

Figure 1 The earliest reported sub-station postal marking is from New York Sub-Station No. 10, dated February 5, 1890, and addressed to Egypt. Unfortunately, a stamp has been removed.

New York City's Early Numbered Postal Sub-stations

by Dennis H. Pack

New York was the first city in the United States to establish postal sub-stations that were numbered. Previous sub-stations had been called by local names or letters of the alphabet. Postmaster General (PMG) John Wanamaker ordered the establishment of 20 numbered sub-stations in New York to take effect January 20, 1890. These new numbered sub-stations would be the first to include “sub-station” or “sub-sta” in their postal markings. Figure 1 shows the earliest reported sub-station postal marking, a registration handstamp dated February 5, 1890, from New York Sub-Station No. 10. The date is about two weeks after the sub-station opened for business.

I first saw references to sub-stations while researching the history and development of US branch post offices. A little digging revealed that sub-stations were neighborhood post offices operated by employees of the drug store or other business where they were located, and that from 1890 to 1902, *sub-station* was part of the name that appeared in their postal markings. Ten years would pass before I would see a sub-station postal marking.

This article looks at some of New York’s early sub-stations. First, it describes the author’s search for information about New York’s first 20 sub-stations. Then, it examines some special circumstances surrounding New York’s Sub-Station No. 33.

RESEARCHING NYC’S FIRST NUMBERED SUB-STATIONS

The image of the grizzled prospector setting out with his burro and gold pan might be a cliché, but it describes the feelings I have had as I search for the mother lode on a postal history topic. I am sure that the information is out there, but it is often necessary to sift through mountains of material to find that which sparkles, and, sometimes, the richest treasure is found in unexpected places.

I found that Post Office Department (POD) documents contain a lot of information about postal sub-stations. *The Daily Bulletin of Orders Affecting the Postal Service*¹ is the most helpful because it announces changes in POD policies and procedures, and lists dates when individual sub-stations were established, changed or discontinued. However, the first reference to sub-stations was in 1894, and the information is sometimes incomplete or appears inconsistent. The first listing I found in the *Daily Bulletin* for a New York sub-station announced the establishment of Sub-Station No.

26 effective December 1, 1894. I would have to search elsewhere to learn about New York's earliest sub-stations.

I looked in the *Reports of the Postmaster General* to Congress, and *Postal Laws and Regulations*. These provided information about policies and statistics affecting sub-stations, and the laws and regulations governing them, but I found almost nothing about individual sub-stations.

An inquiry to the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, DC, brought a description of the *Record Relating to Contract Stations and Sub-Stations*, previously maintained by the First Assistant PMG. The two large ledgers contain entries for each state that had contract postal stations. Contract stations were located in business or other non-POD locations and operated by employees of that business. The volumes cover the approximate periods 1860-1904 and 1902-06. Many sub-stations that are

not found in the *Daily Bulletin* are listed in the *Record*. All of the sub-stations of the New York Post Office are listed there with their dates of establishment, changes in locations, and the amounts paid to those who operated them. The only difficulty is that the entries are sometimes difficult to read, and they do not always agree with what is printed in the *Daily Bulletin*. The *Record Relating to Contract Stations and Sub-Stations* entries for New York's first sub-stations appears in figure 2.² Even though journal entries were edited every time the location or status of a sub-station changed, the original entries are mostly readable. This was my first source about New York's first numbered sub-stations.

I also learned that the National Archives houses volumes of *Orders (Journals) of the Postmaster General*, six volumes of which cover the period 1884-1905. The orders cover many different topics, including sub-stations, and it was these orders about sub-stations that were published in the *Daily Bulletin* starting in 1894. I

No.	LOCATION.	DATE OF ORDER.	WHEN ESTABLISHED.	ALLOWANCES.	
				RENT.	C. H.
1.	✓ 63 Division st.	10/11/89 Dec. 20. 1889.	Jan'y 15. 1890.	400.	
2.	✓ 134 th st. + 7 th ave.	" " "	" " "	500.	500.
3.	✓ 562 Grand st.	" " "	" " "	400.	
4.	✓ 3 2 ^d ave.	" " "	" " "	500.	500.
5.	✓ King + Hudson sts.	" " "	" " "	500.	500.
6.	✓ 7 th st. + Avenue C. 4-21-83 ✓ 102 6 th st.	" " "	" " "	600.	
7.	✓ 102 6 th ave.	" " "	" " "	900.	
8.	✓ 91-93 8 th ave.	" " "	" " "	600.	
9.	✓ (Riverdale R. R. Station)	May 17. 1890.	June 1. "	400.	
10.	✓ 130 th st. + Lenox ave. 7-24-89 129 th st. (2nd)	Dec. 20. 1889.	Jan'y 15. "	300.	
11.	✓ 8 th ave. + 23 ^d st. 120 th 8 th ave. - 2-13-92	" " "	" " "	400.	900.
12.	✓ 53 ^d st. + 6 th ave.	" " "	" " "	500.	
13.	✓ 151 st st. + 8 th ave. 10-3-89 140 East 14 th st. - 6-14-01	" " "	" " "	800.	
14.	✓ 14 th East 14 th st. + 112 ^d st.	" " "	" " "	900.	900.
15.	✓ 61 st st. + Columbus ave. Cor. 59 th st. + Madison ave.	" " "	" " "	700.	700.
16.	✓ 9 th Co. 5 th st. + 116 th st. 4-16-1900 Washington ave. + 116 th st. 5-8-02	" " "	" " "	500.	700.
17.	✓ 35 th ave. + 116 th st.	" " "	" " "	600.	
18.	✓ Pleasant ave. + 121 st st. E. 181 st st. + Kingsbridge Road	" " "	" " "	200.	
19.	✓ 461 Kingsbridge Road, 9-1-89	" " "	" " "	300.	
20.	✓ Kings Bridge Road + Webster Ave.	" " "	" " "	300.	

Figure 2 Entries in the Record Relating to Contract Stations and Sub-Stations for New York sub-stations 1-20 were edited when a sub-station was moved or discontinued and reopened.

assumed that information about sub-stations established before 1894 would be found in these volumes. During my first visit to the National Archives in 1999, I was delighted to find that this was true.

The first information I discovered about New York's earliest numbered sub-stations from the *Orders (Journals) of the Postmaster General* was Order No. 335, dated December 20, 1889, which read:

Establish on January 15th, 1890, 20 stations of the New York, N.Y., Post Office with money order and registration facilities and for the sale of postal supplies and reception of 3rd and 4th class mail matter, to be under the control of the Postmaster. Said stations are to be designated as "Sub-Stations" and by number from one to twenty inclusive and located as follows:-

- No. 1. Catharine and Cherry Sts.
- No. 2. North Moore and Hudson Sts.
- No. 3. No. 562 Grand St.
- No. 4. No. 3 Second Ave.
- No. 5. King and Hudson Sts.
- No. 6. Avenue C and 6th St.
- No. 7. No. 102 6th Ave.
- No. 8. 7th Ave & 14th St.
- No. 9. 5th Ave & 16th St.
- No. 10. 21st St. & 4th Ave.
- No. 11. 8th Ave & 23rd St.
- No. 12. 34th St. & Broadway.

- No. 13. 41st St. & 8th Ave.
- No. 14. Park Ave. & 42nd St.
- No. 15. 57th St. & 9th Ave.
- No. 16. 72nd St. & 2nd Ave.
- No. 17. 110th St. & 3rd Ave.
- No. 18. Pleasant Ave, cor. 121st St.
- No. 19. No. 3409 3rd Ave., Bet. 166 and 167 Sts.
- No. 20. Fordham 2511 West Vanderbilt Ave.

Allow the postmaster at New York for compensation of clerks in charge of said stations, who are to furnish and maintain the same without other expense to the Department, as follows:-

For Station No. 9, the sum of one dollar (\$1.00) per annum. For Station No. 20 Fordham, the sum of \$300 per annum, and for the other stations, the sum of \$400 each, total allowance per annum \$7501.³

This seems straight-forward, but PMG Order 192, dated May 17, 1890, established Sub-Station No. 9 in the Riverdale railway station effective June 1, 1890, with the clerk to provide the facilities and be paid \$400 per year.⁴ There was no indication of what happened to the first Sub-Station No. 9.

A comparison of the addresses of the sub-stations from the PMG's original order and the *Record Relating to Contract Stations and Sub-Stations* is shown in table 1.

SS#	PMG Order	Record Relating to Sta & Sub-Sta
1	Catharine & Cherry Sts	63 Division St
2	North Moore & Hudson Sts	134 th St & 7 th Ave
3	562 Grand St	562 Grand St
4	3 2 nd Ave	3 2 nd Ave
5	King & Hudson Sts	King & Hudson Sts
6	Avenue C & 6 th St	Avenue C & 6 th St
7	102 6 th Ave	102 6 th Ave
8	7 th Ave & 14 th St	91-93 8 th Ave
9	5 th Ave & 16 th St	Riverdale RR Station
10	21 st & 4 th Ave	130 th St & Lenox Ave
11	8 th Ave & 23 rd St	8 th Ave & 23 rd St
12	34 th St & Broadway	53 rd St & 6 th Ave
13	41 st St & 8 th Ave	41 st St & 8 th Ave
14	Park Ave & 42 nd St	Park Ave & 42 nd St
15	57 th St & 9 th Ave	61 st St & Columbus Ave
16	72 nd St & 2 nd Ave	9 E 59 th St
17	110 th St & 3 rd Ave	3 rd Ave & 116 th St
18	Pleasant Ave, corner 121 st St	Pleasant Ave & 121 st St
19	3409 3 rd Ave, betwn 166 & 167 Sts	961 Kingsbridge Rd
20	Fordham 2511 West Vanderbilt Ave	Kingsbridge Road & Webster Ave

Table 1 Comparison of Sub-station addresses.

SS#	DB#	Original Address	New Address	Eff Date
1	5969	Cathering [sic] & Cherry Sts	63 Division St	10/01/99
10	5160	[not given]	130 th St & Lenox Ave	02/01/97
17	5430	[not given]	3 rd Ave & 116 th St	12/20/97
19	5940	[not given]	961 Kingsbury Rd near 183 rd St	09/01/99
20	5590	4262 3 rd Ave	Kings Bridge Rd & Webster Ave	07/01/98

Table 2 Changes to Sub-Stations appearing in the Daily Bulletin.

It is not known when the *Record Relating to Contract Stations and Sub-Stations* was created. Some of the differences between the two sources can be explained by looking at changes to the sub-stations in the *Daily Bulletin*. These are presented in *table 2* with the sub-station number, *Daily Bulletin* issue number and the effective date of the change.

This information leads me to the conclusion that the addresses recorded in the *Record Relating to Contract Stations and Sub-Stations* were probably correct when they were entered into the journal, but were not necessarily the original sub-station addresses. For several years, this was as far as I could go. There were discrepancies that I could not explain.

Leonard Piskiewicz's excellent book *Chicago Postal Markings and Postal History* quotes from the *Chicago Tribune* concerning the establishment of new sub-stations in Chicago.⁵

When I contacted him, he made me aware of his article, "Chicago's Earliest Sub-Stations," in the *Illinois Postal Historian*,⁶ which contains the entire news story from the *Chicago Tribune*. This started me thinking; if the opening of sub-stations was news in Chicago, perhaps it was news other places, too.

Through a university library, I was able to access ProQuest Historical Newspapers online which enabled me to search the *New York Times* by topic within dates I specified. When I searched, I was excited to find five ar-

ticles published in 1890 about sub-stations in New York City. The first of these, dated January 21, 1890, reports the opening of the first numbered sub-stations in New York City. It clarifies some of the information from POD sources that seems inconsistent, but it raises a question of its own. Never-the-less, the *New York Times* articles contribute enormously to the understanding of local sub-stations. *Table 3* gives the addresses of New York's first sub-stations as printed in the *New York Times*. These locations are identified as shown on *map 1*.

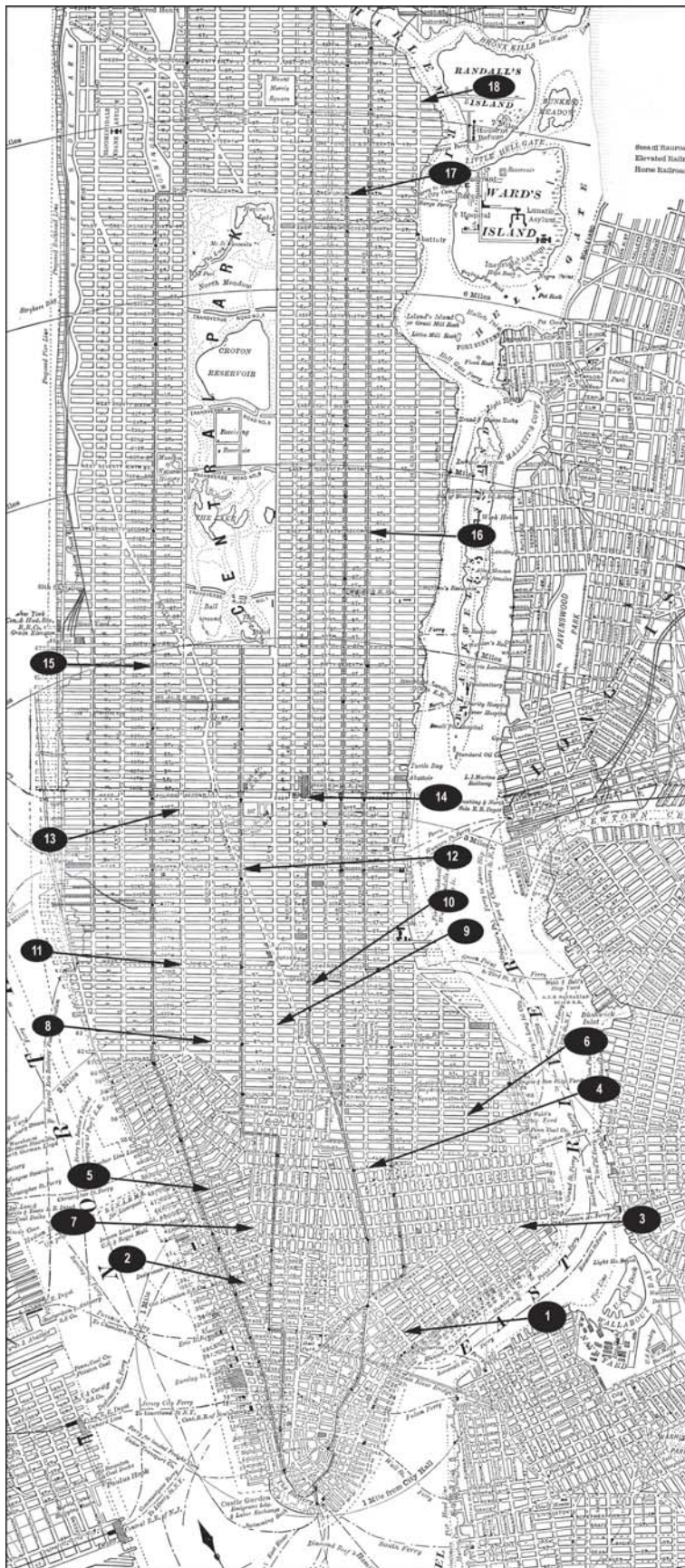
I trust the addresses in the article since they were recorded at the time the sub-stations were opened. However, I believe the address of Sub-Station No. 6 contains a typographical error. Searches using *Google Maps* pinpointed Avenue C and 6th Street, but not an Avenue O, in New York City. *Google Maps* shows an

Avenue O and 6th Street in Brooklyn, which had its own sub-stations, the first of which was established in 1894.

The *Times* article reported that only 16 of the sub-stations opened as planned, and that sub-stations 2, 9, 10 and 15 were expected to open within a few days. A second article, dated February 18, 1890, stated that Sub-Station No. 15 would soon open at the previously announced address and quoted Superintendent Moore of the City Delivery Department as saying "that he thought that the es-

SS#	New York Times
1	Catharine & Cherry Sts
2	North Moore & Hudson Sts
3	562 Grand Ave
4	3 2 nd Ave
5	King & Hudson Sts
6	Ave O & 6 th St
7	102 6 th Ave
8	7 th Ave & 14 th St
9	5 th Ave & 16 th St [Judge Building]
10	21 st St & 4 th Ave
11	8 th Ave & 23 rd St
12	34 th St & Broadway
13	41 st St & 8 th Ave
14	Park Ave & 42 nd St
15	57 th St & 9 th Ave
16	72 nd St & 2 nd Ave
17	110 th St & 3 rd Ave
18	Pleasant Ave, corner 121 st St
19	3409 3 rd Ave, betwn 161 st & 162 nd Sts
20	Fordham 2511 W Vanderbilt Ave

Table 3 Sub-Station locations as identified in the *New York Times*.



Map 1 Location of New York Sub-Stations as indicated by the New York Times in 1890. Note: Sub-Stations 19 and 20 were located north of the area depicted in the map.

establishment of Station O in Thirteenth-street would make it unnecessary to have a sub-station [author: no. 9] in the *Judge Building*.⁷ Another article, dated May 1, 1890, indicated that the Postmaster was looking at sites for a sub-station in Riverdale, and said that stamps were currently being sold at the railroad station, but the current facilities there were not adequate to house a sub-station. The PMG, as quoted above, ordered that Sub-Station No. 9 be established in the Riverdale railway station June 1, 1890. The mystery of the establishment of the second Sub-Station No. 9 was solved; the first one had never operated.

The January 21, 1890, *New York Times* article did much more than report on the opening of the sub-stations. It also advised that all but two of the sub-stations were located in drug stores—one, previously discussed, was in the Judge building, the other in a real estate office in Tremont—and the clerks were almost all young women.

The article went on to say that the sub-stations were created as a convenience to the public because of complaints that patrons had to travel too far to purchase money orders, mail packages and register mail. It says that each sub-station is under the supervision of a branch post office, and advises, “At the sub-stations is transacted just the same kind of business as is done at the branches except that mail is not delivered from them. Letters or postal packages are dropped in a box at the sub-station just as they would be in a street box, and are collected by the carriers from the branch to which the sub-station belongs.”⁸ Ordinary letters are post-marked at the supervising branch post office, so sub-station postal markings would be used for other services such as money orders and the registration of letters. I have only seen boxed straight-line registration markings and double-oval cancels with the sub-station number and “sub-sta” from New York’s sub-stations 1-20. A cover registered at New York Sub-Station No. 7 and bearing both double-oval cancels and the boxed straight-line registration marking is illustrated in *figure 3*.

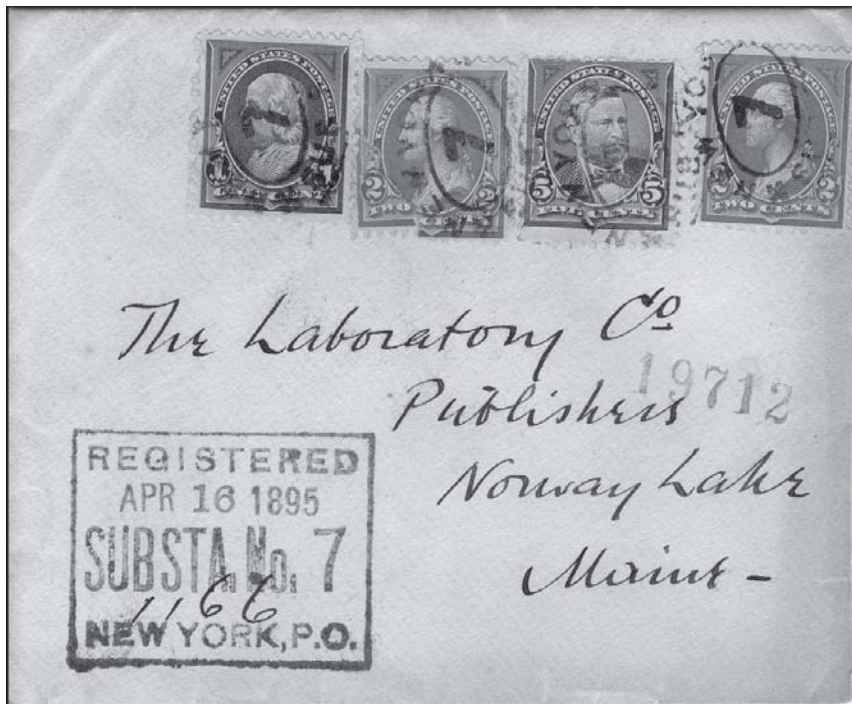


Figure 3 A registered cover mailed at New York Sub-Station No. 7 shows the double-oval cancel used on the stamps and the boxed straight-line registration marking.

The New York *Times* also says that the presence of a sub-station in a business is thought to increase the number of customers who visit the business and that will increase sales of their other products. The managers were required to sign the following agreement:

I hereby propose to furnish space, heat, light, and all necessary clerical service for the transaction of money order, postal-note, and registration business, and the sale of postal supplies; also to fit up my premises at the corner of _____ with the fixtures necessary for public accommodation in connection with above business, and to display such signs as may be required; also to furnish satisfactory bonds in the sum of \$2,000 to the Postmaster, and to superintend and conduct such postal business as may be committed to me to the satisfaction and under the direction of the Postmaster for the sum of \$400 per annum.

In May, the New York *Times* reported in “City and Suburban News” that the superintendent of Sub-Station No. 17 at 110th Street and 3rd Avenue submitted his resignation because he said that he was unable to operate the sub-station and profitably conduct his own business.¹⁰ I find no changes to Sub-Station No. 17 at that time in either the *Orders (Journals) of the Postmaster General* or the *Record Relating to Contract Stations and Sub-Stations*. Perhaps, the superintendent was reminded of the agreement he signed.

New York’s first numbered sub-stations were open and operating. An additional sub-station was added in 1891, two in 1892, one in 1893, seven in 1894, 12 in 1895, and 30 in 1896, until New York Sub-Station No. 161 was established in March, 1902.¹¹

Sub-stations flourished nationwide, but questions arose as to the differences between sub-stations and stations. The PMG issued Order 595, dated November 12, 1897, to clarify this:

The following classification of stations and sub-stations is hereby adopted:

All stations or sub-stations, as now designated, that receive and dispatch mail, either by carriers or through boxes and general 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.¹²

As a result of this order, some sub-stations were re-designated stations. One of these was New York’s Sub-Station No. 33.

Sub-Station No. 33

Sub-Station No. 33 was located at University Heights on the campus of the University of the City of New York. In a talk given to the North Side Board of Trade March 6, 1895, New York Postmaster Dayton announced, “There will be a sub-station at University Heights which will have full accommodations for the transaction of money order and registry business, with two carriers and two clerks.”¹³ The order of the PMG establishing the sub-station read a little differently:

“Establish on March 1, 1895, a sub-station of the post office at New York, N.Y., with facilities for the transaction of money-order and registry business and for the sale of postal supplies, to be located on the grounds of the University of the City of New York, to be known as Sub-station No. 33.”¹⁴ The Order of the PMG makes no mention of mail carriers operating from the station.



Figure 4 Three covers mailed at New York Sub-Station No. 33 with stamps cancelled by New York duplex cancels and showing Sub-Station No. 33 double-oval cancels.

PMG Order 595 stated that mail carriers are not supposed to deliver mail from sub-stations. We have seen that Sub-Station No. 33 was described by the Postmaster as housing carriers. In addition, the description of sub-stations from the *New York Times* given above includes the observation that letters are dropped in boxes at sub-stations and delivered to the supervising branches for handling. Another difference, then, is that first class mail is not postmarked at sub-stations, but is taken to branches for processing. An examination of how first class letter mail was postmarked at Sub-Station No. 33 gives additional insights into the sub-station. A gift by Lloyd Shaw of five covers cancelled at Sub-Station No. 33 provides an interesting study.

The three covers in *figure 4* bear partial impressions of New York duplex cancels plus impressions of a Sub-Station No. 33 double-oval cancel. The first of these is dated March 20, 1895, 19 days after the sub-station was established. The second is dated April 15, 1895, and the third April 18, 1895. They all appear to be mail originating at Sub-Station No. 33. The double-oval cancels do not appear to have been used as forwarding or receiving markings, but to identify the covers as having been mailed at Sub-Station No. 33.

The next cover, dated December 3, 1896, and shown in *figure 5*, appears to have been missent to University Heights. It is addressed to New York University at Washington Square. A hand-drawn pointing finger points to the address, and what appears to be the dial portion of a Sub-Station No. 33 duplex cancel has been stamped at right, presumably as a forwarding marking. This is assumed to be a duplex marking because of the year date at the lower-right of the dial. The back of the cover bears a Sub-Station No. 33 CDS marking. Both Sub-Station No. 33 markings are dated December 3, 1896, but the time in the CDS on the back is 9 AM, while the time in the duplex dial on the front is 11 AM. The earlier CDS would be the receiving marking.

The fifth cover from this group appears in *figure 6*. It originates at University Heights and is addressed to New York University at Washington Square. It shows a clear impression of a Sub-Station No. 33 duplex cancel dated December 2, 1897. I have other impressions of this duplex cancel dated June 1, 1896, and March 22, 1897. It is interesting that the dial of these duplex cancels measures 23 mm in diameter, while the dial appearing in *figure 5* measures 25.5 mm in diameter. I



Figure 5 Cover missent to New York Sub-Station No. 33, where it was forwarded. Cover bears Sub-Station duplex cancel dial on front and CDS on back. Dial measures 25.5 mm in diameter.

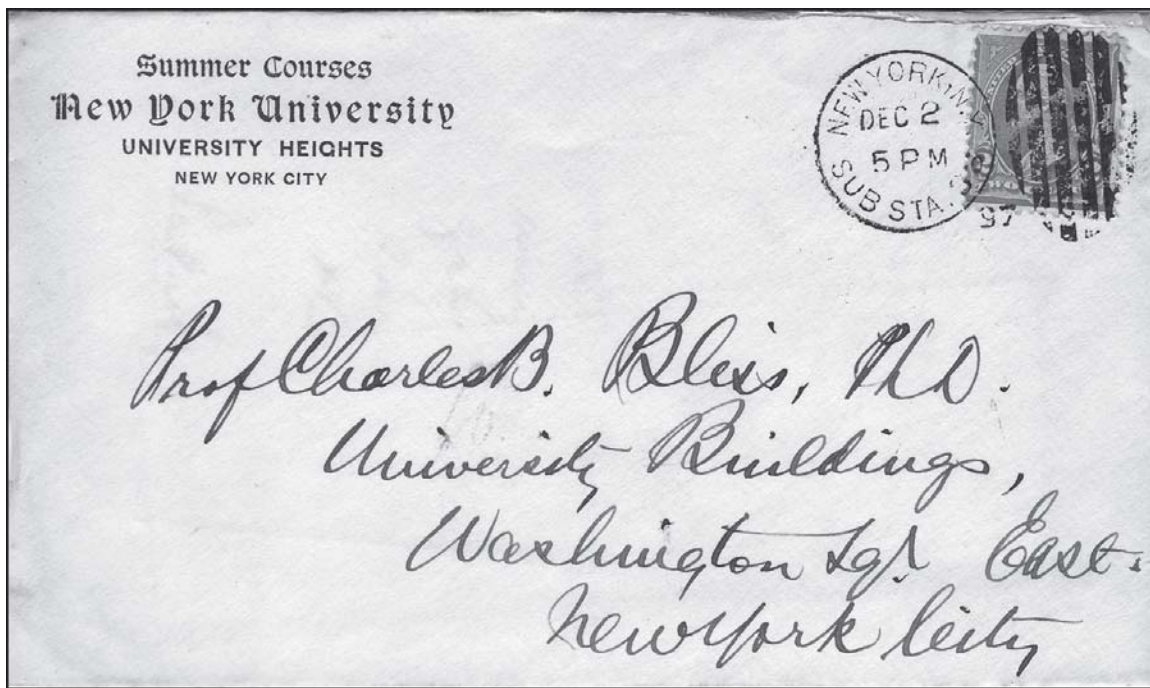


Figure 6 Cover mailed from New York Sub-Station No. 33. Stamp is cancelled by a Sub-Station No. 33 duplex cancel. Dial measures 23 mm in diameter.

would appreciate receiving photo copies or scans of complete duplex cancellations made with the larger dial since I do not know the appearance of the cancel that is with it.

In at least two regards, New York Sub-Station No. 33 behaved more like a station than a sub-station: letter carriers operated from it and first class letter mail was cancelled there. Three days after Order 595, quoted above, clarified the differences between sub-stations and stations, Order No. 617, Nov. 15, 1897, advised, "Under the new classification of stations and sub-stations embraced in Order No. 595, Sub-station No. 33 and High Bridge sub-station at New York, N.Y., become stations and will be designated as 'University Heights Station' and 'High Bridge Station,' respectively." This order was to take effect January 1, 1898.¹⁵

Sub-Station No. 33 is the only New York sub-station reported to have used a duplex cancel.

Conclusion

PMG Order 349, Mar. 31, 1902, discontinued the designation *sub-station*. It modified Order 595 to read:

All stations will issue and pay money-orders, register letters and parcels and sell postal supplies.

Stations that receive and dispatch mails, either by carriers or through boxes and general delivery, will be designated by letters or local names, as 'Station A' or 'Austin Station.'

Stations that are not provided with facilities for receiving and dispatching mails, will be designated by numbers, as 'Station No. 1.'¹⁶

Sub-stations operated 12 years during which they made postal services and stamps more readily available to the public at limited expense to the POD. Sub-stations were the forerunners of the contract postal units currently found in many businesses.

Sub-stations are largely forgotten, but each one has a story. The biggest challenge is discovering where and in what form it is told. Government documents provide basic information about sub-stations' locations and dates of operation. Other sources, such as local newspapers, can be invaluable in helping to understand details and why some things happened as they did. Sub-station postmarks themselves can provide insights into the operation of sub-stations, especially as they become available in greater numbers.

Special thanks to all those who have sent me photocopies or e-mailed me scans of their sub-station markings. The sub-station postal marking census stands at 599 markings. If you have any you would like to add, please contact me: Dennis H. Pack, 1915 Gilmore Ave, Winona, MN 55987, or packd@hbc.com. You can also contact me if you are interested in purchasing a CD or printout of the census for a nominal fee.



Figure 7 Boxed straight-line registration handstamp applied to the back of a cover mailed at New York Sub-Station No. 11.

Additional thanks to Len Piskiewicz for opening my eyes to new sources of information, to Lloyd Shaw for his on-going support of my collecting interests, and to Richard W. Helbock for publishing this article.

END NOTES

¹ The *Daily Bulletin of Orders Affecting the Postal Service* was published by the Railway Mail Service 1880-1906, when it was taken over by the PMG. In 1918, it was renamed the *Postal Bulletin*. It is currently published bi-weekly, and is available on-line at <http://www.usps.gov/cpim/ftp/bulletin/pb.htm>

² *Record Relating to Contract Stations and Sub-Stations*. Vol. 1, p.182.

³ *Orders (Journals) of the Postmaster General*, vol. 2, pp. 381-382.

⁴ *Orders. (Journals) of the Postmaster General*, vol. 2, p. 431.

⁵ Piskiewicz, Leonard. *Chicago Postal Markings and Postal History*, p. 294-295.

⁶ *Illinois Postal Historian*, vol. 26, no. 4, pp. 12-16.

⁷ *New York Times*, Feb. 18, 1890, p. 3

⁸ *New York Times*, Jan 21, 1890, p. 9.

⁹ *New York Times*, Jan 21, 1890, p. 9.

¹⁰ *New York Times*, May 14, 1890, p. 3.

¹¹ Actually, there were more than 161 numbered sub-stations in New York since numbers were often re-used after a sub-station was discontinued.

¹² Order 595, Nov. 12, 1897, in *Daily Bulletin* 5401, Nov. 15, 1897.

¹³ *New York Times*, March 7, 1895, p. 2

¹⁴ Order 72, Feb. 25, 1895, in *Daily Bulletin* 4569, Feb. 26, 1895.

¹⁵ Order 617, Nov. 15, 1897, in *Daily Bulletin* 5405, Nov. 20, 1897.

¹⁶ Order 349, Mar. 31, 1902, in *Daily Bulletin* 6731, Apr. 2, 1902.

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