

A Postal History of Hartford, Connecticut

As U.S Post Office 1792-1897

Synopsis

PURPOSE & SCOPE: This exhibit illustrates the evolution of the rates, markings and services of the postal system of the United States from the perspective of the city of Hartford, Connecticut. After a brief introduction to Hartford's pre-Federal postal history, the exhibit starts with the first U.S. Postal Act of 1792 and continues through 1897 when Hartford opened its first branch office - while Hartford was a "one Post Office town."

The vast majority of items shown originate in Hartford. Inbound mail is included when it displays a postal marking known to originate in Hartford, such as receipt stamps. Mail passing through Hartford, such as forwarded mail, is likewise included. Exceptions are infrequently made when some aspect cannot be shown with a cover originating or passing through Hartford. An exception is made to illustrate the Eastern Express mail (1836-39), that is until I acquire one of the three known covers originating in Hartford. Another exception is an inbound SHIP letter, one of only two examples that I have found. As the Hartford Postmaster did not issue provisional stamps, an inbound cover franked with the New York postmaster's provisional stamp illustrates this aspect of U.S. postal history.

Being from the viewpoint of Hartford, certain rates and fees cannot be shown. For example, intra-California rates (Act of August 14, 1848) would obviously not be included. According to "The Pony Express A Postal History" by Frajola, Kramer and Walske, there are no known Western Pony Express covers originating, terminating or passing through Hartford.

TREATMENT/ORGANIZATION: The covers shown in this exhibit are generally arranged chronologically allowing the viewer to see the flow of the change in postal markings and postal services as they evolved and developed. A tracing of each Hartford postmark is included the first time that it appears in the exhibit.

The exhibit is segmented into "chapters" for each major change in rates. The rate structure is shown in a table on the first page of each segment. Because the covers are arranged chronologically, rates appear "randomly" within each section.

Covers to foreign destinations are intermingled with the domestic covers. After each foreign mail treaty is introduced, corresponding mail is identified under the "Rate" description for subsequent covers. Similarly, after an introductory page, subsequent UPU mail is identified under the "Rate" description.

The main story line is presented as double-line boxed text. Information about each item is in unboxed text, and historical notes are in italicized text. The date of posting, rate information, and once postage is introduced, franking information, accompanies each cover. **Key items are highlighted with green (versus brown) mats.**

IMPORTANCE: Settled in 1636 as the seat of the River or Connecticut Colony, **Hartford is one of the oldest cities in the United States.** From 1701 the role of capitol city was shared between Hartford and New Haven, until 1873 when Hartford became the sole capitol of the state of Connecticut.

The post office in Hartford was operating as part of the Colonial British Post Office as early as 1764 according to the *Connecticut Courant*. In 1775 it became part of the Constitutional Post and later that year the USPOD. Due to its strategic location half way between Boston and New York, the northern and central routes of the Boston Post Road converged at Hartford before continuing on to New Haven.

Situated at the northernmost point of the Connecticut river navigable by large ships, Hartford was a thriving river port exporting livestock, produce and farm tools, while importing molasses, sugar and rum from the Caribbean, and manufactured goods from Europe. Hartford was a center for banking and insurance.

KNOWLEDGE, STUDY & RESEARCH: Since I started this study of Hartford postal history in 2005, I have made some notable observations regarding Hartford's postmarks. "The American Stampless Cover Catalog" lists 20 mm No-Outer-Rim (NOR) postmarks starting in 1794 and does not list a 22 mm NOR postmark until 1812. However, all NOR postmarks that I have collected, starting in 1794, measure 22 mm. The only NOR postmarks that I have seen measuring 20 mm are from incomplete strikes from worn or damaged devices.

I have been studying the very brief period in 1847, where for about 7 months, Hartford used blue ink for its postmarks. The earliest observed cover is from May 24 (included in this exhibit) and the last seen is from December 30. Additionally, I have noted two distinct versions of Hartford's Pointing Hand Paid marking.

Information presented in this exhibit has been gathered and pieced together from over 30 books and web pages on rates, postal marks and postal practices. Knowledge of the postal marks of Hartford has also been gleaned from personal observation and study of many examples. Information on the operations of the Hartford post office comes from research in the resources of the Connecticut Historical Society and the *Hartford Courant* and other local newspapers.

RARITY & CONDITION: Hartford was not a large town. Its population in 1790 was less than 2,700 souls, and would not exceed 10,000 until the mid-1840's. By 1900 the population had grown to just 79,850. With a rather small population for the

early years covered in this exhibit, surviving exhibitable covers are not readily available. The online census of straight-line postmarks (see references below) lists just 10 instances of the HART*D postmark (1793-95) and only 32 instances of the two-line HARTFORD postmark (1796-98).

While Hartford merchants readily conducted trade with the West Indies, virtually all of the mail between merchants and plantations was carried by the captains of the merchants' ships, and thus, outside the mails. Otherwise merchants tended to be parochial, conducting trade mainly with their closest neighbors.

Despite these significant challenges, the exhibit presents a comprehensive picture of the postal history of the nation from the perspective of Hartford. Among the numerous significant and interesting covers, you will find these key items:

- Use of 22 mm NOR postmark predating ASCC by 18 years; the earliest known example
- Several examples (various rates) from the "War Rate" period (1815-16), including a quadruple rate cover
- Two examples of the "Restored Rate" period (April 1816) - the only two known for Hartford
- The only recorded freight money letter originating from Hartford
- One of two recorded covers franked with a pair of the Hartford Mail Route stamp, paying the double rate.
- Hale & Co. covers: Earliest use from Hartford; latest use of Hartford oval forwarding mark
- One of 7 covers franked with a pair of the 1847 5¢ brown recorded for Hartford
- Only bisected 1847 10¢ recorded for Hartford; the only recorded morning cover for any bisected 10¢
- First day use of 3¢ 1851 issue from Hartford; 1 of 4, the only example with stamp tied
- First day use of 3¢ 1883 issue from Hartford; the only known example
- One of four known Hartford Penny Post covers; the best extant
- A cover to Hamburg franked with a strip of 3 10¢ green issue of 1851 Type I, pos. 98R1-100R1
- Covers to Tuscany, Lombardy-Venetia, Italy, Syria (Lebanon), Cuba, Prussia, China, Russia, Denmark, Bohemia, Turkey, India, Sweden, Argentina, Brazil, Hungary, Japan as well as Germany, Canada, England and France

The condition of the covers chosen to be part of this exhibit are of the best condition possible.

Recent Additions: This is a "living" exhibit. For the Great American Stamp Show 2021 (C-of-C) the following significant items had been added:

- The Earliest known use of the rimless Hartford cancel (1794)
- The only recorded use of the orange-red Hale stamp from Hartford
- An 1836 cover to Houston, Republic of Texas
- A much prettier 1858 cover to St. Petersburg, Russia via closed Prussian Mail
- And more

REFERENCES: There is no specific reference regarding postal markings or the postal history of Hartford. However, the following publications include sections pertinent to the subject.

- "American Stampless Cover Catalog" Vol. 1 (1997 5th ed.): pp. xvii - xix (rates), p. 31 (postmarks); Vol. 2 (1987 4th ed.): pp. 130-32 (inland waterways), pp. 191-282 (Free franking). This classic encyclopedia of U.S. postal markings for the "stampless" era provides a base of information about postal marks for Hartford. Unfortunately, there are some apparent errors and omissions as noted under the heading "Research". These books are available on the website of the United States Philatelic Classics Society (<http://www.uspcs.org/resource-center/electronic-library/> - website verified 2022-01-27)
- William J. Duffney's website (<http://www.ctpostalhistory.com/CtPP/Home.html>) "Connecticut Philatelic Projects." Under "Postal Markings" click on "CT. STRAIGHTLINES", then on "Hartford County" for an up-to-date census on Hartford straight-line postal markings. Also from the "Connecticut Postal Markings" page, click on "CT Manuscript Postmark Project" for a list of known manuscript postmarks. From the main page, also available are listings of postmasters, maps, and listings of post offices. (website verified 2022-01-27)