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Postal History Place:

The Evolution of U.S. First Day Covers

By F. X. Mittermeier (*From STAMPS Magazine, October 2, 1954 with images added*)

The collecting of first day covers is becoming more popular with each passing year. From information I have gathered concerning this branch of the hobby, I would say that the first one to recognize the possibilities of first day covers, and the man who started making them on a large scale was Henry Hammelman, a man who worked for the Post Office Department in Washington for about thirty five years.

During the day he worked there, and in the evenings helped out in the office of H. F. Colman, whose establishment in the Second National Building at 507 Seventh Street, N.W., was well known to collectors. He was one of the most famous early dealers in the United States, and one who helped assemble some of the finest collections in the country.

[An excellent biography of Hammelman can be found at <https://henryhammelman.wordpress.com/>. JFD.]

Of course, first day covers exist of many early issues, including, the Columbian of 1893, but these are scarce and beyond the reach of most collectors.

One of the earliest covers prepared by Hammelman, this was for the 1¢ Parcel Post (Sc. Q1) tied by "Washington D.C. Sta. G. Jul. 1, 1913 9PM" machine cancel on 1¢ entire, for the First Day of the First Class Rate.



Hammelman's first covers in volume were the 3¢ Victory issue, of March 3, 1919, but when we say "volume," it is by no means on the scale that we know today. In fact, for

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this 3¢ Victory issue he prepared in the neighborhood of twenty-five singles and a few blocks of four.

The 3¢ Victory issue (Sc. 537) tied by "Washington D.C. Mar. 3 12PM 1919" First Day machine cancel on a cover used locally within the City, prepared by Hammelman with the address in his handwriting.



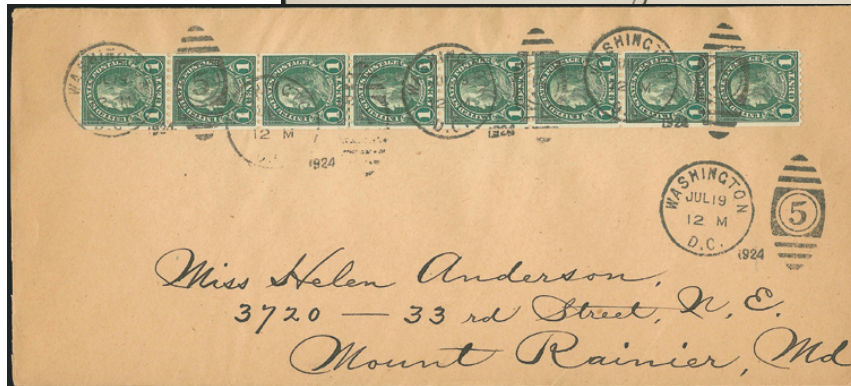
Then came the Pilgrim issue, of which he made about fifty of the various denominations, in addition to complete sets on single covers. In between he made some of the regular issues, but only in very limited quantities, or, in some instances, only for his own collection.



1¢-5¢ Pilgrim Tercentenary (Sc. 548-550) set tied by First Day "Washington D.C. Dec. 21, 1920 2:30 PM" duplex cancels, serviced by Hammelman.

From about that period on he started making nearly all issues in quantities of about 200 each, with the exception of such items as the high values of 1922-23 regular issue. He also prepared such items as the No. 597 coil and the 604 coil, which, I believe, he was the only one to make. (See page 3.)

1¢ green coil (Sc. 597) pair, tied by First Day "Washington D.C. Jul. 18 10:30PM 1923" machine cancel on cover serviced by Hammelman.



1¢ yellow green coil (Sc. 604), strip of eight with joint line between third and fourth stamp from top, tied by "Washington D.C. Jul. 19 12 M 1924" duplex cancels on First Day cover serviced by Hammelman.



1/2¢ Hale, 1-1/2¢ Harding, 4¢ Martha Washington, 5¢ Roosevelt, 6¢ Grant, 1¢-5¢ Lexington-Concord (Sc. 551, 576, 585-587, 617-619) combination cover serviced by Hammelman, all eight stamps were issued on the same day (April 4, 1925) and are tied by Washington D.C. duplex cancels.



\$5 America (Sc. 573) tied by First Day "Washington D.C. Mar. 20 4:30 PM 1923" duplex cancel on 2¢ legal-size entire serviced by Hammelman and sent Special Delivery, with "Washington D.C. Mar 20 4:30 PM 1923 Spec. Delivery" backstamp. This is one of only eight recorded First Day Covers of this issue.

When Hammelman retired from the Post Office in 1936, he had about 100,000 first day covers in stock, and opened an office at 116 Nassau Street, New York. He had a catalog printed, and did business under the name Pioneer Stamp Company.

This 1926 cover also is attributed to the Pioneer Stamp Company. Per the lot description in a recent Harmers International auction, "The U.S. entered into various special delivery treaties with foreign governments on and after January 1, 1923 (Canada). The



only first days for these treaties were sent by Henry Hammelman of the Pioneer Stamp Company. It is believed that he made 3-5 of each, which were sent to the foreign countries using envelopes and sometimes postal cards." This cover was used to the Netherlands with a 1925 20¢ black Special Delivery (Sc. E14) and 1923 1¢, both tied by "Washington D.C. Oct. 1" 1926 duplex on a U.P.U. 1¢ Postal Card bearing red penned "Expres", and miscellaneous manuscript notations as well as boxed "791" and "797" and "Rotterdam".

Another of the early first day cover men was Philip Ward, Jr., of Philadelphia, but he very soon branched out into the regular U.S. field.

65¢-\$2.60 Graf Zep-
pelins (Sc. C13-C15)
tied by "Washington
D.C. Apr. 19 2PM
1930" duplex cancels
on First Day cover
addressed to Philip
Ward Jr. in Philadel-
phia.



H . A. Robinette, who also worked for Colman for a time,
took over when the latter retired from the stamp business
in the early 1920s, and he also started preparing first day
covers at that time.

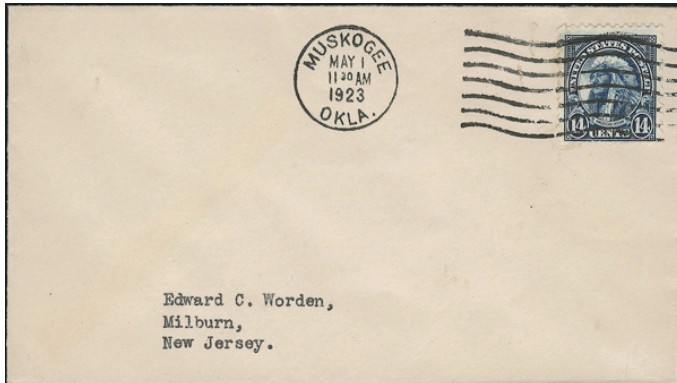
2¢ carmine book-
let pane of six (Sc.
583a) with intact
tab, tied by First
Day "Washington
D.C. Aug. 27, 1926
6:30 PM" duplex
cancel. Bringing to-
gether three FDC
pioneers, the cover
was serviced by
Hammelman, using



a Colman corner card and addressed to Robinette.

One of the most ambitious men to order and make first
day covers in huge quantities was Edward C. Worden,
a chemist from Milburn, New Jersey, whose whole ac-
cumulation of covers was sold some twenty years ago in
New York.

14¢ American In-
dian (Sc. 565), tied
by First Day "Musk-
ogee Okla. May 1
11:30 AM 1923"
machine cancel on
cover with typed
address to and ser-
viced by Edward C.
Worden.



In about 1922 or 1923 Hammelman started a young fellow named C.E. Nickles in the first day cover business, and he became one of the leading suppliers. He really got the thing going in a real way by starting a regular cover service, which is the reason that from then on a much greater number of covers exist. His covers are all neatly typewritten, of a uniform size, and are very popular. Unfortunately, Nickles died while still very young, after serving cover collectors for only about ten years.

*17¢ Wilson (Sc. 623)
First C.E. Nickles cachet. Nickles serviced them with Washington, Virginia and New Jersey December 28, 1925 first day cancels.*



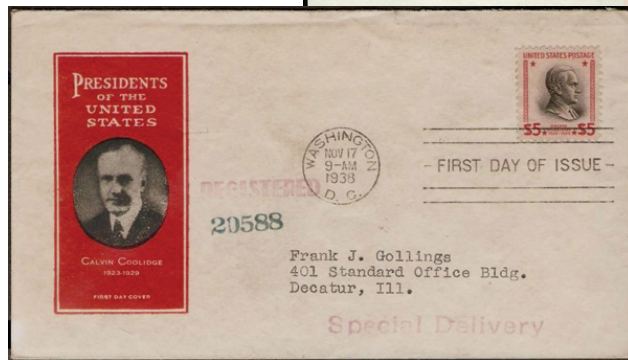
So here we have the real old-timers in the game. The early covers of that period came without cachets, as no thought of them had occurred to anyone as yet. Aside from perhaps a few local cachets made in 1926 for the Liberty Bell issue, the first one to popularize the cachet was A. C. Roessler, of East Orange, New Jersey. Most of his cachets bear his copyright on the back of the cover, and most of them are addressed to him either as Roessler or Roe. He is also responsible for some of the earliest and finest flight covers, such as the Alcock Brown in 1918. His cachet is usually in the form of a replica of the postage stamp issued, with perforations around the design.

\$1.30-\$2.60 Graf Zeppelin (Sc. C14-C15), tied by "New York N.Y. Varick St. Sta. May 7, 1930" datestamp on Roessler brown cachet cover to "A.C. Roe" East Orange N.J.



With the issuance of the Bicentennial stamps, cachets came into general use. In the early 1930s, Harry Ioor, in the Middle West, brought out a very beautiful type of cachet, usually with a black center and a colored border in the color of the stamp issued. I especially like his cachet of the Park set and again the Presidential set of 1938. Unfortunately, Ioor also died too soon.

Ioor FDCs for the American Philatelic Society 1934 Souvenir Sheet (Sc. 750) and the 1938 \$5 Presidential Issue (Sc. 834)



Around the time of the early 1930s the Zeppelin made many trips on which cachets were supplied for each flight, and

this might have been responsible for starting cachets on first day covers, but as is usual in such things, it developed all of a sudden.

It was perhaps, Ward, Hammelman, Worden and Nickles who started the regular small size envelope to be considered standard form for first day cover makers.

Also in the 1930s the Anderson cachets made their appearance.



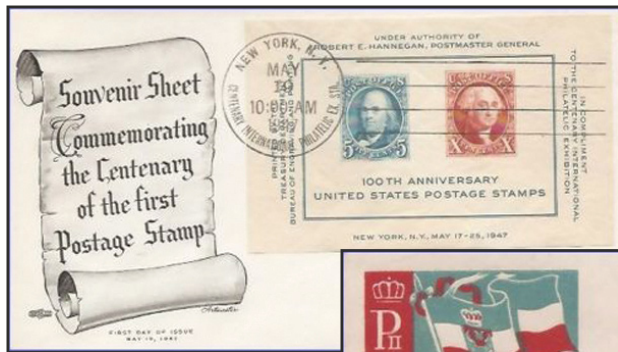
Anderson cachet for the 1937 SPA souvenir sheet (Sc. 797)

Then in 1939, with the advent of the World's Fair, the Artcraft cachets came into being.

These were followed by Artmaster, Smartcraft, Fleetwood, Fulton, Cachetcraft, etc., all of which are nice and have their followers.



The first Artcraft FDC, for the April 1, 1939 World's Fair issue (Sc. 853)



Artmaster FDC for the 1948 CIPEX souvenir sheet (Sc. 948)

Smartcraft cachet, one of a set, for the 1943-44 Overrun Countries issue (Sc. 909-21)



Fleetwood cachet for the 1947 airmail issue (Sc. C33)

Fulton cachet for the 1948 Palomar Mountain Observatory issue (Sc. 966)





Cachetcraft cachet for the 1950 California Statehood issue (Sc. 997)

Fluegel cachet for the 1948 Poultry Industry Centennial issue (Sc. 968)



Captain Fluegel started some very beautiful and colorful cachets, which also became rather popular. I mention here also the very beautiful and colorful Fulton cachets, but, unfortunately, the manufacture of these most attractive cachets has been discontinued recently. As in everything else, the manufacture of cachets has become more or less standardized. Some of the designs, such as the Artcraft and Artmaster, and many others, are artistically perfect, and will in time to come be much sought after such as perhaps the Magnus designs of the Civil War period.

Magnus Civil War Patriotic multicolor cover.



The manufacture of artistic cachets has perhaps been more responsible than anything else for the increasing popularity of first day covers. As the designs in most cases also picture the historic events for which a given stamp is issued, they will in time serve as valuable guides.

This very brief outline will perhaps be of help to the collector of first day covers who is unfamiliar with the start

of this popular hobby, and to the best of my knowledge, no such information has been available so far. It has been my good fortune to be friendly enough with Henry Hammelman to get this information, and the two of us have spent many a pleasant hour discussing stamps, first day covers, and the goings on in Washington around that time. Hammelman also knew Robey, the discoverer of the inverted 24¢ Air Mail stamp, and often told me the story of that discovery and the way Robey spent his money real fast to die broke.

Perhaps some timely advice on first day cover collecting may be in order. If you intend to start a collection, make up your mind what you want to collect and how far back you want to go. Remember the fad that the earlier items are sometimes very hard to get and are sometimes also expensive. Take the C16 Air Mail issue, the supply of these covers is so low that most collectors simply will not be able to ever get them.

A. E. Gorham addressograph cachet FDC for the 1931 5¢ Winged Globe airmail (Sc. C16) in green "First Day Sale in Washington, Albert E. Gorham"



Of course, the first day covers of the Zeppelins are also expensive. You can, however, collect first day covers for their sheer beauty in which case, select the most attractive cachets.

It is my personal opinion that the cacheted cover is more desirable than the plain first day cover, although some collectors still prefer the latter. Remembering the Civil War covers, such as the Magnus, where the difference in price in the illustrated covers and the plain ones is so great, it is easy to guess that the collector of tomorrow will also want the illustrated covers of an era before his time, when he is adding these items to his collection. Today's covers are

tomorrow's historical items, and remember, we are living in one of the most eventful periods of all history.

Note: some of the FDCs in this presentation came from the Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries March 2005 sale of the Dr. Alfred S. Martin First Day Covers and Earliest Known Usages Collection, which can be accessed at:

http://www.siegelauctions.com/dynamic/sales.php?sale_no=894

For more information on the many beautiful modern cachets, go to:

<https://www.washpress.com/> for Artcraft cachets and <http://www.afdcs.org/> for the American First Day Cover Society.

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