

# Dakota Collector

A Research Journal of North and South Dakota Postal History

Published by the Dakota Postal History Society  
Vol XXIII Number II  
April 2006



Fort Rice, Dak.. With "Steamer Waverly MO. Packet" Handstamp

## EDITORIAL COMMENTS: FROM THE PRESIDENT

This issue contains an article I have envisioned for many years, worked on for about six months (on and off), and finally completed in the past weeks....on the subject of the steamboat postal history of Dakota Territory. I would like to thank Mike Ellingson for his support in editing the article and writing most of the Red River section. Floyd Risvold is also to be recognized for his contribution of a significant number of copies of covers used throughout the article. I hope you all enjoy it!

I would also like to direct our membership to an advertisement in this issue from the Western Cover Society. The WCS has scanned in all 55 years of their publication *Western Express* in text searchable PDF format and put them all onto one DVD. The power of this format is incredible. One can easily search on any topic, just as you would do electronically on the internet (without a million hits, though). Searching on "Dakota", for example, yields information on the expresses that operated in/out of Dakota, as well as several articles through the years on different facets of Dakota postal history. I highly recommend the DVD!

Best of collecting!

*Ken Stach*

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## FROM THE SECRETARY

In this issue we have a fine article by Ken Stach with input from Mike Ellingson on "The Steamboat Postal History of Dakota Territory". In the next Issue I hope to publish the Winner of the Gordon Twedt Memorial award for 2005. Remember we are still having the Gordon Twedt Memorial Award Contest. See Page 27 for details. We only had one member submit any articles for the contest last year. Let's try and do better this year. We welcome all articles that are related to North or South Dakota Postal history of any era. Postal History of an era can be interesting.

In the next issue I also hope to publish the financial statement of the Society. Next time will also be dues time and you will get a renewal notice if your renewal for your membership is due.

We will not be having a yearly meeting of the Society this year. The South Dakota State Show is in Rapid City this year and that is just too far out of the way for most of our membership including myself. The only North Dakota show of any size that I know of is in Fargo in January so that is passed already. If anyone can direct me to a listing or send me a listing of all the coin and stamp shows in North and South Dakota I would appreciate it. If I can get this far enough ahead we can plan our meeting for next year.

Happy Collecting!

*Gary Anderson*

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# Dakota Collector

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**NOTE: Cancels and covers pictured may not be actual size! Contributors articles are the opinion of the contributor and may or may not be the opinion of the editor and officers of this organization.**

A special **THANKS** to all the contributors.  
Published Quarterly Cover page is now page 1  
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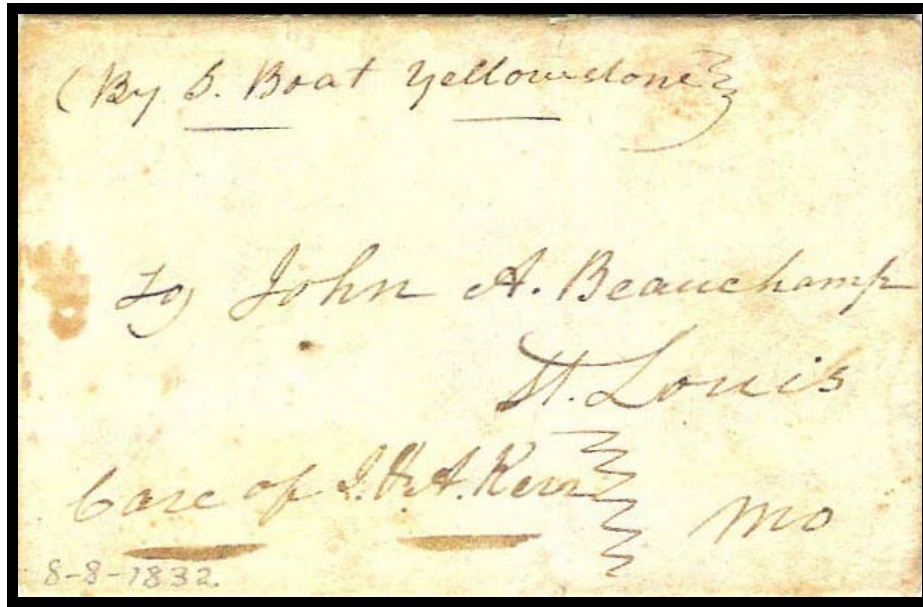
## **The Steamboat Postal History of Dakota Territory**

*By Ken Stach, with input from Mike Ellingson*

If the Missouri River was the first true highway in the exploration and settlement of Dakota Territory, then the steamboat was its first automobile. The steamboat played an integral role in developing the early fur trade of the region, in bringing much-needed supplies to the early trappers, settlers, explorers, farmers, miners, and soldiers attempting to tame the wild frontier, and, likewise, in transporting their goods to market. The steamboat was also a primary means of early mail pick up and delivery. The intent of this article is to illustrate the link between the steamboat and the early mail systems of Dakota Territory, as told by the surviving related covers.

The so-called Yellowstone Expedition of 1819-20 attempted to use five contract steamboats in their exploration of the upper Missouri River. However, only three of those steamboats were actually able to enter the mighty Missouri. And, all the boats had to return to St. Louis in the spring of 1819, of which only two were able to make it as far north as Leavenworth, Kansas <sup>(1)</sup>. This early failure demonstrated the obstacles the Missouri River presented when it came to steamboat traffic.

The first steamboat to successfully navigate the treacherous waters of the Missouri River into Dakota Territory (then an unorganized territory) was the *Yellowstone* in 1831, which was able to make its way to the present site of Fort Pierre (then Fort Tecumseh). In 1832, the same steamer was able to make its way as far north as the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers <sup>(2)</sup>. Figure 1 illustrates a cover carried "by S. Boat Yellowstone" written on Aug 8, 1832, probably in the vicinity of Bellevue (Nebraska). The enclosed letter was written by R. P. Beauchamp, who was a sub-agent at the Upper Missouri Indian Agency at Bellevue. Beauchamp died of cholera only a year after this was written, in August 1833 <sup>(6)</sup>.



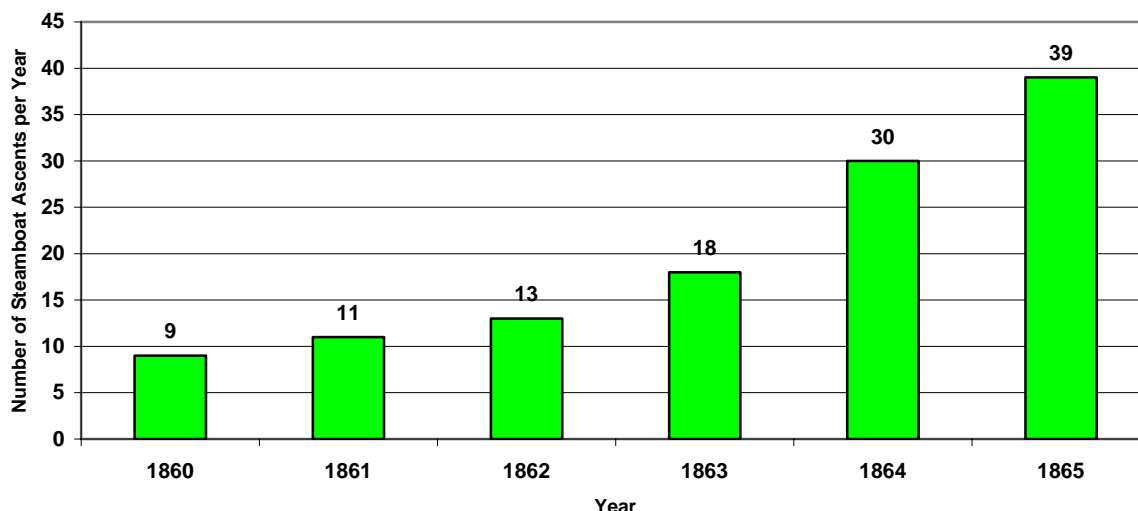
**Figure 1.** “By S. Boat Yellowstone” 8 August 1832 cover addressed to St. Louis. The *Yellowstone* was built for the American Fur Company at Louisville, KY in 1831. It was 130 feet long by 19 feet wide with a 6 foot hold and a register of 144 tons. On Mar 26, 1832, she left Saint Louis, MO and arrived at Fort Union (later in Montana) about June 17, and was back in Saint Louis on July 7. This voyage has been called a landmark in the history of the west because it proved that steamboats could navigate the Missouri River all the way up to the mouth of the Yellowstone (Fort Union) <sup>(6)</sup>. This cover was obviously carried on the second trip taken during the summer of 1832 by the *Yellowstone*.

The earliest steamboats on the Missouri River were the so-called ‘side wheelers’, which had large wheels on either side of the boat as the name would imply. On the circumference of these wheels were paddles that provided the driving force to propel the boat through the water. These side wheelers proved impractical on the narrow, winding, and ever-changing channel of the Missouri River and were soon replaced with the ‘stern wheeler’ vessels. These latter boats had but one paddle wheel, mounted at the rear. The narrower overall design of the boat made it more manageable on the tricky Missouri River.

The author refers the readers to references (2) and (5) for further information on the history and development of steamboat traffic in Dakota Territory. The subject is simply too lengthy and involved to reiterate here in an article aimed primarily at postal history. Suffice it to say that steamboat traffic grew rapidly as the staffing of frontier outposts by the military began in the 1860’s, and further in the 1870’s and 1880’s as settlers and miners swarmed into the region by the tens of thousands.

Moses K. Armstrong’s *History and Resources of Dakota, Montana and Idaho* (1866) gives a numerical account of the rapid growth of steamboat traffic into Dakota Territory “since the opening of navigation in 1860” up through 1865 <sup>(3)</sup> as shown in Figure 2.

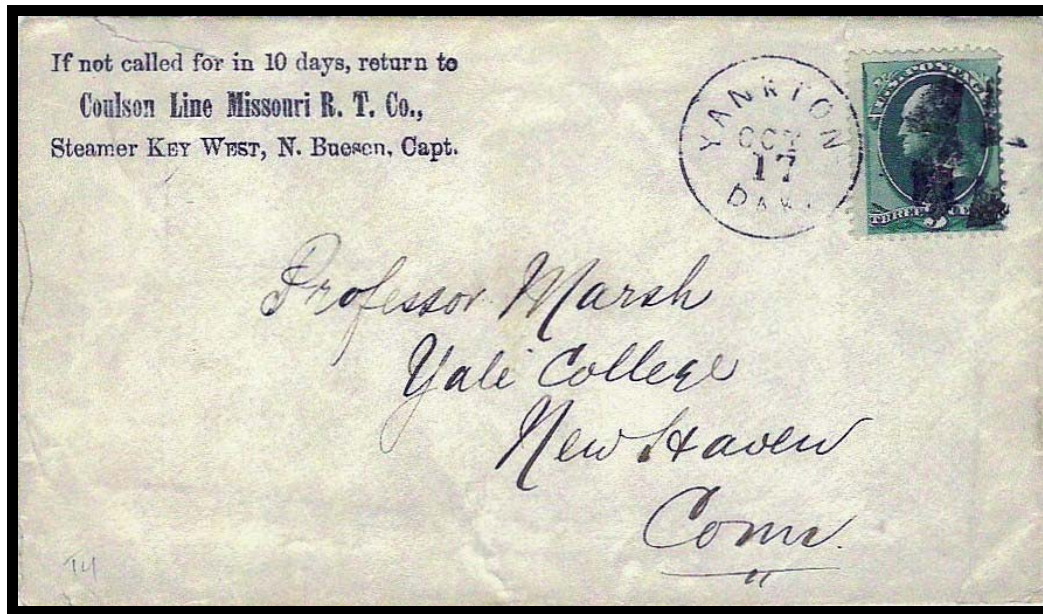
**Number of Steamboat Ascents on the Missouri River through Dakota**



**Figure 2.** The steamboat traffic on the Missouri River grew very rapidly in the 1860's, primarily in response to military and commercial demands.

**The Missouri River - Coulson Line and the Steamer *Far West***

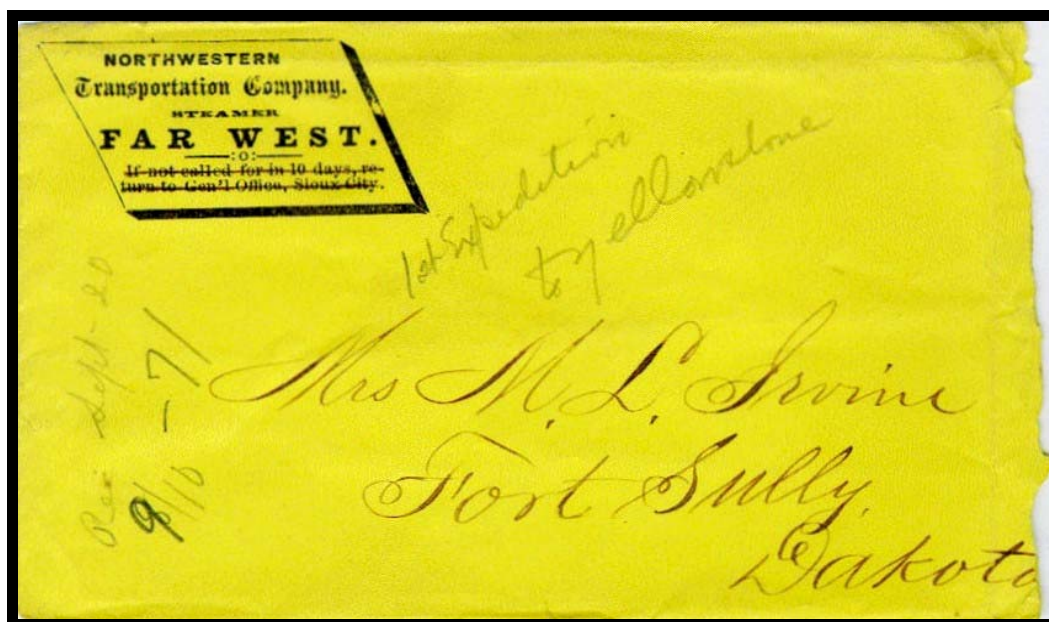
One of the better known of all the steamboat companies and certainly the most important to Yankton and vicinity, was the Coulson Line. Sanford B. Coulson was appointed shoreman to handle the land end of the steamboat business which had been developed by W. S. Evans, D. S. H. Gilmore, and Coulson. It is no coincidence that this very successful transportation company was also the owner of the steamer *Far West*, which was commissioned in 1870. The Coulson Packet Company was formed in 1871 by consolidation of several steamboat businesses above Sioux City on the Missouri River. Coulson was involved with other legal entities as the company transformed in the coming years, including the Missouri River Transportation Company <sup>(2)</sup>. Figure 3 shows an example of a cover with a Coulson Line corner card.



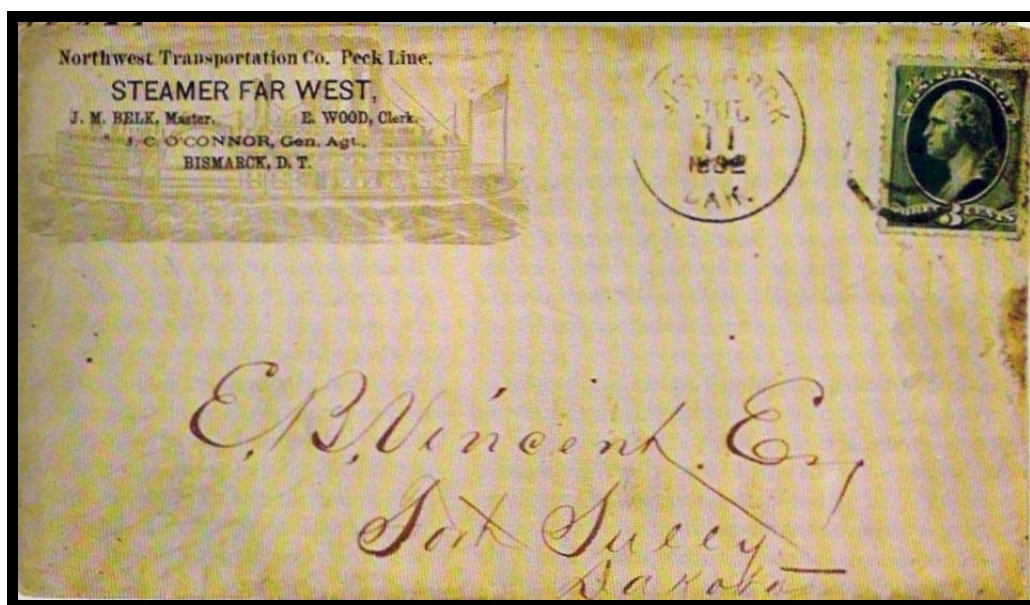
**Figure 3.** “Yankton Dak. Oct 17” cover from circa 1875 with corner card of the “Coulson Line Missouri R.T. Co, Steamer *Key West*, N. Buesen, Capt.” (the “R.T.” most likely stands for River Transportation)<sup>(6)</sup>. Buesen was actually the pilot under Grant Marsh, who captained the *Key West* down the Yellowstone River following the Custer massacre. The addressee, Professor Marsh (no relation to Captain Marsh), was the head of paleontology at Yale.

Perhaps the most well-known of all Dakota-related steamboats was the *Far West*. The *Far West* was a stern-wheeler 190' long by 20' wide by 6' deep and could carry 200 tons and 30 passengers. It was launched in 1870 in Pittsburg, PA and destroyed Aug 30, 1883 seven miles below St. Charles, MO on a snag<sup>(4)</sup>. It was aboard this vessel in the summer of 1876 that the survivors of the battle of the Little Big Horn were transported to Fort Abraham Lincoln, a distance of 920 miles, in a mere 54 hours<sup>(2)</sup>. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate covers carried by the steamer *Far West*.



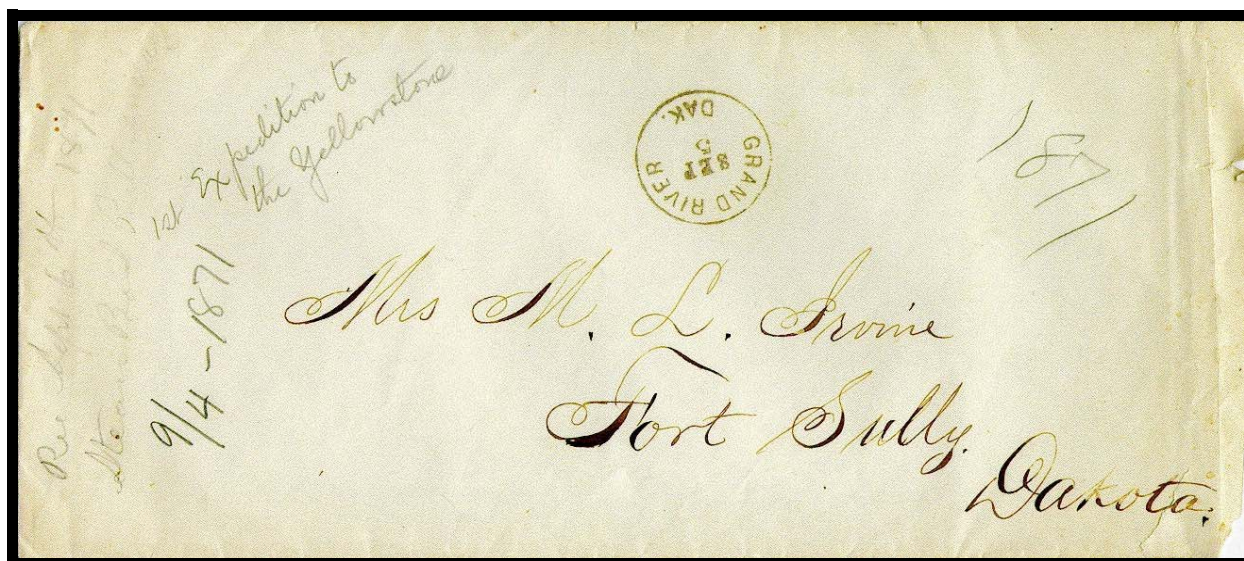


**Figure 4.** “Northwestern Transportation Company, Steamer Far West” corner card on cover used in September, 1871 to a soldier’s wife at Fort Sully, Dakota. This cover is part of the Lt. Javan B. Irvine correspondence with the pencil notation “1<sup>st</sup> expedition to Yellowstone”. This was Irvine’s first trip to the Yellowstone and obviously not the first overall expedition by any military or explorers into that region. The cover did not enter the US Mails; rather, it was carried privately on board the steamer *Far West* from the Upper Missouri River down river to Irvine’s wife at Fort Sully, Dakota.

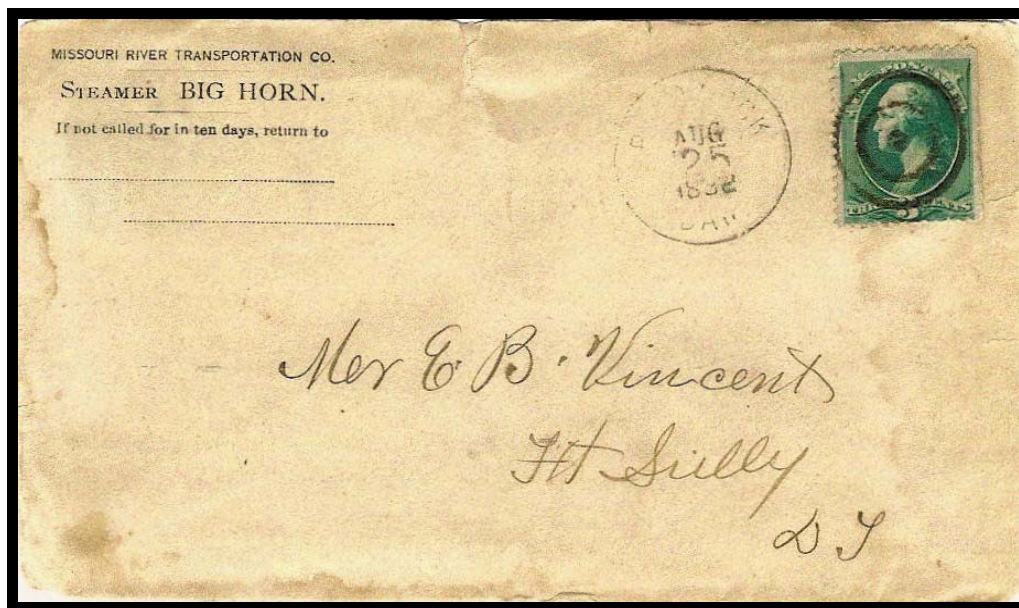


**Figure 5.** Northwest Transportation Co. Peck Line. Steamer *Far West* corner card on cover cancelled “Bismarck Dak. Jul 11, 1882”. A later example of a cover transported, at least in part, by the steamer *Far West* <sup>(6)</sup>. By 1882, the *Far West* was a part of the Peck Line and no longer with the Coulson Line of steamers





**Figure 6.** “Grand River, Dak. Sep 5” (1871). This cover is from the same correspondence as the one shown in Figure 4. However, rather than contain any markings for the steamer *Far West*, the pencil notation at the left indicates “*Rec Sept 6<sup>th</sup> 1871/Steamboat Billenclure*”. I can find no listing for a steamer so named. (Note that this legal size cover has been reduced in size to about 60% in order to fit on the page horizontally).

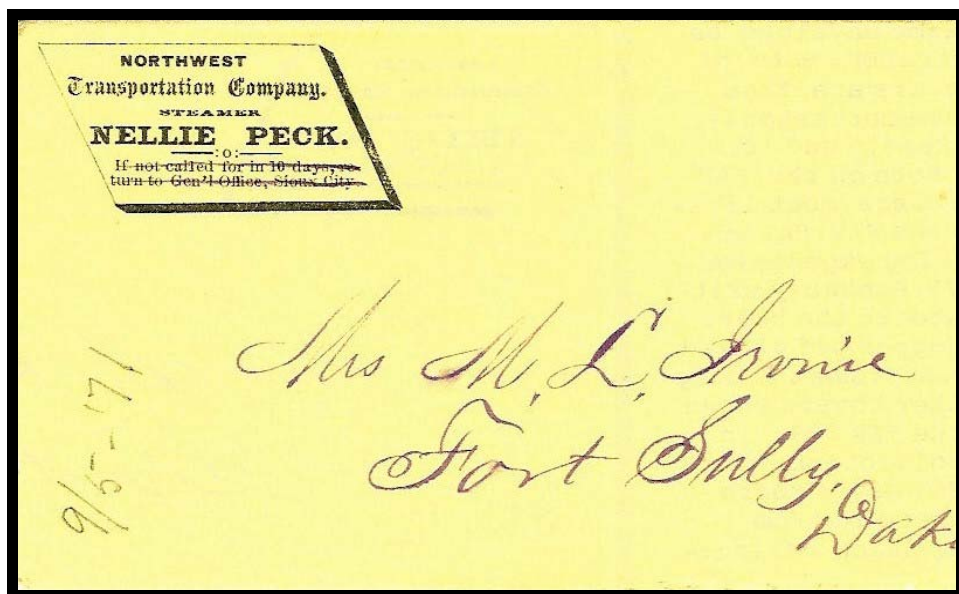


**Figure 7.** “Bismarck, Dak. Aug 25, 1882” postmark on cover with corner card of the Missouri River Transportation Co., Steamer *Big Horn*. Although not part of the Coulson Line, per se, the Missouri River Transportation Company was one of the many steamboat-related legal entities that Sanford B. Coulson was involved with through the years<sup>(2)</sup>. The *Big Horn* was a stern-wheeler owned and operated by the Missouri River Transportation Co. in the upper Missouri trade. It was the fourth steamboat to bear the name *Big Horn*. It was sunk on the Upper Missouri River, near the mouth of the Poplar River on May 8, 1883<sup>(6)</sup>.

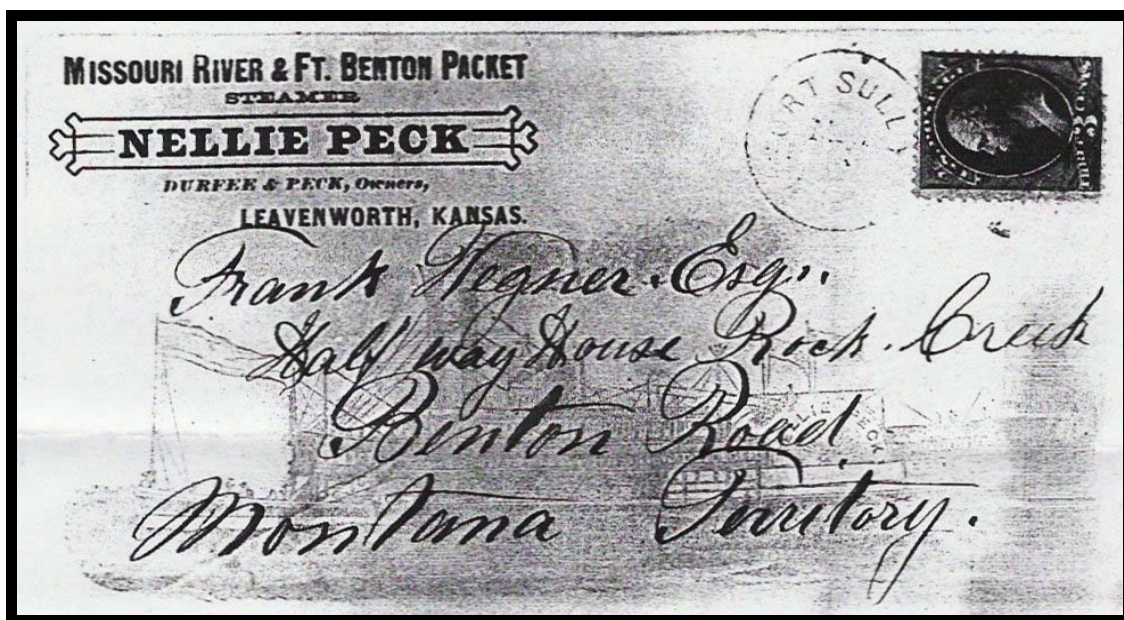
### **The Missouri River - Peck Line**

The Peck Line of Missouri River steamboats was formed when Messrs Durfee and Peck severed ties with the Coulson Packet Company and combined their assets with the Northwestern Transportation Company, which had started a line of boats based out of Sioux City in 1868. The Peck Line was headquartered out of Sioux City, although it was closely allied with Yankton interests and tended to treat the latter as a hub for operations. The Peck Line of boats prospered during the years of government contracts and Black Hills trade in the mid-1870s. By 1882, the line had begun to decline significantly, and by 1885 it was out of business<sup>(2)</sup>. The *Far West* was still in operation when the Peck Line was formed (see Figure 5). Other than the *Far West*, the *Nellie Peck* was perhaps the line’s most well-known vessel, having been commissioned in 1868, only fourteen years prior to the company’s demise. A few covers from the *Nellie Peck* are illustrated in Figures 8-10.





**Figure 8.** This Sep 5, 1871 cover did not enter the mails; rather it was delivered by the *Nellie Peck* to Mrs. Irvine (wife of Lt. Javan B. Irvine) at Fort Sully, Dakota on the Missouri River <sup>(6)</sup>. This cover is a companion to the *Far West* cover illustrated in Figure 4.



**Figure 9.** Cover cancelled “Fort Sully, Dak. May x” from the mid to late 1870’s <sup>(8)</sup>. The corner card cover for the “Missouri River & Ft. Benton Packet Steamer Nellie Peck” has an illustration of that steamboat on front.



**Figure 10.** This cover is very similar to the one shown in Figure 9. Close examination shows it is a different usage, although to the same addressee. The *Nellie Peck* was a stern wheeler of about 350 tons. In 1872 she ran a race with the *Far West* from Sioux City to Fort Benton and return, a round-trip of some 2800 miles, and lost by three hours <sup>(6)</sup>.

Reference 4 provides some good information on the *Nellie Peck* as a Missouri River steamboat. In summary, she was a stern-wheeled, wooden hulled packet, measuring 201.4 feet long by 35.2 feet wide by 4 feet deep. The vessel was launched in 1871 in Brownsville, PA with construction supervised by Captain Grant Marsh. The *Nellie Peck* made some 14 trips to Fort Benton, Montana in her career, the first of which was in 1872. It was also in 1872 that the *Nellie Peck* and *Far West*, at a time when they were owned by different steamboat companies, had a round-trip race to Fort Benton. It is no surprise that the *Far West* won that race, based on her incredible run a few years later, in 1876, from the Little Big Horn to Fort Abraham Lincoln with the survivors of the famous battle in which Custer met his demise.


### **The Missouri River - Benton Line**

The Sioux City and Northern Packet Company, known as the Benton Line, the Power Line, or the Benton Transportation Company, was organized in 1879. It was a combination of four transportation lines and proved to be formidable competition for the Coulson Line. The company did good business between Sioux City and Bismarck in the 1870's but gradually withdrew from business below Bismarck, as it concentrated on the Montana trade, where the Power family (one of the owner's of the line) was most concerned <sup>(2)</sup>. Figures 11 through 22 illustrate some postal history items related to the Benton Line.



\$ against losses of Missouri River Navigation, must effect their own Insurance.

No. 359 **BENTON LINE**  
(T. C. POWER & BRO., Proprietors.)  
— VIA —  
**Northern Pacific Railroad and Bismarck, D. T.,**  
TO ALL POINTS IN  
**Montana and British Northwest Territory.**



**CONTRACTING OFFICES:**

I. P. BAKER,  
Wharfboat, bet. Olive and Laeust Sts., ST. LOUIS.  
I. A. SMITH,  
303 Broadway, NEW YORK.  
A. H. PRIDE,  
CLARKSON, N. Y.

T. C. POWER & CO.,  
Helena, M. T.  
J. P. FARLEY,  
Butte, M. T.

G. G. SANBORN,  
Union Pk't Ag't, Northern Pacific R. R., ST. PAUL.  
H. WARFIELD,  
Gen'l. Freight and Transfer Ag't, CHICAGO.  
C. H. WAPRON,  
Gen'l. Freight and Transfer Ag't, ST. LOUIS.

*Chicago*  
To *St. Paul*  
Via *St. Paul*  
Received from *Brooks & Co.*  
the following packages, contents unknown, and apparent good order, dangers of river navigation accepted.

**CONTRACT RATES:**  
*Carload Rates*  
Charges Advanced, \$

**WEIGHTS SUBJECT TO CORRECTION**

1st. No liability will be assumed for wrong carriage or wrong delivery of goods that are marked with initials, numbered or imperfectly marked.  
2nd. No liability will be assumed for any losses that may occur in the transportation of Merchandise, etc., by the Missouri River from Vankton or Bismarck.  
NOTICE.—In accepting this contract, the shipper or other agent of the owner of the property carried expressly agrees to all its stipulations, exceptions and conditions.

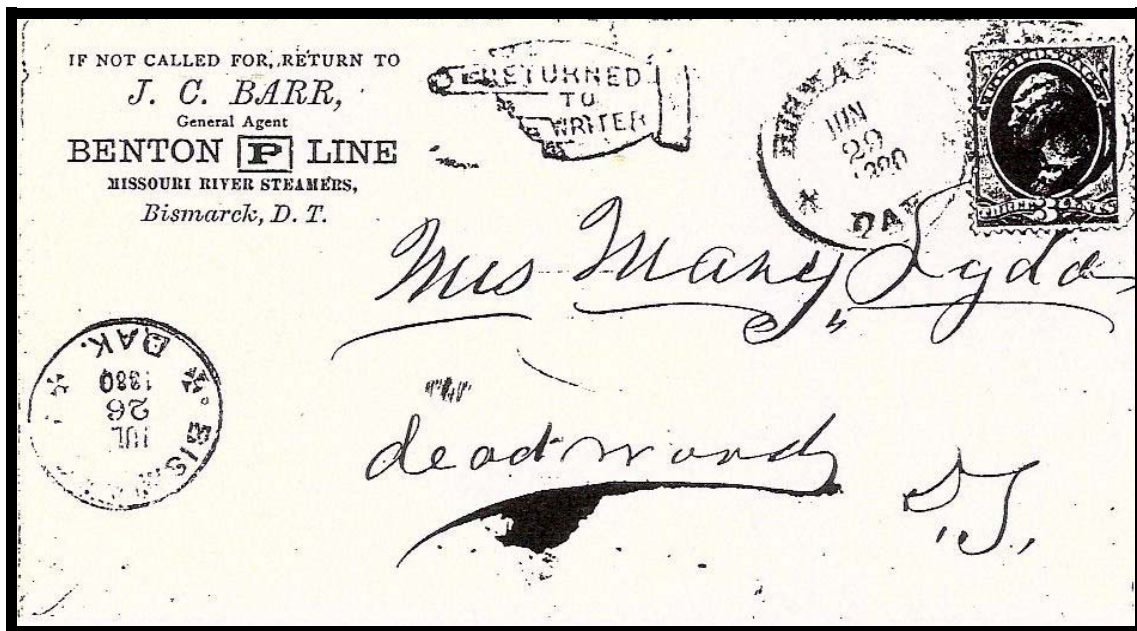
MARKS.	ARTICLES.	WEIGHT.

**Figure 11.** Bill of Lading (only the top portion is shown) from the Benton Line, dated Aug 7<sup>th</sup>, 1878. It is interesting that the illustrated letterhead shows all three primary modes of transportation of the day: steamboat, horse-drawn wagon, and steam locomotive.

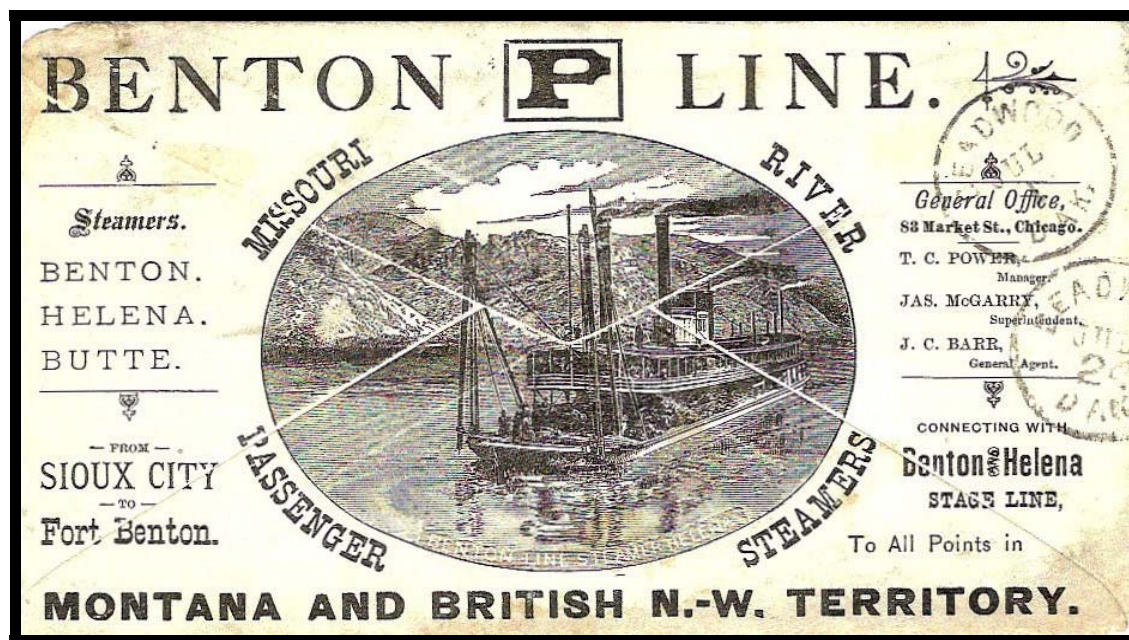




**Figure 12.** Cover postmarked “Fort Yates, Dakota Nov 11, 1879”. The steamboat *Benton* was a stern-wheeler of about 400 tons (197 x 33 x 5 feet). It was built in Pittsburg in 1875 and was one of the famed ‘mountain boats’ owned and operated by T.C. Power and Bros. Block P (Power) Line. It had a long and remarkable career during the Indian Wars and the pioneer days in the Dakota and Montana Territories. She sank on July 18, 1897 after running into a drawbridge at Sioux City <sup>(6)</sup>.

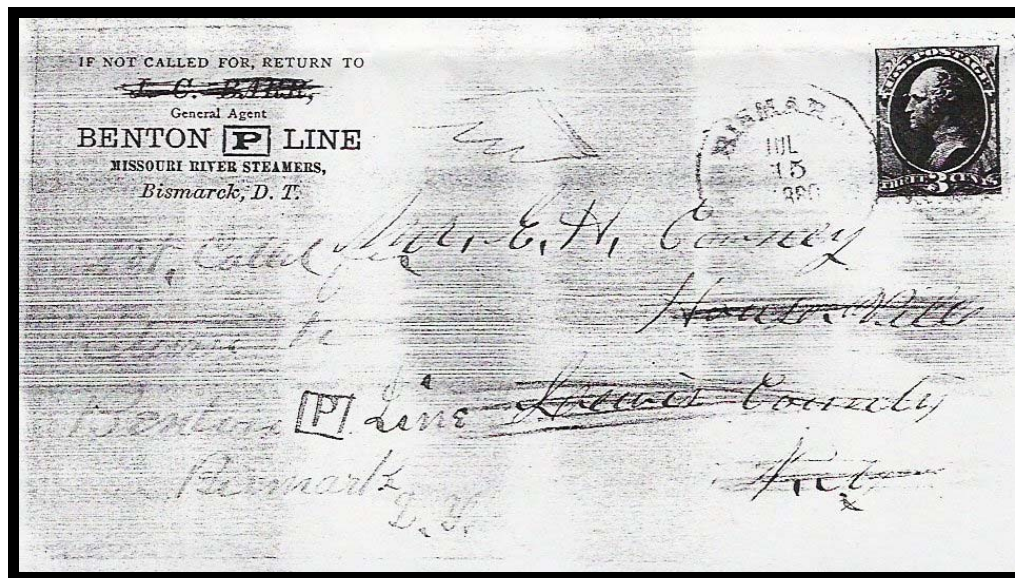


**Figure 13.** This cover has two postmarks from “Bismarck, Dak.”: one dated June 29, 1880 and the other from July 26, 1880 (upon its return to Bismarck) <sup>(6)</sup>. It was evidently either carried by a Benton Line steamboat to Bismarck, where it entered the mails for Deadwood, Dakota; or, alternatively, it was sent from the offices of the Benton Line in Bismarck to Deadwood. At any rate, the addressee was not found in Deadwood and the cover was returned to Bismarck on July 26, 1880. The next figure shows the reverse side of this cover with all-over back ad for the Benton ‘P’ Line.

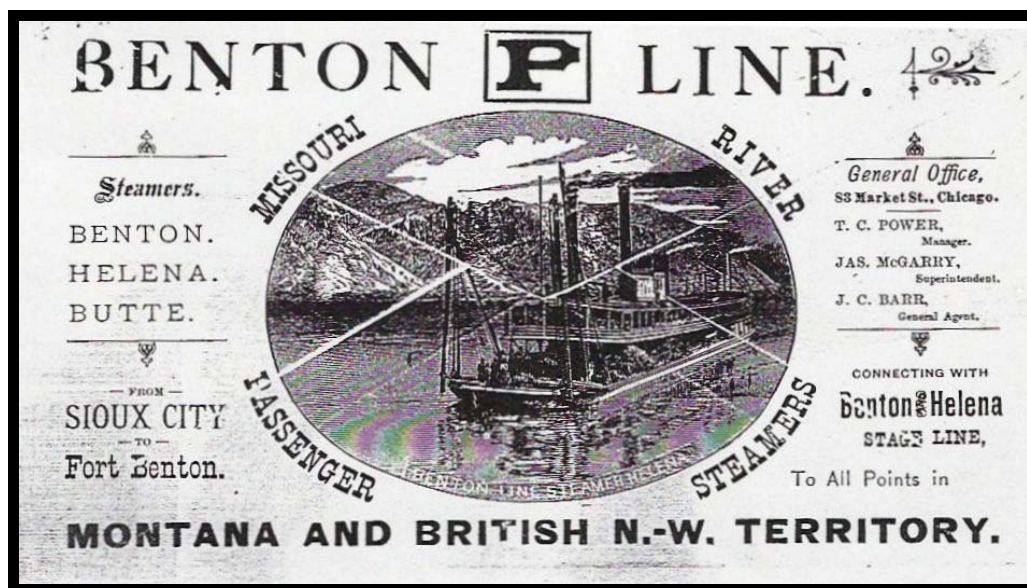


**Figure 14.** Reverse of cover shown in Figure 13, showing all-over back ad for the Benton ‘P’ line <sup>(6)</sup>. The cover was initially received at the Deadwood post office on July 1, 1880 and then returned to Bismarck on July 24, 1880 (as noted by the two handstamps on the reverse of the cover).

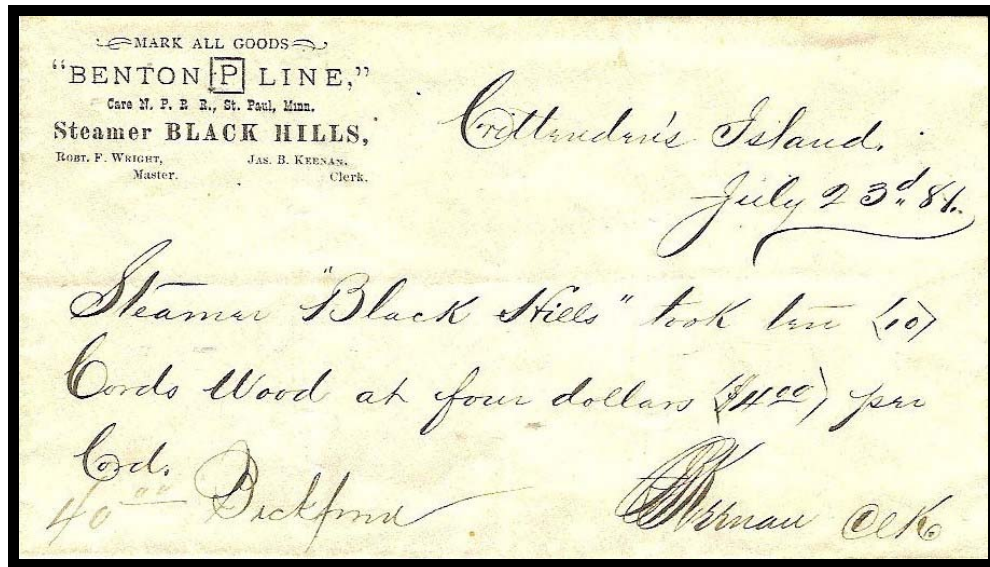




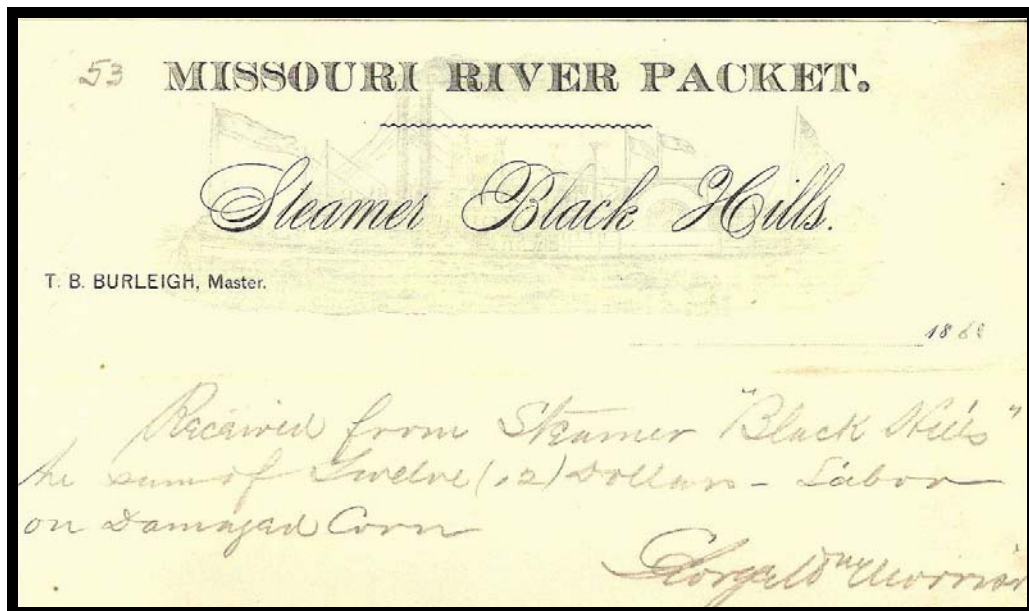
**Figure 15.** Front of cover postmarked “Bismarck Dak. Jul 15, 1880” <sup>(8)</sup>. Note the pencil notation at left “if not called for, return to Benton P Line, Bismarck D.T.”. The Benton Line’s logo was a ‘P’ within a square (for T.C. Power).



**Figure 16.** Reverse of cover shown in Figure 15, a nice illustrated advertisement for the Benton Line <sup>(8)</sup>, same as shown in Figure 14.



**Figure 17.** This cover did not actually enter the mails, but it is interesting, nonetheless. The steamer *Black Hills* was a stern-wheeler of about 350 tons (135' x 27'-5" x 4'-5") built at California, PA in 1877 for the Block 'P' Line. It operated on the Upper Missouri River until she was crushed in the ice at Bismarck on Mar 28, 1884. The cover shown in this illustration was used as a receipt for wood by the clerk of the *Black Hills* <sup>(6)</sup>. The contents and letterhead are shown in the following figure.

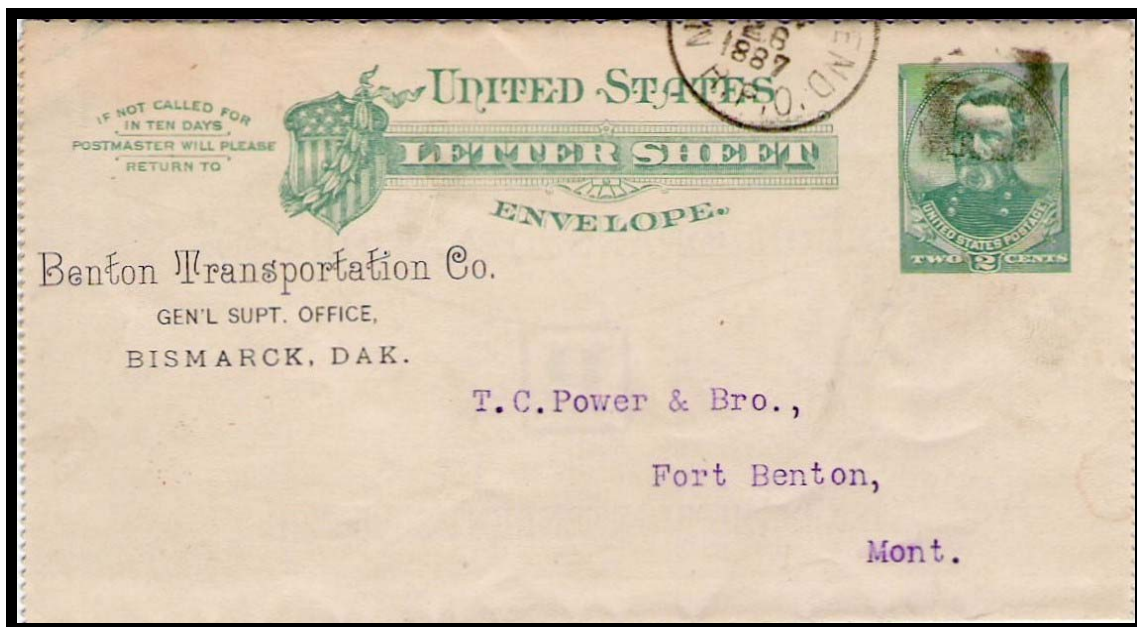


**Figure 18.** Letterhead of the enclosure to the cover shown in Figure 17, noting "received from Steamer '*Black Hills*' the sum of twelve (12) dollars – labor on damaged corn" <sup>(6)</sup>.





**Figure 19.** Postcard cancelled “Casselton, Cass Co., Dakota Sep 1, 1882” with received marking in blue for Isaac P. Baker, G. A. (General Agent) for the Benton Line in Bismarck, Dakota.

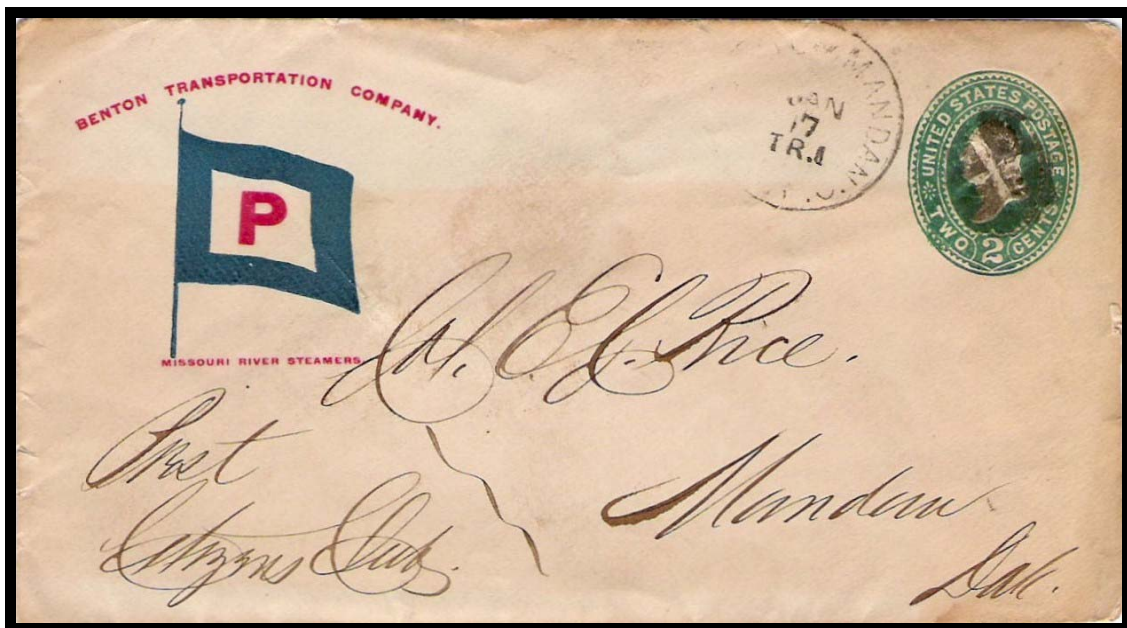


**Figure 20.** Letter sheet cancelled “Mandan & Glendive R.P.O. Nov 28, 1887” with printed return address for “Benton Transportation Co., Gen’l Supt. Office, Bismarck, Dak”. See Figure 21 for the markings on verso.





**Figure 21.** Reverse side of the cover shown in Figure 20. In addition to the “Fort Benton, Mont. Dec 3, 1887” receiving postmark, there are two strikes of the addressee’s received marking “T. C. Power & Bro., Dec 5, Paid, Ft. Benton, M.T.”



**Figure 22.** Light strike of “St. Paul & Mandan R.P.O. Jan 7 Tr1” postmark. This cover is dated to 1887, 1888 or 1889, based on other usages of this marking. The corner card provides a great illustration of the Benton Line’s company flag with the large ‘P’.

### **The Missouri River - Kountz Line**

The Kountz Line was also a significant player in the Missouri River steamboat trade for a time. Captain W. J. Kountz was active primarily on the Lower Missouri River of Dakota Territory in the late 1870's, at times retreating completely to Sioux City (where it had its offices). The Kountz Line gradually withdrew from Missouri River navigation completely and focused on the Mississippi where obstacles were not so prevalent and railroad competition not as strong <sup>(2)</sup>. There are no reported examples of covers related to the Kountz Line of steamers.

### **The Missouri River - Baker Line**

Perhaps the best information on the Baker Line comes from the Fort Benton website ([www.fortbenton.com/mthistory/](http://www.fortbenton.com/mthistory/)): Mr. A. F. Conrad was born in Virginia in 1850, and received a business education before moving to Stirling Valley, Cayuga Co., Virginia, where he was employed as a clerk some 18 months. He then moved to Fort Benton, Montana and served in the capacity of clerk for I. G. Baker & Bro. until 1873. In that year, he became a member of the firm of I. G. Baker, Bro. & Co., and remained in that capacity for one year. Mr. Conrad and his brother, W. G. Conrad, at that time purchased the interest held by George A. Baker, after which the business was conducted under the firm name of I. G. Baker & Co. This firm, in company with T. C. Power & Co., built the steamer *Benton* in 1874. I. G. Baker & Co. then bought the steamer *Red Cloud* (Figure 23) in 1875, and in 1876 built the steamer *Colonel McLeoud*. These boats ran for a number of years between Fort Benton and St. Louis, Missouri, and from Fort Benton to Bismarck. The steamer *Colonel McCloud* sank in 1879, the *Red Cloud* went down in 1882, and the *Benton* was sold in 1882 to T. C. Power & Bro. The firm did an immense business with the Indians from 1865 to 1874, having trading posts at 14 different points at one time, and collecting annually some 30,000 buffalo robes and \$100,000 worth of fine furs. The Canadian government sent 500 mounted police into the country in 1874, which I. G. Baker & Co. supplied with everything except guns, horses and clothing. They acted as the financial agents for the Canadian Government in the Territory of the Northwest. This trade they held for ten years, obtaining it by contract from the Canadian government.



**Figure 23.** Letter cancelled “Fort Buford, D.T. May 7, 1878” with beautiful handstamp from the “Steamer Red Cloud, Baker Line, May 7, 1878”. The *Red Cloud* was bought by the Benton Line in 1875 and sank in 1882.

### **The Missouri River – Independent Operators and Other Lines**

Figure 24 provides a good example of a cover carried by an independent steamboat operator. The Steamer *Waverly* was owned by John P. Kiser, Thomas Raigin, and Captain Thomas W. Rhea. It does not appear as though the *Waverly* had any affiliation with one of the major lines during its short operating lifetime (1866 to Nov, 1867).

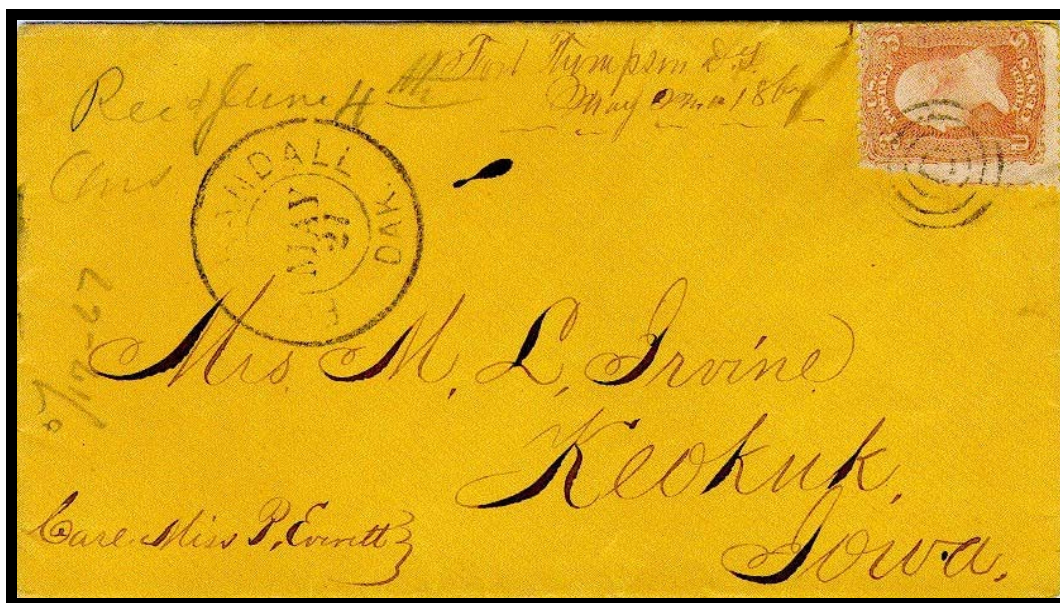
The steamer *Waverly* had an interesting, albeit short, history <sup>(4)</sup>. It was a wooden hulled, stern-wheeled, packet measuring 200 feet long, by 34 feet wide, by 5 feet 5 inches deep and weighed 324 tons. It was powered by two boilers. The vessel was launched in Metropolis, Illinois and then finished in St. Louis. She was owned by John P. Kiser, Thomas Raigin, and Capt Thomas W. Rhea. The *Waverly* was destroyed on Nov 24, 1867 on the down river run from Omaha to St. Louis when it became snagged near Bowling Green Bend, Glasgow, Mo. The boat cost \$50,000 when built and is said to have paid for herself on the first round trip to Fort Benton. In the shipment that arrived into St. Louis from Fort Benton on Jun 17, 1867, the vessel contained 508 bales of buffalo robes, 43 wolf skins, 37 bundles of elk skins, and 5 packages of antelope skins. The machinery from the *Waverly* went to the *Silver Bow* upon her sinking in Nov, 1867.



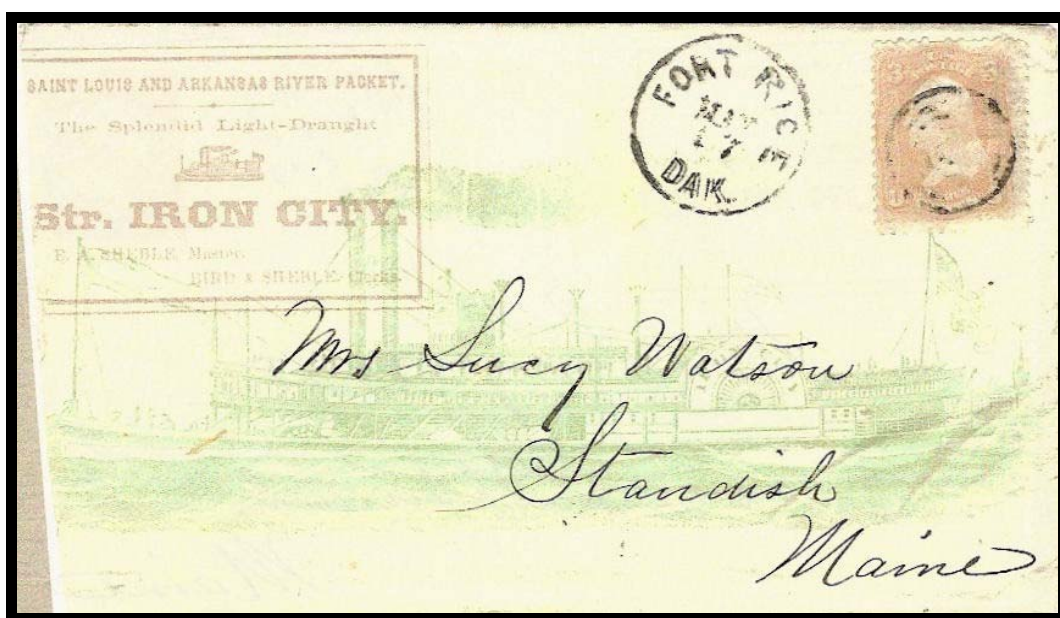
**Figure 24.** Cover cancelled "Fort Rice, Dak. May 6" 1867 with nice handstamp from the "Steamer Waverly, Mo. Packet, May 5, 1867".

Numerous other 1860's and 1870's covers to and from Dakota Territory were undoubtedly carried aboard steamboats, but almost none of them contain any markings to tell their story. An example is provided in Figure 25. Covers like this one were most likely contained within the mail packets being carried for the military and were therefore were never opened to receive steamboat markings. Covers like those shown in Figures 23 and 24 were marked by the steamboat agent upon receipt outside the regular mail packet and are especially rare as such.



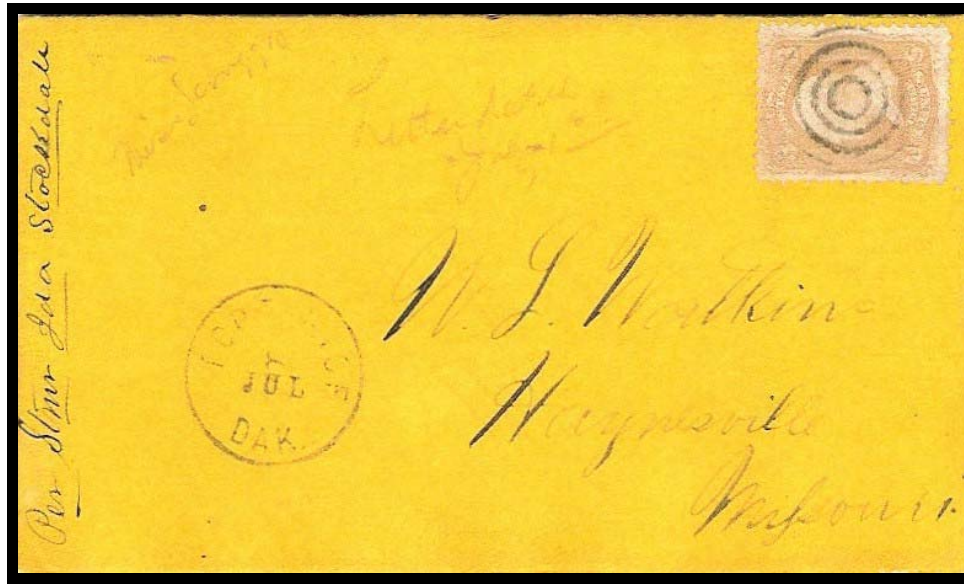


**Figure 25.** This cover contains the provisional military marking “Fort Thompson, D.T. May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1867” and the postmark (where it actually entered the mails) from “Fort Randall Dak. May 27”. Fort Thompson did not have an official post office during the Dakota Territorial period. My belief is that this cover was carried aboard a steamboat, inside a mail packet, for the journey from Fort Thompson to Fort Randall where it entered the US mails.



**Figure 26.** “Fort Rice Dak. May 17” ca 1867, with *Str. Iron City* corner card. Very limited data is available on this boat, but it was operating on the Missouri River in 1866. The corner card and illustration (in light green) on the front of the cover indicate it was a sidewheeler and that it was a *St. Louis and Arkansas River Packet*<sup>(6)</sup>. Business must have been good to have drawn it up into the Missouri River trade!



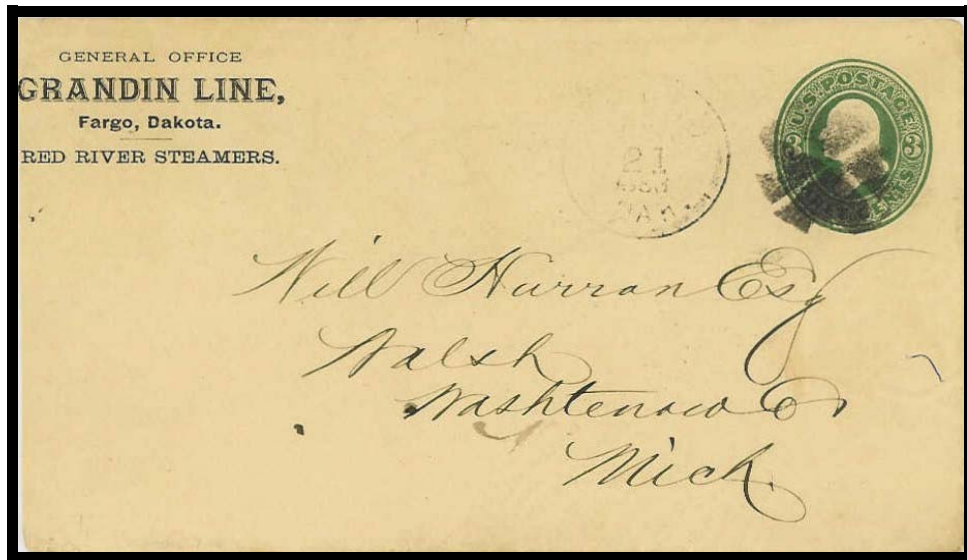


**Figure 27.** “Fort Rice, Dak. Jul 8” 1867, with “Per Stmr *Ida Stockdale*” at left. The *Ida Stockdale* was a sternwheeler of 377 tons, built at Pittsburg, PA in 1867. The cover and enclosed letter were written on board the steamboat *Luella*, as it traveled up the Missouri River to Fort Benton, MT: “Str *Luella* July 1<sup>st</sup>/67....very unexpectedly I have a chance to send you a letter...We have just met and hailed a boat (*Ida Stockdale*) on her return trip, we will be together for a few minutes.”. Thus, the cover was carried by the *Ida Stockdale* to Fort Rice, Dakota where it entered the mails on July 8, 1867. The *Ida Stockdale* was destroyed by ice in April, 1871 at Bismarck <sup>(4)</sup>. Reference (4) also notes that in 1867 this steamer was “attacked by Indians under a bluff known as Plenty Coal Bluff; nevertheless, made a profit of \$24,000 on the voyage”.

### **The Red River of the North – Grandin Line**

Steamboating on the Red River of the North began in the early 1860s, but was mostly halted during the Sioux Indian wars of 1862-1863. By the late 1860s and early 1870s, steamboats and railroads had almost completely replaced the famous ‘Red River carts’ that made so many trips from Fort Garry (near present day Winnipeg) to St Paul, Minnesota. James J. Hill and Norman Kittson operated the Red River Transportation Company and its fleet of steamboats on the Red River in the 1870s. Steamboats plied the Red River for decades, but by the turn of the century, railroads had mostly displaced them.

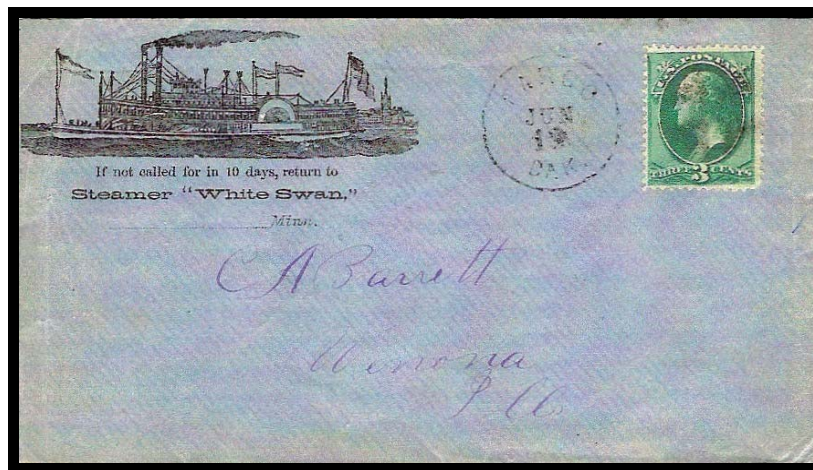
Bonanza farming resulted in the creation of the Grandin Line (see Figure 28). The large Grandin bonanza farming operation owned tens of thousands of acres of farmland north of Fargo, including several miles of Red River frontage. In order to get their crop to market, they built a line of steamboats and barges, which carried both freight and passengers, with some trips going as far north as Winnipeg. Most of their wheat was hauled down to Fargo, where the Grandin operation owned a 50,000 bushel elevator on the railroad line <sup>(7)</sup>.



**Figure 28.** Cover cancelled “Fargo, Dak. Feb 21, 1883” with Grandin Line, Red River Steamers, corner card. The Grandin Line was formed by the massive Grandin bonanza farming operation on the Red River north of Fargo.

### The Red River of the North – Other Lines

There was limited other steamboat traffic on the Red River of the North in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century beyond the Grandin Line. And, seemingly as with all Dakota steamboat related postal history, very few artifacts remain. Another one of the few is shown in the following figure:

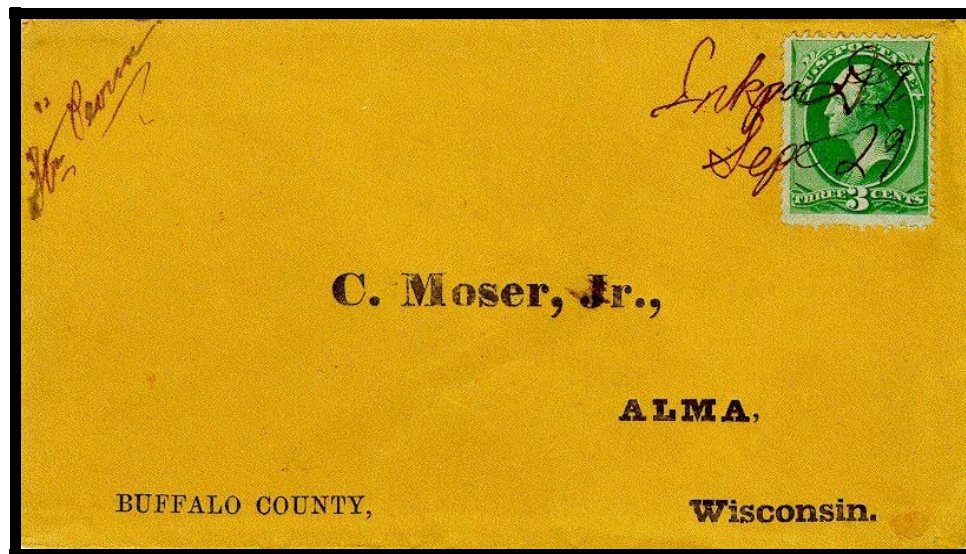


**Figure 29.** Cover cancelled “Fargo Dak. Jun 19” ca 1879. The steamboat *White Swan* was a small sidewheeler of only 36 tons, built at Brainard, MN on the ‘Upper Upper Mississippi River’ (above St. Anthony Falls) in 1878. Because of low water, the boat was cut in twolengthwise and transported by railroad to Fargo in October of that same year and re-named the *Pluck*. She was rebuilt and put into the Red River Trade for the Alsop Line of steamers. The cover shown was probably used in 1879, about the time the boat went into service under the new name. The *Pluck* was dismantled in 1886 <sup>(6)</sup>.

### The Big Sioux River – Steamer *Peoria*

Very little is known about the Steamer *Peoria* and its history. What little could be found comes from reference (4) which cites the launch date as “1880?” (with a question mark in the actual reference) and notes that it was destroyed in 1918 when it was crushed by ice. It was owned by the Eagle Packet Company of St. Louis which operated primarily on the upper Mississippi River.

Figures 30 and 31 provide an interesting piece of postal history related to this operation. The destination of Alma, Wisconsin on this cover is consistent with the fact that the Eagle Packet Company operated on the upper Mississippi River, as Alma is just north of Winona, Minnesota on the east bank of the upper Mississippi. However, the route this cover would have taken by steamboat was tortuous...down the Big Sioux River from Inkpa City, Dakota Territory, into the Missouri River, then down the Missouri to its confluence with the Mississippi and finally north on the Mississippi to Alma, Wisconsin.



**Figure 30.** Cover cancelled “Inkpa D.T. Sept 29” 1875 with the notation “Str Peoria” addressed to Alma, Wisconsin. The Steamer *Peoria* operated on the upper Mississippi River and apparently made at least one trip up the Missouri and Big Sioux Rivers to Inkpa D.T. (near the Sisseton Indian Agency). The contents of this cover are shown in Figure 31. One opinion provided to the author in 1989 suggested that this manuscript Inkpa marking was not genuine; professional authentication is warranted.



**SHIPPED, In Good Order and Well Conditioned, by**  
*L. Leland Sisseton Agency*

On board the good Steamboat *Peoria*  
the articles described below, which are to be delivered, without delay in  
like good order and condition, (unavoidable dangers of river and fire  
only excepted), at the Port of *Alma Wisconsin*  
unto *Carl Moser* or assigns, he  
or they paying Freight for said Goods at the rate of *— 9/—*  
and Charges \$ *6.00*.

A. C. ISAACS & Co., Print.  
**In Testimony Whereof,** The Owner, Master or Clerk of said Boat hath affirmed to . . . Bills of Lading, all of this tenor and date,  
one of which being accomplished, the others to be void.

Dated at *Inkpa Dak. T.* this *28* day of *September* 187*5*.

Marks.	Articles.	Weight.	Charges.
<i>1 C M</i>	<i>Wolfskins</i>	<i>300 lbs 3.25 per cwt</i>	
<i>2 C M</i>	<i>Trade Trinkets</i>	<i>60 lbs 2.10 per cwt</i>	
<i>3 C M</i>	<i>Tanned Deer skins</i>	<i>100 lbs 3.28 per cwt</i>	
<i>4 C M</i>	<i>Gold Luggage</i>	<i>9 lbs 4.50 per cwt</i>	
<i>5 C M</i>	<i>Trade Beaded Moccasins</i>	<i>30 lbs 2.40 per cwt</i>	

*L. Leland*  
*Clerk Sisseton Agency*  
*D. T.*

**Figure 31.** Bill of lading enclosed in the cover illustrated in Figure 30. The items are being shipped from the clerk at the Sisseton Indian Agency in Dakota Territory to a trader in Alma, Wisconsin via the Steamer *Peoria*.

The content of the cover (Figure 31) is an especially interesting bill of lading from L. Leland, the Clerk at Sisseton Agency, Dakota. The various goods being shipped to Alma were: 300 lbs of wolf skins, 60 lbs of trade trinkets, 100 lbs of tanned deer skins, 9 lbs of gold (?), and 30 lbs of trade beaded moccasins. The envelope (Figure 30) is docketed with the note "Str Peoria" and is apparently postmarked "Inkpa D.T. Sept 29, 1875".

## **The End of an Era**

By 1888, only three boats arrived as far north as Fort Benton on the Missouri River <sup>(2)</sup>. The great steamboat trade had been supplanted by the iron horse rumbling across the plains. Ribbons of steel continued to criss-cross the prairie and quickly transformed the mighty steamboat into a 19<sup>th</sup> century dinosaur.

The author would appreciate knowing of any other steamboat related covers from Dakota Territory. I can be reached at [kstach@houston.rr.com](mailto:kstach@houston.rr.com).

## **References:**

- 1.) Department of History Collections – South Dakota, Volume XXXIII, South Dakota State Historical Society, 1966, pp 459-460.
- 2.) Department of History Collections – South Dakota, Volume XXVI, South Dakota State Historical Society, 1952, pp 183-220. Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri River by Ralph E. Nichol.
- 3.) Armstrong, Moses K., History and Resources of Dakota, Montana and Idaho, Geo. W. Kingsbury, Printer, Union and Dakotaian Office, 1866, pp 59-60.
- 4.) Dyer, Robert L., A Brief History of Steamboating on the Missouri River with an Emphasis on the Boonslick Region, from the Boone's Lick Heritage, Volume 5, No. 2, June, 1997.
- 5.) Gerber, Max E., The Steamboat and Indians of the Upper Missouri, South Dakota History Quarterly, Spring 1974, Volume 4, No.2., pp 139-160.
- 6.) Courtesy of Floyd E. Risvold.
- 7.) Drache, Hiram H., The Day of the Bonanza, 1964
- 8.) Courtesy of James Milgram.



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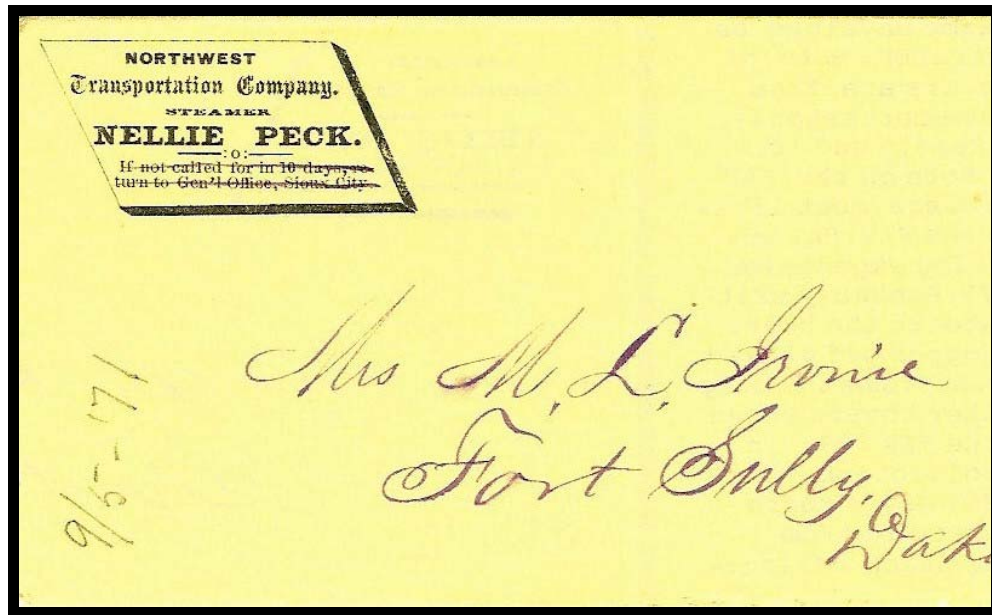
**Wanted for Articles in the  
Dakota Collector**

Any cards or covers with livestock brands on them and/or Yule, Mikkelsen, Bierman, Slope Center, Bessie, Ranger, Chenoweth, Acorn, Trotters, Searing, Oakdale and Sand Creek.

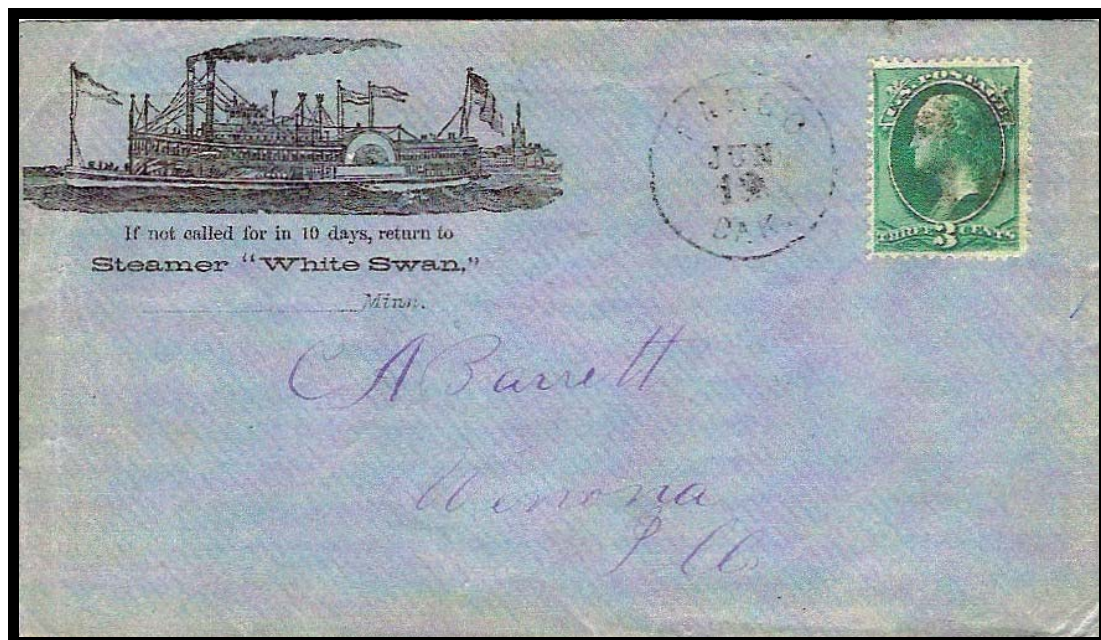
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**Announcing “The Gordon Twedt  
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Open to anyone who is a member of the Society. Any research pertaining to the postal history of The Dakotas, North or South. Deadline is December 31, 2006. Send article to Dakota Collector, P.O. Box 600039 St. Paul, MN. 55106. The judges of this contest will be Gary Anderson, Doug Wick and Ken Stach. The winner will have their article published in the *Dakota Collector* and receive a \$100 cash prize. It was decided at the annual meeting in 2004 in Sioux Falls that this award would be continued and come out of the club treasury since it was such a success. The first two winners Ken Stach and Forrest Daniel donated their prize back to the Society. We hope that this will continue to be a successful contest.



**Nellie Peck Steamer Cover to Fort Sully Dak.**



**Fargo Dak. With Steamer "White Swan" corner card**