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ESSEX COUNTY, NEW YORK POST OFFICES PRIOR TO 1850: A LOOK AT THE STAMPLESS PERIOD

by

Capt. Henry A. Hudson, Jr., USNR-Ret. Millington, Tennessee

Essex County, New York was established in 1799 from territory gained from Clinton County (Everton). The formal establishment of post offices within the boundaries of the county and the appointment of postmasters also dates to 1799 when the post office at Willsborough was established (Kay and Smith). Some of these early post offices have survived; many did not; some changed their names over the years. Often they were established at crossroads, in stores, taverns, in stands or in small settlements. Postmasters often did double duty, not only serving as postmaster, but also as storekeeper, farmer or other full-time occupations. The position of postmaster was not necessarily a full-time job although it was a very important one for the operation of a post office was a center for information, news, commerce and government in the early settlements.

The establishment dates for official post offices and postmaster appointments in the towns of Essex County prior to 1850 were made by the Postmaster General as follows (Kay and Smith):

Name Of Town	Date Post Office Established	First Postmaster
Adirondac	August 3, 1848	Andrew Porteous
Ausable	January 7, 1828	Benjamin Wells
Au Sable Forks	February 4, 1828	Isaac Van DerWarker
Boquet Mills	June 20, 1839	William D. Ross
Brookfield	January 1, 1812	Peter Dowen
Chesterfield	July 11, 1805	Alvah Bosworth
Crown Point	September 7, 1802	1 st name not given Potter
Douws	January 10, 1826	Myron Douws
East Moriah	September 15, 1826	William Meacham
Elizabeth C.H.	1811	Theodorus Ross
Elizabethtown	September 7, 1802	Benjamin Holcomb
EssexJune	1801	Theodorus Ross
Highland	March 31, 1841	S.D. Richardson
Jay	November 24, 1803	John Douglass
Keene	January 1, 1818	Davis Graves
Keeseville	January 25, 1822	Oliver Keese, II
Lewis	September 29, 1818	George Steele
Minevra	December 29, 1827	Alfred White
Moriah	November 4, 1816	Ambrose Mason
North Elba	November 19, 1849	Dillon C. Osgood
Paradox	December 29, 1827	John Schofield
Pineville	December 28, 1828	Joseph Call
Pondsville	June 28, 1820	Jared Pond
Port Henry	September 28, 1829	Simeon Guilford
Port Kendall	July 17, 1837	Levi Higby
Port Kent	May 27, 1826	Elkanah Watson
Scaroon/Schroon Lake	September 7, 1802	B. VanBenthuysen
Schroon River	October 29, 1842	Robert D. Lindsay
Split Rock	April 1, 1817	Reuben Whallon
Ticonderoga	November 5, 1816	Libbeus Haskell
Upper Jay	September 27, 1844	Benjamin Wells
Wadham's Mills	1831	Luman Hadhams
Wells Corners	December 13, 1827	Benjamin Wells
Wessex	November 11, 1829	Chris. Dickinson
West Essex	December 14, 1843	Orrin Smith
West Moriah	February 26, 1846	A.R. DeLance
West Port	October 2, 1816	Boughton Lobdell
Whallonsburgh	January 27, 1849	James S. Whallon
Willsborough	March 1, 1799	Daniel Ross

It is important to note that the date the post office was established may not be the date that the town itself was established as many towns pre-date the post office bearing the same name.

There were many more small towns and settlements in the county during this period but none are known to have official post offices established before 1850. Mail in these towns was taken to the nearest official post office for mailing or handled on an unofficial basis. Many letters were carried by travelers and messengers going from point to point and never entered the postal system. These letters are usually marked "By the favor of" or "By the politeness of." Such letters are termed "Carried outside the mail." Sometimes the letters were carried for some distance outside the mail and mailed at the next post office along the way.

Postmaster appointments are genealogically significant as one family member often succeeds another in the appointment. Sometimes the town is named for the first postmaster. Often the tenure of a postmaster is not for very long. Sometimes the postmaster serves for a given period, is not reappointed, but shows up again as the postmaster after several years. One has to remember that these were governmental appointments, subject to all the ties and patronage of the period. Researchers can use this information to great advantage in their work.

For information about postmaster appointments prior to 1832, you should consult National Archives and Records Administration microfilm publication M1131, Record of Appointments of Postmasters, Oct. 1789-1832. There are four rolls of microfilm, arranged alphabetically by name of post office. For postmaster appointments after 1832, consult M841, Record of Appointment of Postmasters, 1832-Sept. 30, 1971. There are 145 rolls of microfilm in this set of records, arranged by state, then by county, and then by the name of the post office. If you are interested in the specific physical location of a particular post office, consult M1126, Post Office Department Records of Site Locations, 1837-1950. There are 683 rolls of microfilm in this record set (NARA). These records are available at the NARA in Washington, DC and at selected branch offices. You might also want to check with the LDS Family History Center for microfilm loan. You will have to cross-reference the NARA film number/title to obtain the LDS item number.

What did early mail look like? How was the mail managed before postage stamps? As the first United States postage stamps were not issued until 1847, mail was sent stampless, that is, without stamps. Even with the issuance of stamps, the Post Office Department could not print enough of them for all the post offices and stampless mail was permitted until January 1, 1856, when adhesive stamps were required on all mail (Phillips).

A typical stampless letter is a folded letter sheet that has been folded and sealed with wax. The address was written on the outside and usually consisted of simply the recipient's name and their city and state. Only on mail going to the larger cities were street addresses used. Sometimes, only the person's name and the county are given. Only later in the stampless period were envelopes used in any great numbers as the envelope counted as an additional sheet for which additional fees were charged. We generally see envelopes coming into use in the early to mid 1850s.

Once addressed, the letter was taken to the post office for mailing. The postmaster would post the letter using a hand held date stamp, not much unlike what is still in use today. Various colors of ink were used with these stamps, with red, black, blue and green being the most common. Circular date stamps were the most common, but straight lines, boxes, ovals and ornamentals were also used. These date stamps were usually provided to the postmaster by the Post Office Department if revenues met certain levels. If the revenue for the particular post office was not at the specified level, the postmaster would have to purchase the stamp himself or he could resort to posting the letter in manuscript. Such postings are called manuscript postmarks. They are found in many of the smaller towns and in the early days of the history of larger towns.

Once the letter was posted, the postmaster had to apply a rate or fee to the letter. Depending on the particular rate schedule in effect at the time, the fee could be based on weight, distance the letter was to travel or a flat rate. The rate was either stamped on the letter or written in manuscript. If the fee was pre-paid at the time of mailing, the letter would be marked "Paid." If the fees were not pre-paid, the letter would still be sent but the fees would be a due rate, payable at the letter's destination. Certain individuals, because of their position, had free franking privileges and they could send mail without paying postal fees. Senators, congressmen, certain elected and appointed officials and postmasters made the list. Their mail is usually marked or stamped "Free," and usually bears their signature on the face of the letter.

Figure No. 1 represents the use of a black circular date stamp on a stampless folded letter. It is postmarked from Keeseville, NY on January 26, 1835 (Hudson and Hudson). The postage fee of 12 ½ cents is noted in manuscript

on the letter. This is a due rate payable at the letter's destination, Albany, NY. The letter is also marked "By the politeness of Mr. Woodward," this obviously being the person who carried the letter to the post office for mailing. Keeseville used both straight line and circular hand stamps in posting mail with the earliest example dating to 1828 (Phillips). Manuscript postmarks have been found from 1822-1848 (Phillips).

An example of a manuscript posted letter is shown as Figure No. 2. It is postmarked from Jay, NY on January 19, 1847 (Hudson and Hudson). The rate for the letter was 10 cents and this due rate is noted on the face of the letter. This rate is also payable at the letter's destination. Circular date stamps have been found for Jay, NY postings during the mid 1850s (Phillips). Manuscript postmarks have been found as early as 1819 (Phillips).

Another example of a manuscript postmark is shown as Figure No. 3. This letter was posted from Ticonderoga, NY on November 14, 1836 (Hudson and Hudson). The rate for this letter was 12 ½ cents and this fee was pre-paid at the time the letter was mailed. The postmaster has noted this by marking the letter "Paid." Circular date stamps were also used at Ticonderoga as early as 1837 (Phillips). Manuscript postmarks have been found on examples dating to 1817 (Phillips).

Figure No. 4 shows a manuscript postmark on a letter from Elizabethtown, NY dated March 8, 1841 (Hudson and Hudson). The postmaster noted that the letter was 1/4 ounce in excess and noted a due rate of 6 cents. The letter also contains a script "Mail." Upon examining the letter it was found that the letter was refolded and sent through the mail again. Such letters are called "turned covers," in that they were turned over and reused. Figure No. 5 represents the second use of this letter through the postal system, showing a red circular date stamp from Keeseville, N.Y. This second posting was on March 10, 1841 and this letter bears the free frank of the postmaster, O. Keese. Straight line and circular date stamps have been found for Elizabethtown dating to 1837 (Phillips). Examples of manuscript postmarks have been found on letters dating as early as 1805 (Phillips).

Genealogists often overlook the value of using old letters in their research. Each letter is a census into itself, placing a sender and a recipient in an exact place at a specific time. The content of the letters may reveal valuable information about current events of the time, including crops, religious thought, politics, weather and illness. As a postal historian, I have often used the census, either in microfilm or CD format, to identify a post office when the date stamp or manuscript marking was unreadable. Of course, this works best the closer you are to the decennial census, and, for letters written before 1850, it works only for head of household, as that it all you will find on the census.

These old letters are fragile and should be handled very carefully. Never use cellophane tape on them or put them in photo albums. Only archival quality materials should be used to mount and store these documents. One should avoid unnecessary handling of the letters as moisture and oil from your hands can damage the paper. Never store them in places where there is moisture, direct sunlight, extremes of heat and cold or the possibility of insect damage. If you have questions about the display, storage or preservation of old paper documents, contact an archivist at your local library or historical society. Do everything you can to preserve these items for future generations to enjoy.



Figure 1

Stampless Folded Letter: Keeseville N.Y.
Black Circular Date Stamp: January 26, 1835
Script: 12½

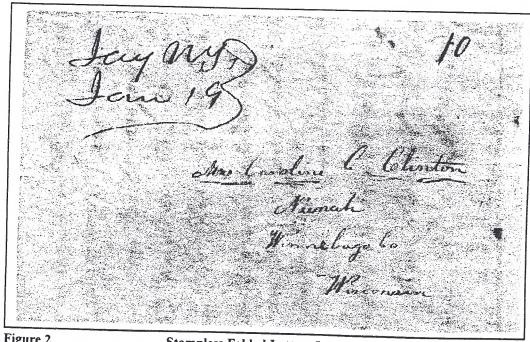


Figure 2 Stampless Folded Letter: Jay N.Y
Manuscript Postmark: January 19, 1847
Script: 10

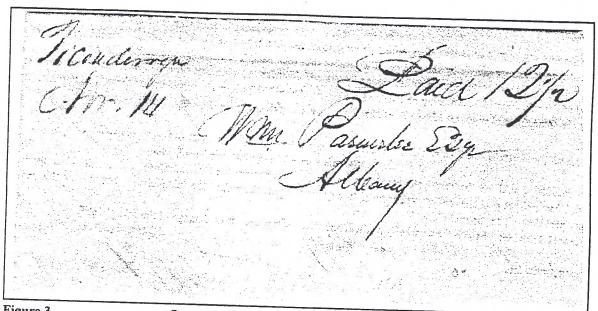


Figure 3 Stampless Folded Letter: Ticonderoga N.Y.
Manuscript Postmark: November 14, 1836
Script: Paid 12 ½

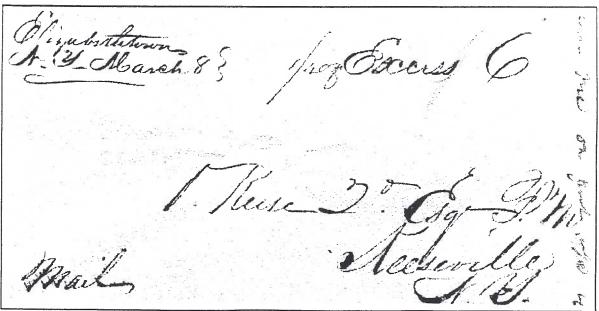


Figure 4

Stampless Folded Letter: Elizabethtown N.Y.
Manuscript Postmark: March 8, 1841
Script: 1/4 oz Excess 6 Script: Mail

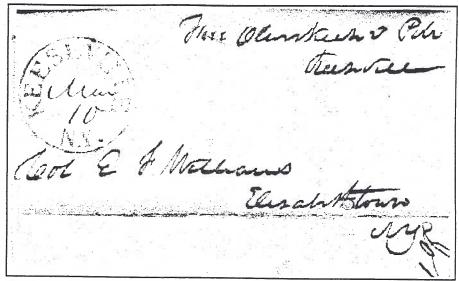


Figure 5 Reverse Side (Turned Cover): Keeseville N.Y.
Red Circular Date Stamp: March 10, 1841
Script: Free O. Keese, P.M. Keeseville

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Everton, George B. Sr., The Handy Book For Genealogists, 7th Ed., The Everton Publishers, Inc., Logan, UT, 1987.

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Phillips, David G., American Stampless Cover Catalog, Vol. 1., David G. Phillips Publishing Co., Inc., North Miami, FL, 1997.



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The B Trading Company of Albany NY has been commissioned by the Dobris Family to dispose

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sold at an auction that afternoon. Included in this sale will be: postal cards(advertising/announce-

ments), postal history, bill and letter heads, trade cards, photos, books, booklets, directories, alma

nacs, blue plates, bottles, Albany Senators baseball memorabilia, business related material and a

host of other interesting items too numerous to mention.

The postcard collection will be offered in an afternoon auction. There are 235 lots. About 40%

are real photos.

For our clients unable to attend, a catalog is being prepared and all net priced items will be avail-

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For the auction sector, bids may be submitted by mail, phone/fax, email or the day of the auction.

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Carl J Blazejewski, proprietor

7B

SYRACUSE, NEW YORK 150 YEARS OF POSTAL HISTORY: AN OVERVIEW

by Augusta Gelfand

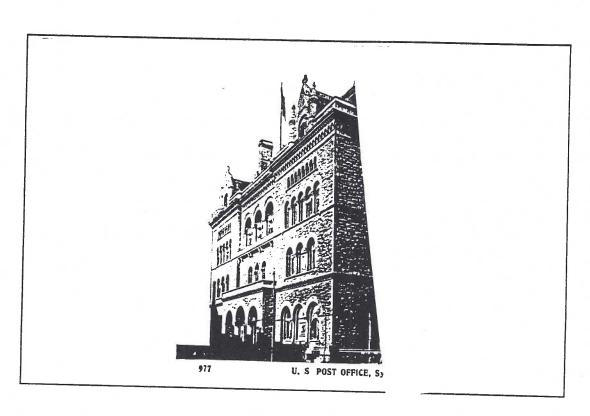
Syracuse got its start as a distributor of salt produced in nearby Salina. When the Erie Canal was built through Syracuse, this increased Syracuse's importance in reference to Salina. The building of the Central Railroad through Syracuse reinforced the dominant position of Syracuse and soon afterwards Syracuse annexed Salina.

The Syracuse post office opened February 24, 1820, with John Wilkinson as its first postmaster. He held that position for twenty years.

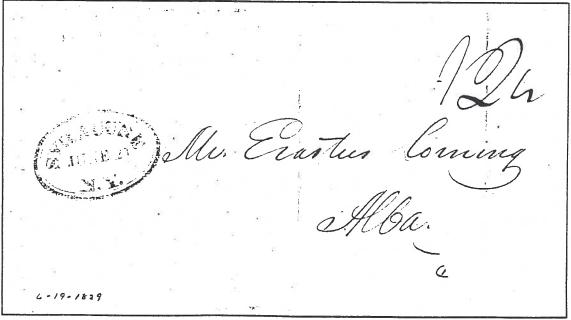
This exhibit is an overview of early Syracuse postmarks especially during the stampless period. A small section is on the 1847-52 period. There are covers from the pre-civil war, the civil war and post civil war periods.

Examples are shown of railroad covers, foreign covers, and post office auxiliary markings. There are covers from early Syracuse branch post offices, and early airmail covers, as well as Syracuse Highway/Post office (HPOs), and other areas of mail usage.

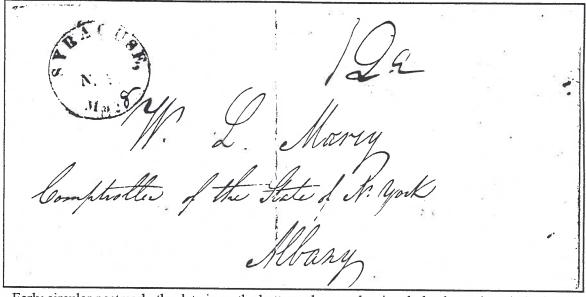
Postcard of Old Syracuse Post Office



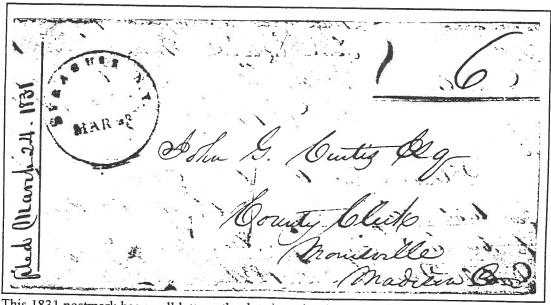
Stampless Period



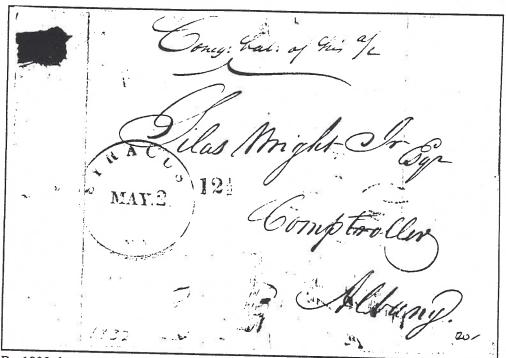
An 1827 short-lived oval postmark. Postal rate was 121/2¢ for a distance of 81-150 miles.



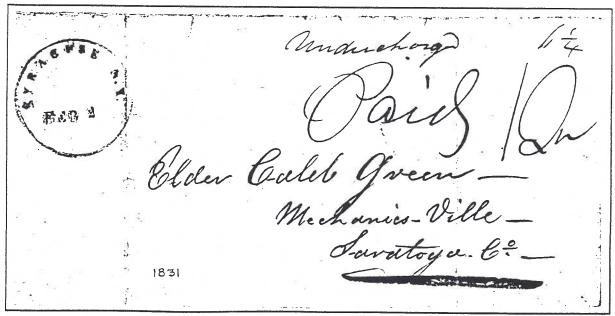
Early circular postmark, the date is on the bottom, the month printed, the day written in by hand.



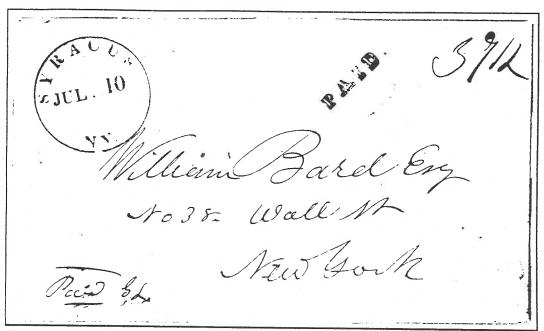
This 1831 postmark has small letters, the date is under the name of the city and everything is printed. The 6¢ pays the rate for less than 30 miles.



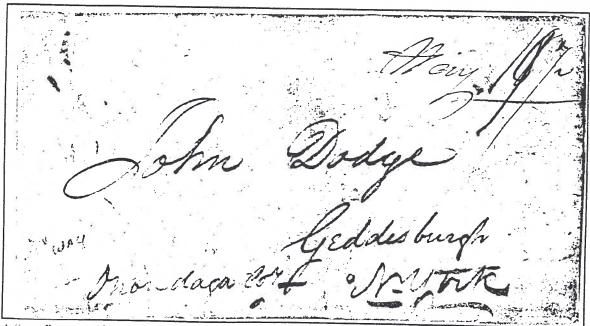
By 1832 the postmark had been changed again. NY is dropped to the bottom of the postmark, the letters are larger and the postal rate is printed. The "C" in Syracuse is larger than the other letters.



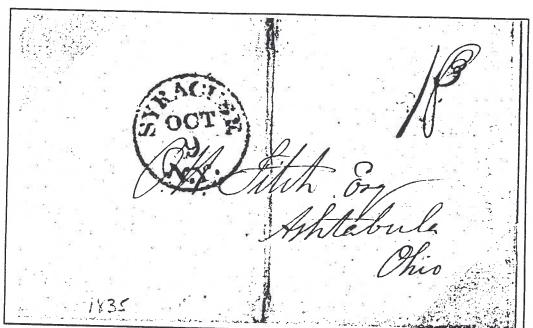
This cover was marked "undercharge" because the distance between Syracuse and Mechanics Ville was incorrectly computed. The actual distance was over 150 miles and the receiver had to pay the difference in postage.



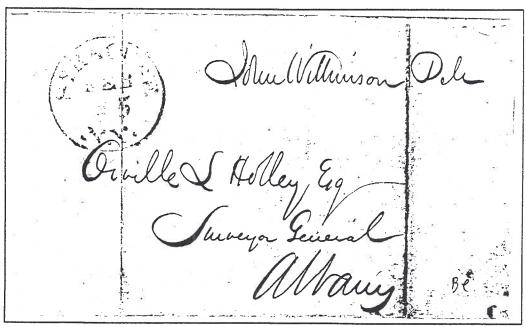
The 37½¢ rate on this cover to New York City was based on two separate sheets of paper. A black postmark indicated an unpaid letter. Red indicated a pre-paid letter. Because of the error in using black "Paid" was used twice.



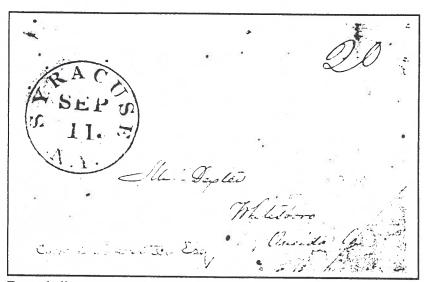
A "way" cover, given to a mailman on his route to be taken to the nearest post office. There was a penny charge for this service, thus the 18½ rate for 151-400 miles and the penny for service brings this letter to 19½¢.



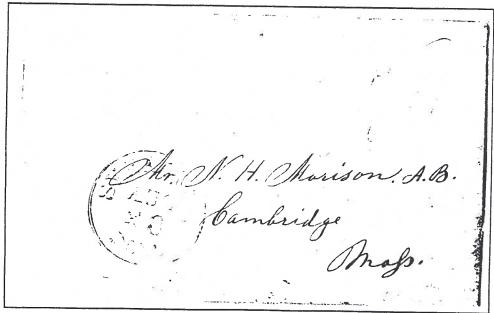
An 1835 red circular postmark with very large letters. The date is on two lines and the rate is written by hand.



Postmaster's letter sent free. The postmaster could send letters pertaining to post office business for free with his signature as his "frank."

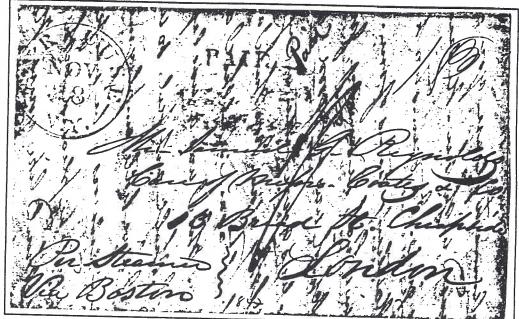


Fancy ladies cover smaller than the usual cover, as ladies were not expected to say much or have much to say.

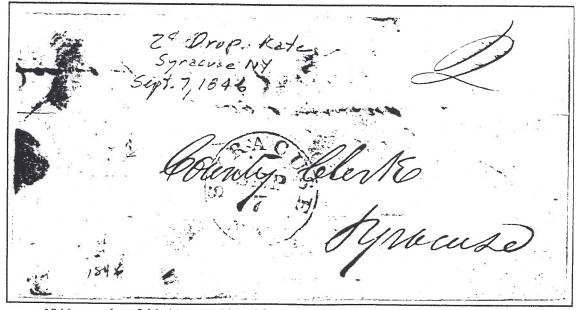


This cover was written on board the barge "Indiana" sailing toward Syracuse on the Erie Canal (see below). The Erie Canal which froze in the winter was not used to transport mail.

But Indiana drawing toward



Pre-paid letter sheet to London via steamer "Boston." 18½¢ is the US Postage. British postage is indicated by the "squiggle" in the center of the cover. The British receiving stamp is on the reverse side.



1846 stampless folded letter with red Syracuse cancel and a 2¢ (Drop Rate). Scarce.

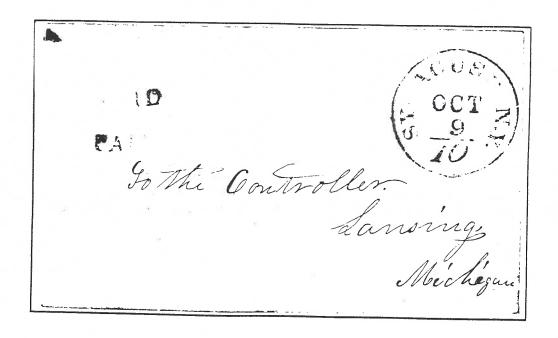
1847-1852 Period

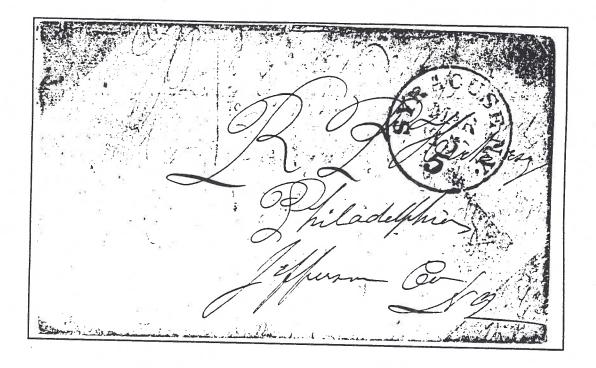
The new rates were 5¢ for up to 300 miles and 10¢ for over 300 miles. Stamps were optional.



A cover using Scott #1 to pay the postage. Unfortunately the stamp is not tied to the cover.

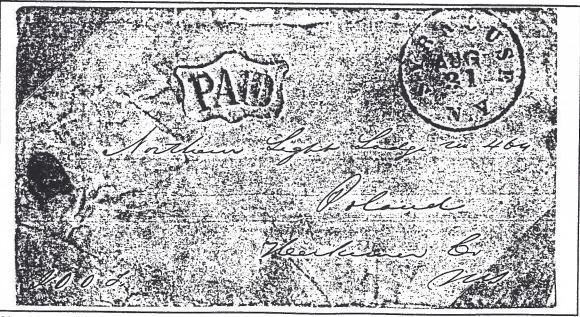
Both covers have the postal rate incorporated into the postmark. The 10¢ rate was charged because the distance was over 300 miles.



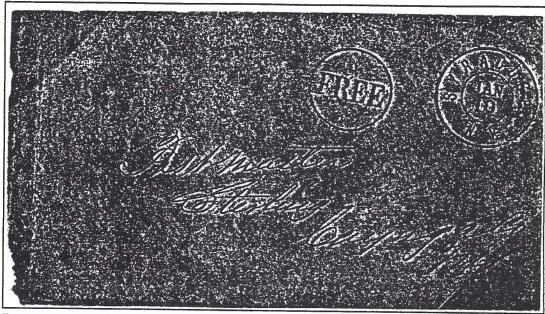


1852-1857 Period

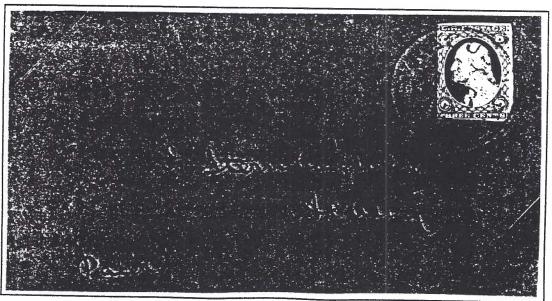
Postage was now 3¢ and stamps were still optional.



Circular cancel without indication of postal rate, but this cover is stamped "paid." This practice was not unusual in the 1852-57 period.



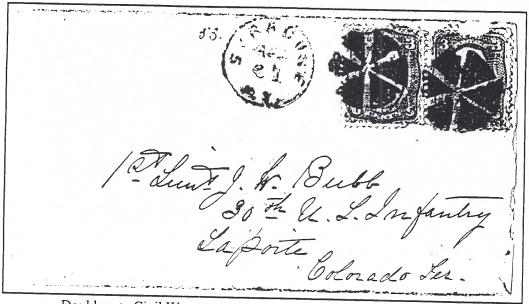
Free cover. The "FREE" is in large letters and circled. The postmark is a double circled postmark. This is a Civil era cover, but there is no year date.



Blue Syracuse postmark cancels this Scott #11.

End of the 1852-57 Period

Stamps are now required. Non-prepaid letters were charged at a double rate.



Double rate Civil War cover sent to an officer in Colorado Territory.

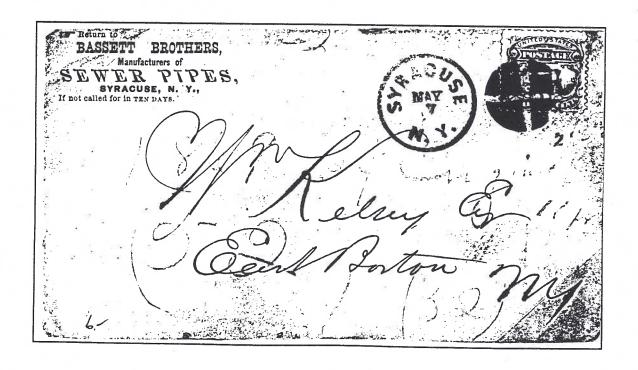


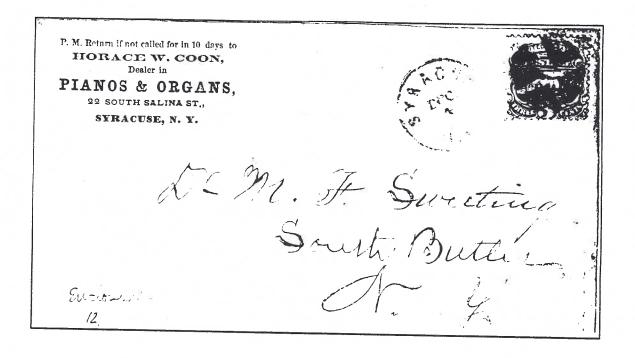
Our first 2¢ stamp issued during the Civil War, to pay the drop letter rate, which now included delivery where available. The stamp could also be used for the 2¢ circular rate.

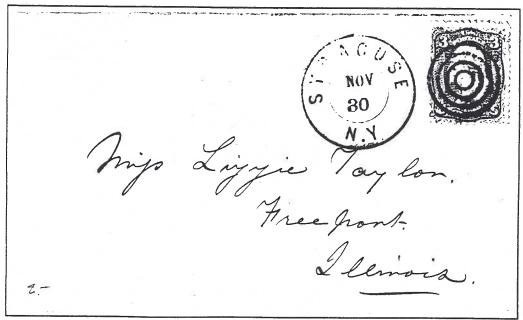


This forwarded letter, which at the time required extra postage. If the letter had been misdirected by the post office no extra postage would have been required.

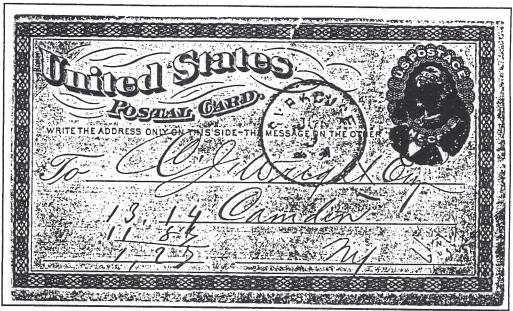
Two covers with business corner cards, franked with Scott #114, which was part of the new set of stamps issued after the Civil War.



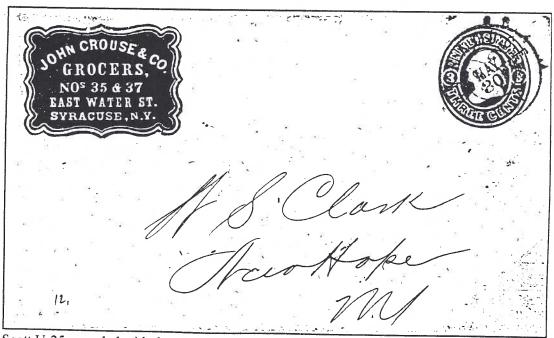




A cover with a large double ring postmark. This type of postmark was used during the period of the Civil War.



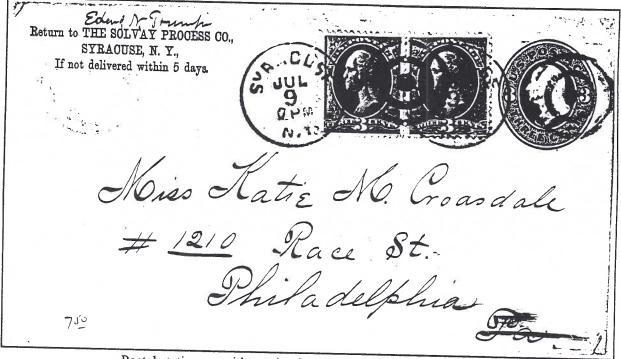
Our first postcard, a Scott #UX3. UX3 and UX1 are alike except for the watermark.



Scott U-35 canceled with the postmarker, which was later declared against post office policy.

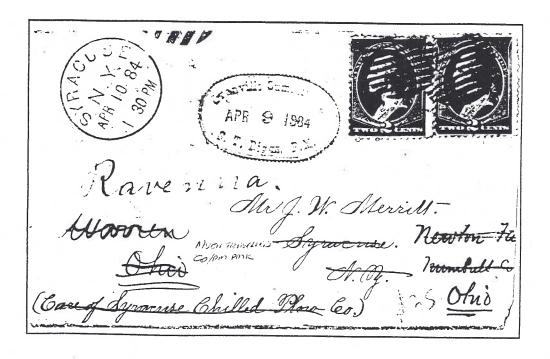
Bank Note Period

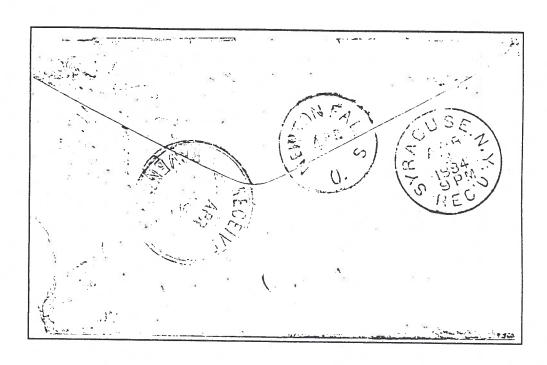
This period ran from 1870-1891. The stamps were printed by printers of bank notes, thus the name.



Postal stationery with a pair of 3¢ Bank Notes, triple rate letter.

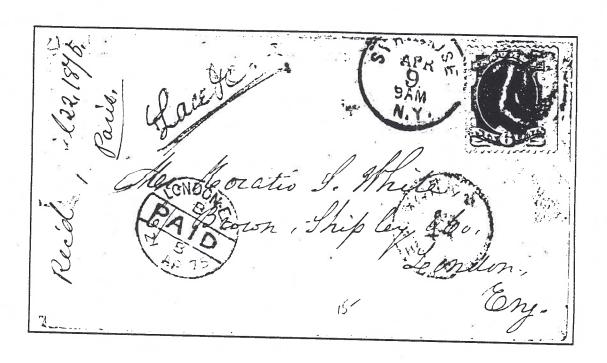
Syracuse receiving mark on a much traveled cover mailed by the postmaster. In 1883, the cost of first class mail dropped to 2ϕ



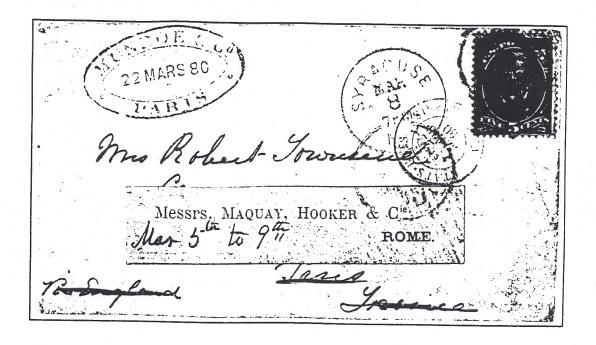


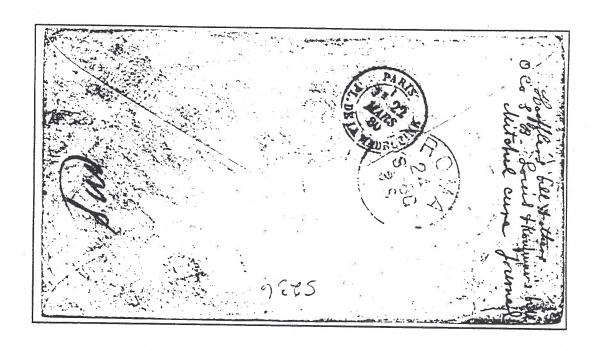
Two covers to England franked with Scott #159, showing a NY forwarding mark and a London receiving mark. The postage to England was 6¢ at this time.





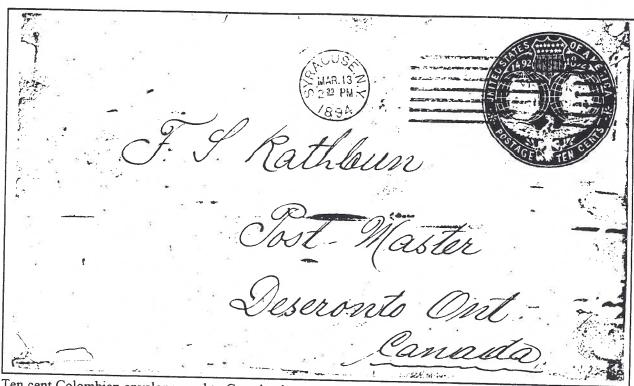
Cover to Rome, forwarded from Paris, with a number of forwarding marks front and back. The postage to most of Europe was $5 \not\in$







Two cent drop letter from the New York State Canal Commission.



Ten cent Colombian envelope used to Canada, thus 10¢ rate. These envelopes were printed and released with the Colombian stamp set.

After 5 days return to PIERCE, BUTLER & PIERCE MFG. CO. SYRACUSE, N. Y., U. S. A.





Isnard & Co., Hospicio 103,

Rio de Janeiro,
Brazil.

An advertising cover to Brazil for a 1¢ rate as printed matter.

After 5 days, return to GEO. E. WILKINS, SYRACUSE, N. Y.

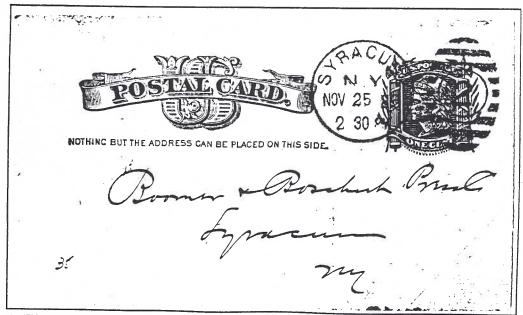


Mr. Chas. Bachmann,

2 Grand Quai.

Geneva, Switzerland.

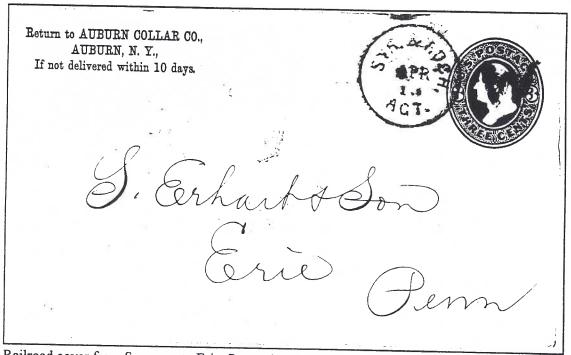
A cover with the 5¢ postal stationery rate to Switzerland.



A "Time on the Bottom" postmark, canceled on US postcard UX-5, our second postal type.

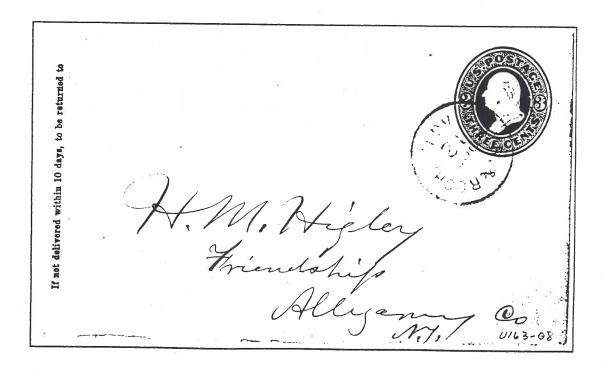
Railroad covers

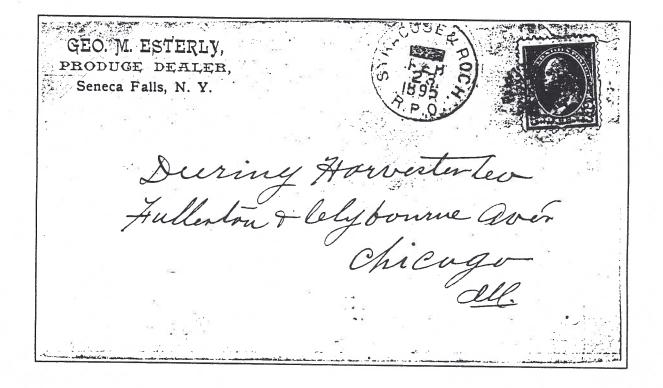
Agents and RPOs



Railroad cover from Syracuse to Erie, Pennsylvania, with agent's cancel and mark "W" to show movement west.

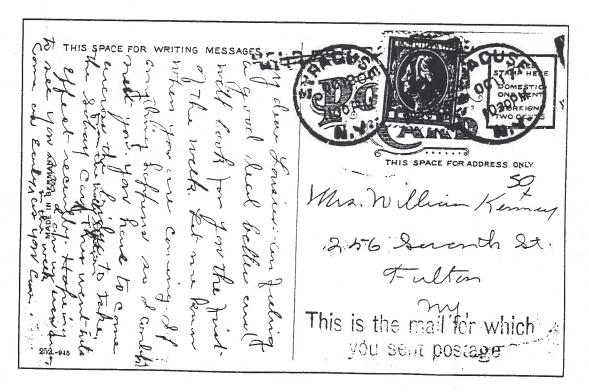
Syracuse, NY was a railroad center. Seven "RPOs" Railroad Post Offices, ran out of it besides the regular mail line of the NY Central, of which the Rochester-Syracuse and Syracuse-Rochester, was a part. The top cover was used when the route had an agent. By the time of the second cover this route was an RPO.

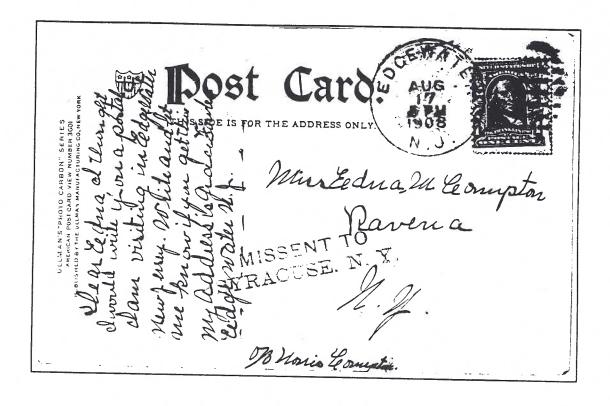




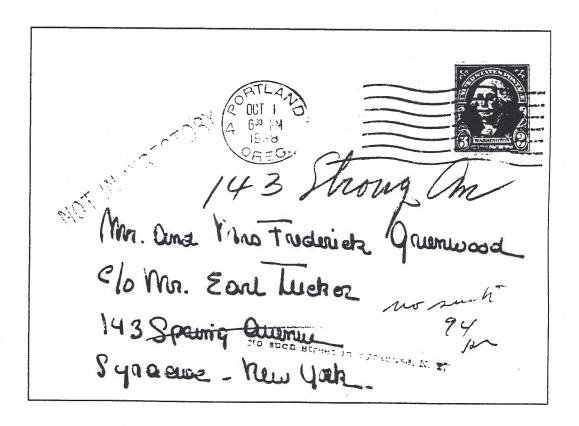
Auxiliary Markings

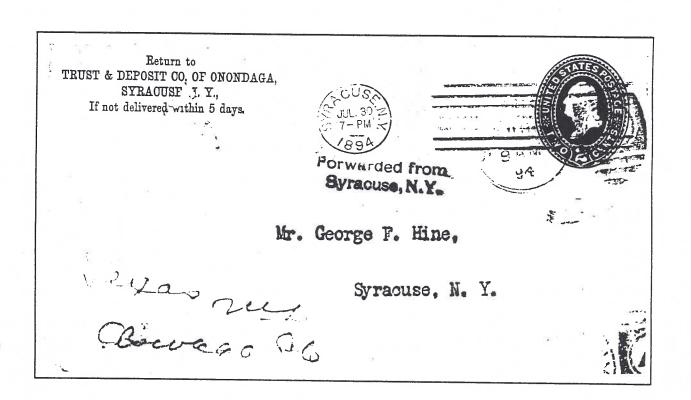
Syracuse postal auxiliary markings on two covers. "This is the mail for which you sent postage," and "Missent to Syracuse, NY."



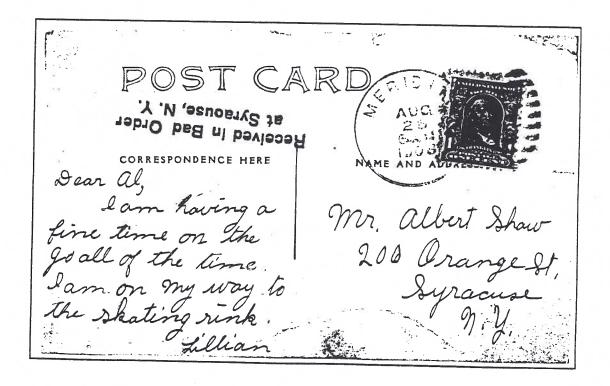


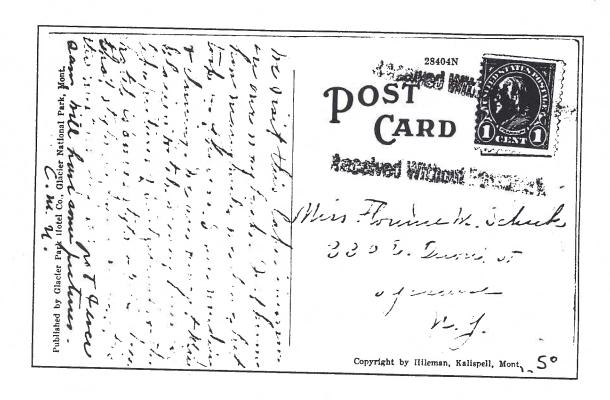
Syracuse postal auxiliary markings on two covers. "Not in Directory" & "No such street in Syracuse. NY" and "Forwarded from Syracuse, NY."



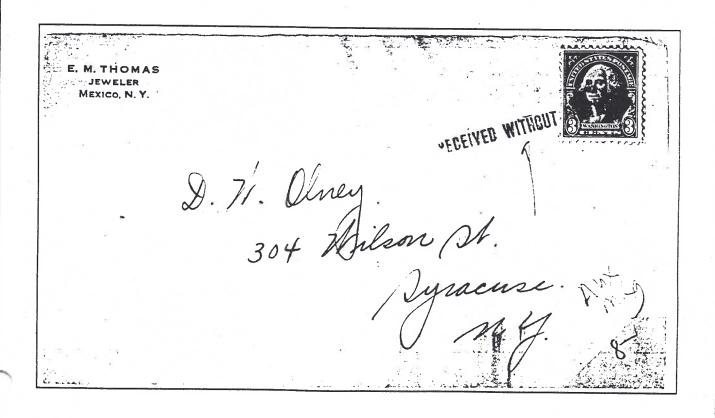


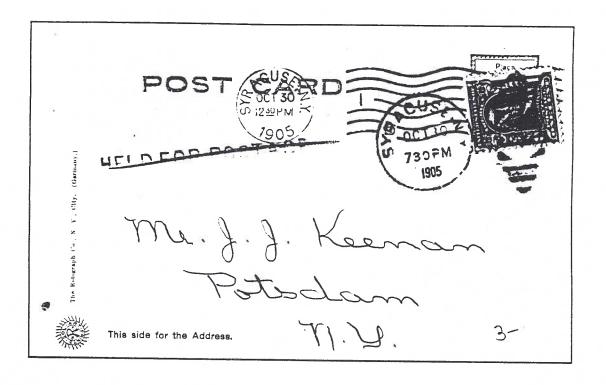
Syracuse postal auxiliary markings on two covers. "Received in Bad Order at Syracuse, NY" and "Received Without Postmark."



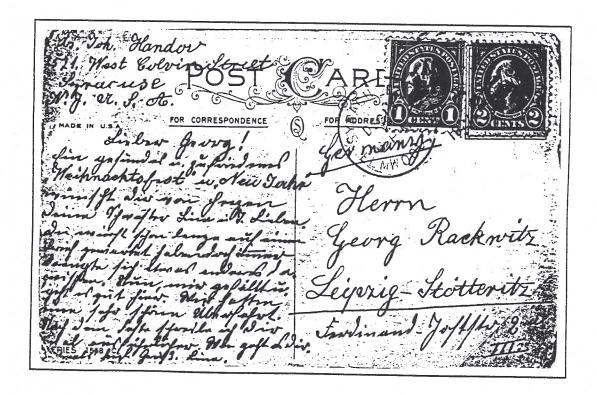


Syracuse postal auxiliary markings on two covers. "Received without a Stamp," and "Held for Postage."

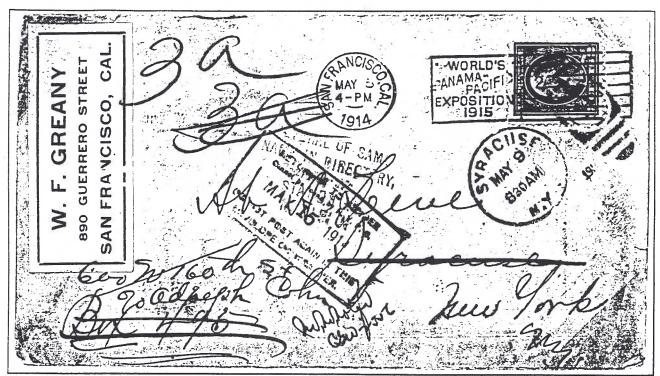




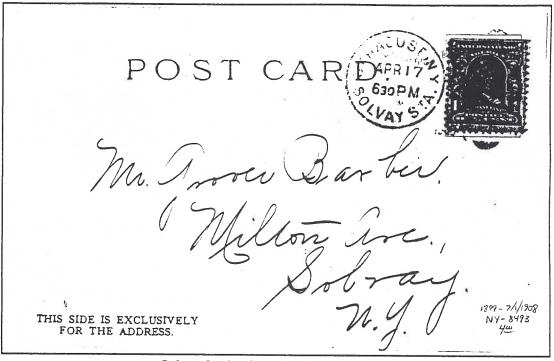
Two Syracuse branch post offices; an Eastwood Station receiving mark, and an Elmwood cancellation.





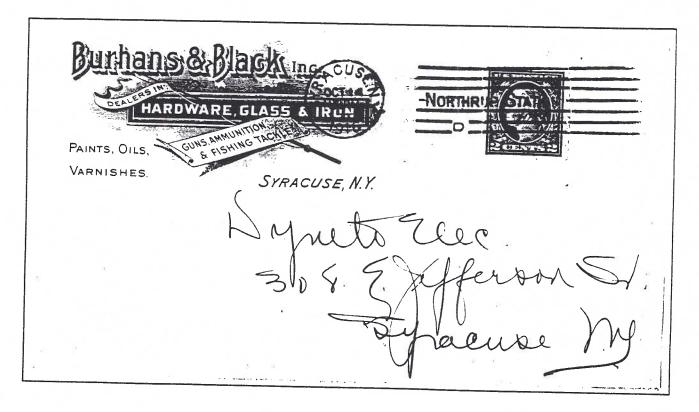


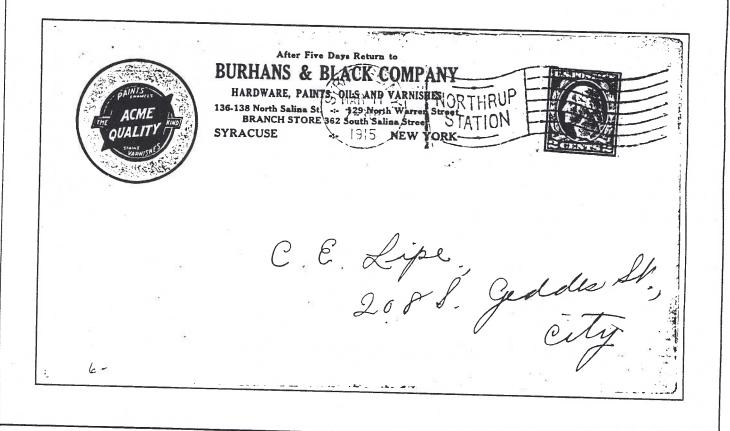
A much traveled cover from San Francisco with a Panama Pacific Exposition slogan cancel, forwarded to New York from Syracuse.



Solvay Station branch of Syracuse, NY

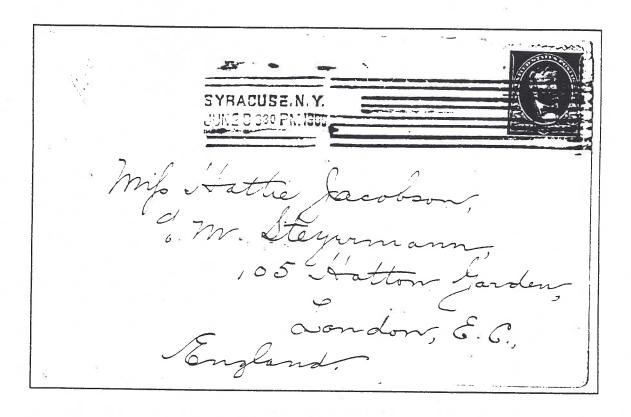
Different machine cancels from the Northrup branch station of Syracuse, NY.





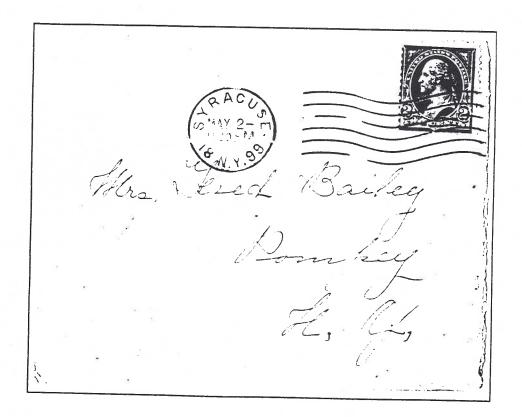
Machine Cancels

Two different pneumatic machine cancels from Syracuse. Syracuse was the only city in New York State besides NYC to use this machine.

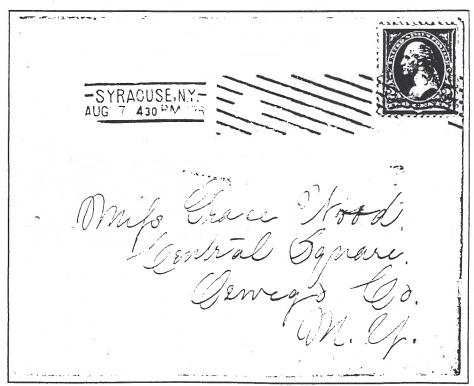


VILLIS R. PERRY, 107 Ashworth Place, SYRACUSE, H.Y. SYRACUSE 101 9				
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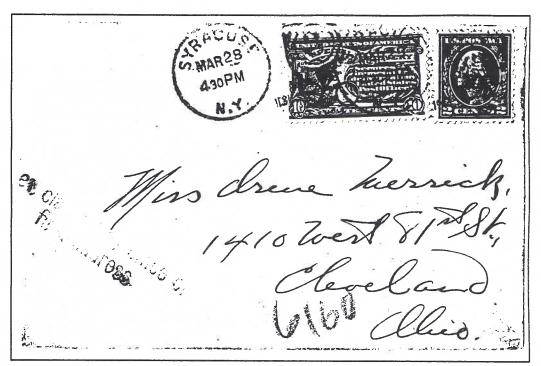
Two Barry machine cancels





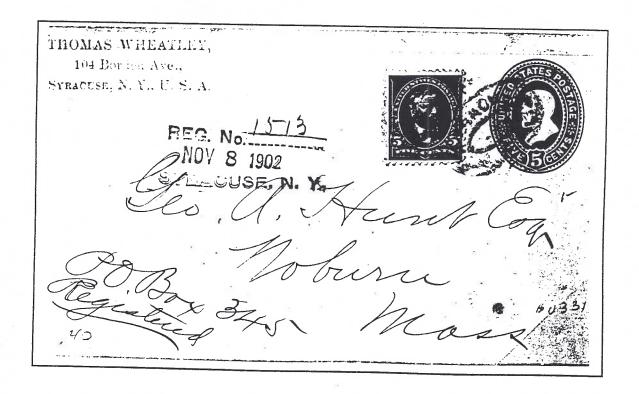


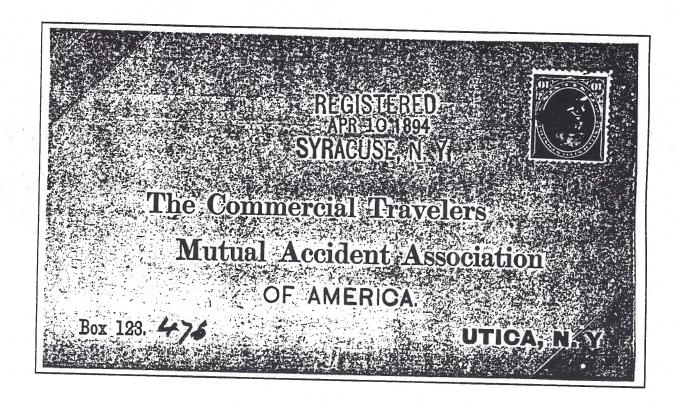
Machine cancel, American



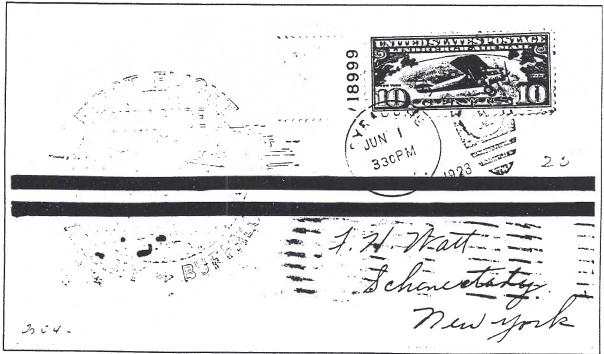
Special Delivery to Cleveland

Registered letters from Syracuse. Top cover shows the 10¢ fee was paid with a 5¢ Grant and the 5¢ stationery. Registered letters cost 8¢ for registry and 2¢ postage.





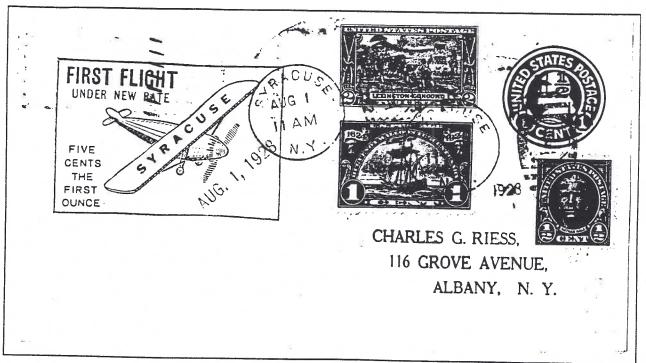
Airmail



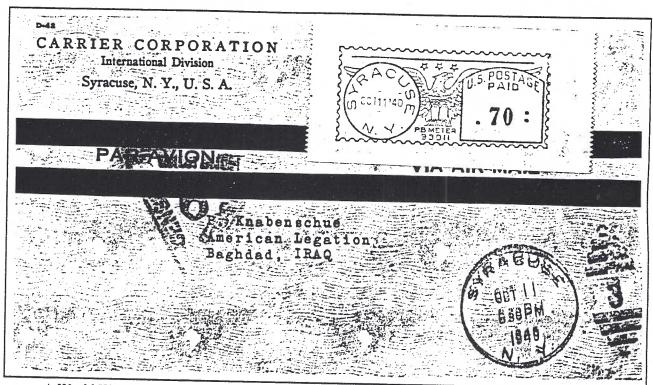
The first Scheduled airmail direct to Syracuse began June 1, 1928 on CAM #20.



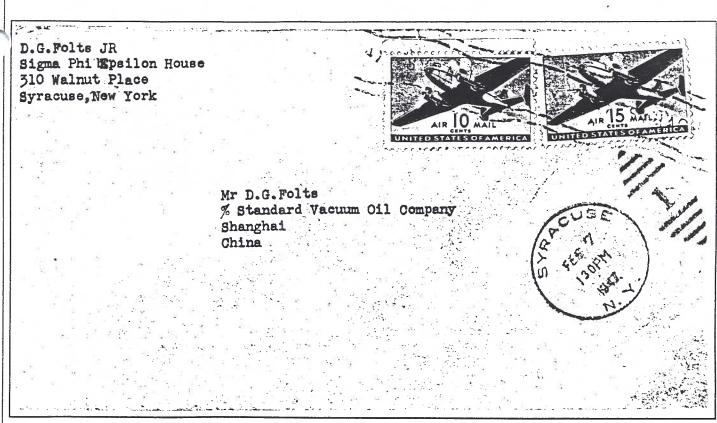
First air passenger service to Syracuse. The planes also flew the mail.



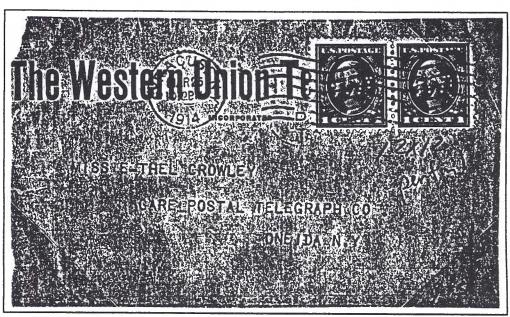
A first flight cover at the new 5¢ rate. The prior rate was 10¢.



A World War II cover to Iraq, postage 70¢, censored with a Bagdad receiving mark on the back.

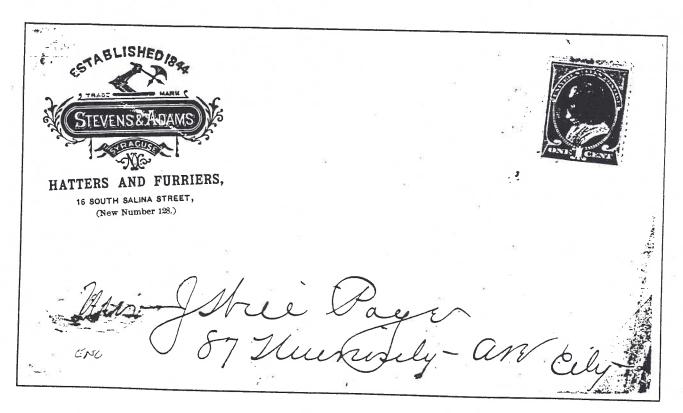


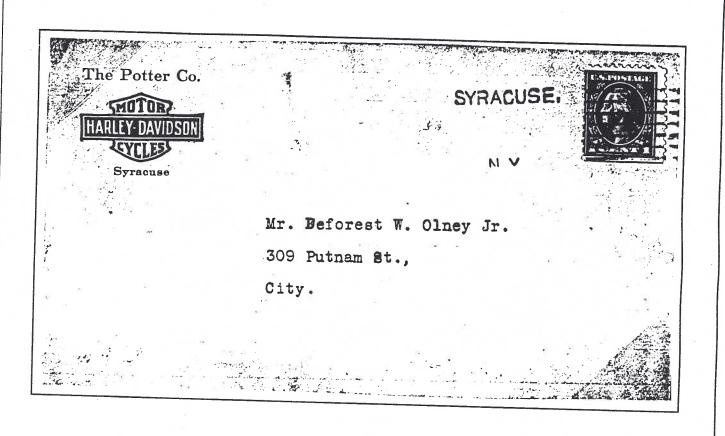
A post war cover to Shanghai, China. The postage was 25¢

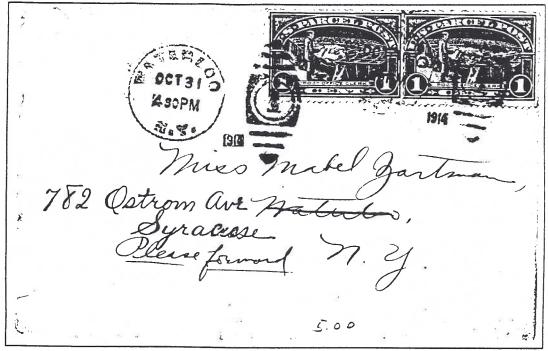


Mailed Western Union Telegram. The stamps are perfins.

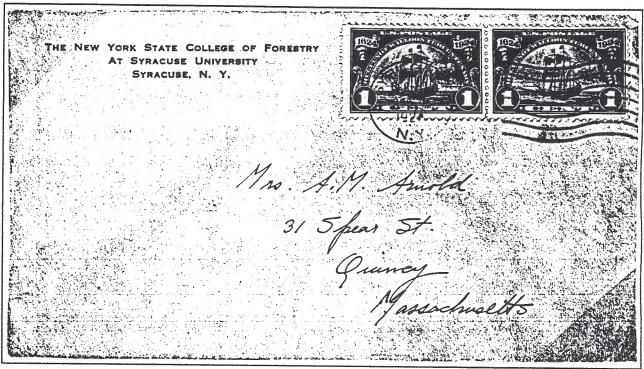
Two mute ad covers. They are called mute covers, because the date and time are omitted. In the second cover, a drop letter, everything is omitted.





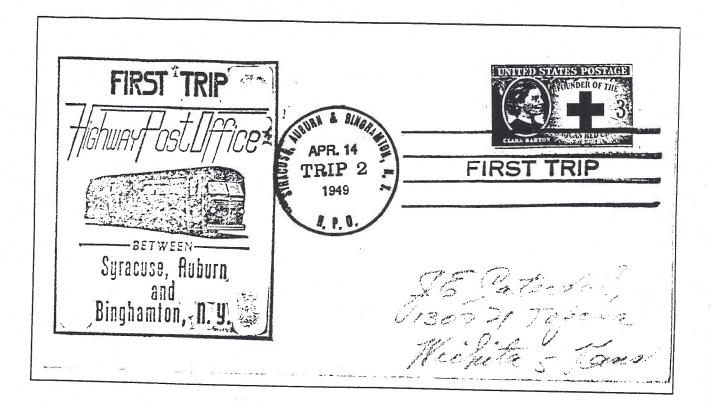


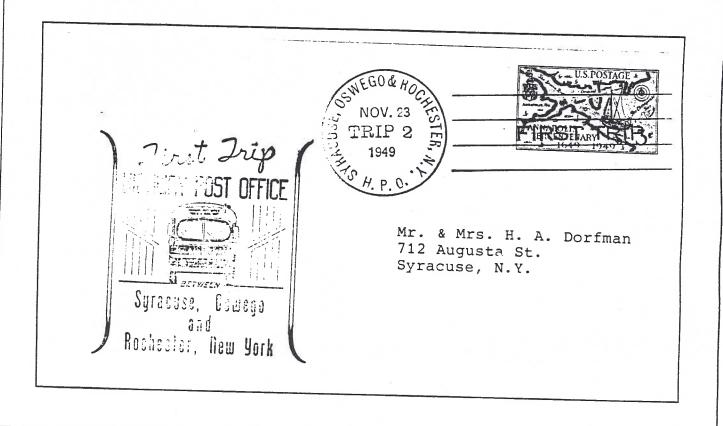
Two 1¢ parcel post stamps pay the rate for this cover forwarded to Syracuse. Parcel Post Stamps were allowed to be used on regular mail in 1913.



The stamps on this cover were canceled prior to the official first day of issue.

Two Highway postal first trip covers, one via Auburn and the other via Oswego.





MANUSCRIPT DATA STILL NEEDED!

Just because the Master Supplement has been published doesn't mean that there is no more work to be done. Please look over your copy (what do you mean, you haven't ordered one yet?) and send new towns, dates, or corrections to the editor. If you have suggestions about formt, they will be conisdered forthe next edition. WE URGENTLY NEED DATA ABOUT MULTI-COUNTY OFFICES! Your contribution is appreciated.

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- D. Pacqueboat covers, cancelled in NYC
- E. Covers to or from Central or South America, to, from, or through NYC

Please send photostats of covers with price wanted.

DO NOT SEND ACTUAL COVERS.

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