Review of Understanding Transatlantic Mail – Volume 1 pp.450

By Rodger McReynolds

This book is an exhaustive examination of transatlantic mail from 1840 through 1875. It is broken down into several chapters including Bremen Mail, British Mail, Prussian Mail and French Mail. Each chapter describes postal arrangements, conventions, printed matter, returned mail and registered mail for each of these areas with the French Mail area covered in particular detail. The book is heavily illustrated with hundreds of photos of mail pieces and hand-stamps with many of the hand-stamps extracted into their own illustrations for clarity. Almost every page of the book includes at least one captioned example of what the author is describing.

The author states that “*some may find the textual descriptions of each cover to be length and possibly boring because of the manner in which the information has been presented*”. One of the goals of the book is to illustrate and analyze a great number of covers from as many different rate periods as possible under each of the selected postal conventions. It is expected that the reader will seek out examples of covers of interest and then read the description of the covers, thereby learning the meaning of the different markings and hopefully understand the postal history of the covers better.

When trying to understand the markings and postal history relating to a transatlantic item, there are usually a number of different questions that must be answered: How did the cover get to its destination? What mail systems were involed? Is the rate shown on a prepaid cover correct? What do all the rate markings on the cover mean? Is the cover genuine?

From the markings on a cover we can underand some or all of the following about the cover: a) the name of the addressee; b) the origin of the cover; c) the destination of the cover; d) the treaty exchange offices that handled the cover; e) the postal rates that were prepaid or the postage that was due; f) any credits or debits required by the postal convention under which the cover was handled; g) the desired routing of the cover; h) the name of the vessels that may have transported the cover overseas; i) comments of the recipient; j) other clues that indicate why a letter was not delivered or was forwarded to another location.

If transatlantic postal history for any of the regions covered in this tome are of interest to you, you likely won’t find another book that covers the subject in more detail than this one. The book also includes a comprehensive index which lists many postmarks by name making it simple to locate information about a specific one with ease.