

**Montgomery Ward's Export Department:  
international orders and mail-order consumers  
in Latin American 1890 - 1930**

*Departamento de Exportação da Montgomery Ward:  
encomendas internacionais e consumidores de vendas  
por correspondência na América Latina, 1890-1930*

*Departamento de Exportaciones de Montgomery Ward:  
paquetería internacional y consumidores  
latinoamericanos de pedidos por correo, 1890-1930*

Sarah A. Johnson<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

New primary source material documents the expansion of Montgomery Ward's mail order through their export department to Latin American consumers from the end of the Spanish American War in 1898 to ca.1930, and the formative period of export advertising and mail order marketing for the first time. Chicago was the center of mail order and ready-made clothing; women's ready-made suits provide a case study of merchandise. A Chicago clothier requested a U.S. State Department inquiry to study the viability of introducing American ready-made clothing in Latin America in 1899. This Government study provides significant details about ready-made clothing in Latin America previously unknown to scholars. U.S. mail order required international parcel post for growth, and a Ward employee championed its passage in 1919. New primary sources have been contextualized within the frameworks of business, advertising, postal, and dress history and political economy. Advances in export advertising led to growth, which has been traced using statistics from trade journals and an internal document about the history of the export department. The essay ends by examining the names and addresses of Latin American consumers from extant Montgomery Ward return envelopes that have been digitally mapped and interpreted. Latin American consumption theory will be examined apropos of consumers and the meaning of mail order goods.

Keywords: Montgomery Ward; mail order; export advertising; international parcel post; Latin American consumers.

## Resumo

*Novo material de fonte primária documenta a expansão das vendas por correspondência da Montgomery Ward através de seu departamento de exportação para consumidores latino-americanos desde o final da Guerra Hispano-Americana em 1898 até cerca de 1930, e o período de formação da publicidade de exportação e marketing de venda por correio pela primeira vez. Chicago era o centro da venda por correspondência e da indústria Prêt-à-porter; a confecção de ternos femininos fornecem um estudo de caso de merchandise. Um fabricante de roupas de Chicago solicitou uma investigação do Departamento de Estado dos EUA para estudar a viabilidade da introdução da indústria Prêt-à-porter americana na América Latina em 1899. Este estudo do governo fornece detalhes significativos sobre a indústria Prêt-à-porter na América Latina, até então desconhecida dos estudiosos. As vendas por correspondência nos EUA precisavam de encomendas internacionais para crescer e um funcionário da Ward defendeu sua aprovação em 1919. Novas fontes primárias foram contextualizadas dentro das estruturas da história dos negócios, da publicidade,*

---

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Johnson is an independent scholar who writes about material culture and mail order history in New York's Hudson Valley. She holds a PhD from the University of Brighton, UK. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2750-7373> . Personal website: [www.publichistorystudio--sarahjohnson.com](http://www.publichistorystudio--sarahjohnson.com) email: [sj3551@gmail.com](mailto:sj3551@gmail.com)

*dos correios, do vestuário e da economia política. Os avanços na publicidade de exportação levaram ao crescimento, que foi traçado por meio de estatísticas de revistas especializadas e de um documento interno sobre a história do departamento de exportação. O ensaio termina examinando os nomes e endereços dos consumidores latino-americanos contidos nos envelopes de devolução existentes da Montgomery Ward que foram mapeados e interpretados digitalmente. A teoria do consumo latino-americana será examinada a propósito dos consumidores e do significado dos bens vendidos pelo correio.*

**Keywords:** *Montgomery Ward; venda por correspondência; publicidade de exportação; encomendas postais internacionais; consumidores latino-americanos.*

### Resumen

*Nuevo material de fuente primaria documenta la expansión de los pedidos por correo de Montgomery Ward a través de su departamento de exportaciones a los consumidores latinoamericanos desde el final de la Guerra Hispanoamericana en 1898 hasta aproximadamente 1930, y el período de formación de la publicidad de exportaciones y el marketing de pedidos por correo por primera vez. Chicago era el centro del comercio por correo y de la ropa confeccionada; Los trajes confeccionados para mujer constituyen un caso de estudio de mercancías. Un fabricante de ropa de Chicago solicitó una investigación del Departamento de Estado de los Estados Unidos para estudiar la viabilidad de introducir prendas de vestir estadounidenses confeccionadas en América Latina en 1899. Este estudio gubernamental proporciona detalles significativos sobre la ropa confeccionada en América Latina hasta entonces desconocidas para los estudiosos. El envío por correo en Estados Unidos requirió el envío de paquetes internacionales para crecer, y un empleado de Ward defendió su aprobación en 1919. Se han contextualizado nuevas fuentes primarias dentro de los marcos de la historia y la economía política de los negocios, la publicidad, el correo y la vestimenta. Los avances en la publicidad de las exportaciones condujeron al crecimiento, que se ha rastreado utilizando estadísticas de revistas especializadas y un documento interno sobre la historia del departamento de exportaciones. El ensayo finaliza examinando los nombres y direcciones de los consumidores latinoamericanos de los sobres de devolución existentes de Montgomery Ward que han sido mapeados e interpretados digitalmente. Se examinará la teoría del consumo latinoamericana a propósito de los consumidores y el significado de los bienes pedidos por correo.*

**Palabras clave:** *Barrio Montgomery; Pedido por correo; publicidad de exportación; paquetería internacional; Consumidores latinoamericanos.*

## 1 Introduction

This essay will describe the Chicago retailer Montgomery Ward's export department as an active agent in the transatlantic circulation of fashion and other consumer goods to Latin American consumers from the formative period in the 1890s until the 1920s formalized export advertising and standardized global mail order. Calkins and Holden defined mail order advertising as "that department of advertising and merchandising whereby goods are sold direct to the consumer by mail, the consumer in most cases living remote from the mail-order house" (1905, p.245-260).

Recent historians have written about the history of Latin American consumption in *The Oxford Handbook of Consumption* (Schwarzkopf in Wherry, Woodward, 2019, p. 33) and mail order in broad strokes in studies such as *The Routledge Companion to the History of Retailing* (Stobart, Howard, 2018, p. 1). *Mail Order Retailing in Britain: A Business and Social History* (Coopey, O'connell, Porter, 2005, p. 14) covers a single country, and a 2003 University of Brighton PhD thesis examined "The Consumption of Middle-Class American Women's Clothing through Mail Order Catalogs, 1850-1900 (Johnson, 2003, p. 33-43) in the USA. Very little attention has been paid to the global outreach of U.S. retailers' mail order to foreign countries. This research examines Montgomery Ward's global trade with rarely used ephemera and Federal government reports to contextualize this growth in business, postal, dress, and advertising history.

The 'discovery' of extant Montgomery Ward return envelopes from the 1910-20s collected during 2021, when Covid-19 had shut down archival and museum collections raised more questions about global mail order than recent secondary sources provided answers. The philatelic community, or stamp collectors have known about return envelopes to Montgomery Ward for several decades (Graham, 2000, p.56). Their interest focused on stamps and registration markings used to return them to Chicago. Most of these stamps are not particularly valuable, so these envelopes have survived intact. The foreign consumer names and addresses provide rare data in consumption history.

Initially, people used plain envelopes to correspond with Ward's in Chicago, and early consumers did not always write their names and addresses on them in the formative period of Montgomery Ward's foreign mail order department, ca.1887 until the 1920s.

Illustration 1: Envelope addressed to Montgomery Ward



Source: Envelope addressed to Montgomery Ward, postmarked La Paz, Bolivia, April 16, 1919, received Chicago May 20 P.M. No return address. Author's collection.

Ward's used blue return envelopes during the 1910s and 1920s, some with a small, lined space for the return address that rarely were filled in. By about 1923, Montgomery Ward seems to have standardized their foreign mail order system by supplying envelopes with a vertical space for the consumer's return address. It is possible these envelopes survived because people writing about export advertising in the 1920s cautioned that many countries had towns of the same or similar names. What else could these envelopes and this process of global mail order tell us about Chicago, Montgomery Ward & Company, what of the staple general merchandise, especially women's ready-made clothing, and then through the wider lens, about American producers and production and distribution and the consumers who bought

these goods? The tantalizing fact is that the order forms carried inside these envelopes are lost to us but these extant artifacts and other more newly digitized primary sources have a great deal to tell us about this formative period of global mail order from the 1890s through the interwar period, a story that has not been told before.

Latin American trade networks with Europe and North America expanded in the 1880s. Postal cards provide evidence of this retail expansion into Latin America as consumers and business sought sources for foreign goods. Four postal cards dating from 1882 to 1906 track these broad ranging developments. Gunado Ramos Ruiz in Bogota, Colombia requested a catalog June 18, 1882 from Miller, Morrison and Co, 600 Broadway, New York. On August 18, 1885, William H. Whitney in Monterrey, Mexico wrote to Thorburn & Titus, 158 Chambers Street, New York, "Will you please send one your Wholesale price list of bulbs and seeds and oblige." On February 15, 1900 on a Union Postale Universelle card addressed to the J.A. Foster Company in Providence, Rhode Island: "Please forward by return mail your handsome catalogue of rugs, pins, watches, chains as advertised in Munsey's with lowest discount allowed to the export trade for cash and Oblige Your H.C. Castagne, P.O. B. 195, Georgetown, Demerara, B[ritish] G[uiana] S.A. Then, on December 14, 1906, E. Sologuren from Oruro, Bolivia mailed a "tarjeta postal" to the Blake Mining and Milling Company in Denver, Colorado, with the following message: "I shall be much obliged if you will send me your catalogue advertised in the 'Engineering and Mining Journal', if possible with prices." In these two later examples, the consumer also revealed the advertising source that brought their catalog query, prior to formalized export advertising. These postal cards requesting catalogs and prices for USA-made goods document an earlier phase of the trade expansion that we have known through historiography but have not have direct evidence to illustrate.

Retail historian Ralph Hower cited the professionalization of global advertising with N. W. Ayer & Sons advertising agency sending representatives to South America in 1930. Hower's assessment was "until after the World War it [Ayer & Son] gave little thought to the marketing of American goods abroad" (Hower, 1939, p. 172). These postal cards and return envelopes, combined with foreign newspaper advertising by Montgomery Ward by the 1890s show earlier activity. There is little

scholarship detailing the specific export sales growth of American companies in these Latin American markets prior to World War I but there is a proliferation of primary sources to consult. Trade publications such as *Printers' Ink* promoted global mail order with how-to tips and cautions about obstacles (Willyoung, 1909, p.5-6).

In more recent scholarship, Stefan Schwarzkopf noted that the late nineteenth-century South American market increased and that “European and North American manufacturers had managed to cut out wholesalers and merchant houses and often sold directly to retailers in these markets” utilizing export advertising (2019, p. 33). Export advertising was defined as “advertising American goods in foreign countries” (Propson, 1923, p. 1). Indeed, by the late 19th century, Montgomery Ward & Company was selling directly to foreign consumers, and continued to do so until it had formalized this business into their foreign and then renamed export department.

Postal history artifacts provide evidence of this shift.

Mail order as a mechanism for retail distribution relies upon transportation and communications infrastructure, extending from the retailer's urban location to the furthest consumer outposts. This infrastructure took longer to achieve in the USA because of the sheer size of the country and thus of delivering mail and packages to homes from coast to coast, and the high costs and physical challenges of creating that infrastructure. Additionally, consumers had to have a safe way to send money to pay for goods and a way to pick up their packages when they arrived at a freight office or post office. Nationally, the U.S. Post Office Department began urban mail delivery directly to homes in 1861 but rural free delivery was not implemented until 1896; this is what brought mail and up to four-pound packages to farm homes directly, instead of requiring people to pick up mail at the post office in town. Larger packages of up to eleven pounds could be delivered directly to consumers homes in starting in 1913, after parcel post legislation was passed. Prior to 1913, large packages had to be delivered by private shipping companies.

The U.S. lagged behind other industrialized nations regarding national (Gallagher, 2016, p. 205) and international parcel post (Laborie, 2015, p. 237). Postal history contextualizes this global trade in terms of distribution infrastructure as international parcel post accommodated such trade in Europe since 1887

(Kochersperger, 2024, p. 4). The changes in international law related to the post offices across the globe permitted the communications infrastructure for sending mail order catalogs and correspondence related to orders. This augmented Montgomery Ward's outreach to foreign consumers and U.S. missionaries posted abroad through advertisements in foreign newspapers and trade journals by the 1880s. International implementation of parcel post allowed small packages of up to four pounds to be sent through the mail based on each country's participation with other countries. Larger packages had to be sent through private express company offices whose reach expanded in the 20th century. This retailer to consumer ordering differed from earlier 19th century foreign trade via import/export through shipping companies, customs houses, and warehousing until foreign goods were delivered to retailers and distributed to consumers from retail and wholesale locations (Albion, 1970, p.13).

United States manufacturers sought new consumers in foreign markets as industrialization churned out mass produced goods by the late 1860s. Allan Nevins noted in *The Emergence of Modern America*, "one healthy effect of the [1873] Panic was to force them [manufacturers] to supplement their reduced domestic demand by foreign conquests" (1927, p. 395-396). Nevins discussed the adaptability of Americanmade locomotives and plows to global consumers. This research examines how industrialization and infrastructure extended Montgomery Ward's vast offerings of consumer goods via global mail order to consumers well before the interwar period in the 20th century, revealed by extant ephemera rarely used outside philately, or postal history.

The recovery from the financial panic of 1893 required American manufacturers to look abroad to stabilize their businesses by drawing in consumers from other countries that had no tradition of "buying American. " In 1896, the *Dry Goods Economist* celebrated prodigious clothing production with their version of a starspangled Columbia holding a banner proclaiming, "The American Idea/Manufacture Here Sell Everywhere" (*Dry Goods Economist*, 1896). This message was emblazoned on posters which were presumably included with the trade journal by the Textile Publishing Company in New York City, [Illustration 2. ].



Illustration 2: "The American Idea—Manufacture Here Sell Everywhere," Dry Goods Economist poster, 1896, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art



Source: Art & Architecture Collection, New York Public Library.

In Daniel Immerwahr's pathbreaking book, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States*, "The proposition that the United States is an empire is less controversial today" (2019, p. 13) gives us the framework to examine how the Federal government and trade associations explored the trade potential of Puerto Rico and Cuba after the Spanish American War and the colonial rhetoric used in discussions of global trade. The Spanish-American War, fought on three fronts in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, highlighted the quest for an American empire. Europe's colonial empires were a tantalizing model in terms of restricting foreign markets to accept export goods from the "motherland" to create consumers in faraway places where those consumers had not yet been "Westernized" by industrially made products.

On October 2, 1899, in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* cautioned,

Colonies are not needed for the extension of American Commerce...We are now selling our manufactured products all over the world without having any troublesome colonies to worry about...There will be no danger of not having a perpetual open door for our products, because people must have them (1899, p. 6).

This article responded to the Spanish American War with the call for global trade through American exceptionalism and pacifism. It also underscored the need for a merchant marine fleet and more secure financing with the placement of American banks abroad, as more important than acquiring territories. William R. Corwin addressed taking foreign trade away from European nations through his trade

organization, the Merchant's Association of New York on a national level. Corwin advised,

...we must manufacture articles to suit the people of Porto Rico, and must pack them and ship them in a way to meet the conditions of climate and transportation in the island. Here is where Chicago is particularly interested...we manufacture...every article needed in Porto Rico...before the Cuban war Porto Rico imported from this country...cotton goods...sewing machines...and ready-made clothing. The same products are in demand in Cuba and all the countries of Central and South America...Our manufacturers can easily adapt their products to the needs of the Cubans and Porto Ricans...Chicago some years ago reached out to Mexico and secured more of its trade than any other city in the United States. There is no reason why she should not manufacture articles of clothing suited to Cuba and Porto Rico (The Interocean, 1899, p. 6).

The 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York provided manufacturers the opportunity to exhibit their merchandise for export to Latin American countries. A trade journal for agricultural equipment captured the commercial opportunity for U.S. merchants:

To Broaden Trade Horizon. The wide-awake producers in the United States and Canada who are looking for new markets for their goods will gladly avail themselves of the splendid opportunity which will be afforded them at the PanAmerican exposition at Buffalo the coming summer to secure the extension of their trade in Central and South America, and the West Indies. They will serve their own interests by making complete displays of their products, so that the visiting representatives of the various countries may see just what they have for sale, and meeting the visitors and learning from them the actual conditions and needs of the different sections. It will be an auspicious time to remove the barriers which have so long restricted international trade into the Western Hemisphere, and lay the foundation for an active exchange, (Farm Implements, 1901, p. 60).

The stage was set for global trade to Latin America at the Pan-American exposition, but the U.S. leadership would change after President McKinley gave his last speech in Buffalo, New York before being assassinated there.

Foreign mail order became a side line for Montgomery Ward in 1887, first extending to Spanish speaking territories with English advertisements placed in Spanish newspapers such as El Fronteriza in Tucson, Arizona Territory (Montgomery Ward Advertisement, El Fronteriza, 1887p. 4), with a reference to Montgomery Ward's goods in a Spanish language advertisement for La Casa de

Kaufman in San Antonio, Texas's *La Prensa* as late as 1920 (*Venta Especial en La Casa de Kaufman, La Prensa, 1920, p. 8*). Ward's advertising in Southwest newspapers must have gained some consumer traction because by 1889, the Santa Fe Daily New Mexican ran an editorial originally from the Gallup News-Register "Bad Business" criticizing "shoddy clothing" and urging people to support local businesses and not Montgomery, Ward & Co (*Santa Fe Daily New Mexican, 1889, p. 3*). Montgomery Ward's foreign department addressed their culturally adaptable merchandise and its quality in reference to their 700-page catalog and their "Handbook for foreign buyers" in an advertisement that ran in the British English language publication the *Mexican Herald* in 1897:

It's a Far Cry from Foreign Lands to Chicago, U.S.A. but no matter where you live, we are anxious to do business with you in Clothing...We handle only dependable goods—no trash...We believe we can send to any clime, goods of any kind, perfect in quality, at lower prices, laid down, than the residents thereof can obtain them anywhere else (*Montgomery Ward Advertisement, Mexican Herald, 1897, p. 5*).

This qualitative reassurance to faraway consumers was particularly important in establishing trust in mail order houses. There had been badly translated department store advertising in foreign language newspapers published in the United States, (*Foreign Language Advertising, Printers' Ink, 1897, p. 16*) catering to immigrant population consumers and radiating out from those networks.

There is little scholarship detailing export advertising and sales growth of American companies' market share in Latin American markets prior to World War II but there is a proliferation of primary sources to consult. Trade publications such as *Printers' Ink* promoted global mail order with how-to tips and cautions about obstacles (*Willyoung, Printers' Ink, 1909, p. 5-6*). Montgomery Ward's main competitor was Sears, Roebuck & Company. On July 26, 1904, Sears, Roebuck and Company mailed a postal card from Chicago, Illinois to Adolph Hempel in Campinas, State of S. Paulo, Brazil with the following message:

Kind Friend:-Your communication at hand. Owing to the enormous increase in our domestic business within the United States, we find it will be impossible for us to quote prices or accept orders for shipment outside the United States or to the Island possessions. Therefore under the circumstances our catalogue or any special quotations or information could be of no service to you.

Thanking you for the courtesy extended, and regretting our inability to serve you, we are your very truly (Sears, Roebuck & Co postal card, 1904, Author's collection).

In this case, Sears, Roebuck and Company was struggling to keep up with the growth of domestic orders and did not yet have the capacity to handle foreign orders that Adolph Hempel requested. Hempel's correspondence underscored that foreign consumers did not necessarily know the difference between Chicago mail order houses, or that only Montgomery Ward had an export department.

Ready-made clothing provides an excellent case study of Chicago's role as a national manufacturing and distribution center of mass production, representing \$25,000,000 in this line of trade, with an annual increase of twenty per cent from 1897 to 1898 (Clothers Were Busy, *The InterOcean*, 1899, p. 15). Chicago had become a center of ready-made clothing production for both men and women by 1900. More specifically, women's ready-made clothing has an earlier and more nuanced history than acknowledged by most dress historians. Previous suppositions related to women objecting to ready-made garments because of lack of quality, poor fit, and socio-economic inappropriateness of consuming cheap ready-made garments. New primary sources address how retailers dealt with issues in the transitional period to more acceptable women's garments. In 1900, the *Chicago Dry Goods Reporter* cited retailers "preparations for fall...obtaining the services of experienced dressmakers in the cloak and suit departments, so as to insure proper alterations where they are necessary (Cloaks And Suits, *Chicago Dry Goods Reporter*, 1900, p. 29). When a consumer took a ready-made garment purchased from a local retailer to a local dressmaker for alterations,

a dressmaker, who is naturally disappointed because the woman is buying ready-made, the alteration is pretty sure to be unsatisfactory. While the work may be done right, the dressmaker has an opportunity to explain to the customer while refitting the garment that she could have suited her so much better if she could have made it to measure (Cloaks And Suits, *Chicago Dry Goods Reporter*, 1900, p. 29).

This trade journal went on to discuss the economies of scale passed along to consumers of women's ready-made clothing and citing a more nuanced reality of fitting ready-made garments in-store to ameliorate this issue with local dressmakers.

By 1904, the Dry Goods Reporter ran a story about two department stores in the college town of Evanston, Illinois, described as

a classic suburb of Chicago...Lord's Enterprise...[has] lines of fancy goods in men's and women's furnishings...the amount of straight dry goods is small... ready-made goods for women...another illustration of studying the needs of the local trade and supplying the merchandise that they need (Review Of The Week, Chicago Dry Goods Reporter, Jan 1904, p. 25).

The other department store in Evanston, the Rosenberg department store, carried less expensive lines of goods, including men's and women's ready-made clothing, given the demographic of college students.

Hence, trade literature illustrated a much broader price range of ready-made garments for women, some much more expensive than previously accounted for by dress historians. Similarly, in discussing Fall silks, "an ordinary jacket, silk lined, was regarded as a piece of extravagance. Now garments of this kind are the rule and not the exception, as silk of some sort has found its way into almost every ready made (sic) garment, even those that may be put before the retail customer at a cheap price" (Fall Silk Review, Chicago Dry Goods Reporter, July 1900, p. 15, 17). National distribution made women's ready-made garments accessible to women across the country. In a small town in south-central Nebraska, Holdrege was surrounded by farms and cited by the Chicago Dry Goods Reporter ca. 1901 as "one of the best stores for men's and women's ready-made clothing to be found in the state outside of Omaha" (Has Cheap Store Sale, Chicago Dry Goods Reporter, Mar 1904, p. 25). Mr. Nelson, the clothing store owner explained,

Our first stock was ready-made clothing, the chief attention being devoted to men's clothing. Then we added or rather increased our ready-made line of clothing for women. We found that the two lines worked together nicely and we have been able to develop a very satisfactory business with these two lines (Has Cheap Store Sale, Chicago Dry Goods Reporter, Mar 1904, p. 25).

These examples show that women's ready-made clothing ran parallel to men's ready-made clothing, a model well developed over a thirty-year period by the late 1890s. Women's ready-made garments existed at a wide variety of price points, could be altered instore to ensure proper fit, and had reached beyond Chicago to rural areas via national mail order and in local retail stores.

Mail order catalogs from the early twentieth century provide a comparative analysis of women's ready-made suits price points. Edward B. Grossman & Co. published their Spring and Summer Styles for 1900, featuring 28 styles of women's tailored suits, ranging in price from \$4.98 to \$16.50 (1900, p. 1-7, Author's Collection). Montgomery Ward & Company's catalog number 75 from 1907 lists both men's made to order clothing on pages 951-964, men's ready made clothing pages 940-989, women's ready-made pages 1027-1078 and made to order page 1048. In "Women's Tailor-Made Suits" eight styles in prices ranging from \$5.85 to \$13.45 (with notation to add postage) are listed on page 1045 (1907, p. 951-1078, Author's Collection). Macy's, the New York department store's Fall-Winter Catalog from 1904/05 listed ten models of ladies' suits, with prices ranging from \$12.96 to \$24.96. The cover announced, "New York is the commercial centre of the United States, and Macy's its largest and leading store" (1904-05, p. 14-15, Author's Collection). Competition heightened for mail order consumer's business with the national expansion of rural free delivery.

Chicago has pushed ahead more rapidly than any other city...Chicago does the largest mail-order business. The largest trading in ready-made clothing...William E. Curtis, Chicago Record-Herald, November 18, 1904 (Fleming, 1906, p. 74).

Chicago's ready-made clothing was about to go global as the twentieth century dawned. The State Department asked for very specific information from Consuls, or the chief officer in U.S. Embassies on the ground throughout Latin America. On April 20, 1899, in a letter addressed "To the consular officers of the United States in Latin America" Third Assistant Secretary Thomas W. Cridler ordered "information concerning ready-made clothing in Latin-American countries, with a view of enlarging the trade in American clothing in those markets." The inquiry made following a request by an unidentified "leading firm of clothiers in Chicago"<sup>2</sup> Thomas W. Cridler's letter expounded,

---

<sup>2</sup> Book cloth in foreign countries, Market for ready-made clothing in Latin America... Special Consular Reports, Vol. XX, Part 1, U.S. Bureau of Foreign Commerce, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1900, pp. 45-69. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044015595754&seq=53>

A search through hundreds of Miscellaneous Letters, part of RG 59: General Records of the State Department did not reveal which Chicago clothier made this request. Thanks to David A. Langbart, Research Services, National Archives at College Park, MD and to Morgan at the Chicago Public Library's reference services, Harold Washington Library Center.

the American clothing trade has made such vast progress in recent years that, after supplying the immense home demands, it is now in a position to enter more extensively into foreign markets; and as much of the success of this prospective expansion will depend on the replies to this instruction... (U.S. Bureau Of Foreign Commerce, Special Consular Reports, Vol. 20, pt. 1, 1900, p. 45-69).

The inquiry specified obtaining information about the sizes, quantity, quality, price points; if ready-made clothing was already being imported and/or locally produced; infrastructural questions about transportation and tariffs, or import taxes that could add 60-75% of the value of the clothing imported to the price paid by the consumer; if there were already local dealers of ready-made clothing; who might consume these goods and in what styles regarding local tastes and socio-economic issues.

In 1900, the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Foreign Commerce published these consular responses from sixteen countries: Mexico, British Honduras (Belize), Costa Rica, Honduras, Salvador, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, The Guianas, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela. In some countries, several consular officers reported. Eleven consulates in Mexico with Ciudad Juarez and Veracruz's reports very comprehensive; three consulates from Chile; two from Columbia; and two from Venezuela. The report does not clarify if this ready-made clothing was for men or women. Moreover, as new primaries have shown here, Chicago's clothing manufacturers were producing both men's and women's ready-made clothing at a variety of price points.

European clothing manufacturers had long established trade with countries like Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and British Honduras, and discussion of competing with cheaper European labor (p. 46), as well as competition with local tailors and some countries like Chile, whose import tariff was 60%, kept high to protect their own labor force. Mexico's U.S. Consuls reported on eleven cities (p. 46-56), some like Chihuahua with active clothing factories and all [U.S. goods] subject to a 75% import tariff. The Consul in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico called for "free trade" (p. 47) to alleviate the import taxes nearly a century before NAFTA was passed in 1994. Some of this trade may have been targeted to American citizens living and working abroad, for example Mexico's San Luis Potosi had 600 American rail "road men" (p. 53).

The Vice Consul in Utiilla, Honduras specified that “bales and packages should be waterproof, as they are often landed through the surf” and carefully packed by class of material or the tariff would be levied on the highest class for the entire package, given very specific tariff rates (p. 58-59). Competition with local made-to-measure tailors is a recurring theme, as is the need to send Spanish-speaking designers and cutters to access local styles and fabric weights appropriate to local climates. The Consul in Valparaiso, Chile had many recommendations, including:

I should recommend them to cut each suit and fold it up separately, with lining, stiffening, buttons, and thread or silk just sufficient for the suit in question, and not to put one single stitch into the work. The clothes can be made up here. The suits will be valued according to quality, and an ad valorem duty of 60 per cent will be assessed, but as there will be no stitches in the material, a reduction of 40 per cent of the 60 per cent will be allowed. (p.62-63)

In this example, having garment “kits” imported and then sewn in Chile saved 40% on the tariff.

The Washington, D.C. based Government Printing Office publication of this report in 1900 may have abbreviated them, based on a 1901 Mexican Herald article that published an “extract” of Consul Charles W. Kindrick’s letter from Ciudad Juarez, just across from El Paso, Texas at the U.S. border with Mexico. The newspaper content focused on a discussion of local merchants, tariff or import tax rates, and American hat styles noting, U.S. “shoes and ready-made clothing are preferred to European productions, and the same is true of hats” (\$\$\$, Mexican Herald, 1901, p. 7) but this content is not the same as the official 1900 Special Consular Report. (p. 47-48). These are just a few examples from this 23-page report, though the report itself warrants much greater exploration and interpretation in the countries cited, related to if and how U.S. imports changed their local labor forces, tariff, and import tax policies to protect their own labor forces, the socio-economic aspects of ready-made and made-to-measure clothing, along with many other future avenues of inquiry beyond the confines of this article.

The U.S. Government’s advocacy with trade organizations to promote global commerce had a significant impact on growth. This support from the Federal government continued with Secretary of State Elihu Root’s 1906 South American tour.



Root visited Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Panama, and Colombia to discuss ways to extend trade (Bacon, Scott, 1917, p. xiv). A Philadelphia trade publication documented this effective outreach:

Trade with Latin America...compared with the figures for 1897 these indicate an increase of 132 per cent in our purchases from Latin America and an increase of 212 percent in our sales to those countries during the ten years [1897-1906] (Commercial America, 1907, p. 5).

Additionally, this article cited significantly increased imports and exports with Puerto Rico and Cuba in the transition after the Spanish American War. In an address to Congress, President Theodore Roosevelt discussed “the apparent unsatisfactory condition existing in the parcel-post arrangements between our country and many...” (U.S. Congress, 3rd International Conference of American States, part 2, 1906, p. 771) as well as the advantages that the earlier adoption of the international parcel post system gave to British exporters. As political tensions in Europe led to the outbreak of World War I in 1914, both European manufacturing of goods including clothing and especially transatlantic trade with Europe to Latin America were curtailed. A commercial trade publication cited, “America’s Trade Opportunity: Europe’s War throws down the bar that stood against our goods in the markets of four continents” (Chapman, 1914, p. 236-244).

The New York based trade journal, *Printers’ Ink* interviewed Senor Francisco J. Acosta, who published a Mexican mail order journal and discussed the American origins of mail order in Mexico:

Mail-order dealing had its birth here five years ago, when a live young American came down with a cargo of electric belts, launched a whirlwind campaign of advertising, and is reputed to have cleaned up a quarter-million pesos (\$125,000) in two years. Since then, there has been a gradual increase in volume of both local and foreign mail-order advertising in our Spanish papers. About three-quarters of this is medical, or for medical apparatus. Local mail-order advertising—houses in Mexico City seeking national trade—includes furniture, farm implements, jewelry and small schemes. Foreign advertisers include people in the United States like the Cartilage Company, one or two schools of hypnotism, who frequently use twenty to forty inches in our leading daily, *El Imparcial*, and so forth. Montgomery Ward & Co., of Chicago, ran a short campaign last year [1905] and placed a large number of their English catalogues with Spanish flyers enclosed (*Printers’ Ink*, Aug 22, 1906, p. 3).

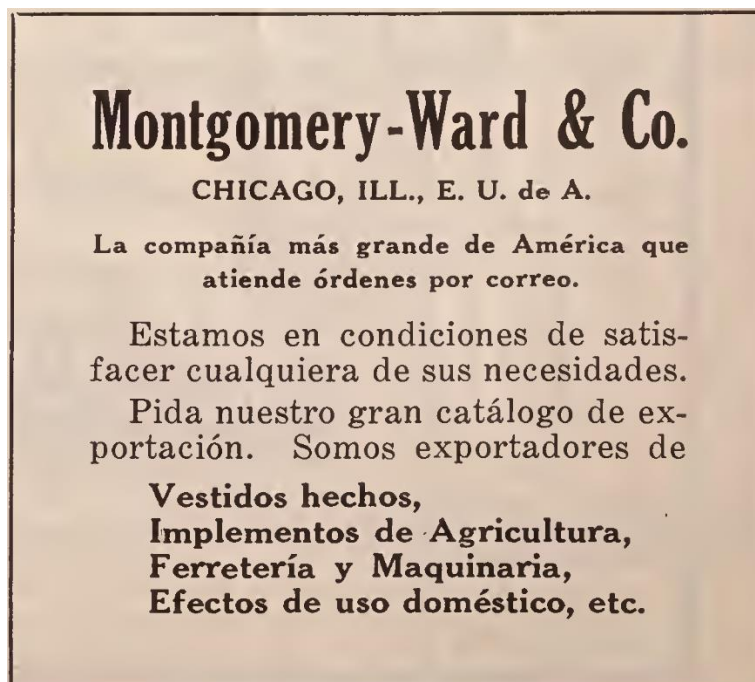
This article discussed the pitfalls of advertising in newspapers that had very small circulations prior to advertising agencies' grasp of this data, and the overarching control of the British-owned newspaper. "Publishers simply cannot buy paper, which is made by a trust and enormously protected, while telegraph service is controlled by the English daily, the Mexican Herald" (Printers' Ink, Aug 22, 1906, p. 4). Francisco J. Acosta discussed his own monthly mail order "magazine selling at ten cents Mexican per year. It is called El Cosmopolita...and is asserted to have a monthly circulation of not less than 10,000 copies" (Printers' Ink, Aug 22, 1906, p. 4). Acosta shared significant advice about mistakes American mail order firms made in requesting payment in gold or international money orders when that put off many Mexican consumers from ordering because they did not have access to these more modern services:

It would be infinitely more profitable to say, 'Send Mexican bills or stamps by mail, or Mexican coin by express.' This puts it in the power of any reader to make purchases, and the currency received by an American house can be turned over at any bank, while Mexican stamps will be accepted in payment for advertising space. It should be made extra prominent that Mexican stamps are acceptable, because there are no bills in the republic under \$5, while silver is not mailable and express offices are scarce. (Printers' Ink, Aug 22, 1906, p.4).

Acosta's local knowledge of Mexican consumers provided many insights on how culturally complicated global mail order could be without an insider's expertise to guide a foreigner in translation, what people might buy, and infrastructure issues.

By the 1920s, how-to manuals like A.A. Preciado's *Exporting to the World*, offered experiential advice like Acosta's in Mexico. The advice of professional marketing organizations kept up with the post-WWI trade boom, shown in advice John Sullivan gave for the Association of National Advertisers (Sullivan, 1924, p. 116). The Los Angeles-based W. F. Burnett's Spanish language *Guia Oficial del Sud America* is another example of how export advertising evolved to include a Spanish language advertisement for Montgomery Ward ca. 1920 and served as a guide for tourists and business travelers. These are just a few examples of these growing export trade publications from the 1920s.

Illustration 3: Montgomery Ward display advertisement in W.F. Burnett, W.F. Burnett's... Guia official del Sud America.



Source: Ca. 1920, Library of Congress.

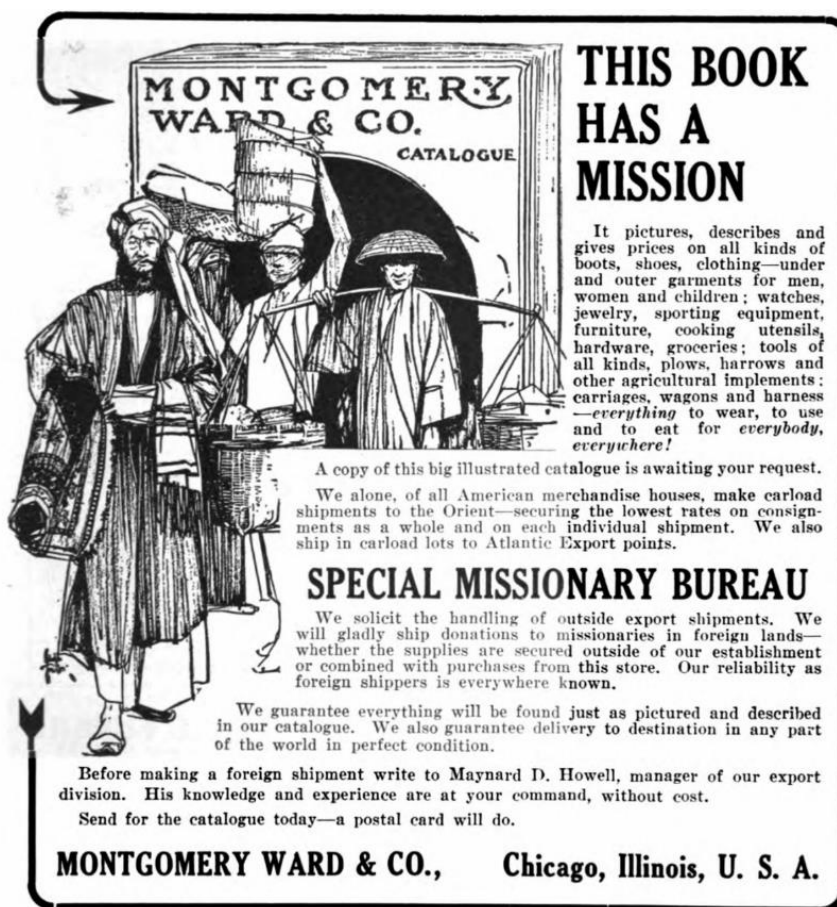
Ralph Hower noted the advertising agency N.W. Ayer's attention to staple commodities "...Montgomery Ward & Co., born of the decade's Granger movement, advertised its mail order business in the Ayer religious lists," (Hower, 1939, p. 115, 58) though he did not provide any explanation for the reference to religious lists for advertising. This reference likely refers to Ward's trade with American missionaries. In Frank Latham's anecdotal centennial history of Montgomery Ward, he cited ex-president Theodore Roosevelt's ca. 1909 discovery while on safari in Africa of a U.S. religious mission in the Sudan furnished by Montgomery Ward. "Before World War I, Ward's export department did a big business all around the world. S.D. Howell, the department head, was much in demand as a man who knew the intricacies of selling abroad" (1972, p. 61). The mis-initialing of Maynard D. Howell's name may have kept his significant role at Montgomery Ward & Company in obscurity. Helen A. Ballard wrote about this aspect of Montgomery Ward's history in "The Mail-Order Catalogue on the Trail of the Missionary: How the Missionary Creates Demand for American Goods." She explained how the export department served Americans being posted to

missionary service worldwide, and that missionary orders supplied 10% of the department's business, noting that "the mail-order catalogue and the Bible lie side by side on the living room table...for Christianity has created the demand for American clothes" (Printers' Ink, 1918, p. 33). Howell's contribution to the development of global trade through Montgomery Ward's export department has not been recognized by historians, though he received national press attention as an expert on global trade.

His professional experiences illuminate this formative period's history. In the 1900 U.S. Federal Census, Maynard D. Howell was 34 years old and listed as a Manager and general merchant, residing in 6th Ward of Evanston, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. In the 1901 Evanston, Illinois city directory, M.D. Howell is listed as an office manager at Montgomery Ward (Evanston, IL City Directory, 1901, p. 204). The 1910 U.S. Federal Census listed Howell as an Export Manager in general merchandise, for Montgomery Ward. By 1915, correspondence is directed to Howell as the export department head in advertisements, as shown in Illustration 5, from The Assembly Herald (Ward advertisement, Assembly Herald, 1915, p. 192). Howell gained valuable experiential knowledge in his twenty-year career at Montgomery Ward's export department, and his experiences and transcripts of his speeches document the history of American export trade in this formative period. At his keynote address at the National Foreign Trade Council in April of 1918 he advocated for international parcel post because of the superior English postal system's reach to 195 countries, over only 94 reached by the USA:

...the fact that for nearly twenty years our house has been building up an export trade in general merchandise,--wearing apparel, foodstuffs, household articles...I have...to note the difficulties that lie in the way of the American beginner in export trade, and the great superiority of the facilities afforded for exporting small orders, by the Governments of England, Germany, Holland, Belgium, and France, over the defective and scattering parcel post from our own country. (Howell, Exporters' Review, 1919, p. 21)

Illustration 4: Montgomery Ward & Co. advertisement



**MONTGOMERY WARD & CO. CATALOGUE**

**THIS BOOK HAS A MISSION**

It pictures, describes and gives prices on all kinds of boots, shoes, clothing—under and outer garments for men, women and children; watches, jewelry, sporting equipment, furniture, cooking utensils, hardware, groceries; tools of all kinds, plows, harrows and other agricultural implements; carriages, wagons and harness—everything to wear, to use and to eat for everybody, everywhere!

A copy of this big illustrated catalogue is awaiting your request.

We alone, of all American merchandise houses, make carload shipments to the Orient—securing the lowest rates on consignments as a whole and on each individual shipment. We also ship in carload lots to Atlantic Export points.

**SPECIAL MISSIONARY BUREAU**

We solicit the handling of outside export shipments. We will gladly ship donations to missionaries in foreign lands—whether the supplies are secured outside of our establishment or combined with purchases from this store. Our reliability as foreign shippers is everywhere known.

We guarantee everything will be found just as pictured and described in our catalogue. We also guarantee delivery to destination in any part of the world in perfect condition.

Before making a foreign shipment write to Maynard D. Howell, manager of our export division. His knowledge and experience are at your command, without cost.

Send for the catalogue today—a postal card will do.

**MONTGOMERY WARD & CO., Chicago, Illinois, U. S. A.**

Source: The Assembly Herald, March 1915, p. 193.

By the Spring of 1919, Montgomery Ward's export department head, Maynard D. Howell actively promoted U.S. adoption of international parcel post in speeches like his "Direct Selling through Parcel Post" (Chicago Commerce, Apr 26, 1919, p. 63). Increased growth in global trade and Howell's expert reputation built at Montgomery Ward's led to extensive national newspaper and trade journal coverage. "Beginning with today all roads lead to Chicago so far as foreign trade interests are concerned...the largest gathering of exporters and others interested in foreign trade...since the outbreak of the war," (Chicago Tribune, Apr 21, 1919, p. 22) with Howell representing Montgomery Ward's as a speaker. The American Manufacturers' Export Association created an advisory committee with an office in Washington D.C. to lobby the U.S. Post Office Department to adopt international parcel post (Exporters' Review, June 1919, p. 21) to which Howell was appointed (Judicious Advertising, 1919,

p. 67). In late November 1919, Maynard D. Howell died onboard the S.S. Empress of Russia bound for China and the Philippines to establish a wholesale department for Montgomery Ward and Company there. Printers' Ink described him as "a leading authority on parcel post and one of the country's most prominent advocates of an extension of parcel post as applied to foreign countries (Dec 4, 1919, p. 229). His tireless advocacy for international parcel post paid off, "the volume of international parcel post sent from the U.S. in 1920 increased a remarkable 108 percent over the prior year" and with international agreements with 93 countries by 1921. (Kochersperger, 2024, p. 12). When we employ the Google Ngram viewer, which tracks how many times data appears in digitized documents, using Montgomery Ward as the keyword, the first significant spike in Montgomery Ward takes place ca. 1918-1920, and perhaps because of Howell's and Ward's advocacy of parcel post to Latin America and the broader world.

Historically, retailers guarded their financial growth statistics. Unless a company's historical archives exist and these records were saved, historians have to piece histories together with other primary sources. An internal Montgomery Ward publication (ca. 1942) entitled "Ward's Export Business (Historical Summary, Current Measurement and Market Opportunities" survived and clarified the extent of Ward's export department:

...from 1924 through 1933, Wards export sales never amounted to as much as 1/10 of 1% of the relative U.S. total in any year. During that period the company's export business was handled more as a minor side line than as a major business opportunity. Net losses were the order of the day. Since 1933, things have been better. In that year, conjointly with a change in the Export Division and general company Managements, an invigorated promotional program was launched. A strong move to gain an enlarged sales volume through 'Distributor-Importer' connections, was the keystone of this effort.<sup>3</sup>

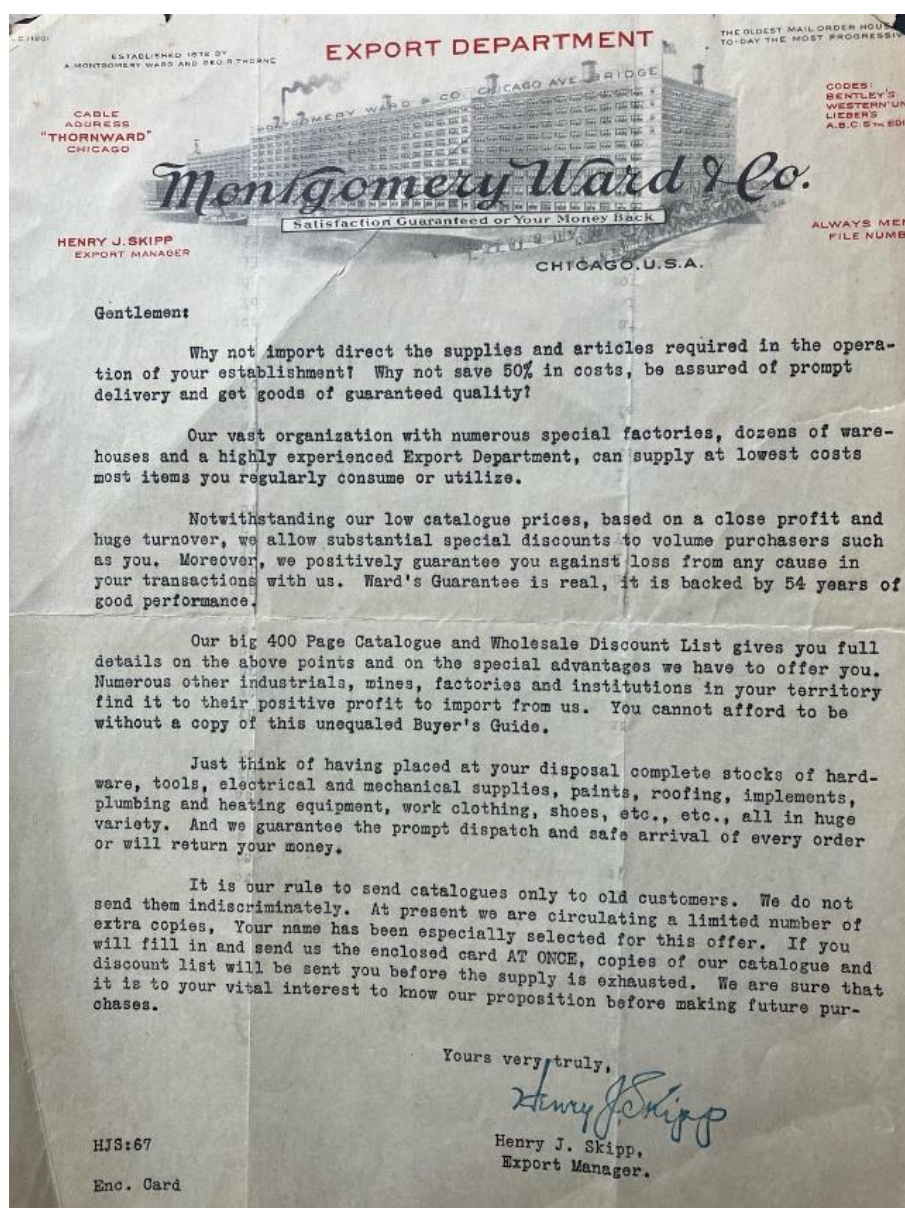
This report also documented "over-all increase in actual sales volume...between 1933 and 1941 was nearly 400%, while the company's total mail order sales gained only 230% by comparison (Ward's Export Business, ca. 1942, p. 11). These statistics suggest that Montgomery Ward invested a lot of resources in

---

<sup>3</sup> Montgomery Ward & Co. Wards Export Business (Historical summary, current measurement and market opportunities). American Heritage Center archives, University of Wyoming, Montgomery Ward collection\_8038\_box22\_f10, p. 8. Grateful thanks to Mary Beth Brown, Clara R. Toppan Rare Book Curator, AHC.

Howell and the export department for so small of a financial return. Henry J. Skipp became the export department manager after Howell died, as noted in extant correspondence shown here in Illustration 5 from the export department soliciting international business. As this study has shown, by the 1920s, export advertising was more advanced and using foreign languages in their export department mail order marketing. In this case, Spanish in a return postcard to receive Ward's 1925 catalog, sent by H. Avila Vázquez residing at J.O. de Domínguez 15 in Toluca, Mexico.

Illustration 5, undated letter from Montgomery Ward Export Department manager, Henry J. Skipp.



Source: Author's collection.

Illustration 6: Montgomery Ward catalog request postcard in Spanish, postmarked January 22, 1925, from Toluca, Mexico.



Sarah A. Johnson

Source: Author's collection.

This research began by thinking about Montgomery Ward's Latin American mail order consumers in both theory and practice. What started as a few Montgomery Ward's pre-printed return envelopes, expanded to nearly 60 from Latin America, 24 with names and addresses and 25 from the rest of the world and continues. When envelopes with consumer's names and addresses appeared, I began to think of plotting these on a digital map. Most of these Latin American consumers lived in coastal areas or on islands, except for Mexico that had closer and longer trade connections to the USA. Infrastructure issues made delivery more complicated to these consumers, given the vast array of goods Montgomery Ward offered and the geographical remoteness of some areas. A 1936 News-week article explained:

Goods destined for such far-off lands require careful wrapping. Sometimes, after travelling thousands of miles by boat and train, the heavy boxes must be carried by caravan across snow-capped mountains or through steaming forests. Pianos are often packed in large tin cases, soldered shut, so they can be floated down jungle streams. (Vol. 7, Iss. 13, March 28, 1936: 34-35.)



Illustration 7, Digital Map with Montgomery Ward consumer envelopes. Black dots are known locations, orange squares are approximate locations, blue squares are the most common locations with frequency reflected in size, green diamond is exporter/Sears Roebuck & Co.



Source: April Beisaw, PhD, RPA, Professor of Anthropology, Vassar College.<sup>4</sup>

Montgomery Ward's use of more advanced export advertising reached Latin American consumers and those in the rest of the world. In an October 12, 1915, postal card responding to an \$80 order dated September 14 from Hans Wolf in Kobe, Japan,

If no changes or additions are made, we can usually assemble the goods and pack an order for export within 10 days, the time consumed varying...many articles that require making up, altering or finishing...longer time will be required for odd sizes, irregular specifications, all repair parts, and items quoted as being shipped from factory—vehicles, stoves, furniture, etc...Before writing to us about delays, always allow ample time for orders to be filled and sent to you. We often get complaints about delay before we have received the order complained about, especially when the order is sent to us by registered mail, which is much slower... (Ward's Postal Card, Oct 12, 1915, Author's Collection).

This example, while not from Latin America, provides details about ordering delays. Data on these envelopes show that prior to the mid-1920s adoption of the vertical space for consumer information, Ward's was stamping the date receipt of orders and when those orders were shipped out. The new form of envelope does not

<sup>4</sup> Grateful thanks to April Beisaw, PhD, RPA, Professor of Anthropology, Vassar College for making this digital map. Map link here: <https://arcg.is/1mCylia>

contain these date stamps, so internally, Ward's must have standardized their system of tracking orders.

Illustration 8: U.S. Mail plane meeting an ox cart, "The Mail Landed in (Ma...) Nicaragua, Y.B. 1931.



Source: Manufacturer's Aircraft Association Records (06858), American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

The U.S. Mail plane being unloaded onto an ox cart in this 1931 photograph in Nicaragua underscores the infrastructure challenges of mail and package delivery even with international parcel post, as an armed guard stands at the rear of the airplane.

We do not know what sorts of goods the consumers from the Montgomery Ward return envelopes ordered. Data about consumers is rare, and about foreign consumers even rarer. Who were these people sending their money to Chicago, and what did these more staple consumer goods mean to them, since they had come from so far away? Artifacts as historical documents sometimes provoke more questions than

answers. One glimpse of how Montgomery Ward's mail order was used in 1925. In "Round the World with your Editor," Boy's Cinema magazine published a reader letter,

Cowboy outfit and Cost. I am greatly obliged to C.T. Horden, S. Rhodesia, for the addresses of cowboy outfitters and prices—an inquiry which I have made repeatedly. The following are two addresses that chums can write to: Montgomery Ward & Co., Export Department, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A..."A pair of chaps cost from 3 pounds to 5 pounds" writes this chum, "I have got a full outfit...Messrs. Montgomery Ward & Co. sell a complete outfit of saddlery, including blankets and bridle, at 5 pounds. I should think this was rather too cheap and not likely to last very long. This firm also sells other types of saddles ranging from 3 pounds, 10 shillings to 13 pounds (Boy's Cinema, Nov 28, 1925, p. 26)

You could not get more American than a cowboy outfit as a foreign mail order purchase. In Claudia Milian's book *Latining America: black-brown passages and the coloring of Latino/Latina Studies*, she cited,

my study refigures how Latino/a studies' construction of Latinoness and Latinaness looks outside this field and its relation to ideological white Americanness to think of new possibilities beyond national identities and brown symbology. (Milian, 2013, p. 5)

Milian's clever word play made me wonder if general merchandise crossing national borders from Montgomery Ward represented the "Chicagoing" of Latin America, or some of it? Did consumers' perceptions of merchandise change because advertisements and catalogues were in Spanish or Portuguese, or did that just facilitate the ordering process and promote mail order growth? What did merchandise from Montgomery Ward's represent to Latinos and Latinas, is that different from what it represented to U.S. missionaries, or Americans living and working abroad?

Did these objects from Chicago represent American imperialism encroaching on what had been a cross cultural mix of traditions, Indigenous, National, Colonial, and post-Colonial European import traditions? Were these garments and household goods simply one more try at offloading goods that could not find a market at home in the USA or Western countries. Were these goods treasured by consumers because they were ordered with great care, travelled a long distance, and represented something less easily obtainable? The envelopes do not tell us though I hope future scholars will delve into this material culture exploration in theory and practice.

Illustration 9, Gray pre-printed Montgomery Ward's return envelope from Eustace Uriah Discon, Winchester, Golden Grove Post Office, Jamaica, BWI, postmarked Golden Grove May 19, 1925, received Chicago May 27, 1925, contents registered, envelope type in common usage ca. 1923; Blue pre-printed Montgomery Ward's return envelope from Francisco Cubas, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, postmarked July 12, 1928.



Source: Author's Collection.

Table 1: Consumer data from envelopes addressed to Montgomery Ward & Co., Chicago, Illinois, 1904-1938.

| Name  | Street                | City, State        | Country    | Postmark date(s)  | Ward's Receive d date           | Envelope  | Notes  |
|---|-----------------------|--------------------|------------|---|---------------------------------|---|--|
| Adolph Hempel                               | Caixa do Correio n. 7 | Campinas, S. Paulo | Brazil     | Chicago-26 Jul 1904   |                                 | Postal card   | Ward's competitor Sears catalog request        |
|   |                       |                    | Chile      | Antofagasta Recepcion 20 Jan 1913                             | 26 Feb                          | yellow  |  |
| Empresa Minera "Mercedes" oval company mark |                       | Oruro & Huanuni    | Bolivia    | Ainofagasta Recepcion 3 May 1913, 7 am                        |                                 | cream   | Via Panamá; Moraga & Hijo                      |
| Banco Nacional de Bolivia company mark      |                       | La Paz             | Bolivia    | Illegible, 19 Feb 1914  | 13 Mar AM                       | yellow  | Via Panamá                                     |
|   |                       | Limon              | Costa Rica | Illegible. Back 1 Abr 1914                                    | 15 Apr AM                       | cream   | By first opportunity                           |
|   |                       |                    | Dominica   | 14 Sep 1914   | 28 Sep                          | cream   | Registered-NY 25 Sep 1914; Chicago 26 Sep 1914 |
| GG Jamania?                                 |                       |                    | Colombia   | Illegible. Oct 1916   | 20 Oct AM                       | Blue Ward   | Registered                                     |
|   |                       | La Paz             | Bolivia    | La Paz 16 Abr 1919  | 20 May PM                       | Green   |  |
|   |                       | Cross Roads        | Jamaica    | Front-Cross Roads 15 Sep 1919; Back Kingston 16 Sep 1919 10am | In 24 Sep 1919                  | Ward Blue Form Env. 26, Foreign Division                  |  |
|   |                       | Kingston           | Jamaica    | Kingston 17 Oct 1919  | In 27 Oct PM; Out 28 Oct 2.30   | Cream   |  |
|   |                       | Watson Hill        | Jamaica    | Watson Hill J 7 Dec 1919                                      | In 10 Jan am; Out 11 Jan, 10.00 | Ward Form envelope 29 Blue, Foreign Div; Export Div stamp |  |
| W.H. Foote                                  |                       | Nassau             | Bahamas    | Nassau 22 Apr 1919  | 28 Apr PM                       | Cream   | Registered Miami 23 Apr, Chicago 26 Apr        |

|  |  |                      |            |  |                               |   |                                 |
|--|--|----------------------|------------|--|-------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
|  |  |                      |            |  |                               |   | 19                              |
|  |  |                      | Peru       | Back 21 May 1919                                 | 21 May AM                     | Blue Ward   | 6 stamps on back                |
|  |  | Laticetown           | Br. Guiana | Laticetown 4 Jun 1919; Bherverwactin c?          | 27 Jun AM                     | Cream   | Per 1st post                    |
|  |  |                      | Bermuda    | Illegible town, Bermuda 23 Oct 1919 1AM          | 31 Oct PM                     | Cream   | typed                           |
|  |  | Kingston Montego Bay | Jamaica    | 11 Jun 1919 PM                                   | 21 Jun am                     | Cream   |                                 |
|  |  | Montego Bay          | Jamaica    | MBay-10 Jun 1919<br>Kingston- 11 Jul 19 am       | 22 Jul am                     | Cream   |                                 |
|  |  | Gully...             | Jamaica    | Kingston 4 Aug 1919, 4pm                         | 18 Aug am                     | Cream   |                                 |
|  |  |                      | Jamaica    | Port Anthony Sp ? 1919                           | In-8 Oct pm Out-30 Oct        |   |                                 |
|  |  | Kingston?            | Jamaica    | Kingston, Jamaica 5 Jan 1920 6:30 am; Chapelton? | In-19 Jan am; Out-19 Jan 3 pm | Blue Ward Form Env. 29, Foreign Division; Export Div. stamp |                                 |
|  |  | Bus...Park           | Jamaica    | Illegible, Jamaica 2.5d stamp, no year           | In-19 Jan am; Out Jan ?       | Blue Ward Form Env. 26, Foreign Division                    |                                 |
|  |  | Bog Walk             | Jamaica    | Bog Walk? Jamaica 1920?                          | In-16 Feb; Out-17 Feb         | Blue Ward C142 NTM, Foreign Division                        |                                 |
|  |  |                      | Jamaica    | Kingston-14 Feb 1920 am                          | 24 Feb am                     |   |                                 |
|  |  | Kingston?            | Jamaica    | Kingston Jamaica 12 Mar 1920, 12_m               | In-22 Mar                     | Blue Ward Form Env. 29 Foreign Division                     |                                 |
|  |  | Georgetow n?         | Br. Guiana | Georgetown15 Jan 1920                            | In-4 Feb Out- 5 Fe            | Blue Ward   | "new" envelope Export div stamp |

|                            |                      |                          |                  |  |                               |   |   |
|----------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--|-------------------------------|---|---|
|                            |                      | Mexico City              | Mexico           | Mexico DF 14 Feb 1920                      | 20 Feb pm                     | Blue Ward   | Export div stamp  |
|                            |                      |                          | Ecuador          | illegible                                  | In-3? Mar 1920 am; Out-24 Mar | tan   |   |
|                            |                      |                          | Mexico           | 18 Nov 1920 & 1920 stamp                   | In-26 Nov pm; Out-28 Nov      | cream   | Out-foreign files   |
| American Clothing Co, S.A. | AP Postal 1631       | Mexico City              | Mexico           | 22 Oct 1923 stamp                          |                               | Mexican Company envelope  | Addressed to Edward Fahlstrom at M. Ward                          |
|                            |                      | Sorata?                  | Bolivia          | Sorata 1 Feb 1924                          | In-11 Mar pm; Out-Mar 12?     | cream   |   |
|                            |                      | San Pedro Sula?          | Honduras         | San Pedro Sula, 28 Oct 1924                |                               | cream   | Registered-4 Nov ?; 5 Nov 1924 Chicago                            |
| H. Avilla Vázquez          | J.O. de Domínguez 15 | Toluca                   | Mexico           | Toluca, 22 Jan 1925                        |                               | Export dept catalog request post card, cream with red illustration & type | In Spanish  |
| Dr. Philip MacAdam         | "Rhonda" - Worthing  | Bridgetown, Christchurch | Barbados, BWI    | Barbados ...28 10.00 am                    |                               | Dk Green Ward export dept envelope  | Stamp date 1921 though envelopes not used until ca. 1925 or after |
| A. Medina Zeballos         | Jaen No. 100         | Coroico, Nor-Yungas      | Bolivia          | Coroico legible, 1923 stamp used ca. 1925? |                               | Green Export Dept envelope  | typed   |
| Eustace Uriah Discon       | Winchester           | Golden Grove PO          | Jamaica BWI      | Golden Grove 16 May & 18 May 1925          |                               | Gray Export Dept envelope   | Registered R'cd Chicago 27 May 1925                               |
|                            |                      |                          | British Honduras | 26 Br Honduras, 1926?                      |                               | cream   | "BUY BRITISH GOODS...BEST" stamped on envelope                    |
|                            |                      | San Fernando             | Trinidad         | 19 Mar 1926 San Fernando                   |                               | Registered letter envelope, fee paid                                      | Registered R'cd NY 30 Mar 1926                                    |
| Nanuel ? de L'Espinosa     | Clle 61 No 70a       | Bogota?                  | Columbia         | Bogota 18. 11.1926                         |                               | yellow  | Registered-left Columbia 24 Feb 1926; Rcd                         |

|                       |                    |                            |                                  |  |  |                                    |   |
|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--|------------------------------------|---|
|                       |                    |                            |                                  | (Unclear re: registered dates)                   |  |                                    | NY8 Mar, Rcd Chicago 9 Mar  |
| M. Ayoub Rayman       | Vreeden Hoop       | Vreeden Hoop, West Bank    | Demerara, Br. Guiana             | 21 May 1926 G.P.O.                               |  | Gray Ward export dept envelope     | Registered Rcd NY14 Jun 1926; Rcd Chicago 16 Jun  |
| Luis Lam S.           | 2 de abril #17.    | Payo Obispo, Quintana Róo  | Mexico                           | 19 Apr 1927 Quintana Róo                         |  | Lt green Ward export dept envelope | Registered Rcd NY26 Apr, Chicago 27 Apr 1927; typed   |
| Mr. J.W. Williams     |                    | Cristobal, Canal Zone      | R. P. Panama                     | Cristobal Canal Zone 28 Jul 1927 1:30 pm         |  | Lt green Ward export dept envelope | US Stamp with Canal Zone overprint  |
|                       |                    |                            |                                  |  |  |                                    |   |
| Geo. E. Edwards       | 28 Moore St.       | Cross Roads, Woodford Park | St. Andrew Jamaica BWI           | Cross Roads Au 27                                |  | Lt green Ward export dept envelope | Registered R'cd Kingston 27 Aug 1927; R'cd Chicago 2 Sep 1927   |
| Mrs. H.G. Steen       | B. de las Delicias | Puerto Cortes              | Spanish Honduras Central America | 24 J? 1928 Pto Cortes-Cortes                     |  | Lt green Ward export dept envelope |   |
|                       |                    | Devonshire South           | Devonshire South, Bermuda        | illegible  |  | green                              | Registered, R'cd NY 6 Mar 1928; R'cd Chicago 7 Mar 1928; Registered sticker Devonshire South, Bermuda |
| E. U. Anderson        | 50 Handyside St    | Belize                     | Belize, British Honduras, C.A.   | Blurry Belize British Honduras 26 Mar 1928       |  | cream                              | Registered, R'cd Belize 26 Mar 1928; R'cd NY 3 Apr 1928, R'cd Chicago 4 Apr 1928                      |
|                       |                    |                            | Trinidad                         | Trinidad 24 Apr 1928                             |  | cream                              |   |
| S.A. Sattaur          | Lot 2, Essex Str.  | New Amsterdam Berluce      | British Guiana                   | New Amsterdam British Guiana 21 May 1928 4.20 pm |  | Lt green Ward export dept envelope |   |
| Sicta Clara Escalante | Avenida Norte      | Bocas del Toro             | Panama                           | Bocas del Toro 25 Jun 1928                       |  | Lt green Ward export               | Registered R'cd Bocas del Toro 25 Jun 1928; R'cd  |



|                       |          |                         |                            |   |  |                                    |   |
|-----------------------|----------|-------------------------|----------------------------|---|--|------------------------------------|---|
|                       |          |                         |                            |   |  | dept envelope                      | New Orleans 3 Jul 1928; R'cd Chicago 4 Jul 1928; Red wax seal on back of envelope |
| Francisco Cubas       |          | Tegucigalpa             | Honduras                   | Honduras Receptoría<br>12 Jul 1928            |  | Old blue foreign div Ward envelope |   |
| Mrs. Leslie J. Rivers | Oakridge | Ruatan                  | Rep. Honduras<br>,<br>C.A. | La Ceiba Honduras<br>23 Aug 1928              |  | Lt green Ward export dept envelope | "sent letter" written above the postmark  |
|                       |          | Puerto Castilla Colon ? | Honduras                   | Puerto Castilla-Colon Honduras<br>18 Jul 1928 |  | tan                                | Back of envelope cut out where return address may have been                       |
| Carlos A. Vidal       |          | La Yuaira               | D.F. Venezuel<br>a         | Venezu...                                     |  | Lt green Ward export               | Registered R'cd NY 21 Apr 1929, R'cd  |
| c/o Fr. Eraso         |          |                         |                            |   |  | dept envelope                      | Chicago 22 Apr 1929   |
| Hortensia Florey Leon |          | Post Office 42 Lima     | Peru                       | 24 Jul 1929 Peru                              |  | Lt green Ward export dept envelope | Registered, sticker near stamps with #; R'cd Chicago 7 Aug 1929                   |

Source: Author's Collection.

## 2 Conclusions

Three wars and several financial panics contributed to the commercial outreach by Montgomery Ward's export department in Chicago to Latin America and the Caribbean—the Spanish American War, WWI, and WWII. The development of Ward's export department chief Maynard Howell to induce the U.S. Post Office Department's adoption of international parcel post in 1919 was necessary to deliver the goods to international locations and compete with other industrialized nations who were earlier adopters of international parcel post and the mail order growth that followed. Extant ephemera provides new documentation of mail order history we know in theory and can now see traces of in practice. The history of Montgomery Ward's twentieth-century distribution of women's clothing and other merchandise had its own strikes and labor issues on the production side nationally. Now, it is harder to imagine

and obtain women's clothing made in the USA. The present context of U.S. and global reliance on draconian Latin American labor in export processing zones created from the 1980s to the present (Thanhauser, 2023, p. 203-204.) gives us cause to rethink globalization's intended and unintended consequences.

## References

- \$\$\$\$. In: **Mexican Herald**, Mexico City, 2 Oct 1901, p. 7.
- 300 Members of Export Trade Due Soon, **Chicago Tribune**, Chicago, 21 Apr 1919, p. 22.
- A Coupon Ad. In: **Dry Goods Reporter**, Chicago: v. 34, n. 3, 16 Jan 1904, p. 25.
- ALBION, R. **The Rise of the Port of New York, 1815-1860**. Devon, UK: Newton Abbot, 1970.
- Bad Business. In: **Santa Fe Daily New Mexican**, Santa Fe, NM: 19 Dec 1889, p. 3.
- BACON, R; SCOTT, J. **Latin America and the United States, Addresses by Elihu Root**. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917.
- BALLARD, H. The Mail-Order Catalogue on the Trail of the Missionary. **Printers' Ink**, NY, v. 104, n. 10, 5 Sep 1918, p. 28-36.
- BLEVINS, C. **Paper Trails: The US Post and the Making of the American West**. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.
- BOURNE, J. **Parcel Post in Foreign Countries**. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1912.
- BROWN, L. **1872-1972 A Century of Serving Consumers: The Story of Montgomery Ward**. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chicago: Montgomery Ward, 1972.
- BURNETT, W. **W.F. Burnett's Guia oficial del Sud America**. [N.P., N. D.] <https://www.loc.gov/item/unk84041383/>.
- CALKINS, E.; HOLDEN, R. **Modern Advertising**. NY: D. Appleton & Co., 1905.
- CHAPMAN, J. America's Trade Opportunity, **System: Magazine for Business**. NY, v. 26, p.236-244, Sept 1914.
- CHICAGO'S Colonial Opportunity. In: **The InterOcean**, Chicago: 16 June 1899, p. 6.
- CLOAKS and Suits: Making Alterations. In: **Dry Goods Reporter**, Chicago: v.30, n.28, 14 Jul 1900, p. 29.
- CLOTHERS (sic) Were Busy. In: **The InterOcean**, Chicago: 1 Jan 1899, p. 15.
- COLONIES are not needed for the extension of American Commerce, In: **Cincinnati Enquirer** Cincinnati, OH: 2 Oct 1899, p. 6.

- DÁVILA, A. **Culture Works: Space, Value, and Mobility across the Neoliberal Americas**. New York and London: New York University Press, 2012.
- DÁVILA, A. **Latinos Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People**. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2012.
- EDWARD B. GROSSMAN & CO. **Spring and Summer Styles**, Chicago, 1900. Author's Collection.
- EDWARDS, L. **Only the Clothes on Her Back**. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.
- EDWARDS, R. **New Spirits: Americas in the "Gilded Age" 1865-1905**. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- EVANSTON CITY DIRECTORY. Evanston, IL, 1901.
- Extension of Parcel Post Service to Foreign Countries, **Judicious Advertising**, Chicago, v. 17, n. 4p. 67-68, May 1919.
- Fall Silk Review. In: **Dry Goods Reporter**, Chicago: v.30, n. 28, 14 Jul 1900, p. 17.
- FLEMING, H. The Literary Interests of Chicago. VI and VII. **American Journal of Sociology**, v. 12, n. 1 July 1906, p. 68-118.
- Foreign Language Advertising of Department Stores. In: **Printers' Ink**, NY, v. 18, n. 7, 17 Feb 1897, p. 16.
- GALLAGHER, W. **How the Post Office Created America: A History**. NY: Penguin Press, 2016.
- GAUGELE, E.; TITTON, M. **Fashion and Postcolonial Critique**. London: Sternberg Press, 2019.
- GRAHAM, R. Foreign Mail Orders: Montgomery Ward Covers. **Linn's Stamp News**. Sidney, OH, v. 73, n. 3724, p. 56-57, 13 Mar 2000.
- HAESSELBARTH, A. Charity's Useful Work in Porto Rico. **Frank Leslie's Weekly**, NY, 6 Nov 1902, p. 439.
- Has Cheap Store Sale. In: **Dry Goods Reporter**, Chicago: v. 34, n. 11 p. 25, 12 Mar 1904.
- HORTON, R. Compilation of Reports, Hearings, etc. on Insular Affairs, 58<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, House document n. 144, Washington, DC: GPO, 1903-1904p. 363-364.

- HOWELL, M. Direct Selling through Parcel Post, **Chicago Commerce**, Chicago, v. 15, p. 63-64, 26 Apr 1919.
- HOWELL, M. Extension of Parcel Post. **Exporters' Review**, NY, June 1919, p. 21-24.
- HOWER, R. **The History of an Advertising Agency, N.W. Ayer & Son at Work, 1869-1939**. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939.
- IMMERWAHR, D. **How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States**. NY: Picador, 2019.
- JOHNSON, S. **The Consumption of Middle Class American Women's Clothing Through Mail Order Catalogs, 1850 to 1900**. 2003. 410p. Thesis (Doctorate in Historical & Critical Studies) – University of Brighton, United Kingdom, 2003.
- Jones, C. The Parcel Post in Foreign Countries. **Journal of Political Economy**, v. 22, n. 6, p. 509-525, June, 1914.
- KAUFMAN DRY GOODS CO. advertisement, **La Prensa**, San Antonio, TX, 6 Oct 1920, p. 8.
- KLEIN, J. Economic Rivalries in Latin America. **Foreign Affairs**, v.3, n. 1, 1 Jan 1924, p. 236-243.
- KOCHERSPERGER, S. **Transnational Influence: Development of United States Parcel Post, 1887-1984. UPU Conference, Bern, Switzerland, 2024**.
- LABORIE, L. Global Commerce in small boxes: parcel post, 1878-1913, **Journal of Global History**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. P. 235-258.
- LAIRD, P. **Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing**. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.
- LATHAM, F. **1872-1972: A Century of Serving Consumers: The Story of Montgomery Ward**. Chicago: Montgomery Ward & Co, 1972.
- LEACH, W. **Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture**. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
- MACY'S. **Fall and Winter Catalogue, 1904-05**, NY, 1904, Author's Collection.
- Mail-Order Advertising in Mexico. In: **Printers' Ink**, NY, v. 56, n. 8, p. 3-6, 22 Aug 1906.
- MASK, D. **The Address Book: What Street Addresses Reveal about Identity, Race, Wealth, and Power**. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2020.

MCGOVERN, C. **Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945.** Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

M.D. Howell, of Montgomery Ward & Co., is Dead, **Printers' Ink**, NY, v. 109, n. 10, p.229, 4 Dec 1919.

MERCHANTS' ASSOCIATION. **Against further extension of the parcel post service**, NY: 1914.

MILIAN, C. **Latining America: black-brown passages and the coloring of Latino/Latina Studies.** Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013.

MIRACLE, G. International Advertising Research: A Historical Review, **A Handbook of International Advertising Research**, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2014.

MONTGOMERY WARD AD. **El Fronteriza**, Tucson, Arizona Terr. 29 Oct 1887, p. 4.

MONTGOMERY WARD AD. **Mexican Herald**, Mexico City, 24 Aug 1897, p. 5.

MONTGOMERY WARD AD. **The Assembly Herald**, Lebanon, PA, v. 21, Mar 1915.

MONTGOMERY WARD & CO. Catalogue No. 75, Chicago, 1907. Author's Collection.

MONTGOMERY WARD Order acknowledgment UPU card to Kurume, Japan, 28 April 1905. Author's Collection.

MONTGOMERY WARD Order acknowledgment UPU card to Kobe, Japan, 12 Oct 1915. Author's Collection.

MONTGOMERY WARD & CO. Catalog request postcard in Spanish, 22 Jan 1925. Author's Collection.

MONTGOMERY WARD & CO. **Wards Export Business (Historical summary, current measurement and market opportunities).** Chicago: Montgomery Ward & Co internal document, ca. 1942. American Heritage Center archives, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY, Montgomery Ward collection\_8038\_box22.

MONTGOMERY WARD & CO. EXPORT DEPARTMENT letter, n.d. Henry J. Skipp, Export Manager. Author's Collection.

MONTGOMERY WARD: It Paid to Let the Customer Shop at Home. In **Newsweek**. New York: v.7, n. 13, 28 Mar 1936: p. 34-35.

NEVINS, A. **The Emergence of Modern America, 1865-1878.** NY: Macmillan Company, 1927.

PARKER, R.; WHAPLES, R. **Routledge Handbook of Major Events in Economic History**. London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

POUILLARD, V. **Paris to New York: The Transatlantic Fashion Industry in the Twentieth Century**. Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 2021.

PRECIADO, A. **Exporting to the World: A Manual of Practical Export for all who are engaged in foreign trade**. NY: James A. McCann Co., 1920.

PROPSON, C. **Export Advertising Practice**. NY: Prentice Hall, 1923.

Round the World with your Editor. In: **Boy's Cinema**. London, v. 12, n. 312, p. 26, 28 Nov 1925.

SCANLON, J., ed. **The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader**. London and New York: New York University Press, 2000.

SCHWARZKOPF, S. The Social Embeddedness of Marketing. In: WHERRY, F.; WOODWARD, I. **The Oxford Handbook of Consumption**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 26-49.

STOBART, J.; HOWARD, V. (Eds.). **The Routledge Companion to the History of Retailing** (1st ed.). London: Routledge, 2018.

STRASSER, S. **Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market**. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989.

SULLIVAN, J. The Contribution of the Association of National Advertisers to Better Present Business Practices. **The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science**, Philadelphia, v.115, Sep. 1924, p. 116-123.

TAYLOR, L.; MCLAUGHLIN, M., eds. **Paris Fashion and World War Two: Global Diffusion and Nazi Control**. London: Bloomsbury, 2020.

THANHAUSER, S. **Worn: A People's History of Clothing**. New York: Vintage Books, 2023.

THORPE, R. **Progress, Poverty and Exclusion: An Economic History of Latin America in the Twentieth Century**. New York: Inter-American Development Bank, 1998.

TO Broaden Trade Horizons. In: **Farm Implements**, Minneapolis, MN: v. 15, n. 128 Jan 1901, p. 60.

TRADE with Latin America. In: **Commercial America**. Philadelphia, v. 4, n. 1, p. 5, July 1907.

TRENTMAN, F.; OTERO-CLEVES, A. Presentation. Paths, Detours, and Connections: Consumption and Its Contributions to Latin American History. **Historia Crítica**. n. 65, p. 13-28, 2017.

U.S. BUREAU OF FOREIGN COMMERCE. **Book Cloth in foreign countries, Market for ready-made clothing in Latin America...**, Special Consular Reports, v. 20, pt. 1, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1900, p. 45-69

U.S. CONGRESS. **Third International Conference of American States, Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States with the annual message of the President transmitted to Congress 3 Dec 1906, pt. 2**. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1906.

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, Evanston, Illinois, (1900), (1910).

WILLYOUNG, A. Worldwide Sales through Mail-Order Advertising. **Printers' Ink**, v. 67, n. 13, 30 Jun 1909, p. 3-6.

**Data de submissão:** 08/03/2024

**Data de aceite:** 08/06/2024

**Data de publicação:** 26/08/2024