

# UNITED STATES DOMESTIC LETTER RATES FROM THE ACT OF 1792 TO OCTOBER 1, 1883

## SYNOPSIS

### PURPOSE

Show the continuous simplification and decrease in cost of Domestic Letter Rates from the **ACT OF 1792** to the First Day of the **ACT OF 1883** and prove that the reduction of Postal Rates was the primary factor in reducing the effective cost.

### TREATMENT

**Beginning of Exhibit:** *The First Federal Postal Act established by the U. S. Government.*

Prior to 1792, postal operations were a continuation of the British System based on the Pound / Shilling / Pence. The First Federal **POSTAL ACT OF 1792** established new postal rates based on the U. S. Dollar (**COINAGE ACT OF 1792**).

**Conclusion of Exhibit:** *End of the ACT OF 1872 / First Day of the ACT OF 1883.*

On October 1, 1883, the Domestic Letter Rate was reduced to 2 ¢ per half ounce delivered anywhere within the continental United States, and this rate is the lowest cost ever attained. From this date onward, the Domestic Letter Rate continued with little change except for an increase in the weight allowance and subsequent postal rate increases primarily due to inflation.

**Time Frame:** The time frame of the exhibit begins with the *most complex* **FIRST FEDERAL POSTAL ACT** created by the newly formed country, includes the *most expensive* postage rates (i.e., the **WAR RATES**) and ends with the initial appearance of the *lowest postage rate* that commenced on October 1, 1883.

**Subject Limits:** Exhibit does *not* include:

- Postal activity of the Confederate States. This Postal System was created by "...states in rebellion."
- Postal Convention between U.S. and Great Britain involving "Retaliatory Rates" – this is considered a special situation affecting rates between governments for a short duration. (Inclusion adversely affected purpose of the exhibit).
- Registration and Special Delivery – these "Additional Service Fees" are tangential to the basic Domestic Letter Rates.
- Non-Letter items such as newspapers, printed circulars, packages, and similar postal matter.
- Postal Rates applicable to mail to or from Chagres, Havana, and Panama as established by the **ACT OF 1847**. These rates are considered international rates and not Domestic Letter Rates.
- Secondary Postal Acts affecting sundry matters such as the establishment of postal roads, compensation paid to postal workers, and other **ACTS** not affecting Domestic Letter Rates.

**Organization and Development:** Chronologically based on the **POSTAL ACT**. Each **ACT** includes the Domestic Letter Rates, in order of "Distance of Travel" where applicable, and each main Chapter is typically arranged as follows:

- **LETTER RATES:** Example of the correct "Single Weight" Letter often followed by examples of variations (i.e., prepayment versus payment due, multiple weight, erroneous rates, unusual marking or significant events, etc.)
- **TERRITORIAL USAGES,** to indirectly indicate the territorial expansion of the United States.
- **FORWARDING,** to illustrate the methodology and application of forwarding costs as established by the Act.
- **SHIP FEE,** added to the Domestic Rate, when imposed by the Act.
- **WAY LETTER FEE,** added to the Domestic Rate when allowed by the Act.
- **DROP LETTER FEE**
- **CARRIER FEE,** as established by the Act.

An **INTRODUCTON** and **CONCLUSION** are included. Also, a **SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION** Chapter illustrates the relationship of the 1815 **WAR RATES**, the one-month **RESTORED RATES** of 1816, and the **NEW RATES** of 1816.

**Balance:** The amount of material to illustrate the Letter Rates within each Act is a function of the number of different Postal Distance Zones and other related fees (i.e., Ship Fee, Way Letters, etc.). In order to illustrate the economic factors comparing postal costs with the Daily Wage Rate, multiple weight letters are frequently used. Due to the gradual decline in the number of Postal Zones, it is apparent that the number of examples presented towards the end of the exhibit (i.e., 1845 and beyond) would typically decrease due to simplification of the rate system. However, these later **ACTS** contain relevant examples of multi-weight letters, free forwarding, unusual markings, and other interesting postal activity.

**Relevance:** Material was selected to illustrate the steady simplification of the rate structure and reduction of postal costs. Particular attention was exercised in obtaining the best possible material commensurate with availability.

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**Completeness:** No Postal History exhibit is ever *complete*. There are always new items to add. It is significant that:

- Each Distance Zone for all of the ACTS are complete, and representative examples of the Postal Fees are included.  
**Exception:** Despite more than 25 years of searching, I have never seen an example of the obscure 40¢ rate to or from Astoria and few suitable examples of the 40¢ trans-continental rate via the Isthmus of Panama posted during the 529 days between the ACT OF 1847 and the ACT OF 1848. However, during the ACT OF 1848, examples of the new 12½¢ rate for mail delivered within California, and the reiterated 40¢ trans-continental rate via Panama, are included.
- The limit of ten frames mandated that many examples of Territorial Origins and Destinations, Forwarding, and the “Ship Fee Added to the Domestic Rate” had to be excluded. The exhibit includes selected representative examples.

## IMPORTANCE

**Subject Importance:** Between 1792 and 1883, the U. S. population grew from approximately 4.2 million to nearly 53.8 million. Land under U.S. control expanded from 892,135 square miles to 3,617,800 square miles. During this time period, the U.S. established more than a dozen significant postal regulations affecting Domestic Letter Rates and the territorial growth is the most dramatic expansion in the size of the United States.

**Philatelic Importance:** The exhibit illustrates the evolution of the postal system from a complex system of rates and fees, based on multiple “Distance of Travel” zones, to a simplified and low-cost method of conveying mail within the U.S. that established the foundation of the modern postal system in the United States.

**Exhibit Importance:** The exhibit combines the Subject Importance and the Philatelic Importance and further illustrates the economic advantage of declining postal costs with respect to wage rates.

**In summary, the exhibit is essentially a complete presentation of the most significant era in the evolution and development of the rate structure of the U. S. Postal System.**

## PERSONAL STUDY AND RESEARCH

**Personal Study and Research:** Investigated all cancellations to verify previously published usages and included ten examples of previously unknown or unrecorded covers. Also, extensive research of historical maps to determine the actual distances of post roads in existence at the time the correspondence was mailed was both difficult and time-consuming.

**Original Comparative Analysis:** Developed the exhibit to illustrate the *Effective Cost* (Duration of Labor to pay for Postage). Researched both historical documents and Department of Labor data to analyze the labor required to pay postal costs. I am not aware of any other U. S. Postal Rate Study comparing postal costs with a standardized wage rate.

## RARITY

**Challenge:** Development of the exhibit required searching for items from numerous sources. Initial exhibit material was first acquired in early 1974 and has continued to the present, representing a time span of nearly 45 years.

**Difficulty of Acquisition:** Obtaining exhibit-quality examples is difficult in many instances, especially regarding:

- Multiple examples of each of the **WAR RATES** and both the proper 1-Cent Drop rate and the improper 1-1/2 Cent rate as well as example of a Territorial origin, Territorial destination, and the unique turned cover at two different postage costs.
- At least one example of each of the basic **RESTORED RATES** and an example of the ship fee.
- Inclusion of various Ship Rates, Territorial examples, forwarding, early Drop and Way Rates, and multi-weight letters.
- Letters to and from identical persons to illustrate the effect of a rate change. (Three instances are included).
- The exhibit contains ten examples of **First Day of Rate**, six examples of **Last Day of Rate**, and one example of a letter posted near the conclusion of one ACT and forwarded on the **First Day** of the subsequent ACT.

## PRESENTATION

Organized chronologically by each applicable **POSTAL ACT**.

**Chapters:** Each **POSTAL ACT** (and other Chapters) is presented within a blue, multi-border box with gray shading. Postal Rates and Postal Fees, as appropriate, are presented immediately below the Chapter Headings.

**Subchapters:** Subchapters, such as “Distance of Travel” for a specific rate, are presented initially in **Bold Black Text** within a single-line black box with gray shading.

**Significant Items:** Matted with an additional red border. Justification for prominence is within a double-line red box.

**Postal Rate or Philatelic Aspect** are presented in a double-line blue box.

**Economic and Social Factors** are presented in a double-line green box.