

THE BEACON AIR MAIL STAMP

The purpose of this exhibit is to illustrate the Beacon Air Mail stamp and its uses.

In 1928, the Post Office Department decided to promote air mail use by expanding the air mail system and by lowering the air mail rate. August 1, several new air mail routes were added and the air mail rate was lowered to five cents per the first ounce from ten cents per half ounce. The fee for covers weighing over one ounce was ten cents for each additional ounce. The promotion included issuing the Beacon Air Mail stamp, a bi-colored unusually large stamp intended to be visually attractive to draw attention to the expanded services.

The first day of issue was July 25, 1928, a week before the rate reduction, thus creating a challenging collecting area. With the rate still ten cents, people sending air mail preferred using their ten cent stamps which would soon represent an overpayment. Thus, Beacon use during that week was unusual.

The stamp was printed on the flat plate press, which meant the stamp had to be printed twice, once for each color. The second printing was slower and, because of alignment problems, resulted in disproportionately more waste and higher production costs. The stamp was much larger than a regular stamp resulting in fewer stamps per press run, again resulting in higher production costs. After production of 106,877,655 stamps, a smaller, single color replacement stamp was issued February 10, 1931.

The "five cent" era ended July 6, 1932, when the rate was raised to eight cents for the first ounce. During the Beacon Era, there was worldwide use of the stamp and examples of use will be shown to and from many regions of the world including Antarctica. Attempts to speed the mail by means such as catapult or by Zeppelin will also be shown. Interrupted flight covers will illustrate the dangers inherent to flying in that era.

The exhibit is arranged as follows:

- 1- Pre-Production
- 2- Marginal Markings
- 3- Printing Problems
- 4- The First Eight Days
- 5- Domestic Use
- 6- Foreign Destination
- 7- Foreign Origin
- 8- Interrupted Flights
- 9- End of the Era

Items of exceptional interest are highlighted with a distinctive border as illustrated below.



Note the signature of Harry S. New, Postmaster General, 1923-1929.

Items of Exceptional Interest include:

The only known example of plate number 19639

A "blue moon" plate flaw on cover

Pre-date of issue cover (seven known)

Unofficial FDC from the U.S.S. Oklahoma (3 known)

An insured parcel with a Beacon (two known)

Cover to Antarctica

Cover from Papua via Australia (fifteen known)

Interrupted flight cover from Meriden CT (two known)