

Civil War Blockade of the Southern Coasts

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Civil War Blockade of the Southern Coasts

Mail Routes through the Federal Blockade, 1861-65



The United States (USA) proclaimed the blockade of the Confederate States of America (CSA) on April 19, 1861. Stretching from Virginia to Texas, the blockaded area encompassed over 3,500 miles of coastline and nearly 200 harbors and river openings, so the USA concentrated on the thirteen CSA deep-water ports that could serve as effective transit points for supplies and mail. By early 1862, six of these ports had been captured before they could commence blockade running. By mid-1862, New Orleans was also captured and Savannah was effectively closed. The remaining five ports (Wilmington, Charleston, Mobile, Galveston and Victoria) were active in blockade running until they were captured late in the war, although Federal naval actions temporarily stopped blockade running at Charleston and Galveston. The blockade ended with the fall of Galveston on June 2, 1865.

There were eleven different routes between these seven CSA ports and the five foreign ports (Nassau, Bermuda, Havana, Halifax and Matamoros) that acted as the staging points for supplies and mail. This exhibit shows mail carried on all eleven blockade run routes.



**Endorsed to the *Flora* at Bermuda - prepaid by 10¢ 'Frameline' - additional 2¢ ship fee assessed
Flora left St George's on October 3, 1863 and arrived in Wilmington on October 8**

Fewer than 400 of the letters carried by blockade runners are known today. Other than at New Orleans and Mobile, the blockade mail service was slow to develop since less hazardous through-the-lines mail routes were available until early 1862. Nearly all of the surviving letters were carried in the May 1862 to March 1865 period.

An incoming letter to the CSA was typically sent inside of another envelope to one of the foreign staging ports for transfer to a blockade runner, and then posted in the CSA arrival port, where inland postage and a two cents ship fee were assessed. No West Indies postal markings appear on incoming mail. Outgoing letters were typically forwarded under cover to a blockade runner in a Confederate port, and did not enter the mails until they reached the blockade runner's destination port. With rare exceptions, CSA postal markings do not appear on outgoing mail.

Civil War Gulf Coast Blockade

Havana-Mobile - October 1861 to August 1864



The blockade of Mobile, Alabama was initiated on May 26, 1861 by the USS *Powhatan*. The few known covers carried through Mobile are from the October 1861 to May 1864 period. Mobile Bay was captured by Federal naval forces on August 5, 1864.



Envelope carried by blockade runner *Alabama* from Havana on August 10, 1863
Arrived in Mobile on August 15 - rated for 12¢ due (10¢ inland plus 2¢ ship fee)
Forwarded from Charleston on August 21 with additional 10¢ CSA postage due



Dated April 30, 1864 from the Confederacy - sent under cover to blockade runner at Mobile
Denbigh left on May 7 and arrived on May 10 in Havana - active on Gulf Coast 12/63-5/65
Spofford & Tileston steamship *Eagle* from Havana to NY on May 25 - 10¢ US postage due

Civil War Gulf Coast Blockade

Havana-New Orleans - May 1861 to April 1862



The blockade of New Orleans was initiated on May 26, 1861 by the USS *Brooklyn*. New Orleans fell to the Federals on April 26, 1862.



Posted June 8, 1861 in St Vincent - RMSP steamers *Teviot* and *Clyde* to Havana via St Thomas
Blockade runner *West Indian* to New Orleans on September 5 - 12¢ CSA postage due



Dated February 15, 1862 in New Orleans - *Florida* left February 19 for Havana
Spofford & Tileston steamship *Columbia* from Havana to New York on March 3

Civil War Gulf Coast Blockade

Havana-Galveston - February 1863 to May 1865



The blockade of Galveston, Texas was initiated on July 2, 1861 by the USS *South Carolina*. Blockade runners connected with Havana, except during the September-December 1862 Federal occupation. Galveston surrendered on June 2, 1865.



Letter forwarded by Vignier Robertson & Co. from Havana - 25¢ express fee
Blockade runner *Alice* arrived in Galveston on April 8, 1864 - forwarded via Houston on April 10



Docketed September 11, 1863 from Galveston - blockade runner to Havana
Trans-shipped to Nassau to catch Cunarder *Corsica* leaving September 28 for NY
Prepaid 1/5 (partially with **1d Bahamas stamp**) to Germany by forwarder Saunders & Son

Civil War Atlantic Coast Blockade

Nassau-Wilmington - June 1862 to January 1865



The blockade of Wilmington, North Carolina was initiated on July 14, 1861 by the USS *Daylight*. Wilmington's port defenses fell on January 15, 1865.



Posted September 25, 1863 in Liverpool - sent via Nassau forwarder Sawyer & Menendez
Prepaid 1 shilling postage to Nassau - 1d credit to Nassau - Carried by Cunard Line via NY
Fannie left Nassau on October 19 and arrived in Wilmington on October 23 - 12¢ due



Posted August 20, 1864 in Raleigh, NC - prepaid 10¢ CSA postage to Wilmington
Endorsed to blockade runner *Lilian* which was bound for Bermuda, not Nassau
Sent instead by *Will of the Wisp* from Wilmington August 23 to Nassau August 27
Postmarked Nassau Ship-Letter on August 27 - 4d ship postage due

Civil War Atlantic Coast Blockade

Nassau-Wilmington - June 1862 to January 1865



The Union attacked Wilmington's port defenses in two land-sea operations from December 24, 1864 to January 15, 1865. The fall of Fort Fisher closed Wilmington to blockade running, and the last successful entry was by the *Wild Rover* on January 5.



Endorsed to blockade runner *Wild Rover* by Nassau forwarder Saunders & Son
Addressed to a Wilmington forwarder - 10¢ stamp overpaid the 6¢ in-port ship rate
Wild Rover left Nassau on January 1, 1865 and arrived in Wilmington on January 5



Docketed from Petersburg on November 3, 1864 - *Agnes E. Fry* left on December 5
Posted unpaid on December 9 in Nassau - 2 shillings due in London on January 9
Embossed "STEAMSHIP AGNES E. FRY" ship marking

Civil War Atlantic Coast Blockade

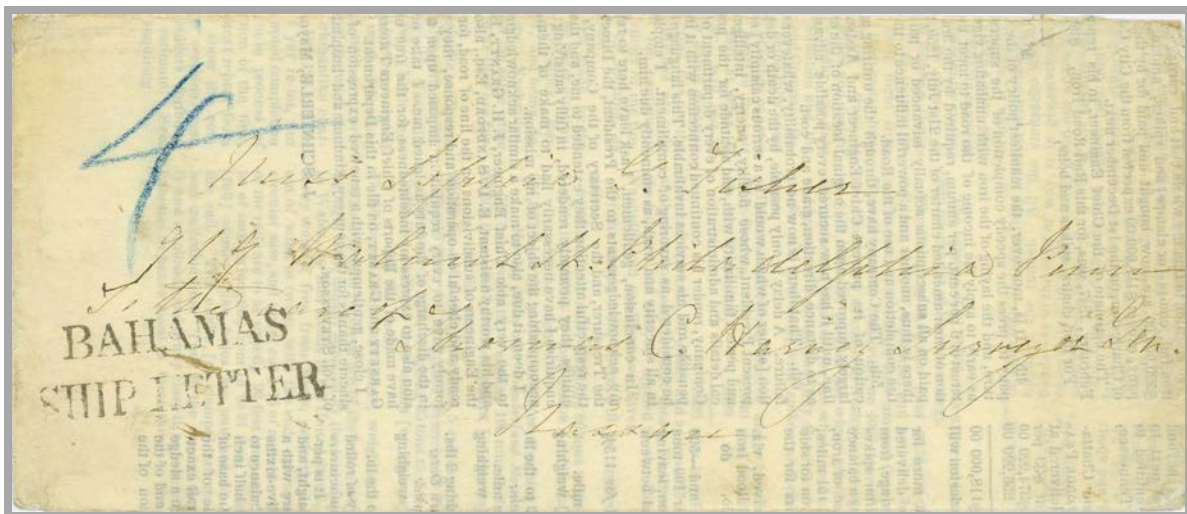
Nassau-Wilmington - June 1862 to January 1865



Bahamas postal rates to or from the United States and Canada were the 4d per half ounce ship rate. Fewer than ten blockade covers are known with this rate prepaid in Bahamas postage stamps.



Docketed Charleston, SC - *Pet* left Wilmington Dec. 10 - arrived in Nassau Dec. 14, 1863
Prepaid with 1863 Bahamas 4d stamp for outgoing packet postage on December 15
Cunarder *Corsica* left Dec. 21 - arrived in New York Dec. 26 - 5¢ U.S. postage due



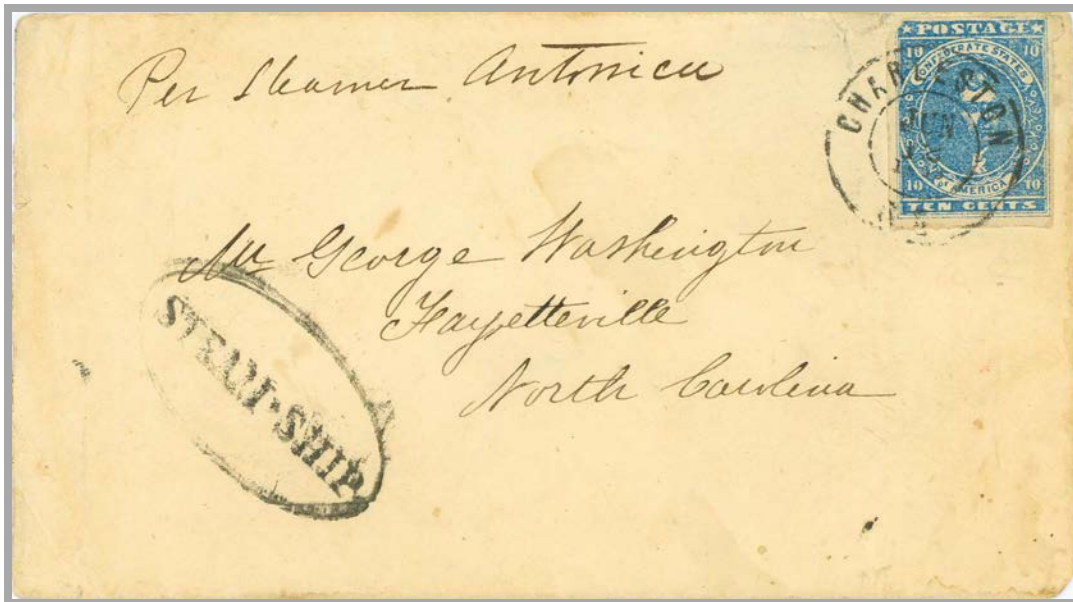
Originated in Charleston, SC - **censored by Colonel B. Duncan**, provost marshal at Charleston
Charleston was closed, so routed to *Fannie* from Wilmington - arrived in Nassau on Oct. 15, 1863
Marked BAHAMAS SHIP LETTER - 4d ship fee due - Cunarder *Corsica* to New York Oct. 31

Civil War Atlantic Coast Blockade

Nassau-Charleston - May 1862 to February 1865



The blockade of Charleston, South Carolina was initiated on May 10, 1861 by the USS *Niagara*. Charleston was closed by Federal actions from September 1863 to March 1864, and fell to Sherman's Federal army on February 17, 1865. Known letters were carried between May 1862 and February 1865.



Docketed (England) April 24, 1863 - prepaid 10¢ CSA postage - no 2¢ ship fee assessed
Endorsed to *Antonica* - arrived at Charleston on June 11 - marked oval STEAM-SHIP



Originated in Augusta, GA - *Druid* left Charleston February 4, 1865 - to Nassau on February 8
Prepaid 1 shilling 4 pence to France and marked with **crowned "Paid at Bahamas"**

Civil War Atlantic Coast Blockade

Nassau-Savannah - June to July 1862



The blockade of Savannah, Georgia was initiated on May 28, 1861 by the USS *Union*. Access to Savannah was limited after Union forces captured Fort Pulaski at the head of the harbor on April 11, 1862 but all known letters were carried in June-July 1862.



Dateline London May 7, 1862 - sent under cover to Nassau forwarder Adderley & Co.
Blockade runner *Kate* left June 21 and arrived in Savannah on June 25
7¢ CSA postage due - **only known inbound blockade run letter via Savannah**



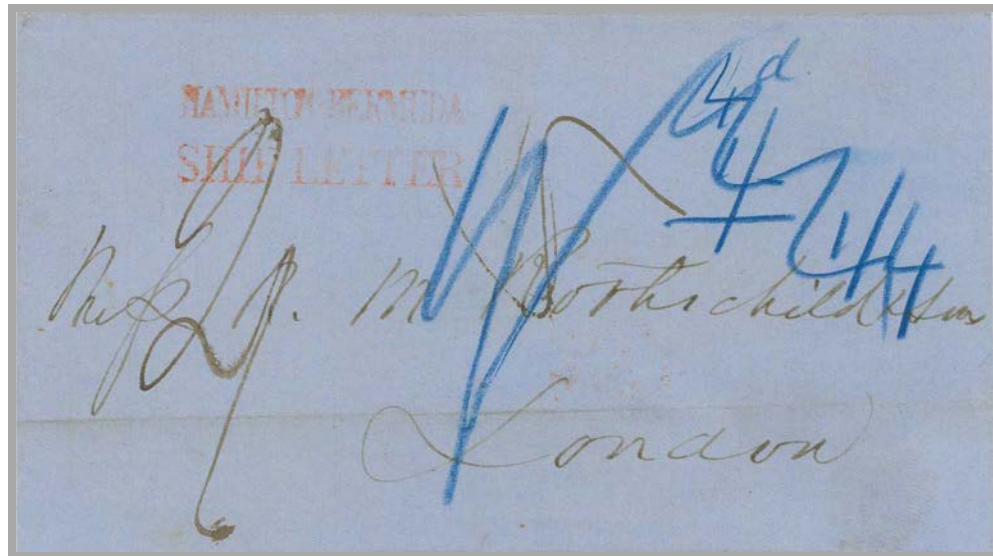
Kate left Savannah July 22, 1862 - arrived Nassau July 26 - handled by forwarder Saunders & Son
Prepaid 4d postage on July 26 - Cunard steamer to N.Y. on August 2 - 5¢ due to San Francisco

Civil War Atlantic Coast Blockade

Bermuda-Wilmington – Dec. 1862 to January 1865



Starting in December 1862, Bermuda became continuously active in blockade running. Most ships ran between Wilmington and St George's until the 1864 yellow fever epidemic, when Hamilton and Halifax, Nova Scotia became alternate ports.



Docketed Petersburg, Virginia July 19, 1864 - *City of Petersburg* left Wilmington on July 23
Postmarked in Hamilton, Bermuda on July 28 - **marked HAMILTON-BERMUDA SHIP LETTER**
Transferred to St George's on August 4 to catch Cunarder *Alpha* to Halifax on August 10



Endorsed "pr Advance" in St George's, Bermuda - prepaid 20¢ CSA postage
Advance left St George's on July 28, 1864 and arrived in Wilmington on August 2
20¢ overpaid the 12¢ postage (10¢ plus 2¢ ship fee) to Richmond, Virginia

Civil War Atlantic Coast Blockade

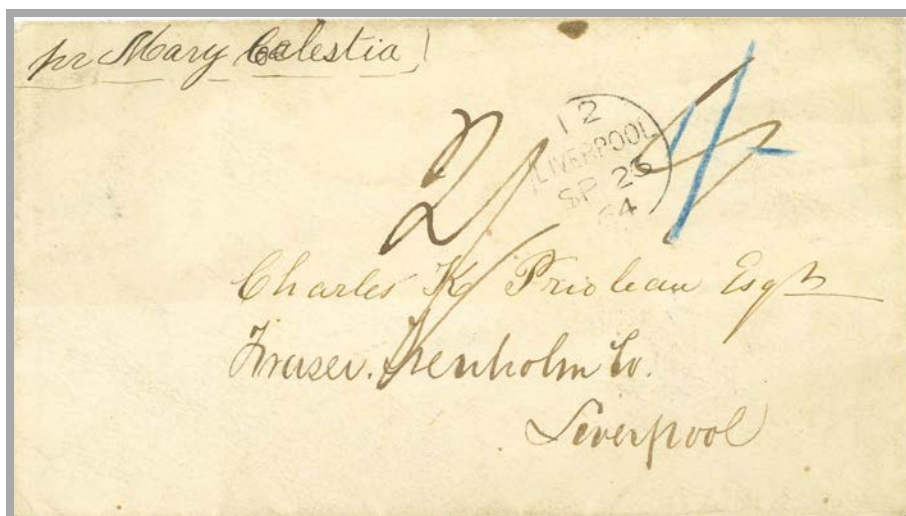
Bermuda-Wilmington – Dec. 1862 to January 1865



Fewer than 15 blockade run letters are known with Bermuda transit postmarks. Most outgoing letters sent through Bermuda did not receive transit postmarks.



Dateline: Wilmington, NC on May 23, 1863 - CSS *Cornubia* to St George's on May 29
Prepaid 4d ship postage on June 3 - Cunard steamer *Merlin* to Halifax on June 19
Private ship to Boston on June 23 - 5¢ postage (3¢ inland plus 2¢ ship) due to Missouri
Return mail instructions via Halifax to agent A.H. Williams at St George's, Bermuda



Dateline: Savannah, Georgia August 3, 1864 - **endorsed to *Mary Celestia* at Wilmington**
Mary Celestia left Wilmington August 25 and arrived in Hamilton on August 29
Cunard steamers via Halifax arrived in Liverpool on September 26 - 2 shillings due

Civil War Atlantic Coast Blockade

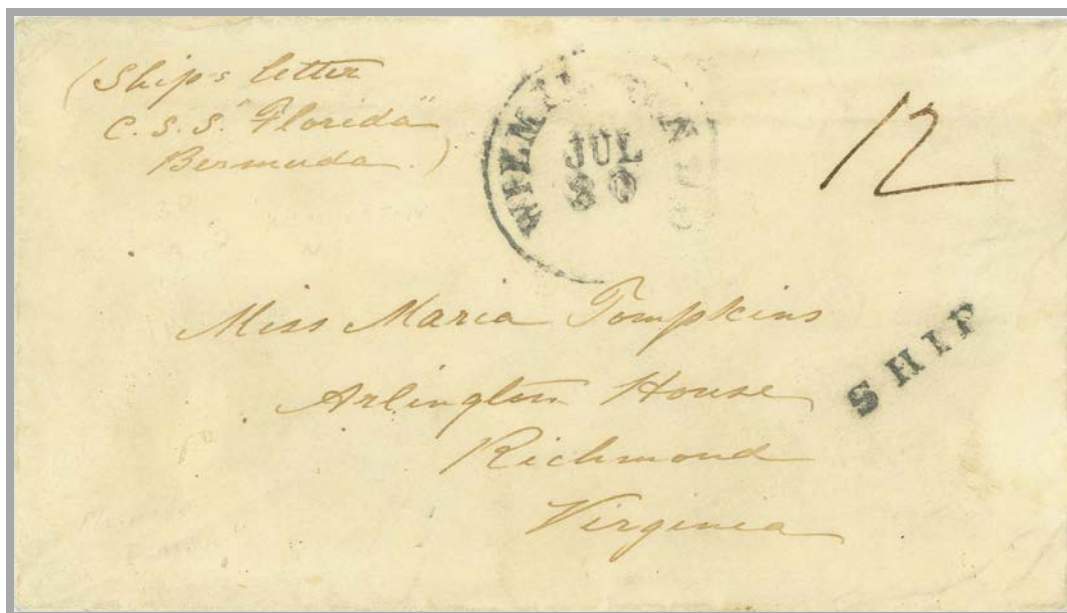
Bermuda-Wilmington – Dec. 1862 to January 1865



The Confederate States navy operated mostly through Bermuda for supplies and transfer of personnel.



Written at Bermuda in September 1863 by Commodore Samuel Barron, enroute to Europe
Cornubia left Bermuda on September 18 and arrived in Wilmington on September 23
Postmarked on September 26 - rated SHIP and 12¢ due to North Carolina



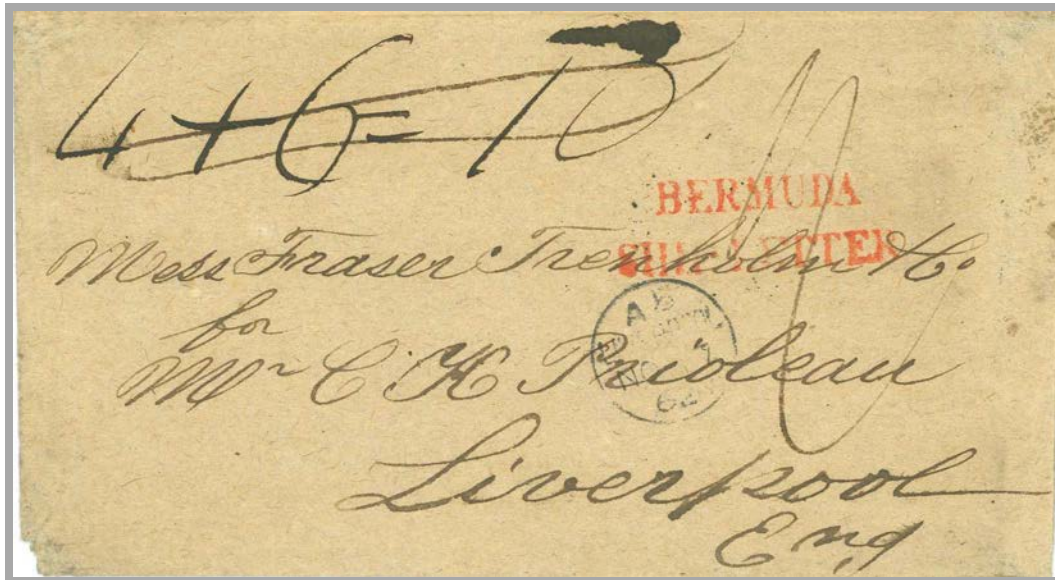
From commerce raider **CSS Florida** at Bermuda – Robert E. Lee to Wilmington on July 28
Marked SHIP and rated for 12¢ due (10¢ to Richmond plus 2¢ ship fee) on July 30

Civil War Atlantic Coast Blockade

Bermuda-Charleston – July 1862 to April 1863



Charleston was 250 miles closer to Nassau than Bermuda, so virtually all Charleston trips connected with Nassau. There were only six successful blockade run trips between Charleston and Bermuda, all in the July 1862 to April 1863 period.



Dated October 3, 1862 - *Herald* arrived in Bermuda on October 16
BERMUDA SHIP LETTER - Cunard and RMSP steamships via St Thomas to Southampton



Endorsed "Per SS Princess Royal" by CSA agent in St George's - departed January 23, 1863
Princess Royal ran aground and was captured entering Charleston on January 29 - mail saved
Double-weight 22¢ postage due (20¢ plus 2¢ ship fee) to Richmond, Virginia

Civil War Atlantic Coast Blockade

Halifax-Wilmington - August-December 1864



Because of yellow fever in Bermuda, much of the blockade running activity was shifted from Bermuda to Halifax, Nova Scotia in the August-December 1864 period. Only 25 trips between Wilmington and Halifax are recorded.



Endorsed "S.S. Old Dominion" and put with official dispatches by CSA agent in Halifax *Old Dominion* left Nov. 16 and arrived Nov. 22 - franked 10¢ and mailed by Navy Agent



Carried by *Helen* from Wilmington on September 15, 1864 to Halifax on September 20
Censored (reverse) at Wilmington by "W Strong aag" - posted unpaid at Halifax September 20
1d Halifax debit to London - 50c debit to France - 33 kreutzer due in Heidelberg, Germany

Civil War Gulf Coast Blockade

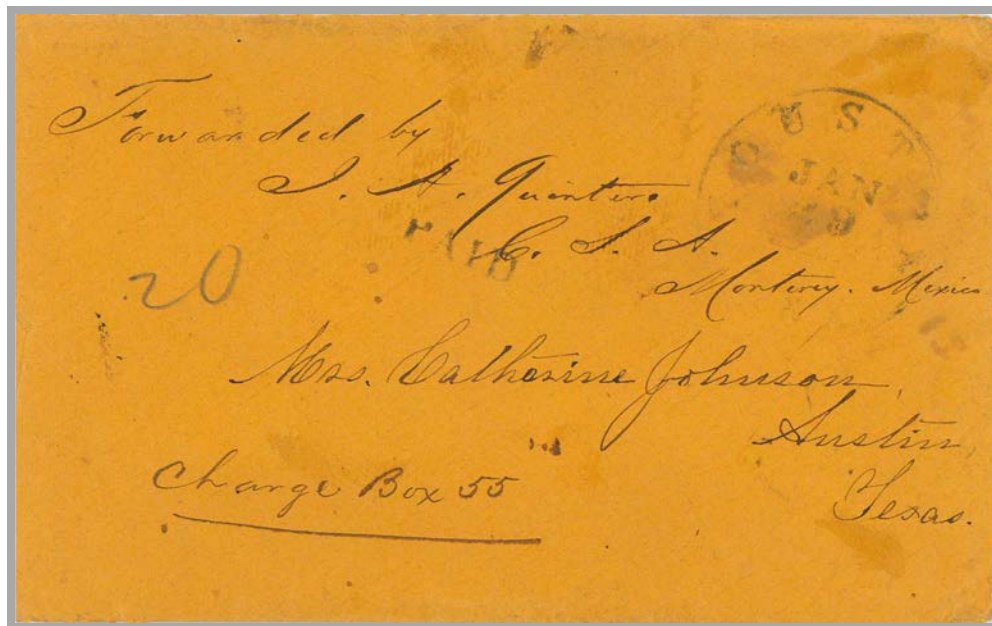
Matamoros-Texas - February 1862 to July 1864



Matamoros, Mexico was a conduit for trans-Rio Grande mail. During the November 6, 1863 to July 19, 1864 Brownsville occupation, all mail was sent by blockade runner.



Dateline Mulhouse (France) July 2, 1863 - RMSP steamers to Tampico on August 29
Forwarded by A.M. Erhard in Matamoros (mark on reverse) - charged "3/- specie"
Blockade runner to Matagorda Bay - posted prepaid in Victoria on September 25



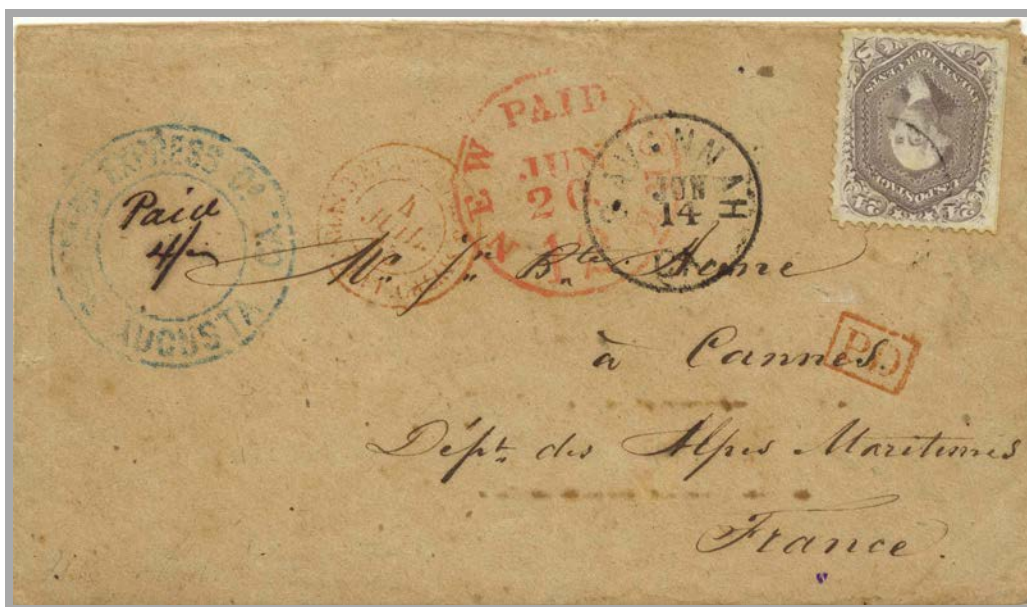
Dateline Santa Clara, California Sept. 27, 1863 - forwarded via Mazatlan and Monterrey
Forwarded by CSA agent Jose Quintero to a blockade runner from Matamoros to Galveston
Prepaid double-weight 20¢ CSA postage in Houston on January 29, 1864

Civil War Atlantic Coast Blockade

End of the Blockade - January-June 1865



The last blockaded Atlantic ports of Wilmington and Charleston fell in January-February 1865, and the last Gulf port of Galveston surrendered on June 2, 1865. The United States formally lifted the blockade on June 23, 1865.



Carried by Southern Express from Augusta, Georgia to Union-occupied Savannah
Posted June 14, 1865 at Savannah - sent via New York on June 26 to France



Overpaid by 2d on March 1, 1865 at Nassau, Bahamas - addressed to South Carolina
Charleston had fallen February 17, so sent via New York - mails suspended to the South