

The United States - Hamburg Convention 1857

- I. Preparations, Conclusion and Charges
- II. The Special Postmarks and Postal Notes
- III. German and European Posting Places
- IV. Posting Places in the United States
- V. Registered and Returned Letters, Printed Matters



The exhibit wants to document the United States – Hamburg convention from a contractual and postal perspective. For the Hamburg Stadtpost it had been a very important milestone in the provision of transatlantic mail services.

The treatment dives deep into all contractual provisions, and the postal peculiarities are shown. While the basic facts and the analysis of the existing philatelic material are well covered by publications like the two volumes “Understanding Transatlantic Mail” (see below), there were in the last years numerous additional findings that are incorporated in the exhibit as well. The selection of the material is supposed to demonstrate the diversity in the use of the direct postal connection between Hamburg and New York, whereas the material is quite rare throughout.

Hamburg had to “fight” for several years to secure the contract, certainly with a view on Bremen that had signed a convention with the United States as early as 1847. The convention of 1857 became more or less a copy of the contract of 1847. Hamburg was very well prepared for the start of a transatlantic postal connection as HAPAG had with its fleet of steam ships began some time before with passages between Hamburg and New York. The Hamburg Stadtpost was able to benefit from the postal service only for a few years, on the 31st December 1867 it lost its independence.

References (selection)

Winter, Understanding Transatlantic Mail (Vol I + II)
Hubbard / Winter, North Atlantic Mail Sailings 1840-1875
Dr. Conzelmann, Der Weg zum Postvertrag zwischen Hamburg und den USA von 1857 ... (DASV-Rundbrief Februar 2022)
Wierenga, United States Incoming Steamship Mail 1847-1875

Own research and publications
Die USA-Hamburg Convention 1857 (Zoom-Presentation)



Steamship BORUSSIA

I. Preparation, Conclusion and Charges

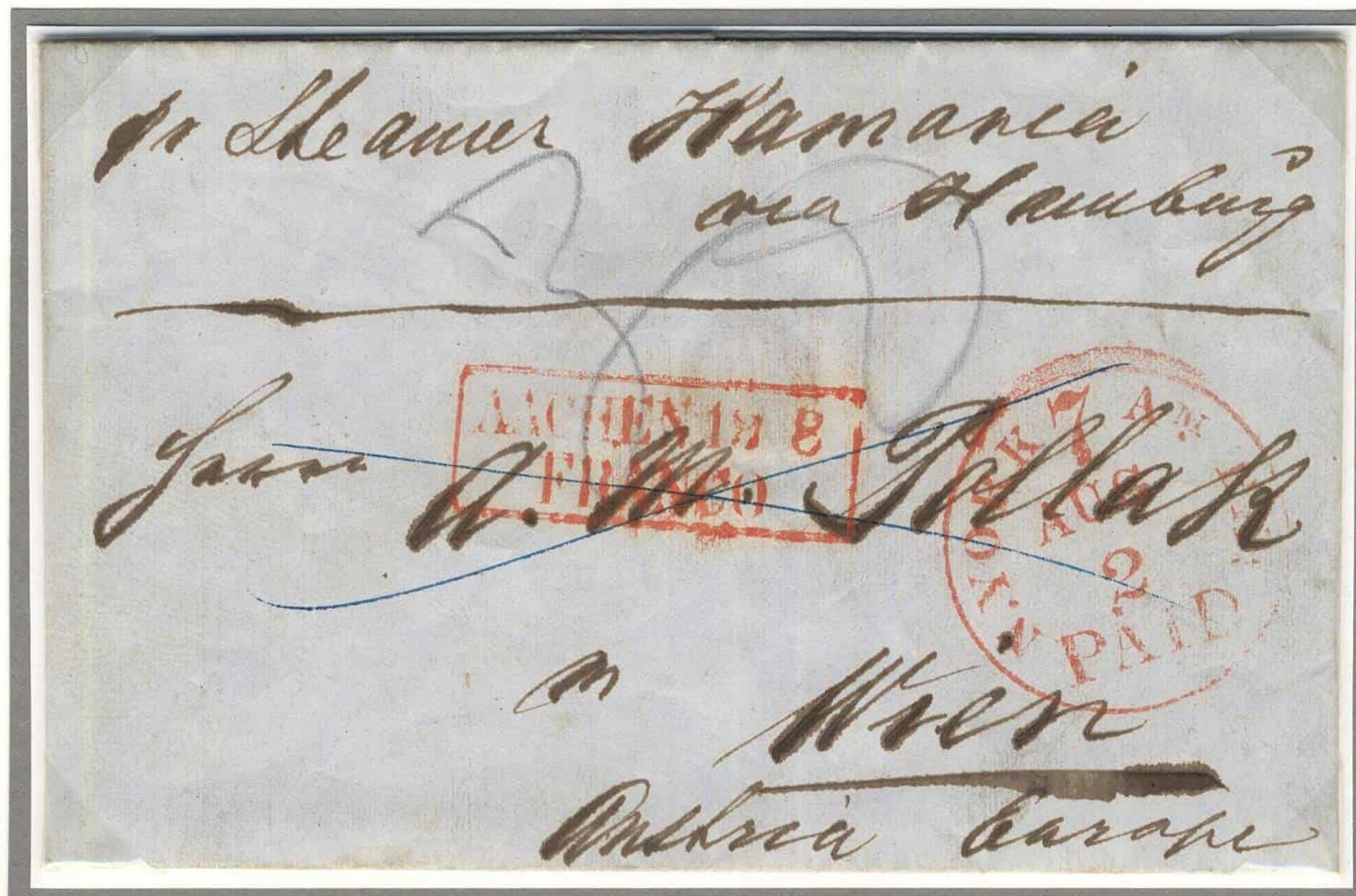
Lobbying, the "informal arrangement" and the conclusion of the 1857 convention

After the conclusion of the convention between the United States and Bremen in 1847 the Hamburg Stadtpost started from the early 1850s to lobby for an own contract. Despite various attempts the United States kept their defensive position for quite a long time.

In 1855 the Hamburg shipping company HAPAG put the first two screw steamers (HAMMONIA and BORUSSIA) into service on the ship connection between Hamburg and New York. This fact and the persistence of the Hamburg representatives with their American Post colleagues certainly helped that a so-called "informal arrangement" finally came to fruition in 1856. Coming into force on the 1st September 1856, it applied to mail from and to Hamburg. So far only a few covers are recorded under this arrangement

One year later the convention between the United States and Hamburg was signed and became effective on the 1st July 1857 (execution in Hamburg on the 1st August 1857). The charges were the same as in the Bremen convention and consisted of the international rate plus the transit fees between Hamburg and GAPS destinations or origins.

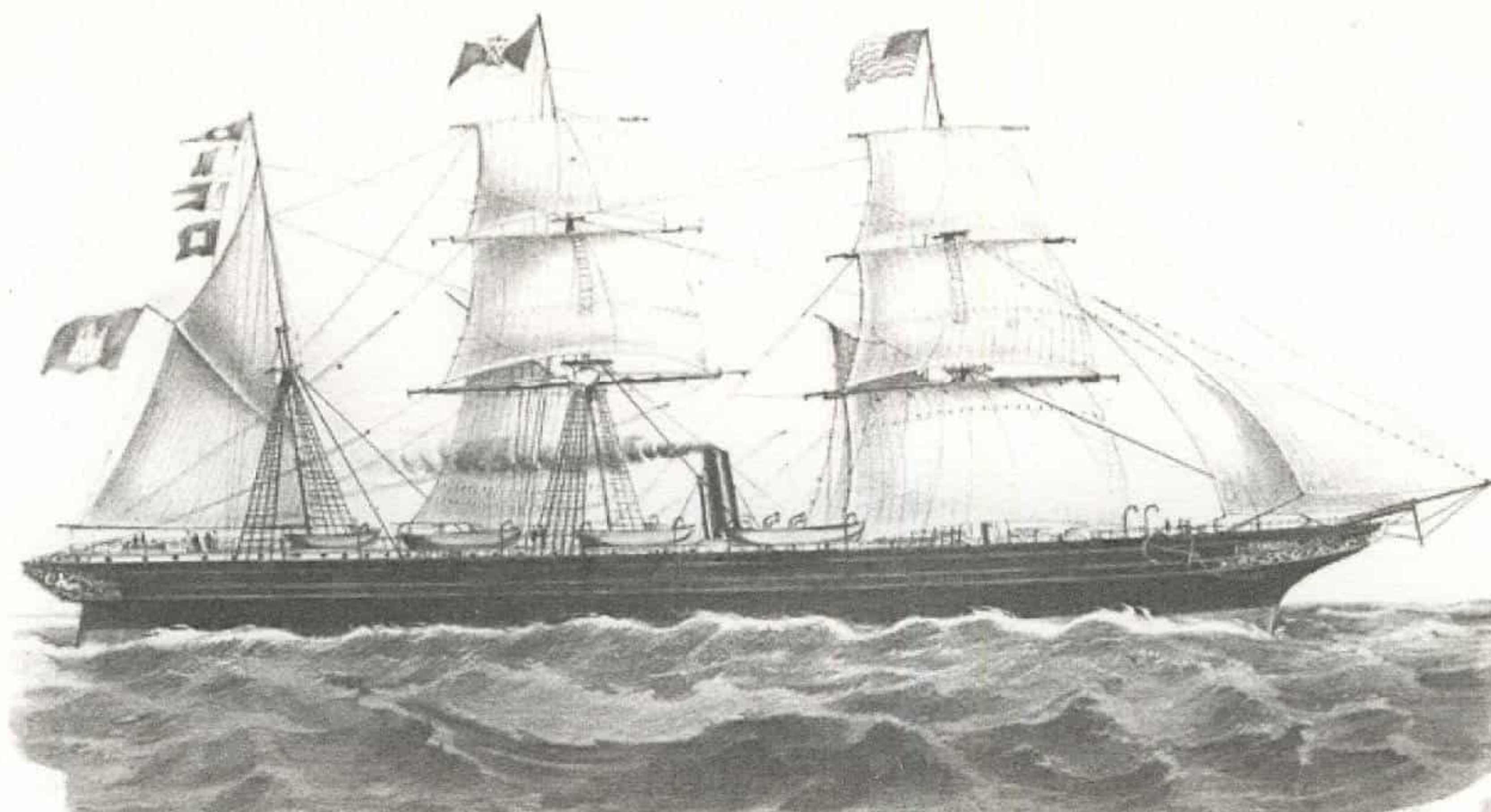
All the crossings between Hamburg and New York were operated by HAPAG, while Southampton was used as a "service point". At the start in 1856 there was one crossing per month, in 1858 the service was extended to two crossings per month.



1856. New York to Vienna via Hamburg. The letter was supposed to go with the HAPAG steamer HAMMONIA (departure New York 1st August) under the "informal arrangement", but because the contract service did not allow mail beyond Hamburg, it was re-directed to the Collins Line ERICSSON (departure New York 2nd August, arrival Hamburg 17th August) under the Prussian Closed Mail convention.

The maiden voyage of the HAMMONIA I (crossing from Hamburg to New York) was on the 1st July 1856, and three covers are recorded that went on that voyage. There are no covers recorded of any voyage from New York to Hamburg under the "informal arrangement".

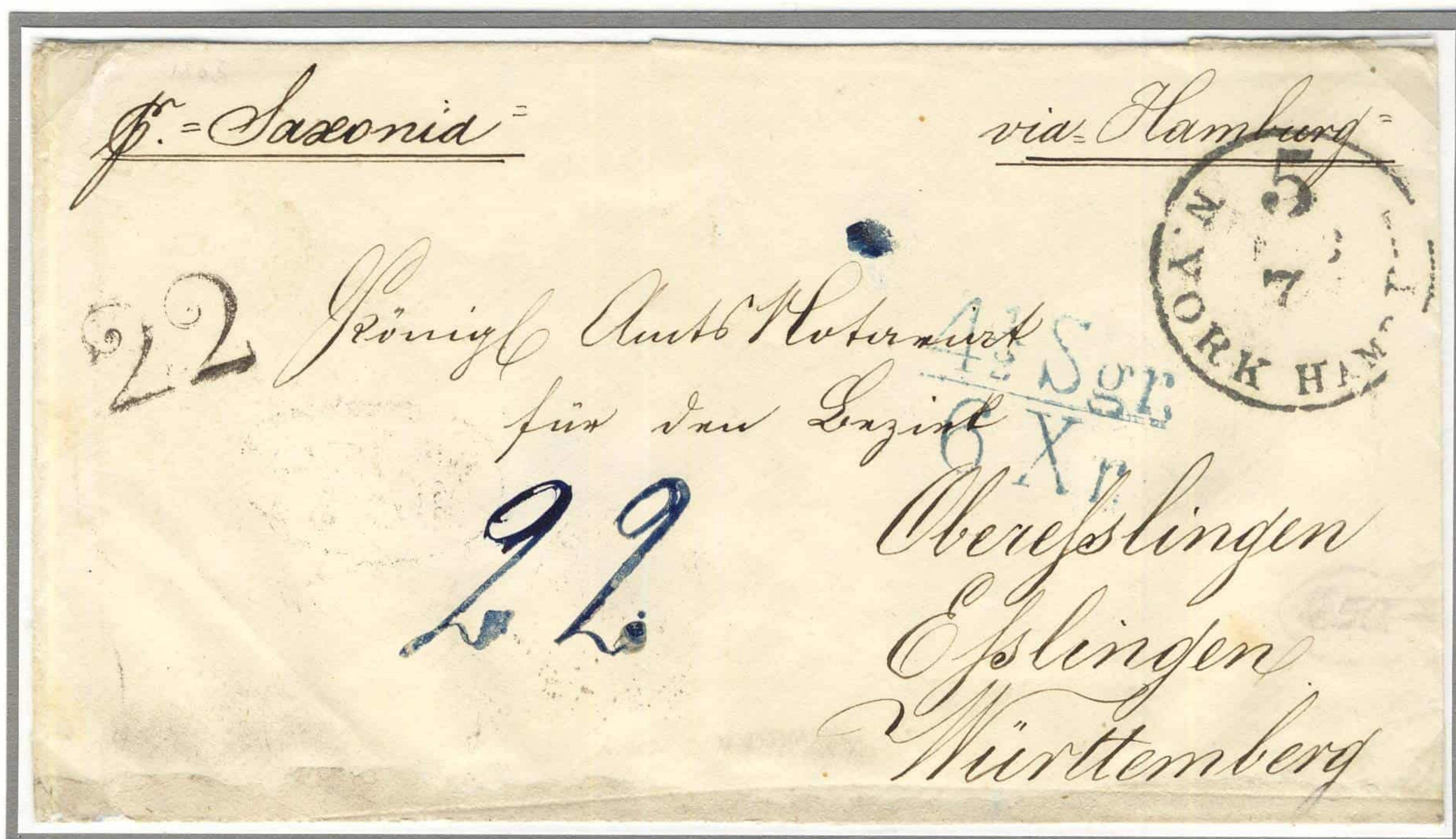
The illustration below shows the HAMMONIA I, one of HAPAG's first two screw steamers.



I. Preparation, Conclusion and Charges

The international rate and its distribution between the United States and Hamburg

The international rate (covering the mail conveyance by sea) was 10 U.S. Cents. Initially the split was even (i.e. 5 Cents each for the United and Hamburg), in 1863 it was changed to 3 Cents for the United States and 7 Cents for Hamburg. It has to be said that all crossings were made by HAPAG ships, therefore it looks like even the 3/7 split was quite favourable for the United States.



1863. New York to Esslingen via Hamburg and Stuttgart (see postmarks on backside). Posted unpaid, the U.S. portion of the international rate of 5 U.S. cents was debited to Hamburg (see the black N.YORK HAMB. PKT.), the total due amount was 22 Kreuzer; carried with SAXONIA (departure New York 7th February, arrival Hamburg 21st February).



1867. Genthin (Prussia) to New York via Hamburg. Posted with a 3 Silbergroschen franking (PS envelope), which was accepted as a part franking to Hamburg, the Hamburg portion of the international rate of 7 U.S. Cents was debited to the U.S. (see the blue HAMBURG PACKET); the recipient had to pay the full international rate of 10 U.S. Cents. Carried with ALLEMANNIA (departure Hamburg 26th May, arrival New York 10th June).

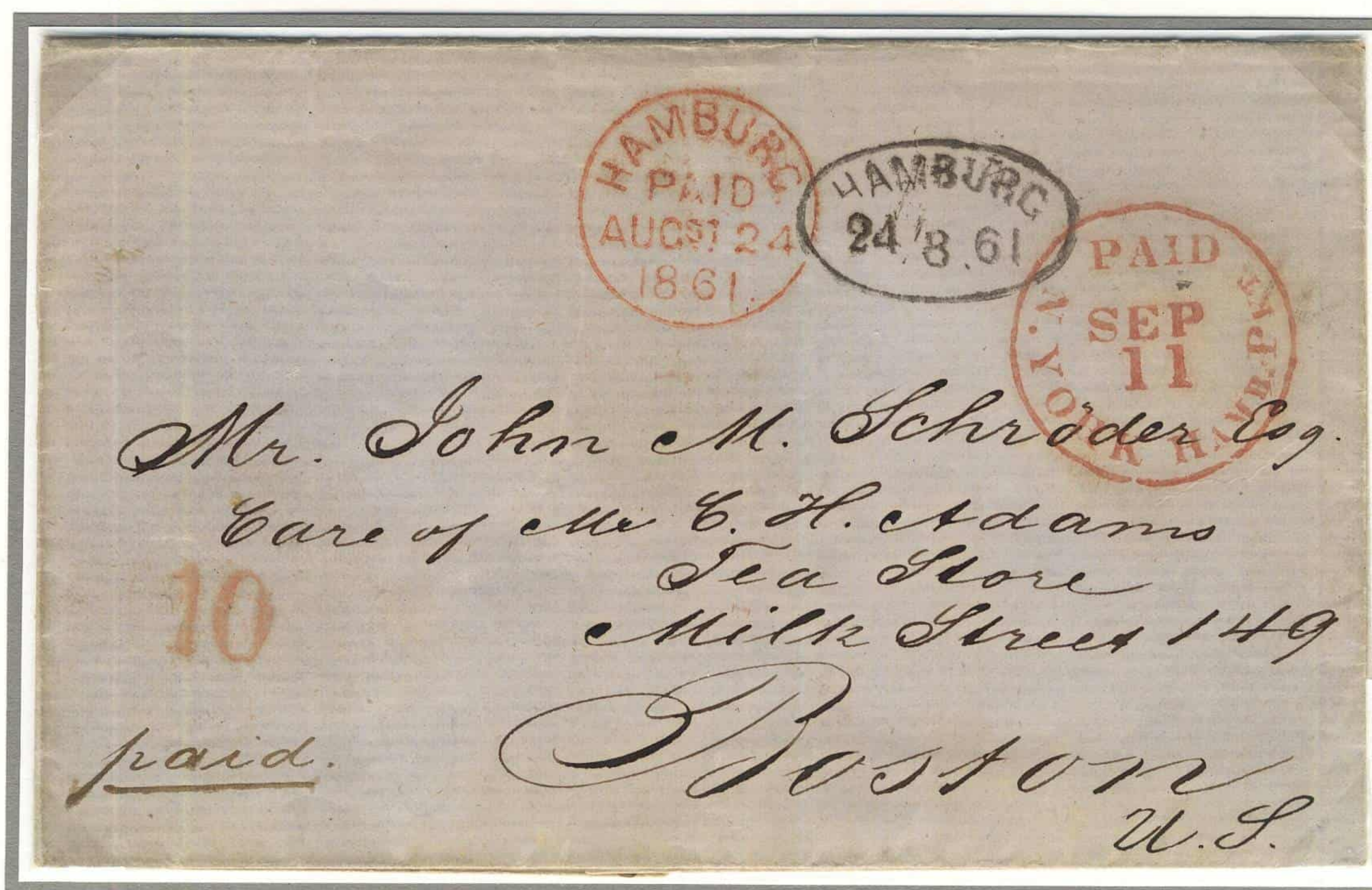
II. The Special Postmarks and Postal Notes

The international rate: special handstamps used by the Hamburg Stadtpost

Before the introduction of the HAMBURG PACKET postmarks in 1863 the Hamburg Stadtpost used special handstamps to confirm the international rate. The small stamps "10" were struck in black on unpaid letters and in red on paid letters. Letters with these handstamps are quite difficult to find.



1858. Hamburg to New York. Posted unpaid, the international rate of 10 U.S. Cents was debited to the U.S. (see the "10" handstamp in black). Carried with SAXONIA (departure Hamburg 1st December, arrival New York 24th December).



1861. Hamburg to New York. Posted cash paid, the credit of the international rate was confirmed to the U.S. (see the "10" handstamp in red); carried with HAMMONIA (departure Hamburg 25th August, arrival New York 10th September).

II. The Special Postmarks and Postal Notes

The HAMBURG PACKET and the dual-currency postmarks

The Hamburg Stadtpost used the large single-circle HAMBURG PACKET postmarks to confirm paid (red) or unpaid (black or blue) amounts on letters to the United States. In New York dual-currency (coin and depreciated greenback) postmarks stated due amounts on incoming mail. Both can be seen from late 1863.



1864. Hamburg to New York. Posted unpaid and debited with 7 U.S. Cents (the Hamburg portion of the international rate), in New York the due amount was shown as 16 Cents in coins or 19 Cents in depreciated greenback; carried with TEUTONIA (departure Hamburg 16th May, arrival New York 31st May).



1866. Hamburg to New York. Posted unpaid and debited with 7 U.S. Cents (the Hamburg portion of the international rate), in New York the due amount was shown as 10 Cents in coins or 15 Cents in depreciated greenback; carried with BORUSSIA (departure Hamburg 15th July, arrival New York 30th July).

II. The Special Postmarks and Postal Notes

The HAMBURG PACKET and further accountancy postmarks

Further accountancy postmarks were introduced for mail from the United States with destinations in the Gulden (Kreuzer) area. The currencies were abbreviated "Sgr" (Silbergroschen) and "Xr" (Kreuzer). The letter shown at the bottom was addressed to Wuerttemberg.



1867. Halle (Saale) to Rush (New York State) via Hamburg and New York. Posted unpaid and marked with a HAMBURG PACKET "12" (GAPU = 5 U.S. Cents plus the Hamburg portion of the international rate = 7 U.S. Cents), total charge in New York 15 U.S. Cents. Carried with GERMANIA (departure Hamburg 29th September, arrival Southampton 2nd October, because of a broken propeller en route to New York return to Southampton, second departure Southampton 22nd October, arrival New York 3rd November).



1861. Baltimore to Stuttgart via New York and Hamburg. Posted unpaid and prepared for conveyance by Prussian Closed Mail (stamped "30"), but then re-routed to go "Hamburg direct"; 4 ½ Silbergroschen debit in Hamburg, the GAPU charge was 6 Kreuzer, in total 22 Kreuzer; conveyance to the final destination under the responsibility of Thurn & Taxis. Carried with BORUSSIA (departure New York 15th June, arrival Hamburg 29th June).

4 ½ Sgr.
6 Xr.

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II. The Special Postmarks and Postal Notes

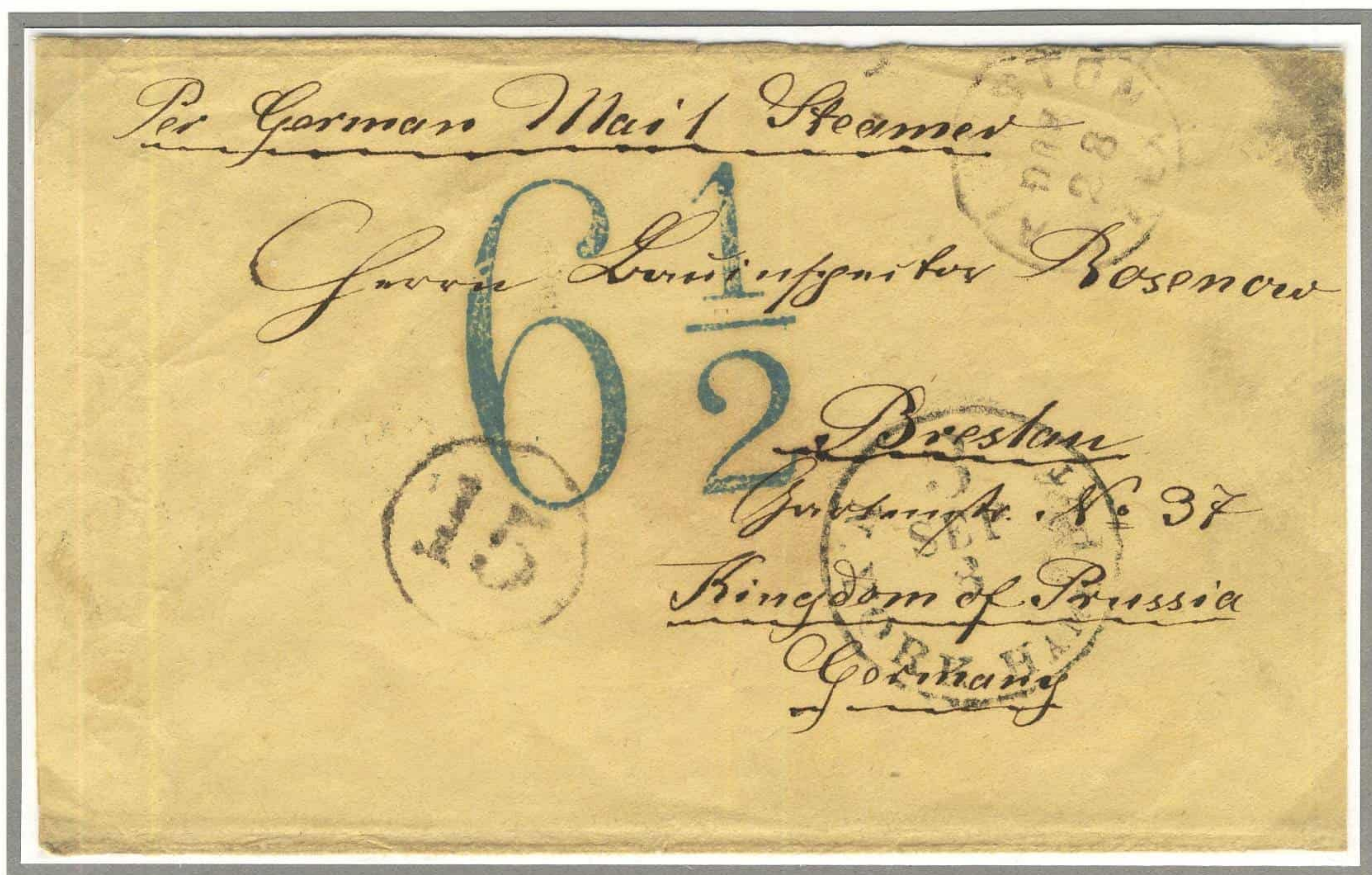
Handwritten and unusual accountancy marks

Accountancy postmarks like the one shown on the bottom of the previous page were available for single weight letters only; for heavier letters the numbers were handwritten – see the cover on top.

Debiting unpaid letters from the United States arriving in Hamburg with 6 ½ Silbergroschen (international rate plus GAPU transit fee) was quite common, and a small handstamp was available for that purpose (VdL 3094+3095), while the use of the very large handstamp (VdL 3098) on the cover at the bottom is really unusual.



1858. New York to Lorch via Hamburg and Stuttgart. Posted unpaid as a double weight letter and charged 10 U.S. Cents (2x5 Cents = U.S. portion of the international rate), total debit noted handwritten as 13 ½ Silbergroschen plus 9 Kreuzer resulting in 57 Kreuzer to be paid by the recipient. Carried with AUSTRIA (departure New York 1st June, arrival Hamburg 14th June). The ship AUSTRIA was destroyed by a fire on the 13th September 1858 en route to New York.



1866. Boston to Breslau via New York and Hamburg. Posted unpaid and debited 15 U.S. Cents equivalent to 6 ½ Silbergroschen, this amount confirmed by a very large 6 ½ handstamp (VdL 3098). Carried with ALLEMANNIA (departure New York 8th September, arrival Hamburg 21st September).

III. German and European Posting Places

Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein

The cover on top went via the United States to Peru, which is quite unusual as the conveyance via Southampton, St. Thomas (by Royal Mail Steam Packet Company) and Panama was at that time faster and quite reliable. The HAMURG PACKET without amount (to be filled manually) is rare, whereas the two examples mentioned by Winter (Vol. II page 531 footnote 271) is too low, but the number is certainly under ten.

1867. Hamburg to Lima (Peru) via New York and Panama. Posted cash paid at the Stadtpost as a double weight letter with an amount of 30 Schilling. Conveyed by the "Hamburg direct" service, a forwarding credit of 40 US Cents was noted, the HAMBURG PACKET mark without amount; New York noted a 24 US Cents (2 times 12 US Cents) credit to the British Post for the Panama-Peru transit. Carried by HAPAG HAMMONIA II (departure Hamburg 22nd December, arrival New York 5th January) and on with Pacific Mail Steamship Company (Atlantic Line) to Panama, arrival on 20th January, from there with Pacific Steam Navigation Company to Lima, arrival on 1st February 1868.

One of three recorded "Hamburg direct" letters to Peru.



1866. Kiel to New York via Hamburg. Posted stamp franked with 10 Schilling equalling 6 ½ Silbergroschen, the Stadtpost marked 3 U.S. Cents credit for the U.S. share of the "international rate". Carried with HAPAG BAVARIA (departure 17th June, arrival 2nd July).

One of five recorded Schleswig-Holstein stamp franked "Hamburg direct" letters.

III. German and European Posting Places

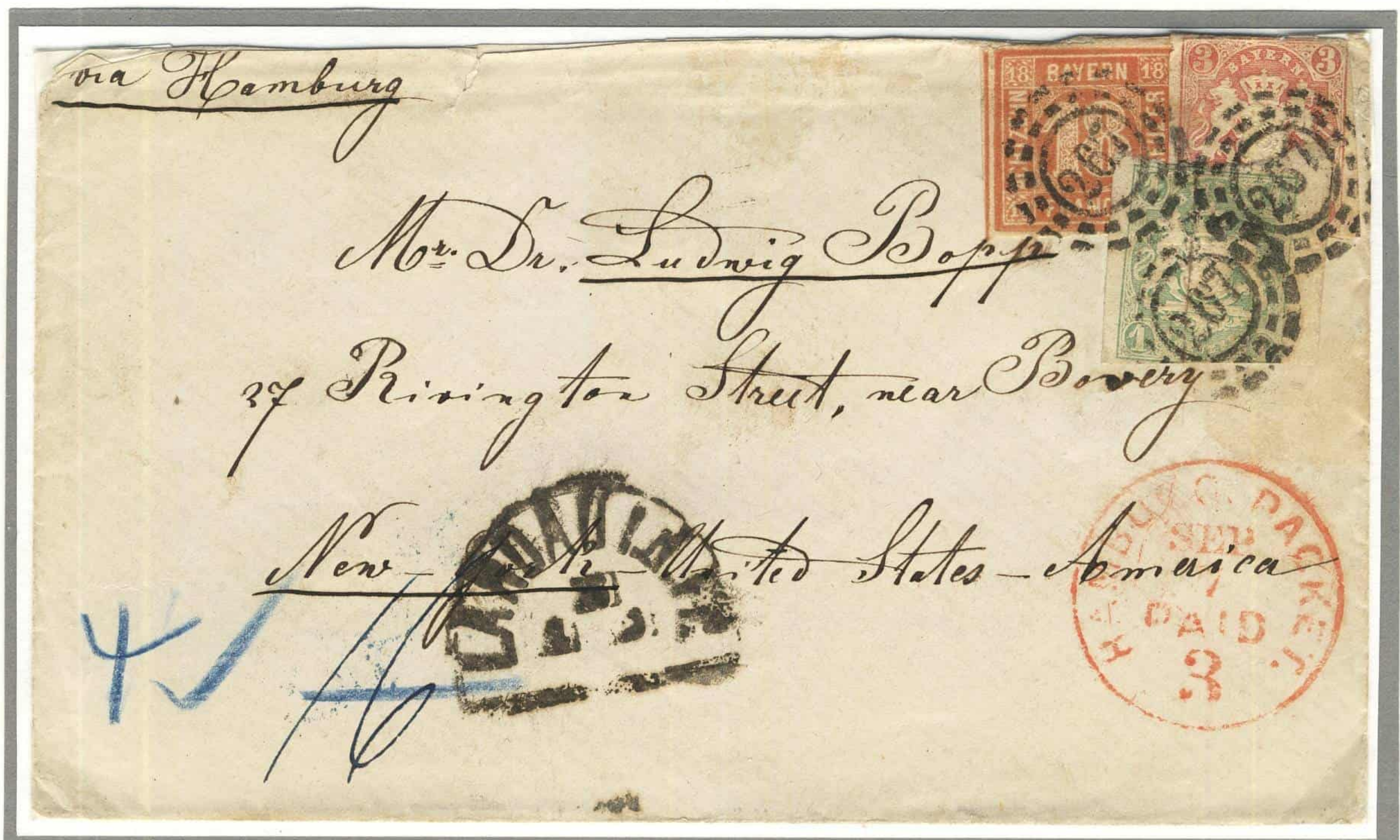
Prussia and Bavaria

Prussia was divided into two "currency areas", Thaler (Silbergroschen) und Gulden (Kreuzer). The number of recorded letters from the Gulden area (see the item on top) to the United States is much lower compared to ones from the Thaler area.

Letters from Bavaria to the United States usually ran via France or with Prussian Closed Mail, the "Hamburg direct" route is rather uncommon.



1867. Frankfurt (Main) to Chicago via Hamburg and New York. Posted stamp franked with 22 Kreuzer, the credit for conveyance to the United States was 4 ½ Silbergroschen or 10 U.S. Cents; in Hamburg handover from the Prussian Post to the Stadtpost; carried with HAMMONIA II (departure Hamburg 22nd Dec, arrival New York 5th Jan).



1867. Landau/Pfalz (Bavaria) to New York via Hamburg. Franked with 22 Kreuzer equalling 6 ½ Silbergroschen, in Hamburg a credit of 3 U.S. Cents was confirmed. In Hamburg received by the Prussian Post and then handed over to the Stadtpost. Carried with HAPAG TEUTONIA (departure 7th September, arrival 23rd September).

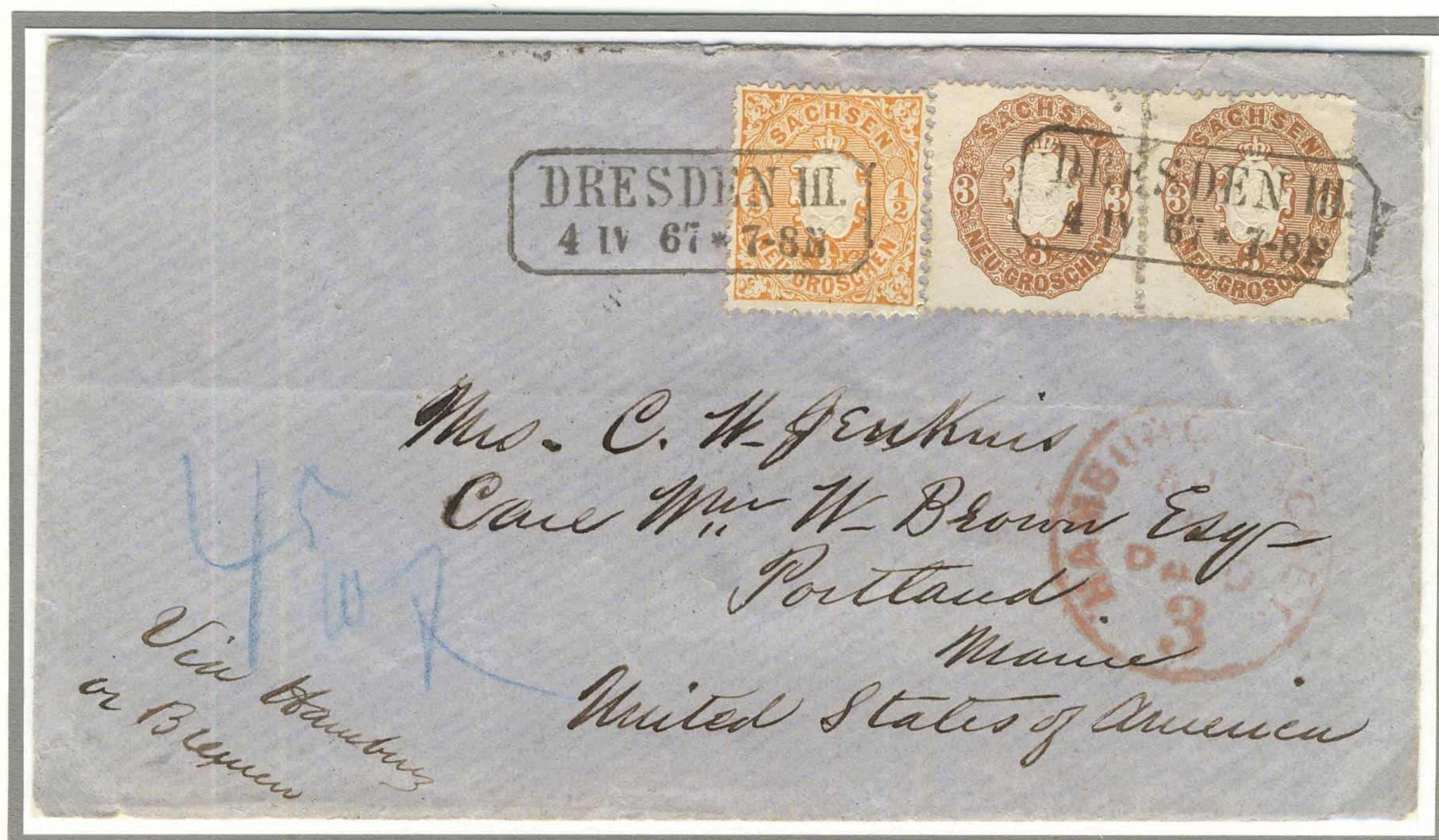
III. German and European Posting Places

Saxony

The currency used in Saxony (Neugroschen) was equivalent to the Silbergroschen used in parts of Prussia and Thurn & Taxis. The lower postage for the route via Hamburg (compared to Prussian Closed Mail) came with the disadvantage of less frequent transatlantic crossings.



1861. Schandau to Burlington (New Jersey) via Hamburg and New York. Franked with 6 ½ Neugroschen, in Hamburg a 3 U.S. Cents credit was confirmed. In Hamburg received by the Prussian Post and then handed over to the Stadtpost. Carried with HAMMONIA (departure Hamburg 15th June, arrival New York 1st July). Ex coll. Knapp + Fumu.



1867. Dresden to Portland/ Maine via Hamburg and New York. Franked with 6 ½ Neugroschen, in Hamburg a credit of 3 US Cents was confirmed. In Hamburg received by the Prussian Post and then handed over to the Stadtpost. Carried with BORUSSIA (departure Hamburg 7th April, arrival New York 24th April).

III. German and European Posting Places

Thurn & Taxis and Wuerttemberg

Thurn & Taxis was also divided into two "currency areas". Letters from Wuerttemberg to the United States usually ran via France or with Prussian Closed Mail, the "Hamburg direct" route is quite rare. Only a few registered letters from GAPU states via Hamburg under this convention are recorded. The registration fees were kept by the sender's post office.



1865. Caub (Thurn & Taxis) to Milwaukee (Wisconsin) via Frankfurt, Hamburg and New York. Posted as stamp franked registered letter with 28 Kreuzer (GAPU = 6 Kreuzer, Hamburg-United States = 16 Kreuzer, registration = 6 Kreuzer). Carried with ALLEMANNIA (departure Hamburg 17th September, arrival New York 1st October).



1867. Ludwigsburg (Wuerttemberg) to St. Louis (Missouri) Hamburg and New York. Posted stamp franked (uprated PS envelope) with 22 Kreuzer (GAPU = 6 Kreuzer, Hamburg-United States = 16 Kreuzer). Carried with CIMBRIA (departure Hamburg 1st September, arrival New York 12th September). Ex coll. Trost.

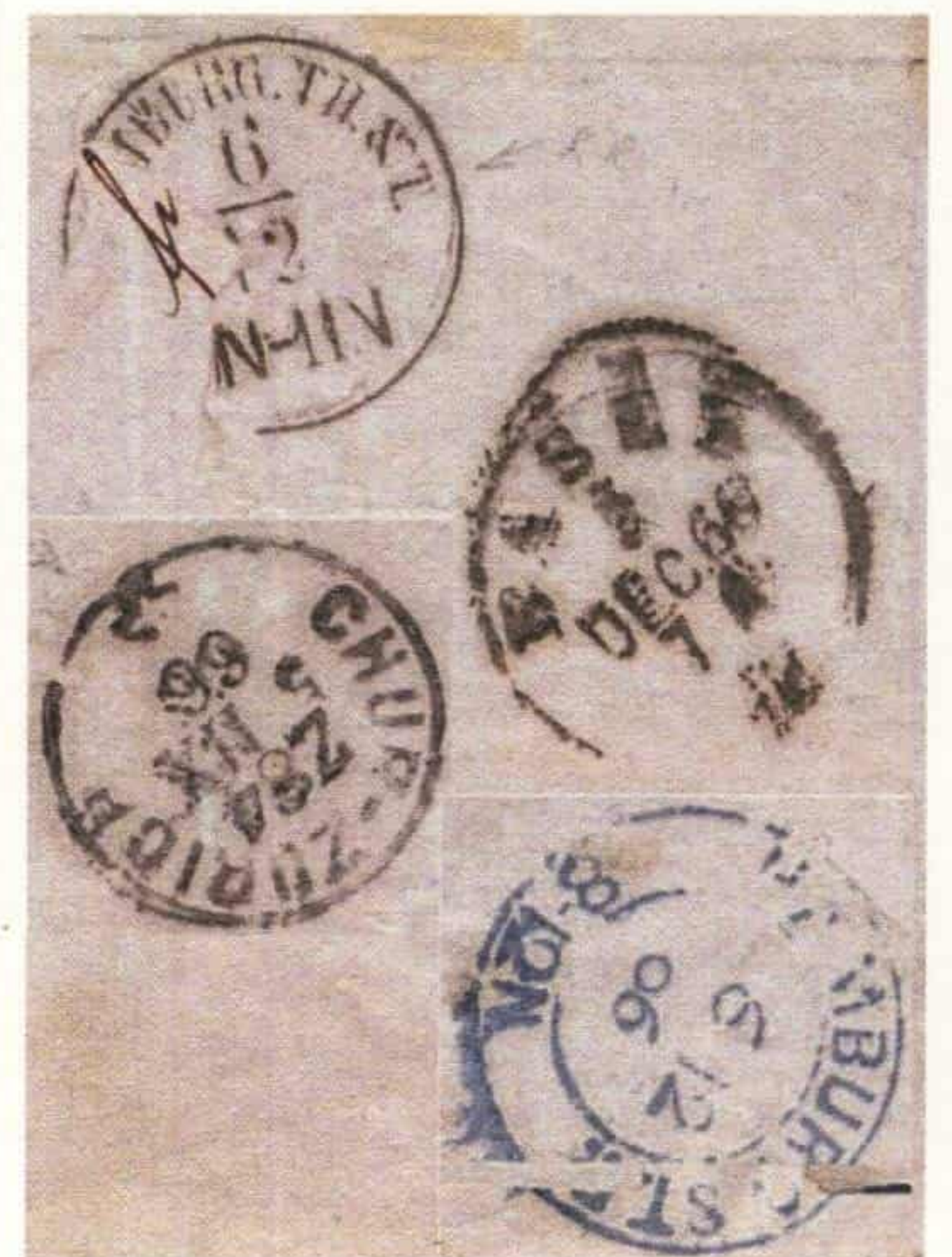
III. German and European Posting Places

Mail posted outside of Germany: Denmark and Switzerland

Letters posted outside of the GAPU area were supposed to arrive in Hamburg with a transit postage of upto 2 Silber-groschen as fixed in the 1857 convention in order to be eligible to the international rate of 10 U.S. Cents. Both letters shown here fulfilled that prerequisite, such entires are quite rare



1858. Christiansfeld (Denmark) to Hope (Indiana) via Hamburg and New York. Posted unpaid and handstamped "20", the split of that amount was noted in the black New York postmark (10/10). Carried with TEUTONIA (departure Hamburg 3rd January 1860, arrival New York 26th January).



1866. Niederurnen (Switzerland) to New York via Chur, Zurich, Basel and Hamburg. Posted stamp franked with 95 Rappen equivalent to 22 Kreuzer (noted in red) with a 4 ½ Silbergröschen credit (noted in red at bottom left), the Stadtpost showed their portion of the international rate with the red HAMBURG PACKET postmark. Carried with ALLEMANNIA (departure Hamburg 8th December, arrival New York 26th December).

IV. Posting Places in the United States

Stamp franked single and double weight letters to GAPU members

Stamp franked letters were 15 U.S. Cent for a single weight and 30 U.S. Cent for a double weight. Letters in higher weight tiers are very rare, whereas there were above the double weight only even tiers, i.e. no triple weight.



1867. New York to Eisleben (Prussia) Hamburg. Posted stamp franked with 15 U.S. Cents, after deduction of the U.S. share of the international rate of 3 US Cents a credit of 12 US Cents was confirmed. Carried with HAPAG HAMMONIA II (departure 29th June, arrival 10th July), in Hamburg received by the Stadtpost and handed to the Prussian Post.



1864. Alleghany (Virginia) to Stade via New York and Hamburg. Posted stamp franked with 30 U.S. Cents for a double weight, after deduction of the U.S. share of the international rate of 6 U.S. Cents a credit of 24 U.S. Cents was confirmed. Carried with HAPAG GERMANIA (departure 12th November, arrival 26th November).

IV. Posting Places in the United States

Mail to destinations outside of Germany: Austria and Switzerland

Mail posted in the United States routed via "Hamburg direct" to destinations outside of Germany is quite uncommon. The two entires shown here to Austria and Switzerland show how well informed senders as well as the postal staff were regarding the available options for mail going to Europe.



1859. New York to Vienna via Hamburg. Posted part franked to Hamburg (confirmed by the red New York postmark showing the 10 Cents for the international rate), the recipient was charged 15 Kreuzer (see the faint "15" pencil note on the bottom left). Carried with BORUSSIA (departure New York 15th September, arrival Hamburg 28th September).

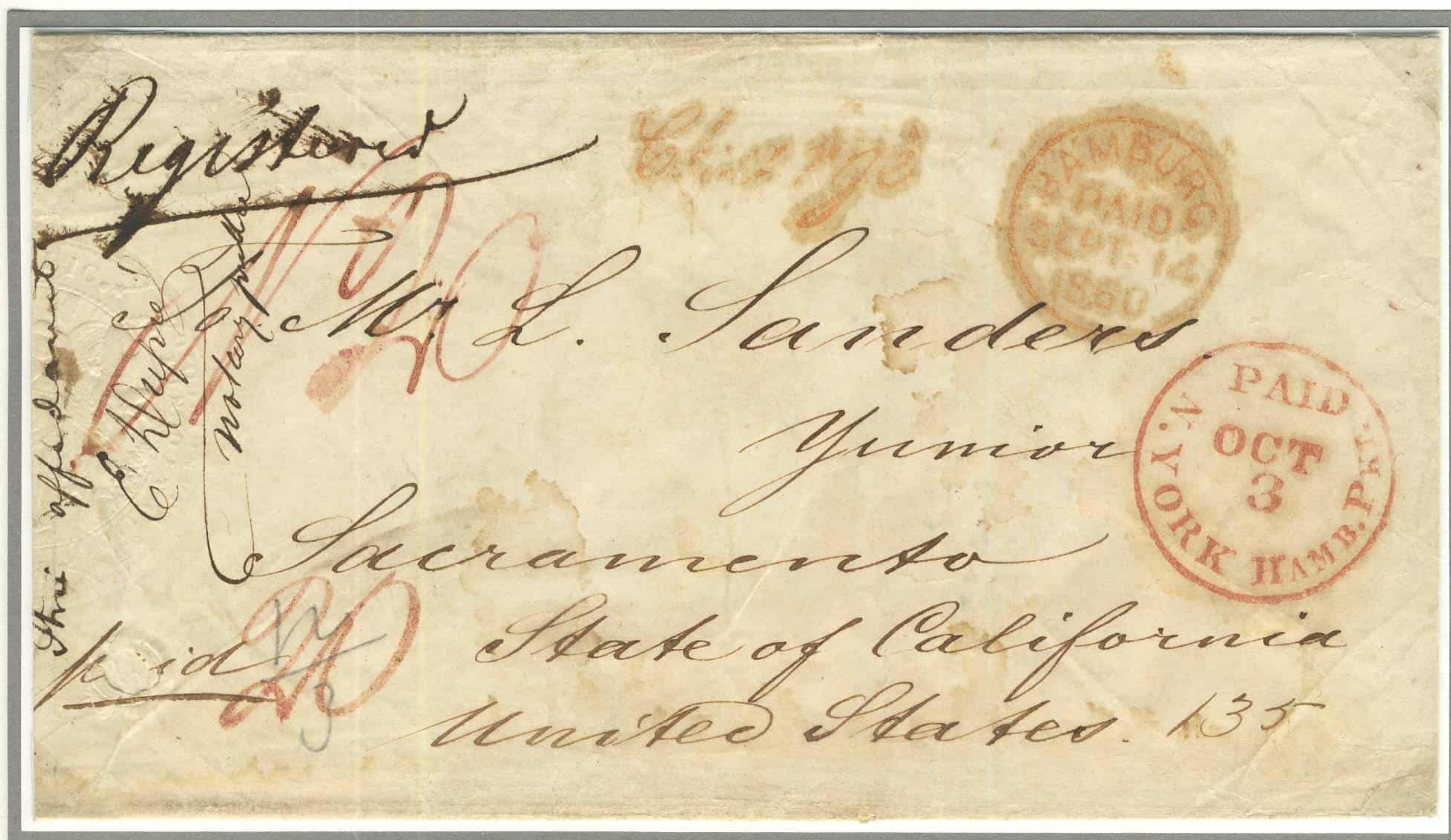


1866. Herman (today Hermann, Missouri) to Olten (Switzerland) via New York and Hamburg. Posted stamp franked with 19 U.S. Cents, the full payment to destination was confirmed by the red "4" (Silbergroschen, next to the upper 2 Cents stamp) consisting of 3 Silbergroschen GAPU and 1 Silbergroschen for Switzerland. Carried with BAVARIA (departure 7th July, arrival 21st July). In Hamburg received by the Stadtpost and handed to the Thurn & Taxis Post.

V. Registered and Returned Letters, Printed Matters

Registered letters and letters undeliverable in the United States

The original convention did not contain provisions for registered letters, and only in 1863 (11th Nov) these were added. Nevertheless there is proof that registered mail was exchanged before 1863, and the handling separated from regular mail is well documented. Registration required fully paid franking, and the U.S. registration fee was 5 Cents, in Hamburg it cost 2 Silbergroschen (3 Schilling); these amounts were kept by the senders' post office. There are several registered covers known from the U.S. to Germany via Hamburg, but only one in the other direction. Letters that could not be delivered in the United States were returned to the sender. In some cases it took many weeks until that happened. Only a few returned letters are recorded under the 1857 convention.



1860. Hamburg - New York - Sacramento (California/USA). Posted cash paid as registered double weight letter, 12+3 Schilling noted (2x6 Schilling letter rate plus 3 Schilling registration fee) and 20 U.S. Cents credit (in red); carried with the HAPAG ship SAXONIA (departure Hamburg 5th Sep, arrival New York 3rd Oct). The only recorded registered letter from Hamburg to the United States under this convention.

1860. Duderstadt to Wisconsin via Bremen, Hamburg and New York and back via New York, Bremen and Goettingen under the 1847 convention Bremen-USA. Posted fully paid (stamp franked 1/15 Thaler for conveyance to Bremen/Bremerhaven and cash paid 4 ½ Silbergroschen for conveyance to the U.S.); carried with HAPAG ship BORUSSIA (departure Hamburg 1st April, arrival Southampton 4th April) and HAMMONIA (departure Southampton 10th April, arrival New York 23rd April); back from the U.S. probably carried with Inman Line CITY OF MANCHESTER (departure New York 5th Jan, arrival Liverpool 21st Jan, sent from Liverpool to Bremen). The boxed marking "Am Bestimmungsorte nicht abgefordert." was applied in Bremen.

The only known dual-contract stamp franked entire returned from the U.S.



V. Registered and Returned Letters, Printed Matters

Printed matters from the United States to Hamburg and beyond

The rate for printed matters from the United States to Hamburg was 2 U.S. Cents, for G.A.P.U. destinations beyond Hamburg an additional U.S. Cent had to be paid.



1859. New Orleans to Cromfort (Ratingen today) via New York and Hamburg. Posted stamp franked as printed matter at the 2 U.S. Cents rate to Hamburg, postage to the destination would have been another U.S. Cent, but as the US Post had stamped PAID ALL and the Prussian Post FRANCO, no postage due was claimed. Carried with HAMMONIA (departure New York 1st November, arrival Hamburg 15th November).

Overview of all ship crossings shown in this exhibit

HAPAG Ship	Departure Hamburg	Arrival New York	Departure New York	Arrival Hamburg	P #
AUSTRIA			1.6.1858	14.6.1858	7
BORUSSIA			15.9.1858	28.9.1858	14
SAXONIA	1.12.1858	24.12.1858			4
HAMMONIA			1.11.1859	15.11.1859	16
TEUTONIA	3.1.1860	21.1.1860			12
BORUSSIA + HAMMONIA	1.4.1860	23.4.1860			15
SAXONIA	5.9.1860	3.10.1860			
BORUSSIA			15.6.1861	29.6.1861	6
HAMMONIA	15.6.1861	1.7.1861			10
HAMMONIA	25.8.1861	10.9.1861			4
SAXONIA			7.2.1863	21.2.1863	3
TEUTONIA	16.5.1864	31.5.1864			5
GERMANIA			12.11.1864	26.11.1864	13
ALLEMANIA	17.9.1865	1.10.1865			11
BAVARIA	17.6.1866	2.7.1866			8
BAVARIA			7.7.1866	21.7.1866	14
BORUSSIA	15.7.1866	30.7.1866			5
ALLEMANIA			8.9.1866	21.9.1866	7
ALLEMANIA	8.12.1866	26.12.1866			12
BORUSSIA	7.4.1867	24.4.1867			10
ALLEMANIA	26.5.1867	10.6.1867			3
HAMMONIA			29.6.1867	10.7.1867	13
CIMBRIA	1.9.1867	12.9.1867			11
TEUTONIA	7.9.1867	23.9.1867			9
GERMANIA	29.9.1867	3.11.1867			6
HAMMONIA	22.12.1867	5.1.1868			8+9

Final Note

As mentioned on the title page, the Hamburg Stadtpost lost its independence on the 31st December 1867, and the 1857 convention ended as well. While the Stadtpost got a new role within the Norddeutscher Bund (North German Federation), HAPAG continued its business. Arguably, their most successful times were still to come. Today HAPAG Lloyd is among the top five shipping companies worldwide. If you happen to be in Hamburg, you can go to Ballindamm right next to the Binnenalster and have a look at the impressive HAPAG building.