

## Synopsis

# James William Denver—The Man & His Times

**Purpose:** This exhibit is a general class presentation. It contains postal history, letters and other associated material related to the long and fascinating life of James William Denver. Items exhibited help illuminate the person and general historical importance of Denver and his times. Except for minor exceptions, the exhibit generally follows a chronological progression.

**Background:** J. W. Denver was the archetypal mid-19<sup>th</sup> century man: lawyer, newspaper editor, 49er, duelist, California state senator & secretary of state, US Congressman, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Governor of Kansas Territory, Civil War General and successful claims attorney in the nation's capital. Although Denver was born into a humble farm family he died a wealthy man with extensive business investments and real estate holdings. Denver crossed paths with many famous and influential individuals of his time, and although not a well known figure today (few even realize Denver, Colorado was named after him), he was a confidant of presidents, governors, prominent politicians, generals, judges, etc. He lived during exciting times and was part of many of the most important events that occurred during this era. Although Denver correspondence is well known to postal historians, my extensive research indicates there has never been an exhibit about Denver's life or containing a substantial number of Denver related items.

**Plan & Treatment:** As previously noted, the exhibit generally follows a chronological progression, with a few exceptions, of Denver's life from his birth in Virginia to shortly before his death in 1892. This is the most logical and non-confusing way to tell the story of Denver's life. There are numerous examples of postal history used in the presentation, and the non-philatelic items support and are important to the story line. From a postal history perspective, this exhibit shows various rates and uses spanning approximately 45 years, including stampless, California Express companies, transcontinental rates & routes, territorial covers, free franks, circular and carrier rates, registered, etc. When comparing various components of the exhibit it is apparent that a great deal of emphasis is given to the pre 1865 era. Prior to the mid-1860s Denver followed an extremely varied career path across a wide geographic area. In the post Civil War period Denver dedicated his life to building a successful law practice and pretty much settled down to his joint residences in Washington DC and Ohio. There is one type of item that is not in the exhibit, notably Pony Express

usages. There is one Pony Express cover addressed to Denver, a free frank from Senator Milton Latham, which currently resides in the collection of a well-known philatelist.

**Challenge Factors:** I have collected Denver correspondence and related items for over 30 years and during the last 15+ years studied his life extensively. Any accumulation of 19<sup>th</sup> century postal history and documents tends to show a wide range of conditions due to age, wear, storage method, etc., and Denver items are no different. However, I have attempted to obtain the best examples available. Denver correspondence has been sought by collectors since at least the 1920s and items have resided in the collections of many well known philatelists including Ashbrook, Alexander, Cipolla, Grunin, Frajola, Graham, Haas, Neinken, Pollard, Risvold and Wagshal. Individual covers in this exhibit once belonged to this entire distinguished group. Denver covers have been spread throughout the philatelic world, many tracing their origin to the Fox auction of Denver Family Correspondence in 1968. At that time the majority of items still had their original enclosures. Today, that is not the case and only rarely is the letter still with the envelope. I have been able to locate a significant number of original letters and in some cases reunite them with the envelope. I have acquired most of my most prominent pieces from major auctions over a number of years. Some items have been purchased from dealers who recognized the significance of Denver covers. Other items have been discovered in dealer's stocks and lesser known auctions. I avidly pursue Denver items and have spent countless hours poring over dealer inventories, searching on-line and every auction catalogue I can obtain, including nonphilatelic sources. My reward has been the opportunity to build an interesting and historically significant exhibit. Fierce competition in auctions for unusual uses, especially Western material has made acquisition of many Denver items challenging. Within the past 2 years I have been able to acquire additional Denver material with historical and philatelic significance, particularly items that once graced Tom Alexander's and Richard Graham's collection.

**Research & Knowledge:** I have studied Denver's life for many years and have utilized all known published sources and many primary sources located in archival collections such as the Kansas Historical Society, University of Kansas, Huntington Library and Clinton County Ohio Historical Society. I have also utilized my

own collection of historical documents many which contain information not noted in any account. There are good general summaries concerning Denver on but all contain various inaccuracies. The two books that have been published on Denver him both contain valuable information, but lack objectivity and tend and are more hero worship than accurate portrayals. Denver's His proslavery views in particular are either avoided entirely or glossed over. The best single source of information is an article that I wrote for the 2013 Philatelic Congress Book. My research research and acquisition of historical documents have given me unique insight into his life and views on a number of subjects. The postal history items along with relevant documents have allowed me to accurately reconstruct his life.

Highlights: I have acquired several additional items recently. Several items in my exhibit are worth noting due to their unusual nature or use. I have used a dark red outline to designate these items.

- Folded 1849 letter with Westport, Mo. datelined Sac & Fox Agency which was in what became Kansas Territory. Concerning a law suit about horse. Illustrated in Alexander's "Missouri Western Frontier".
- Cram & Rogers, Adams & Co. Express conjunctive usage with appropriate hand stamps. Fewer than six covers recorded.
- "Via Nicaragua" free frank, New York Steamship postal marking and "Free" hand stamp (Ex Ashbrook, pictured in his One Cent & Neinken's Ten Cent book). Only recorded free frank example of this Via Nicaragua handstamp and fewer than five total examples of this particular oval marking.
- Strip of four 3 cent imperforate stamps with Sutters Mill this postmark. Fewer than ten with this postmark.
- San Francisco Newsletter circular rate franked with plate 3 sheet margin one cent imperforate stamp. Fewer than five recorded examples of SF Newsletter without preprinted address panel. Not a circular rate, was sealed, marked personal. Scarce example of carrier use with the one cent stamp paying fee 'to the mails". Tracing of the postmark and notation of the stamp denomination and Type illustrated in Ashbrook's One Cent book. One of two recorded examples. (Ex Cipolla, Ashbrook)
- "Via Tehuantepec" triple rate cover with strip of three perforated 1857 series ten cent stamps. Route used less than a year, only recorded Tehuantepec triple transcontinental rate cover.
- "Stage Coach" cover sent "Via Las Angeles" to Ohio, double rate franked with perforated ten cent stamps.
- Transcontinental rate cover franked with two strips of five one cent perforated stamps sent to Denver in 1861. Signed & plated by Ashbrook. (Ex Haas)
- Wyandott, KT cover to Denver in Lecompton, KT. Scarce corner card envelope, post mark illustrated in Ashbrook's One Cent book. (Ex Ashbrook)
- Fort Arbuckle, Chickasaw Nation cover to Denver in Lecompton, Kansas Territory. Only recorded copy of this manuscript postmark. Letter concerns battle with Comanche village.
- Letter from banking house to Denver in California postmarked Kansas, Mo. 1860, "due 7" handstamp and enclosure with ornate illustration, only example known. Letter concerns claim against Pawnee Indians for theft of horses in Council Grove, KT. (Ex. Alexander).
- Cover and enclosures sent to Denver in DC, forwarded to Ohio with formal invitation to dedication of statue of Civil War hero General Thomas. Only recorded example of these documents.
- Original Matthew Brady carte-de-visite of Denver taken in Washington DC studio. Only two known in private hands.
- Cabinet photo of Denver taken just prior to his death in 1892.
- Four letter series of letters written by Denver and newspaper editor Edward Gilbert concerning their upcoming duel in which Gilbert was killed.
- Camp Shaemahmoo W.T. cover, one of three recorded.
- Richardson's Express cover and label, Parkville, Missouri. Only known example.

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