

# THE STREET LETTER BOXES OF JAMAICA

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According to Tom Foster from whose article "The Street Letter Boxes of Jamaica" much of the information below is gleaned, Street Letter Boxes, or Post Boxes were not introduced into Jamaica, at Kingston, until the latter quarter of the 19th Century. Prior to then the public had to go to their nearest Post Office to post a letter. At this period the postal authorities had not created either the various grades of Postal Agencies or Sub Postal Agencies. Hence, members of the public often had to travel some distance to reach a Post Office; although by the beginning of the 19th Century Post Offices had been established in the Parishes and the G.P.O. in Kingston from the late 1700's. It was important for trade and business to have postal facilities, especially in the centre of Kingston where many of the business houses were concentrated North of the harbour and, although the G.P.O. was relatively close, complaints were continually made for a service in other parts. Indeed, the Lower St. Andrew Office (Cross Roads) only opened in 1884 and it was not until the turn of the century that other "Kingston" offices were created Constant Spring (1900), Hope (1905), Windward Road (1909) and the Myrtle Bank Hotel Office (basically this latter office was for the use of tourists and only open during the tourist seasons from 1901). In practice, therefore, the business community mainly provided their own facilities for local mail such as delivery by a servant or local carrier. Similarly, the delivery of letters was slow; outside Kingston the Post Office sent a letter to the Post Office nearest to where the addressee resided and he or she was expected to collect it from that office. Except in Kingston and some of the other major towns this is still the procedure today. In Kingston, by 1889, there was a limited delivery of post which started in the east of the City going via Paradise Street, through Rae Town to its junction with the Windward Road; then west along Windward Road to South Camp Road and north to the junction with North Street. The delivery then went to Allman Town via the Race Course to Torrington Bridge and south down Orange Street as far as Drummond Street; through the Hannah Town area to the Spanish Town Road and on to the Harbour past the Railway terminal and the Slaughter House. This facility seems to have proved successful as regards delivery but, as regards posting a letter, there was still only the one convenient facility the G.P.O. in King Street until the early 1900's. As mentioned, there had been pressure on the postal authorities to improve the service and in 1893 after the Post Office had been taken over from the G.P.O. in England it was decided to erect pillar boxes similar to those already in use in England. They were called Street Letter Boxes to distinguish them from the private letter boxes then in use at the Kingston G.P.O. and, later, from the railway letter boxes provided at all railway stations from 1878. The boxes were welcomed as they saved tiring journeys to the G.P.O. and, as most boxes were cleared three times daily by special letter carriers from the G.P.O., a speedy and efficient service was provided. It should be mentioned that there were alterations from time to time in the number of "clearances" and, when certain packets were due to sail, there were extra morning clearances. In the period 1893 1897 there were 10 boxes in the Kingston area, which are listed alphabetically below. The locations of these boxes are numbered so that such numbering provides a later reference, namely :

- 1 Cross Roads Police Station, also called Camp
- 2 Central Avenue and North Street, Kingston Gardens.
- 3 Elleston Road and Tower Street, Rae Town.
- 4 Harbour Street and Princess Street
- 5 North King Street and King Street.
- 6 Parade Street and King Street.
- 7 Park Lodge Hotel, Windward Road
- 8 Port Royal Street and Luke Lane.
- 9 Prince of Wales Street and Race Course.
- 10 Victoria Market.

A further 7 boxes were added in 1897 to those Numbered 1 to 10 above.

- 11 Brown's Town Police Station.
- 12 Fire Brigade Station.
- 13 High Holburn Street and Laws Street.
- 14 Myrtle Bank Hotel.
- 15 Regent Street and Spanish Town Road
- 16 South Camp Road. Police Station.
- 17 Torrington Bridge.

In 1898 a further two boxes came into operation

- 18 Marine Gardens
- 19 Queen's Hotel.

Between 1899 and 1903 four more boxes were added,

- 20 Charles Street and Queen Street.
- 21 Colonial Secretary's Office.
- 22 Jamaica Club
- 23 Parade by the Parish Church.

Another two boxes were added between 1905 and 1908

- 24 Gardner's
- 25 Police Station at Matilda Corner.

From the 1905 to 1908 period the daily clearance rate was increased to four times daily. As mentioned, box No. 14 at the hotel was one of those only operational during the tourist season and, by this time box 25 was only cleared twice a day. By 1913 other boxes had been added, whilst some had disappeared due to the earthquake of 1907 for instance the Myrtle Bank Hotel had to be rebuilt. It also appears that by then the hotels which formerly had boxes for the use of their visitors had ceased to have this facility. However, it seems that the boxes Numbered 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23 and 24 above were then still in use together with the further 25 boxes, namely

- 26 Charles Street and East Street
- 27 Allman Town Police Station
- 28 Princess Street and West Queen Street

- 29 Orange Street and Charles Street
- 30 Franklin Town Police Station
- 31 Marescaux Road and Club Lane
- 32 Corner of Hope Road and Oxford Road
- 33 Retirement Road, near Retirement Pen
- 34 Knutsford Park Gate
- 35 King's House Gate
- 36 Bedford Park Gate on the Constant Spring Line near Samdy Gully
- 37 Barbican Road
- 38 Percy Street and Wellington Street, Smith Village
- 39 Liverpool Street and Hampton Street, Campbell Town
- 40 Woodford Park
- 41 Papine Road
- 42 Duke Street and Harbour Street
- 43 Manchester Square, South Race Course
- 44 Laws Street and East Street
- 45 Hannah Street and Rose Lane
- 46 Arnold Road, North of Connolly Avenue
- 47 Brentford Road and Curphey Road
- 48 Studley Park Road
- 49 Groves Road and Central Road, Kencot Lands
- 50 South Camp Road Hotel.

It is sometimes difficult to determine the exact location of a box; some were closed, whilst from about 1914 Letter Boxes became more numerous and former boxes were often resited. Indeed, many of the boxes listed in 1913 may well have been the ones listed earlier but designated by different street names etc. The boxes were also used in places other than Kingston and Tom Foster states that in Montego Bay the first boxes were erected in 1914 and that by August, 1927, there were six boxes which were cleared twice daily. These appear to have been in use until 1954 at least. Port Antonio also had these Street Letter Boxes, the earliest recorded date for this port being in July, 1911 and the latest 13th November, 1967. Tom Foster also reported that a Street Letter Box was erected in Savanna La Mar on the 3rd March, 1923 and another box at Spanish Town in 1930, with two other boxes added by 1937. However, so far as these two towns are concerned, no Street Letter Boxes dates are recorded and it is therefore assumed that mail collected from these boxes received the normal town date. For reasons that are unclear, it was decided in 1889 that mail collected from the Street Letter Boxes should receive a special postmark, thus creating the Street Letter Box dates. The earliest date for a marking is 8th May, 1889 and, so far as Kingston, is concerned the latest date is 5th December, 1919.