

Synopsis
St. Louis Street Car Mail 1892-1915

Gary G. Hendren

I began collecting MO Postal History in the early '90's and acquired a number of St. Louis Street Car cancels including one that turned out to be a last day cancel. Several years later, when the Earliest Known Usage (EKU) came up in a local auction, I was able to acquire it, giving me the bookends needed to tell the story of the Street Car Mail in St. Louis. I've been diligently trying to acquire key pieces ever since.

Purpose of Exhibit – The purpose of the exhibit is to show the routes, cancels and usages of the St. Louis Street Car mail service. St. Louis Postmaster John B. Harlow was the first postmaster in the U.S. to use electrified trolleys to speed up the mail service in rapidly growing cities, 14 additional cities that had their own distinguishing cancels using this method of mail delivery from 1892 to 1929 when the Baltimore system ended.

Challenge Factor – The St. Louis Monograph lists 55 different canceling devices, if you include the centennial cancel, used in the 23-year life of Street Car mail in St. Louis. Many are easy to acquire, but the last 10 to 12 become more difficult with the last 3 or 4 becoming extremely difficult to obtain. Earliest and latest known uses are subject to change. My EKU for the system is unique while the LKU can be found on more than one line. The quest for usages, destinations, special services, and unusual rates takes a lot of patience and searching. I recently acquired the rarest of all St. Louis cancels, the Clayton Circuit cancel, and can account for 2 other cancels currently in collector's hands.

What is Presented – The exhibit shows examples of the St. Louis RPO No. 1, St. Louis and Florissant, Grand Avenue, St. Louis and Webster Groves, St. Louis and Kirkwood, St. Louis Provisional, Cass, Chouteau, Clayton, Olive, Easton, Northwest, North Broadway, Southwest, and South Broadway RPO's as well as the Centennial Parade RPO. All cancels in the St. Louis Street Car Monograph are represented.

Organization – The organization is chronological as the lines came into existence and as additions and changes were made in the routes and old canceling devices were replaced by newer ones. I also try to show some of the services, markings, and destinations for the different lines. Emphasis is placed on the Grand Avenue service which, during this period of time, was the major route along what was then the center of the upper-class residential area, was near major businesses, and carried a larger percentage of the mail than most lines. Sub-Stations were closed during this period.

Material Highlights – Rare Clayton cancel with no more than 5 recorded examples
EKU (Unique) and LKU's for St. Louis with EKU's and LKU's for several of the marking periods and routes.
Foreign Destinations: Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Italy, South Africa, Switzerland, Cuba
Incoming: Germany, Denmark, Mexico

Misspelled Chouteau

Several unlisted (TR)ip numbers

Several unlisted Killer numbers

Six Special Delivery uses including two not listed in Doug Clark's original survey

Newspaper wrapper with a transit marking

All 3 of the markings, each used less than a month, with no reference to "St. Louis" in the cancel

All of the Provisionals with variations

A double street car cancel and a combination street car with a St. Louis Pioneer Air Mail cancel.

Informational Sources –

The Street Railway Post Offices of Saint Louis by Robert G. Schultz, Mobile Post Office Society Monograph series

"The Saint Louis, Missouri Street Car Mail System" by Robert J. Hutcheson, 1963 Congress Book

"The Street Car R.P.O. System" by Earl D. Moore, 1948 Stamp Specialist, Chartreuse Book

Several articles and items specific to St. Louis have appeared in the Transit Postmark Collector by MPOS