



Figure 1. The obverse of a folded letter from Philadelphia to Cognac, France, 1839.

À Votre Santé

From Philly to NYC to France – All for a Brandy!

By Dr. Charles J. DiComo

I recently acquired the 1839-dated stampless folded letter (SFL) shown (**Figure 1**) for my decades-old research study on the use of the New York City (NYC) circular date stamp (CDS) in which April is abbreviated with an “APL” as opposed to the more common “APR.”

The letter entered the mail on April 23 in Philadelphia, where a clerk added a weak strike of the blue “PHILADEL APR 23 PA.” circular datestamp. There is a matching blue octagonal “PAID” to the right and the rate of 12.5 is handwritten. This was the correct



Figure 2. The original marking from Philadelphia in light blue and the “APL,” for April, marking applied in New York City.

U.S. inland fee for a letter traveling between 80 and 150 miles (**Figure 2**).

The letter was received in NYC, where the clerk added the uncommon “NEW-YORK APL 24” circular datestamp in red at the bottom.

Here, “APL” was used to abbreviate “April” instead of the more common “APR”). This type of a New York City circular datestamp (with the very low month/date aligned with the “N” and “K” of New York), which is indicative of foreign mail.

The letter was placed in a mail bag, carried by the Union Sailing vessel *Ville de Lyon*, which departed on April 25, 1839 from New York City Harbor.

After a 27-day transatlantic voyage, the *Ville de Lyon* arrived in Le Havre, France. The mail bags were unloaded and sorted, and then a red-orange, **COGNAC, PAGE 4**



Figure 3. The red-orange marking applied after the letter's arrival in France.



COGNAC, FROM PAGE 3

double-circle “Outre-Mer Le Havre 22 MAI 39” cancellation was applied below the blue Paid box (**Figure 3**).

The folded letter was then on its way overland via railway to Paris, where the blue, double-circle “Paris 15/ (60)/15 23 MAI 39” was applied on the reverse (**Figure 4**). The letter continued via rail to its final destination of Cognac. Upon arrival, the clerk struck the black, double-circled “COGNAC (45) 25 MAI 39” on the reverse.

The recipient paid 13 decimes to collect this letter and docketed on the rear flap the following (**Figure 5**): “Jacob Adams Philadelphia 23 April, rec’d 25 May, ans’d 1 June.”

The contents (**Figure 6**) discuss the sale of Otard Dupuy & Co. brandy from either La Rochelle or Bordeaux in France to the writer, Jacob Adams, of Philadelphia.

Otard, also known as Château de Cognac, is a French cognac house founded in 1795 by Jean-Baptiste Antoine Otard (**Figure 7**).



Figure 4. The entire folded lettersheet laid out (left) and the final marking made at Cognac.

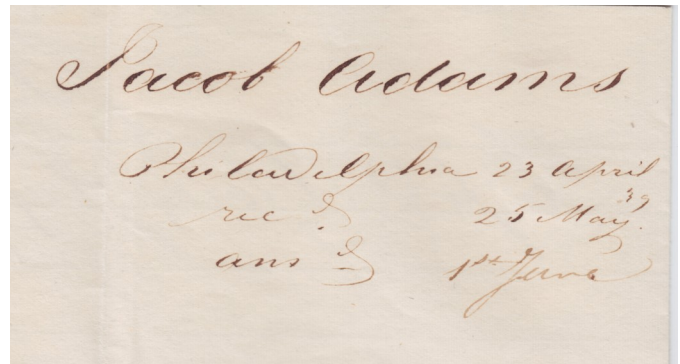


Figure 5. Jacob Adams’ hand notation.

The company has remained in the hands of the same family since its establishment. The firm is based in the Château des Valois (Château de Cognac), Cognac, Charente, its home since 1796. James Otard fought alongside Louis XIV of France and was named a baron in 1701.

Philadelphia 23 Apl. 1839
Messrs. Otard Dupoy & Co
Cognac

Dear Sirs

I duly received your favor of the 29 January. I have made insurances on the Brandy by vessel or vessels from either La Rochelle or Bordeaux. I am informed the Russian Brig Navigator sailed about the 9 March from Bordeaux & being of heavy Sailor. I do not look for her until the beginning of May. Whenever she arrives I will immediately remit you a bill on thy friends C. (Yardien) & () Loubot for the whole amount. I much regret that opportunities offer so seldom for vessels coming from either Bordeaux or La Rochelle. I could sell your Brandy at the rate of 25 to 30 half pipes every month and at a fair profit. It will not sell unless it comes direct to Philadelphia. I hope soon to make some arrangements more pleasing to both parties and receive Brandy by every opportunity.

With sincere regards, I remain your obed. Servt.

Jacob Adams

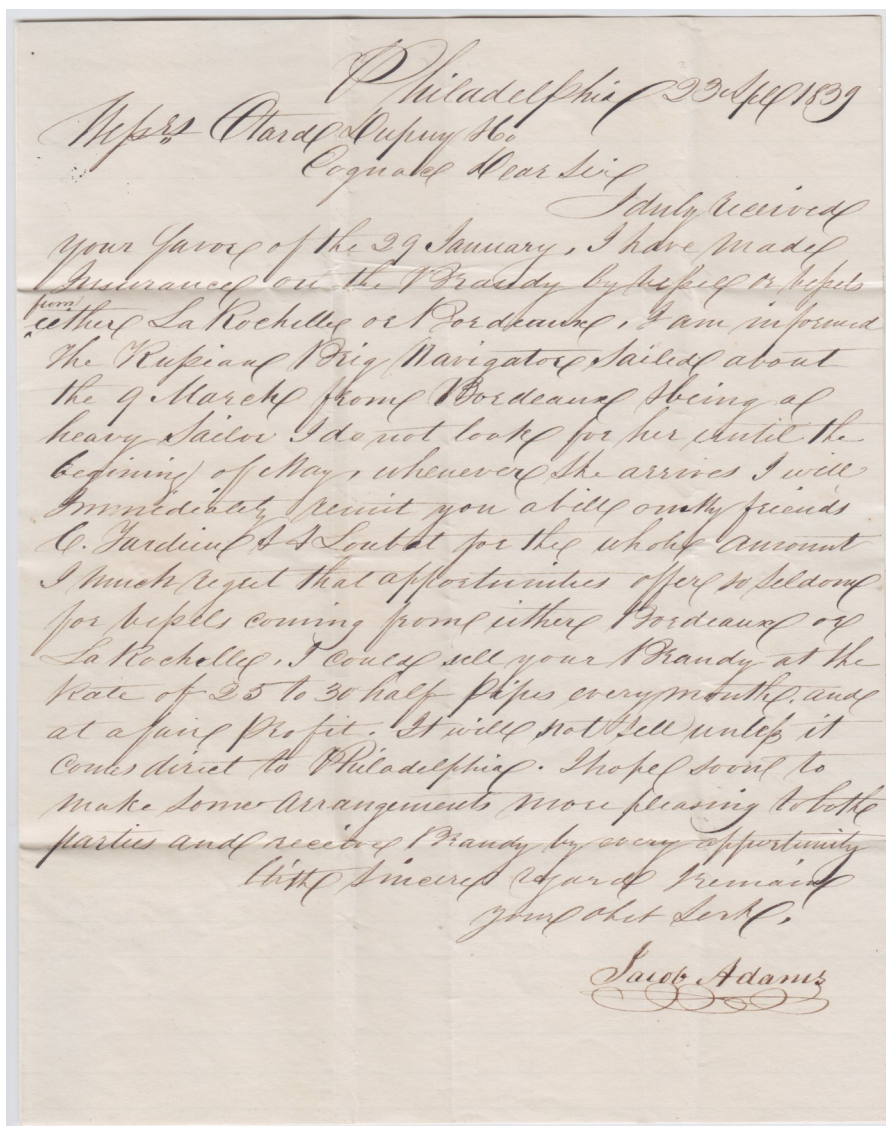


Figure 6. The full handwritten letter from Jacob Adams, of Philadelphia.

It was his great-grandson, Jean-Baptiste Antoine Otard, born near the town of Cognac, who created the cognac trading house bearing his name in 1795. The family-owned vineyards around the town of Cognac and were already distilling and ageing “eaux-de-vie.”

The following year, he brought the Chateau de Cognac, built in the 10th century to protect the villagers from Norman invaders, as a base for his business. The cellars of the chateau, which can be visited, are still used for storing and ageing the casks of cognac.

In closing, my decades-long studies of the NYC “APL” postal marking have brought me much joy as I search for new varieties, new cities, and new destinations. One never knows where your research will take you. In



Figure 7. A bottle of Baron Otard “Princes de Cognac.”

this case, my recent acquisition of this letter took me on a three-week journey from Philadelphia, across the Atlantic Ocean, through Europe via rail, to the Otard House, where Château de Cognac has been distilled for centuries. And all from the comfort of my easy chair!

Acknowledgement

I wish to thank Richard F. Winter for sharing his vast knowledge on transatlantic mail, routes and rates. Any errors or an omission is the author’s responsibility. I can be reach at charlesdicomo@gmail.com.

Translation: Our main headline — À Votre Santé — is a French toast meaning, “to your health.”

Wanted: Your knowledge, your interests, your articles. The Excelsior! needs all types of submissions. Share your passion, even if it’s just about a single cover. Contact the editor or president for details.



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Thomas X. Casey: Our author grew up in the Bronx and has a keen interest in tracking the history of the post offices there. He shares the story about his quest for a 19th century postal cancellation from one of those post offices: Williams Bridge / Jerome. **Cover, Page 6.**

Charles J. DiComo, PhD: An stampless lettersheet from 1839 that traveled from Philadelphia to France, via New York City, presents several intriguing markings along with links to some high end spirits. Salut! **Page 3.**

New Book: Longtime postal history researcher Terence Hines explored his home county so much that he had enough to write a book. Hines offers the postal ins and outs of Putnam County. **Page 9.**

National Air Mail Week 1938 Revisited: Excelsior! published an article last fall that focused on a small New York town's involvement with a national celebration of the 20th anniversary of airmail. This issue offers a look at more special event covers created in more than a dozen New York communities of NAMW 1938. **Pages 11, 12.**

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dated from January to June. For applications dated July to December terms are for 1 ½ years with a fee of \$30 (\$35 for non-U.S. addresses). Advertising is accepted. For ads, please contact the society secretary.

LETTER

Fixing some date errors

Where did the list of postal history dates in the last Excelsior! come from? A couple are wrong, and at least one I have a question about:

First, regarding the 1811 attribution of the Post Office Department going to steamboats. At least on the

Hudson, that didn't happen until later in the decade, probably 1815.

The July 1, 1842 date for first general issue stamps going on sale in NYC. If this is supposed to be 1847, there is a question of whether they were actually sold on that date. I have found no newspaper evidence of their being placed on sale. The

earliest known use is postmarked July 2.

The 1862 date for the start of free city delivery is not right. The end of the fee period for city delivery was June 30, 1863, so the earliest date was July 1, 1863.

Thomas Mazza

Editor's note: Apologies, and thanks for setting us straight.