

Innovative and Versatile: First Issue United States Stamped Envelopes 1853-1860

The aim of this single-frame Postal Stationery exhibit is to show the many *innovations* (pages 2 through 6 and 16) that characterized our earliest stamped envelopes, and their great *versatility* (pages 7 through 15): the extensive variety of uses to which they were suited and adapted — greater than the usages of contemporary adhesive stamps in some respects — despite the limited number of denominations and sizes. This is *not* an attempt to squeeze every First Issue envelope variety into 16 pages, which would not be possible.

First Issue stamped envelopes were more practical and more secure than contemporary adhesive stamps. The only U.S. stamps in use from 1853 to 1855 were 1¢, 3¢, and (seldom used) 12¢ denominations; 10¢ stamps arrived in 1855 and (rarely used) 5¢ in 1856; none were watermarked or embossed. The 3¢, 6¢, and (beginning 1855) 10¢ embossed stamped envelope denominations were all useful. Until 1869, the United States had no 6¢ adhesive stamp, but that was the single coast-to-coast letter rate in effect until 1855 and the double ordinary letter rate. Only stamped envelopes had that denomination. Stamped envelopes were embossed and watermarked for security. This exhibit shows how First Issue stamped envelopes fulfilled all postal duties of their day except 1¢ drop letter and circular rates, plus out-of-the-mails usage for which adhesive stamps were not suitable. Only used envelopes are included. The only added frankings are carriers, locals, express company imprints, and Confederate States stamps. No regular issue United States adhesive postage stamps are shown. The novelty and adaptability of these products are illustrated by performance in their day, not through fluke unused survivors. But the overall quality is excellent, including the envelope flaps.

No first day covers of First Issue stamped envelopes exist. A July 22, 1853, cut square — the earliest documented use of Scott U4 — appears on the title page. The July 19, 1853, earliest documented use of a white die 1 envelope without a Nesbitt seal appears on page 4. The exhibit closes with the November 12, 1859, earliest documented use of the first stamped envelope with patented self-ruled lines; a March 1861 Confederate usage of the final revised patent lines envelope mailed at Montgomery, Alabama, (capital of the CSA at that time); and a post-demonetization Civil War adversity cover that was turned and reused in 1862 or later.

Except for the cut square on the title page, all the envelopes are entire. Two entire are windowed. Each master die type is shown and its details are described on first reference. All three sizes of envelope are included. White and buff papers, and the two stamp colors, red and green, are shown, including both Scott-listed shades of the 10¢ green. Less significant features are not enumerated, but the exhibit presents important early trial-and-error-period production varieties on page 5. Production ended in 1860, when First Issue envelopes were superseded by Second Issue (Star Die) envelopes, but a couple of later usages are included.

Three envelopes on scarce original horizontally laid white paper with horizontal watermark are shown (Maisel estimated 40 to 80 exist). One is the unique note-size cover on page 3 that has no Nesbitt seal. Another is one of two known with watermark inverted and reversed on page 4, originally discovered by this exhibitor.

Route agent, WAY, and STEAM markings illustrate various postal arrangements for conveyance by rail and steamboat. Cross-border, and transatlantic covers are shown, as are registered, shortpaid, and forwarded mail. Transcontinental mail, collection by post office carriers, collection and delivery to-the-mails and from-the-mails by local posts, and Western express (including conjunctive) out-of-the-mails transport and delivery are included.

Many of these envelopes were previously owned by some of the greatest postal stationery specialists and postal history collectors — Dr. Carroll Chase, Louis H. Barkhausen, Marcus W. White, William A. Maisel, Charles A. Fricke, Allen Mintz, Rob Haeseler, Robert Schoendorf, and John D. Bowman. Combining the most desirable envelopes from the most storied collections with this exhibitor's new discoveries, the exhibit represents the first time 1853 Series envelopes of this importance have been presented in concert.

Here are some measures of this exhibit's response to the difficulty-of-acquisition challenge:

Page 1. The 1853 year-dated cancel of New-York, in use only July 11 to 25, is known on just four stamped envelopes and one cut square. The cut square is shown.

Page 1. The entire has both a foreign origin, Hawaii, and a foreign destination, Prussia, via two oceans and across Panama. According to Hawaii expert Fred Gregory, only one other First Issue stamped envelope from Hawaii is recorded, a 10¢ green to New Bedford, Massachusetts; this is the unique 3¢ discovered in 2005.

Page 2. Gary Starkey and Dan Undersander, today's leading First Nesbitt Issue specialists, believe this exhibit's die 4 envelope with a Nesbitt seal on the flap is one of only two known. Charles L. Wunsch's and Dr. John R. Weimer's 1980s gold medal exhibits of First Issue stamped envelopes did not include one, nor does Dr. Louis Call's comprehensive exhibit.

Page 6. Die 3 on white paper (Scott U5) is the rarest First Issue envelope.

Page 6. **Newly added:** The common die 5 envelope from aeronaut John Wise in 1857 to aspiring aeronaut William Markoe in Minnesota Territory has Professor Wise's first balloon in flight cachet. This is the cover illustrated in Robert Schoendorf's *Catalog of Classic American Airposts and Aeronautica 1784-1900*.

Pages 7 and 8. The earliest 3¢ stamped envelope used from California (page 7) and the last-day-of-rate 6¢ green envelope (windowed entire on page 8) are this exhibitor's discoveries. John Birkinbine II reports only one other last-day-of-rate envelope (a 3¢).

Page 9. Richard F. Winter records only two Nesbitt envelopes from California to France before the U.S.-French postal convention of 1857. One is this exhibit's 6¢ green envelope, 1854 usage (the other is a 10¢).

Page 9. An October 5, 1853, 3¢ envelope with Nesbitt seal, mailed from Norwich, Connecticut, October 5, 1853, to Perth, Canada, crossed the border at Ogdensburgh, New York. In *Simpson's Postal Markings*, Thomas J. Alexander rated the Ogdensburgh exchange marking a 7 ("rare" 7 to 10 known).

Page 9. An 1858 incoming cover from the U.S. Navy sloop of war *Jamestown* cruising the Caribbean.

Page 10. All usages of the 6¢ red envelope are scarce. The one in this exhibit went by registered mail from Alligator, Florida, to Tallahassee.

Page 11. In the 1927 Toaspen sale, this exhibit's 1853 Pennsylvania Railroad route agent's cancel from Dr. Chase's collection was described as "One of the scarcest railroads. Two seen." Simpson-Alexander rarity 9 ("extremely rare" 2 to 3 recorded). It is unique on postal stationery, and the Nesbitt seal is a bonus.

Page 11. The *Southern Belle* Mississippi River steamboat cover is rated as rare by Alexander and by James W. Milgram in *Vessel Named Markings on United States Inland and Ocean Waterways 1810-1890*. It is later than previously recorded examples (1853), but barely late enough (mid-1854) for a die 5 stamped envelope.

Page 12. The Scott catalog lists three Nesbitt entires franked with Eagle carriers' stamps (two were in Siegel's 1999 David Golden sale). This exhibit includes an unlisted example.

Page 15. George F. Nesbitt & Co. printed embossed advertising corner cards on envelopes along with the stamp imprints. Five are recorded, each for a different firm. Two unique examples are included here. (One entire, discovered by this exhibitor, is windowed to show only the flap imprint.) They are compared with a scarce commercial embossed ad privately printed on a finished envelope and a rare pictorial corner card.

Page 16. Confederate usage of a 3¢ Nesbitt envelope from Alabama to Iowa while the United States still operated the post office is unusual and seldom seen; turned re-use of a Nesbitt envelope mailed in the Confederate postal system is rare.