

PACKET MAIL BETWEEN THE USA AND FRANCE, 1783-1793

During the 18th Century, the European powers of England, France and Spain all had strategic, colonial and commercial interests in North America. Accordingly, each country established packet sailing lines to maintain communication with those interests. This exhibit examines mail carried by those packets from just after the American Revolutionary War to the 1793 French wars with England and Spain.

Monthly English packet service between New York and Falmouth began in November 1755. Following the Revolutionary War, normal service resumed in December 1783. Mail between the USA and France could be carried by Falmouth packets only after an August 4, 1784 postal treaty provided for transit mail between France and England. Even so, no USA-France mail is known by this route.

The French Royal packets began in September 1783, and made 62 round-trip voyages, initially monthly, until war with England in 1793 ended operations. The service was operated for the king by three successive agents (called Régies) and a variety of distinctive markings are known. Much of mail between the USA and France during this period was carried by these packets. This type of mail is the principal focus of this exhibit. In all, about 50 covers carried by these packets are known.

Spain established packet connections between New Orleans and Spain via Havana in March 1766. Royal Mail Packets ran quarterly between New Orleans and Havana and bi-monthly between Havana and Coruña, Spain. Mail between Coruña and France was routed overland. From 1779 to 1783, this service was severely disrupted by Spain's participation in the Revolutionary War on the side of the USA. Normal service resumed in 1783. Only three letters carried by Spanish Royal Mail Packets between New Orleans and France are known from the 1783 to 1793 period.



Dated October 24, 1792 in New Orleans - postmarked "NUEVA ORLEANS"
New Orleans "YNDIAS" origin marking - prepaid 4 reales to Spain (not marked)
Spanish Royal Mail Packet *El Tucumán* arrived in Coruña, Spain on December 26
16 sols due for overland rate from Spain up to ¼ ounce - received January 31

French Royal Packets

Première Régie: September 1783 – February 1787



The Première Régie operated 31 round-trips between Lorient and New York. It was replaced by the Seconde Régie for financial reasons.

The Régie prepared a “PAQ.L’ORIENT” marking for westbound mail to the USA. Packet charges were 20 sols per simple folded letter, and inland charges in France and the USA varied according to distance.



Dated April 20, 1784 in La Rochelle - sent under cover to an agent in Lorient
Agent posted letter in Lorient - prepaid 20 sols sea postage per manuscript “20” on reverse
Post office transferred mail to agent for Régie, who applied “PAQ.L’ORIENT” marking
Carried by *Le Courier de l’Europe* - left on April 29 and arrived in New York on June 5
No USA postage due since addressed to port of arrival

Only 19 westbound Première Régie covers are known

French Royal Packets

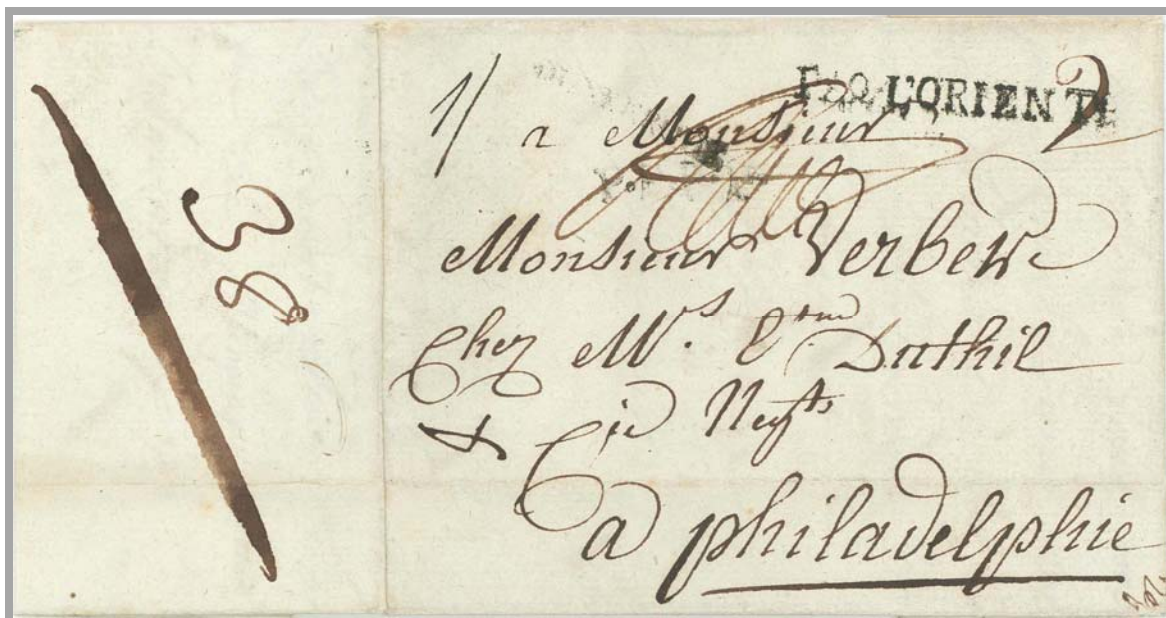
Première Régie: September 1783 – February 1787



Until 1792, USA inland postage was expressed in pennyweights (dwt). 2 dwt was the rate for the 100 miles from New York to Philadelphia.



Dated June 1, 1784 in Nantes - paid 20 sols sea postage per "Port Payé à L'Orient"
Le Courier de New York arrived in New York on August 4 - 2 dwt due in Philadelphia



Posted October 1786 in Dunkerque - straight-line postmark - prepaid 38 sols sea and inland
Le Courier de New York arrived in New York on December 27 - last trip of Première Régie
2 dwt due in Philadelphia - converted to one shilling local postage, including 2d carrier fee

French Royal Packets

Première Régie: September 1783 – February 1787



Sometime between November 1784 and November 1785, the post office began assessing 2 pence due on mail addressed to New York.



Posted August 11, 1784 in Marseille - prepaid 40 sols sea and inland postage

Le Courier de l'Europe arrived in New York on November 4 - no postage due in NY



Posted August 2, 1786 in Marseille - prepaid 40 sols sea and inland postage

“P.PAYE” of Marseille - routed via Paris to Lorient per “P.P.P.P.” marking

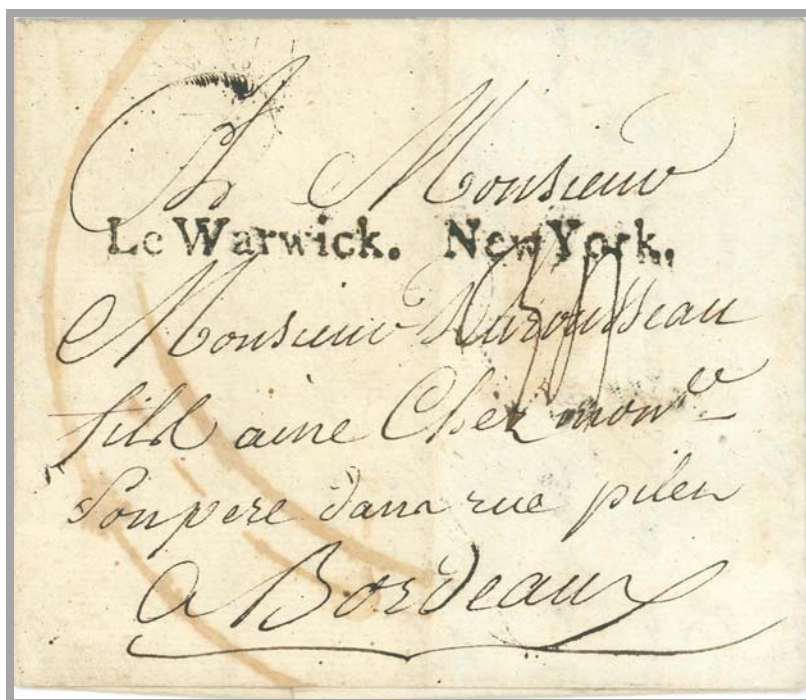
Le Courier de l'Europe arrived in New York on October 22 - 2 pence due in New York

French Royal Packets

Première Régie: September 1783 – February 1787



The French consul was the agent for the Première Régie in New York, and prepared departure markings which incorporated ship-names for each sailing from February 1784 to June 1785. Only ten covers are known, showing eight different ship-name departure markings.



Dated June 8, 1784 in Philadelphia - sent under cover to an agent in New York
Post office transferred mail to Régie which applied "Le Warwick. New York." marking
Carried by *Le Warwick* - left on June 17 and arrived in Lorient on July 14
34 sols due for sea postage plus inland postage to Bordeaux

Only known example of *Le Warwick* departure marking

French Royal Packets

Première Régie: September 1783 – February 1787



Dated March 15, 1784 in Philadelphia - sent under cover to an agent in New York
Post office transferred mail to Régie which applied "Le Courier de New York" marking
Le Courier de New York left on March 20 and arrived in Lorient on April 17 - 32 sols due



Dated July 1, 1784 in Philadelphia - "Le Courier de l'Amérique *New York*" marking
Le Courier de l'Amérique left on August 17 and arrived in Lorient on September 19 - 44 sols due

French Royal Packets

Première Régie: September 1783 – February 1787



The French consul in New York returned to France on June 17, 1785 and no ship-name markings were used after his departure.



Dated December 13, 1784 in Philadelphia - sent under cover to an agent in New York
Régie applied “P. Le Courier de l’Europe capt: CORNIC: New York” departure marking
Le Courier de l’Europe left on December 21 and arrived in Lorient on January 19, 1785
36 sols due for sea postage plus inland postage to Epernay - forwarded to Paris

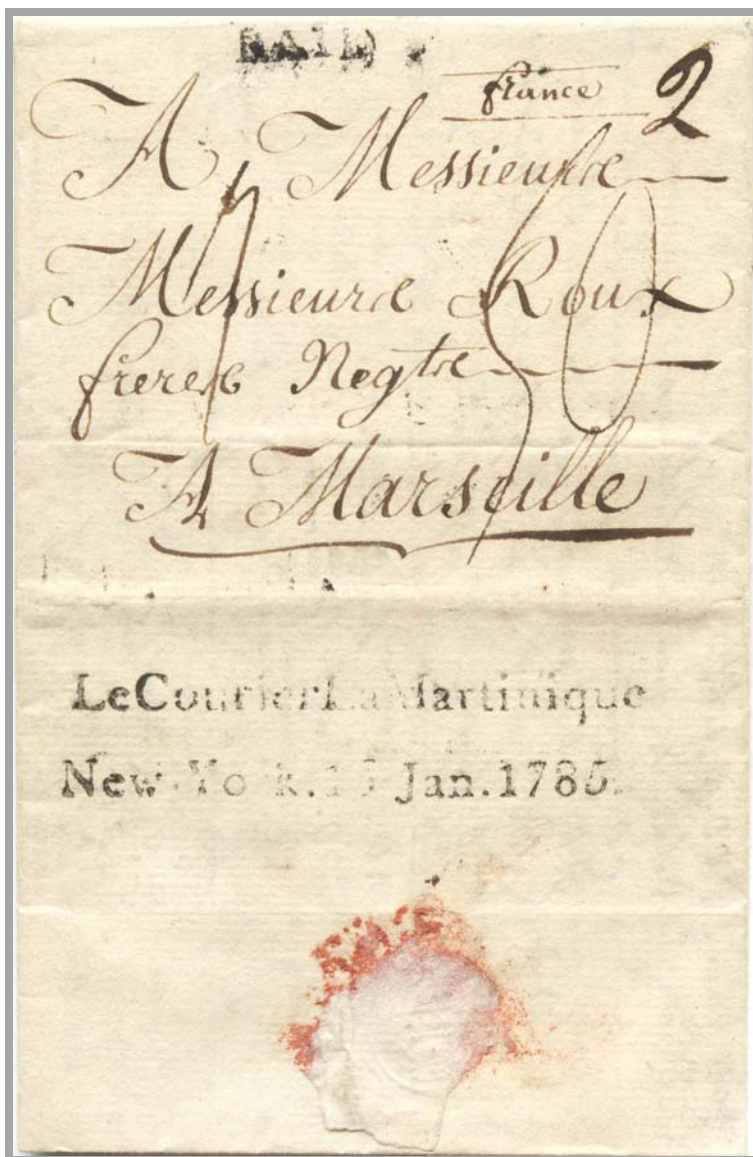
Only known example of a ship-name marking with the Captain’s name

French Royal Packets

Première Régie: September 1783 – February 1787



The ship-name markings were supposed to include the date of departure, but only those from 1785 are dated.



Posted January 12, 1785 in Philadelphia - marked PAID and prepaid 2 dwt to New York
Régie applied "Le Courier La Martinique New York 15 Jan. 1785" departure marking
La Martinique left on January 15 and arrived in Lorient on February 26
50 sols due for sea postage plus inland postage to Marseille

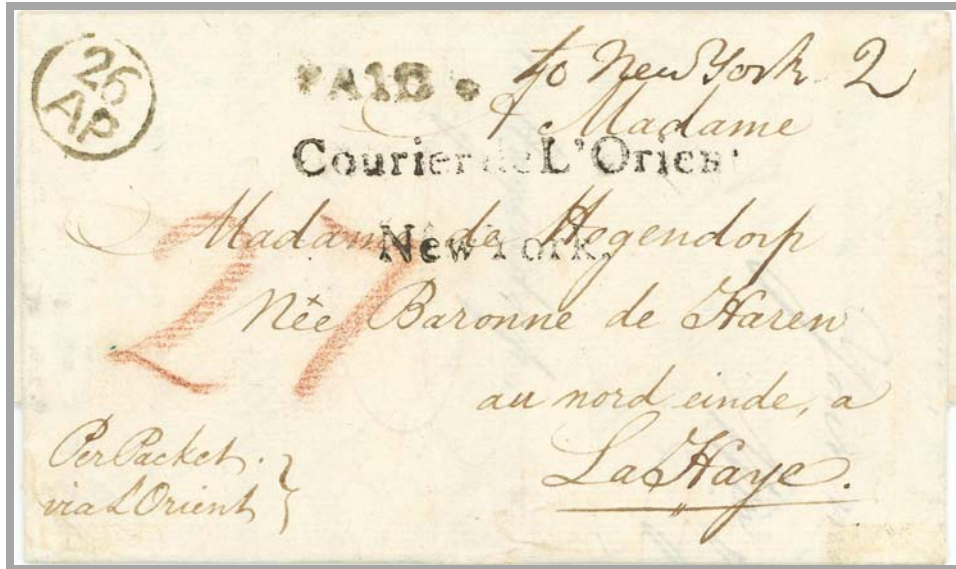
Only known example of *La Martinique* ship-name marking

French Royal Packets

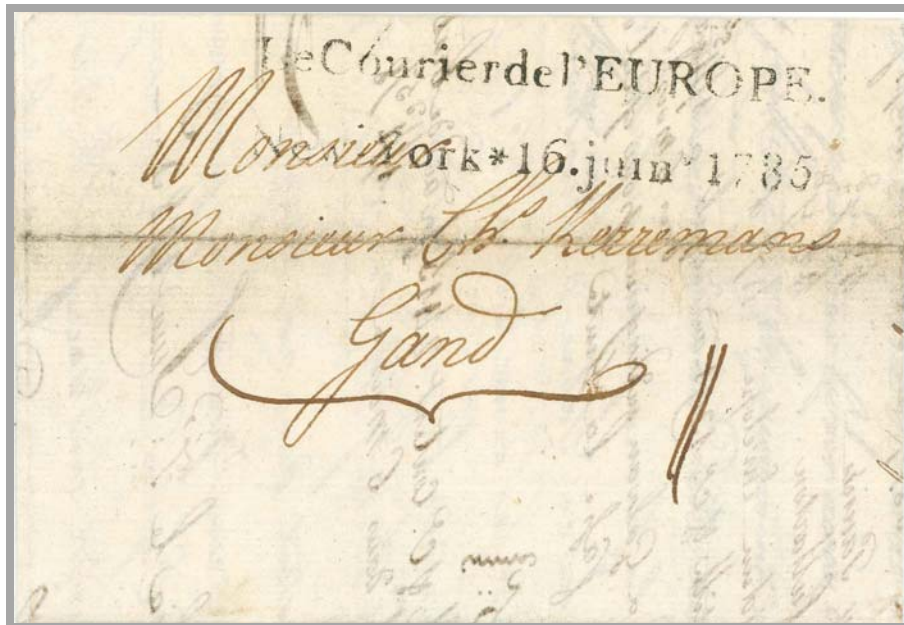
Première Régie: September 1783 – February 1787



The packet service was publicized throughout Europe, and some mail to countries beyond France is known.



Posted April 26, 1784 in Philadelphia - marked PAID and prepaid 2 dwt to New York
“Courier de L’Orient New York” departure marking - 27 stuivers due in Holland



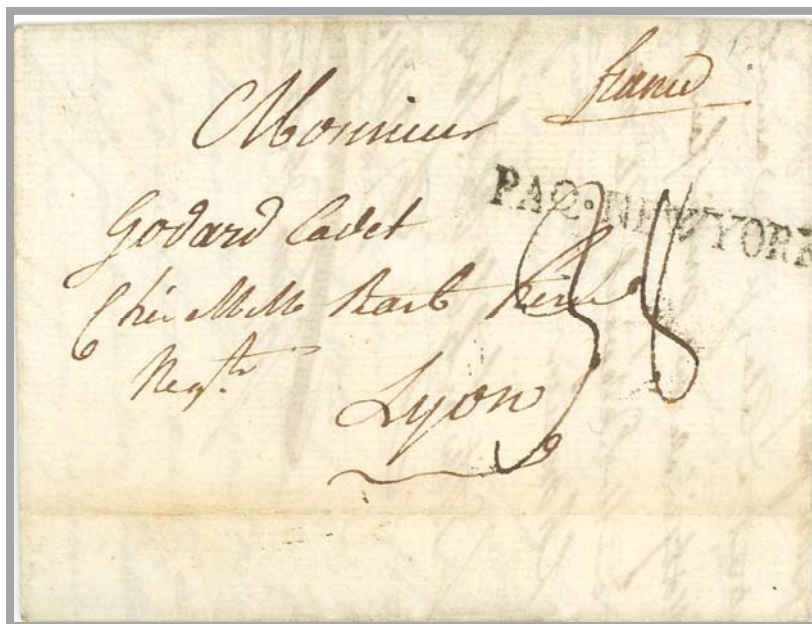
Dated June 7, 1785 in Philadelphia - sent under cover to agent in New York
“Le Courier de l’Europe New York * 16 juin 1785” departure marking
11 Brabant sols due in Belgium - packet postage prepaid by sender to consul in New York

French Royal Packets

Première Régie: September 1783 – February 1787



The replacement New York agent for the Régie created a uniform “PAQ.NEWYORK” departure marking, starting with the sailing which left on September 18, 1785.



Dated January 10, 1786 in Philadelphia - sent under cover to an agent in New York

Agent for Régie applied straight-line “PAQ.NEWYORK” departure marking

Le Courier de l'Europe left on January 23 and arrived in Lorient on February 18

38 sols due for sea postage plus inland postage to Lyon

Only three examples of the PAQ.NEWYORK marking known used during 1e Régie

French Royal Packets

Seconde Régie: September 1787 – July 1788



The Seconde Régie operated ten round-trips between Le Havre and New York. It was discontinued for financial reasons.

This Régie used the same “PAQ.L’ORIENT” marking for westbound mail as during the Première Régie, so the handstamp was transferred to Le Havre along with the ships and crews.



Originated July 1787 in Le Havre - prepaid double-weight 30 sols sea postage (over 1 oz.)

Post office transferred mail to Régie which applied “PAQ.L’ORIENT” marking

Le Maréchal de Castries left on August 10 and arrived in New York on September 21

Double-sheet 6 dwt 16 grains due for 202 miles - re-stated to 2 shillings 10d local postage

October 22, 1787 docketed receipt for ship captain in Baltimore

Only two westbound Seconde Régie covers are known

French Royal Packets

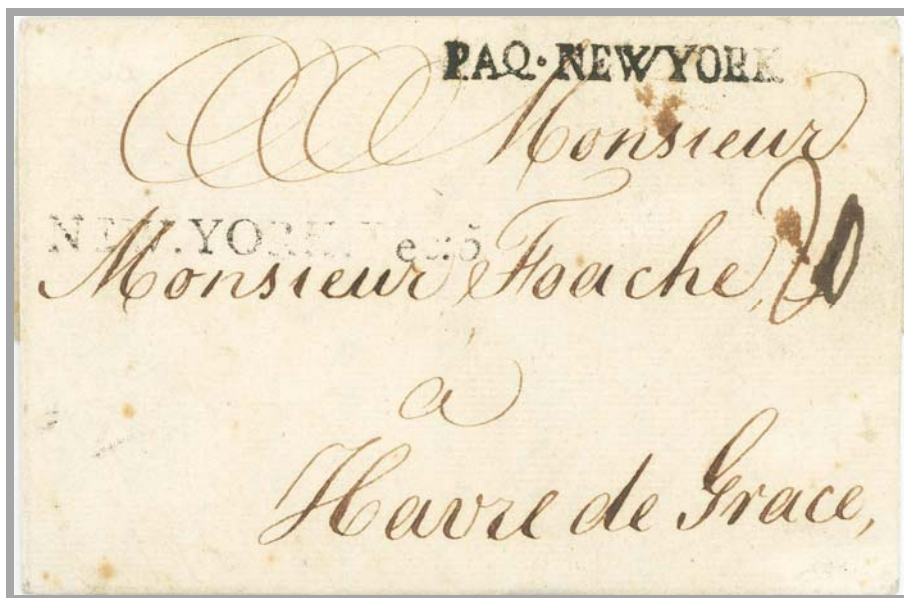
Seconde Régie: September 1787 – July 1788



The Seconde Régie used the 1e Régie “PAQ.NEWYORK” marking for eastbound mail. Only five examples are known.



Dated May 26, 1787 in New York - “PAQ.NEWYORK” departure marking
Le Courier de l’Orient left on June 10 and arrived in Le Havre on July 9
Red “NEW-YORCK PAR LE HAVRE” French entry marking - 41 sols due



Posted December 5, 1787 in New York - “PAQ.NEWYORK” departure marking
Le Courier de l’Europe arrived in Le Havre on January 19 - 20 sols sea postage due

French Royal Packets

Troisième Régie: March 1789 – May 1793



Benjamin Dubois' Troisième Régie received a Royal subsidy of 6,000 livres per successful round-trip voyage. It operated 21 round-trips between Bordeaux/Lorient and New York. War with England in 1793 ended the service.



Posted February 1, 1792 in St Quentin - prepaid per red Paris "P.P.P.P." marking

Le Washington left Lorient on April 10 and arrived in New York on June 7

No USA postage due - French consul arranged for private delivery to Boston

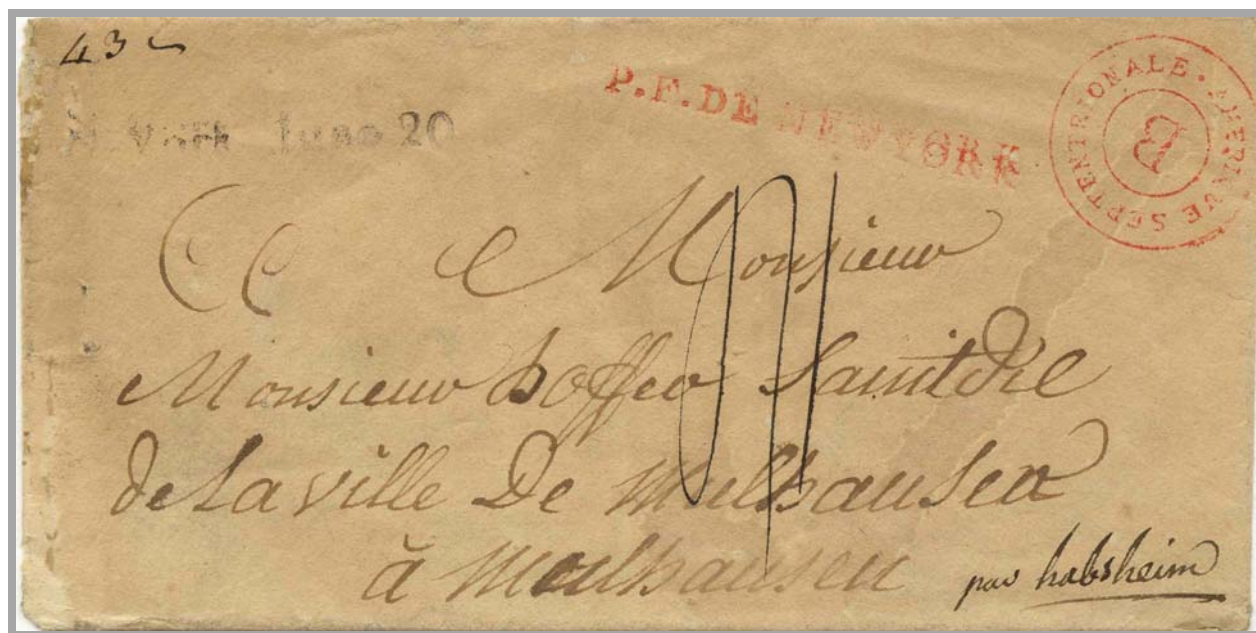
No distinctive postmarks on westbound mail were used

French Royal Packets

Troisième Régie: March 1789 – May 1793



The Troisième Régie introduced new types of New York departure markings. In 1789, it used a red “P.F. DE NEW YORK” (Paquebot Français de New York) marking. This same marking, in black, was re-used in 1792-93.



Dated June 12, 1789 in Philadelphia - posted June 20 in New York

Agent for the Régie applied red “P.F. DE NEW YORK” marking

Télémaque left on July 1 and arrived in Bordeaux on August 19

Bordeaux entry mark “AMERIQUE SEPTENTRIONALE B” - 41 sols assessed

Additional 2 sols to independent Republic of Mulhouse - 43 sols total due

Only known example of red Bordeaux entry marking

French Royal Packets

Troisième Régie: March 1789 – May 1793



Two of the first six voyages of the Troisième Régie returned to Bordeaux, so the post office created a special “AMERIQUE SEPTENTRIONALE B” entry marking. It is known in black or red ink.



Posted December 31, 1789 in Philadelphia - prepaid triple 4 dwt rate to New York

Agent for the Troisième Régie applied red “P.F. DE NEW YORK” marking

Télémaque left New York on January 4 and arrived in Bordeaux on February 20

Black Bordeaux entry marking “AMERIQUE SEPTENTRIONALE B” - 35 sols due

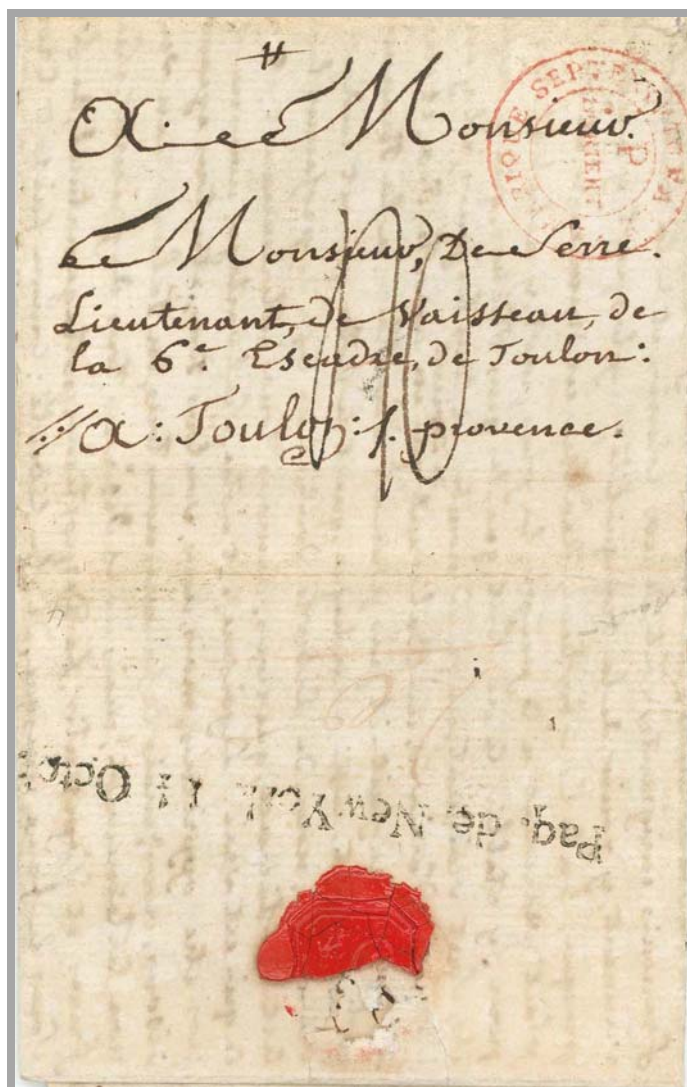
Only known example of black Bordeaux entry marking

French Royal Packets

Troisième Régie: March 1789 – May 1793



In May 1790, Dubois shifted operations to Lorient, so the final 15 voyages returned to that city. The post office created a special red “AMERIQUE SEPTENTRIONALE P LORIENT” entry marking for the service.



Dated October 2, 1791 in New York - no USA postage paid

Agent for the Troisième Régie applied dated “Paq. de New York 14 Octb.” marking

Le Suffren left New York on October 14 and arrived in Lorient on November 22

Red Lorient entry marking “AMERIQUE SEPTENTRIONALE P LORIENT” - 40 sols due

Nine examples known of red Lorient entry marking

French Royal Packets

Troisième Régie: March 1789 – May 1793



In 1792-93, the Régie's agent re-used the "P. F. DE NEW YORK" marks.



Posted January 28, 1793 in Elizabethtown, NJ - prepaid 6¢ for under 30 miles to New York
Black "P. F. DE NEW YORK" - *Washington* arrived in Lorient on April 8- 27 sous due



Dated February 12, 1793 in New York - given directly to captain of *Le Suffren* which left February 18
Not handled by agent, so no New York markings - last voyage of the Royal packets - arrived May 14, 1793