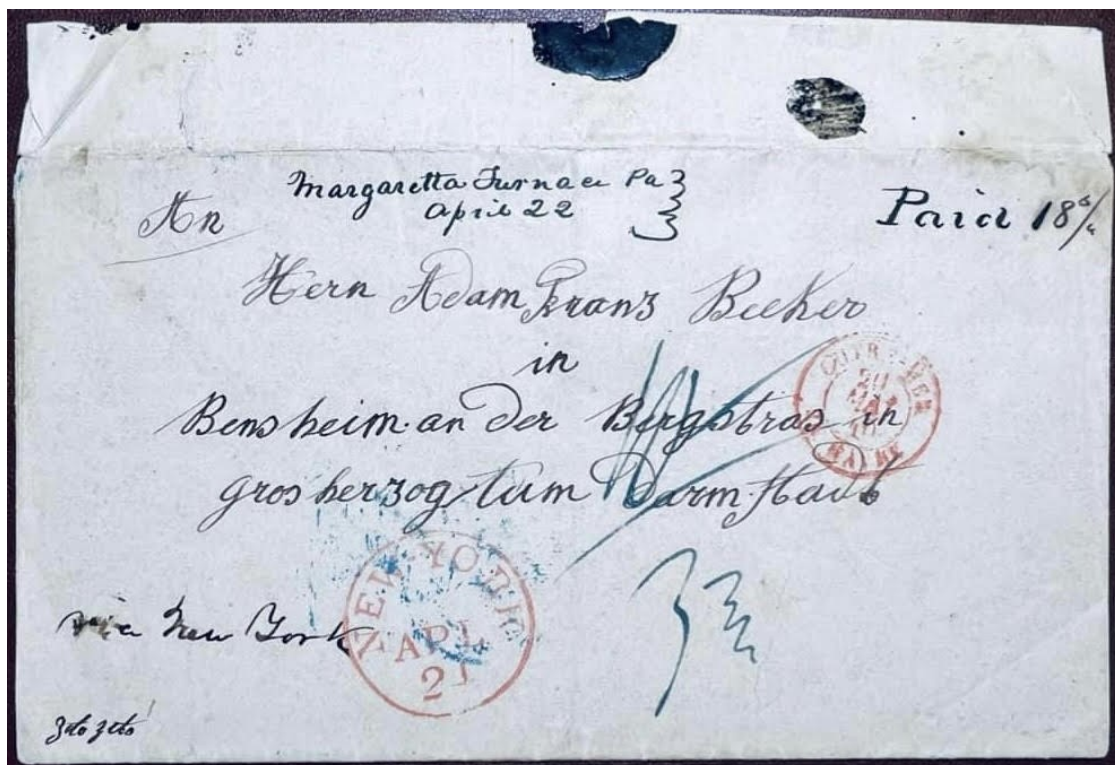


The front of a stampless letter-sheet sent from Pennsylvania to Germany, by way of New York City and France.



## What's It All About?

Dissecting a foreign-bound stampless cover and its markings and rates

By Charles J. DiComo, PhD

Shown here is a folded letter with contents to Darmstadt, Hessen, Germany 1840, which was first posted at Margaretta Furnace, York County, Pennsylvania.

The letter traveled to New York City, then by Le Havre, France by the sailing vessel Louis Phillippe, before moving by train to Paris, on to Strasbourg, north through Baden, to Hessen territory, and finally to Bensheim, Darmstadt.

Wow, what a journey! Following is my full diagnosis. This is a rare use from Margaretta Furnace, where annually 1,100 tons of iron were produced for about 20 years until the production ended in 1843.

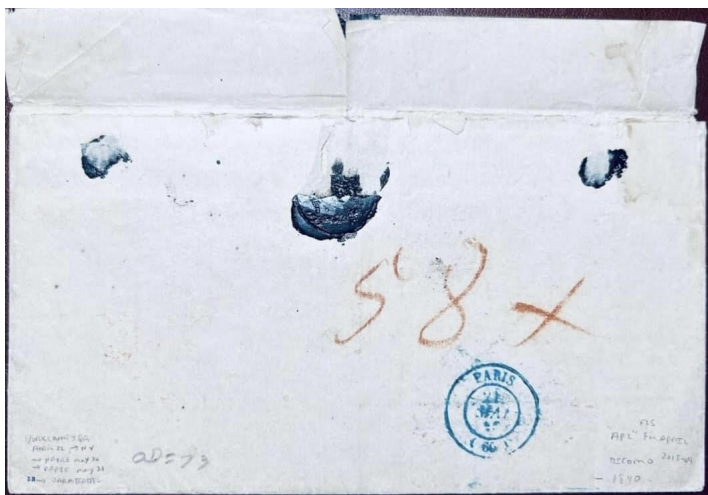
This cover entered the mail on April 22, 1840. It has a black manuscript marking of "Margaretta Furnace Pa April 22" and a manuscript "Paid 18 3/4." The rate covered the U.S. inland rate of 150 to 400 miles, which would have gotten the letter to New York City.

The cover was received April 24 at New York City, which is shown on the front via the scarce "APL" abbreviation for April instead of the standard "APR."

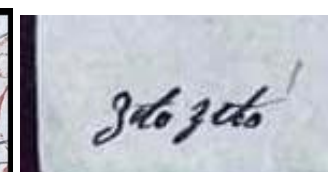
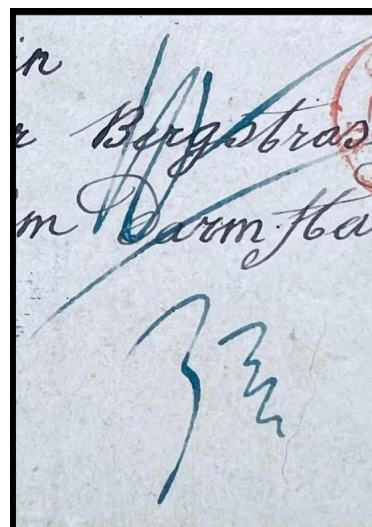
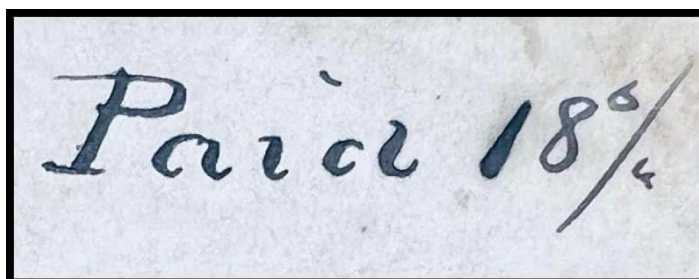
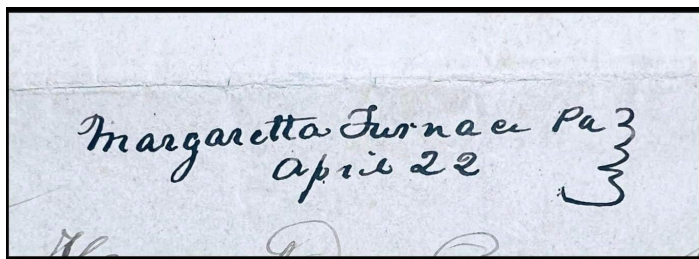


Close-ups of the cover's cancellation marks.





The reverse of the cover from Pennsylvania to Germany shows the remnants of a black wax seal.



Close-ups of some of the writing on the cover, including the rate and the date and place of origin.

The letter was placed in a mail bag carried by Havre Line on the sailing packet Louis Phillippe, which departed April 24 from New York City and arrived on May 20 in Le Havre. There, the red-orange double-circle handstamp of “OUTRE-MER LE HAVRE 20 MAI 40” was applied.

The cover then traveled by railroad to Paris, with the blue double-circle “PARIS 21 MAI 40 (60)” handstamp applied. The journey continued to Strasbourg, then north to Bensheim in Darmstadt.

The black rate marking on the obverse is “10/3¼” (or “10½/3¼”) for a total of 13¾ (or 14¼) silbergroschen, which is in the currency of the North Thurn & Taxis. (Silbergroschen was a denomination used in Prussia and other northern German states at the time.)

The letter was carried by the Thurn & Taxis Post from Paris to the German state of Hesse-Darmstadt.

Most likely, the 10 (or 10½) silbergroschen was for 8 (or 8½) silbergroschen to France and 2 silbergroschen for Prussian transit. The other 3¼ silbergroschen was for Baden transit.

The 13¾ (or 14¼) silbergroschen converts to 48 (or 50) kreuzer, which means that an additional 10 (or 8) kreuzer was collected in Darmstadt (possible local Hessen fee). The red crayon “58x” on reverse equals 58 kreuzer (probably total postage due by recipient).

The cover is addressed to Mr. Herr Adam Franz Becker in Bensheim an der Bergstrasse in Großherzogtum Darmstadt and was sent (at lower left) “via New York” and, with manuscript markings of “zito, zito” at bottom left (I am unsure what these mean). There are no contents, but there are the remnants of a black wax seal.

**Note:** Richard Winter and Dwayne Littauer provided expert insight on the rating of French sailing ships to Germany. Richard does not have a similar cover to compare and confirms this is “unique.”



A postcard dated 1910 showing Bensheim, Germany. (Courtesy of Subin's Postcard Shop, <https://www.postcard-shop.de/en/>).