

Galena's Lead Mining Era: An American "Boom to Bust" Story

1830 - 1869

Treatment and Importance

Rather than just another "my hometown collection", this exhibit describes the history of how and why the town developed, as a proxy to other towns of its kind. Covers are described by their rates, routes and markings for the philatelic aspects, while the social history of the region is described through added display items.

The exhibit is complete as to rates and cancellations of the period, but it is not a "one of each" collection shown in exhibit form. The exhibit presents specific covers from a larger collection which advance the lead mining story. Certain display items, including the mineral Galena, a lead bullet, graphics, documents and foreign covers are brought in to illustrate specific aspects of this lead mining history.

Knowledge, Study and Research

The exhibit takes the opportunity to specifically describe covers with difficult rates and routes, including Trans-Atlantic items. Where the exhibit differs from a more typical hometown exhibit is in these difficult destinations.

Further, there is study in the additive historic information. Additional research into the town history, lead mining industry, and population statistics and comparisons shown to tie the story to the material selection and philatelic uses.

Challenge Factor

Of particular note was the challenge of selection of materials from a larger collection that work to tie a moving story line across the pages. This was a more complex task than a strict chronological, rate or cancel type organization. The philatelic items are indeed a challenge, but added to that was the story line demands.

Rarity and Condition

Galena was the wild west in the 1830s and 1840s, and by the late 1860s, that west just moved further west. To be specific, territorial mail for Illinois was downstate. Galena is in far northwest of the state and was Indian country primarily until the 1830s.

This is a tough city to collect, with a low population in a very rural and yet unsettled geography. It wasn't the wealthy and educated who came rough hill terrains known for harsh winters and troubles with the natives.

The miners were the fortune seekers, and the early miners who came here were the ones who went on to the next boom area. Mail found from early days of Galena is often not in good condition, some of this "rough mail" is shown to represent the realities—mail with the gray lead dust clearly evident adds texture (really) to this story.

Organization

Each double page has a storyline title on the right, and a date on the left. An exhibit plan is on the title page.

Scope: As a One Frame Exhibit

This exhibit is presented in a tight time frame of the 1830-1860s, against the historic backdrop of lead mining and the Civil War. The exhibit is balanced across the years, and described by the headings across the time frame.

Rates applicable in the timeframe are represented. Each mode of sending mail: the mail coaches, steamboat and rail carriage is demonstrated.

The markings are complete for the time as well: the first straight line cancel, 30 mm, 35 mm balloon, and cancels that followed. Could this be more than a single frame? It could grow to include the 50+ Jo Daviess County towns, but the intent is just a single frame about Galena, IL.

What you won't find:

- ♦ Territorial mail, the territorial mail from Illinois is from well to the south.
- ♦ Galena did not receive any 1847 stamps to distribute from their post office, you won't see 5¢ or 10¢ 1847 covers here.
- ♦ A famous Beer Mug cancel is from Galva not Galena.

Sources Consulted:

American Stampless Cover Catalog, E. N. Sampson

Glorious Galena Illinois Postal Historian Vol 2 No 4 Whole 7

Chicago Postal Markings and Postal History Leonard Piskiewitz, 2006

The Saga of Jo Daviess County, Chapters 1 & 2.

Glamorous Galena Richard Gear Hobbs

Harper's New Monthly Galena, IL, May, 1866 article

Trails to Rails, A Story of Transportation Progress in Illinois, Carlton Corliss

The United States 1847 Issue: A Cover Census by Thomas J. Alexander



Lead Miners, Galena, Illinois

Galena's lead supplied union and confederate ammunition needs for the Civil War.

