



The Massachusetts Spy

The Journal of the Massachusetts Postal Research Society

Volume 12

Fall 2011

No. 129



ISSN 1539-2228

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Opened by the Commander of the La Hogue

by Mark Schwartz

Until the second quarter of the 19th century, essentially all letters traveling across the Atlantic were carried by private ships. Arrival of these ships at their intended ports was not a certainty. Most of these letters were of a commercial nature, and duplicate and even tripli-

cate letters were often sent on different ships to help ensure that the letter reached the addressee without undue delay. What happened to the letters carried aboard ships that did not reach their ports, or took much longer than was expected, is not always clear, since there is generally little or no record of those letters.

This article tells the story of one of those rare letters for which we do have a record, which had been sent on a ship that was captured during the War of 1812.

The letter in Fig. 1 was datelined in Glasgow, Scotland on December 12, 1812, rated 11d and sent by

James Thomson to a forwarder in Liverpool. The letter was eventually destined for William Steele in New York. Thomson, a Scottish-born American citizen had managed the European end

of his dry goods business, and had been trying to discharge debts of \$20-30,000 before returning to the U.S. In the letter Thomson states that "The President's speech has not been published, but it is understood that its intents are known; & that they are very hostile. It is

also believed that the proposals made by Admiral Warren

have been rejected by the President." British Admiral John Borlase Warren, who had assumed command of the Halifax, Leeward Island and

(Continued on page 2)



(Fig. 1) - Letter from James Thomson in Glasgow sent via Liverpool and Boston to New York

Dedicated to the study of Massachusetts postal history, from Colonial to the Modern Era.
<http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/statepostalhistory/massachusetts.html>

Jamaica stations in August 1812 to direct overall naval strategy, had also been tasked to negotiate an end to the war with the American Secretary of State, James Monroe. However, in late October, Monroe informed Warren that the President would not accept any terms that did not immediately end impressments and resolve the other issues for which the United States had gone to war.

The letter was initially sent to Liverpool in the hope that they could find a ship to take it to New York or other nearby port. The ship *Henry*, B. Gardiner, master, and carrying a cargo of salt, crockery and glassware, sailed from Liverpool for Boston around March 13, 1813. In late April the *Henry* had the misfortune to run into the 74-gun vessel, *La Hogue*. Captained by Thomas Bladen Capel, the *La Hogue* had been plying New England waters during the spring of 1813, capturing and burning a number of ships. On April 28, the *La Hogue* captured the *Henry*, and took it to the Vice Admiralty (Prize) Court at Halifax.

The *Henry* was cleared by the Prize Court on June 15 and sailed for Boston. Per the Boston Daily Ad-

vertiser of June 24, 1813, the *Henry* arrived at Boston the previous day, five days from Halifax, and just under three months after she had left Liverpool.

Perhaps to explain the delay, it appears that the master of the *Henry* endorsed the letter “*opened by the commander of the La Hogue*” at the top.

The Boston CDS is not completely clear, but appears to have been struck on June 25 or 26. Since it was rates 17c for a single letter sent 150-300 miles (act of Congress, March 2, 1799), no ship fee was added. Perhaps it was brought to the post office privately. The captain was likely busy with reports of his capture and eventual release from the Prize Court at Halifax. Possibly, the postmaster chose not to add the ship fee due to the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the ship and its cargo (including this letter). While we do know quite a bit about the trials of this letter’s voyage to Boston, some details still elude us.

¹ Letters with such endorsements are quite rare based on the author’s experience and on communications with other philatelists who study early maritime mail. There is one other such letter endorsed by the captain in the author’s collection, a letter opened by French naval officers in 1798 during the undeclared war with France, sometimes termed the “quasi-war.”)

Massachusetts Postal Research Society Annual Meeting Annual meeting – Boxboro, May 6, 2012

The Massachusetts Postal Research Society will hold it’s annual meeting during the Philatelic Show hosted by the Northeast Federation of Stamp Clubs in Boxboro, MA.

A room has been reserved for 11AM Sunday, May 6, 2012. Check the show brochure or watch for signs posted on Sunday for the exact room location.

This would be a great time to bring a philatelic friend to the meeting and introduce them to the group!

This year’s Philatelic Show will be held on May 4 to May 6, 2012 at the Boxborough Holiday Inn (Interstate 495 & Route 111). Show hours will be

11am to 6pm on Friday, May 4

10am to 5pm on Saturday, May 5

10am to 4pm on Sunday May 6.

There is normally a small admission fee for the show. Parking is free and the show is handicap accessible

A Very Merry (Postal) Christmas and a Happy New Year

By Shawn Pease



Santa arrives by snowshoe and toboggan in 1907, bearing baskets of toys and Christmas trees to young brothers Benjamin and Wesley in Newton Center, MA.

Franked with the popular Capt. John Smith Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition stamp these postcards were cancelled at 6pm on 23 Dec, 1907 with a Brookline Station 7 line waiving stamp cancel.

The pair of postcards arrived together in the mailbox on Christmas Eve, just in time to wish a Merry Christmas to the 9 and 10 year old boys, who were no doubt stamp collectors! Newton Center 13 star waiving flag cancel shows the efficient overnight delivery!



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