

## Stamp-ing Around, by J.R. Greene Athol Daily News, May 4 & 10, 1977

This week a two part survey will begin on Lysander Spooner, the postal service he founded, and the [stamps](#) it produced. While Spooner is best known for his writings on civil liberty, the postal service run by this Athol native should be of some interest to the readers of this column.

Lysander Spooner was born on a farm off Petersham road in Athol in 1808, and spent the first 25 years of his life in this town. He moved to Worcester in 1833, and later to Boston. Spooner became a lawyer, and from this stemmed his interest in the legality of government interference in business and the economy. One of the most hated symbols of government to Spooner was the postal department with its high rates and inefficiency.

Arguing that while the Constitution stated that Congress could "carry the mail," this did not prevent others from doing so, Spooner started the American Letter Mail Company in 1844. Initially, the service ran between Boston and New York, but it was later extended to Philadelphia and Baltimore. The fee for delivering a letter between any of these points was five cents. The government rate between Boston and New York was 18 3/4 cents!

Although this was not the first private mail service, it was the first interstate one, thus bringing the wrath of congress upon Spooner. The immediate success of the new service brought a number from the government. Threats of a jail sentence caused Spooner to reluctantly fold up his business after only a few months, but he made his point.

While the American Letter Company lasted, it issued two stamps, with two varieties of each. Both of these stamps pictured the bald eagle, and both were without perforations, as the latter did not appear until a dozen years later. (Continued next column)

May 10, 1977

Last week a brief survey of the American Letter Mail Co. was featured in this column. This private service was operated by Athol native Lysander Spooner in 1844. Spooner issued two stamps during the life of the service, both for five cents. The designs of the stamps will be discussed this week.

The first variety was an imperforate stamp with a square frame enclosing a circular vignette. An eagle about to take off is the central scene of the stamp. The company name was at the top of the stamp, while "20 for a dollar" was inscribed at the bottom. The color was black, and both thick and thin paper were used, creating two major varieties.

Spooner's second stamp was somewhat simpler in design, having no denomination printed on it. A different eagle, resembling those appearing on silver coinage of the day, was surrounded by a circular frame in a square. The company was split between the top and bottom of the circular frame. Blue and black printings were made on gray paper.

Many unsold remainders of the stamps apparently were saved after the suppression of the post because one variety lists for as little as \$2 in that condition. As with most local stamps, they are worth the most when on a genuinely used cover. Whatever their monetary value may be these stamps represent Athol's greatest contribution to philately.