



EMPIRE STATE
POSTAL HISTORY
SOCIETY

APS UNIT 28

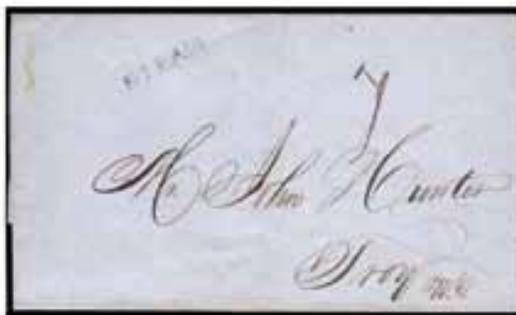
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HUDSON RIVER MAIL POSES A CHALLENGE

By Maris Tirums

Throughout history, waterways have served various nations and cultures as a primary means of travel, conveyance of goods, and communication. In New York State, rivers and streams south of the St. Lawrence River basin almost all feed into the Mohawk–Hudson basin, and this made the Hudson River a major artery for travel.



In the 19th century, especially after the invention of steam driven ships, the Hudson became a major mail route between Albany and New York City. Steamboats also disembarked at Troy, about 10 miles beyond Albany.

In spite of the practicality of carrying mail on the Hudson, covers that can be identified as having traveled via this route are relatively scarce. Hudson River mail was marked upon disembarkation rather than at the point of origin. Thus, a letter from New York City to Albany carried via a Hudson River steamboat was marked in Albany and not in New York.

The cover illustrated here was mailed to Troy, and was hand-stamped STEAM at the Troy post office. Docketing reveals that the letter was mailed in August 1846, but as the contents are not with the cover sheet, we cannot know for certain where it was initially mailed.

The seven cent rate, shown with a manuscript numeral 7, is a peculiar amount that calls for some analysis. In 1846, the postal rate to mail a letter weighing one-half ounce or less a distance under 300 miles was five cents. The additional two cents was referred to as the ship letter fee and was paid directly to the captain of the steamboat that carried the letter. The addressee had to pay the entire seven cents as this letter was not prepaid by the sender.

Hudson River mail poses a challenging Empire State postal history field. The definitive reference work on the subject was written in 1969 by Kenneth R. deLisle of Albany and is titled *The Hudson River Mail, 1804–1858*. DeLisle based his research on the incomparable Albany collection of the late W. L. L. Peltz and on his own substantial holdings. ■