

TELEGRAPH CENTENARY ISSUE OF 1944

Synopsis

PURPOSE AND SCOPE:

This is a traditional first day cover exhibit of the 3¢ Telegraph Centenary stamp of 1944 (Scott 924). A 3-cent red violet stamp issued on May 24, 1944, marked the 100th anniversary of the first transmission of a telegraph message. Samuel F. B. Morse sent the first telegraph message: "What hath God wrought?" from the Old Supreme Court chamber in the U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C., to the B & O Railroad Depot in Baltimore, Maryland, on May 24, 1844.

TREATMENT:

The exhibit examines the stamp design and printing; first day ceremonies in Washington DC and Baltimore MD; first day covers and cancellations; domestic and international postal uses and commemorations. The exhibit will follow the established traditional approach for First Day Cover displays, beginning with an analysis of the stamp itself; moving on to the First Day ceremonies, covers, and cancellations; and concluding with a look at various postal uses. Descriptions of individual items will be presented in standard text, while additional explanatory content will be in italicized text. Key details and important facts will be emphasized with bold text. Special attention will be given to First Day Covers that feature unique services such as airmail, registered mail, special delivery, and other distinctive markings, as well as those sent to foreign destinations.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Samuel Finley Morse's 1835 invention of the electric telegraph and his groundbreaking Morse Code reshaped the globe. From 1844, its commercial use marked a seismic shift in communication technology, rivaled only by Gutenberg's printing press 400 years earlier.

DIFFICULTY OF ACQUISITION:

Despite being a modern stamp issued just 80 years ago, many cachets for this stamp are not often seen today. Add to that, there are two official first day locations with attendant postmarks. While the stamp is not considered a rarity in the classical sense, stamp production represented a significantly smaller stock than other commemorative wartime stamps issued during the period. Michael Mellone catalogs forty-four first day cachet designs of the Telegraph Centenary, of which this exhibit includes forty. The other four are elusive variations of Crosby, Linto and Chambers cachets. Dorothy Knapp created only two hand-painted, pen & ink cachets for this issue, both of which

are included here along with others of her color, black & white varieties, and Fleetwood partnership. Many of these covers have been extraordinarily difficult to acquire. Die and plate proofs are also extremely rare and are not included in the exhibit, although a photogravure essay is included, as well as block, cover and various ephemera signed by Bureau and Post Office personnel.

Postal Usages: The stamp was issued at the first-class letter rate, and most postal use was for that purpose. Other uses are scarce and difficult to acquire because (1) being a commemorative, the stamp saw limited use for other classes of mail or special services, and (2) postal use covers of a modern stamp are often of little interest to dealers and thus generally scarce in the marketplace. Despite these difficulties, a wide range of domestic usages is presented, as well as singles and multiples used to meet a variety of international rates.

SELECTED REFERENCES:

Specialized Cachet Catalogue of First Day Covers of the 1940's, Michael Mellone (1984)

U.S. First Day Cover Cachet Display Catalog, Douglas H. Henkle (2006)

The United States Commemorative Stamps of the 20th Century, Max G.Johl (1947)

Franklin D. Roosevelt and Stamps of the United States 1933-45, Brian C. Baur (1993)

Mellone's FDC Photo Encyclopedia of First Cachets, Monty, Richard, et al (2006)

Linn's Weekly Stamp News (1944-45)