

THE WOODBRIDGE N.J. COLONIAL STRAIGHT LINE HANDSTAMP: WHERE IS IT?

By: Robert G. Rose

As collectors of postal history, and especially for those who take on the challenge of competitive exhibiting, a major objective is to show an example of each of the rarities within the subject area of one's specialty. For the last 40 years, this author has actively pursued his collecting passion, New Jersey stampless mail with handstamp postmarks. Yet, in those four decades of participation in auction sales,¹ many contacts within the dealer community, and extensive research in earlier catalogs and literature,^{2,3} the author has never seen an actual cover or even an illustration of a cover with the Colonial Woodbridge, N.J. straight line which is listed in the most current edition of the *American Stampless Cover Catalog*.⁴

That catalog includes an illustration of what appears to be a tracing of the handstamp postmark in *Figure 1* below. The catalog lists two reported dates for this marking, just four days apart, July 22 and July 26, 1775. The later date is of particular interest to postal historians. On that date, the Second Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia, established the Congressional Post. Accordingly, this handstamp would have been provided by the British Parliamentary Post prior to the establishment of the Congressional Post. On December 25, 1775, with the American Revolutionary War underway, the Parliamentary Post ceased domestic mail service in its American colonies.⁵



*Fig. 1. Tracing of Woodbridge Colonial Handstamp Postmark,
July 26, 1775.*⁴

The *Coles Book*, published in 1983, is the most authoritative study of New Jersey's postal markings on stampless covers. However, it does not illustrate or discuss the Woodbridge straight line.⁶ Instead, the tracing in *Figure 1* is included in its alphabetical listing of postmarks with a footnote reference and attribution to the third edition of the *American Stampless Mail Catalog* published in 1978 from which the handstamp tracing was copied.⁷

So, how and when did the Woodbridge straight line come to the attention of the postal history community? The earliest reference known to this author first appeared in the 1952 edition of the stampless cover catalog.⁸ That listing did not include a tracing of the handstamp nor its dates of use other than the year "1775." Its size was listed as "53 X 42" which appears to be a typo for the dimension of its height, which more probably should have read either "4" or "4½. Presumably, the dimension of its width refers to the overall combined size of both the town's name and date. The 1952 edition of the catalog was edited by Harry Konwiser. The catalog's New Jersey listings were compiled by Stephen G. Rich. Both were avid students, writers and exhibitors of stampless mail. Unfortunately, we are left without any reference to the source of this listing.

The 1965 edition of the stampless cover catalog listed both the July 22 and July 26, 1775 dates together with a tracing of the handstamp with the July 26 date measuring 40 x 4½mm.⁹ Stanley E. Griffith was the editor of the catalog's New Jersey listings. Griffith was a longtime friend of William Coles and a contributor to the *Coles Book*. Again, there is no reference to the source of this marking's expanded description.

Mention of this marking was contained in Kay Horowicz & Robson Lowe's *The Colonial Posts in the United States 1606-1783*, published in 1967.¹⁰ Under its listing for "Congress Post" markings, it includes a reference to the Woodbridge straight line with a listing of only the July 26, 1775 date. However, as noted above, on this date the Congressional Post was first established and the transition from the Parliamentary Post would not have had the time to have taken place.

Finally, reference to this handstamp is found in the pages of *NJPH*. In a 1976 article entitled "Straight Line Markings of New Jersey," by Frank Engle,¹¹ Coles, Jr. and Griffith are credited by Engle for their assistance, both noted as having served as co-editors for the New Jersey listings in the 1971 edition of the stampless cover catalog.¹² With respect to the two listed dates for the Woodbridge straight line, Engle writes: "we have never seen either of these two covers. The listing was made by Harry Konwiser when he edited the catalog [the 1952 edition catalog described above] and we assume they are the only known."¹³

It is remarkable that for nearly 70 years after the existence of the Woodbridge straight line was first reported, no illustrations of these two covers have ever been seen. Given their absence to the world of philately, one suspects that they may be preserved in an archive whose whereabouts is unknown to this generation of collectors. The author eagerly seeks your help in identifying their present location so that images of both covers may be added to the philatelic record. Please contact me at robertrose25@comcast.net with any information.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Robert G. Kaufmann, "The William C. Coles, Jr. Collection," Sale No. 33, March 8, 1984; Robert G. Kaufmann, Sale No. 42, November 22, 1985 (unnamed Coles collection); Richard C. Frajola, Inc., "The Royden Loundsbery 'Unexhibited Exhibit' Collection," Sale No. 26, January 24 & 26, 1986; Richard C. Frajola, Inc., Sale No. 28, "United States Postal History," May 3, 1986 (unnamed, including Marc Haas Colonial period stampless collection); Christie's Robson Lowe, "The David L. Jarrett Collection of United States Postal Markings," October 9-10, 1990; Weiss Philatelics, Sale No. 127, "Norman Brassler Collection of New Jersey Postal History," January 27, 1996; Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc., Sale No. 825, "The Brad Arch Stamps Collection of New Jersey Postal History," June 27-29, 2000; Matthew Bennett International, Sale No. 290, "The Ed and Jean Siskin Collection American Colonial and Early United States Mails 1662-1799," October 7, 2005.

² None of the earlier "name" auctions includes an example of this handstamp despite extensive offerings of early stampless mail. Park-Bernet Galleries, Inc., "The Edward S. Knapp Collection," October 5-10, 1941; Samuel C. Page, "The Robert F. Chambers Collection," December 1-2, 1950; H. R. Harmer, "The Edwin Mayer Collection of Pre-Stamp and Stampless Covers," February 17, 1967; Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc, Sale No. 440, "The Edith M. Faulstich Collection," November 19-21, 1973; Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc., "The Stephen G. Rich Collection of North Jersey Postal History," Sale No. 546, May 17, 1979.

In addition, Richard Frajola's website, www.rfrajola.com/exhibits.htm, includes pdf images of the extensive Colonial postal history collections of Joseph Carson, but does not include a cover with the Woodbridge straight line. Carson exhibited Colonial stampless mail at the Centennial Exhibition in 1947. His wife, Marion, exhibited Colonial stampless mail to and from Philadelphia at the FIPEX Show in 1956. Neither exhibit included the Woodbridge straight line, nor is there a reference to this marking in any of the stampless mail exhibits described in the catalogs for the international shows held in the United States on a ten year interval from 1936 through 2016.

- ³ Harry M. Konwiser, *Colonial and Revolutionary Posts* (The Dietz Printing Co., Richmond, Va. 1931). In addition, Konwiser and Stephen Rich both edited and contributed to the pioneer periodical on stampless mail markings, *Postal Markings*. A review of this publication from its inaugural issue in October 1930 through July 1944 makes no reference to the Woodbridge handstamp. Nor is there a reference in the compilation of Konwiser's articles reprinted in *Postal Markings* (Quarterman Publications, Lawrence, Massachusetts 1980). Alex L. ter Braake, coordinator, *The Posted Letter in Colonial Revolutionary America 1628-1790* (American Philatelic Research Library, State College, Pennsylvania 1975), does not include a reference to the Woodbridge handstamp. The five-part series of articles by Ed & Jean Siskin appearing in this Society's journal, "Census of Early New Jersey Covers," makes no reference to the Woodbridge Colonial handstamp. *NJPH*, Vol. 39, May & August, 2011 and Vol. 40, February & August 2012, and February 2017, Vol. 45.
- ⁴ David G. Phillips, ed., *American Stampless Cover Catalog*, Fifth ed., Vol. I (David G. Phillips Publishing Co., Inc., North Miami Beach 1997) p.223. An updated revision of that catalog is currently in preparation under the auspices of the United States Philatelic Classics Society to which the author is a contributor for the New Jersey listings.
- ⁵ Robert G. Rose, "The American Colonial Postal System's Year of Transition, 1775," *The Collectors Club Philatelist*, Vol. 85, November-December, 2006, p.355.
- ⁶ William C. Coles, Jr., *The Postal Markings of New Jersey Stampless Covers* (Collectors Club of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois 1983) p.281.
- ⁷ E. N. Sampson, ed. *emeritus*, *American Stampless Cover Catalog*, 3rd edition (David G. Phillips Publishing Co., Inc., North Miami, Florida, 1978) p.122. William C. Coles, Jr. and Stanley E. Griffith are credited as the editors of the New Jersey listings on behalf of the New Jersey Postal History Society.
- ⁸ Harry M. Konwiser, ed., *United States Cover Catalog* (Van Dahl Publications, Inc., Albany, Oregon 1952) p.77. None of the earlier editions of the catalog list this handstamp. Harry M. Konwiser, ed., *United States Stampless Cover Catalog, 1938 Edition* (Steven G. Rich, Publisher, Verona, New Jersey 1937); Harry M. Konwiser, ed., *United States Stampless Cover Catalog, 4th edition* (Severn-Wylie-Jewett Company, Portland, Maine 1947).
- ⁹ E.N. Sampson, ed., *American Stampless Cover Catalog* (Van Dahl Publications, Inc., Albany, Oregon 1965) p. 76.
- ¹⁰ Kay Horowicz & Robson Lowe, *The Colonial Posts in the United States 1606-1783* (Robson Lowe Ltd., London 1967) p.26.
- ¹¹ Frank Engel, "Straight Line Handstamps of New Jersey," Vol. 19, May, 1976, as reprinted in E. E. Fricks, ed., *New Jersey Postal History Vols. 1-5* (New Jersey Postal History Society, Basking Ridge, New Jersey 1983) p. 62.
- ¹² E. N. Sampson, ed., *American Stampless Cover Catalog* (Van Dahl Publications, Inc., Albany, Oregon 1971) p.94. Engle amassed a significant collection of New Jersey stampless covers which were offered for sale by Richard Michelli during the late 1970's.
- ¹³ Engle, *op. cit.* p.62.

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