

## APS UNIT 28

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EMPIRE STATE  
POSTAL HISTORY  
SOCIETY

## PEELING BACK THE HISTORY OF A COVER

By Albert W. Starkweather

Modern examples of nixies — mail undeliverable as addressed — are scarce since they are supposed to be destroyed if the USPS nixie section cannot find a recipient.

This example with three overlaid labels was undeliverable as both the sender and intended recipients had moved and left no forwarding address.

The letter from Ithaca, which was postmarked in Rochester on August 05, 2009, was stamped RETURNED FOR POSTAGE. The mail carrier attempted to return the letter, but found the sender had moved and noted this on the envelope. The USPS then applied a VAC (vacant) spray (arrow), a return to sender endorsement applied to each piece in an RTS (return to sender) bundle.

USPS attempted to return the piece on three more occasions. The first (1) received a nixie label on August 14 and endorsed AKN (addressee not known) at the upper right. The main endorsement was RETURN TO SENDER / VACANT / UNABLE TO FORWARD.

The second (2) on September 10, also marked AKN received a different endorsement: RETURN TO SENDER / ATTEMPTED – NOT KNOWN / UNABLE TO FORWARD. This label was applied on top of the first.

The third (3), applied on September 17 over the first two, lacks the ANK marking, but is otherwise identical to the second label. A nixie clerk has written *Dead letter* on the left edge. All three labels include the sender's extended ZIP code at the bottom left of the labels.

This unopened cover was part of a batch of covers returned to me from a broken package I had mailed to Heather Sweeting in Sterling. (See page 16.) If USPS procedure had been followed, it would have been opened by the Rochester ASF (Auxiliary Service Facility) to be to determine if it could be returned to the sender or destroyed if it could not.

