

Cover Story by Phillip Fettig

My most important “job” at FLOREX

Sometime during the past two years of FLOREX, you might have heard me joking about being the only fool with three show ribbons on – Dealer, Exhibitor and Staff Member. Well, actually I had a fourth “job” - the basic occupation of a collector. You also know by now I have many collecting interest, the least of which is submarine related items.

During the show last month, a dealer friend mentioned to me that he had two submarine covers that I might be interested in. During a slow period at A & R, I ventured across the room and sat at his table. He showed me an item which immediately got my attention. The world's first nuclear powered ship, the U.S. Navy submarine, USS NAUTILUS (SSN-571) is a collecting area that I am interested in. I had the honor of a tour of her in 1965, while stationed at the Submarine Base. In the summer of 1958, the NAUTILUS left on a secret attempt to find a passage under the North Pole while submerged. One of the crew members came up with the idea of creating a “logo” (cachet to us) and a device to postmark the mail. He used a piece of rubber that was laying around and made a two piece cachet stamp and another sailor did the canceling device. *(An interesting note is that the cachet was prepared in two pieces so that no more than a few crew members would guess the true nature of the mission. My experience is that you cannot fool sailors - the time I left on a secret cruise, we all correctly guessed where we were going!)* The cachet was placed on the covers during the early part of the trip, while the cancel was applied while actually submerged 700 feet beneath the North Pole on August 3, 1958. Figure (1) shows the cover I now proudly have in my collection. The Universal Ship Cancellation Society Postmark Catalog indicates there are less than 100 of these covers known. Another source, the National Postal Museum website, indicates the number may be as much as 1,500. Either way, the cover is an outstanding piece of history that I am proud to have.

Another interesting aspect to the story is how the covers came to be placed in the mail system. The Commanding Officer, Commander William Anderson, USN was ordered to Washington, DC upon completion of the trip. He was to brief Navy leaders and President Eisenhower. CDR Anderson took the bag of canceled mail with him to meet the President, who upon hearing the story of the crews effort, ordered the bag delivered to the Postmaster General with instructions to place the items in the mail without further cancellation

Figure (2) The two piece cancelling device used.

Figure (3) Photo of the cancelling process.

The Stanley B. Ashbrook Cup Awarded to James R. Pullin

The Stanley B. Ashbrook Cup is awarded to authors of articles, books, or other studies concerning United States postal history from the Colonial Period to 1894. This year it is presented to James R. Pullin for his book, *North Atlantic Packets, 1818-1840: Sailing Departures and Arrivals*.

Before steamships plied the North Atlantic, American sailing packets dominated the sea-lanes from New York to London and Liverpool carrying a majority of the mail, passengers, and specie transported between the United States and Great Britain. Frustrated in his attempts to identify the ships and sailing dates for the early transatlantic covers in his collection, Jim built a database of Sailing Schedules from data in *Lloyd's List* and *Lloyd's Register* as well as period newspapers.

Years of archival and museum research produced the 108-page data table at the heart of this volume. It lists the arrival and departure dates at New York, London, and Liverpool for ships of the Black Ball, Red Star, Blue Swallowtail, Red Swallowtail, Dramatic, and Black X packet lines from the organization of the first packet line in 1818 and continues until steamships began to capture the mail and passenger business around 1840.

With his research, Jim has extended and complemented the work of George Hargest, Walter Hubbard, and Richard Winter by gathering data for the ships that preceded their studies of transatlantic mail in the age of steam. Although the sailing tables are useful by themselves, the other two-thirds of the book provides a historical context for appreciating maritime postal history in general and transatlantic mail in the age of sail in particular. Accounts of the history and development of the six shipping lines include details about individual vessels such as their fate in storms, or groundings.

Other chapters briefly describe postal rates and markings; the growth and development of the ports in New York, Liverpool, and London; ship construction and technology; along with various economic, political, and military considerations of the time. Collectors of early transatlantic stampless mail now have a tool for better understanding their covers along with a historical context that provides enjoyable reading.

Editor note: Congratulations to James Pullin – this highly regarded award goes to an active member of the Central Florida Stamp Club, since the fall of 1990.

