

Synopsis

James William Denver – The Man & His Times

Purpose: This exhibit is a general class display division presentation which uses postal history, letters, documents and limited ephemera (almost all in period) related to the long and fascinating life of James William Denver. Items exhibited help illuminate the person and general historical importance of Denver and his times. Except for minor exceptions, the exhibit generally follows a chronological progression.

Background: J. W. Denver was the archetypal mid-19th century man: lawyer, newspaper editor, 49er, duelist, California state senator & secretary of state, US Congressman, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Governor of Kansas Territory, Civil War General and successful claims attorney in the nation's capital. Although Denver was born into a humble farm family he died a wealthy man with extensive business investments and real estate holdings. Denver crossed paths with many famous and influential individuals of his time, and although not a well known figure today (few even realize Denver, Colorado was named after him), he was a confidant of presidents, governors, prominent politicians, generals, judges, etc. etc. He lived during exciting times and was part of many of the most important events that occurred during this era. Although Denver correspondence is well known to postal historians, my extensive research indicates there has never been an exhibit about Denver's life or containing a substantial number of Denver related items.

Plan & Treatment: As previously noted, the exhibit generally follows a chronological progression, with a few exceptions, of Denver's life from his birth in Virginia to shortly before his death in 1892. This is the most logical and non-confusing way to tell the story of Denver's life. Even though a display division exhibit, there are numerous examples of postal history used in the presentation, and the non-philatelic items support and are important to the story line. From a postal history perspective, this exhibit shows various rates and uses spanning approximately 45 years, including stampless, California Express companies, transcontinental rates & routes, territorial covers, free franks, circular and carrier rates, etc. When comparing various components of the exhibit it is apparent that a greater emphasis is given to the pre 1865 period than the post Civil War era. Prior to the mid-1860s Denver followed an extremely varied career path across a wide geographic area. In the post Civil War period Denver dedicated his life to building a

successful law practice and pretty much settled down to his joint residences in Washington DC and Ohio. There is a type of items that is not in the exhibit, notably Pony Express usages. There is one Pony Express cover addressed to Denver, a free frank from Senator Milton Latham, which currently resides in the collection of a well known western cover collector. Although the exhibit covers Denver's entire life, primarily collateral material is necessary for the pre-1845 era because no Denver correspondence is known from this time period.

Challenge Factors: I have collected Denver correspondence and related items for over 20 years and during the last ten years studied his life extensively. Any accumulation of 19th century postal history and documents tends to show a wide range of conditions due to age, wear, storage method, etc., and Denver items are no different. However, I have attempted to obtain the best examples available. Denver correspondence has been sought by collectors since at least the 1920s and items have resided in the collections of many well known philatelists including Ashbrook, Alexander, Cipolla, Grunin, Frajola, Graham, Haas, Neinken, Polland, Risvold and Wagshal. Covers in this exhibit once belonged to all of this distinguished group. Denver covers have been spread throughout the philatelic world, many tracing their origin to the Fox auction of Denver Family Correspondence in 1968. At that time the majority of items still had their original enclosures. Today, that is not the case and only rarely is the letter still with the envelope. I have been able to locate a significant number of original letters and in some cases reunite them with the envelope. I have acquired many of my most prominent pieces from major auctions over a number of years. Some items have been purchased from dealers who recognized the significance of Denver covers. Other items have been discovered in dealer's stocks and lesser known auctions. I avidly pursue Denver items and have spent countless hours poring over dealer inventories, searching on-line and every auction catalogue I can obtain, including non-philatelic sources. My reward has been the opportunity to build an interesting and historically significant exhibit. Fierce competition in auctions for unusual uses, especially Western material has made acquisition of many Denver items challenging.

Synopsis: James William Denver: The Man & His Times

Research & Knowledge: I have studied Denver's life for many years and have utilized all known published sources and many primary sources located in archival collections such as the Kansas Historical Society, University of Kansas, Huntington Library and Clinton County Ohio Historical Society. I have also utilized my own collection of historical documents related to Denver, many which contain information not noted in any published account. There are relatively good general summaries concerning Denver on the internet, but all contain various inaccuracies. The two books that have been published on Denver both contain valuable information, but lack objectivity and tend to be more hero worship than accurate portrayals. Denver's pro-slavery views in particular are either avoided entirely or glossed over. Probably the best single source of information on Denver is an article that I wrote for the 2013 Philatelic Congress Book. My research and acquisition of historical documents has given me unique insight into his life and views on a number of subjects. The postal history items along with relevant documents have allowed me to accurately reconstruct his life.

Highlights: Several items in my exhibit are worth noting due to their unusual nature or use. I have used a dark red outline to designate these items.

- Folded 1849 letter with Westport, Mo. ms. postmark datelined Osage Sac & Fox Agency which was in what became Kansas Territory. Concerned a law suit about a horse. Illustrated in Alexander's "**Missouri Western Frontier**".
- Cram & Rogers, Adams & Co. Express conjunctive usage with appropriate hand stamps. Fewer than six similar covers recorded.
- "Via Nicaragua" free frank, New York Steamship postal marking and "Free" hand stamp (Ex Ashbrook, pictured in his One Cent & Neinken's Ten Cent book). Only recorded free frank example of this Via Nicaragua handstamp and fewer than five total examples recorded of this particular oval marking.
- Strip of four 3 cent imperforate stamps with Sutters Mill postmark. Fewer than ten recorded covers with this postmark. (Ex Hass, illustrated in Coburn's Letters of Gold)
- San Francisco Newsletter circular rate franked with plate 3 sheet margin one cent imperforate stamp. Fewer than five recorded examples of

SF Newsletter without preprinted address panel. (Ex Cipolla)

- San Francisco free frank with one cent imperforate stamp. Not a circular rate, was sealed, marked personal. Scarce example of carrier use with the one cent stamp paying fee "to the mails". Tracing of the postmark used on this cover and a notation of the stamp denomination and Type illustrated in Ashbrook's One Cent book. One of two recorded examples. (Ex Cipolla, Ashbrook)
- "Via Tehuantepec" triple rate cover with strip of three perforated 1857 series ten cent stamps. Route used less than a year, only recorded Tehuantepec triple transcontinental rate cover.
- "Stage Coach" cover sent "Via Las Angeles" to Ohio, double rate franked with perforated ten cent and three 3 cent stamps, underpaid by one cent, no postage due. Illustrated in Simpson's US Postal Marking. (Ex Polland)
- Transcontinental rate cover franked with two strips of five one cent perforated stamps sent to Denver in 1861. Signed & plated by Ashbrook. (Ex Haas)
- Wyandott, KT cover to Denver in Lecompton, KT. Scarce corner card envelope, post mark illustrated in Ashbrook's One Cent book. (Ex Ashbrook)
- Fort Arbuckle, Chickasaw Nation cover to Denver in Lecompton, Kansas Territory. Only recorded copy of this manuscript postmark. Letter concerns battle with Comanche village.
- Letter from banking house to Denver in California postmarked Kansas, Mo. 1860, "due 7" handstamp and enclosure with ornate illustration, only example known. Concerns claim against Pawnee Indians for theft of horses in Council Grove, KT, Ex. (Ex. Alexander).
- Cover and enclosures sent to Denver in DC, forwarded to Ohio with formal invitation to dedication of statue of Civil War hero General Thomas. Only recorded example of these documents.
- Original Matthew Brady carte-de-visite of Denver taken in Washington DC, and Denver is wearing his general's uniform. Although there are other photographs of Denver in various archives and museums, *only two or three are in private hands.*

James William Denver – The Man & His Times

Bibliography

- Alexander, Thomas. “Bleeding Kansas”, Chronicle of US Classic Postal Issues, Vol. 40, No. 1, pp. 28-30, 1988.
- Alexander, Thomas. **Simpson’s US Postal Markings 1851-61, 2nd Ed.** USPS, Columbus, Ohio, 1979, pp. 45, 322, 351, 377.
- Ashbrook, Stanley. **The US One Cent Stamp 1851-1857, Vol. II**, H. L. Lindquist, New York, NY, 1938, pp. 258, 264, 303, 319.
- Ashbrook, Stanley. “James W. Denver”, Stamps, Vol. 95, No. 3, May 1951.
- Johnson, William. “James William Denver-his public life”, **The Congress Book 2013**, Ken Trettin Editor, Marrakech Express Inc., Tarpon Springs, Florida, 2013, pp. 38-69.
- Martin, William A. **Somewhere in Time, The Kansas Territory 1854-1861**. La Posta Pub., 1987. Good general reference on Kansas Territorial postal history.