

U.S. PROPAGANDA COVERS

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Introduction

The 1850s and 1860s in the United States saw a great proliferation of propaganda covers, preprinted covers whose illustrations or legends advocated various reforms and causes reflecting the mind-set of the nation at the time. Propaganda covers in the U.S. often followed or paralleled advocacy activities occurring in England. Britain was the birthplace and the wellspring of illustrated propaganda covers, going back to the Mulready envelope and its caricatures in 1840.

A definitive 332-page book and catalog of propaganda and related covers, *British Pictorial Envelopes of the 19th Century*, by Bodily, Jarvis and Hahn, was published by the Collectors Club of Chicago in 1984. This book discusses in depth the origins of many of the British and U.S. propaganda covers.

One man was behind a number of related movements and causes that were promoted on propaganda covers. He was an American named Elihu Burritt. A blacksmith by trade, Burritt (1810-1879) studied widely and came to be known as “the learned blacksmith.” He was the founder of the League of Universal Brotherhood and its supporting societies. In

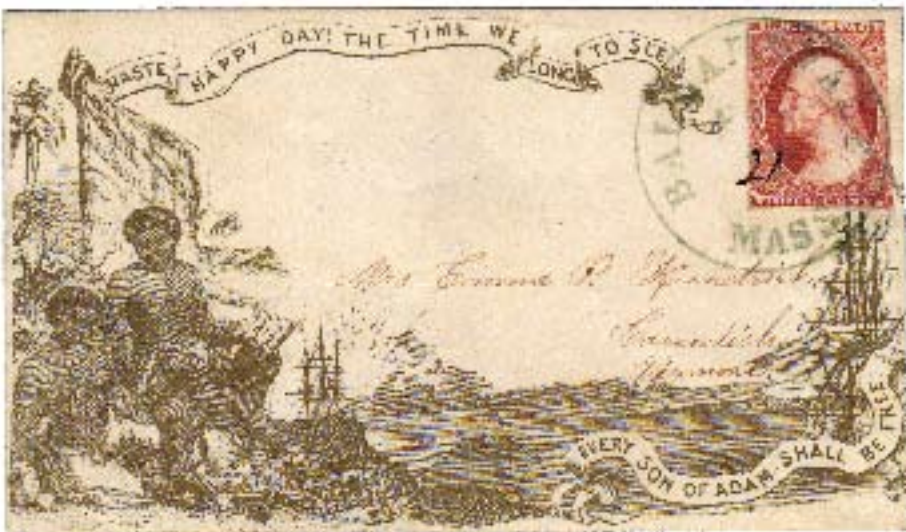


Figure 1. British-printed anti-slavery cover printed in gold ink and postmarked in olive green at Ballardvale, Massachusetts, during the early 1850s.

books and pamphlets he advocated many reforms, including ocean penny postage, peace, the brotherhood of man, the settlement of disputes between nations by arbitration rather than war, temperance and anti-slavery. Many of the propaganda covers of this era, both British and American, promote causes related to Burritt's activities. Some advocate more than one of these reforms simultaneously.

The purpose of this survey article is to provide an overview of the various types and designs of U.S. propaganda covers that can be collected. While most of the propaganda covers posted in the United States were designed and printed domestically, a limited number of British-made propaganda envelopes were imported by enthusiasts and used in the U.S. Beautiful and highly ornate, these make a good starting point for general discussion.

British Propaganda Covers Used in the United States

Figure 1 is an fine example. This is an exquisite small cover, printed in gold ink and postmarked in olive green at Ballardvale, Massachusetts, during the early 1850s. The anti-slavery theme is clear and eloquent. The inscription ("Haste, Happy Day! The time we long to see...when every son of Adam shall be free!") surrounds an African family, seated and unchained, with a sailing vessel in the distance. The man holds in his left hand a Bible, referencing Isaiah 58:6: "...loose the bands of wickedness, undo the heavy burdens, let the oppressed go free and break every yoke...."

The British cover shown in Figure 2 is a peace propaganda cover. The inscription reads "Peace, the parent of prosperity, the companion of the truth and love." A draped female figure, presumably Britannia, rests on an anchor within a grouping of artistic and agricultural equipment atop the remnants of destroyed weapons of war. In the background a multicultural group of oddly dressed individuals engages in animated but friendly exchange. The British origins of this cover are attested by the script printer's credit line across the bottom. Franked with an imperforate 3¢ 1851 stamp and addressed to Connecticut, this cover was posted at Worcester, Massachusetts, on February 20. The year date is uncertain, but the cover surely dates from the 1852-57 era.



Figure 2. British-printed peace propaganda cover, franked with an imperforate 3¢ 1851 stamp and posted at Worcester, Massachusetts, during the 1852-57 era.



Figure 3. Multi-theme propaganda cover, franked with an imperforate 3¢ 1851 stamp and posted at Farmington, Ohio, in the early 1850s. A legend on the envelope indicates it was engraved and published by J. Valentine of Dundee, one of the most talented and prolific creators of British propaganda envelopes.

Figure 3 is an intricately engraved multi-theme propaganda cover, franked with an imperforate 3¢ 1851 stamp and posted at Farmington, Ohio, in the early 1850s. A legend on the envelope indicates it was engraved and published by J. Valentine of Dundee, one of the most talented and prolific creators of British propaganda envelopes. The three visual elements at the top of the envelope promote arbitration for war, universal brotherhood, and freedom of commerce (free trade).

The juxtaposition of these thematic elements is highly representative of the reformist mood of the day. Inspired by Adam Smith, the British free-traders of the 1840s reasoned that world-wide free trade would create a global web of mutual dependence that would foster universal brotherhood and make war unthinkable. The visual element at upper left on the cover in Figure 3 shows a Greek-style building with “Congress of Nations” inscribed on the pediment. This is a very early reference to the modern concept of a world governing body.

Figure 4 is another British propaganda cover, here supporting ocean penny postage and universal brotherhood. Per a legend on the backflap, it was printed by the London office of the League of Brotherhood. This cover was posted at Boston, Massachusetts, in the early 1850s. The imperforate 3¢ 1851 stamp is tied by the distinctive Boston PAID marking. A red 23 x 17 millimeter design on the backflap shows two clasping hands. The propaganda theme on the front, with various foreign-looking people surrounding an allegorical figure of peace, suggests that inexpensive ocean postage would contribute to the world-wide brotherhood of man. An ocean steamship, an image frequently encountered on these covers, trails smoke in the background.

Figure 5 expresses the same theme more explicitly. This is another creation of Valentine of Dundee, printed in England but mailed in the U.S. in the late 1850s. The perforated 3¢ 1851 stamp is postmarked North Brookfield, Massachusetts, November 5. The printed legend clearly expresses the expected benefits of inexpensive international postage: “Britain! Bestow this boon, and be in blessing blest. Ocean Penny Postage will link all lands



Figure 4. British propaganda cover supporting ocean penny postage and universal brotherhood, posted at Boston in the early 1850s. Per a legend on the backflap, this envelope was printed by the London office of the League of Brotherhood.

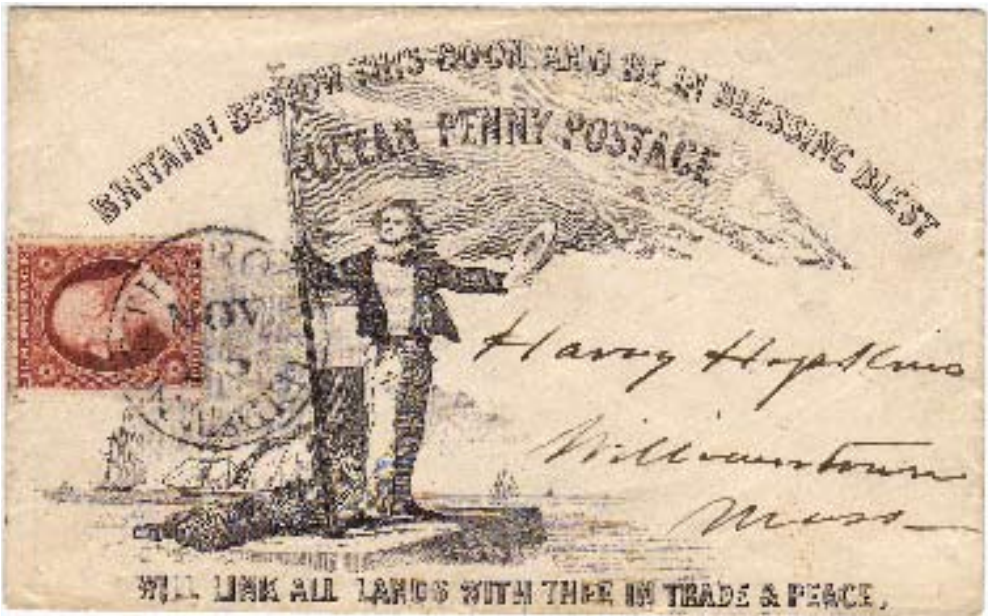


Figure 5. Another creation of Valentine of Dundee, mailed in the U.S. in the late 1850s. The perforated 3¢ 1851 stamp is postmarked North Brookfield, Massachusetts. The legend expresses the expected benefits of inexpensive international postage.

with thee in trade & peace.” Mailbags from India, China, Australia, Africa and America are spread at the feet of a sailor (the prototypical Jack Tar) who holds aloft the staff of a Union Jack. Again, there’s a steamship (along with several sailing vessels) in the background.

Propaganda Covers Created in the U.S.

Having established the British background, we now turn to propaganda covers that were created in the United States. These are most frequently collected by topic. I have been collecting postally-used pre-1870 U.S. propaganda covers for almost 40 years. My experience over that time suggests that the covers fall roughly into 15 or 20 different thematic categories. Any subject-based categorization of covers is arbitrary and arguable, but the following categories (in alphabetical order) are what I've arrived at: anti-conscription; anti-post office monopoly; anti-slavery; Civil War patriotics; free trade; land reform; mail carriage via Panama or Nicaragua; ocean penny post; overland mail; peace; political campaigns and related political causes; religion; temperance, universal brotherhood and Valentine's day. Examples illustrating some of these topics are presented herewith.

The cover in Figure 6 shows one of the best-known U.S. propaganda designs, advocating cheap inland and ocean mail postage. This overall design was copyrighted in 1851 by Barnabas Bates, secretary of the N.Y. Cheap Postage Association. The envelopes were printed by a local New York printer. This example is franked with an imperforate 3¢ 1851 stamp postmarked Havana, New York, on March 25 [1854].



Figure 6. One of the best-known U.S. propaganda designs, Barnabas Bates' envelope advocating cheap inland and ocean mail postage. The Bates design derives from British antecedents (see Figures 4 and 5), but it has its own distinctively American elements and was printed in New York City. The visual symbols of postal reform on the Bates cover were subsequently repeated on the 1869 pictorial stamps.

The Bates design clearly derives from British antecedents (see Figures 4 and 5), but it has its own distinctively American elements, most notably the eagle and shield, and the petition to Congress: "We ask of Congress cheap inland and ocean postage." This envelope design was very popular with the public. Its three major pictorial elements came to symbolize the cause of postal reform in the United States. These icons were subsequently adopted by the U.S. Post Office and incorporated into the 1869 pictorial stamps—the steam locomotive on the 3¢ stamp, the eagle and shield on the 10¢ and 30¢ stamps, and (on the 12¢ stamp) the ubiquitous side-wheel ocean steamship.

Figure 7 illustrates a propaganda cover advocating a trans-continental railroad. Franked with a perforated 10¢ 1857 stamp, this cover was posted at San Francisco in 1859,



Figure 7. Propaganda cover advocating a U.S. trans-continental railroad. Franked with a perforated 10¢ 1857 stamp, this cover was posted at San Francisco in 1859, a decade before its cause came to fruition.



Figure 8. Highly detailed overall illustrated design advocating temperance. This cover is franked with a perforated 3¢ 1857 stamp. The postmark is unclear, but the engraver's signature at bottom reads "Lith by R. Burger & Co., Detroit."

a decade before its cause came to be realized. The inscription "PER OVERLAND MAIL STAGE, VIA LOS ANGELES, IN HOPE OF THE..." is placed directly above an illustration of a steam locomotive with passenger cars.

Figure 8 is a cover with an extraordinary overall-illustrated design advocating the cause of temperance. On the left side of the envelope are arrayed elements of sin. The "licensed free & easy saloon" offers temptation, drunkenness and dissolution. At upper left a volcano erupts the words "no hope." The road in front of the saloon is labeled "the wages of sin is death" and leads to a devil hidden in an adjacent cave. At center and right, healthy citi-



Figure 9. The propaganda message on this cover is the printed collar surrounding the 3¢ 1857 stamp. The collar legend reads “FREE TRADE / NO MONOPOLY.”



Figure 10. Confederate cover, franked with a 10¢ blue stamp and posted in 1864, with a printed legend promoting the free trade.

zens gather under a tree whose trunk and branches extol the benefits of temperance: purity, righteousness, love, peace and domestic happiness. This cover is franked with a perforated 3¢ 1857 stamp. The postmark is unclear, but the engraver’s signature at bottom reads “Lith by R. Burger & Co., Detroit.”

The propaganda message on the cover in Figure 9 is contained in the printed collar that surrounds the 3¢ 1857 stamp. The collar legend reads “FREE TRADE / NO MONOPOLY!” In the 1850s, many northern states sought heavy tariffs on imported foreign

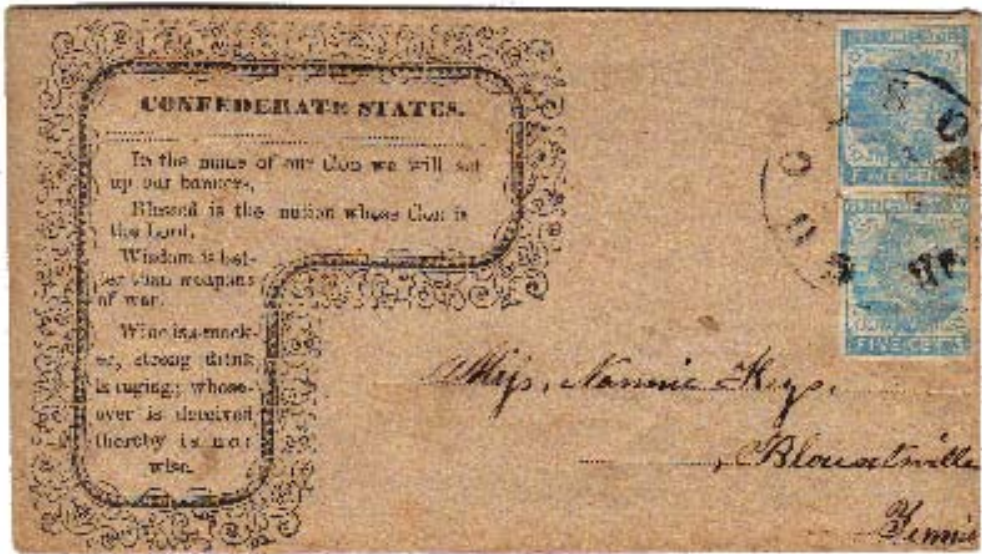


Figure 11. Confederate propaganda cover promoting three causes that were widely advocated during the middle of the 19th century: religiosity, peace and temperance. Franked with two 5¢ Jefferson Davis stamps, this cover was posted in Goodson, Virginia (now Bristol), probably in 1862.

goods, so that the agrarian southern states would be compelled to buy goods from the more industrialized north. Southern states (and northern supporters such as the sender of this cover) favored free trade, which enabled southern planters to sell their produce to England in exchange for less expensive British manufactured goods. Along with slavery, disagreement over free trade was one of the unreconcilable issues that culminated in the Civil War.

Figure 10 is a Confederate cover, franked with a 10¢ blue stamp and posted in 1864, with a printed legend promoting the same sentiments: “SOUTHERN CONFEDERACY: FREE TRADE with all the world.” This cover was posted in Savannah, Georgia, and sent to Marietta.

Figure 11 is another Confederate propaganda cover, promoting three different themes. As we have seen, combined advocacy like this was fairly common in British propaganda covers. It is much scarcer on U.S. covers. The legend on the Figure 11 cover paraphrases biblical verses promoting belief in God (“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord”), opposition to war (“Wisdom is better than weapons of war”) and temperance (“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise”). Franked with two 5¢ Jefferson Davis stamps (Scott 6), this cover was posted in Goodson, Virginia (now Bristol), probably in 1862.

Civil War Patriotic Covers

The most frequently encountered examples of U.S. propaganda covers are Civil War patriotic covers and political campaign covers. Both categories are sufficiently familiar that they don’t require much elaboration. There are thousands of designs to choose from. We present here a few selected examples.

Figure 12 is a colorful overall illustrated Civil War patriotic design, showing Union troops at a military camp. This is one of many striking multi-color Civil War patriotic envelopes created by Charles Magnus of New York City. The Attleboro, Massachusetts, 1865 town-mark and matching patriotic shield killer on the 3¢ 1861 stamp add to the cover’s visual appeal.



Figure 12. Colorful overall illustrated Civil War patriotic design, showing Union troops at a military camp. This is one of many striking Civil War patriotic envelopes created by Charles Magnus of New York City.



Figure 13. Dual-portrait political campaign prepared for the election of 1864. General McClellan, the candidate of the Democratic Party, lost to incumbent Abraham Lincoln. George Pendleton, the Democratic vice presidential candidate, hailed from Cincinnati, where this cover, franked with a 3¢ 1861 stamp, was posted.

Figure 13 illustrates a dual-portrait political campaign cover (picturing the Presidential and the Vice-Presidential candidate) prepared for the election of 1864. General McClellan, the candidate of the Democratic Party, lost to Abraham Lincoln, the incumbent. Franked with a 3¢ 1861 stamp, this cover was posted at Cincinnati (hometown of George Pendleton, the Democratic vice presidential candidate) in June, 1864. Tiny type under Mc-



Figure 14. Campaign cover used during the bitterly-contested Presidential campaign of 1856. The 3¢ 1851 stamp has been pasted directly over John Fremont's portrait, presumably reflecting the sender's anti-Fremont views.

Clellan's name indicates the engraving on this envelope was created by "L. Prang & Co., Boston."

Figure 14 pictures an unusual campaign cover used during the bitterly-contested Presidential campaign of 1856. The 3¢ 1851 stamp has been pasted directly over John Fremont's portrait, presumably reflecting the sender's anti-Fremont views. So here we have a propaganda envelope enhanced by an additional propaganda statement made by the placement of the stamp.

The 1856 presidential election was one of the most bitter elections ever held in the U.S., as various factions vied to win votes and advocate their causes. Sectional animosity developed over the question of slavery. It was a three-way election. The newly-established Republican party selected Fremont as its presidential candidate, running on an anti-slavery, anti-Southern and moralistic platform. Millard Fillmore was selected as Presidential candidate of the Know-Nothing party (American party), the remnants of the Whig party, which had fragmented over the issue of slavery.

In the event, the Democrat candidate, James Buchanan, won the election on a pro-union platform (with all of the slave states and several border states supporting him). Many voters were concerned that if Fremont became President it would split the Union. James Milgram's definitive book *Presidential Campaign Illustrated Envelopes and Letter Paper 1840-1872*, discusses the fascinating complexity of the 1856 presidential campaign.

Non-printed propaganda covers

Printed propaganda covers are the most frequently encountered, but there are other categories of covers on which the propaganda statement is made by other means. Figure 15 shows another form of individually created propaganda cover. This is a hand-painted cover, franked with a 3¢ 1861 stamp. The illustration and its captions oppose the cause of military conscription. In 1863, the U.S. government instituted a military draft. This resulted in major riots in New York City and elsewhere. The illustration on the Figure 15 cover shows a young man walking, his possessions in a back pack, with the manuscript inscriptions "Going to Canada" and "You don't draft me." The enclosed letter is headed "Camp



Figure 15. Anti-draft propaganda cover. On this hand-painted cover, franked with a 3¢ 1861 stamp, the illustration and captions oppose the cause of military conscription. The draft had been instituted just weeks before this cover was created in 1863.



Figure 16. The Philadelphia local stamp on this cover qualifies as a propaganda statement opposing post office monopoly. The stamp pictures a Blood's messenger leaping over the Merchant's Exchange Building, which housed the U.S. post office. The clear implication is that the Blood private local mail service was superior to the U.S. post office.

near Tennallytown April 4th 1863” and the cover is postmarked Tennallytown D.C. APR 6. The letter has wonderful contents concerning the draft, states that “drafted men are sent to the front” and makes comments about desertion.

The cover in Figure 16 is an unusual type of anti-post-office monopoly cover, in

that the propaganda statement is made by the stamp itself. On the folded letter-sheet is a privately-printed Philadelphia Dispatch Post adhesive stamp that was surcharged in manuscript "D. O. B. & Co." by D. O. Blood & Co. after Blood purchased the Philadelphia Dispatch Post operations. The stamp paid postage to the Philadelphia post office, where it was postmarked September 22, 1845. The stamp pictures a Blood's messenger leaping over the Merchant's Exchange Building, which housed the U.S. post office in Philadelphia. The clear implication is that the Blood private local mail service was superior to the U.S. post office. In these early days, private mail-carrying companies competed aggressively with the U.S. post office. Eventually, the private carriage of mail was curtailed through restrictive laws and regulations. The final blow came in 1863, when Congress passed a bill declaring that all the streets of a city or town were post roads, on which competition with the post office was forbidden.

On the cover in Figure 17 the propaganda statement is made by an advertising handstamp. This is a mail-route propaganda cover, with an oval hand-stamp containing the



Figure 17. Mail-route propaganda cover, with the propaganda statement made by the advertising handstamp: "VIA NICARAGUA IN ADVANCE OF THE MAILS."

wording "VIA NICARAGUA IN ADVANCE OF THE MAILS." This cover was handed to a private mail service in San Francisco, which arranged for it to be carried by steamer to Nicaragua, across Nicaragua to the Atlantic side and by steamer up to New York, where the cover finally entered the U.S. mails for carriage on to Virginia. The private San Francisco mail handler used this handstamp to make the statement that his coast-to-coast service was a speedier and more reliable alternative to the government mails.

On the cover in Figure 18, the propaganda statement is actually made by the government postmark. This is a most unusual. This folded letter-sheet, dated 1819, bears an ordinary-looking circular datestamp that reads KENNEBUNK MS. FEB 26. The state designation "MS" is actually a political propaganda statement protesting the separation of the District of Maine from Massachusetts.

Maine was politically attached to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts from colonial times up to March, 1820, when it finally became a separate state. There never existed a town by the name Kennebunk in Massachusetts; it was always in the District of Maine. From the late 1700s, agitators attempted to separate the District of Maine from Massachusetts, with



Figure 18. Stampless folded letter sheet, dated 1819, with circular datestamp reading KENNEBUNK MS. FEB 26. The state designation “MS” is actually a political propaganda statement, protesting the separation of the District of Maine from Massachusetts.

special separation conventions held, commencing in Falmouth, Maine, in May of 1786.

Most of the inhabitants of Kennebunk (a village located in the town of Wells, District of Maine) did not want the expense of supporting a new government and felt close economic ties to Massachusetts. Repeated separation efforts were made over the next 30 years, but the town consistently voted against separation. In May 1819, concern that separation would soon succeed caused the citizens of Kennebunk to petition the legislature of New Hampshire, requesting annexation, but that request was doomed to failure. By act of Congress, Maine became an independent state on March 15, 1820. I wrote a detailed article on this subject in *Chronicle* 88, November 1975, pages 202-206.

Figure 19 shows another instance where the propaganda statement is made by the postmark. This is an 1844 stampless folded letter from Newark Valley, New York, addressed to Binghamton. The wonderfully ornate oval postmark, with two kissing doves and entwined hearts, was used by the local postmaster around Valentine’s Day. These particular handstamps were available for purchase by postmasters and were sometimes used as a substitute for a manuscript town-mark or a plain circular handstamped town-mark.

Greatest U.S. Propaganda Cover?

Figure 20 is in my opinion the greatest U.S. propaganda cover. Here the propaganda statement represents an early expression of a powerful message, whose fulfillment would ultimately result in the formation of the United States of America.

This is a folded letter addressed by Stephen Moylan to William Bartlett of Beverly (Massachusetts). The letter was written on Christmas day, 1775, from Cambridge, Massachusetts, headquarters for the Continental Army during the siege of Boston (19 April 1775 to 17 March 1776, at which time the British army evacuated). The Battle of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775, had brought militia forces from all over New England to the area surrounding Boston. These men remained and their numbers grew. The new



Figure 19. 1844 stampless folded letter from Newark Valley, New York, addressed to Binghamton. The wonderfully ornate oval postmark, with two kissing doves and entwined hearts, was used by the local postmaster around Valentine's Day.



Figure 20. Folded letter written on Christmas day, 1775, from Cambridge, Massachusetts, securing supplies for George Washington's army, then forming. Endorsed "on the Service of the United Colonies."

Continental Army under General George Washington (who arrived 3 July 1775 to take command) had surrounded Boston to prevent the movement of the British army garrisoned there. The siege of Boston was the opening phase of the Revolutionary War. It played an important role in the creation of the Continental Army and in promoting the unity of the 13 colonies. Commenting on the siege, British General Gage wrote of his surprise at the

number of rebels who had surrounded Boston: "the rebels are not the despicable rabble too many have supposed them to be....In all their wars against the French they never showed such conduct, attention, perseverance, as they do now."

Stephen Moylan (1733-1811), who was born in Ireland and was one of the few Roman Catholic generals in the American Revolution, was a successful Philadelphia merchant. He was among the earliest to enlist in the revolutionary cause and hurried to join the insipient Continental Army stationed in Boston in 1775. He was placed in the commissary department, in which capacity he was operating when he wrote the letter in Figure 20. In March of 1776, Washington made him one of his aides, and in June he was named Quartermaster-General by Congress. He was at Valley Forge in the winter of 1777-78, on the Hudson River in 1779 and in Connecticut in 1780. He accompanied General Wayne on the exhibition to Bull's Ferry and subsequently was in the Southern campaign. He retired at the close of the war as a brigadier general. He was a zealous patriot desiring to unite the colonies and separate from England.

The simple seven words penned by Moylan on the address leaf of this folded letter (which was carried privately) are powerful, poetic and prophetic: "on the Service of the United Colonies." ■

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