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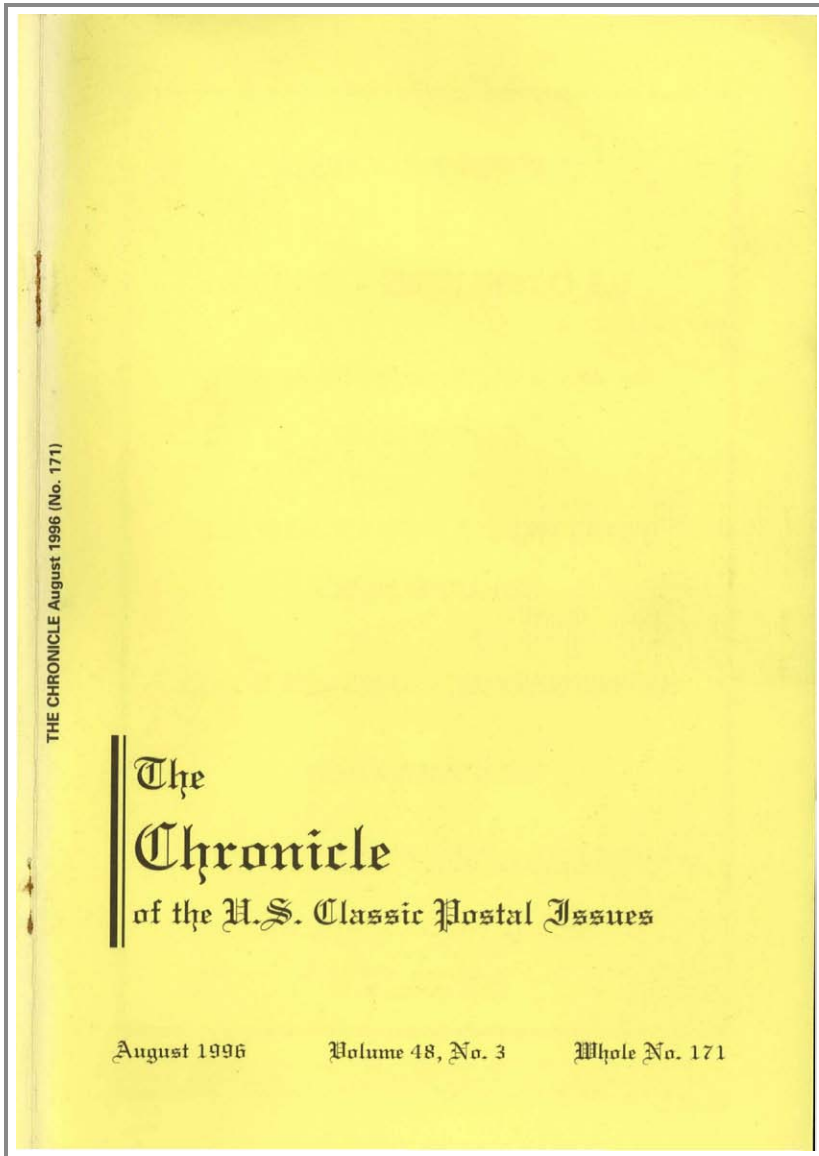


Table Of Contents

items marked with * cannot be viewed as an individual PDF document

[Click here to view the entire Volume: 48 No: 3 Chronicle: 171](#)

	Starting Page
Front Cover (1 page)	Front Cover
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Jack E. Molesworth, Inc.	Inside Front Cover
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Edward Hines	145
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc.	146
Masthead (1 page)	147
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Victor B. Krievins	148
Table of Contents (1 page)	149
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Regency Stamps, Ltd.	150
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Christie's Robson Lowe, New York	151
1847 Period	
A Census of Multiples (Three or More) of the 5¢ 1847 (7 pages) <i>Malcolm L. Brown</i>	152
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: James E. Lee	154
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Steven Hines	154
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Christie's Robson Lowe, New York	159
1851-61 Period	
Earliest Known Uses in the 1851-1857 Era (6 pages) <i>Elliot Omiya, Keiji Taira, Mark Rogers, Richard C. Celler, W. Wilson Hulme II</i>	160
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Shreves Philatelic Galleries, Inc.	166
1861-1869 Period	
Chicago Postmarks of 1863 with Initials (13 pages) <i>Leonard Piskiewicz</i>	167
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: U.S.P.C.S.	179
Display Advertisement (2 pages) Advertiser: Andrew Levitt	180
Special Printings 1875-84	
More about the 1865 Newspaper and Periodical Reprint (1 page) <i>William E. Mooz</i>	182
Officials	
Varieties of United States Official Stamps: 90¢ Navy Short Transfer and 3¢ Treasury Double Impression (7 pages) <i>Alan C. Campbell</i>	183
Plate Varieties on the 3¢ Justice and 30¢ Treasury Departmental Stamps (3 pages) <i>Roy D. Craig Jr.</i>	190
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: U.S.P.C.S.	192
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Guido Craveri	193
Foreign Mails	
Book Review: Transatlantic Mail Study Group Handbook (2 pages) <i>Richard F. Winter</i>	194
New York Exchange Office Markings - Update (10 pages) <i>Richard F. Winter</i>	196
The Cover Corner	
Additional Answers to Problem Covers in Issue 169 (3 pages) <i>Ray W. Carlin</i>	206
Answers to Problem Covers in Issue 170 (3 pages) <i>Ray W. Carlin</i>	208
Problem Covers for This Issue (5 pages) <i>Ray W. Carlin</i>	210
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Leonard H. Hartmann	214
Classified Advertisement (1 page)	215
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Taylor Made Company	215
Index to Advertisers (1 page)	216
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: S.C.R.A.P.	216
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Ivy & Mader Philatelic Auctions, Inc.	Inside Back Cover
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Raymond H. Weill Co	Back Cover

CHICAGO POSTMARKS OF 1863 WITH INITIALS
LEONARD PISKIEWICZ

The Chicago double circle postmarks with initials or letters have been described occasionally in the philatelic literature in recent decades, beginning probably with Delf Norona's 1935 noting of their existence in his *Cyclopedia of United States Postmarks and Postal History*.¹ Richard Graham has written about them and their meaning in articles in the *Chronicle*^{2,3} and *The American Philatelist*⁴ and in a chapter in Harvey Karlen's *Chicago Postal History*.⁵ This article deals with the letter postmarks used on intercity mail and does not address similar letter postmarks used on drop letters.

The letters observed in these postmarks include RA, SB, GA, X and U (see Figure 1). In previous articles, the letter U was not reported, but a single example appeared in a recent Richard C. Frajola, Inc. auction.⁶ Graham reported the research of Richard McPherren Cabeen, who indicated that not enough cover data had been accumulated to correlate letters with geographic patterns of cover origins or destinations. But Graham did report that Cabeen noted a

connection between the letter combinations and the initials of some of the post office personnel at the time. Mr. Cabeen gave the following names as being listed in Andreas' *Chicago*, Vol. III, page 601.

John L. Scripps, Postmaster (and part owner of the Chicago Tribune)
George B. Armstrong
Samuel Bangs
A.F. Bradley
P.D. Leeward
Robert A. Gilmore⁷

At first glance, this explanation seems plausible, but problems appear when details are checked. The reference to "Andreas' *Chicago*, Vol. III, page 601" does not check out. A.T. Andreas' *History of Chicago* contains nothing of the sort of information quoted above on page 601 of Volume III. A search through all the volumes of Andreas' *History of Chicago* failed to locate this reference. And Andreas is not known to have written another three-volume work entitled simply *Chicago*. Apparently Cabeen got his references mixed

¹Delf Norona, *Cyclopedia of United States Postmarks and Postal History*, reprint ed. (Lawrence, Massachusetts: Quarterman Publications, 1975), p. 323.

²Richard B. Graham, "Chicago Double Circle and Local Postmarks with Initials," *Chronicle*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Whole No. 64)(Nov. 1969), pp. 155-59.

³Richard B. Graham, "Chicago Postmarks of 1863 with Initials," *Chronicle*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Whole No. 120)(Nov. 1983), pp. 266-68.

⁴Richard B. Graham, "Chicago Postmarks with Initials," *The American Philatelist*, Vol. 86, No. 3 (March 1972), pp. 203-05.

⁵Richard B. Graham, in Harvey M. Karlen, *Chicago Postal History* (Chicago: Collectors Club of Chicago, 1971), pp. 94-104.

⁶Richard C. Frajola, Inc., Auction No. 53, Oct. 9, 1993, lot 143x.

⁷Graham, "Chicago Double Circle . . .," p. 157; the "G" of "Gilmore" was mistakenly underlined instead of "A" in this reference.



Figure 1. Chicago "GA" letter postmark, Nov. 9 [1863]

in his hand-written notes on the letter cancels that he distributed to interested collectors, including Graham, in 1967 (furnished to this author by Graham).

However, most of the names listed by Cabeen were associated with the post office in one way or another in the 1860's. George B. Armstrong was assistant postmaster under Scripps and is listed as such in the Chicago city directories of 1863 and 1864. Samuel Bangs is not listed as a clerk in the Chicago Post Office in the *U.S. Register* for either 1863 or 1865 (there was no *U.S. Register* for 1864), nor is that name listed in the Chicago city directories of 1863 and 1864. However, the name of George S. Bangs is well known as successor to Armstrong as superintendent of the Railway Mail Service; Bangs previously had been postmaster of Aurora, Illinois. Bradley appears in the *U.S. Register* for fiscal year 1865 as a Chicago Post Office clerk, but Leeward does not. However, both Bradley and Leeward are mentioned by Andreas as chief clerk and assistant, respectively, on the first officially recognized R.P.O. run on June 9, 1864 between Chicago and Clinton, Iowa.⁸

Robert A. Gilmore is alleged to be the connection to the letters RA, and, indeed, Gilmore was postmaster of Chicago, appointed November 16, 1866, serving until his untimely death by drowning in Lake Michigan on August 9, 1867. However, during 1863 Gilmore served in the Union Army in the 26th Illinois Regiment; he was mustered out as lieutenant-colonel October 27, 1864.⁹ Further, Gilmore did not appear in Chicago city directories of 1863 or 1864. At the close of the Civil War, Gilmore resumed a position in Chicago with the Chicago & Rock Island Railroad as General Ticket Agent.¹⁰

⁸A.T. Andreas, *History of Chicago*, Vol. I (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1884), p. 390.

⁹A.T. Andreas, *History of Chicago*, Vol. III (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1886), p. 558.

¹⁰Charles Ulysses Gordon, "The Postmasters of Chicago," typewritten manuscript, Oct. 1953, Chicago Historical Society Library.

The individuals listed under Scripps above were involved in the early years of the R.M.S. and the Chicago Post Office, but linking them to this letter postmark experiment of late 1863 is problematical. Supporting documentation of their involvement *during 1863* is lacking.

But what of the postmarks themselves? What do they tell us? The postmarking devices used during this time were originally designated by Norona as types A-14 and A-15 (Figure 2),¹¹ differentiated by the distance between the first "C" of Chicago and the "T" of Ill. These postmarks are known used from September 7 through September 10, 1863 *without* letters. The earliest postmark *with* letters is known from September 11, 1863 (a Friday), and the latest known is November 13, 1863 (also a Friday). Postmarks with year dates and without letters resumed by November 16, 1863 (Monday), but I have not seen any postmarks from November 14 or 15, 1863 (since these dates were Saturday and Sunday, the scarcity of postmarks on these dates is understandable). During this time, the Chicago Post Office was open seven days a week, but with reduced hours on Sunday.



Figure 2. Chicago CDS's, Norona Types A-14 and A-15

The cancelers duplexed with these CDS's initially were four-ring targets, but after one to two weeks of use these were changed to simple cut corks. In general, these corks lasted from a few days to a week of use before being replaced.

Examination of more than one hundred letter postmark covers and photocopies of covers has provided some very revealing data. First, it is apparent that each of the Norona types A-14 and A-15 represents two distinct postmarking devices. Figure 3 illustrated the four devices used. Differences between the sub-types a and b, which are very subtle, can be illustrated in black and white by the orientations of the letters indicated by the added lines. The differences are best shown by overlaying transparencies of the sub-types. The different cut corks used with the CDS's frequently served to verify differentiation of the sub-types. It should be noted that additional devices may have existed but were not found among the covers studied.

Considering the fact that four devices were used for the letter postmarks, I then tabulated each sub-type by letters and postmark dates for the 100+ covers examined for the nine week letter postmark period. Different devices were used with different letter combinations at different times, suggesting that specific devices were not assigned to specific individuals but rather were all mixed together and locked up overnight; the following day the devices were sometimes used with the same letters but frequently were not. On most days, I have found two devices used, but I have recorded three days (October 1, October 7 and October 16) on which three devices were used. On ten different days, I have found two letter combinations used in the same device on the same day.

¹¹Norona, *op. cit.*, p. 324.



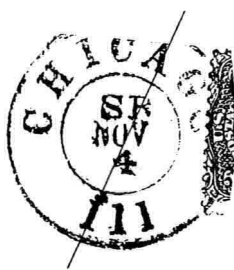
A-14a



A-14b



A-15a



A-15b

Figure 3. Chicago CDS's, Norona sub-types A-14a and b, A-15a and b

A fascinating correlation of letters and devices soon became apparent. Letter combinations RA and X were associated exclusively with each other, while SB and GA formed their own association. The associations are manifest in two distinct ways. First, paired letters, *e.g.*, RA and X, are found used in the same device on the same day or successive days, sometimes going back and forth, *e.g.*, RA to X to RA, etc. That is, the letters RA and X were removed and replaced in a given device for use in applying postmarks. The same pattern of use is observed for SB and GA.

Second, and more fascinating, is the geographic distribution of cover designations as related to the letters (see Table 1). The vast majority of RA and X covers are addressed to states east of Lake Michigan and the Illinois-Indiana state line (including Kentucky). Likewise, the vast majority of SB and GA covers are addressed to western states, including two covers to Mississippi. Such correlations are apparent if one examines the list of letter postmark covers in Karlen's *Chicago Postal History*,¹² but Cabeen's sample of covers was smaller than the group studied here and, apparently, Cabeen allowed exceptions to the correlations to shape his conclusion. Of 109 covers with readable addresses which I examined, only six failed to fit this east-west separation scheme.

The fact that outgoing mail was separated into eastern and western groups and received postmarks that were never used concurrently in both groups is corroborated by a fleeting reference to the "Eastern Room" in a contemporary account of the distribution area of the Chicago Post Office.¹³ Similarly, a reference to the "western room" of the Cairo, Illinois post office appears in a similar account.¹⁴ These accounts and the evidence

¹²Graham, in *Chicago Postal History*, pp. 102-03.

¹³*The Beginnings of the True Railway Mail Service* (Mobile Post Office Society, 1989), p. 15; reprint of a publication originally issued in 1906 by the Lakeside Press, Chicago, for private circulation.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 18.

of the postmarks indicate that an initial separation into eastern and western destinations was made on outgoing mail, perhaps in a separate sorting before the final sorting for direct posting to post offices and for intermediate distributing offices, but certainly before postmarking. In any case, it appears that postmarking of the sorted mails was accomplished in physically separate locations, *e.g.*, the “Eastern Room” and the “Western Room.”

Even more intriguing than this east-west division of letter combinations are the distinctions within the letter pairs. RA cover destinations concentrate in Kentucky, the New England States, Michigan and New York. X covers, while less numerous, show some concentrations: New Hampshire (Concord, from the Quimby correspondence), Pennsylvania (three covers, all to Pittsburgh), New York (including two to New York City), Indiana and Kentucky. The large number of covers to Kentucky in the RA category reflects the fact that most of them bear “CAMP DOUGLAS EXAMINED./PRISONER’S LETTER.” oval markings. However, of three covers from a commercial correspondence to Hopkinsville, Kentucky, two show X postmarks. Has anyone ever seen a Camp Douglas cover with a postmark letter combination other than RA?

TABLE 1. Letter Postmarks vs. Destinations

RA (60)	X (19)	SB (24)	GA (10)	U (1)
20 - Kentucky ¹	4 - New Hampshire ⁴	12 - Illinois	2 - Illinois	1 - New Hampshire ⁵
18 - New England ²	3 - Pittsburgh, Pa.	5 - Iowa	2 - Iowa	
7 - Michigan	3 - New York	1 - Wisconsin	2 - Wisconsin	
7 - New York	2 - Indiana	1 - Missouri	1 - Minnesota	
1 - Indiana	2 - Kentucky	1 - Mississippi	1 - Mississippi	
1 - South Carolina	1 - Michigan	1 - New York ⁶	1 - Mass. ⁶	
1 - Missouri ⁶	1 - Ohio	1 - New Hampshire ⁶	1 - Canada West	
1 - England	1 - Mass.	1 - England ⁶		
4 - unreadable ³	1 - Maine	1 - unreadable		

¹includes 16 with Camp Douglas EXAMINED marking

²New England breakdown:

6 - New Hampshire (incl. 4 Quimby)

5 - Massachusetts

3 - Connecticut

3 - Vermont

1 - Rhode Island

³includes 1 with Camp Douglas EXAMINED marking

⁴all 4 to Quimby, Concord, N.H.

⁵to Quimby, Concord, N.H.

⁶violates east-west separation scheme

Covers with SB postmarks are addressed primarily to Illinois towns outside Chicago, with a few to Iowa and other western states. GA covers show addresses predominantly to the north and west of Chicago.

In addition to the 100+ covers studied here, there are 24 covers listed (by description only) in Karlen's book¹⁵ (and originating in Cabeen's notes) that apparently are not reflected in this study. These listings show the same destination distribution.

The distribution basis of the letter combinations is clearly geographic. But could this be related to the clerks in the Chicago Post Office? This seems unlikely if each letter combination was limited to one individual clerk. Combinations RA and SB can be found on all days of the week during this nine week period, though not enough covers have been seen to account for every day of the nine weeks. One would have to argue that clerks worked essentially every day of the week or very irregular schedules with different days off week to week to account for this finding. Besides, one must remember that RA and X often used the same device while SB and GA used another device. This is hardly consistent with the notion of a specific device being assigned to a specific clerk.

Obviously, outgoing mail was sorted by the Chicago Post Office according to the destination before postmarking. To the extent that the letters in the postmarks may relate to clerks, it is possible that clerks familiar with separation schemes for the east or west were assigned the letter postmarks. More likely, however, postmarking and sorting tasks were done by different clerks who were able to distinguish among outgoing mail routes, essentially rail routes.

In 1863 there were about a dozen mail routes emanating from Chicago. It was not immediately obvious how the postmark letters might relate to the mail-carrying railroads, but one tantalizing coincidence furnished a clue. Covers bearing GA postmarks are addressed primarily to regions north and west of Chicago, regions where the dominant rail line was the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad. Could GA signify the Galena line?

The Michigan Central Railroad is the logical choice for outgoing mail with RA postmarks addressed to Michigan, New York and New England (conveyed eastward by antecedents of the New York Central). But what, then, would have been the connection to Kentucky, destination of many RA covers? A possibility is the Louisville, New Albany and Chicago Railroad (commonly known as the Monon Route), running between Louisville, Kentucky and Michigan City, Indiana. Mail could have departed from Chicago eastbound on the Michigan Central and then could have been transferred to the Monon at Michigan City.¹⁶ The Michigan Central Railroad used the terminal facilities of the Illinois Central on the lakefront south of the Chicago River. This depot was known as the Randolph Street Station,¹⁷ and its direct descendant still exists near the corner of Michigan Avenue and Randolph Street and is still known as Randolph Street Station (currently used by the Illinois Central and the South Shore Line). It seems quite plausible that RA signified Randolph Street Station.

¹⁵Graham, in *Chicago Postal History*.

¹⁶J. David Baker, *The Postal History of Indiana* (Louisville, Kentucky: Leonard H. Hartmann, 1976), pp. 586, 607.

¹⁷George H. Douglas, *Rail City Chicago USA* (San Diego: Howell-North Books, 1981), pp. 31, 35. Depots used by railroads were also found in two contemporary sources: (a) *Halpin & Bailey's Chicago City Directory for the Year 1863-64* (Chicago: Halpin & Bailey, 1863); (b) *Chicago Business Directory* (Chicago: W.S. Spenser, 1864).

The apparent correlation of letter combinations GA and RA with rail routes prompted an attempt to correlate all railroad mail routes departing from Chicago in 1863 with the letter combinations. A published statement by George Armstrong, then assistant postmaster, indicated, "There are 48 arrivals and departures of mails from and to all parts by railroads diverging from Chicago."¹⁸ With arrivals most likely equaling departures, this statement indicates 24 outbound trips per day. During 1863, there were eleven route agent mail routes emanating from Chicago tabulated in the *Report of the Postmaster General* for 1863 and 1864. These routes are listed in Table 2 with pertinent data from the Reports, together with the postmark letter combinations that appear to pertain to each route. Since there are eleven routes and only five known letter combinations, at least some letter combinations must refer to more than one route.

Armstrong's statement about "48 arrivals and departures" on a daily basis is substantially supported by the data in Table 2. The data indicate an absolute minimum of 19 round trips per day (presumably with Sundays excluded), but the three routes showing six trips per week all are annotated to indicate that six per week was the minimum, and, in fact, compensation for these routes reflected the rates for two trips per day. Therefore, consistent outbound traffic of 22 trips per day (again, Sundays excluded) can be inferred from the data, close enough to Armstrong's assertion and leaving room for an extra trip or two on the busiest days, depending perhaps on extra trains in railroad schedules. In any case, these eleven routes accounted for substantially all mail departing Chicago in late 1863.

The postmark letter assignments in Table 2 are based on comparison of cover destinations with the areas served by the routes. On this basis, the correlation of letter combinations with expected routes of travel is very high (about 90%). It is particularly interesting that five routes appear to have been GA routes. All five of these routes departed Chicago from the Galena & Chicago Union's station and trackage on the north side of the Chicago River in 1863, including the route to Galesburg on the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy. The CB&Q did not have access to Chicago on its own tracks to the south side of the downtown areas until June 20, 1864.¹⁹ Therefore, postmark letter combination GA apparently refers not to the railroad but to the station area operated by the Galena line. In view of the probability that the letters RA also referred to a station, it is entirely consistent for GA to refer to a station also.

The situation with letters SB, however, seems different. Covers with SB postmarks were destined primarily for Illinois towns and probably departed Chicago via the Illinois Central, the Rock Island and the Alton Railroads, all of which left Chicago in a southerly direction but from different stations. If SB was to serve as a common identifier, it could be interpreted as "South Bound."

The X postmarks can be correlated with destinations along the Pittsburgh, Ft. Wayne and Chicago Railroad with a southward connection to Kentucky and an eastern connection across Pennsylvania to New York City and onward to New England. But the meaning of X remains an enigma. Perhaps some designation containing "cross" (e.g., cross-country, cross-roads) or some title containing the word "express" could be the source of this letter. An intriguing possibility is that the station used by this railroad was located at Canal and

¹⁸*U.S. Mail and Post Office Assistant*, Nov. 1863, reprint ed. (Chicago: Collectors Club of Chicago, 1975), Vol. I, p. 151.

¹⁹Charles L. Towle, "Chicago's First Railroad—Postal Pioneer," *Chronicle*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Whole No. 130)(May 1986), p. 134.

TABLE 2. Railroad Mail Routes Diverging from Chicago, 1863¹

Letters in p'mark	Route No.	Termini	Corporate title of carrier	Distance (miles)	Trips/week	Annual pay	Ann'l cost/mile
X	9051	Pittsburg to Chicago ²	Pittsburg, Ft. Wayne, and Chicago ²	469½	12	\$93,900.00	\$200
U-?	12501	Toledo to Chicago	Michigan Southern and Northern Indiana	242	12	36,300.00	150
RA	12506	Detroit to Chicago	Michigan Central	285¼	12	42,787.50	150
GA	11501	Chicago to Milwaukee ²	Chicago and Milwaukee and Milwaukee and Chicago ²	87	12	8,700.00	100
GA	11502	Chicago to Freeport	Galena and Chicago Union	121	12	12,100.00	100
GA	11503	Chicago to Clinton	Galena and Chicago Union	138	6+	13,800.00	100
GA	11505	Chicago to Galesburg	Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy	164.7	12	19,764.00	120
GA	13001	Chicago to Green Bay	Chicago and Northwestern	244	12	24,400.00	100
SB	11504	Chicago to Davenport	Chicago and Rock Island	183	12	18,300.00	100
SB	11506	Chicago to St. Louis	Chicago and Alton	288¾	6+	28,475.00	100
SB	11507	Chicago to Centralia	Illinois Central	253	6+	— ³	100

¹taken from 1864 *Report of the Postmaster General* (except postmark letter assignments)

²old spellings of "Pittsburg" and "Milwaukee" as used in *Report* . . .

³amount paid for FY 1863: \$42,100; no figure given for FY 1864

Madison Streets, a few blocks west of the Post Office and *across* the South Branch of the Chicago River. However, that station was known as the Union Depot, also used by the Chicago and Alton and the Cincinnati and Chicago Air Line Railroads.

Two unknowns still remain unresolved. First, the letter U is known from one example, a cover from the large Quimby correspondence to Concord, New Hampshire. Many such Quimby covers are known with RA and X postmarks, and the lone example with the letter U offers no clue as to routing. It is conceivable that use of the letter U was a single instance of mistaken use in place of X, since the Pittsburgh, Ft. Wayne and Chicago Railroad departed from the Union Depot. Secondly, the present state of the data does not allow an unequivocal assignment of a letter combination to the Toledo & Chicago route. There is a lack of covers to provide strong evidence for an assigned letter designation: for example, a cover addressed to northern Ohio. Since it was one of the highest paid routes (in terms of dollars per mile), this is a curious situation. Resolution of this quandary will probably require the discovery of a cover to a northern Ohio destination.

Considered in its entirety, this explanation for the array of letter combinations shows plausible consistency. The chart in Figure 4 summarizes the above discussion and illustrates the relatively simple distribution scheme. The Eastern Room dispatched mail on three mail routes—to Detroit (RA), Pittsburgh (X) and Toledo (possibly U?)—a very simple coding system. Judging by the relative numbers of covers surviving, the Eastern Room accounted for about three-quarters of outgoing mail. This rudimentary code would have been easy to follow, facilitating dispatch of the relatively large volume of mail.

The Western Room, in contrast, would have handled about a quarter of the total outgoing mail, supplying eight routes. GA-coded mail was dispatched to five routes leaving from the Galena Station, while SB mail was distributed to the remaining three routes departing from three separate stations. This would have been only a first-step separation code. A full set of eight separate codes for all eight western routes may have been thought to be more complicated than it was worth or may not have been thought necessary or appropriate for the problem the code was intended to solve.

The foregoing discussion presents an explanation of WHAT the letter combinations represent. There remains the question of WHY they were used. It seems clear that this was an experiment that failed or produced no significantly useful results. One would not expect government bureaucrats to publicize a failure in which they were involved. Therefore, it seems improbable that any reference to this failed experiment would be found in any government document, and to date none has been found. Consequently, it remains to reconstruct the intent of the experiment from what is known of the mail handling problems at the time in the Chicago Post Office.

Chicago assistant postmaster George B. Armstrong proposed and implemented several measures in attempting to rectify the problems in mail distribution by the Chicago Post Office and, in a more general sense, by the entire United States Post Office. This led him to formulate the *en route* distribution of mail on railway cars that became the Railway Mail Service.

Aside from the delays caused by sorting at distributing post offices (there were three dozen listed in the 1866 *PL&R*²⁰), Armstrong was very concerned with what he considered the unacceptably large amount of misdirection of mail. In the first of three letters to Third Assistant Postmaster General A.N. Zevely describing in detail his proposal for reforming

²⁰U.S. Post Office Department, *The Postal Laws and Regulations*, reprint ed. (Holland, Michigan: Theron Weirenga, 1981), Regulations section, p. 15.

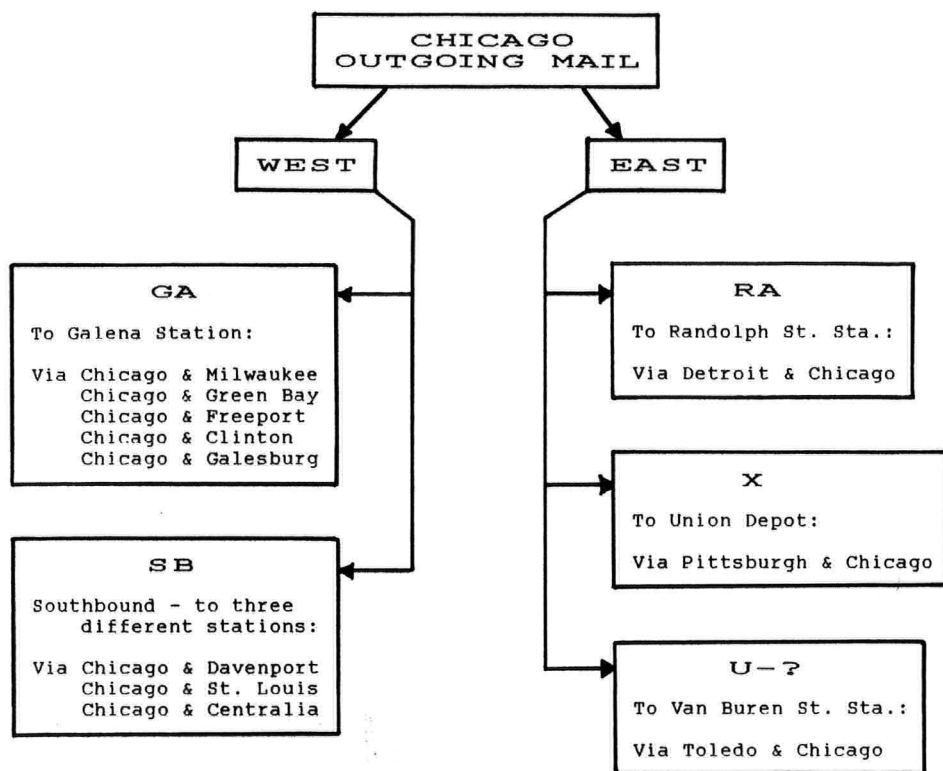


Figure 4. Apparent letter-code distribution system for Chicago outbound mail, 1863

the Post Office mail distribution system (May 10, 1864), Armstrong stated, "... no small amount of misdirected packages, as is well known to the post office, daily travel in the mails . . ."²¹ That Chicago had a particularly large problem in this regard is highlighted by data from the 1863 *Report of the Postmaster General*. In a table listing (among other items) the number of misdirected letters so badly directed that they were sent to the Dead Letter Office, the Chicago Post Office is listed as having the highest number, having sent 6,786 such letters to the DLO, while the second highest, Boston, sent only 413.²²

One of the factors that Armstrong considered important in reducing misdirection was the elimination of wrapping letters to each post office in wrapping paper, an opportunity for making a mistake in direction:

It is proper to repeat, however, that both in large and small offices misdirections of packages are known to be frequently made; and this constant exposure to liability of misdirection of whole mails is very objectionable. There is only one way to remedy this: To dispense with the use of wrappers entirely, except in the case of mails to distant places where they are required to protect letters from attrition and separation in transit. In the plan submitted, wrapping will be done away with, excepting in the cases just named; and as the quantity of paper used for this purpose will be comparatively tri-

²¹*Beginnings of the True Railway Mail Service*, p. 24.

²²U.S. Post Office Department, *Report of the Postmaster General, 1863*, reprint ed. (Holland, Michigan: Theron Weirenga), Table No. 15, p. 50.

fling, the saving in this item of expense will be considerable, while the objections to the use of wrappers are removed.²³

The importance of this seemingly minor proposal was succinctly expressed in the official *History of the Railway Mail Service* published in 1885:

. . . Mr. Armstrong pointed out objections to the then existing method of mailing direct, and made a suggestion which, having afterwards been adopted, proved to be of incalculable benefit to the service.

It was simply to dispense with wrappers for letters or packets of letters, and, instead, to tie them together so that one of the letters of legible address be *faced outside*. By this simple method not only paper, labor, and the time of wrapping and writing were saved, but the commission of many errors in writing the direction was entirely prevented, and the means afforded of quickly detecting and correcting errors in bagging; whereas with the wrappers, which it was forbidden to open except at the place of address, errors were perpetuated from hand to hand, in transit, without the opportunity of correction, and letters were thus continually being miscarried and delayed in reaching their proper destinations.²⁴

Could this have been the basis of the letter postmark experiment? Could the elimination of wrapping have been implemented so that the letters in the postmarks could easily be seen by clerks bagging letter packages, providing the clerks a guide as to the direction of each letter packet? It is apparent that routing information was the function of the postmark letters. If wrapping were eliminated, the postmark letters could theoretically serve a useful purpose. Even if wrapping were not eliminated, the postmark letters could still have served as a direction guide for the clerks doing the wrapping.

Letters recorded in the personal letterbook of Chicago Postmaster J.L. Scripps (still extant, in the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum) indicate that experiments in the elimination of use of wrapping paper on letter packages were conducted approximately one year previous to the letter postmarks experiment. The following letter to the postmaster of Boston documents perhaps the first attempt at this innovation:

Oct. 4, 1862

Sir:

By the direction of W.A. Bryan, Chief Clerk of the P.O.D., who is now in this city, the letter packages made up at this office for Boston, will not for several weeks to come, be enclosed in wrappers but securely tied with twine. The packages will be composed of 80 letters each. The object of the experiment is to test whether letters so done up will pass to destination as free from damage in handling and friction in transit as when enclosed in wrapper. The saving in wrapping paper, if the plan should be adopted after a successful trial, will be large.

I would be pleased to have your own views in regard to this matter after the expiration of say ten days from the date of the receipt of this note.

²³*Beginnings of the True Railway Mail Service*, p. 26.

²⁴Quoted in *Beginnings of the True Railway Mail Service*, p. 8.

Truly Yrs
J.L. Scripps P.M.
G.B. Armstrong A.P.M.

P.M.
Boston, Mass

I am requested to ask [unreadable] to do up the packages for this office in the same manner - say for a month.

A follow-up letter in Scripps' letterbook addressed to Geo. W. McLellan, Second Asst. P.M. General, further describes these experiments:

Oct. 22, 1862

Sir:

In reply to yours of the 10th instant, I have to say that when W.A. Bryan, Esq., Chief Clerk of the P.O.D. a fortnight since, he instructed me by [unreadable] of expenses to dispense with wrappers [unreadable] for packages for certain of the larger offices for a period of thirty days. Baltimore is one of the designated places. I am satisfied that the mails may be sent in this manner with perfect safety. But the Clerks prefer the old method at which they are expert to one with which they are not familiar, and for that reason do up the packages in a very [unreadable] manner. I trust the Department will not wholly abandon the experiment upon so partial a test. I am not at present having packages tied up in the manner in use in New York for circulars. The packages are secure from coming to pieces, while the envelopes provide a sufficient protection for the enclosures. The adoption of this method will save the Department from thirty to fifty thousand dollars per annum, now expended for wrapping paper.

Very Respectfully
J.L. Scripps P.M.

This letter makes two significant observations: (1) the clerks were resistant to change and (2) the experiment in Chicago was continuing. In addition to discontinuing wrapping, the Chicago Post Office had, some years previously, discontinued way-billing of letters dispatched direct to post offices, eliminating a costly and increasingly useless exercise.²⁵

No further letters regarding the discontinuance of wrapping are found in Scripps' letterbook, but it can be surmised that the initial experiments were successful. A notice published in the *U.S. Mail and Post Office Assistant* in November 1864 read in part, "As far as practicable, the wrapping of mail packets, especially to neighboring offices, may be discontinued. Care should be exercised to see that all packages are firmly secured with twine."²⁶ Thus, it appears likely that outgoing Chicago mail, rather than being wrapped, was faced and bundled with twine, allowing the postmarks with initials or letters to be visible to postal clerks.

In summary, the data from this study indicate that the initials or extra letters in the upper date slot of the postmarks most likely refer to train stations for outgoing mail routes.

²⁵*Beginnings of the True Railway Mail Service*, p. 14.

²⁶*U.S. Mail and Post Office Assistant*, p. 198.

To be sure, there are still points to be clarified, such as the meanings of the letters X and U, and the designation for the mail route to Toledo. Also, the nuances of the distribution scheme with respect to letter combinations GA and SB, where the areas served by the two groups of mail routes overlapped, are by no means clear from the cover data. However, the overall distribution scheme is substantially clear from the cover evidence.

The correlation of approximately 90-95% of the letter combinations on the covers studied with anticipated routes of travel may reflect the degree of misdirection decried by Armstrong in his proposal for Post Office reform. The use of these letters in postmarks may well have been coupled with experiments in dispensing with wrapping of letter packages in an attempt to reduce the amount of misdirection.

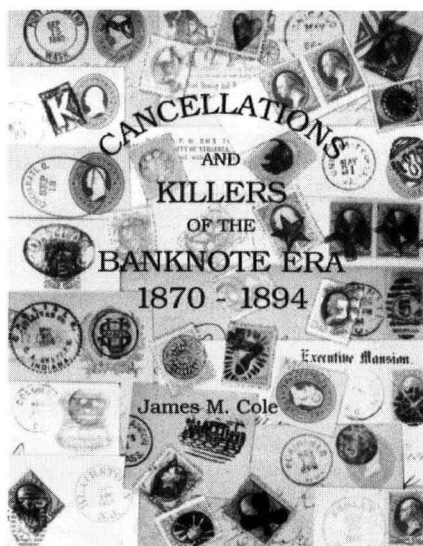
I wish to acknowledge the assistance of many collectors, too numerous to mention, who have provided copies of covers from their collections for this study. In addition, I wish to acknowledge contributions of significant information by Harvey Karlen and Seymour Stiss. I do not regard this study as completed, and solicit further information and copies of letter postmark covers, especially covers that might shed additional light on the handling of these most unusual postmarked items. □

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