

Interested in Collecting US Local and Carrier Stamps?

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Interested in collecting US local and carrier stamps? I will be your guide for a brief tour.

It's not hard to find local and carrier stamps at stamp bourses, on the Internet via eBay or through one of the many commercial sites, in auctions, in group lots, etc. But it is hard to decide whether to collect them, how to collect them, and how to find more information about them. The purpose of this article is to introduce this collecting area to those who are curious about these old stamps, at least from my viewpoint as a collector.

One of the best resources to start with is the *Scott Specialized Catalog of US Stamps & Covers*. Be sure to use a recent issue, because for many years the section on carriers and locals used images of forgeries for a number of the stamps. These have been corrected, and prices are more up-to-date because some large old-time collections have been sold since 1999. You'll find this section sandwiched between the Booklet Panes and Vending Machine areas, and the Stamped Envelopes section. Most would call locals and carriers "back-of-the-book" items, but these days they are in the middle of the catalog!

It's always a good idea to read the introduction to each section in the *catalog*, and there is one for the Carriers section and one for the Locals section. As you look over the listings, you will see that many of them are similar to the listings for the US classic stamps. In other words, varieties are noted under each stamp. These might include shades, uses on covers of various types, pairs and blocks, double transfers, cancellations, and so on. When you look at the *catalog* valuations, you see they vary widely, from less than a dollar to tens of thousands of dollars.

If you start to ask your favorite dealers or collectors about carriers and locals, you might find out that for the most part, very few seem to know much about them beyond what the catalog states. You might also hear that there are reprints and forgeries of most of them, so you should be a little hesitant about buying them without doing some homework.

Let's take a stroll through the *Scott Catalog*. Look at number 40L1 in the Locals section (**Figure 1**). Here we see a nicely engraved portrait of George Washington on a three cent black stamp. But check out the date! This is the first adhesive stamp used in the US and was issued on Feb. 1, 1842. Now, go to 6LB1 under City Carrier Department Stamps. Here we see exactly the same stamp, but with a "US" cancellation. If we read the text, we see that the US Post Office bought the private local delivery service of Alexander Grieg, used his stamps, and named him superintendent for local delivery from the New York City Post Office. Looking down the *catalog*, we see stamps on different colored papers that look just the same, except the name is now "United States City Despatch Post" instead of simply "City



Figure 1. George Washington on the 401L1 adhesive issued on February 1, 1842.



Figure 2. The General Issue Franklin carrier, L01, at the left and the general issue, L02, Eagle carrier adhesive at the right.



Figure 3. 149L1 W. Wyman's stamp. First stamp to depict a train.



Figure 4. 15L3 Blood's (Roberson & Co.) World's first propaganda stamp. First pictorial and first mail carrier stamp.

Despatch Post.” So, it turns out that these are the very first stamps used in the US, and that 6LB3 is noted to be the first stamp issued by authority of the US Post Office Department. In July of 1845, the NYC Postmaster issued his own provisional stamps to pay the five cents for carrying mail between cities, and finally in 1847 the first US general issues were prepared (*Scott* numbers 1 and 2).

The catalog gives the two official (general issue) carrier stamps the designations “LO1” and “LO2” (**Figure 2**). The next four carrier stamps are actually reprints of the originals. The next part of the Carriers section in the *catalog* is called “City Carrier Department Stamps.” These stamps are grouped alphabetically by the city in which they were used. What are they? According to the introduction of this section, the city carrier department stamps were those issued in various cities to prepay the appointed official letter carriers’ fees for delivery of mail. (This section used to be named “Semi-Official Stamps.”) We can see that in Baltimore, for example, stamps were issued that said “Post Office Despatch” or “Carrier’s Despatch” or “Government City Dispatch.” In Charleston, SC, however, several carriers were employed and used their own names on these stamps, such as Honour, Kingman and Steinmeyer. The Philadelphia stamps look very official, as they all include “U.S.P.O.” in the design. During this early time period, city carriers were employed by the US Post Office but did not receive a salary. Instead, they were paid a fee for each letter by the sender.

If we move to the Local Stamps section, we see that the numbering system starts with a number, has an “L” for local in the middle, and ends with a number. These stamps are arranged alphabetically for the most part, so that “Adams & Co.’s Express” is first and “Zieber’s” is last. But look below the Zieber stamp and you will see a cross-reference for those stamps whose first number is not in the expected alphabetic sequence. These items were added to the *catalog* after the first 150 were numbered, so that “Faunce’s Penny Post” is listed with other posts starting with “F” but has a first number of 152. The end number is simply which stamp in sequence is which for those posts who made more than one stamp. Most of the time, these numbers are in chronological order by when they were issued.

If you are still on that page, look at local 149L1 (**Figure 3**). This is the first stamp to show a picture of a train ever issued, so railroad collectors like this one. Now go to 15L3 (**Figure 4**). Is this the world’s first pictorial stamp, issued in 1843? It certainly is the first stamp to show a mail carrier at work, although leaping over the Philadelphia post office is a stretch of the imagination! Because the illustration depicts a private post’s mail carrier leaping over the US Post Office in Philadelphia, it is likely the world’s first propaganda stamp. If you look more closely at the listings for Blood’s, you will see there are three sections, and each group of stamps in the section was issued by a different owner of Blood’s. The first stamps don’t say anything about D. O. Blood, but 15L4 shows his name signed on the 15L3 stamp. Should we call this post “Philadelphia Despatch Post,” as it was first named, or should we continue to call it “D. O. Blood & Co.”? I suppose this is an argument for the specialists in this area, but I am content to call them all Blood’s stamps.



Figure 5. The 75L1, Hale & Co. adhesive on cover, issued in 1844. Perhaps the first stamp to show letters. This company delivered mail intracity.

Glancing through the listings, you see lots of different designs of these local stamps, with some companies operating for less than a year, and others lasting forty years! Some operated in small cities, others in the largest cities.



Figure 6. Boyd's City Post and Pomeroy's Letter Express. July 8, 1844.

Now look at 75L1 by Hale & Co. (**Figure 5**). Here we see a stamp issued in 1844, perhaps the world's first stamp to show letters. But the description tells us that this company delivered mail from one city to another, just like the US Post Office! The price for the stamp was six cents according to the catalog (actually, it was six and one-fourth cents or twenty for a dollar). This price did not depend on the distance the letter traveled, so Hale clearly wanted to undercut the USPO's delivery rates, which at the time were based on distance carried. Customers could save perhaps 25% when mailing a letter!

Most of the other local stamps listed were prepared by companies who wanted to make money by delivering mail in cities which had no or little USPO local delivery services. Remember, during this time period, it was customary to “drop” your letter at the post office, whether it was for a local addressee or for out of town service. If it were for a local person, he might have to go to the post office and ask if he had any mail. Often he had to pay for the mailing charges.

Thus it is clear to see that these private enterprises were finding a niche in which to provide a service to customers, and in many cases they were successful. The government wanted to get this business revenue, and started to increase their services, modeled after the local posts. Eventually, the government passed laws and conducted raids and arrests to force the private companies out of business. Nevertheless, the local and carrier posts brought a new level of service to the public from the government, and the public also benefited from decreased costs to mail letters and other material. Eventually, one after another from city to city, the private local posts were forced out of business.

Back to Hale & Co. Unlike the local posts, this company, as well as others including the American Letter Mail Company, Well’s Letter Express, and Pomeroy’s Letter Express, made money delivering mail between cities in 1844 and 1845. Sometimes, they would transfer a letter to a local post for street address delivery, and examples of covers with two or three companies’ handstamps or stamps are considered very desirable (**Figure 6**). The government stopped this competition for mail between two cities in 1844 and 1845 in the various cities involved.

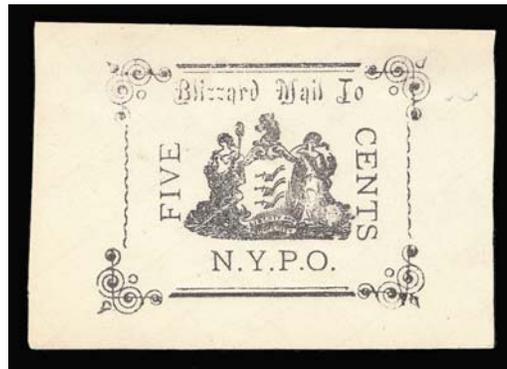


Figure 7. Blizzard Mail stamp used during the Blizzard of 1888.

Now look at the Blizzard Mail Co. stamp (**Figure 7**), right before Blood’s in the *catalog*. Here is a company that carried mail for a fee during the blizzard of 1888 in New York City. It was only used for five days! And what about McGreely’s Express in Alaska (**Figure 8**)? The scene shows a dogsled, but apparently they planned to carry mail by motorboat in Alaska in 1898. The small print below says “The status of No. 155L1 is questioned.”



Figure 8. McGreely's Express adhesive, 155L1, from Alaska.



Figure 9. Forgery A of the Wyman's stamp shown in Figure 3. This forgery was made by George Hussey.

It is easy to see why collecting locals and carriers can get confusing. Companies like Hale and American Letter Mail Company did not deliver letters locally, so they are usually referred to as "Independent Mail Companies." Yet, they are listed with the Local companies that delivered mail only within a city, either to the US Post Office or to a local addressee. There are different periods of use, from the 1840's to the end of the nineteenth century, although later posts were largely illegal. In addition, there are many "modern" local posts which are not listed but which made stamps and put them on mail that they may have delivered to the Post Office in the twentieth century, such as Herman Herst's "Shrub Oak Local Dog Post."

Are you discouraged yet? Interested? If interested, you might ask where to get album pages for the local stamps. Does *Scott* make them for its albums, or does any other album/page company? The answer is "No." This fact may be the biggest discouragement to collecting for many.

By looking through the *catalog*, there are certainly a lot of stamps in this area that could be collected. However, some are so rare that you might have to wait a long time to find one, and then be prepared to pay a lot of money! But others are fairly common, and most collectors will be able to find them.



Figure 10. Forgery made by Taylor, perhaps in the 1860's.

But there is another problem facing the potential collector of US local and carrier stamps - the large number of reprints and forgeries that are also available, sometimes mistakenly described as the real thing, especially on internet sites. How can a beginner in this area avoid buying one of these when he wants the real thing? The first thing to do is compare the stamp that is offered with the illustration in the *catalog* and its description of color. Very often, the forgery will be a crude imitation of the authentic stamp, and printed in inks and papers that are not listed in the *catalog*. Another "red flag" is the unused stamp. Not many of the reprints or forgeries were cancelled in any way, and those that are have a cancellation not listed in the *catalog*, probably a fake cancellation. In general, a cancelled stamp is much more likely to be genuine than a forgery. **Figure 9** is a forgery of the Wyman's stamp in **Figure 3**. **Figure 10** is a forgery of a Crosby's Local Post stamp made by S. Allan Taylor. Collecting forgeries of local stamps is a popular field which is relatively inexpensive.

You could send off a stamp for expertization, but that takes time and money. If you want to be sure without an expert opinion, you may have to invest in some literature. Or perhaps you already have some.

Elliott Perry wrote a number of articles in *Pat Paragraphs* about carriers and locals, and these have been reproduced and compiled in a hard-bound volume by the Bureau Issues Association. If you don't have it, you can easily buy it from a number of dealers, especially the literature dealers. Perry illustrated a number of real and forgery stamps in his writings.

Donald Patton went even further and began a series of articles that described all the details for telling the forgeries from the authentic stamps. Unfortunately, he only published Volume I, which was for the state of New York, in a hard-bound edition. This book is also easily obtained from several dealers. Volume II was not published as a book, but did run as a series in Robson Lowe's *The Philatelist* from 1957-1965.

Finally, Larry Lyons published a three-volume hardbound set of books called *The Identifier for Carriers, Locals, Fakes, Forgeries and Bogus Posts of the US* in 1998. This set of books is the most comprehensive single reference ever published for identifying the various forgeries and reprints of carrier and local posts. Lyons used the already published information by Perry, Patton and others, and also the various articles published by *The Penny Post*, the official journal of the Carriers and Locals Society. In addition, he added information from other collectors and many other sources. This set is still available in new condition from several dealers or from the author himself. He has now made a companion Price Guide available.

How much do you want to invest in reference materials and books versus the stamps? You have to decide, depending on how deeply you want to get involved in collecting in this area. But keep one thing in mind – the reprints and forgeries were made primarily from the early 1860's through the 1880's. They are old, in most cases, and have become a collecting specialty themselves. It is entirely possible that there were more types of reprints and forgeries of US local and carrier stamps than there were authentic emissions of every country in the world by 1870.

At one time, forgeries and reprints of locals were despised and sometimes destroyed. But in some cases, certain forgeries are much scarcer than the authentic stamp! Three persons were primarily responsible for most of the forgeries and reprints: S. Allan Taylor, George Hussey and J. Walter Scott. Taylor made a very large variety of forgeries, often using ink and paper colors of great variety. A single authentic stamp may have fifty or so forgeries that were made by Taylor, each with different combinations of ink and paper colors. Hussey and Scott tried to buy the plates used by the local companies and both made reprints of some of the original stamps when they could. Hussey decided to profit from the collecting community by offering his own stamps as well as reprints and forgeries. In many cases, he had printing runs that were small, such as 2000 copies of a stamp. So even though today we might think of Hussey forgeries and reprints as common, in fact some are not common at all. Scott prepared forgeries that were similar to the authentic stamps, but probably at first simply wanted to illustrate them in his articles and *catalogs*. For many of the so-called “cuts” or images in his albums and articles, he made close imitations of the original stamp.

It may not be a bad idea to hang on to your forgeries. For the most part, they are “antiques” in the sense they are over one hundred years old. In addition, some of them are quite scarce today! (For example, the overprint on Taylor's forgery in **Figure 10**.) Is it a bad idea to pay a dollar or two or three for a stamp forgery that was made in the 1860's in quantities of only hundreds? I think not. In fact, group lots today can bring in excess of \$300 per hundred, if you can still find them.

Some of the lingering questions about forgeries and reprints are being researched continuously by specialists, and a visit to the Carriers and Locals website (www.pennypost.org) will let you look through the cumulative index for *The Penny Post* where one can find many articles about the forgeries and reprints. A new cumulative index through 2008 is available for purchase from the Secretary of the Carrier and Locals Society.

Some collectors in this area mount their real stamps on homemade album pages or stock pages, followed by pages of the various forgeries of the same post. It can be a challenge to identify them, and an even larger challenge to get examples of each type of forgery. As noted earlier, in some cases the forgeries and reprints are scarcer than the original stamps.

What if you don't want to bother with the reprints and forgeries, and also don't want to collect the whole spectrum of stamps listed in the *catalog*? Some collectors specialize in a particular city, such as New York or Philadelphia, and still others collect one or two of the larger local posts, such as Boyd's or Blood's.



Figure 11. Blood's embossed imprint on US Nesbitt U2 with Nesbitt seal on backflap.

If you decide to focus on one of these areas, you have to consider whether you also want to collect the postal history of the post. If so, you will not only find the stamps on covers, but also stampless covers and even postal stationery used by the local or carrier post. **Figure 11** shows a Blood's stationery envelope along with the first issue of US Postal Stationery, U2. The Nesbitt seal on the backflap was discontinued shortly after the initial printing, so these envelopes were used right away by Blood's post to carry mail to the post office for out of town delivery by the US Postal Service. The *Scott Catalogue* includes a small representation of some these stampless markings right after the Local Stamps section and just before the Stamped Envelopes section. However, there are no valuations and the group is far from complete. A better reference for these markings, which sometimes also are used on stamped covers, is the *American Stampless Cover Catalog*, Volume II.

If you are only interested in carrier stamps and markings, you should read Elliott Perry's chapter in Volume II of Stanley Ashbrook's *The United States One Cent Stamp of 1851-57*. Perry does an excellent job of describing the different carrier services available in major cities.

Another great source of information is the auction *catalogs* published over the years. Recently, Robert A. Siegel Galleries has held auctions of famous and long-held collections of David Golden, Richard Schwartz, John Hall and his son, and others. Richard Frajola produced a net price *catalog* of the Middendorff collection, and some of his auctions contain detailed information about some of the local posts. There have been earlier auctions of big-name collections, such as Caspary, Lily and Ferrary, but the more recent auctions have included important information about many of the carriers and locals.

You can see that one can get lightly involved or deeply involved in this collecting area. Why should an advanced collector of US stamps consider getting deeply involved in locals and carriers anyway? For one reason, there are a lot of discoveries to be made. For the most part, these early stamps have not been the subject of plating research or research on varieties. For example, in the past few

years a printed-on-both-sides variety of Boyd's has been discovered and confirmed; double and foreign transfers exist; ink and paper varieties suggest several printings for some stamps but have never been adequately worked out; new major *catalog* listings have been proposed for unreported stamps and varieties; and so on. This is a fertile field for more research, compared with many classic and later US issues, which have been studied in much greater detail for many years.

What about collecting in a more general way? Is this a good idea? Of course, the basis for the hobby is the enjoyment and challenge of collecting, so everyone has to decide for themselves how and what they wish to collect. Some collectors value the investment aspect of their field and hope that their collections will increase in value over the years. There is no question that many local and carrier stamps have increased in value tremendously; just compare old and new *catalog* prices for some of the stamps. If a collector is reluctant to venture into Postmaster Provisionals, or Confederate Provisionals, or classic stamps such as Scott number 5 or 6, he might find that local and carrier stamps in some cases are equally scarce, or more so, than these issues, yet at much more affordable prices.

Just remember that some forgeries or reprints are hard to distinguish from the originals, such as the Wells Fargo pony stamps. You don't want to pay a high price for a reprint if you think you are buying an original stamp. But for many local and carrier stamps, it is not that hard to correctly identify the authentic ones and the forgeries. If you like using your magnifying glass, you just might enjoy starting to collect in the large field of locals, carriers, forgeries, express stamps, and bogus or fantasy issues. Just like any other collecting specialty, the informed collector can sometimes find a bargain at auction or from a dealer!

Thanks to Larry Lyons for helping illustrate this article.