

STEAMBOAT MAIL AND THE U.S. 1847 ISSUE

EXHIBIT PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE: Presents a comprehensive study of inland waterway uses of the first postage stamps issued by the United States - the 5¢ and 10¢ stamps of 1847. Explains uses, postal rates, and markings. It is arranged by geography, as presented in the table at right. It is organized as follows:

- Bold sub-headers on each page indicate important organizational detail about the presented material, such as the port of entry into the mails or whether the cover was carried by route agent service. Additional information, if important, is presented at the upper right of each sub-header.
- The captions accompanying each item describe important information related to the stamps, postal markings, and use.
- ***Boldface, italicized*** statements describe important items, including the degree of rarity, supported by census data if available or based on the exhibitor's experience. Especially important items are highlighted with a **RED** box.

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HISTORY: The first US general issue stamps were authorized by the 3 March 1847 Act and signed into law by President Polk. The Act was effective 1 July 1847 and until 30 June 1851, the date of demonetization, the postal rates for single letters up to half-ounce in the US was 5¢ for distances under 300 miles or 10¢ if greater.

Steamboats had been carrying mail on inland waterways and along coastal routes since 1808 when the *Clermont* made its maiden voyage from New York City up the Hudson River to Albany, NY. Most mail carried on inland waterways was transported in closed bags under contract, thereby entering the postal system at the port of origin and lacking the distinguishing markings coveted by collectors and necessary for study. "Loose" letters, which represent a small percentage of inland waterway mail, were delivered by the steamboat master to the post office at the port of entry, thereby requiring adoption of special procedures and regulations.

Postmasters receiving loose letters of domestic origin from steamboats were to pay the boat master two cents per letter out of the normal postage. Postal charges were determined in the same manner as if conveyed by land and, unlike mail entering the postal system from outside the states, were not supposed to be assessed a "ship fee." Rates were based on distance between origin (as opposed to the port of entry) and destination.

Loose letters received from steamboats were marked with various handstamps - typically "STEAM" or "STEAMBOAT" straightlines - to ensure accurate accounting by local postmasters. Covers displayed in this exhibit are organized by waterway and port of entry where the steamboat markings were applied.

The material in this exhibit has been carefully curated from the most important collections ever formed of the 1847 issue. Many of the covers are the finest known and some are unique. ***Every item has at least one certificate from The Philatelic Foundation.***

HUDSON RIVER

Troy, New York



5¢, Red Brown shade, tied by blue 7-bar circular grid and matching "2 cts." double-circle handstamp for postage due with matching "TROY & NEW YORK/STEAM BOAT" two-line framed handstamp on blue folded letter to Schenectady, NY.

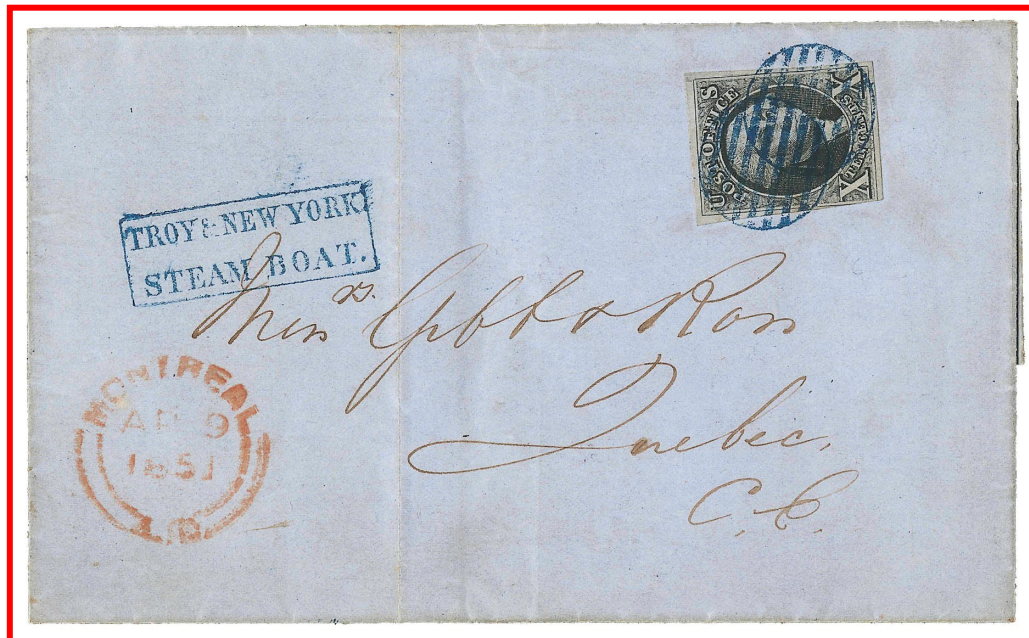
This letter was incorrectly assessed two-cents postage due as a ship fee by the Troy postmaster, inconsistent with postal rules that had been in effect since 1810.

HUDSON RIVER, CONT'D

Troy, New York

Troy was a major industrial city along the Hudson. Postal practices in Troy through at least the first half of 1842 conformed to the "origin to destination" land rate law applicable to loose letters received from steamboats, as explained on the title page. However, during the 1847 period the Troy postmaster added a two-cent fee to the postage received from steamboats on domestic mail. An authorization for adding the fee has not been found and it is suspected that the postmaster retained the incremental fee himself.

The cover presented on the title page entered the mails at Troy with the boxed "TROY & NEW YORK STEAM BOAT" handstamp, which was introduced in late 1848. It is also marked with a "2 cts." double-circle handstamp, indicating postage due as required by the Troy postmaster but inconsistent with the postal laws. The uses to Canada shown below were not assessed the additional two-cent fee, perhaps because of the foreign destination. Both covers originated in New York City and entered the mails at Troy.



TROY & NEW YORK
STEAM BOAT

10¢, position 64R, tied by two strikes of blue 7-bar circular grid with matching "TROY & NEW YORK/STEAM BOAT" two-line framed handstamp and red 9 April 1851 Montreal exchange office transit handstamp on blue folded cover to Quebec, Canada East.

10¢ vertical pair with bottom sheet margin, positions 86/96L, tied by "Troy N.Y./Sep2" (1850) circular datestamp with matching "TROY & NEW YORK/STEAM BOAT" two-line framed handstamp and manuscript "9" pence due marking on blue folded letter to Quebec, Canada East. The 10¢ pair pays double the over-300 mile land rate for less than one-half ounce from New York City.



The above covers represent the only two known examples of this marking used in conjunction with the 10¢ stamp to Canada. The top cover is the only example fully paid to destination by the U.S. stamp, and the bottom cover is the only example bearing a pair.

HUDSON RIVER, CONT'D

Route Agent Service

Hudson Riv. Mail N.Y.

Over the decades, mail volume on the Hudson grew significantly and the increased number of letters picked up enroute and at wharf boxes resulted in a need for steamboat route agent service, which began in August 1842. The two agents used a variety of postal markings, which had already evolved several times by the beginning of the 1847 period. The uses shown here illustrate the distinctive fine-grid cancel device and the "Hudson Riv. Mail N.Y." route agent postmark (Ryterband Type 3A*).



The type 3A device, above, has the letters "HUD" evenly spaced while the type 3B device, next page, has the "U" closer to the "H."



5¢, Grayish Brown shade, tied by red 17-bar grid in circle with matching "HUDSON RIV. MAIL N.Y./May 29" route agent's circular datestamp on cover to Cooperstown, NY.



10¢, left margin single, tied by red 17-bar grid in circle with matching "HUDSON RIV. MAIL N.Y./Jul 2" (1849) route agent's circular datestamp and manuscript "4 1/2" indicating postage due for the under-60 mile distance to the border on folded letter cover to Montreal, Canada East.

*Ryterband "types" referenced in this chapter reflect variations in handstamp markings as distinguished in "Fire on the Water" steamboat exhibit, available on the USPS website.

HUDSON RIVER, CONT'D

Route Agent Service

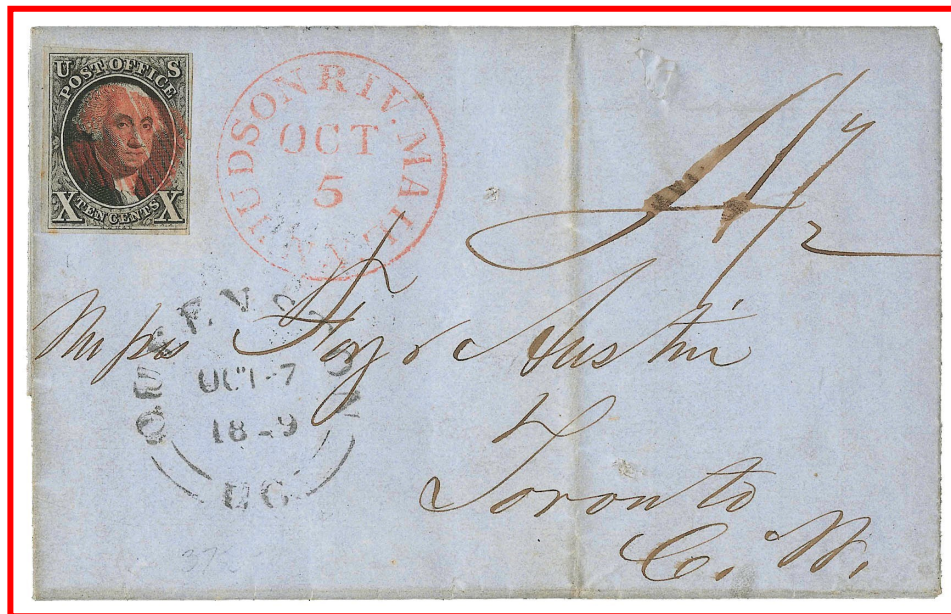
Hudson Riv. Mail N.Y./Hudson River Mail N.Y.

Unlike the distinctive fine-grid cancel device illustrated on the prior page, the route agent carrying the Ryterband Type 3B postmark devices used a wider, 15-bar grid as a cancel device.



Ryterband Type 3B device, with the "U" closer to the "H."

The 15-bar rectangular grid used on this cover is one of two known examples on Hudson River mail.



10¢ cancelled by red 15-bar rectangular grid with matching "HUDSON RIV. MAIL N.Y./Oct 5" (1849) route agent's circular datestamp with black "Queenston U.C./Oct 7, 1849" circular datestamp and manuscript "4 1/2" pence Canadian due marking indicating the postage due for the 60-mile distance to the border.

For the 1850 season, the two route agents serving on the Hudson River steamboats were supplied with new postal devices with "HUDSON RIVER MAIL N.Y." text ("Riv." replaced by "River"—Ryterband Type 4).



Ryterband Type 4 device, with "Riv." replaced by "River". The Type 4 device was used in 1850.

The only known example of a "RIVER MAIL" device with postage prepaid by an adhesive stamp.

10¢ cancelled by black pen strokes with matching "HUDSON RIVER MAIL N.Y./Jul 17" (1850) route agent's circular datestamp to Auburn, NY.

LAKE CHAMPLAIN

Whitehall, New York

STEAMBOAT



Lake Champlain served as the major communication link between Montreal, Canada, and the eastern United States. Whitehall is located at the southern-most portion of Lake Champlain and was a major port of entry for mail carried on Lake Champlain from northern ports, Vermont and Canada.

Unlike postmasters in almost all ports of entry, Whitehall did not postmark transit mail received from steamboats.

This cover was carried from Montreal to Whitehall on Lake Champlain by the Lake Champlain Transportation Co. It entered the U.S. mails at Whitehall for further transmission to NYC, where it received the "5" handstamp.

10¢ cancelled by blue numeral "5" handstamp and tied by two strikes of blue "STEAM*BOAT" straightline handstamp of Whitehall, NY on folded letter from Montreal, Canada datelined "Montreal 5th July 1848" to New York City with additional strike of the "STEAM*BOAT" marking at left.

The only recorded 1847 steamboat cover FROM Canada.

Route Agent Service

Route Agent service on Lake Champlain steamboats was inaugurated on 1 August 1849 when daily service by steamboat commenced from Whitehall, NY to Saint Johns, Canada. The daily service over the 150 mile mail route #943 required two post office agents.

5¢, Brown shade, cancelled by red fancy open grid of dots cancel with matching "LAKE CHAMPLAIN S.B./Jun 17" route agent's circular datestamp on folded address sheet to Burlington, VT.



Type 2B

Ryterband Type 2B device, distinguished from Type 2A by the smaller space between the "E" of "Lake" and "C" of "Champlain."



One of nine known 5¢ covers with the Lake Champlain route agent marking.

LAKE CHAMPLAIN, CONT'D

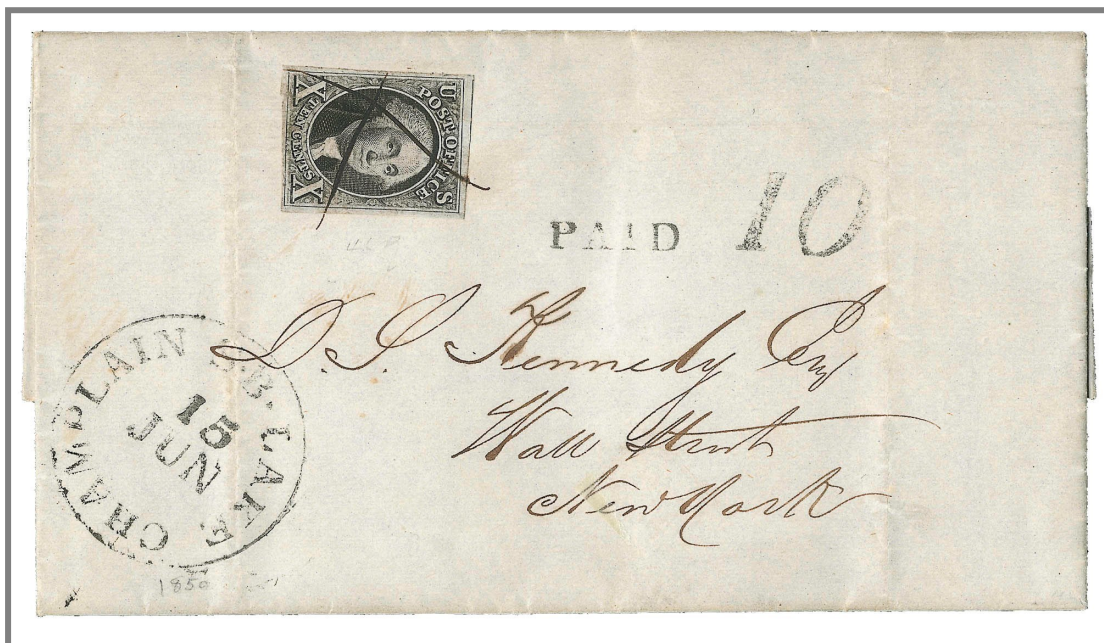
Route Agent Service



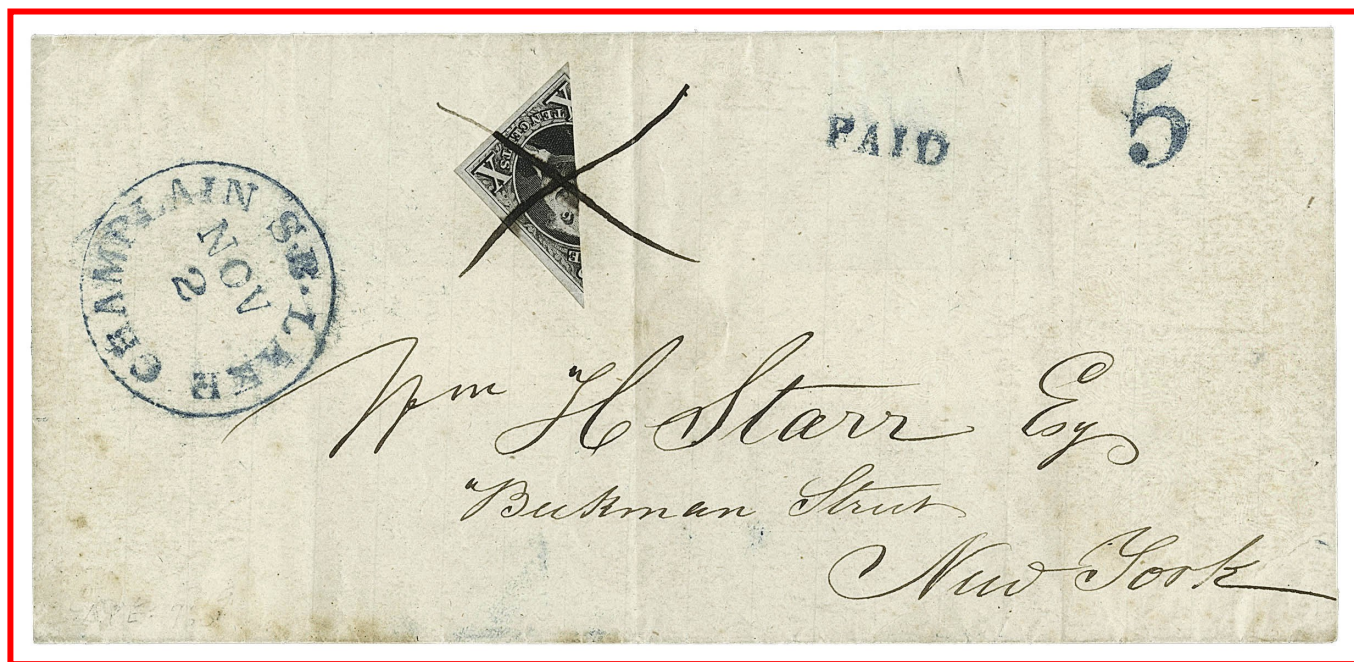
Type 2A

Ryterband Type 2A device with wider space between the "E" of "Lake" and "C" of "Champlain."

This cover was carried from Canada on Lake Champlain to Whitehall, NY where it entered the U.S. mails for further transmission to NYC.



10¢ tied by two pen strokes on 13 June 1850 folded letter from Canada with black "LAKE CHAMPLAIN S.B./Jun 15" route agent's circular datestamp and matching "PAID" straightline handstamp and numeral "10" handstamp to New York City.



10¢ bisect used as a 5¢ on folded cover with blue "LAKE CHAMPLAIN S.B./Nov 2" (ca. 1849) route agent's circular datestamp (Ryterband Type 2A) and matching "PAID" straightline handstamp and numeral "5" handstamp to New York City.

The only known 10¢ bisect used in conjunction with the "LAKE CHAMPLAIN S.B." route agent's marking and one of two known covers with the postmark in blue (the other is stampless).

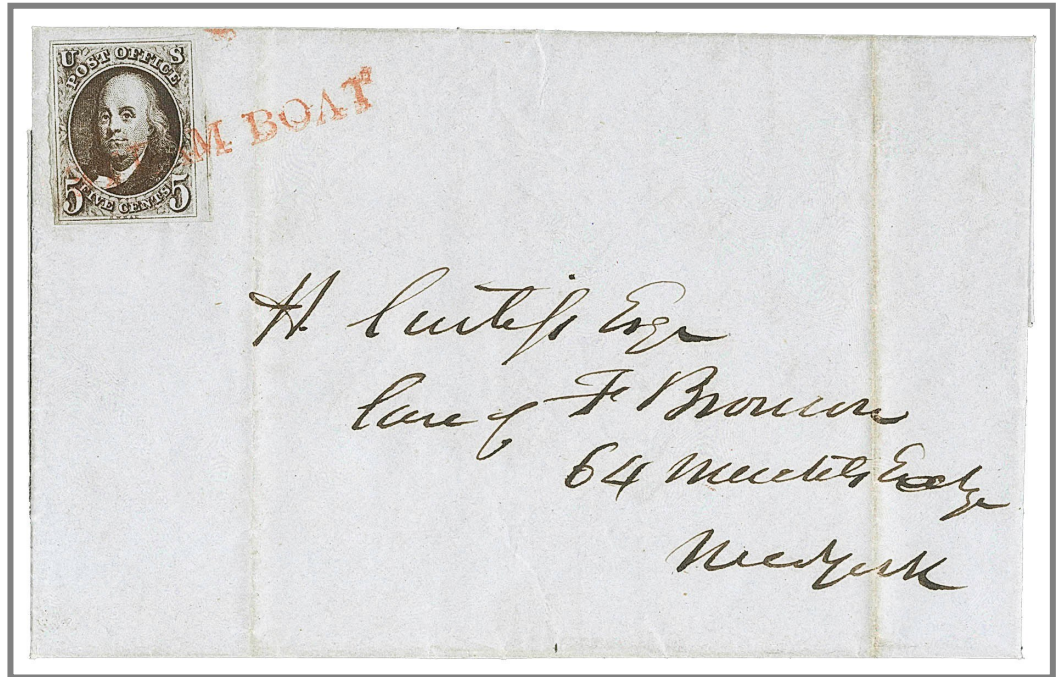
LONG ISLAND SOUND

New York City

The Long Island Sound served as a gateway to interstate commerce during the steamboat era with mail routes proliferating. Direct steamboat routes connected New York City with ports on the Sound including New Haven, New London, and Stonington. Steamboats also directly reached ports on the Connecticut River north to Hartford and the Thames River to Norwich.

STEAM BOAT

5¢, tied by red
"STEAMBOAT"
handstamp of New York
City on blue folded letter
on Atlantic House, R.I.,
illustrated stationery,
datelined "Newport, Aug.
3rd, 1849."



Route Agent Service: U.S. Express Mail

To compete with private express companies that were transporting a substantial amount of mail, the Post Office Department established Express Mail route agents that operated on and along both trains and steamboats on the Long Island Sound.



10¢ horizontal pair,
paying two-times
the over-300 mile
rate, tied by red 7-
bar grid cancels
with matching
"U.S. EXPRESS
MAIL Mass./
Boston/Apr 25"
route agent's
circular datestamp
on folded cover
from Boston, MA
via New York City
to Philadelphia, PA.

LONG ISLAND SOUND, CONT'D

Route Agent Service

Steamer Oregon

From August 1846 until it was withdrawn from the line on 18 November 1847, the Steamer *Oregon* carried a route agent on the portion of the express mail route #801 between New York City and Stonington, CT.

Three types of handstamp markings were used, as illustrated below. The first style of the "STEAMER OREGON" oval handstamps bears the steamer name at foot and was discontinued prior to the 1847 issue. The "STEAMER 10" marking, which was used from 16 April 1847 to 30 September 1847, is much rarer than the 5¢ markings and use with an 1847 adhesive stamp is extraordinarily rare.



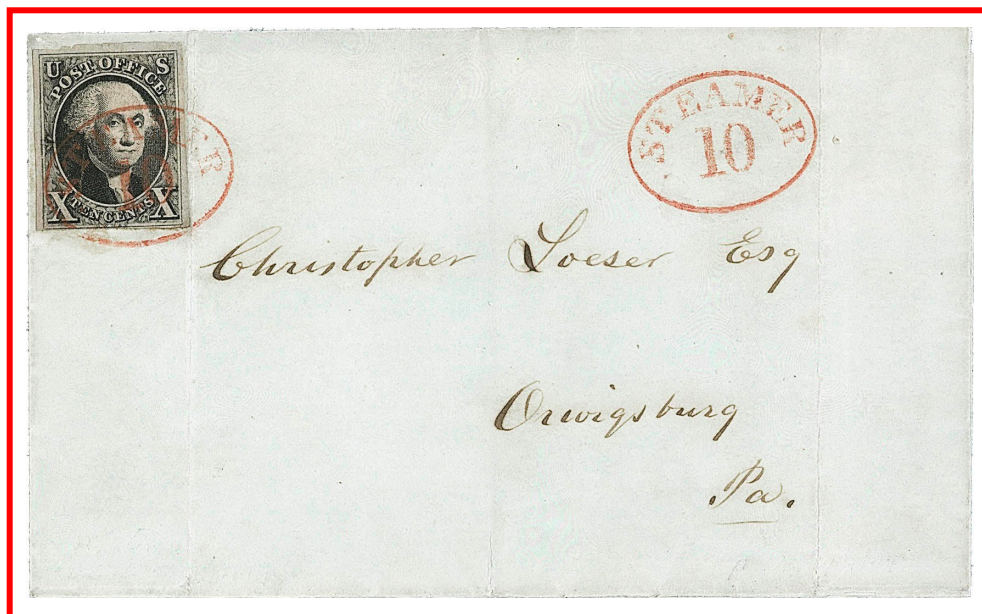
Type 1



Type 2



Type 3

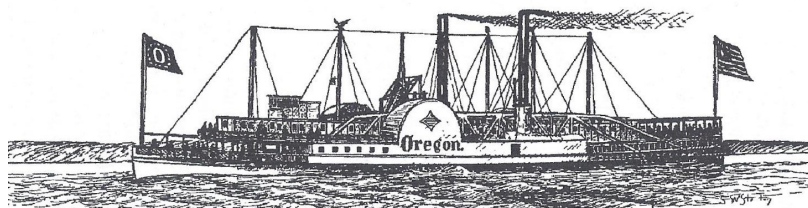


10¢ tied by red "STEAMER 10" oval route agent's handstamp, cancelled on board the boat, with a matching strike at right on 1 September 1847 folded letter datelined at Boston, MA via New York City to Orwigsburg, PA.

The only genuine recorded example of a 10¢ 1847 cover with the "STEAMER 10" handstamp.

The USPCS census illustrates approximately 17 covers bearing the red "Steamer 10" (or "Steamer 5") handstamp, but 15 are John A. Fox fakes addressed to Gardiner in Sag Harbor, Long Island, and identified as such in the census.

The only genuine examples are this 10¢ cover and a stained and defective cover addressed to New York City with two 5¢ stamps and weak strikes of the marking.



"OREGON"

LAKE ERIE

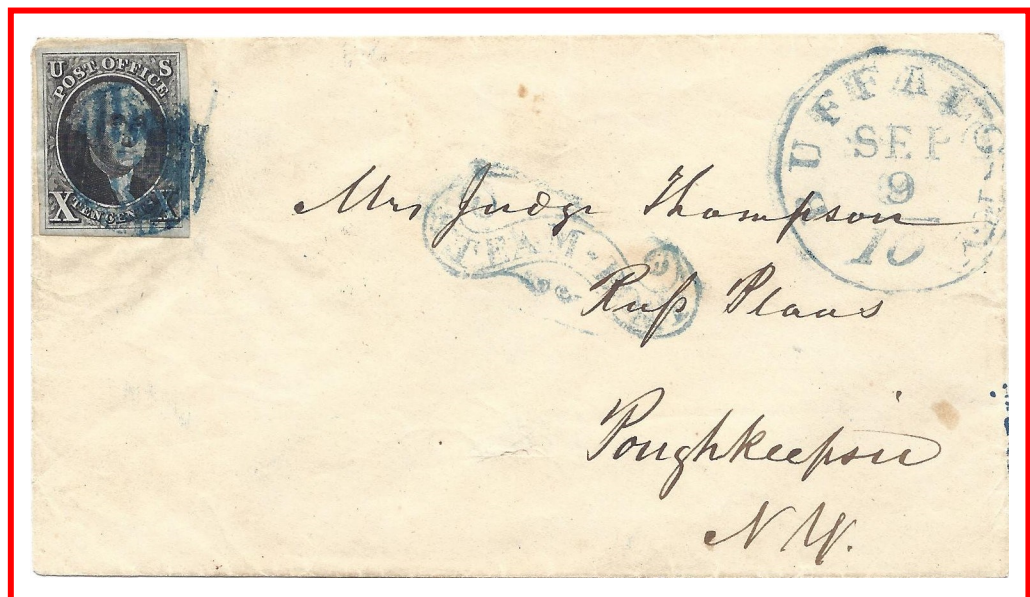
Buffalo, New York

Following the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, Buffalo had become one of the most active ports in the country by 1847. It connected New York and other eastern cities to Detroit, Cleveland, and other mid-western ports.



10¢, right sheet margin single, cancelled by blue circular grid on cover with matching “Buffalo N.Y./Jul 23/10” (1850) integral-rate circular datestamp and fancy “Buffalo/Steam Boat/10 cts.” handstamp to New York City.

One of two known examples of a 10¢ 1847 stamp used in conjunction with the fancy Buffalo Steam Boat marking.



10¢ tied by blue circular grid on cover with matching “Buffalo N.Y./Sep 9/10” (1850) integral-rate circular datestamp and fancy “STEAM-BOAT” in scroll handstamp to Poughkeepsie, NY.

One of two known examples of a 10¢ 1847 stamp used in conjunction with the fancy Buffalo Steam Boat marking.

ATLANTIC COASTAL STEAMERS

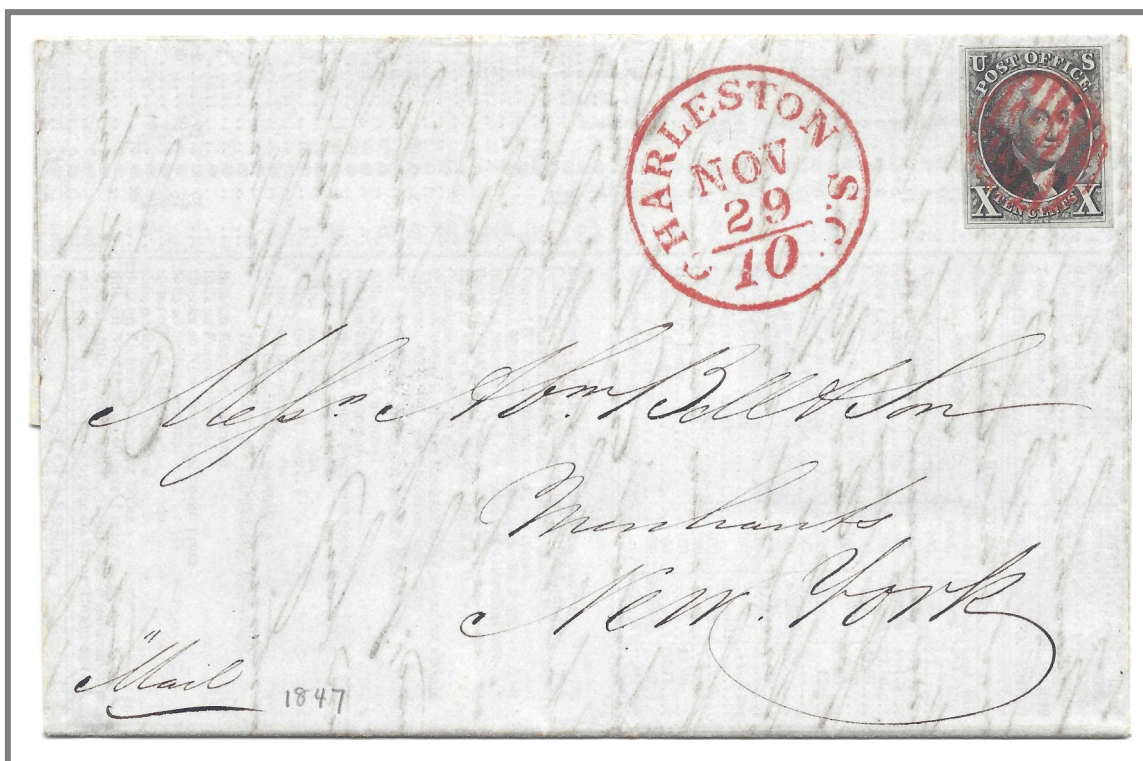
Eastport, Maine to NYC via Boston

The coastal waterways were deemed postal routes and domestic letters traveling by steamboat were therefore subject to the same rate structure as those traveling on inland waterways, including the origin to destination land rate law.

Charlotte, NC to New York City



10¢ tied by red 7-bar circular grid cancel and by matching "STEAM" straightline handstamp on folded letter datelined 4 July 1848, with matching "Boston/7 Jul/10 cts" integral-rate circular datestamp, carried by steamboat from Eastport, Maine to Boston where it entered the mails to New York City.



10¢ cancelled by red 7-bar circular grid on blue "Mercury Prices Current" with matching "Charleston S.C. /Nov 29/10" (1847) integral-rate circular datestamp, carried by coastal steamboat "Southener" (Spofford, Tileston—departing Nov. 29) to New York City.

ATLANTIC COASTAL STEAMERS, CONT'D

New York City to Philadelphia

New York City to Newark, NJ



This cover was carried to NY by steamboat outside of contract mail bags and then forwarded to Philadelphia by rail.

5¢, Red Brown shade with intermediate impression, tied by red square grid of New York City with matching “New-York/12 Aug/5 cts.” integral-rate circular datestamp and “STEAMBOAT” straightline handstamp on folded cover to Philadelphia.

This cover combines numerous aspects of philatelic interest including carriage by steamboat outside contract mail bags, use of a rate handstamp to cancel the stamp, and franking with a sheet margin stamp displaying a double transfer plate variety.



5¢, Red Brown shade with right sheet margin and Type A Double Transfer, tied by two strikes of red “5” numeral in circle handstamp with matching “New-York/Dec 13” circular datestamp and “STEAMBOAT” straightline handstamp on folded cover to Newark, NJ.

WESTERN RIVERS

Louisville & Cincinnati Mail Line

The Louisville & Cincinnati Mail Line provided daily service on the Ohio River between those cities, with multiple stops between. Two styles of datestamp were used during the 1847 period, as illustrated below.

5¢, Red Brown shade, two singles originally forming a vertical pair and one showing top sheet margin, arranged tete-beche, tied by blue grid cancels on blue folded letter to Philadelphia, PA with matching "LOUISVILLE & CINCINNATI MAIL LINE/ Jun 27" (1851) balloon style circular route agent's handstamp.

This cover represents a late use of the stamps, just four days before the July 1, 1851 demonetization.



One of two covers bearing an 1847 stamp and the balloon style marking and the only one bearing 5¢ stamps according to the USPCS census.



10¢ tied by blue 7-bar circular grid cancel and matching "LOUISVILLE & CINCINNATI/MAIL LINE Apr 22" (with date in manuscript) rectangular style route agent's handstamp on cover to Philadelphia, PA.

One of two covers bearing an 1847 stamp and the rectangular style marking and the only one bearing a 10¢ stamp according to the USPCS census.

WESTERN RIVERS, CONT'D

The Mississippi River

“STEAM” and “STEAMBOAT” handstamps served the same purpose, but the former was generally used on Western waterways, such as the Mississippi, and the latter in the East.



10¢ tied by black circle cancel on 4 December 1848 folded letter with matching “STEAM” straightline handstamp, endorsed “pr. Alice” sender directive at top left, carried by steamboat from St. Louis down the Mississippi River to New Orleans for port of entry delivery.



This cover is datelined “Rodney (Miss.) March 14, 1850.” An article in the *Chronicle* Issue 60, page 123 discusses this cover, noting “Rodney a river town important enough before the Civil War to receive a supply of 1847 stamps but now too small to be shown on a Rand McNally road map.”

This cover was carried down the Mississippi on the *General Worth*.

5¢, Red Brown shade with intermediate impression and dot in “S” variety, tied on folded letter to Natchez, MS by two strikes of black circular grid cancel with matching “STEAM” straightline handstamp and manuscript sender’s directive “Genl. Worth.”

WESTERN RIVERS, CONT'D

The Mississippi River

Name-of-Boat Handstamps

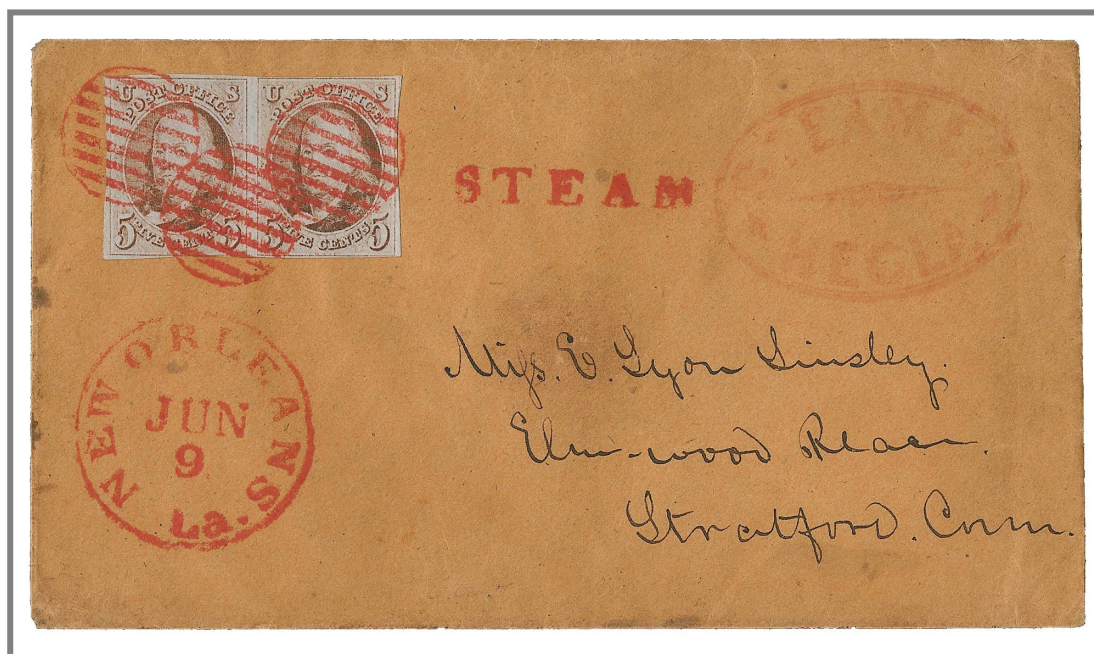
"Name-of-Boat" markings were applied by the steamboat master to advertise the vessel and provide other information deemed important by the owner of the steamboat that carried the letter. The earliest "Name-of-Boat" handstamp marking was used on the *Franklin* on Lake Champlain in 1832. By the 1850s, Name-of-Boat markings became common, especially on mail carried by packet boat on the lower Mississippi River, but are rare on covers franked with the 1847 issue.



5c, Red Brown shade, horizontal pair tied by two strikes of red 7-bar circular grid cancels on cover to Stratford, CT with matching "STEAM" straightline handstamp and red "STEAMER/FASHION" oval name-of-boat handstamp. There is no town datestamp but the cover entered the mails in New Orleans.

The only recorded example of this Mississippi and Red River steamboat marking on an 1847 cover in the USPCS census.

5c, Red Brown shade, horizontal pair tied by three strikes of red 7-bar circular grid cancels on cover to Stratford, CT with matching "New Orleans La./Jun 9" circular datestamp and "STEAM" straightline handstamp, and red "STEAMER/HECLA" oval name-of-boat handstamp.



The *Fashion* and *Hecla* were steam powered packet boats built in 1848 and 1847, respectively. Both operated on the Mississippi and Red Rivers. The name-of-boat markings were applied by the steamboat master, who received a two-cent fee for conveyance along the river, and the postal markings were applied at the port of entry in New Orleans upon entering the U.S. postal system.

OTHER CANADA

Uses to and from Canada are presented elsewhere in this exhibit. Presented in this chapter are unusual routes.

To Kingston, Canada

3-pence Ferriage Rate

The 3-pence ferriage rate applied to mail crossing between Cape Vincent, NY and Kingston, Canada. While a short trip, it required two ferries and a land crossing. The ferriage rate applied until the new U.S.-Canadian postal treaty took effect on 6 April 1851. Very few ferriage rate covers are known with 1847 stamps.



5¢, Orange Brown shade tied by red 7-bar circular grid on folded cover to Kingston, Canada with matching "Cleveland O./Mar 28" (1850) circular datestamp and manuscript "3" pence ferriage rate applied in Canada.



10¢, tied by red 7-bar circular grid on folded letter to Kingston, Canada with matching "New-York/Dec 1" (1849) circular datestamp and manuscript "3" pence ferriage rate applied in Canada.

OTHER CANADA, CONT'D

To Prince Edward Island

Via Steamboat and Steamer

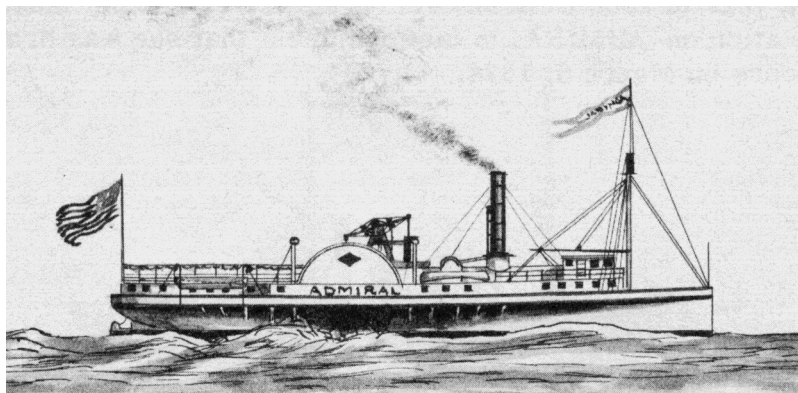
One of two known covers received at Eastport, Maine as a steamboat letter and at St. John, New Brunswick as a ship letter.



10¢ tied by red 7-bar circular grid cancels on folded letter to Prince Edward Island datelined “Boston, U. States, Thursday, 10th May, 1849” with matching “STEAM•BOAT” straightline handstamp and Roman numeral “X” handstamp (crossed out), endorsed “via New Brunswick” sender’s directive at bottom, and black “ST.JOHN•N•B/SHIP LETTER” two-line handstamp, and manuscript “1/4” ship letter rate due marking (1 shilling, 4 pence).

The earliest of three recorded 1847 issue covers to Prince Edward Island and the only one sent by steamer. Only one other 1847 cover, which was sent to Pictou, Nova Scotia, possesses this combination of markings.

This cover originated in Boston and entered the mails at Eastport, Maine, where the red “STEAM•BOAT” and Roman numeral “X” markings were applied. The cover then left Eastport on the steamer *Maid of Erin* on its regularly scheduled trip to St. John, New Brunswick, arriving on Saturday, May 12. At St. John the cover entered the British mail system as a ship letter, receiving the “ST.JOHN•N•B/SHIP LETTER” handstamp and manuscript “1/4” due marking for further conveyance to Pictou, Nova Scotia, and on to Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. The cover is backstamped St. John (May 12), Pictou (May 14) and Prince Edward Island (May 17).



The letter contents describe the sender’s journey and explains the extraordinary combination of waterway markings. The writer arrived in Portland the day before drafting the letter and then traveled by rail to Boston. He anticipated further travel to New York City and then taking a steamer to Halifax, thus entrusting the letter to a steamboat master rather than placing it in the mails at the Boston post office. The steamboat was likely the *Admiral*, captained by Hiram Favor who carried it to Eastport for conveyance to Canada via steamer.