

The First Issue U.S. Six Cents U.S. Postal Stationery Envelope

Purpose: This exhibit will show the development and use of the first U.S. six cents envelope. This was the first and only envelope essayed of this series but the second produced (after the three cents). It was produced letter size for the over 3,000-mile rate (green indicium) and legal size for the under 3,000 mile double rate (red indicium).

The Postal Act of August 31, 1852 authorized the Postmaster General to provide stamped envelopes as a convenience to citizens when paper was scarce and to recover postage from letters carried outside the mail by private companies.

Essays:

The stamped envelopes had **embossed indicia to prevent counterfeiting**. The design incorporated a bust of George Washington (after a Houdon sculpture) in a large upright oval with rope work design and engraved denomination above the bust and "CENTS" below.

The essays differed from issued stationery as follows:

- The essay has **four strands in the braid** rather than three as the issued design.
- The **bust of Washington** was deemed not sufficiently plain and bold.

Note that the essay **denomination is SIX CENTS**. No other essays or proofs are known for any of the first issue of U.S. postal stationery envelopes.

These essays trialed three ink colors on white (first quality) and buff (second quality) paper. Envelopes were issued with both paper types.



Red on white paper



Violet-brown on white paper



Green on white paper



Violet-brown on buff paper



Green on buff paper



Violet brown on buff Paper

Exhibit Outline:

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9-10	Carried Outside the Mails
11	Use on West Coast
12	Use after Rate Increase
13-14	Double Weight and Heavier Mailings
15-16	End of the Six Cents First Issue Envelope

Significant items shown in red box.

The “First” U.S. Six Cents Postal Stationery Envelope

Purpose of exhibit:

This exhibit shows the development and use of the first six cents U.S. postal stationery issue. The U.S. Post Office received authorization to produce stamped envelopes in Postal Act of August 31, 1852 to benefit citizens since envelopes were not commonly available and paper was scarce during the Civil War.

The California gold rush caused a large influx of people to California, particularly into remote mining areas where mail was provided only by express companies. The Post Office was concerned about losing the income from letters carried outside the mail by these companies. Thus the 1852 authorizing legislation stated:

...all letters enclosed in such envelopes...may be sent, conveyed and delivered otherwise than by post or mail...provided that said envelope shall be duly sealed, or otherwise firmly and securely closed, so that such letter cannot be taken therefrom without tearing or destroying such envelope.”

Much has been written about the three cents first issue and the ten cents first issue (released 2 years later) but next to nothing has been written about the six cents first issue. The only first issue stationery essays were for the six cents issue, even though the three cents envelope was the first produced.

The six cents issue was manufactured with green indicium on letter-size envelope for the over 3,000-mile rate and was used largely by individuals. It was also produced with red indicium on legal-size envelope for double weight mail traveling less than 3,000 miles used mainly by businesses.

Challenge Factor:

Manufacture of the six cents envelopes began after July 7, 1853 (when envelopes were no longer manufactured with a Nesbit seal on the top flap). The six cents green envelope was only manufactured until the over 3,000-mile rate was increased to 10¢ on April 1, 1855. The six cents red, legal envelope was available until replaced by the second postal stationery issue in 1860, however this envelope was only used by a few businesses.

Few of either envelope type were produced: letters in the National Archives indicate delivery to the Post Office was 5 million 3¢ envelopes by July 25, 1853 and 2,000 legal size (6¢) envelopes by July 29. Thus, at this point, the six cents red, legal envelope was only 0.05% of total envelope production. Further these envelopes were only sold in boxes of 100 so few post offices carried them. The 6¢ green envelope was printed in similar amounts but only for 2 years. Six cents issues were less than 0.02% of total U.S postal envelopes manufactured during the issue period (per PMG reports, 1854-1860).

What is presented

The exhibit begins with the unique set of essays for the first issue envelopes (which were the six cents denomination). It then shows the four working die types with the two indicia colors on the two paper types. The exhibit shows multiple uses for the six cents green over 3,000-mile rate and six cents red double weight or higher regional uses. The exhibit contains several carried outside the mail envelopes with “SHIP” cancel, Noisy Carrier cancel, and “VIA NICARAGUA AHEAD OF THE MAILS” as well as legal size envelopes with various express company franks. The exhibit contains a unique “Paid to the Lines” envelope with 34 cents additional cash paid when mail to Canada required domestic postage of each country prior to 1872. The exhibit also has two of three known six cents green used under 3,000 miles for double rate. The exhibit ends with envelopes likely charged postage due for use after demonetization.

References

Undersander, Dan. Postal Stationery, The 6¢ first Nesbitt Issue, May-June 2022

Undersander, Dan. 2003. United States Stamped Envelopes Essays and Proofs. United Postal Stationery Society, Chester, VA.

Undersander, Dan (*ed*). 2018. Catalog of 19th Century Stamped Envelopes, Lettersheets and Wrappers of the United States. United Postal Stationery Society, Chester, VA.

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