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The Prexie Era

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Famous Americans Paying the 55-Cent Airmail Rate to South Africa

by Louis Fiset



The cover shown here was dispatched from New York to Johannesburg, Union of South Africa, on March 15, 1940, franked at the 55-cent airmail rate using stamps from the Famous Americans Series. This one-year rate was in effect from July 1, 1939, to June 14, 1940, reflecting the 30-cent transatlantic airmail rate to Europe plus 25-cent surcharge for air service beyond Europe.

This rate ended when Italy entered the War and commercial air routes across the Mediterranean were suddenly closed. After a brief suspension, air service to South Africa resumed on August 6 via transpacific routing, payable at 95 cents

per half ounce.

Most frankings of the 55-cent rate were made up of Prexie stamps alone or in combination with the three Clipper airmail stamps then in general use. Far less common are covers bearing Famous American commemoratives. The first set (Authors) was issued between January 29 and February 13, 1940, allowing little more than four months of potential use before the end of the rate period. Five of the seven sets were issued before June 14. The Nevin stamp, from the fifth (Composers), appeared on June 10, allowing less than a week for postal patrons to use it to help pay this rate.

2-Cent Local Letter: Last Day of Rate Cover

by Stephen L. Suffet



Last day of 2-cent local carrier office letter rate. Saranac Lake, NY. March 25, 1944.

Note: This is the third in a series of articles exploring the first and/or last day of postal rates during the Prexie era.

The 2-cent local first class letter rate was one of the most durable rates in United States postal history. From July 1, 1863, through June 30, 1885, the postage for letters addressed for delivery within the same city or town where mailed was 2 cents per half ounce, provided the post office had letter carrier service. Effective the following day, the weight unit increased to the full ounce, and the rate of 2 cents per ounce then remained in effect through July 5, 1932. In total, the 2-cent rate, whether per half ounce or per ounce, lasted 69 years and 5 days. At times it was the same as the non-local domestic letter rate, while at other times it was 1 cent less.

The 2-cent local letter rate finally came to an end on July 6, 1932, when along with the non-local domestic letter rate, it increased to 3 cents

per ounce. (This increase did not affect the 1 cent per ounce rate for local letters deposited for pickup at a post office without carrier service.)

The new 3-cent local letter rate did not last long. Responding to the wishes of constituents, Congress soon rolled the rate back to 2 cents per ounce as of July 1, 1933. The 2-cent local letter rate was thus in effect when the U.S. Presidential Series was introduced in 1938.

As a wartime revenue measure, Congress raised the local carrier office letter rate back up to the same level as the current non-local domestic letter rate, 3 cents per ounce, beginning March 26, 1944. The discounted rate for local letters mailed at post offices with carrier service was never restored, and from that date onward such letters were charged the same rates as non-local domestic letters. (Once again, the increase did not affect the 1 cent per ounce rate for local letters deposited for pickup at a post office

without carrier service. That rate finally rose to 2 cents per ounce on January 1, 1952.)

The cover illustrated above was used at the 2-cent local letter rate on its last day, March 25, 1944. The cover was mailed for delivery within Saranac Lake, New York, a village located in the Adirondack Mountains in the northernmost part of the state. In the 1940 census, the village had a population of 7,138, which was large enough for its post office to provide carrier service. At the time, Saranac Lake was the site of the Will Rogers Memorial Hospital, a tuberculosis sanatorium serving people who had worked in the entertainment industry. Saranac Lake also had a number of smaller “cure cottages” for people with TB or other long term illnesses. In addition, Saranac Lake offered numerous lodgings for hikers, boaters, anglers, hunters, skiers, and other outdoor vacationers. Will Rogers Memorial Hospital closed in 1975, and its buildings are now an

independent living facility for senior citizens known as Saranac Village at Will Rogers.

Ironically, I owned this last day of rate cover twice. It had been in the all-denomination Presidential Series postal history exhibit that I sold to Nutmeg Stamp Sales in 2002. It was then one of two covers that made up Lot 1189 in Nutmeg’s Mail Auction Sale #62 on April 15, 2003. Since Nutmeg did not publish the price realized, I have no idea what the two-cover lot sold for, although the pre-auction estimate had been \$100. Three years later, after I decided to mount a postal history exhibit of only the 1-cent Prexie, I repurchased the same cover from a dealer at a stamp show. Unfortunately, I do not recall from whom and for how much.

That was not the first time I bought a particular cover more than once, and I suspect it will not be the last.

Stepping Down

by Louis Fiset

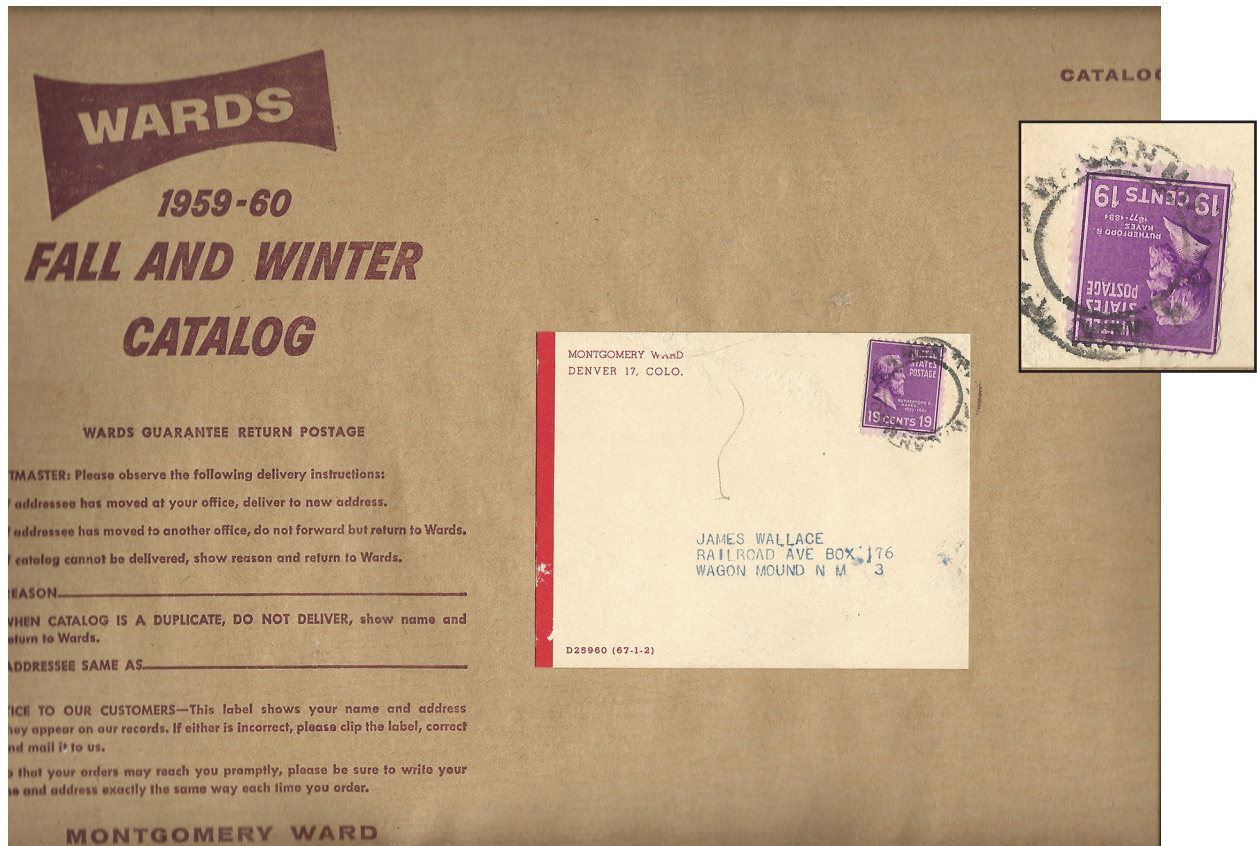
After fifteen years at the helm I am stepping down as editor of *The Prexie Era* to pursue other philatelic interests. Over the past decade and a half I’ve edited and published articles by motivated writers to fill 60 uninterrupted quarterly issues. I deeply appreciate the support of both writers and subscribers who have demonstrated ongoing interest in Prexie era philately.

I urge a new editor to step forward in the near future to keep the publication going without a break and perhaps move content in a new direction. I will be available to assist with the transition and look forward to contributing articles in the future.

If you are interested in learning the responsibilities of editing *The Prexie Era* you may contact me directly, or contact Jeff Shapiro at coverlover@gmail.com

19-Cent Prexie Solo Pays Bound Printed Matter Rate

by Willy Knopp



In my experience, bound printed matter examples are seldom seen. So, when I saw the catalog illustrated here at a local flea market, franked with a 19-cent Prexie solo, no less, I snapped it up. After a couple of minutes of haggling, it was mine. Happily, I drove home with my treasure. However, after consulting the Beecher and Wawrukiewicz domestic rates book, I discovered, to my chagrin, that a 5.5-pound catalog mailed to Zone 3 (Denver, Colorado, to Wagon Mound, New Mexico) in 1959 would have required 32 cents postage. Something was obviously wrong here. It seems unlikely Montgomery Ward was sending out catalogs 13 cents short paid, so why the discrepancy?

Finally, I did what I should have done in the first place; I examined the poorly struck cancel.

When I discovered the postmark was not Denver, Colorado, but Wagon Mound, New Mexico (see inset), I realized immediately the catalog was mailed locally. And the local rate for a 5.5-pound catalog in 1959 was 19 cents! What joy to find a correctly franked 19-cent solo -- truly a thing of beauty.

I'm pretty sure Montgomery Ward was carrying pre-franked catalogs in their appliance delivery trucks to be mailed locally, thereby saving the company postage expenses. I have several other pieces in my collection that are consistent with this practice. The item shown here is what prompted me to think they were doing so. It seems unlikely that a tiny town like Wagon Mound (1960 population of 763) would have had a stock of 19-cent Prexies in their post office.

Prexie Census Data Update

by Richard Pederson

In a previous article in *The Prexie Era* (No. 77 Spring 2017), I discussed my effort to collect census information for two categories of Prexie postal history: solo uses; and covers containing the largest known number of any given Prexie value on cover, tag, or parcel piece. Since then, I have completely redesigned my website and added updates provided by Prexie collectors in addition to some of my own updates. I have also reviewed all back editions of *The Prexie Era*, and the books *The Prexies*, by Roland E. Rustad; *Prexie Postal History*, edited by Richard W. Helbock; and the *Prexie Era 1938 – 1962*, edited by Louis Fiset. I have entered all the information I have received or uncovered in the above references regarding multiple copies of a given value on cover and selected solo uses. For that reason, I am requesting, once again, that Prexie Era Committee members view their collections and send me any updates they have to the current census data displayed on my website.

To view the current census data, enter <https://www.pedersonstamps.com/prexie-census-data> in your web browser. That will bring up the screen shown in Figure 1. Then select “1. Census Tracking Largest Number of a Given Prexie on Cover, Tag, or Parcel Piece” or “2.

Selected Prexie Solo Uses” and follow the instructions on the next screen.

The Table shows the current largest recorded multiple for each major Prexie variety including booklets, coils, and the Canal Zone overprints. There have been a significant number of updates to the table since this information was previously published, including the two items pictured in Figures 2 and 3. The parcel tag shown front and back in Figure 2, is from my collection, and the cover in Figure 3 is from the Prexie Era website¹.

For those Prexies which I have not received any input from Prexie Era committee members, as a starting point, I recorded the largest multiple I found in one of the above references or had in my collection. If there are other significant multiples known for any given Prexie, they are also listed (i.e., 2nd largest, 3rd largest, etc.). For 20 of the 50 entries, there are less than 10 copies recorded on any cover, tag, or parcel piece in my database. If each committee member reviews the items in their collection, I am sure that many of the entries can be replaced with those showing a greater number of multiples.

Prexie Census Data

This portion of the Pederson Stamps website tracks census information for U.S. stamps included in the Fifth Bureau Issue, otherwise known as the Presidential Series of 1938 and referred to by specialists in that series as the Prexies. The site tracks information related to two Prexie areas: solo uses of selected Prexie stamps; and the use of multiple copies of a specified Prexie on cover or parcel piece. We ask that Prexie collectors and other postal historians review the census information and provide updates where possible. Updates should be sent to Richard Pederson, at rich@pedersonstamps.com, along with a high resolution scan (300 bpi) of the item so it can be included in the census and posted on the site. If the item in question has stamps or markings on both sides, please submit scans of both sides. If you are the current owner and would like the item attributed to you, please say so. If you do not want the item posted, but included in the census, it will still be necessary to see a scan/picture of the item to be certain that it has not already been counted (e.g., from information passed by a previous owner).

Please select the link below for the census of interest.

1. Largest Number of a Given Prexie on Cover, Tag, or Parcel Piece; and
2. Selected Prexie Solo Uses.

In the case of solo uses, I have tracked those I have found to be somewhat difficult to locate. I would welcome additional entries for any of the solo uses currently being tracked as well as others that you believe are scarce.

Updates can be sent either as scans via E-mail to **rich@pedersonstamps.com** or high resolution pictures with descriptions via mail to 15312 Gammon Green Walk, Midlothian, VA 23112. If you wish to remain anonymous, please let me know.

¹ <https://www.prexie-era.org/prexies-high-values/>

Table: Largest reported multiples for each major Prexie value

Description	Largest Known	Description	Largest Known
½¢ Sheet Stamp	32	20¢ Sheet Stamp	31
1¢ Sheet Stamp	38	21¢ Sheet Stamp	10
1¢ Booklet	12	22¢ Sheet Stamp	6
1½ ¢ Sheet Stamp	100	24¢ Sheet Stamp	10
2¢ Sheet Stamp	39	25¢ Sheet Stamp	16
2¢ Booklet	6	30¢ Sheet Stamp	15
3¢ Sheet Stamp	50	50¢ Sheet Stamp	103
3¢ Booklet	13	\$1 Sheet Stamp	74
4¢ Sheet Stamp	6	\$2 Sheet Stamp	30
4½¢ Sheet Stamp	22	\$5 Sheet Stamp	71
5¢ Sheet Stamp	50	1¢ Horiz. Coil	24
6¢ Sheet Stamp	10	1½¢ Horiz. Coil	4
7¢ Sheet Stamp	7	2¢ Horiz. Coil	15
8¢ Sheet Stamp	16	3¢ Horiz. Coil	17
9¢ Sheet Stamp	9	4¢ Horiz. Coil	7
10¢ Sheet Stamp	35	4½¢ Horiz. Coil	10
11¢ Sheet Stamp	6	5¢ Horiz. Coil	7
12¢ Sheet Stamp	8	6¢ Horiz. Coil	20
13¢ Sheet Stamp	5	10¢ Horiz. Coil	27
14¢ Sheet Stamp	4	1¢ Vert. Coil	6
15¢ Sheet Stamp	48	1½¢ Vert. Coil	12
16¢ Sheet Stamp	4	2¢ Vert. Coil	2
17¢ Sheet Stamp	5	3¢ Vert. Coil	2
18¢ Sheet Stamp	4	½¢ Canal Zone Sheet Stamp	10
19¢ Sheet Stamp	8	1½¢ Canal Zone Sheet Stamp	4



Figure 2: Largest reported 25-cent sheet stamp multiple on a tag.



Figure 3: Largest reported \$2 sheet stamp multiple.

Not Covered: Special Services Not Paid for by Penalty Clause

by Richard Martorelli

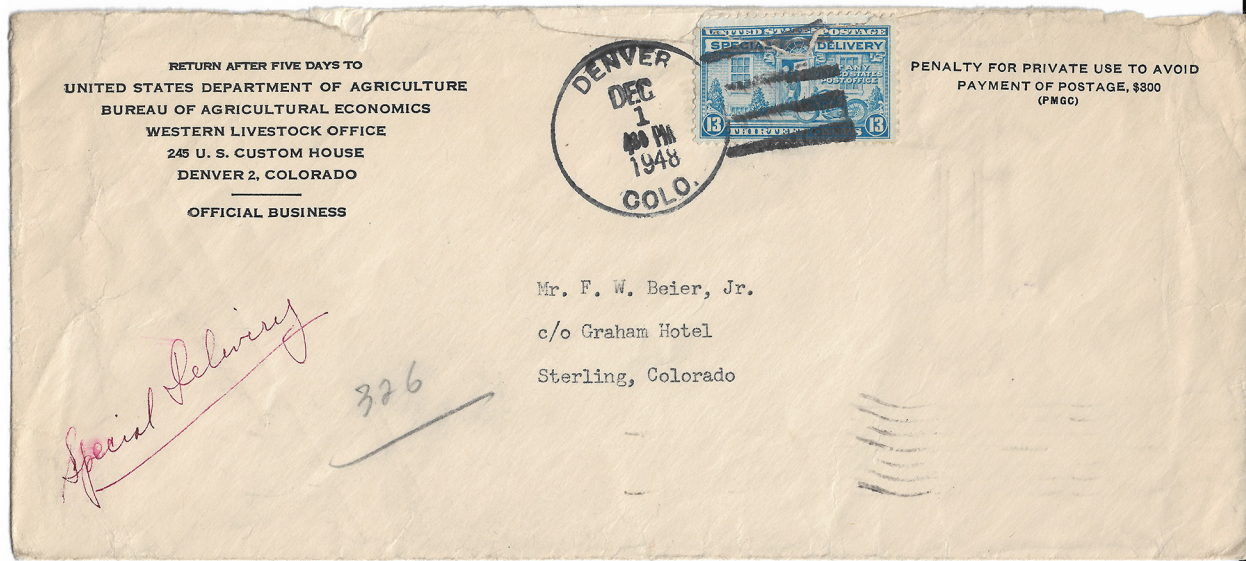


Figure 1: No first class postage paid; special delivery fee paid in full.

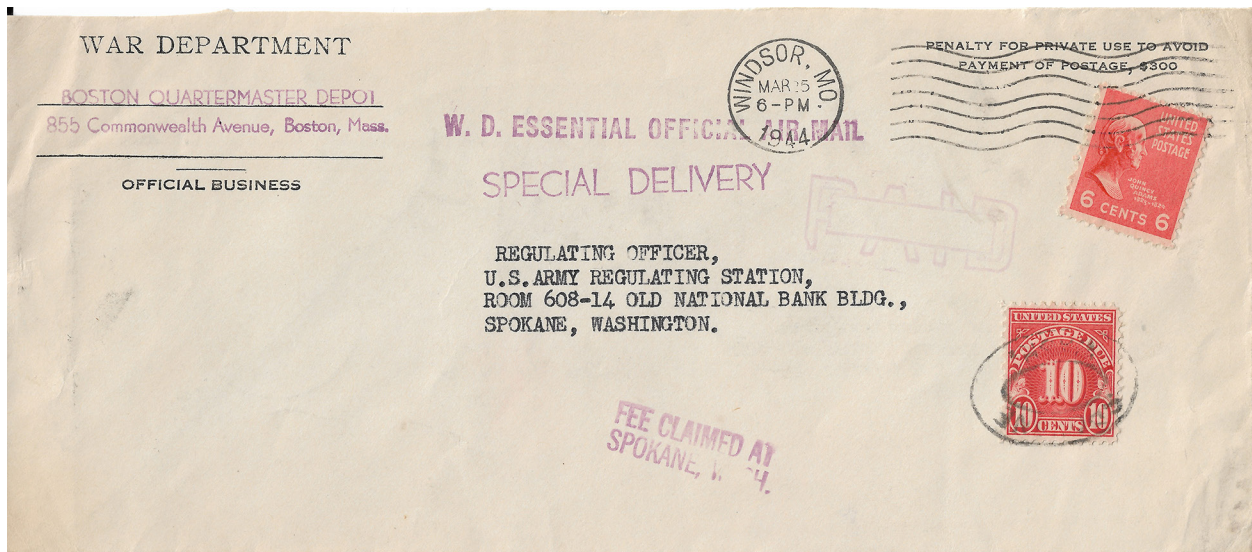


Figure 2: Airmail postage paid, as required; special delivery fee assessed postage due.

All readers are likely familiar with the official government franking of “Penalty for private use to avoid payment of postage \$300.” This was used on US government official business mail from 1877 up thru the late 1950’s. The \$300 fine has never been changed. If it was adjusted either for inflation or for the percentage of an average government employee’s salary,

the current value would be \$5,000 or more. The major restriction on government mailers was that the Penalty clause only paid for the basic postage. Additional services had to be paid separately and payment indicated on the envelope.

Figure 1 shows an example of this principle in

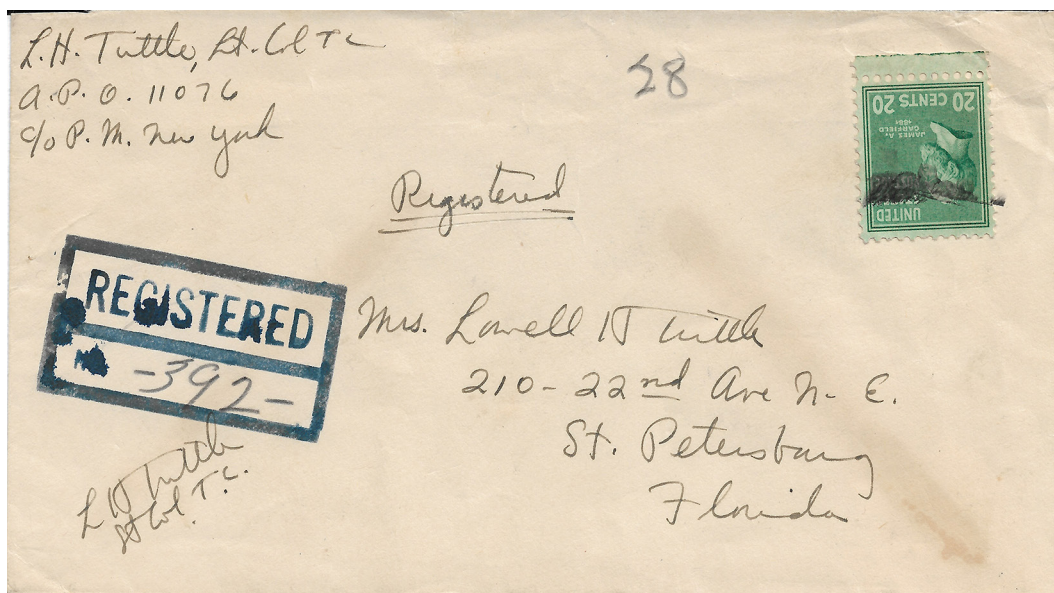


Figure 3: Surface mail free for military personnel; registration fee paid in full.



Figure 4: RRR fee paid; registration fee included in scope of the Penalty clause for all Bureau of the Census mail.

action. This is a December 1948 letter from the US Department of Agriculture to an individual. The first class postage is paid for by the Penalty clause, but the USDA deemed this mail to need Special Delivery service, so they applied a 13-cent Messenger & Motorcycle stamp to pay for that service.

In Figure 2, this 1944 letter between US Army offices in Windsor, MO and Spokane, WA,

was identified as both “W.D. Essential Official Airmail” as well as needing “Special Delivery”. The envelope is franked with a 6-cent Prexie for the airmail service, but seemingly the sender thought the 10-cent Special Delivery fee was covered by the Penalty clause. An eagle-eyed USPOD clerk caught the postage shortfall and appropriately assessed and collected 10 cents postage due.

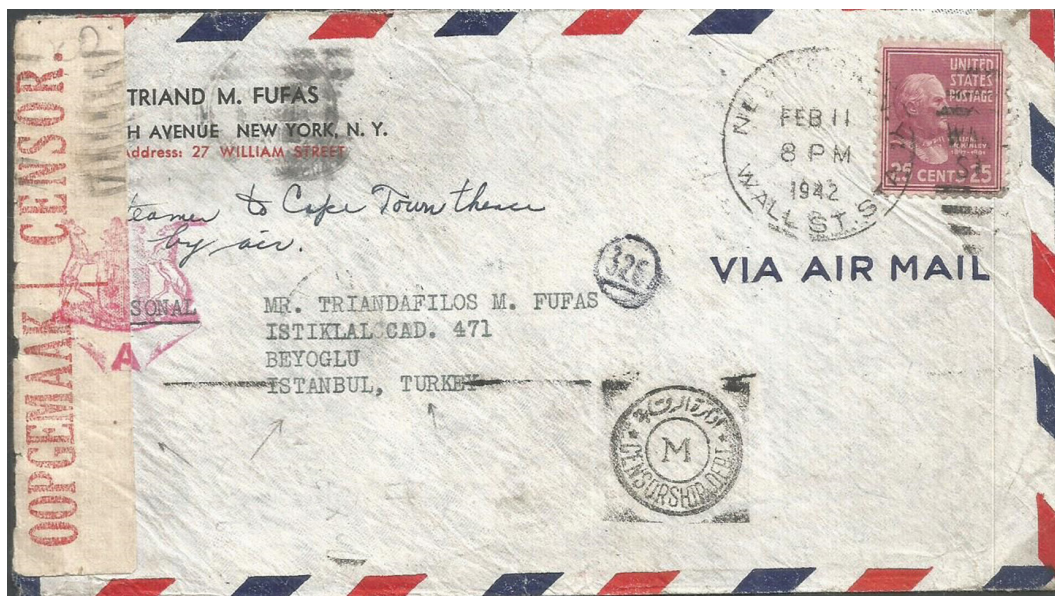
Another common special service used on official mail is registration. The cover shown in Figure 3 is a surface mail letter sent by a soldier serving overseas (India) in December 1944. This is a little bit of a twist, in that it is not official government mail, but actually an example of concession mail. Nonetheless, the sender is a government employee. The letter is registered, making it an unusual combination. The envelope is franked with a 20-cent Prexie to pay the then current basic registration fee.

The last cover, in Figure 4, seems unusual on its face. It was mailed by the Census Bureau in October 1947 from Washington, DC to New York, NY (per backstamps). It is marked

“Registered” and “Return Receipt Requested”, but franked only with a WASHINGTON D.C. precanceled 4-cent Prexie. Sure, the Penalty clause pays the first class postage, and precancel pays the RRR fee for a receipt showing to whom and when the letter was delivered. Did everybody just forget about the 20-cent registration fee? This is one of the few examples where, by law, a special service fee (in this case registration), is included in the scope of the Penalty clause. For Census Bureau mail, registration is free no matter the US origin of the mail. For Executive Branch government departments, and some other government institutions, free registration is applicable only when mailed from Washington, DC.

Unusual Surface/Airmail Routing to Turkey in 1942

by Louis Fiset



Transatlantic airmail to Turkey was re-routed via the Pacific when Mediterranean commercial air routes were suspended in June 1940. Transatlantic routes via west Africa and Cairo resumed in December 1941 at a cost to postal patrons of 70 cents per half ounce. What prewar took four days to reach Turkey was now an 11-12 day journey to Cairo, then onward by surface following censorship.

The cover here shows an uncommon surface/air routing resulting in less postage (5 cents surface plus 20 cents for air service from South Africa to destination) but increased transit time: New York to Cape Town direct by ship (22-28 days); by train to Durban; Horseshoe route to Cairo; and onward to destination by surface. Censorship occurred both at Cape Town and Cairo.