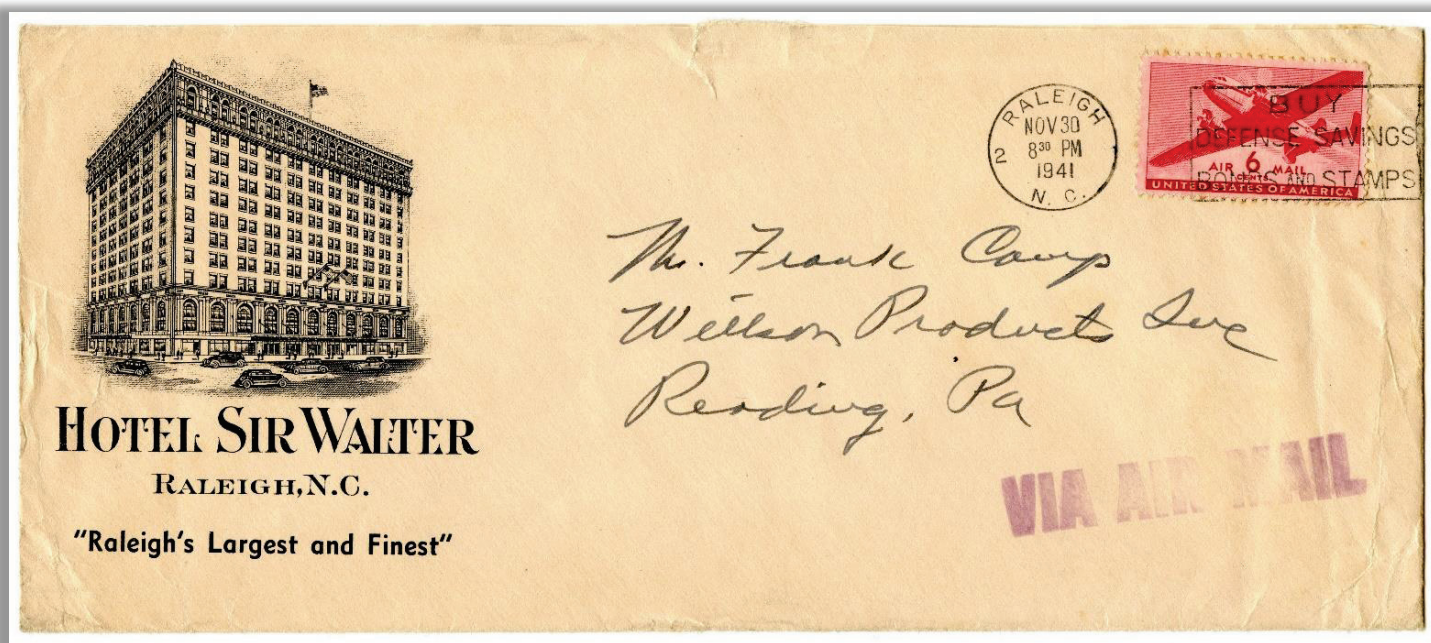


Hotel Sir Walter

By John Walter

How can anyone pass up a cover like this with your surname being used in the cachet. I couldn't. It was in the front of a cover box on a dealer's table at WESTPEX a few years ago.



Following are the main elements of the cover I researched. It turned up a few surprises.

Let's look at the postmark first. The **slogan & cancel** is from Raleigh, North Carolina, dated Nov. 30, 1941, a week before the attack on Pearl Harbor. The cover was canceled on Sunday at 8:30 p.m. The slogan cancel reads: "BUY DEFENSE SAVINGS BONDS AND STAMPS."

The 6¢ airmail stamp (Scott 25) was issued a few months earlier on June 25, 1941. The domestic air mail rate was 6¢ from July 1, 1934 to March 25, 1944, per oz. on all routes.

The stamp was the first in a series of seven transport airplane values being 6¢, 8¢, 10¢, 15¢, 20¢, 30¢, and 50¢. Here are all the airmail stamps in the Transport Series.



The additional rubber stamp in red "VIA AIR MAIL" makes sure the cover traveled for the paid service.

Now for some interesting history looking for the addressee company: **Willson Products Company**.

The company was located at the corner of Washington and 2nd Streets in Reading. It was founded in 1871 and manufactured safety products for ear and eye protection. It was the first company in the United States to manufacture optical lenses. One of the founders, Thomas Willson, patented the process for hardening glass, enabling the production of shatterproof protective eyeglasses.

Working with Thomas A. Willson & Co., the National Safety Council was formed to set standards in 1913 for uniform safety standards for America's workers. By the late 1930s, the company is manufacturing a large range of products, including ear protectors, breathing devices, gas masks, and the Saf-t-bra.

As the world was changing with the war in Europe, the company helped the war effort by making aviator goggles and high-altitude oxygen masks for pilots in the military. By 1943, the factory was manufacturing all of the sunglasses issued to the U.S. military during World War II and reached its peak at 1,300 workers.

In 1950, Willson Products begins to manufacture swimming goggles. During this year, Florence Chadwick wears them to traverse the English Channel. In 1980 due to the Occupational Safety & Health Act (OSHA), Willson stops manufacturing safety eyewear and focuses its attention on developing new varieties of respirators, gloves, and other protective equipment. Under the name Dalloz Safety Plant since 1997, the factory closed in 2002, ending the campus' 130 year history of manufacturing safety products.



GoggleWorks Center for the Arts, <https://goggleworks.org/about/history/>

But that is not the end of the story. Located in the former Willson Products Company building, GoggleWorks Center for the Arts is a community art and cultural resource center. The mission of the GoggleWorks is “to transform lives through unique interactions with art.” At 145,000 sq feet the GoggleWorks campus comprises the country's largest interactive visual art center. The complex also includes a 131-seat theatre, which presents art house films daily, a café, and store, which retails the work of over 200 individual artists from around the country.

The building was added to the U.S. National Register of Historic Places in 2006.

Now for some history about the **Hotel Sir Walter**. Built in 1923-24, Hotel Sir Walter was known as the “third house of state government” or “third house of the legislature” through the 1950s, because it was the hub of political activity in North Carolina before the Legislative Building was constructed in 1963.

In 1934, the Depression forced the building's lessees into bankruptcy, and the hotel was leased to the North State Hotel Company. The following year, North State fully renovated the building, and in 1938, the company added 50 rooms to make the hotel a 400-room facility, at that time the largest in the state.

These additions solidified the Sir Walter's reputation as one of North Carolina's top convention hotels.

Politicians, journalists, and lobbyists conducted much of their work in the hotel — and the late Rep. William "Billy" Watkins once said more laws were passed at the Sir Walter than at the Capitol itself.

Wives, daughters, and secretaries of politicians — as well as women officials themselves — also met together at the Sir Walter Hotel for more than 50 years in what was called the Sir Walter Cabinet.

Members of the cabinet committed themselves to political work such as endorsing the women's suffrage movement, aiding the North Carolina Symphony, bettering prison conditions + calling for improvements to roads and highways. It was the only organization of its kind in the nation for decades.

A gentleman's space called the Sphinx Club also operated in the basement under the street sidewalk during the hotel's existence. The club was reportedly a retreat for the men to get away from their wives.



Opened in January 1924, 10 story neoclassical design.



Image courtesy of B. Fullington, Capital City Camera Club, 2010.

The building was converted into 140 apartments for seniors in the late 1970s, about the time Fayetteville Street was transformed into a downtown pedestrian mall. The building continues to serve as senior apartments today. It is the only affordable housing for seniors in downtown Raleigh. The historic Virginia Dare Ballroom is a longstanding event space located within the building and is still in use today, despite the building's conversion from a hotel into an apartment complex. The ballroom has played host to thousands of events over its century-long existence and is now a popular wedding and party venue.

Since 1978, the Sir Walter building is listed on the US National Register of Historic Places and is downtown Raleigh's oldest surviving hotel building.

My \$5.00 cover has connections to two properties on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places. How nice is that!

And of course, the use of my surname makes this cover a premium possession.

References:

<https://raltoday.6amcity.com/hotel-sir-walter-raleigh-nc>

National Park Service website: <https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/raleigh/sir.htm>

John Walter collects U.S. used postal stationery, U.S. navy hospital ship covers, Japan, some UN and U.S.