

GUEST PRIVILEGE

JOHN BOUTON'S POSTS — THEIR HISTORY AND HANDSTAMPS

© Copyright Calvet M. Hahn 1973

Very little has been reported about John Bouton and his important series of local posts. He suddenly appeared upon the New York postal scene and just as suddenly disappeared. The dates and data about his posts have frequently been given erroneously. He was involved with the Manhattan Express, the Franklin City, and the Bouton City post. The handstamps and the New York City directories give us a sizeable body of data that has not been available to those who specialize only in the local adhesives.

The Barr Predecessor

William V. Barr, postman, is first listed in the 1846 *Doggett City Directory* published in late June 1846 and containing data chiefly collected in May. Barr was listed at 121 Norfolk. Several other William Barrs are listed in this directory—one is a merchant, one a gunsmith, and one a boilerman. The gunsmith is reported as far back as the 1842 directory. There is at least a possibility that the William Barr, watchmaker, at 45½ Clarkson, listed in the directory is the same as the William V. Barr, postman. However, it seems more likely that William V. Barr is new to town and arrived in the summer of 1846 or the winter of 1845.

Only one handstamp of Barr's post has survived. It is on a cover of February 14, 1847, which contains a valentine for Hannah Price, reproduced in *Pat Paragraphs*, p. 1064. The handstamp is not clear as to the value but according to Elliott Perry it is probably 2c. The marking is a red 24mm circle MANHATTAN EXPRESS/WV/BARR/ C with the 't' or 'ts' in cents also blurred as was the value. The cover last changed hands for \$100 within the past five years with Mr. Perry purchasing it as an agent.

Barr sold his operation to John Bouton sometime after Valentine's Day in 1847 and prior to May 1847. Inasmuch as Barr was not reported in the 1845 directory and as there is no 1846 Valentine cover, it is likely that he began operations either shortly before Valentine's Day 1846, or shortly thereafter. On the basis of operating patterns from other locals, I would suspect he was in operation only 12-14 months, probably catching two Valentine periods. The directory published June 30, 1847 shows Barr as a coffee merchant at 37 Stanton. The 1848 directory confirms the coffee business and gives his home as 121 Norfolk—the earlier address of the penny post.

Bouton's Franklin Despatch and Manhattan Express

The *Doggett City Directory*, published in mid-1847, reports John Bouton, Manhattan Express post 10 Spring, home 10 Spring in the alphabetical listing (which is compiled in May). In the express section, edited later, it adds:

Franklin and Manhattan City Express Post for letters and small hand packages
John Bouton, 10 Spring.

This is the first listing that connects John Bouton with a local. It connects him with two locals, and a package express, at *slightly different dates*. The *Doggett* of 1846 reports a John Bouton, grocer, at 68 King with his home at the same location.

There is no John Bouton reported in the 1845 directory, but in 1844 there are two reported. One, a ship carpenter living at Cherry, corner of Montgomery, first appears in the 1842 directory at the same address and occupation. The second John Bouton listed in 1844 is a clerk at 281 Pearl street with his home at 338 Greenwich. This Bouton may well be the one connected with the local in 1847.

Most of the Boutons in America in the mid-1800's are descendants of Jean Bouton, a French Huguenot who came over in the 1600's. One prominent

contemporary of the local post Bouton is John Bell Bouton, born March 15, 1830, in Concord, N. H. who in 1857-1866 was editor of the *New York Journal of Commerce*. He is probably too young to be the same man. Most of the Boutons settled in Connecticut and the John Bouton of philatelic fame probably came from that state.

From the evidence in the 1847 city directory we know that Bouton was operating the Manhattan Express at least as early as May 1847 (a fact confirmed by handstamps) when the original data for the directory was gathered, and the Franklin post in June, when the late additions were made just prior to publication.

Henry Abt in the third chapter of his *Boyd's City Express Post* states, . . . some time in 1846 William V. Barr established the Manhattan Express Post, and it is said, the Franklin City Despatch, serving the 'uptown' region between Canal Street and Union Square.

There is some evidence to support Mr. Abt in his statement that John Bouton did not found the Franklin City Post, however, it may not support his thesis that Barr founded it. First, there is a dated Franklin City Post cover of June 25, 1847, establishing its existence at that date. This cover accords with the facts in the city directories. It tends to confirm Bouton's operation at that date as the directory was published the following week. Second, there is a dated piece of September 2, (1847?) which was found by W. P. Brown in 1878 which has a manuscript 'Boutons' over it. Logic makes it highly unlikely that this is 1846 or 1848, although I have not had the cover to examine the New York city postmark to date it precisely, which probably could be done. The question is what a manuscript 'Bouton' was doing on it unless it indicated a takeover, as we find subsequently with the 'Swarts' manuscript on the Bouton stamps that Elliott Perry reported in his *Chatham Square* monograph. If a customer had bought the stamp previously and did not use it on a cover until September 1847, such a notation might well be put on the stamp, to show the change in ownership.

I have carefully searched the city directories of 1845-1848 to see if any Franklin was listed that might have originated this post, or that was at one of the various addresses occupied by John Bouton or William Barr. The search was unsuccessful. The most probable explanation is that the Franklin refers to Franklin street, which is south of Canal street, and nine blocks south of Spring street, where the Manhattan Express was located. It is on the other side of town from Barr's Norfolk street address. Thus, this location does not accord with Abt's explanation of Canal to Union Square being the area serviced.

For future postal historians who wish to explore the Franklin City Post I will go out on a limb and suggest that: a) Bouton did not found it but took it over in June 1847, b) Bouton closed it down prior to October 2, 1847, c) it operated from a Franklin street address and thus was not founded by Barr, d) a non-existent reverse directory of Franklin street listings in 1846-7 would probably identify the owner, who otherwise must be searched for by examining every single listing in the 1847 directory to identify all those on Franklin street, and e) the local probably was founded in 1847 to take advantage of the Valentine business that year and, therefore, we may yet find a handstamp.

There are serious problems involved in the Bouton Manhattan Express handstamp. The first question is the date of the takeover. The general assumption, in which I concur, is that Barr sold his post to Bouton after Valentine's Day 1847. One piece of evidence suggests the sale took place almost immediately after. This evidence is the existence of a cover dated February 18, 1847, with an uncanceled Bouton Manhattan Express stamp tied by a filing crease. This letter carries a red New York circle handstamp and is addressed to 'Watesolich, N. Y.' according to Robson Lowe's report of it in the Basle 1972 sale. No such town, or similarly named town, ever existed in New York state according to the post office records. A very bad misreading of the manuscript address might have confused the town and state, but the name as

reported does create a problem. The second problem in connection with this cover is that it bears a Bouton's Manhattan Express stamp. Normally the local posts used handstamps prior to the use of adhesives. There is no Bouton Manhattan Express handstamp known near this date so that normal procedure would have to be inverted to justify this cover.

The handstamp used for this local is a 32x24mm reddish-brown colored marking. It reads: BOUTON'S/MANHATTAN/lozenge/EXPRESS. Several covers have a manuscript 'paid 2' to indicate the rate. I have been able to record the following covers: a) lot 402 in the Kaufmann 1972 sale dated April 29, 1847, b) a May 31, 1847 item, lot 1255 in the Lowe Basle 1972 sale, c) an undated copy illustrated here, d) a copy dated September 1, 1847 and e) lot 176 of the Lazarus 50th Mail sale dated July 16, 1848 with certification by John Fox. This last also has a red-brown adhesive negative PAID, measuring 27x7mm.

There are, unfortunately, two varieties of the Manhattan Express handstamp reported. One difference is that one variety has the lozenge and the second does not. Also differentiating these two is the fact that the non-lozenge variety has the 'H' of Manhattan directly under the 'T' of Bouton: It also has a different letter spacing. In order to better study this handstamp, I would appreciate Xerox's of known covers in various collections, with notations on the contents, date, etc. if possible.

It is my opinion that not both varieties are genuine. This opinion rests upon the dates of the reported covers, the fact that use of two handstamps in such a short time span in this period (rather than the later Boyd/Hussey period) is otherwise unknown and unlikely under the same ownership. Bouton is not otherwise known for this practice as his later handstamp testifies. New handstamps almost always have a valid philatelic reason until the later period. No one has presented such a reason for two handstamps here with the peculiar use pattern they denote.

Paid 2

William Clark Esq.

20 Cedar St. uptown

Peru.



Figure 1
(Photo by Adrien Boutrelle)

The first cover to examine is the one of July 16, 1848—a non-lozenge variety. The date is late—very late! It is also well after Bouton began using his Bouton's City Express handstamp, raising the problem of why there are two handstamps at the same time, inasmuch as the City Express handstamp is known in the fall of 1847.

The alphabetic listing of the 1848 *Doggett's Directory*, published June 30th of that year reads: 'John Bouton express post 29 Spring, h. 25 Dominick'. However, preceding the listings is a notice of changes 'too late to be entered' which reads: 'John Bouton, express post, 175 Bowery'. Thus we know Bouton moved between May and late June 1848 to the 175 Bowery address. The listing under the Express category at the end of the directory reads:

Franklin and Manhattan City Express Post for letters and small hand packages
John Bouton 175 Bowery.

Except for the address, this listing is identical with the one published a year earlier. Yet, at this period *only* the Bouton City Express handstamps are known *except* for this July 16, 1848 Manhattan Express cover. I have been unable to record any other cover that overlaps the two handstamp dates and an overlap of nine months is dubious without a single substantiating second item. If this cover, with its fancy negative PAID label, is dubious, then any other cover using the same typesetting is also suspect. This would include the one recorded May 31, 1847, which does have the same typesetting and which does not have the lozenge. The style of this non-lozenge handstamp may well have inspired the Bogus Type B stamp illustrated in Patton. The May 31st cover is sandwiched, in date sequence, between covers bearing the lozenge and thus raises the problem of why.

The April 29, 1847 cover bears the lozenge and is to an addressee known to have resided at that location in the 1847-8 period. The undated cover, illustrated here, (Figure 1) is addressed to William Clark at 20 Cedar street, upstairs. From 1846 through to the 1850's, one of the residents at this address is a G. W. Powers, domestics. In the 1850's a J. B. Montgomery, cloths, also shared this address. He is not listed in the 1846 or 1847 directory. Unfortunately, neither is William Clark—at this address. Searching from 1842 through to 1851, there is no William Clark or Clarke at 20 Cedar. However, there are a plethora of Clarks on Cedar street—numbers 15, 80, 87, 89 and 106 were all Clark or Clarke residences in 1846-1847. Thus, it is not unlikely that young William Clark moved out of his family domicile for a while and took the upstairs room at 20 Cedar.

A final note of mystery about the Manhattan Express is the fact that it again shows up in 1859 as a local city post. My article on *Stone's City Post* covers this late revival of the name. As Mr. Stone was in New York at the time Swarts was disposing of his operation, he may have bought the rights to this name from Swarts who acquired it from Bouton; more likely Stone just appropriated it.

The City Dispatch Post Handstamp

Past records report this handstamp only during 1848. It is a red 31x19mm oval reading: BOUTONS/CITY/DISPATCH POST. A substantial quantity are known, a few of which will be listed later. The earliest recorded copy is illustrated here, Figure 2. It is in the same brownish-red as the Manhattan Express handstamp and is unlike the typical orangish-red normally reported for the City Dispatch Bouton marking. The color, therefore, is scarce.



Mr Haprock Junr
Pos of Brevort Place

Figure 2
(Photo by Adrien Boutrelle)

The letter bearing this first Bouton City Dispatch marking is addressed to Mr. Hoppock and is not year dated but is dated October 2nd and asks the addressee to meet the next day, Sunday, at the Howard House. The only October 2nd on a Saturday during the period when Bouton operated is in 1847. Thus this letter has to be dated October 2, 1847 and is the earliest recorded use of this handstamp. This is confirmed by the city directories. An Ely Hoppock lived at this address in 1845 and James L. Hoppock lived there in 1847 according to the directory published June 30, 1847—Ely having moved to 128 10th street. James was a grocer at 62 Dey, living, however, at the address on this cover. He is not listed in the directory published in mid-1848.

Following the September 1, 1847 Manhattan Express handstamp, this cover fits nicely into the time sequence of the Bouton operations if we disregard the very late July 1848 Manhattan Express cover. This Hoppock cover suggests a change of some sort in the operation during September 1847. Such a change might be the move from 10 to 29 Spring street which we know took place between June 1847 and June 1848.

For the record, some of the dates I have noted this handstamp recorded are listed below. It is definitely not meant to be a comprehensive list:

10/2/1847	4/29/48	11/6/48
1/5/1848	7/16/48	12/2/48
2/12/48	7/18/48	12/9/48
4/16/48	9/12/48	(several undated)
4/29/48 (Bridgeport)	10/13/48	

PAID
BOUTON.



Robt. Schuyler Esq.
No. 2 Hanover St.
New York

Figure 3
(Photo by Adrien Boutrelle)

A typical example of the orangish-red handstamp is illustrated as Figure 3. This letter is from an engineer who wants to work on the New York and New Haven Railroad out of New Haven. Dated April 29, 1848, it is addressed to Robert Schuyler, a civil engineer, who had his office at #2 Hanover at least from 1842 through 1848. His home, according to the 1847 directory, was 13 Laight. This cover also bears a red 20x10mm straightline supplementary marking: PAID/BOUTTON. The PAID may also be found separately. I record this supplementary marking on stampless covers of 4/29/1848, 7/5/48, 11/6/48, and 12/2/48. The BOUTTON is also reported as a separate listing.

While covers bearing adhesives are not the subject of this analysis, there is one that should be commented upon. That is a cover sold as lot 869 of Siegel's 342nd sale. This cover bears an adhesive purportedly tied to a cover of May 19, 1847, by a PAID/BOUTTON. If the cover date is 1847, as reported in the catalog, it is remarkably early and the stamp should be closely examined to see if it is "tied". Neither adhesive nor handstamp is otherwise reported

All four uses, however, are on covers addressed North of Houston street. Therefore, it is possible that this marking represented a special Greenwich Village routing—possibly even an unknown second local. Owners of Bouton markings addressed north of Houston street that *do not* bear this handstamp are asked to contact the author as are owners of Swarts covers, prior to June 1849, that do have north of Houston addresses *not* bearing this handstamp. I should also be interested in hearing of other local covers bearing this “N”, which should not be confused with the blue “railroad” “N” known in the 1840’s.

The Swarts Takeover

John Bouton had shown himself to be an enterprising local in the two years of his operation. The number of Bouton covers illustrates the degree of his success. Thus it was not illogical for Aaron Swarts to want to buy him out if Swarts was to achieve his goal as a major New York local. The accompanying map, showing the locations of the Bouton, Barr, and Swarts posts, illustrates clearly that Swarts would have problems growing northward with the city if Bouton continued. Southward operations were already heavily limited by the very successful Boyd post.

Elliott Perry in his *Chatham Square Post Office* has discussed the Swarts scheme to become the U. S. post office carrier agent for mail north of Chambers, leaving that south of Chambers to Boyd. While the proposal did not go through it was in the air in January 1849. The details are adequately covered by Mr. Perry.

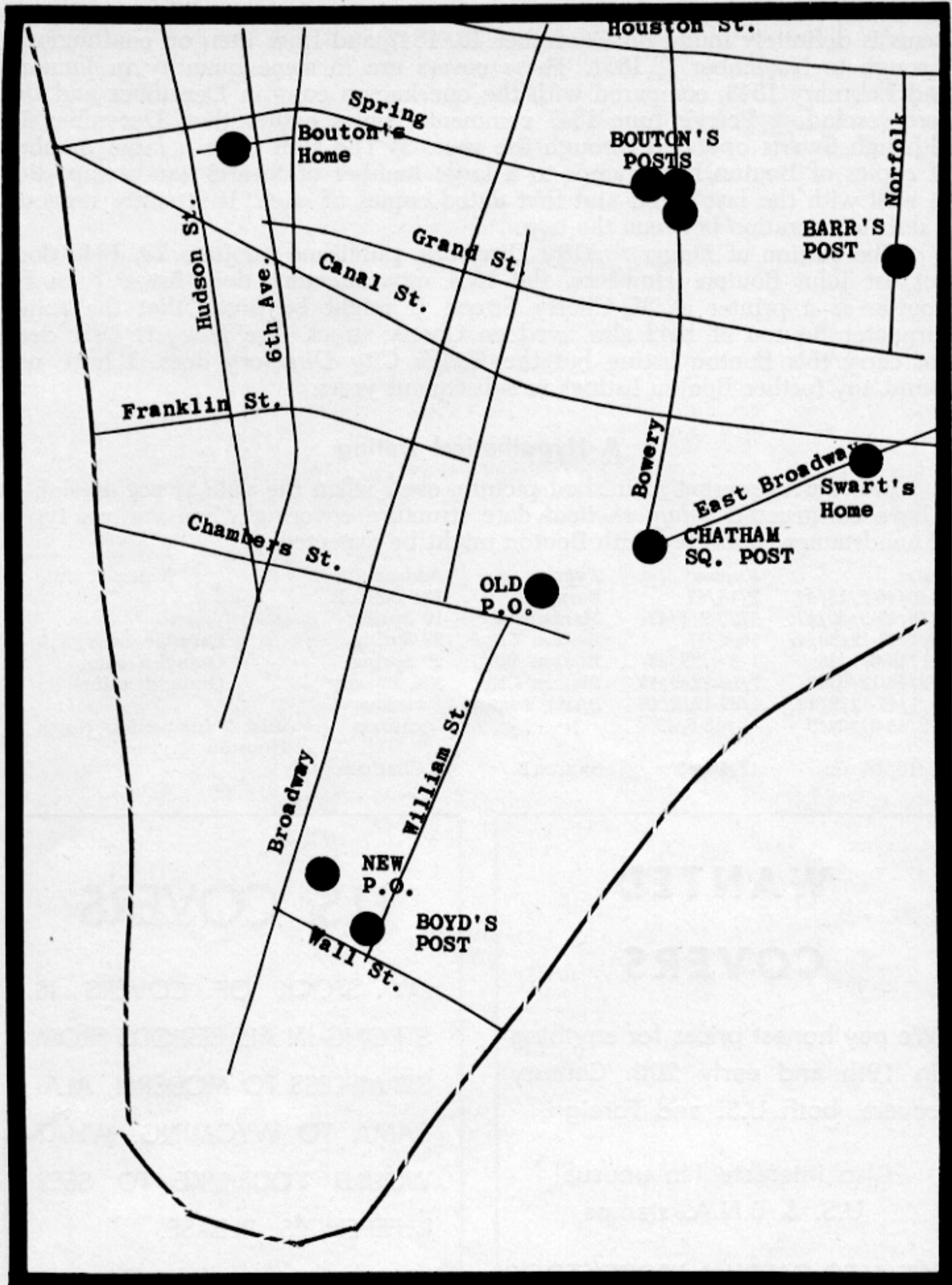
As Bouton did sell out to Swarts, the question is when. The takeover certainly did not take place prior to December 9th, 1848, the date of the last known Bouton handstamp. It apparently did take place by February 3rd or 5th 1849 for one of the items illustrated in the Chatham Square booklet is a dated piece containing a Bouton stamp with a Swarts signature over it. This item is dated February 3rd or 5th, 1849. Mr. Perry raises the question of whether the takeover occurred before or after the proposed government carrier proposition, of January 1849.



Mr Dr Williams,
127 Grove St
New York

this early, and it is always wise to examine all locals that fall out of the logical mainstream of date sequence for the known handstamps.

Another supplementary marking is reported on two Bouton covers and two of Swarts. This is a red 9x8mm N. One of the Bouton covers is illustrated as Figure 4. The other is addressed to 9 East 11th street. Neither is dated. The two Swarts items are known in March and June of 1849. The purpose of this supplementary marking is not known. The late Swarts items make it unlikely that the handstamp represented a North-South geographic split between the two posts.



Based upon the known Bouton cover quantities and the scarce number of Swarts covers known in 1848 it would be presumptuous of Mr. Swarts to make a proposal to the government to handle the mails north of Chambers unless he had already eliminated his far more successful rival, John Bouton. There is philatelic evidence that the takeover occurred between December 9th and December 16th 1848. This evidence is: 1) there are only two Swarts covers known before December 16, 1848—the two Branch post office items, with the fancy eagle and stars. They both date to January 1847. Perry does mention one Swarts B Post item that “may possibly have been used in June 1847”. I’ve not seen this cover and do not know the basis of his reasoning; however, misreading a ‘7’ for a ‘9’ is not an uncommon problem in dating

covers. 2) What we do know is that the earliest of the well-known Swarts items is definitely found on December 16, 1847 and from then on continuously through to November 7, 1851. These covers are in some quantity in January and February 1848, compared with the one known copy in December and the zero (excluding Perry's June 1847 comment) copies earlier than December 16 although Swarts operated through the year. 3) The shift from a large number of copies of Bouton handstamps to a large number of Swarts handstamps ties in well with the last dated and first dated copies of each. It strongly suggests a shift in operation between the two.

The edition of *Doggett's City Directory*, published on June 29, 1849 does not list John Bouton. However, the 1851 city directory does list a John H. Bouton as a printer at 37 Cherry Street. It might be noted that the ship's carpenter Bouton of 1842 also lived on Cherry street. The *Doggett* 1851 does not carry this Bouton listing but the *Rode's City Directory* does. I have not found any further Bouton listings in subsequent years.

A Hypothetical Dating

In order to present a finished picture, even when the data is not available, I have constructed a *hypothetical* date structure covering when various types of handstamps connected with Bouton might be expected.

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Known</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Notes</i>
2/10/46-2/15/47	2/14/47	Barrs	121 Norfolk	
2/16/47-9/30/47	4/29-9/1/47	Manhattan	10 Spring	
10/1/47-12/30/47	10/2/47	Bouton City	29 Spring	Carmine color
1/1/48-6/1/48	1/5-4/29/48	Bouton City	29 Spring	Orangish color
6/2/48-12/9/48	7/16-12/9/48	Bouton City	175 Bowery	Orangish color
10/1/47-12/9/48	4/29-12/2/48	PAID/Bouton	various	
6/2/48-6/30/49	-/-/48-6/49	N	various	used 2 companies; North of Houston service
12/16/48- on	12/16/48	Swarts B	2 Chatham	

Hon. Luther Bradish

36 East Sixteenth Street

N.Y.



David S. Kennedy Esq

58 Wall Street

New York



SEPT 17 - 1847



Hon Luther Bradish
36 East 16th Street
New York

350-

Miss Mary Harwood

Savannah N.Y.

