

EARLY CONTRACT STEAMSHIP MAIL BETWEEN CHARLESTON, SAVANNAH & CUBA.

An Act of Congress of March 3, 1847 authorized the U.S. Post Office to subsidize steamers to carry correspondence between the east and Pacific coast ports of the United States via the West Indies and the isthmus of Panama, and to establish new (higher) postal rates to partially pay for this service. The first contract was awarded to the Charleston merchant Moses Cohen Mordecai, who operated a steamer between the two main southern ports of the Atlantic coast of the United States, Charleston & Savannah, and the capital of the island of Cuba, Havana. The steamer *Isabel* ran fairly regularly on this route every two weeks from October 1848 until the outbreak of the U.S. Civil War. A few other steamers were also used for this service and mail to and from the northeastern coast of the United States was transferred to the vessels of other coastal steamship lines.

This is a study of the mail handled by the first American steamers contracted by the U.S. Post Office to carry correspondence between the ports of Charleston (SC) & Savannah (GA), and Havana. This exhibit shows all the fifteen different markings used by these two southern post offices to identify this new type correspondence (steamship mail) in order to assess the proper postage. Also, all the known categories of mail are represented here. The period we deal with begins in October 1848 and ends with the start of the U.S. Civil War, which abruptly interrupted this service. No contract steamship mail postmarks are known from either Savannah or Charleston after the U.S. Civil War.

The two main references for this type of material are: 1) Wierenga, Theron. *United States Incoming Steamship Mail, 1847-1875*. Second Edition, U.S. Philatelic Classics Society, Inc., 2000., and 2) Kouri, Yamil H., Jr., & Wierenga Theron. "The HAVANA. Markings from Charleston and Savannah," *The Chronicle*. 199, Vol. 55, No. 3, pp. 221-230, August 2003; and 201, Vol. 56, No. 1, pp. 63-73, February 2004.

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1848 (Oct. 24). Havana to Portland, Maine via Savannah. First return trip of the steamer *Isabel*. Unpaid single-weight rate of 12½ cents. Erroneous use of the STEAM BOAT marking.

Earliest incoming contract steamship letter to the USA and earliest use of the HAVANA postmark.

October 1848 to June 30, 1851.

Cuba to the USA via Savannah

Single-weight letter
Printed matter

There are 18 recorded examples of the small HAVANA. postmark of Savannah, used between October 1848 and July 1859. Four copies are known in red (1848 to 1850) and the rest are in black (1854 to 1859). This was the first U.S. postal marking with the name of a foreign city.

1850. Havana to
St. Johnsbury,
Vermont. Unpaid
single-weight
letter.

Only recorded
example of the
Savannah cds
with the 12½ rate
on steamship
mail.



1850. Matanzas, Cuba
to Topsham, Maine.
Unpaid printed matter
rate of 6 cents.

There is one other
example of this rate from
Savannah.



October 1848 to June 30, 1851.

Cuba to the USA via Charleston

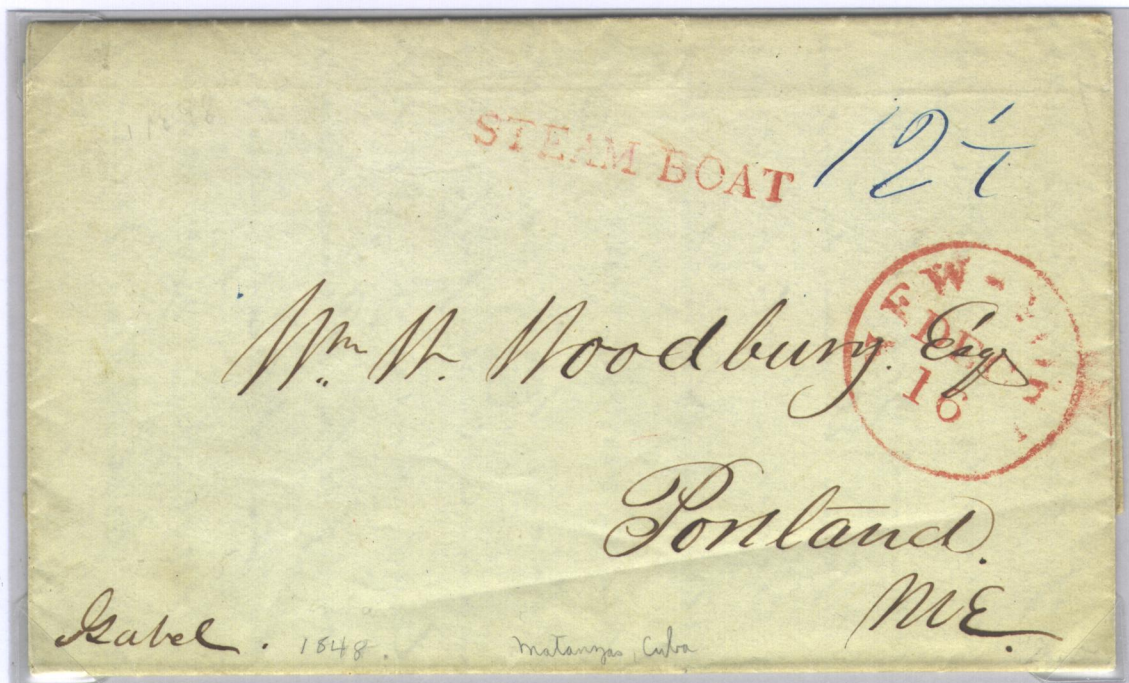
(Mail processed in New York)

Single-weight letters

Incoming mail was generally handled (rated, marked and sorted) by the postal clerks at either Savannah or Charleston, depending on the time available to make the connection to the north. On one occasion (fourth return trip of the steamer 'Isabel') there was no time to sort the mail bags which were processed by the New York post office.

1848. Matanzas, Cuba to Portland, Maine. Unpaid single-weight letter.

Only recorded use of the New York STEAM BOAT marking on this type of mail.



1848. New York to Cadiz, Spain, via Charleston and Havana. Initially dropped off as an unpaid single-weight letter at the New York post office, but held there until the sender paid the 12½ cents. Handled by the Empresa in Havana and charged 7 reales (vellon) in Spain. The yellow transit HABANA has only been recorded on a handful of covers.

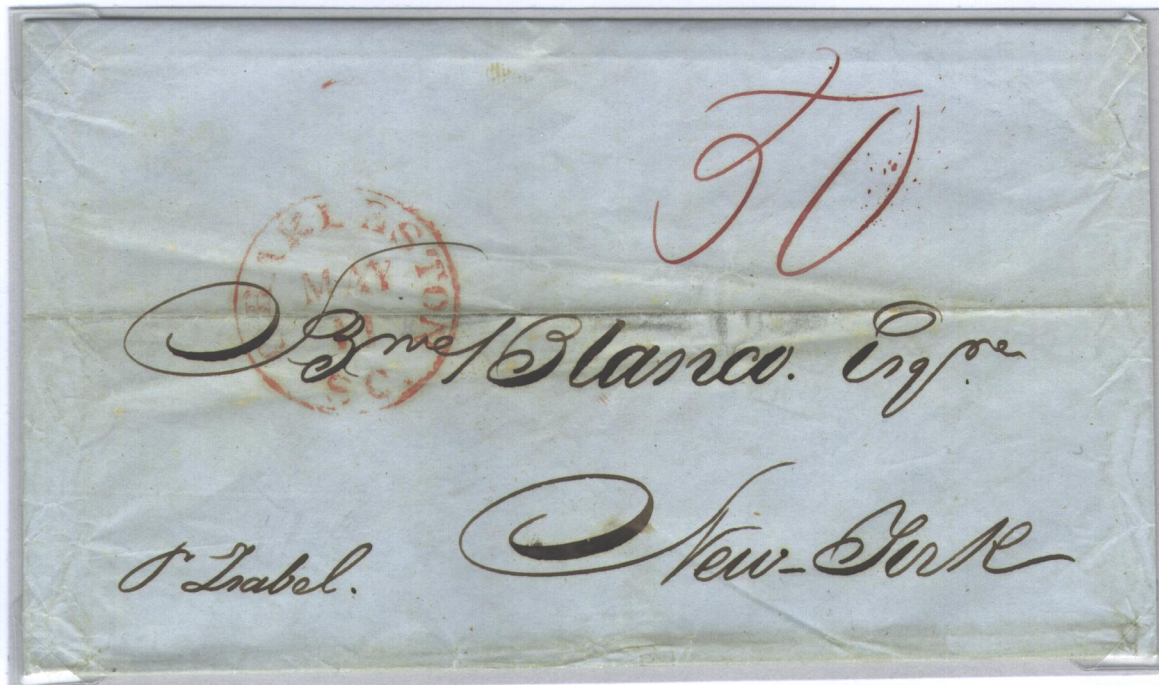
October 1848 to June 30, 1851.

Cuba to the USA via Charleston

Multiple-weight letters

Initially, Charleston simply applied the new postal rates and did not use any special postmarks on contract steamship mail. The rates during this period for regular correspondence, in ½ ounce increments: 12½, 25, 50, 75 (for single, double, triple, cuadruple-weight, etc.); and for printed matter 3 cents (prepaid), and 6 cents (unpaid).

1851. Havana
to Portland,
Maine. Unpaid
double-weight
letter.



1851. Havana
to New York.
Unpaid triple-
weight letter.

October 1848 to June 30, 1851.

To or from Cuba via Charleston

Single-weight letters
Printed matter

1848 (Oct. 31). Prepaid single-weight letter from Charleston to Havana. One real postage due in Havana.

Earliest recorded outgoing contract steamship mail cover, carried on the second southbound trip of the 'Isabel.'



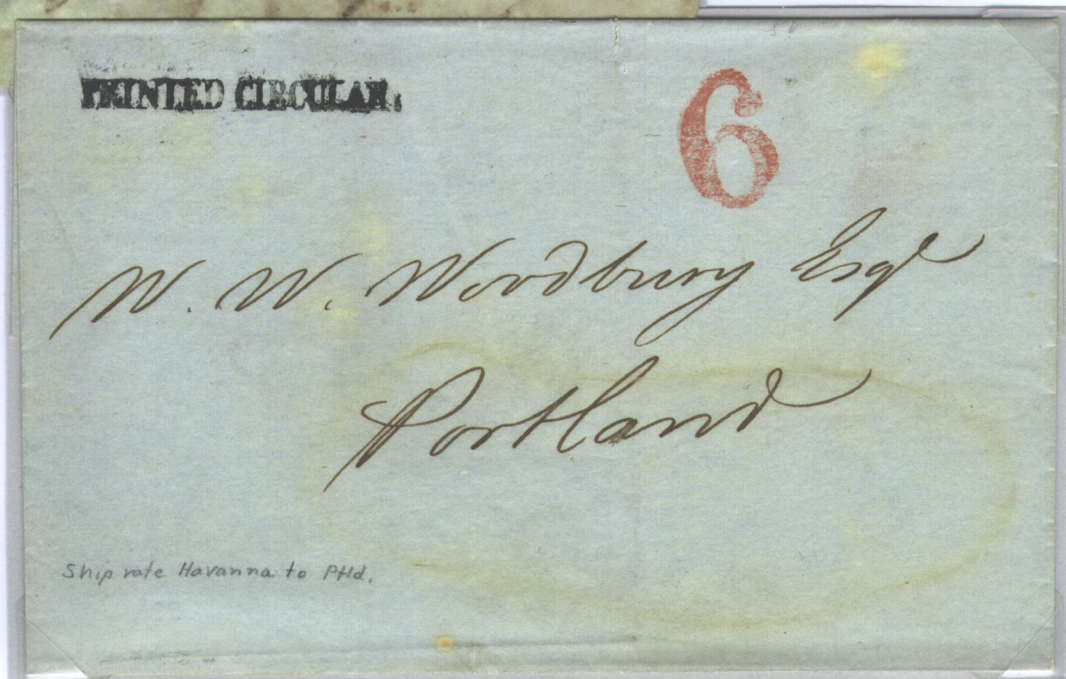
1848. New York to Cienfuegos, Cuba. It was privately carried to Charleston where the forwarding agents Cay & Aveilhe paid 12½ cents. One real postage due in Havana.

Only know use of the incoming ship mail handstamp 12 (small numerals) on outgoing contract steamship mail.



c1850. Havana to Portland, Maine. Unpaid printed matter rate of 6 cents.

There are about six reported examples of this marking on printed matter.



October 1848 to June 30, 1851.

USA to Cuba via Charleston

Single-weight letters

After the first few months of this line's operations outgoing mail was routinely prepaid at the place of origin. The contract steamship mail rate to and from Cuba was a 'flat' fee that did not add a surcharge for inland postage. The Cuban Post Office did not recognize prepayment of postage and charged letters from the USA one real per ¼ ounce.

1849. Prepaid single-weight letter from Troy, NY to Coliseo, Cuba. One real postage due in Havana.

Rare example of mail disinfected in Havana (vertical slit to the left of PAID).



1850. New York to Havana. Prepaid to Charleston with the route agent cds POTOMAC STEAM BOAT. Forwarded in Charleston and carried privately to Havana.

One of only three known covers with 1847 stamps to Cuba.



October 1848 to June 30, 1851.

Cuba to the USA via Charleston

Single-weight letters

Charleston started using rate handstamps to indicate postage due instead of manuscript notations in February 1849, but only for single-weight correspondence addressed to the USA.

1849. Havana to New York.
Unpaid single-weight letter.

One of two examples of the 12½ handstamp on contract steamship mail.



1851. Havana to Portland, Maine. Unpaid single-weight letter.

1851. Havana to Boston. Unpaid single-weight letter.



July 1, 1851 to 1861.

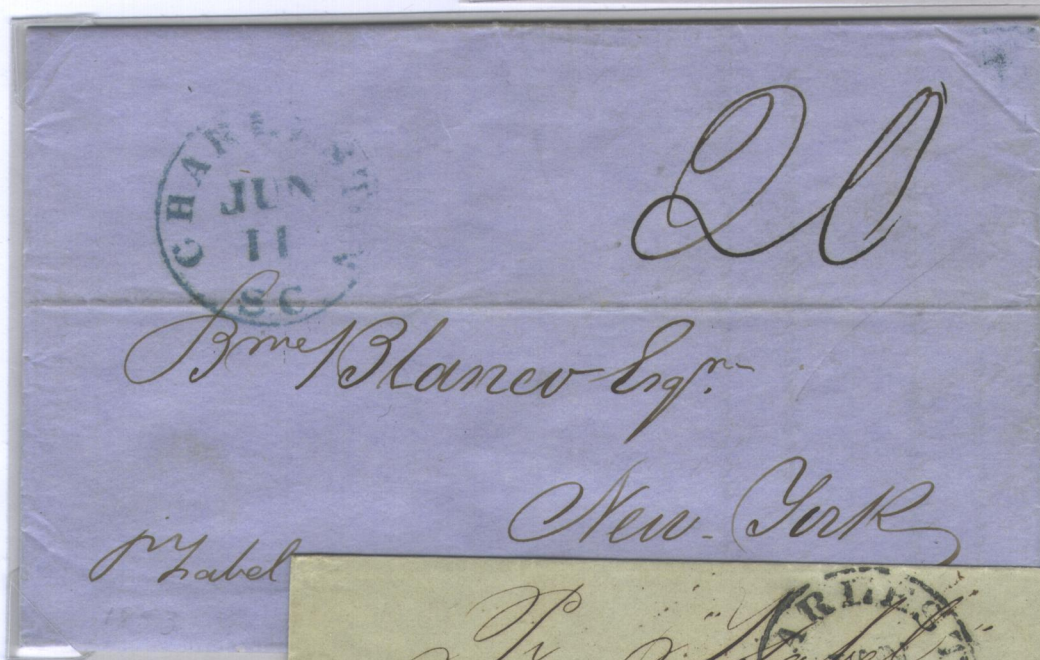
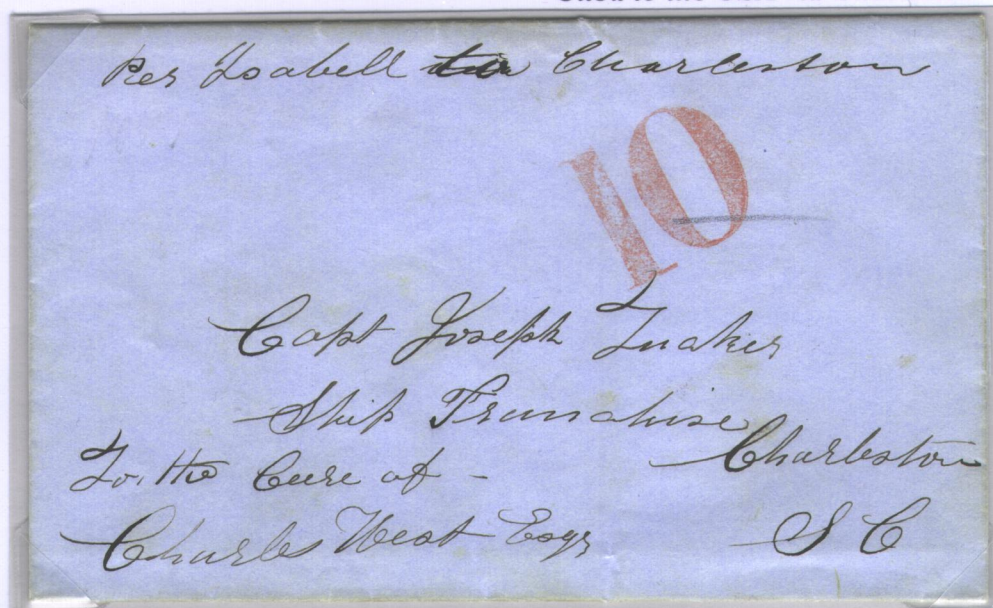
Single, double, and
triple-weight letters

Shortly after the rate change
Charleston improvised with
the use of generic handstamps
or manuscript markings.

1851 (July 17). Havana to
Charleston. Unpaid single-weight
letter.

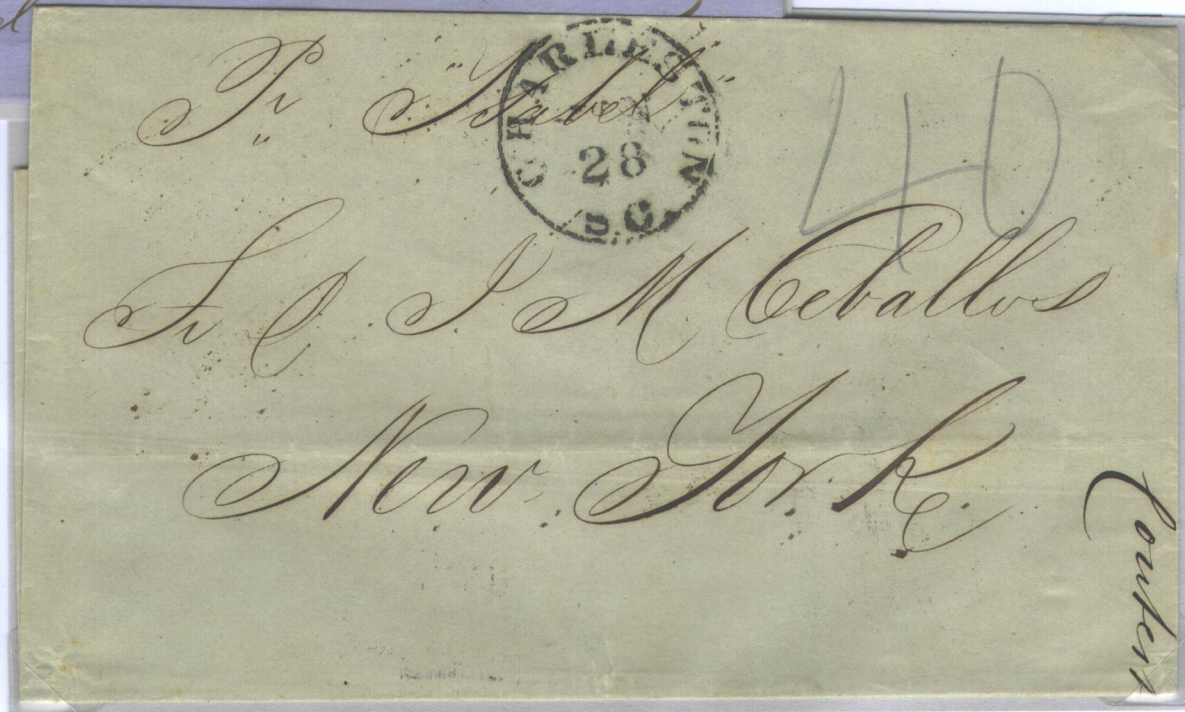
Earliest known use of the '10' on
contract steamship mail.

Cuba to the USA via Charleston



1853. Havana to New
York. Unpaid double-
weight letter.

1856. Havana to
New York. Unpaid
triple-weight letter.



July 1, 1851 to 1861.

Cuba to the USA and Europe via Charleston

Single-weight letters
forwarded in Havana

1854. Trinidad de Cuba, forwarded in Havana, to Lyon, France via Charleston and New York. Unpaid single-weight steamship letter to the US sent as an unpaid ship letter from New York to Le Havre (pre U.S.-France treaty). Evidently nobody paid the steamship fee from Cuba.



1851. Cardenas, Cuba, forwarded in Havana, to Portland, Maine. Unpaid single-weight letter.

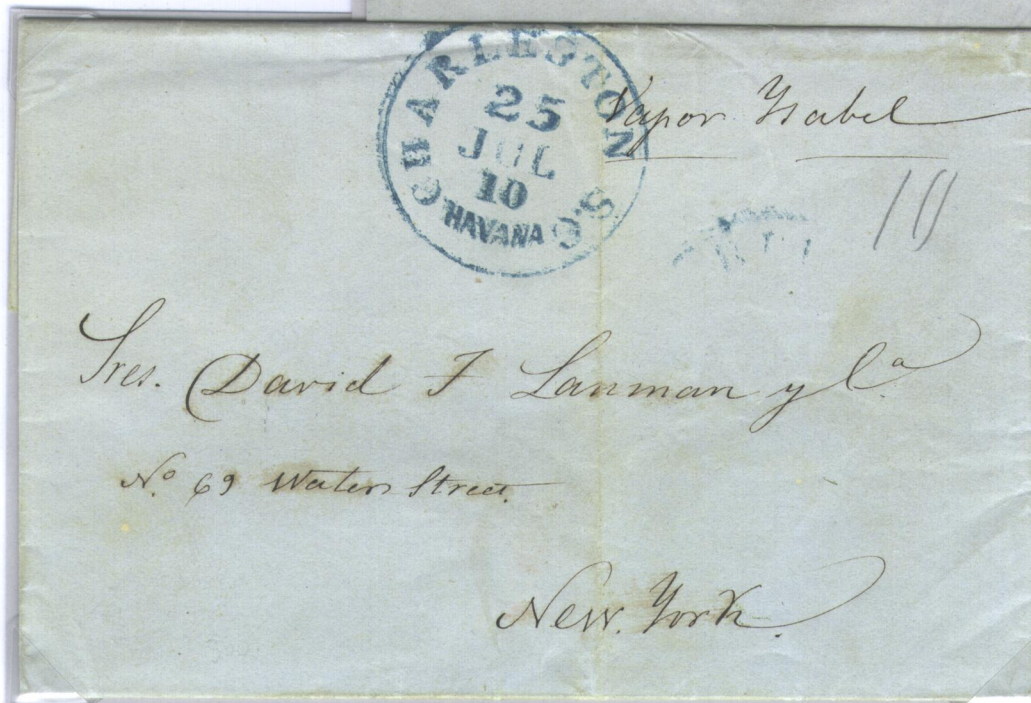
July 1, 1851 to 1861.

Cuba to the USA via Charleston

Single-weight letters

In 1854 Charleston started using a cds which incorporated the word HAVANA and the rate 10.

1856. Havana to New York. Unpaid single-weight letter. Month over day cds.



1854. Havana to New York. Unpaid single-weight letter. Day over month cds.

1855. Matanzas, Cuba to Havana by the Spanish mail system. It was charged the internal mail single-weight fee of 1 real and it was forwarded in Havana to New York via Charleston.

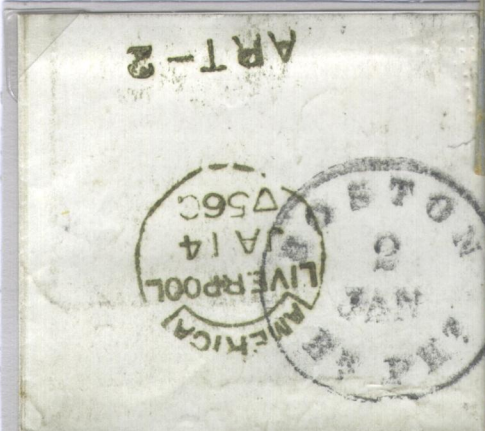
There are four recorded examples of the inverted HAVANA cds.



July 1, 1851 to 1861.

Cuba to the USA and Europe via Charleston

From 1854 to 1856 Charleston used the scarce straight line HAVANA (seven known).



1854 Havana to Erie, PA, forwarded to Cleveland. Unpaid single-weight letter initially charged 10 cents but changed to FREE since it was addressed to the P.M.

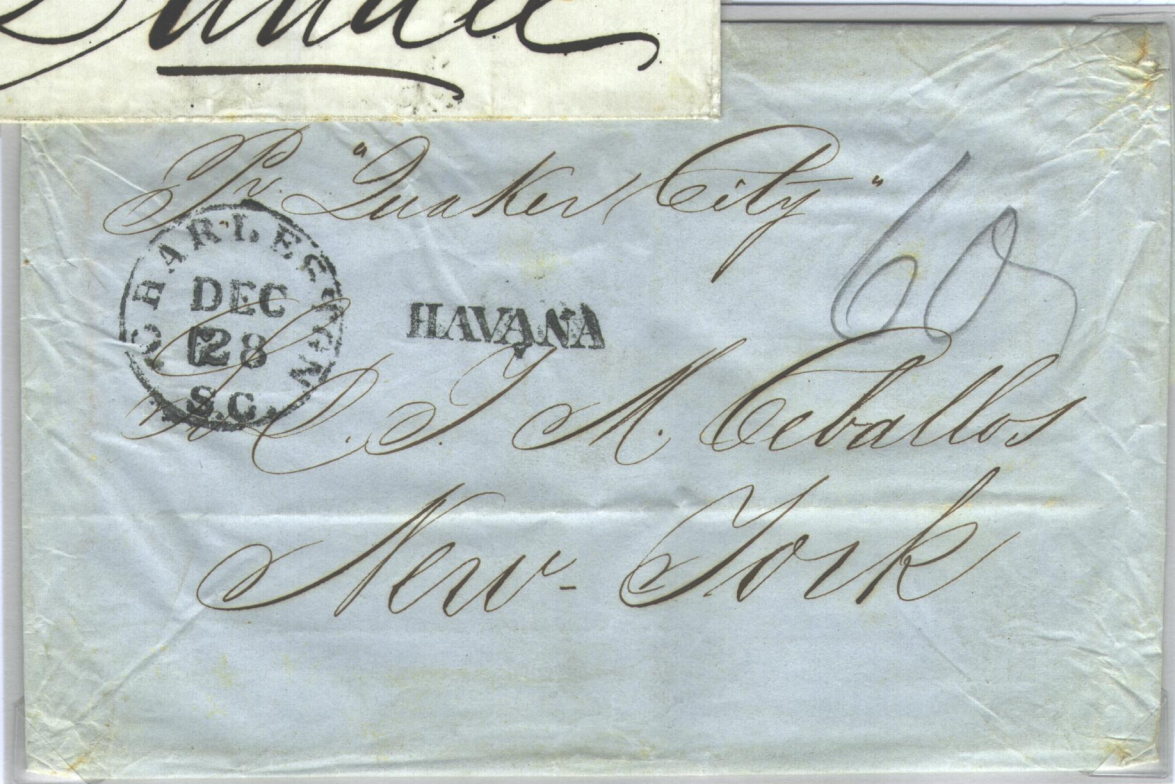
Only recorded free steamship letter from Charleston or Savannah.

(BELOW) 1855. Havana to NY. Unpaid quadruple-weight cover.

Highest rate known on a steamship cover via Charleston or Savannah.

(ABOVE) 1856. Havana to Dundee, Scotland via Charleston, NY, and Liverpool. By British steamer to England, charged the transatlantic fee of 1 shilling plus 2 ½ pence for the unpaid steamship fee = 29 cents (10 of which were a credit to the USA).

One of two known foreign usages of this marking.



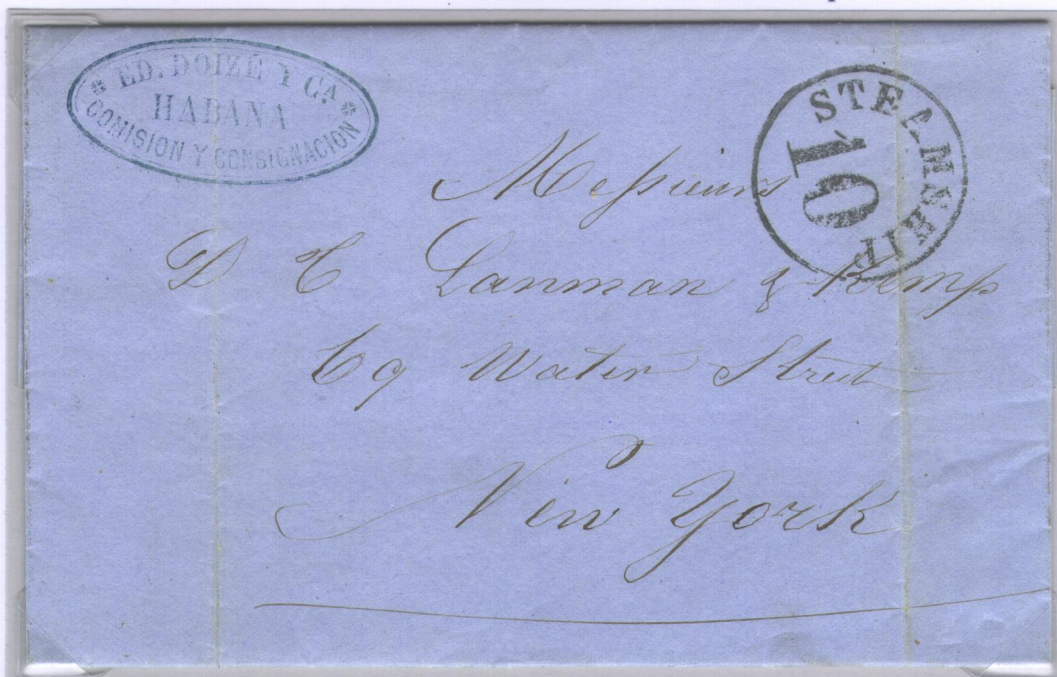
July 1, 1851 to 1861.

Cuba to the USA and Europe via Charleston

Single and double weight letters

In 1856 Charleston started using a set of circular STEAMSHIP rate markings.

1859. Havana to New York. Unpaid single-weight letter. This type of marking, with the small 10, is far rarer than those of New York.

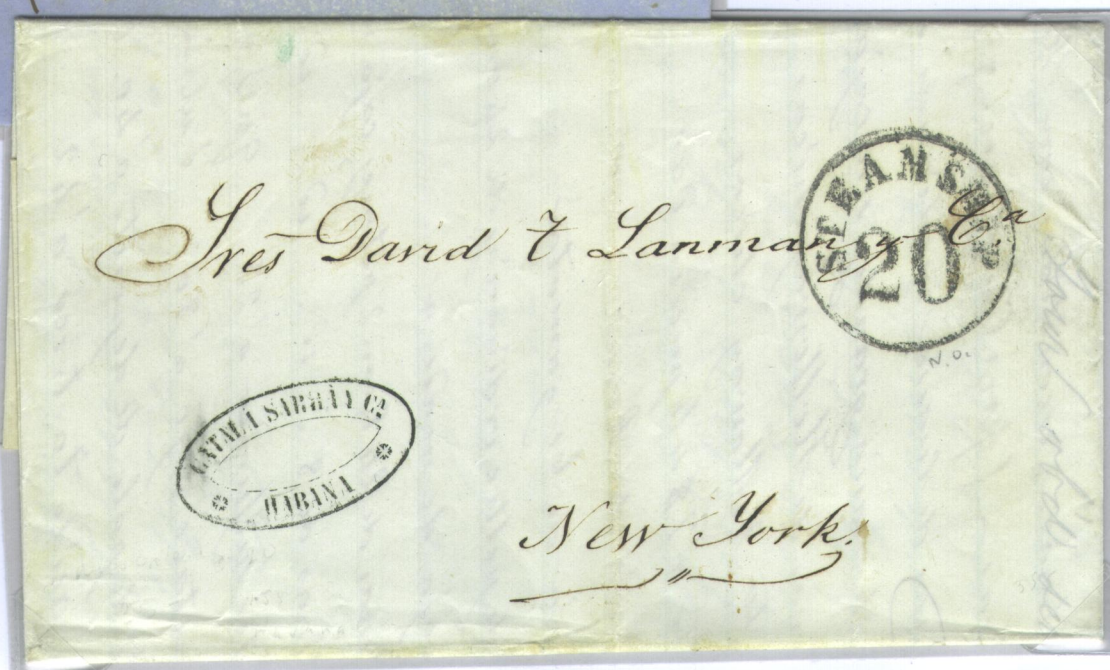


1858. Havana to Bordeaux, France, via Charleston and NY. Unpaid single-weight letter by American steamer to Le Havre. U.S.-French treaty rate of 22 cents (12 decimes). The credit to the US was 19 cents for the steamship and transatlantic fees. France retained 3 cents.

Only such recorded usage of this handstamp.

1858. Havana to New York. Unpaid double-weight letter.

There are only four recorded examples of this postmark.



July 1, 1851 to 1861.

Cuba to Europe via Charleston

Single and double weight letters

In 1856 Charleston started using an oval STEAMSHIP marking which is scarce prior to the Civil War.

1859. Havana to London via Charleston and NY. Unpaid single-weight letter. Same rate analysis as the third cover on page 11.



1858. Havana to London (same route as above). Double weight letter carried by American steamer to England. Trans-atlantic fee of 1 shilling plus 2 ½ pence for the unpaid steamship fee (x 2 = 2/5) or 58 cents (52 of which were a credit to the USA).

1857. Havana to Bordeaux, France, via Charleston and NY. Unpaid single-weight letter by American steamer to Le Havre. U.S.-French treaty rate of 22 cents (12 decimes). The credit to the US was 19 cents for the steamship and transatlantic fees.



July 1, 1851 to 1861.

Cuba to the USA and Canada via Charleston

Use of US stamps in Cuba

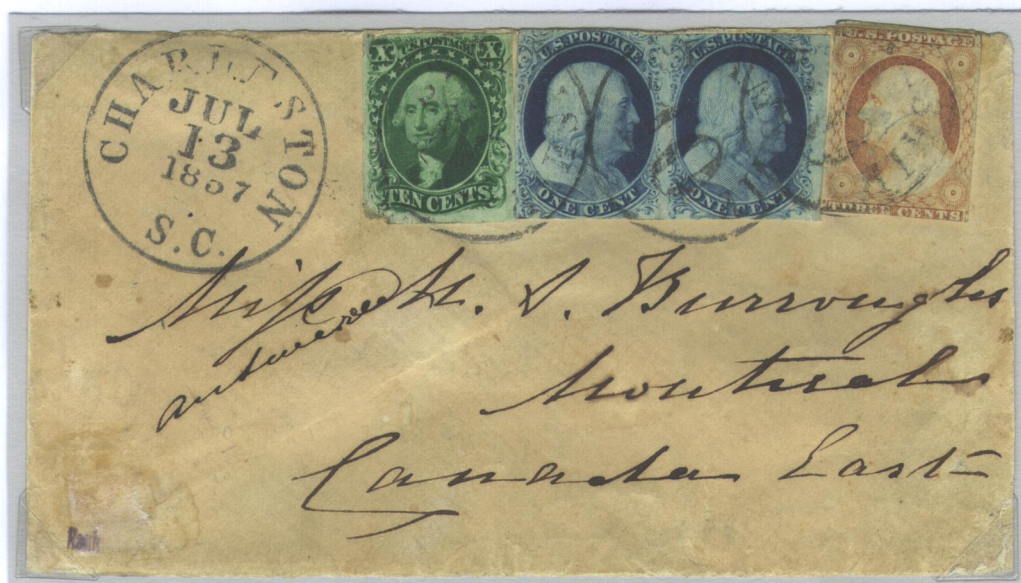
Single and double-weight letters

On rare occasions starting in the mid-1850s Cuban merchants prepaid their letters sent by north bound US contract steamers as a courtesy to their American counterparts. The US stamps were purchased by Cuban firms and applied to the covers in Cuba.

In July 1, 1851 a new 15 cent rate to Canada was established for letters from the West Coast of the US or from the West Indies, a distance of over 3,000 miles from the border (carried by American contract steamers).

1857. Matanzas to New York via Havana and Charleston. Prepaid double-weight letter carried by an American steamer to Charleston where the stamps were cancelled.

Only such known usage of this postmark.



1857. Havana to Montreal, Canada, via Charleston. Exceptional use of US stamps from Cuba prepaying the 15 cent rate to Canada. Seldom seen usage of the Charleston STEAMSHIP / 10 to cancel stamps

Only known example of contract steamship mail to Canada via Charleston (there is one other known via Savannah).

July 1, 1851 to 1861.

To or from Cuba via Savannah

Single-weight letters

After July 1, 1851 most of the contract steamship mail to Cuba via Charleston or Savannah does not show any identifying notations.

1854. Savannah to Santiago de Cuba, via Havana. Prepaid single-weight letter (10 cents) carried by the steamer *Isabel*. Unusual use of the NA (North America) marking in green. One real postage due charged in Cuba.



1857. Manzanillo, Cuba, to Havana. The internal mail fee was prepaid by a ½ real Cuban stamp. From Havana it was sent to Apalachicola, FL by the steamer *Isabel* via Savannah.

Only known use of the HAVANA marking from Savannah on a cover with Cuban stamps.

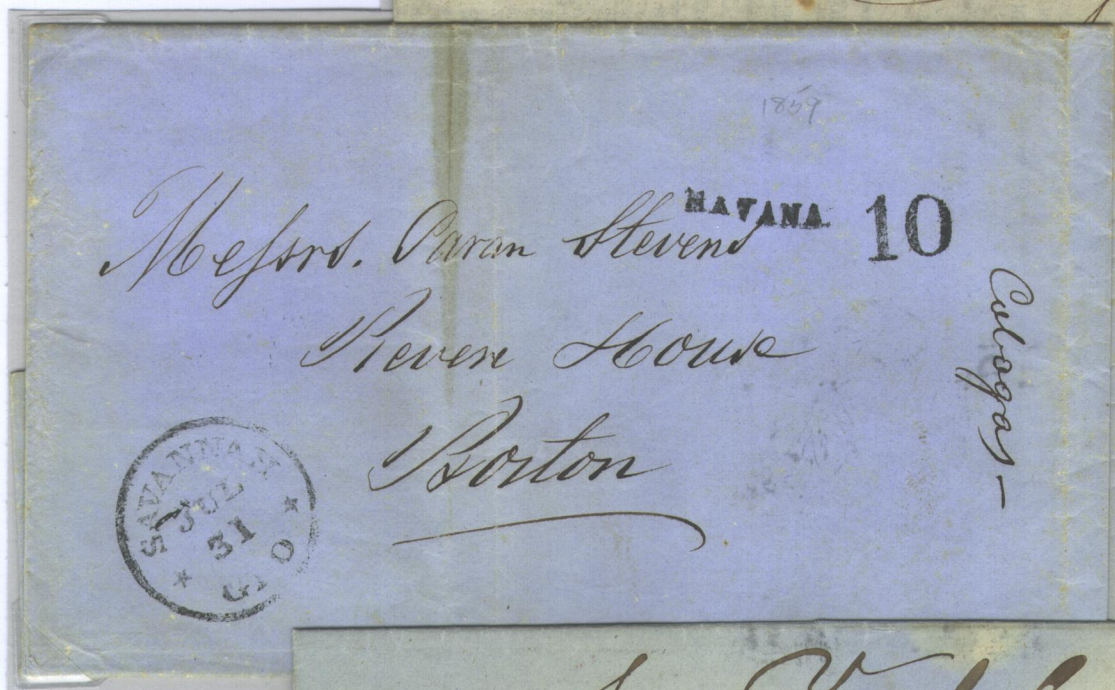
July 1, 1851 to 1861.

Cuba to the USA and Europe via Savannah

Printed matter
Single-weight letters

1855. Havana to Augusta, GA via Savannah. Unpaid printed matter rate.

Only recorded example of the HAVANA marking of Savannah on printed matter after July 1, 1851.



1859. Havana to Boston via Savannah. Unpaid single-weight letter. This is the most typical use of this postmark.

1859. Havana to Paris via Savannah, NY, and London. Unpaid single-weight letter by British steamer to England. U.S.-French treaty rate of 22 cents (12 decimes). The credit to the US was 15 cents for the steamship and local fees. One shilling due to GB for the transatlantic packet rate.

