



U.S. Philatelic Classics Society

Volume: 26 Number: 4 Year: 1974 Chronicle: 84

Article: Summary of Drop Letter and Carrier Postal Rates, New York City (1794-1885)

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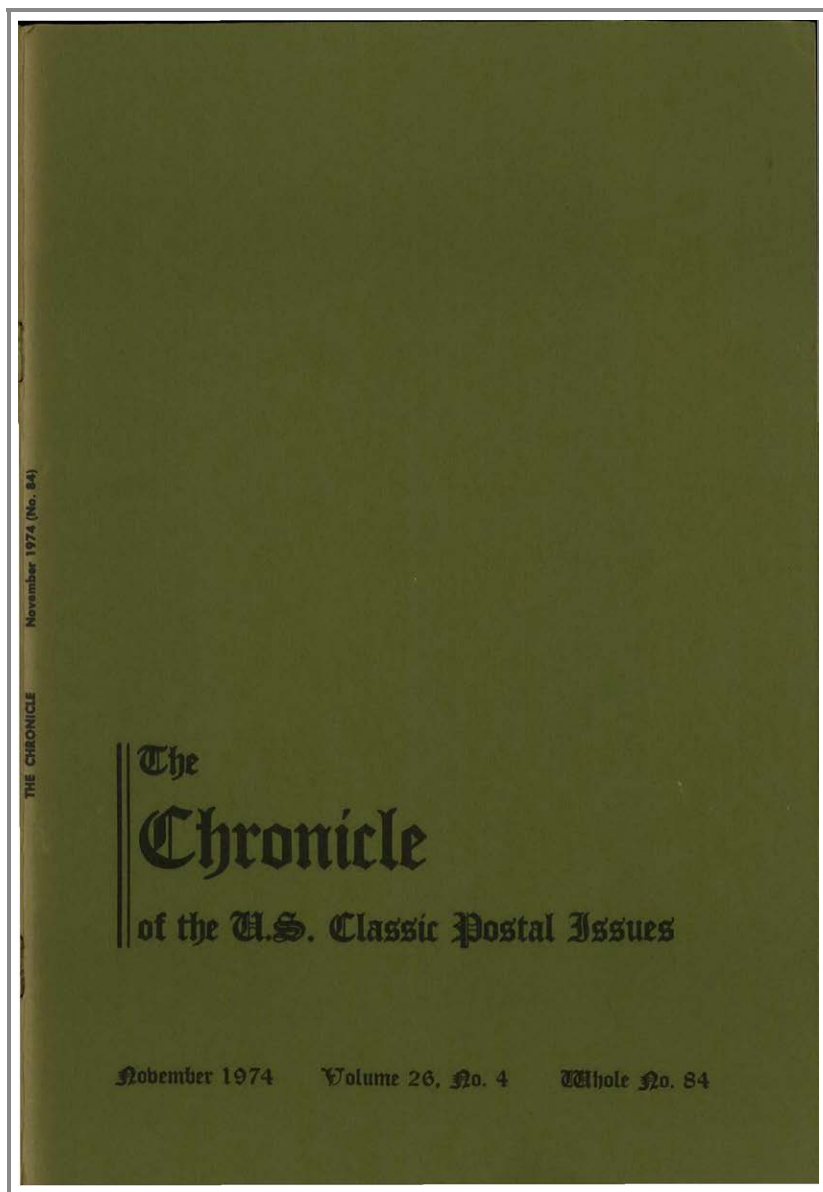


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SUMMARY OF DROP LETTER AND CARRIER POSTAL RATES New York City (1794-1885)

STEVEN M. ROTH, R.A. 1169

Elliott Perry has defined the term "drop letter" as follows: "... a letter deposited in a post office for delivery in or from that post office to an addressee, without being transmitted to another post office for delivery."¹ In the foregoing definition, the term *deposited* includes letters that are placed or "dropped" in the post office or which are collected from letter boxes and brought to the post office.² The term *delivery* includes letters that are handed to the addressee at the post office (i.e., over-the-counter) and letters that are carrier-delivered to a home or business from the post office.³ The essential factor is that the letter is not transmitted from or to another post office before it becomes available to the addressee.

The rates charged for drop letters depended upon how such letters were handled. If the letter passed through the post office (for over-the-counter delivery or for home or business delivery from the post office), then a drop letter fee was due. If the letter was carrier-delivered, too, a carrier fee was *also* due. If the letter was handled *only* by the carrier department (i.e., was placed in a collection box for delivery to a home or business so that *technically* it did not pass through the post office), then only a carrier fee was due, and no drop letter charge was made.⁴

Possible Combinations

A. Deposited in Post Office:

1. Delivery to addressee over-the-counter at the post office (drop letter with no carrier involved).
2. Delivery to another post office (normal postal rates applicable to out-of-town transmission).
3. Delivery to addressee at home or business (drop letter with delivery by carrier from post office or collection box to addressee).

B. Deposited in Collection Box:

1. Delivery to addressee at home or business (not a drop letter; handled only by the carrier department, which delivered the letter from the collection box to the addressee). No drop letter fee.
2. Delivery to post office for transmission to an out-of-town destination (various transient rates at different times; not a drop letter).
3. Delivery to post office for over-the-counter pick-up by addressee (drop letter; no carrier involved after receipt at post office).

C. Received at Post Office for Local Delivery ("From the Mails"):

1. Delivery to local addressee by carrier (not a drop letter). Carrier fee collected in addition to normal postage.
2. Pick-up by addressee over-the-counter at the post office. Not a drop letter.

For a discussion of the ways in which a letter could be handled when it arrived at a post office having city delivery service in the pre-1840 period, see C. Hahn, "Letter Carrier Service in New York," *The Chronicle* 83:182-184.

Rates

The rates charged in New York City for the various combinations shown above are:

Type of Delivery	Date of Law or Rate	Amount Prepaid to or Collected by Post Office	Carrier Fee	Total Charge for Service
	Source: Act of 5-8-1794 (Effective 6-1-1794) (1 Stat. 359)	Rate in Effect: Normal Postal Rates (NPR) or 1c Drop Rate		
A1		1c	2c	—
A2		NPR	—	1c
A3		1c	2c	NPR
B1		—	2c	3c
B2		NPR	—	2c ⁵
B3		1c	—	NPR
C1		NPR	2c	1c ⁵
C2		NPR	—	NPR+2c
				NPR

The same rates were continued in the Acts of March 2, 1799; April 10, 1810; March 3, 1825; and March 2, 1827. The 1843 *PL&R* indicates that these rates were generally continued in effect as of 1843 except that, pursuant to Section 249, carriers for the United States City Dispatch Post in New York City were authorized to collect 3c on each letter deposited in any part of the city and delivered in another. From February 1, 1815, to March 31, 1816, the "War of 1812" rates applied, increasing all postal rates (including the drop letter rate) by 50 percent. This surcharge did not apply to carrier fees, which were not considered to be postal rates, *per se*. Since carrier fees were generally paid in cash to the carrier, the carrier rate was not necessarily shown on the cover.

The Act of July 2, 1836 (5 Stat. 89), authorized the Postmaster General to set the carrier fee for delivery and collection at a figure *not exceeding 2c*.

<i>Type of Delivery</i>	<i>Date of Law or Rate</i>	<i>Amount Prepaid to or Collected by Post Office</i>	<i>Carrier Fee</i>	<i>Total Charge for Service</i>
	Source: Act of 3-1-1845 (Effective 7-1-1845) (5 Stat. 733)	NPR or 2c Drop Rate	2c	
A1		2c	—	2c
A2		NPR	—	NPR
A3		2c	2c	4c
B1		—	2c	2c
B1	February, 1849 in New York City		1c	1c
B2		NPR	1c	NPR+1c
B3		2c	—	2c
C1		NPR	2c	NPR+2c
C1	February, 1849 in New York City			
C2		NPR	1c	NPR+1c
	Source: Act of 3-3-1851 (Effective 7-1-1851) (9 Stat. 587)	NPR or 1c Drop Rate	1c	
A1		1c	—	1c
A2		NPR	—	NPR
A3		1c	1c	2c
B1		—	1c	1c
B2		NPR	—*	NPR
B3		1c	1c	2c
C1		NPR	2c	NPR+2c
C2		NPR	—	NPR

*No charge in New York City for collection and delivery to post office "for the mails."

Drop letter rate (1c) continued in the Act of 1855 (10 Stat. 641).

	Source: Act of 4-3-1860 (Effective 4-3-1860) (12 Stat. 11)	NPR or 1c Drop Rate	1c	
A1		1c	—	1c
A2		NPR	—	NPR
A3		—	1c	1c**
B1		—	1c	1c
B2		NPR	1c	NPR+1c
B3		1c	1c	2c
C1		NPR	1c	NPR+1c
C2		NPR	—	NPR

**Act prohibited drop letter charge on all letters delivered in New York City by carrier (only carrier fee charged).

Source: Act of 6-15-1860 (Effective 7-1-1860)

This Act set the carrier fee at 1c, and removed all discretion of the Postmaster General to change or adjust fees (as was permitted under the old laws, which set the fees as "not exceeding 2c or 1c," as the case may be).⁶

Source: Act of
3-3-1863 (Effective
7-1-1863)
(12 Stat. 704)

Under this Act, carrier fees were abolished. The drop letter rate was increased from 1c to 2c, whether or not the post office provided carrier service; 1c went into the carrier budget (not to the carrier) of the Post Office Department. Carriers were placed on an annual salary. During this period, letter carriers were employed in only about 50 post offices of approximately 20,000 in existence.⁷

Source: Act of
3-3-1865 (13 Stat. 507):
See below regarding
drop letter rates.

Drop letter rates from and after 7-1-1865:
1865-1885: (Cities with Free Delivery = Carrier Post Office)
At Carrier Post Office = 2c* Per ½ ounce.
At Non-Carrier Post Office = 1c
1885 (7-1-1885) (23 Stat. 387):
Including free delivery at Carrier Post Office = 2c* Per 1 ounce.
At Non-Carrier Post Office = 1c
*Included extra 1c charge in cities having free city delivery.

Footnotes

¹ E. Perry and A. Hall, "One Hundred Years Ago," (APS, 1942), p. 34.

² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³ See also M. Blake and W. Davis, *Boston Postal Markings to 1890*, Chart on p. 116 with respect to fees for "drop letters delivered by a carrier."

⁴ E. Perry, *Pat Paragraphs*, pp. 1701-2, says: "'City' (i.e., 'local') letters, which were handled only by the carrier department, were delivered at the 1c rate, but if deposited in the regular mail drop at the post office, or if they were addressed to a box at the post office, they became 'drop letters' and were subject to an additional charge of 1c which was the drop letter rate for twelve years beginning July 1, 1851." See also M. Fortgang, "Carrier Markings," *The Chronicle* 31:7-8.

⁵ It would appear that the first collection boxes in New York City were established by letter carriers in 1833. See B. Bates, *Brief Statement of the Exertions of the Friends of Cheap Postage in the City of New York* (1848), quoted in C. Hahn, "Letter Carrier Service in New York," *The Chronicle* 82:121.

⁶ Stanley B. Ashbrook, *The United States One Cent Stamp of 1851-1857*, Vol. II, p. 144.

⁷ M. Lane, *The Harry F. Allen Collection of Black Jacks* (A.P.S. 1968), p. 19.

MASSACHUSETTS TOWNS

Mr. Henry Stevens, Box 417, Alton, N. H. 03809, has abstracted the list of Massachusetts towns contained in the 1851 Table of Post Offices in the United States and has printed the result on six 8x10 pages. He offers to send a copy to any interested Route Agent gratis on receipt of a stamped self-addressed envelope.

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