Innovative and Versatile:

First Issue United States Stamped Envelopes 1853-1860

By showing examples of First Issue stamped envelopes used postally and out-of-the-mails, this exhibit explores innovations that added new dimensions to written communication during the brief dynamic antebellum era of national expansion driven by the California gold rush. Stamped envelopes were issued in June and July of 1853. After initial distributions of 3¢ letter-size envelopes on both white and buff paper, smaller 3¢ note-size and larger 6¢ official-size envelopes followed, all three with embossed red George Washington stamp imprints to meet the single and double letter rates for carriage less than 3,000 miles. Letter-size 6¢ green envelopes met the transcontinental single letter rate. (No 6¢ adhesive stamps met these needs.) When the transcontinental rate rose to 10¢ in 1855, envelopes in that denomination replaced the 6¢ green issue. First Issue stamped envelopes were phased out gradually after designs of the Second Issue were distributed in the late summer and fall of 1860. They were demonetized during the Civil War in 1861 and 1862 as Third Issue stamped envelopes were distributed.

The entire First Issue employed just nine master dies, numbered 1 through 5A for 3¢ denominations, 6 for all 6¢ envelopes, and 7 and 8 for 10¢ envelopes



Die 2: THREE
in short label with
straight ends, 15½mm
wide at top.

This New-York year-dated cancel was in use only from July 11 to 25, 1853. The cut square is the earliest documented use of die 2 on buff paper.

Hawaii to Prussia



Die 5 THREE in medium wide label with curved ends; 16mm wide at top, long crossbar on both Ts; small letter R.

Unique 3¢ First Issue envelope posted at Hawaii June 20, 1858. Total postage 37¢ paid - 5¢ Hawaiian plus 32¢ credited to U.S. (2¢ ship fee plus 30¢ Prussian closed mail). U.S. credited 7¢ to Prussia. Two-ocean voyage, Honolulu to San Francisco, via Panama to New York, to Southampton, to Aachen, arrival August 27 at Minden, Prussia. Professionally preserved and restored.

The Nesbitt Seal

A feature limited to early production of Nesbitt stamped envelopes is a small circular embossed trademark of G. F. Nesbitt & Co. printed on the flaps of many envelopes in the same red color as the stamp imprint indicia. These are found on envelopes printed from three of the die types - die 1 white and buff, die 2 white and buff, and die 4 white only. As soon as the new stamped envelopes were available, the seals drew criticism. The July 6, 1853, New York Daily Times published a protest from Nesbitt's competitor in the stationery business, Charles H. Lyon. Responding to these critics, and to a request from Nesbitt that he be relieved of his contractual obligation to include the seal on the flap, the Postmaster General forbade further use of it in an order dated July 7, 1853, so envelopes manufactured after that date do not have them.

Die 2 on buff; die 4 on white, probably 1853 and 1854, respectively.



Die 4 envelope with a Nesbitt seal on the flap, only two with the seal reported. The die type itself is seldom seen. A snippet in the December 29, 1853, New York Daily Times, denying rumors that counterfeit stamped envelopes were circulating, may provide an explanation. "The story originated probably in the fact that a million or so of the first issue, made from an imperfect die, are in circulation, and they are ragged and imperfect." This example is poorly inked in the areas that should be solid red, and has ink in the raised bust that is supposed to be colorless. Ex White.

Watermarked Paper for Stamped Envelopes

The Act of 1852 that authorized stamped envelopes required that they be printed on watermarked paper, the first U.S. postal issues to have this feature. The design called for the monogram POD US (Post Office Department of the United States) erect and readable from the front. The original design, when cut to a diamond-shaped envelope blank, wasted considerable paper stock. Blanks could be cut more economically when a side of the diamond was parallel to the edge of the paper sheets, bringing the laid lines in the paper at various angles to the front of the folded envelope. In the rare original watermark configuration on horizontally laid paper, the two rows of letters have a space separating them. The common revised watermark configuration on diagonally laid paper has two rows of letters that touch each other. Only die 1 envelope stamps were printed on horizontally laid paper, the earliest printings of First Issue 3¢ embossed envelopes.



The original horizontally laid type is hard to find; fewer than 50 are known today. All but one are letter-size with Nesbitt seals on the flap. August 7, 1854, example is ex Barkhausen. The unique note-size April 17 (1854) example without a seal on the flap is ex Fricke, discovered in 1963.

Watermark and Laid Paper Varieties

One envelope is recorded on horizontally laid paper with the original horizontal watermark inverted and reversed. After that first batch of paper was depleted, all production of First Issue stamped envelopes was on diagonally laid paper with the watermark tilted to remain in the horizontal position and with the two lines of the monogram touching each other.



Unique letter-size envelope with Nesbitt seal on horizontally laid paper, watermark inverted and reversed. Letter-size July 19, 1853, and note-size December 6, 1853, envelopes on diagonally laid and watermarked paper are respectively the <u>earliest documented uses</u> of white die 1 envelopes without Nesbitt seals on the flaps. This exhibitor's discoveries.

Early Envelope Production Varieties



Doubled impression of the stamp and seal. The second colorless (albino) stamp impression is displaced about one millimeter to the right and three millimeters upward from the normal red inked impression. Albino seal displacement is five millimeters, evidence of a different plate setting. Ex Bowman.

When an envelope blank was folded before printing, the image embossed the back side and top flaps as well as the front, but no seal could be printed on the flap; only three reported. Ex Mintz.

When a print was pulled without paper in its proper position, ink transferred from the press platen to the embossing die. On the next print, the die inked the print front and back. Ex Mintz.

Later 3¢ Die Types

Dies 3 and 5 were not placed into production until 1854, so they do not exist with Nesbitt seals on the flaps. Die 3 is known as the K die because the notched ends of the upper and lower labels resemble the letter K. It is the scarcest of all First Issue embossed envelope die types, used only briefly. Die 5 (including its die 5A variant) is the most common, in production until mid-1860.



Coast to Coast

The first stamped envelopes arrived at San Francisco on July 31, 1853, aboard the steamer Sierra Nevada, which had connected at Nicaragua with the steamer Northern Light, which had sailed from New York on July 5. These were letter-size 3¢ die 1 and 2 envelopes with Nesbitt seals on the flaps. Envelopes with 6¢ green stamps to pay the transcontinental single letter rate did not arrive until a later date, along with 3¢ envelopes without Nesbitt seals.

Die 1 on white with Nesbitt seal on flap; die 6 green on white.



When the 6¢ transcontinental rate was shortpaid by 3¢, the letter was rated 5¢ postage due, collected on delivery. September 1 (1853), San Francisco to University of Virginia, earliest use of a stamped envelope in California, this exhibitor's discovery. DUE 5 is seldom seen on a stamped envelope.



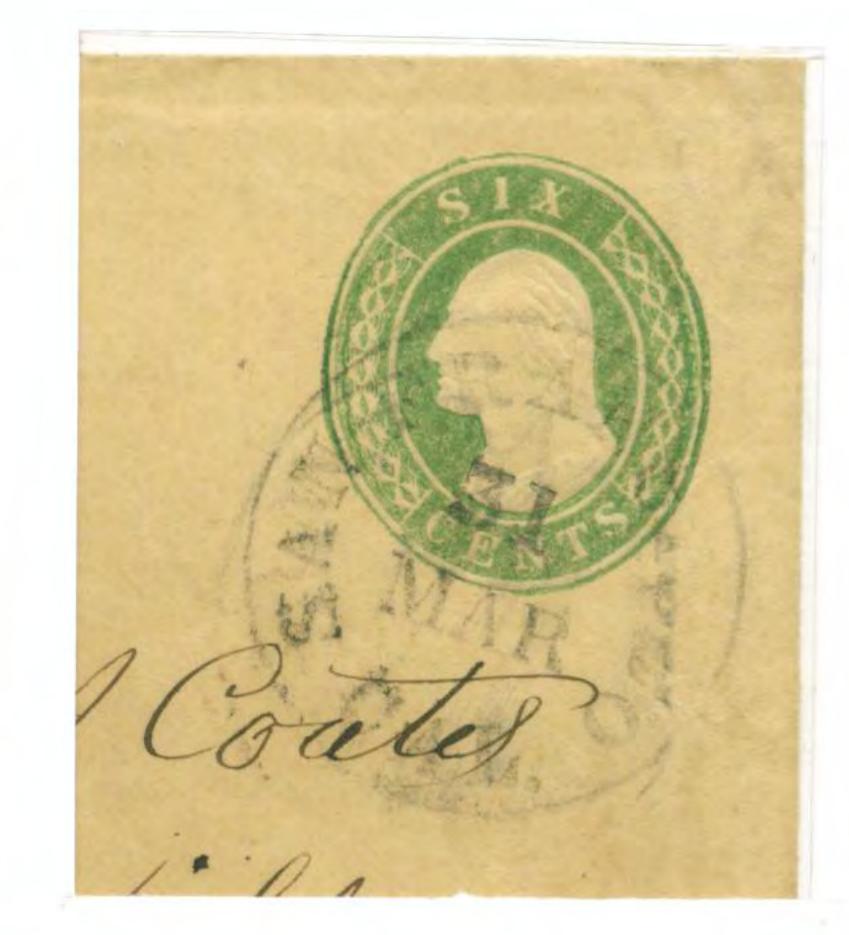
Die 6: SIX in label; the only 6¢ type for both red and green imprints.

March 30 (1854), Placerville, Cal., to Rancocas, N.J., typical use of 6¢ green envelope.

Coast to Coast

On April 1, 1855, prepayment of domestic letter postage became mandatory, and the transcontinental rate increased to 10¢, causing the 6¢ green envelopes to be replaced by 10¢ green envelopes, which remained in use until they were demonetized as a Civil War expedient in 1861.

March 31, 1855, last day of 6¢ transcontinental letter rate, San Francisco to Greenfield, Massachusetts (windowed entire). Unique last-day use of the 6¢ green; one 3¢ red example is reported. Mail departed San Francisco on April 1, but the March 31 cancel assured that it would not be rated postage due upon arrival at New York.





Die 7: TEN in short label; 15½mm wide.

Die 8: TEN in wide label; 20mm wide.

Mers. Laura L. Maisley Burlington Mermont

Two shades of ink are recognized on the 10¢. Die 7 on buff, green; die 8 on white, pale green. October 19 (circa 1855-1858) Marysville, Cal. PAID BY STAMPS postmark to Lockport, N.Y. August 5, 1857, San Francisco, Cal., to Burlington, Vermont. Year-dated postmarkers became common in the post offices of large cities after 1856. Transcontinental mail transported via Panama.

Transatlantic Steamship; Cross-Border to Canada and Mexico

Foreign destinations: France from California; earliest recorded stamped envelopes to Canada and Mexico. 6¢ green on white and 3¢ die 1 on buff with Nesbitt seal on flap entires; 3¢ die 2 on white rebacked/reinforced cover front.

September 1, 1854, San Francisco to Lyon, prepaid 26¢ (the 6¢ envelope stamp plus 20¢ cash lightly penciled and erased left of the stamp), the British open mail fee by American packet, with 10¢ allocated to the U.S. inland fee and 16¢ to the transatlantic fee. Rated 8 decimes collect, the French inland amount for a single letter up to 7½ grams carried by American packet. Ex Maisel.

Monsing Doiron notain
Place Berunger 2 France

Lyon

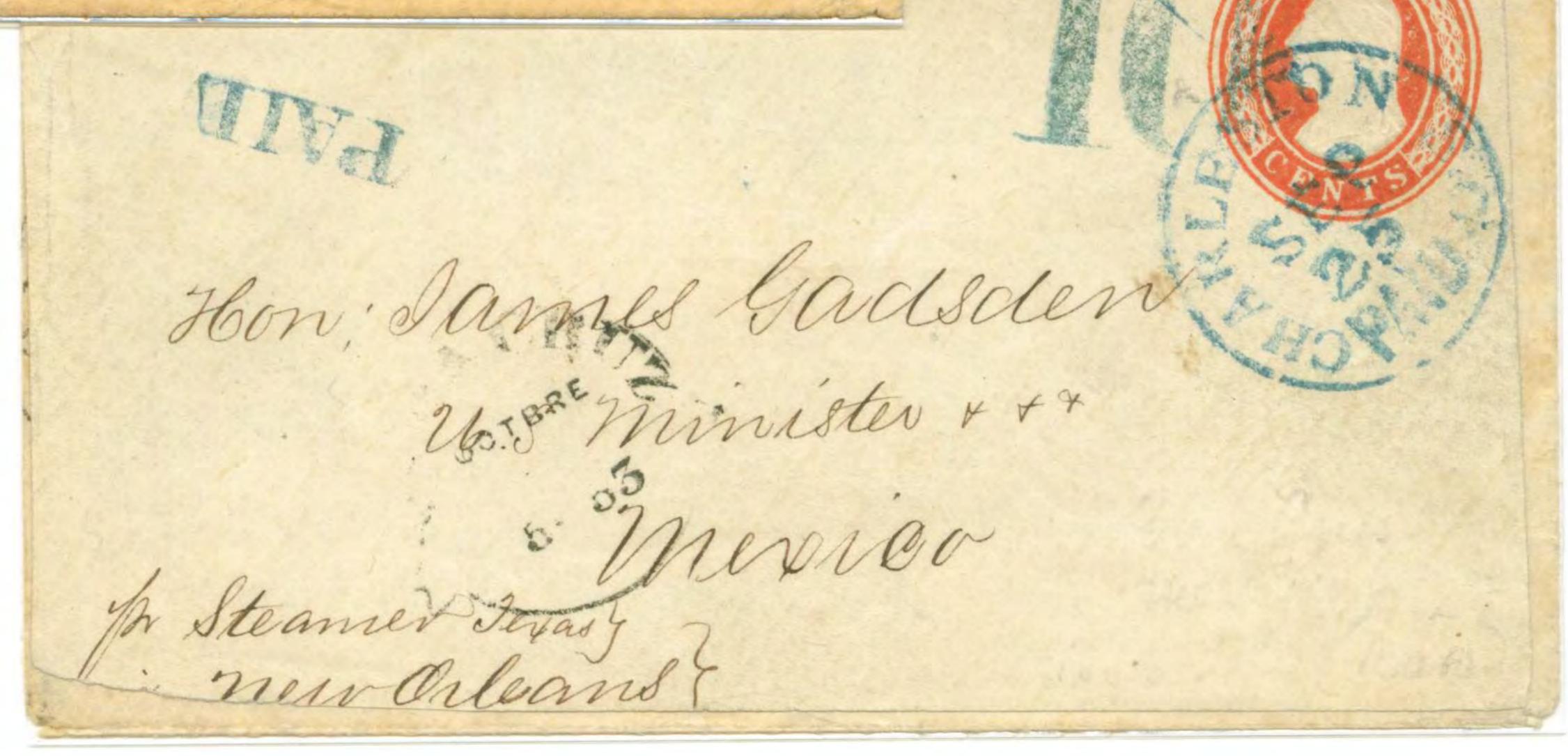
Lyon

Lyon

Fath Canus Mar

October 5, 1853, Norwich,
Connecticut, to Perth, Canada,
partial payment not allowed
(PAID struck though) at
Ogdensburgh, U. STATES
enclosed arc exchange mark,
10¢/6d collect. Ex Barkhausen

September 25, 1853, Charleston, South Carolina, to U. S. Minister James Gadsden at Vera Cruz, Mexico, 10¢ prepaid, by American packet *Texas* from New Orleans. On December 30, 1853, Gadsden signed the treaty with Mexico that purchased 45,535 square miles south of the Gila River for \$10 million.





September 3 (1853), Philadelphia to Chambersburg, forwarded September 9 to Quincy, due 5¢. Letter-size die 2 with Nesbitt seal on flap.

November 10 (1854), Franklin, Massachusetts, misdirected to Elizabethtown, New Jersey, marked 'mst&forw,' forwarded free November 12 to Elizabethtown, New York. Note-size die 4.

April 21, 1856, Alligator, Florida, to Tallahassee, registered No. 17 double letter, official-size envelope with valuable contents (\$14.75 in money), 5¢ fee paid in cash plus 6¢ postage. Red die 6.

Route Agent, Contract Carrier, and Non-Contract Carrier

Steam-driven conveyance revolutionized the transport of mail in the 1850s. Some trains and boats carried postal employees called route agents who processed mail in transit. Masters of steamboats under contract to the Post Office Department received one cent for each letter received en route in addition to the contractual amount paid to the owner; these letters were marked WAY at the post office where they were deposited. Non-contract carriers received two cents for each letter collected en route, which were marked STEAM or STEAMBOAT upon deposit at the post office.

Die 1 with Nesbitt seal on flap, 1853 and 1854; die 5, 1854.



Pennsylvania R.R. route agent's September 20, 1853, cancel postmarked on the Harrisburg-to-Pittsburgh train. Ex Chase. WAY on letter received by contract carrier steamboat upon arrival at New Orleans February 10 (1854). STEAM marked on letter received by the non-contract Natchez-to-New Orleans Mississippi riverboat Southern Belle upon arrival May 10 (1854).

City Carriers

Post offices that offered carrier service - collection and delivery of mail within a city - provided stamps to prepay the carrier fees. The 1¢ Eagle U.S.P.O. Despatch carriers' stamp was a general issue of 1852 valid at any post office with carrier service on the authority of the postmaster general. The 1¢ Government City Dispatch stamp was an 1857 local issue of the Baltimore postmaster. Carriers' stamps are seldom seen on stamped envelopes.

Die 5 1854 and die 5A circa 1857-1858.



The June 6 Eagle carriers' stamp paid for collection from the sender to the Cincinnati post office.



Die 5A: THREE in medium wide label with curved ends;
16mm wide at top,
short crossbar on both
Ts; large letter R

The June 1 Baltimore carriers' stamp is the ONE SENT plate variety, which paid for collection from the sender to the post office.

Local Posts

Private companies in competition with the government Post Office Department collected and delivered letters in cities until nearly all of them discontinued service in 1861.



For a fee of 1¢ paid in cash, D. O. Blood & Company delivered the January 19 (1854) cover to the Philadelphia post office for mailing to Red Lion, Delaware. Penny Post Company of California sold its franked envelope for 8¢, which included its 5¢ delivery fee plus 3¢ postage. The sender mailed the envelope July 16 (1855) at the Marysville post office. Upon arrival at San Francisco, a Penny Post representative collected the letter from the post office and delivered it to Tandler Company.

Western Express Companies

The principal need for stamped envelopes was to provide a method for the Post Office Department to collect postage on letters that were carried out-of-the-mails by express companies, especially in the California gold fields where postal service was infrequent and insecure. Adhesive stamps were not authorized for this use except as added postage on stamped envelopes.



Pacific Express Company succeeded Adams & Company's Express in 1855; the undated cover went from Stockton to Benicia shortly after the company opened for business. A sender at Eureka City posted his letter with Langton's Pioneer Express on September 22; Langton's delivered it to Wells Fargo at Marysville on September 26, and Wells Fargo delivered it in San Francisco the next day. Each of the express companies collected a fee, and Langton's paid 3¢ to the POD for the privilege.

Imprinted Commercial Advertisements

Stamped envelopes were natural vehicles for commercial advertisements. Die 1 on diagonally laid white and buff paper, 1854; die 5 on buff.



George Nesbitt enjoyed a great advantage over competitors, because his firm could print advertising matter on the envelopes during original manufacture, before they were gummed and folded. The Charles A. Morford embossed corner card on the flap of the buff envelope is one of five envelopes reported with ads printed on unfinished blanks by Nesbitt; the ad itself is unique. Ex Mintz. The La Fayette College cameo (windowed entire) is another Nesbitt production imprint, also unique.

The embossed corner card on the white envelope was printed on finished stock purchased from a post office, probably by a stationer in Buffalo. The embossing extends through all layers of the envelope.

Pictorial advertisements are seldom seen on First Issue stamped envelopes.

Convenience and Adversity

Die 5 on white and die 5A on buff with patented ruled lines; die 5 on white.



The final innovation was a patented self-ruling envelope issued in October 1859. Ruled lines printed on the inside of the back flap guided the writer in addressing the envelope, but after a letter was enclosed the lines were no longer visible. The original design with patent lines printed on the bottom flap was used only briefly. November 12, 1859, earliest documented use of the first self-ruling envelope. Ex Haeseler. March 13, 1861, Montgomery, Alabama, Confederate use of the more common version with patent lines printed on a reconfigured side flap. Ex Bowman.



Civil War adversity cover. October 16 (1855 to 1860), Boston, Mass., to Rev. Ed Reed, Fulton, South Carolina, turned and remailed with 10¢ Confederate States letter postage December 6 (1862 to 1864) Flat Rock, North Carolina, to Mr. Edw Reed care of Mr. B.M. Blocker, Edgefield, South Carolina.