

# ***U.S. SPECIAL DELIVERY STAMPS***

A primer by Robert L. Markovits and Fran Adams

The U.P.U. first established a basis for a special service to speedily deliver mail for an extra fee in 1885 and the United States was the first country to issue postage stamps expressly for this service. During the life of the Special Delivery service in the U.S. there were nine basic designs with 21 stamps for the service and 5 for a combination of services which included airmail.



The following is an overview of the various designs and printings. We hope this primer provides you with an appreciation of the subject and encourages you to study the field of Special Delivery as there are still discoveries to be made and fun to be had.

## ***Foot Messengers***



# ***U.S. SPECIAL DELIVERY STAMPS***

The first United States Special Delivery stamp design incorporated the likeness of a messenger boy on foot to indicate a speedy delivery.

## *Issue of 1885*

Only 555 domestic first class post offices initially provided service. On October 1, 1886 service was extended to all first class post offices.

## *Issue of 1888*

In late 1888, the text tablet changed to “at any office” to indicate expanded use of the service to 4000+ post offices.



## *Issue of 1893*

In February, 1893 the stamp’s color changed to orange to avoid confusion with the one cent 1893 Columbian issue.

## *Issue of 1894*

The Bureau of Engraving and Printing, modifying the American Banknote Co. dies, printed Special Delivery stamps using an unwatermarked paper, perforated 12 in October, 1894.

## *Issue of 1895*

The Bureau of Engraving and Printing, due to perforating difficulties and paper shrinkage during printing, switched to a double line watermarked paper, improving printing quality. The color returned to the familiar ultramarine.

## *Issues for Possessions*

The issue of 1895 was overprinted for use in Cuba, Guam and the Philippines.

# *U.S. SPECIAL DELIVERY STAMPS*

## *Bicycles*



In 1902 and continuing for 20 years, messengers were issued bicycles and a new design denoted this change.

### *Issue of 1902*

The bicycle design was adopted to signify Special Delivery service as part of the newly issued series of 1902.

### *Issue of 1909*

The Bicycle design was reintroduced and looks identical to the earlier printing. Some of the earliest printing does not have the ‘-09’ and is therefore difficult to identify.

### *Issue of 1911*

A single line USPS watermark was adopted, perforation 12.

### *Issue of 1914*

A single line USPS watermark paper, now perforated 10.

### *Issue of 1916*

The Bureau introduced unwatermarked paper, perforated 10.

### *Issue of 1917*

The Bureau utilized unwatermarked paper, but perforated 11.

### *Issues for Possessions*

The issue of 1902 was overprinted for use in the Philippines.

# *U.S. SPECIAL DELIVERY STAMPS*

## *The Merry Widow*



In 1908 New York architect, Whitney Warren, presented his idea for a novel stamp design, a green special delivery stamp, the most artistic design ever produced for a United States stamp. Warren studied art in Paris and the first designs were prepared there.

Warren used the Helmet of Mercury, the messenger of the gods, as a central feature. In 1903, a hat inspired by Viennese composer Franz Lehar's operetta, the "Merry Widow", a large cartwheel straw sailor hat for summer. Immediately, the philatelic press dubbed the stamp the Merry Widow and to this day, it is so called.

The stamps enjoyed but a short official life allegedly because the stamp looked like the then current one cent regular issue; therefore the mail did not receive Special Delivery handling.

## *Motorcycles*



Keeping up with the advances of technology, the Bureau employed a motorcycle design, and printing on a flat plate press.

# ***U.S. SPECIAL DELIVERY STAMPS***

## *Issue of 1925*

(Parcel Post) The motorcycle design was revised with a new value for the parcel post delivery service.

## *Issue of 1927*

The design was reused for the Bureau's new rotary presses.

## *Issue of 1931*

The, design was adapted and printed on the rotary press.

## *Issue of 1944*

(Other than First Class) The 17¢ stamp was issued for postal matter up to two pounds.

(First Class) The first class Special Delivery rate was increased to 13 cents near the end of World War II.

## ***Trucks***



The United States Special Delivery system was nearly 40 years old when its stamp design changed to reflect modern transportation, a truck, for delivery of its mail. The original model for the design was made from a photograph taken at the old City Post Office in Washington, D.C. More than 30,000,000 stamps were issued, printed from the flat bed press.

## *Issue of 1925*

(Parcel Post and Treaty Rates) The Postal Service Act of February 28, 1925, instituted Special Delivery rates based on weight. The stamp also paid the Special Delivery treaty rates to various foreign countries. Its primary usage, however, was on heavy packages.

# ***U.S. SPECIAL DELIVERY STAMPS***

## *Issue of 1951*

The truck design was re-used for revised Special Delivery fees on first class mail and postal matter under two pounds, starting January 1952. The stamp was printed in black on the rotary press.

## ***Hands***



## *Issue of 1954*

Fee for first class matter increased to 20 cents for up to two pounds.

## *Issue of 1957*

Fee for first class matter increased to 30 cents for up to two pounds.

## ***Arrows***



## *Issue of 1969*

Fee for first class matter increased to 45 cents for up to two pounds.

# ***U.S. SPECIAL DELIVERY STAMPS***

## *Issue of 1971*

Fee for first class matter increased to 60 cents for up to two pounds.

## ***Combination Service Issues***

Between 1918 and 1936, five different combination air mail / Special Delivery service stamps were issued by the United States Post Office. The Scott catalogue has clearly mis-numbered these stamps.

## *Issues of 1918*

The first two U.S. air mail stamps included ten cents for special delivery service and no additional stamps were required.

(single weight) Information on 16¢ bi-plane issue design.

(Insert bi-plane graphic)

(double weight) Information on 24¢ bi-plane issue design.

Between 1934 and 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt designed three stamps which included the ten cent fee for Special Delivery service in addition to the airmail fee. The stamp was prepared in horizontal format in the traditional blue color for Special Delivery.

# *U.S. SPECIAL DELIVERY STAMPS*

## *Great Seal*



### *Issue of 1934*

This issue formally acknowledged combined airmail and Special Delivery service in one design.

### *Issue of 1935*

When the uproar over limited edition imperforate national park series stamps surrounded James A. Farley, Postmaster General of the United States, the airmail Special Delivery stamp was included in the issue known as Farley's Follies of March 15, 1935.

### *Issue of 1936*

The design was reused in 1936, this time in two colors. Numerous printings took place over the next five years.

## *Cancellations*

Special Delivery service was rendered in many places and cancels on these issues are an interesting study in themselves.

