

American Sailing Packets on the North Atlantic 1818 to 1840

Synopsis

Revised 3/7/2013

Purpose: Postal history material illustrates how the United States adopted skills gained during the War of 1812 to gain superiority of North Atlantic sea lanes. This provided reliable year round communication that supported the evolution of the industrial revolution in both countries.

Scope: For this study, a packet is defined as a vessel that sailed year round on a regular schedule between two specific ports. The material covers the period from the time the Black Ball and five other lines established regular sailing schedules that provided reliable communications between the United States and Europe. The material ends with the beginning of the steam era that reduced sailing packets' importance due to more reliable steam ships, on the westerly leg of their crossings.

To understand this study's importance one must be familiar with types of vessels sailing on the North Atlantic in the early 1800s. Traders did not depart on a regular schedule, nor did they sail during winter months. They offered poor reliability for business communications. Tramp vessels provided even worse service. These vessels sailed to any port with cargo to deliver or to be picked up, usually waiting for a full hold before moving on to the next port. Neither traders nor tramps provided growing commercial interests with needed regular communications.

Treatment: During the period of study, packets generated revenue by concentrating on service for mail, specie, passengers and fine freight. By sailing on a regular published schedule, they provided the growing international business community with needed reliable communications. The exhibit develops in chronological order by a packet shipping line entrance into the market. A primary feature presents sailing packets' arrival and departure dates not shown to this extent in any other exhibit. Outlined boxes with a shaded background contains sailing or ship information.

Section pages are designed in the following manner:

1. Beginning of a section headings are in upper left: CAPS - bold.
2. Subsequent pages of that section have major heading in CAPS in lighter tone font.
3. Upper left headings contain shipping line name, bold on the first page of a section and lighter tone of subsequent pages.
4. Upper right contains the ship name with unique philatelic features of the item.
5. An introduction to each chapter is included under the main section title.
5. Information pertaining to a cover is at the bottom or side of the item.
7. Specific ship information is in a shaded box left or right of a cover.
8. Rates appear in a table below or near the ship information box.

Exhibit follows this convention as closely as cover size and shape permit.

Since winning the Grand award in Oklahoma City, exhibit has been increased with new material from six to eight frames. In addition, approximately 20 percent of the original material has been up graded. The exhibit has also been remounted and significant formatting changes made to make the story line easier to follow.

Background: All six shipping companies that formed packet services during the period of this exhibit were established shipping companies. Several sailed vessels around the Horn to China in addition to England and the Continent.

At the time of this study, New York was contending with Boston and Philadelphia to become the leading east coast port. Building of the Erie Canal in 1825 decided this contest by giving New York an advantage to markets and produce of the western states.

The exhibit ends in 1840 with the initial decline of packet service on the North Atlantic when Samuel Cunard and the English Government inaugurated regular steam service between Liverpool and Boston, July 4, 1840.

Steamers made the western passage in a shorter time than sailing packets. Communications and transport of specie, mail and passengers slowly became the job of steamers. Some packets remained in business transporting immigrants and less valuable freight on a regular schedule. The Black Ball Line terminated packet operations in 1865.

Personnal Knowledge and Reserch: The exhibitor spent more than ten years researching arrival and departure dates of American sailing packets. Results of this reserach were published in 2009 in *North Atlantic Packets Depasrtures and Arrivals 1818-1840*. During 2010 the book entered four literature competitions winning four golds and one grand. The United States Philatelic Classics Society awarded it the Stanley B. Ashbrook Cup in 2011 for the best philatelic research in 2010. Results of this research appear in Ship Information boxes with tinted blue background for each packet.

Condition and Acquisition: Material in this exhibit is generally more than 150 years old and shows normal aging features associated with ephemeral material. Items selected support the story and illustrate unique features from the study period. When available, unusual origins and destinations enhance the importance of packet service. Seeking material in better condition, from other ships and with better philatelic features remains a goal of the exhibitor.

There will be apparent balance challenges. These can be explained by considering that the Black Ball Line sailed twice as many packets as the other lines. Also the Dramatic Line started packet late in the period of this study, 1837. Another contributing factor was the Black Ball Line's greater reliability in maintaining their schedule and the safety of their ships. Historians believe that they were the carrier of choice. Also as the rates became more affordable in Great Britain more people could send letters contributing to more available material in the later stages of this study.

Bibliography:

1. Pullin, James R. *North Atlantic Packets Departures and Arrivals 1818 - 1840*, 2009. The definitive work on the sailing schedules of the packets sailing between New York - Liverpool and New York - London. Also contains useful information on the development of the packet lines of interest.
2. Albion, Robert G. *Square-Riggers on Schedule*, Princeton University Press, 1938. Has little information on the schedules but is a wealth of information on development of packet services.
3. Robertson, Alan W. *A History of the Ship Letters of the British Isles*, James Bendon Ltd., 1993. Originally published by the author from 1955-1964 and considered the major reference for this subject.
4. Tabcart, Colin. *Robertson Revisited*, James Bendon Ltd, 1997. An update of the data found in Alan Robertson's *A History of the Ship Letters of the British Isles*. A valuable additional reference.