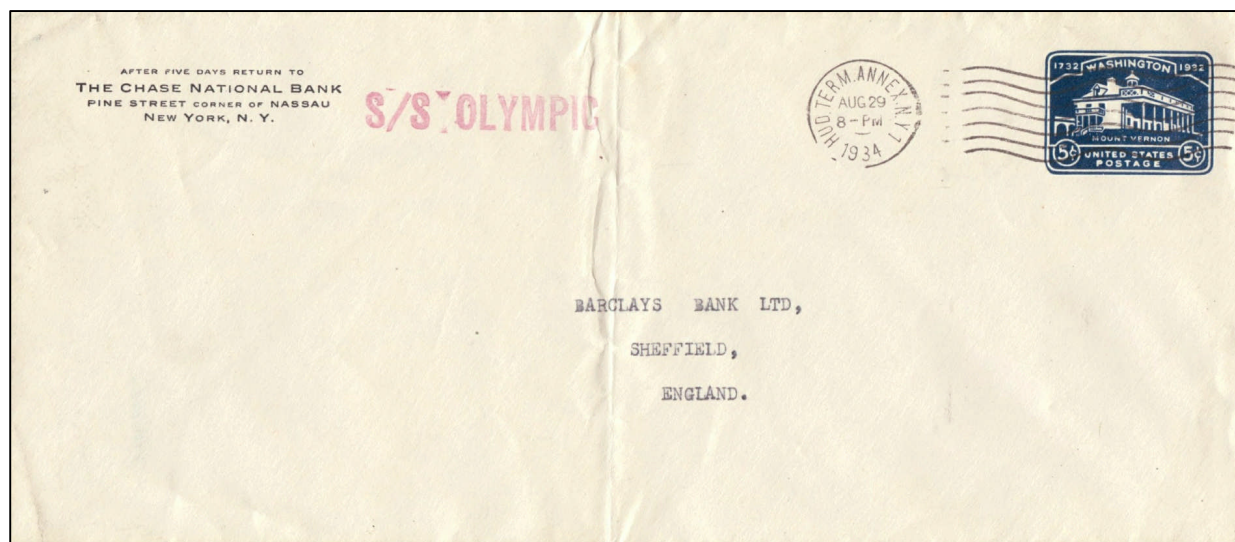


Bank Cover Sent "Surface Rate" via S/S Olympic to England by John Walter



I purchased this cover a few months ago from the consignment table. The seller had the following comments on the bid sheet: "An interesting and mysterious cover sent from the Chase National Bank, NY to Barclays Bank LTD in Sheffield, GB. It has an imprint "S/S Olympic" after the sending address indicating this ship is the subject of discussion. The date of the letter is within the period for the merger of the Cunard and White Star line (Owner of the Olympia) in 1934. The Olympia was the only profitable ship for White Star and the sister ship of the Titanic."

What a great introduction to the cover.

The legal sized cover (UPSS size 23) did have a heavy vertical crease through the center.

The Stamped Envelope

Since I collect U.S. postal stationery (esp. addressed to overseas addresses), I was attracted to the stamped envelope (U528) and the overseas destination. The envelope was issued on Jan. 1, 1932 to commemorate George Washington's birthday. The item is one of seven (highest denomination) stamped envelopes issued for the occasion. The indicium is Die 159, Watermark is 29, Size is 23, with a Knife of 106. Nothing unusual so far.

Looking up the surface postage rate for 1934 in the "U.S. International Postal Rates, 1872-1996," I discovered the rate was 5¢ for the first oz.

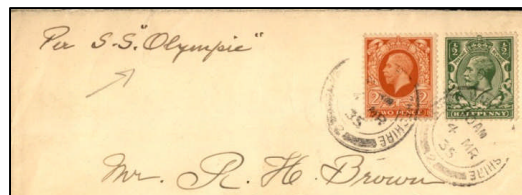
The envelope has a "corner card" return address for The Chase National Bank. Do you know why the imprint "After five days return to" is printed above the address? Just read an interesting article on the subject. That imprint started in 1860 so mail would not be sent to the dead letter office. That one line above the return address is an article all by itself.

The cover was postmarked from the Hudson Terminal Annex NY on Aug. 29, 1934. The other item that caught my eye was the address to Barclays Bank LTD, Sheffield, England. It was of interest since I have a small collection of Barclays Bank covers from the early 20th century.

I researched the banks first, both Chase and Barclays. Each have very interesting histories and don't really add much to the cover, other than sending and receiving addresses. Maybe there will be another article or two about the banks and their covers in the future.

S/S Olympic marking

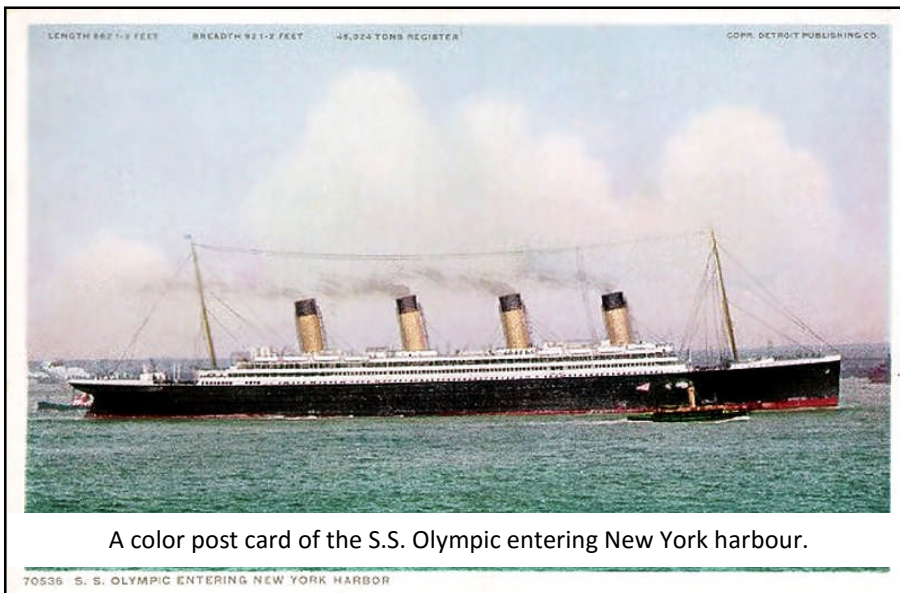
The last thing on the cover was the red "S/S Olympic" rubber stamp mark. I was not particularly interested in that aspect.



Cropped cover with script "Per S.S. "Olympia"

Since there was no receiving postmark or other indication the cover went via the S/S Olympic, that was suspicious. Looking on the Internet for other S/S Olympic covers I came across two. Both those covers had script "S.S. Olympic" written on the face of the cover. Neither of those covers had other markings, or receiving postmark on the reverse. So it looks like my cover went via the S/S Olympic from New York to England (prob. to Southampton).

Let me concentrate on the S/S Olympic marking. Exactly what does the S/S prefix mean. I start with that because I was confused, at first, when starting the research. A ship prefix is given for civilian vessels to identify the type of propulsion, such as "PS" for paddle steamer, or purpose, such as "RV" for research vessel. Sometimes the slash is used between letters. But locating information on SS Olympic (screw steamer or steamship) revealed the actual name as RMS Olympic (Royal Mail Ship or Royal Mail Steamer).



A color post card of the S.S. Olympic entering New York harbour.

RMS Olympic was a transatlantic ocean liner, the lead ship of the White Star Line's trio of Olympic-class liners (the others were Titanic - sunk in 1912, and the Britannic - struck a mine and sank in 1916). The RMS Olympic enjoyed a long and illustrious career, spanning 24 years from 1911 to 1935. This included service as a troopship during the First World War. After the war the RMS Olympic returned to civilian service and had success as an ocean liner throughout the 1920s and into the first half of the 1930s. Increased competition and the slump in trade during the Great Depression,

after 1930, made her operation increasingly unprofitable.

She was the largest ocean liner in the world for two periods during 1911-13, interrupted only by the brief tenure of the slightly larger Titanic.

In 1934, the White Star Line merged with the Cunard Line at the instigation of the British government, to form Cunard White Star. This merger allowed funds to be granted for the completion of the future RMS Queen Mary and RMS Queen Elizabeth. The RMS Olympia was withdrawn from transatlantic service, and left New York for the last time on April 5, 1935, returning to Britain to be laid up. She was finally demolished and scrapped in 1936-1937.

By the time of her retirement, RMS Olympic had completed 257 round trips across the Atlantic, transported 430,000 passengers on her commercial voyages, and traveled 1.8 million miles.

For the \$4.50 I paid for the cover, it is a nice addition to both my postal stationery and Barclays Bank cover collections.

John Walter collects used postal stationery, Japan, People's Republic of China, U.S., and U.N. He currently serves as President of the NSSS and Editor of this newsletter.