The Cleveland Circuit R.P.O., 1908-1919

This exhibit focuses on the postal markings of the Cleveland Circuit R.P.O., Cleveland’s only streetcar postal route. The Cleveland Circuit concurrently utilized both handstamp and machine markings.

The Cleveland Circuit R.P.O.—postal route #3351005—operated from April 3, 1908 through August 4, 1919 on the streetcar line of the Cleveland Electric Railway Company. The single R.P.O. car made nine daily trips on a 16.3 mile route primarily servicing the heavily populated east side of Cleveland and several Cleveland postal stations (B, C, D, E and H), heading east from the main post office, carrying mail bags between the main post office and the stations as well as collecting mail from collection boxes along the route. Some trips included an additional “spur” to Station A. Trip 4 was run in the reverse direction. Trips 3 and 5 skipped the St. Clair Avenue and East 105th portions of the route, progressing directly up Euclid Avenue to Station B instead.

The R.P.O. route was phased out after a shift to motor vehicles by the Postal Service, though streetcars continued to carry closed mail sacks to the stations into the 1920s. Two handstamp varieties were used during the existence of the route. Machines were used concurrently with a handstamp device. The Circuit R.P.O. used an American Postal Machines Co. “flag” machine until 1911, followed sequentially by three different machines produced by the Universal Stamping Machine Company. Handstamp markings are shown first, followed by machines in chronological order. Items of particular significance, including the earliest and latest reported markings from the route and the provisionally used “trip” in dial Universal machine from 1912 and 1914, are noted with red dots.

April 4, 1908

*Earliest Reported Mail Item from the Cleveland Circuit R.P.O.*

(one day after start of operations)
Handstamp—First Die

October 31, 1908
Trip 8
Year slug below the date only in 1908
Fewer than 10 reported

February 9, 1909
Trip 7
Leather postcard

November 21, 1910
Trip 5

June 21, 1909
Trip 10

The Cleveland Circuit R.P.O. utilized a steel duplex handstamp featuring a “trip” number in the dial and “RMS” in the killer. Trips 2 through 10 are reported. For most of the R.P.O.’s existence, nine trips a day were run.
Handstamp—First Die Uses

December 24, 1913
Trip 7
Special Delivery

December 24, 1908
Trip 9
1 cent postage due
(letter rate due to glitter)

Sep. 1, 1910
Trip 4
forwarding marking on redirected mail

April 20, 1909
Trip 8
Triple UPU
rate to France
(1 cent overpaid)

R.P.O. clerks could handle special delivery, postage due, and foreign-destination mail, and could re-direct and forward mail as well.
Some mail received auxiliary markings, either in processing by R.P.O. clerks or elsewhere in the mail system.
Handstamp—Second Die

A new die of the handstamp was placed into use in August 1916. Fewer than 20 examples are reported. The latest reported example is August 23, 1918.
An American Postal Machines Company “flag” machine was placed into use on the R.P.O. car in April 1908. The latest reported use is November 17, 1911. Trips 2 through 10 are reported.
American Flag—Uses

As with the handstamp, the flag machine was used to process numerous types of mail.
American Flag—Auxiliary Markings

January 28, 1911
Trip 8
Held for Postage

December 18, 1908
Trip 9
1 cent underpaid for UPU rate to Ireland
Double deficiency charged to addressee

August 6, 1910
Trip 9
Missent to and forwarded from North Olmsted, Ohio
A Universal Model B machine was first placed into use on or about August 1, 1911. Trips 1-2 and 4-10 are reported.
The machine was one of 60 purchased by the United States Post Office Department as part of its second contract with the Universal Stamping Machine Company.
Universal Machine —Model B First Die Uses

The latest reported use of this die is September 9, 1914.
During short periods between July 9 and 20, 1912 and September 8 and October 1, 1914, a different Universal Model B machine, with a wavy bar killer, was used on a provisional basis on the Cleveland Circuit R.P.O. It is believed that a Universal machine from Cleveland’s Station B was used, perhaps to allow service or repair to the dedicated Circuit R.P.O. universal machine. The marking is identified as a streetcar use by the presence of “TRIP” in the postmark dial.
By October 2, 1914, the Universal Model B machine (or at least its canceling die) was replaced. The second die is most noticeably different in the shape of “P” in “R.P.O.” Some 1914 and 1915 examples seem to show missing periods in “R.P.O.”
Universal Machine – Model B Second Die

December 10, 1914
Trip 7
Standard Oil Company
“Ohio” perfin

May 28, 1917
Trip 6
The Brown Fence & Wire Co. perfin

“BUY A LIBERTY BOND” Promotional auxiliary marking
Applied at destination office

August 26, 1915
Trip 4
The White Company perfin

This machine was used with the second die through at least July 17, 1917.
A Universal Model D machine, imprinting a boxed killer, was used as early as July 2, 1917. Instead of “trip” numbers, this machine used a time of day corresponding with the departure time of the trip of the R.P.O. car.
By mid-1919, the Post Office Department had adopted motor vehicles to carry mail between stations and to collect mail from mailboxes. The Cleveland Circuit R.P.O. was formally discontinued effective August 4, 1919.