

DETECTING CARRIER SERVICED COVERS IN THE FEE PAID PERIOD: A PRIMER

STEVEN M. ROTH

I. Introduction

Collectors who accumulate and study folded letters and covers that have been serviced by a letter carrier approach their preoccupation in many different ways. Some collect according to city; others focus on the official and/or semi-official adhesives; some study the cover and the fees. There is room enough for all of these approaches in this alluring field of postal history. The subject matter is ambiguous and difficult enough to support everyone's criteria for selecting a subject matter for study and collection.

In this brief article I will examine carrier serviced covers from the point of view of identifying them when there is no carrier adhesive or special handstamp marking to provide the clue. I will proceed from the most obvious circumstances to the most enigmatic, and then even into the questionable.

II. Terms

The phrase "*carrier service*" refers to the collection and/or delivery of mail by a letter carrier acting under the auspices of the local postmaster or local carrier department or, after 1836, as an employee of Washington, D.C. The phrase is not used in connection with the employees of any private post.

The phrases "*letter carrier*," "*carrier*" and "*post boy*" describe a person who collected and/or delivered the mail for the government.

The phrases "*to the mails*," "*collection*" and the like refer to the taking of mail from lamp post letter boxes or other collection boxes and delivering it to the post office for processing.

The phrase "*from the mails*" refers to the delivery of letters from the post office to street addresses. Such letters may have arrived from other post offices or might have been deposited into the general delivery window of the post office.

"*City letters*" or "*city mail*" is mail that was deposited for delivery within the same city. It is said not to have entered the mails because it was processed solely by the Carrier Department of the local post office.

The phrase "*fee paid period*" refers to June 30, 1863 and before when a fee was required to be paid for carrier service.

III. A Brief Description of Carrier Service in the Fee Paid Period

The operation of a penny post/carrier service antedated the first postal act¹ passed by Congress under the Constitution—a statute in which carrier service was not even mentioned. But carrier service had indeed existed in North America long before the ratification of the Constitution. For example, provision was made for a penny post in the Neale Patents in 1692. A penny post also was provided for in the Act of Queen Anne 1710. And Hugh Finlay in his journal entry for October 11, 1773 noted the absence of [and the need for] a "runner" (*i.e.*, a post boy) in Boston.³

¹Act of February 20, 1792; effective March 1, 1792.

²For a good discussion of the historical predecessors to the Constitution-based penny posts, see Calvet M. Hahn, "Letter Carrier Service in New York," *Chronicle* 80 (Vol. 25, No. 4)(Nov. 1973), p. 246-48; Steven M. Roth, "The War Against the Private Expresses: An Examination of the Post Office's Monopoly Power," *Chronicle* 161 (Vol. 46, No. 1)(Feb. 1993), pp. 14-17.

³Hugh Finlay, *Journal Kept by Hugh Finlay, Surveyor of the Post Roads on the Continent of North America During his Survey of the Post Offices . . . 13th September 1773-26th June 1774* (reprinted, 1975), pp. 29-30.32

In addition to antecedents that had their origins abroad, there also is evidence that home grown pre-Constitution penny posts operated in North America. For example, a penny post was mentioned in the *New York Post Boy* in 1753, where it was written,

All letters for Persons living in the Town
that remain uncall'd for on Post Nights
will, on Monday Morning, be sent out by
a Penny Post provided for that purpose...⁴

Benjamin Franklin established a penny post in Philadelphia in 1753. In July 1762, Philadelphia postmaster William Dunlap placed the following notice in William Bradford's *Pennsylvania Journal*:

The lad who was lately employed at the
Post office as penny-post having
ran away, the gentlemen who expect
letters are requested to call for them
until a suitable person can be procured
to carry them.⁵

Even Goddard, in his proposal to create a constitutional post to operate in opposition to the parliamentary post, included a penny post in his proposal.⁶

Postal historians long have known that penny posts operated during the founding decades of the United States in such large cities as New York and Philadelphia. Now, recently published scholarship by postal historian Robert J. Stets and others has established that penny posts operated in such smaller towns as Harrisburg, Pa., Middletown, Pa., Alexandria, Va., Catskill, N.Y., Fredericktown, Md., Portland, Me., Richmond, Va., Baltimore, Md., Washington City and Wilmington, Del.⁷

Such service was decentralized from the Post Office Department in Washington, was mostly unregulated except for statutory outer-boundaries on the fees that could be charged for service, and appears to have functioned generally on an *ad hoc* basis, subject to the will of the local postmaster.

In theory, at least, postmasters in all towns and cities for which the Postmaster General had directed the establishment of carrier service should have tendered a penny post to the public. Such postmasters should have offered to deliver letters from the mails except in those cases where the recipient had lodged a written instruction with the local postmaster to hold his mail. This is because the postal statutes, beginning with the Act of 1794, and continuing with all major postal legislation over the next forty years, provided for such service, subject only to the two conditions noted above.⁸

While we have only scant evidence to determine much about how the early penny posts actually operated on a day-to-day basis, surviving folded letters suggest that the most common available service was the delivery of letters from the mails to a street address, and

⁴Quoted in Hahn, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

⁵Quoted in Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania in the Olden Time*, Vol. III (Hazard, 1891), p. 475.

⁶Calvet C. Hahn, "The Provisional Post in the United States," *Collectors Club Philatelist*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (May 1974), p. 158.

⁷Robert J. Stets, "Penny Posts in the United States Before 1809," *The Penny Post*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (July 1993), pp. 4-12; Steven M. Roth, "The Harrisburg Post Boy," *The Penny Post*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (April 1994), pp. 10-15; Steven M. Roth, "An Early Carrier Delivered Cover from Middletown, Pa.," *The Penny Post*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Oct. 1994), pp. 5-6.

⁸Act of May 8, 1794; effective June 1, 1794. This subject was extensively discussed, with all the statutory citations, in Steven M. Roth, "A 5¢ Letter Revisited: Was it a Carrier Delivered Overpaid Drop Letter?," *Chronicle* 157 (Vol. 45, No. 1)(Feb. 1993), pp. 21-29.

to a lesser extent collection service to the mails. City mail service appears not to have existed prior to the reforms in 1836.

In 1836 Congress enacted comprehensive legislation affecting the entire postal system.⁹ Section 41 of that Act substantially reorganized the carrier system, bringing it under the centralized control of Washington.¹⁰ In addition, the statute provided for (i) the collection of letters to be taken to the mails, (ii) the giving of some discretion to each local postmaster to establish carrier fees within his jurisdiction, (iii) the authorization to each postmaster to create a general fund to be used as a source of payment to the letter carriers, and (iv) the bonding of all letter carriers.

On June 30, 1863, the fee paid period came to an end.¹¹

IV. Recognizing Carrier Serviced Covers

The detection of carrier serviced covers runs the gamut from the most obvious identifying clues through the subtle and complex examples, including those in the gray spectrum—the “could be” examples about which we will never be sure. This, then, is the order in which we will proceed.

A. Covers that were definitely carrier serviced

The most obvious candidates for this category are those covers which contain adhesives¹² specifically issued to show prepayment of a carrier fee. Two examples are illustrated as Figures 1 & 2. The Franklin carrier adhesive (Scott LO1)(Figure 1) was issued in 1851 to evidence prepayment of the carrier fee and to offer the convenience of prepayment to the postal customer. This adhesive was distributed to New York, Philadelphia and New Orleans. The Eagle carrier adhesive (Scott LO2) was the successor to the Franklin carrier stamp, and was distributed to New York (although the question whether the few covers showing its use in New York are genuine applications remains debated), Philadelphia, Washington, D.C. and Cincinnati. One example each of Eagle carrier use from Cleveland and from Andalusia, Pa. has been reported, as well as several examples from Kensington, Pa., although there is no evidence that the stamp was distributed to any of these cities.¹³ If a cover which originated in a city that received the stamps (as noted above) contains an Eagle carrier stamp, it is safe to assume that carrier service was provided — generally, but not always, to prepay the collection fee to the mails — although there are examples where three Eagles were unsuccessfully used on a cover to attempt to prepay the ordinary postage.

Prior to the issuance of the Franklin carrier adhesive in 1851, several postmasters issued their own adhesives, now known as semi-official carrier stamps. An example is shown at Figure 3. Cities in addition to Philadelphia where semi-officials were issued are Baltimore, Boston, Charleston, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Louisville, New York and St. Louis.

Some covers are recognized as having been carrier serviced even though they do not bear a carrier adhesive, because the covers contain handstamps that were used by carrier departments to show prepayment.¹⁴ Two examples are Figures 4¹⁵ & 5.

⁹Act of July 2, 1836; effective same date.

¹⁰The reforms are treated in Steven M. Roth, “The Reform of the Penny Post in 1836,” *Chronicle* 159 (Vol. 45, No. 3)(Aug. 1993), p. 161-67.

¹¹Act of March 3, 1863; effective July 1, 1863.

¹²For the purpose of this article, I will make two assumptions that will apply throughout: (i) that the adhesive on each cover is a genuine specimen, not a forgery or reprint; and (ii) that each adhesive originated on the cover and was legitimately used.

¹³It has also been reported that the adhesive was distributed to the offices in Boston and Baltimore. I am not aware of any uses from either city.

¹⁴Such handstamps sometimes also were used to cancel carrier stamps, but that subject is not relevant to this article.

¹⁵Discussion of the several “types” of handstamps is outside the scope of our subject; I will not treat that here.



Figure 1. Franklin carrier adhesive on cover with Philadelphia postmark.

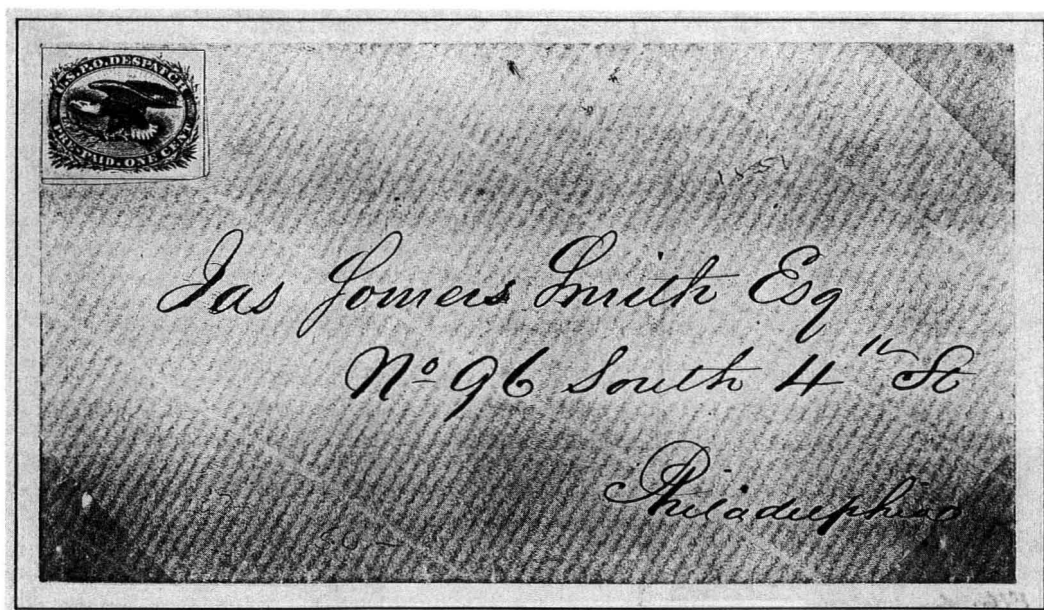


Figure 2. Eagle carrier adhesive on cover.

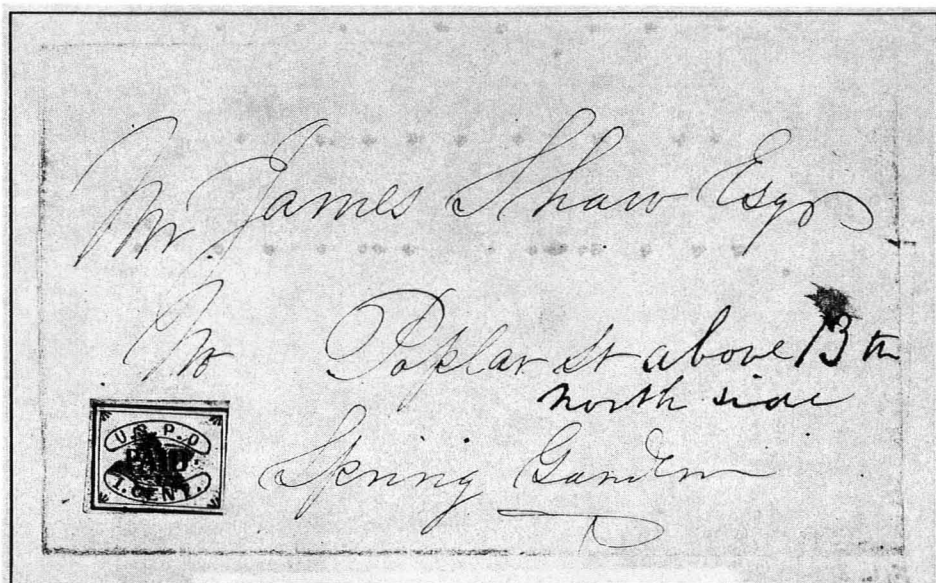


Figure 3. Philadelphia U.S.P.O. semi-official carrier on cover.

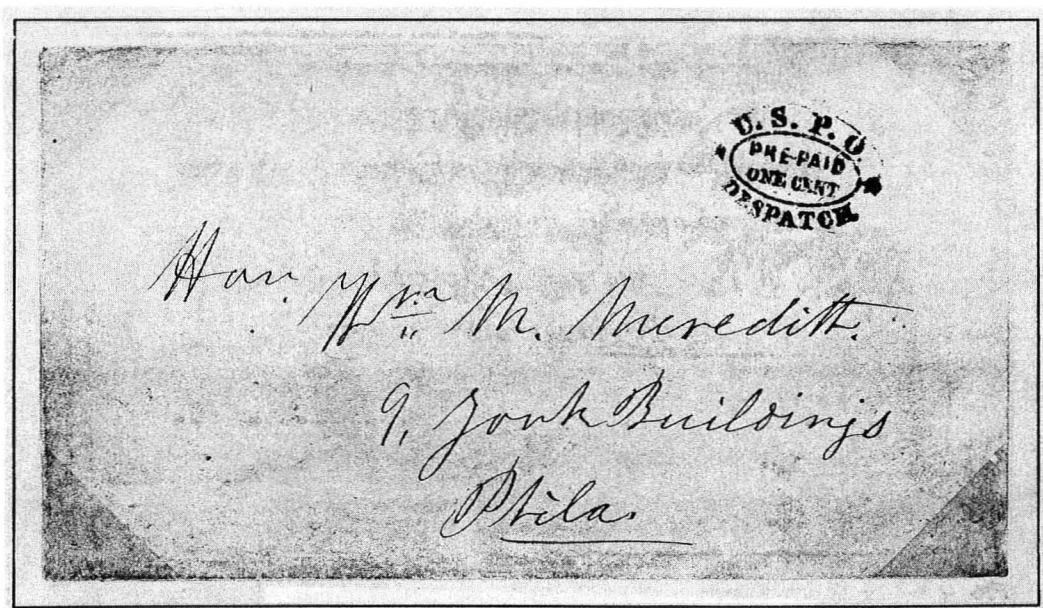


Figure 4. Philadelphia U.S.P.O. * DESPATCH handstamp on cover.

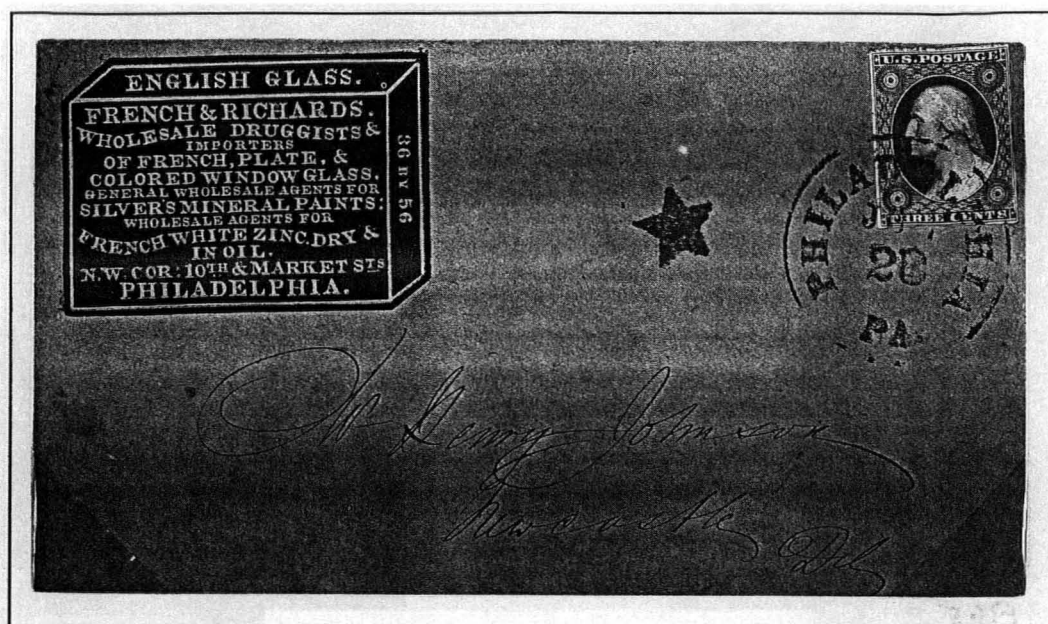


Figure 5. Philadelphia to Newcastle, Del. cover with Philadelphia carrier cancel on U.S. 3¢ 1851 issue.

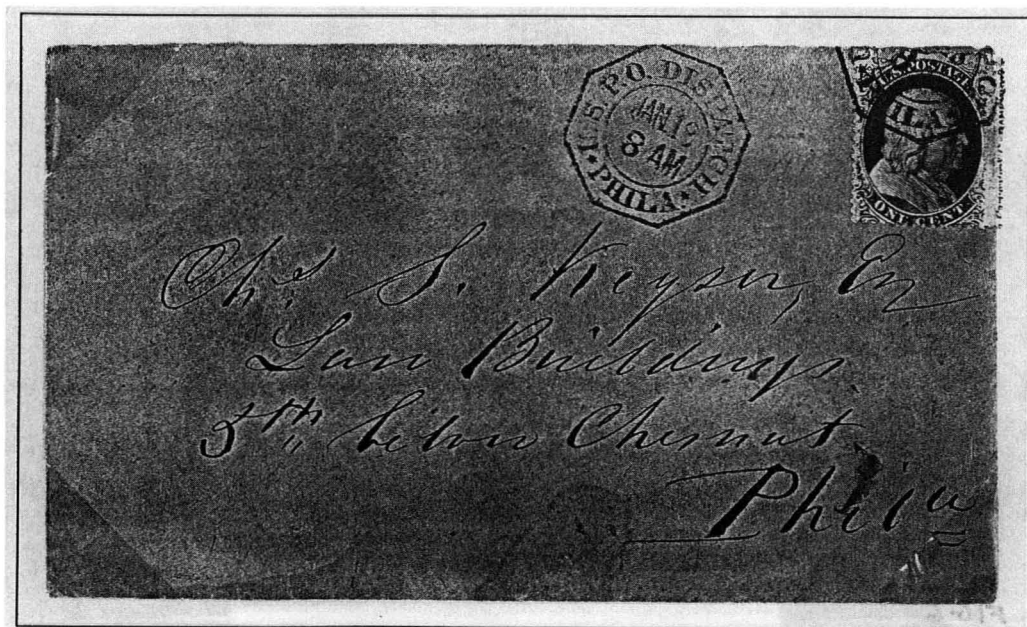


Figure 6. U.S.P.O. DISPATCH * PHILA. carrier cancel on U.S. 1¢ 1851 issue.



Figure 7. Philadelphia to Harrisburg cover, 1813, annotated "post boy 2."

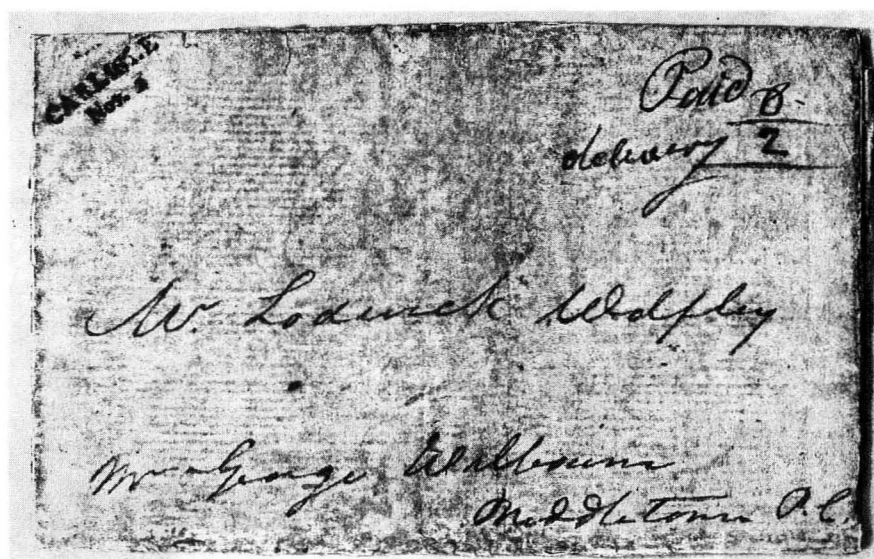


Figure 8. Carlisle to Middletown, Pa. folded letter, 1800, annotated "delivery 2."

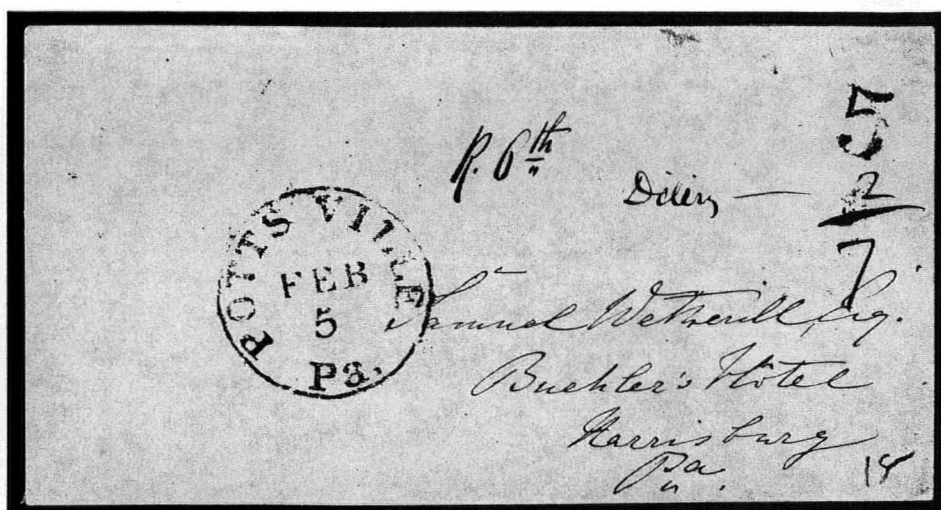


Figure 9. Pottsville to Harrisburg, Pa. cover, annotated "delivery 2."



Figure 10. Blue 1[c] due marking on Philadelphia carrier cover.

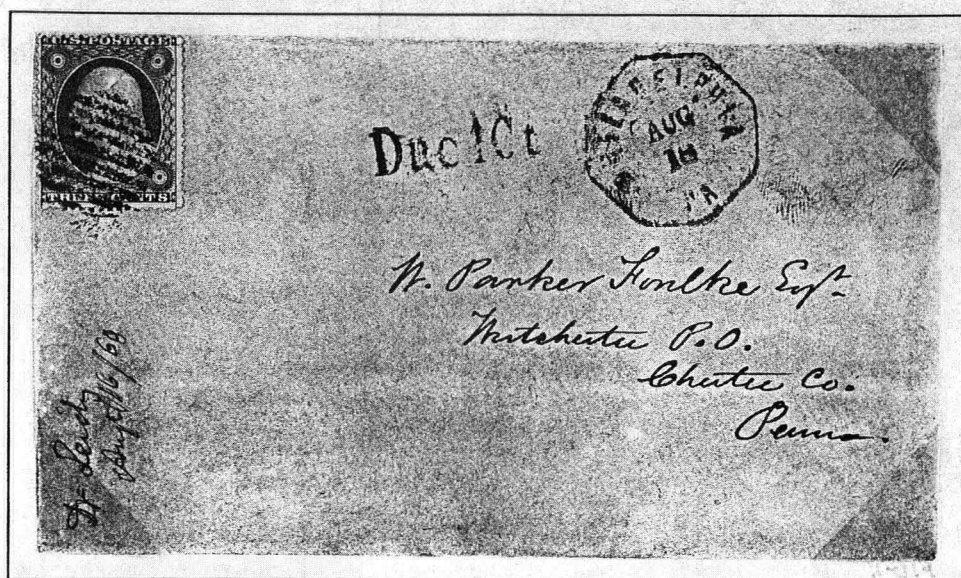


Figure 11. August 18, 1860 cover with "Due 1 Ct" carrier fee marking.

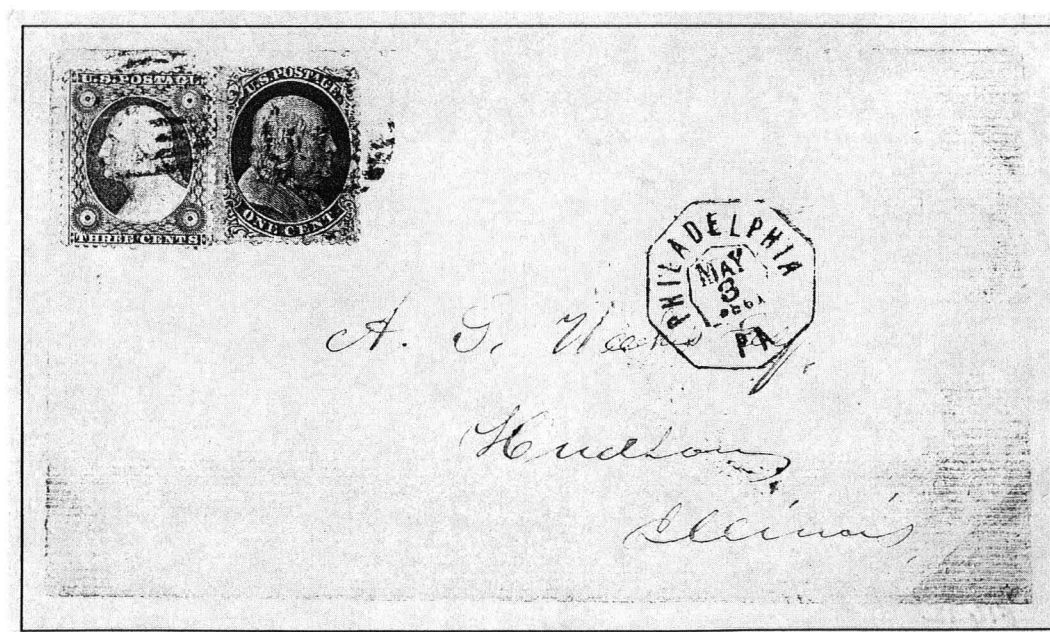


Figure 12. Carrier service indicated by addition of 1¢ adhesive to 3¢ cover.

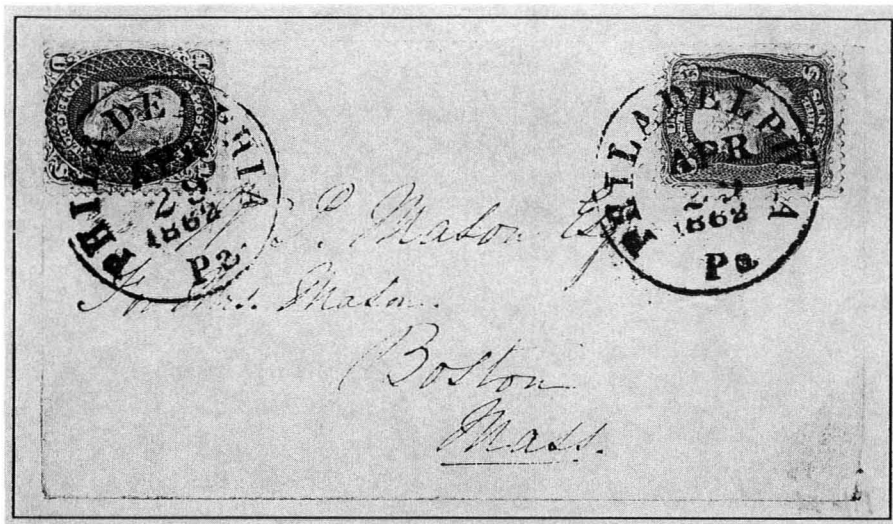


Figure 13. 1862 Philadelphia to Boston cover, 1¢ adhesive added to 3¢ cover for carrier fee.

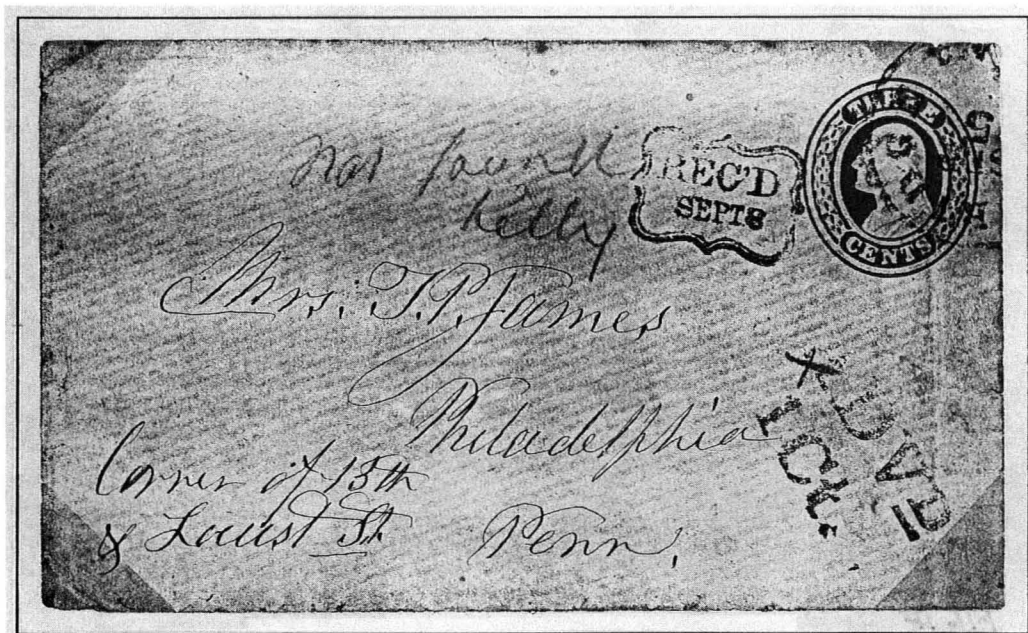


Figure 14. Carrier service indicated by "Not found/Kelly" carrier's note.

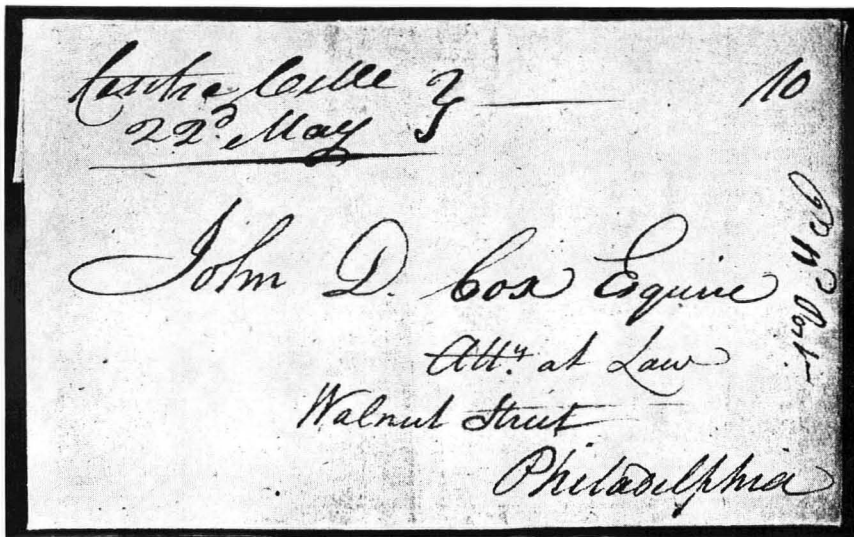


Figure 15. 1797 Carlisle to Philadelphia cover, docketed "Pd 11c Post."

On some occasions, the carrier department would use a special handstamp in conjunction with a non-carrier type adhesive. An example is the "U.S.P.O. DISPATCH * PHILA" shown in Figure 6.

Even though neither a carrier adhesive nor a special handstamp is present on a cover, it sometimes is obvious that the cover received carrier service from the postage rates and fees present. These are evidenced in any one of three ways: fees written in hand on the cover; handstamp fee markings; and, regularly issued postage stamps.

The 1813 cover shown as Figure 7 illustrates the notation of a fee to indicate carrier service. The folded letter originated in Philadelphia, destined for Harrisburg. The Philadelphia clerk rated the cover with the correct single rate postage (12½ cents) for the distance (96 miles). When the letter arrived in Harrisburg, someone added (in an ink of a different color than the postage rate ink) the phrase "Post boy 2." The postage and the carrier fee were then totaled.

Figure 8 is comparable. This 1800 folded letter shows the addition of the written phrase "delivery 2" below the postage rate. Undoubtedly, this reflected the charge for the post boy in Middletown, Pa.

Finally, Figure 9, too, illustrates this identification tool.

Handstamp markings that are not special markings of the Carrier Department, but which provide evidence of carrier service, usually are indications that the fee is due. In the case of Figure 10, the letter was handled only by the Philadelphia Carrier Department so that the 1¢ carrier fee (represented by the blue handstamp) was charged, rather than both the carrier fee and drop letter postage. Figure 11 illustrates a nice example of the flip side. In Philadelphia, Boston and New York, from approximately August through October or November 1860, each city's postmaster permitted the collection fee (to the mails) to be passed on to the addressee in another city. Thus, carrier service was indicated by the "Due 1 Ct." handstamp. Beginning in October or November 1860, such partially unpaid carrier serviced letters were held for payment of the fee by the sender.

Carrier service sometimes is revealed by the addition of an ordinary stamp to prepay the fee. Figures 12 and 13 illustrate this point.

Occasionally a notation added to the cover by the letter carrier or even by the recipient will provide the clue. The former was noted in the illustrations for Figures 7, 8 and 9 [the latter bearing the phrase "delivery 2"]. But the carrier's notation might be more subtle. For example, the cover shown as Figure 14 contains the letter carrier's penciled note, "Not found/Kelly." A review of *McElroy's Philadelphia City Directory* for 1854 and 1855 (the correct years for the embossed envelope) reveals a Malachi Kelly listed as a letter carrier.

Docketing by the recipient might provide the key. For example, the cover shown as Figure 15 originated in Carlisle, Pa. in 1797. There it was rated "10," for 10¢ due for the distance to Philadelphia. Upon arrival, the folded letter was carrier delivered to Mr. Cox, for which service he paid one penny. How do we know? Docketed vertically on the right edge of the letter is the phrase "Pd 11c Post." The extra one penny paid was for carrier service.

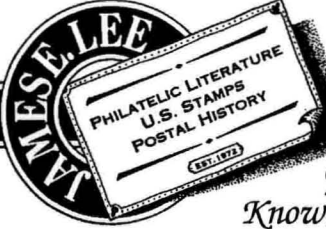
(to be continued)

SECTION EDITOR'S NOTE

Beginning with issue No. 167 of the *Chronicle*, this Section has a new name. This change has been made to descriptively reflect what has always been the case—that articles for this Section involving local posts, independent mail companies and government carriers are all welcome.

Also, with this issue of the *Chronicle* I welcome my friend Thomas Stanton as our new Assistant Section Editor. To those of you who do not know him, Tom is an indefatigable researcher in many fields of postal history, including that involving government carriers. I look forward to working with Tom.

— Steven M. Roth □



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**DETECTING CARRIER SERVICED COVERS
IN THE FEE PAID PERIOD: A PRIMER**

STEVEN M. ROTH

(Continued from *Chronicle* 168:240)

B. Covers that are a little less obvious, but which received carrier service

Carrier service with respect to the covers grouped under this heading are, in my opinion, the most interesting because they require a sharp eye to isolate the cover from similar looking folded letters, as well as good knowledge of relevant rates to spot the buried and hidden post boy fee.

Figure 16 is a good case in point. This Articles of Confederation Post folded letter arrived in New York Port aboard the *Caledonia* in 1785. There it was rated "2" [dwt.] for the single rate charge to Philadelphia. Two pennyweights were equivalent to 10 pence. Upon arrival in Philadelphia the letter was rerated with the local currency equivalent, but

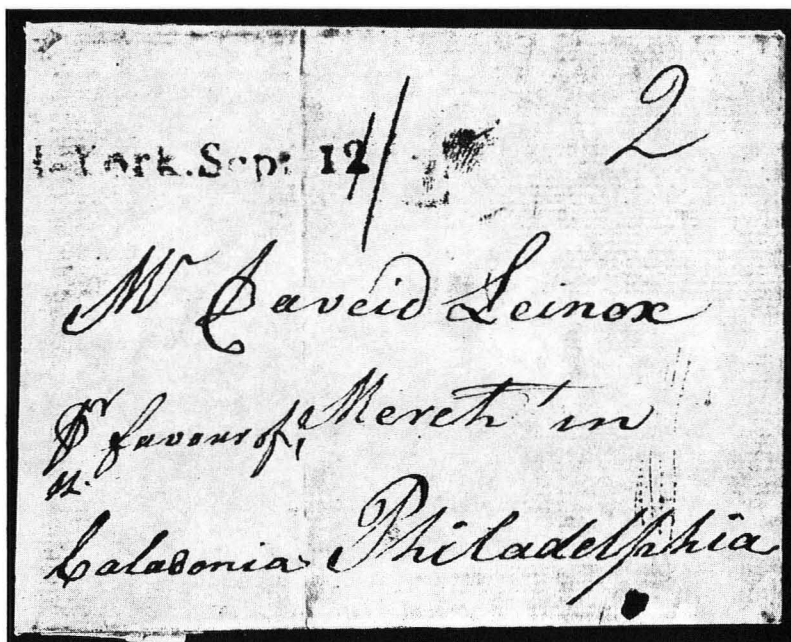


Figure 16. 1785 New York to Philadelphia cover with "2" [pence] carrier fee rating.

at the rate of "1" [one shilling]. One shilling, however, was equal to 12 pence not 10 pence. The additional 2 pence due in Philadelphia was payment for the carrier fee.

Another example, Figure 17, makes the same point, but somewhat differently. It also illustrates another important component of the rate interpretation. This 1789 folded letter originated in Baltimore where it was rated "4" [dwt.] as a double letter [2 dwt. x 2] for the distance to Philadelphia [100-200 miles]. Four pennyweights was equal to 20 pence. In Philadelphia the letter was given the local currency equivalent "1/10" [one shilling, 10 pence]. Thus, in Philadelphia it was rated as if there were due 22 pence. The extra 2 pence were for carrier service.¹⁶

¹⁶If the letter had not received carrier service, it would have been rated "1/8" or 20 pence [one shilling was equal to 20 pence].

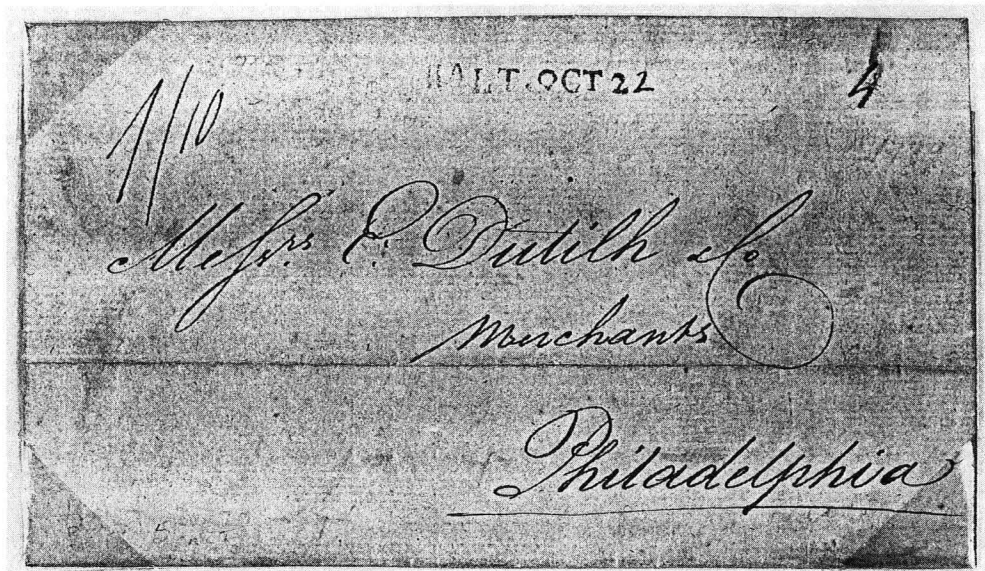


Figure 17. 1789 Baltimore to Philadelphia double letter, rated 22 pence due (including 2 pence for carrier service)

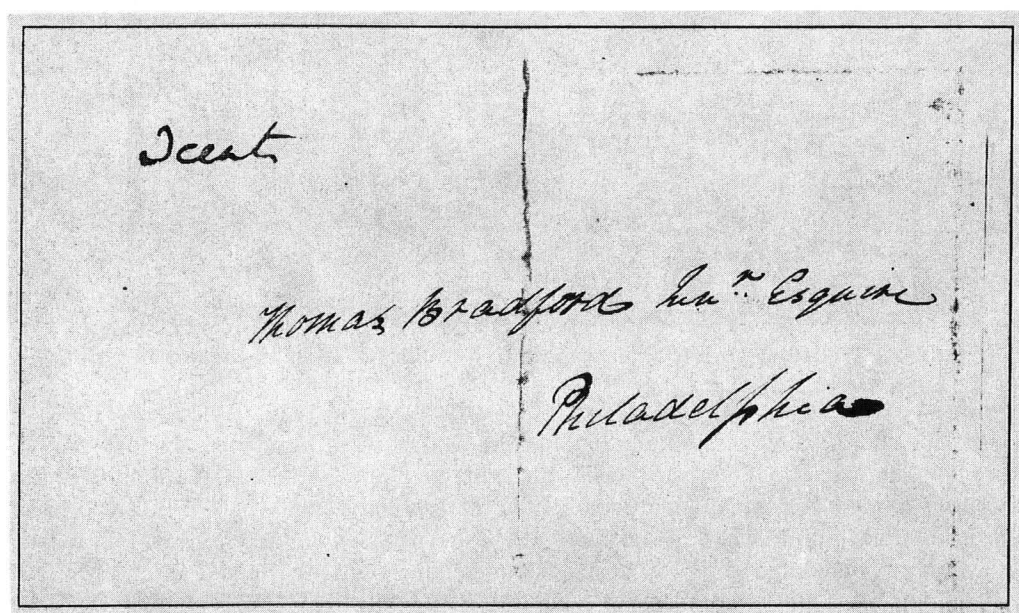


Figure 18. 1807 folded letter carried out of mails from New Castle to Philadelphia, then given carrier service to addressee as denoted by annotation "2 cents."

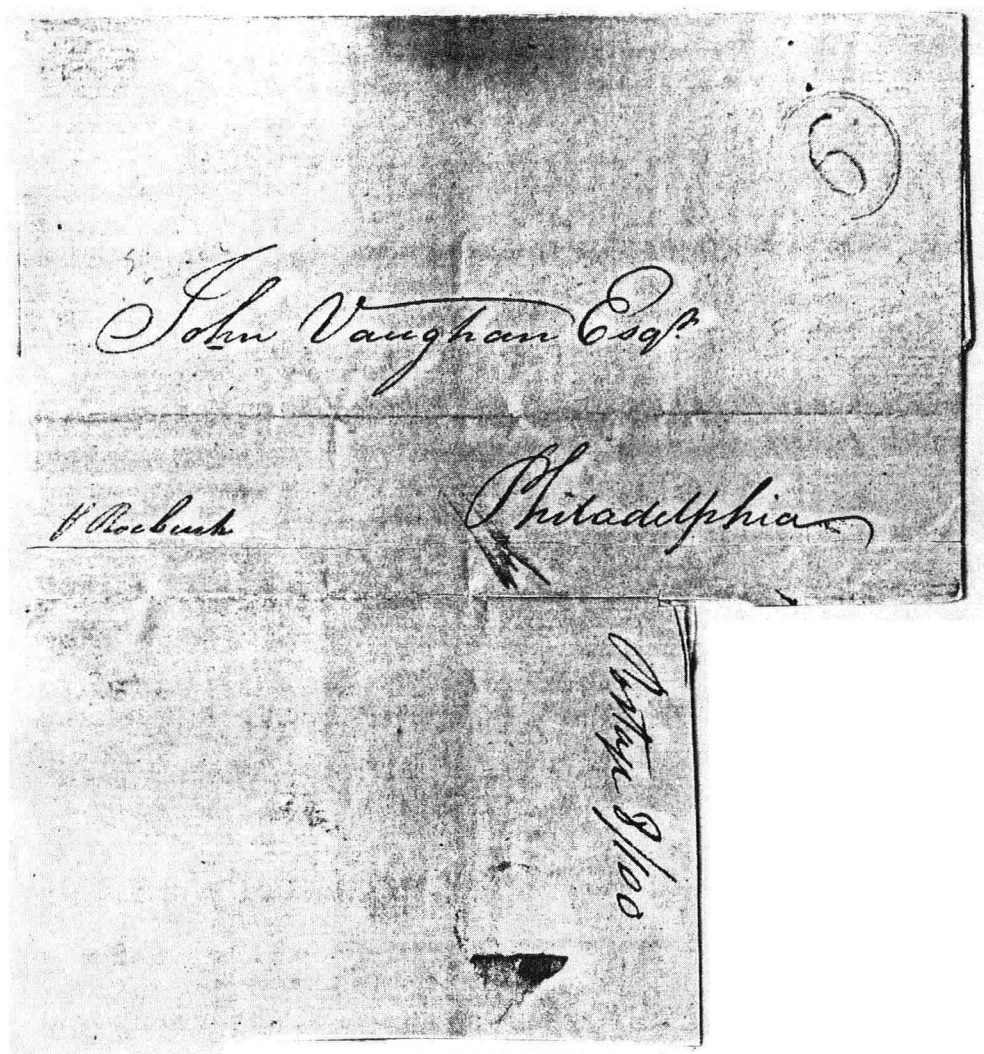


Figure 19. Incoming ship letter rated 6¢, docketed on reverse "Postage 8/100" reflecting adding of 2¢ carrier fee.

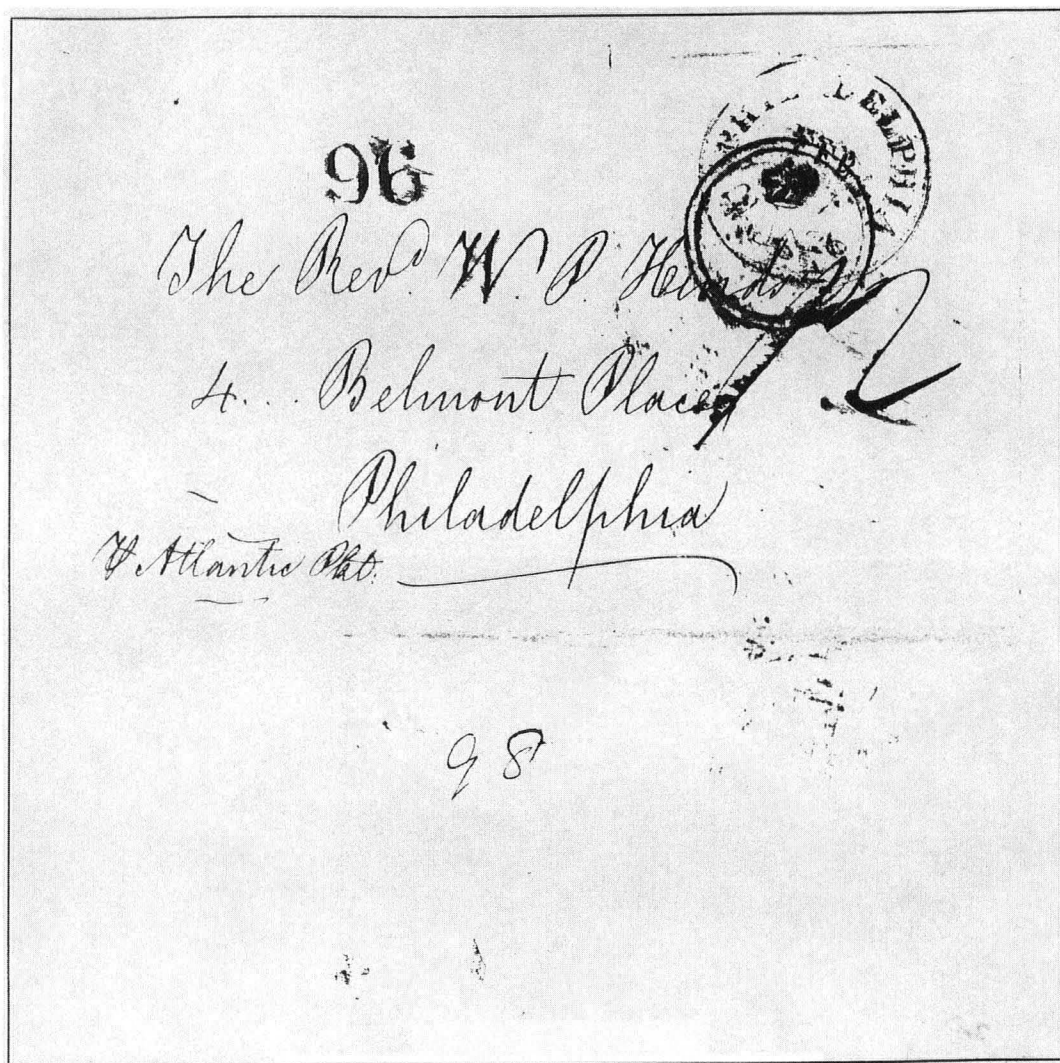


Figure 20. 1854 transatlantic quadruple weight letter, rated 96¢, docketed "98" reflecting addition of 2¢ carrier fee.

Figure 18 is an example of an 1807 folded letter that was privately carried from New Castle to Philadelphia, where it was given directly to a carrier for delivery. I am satisfied for the reasons set forth in my analysis of this cover in *The Penny Post*¹⁷ that this does in fact evidence carrier service and not a way fee or ship captain's fee.

Another set of rates that subsumes the carrier fee is found on incoming ship and treaty ocean mail. The folded letter shown as Figure 19 was properly given the port of destination ship rate of 6¢ when it arrived in Philadelphia. The letter is docketed on its back, however, with the phrase "Postage 8/100." The extra 2¢ was the carrier fee.

Figure 20 originated in London in 1854 where it was handstamped 96 [cents] for four times the transatlantic rate due. Upon arrival in Philadelphia it was inscribed on the back flap by hand "98." The extra 2¢ was for the carrier fee. Likewise, Figure 21, an 1855 cover which originated in Liverpool, was handstamped in England to indicate 24¢ due upon arrival. It was inscribed in Philadelphia with the phrase "26 cents." Carrier service was the reason for the extra charge.

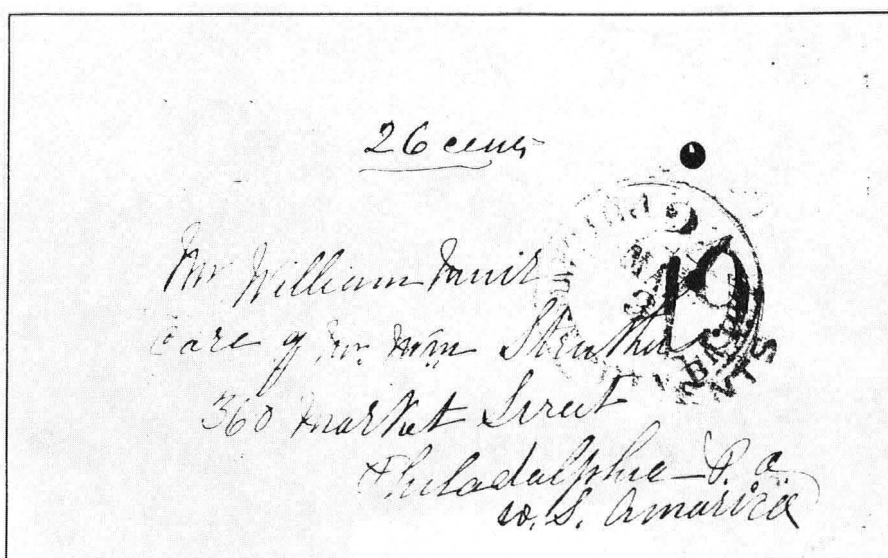


Figure 21. 1855 Liverpool to Philadelphia cover, handstamped at 24¢ rate, annotated "26 cents" to reflect carrier fee.

C. Covers that likely received carrier service

Lowell Newman, writing in *The Penny Post*,¹⁸ persuasively concluded that covers in Philadelphia and Washington, and perhaps in other cities having carrier service, which had a check mark on their face had been processed by the carrier department of the post office. I will not repeat Mr. Newman's reasoned argument here, but I recommend the article as an example of how seemingly innocuous markings might have carrier significance. Figures 22 and 23 are examples of such covers.

Similarly, one sometimes finds a cover with a simple pencil stroke on its face. It is believed that this mark was put on the folded letter by the carrier to indicate 1¢ due.¹⁹ Figure 24 is an example.

¹⁷Steven M. Roth, "The Writing Says '2 Cents': Why?," *The Penny Post*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Oct. 1994), pp. 22-25.

¹⁸Lowell Newman, "The Carrier Check Marks," *The Penny Post*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Oct. 1994), pp. 12-15.

¹⁹For a discussion of this in New York City, see Hahn, "Letter Carrier Service in New York," *op. cit.*, p. 247.

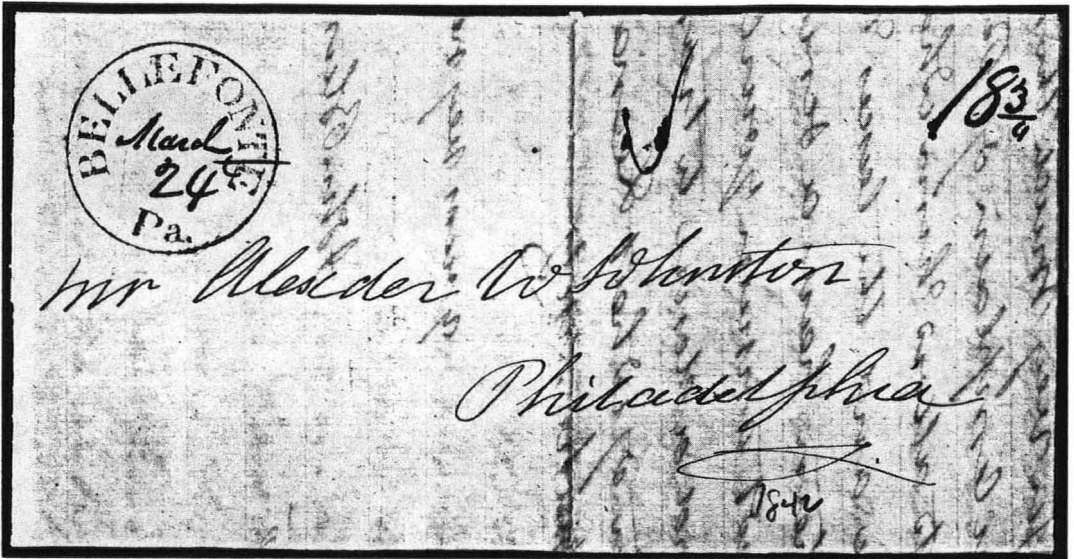


Figure 22. Bellefonte to Philadelphia, Pa. folded letter, March 24, 1842, with check mark on cover indicative of carrier department processing.



Figure 23. Lock Haven to Philadelphia, Pa. folded letter with check mark on cover indicative of carrier department processing.

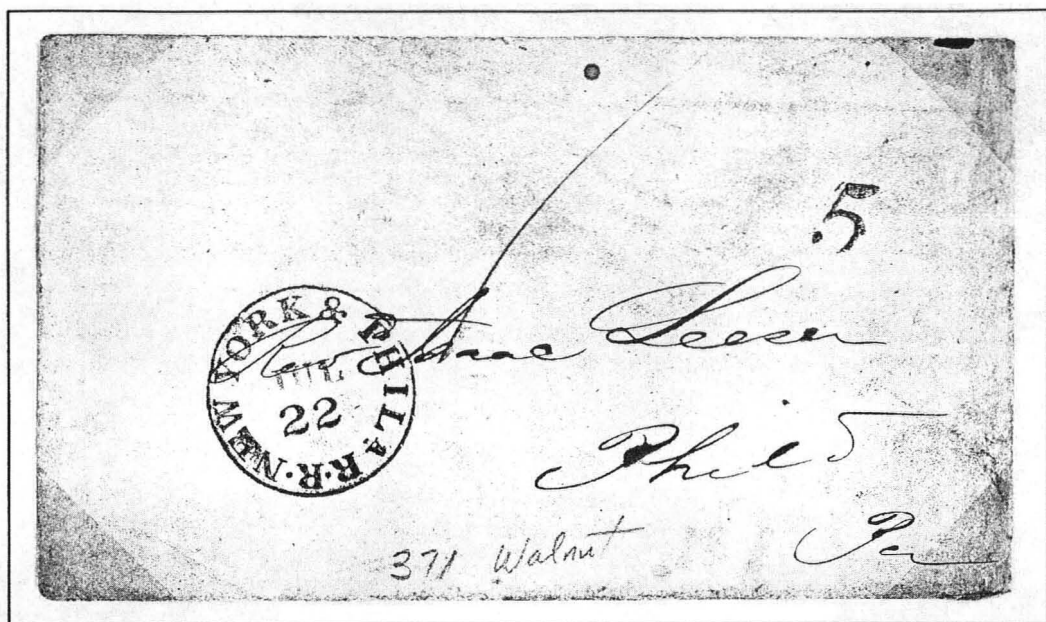


Figure 24. Pencil mark on cover, possible 1¢ due marking by carrier.

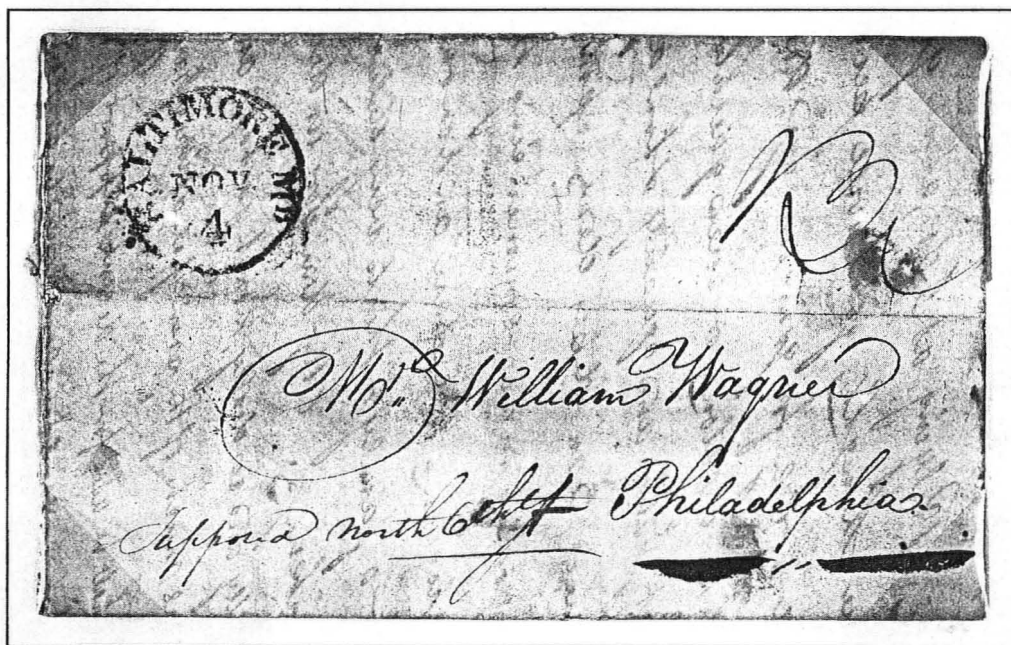


Figure 25. Addition of street address, suggesting carrier service.

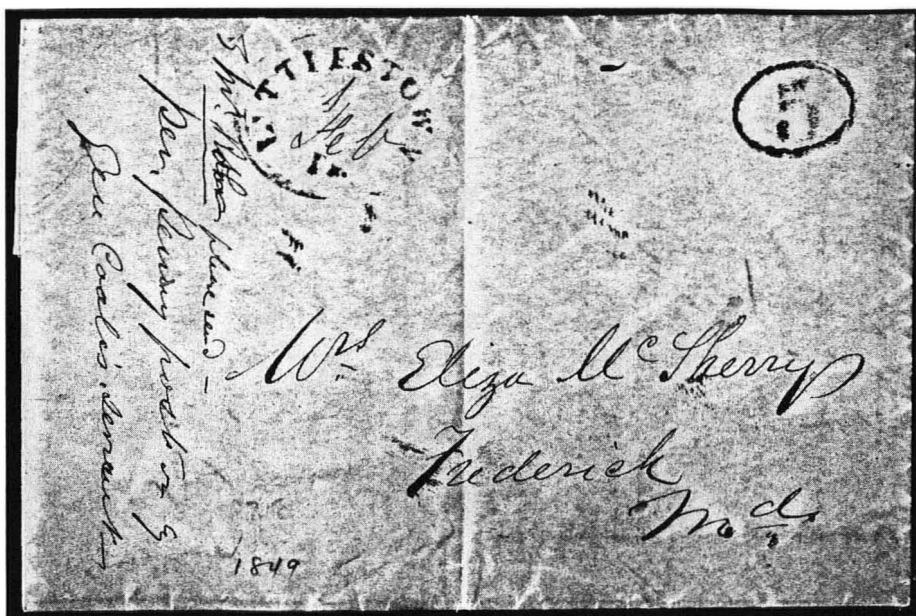


Figure 26. 1849 folded letter, annotated with instructions to send by penny post "or by Gen Cole's servant."

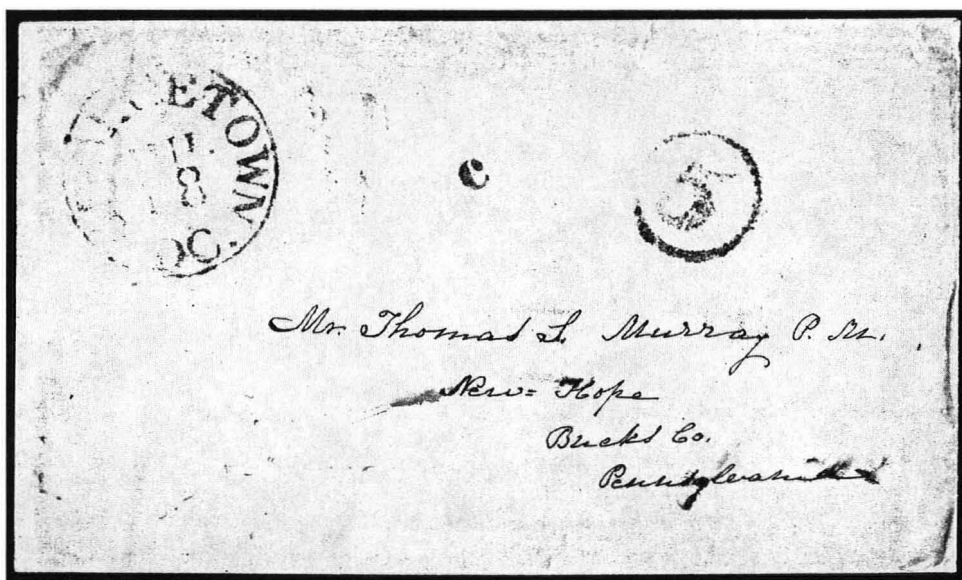


Figure 27. Georgetown, D.C. to New Hope, Pa. folded letter, "c" handstamp of unknown significance.

Finally, letter carrier service is indicated, too, by the presence of the street address.²⁰ This is especially true when the street address has been added in the city of receipt. Figure 25 is an example where the street address has been added in a different hand and ink than that used to address the folded letter.

D. Covers that we would like to think received carrier service, but about which we will probably never be sure

This class of covers is limitless. I will illustrate two covers to show the kind of clues we respond to.

Figure 26 is an ordinary 1849 folded letter that originated in Littleton, Pa. and was addressed to Frederick, Md. The unusual feature of this cover, however, is the sender's admonition to the postmaster: "Mr. _____ please send/per penny post or by Gen Cole's servant."

We will never know if or how this admonition was acted upon since there is no evidence of carrier service on the cover. But it is intriguing that the sender believed that there was a penny post either in Littleton or Frederick. Indeed, as Robert Stets has shown,²¹ a penny post had operated in Fredericktown before 1809. But was it still in operation in 1849?

The cover shown as Figure 27 originated in Georgetown, D.C.; it was addressed to New Hope, Pa. Neither town is reported as having had carrier service. But I have now found two examples of covers from this same correspondence with a handstamp "C" on their face. Does this indicate carrier service in one or the other of the towns? Or was it a private receiving mark? It is likely we will never know.

V. Conclusion

The search for carrier serviced covers that do not scream out "post boy" when you see them is challenging and occasionally rewarding. I would appreciate other examples of types of carrier serviced covers one can look for. The information will be noted in this Section.²² □

²⁰*Idem.*, p. 248.

²¹Stets, *op. cit.*

²²My thanks go to Mr. Calvet M. Hahn who read the draft of this article and made several helpful suggestions to correct it.

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