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Where are the Confederate Route Agents?

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Abstract

Railroad and steamboat route agent markings disappear mysteriously with the start of the War Between the States. This paper will treat this situation and pose possible reasons for the lack of Confederate route agent markings.

Before the War Between the States, postmarks can be readily found from most southern route agents. But with the start of the war, route agent postmarks in the Confederate states all but disappear.

A route agent is a post office employee on a train or inland waterways vessel, distributing local mail to way points and receiving mail from way stations. They postmarked mail if received uncanceled from stations or on the train. Chronologically, they preceded railway post office clerks.

Route agents continued to function under the Confederate Post Office Department. An example of a route agent contract will be shown. A few Confederate route agent markings are known and these will be mentioned. There are also a number of Confederate station agent postmarks; most comprehensive Confederate postal history collections contain some. But route agents and station agents are quite different.

After the War, again under the U.S. Post Office Department, southern route agents' postmarks are seen again, but with different devices than used in the antebellum period. Researchers have yet to locate records of orders or communications instructing route agents to stop postmarking letters in the Confederate States of America.