

Wichita Stamp Club Newsletter



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Editor



“Go Fly A Stamp”



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USS KANSAS (1863-1883) & THE FIRST WOMAN MAYOR



Figure 1

U.S.S. Kansas Gunboat James River, Virginia

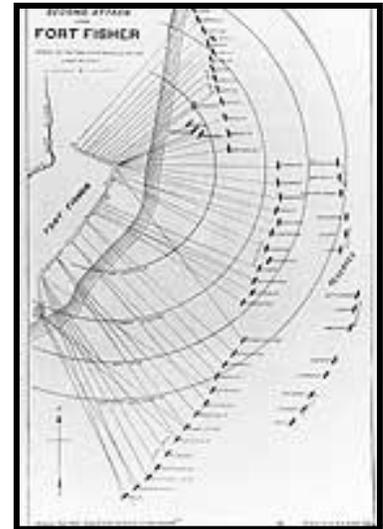


Figure 2

2nd Attack chart-Fort Fisher

Yes, there was an earlier *U.S.S. Kansas* besides the *U.S.S. Kansas BB-2* launched in 1905. This ship was 836-ton screw steam gunboat, first in its class. The ship was built at the Philadelphia Navy Yard in Pennsylvania. The *U.S.S. Kansas* was commissioned in December 1863 and was assigned to the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron.

The *U.S.S. Kansas* (Figure 1) operated in the waters of Virginia and North Carolina. On 6 May 1864, she encountered the Confederate ironclad ram *Raleigh* off New Inlet, North Carolina. Later in May she captured the blockade running steamer *Tristram Shandy*. She participated in capturing the blockade runner *Annie* and destroying the *Stormy Petrel*, during maneuvers in October and December of 1864. She was part of an attempt to capture Fort Fisher in late December 1864 that was aborted, but the second attempt in January 1865 proved to be successful as shown in a chart, giving the positions of 58 ships, including the *U.S.S. Kansas* and the line of fire on Fort Fisher (Figure 2).

There is not much known about the ship and a photo taken on the James River, in Virginia around February to April 1865 is the only visual record of the ship (Figure 1). The white steam coming from her smokestack can be seen in the photo. Three officers are sitting on the shore of the James River. She remained on the James River until April 1865 and was decommissioned at Philadelphia in May, but she returned to active service in July with the South Atlantic Squadron. She would be decommissioned again in 1869 and then back again in September 1870 serving in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico with a final decommission in August 1875.

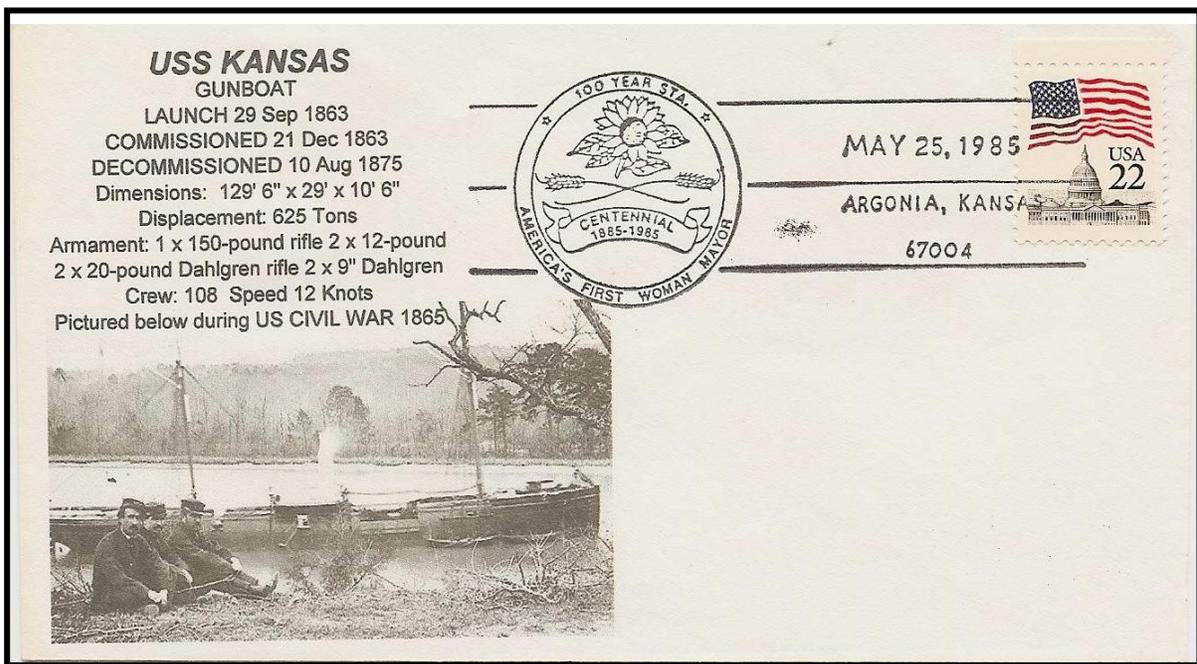


Figure 3—Event Cover with Cachet added of the U.S.S. Kansas

An Event Cover (Figure 3) celebrating the Centennial on May 25, 1985 of Argonia, Kansas with a Cachet added by MhCachets USCS 7913 provides additional information on the gunboat such as the armament aboard the ship and the number of crew members. What relationship the cachet has to the centennial celebration of Argonia is unknown, other than the name 'Kansas'. However, it has two good stories!!

The event cover is franked with a 22¢ Flag over Capital Dome stamp and tied to the cover with a special cancellation from the '100 year sta.' Centennial 1885-1995. The double circle cancel depicts a sunflower, the Kansas State Flower and two heads of wheat, representing the nickname of 'The Wheat State'. At the bottom of the circle it states "America's First Woman Mayor".

Argonia is located in far western part of Sumner County Kansas (Figure 4) along the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad which ran across the middle of the County through the County Seat of Wellington. The County, organized in 1873, takes its name from the Honorable Charles Sumner, a distinguished Senator from Massachusetts. The interest in the county was the cattle drives on the Chisholm Trail from Texas.

Following the Civil War immigrants began settling in various parts of the state of Kansas and women started to get involved and renewing their demands for more political involvement in the affairs of city, state and federal government. Several families were of Quaker ancestry having come to America from England with William Penn's colonists on the ship *Welcome*. The initially settled in Pennsylvania, and then went on to Ohio. One of these families, Oliver Kinsey and his wife Terissa Ann White,

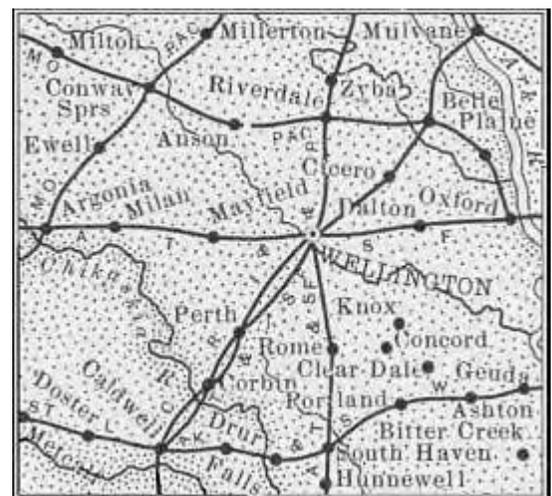


Figure 4

Sumner County, Kansas

settled near Lamira, Belmont County, Ohio. On March 2, 1860 their daughter Susanna Madora "Dora" Kinsley was born. In 1872 the family moved to the Kaw valley near Silver Lake in Shawnee County, Kansas.

Dora Kinsey attended the district school near Silver Lake until 1878, when she entered the Kansas State Agricultural College as a sophomore. While at Manhattan she met Lewis Allison Slater, from the Melville J. Slater family, former Lt. Governor of Kansas. Slater graduated in 1879 and he married Dora on September 1, 1880 at Silver Lake.



Figure 5

Dora Slater in 1887 at age 27

In 1882 they moved to Argonia where Slater managed a hardware store. In 1883 Dora's parents moved to Argonia and bought the hardware store and operated under the name "Kinsey & Slater". Lewis Slater studied law on the side with a local attorney and was prepared to take the bar. In 1885 the town of Argonia was incorporated and Oliver Kinsey was selected its first Mayor and Lewis Slater was selected City Clerk. The ordinances of the town were drawn up by Mr. Slater. Two years later the Kansas Legislature enacted the franchise of women in first, second, and third class cities and since Argonia was a third class city, the women became eligible to vote in the town.

Back in 1883, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) had been organized along with the right to vote. Members of the W.C.T.U. made enforcement of the state prohibition law a prime issue of the city election. The women called a caucus and selected a slate of candidates from men they considered to be qualified for the town's offices, regardless of

political labels. When the President of the W.C.T.U. in Argonia did not show up at the meeting, Dora Slater (Figure 5) presided over the caucus.

The town had a group of men that felt the field of politics was their exclusive domain and resented the intrusion of women into their affairs. In fact, two of the men had attended the W.C.T.U. caucus and heckled the proceedings. They were "wets" trying to intimidate everyone and even attempted to nominate a candidate of their choice but were voted down by the women's caucus.

A secret caucus of 20 town's men gathered in the back room of a restaurant and decided to teach the W.C.T.U. a lesson when they drew up a slate of candidates just like the one the women drew up, except for the office of Mayor, they inserted Mrs. Slater's name. The men thought the women would vote for their slate, but the men would not vote for a woman, resulting in only 20 votes for the W.C.T.U. slate which would be an embarrassment. Mrs. Slater was the only officer of the W.C.T.U. that was eligible to run for office as all the others lived outside the city limits. And, in those days you did not have to declare yourself a candidate before the election.

On Election Day early voters were shocked to see Mrs. Slater's name as was the chairman of the Republican Party of Argonia. They sent a delegation to see her and found her doing the family laundry, totally unaware that her name was on the ballot. They explained the trick and then asked if she would accept if elected and she agreed. With this, the delegation said they would vote for her to turn the tables on the group of men. Mr. Slater was an early voter and he became angry when he saw his wife's name on the ballot and even more so when he went home and found that his wife agreed to serve if elected. At 4 P.M. Dora went to the polls with her parents and voted. It was not considered proper to vote for oneself in those days, so Mrs. Slater left the "Mayor" unmarked. By forsaking their own caucus nominee, the members of the

W.C.T.U. voted for Mrs. Slater in such numbers that she received two-thirds majority and was elected the first woman Mayor in the country. At the end even her husband adjusted to the 'Woman Mayor' and with some pride he would often make jokes about being the 'husband of the mayor.'

Following her term as Mayor the family moved to Oklahoma in 1893 where her husband practiced law until his death in 1916. Dora Slater moved to Norman, Oklahoma where she continued to be involved with women's groups until her death on March 17, 1961.



Figure 6

Dora Slater in 1954 on 94th birthday

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DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF by Ralph Lott and Neal Danielson

This is the 24th in a series of articles relating to small post cards and small covers so if you have any in your collection that you would like to share please let us know.

This small stuff comes to us from the air, that is it's an air mail small cover that measures 4 1/8 inch by 3 1/4 inch. The cover is franked with a 15¢ Air Mail Stamp depicting the Statue of Liberty, New York Skyline and the Lockheed Constellation (Scott #C35) issued Aug. 20 1947 and tied to the cover with two six-wavy line circular-date-stamp from Falls Church, VA on Aug. 3, 1953. The unusual aspect of this cancellation is that for some reason it was machine canceled twice, with the cover turned to achieve the second cancel.

Falls Church, Virginia is located at the border of the District of Columbia (DC). In fact the original 1791 boundary stones of DC are located between the City of Falls Church and Arlington County in public parks. The City of Falls Church was incorporated in 1948, but its beginning dates back to 1733 when the 'William Gunnell's Church' built out of wood for the Truro Parish. By 1757 the Church was referred to as "The Falls Church" as it was located on the tobacco rolling road from the Little Falls on the Potomac River. George Mason (1748) and George Washington (1763) served as Vestrymen in the Church.

Falls Church was a farming community and in its beginning was just a "neighborhood", but by the time the American Civil War started the "neighborhood" had seen an influx of Northerners looking for better weather and land to farm. Therefore when the vote came to secession the percentage was about 75% for and 25% against. Falls Church would change hands several times during the War. The Confederates established a headquarters in the town following the First Battle of Manassas. The Union Army Balloon Corps, operated the first air reconnaissance by directing Union bombardment out of Arlington Heights near the Chain Bridge.

Following the Civil War, Falls Church remained a rural community and by 1875 gained township status, electing their first mayor. The town of Falls Church retro-ceded to Fairfax County in 1887 and in 1948 it became an independent city in order to control its municipal services, including the school system that was segregated, but would face the issue a year after this cover was mailed, following the 1954 desegregation rule by the U. S. Supreme Court's. Today Falls Church is within the beltway and the farm land has move some distance south and west of the city.





Minden, is located in the north western part of Germany along the Weser River, where the river leaves the mountains and enters the plains west of Hannover (see map). About AD 800 a Bishopric was founded in Minden by Charlemagne. By the year 1230 it received the town charter and began the task of separating itself from the church. The Protestant Reformation was introduced in Minden in 1529 creating conflict within the towns' population and a new evangelical church was announced by Nicholas Krage in Minden.

Imperial troops occupied Minden for almost ten years (1625-1634) during the 1618-1648 Thirty Years' War. It was captured in 1634 following the siege by Protestant Swedish troops and Queen Christina of Sweden granted full sovereignty in the affairs to Minden, both internal and external.

When WWII broke out underground factories were constructed near Minden. Slave labor from nearby concentration camps produced weapons and other material. However, Minden sustained severe damage from bombardment during the War, the attacks being minor in the beginning. On October 26, 1944 an attack on a canal aqueduct resulted in the drowning of workers that had taken to the air raid shelter. The most devastating bomb attack was conducted by the U. S. Army Air Force B 17s on March 28, 1945 that almost destroyed the town center including the town hall, as well as a cathedral killing over 180 people (see photo above of the old city hall). The machinery that was housed in the underground factories was removed by American troops and entrances to the underground closed up. Minden was able to assume its administrative responsibilities on April 9, 1945 on a provisional basis when it became a part of the British Occupation Zone

Minden became a possession of Brandenburg-Prussia during the Peace of Westphalia and would remain with Prussia until its break-up in 1947, ending the 400 plus years of independence of the citizens of Minden.

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GUAM TO HONG KONG by Neal E. Danielson



Figure 1

Island of Guam



Figure 2

Hong Kong, China

This article deals with an airline flight from Guam (Figure 1) to Hong Kong, China (Figure 2). The Territory of Guam is an island located in the Western Pacific Ocean and is the largest and southernmost of the Mariana Islands. It is about three fourths of the way from Hawaii to the Philippines. Guam was acquired by the United States from Spain in 1898 following the Spanish-American War and is an organized unincorporated territory of the United States. It is one of five United States Territories with an established civilian government. The Capital was formerly called Agaña but has now been changed to Hagåtña.

The island was formed by volcanic eruptions and is surrounded by coral reefs and was first discovered by Ferdinand Magellan on his attempt to circumnavigate the globe in 1521. Spain would lay claim to Guam in 1565 and colonization began in 1668 when a Catholic mission was established.

The island would become a stop over for rest and relaxation on voyages between Mexico and the Philippines by Spanish traders. The island is 30 miles long and 4 to 12 miles wide.

Following WWI the United States a Naval base on Guam and established a Naval Air Station near Agaña. Anderson Air Force Base was built at the north end of the Island near Upi. Pan American Airlines first flight from Guam to Hong Kong, China took place on April 27, 1937 (Figure 3). The cached event cover below is franked with a 20¢ Transpacific issue air mail stamp (Scott #C21) depicting the “China Clipper” over the Pacific plus a pair of 5¢ Winged Globe air mail stamps (Scott #C12) and are tied to the cover with a four-bar balloon cancel postmarked from Guam, Guam. The back cancel is a double circle cancel from Victoria, Hong Kong on 28 AP 37.

Hong Kong was occupied by the United Kingdom (UK) in 1841 and was ceded to China the following year. However, the UK ended up with a 100 year lease of Hong Kong. Pursuant to an agreement signed by China and the UK on 19 Dec. 1984, Hong Kong became the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People’s Republic of China on 1 July 1997, as “one country, two systems” formula. Hong Kong retains the autonomy in all matters except foreign and defense affairs for the next 50 years.

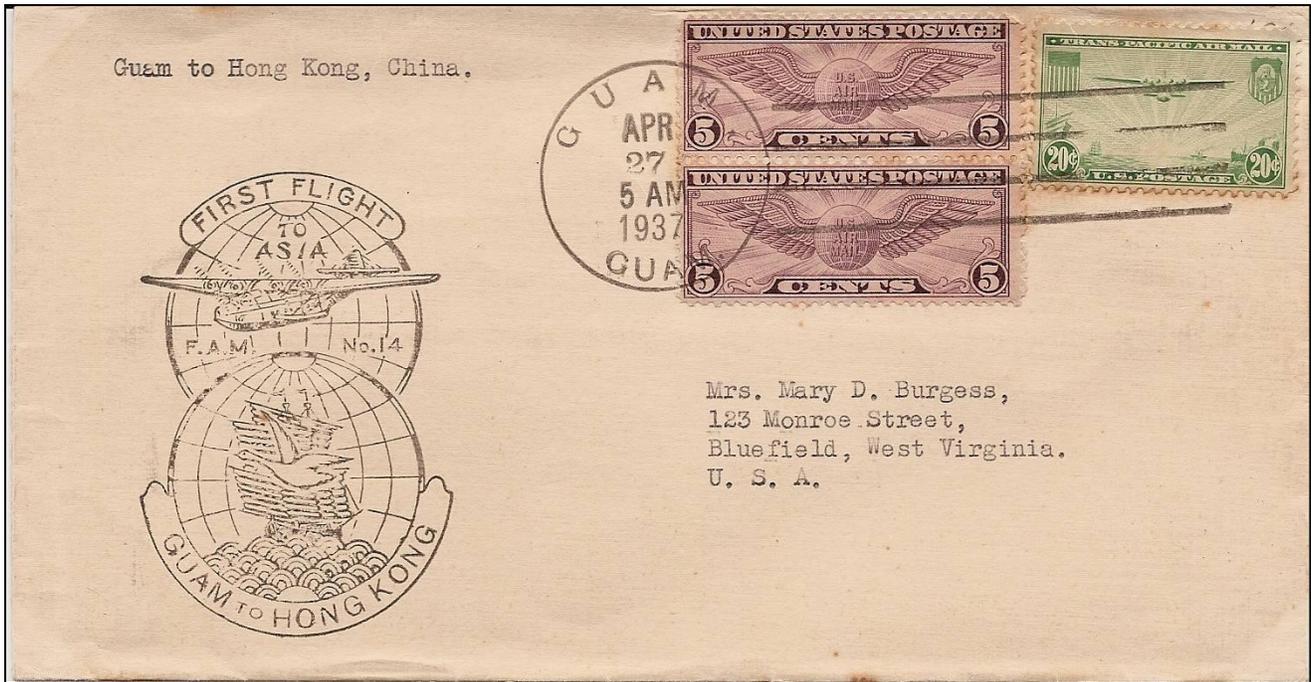


Figure 3

First Flight Event Cover – Guam to Hong Kong

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TRAVEL KANSAS—EAST TO WEST—NORTH TO SOUTH by Neal E. Danielson

Travel Kansas – Freeport located in Harper County along the southern border of Kansas (Figures 1 & 2). As with a lot of Counties and Town in Kansas the military enters the picture. Harper County is named in honor of Sergeant Marion Harper, who enlisted in 1861 as a private and rose to a sergeant rank in Company E of the Second Kansas Cavalry, commanded by Captain Samuel Crawford. Crawford would later become the third Governor of Kansas (Jan. 9, 1865 to Nov. 4, 1868) and would resign from office to take command of the 19th Kansas Regiment in order to fight Indian wars in western Kansas and eastern Colorado.

Harper was wounded at Waldron, Arkansas in 1863 and on his death bed he made a bet with another wounded soldier that he would die first—he won the bet! Waldron also became a town in Harper County.

The town of Freeport was established as Mid Lothian in 1879 and was located about six miles south of what became Highway 160 that runs through Harper. The Postmaster, Benjamin Freeman, was appointed on April 23, 1879. The town was changed to Freeport on September 16, 1885 and Lewellen R. Hill was appointed Postmaster. The town never could muster enough drawing amenities to keep it going strong, even though the townspeople were dedicated to the cause. By 1928 the census in Freeport was 125, but by 1990 it only had 8 inhabitants and today it is down to 6. However, Freeport is “the smallest incorporated city in the U.S.A. having a bank”, The Freeport State Bank (Figure 3). It still has a grain elevator across the street, which you can see mirrored in the window of the Freeport State Bank, and it is still in operation. The Bank was chartered January 7, 1902 and crop insurance was available through the Bank.

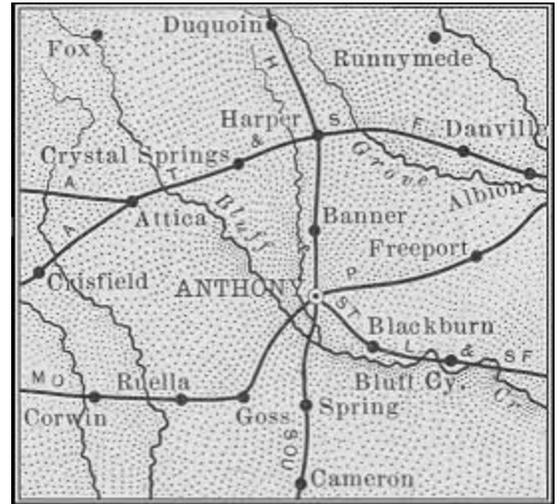


Figure 1

Harper Co. Railroad Map ca 1899

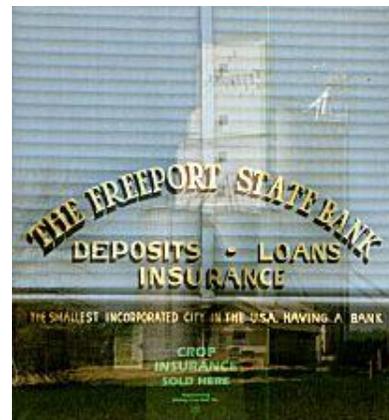
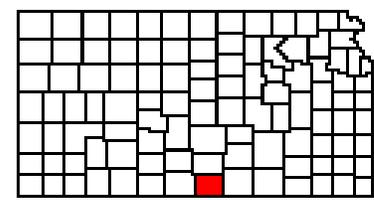


Figure 3

The Freeport State Bank

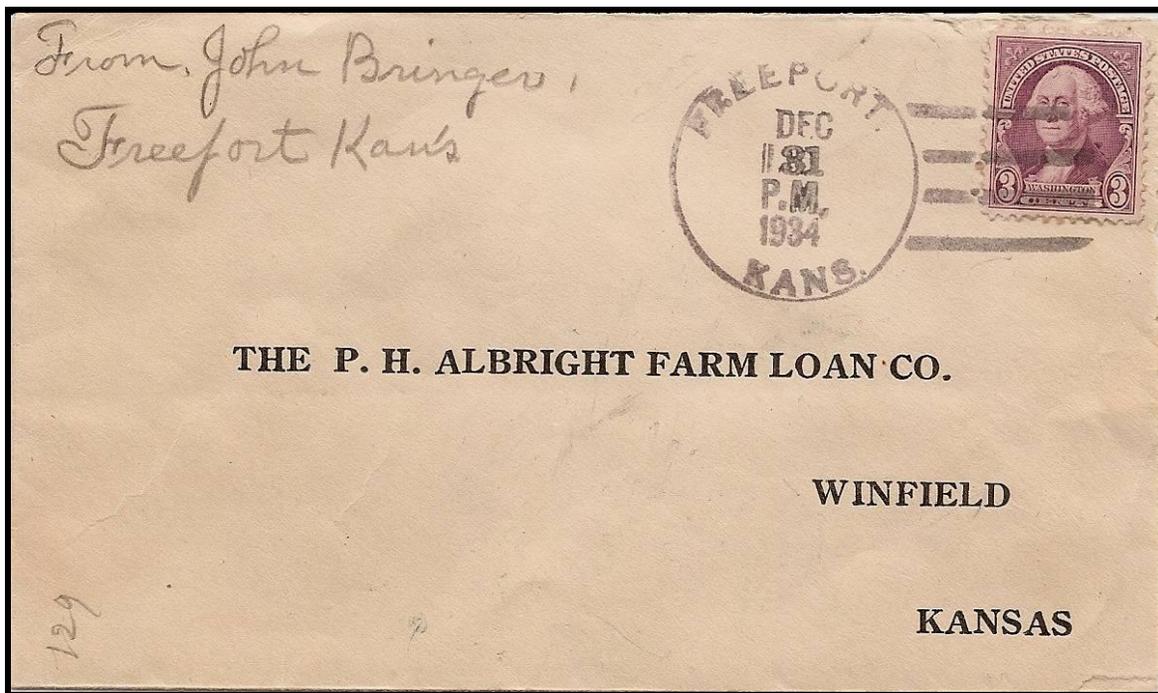


Figure 4—Cover postmarked from Freeport, Kans. Dec. 1934

The Post Office in Freeport appointed Charles C. Stoddard, Acting Postmaster on Oct. 1, 1933, two days following Noah J. Crouse's departure. He was appointed Postmaster on January 15, 1934 and would remain in this position until August 2, 1937. Figure 4 is a cover franked with a 3¢ George Washington stamp (Scott #720) and tied to the cover with a four-bar circular date stamp and postmarked Dec 31 1934 from Freeport, Kans. The cover was from a John Bringer of Freeport to The P. H. Albright Farm Loan Co., in Winfield, Kansas. The P. H. Albright Farm Loan Co. was owned and operated by Penrose Hills Albright, a successful businessman who came to Kansas in 1876 with his brother Henry Haines Albright. He began his career in the newspaper business and then partnered with a James B. Moore to form the firm of P. H. Albright & Company, a mortgage loan establishment representing the George W. Moore & Company of Hartford, Connecticut. He would go on to become a member of the Stafford, Albright & Sadil real estate brokers and abstractors of title firm. He became President of the Winfield Construction Company and owner of valuable tracts of choice farm land. Mr. Albright served two terms as Mayor of Winfield (1889-90 & 1899-1900). Mr. Albright passed away March 8, 1922, so his family owned the business in 1934 when the cover was postmarked.

Another interesting feature of Freeport is the Freeport Presbyterian Church (Figure 5) as it still in existence with a congregation of around 60, so the farming community has a direct bearing on the small 'Ghost Town'. The Church is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places. The townspeople all meet at the Church during the Christmas holiday season and decorate a Christmas tree and have a concert. If the truth is known the Post Office could be considered one of the smallest in operation.



Figure 5

Freeport Presbyterian Church

References:

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CELEBRATING ST. PATRICK'S DAY by Neal E. Danielson

To so many citizens of this country March 17th is the day you wear 'green' to school or work, because if you don't your friends have the opportunity to 'pinch' you. Or you might see a street or even a river turned 'green' to celebrate the day. It is also a time to have a 'shamrock', a three-leaved plant, to explain the Holy Trinity to the Christian Irish population, but today people generally wear it for good luck, so they say.

March 17, 2011 we will recognize the patron saints of Ireland, Saint Patrick (ca 387-461 AD) (Figure 1). The day originally was celebrated by the Catholic Church as an official feast day as early as the 17th century. Originally blue was associated with Saint Patrick, but over the years it changed to green when green ribbons and shamrocks (Figure 2) were worn to celebrate the day. It was believed that Saint Patrick used the three-leaved shamrock plant to explain the Holy Trinity to the pagan Irish. Today if you have any Irish blood in you, you celebrate the day no matter what religion you might be associated with.

Saint Patrick's Day became an official public holiday in Ireland in 1903. The first Irish Free State Saint Patrick's Day parade was held in Dublin 1931. Secular celebrations exist in several countries, but it still remains a religious observance by both the Church of Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. Festivals and parades are held in cities other than Dublin, such as Cork, Belfast, Derry, Kilkenny and Waterford, but the largest celebrations are in Downpatrick, County Down, where it is rumored that Saint Patrick is buried. Some believe that the festival celebration has become too commercialized and promotes drinking and that it is time to bring the piety and the fun together as a church festival.

To celebrate St. Patrick's Day in 1948 the *U.S.S. Hollister* (DD 788) (Figure 3) designed an event cover to celebrate the occasion (Figure 4) with a cachet depicting an Irishman with his trusty cane, pipe and derby hat.

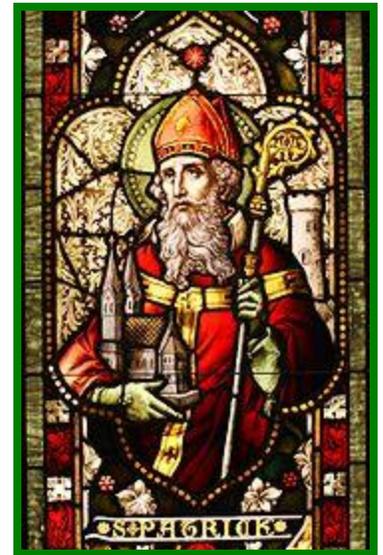


Figure 1

Saint Patrick



Figure 2

Shamrock



Figure 3

U.S.S. Hollister (DD 788)

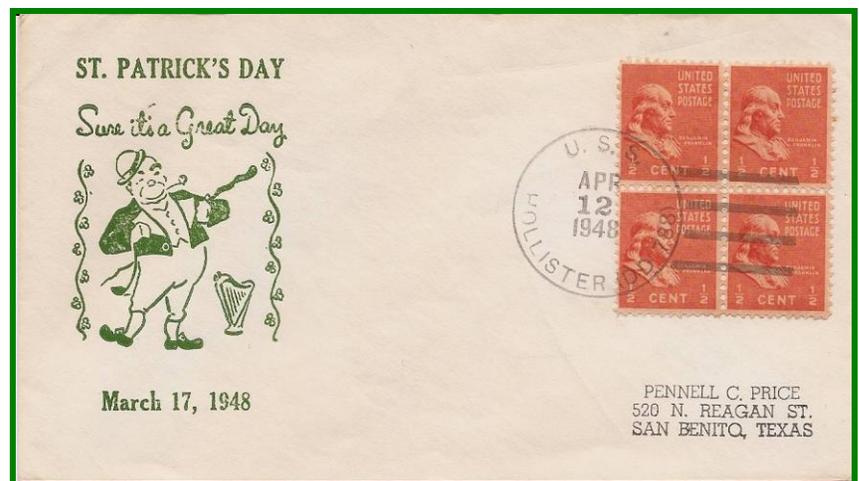


Figure 4

Cached Cover Celebrating St. Patrick's Day March 17, 1948

The *U.S.S. Hollister* (DD 788) came out of Todd Shipyard in Seattle, Washington. It was launched 9 October 1945 and commissioned 29 March 1946 with Commander W. T. Samuels in command. The *Hollister* was sponsored by Mrs. Howard J. Hollister, mother of the three Hollister brothers for whom the *Hollister* was named.

The three Hollister brothers included Lyle Eugene Hollister born in Sioux Falls, South Dakota on 6 July 1923, enlisted in the Navy 26 March 1941. He was a Radioman Second Class and served on the *Prairie* but later assigned to the *Plunkett* and *Relief*. After a stint at the Naval Station in Key West he was reassigned to the *Plunkett*. He was reported as 'missing in action' following an enemy aircraft attack when they were engaged in an assault on Anzio in September 1943.

Lyle had two younger twin brothers born on 22 November 1925 in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, William Howard and Richard Jerome Hollister. They enlisted in the Navy 2 March 1943 and were serving on board the carrier *Lisome Bay* when it was torpedoed in the Gilbert Islands area 24 November 1943. William Howard died from wounds received during this attack and Richard Jerome was reported as 'missing in action' and presumed dead. All three brothers were posthumously awarded the Purple Heart.

The *U.S.S. Hollister* left San Diego on 9 November 1946 for operations in the Far East. She assisted the Korean Government in curtailing smuggling activity and continued in this service until she returned to San Diego 22 June 1947. She engaged in fleet maneuvers and training exercises along the West Coast for the following 14 months. It was during this time frame that the event cover celebrating Saint Patrick's Day on 17 March 1948 transpired (Figure 4). The *Hollister* was deployed a second time 1 September 1948 when it joined the 7th Fleet in peacekeeping operations in the western Pacific until 24 April 1949.

When North Korea invaded South Korea in June of 1950 the United States committed its military might in helping South Korea in halting the aggression of the Communist régime. The *Hollister* rushed to the battle area bringing the first reinforcements. She served as a screening ship with the Fast Carrier Task Force 77 and performed plane guard duty. She was engaged in the highly successful landing at Inchon with the Task Force 77. She would remain with Task Force 77 performing duties such as fire-support missions, patrol, antisubmarine warfare exercises, and screening duty becoming one of the U. S. Navy's veteran ships.

The *Hollister* accompanied the 7th Fleet in January 1955 in evacuation of Chinese Nationalists from the Tachen Islands. Another 7th Fleet deployment in peace keeping operations was visiting Samoa, New Zealand, Manus, and Guam in route to the South China Sea from September 1955 to March 1956. In February 1960 she made her 11th Western Pacific deployment and began duty in the Formosa Straits. She had a rest period in 1961 when she entered Puget Sound Naval Shipyard for overhaul and an addition to the helicopter deck and hanger aft. It was back to the 7th Fleet in June 1962 to once again show support of a small country when the crisis in Laos and the Communist insurgency threatened Thailand whose freedom was in jeopardy.

The *Hollister* would remain in the Far East transiting from Yokosuka, Japan engaging in training exercises to patrol in and around Taiwan. In September 1965 she deployed to Subic Bay, Philippine Islands, to commence plane guard and antisubmarine screen duties supporting *Bon Homme Richard* (CV-31). She accompanied the aircraft carrier on "Yankee Station" off Vietnam providing valuable support to the naval operations in opposing the North Vietnamese Communists. Return to Long Beach for six-month repair and training period the *Hollister* would again return to the Far East and screening carriers and preventing infiltration of supplies to the Viet Cong.

The *Hollister* remained in the Far East, where she was on station in May 1967. In September 1973 she entered into the Reserve Fleet at Long Beach. She was decommissioned in September 1979 and stricken from the register 31 August 1979.

The Event Cover celebrating St. Patrick's Day was franked with a block of four 1/2¢ Benjamin Franklin stamp (Scott #803) and tied to the cover with a four-bar balloon cancel of the U.S.S. *Hollister* (DD 788) postmarked Apr 12 1948. The cover must have been one left over as it was almost a month late being sent and the ship was conducting training exercises and fleet maneuvers along the West Coast until September 1948.

The cover was sent to San Benito, Texas located in Cameron County at the southern tip of Texas (Figure 5). San Benito was called "Diaz" in honor of Porfirio Diaz, President of Mexico (Figure 6) when the village was first established and a post office opened April 2, 1907 with Samuel A. Robertson as Postmaster.

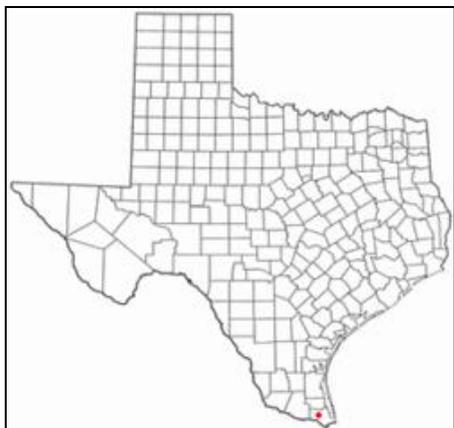


Figure 5

San Benito, Texas

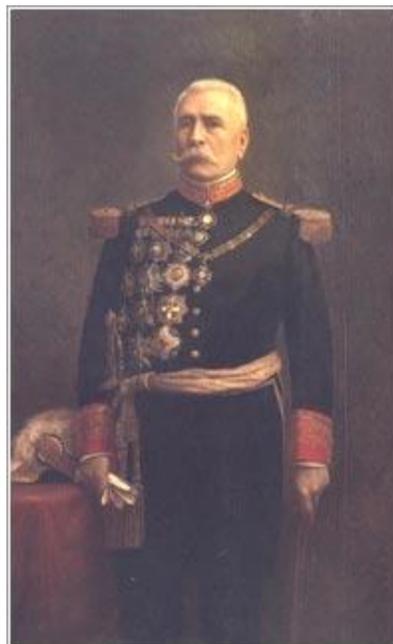


Figure 6

President Porfirio Diaz

However, the name "Diaz" only lasted until May 11, 1907 when it was changed to San Benito in honor of Benjamin Hicks. Hicks was a pioneer rancher whose charitable contributions to the population endeared him. The name change was suggested by Rafael Moreno, an elderly camp cook of the surveying party for the town site. Moreno's suggestion stemmed from his beloved "Saint Benjamin" Hicks. The Postmaster at the time the cover was received in San Benito was Alexander M. Bowie, who was appointed Postmaster on January 25, 1935 and remained until June 29, 1959.

Before the village became a reality the railroad made its first passenger train arrival in 'Diaz' on the 4th of July 1904. The community leaders celebrated the coming of the new railroad and renamed the railroad station "Bessie", in honor of Bessie Yoakum. Her father Benjamin Franklin Yoakum, railroad executive and Chairman of the Board of the Empire Bond & Mortgage Company was instrumental in construction of the railroad.

For those local residents San Benito is known as the “Resaca City”, as a dry river bed or Resaca (Spanish name) made its way through the small village. The village began to see progress in 1906 when the irrigation district was organized and eventually resulted in the availability of irrigation water. The Lower Rio Grande Valley acquired newly developing agricultural territory, including San Benito. The first U.S. Census count taken in San Benito was in 1920 showing that San Benito had become a city of over four thousand. The Resaca is now the main canal of a large irrigation system.

This story has served to show the diversity we can have with collecting covers. We have the Irish culture; the U. S. Navy environment; and the Mexican culture all wrapped into one cover. We could even have more if we looked at the Hollister background.

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U.S.S. Hollister website: <http://usshollister.org/history.htm/>

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ALASKA THE NORTH COUNTRY by Neal E. Danielson

A little over 20,000 years ago, or one might say a long, long, time ago, an ice bridge connected North America with Asia where Alaska now exists. Migration of the Asian people came about when they walked across this ice bridge, some call it the Bering Land Bridge, and spread into Canada, the North and South American continents. Some scientists believe that so much water was stored as ice that the sea level dropped, exposing more land. Other scientists believe that during the ice age this strait was frozen over. Either would have allowed humans and animals to cross. As the years passed the Asian people adapted into an entirely new race resulting in the Alaskan Native people called Eskimos and in America they became known as the American Indian.

The first written accounts indicate that the first Europeans to reach Alaska came from Russia. Vitus Bering sailed east and saw Mt. St. Elias. The Russian-American Company hunted otters for their fur. The colony was never very profitable, because of the costs of transportation. The area once occupied by the ice or land bridge is now called the Bering Strait. The Bering Strait is approximately 58 miles wide, with an average depth of 100-165 feet (Figure 1). It connects the Chukchi Sea (part of the Arctic Ocean) in the north with the Bering Sea (part of the Pacific Ocean) in the south. Although the Cossack, Semyon Dezhnev, passed by the strait in 1648, it is named after Vitus Bering, a Danish-born Russian explorer who crossed the strait in 1728.



Figure 1

Map showing Alaska-Bering Sea-Russia

Fast forward to the mid 1800s when Andrew Johnson was President of the United States and his Secretary of State William Seward persuaded the Senate to purchase Alaska from Russia for \$7, 200,000 that took place on April 9, 1867. This purchase was not popular in the continental United States and thus Alaska became known as “Seward’s Folly”. The flag of the United States was raised on October 18, 1867 and is now celebrated as Alaska Day. Alaska would become a Territory in 1912 and remained a Territory until President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Alaska Statehood Act on July 7, 1958 that paved the way for Alaska to become a part of the Union on January 3, 1959.

Alaska had its fame and fortune in 1896 when gold was discovered in the Klondike region of the Yukon Territory and in 1897 and 1898 thousands of prospectors converged on the territory and Alaska gold rush hit high gear. This resulted in industrial development of the area and interest nationwide in Alaska. Fish canneries sprang up along the coast and mining companies brought the increased development of towns and villages.

Anchorage, one of the largest towns in the southern part of the Territory did not become a mining town or a fishing village and none were within ten miles of the town. Anchorage grew out of being selected as a choice site of a railroad construction port in 1914 for the Alaska Railroad. The railroad was built between 1915 and 1923 with their headquarters located at Ship Creek Landing. Anchorage went from a ‘tent city’ to being incorporated as a town on November 23, 1920.

During the 1930s and 1940s Anchorage experienced major growth in air transportation and the United States military became an increasingly important part of the Territory. Merrill Field opened in 1930, which brought about Anchorage International Airport in the 1950s. Fort Richardson and Elmendorf Air Force Base

were built in the 1940s. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 it brought a wake up call to the military stationed in Alaska. Back in 1935 General Billy Mitchell was quoted as saying “I believe that in the future, whoever holds Alaska will hold the world, I think it is the most important strategic place in the world.” The Aleutian Islands off the coast of Alaska were strategic in our ability to control the Pacific Great Circle transportation routes.

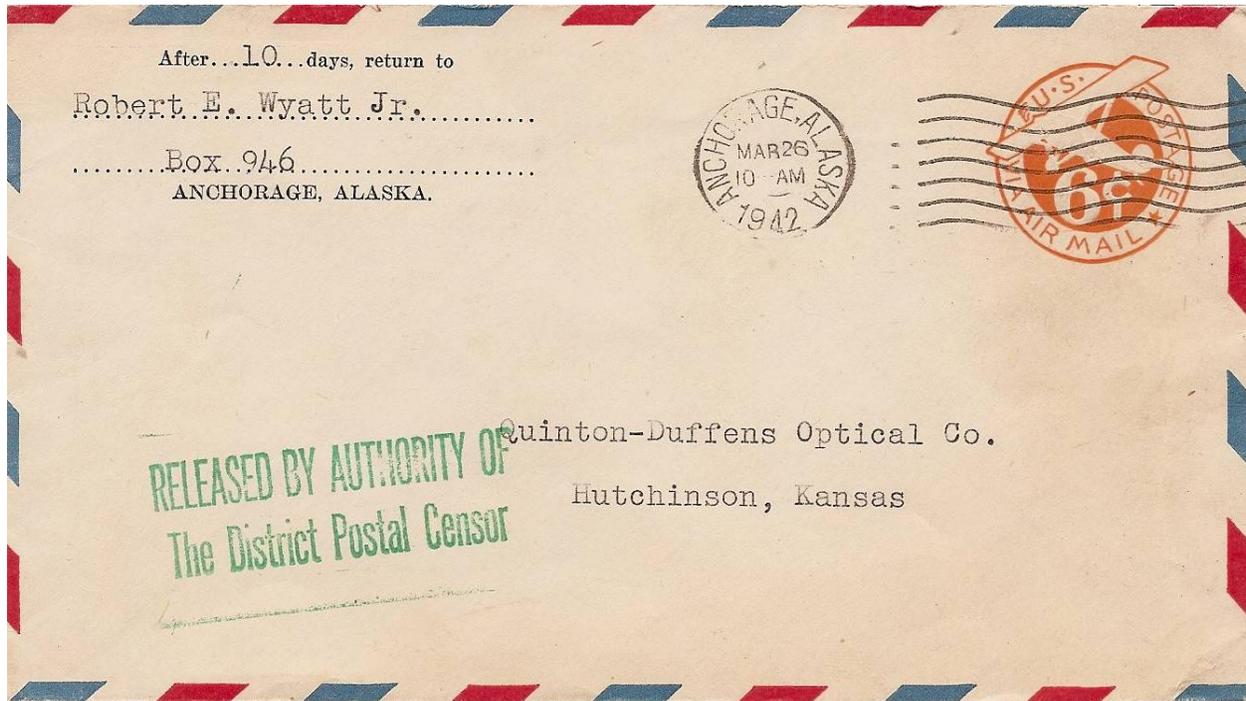


Figure 3—Alaska Air Mail Cover March 26 1942

Once the war was underway things changed in Alaska as well as the United States and an all out effort was made to protect the areas from invasion by the Japanese. An air mail cover (Figure 3) postmarked from Anchorage, Alaska on Mar 26 1942 had to be inspected and released by Authority of The District Postal Censor as noted by the hand stamp on the cover. Six months after Pearl Harbor the Japanese bombed Dutch Harbor on Unalaska Island and on June 3, 1942 a small Japanese force managed to occupy the islands of Attu and Kiska along the southern portion of the Aleutians and would take nearly a year before the U.S. military managed to eject them. The Japanese reasoned that control of the Aleutians would prevent a possible attack by the U.S. across the Northern Pacific and the U.S. feared that the islands would be used as possible bases for aerial assaults on the west coast of the States. The majority of the population on the Aleutians had been evacuated when the war broke out and were relocated in the fishing and mining camps in Southeast Alaska.



Figure 4

American Troops on Attu Island

The battles that took place on the Aleutians changed the lives of ordinary native Alaskans. Many Alaskans join in by serving as Scouts and in the Territorial Guard patrolling the Alaskan coast. Fighting in the Islands rugged terrain was difficult and hazardous as American troops navigate through snow and ice during one of the battles on Attu in May 1943.

Reference:

World War II in Alaska, A Resource Guide for Teachers and Students U.S. Department of the Interior, Anchorage, Alaska

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