

UNITED STATES DOMESTIC LETTER RATES 1800 TO 1900

A STUDY OF THE DOMESTIC LETTER RATES IN EFFECT FOR STANDARD POSTAL COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN 1800 AND 1900

HISTORY

Between 1800 and 1900, the United States experienced rapid population growth, significant westward expansion, and a general rise in literacy. During this time period, the United States had 37 different Postmasters General, established more than a dozen significant postal regulations that affected domestic letter rates, fought three noteworthy international conflicts (the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War, and the Spanish-American War) and a devastating civil war.

SCOPE

This exhibit describes the development of the various domestic letter rates and methods of postal communication during this significant 100 years in our nation's history. The emphasis is on the postal rate structure applicable to typical letters, for personal and business matters, which represents the major purpose and justification for the establishment of the postal communication system. The exhibit is primarily a chronological display of examples of the basic postal communication system from the early, complex system—consisting of rates based on the number of letter sheets and the distance between origin and destination—to the simplified system based on classification and weight of the correspondence within the Continental United States.

HIGHLIGHTS

Highlights include examples of the early rates which were dependent upon both weight and distance, the War Rate Surcharge of 1815 (except for the scarce 1-1/2 cent Drop Rate), examples of the Restored Rates of 1816 including an example of the first day of the rate restoration, the Express Rate and Transcontinental Rate, the first two regularly issued stamps of 1847, carrier stamps used in combination with regular issues, and examples of the additional fees for ship rates. Also included are examples of “bootleg” covers, the 3 cent pink issue of 1861 on cover, and the only known green Norfolk, Connecticut circular date stamp used before 1851 (discovery copy, used in 1839). Other significant items include the Westtown and the Friends Boarding School locals, and the reunited *Pittsburgh Twins* court covers paying 18 and 25 times the 3-cent rate. Examples of correspondence to and from various Territories of the United States are also included as well as examples of bisected stamps and the whimsical creation of a bicolor stamp using the vignette of one stamp and the frame of another similar stamp.