



The front and back of a transatlantic stampless folded letter sent in 1841 from New Orleans to France via New York City.

Louisiana to France: A 6-week journey

By Charles J. DiComo, PhD

Here is the story behind a transatlantic stampless folded letter with contents in French that passed through New York City harbor.

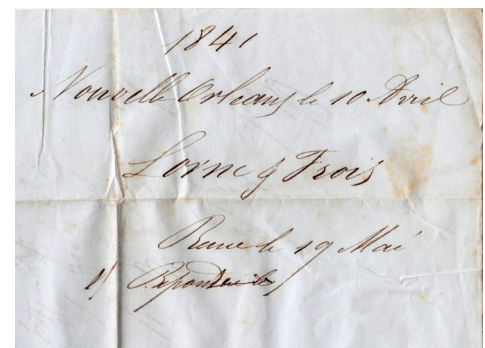
The letter was written April 10, 1841 and was sent from Lorne & Frois, 21 Chartres St., Importers & Wholesale Merchants, New Orleans, Louisiana. It is addressed a business in Le Havre, France, a port city in Normandy.

The folded lettersheet entered the mail at New Orleans, where the clerk added a blue 30-millimeter circular postal marking reading “NEW ORLEANS APR 10 La.”

There is a red, 21-by-4 millimeter “PAID” handstamp, a “50” in pencil and a duplicate “50” in blue ink. This indicates a prepayment for more than 400 miles at the inland rate of 25 cents applied for double-weight).



An etching of the commercial harbor at Le Havre, France, from Joseph Morlent’s “Album of the trip to Le Havre and the Surrounding Area” (1841).



The writer added in cursive “via N. York” at lower left and “Packet of 24th April” at top.

Once the letter was received at New York City, the clerk applied a red “NEW-YORK APL 20” circular datestamp (note that “APL” stands for April instead of the usual “APR”).

The letter was placed in a mail bag and carried by the New York & Havre Line sailing packet Rhone, with Captain Wotten at the helm. The ship was scheduled to depart New York on April 24, but was detained three days awaiting favorable weather to sail, and departed on April 27. This line also was known as the Union Line of Havre Packets.

The transatlantic journey took about 21 days to Havre, where the French clerk added an orange-red double-circle, “OUTREMER LE HAVRE 19 MAI 41” entry marking and black “2” (decimes), which was to be paid by the recipient.

The folder lettersheet is addressed to Messieurs Porteu-Albert, Marine Insurance Co. in Havre.