

The Civil War Post

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Charleston Penny Post Service During the Civil War

Home Mail Delivery

Universal home mail delivery did not exist until many years after the American Civil War. But in some cities, independent mail services would deliver mail from the post office to a street address for an additional charge.

Free mail delivery in eastern cities with 50,000 or more people began on July 1, 1863. Before 1863, postage paid only for the delivery of mail from post office to post office. Coincidentally, July 1, 1863, was the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg. Within a year, free delivery was offered in 65 cities nationwide; by 1880, free delivery was offered in 104 cities and, by 1900, in 796 cities.

In the 1890s, the USPOD began providing free home delivery to rural Americans, who then comprised more than 60% of the population.¹

John Henry Honour D.D.

In 1849, John Henry Honour (1802-85), shown in Figure 1, became the first superintendent of the Carrier Department in Charleston, S.C., a penny post service. The new service was announced in a May 8, 1849, advertisement in the *Charleston Mercury*, the city newspaper. The carriers were all related by marriage – Honour, Kingman, Martin and Steinmeyer.

These bonded carriers were employees of the U.S. Post Office Department, but were not paid a salary. Instead, an additional 2¢ was paid for every letter they delivered, as decreed by Congress. Most citizens instead chose to pick up their mail at the post office. To indicate payment, the various carrier services used small paper labels, known as carrier stamps. They were issued and sold by the carriers themselves.

A detailed biography of the Rev. John Henry Honour appears in the October 2008 *Penny Post*, the quarterly journal of the Carriers and Locals Society.² It was authored by Larry Lyons, who has spent years studying this fascinating area. There is also a great deal of information online dealing with Honour's ministry in both the Methodist Episcopal and Lutheran churches, as well as fraternal organizations. An autobiographical sketch

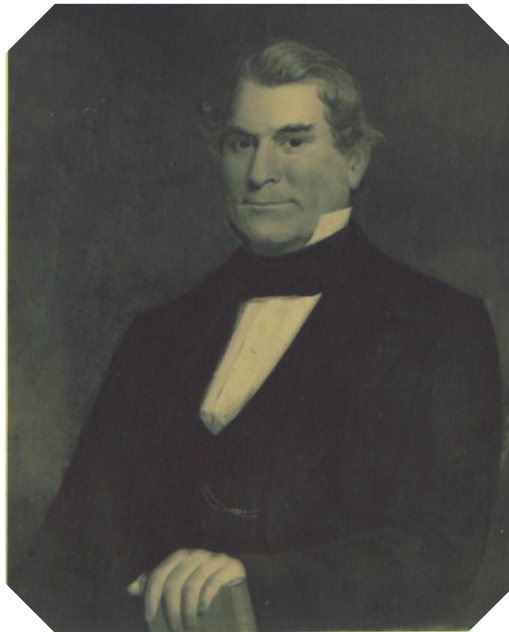


Figure 1. John Henry Honour, the first superintendent of the Charleston Carrier Service for the U.S. Post Office Department.

of Honour is housed in the Wilson Special Collections Library in the University of North Carolina.

Honour was involved in a wide array of trades, including bookkeeping, insurance and banking, as well as myriad religious and civic endeavors. He excelled at all. He became the sixth Sovereign Grand Commander of the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite of Freemasons, Southern Jurisdiction, USA. He was also an Odd Fellow and the first Grand Master of that order in South Carolina.³

In civic affairs, he served as Acting Mayor of Charleston, was a member of the city council, commissioner of the Orphans Home, of the Alms House, of the Poor of Charleston Neck, commissioner of the Market, trustee of the Charleston Library and trustee of Charleston

College. The list goes on and on; I've named but a few.

In 1860, he was a member of the Secession Convention that led to South Carolina being the first state to secede from the Union. The South Carolina delegates voted 169-0 to secede from the Union. It was that event that led to Honour's retirement as head of the Carrier Department.



Figure 2. One of only five known examples of the Honour's border-of-links stamp tied in combination with the 3¢ 1851 issue, and the only-recorded use of the stamp from Aiken, S.C., to prepay the Charleston carrier fee.

Charleston Carrier Use

As shown in Figure 2, this Honour's City Express (2¢) black on bluish (Scott 4LB13) from Charleston is used with a U.S. 1851 3¢ dull red, type II. Both stamps are tied by an Aiken, S.C., JUN 27 circular datestamp on a small cover addressed locally to T.P. Ravenel. This is one of only five known examples of the Honour's border-of-links stamp tied in combination with the 3¢ 1851 issue, and the only recorded use of the stamp from Aiken to prepay the Charleston carrier fee.

These carrier stamps were discontinued by 1860. Only manuscript notations are known to exist during the war. By 1861, only John C. Beckman, Joseph G. Martin and John F. Steinmeyer Jr., still operated the Charleston Penny Post service in conjunction with the Charleston post office. Corresponding to the antebellum system, the carriers were employees of the Confederate Post Office Department, but were not paid a salary. An extra 2¢ paid for their services.

Although the penny post service continued throughout the Civil War, fewer than 20 Charleston Penny Post covers are recorded used during that period.⁴

The CSA catalog⁵ records two known types of Charleston Penny Post mail. Local delivery is listed as type CS-01 with a value of \$3,500.

The local delivery cover shown in Figure 3 is franked with a Scott CSA 12, 10¢ blue Jefferson Davis, tied with a bright violet Pendleton, S.C., Oct. 4 (1864) circular datestamp on a local cover with the rare sender's directive "Care of Penny Post." It is addressed to W.G. Carrere, No. 39 Radcliffe Street, Charleston, S.C. The postmark color alone is quite scarce. There are only seven violet town postmarks recorded in the CSA catalog, one of which is a legacy entry not seen by the 2012 catalog editors and thus listed with an asterisk⁶.



Figure 3. Scott CSA 12, 10¢ blue Jefferson Davis, tied with a bright violet Pendleton, S.C., Oct 4 (1864) circular datestamp on a local cover with the rare sender's directive "Care of Penny Post."

Another local delivery example is shown as Figure 4. The manuscript directive at top reads "Penny Post paid." It bears a Charleston, S.C., Jun 7, 1861, circular datestamp with a matching handstamped "PAID 2" to pay the local drop rate. It is addressed to The Revd W. Pinckney, Pastor of Grace Church, Wentworth Street.

Post office delivery (not delivered to the street address) is listed as type CS-02 and valued at \$2,500 in the catalog. No outbound mail has thus been recorded from a pickup point to the local post office for entry into the mail system, although it was given type CS-03 in hope that an example may someday be found.

The only other Confederate mail carrier service was in New Orleans, La. It is even rarer with valuations of \$4,500 and \$3,500 for local and post office delivery respectively. As with Charleston, no outbound mail is recorded.

Acknowledgement: My sincere thanks to Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries for use of some of the images from their invaluable collector databases. ☐

Endnotes

1. United States Postal Service, "Universal Service and the Postal Monopoly: A Brief History," <https://about.usps.com/who/profile/history/universal-service-postal-monopoly-history.htm> (Accessed March 29, 2023).
2. Larry Lyons, "John Henry Honour D.D." *The Penny Post, Carriers and Locals Society*, October 2008, pp. 48-56.
3. Geni, John Henry Honour, www.geni.com/people/John-Honour/6000000044033282419 (Accessed March 28, 2023).
4. Richard L. Calhoun, *Charleston, South Carolina, and the Confederate Postmaster Provisionals*, pp. 16-17.
5. Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown Jr., Jerry S. Palazolo, *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*, (Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012), page 478.
6. *Ibid*, page 374.

Patricia A. (Trish) Kaufmann was first introduced to Confederate postal history in 1965. She became actively involved in organized philately in 1969, became a dealer in 1973 and today specializes solely in Confederate stamps and postal history. She enjoys hearing from readers and may be reached at trishkauf@comcast.net.



Figure 4. The manuscript directive at top reads "Penny Post paid." Its cover bears a Charleston, S.C., "JUN 7, 1861," circular datestamp with a matching handstamped "PAID 2" to pay the local Confederate drop rate.