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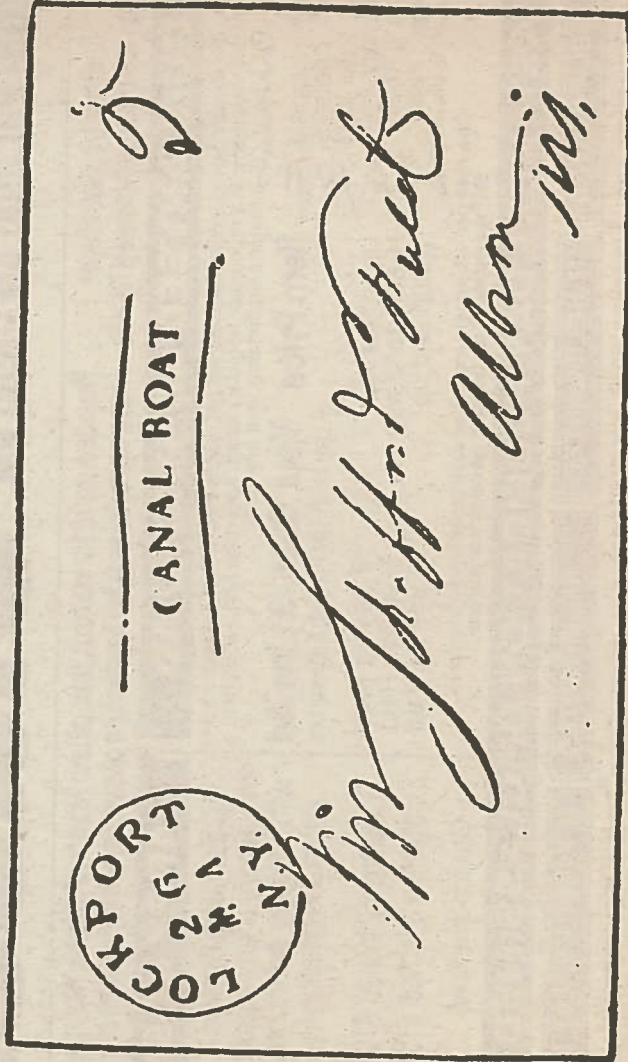
Mail By Canal Boat

Our illustration shows an envelope with the route mark "Canal Boat" printed on it. This was a letter sent from Lockport to a person in Albion. During the 1840's and 1850's the United States Postal Service made use of the Erie Canal. Little is known of the exact provisions for mail carrying except that some sort of arrangement was made with postmasters along the Erie Canal route. The government could not give yearly contracts because of the tie-up during the winter months when the canal was not navigable.

The Red Bird Packet Line, which ran boats from Schenectady to Buffalo, could cover this distance in four days. Through Whitesboro they trotted, which was kind of advertisement for the line. The driver of the mules or horses shrilling commands while the captain of the packet played on his bugle. Mail was tossed aboard and a bag thrown to the canal docks in return. The boat never stopped.

Mail was apparently sorted on the boat during the journey but in haste wrong bags were often sent ashore. A mistake like this meant a week's delay or more until the letter could be re-routed.

Passenger boats ran seven days a week, day and night to make the journey quicker for the patrons. Four miles an hour was the legal limit. The packets were often over-crowded and there were generally some "standees." They were allowed to stretch out on the floor, with a carpet bag for a pillow and overcoat for bedding. In fact, passengers were allowed to do about anything they wanted on the deck. This included singing, playing musical instruments, cards or checkers. When the bowman shouted "Low bridge! Everybody down!" it meant that in some cases passengers truly had to flatten themselves to the deck in order to avoid being scraped off the boat.



The sleeping cabins were designed for as many as 30 people. Bunks were let down from the sides of the cabins on chains in three or four layers. Three meals per day, canal travel.