



## CARRIERS AND LOCALS

### WHAT ARE CARRIER STAMPS?

Carrier stamps prepaid the fee for service in taking a letter to or from the post office or between correspondents in the same city. The fee, 1¢ or 2¢, varied among cities at the discretion of the local postmaster, usually in response to competition from local posts.

The fee-based carrier system, which dates back to 1836, ended on June 30, 1863, when the government Post Office Department began paying carriers a salary, in lieu of compensating them for each letter. This date also marks the end of 1¢ plus 3¢ carrier-rate covers.

The period in which mail-carriers issued their own stamps is said to begin in 1835 when the Northern Liberties News Room imprinted lettersheets with a non-denominated design. Some experts believe that these indicated prepayment of a fee paid to Northern Liberties for carrying mail to the main post office in Philadelphia.

Semi-official carrier stamps listed in the Scott Catalogue were issued by the men who served in the carrier departments of city post offices. These individuals often operated private local posts before or after they worked for the government. A carrier stamp allowed a sender to conveniently drop the letter into a mail box, which the carrier would pick up, or hand the letter directly to the carrier, who would take it to the post office.

The first stamp ever used under government authority is a carrier issue, the 3¢ stamp (Scott 6LB1) accepted by the New York City carrier department in 1842 after buying the private firm known as the City Despatch Post. In September 1842 the U.S. City Despatch Post issued the first adhesive stamp under government authority, the 3¢ Black on Blue (Scott 6LB3).

The government issued two official carrier stamps in 1851, known as the Franklin and Eagle carriers (Scott LO1 and LO2). These stamps were released as part of the 1851 Issue and printed by Toppan, Carpenter, Casilear & Co. They were created to facilitate prepayment of the carrier fee, 1¢ or 2¢, and were used in major cities for several years.

### WHAT ARE LOCAL POSTS?

At a time when mail delivery between one's door and the post office was a premium service, the government and scores of enterprising individuals vied for this business. The men hired by the Post Office Department were the Carriers. The private firms carrying mail within city limits were the Local Posts.

Although inter-city mail routes were suppressed in 1845, the local posts operating within city limits continued to carry letters to and from the post office and between local correspondents. They were able to avoid government interference as long as city streets were not declared post roads closed to private mail carriers.

Sometimes the local posts simply defied authorities. Most of these illegal posts were quickly suppressed. Others changed the nature of their business to survive. George Hussey, infamous for his philatelic chicanery, kept his operation going well into the 1880s by defining it as a special messenger service that catered to banks and insurance firms.

The City Despatch Post in New York City was started in 1842 as a successor to the New-York Penny Post. It was bought out by the U.S. post office in August 1842, in an effort to establish carrier service in the city.

Dozens of local posts flourished in New York City during the 1840s and 1850s. Their ranks thinned as the government continued its effort to monopolize the mails. The longest-running of the New York local posts was Boyd's, which began in 1844 and operated until the 1880s under three different proprietors.

In Philadelphia, the largest of the local posts was Blood's Penny Post, which can be traced back to 1842 when its predecessor firm, Robertson & Co.'s City Despatch Post, advertised stamps for sale at 37¢ per dozen (15L1-15L2). The Robertson post was acquired in July 1845 by Daniel Otis Blood and re-named D. O. Blood & Co.'s City Dispatch. Under changing ownership, the firm survived until 1862.

In addition to the large and prolific stamp-issuing posts, such as Blood's, Boyd's and Hussey's, there were scores of small short-lived companies. Many of these sprang up in the stores of stationers and booksellers, news rooms and local merchants, to fill the needs of their local patrons. They evoke the true spirit of 19th-century American enterprise.

### WHAT ARE THE 1844 INDEPENDENT MAILS?

In 1844, express companies such as Adams, American Letter Mail Co., Hale & Co., Harnden and Pomeroy expanded the letter-carrying business along the eastern railroad routes used to carry freight. These firms, known as the Independents, generally charged letter rates based on circulating silver coins: 6¢, or half a bit (12¢), a bit being an eighth of a silver



## CARRIERS AND LOCALS

dollar. Stamps purchased in quantity were discounted to 20 for a dollar.

The rates charged by the Independents were a fraction of the postage charged by the United States post office. This savings, combined with reliable, efficient service and innovations such as prepayment by adhesive stamps, made the 1844 independent mails very popular with the public.

The government was threatened by the Independents, who siphoned revenues from profitable eastern mail routes, while leaving the government to subsidize money-losing rural routes and high-volume newspaper delivery. In fact, historians generally agree that the Independents were a catalyst for the postal reforms of 1845, which lowered and standardized rates.

After fighting the independent operators in court, the government finally won in 1845 by threatening to cancel mail contracts with railroad companies who permitted the Independents to use their lines to carry letters. This effectively shut down transportation of inter-city letters by the express companies, but they continued to carry freight and valuables considered to be non-letter mail. In areas where government service was unavailable, private expresses continued to carry mail. The Western Expresses in mining regions are the best-known of the post-1845 independent mail routes.

### DIVERSE IMAGES AND FIRSTS IN PHILATELY

Stamps issued by the local posts not only indicated prepayment; in many cases they served as miniature advertisements. Some were little more than typeset labels with the name of the post. Others were designed with elaborate images to capture the public's attention.

In an article published in the *Chronicle* (Nov. 1996, U.S. Classics Society), local-post specialist Gordon Stimmell identified several "firsts" in topical philately. Some of these are:

\* The first-ever depiction of an actual building on a stamp — in 1843 Robertson & Co. issued the Striding Messenger stamp, which pictures a giant mail-carrier stepping over the Merchant Exchange building in Philadelphia. The competitive meaning was obvious to locals who knew that the Philadelphia post office was housed in the Merchant Exchange building.

\* A tiny ocean steamer was depicted on the Hartford Mail Route stamp issued in 1844 (80L1, 80L3). This is believed to be the earliest representation of a vessel on any stamp.

\* The bird got its philatelic start in 1844 with the American bald eagle, which appeared on the stamps issued by American Letter Mail Co. (5L1–5L2) and Boyd's (20L1). The message-carrying pigeon made its debut on a stamp in 1844 with Overton & Co.'s issue (113L1).

\* A train appeared on a prepayment stamp for the first time in 1844, when Wyman's independent mail route produced its locomotive "20 stamps for one dollar" adhesive (149L1).

\* The beehive motif, a representation of industriousness, is found first on the Dupuy & Schenck stamp issued in 1846 (60L1–60L2) and later on the Chicago Penny Post stamp of 1862 (38L1).

\* Also found the Locals is the first political-campaign image: Bouton's stamp portraying "Old Rough and Ready", the 1848 presidential candidate Zachary Taylor (18L1–18L2).