



EMPIRE STATE
POSTAL HISTORY
SOCIETY

APS UNIT 28

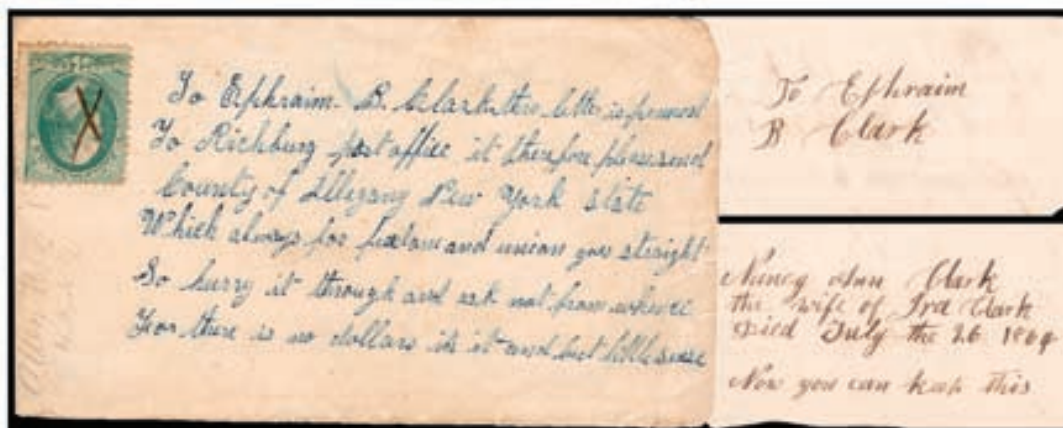
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A PUZZLING LETTER FROM LONG AGO

By Heather Sweeting

In today's world a letter without a ZIP code or proper address will be rejected by computer sorting machines rather quickly. Not so 100 years ago, when a letter's address could be merely a name and a town. How did the mail get delivered? Not quite as rapidly as it does now, but often in a unique manner. This sender of this letter from Allen in Allegany County on April 5, 1882, which bears an untied manuscript pen cancel on a three-cent bank note stamp, used a bit of creativity for the address which is written almost as a limerick.

*To Ephraim B. Clark this letter is penned / To Richburg post office it therefore please send /
County of Allegany New York State / Which always for freedom and union goes straight / So
hurry it through and ask not from whence / For there is no dollars in it and but little sense*

The contents are even more cryptic. A small piece of paper is inscribed on one side *To Ephraim B. Clark*. The reverse says *Nancy Ann Clark the wife of Ira Clark Died July the 26th 1864. Now you can keep this*. Was this a letter from Ira to his brother Ephraim with family genealogical information? Was something else enclosed as well, perhaps a picture? We will never know. One would assume that even in 1882 someone spending three cents to mail a letter would have tried to get their money's worth and include more than a fragment of paper.

The 1880 state census lists an Ephraim B. Clark, farmer, born in 1825 and living in Elliptonville, Cattaraugus County, New York with a wife and two sons, but it is unlikely that it is the same person. The birth of an Ira Clark at Allen in 1817 is listed in the International Genealogical Index (www.familysearch.org), which is a fantastic research tool if you are searching your family tree, or any person who might have written a letter long ago.