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Issue No. 22

The Prexie Era

The Newsletter of the BIA 1938 Presidential Era Study Group

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Message From the Editor

My thanks to all of you who have contributed to this Issue. The material is diverse and interesting. I now need reports, etc., for Issue No. 23, and would appreciate having whatever you can offer.

Here is a content question for which I would appreciate your feedback: Is it appropriate -- now that the Newsletter covers the Prexie Era (not just Prexies) -- to include reports about covers without stamps? I made the judgment for Issue No. 22 that Len Piskiewicz's report is so interesting that I would include it. Will this approach be appropriate for future Issues as well? Please let me know your thoughts about this or any other matter affecting the Newsletter.

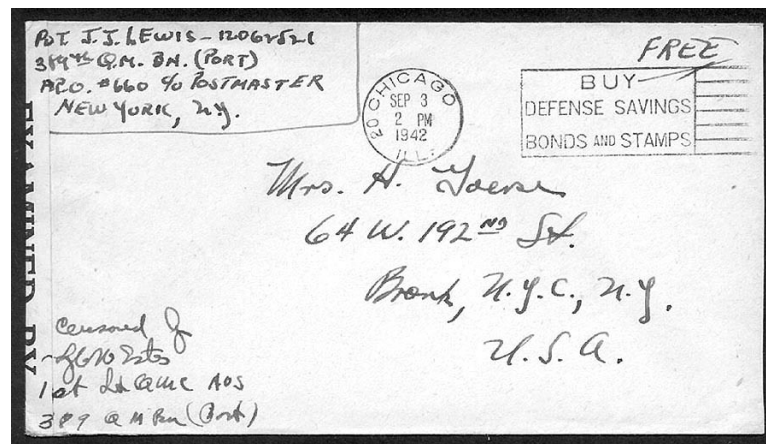
I also want to thank those readers who have responded to our call for contributions to keep the Newsletter coming. The response has been very gratifying. However, since our publication fund is not self-renewing, we always need additional funds or postage. Please continue to send your contributions to Jeff Shapiro; and, please send your auction donations directly to me.

Censored Within the U.S.?

by

Leonard Piskiewicz

The illustrated cover, at first glance, looks like a domestic letter that was censored during the early days of World War II. It was postmarked at Chicago and was destined for the Bronx, New York.



One does not often see a cover that was postmarked in the United States, addressed to a destination in the United States, and censored. In this instance the cornercard script offers the clue to the explanation.

The cover actually is from the early days of APO 660 in Churchill, Manitoba -- a town where polar bears are at the top of the food chain. Apparently, after the letter was censored, it was dropped into the mail in Chicago. This is not the only such cover known. Bill Helbock wrote about "Censor Markings of the U.S. Army in 1942" in *La Posta* some years ago, illustrating another cover from APO 660, also postmarked

at Chicago. The Helbock cover was dated SEP 21 1942 [*La Posta*, May 1996, p.7]; the cover in this report has a postmark dated SEP 3, 1942. So far, these are the only reported covers from APO 660!

What is curious about both covers is that neither received U.S. Army Postal Service postmarks.

As Helbock writes, APOs 660 and 669 were established in July 1942. APO 660 was discontinued in October 1942; APO 669 was discontinued at some date not known to Helbock. Since both were short-term APOs, they might never have had postmark devices, so that outgoing letters entered the mail at some convenient point in the United States after being processed by the Office of Censorship. There are no reported covers from APO 669.

Does anyone have a cover from APO 660 or APO 669? If so, please report it to the Newsletter Editor or to this author. Also, does anyone have any records that will help establish how common or perhaps uncommon covers are from APOs with ordinary U.S. (non-Army) postmarks?

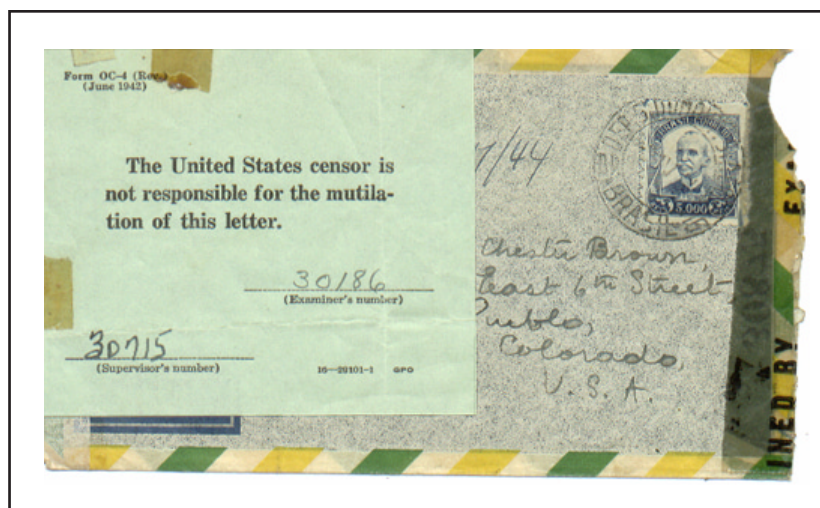
World War II Letter Mail Labels

[continued from Issue No.21]

by

Steven M. Roth

Until recently, all of the labels I have had in my holdings reflect official responses to *outgoing* international civilian mail. Now, however, I own an Office of Censorship label [Form OC-4 (Rev.)] which was applied to mail coming into the U.S.



This cover originated in Brazil in December 1943. It was delivered to the addressee in Colorado in May 1944.

Results of Donor Auction

Our first Donor Auction netted \$102 from four bidders who cast five bids for the three Lots. Lot #1 realized \$70; Lot #2 realized \$7; and, Lot #3 realized \$25. All of the proceeds will be used to offset the costs of publishing the Newsletter (*i.e.*, printing and/or postage). While we do not plan to host auctions frequently, we will include them in the Newsletter if suitable donations in kind are offered.

Pitney-Bowes Barrel Cancel: A Trial Use

by

James Felton

Reader Jim Felton recently wrote to the Editor:

I picked up [this] cover at INDYPEX last summer. This is a trial use of an experimental Pitney-Bowes barrel cancel. This is nearly 2 years prior to my earliest recorded use of the production devices (*i.e.*, early March 1953). I have reports from 2 parties of a 1953 trial use of the roller cancel based on the barrel. Len Piskiewicz sent me a copy of an article from *The Bureau Specialist* of March 1959 describing such experimental devices.



Wanted

Covers to Asia, Europe
and Africa in 1940.

Contact: Steve Roth

A Reader Responds: A *PO Box 20* Undercover Address Cover

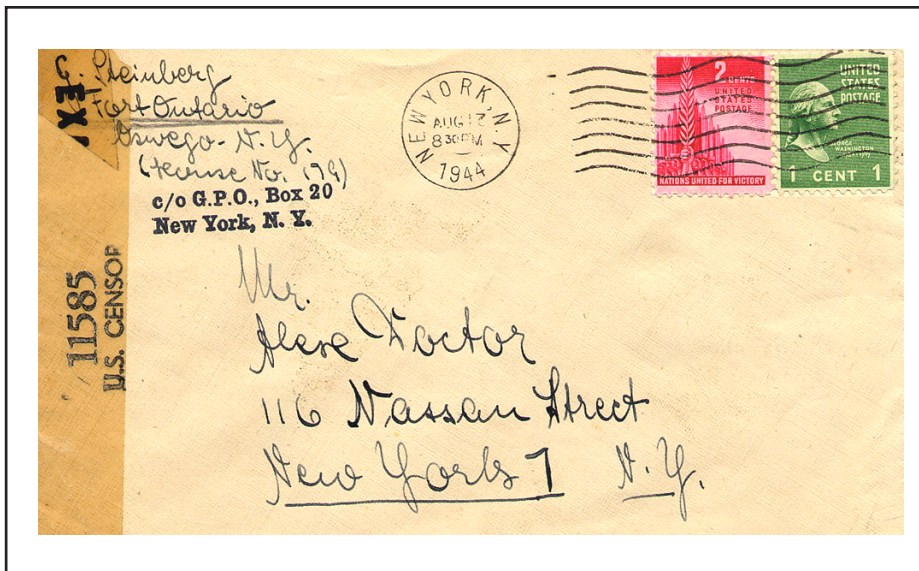
by

Louis Fiset

Reader Louis Fiset responded to my request in Issue No. 21 for examples of **PO Box 20** covers, offering two examples from his holdings.

Professor Fiset wrote:

In response to your request for covers with the PO Box 20 address, I'm sending you both outgoing and incoming covers. I think you're right that the address was to help routing of mail. The POW cover made the rounds to McAlester and Maxey, to be sure. However, my guess is the master list of POWs and internees was kept at some central location. I wouldn't call covers with this address plentiful, but the POW covers, at least, are not rare.



The civilian cover [above] is a recent acquisition and is one I've never seen before, even though I've known about these people for many years. This is a cover from a Jewish refugee, one of about 1,000 who were permitted into the country in August 1944, and eventually [were] allowed to stay. The camp was run as a modified concentration camp, and [was] administered by none other than the War Relocation Authority, which ...also administered the relocation centers that [held] incarcerated Japanese Americans.

Here is what I know about the POW cover [shown on the next page].

[The cover is] postmarked December 12, 1944, Bebra Hessen, to a German POW at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. [The cover was] forwarded to Camp McAlester, Oklahoma, and finally to Camp Maxey, Texas, where it was received April 5, 1945.

[The cover indicates that its contents were] censored both in Berlin and New York (POW

Unit). [It seems that the] air post instructions were likely unfulfilled.



If the Box 20 address was an attempt to centralize mail distribution [Editor's note: as I suggested in Issue No.21], it appears not to have been effective in this case.

Interestingly, Camp McCoy also held Japanese aliens from Hawaii early in the War (and a few Nisei until the ACLU threatened [to bring] *habeas corpus* proceedings), and, later, Japanese prisoners of war. The all-Nisei 100th Battalion, from Hawaii, also trained there before heading to Camp Shelby to become the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Camp McAlester held approximately 250 Italian enemy aliens until they were returned to INS jurisdiction in the spring of 1943. Japanese, German and Italian enemy alien civilians under Army jurisdiction used the Box 20 address between March and June 1943.

Professor Fiset has published an interesting article which I recommend: "*Return to Sender/U.S. Censorship of Enemy Alien Mail in World War II*". The article is available online, without charge, at <http://www.nara.gov/publications/prologue/fiset1.html>.

Return to Sender/No Service Available: When Was Letter Service to Neutral Switzerland Temporarily Suspended?

by

Steven M. Roth

Until recently, I have been puzzled by various aspects of the interruption of First Class letter mail to

Switzerland during World War II since, as we all know, Switzerland was a declared neutral. For example, I was curious about the wording of the handstamp used to indicate the break in service. Instead of the common “RETURN TO SENDER/SERVICE SUSPENDED” (or some variation in language), the handstamp used by U.S. authorities to indicate the cessation of mail service to Switzerland stated “RETURN TO SENDER/NO SERVICE AVAILABLE”.

I now know that the “SERVICE SUSPENDED” type handstamp reflected the declared suspension of service to a country which itself was an Allied Powers enemy or which was occupied or controlled by an enemy country. The “NO SERVICE AVAILABLE” handstamp, on the other hand, reflected the interruption of mail service to a friendly country or to a neutral country because of the difficulty of delivery or the inconvenience of mail delivery to that country resulting from the exigencies of war.

Does anyone have an example of the “NO SERVICE AVAILABLE” handstamp used for a country other than Switzerland? I haven’t seen any.

I also have been puzzled by the published dates that appear in the literature concerning when service to Switzerland ceased and resumed.

Here, briefly, is what I have been able to determine so far.

The First Period of Suspended Service

There appear to have been two distinct periods during which letter mail service to Switzerland was suspended. The first occurrence was in November 1942 when the German Army closed the Swiss borders after the Allies invaded North Africa. This period of suspension lasted for several months, according to conventional wisdom, although I have not been able to find any original source indicating when this first suspension period terminated. Helbock (Prexy Postal History, Appendix B), Davis (The Transports) and Wawrukiewicz & Beecher (U.S. International Postal Rates, 1872-1996) all date the beginning of this suspension period from November 1942, and give the date service resumed as June 20, 1945, more or less, treating what I believe to be two distinct periods of service suspension as one continuous period.

While it is possible that there was only one period of suspension, and that it lasted from November 1942 until June 1945, it seems unlikely that this was the case. Otherwise, why would the United States have announced its own suspension of the mails to Switzerland in 1943? So far, however, I have not found any covers which show that service resumed sometime after the German Army suspension period ended and before the commencement of the second period of suspension, as described next. But until I wrote this note I wasn’t looking for such covers, instead I assumed that I had everything I needed concerning the suspension of the mails to Switzerland.

The Second Period of Suspended Service

The second period of suspended service to Switzerland occurred when the United States inaugurated its period of suspension on March 24, 1943. The following notice appeared in *The Postal Bulletin* for Wednesday, March 24, 1943 [No.18571]:

INSTRUCTIONS OF
SECOND ASSISTANT POSTMASTER GENERAL

INTERNATIONAL MAILS

No Service Available to Switzerland

Since there is no service to Switzerland except through Axis-occupied territory, the United States mails that have accumulated for that country will be returned to senders. Until such time as mails can be safely sent to Switzerland (notice of which will be given), mails for that country should not be accepted. As an exception to the above, prisoners-of-war mail and certain Red Cross welfare messages will be accepted and given dispatch.

It is understood that the Swiss authorities have made arrangements for the sending of certain unregistered mail from Switzerland to the United States.

Postmasters shall advise prospective mailers to the extent practicable that mail, other than prisoners-of-war mail and Red Cross welfare messages, cannot be sent to Switzerland until further notice.

The second suspension period ended on November 6, 1944, with this announcement in *The Postal Bulletin* for November 7, 1944 (No. 18769):

ORDER OF
THE POSTMASTER GENERAL

RESTRICTED RESUMPTION OF MAIL SERVICE TO SWITZERLAND

ORDER No. 26449; DATED NOVEMBER 6, 1944.

Effective at once letters weighing not in excess of 1 ounce and post cards shall be accepted when addressed for delivery to civilians in Switzerland. The postage rates applicable thereto shall be the same as were previously in effect (5 cents for letters and 3 cents for post cards).

Registration, money order, air-mail, and parcel post services are not available at this time.

This does not affect prisoner of war mail.

There are a few covers in my collection which reflect the structure I have described.

Pre-Suspension Period



This cover (special because of its emergency trans-Pacific routing) is dated September 14, 1942. It pre-dated the sealing of the borders

The First Period of Suspension: Swiss Borders Sealed

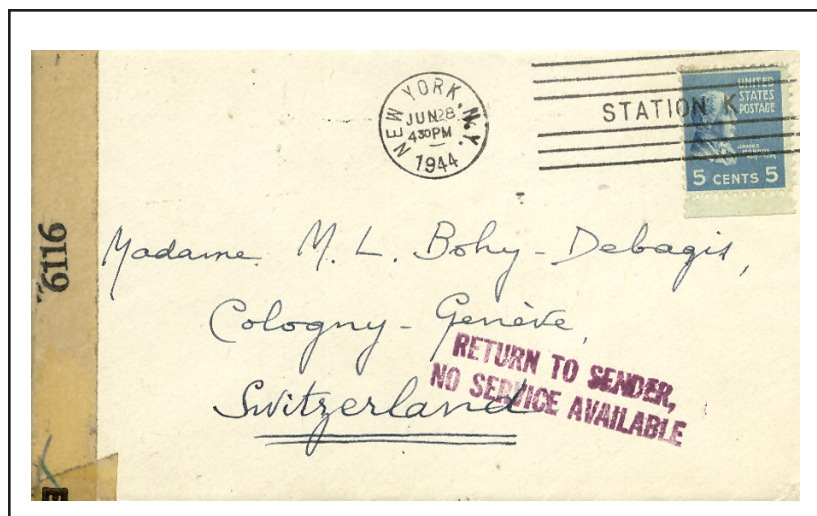
The German Army closed the Swiss borders to Allied nations' mail by prohibiting its transit over Axis occupied countries. The cover below (dated December 11, 1942) was held by United States Censorship and then returned to the sender in April 1943.



I believe that sometime in 1943 (date still to be determined) the German Army again permitted the mails to enter Switzerland.

The Second Period of Suspension: The United States' Period of Suspension

The United States suspended letter mail service to Switzerland from March 24, 1943 to November 6, 1944.



Of course, neither the German Army's suspension of service nor the United States' suspension affected

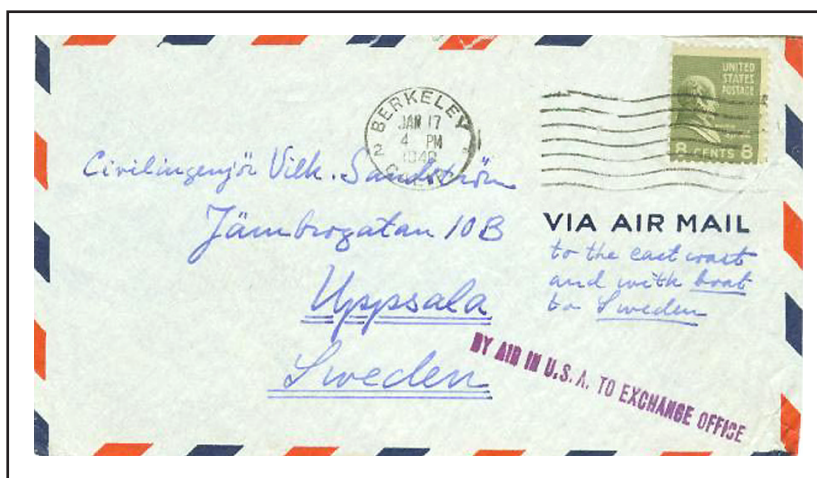
the delivery of mail to Switzerland addressed to the International Committee of the Red Cross, to POWs, or to civilian internees held in Switzerland.

Now that I have layed this out, it seems obvious that I am missing some relevant covers although I did not realize this before I put this note together. What do I need?

I need a cover that was admitted to Switzerland after November, 1942 but before March 24, 1943.

I need, too, a cover that was admitted to Switzerland after November 6, 1944, but before June 20, 1945, the date generally given for the resumption of service to Switzerland.

Show & Tell: Items From Our Readers



When he sent me files of this cover and others in his collection, Professor Thomas P. Myers wrote about this cover:

[This is a] wartime airmail letter from Berkeley, California to Sweden, dated 17 January 1940, with airmail postage paid only to the east coast. [The letter was to]...be forwarded to Sweden by surface mail. [The h]andwritten notation by [the] sender reads "To the east coast and with *boat* to *Sweden*". The magenta handstamp reads "BY AIR IN U.S.A. TO EXCHANGE OFFICE". [This was probably] applied by [the] Berkeley [post office].

This cover is a nice example of a combi-use after the commencement of trans-atlantic mail flights. Such uses, while not rare, are far more difficult to come by than those from before May 20, 1939 when FAM 18 was inaugurated.

The 8 cents solo franking on Professor Myers' cover was allocated: 2 cents per ounce for ship transport across the ocean [the 2 cents was the difference between the U.S. first-class 3 cents rate and the 5 cents foreign ship rate]; and, 6 cents per ounce for the domestic airmail rate. The 2 cents (calculated above) was added to this.