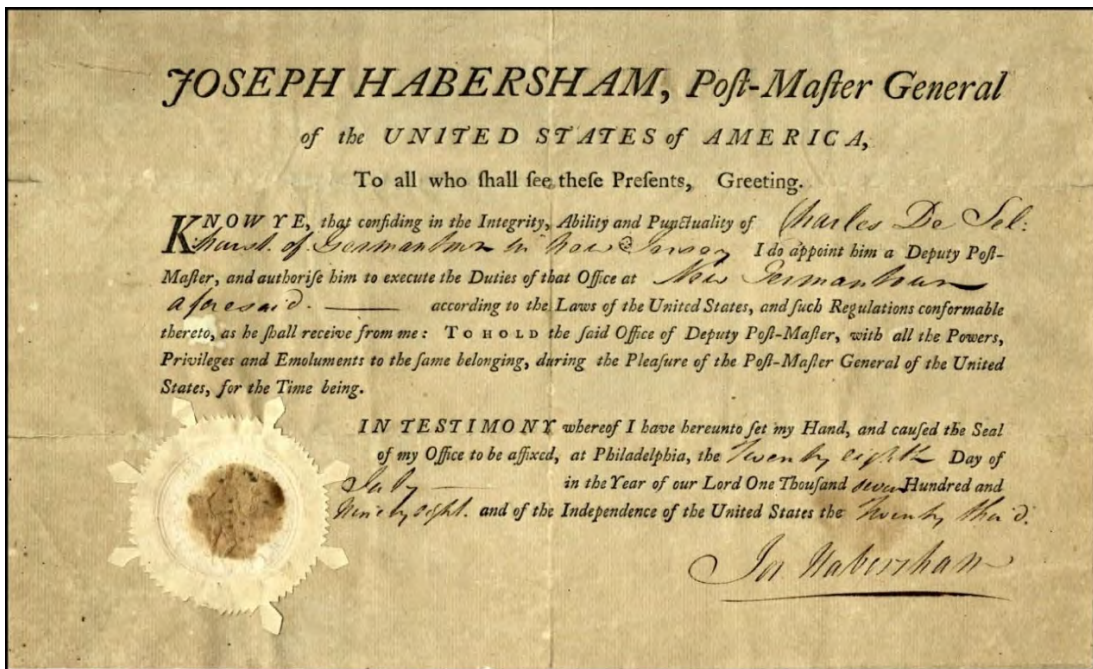


NJPH

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NEW JERSEY POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY

**1798 Postmaster Certificate of Appointment
From New Germantown, NJ**



A certificate of appointment as postmaster at New Germantown, New Jersey. See other documents and story below.

EARLY NEW GERMANTOWN, NJ POSTMASTER APPOINTMENT DOCUMENTS

By Mike Ludeman

One of the key functions of the early General Post Office was the identification and appointment of Deputy Postmasters to operate post offices which served as the interface between postal patrons and the postal system. The ongoing task of appointments was necessary because of the death of postmasters, the resignation or relocation of the postmasters as the country expanded, and even the failure of postmasters to perform their assigned duties. These appointments were the responsibility of the Postmaster General and his assistants. While much early correspondence between the Postmaster General and the Deputy Postmasters was done by ordinary correspondence, the efficiency of the process was quickly enhanced by the introduction of special part-printed forms, which were prepared by the staff to notify prospective postmasters of their selection and to guide them through the process. The present article describes two such documents.

These particular documents led to the appointment of Charles DeSelhurst as postmaster at New Germantown (now Oldwick) in July 1798, and include one of these part-printed letters of notification and a certificate of appointment, both signed by Postmaster General Joseph Habersham.

Charles DeSelhurst was actually the fourth postmaster at New Germantown, his predecessors being Frederic Bartles, January 1, 1795, John Porter, April 2, 1796, and Walter R. Cole, July 1, 1798.¹ Charles DeSelhurst was appointed July 16, 1798, and was followed by Richard Kreeser, March 27, 1799, and David Mellie Jr., on May 28, 1802. De Selhurst held the position for less than a year – actually 7½ months.

New Germantown is described by Jim Walker in his *Post Offices of Hunterdon County*:²

Hunterdon's location along the earliest post road between New York and Philadelphia assured that her towns appeared on the earliest maps drawn by Abraham Bradley for the Post Office Department in 1796. These maps show the first proposed routes for contractors to carry mail on branch routes from the main post road on a regular schedule. Flemington and Pittstown connected with Trenton, New Germantown to New Brunswick, and Alexandria connected by ferry to the route between Philadelphia and Bethlehem, Pa.

* * *

One of the earliest post offices in the County, this post office is located on Route 517 near the present intersection of Route 523. It was established January 1, 1795.³



Fig. 1: Section of Bradley's Map of the United States, 1804 edition, with the location of New Germantown, over a modern Google map of the same section of New Jersey.⁴

The appointment notification letter dated July 16, 1798 (shown in *Figure 5*) was printed on a 16.0" x 8.5" sheet of paper, folded, and addressed to *Mr Selhurst / New Germantown / New Jersey*, with a docketing for *John Caghenter* at the left edge. An image of the front address panel is shown in *Figure 2* below. The identity of John Caghenter is unknown. The folded letter shows no indication of free franking or postage, or a docket that indicated it was sent on official post office business, which is unusual.

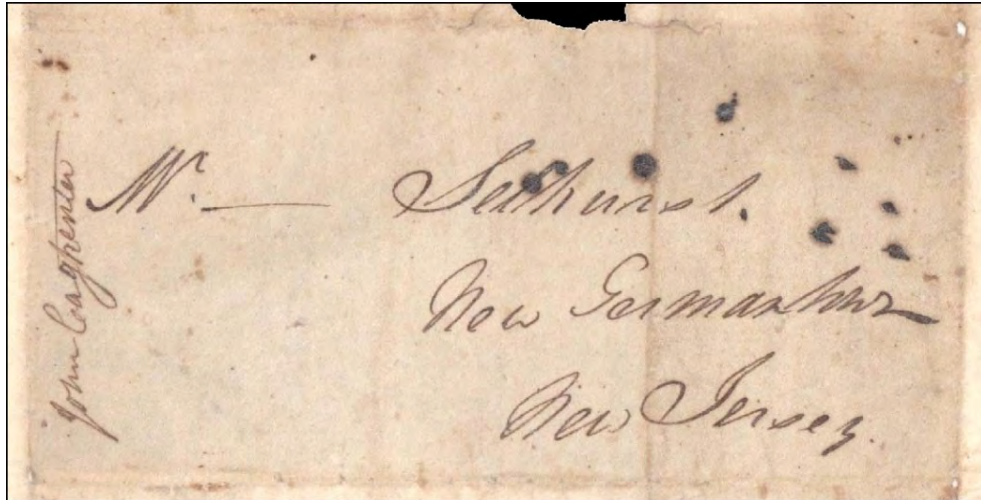


Fig. 2: The address panel of the postmaster notification sent to Mr. Charles Selhurst. Note that it has no indication of free franking.

Some additional research was able to provide an explanation for the absence of any signs of postal markings or free franking. The business of the General Post Office, as managed by the Postmaster General, was recorded in a series of Letter Books, or copy books, prepared by clerks of the Postmaster General's office. These ledgers are currently in the custody of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), and fortunately for the postal historian, a number of these were microfilmed between 1965 and 1985, and are part of NARA Microfilm Series M601. Seventy-nine of these Letter Books, covering the years between 1789 and 1869, were more recently digitized by the United States Philatelic Classics Society, where they reside on their website.⁵

In an examination of the Letter Book which included the July 16, 1798 date of the appointment letter, we find two entries relevant to the New Germantown post office.⁶ The first was a letter sent to Walter R. Cole (see *Figure 3*), then current postmaster at New Germantown, dealing with an acknowledgement that the Accounting Office has received his closing postmaster account. It also states an agreement with his recommendation that Charles DeSelhurst is to be appointed as the new postmaster at New Germantown, NJ, and that *his official notice of appointment is enclosed in this letter to Cole*, who is instructed to give it to DeSelhurst. This explains why the address panel for the appointment letter shown as *Figure 2* had no postal markings.

Cole is further asked to insure that DeSelhurst executes the enclosed oath and bond forms, and then to turn over all post office supplies to him. The note closes with an additional request from the Postmaster General who asks Cole to provide additional information about Mr. [John] Porter, who had been postmaster prior to Cole, as Porter has still not completed the closing of his accounts from his tenure as postmaster (which ended in 1797.) This letter is shown in *Figure 3*.

Walter R. Cole esq. July 16. 1798.

Sir Your favor of the 12 Instant was duly received with the accounts since you have been in office at New Germantown and the balance due there on of Two Dollars and Sixty two cents which sum is paid to the credit of your account on the books of this office

Agreeably to your recommendation I have appointed Mr. Selhurst to succeed you to whom you will be pleased to deliver the inclosed Letter, with all Letters remaining on hand, and any articles of Post Office Property that may be in your possession. May I request the favor of you to see the blanks bonds in Oaths properly executed by Mr. Selhurst - when they are returned to this office I will on receiving them send him a Commission as Deputy Postmaster of New Germantown. I thank you for the Information you have given me respecting Mr. Porter who must have held the office nearly two years. I find he was appointed the 2nd April 1796. Can you give me any particular information as to the present residence of Mr. Porter?

I am &c. &c.

Fig. 3: A letter book copy of the July 16, 1798 letter to Walter A. Cole, then current postmaster at New Germantown, where the Postmaster General advises Cole that he is enclosing the appointment letter to be given to the newly appointed postmaster Charles Selhurst.

The second entry records the preparation and dispatch of this postmaster appointment letter, which is shown here in Figure 4.

July 16. 1798. Appointed Mr. Selhurst
 Deputy P. Master. at New Germantown in the room
 Walter R. Cole.

Fig. 4: Entry in the Postmaster General Letter Book for the appointment of Charles Selhurst as postmaster at New Germantown, NJ, on July 16, 1798, replacing Walter R. Cole.

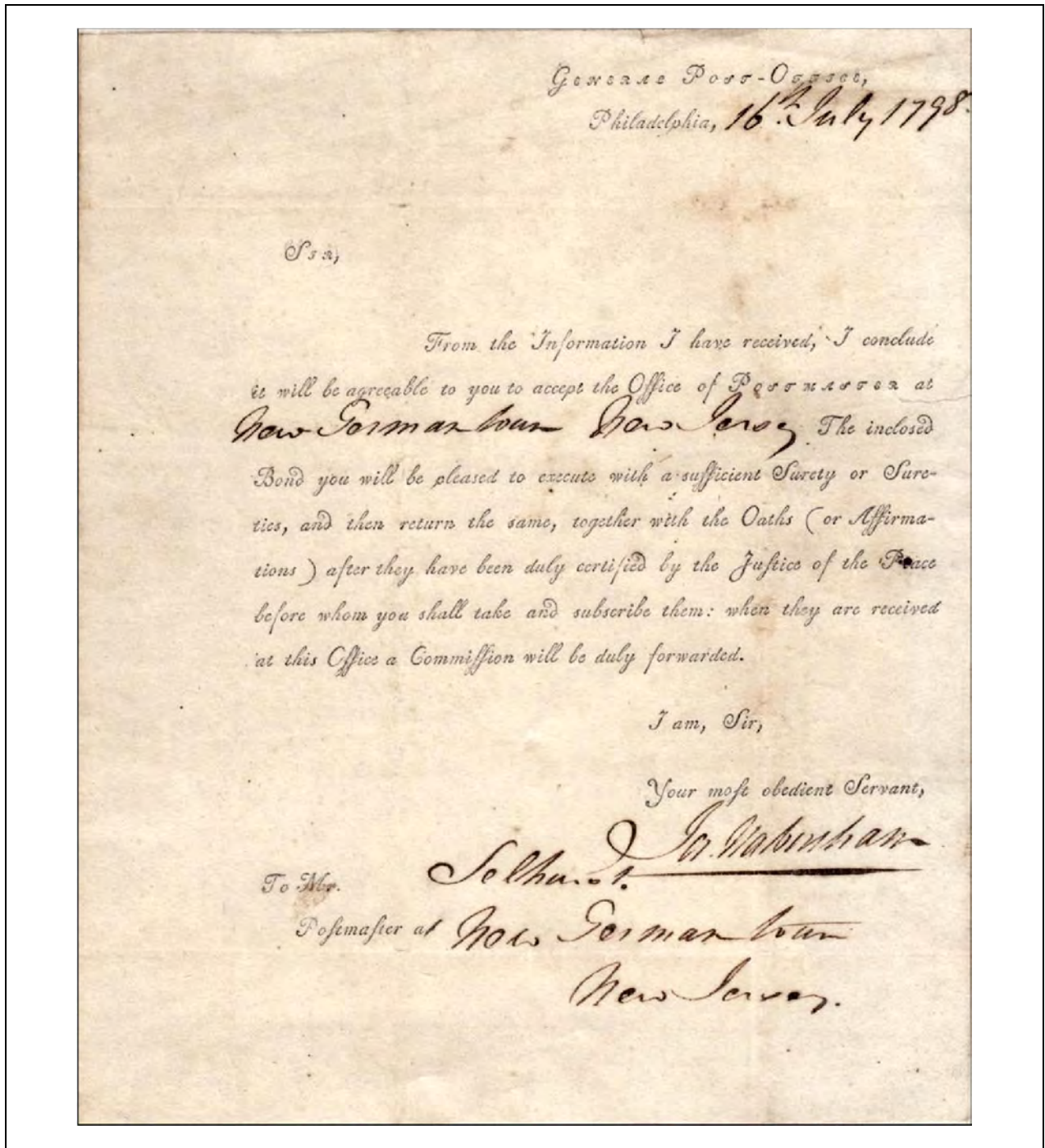


Fig. 5: The printed appointment letter datelined July 16, 1798 to Mr. Selhurst, signed Joseph Habersham, Postmaster General, and enclosed in his letter to Walter Cole of the same date. It is the earliest recorded example of a part-printed postmaster appointment notification letter I have found. The document is 16 x 10.5".

(Note DeSelhurst's name is variously spelled Selhurst, Selhorst, DeSealhorst, etc. in National Archives documents and Post Office communications. His full name appears to be Charles DeSelhurst, as on the appointment certificate in Figure 6, dated July 28, 1798, and sent to him after he was installed.)

And finally, the appointment certificate itself, dated the 28th Day of July, in the Year of our Lord One Thousand seven Hundred and Ninety eight.

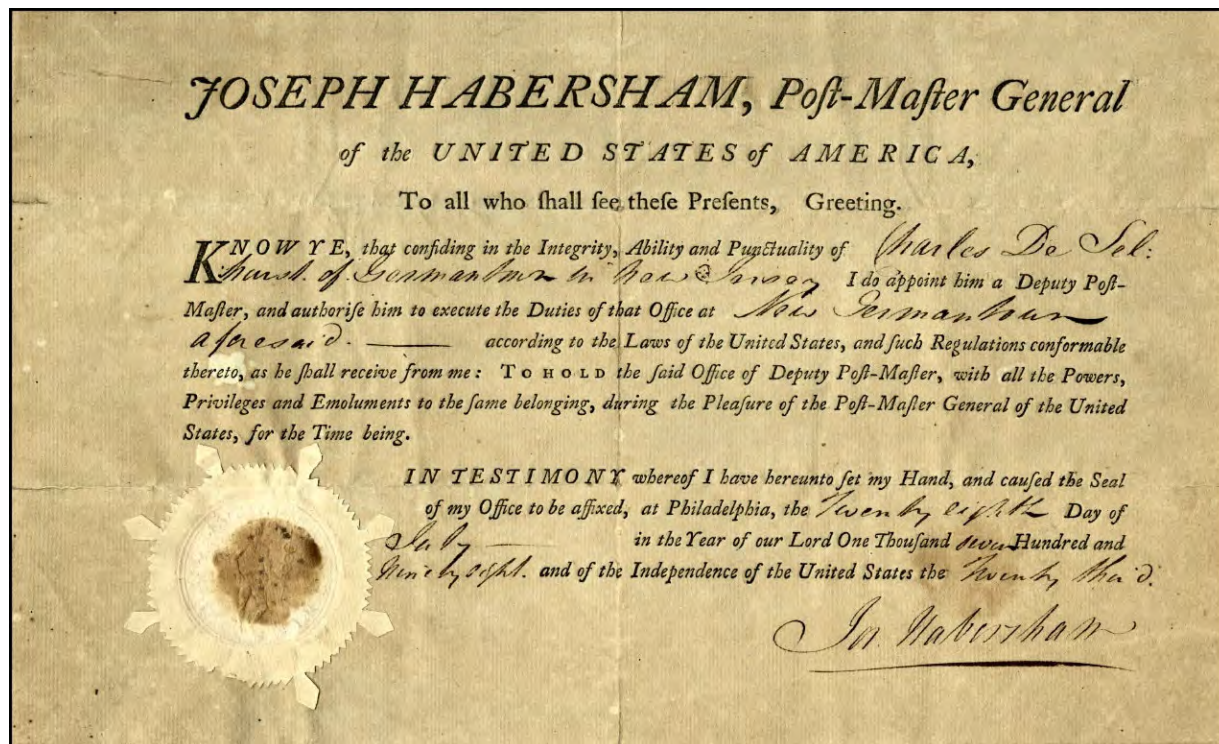


Fig. 6: Appointment Certificate with seal of Charles DeSelhurst as postmaster July 28, 1798 signed by Jos. Habersham, Post-Master General.

To close out the DeSelhurst story, we find in a later Postmaster General Ledger Book⁷ an entry in which it is reported that Richard Kreeser has been appointed as the new postmaster at New Germantown on March 27, 1799. This entry is shown in Figure 7.

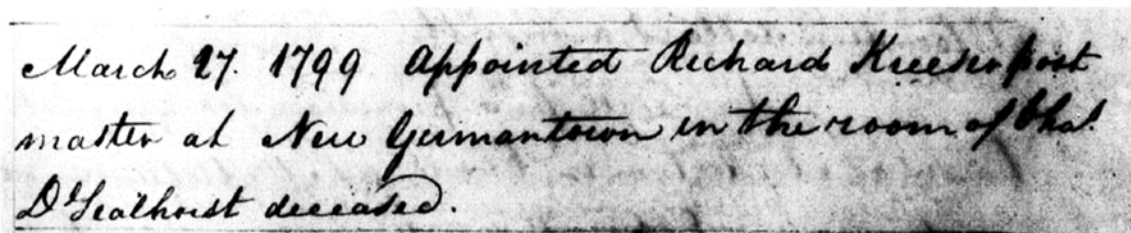
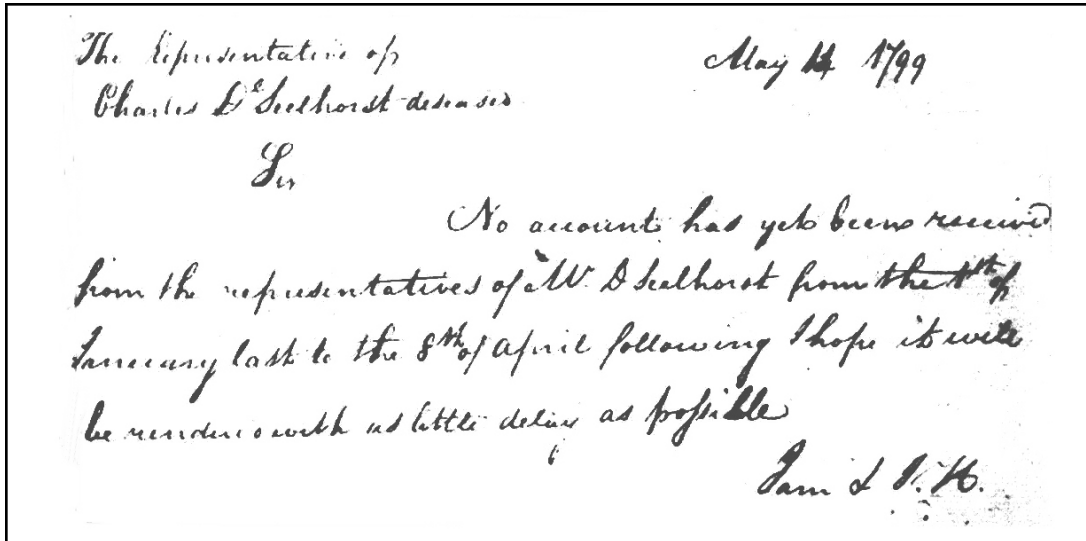


Fig. 7: Appointment of Richard Kreeser, March 27, 1799, as postmaster at New Germantown, to replace Charles D'Sealhorst, deceased.

And on a later page in another Letter Book, we find the final entry for postmaster Charles DeSelhurst.⁸



The representatives of
Charles D Selhorst deceased

May 14 1799

Sir

No account has yet been received
from the representatives of W. D Selhorst from the 11th of
January last to the 8th of April following I hope it will
be rendered with as little delay as possible

Saml P. H.

Fig. 8: May 14, 1799 Letter Book entry to the estate of Charles D Selhorst, deceased, noting that his final accounting has not been received, with hopes that “it will be rendered with as little delay as possible.”

[Early postmaster appointment printed documents are seldom seen, but the two shown here from New Jersey, for New Germantown from 1798, are the earliest such documents that the author has found in the private market in his dozen years of pursuing this material. Our sincere gratitude to Mike for sharing these early pieces of New Jersey postal history.]⁹ Ed.

ENDNOTES:

- ¹ The appointment dates on the first three New Germantown postmasters are unknown, and these dates are actually the dates of their first financial reports.
- ² New Germantown in *Hunterdon County New Jersey Postal History*, by Jim Walker, copyright 2010, <https://njpostalhistory.org/media/pdf/HuntHist.pdf>, p. 2
- ³ *Ibid*, p. 103.
- ⁴ Map of the United States, by Abraham Bradley, 1804 edition, from David Rumsey Historical Map Collection. See https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~224~20038:Map-of-the-United-States-?sort=pub_list_no_initialsort%2Cpub_date%2Cpub_list_no%2Cseries_no&qvq=q:pub_list_no%3D%222929.000%22;sort:pub_list_no_initialsort%2Cpub_date%2Cpub_list_no%2Cseries_no;lc:RUMSEY~8~1&mi=1&trs=2
- ⁵ U.S. Philatelic Classics Society: Postmaster General Letter Books, 1789-1836, 1827-1861, and 1861-1860, URL= <https://www.uspcs.org/resource-center/government-documents/postmaster-general-letter-books-1789-1836/>, accessed Dec 13, 2018.
- ⁶ Postmaster General Letter Book, Oct 14, 1797 to Oct 13, 1798, p. 233.
- ⁷ Postmaster General Letter Book, Oct 12, 1798 to May 8, 1799, p. 390.
- ⁸ Postmaster General Letter Book, May 8, 1799 to Mar 4, 1800, p. 9.
- ⁹ Two of the earliest recorded printed postmaster appointments by Benjamin Franklin, of the postmaster at Trenton, Abraham Hunt, were shown in an earlier (May 2017) *NJPH* issue, from 1764 under the British Crown, signed by Franklin & Foxcroft, and 1775 under the United Colonies, signed by Franklin. See *NJPH*, Vol. 45/No. 2 May 2017, Whole No. 206 at <https://www.njpostalhistory.org/media/journal/206njphmay2017.pdf>.