

Cross-Border Mail via the Cunard Line:
Mail Between the United States and Nova
Scotia, 1840-1867

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SYNOPSIS

Introduction:

This postal history exhibit traces the evolution of Cunard Line operations between Halifax, Nova Scotia, and the United States. The exhibit is limited to this coastal service and does not address transatlantic mails. During the 28-year existence of this mail route, there were many changes, including rate reforms and the introduction of postage stamps in both the United States and Nova Scotia, the execution of a postal treaty between the United States and Great Britain, Nova Scotia's conversion to decimal currency, and the confederation of Nova Scotia with other provinces to form the Dominion of Canada.

The Cunard Line service between Halifax and the United States was never covered by postal treaty, and was little known in the United States. In fact, it was not listed in the *United States Mail and Post Office Assistant* until August, 1863, and was not listed in the *Postal Laws and Regulations of the United States of America* until the 1866 edition. Sometime in 1854, the US began charging 5¢ for letters to Halifax, instead of the previous charge of 3¢ ordinary inland postage (Cunard mail was required to be prepaid). There is no record of the date or the reason for this change; however, it was probably designed to set the rate equal to the British Open Mail rate applicable to mail sent pursuant to the US-Great Britain postal treaty. This exhibitor reviewed the Postmaster General's Order books in the US National Archives, but was unable to locate a record of the rate change.

Most of the covers in the exhibit originated in or were delivered to Halifax;

however, the exhibit includes the closed mail between Nova Scotia and Canada, as well as mails to Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, and the French territory of St. Pierre et Miquelon (small islands off the coast of Newfoundland).

Key Items:

Only reported use of a United States Postmaster Provisional on packet cover to Halifax.

One of five recorded examples properly paying the 8d rate by packet from the interior of Nova Scotia to Boston.

Printed Circular to St. Pierre et Miquelon, mail between the US and St. Pierre is extremely rare.

Also worthy of mention are covers franked with the US 5¢ 1847, 10¢ 1847, 5¢ 1856, and 5¢ 1861 buff. In addition there are covers from Nova Scotia paying the 5d and 13½¢ packet rates with stamps, and a cover from Newfoundland bearing an 8d Scarlet Vermillion 1857 bisect.

Sources:

McDonald, Susan M., "Cunard Packet Mail Between Nova Scotia and the United States, *Postal History Journal* No. 29, pp2-14, September 1971; No. 30, pp. 27-40, January 1972 (Best overview of the subject).

Arnell, J.C., *Atlantic Mails: A history of the mail service between Great Britain and Canada to 1889*, National Postal Museum Ottawa, Canada, 1980 (Halifax sailing dates not reported in Hubbard & Winter).

Cross-Border Mail via the Cunard Line:

Mail Between the United States and Nova Scotia, 1840-1867

From 1840 through 1867, mail to, from, and through the United States and Nova Scotia was transported by the British & North American Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, better known as the Cunard Line. From its inception in July 1840, Cunard Line steamers stopped in Halifax, Nova Scotia *en route* between Boston, Massachusetts, and Liverpool, England. Cunard Line Steamers between New York City and Liverpool also served Halifax between January 1848 and September 1850. The primary purpose of the Halifax service was to connect British North America with the mother country; however, the Cunard Line steamers also linked Halifax with and the United States. Although the United States and Great Britain entered into a postal treaty in 1848, mail carried between the United States and Halifax was not addressed by the treaty, and the route was not well known within the United States. The Cunard line stopped calling in Halifax at the end of 1867.

As the Cunard Line mails to Halifax were not covered by treaty, letters could not be paid to destination. The packet postage, and the Nova Scotia inland charge, if any, was always paid by the sender or recipient in British North America. The United States postage was always paid by the correspondent in the United States. While most of the mail carried on this route was exchanged between the United States and Nova Scotia, the Cunard Line service via Halifax was also used for mails to other parts of British North America, and through the use of forwarding agents, the rest of the western hemisphere.



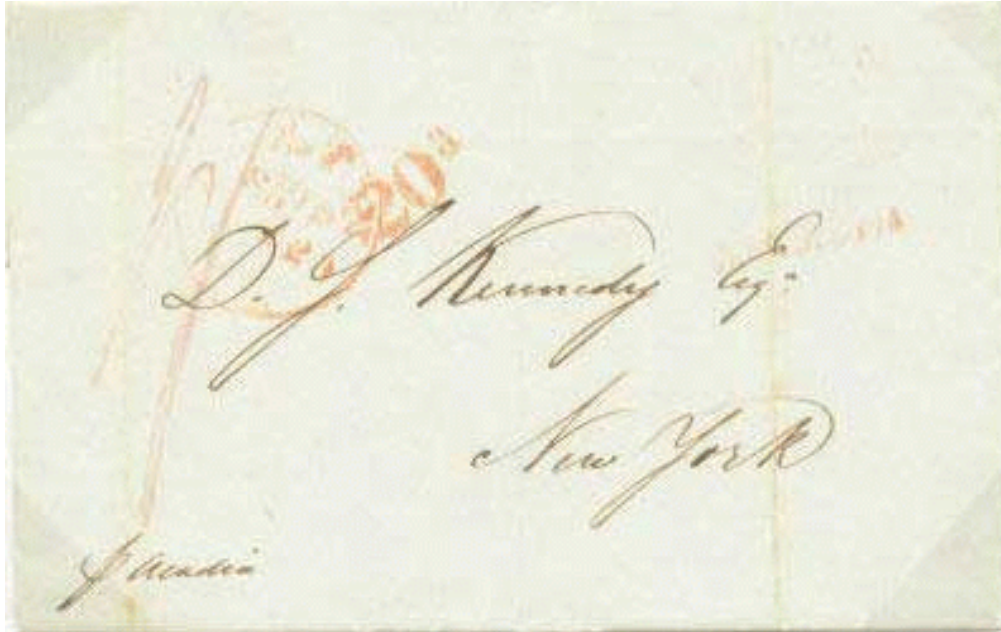
Postage:
US inland - 5¢
GB packet - 1/ stg.

Only reported use of a postmaster provisional on packet cover to Halifax, and only reported use to Nova Scotia.

New York, June 29, 1846, large part folded address sheet, 5¢ black 1845 New York postmaster provisional (position 11) pays 5 cent rate for distance less than 300 miles to Boston. 1 shilling sterling packet postage due per *Caledonia*.

Packet Postage Rate 1 Shilling Effective December 5, 1842

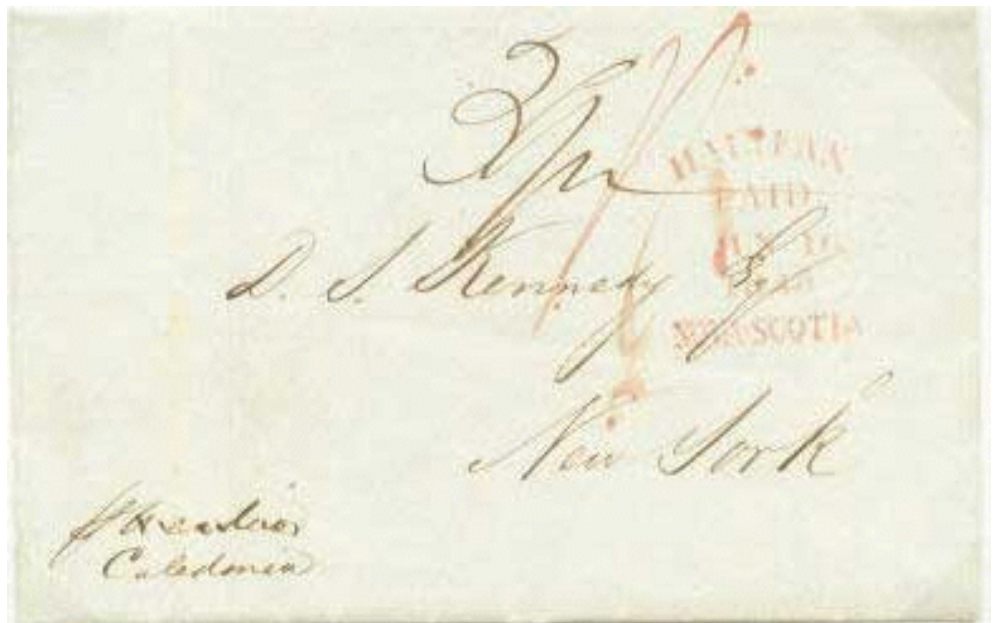
Halifax, February 17, 1843, paid 1 shilling sterling packet postage per *Acadia* to Boston. Rated 20^3 [$20^3\frac{3}{4}\text{¢}$] due, comprised of $18^3\frac{3}{4}\text{¢}$ for distance of 150 to 400 miles, plus 2¢ ship letter fee. 20^3 marking created for use with transatlantic mail.



Postage:
GB packet - 1/ stg.
US inland - $18^3\frac{3}{4}\text{¢}$
US ship letter - 2¢

Single Rate / Double Rate Cover

Halifax, June 16, 1845, paid 1 shilling sterling single rate packet postage for letter up to $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce per *Caledonia*. Rated $39^1\frac{1}{2}\text{¢}$ due comprised of double $18^3\frac{3}{4}\text{¢}$ rate per sheet for distance of 150 to 400 miles plus 2¢ ship letter fee (ship letter fee not doubled).



Postage:
GB packet - 1/ stg.
US inland - $37^1\frac{1}{2}\text{¢}$
US ship letter - 2¢

U.S. Rates Of 1845

Postage:

GB packet - 1/ stg.

US inland - 5¢

US ship letter - 2¢

U.S. Rate Reduction Effective July 1, 1845



Halifax, September 15, 1846, paid 1 shilling sterling packet postage per *Cambria*. Rated 7¢ due comprised of 5¢ for distance under 300 miles, plus 2¢ ship letter fee.

Postage:

US inland - 10¢

GB packet - 1/ stg.



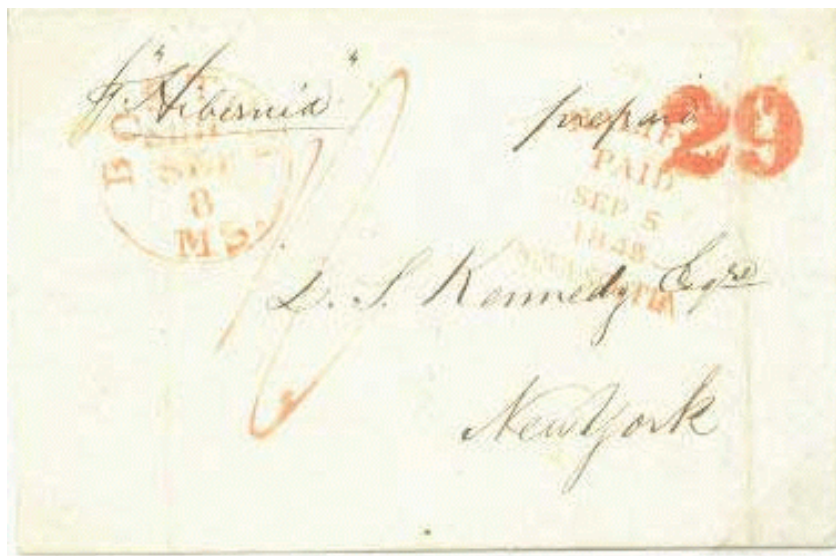
Baltimore, Md, March 8, 1848,

10¢ black 1847 pays 10¢ rate for distance over 300 miles to Boston. Rated 1 shilling sterling packet postage due per *Brittania*. HALIFAX U^D STATES March 13, 1848 transit backstamp applied to Cunard Line mail from the United States from 1845 through 1867. 22 covers to Nova Scotia reported with this franking (overland and packet).

Retaliatory Rates

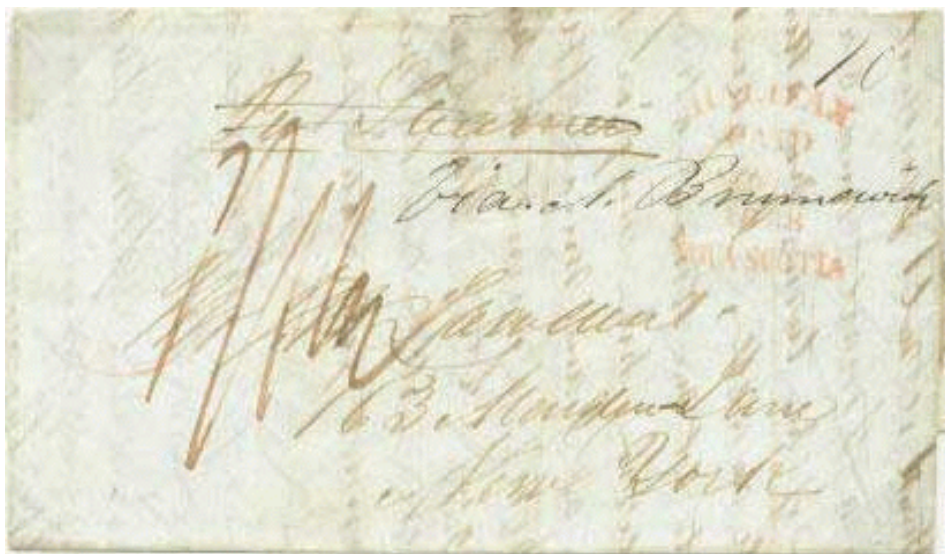
June 27, 1848 to January 3, 1849, Retaliatory Rate Period

Postage:
GB packet - 1/ stg.
US inland - 5¢
US retaliatory charge - 24¢



Halifax, September 5, 1848, paid 1 shilling sterling packet postage per *Hibernia* to Boston. Rated 29¢ due comprised of 5¢ for distance under 300 miles plus 24¢ retaliatory charge equal to the American packet postage. Although British packet postage was prepaid in Halifax, United States assessed a retaliatory charge equal to American packet postage on letters arriving by British packet.

Postage:
NS inland - 1/1½d cy
(1/ stg.)
US inland - 10¢



Halifax, November 8, 1848, paid 1 shilling 1½ pence currency (1 shilling sterling) for distance of 301 to 400 miles to St. Andrews, New Brunswick, exchange office. Rated 10¢ due for distance over 300 miles from corresponding exchange office, Robbinston, Maine, to New York. Initially endorsed “Per Steamer,” routing crossed out and redirected “Via N. Brunswick” to avoid the retaliatory charge.

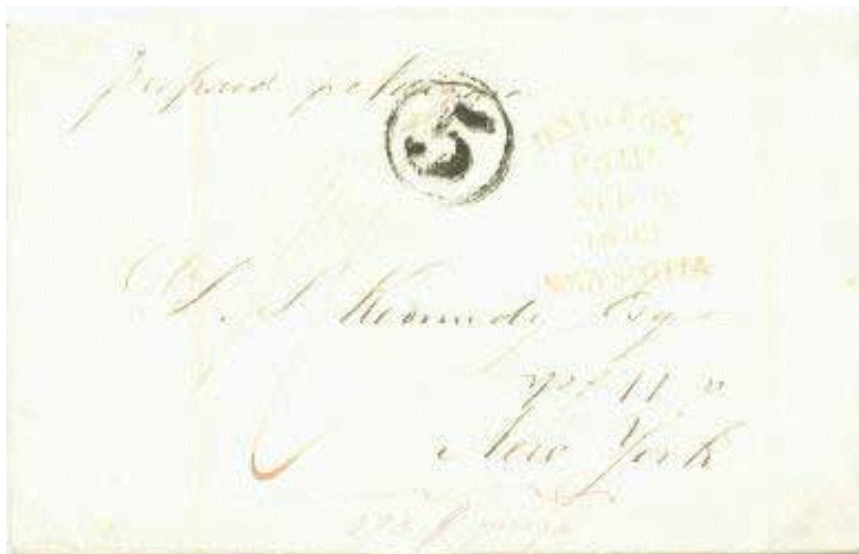
United States - Great Britain Postal Treaty

Liverpool to New York City Packets Call in Halifax January 1848 to September 1850 Postal Treaty With Great Britain Effective February 16, 1849

Postal treaty does not apply to mails to and from Halifax. No change in packet postage rate for service between Halifax and the United States; however, the United States no longer collects ship letter fees.

Postage:
GB packet - 1/ stg.
US inland - 5¢

Halifax, September 3, 1849, paid 1 shilling sterling packet postage per *Niagara* to New York. Rated 5¢ due for distance under 300 miles.



Packet Postage Rate Reduced to 4d Effective September 20, 1849

Postage:
US inland - 10¢
GB packet - 4½d cy
(4d stg.)

Baltimore, Md, February 3, 1850, pair of 5¢ red brown 1847s pay 10¢ rate for distance over 300 miles to Boston. Rated 4½d currency (4d sterling) packet postage due per *Niagara*. 14 covers to Nova Scotia reported with 5¢ 1847s (overland and packet).



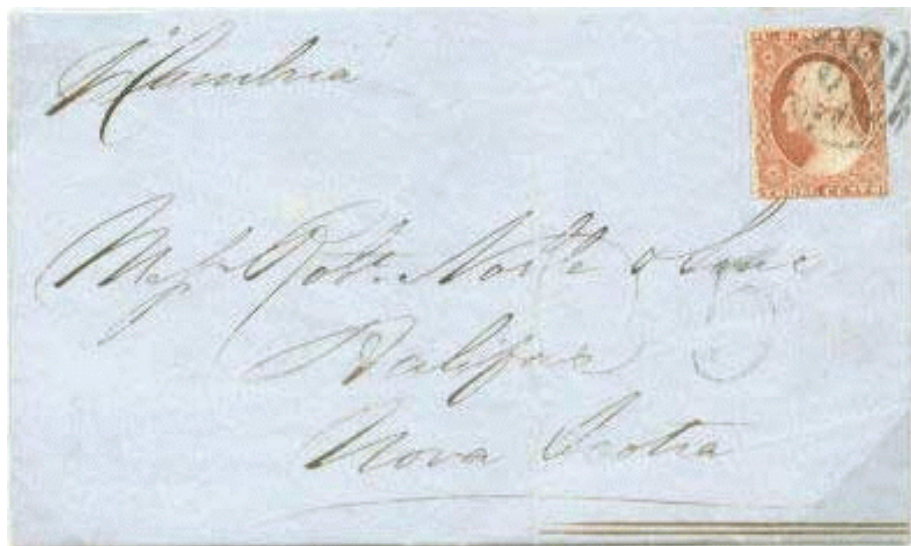
1851 - 1860 Pence Rates, 5d Rate

United States and Nova Scotia Rate Reductions Effective July 1, and July 6, 1851 Packet Rate Increases to 5d Currency

Postage:

US inland - 3¢

GB packet - 5d cy
(4d stg.)



New York grid, November 1851, 3¢ orange brown 1851 pays 3¢ prepaid domestic rate to Boston. Rated 5d currency (4d sterling) packet postage due per *Cambria*.



Postage:

GB packet - 5d cy
(4d stg.)

US inland - 5¢



Halifax, February 1, 1854, 3d dark blue 1851 and pair 1d red brown 1853 pay 5d currency (4d sterling) packet postage per *America*. BOSTON B^R PK^T FEB 6, 5¢ due typical of exchange office markings applied to Cunard mail from Halifax from 1853 through 1867. 16 packet covers reported paying the 5d rate with 1d and 3d stamps.

1851 - 1860 Pence Rates, 5d Rate

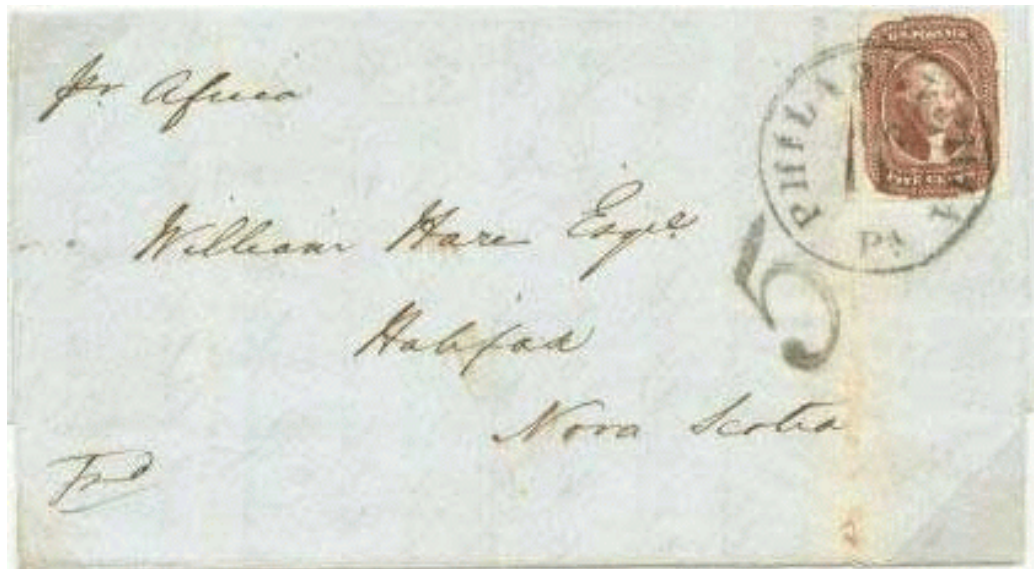
United States Rate For Outgoing Letters Increased to 5¢, 1854 (Exact Date Unknown)

Although mail from the United States to Halifax was not covered by the postal treaty between the United States and Great Britain, the new 5¢ rate was equal to the British Open Mail rate.

Postage:

US open mail - 5¢

GB packet - 5d cy
(4d stg.)



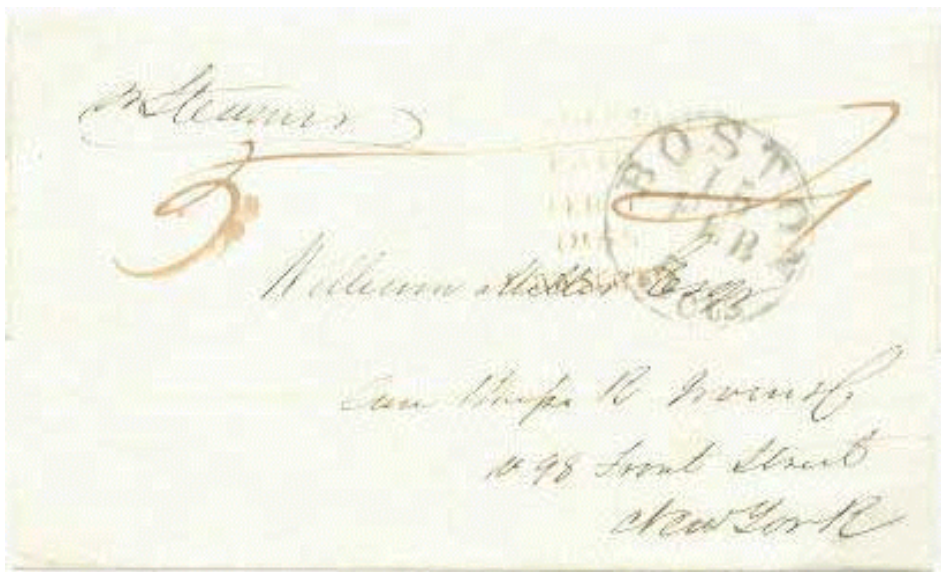
Philadelphia, August 11, 1856, 5¢ red brown 1856 pays 5¢ rate equal to the British Open Mail rate. Rated 5d currency (4d sterling) packet postage due per *Arabia*. BOSTON B^R PK^T 13 AUG transit typical of backstamp markings used on Cunard mail to Halifax from 1853 through 1867. 22 covers reported to Nova Scotia with this franking (overland and packet).

Postage:

GB packet - 5d cy
(4d stg.)

US inland - 5¢

FORWARDED BY
RICH'D IRVIN & CO.
NEW YORK.



Halifax, February 13, 1855, paid 5d currency (4d sterling) packet postage per *Asia*. Rated 5¢ due as an unpaid letter. Forwarded by Richard Irvin & Co. New York, forwarding agent marking on back.

1851 - 1860 Pence Rates, 8d Rate

Postage:

US open mail - 5¢

GB packet - 5d cy
(4d stg.)

NS inland - 3d cy



Boston, Mass., June 16, 1858, two 1857 1¢ Type Vs, and 3¢ 1857 Type II pay 5¢ rate equal to British Open Mail rate. Rated 8d currency due comprised of 5d currency (4d sterling) packet postage per *America* plus 3d currency inland postage. Advertisement for Wilder's New Style Fire Proof Safes on back.



Postage:

NS inland - 3d cy

GB packet - 5d cy
(4d stg.)

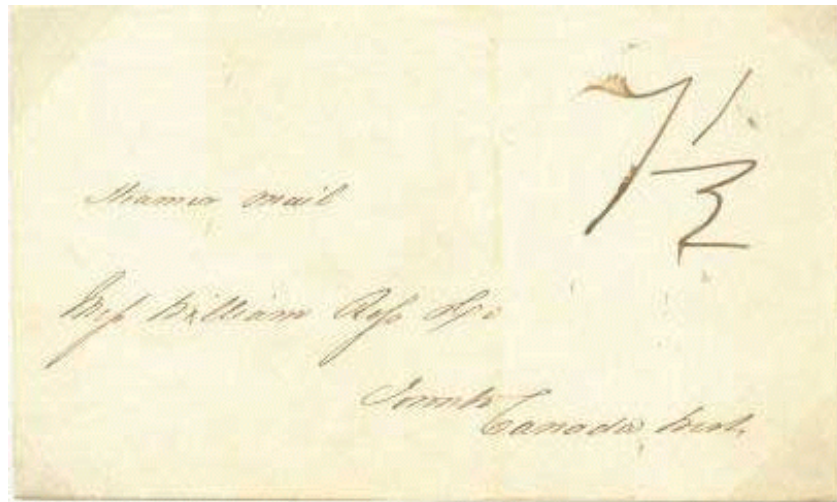
US inland - 5¢

Cover front originating beyond Halifax, October 1860, 6d yellow green 1851 and pair 1d red brown 1853 pay 8d currency rate comprised of 3d currency inland postage, plus 5d currency (4d sterling) packet postage per *Arabia*. Rated 5¢ due as an unpaid letter. 5 packet covers reported paying the 8d rate with 1d and 6d stamps.

Interprovincial Mail, Pence Rates

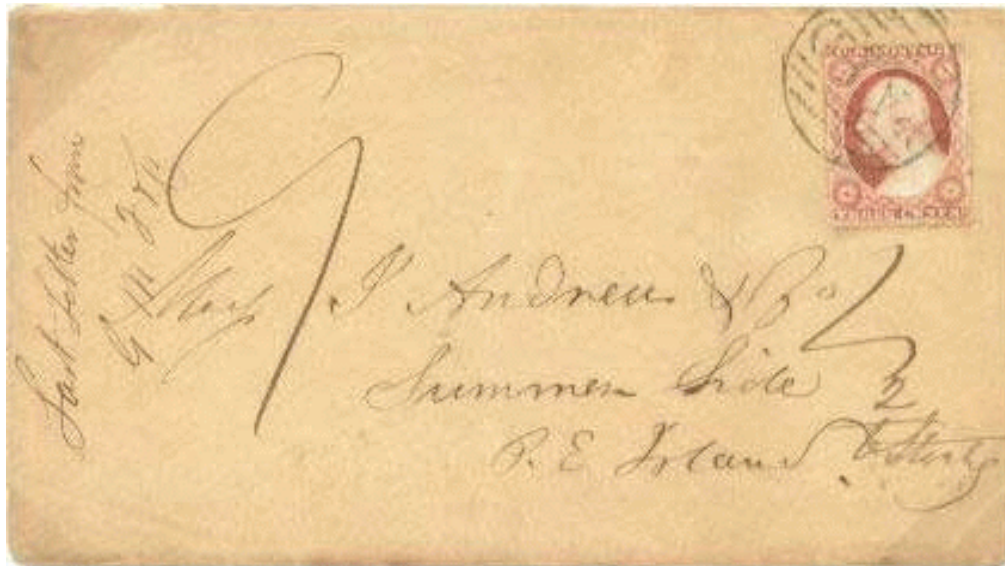
Closed Mail Via Boston

Postage:
GB packet - 5d cy
(4d stg.)
CW inland - 2½d cy



Halifax, September 12, 1853, rated 7½d due comprised of 2½d currency inland postage, plus 5d currency (4d sterling) packet postage via closed bag per *Niagara* to Boston, followed by rail transit to Canada East and overland transport to Toronto, Canada West. No United States transit postage.

Mail To Prince Edward Island



Postage:
US open mail - 5¢
(underpaid)
GB packet - 6d cy (PEI)
(4d stg.)
PEI inland - 3d cy

Boston, August 12, 1857, 3¢ rose 1857 Type I underpays 5¢ rate equal to British Open Mail rate. Rated 9d currency due comprised of 6d Prince Edward Island currency (4d sterling) packet postage per *Europa* plus 3d currency interprovincial postage. Due to differing depreciation against the pound sterling, the 4d sterling packet charge was equal to 6d in Prince Edward Island's currency, but only 5d in Nova Scotia's currency.

Interprovincial Mail, Pence Rates

Great Britain operated a feeder route between Halifax and St. Johns Newfoundland. Nearly all mail to and from the United States was carried by Cunard Line packet via Halifax.



St. Johns, Newfoundland,
November 1846, Crowned
Circle Paid 1 shilling per
packet *Unicorn* to Halifax
and packet *Acadia* to
Boston. Sent to
Philadelphia by closed-bag
where it was rated 12¢ due
comprised of 10¢ for
distance over 300 miles
plus 2¢ ship letter fee.

Postage:
GB packet - 1/ stg.
US inland - 10¢
US ship letter - 2¢

Packet Postage From St. Johns to Halifax Charged In Addition to Halifax to Boston Packet



Postage:
GB packet - 8d stg.
US inland - 5¢

St. Johns Newfoundland,
September 6, 1854, paid
8d sterling combined rate
comprised of 4d sterling
packet postage to Halifax,
and 4d sterling packet
postage per *Niagara* to
Boston. Rated 5¢ due as
an unpaid letter.

Interprovincial Mail, Pence Rates

Packet Rate from St. Johns to Boston Reduced to 4d stg. January 1, 1856

St. Johns, Newfoundland,
May 9, 1860, 8d Scarlet
Vermillion 1857 bisect
pays 4d sterling packet
postage via Halifax per
Europa. Rated 5¢ due as
unpaid letter.

Postage:
GB packet - 4d stg.
US inland - 5¢

BPA # 75663

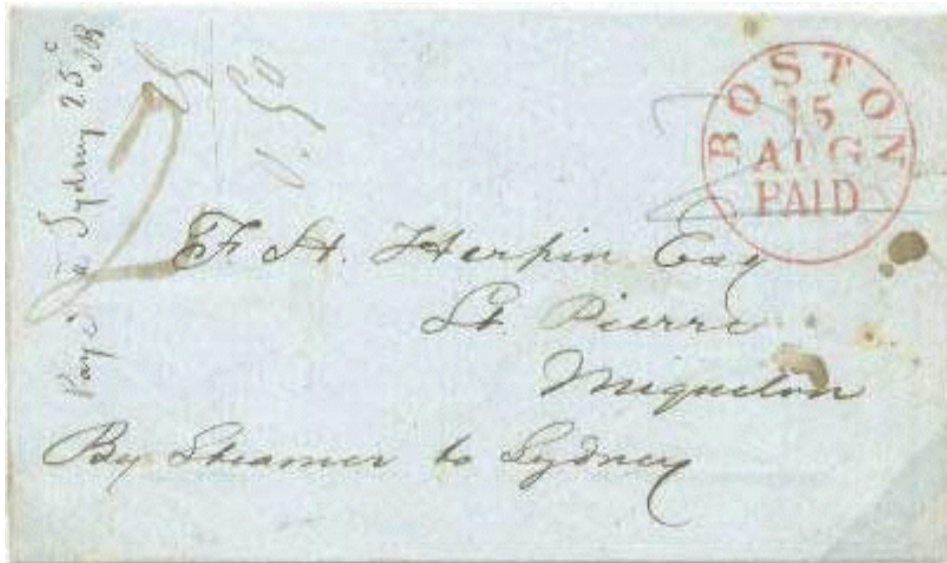
New York, October 28,
1863, 10¢ yellow-green
1861 overpays 5¢ rate
equal to British Open
Mail rate. Rated 4d
sterling packet postage
due per *Olympus* via
Halifax, plus 3d
currency due (2½d
sterling) internal
postage to Harbor
Grace.

Postage:
US open mail - 5¢
(overpaid)
GB packet - 4d stg.
NF inland - 3d cy
(2½d stg.)



St. Pierre et Miquelon Mail, Pence Rates

The minuscule amount of mail between the United States and the French territory of St. Pierre et Miquelon was generally carried by Cunard Line packets via Halifax.



Postage:
US open mail
circular - 2¢
GB packet
circular - 2d stg.
St. Pierre - 25c

Boston, August 15, 1855, printed circular paid 2¢ equal to British Open Mail circular rate. Rated 50 centimes due comprised of 2d sterling (25 centimes) circular rate packet postage per *Asia* to Halifax, then per Cunard feeder line to North Sydney, Cape Breton, plus 25 centimes to St. Pierre.

Postage:
GB packet - 5d cy.
(4d stg.)
US inland - 5¢

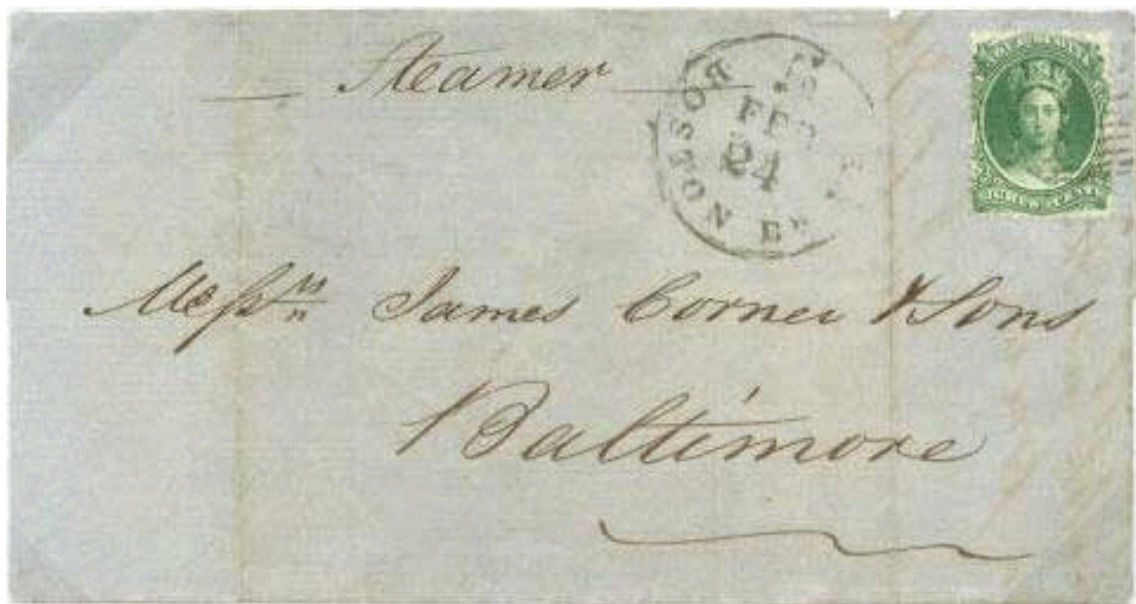


Saint Pierre May 23, 1857, enters the mails at Halifax June 1, 1859. Paid 5d cy (4d sterling) packet postage per *America*. Rated 5¢ due as unpaid letter.

1860-1867 Decimal Rates, 8½¢ Rate

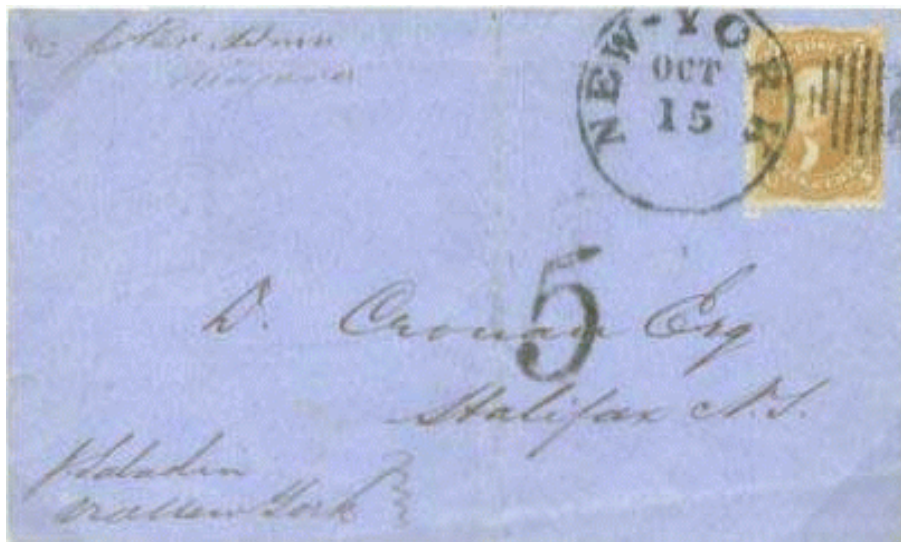
Nova Scotia Converts to Decimal Currency January 1, 1860,

Postage:
GB packet - 8½¢ cy
(4d stg.)
US inland - 5¢



RPSL #105041

Halifax, February 18, 1861, 8½¢ green 1860 pays 8½¢ (4d sterling) packet postage per *America*. Rated 5¢ due as unpaid letter. The 8½¢ packet rate was in effect for only nineteen months after the stamp was issued.



Postage:
US open mail - 5¢
GB packet - 8½¢ cy
(5d cy/4d stg.)

Kingston, Jamaica, October 5 1861, Tucker & Lightbourne forwarding agent marking on back. Enters the mails New York October 15, 1861, 5¢ buff 1861 pays 5¢ rate equal to British Open Mail rate. Rated 5d currency (8½¢ [4d sterling]) due packet postage per *Niagara*. Halifax used 5d rate marking during the 8½¢ rate period.

1860-1867 Decimal Rates, 10¢ Rate

Packet Postage Increases to 10¢ Effective May 1, 1862

Additional 1½¢ Postage Accrues to the Halifax Post Office



Postage:
NS inland - 1½¢
GB packet - 8½¢ cy
(4d stg.)
US inland - 5¢

Halifax, March 16, 1864, pair of 5¢ blue 1860s pay 10¢ rate comprised of 1½¢ inland charge and 8½¢ (4d sterling) packet postage per *Canada*. Rated 5¢ due as unpaid letter.



Postage:
US open mail - 5¢
GB packet - 8½¢ cy
(4d stg.)
NS inland - 1½¢

Boston, September 28, 1864, 5¢ brown 1863 pays 5¢ rate equal to British Open Mail rate. Rated 10¢ due comprised of 8½¢ (4d sterling) packet postage per *Arabia* plus 1½¢ inland charge.

1860-1867 Decimal Rates, 13½¢ Rate

The 13½¢ Rate Beyond Halifax

The 13½¢ Rate (8½¢ packet + 5¢ inland) Did Not Change When Packet Rate to Halifax Increased to 10¢



Postage:
NS inland - 5¢
GB packet - 8½¢ cy
(4d stg.)
US inland - 5¢

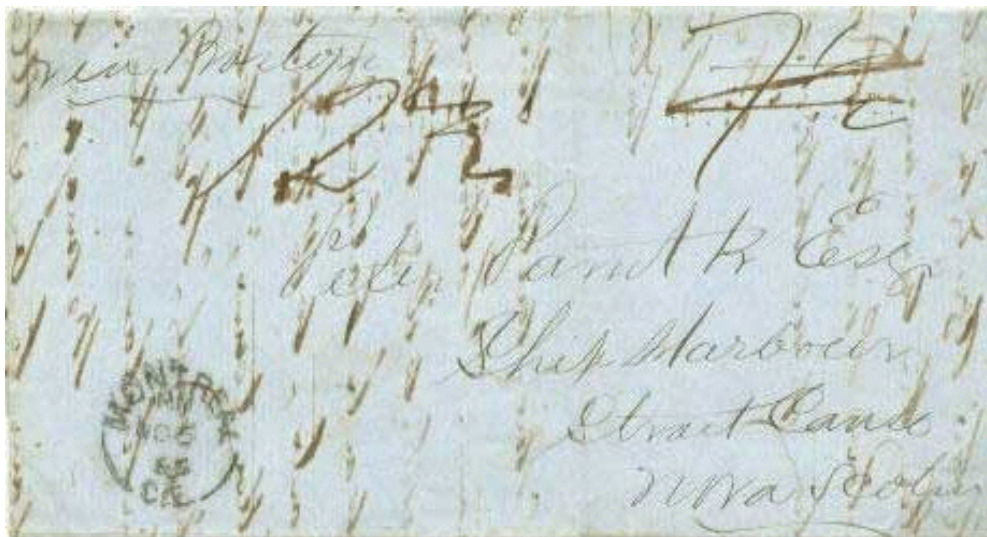


Postage:
NS treaty rate - 15¢
(no division of
postage)

Pair of covers from Windsor, Nova Scotia January 15, 1867, and November 23, 1866, each franked with 10¢ orange 1860 and 5¢ blue 1860. Top cover, directional endorsement for transcontinental carriage “by steamer from New York” apparently misinterpreted as request for packet service to Boston. 15¢ postage overpays 13½¢ packet rate comprised of 5¢ inland postage, plus 8½¢ (4d sterling) packet postage per *Asia*. Rated 5¢ due as unpaid letter. Bottom cover correctly sent prepaid at the 15¢ overland treaty rate for distances over 3,000 miles from the exchange office. Pursuant to treaty, Nova Scotia kept all postage collected on prepaid letters.

1860-1867 Decimal Rates, Closed Mail and Post-Confederation Use

Postage:
GB packet - 8½ cy
(4d stg.)
NS inland - 4¢ cy



Montreal, Canada East, November 6, 1865, via closed bag to Boston, per *Africa* to Halifax, then overland transit. Ship Harbour November 13, 1865 receiver (5 or fewer markings reported). Initially rated 7½ due, crossed out and correctly rated 12½¢ due per closed mail comprised of 8½¢ (4d sterling) packet postage and 4¢ inland charge. No United States transit postage.

On July 1, 1867, Nova Scotia Joined the Dominion of Canada. Cunard Line Service Ends December 1867



Postage:
US open mail - 5¢
GB packet - 8½¢ cy
(4d stg.)
Canada inland - 1½¢

Boston, August 29, 1867, 5¢ brown 1863 pays 5¢ rate equal to British Open Mail rate. Erroneously rated 13½¢ due for letter addressed beyond Halifax, overstruck with correct 10¢ due rate comprised of 8½¢ (4d sterling) packet postage per *Java* and 1½¢ inland charge.