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## PHILADELPHIA TO SINGAPORE, A REPRISE

— ALSO IN THIS ISSUE —



AN AUTHOR'S GUIDE TO  
WRITING FOR THE HISTORIAN



LANCASTER TO PHILADELPHIA:  
IT'S ALL ABOUT THE SHEETS



UNITED STATES ARMY  
CIVIL WAR HOSPITALS



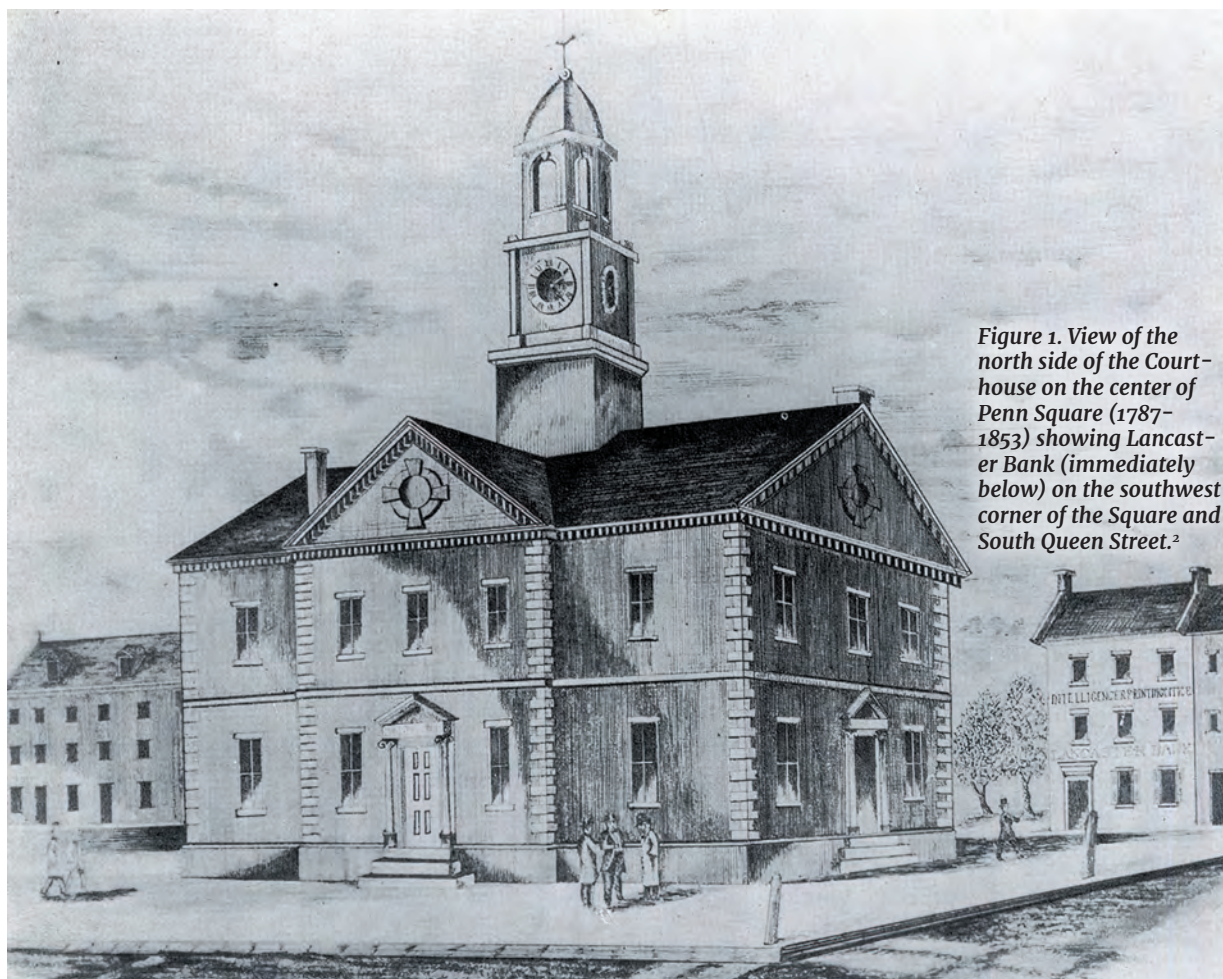


Figure 1. View of the north side of the Courthouse on the center of Penn Square (1787-1853) showing Lancaster Bank (immediately below) on the southwest corner of the Square and South Queen Street.<sup>2</sup>

## Lancaster to Philadelphia Same Distance, Different Rates— It's All About the Sheets

by Charles J. DiComo, PhD | PaPHS #605

The Lancaster Bank began life as Lancaster Trading Company, and enjoyed a rather long period of operation under this title from March 24, 1818 until 1856 (Figure 1). Christian Bachman (1795 – 1849) was for a longtime cashier of the old Lancaster Bank. He was born in Hempfield, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and prominent in the community. He held a number of positions besides cashier, from prothonotary in 1830 of the Court of Common Pleas of Lancaster County, as well as Prothonotary of the District Court for the city and county of Lancaster until 1836. His son, Benjamin C. (B.C.) Bachman, was also a cashier at the Lancaster Bank, later becoming president. The bank had an interesting history, a few comments concerning which are given below.

By December 1856, *Banker's Magazine* printed that “The Lancaster Bank, with a capital of \$403,900, and circulation about \$500,000, suspended payment on the 15th November, in consequence of a pressing demand for specie in payment of its bills, arising from the refusal of the banks and brokers of Philadelphia to take the bills on deposit. Mr. B.C. Bachman resigned the presidency a few days



before the suspension, and is succeeded by Mr. A. Herr Smith." Why did Benjamin C. Bachman resign the presidency? He and his partners had been embezzling and were arrested shortly thereafter and charged.<sup>1</sup> The Lancaster Bank closed its "vaults" by the end of 1856, and did not live to suffer in the Panic of 1857, which began the following autumn.

Times were difficult for many banks in 1855 and 1856 leading up to the Panic of 1857, an abrupt downturn in the US economy. A general recession had emerged in late-1856, but the successive failure of banks and businesses that characterized the panic began in mid-1857. While the overall economic downturn was brief, the recovery was disproportionate, and the lasting impact was more political than economic. The panic began with a loss of confidence in an Ohio bank, and spread as railroads failed and fears that the US Federal Government would be unable to pay obligations in specie mounted. More than 5,000 American businesses failed within a year, and unemployment was accompanied by protest meetings. Ultimately, the panic and depression spread to Europe, South America and the Far East. No recovery was apparent in the northern parts of the US for a year and a half, and the full impact did not dissipate until the American Civil War.

Before we analyze the three letters Christian Bachman wrote; a few words on the addressee Orrick, Grubbs & Parker. Founded in 1839 in Philadelphia, Samuel D. Orrick, Edward B. Grubb and William B. Parker were iron merchants located at Race & Water Street. They acted as the selling agent for the many forges and furnaces operated by members of the Grubb family in Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon and York Counties. The Grubb family was prominent in the history of iron making in Pennsylvania. One of the furnaces they owned and operated, the Henry Clay Furnaces, was located in West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County (Figure 2).

It is worth mentioning that in the area between Marietta and Columbia, eleven furnaces operated between 1845 and the end of the century. These furnaces did not operate as a lone stack. There were many connected and ancillary buildings to keep the hot blast furnace flowing. It was common to have a casting house, stock house, ore roasters, engine house, as well as houses for the workers. For those adventurers and historians, one can still see the remains of the iron furnaces today, most of which can be found along the Northwest Lancaster County River Trail between Columbia and Marietta.

With that background, we turn to the three stampless folded letters that Lancaster Bank Cashier, Christian Bachman penned to Orrick, Grubbs & Parker between 1841 and 1842. The Figure 3 letter



Figure 2. Henry Clay Furnaces, West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, PA. Built in 1845 by Peter Haldeman, merchant of Columbia. Purchased in 1857 by Mr. Grubb and James McCormick, Esq. Remained idle from 1857-1863, then purchased by a consortium who eventually sold out to C.B. Grubb and Son.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 3. Folded letter from Lancaster, PA to Philadelphia, PA. Entered mails April 25, 1841 with PAID and manuscript "10", paying inland rate for 30-80 miles for a single letter sheet.

entered the mails in Lancaster, Pennsylvania on April 25, 1841, where the clerk struck a pale blue 30 mm **LANCASTER APR 25 PA** circular date stamp (CDS), with matching pale blue 19 x 5 mm **PAID** handstamp and a manuscript "10," paying the inland rate for 30-80 miles to Philadelphia for a single letter sheet. The contents of the letter discuss railroad iron being offered for sale by the State of Pennsylvania, which the Lancaster Bank could loan funds on. The letter is docketed in cursive on the inner flap "C Bachman April 24/41, Rec. 25," confirming receipt by the offices of Orrick, Grubbs & Parker.



Figure 4. Folded letter from Lancaster, PA to Philadelphia, PA. Entered mails August 3, 1841 with manuscript "20", paying double the 10¢ inland rate for 30-80 miles for "two" sheets. Contained a bank draft (absent) for \$978.66.

The Figure 4 letter entered the mails in Lancaster on August 3, 1841, where the clerk struck a pale blue 30 mm **LANCASTER AUG 3 PA** CDS and manuscript "20," this time paying double the 10¢ inland rate for 30-80 miles to Philadelphia for "two" sheets. From the contents, this letter contained a bank draft (absent) for \$978.66. Of note, the clerk did not strike the pale blue 19x5 mm **PAID** handstamp. As with the letter in Figure 3, this is docketed in cursive on the inner flap "C Bachman Aug 9/41, R. 10," confirming receipt.

The final letter of this trio is depicted in Figure 5. It entered the mails in Lancaster on August 13, 1842, where the clerk struck the pale blue 30 mm **LANCASTER AUG 13 PA** CDS and manuscript "30" (now in blue ink), paying triple the 10¢ inland rate for 30-80 miles to Philadelphia for "three" sheets. From reading the con-



tents, this folded letter contained a note for \$106.28 and a bank draft (both absent). As with the prior two letters, there is docketing in cursive on the inner flap "C Bachman Aug 13/41, Rec. 14\_\_," confirming receipt.

Summing up, we have three stampless folded letters sent over a one year period from Christian Bachman, Cashier at the Lancaster Bank, to iron merchants Orrick, Grubbs & Parker, in Philadelphia, PA. They traveled the same distance of nearly 65 miles, yet were rated differently (10¢, 20¢ and 30¢). Why the different rates?



Figure 5. Folded letter from Lancaster, PA to Philadelphia, PA. Entered mails August 13, 1842 with manuscript "30", paying triple the 10¢ inland rate for 30-80 miles for "three" sheets. Contained a note for \$106.28 and a bank draft (both absent).

To answer this question, we need to revisit the establishment of our own centralized postal system after the founding the United States and the Act of February 20, 1792. Agents were hired and paid to perform various services. Owners of freight lines and stages bid on contracts to carry the mail on a regular basis over specific routes, stopping at various towns along the way. Post Offices were established in each of these towns to accept and hold letters for delivery. Postal fees were established by Congress and related to the distance a letter was carried, the number of sheets of paper in the letter, and the weight.

This period between 1792 and 1855 is called the "Stampless Era." Postage stamps had not been issued by the US government until 1847 and their use on letters did not become mandatory until after 1855. Over the years from the first Act in 1792, additional Acts were passed changing the cost per distance per sheet and weight. During the 1840's when the three letters were mailed, the Acts of April 9, 1816 and March 3, 1825 were in effect. The rates per single sheet were: 1¢ drop letter; 6¢ <30 miles; 10¢ 30-80 miles; 12½¢ 80-150 miles; 18¾¢ 150-400 miles; 25¢ >400 miles.

Furthermore, most mail was sent postage due – the recipient paid the postage when he or she picked up the letter from the receiving post office. Gradually, that practice changed so some mail was prepaid and some was sent due. "PAID" markings were used to denote prepayment. The cover in Figure 3 shows the **PAID** handstamp, confirming that Cashier Bachman, on behalf of Lancaster Bank, prepaid 10¢ in cash to the clerk to mail the "single sheet" letter to Philadelphia. The other two

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letters were not stuck with the PAID handstamp, indicating they were sent postage due – the 20¢ and 30¢ being paid by Orrick, Grubbs & Parker. No doubt the sizeable transactions being conducted between the two entities made for paying the postage due by Orrick, Grubbs & Parker simply a cost of doing business.

Over time, postal reform gradually occurred with a great reduction in the fees charged on letters. A few years after these three stampless letters were mailed in 1845; the postage fees were reduced to 5¢ and 10¢ for letters carried for less or greater than 400 miles, respectively.

We are fortunate that these letters were jointly found, informing us on the business dealings in the 1840s between Lancaster Bank and the iron merchant Orrick, Grubbs & Parker. They also allow a recounting of the numerous postal rates established during the Stampless Era, based on distance, sheets and weight. Happy hunting! ▀

### References

1. "The Mysteries of Banking," published in *The Star of the North*, Bloomsburg, Columbia County, PA, Vol. 9, No. 1, Jan. 21, 1857, pg. 1.
2. View of the north side of the courthouse on the center of Penn Square (1787-1853) showing the Lancaster Bank on the southwest corner of the Square and South Queen Street. LancasterHistory.org, Object ID: 2-15-01-09.
3. Image of the Henry Clay Furnace, south of Chickies Creek, West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Credit: Ellis, Franklin and Samuel Evans, *History of Lancaster County*, 1883. [http://explorepahistory.com/kora/files/1/2/1-2-107E-25-ExplorePAHistory-a0k6ko-a\\_349.jpg](http://explorepahistory.com/kora/files/1/2/1-2-107E-25-ExplorePAHistory-a0k6ko-a_349.jpg).

### About the Author

Charles J. DiComo, PhD is a lifelong philatelist, postal historian and award-winning author. He enjoys researching, restoring, writing, publishing, and presenting on a broad array of philatelic and postal history topics. He is President of the Philatelic Society of Lancaster County, President of the Empire State Postal History Society, Editor-in-Chief of the USPCS Chairman's Chatter, life member of the U.S. Philatelic Classics Society, and on the Board of the PA Postal History Society. A native New Yorker, he currently resides in Lancaster, Pennsylvania with his wife of 25 years, Kathleen, and their daughters McKenna and Mia.



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