

# The U.S. CIPEX Souvenir Sheet of 1947

## Development, Production, First Days and Contemporary Use

**Goal;** To tell the story of the souvenir sheet issued for the Centenary International Philatelic Exhibition (CIPEX) in New York City, May 17-25, 1947, to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of U.S. national postage stamps released in 1847; with special focus on First Day cachets.

**Context:** The 15c sheet was released on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the show. Both the exhibition and the sheet generated strong collector enthusiasm and a broad array of first day items.

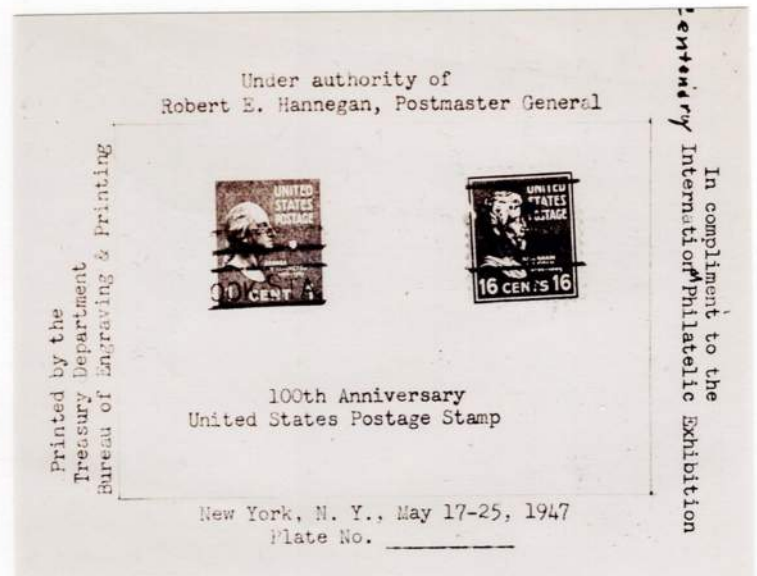
**Idea and Design Concept:** The idea for a souvenir sheet to honor the first U.S. stamps grew from a late 1939 proposal approved by Pres. Roosevelt to recognize in 1940, the world's first postage stamp issued by England in 1840. FDR gave the Post Office Department (POD) guidance on the design of a sheetlet, as shown. It was decided that it would be inappropriate to picture another nation's stamp, so the sheet pictures the first U.S. stamp.



Despite the issue having been announced by the POD, development was cancelled in April of 1940 by Postmaster General (PMG) Farley as war clouds enveloped Europe and strong isolationist sentiment rose in the U.S.

After the War's end, the CIPEX organizing committee asked the POD to issue souvenir sheets at the show in honor of the first U.S. stamps. The PMG approved the idea on May 29, 1946. This sample layout for the sheet by the POD was submitted to the committee for reaction. They added the only "Centenary" to the inscription.

The official photos of essays in this exhibit were made for POD and Bureau of Engraving & Printing (BEP) staff as part of the design approval process. (ex-Johl and Glass)



**Exhibit organization:** uses the traditional method for First Day cover exhibits.

Chapter 1: Design development

Chapter 2: Production and distribution

Chapter 3: The sheet at the CIPEX show

Chapter 4: Portraits on the s/s in the cachet

Chapter 5: Elements of 3c commemorative design in the cachet

Chapter 6: Cachets related to New York City

Chapter 7: Cachets with related pictorials

Chapter 8: Unrelated pictorial designs

Chapter 9: Text-only cachets

Chapter 10: Contemporary uses of the s/s for domestic and international mail

**Especially significant items are identified by blue text**

Synopsis (5/26) for  
**The U.S. CIPEX Souvenir Sheet of 1947**

**Note:** This exhibit was originally built by the late Dickson Preston, and was shown from 2016 to 2017 in eight frames. It has been totally revised. The present exhibitor has replaced two frames worth of the original exhibit and added two full frames of material; especially production varieties, U.S. #1 and #2, scarce first days (e.g. two unique Dorothy Knapp cachets done for Adam Bert), and very unusual usages. It represents over 30 years of study and accumulation by the present exhibitor, as well as Preston's impressive efforts.

**Treatment:** The exhibit is arranged chronologically from the genesis of the idea for the sheet in 1939 to contemporary postal uses. The largest portion is the central Chapters showing the First Day cachets, which are arranged by the content of the cachet designs. The object is to study the cachets, not the cachet makers. This makes for more of a story than the usual way of presenting cachets by cachet-maker alphabetically.

An effort has been made to show covers that are special; not just unaddressed hand-backs. Common commercial cachets are in my collection but only a few are included here because the covers are special for other reasons. Please note that even in the First Day cachets sections, there is a large percentage that are mailed overseas. Every known unusual cachet is included. The exhibit closes with a much strengthened showing of postal uses showing different postal services, a range of auxiliary markings, and out-of-the-way destinations.

**Importance:** In addition to being the first U.S. multicolor souvenir sheet, the CIPEX sheet was a tribute to stamp collecting as well as the first U.S. national postage stamps. It was a major feature of the show as the BEP provided a press that completed partially-printed sheets for the information and entertainment of the crowds. (All of the sheets completed at CIPEX were returned to Washington, DC, and destroyed.)

**Knowledge, Research, and Personal Study:** Preparation of the exhibit required in-depth knowledge about the show, the history and production of the sheet, detailed knowledge about the portraits in the cachets, production of the cachets, and postal rates and handling policies. Study of the POD and BEP files held by the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum were among the sources used by this exhibitor.

**Difficulty of Acquisition/Rarity:** There are over 20 unique cachets; some very attractive; others ordinary-appearing. The developmental photographs in the first section are seldom seen and so far as I know, have never been offered at auction. Their origin is from leading philatelic writers of the period (Max Johl and Sol Glass) who were able to get a few from insiders at the POD or BEP. They are identified as working copies on the reverse of the photos.

The production varieties are either unique or the extremes of flaws that exist (miscuts, for example).

It has been observed by a prior jury, that many FDCs of the CIPEX sheet are seen on eBay. In fact you will not find most of them here. Because I have used all ten frames, I have

intentionally left out the many common FDC cachets (and common commercial usages) in favor of the harder-to-find examples.

**What you will not see:** No die or plate proofs are known in private hands for this issue. There are a few lesser fold-overs from corners of the 30-subject sheets, but only two reported major corner folds, which I've been unable to track down, and none have appeared at auction in the last 20 years. There are no reported non-philatelic uses of precancels, and no uses at all of perfins.

**Condition:** Efforts have been made to obtain the best condition available in all areas covered by the exhibit.

**Presentation:** The guiding lights have been clarity, simplicity, the avoiding of white space and overcrowding; with only essential text. Inevitably there will be at least one judge who will sniff at using diagonal covers and will want oversized pages to be used. I have deliberately not done that as they are hard to mail, hard to carry, and the times where legal size covers are used are relatively few. Aside from that, the elements that are the reason for including the cover are easy to discern without undue twisting of the head.

**Prior Exhibitions:** The exhibit was awarded a Large Gold at 90 points at Garfield-Perry 2025. As a result of judges' comments, a section on cachets in large sets has been removed since they are in the main common. A few scarcer examples have been integrated, and the space gained has been used to further strengthen the contemporary usages chapter. It was awarded an LG at 91 points at NAPEX 2025, and 93 points at Garfield Perry March Party 2026.

**Additions: Since it was first shown:** The exhibitor acquired the Phil Rhoades CIPEX collection in mid-2025, and about a dozen covers from it have been integrated; including a second Knapp cover that shows through small differences in the facial features of Washington and Franklin, that each of her cachets was indeed hand drawn and painted. Separately, the die proofs of US #1 and 2 used as models for the sheetlet design have been acquired and are shown.

**References:** There is no single reference, but the following may be of use:

- **Glass, Sol.** United States Postage Stamps, 1945-1952, Chap. 14. Bureau Issues Assoc. 1954.
- **Arch, Brad**, "The Centenary Souvenir Sheet, 1847-1947", self-published 41pp, 1997.
- **Sloane, George B.**, Sloane's Column, A Compilation of the Subjects (from his long-running *Stamps Magazine* column), compiled and arranged by George Turner, Bureau Issues Association, 1961, pp 346-348.
- **Johl, Max G.**, The United States Commemorative Stamps of the Twentieth Century, Volume II, 1935-1947. Chapter 58. H.L. Lindquist Publications, 1947
- **Hotchner, John M.**, "Philately@Large: Colorful 1947 CipeX First-Day Cachets", *American Stamp Collector & Dealer*, pp36-39, March, 2020
- **Hotchner, John M.**, "Philately@Large: Odd Rates and/or Destinations for the CipeX Souvenir Sheet of 1947", *American Stamp Collector & Dealer*, pp30-33, May, 2021