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Article: School Stamps: a New Learning Curve

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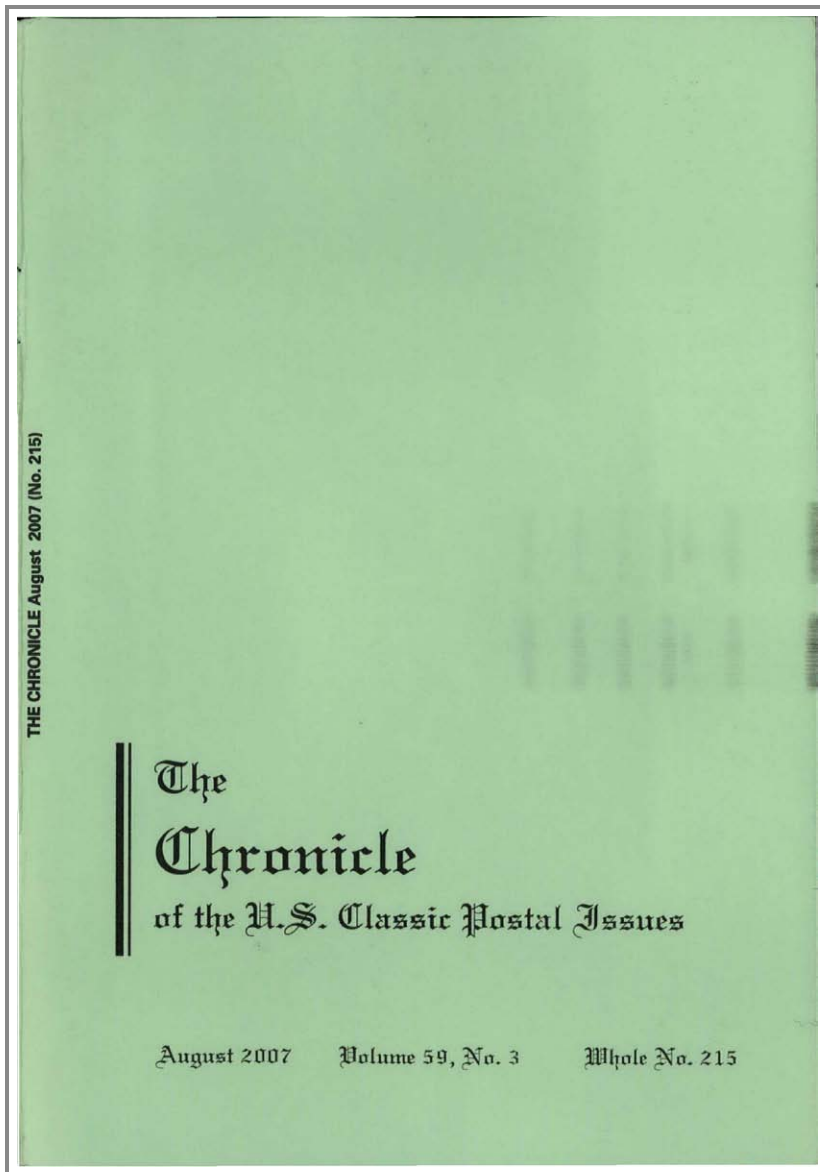


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In researching the background information for this article, I relied heavily on newspaper advertisements and four other references. A sub-section on the Wells & Co. Letter Express, by Thomas Allen, in *19th Century Cleveland, Ohio, Postal Markings*, provided early history and newspaper documentation of service dates along with information on the Cleveland Express office. A chapter on the Letter Express in an unpublished manuscript written by noted collector Pitt Petri also provided newspaper advertisements with listings of Wells & Co. offices, rates and other insights. Additional information on independent carriers in general and Wells & Co. specifically, was obtained from the *American Stampless Cover Catalogue*, Volume II. The history of the Central Railroad was documented by Willis Dunbar in his book detailing the history of Michigan railroads. Auction catalogs for the Hall and Golden collections by Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc. provided photos of many Letter Express covers along with other general information. A special thanks to Richard C. Frajola for his consultation and for providing the Petri manuscript.

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SCHOOL STAMPS: A NEW LEARNING CURVE

GORDON STIMMELL

James N. Drummond's welcome new book, *College and School Stamps*, turns out to be a fascinating learning experience.

Business school adhesives have long been an enigmatic backwater for philatelists, compounded by the regular surfacing of new types never before encountered or recorded.

The origin of these stamps stemmed from the changing economic dynamic of late 19th century America. The creation of a white-collar clerical work force after the Civil War was the catalyst for the creation of hundreds of commercial business colleges in large cities and major towns.

Business colleges prided themselves in creating a microcosm of the real work place. Students learned accounting practices, shorthand, phonography, calligraphy, telegraphy, and correspondence, plus typewriting skills, bookkeeping and all the latest essentials to walking fully prepared into an office job after graduation.

As Drummond points out, the better schools had facades erected within classrooms "with partitions for a bank, post office, or express office. The students took turns being a bank, a postmaster, a merchant, or a customer." Some schools had classes in business letter-writing, which included placing a stamp properly on an envelope, which is where business school stamps come into the picture.

Many of the colleges had stamps printed up that fit in with the simulated business environment of the classrooms. These were pretend stamps that students pasted on business envelopes and revenue forms that mimicked the correspondence and legal documents used by shipping, banking, railroad and other firms of the 1860-1910 period. Thousands of these

stamps of course, wound up in wastebaskets so we owe the survival of the stamps to the saving grace of a few students and teachers who kept them as mementoes.

Students of locals and carriers encounter these when buying large lots of forgeries. The field is full of imitation and bogus college stamps issued by S. Allan Taylor and other stamp dealers in the 1860s and placed in their packets for sale to collectors.

The more common bogus creations were depicted by the late Sherwood Springer in his series of handbooks of North American Cinderella Stamps. Until Drummond's book, Springer was a main resource for students of this at times baffling field.

Drummond's book includes two boarding schools that issued stamps actually used for supplemental postage to the mails: Friends' Boarding School in Ohio and Westtown in Pennsylvania. Both are listed in the Scott's *Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps & Covers*. These Quaker school stamps actually pre-paid fees for carriage of student letters by horse-drawn wagons to the post office, with a label affixed in addition to a U.S. stamp. So these are true locals, not business-school stamps.



Figure 1. A sampling of school stamps. At left: Moore's College Postage, 3 cents green, Atlanta, Georgia, 1878, two examples known. Center: Quaker City Business College, 2 cents red, Philadelphia, 1869, the only known copy. Right: Nelson's Business College, no value, red, Cincinnati, circa 1865, seven colors recorded.

As well, Drummond includes stamps from a number of British universities that were used mainly for dormitory mail between students and to local businesses. These thread throughout the book. I would have preferred them in a separate addendum or section away from the U.S. stamps.

Included also are the stamp dealers' creations, some of which imitated real business school stamps while others were pure flights of fancy produced to feed the appetite of the growing number of stamp collectors in the 1860-90 period. Drummond's inclusion of these is useful, because he separates out the fanciful and imitations from the "real" business-school stamps.

The design elements widely vary. Many imitated revenue stamps of the day that were actually used on legal documents. Some were inspired by U.S. postage stamps in use at the time, and this can provide a clue to roughly dating the school stamp when the date is in doubt. Others showed portraits of George Washington, or the school founder or principal. Some showed Greek mythological or allegorical figures. One series even seems to depict William Shakespeare. The stamps shown in Figure 1 are representative examples. At left is a 3 cent green stamp of Moore's College Postage, Atlanta Georgia, 1878, one of two examples known. At center is a 2 cent red stamp from the Quaker City Business College of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, from 1869, the only known copy. At right is a red stamp from Nelson's Business College of Cincinnati, circa 1865. Seven colors are recorded.

Laced throughout the book are wonderful collateral items gathered by the author as well as contributed by leading students of the field, including William Sammis, Michael McBride, Jim Kesterson and George Norton. Their collections, says Drummond, turned his original idea for a small 40 page booklet two years ago, into the sprawling 236-page

goldmine of information just published.

Fascinating collateral images include classrooms of students at their appointed business tasks, images of the schools, business-college bogus paper currency, revenue-stamped bank checks with college revenues attached, surviving accounting documents processed by students learning their future trade, as well as stamps that survive on practice envelopes.

All of the stamps are depicted in color as are most of the lavish illustrations derived from the 86 business colleges listed alphabetically in the book, which is printed with cardboard backing and an acetate front binding. With each college entry, rough market prices are given, both for the stamps and for examples found on surviving letters or documents.

Drummond feels that at this point he has captured fully 90% of the known emissions, but of course he's eager to learn of unlisted items. Some stamps have not as yet been linked to any known school in a particular town or city. A few of the stamps are thus far known to exist as unique items – and for a few, photo images have yet to surface. *Chronicle* readers are urged to transmit any additional data they may have at hand. A second edition is in the planning stages and submissions from collectors will be vital to this updated catalogue.

This book was a revelation to me, because despite 20 years of study, the book presented dozens of stamps I had never encountered before. This tome is as ground-breaking as Bruce H. Mosher's recent *Catalog of Private Express Labels and Stamps* (reviewed by me recently in the *Chronicle*), in which thousands of express items have been recorded and catalogued, many for the first time.

To share information on new school stamp discoveries or to purchase his book (for \$60 postpaid), you can contact the author directly: James N. Drummond, 19335 Pauma Valley Drive, Porter Ranch, CA 91326-1701. The book is also available from philatelic literature dealers, two of whom advertise in this *Chronicle*.■

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