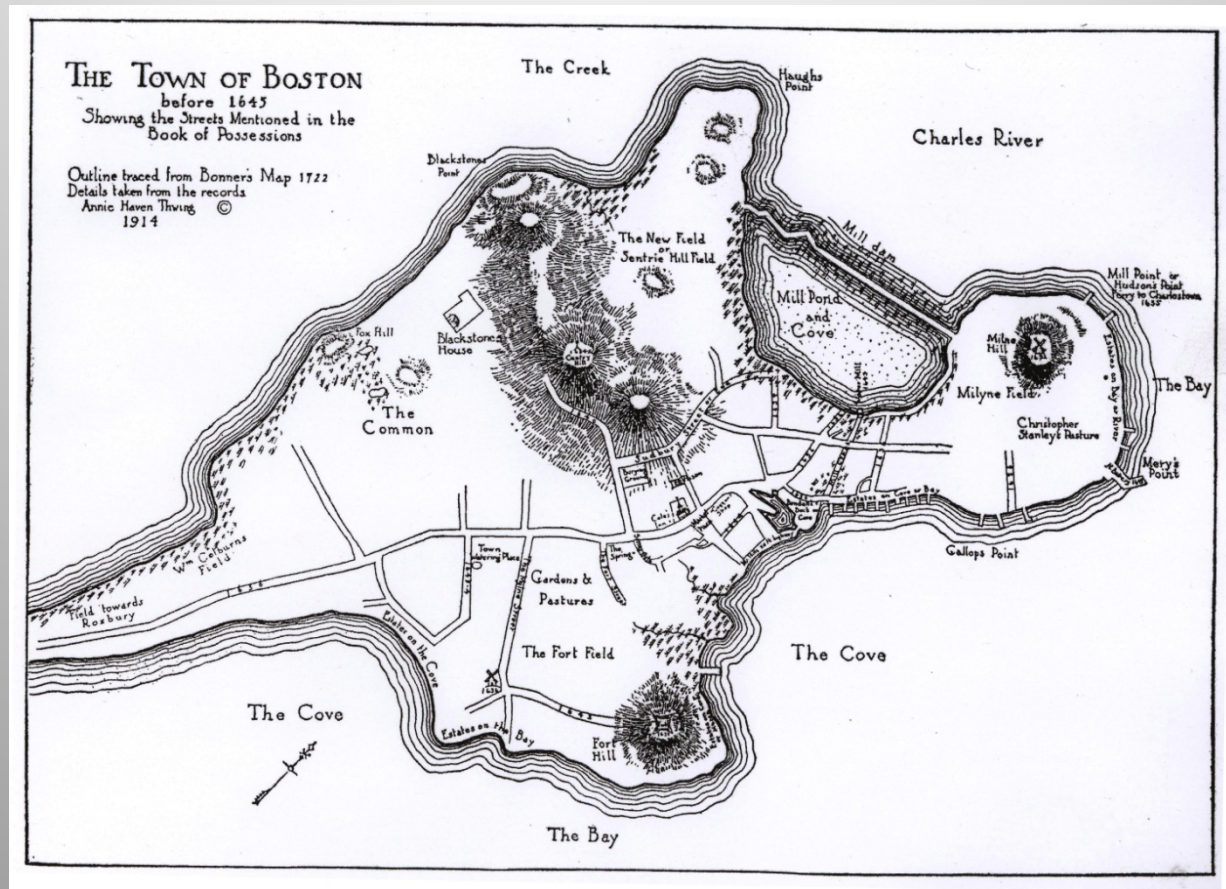


Colonial Boston Postal History



New York Collectors Club
September 11, 2013

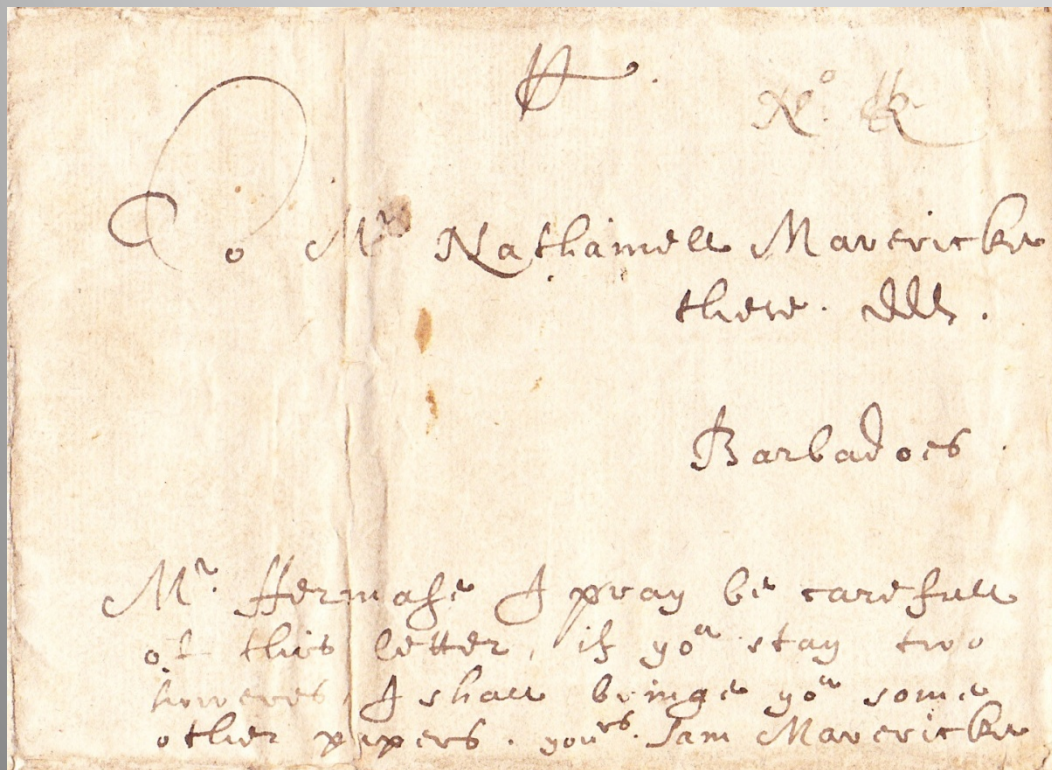
Richard Fairbanks, 1st Boston PM

- Born in Boston, England c.1600; died in Boston, Mass. 1667
- Immigrated to America in 1633
- Fairbanks' Inn appointed by the Massachusetts General Court, Nov. 6, 1639
- Post limited to overseas letters
- At this time, Boston had one church and 100 houses

“For preventing the miscarriage of letters; and it is ordered, that notice be given to Richard Fairbanks, his house in Boston is the place appointed for all letters which are brought from beyond the seas, or are to be sent thither, are to be brought unto; and he is to take care that they be delivered or sent according to their directions; and he is allowed for every such letter a 1d., and must answer all miscarriages through his own neglect in this kind; providing that no man shall be compelled to bring his letters thither, except he please.”

The Earliest Letter Datelined at Boston in Private Hands

- Datelined April 15, 1651
- Sent to Barbados from Samuel Maverick to his son, Nathaniel
- May have been sent *via* the Fairbanks Post



“Mr. Ferncase (?), I pray be
carefull of this letter, if you
stay two morrow, I shall bring
you some other papers.
yours, Samuel Mavericke”

Efforts to Establish a Domestic Post

- Monthly service between NY and Boston estab. by NY Gov. Lovelace in 1672
 - Short-lived effort
 - Dutch re-occupied NY 1673
 - King Philip's War 1675-78
- On Jan. 6, 1674, the Mass. General Court referred to payment for post riders



“...it is ordered by this Court & the authority thereof, that from henceforth every person so sent upon the publicke service of the country shallbe allowed by the Treasurer after the rate of three pence a mile to the place to which he is sent, in money, as full satisfaction for the expence of horse & Man;”

John Hayward, 2nd Second Boston PM

- By the mid-1670s, no one appears to have taken Fairbanks' place and the Court was concerned about lost letters

“...many times the Letters imported are throwne upon the Exchg, so that who will, may take them up; no person (without some satisfaction) being willing to trouble their houses therewith; so that Letters of great moment are frequently Lost.”

- Hayward appointed on June 1, 1677 to *“take in and convey letters according to direction”*
- Responsible for both sea and domestic post

The letter below was possibly sent by Hayward's post



Boston to Pistataqua (Portsmouth) NH - Nov. 3, 1685

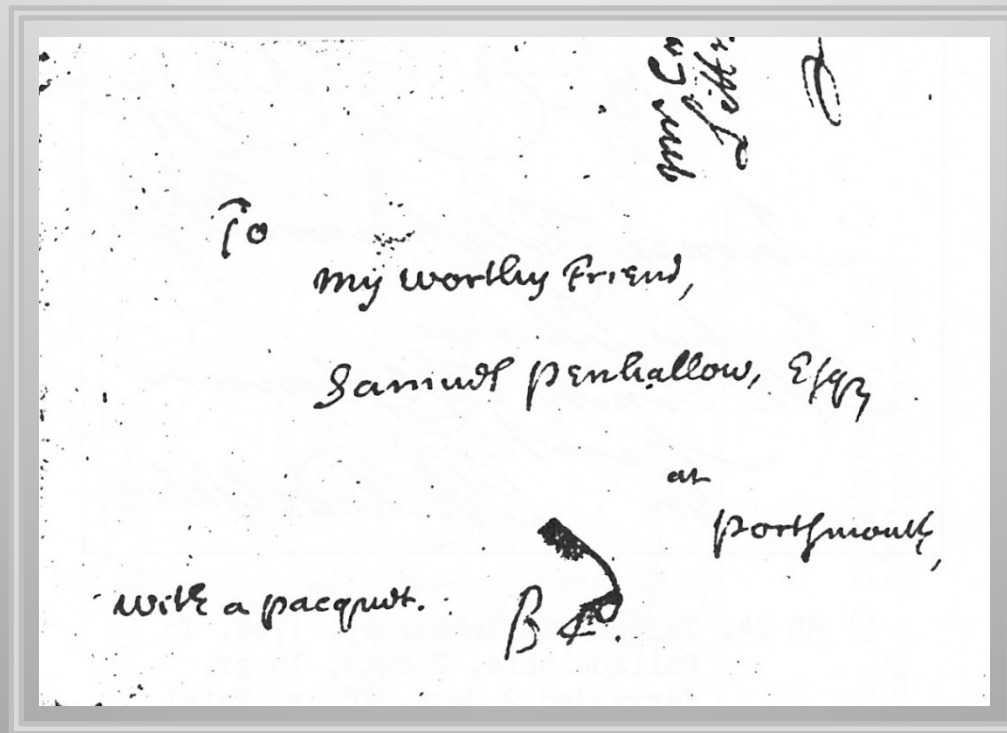
- Sent by John Campbell, future Boston PM

The First American Post Office

- Feb. 17, 1692 – Thomas Neale granted a patent (license) for 20 years to establish a post office in America
- 1692 – Neale appoints Andrew Hamilton Deputy PMG
- 1692-94 – Assemblies of NY, VA, PA, MA, NH and CT pass acts for colonial and inter-colonial postal service
- 1693 – Hamilton appoints Duncan Campbell Boston/MA PM
 - A “General Letter Office” was established in Boston and authorized the PM to
 - Convey public letters free of charge
 - Receive sea letters
 - Transmit letters within and beyond the province at specific rates
 - Mark letters with the date of arrival (apparently neglected)
 - 1702 – Duncan Campbell dies; succeeded by his son (brother?) John
 - 1704 – First Boston postmarks recorded

First Boston Postal Markings

- 1704 – handwritten postmarks, “*B*” or “*B^O*”, with “*Sh*” if a ship letter



Boston to Portsmouth, NH – Dec. 14, 1704

Rated 4d, as a single letter sent to Portsmouth, NH

The Earliest American Free Frank in Private Hands

The Cover

John Campbell, Boston PM (1702-1718) “*ffrank/J:C*”

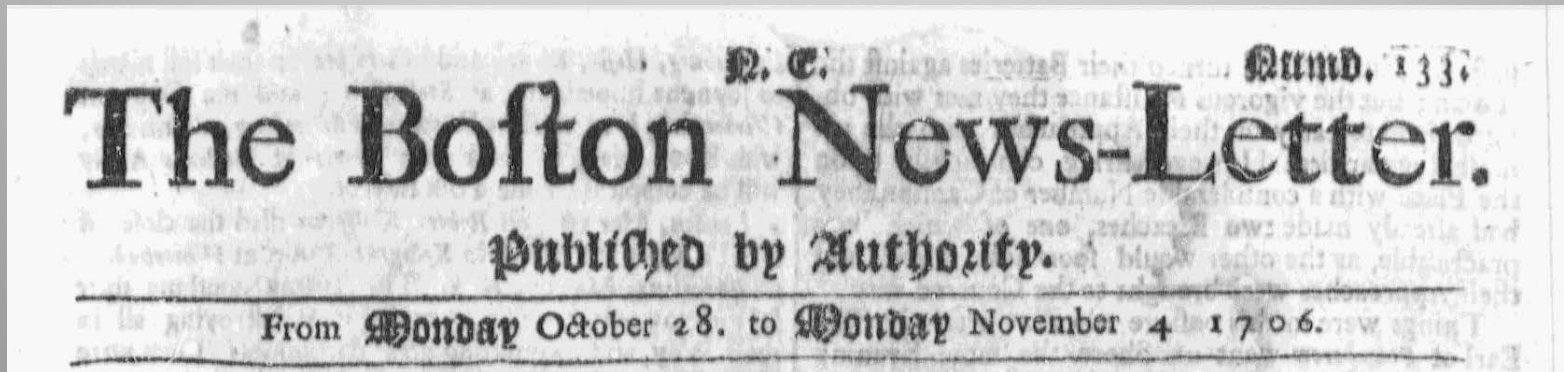


Boston to Bristol, Mass. – June 9, 1707

The Earliest American Free Frank in Private Hands

The Story

- PM John Campbell also published the Boston News-Letter, the first continuing newspaper in the Colonies.



The Earliest American Free Frank in Private Hands

The Story

- In the issue of Oct. 28 – Nov. 4, 1706, an article noted the capture of a thief and described a silver tankard in his possession.

THERE is a certain Person, That calls himself by the Name of *John Foster*, of low Stature, pretty fresh coloured, Aged about 28 years, Says, he is a Welsh-man, but proves to be an Irish man, That in all probability has Stole Two Horses, and a large old Silver Tankard will hold near Two quarts, has no mark discernable, but the Work-mans Name that made it; which said *Foster* is committed to Prison at *Bristol*, by the Honorable Col. *Nathanael Byfield* Esq. One of Her Majesties Justices of the Peace, upon Suspicion of Stealing; and the said Justice sent this, Relation to be put into the Publick Print, That the true Owner may have his own, & the Fellow Justice done him,

The Earliest American Free Frank in Private Hands

The Story

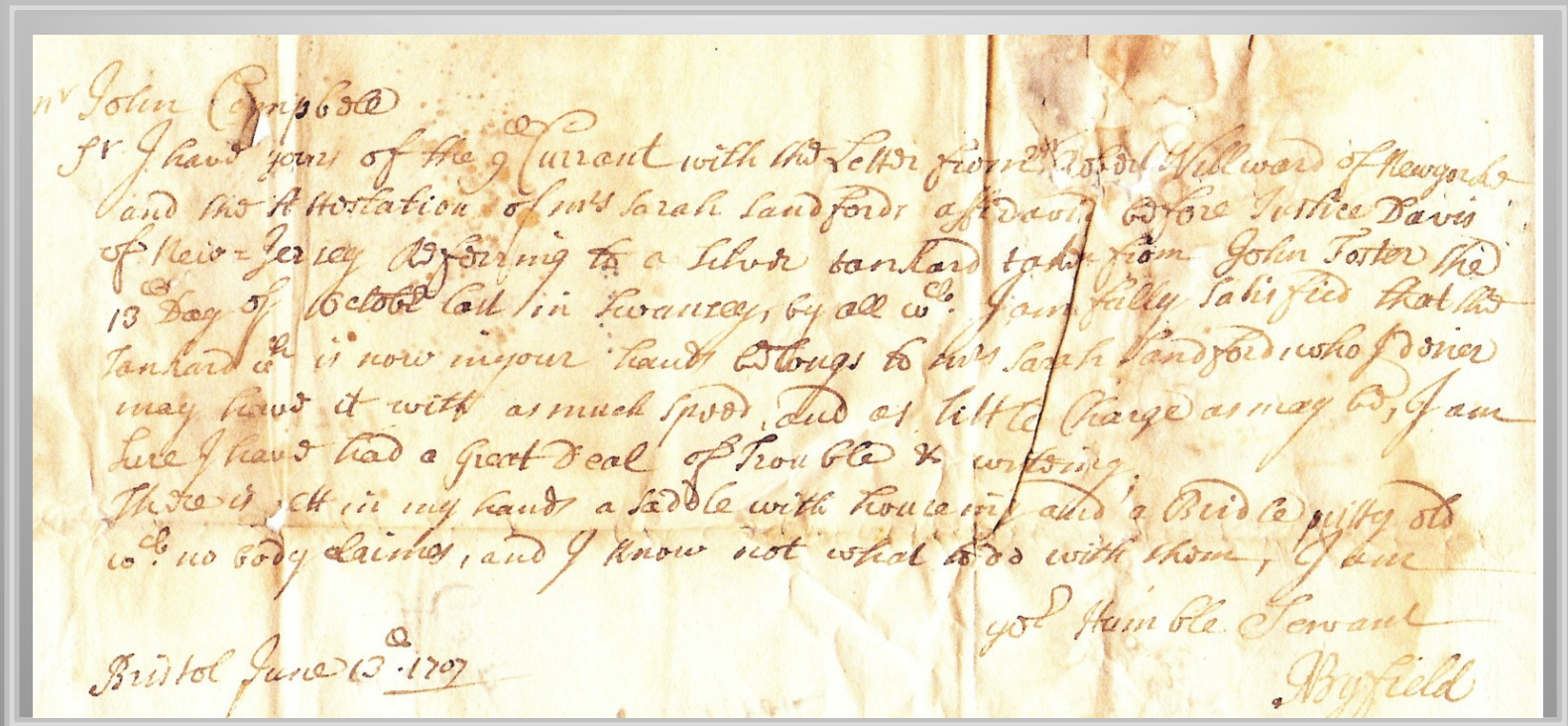
- Campbell received a letter from Robert Milward, lawyer for Mrs. Sarah Sanford in New Jersey, claiming that Mrs. Sanford owned the tankard and providing additional details.
- The above letter from Milward, datelined May 30, 1707, was sent to Campbell, who noted that it “*came to me last post.*”



The Earliest American Free Frank in Private Hands

The Story

- Campbell's letter requested Nathaniel Byfield, the judge who sentenced the thief, to determine whether the details provided by Milward were sufficient.



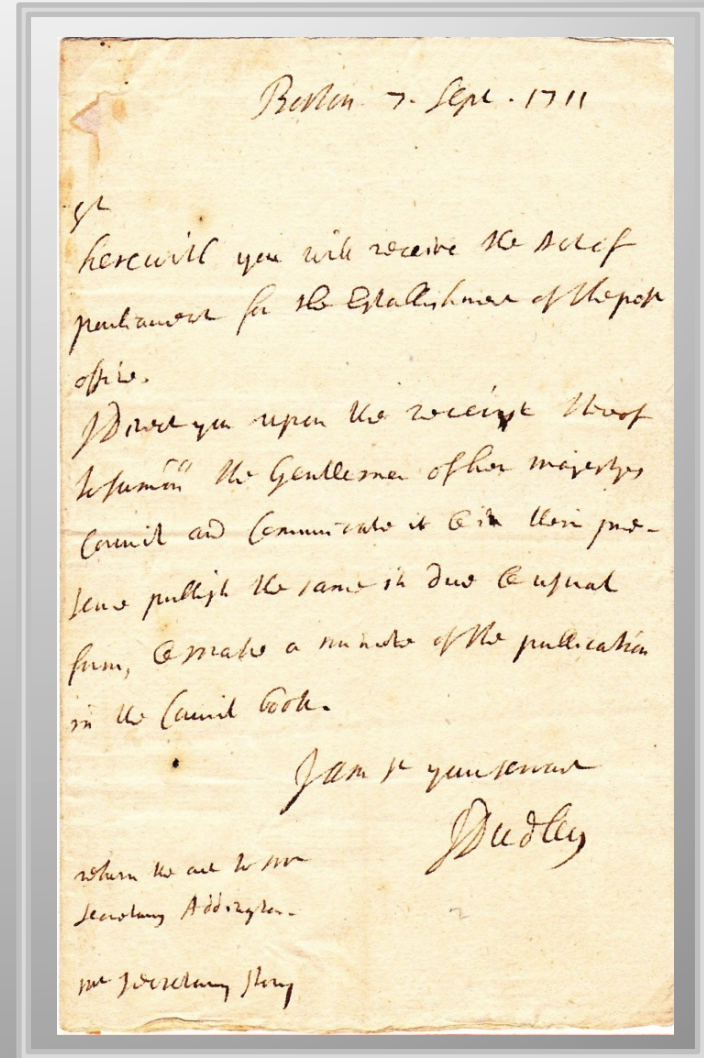
- Byfield wrote inside Campbell's letter and returned it, likely by private messenger. He accepted the evidence from Milward, and authorized the tankard's return to Mrs. Sanford.

The Queen Anne Act

- Officially, the British PO Act of 1710, eff. June 1, 1711
- The British Governmental now responsible for all colonial post offices.
- Created a “chief letter office” at New York.
- Official rates were in sterling (shillings and pence) based on distance traveled
 - Transatlantic fee - 1 shilling
 - Zoned rates: up to 60 miles; 60-100 miles
 - For greater distances, rates were stated as from specific place A to specific place B

The Queen Anne Act

- The letter accompanying a copy of “*the Act of Parliament for the establishment of the post office*”
- Dated Sept. 7, 1711, and sent from Mass. and NH Governor Joseph Dudley to NH Royal Council secretary Charles Story for communication to the other members of the Council.



The Queen Anne Act

- At first, marked rates were in British sterling (shillings and pence)

Postal Rates in Shillings and Pence Sterling

| <u>Distance</u> | <u>Single Sheet</u> | <u>Double Sheet</u> | <u>Triple Sheet</u> |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 0-60 miles | 4d | 8d | 12d |
| 60-100 miles | 6d | 1 sh | 1 sh, 6d |
| Boston to Connecticut or Maine | 9d | 1 sh, 6d | 2 sh, 3d |
| Boston to New York | 1 sh | 2 sh | 3 sh |
| Boston to Philadelphia | 1 sh, 9d | 3 sh, 6d | 5 sh, 3d |

- However, sterling was very scarce in the colonies; soon we see letters marked in either weights of coined silver, or in provincial paper currency.
- While the weight of coined silver had a fixed relationship with sterling, paper currency was subject to inflation.

Paper Currency and Inflation

- Massachusetts began issuing paper currency in 1690, to pay for a colonial war between New England and New France.
- Because silver coinage was also scarce, by the early 1720s, the rates marked on letters sent within New England were in local currency, called Massachusetts Old Tenor (MOT).
 - Over time, inflation devalued that currency, and postal rates stated in MOT had to be increased to reflect their true value in sterling.

Local Currency Inflation

Postal Rates in Massachusetts Old Tenor

| <u>Period</u> | <u>Inflation Factor</u> | <u>Up to 60 miles*</u> | <u>60-100 miles*</u> | <u>Boston to Conn./Maine*</u> |
|---------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1723-1731 | 2.3 | 9d M.O.T | 1 sh, 2d | 1 sh, 9d |
| 1735-1748 | 3.5 | 1 sh, 2d | 1 sh, 9d | 2 sh, 8d |
| 1748-1750 | 7.0 | 2 sh. 4d | 3 sh, 6d | 5 sh, 3d |
| 1750-1751 | 7.5 | 2 sh, 6d | 3 sh, 9d | 5 sh, 8d |
| 1752-1754 | 9.0 | 3 sh | 4 sh, 6d | 6 sh, 9d |

* single sheet rates

Local Currency Inflation (2.3x)

- In 1723, inflation was first noted in postal rates



London to Boston - Oct. 23, 1723

Rated 8d sterling + 1d ship fee as a double letter sent up to 60 miles = 1sh, 9d MOT

Local Currency Inflation (3.5x)

- From 1742-48, the inflation factor was 3.5x .



Boston to Newport, RI - Sept. 10, 1744

Rated 4d sterling as a single letter sent up to 60 miles = 1sh, 2d MOT

Local Currency Inflation (7.0x)

- In early 1748, the inflation factor had risen to 7x .



Boston to New London, Conn. - Aug. 28, 1749

Rated 9d sterling as a single letter sent to Connecticut = 5sh, 4d MOT

Local Currency Inflation (7.5x)

- By mid-1752, the inflation factor had risen to 7.5x .

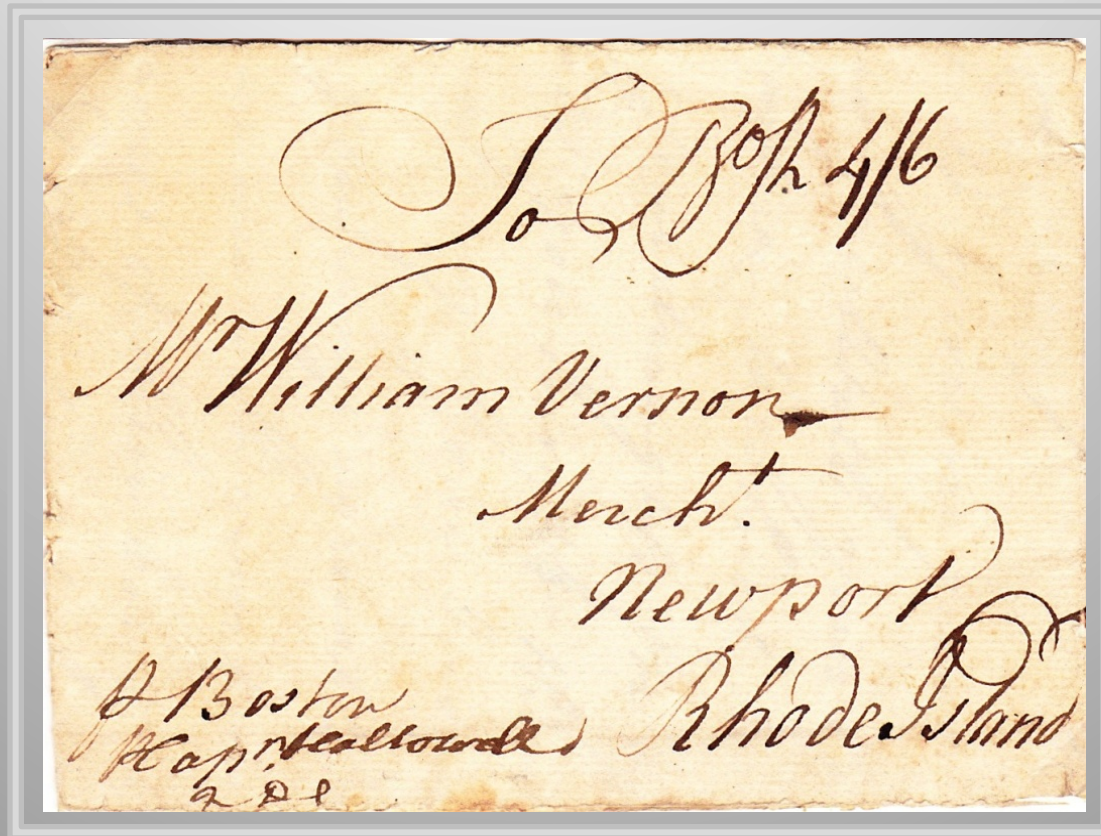


Boston to Newport, RI - Nov. 19, 1750

Rated 12d sterling as a triple letter sent up to 60 miles = 7sh, 6d MOT

Local Currency Inflation (9.0x)

- From 1752-1754, the inflation peaked at 9x sterling.



London via Boston to Newport, RI - Apr. 10, 1752

Rated 4d sterling + 2d ship fee as a single letter sent up to 60 miles = 4sh, 6d MOT

Letters Sent Outside New England

- Rating letters in M.O.T. sent **within New England** was standard practice.
- NY, PA, MD and VA had their own local currencies. Rating letters sent to these Colonies in M.O.T. would have created confusion.
 - Letters sent outside New England were rated in pennyweight (dwt) and grains (gr) of coined silver.
 - Unlike paper currency, coined silver had a constant relationship over time with British sterling.
 - 1dwt (24gn) of coined silver = 3d sterling; 8gn = 1d

Letters Sent Outside New England

Postal Rates in Pennyweight and Grains

| <u>Distance</u> | <u>Single Sheet</u> | <u>Double Sheet</u> | <u>Triple Sheet</u> |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 0-60 miles | 1 dwt, 8 gn | 2 dwt, 16 gn | 4 dwt |
| 60-100 miles | 2 dwt | 4 dwt | 6 dwt |
| Boston to Connecticut or Maine | 3 dwt | 6 dwt | 9 dwt |
| Boston to New York | 4 dwt | 8 dwt | 12 dwt |
| Boston to Philadelphia | 7 dwt | 14 dwt | 21 dwt |

Letters Sent Outside New England



London *via* Boston to Philadelphia, Pa - Apr. 23, 1743
Rated 21dwt, 16gn as a triple ship letter sent to Philadelphia

The Franklin-Hunter Directions

- In 1753, Benjamin Franklin and William Hunter were appointed Deputy Postmasters General for the Colonies.
- The following year, trying to eliminate the confusion caused by multiple local currencies, they instructed postmasters to rate all letters in pennyweight and grains.
- While this directive was generally followed, letters were often rated as well in the local currency of the addressee.
 - The practice of ‘translating’ the official rate into the local currency of the addressee continued until the Act of Congress of 1792 establishing the U.S. Post Office.

The Franklin-Hunter Directions



Boston to Salisbury, Mass. - Apr. 28, 1755

Rated 1dwt, 8gn as a single letter sent up to 60 miles)

The Franklin-Hunter Directions



Boston to New York – Sept. 24, 1764

Rated 4dwt as a single letter sent to New York City,
and 1sh, 8d in local NY currency

The Act of King George III

- Effective Oct. 10, 1765
- Extended the zoned rates of Queen Anne beyond 100 miles and reduced them somewhat.
 - American port to port ship letter rate was 4d
 - Ship letters addressed beyond port of entry, 2d

The Act of King George III

From the Boston Evening-Post, Aug. 5, 1765

POST-OFFICE, London, June 8. 1765.

PUBLIC Notice is hereby given, That by an Act passed the last session of parliament, "For altering certain Rates of Postage, and for amending, explaining, and enlarging several provisions in the Act of the Ninth of Queen Anne, & other Acts relating to the Post-Office;" It is, amongst other Things, Enacted.

That Letters between London and any Port within the British Dominions in America, (in which all his Majesty's West-India Islands are included) shall pay Single one Shilling, Double two Shillings, Treble three Shillings, the Ounce four Shillings.

That Letters, by Sea, from any one Port to any other Port within the said Dominions, shall pay Single four Pence, Double eight Pence, Treble one Shilling, the Ounce one Shilling and four Pence.

That Letters, by Land, to or from any Chief Post-Office in America, from or to any other part thereof not exceeding sixty miles from such Chief Post-Office, or from the Office where such Letters, not passing through a Chief Office, may be put in, shall pay Single four Pence, Double eight Pence, Treble one Shilling, the Ounce one Shilling and four Pence. And being upwards of Sixty, and not exceeding one Hundred Miles within the said Dominions, shall pay Single six Pence, Double one Shilling, Treble one Shilling and six Pence, the Ounce two Shillings. And being upwards of one Hundred, and not exceeding two hundred Miles within the said Dominions, shall pay Single eight Pence, Double one Shilling and four Pence, Treble two Shillings, the Ounce two Shillings and eight Pence. And for every Distance not exceeding one Hundred Miles above such two Hundred, and for every such further distance within the said Dominions, shall pay Single two Pence, Double four Pence, Treble six Pence, the Ounce eight Pence.

That no Vessel shall be permitted to break Bulk, or make Entry in any Port within the British Dominions, where Ports are or may be established, until all Letters on board are delivered to the Post-master of such Port (he paying the Bringer one Penny for each Letter) to be forwarded according to their respective Directions, except such as are excepted by the Act the Ninth of Queen Anne, and such as may be brought by Vessel's liable to Quarantine, which last are to be delivered to the Person superintending the Quarantine, for proper care, before they are forwarded by the Post. And that all Masters, Mariners, Passengers, &c. neglecting to deliver the Letters as aforesaid, shall, for every neglect, forfeit 20 Pounds.

That the Postmaster shall take for every Letter brought by such Vessel, from any Place within his Delivery, one Penny above the Penny paid to the Master or other Person for the same.

That any Officer of the Post-Office secreting or destroying any Letter, Bag or Mail of Letters, containing any Bank Note, or other Paper, Writing, or Order for the payment of money; or stealing out of any Letter any such Bank Note, Bill, &c. on conviction, shall suffer Death as a Felon.

That any person robbing a mail, in any place or any manner whatsoever, although it may not appear that any one was put in fear by such Robbery, shall, on conviction, suffer Death as a Felon.

That any Officer of the Post-Office, entrusted to take in Letters, and receive the Postage thereof, embezzling the money received or destroying the Letters; or any Officer advancing the Rates on Letters, and not accounting for the advanced Postage, shall, on conviction, be deemed guilty of Felony.

That all rates of Letters, and all Forfeitures, mentioned in this Act, shall be paid in Sterling Money of Great-Britain.

All other Regulations, Rates of Postage, Pains, Penalties, and Forfeitures before-mentioned, to commence from the Tenth Day of October next.

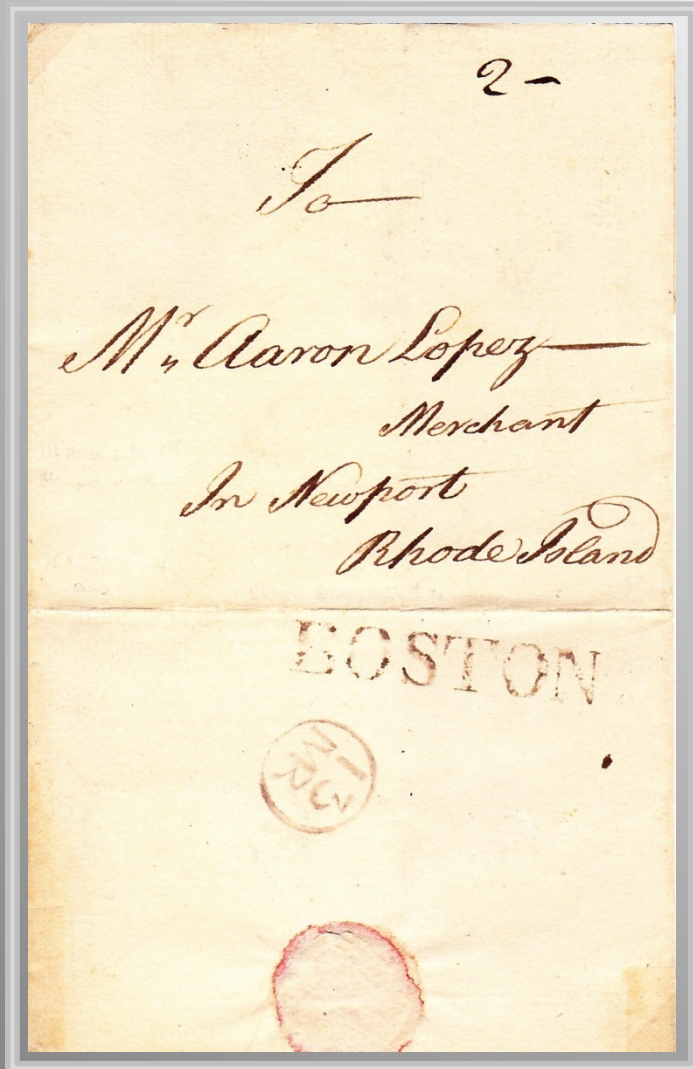
The Act of King George III

Postal Rates in Pennyweights and Grains

| <u>Distance</u> | <u>Single Sheet</u> | <u>Double Sheet</u> | <u>Triple Sheet</u> |
|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 0-60 miles | 1 dwt, 8gn | 2 dwt, 16 gn | 4 dwt |
| 60-100 miles | 2dwt | 4 dwt | 6 dwt |
| 100-200 miles | 2dwt, 16gn | 5dwt, 8gn | 8 dwt |
| 200-300 miles | 3dwt, 8gn | 6dwt, 16gn | 10 dwt |
| 300-400 miles | 4dwt | 8dwt | 12 dwt |

The Act of King George III

Boston Hand-stamped Postal Markings



- The **first Boston straight-line** hand stamp was introduced in early 1769
- The first ink color used was **violet**. This ink was used for only 6 months.

Boston to Newport, R.I., Mar.. 13, 1769

Rated 2dwt as a single sheet letter sent up to 60 miles.

The Act of King George III

Boston Postal Markings

- The ink was then changed to **red** and eventually **magenta** for better visibility.

Boston to Philadelphia, Pa., Oct. 11, 1773

Rated 4dwt as a single sheet letter sent
300-400 miles.



The Act of King George III

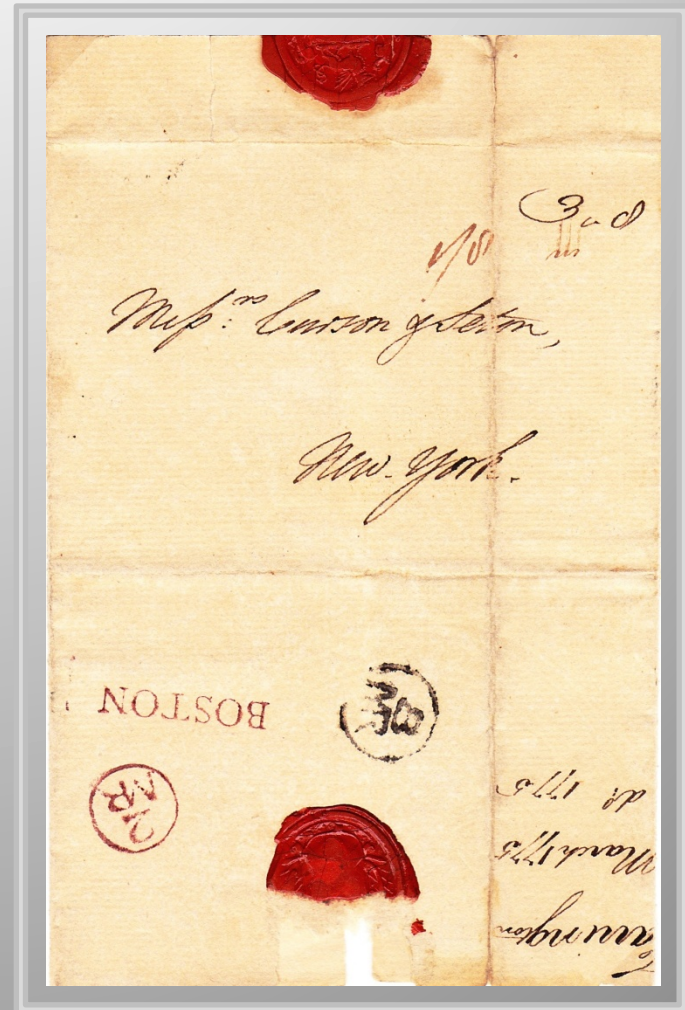
Boston Postal Markings

- A smaller hand stamp, and the last used by the British Colonial Post Office at Boston, was used from Feb. to June 1775.

Boston to New York, Mar. 2, 1775

Rated 3dwt, 8gn as a single sheet letter
sent 200-300 miles.

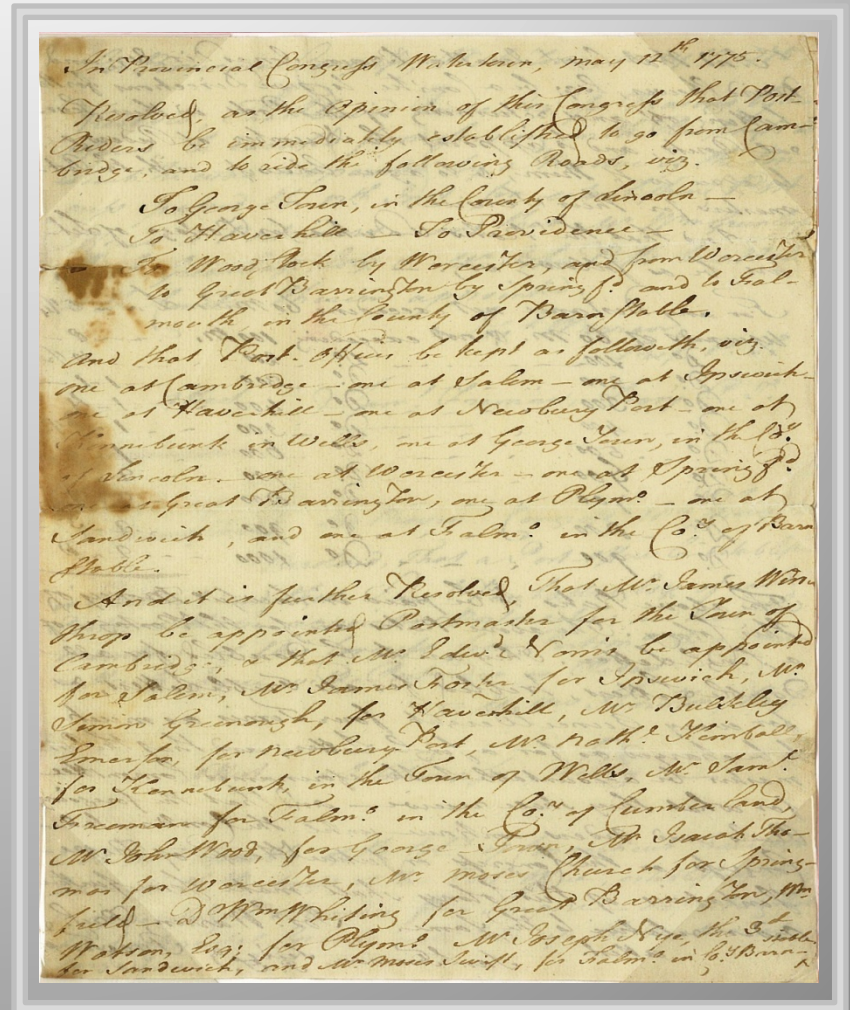
Also rated 1sh, 8p in local NY currency



The Massachusetts Provisional Post

Removal of the Boston PO to Cambridge

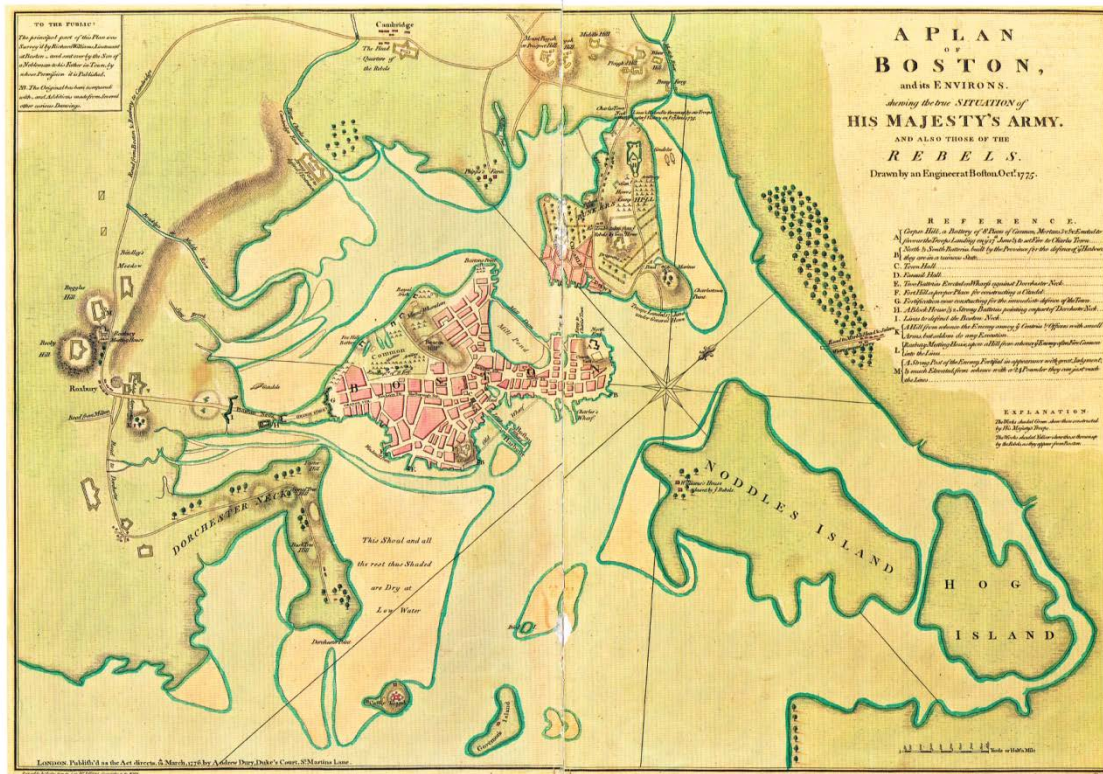
- The British voided the provincial charter and the independence of the provincial government.
- An Independent Congress was formed in Mass. in Oct. 1774 to exercise control over the rebellious parts of the province.
- Having moved to Watertown to prevent capture, this Congress established a Provincial Post on May 12, 1775
 - Main post office at Cambridge
 - 13 additional post offices
 - New rates



The only manuscript copy in private hands

The Start of the Revolution and the Siege of Boston

- The Battles at Lexington and Concord took place on April 19, 1775.
- After Lexington and Concord, Americans surrounded Boston to interrupt supplies for the British naval fleet in the harbor, and the Siege of Boston began.
- The Siege was relatively uneventful until early 1776.
- On January 25, 1776, Col. Henry Knox arrived outside Boston after a 200+ mile trip from Fort Ticonderoga with 60 tons of cannon and other armament captured from the British.
 - Described as “*one of the most stupendous feats of logistics*” of the war.



Map 1. The "situation" at Boston as drawn by a British army engineer in October 1775.

- On the night of March 2, the Americans distracted the British with a bombardment from the Cambridge side of Boston.
- Meanwhile, 2000 men dragged the captured cannon up Dorchester Heights and forced the British to Evacuate Boston on March 17-18, 1776.

- Meanwhile, 2000 men dragged the captured cannon up Dorchester Heights and forced the British to Evacuate Boston on March 17-18, 1776.

Dear Chauncy.

On Board the James and William Trans-
port about 5 miles from Boston
10th March 1776. King Road

On the 2^d Instant at 1/2 past 11. o'clock at night the Rebels began a cannonade on the Town from some new works that they had thrown up on the Cambridge side and at the same time they opened a Bomb Battery, and throwed several Shells into the Town. It happened to be on the Line Guard leading to Roxborough, and at the same time they began to cannonade us, and likewise opened another Bomb Battery ~~opened~~ which they continued to play upon us all night, without doing us any kind of hurt, except a few Houses in the Town disfigured by the Shot and Shells, this sort of work they continued from time to time, but on the Monday night of the 4th inst. in particular, when a general cannonade began on all sides, and Shells thrown from all quarters, this continued the whole night, but to our great surprise on the Tuesday morning the enemy had thrown up such works on Dorchester hills, as could not possibly ^{have} been done by the opinion of every body with less than Ten Thousand Men, we then found our selves so insuladed all round, that a disposition was made for attacking those Hills on the Tuesday evening, four Reg^{ts}. of Barbett and fell down to the Castle William in order to land there, but it blowing so very hard, that one of the Transports got on shore, the Grenadiers and Light Companies were to have gone over in the flat Boats and to have been sustained by some Regiments, the Remainder of the Troops were at the same time to have gone and attacked the works at Roxborough, but from the badness of the weather, and the violent Gale of Wind, it was found impracticable, and therefore the scheme was abolished, which consequently determined the General

- British Capt. George Elliot recorded the events of the last few days of the Siege of Boston:

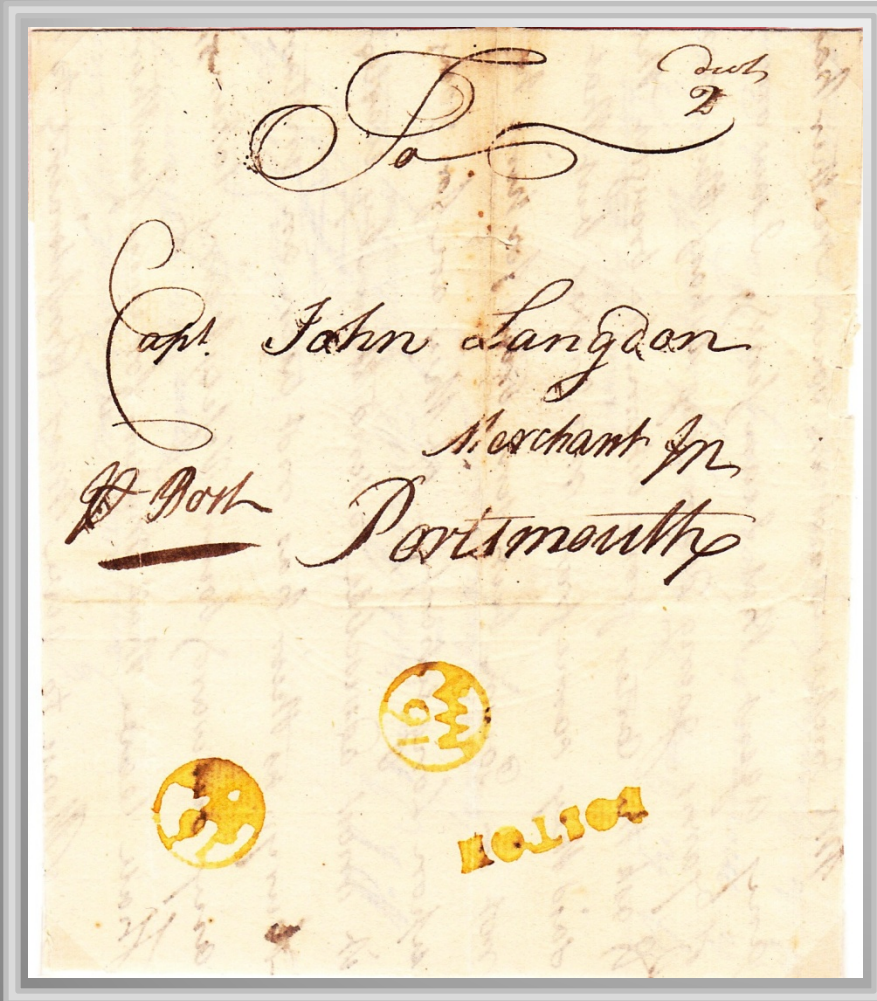
“To our great surprise... the enemy had thrown up such works on the Dorchester Hill as could not probably have been done... with less than Ten Thousand Men”

“We then found ourselves so insuladed all round, that a disposition was made for attacking those hills.”

“From the badness of weather... the scheme was abolished” forcing “the General to abandon the town.”

The Boston Post Office is Reopened

The Earliest Known Letter



- The British were forced out of Boston on March 17, 1776 (Evacuation Day)
- This is believed to be the earliest hand stamp from the re-opened Boston Post Office.
- One of two such hand stamps in yellow/gold.

Boston to Portsmouth, NH - May 16, 1776
Rated 2dwt as a single letter sent 60-100 mi.