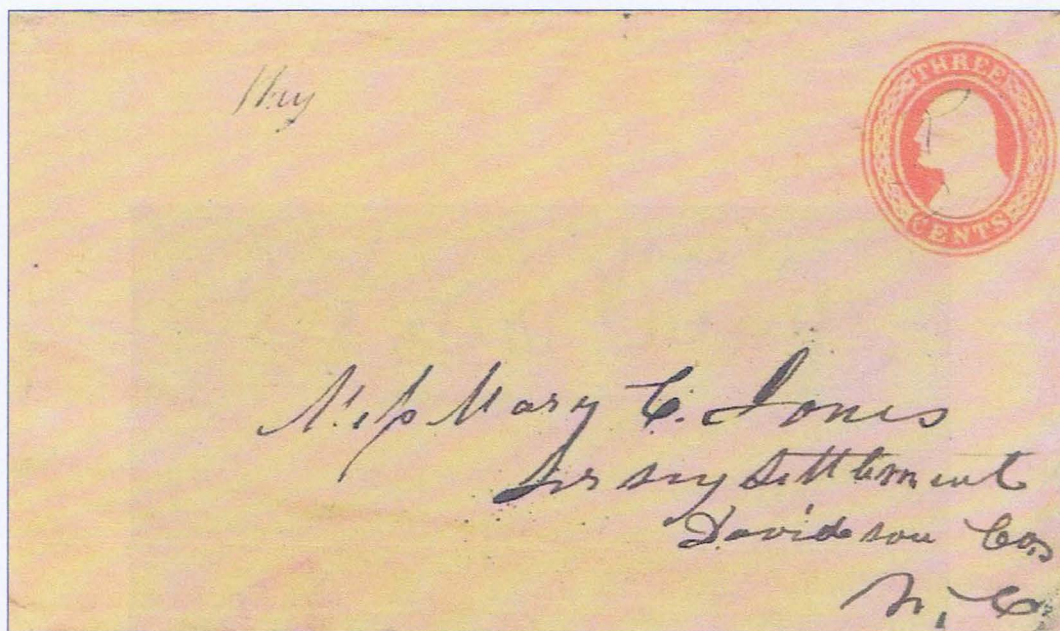
Five cents postage was paid for the half ounce rate for letters under 300 miles. The letter was posted to Ridgeway PO, Warren Co. N.C. with no indication of payment of way fees.





**Fig 6. Raleigh, NC, November 29 (1845-53), Way**

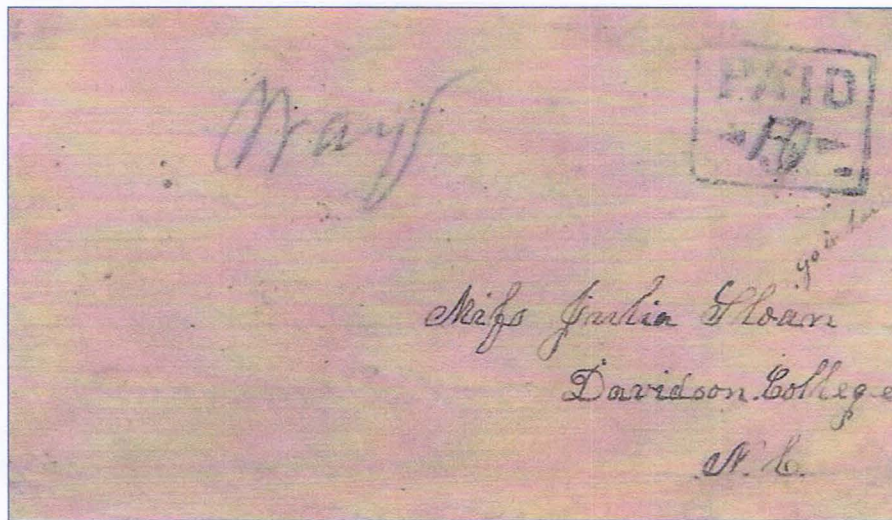
This letter was given to the carrier on his way to Raleigh. It entered the mail in Raleigh where the Postmaster handstamped it "paid 5" (part of the cds) and sent it on to Ft. Defiance.



**Fig 7. (Statesville, NC), February 11, 1854, Way**

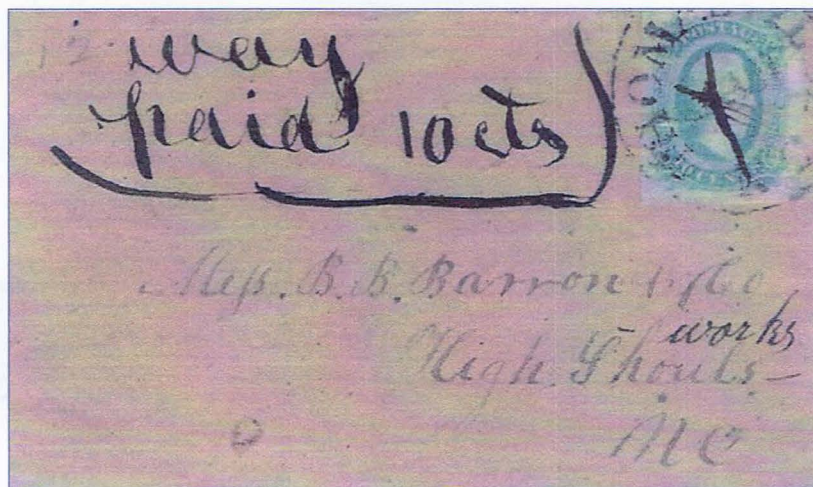
The Act of March 3, 1851, effective June 30, 1851, set the postage rate at 3 cents for letters of a half ounce not exceeding 3000 miles. The way rate was unchanged. There is no indication a way fee was charged.





**Fig 8. Statesville, NC, 1863**

Re-valued 5 cent paid to a 10 cent rate. This is the only known North Carolina postmaster's provisional used with way markings. The provisional envelope was given the post rider along his route south from Statesville to Davidson. He marked the cover "Way" and revalued the rate to indicate prepayment of the then current 10 cent rate.



**Fig 10. Thomasville, NC, May 1864**

This letter was given to the mail carrier on his way to Thomasville. He marked it "Way" and "paid 10 cts". It was placed in the Thomasville post office where postage was applied and sent on its way to High Shoals, NC.



# The First Post Road Into Hyde County

By Richard F. Winter

In the years following the end of the Revolutionary War, the United States postal system showed little change from when it had been the royal mail system under British rule. There was practically no growth in the number of post offices or post roads. Richard R. John in *Spreading the News* wrote, "As late as 1788, thirteen years after the establishment of the American postal system and seven years after the adoption of the Articles of Confederation, the American postal system included only sixty-nine offices, just two more than the sixty-seven offices in the northern district of the royal postal system in 1765." After the war, North Carolina, which was in the southern district, had only four post offices until 1792, each a former post office under the colonial system.

The start of a steady expansion of the United States postal system directly resulted from the Post Office Act of 1792. Prior to this time the Congress was only concerned with the determining the route of the main North-South post road. Under the Act of 1792, Congress decreed that, in the future, it would authorize every postal route in the United States. As citizens settled into new regions of the country, Congress approved post routes along which new post offices were established by the Postmaster General. The main post road through North Carolina, authorized by the Act of 1792, went from Virginia through Halifax, Tarboro, Smithfield, Averysboro, Fayetteville and Lumberton to South Carolina. A few cross-post roads, branching from the main road, were also authorized. In subsequent years the Congress would continue to authorize more cross-post roads to reach into other parts of North Carolina, principally to connect the court houses of the various counties. Until 1800 there was no post road that took mail into Hyde County.

Working in the North Carolina State Archives, specifically in the very large private collection of John Gray Blount, a prominent merchant from Washington, North Carolina, I came across correspondence that related to the establishment of the first post road to Hyde County. Now I have reached some conclusions about the early Hyde County post offices, which I shall present in this article. Additionally, I have found the earliest letters that we have recorded, which were posted at the post office of the Hyde County courthouse.

The location of the Hyde County courthouse changed four times from the 1770s until 1836. At the start of the Revolutionary War, it was located in Woodstock on the west side of the Pungo River (see Figure 1). In 1790, it was moved to Jasper's Creek on Bell's Bay, on the east side of the Pungo River about eight miles to the east. The name Jasper's Creek was changed in 1792 to Germantown in honor of Germain Bernard on whose land the courthouse was built. The county seat remained at Germantown until 1821. In 1819, all of Hyde County west of the Pungo River was annexed to Beaufort County by act of the General Assembly. In 1821, the county seat was moved to Lake Landing, about 27 miles to the east. Finally, in 1836 it was moved to Swan Quarter, about 20 miles west and closer to the earlier Germantown

location. It has remained there ever since.

The Act of Congress of 23 April 1800 authorized the first post road into Hyde County. This was part of a continuing effort by the Congress to connect the seats of the various North Carolina counties to the United States postal system, which would, in turn, improve communications throughout North Carolina. The new post road was defined by Congress as follows: "In North Carolina—From Washington to Bath, and from thence by Woodstock, to Hyde Courthouse." I have shown the post road that resulted from this authorization in Figure 1. Soon after the Act of 1800, the first post offices in Hyde County were approved by the Postmaster General in Washington, D.C. Under Hyde County, *Post Offices and Postmasters of North Carolina* shows that the first two post offices were formed on 3 September 1800. They were Hyde C.H. with postmaster John Gayland and Woodstock with postmaster Seth Hovey. These listings were derived from United States Government post office records. If the Postmaster General in Washington, D.C. knew that the county courthouse of Hyde County was located at Germantown he made no effort to correct his books. An entry in the Postmaster General's Letter Books on 3 September 1800 confirms the appointments of Deputy Postmasters John Gayland of Hyde C.H. and Seth Hovey of Woodstock. *Post Offices and Postmasters of North Carolina* also shows that the Hyde C.H. was discontinued about 1810 and that a Germantown post office was opened in January 1816. It is not clear to me what post office represented the count seat between the years 1810 and 1816.

The John Gray Blount collection offers some insight into the creation of the new post road to Hyde County. This collection contains two letters written by the Assistant Postmaster General, Abraham Bradley, Jr. He wrote the majority of the letters for the Post Office Department related to financial matters and route contracts. The first letter requested that John Gray Blount, then postmaster of Washington, North Carolina, take action to contract for carrying the mail on the new post road. It read:

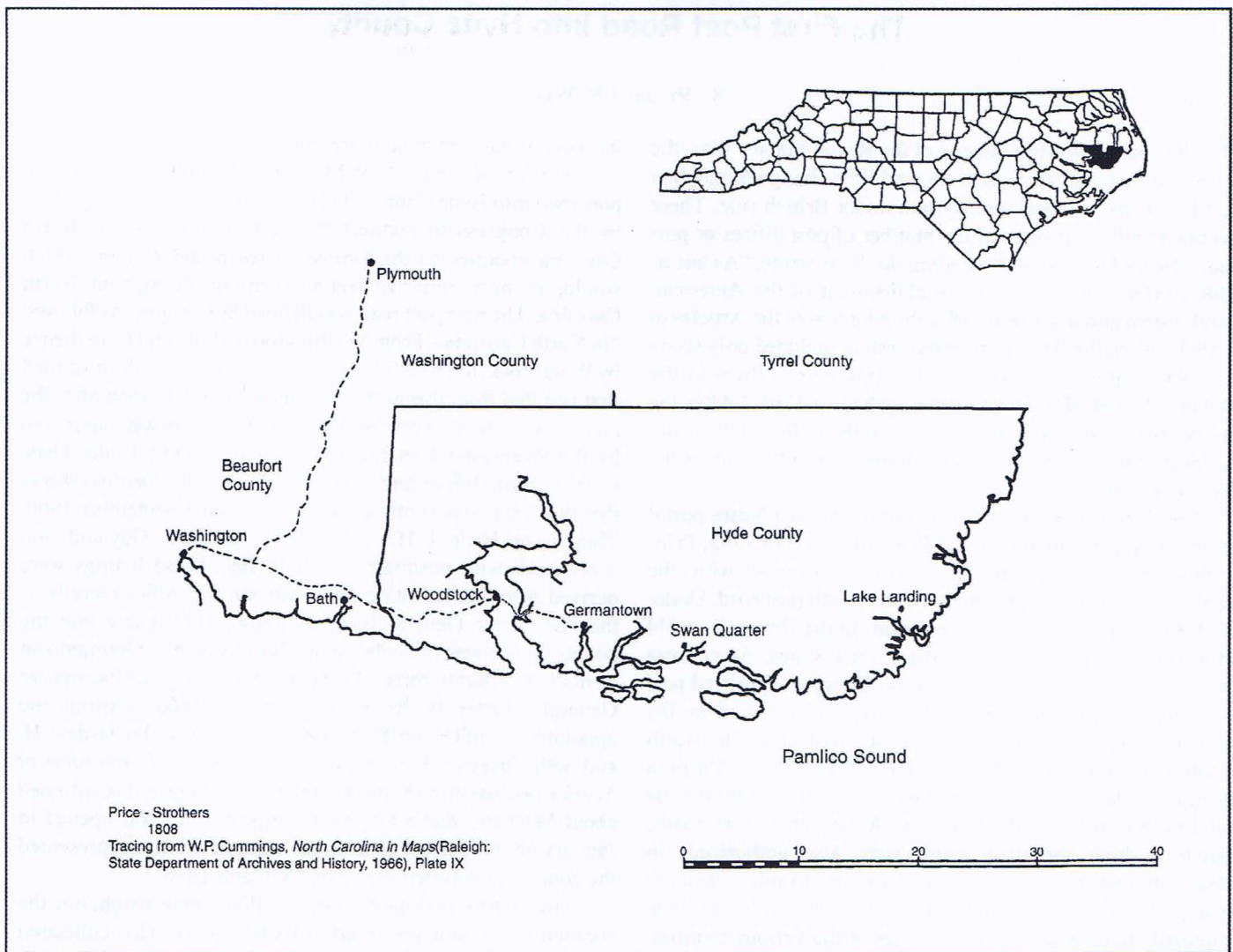
General Post Office  
August 22, 1800

Sir

*Not having received any offer for carrying the mail between Washington & Hyde c.h. I have to request you to contract with some person for carrying the mail on that route if it can be done for a sum not exceeding two hundred & twenty dollars a year & the expense of ferriages if any. If you find a proper person to contract for the route I wish you to fill out the contract & bond & when executed return to this office when a counterpart executed by the postmaster general will be forwarded to the contractor.*

*If there are ferriages the yearly amount is to be ascertained and added to the above sum, so that a quarterly sum in gross is to be paid for carrying the mail without reference to ferriages in the contract.*





**Figure 1.**

Tracing of Hyde County made from the 1808 Price-Strothers map with location of post road from Washington to Germantown added.

*If you do not soon hear of a person who will contract for that price you will communicate it to this office.*

*For your trouble in making the contract you will be allowed ten dollars to be charged in your quarterly a/c as a contingent expense*

*I am respectfully  
Your obedient servant  
Abraham Bradley jun.  
Assist. Postm. Genl.*

The second letter provided additional instructions and the written proposal of a Hyde County resident to carry those mails. It read:

*General Post Office  
Septem' 28, 1800*

*Sir*

*I have just received the enclosed proposal for carrying the mail between Washington & Germantown if you have not*

*already contracted I wish you to make the contract with Mr. Alderson at 200 dollars a years making the alterations in the schedule which he requested.*

*I am respectfully  
Your obedient servant  
Abraham Bradley jun.  
Assist. Postm. Genl.*

*John G Blount Esq.  
Postmaster  
Washington N.C.*

The enclosure to this letter was the actual letter proposal of John Alderson of Germantown to carry mails on the new post road. In his letter Alderson also enclosed a printed post office form used to record the oath of postmasters and contractors, which he signed to show that he was serious with his proposal. His proposal letter read:



Germantown 15<sup>th</sup> Sept 1800

Sir

I observe in the gazette your invitation to persons dispos<sup>d</sup>, to carry the mail from Washington, by Bath & Woodstock, to Germantown – I propose to carry that mail for two hundred & seventy five dollars pr year, on Condition of receiving payment quarterly – from which sum I am willing to abate Seventy five dollars on condition, the times of leaving & arriving may be altered, to the following – to leave Washington on Thursday at six in the morning – and arrive at Germantown on Friday at Eight in the morning – & to leave Germantown at noon on Friday & arrive at Washington on Saturday at four oclock in the afternoon –

Permit me to remark to you that to make the whole journey from the one to the other of these Towns in one day woud be Extremely difficult & often impossible by reason of a ferry of five miles width between Woodstock & Germantown which Especially in the winter Season, can very scarcely be cross<sup>d</sup> otherwise than in the night – with these observations I take the liberty of submitting the foregoing to your Consideration.

& although I have not the honor  
to be personally Known by you  
am never the less –  
Sir your most obed<sup>t</sup>  
J Alderson

The outside of this letter is shown in Figure 2. In the upper left corner was written in an ink darker than the ink used on the address label the notation “Sep 19.” In the upper right corner in the same ink was written the word “Free.” I believe that both

these notations were made by John Gayland, the postmaster of the county seat at Germantown (or the postmaster of Hyde C.H. as Washington, D.C. saw it). Unfortunately, he did not write the name of the post office in his postal marking, which would have been proof positive that the letter had been posted at the post office of Hyde County. Since the letter bears a dateline of Germantown and that there was a post office at the county courthouse, it is reasonable to assume that the letter was posted at that office. We will see in another letter that Gayland didn’t write the post office name on other letters from the same post office. The letter’s routing instruction in the lower left corner, “Washington/mail,” was, in my view, a reference to routing via Washington, North Carolina. In this as well as other letters from Germantown, the letter writer wrote “Germantown.” Many town names ending in “town” at the time were shortened by the residents to a name ending in “ton.” There is little doubt in my mind that this letter originated and was posted in the county seat of Hyde County at Germantown. This letter proposing to carry the mail between Germantown and Washington is my candidate for the earliest letter from Hyde C.H.

I have found two additional letters from John Gayland, the postmaster of Hyde C.H., in the Blount papers. Each of these letters, one written on 13 March 1802 and the other on 23 April 1802, was datelined at Germantown and addressed to Washington, North Carolina. Each was signed by Gayland on the address side in the upper right corner using his free franking privilege. Figure 3 illustrates the 13 March 1802 letter and shows the postmaster’s franking. Note that he has not applied the expected manuscript postmark to the letter, just his franking signature. This franking and the date shown in Figure 2 are the only postal markings located to date that emanated from Hyde

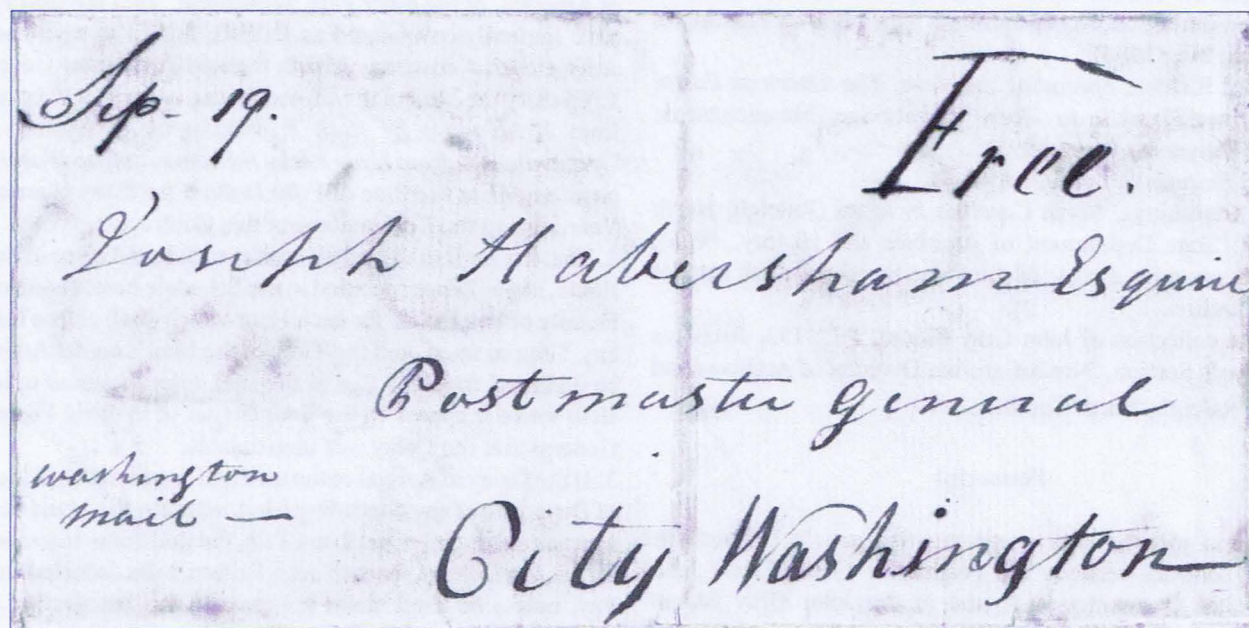
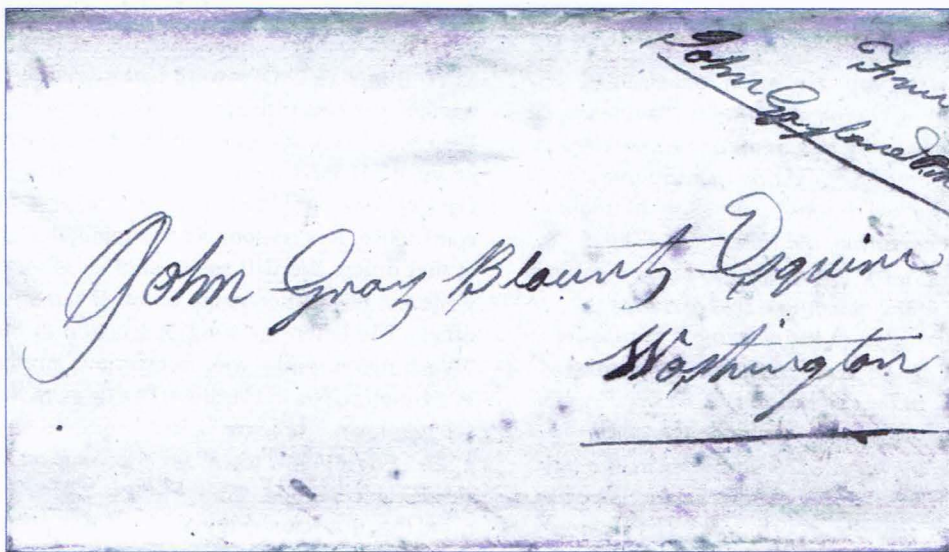


Figure 2.

15 September 1800, Germantown to Washington, D.C., letter of John Alderson proposing to carry mail on the post road to Hyde County. “Sep 19” and “Free” notations believed to be postal marking of John Gayland, postmaster of Hyde C.H., which was actually located at Germantown. (North Carolina State Archives)





**Figure 3.**

13 March 1802, Germantown, N.C. to Washington, N.C., letter from postmaster John Gayland showing his franking in upper right corner as only postal marking (North Carolina State Archives).

C.H. I doubt that a postmark showing "Hyde C.H." actually exists.

#### Bibliography:

1. *Post Offices and Postmasters of North Carolina* 4 volumes (Charlotte, North Carolina: North Carolina Postal History Society, 1996), volume 2.
2. Morgan H. Harris, *Hyde Yesterdays: A History of Hyde County* (Wilmington, North Carolina: New Hanover Printing & Publishing Inc., 1995).
3. Richard R. John, *Spreading the News, The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995).
4. U.S. 2 *Statutes at Large*, pp. 42-45.
5. W.P. Cummings, *North Carolina in Maps* (Raleigh, North Carolina: State Department of Archives and History, 1966), Plate IX, provides a copy of the Price-Strothers 1808 map of North Carolina.
6. Private collection of John Gray Blount, P.C. 193, Archives and Records Section, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

#### Postscript

Several months after preparing this article I found the original contract between the Postmaster General and John Alderson of Germantown. It was in the John Gray Blount collection at the North Carolina Archives under miscellaneous papers. The contract is important because it was on a preprinted form with pertinent data filled in by pen. This means that it was the standard contract used by the Postmaster General in 1800. Since mail route contracts are seldom found I will transcribe it completely. This preprinted contract provides insight into the

standard contractual features of early mail route contracts. In my transcription the preprinted data will be in regular type and the data penned into the blank spaces will be in italics.

THIS CONTRACT made the *fifteenth* Day of *August* in the Year One Thousand ~~Seven~~ *eight* Hundred ~~and~~ *Ninety* between *John Alderson, Blacksmith of the County of Hyde* of one Part, and *Joseph Habersham* Postmaster General of the United States of America, of the other Part, Witnesseth, That the said Parties have mutually covenanted as follows; that is to say: The said *John Alderson* covenant & with the said Postmaster General

1. To carry the Mail of the United States, or cause it to be carried from *Washington by Bath & Woodstock to Hyde c h or Germantown & from Hyde c h by the same route to Washington* once a week at the Rate of *Fifty Dollars* for every Quarter of a Year, during the Continuance of this Contract.
2. That the Mail shall be delivered at each Post-Office in the said Route, at the Times specified in the Schedule hereto annexed, on Penalty of *one Dollar* for each Hour which shall elapse between any Time so fixed, and the Time of the Mail's actual Arrival, to be deducted from the Pay of the said *John Alderson* unless *he* shall make it appear to the Satisfaction of the said Postmaster General that the Delay was unavoidable.
3. If the Delay of Arrival of the said Mail continue until the Hour of Departure of any depending Mail, whereby the Mails destined for such depending Mail lose a Trip, the said *John Alderson* shall forfeit *five Dollars*, for each such Failure, to be deducted from *his* Pay, unless *he* shall make it appear to the Satisfaction of the Postmaster General that such Delay was unavoidable.
4. That the said *John Alderson* shall be answerable for the Persons to whom *he* shall commit the Care and Transportation of the Mail, and accountable for any Damages which may be sustained through their Unfaithfulness or Want of Care.
5. That *Thirty Minutes* after the Delivery of the Mail at any Post-



## THE SCHEDULE

Office no named in the annexed Schedule, on the aforesaid Route, shall be allowed the Post-master for opening the same, and making up another Mail to be forwarded.

6. That is the said *John Alderson* or *his* Agents, charged with the aforesaid Mail, shall pass any Post-Office without stopping the Time allowed for opening and making up a Mail, unless sooner discharged by the Post-master, *he* shall forfeit *five* Dollars, for every such Failure, to be deducted from *his* Pay.

7. That if the Person or Persons to whom the said *John Alderson* shall commit the Transportation of the Mail do proceed without it. Or do not make a proper Exchange of the Mails, where such Exchange is statedly to be made, and instead thereof shall carry back the same Mail, which he or they brought to such Place of Exchange, it shall be considered as a whole Trip lost, and double the Sum allowed the said *John Alderson* for one Trip, to be calculated in Proportion to the Value, or Sum allowed for the whole Number of Trips to be performed, shall be deducted from *his* Pay, as a Forfeiture for such Failure. And a similar Deduction shall be made for every Trip lost during the Continuance of this Contract; unless it shall be made to appear, to the Satisfaction of the said Postmaster General, that such Trips were not lost through Neglect, but by unavoidable Accident.

8. That the said *John Alderson* will enter into Bond, with two sufficient Sureties, in the Sum of *Three hundred* Dollars, for the faithful Performance of this Contract on *his* Part; which Bond shall be sent to the General Post-Office, or delivered to *the Postmaster* at *Washington* by or before the *thirtieth* Day of *September* next.

9. That upon reasonable Complaint made by the Department of the Post Office, against any Carrier of said Mail, for Negligence or Missbehavior, such Carrier shall be forthwith discharged. That when the said Mail goes by a Stage Waggon, it shall be invariably carried within the Body of it; and that when it stops at Night, it shall be put in a secure Place and there be locked up.

And the said *Joseph Habersham* Post-master General as aforesaid, covenants with the said *John Alderson* to provide Portmanteaus and Bags necessary for containing the Letters and News-papers which shall constitute the aforesaid Mail, and pay the said *John Alderson* for the Carriage thereof as aforesaid, at the Rate aforementioned, quarterly, in the Months of April, July, October and January; the Penalties for Failure (if any) being first deducted.

And it is mutually covenanted and agreed by the said Parties, that this Contract shall commence on the *first* Day of *October* next, and continue in Force until the *thirtieth* Day of *September* inclusively, which will be in the Year One Thousand *Eight Hundred and one* IN WITNESS whereof they have hereto interchangeably set their Hands and Seal the Day and Year first above written.

Signed, sealed and delivered

By *Jos Habersham*

In the Presence of

*Abraham Bradley jun*  
*Habersham*

*Jos*

*Post M<sup>r</sup> Gen<sup>l</sup>*

Subject to Alteration by the Post-master General; be previously stipulating an adequate Compensation for any extra Expense that may be occasioned thereby.

~~*Leave Washington every Thursday at 5 a.m. & arrive at Hyde c.h. on the same day by 6 p.m.*~~

*Returning*

~~*Leave Hyde c.h. every Friday at 7 a.m. arrive at Washington same day by 5 p.m.*~~

*Leave Washington every Thursday at 6 a.m. & arrive at Hyde c.h. on Friday at 8 a.m.*

*Returning*

*Leave Hyde c.h. every Friday at 12 at noon & arrive at Washington on Saturday following at 11 p.m.*

A few observations from the contract follow:

1. The preprinted contract was intended for use in the 1790s, the date on this one was altered to the year 1800. It probably resulted from the Post Office Act of 1792.
2. John Alderson was listed as a blacksmith in Hyde County.
3. The first paragraph of the contract provisions states that the terminus of the route was Hyde C.H. or Germantown. This is the only time the contract mentions Germantown and throughout uses Hyde C.H. This suggests that the Postmaster General knew that they were both the same place but chose to call it Hyde C.H.
4. The contract called for a weekly mail trip between Washington and Hyde C.H.
5. Numerous penalty features were in the standard contract. John Alderson was to lose \$1 per hour for delayed delivery of the mail according to the contract times and \$5 if a trip was missed. Also he would lose \$5 for each failure to make a required stop and remain the required time for the new mail.
6. John Alderson could arrange for someone else to perform the service, but was responsible for that person's conduct as a mail carrier.
7. If he used a mail wagon, John Alderson had to carry the mail within it and provide security for the mail on overnight stops.
8. The Postmaster General would provide appropriate mail portmanteaus and bags for the mail, which included not only letters but also newspapers. The Postmaster General provided locks to the postmasters for the portmanteaus or bags that they made up. The route carrier did not have the keys to these locks. Since the mail was closed between mail stops, way letters, those picked up along the route between post offices, were carried loose until arrival at the next post office.
9. The originally desired route times, which were probably those that had been advertised for the contract, had been written on the contract. These were changed to accommodate the request of the bidder, John Alderson, who did not want to be tied to a same day delivery for the whole route.



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