

The 10 cent Special Delivery Rate of the U.S. 1885-1917

Scott E 1 - 11 and Forerunners

A Presentation by Robert L. Markovits for the Garfield Perry Stamp Club 11/9/01
Through the courtesy of Thomas F. Allen, Esq.

Thank you for the privilege of allowing me to address my fellow members of this esteemed Club. I believe that I am a more than 30 year member but cannot locate when I first joined.

As Program chairperson of the Collectors Club of New York, I know how difficult it is for the program chairperson to line up speakers every meeting and so I offered to come to Cleveland to give a presentation. Unfortunately, medical tests have prevented the visit so Tom Allen, as always, graciously offered to stand in for me.

I sent him directions to my website (www.franadams.com) where my title page and synopsis for this exhibit entitled The United States 10c Special delivery rate, encompassing the Scott issues E 1 - 11 appear. The two slide reels show some forerunner material prior to the institution of a formal service.

Many of you have seen stampless covers marked: Will the Postman deliver this immediately, or simply "immediately", or some other similar request. One of the earliest so marked covers bears a NEW YORK 1768 handstamp and an immediate request. A favorite cover of mine is the "RUSH TO STAGE COACH" marking on an early 1817 cover. Of course, the earliest recorded offer to pay for this special service is a stampless cover with an address which states: to Ms. so and so in Queens County, New York, with haste, "AND 5 CENTS OVER TO YOU SHE WILL FORK". The wonderful 5c 1847 is duty marked "WILL THE PENNY POSTMAN DELIVER THIS LETTER IMMEDIATELY". Then I believe I illustrate, but if I do not, I am sorry, a Confederate cover marked "DOUBLE QUICK" (a military man for certain wrote that request).

By 1869, Joseph Story Fay, associated with the Smithsonian Institution, working at their Woods Hole, Mass. facility, wrote to his congressman and requested that the post office establish a special mail service for prompt delivery of letters for an additional fee. This initial letter was printed in the Congressional Record and is the

first attempt I have located to initiate such a service. Then about 1883, the post office thought about such a service; if one believes a Watertown, New York Congressman, he claims to be the father of the system. Postmaster General Wanamaker also claims the honor, but I believe the real honor goes to the Universal Postal Union, which at its March 1885 meeting in Lisbon, Portugal, actually established such a special service for an additional fee. The United States immediately jumped on the idea and began preparing a die and printing stamps, and by August, a full page poster was printed listing the 555 Special Delivery post offices which would receive and deliver this mail. By the first of September, most of those offices had also been supplied with special delivery stamps, in quantities of 10 to thousands depending on the estimated usages. On October 1, 1885, all was in readiness.

The first issue is marked "AT A SPECIAL DELIVERY OFFICE" since only 555 first class offices (of the 4000 or so in being at that time) could actually deliver these special letters. How were they special -- they did NOT receive special treatment along the route from the mailing but once they reached the applicable post office in the City, they were sent out by a specially appointed messenger, generally boys 13 to 16 years old, whose sole salary was 8c of the face of 10c of each letter they delivered. There were limitations as well. Mail to post office boxes, general delivery or where forwarding instructions were left would not be paid for at the 8c rate; the government made the entire 10c fee. And, the messenger's compensation was capped at \$30 per month. This payment arrangement went on until June 30, 1945 when special delivery messengers were made paid employees of the government and some abuses were found in that fee arrangement. The 8c messenger compensation did not increase until decades later as the special delivery fee was raised above 10c, but it was not until after the period shown in this program that the fee was raised according to weight; one could send a 70 pound tire for the same 10c special delivery fee...

The stamps were ready on the first day of the service, October 1, 1885, and some were actually used on September 29 and 30th, but they had no purpose until 6 a.m. on October 1 when the service began. Three of the known and available first day covers, now numbering seven, are in the collection and a couple of illustrated, including early use covers. The early stamp sale was allowed.

In addition to the special delivery stamp (this had to be placed on the envelope and regular stamps could not be used until July 1, 1907 to pay for this service), (the earliest use of regular stamps is July 4, 1907, by the way) a first class stamp had to be added. No letter could be sent postage due for the first class rate and obtain special delivery service. This was changed on January 13, 1889 when postage due special delivery letters could be delivered and postage due collected from the addressee.

There was no mail allowed to be sent to any foreign country special delivery since none had a treaty arrangement with this country until Canada commencing on January 1, 1923. Great Britain did have a special delivery system in the early 1890s and in fact had treaties with 13 countries but not the United States, so any special delivery mail which is directed abroad would not receive service. The United States, however, did allow service where its special delivery stamps were taken abroad and used on incoming mail; in fact, the earliest one known to me is from the Kingdom of Hawaii in 1886 and from Germany in 1887, both of which are in my collection as long as the foreign post office did not cancel the US stamp, service was given.

In the 19th century, only Canada formally issued special delivery stamps, on June 28, 1898, but other countries soon followed, including US possessions, so there was but limited service around the world until 1904 when several countries began to issue stamps. Great Britain had a well defined service but never issued stamps; in fact, only five British related countries ever put out special delivery stamps: Bahamas, Canada, Egypt, Mauritius, New Zealand and British Guiana (modern). This is a story for another time.

Another key date for special delivery collectors is October 1, 1886, exactly one year after the establishment of the service, since on that date special delivery service was extended to all 4000 first class post office. A first day cover of that date is known - a very rare cover which I own but do not illustrate is one addressed to a non-special delivery office prior to October 1, 1886; this is a great postal history item and one well worth searching for.

The Remington Typewriter company put out a booklet listing the special delivery offices in 1885 and is useful to carry around; Henry M. Gobie's book, "The Speedy", also lists the 555 offices. More on the literature from Tom Allen.

Trial color proofs on the first issue are known. The Peltz collection at the Brown University Library has 12 trial color proofs of the 1885 issue; my collection has three (all that are in private hands).

There were a few neat markings to indicate the service, mainly receiving markings, during the initial period. Some are shown. One of the earliest great markings is the clock-face receiving mark used in Oakland and San Francisco, Ca. To indicate when the mail arrived. The Istograph Company, located in Oakland, made this machine and eventually the company became part of IBM (you know, I've been mugged)...

When the service was extended, new wording on the stamp was required, to wit: "AT ANY OFFICE" to indicate the broadening usage, but since the stock of the first stamp, Scott E1 was still available in the various offices, the new stamp was held off until some time in October, 1888 (a month or two before the Scott listed date due to a find I made) and then issued with the new wording. That stamp held forth until the Postmaster decided that the one cent Columbian looked too much like a special delivery stamp and would be misused so he changed the color to orange and the third special delivery stamp was issued. Scott E3. I have yet to find such a cover in more than 44 years of looking, by the way. The 1888 issue has one of my favorite covers, the Circus cover, a multi-colored advertising cover which I acquired ages ago from Philip H. Ward, Jr. for \$5, the only bargain I ever acquired from Mr. Ward. Interesting markings continue on this issue.

The Orange Columbian special delivery stamp allows for some pretty usages but again, attempts to mail special delivery letters abroad cause a wasting of the stamp and fee paid. In this issue, there is no large die proof known; the only such item is a hybrid large die proof so the catalogue is technically wrong in this regard. There are three Pan Pacific proofs made and in private hands (5 actually put together we are told) and the collection boasts these items. A marvelous philatelic cover showing the special delivery stamp with the Columbus face design is a highlight of this issue as is a use as a revenue (not proper but accepted) the marriage was legal. The only known use from GUAM is also a gem and most colorful. This stamp is known used on the Hawaii special delivery favor envelope and the Hawaii Advertiser collection had a few of these (I deem them terribly philatelic but very pretty and rare).

The American Bank Note Company printed the first three special delivery stamps. When the Bureau decided to take over the printing contract for US Stamps in 1894, it acquired the ABN dies. There were lines added under ten cents to the die to make a change and the paper was different. The first Bureau special delivery issue was printed from plate 77 on unwatermarked paper. The colors vary from very milky blue to a due over-inked blue, recognizing the problems the Bureau encountered in printing stamps for the first time (they had done revenues). The perforations rarely punched through also on this issue which was short lived

The story of the design is an interesting one and told in my Congress Article 1962.

The covers in period are rare. Proofs are few. One I own but do not show has the so-called dots over messenger variety which will be discussed with the next issue.

The greatest cancel on any special delivery stamp is found on the 1894 issue, the Boston, Mass. Eagle and Thunderbolt machine cancellation which I wrote up in the Collectors Club Philatelist in March 2001 and illustrated. Our friend Clyde Jennings allowed me the privilege of buying this stamp from him after he had outbid me when I was a Cornell University freshman. The story is wonderful. An imperforate variety exists and is in the collection. It is extremely rare.

The fifth special delivery stamp, the same design as the 1894 issue, came out in 1895 and was on watermarked paper. The paper change was allegedly brought about because of the so-called Chicago counterfeits of the 2c regular issue but I think that safety paper was always being thought about by the BEP.

One plate, plate 882, bore dots over the runner's head and this has been recognized as a new Variety. There are several neat varieties of this stamp.

The most intriguing is the imperforate stamp. (Scott E5a) I own the only plate block in private hands, one of the two greatest special delivery pieces of the United States. I also own two of the three position pieces, 10 of the 50 stamps which exist. See my Congress Book 1962 article for the story about its acquisition.

The 1895 issue was overprinted for use in the newly acquired United States possessions as a result of the Spanish American War. This information also

appears in the 1962 Congress book. Cuba, Guam and PHILIPPINES all used this stamp but service in the Islands was limited. Numerous covers and varieties are shown.

The 1895 issue has a wonderful group of covers, including combinations with Trans-Miss. Issue and the Pan American Issue. How many special delivery covers does one think are out there on the Pan American patriotic covers - I know about four so far.

By 1902, the messenger had run afoot on his rounds and the post office began getting a little bit modern. The new issue, Scott E6, pictured the messenger on a bicycle. R. Ostrander Smith, the famous designer of intricate stamps, posed himself for the design and several photographs are known (See Gobie). All of the known trial color proofs and essays are in the collection and even some presently unlisted, such as one in Salmon Pink and pink are known. The earliest use, January 19, 1903, is also in the collection.

Covers of the 1902 issue from and to the Louisiana Purchase exposition and the buildings and executives make a wonderful addition.

In 1907, the rarest special delivery item was made by the United States, allegedly for the Queen of Italy (but not confirmed). Two panes of 50 were specially overprinted, but only the two bottom plate blocks remain (the plate block of eight is in my collection and I sold the plate of six also). Five blocks of four are also recorded and about a dozen singles. One with the plate variety also known on the stamp is in my collection. (Philippines Scott E2a). This is the greatest special delivery piece of the United States. None are known used.

My favorite special delivery stamp is the 1908 Helmut of Mercury or "MERRY WIDOW" special delivery stamp. At one time, I had many dozen trial color woodblock proofs, made in Paris, but now only 18 remain, all different. I also have all of the known proofs, essays including the two Bureau essays.

This stamp was privately prepared by Whitney Warren, the Beaux Arts architect of New York and approved by Postmaster General George Von L. Myer. When he submitted the design work to the BEP, they 'hated' it because it was not done by one of theirs, and they prepared terrible looking essays which were rejected by the

PMG. Finally, a successful design was accomplished. Two of Warren's three original pen and ink sketches are in the collection. All of the proofs from the Todd, Gros and Roosevelt collection are in the collection as well. The usages shown are likewise among my most favorite. See my article in the 1975 congress book for stories, and notes....

This stamp was short lived because the PMG who succeeded Von L. Myer said that this stamp was being confused with the normal 1 cent stamp (the same baloney dished up for issuing the Orange 1893 issue); and again, I have never seen a cover showing such confusion. The bicycle stamp was reissued in the summer of 1909, so the E7 was only a six plus issue although it was never demonitized.

When the Bureau re-issued the 1902 issue, they used plate numbers in the 5000 series, One of the local commentators published an article in Mekeels saying that no one could distinguish the reissue from the original so the Bureau (stupidly) added -09 to the plate numbers; the rare ones are the four without the -09 added); the retraction by the Mekeels writer appeared in London, and not the USA but the damage had been done and a new plate number variety was in the public's hands, adding to the fun of collecting. The last 1902 plate number was 1776, so a 5200 plate number was clearly different although the same die was used for the stamp and the stamp can only be identified with the number attached.

Commencing in 1911, and on to 1914, 1916 and 1917, the same bicycle design of R. Ostrander Smith remained in use, actually until July, 1922 (and thereafter), with the Bureau not recognizing a different issue but collectors noting the perforation and paper changes as Scott E8, 9, 10 and 11. The rarest of these four issues is the short-lived E10, perforated 10 stamp, which is most difficult to acquire on cover. Neat usages are present through-out and for the 1917 issue, printing problems due to bad ink at the Bureau, bleeding of ink through the paper to make pink back stamps, and WW I and its usages, make for an interesting group of material. Of course, my favorite cover of this period is the single of the 5c error paying the first class rate on a special delivery envelope to Sears, and the use of a block of six to pay the 12c rate (actually 3c overpaid) which I also own.

Still, the rate remained 10c through this entire period and except for the informal arrangement with Canada, no foreign special delivery usage exists. Usages from and to US possessions are not deemed foreign usages for this purpose.

The first two air mail stamps (Scott C2 and C3) both contained as part of their rate a special delivery element and a rare improper use shows a 24c air mail with an additional 10c special delivery stamp attached (E 11); the special delivery fee was included in the 24c rate (14c air mail and 10c special delivery) so the stamp and fee were wasted.

Special delivery clock-face receiving marks have been in heavy use from 1892 to the end of this collecting period, 1922. The one most studied was from Boston where we have even been able to note when the machines changed, there were six-clock face devices used almost entirely on the front of the envelopes in blue (except for a few months when purple was used). See the Harold B. Billian series in the BIA journal in 1955 detailing many postal markings.

The most used marking was "FEE CLAIMED BY OFFICE OF FIRST ADDRESS". This indicated that the letter was taken out by the special delivery messenger and he 'claimed' the fee. A much more difficult marking as "FORWARDED, FEE NOT CLAIMED". This meant that there was a change of address card on file with the post office. I know of a marking: "FEE TAKEN". Sometimes the cities put their names in the "FEE CLAIMED" markings. No one has yet done an elaborate study but I am working on this area.

In summary, this collection is the result of a 44 year challenge by my mentor Louis K. Robbins, the auctioneer and auction agent who challenged me back in 1957. In 1962, I won the HOPKINSON award from the BIA for the best researched article in their journal, on the plate numbers used to print the special delivery stamps. Then, and now, although the evidence is pointing to the existence of plate 882 for use on the CUBA overprints, this is the only plate number still not confirmed by an actual plate piece. The research has held up.

This collection has won a Grand Award, and has competed for the Champion of Champions, and large golds internationally. It has twice been shown at the Collectors Club of New York and written up in the Journal and is the subject of many ongoing articles. Useful information is always solicited as I am presently re-writing and expanding the Henry M. Gobie Book, "The Speedy", for which I own the copyright.

Thank you for allowing me into your philatelic life this evening and I look forward to showing this material at Garfield Perry this year, either this collection or the last 71 years since special delivery service ended on the last day of the Pacific 1997 exhibition, June 7, 1997. Good Evening.

And a tip of the high hat to Tom Allen for his yeoman work.

Robert L. Markovits

(c)2001 Robert L. Markovits