

MASONIC POSTAL POSTMARKS

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1884 Wymore, Nebraska postal cancellation with STAR



Masonic Square and Compasses cancellation



MASONIC POSTAL POSTMARKS are unique and they are rapidly becoming a vanishing species in the Age of Electronic E-Mail Transmissions. The United States of America was built on an infrastructure of Post Offices and Post Roads (even mentioned in The U.S. Constitution). Even in this 21st Century, not all people have computers--- and the U.S. Post Office (now called the U.S. Postal Service) plays a key role as a lifeline to the world for many people who depend on cards, letters, jury-duty notices, and even their plastic credit-cards still arrive by what is affectionately (or disparagingly) called "Snail-mail". One of the "Founding Fathers" of The United States was Bro. Benjamin Franklin, who began his postal career under Great Britain in 1737, when the British Crown Post named him Postmaster General of Philadelphia. Back in Franklin's day, newspaper printers often served as postmasters, which helped them gather and distribute news.

Being Postmaster General gave Franklin financial oversight over several post offices in neighboring towns. Gradually, Franklin's influence expanded. He became joint postmaster general. He surveyed post offices and post roads. He had riders (on horseback) carry mail by night as well as by day, greatly speeding service. Thanks in large part to Bro. Franklin's efforts, the British Crown Post established its first profit in 1760.

Postage stamps were introduced to denote that payment of the delivery-fee had been made. Postal cancellations are simply a distinguishing marking to deface the stamp and prevent its reuse.

There is a very, very slight difference in a "postmark." A modern postmark may indeed deface the stamp to prevent re-usage; modern postmarks often carry the City or Town the item was mailed from; along with the Month, Day, and Year. In select areas, even an hourly time might be noted. However, the latter is more rare to see.

In the earliest years of our country until about the early 1940's, all postal mail was hand-cancelled. However, "metering" of mail was authorized as early as the year 1920; but not widely used until much later. Automated routing and canceling machines came into vogue much later. The "Zip Code" routing system was established in the year 1963. This provided a numerical regional 'grid' that is still utilized today for efficiency with deliveries by making a Zip Code correspond with a particular geographic region of the country. The "Zip Code" for York Nebraska is 68467 and the downtown postal Zip Code for Wichita, Kansas is 67202. The beginning number "6" indicates the mid-section of the country --- whereas, 98902 is the Zip Code for Yakima, Washington and 12230 is one of the several Zip Codes serving the city of Albany, New York.

In the year 1982, automated Bar-Code optical scanners began, which imprinted a digitized bar code at the bottom of the addressee's address to facilitate sorting and delivery.

From about 1840 to the late 1930's (and even later), many small town postmasters were members of the Masonic Fraternity. Many took the opportunity to use hand-canceling postage devices which included imprints of: The Masonic Square and Compasses; the 5-pointed Star; and 'Pillars,' which sometimes even said Jachin and Boaz. There were no automated machines as we see today.

Today, a few Commemorative Cancellation postmarks are seen, but the application-process requires going through channels and following postal guidelines, subject to national approval.

Local postmasters have little discretion, and the "good old days" of seeing a Masonic postmark may be confined to either seeing something in an antique-shop, or in someone's attic----or by reading a Presentation (such as this one).

Older postal letters ---just like the Masons of olden times-- had their distinctive 'mark.'

. Sources / Exhibits / Recommended Readings:

- United States Postal Service: "Biography of Benjamin Franklin" . Used by Permission. website: <http://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/pmg-franklin.pdf>
- George Washington Masonic Stamp Club...of which Frater Marples is a life member.
- Exhibit #1: Masonic 5-Pointed Star (negative Star postmark) on letter mailed from Wymore,



Nebraska, October 27, 1884.

- Exhibit #2: Masonic "Square & Compasses Postmark" of a letter sent to Newton Centre, Massachusetts...postmarked from Quincy, Massachusetts. Interestingly, notice the abbreviation "MS". That was before "postal uniformity with US State Abbreviations)...MS is now Mississippi...whereas MA is the current postal abbreviation for Massachusetts.

- Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry by Dr. Albert G. Mackey, M.D., 33° and a Knight Templar.

About the Author:

Frater James A. Marples, VII° is a Perpetual Life Member of Mulvane Masonic Lodge #201 A.F. & A.M. in Mulvane, Kansas. He is a Life Member of The International Peace Gardens Lodge of Freemasons (Canada-USA) and also an Honorary Member of Golden Rule Masonic Lodge #562 in Willard, Ohio; as well as an Honorary Member of Nelson Masonic Lodge #77, in Nelson, Nebraska, which has recently consolidated with the Superior Masonic Lodge at Superior, Nebraska.

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