

Swans Island Postal History

Hancock County, Maine

Last update for this page: 08/30/2026

This page is part of the Maine Postal History website—a project of the Maine Philatelic Society.
For more information, see <https://www.mainephilatelic.org/mph>.

Swans Island is a town in Hancock County, incorporated on March 26, 1897, from Swans Island Plantation. It is located in the southern end of Blue Hill Bay and has had connections with both Stonington and Tremont over the years.

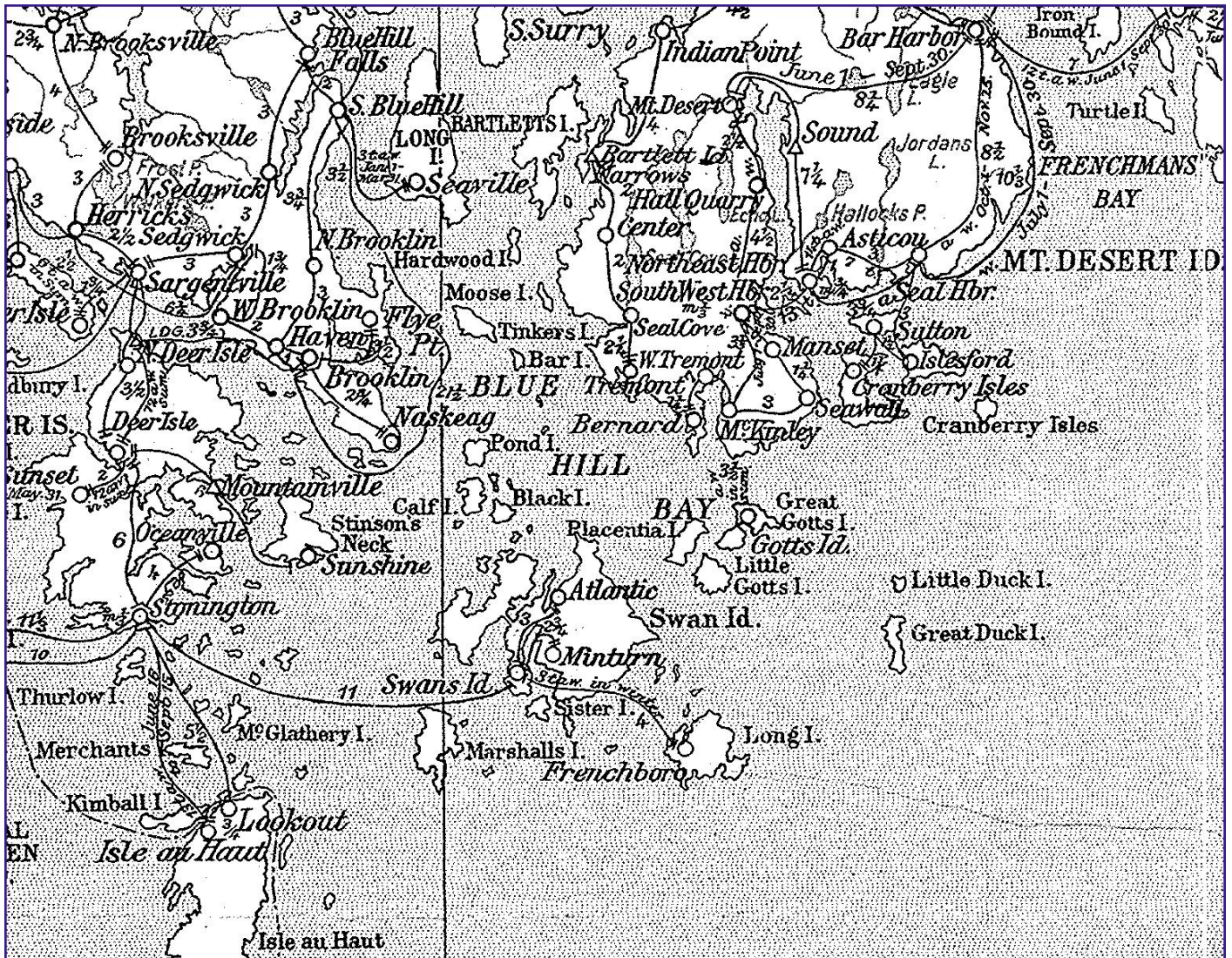
Swans Island had earlier been known as Burnt Coat Island. When Champlain first visited the island in 1604, it had been burned over; and the name Burnt Coat evolved from the French name Champlain gave the island, *Brûlé côte* meaning burnt hill.

The name Swans Island comes from Scotsman James Swan, who purchased the island and 15 smaller ones in 1785, with a mandate to bring settlers.

During the history of Swans Island, there have been three post offices.

Briefly, the history of these three is as follows:

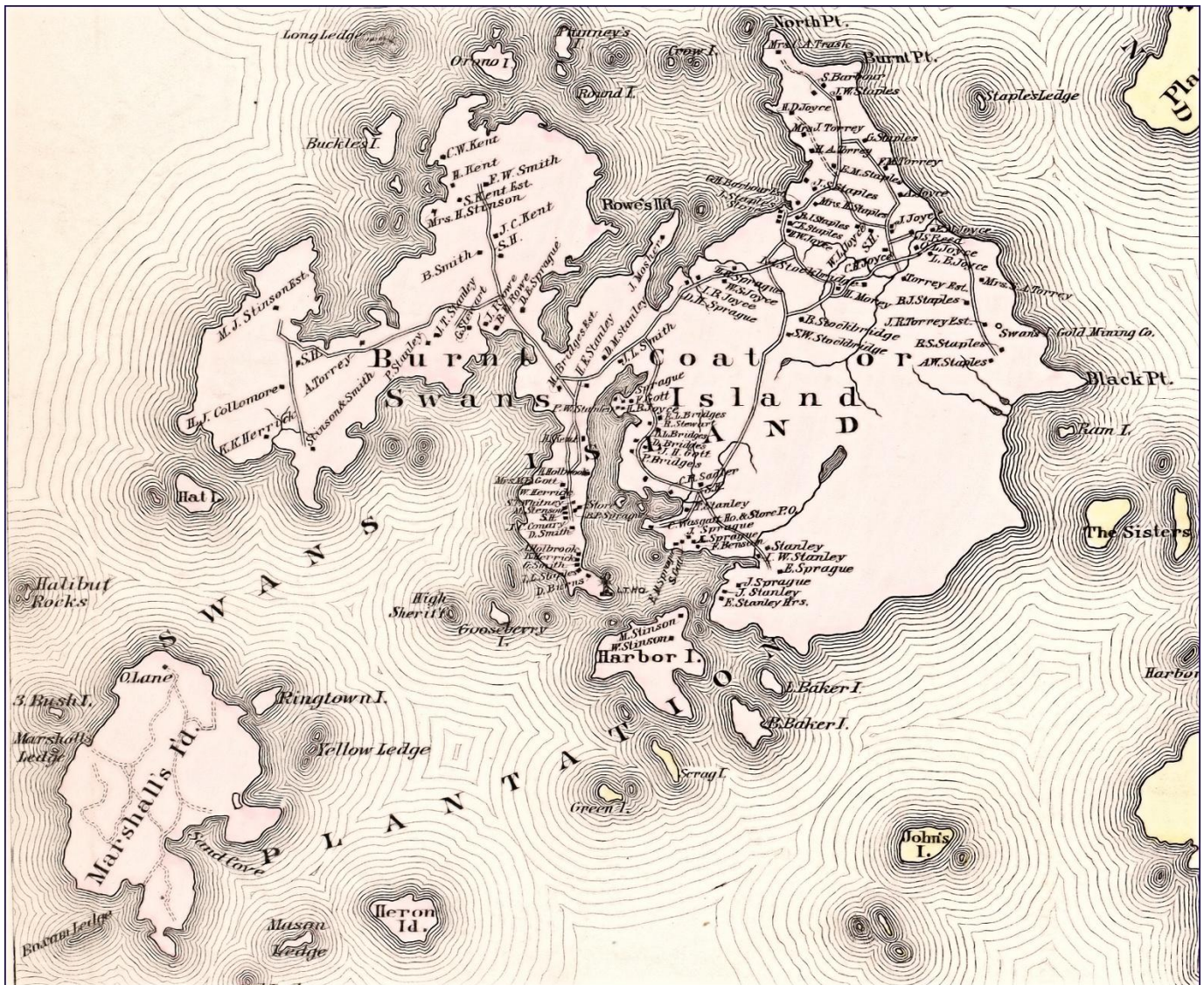
1. [Atlantic](#) Post Office opened on 28 September 1883 and closed on 24 May 1995.
2. [Minturn](#) Post Office opened on 4 February 1897 and closed on 24 April 1998.
3. [Swans Island](#) Post Office opened on 24 June 1844 and is still operating.



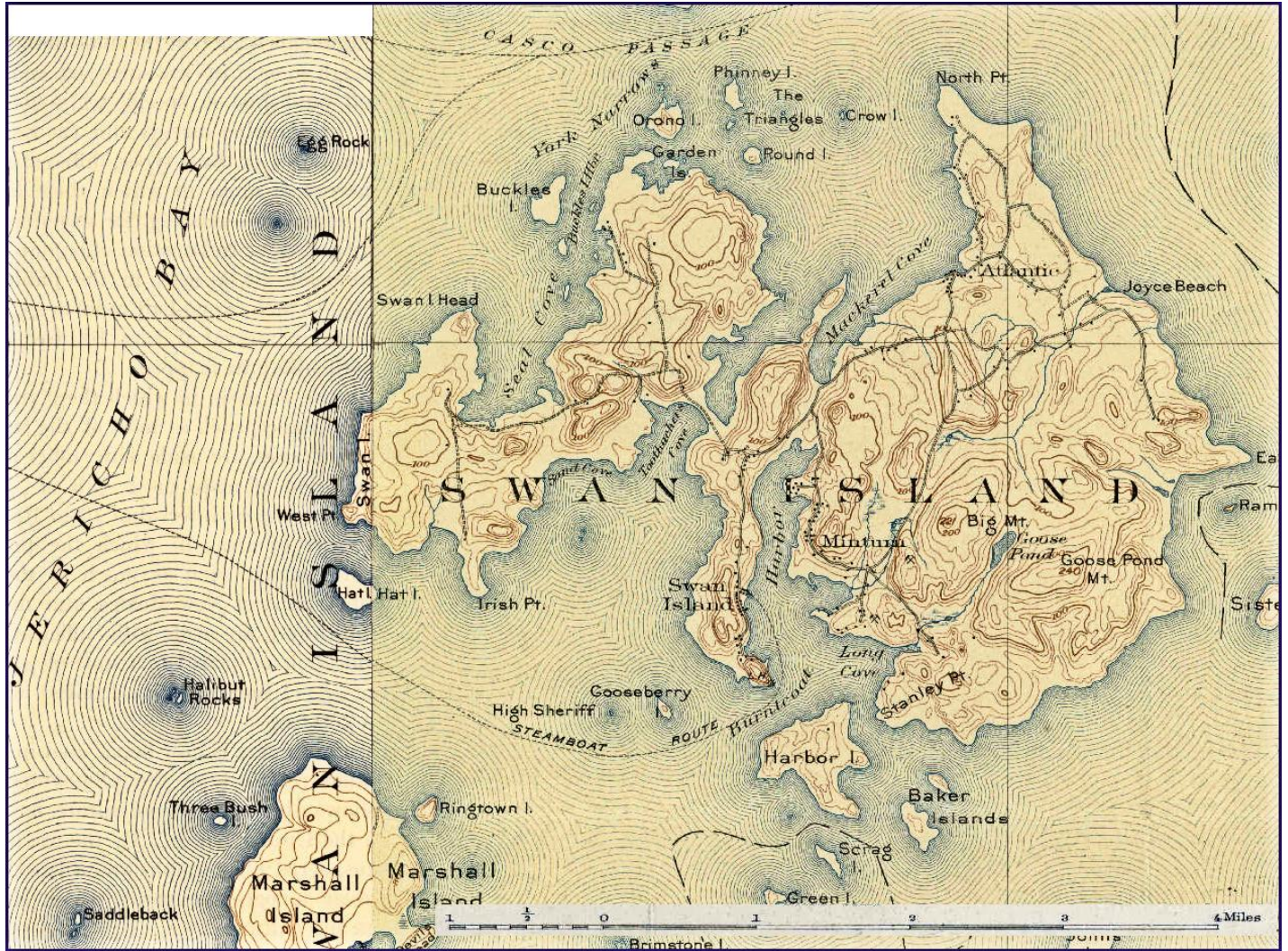
Swans Island is located east of Deer Isle and Stonington, and south of Tremont on Mount Desert Island. In 1914, there were three post offices on Swans Island: Atlantic, Minturn, and Swans Island. (source: Post Route Map of the State of Maine 1914). Some earlier maps (1897, 1903) incorrectly show the Frenchboro Post Office as being on Swans Island. At one point, as shown here, Frenchboro did receive its mail via a route from Stonington that also touched Swans Island.

Map available for free download from Maine Philatelic:

<https://www.mainephilatelic.org/PostRouteMaps/MainePostRouteMap1914.pdf>



In 1881 there was only one post office in Swans Island Plantation. Post offices would not be created for Atlantic until 1883 and Minto until 1897. As labelled on this map, Swans Island was a Plantation until it incorporated as a town in 1897. Map is from a page in the 1881 Atlas of Hancock County, Maine, by George N. Colby, available for free download from the Digital Maine Repository: https://digitalmaine.com/atlas_hancock_1881/27/



This composite topographic map from 1904 shows Swans Island and the locations of the three villages with the post offices: Swans Island, Minturn, and Atlantic. It appears that the U. S. Post Office Department and U. S. Postal Service have respected the spelling of Swans Island with an “s” on Swan, but the U. S. Geological Survey used the spelling Swan Island in its spelling at one point. Records at the Maine State Archives show the spelling in official records as being Swans Island – not to be confused with the Swan Island also known as Perkins Township in the Kennebec River at Richmond.

Maps available for download from the U. S. Geological Survey Topoview website:

Swans Island 1904 map

https://ngmdb.usgs.gov/ht-bin/tv_browse.pl?id=3820ee0a38cbd92aab964729f543ee23

Deer Isle 1904 map (has the extreme western tip of Swans Island)

https://ngmdb.usgs.gov/ht-bin/tv_browse.pl?id=431928313441355c20a05cebf86f3fff

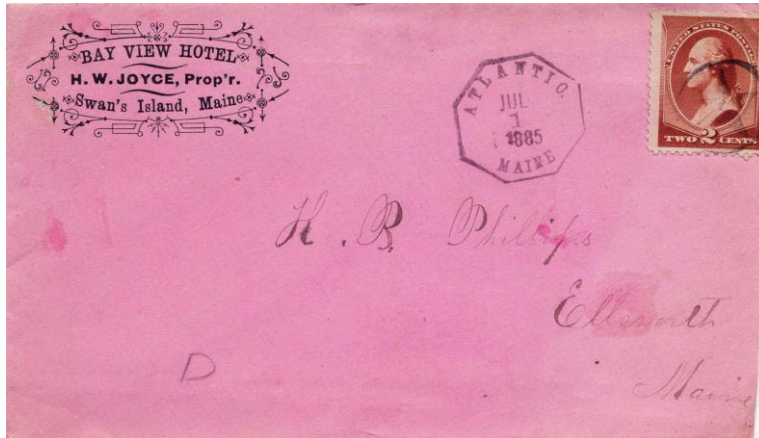
Atlantic

28 September 1883:

Atlantic Post Office opened.

28 September 1883:

Durilla Joyce became the Postmaster of the Atlantic Post Office.



1 July 1885:

The octagon-shaped postmark is 25 X 25 mm with a fancy star in a circle killer.

23 June 1897:

Llewellyn V. Joyce became the Postmaster of the Atlantic Post Office.



5 January 1898:

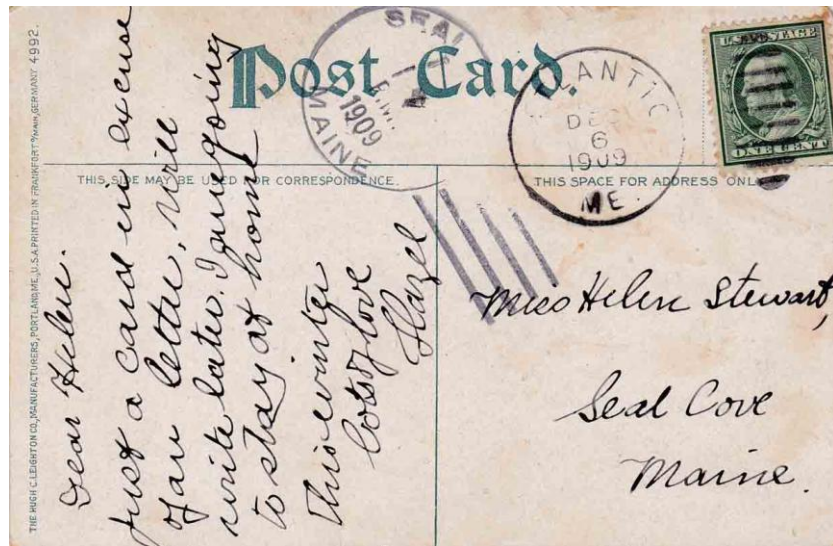
The circular postmark is 29 mm in diameter.

20 September 1902:

Abbie H. Staples became the Postmaster of the Atlantic Post Office.

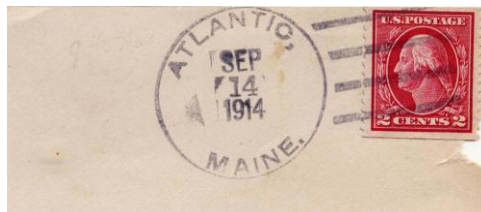
16 January 1908:

Viola M. Stockbridge became the Postmaster of the Atlantic Post Office.



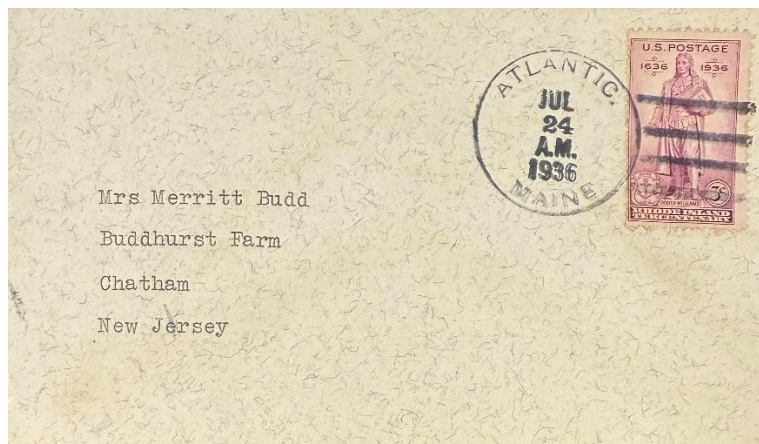
6 December 1909:

The circular postmark is 29 mm with an oval nine-bar duplex killer. A similar postmark and killer dated 6 August 1908 is known.



14 September 1914:

The circular postmark is 32 mm in diameter with a four-bar B killer.



24 July 1936:

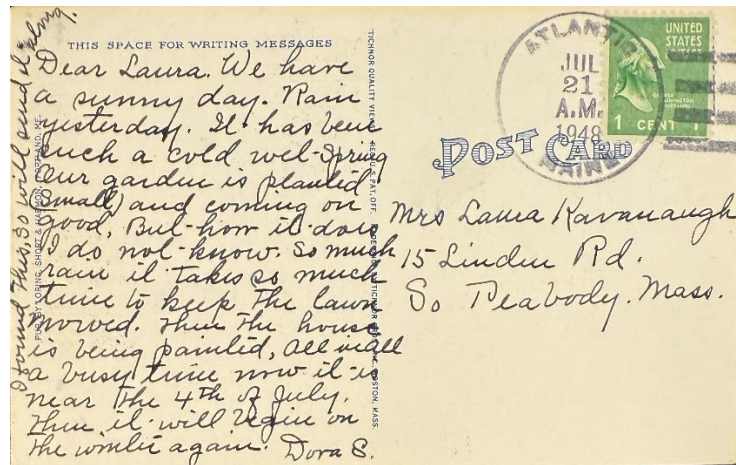
The circular postmark is 33.5 mm in diameter with a four-bar C/2 killer. A similar postmark and killer dated 22 May 1937 is known.

31 January 1940:

Mrs. Hazel D. Staples became the Acting Postmaster of the Atlantic Post Office.

3 October 1940:

Mrs. Bessie W. Dunham became the Postmaster of the Atlantic Post Office.



21 July 1948:

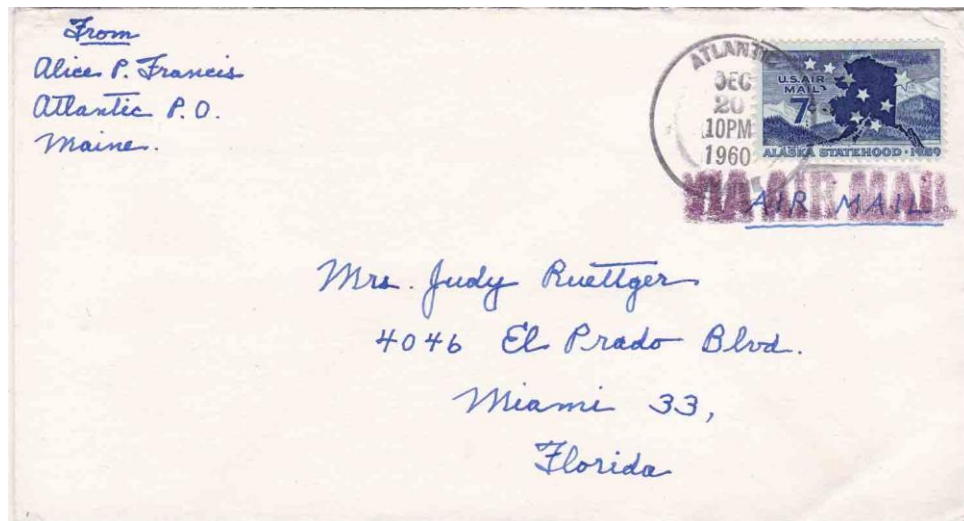
The circular postmark is 32 mm in diameter with a four-bar F/1 killer. Similar postmarks and killers dated 10 August 1950 and 25 September 1950 are known.

30 September 1956:

Mrs. Ethel H. Staples became the Acting Postmaster of the Atlantic Post Office.

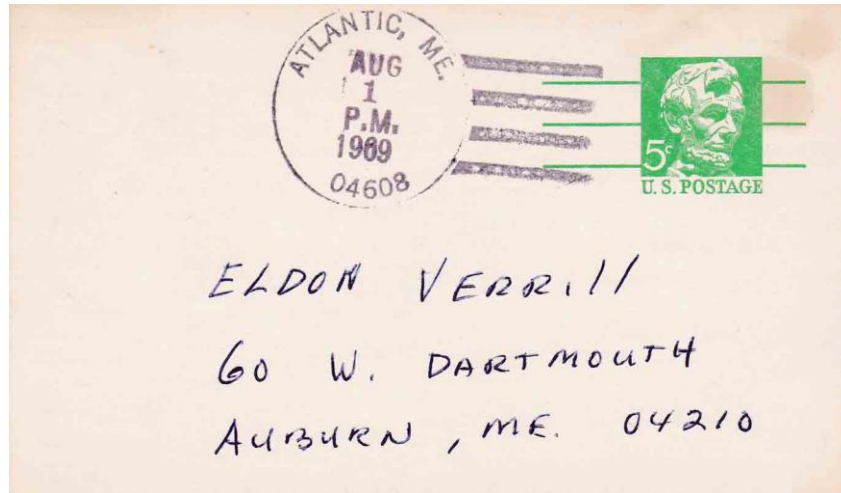
12 March 1958:

Mrs. Ethel H. Staples became the Postmaster of the Atlantic Post Office.



20 December 1960:

The circular postmark is 34 mm in diameter, with the postmark used to cancel the stamp.



1 August 1969:

The circular postmark is 32.5 mm in diameter with a four-bar F/2 killer.

30 August 1990:

Deborah Staples became the Officer-In-Charge of the Atlantic Post Office.

23 May 1997:

Atlantic Post Office was Discontinued effective 24 May 1995 with service from Swans Island.

Minturn

4 February 1897:

Minturn Post Office opened.

4 February 1897:

Alwilda M. Newman became the Postmaster of the Minturn Post Office.



? July 1903:

The circular postmark is 29 mm in diameter.

17 April 1908:

Mary E. Stanley became the Postmaster of the Minturn Post Office.

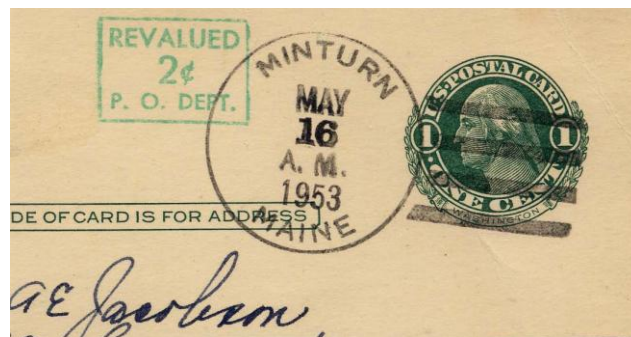


2 October 1916:

The circular postmark is 32 mm in diameter with a four-bar B killer.

5 November 1920:

Mrs. Abbie B. Stanley became the Postmaster of the Minturn Post Office.



16 May 1953:

The circular postmark is 33 mm in diameter with a four-bar F/1 killer.

30 November 1955:

Mrs. Helen W. Bernstorff became the Acting Postmaster of the Minturn Post Office.

8 March 1957:

Mrs. Helen W. Bernstorff became the Postmaster of the Minturn Post Office.

30 September 1971:

Mrs. Elizabeth J. Carlson became the Officer-In-Charge of the Minturn Post Office.

22 July 1972:

Mrs. Elizabeth J. Carlson became the Postmaster of the Minturn Post Office.

22 November 1994:

Donald Carlson became the Officer-In-Charge of the Minturn Post Office.

April 24, 1998;

Minturn Post Office was discontinued with service from Swans Island.

18 November 1891:

Isaac W. Stinson became the Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.



July 1895:

The circular postmark is 29 mm in diameter with a cork killer.
A similar postmark on a cut square dated 13 November 1902 is known.

29 October 1895:

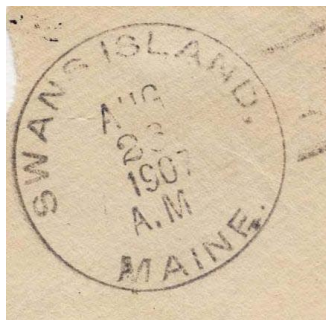
William Herrick became the Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.

17 November 1899:

George A. Sprague became the Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.

7 April 1902:

Dora C. Stinson became the Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.



23 August 1907:

The circular postmark is 32 mm in diameter with a Doane 3/3 killer.

22 September 1919:

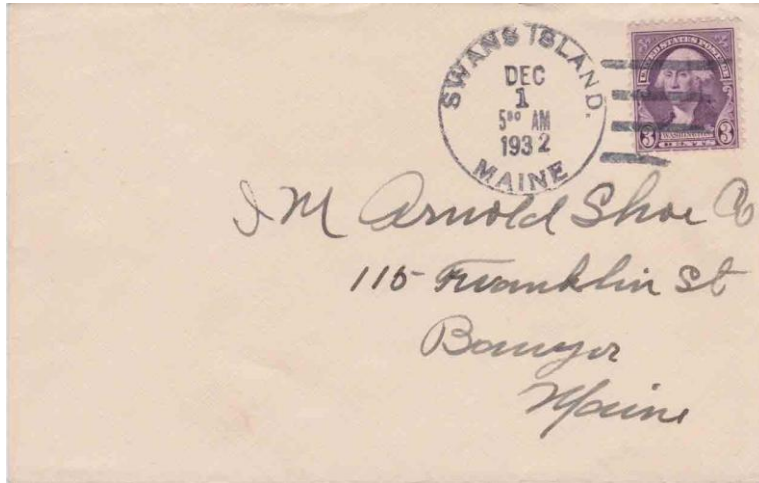
Lynette G. Eaton became the Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.

5 August 1925:

Carolyn F. Herrick became the Acting Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.

23 September 1925:

Carl L. Sprague became the Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.



1 December 1932:

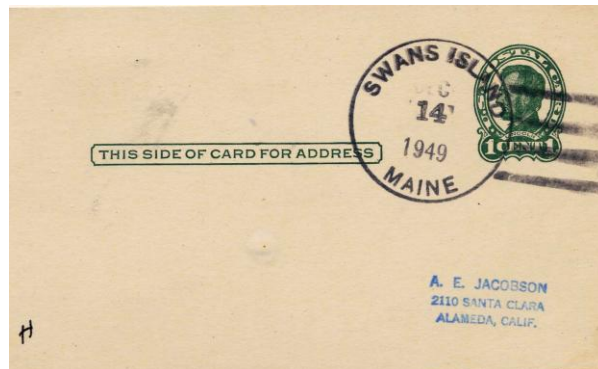
The circular postmark is 31.5 mm in diameter with a C/1 killer.

30 June 1942:

Mrs. Hesther K. Freethey became the Acting Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.

24 September 1942:

Mrs. Hesther K. Freethey became the Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.



14 December 1949:

The circular postmark is 35 mm in diameter with a F/1 killer.

7 June 1956:

Miss Phoebe M. Kent became the Acting Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.

18 April 1957:

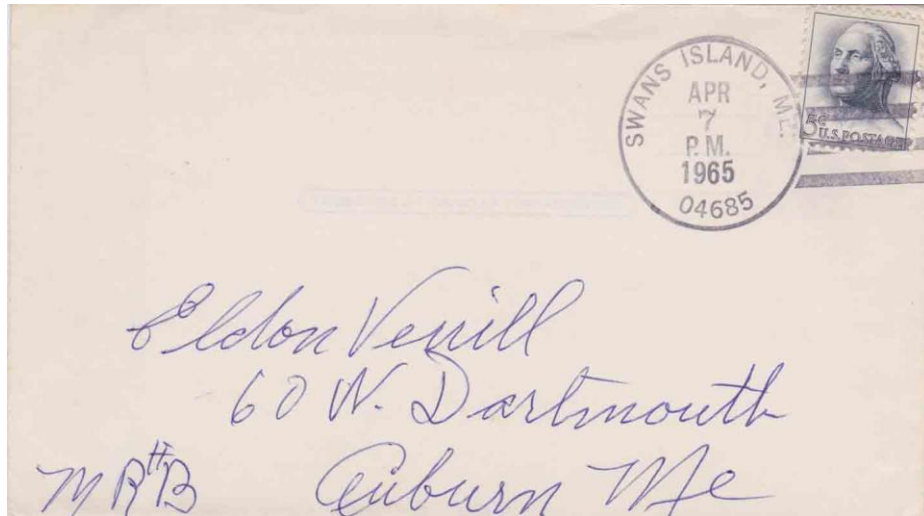
Miss Phoebe M. Kent became the Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.

15 August 1961:

Mrs. Agnes L. Staples became the Acting Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.

10 August 1962:

Mrs. Verna V. Molnar became the Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.



7 April 1965:

The circular postmark is 33.5 mm in diameter with a four-bar F/2 killer.

29 March 1968:

Mrs. Lenora F. Wheaton became the Acting Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.

17 May 1968:

Mrs. Dorothy L. Killam became the Acting Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.

15 July 1969:

Mrs. Avis J. Norwood became the Officer-In-Charge of the Swans Island Post Office.

31 July 1971:

Mrs. Avis J. Norwood became the Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.

30 June 1988:

Deborah D. Staples became the Officer-In-Charge of the Swans Island Post Office.

5 November 1988:

Robbie Paul Bullof became the Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.

16 August 1994:

Barbara A. Tozier became the Officer-In-Charge of the Swans Island Post Office.

3 April 1995:

Carole A. Young became the Officer-In-Charge of the Swans Island Post Office.

9 December 1995:

Carole A. Young became the Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.

17 December 1999:

Deborah D. Staples became the Officer-In-Charge of the Swans Island Post Office.

9 September 2000:

Deborah D. Staples became the Postmaster of the Swans Island Post Office.



December 2021.

Swans Island Post Office - Photo courtesy of Evan Kalish.

See photo gallery of Maine post offices at Post Mark Collectors Club website,

<https://www.postmarks.org/photos/us.php?st=ME>

22 March 2025:

Swans Island Post Office is operational at 125 Harbor Road, Swans Island, Maine 04685. GPS 44° 09' 16" N X 68° 27' 05" W.

Credits:

This document is based on the original web page compiled by the V. F. Thomas Co. (2021), with revisions and additions by James Husson, Brian Damien, and Kelvin Kindahl (2024-6).

<https://www.mainephilatelic.org/mph>

Thank you for the contributions to this page by the Strout Family, the [Willett Thompson Collection at the National Museum of the Post Mark Collectors Club](#), and Jim Husson.

Thank you to the Waterville Stamp Club (<https://thewatervillestampclub.com>) for helping ensure this project's continuity.

Sources:

Postal History

Maine Postal History Gateway at Maine Philatelic Society:
<https://www.mainephilatelic.org/mph>

The Post Offices of Maine 2022, Maine Philatelic Society:
<https://www.mainephilatelic.org/books/TPOOM>

Postmaster Appointments

U. S. Post Office Department. Appointments of Postmasters records, Hancock County, Maine, via U. S. National Archives website: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/78746582>. This link is correctly labelled as Hancock County, but contains only a few pages. The next link, *which is incorrectly labelled as Penobscot County on the website*, actually has most of the appointments for Hancock County. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/78746587>.

For help in researching appointments see the Finding Aid for U. S. Postmaster Appointment Records, 1789-Present,

The Digitised U. S. Postal Bulletins and PL&Rs 1880-2013
<http://www.uspostalbulletins.com/>

U. S. National Archives. U. S. Post Office Department Reports of Site Locations, Hancock County, Maine. Site Location Reports for the Post Offices in the Town of Swans Island
Atlantic: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/68415820?objectPage=351> and the following two pages
Minturn: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/68415820?objectPage=668> and the following three pages
Swans Island: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/68415820?objectPage=940> and the following three pages.

→ *It is important to note that the archives of the Reports of Site Locations are incomplete, and do not represent all the sites where the various post offices were located.*

Additional material can be found at Research Resources on Maine Postal History:

<http://www.mainephilatelic.org/books/post-office-sources.pdf>.

Town of Swans Island History

Chadbourne, Ava Harriet. "Swans Island," pp.370-1 in ***Maine place names and the peopling of its towns***. 1955. Pages on Swans Island, from the Internet Archive:

<https://archive.org/details/maineplacenamesp00chad/page/370/mode/2up>

Colby, George N. ***Atlas of Hancock County, Maine***. S. F. Colby & Co., 1881. Digitised versions of pages showing the Town of Swans Island can be downloaded from

https://digitalmaine.com/atlas_hancock_1881/27/

Maine State Archives. ***Counties, Cities, Towns and Plantations of Maine: A Handbook of Incorporations, Dissolutions, and Boundary Changes***. 1980.

https://digitalmaine.com/arc_publications/11/

Small, Herman Wesley. ***A History of Swan's Island, Maine***. 1898. Postal history on pp. 235-237. Available for free download from the Digital Commons at the University of Southern Maine: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/me_collection/1/

Swans Island Historical Society. <https://swansislandhistory.org/> Has many photos depicting postal activities on the island. To find them, From the home page, go to *Collections* and then *PastPerfect*

Swans Island, Six Miles East of Ordinary. <https://si.mainememory.net/page/3096/display.html>

The lives and stories of a unique community. Includes information and photos on modes of postal transportation to and from the island over the years.

U. S. Geological Survey. Editions of historic (as well as current) topographic maps of Swans Island are available to download as digital graphic files from the USGS website. Search for maps from this link:

<https://ngmdb.usgs.gov/topoview/viewer/#4/39.98/-100.06>

Swans Island 1904 map (show almost all of the island)

https://ngmdb.usgs.gov/ht-bin/tv_browse.pl?id=3820ee0a38cbd92aab964729f543ee23

Deer Isle 1904 map (has the extreme western tip of Swans Island)

https://ngmdb.usgs.gov/ht-bin/tv_browse.pl?id=431928313441355c20a05cebf86f3fff

Postmarks

Anderson, Gary. Maine Doane Cancels, from the *Doane Cancel website*,
http://www.doanecancel.com/maine_doanes.html
<http://www.doanecancel.com/doane.html>

Helbock, Richard W. *Postmarks on Postcards: An Illustrated Guide to Early 20th Century U. S. Postmarks*. Revised, Second Edition. Scappoose, Oregon: LaPosta Publications, 2002.

Sanders, Christine, The 4-Bar Postmark of the USPS, *PMCC Bulletin* Reprinted Article, Original Publication Date: June, July & December 2012.
http://www.postmarks.org/resources/PMCC_FourBarCancelsUSPS.pdf

Disclaimer:

As with any database of this size, occasional errors—especially typos—are inevitable. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this work and to correct any mistakes made by previous authors. We take full responsibility for any errors and encourage you to bring them to our attention so that we can make the necessary corrections. We are happy to hear from you at postalhistorymaine@gmail.com.

Determining the size and type of a postmark or killer is as much an art as it is a science. Many of the cut squares originate from the digital Willett/Thompson Collection at the Post Mark Collectors Club Museum (<https://postmarks.org>). Those postmark dimensions have been estimated by comparing them to a known object, such as a stamp, and using proportional ratios. These measurements may vary by a millimeter or two. Additionally, parameters such as V span or wBar for four-bar killers can be difficult to assess without examining the specimen firsthand. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of these interpretations.

