

Synopsis for Judges: U.S. 1¢ Jefferson Emergency Paper Postal Card Printings of WW1

Historical Background:

The Government Printing Office in Washington D.C. assumed U.S. postal card printing from private firms in 1910. Two new Potter web-fed, vertical rotary printing presses were bought and installed at the GPO, printing 1¢ domestic postal cards. From 1910 to 1916 postal cards from these presses utilized 44.5” wide Bristol paper rolls and vertically curved steel plates. When a worldwide paper shortage occurred during the First World War, the GPO’s normal postal card work was seriously constrained. By December 1916, the GPO used their remaining paper to stockpile production of single cards while deciding to limit printing of postal cards in press sheets of 48, provided almost exclusively to outside contract printers.

The Exhibit:

Emergency Paper –The only available card stock for press sheets was of lower quality, thicker, varying from coarse to smooth texture, and with a grayish white cast (previously cream). This ‘emergency paper’, only attainable in 24”x40” sheets, required a sheet-fed, flat-bed press using replacement flat plates.

The ‘Regular Die’ (UPSS S38, Scott UX27C) - With the Bureau of Engraving and Printing overburdened, the GPO quickly fabricated 48 electrotype flat plates for the press using the 1913 Master Die. Initial printing began on the replacement stock, but provided poor results, mostly due to ink filling up indicia details. Examination of dozens of printed cards show each subject to be different from others, due either from the creation of each electrotype or by later corrections. There are no known archival items. Production output is unknown, but extremely limited over a period of perhaps no more than one week.

The ‘Re-Cut Die’ (UPSS S39, Scott UX27D) - Using a re-touched Transfer Master, the GPO created new electrotype plates, providing improved definition. Production again utilized the same sheet-fed, flat-bed press. Sheets of 48 on the ‘emergency’ paper continued and provided to over 40 firms for contract printing. Printing was severely limited, a duration of perhaps no more than six weeks.

Once acceptable 44.5” wide Bristol roll stock was restored for the rotary presses, normal production for single cards started up again, minus press sheets. Although the emergency sheet paper stock was exhausted by February 15, 1917, and electrotype plates from the Regular and Re-Cut Dies discarded, distribution of stockpiled ‘emergency’ press sheets continued into the early 1920s.

Usages – The basic use for this card was for the U.S. domestic, 1st class rate. Uses provided an inexpensive form for business communication and commercial mailings. Unusual usage due to the 2¢ ‘war rate’ increase included added postage. No single cards were planned for sale, with the exception of a few reported in Washington DC, and rarely used by individuals. No international uses are recorded.

Significant items in this exhibit:

One of Only 7 Recorded Mint Re-cut Die Single Cards; Largest Existing (and Unique) Mint Normal Die Block of 9; Re-cut Die Earliest Reported Postmark, Original and Ongoing Research on Plate Varieties; WWI Uprated Usages; 3rd Class War Rate Usage; Unused Vertical Re-cut Die Pair.

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