

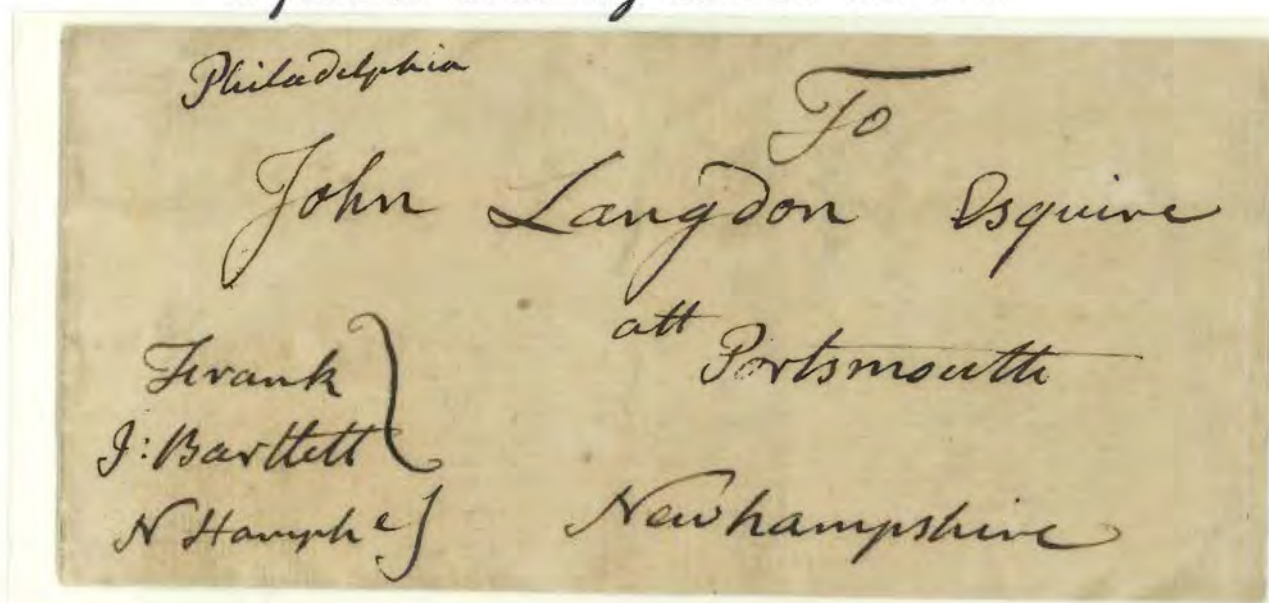
# UNITED STATES

## FREE FRANK COVERS



The right to send mail free of postage is commonly referred to as a “free franking” privilege, with the frank being a signature denoting such right. In the United States, the franking privilege predates the establishment of the republic itself, as the Continental Congress bestowed it on its members in 1775. The first Continental Congress was formed on 5 September 1774 and included delegates from 12 of the 13 colonies that were later to form the United States of America. On 8 November 1775, the Continental Congress passed a resolution granting the free franking privilege to delegates in order to send and receive mail, free of postage, for both personal matters and issues related to the formation of the government.

*“All letters to and from the delegates of the united colonies, during the sessions of Congress, to pass and be carried free of postage, the delegates not to frank or enclose any letters but their own.”*



Frank of *Josiah Bartlett*, Signer of the Declaration of Independence, addressed and signed in his hand as a New Hampshire delegate to the Continental Congress to John Langdon on 1776 folded cover to Portsmouth, NH. This cover was franked shortly after the privilege was approved by The Continental Congress on 8 November 1775.

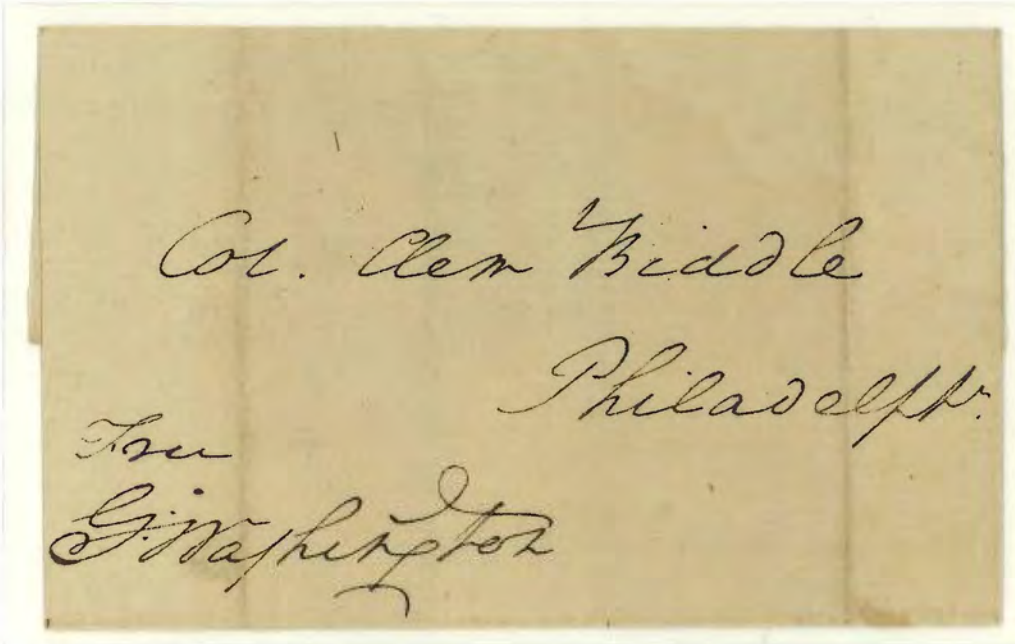
This single-frame exhibit presents examples of various areas in which a philatelist may build a collection of free franked covers. It is presented in the following sections:

- Franks of the U.S. Presidents, numbers one through 10
- Franks of Signers of the Declaration of Independence
- Franks of the Framers of the U.S. Constitution
- Franks of Congressman and Senators
- Franks of Key Military Leaders

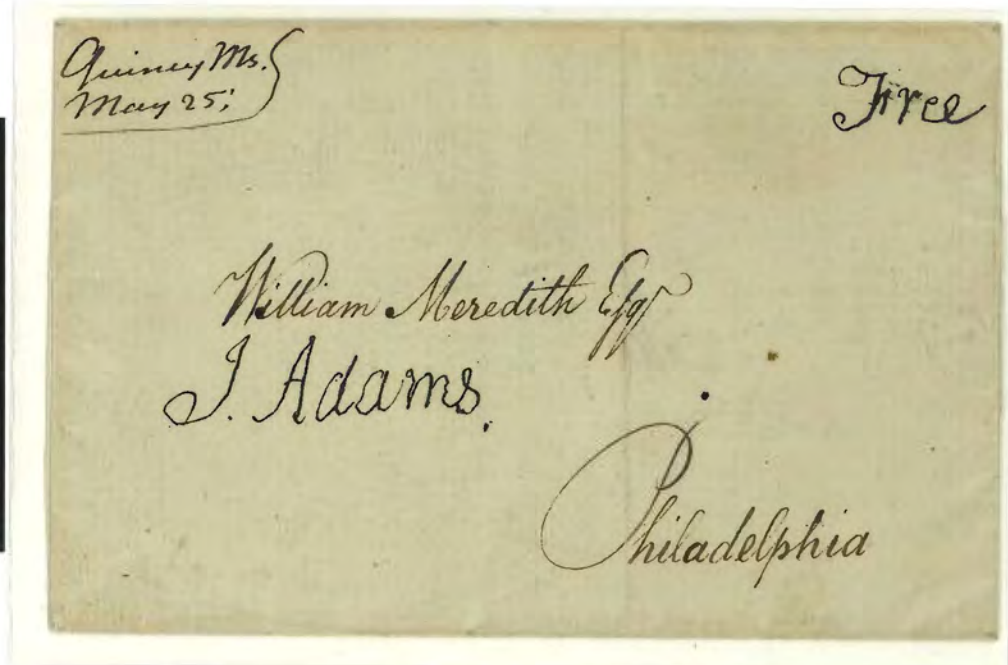
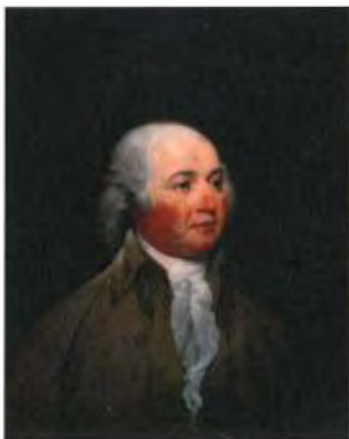
The preceding list is not exhaustive and there are myriad ways in which free frank collections can be formed. While most collections have traditionally focused on the governmental status or historical significance of the franker, collections can also be formed that illustrate the postal laws and regulations that have governed the franking privilege. *Every cover has a certificate from the Philatelic Foundation.*

# UNITED STATES PRESIDENTS

Presidents Washington through Grant were provided the free franking privilege while serving in office. The right was abolished by an act of Congress effective 1 July 1873 and no President since Grant has enjoyed the privilege while serving in office, although many have been bestowed franking rights at another time, such as while serving as Senator or while ex-President. Presented below are examples of the franks of U.S. Presidents one through 10.



Free frank of **George Washington** – first President, Framers of the US Constitution and President of the Constitutional Convention, Commanding General of the Continental Army, and the Father of his Country – addressed and signed in his hand to Col. Biddle in Philadelphia, PA. Sent following his service in the Revolutionary War and prior to election as President in 1789 as indicated by receipt docketing “General Washington, Mount Vernon, June 21st, 1786.”



Free frank of **John Adams** – second President, Signer of the Declaration of Independence – signed in his hand on folded letter sheet to Philadelphia, PA, with manuscript “Quincy MS, May 25” town marking.

# UNITED STATES PRESIDENTS

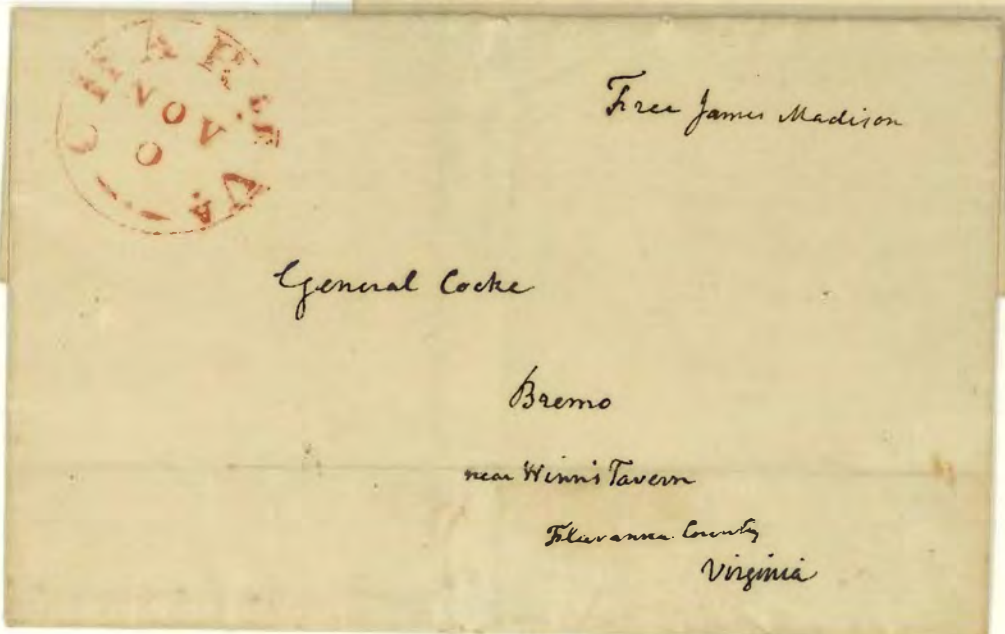


Free frank of *Thomas Jefferson* – third President, Signer and Author of the Declaration of Independence – signed in his hand “Th. Jefferson Pr. US” as President on folded address sheet to Philadelphia, PA with “Washington City, Dec 22” circular date stamp.


Free frank of *Dolley Madison* – First Lady of the US – signed in her hand, “Free/D.P. Madison” on cover to Philadelphia, PA, with red “Richmond, VA/ Dec 26” cds. Many of the widows of the early Presidents were given the franking privilege upon the death of their husband.



Free frank of *James Madison* – fourth President, Framers, and “Father of the Constitution” – addressed and signed in his hand as President on folded address sheet to General Cocke, near Winn’s Tavern, Fluvanna County, VA, with red “Charle VA/Nov 6” circular date stamp. Cocke was a brigadier general in command of the Virginia militia during the War of 1812 and led the defense of Richmond along the Chickahominy River against British forces.



# UNITED STATES PRESIDENTS



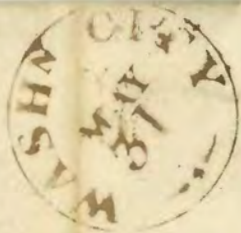
James Monroe Esq. Acting Secy of State, on the subject of the Woods Georgia land. Phelps. &c. — 29. Decr. 1814.



Department of State  
Jas Monroe

Seymour Esq  
Canandaigua  
New York State.

Free frank of **James Monroe** – fifth President – signed in his hand as Secretary of State under James Madison on folded cover to Canandaigua, NY, with “Washn. City/Dec 22” (1814) circular date stamp and matching straightline “FREE” handstamp.



Department of State  
J. Q. Adams

FREE

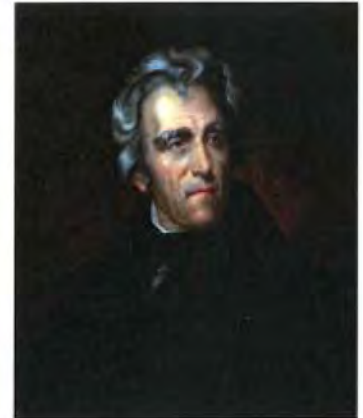
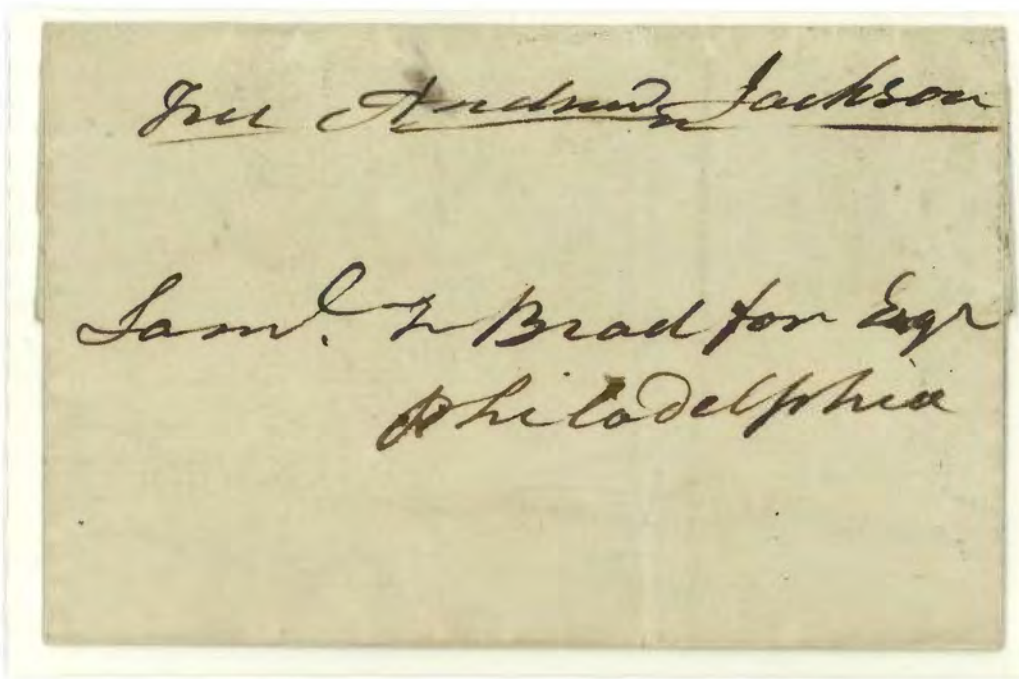
The Collector of New York

New York

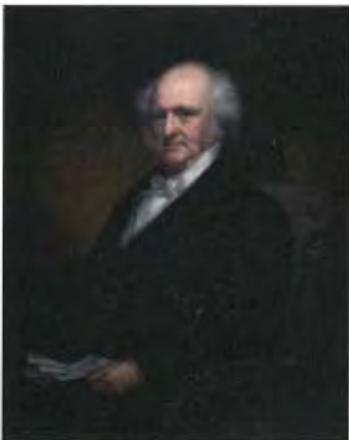


Free Frank of **John Quincy Adams** – sixth President – signed in his hand as Secretary of State under James Monroe on folded address sheet to New York City with “Washn City/May 31” (1819) circular date stamp and matching straightline “FREE” handstamp. Accompanied by the original letter written by Thomas Parker, District Attorney, datelined Charleston 23 May 1819 that addresses the intended prosecution of pirates from the ship Louisa, which was captured by George Clarke (alias Almeida), who were later tried and found guilty in 1820.

UNITED STATES PRESIDENTS



Free frank of *Andrew Jackson* – seventh President – signed in his hand on folded address sheet to Philadelphia, PA, as ex-President.



Free frank of *Martin Van Buren* – eighth President – addressed and signed in his hand on folded address sheet, as ex-President, from his estate “Lindenwald” in Kinderhook, NY, to Philadelphia, PA, with “Kinderhook, NY / Sep 5” circular date stamp.

# UNITED STATES PRESIDENTS



Free frank of **William Henry Harrison** – ninth President – addressed and signed in his hand on 1826 (docketed) folded address sheet to Richmond, VA, as US senator during the second year of an abbreviated term prior to his appointment as minister to Columbia.

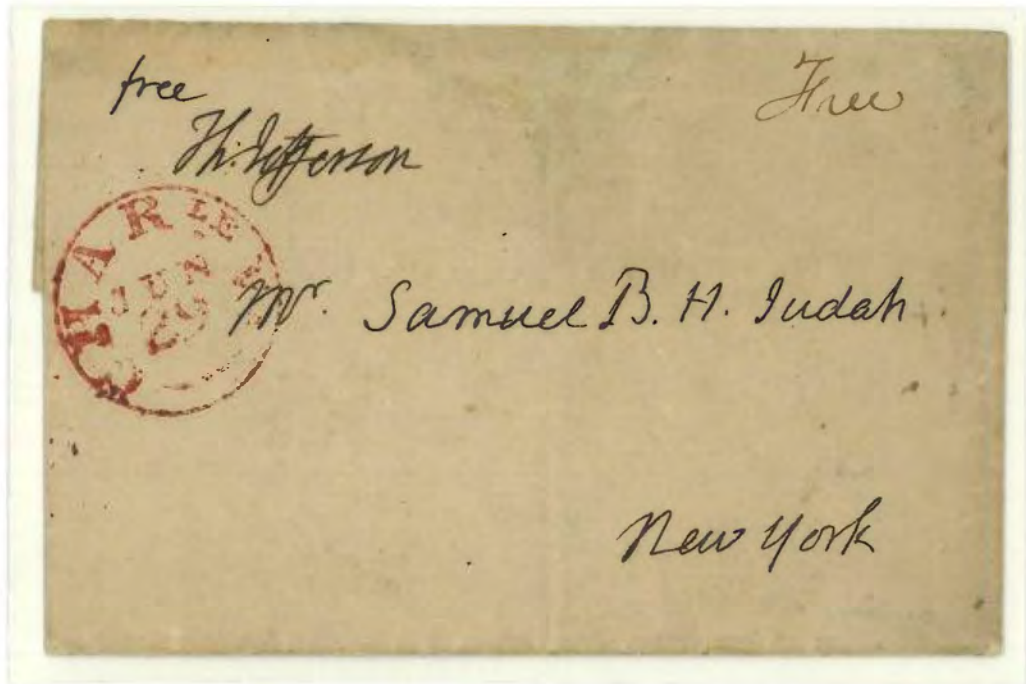
A rare frank of Harrison, the first US President to die while in office, having served only 32 days when he succumbed to pneumonia.



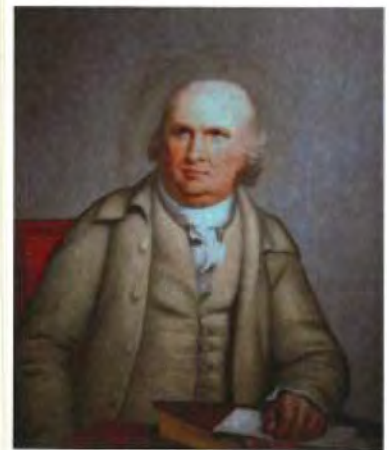
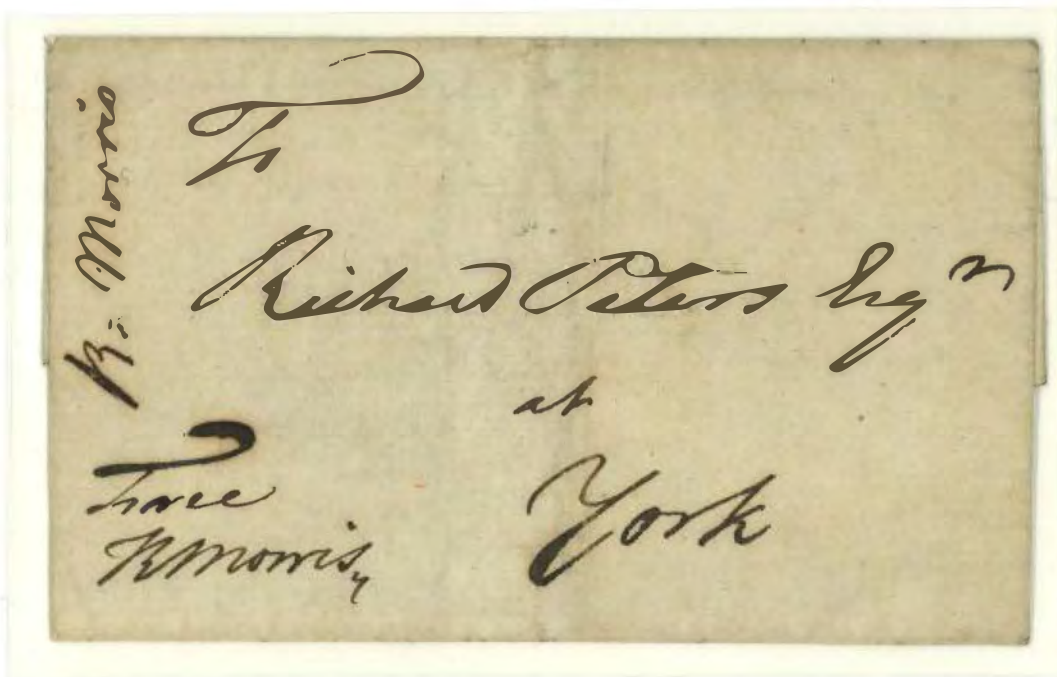
Free frank of **John Tyler** – tenth President – addressed and signed in his hand as US Senator on folded address sheet to Virginia, with “City of Washington/Mar 8” circular date stamp and matching straightline “FREE” handstamp.

# SIGNERS OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

The Second Continental Congress convened on 10 May 1775, at Philadelphia's State House, and unanimously passed the Declaration of Independence the following year on 2 July 1776, publicly announcing the decision two days later. There were 56 signers, including Thomas Jefferson of Virginia who drafted the declaration.



Free frank of *Thomson Jefferson* – third President, Signer and Author of the Declaration – addressed to Samuel B.H. Judah, playwright and lawyer, in New York and signed in his hand on folded address sheet, with “Charle, VA/Jun 29” circular date stamp.



Free frank of *Robert Morris* – Signer of the Declaration – addressed and signed in his hand as delegate to the Continental Congress on 1777 folded address sheet to Richard Peters in NY, who was Secretary to the Board of War at this time during the Revolution.

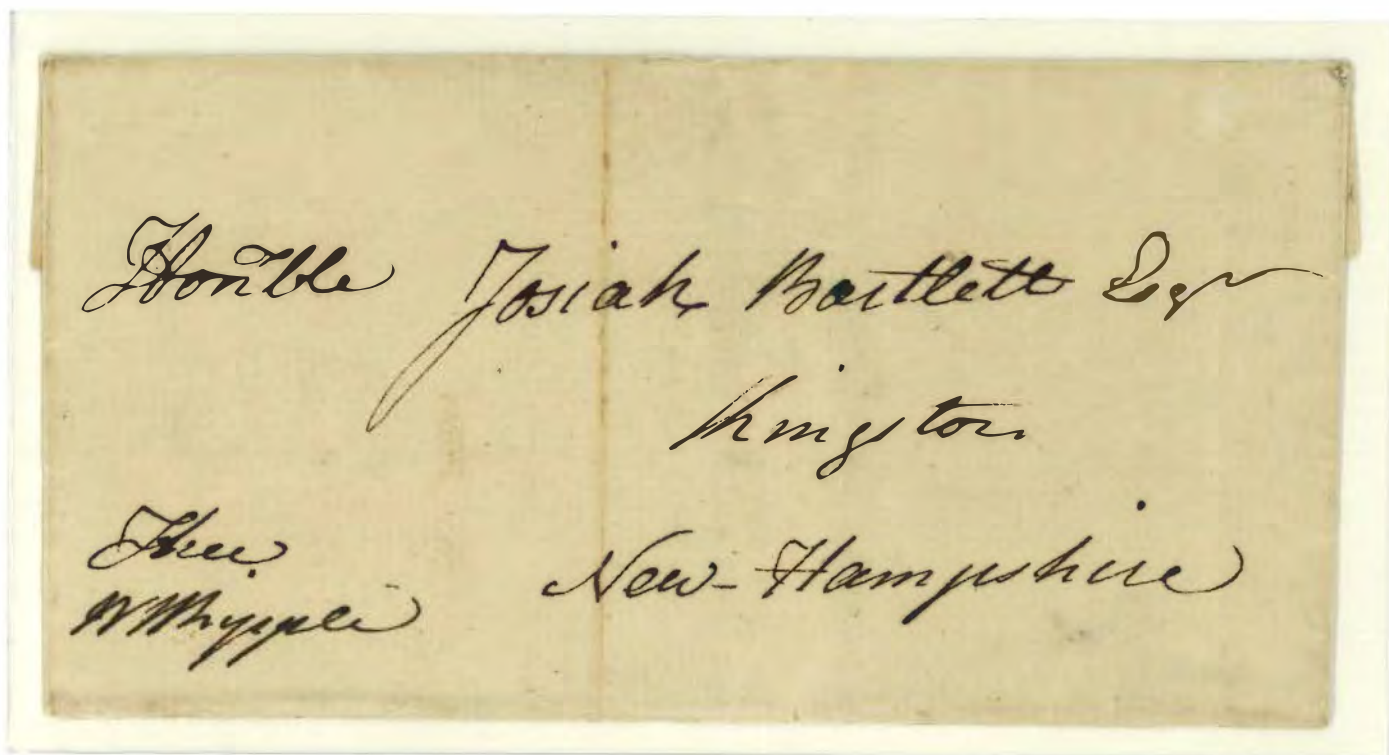
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SIGNERS OF THE  
DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

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Free frank of *Elbridge Gerry* – Signer of the Declaration and Framers of the US Constitution – addressed and signed in his hand as US Vice-President on 1814 (docketed) folded address sheet to Cambridge, MA.

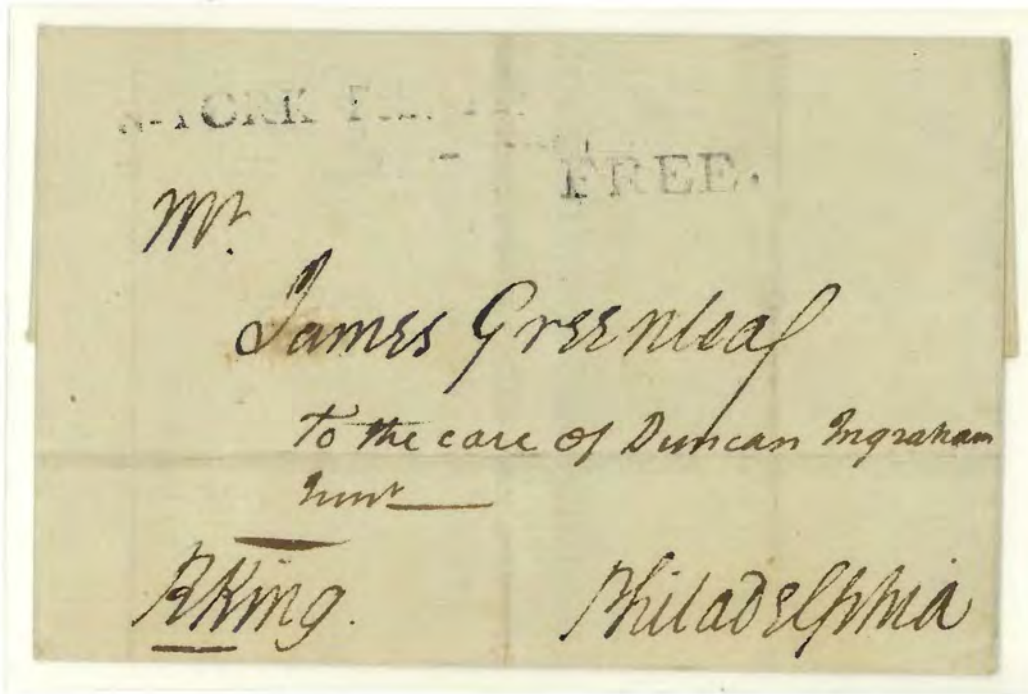


Free frank of *William Whipple* – Signer of the Declaration – addressed and signed in his hand as delegate to the Continental Congress on 1779 folded address sheet to fellow delegate and signer, Josiah Bartlett, in New Hampshire.



# FRAMERS OF THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION

By 1786, the Continental Congress under the Articles of Confederation had become an ineffective governing body. In recognition that the newly formed federation was at risk of disunification, a convention of delegates from the 13 states was called by the Congress in a resolution of 21 February "for the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation." It elected George Washington of Virginia as its President, and the revisions turned out to be so substantive that the Articles of Confederation were replaced with the Federal Constitution. All but three of the 42 "Framers" then present signed the final draft of the Constitution on 17 September 1787.



Free frank of *Rufus King* –  
Framer of the US  
Constitution – addressed  
and signed in his hand on  
folded letter to James  
Greenleaf in Philadelphia,  
PA, with “N-York Feb  
11” (1787) straightline  
postmark and matching  
“FREE” handstamp,  
accompanied by the original  
2-sided letter written and  
signed by King.

Free frank of *John  
Langdon* – Framer of the  
US Constitution –  
addressed and signed in  
his hand as Senator on  
1795 folded address sheet  
to fellow framer, Nicholas  
Gilman, in Boston, with  
“II/IV” Franklin mark and  
straightline “FREE”  
handstamp.



# FRAMERS OF THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION



Free frank of **Alexander Hamilton** – Framers of the US Constitution, First Treasury Secretary, and Founder of the US financial system – addressed and signed in his hand, as Secretary of the Treasury, on 1790 folded letter to Boston, MA, with “15/NO” Franklin mark and straightline “FREE” handstamp, accompanied by original letter.



Free frank of **Aaron Burr** – Vice-President under Jefferson – addressed and signed in his hand, as Senator, on (docketed) 1796 folded address sheet to Worcester, MA, with “12/MR” Franklin mark and straightline “FREE” handstamp.

While Burr was not a Framers of the Constitution, he played a key role in the politics of the Founding Fathers and was the political rival of Hamilton, killing him in perhaps the world’s most famous duel in 1804, the last full year of his single term as Vice President.

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# UNITED STATES

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## CONGRESSMEN AND SENATORS

There are numerous Congressmen and Senators who have played critical roles in American history but never served as President or were part of the group of “Founding Fathers” who signed the Declaration or the US Constitution.



Free frank of *David “Davy” Crockett* – Congressman from Tennessee, frontiersman, and American folk hero – addressed and signed in his hand to J.K. Paulding in New York with “Washington City/Dec 23” (1830) circular datestamp.



The *Lion of the West*, a play written by Paulding, featured the character Col. Nimrod Wildfire, an unschooled but wise Kentucky Congressman. Prior to its 1831 production, news of the character leaked to the public and contemporary opinion quickly developed that Wildfire was a spoof of Davy Crockett, who at the time served as a Tennessee Congressman. Paulding denied linkage to Crockett and wrote to him to disclaim the public view. This letter sheet contained Crockett’s response to Paulding of 22 December 1830 in which he states “the newspaper publications to which you refer I have never seen ... and I thank you ... in assuring me that you had no reference to my peculiarities ... (and that it) was not necessary to convince me that you were incapable of wounding the feelings ... of an unlettered man who had never injured you ...”

The *Lion of the West* and subsequent plays featuring Wildfire contributed to the legend of Davy Crockett, who following his lost bid for a fourth term in Congress left for Texas where he died on 6 March 1836 at the Alamo.

*The signature of Davy Crockett is scarce in any form and of the greatest rarity as a free frank.*

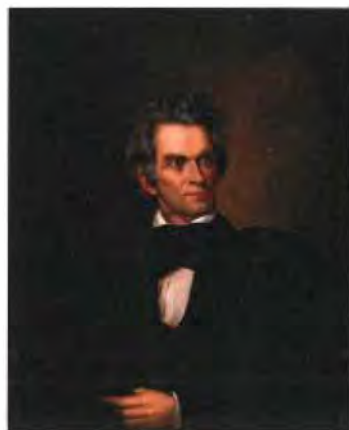
# UNITED STATES CONGRESSMEN AND SENATORS

The Great Triumvirate, or Immortal Trio, refers to the three statesmen John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, Henry Clay of Kentucky, and Daniel Webster of Massachusetts, each of whom played an important role in the Second Party System (1828 to 1854) in American politics during the Antebellum Period leading to the American Civil War.

Each served as Secretary of State and as both a Congressman and Senator, and they individually represented the three major sections of the US during the time leading up to the Civil War. Their individual views on slavery led to the "Compromise of 1850," which was intended to quiet the controversy between the North and South over the expansion of slavery and other sectional disputes. It arguably postponed secession and the Civil War for a decade.



Free frank of *John C. Calhoun*, "The Cast-Iron Man" – Vice President under John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson, Secretary of State, Secretary of War, Congressman, Senator – addressed and signed in his hand as Secretary of War under James Monroe on 1821 folded address sheet to Baltimore, MD, with "Washn. City/Nov 2" circular date stamp and matching straightline "FREE" handstamp.



Calhoun was the primary representative of Southern interests in the Immortal Trio and led the pro-slavery faction in the Senate. While he died 11 years before the commencement of the Civil War, his impassioned defense of slavery lived on in the minds of Southerners and contributed to the growing threat of secession.

# UNITED STATES CONGRESSMEN AND SENATORS



Free frank of **Henry Clay**, “The Great Compromiser” – Secretary of State, Congressman, Senator – addressed and signed in his hand as Senator on folded address sheet to Salem, MA, with “City of Washington/Jun 21” circular date stamp and matching straightline “FREE” handstamp. Clay was the primary representative of Western interests in the Immortal Trio.



Free frank of **Daniel Webster**, “The Great Orator” – Secretary of State, Congressman, Senator – addressed and signed in his hand as Senator on folded address sheet to Lowell, MA, with “Boston, MS/Oct 24” (1831) circular date stamp and large matching straightline “FREE” handstamp.

Webster was the primary representative of the Northern interests and worked to develop compromises to avert war and preserve the Union. Webster introduced legislation to produce pre-paid adhesive postage stamps, the first of which were issued in the US in 1847.

## FRANKS OF KEY MILITARY LEADERS

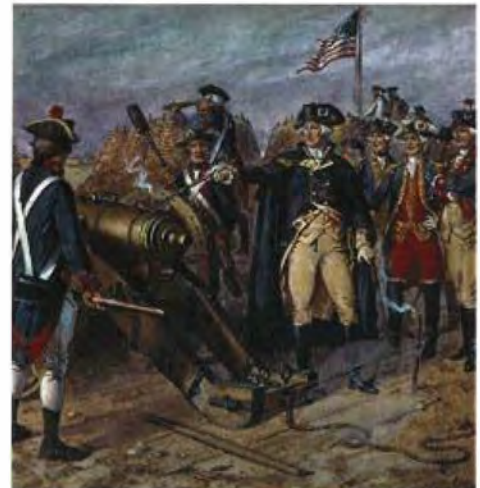
Shortly after the Continental Congress bestowed the right to frank mail on its Delegates, it passed resolutions granting the franking privilege to the Commander of the Continental Army and other army personnel, as well as to the Departments of War, Finance, and Foreign Affairs under the Congress.

Free frank of *George Washington* – first President, Framer of the US Constitution and President of the Constitutional Convention, Commanding General of the Continental Army, and the Father of his Country – addressed by John Trumball, Aide-de-Camp, and signed by Washington *as Commanding General* on folded address sheet to Brigadier General George Weedon at Gloucester Point, VA.

With docketing dated 29 September 1781.



George Washington was appointed Commanding General of the Continental Army on 15 June 1775 and resigned following the conclusion of the American Revolution in August of 1783. This letter was received by General Weedon just prior to the British surrender by Lord Cornwallis to Washington and the Allied Armies at Yorktown on 19 October 1781, where Weedon led a brigade that repelled the infamous Col. Bonastre Tarleton, thus closing the one means of British escape by sea at Gloucester Point, which was blockaded by the French fleet.



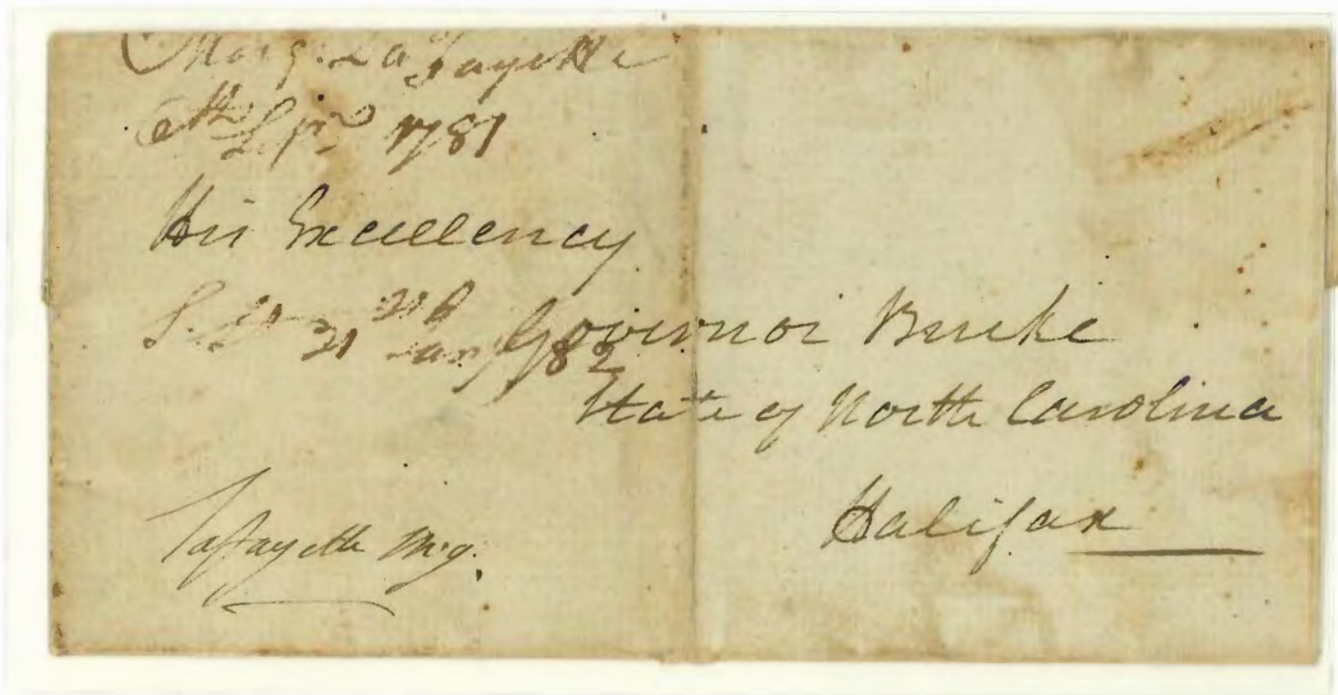
Washington firing the first gun at Yorktown

## FRANKS OF KEY MILITARY LEADERS



Lafayette and Washington at Valley Forge

Free frank of *The Marquis de Lafayette* – Revolutionary War hero from France and Major General in the American Continental Army – signed in his hand and addressed to “His Excellency, Governor Burke, State of North Carolina, Halifax,” with receipt docketing “6th Sept. 1781, \_\_\_ 31st Jany 1782.”



In September 1781, Thomas Burke, the third Governor of North Carolina, was captured by the British and imprisoned on James Island near Charleston, SC. On 16 January 1782 he escaped and made his way back to North Carolina, where this mail from General Lafayette — written at Yorktown approximately one month prior to the surrender of the British in the last major land battle of the Revolution — was waiting for him upon return.

## FRANKS OF KEY MILITARY LEADERS

The franking privilege of various army personnel was continued throughout the period of the Continental Congress and after the conclusion of the Revolutionary War, but there is no mention of such rights in the Postal Act of 20 February 1792 and it appears that the Commanding General did not receive such rights again until 1838 when bestowed on General Macomb. The franking privilege of the Commanding General was held by Winfield Scott from 1841 until his retirement in 1861 during the early stages of the American Civil War.

Free frank of **Winfield Scott** – Commanding General of the Army – addressed and signed in his hand on cover to Cambridge, MA, with “FREE/New-York/Oct 5” (1853) circular date stamp, accompanied by original contents.



The free franking privilege is not known to have been bestowed on Scott’s Civil war successors — Generals McClellan, Halleck, and Grant. McClellan replaced Scott as Commanding General on 1 November 1861, and the following example of an unauthorized frank is possibly unique. Postal clerks in Washington, DC likely assumed that such privilege transferred to McClellan with control of the Army.



Free frank of **George McClellan** – Commanding General of the Army – addressed and signed in his hand on cover to Hartford, CT, with “Washington, DC/Jan 20” (1862) circular date stamp. While the cover is not marked “Free,” the absence of paid or postage due markings indicates that the cover went through the mails unpaid as a result of McClellan’s notation “Hd Qts of the Army/Geo McClellan/Maj. Enl Comdg.”