

MEARIS' CITY DESPATCH POST, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

A comprehensive history of Baltimore's City Despatch Post is provided in Denwood N. Kelly's series, published in the *Collectors Club Philatelist* (Vol. 50, No. 3). A summary of Kelly's research follows.

The City Despatch Post was established by Malcolm W. Mearis, who announced its opening in an advertisement that appeared in *The Sun* from January 23 to 29, 1846. Mearis's office was located in the basement of the Jarvis Building at the corner of North (now Guilford Avenue) and Baltimore Streets. Mearis placed 100 letter boxes throughout the city and charged two basic rates: 2c for city-delivery letters and 1c for letters carried to the post office. A special 2c "fast horse" rate was available for eastbound mail that Mearis would bring to the Lower Depot railroad route agent just before the mails closed. Package-delivery and money-collection services were also offered.

On October 20, 1846, an advertisement appeared in *The Sun*, announcing new ownership of the City Despatch Post by William Taylor, with R. K. Ford named as the post's agent. Taylor owned a bookstore in the same building where Mearis had his City Despatch Post office. Subsequent ads announce letter-box locations, new delivery times, and reiterate the 2c and 1c rates charged by Mearis. The availability of "Paid stamps" is specifically mentioned, although no examples under the Taylor-Ford ownership have been recorded. A special 2c rate for last-minute delivery of eastbound and southbound mail, directly to the railroad route agent, was also advertised. The last reported ad for the City Despatch Post, without any change in ownership noted, appears early January 1847. On March 22, 1847, an announcement in *The Sun* states that the City Despatch Post has been acquired by Wm. H. Hahn from R. Wilton. No mention of Taylor or Ford is made, and it is unclear whether this City Despatch is even the same one started by Mearis.

The 1c and 2c stamps issued by Mearis in 1846 were typeset and printed in black on grayish paper. Ten distinct types have been identified, and the plate arrangement was almost certainly in two columns of five; the 2c stamps at left and the 1c stamps at right. This arrangement is supported by the existence of three 2c-1c se-tenant pairs. There was significant variation among the ten subjects, involving two types of corner ornaments (flowers and diamonds) and font changes for three of the four lines of type in each stamp. Using digital scans and Adobe Photoshop, we have been able to overlay the eleven recorded stamps and two additional fragments, in order to classify each type and reconstruct the setting.

Three of the five rows can be positioned in their correct relative order, owing to the miraculous survival of three se-tenant pairs with original gum. Two of the pairs are offered here and have long been regarded as the only known se-tenant multiples. What has not been generally known is the existence of a *third* se-tenant pair, located in the British Library's Tapling collection. The Tapling pair is the piece of the puzzle that allows us to reconstruct the original block of six from which all three pairs were cut. Illustrated opposite is a digital reconstruction with the pairs joined together and the four additional types in positions that we believe may accurately reflect the original setting.



Advertisements placed by Mearis (left) and Taylor-Ford (above), announcing the establishment and change in ownership of the City Despatch Post.

SUGGESTED RECONSTRUCTION OF THE MEARIS PLATE



The suggested reconstruction is based on eleven stamps and two fragments (three duplicates shown below). Two of the three se-tenant pairs (Positions 3-4 and 7-8) are offered in this sale (lots 1334-1335). The third se-tenant pair (Positions 5-6) is in the British Library's Tapling collection. The three pairs were originally a block of six, which was divided prior to 1891.

We have used Denwood Kelly's types A-H, plus types I, J and K that we have identified. Kelly's type D is a duplicate of his type C. Scott numbers are shown in parentheses.

DUPLICATE EXAMPLES



TYPE I (103L5)
Position 5



TYPE B (103L4)
Position 8



TYPE C/D (103L1)
Position 10