

**NEW YORK & LIVERPOOL UNITED STATES MAIL
STEAMSHIP COMPANY – THE COLLINS LINE,
BRITISH NORTH AMERICA
PART THREE: 1855 – 1858**

Malcolm Montgomery *M.B.E.*

Herein a slight diversion ... When Samuel Cunard was obliged to withdraw a number of ships from the Atlantic service for Crimean War support, he found it necessary to curtail his line's service between Liverpool and New York.

'Africa', 13th December 1854, was the last to visit New York until she returned on 23rd January 1856.

Collins very quickly changed his line's sailings from Saturday to the more popular Wednesdays. Other lines, Ocean and Havre, also served New York, but their vessels were slower and less luxurious than 'Atlantic', 'Pacific' and 'Baltic' and so had been less of a competitive force than Cunard. Further, their ships rarely carried British North American mails. For Canadian correspondents seeking a quicker service, the American packets quickly became a more popular choice, despite the higher cost of postage: one shilling and twopence against eightpence or sixpence by British or Canadian packets.

A large proportion of trans-Atlantic letters continued to be posted unpaid and many British addressees, less familiar with North American postal practices began to question the higher cost of some letters from Canada. The Liverpool postmaster, responsible for distributing the bulk of incoming mail from the American packets, found himself inundated with complaints from addressees of letters that had been charged the sixpence or eightpence additional postage on letters underpaid for the American packets and procured two handstamps to help explain the higher charge (see *figures 1 and 2 opposite.*)

CONVEYED BY
UNITED STATES
PACKET.

(Type 1)

CONVEYED BY
UNITED STATES
PACKET.

(Type 2)

These marks came into use in Liverpool in May 1855 for incoming mail (there is only one recorded example used on an outgoing, westbound, letter, once in the Frank Staff collection, now lost). Curiously, the marks do not appear on all letters underpaid and carried by the Collins Line – in the past several explanations have been proposed, but none are totally convincing. The marks have not been reported on letters that would have been in bags made up for London (and thus for postal towns in the South of England), but only for the Midlands, the North, Ireland or Scotland. For Scotland and



Figure 1: A letter from Quebec, L.C., to New Ross Ireland, posted unpaid on 15th October 1855, with the rare Quebec '1/2' (Sterling) postage due handstamp. It was sent to New York for the first packet to sail, 'Pacific', out of New York on 17th October for Liverpool on 28th October 1855, marked with 'CONVEYED BY / UNITED STATES / PACKET' in grey on obverse.



Figure 2: Ancaster, C.W., to Edinburgh, Scotland, 8th March 1856, prepaid tenpence Currency (as though for a British packet) but sent with 'MORE TO PAY' to New York for the first packet to sail 'Baltic' out of New York on 15th March for Liverpool on 28th March 1856, charged sixpence (Sterling) and marked with 'CONVEYED BY / UNITED STATES / PACKET' in black on obverse. The last recorded use of this handstamp.

Ireland use was irregular and one explanation may lie in the creation of exchange offices in British North America that pre-sorted correspondence for the United Kingdom, but this needs further examination. (see figure 3.)

Despite the higher rate, there was an appreciable increase in the amount of British North American correspondence carried by the Collins Line during 1854-55 – sufficient for collectors some years ago to have mistakenly labelled the one shilling and twopence rate ‘*The Crimean War*’ rate. It was not, and the increased use of the line was only temporary, for Collins was soon in trouble.

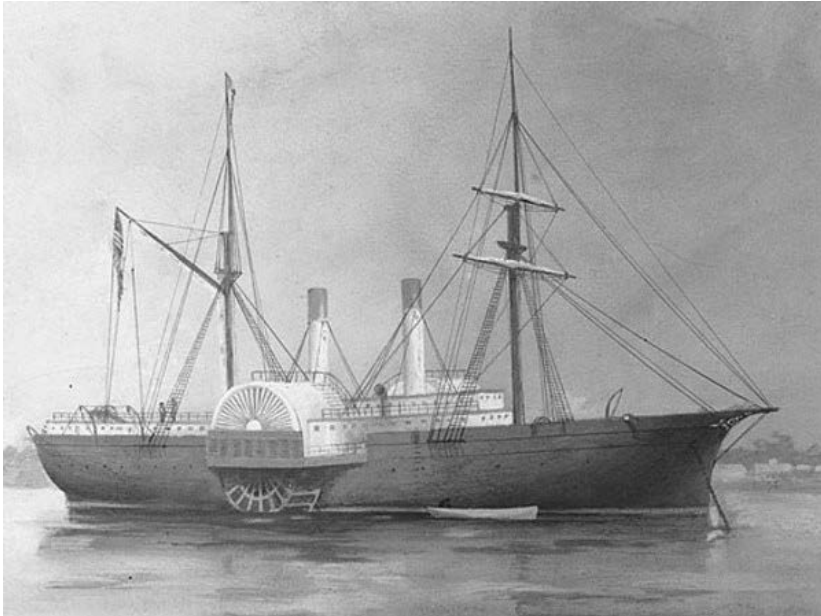
By the end of 1855 the Cunard Line began to be relieved of its Crimean War transport commitments and resumed its preferred Wednesday New York sailings; the Collins Line reverted to the less popular Saturdays. Worse was to follow when ‘*Pacific*’, returning from Liverpool on her first voyage in 1856, disappeared without trace, with her entire complement of almost 200 passengers and crew, leaving Collins with only three vessels to maintain his service. There is, as far as I know, only one clue to the fate of ‘*Pacific*’ – a message from a passenger enclosed in a bottle and washed ashore in Scotland some time after the sinking. If any reader knows of its present location I would dearly like to see it!



Figure 3: A letter from Toronto posted on 1st October 1855 prepaid one shilling and fourpence (6d +10d currency) and passed to New York for ‘*Baltic*’, sailing on 3rd October for Liverpool on 14th October 1855. The letter arrived in London on 15th October 1855, marked ‘*PAID*’. (Courtesy of Eastern Auctions.)

Wyn Craig Wade mentions the missing ship in his 1979 book, *'The Titanic: End of a Dream'*. He wrote: *'The only clue in this instance had been a note in a bottle, washed ashore on the west coast of the Hebrides'* as follows: *'On board the Pacific from Liverpool to N.Y. - Ship going down. Confusion on board - icebergs around us on every side. I know I cannot escape. I write the cause of our loss that friends may not live in suspense. The finder will please get it published. W.M. GRAHAM.'* Jim Coogan mentions the missing vessel in his article *'A Message from the Sea'* published in *'The Barnstable Patriot'*: Coogan writes that after the bottle was found, *'... on the remote Hebrides island of Uist ... in the summer of 1861'*, the passenger list was thoroughly checked by the London Shipping & Mercantile Gazette, *'... and when the passenger list of the ill-fated steamer was examined, it contained the name of William Graham, a British sea captain headed for New York as a passenger to take command there of another vessel'*.

'Quaker City' was chartered immediately as a replacement for one round voyage (Figure 4.) and, in March 1856, *'Ericsson'* for a longer term, making eleven round voyages in all. (Figure 5.) Normal service was resumed after a fashion, but the amount of British North American correspondence carried by the Collins Line declined dramatically in 1856, and the latest example that I have seen is from Glasgow to Montreal dated 20th January 1857. (Figure 6.)



S.S. Quaker City



Figure 4: 'Quaker City'. Detroit to Paris, 13th February 1856. The envelope of a letter from Detroit with red octagonal '21' (cents), through New York 16th February to Liverpool thence to London and arriving in Calais on 3rd March 1856. Charged '8' décimes in Paris.

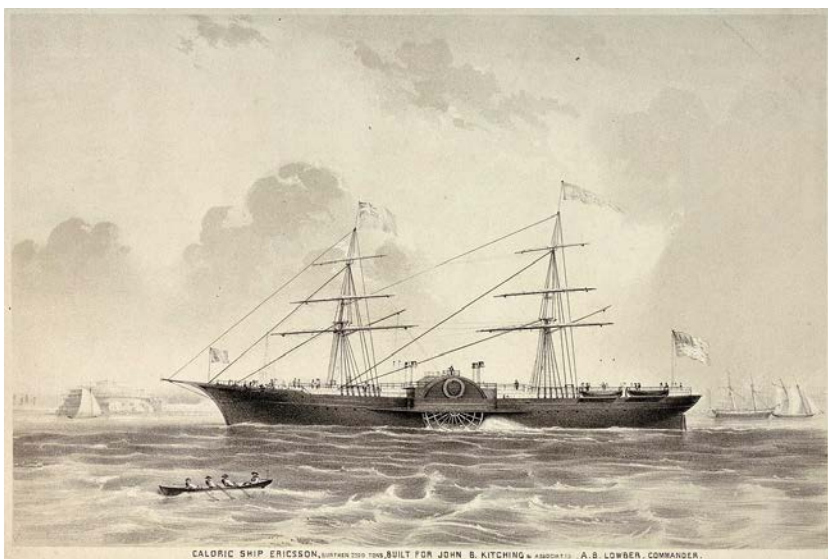


Figure 5: 'Ericsson', 1,920 tons, built 1853 as a caloric ship, was chartered by the Collins Line to augment the service after the loss of the 'Pacific' at the beginning of 1856. She made eleven round voyages in all, the first out of New York on 29th March, returning from Liverpool on 16th April for New York on 30th 1856.



Figure 6: 'Baltic'. Glasgow, Scotland, to Montreal, Canada East, 20th January 1857. A letter posted unpaid 'Baltic' without a British claim. It was charged one shilling and fourpence, the Montreal office using a rate handstamp by this time with its original 'Cy.' (Currency) designation either missing or removed. This is the last letter recorded carried to Canada by the Collins Line. 'Baltic' was damaged during westbound leg of voyage, and required extensive repairs on return to New York, did not sail again until 16th August 1857.

By the end of 1857 Collins' service, despite further charters, was failing. The Atlantic gales were taking their toll, and both 'Atlantic' and 'Baltic' suffered delays from equipment failures. In the autumn of 1857 Collins took delivery of his fifth ship 'Adriatic', (Figure 7.) This vessel, long delayed by lack of funds, made only one round voyage before Collins' mail contracts were terminated and the line ceased operation. The final voyage of the Collins Line was made by 'Baltic' early in 1858. Not one cent, by way of dividends, was ever paid to the investors in the company.



Figure 7: 'Adriatic'. Chester, England, to New York, via Liverpool, 6th December 1857. A letter from Chester for New York prepaid one shilling and a penny (with a shilling cut-to-shape and a Penny Red) marked 'Over 1/2 oz.' the prepayment disregarded and charged double as a one-ounce letter. Carried by 'Adriatic', on the return leg of her maiden and only voyage for Collins Line, sailed from Liverpool on 9th December for New York on 21st December 1857.