

Revolutionary Hostilities Begin: Admiralty Assumes Command of Packet Service

War broke out in April 1775 with the battles of Lexington and Concord. American attacks on British ships soon followed, and led to withdrawal of scheduled packet service to New York. The last Post Office packet left Falmouth on 6 October, after which the Admiralty assumed scheduling and protection of the packets.

Armed Packet Through the American Privateer Blockade of New York

Bristol, 20 December 1775

Sent unpaid: Bristol assumed private ship, so rated only 4^d inland postage to London
GPO London rerated $1/4$, the unpaid packet rate

Packet *Swallow* : Falmouth 9 January 1776, New York 9 March 1776 60 days

Carried privately to Philadelphia, where rated $2/6$ due in local currency
 16^d stg. x 180% inflation + 2^d carrier fee = 30^d = $2/6$

***Swallow* carried a larger volume of mail than any previous transatlantic voyage**

Swallow offloaded mails to HMS Asia, a 64-gun frigate in New York Harbor. Deputy PMG Foxcroft was given permission to board Asia with clerks to sort the mails, so on 19 March, Francis Dashwood (PO Secretary) and Elias Nixon were sent by the New York Committee of Safety to bring mails ashore. Agents traveled to New York to pay for and collect their town's letters from Nixon and Henricus Boel (First Clerk). The 1765 British postal rates were retained.

Private Sailing Ship

American Blockade of British Enclaves

American privateers began attacking British shipping in the Spring of 1775. As America's largest city, Philadelphia was a center of trade, so British vessels in or out of Delaware Bay offered attractive prizes. By the Summer of 1775 Royal Navy warships were patrolling the mid-Atlantic coast between Cape Henlopen and Chesapeake Bay to thwart privateer attacks.

Through the American Privateer Blockade of Delaware Bay

Philadelphia, 2 August 1775

Sent unpaid

Ship *Chalkley* : Philadelphia 9 August, Bristol 17 September

London rated 5^d due: 1^d ship, 4^d inland from Bristol

Received at London 19 September 49 days

"Fifteen large galliots carrying at their bows from 32 to 48 pounders, swivels, etc. and fifty men each, are built at Philadelphia, and are to be stationed in Delawar [sic] River about Redbank, to oppose any men of war, who may attempt to come up the river, and to defend the machines sunk in that narrow part of the river."

The Ipswich Journal, England, 23 September 1775

Delaware Bay was not under a British blockade until March 1776 when the frigate HMS *Roebuck* entered Delaware Bay and stood off Lewes. Despite defensive measures along the Delaware, Philadelphia was invaded and occupied by British troops in September 1777.

Post-War Reinstatement of British Packet Service

After the American Revolution, British authorities asked Benjamin Franklin to reinstate the New York packets under the old terms, including that no U.S. ship fees were to be charged on incoming packet letters. Anxious to restart commercial relations, the American government agreed.

Single rate, prepaid 1/6 :
6^d inland
1s packet
London marked **POST/PAID**

Packet *Shelburn* :
Falmouth 16 December
New York 4 February 1786
New York rated 2^{dwt} due

Received 6 February

53 days

Boxed **204** :
204 miles to London



Liverpool, 3 December 1785



Ostende Belgium, 30 June 1787

Privately to London, posted 4 July
Prepaid 2/- for double packet rate

Packet *Dashwood* :
Falmouth 8 July
New York 31 August
New York rated 4^{dwt} for double inland

Philadelphia rated 1s due (sterling)

Received 1 September 60 days

Act of 1784, 24 Geo III
effective 31 August 1784

Under one post stage	2 ^d
1-2 post stages	3 ^d
Over 2 post stages:	
under 80 miles	4 ^d
80-150 miles	5 ^d
above 150 miles	6 ^d
Ship letters	
Inland postage plus	1 ^d

Quadruple Rate



London, 2 February 1786

Prepaid 4/- for a letter weighing over 1 oz.

Packet *Speedy*: Falmouth 14 February, New York 18 AprilNew York rated 8^{dwt} due for inland postagePhiladelphia rated 3/6 due in local currency: 8^{dwt} = 24^d sterling, so: 24^d x 1.67 = 40^d local + 2^d delivery = 3s6^d

Received 21 April 1786 67 days

From Portugal via London



St. Ubes, Portugal, 30 June 1788

Privately to London, received 11 October

Prepaid 1/- packet rate on 7 January 1789

By forwarder *Duveluz & Co.*Packet *Duke of Cumberland* :

Falmouth 11 February

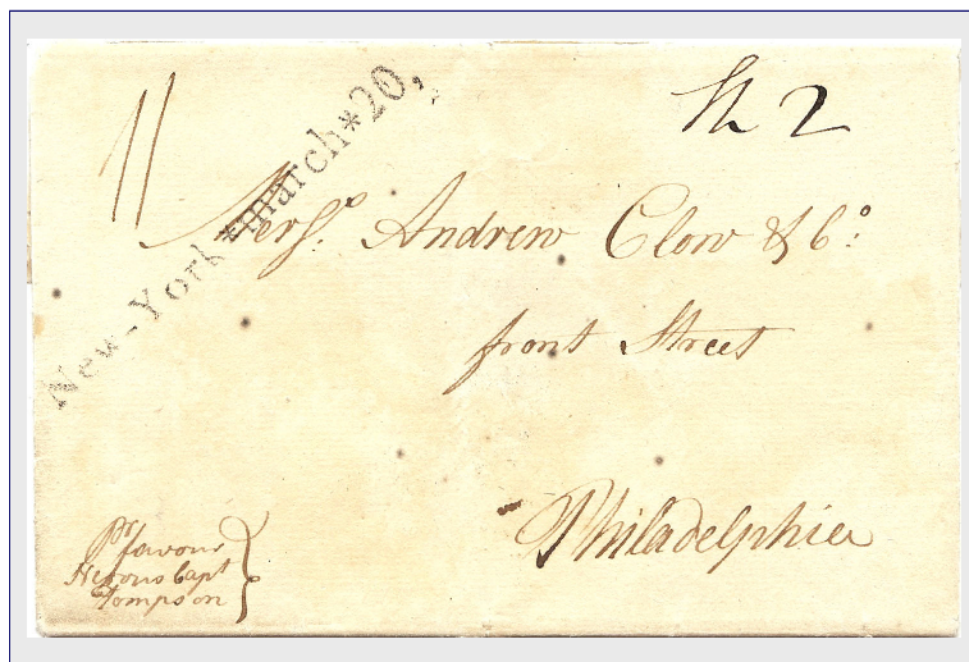
New York 2 April

New York rated 1^{dwt} 8^{gr} due in Philadelphia
(60-100 miles; 1788 Congr. Resolution)

Received 5 April 1789 279 days

Private Sailing Ship

Rate Reduction of 1787



Liverpool, 19 January 1790

Sent unpaid by private ship

Ship *Nereus* : Liverpool 20 January, New York 20 March

New York rated **Sh 2**: 2d stg. ship fee; 16 grains of silver per Congressional resolution of 1788

Phila. rated **1/-** due in local currency: [2d stg. ship + 4d stg. Inland] x 1.67 inflation = 10d; 10d + 2d delivery = 1/-

Received 23 March

64 days

1787 Rate Reduction effective 5 April 1788			
Mileage	Sterling	GB Pence	PA Pence
Not over 60	1 dwt	3d	5d
60-100	1 dwt, 8 gr	4d	7d
100-200	2 dwt	6d	10d
200-300	2 dwt, 16 gr	8d	1s1d
300-400	3 dwt	9d	1s3d
400-500	3 dwt, 8 gr	10d	1s5d
Ship letters	16 gr	2	3d
Inland postage added to ship fee			

These new rates ended a period of 11 rate changes in 14 years, at one point having been inflated to 40 times the 1775 rates.

Private Sailing Ship

1792 Increase in Ship-Letter Fee: America's First Handstamped Numerals

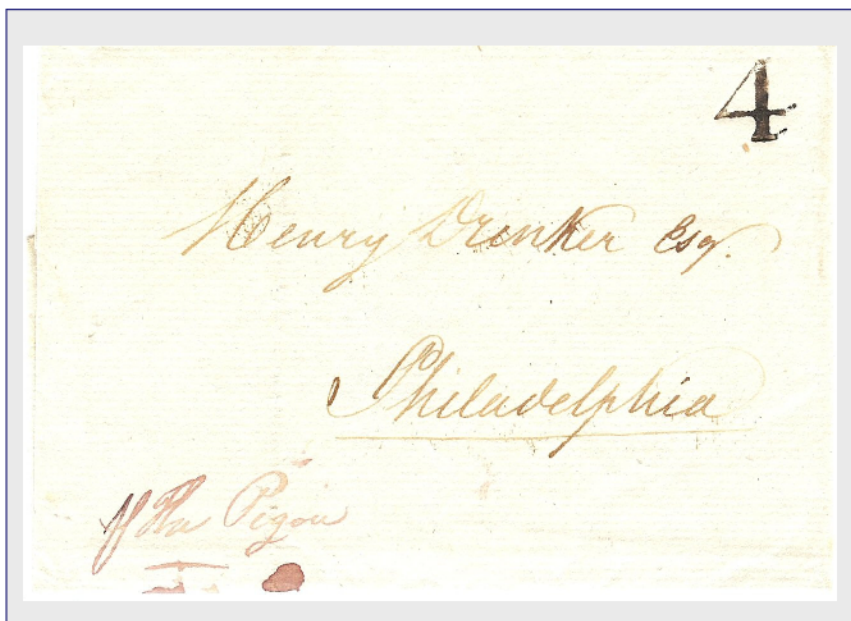
Carried privately to London

Ship *Pigou* : London 2 September
Philadelphia 31 October

60 days

Philadelphia rated **4** cents due

12mm **4** used 1792 to 1799
Finest of 15 recorded



Berne, Switzerland, 3 August 1793



London, 28 March 1794

Sent unpaid

Ship *George Barclay* :
London 1 March
Philadelphia 1 May 62 days

Philadelphia rated **4** cents due

8mm **4** used 1793 to 1794
Finest of 5 recorded

U.S. Act of 1792
effective 1 June 1792

Mileage	Cents
Not over 30	6
30-60	8
60-100	10
100-150	12½
150-200	15
200-250	17
250-350	20
350-450	22
Over 450	25
Ship letters	4

Philadelphia was the only city to use a handstamp 4 device. Four sizes of typeface were used to indicate this rate; a census records that all four comprise only 26 examples.

Private Sailing Ship
British Contract Sailing Ship



Philadelphia, 8 November 1794

Sent unpaid by private ship *Adriana* :
Philadelphia 8 November
Falmouth 9 December

London rated **11^d** due:
1^d ship, 10^d inland

Received 9 December

31 days

**FALMOUTH
SHIP-LRE**

Carried privately to New York,
where sent unpaid

Packet *Harlequin* :
New York 1 May
Falmouth 7 June

London rated **1/8** due:
1s packet, 8^d inland to Whitby

Received 8 June

70 days



Philadelphia, 29 March 1798

Eastbound post-war letters by Falmouth packet are uncommon

Letters from Philadelphia were seldom sent to New York for the packet to Falmouth, because private ship departures from Philadelphia for England were relatively frequent. However from the date this letter was written until 30 April, not a single ship cleared Philadelphia for Great Britain. The sender evidently grew tired of waiting, so the letter went by favor to New York.

British Contract Sailing Ship

British Packet Mail Arriving at U.S. Ports not Liable for Ship Fees

Packet to New York



Rotterdam, 2 November 1792

Carried privately to London, where paid the **1/- packet rate**.

Packet *Queen Charlotte*
Falmouth 24 December
New York 7 February

New York crossed out the London PAID, then mis-rated **12** cents

Received 9 February 1793

89 days

U.S. inland postage due should have been only 10 cents (60-100 miles).

Packet to Halifax, Private Ship to Boston

Prepaid **1/1** : 1s packet, 1d to London

Packet *Sandwich*:
Falmouth 27 February
Halifax 3 April

Private schooner *Lively* :
Halifax ~20 April
Boston 27 April

Boston rated **24** cents due
4¢ ship, 20¢ inland (300-350 miles)

May arrival date unknown

~90 days

Boston charged a ship fee because the letter did not arrive by packet



Richmond, 4 February 1795

French naval vessels and privateers used New York harbor as a base for launching attacks against British ships, which resulted in the withdrawal of monthly packet service to New York from January 1794 until November 1795. Packets letters were instead landed at Halifax, Nova Scotia, from where they were taken to Boston by private vessels.

British Contract Sailing Ship

From Italy via Swiss Forwarder, Double Rate from London



Livorno, 13 October 1797

Carried privately to Geneva

Forwarded by Merle d'Aubigné's courier service: Geneva 19 November, London 27 December

Forwarder paid $3/4$: 2 x (8^d London to Falmouth, 1s packet)Packet *Halifax* : Falmouth 25 January, New York 10 MarchNew York rated **20** cents due, double rate for 60-100 miles

Received 12 March 150 days

Act of 1797, 37 Geo III

effective 5 January 1797

Packet rate remained 1s, but must include:

8^d inland postage from London, and
inland postage to London if posted elsewhere

From Hamburg Via London



Hamburg, 6 December 1799

Carried privately to London, where paid $1/8$ on December 14: 8^d to Falmouth, 1s packet

Packet *Earl Gower* : Falmouth 12 February 1800, New York 10 April

New York mis-rated at **12** cents, ignoring the 1799 rate change

Received 11 April 1800, *transit 127 days*

U.S. Act of 2 March 1799	
effective 1 May 1799	
Mileage	Cents
Not over 40	8
40-90	10
90-150	12½
150-300	17
300-500	20
Over 500	25
Ship letters	
Delivered at port	6
Elsewhere, plus postage	2

Although Hamburg was an important trading center in 1799, direct sailings for Philadelphia were infrequent. The sender no doubt counted on the regularity of Falmouth packets. In this case the results must have disappointed.

British Contract Sailing Ship

Falmouth Packet Single Rate

Prepaid $1/8$: 8^d to Falmouth, 1s packet

Packet *Duke of Cumberland*

Falmouth 24 January

New York 1 March

New York Rated $12\frac{1}{2}$ cents for inland

Received 2 March 55 days



London, 7 January 1801

Falmouth Packet Double Rate



Lewes, 15 January 1804

Prepaid $3/10$:
2x (11^d to London + 1s packet)

Packet *Prince Adolphus* :

Falmouth 12 February

New York 7 April

New York rated **25** cents for
double inland

Received 9 April 1804 86 days

Private Sailing Ship

From Jamaica Via Baltimore



Sent unpaid by private ship

Fair American

Kingston 24 February

Baltimore 20 April

Baltimore rated **27** cents due:

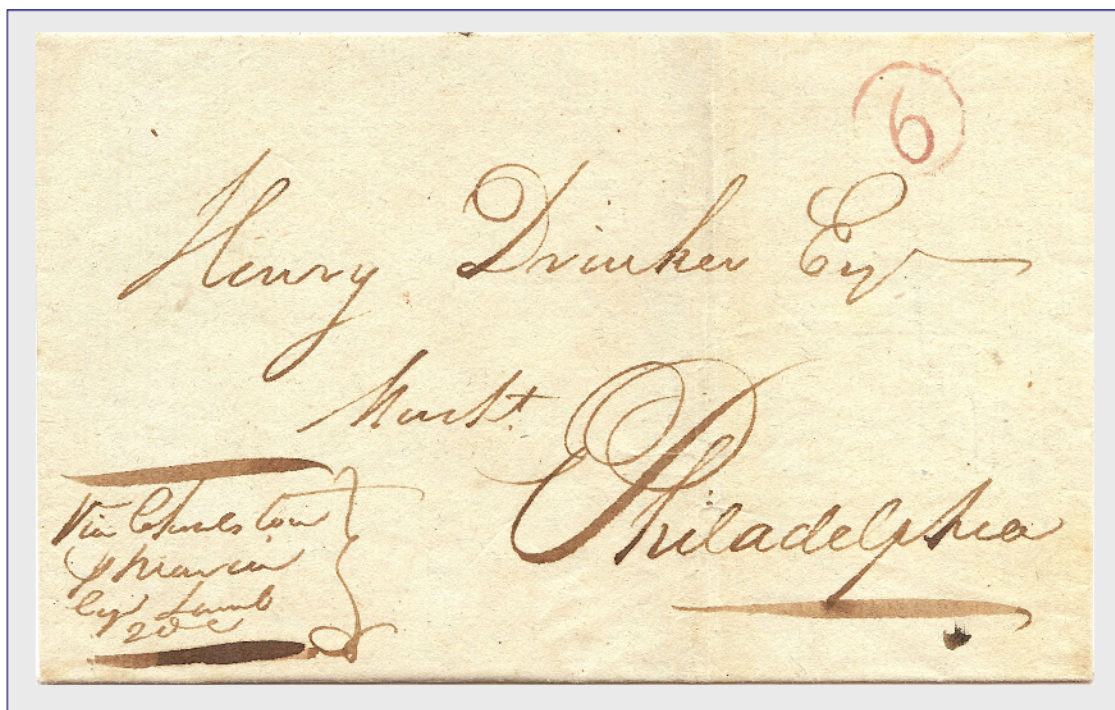
2¢ ship, 2 x 12½¢ inland

Received 23 April

55 days

Kingston, 24 February 1804

From The Bahamas Via Charleston



Nassau, 26 April 1801

Sent unpaid via sloop *Maria* : Nassau 26 April, Charleston 5-30 May, Philadelphia 10 June
 Philadelphia rated **6** cents due for delivery at the port

Received 10 June 46 days

Private Sailing Ship

Prepaid Ship Letter



London, 21 July 1803

Prepaid **11^d**, one half the packet rate of 1/10

Ship *Pigou* : London 22 July, Philadelphia 7 September 47 days
Philadelphia rated **6** cents due for delivery within the city

The only recorded example of this postmark on a letter to Philadelphia



1802-1805

Prepaid Ship-Letter Rates From London

1799 (39 Geo III c 76)	≥ ½ packet rate
1803 (POD)	11 ^d to N. America
1814 (POD)	¼ packet rate
1815 (POD)	½ packet rate
1835 (5/6 William IV 25)	8 ^d

Prepayment of ship letters was not permissible until 1799. **Act 39 Geo III c 76** allowed private ships to carry mail for the post office at "not less than half the packet rate". This was amended by GPO notice in 1803 to be exactly half the packet rate, and required letters to be held in sealed bags.

Private Sailing Ship

Via Cadiz and Havana



Sent unpaid by private ship

Ship *John* :
 Hull 23 July
 Philadelphia 30 October

Philadelphia rated **6** cents due
 for delivery within the city

69 days



Aug 1802 – Jul 1805

Hull, 23 July 1803

Sent unpaid by private ship

Ship *Union* :
 Plymouth 8 February 1809
 Philadelphia 9 March

Philadelphia rated **22** cents due:
 2¢ ship, 20¢ inland to Boston

Received 12 March

81 days



London, 22 December 1808

Private ships commonly sailed the southern route to Philadelphia, since it provided additional port calls for trade purposes, and avoided sailing against the Gulf Stream. Stops were often made at Cadiz, Madeira, and Caribbean ports.

Private Sailing Ship

From Cape Colony

unpaid by private ship

Ship *Perseverance* :
 Cape Town 8 March
 Philadelphia 3 May

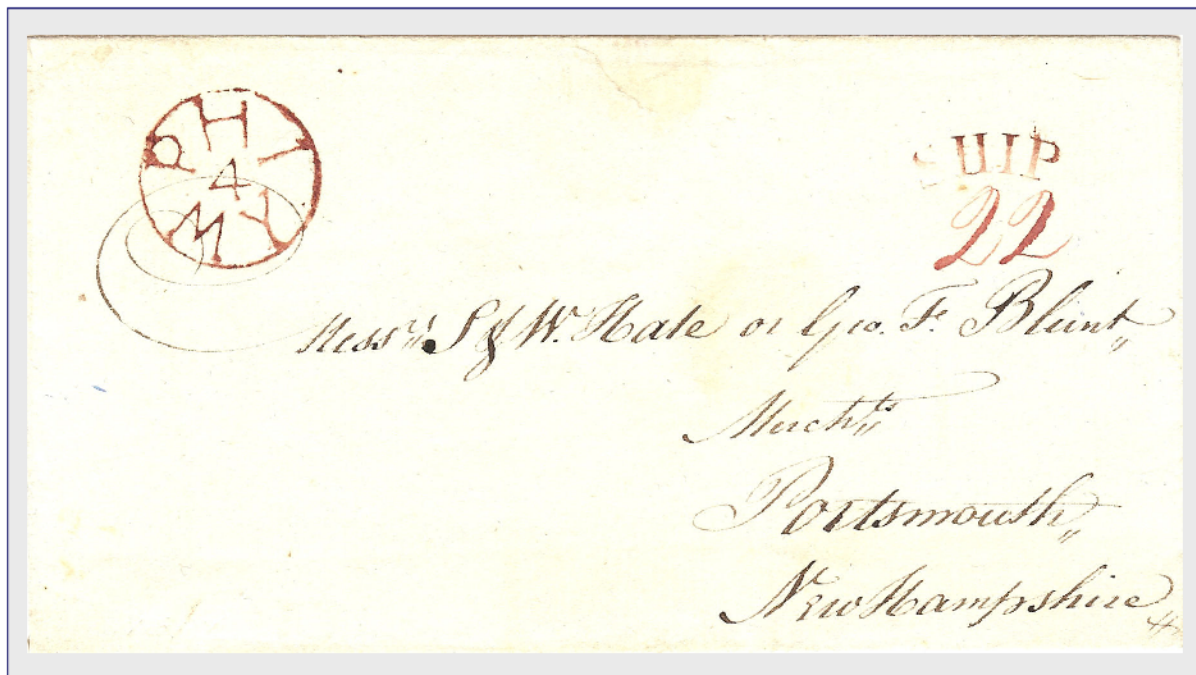
Philadelphia rated **22**
 cents due:
 2¢ ship, 20¢ inland
 to Portsmouth
 (300-500-Miles)

58 days

SHIP

1804-1817

earliest recorded use



Cape Town, 8 March 1804

Double Rate via Kingston-on-Hull



Philadelphia, 13 February 1807

Unpaid by private ship

Endorsed for *Latona*, but sent
 on Ship *Abigail*:
 Philadelphia 14 February
 arrival unknown

Hull rated **1/10** due :
 2 (4^d ship + 7^d inland)

Illustrated in Robertson

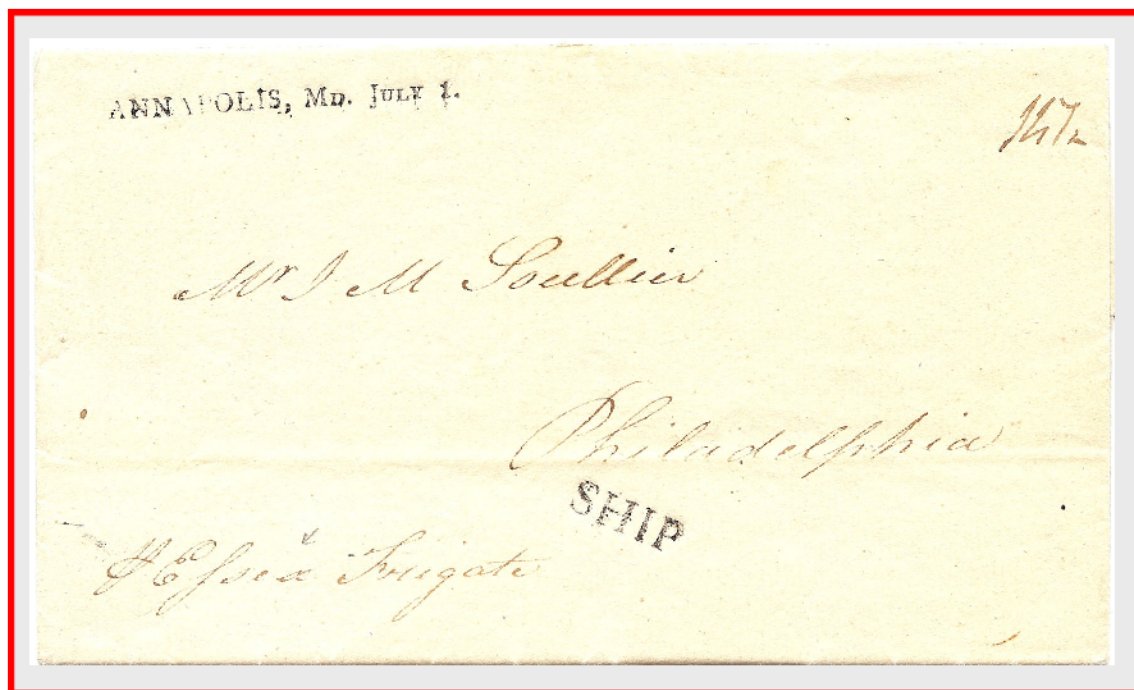


two recorded

Private ships were often the wiser choice for senders in British colonies, as they could offer a more direct route—and very possibly a faster one—than sending a letter via the GPO in London.

American Naval Warship

Diplomatic Mission of American Warship



London, 8 April 1811

Sent unpaid by U.S. Naval vessel
Frigate *Essex*: Cowes 6 May, Annapolis 1 July

Annapolis rated **14½**cents due: 2¢ ship, 12½¢ inland (80-150 miles)

Received 4 July 1811 78 days

ANNAPOLIS, MD. JULY 1.

2 recorded in black

Prelude to the War of 1812

Anglo-American relations had been worsening since the 1790s, due to harassment of American merchant vessels engaged in "neutral trade" with France during Britain's war with France.

In 1811 President Madison recalled the U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain, Thomas Pinckney, and replaced him with a Charges des Affairs—a position of lower rank. The 46-gun U.S. Frigate *Essex* was sent to England to transport Pinckney home to Annapolis. She put into Cowes on the Isle of Wight, just offshore from the entrance to Portsmouth Harbor, to where Pinckney is reported to have traveled from London.