

NOTE to readers: This essay, which in a revised form is forthcoming in the Journal of Policy History, is my first venture into the history of communications networks linking the United States and the world. It is part of a larger project on the distinctive features of U. S. global communications policy in the period between the American War of Independence and the Second World War...and maybe beyond. I am interested in comments not only on this case study, but also on the larger project. I plan to organize a conference on this theme (with a focus on the Atlantic world) at Columbia in a year or so; this July, I have organized a conference on this theme (with a focus on the Pacific Rim) at Renmin University in Beijing. The CFP for the latter conference is attached.

“Projecting Power Overseas: The 1863 Paris Postal Conference, the American Civil War, and the Creation of International Communications Networks”

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In May 1863, representatives from the fifteen countries that generated ninety five percent of the world’s correspondence met in Paris at the invitation of the U. S. Postmaster General, Montgomery Blair, to discuss the establishment of protocols for international postal communications. Though the participants agreed in principle to restructure their international postal arrangements in accordance with a common set of standards, the meeting led neither to the formation of a permanent international organization nor even in the ratification of a treaty. These events would not occur until 1874, when German postal administrator Heinrich von Stephan orchestrated another international meeting that led to the establishment of the Universal Postal Union (UPU), the international organization that has coordinated the formulation of the standards regulating the circulation of mail across national boundaries ever since.

The 1863 Paris Postal Conference is rarely accorded much space in histories of nineteenth-century international relations. It is ignored in the standard histories of U. S. foreign policy, and is little more than a footnote even in histories of the UPU.

<sup>1</sup> Yet it serves as a reminder that, even in the midst of a devastating civil war, American statesmen looked outward not only westward toward the trans-Mississippi west, southward toward the Cuba, Mexico, and Central America, or northward toward Canada, but also eastward toward Europe.<sup>2</sup>

Histories of American communications in the long nineteenth century that began with the adoption of the federal Constitution in 1788 and ended with the start of the First World War typically underplay the influence on American communications of the Atlantic world. The transcontinental telegraph is celebrated as is the overland mail and the Pony Express. Yet with the exception of the Atlantic cable, which is remembered primarily as a technical marvel, rather than a cornerstone of international trade, few historians devote more than passing attention to the influence on American communications of innovations that originated in Europe—and, in particular, in France, Britain, and Bremen.

The French connection is most obvious in the case of the optical telegraph. Invented by Claude Chappe in 1792, this communications network would remain for decades a source of inspiration to would-be optical telegraph promoters in the United States. No comparable network was ever built on this side of the Atlantic. Even so, its existence would inspire the one-time War of 1812 privateer Samuel Reid to recommend in 1836 that Congress build a similar

network to link New York City and New Orleans. Inventor Samuel F. B. Morse used the French optical telegraph as a template for his electric telegraph, and was galvanized into action by his fear that he was about to be preempted by a French optical telegraph promoter peddling his wares in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

British innovations shaped nineteenth-century American communications in myriad ways. The most obvious was the centrality of Liverpool in the Atlantic communications circuit. The most important commercial information in the United States in the early republic was the European market price for cotton and wheat, and this information ordinarily found its way to the United States aboard vessels originating in Liverpool. “Fresh news” from European markets--as these price quotations were called--was highly prized not only in the commercial entrepôts of New York City, Philadelphia, and Boston, but also in the cotton ports of Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, and New Orleans. The maritime historian Robert G. Albion underscored this importance of the Atlantic circuit decades ago in two foundational monographs on the nineteenth-century maritime world.<sup>4</sup> Yet it remains underappreciated by historians of the United States—who remain, wrongly, largely oblivious to the looming presence of Great Britain in nineteenth-century American business, culture, and public life.

A second British influence on American communications was a product less of commerce than culture. In 1840, Great Britain became the first country to lower dramatically its basic inland letter-postage rate to increase revenue, forestall competition in the letter-delivery market, and—by no means incidentally—increase popular access to the facilities for long-distance

communication. Penny postage, as this experiment was known, would embolden cheap postage enthusiasts in the United States to press for a comparable reform. Cheap postage in the United States had a different rationale from penny postage in Great Britain. In Great Britain, the primary rationale for lowering the basic letter rate was fiscal: a lower rate, or so its proponents contended, would increase the revenue that the post office generated for the Crown. The British post office in this period remained a branch of the treasury: Its primary rationale was fiscal. In the United States, in contrast, cheap postage had an emphatically civic rationale. Initially, the civic mandate for the low-cost circulation of information was confined to information on public affairs, a mandate that dated back to the Post Office Act of 1792. In 1825, an administrative ruling would (briefly) expand this mandate to embrace information on market trends; following the Post Office Act of 1845, lawmakers would extend it once again to information on personal matters, such as the health of a family member, or the birth of a child.<sup>5</sup>

The most enduring British influence on American communications was neither commercial nor cultural but political. To project its power overseas, the British government invested massively during the long nineteenth century in what we might today call communications infrastructure. The post office packets, which the British government had been subsidizing since the seventeenth century, were one tool the British government used to project its power. Others included the awarding of huge steamship mail contracts to the Cunard Company in 1840, a subsidy that hastened the emergence of the Cunarders ocean liners

as the dominant carrier of transatlantic mail, and the panoply of benefits that the British government lavished on the promoters who completed the first successful Atlantic cable in 1866. The communications historians Dwayne R. Winseck and Robert M. Pike have contended that the United States would become a major rival of Great Britain in the Atlantic cable market by the First World War.<sup>6</sup> My own research on this topic has tended to confirm the older consensus—articulated most forcefully by Daniel R. Headrick—that the United States would remain a minor player in international communications prior to the rise of radio broadcasting in the 1920s.<sup>7</sup> The 1866 Atlantic cable, for example, was—U. S.-centric civic-booster mythology notwithstanding—almost entirely a British venture, while Western Union remained confined primarily to the North American market.

When historians of American communications look overseas, they most often turn their attention to Britain and France. Yet the first transatlantic bilateral postal agreement into which the United States had entered was negotiated neither with France nor Britain, but, rather, with the thriving German republic of Bremen, and its newly established North Sea port of Bremerhaven. German merchants were eager to expand U. S. trade, and German immigrants were flooding into the United States, giving Bremen a prominence in the Atlantic world that is often overlooked.

The U. S.-Bremen postal agreement was adopted in the summer of 1847. It facilitated the conveyance of the mail not only between the United States and Bremen, but also between the United States and the rest of continental Europe.<sup>8</sup>

The catalyst for this agreement was the first sailing of the steamship Washington from New York City to Bremen earlier that year.

The Washington was one of the first two steamships to be subsidized by Congress under an 1845 law that for the first time authorized the postmaster general to contract with a steamship line to compete with Cunard in the Atlantic trade. Edward Mills, a shipping-business neophyte, obtained the first U. S. government postal contract in 1847 by underbidding two more credible contenders: Edward K. Collins and Robert B. Forbes. The proposal of a third contender, ex-Postmaster General Amos Kendall was rejected by Congress because Kendall proposed to carry the mails entirely by sail.

Collins operated a successful fleet of Atlantic sailing packets; Forbes was the owner of a large fleet of ships active in the China trade. The Post Office Department was hamstrung by its legal obligation to award its contract to the lowest bidder; whatever misgivings its staff may have had about Mills, he promised more for less, and he got the contract. Unable to raise even a fraction of the capital that had been mandated by his contract, Mills transferred the contract almost immediately to the Ocean Steam Navigation Company, a German-American joint venture that had obtained substantial financial backing of a wealthy group of Bremen merchants. The first U. S. government-subsidized steamship line, in short, was mostly a German affair.

The Ocean Steam Navigation Company was the first American-based steamship company to operate regularly scheduled transatlantic service. In

recognition of its German backing, its principal European destination was neither Liverpool nor Southampton, but Bremenhaven.

Steam-powered vessels were nothing new. In fact, steamboats had for several decades operated on rivers and coastal waterways. Ocean liners, as ocean-worthy steam-powered vessels would come to be known, in contrast, remained untested, and their construction posed a technical challenge. It was in part for this reason that promoters regarded government support of some kind as so essential.

Each of the two ships that the Ocean Steam Navigation Company built--the Washington and the Hermann--were constructed by Westervelt & McKay in New York City, the same shipyard responsible for some of the country's most celebrated clipper ships. These steamships proved to be a disappointment to the Post Office Department. Not only did they cost more than Mills's had estimated, but their sailing times failed to outpace the Cunarders. The company stumbled along until 1857, when the North German Lloyd Company took over its assets and made it part of its fleet.

While the Ocean Mail Steamship Company would ultimately fail, its fate remained unknown in 1848 when the U. S. minister to Great Britain, George Bancroft, successfully negotiated the first bilateral postal treaty with Great Britain. Had this government-backed venture never existed, it is entirely possible that Bancroft would have lacked the clout to overcome a major stumbling block in U. S.-British diplomatic relations.<sup>9</sup> The crux of the problem lay in the strikingly different rationales for mail delivery in the two countries. The British government

regarded postage as a tax, rather than a fee-for-service payment; as a consequence, government administrators expected postal patrons to pay British overseas postal rates even if the United States government was subsidizing the cost of its conveyance.<sup>10</sup> Had the United States lacked a credible steamship company, it might well have had no choice but to accede to the British demands. Yet the United States did have a rival in Mills's Ocean Mail Steamship Company, and thus could press for a rate reduction. In so doing, Bancroft underscored the distinctively American civic rationale for postal policy. Bancroft's "sole motive" in negotiating a postal treaty, as Bancroft declared in a public letter that he issued shortly before the treaty was ratified, was to promote the "comfort and interest of the commercial world"--independent of the potential fiscal consequences of the rate reduction for the United States treasury.<sup>11</sup>

The civic rationale for American postal policy goes far toward explaining why it was an American, the Vermont-born postal administrator John Kasson, who took the lead in organizing for Postmaster General Montgomery Blair the Paris Postal Convention in 1863.

The immediate impetus for Kasson's decision was the balance of payments deficit that the United States confronted in settling postal accounts. The United States was at war in 1863, and gold was at a premium. To prevent its outflow, Kasson decided--with the full support of Postmaster General Montgomery Blair, and at the official invitation of Secretary of State William Seward--to see if it might be possible to develop a set of agreed-upon protocols that would lower transatlantic postal rates, make them more uniform, simplify if

not abolish altogether transatlantic postal accounting, and devise a standardized rate structure and weight guidelines.<sup>12</sup> If the initial impetus for this convention was fiscal exigency, its ambit was far broader. The “cheap postage” movement in the United States of the 1840s and 1850s had popularized the idea that low and uniform postage promoted the public good and Kasson was determined to show how the benefits of postal reform could be realized not only in one country, but also worldwide. Like Elihu Burritt--the stalwart American-born proponent of “ocean penny postage”--Kasson was infused with the idealism of the many Americans who had become convinced of the nineteenth-century variant of the digital age mantra, “information wants to be free.”

During the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition in Great Britain, a delegation of British postal experts had declared that any movement to institute a “system of cheap ocean postage” had to originate in the United States--because the United States government, unlike its British and continental counterparts, did not regard postal revenue as a form of taxation. The civic rationale for American postal policy often found expression in the public pronouncements of American diplomats. “Our security for the preservation of our popular institutions,” declared the U. S. minister to Great Britain in 1852, in a letter to the U. S. secretary of state, “rest upon the enlightenment of the people and the extension of knowledge”: “Perhaps nothing does more to diffuse that knowledge than the constant correspondence which takes place among the people of the United States; and were it extended to these islands [that is, Great Britain], a corresponding advantage would be gained.”<sup>13</sup> Kasson took it upon himself to

realize this “liberal” goal--a term that was invoked to characterize the goals of the 1863 postal conference in at least one of the relatively few U. S. newspapers that reported on Kasson’s mission.<sup>14</sup>

The civic mandate for American postal policy that Kasson invoked in 1863 had been for several decades a subject of frequent discussion by the small yet dedicated cadre of journalists who had made a special study of postal policy. Foremost among them was Joshua Leavitt, a Congregationalist-minister turned-newspaper editor who would long report on postal topics for the Independent, an influential religious newspaper based in New York City. Leavitt had followed postal affairs closely since the 1840s, when he had lobbied lawmakers to emulate Rowland Hill’s experiment with penny postage. Frustrated by the refusal of Congress in 1845 to reduce the basic inland letter rate to 1 cent (the basic inland letter rate would be reduced to 5 and 10 cents in 1845, depending on distance, and to a flat 3 cents for most of the U.S. in 1851), Leavitt repeatedly lectured the public on the distinctiveness of the civic mandate of the U. S. government to circulate information over long distances at low cost. The “language of the Constitution,” Leavitt postulated in 1862, sustained the principle that information--and, in particular, the information contained in newspapers--should be circulated at the lowest practicable rates, in accordance with the principle that the postal system should remain a “great engine of governmental wisdom and beneficence” that had been established and that had been long conducted for the “public good” to promote the “widest diffusion of intelligence.”<sup>15</sup>

Leavitt had no doubt that the category of “intelligence” embraced not only newspapers, but also personal correspondence, which, by an analogous logic, should also be circulated at the lowest possible cost. Should Congress reduce the inland letter rate to 1 cent, Leavitt predicted several months later, such a reduction would assuredly hasten a huge increase in the circulation of inland letters through the postal system, enabling the United States to match Great Britain in mail volume--a benchmark that Leavitt regarded as proof that the republican United States could match its monarchical parent.<sup>16</sup>

Like most journalists, however, Leavitt wrote nothing during the American Civil War about the Paris Postal Conference; and, in fact, would not turn his attention to cheap ocean postage until after the inauguration of Ulysses S. Grant in March 1869.

While journalists were largely oblivious to Kasson’s expansive interpretation of the civic mandate for the American postal system, his ideas would be held up for admiration by several of the delegates to the 1863 postal convention. In contrast to the postal systems of the “great majority of countries,” or so one delegate admiringly observed, the U. S. postal system was not expected to generate a surplus for its government, making its policy, as a French delegate quite accurately termed “exceptional.” It was to honor this civic ideal that Kasson repeatedly urged the delegates to lower the transit fees that postal administrators charged on postal items that neither originated in nor was addressed to but merely passed through their territory. Here the United States and France were at odds. The French government, which had sovereignty over a

vast domain in the middle of Europe, profited handsomely from the transit fees that its postal administrators collected. Had Kasson prevailed, these fees would have been either eliminated altogether, or reduced to the mere cost of transmission, a rate far lower than that which many countries--including France--currently charged.<sup>17</sup>

Kasson had not intended the 1863 Paris Postal Convention to lead directly to the establishment of an international postal organization, and it did not. The “idea” of the United States in calling for the meeting, or so Kasson explained in a public statement that he gave during its opening day, was not to “bind” the countries who had sent delegates to it, but, rather, “simply to examine a certain number of questions, whose solution would facilitate the negotiation of postal treaties.”<sup>18</sup> The Universal Postal Union (UPU)--the international standard-setting body that would swiftly render bilateral postal treaties superfluous--would not be founded until 1874.

Public interest in the low-cost circulation of information between the United States and Europe would receive a major boost in the United States with the inauguration of Ulysses S. Grant in 1869. Unlike his predecessor, Andrew Johnson, Grant was regarded as an internationalist eager to expand the role of the United States on the world stage. Now that it seemed probable that the United States and Great Britain might once again enter into bilateral negotiations, Joshua Leavitt found himself pondering why Great Britain had held back. It was a matter of surprise, Leavitt editorialized, that the British government--so “justly proud” of its inland penny postage reform that Parliament had enacted in 1840--

had never made any attempt to apply this “superlatively excellent system” overseas and given the world the gift of “ocean penny postage.” The stumbling block, Leavitt concluded, had nothing to do with economics: the cost of transporting the mail by steamship was small. Rather, it lay in the hostility of British statesmen to legislation that was certain to foster Anglo-American solidarity.

The reduction of inland postage in Great Britain, Leavitt reminded his readers, had been justified in the 1840s by the free-trader enthusiast Richard Cobden on the grounds that it would unite the English people by “assimilating their views” through the “familiarity” of their personal correspondence. An analogous reduction in ocean postage, Leavitt postulated, would have a comparable effect in the Anglo-American world by promoting mutual understanding between the people of Great Britain and the United States. In Leavitt’s view this was precisely what British statesmen found so unsettling, and why they had refused to take the lead. When British statesmen recognized that ocean penny postage would have a tendency to “make the English and American people think alike, and feel alike, and act alike, on all sorts of subjects, the old sort of British statesmen shook their heads, and said: ‘That is the very thing we don’t want.’”<sup>19</sup>

Yet even had British statesmen wished to go forward, a problem remained. The financial self-interest of the steamship companies that carried the mail under government contracts had become an impediment to reform. To solve this problem, Leavitt urged British and U. S. lawmakers to enact a bilateral

postal treaty that would simplify administrative procedures, reduce and simplify postal rates, and end the current “monopoly” enjoyed by favored steamship lines. Should the British government eliminate its steamship subsidies, and rely instead on the open market--or “commerce”--to carry the mail, British postal administrators should be able to negotiate postal contracts at a much more advantageous rate, enabling it to reduce ocean postage to the low rate of one British penny, to the enormous benefit of the British and American people: “The hundreds of thousands of emigrants from Great Britain to this country, and their friends who remain behind, would feel themselves reunited by penny postage between the two countries. The monopoly and greed of the steamships would be extinguished, and new ties of amity and peace would be established for ages to come.”<sup>20</sup>

The refusal of British lawmakers to lower ocean postal rates prompted Leavitt to urge U. S. makers to fill the void. Until now, Leavitt freely conceded, the United States had lagged behind Great Britain in providing low-cost postal facilities for its people. Great Britain had reduced its inland postal rates to 1 penny in 1840; in the United States, this reform had yet to occur. (One British penny was worth roughly 2 U. S. cents, a fact well known to U. S. postal reformers, who used this fact to lobby for a 2-cent inland rate; Leavitt, for his part, held out for a U. S. inland rate of 1 U. S. cent.) Even so, it would seem “natural” for the United States, being the “recognized leader of the nations in the cause of liberty and the rights of man” to “keep in advance of all other countries in the promotion and diffusion of useful intelligence among all the people.”<sup>21</sup>

Leavitt would continue to lobby for cheap ocean postage until his death in 1873.<sup>22</sup> For him, and for other like-minded Americans--going back at least as far as Elihu Burritt--the low-cost circulation of information was far more than merely a boon to commerce. Even more importantly, it was a harbinger of social progress, group solidarity, and world peace. The failure of U. S. lawmakers to lower postal rates sufficiently in 1845 was, in Leavitt's view, one of the proximate causes of the U. S. Civil War. Had U. S. lawmakers adopted a 1 cent rate in 1845, Leavitt predicted in 1872, in one of the last editorials he wrote before his death, the "rebellion of 1861 would not have happened." For Leavitt, the benefits of Rowland Hill's 1840 postage-rate reduction in promoting prosperity, "elevating" the masses, and accomplishing desirable "political reforms" (by which he meant the abolition of the high tariffs on imported wheat known as the corn laws) was "incalculable": "In its success, in the wisdom and completeness of its arrangements, in the security it has given to the institutions of the country, and in its beneficent influence upon the people, it is the greatest achievement of governmental wisdom in modern times. It would be difficult to find another instance so much like the government of God in the world."<sup>23</sup> Yet in the end it would not be the British government, but an international organization--whose rationale had been articulated, early on, by a U. S. diplomat eager to expand abroad a distinctively American civic mandate for long-distance communications--that would institutionalize the standards regulating overseas mail, facilitating the huge increase in international communications that, as the First World War would tragically reveal, would prove altogether unable to realize the exalted hopes with

which this reform had been invested.

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The 1863 Paris Postal Conference was but one of a series of events that would lead to the founding of the UPU, and with it, the establishment of international standards for the circulation of letters, newspapers and, eventually, parcels. Yet it is worth remembering for at least two reasons that had nothing to do with UPU genealogy. Most obviously, it thrust the United States onto the world stage at an unusually precarious moment in its history. In the summer of 1863, the future of the republic remained to be decided on the battlefield and the possibility that one or more European powers might negotiate a postal agreement with the Confederacy could not be discounted. Though there is little evidence that John Kasson regarded the conference as an opportunity to show the flag, he could not have been unaware of the extent to which--by the very act of organizing the conference--he was reminding the great powers of Europe that the United States remained a player on the world stage--while the Confederacy was not.

The power that the United States projected at the postal conference had little to do with its commercial prowess. The United States government no longer commanded in 1863--as it had had in 1848--its own fleet of mail steamers: U. S.-backed transatlantic mail steamship service had been suspended during the war.

It was, similarly, unrelated to its military muscle. The United States was so weak militarily that the Lincoln administration found it impossible to retain two Confederate diplomats who a U. S. naval commander (acting on his own authority) had captured on a British mail steamship in international waters. Though the Confederate diplomats had been trying to negotiate British and French recognition for the Confederacy, the Lincoln administration found itself stymied not only by hostile international public opinion, but also by the very real possibility that, had it refused to give the Confederate diplomats up, it would have provoked war with Great Britain, then the leading naval power in the world.

The power that the United States projected, rather, rested in the realm of ideas, or what a present-day political theorist might call “soft power.” In international postal negotiations, the United States enjoyed the moral high ground by virtue of the expansiveness of its civic mandate for postal policy. “Let us not forget, gentlemen,” Kasson declared, in a brief speech that he delivered on the final day of the conference, “the extent of the interests involved in some degree in our enterprise. The mails carry those orders which create foreign commerce, sustain the commercial marine, and aid largely in the development of interior industry. They exchange the missives which are so necessary to the interests of family, of kindred and of friendship, and upon which so much of the happiness of our race depends. They diffuse the printed elements of civilization, progress, and intelligence. In each of these ways, they serve to break down the useless barriers which ignorance and non-intercourse formerly interposed between nations. They are the initiators of a durable condition of international

peace and prosperity. To facilitate these great results, while at the same time we promote the immediate convenience of the public--this has been our mission.”

The primary rationale for the 1863 Paris Postal Conference had been to remove the “obstacles to uniformity, simplicity, and cheapness in international postal intercourse” that had been known to exist--and, to an extent that was greater than their “fears” had permitted them to anticipate, its delegates had drafted guidelines for international postal arrangements that that done much to “remove them.”<sup>24</sup>

The capacious civic mandate for postal policy that Kasson articulated in his closing remarks in 1863 elicited distinguished the United States from the Confederacy--a regime that had for twenty five years systematically suppressed the circulation of information on the slavery issue. In addition, it identified the United States with a mission more elevated than self-preservation, less controversial than popular self-government, and more plausible than abolition.

“Cheap postage” lacks moral resonance today. Yet it remained a phrase to conjure with in the Atlantic world in 1863, and helps to explain why, at such a seemingly unpropitious moment in its history, the United States took the lead in hastening the promulgation of international standards in a realm that was seemingly so far removed from the pressing needs of the day. Nineteenth-century liberalism differed in many ways from its twentieth-century stepchild. Yet it was no less infused with a fervent faith in the utopian proposition that collective experiments in social engineering could remake the world. Politics have artifacts. Like the Atlantic cable--or the mail steamship--cheap postage was not only or

even primarily a technical advance; rather it was a cultural expression of a compelling civic ideal.

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<sup>1</sup> The conference goes unmentioned, for example, in George C. Herring's From Colony to Superpower: U. S. Foreign Relations since 1776 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). For a French perspective, see Léonard Laborie, L'Europe Mise en Réseaux: La France et la Coopération Internationale dans les Postes et les Télécommunications (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2010), chap. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Misled by the assumption that, as the historian C. Vann Woodward famously contended, the United States enjoyed “free security” in the nineteenth-century, historians have been slow to emphasize the entanglement of the United States with the wider world. Historians of international relations have long questioned the isolation of the United States from Europe in this period; only recently, however, has the cultural dimension of U. S. internationalism begun to receive sustained attention. See, for example, Frank Ninkovich, Global Dawn: The Cultural Foundation of American Internationalism, 1865-1890 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009) and Ian Tyrrell, Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Richard R. John, Network Nation: Inventing American Telecommunications (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), chap. 1.

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<sup>4</sup> Robert G. Albion, The Rise of New York Port, 1815-1860 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1839); Albion, Square Riggers on Schedule: The New York Sailing Packets and the Cotton Ports (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1938).

<sup>5</sup> Richard R. John, "The Political Economy of Postal Reform in the Victorian Age," Smithsonian Contributions to History and Technology, 55 (2010): 3-12; John, "Expanding the Realm of Communications," in An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, edited by Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 211-220. The extension of this civic mandate to embrace the circulation of parcels was highly controversial and, in the 1870s--when this issue first found its way onto the public agenda--met with vigorous opposition. "If Congress proposes to go into the business of transporting dry goods, groceries, and harnesses in four-pound packages"--declared an editorialist who was otherwise sympathetic to the low-cost mail delivery in 1876--"it should, at the very least, charge enough to pay the expenses. We doubt the expediency of going into the [parcel delivery] business at all....The cheapest rate of postage can be attained best by confining the mail to its proper business." "The Postal Question," Independent, 20 April 1876.

<sup>6</sup> Dwayne R. Winseck and Robert M. Pike, Communication and Empire: Media, Markets, and Globalization, 1860-1930 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). See also Jonathan Reed Winkler, Nexus: Strategic

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Communications and American Security in World War I (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Daniel R. Headrick, The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics, 1851-1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> George E. Hargest, History of Letter Post Communication Between the United States and Europe, 1845-1875, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lawrence, Mass.: Quarterman Publications, 1971), chap. 1.

<sup>9</sup> I owe this insight to Peter A. Shulman.

<sup>10</sup> Lilian Handlin, George Bancroft: The Intellectual as Democrat (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 232.

<sup>11</sup> George Bancroft to Lord Clanricarde, 11 February 1848, in James K. Polk, "Message from the President, Communicating the Correspondence between the United States Minister at London and Authorities of the British Government, In Relation to a Postal Arrangement between the Two Countries," Sen. Ex. Doc. 30, 30<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1848, p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> Edward A. Younger, John A. Kasson: Politics and Diplomacy from Lincoln to McKinley (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1955), chap. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Abbott Lawrence to Daniel Webster, 7 May 1852, in Hamilton Andrews Hill, Memoir of Abbott Lawrence (Boston: Printed for Private Distribution, 1883), p. 218.

<sup>14</sup> "The International Postal Convention," Boston Daily Advertiser, 24 August 1863.

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<sup>15</sup> “Thorough Postal Reform,” Independent, 13 February 1862. Most Independent editorials, like this one, were unsigned. Leavitt’s authorship can be inferred from its vigorous style, the self-assurance with which it tackled arcane postal topics, and its allusion to the newly appointed Boston postmaster, John Gorham Palfrey, a longtime acquaintance. Leavitt served as managing editor of the Independent from its founding in 1848 until his death in 1873; during this period wrote dozens of editorials on postal topics.

<sup>16</sup> “New Postal Project,” Independent, 10 July 1862.

<sup>17</sup> “International Postal Conference,” in Report of the Postmaster General (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), pp. 144-45. The United States, the French delegate explained, was in an “exceptional position” by not relying on its postal system as a taxing mechanism, and “only the general state of things could be taken into consideration”: “The committee, in limiting the transit rate to one-half of the inland rate, had already made an immense step forward, and there would yet remain a handsome profit with which the treasury could be satisfied” (p. 145). This committee’s proposal, which had been introduced by a sympathetic British delegate who regarded these rates as the lowest that could be obtained, was approved.

<sup>18</sup> “International Postal Conference,” p. 111.

<sup>19</sup> “Ocean Penny Postage,” Independent, 18 March 1869.

<sup>20</sup> “Ocean Penny Postage,” Independent, 18 March 1869.

<sup>21</sup> “Should We Lag or Lead in Postage?” Independent, 1 July 1869.

<sup>22</sup> “A Hitch in Ocean Postage,” Independent, 6 January 1870.

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<sup>23</sup> Dr. Joshua Leavitt, "Why May We Not Have Cheap Postage?"

Independent, 5 January 1871.

<sup>24</sup> "International Postal Conference," p. 164.