

U.S. SPECIAL DELIVERY ISSUES 1885-1917

Background

The U.P.U. established a basis for a special service to speedily deliver mail for an extra fee in 1885. The United States issued the first express stamp on October 1, 1885; only 555 first class post offices provided service. On October 1, 1886 service was extended to all offices. In late 1888, the text tablet changed to "at any office", and in February, 1893 the stamp's color changed. In 1902 and continuing for 20 years, messengers used bicycles. In mid-December 1908, the U.S. adopted the 'Helmet of Mercury' design for a short period.

No Special Delivery treaties with foreign countries existed until 1923. The United States and Canada enjoyed an informal arrangement as of 1900 whereby each made Special Delivery stamps available at cross-border post offices. Businesses often stocked Special Delivery stamps at foreign locations for their own and customer use.

This traditional exhibit focuses on U.S. Special Delivery issues from inception to the 1917 issue when motorized service became the norm. The American Banknote Co. printed the first three issues and the Bureau of Engraving and Printing printed the remainder. The rate, without weight limit, remained at 10¢ during the entire period. Only four face different designs were used during the first 37 years of service shown here.

Essays, proofs, stamps and domestic as well as territorial usages are followed by foreign destinations and origins. Rarities are specially backed with dark blue borders.

Highlights by Issue

- 1885: Essay in trial color, trial color proofs, Pre- & First Day covers; held for postage cover, forwarded to non-Special Delivery office, remaining cover
- 1886: First Day to all first class offices, earliest postage due combination, earliest Canadian origin, earliest foreign origins (Hawaii & Europe)
- 1888: Proofs, combination use of 1885 & 1888 issues
- 1893: Multiple delivery attempts, Guam origin (Scott listing item), illegal revenue use (marriage)
- 1894: Signed large die proof, imperforate block on stamp paper, Boston eagle & thunderbolt cancel, foreign origin cover
- 1895: Offset block with plate number, imperforate plate block, arrow position pieces, illegal revenue use (block of 6), multiple delivery attempt cover, territorial origin (Philippines), missing dot variety plate strip (Cuba), Guam special printing imprint single, Saipan local cover, Philippine overprint first day of issue, US-Philippines plate block
- 1902: Signed large die proof, unlisted trial color proofs, "Ultramar" overprint for UPU, earliest use, combination 1888 and 1902 issue cover
- 1907: Canal Zone origins, Philippines special printing overprint for department of insular affairs plate block of 8
- 1908: Original signed sketches, BEP essays, signed large die proof, "Ultramar" overprint for UPU, precancels, territorial usages (to & from Alaska), internationally forwarded transit
- 1909: Re-issue cover, plate modification with and without -09
- 1911: Missing frame line, U.S. offices in Vera Cruz, consulate usage
- 1914: Plate without imprint, earliest Presidential Widow use
- 1916: Used block, earliest use
- 1917: Printing flaws, free frank/special stamp, international transit cover, WWI revenue use, A.E.F. (to and from usages), foreign origin cover (China).

