

'Evolution of outbound Foreign Mail cancelled in New York City 1845-1878'

Nicholas M. Kirke

SYNOPSIS

Since first exhibited as a simplistic cancel exhibit in 2011 called, 'The progression of New York Foreign Mail Cancels 1870-77' this exhibit has undergone transformation as follows;

1. Change of concept

From being based purely on the obliterating cancels which this mail attracted, traditionally referred to as, 'New York Foreign Mail' (NYFM), these cancels are now subordinated as a chronological framework upon which to display the *postal history aspects* of the material.

2. Change of time period

The exhibitor has expanded the exhibit time frame back to 1845 from the traditional 1870 so as to show the first individualistic postal markings and cancellations used in the NYC post office on outbound foreign mail. The cancellations obliterating these stamps can now more appropriately be regarded as the '*chronological glue*' which bind this mail together. Additionally, the final year of the exhibit is extended to 1878 to better show closure of the era of these foreign mail wood cancels upon their replacement by the steel ellipse duplex cancels.

3. Introduction of new material

The addition of the period 1845-69 entailed acquiring a wide representation of the period. The exhibitor included rare covers such as U.S. 1857-61 Issue 90¢ value to India (1-8), and scarce destinations such as Aden (2-1), and, in the later period 1870-78, Natal (5-9), and Burma (7-1). This improvement in quality is replicated throughout.

4. Change of moniker

These wooden cancelling devices have been traditionally referred to as 'New York Foreign Mail' (NYFM) cancels. Bearing in mind the processing area for these letters comprised just 10%* of the foreign mail department, the exhibitor thought it appropriate to label this mail 'New York **City** Foreign Mail' (NYCFM) to indicate it was but a relatively minor part of the whole outbound foreign mail. *This 10%* is justified later at paragraph number eight.*

5. New classification system The exhibitor introduces of a new chronological classification system for New York City Foreign Mail cancels 1850-78 as an on-line appendix noted on the introduction page <http://www.philatelist.cz/cancels/> showing a reference number for each known cancel, providing dates for first and last uses. It increases the recorded number of NYCFM cancels from 235 to 315.

6. Covers not originating in New York City

A substantial amount of letters *did not originate in NYC but still received a NYCFM cancel*. Such letters originated in Europe, and places such as Danish West Indies, Cuba, or Peru transiting New York City enroute to their inbound U.S. destination or outbound to Europe and elsewhere. More rarely, letters entered the mails in *other* U.S. towns or cities and received a town datestamp from elsewhere *and* a NYCFM obliterating cancel. When a cover originates outside of NYC it is noted.

7. Foreign destinations

The exhibitor's figures for numbers of foreign country destinations are representational, not actual. For example, during Period 1 (1850-1861), there will exist more than the 12 different country destinations shown. Nonetheless, when viewed in the totality of the exhibit, this initial period contributes to the overall picture of the dramatic increase in later foreign destinations. This exhibit is drawn from an uncommonly wide range of outbound foreign material, so the exhibitor feels his figures can be regarded as representative of the whole.

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SYNOPSIS (Cont)

8. NYCFM as a percentage of the total outbound foreign mail

The exhibitor calculates that foreign mail first cancelled in New York City was approximately 10% of the whole outbound U.S. foreign mail. How does he arrive at this conclusion? This percentage is not factually recorded. However, two contemporary facts help establish a ball-park figure.

a) floor area; Schribner's Magazine of May, 1878, published in the U.S, shows a floor plan detailing the foreign mail drops with two desks accessing from the public hallway where New York residents posted letters. This area constituted 10% of the whole Foreign Mail Department. Although the plans related to City Hall post office which processed foreign mail for the relatively short period 1875-78, it nonetheless indicates the previous proportion that probably existed at the Old Dutch Church post office where foreign mail was cancelled/processed during 1845-1875.

b) volumes; Using the total of outbound letters from New York City to foreign destinations taken from the Annual Postmaster's Reports, the exhibitor sought to discover if his proposed 10% of the whole could be processed in such an area. In 1876, for example, 10% of the whole (10,136,743), equated to 1,013,674. Could two clerks at two desks, process such an amount? An estimated annual 2,500 working hours indicates 405 letters per hour, or nearly 7 per minute. Although practical experiments show two clerks working in unison could cancel up to 60 letters per minute, there would also be checking of postage paid, the occasional weighing, and at least one other handstamps to be applied; the Exchange Office datestamp. The space was thus sufficient to cope with the volumes suggested by the exhibitor.

9. Are outbound foreign mail covers cancelled in New York City scarce?

Compared to some other U.S. collecting areas, relatively so. This is primarily due to the low survival rate vis a vis the copious quantities processed. For example, between 1850-1877, the exhibitor estimates this mail (which comprised 10% of the whole mail) numbered a colossal 14,420,000. William R. Weiss's 1990 book⁽¹⁾, records a mere 1,800 covers surviving from 1870-1878. Even if his figure was a hundred fold larger, it would still be but a tiny fraction.

The reasons for this minimiscule survival rate may be that these envelopes had to be repatriated to the United States, often from distant (war torn) lands, before being collected and appreciated. More significantly, mail originating in NYC, and the cancels this mail attracted, was not publicised as a collecting genre until introduced in 1926 by J. Murray Bartels⁽²⁾, *more than 50 years after these cancels ceased being used*. By then, much material was likely destroyed as having no philatelic interest, or the stamps removed to fill gaps in pre-printed albums. And, of course, it was the striking geometric cancels 1873-75 which traditionally attracted collectors (termed 'New York Geometrics' in those days).

(1) 'The Foreign Mail Cancellations of New York City 1870-78', William R. Weiss Jr. Copyright 1990, William R. Weiss Jr..

(2) 'New York Foreign Mail Cancellations'. J. Murray Bartels Co, 116 Nassau Street, New York City, 147th Sale, Jun 2, 1927.