

SYNOPSIS

LOUISVILLE & CINCINNATI MAIL LINE

The Louisville & Cincinnati Mail Line was the largest early company transporting mail on steamboats. This exhibit shows the postal markings used on boats travelling the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. These markings are those of the route agents employed by the U.S. Post Office Department to ride on the different steamboats with mail contracts to accept and distribute letters that were transported on the steamboats. The markings are shown on original covers bearing the different postmarks. Many are very rare or even unique. All known markings are shown as well as six very rare vessel-named markings of individual steamboats. The two patriotic covers are the only known examples, and the overall design cover is very special.

THE LOUISVILLE & CINCINNATI MAIL LINE

ROUTE AGENT MARKINGS

Route agents were paid Post Office Department employees who were assigned to travel on trains and steamboats to process those letters that were presented to them for postal handling. This exhibit will show the markings used on one of the most important steamboat contract lines, that of the Louisville and Cincinnati Mail Line on the Ohio River. This particular route of about 135 miles bore different route numbers from 1843 to 1881. Documentation exists that a route agent, officially designated "the Cincinnati, Oh. and Louisville, Ky. Agent" was assigned to the route for the period between December 28, 1850 and May 27, 1861 and again for 1868-1878. Covers show usages from the period of the Civil War as well. Markings are known on letters traveling in both direction on the river, so there must have been two agents at least with one in each of the terminal cities. It is possible that certain markings are from route agents who were on a particular steamboat. Most of the postmarks can be found on letters travelling in both directions.



This cover was sent from Louisville, Ky. on September 6, 1837 and bears a manuscript postmark that reads "Mail Boat 10". This is a postal marking applied by a route agent and it proves that route agents processed the mails at this early date. This is the earliest recorded use of a route agent postmark on a waterway route. 1837 is also the date of the earliest known railroad route agent postmark as well.