

APRIL 1994

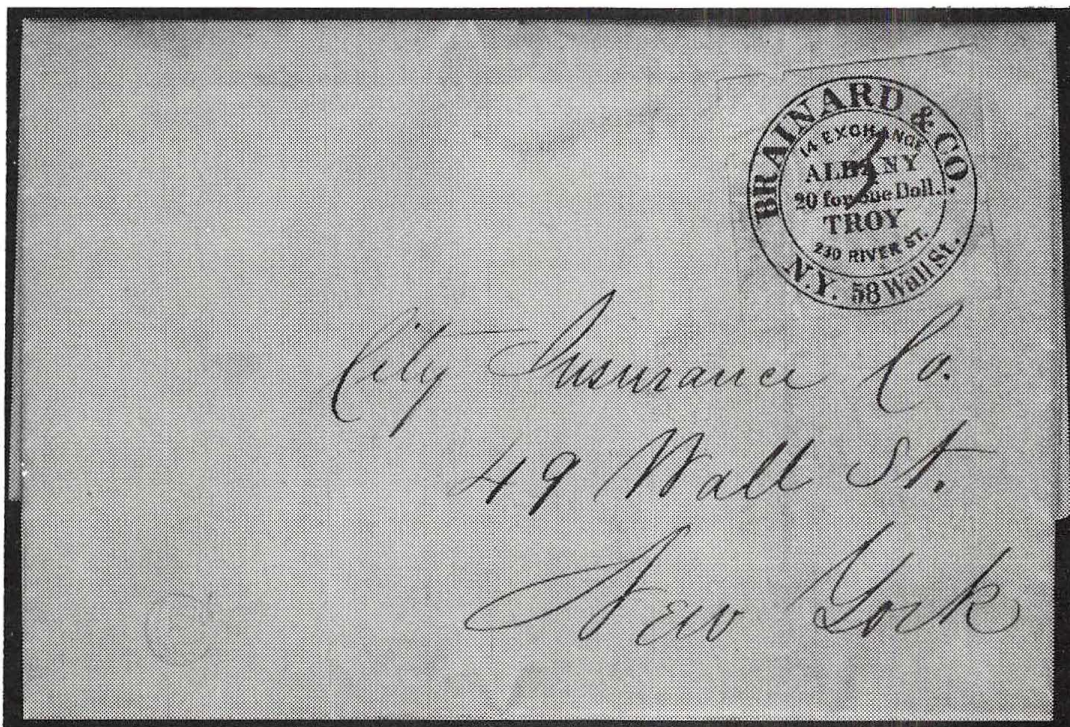
Vol. 4 No. 2

# THE PENNY POST

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Official Journal Of The Carriers And Locals Society

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Genuine blue Brainard stamp, Feb. 8, 1845, Albany-NYC cover, ex Chapman.

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A PHILADELPHIA EVENING

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# THE CONCORD BICYCLE STAMP

By Gordon Stimmell

**M**any collectors are familiar with the famous diamond-shaped 1894 California Bicycle Mail Route stamp, listed for decades in the Locals section of the Scott Specialized Catalogue. Fewer are aware that another Bicycle Post stamp was issued and used locally during the Gay Nineties — in Concord, New Hampshire.

While many differences can be drawn between these two unofficial postal operations, intriguing parallels exist between the two stamps.

First, I'd like to very briefly touch on the California bicycle post.

## BICYCLE MAIL ROUTE

**T**his post has been extensively documented, most notably in Lowell B. Cooper's *The Fresno and San Francisco Bicycle Mail of 1894*, the basic Bible of Scott 12L1. Lowell Cooper, who is 90 and still going strong, does a magnificent job detailing the post's history in his 1982 book.

Other writers have deepened knowledge, including Bert Schapelhouman, past President of the Bicycle Stamps Club and a member of our Society. His articles on the Fresno post and a pioneering piece on the Concord, NH Bicycle Post have appeared in *Bicycle Stamps*, their official publication.

Basically, the California post was created by Arthur C. Banta, the Manager of Victor Cyclery in Fresno, as a means of moving mail and merchant's goods by bicycle during the American Railway Union strike. The post operated from July 7 to July 18, 1894

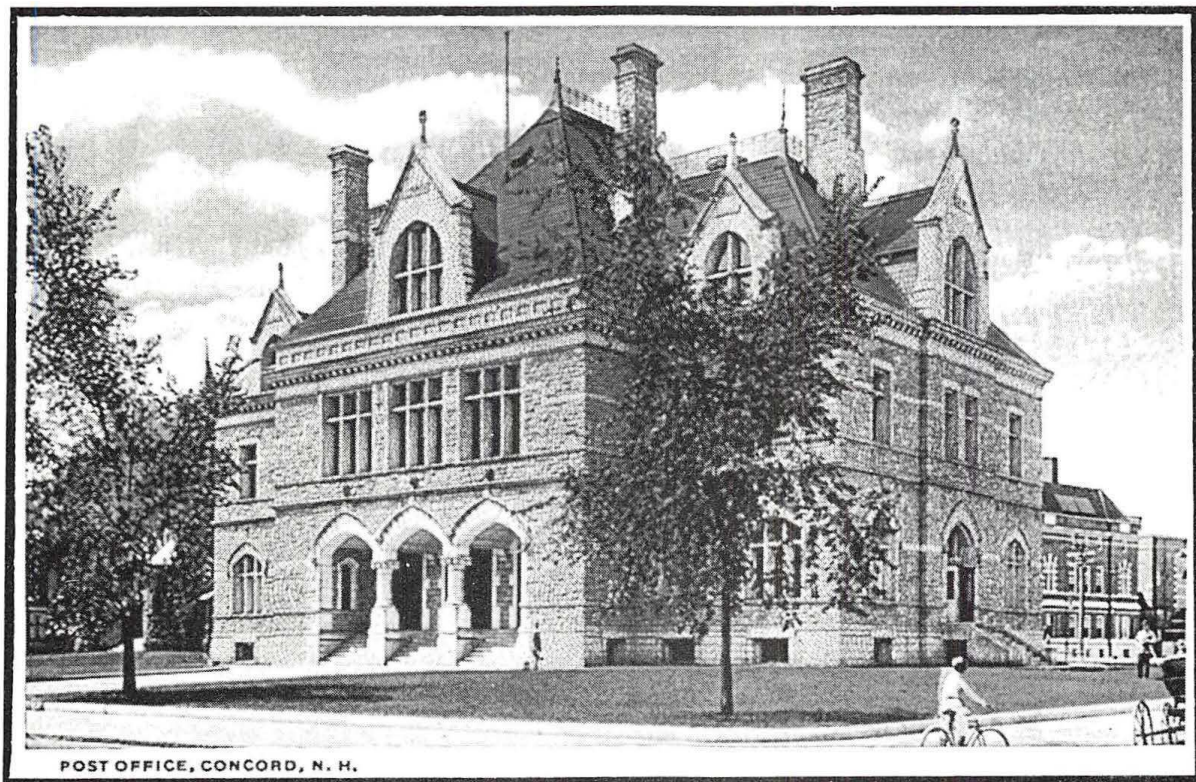
between Fresno and San Francisco, using relays of riders taking 18 hours each way over 210 miles of rugged dirt roads. The going rate was 25 cents.

The Fresno stamp was the world's first to be issued as a result of a strike, says Schapelhouman, and America's second emergency mail stamp after the Blizzard Mail stamp of March 12-16, 1888 (Scott 163L1). The adhesive could be categorized, loosely, as a very late inter-city mail stamp.

## THE CONCORD STAMP

**M**y first close encounter with the Concord Bicycle Company Public Messenger Service stamp came while examining the George B. Sloane locals reference archive, now in the possession of Richard Frajola. What especially excited me was that Concord, NH is only 30 miles from my ancestral home and current cottage in Northwood, NH and yet, I'd never heard of such a stamp. Neither had my late grandfather, George Gordon Jr., who operated between New Hampshire and New York City for 50 years as a stamp dealer, and who had examined hundreds of collections in New England.

One summer day three years ago I drove to Concord and did a bit of research into the Concord Directories at the New Hampshire Historical Society and in the New Hampshire State Library, where I perused 15 years of the *Concord Evening Monitor* newspaper on microfiche.



Concord P.O. at turn of century was a short hop from Crapo's Bicycle Livery.

What emerged is proof that the stamp was legitimate, that F.H. Crapo whose printed signature appears on the design, was the manager of the Concord Bicycle Company and that, as Bert Schapelhouman noted in his brief article, "it is probably the earliest Bicycle Local Mail stamp of America."

## DIRECTORIES AND ADS

**E**arliest mention of the family name Crapo was not F.H., but E.B. Crapo, a clothing merchant who sold "laces, corsets, hosiery and ribbons" out of his store at 70 North Main St. in Concord. His ads run from Feb. 11, 1885 through the mid-1890s.

Frank H. Crapo first crops up in the 1889-90 Concord Directory as "clerk." In the 1891-92 Directory he is listed as "Crapo, Frank H., clerk, 103 No. Main, and Bicycle repairer, r. 70 do., bds. 55 South."

The 1892-93 Directory gives three listings:

"Crapo, Frank H., clerk, 103 No. Main St. and bicycles rear 70 do., boards 55 South.

"Concord Bicycle Co. (F.H. Crapo, prop.) r. 70 North Main.

"Concord Bicycle Co's Rapid Messenger Service, F.H. Crapo prop., rear 70 No. Main."

What relation E.B. Crapo and F.H. Crapo had is not certain, but operating out of the front and the back of the same building one can safely presume they belonged to the same family. Probably E.B. was the father, but he could also have been an uncle, or even an older brother. The 1890 Concord Census, which I have not accessed, may provide the link.

What is clear is that Frank H. Crapo began his bicycle repair and Public Messenger Service out of the back of the store, likely delivering notes and goods to customers of the elder E.B. Crapo.

In the Concord Directory for 1895 (Littlefield Publishing Co.) Frank has moved out of the family store, being listed solely as:



**Bicycles at Cut Prices.**

1894 New Model sells everywhere for \$115. Call on us only, to \$100. This is one of the hand-  
somest and best wheels on the American market.  
We have a \$100 machine, the price of which  
is out to \$64.50. It has a diamond frame, tangent spokes, Morgan & Wright tires, drop  
forging. Call and see them. Supply limited.

**Bicycle Livery.**  
New wheels to let by the hour, day, or month. Reduced rates.

**Easy Payments.**

**Concord Bicycle Co.,**  
3 Depot St. F. H. CRAPO, Manager.

May 1894: F.H. Crapo's ad used same bicycle cut as Banta's Fresno handstamp.

"Concord Bicycle Co. F.H. Crapo, prop.,  
3 Depot."

The 1897 Concord Directory No. 16 (W.A. Greenough & Co.) shows the last year for "Concord Bicycle Co. F.H. Crappo, prop. 5 Depot." In the 1898-99 Directory the Concord Bicycle Co. is no more, and Frank H. is listed only as "clerk at 103 No. Main H. 55 South."

The imaginative ads run in the *Monitor* newspaper by Frank Crapo show the changing nature of his business. His first ad ran on Oct. 7, 1893 and these early ads feature mainly bicycles in fanciful illustrations. No ad specifically mentions the Rapid Messenger Service. Remarkably, one of the ads (three are shown here) showed the same model bicycle illustration used several months later on the West Coast by the Fresno Victor Cyclery in its large handstamps on mail during the railway strike. It is likely both were sourced from the same national bicycle catalogue illustration, as both Banta and Crapo were managers for bicycle sales outfits.

In Nov. 1894, the Concord Bicycle Company expanded and became agents for Densmore Typewriters. By December 1894, the inventory had grown to include skates, sleds, sweaters and sporting goods. In 1895-96 mocassins and snowshoes were added. By May, 1896, Crapo's name vanished from the ads, which suddenly boasted a full range of fishing tackle.

It must be emphasized that the only Directory listing for the "Rapid Messenger Service" is 1892-93. I could locate no surviving Directory for the year 1894 to officially confirm its continued existence. However, the Sloane copy is back-dated "Feb. 10, 1895". It should be noted that the stamp reads "Public" Messenger Service, not "Rapid" Messenger Service. Rarity of the stamp indicates a very brief window of usage, but so far not enough data has emerged to assign an exact date of emission. If the large watermark on the stamp can be re-assembled from known copies perhaps the printer can be determined and a search for his records begun.

**RIDING TIME.**



You make no mistake when you buy  
**THE CALIGRAPH**  
**Writing Machine.**

It will do better work and more of it than any other typewriter.


**CONCORD BICYCLE COMPANY.**

F. H. CRAPO, Manager      3 Depot St.  
 CONCORD, N. H.

At this time of the year—when the air is fresh, the roads good, and all nature beautiful—is all the time. If you have no wheel you are lacking one of the greatest pleasures of life. Come in and see the 'Victor wheel' and let us show you how easy it is to own one.

Oct. 3, 1894: Crapo's bicycle business was transitioning into typewriters.

**THE IDEAL WHEEL**



For family use is much simpler than the above. In fact in its simplicity lies its great advantage. An examination of the

**Victor, Lovell Diamond, New Mail, Waverly, Monarch, and Templar Bicycles will show their superiority in all respects.**

We shall be pleased to put in any office or trial, the celebrated

**CALIGRAPH WRITING MACHINE.**

Come in and let us show you how easy it is to own a wheel or a typewriter.

**Concord Bicycle Company.**

3 Depot St.      F. H. CRAPO, Manager.

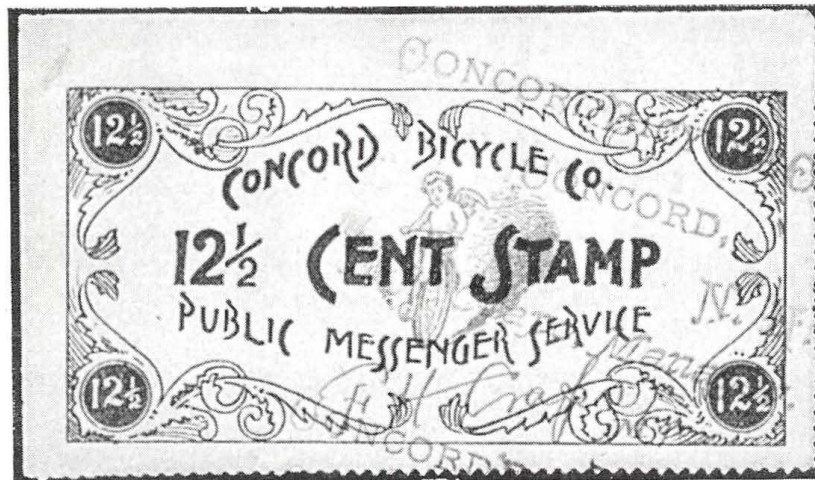
June 11, 1894: Fanciful ad is reminiscent of cupid on Crapo's bicycle stamp.

An earlier note from a librarian at the Concord Library, and quoted by Schapelhouman in his brief 1990 article, extends our knowledge a bit more: "Mr. F.H. Crapo was still in business in 1895-96 as owner of the Concord Bicycle Company with three drop stations for the Messenger Service. Around 1900 he became a travelling salesman and around 1906 moved to New York City. He died towards the end of the First World War, but this has not been confirmed."

Schapelhouman also added a personal touch in his article: "I have seen a photocopy of a used one ... pasted onto a

page of an old album and, on the reverse of the page, the following inscription was penned: 'I knew Frank Crapo well and can vouch for its genuineness. The Highwheel was used. Rare item.' The inscription was signed W.W. Rich."

A diligent search by members of our Society of philatelic publications in New England in the 1890's may yield further clues of a contemporary nature. A check of the William C. Stone Index, the Kimbel Index and Rickett's U.S. Index revealed no early articles on this stamp.



Concord Bicycle Co. stamp with purple handstamp.

## THE ADHESIVE

**T**he stamp is very large, 1 9/16" X 3 1/8 + " and printed in two colors. An ornate scroll frame design surrounds an inscription reading: "CONCORD BICYCLE Co. PUBLIC MESSENGER SERVICE, 12 1/2 CENT STAMP". Four numeral "12 1/2"s in circles occupy the corners. This preceding part of the design is orange red. The central design of a cupid on a High-wheeler and the printed signature inscription, "F H Crapo Mgr" are in grey blue as well as foreshadowing and backshadowing lines near the unicycle. Like many bi-color stamps, the grey blue part of the design shows horizontal and vertical shifts in relation to the

overall orange red on surviving copies which could give us a clue as to how many sheets were printed.

The stamp is printed on porous white wove paper, perforated 11 1/4 by 11 1/4 but all copies known have a straight edge on the left. The stamp has a watermark of double-lined letters running vertically so that if the stamp is held with its left edge down, the watermark lettering reads left to right. Size of the full pane remains unknown but I would speculate it was no larger than 10 or 12 stamps, probably 2 X 5 or 2 X 6.

The cupid riding a large wheel with no pedals (he has wings, who needs pedals?) reminded me of a Valentine's



The only known cover: Date too late, wrong city, forged Nashua handstamp.

motif so I checked bracketed Valentines dates for any ads relating to the post in the *Concord Monitor*, but found no such classified or display advertisements for any February in the span of the post. The high 12 ½ cent fee and the “dated” Sloane copy might also signify Valentine’s use, but the stamp no doubt saw service on parcels as well as mail, which could account for the rate. One copy exists with a company handstamp, in purple, reading in four lines: “CONCORD BICYCLE CO/ CONCORD,/ N.H./ F.H. Crapo, Manager.” The last line is set in italic type. Most copies known still have original gum, indicating potential sale of remainders.

### RECORDED COPIES

**A**t least 8 copies exist. Three are owned by Lowell B. Cooper, author of the Fresno book. One copy is in Frajola’s Sloane archives. Bert Schapelhouman owns one. Norman Batho, Honorary Secretary of the Bicycle Stamps Club, purchased his copy from stamp dealer Richard Champagne, who obtained it from relatives of a deceased stamp dealer who in turn had found it on a basement floor when

they were sorting out the estate. My corner copy, shown here, has the handstamp, and was bought at Lowell S. Newman auctions. One copy is known on cover, last reported in the collection of Jean-Pierre Mangin of Barle-Duc, France.

This sole cover, illustrated here, is not, to my eyes, very convincing. It’s posted from the wrong city, Nashua, NH, with which Crapo had no known connection. The date of usage, March 21, 1904, is nearly 10 years too late for the documented span of the post and the 3 cent Washington stamp is obsolete by two decades. Capping it all, the Nashua handstamp is faked, says noted NH postal historian Bob Stanger.

Was the Concord Bicycle Post stamp a true local, or should it be classified as a delivery stamp? Lacking any decisive evidence pointing to either camp, its status must remain a moot matter.

One thing is certain. The bicycle company, its owner and his post existed, and the stamp remains one of the great and eagerly sought after rarities in the topical field.

Anyone with additional knowledge of surviving stamps or usages is kindly urged to contact the author.