

BULLETIN *of the Empire State*

Postal History Society

Volume 51 Number 1

March 2018

UPCOMING EVENTS:*

ROPEX

Rochester Philatelic Assoc.

Canandaigua, New York May 18-19, 2018

The Greater Canandaigua Civic Center

250 North Bloomfield Road

Canandaigua, New York.

Tom Fortunato, 585-752-6178

stampmf@frontiernet.net

www.rpastamps.org/ropes.html

* Taken from American Philatelist

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Members, over the winter I have been searching E-bay for covers that fit into my collecting interest. It seems I can always find something to add to my collection. Granted there is plenty of overpriced material, but there are often bargains too. I was able to buy a rare Pam Am cancel at a reasonable price. In this case I made an offer and we went back and forth and settled on a price satisfying buyer and seller. If you haven't tried E-bay as a source of covers for your collection, you should give it a try. There are covers out there to be had but you need to search for them.

David Przepiora

***EXCELSIOR!* DEADLINE**

The deadline for the March 2018 issue of *EXCELSIOR!* is February 1st.

As an incentive, submitting a one to four-page article will get you a one year extension on your membership and a five-page article will get you a two year extension. Just think – if you write regularly for *EXCELSIOR!*--you'll have the potential of earning free membership for life!...And think about how you will enrich yourself and others.

Published Quarterly by the Empire State Postal History Society
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BULLETIN DEADLINE

DEADLINE – The deadline for the June issue of the *BULLETIN* is **June 1**. The editor is always looking for short (1/2 page, 1 page, 1 ½ page or 2 page) articles to fill spots in the Bulletin. Submit to largin1@verizon.net. Larry Laliberte

Secretary's Membership Report

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New York terminal RPO cancels

By George McGowen

Mail between cities originally would have been carried by post rider or carriage. With the introduction of the steamship, postal authorities soon recognized that a decrease in delivery time could be had and declared all navigable waterways, (rivers, canals, lakes etc.) “post roads”. The next major development to speed up the mail was the railroads, and again the post office took advantage of the new technology. Few people realize that by the turn of the century, the post office was delivering mail at incredible efficiency. Countries around the world would send representatives to the US to learn how it was possible. A letter could be mailed in Boston on one day and delivered in Chicago the next day.



Figure 1. A postal clerk prepares a mail bag for pick up “on the fly” at the Fort Plain Station on the New York Central Railroad.

Post card from the editor's collection.

The backbone of the Railway Mail System was the RPO cars and the postal clerks who manned them. Before the train left the station, clerks would be at work receiving sacks of mail, 1st class, newspapers, parcels etc. and destinations could be on route or the terminus. Mail on route was dropped and picked up on the fly, **Figure 1**, or if it was a scheduled stop, exchanged for outgoing mail. All the while the train was moving, mail was being sorted and bagged.

Terminals were located in large cities where another group of clerks

would assemble outgoing mail and receive incoming, all on a very tight schedule. Clerks carried an amazing number of destinations in their memory and were tested regularly. A passing grade was 97% and many scored a perfect paper.

As postal historians, we study, among other things, postmarks. Most mail entering the Railway Mail system would have already been postmarked, however, letters found without a cancel were hit by the RPO clerk. Letters and cards mailed at the terminal would receive a terminal cancel. Pictured here are a few NY terminal cancels.



Figure 2. Albany, 1909
Figure 3. Binghamton, 1942
Figure 4. Buffalo, 1935

Figure 5. Utica, 1923
Figure 6. Penn Station, 1915
Figure 7. Grand Cent. Station, 1916

Over the years terminals used several different cancels, both hand and machine. These would make a nice addition to any city or county collection.