

# Viewing the “New Amsterdam” City Despatch Post Collection

by John F. Dunn

This past March Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries auctioned off the “New Amsterdam” Collection of City Despatch Post 1842-1852, a private service that was established in New York City in February 1842 by Alexander M. Greig. Although it was only in business until August of that year, it is credited with many postal innovations and was the predecessor to the United States Post Office Department, and spin-offs of the City Despatch Post continued to operate as private local posts until 1852. The “New Amsterdam” Collection encompasses this entire period, and as usual, the Siegel auction catalog provides us with a wealth of information from start to finish.

Among the first lots, we find an early usage, a printed meeting invitation with a Feb. 18, 9 O’Clock double-line circular datestamp with “N.Y.” inverted, the first type of datestamp used by the City Despatch Post. The invitation was



sent to officers of “Artillery and Infantry of this City” to attend a meeting to arrange for a “Grand Military Fete” in honor of Washington’s Birthday. Estimated at \$400-500, this rare marking realized \$2,000.

On page 2 we show another early lot, one of only five known complete sheets of 42 of the first adhesive stamp ever issued in the Western Hemisphere, the (Greig’s) City Despatch Post 3¢ black on grayish paper (Sc. 40L1).

As we will see later in this viewing, the same plate was modified to produce stamps for successor posts, leading the auctioneers to state, “No other single plate in American

philately is believed to have produced such an unusual variety of stamps over such a long period.” With an SCV of \$27,500, and a presale estimate of \$25,000-35,000, this rarity sold for \$23,000. (All prices in this report do not include the 15% Buyers’ Premiums that were added on to these hammer prices.)

Next we see the (Greig’s) City Despatch Post, New York N.Y., 3¢ black on grayish (Sc. 40L1) cancelled by a



manuscript “X” and tied by a red “New-York Jun. 1” circular datestamp on a May 31, 1842 folded letter to New Brunswick N.J., also with a magenta manuscript “10” due rate. As explained in the lot

description, “this rare cover dates from the two-month period (April-May 1842) when letters carried by the City Despatch Post to the mails for delivery outside the city were cancelled in manuscript and received no local post markings...”. Estimated at \$500-750, it sold for \$2,600.

In August 1842 the privately owned City Despatch Post was bought out by the government and established as the carrier department of the New York City Post Office. The City Despatch Post stamps continued to be used, and in the time before U.S. City Despatch Post stamps were issued, the carrier stamp, Sc. 6LB1, was cancelled by a

“U.S.” marking. Only 19 covers are known with what some observers regard as the first U.S. postage stamp. Among these, we view this cover with the U.S. City Despatch Post 3¢ black on grayish (Sc. 6LB1) with its



distinctive orange-red “U.S.” in frame cancel. The small folded cover also bears a matching “U.S. City Despatch Post Aug. 20, 9 O’Clock” (1842) double-line circular datestamp. Demonstrating its rarity—being one of only five usages before the first “United States City Despatch Post” stamp was issued—the small folded cover to a local addressee fetched \$15,500 against a \$10,000 SCV despite have one side panel missing and its address being written over some time later.

That first “United States City Despatch Post” issue is seen here, with the frame reading “United States City Despatch Post” instead of just “City Despatch Post.” This 3¢ black on light blue unsurfaced paper (Sc. 6LB3) also shows the boxed “U.S.” marking. With an SCV of \$500, this XF example went for \$5,250.



By way of explanation, the Sc. 6LB2 stamp is considered to be an essay and the 6LB3 is given the honor of being the first stamp issued by the U.S. Post Office Department. Scott lists 6LB2, but only unused. We see an unused example of the 3¢ black on rosy buff unsurfaced paper, (Sc. 6LB2) with no gum (as always). While it has a thin, it is one of only approximately ten known examples of this stamp, and most of them have thins, so this VF example with thin spots sold for \$5,250 against a \$2,500 SCV.





This next lot shows the U.S. City Despatch Post 3¢ black on blue green glazed paper (Sc. 6LB5) in a spectrum of shades, including moss green, green, blue green and greenish blue, most with faults, but still selling for \$1,300 against a \$500-750 presale estimate. Also shown here is a rare shade, the 6LB5d “Apple Green”. With large margins and a light red “U.S.” in frame cancel, but a tiny pinhole, this stamp was estimated at \$1,500-2,000 and sold for \$1,900.



Shown here is a cover that was mailed from Paris via Havre to New York, carried on a private ship, then forwarded to Bond Street by the U.S. City Despatch Post, the forwarding covered by a 3¢ black on blue green glazed (Sc. 6LB5). The

stamp bears the boxed “U.S.” and the cover shows a matching “U.S. City Despatch Post Mar. 30, 1 O’Clock” circular datestamp (center of cover). Also at right is a “Bureau Maritime Havre 16 Fevr. 1844” double-circle datestamp and matching “P.P.” (paid to port) framed handstamp, and manuscript “6” private ship-letter rate crossed out.

Estimated at \$2,000-3,000, it realized \$5,500.

Next up for viewing (on page 5) is what was described as “the world’s first government-issued, overprinted stamp.” It is the 2¢ on 3¢ U.S. City Despatch Post carrier issue, Sc, 6LB7. As explained by the auctioneers, “It was overprinted

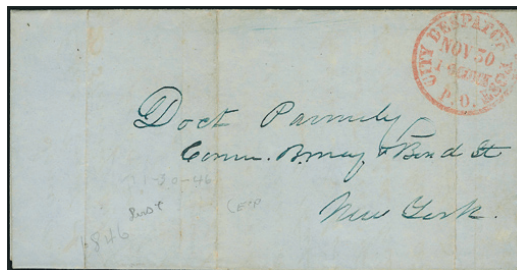
in late 1845 or early 1846 to meet the need for a 2¢ stamp to prepay the carrier fee after the drop-letter rate was modified on July 1, 1845....at the same time inter-city rates were lowered, Congress raised the drop-letter rate from 1¢ to 2¢. A drop letter is one brought to a post office that is not transmitted to another post office....



The consequences of this legislation for the U.S. City Despatch Post were immediate and dire. Prior to July 1, 1845, a drop letter could be taken by the carrier to or from the post office for 3¢, which included 2¢ for the carrier department and 1¢ for the post office...the U.S. City Despatch found itself at a severe disadvantage competing with local posts, who generally charged 2¢ for a city letter.... On November 28, 1846, the U.S. City Despatch Post was closed. One of only four known examples, and the only one off cover, this stamp was estimated at \$15,000-20,000 and sold for \$12,000.

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As explained in the auction catalog's wonderful introduction, the assets of the U.S. City Despatch Post were sold to Abraham B. Mead, a former government letter, who operated the business as the Post Office City Despatch. Shown here is a folded letter carried by (Mead's) Post Office City Despatch on November 30, 1846, its first day of operation, with a red "P.O. City Despatch Post Nov. 30, 1 O'Clock" circular datestamp. The only recorded first day usage of this post, and went for \$2,200—almost triple the high end of its \$500-750 estimate range.



Needing stamps, Mead acquired the old Greig plate of 42 and had it reworked by Rawdon, Wright & Hatch, who burnished out the word "THREE" from each subject and reengraved "TWO" in its place and printed them on bril-

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liant green glazed paper. Now a local post, that stamp is identified as Scott 40L2.

It is shown here with a red “Free”

in frame cancel and matching “P.O. City Despatch Post Feb. 15 — O’Clock” circular date-



stamp on a silver and blue decorative Valentine cover to a local street address. Estimated at \$3,000-4,000, this beautiful cover fetched \$4,750.

As we move along in the history of the City Despatch Post and its successors, we find evidence of the research that sets apart our hobby from most. In the lot description for the next item selected for viewing, we learn:

“Abraham B. Mead took over the former U.S. City Despatch Post in November 1846...About one year later (probably October-November 1847), Charles Cole acquired the post, and, by January 27, 1848, he issued stamps printed from the Mead plate with “CC” initials engraved or etched into each subject.

HOWEVER, “The existence of Mead stamps with the Cummings & Wright overprint was for many years the only available evidence suggesting that ownership of the City Despatch Post Office might have changed hands prior to the sale to Cole. Thomas C. Mazza, in his ‘Cummings’ City Post Redux’ *Collectors Club Philatelist* article (Sep.-Oct. 1995), revealed a new and documentary form of evidence: a receipt dated May 15, 1847, from the ‘P.O. City Despatch’ signed ‘Cummings & Wright, Proprietors’. Through the 1847-48 city directory, it has been established that Cummings was Alfred H. Cummings and Wright was Robert

Wright, and that the two operated the Post Office City Despatch from 42-1/2 Nassau Street. Covers are known that bear Cummings' City Post stamps in combination with the 'P.O. City Despatch Post' and 'Free' markings used by Mead, dated as early as March 25, 1847. The overprinted stamps, the Cummings/P.O. City Despatch covers, together with the Mazza receipt discovery, are solid evidence that Cummings and Wright were the successors to Abraham Mead, probably beginning in March 1847 and ending by November 1847."

There is room for both in this hobby, but if you want to know the difference between a stamp collector and a philatelist, it is research like this.

The only problem is that Scott presently does not recognize the Cummings and Wright service and its overprinted stamps. Be that as it may, we view here one of two recorded stamps with a Cummings & Wright overprint. Estimated at \$3,000-4,000, it sold for \$2,500—and should be worth much more if Scott ever recognizes it.



The New Amsterdam Collection also included this cover, described as follows:

"(Cummings and Wright) Post Office City Despatch, New York N.Y., 2¢ black on green glazed (Sc. 40L2)...tied by vivid red 'Free' in frame, second strike and matching 'P.O. City Despatch Post Mar.



25, 4 O'Clock' circular datestamp on 1847 folded prices-current list from Glasgow, Scotland, to local New York City address...this March 25, 1847, use of the Mead 40L2 stamp falls into the Cummings and Wright period...".

This cover fetched the low end of its \$750-\$1,000 estimate range.

Just to add to the intrigue, the next lot was a single, described as follows:

“(Cummings and Wright) Post Office City Despatch, New York N.Y., 2¢ black on green glazed (40L2)...manuscript ‘C&P’ initials similar to the ‘C&W’ initials indicating ownership of the City Despatch Post by Cummings and Wright after Mead’s...this stamp only recently came to light after having been hidden in an album since the 1930s.” There is no additional information to indicate further why this might be a Cummings and Wright usage. So it was estimated at just \$300-400 and was hammered down for \$325.



Meanwhile...there is more to the Cummings story, because here we see a folded letter to a local street address. It bears the Cummings' City Post, New York N.Y., 2¢ black on yellow glazed



(Sc. 55L3), which was issued in 1844 when Cummings operated this local post. The stamp is cancelled by a “Free” in frame, with a second strike to the right of the stamp—and a red “P.O. City Despatch Post Mar. 25, 4 O’Clock” circular datestamp, making this one of two recorded covers with the Cummings stamp used in conjunction with the City Despatch Post AFTER Cummings and Wright took over the City Despatch Post from Abraham Mead, this being a March 1847 usage.

Estimated at \$1,500-2,000, it sold for \$1,200.

Moving along in this interconnected history, now we view an undated folded cover with a (Cummings and Wright) Post Office City Despatch 2¢ black on pink glazed (Sc. 40L3), cancelled by a light strike of a black “Free” in





frame. It was sent to a Baltimore street address, also bearing a red “New-York 5 Cts. 13 Dec.” (1847) integral-rate circular datestamp, and was described as “without question the finest of the twelve recorded examples of 40L3—and one of four recorded covers. This is the latest recorded use of the Post Office City Despatch 2-cent before Cole began issuing his own stamps at the beginning of 1848.”

“Cole”? Where did he come from? No surprise, the auctioneers have the answer: “By March 1847 the post was owned and managed by Cummings & Wright. Sometime in October-November 1847, the post’s ownership changed again, and Charles Cole became the proprietor. The 2¢ on pink glazed paper (Sc. 40L3) was first issued by Cummings & Wright (the earliest documented use is May 15, 1847....Examples cancelled in red were probably used during the Cummings & Wright period, while the use of black ink probably signifies the change in ownership to Cole (October-November 1847).”

So this is a usage under Cole’s ownership; estimated at \$3,000-4,000, it sold for \$2,600.

Now, to Coles...we view here an 1848 folded letter with a “Coles City Despatch P.O. Jul. 1” red double-circle datestamp (lower left) and a red “New-York 10 cts. 1 Jul.” integral-rate circular date-stamp.



Estimated at \$200-300, it realized \$475.

This was followed by the only recorded o.g. example of the (Cole’s) Post Office City Despatch 2¢ black on green glazed, with “CC” at the sides (Sc. 40L4)—also produced from the modified Greig plate that started with Sc. 40L1, as described on page 1.



Estimated at \$1,000-1,500, it went for \$1,400.

For varieties, we show another Sc. 40L4, but with the right “C” a mirror image. This is one of five recorded examples, and the only confirmed one on green paper. As explained by the auctioneers, “Only one subject on the plate of 42 (Position 36) shows the so-called ‘Inverted C’ variety, which was caused when a mirror-image letter punch was used to enter the righthand ‘C’. The mirror-image punch left a right-reading engraved letter on the plate, which in turn produced a mirror-image printed letter ‘C’. The Scott Catalogue lists this variety as ‘C at right inverted’, but in fact it is a mirror image of the letter ‘C’...” The realization matched the SCV of \$3,500.

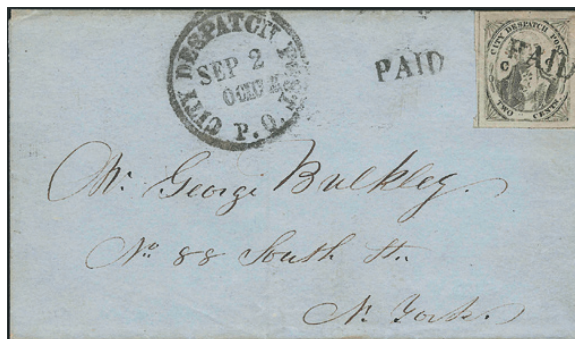


Cole’s Post Office City Despatch 2¢ black on grayish with “CC” at the sides (Sc. 40L5) also offers some interesting varieties. First, for comparative purposes, at left we see an XF example that sold



for \$3,750 against a \$500 SCV; and at right we see an example with a manuscript initial “C” Control Mark between “Two” and “Cents” (Sc. 40L5c)—one of only two unused examples of the approximately fifteen recorded examples of the 2¢ with Manuscript “C” Control Mark—estimate \$400-500, realization \$1,100. This manuscript Control Mark also is known at the center of the stamp.

The New Amsterdam Collection also presents us with a cross-section of usages of Sc. 40L5. Shown first is a single cancelled by a “Paid” handstamp with a second strike and a “P.O. City Despatch Post Sep. 2—O’Clock” circular date-stamp



on a folded cover to a local street address. The auctioneers tell us that the black circular datestamp and black “Paid” indicates an 1848 usage and that “beginning in September 1848, the Post Office City Despatch stopped using the ‘Paid’ handstamp on mail brought to the post office, probably by order of the New York postmaster who may have received complaints about the word ‘Paid’ appearing on letters which had no prepaid U.S. postage. From September 1848 on, only city-delivery covers have the ‘Paid’ handstamp, as this example demonstrates.” Estimated at \$2,000-3,000, it sold for \$3,500.

However, while the black markings indicate an 1848 usage, red markings also were used at that time. Shown here is an example cancelled (but not tied, as the cancel does not touch the cover as well as



the stamp) by a red “Paid” straightline, also with a red “New-York 5 cts. 2 Aug.” (1848) integral-rate circular datestamp on a folded cover to Yonkers N.Y. This example of the Scott 40L5 used to prepay delivery to the Post Office was estimated at \$1,500-2,000 and realized \$2,800.

Coming back to the problem the New York Post Office had with the “Paid” marking causing complaints from out of town mail recipients who had to pay despite the New York City local marking, this cover shows



the “Paid” crossed out in blue pen. The auctioneers point out that blue ink was used at the New York post office and that subsequent covers delivered to the post office by the

Post Office City Despatch do not have "Paid" markings, which was used exclusively on city-delivery letters starting in September 1848. Estimated at \$4,000-5,000, it was hammered down for \$6,500.

And on that note we conclude this viewing of the "New Amsterdam" Collection of the City Despatch Post 1842-1852. For the complete story and auction catalog, we refer you to:

<http://www.siegelauctions.com/2011/1005/Sale1005.pdf>