

Society Sampler:

Seal Collecting As Part of the Hobby

by George Painter

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1907 Type 1 seal postmarked Philadelphia on December 25, 1907.

We who collect seals, labels, and poster stamps as our primary philatelic interest often need to explain our hobby to other philatelists. This article is to give an overview of this specialty.

Definitions are in order as a first step. A "seal" is any stamp-like item issued by a private organization or governmental entity specifically to raise funds for some charitable or public cause. A "poster stamp" is any stamp-like item issued by a business, industry, or governmental entity to promote that business, industry, or some public event like an exposition. A "label" is any stamp-like item that is exclusively for a decorative purpose, sold by a business purely as a profit-making enterprise. Though the three arguably should be distinguished when speaking, we collectors have a tendency to lump them together under the rubric "seals."

Seals, labels, and poster stamps are graded exactly the same way as postage stamps. Physical condition [paper, gum, perforations] and appearance [centering] are of equal concern to seal collectors.

The focus of this article, owing to the time of the year, is the U.S. Christmas Seal. These first were issued in 1907 and sold only in Wilmington, Delaware and Philadelphia to raise funds for a financially troubled tuberculosis hospital in Delaware. As it turns out, more than ten times the amount of money needed was raised and word of these special "Christmas Stamps," as they were then called, spread throughout the country.

The excitement generated by the Delaware experiment led the American National Red Cross to convene a meeting in early January 1908. There, they agreed to begin issuing a national seal each year. Beginning in 1911, the Red Cross shared responsibility for the seals with anti-tuberculosis groups. In 1920, the National Tuberculosis Association took over all aspects of the Christmas Seal program and

the Red Cross logo was replaced by the NTA's red double-barred Cross of Lorraine, which remains on seals to this day. [What was originally the NTA has changed its name to the American Lung Association and expanded its scope to fighting numerous lung diseases.]



1907 Type 2 seal postmarked Wilmington, Delaware on December 25, 1907. Note an overlapping receiving mark, which is also dated December 25, 1907.

Seals were officially called "Christmas Stamps" for the first three years of sale. This led to some confusion. By being called a "stamp," many people thought they were special postage stamps. Additionally, they were sold for one cent each, the same as the postage rate for postcards, the most common mode of use for seals in that time era. In December 1909, the U.S. Post Office Department issued a plea for people to stop using these "Christmas Stamps" as postage.



1908 Type 1A seal successfully used as postage.

In response, the American Red Cross did two things. First, harmlessly, they renamed these fundraising items "Christmas Seals" to differentiate them from postage stamps. Second, not harmlessly, they began a campaign urging people to place seals on the backs of envelopes or packages, or on the picture side of postcards. The terrible harm this caused will be discussed later in this article under the "Seals On Cover" section.

It is unclear exactly when the seal collecting hobby began, but it is clear that the 1930s was the decade in which it really took off. In 1931, the Christmas Seal and

Charity Stamp Society, the official organization for seal collectors, was founded. Newspaper articles about seal collecting first appeared in this decade. Beginning in 1936, and continuing to this day, each year's Christmas Seal has an official first day of issue, with a cacheted cover and seal postmarked in Santa Claus, Indiana. The NTA issued a special souvenir sheet in 1938 for collectors. It featured that year's seal design and four portrait seal designs that were incorporated into the year's sheet....This is also the decade during which blatantly philatelic uses of Christmas Seals became common. More about the philatelic uses of seals is forthcoming.

It is important to note that, although some U.S. Christmas Seals are found in the Scott Catalogue [under prefix WX], there are a number left out....There is a national seal issued every year. Scott just doesn't want to devote space to them. Additionally, three very rare seals, in fact the three rarest, are not listed—the 1911 Type 4, 1911 Type 5, and 1913 Type 4. Finally, Scott does not differentiate certain types—it lists a 1908 Type 1 and Type 2, but does not break down the Type 1 properly into Type 1A and Type 1B. Likewise, there are officially 1913 Type 2A and Type 2B seals, which Scott lumps together as "Type 2."...



Ultra-rare 1911 Type 4, not listed by Scott.

The consequence is that seal collectors do not use the Scott Catalogue, and dealers listing seals for sale by Scott Catalogue number are not providing any helpful information to a collector. Any seal item listed for sale should be referred to only by the year, type, perforation variety, or any other such detail. For example, a seal collector will know what a 1921 Type 3 seal is, but maybe not what a WX29A [the corresponding Scott number] is.

Different type seals exist for only 10 years [1907, 1908, 1911, 1913, 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921, 1925, and 1928]. They range from two to five "types." For most of these years, types exist due to having different printers produce the seals and the printers making subtle design changes to differentiate their production from another printer's. In more recent years, printer's marks have replaced design changes....With some years [1921 and 1925], differences are so subtle that magnification is required to tell the types apart....

A few of these types or varieties exist due to local shortages of seals. The 1908 Type 1A rouletted seal, 1908 Type 1B rouletted seal, 1911 Type 4, and probably the 1913 Type 4, 1921 Type 3, and 1925 Type 3, were due to local shortages that could not be made up by the national office....

Knowing your "types" is important because catalog values can be radically different for them. Examples of value differences for the two years with the largest number of types, for MNH/VF singles:

1911		1913	
Type 1	\$50.00	Type 1	\$1,400.00
Type 2	\$120.00	Type 2A	\$7.50
Type 3	\$75.00	Type 2B	\$7.50
Type 4	\$750.00	Type 3	\$8.50
Type 5	\$2,000.00+	Type 4	\$350.00

...Sheets

If you are interested in collecting Christmas Seals in sheets, you may be surprised to learn you can obtain full sheets going back quite a number of years without spending a lot of money. You also can spend a lot of money for certain years, and have a great deal of trouble finding them. Full sheet prices can be broken into three categories by year. Keep in mind that 10 years have multiple types of seals, and the prices below are for each type of each of these years.

1907, 1908, 1910-16, 1918	Rare; prices in the hundreds or thousands of dollars.
1909, 1917, 1919-26	Still easily obtainable; prices range from \$25 to \$100; with the vast majority in the \$40 to \$50 range.
1927-present	Very easy to find; prices range from \$2 to \$4.

Some years or types were not issued in sheets. The 1911 Types 3 and 5 are coils, and the 1918 Type 2 was issued only in booklet panes. Other rare seals are not known to have intact sheets survive—the 1911 Type 2, 1911 Type 4, and 1913 Type 4....

The 1907 seals, existing in two types and sold only in two cities, did not have a large number produced. Full sheet survival also was hampered by their size—228 subjects. Many sheets were broken up simply for the sake of convenience at sales booths. The same story occurred with all three types of the 1908 seal. Being produced for nationwide sale, the Red Cross, having no previous experience in such matters, had to estimate demand. As it turns out, they greatly underestimated that demand. This alone caused the breakup of huge numbers of sheets, but, as with the 1907 seals, size also was a major factor. The 1908 seals are the largest ever made in the U.S. measuring 1-3/8 by 1-1/2 inches....

Full sheets of most of these other early years are rare simply due to heavy demand causing the sheets to be broken up for use. The 1918 Type 1 seal was printed in sheets but not sold to the public. They, like the Type 2 seal, were sold only in panes of 10. Given how rare 1918 Type 1 sheets are, it is evident that either few were printed or that many were destroyed after printing. The current catalog values of the rare sheets are shown below.

1907 Type 1	\$2,500	1913 Type 2A	\$400
1907 Type 2	\$4,000	1913 Type 2B	\$400
1908 Type 1A	---	1913 Type 3	\$900
1908 Type 1B	---	1914	\$600
1908 Type 2	---	1915	\$800
1910	\$900	1916	\$600
1911 Type 1	\$5,000	1918 Type 1	\$1,200
1912	\$750		

...Booklets

Seals were issued in both booklets and sheets in four years: 1908, 1930, 1931, and 1939. They were sold only in booklet pane format in 1918. The 1908 seal has three types, but only the Type 1A and Type 2 were sold in booklets. Each was sold in booklets of 9 [cost: 10 cents], 24 [25 cents], or 48 [50 cents]. The booklets had three panes of three, four panes of six, or eight panes of six. Intact booklets of these are tremendously rare and may exist only for the booklet of 24 and then only for the Type 1A. Intact panes are rare, especially the Type 1A pane of three. The top and middle seal from panes of three have opposing straight edges and often are mislabeled as coils by sellers. Even just the covers from these booklets are highly col-

lectible today, and they are rare. Few people kept booklet covers once all the seals inside were used.



Cover for 1908 booklet of 9.



1908 Type 2 booklet pane of 3.

In both 1930 and 1931, there were booklets of 100 and 200 seals. Of these, the 1930 intact booklet of 100 is a scarcity, but the others remain common. In 1939, there was a booklet of 200 seals issued, and it remains common. There were experimental booklets of the 1923 seal, but not sold to the public. Only two were known. One remains intact and the other was broken into individual panes and sold by a dealer.

Errors

Seal errors are a collecting specialty and the same kinds of errors, i.e., total mistakes, occur on seals as on stamps, e.g., no perforations when called for, colors completely missing.

Seals on Cover

Earlier it was mentioned that the American Red Cross promoted placing Christmas Seals on the back of envelopes or packages and on the picture side of postcards to help the Post Office Department stop people from using them as postage. It is a great misfortune that many people did so, and that an increasing number of people did so over the years.

Let's be blunt and up-front about it now. If you use any kind of current seal, label, or poster stamp on your mail, ALWAYS PUT IT RIGHT NEXT TO THE POSTAGE. Never put it on the back of your mailings. Why? Seals on postcards or envelope, unless great rarities in and of themselves, have little to no collectable value if they are not "tied" to that card or envelope.

What is a "tied" seal and why is it so important that it be tied? A tied seal is one whose existence on a postcard or envelope can be documented as being there at the time of the mailing. If it is placed next to the postage, the postmark will hit it and thus prove it was used the year it was issued. Some seals are very common as mint singles, but rare tied. Without this rule, there is nothing to stop an individual from buying a supply of inexpensive mint seals and sticking them on the back of an envelope and then trying to pass them off as rare tied examples. A seal on a postcard or envelope without being tied is considered just a used seal and its catalog value is one-half that of a mint seal.

A postmark ties a seal no matter how small of an area of the seal is hit by it, even if only a single perf. Offset on the reverse of an envelope or postcard hitting the seal also ties it, although these are less desirable than a front-side

cancel. Auxiliary markings also count if they hit a seal.

In addition to the postage, a seal can be tied by overlap. If it is overlapped by a stamp that has been canceled or another tied seal, then it is considered tied, even without the postmark hitting it...

The third way to tie a seal is a gray area—it can be considered "tied by message." This includes auxiliary markings that reference the seal on the cover, a written message on a card or letter mentioning or describing the seal, and various other ways that indicate clearly that the seal was on the card or envelope at the time it was mailed.

Below are three charts illustrating the difference in catalog value by types of certain years between used, i.e., not tied seals and tied ones. They illustrate both the importance of knowing your types and being sure a seal is tied nonphilatelically.

1907	Used Single	Tied Single
Type 1	\$8.75	\$1,000.00
Type 2	\$7.50	\$1,200.00
1913	Used Single	Tied Single
Type 1	\$700.00	Does not exist
Type 2A	\$3.75	\$200.00
Type 2B	\$3.75	\$200.00
Type 3	\$4.25	\$25.00
Type 4	\$175.00	[currently unique] ---
1925	Used Single	Tied Single
Type 1	\$0.15	\$10.00
Type 2	\$0.15	\$50.00
Type 3	\$0.375	\$100.00

What a difference a timely postmark can make! And, the postmark must be timely. Putting a 1907 seal on an envelope and sending it through the mail in 2010 will not make it worth any more than a used seal. "Timely" is defined as any use of a seal before the next seal was issued. Therefore, a 1912 seal postmarked in October 1913 is a late use, but not an untimely one, whereas one postmarked in December 1913 is an untimely use. Late uses have lower catalog values, but they still have value above a used seal, which is all an untimely use would command.

These prices for tied singles are the base catalog value. A number of other factors can raise the value of a tied seal, and these factors are discussed below. Before doing so, it is important to mention philatelic uses. These became common beginning in the 1930s, although a few are known from earlier years. There is a strong divide among seal collectors concerning these uses. They are either loved or hated, with no middle ground. A philatelic use is one intended to enhance interest in the tied seal by intentional acts. Examples include, but are not limited to, cachets, an envelope with sender and addressee the same person, ultra-early postmarks, use of vintage postage, use of proofs or essays instead of, or with, the issued seal, and December 25 postmarks in towns like Christmas, Florida or Santa Claus, Indiana. Whether or not one likes philatelic uses, they always have less value than nonphilatelic uses.

There are also a few years that are scarce or rare tied, regardless of type. The 1907 seals, sold in only two states, are both quite rare tied. Scarce, but not rare, are both types of the 1918 seals, the scarcity due to the difficulty the Red Cross had getting them out in the year of World War I and the Spanish influenza pandemic, as well as their own restrictive sales policy that year. Also scarce to rare are Depression Era seals, those of the years 1925 through 1936, with the 1928 [all three types] as the most

difficult of all. These seals from the Depression Era remain quite common as singles and in sheets, but many people at the time couldn't afford charity seals or greeting cards and tied usage plunged temporarily.

All information below is for non-philatelic uses of seals. All of these factors make a tied seal both more financially valuable and more desirable to a collector.

Enhancing the Collectability, Desirability and Financial Value of a Tied Seal



1908 Type 1A seal "nabbed" by the Post Office. Also note the mis-perforation error on the seal.

[1] Use as postage. This is the single most exciting factor for a collector. Even though much education has taken place that Christmas Seals are not postage, a number of people continued to use them that way. Most commonly today, they are placed on mailings to utilities, insurance companies, and various creditors. This type of usage appears to be a concerted protest against the addressees, hoping to make them pay postage due. As to catalog value, use as postage greatly increases the value of a tied seal, anywhere from tripling to quintupling it.

[2] Logo cancels. Although most logo cancels increase the desirability of a tied seal, there are standouts. In 1919, 1922, and 1923, there were different Christmas Seal promotional logo cancels. Some of these are scarce in and of themselves, but if they tie that year's seal, they can be extremely rare. Below are the known logo cancels for these years and their commonness. This listing concerns only these cancels tying that year's seal.

1919	"Fight Tuberculosis With Red Cross Christmas Seals"	Rare
1922	"Fight Tuberculosis With Christmas Seals"	Rare
1922	"Christmas Seals Stamp Out Tuberculosis" – Plain text	Scarce
1922	"Christmas Seals Stamp Out Tuberculosis" – Stylized text	Scarce
1923	"Christmas Seals Stamp Out Tuberculosis" – Plain text	Common
1923	"Christmas Seals Stamp Out Tuberculosis" – Stylized text Type 1	Rare
1923	"Christmas Seals Stamp Out Tuberculosis" – Stylized text Type 2	Unknown

1919 – First year of Christmas Seal logo.

In later years, there also are general TB cancels that make no reference to Christmas Seals, but show the Cross of Lorraine logo, and there was a revival of Christmas Seals postmarks in the 1970s and 1980s.

[3] Postmark date. There are a few postmark dates that raise the value of a tied seal. The most obvious is a Christmas Seal with a December 25 postmark. These are far more common among early rather than recent years, because a century ago people tended to mail their greeting

cards much later. December 19 through December 23 are exceedingly common postmark dates for these older seals. [A nonphilatelic December 25 postmark date raises the value of a tied seal 30 percent.] Likewise, a January 1 postmark on a seal on a New Year's greeting card is of high desirability. Of secondary desirability are December 24 postmarks on Christmas cards and December 31 postmarks on New Year's cards. They are considerably easier to find than those on the actual holiday. The other exciting postmark date is the EKU for a seal—the earliest known use. While these other postmark dates are static, the EKU can be trumped by another when a new example is found.

[4] Mailing venue. Our society changed from postcard greetings to cards in envelopes greetings, and that has affected tied seals. From 1907 through 1924, postcard use of tied seals overwhelms envelope use. When a tied seal is found on an envelope from these years, it's more likely to be on a commercial envelope because many businesses used Christmas Seals on their mail as a public service. Noncommercial envelope use of seals during these years was rare. There was a transition period during the years 1925 through 1931, when postcard and envelope uses were competitive in numbers. It was 1928 when envelope use first exceeded postcard use. From 1932 to the present, envelope use overwhelms postcard use. The number of businesses using seals on their mail dropped steadily, so that in recent years the order of most to least common use is noncommercial envelope, postcard, and commercial envelope. Consequently, the early year seals are more valuable and desirable on envelopes, especially noncommercial ones, rather than postcards. In recent years, seals are more valuable on postcard than on noncommercial envelope, with commercial envelope usage now exceedingly rare.

[5] Double-tied seals. This term refers to two [or more] different kinds of seals timely tied together on a single postcard or envelope. Examples would be a TB Christmas Seal tied with a Holy Childhood Association Christmas Seal, or a Lutheran Wheatridge Christmas Seal tied with a Boys Town Christmas Seal.



1965 NTA Seal double tied with 1965 Holy Childhood Seal. Note the tuberculosis logo cancel.

[6] Multiples. Use of more than one seal, whether a pair, strip, or block, greatly enhances the tied seal in the eyes of a collector. Some years are quite rare in multiple, even if not necessarily so in single. The 1908 and 1913 seals, all types, are rarities in multiple simply because of the large size of the seals. Since postcard use was the common venue for them, even a single of these seals took up a lot of space on the card. The 1918 seals are quite rare in multiple for a different reason: they were sold by the Red Cross exclusively in panes of 10, and everyone, no matter how much money given, could get just a single pane of 10. Thus, if you ordinarily sent out 20 or 30 greeting cards, only 10 would get a seal. In this scenario, it is easy to see

why so few multiples were put onto mailings.



1909 multiple tied by postmark and overlap. The lower left of the left postmarked seal overlaps the lower right corner of the pair to the left. Thus, all four seals are considered tied.

[7] Foreign Destinations. Seals on postcards or envelopes mailed to foreign countries command a premium, although three are common destinations: Canada, England, and Germany. The more exotic the location, the more desirable the tied seal. There is a myth that seal use to foreign countries is, or was, illegal. In fact, seal use to foreign countries never has been illegal in the United States. This myth may come from the actions of England in December 1909, when it, in a fit of pique, banned all mail from any country that had one of these “Christmas Stamps” on it. Worldwide protest caused England to reverse its decision two weeks later. However, there is a specialty finding 1909 tied seals returned because of refusal of entry by England. “Prohibited by Country of Destination” is a common auxiliary marking on them.

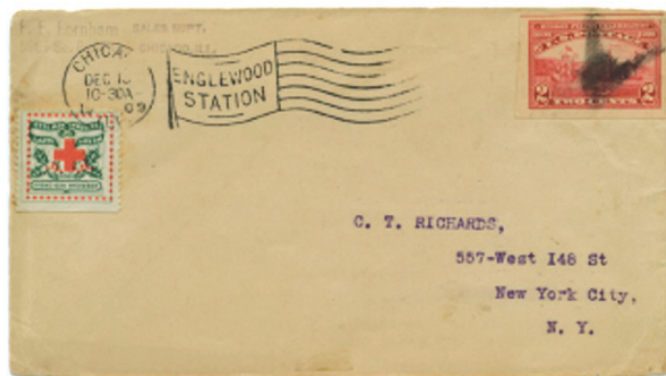


“Prohibited by Country of Destination” auxiliary marking on 1909 card with seal sent to England from Boston.

In fact, foreign countries often do seal collectors a favor. Many seals placed on the back of envelopes have been tied by a receiving cancel in countries of destination. This happens most commonly in countries that are not English-speaking. The post office employees may not be able to read what is on the seal and think it’s some kind of postage that they need to cancel upon receipt.

[8] Commemorative Stamps for Postage: In the pre-Roosevelt and Farley days, as we know, there were far fewer commemorative stamps issued, especially before the mid-1920s. Thus, finding a tied early seal with a commemorative stamp for postage is extremely exciting. The use of commemoratives for postage in recent years is not considered a bonus, because the number of them issued and their popularity make them more commonly found with a tied seal than a definitive stamp. (See top of next column.)

[9] Miscellaneous Factors. Seals with errors on them, those sent to or from a famous person, and those with auxiliary markings also are enhancing factors for tied seals.



Common seal; uncommon stamp. Tied 1909 seal with the scarce imperforate Hudson-Fulton commemorative paying postage.

Ancillary Seal Items

There are a significant number of items reproducing seal images, including lapel buttons, bookmarks, window posters, transit passes, booth envelopes, placemats, coffee mugs, letterhead, bonds, and milk bottle caps, each of which has collectors. These generally are not of high value, although some of the scarcer lapel buttons and bonds can reach triple digit sale prices.



1938 Portland, Oregon transit pass.

Miscellaneous Seals

Many other organizations issue seals for charitable purposes. These are specialty collections. Among the longest-lived and most collected of such seals are those from Boys Town, the Easter Seal Society, the Pontifical Association of the Holy Childhood, Lutheran Wheatridge Sanitarium, and Grace Lutheran Sanitarium.

For further reading:

John Denune, *Comprehensive and Simple Christmas Seal Price Lists and Albums*, 2006 [CD].

Dick Green, *Green’s Catalog of Tuberculosis Seals of the World—U.S. National*, Christmas Seal and Charity Stamp Society, 2007 [CD].

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Douglas Lehman, *The Postal History of Christmas Seals*, Paragon Publishing, 1990.

Timothy McGinnis, ed., *Mosbaugh’s Easter Seals Catalogue*, 2nd rev., 2009.

Seal News, quarterly journal of the Christmas Seal and Charity Stamp Society.