

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 1786-1799

In 1789, Richmond, Virginia, was listed as one of only 75 post offices in the new United States. A post office had been established there, according to Franklin's Ledger, by 1776. A manuscript town marking has been reported from 1773. The Virginia capitol moved to Richmond in 1780 to be in a more secure location and safer from British attack. However, Benedict Arnold's forces still managed to sack and burn Richmond in 1781. It was soon rebuilt, becoming designated as a city in 1782.

This exhibit presents postal markings and various rates from Richmond's earliest handstamps, which were used first by the Confederation Post from 1786 to 1791, then by the United States Post Office from 1792 to 1799. All are of the straight-line type and struck in black. Among the covers shown are a number of multiple-rate folded letters, as well as prepaid examples and free usages to the Secretary of War and to a member of Congress.

The postal rates in effect in 1786 were expressed in pennyweight and grains of silver, and were based upon the distance the letter was to be transported. They were often also rated by the receiving postmaster in local currency, which could vary from one locality to another, for ease of collection. Many covers thus bear two different rate markings, in silver and in local shillings. Rates in the new U.S. currency were not established until 1792 and ranged from 6c to 25c, again varying with distance. In 1799, the rate table was simplified from nine to six distance categories.

The exhibit is the result of over 50 years of collecting information about these postal markings, and many of those shown are the actual listing examples in such works as the American Stampless Cover Catalog. No straight-line marking is known after 1799. A new circular town marking was introduced in 1800, possibly as a way of noting what was considered to be the beginning of a new millenium.

The applicable rate tables are shown, with examples of various rates, first of the Confederation Post of 1786-1791 and later of the U.S. Post Office from 1792-1799.

References:

1. "The Seven-thorned Queen: Richmond, VA Postal History to 1865", Daniel C. Warren, American Philatelic Congress Book, 1971, pp. 53-65
2. "The Straight-Line Handstamps of Richmond, Virginia 1786-1799", Dan Warren, Way Markings Vol. 31, No. 4, November 2000, p. 45-49
3. "Postal Service in the Virginia Colony", Daniel C. Warren, M.D., Way Markings Vol. 32, No. 1, February 2001, pp. 4-9
4. American Stampless Cover Catalog, David G. Phillips, Editor; David G. Phillips Publishing Company, Miami, FLA, 1997