

## WASHINGTON, DC, MANUSCRIPT CARRIER PRECANCELS

Here's some background which applies to all carrier stamps, either the official issues (LO1 and LO2) or the semi-official ones (those bearing the "xLB" prefix in the Scott *Specialized Catalogue*). Carrier stamps could be used to prepay the fee to take letters to the post office ("collection") or to prepay the fee to take letters from the post office to the street address ("delivery"). Normally, carrier delivery was paid in cash by the recipient or via a charge account with the post office and such covers were never marked as such. Consequently, nearly all used carrier stamps represent the collection fee and not the delivery fee. The carrier fee was per piece and not based on weight. Thus, one can find double-, triple- or higher rate covers bearing a single carrier stamp. Only thirteen cities had regular carrier service for any length of time: Baltimore, Boston, Brooklyn, Charleston, S.C., Cincinnati, Cleveland, Kensington, Pa., Louisville, New Orleans, New York City, Philadelphia, Providence, R.I., and Washington, D.C. Not all of these cities' carriers used carrier stamps. And there is spotty evidence of carrier operations run by postmasters in some other towns.

The 1¢ eagle carrier (Scott LO2), unlike its undenominated Franklin brother (LO1), enjoyed wide usage in four cities which had carrier service: Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Kensington, Pa. (before it was absorbed by Philadelphia in 1854) and Washington, D.C. A wide variety of cancellations were used. Philadelphia, for instance, used either a red star or a black oval handstamp impression, which also did duty as the handstamp applied to sheet margins of the regular 1¢ Franklin stamps to make semi-official carrier stamps. Washington, D.C., carriers precancelled their stamps with their manuscript initials.

There is no documentary evidence that these are actually precancels. However, every example I've seen has the initials neatly written in ink without blobbing and right in the center of the stamp. I find it impossible to believe that the carrier would tote a writing desk plus writing supplies as he made his rounds on foot!

The following data comes from unpublished notes by Elliott Perry. In the 1850's, during the period of the eagle carrier, Washington, D.C., had four carriers bonded by the Washington, D.C., postmaster. Here are their names and initials used to precancel their stamps:

Robert Ball..... "B"  
Thomas F. Harkness ..... "H"  
Vincent Jackson ..... "J"  
Charles J. Wright ..... "CJW" or rarely "W"

It can be quite a challenge to assemble a set of all four Washington, D.C., carrier initials. As I peruse the Robert A. Siegel auction of the David Golden Collection of United States Carriers and Locals (Sale 817, November 15-17, 1999), I only find the initials of Thomas F. Harkness and Charles J. Wright.

The next page illustrates all four of these carriers' manuscript initial precancels to aid you in your search for these elusive precancels..



*“B” [Robert Ball] on piece with 3¢ red.*



*“H” [Thomas F. Harkness]*



*“J” [Vincent Jackson]*



*“CJW” [Charles J. Wright]*



*1¢ eagle carrier bearing manuscript precancel “H” [Thomas F. Harkness] with 3¢ red regular issue, the latter tied by Washington, D.C., town cancel.*