

Famous Americans Series

International Uses 1940-1941

Purpose and Scope: The primary purpose of this six frame postal history exhibit is to celebrate the 1940 Famous Americans Series with a focus on international uses generated during the height of its two-year popularity. Because this period coincides with the 27-months of World War II before the U.S. entered the conflict as a belligerent, a secondary purpose is to highlight the impact of the war in Europe on US Neutrality Period mail. Included is letter and postcard mail addressed to the nations at war, overrun and neutral nations and their territories, and trans-oceanic US possessions. The exhibit concludes with the nation's entry into the War in December 1941. At this time the popularity of the Series' began was in decline.

Organization and Development: The exhibit opens with a selection of censored first day covers to introduce the Series (issue dates, subject matter, low face values) and set viewers' expectation that the world is at war. The storyline then develops with surface and air mail to the nations and territories impacted by the War.

Emphasis is placed on air and/or supplementary service mail. Because trans-oceanic airmail rates ranged from 30 cents to \$1.10 and fees for supplementary registration or special delivery service further increased the postage required, the low face values of the Series discouraged use on mail demanding the higher cost services. Thus, international uses highlight the challenge imposed on a Series issued primarily for domestic use.

Plan of Exhibit

- I. Series Introduction
- II. Nations at War
- III. Overrun Nations
- IV. Neutral Nations
- Epilogue

The impact of the war may be seen with censorship delays, rerouting around occupied regions and war zones, and suspension of service, altogether.

Historical Note: Although the United States favored the Allied side from the outset of the War, the country remained neutral throughout the first 27 months of it in compliance with the Neutrality Act of 1936. However, when France fell to The Third

Reich in June 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt expanded the nation's armed forces with a military draft and initiated the "Arsenal of Democracy" with supply to Great Britain of military ships and other desperately needed matériel. Throughout the period, however, no armed U.S. combatants entered the conflict.

Per presidential executive order, from December 13, 1941, all mail leaving and entering the U.S. mainland was subject to censorship regardless of destination.

Significance: The Famous Americans Series proved highly popular with postal patrons. However, few exhibits exist to highlight its use either in help moving international mail, or as a vehicle to draw attention to the U.S. Neutrality Period.

Key Items: Covers showing special historical or philatelic significance are bordered in red and annotated.