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## You've Got Mail: Throwback to the American Revolutionary War

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# You've Got Mail: Throwback to the American Revolutionary War

## **Abstract**

A collection of approximately 150 Civil War era envelopes, mainly produced by Philadelphia publisher James Magee as well as the King & Baird printers, with patriotic Unionist themes is located in Gettysburg College's Special Collections & College Archives. Of particular interest are the "throwbacks" and references to the American Revolution. The "Glorious Old Hall of Independence," a depiction of Bunker Hill, and Mount Vernon are only a few illustrations from the collection that demonstrate this American Revolution era theme. [*excerpt*]

## **Keywords**

American Revolution, Civil War, illustrations

## **Disciplines**

History | Military History | Public History | United States History

## **Comments**

This blog post originally appeared in [The Gettysburg Compiler](#) and was created by students at Gettysburg College.

# THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

## ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

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### You've Got Mail: Throwback to the American Revolutionary War

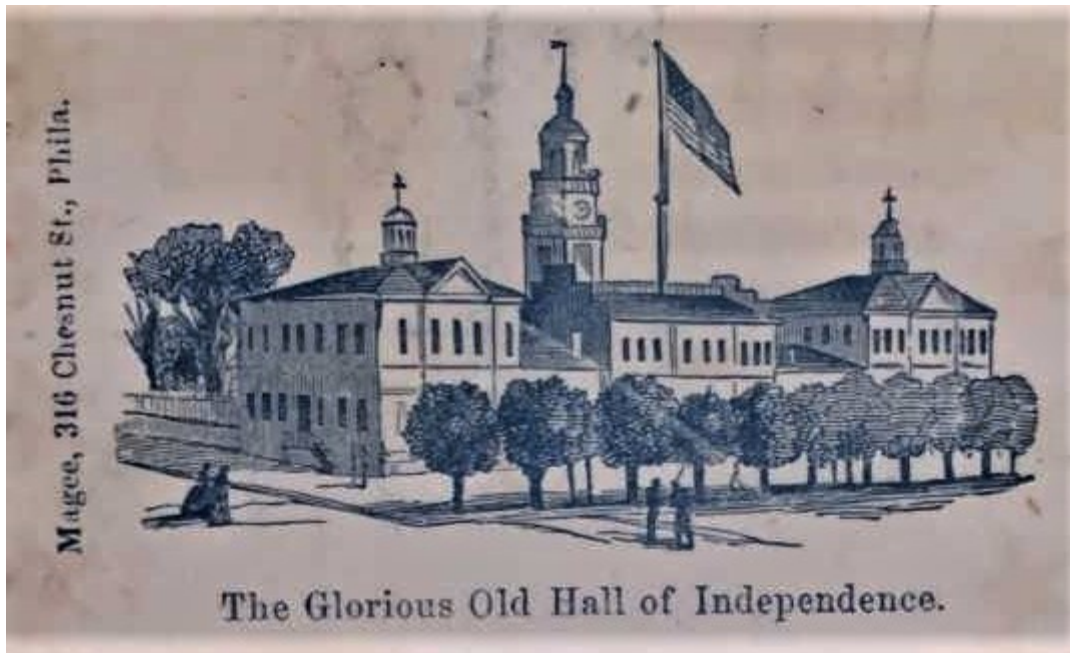
By [Abigail Major '19](#)

A collection of approximately 150 Civil War era envelopes, mainly produced by Philadelphia publisher James Magee as well as the King & Baird printers, with patriotic Unionist themes is located in Gettysburg College's Special Collections & College Archives. Of particular interest are the "throwbacks" and references to the American Revolution. The "Glorious Old Hall of Independence," a depiction of Bunker Hill, and Mount Vernon are only a few illustrations from the collection that demonstrate this American Revolution era theme.



*Independence Hall. Photo by the author of item located in CWVFM-23: Envelopes, Patriotic Collection, Special Collections, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.*

These references to the American Revolution tell us something about the mindset of the peoples that were buying, using and mailing these products to their family members and friends. Indeed, if mail was such an essential part during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the illustrators of these American Revolutionist themes would have known that the public would see and purchase these envelopes. There are a few reasons why these illustrations may have been on Civil War era envelopes, and each reason proposed does not necessarily stand on its own. Instead, these theories are interwoven and work together to serve a bigger purpose: it reassured that the North was justified in their cause of war, and that this was not the first time the nation had faced such a major conflict.



*The Glorious Old Hall of Independence. Photo by the author of item located in CWVFM-23: Envelopes, Patriotic Collection, Special Collections, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.*

These illustrations served as a reminder of the nation's history, a way to remind the public of the principles the country was first founded on. The illustration of "Glorious Old Hall of Independence" would strongly support this idea. Likewise, these 18<sup>th</sup> century themes could have been a way to confirm that the Union's decision to combat the "rebel rousers" of the Confederacy was valid. By fighting against the South and saving the Union, the North was in essence preserving the values that the Founding Fathers had so treasured and fought for – an idea that could have inspired the depiction of Mount Vernon, George Washington's estate in Virginia, which belonged in Confederate territory.

It is interesting to note that a considerable amount of Founding Fathers hailed from the Southern aristocracy, the very group that was leading the charge for secession in the Civil War era. Even so, the Philadelphia publishers' decision to include historical and patriotic landmarks (like the Virginia based Mount Vernon) demonstrates the conscious decision to claim that these places and ideals belonged to the North's heritage. While the physical location of such patriotic symbolism may belong in the South, the beliefs that the Founding Fathers had advocated for were present in the North and were true qualities that were believed in the people of the Union unlike the rebellious South.



*Mount Vernon. Photo by the author of item located in CWVFM-23: Envelopes, Patriotic Collection, Special Collections, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.*

One other idea that I have mentioned previously is that that these illustrations allowed the public to remind themselves that the nation had been in a major conflict once before – perhaps a reference to the depiction of Bunker Hill. Bunker Hill, which took place in June of 1775, was one of the military skirmishes between the British and American forces during the American Revolution. By employing these illustrations, the people could be comforted that the nation – which had once been faced with a great conflict during the 18th century – would yet again come out of yet another monumental conflict as a unified and prosperous nation for not only the present generation, but future as well.



*Bunker Hill. Photo by the author of item located in CWVFM-23: Envelopes, Patriotic Collection, Special Collections, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.*



Both the Civil War Trust and John Hannigan's post on *Rethinking the Age of Revolution* state how the term "revolution" was not automatically used in describing the conflict between the British and the American colonists. Instead, as the Civil War Trust mentions, this series of conflicts was described as a "civil war" until Chief Justice of South Carolina's Supreme Court, William Henry Drayton, used the term "revolution" in 1776. American citizens could have therefore looked to the American "civil war" of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a point of reference during the American Civil War during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, for the North, the conflict that took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was truly a civil war – unlike their Southern counterparts who viewed the war as an attempt at revolution. The North's decision to use American Revolutionary imagery suggests the Yankees' belief that by staying true to the values of the Founding Fathers, the North would eventually be victorious in saving the Union – just as the American colonists had been over the British in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Sources:

CWVFM-23: Envelopes, Patriotic. Special Collections & College Archives/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

Hannigan, John. "[William Henry Drayton and the Meaning of Revolution.](#)" *Rethinking the Age of Revolution*. October 8, 2013.

["What is a Civil War?"](#) *Civil War Trust*. Accessed October 17, 2017.