

The First Indiana Railroad

A postal history of the Madison & Indianapolis Railroad

A single frame philatelic exhibit

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Indypex 2019

Casey Jo White, Editor

Background - Railroad Map of Indiana

Published by Indiana State Board of Tax Commissioners, 1896 Indianapolis

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A postal history of the Madison & Indianapolis Railroad

The Madison and Indianapolis Railroad (M&I RR) was chartered by the Indiana legislature in 1832, but its construction wasn't started until 1836. Initially the railroad was state owned and funded, a project of the Board of Internal Improvements, in an attempt to connect the new capitol of Indianapolis with Eastern and Southern markets. Madison was the second largest city in Indiana at the time, and its location on the Ohio River made it an ideal destination to connect with Indianapolis.

On November 29, 1838, the first steam locomotive in Indiana traveled a short, 15-mile segment between North Madison and Graham's Ford, near Vernon. In 1841, the Madison incline, connecting Madison to the North Madison portion of the track, was completed. But as construction continued, the state could no longer fund the overbudget project. In 1843 the railroad was sold to the private Madison and Indianapolis Railroad Company. The line continued northward, reaching Columbus in 1844, Edinburg in 1845, and Franklin in 1846. Finally, after nine years of construction, the 86-mile route was completed on October 1, 1847.

Railroad revolutionized travel in Indiana. In 1848, passengers could travel from Indianapolis to Madison in only 6 hours for 3½¢ per mile. As outside markets became available to the public, farmers saw profits for their crops rise significantly – within a few weeks of rail access, the price of wheat in Indiana rose from 40¢ to 90¢ a bushel. Among the benefits of rail travel, mail could also be quickly delivered. The M&I RR was contracted to carry US mail throughout its operation. **This one-frame exhibit will illustrate how mail was carried on the M&I RR.**

Exhibit Plan

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Union Station (1853)
Indianapolis (1847)

Franklin (1846)

Edinburg (1845)

Columbus (1844)

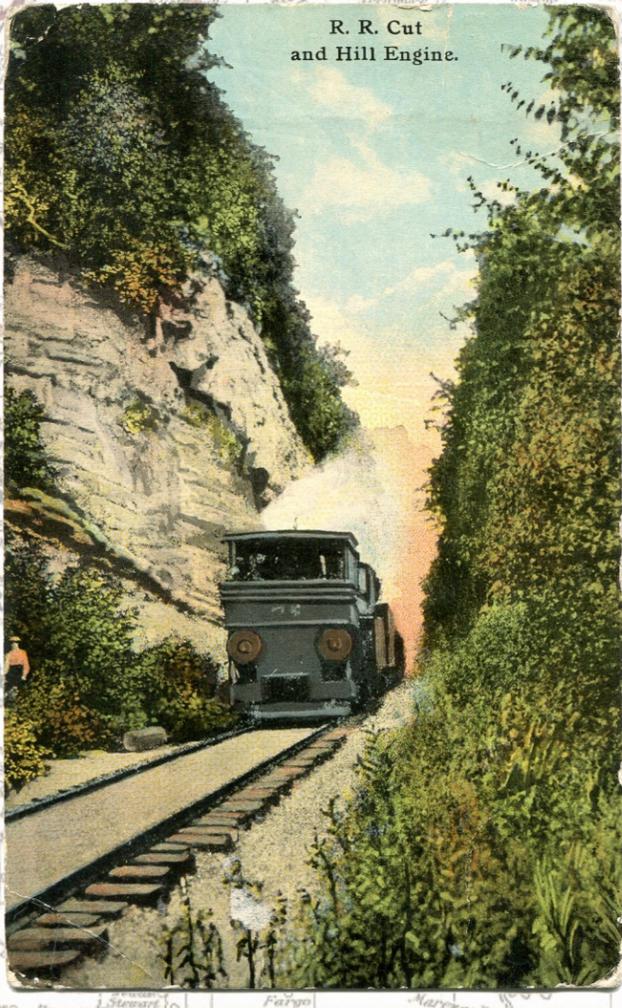
Vernon (1839)

Graham's Ford (1838)

North Madison (1837)

Madison (1841)

RAILROAD MAP



Picture Postcard

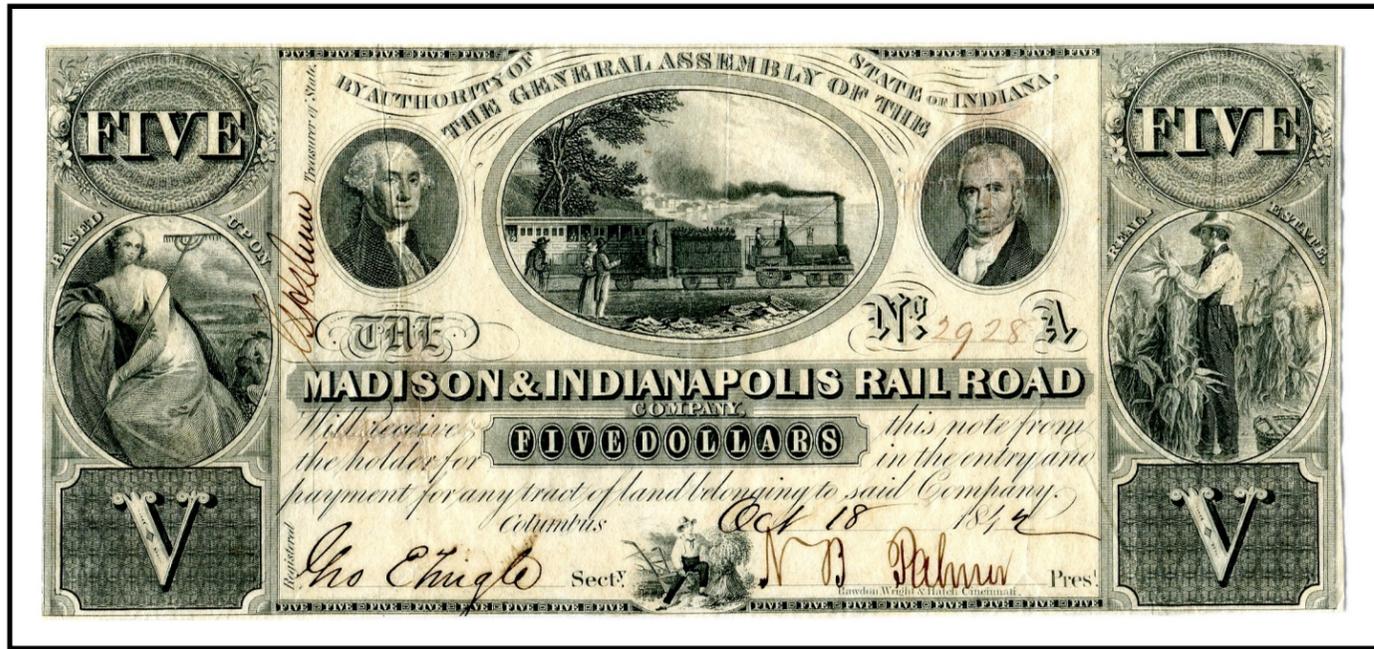
Published by A.C. Hillabold, Madison, IND

Construction started from North Madison, since the ground was relatively level north of that point. The path between Madison and North Madison was more difficult, requiring cuts through 100 feet of solid rock. Traveling 413 feet up from the riverfront, the road has a 5.89% grade. It is still the steepest common carrier standard-gauge line in the US. This postcard shows a picture of the Madison incline, circa 1907.



MADISON & INDNPLS R.R. red 33mm CDS (Type 1) - APR 28 (1852)
1851 3¢ orange red stamp with manuscript cancel; 3¢ rate for prepaid mail < 3,000 miles (1851-1855)

The cover above is addressed to Samuel Merrill. Merrill served as the president of the Madison & Indianapolis Railroad from 1844 to 1848.



Madison & Indianapolis Railroad Company \$5 note - October 18, 1842

Before the federal government began printing currency during the Civil War, early private railroads issued their own currency (scrip) to fund their construction needs. Above is a note which was backed by railroad assets – in this case the valuable iron English Trails on which the steam locomotive ran.

Note the engraving of the locomotive, a Baldwin 4-2-0 locomotive like the M&I RR used. Also note the engraving of Washington, the same one used by Rawdon, Wright and Hatch for the 10¢ US postage stamp issued in 1847.

5 Numeral 5 handstamp
Used on unpaid mail carried by the M&I RR until 1855 (when prepayment was required)

The cover at right is a bill of lading, listing items shipped from Polleys & Butler in **Madison** to the station at **Vernon**. The cover was then carried about eight miles north to the Brewersville, where it was delivered to I.D.P.A.M. Chauncey.

Chauncey was the postmaster of Brewersville from 1847 to 1849. The office closed briefly in the summer of 1849, and reopened on November 5, 1849 - just five days prior to this letter's postmark.

MADISON & INDNPLS R.R. red 33mm CDS (Type 1) - NOV 10 (1849)
With red numeral 5 handstamp
5¢ rate for all mail < 300 miles (1845-1851)

POLLEYS & BUTLER,
Commission and Forwarding Merchants, and Dealers in
IRON, NAILS, GROCERIES, &C. &C.
MADISON, INDIANA.

Franklin Printing Rooms.

Madison, *November 9th* 18*49*

RECEIVED of POLLEYS & BUTLER, In apparent good order, to be transported on the Madison and Indianapolis Rail Road, the undernamed articles, marked as per margin, which we promise to deliver without unnecessary delay, in like good order, subject to the agreement now made and hereinafter expressed, for *A. M. Chauncey* at the regular station at *Vernon* on payment of freight as per tariff of the Company, and presentation of this receipt without alteration or erasure.

It is agreed, and is part of the consideration of this contract, that the Rail Road Company is not to be responsible for leakage, fire, (except from locomotives in transportation,) unavoidable accidents, or any cause whatever, unless the same be shown to have occurred by the fraud or gross negligence of ourselves, our agents or servants; and that the liability of said Company shall cease after the delivery of said articles at the station named, as to any burglary, robbery, theft, loss or damage of said goods, unless any such burglary, robbery or theft shall be proven to have been the act of some agent or servant of said Company, connected with such station, or having access thereto.

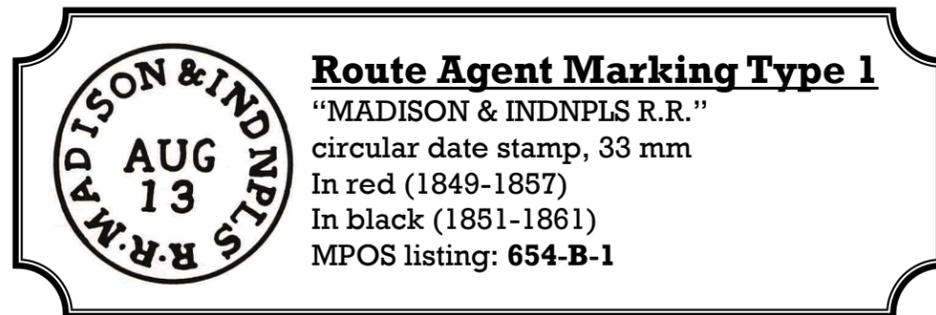
It is further stipulated, that no liability shall attach to the Company for losses, or damages not apparent on delivery, unless the same be claimed and specified within ten days from the date of this receipt; nor for apparent damages unless the same be claimed and specified before the articles are taken from the place of delivery. All Hollow ware, Stoves, and Castings, are shipped at the owner's risk solely as to breakage. Contents of Stoves, packed therein, are not receipted for as to number of pieces or description.

MARKS.	PACKAGES.	ARTICLES.	WEIGHTS.
<i>A. M. Chauncey</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Bag Coffee</i>	<i>166</i>
<i>Brewersville</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>Bl Sugar</i>	<i>114</i>
<i>1 Bl mol with</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>" Molasses</i>	<i>280</i>
<i>1 Slave Brake</i>			
<i>Coffee, Markey & J. Chauncey</i>			

Mr. J. I. P. A. M. Chauncey
Brewersville
Jennings Co. Ind

E. J. Morley

Freight per Steamer
 Charges per... do...
 Drayage.....
Nov 9 1849
20
20 75
6 88
9 25
1 10
37 03



The cover below was mailed from John Herriott in Franklin to Samuel Bispham, a grocer, in Philadelphia. The letter was carried **down the line** to Madison, where it was likely carried via the Ohio River to Pennsylvania. The straight-line **STEAM** handstamp used to cancel the postage stamps was used for steamboat mail. In Pennsylvania, it could be carried via **Pennsylvania Central RR** to Philadelphia.



MADISON & INDNPLS R.R. red 33mm CDS (Type 1) - MAY 28 (1849)
 Two 1847 5¢ red brown stamps with red **STEAM** cancel
 10¢ rate for all mail > 300 miles (1845-1851)

In this letter, Herriott expresses his desire to open a store selling shoes, leather, and groceries. He requests quotes for supplies from Bispham and asks for recommendations of other suppliers. The letter was then passed on by hand to the shoe and leather dealers Levick & Jenkins, with a note from Bispham encouraging them to contact Herriott with their quotes.

Most Likely Route of Cover

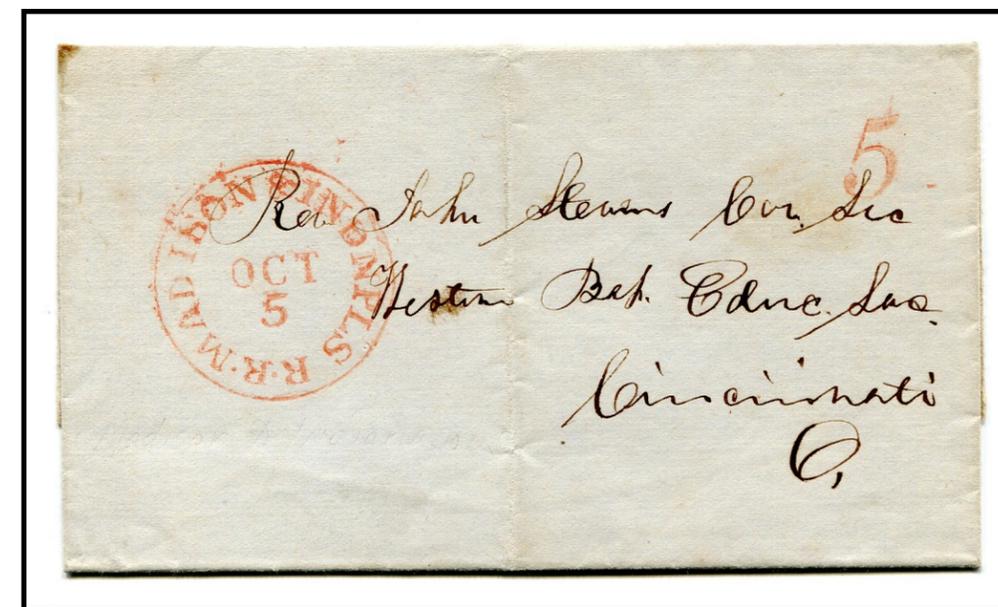
Over map: Skeleton Map of Rail-Roads Between Cape Canso and St. Louis
 Published by Tappan & Bradforth Lithographers, 1851 Boston



MADISON & INDNPLS R.R. black 33mm CDS (Type 1) - JUL 6 (1854)
 With black numeral **5** handstamp; 5¢ rate for unpaid mail < 3,000 miles (1851-1855)

The cover above was carried a short distance from Perry Township (posted from Southport) **up the line** to Indianapolis.

Route of Cover Over map: Map of Marion County, Indiana published by C.O. Titus, 1866 Philadelphia



MADISON & INDNPLS R.R. red 33mm CDS (Type 1) - OCT 5
 With red numeral **5** handstamp; 5¢ rate for unpaid mail < 3,000 miles (1851-1855)

Mail carried **down the line** to Madison. From Madison, the letter could easily be carried the remaining distance (roughly 90 miles) by river to Cincinnati.

Route Agent Marking Type 2
 "MADISON & INDNPLS R.R."
 circular date stamp, 32 mm
 In red (1849-1857)
 In black-blue (1851-1857)
 MPOS listing: 654-B-2

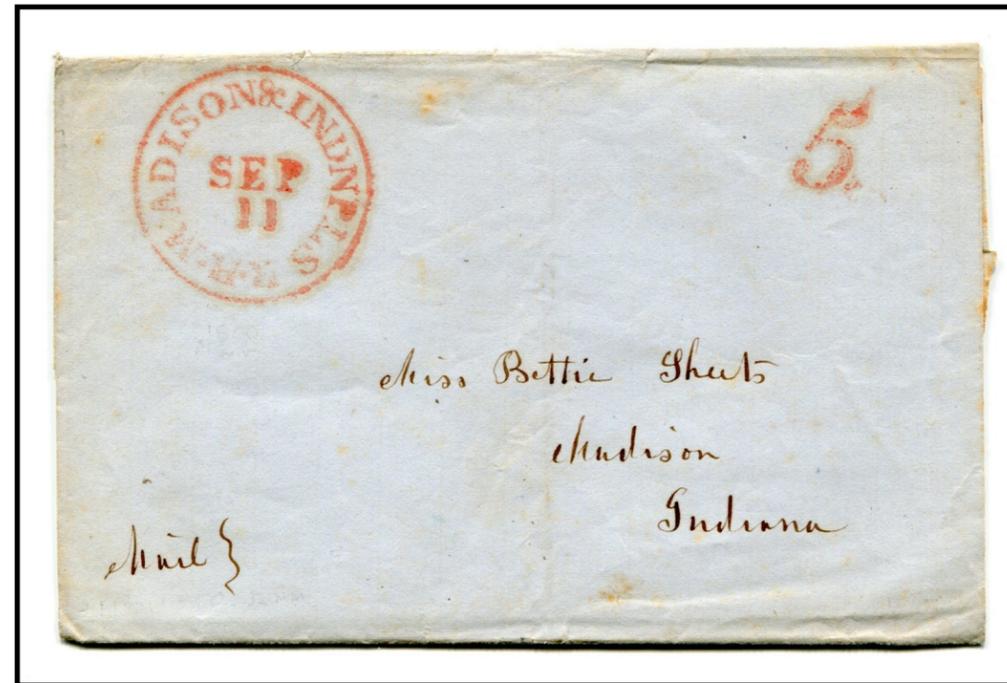


The cover below was carried on the M&I RR **down the line** to Madison. This was only the first leg of a long journey to Eastville, Virginia. Once in Madison, it was probably transferred to steamship and carried along the Ohio River to Gallipolis, where it was carried down the Kanawha River into what is now West Virginia.

It was likely carried over land for a short distance before reaching the point where construction on the **Virginia Central RR** was complete. It could then be carried by rail to the coast before taking another ship across the Chesapeake Bay to Eastville.



MADISON & INDNPLS R.R. blue 32mm CDS (Type 2) - JUL 4
 1851 3¢ Dull Red stamp; 3¢ rate for prepaid mail < 3,000 miles (1851-1855)



MADISON & INDNPLS R.R. red 32mm CDS (Type 2) - MAY 28 (1850)
 With black numeral 5 handstamp; 5¢ rate for all mail < 300 miles (1845-1851)

The cover above was carried from Indianapolis **down the line** to Madison. It was mailed in 1850, one year before the post office offered a discounted rate for prepaid mail. The discounted rate helped encourage the use of stamps prior to requiring them for delivery in 1855.



MADISON & INDNPLS R.R. black-blue 32mm CDS (Type 2) - JUL 26 (1852)
 1851 3¢ Dull Red stamp; 3¢ rate for prepaid mail < 3,000 miles (1851-1855)

Mail carried **down the line** to Madison by the M&I RR, and by Ohio River steamship to Cincinnati.

The cover below was **forwarded on the line**. Dated *Middlebury May 3, 1852*, the letter entered the mails in Akron, Ohio on May 5th. From Akron, the letter could have taken a number of different routes to its original destination in Madison - both canals and railroads were used for carrying mail from Akron to the Ohio River.

At Madison, the letter was marked in manuscript to be forwarded to Indianapolis. Five cents was charged for the unpaid postage to the new destination, and it was carried **up the line** to Indianapolis.

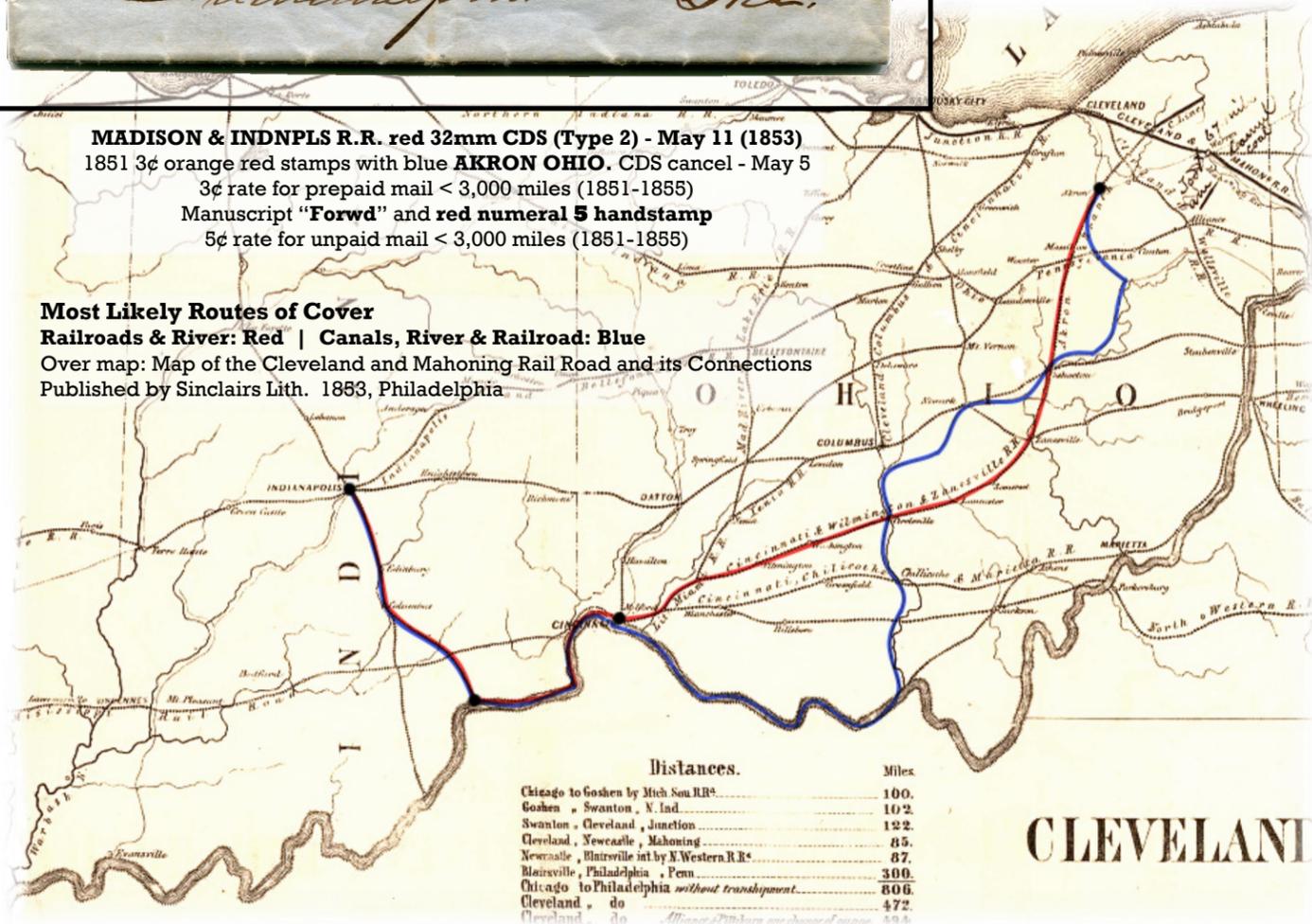
The M&I RR handstamp is dated May 11, this indicates a six day travel from Akron. The enclosed letter ends with a note: "Telegraph us if you get this job" - requesting the reply in a faster means of communication.

Madison's telegraph office had opened on September 29, 1847. This was the first telegraph office in Indiana.

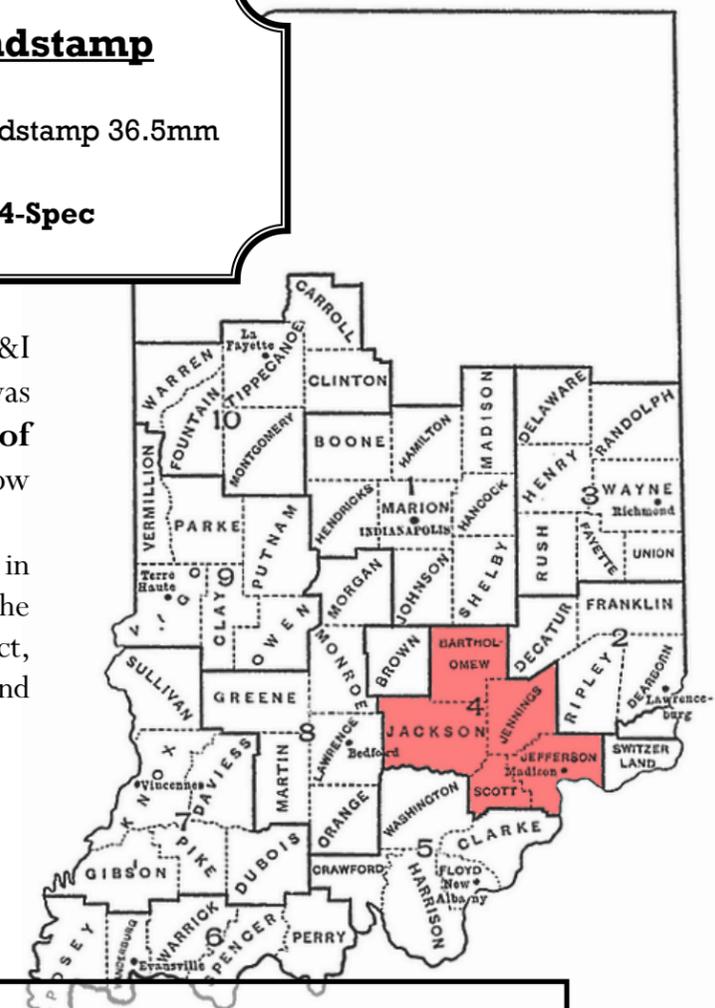


MADISON & INDNPLS R.R. red 32mm CDS (Type 2) - May 11 (1853)
 1851 3¢ orange red stamps with blue **AKRON OHIO**. CDS cancel - May 5
 3¢ rate for prepaid mail < 3,000 miles (1851-1855)
 Manuscript "Forwd" and red numeral 5 handstamp
 5¢ rate for unpaid mail < 3,000 miles (1851-1855)

Most Likely Routes of Cover
Railroads & River: Red | Canals, River & Railroad: Blue
 Over map: Map of the Cleveland and Mahoning Rail Road and its Connections
 Published by Sinclairs Lith. 1853, Philadelphia



MAP OF INDIANA
 SHOWING BANKING DISTRICTS AND PLACES WHERE BRANCHES WERE LOCATED.



VIA M.&I. R.R.
Special Handstamp
 "VIA M.&I.R.R."
 Straight line handstamp 36.5mm
 In black, 1851
 MPOS listing: 654-Spec

This handstamp is was **not** used by M&I RR route agents or by postal clerks - it was applied privately by the **Madison Branch of the State Bank of Indiana** to request how the letters should be carried.

The State Bank of Indiana was chartered in 1834. The Madison Branch was one of the original ten branches; it served the fourth district, which included Jefferson, Jennings, Jackson, and Bartholomew counties.

This cover is one of many known carried to Thomas H. Sharpe, cashier at the Indianapolis Branch.

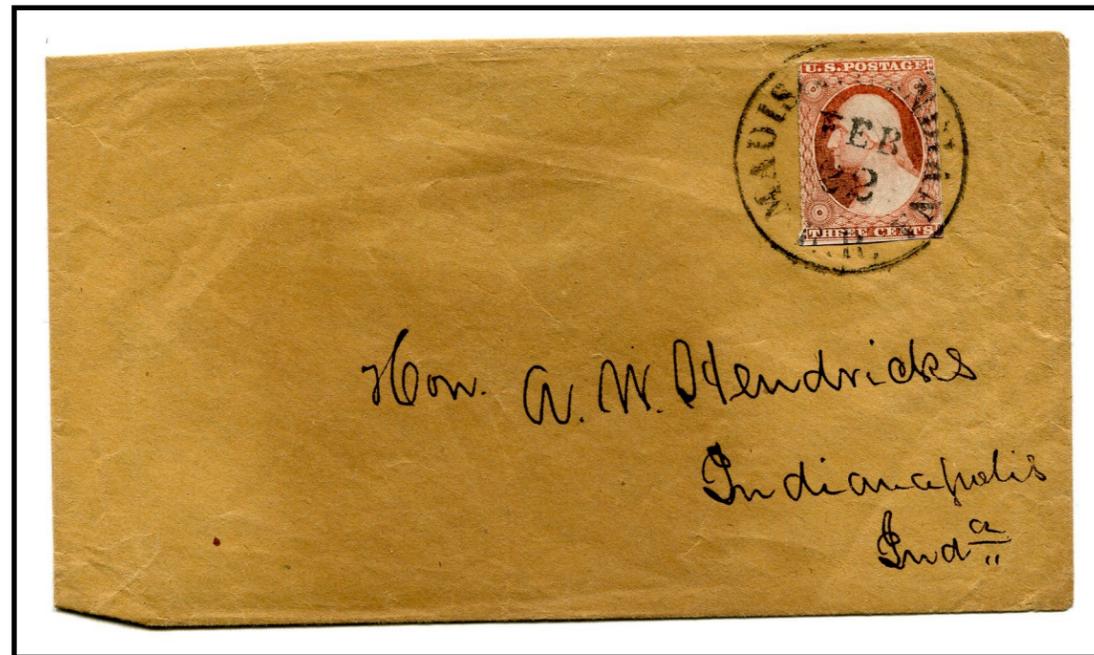
Map from Journal of Political Economy Vol. 4, No. 1
 Published by The University of Chicago Press, 1895



VIA M.&I.R.R. straight-line handstamp (Special)
 1851 3¢ Dull Red stamp with **MADISON Ind.** CDS cancel **OCT 14 (1851)**
 3¢ rate for prepaid mail < 3,000 miles (1851-1855)



The cover below was carried **up the line** to Indianapolis. It is addressed to Abram W. Hendricks. Hendricks was a lawyer in Madison from 1847 until 1866. He then moved to Indianapolis to join a law firm with his cousin, Thomas A. Hendricks (the sixteenth governor of Indiana).



MADISON & INDIANA R.R. black 32mm CDS (Type 4) - FEB 22
 1851 3¢ Dull Red stamp; 3¢ rate for prepaid mail < 3,000 miles (1851-1855 / 1855-1863)

Connecting Railways

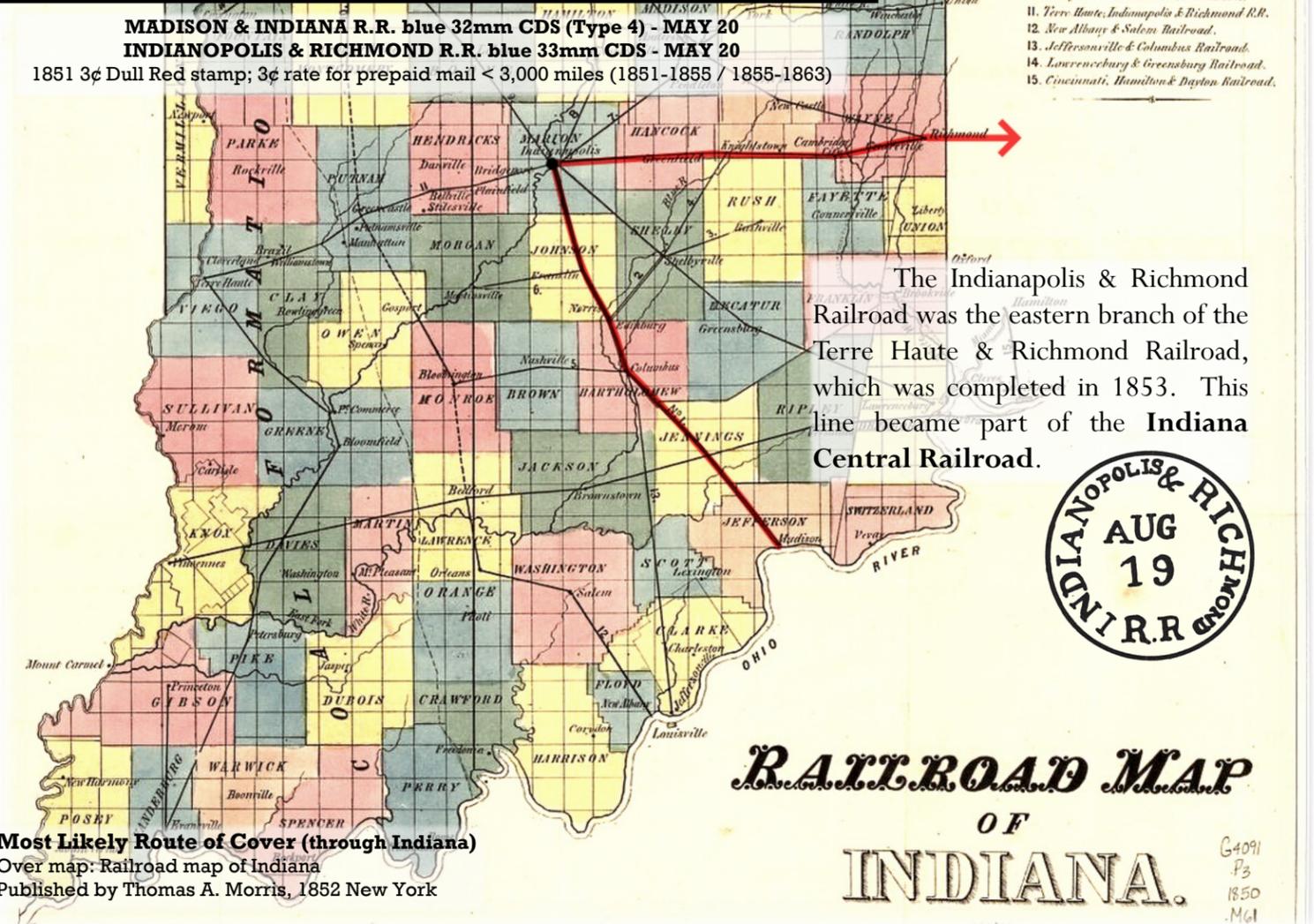
The Madison & Indianapolis Railroad was completed in 1847. Shortly after the completion of this first railroad, a burst of construction on other lines began. By 1853, railroads directly connected Indianapolis to Lafayette, Terre Haute, Peru, Union, Richmond, Lawrenceburg, and Jeffersonville.

To connect these lines, the Union Railway Company was formed to build the Indianapolis Union Station. When the Union Station was completed in 1853, it allowed passengers - **and mail** - to easily transfer between lines.

The cover below is the **only known example** of two different railroad route agent marks on the same cover. Without the enclosed letter, its originating post office is unknown, but it likely entered the mail somewhere below Indianapolis. As it was carried up the line on the M&I RR, it was hand stamped and pouched for points east via the **Indianapolis & Richmond Railroad**. When it was transferred to the I&R RR train, a route agent sorting the mail probably noticed that the **M&I RR** handstamp did not cancel the postage stamp, so the **I&R RR** handstamp was applied as a cancel.



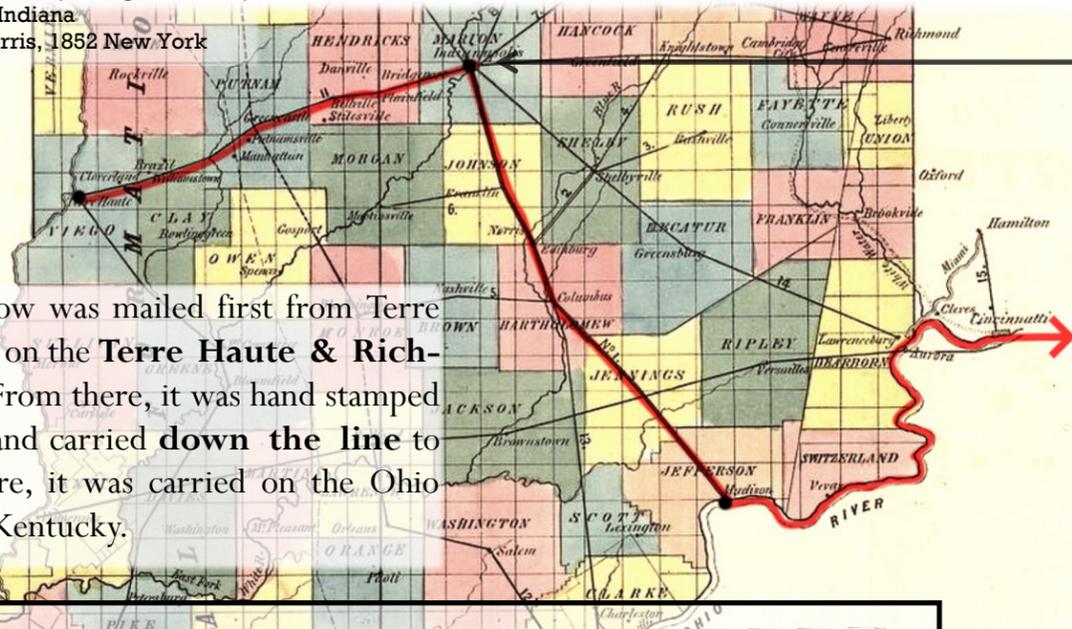
MADISON & INDIANA R.R. blue 32mm CDS (Type 4) - MAY 20
INDIANAPOLIS & RICHMOND R.R. blue 33mm CDS - MAY 20
 1851 3¢ Dull Red stamp; 3¢ rate for prepaid mail < 3,000 miles (1851-1855 / 1855-1863)



The Indianapolis & Richmond Railroad was the eastern branch of the Terre Haute & Richmond Railroad, which was completed in 1853. This line became part of the **Indiana Central Railroad**.

Most Likely Route of Cover (through Indiana)

Over map: Railroad map of Indiana
Published by Thomas A. Morris, 1852 New York



The cover below was mailed first from Terre Haute to Indianapolis on the **Terre Haute & Richmond Railroad**. From there, it was hand stamped by a M&I RR agent and carried **down the line** to Madison. From there, it was carried on the Ohio River to Covington, Kentucky.



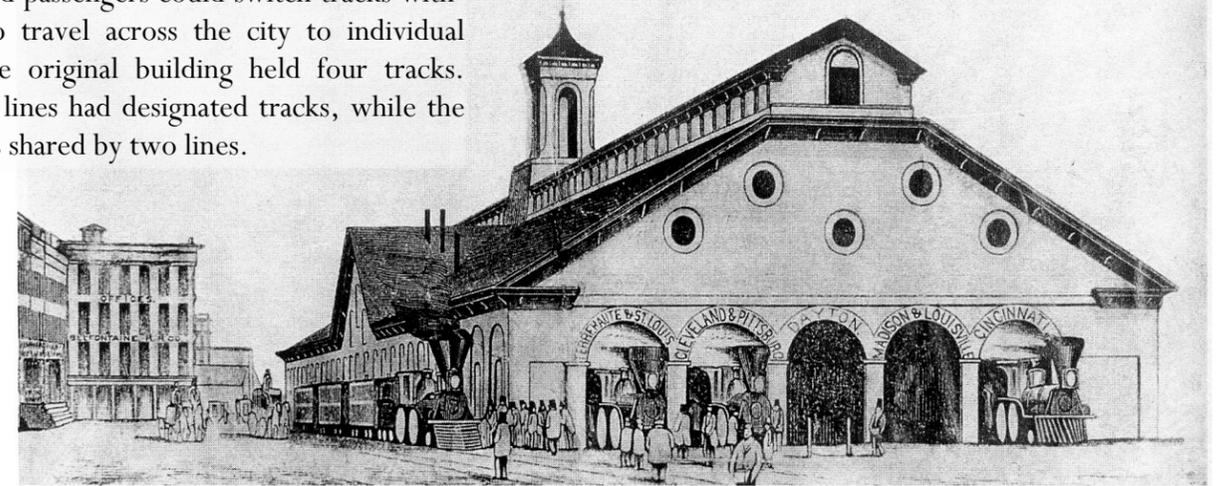
MADISON & INDIANA R.R. blue 32mm CDS (Type 4) - SEP 21 (1853)
1851 3¢ Dull Red stamp; 3¢ rate for prepaid mail < 3,000 miles (1851-1855)

The cover at right was mailed from the Madison Branch of the State Bank **up the line** to Thomas Sharpe in Indianapolis. Although this folded letter is dated from Madison and carried on the M&I RR, the stamp is canceled with a **Terre Haute CDS**. It is unknown why this letter would have been in Terre Haute, which is far out of the way from this letter's path. It represents an interesting postal history mystery.

First Indianapolis Union Dept

Illustration published in Railroads of Indiana by Simons & Parker
Indiana University Press, 1997 Bloomington

With the construction of the Union Depot in 1853, mail and passengers could switch tracks without having to travel across the city to individual stations. The original building held four tracks. Four railroad lines had designated tracks, while the fifth track was shared by two lines.



MADISON & INDNPLS R.R. red 32mm CDS (Type 2) - MAY 25 (1852)
1851 3¢ Dull Red stamp; 3¢ rate for prepaid mail < 3,000 miles (1851-1855)

Madison & Indianapolis Railroad Co.,

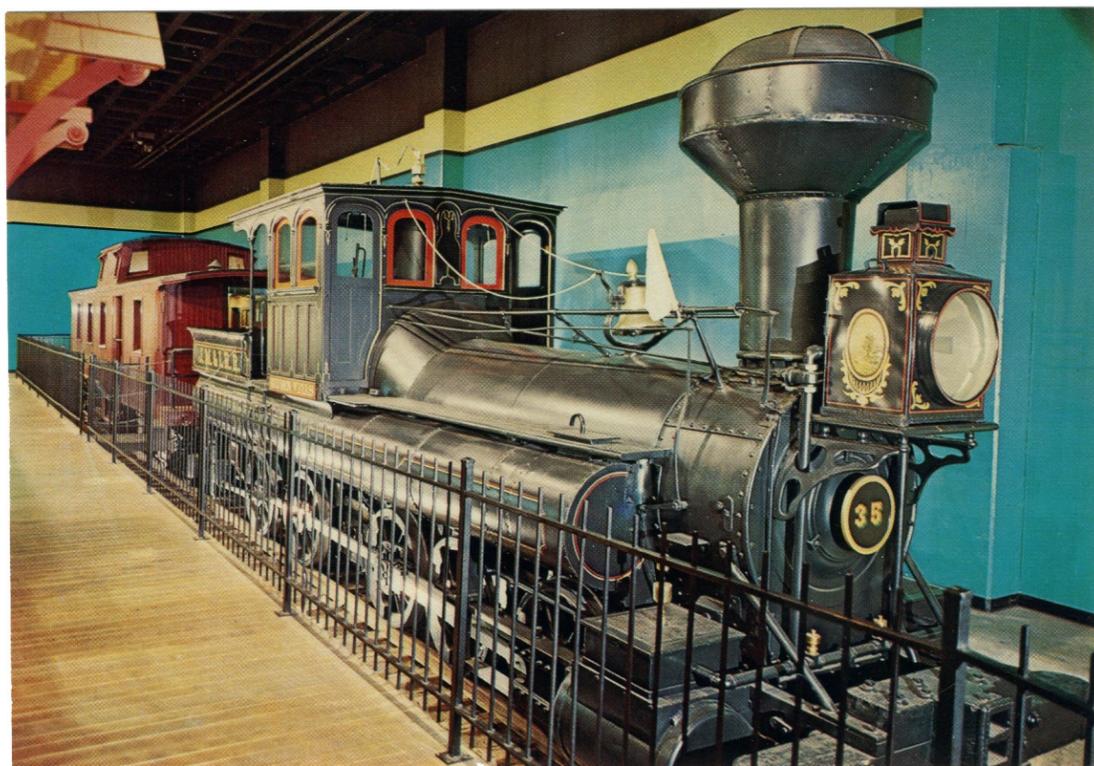
Madison, Ind.,

186-

Madison & Indianapolis Railroad Co. Letterhead

Madison, Ind., 186-

Letterhead used by the Madison & Indianapolis Railroad Co. circa 1860. Printed on laid, watermarked paper. The blank 1860 date indicates that this page was used late in the line's operation - it became the Jeffersonville, Madison & Indianapolis Railroad in 1866.



Picture Postcard

Published by Indy Images, Inc. 1978

The Ruben Wells was once called the world's most powerful locomotive. This 55-ton, wood burning engine was built in 1868 to tackle the Madison Hill. This postcard shows the locomotive's home at the Indianapolis Children's Museum in 1978. A photograph of the engine at work is shown on the postcard on the first page of this exhibit.

End of the (Rail) Road

In 1866, the Madison & Indianapolis Railroad merged with the Jeffersonville Railroad and reorganized as the **Jeffersonville, Madison & Indianapolis Railroad**.



Corner Card for Jefferson, Mad. & Indianapolis Railroad / AUDITOR'S OFFICE / LOUISVILLE, KY.

Carried from Louisville, KY to Edinburg, IN

1883 2¢ Orange Brown stamp; 2¢ per half ounce rate (1883-1885)

Barred Oval (1) and LOUISVILLE K.Y. CDS duplex cancel - May 22 / 11 AM / 1884

The JM&I RR acquired other lines within the next twenty-four years of operation. The Shelby & Rush Railroad (1882), Columbus & Shelby Railroad (1881), and Lake Earie & Louisville Railroad (1890) all became part of the JM&I RR. Finally, in 1890 it merged with the Pittsburg, Cincinnati & St. Louis Railway and the Chicago, St. Louis & Pittsburgh Railroad to form the Pittsburg, Cincinnati, Chicago & St. Louis Railway. Finally, in 1968, after four more consolidations, it became part of the **Pennsylvania Central Railroad**.

M&I RR Legacy

In 1976, a seventeen mile section of the original M&I RR, stretching between Columbus and North Vernon, was abandoned by Penn Central. This was acquired by the City of Madison Port Authority and is **currently still in operation**.

The locomotive, *Ruben Wells*, was engineered specifically to work the M&I RR, with its steep Madison Hill. It was the first locomotive to climb the hill without assistance. It worked from 1868 until 1907. It is currently on permanent display at the **Children's Museum of Indianapolis**.