

# THE FIRST CENTURY OF VICE PRESIDENTS

The office of Vice President was proposed to the Constitutional Convention, almost as an afterthought, by Alexander Hamilton. Ironically, Hamilton would become the only person in American history to be killed by a Vice President.

It was originally intended that the Vice President should be an eminent man, the best available backup to the President, and that he should be selected in a non-partisan manner. Only the first Vice President, John Adams, was selected in this manner.

By 1796 factions had emerged and the leaders of the two factions won the two top offices. Though he had not been selected in the spirit of the Constitution, Thomas Jefferson was nevertheless a most eminent Vice President.

By 1800 the concept of the two-man ticket had developed, and most electors voted for the two people designated by their faction's Congressional caucus.

The tied vote in 1800 led to the Twelfth Amendment, which provided for separate elections for President and Vice President. An unintended side effect of the Amendment was to institutionalize the concept of the two-man ticket. Through the election of 1820 the caucuses continued to pick nationally prominent men for Vice President. The usual choice, for reasons of geographical balance, was the Governor of New York.

When the caucus system began to collapse in the 1820s there was a movement back towards original intent, as candidates for national office were nominated by state legislatures, newspapers, and mass rallies. This transitional period produced the third (and last) Vice President who was a great national figure before becoming Vice President, John C. Calhoun.

The emergence of national party conventions in the 1830s made the selection of Vice Presidential nominees an afterthought, the province of the Presidential nominees and party bosses. Vice Presidents were picked for reasons of personal or party loyalty, geographic or ideological balance; to pay off a debt, or to placate the wing of the party whose man had not been nominated for President. As a result, nominees for Vice President since 1832 have often been little-known men with limited apparent qualifications for the office.

Contempt for the office, if not always for its occupant, was immediate. Ben Franklin suggested the title "His Superfluous Excellency" for the Vice President. Daniel Webster once rejected the chance to run for Vice President, saying "I do not propose to be buried until I am really dead."

In more modern times, President Woodrow Wilson (who described his own Vice President as "a small caliber man") said that the Vice President's "importance consists in the fact that he may cease to be Vice President," and Vice President Charles Dawes said that he "look[ed] at the newspapers every morning to see how the President's health is."

Contempt for the office was expressed most succinctly by Vice President John N. Garner, who said that it was not worth "a bucket of warm [rhymes with spit]."



Seven of the Vice Presidents in this exhibit moved on to the top job.

# SYNOPSIS

## THE FIRST CENTURY OF VICE PRESIDENTS

This exhibit is a thematic look at the men who held the office of Vice President from 1789 to 1889. As a thematic, it includes material on Presidents and others where relevant to the Vice President being discussed.

The Title Page gives a historic look at the office of Vice President, with emphasis on the contempt with which the office was widely viewed. The body of the exhibit shows the Vice Presidents, with emphasis on how and why they were chosen for the job, what they did as V.P., and their relationships with others (especially the Presidents under whom they served), and what they are remembered for.

All town cancels, etc., are named for the individual shown.

Elements include free franks, souvenir sheets, a proof (p2), an experimental coil (p4), county cancels (pp. 7, 11), an unofficial Confederate printing (p8), revenues, and a campaign cover (p13).

Key items include the free franks of Aaron Burr, George Clinton, Elbridge Gerry, and Daniel D. Tompkins, as well as an early "Vice President's Chambers" cover (p 14).

THE FIRST CENTURY OF VICE PRESIDENTS

PLAN OF THE EXHIBIT

Title page	p. 1
Plan page	2
John Adams	3
Thomas Jefferson	3
Aaron Burr	4
George Clinton	5
Elbridge Gerry	6
Daniel D. Tompkins	7
John Caldwell Calhoun	8
Martin van Buren	9
Richard Mentor Johnson	9
John Tyler	10
George Mifflin Dallas	10
Millard Fillmore	11
William Rufus deVane King	11
John Cabell Breckinridge	12
Hannibal Hamlin	13
Andrew Johnson	13
Schuyler Colfax	14
Henry Wilson	15
William Almon Wheeler	15
Chester Alan Arthur	15
Thomas Andrews Hendricks	16
Levi Parsons Morton	16



JOHN ADAMS (1789 - 1797)

One of the most eminent men of his day, John Adams placed second in electoral votes in 1789 and became the country's first Vice President.

He described his office as "the most insignificant that ever the invention of man contrived."



Adams believed that he should have been the first President, rather than the under-educated military man who was actually chosen.



THOMAS JEFFERSON (1797 - 1801)

As leader of the political faction which bore his name, Thomas Jefferson placed second in electoral votes in 1796 and became Vice President.

Jefferson wrote the "Manual of Parliamentary Practice," which still serves as the basic rulebook for Senate procedures.

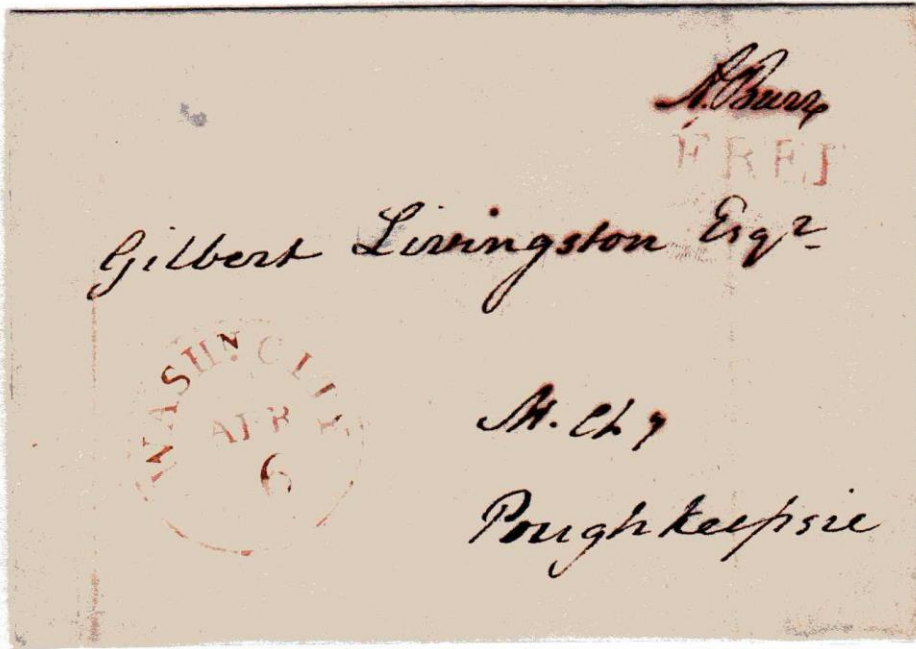


Jefferson wanted to be remembered as the principal author of the Declaration of Independence and founder of the nation's first non-religious school, the University of Virginia.



AARON BURR (1801 - 1805)

Aaron Burr, a leading New York Anti-Federalist, had his faction's backing for Vice President in 1800.



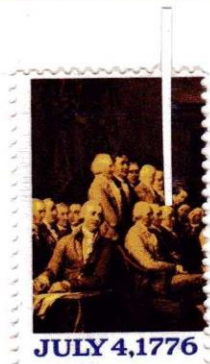
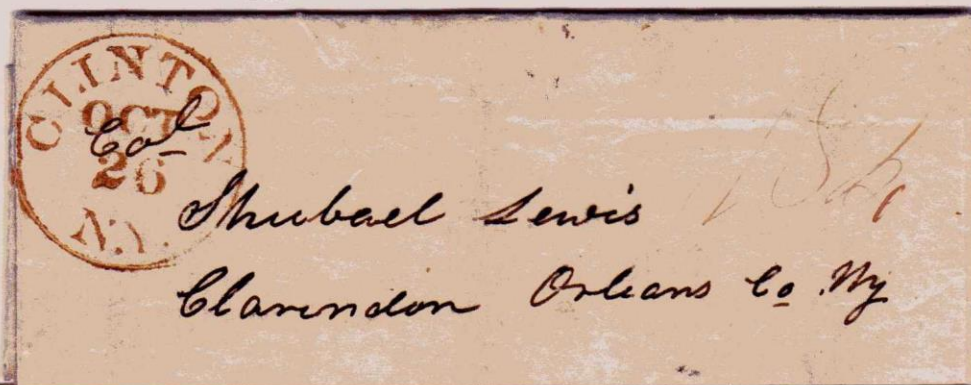
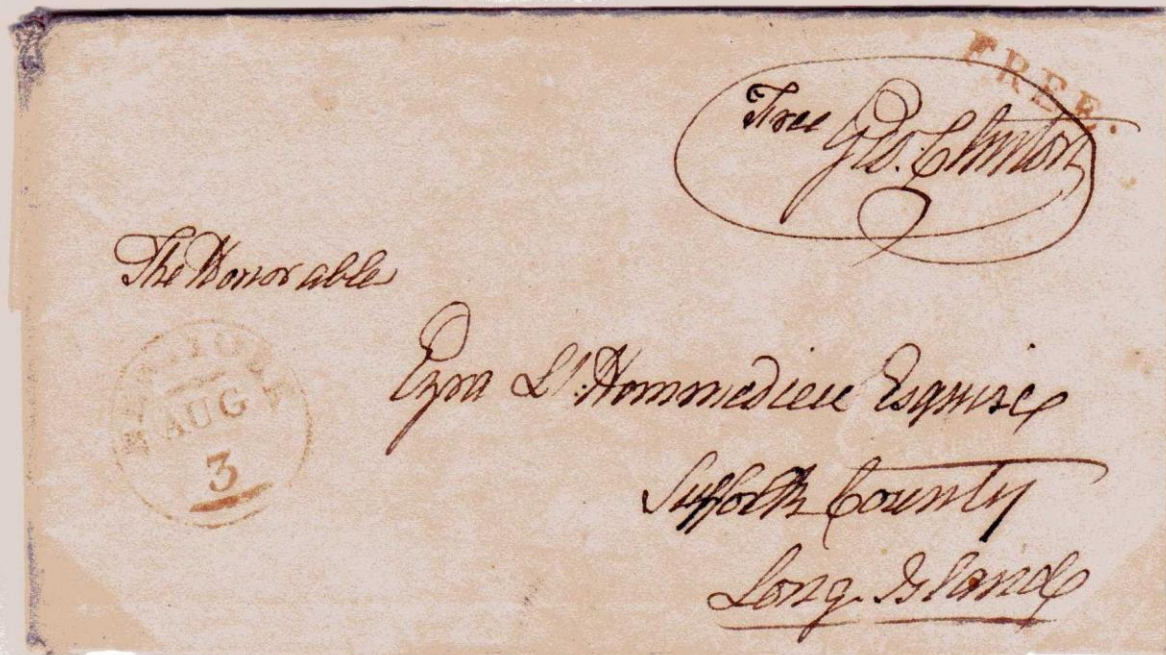
Following a tied electoral vote, Burr nearly wrested the Presidency from Thomas Jefferson in the election in the House of Representatives. Burr is best remembered for killing Alexander Hamilton in a duel in 1804.



GEORGE CLINTON (1805 - 1812)

As Governor of a large Northern state, New York's George Clinton was picked to balance a ticket headed by a Presidential nominee from Virginia.

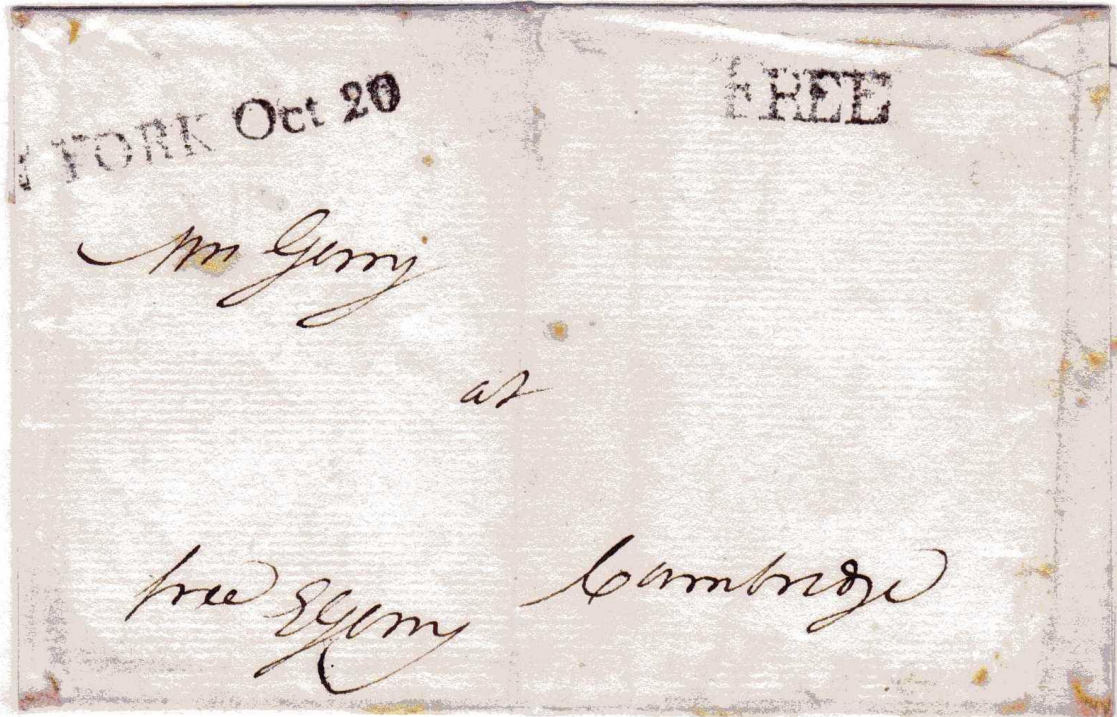
Early in 1805 he wondered whether there was any point in attending his own inauguration, "the office not imposing any duties upon [the Vice President] until the next meeting of the Senate." Clinton was the first Vice President to die in office.



Clinton, New York was named for George Clinton. Clinton approved of the Declaration of Independence, but never signed the document.

ELBRIDGE GERRY (1813 - 1814)

Elbridge Gerry was Governor of Massachusetts and a supporter of the President's war policy when he was elected Vice President in 1812. He died in office in 1814.



Gerry signed the Declaration of Independence, but refused to sign the Constitution.



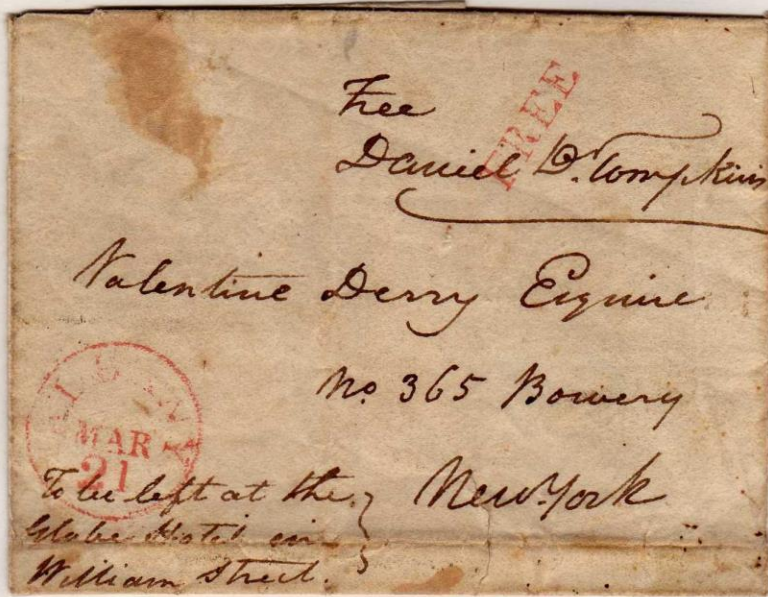
Gerry served under President James Madison, who was known as the father of the Constitution.



DANIEL D. TOMPKINS (1817 - 1825)

Daniel D. Tompkins, the four-term Governor of New York, made an ideal running mate for a Presidential nominee from Virginia.

Poor health, combined with financial and drinking problems, kept Tompkins from spending much time at his job. "Anyone can preside over the Senate," he observed.



Tompkinsville, Kentucky and Tompkins County, New York were named for Daniel D. Tompkins.



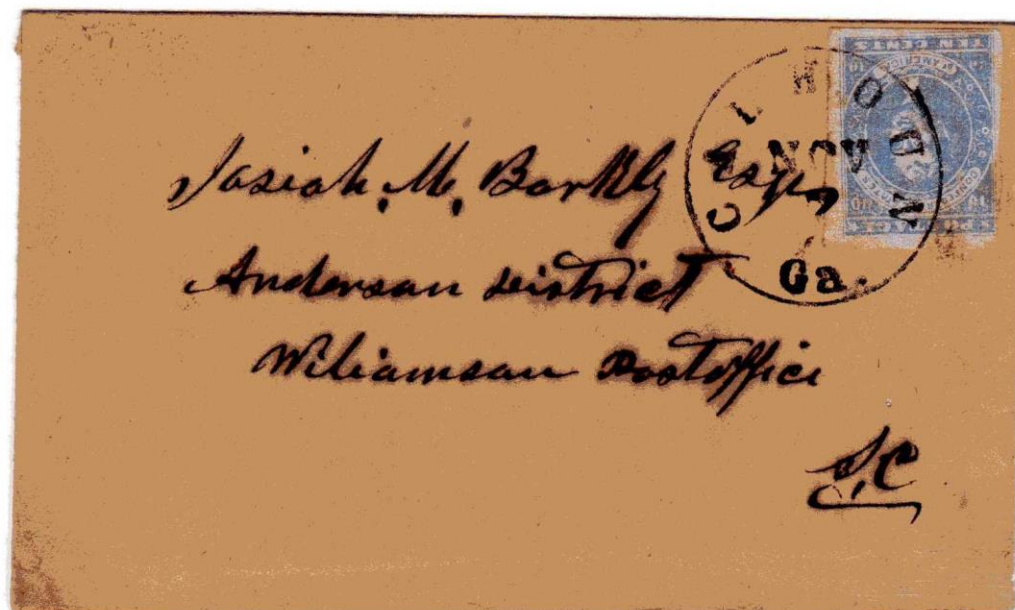
JOHN CALDWELL CALHOUN (1825 - 1832)

John C. Calhoun, leader of the South, withdrew from a five-way Presidential race in 1824 to run for Vice President under three of the remaining candidates. He hoped that the Presidential election would be deadlocked and the Presidency would pass to the incoming Vice President: himself.

Frustrated after eight years of waiting, he resigned in 1832.



The Confederacy's 1¢ Calhoun stamp was never used because the rate for drop letters and circulars was raised to 2¢. The stones were revised to 2¢, but never used until August Dietz printed dark green stamps decades later.

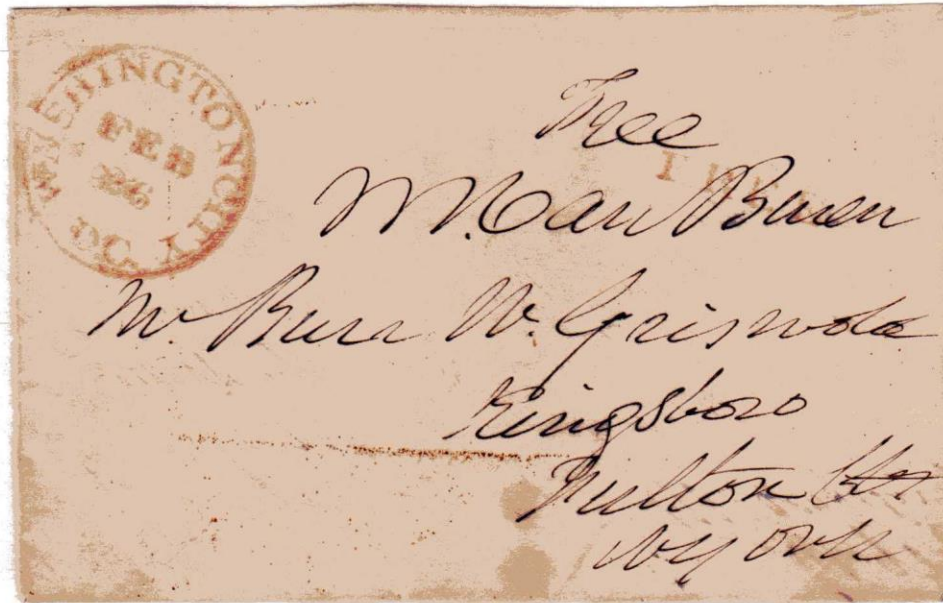
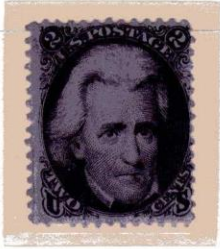


Dawsonville, Georgia was renamed in honor of John C. Calhoun in 1850.

MARTIN VAN BUREN (1833 - 1837)

Martin Van Buren was President Jackson's personal choice for Vice President in 1832. With no opposition to his own renomination, Jackson called the first Democratic national convention primarily to ratify his selection of Van Buren.

Van Buren's loyalty as Vice President earned him Jackson's backing for the Presidential nomination in 1836.



RICHARD MENTOR JOHNSON (1837 - 1841)

Richard M. Johnson's support of Andrew Jackson led Jackson to pick Johnson as the Democratic nominee for Vice President in 1836.

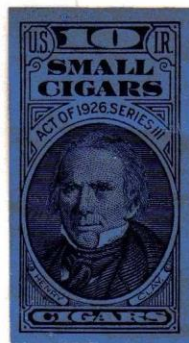
As Vice President, Johnson operated a tavern and openly kept several Negro mistresses. He was not renominated in 1840.



JOHN TYLER (1841)

John Tyler won the Whig Vice Presidential nomination in 1840 largely in return for a favor done for party boss Henry Clay.

Tyler was Vice President for only a month and was at his home in Virginia when the President died. He had to borrow money to make the trip to Washington.



GEORGE MIFFLIN DALLAS (1845 - 1849)

George M. Dallas, a prominent Pennsylvania politician, was elected Vice President on the Democratic ticket in 1844. His influence was sharply curtailed when his Pennsylvania rival, James Buchanan, became Secretary of State.



MILLARD FILLMORE (1849 - 1850)

Regional balance and a need to restore party unity led the Whigs to pick Millard Fillmore, Comptroller of New York, for Vice President in 1848.

When the President died in 1850, he moved up to the top job.

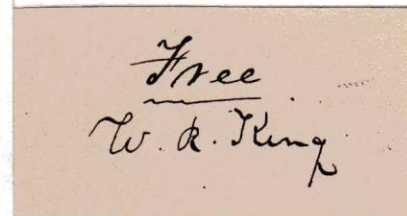
Below: 3c for postage plus 10c for special delivery; Fillmore County, Minnesota was named for Millard Fillmore.



WILLIAM RUFUS DE VANE KING (1853)

Long-time Senator William King of Alabama was elected Vice President in 1852 even though he was already suffering from tuberculosis.

An act of Congress allowed King to take the oath of office in Havana, where he had relocated for health reasons. He returned to his plantation in Alabama, where he died 45 days after the inauguration, never having functioned as Vice President.

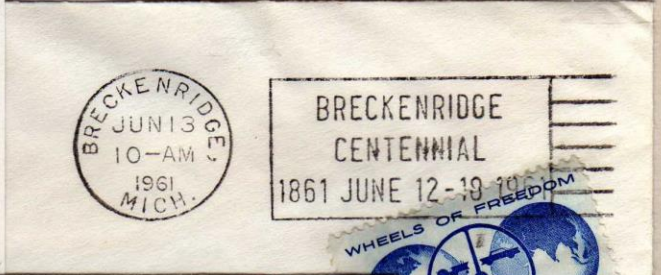


JOHN CABELL BRECKINRIDGE (1857 - 1861)

Though he considered himself too young for the job, Kentucky's John C. Breckinridge accepted the Democratic nomination for Vice President in 1856 because the party needed a Southerner on the ticket.

Breckinridge ran for President in 1860, then sided with the South.

Oddly, a U.S. warship was named for Breckinridge in his capacity as a rebel general rather than as Vice President of the U.S.



1857 100 YEARS 1957  
CENTENNIAL  
JUNE 14, 15, 16, 1957



After 5 days, return to  
T. W. BROWN,  
BRECKENRIDGE, TEX.



*J. Breckinridge*

*Club of County Court  
Williamstown  
Grant Co  
Ky*

HANNIBAL HAMLIN (1861 - 1865)

Hannibal Hamlin, an abolitionist Senator from Maine, was picked by the Republicans in 1860 for regional balance. A key advisor during the war, Hamlin was a supporter of radical emancipation measures. Enemies accused him of being part Negro. He was dropped from the ticket in 1864 for a different kind of balance.



ANDREW JOHNSON (1865)

Calling themselves the National Union Party in 1864, the Republicans picked Andrew Johnson, a pro-war Democrat, for Vice President.

Johnson became tipsy and embarrassed himself at his inauguration. Six weeks later he became President.



SCHUYLER COLFAX (1869 - 1873)

Schuyler Colfax was Speaker of the House when he emerged from a field of 11 candidates to win the Vice Presidential nomination at the Republican convention in 1868.

He was the first to use printed "Vice President's Chamber" stationery.



Colfax was nearly impeached in 1872 when it became known that as Chairman of the House Post Office Committee in 1868 he had accepted campaign contributions from George F. Nesbitt & Company of New York, the firm which had printed U.S. postal stationery since 1853. Nesbitt lost the contract in 1870. The envelope above is an example of Nesbitt's work.

HENRY WILSON (1873 - 1875)

A leading Radical Republican from Massachusetts, Henry Wilson was picked for Vice President in 1872. He seldom presided over the Senate because of poor health. Yet it was while presiding that he suffered a fatal stroke. He died in the Vice President's room in the Capitol.



WILLIAM ALMON WHEELER (1877 - 1881)

A desire for sectional balance led the Republicans to pick New York's William A. Wheeler for Vice President in 1876. Several months earlier the eventual Presidential nominee had asked an associate, "Who is Wheeler?"

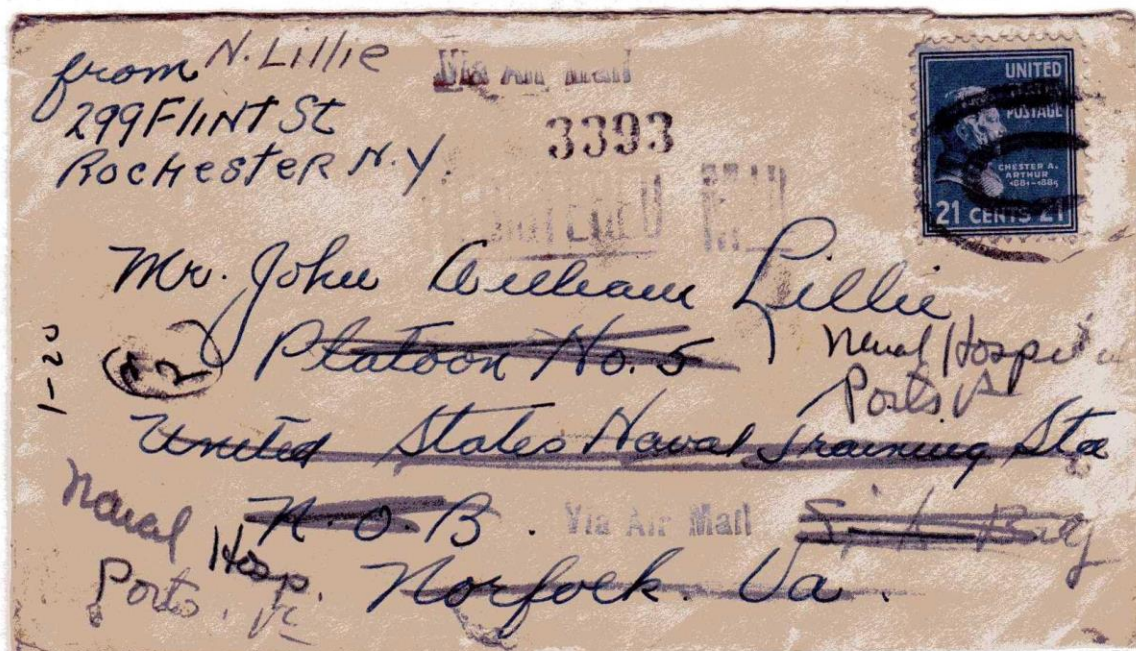
Wheeler spent much of his time with the First Family because his wife had died in 1876.



CHESTER ALAN ARTHUR (1881)

Chester Arthur was a product of New York patronage politics who had never run for elective office. Offered the Vice Presidential nomination in an attempt to heal factional wounds at the 1880 Republican convention, Arthur said "the office of Vice President is a greater honor than I ever dreamed of attaining."

Below, 6c airmail plus 15c special delivery; transit time of 11 days.





THOMAS ANDREWS HENDRICKS (1885)

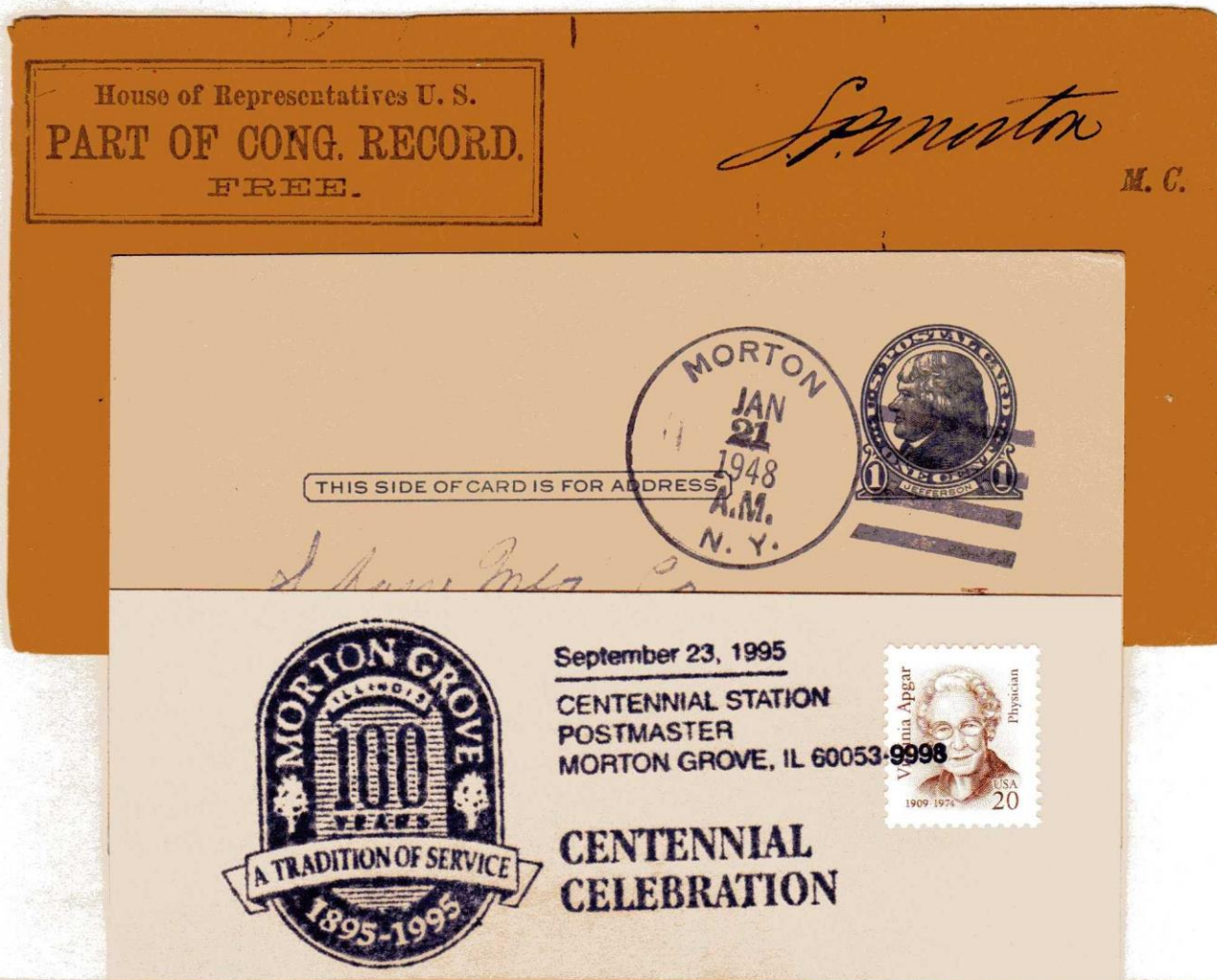
Thomas Hendricks was a perennial Presidential bridesmaid who was considered for the Presidential nomination at four Democratic conventions. He was nominated for Vice President in 1876, but the ticket lost. Finally elected Vice President in 1884, he died after less than ten months in office.



LEVI PARSONS MORTON (1889 - 1893)

New York railroad executive and Congressman Levi P. Morton provided balance for a ticket headed by a candidate from Ohio.

Towns in New York and Illinois were named for him.



Less than two months after Morton's inauguration, the office of Vice President marked its centennial.