

Postal History of the U.S. 3-Cent Circular Die Stamped Envelopes: Rates and Usages 1917-1960

This exhibit shows how the United States 3¢ Circular Die stamped envelopes were used in their day. Also included are 3¢ Circular Die stamped envelopes revalued to 2¢ in 1920, revalued to 4¢ in 1958, or overprinted for official Post Office Department use.

3¢ envelopes were added to the existing Circular Die series in 1917 when the domestic 1st class letter rate increased from 2¢ to 3¢ per ounce as a temporary wartime revenue measure. While the exact date of issue is not known, this exhibit contains the only reported example used on the first day of the new rate, November 2, 1917. The 3¢ rate of 1917 to 1919 also applied to mail sent to so-called treaty rate countries, such as Canada, where the 2¢ domestic rate had applied.

Production of the 3¢ Circular Die stamped envelopes ended in 1919 when the letter rate reverted to 2¢ per ounce. In 1920, the U.S. Post Office Department revalued many remaining 3¢ envelopes to 2¢. These included envelopes in private hands, for which a refund of 1¢ each was given, as well as those in post office stock.

3¢ Circular Die stamped envelopes were reissued in 1932, just before the domestic 1st class letter rate increased again to 3¢ per ounce. By then, the letter rate to treaty rate countries had already risen to 3¢.

Production of Circular Die stamped envelopes ended again in 1950 when the Post Office Department issued a new Oval Die series. Nevertheless, some 3¢ Circular Die envelopes remained in use for several more years. There were even some in post office stock that were revalued to 4¢ in 1958 when the domestic 1st class letter rate rose to 4¢ per ounce. This exhibit thus contains a few envelopes used after 1950, including the two final items used in 1960.

Plan of exhibit:
1917-1919 Era
Rate Restoration Era
1932-1958 Era
Epilogue (1 page)

Please note that domestic mail includes usages between the United States and its possessions, sea post facilities, military post offices, and postal agencies. Please also note the two ways this exhibit presents a radical departure from the usual method of collecting and exhibiting postal stationery. (1) As a postal history exhibit, it focuses on rates and usages, and it generally ignores die, knife, watermark, shade, and overprint varieties. (2) It includes many items that have adhesive stamps added to pay for rate increases, multiple rates, foreign mail rates, special postal services, and/or air mail.



18¢ postage =
3¢ letter rate
+ 15¢ registry
fee. 1937.

POSTMASTER: If not deliverable at address given, return to sender immediately. Return Postage Guaranteed.