

# Famous Americans Series International Uses 1940-1941

## Synopsis

Notes for the Sarasota National Stamp Exhibition Jury  
(January 16-18, 2026)

**Purpose and scope:** The purpose of this six-frame postal history exhibit is to celebrate the Famous Americans Series, a 1940 set of 35 stamps issued over a nine-month period that proved popular with postal patrons and collectors alike. The Series was in its heyday during the first two years of World War II as German armies were advancing largely unchecked throughout Europe, and prior to the US involvement as a belligerent. Thus, by limiting the scope of the exhibit to international uses, a secondary purpose is to use the Series to illustrate the impact of the war on transmission of mail from a neutral country.

In the exhibit I've made no attempt to present a comprehensive study of the War's impact on US Neutrality Period mail. [Elsewhere I show such a study in a nine-frame exhibit using the 30-cent Winged Globe airmail stamp.] Rather, the purpose here is to document relevant postal evidence on each of the covers selected and attempt to diagnose what is present.

**Treatment:** Why does the exhibit begin with 11 pages of first day covers? First, the group introduces the Series to the uninitiated viewer by showing the period when the stamps first appeared, the subject matter involved, and the low face values of the stamps. Second, censor markings on each cover, specifically chosen to represent 12 different countries of the world, help set the viewer's expectation that the world is at war and each subsequent cover in the exhibit will bear some relationship to it. The FDCs serve a practical purpose here.

The exhibit ends with a five-page epilogue documenting the US entry into the War on December 7, 1941. Postal relations with most nations were immediately suspended at the time the Famous Americans Series was beginning to lose its popularity.

**Knowledge, personal study, and research:** My background as an exhibitor and writer centers on the impact of war on transmission of the mail. I draw on this expertise in the exhibit. The Series was issued during the so-called Prexie-era. The source cited below provides a general view of censorship, rerouting and suspension of mail during the period covered in the exhibit. Censorship data provided for each cover was drawn from established sources (e.g., Morenweiser, Flynn, Little, etc.) well known to students of World War II censorship. Rate data was provided by the well-known Wawrukiewicz & Beecher book on U.S. international postal rates.

**Difficulty of acquisition:** Because most US international mail generated in 1940-1941 was franked with Presidential Series and higher value airmail definitives, and because the

Series stamps bear low face values, the opportunity to acquire covers to foreign destinations with Famous Americans stamps is somewhat limited. Based on my experience assembling five major exhibits of US generated mail throughout World War II, it appears that less than ten percent of the international mail generated during the US Neutrality Period bears Series franking.

**Source:**

- Louis Fiset (ed.) *Prexie Era: Postal History and Stamp Production, 1938-1962*. (American Philatelic Society, 2017.)