

Florida “Fumigated” cover census

During the 1888 Yellow Fever Epidemic in Florida, Jacksonville became a hot spot after R. McCormick arrived there on July 28, 1888, after visiting Tampa and Plant City. Within a few days other citizens developed Yellow Fever and the city and the Florida border was locked down and no mail or persons could leave the state.

The Surgeon General of the United States eventually allowed mail to leave after fumigation railroad stations were set up on sidings where box cars could fumigate mail with burning sulfur. A station Waycross, Georgia became operational on August 13, 1888, followed on August 20, 1888, by ones at Flomanton, Alabama for mail going west and at La Villa Junction (just outside of Jacksonville) for mail within Florida. Mail in the box cars was placed on screen racks and perforated with nail imbedded mallets to allow the sulfur fumes to penetrate and disinfect the contents.

Fumigation ended on December 17, 1888, after cold weather developed in north Florida and the yellow fever epidemic declared over. Thus, any letter mailed from Florida between August 13 and December 16, 1888, should be a “fumigated” cover with rows of puncture marking and often a brownish stain on the cover and punctures. The Waycross, GA station processed over 3,000,000 pieces of mail during this fumigation period and Jacksonville alone had over 4,700 cases of yellow fever (1/3 of the city population) with over 500 deaths.

Todd Hirn has been maintaining this census which currently has 69 confirmed examples, one likely fake, and four from the 1899 Key West yellow fever epidemic. Please contact him with any new examples at thirn@cfl.rr.com.