

United States Official Stamps 1873-1884

Postal History Synopsis (c)1994

The official stamps of the United States were the second longest used series in the 19th Century (1873-1884); only the Banknote Issues (1870 through 1894) had a longer continuous life. That fact, it seems, is not supported by the number of surviving covers or by the fact that numerous stamps have not either been found or survived on cover. Certain rarities were stolen in the early 1980s and conflicting reports state that the stamps were soaked off the covers, in Italy, or that they are in hiding in the United States beyond the reach of the law; in any event, these covers, totaling about 100 in number, cannot be counted in any census.

The second page of this exhibit is included because it is one of the very few known signature pages of the U.S. Grant Cabinet and the order of signing by Cabinet Secretaries is the order followed by this collection. The Agriculture Department was not a cabinet member until 1889 so no signature appears on this page. The India proofs are merely added to show the basic stamp designs without defacing cancels.

Prior to the use of the special official stamps, the President and his cabinet since 1869 had personally franked the mails. Two outstanding examples of forerunners are displayed, one from Washington by Grant to his Secretary of State Ham Fish and the other by Grant sent from his summer White House in Long Branch, N.J. to a Senator.

Grant's White House used the stamps but Hayes' took the passage of the Penalty frank law on March 4, 1877 (his inauguration date) as a sign that he was not to use the stamps on official mail; Hayes, his family and secretaries did use the left over stamps from the Grant era on personal mail while Hayes wife used the 3¢ Banknotes to frank invitations to her lemonade parties at the dry White House, while Penalty mail carried official communications.

The pre- General Postal Union Treaty (July 1, 1875 to March 31, 1878) rates are illustrated. The 3 cent Treasury first day cover (one of two Treasury first days, and four total of all Officials) illustrates the rate to Canada. Other treaty rates are to Japan and Hawaii.

Several G.P.U. 5¢ and double rates are shown both paid with correct combinations of stamps (no Department had a 5¢ stamp) but sometimes by overpaying the rate.

The one cent denominations generally paid either the unsealed circular rate(1¢ for 2 ounces, the two cent local rate (two copies) or as part of the domestic 3¢ or 2¢ rates. It appears that few one cent stamps were used to complete rates; it was easier for the clerks to overpay rates than use correct postage.

Registration of official mail required stamps except in two main instances -- the Post Office enjoyed registration privileges for its official mail, without stamps, unless the enclosures were philatelic materials (stamps) in which event the registration fee had to be paid. Secondly, the

Treasury Department enjoyed free registration fees if mutilated currency was redeemed and the proper officials frank added. Warren Reuben Taylor of Vermont, a gentleman who used over a dozen alias to obtain new currency, including Court LeDiable and Quincy Quiverly for over a decade, has several covers addressed to him in Vermont recorded, and a couple shown here.

High frankings are virtually unheard of. The Kohinoor of Official covers, the combination lot, 17 30¢ values and the \$2 State, to Stettin, Germany, is the most exciting Official postal history item ever located and is the only surviving dollar value used, this one carrying bound volumes to the American Library, payable at the special rate of lot per bound volume. The \$1.26 postage on the official mail to Mexico, which charged triple that amount (approximately) to deliver the mail 30 miles across the border, since the United States paid the rate only to the frontier, is an incredible usage. The portion of the front of the War Department envelope using one 90¢ value and the four 24¢ denominations, is another high franking. The only 90¢ values reported are the State (one) War (four) and Interior (one, stamp not tied) even though seven of the nine departments had 90¢ values. It is surprising that a 90¢ Treasury cover has not survived given the fact that there are numerous blocks of four and larger off-cover multiples known.

The 30¢ denominations appear in eight of the nine Departments; there are probably five State Department covers (two here), no surviving Navy or Interior (one each was reported but stolen), four 30¢ Wars (one out of period), and no Agriculture, Treasury, Post Office, or Justice.

Even the 24¢ denominations are rare. I record two 24¢ State covers, 3 Justice covers (including the item shown which is the largest used multiple (a pair) and a single, two Navy items including the largest piece shown here) (plus one stolen) and the only known State cover from Syria, to the former President of the Confederacy (shown here).

Even the 15¢ values are scarce. I doubt that 25 in total exist--the State Department here is one of two, the two Justice covers are of three or four reported.

The 12¢ Agriculture is the only cover and there is one label. Several other departments have only a couple, and none are common--the Interior Department seemed to have the greatest number, and this is probably 25 to 30 covers, not a very large census in the philatelic sense.

The 7¢ State and Navy covers are extremely rare, probably fewer than five examples each but there are several more 7¢ Treasury covers since it was used with the 2¢ denomination to make up triple rated domestic covers.

The rarity of covers among all of the departments starts with the Agriculture Department. A remarkable grouping is displayed in this exhibit. Probably no more than 30 covers and mailing labels of all values reported exist today.

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