

# FLORIDA POSTAL HISTORY JOURNAL

Vol. 15, No. 1

March 2008



**CEDAR KEYS/ FLA.**

*Registered cover with mixed franking with 3 cent Official Treasury and 1 cent regular issue Banknote stamps. See the article beginning on page 4.*

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Florida Postal History Society Officers .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>President's Notes</b>	
<i>by William Johnson, D.D.S. ....</i>	<b>4</b>
<b>Florida Official Stamps &amp; Covers</b>	
<i>by Daniel B. Curtis .....</i>	<b>5</b>
<b>Hollywood Provisional</b>	
<i>by Deane R. Briggs, M.D. ....</i>	<b>7</b>
<b>Contract Steamship Mail Between Cuba and Apalachicola via Savannah</b>	
<i>by Yamil H. Kouri, M.D. ....</i>	<b>8</b>
<b>Assassination of the Sarasota Postmaster</b>	
<i>by Jack Harwood .....</i>	<b>10</b>
<b>Tarpon Springs Provisional Postmark</b>	
<i>by William Johnson, D.D.S. ....</i>	<b>14</b>
<b>Central Florida Correspondence Letters from 1903-1905 DPOs</b>	
<i>by Deane R. Briggs, M.D. ....</i>	<b>16</b>
<b>Florida Postal History Society Contributing Members .....</b>	<b>23</b>



# PRESIDENT'S NOTES

*By William Johnson, D.D.S.*

**T**he 16th Annual Meeting of the Florida Postal History Society was held on Saturday, February 2, 2008 at the Sarasota National Stamp Exhibition. Twenty-five members including dealer members were in attendance at the show which reflects nearly one-third of the society's individual membership, a very good turnout. Before the actual meeting, a moment of silence was offered in memory of deceased members and past presidents, Theodore Light and Herbert P. McNeal.

Secretary-Treasurer Deane R. Briggs reported a balance of \$4392.04 in the account with approximately one-third of the 2008 dues having been already received. He noted that approximately half of the membership renewals are as contributing members at the \$20 per year rate.

A discussion was held regarding printing our journal in full color. This would over triple the per issue cost to nearly \$5.00 per issue including postage. Member Dr. Everett L. Parker, who currently edits and publishes several philatelic journals, was selected by unanimous vote to be the publisher and co-editor with Dr. Briggs. It was felt that the additional cost could be borne by our treasury reserves and continued contributing membership without raising the current \$10 dues rate which should encourage additional membership. Florida stamp club memberships will be sought. In addition, it was discussed to offer color advertisements for dealers as well as announcements of Florida stamp shows and bourses in the journal. Dr. Briggs will coordinate this.

A presentation by Donald Ball on Robert Meacham, the first black postmaster appointment after Reconstruction, was well received. Don had original postmaster appointments for Monticello and

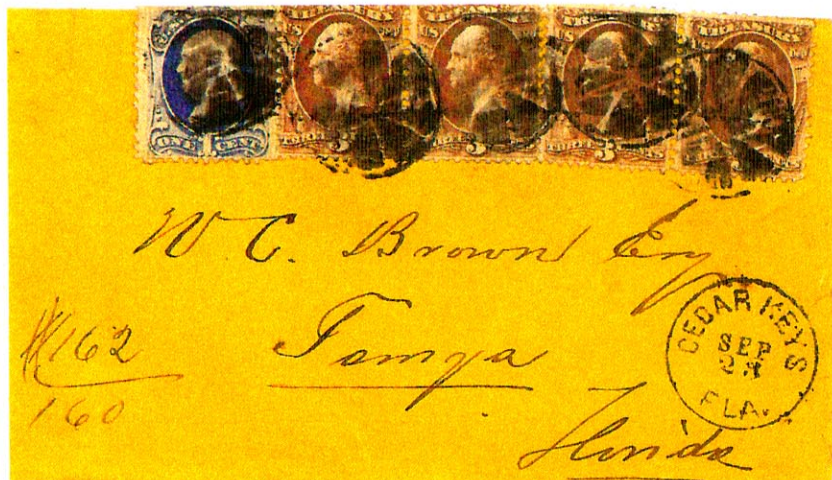
*Continued on page 22*



# Florida Official Stamps & Covers

By Daniel B. Curtis

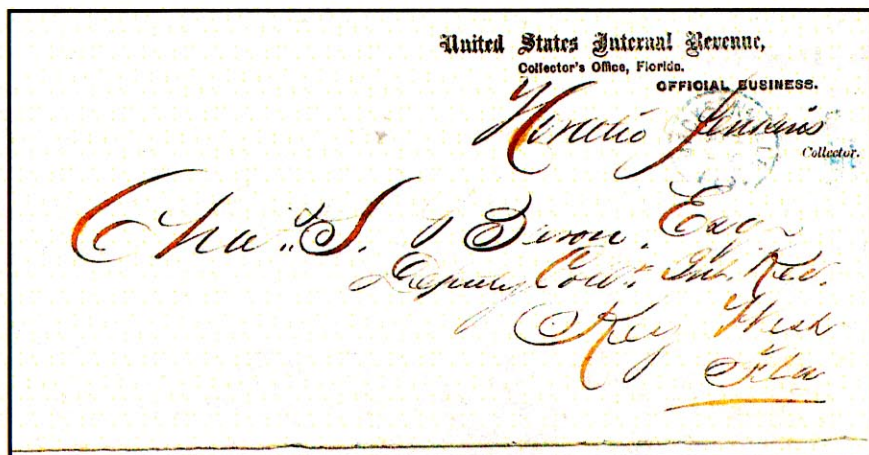
Official stamps and penalty covers used from 1873 through the early 1880s have long been a popular collecting segment of U.S. philately. Items from the State of Florida, however, are very uncommon as very little material exists. I am recording two such covers that I have in my collection.



**Figure 1:** CEDAR KEYS / FLA. SEP 23 ca. 1875 cds postmark with killer cancelled #156 and two pair of #074 official Treasury stamps on registered cover to Tampa.

The above cover (*Figure 1*) is a ca. 1875 small registered envelope from Cedar Keys to Tampa, endorsed on the back by the Collector of Customs. Similar covers with mixed “official” and regular postage stamp frankings have often been considered ambiguous. The lack of a typical imprinted corner suggests illegitimate private use of the Treasury stamps, but in this case, the endorsement on the

reverse proves an official business. Presumably, the sender's duties did not warrant special printed envelopes, but he was simply given a supply of three-cent Treasury stamps to frank his official business correspondence.



**Figure 2: JACKSONVILLE / FLA. APR 13 (1870)  
blue cds postmark and partial fancy killer on  
U.S. Internal Revenue Official free frank cover.**

Since 13 cents postage was required (10 cent registry fee, three cent postage), the sender used two pairs of the three-cent Treasury stamps and a one-cent regular issue stamp. There was no manuscript registry number, typical for small post offices. This cover is ex. Markovits who considered it a classic and comprehensible mixed franking of official and regular issues.

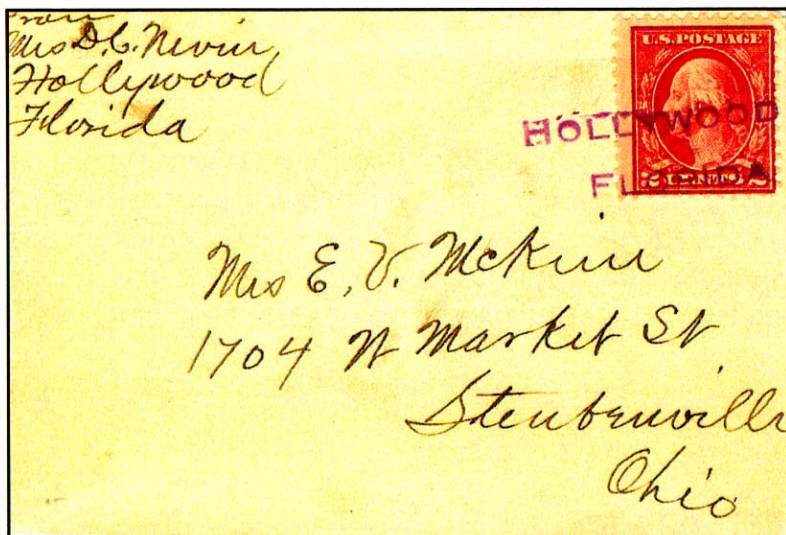
The cover in Figure 2 is a stampless free frank cover with the endorsement of Horatio Jenkins, Collector. The envelope is legal sized and printed with "United States Internal Revenue, Collector's Office, Florida. Official Business. (space for signature) Collector." The addressee is Charles S. Baron, Esq., Deputy Collector Internal Revenue, Key West, Fla. Baron was born in New York in 1803 and moved to Key West in the 1850s. He was a Monroe County judge in addition to his duties as collector of customs at Key West.

*Continued on page 13*



# HOLLYWOOD PROVISIONAL

By Deane R. Briggs, M.D.



***HOLLYWOOD, FLORIDA magenta straight-line “Provisional” postmark on circa 1922 cover to Ohio.***

**T**he above cover has provisional straight-line Hollywood, Florida postmark which ties #499 on cover to Ohio. Although the postmark does not have a date, this adhesive stamp was issued in 1917 and the next two-cent red regular issue stamp #549 was issued in December 1920. The Hollywood Post Office was established on October 11, 1922 in Broward County with Paul R. John as postmaster. The stamp on this cover must have been purchased earlier than the Hollywood Post Office opening and used shortly after October 1922. Since the Hollywood postmaster did not have a 4-bar, duplex or machine cancelling device available, this can be considered a “provisional” postmark.



# Contract Steamship Mail Between Cuba and Apalachicola via Savannah

By Yamil H. Kouri, M.D.

In 1847, the U.S. Post Office Department created the new category of “steamship” mail for correspondence carried on board ocean-going ships contracted by the Post Office to carry mail. This was done in order to distinguish this new type of mail from the ordinary “ship” mail transported by vessels not receiving a Post



*Steamship letter from Manzanillo, Cuba, via Havana and Savannah to Apalachicola, Florida.*

Office subsidy that simply dropped off the loose letters they carried at the port of arrival. In order to recover some of the expense incurred by the U.S. Post Office in these contracts, it charged substantially higher rates for “steamship” mail than for “ship” mail. These distinctions applied both to incoming and outgoing mail, although the U.S. Post Office rarely handled outgoing “ship”

mail, which was often taken directly to the ships. The vast majority of "ship" letters were unpaid and originated in foreign countries. Outgoing "steamship" mail had to be prepaid, otherwise the U.S. Post Office had no way to collect payment in foreign lands. The first "steamship" letters were not received until October 1848, when the new contract steamship *Isabel* started traveling between Charleston and Havana, with stops in Savannah and Key West.

Prior to the U.S. Civil War, contract "steamship" mail to or from Florida is quite rare. Even though the steamship *Isabel* made stops in Key West, it appears that its mail bags were dropped off and handled mainly at Charleston, sometimes in Savannah, rarely at New York, but never in Florida. I recently came across the unusual cover shown above. It originated in the southeastern Cuban town of Manzanillo, where it was posted on February 7, 1857. It was sent prepaid with a real stamp to Havana, and from there it was carried by the steamer *Isabel* that was scheduled to leave the Cuban capital on its way to Charleston on February 25. The mail bag from this trip of the *Isabel* was handled at Savannah on February 28. The Savannah Post Office applied its cds, the small straight line marking "HAVANA." and a "10" inside a double circle, all in black ink. After July 1, 1851, the single-weight incoming "steamship" letter rate was 10 cents. The real stamp paid the Cuban inland fee but the American steamship rate had to be paid by the addressee. The contract "steamship" mail rate from Cuba was a flat fee, no U.S. inland charges were added. This letter, without contents, was likely carried by overland mail from Savannah to Apalachicola.

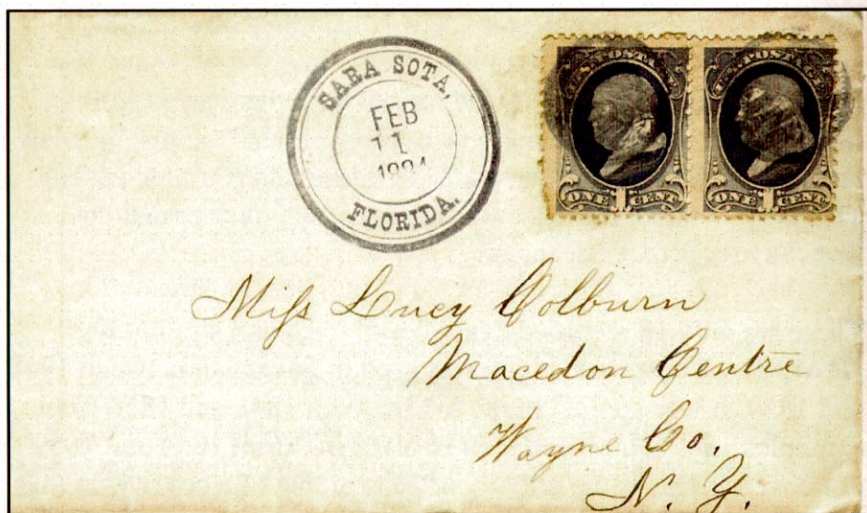
There are only 18 recorded examples of the small straight line "HAVANA." postmark which was used in Savannah between 1848 and 1859. It was applied in red ink between 1848 and 1850 (four examples), and it has been seen in black ink from 1854 and 1859 (14 covers). This is the only reported example of a cover with this marking to Florida, and there is only one other known use to another southern town (Augusta, Georgia). If any of our readers are aware of other examples of pre-Civil War "steamship" mail to Florida, I would like to hear from them.



# Assassination of the Sarasota Postmaster

By Jack Harwood

**T**he postal history of Sarasota is relatively brief when compared to other Florida communities. But it may be among the most interesting. The first post office opened in 1878, with Charles Abbe as postmaster. He had moved to the area from the Midwest in 1877, and built a home on a high point overlooking Sara Sota Bay. He opened a small store in his home, and his application for a post office was approved in 1878. The settlement originally known as Helena was renamed Sara Sota, after the historic name of the bay.



**Figure 1: Blue SARA SOTA / FLORIDA FEB 11 1884  
triple circle postmark with cork cancels  
tying pair of one-cent #206.**



In 1882, the State of Florida, badly in need of cash, began to sell land to ranchers and speculators, often for as little as 25¢ per acre. This caused friction in the Sara Sota area because farmers had worked much of the state-owned land for years. Two rival factions developed as ranchers and land speculators evicted farmers from land the farmers believed they owned.

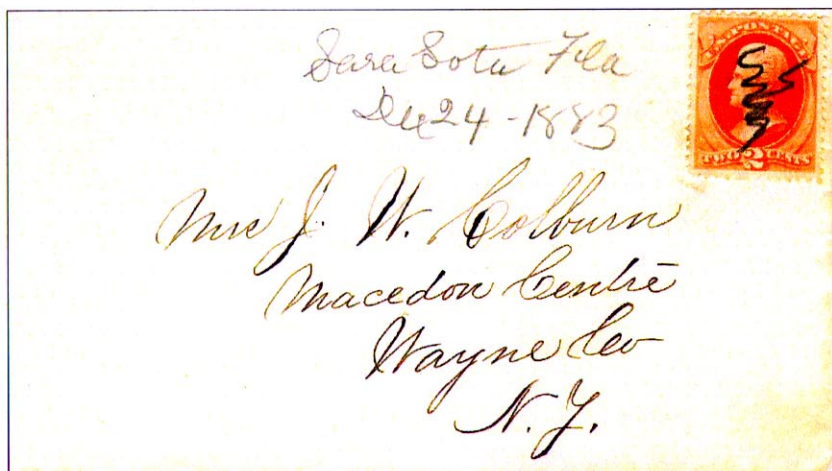
In 1884, a group of farmers formed the Sara Sota Vigilance Committee to help protect their interests. The organization officially convened as a Democratic Club, as 1884 was an election year. It included a variety of homesteaders, several prominent citizens sympathetic to the "squatters," and a few reputed thugs. The leader of the group was reported to be Jason Alford, who owned a large block of land and was considered one of the settlement's most prominent citizens. He was also known to despise the ranchers and land-grabbers, who, he believed, were victimizing the homesteaders.

Charles Abbe was active in Republican politics in an area where 75% of the voters were Democrats. He had purchased 300 acres of land overlooking the bay, land which he had planted with citrus and pineapples. And he had acquired enemies. Some resented his northern "enterprising nature," and others thought he was politically allied with the hated land speculators. Whatever the case, the area seethed with bitterness which soon led to violence.

On December 27, 1884, Charles Abbe was shot and killed as he painted a boat alongside a road to the beach. A friend visiting for the Christmas holidays witnessed the murder. Within a week, the sheriff arrested 20 "vigilantes." The following March, a grand jury indicted four for murder and five others as accessories before the fact.

The trial took place in May 1885, in Pine Level, the Manatee County seat, with Judge Henry L. Mitchell presiding (he would be elected governor of Florida in 1892). Manatee County was a largely undeveloped area stretching from Tampa Bay to Charlotte

Harbor, from the Gulf of Mexico to Lake Okeechobee, an area larger than the State of Connecticut. Pine Level was centrally located in the county, but not easy to reach. The nearest railroad was 50 miles away, so travel from Sara Sota usually included a night's encampment. Yet the trial generated national attention. The *New York Times* reported that the Sara Sota Assassination Society, as they called it, "...is supposed to exist for the purpose of the



**Figure 2: "Sara Sota Fla Dec 24, 1883"  
manuscript postmark with 2 cent #183 on cover  
from same correspondence.**

secret murder of political opponents." One wag described the courtroom floor as "one part sawdust and two parts fleas."

Altogether, eight vigilantes stood trial for the murder of Charles Abbe and another earlier victim. Three were sentenced to die by hanging, four others, including Jason Alford, were given life sentences. One was acquitted, and three vigilantes had turned state's evidence.

Two of those sentenced to die escaped by cutting through the roof of the jail, and were never recaptured. The third death sentence was eventually commuted. Those imprisoned served their time in a



turpentine labor camp near Live Oak, and by 1892, all had been released.

The motive for the killing was never made clear. But trial testimony offered some insight. Charles Abbe had often assisted homesteaders in measuring their property to help prove their homestead claims. Because he was a postmaster, many assumed he was a government agent. He was accused of “illegal activity” because measuring homesteads was not part of a postmaster’s duties. He was said to have spied and eavesdropped, crawling under houses to take notes of visitor’s conversations. He was a known “informer.”

Following Charles Abbe’s death, his wife assumed the position of postmaster of Sara Sota. On May 19, 1887, Manatee County was divided into what became smaller counties. Sara Sota became Sarasota, in Sarasota County, and a historical marker now stands at the location of the original post office. Pine Level, which found itself in the newly formed Desoto County, lost its county seat designation to Arcadia, and fell into decline and became a ghost town. It is now a farm field, with only a small cemetery remaining as an indication of its glory days as home of the trial of the Sara Sota Assassination Society.

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## ***Florida Official Stamps & Covers***

### ***Continued from page 6***

I was assisted with the descriptions of these cover from research by Alan Campbell, a California architect, and the foremost researcher, analyst, and author in the official field. He is also a great guy and good friend who is always ready to help. As both of these covers have enclosures with contents trying to collect taxes, Alan closed his letter to me by stating how invigorating it was to see tax collectors at work. This author and others in the “Official” field would appreciate information on Florida covers used officially, especially with official stamps.



# TARPON SPRINGS PROVISIONAL POSTMARK

By William Johnson, D.D.S.



**Figure 1: Tarpon Springs**

**Fla Jan 26/84 manuscript postmark with pen cancelled #210 on Mark's Hotel corner card cover to E. A. Hunting in Boston.**

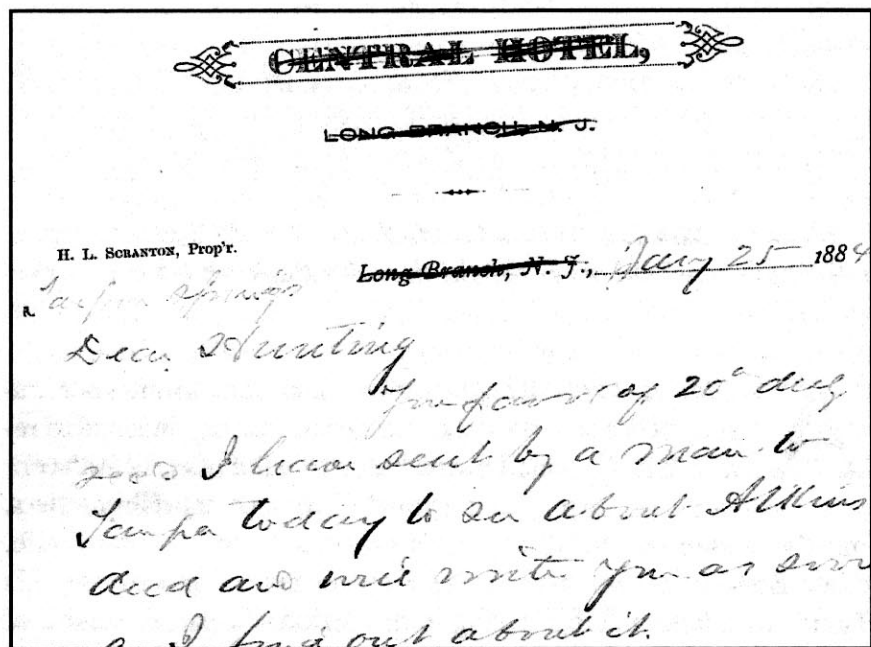
The above cover represents perhaps the earliest postmark from the town of Tarpon Springs, Florida. The post office had been established less than three months earlier on November 7, 1883, with Edward A. Blum as postmaster. As such it can be called a provisional postmark before a handstamp device was available.

Settlers began to enter this area of Florida in the mid 1860s, but nothing of interest happened until 1881, when Hamilton Disston, a wealthy saw manufacturer from Philadelphia purchased four million acres for 25¢ per acre from the "Florida Internal Improvement Fund." About 20,000 acres of this purchase are now located

in Pinellas, Pasco and Hillsborough counties.

The writer of the enclosed letter, (see Figure 2), Anson P. K. Safford, was brought in to Florida to manage Disston Enterprises, a land development company. Safford had already made a name for himself as Surveyor General of Nevada and in 1869 was appointed Territorial Governor of the Arizona Territory. He became one of Tarpon Springs' founding fathers, and donated land for schools and churches in the area. The enclosure, dated January 25, 1884, refers to a transaction with which Safford was disappointed. He does mention at the end of the letter that "I wish you could visit us this winter. We are making a great deal of improvements and this place is flourishing."

Although the post office at Tarpon Springs was opened in 1883, the town was not incorporated until February 12, 1887 at which time it had a population of about 300 inhabitants.



**Figure 2: Enclosure datelined Tarpon Springs, Jan'y 25, 1884.**



# Central Florida Correspondence Letters from 1903-1905 DPOs

By Deane R. Briggs, M.D.



***Figure 1: MIDLAND / FLA. MAY 13 1904 EKU Doane type II(1) postmark on cover to Whittier with Peghorn transit mark.***

A medical doctor friend of mine, Dr. Gary Montsdoca, recently lent me a 100-year-old family correspondence to review. What I found was a fabulous wealth of early 20th century Florida postal history and a lovely series of courtship letters, mostly written by Dr. Montsdoca's grandfather to his future wife, Alice Bass. Julian Montsdoca was a descendent of an early Florida family with land holdings dating to the period of Spanish control of Florida. There is a Spanish land grant covering several sections of land along the Kissimmee River near present day Lorida which the family maintains as a cattle ranch, very much like grandfather Julian did.



The correspondence consists of 41 covers and courtship letters dating from March 25, 1903, to November 2, 1905, and ending with a single birth announcement letter of May 17, 1911. At the conclusion of this article, I will summarize all letters as to dateline, postmark, destination and routing markings which reflect the many small and now discontinued post offices along the way.

Julian Montsdoca was a young cattle drover, moving cattle which he owned or which were associated with the Consolidated Land Company. The cattle were moved across the Central Florida flatlands, east of the "ridge" and across the Kissimmee River flood plains following the plentiful "free range" grasslands. This was well before the "fence laws" allowed fencing of property and eliminated mass movement of cattle across central Florida. Places he stopped for the night were often just "hammocks" many miles from the nearest post office. His letters were almost all written at these camps: "Grape Hammock" or "Turkey Hammock." One letter written from Midland relates that he is at home for the first time in three months. Apparently, his home base was located in 1904 at Midland, in Polk County near present day Lake Buffum. Other letters written from "Grape Hammock" were postmarked often a day or two later from Midland or Kissimmee. These letters were occasionally given to other drovers to take to the nearest post office, often with Kissimmee postmarks, it being a good 40 miles from Midland. Later letters datelined from "Turkey Hammock" were postmarked from Kissimmee or Whittier in Osceola County, with several hand-carried from "Turkey Hammock" to Alice Bass who lived in Whittier. It appears that "Grape Hammock" must have been located somewhere east of Lake Wales in Polk County, near the present day Kissimmee River, and "Turkey Hammock" must have been located in Osceola County, between the towns of Kissimmee and Whittier.

One interesting letter to Alice Bass in Whittier was datelined Lanier and postmarked at Lanier on March 25, 1903. The distance between Lanier and Whittier was no more than 10 miles and when the Lanier Post Office was discontinued in 1914, mail continued to be handled at the Whittier Post Office. The reverse of this cover shows a very



**Figure 2: LANIER / FLA. MAR 25 1903 postmark  
on cover to Whittier, Florida.**

lengthy circuitous route for the 10 miles (Figure 2). Route marks show a March 25 unclear post office, Eau Gallie on March 26, Bovine on March 26, and a Kissimmee 9PM March 26 Rec'd mark, followed by Peghorn on March 27 and finally a receiving mark for Whittier on March 28, 1903. This cover took three days and two counties with six post offices to go 10 miles.



**Figure 3: Reverse of above cover showing route  
and receiving marks.**



Julian Montsdoca was married to Alice Bass in 1905, and moved to Kicco, a small steamboat landing on the-then meandering Kissimmee River in eastern Polk County. The only means of travel was by steamboat or primitive dirt trails. One cover (*Figure 4*) from Alice to Julian was addressed to him at Kissimmee care of Captain (Clay) Johnson who piloted the *Osceola* down the Kissimmee River with a stop at Kicco. They were friends and Julian was likely staying at the Johnson home on Lake Tohopeka. Of interest, over 40 years later, Captain



**Figure 4: WHITTIER / FLA 9 SEP 1905 postmark on cover to Julian Montsdoca in Kissimmee c/o Capt. Johnson.**

Johnson assisted Julian in a legal action against the government over land rights following the straightening of the Kissimmee River. He succeeded in obtaining several more sections of good cattle land which were previously wetlands. Julian worked for the Kissimmee Island Cattle Co. (Kicco) as a cattle manager. When the Kissimmee River was “straightened” and dammed by the U.S. Corps of Engineers in the 1920s, steamboats were no longer able to go between Kissimmee and Ft. Myers and towns along the river soon died. The post office at Kicco was discontinued on April 30, 1927, with mail handled at the nearest post office, Sumica, many miles away. That office closed a month later on June 30, 1927, with no nearby post office. Both these



towns just died and are now only “ghost towns.”

Several years ago, I visited the Sumica site, a true “Ghost Town,” which was several miles from the nearest road and required leather leggings to protect one from rattlesnake bites while walking through several miles of barren palmetto scrub land with a few remaining pine trees. Once there, I found only a few shards of pottery (*Figure 5*) used to collect pine sap for turpentine, some remains of cast iron stoves and foundations of previous homes and a large turpentine processing site, all located in a peaceful oak hammock. There was evidence of a prior railroad bed with crushed rock right of way elevated



***Figure 5: Pottery shards of pots used to collect pine sap at Sumica.***

a few feet above the surrounding land. Portions of old telegraph line posts sticking eight feet out of the ground could be seen next to the railroad bed along with bits of coal used in the steam engines. Within the last few years, Polk County has preserved the site with a graded access for hikers and a parking area along Highway 60 between Lake Wales and Yee Haw Junction, but unfortunately many of the artifacts at the site have been long removed or vandalized.

Julian and Alice then moved to a ranch at Fort Kissimmee, located on the Kissimmee River about 15 miles east of Avon Park. He raised cattle there until the government again entered his life and confiscated his land in 1940 for use as the Avon Park Bombing Range. The land even today is closed to the public except for occasional hunters.

After leaving Fort Kissimmee, Julian moved to Highlands County and settled on several sections of land at Bluff Hammock, a prior

steamboat landing on the west side of the Kissimmee River near present day Lorida, Florida. This is the ranch still run by the family.

A review of the postmarks and transit and receiving marks on the covers in this correspondence reveals a new Doane listing for Midland and the only postmarks I have seen from Lanier and Whittier. Transit markings for Bovine, in Brevard County, and Peghorn and Narcoosee in Osceola County, are new markings. Two of the covers have no postmark but have datelines from Lanier in Osceola County. A summary of these D.P.O. towns with post office dates of service follows:

**Bovine, Brevard Co., 9 Jul 1894 – 14 May 1904, to Eau Gallie**

**Kicco, Polk Co., 8 Jan 1918 – 30 April 1927, to Sumica**

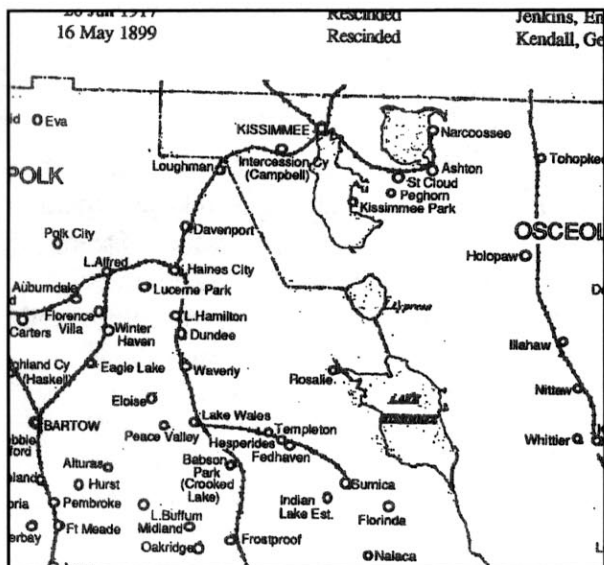
**Lanier, Osceola Co., 16 May 1899 – 31 July 1914, to Whittier**

**Midland, Polk Co., 28 April 1887 – 15 June 1907, to Lk. Buffum**

**Narcoosee, Osceola Co., 20 Nov 1887 – 15 Feb 1955, to St. Cloud**

**Peghorn, Osceola Co., 12 Dec 1899 – 15 March 1911, discount'd**

**Sumica, Polk Co.,** 19 March 1919 – 30 June 1927, discontinued  
**Whittier, Osceola Co.,** 7 June 1892 – 30 Oct 1915, to Kenansville



***Figure 6: Map of Polk and Osceola counties showing post offices.***



# PRESIDENT'S NOTES

## *Continued from page 4*

Punta Gorda as well as other early documents regarding this remarkable man's career. Don is one of our newer members and has a wealth of historical knowledge.

It was decided to have two meetings annually, one at FLOREX in Orlando the first weekend of December, and one at Sarasota, the first weekend of February. The annual meeting for 2009 will be held at FLOREX to coincide with the Confederate Stamp Alliance annual meeting that year with Deane Briggs and President-elect Steve Patrick organizing meetings, presentations and a dinner. Installation of officers for 2009-2010 will be made at that time. Any FPHS members who have an interest in Confederate philately are encouraged to join the Confederate Stamp Alliance. Membership applications can be obtained on the CSA web site or from Deane Briggs.

Articles are always needed for our journal and member Daniel Curtis submitted a nice one on Official Stamps which is featured on the cover of this issue. Members Yamil Kouri, Jack Harwood, William Johnson, and Deane Briggs have also added articles for this, our inaugural full color journal issue.

Anyone affiliated with the Florida Federation of Stamp Clubs or interested in helping get Florida stamp clubs or county historical societies to join our society should contact the Secretary, Deane Briggs at [drb@gte.net](mailto:drb@gte.net) or phone (863) 299-1251. Additional club memberships would help offset costs of the new color journal and encourage more club news and stamp show and bourse news.

## FLORIDA POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS - 2008

The following members of the Florida Postal History Society have been denoted as “**Contributing Members**” for their additional contribution to the Society. The support of these members keeps our Society fiscally sound and enables us to respond to member and non-member inquiries regarding Florida postal history and send sample copies of our *Journal*.

----

Albert Aldham  
Hector Arvelo  
Donald Ball  
Wade H. Beery  
John J. Beirne  
Richard F. Bergmann  
Deane R. Briggs, M.D.  
Conrad L. Bush  
Walter S. Clarke  
Daniel B. Curtis  
James L. Diamond  
James P. Doolin  
Harry G. Dow  
Gus Dueben  
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