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WHO INVENTED THE ADHESIVE STAMP? AND WHO WAS THE AUTHOR OF UNIFORM PENNY POSTAGE?

BY GEORGE HENDERSON.

THE much discussed and vexed questions as to who invented the adhesive postage stamp, and as to the authorship of the uniform penny postage scheme, have been argued pro and con, with increasing or diminishing ardor, for well nigh ten years, and for want of competent authority—a judge whose decision will be respected—they still remain unsettled. But they increase in interest, as the fiftieth anniversary of our present postal system will be celebrated next year.

For the benefit of those who have not been able to procure and closely follow the pamphlets and other minor publications of Messrs. Chalmers and Hill, I shall attempt a review of the case in the light of these brochures, supplemented by lengthy explanatory letters, with which both of the aforementioned gentlemen have favored me.

Before discussing the merits of these claims, I wish to state that I shall, as far as it is possible, accord the writings of one as much credence as those of the other—an extremely liberal position as regards Mr. Chalmers, for he has time and again falsified and misrepresented the facts of the case. In his letter to Pearson Hill, dated December 10, 1879, he makes several statements which he would rather have left unsaid; sometime after publishing this letter he deliberately cuts out the objectionable parts, without so much as an asterisk, and when accused of so doing, excuses himself by asserting a desire for brevity. Pearson Hill even went so far as to dare him to bring an action for libel; he simply denies the charge, and “runs away and hides himself,” thinking his vindication complete.

He triumphantly quotes a Treasury minute, in which “My Lords” refer to “what honor may be due to those who, before the development of the plan of Sir Rowland Hill, urged the adoption of uniform penny postage.” Half the truth is worse than an outright falsehood. Why did not Mr. Chalmers also add that this statement was at once challenged, and that the Treasury admitted its error, stating that they had no idea of questioning his originality.

Patrick Chalmers also tells his enthusiasts with much glee, that the Dundee Town Council passed a resolution recognizing his father's claims. But why does he not tell them that the Council practically admitted their mistake. The Dundee *Advertiser* for April 6, 1883, had the following report of the meeting on the previous day:

“The Provost said that he had received the following letter from a son of the late Rowland Hill.” Then follows the letter.

“Baillie Phillips: What you stated, Provost, has come to pass, and we now see how stupid it was to pass the resolution we did.

“The Provost: It would have been better if we had not meddled with this question; it was out of our province altogether.

“It was agreed that the letter should lie on the table. (No one else spoke.) Sixteen members were present, including the author of the Chalmers' resolution and at least six of his supporters.”

I wrote to Patrick Chalmers and asked him to explain the above, but this, as also several other searching questions I put to him, he artfully dodged.

The Dundee Town Council has, by the casting vote of the Provost, voted five pounds towards a bust of James Chalmers. As this is likely to be quoted as an important recognition, I will state that the motion was only passed after the proposer having admittedly so modified his motion as to make it carefully avoid expressing any opinion on the Chalmers-Hill controversy. (See *Dundee Courier and Argus* for July 13, 1888.)

Mr. Patrick Chalmers has just issued a leaf containing a description of the headstone which he has erected over his father's grave, giving a long inscription which sets forth his claims to the invention of the adhesive stamp; and closes by saying that it was "erected by and with the official sanction and assent of the Town Council of Dundee." But here again he only tells half the truth. At a meeting of the Town Council the above quoted language was protested against, and his most ardent supporters disclaimed all knowledge of the inscription, and said that merely a new headstone was sanctioned.

The last of his gross misrepresentations to which I shall refer is that of the "Sir Rowland Hill Committee," which was formed to collect subscriptions for the erection of a monument. Mr. Patrick Chalmers took great care to see that the committee were well supplied with his pamphlets; and to the various letters he addressed to the Lord Mayor of London, the most characteristic reply he could obtain ran as follows:

"The Lord Mayor presents his compliments to Mr. Chalmers, and begs to acknowledge the receipt of his letter of the 25th inst., which shall have due attention."

Being unable to get a positive declaration from the committee, he at once draws the conclusion that in silence there is submission.

Fearing that such evidence as this might not produce conviction in the mind of one who thinks for himself, he declared that his statements had had such weight with the committee that a change of the inscription on the statue was ordered, thereby recognizing the truth of his contention.

To show that Mr. Chalmers is again in error, I need but quote a letter from the Secretary of the committee:

"HIGHFIELD HOUSE, CATFORD BRIDGE, KENT, S. E.,

"29th October, 1887.

"DEAR SIR: In answer to your letter of the 24th instant, there is not the slightest excuse for the assertion of Mr. Patrick Chalmers that the Memorial Committee admitted that Sir Rowland Hill was not the originator of the penny postage scheme, or that they changed the inscription for the city statue in consequence of his or any other representations.

"No doubt of any kind was at any time expressed by a single member of the committee to Sir Rowland Hill's right to be considered the originator of the penny postage scheme. The only difference of opinion amongst us was as to what would be the most suitable and impressive inscription for the statue. One proposal (my own) was that it should run: 'He gave us Penny Postage;' another, 'He founded Penny Postage;' a third, 'Founder of Uniform Penny Postage.' Eventually, and after Mr. Patrick Chalmers' contention had been fully considered, we decided that it should be the last of these three.

"The words on the memorial in Westminster Abbey, which describe him as the 'Originator of the Penny Postage System,' were written by the late Dean Stanley, and were submitted to and unanimously approved by the committee.

"Thus you will see that we were agreed that both 'founder' and 'originator' correctly described Sir Rowland Hill's position in connection with this great public boon.

"I think I ought to add that Mr. Chalmers afterwards sent to each member of the committee numerous letters and pamphlets on the subject, but neither the committee nor, so far as I know, any individual member of the committee, thought that his communications called for reply. I am, dear sir, yours faithfully,

"PEARSON HILL, Esq."

"JAMES WHITEHEAD.

I wrote to Mr. Chalmers and asked him if he could explain this letter, and with his usual dexterity he dodged the question.

Patrick Chalmers makes two claims on behalf of his father, James Chalmers: (1) That he invented the adhesive stamp in 1834; (2) That he was the first to suggest its use in carrying out the penny postage scheme, fixing November, 1837, as the date.

The first claim is totally untenable, as adhesive postage stamps were used in the "Chamouset Post," in Paris, in 1758. (See "Der Servier des Portez et de la Taxation des Letre au Moens d'un Timbre," by M. Piron; also, "Historical Anecdotes of French Industry," by M. d'Auriac.) While denying the above, Mr. Chalmers suggests that before so long ago it was forgotten and practically lost. If any one really believes this to be the case then I would call his attention to the fact that adhesive stamps were used in the collection of internal revenue for at least a quarter of a century prior to 1834. True it is they were not postage stamps, but whether you call them such or call them revenue stamps, they are one and the same thing.

In support of his case Mr. Chalmers publishes a number of letters from his father's former workmen, in which they testify to "the setting up of the form with a number of stamps having a printed device; the printing of the sheets; the melting of the gum; the gumming of the backs, etc.," all taking place in 1834. Such testimony as this cannot be set aside with a sneer, as Pearson Hill has attempted. It must be accepted as reliable until proven to be otherwise. But saying that Mr. Chalmers made these stamps in 1834 is not saying that he invented them. There is a bare chance that he had never heard of adhesive stamps before, and in that case the invention would be a subjective one only. The worthlessness of such a claim being apparent to all, I need not dwell on it.

The claim of invention having been put down, there is but one point, in connection with the adhesive postage stamp, left to decide: Who was the first to suggest its use in connection with the penny postage scheme? Just where the honor lies in having made this suggestion, I think it difficult to say; but, however, that is not my task.

Pearson Hill also claims that his father, Sir Rowland Hill, invented the adhesive stamp. But his language is misleading; in his last letter to me he admits that he uses the words "invented" and "suggested the use of," as if they were synonymous.

James Chalmers first published his suggestion of the use of the adhesive stamp in November, 1837. This date is fixed by his own letter to Rowland Hill, of October 1, 1839. It is also accepted by Mr. Chalmers. But to get in a still earlier claim, he says that his father's "display of the stamps was a matter of notoriety in Dundee years before 1837." Unfortunately for Mr. Chalmers, "a matter of notoriety" is too vague an assertion for these exacting times. In such a case we can only admit what has appeared in cold type. It is strange that "a matter of notoriety" such as this never appeared in the local papers.

Mr. Chalmers, seeing that this last claim cannot stand, accepts the date of November, 1837, as the time of the publication of his father's suggestion, and proceeds to throw cold water on Rowland Hill's claim by saying that the first edition of his pamphlet on Post-office Reform did not contain anything about an adhesive stamp. This is very true, but the second edition, which came out one month later (February), did contain the suggestion of an adhesive stamp. Mr. Chalmers himself says: "Mr. Hill had said something about a bit of gummed paper before the Commissioners of Post-office Inquiry, in February, 1837, * * * * an idea which he had acquired in the interval." He admits having acquired the idea, and furthermore gives Mr. Charles Knight the credit for it.

To be more precise, I shall give the suggestion in the exact words from Sir Rowland Hill's pamphlet: "But the bringer would sometimes be unable to write. Perhaps this difficulty might be obviated by using a bit of paper just large enough to bear the stamp, and covered at the back with a glutinous wash, which the bringer might, by applying a little moisture, attach to the back of the letter so as to avoid the necessity for redirecting it." Does not an adhesive stamp tally with that description?

But, says Patrick Chalmers, this adhesive stamp was only to be used in case a person could not write. Rowland Hill's pamphlet contains both the suggestion of the impressed stamp and that of the adhesive stamp. That one should become more popular than the other is but natural; and as it happened, the adhesive stamp, in which Hill placed the least confidence, came to the front. There is no doubt but that Rowland Hill early thought the impressed stamp to be the better, but this cannot wipe out the fact that he also suggested the adhesive stamp. The same thing could be said of the penny postage scheme. Parliament as well as Rowland Hill himself had grave doubts as to the direct financial success of the plan. Sir Robert Peel in a speech said: "The author of the plan, Mr. Rowland Hill, whose remarks it was impossible to read without being prepossessed in its favor, admitted that the Post-office revenue might suffer, but added that a great stimulus would be given to commerce, which would be a benefit to other sources of revenue." He also estimated the deficit at £2,000,000 a year.

There is but one conclusion that we can draw from the mass of evidence that has been examined: Rowland Hill was the first to suggest the use of the adhesive stamp in connection with the uniform penny postage scheme; and, perhaps it might be added, that his faith in it, at the time of the proposal, was a small and unknown quantity.

Having disposed of the first query, I shall now examine the second one,

WHO WAS THE AUTHOR OF UNIFORM PENNY POSTAGE?

The plan of uniform Penny Postage, like the Constitution of the United States, like our system of common law, was a growth, not a creation. It arose out of the necessities of the times. One thing led on to another. The abstract idea of uniformity was not new, for it had been applied to newspapers; a low rate was not new, for it had been used on the Continent. But to Rowland Hill belongs the credit of having first applied these conceptions to letter postage.

Patrick Chalmers would discredit his authorship because in the "Fifth Report of the Commissioners of Post-office Inquiry" it is recommended that *Prices Current* and similar publications be allowed to pass through the Post-office at a low and uniform rate. On page 79 of the "Submission Pamphlet" he says: "Insert letters," and we have Mr. Hill's scheme.

Pearson Hill's explanation of this part of the Post-office Report, above referred to, is so clear, that I shall quote that part of his letter to me, dated July 21, 1888.

"As any student of postal history in this country knows, the postal service was originally established here mainly for the conveyance of government dispatches, and for the written communications of merchants and others, and the rates of postage on letters were fixed sufficiently high to enable the department to be worked at a profit; and these were often raised from time to time as additional revenue was required. Gradually, however, when the postal service had become well established, it was also employed for the distribution of other things, such as Parliamentary Proceedings, newspapers, etc., which could not have borne the high letter rates of postage, but which the government, for political or financial reasons, were interested in circulating, and which were therefore allowed to go free, or at low rates of postage which no one would ever have thought of applying to letters. The difference in charge is now far less than it used to be, but even to this day in the United Kingdom the heaviest newspaper is charged only one-half penny, while even the lightest letter is charged twice as much. Indeed, the letter postage has always been regarded as the back bone of the postal system, letters, in fact, paying largely for the rest of the mail, as they still do, not merely for newspapers, but for trade circulars, parcels and telegrams, all of which are now carried at a loss. The letter rates of postage were formerly and are still jealously guarded, as the profit derived therefrom alone enables the department to be self-supporting.

"In former times, however, the newspapers were a most profitable source of revenue to the government. Some fifty years ago, and indeed, from a much earlier date, the government was, as it were, a sort of sleeping partner in every newspaper;

incurring no responsibility or expense, but pocketing the lion's share of the profits. It received a duty of one and one-half pence per pound on all the paper used; a duty of one shilling and six pence on every advertisement—(the payment to the government in 1836 by *The Times* alone, under this one heading, was at the rate of ten thousand pounds a year)—but its most important share of the profits was from the newspaper stamp duty (of four pence up to 1836, then reduced to one penny) which was charged on every copy of every newspaper printed, whether it went through the post or not. The government had thus the strongest pecuniary interest in encouraging the wide circulation of newspapers, knowing that the produce of these three taxes would be greatly augmented thereby, while even the letters sent would also be much increased; therefore, independently of political reasons, it permitted newspapers (with certain exceptions as regards local posts) to go through the post, not once merely, but as often as any one cared to send them, free of charge.

“In any file of English newspapers of earlier date than 1855 that you may find in your libraries, you will see the kind of stamp (printed in red ink) which was employed, and you will notice that every newspaper, even so late as 1855, had to be printed on paper bearing its own newspaper stamp, which bore the name of the newspaper, and if a copy of *The Times* had been, by accident, printed on a sheet bearing the stamp, say of the *Standard*, it would not have been allowed to pass through the post; another proof that the stamp was a fiscal rather than a postal charge.

“Besides newspapers, properly so called, there were in 1836 some publications, not strictly newspapers, of which modern instances can be found in *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*, *The Illustrated London News*, *Punch*, and many others, which of course paid paper and advertisement duties, but were not required to bear the newspaper duty stamp. The proprietors of these papers were, however, permitted to have a portion of their issue printed upon paper bearing that stamp, and these papers having thus paid all duties chargeable on newspapers, were granted the same rights of constant free transportation as often as desired through the post.

“In one of Mr. Patrick Chalmers' earlier pamphlets, ‘The Penny Postage Scheme of 1837,’ of which doubtless you possess a copy, he reprints the recommendations of the Fifth Report; but at the bottom of page four he inserts in the recommendations of the Commissioners the words ‘(1d.)’ which are not in the original. Possibly he may assert that he put them there, not so much as to mislead, as to make the passage more intelligible, as under the contemplated reduction, the newspaper stamp duty was ultimately fixed at that sum; but it is important to point out that the statement he makes at the bottom of page five, ‘that * * * here we have * * * all the proposals of a low and uniform rate of postage chargeable by weight, and prepaid by stamp, at the rate of one penny to the half ounce,’ is absolutely untrue. If the half ounce came in at all, the stamp duty was to be one penny only, while if the penny duty were paid, there was to be no limit to the weight, and in either case the stamp duty, whether of one or one-half penny, was to cover even a dozen transmissions, instead of only one as in the case of letters. Besides which, as I have often pointed out, no person in his senses ever dreamed of proposing, that because printed matter might go through the post at these low rates, therefore letters should do so. Indeed, the *St. James Gazette* recently said that so far from its being regarded as reasonable to take such a step, a Parliamentary Sub-committee had recently called attention to the evil of permitting these low and unprofitable rates to continue.

“If such a reduction as was proposed (but never adopted) for *Prices Current* had been any real precedent for Sir Rowland Hill's plan of Uniform Penny Postage, would he not eagerly have seized upon such a valuable argument in his favor? The absurd and malicious charge of his having attempted secretly to appropriate the Commissioners' idea has been thoroughly exposed by the simple fact that his plan was almost in the first instant submitted by him to the identical Commissioners who had signed the Fifth Report, within less than a year of their so doing. Is not the otherwise inexplicable fact, neither Sir R. Hill referring to this report, nor of the Commissioners, nor any of

his official opponents ever discovering his supposed plagiarism, simply and amply accounted for by their all knowing perfectly well that the plans were dissimilar? Is not this simple reason more likely to be true than the complicated explanation for this general conspiracy of silence put forward by Mr. P. Chalmers?"

While searching through a lot of Parliamentary Reports, for anything I could find which might throw some light on this question, I came across the following in a speech by Mr. Hume: "Single letters all paid the same postage, and if a double letter were put into the post it was charged double. There must be a limit somewhere. The question had, however, been already discussed and settled on the basis of a penny stamp, and if they were to say that one-half sheet of paper should only pay one-half penny, they would be abandoning the principle upon which the house had already decided to act."

Mr. P. Hill's explanation of this is so good that I shall also quote it: "This is an admirable instance of the way in which postal expressions have in the course of time changed their meanings. The words that 'the question had, however, been already discussed and settled on the basis of a penny stamp, etc,' merely meant that the House of Commons had decided that the Newspaper Duty should be reduced to one penny (just as receipt stamps were reduced to one penny many years after) and that he was not prepared to go further.

"He was replying to a speech in which it was stated that if a newspaper was to be charged one penny stamp duty when printed on a whole sheet, and an additional half penny for an additional half sheet, then 'a small newspaper published in the country, containing altogether only one-half sheet, ought to pay no more than one-half duty.'

"He also said that the duty 'on newspapers' was imposed on the same principle upon which letters paid postage. Single letters all paid the same postage, and if a double letter were put into the post it was charged double, etc.

"This, however, did not in the slightest degree mean that single letters, whether sent a long or short distance, all paid the same postage. It simply meant, in those days, that as single letters (when going the same distance) all paid the same postage, whether consisting of one large sheet or of one small sheet of paper, and double letters were charged double if consisting of two sheets of paper, large or small, it would be contrary to that principle to charge a half penny duty merely because the single sheet on which the small country newspaper was printed happened to be half size.

"Every Post-office directory published in 1836 will show you that single letters were then charged rates according to distance, from four pence to one shilling, eight and one-half pence in the general posts."

Concluding then, I would say that Mr. Hill's plan and that contained in the fifth Report are by no means identical.* The ideas of uniformity and a low rate had been in practical operation as regards newspapers; and we must consider these as suggestions or hints however slight; Mr. Hill may or may not have gotten his clue from them; if he did not, then his discovery is merely subjective, and of no value whatever. The ideas were not new, but what was new was Rowland Hill's application of them to letter postage. He deserves great credit and the united thanks of all those using the mails, for his admirable pamphlet on Post-office Reform. Some will doubtless say that as his faith in the financial success of the plan, as I have above remarked, was rather skeptical, that he does not deserve all the honor that has been accorded him; but whatever conclusion is reached on this point, we can all, without hesitation, revere his memory for having carried Uniform Penny Postage to a successful issue, "and for having done so," to use the words of Patrick Chalmers, he "deserves more than our credit, our gratitude."

* One deals with letters, the other with newspapers.

The Philatelic Beacon will hail from Newtonville, Mass., sometime this month. From what we know of Hutchison, it will be a very readable paper.

The Philatelic Herald is announced to reappear shortly from Freeport, Me.

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No ONE who is at all disposed to be fair-minded should fail to read the admirable defense of Sir Rowland Hill, which occupies the greater part of our journal this month. Twenty years ago we were taught by philately to look up to Sir Rowland Hill as a great promulgator of postal reforms, and also as the inventor of the postage stamp, and we must admit that any change came hard to those who had never heard his rights questioned or the claims which were made for him denied; but shortly after his death Mr. Patrick Chalmers appeared on the scene with great and, at first sight, plausible claims for his father's memory, and, denouncing Sir Rowland Hill, proceeded to secure such believers as he could, using means which even our late friend, Mr. L. W. Durbin, declared to be bribery.

Mr. Pearson Hill has permitted his father's name to be dragged about the dust long enough, and we are more than glad to see that Mr. Chalmers is to be met with his own weapons, and the philatelists of all nations, benefited by the historical facts which are presented owing to this remarkable fight, and which prove to our mind that the inventor of the postage stamp has not yet been discovered, and that it certainly was discovered long before the present century.

To Sir Rowland Hill unquestionably belongs the credit of having discovered its utility and of bringing it into general use, which is now shown to be the belief of the Sir Rowland Hill Committee.

MOVING on all the time, we hope to regain the lost time, and shortly will appear on the 1st of each month. We have never been so far behind time before, even when our finances were not so sure as now, and in apologizing for the delay we explain that our trouble is an editorial one.

MESSRS. VOUTE & BRADT are at it again, and Chicago again has two rival journals. Long may they wave!

JOTTINGS.

The American Journal of Philately is thriving, and is certainly one of our best exchanges.

The Curiosity World has become the *Stamp World*, which to our mind is a better title for a very bright paper.

The Philatelic Journal of America is one of our most successful journals devoted to our hobby. Its Convention notes were the best we have seen.

Stamp Collector from Ottawa is certainly trying to keep its editorial promise of independence. It appears to pitch into something or somebody right along.

THE usual crop of new papers come and go, and also like the roses bloom and die. But let us hope some will be spared to us through the cold, cold winter.

WE are also in receipt of several numbers of the *Springfield Republican*, containing stamp articles, and always enjoy them. Thanks, Brother Smith, come again.

The Stamp Collectors' Figaro is not dead, but was only sleeping, as it has just appeared for September under the old management. Many collectors will be glad to hear this.

ALTHOUGH rather late in the day, still it is never too late to give earned praise to a contemporary, and that is why we regret the suspension of the *Philatelic Gazette*, of Altoona. Always bright, always newsy, and never laid down by the writer without a feeling of having been both entertained and instructed. We are glad to welcome it from its new place of abode, but we must say that No. 1 is not up to the old standard.

The Philatelic Gazette now hails from Chicago, Messrs. Mann & Kendig having sold out their interest. The Chicago collectors must have a journal, for as soon as one fails from any cause—financial usually—they immediately start another one. We do not think the old saw, "there's always room at the top," applies to stamp publications. The collectors will not support too many papers, even if they are all of the best. As long as "sample copies" are sent every month the majority of collectors will read them; if the samples stop the collectors stop also. The result is that a few hundred subscribers are expected to pay for an expensive paper. The advertisers soon drop off and patronize a cheaper paper with a large circulation among the younger class of collectors.

ARMS OF THE WEST INDIAN COLONIES.

It is a matter for regret that the West Indian Islands generally have not chosen to employ their armorial bearings for the designs of their stamps, in preference to the ever-repeated queen's head. The shield of Antigua bears a pleasant landscape, em-

bracing a tall tropical tree in the foreground; a fortress on the hill, in the middle distance; and in the rear, the sea and mountain peaks. St. Lucia has another view—that of a harbor guarded by forts, with ships visible beyond; and, on the right, the sun partially seen rising beyond two conical hills. The St. Vincent shield, again, contains a representation of two figures, one kneeling and sacrificing on an altar, the other standing bent forward, olive branch in hand; below is the motto, PAX ET JUSTITIA. The Bahamas adopt as their motto, EXPULSIS PIRATIS, RESTITUTA COMMERCIA; beneath a shield, occupied with a view of the sea, on which is seen an English man-of-war, with the flag of St. George flying at the mizzen. In the distance are seen other vessels, and the sun, rising out of the ocean, illumines all. The arms of the Bermudas are a graving-dock, and a dismasted ship outside. The shield of Jamaica contains the arms and supporters known to collectors from their appearance on the quasi postal shilling stamps of the island; but the principal portion of the armorial device consists of a king, enthroned beneath a canopy, receiving homage and gifts from a kneeling figure. The Trinidad shield shows a near view of a harbor, with a fort on the right, whereon a flag is flying; to the left is a man-of-war at anchor, and in front a boat; mountains in the background complete the scene. Lastly, the arms of St. Kitts are—Columbus standing on the deck of his vessel, telescope to eye, scanning the coast.—*Stamp Collectors' Magazine.*

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