

The Merry Widow

Development & Uses of the US 1908 Special Delivery Stamp

Purpose. The goal of this exhibit is to illustrate the development, rates, markings, unusual uses, and combination frankings of the 10¢ Merry Widow stamp. (The name “Merry Widow” comes about because the image of the hat in the stamp is said to resemble a hat used in Franz Lehar’s operetta, “The Merry Widow.”)

Why? One of the most beautiful stamps ever issued by the US POD, it had a very short period of production but was, nevertheless, “out there” for a while. The scope here is perfect, in my view, for a single-frame exhibit.

Treatment. The treatment is pretty straightforward. We start with a review of essays, the layout of the printing plates, and then we cycle through rates, marking, and unusual uses. Typically, each page constitutes a “chapter,” each individual cover serving to illustrate the chapter’s purpose. I have striven to ensure that no cover is duplicative.

There may be issues regarding out-of-period use of covers in the exhibit. To some degree, part of the point of this exhibit is that the stamp had a short period of production and that supplies were to be worked down, not withdrawn and returned to DC., or destroyed. Approximately 25% of covers in my census were used 10 years after withdrawal. We have also striven to avoid philatelic use, and to the best of our knowledge, there isn’t a single philatelic cover in this exhibit.

Importance. A single stamp, a short production period, and a long-ish period of use. A beautiful stamp that still captures our imagination 100 years after its introduction. Great nickname, “Merry Widow.” Is there another US stamp that has a nickname? [“Inverted Jenny” is a description.] Amongst special delivery stamps, probably the most distinctive.

Knowledge, Study & Research. The claims of rarity are based on a census I maintain.

Rarity. I have an early use, in 1908 (there are very few of those), but I do not have the earliest known use. I know where it is, but Henry won’t sell it to me. I ask repeatedly.

Condition. Given that many of these items are one-of-a-kind or few-of-a-kind, the condition is as good as can be expected. The more common items were chosen for their condition and to still display a wide range of material.

Sources:

This is no single reference that dominates here. I do have a copy of Bob Markovits' SFE on this issue, but he has a very different take than I do:

Robert L. Markovits, *The Merry Widow, 10c Special Delivery Issue of 1908* [exhibit], 1996, APRL

For rates I used Henry W. Beecher & Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz, *U.S. domestic postal rates, 1872-1999*