

Postal Markings of the Schenectady, N.Y. Post Office, 1797-1907

Synopsis

Purpose:

Demonstrate the evolution of postal markings of the Schenectady, New York post office from its establishment in 1792 to about 1900.

Approach:

This exhibit follows the chronological succession of Schenectady's postmasters, showing the fabricated and manuscript postmarks, rate marks and the few auxiliary markings found on mail conveyed from the Schenectady post office. This approach highlights the fact that early postmasters personally decided who to hire and what equipment to use, so the marks on surviving mail reflect each postmaster's approach to running a post office in their day.

The exhibitor takes advantage of this approach to note his postmasters' actions that determine the markings we see, and to throw in a page here or there that focuses on daily office activity.

Scope:

The exhibit covers 110 years, 17 postmasters and, coincidentally, 17 postmarks. The first 3 postmasters employed a total of 7 clerks during "the Manuscript Era" of 1800 to 1828. Just one set of single letter rate stamps was used from 1830 to about 1840, followed by a veritable explosion of different 5's & 10's. The point is that for a relatively significant post office (based on revenue), the operation was simple and never used more than a couple of clerks on any one day until probably 1865 when demobilized soldiers came home.

Exhibited material illustrates fully such postal periods as the War of 1812, the receipt of government devices after Schenectady was designated a Presidential Office, the rate simplifications of 1845 and 1851-1855, the separation of postmarking from obliteration, the introduction of "duplex" devices in the short era of vulcanized rubber stamps in the late 1870's, and the testing and introduction of machines for processing the mails in the late 1890's - and the inevitable discovery that not everything could pass through a machine.

Presentation:

With few exceptions, each exhibit page identifies the standing postmaster, the current postmark and an associated "feature" illustrated on that page, whether it is rate markings, the post-1860 "distinct canceller" or an auxiliary mark.

Manuscript markings were used in Schenectady to one extent or another almost continuously from inception to 1860. Care is taken to differentiate among "hands" during periods when all or most markings were applied with pen and ink; this may be an unanticipated feature, but it helps tie each postmaster personally to the management and operation of the post office [see Appendix titled Manuscript Markings of the Schenectady, N.Y., Post Office] for background.

The exhibit categorizes material as Important (red border), Interesting (orange border), or Illustrative (blue border).

The term *Earliest Recorded Use* is used during the years 1797 to 1855 when the ASCC is generally accepted as authoritative as to the earliest and latest year (but no more precisely) that a postmark was reported to have been used. Thereafter, the term *Earliest Known Use* is used based on the exhibitor's knowledge.

Knowledge of Subject:

Over the last 9 years the exhibitor has pursued one philatelic interest: Schenectady postal history, building a collection of significant and interesting outgoing and incoming

mail from provincial times to the 20th century. Within the confines of marcophily, the best of these are shown in this exhibit. Since each new acquisition for a collection requires assimilation, the exhibitor has studied and written on the operation of the Schenectady post office for most of those 9 years.

In that time, the exhibitor has identified a few previously unrecorded Schenectady markings:

1. the “3” rate stamp shown on an 1848 prepaid circular (Frame 3 Page 8);
2. the 3rd POD-supplied circular date stamp, which measures 32mm diameter, shown in Frame 3 Pages 11-13;
3. the existence of two very similar Civil War era 26mm double circles that had not previously been differentiated, shown in Frame 3 Pages 14-16 and Frame 4 Pages 1-4.

The exhibitor also cataloged 3 additional variations of the town name Schenectady (beyond “Schenectady” and “Schen,dy” previously reported in ASCC) and has demonstrated that variations on the town name were codified by each postmaster over the 27 years when the postmark was applied in manuscript (see Appendix - Manuscript Markings of the Schenectady Post Office).

Also, in the event any catalog of postal markings aspires to advance the New York State timeframe to 1900, the exhibitor would offer the 4 additional hand stamps and 5 different postmarking/cancelling machines used in Schenectady between 1878 and 1907 shown in Frame 4 Pages 5-16.

Condition & Rarity:

Condition of the material in this exhibit ranges from Average to Extremely Fine, which is understandable for covers, if not stamps. The condition of ERU/EKU covers is usually Average, as it should be - who ever burned an EKU because it was ratty?

Rarity in covers depends on whom you consider authoritative. ASCC stays away from “rarity”. George Bernadt, the seminal cataloger of New York State postal history, considers the “Large Double Circle” of 1824 - 1825 as the scarcest Schenectady postmark with 6 to 15 extant in 1993, and the exhibitor holds 8 today.

Perhaps the greatest rarity in this exhibit is the “Restored Rate” cover of April 7, 1816 (Frame 1 Page 10) or perhaps the only known example of a manuscript postmark applied by first Schenectady postmaster Joseph Shurtleff’s unidentified clerk (Frame 1 Page 5).

Bibliography:

Bernadt, George J., *Postal Markings of New York State*, ESPHS 1993

Bramwell, Robert B., *Geography and Postal Service between Schenectady and New York City*, APS Summer Seminar 2011, Diane DeBlois, Robert Dalton Harris & David L. Straight, eds.

Bramwell, Robert B., *Changing Mail Service Areas Indicated by Lists of Letters Remaining for Post Offices on the New York Frontier, 1790-1820*, Postal History Society, No. 159 Oct. 2014

Kay, John & Chester M. Smith, *New York Postal History*, APS, 1982

Langford, Frederick, *Flag Cancel Encyclopedia, 4th edition* 2008

Phillips, David G. (Editor), *American Stampless Cover Catalog, Vol. 1*, Phillips Publishing, 1997

Whitfield, Kenneth A., *Cancellations Found on 19th Century Stamps*, U. S. Cancellation Club, 2014

Appendix
Manuscript Markings of the Schenectady, N.Y. Post Office
ROPEX 2015

Schenectady is certainly not unique for its number of known manuscript markings. - some post offices did not acquire a hand stamp until the late 19th century - but it is certainly unusual for an office with its volume of mail to have its “full-manuscript” period extend from 1800 to 1828 with only a 15 month period during which a fragile hand stamp town mark was used with dates added by pen and ink to each impression.

The exhibitor intends to broaden and deepen attention to manuscript markings beyond that recorded by the present 5th edition of *American Stampless Cover Catalog* and Doug Penwell’s recent 6th Supplement to his *Manuscript Post Offices of New York State* published in the Empire State Postal History Society’s newsletter Vol. 47 No. 2 June 2014.

Schenectady Manuscripts Recorded by Compilers of ASCC (Vol. 1, page 280)

Schenectady, Schen’dy 1800-1817 1826-1829

Schenectady Manuscripts Compiled by Exhibitor

<u>Abbreviation†</u>	<u>‘Hand’</u>	<u>From - To</u>	<u>#</u>
Schen	Joseph Shurtleff	1800-1809	5
Scheny	Shurtleff Clerk	1802	1
Schendy, Schend’	Jacob Thurston	1811-1819	9
Schend’, Schen ^{dy}	Thurston Clerk A	1815-1820	6
Schenectady	Thurston Clerk A	1816	1
Schenectady NY	Thurston Clerk A	1817	2
Schend’	Thurston Clerk B	1817-1819	5
Schenectady	Ryley Clerk A	1820	3
Schenectady	Ryley Clerk B	1820-1822	3
Schd’	Ryley Clerk C	1825	1
Schd’	Ryley Clerk D	1825	1
Schenectady	Ryley Clerk A	1826-1828	9

† the raised ending “y” often seen in Schendy and Schdy is not a different abbreviation.

This differentiation among “hands” is based on comparison of penmanship together with how each “hand” added the month and date to the town name to complete a postmark. Great consistency is observed in this matter, and in the form of abbreviation apparently desired by the postmaster. In the case of Schenectady’s first three postmasters, handwriting samples positively identified to each one exist so those “hands” are identified. As yet, in no case are postal clerks known by name during this period of 1802 to 1828 although this research will continue.

The From-To dates are given based on material either owned by exhibitor or material in institutional hands for which the exhibitor has photographs. Some gaps in the time sequence result from incompleteness of exhibitor’s collection. The gap between 1824 and early 1825 results from introduction of the “Large” Double Circle hand stamp shown in Frame I, Pages 14 & 15.

The term “Full Manuscript” is appropriate where all needed postal markings (town name, date, rate, paid or due status and auxiliaries) are applied in manuscript. The existence of fewer elements applied by pen and ink means the piece of mail has a “Partial Manuscript”, such as the date filled into a postmark and a rate applied by hand stamp.