
The Travers Papers
Original Post Office Documents and Typewritten Copies
1847 to 1910

FINDING GUIDE

Prepared by
Cheryl R. Ganz, Chief Curator of Philately
Michael Plett, Assistant Curator
Ken Gilbert, Assistant Curator



Arthur M. Travers
1870-1951



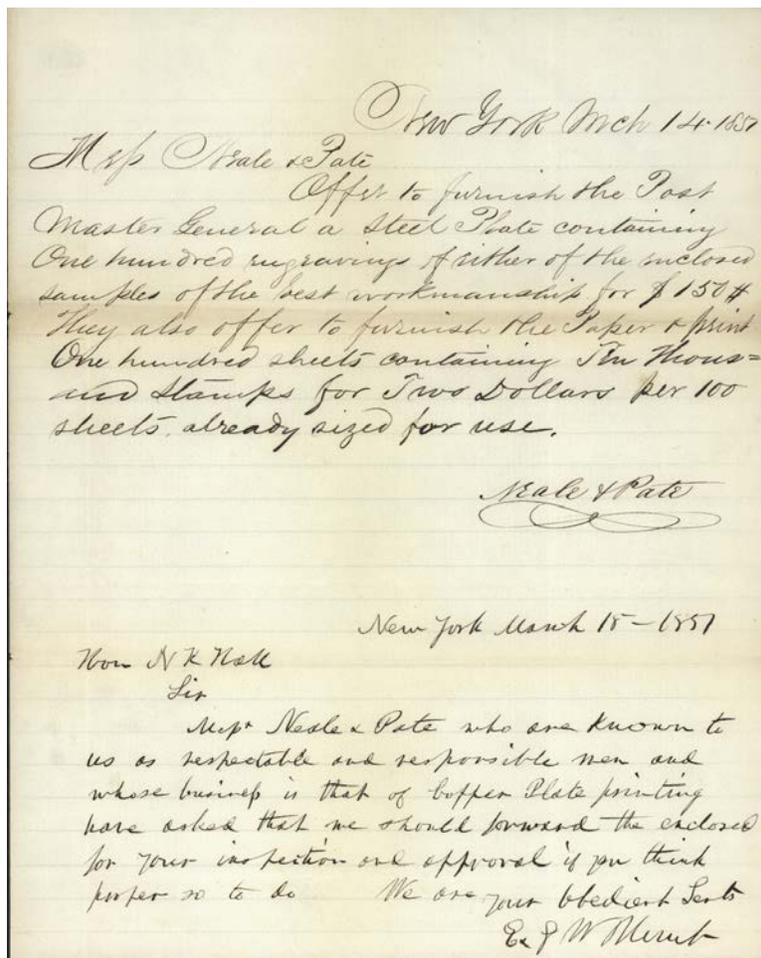
Smithsonian
National Postal Museum

This finding guide will be available online at
<http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/findingguides/index.html>
Check online to be certain you have the latest revision. March 2014 version.

Table of Contents

The Travers Papers

Collection Scope & Content.....	3
Provenance.....	6
Narrative Description.....	7
Collections Inventory.....	8
Bibliography.....	12



The original proposal of Neale Pate to print the 1851 series of postage stamps with a recommendation by P.W. Merub appended. Box 6, Folder 1.

The Travers Papers

COLLECTION SCOPE & CONTENT

This collection of over 4,000 pages will make available to historians and collectors official documents relating to the production of United States postage stamps from 1847 to 1910. Except for small bits of information that have occasionally come to light, these have been unavailable for the past 100 years. Even before their disappearance, researchers could access neither the documents nor the information they contained because officials at the Post Office Department felt no obligation to share this data with the public.

The *Guide to the Archives of the Government of the United States in Washington* of the Carnegie Institution of Washington gives some idea of the enormous number of documents in the office of the chief clerk of the Third Assistant Postmaster General as late as 1907¹:

1. Letter-books, January 1, 1850—December 23, 1887 (20 vols.); press copies, May 11, 1859, to date (about 1,000 vols.)
2. Index to letter-books, July 1863, to date (42 vols.). Before 1863 each letter-book contained its own index
3. Register of letters received, January 2, 1864, to date (62 vols.)
4. Record of registered matter received, March 3, 1883, to date (8 vols.)

The *Guide* also mentioned the card index “to all important material maintained in the office of the chief clerk,” which was prepared by Arthur M. Travers. These documents were not saved except for some papers in the National Archives and Records Administration and the Smithsonian National Postal Museum.

The key figure in the preservation of these records and their subsequent disappearance is Arthur M. Travers. He was born in Port Huron, Michigan, on May 29, 1870, and he became a stamp collector at an early age. Even though educated as a lawyer, his collecting interest led him to seek employment at the Post Office Department. He entered service in 1889 at Detroit. In 1901 he moved to Washington after being appointed Confidential Clerk to Edwin Madden, a fellow Detroitier who was the Third Assistant Postmaster General. Two years later, he became the Chief Clerk, holding that position until he was dismissed from the service in 1911. While Chief Clerk, he served as Acting Third Assistant Postmaster General during the absence of the incumbent.

His position put him in constant touch with collectors and dealers who wrote the Third Assistant Postmaster General for data about postage stamps, and his plan soon became well known. On December 15, 1910, *The Philatelic Gazette* published a congratulatory note²:

¹ Claude Halstead Van Tyne and Waldo Gifford Leland, *Guide to the Archives of the Government of the United States in Washington*, Second Edition (Washington: The Carnegie Institution of Washington: 1907), 166-167.

² *The Philatelic Gazette*, (December 15, 1910), Vol. 1, #4, 66.

Old Correspondence

Mr. Arthur M. Travers, Acting Third Assistant Postmaster General, deserves the gratitude of all serious philatelists for the work in which he is now engaged. A vast aggregation of old correspondence amounting to over 400,000 individual papers have been carefully searched before being destroyed for records which might be of interest to philately in some way. All of these are being collated according to subjects, and will some day be available for publication. Mr. Travers is in fact engaged in compiling statistics and data [from] the postal records which will be of great interest to philatelists.

By the end of 1910, after many months of intensive work by both Travers and his staff, a great mass of official Post Office Department documents relating to philatelic matters had been identified and transcribed by typewriter or summarized in preparation for the work, which was to be titled "United States Postage Stamps: A Compilation of the Official Historical Records." Nine manuscript pages of the introduction to this work had been completed when disaster struck.

The flaw in Travers's character seems to have been a disregard of the impropriety of self-dealing as a government official. Travers continued as an avid collector of United States stamps after his employment in the office of the Third Assistant Postmaster General. The official in this position was in charge of contracting for stamp production and distribution. Travers frequently received specimens as gifts from other government officials and employees. When the Department was in possession of multiple copies of a particular specimen, he seems not to have hesitated to appropriate one or more examples for himself, although he sometimes claimed these were for illustrations in his proposed book. He also fell into the trap of accepting stamps for his collection from collector/dealers (particularly Joseph A. Steinmetz of Philadelphia) and giving in exchange duplicates from the files of the Department.

In early 1909, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing began experiments with a different kind of paper for printing stamps. The goal was to correct perforation problems with the regular wood pulp paper caused by uneven shrinkage during the printing process. This experimental paper had a 30% rag content, which gave it a bluish-gray cast. Initially, the paper was used to print a limited number of sheets of the current 1¢ and 2¢ regular issue of 1908, as well as the 2¢ Lincoln commemorative issue. These sheets on the experimental paper were sent out for normal distribution to post offices, the Bureau considering them not particularly distinctive. Collectors, however, were of a different mind. When the experimental nature of the paper became known, there was a furor as they attempted to obtain copies for their collections, and prices naturally escalated rapidly.

The generally accepted version of the story is that Steinmetz used his friendship with Travers to persuade him to steal part or all of the 200 blue paper examples of each denomination that were scheduled for destruction. He was to give them to Steinmetz for sale through the Philadelphia Stamp Company. For performing this service, Travers was to receive a "commission" of \$1,500.³

³ Stanley M. Bierman, "Joseph A. Steinmetz," *More of the World's Greatest Stamp Collectors* (Sidney, Ohio: Linn's Stamp News, 1990), 17.

On March 6, 1911, Travers was dismissed as the Chief Clerk to the Third Assistant Postmaster General and was arrested by Post Office Inspectors, charged with the unlawful disposal of stamps while they were in his custody when he was the Acting Third Assistant Postmaster General. Also on that day, Postmaster General Frank H. Hitchcock issued the following statement:⁴

Postmaster General Hitchcock issued an order today dismissing from the service Arthur M. Travers, chief clerk to the Third Assistant Postmaster General. This dismissal is the result of an investigation initiated by the postmaster-general over a year ago, which culminated yesterday in Mr. Travers' confession to post office inspectors that he had been guilty of dishonest practices in the disposal of valuable postage stamps.

Mr. Travers' offense consisted in causing certain stamps to be manipulated so as to create fictitious market value. In his official capacity he caused to be delivered to himself certain rare stamps of great value and falsified the records of his office by certifying that a portion of these stamps were legally destroyed after condemnation. Instead of having them destroyed, however, he withheld them and substituted stamps in current use to an amount equal to those condemned, disposing of the obsolete issue at a very large profit. While the philatelic value of the stamps so disposed of exceeded \$10,000; the government has suffered no pecuniary loss because of Mr. Travers' manipulations in substituting stamps of current issue to the face value of those he sold to dealers.

The case was presented to a grand jury and on April 3, 1911, indictments were handed down in two cases—one against Travers alone and one against both Travers and Steinmetz as co-conspirators. Each of the defendants pleaded not guilty.

A year and a half after the indictments were handed down, Travers and his attorney apparently negotiated a plea bargain with the prosecutor under which Travers agreed to pay a fine of \$1,500. This was the amount he had received from Steinmetz for the blue paper stamps he had appropriated. The deal was made in October 1912, and on October 29th, the prosecutor entered a *nolle prosequi* (an action by which he declared that he would no longer prosecute), ending the case against Travers.

In 1912, after his conviction, Travers and his manuscript disappeared from the philatelic world. He fell back on his legal training. After practicing law for a time, in 1917 he was employed by the Commerce and Industry Association of New York as the manager of its legislative service in Albany and New York City. He retired in 1941, moved to Clearwater, Florida, in 1946, and died there on December 8, 1951, at age 81. Apparently he did not revisit his work with the Post Office documents. His original intention was to publish them in a public document, which he could not do after he was dismissed from the Post Office. The "Travers Papers" were government property and presumably held by the Post Office Department or destroyed by them.

⁴ *Philadelphia Stamp News*, (March 17, 1911) Vol. 1, No. 51, 1.

PROVENANCE

What had happened to the Travers manuscript and the original records upon which they had been based? The first hint that all was not lost came from Travers' co-defendant. Steinmetz. In 1913 he mounted a campaign to acquire the Visitors' Cup for his exhibit at the 1913 International Philatelic Exhibition in New York City. In an effort to influence the voting on the Cup, he published a pamphlet describing the exhibit, titled *1913 International Philatelic Exhibition: Steinmetz Miscellany*. The most remarkable part of the exhibit consisted of copies of letters between the Post Office Department and the engraving firm of Toppan, Carpenter, Casilear & Co., concerning the stamps produced by that company for the government. The text of these letters was illustrated by examples of the stamps, proofs, and essays described in them. These letters were part of the Travers Papers, but Steinmetz did not acknowledge their source, nor did he say if these were all he had. He never published any more of the Papers. Steinmetz died on July 11, 1928.

It was not until 1948 that any interest was expressed in print over the fate of the original documents on which the Travers manuscript had been based. In that year Clarence W. Brazer published his *Essay Proof Journal* article that contained Travers' "Outline" of his project. Brazer had acquired this document along with the Lawyer's File from the Steinmetz estate through stamp dealer Eugene Klein. In this article he described his search for the original documents and his eventual success in locating them in the Post Office Department library⁵:

Mr. Klein some 20 years ago told me about these letters, some of which Steinmetz published as to the 1851-60 issue in 1913, but I was told the government agents seized most of the letters when he was arrested. I tried to trace these letters at the P.O.D. but was then informed that they must have been destroyed. However, when the P.O.D. moved from the old to the new buildings about 10 or more years ago a vault was opened and most of the original contracts and letters were then found. I made influential contacts and was then permitted to copy the contracts, some of which I have published. Some of the letters are now filed in bundles in the P.O.D. Library and last year I searched these and copied many of them, but they are not in order and only a comparatively scattered few were then available...

Subsequent inquiry at both the Post Office Department and the National Archives indicated that neither of these institutions had any such letters or contracts at that time. No one doubted Brazer, but the assumption again was that these had been destroyed in the interim.

It is now clear that these originals survived into the 1950s at the Post Office Department. At that time Stanley Hodziewich, now deceased, was an employee of the Department. He has written that one day he came upon these papers dumped in a hallway, slated for destruction. With the permission of his superiors, he retrieved them and eventually passed them to a philatelic scholar.

Then, in 1993 the 747th auction catalog of the Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc. contained the following lot:

⁵ Clarence W. Brazer, "Two Lost Manuscripts on U.S. Essays and Proofs," *The Essay Proof Journal* (July 1948), 144.

THE PAPERS OF A. M. TRAVERS

1150 United States Postage Stamps. A Compilation of the Official Historical Records from 1840 to 1910. By A. M. Travers. Mr. Travers was Chief Clerk, Third Assistant Postmaster General, and his 80-year old unpublished manuscript, consisting of many hundreds of typed and hand-written pages, never really progressed beyond the raw data stage, nevertheless it offers the student a rare opportunity to organize and interpret, with possibly a discovery or two waiting to be made. Offered for the first time.

These were acquired by Jack Rosenthal, a prominent philatelic scholar, who has served as Chair of the Philatelic Foundation and Chair of the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee of the United States Postal Service. It is through his generosity to the National Postal Museum that the Travers Papers are finally being published, almost 100 years after their collection.

The Rosenthal archive contains multiple copies of many of Travers' typed letters, the beginning draft of his projected book, his research notes and what appear to be all of his manuscript analyses and spread sheets. Very few of the letters are typed on the linen sheets described by Travers. It does not have a uniform number of copies of each item. In addition, the National Archives has a number of letters that are not in the Rosenthal typescripts. These may have been overlooked by Travers in his sorting routine or perhaps were thought by him not to be of sufficient importance to copy. All of these circumstances taken together make it certain that the Papers as they existed when Travers had them have been selectively plundered over the years. The National Postal Museum is very interested in recovering as much of this material as possible. Please contact the Curator of Philately if you have some to share with the philatelic community.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

In 1997, George W. Brett donated Travers papers about the 1847 first issue. He credited Stanley Hodziewich for saving the documents from destruction, even though he did not realize the significance of what he was saving.

In 2009, Jack Rosenthal and his sons Michael, Robert and Richard, selected the National Postal Museum for donation of the balance of these Travers Papers. The donation was made in honor of Tom Alexander and in memory of Wilson Hulme, in recognition of their research efforts.

The museum would like to acknowledge the United States Philatelic Classics Society, and the following individuals: Tom Alexander, James A. Allen, John Barwis, George Brett, Michael Devaney, W. Wilson Hulme II, Bill Lommel, Elizabeth Schorr, M.T. Sheahan, and Richard Winter for assistance with this project.

The Travers papers came to the National Postal Museum in stages. Accession numbers include: 1986.0573, 1997.2001, 2008.2028, and 2009.2034. It might be necessary to search in several places in the finding guide and collection to complete research on a specific topic.

COLLECTIONS INVENTORY

For images of these documents visit <http://www.uspcs.org/travers-papers/>

Box 1 U.S. Stamps of 1847

For an annotated finding guide of Box 1, see *1847 Federal Postage Stamp Correspondence*

www.postalmuseum.si.edu/findingguides/3b2_1847.html

For images of these documents, see Arago online database *1847 Federal Postage Stamp Correspondence*

<http://arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=2&tid=2035134&>

Box 2 U.S. Stamps to 1910

Folder 1	Pre 1847
Folder 2	1847 Issue
Folder 3	1851 Issue
Folder 3A	1851-1855 Record of Postage Stamps Delivered
Folder 4	1861 Issue
Folder 5	1869 Issue
Folder 6	1870 Issue
Folder 7	1873-1878 Continental Bank Note Co.
Folder 8	1879-1893 American Bank Note Co.
Folder 9	1894-1901 Bureau of Engraving and Printing Issues
Folder 10	1902-1910 Bureau of Engraving and Printing Issues

Box 3 U.S. Commemorative Stamps and special Purpose Postage

Folder 11	1898-1901 Trans-Mississippi Commemoratives
Folder 12	1893 Columbian Exposition Commemoratives
Folder 13	1904 Louisiana Purchase and 1907 Jamestown Commemoratives
Folder 14	Stamp Production Designs
Folder 15	Locals
Folder 16	Newspaper Stamps
Folder 17	Official Department Stamps
Folder 18	Postage Currency
Folder 19	Postage Due Stamps
Folder 20	Stamp Proofs

Folder 21	Special Delivery Stamps
Folder 22	Special Printings
Folder 23	Specimens
Folder 24	Universal Postal Union
Folder 25	Stamped Envelopes
Folder 25A	1902 Postal Stationery
Folder 26	Private Vending Machine Perforations
Folder 27	Miscellaneous
Folder 28	Dies, Rolls, Plates
Folder 29	Quantities Issued, Remainders, Destruction Plate #s
Folder 30	Possessions

Box 4 Postal Stationery Contracts and Correspondence

Folder 1	Postal Stationery
Folder 2	Postal Stationery
Folder 3	Postal Stationery
Folder 4	Postal Stationery

Box 5 Postal Stationery and Cuba Correspondence

Folder 1	Postal Stationery
Folder 2	Cuba
Folder 3	Cuba
Folder 4	Cuba
Folder 5	Cuba
Folder 6	Cuba
Folder 7	Cuba

Box 6 U.S. Stamps 1851-1877

Folder 1	March 14, 1851 - April 30, 1861
Folder 2	May 1861 - Nov. 4, 1869
Folder 3	March 1870 - April 1, 1873
Folder 4	April 2, 1873 - Oct. 3, 1873
Folder 5	Jan. 15, 1874 - Nov. 9, 1876
Folder 6	March 6, 1877 - Oct. 26, 1877

Box 7 U.S. Stamps 1881-1889

Folder 1	Jan. 21, 1881 - Feb. 7, 1882
----------	------------------------------

Folder 2 Aug. 29, 1882 - Aug. 19, 1888
Folder 3 July 18, 1889 - Oct. 9, 1889

Box 8 U.S. Stamps 1891-1895

Folder 1 Aug. 3, 1891 - Sept. 30, 1892
Folder 2 Oct. 1, 1892 - Dec. 31, 1892
Folder 3 Jan. 1, 1893 - Dec. 31, 1893
Folder 4 Jan. 1, 1894 - April 30, 1894
Folder 5 May 1, 1894 - Aug. 31, 1894
Folder 6 Sept. 1, 1894 - July 2, 1895

Box 9 U.S. Stamps 1896-1903

Folder 1 March 6, 1896 - Jan. 4, 1897
Folder 2 Jan. 19, 1897 - April 19, 1897
Folder 3 Jan. 3, 1898 - March 31, 1899
Folder 4 April 4, 1899 - Dec. 27, 1899
Folder 5 Jan. 1900 - Nov. 18, 1903

Box 10 Stamps Shipped and Attorney General Opinions

Spreadsheets Toppan Carpenter: Stamps Shipped June 30, 1851 - 1855
Attorney General Opinions April 1877
Case Summary of Use of Postal Card Image in Advertising

Box 11 U.S. Postal Cards 1871-1873

Folder 1 Oct. 1, 1871 - Aug. 14, 1872
Folder 2 Aug. 16, 1872 - Jan. 30, 1873
Folder 3 Feb. 1, 1873 - Feb. 25, 1873
Folder 4 Feb. 27, 1873 - March 31, 1873

Box 12 U.S. Postal Cards April - May 1873

Folder 1 April 1, 1873 - April 19, 1873
Folder 2 April 22, 1873 - May 10, 1873
Folder 3 May 12, 1873 - May 23, 1873

Box 13 U.S. Postal Cards 1873-1896

Folder 1 May 24, 1873 - June 5, 1873
Folder 2 June 6, 1873 - June 30, 1873
Folder 3 July 1, 1873 - Sep[t. 20, 1873
Folder 4 Sept. 22, 1873 - Jan. 6, 1896

Box 14 U.S. Stamped Envelopes 1881-1896

Folder 1 May 14, 1881 - March 31, 1882
Folder 2 April 1, 1882 - Dec. 31, 1882
Folder 3 Jan. 1, 1883 - mixed dates 1874, 1894, 1896

Box 15 U.S. Stamped Envelopes 1898-1902

Folder 1 March 15, 1898 - Dec. 16, 1898
Folder 2 Dec. 17, 1898 - Nov. 18, 1902

Box 16 Cuba Stamps 1893-1904, Stamped Envelopes 1899-1901

Folder 1 Stamps Feb. 1, 1893 - April 30, 1898
Folder 2 Stamps May 1, 1899 - Dec. 31, 1901
Folder 3 Stamps Jan. 1, 1902 - March 18, 1904
Folder 4 Stamped Envelopes Jan. 1, 1899 - Aug. 31, 1899
Folder 5 Stamped Envelopes April 28, 1900 - May 1, 1901

Box 17 Cuba Stamped Envelopes 1901-1902

Folder 1 May 10, 1901 - Oct. 30, 1901
Folder 2 Nov. 1, 1901 - Dec. 31, 1901
Folder 3 Jan. 1, 1902 - Feb. 28, 1902
Folder 4 March 1, 1902 - May 31, 1902
Folder 5 June 2, 1902 - Oct. 9, 1902

Box 18 Puerto Rico & Hawaii 1899-1900

Folder 1 May 4, 1899 - July 31, 1899
Folder 2 Aug. 1, 1899 - Dec. 17, 1899
Folder 3 May 14, 1900 - Sept. 24, 1900

Box 19 Philippines 1899-1904

Folder 1 Aug. 12, 1899 - Aug. 31, 1901
Folder 2 April 1, 1903 - Aug. 29, 1903
Folder 3 Sept. 15, 1903 - Sept. 22, 1904

Box 20 Philippines 1899-1902

Folder 1 April 29, 1899 - Dec. 1899
Folder 2 Jan. 1, 1900 - March 24, 1900
Folder 3 April 3, 1900 - July 23, 1900
Folder 4 Aug. 1900 - Dec. 21, 1900
Folder 5 Jan. 8, 1901 - June 29, 1901
Folder 6 July 3, 1901 - Sept. 29, 1901
Folder 7 Oct. 1, 1901 - Dec. 15, 1901
Folder 8 Jan. 7, 1902 - April 14, 1902
Folder 9 May 4, 1902 - Nov. 7, 1902

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Much of the “Collection Scope and Content” and “Provenance” are condensed from W. Wilson Hulme II’s notes on the subject.

Thomas J. Alexander, George W. Brett, and W. Wilson Hulme II, compilers, *United States Postal History and Postage Stamps Official Records* (Cary, IL: James E. Lee, 2011).

Joseph A. Steinmetz, *A Hundred or So Graphic Pages Selected at Random from a Wonderland Collection...*, (New York, 1913).