

The Sesquicentennial of The World's First Commemorative Stamped Envelope

The 1876 Centennial Envelope

Purpose of exhibit: This exhibit shows development and usage of the world's first commemorative stamped envelope which was issued by the U.S. Post Office for the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, PA, May 10 to November 10, 1876. The 3¢ red envelope was intended for commercial use and the 3¢ green envelope was a smaller size intended for individual use. Most envelopes were produced at the Plimpton Hartford envelope manufacturing plant but The Plimpton Manufacturing Co. manufactured envelopes at the Centennial Exhibition, demonstrating a newly designed envelope-making machine which printed a stamp on a precut blank, gummed and folded it and, *for the first time*, applied gum to the top flap that was dried before the finished envelope exited the machine. It is believed that only green envelopes were produced at the Centennial Exhibition.

Challenge factor: The exhibit presents essays, each of which are unique, along with counterfeit 'essays'. The exhibit shows specimen overprinted envelopes (less than 6 envelopes are reported) including one handstamped from the archives of the Czar of Russia that was a gift to Russian representatives at a dinner during the Centennial exhibit recognizing their support protecting western ports during the Civil War. The exhibit shows usages, some with advertising and to foreign countries, both are very scarce due to the short period of issue (6 months) and the fact that only 10% of stamped envelopes issued during this time were Centennial envelopes. Several counterfeits are shown including unique entire envelopes.

What is presented: The exhibit begins with essays of the Centennial issues, both valid and counterfeit (drawn for philatelic market). Note that the red envelope with double lines under postage is considered a proof rather than regular issue since only 4 copies are known and no used copies exist. An example is shown with trial color proofs. The exhibit also shows specimen overprinted envelopes. The exhibit shows the first public demonstration of the Remington typewriter and Centennial exhibition typed letters along with typed addresses on envelope (two font designs – with and without serif letters). The exhibit discusses return envelope and government corner card development. The exhibit ends with counterfeits of the Centennial issue both cut squares and entire envelopes made in Europe.

Outline of exhibit:

Page	
1	Introduction/Development
2-4	essays
5	Trial colors proofs
6	Watermarks
7--8	Specimen overprinted envelopes
	Usage
9	Commercial & private
10	Advertising on envelopes
11	Sent to foreign countries
12	Registered
13	With typewriter at Centennial Exposition
14	Clarks Express
15-16	Counterfeits

References

Ellis, F.L. and William H. Maisel. 1974. U.S. Commemorative and Special Printed Envelopes: 1876-1965. *American Philatelist* Vol 88 (4) pp 311-328.

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Undersander, Dan. 2003. *United States Stamped Envelopes Essays and Proofs*. United Postal Stationery Society, Chester, VA.

Undersander, Dan (ed). 2017. *Catalog of 19th Century Stamped Envelopes, Lettersheets and Wrappers of the United States*. 4th ed. United Postal Stationery Society, Chester, VA (*updated versions available electronically at www.upss.org, most recent edition is 2024*).

Undersander, Dan. 2015. Return to Writer and the Beginning of Government Printed Corner Cards (Return address admonition). *Postal Stationery* Vol 57 (5) pp 217-219.

The World's First Commemorative Stamped Envelope – The 1876 Centennial

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Exhibit layout

Pages are numbers on the back upper right

1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16

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This exhibit shows development and usage of the world's first commemorative stamped envelope issued for the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, May 10 to November 10, 1876. Envelopes were produced by Plimpton Manufacturing Company which held the contract of postal stationery manufacture for the U.S. Post Office. They had printed a supply in advance and continued to print them until the exhibition end on November 10, 1876. The 3¢ red envelope was intended for commercial use and the 3¢ green envelope was a smaller size intended for personal use.

Plimpton also manufactured envelopes at the Centennial Exhibition, demonstrating a newly designed envelope-making machine which printed a stamp on a pre-cut blank, gummed and folded it and, *for the first time*, applied gum to the top flap and dried it before the finished envelope exited the machine. It is believed that only green envelopes were produced at the Centennial Exhibition.

Exhibit outline	
Page	
1	Introduction
	Development of Envelope
2-4	essays
5	Trial colors proofs
6	Watermarks
7-8	Specimen overprint envelopes
	Usage
9	Domestic
10	Advertising on envelopes
11	Sent to foreign countries
12	Registered
13	With typewriter at Centennial Expo
14	Clarks Express
15-16	Counterfeits

Two types of working dies are recognized:

Die A one line under 'POSTAGE' (Hartford Die).

Die B two lines under 'POSTAGE' (Philadelphia Die) used at Exposition.



Die A – One line under 'POSTAGE'



Die B – Two lines under 'POSTAGE'

Most authorities believe only the green indicium was issued with a double line underneath POSTAGE and the red issue with double line is a proof.

Particularly significant items noted with red frame.