

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
WASHINGTON,

January 15, 1897.

The Director  
of the Geological Survey.

Sir:

Your letter of the 9th instant has been received enclosing a printed copy of an article written by Dr. George F. Becker, an employe of the Survey, and published in the Journal of Geology, regarding his recent investigation of the gold resources of Alaska. You request to be advised as to whether it is permissible for the author to send printed copies of such article to whomsoever he desires by mail under the Government frank.

In response thereto I have to state that Section 5 of the Act of Congress, approved March 3, 1877 (19 Stats. 335) governing the transmitting of matter through the mail free of postage, provides -

"That it shall be lawful to transmit through the mail free of postage any letters, packages or other matters RELATING EXCLUSIVELY TO THE BUSINESS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES: provided that every such letter or package to entitle it to pass free shall bear over the words "official business" an endorsement showing also the name of the Department, and, if from a bureau or office the names of the bureau or office, as the case may be, whence transmitted. And if any person shall make use of any such official envelope to avoid the payment of postage on his private letter, package, or other matter in the mail, the person so offending shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and subject to a fine of three hundred dollars, to be prosecuted in any court of competent jurisdiction."

From your statement of the case it would appear that the article which Dr. Becker desires to mail free of postage is a personal matter with him and does not relate to the business of the Government, and he cannot therefore send the same through the mails free. The Survey, however, if it so desires in response to inquiries requesting information regarding gold deposits in Alaska, can send copies of Dr. Becker's article as part of an official response to such communications.

Very respectfully,  
(Signed) D. R. Francis,  
Secretary.