

Period Hand-Crafted First Day Covers of the Eagle holding Shield Airmail of 1938

The eagle holding shield airmail was issued on May 14, 1938, at Dayton, Ohio and Saint Petersburg, Florida just before the National Airmail Week celebrations that ran from May 15 through May 21. Many different first day covers were produced, but very few of those had hand-painted or hand-drawn cachets.

The purpose of this exhibit is to show a representation of those that had hand-crafted cachets applied either before mailing or within a short time after.

Not all of the cover artists signed their initials or name to their work, so some of the identifications may be best guesses based on the style and/or the addressee.

Rarity statements are in red type.



An example of a hand-drawn cachet that appears to have been present at the time of issue. There is no indication who drew and hand-colored the vignette, but **there is at least one more cover with the same drawing**, both mailed at Dayton. Both are addressed to Dr. A.D. Pattillo in Wichita Falls, Texas. It is logical to think that either Dr. Pattillo or someone he knew was the artist.

Both covers were mailed from Dayton, which strengthens my belief that the drawings were added before mailing. Someone adding the drawings later would surely have put one of them on a blank Saint Petersburg cover.

Dr. Pattillo was interested in aeronautics, judging from the cover. The airplane depicted is a Queen Monoplane, which was a U.S. version of the Blériot XI which French pilot Louis Blériot used to make the first flight across the English Channel in 1909. Earle Ovington used a Queen Monoplane for the first airmail delivery in 1911.

Synopsis – Period Hand-Crafted First Day Covers of the Eagle holding Shield Airmail of 1938

Purpose. To show hand-crafted first day covers created before or within roughly a year after the time of issue of the bi-colored eagle airmail issued by the United States on May 14, 1938.

It is virtually impossible to know for sure whether a hand painted or inked vignette was applied before a first day cover of that era was mailed, or afterward. However, the covers in this exhibit are limited to those that have been hand-decorated before issue or within about one year of the date of issue. That is why “Period” is included in the title.

Selection. All covers shown were *mailed* on the first day of availability of the stamp. Issue was limited to two locations, Dayton, Ohio and Saint Petersburg, Florida, though a few mailings were made the day before, and from a number of other places on the first day. We are not concerned with the exceptions, as these covers were not hand-decorated.

Not everyone who decorated one of these first day covers signed their name on them. Some attributions were made based on style and/or addressee.

Completeness. This is a good representation of what is available. I strongly doubt that anyone else could put together a more inclusive group of period illustrated first day covers for this issue.

What is not there. There should not be any add-ons from more than a very few years after the first day except in the epilog. This precludes the group who added cachets near the fiftieth anniversary of the issue, such as Anderson, Barbour, Dewitt, Follows, and Fox.

There is, to the best of my knowledge, only one Dorothy Knapp first day cover for this stamp, and it is an add-on created sometime later than is covered by this exhibit.

Condition. First day cover collectors toward the end of the 1930's were not generally aware of the likelihood of envelope gum migrating to the front of the cover, leaving diagonal brown lines. The covers in this exhibit were mostly protected from this, though it is possible to see some faint lines on several. This is unavoidable where it has occurred, and covers were selected to fill their purpose in the exhibit rather than to offer a pristine appearance.

Rarity. None of these first day covers are in any sense common. They were produced as one of a kind or in very limited numbers, like two or three. Rarity statements are in red type.

Reference. Planty Photo Encyclopedia of Cacheted First Day Covers Vol. XIII, 1937-1938, Pages 96-99 and 105-107. This has been reprinted in 2001 by F.D.C. Publishing Company, Stewartsville, New Jersey.