



Title page on Queen Anne legislation

Postal Rates in the British American Colonies

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*A compilation of text and images
To accompany Excel files*

RATE CHART PREFACE

Before 1845, all rates within the United States and its colonial predecessors were based on distance. The Queen Anne Act did define the distances for most of the post office then existent. No subsequent postal acts defined “official distances.” This caused two problems. First, the distance between two offices frequently changed as new routes were developed. If the distance were close to a rate divide, the rate could change as the route changed. For example, the distance between New York and Philadelphia changed numerous times; sometimes it was more than 100 miles, sometimes less. Also, as additional post offices were established, the distances were not established by Act. Starting in 1754, Franklin defined the “official distances” between post offices. These didn't change as routes changed and helped establish consistent rates.

All postal rates, except those of July 26, 1775, either are covered by a rate chart or are a simple multiple of a rate chart. Thus, rates are simple to determine. During the period July 26, 1775-September 30, 1775, the rates were reduced by 20% but we don't specifically what that meant. It was not too great a problem since only four covers are reported for that period.

There is an additional point that should be mentioned. Rates are given in currency of accounts, pennyweights and grains of silver. No such coins existed. Each colony had its own currency. Also many foreign coins were in circulation. The conversion rate for each available currency varied frequently. The conversion rates for each colony were published sporadically but people seem to have known what they were. Thus on most covers, two rates are noted, the official rate and the equivalent in local currency.

Colonial Outline: United States Postal History before the United States Post Office

Forerunners (before 1711)

Although England had established a domestic post office monopoly about 1660, it was not imposed on the Colonies. Most mail traveled privately. There were a few attempts to provide some service, but basically service was viewed as the responsibility of the Colonial Legislatures. The Legislatures set their own rates and established what little domestic service existed.

- Ship Captain Mail
- Forwarders (Authorized and Private)
- Colonial Government Posts
- Neale Patent
- Subscription Posts

Parliamentary Post (1711 - 1783)

Queen Anne Act of 1710-11 - The primary purpose of this Act was to raise revenue. In doing so, it gave the British Postmaster General control of all post offices in Britain and the Colonies and gave the Post Office the sole power to set rates. Further, it initiated the Post Office's responsibility for providing service. Such service was slow in coming to the American Colonies and it was the late 1750's before much expansion occurred.

Franklin/Hunter Directions of 1754

King George III Act of 1765

Revolutionary War Period (1775 - 1783) - The British Post Office continued limited operation throughout the War for those areas under British control. All operation ceased with the signing of the Treaty of Paris of 1783.

Independent Postal Services (1774 - 1792)

Transition Period (1774 - 1775) - Starting in 1774, various efforts were undertaken to develop postal systems separate from the British system.

Continental Congress Post (1775 - 1782) - On July 26, 1775, the Continental Congress established the General Post Office with Benjamin Franklin as Postmaster General. Between 1775 and the adoption of the Articles of Confederation in 1782, there were numerous rate changes, some for revenue purposes and some to reflect inflation.

Act of July 26, 1775 (20% less than Act of 1765)
Act of September 30, 1775 (Rates as in Act of 1765)
Act of October 17, 1777 (Increased 1775 rates by 50%)
Act of April 16, 1779 (Doubled 1777 rates)
Act of December 28, 1779 (20 times the 1775 Rates)
Act of May 5, 1780 (40 times the 1775 rates)
Act of December 12, 1780 (½ 1775 rates in specie)
Act of February 24, 1781 (2 times 1775 rates in specie)
Act of October 19, 1781 (1775 rates)

Confederation Post (1782 - 1792) - Under the Articles of Confederation, Congress established the Confederation Post Office effective October 18, 1782. Although the Constitution was adopted in 1788 it was not until 1792 that Congress formally established the United States General Post Office.

Act of October 20, 1787 (20% reduction)

US General Post Office (1792 -)

Congress established the General Post Office effective June 1, 1792. For the first time rates were set in US dollars.

Packets

Dummer (Portsmouth-Barbados) (1702-1711)
Bristol-New York (1710-1714)
NY-Falmouth (1755-1783)
NY-Halifax-Falmouth Post-War (1784-)
Charleston-Florida-Jamaica-Falmouth (1765-1782)
French (1783-1788)

Postmarks to 1754

Boston	1704	Trenton	1737
New York	1709	Portsmouth	1740
Newport	1714	Perth Amboy	1745
Philadelphia	1718	New London	1750
Williamsburg	1734	Potomack	1751
Annapolis	1735	New Brunswick	1752
Marlboro	1735	Salem	1754

Following the Franklin/Hunter Directions of 1754, many more town postmarks began to appear.

"United States" Population

1630	4,600	1740	905,600
1650	50,400	1750	1,170,800
1670	111,900	1770	2,148,100
1690	210,400	1780	2,780,400
1700	250,900	1790	3,929,214
1720	466,200	1800	5,308,483

Pennyweights

Generally after the Franklin/Hunter Instructions of 1754, accounts were maintained and letters marked in pennyweights and grains of coin silver. These were a currency of accounts and not real coins.

1 Pennyweight (dwt) = 24 grains (gr)
1 Pennyweight (dwt) = 3 pence Sterling (3p)
8 Grains (8 gr) = 1 penny Sterling (1p)
12 Pence (12p) = 1 Shilling (Typical abbrev. is 1N)

Covers generally have two rates marked, the currency of account and the local currency equivalent.

Excerpts From Queen Anne Act of 1710
Effective June 1, 1711

All letters and packets from London to New-York in North-America and thence to London, --
Single, One Shilling
Double, Two Shillings
Treble, Three Shillings
Ounce, Four Shillings

All letters and packets from any part of the West-Indies, to New-York aforesaid, --
Single, Four Pence
Double, Eight Pence
Treble, One Shilling
Ounce, One Shilling Four Pence

All letters and packets from New-York, to any place within sixty English miles thereof, and thence back to New-York, --
Single, Four Pence
Double, Eight Pence
Treble, One Shilling
Ounce, One Shilling Four Pence

All letters and packets from New-York to Perth-Amboy, the chief town in East New-Jersey, and to Bridlington, the chief town in West New-Jersey, and from each those places back to New-York, and from New-York, to any place not exceeding one hundred English miles, and from each of these places to New-York, --
Single, Six Pence
Double, One Shilling
Treble, One Shilling Six Pence
Ounce, Two Shillings

All letters and packets from Perth-Amboy and Bridlington to any place not exceeding sixty English miles, and thence back again, --
Single, Four Pence
Double, Eight Pence
Treble, One Shilling
Ounce, One Shilling Four Pence

All letters and packets from Perth-Amboy and Bridlington to any place not exceeding one hundred English miles, and thence back again, --
Single, Six Pence
Double, One Shilling
Treble, One Shilling Six Pence
Ounce, Two Shilling

All letters and packets from New-York to New-London the chief town in Connecticut in New-England, and to Philadelphia the chief town in Pensilvania, and from those places back to New-York, --
Single, 9 Pence
Double, One Shilling Six Pence
Treble, Two Shillings Three Pence
Ounce, Three Shillings

All letters and packets from New-London and Philadelphia, to any place not exceeding sixty English miles, and thence back again, --
Single, Four Pence
Double, Eight Pence
Treble, One Shilling
Ounce, One Shilling Four Pence

All letters and packets from New-London and Philadelphia, to any place not exceeding one hundred English miles, and thence back again, --
Single, Six Pence
Double, One Shilling
Treble, One Shilling Six Pence
Ounce, Two Shillings

All letters and packets from New-York aforesaid to Newport the chief town in Rhode-Island, and Providence Plantation in New-England, and to Boston the chief town in Massachusetts Bay in New-England aforesaid, and to Portsmouth the chief town in New-Hampshire in New-England aforesaid, and to Annapolis the chief town in Maryland, and from every of those places to New-York, --
Single, One Shilling
Double, Two Shillings
Treble, Three Shillings
Ounce, Four Shillings

All letters and packets from Newport, Boston, Portsmouth, and Annapolis aforesaid, to any place not exceeding sixty English miles, and thence back again, --
Single, Four Pence
Double, Eight Pence
Treble, One Shilling
Ounce, One Shilling Four Pence

All letters and packets from Newport, Boston, Portsmouth, and Annapolis aforesaid, to any place not exceeding one hundred English miles, and thence back again, --
Single, Six Pence
Double, One Shilling
Treble, One Shilling Six Pence
Ounce, Two Shillings

All letters and packets from New-York aforesaid, to the chief offices in Salem and Ipswich, and to the chief office in Piscataway, and to Williamsburgh, the chief office in Virginia, and from every of those places to New-York, --
Single, One Shilling Three Pence
Double, Two Shillings Six Pence
Treble, Three Shillings 9 Pence
Ounce, 5 Shillings

All letters and packets from the chief offices in Salem, Ipswich, Piscataway, and Williamsburgh, aforesaid, to any place not

exceeding sixty English miles, and thence back again, --
 Single, Four Pence
 Double, Eight Pence
 Treble, One Shilling
 Ounce, One Shilling Four p

All letters and packets from the chief offices in Salem, Ipswich, Piscataway, and Williamsburgh, aforesaid, to any place not exceeding one hundred English miles, and thence back again, --
 Single, Six Pence
 Double, One Shilling
 Treble, One Shilling Six Pence
 Ounce, Two Shillings

All letters and packets from New-York aforesaid, to Charles-Town, the chief town in North and South Carolina, and from Charles-Town aforesaid to New-York, --
 Single, One Shilling Six Pence

Double, Three Shillings
 Treble, Four Shillings Six Pence
 Ounce, Six Shillings

All letters and packets from Charles-Town aforesaid, to any place not exceeding sixty English miles, and thence back again, --
 Single, Four Pence
 Double, Eight Pence
 Treble, One Shilling
 Ounce, One Shilling Four Pence

All letters and packets from Charles-Town aforesaid, to any place not exceeding one hundred English miles, and thence back again, --
 Single, Six Pence
 Double, One Shilling
 Treble, One Shilling Six Pence
 Ounce, Two Shillings

TABLE 2: BOSTON POST OFFICE 1754

To	dwt	Sterling
Portsmouth and all intermediate offices	1.08	0.0.4
Providence	1.08	0.0.4
Newport	2.00	0.0.6
New London	3.00	0.0.9
New York	4.00	0.1.0
Woodbridge	5.00	0.1.3
Trenton	6.00	0.1.6
Philadelphia	7.00	0.1.9
Annapolis	8.00	0.2.0
Alexandria	9.00	0.2.3
Fredericksburg	9.00	0.2.3
Williamsburgh	10.00	0.2.6
Yorktown	10.00	0.2.6
Hampton	10.00	0.2.6
Norfolk	10.00	0.2.6

New-bern Post Office 1754

Rates for the Post of Single Letters to or from the following Offices conformable to an Act of Parliament made in the Ninth Year of the Reign of her late Majesty Queen Anne Entituled in Act for Establishing a General Post Office for all her Majesty's Dominions

Rated in Penny weights and Grains of Silver at three Pence Sterling for each ^{Letter} ~~Letter~~

Portsmouth and all the intermediate Offices	Ditto	Grains of Silver	Penny	Grains
Portsmouth and all the intermediate Offices	}	8	0	0 1/4
Providence	1	8	0	0 1/4
Newport	2	8	0	0 1/2
New London	3	8	0	0 3/4
New York	4	8	0	1 0
Woodbridge	5	8	0	1 3/4
London	6	8	0	1 6
Philadelphia	7	8	0	1 9
Annapolis	8	8	0	2 0
Alexandria	9	8	0	2 3/4
Fredricksburg	9	8	0	2 3/4
Williamsburg	10	8	0	2 6
York Town	10	8	0	2 6
Hampton	10	8	0	2 6
Norfolk	10	8	0	2 6

The Rates mentioned above may be doubled for all double Letters and trebled for all triple Letters and for each ounce weight, for Letters so much to be charged as for a single Letter

All Ship Letters and Packets must be charged (over and above the aforementioned Rates) with 16 Grains weight of Silver for each ounce received from on board and with 8 Grains weight each for such as are directed on board any Ship or Vessel

And the whole Postage of the Post sent forward to other Offices must be paid down at the Post Office where such Letters and Packets are delivered in

1754 Rates in Franklin's own hand

1775 RATE CHART*

See also 1775 jpg, or 1775.xls

*note that there is both a large 16x19½, and reduced 9x7" format

T A B L E S

Of the Post of all SINGLE LETTERS carried by POST in the Northern District of NORTH-AMERICA,
AS ESTABLISHED BY

C O N G R E S S,

One Thousand Seven Hundred and Seventy-five.

Rated in PENNY-WEIGHTS and GRAINS of SILVER, at Three Pence Sterling for each Penny Weight.

From	To	Rate
New-York	to Albany	4
	to Burlington	4
	to New-Brunswick	4
	to Philadelphia	4
	to New-London	4
	to Hartford	4
	to New-Haven	4
	to Springfield	4
	to Worcester	4
	to Boston	4
Philadelphia	to New-York	4
	to New-Brunswick	4
	to New-London	4
	to Hartford	4
	to New-Haven	4
	to Springfield	4
	to Worcester	4
	to Boston	4
	to Albany	4
	to Burlington	4
New-London	to New-York	4
	to Philadelphia	4
	to New-Brunswick	4
	to Hartford	4
	to New-Haven	4
	to Springfield	4
	to Worcester	4
	to Boston	4
	to Albany	4
	to Burlington	4
Hartford	to New-York	4
	to Philadelphia	4
	to New-Brunswick	4
	to New-London	4
	to New-Haven	4
	to Springfield	4
	to Worcester	4
	to Boston	4
	to Albany	4
	to Burlington	4
New-Haven	to New-York	4
	to Philadelphia	4
	to New-Brunswick	4
	to New-London	4
	to Hartford	4
	to Springfield	4
	to Worcester	4
	to Boston	4
	to Albany	4
	to Burlington	4
Springfield	to New-York	4
	to Philadelphia	4
	to New-Brunswick	4
	to New-London	4
	to Hartford	4
	to New-Haven	4
	to Worcester	4
	to Boston	4
	to Albany	4
	to Burlington	4
Worcester	to New-York	4
	to Philadelphia	4
	to New-Brunswick	4
	to New-London	4
	to Hartford	4
	to New-Haven	4
	to Springfield	4
	to Boston	4
	to Albany	4
	to Burlington	4
Boston	to New-York	4
	to Philadelphia	4
	to New-Brunswick	4
	to New-London	4
	to Hartford	4
	to New-Haven	4
	to Springfield	4
	to Worcester	4
	to Albany	4
	to Burlington	4

E X P L A N A T I O N :

THESE TABLES show the Rate of a Single Letter, from any one Post Office to another, viz. by the Figure, or Figures, set down at the Angle of Meeting, or in the Square which points to both Places. *EX. AMPLE:* To know the Postage of a Letter from New-York, to Williamsburgh—look in the Table for New-York, and thence carry your Eye frant down till it comes opp'ite to Williamsburgh, and in that Point of Meeting you'll find [4; 6] which is Four Penny weight Sixteen Grains of Silver, for the Post of a Single Letter between thate two Places.

- I. The Rates set down in these Tables must be doubled for all Double Letters, and trebled for all Treble Letters, and for every Ounce Weight Four Times as much must be charged as is here set down.
- II. All Ship Letters and Packets must be charged, over and above the Rates set down in these Tables, with Sixteen Grains Weight of Silver, for such as are received from on-board; and with Eight Grains Weight, for such as are directed on Board any Ship or Vessel; and the whole Postage of these last Sort, must be paid down at the Post-Office where such Letters and Packets are delivered in.
- III. For all extraordinary Posts and Expresses sent along the Post Road, and for all Expresses sent from any Stage to any Place out of the Post Road, there must be charged and paid One Penny-weight of Silver for every Mile such Express shall be sent.

B. FRANKLIN,
Post-Master General.

M E M O R A N D U M

For any Distance not exceeding 60 Miles	3 pence
Upwards of 60, and not exceeding 100	4
Upwards of 100, and not exceeding 200	5
Upwards of 200, and not exceeding 300	6
Upwards of 300, and not exceeding 400	7
Upwards of 400, and not exceeding 500	8
And so on, 10 Grains Advance for every Hundred Miles.	

Note.—These Tables are to be pasted on a Board, and hung up in open View, in the most convenient Place in each respective Post-Office.

Images from ter Braake, Alex ed. *The Posted Letter in Colonial & Revolutionary America 1628-1790*