

Leominster, Mass. Provisional Postage Due and Instructional Labels

Postmasters worldwide applied manuscript or handstamped rate and instructional markings to mailed items to inform transit and destination postmasters and recipients of services rendered or fees required. In the mid 19th century in the United States, any rate markings applied to mail designated postage due from the recipient unless specifically marked “Paid” to designate prepayment.

One postmaster, Charles H. Colburn of Leominster, Massachusetts, created small labels with postage due rates and instructional markings and applied them to letters requiring further actions or explanations. The use of such postmaster provisional postage due labels beginning in 1855 pre-dated the issuance of official U.S. Government postage due stamps in 1879 by almost 25 years. As most of his labels are formatted differently, they were apparently created either singly or in small batches. These, as well as two copies of an Easton, Penn. label are the only known postmaster provisional postage due labels.

The postage due labels (at least) deserve catalog recognition. Like the postmaster provisional postage stamps, they were postmaster issuances of adhesives to indicate postal charges. Like the postmaster provisional postage stamps, they were replaced by adhesives of similar function by the U.S. Government. Like the postmaster provisional postage stamps, they are deserving of catalog recognition.

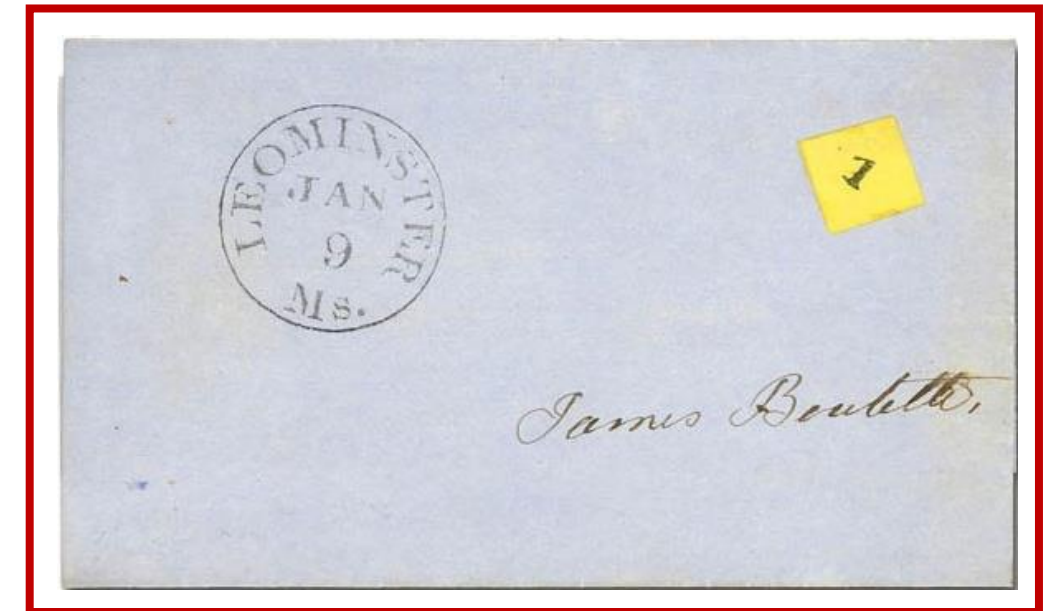
There are 45 recorded examples of the Leominster postmaster provisional postage due and instructional labels. This exhibit shows more than one third of them, including the earliest recorded, demonstrating the span and breadth of this postmaster’s activities.

The Creator of the Provisional Labels:

Charles H. Colburn, the Postmaster for Leominster, Mass., served in this role from 1833 until his retirement in 1874 but for an 8-day interruption due to politics. He was meticulous in his duties and his aide and successor described how he would heat his handstamps prior to use to ensure a clear and precise strike. As Postmaster, Colburn served in a city with a population ranging from 3,121 in 1850, to 3,522 in 1870.

N.B. – It’s pronounced “Lemon-stir”

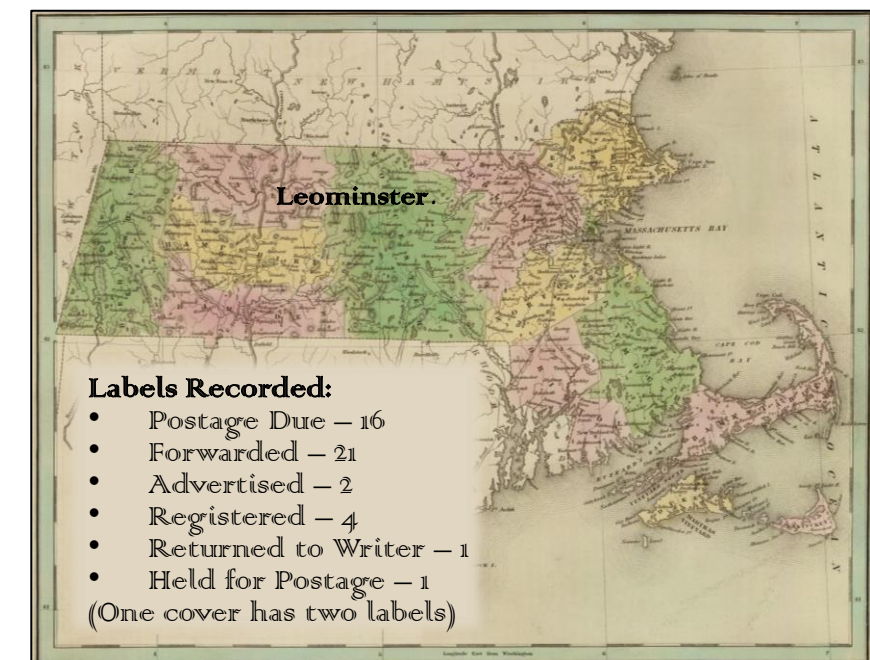
Postmaster Provisional Postage Due Label



PFC

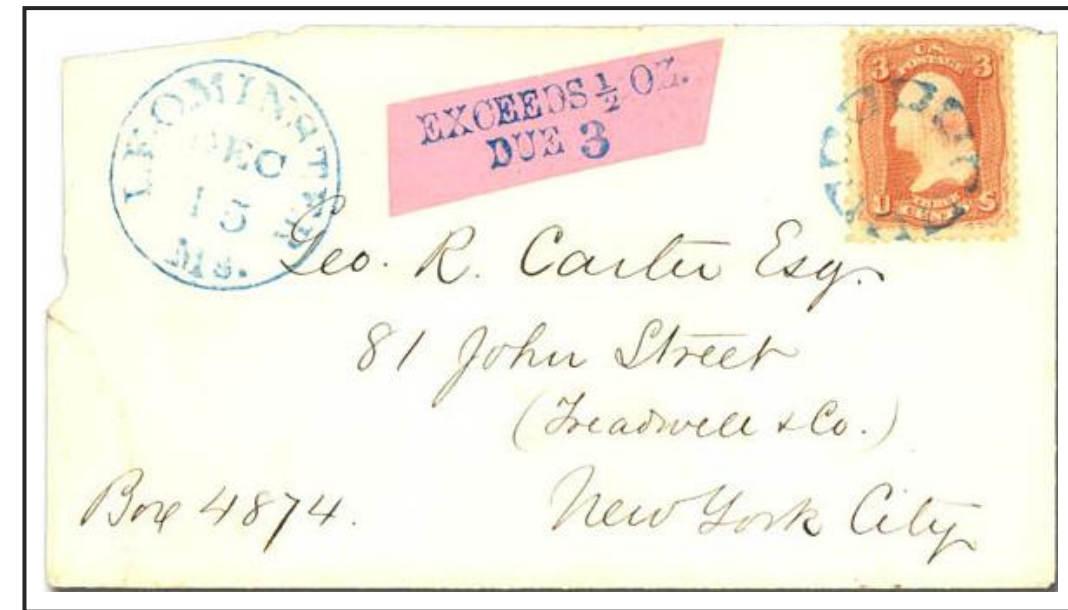
“1” on yellow, square label affixed on blue January 8, 1855 folded drop letter, “Leominster Ms. Jan 9” datestamp.

Earliest dated example of the 45 Leominster postmaster provisional labels recorded.





“3” on pink. Square label affixed on circa 1859 envelope from North Cambridge, Mass. to South Lancaster, Mass. Forwarded to Leominster, with manuscript “3 cents Due.” Leominster postmaster applied postage due label over this notation.



“EXCEEDS ½ OZ. / DUE 3” blue on pink label affixed on cover to New York City bearing 3¢ grilled adhesive. Blue Stovepipe cancel and matching blue “Leominster Ms. Dec 15” datestamp. Circa 1868.

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“3” on orange label affixed to orange U.S. Christian Commission Soldier's Letter envelope to Leominster, Mass., “Washington D.C. Jun 22 '65” datestamp and matching “Due 3” handstamp,

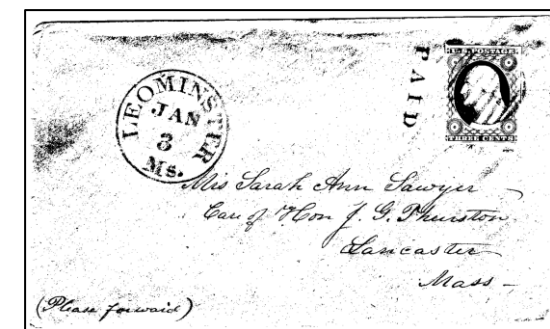
Prepayment rules were suspended for soldier's letters, though payment was required from the recipient.



PFC



The small “3” on these covers was also used in the Leominster datestamp. Note the slight dip to the center line of the “3” This example circa 1855.



Full cover mounted behind; scan 50% original size

16 Leominster “Postage Due” or “Postage Collect” labels recorded.

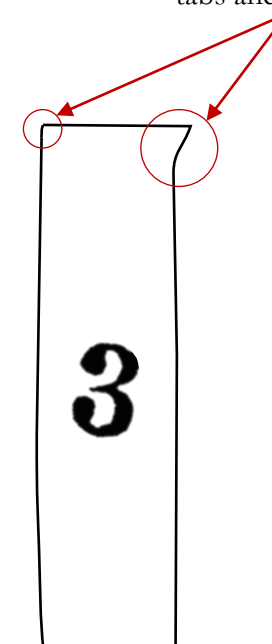


“DUE 3 CENTS” on red.

Baltimore “Due. 3” handstamp on April 17, 1861 letter to Leominster. Postage collect for soldier’s letter. This letter was sent from Baltimore two days after departure from Boston on the way to the battlefields.



Uneven corners indicate that a strip of labels was prepared in advance with cuts almost all the way through to separate. When needed, the postmaster would tear the remaining tabs and use the label.



Soldier's Letters

Three covers from the correspondence of John H. P. White of Acton, MA. 26th Massachusetts Regiment

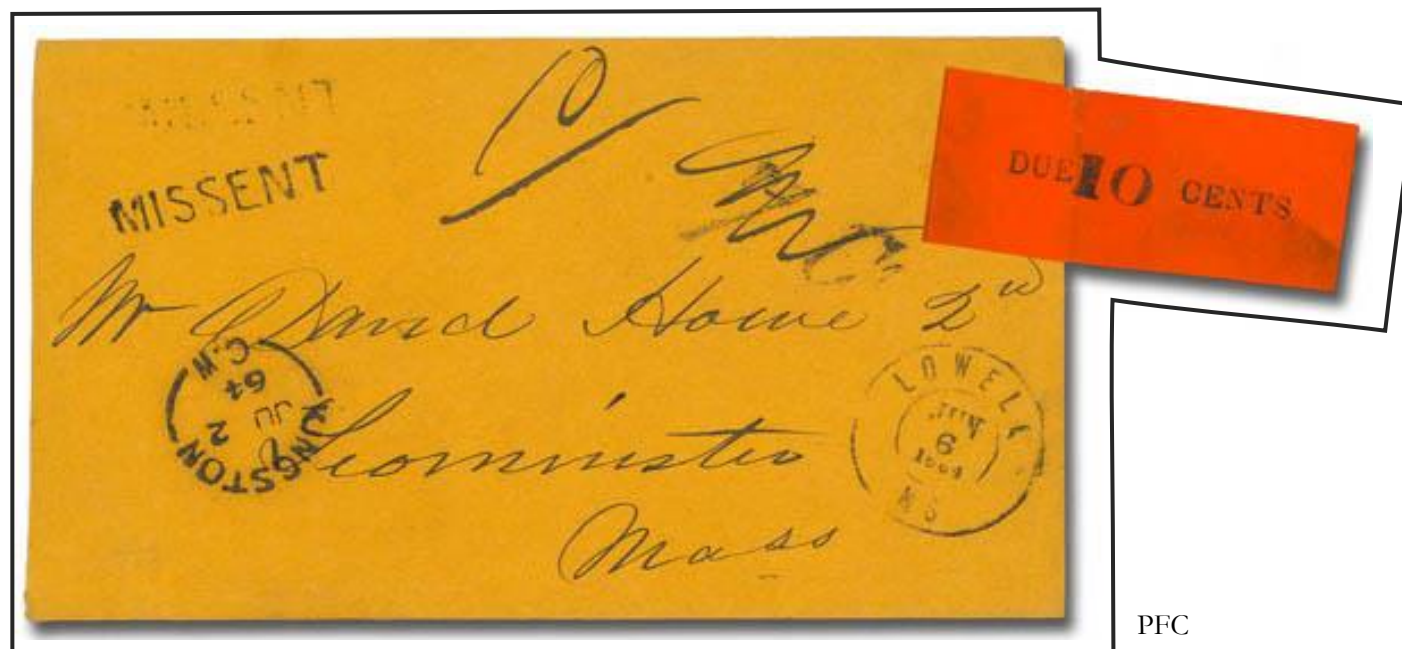
On the April 17, 1861, the regiment entrained from Boston to Washington, passing through Baltimore on April 19. Later in the War, after being reformed in Boston, they were sent to Ship Island, Miss., and later to occupy and defend New Orleans. White died of disease in New Orleans on July 10, 1863. The last cover from the correspondence was posted in New Orleans the following day.

“3” on red. “U.S.Ship / 3 cts” handstamp. 3¢ collect at Leominster for postage on properly endorsed soldier’s letter..

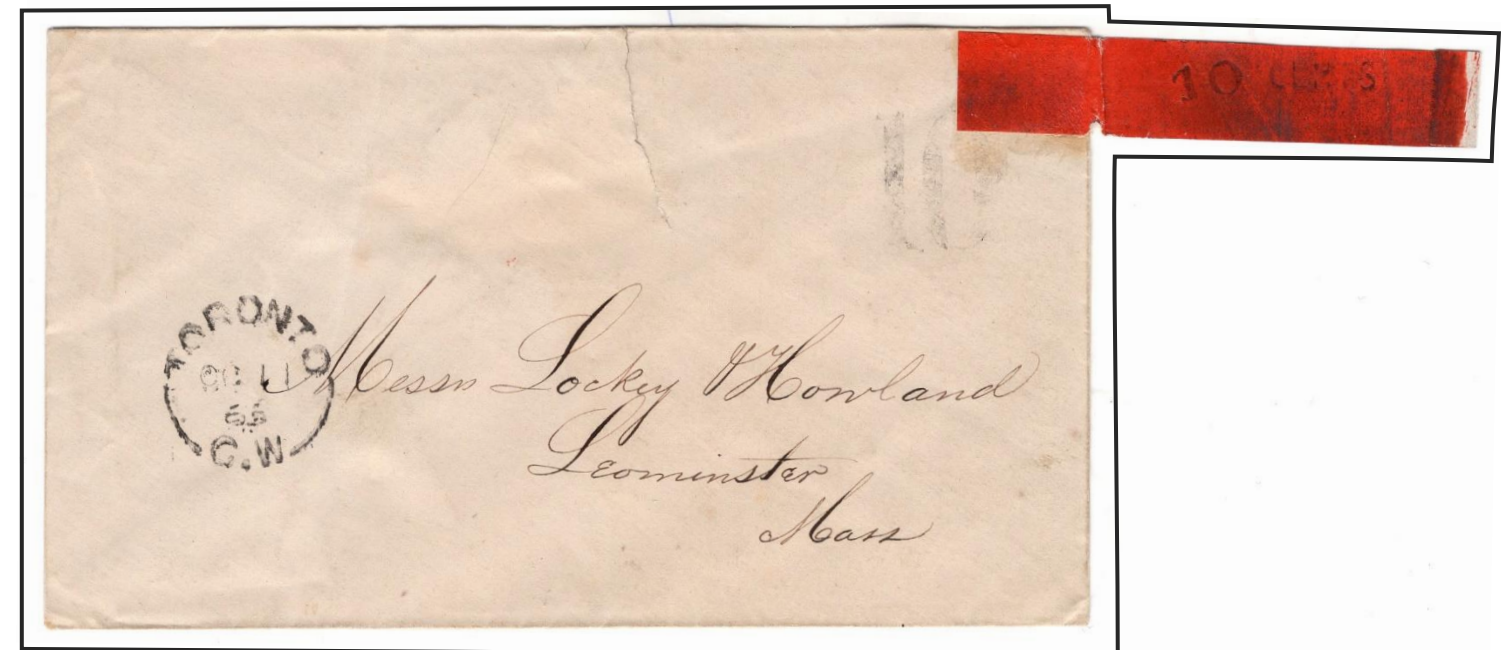
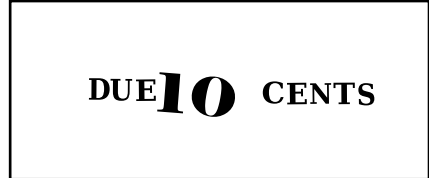


Remnant of red label. New Orleans, July 11, 1862. Remnants of label possibly torn off by Postmaster to indicate payment of the 3¢ due charge.

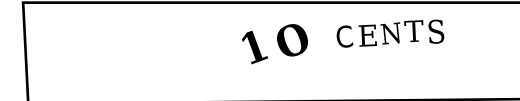




“DUE 10 CENTS” on orange label, pasted over the edge at right on 1864 buff cover to Leominster, Mass. “Kingston C.W. JU 2 ‘64” datestamp and “7 Ct” Canadian currency collect handstamp which was crossed out when converted to “10 U.S. cents due. “MISSENT” to Lowell, Mass. and rerouted to Leominster. Label advised 10¢ due from recipient for unpaid treaty mail rate from Canada.



“10 CENTS” on orange label, pasted over edge at right on 1866 cover to Leominster, MA., “Toronto C.W. OC 11 ‘66” datestamp and “10” postage collect handstamp. Label advises 10¢ due from recipient for unpaid postage from Canada.



As both of these covers already had applied “10” rate markings indicating postage due, the rate marking on the label itself was unnecessary. However, the placement of the label on these and other covers – affixed only on the left side and sometimes overhanging the side of the envelope – may indicate that it was intended to be torn off and retained for accounting purposes.

Prepayment of postage was not required on foreign mail, unless specified in the postal treaty between the countries.

Forwarded – Due and Free



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“FORWARDED, 1855. / DUE 3 CENTS” on blue, rhomboid-shaped label affixed on cover to Leominster, Mass., “Buffalo N.Y., 3 Paid, Aug 4” datestamp. Forwarded to Boston, Mass. “Leominster Ms. Aug 7” datestamp and additional pencil “3 Due” at upper right. Original enclosure begins, “I know not where to direct my letters, but that is of course no excuse for neglecting to write.”

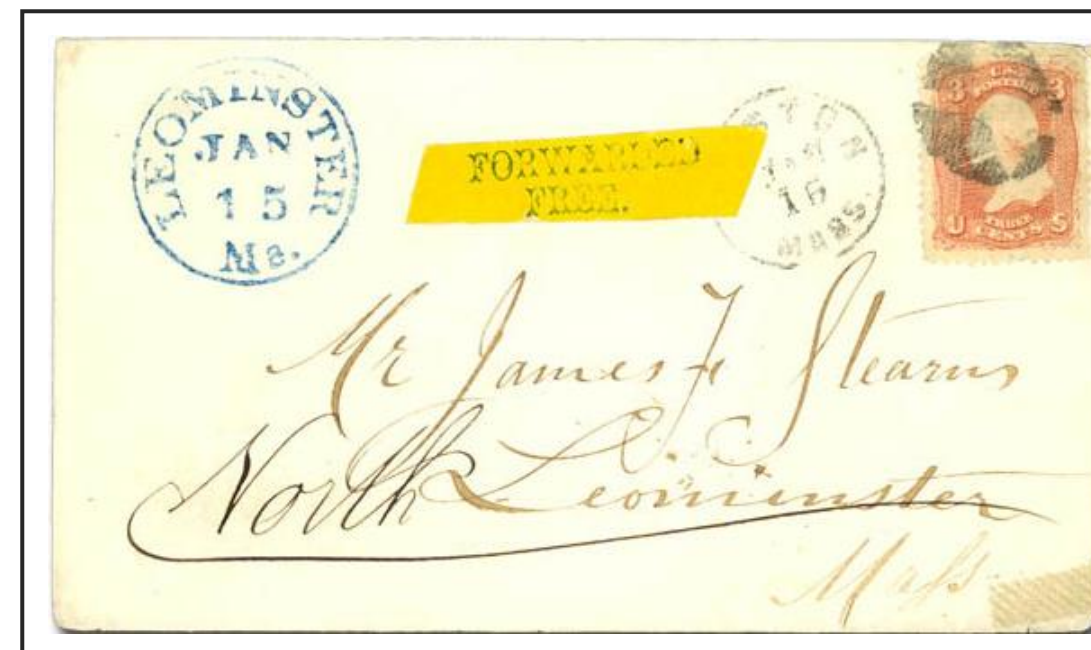


WTC

“FORWARDED / DUE 3 CENTS.” on pink, affixed on cover to Leominster, Mass., “Trenton N.J., JUL 28, 1863” datestamp. Postmaster added “North” to the address, redirecting it to North Leominster, and applied “Leominster Ms. JUL 30” datestamp. The North Leominster post office opened in 1851.



“FORWARDED. / DUE 3 CENTS.” on orange, affixed on cover to Leominster, Mass., “Harper’s Ferry VA, Oct 17, 1863” datestamp. Postmaster added “North” to the address, redirecting it to North Leominster, and applied “Leominster Ms. Oct 23” datestamp.



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“FORWARDED / FREE.” blue on yellow label on cover to Leominster Mass. Grilled adhesive tied by “Boston Mass. Jan 15” duplexed datestamp, forwarded to North Leominster. Blue “Leominster Ms. Jan 15” datestamp. Grilled stamp indicates circa 1869 use.

21 Leominster “Forwarded” labels recorded.

Missent & Forwarded

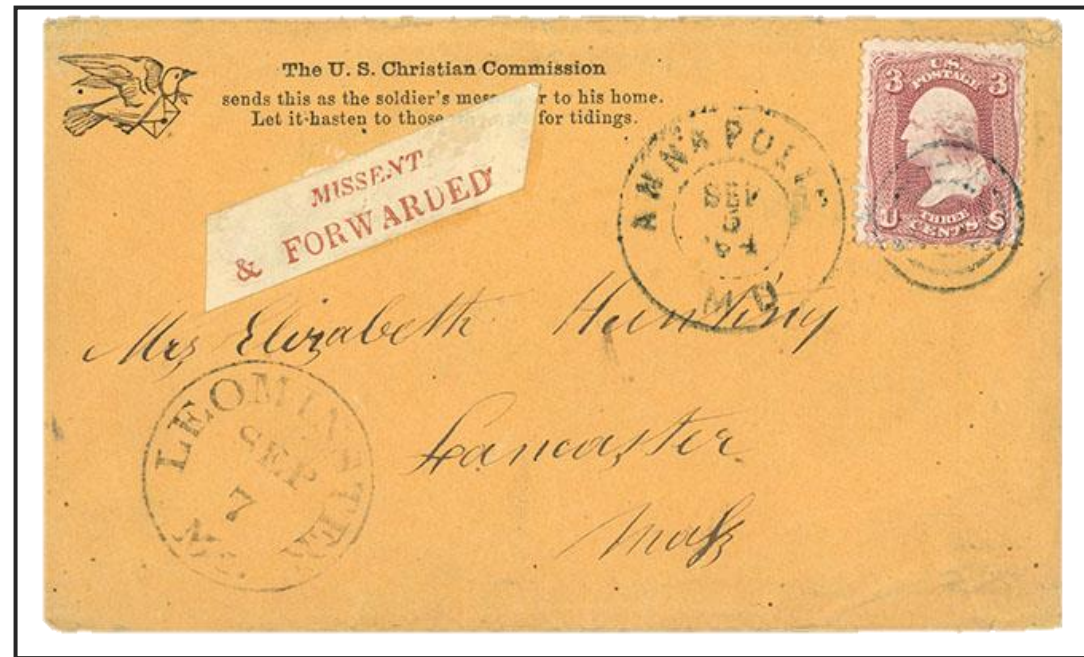


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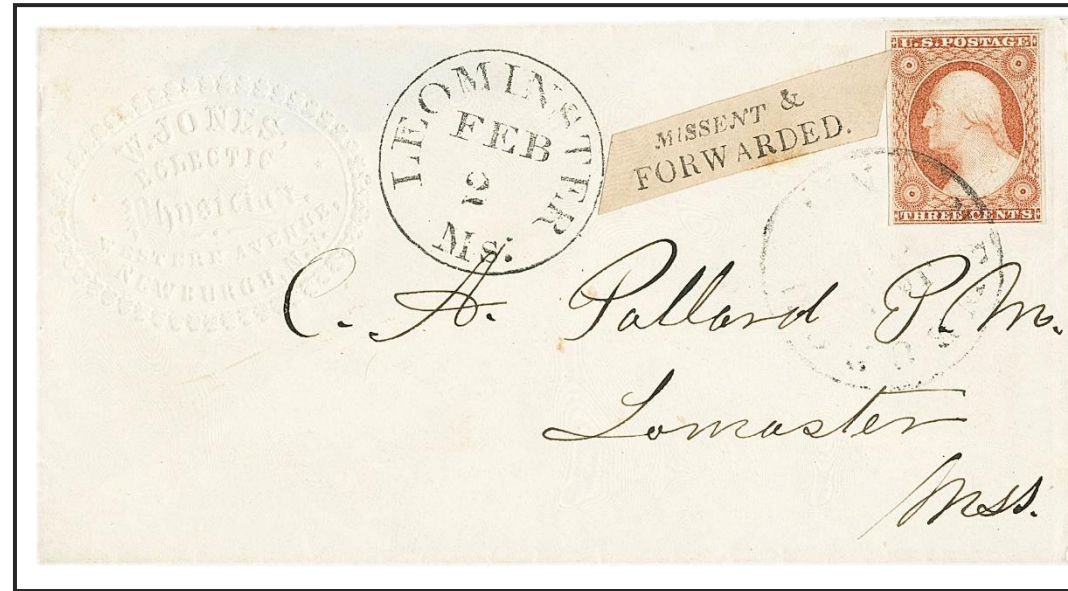
“MISSENT / & FORWARDED” on red, affixed to patriotic cover from Key West, Fla. Key West, January 6 and Leominster, January 21 datestamps. Enclosed letter datelined “Jan. 5, 1862.” Key West remained under Union control for the entire war.

MISSENT
& FORWARDED

Only recorded Leominster label on a patriotic cover.



“MISSENT & / FORWARDED” red on white, affixed to September 1864 U.S. Christian Commission soldier's letter envelope from Annapolis, Maryland.



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“MISSENT & / FORWARDED.” on tan, affixed to cover from Newburgh, NY with embossed physician's corner card. Newburgh and Leominster datestamps.

“MISSENT & / FORWARDED” on orange, affixed to cover from San Antonio, Fla. Forwarded to North Village, Mass.

MISSENT &
FORWARDED



“MISSENT & / FORWARDED TO” on red, affixed to cover from Holliston, Mass.

MISSENT &
FORWARDED TO



Returned to Writer Free



“RETURNED TO / WRITER FREE” on maroon, affixed to cover from Albany, NY. Postmarked in Albany on January 10. Returned from Leominster January 26.

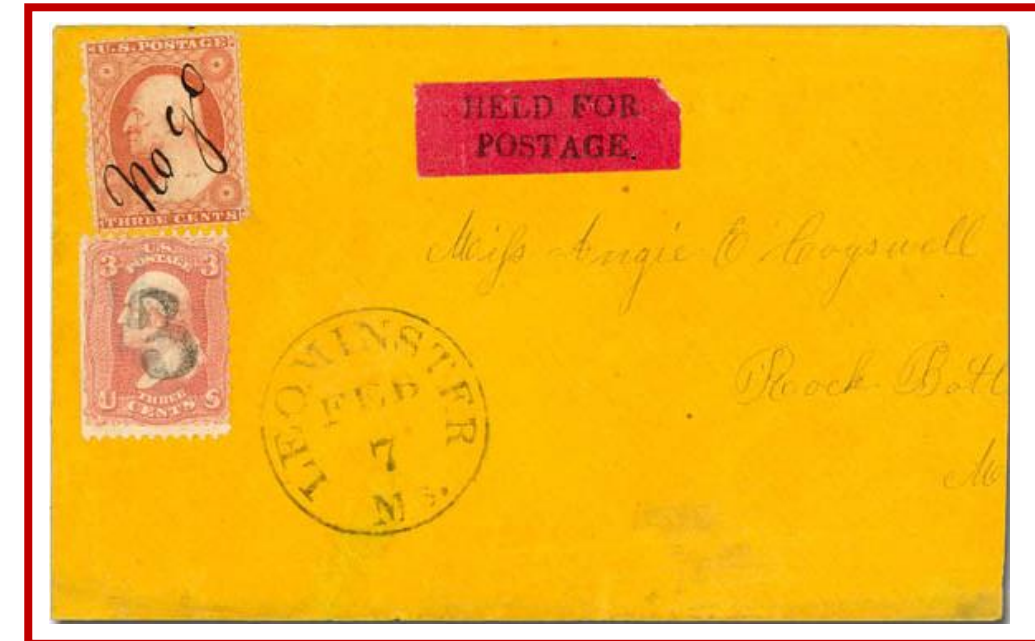
Mailer’s endorsement reads “If this letter is not called for in 10 days, please return to Box 378 Albany P.O. NY. Postmaster in Leominster complied with these instructions, crossing out the original address and applying a manuscript “pointing hand.”

RETURNED TO
WRITER FREE

Only Leominster “Returned to Writer” label recorded.

Held for Postage

Demonetized Stamp



“HELD FOR / POSTAGE.” on red, affixed on orange cover to Rock Bottom, Mass. “Feb. 7” datestamps indicates 1862 (or later) attempted use of demonetized 3¢ 1857 issue . Cancelled “No Go.” and mailer notified. 3¢ 1861 issue later added for proper postage. Cancelled with “3” handstamp and dispatched to destination.

PFC

HELD FOR
POSTAGE.

Only Leominster “Held for Postage” label recorded.

Leominster Large “3” Handstamp



The numeral “3” handstamp used to create many of the labels was also used as a cancelling device during the 1850s and 1860s. It is invariably centrally-struck and crisp and clear, reinforcing the reports that Colburn was extremely methodical and diligent in his postmarking activities.

Leominster was not the only post office where postmaster-created labels were affixed to envelopes designating postage due or to add information to meet postal regulations.

Leominster in Context

Easton, Penn. Provisional Postage Due Label



“5” on selvage. 1851 3¢ Red Brown Plate 2 selvage with imprint and plate number inscribed with manuscript number “5” on cover addressed to Easton, PA. Enclosed letter datelined “Camp Puerta Cabellos, Honduras, Friday, May 22, 1857.” The South America to U.S. steamship service rate was 10¢, so presumably the label plus the handstamp represented the total postage due. **One of two recorded.**

Columbus Grove, Ohio Official Business Label



OFFICIAL BUSINESS, J.M. Sprague, P.M. August 1, 1857 cover from Columbus Grove, Ohio returning registered letter receipt to postmaster at Kingston, Ohio. Postmaster applied label, rather than endorsing official business correspondence.