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GIRLS OF FRANCE



Titanic Survivor Edith (Rosenbaum) Russell's World War One Letter from France



TITANIC AND THE WINTER BUILDING COVERS

Possible explanations for the markings and handstamps that can be found on them.

By Jerry N. J. Vondeling



Over the years several covers have been discovered sent to the M.A. Winter Company in Washington, DC in March of 1912 with a “Titanic” mark on them, which sparked my interest. But other markings common among them are there, too, including a purple “received” mark, a blue six-digit hand-stamped number, and a “file” or “dossier” number. What’s the story behind them?

Cover mailed to the M.A. Winter Company, originally to have sailed on the *Titanic*, received March 19, 1912. Tom Fortunato collection.

The first two are easy to explain. It was a common practice of the time that mailed envelopes bound across the Atlantic would be marked with the name of the ship carrying it before the sailing. The “Titanic” mark indicates that this cover was to have been transported across the Atlantic aboard that ship during her maiden voyage, originally planned on March 20, 1912. The ship was delayed, but not before some covers were so marked first and sent on other vessels, including Cunard’s *Lusitania*. The covers found mailed to the Winter Building in Washington arrived between March 18 and 28 based on the dated purple “Received” mark on them. The same mark can be seen on covers received earlier by the company, sometimes in red ink. Then what could be an explanation for the four-digit handwritten “dossier” or “file no.” marking added before posting the covers? They are in the same handwriting as the address. It has been suggested that these numbers refer to articles in a catalogue or items being sold by the Winter Company. So to prove this, I first

tried finding a newspaper advertisement published by the firm during that time among several online Washington newspaper sources, but I found none. Me being Dutch, I next tried searching online Dutch newspaper archives on the chance something would appear. I stumbled upon an advertisement for the Winter company dated December 19, 1911, in “de Grondwet,” a Dutch newspaper published by and for immigrants in the United States.*

Een welbetalende betrekking voor een betrouwbaar persoon.

Gij kunt werk bij ons krijgen, dat uwe Inkomsten 50c per uur vermeerderen kan en niet uw tegenwoordig werk verhindert en als gij ons uwe geheele tijd geven wilt kunt gij \$100 per maand maken. De vermeerderde navraag voor ons welbekend artikel zal de Hollanders interesseren en maakt het noodzakelijk dadelijk een persoon aan te stellen die ons plaatselijk vertegenwoordigt. Gemakkelijk werk, ondervinding onnoodig.

SCHRIJF VAN DAAG uw vol adres gevend en wij zullen u dadelijk volle uitlegging van ons eerlijk en oprecht aanbod geven. Adresseer als volgt:

**THE M. A WINTER CO., D-2 WINTER BUILDING,
WASHINGTON, D. C**

An advertisement found in the Dutch newspaper archives published in 1911.

*After 1845, mass emigration from the Netherlands to the United States of America occurred. Agricultural workers from the Dutch clay areas left the country and settled in villages and cities at the East Coast and in the Midwest of the US. Like other Western-European immigrant groups, the Dutch published their own newspapers for more than a century. Through these weekly Dutch publications the editors served the commercial, political, and religious interests of their communities.

The recruitment ad translates as: A well-paying relationship for a reliable person. You can work with us to increase your income by 50 cents per hour without interfering with your current job. If you give us your entire time you could earn \$100 per month. Increased inquiries for our well known article will interest the Dutch and make it necessary to appoint a person who represents us locally. Easy work. Experience not necessary. WRITE TODAY giving your full address and we will immediately send a full details of our fair and sincere offer. Address as follows:

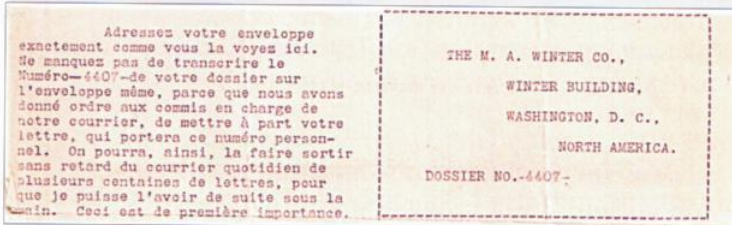
THE MA WINTER CO. D2 Winter Building, Washington DC. It appears that the letters mailed by the company back to these future employee prospects included a reference number that was to be written on the envelope so it could be directed to the right person (or department) when it came back. This number may also have been used on additional correspondences as well. A postal card seen here mailed on September 3, 1912 from Chicago and sent to the Winter Building reads as follows: "Dear sirs, yours of 8, 28th '12 is at hand" and "I can put all my time to anything that is suitable for me to do, this is all I can say until I hear from you."



A McKinley postal card received September 4, 1912 - Author's collection

The sender marked the card in the lower left corner with "File No. 6055." The Titanic covers were similarly marked with reference numbers ranging from 5536 to 5631. Note, too, that the Chicago post card has a purple "received" mark and 6 digit blue number like the Titanic covers. Was "yours of 8, 28th '12" (August 28, 1912 (postal card in the THS collection) a letter referencing file number 6055? [It is 5536] This possibility is supported by a letter sent by the Winter Company two years earlier in 1910 to a possible future employee living in France. The letter offered a new job to the recipient, as his address was given to the company by another representative of the company. In this letter the recipient was instructed to address his letter as follows: "Address your envelope exactly as you see here."

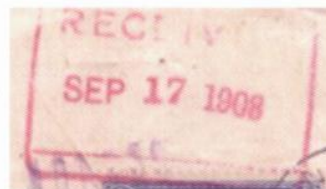
Part the letter sent by the Winter Company May 4th 1910 - Author's collection



Be sure to write the number -4407- from your folder on on the same envelope, because we instruct the clerk in charge of our mail to look for your letter that will carry this personal number. We can, thus, find it without delay from the hundreds of letters received daily so that I can have it at hand."

The letterhead of the letter send by the Winter Company dated May 4, 1910. Author's collection.

Now that the "dossier" number is explained; what about the blue six-digit numbers ranging from 264552 to 273940 found on the Titanic covers? The number is 385081 on the September 1912 postal card. It was originally thought this number could be a tracking number used on registered mail, but that idea was discarded since the covers do not pay the registered mail letter rate nor show other markings typically seen on registered mail. This number was clearly applied by the Winter Company as a reference number. But how and when?

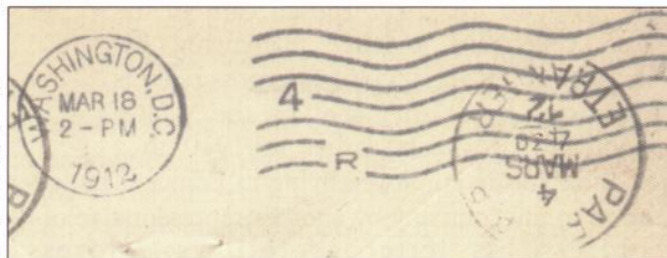


Back-stamped company receiving mark.

This cover does not have a file or dossier number.

Author's collection.

One cover mailed from Amatitlan, Guatemala on September 3, 1908, and received by the firm on September 17 can explain the process, since the six-digit handwritten number was additionally dated using the same blue marker reading 270972 - Oct 22. The October 22 docket probably marked the date the letter was archived. This is also supported by two covers sent to the company from Chile, both arriving August 18, 1909. Both were marked using the same number (295250) and noted as "personal" by the sender. Maintaining an envelope mail archive would also explain why such a large number of Winter Company covers have survived dating between 1905 and 1917**.



Most of the Titanic covers found also bear a Washington, DC receiving postmark on the reverse. This International Machine cancel is found with a "3" or "4" in center left of the 7 bar field. The letter "R" to the lower right of that number probably refers to "receiving." More about this subject can be found at Mr. Fortunato's website, "www.titaniccovers.com." To date, 19 such covers have been found, most originating in France but also one from Spain and one from Denmark. The most recent cover in this census was added in August, 2015. Perhaps this could clear some of the mysteries surrounding the Winter Company's mail processing and their connection to the Titanic marked covers, at least until additional evidence is found. ❄️



**Note: Covers sent to the M A Winter Company before 1909 were addressed to the Armory Building, their prior address before moving to the Winter Building that was constructed between 1908-1909.

With thanks to Thomas M. Fortunato for proofreading and editing my article. Excerpts from *Stamp Insider*, Mar./Apr. 2009

Stamps at the back of the Titanic cover Tom Fortunato collection.

Titanic cover. THS collection