

Figure 6. Johnson & Johnson preprinted reply cover mailed from New York, Station F, July 9, 1901, to New Brunswick, N. J.

Station F, New York

The dated circular handstamp on the preprinted return envelope with the Johnson & Johnson “Red Cross” logo was mailed on July 9, 1901 (Figure 6). In addition to the 5:30 PM time slug, a large “F” appears at the bottom of the marker.

The “F” was the designation identifying the mailing post office station within the New York City General Post Office. Until 1908, the terms “station” and “branch” were used interchangeably.

The earliest known Post Office branch was established in New York City on January 1, 1837, at the corner of William Street and Exchange Place. Created to satisfy merchants and banks that complained of the inconvenience of the main Post Office’s uptown location, it wasn’t until March 3, 1847 that Congress specifically authorized the Postmaster General to establish one or more branch post offices in a city. By mid-1857, the New York Post Office had six stations located between 1½ to 3 miles of the main Post Office, and by the early 1860s, Post Office stations had opened in other cities.

By the early 1880s, Postmaster General John Wanamaker wanted to put contract Post Office branches in corner drug stores and other businesses both as a public convenience and to relieve overburdened postal facilities. By January 1890, 16 contract stations were operating in New York City. All but two of these stations were in drug stores. By December, 1892, contract stations, called “sub-stations,” outnumbered regular stations in New York City. Though contract stations in some cities were called substations designated by numbers, the the terms “station,” “substation,” and “branch” were often used interchangeably. On November 12, 1897, Postmaster General James Gary issued Order Number 595:

The following classification of stations and substations is hereby adopted: All stations or sub-stations, as now designated, that receive and dispatch mail, either by carriers or through boxes and general

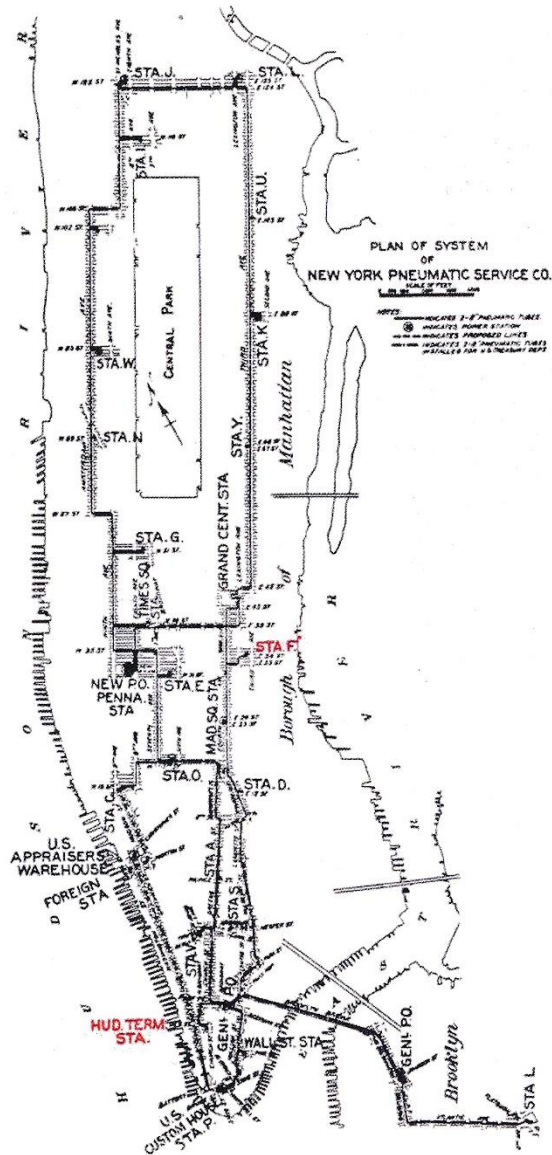


figure 7. Plan of the New York Pneumatic Tube System; locations of Station F and Hudson Terminal Station indicated in red.

delivery, will be known as stations and will be designated by letters or local names. Sub-stations issue and pay money orders, register letters and parcels, sell postal supplies, but do not deliver mail, and will be designated by numbers.

Station F from where the Johnson & Johnson cover was mailed was located at 301 Third Avenue. The F station was linked to the New York City pneumatic tube mail system that transported intra-city mail underground in steel cylinders. Inaugurated on October 7, 1897, between the old General Post Office on Park Row and the Produce Exchange on Bowling Green, the network eventually stretched up both sides of Manhattan Island forming a loop running a few feet below street level (Figure 7).

A crosstown line connected the two parallel lines between the new west side 34th Street General Post Office and Grand Central Terminal on the east, which, at speeds of 30 miles per hour, took four minutes for mail to traverse. The New York system remained in operation until 1952. Operators of the system illustrated in Figure 8 were called "Rocketeers."



Figure 8. Operators at pneumatic sending and receiving apparatus.

While there are no markings to indicate that the Johnson & Johnson cover went via the pneumatic tubes from Station F to the Hudson Terminal Station, where it would have been transported by ferry to New Jersey, it is not so fanciful to think so.

Figure 9. Receptacles used to carry mail through pneumatic tubes in several U.S. cities on display at the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition.

