

**FREE FRANKING &  
PRE-1789: AMERICAN COLONIAL MILITARY MAIL:**

Military Postal History Symposium  
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Presented By

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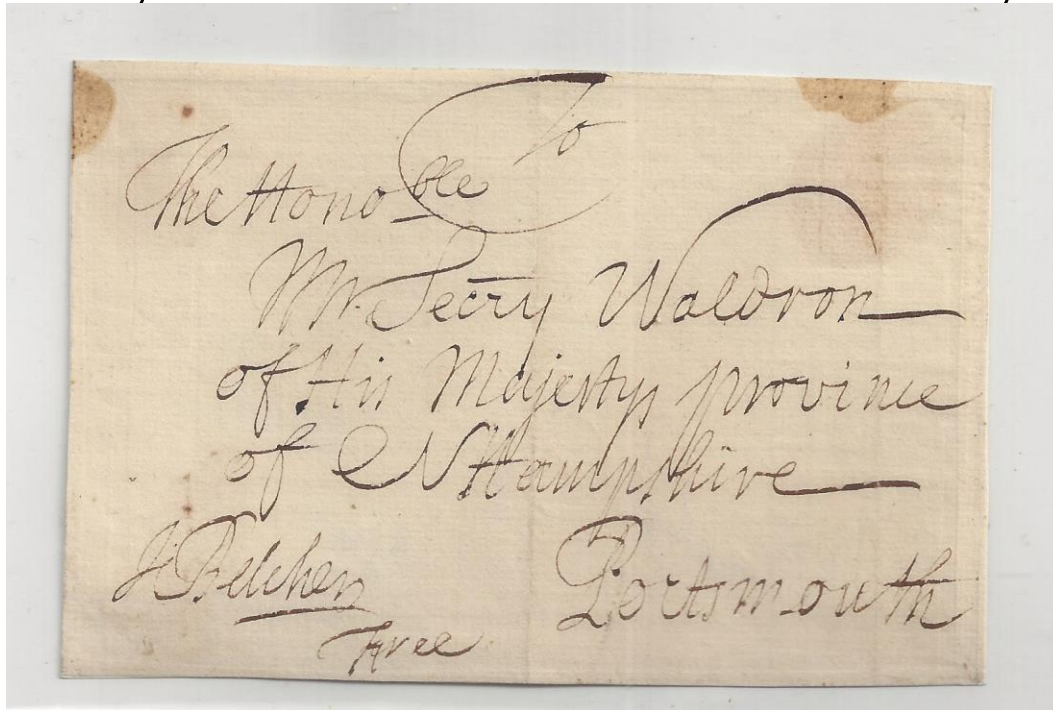
# TOPICS

- Genesis of Free Franking Privileges
- Presentation covers following examples
- Pre Independence Examples
  - 1739-41: Jonathan Belcher, Governor of Massachusetts Bay
  - 1761: President Colden, General Assembly of Colony of New York
- Post Independence: Military Mail
  - 1777-78: General Smallwood (Later Governor of Maryland)
  - 1778: Jer. Powell President of Council of Chambers, State of Massachusetts to Brigadier Oliver Prescott, Groton, Mass.
    - To be presented in upcoming MPHS article centered on colonial militias
  - 1778: Charles Petit Secretary to Governor of NJ
  - 1779: Colonel George Letter
  - 1780: James Sutton, Board of War, Philadelphia
  - 1785: Timothy Pickering Quarter Master General, Sec of War, Post Master General, and Secretary of State

# Franking Privilege: Historical Development by Congressional Analyst

- Origins of the Franking Privilege: British Colonial Period
  - 1660: British House of Commons instituted free mail to many colonial officials.
- Pre-1789 Period:
  - In 1775 the First Continental Congress passed legislation giving Members mailing privileges so they could communicate with their constituents, as well as giving free mailing privileges to soldiers;
  - In 1782, under the Articles of Confederation, the Continental Congress granted its members, the heads of various departments, and military officers the right to send and receive letters, packets, and dispatches under the free frank.

# Circa 1739-41: Jonathan Belcher, Governor of Massachusetts Bay Free Frank to Secretary Waldron of New Hampshire



The Honorable To  
Mr. Secry Waldron  
of His Majesty's province  
of New Hampshire  
Belcher Free Portsmouth



**Circa 1739-1741:** Free frank signature of J. Belcher on an address panel to Secretary Waldron of His Majesty's province of New Hampshire. Jonathan Belcher was the Governor of Massachusetts Bay and New Hampshire from 1730 to 1741. Waldron was a close ally and friend of Belcher against the Wentworths in New Hampshire who were advocating NH to a separate province. Both Belcher and Waldron were replaced in 1741! Correspondence from Governor Belcher to Secretary Waldron was recorded in 1739 as per following

Reference: <https://books.google.com/books?id=XfM7AAAAIAAJ&pg=PA89&lpg=PA89&dq=to+Richard+Waldron,+the+Secretary+of+His+Majesty%E2%80%99s+Province+of+N.+H+ampshire,+Portsmouth&source=bl&ots=0yAZYC8XsA&sig=cTNYgaS9yWSgz74iXInSlfGCOzE&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjWm6bzip3RAhUC2GMKHXgDCykQ6AEIGjAA#v=onepage&q=to%20Richard%20Waldron%2C%20the%20Secretary%20of%20His%20Majesty%E2%80%99s%20Province%20of%20N.%20Hampshire%2C%20Portsmouth&f=false>



# 1761: Official OHMS Letter from President Colden General Assembly of Colony of New York

1761

On his Majesty's Service  
- Aug. 1761 -  
To Thyer Schermerhorn Esq<sup>r</sup>  
Township of Schenectady  
Albany

New York 6 August 1761

Sir

The General Assembly having  
adjourned by Proclamation to Tues-  
day the First day of September next  
then to meet to proceed on business  
I have his Honour the President's direc-  
tions to acquaint you therewith and  
that he expects you will punctually  
attend on that day —

I am Sir  
Your most Obedient  
Humble servant  
J. Cadwallader

Thyer Schermerhorn Esq<sup>r</sup>

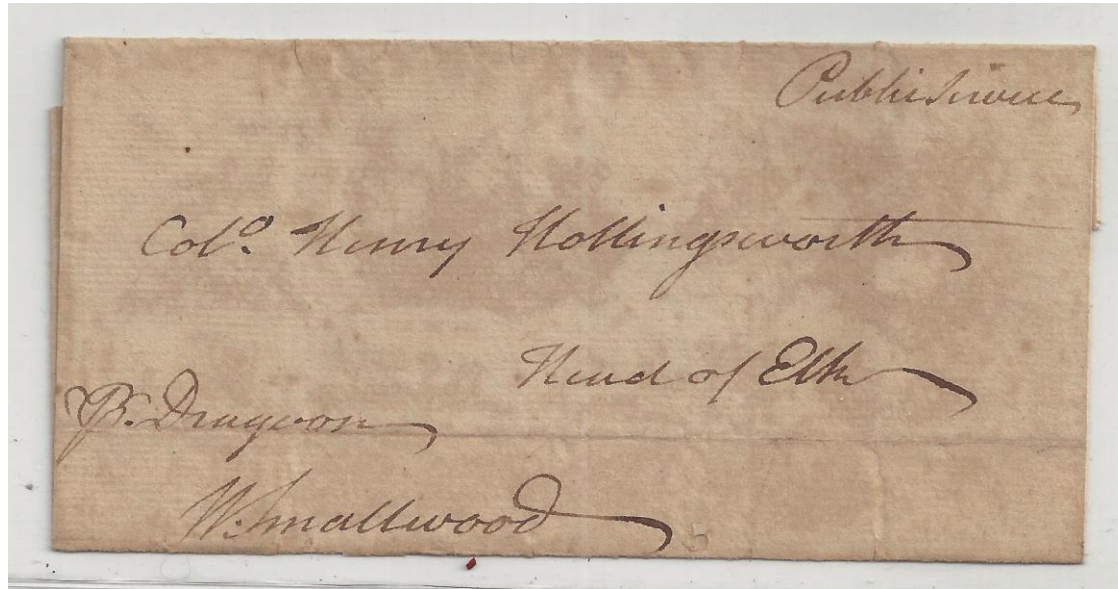
6 August 1761: An official letter addressed to Thyer Schermerhorn at Schenectady, NY with "On His Majesty's Service" free frank from President Colden of General Assembly of NY Colony.

Letter advises that the General Assembly had adjourned in August 1761 and that President Cadwallader Colden had directed Thyer Schermerhorn of Schenectady NY to attend the next meeting on September 1, 1761. Cadwallader Colden was also the acting governor of Province of New York for His Majesty's Government.

# Challenges of American Revolutionary War:

- During the American Revolutionary war period of first 20 years of independence, the predominant issues, and challenges of fighting the British Army were of organizing, paying for and availability of provisions, and logistics of transport for various militias organized by the states and newly proclaimed independent government of USA.
- Quarter Master General and their staff played a critical role in successfully fending off British Army who kept trying to recapture the lost provinces by His Majesty's government.
- Effective communication was critical between the Federal military leaders and state officers and soldiers in the field.
- Free franking, also called "On Public Service", was essential due to paucity of funding by the US and state militias.

# 1777-78: General Smallwood to Colonel Hollingsworth, Head of Elk, Maryland



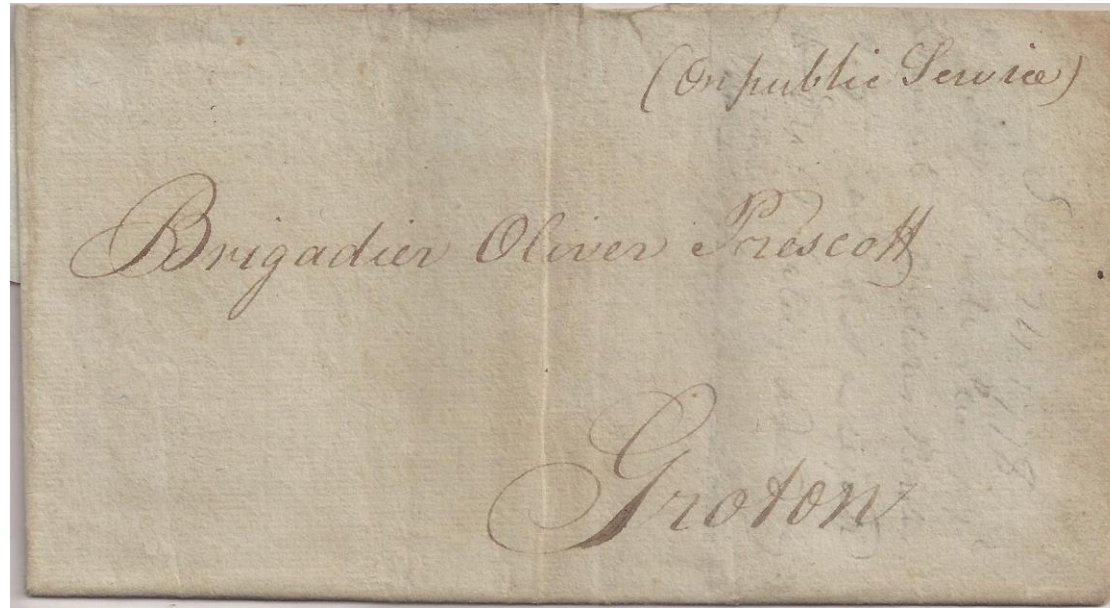
Circa 1777-1778: Outer page of letter from General William Smallwood (Maryland) to Colonel Henry Hollingsworth at Head of Elk in Maryland who was Quarter Master General responsible for providing provisions to the American troops. Front bears "Public Service" and signature of W. Smallwood.

Communications from Smallwood and from General Washington to Colonel Henry Hollingsworth address the problem of inadequate provisions or clothes for American Soldiers who were fighting the British Army trying to reach Philadelphia to recapture.

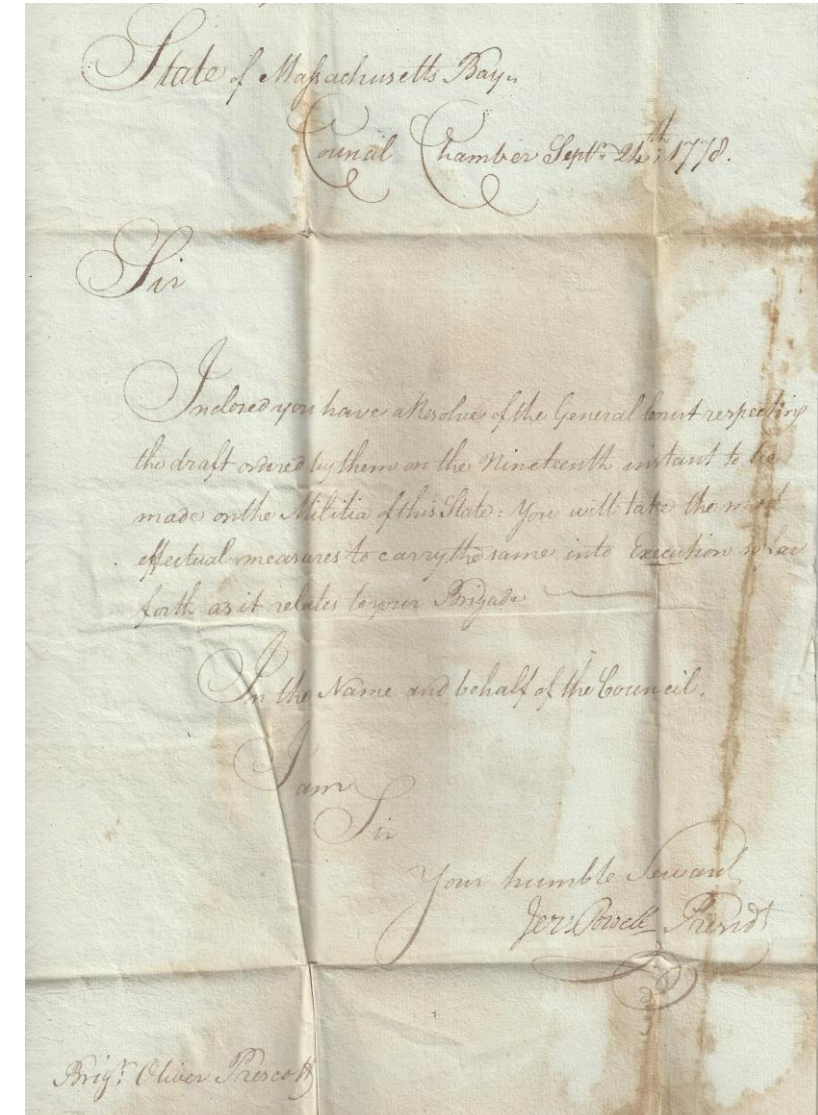
General William  
Smallwood, later  
Governor of Maryland



# 1778: Jer. Powell President of Council of Chambers, State of Massachusetts to Brigadier Oliver Prescott, Groton, Mass.

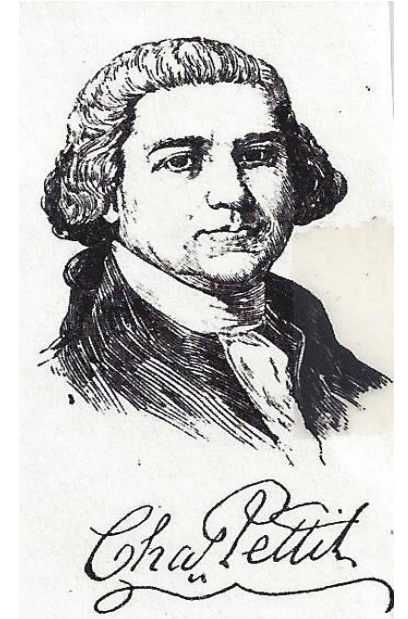


24 September 1778: Folded letter with "(On Public Service)" to Brigadier Oliver Prescott, Groton, Massachusetts. Letter head lined, "State of Massachusetts Bay, Council of Chambers, Sept. 24, 1778" and the official letter signed, Jer. Powell, President (For Jeremiah Powell who was President of Council of Chambers and had extensive communications with Samuel Adams and other founding fathers) to Brig General (Dr.) Powell. Letter refers to recent directives for the state Militias and directing Brig General to execute orders for his militias..."



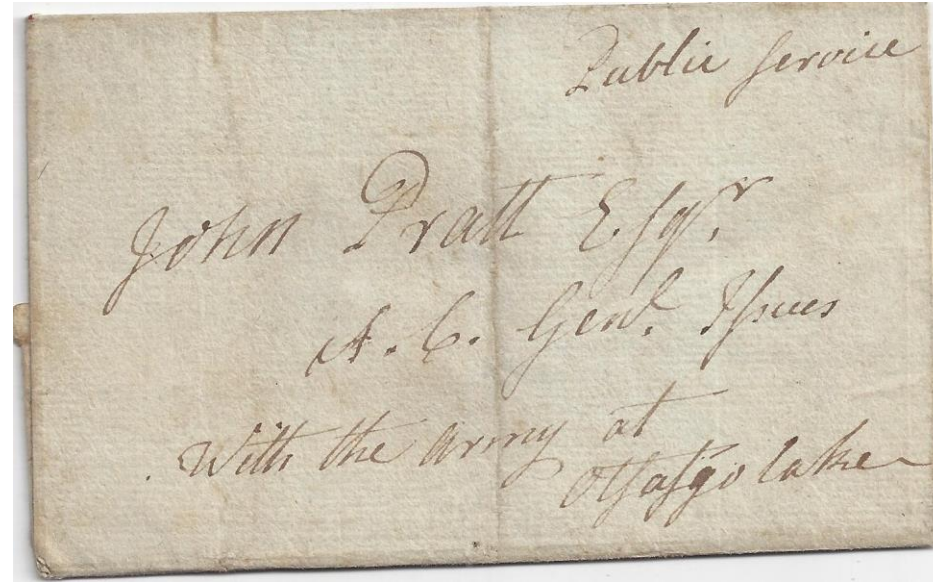


# 1778: Charles Petit Secretary to Governor of NJ to DDM General Jehermiah Hubbard



23 Sept 1778: Official letter from Charles Petit, then Secretary to Governor William Livingston of New Jersey with his signature and manuscript marking, "Public Service. It is addressed to Jehermiah Hubbard, D.D.M. General at Hartford, (Conn.). Hubbard was appointed 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Master General by General N. Greene. No content.

# 1779 Colonel George Letter to John Pratt, AC General, Army at Otsago Lake, New York



26 June 1779: Official letter from Colonel George Letter with “Public Service” marking to (Captain) John Pratt, A.C. General Subs with Army at Otsego Lake. No content

Captain John Pratt was Assistant Commissary General of Subsistence and was part of volunteers under the command of John Harper that participated in General George Clinton’s Portage March from Mohawk River to Otsego Lake on June 26<sup>th</sup> 1779 and established Camp Liberty in Low’s Grove on the West side of Mount Wellington. It was then in position to guard the embarkation point at Hyde Bay for attack from the West.



# 1780: James Sutton, Board of War, Philadelphia to Major Gordon, Trenton, NJ



Sir I have received orders from the Board of War, to send Shallops to convey the Maryland Troops by Water from Trenton to Christeen — for which I have agreed with Capt. Allen, Capt. Thompson, & others and the remainder shall forward as soon as possible, — you will please to stop Capt. Allen, Schoon and any others, that should be wanted.

Phila. April 11. 1780

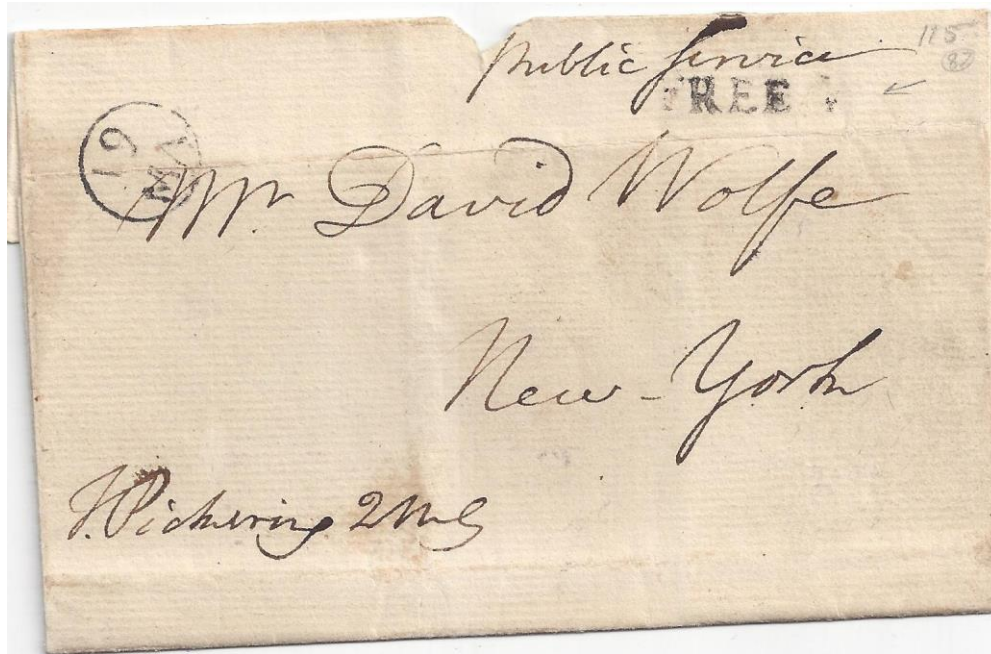
Yours most humble servant  
James Sutton  
Attd. Sec.

Major Gordon

Letter from James Sutton, APD (In Captain James Brown's Company) in Philadelphia. Letter addressed to Major Gordon, Trenton (NJ) with "On Public Service" marking. Major Gordon was in charge of the Continental Store in Trenton NJ for the Continental Army.

Letter refers to directives from the Board of War to send shallops (shallow boats) to transport Maryland Troops from Trenton to Christeen. Mentions agreement with two to three captains for transport as soon as possible. Also, provides a muster (Roll call of names of 12 soldiers) for transport on Shallops.

1785: Timothy Pickering Quarter Master General Free Frank to David Wolfe, Assistant QMG, New York With "FREE" and "19 MA" Bishop Cancel



19 May 1785: FL from Timothy Pickering (Quarter Master General) FL to Mr. David Wolfe Assistant Quarter Master General in New York, Cover bears "FREE" and bishop cancel " 19 MA" No Content. But very scarce of T Pickering free frank when he was Quarter Master General of the Continental Army. He was elected QMG by Continental Congress on August 5 1780 and served till July 25, 1785 ! Later Timothy Pickering became Post Master General, Secretary of War and finally was appointed Secretary of State by President George Washington.



# CONCLUSION

- Free Franking Privilege during American Revolutionary period was a legacy of British system of free franking started by British House of Commons in 1660 and applied to Colonial America and continued by the newly independent Continental Congress of America
- Free franking privilege to both the Continental Congress and State Government officials as well as to the Continental and State military officers was essential for timely communications between government and military officials including state militia.
- Free franking was signified by following markings:
  - Free
  - On His Majesty's Service
  - On Public Service or Public Service