



EMPIRE STATE
POSTAL HISTORY
SOCIETY

APS UNIT 28

www.esphs.org

Meets twice annually

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POSTMASTER AND COUNTY CANCELS

By Glenn Estus

Postal history affords so many different avenues of collecting. Many New York collectors will usually have a small collection dealing with some aspect of the town, city, or county in which they live. Others will tend to search for subtopics that may extend across the state or across all 50 states. One such subtopic is *postmaster and county cancels*.

In the late 19th century, smaller post offices were expected to provide their postmarking devices at their own expense. Many of these offices purchased devices that included either the county location in the postmark, the postmaster's name, or both.

It actually makes sense that the *county name* would be included in the postmark. If you lived in Malone (Franklin County) and received a letter from your great-aunt Tilly telling you that she had just moved to Prospect Grove and to write soon, it would be a great help to know what county she lived in. It could even speed up your mail a bit if you included the county name in the address of your response to Aunt Tilly. In the days before postal automation, all sorting was done by hand. It would be a help to the mail sorters to see the county name. By the way, Prospect Grove was in Suffolk County and today is known as Shelter Island Heights.

But why would anyone include the *postmaster's name*? I believe in this case it's simply a matter of pride or ego. You're proud of being a postmaster and want to let the world know about it.

Of course, you could have the best of both worlds if you included *both* the *county name* and the *postmaster's name*, as is the case in the La Salle postmark.

Are there even more subtopics of county and postmaster cancels that one can collect? How about oval postmarks, rectangular postmarks — a very small subtopic, etc. And why be limited to New York State? Every state and almost every territory in the United States has the same possibilities.

Good hunting.