

Oh, The Things You Can Learn Stamp Collecting! A 50-cent Cover and a Whole Lot of History!

by Mike Schumacher

This article is about one of those finds from those dealer boxes of inexpensive covers - the cost was 50 cents. What attracted my attention was the postmark – May 15th! Ok, for those of you who don't know – that is my birthday. What -- don't all Philatelists collect postmarks of their birthday?



Ok, so that only makes the cover a little interesting.

A closer look at the cover and the interest level significantly increases. First it is a cover (with letter included) from “Mr. McFarland” to “Dr. Edward Maynard” with an 1883 American Banknote Printing, 2 cent George Washington stamp, postmarked from Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts and a pair of “cross” cork cancels. The stamp was created to meet the need resulting from the act of Congress in March 1883 that lowered the First-Class mail rate from 3 cents to 2 cents.



A little history about Chicopee Falls, Mass (before exploring the sender and recipient, as well as the contents of the enclosed letter). Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts became a town in 1848. Prior to that it was the villages of Cabotville and Factory Village on the northern part of Springfield. Chicopee Falls is home to a variety of mills (cotton, wool, textiles) and industries (brass & iron foundries; paper making; footwear; ship building and the first friction matches) including the Ames Manufacturing Company which was the largest producer of swords and cutlasses for the Union Army in the Civil War. Ames Manufacturing also made cannons and a number of bronze statues, including the equestrian statue of President George Washington that stands in Boston's Public Garden. Another notable connection to Ames Manufacturing that has recently been in the news are the bronze doors at the U.S. Capital Building in Washington D.C. The doors were designed by sculptor Thomas Crawford and manufactured by Silas Mosman Jr. and his son Melzar Mosman in the foundry of Ames Manufacturing **[image below right]**. Chicopee Falls is also home to the Massachusetts Arms Company (founded by Joshua Stevens; Horace Smith & Daniel Wesson¹); Duryea Motor Wagon Company (produced the first gas powered car); Fisk Tire Company; Overman Wheel Company (a major manufacture of bicycles); and A.G. Spaulding (sporting goods factory). Westover Air Force Reserve Base was built there in 1940 and is currently the largest Air Force Reserve Base in the United States.

The sender of the letter is Mr. William Putman McFarland who was the Chicopee Falls Postmaster (a federal appointment and term expired April 1, 1886) & the master machinist and superintendent for the Massachusetts Arms Company (producer of the Maynard rifle). He also worked for the Springfield Armory. He held a patent (along with George W. Hadley) on an improvement for gun sights.

The recipient of the letter is Dr. Edward Maynard (1813-1891) who was born in Madison, NY and was a noted dentist and firearms inventor most famous for the breech loading design (Maynard rifle) [figure above right]. He founded the Maynard Arms Company in 1857. His dental clients included many congressmen and Presidents. It is rumored that he was offered the position of Imperial Dentist to Tsar Nicholas I, but declined. Mr. Maynard held patents for both dental instruments and firearms.

In the contents of the letter [below left], Mr. McFarland advises Mr. Maynard to seek counsel from Senator Dawes and Congressman Rockwell, as they would know what has been done about the Chicopee Falls Post Office. The Senator Dawes referred to is - Henry L. Dawes attorney and politician, most notable for the Dawes Act, which was intended to assimilate Native Americans by ending tribal governments and allowed the federal government to break up tribal lands.



Chicopee Falls, Mass.
 May 15th 1886.
 Dr Edward Maynard
 Dear Sir

If you decide to do what I asked you to in my letter yesterday. I would suggest that you see Senator Dawes & Congressman Rockwell who are both from our District and know all that has been done in reference to the Chicopee Falls Post Office. I notice by this morning's paper that Mr. Shea was not confirmed yesterday & the Senate had adjourned until Monday. So - you will have time

to see the President. before anything is done & Mr. Dawes & Mr. Rockwell can give you some points that may help you

Yours in haste
 Wm P. McFarland

Congressman Rockwell referred to in the letter is Francis W. Rockwell (son of Julius Rockwell – longtime Republican member and speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives and Massachusetts Supreme Court Judge). Francis Rockwell also served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

The contents of the letter further indicates that Mr. McFarland noticed in the daily paper “that Mr. Shea was not confirmed by the Senate and had adjourned until Monday, so you (Mr. Maynard) will have time to talk with the President.” The Mr. Shea referred to is – Patrick Michael Shea who was an undertaker; a Democrat and a newcomer in consideration for the Chicopee Falls Postmaster position. It looks like

Mr. McFarland was seeking a bit of help from Mr. Maynard to be reappointed to the Chicopee Falls Postmaster position instead of newcomer Mr. Shea being appointed.

Oh, the things you can learn stamp collecting! So much history - all for a 50-cent cover!

Footnote

¹Horace Smith & Daniel Wesson later went on to found the Smith & Wesson (firearms and ammunition manufacturer) company in 1856 in nearby Springfield, Massachusetts.