

Yesterday in Mekeel's:

U.S. Postal Service in 1857

(by Mannel Hahn, from *Mekeel's Weekly*, September 13, 1937, with images added)

The year 1857 was an important one philatelically. By that year the use of postage stamps had become well established. It had been required in a previous year, but it took about twelve months to get it in actual practice. In 1857, too, postage stamps were introduced in perforated form, thereby reducing the annoyance of cutting them apart with scissors.

1857 3¢ (Sc. 25) tied by "Philadelphia Pa. Feb. 28" (1857) c.d.s. on cover to Pughtown Pa. This is the earliest documented



use of a perforated stamp in the U.S., the first experimentally perforated stamps having been delivered to the U.S. government on Feb. 24, 1857.

Traffic with the west coast was pretty well established. Postage rates had come down to 3¢ per half ounce for 3,000 miles and less, and 10¢ per half ounce for a greater distance.

Barnabas Bates illustrated "Cheap Inland and Ocean Postage" depiction of steamship and railroad train on cover to Cleveland, Ohio with



1851 3¢ (Sc. 11A) tied by "Troy N.Y. Jun. 27" c.d.s. Bates was an advocate for cheap land and ocean postage and lived to see the 3¢ domestic rate introduced in 1851.

New York and New Orleans were the two most important commercial centers of the United States. They were connected by a combination railroad, coach, and steamship business, at an average time of six days seventeen hours in the summer, and seven days thirteen hours for the winter. There were sixteen separate links in the chain, of which one—from Montgomery, Alabama, to Stockton, Alabama—was by coach, and then from Stockton to Mobile by steamboat! whence it was transferred to the Mobile-New Orleans steamboat.

Mails from San Francisco and Astoria on the west coast were dispatched by boat from New York to Aspinwall, New Granada, thence by railroad across the Isthmus to Panama, and from Panama up the coast by steamboat. In addition, there was signed in 1857 a contract for dispatch of mails by coach from St. Louis and/or Memphis by the Southern Route to Los

Angeles and San Francisco. The fast trip from St. Louis, 160 miles of which was by railroad, took 596-1/2 hours [24.8 days], which wasn't bad. The Panama transit at the same time took 23 days, and there was in construction a railroad from Fernandina, Florida, to Cedar Key, whence it was expected that steamers would leave for Tehuantepec and would make the trip in twenty days or less. New York to Fernandina by boat; Fernandina to Cedar Key by rail; Cedar Key to Coatzacoalcas by boat across the Isthmus to Acapulco by mule, and thence to San Francisco by boat. There was also some talk of starting service via the Nicaragua route, but the fact that the Pacific Mail Steamship Company was operating so very well made even these other shorter routes more or less guesswork.

Foreign mail routes included one to Vera Cruz from New Orleans, one to Havana from Savannah and Charleston, one to Liverpool, one to France, one to Hamburg, and reciprocally, one from Liverpool to Boston and New York and one from Bremen

1857-61 10¢ Ty. III pair, 1¢ Ty. V and 3¢ Ty III pair (Sc. 15, 24, 26) tied by "Wabash Ind. Nov. 17" c.d.s. on 3¢ red Nesbitt entire to Germany, with "via New York & Bremen", red "N. York U.S.



Pkt. 8 Paid Nov. 28" credit c.d.s., "America Uber Bremen Franco" handstamp, also with Frankfurt and 1857 receiving backstamps.

to New York. Through these connections correspondence with all parts of the globe were possible. Mails for Brazil went to Liverpool and thence by British packet. Same for Argentina. Mails for the west coast of South America went to Southampton and thence by British steamer to Aspinwall and from Panama by British steamer to the west coast. Mails for the Far East went by American packet to France, across France by railroad, from Marseilles to Alexandria by French steamer, overland to Suez, and thence by British packet.

1857-61 12¢ black pair and 3¢ Ty III strip of three (Sc. 36, 26) tied by grids, with red "New York N.Y. May 2?" c.d.s. on 1860 folded cover to Buenos Aires,



Argentina, with red "12" credit handstamp, red London transit.

10¢ Ty. II horizontal pair, and 1¢ Ty. IV (Sc. 14, 9) tied by "Trenton N.J. Jun. 6, 1856" c.d.s. on cover to Hong Kong, endorsed "Via Southampton"



and with red "New-York Am. Pkt. Jun. 7" c.d.s., manuscript "6" pence due to make up the 33¢ via Southampton rate.

Transportation of mails in the United States was well established. There were 22,530 miles of post roads via railroad; 15,245 miles of steamboat lines exclusive of the foreign mail (which included the California service); 49,329 miles of post roads by coach; and 115,497 miles of "inferior modes". No detail as to what an "inferior mode" could be is given!

1857 3¢ (Sc. 26) tied by grid with "Salt Lake City U.T. Jul. 27" c.d.s. on Sammy's Pacific Mule Railroad corner card cover to Lyons Mich. This may be one of those "inferior" modes.



1857 3¢ (Sc. 26) tied by "Danville Me. May 27" c.d.s. on "Electric Telegraph, Grand Trunk Railway" corner card cover to North Auburn Me. with illustration of locomotive. This railroad operated from 1852-1923 in the Canadian provinces of Quebec and Ontario as well as several New England states.



The railroads included one from New York to Detroit, from Niagara Falls to Windsor on the Canadian side. One on the south side of the lakes that extended all the way to Chicago and thence to Milwaukee.

From Milwaukee there was a line to Prairie du Chien. From Chicago a line extended westward to Dubuque, one southward to St. Louis, and the Illinois Central was complete as far as Centralia and had started building from Cairo north. From St. Louis the Pacific Line extended as far as Jefferson City, and St. Louis was connected to New York by a direct line with express agents, changing only at Cincinnati.

Boston was the real hub of railroad traffic. More lines radiated from there than anywhere else. Railroads extended

from Boston up into Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and into New York.

Baltimore was another important junction. There was a line from Baltimore to Wheeling, Virginia. Steamboat routes supplemented all important railroad routes. To the west there was a steamboat route for Jefferson City north to St. Joe. On the Great Lakes, steamboats connected the northern peninsula of Michigan with Detroit. St. Paul, in Minnesota territory, was connected with St. Louis by steamboats, but south of St. Louis there was no service until one reached Cairo, whence "The Great Through Route" to New Orleans operated. The lower part of the river was thick with mail routes, and one operated up the Red River to Shreveport. From Cairo, steamboats went through all the way to Iuka, Mississippi, and again, on a separate route, to Nashville. Louisville and Cincinnati had mail steamers each day. In California, mail from Sacramento to San Francisco was carried by regular steamer on a "post road", and Puget Sound boasted three routes.

1851 3¢ (Sc. 11) tied by "San Francisco Cal. 17 Jan." c.d.s. on cover to Sacramento City Cal., with clear strike of "NC-RR/POST" (Noisy Carrier River



Route mail service by steamer) two-line handstamp at left.

In 1857 there were 26,586 post offices, and this was an increase of over 1,000 in one year. In 1827 there had been but 7,000 post offices in the U.S.; in 1837, 11,767; and in 1847, 15,146. So you can see there was a tremendous increase. There were no railroads, with the one exception already noted, west of the Mississippi, except for two short lines in Texas and one in Iowa....

The post office reported a deficit of approximately three million dollars, and the postmaster recommended strongly the establishment of a money-order system for this country, pointing to the enormous increase in use in Great Britain.

Express agents were accompanying all important mails, and the city was recommended to be increased. A million dollars was considered a considerable sum by the postmaster general, and the deficit, he believed, could have been wiped out if free franking were abolished. Abuses to the free franking system were common, and the plan of official stamps, for which an accounting could be made, was suggested. It went into effect 16 years later.

The total expenditure of the post office department ran around \$12,000,000, of which over \$7,000,000 was for transportation—and postmasters and clerks accounted for \$3,000,000. Postage stamps accounted for nearly \$31,000 of the expenditures, while stamped envelopes came to nearly \$64,000. Letter carriers received \$155,000. Actually, more was spent for wrapping paper (\$52,000) than for postage stamps, and the only items which accounted for less were mail locks, keys, and handstamps (\$12,000) and office furniture (\$4,000)!