

# The U.S. "Retaliatory" Rate of June - December 1848

## Purpose and Scope

This exhibit shows range of postal markings and rates used on letters sent to and from the U.S. *via* British mail steamships and sailing ships during the so-called "retaliatory" rate period of the early transatlantic packet era. In addition, letters are shown which traveled on "retaliatory rate" sailings, but which avoided the rates themselves.

## Organization

This exhibit is organized by city, and within that by rate zone. The city is shown in the headline at upper left and the rate zone (e.g., "up to 300 miles") directly below it. The manuscript and/or hand stamped rate markings on the covers are noted at upper right, with their weight (e.g., "single packet") below them. Additional information shown includes the foreign rates; the packet or sailing ship; and the start and end dates of the ship's voyage. Information about the usage dates of the markings are included in light gray boxes next to the covers. **Important items are outlined in red.**

## Background

In May 1840, Samuel Cunard began a British packet service between Liverpool and Boston. Payment in each country was required for that country's postal fees. Letters arriving at Boston from the U.K. were pre-paid 1 shilling per ½ oz. for the transatlantic rate by the sender; the U.S. inland rate and private ship fee were paid by the addressee. Letters sent from the U.S. allowed and required pre-payment only of the U.S. inland rate to the port of departure; the transatlantic and any inland rates within the U.K. or beyond were paid either by the forwarder in the U.K. or by the addressee. Cunard maintained a monopoly until June 1847, with Boston the only northern U.S. port servicing Cunard ships until New York sailings were added in January 1848.

The Act of Congress March 3, 1845 created a problem which led eventually to the first U.S.-U.S. postal Convention. It authorized the Postmaster General to enter into contracts with American steamers to convey mail between the U.S. and Europe. On June 1, 1847, the Ocean Mail Steamship Co. began carrying pre-paid U.S. letters from New York to Southampton in the U.K. then on to Bremerhaven in Bremen. The British refused to accept them as ordinary ship letters, because the British Post Office order of June 9, 1847 made them subject to the usual British Packet one shilling rate, i.e. the "discriminatory" rate. After unsuccessful attempts to stop this practice, the Act of Congress, June 27, 1848, in effect authorized a "retaliatory" rate on mail carried to and from the U.S. on British vessels - 24c for letters carried on steamships and 16c for letters carried on sailing ships. This lasted until December 1848. On January 3, 1849, the first U.S. - U.K. Postal Convention was signed, to become effective in mid-February.

## A Letter Sent on the 2nd Sailing under the "Discriminatory" Rate



The 24c U.S. packet rate was paid at New York.

An additional 1 shilling rate was required in the U.K.

New York *via* Southampton to London

September 23 - October 9, 1847

Ocean Line Steamer *Washington*



**New York City**

**red 44x26mm "24"; 24x16mm "24"; 12x8mm "24"**

**to and from the port**

**single packet**

**One of Three Known Examples of the Large New York "24"**



**First Westbound Sailing**

The 1 shilling packet rate was paid in the U.K.

The rate of 24c was for a packet letter addressed to the port.

Norwich, Eng. *via* Liverpool to NY

June 24 to July 8, 1848

*R.M.S. Caledonia*

Only three examples of this large red "24" rate hand are recorded in July-Aug. 1848.

**From Switzerland**

Prepaid 20 kreuzer (on reverse) for all transit fees by British mails.

The rate of 24c was for a packet letter addressed to the port.

Corselles, Switz.. *via* Liverpool to NY

October 14 to October 25, 1848

*R.M.S. Europa*



**One of Four Known Examples of the Small New York "24"**

Prepaid 12 decimes (on reverse) for all transit fees by British mails.

The rate of 24c was for a packet letter addressed to the port.

Dunkerque, France *via* Liverpool to NY

July 8 to August 19, 1848

*R.M.S. Cambria*



New York City

pencil mspt "24"; blue ink mspt "48"; blue ink mspt "72"

to and from the port

single packet / double packet / triple packet

### First Eastbound Sailing

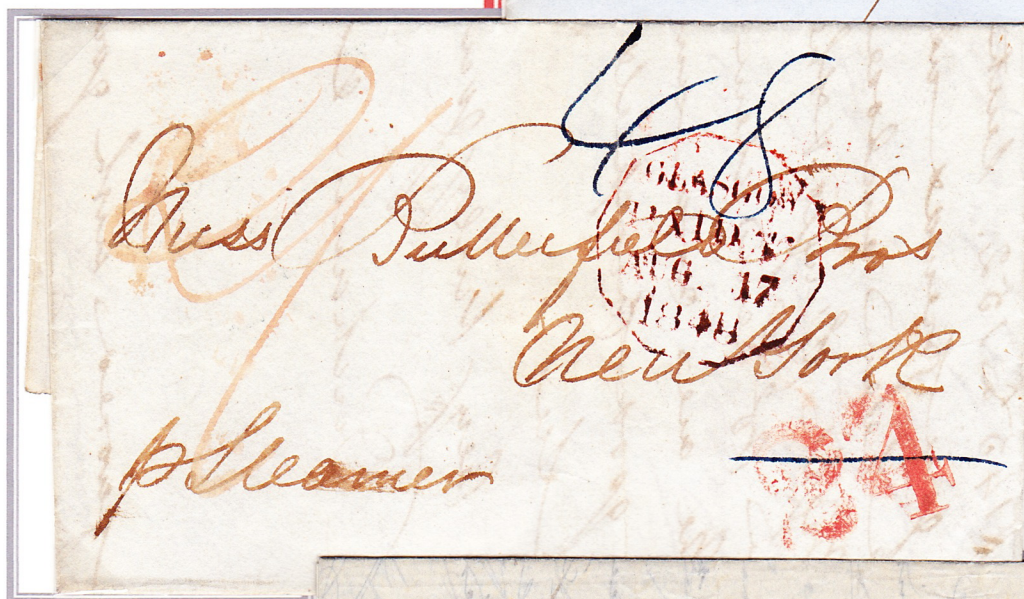
The rate of 24c  
was for a packet letter  
posted at the port  
of departure.

The 1 shilling packet  
rate was paid in the U.K.

New York via Liverpool to London

July 5 to July 19, 1848

R.M.S. Britannia



The 2 shilling  
packet rate was  
paid in the U.K.

The rate of 48c  
was for a ½-1 oz.  
packet letter  
addressed to the port.

Glasgow via Liverpool to NY

August 19 to 31, 1848

R.M.S. Niagara

### Unauthorized Triple Rate

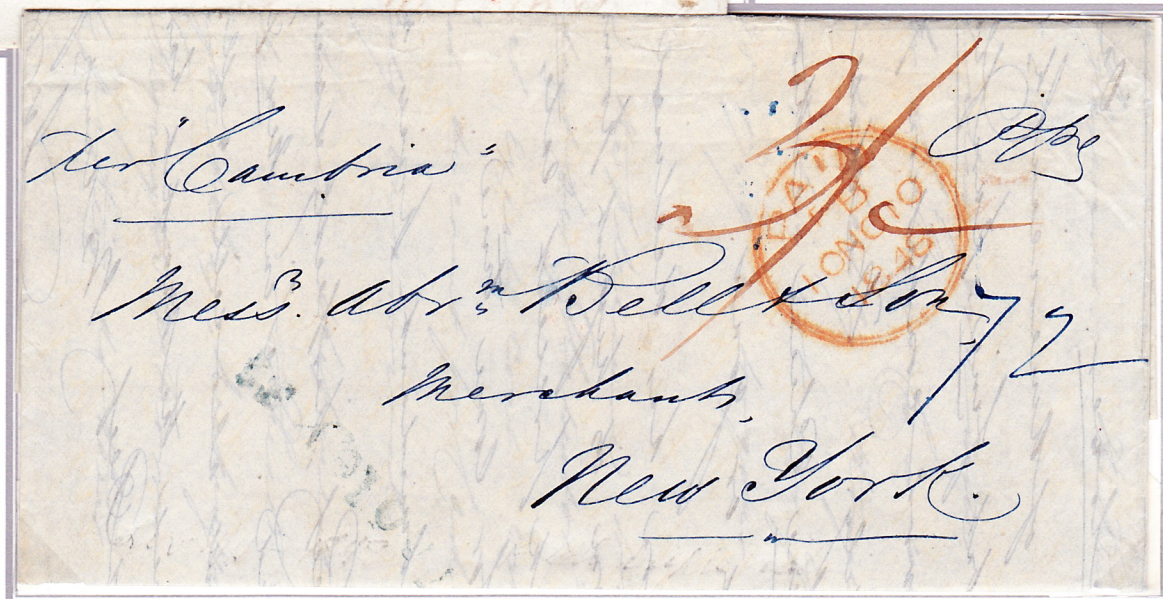
The 3 shilling  
packet rate was  
paid in the U.K.

The rate of 72c  
was for a 1-1½ oz.  
packet letter  
addressed to the port.

London via Liverpool to NY

November 11 to 25, 1848

R.M.S. Cambria





New York City

pencil mspt "29; blue ink mspt "29"; red 22x15mm "29"

up to 300 miles

single packet

The rate of 29c  
was for a ½ oz. packet  
letter sent up to 300 miles.

The 1 shilling packet rate  
was paid in the U.K.;  
the 1d rate paid for  
forwarding within London.

NY via Boston and Liverpool to London  
(forwarded within London)

September 6 to September 19, 1848

R.M.S. Britannia



The 1 shilling packet rate  
was prepaid in the U.K.

The rate of 29c was for  
a ½ oz. packet letter sent  
up to 300 miles.

India (privately) via Liverpool  
and New York to Boston

Sept. 30 to Oct. 13, 1848

R.M.S. Britannia

The 1 shilling packet rate  
was prepaid in the U.K.

The rate of 29c was for  
a ½ oz. packet letter sent  
up to 300 miles.

London via Liverpool and  
New York to Boston

September 2 to 14, 1848

R.M.S. Europa

This red-orange "29"  
hand stamp is reported  
used from July 8 to  
Oct. 17 1848.





New York City

red 34mm "29" CDS; pencil mspt "58"; blue ink mspt "58"

up to 300 miles

single packet / double packet



The 1 shilling packet rate was prepaid in the U.K.

The rate of 29c was for a ½ oz. packet letter sent up to 300 miles.

Liverpool via NY to Boston

Nov. 25 to Dec. 14, 1848

R.M.S. Canada

This New York CDS is reported used in red from July 9, 1848 to Jan. 1, 1849.

The 2 shilling packet rate was prepaid in the U.K.

The rate of 58c was for a ½-1 oz. letter sent up to 300 miles.

Liverpool via NY to Boston

Nov. 25 to Dec. 14, 1848

R.M.S. Canada



The rate of 58c was for a ½-1 oz. letter sent up to 300 miles.

The 35 decime rate was paid in France, including 20 decimes for the U.K. and 15 decimes for a 20g letter sent 220-300km from Boulogne to Paris.

NY via Boston to Paris

September 6 to 19, 1848

R.M.S. Britannia



New York City red 34mm "34" CDS; blue ink mspt "68"; blue ink mspt "78"

over 300 miles

single pack / double packet / double packet (error)



### From Belgium

The 1 shilling packet rate was prepaid in the U.K.

The rate of 34c was for a 0-½ oz. packet letter sent over 300 miles.

Antwerp via NY to Castine, Me.

November 11 to 25, 1848

R.M.S. Cambria

This New York CDS is reported used in red from July 22 to Nov. 11, 1848.

### From Gibraltar

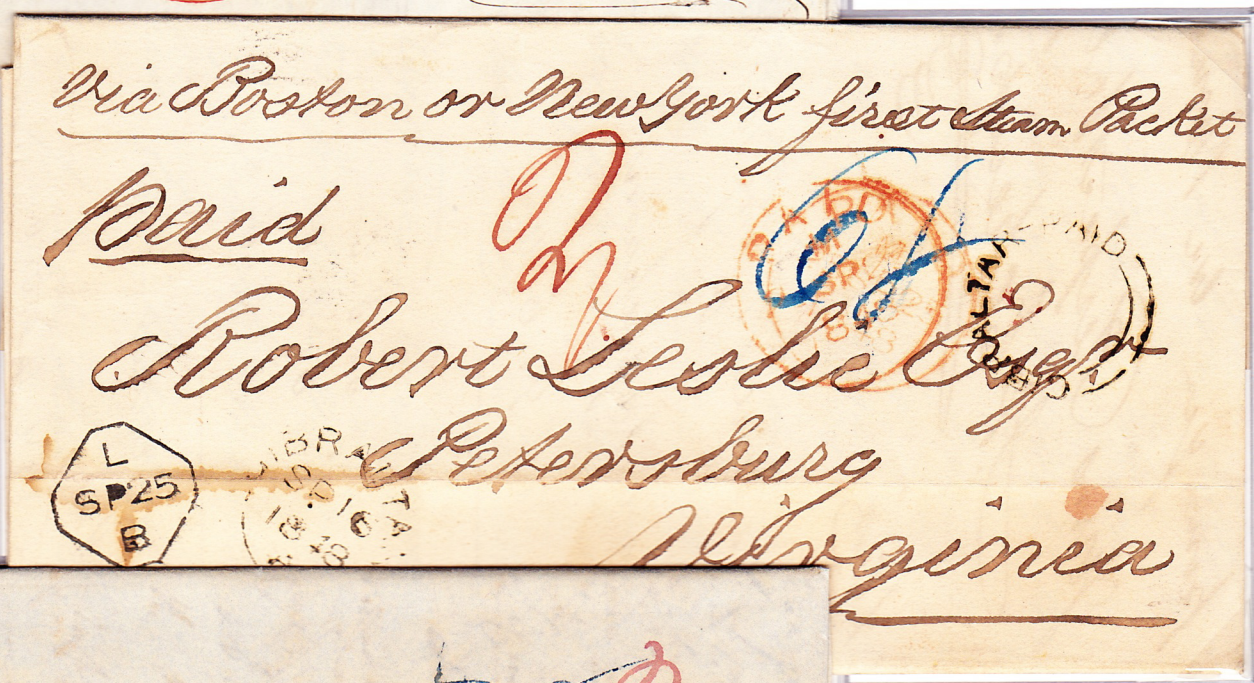
The 2sh pkt rate was paid in Gibraltar

The rate of 68c was for a ½-1 oz. letter sent over 300 miles

Gibraltar via NY to Petersburg, Va.

Nov 25 to Dec 14, 1848

R.M.S. Britannia



The 2 shilling packet rate was paid in the U.K.

The rate of 78c was applied in error for a ½-1 oz. letter sent over 300 miles

London via NY to Petersburg, Va.

August 19 to 31, 1848

R.M.S. Niagara





paid to the port / carried privately to the steamer

single packet

**Avoiding the Retaliatory Rate - Legally and Legally**

Criticism of this rate became increasingly evident. The New York Herald called the attempt to convince the U.K. to abandon its 1 shilling discriminatory rate "lame and impotent" and that, assuming equal British obstinacy, "we shall be condemned to this heavy and cruel taxation until we get a new Postmaster General." It went on to state that "there is no method of evading the provisions of the law" due to "heavy penalties". However, ways were found to avoid this odious surcharge. An seldom used, but legal, means was to pay the postage only to the port, where the postmaster was required by the postal regulations to find the next non-British, non-contract ship "convenient to carry letters to the place of their destination". A common illegal means was to carry the letter directly to the steamer, avoiding the post office entirely.

**Legal Avoidance - Paying Postage to the Port**

The 10c rate was for a letter of up to ½ oz. sent over 300 miles.

Per Sec. 359-362 of the 1847 Postal Regulations, the postmaster was required to put the letter aboard the next non-British sailing ship headed to the destination.

Darlington, SC via New York to Liverpool

December 13, 1848

New Line Ship *Liverpool*, Eldridge

**Illegal Avoidance - Placing the Letter Directly Aboard the Ship**

No U.S. rate.

The 1 shilling packet rate was paid in the U.K. by a forwarder, who also paid the 1 shilling, 3d rate to the Sardinian border.

An additional 30 decimes was paid by the addressee for Sardinian-Tuscan transit.

New York via Boston, Liverpool, London, Paris, and Sardinia to Livorno, Tuscany

Nov. 29 to Dec 12, 1848

*R.M.S. Acadia*





**Boston**

**red 17x11mm "24"; red crayon mspt "21"**

**to the port**  
**up to 300 miles**

**single packet**  
**single ship**

The 1 shilling packet rate was paid in the U.K.

The rate of 24c was for a packet letter addressed to the port.

This "24" hand stamp is known used in red from September 18 to December 6, 1848.



Manchester via L'pool to Boston

November 4 to 19, 1848

*R.M.S. Acadia*

### **Retaliatory Rate Ship Letter**

The letter was sent unpaid from the U.K.

The rate of 21c was for a ship letter sent over 300 miles.

The Act of June 27, 1848 called for a retaliatory rate of 16c for letters arriving in the U.S. by **British sailing ship**.

The vast majority of mail was carried by British contract steamers or American sailing ships.



Halifax via Boston to New York

July 5 to 19, 1848

*British Schooner Boston*



Boston

red 18x10mm "29"; 19½x12½mm "29"; 20x14mm "29"

up to 300 miles

single packet



The 1 shilling packet rate was paid in the U.K.

The rate of 29c was for a ½ oz. packet letter sent up to 300 miles.

Manchester via  
Boston to NY

July 15 to 27, 1848

R.M.S. Europa

This "29" hand stamp is reported used from July 12 to Dec. 16, 1848.

The 1 shilling packet rate was paid in the U.K.

The rate of 29c was for a ½ oz. packet letter sent up to 300 miles.

Auchnacloy, Nor. Ireland via Boston to Utica, NY

July 1 to 12, 1848

R.M.S. Niagara

This "29" hand stamp is reported used from July 18 - 27, 1848.



The rate of 29c was for a ½ oz. packet letter sent up to 300 mi.

The 19 decime rate (10 dec. for the U.K. and 9 dec. for a 7½g letter sent from Boulogne to Cognac) is not marked.

Boston via New York and Liverpool to Cognac, France

October 11 to 23, 1848

R.M.S. America

This "29" hand stamp is known used from Aug. 14 to Dec. 16, 1848.





Boston

red crayon mspt "58"; 22x14mm "58"

up to 300 miles

double packet

Sent from New York to Boston without a NY Rate Mark - Rated at Boston



The 2 shilling packet rate was paid in the U.K.

The rate of 58c was for a ½-1oz. packet letter sent up to 300 miles.

This red crayon manuscript "58" is **unreported** in Blake.

While common for NY not to apply a CDS, the lack of a NY rate mark is unusual.

Liverpool and New York to Boston

July 22 to Aug. 4, 1848

R.M.S. America

The 58c Boston Hand Stamp - Approx. 10 known examples

The 2 shilling packet rate was prepaid in the U.K.

The rate of 58c was for a ½-1oz. packet letter sent up to 300 miles.

This "58" hand stamp, **unreported** in Blake, is known used from Aug. 13 to Dec. 16, 1848.



London via Liverpool and Boston to Salem

August 12 to 26, 1848

R.M.S. Britannia



Boston

red 17x11mm "34"; 20x14mm "34"; red crayon mspt "68"

over 300 miles

single packet / double packet



The 1 shilling packet rate was paid in the U.K.

The rate of 34c was for a ½ oz. letter sent over 300 miles.

London via Boston to Phila. Pa.

July 1 to 12, 1848

R.M.S. Niagara

This red Boston "34" hand stamp is known used from July 12 to Dec. 16, 1848.

The rate of 120 Dutch cents paid for all British transit.

The rate of 34c was for a ½ oz. letter sent over 300 miles.

Rotterdam via Boston to Phila. Pa.

Sept. 9 to 24, 1848

R.M.S. Acadia

This "34" hand stamp is reported used July 27 to December 16, 1848.



The 2 shilling packet rate was paid in the U.K.

The rate of 68c was for a ½-1oz. packet letter sent over 300 miles.

Liverpool via Boston to Petersburg, Va.

November 4 to 19, 1848

R.M.S. Acadia





## New York / Boston

red 23x25mm "24" / 20x14mm "29"

to the port  
up to 300 miles

single packet  
single packet

### Letters from British Colonies

While the great majority of letters bearing retaliatory rates were sent between the U.S. and Liverpool, the Act of Congress of June 27, 1848 applied to **letters carried on any British packet to the U.S.** Letters from the Maritime Provinces could be sent to the U.S. on board the Cunard steamers that stopped at Halifax, Nova Scotia on their way from Liverpool to Boston or New York. Letters from the British West Indies could be sent to the U.S. on the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company packets operating between the U.K., British West Indies, and New York or New Orleans.

#### **From Trinidad via Bermuda**

The 1 shilling packet rate was paid in Trinidad.

The 24c rate was for a packet letter addressed to the port of arrival.



Trinidad via Bermuda to New York

October 6 to October 12, 1848

*R.M.S. Severn*

The 1 shilling packet rate was paid in Halifax, NS.

The rate of 29c was for a ½ oz. packet letter sent up to 300 miles.



Halifax via Boston to NY

September 5 to September 8, 1848

*R.M.S. Hibernia*



**Philadelphia**

**red pencil manuscript "29"; blue 15x8½mm "29"**

**up to 300 miles**

**single packet**



The 29c rate was for a  
½ oz. packet letter  
sent up to 300 miles

The 24 decime rate  
was paid in France,  
including 10 decimes  
for the U.K. and 14  
decimes for a 10g  
letter sent 600-750 km  
from Boulogne  
to Cognac.

Philadelphia via New York and Liverpool to Congac

July 5 to 19, 1848

R.M.S. *Britannia*



29

The 29c rate was for  
a ½ oz. packet letter  
sent up to 300 miles

The 15 decime rate  
was due in France,  
including 10 decimes  
for the U.K. and 5  
decimes for a single  
letter sent 215 km  
from Boulogne  
to Paris.

Philadelphia via New York to Paris

October 11 to 23, 1848

R.M.S. *America*



Philadelphia

pencil manuscript "58"; blue 16x8mm "34"

up to 300 miles  
over 300 miles

double packet  
single packet



The 58c rate was for a ½-1 oz. packet letter sent up to 300 miles

The 43 decime rate was paid in France, including 20 decimes for the U.K. and 23 decimes for a 15-20g letter sent 600-750 km from Boulogne to Cognac.

Philadelphia via New York and Liverpool to Cognac

November 8 to 20, 1848

R.M.S. Europa

### The 34c Philadelphia Hand Stamp - Fewer than 5 known examples

34

The rate of 34c was for a ½oz. packet letter sent over 300 miles.

The 15 decime rate was due in France, including 10 decimes for the U.K. and 5 decimes for a single letter sent 215 km from Boulogne to Paris.



Philadelphia, Pa. via Liverpool to Paris, France

September 18 to October 2, 1848

R.M.S. Hibernia



**Baltimore /Charleston**

**black ink manuscript "34"/ red ink manuscript "8"**

**over 300 miles**

**single packet**

The 34c rate was for a ½ oz. packet letter sent over 300 miles

The 19 decime rate was paid in France, including 10 decimes for the U.K. and 9 decimes for a 7½g letter sent 500-600km from Boulogne to Cognac.



Baltimore via Boston and Liverpool to Cognac

September 6 to September 20, 1848

R.M.S. *Britannia*

**Only Known Prepaid Retaliatory Newspaper Usage**



Charleston via Boston and Liverpool to Edinburgh, Scotland

December 22, 1848 to January 13, 1849

New Line ship *Liverpool*

The 8c retaliatory rate was paid in the U.S. for two newspapers carried by a British packet. The 4d rate was paid in the U.K. The newspapers arrived at New York too late for the Dec. 20 sailing of the Cunard steamer *Canada* and was sent on the American ship *Liverpool* of the New Line, and thus were overpaid at Charleston.



## New Orleans

black 15x10mn "10"; 16x10mm "34"

over 300 miles

single packet

Sent Before the New Orleans P.O. Knew about the Retaliatory Rate

### First "Retaliatory Rate" Sailing from Boston

The rate 10c was for a ½ oz.  
letter sent over 300 miles.

The 15 decime rate was  
due in France, including  
10 decimes for the U.K.  
and 5 decimes for a single  
letter sent 220-300 km  
from Boulogne-sur-Mer  
to Havre.

This cover was posted on July 1,  
three days after the retaliatory  
rate was enacted and before  
instructions from the PMG had  
reached New Orleans. The rate  
of 10c was accepted by the  
Boston P.O., rather than return  
it for additional postage.



New Orleans via Boston to Havre, France

July 12 to 24, 1848

R.M.S. Cambria

The rate of 34c  
was for a ½ oz.  
packet letter sent  
over 300 miles.

The 1 shilling  
packet rate was  
paid in the U.K.

The black New Orleans  
"34" rate hand stamp is  
reported used only  
in 1848.



New Orleans, La., via New York to London

December 6 to 20, 1848

R.M.S. Cambria