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Postmarks of Historic Significance Found in the Huntsville Public Library, January, 1976

E. Edward Starnes Jr.

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POSTMARKS OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE FOUND IN
THE HUNTSVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY
HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA
JANUARY, 1976

E. Edward Starnes, Jr.

THE JOHN WILLIAM WALKER LETTERS

The Huntsville Public Library has a folio of 32 original letters written by John William Walker in the years 1805 to 1809. All are addressed to his brother, James S. Walker, at Augusta, Georgia and, with the exception of the first letter, they bear postmarks of the towns in which they were posted.

During the period covered by these letters John W. Walker was a student at Princeton University and then a young man starting his career. Ten years after these letters were written he convened the Constitutional Convention at Huntsville, temporary Capitol of Alabama Territory, and was elected this State's first U. S. Senator in 1819.

Of greatest importance to the postal historian is the group of five letters with manuscript postmarks of "Washington, M. T." (for Mississippi Territory) mailed between August 19, 1808, and March 5, 1809. This is the largest group of Washington territorial markings ever found and the letter dated August 19 was postmarked more than two months before the previously recorded "earliest date".¹ The importance of the letters is enhanced by the fact that Washington had been made Capitol of the Territory in 1802 and continued to be the seat of Mississippi government for 20 years.

Next in order of value to postal history would be the letter mailed July 5, 1809. It has a manuscript "Belize, July 6" postmark and also a handstamp postmark of "NEW ORLEANS JUL 10." This falls in the period with New Orleans was part of "Orleans Territory," before the formation of the State of Louisiana, and the combination

of postmarks is very scarce if not unique. There are three other letters bearing the "NEW ORLEANS" hand-stamped postmark during the territorial period and all are scarce.

The other letters were postmarked by circular hand-stamp of Fredricksburg, Va., Princeton and Trenton, N. J., Philadelphia, Pa., Washington, D. C., Baltimore, Md., and Charleston, S. C. These towns had long been established and none of the postmarks are considered scarce.

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The first three letters mailed from Washington, M. T. were docketted by James Walker on the date he received them and from these dates we can get a very clear picture of the problems encountered by the federal government in trying to establish a postal system in the wilderness.

These letters were dispatched over the recently established Federal Post Road which ran almost due east from Natchez to Fort St. Stephens and Fort Stoddert on the Tombigbee River (in present day Alabama) and from the river crossing in a northwesterly direction through Tuckabatchy, the Upper Creek Indian Agency town on the Tallapoosa River (in present day Alabama), to Coweta, the Lower Creek Agency on the Georgia frontier (in present day Alabama, near Columbus, Ga.). At Coweta a connection was made with a road across Georgia to the east coast cities.

At this time the Federal Post Road was little more than a wide trail through the rough, heavily timbered country. In April, 1806, Gideon Granger, Postmaster General of the United States, wrote to Benjamin Hawkins, Indian Agent at Tuckabatchy, that Congress had authorized money for "laying out, making and improving the post road between the frontiers of Georgia and the . . . 31 degree of north latitude near Fort Stoddert."²

On July 10, 1806, Granger sent Hawkins a postal

schedule that allowed three days from Coweta to Fort Stoddert and one week from there to New Orleans and return.³ On the 13th of the month he wrote to Blaize Cenas, postmaster at New Orleans, that the schedule was from "New Orleans to Washington...thirteen days, seven hours."⁴ From these schedules it can be seen that the mails should have taken one week to cross the entire Mississippi Territory to Georgia and another week to Washington City.

These schedules proved to be more ambitious than realistic. In mid 1807 Granger was urging the Governor of Georgia to complete the Federal Post Road and as late as 1814 the mail schedule allowed one full week to cross Mississippi and another week to cross Alabama.

In what must have been complete frustration Granger, on March 11, 1808, authorized the postmaster at Fort St. Stephens to carry "the mail from Fort Stoddert by St. Stephens and the Choctaw Agency House to McIntoshville until a more practicable road is made between Fort Stoddert and Natchez."⁵ The town of McIntoshville was in Mississippi on the Natchez Trace almost 250 miles north of Washington and Natchez. It was a similar distance from Fort Stoddert so the mail had to travel what amounted to the two long sides of a triangle instead of the direct third side.

This was the route the Walker letters traveled and the dates on the letters give a vivid example of the government's difficulties. The first letter was mailed August 19, and was delivered in Augusta on October 5, for a 48-day delivery period. The next two letters were sent on November 4 and 18 respectively and both were received on December 28 which shows a 54 and 40 day transit. A mail trip the government said should take less than two weeks was in fact requiring six to eight weeks.

THE JOHN WILLIAM WALKER LETTERS IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

The postmarks are of two types: manuscript, or hand-written; and handstamped, or struck with the circular die common to that period. For all postmarks the date is the actual date the letter was posted and not the date of the letter. The spelling of the postmark is exactly as it appears in the circular die, and the size is the measurement of the diameter of the circle in millimeters. The color given is the color of ink used for the postmark strike.

No.	Town	Postmark	Date	Size	Color
				mm	Ink
Mailed in 1805					
1	Petersburg, Va.	None ¹			
2	Fredricksburg, Va.	FREDG. VA.	APR 17	26	Black
3	Princeton, N.J.	PRINCETON N.J.	APR 30	28	Black
4	Princeton, N.J.	PRINCETON N.J.	MAY 21	28	Black
5	Princeton, N.J.	PRINCETON N.J.	AUG 19	28	Black
6	Princeton, N.J.	PRINCETON N.J.	OCT 7	28	Black
7	Princeton, N.J.	PRINCETON N.J.	NOV 25	28	Black
8	Princeton, N.J.	PRINCETON N.J.	DEC 23	28	Black

Mailed in 1806

9	Princeton, N.J.	PRINCETON, N.J.	JAN 27	28	Black
10	Princeton, N.J.	PRINCETON, N.J.	APR 14	28	Black
11	Princeton, N.J.	PRINCETON, N.J.	JUL 16	28	Black
12	Princeton, N.J.	PRINCETON, N.J.	AUG 20	28	Black
13	Philadelphia, Pa.	PHI	OCT 16	25	Rd/Bn
14	Washington, D.C.	WASHINGTON CITY	DEC 31	26½	Rd/Bn

Mailed in 1807

15	Washington, D.C.	WASHINGTON CITY	FEB 9	26½	Rd/Bn
16	Washington, D.C.	WASHINGTON CITY	FEB 25	26½	Rd/Bn
17	Baltimore, Md.	BALTR. MD.	MAR 12	28	Red
18	Baltimore, Md.	BALTR. MD.	MAR 25	28	Red

(1) This letter was carried "outside the mails" by a friend and has no postal markings.

Starnes: Postmarks of Historic Significance Found in the Huntsville Public

No.	Town	Postmark	Date	Size	Color
				mm	Ink
19	Philadelphia, Pa.	PHI	MAY 21	25	Rd/Bn
Mailed in 1808					
20	Charleston, S.C.	CHARLN. S. CA.	MAR 3	27	Black
21	Charleston, S.C.	CHARLN. S. CA.	MAR 15	27	Black
22	Charleston, S.C.	CHARLN. S. CA.	MAR 25	27	Black
23	New Orleans, O.T. ²	NEW ORLEANS	MAY 7	28	Red
24	Washington, M.T. ³	WASHINGTON M.T.	AUG 19 ⁴		Manuscript
25	Washington, M.T.	WASHINGTON M.T.	NOV 4		Manuscript
26	Washington, M.T.	WASHINGTON M.T.	NOV 18		Manuscript

Mailed in 1809

27	Washington, M.T.	WASHINGTON M.T.	JAN 30		Manuscript
28	Washington, M.T.	WASHINGTON M.T.	MAR 5		Manuscript
29	New Orleans, O.T.	NEW ORLEANS	APR 29	28	Black
30	New Orleans, O.T.	NEW ORLEANS	JUN 26	28	Black
31	Belize, La. (and)	BELIZE	JUL 6 ⁵		Manuscript
	New Orleans, O.T.	NEW ORLEANS	JUL 10	28	Black
32	Trenton, N.J.	TREN. N.J.	JUL 24	25	Black

- (2) The New Orleans postmarks fall within the period of "Orleans Territory" prior to the formation of the State of Louisiana.
- (3) The Washington, M.T. postmarks fall within the period of "Mississippi Territory" prior to the formation of the State of Mississippi.
- (4) The August 19, 1908 date is more than two months earlier than the previously recorded earliest date for this post office.
- (5) The postmaster at Belize had a straight-line hand-stamp postmark die available for letters during this period.

THE GENERAL JOHN COFFEE LETTERS

The Huntsville Public Library has a collection of papers relating to General John Coffee which contains five original letters to him. Each letter has postal markings of historical significance.

The most important letter of the series, and the single most important letter in the Library, is one with a manuscript "Washington M. T. / 24 December" (1803) postmark. This is the earliest postmark ever recorded from this town which had been made the Territorial Capitol on February 1, 1802. In his book on Mississippi Postal History, Bruce C. Oakley, Jr. states that this Post Office was established on "January 1, 1804, or slightly before." Consequently this Coffee letter is as early as might exist, and is also one of the half-dozen earliest letters known from any town in what is now Mississippi. The author of the letter, Mr. Robert Williams, was appointed Territorial Governor in January, 1805.

An 1816 letter to Coffee at Huntsville, Mississippi Territory, bears the manuscript postmark "Chickasaw Agency / 30th Decr" (1916). This letter was mailed at the Agency House at McIntoshville and is the only recorded use of that particular name although much earlier letters are known from this Post Office with "Chickasaw Nation" as the postmark.

There are two letters from Tennessee towns. One has a manuscript postmark of "Jonesborough / Septr 8 1804" and the other bears no postmark but has an inside address of Carthage, June 10th, 1810.

The last letter was posted in 1823 and bears a "KNOXVILLE T." handstamped postmark in an arc, 34X5 millimeters, in black ink. This is the earliest known use of this particular postmark die.

THE STAMPLESS PERIOD OF MISSISSIPPI TERRITORY: POSTMARKS OF HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE FOUND IN THE HUNTSVILLE PUBLIC

No.	Town	Postmark	Date	Size	Color
				mm	Ink
1	Washington, M.T. ¹	WASHINGTON, MT	DEC 24 1803 ²	Manuscript	
2	Jonesboro, Tenn.	JONESBOROUGH	SEPT 8 1804	Manuscript	
3	Carthage, Tenn.	NONE	JUNE 10 1810	Manuscript	
4	Chickasaw, M.T. ³	Chickasaw Agency	DEC 30 1816	Manuscript	
5	Knoxville, Tenn.	KNOXVILLE. T.	DEC 14 1823 ⁴	34/5	Black

- (1) The Washington, M.T. postmark falls within the period of "Mississippi Territory" prior to the formation of the State of Mississippi.
- (2) The December 24, 1803 date is the earliest listed and known postmark from this town.
- (3) The Chickasaw, M.T. postmark falls within the period of "Mississippi Territory" prior to the formation of the State of Mississippi.
- (4) The December 14, 1823 date is the earliest known for this particular postmark die which is an "arc."

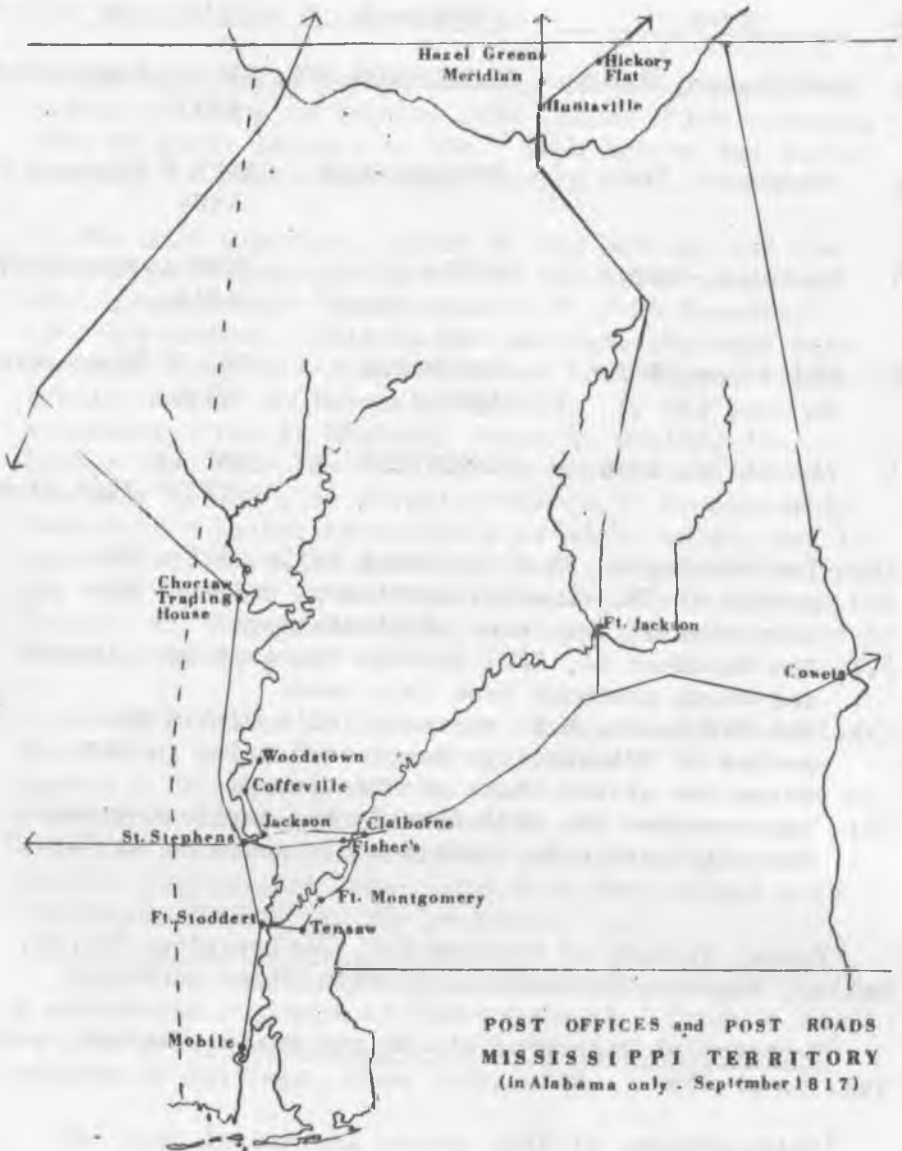
¹Postal History of Mississippi, The Stampless Period, Oakley, Magnolia Publishers, Baldwin, Miss., 1969.

²Territorial Papers of the United States, Carter, Vol. V, p. 459.

³Ibid., Vol. V, p. 471.

⁴Ibid., Vol. V, p. 471.

⁵Ibid., Vol. V., p. 619.





POSTMARKS OF NORTH ALABAMA



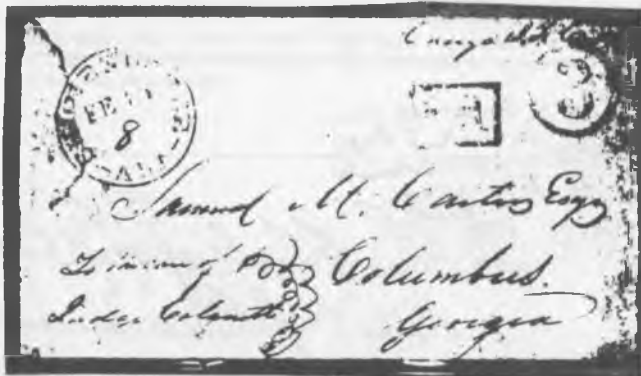
MONTEZUMA Ala. APR 12 (1847) - 31mm circle Type 1 in red. Only example noted.



MOULTON, Ala. MAR. 15. (1833) - Type 1. Black. Interesting set for date logo and State abbreviation.



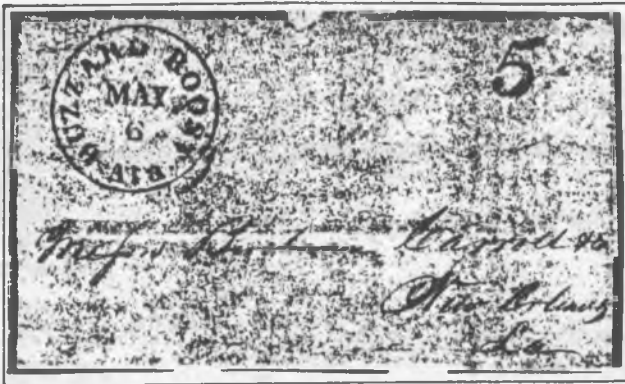
CAMBRIDGE ALA. AUG 17 (1852);C 30mm; 5(C), 18mm; all in black ink.



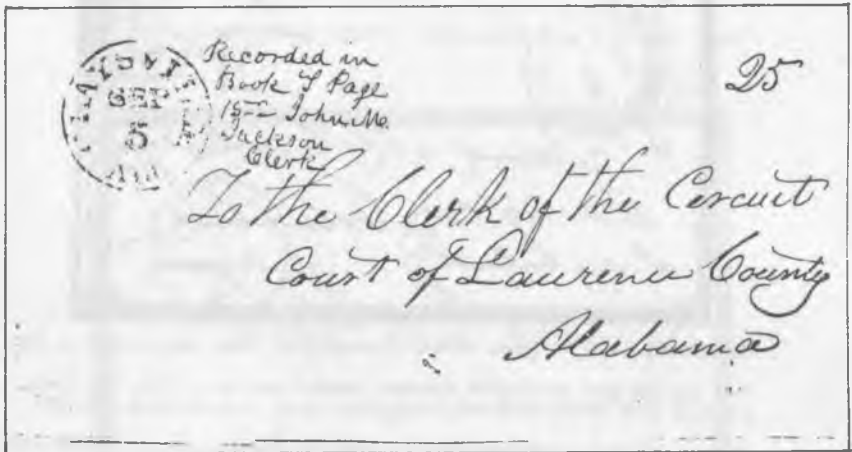
CHUNENUGGEE -ALA- C 29mm; Pd(Box) 18x13mm; 3(C) 18mm; all strikes in red.

It's a shame that continuous xeroxing reduces quality as this is a clean, slightly torn in the left end, cover with clear, full markings. A GEM!

This is the Type 1 postmark from the town and possibly the only known cover with the additional markings. There is another postmark as Type 2.



BUZZARD ROOST Ala. MAY 6 (1856) - Type 1 postmark, with the large 5 rate handstamp. Both markings in black.



CLAYSVILLE Ala. SEP 5 (1838) - New Type 1 postmark. Brown ink. Discovery copy. Clinton McGee collection.



BELLEFONTE ALA. OCT 3 (1854) - new Type 2 postmark. "5" in 12mm Circle rate handstamp. All markings in black ink. Ed Starnes collection.



BENTON Ala. APR 28 (1848) - known Type 1 postmark but previously unrecorded "V" handstamped rate. All in black ink. Ed Starnes collection.

Florence - Clinton McGee first identified the four different types of oval postmarks from this town.

Type 1 FLORENCE, A.

Ov-28x23-red

Early - Aug 4, 1824



Type 2 FLORENCE A

Ov-28x22-red

Early - Feb 7, 1825



Type 3 FLORENCE

Ov-29 1/2 x 22 1/2 -black

Early - Aug 12, 1825



Type 4 FLORENCE A.

Irregular Ov-30x?-black

Early - Feb 17, 1826

Late - Aug 17, 1827



There were four examples of Type 4 seen and the horizontal line and date were different in each one. The illustration is of an August 16, 1827 use seen in the Tennessee Archives.



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POSTMARKS DURING PERIOD OF MISSISSIPPI TERRITORY
(Towns in State of Alabama only)

HUNTSVILLE

HUNTSVILLE M.T.

SL - 1071 - Black

SL - 1072 - Black

*Huntsville M.T.
March 13th*

*Huntsville M.T.
July 14-1816*

Manuscript - 1111

Manuscript

*Huntsville M.T.
July 26th 1816*

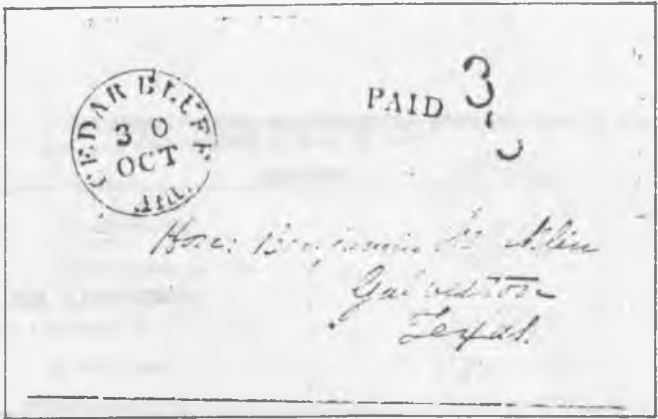
12 1/2



Manuscript

25-11-Black - 1111





CEDAR BLUFF Ala. 30 OCT (1851) - Type 1 postmark with PAID and homemade "3" rate handstamp. All markings in blue. Ed Starnes collection.

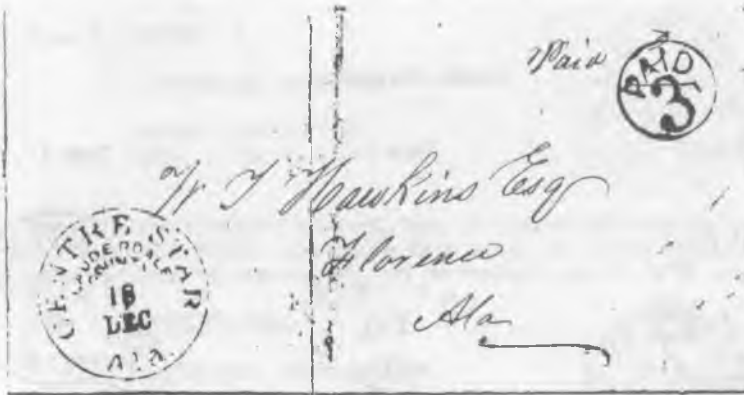


CENTREVILLE Ala. NOV 10 (1841) - Type 1 postmark with FREE and signature of the postmaster. Markings in black.



BAILEY'S SPRINGS, Lauderdale County

CENTRE STAR, Ala.





LEIGHTON ALA. APR 15 (1852) - New as stampless, Type 1 postmark, 33mm circle. A "5" in 14mm circle rate.

Linden Postmarks

Type 1

Type 2

Type 3



LINDEN AL. - 1833
29mm - red



LINDEN Ala. - 1839
30mm - red, black



LINDEN Ala. - 1854
30mm - red

(Some of the lines have been pen reinforced)

Starnes: Postmarks of Historic Significance Found in the Huntsville Public

Abbreviated Town Circle Postmarks

Courtland - Only 2 copies in private hands were recorded.

Type 1 COURTLD. A.

C-31-black

Early - May 26, 1820

Late - Dec 15, 1837



Florence - Of the 26 copies recorded only 7 were in private hands.

Type 7 FLOR. A.

C-32-red, black, blue

Early - Jan 22, 1829

Late - Sep 9, 1837



Supplemental
Markings
Seen

FREE 26x4 FREE PAID 24x5 PAID

Red ink used to Feb 8, 1831, black until Jun 4, 1833, and blue after. The only exception was a Jan 11, 1830 use in black ink.

Huntsville - Of the 22 copies of Type 7, 8 are privately owned and of the 6 copies of Type 8, 3 are privately owned.

Type 7 HUNTSE. A.

C-30-black, red, blue

Early - Dec 7, 1820

Late - Nov 9, 1829



Black is the dominant color of ink. A single red copy was seen dated May 9, 1822. Three blue copies were seen; one dated Mar 12, 1826, one which can not be year-dated, and an unusual Jan 13, 1835 usage!

Type 8 HUNTSE. ALA.

C-30-black, blue, red

Early - Oct 21, 1830

Late - Nov 29, 1836



Black is used thru 1833 with blue thereafter. A single red copy was reported on the Nov 29, 1836 use.

Mooresville - Only 2 copies in private hands were reported.

Type 1 MOORE. A.

G-31-black

Early - Aug 26, 1828

Late - Jan 19, 1834



Tuscumbia - There have been 4 examples of this postmark reported.

Type 1 TUSCUMBIA / AL.

S/L-29x3-black

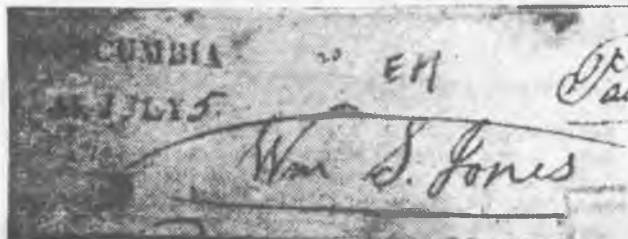
Early - Mar 16, 1825

Late - Dec 11, 1826

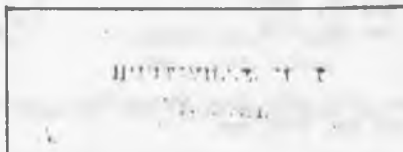
TUSCUMBIA

AL. AUG. 9/

There are two variations in the setting of the state abbreviation with both "AL." and Al." seen.



TUSCUMBIA / AL. JULY 5 (1826) - black



"HUNTSVILLE , M.T. / MAY 22th"
1814

Starnes: Postmarks of Historic Significance Found in the Huntsville Public

Dotted Circle Postmarks

Huntsville - A single example, privately owned, has been reported.

Type 8a HUNTSVE. ALA.

Dotted C-30-black

Early - Jul 20, 1837



This is the Type 8 abbreviated town circle postmark in which the outer rim of the die has been cut into small segments.

Tuscumbia - There were 7 copies of the first type and a single copy of the latter type reported.

Type 2 TUSCUMBIA. ALA.

Dotted 6-31 $\frac{1}{2}$ -black

Early - Mar 9, 1827

Late - Nov 26, 1830



Type 3 TUSCUMBIA. ALA.

Dotted C-31 $\frac{1}{2}$ -black

Early - Mar 4, 1831



This is a distinct type with the state abbreviation moved to the bottom of the die and all letters are more widely spaced.





HUNTSVILLE AL. AUG 24 (1845) - Type 8 postmark with extremely large (17x19mm) "5" rate. All markings in blue.

