

Collecting Postmarks



A collection of LeRoy postmarks and cancellation stamps. 1830s through 1928

by Lynne Belluscio

I've started collecting LeRoy postmarks for the archives. It started when I began writing a history of the LeRoy postal service for the Historical Society newsletter and I discovered LeRoy postmarks for sale on Ebay. I have to be honest, I haven't learned enough about postmarks to know why some are worth hundreds of dollars and others a couple of dollars. I have learned that there is a post mark museum in Belvue, Ohio and that the Post Mark Collectors Club ie. PMCC will be holding its annual meeting in Reno, Nevada this year. I've also learned that I don't know very much about this topic, but I want to collect some of LeRoy's postmarks for the collections at the Historical Society.

Maybe this is obvious, but there is actually a difference between a postmark and a cancellation. A cancellation "cancels" the stamp, whereas a postmark indicates where the letter

was mailed from. Postmarks can be cancellations if they also cancel the stamp. The reason for the cancellation is to mark the stamp so it can't be used again. Cancellation marks are also called "killers." The postmark indicates where the piece of mail came from and can tell when it was mailed. There are also receipt postmarks that are put on the envelope to certify that it was received on a specific day by the post office. The Post Mark Collectors Club has an entire page of abbreviations to classify the marks: a SOTN is a "sock on the nose" or bulls eye cancellation – this is a circle or double circle with the post office and state as well as the date and sometimes the time; a DCDS is a double circle date stamp; a CDS is a circular date stamp; a SFLS is a stamp less folded letter. A "duplex" is both a postmark and a cancellation mark. In 1894 a flag design was used to cancel a stamp. This design was in used for a long time.

For many years, there were mail cars on the railroad. These mail cars were rolling post offices. Men worked in these cars, sorting mail and dropping mail off along the railway at the railroad stations. In fact, there were tall poles that had a special hook, which a mailbag would be attached to. As the train passed by, the mail bag would be picked up and then sorted on the mail car. (I'm still trying to find out whether LeRoy had one of these mail poles.) Letters postmarked on the rail cars are classified as RPO – Railway Post Office. There are even HPO marks that indicate that they were canceled on trucks on the highways post offices. (Who knew?) The actual hand stamps used to cancel mail are destroyed after they become obsolete. But the Postal Museum in Washington, D.C. has a most unusual handstamp. It was salvaged from the wreckage of the USS Oklahoma in Pearl Harbor. The handstamp is dated December 6, 1941, the

day before the Japanese bombed and sunk the Oklahoma.

In the 1860s, the post office tried a machine that impressed a "grill" pattern in the stamp. Apparently some folks had tried washing the ink off the stamps so they could use the stamps again. The grill broke up the fibers of the paper and allowed the ink to soak into the stamp. These grills were only used for four years, between 1867 and 1871. I have no idea whether LeRoy used this type of cancellation. These grill stamps are considered to be the rarest of all U.S. cancellation stamps. There are two 1 cent grills known and two 15 cent grills. In 2011, the only 30 cent grill was discovered.

I am still wondering if there are any letters canceled at the post offices at Fort Hill and Limerock. The post office in Limerock was only open for four months. I did see a letter from South LeRoy but wasn't able to bid high enough to get it for the collection - - - but the hunt continues for LeRoy cancellations and postmarks.

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