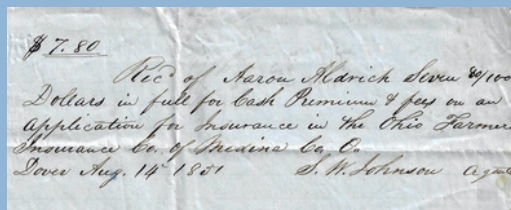


BAY VILLAGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Preserving the Character of Our City



Sending Snail Mail

19th Century Letter Writing

Before the days of text messages and emojis, "snail mail," or written letters were the primary form of communication. Writing a letter was not considered to be a tedious task, but rather gave people a way to communicate with friends, family, and often far-off relatives.

In the 1800s, pre-made envelopes were not readily available as they are today. Instead, it was common to write on the front of the paper and leave a section of the back blank to fold into an envelope. One would then address the blank section of the envelope to the recipient, seal and stamp (if needed),



Paper selection was an important first step when writing a letter. **Plain paper** was always preferred, any type of decorated paper was considered vulgar and in bad taste! Equally as important was pen and ink, and again, simplicity was the preference. People were encouraged to write in **black ink** (housed inside an **inkwell**), and to find a pen that best suited their "hand and temperament." An early settler's pen would have been a large bird feather (goose feathers being common), also called a quill, or later on a writing utensil with a steel nib.

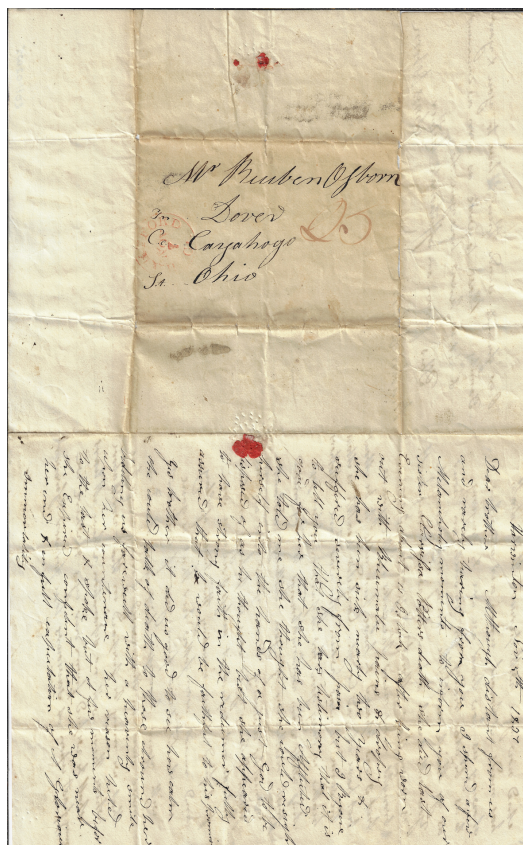


Once materials were selected, one would consider *who* they are writing to - a friend, relative, neighbor? After recipient of the letter is chosen, one should ponder the **style** in which they will write. The style of the letter should be adapted based on the recipient of the letter. For example, if you are writing to a teacher, the style should be respectful, to a child, the style should be simple and playful.

When you begin writing, ensure your handwriting is neat and if possible, elegant, so that it maybe both easy to read and appealing to the eye. Begin the letter with an appropriate **salutation** to open the letter: *Respected Friend, My dear Son, Dear Madam*, for example.

Next, write the **body** of your letter. In this section one should write the things they'd like to share with the recipient. Common subjects of letters in the 1800s included crop, livestock and general farm news, **health**, neighbors, and the weather, amongst other things. This section of the letter would often be written very small and close together, front and back, to share as much with the recipient as possible. Finally, choose a **conclusion** to end the letter: *Your loving Daughter, Yours Respectfully, Your obedient servant*, for example.

This example shows a letter written by **Amos Osborn** in 1827 to his brother **Reuben Osborn**, one of Dover Township's earliest settlers. Amos writes with the news that their sister, Clarissa, had passed away from rheumatic fever and dropsy, which she had suffered from for nearly two years. He also expresses that it would be nice for the brother to reunite, but also that they may not in this world. This was the reality for many of Dover's early settlers that picked up and left their homes to settle here! Keep reading for a closer look at the complete letter (Tip: change the orientation to landscape in order to read the text).



Mr. Hubert Osborn
2nd Dover
Care Carthage
La. Ohio

Washington Nov 5th 1891

Dear brother
Although distant from us
and nearly having from you a year ago
Monday morning to inform you of our
sister Emma's father's death she died last
evening about 11 o'clock after being over
not with the immediate pains of dying
she has been sick nearly two years &
suffered severely from pain but I begone
to tell you that she has been suffering that it is
now you see that she has been afflicted
she had me she thought she could never
herself into the hands of a just God to be
judged of as he thought that she appeared
to have strong faith in the redemption fully
assured that it would be faithful to his promise
God brother it was good to see how calm
she would talk of death to those around her
holding our forewell with a heavenly smile
when her undertaker has never held
to the last a splake but of his manner before
she expired confident that she was made
her and her full satisfaction of God's
divinity

And now you will perceive that doubt
has made at least upon our numbers
showing us how great we are & saying
to us be also ready for in such an hour
as you think not the sin of man cometh
You will wish to know how we are my health
is very poor about of years ago I was
brought very near the gates of the grave
but I was spared & have been able to be about
but house of God long. Confide health is about
the same it was when you were here others
health is very good for of reason of his age
and while some writings things to my mind
just recollections of you although absent
Especially desiring to see your face in the
 flesh & hear your voice in prayers and company
but do not expect it unless I see you soon
for I find disease invading this house of God
and must soon follow but that is gone
we should be visit from you if consistent
with your business but if we should be
more and in this world I may be in line
that we may be present in that world above
where there will be no separation where all hearts
shall be united from our eyes & where we
may feast upon the precious Saviour

Dear friends send them I love to you & your
family Please to write as soon as convenient
& let us know how you do
Yours from an affectionate brother
James Colburn
Hudson River

2011.02.005



Writing could be done at home or on the go! **Travel writing boxes** from the period have been found - containing everything one would need to write a letter, with the exception of the paper itself. A brass writing box is pictured below in two different positions. Notice the miniature inkwell and pop up candle to heat up wax for a seal if needed. It also has a pencil and a possible holder for a quill kit.



Letter writing was one of the most common past times of an early settler. It was their only way to communicate with those they could not see on a regular basis - can you imagine not being able to pick up your phone and call your loved ones across the country? Consider the Cahoon Family who left their home back in Vermont or the Osborn Family who left their home in New York. News could not be shared in a matter of moments, but rather in a day or so's time, perhaps even longer! Find the instructions to fold your own 19th century style letter below.

We encourage you to visit Rose Hill Museum to find the artifacts pictured in this article!

Open Sundays 2:00 - 4:30, April through December.

Scribe & Fold a 19th Century Letter

Supplies Needed:

- a piece of paper - 8.5"x11" or larger will work best
- writing utensil
- hot water, mug, tea bags, baking sheet, paint brush
(optional, to dye paper beforehand)



Instructions

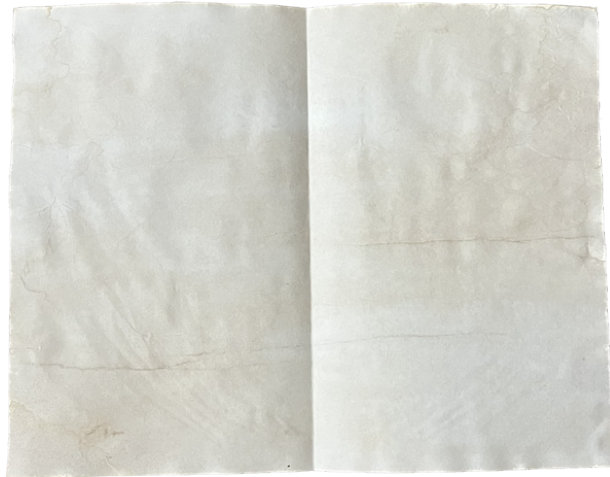
This step is **optional** to give paper an antique effect. **Ask an adult for assistance to acquire tea.**

- 1 tea bag per sheet of paper is needed
- Place paper on a baking sheet to protect surface and collect any extra water
- Use a paintbrush to apply the tea to the paper. You can also dab the tea bags directly on the paper once they are cool enough.
- If you would like a darker effect, you may want to repeat with multiple tea bags on the same sheet of paper.
- Allow the paper to dry completely before writing and folding.



Follow the instructions found in the lesson above to write your letter.
After your letter is written, place the paper in the landscape position
with your written letter facing upward.

Fold your paper in half vertically. Unfold to create a center line.



Fold the outer edges to the center line.



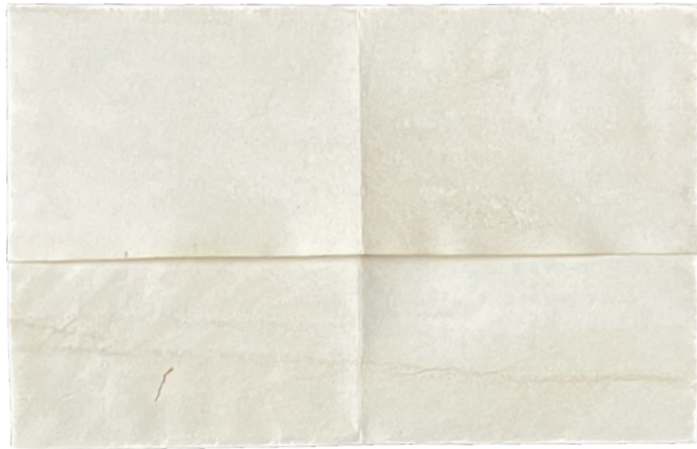
Fold the bottom third of the paper up.



Fold the top third of the paper down, leaving about 1.5" to the bottom of the envelope (pictured below)



Insert the bottom flap into the top flap, securing the envelope shut.



Flip the envelope over and address to the recipient.

Check our website for a lesson on sealing your letter and creating your own stamps!

We would love to see your 19th century letters! Share a picture with us via email bvhsrosehill@gmail.com, or share on Facebook and tag Bay Village Historical Society.

