

The Eagle and Thunderbolt Cancel – The Cancel from that Missing Cover

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Collector's Club Philatelist - March-April 2001

Somewhere out there in philatelic land is the cover from which was removed the finest cancellation ever to strike a special delivery stamp. The Eagle and Thunderbolt cancel on the 1894 issue (Scott E4). This cancellation was only used from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. on January 2, 1895, in Boston as a test. As it turned out, the Post office liked the flag but not the eagle cancel. Eight strikes are known, it is believed, three off-cover (including this one) and five on cover. A proof impression has also been located. This is one of the great rarities of machine cancellation philately.'

This stamp first appeared at a Robert A. Siegel, Inc. auction in New York City when I was a freshman in college (1955-1956). At that time, gasoline was 19.9 cents. The estimate, as I recall, was \$50 to \$75, virtually my semester's social budget. I had only shortly before met my philatelic mentor, Louis K. Robbins, a life member of the Collectors Club and, among other things, a fellow special delivery of the world collector. Lou acted as my auction agent and ran my bid of \$100 to \$125. Had I been in the room, I probably would have fainted because of his audacity (now I realize it was fine judgment). The lot was lost to a \$135 bid on the book, with much more there I later was told.

Probably five years later, at a FLOREX show, I noted that fancy cancellation exhibit of Clyde Jennings, Jr., the legendary philatelist, raconteur, and dear friend. I told him the story about my underbid and what it would have meant if I had acquired the stamp at that time. By the way, the Siegel description listed the stamp as the 1895 issue, Scott E5. Clyde told me that "you are in luck." I just acquired a cover with that cancellation and so I am willing to dispose of that stamp, if you would still like it. My heart skipped. He said "I paid \$135 for it and that is what I want from you for it, but don't sell it, enjoy it as a fine old treasure." I jumped at the chance, paid him his money, thanked him, and of course followed his advice. This stamp remains one of the great gems of special delivery philately and one of my key pieces, certainly one of my sentimental three key pieces. More on the other two in my forthcoming book on United States Special Delivery material, the sequel to Henry M. Gobie's *The Speedy* ©1976, the copyright to which I own. This stamp is illustrated in my 1962 article in the *Congress Book* and now graces these pages.

1. George T. Turner, "Eagle & Thunderbolts," *The Bureau Specialist*, April 1964, pp 117-123.

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