

(Synopsis) Postal History of the United States Large Numeral Postage Dues

By an Act March 3, 1879 Congress approved the first use of postage due stamps in the United States. Their use was intended to simplify accounting on postage due mail and postmasters were required to affix postage due stamps to underpaid mail as a receipt for the underpayment collected. This established system of credits and debits based on postage due stamps serving as accountable paper.

The original denominations of the first United States postage due series (1¢, 2¢, 3¢ and 5¢) were issued to postmasters in May 1879 to be put into use from July 1, 1879. The three high values (10¢, 30¢ and 50¢) were distributed in September 1879. The seven stamp series was initially printed in brown. By December 1883 the stamps were being printed in red brown and in 1891 the claret stamps, printed with fluorescent aniline ink, were first distributed. This exhibit includes the earliest reported uses of sixteen of the twenty-one stamps that comprise the three issues of the large numeral postage dues. All twenty-one stamps are shown on cover.

The most frequently found use of postage due stamps on cover are simple overweight, short paid letters or on unsealed circular use covers. Other types of uses range from uncommon to rare. For example, there are fewer than twenty examples reported of covers bearing either the 30¢ or the 50¢ large numeral postage dues. Eleven of these covers are included in this exhibit and both denominations on cover, each in the three different shades, are also shown.

In the domestic use section of the exhibit are several items that exist in fewer than ten reported examples. These uses include, a non philatelic bisect, steamboat origin, use on registered covers, uprated postal cards, uprated private card, forwarded newspaper, returned periodical, uprated book rates, and uprated parcel post use.

In the overseas use section, several items exist in fewer than ten reported examples as well. These in addition to the generally rare uses of the thirty and fifty cent stamps, the only reported 30 cent claret used on cover, use on foreign free franked cover, use on paquebot cover, uprated private postal cards, uprated postal lettersheets, and use on invalid postal card.

This collection was largely formed by postage due researcher and author, John Irwin. John wrote the first article describing the distinguishing flaw on the one cent claret postage due of 1891. Many of the items in the exhibit were previously owned by George Arfken and were illustrated in his 1991 book. A second large group of covers included in the exhibit were acquired by John Irwin privately from the Warren Bower collection.