

Yesterday in STAMPS:

The Collecting of Steamboat Covers

By Henry A. Meyer, S.P.A.

(From STAMPS Magazine, August 1, 1953, with images added)

[This is an excellent article, although the images in the original article needed a lot of work. In a U.S. Stamp News reprint, to save space I did not include them; however, as the author refers to them in his text, and we have more room to work with in SNO, I have included them, with apologies for the quality of those black and whites. Note that there are gaps in the numerical sequence.

To supplement the text and the black and white images, I did quite a bit of online searching and found 30 new images that I tried as best I could to place near appropriate references in the text, with a few leftovers that will be placed at the end of the article. JFD.]

In line with the growing interest in all phases of postal history, a rapidly increasing enthusiasm for the collecting of covers carried on the old-time steamboats is strongly in evidence. Articles are being written, collectors are adding steamboat covers as a new specialty, auction prices are soaring. But amid all this enthusiasm, the writer has observed that many collectors are not at all clear on certain points of information about their covers.

Noticing the manuscript and handstamped words and phrases on the covers, what do they mean? Which are of official origin, which are purely private in nature? Which were applied on the boat, which were applied in the post office? And in which post office, the one where the letter originated, or the one where it was delivered? Which marks signify something to the Post Office Department, which have no postal significance?

Until Dr. Carroll Chase called attention to these marks in 1929 in his great work, *The Three Cent Stamp of the United States 1851-57 Issue*, collectors hardly even suspected that the words STEAM or WAY on a letter meant anything definite. Mannel Hahn dug into old editions of Postal Laws & Regulations and published definitions in very brief form in *Postal Markings* of September, 1938. That same year, Stanley B. Ashbrook published the results of further research in *The United States One Cent Stamp of 1851-57*. In 1940, Eugene Klein published *United States Waterways Packetmarks*. Since that time, interest has grown at an increasing rate.

Some collectors will not care to study the technicalities of their covers. Pride of possession will be sufficient reason for wanting to own the covers. But for those who wish to know the various classifications of marks and their meanings, the writer hopes that the following explanation will serve as basic information for a correct understanding of steamboat markings. This is elementary information only; the unusual cases, the covers difficult of interpretation, have intentionally been omitted. If desired, they can be taken up in a later article.

Our discussion will be concerned chiefly with letters reaching the post office through a means of carriage "outside

An ex Klein cover. I found this one on the excellent, extremely informative, Siegel Galleries site, part of a 'viewing' article on a 2007 auction, when it drew a top hammer price of \$25,000. It's a Steamer Knickerbocker cover with an orange-red "Father Knickerbocker" in circle handstamp on a folded letter datelined "New York, May 18, 1846" from Aaron Claflin at 253 Pearl Street to William Carter in Defiance O., also with a red "New-York Ship May 2(0?)" c.d.s. and a matching "STEAM BOAT" straightline handstamp, manuscript "10" rate.



Ex Chase, cover to New Orleans with pen cancelled 3¢ Dull Red Type III (Sc. 26) and a "Steamer J. F. Pargoud, J. W. Tobin, Commander" handstamp,



with Chase's notes on back.

the mail," through the favor of a steamboat captain or clerk. That is the distinguishing characteristic of most classes of steamboat letters. Since SHIP letters are the fundamental class of letters reaching the post office through an outside means, and since all classes of steamboat letters have their basis in SHIP letters, we must take that class first, to understand the rest correctly.

Marks Officially Ordered or Authorized

1. SHIP

The mark SHIP (Figure 1) means that the letter bearing it was brought to a United States seaport, either from abroad or from another domestic seaport, in a ship having no mail-carrying status with the Post Office Department.

It was carried by the captain as a Favor to the writer, and the captain was required by law to deliver it in person to the post office of the place where the ship made port. He was then entitled to a fee of 2 cents for his trouble.

This fee was passed on to the addressee by the imposition of the following rates of postage on such letters. See page 3.

1792—8¢ if brought in a ship operating under government subsidy; if in a ship having no subsidy, 4¢ if destined for delivery at the same post office where the ship made port, or 4¢ plus regular zone postage if sent on inland by mail.

1799—6¢ if destined for delivery at the same post office where the ship made port, or 2¢ plus regular zone postage if forwarded by mail.



Ex Meyer cover: Plattsburgh N-Y. Oct. 16. red c.d.s. and "BOAT" straightline handstamp on 1832 folded letter to Grand Isle Vt., also with manuscript "12" rate.

The manuscript circled numbers on the covers are the figures to which the author refers.



New Orleans-Natchez Steamboat "SHIP" handstamp and manuscript "6" rate applied on arrival on folded letter to Natchez datelined "New Orleans 9th June 1819" also with manuscript "Volcano" sender's name-of-boat directive. We found this image on the Siegel Galleries site along with a description that explained, "...handstamped 'Ship'. Until 1825 when the category of steamboat (or steam) letters was established some postmasters used the 'Ship' marking on incoming non-contract letters from inland waterways, this is one of the earliest "Ship" markings used in western U.S. waters.



1861—5¢ to place of arrival, 2¢ plus regular postage if forwarded by mail.

1863—Double the regular postage. This rate is still in force, if a ship's captain brings a letter which was not mailed at a post office, but was handed to him before he sailed.

In all cases, the mark SHIP was applied, in manuscript or by handstamp, "in the post office" where the captain deposited the letter and received his two cents.

2. STEAMBOAT

The mark STEAMBOAT means that the letter bearing it was picked up somewhere along an inland river, lake, bay, or sound by the captain or clerk of a steamboat having no mail-carrying status with the Post Office Department.

It was carried as a favor to the writer, and the captain or clerk was required to carry it to the post office at the end of his run. There the letter was marked STEAMBOAT (Fig. 2, page 3) in manuscript or by handstamp, and the captain or clerk received 2 cents for his trouble. At certain times, but not at all times, the extra fee was passed on to the addressee, according to the following chronology:

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The mark STEAMBOAT means that the letter bearing it was picked up somewhere along an inland river, lake, bay, or sound by the captain or clerk of a steamboat having no mail-carrying status with the Post Office Department. It was carried as a favor to the writer, and the captain or clerk was required to carry it to the post office at the end of his run. There the letter was marked STEAMBOAT (Fig. 2, page 3) in manuscript or by handstamp, and the captain or clerk received 2 cents for his trouble. At certain times, but not at all times, the extra fee was passed on to the addressee, according to the following chronology:



"STEAM. BOAT" straightline in frame handstamp struck in dark red with matching "Fall River Ms. Aug. 2" circular datestamp on 1836 folded letter from Providence R.I. to Fall River, also with manuscript "6" rate.

1825—Class of STEAMBOAT letters recognized for the first time in Postal Laws & Regulations, with 2¢ paid to the captain, but nothing said about charging it to the addressee. Certain post offices, however, did charge it; perhaps by analogy with SHIP letters.

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1855—Prepaid STEAMBOAT letters were charged no extra fee. Unpaid STEAMBOAT letters were charged the same as SHIP letters: 6¢ to port of arrival, 2¢ plus regular postage if forwarded by mail.

1861—Whether prepaid or unpaid, 5¢ to port of arrival, plus regular postage if sent on by mail.

1863—Double the regular postage, whether prepaid or unpaid.

1882—If prepaid, regular postage plus 2¢. If unpaid, double postage plus 2¢.

3. STEAM

The mark STEAM (Fig. 3) means exactly the same as the mark STEAMBOAT. There was no distinction between the two in P. L. & R. STEAM is a little more common along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, while STEAMBOAT is a little, more common along the Atlantic seaboard. Some post offices had both marks in use indiscriminately, at the same time or one closely succeeding the other. It is therefore unnecessary to give a schedule of rates by years, since the list would read the same as the list under STEAMBOAT.



Steamboat Andrew Jackson large framed name-of-boat handstamp on folded letter datelined "Natchez June 6, 1846" to Louisville Ky., also with blue "STEAM" handstamp, manuscript "10" rate, a rare Mississippi River packetboat marking.



Red "S.B. Empire" Ohio and Mississippi Rivers steamboat vessel-named handstamp on blue folded letter datelined "New Orleans April 14th 1847" and addressed to Louisville, also with blue "Steam" straightline handstamp and manuscript "10" rate.

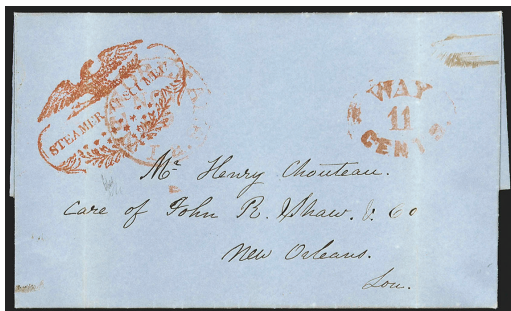
Until the category of STEAMBOAT letters was established in 1825, postmasters at inland river and lake ports had no directions how to mark such letters, so they did the only thing they could find in P. L. & R., and marked them SHIP. (Fig. 4) The post office at Plattsburg, on Lake Champlain, had a mark reading BOAT. Some postmasters prolonged the use of SHIP for a year or two beyond 1825, probably by reason of not keeping up with changes in P. L. & R.

It is not at all apparent how a postmaster, for example at Boston, Philadelphia, or Savannah, upon receiving letters from the captain of a coastwise steamer (not coming from overseas) decided whether the letters should be marked SHIP or STEAMBOAT. There may have been a letter of instructions sent out from Washington, of which postal history students have not found a copy; or each postmaster may have made the decision himself. The distinction, if any, is not made clear in any edition of P. L. & R. which has come to the attention of the writer, and a study of large numbers of such covers does not reveal the distinction.

4. WAY

The mark WAY (Fig. 5) means that the letter was brought to a post office by the captain of a steamboat having a contract, permanent or temporary, to carry mail in locked pouches. The Post Office Department paid the steamboat a price agreed upon for carrying the mail sacks. The letters in the sacks did not receive the mark WAY; they bore the regular town postmark of the post office where they were mailed. The WAY letters were letters which were handed to the captain or the clerk where the boat landed. Of course the captain could not put the letters into a pouch, since he had no key to open [the pouch]; so, he took care of the letters himself, carried them to the post office at the end of his run, where they were marked WAY, and the captain received a fee of 1¢ per letter for his trouble.

When the category of WAY letters was established in 1799 or earlier, it was conceived as referring to letters picked up en route by a mounted post rider or by the driver of a stage-coach carrying mail bags. Steamboats did not exist at that time, and they were not thought



“Steamer Tuscumbia” vessel name handstamp framed with eagle at top, also with red “New Orleans La. Nov. 22” c.d.s. and matching “Way 11 Cents” due handstamp on 1849 blue folded letter to New Orleans.

of as being a “carrier” until 1845. The extra fee of 1¢ was at times passed on to the addressee, but not at all times, as follows:

1799—1¢ paid to the carrier; nothing said about charging it.

1825—1¢ paid and charged on stagecoach and mounted post routes.

1845—1¢ charged also on steamboats.

1853—1¢ no longer charged on steamboats, but still paid to the captain.

1855—On prepaid steamboat WAY letters, 1¢ paid to the captain, but not charged to the addressee. Unpaid steamboat WAY letters were charged the same as SHIP letters: 6¢ to port of arrival, 2¢ plus regular postage if forwarded by mail.

1863—Entire WAY fee system abolished; but the use of the mark to designate letters picked up along the route continued at some post offices.

5. OTHER MARKS FOUND ON SHIP AND STEAMBOAT LETTERS

There are a number of other marks found on letters brought in as a favor by the captain or clerk of a ship or a steamboat, the exact significance of which is not understood by present-day postal history students, since they are nowhere defined or provided for in P. L. & R. (Fig. 6) The use of each mark seems to be peculiar to one or a very few post offices. Some of them may be equivalent to SHIP or STEAMBOAT, some of them to WA Y. The following is a list of such marks known to the writer:

BOAT

MAIL ROUTE (in at least three styles)

PACKET

PAID SHIP

PER STEAMER

PURSER

QUARANTINE

6 (in circle)

STEAM SHIP

U. S. SHIP (in at least five styles)

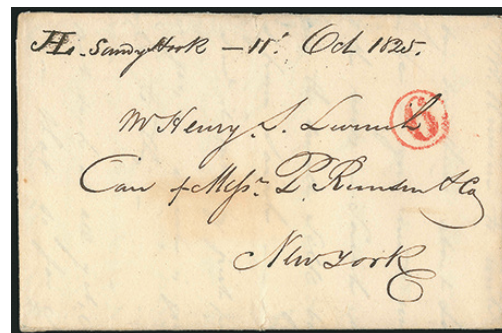
“MAIL ROUTE” (Philadelphia) straightline handstamp and manuscript “10” rate on folded 1828 cover to Philadelphia



(docketed in Charleston, 1828), sender’s notation “Langdon Chevy”, extremely scarce ship mail marking, applied for a brief period from 1827 to 1830 on private ship letters not classified as “ship letters” through the use of the “impliedly under contract” ruling of the Post Office Department.



“Ouachita Packet/Princeton” Ouachita River name-of-boat handstamp in blue with illustration of a cotton bale at center on light blue folded cover to New Orleans,



“Tuesday 12 o’Clock at the Narrows, Oct. 11, 1825” dateline on folded letter written on board outbound vessel and given to pilot boat captain to bring back to New York City, entered post office as a ship letter and rated with red “6” in circle handstamp.



1827 cover from Marseilles, France to Philadelphia routed through Boston with red “QUARANTINE” straightline handstamp and Boston c.d.s.

Of the foregoing marks, it is almost certain that MAIL ROUTE designates letters carried by coastwise vessels, under contract or not, plying entirely over stretches of water declared to be post roads. Letters marked U. S. SHIP will invariably be found to have originated with personnel of U. S. naval vessels during the Civil War, either ocean-going or river craft, and they never bear evidence of either the payment or the charging of any extra fee. On letters arriving from abroad at New York or Philadelphia, and destined for delivery at the same post office, a “6” in a single circle, with absolutely no other postal markings on the letter, means the same as SHIP 6; that is, brought in by a ship having no mail-carrying status, with 6¢ to be collected, 2¢ of which was paid to the captain when he turned the letter in.

Summarizing, the marks we have been discussing thus far have all been applied in the post office where the letters were turned in, and all indicate that the letter reached the post office by abnormal means, “outside the mail,” through the accommodating spirit of a ship or steamboat captain as a favor to the sender. They became mail when the postmaster accepted them. None of these marks were applied aboard the vessel.

The reader will have noticed that no mention has been made of those combination town and ship postmarks reading NEW YORK AM. PACKET, BOSTON, BRITISH PKT., etc. The reason is, such letters were not brought in “outside the mail”

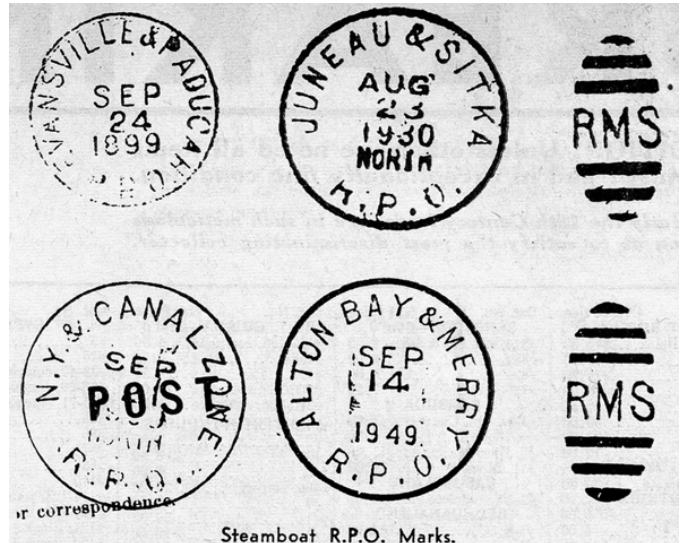
by the captain. They were mailed at a post office abroad, were handled through an exchange office, a record was kept there of the split of the postage (whether prepaid or collect) between the two countries involved, and they reached this country in a mail bag. They therefore do not constitute ship letters in the meaning of that expression. The same remarks apply to letters from Havana or from South America via Panama marked STEAMSHIP 10, STEAMSHIP 12-1/2, etc. They also were mailed at a post office abroad and arrived inside a mail bag, and are therefore not ship letters.

6. THE MARKS OF THE ROUTE AGENTS

We now come to a class of marks differing radically in style and in meaning from the marks we have been discussing. These are the marks of the route agents (Fig. 7). As soon as the Post Office Department overcame the early reluctance of steamboat men to enter a mail contract, and the first such contracts were negotiated on the Ohio and Mississippi (Louisville Cincinnati 1831, Louisville-New Orleans 1837); the Department reserved the right to assign route agents to the boats in all cases where they were deemed necessary for the efficient handling of the mails. These route agents were employees of the Department, not of the boats; they rode along on the boats, sorted mail, accepted mail bags containing letters which had been mailed at post offices, put off mail for the towns along the river, accepted letters mailed by passengers and by people who appeared at a landing with a letter, sold stamps, and postmarked letters received outside the mail bags. From the 1840s down to about 1875, the postmarks used by these route agents were of almost any style and in almost any wording which pleased the route agent.

In the late 1870s and early 1800s the Post Office Department began to standardize the style and wording. One can tell a steam boat route agent's mark from a railroad route agent's mark by the presence of such words, expressions, and abbreviations as S.B., Steamer, Riv. Rt., St. Bt., River Mail, R. M., Mail Line, M. L., Mail Route, Riv. Agt., Route 7309, etc. Knowing what towns are on an easily navigable river also helps to identify the waterborne routes. Letters handled by route agents never cost nor paid any extra fee, as the route agent's sorting room was a miniature U. S. post office.

"Skaneateles Lake RPO", 16 mile steamboat RPO, on picture postcard, Glen Haven Shore, Skaneateles Lake, to Syracuse, N.Y.



Steamboat R.P.O. Marks.

The only way to tell whether an R.P.O. mark is of a rail or a water route is to know the geography and the times. Lists are of course obtainable; the *TRANSIT POSTMARK* is currently running a list which distinguishes the boat routes.

There are several groups of routes which are of special interest. For example, there were many waterborne R.P.O. routes to and within Alaska. None of these exist any longer. There were also several routes forming a small, interesting group, two of which were the New York & Canal Zone R.P.O. and the Port Tampa & Havana R.P.O. The various U.S. Sea Posts (as well as U.S.-German Sea Posts) operated in a manner very similar to an R.P.O. route. Many collectors will enjoy looking for the marks of the four water-borne R.P.O.'s still existing: Alton Hay & Merrymount R.P.O., Lake Winnepesaukee R.P.O. (with both a handstamp and a machine mark), Asquam Lake R.P.O., and Inlet & Old Forge R.P.O. The first three are in New Hampshire; the last is in New York State.

8. LOCAL AGENTS' MARKS

As soon as steamboats became a big factor in bringing in mail picked up along the way, the Postmaster General hit upon the expedient of appointing local agents at busy river ports to represent the local post office on the water front. Their duty was to meet incoming boats, decide whether the loose letters carried by them were STEAM BOAT letters (paying the captain 2¢ each), WAY letters (paying the captain 1¢ each), route agent's mail (paying the captain nothing), or consignee's mail (bills of lading, instructions for handling merchandise, etc.) entitled within certain limits to pass entirely free of postage, or letters enclosed in U.S. embossed envelopes, which might be handed directly to the addressee if he appeared to claim them, without going through the post office, and to collect the postage on unpaid letters.

The first two such local agents were appointed at Louisville and Cincinnati in 1842. By 1854 there were twenty-six of them, by 1857 there were forty-five of them located at all river towns where steamboat business justified it. One of them, F. A. Dentzel of New Orleans, has become famous among postal history collectors because he was progressive enough to have a handstamp made to

"S Bt. Oswego" manuscript marking, also with manuscript "6" rating, on folded cover to Sackets Harbor N.Y., with 1838 docketing on back.



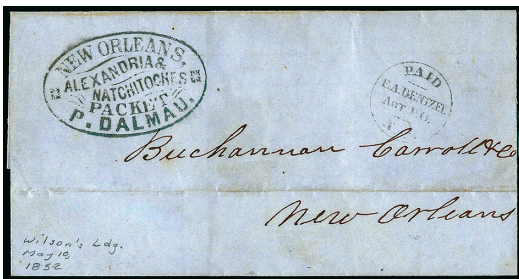
3¢ Nesbitt entire each with "U. S. Mail Packet Natchez" blue oval handstamp and "Route 7309" in double-oval to Livingston Tenn.



7. STEAMBOAT R.P.O. MARKS

On July 1, 1882, all branches of the mail transportation service which required the presence of a postal employee to accompany the bags and handle the mail enroute was unified under the Railway Mail Service and was designated as a Railway Post Office, even though located on a river or lake steamer. As fast as the older handstamps wore out and needed replacing, new handstamps containing the initials R.P.O. were supplied.

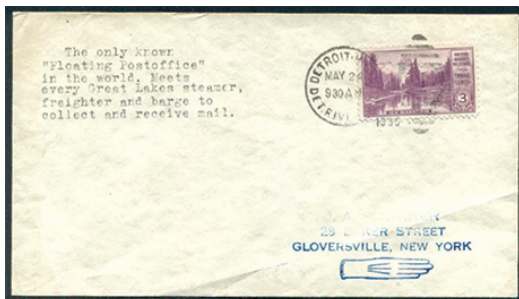
"New Orleans, Alexandria & Natchitoches Packet, P. Dalmau" oval handstamp with matching "Paid E.A. Dentzel. Agt. P.O. N.O."



handstamp on 1852 folded cover addressed to New Orleans. Since postal agent Dentzel collected postage this was allowed to be delivered without going through a post office. saving writing on all the letters he examined and processed. His mark comes in two styles, a circle and an oval, both quite scarce, (Fig. 9, page 3) There are not enough copies known for every postal history collector to own one, but we cannot ignore the existence of the mark in a synoptic article such as this.

9. SPECIAL SERVICES AT DETROIT

At Detroit, by reason of its location where thousands of freighters pass during the navigation season, a need was felt for method of getting mail to and from the freighters. A contract was made by which



Detroit River Mail usage, with a duplex cancel dated May 24, 1935 bears a "Floating post office..." typed cachet.



Detroit Marine Post Office Postmarks

a small boat was fitted up much like an R.P.O. car, with sorting desks, postmarking handstamps, racks for pouches, etc., This boat met each freighter as she passed and delivered mail for the members of the crew. It also, accepted mail which the members of the crew wished to hand in. The handstamp at first read DETROIT, MICH., MARINE P.O. Later it read DETROIT; MICH. DETROIT RIVER STA. The service existed from 1897 to 1948; since that time it has been closed pouch service only, without postmarking equipment. It was never an R.P.O., having always been staffed by personnel of the Detroit Post Office.

Another special service operating at Detroit was the R.F.D.



Detroit R.F.D. Boat Postmarks.

boat which delivered mail to the summer homes along the St. Clair Flats. It also picked up mail, just as the rural carrier does. It has two very distinctive postmarks, which were used from 1898 to 1911. This was also not an R.P.O., having been staffed by Detroit Post office personnel.

10. THE ROUTE AGENTS MARKS OF THE PRIVATE EXPRESSES

Out in California, where the Post Office Department during the gold rush found itself completely incapable of establishing mail routes to the outlying mining camps, the private expresses were not only permitted, but encouraged to take over this thankless task, provided they met the requirement of seeing that the U.S. postage was paid on each letter thus handled. After the issuance of embossed envelopes, it became mandatory to use them for such letters. How much the express charged over and above the U. S. Postage, the Post office Department did not care.

Wells, Fargo & Co. were, of course, the biggest and most progressive of the private expresses. Their agents rode the steam boats on the Sacramento River between San Francisco and Sacramento, and on the San Joaquin between San Francisco and Stockton. They



"Wells, Fargo & Co's Express from Dutch Flat" train and steamboat illustrated orange label with "Dutch Flat" in manuscript, on 3¢ pink entire with Wells Fargo & Co. printed frank to San Francisco, also with blue "Wells, Fargo & Co. Express, Dutch Flat" oval handstamp.

may have gone even farther upriver when business justified it. Their primary business was carrying supplies to the miners and bringing gold dust out, but they also took their mail carrying function very seriously. Wells, Fargo furnished its route agents with handstamps in at least six different styles, all of them quite rare (one shown, Fig. 12).

On the Atlantic Coast, between Boston and St. John, N.B., Favor's Express appears to have operated in a very similar manner. Very little is known about this express or about its contractual relation to the Post Office Department. All we know is that we find letters bearing both the official Postmarks of the route agents on the run, and the Favor's Express mark. It would be very interesting if some postal history student situated advantageously for doing research would make this his project.

"Favor's Express, Boston, 1 Court Sq./ St. John N.B., Eastport & Boston" red double circle handstamp on back of folded letter datelined "St. John N.B., Jun. 18, 1852", addressed to New York, carried by steamer from New Brunswick and entered U.S. mails as shown by "Boston 5 cts. 21 Jun" integral-rate c.d.s. and "STEAM" handstamp.



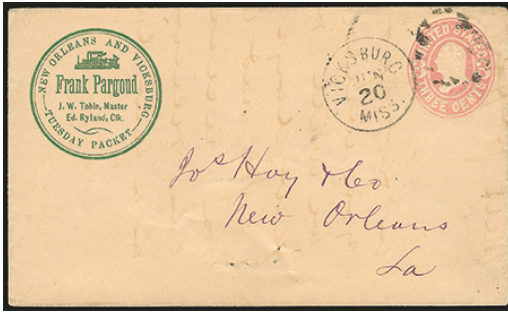
The marks thus far discussed were explained and listed in detail in certain numbers of the *S.P.A. Journal* during the years 1949, 1950, and 1951. Since then, the writer has had the loan of hundreds of covers through the co-operation of numerous correspondents. By this means, the coverage in the check lists has been vastly increased. The writer earnestly requests the loan of any covers which bear marks not listed in that series of articles, or not agreeing exactly with the descriptions and measurements given there, or which will help extend the dates, colors, etc.

We have completed the study of the marks ordered or authorized by the Post office Department for use on steamboat mail, or which were used in, pursuance of a policy of the Department. We now turn to a different category of covers, those bearing marks of purely private origin, meaning nothing to the postal system, but nevertheless of great interest to students of a vanished era of American history.

Marks of Private Origin

1. IMPRINTED STEAMBOAT CORNER CARDS

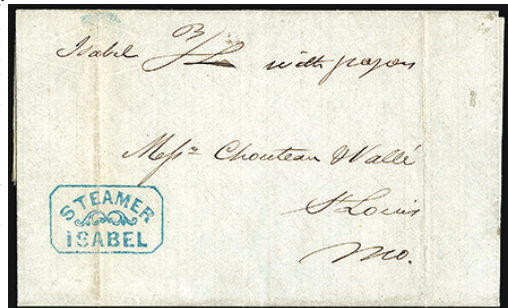
Green corner card "New Orleans and Vicksburg Tuesday Packet Frank Paragoud..." on 3¢ Pink entire to New Orleans, cancelled by "Vicksburg Miss. Jun. 20" duplex.



"Ouachita Packet/Princeton" Ouachita River name-of-boat handstamp in blue with illustration of a cotton bale at center on light blue folded cover to New Orleans,



Clear strike of Steamer Isabel blue octagonal handstamp with floral detail on blue folded letter datelined at New Orleans on Dec. 23, 1850, addressed to St. Louis Mo.



Many steamboats of the second half of the 19th century had imprinted corner cards of varying degrees of ornateness. Some were very simple, some were fancy, some were pictorial. They came in single colors and in multicolor printing. In many cases they had matching letterheads. They were primarily for the use of the owner and officers of the boat, but they were also made available to passengers for writing letters on the voyage. Sometimes a passenger took some along and used them later from other places, just as hotel guests often do now.

When steamboat stationery bears a picture of a steamboat, it may on rare occasions be a true picture of the boat. But in far more cases, it is a stock cut which the printer had on hand, bearing little resemblance to the real boat. In fact dwellers along the rivers would have been amazed to see boats coming in which resembled some of the pictures on steamboat stationery. (Fig. 13)

2. HANDSTRUCK PURSER'S MARKS

3¢ Red on Buff Nesbitt entire (Sc. U10) cancelled by "STEAM" straightline handstamp and red "STEAMBOAT SOUTHERN BELLE" in oval name-of-boat handstamp, also with "New Orleans La. May 10" c.d.s.



"Steam-Packet Franklin, Lake Champlain, Capt. R. W. Sherman" double-line circle handstamp struck in red on Oct. 20, 1832 folded letter

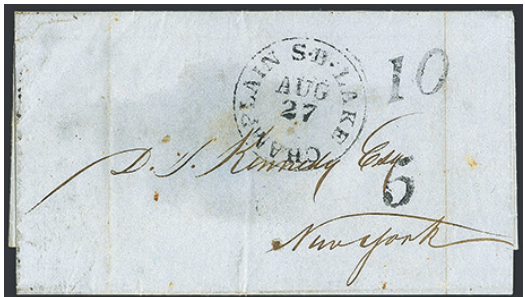


from Port Kent (on Lake Champlain) to Albany N.Y., free franked by Pt. Kent postmaster, also with red manuscript "B" (steamboat) and "free". "Steamer Rapides" illustrated Mississippi River name-of-boat handstamp on 3¢ Red Nesbitt entire to Buchanan Carroll & Co. in New Orleans, with red "New Orleans La. Dec. 20" c.d.s. and black "Steam" straightline handstamp.



The clerk or purser of a boat usually had a handstamp of steel or brass containing the boat's name and such other words as the owner desired (Fig. 14). These were intended primarily for stamping on bills of lading, freight bills, receipts, passage tickets, etc. But the clerk often applied the stamp to letters which he was carrying as a favor, as publicity for the boat. Handstamps are found on SHIP letters, STEAM and STEAMBOAT letters, WAY letters, consignee's mail (entitled to exemption from postage), and to letters carried legally outside the mails in stamped envelopes. They do not normally occur on letters carried by route agents, the notable exception being the mark U.S. MAIL PACKET NAT-CHEZ used in conjunction with the route agent's mark ROUTE

"Lake Champlain S.B. Aug. 27" circular date stamp with "5" and "10" rate handstamps on blue folded letter datelined "Montreal Augt. 24th 1850" to New York. This was smuggled across the border.



7309, page 5. They cannot possibly occur on letters mailed at post office and carried aboard a steamboat in closed pouches.

This is a good place, to mention that large numbers of letters were also carried illegally outside the mail by steamboat personnel, either to evade postage or to speed delivery. These letters constituted a great source of concern to the Post Office Department, and were one of several reasons for the issuance of embossed envelopes. These smuggled letters often bear handstamped purser's marks (page 7).

3. ADHESIVE LABELS

A very few boats used adhesive labels bearing the boat's name and any other desired words, instead of either imprinted corner cards or handstamped marks. These adhesive labels are major rarities on steamboat covers and the collector who acquires one is fortunate indeed.

"New York & Toledo Line, Boat E. P. Smith, Capt. S. R. Town, 1845." with woodcut steamboat illustration used as corner card on folded letter



from the captain, S. R. Town, to New York City street address, also with red "Schenectady N.Y. Jul. 25" (1845) circular date stamp and matching "5" rate handstamp.

Three classes of insignia imprinted corner cards, handstamped purser's marks, and adhesive labels form the subject matter of Eugene Klein's great work, *United States Waterways Packetmarks*. The original volume appeared in 1940, followed by two supplements.

4. STEAMBOAT LINE CORNER CARDS

Some steamboat lines having a number of boats had imprinted envelopes (and matching letterheads) prepared for use on all the boats of the line (Fig. 15). Sometimes they contained the names of all the boats of the line; in this case, Eugene Klein listed them under one of the names, with cross-references under the remaining names. Sometimes they contained no name of a boat, in which case Mr. Klein omitted them from his study. But the writer finds them of great interest, and is listing them as fast as they are submitted by correspondents. Cases are not rare in which an envelope with the imprint of a line but no boat's

name is also handstamped with the purser's mark containing the boat's name. Even though Mir. Klein has listed the purser's mark, the writer wishes further to list the line imprint.

Memphis & Vicksburg Passenger Steamer Vicksburg green all-over illustrated cover addressed to New Orleans, but with no



markings to indicate it went through the mails.

5. STEAMBOAT LINE HANDSTAMPS

The writer knows of only two cases in which a steamboat purser used a handstamp containing the line's name but not the boat's name. One is the Star Line on the Alabama River, the other is the Oregon Steam Navigation Company on the Columbia River. Readers are requested to submit further examples for listing.

6. STEAMBOAT AGENTS' CORNER CARDS

At all principal river ports there were individual or partnerships who acted as agents for the various steamboat lines. Sometimes they designated themselves as ticket agents, sometimes as wharfboat owners, sometimes as commission and forwarding agents. They often had imprinted envelopes (and matching letterheads) continuing information about the firm, sometimes including a picture of the wharfboat and a steamboat or two. These envelopes are very interesting evidences of a past era. (Fig. 16)

7. STEAMBOAT AGENTS' HANDSTAMPS

The steamboat agents and wharfboat owners often took care of mail for their customers and for transient travellers, putting the letters aboard the first boat going the right direction. They sometimes struck the envelopes or folded letters with their handstamp as publicity for their business (Fig. 17).

8. CORNER CARDS SUGGESTING STEAMBOAT ACTIVITIES

Not directly related to steamboat covers, and yet interesting memorabilia of the steamboat era, are the corner cards of produce dealers, logging firms, river-front hotels, etc., showing more or less realistic pictures of steamboats as part of the design. These can be regarded as an appendix to a steamboat cover collection (Fig. 18).