

APS UNIT 28

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EMPIRE STATE
POSTAL HISTORY
SOCIETY



NO JOKE — A REAL MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

By Frank Braithwaite

In 1854 the U.S. Naval Observatory and Hydrographical Office was established to study and chart the ocean, including ocean currents. This unassuming postal card was a product of such a study. It was pre-addressed, rolled up, placed in a bottle, and set adrift. The reverse of the card reads:

Long Island Sound July 27/03. This bottle was thrown overboard from the steamer Allen (illegible) off Captain's Island (Connecticut) about 1:30 pm July 27, 1903 by R. S. Camp of the address named. Will finder kindly put their name and address where picked up and time and mail to the sender and oblige [sic].

The finder, Wilbur V. B. Wright noted on the card that he found it at 2:30 p.m. on July 28 in Bayville, NY. He must have been on holiday at the time (Bayville has some nice beaches), because the card was postmarked on August 1 in Oyster Bay, even though Bayville had its own post office. There is a second postmark, on the same day, from New York, NY Sta. J., just six hours later, at 9:30 p.m.

A response letter was sent to the finder thanking him for his efforts:

Sir; The U.S. Hydrographic Office acknowledges with thanks the receipt of your communication of Aug 1, 1903, enclosing a copy of postal card thrown overboard in Long Island Sound, recovered July 28, 1903, at Bayville, NY. Your cooperation in investigating ocean currents is appreciated. Respectfully, W.H.H. Southerland, Commander, U.S. Navy Hydrographer. CC Raymond S. Camp.

While the card entered the U.S. mail stream in Bayville, NY, an argument could be made that this is also a piece of Connecticut postal history. What do you think?