

A PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

Cincinnati's Carrier Service During The Free Period

By Robert B. Meyersburg

POST OFFICE, CINCINNATI, OCTOBER, 1854.—Letter Boxes have been established at the corners of principal streets and public places, for the purpose of enabling the citizens to mail their letters, without subjecting them to the inconvenience of visiting the office.

Carriers' Stamps will be for sale at all the points at which boxes are located, and all letters intended for the mails must be prepaid by a one-cent stamp. Mr. C. C. WILLIAMS, who has been appointed Letter Carrier, will superintend the business. J. L. VATTNER, P. M.

U. S. MAIL LETTER BOX.

Letters for the Postoffice must be prepaid by a one-cent blue stamp.

Letters and Packages intended for City Delivery must be prepaid by one of Williams' two cent brown stamps, or two of the one-cent blue (eagle) stamps.

Letters containing valuable inclosures should be marked "Valuable."

Letters intended for the Afternoon Mails should be dropped into the boxes previous to 1 o'clock P. M. Those intended for the Morning Mails should be dropped into the boxes previous to 6 P. M.

Letters intended for City Delivery will be delivered promptly after being taken from the boxes. Such letters should be plainly directed, with the number and streets on them.

Office—Gest's Building, Fourth street, between Walnut and Vine streets, room No. 11, up stairs. oc 9

Postoffice.

CINCINNATI, October 30, 1854.

List of Steamers from New York and Boston, for Europe, Havana and California, for the month of November 1854.

Figure 1.

Cincinnati is known to have had carrier service as early as 1838, but for reasons still unclear it was not continuous. There was a period between October 1845 and June 1849 during which there is no evidence of government carrier service. Hiram Frazer, one of the early letter carriers, resigned from the Post Office in October 1845 and established Frazer's City Express Post, which provided city mail service during this period. From June 1849 until sometime in 1851 government carrier service was again available.

The Postal Act of March 3, 1851 empowered the Postmaster General to "establish post routes within cities and towns, to provide for conveying letters to the post office, by establishing suitable and convenient places of deposit, and by employing carriers to receive and deposit them in the post office; also to cause letters to be delivered by suitable carriers, at a charge not exceeding one or two cents each letter." While other cities, most notably New York, Philadelphia and New Orleans, reorganized their carrier service to accommodate the new routes, there is no evidence that any of Cincinnati's streets were declared to be post roads or routes, nor was there any reorganization of the carrier service. To the contrary, it appears that the existing carrier service was again dropped, with neither government nor private letter delivery from the post office until carrier service was resumed late in 1854. This hiatus was filled by Browne's City Post and Sullivan's Dispatch Post, both local posts.

On September 22, 1854, Claudius C. Williams and James W. Wilson were appointed letter carriers, less than six weeks before the official carrier service under Williams' superintendency began operation. On October 27, 1854 the Cincinnati Daily Gazette carried the following notice:

"CITY LETTER CARRIER--Mr. C.C. Williams has been regularly appointed by the Post Office Department, letter carrier in this city, and will commence his duties on Monday. His signs are now stuck up at the several places of deposit, and the boxes in which the letters are to be dropped, will be found inside, and also stamps for the payment of the carrier. This business has repeatedly broken down in this city, but an effort will now be made to place it on a permanent and reliable basis."

Two days later, the advertisement of Cincinnati Postmaster John L. Vattier appeared in The Enquirer (Figure 1). This notice clearly confirms the official status of Williams City Post, and it makes clear the fact that the one cent postage stamp of 1851 was not acceptable for prepayment of any of the carrier fees. Only the Eagle carrier stamp could prepay the delivery fee to the mails, and either two Eagle stamps or one Williams two-cent brown stamp could prepay the city delivery fee. A small number of the Williams City Post stamps on cover are known, all used during 1855. From 1855 until its demonetization in 1861, only the Eagle stamps have been seen prepaying carrier fees in Cincinnati.

When Williams established the Williams City Post, upon being appointed superintendent of the Cincinnati carrier service, he acquired a canceling device in the form of a squared target. A study by the author and a search of The Philatelic Foundation records has turned up fewer than a dozen strikes of this canceler, all presumed to have been struck in 1854 and 1855. A photographic record of these items is presented herein; a full description of the photos follows at the end of this article.

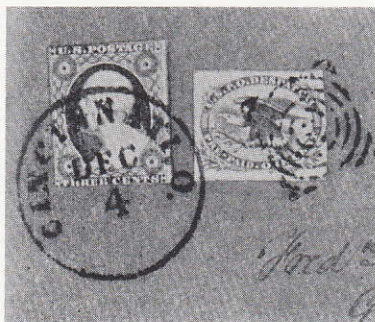


Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.

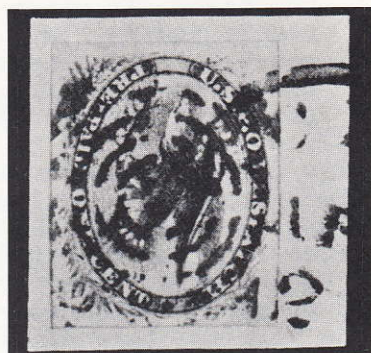


Figure 6.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.



Figure 10.



Figure 9.

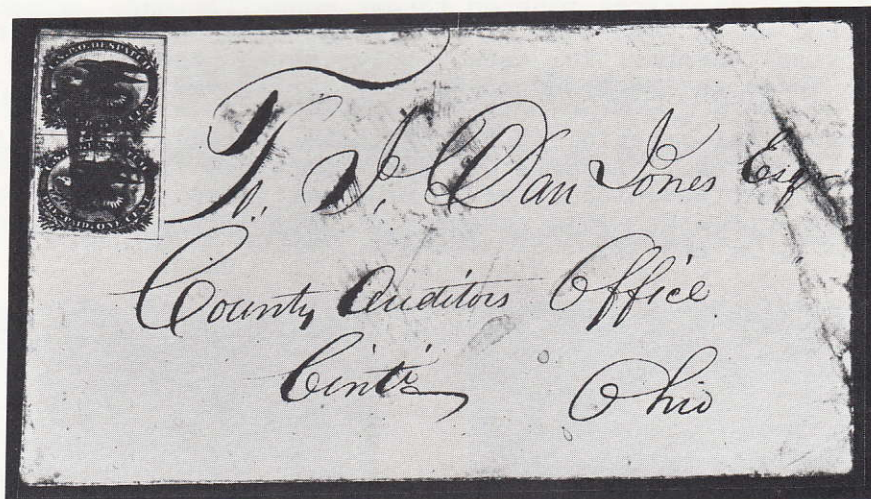


Figure 11.

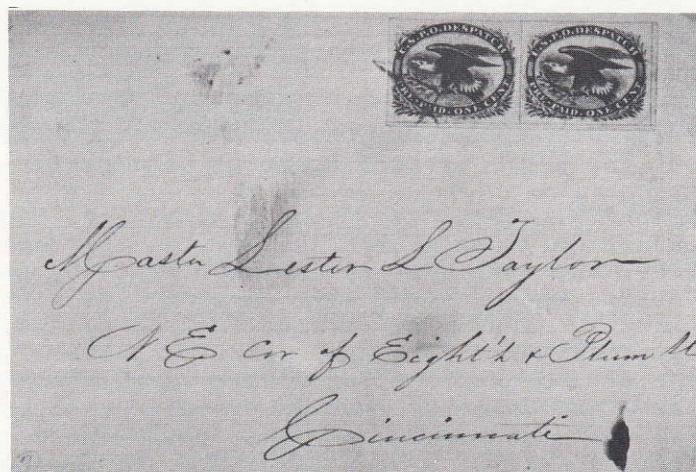


Figure 12.

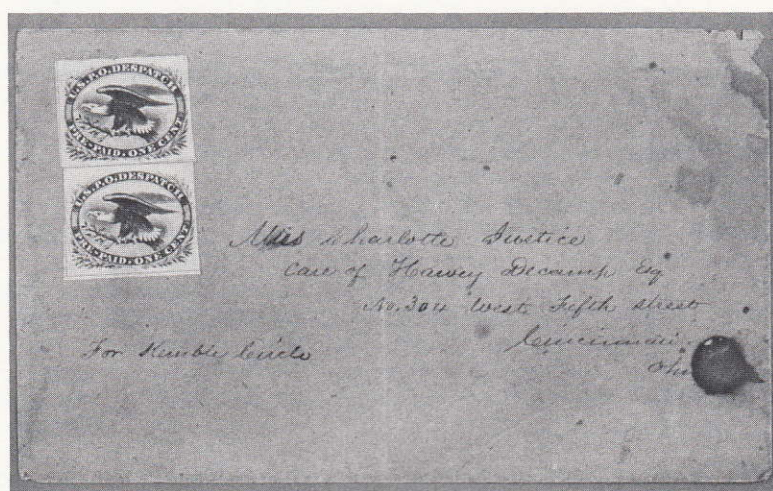


Figure 13.

Along with the scarce squared target cancellations, Cincinnati also is the source of an even scarcer item, the city mail letter bearing two Eagle carrier stamps. To date, only three such covers have been reported. These are pictured in Figures 11, 12 and 13.

The historical material in this article is taken from Elliot Perry's manuscript records. Readers who are interested in learning more about Cincinnati's carrier history will find articles of interest in the August and September 1974 issues of The Philatelist and in Pat Paragraphs 25, 26 and 27.

The writer would appreciate learning of the existence of any unlisted squared target cancellations, and any city mail letters bearing two Eagle stamps.

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Descriptions of All Known Cincinnati Carrier Usages During The Fee Period

- Figure (2) Enlargement of December 4, 1854, blue cancellation on Eagle carrier, to Georgetown, Ohio. This is the earliest recorded use of the Eagle carrier stamp in Cincinnati.
- Figure (3) December 19, 1854, red cancellation on Eagle carrier, to Denmark. Only the right half of the original envelope front remains, the left half having been removed, presumably to get the stamps which, along with those on the right half, prepaid the 21-cent open mail rate to England by American packet. A reconstruction shows the correct postal rate. The light strike of the red squared target marking on the Eagle stamp proves conclusively that it prepaid the carrier fee to the mails, and did not, as has been widely stated by some experts, "make up a ten cent rate to Germany." Very few Eagle carrier stamps are known used on international mail.
- Figure (4) December 20, 1854, red cancellation on Eagle carrier, to Poplar Ridge, N.Y.
- Figure (5) February 12, 1855, red cancellation on Eagle carrier, to Union, Ohio.
- Figure (6) Enlargement of April 2-, 1855, Eagle carrier, on piece, color of cancellation not known.
- Figure (7) May 29, 1855, red cancellation on Williams 2-cent stamp, city mail.
- Figure (8) June 5, 1855, blue cancellation on Eagle stamp, to Washington D.C.
- Figure (9) September 25, 1855, red cancellation on Eagle carrier, to Pittsburgh, Pa.
- Figure (10) Enlargement of undated, red cancellation on Williams 2-cent stamp, "socked on the nose".
- Figures (11-13) Only known covers with two Eagle carriers, city mail.