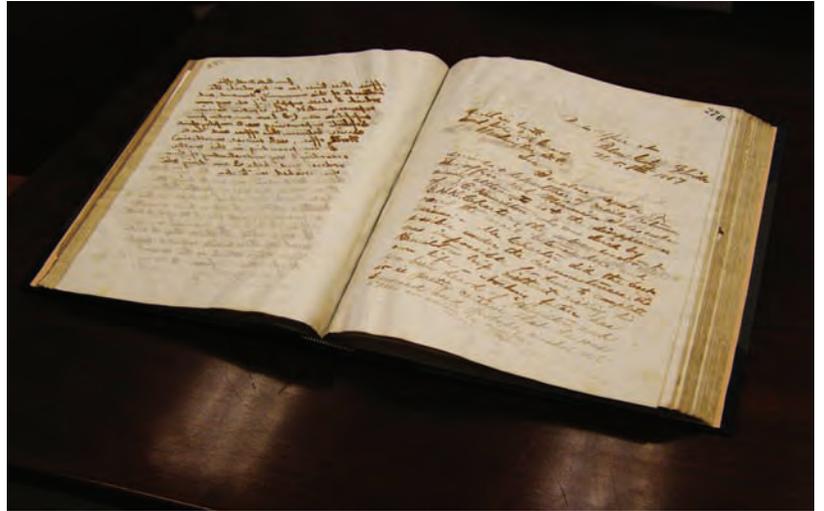


Brelsford's Lettercopy Book from the Palm Beach Post Office

Unlike today where we have a variety of reliable ways to deliver mail, from the U.S. Postal Service to emails, the early pioneers did not have a fool-proof method to ensure that they received their mail or even that important letters made it to their destination.

The lettercopy book pictured here is part of the archives of the Historical Society of Palm Beach County. E.M. Brelsford established the Palm Beach Post office in 1887 in his store on Brelsford's Point (now the Henry Morrison Flagler Museum). As part of the mail service, letters and other correspondence were copied in a book so that a record would be made in case the letter did not make it to its intended destination. This particular one is from the late 1880s and contains letters, financial correspondence, and copies of reports to the U.S. Postal Service.



The book is open to page 276 showing a copy of a letter, dated November 1, 1887, to the Post Master General in Washington D.C. It states that there were reports about the mail service and sworn statements about the disappearance of J.E. Hamilton. Hamilton went missing at the Hillsboro Inlet while carrying the mail between Palm Beach and Miami in October 1887.

The usual process to copy of an original letter was rather simple. First one lightly wet or dampened a tissue page in the copy book with a wet cloth or brush on the top or front of the tissue page. An oiled paper protected the other unused pages. The original, right side up, was then placed under the damp tissue page and the book closed. It was then inserted into a letter press for approximately two minutes. The process transferred a small amount of ink to the underside of the tissue paper. The writing could be read from the front side because of the thinness of the tissue paper. This is the method that may have been used to make the copies in the Brelsford's lettercopy book.

Lettercopy books such as this one reveal interesting facts about life and business of a community. Maintaining this book for future generations is problematic though. The ink is fading, taking the information with it. The best way to preserve the information is to transcribe it which is a lengthy process trying to read the handwriting. But nevertheless, it is a worthy undertaking to preserve the information related to our local history.

