

A 2009 Symposium Paper

America's First Carrier Service The U.S. City Despatch Post Government Carrier Service in New York August 16, 1842 – November 28, 1846

Presented By
Larry Lyons

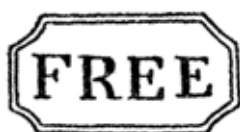
The origin of organized carrier service is the basis of postal reform. The Greig's City Despatch Post local stamp was the first adhesive stamp printed in North America. The Post Office Department purchased this company for use as the first carrier service and adopted this first stamp. The postal reforms established by the U.S. City Despatch Post, America's first carrier service, can be summarized as follows:

1. The first use of a stamp for government purposes.
2. The established rate of 3 cents per stamp or \$2.50 per 100.
3. The first government handstamp. The creation of the "U.S." in an octagon to cancel stamps and prevent their reuse.
4. The first government datestamp to show the date and time of delivery.
5. The first adhesive design for use by the United States City Despatch Post, the 6LB3 stamp.
6. The creation of various color adhesives on unsurfaced paper colored through.
7. The first adhesive stamp printed on glazed surface colored paper for use by the government.
8. The first double impression errors.
9. The Postal Act of March 1845, effective July 1, 1845, putting the independent mail companies out of business.
10. The first use of adhesive stamps for pre-payment of postage on intercity mail.
11. The first government overprinted stamp due to a change in the rate for carrier service.
12. The first failure of the government at carrier service.

This is a unique story about how the government started a carrier service in New York City and was forced to close down due to competition from the local posts. For once free enterprise triumphed over the government. This was a first attempt at postal organization.

By an order made by the Postmaster General on August 1, 1842, a carrier service was established in New York known as the "United States City Despatch Post". In order to get started with carrier service the Post Office Department felt it was best to purchase Grieg's City Despatch Post, a local post in New York City which had been operating successfully since February 1, 1842. The purchase would also eliminate the competition from that particular local post. August 15, 1842 was the last day of the operation of Grieg's City Despatch Post and on August 16, 1842 the service continued its operation but now was an official service of the post office with the name changed to "United States City Despatch Post". There wasn't time to print new stamps so the City Despatch Post adhesives created by Grieg (40L1) were used but were now official carrier stamps (6LB1). The stamps were sold singularly at 3 cents each or \$2.50 per 100. This was the same rate Grieg had charged. The outer limit of operations of the U.S. City Despatch Post was Twenty-Second Street. The areas from 4th Street to 22nd Street was known at that time as Uptown New York City. Central New York City was from 4th Street south to Fulton Street and Downtown New York City was South of Fulton Street to the lower tip of Manhattan.

The Greig's City Despatch Local Post adhesive was to become America's first and most versatile stamp producing plate. It was now also the first plate used to make carrier stamps in the United States. The plate was made by Rawdon, Wright and Hatch. When Greig was operating as a local post he used a "FREE" handstamp in a fancy octagon. See **Figure 1**. The "FREE" actually meant that the stamp was purchased and therefore the letter was prepaid. When Greig's became the U.S. City Despatch Post, the cancel used was a "U.S." in a fancy octagon shown in **Figure 1**. The U.S. City Despatch stamps were prepurchased and the "U.S." octagon cancel was to prevent their reuse. This was an innovative action by the Carrier Department based on the same action used by Greig cancelling his local post adhesives. The carrier service also had a circular datestamp which reads "U.S. City Despatch Post", with the "U.S." at the bottom. When Greig operated as a local post his datestamp read "City Despatch Post" with "N.Y." at the bottom. These handstamps can be seen in **Figure 2**. Both the Greig's Local Post datestamp and the U.S. City Despatch Post handstamp were double lined circles with the middle reserved for a date and a clock time. The datestamp was an innovative action by the carrier department and it was based on the same action and design used by Greig when he ran his local post. Since Greig was running the U.S. City Despatch he made good use of his handstamp design he developed earlier. Sometime in 1843 the U.S. City Despatch replaced its double lined circular datestamp with a single line datestamp. See **Figure 2**. We will address this in due time.



Grieg's Local Post
handstamp



U.S. City Despatch Post
handstamp

Figure 1. The handstamps that identify covers used while Grieg operated his local post and those of the U.S. City Despatch Post, the first government carrier service.



Grieg's Local Post
datestamps



U.S. City Despatch Post
datestamps



Figure 2. The datestamps that identify covers used while Grieg operated his local post and those of the U.S. City Despatch Post.



Black/light blue



Black/grayish

Figure 3. The first new adhesive design for the U.S. City Despatch (6LB3) is shown at the left and the Grieg's stamp (40L1) is shown at the right.

The Second U.S. Carrier Adhesive

On September 1, 1842 the U.S. City Despatch Post came out with its first new adhesive design which was black on light blue unsurfaced paper (6LB3). See **Figure 3**. This was the first carrier adhesive printed by a post office. The use of prepaid adhesives was now proven as a great improvement over collect mail and manuscript notations. This was the beginnings of a postal reform equivalent to the invention of the wheel. The first new adhesive design reads “United States City Despatch Post” at the top as opposed to the Greig’s stamp which reads “City Despatch Post” at the top. The side ornaments were also changed but the general appearance with Washington in the middle and “THREE CENTS” at the bottom stayed the same. The original plates and printing size was not used. The new plate was also made by Rawdon, Wright and Hatch. The original Greig’s local post stamps were printed in a 42 stamp format of 6x7 subjects and the new U.S. City Despatch Post stamps were printed in sheets of 100 subjects. Cal Hahn, a noted historian, plated the U.S. City Despatch Post stamps. He noted 25 positions on the left and 25 on the right which were repeated to make 100 stamps. His plating analysis can be found in the *Lyons Identifier* in Volume III on pages 1055-1066.¹ Scott Trepel did pioneer work on the City Despatch Post adhesives and that plating analysis can be found in the study that he published.²

The United States City Despatch Post was initially very successful. By November 1842 they noted carrying 762 letters a day. They had 112 stations with collection boxes. Pick up was 3 times a day.³ They employed 8 letter carriers. The stamps were sold singularly at 3 cents each or \$2.50 per 100.

The Unsurfaced Paper Colored Through Adhesives

The major stamp in this category is the black on light blue adhesive (6LB3) which saw major usage. This adhesive was issued September 1, 1842 and is typically found on 1842 covers from September to the end of the year 1842. According to Siegel Auction Galleries lot descriptions the earliest recorded cover with the 6LB3 adhesive is September 2, 1842, the second day of its usage. There is a cover dated August 31, 1842 which is dated September 3, 1842 which is the third day of usage for this adhesive. Lot 201 in the Middendorf sale is a cover which is reported to be the earliest use of 6LB3. That cover is dated September 1. There is a cover dated December 31, 1842 which is the latest usage in 1842. Sporadic late usages can be found as the purchased stamps were used. I note a January 31 (1843) cover, an April 2, 1844 cover and a February 14, 1846 cover, all with the early 6LB3 adhesives. The last three covers are not typical of when the majority of the 6LB3 adhesives were used.

In **Figure 4** we see an unsurfaced paper colored through adhesive which has been described as black on wheat. This stamp is cancelled with the U.S. in an octagon, the handstamp used by the U.S. City Despatch Post. This color is not listed in the *Scott Specialized Catalogue* and it should be listed.

We find a black on rosy buff (6LB2) adhesive listed in the *Scott Specialized Catalogue* in the unsurfaced paper colored through section. There is a note to the effect that “some authorities consider 6LB2 to be an essay”. This author does not think so. Only about 8-10 unused copies are recorded.

There is also an unsurfaced black on green adhesive (6LB4). There are only two recorded examples. Again there is a note in the *Scott Specialized Catalogue* to the effect that some authorities believe this color to be “a color changeling”. It is a very valuable stamp with a *Scott Specialized Catalogue* price of \$11,500.00. No covers are recorded with this color adhesive. The Philatelic Foundation has certified the black/green unsurfaced paper adhesive (6LB4) as a genuine color and not a color changeling. There is also a recorded apple green adhesive which has been certified by the Philatelic Foundation. See **Figure 5**. This color should be listed in the *Scott Specialized Catalogue*. Only one example of the apple green color has been recorded. It has been suggested that the black on green adhesive was a trial color impression. This writer believes it was an issued color used for a very, short time. The one known example has been certified by the Philatelic Foundation as a genuinely used stamp.

¹ *The Identifier for Carriers, Locals, Fakes, Forgeries and Bogus Posts of the United States*, Larry Lyons, 1998.

² *The City Despatch Post 1842-1852 Issues: A Study of America’s First and Most Versatile Stamp-Producing Plate*, Scott R. Trepel, Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc. 2003.

³ USA1, Robson Lowe, March 15, 1972, Lot 1011.



Figure 4. The U.S. City Despatch adhesive in wheat. This is an unsurfaced paper colored through adhesive which is not yet listed in the *Scott Specialized Catalogue*.

The Philatelic Foundation No. 0410555
 70 West 40th Street • 15th Floor New York, NY 10018 4/27/04
EXPERT COMMITTEE

We have examined the enclosed item, of which a photograph is attached, and *described by the applicant* as follows:

Country: UNITED STATES OF AMERICA


Cat. No.	Issue	Denom.	Color
6LB4UAR	1842	3¢	blk on yellow green

Denom. unless otherwise specified

USED

AND WE ARE OF THE OPINION THAT:

IT IS GENUINE WITH REPAIRED PINHOLES AT TOP, AND A LARGE SEALED INTERNAL TEAR. * * * * *



N. Rami
 For The Expert Committee
 Chairman

Photocopies of this Certificate are not valid.

Submitted by: LARRY LYONS

E 105043

Figure 5. A used U.S. City Despatch adhesive in apple green sometimes called yellow green. There has been only this one recorded example. This color is not yet listed in the *Scott Specialized Catalogue*.



Figure 6. The 6LB5d adhesive is a black on green stamp on glazed surface colored paper. It is the first glazed paper stamp issued by the government in the United States. It was issued in the fall of 1842.



Figure 7. The 6LB5, black on blue green adhesive.



Figure 8. The 6LB5b, black on blue adhesive which was issued in the fall of 1844.



**6LB5a
Black/blue green**



**6LB5c
Black/blue**



**6LB5e
Black/green**

Figure 9. Examples of the U.S. City Despatch Post double impression errors in each of three different colors.

The Glazed Surface Paper Adhesives

The black on green glazed surface paper adhesive (6LB5d) came on the scene in the fall of 1842. **The 6LB5d adhesive is the first glazed paper stamp issued by the government in the United States.** According to research done by Bob Meyersburg the earliest recorded date of the 6LB5d stamp is November 26, 1842. An example is shown in **Figure 7**. This is a postal first. The express companies were the pioneers in the use of glazed surface paper probably preceding the first government glazed paper adhesive by about three years. This color was in typical use for a full year into November 1843. There are four recorded examples of multiples of the black on green (6LB5d) adhesive with 5 stamps being used to pay the U.S. intercity postage to Philadelphia. More on this in the next section of this paper. There is also one cover with only four 6LB5d adhesives to Philadelphia because one adhesive is missing.

There are **early examples** of the black on green glazed adhesives and there are **late examples** of black on green glazed adhesives. These colors have been lumped together under one generic color name. **This author has extensively studied the colors of the adhesives and they are not the same.** The early examples are much greener and were probably printed in November 1842. These were in used until the black on light blue glazed adhesives and the black on blue green glazed adhesives were issued in January 1843. An example of the early black on green glazed paper adhesive can be seen in **Figure 10**. It is on a folded letter dated February 14, 1843 to 30 Wall Street. The early black on green glazed paper adhesives are very scarce. The later black on green glazed adhesives are basically variations in color shades of the black on blue green adhesives issued and reissued from 1843-1846.



Figure 10. An early black on green glazed paper adhesive on a folded local letter dated February 14, 1843 to 30 Wall Street. The U.S. City Despatch Post datestamp is the double circle type. This is a true green glazed paper adhesive. Stamps issued later are not as green.

Double impressions exist for the black on blue green adhesives and are designated 6LB5a. Double impression examples of the black on blue adhesives are designated 6LB5c and double impressions of the black on green adhesives are given the designation 6LB5e. Examples are shown in **Figure 6**. This was a postal first. The express companies were the pioneers in the use of printing on glazed surface colored paper probably preceding the first government glazed paper adhesive by about three years.

At the beginning of 1843 the U.S. City Despatch Post issued a black on blue green adhesive on surface colored paper (6LB5). It is at this time that they also changed to a single circle datestamp. The double circle datestamp had been in use for less than a year. The recording of the time in the datestamp was evidently no longer important and it would be left out of the new datestamp. Over the next four years through 1844, 1845 and into the fall of 1846 the black on blue green adhesive would be the “workhorse” with various shades of reprinting.

The black on blue adhesive (6LB5b) does not appear until the fall of 1844. An example of this stamp is shown in **Figure 8**. The black on blue adhesive is in my opinion a very striking color. There are only two examples of covers with multiple black on blue adhesives (6LB5b). One cover has 4 adhesives and is addressed to Athens, New York and the other has 3 adhesives and is addressed to Ridgefield, Connecticut. More about this is in the next section when we address intercity mail. This black on blue color adhesive continued to be used until the U.S. Despatch Post closed in November 1846.

The black on blue green adhesive (6LB5) is also recorded on cover with the New York Provisional 9X1d.

Double impression errors on glazed surface paper adhesives occurred in three different colors. These are shown in **Figure 9**.



Figure 11. A black on pink unglazed surface colored adhesive 6LB6, on a cover front dated April 7, (1843). This is the only recorded example. The datestamp is the double circle which was not in use after 1843.

Last but not least there is a black on pink adhesive (6LB6). This stamp is on a cover dated April 7. The U.S. City Despatch circular datestamp on this cover is a double line circle which leads to the conclusion that the year date is ca. 1843. There is only one recorded example of the pink adhesive. It is shown in **Figure 11**.

Intercity Covers

The independent mail companies began handling intercity mail in early 1844 and were put out of business by an Act of March 1845 which became effective July 1, 1845. This was major postal reform intended to eventually put an end to private local posts as well. First the government would make it illegal for an independent mail company to carry mail intercity by declaring that all postal mail routes could only be traveled with mail by the government post office. The independent mail companies were therefore terminated by a government act. This was postal reform by decree. This reform did not apply on the west coast because there the government was not organized to deliver the mail and would not be organized in the west for twenty more years until 1865.

There are eight recorded intercity covers with United States City Despatch Post adhesives. **These covers mark the beginning of prepayment of intercity postage by adhesive stamps in the western hemisphere.** This was pioneer activity in postal reform and set the stage for the first U.S. government regular issue stamps which would come into use exactly two years later on July 1, 1847. The covers are recorded between the dates of May 25, 1843 and June 13, 1845. A listing of these eight recorded covers can be found in **Table 1**. An example can be seen in **Figure 12**.



Figure 12. An example of intercity mail with five United States City Despatch Post adhesives.

Table 1
The Eight Recorded Intercity Covers of The U.S. City Despatch Post

	<u>Adhesives</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Destination</u>	<u>Note</u>
1.	6LB5d (5)	May 25, 1843	To Philadelphia	Strip of 3 + pair
2.	6LB5d (5)	May 30, 1843	To Philadelphia	Two pairs + single
3.	6LB5d (5)	June 16, 1843	To Philadelphia	Strip of 4 + single
4.	6LB5d (5)	July 5, 1843	To Philadelphia	Strip of 5
5.	6LB5d (4)	August 23, 1843	To Philadelphia	4 singles + 1 missing
6.	6LB5d (5)	Nov. 1, 1843	To Pleasant Valley, N.Y.	5 singles
7.	6LB5b (4)	Oct. 18, ca. 1844	To Athens, N.Y.	Strip of 3 + single
8.	6LB5b (3)	June 13, ca. 1845	To Ridgefield, Conn.	3 singles

Five of the covers have five U.S. City Despatch adhesives, black on green (6LB5d). One cover has our black on green (6LB5d) adhesives with one missing. One cover has 4 black on blue adhesives (6LB5b) and one cover has 3 black on blue adhesives (6LB5b). The five covers with five adhesives are to Philadelphia. The rate was 12½ cents for the 80/150 mile zone. At the wholesale rate of 2½ cents per stamp the five adhesives would be correct for the 12½ cents U.S. postage rate. This fee was the intercity rate and included the carrier rate to the post office. The only cover with 4 carrier adhesives (other than the one to Philadelphia with one stamp missing) is to Athens, New York. The four carrier adhesives at the wholesale rate of 2½ cents per stamp accounted for the 10 cent rate for the 30/80 mile zone. This writer believes the post office accepted the carrier stamps at the wholesale rate. The one cover with 3 carrier adhesives is to Ridgefield Connecticut. The balance of the postage on this cover was presumably paid in cash. There is a manuscript notation “10” which has never been explained. This cover can be seen in the Middendorf sale catalogue.⁴ The intercity carrier covers just described are among the most prized covers of all carrier covers.

⁴ Richard C. Frajola, Inc. Sale No. 4. (Middendorf), May 1990, Lot 215.

The First Government Overprinted Stamp

On July 1, 1845 the price of the U.S. City Despatch Post carrier service rose to 4 cents retail and 3½ cents wholesale. This was necessary because the post office “drop letter” rate was increased on the same day to 2 cents from 1 cent. Congress raised the drop letter rate out of fear that the new postage structure which established the 5 cent and 10 cent postage rates would cause a severe decline in postal revenues. The 5 cent and 10 cent rates laid the foundation for the first general issue adhesive stamps to be issued in this country in 1847. Because the intercity rate was lowered Congress hoped to offset some of the anticipated losses by raising the drop letter rate. A “drop letter” is a piece of mail that is brought to the post office for pickup by the addressee. Drop letters are not transmitted to another post office.

“The consequences of this legislation for the U.S. City Despatch Post were immediate and dire. Prior to July 1, 1845 a drop letter could be taken by the carrier to or from the post office for 3 cents, which included 2 cents for the carrier department and 1 cent for the post office (drop postage). Beginning July 1, an extra cent was required for the drop postage, making the total amount equal to 4 cents. Although other classes of mail were unaffected by the drop-rate increase (including carrier letters that by-passed the main post office), the U.S. City Despatch found itself at a severe disadvantage competing with local posts, who generally charged 2 cents for a city letter. In the post-July 1 period, not only did Boyd flourish, but many smaller local posts entered the scene, hoping to capture a share of the market for intra-city letter delivery.”⁵

A new overprinted stamp (6LB7) came into use. See **Figure 13**. The “THREE” in cents at the bottom of the stamp has a red line through it because the retail cost of the stamp was now 4 cents. The overprinted “2” was the cost of the “drop letter” rate. Covers without U.S. stamps that were dropped at the post office after this drop letter rate change have a large circular date stamp with a large “2” and “cts” at the bottom. See **Figure 14**. Scott Trepel proved the “2” from the overprint on the adhesive stamps (6LB7) is the same as the “2” in the New York City drop rate circular datestamp. He did this by scanning and superimposing the images. If a letter was carried by the U.S. City Despatch Post during the new rate period it would also have their handstamp. The cover shown in **Figure 13** has both the U.S. City Despatch Post handstamp and the New York City circular datestamp indicating the 2cts drop letter rate. It is the only recorded cover with both handstamps and the 6LB7 adhesive.

There are only three recorded covers with the red “2” surcharge on the U.S. City Despatch Post adhesive which is listed in the *2009 Scott Specialized Catalogue* as 6LB7 with a value for a cover shown in italic as \$70,000.00. The three recorded covers are dated January 9, 1846, February 14, 1846 and March 2, 1846. The stamp on the March 2, 1846 cover was originally affixed on the back of the cover and was torn in half upon the opening of the letter. A true philatelic travesty. Previous research has indicated that the overprint was created in late 1845 or early 1846. The dates of the three recorded covers indicates early 1846. There had been a fourth cover with an overprinted stamp dated October 29 (1845 or 1846) but the Philatelic Foundation determined the stamp did not originate on this cover and the adhesive was subsequently removed. The rarity of the overprinted U.S. City Despatch Post covers suggests that it was in use for a limited time. There is also a decline in the presence of surviving 1846 U.S. City Despatch Post letters reinforcing the belief that the New York City carrier service was in trouble due to the competition from the New York City local posts. If you ever wondered why certain New York City local posts first appear the 1845-1849 time period, this is the reason. These included Dupuy & Schenck, Messenkopes, G.A. Mills, Bouton’s Broadway Post Office, Gordon’s, Hanford’s, New York City Express Post, Union Post, Bouton’s Manhattan Express, and Franklin City Despatch. Boyd’s was already in existence and they issued new adhesives in this time period which were used extensively, and far in excess of their previously issued adhesives which are much rarer.

⁵ Siegel Auctions Galleries, Golden sale, November 15-17, 1999, Lot 315.



Figure 13. The only recorded U.S. City Despatch Post cover with both the U.S. City Despatch handstamp and the New York City circular datestamp indicating the 2 cts drop letter rate. The adhesive has the price struck out. This is the 6LB7 adhesive. There are three recorded covers with this adhesive.



Figure 14. A drop rate cover from the new rate period which began July 1, 1845 and required 2 cents for a drop rate fee. The previous rate was 1 cent. This cover also has the datestamp of the U.S. City Despatch Post.

The End of The U.S. City Despatch Post

The U.S. City Despatch Post had functioned well until mid-1845. The Postmaster General discontinued the U.S. City Despatch Post on November 28, 1846. The government could not compete with the better service and lower prices offered by the local posts operating in New York City. The government service itself was succeeded by a private post. This private post was "Mead's Post Office City Despatch". Abraham Mead had been a letter carrier for the U.S. City Despatch Post.

Government carrier service in New York had been forced to stop its operations and would not appear again in New York City until February 1849. The U.S. mail adhesive, 6LB9, was issued at that time.

Summary of Postal Reforms

The U.S. City Despatch Post originated from the purchase of Greig's City Despatch Post and used their stamps with a different cancel. The U.S. City Despatch Post issued the second U.S. carrier adhesive (6LB3) in a slightly new design on unsurfaced colored paper on September 1, 1842. In 1843 the U.S. City Despatch Post began using glazed surface paper adhesives. This would be the first government use of a glazed paper adhesive. The Postal Act of March 1845, effective July 1, 1845, put the independent mail companies out of business. In early 1846 the U.S. City Despatch Post issued the first government overprinted stamp. This was necessitated by the increase in the post office "drop rate" from 1 cent to 2 cents. The U.S. City Despatch was unable to compete with the local posts due to the rise in the drop rate and was forced to stop its operations. This was perhaps the only time in our history where free enterprise put the government out of business.

Suggested Scott Catalogue Revisions

The black on wheat unsurfaced paper colored through adhesive shown in **Figure 4** should be added to this section of the *Scott Specialized Catalogue*. The suggested designation is 6LB2A.

The black on apple green unsurfaced paper colored through adhesive shown in **Figure 5** should be added to the *Scott Specialized Catalogue*. The suggested designation is 6LB4A.