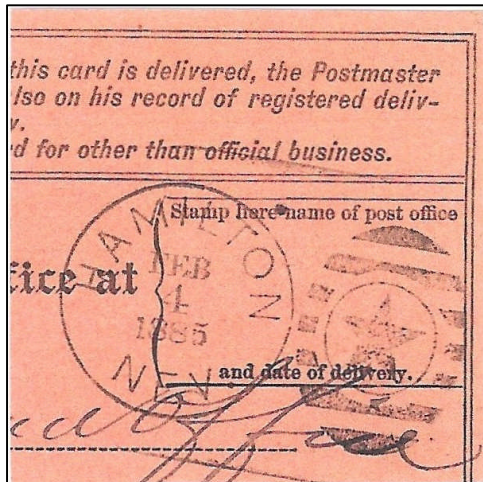


# Hamilton, Nevada- A Second-Class Post Office in a Ghost Town

By Mike Del Grosso

One of the greatest mining booms in the west occurred in 1868 in a remote area of Nevada known as the White Pine District. The center of activity of the district, which included many smaller camps in the area, was the boom town of Hamilton. Located high on the slopes of Mount Hamilton and Treasure Hill at elevations of 8,000' or more the towns of the White Pine District experienced brutal weather and remoteness. The quest for rich silver deposits triggered the boom. Within a year-and-half the population of the district was estimated to be more than 20,000, with most located in Hamilton. The Hamilton post office was established August 10, 1868. When White Pine County was organized in 1869, Hamilton was designated as the county seat. It remained the county seat until 1887, after the courthouse in Hamilton was destroyed by a fire in 1885.



Because of the large population the Hamilton post office was rated as a second class office. At that time postmaster salaries were established in accord with the rating of the post office and that rating based of revenue generated. In 1870, as a second-class office, the salary of postmaster James Riley was set at \$3,200 a year. The post office was located in a general store, owned by Riley and his brother-in-law, which also served as a telegraph office and a stock exchange office for a San Francisco brokerage firm. Business was good for a few years but by the early 1870's many of the mines closed and the population of the district and Hamilton diminished quickly. The activity of the post office also dramatically declined with fewer than 50 letters a day being postmarked, however, that office continued carrying a second-class rating with the postmaster receiving his \$3,200 annual salary. The second-class rating, based on the volume of stamps purchased, continued until 1885 when

the postal authorities became suspicious and investigated the situation.

They learned that postmaster Riley was purchasing enough stamps himself to generate the volume necessary to retain the second-class rating. They also learned that Riley continued operating the general store but had persuaded wholesalers supplying goods to the store to accept payment for the goods in postage

stamps. It was reported that one San Francisco firm had for years supplied Riley with approximately \$2,200 worth of goods each month and accepted the entire payment in postage stamps.



After his arrest and later trial in San Francisco, Riley was acquitted when the prosecution failed to show he had ever acknowledged the government's notice of a change in the system of computing salaries for postmasters. This technicality, probably found by a good defense lawyer, kept the then ex-postmaster of Hamilton, Nevada out of prison.

The post office in Hamilton survived, with the help of a few small mining

revivals, until March 14, 1931 when the population of the district was 57 hardy souls. Only scattered remnants of once substantial buildings in Hamilton remain.

Mike Del Grosso is a member of the Nevada Stamp Study Society who has a passion for collecting post card postmarks. He is a museum board member of the Post Mark Collectors Club. More information available at <http://postmark.org/>

