

EARLY NEW JERSEY PICTORIAL LETTER SHEETS

Edited by Jean Walton

Attractive illustrated letter sheets from the 1800s are highly collectable and not often seen. Some of the most well-known depicted California mining scenes during the Gold Rush days, or were illustrated sheets used during the Civil War. The earliest, before the use of envelopes, were used as folded letter sheets, and would normally have an attached blank sheet for additional writing space. Later ones were enclosed in envelopes. Joe Felcone has shared several with New Jersey views from his collection. All are single sheets: none are postally used. Whether any of these had attached blank sheets that have been removed is unknown.

This one from the Speedwell Iron Works in Morristown is perhaps the most spectacular, but we can't say definitively whether it was used as a letter sheet, with a now-gone attached sheet. It has stab holes at the extreme right edge and a vertical fold mark through the "D" of "SPEEDWELL." It was clearly folded for a long period of time, and whatever faced it was apparent-



Fig. 1: This sheet was prepared for S. Vail & Son's Speedwell Iron Works in Morristown, with a gorgeous engraving by D. G. Johnson (NY) occupying the top half of the sheet, calligraphic engraved lettering at the center, and a list of manufactured items at the bottom.

ly acidic and has offset to the back of the left third and, as you can see, down the right side. This would be about the physical configuration of a folded frontispiece in an octavo pamphlet, so it may have been the frontispiece of a Speedwell publication, and not be a letter sheet at all. It was engraved by D. G. Johnson, 67 Liberty St., NY. Johnson was at this address in 1833 and 1834, according to the NY directories, and at other addresses in 1832 and 1835, so we can be certain of the date. Other non-NJ business letter sheets that looked similar to this are known, with a view of the factory or works and with advertising text on the back of the first sheet, and blank pages for business correspondence, to be used in this period as a stampless folded letter.

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The next is one for Newark, with an 1853 colored map at the top, and a blank dateline of 185___. As this sheet postdates the introduction of envelopes, it may have been intended to be enclosed in an envelope. In 1853, Russell Hawes developed the first envelope folding machine in the U.S.¹ following the English inventions by several years. Hand-made envelopes preceded these inventions.

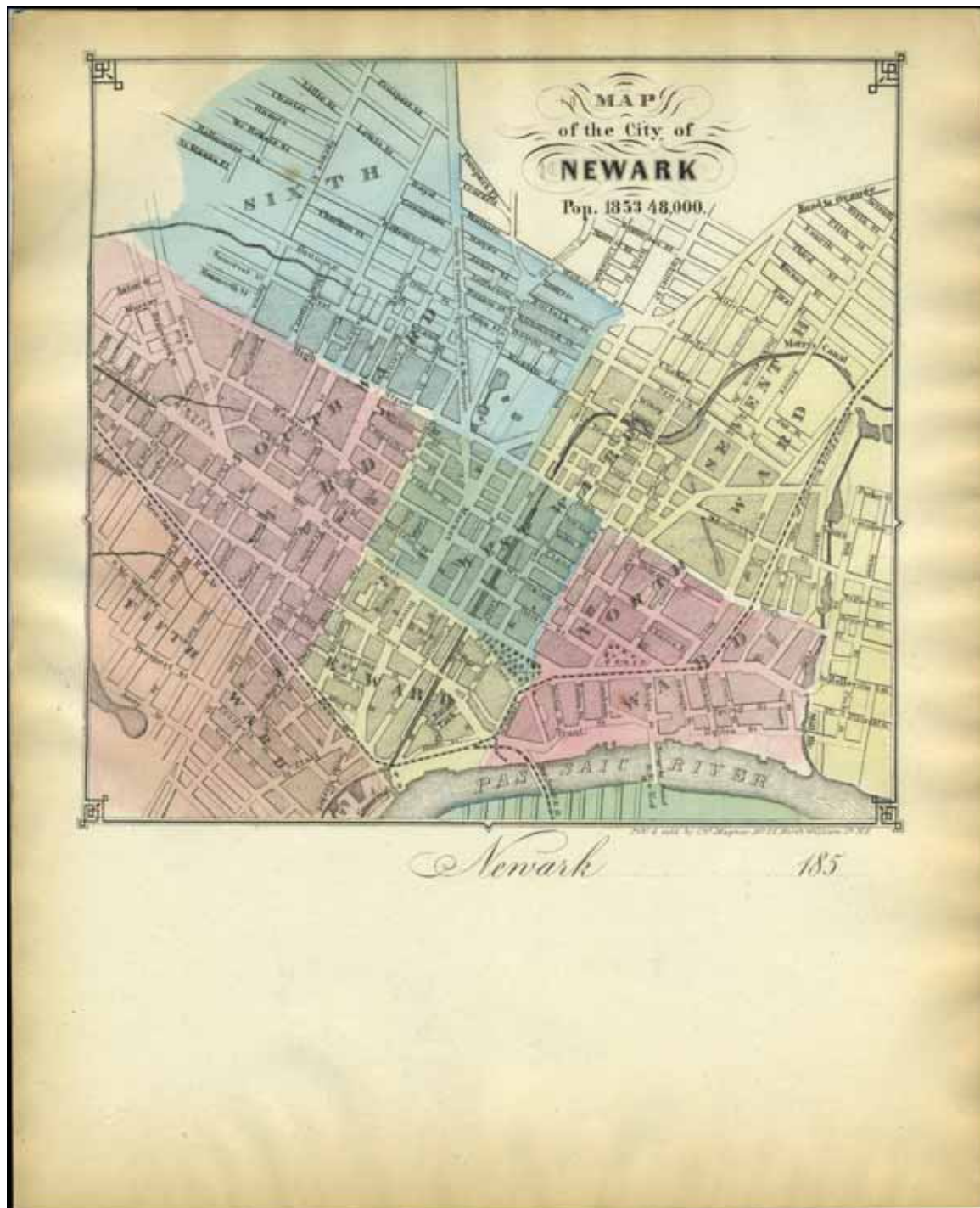


Fig. 2: Letter sheet with a map of Newark and a dateline of 185__, which may once have had an attached second sheet. It was printed by Chs Magnus, No. 22 North William St., New York, and shows much detail about Newark in 1853.

Below is one from Egg Harbor City, again printed by Charles Magnus, in 1866.

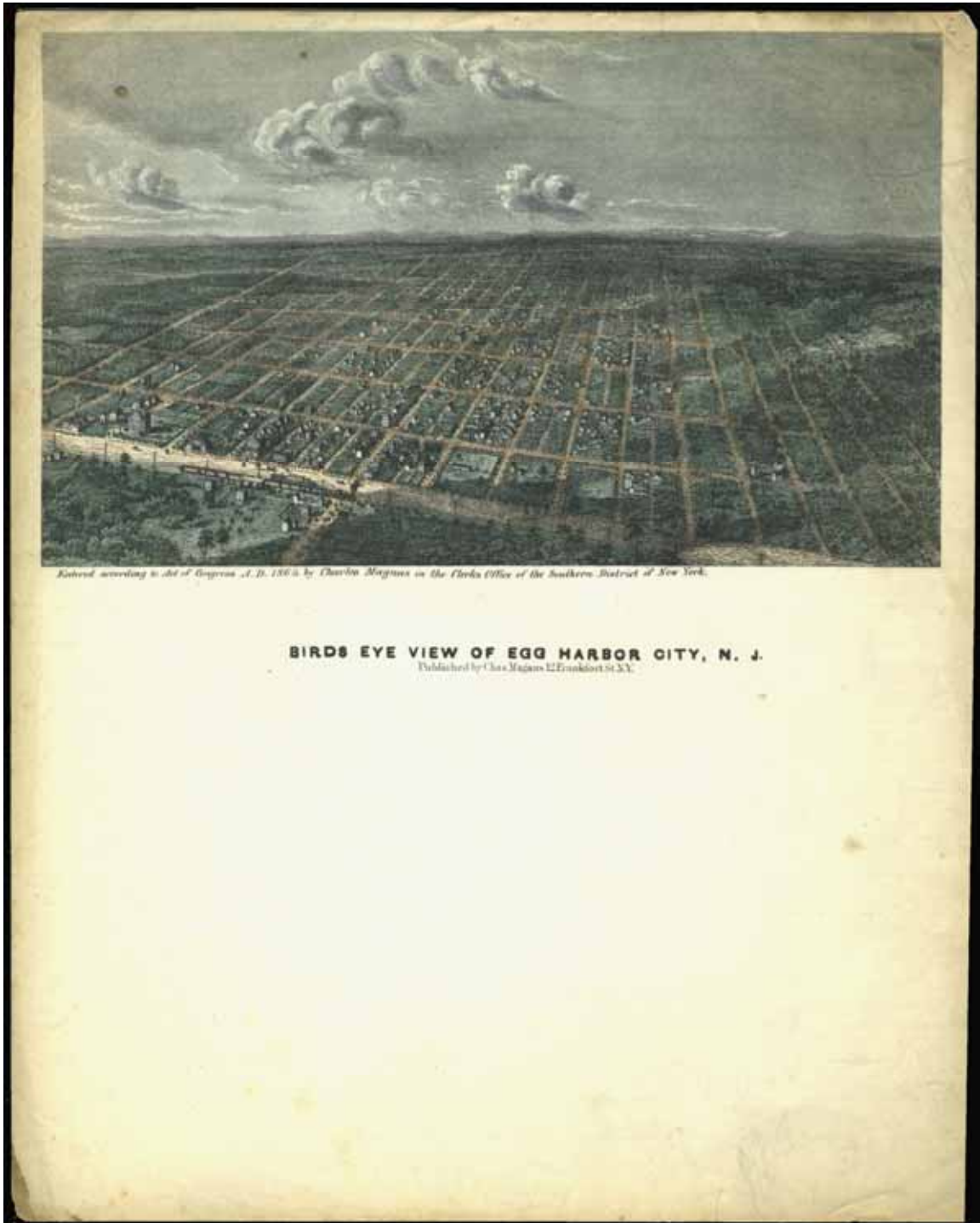


Fig. 3: Pictorial letter sheet depicting "Birds Eye View of Egg Harbor City, N.J." Printed by Chas. Magnus, 12 Frankfort St., N.Y., in 1866. Dimensions are 10 3/4 x 8 1/2 in.

This is only the second copy of this sheet seen by Joe Felcone.

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This last one letter sheet is undated, but is probably ca. 1870s² -- from the South Jersey Institute, Bridgeton, with an uncolored woodcut of the school building at the top. The date of this sheet makes it more likely a letterhead prepared for use at the school:

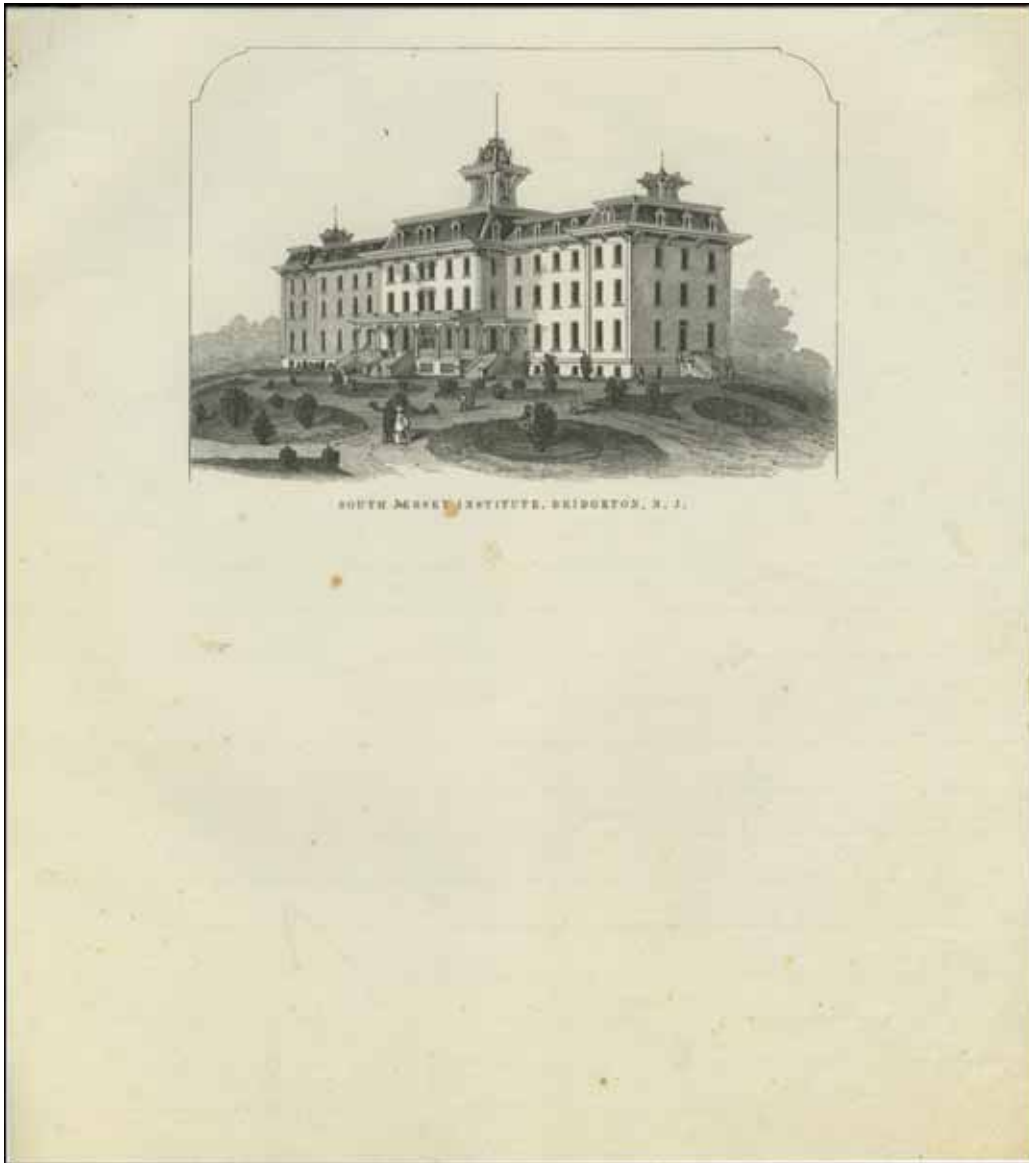


Fig. 4: Bridgeton, NJ, South Jersey Institute letter sheet, with faint writing lines. No printer or date is shown, but the school was founded around 1870, and operated to 1906.

Do others have similar letter sheets of other New Jersey locales? We would be happy to report more. Contact your secretary at Secretary@NJPostalHistory.org.

ENDNOTES:

¹ The Smithsonian National Postal Museum at <http://arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=2&cmd=1&id=17026&pg=1> (8/26/2010).

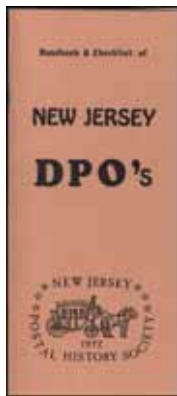
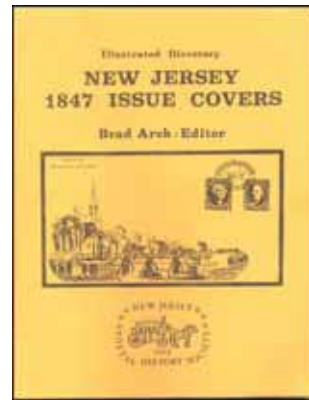
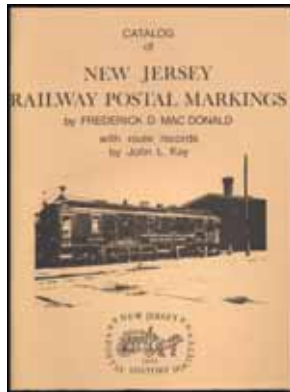
² South Jersey Institute was founded in Bridgeton in 1870, a school for boys and girls, and functioned until 1906. Nichols, Isaac, *The City of Bridgeton, NJ* (1889), Philadelphia, Burk & McFetridge, digitalized by the Sloan Foundation. [Open Library](http://openlibrary.org/books/OL17940112M/city_of_Bridgeton_New_Jersey), at [http://openlibrary.org/books/OL17940112M/city_of_Bridgeton New Jersey](http://openlibrary.org/books/OL17940112M/city_of_Bridgeton_New_Jersey). (8/20/2010).

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