

A Hudson River Mail Cover

By George McGowan



In Ken DeLisle's book, *The W. L. L. Peltz Collection of Albany Postal History*, there is mention of a cancel 30mm in diameter "U.S. EXPRESS MAIL / N.YORK or ALBANY / DATE / N.Y.", see attached figure.

He further details that letters of the 1840's displaying one of these markings are mementos of the long ongoing struggle between the Post Office Dept. and independent mail carriers.



U.S. Express Mail – N. York Cancel

As a result of steam boat services and later railroad service quick, reliable, connections over long distances were becoming commonplace. Some entrepreneurial private citizens established delivery companies that would carry parcels, goods, drafts, notes and bills, etc. In addition, these messengers would collect and pay drafts, execute orders for merchandise, pick up and deliver cash, and make themselves useful to their customers in any way possible. The messengers would pay for their fare as a regular passenger and carry their express cases as personal luggage. The carrying of letters put these companies in direct competition with the Post Office Dept. and in violation of the law.

Express companies were actually advertising their services as being in competition with the Post Office. Attempts to stop this illegal mail competition met with little or no success as the public enjoyed breaking this law because they often received better services at lower rates.

To make a long story shorter, the Post Office decided it was better to join them rather than to fight them, and saw an advantage in having these express companies carry the U.S. Mail under contract, plus the use of the words "Express Mail" gave a favorable impression to the public.

These markings were replaced by a new style device in early 1847, and the "ALBANY" cancel is the rarer of the two.

The cover in figure #1 originated in NYC on Aug 5, 1845 and carries an Aug 5 N.YORK express marking applied by an agent, probably on the boat as it traveled north bound. It cost 10 cents to mail, the correct rate for a ½ oz. letter going over 300 miles (Act of March 3, 1845) and went to Detroit, Mich.

If you collect New York postal history or would like to learn more about this and other related topics, consider joining the Empire State Postal History Society.