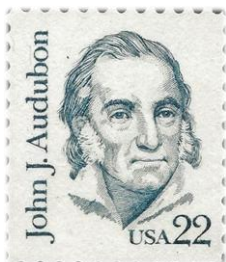


Birmingham - Ferndale Stamp Club Newsletter



April 2026

April in Michigan always feels like a promise - sometimes a reliable one, sometimes a bit of a practical joke. One day the crocuses are out, the next day they're wearing a light dusting of snow. But for collectors, this in-between season is perfect: a stretch of weeks when we're still indoors enough to enjoy our albums yet finally seeing enough daylight to feel energized about new projects.



Scott #1863

This month we celebrate American Artist and Naturalist John J. Audubon (1785-1851) on his birthday, April 26th. He drew life-like illustrations of North American birds.

Paul Jay Stanton, founder of the Michigan Stamp Dealers Supply Company and the "Mouse & Such" stamp company, passed away on Sunday, March 22, 2026. Paul was an avid stamp collector and a fixture at our club shows. Our condolences are offered to his wife Loraine and children.

Our club continues plans for BIRMPEX 2026 to be held on April 12th (a one-day show) at

the Infinity Hall, 16650 East 14 Mile Road, Fraser, 48026. The event is cosponsored by the Pontiac Stamp Club with Martin Brown as Show Chairman and Phil Vallelunga assisting. Our club competes for dealers because of other philatelic events being held on the same date, but we are not deterred. If the show is successful, we may plan the next FERNPEX show at the same location. Finally, there is a stamp show on the east side!

Club Meetings –

April 7th and 21st, 6:00 p.m. at the NEXT Senior Center, Birmingham.

Upcoming Events –

April 11th, Modern Stamps Public Auction at their Oak Park facility, Saturday at 12N.

April 12th, BIRMPEX Stamp Show at Infinity Hall, Fraser, Sunday 10-5.

April 24th & 25th The Plymouth Stamp Show at the Hellenic Cultural Center, Westland, Friday & Saturday 10-4 & 10-3.

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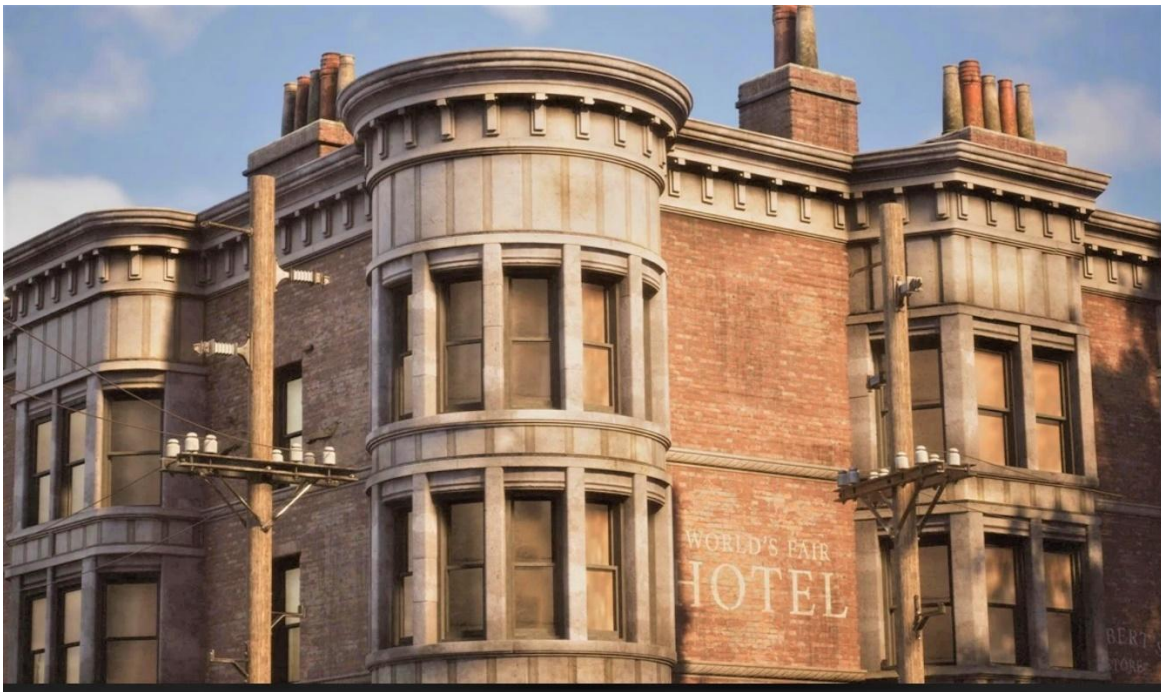
The First Serial Killer, a Murder Castle, and a Post Office

Pat Hensley

While this is not about a specific stamp, this is a topic that should interest all stamp collectors. Those that collect World's Fair stamps or are interested in the post office might find this story particularly interesting.

H.H. Holmes is considered to be the first known serial killer in the United States. He was born Herman Webster Mudgett in Gilmanston, New Hampshire, in 1861. He was a gifted student and attended medical school at the University of Michigan, but was expelled for stealing cadavers. After leaving medical school, Holmes traveled around the country, working as a doctor, a pharmacist, and a businessman. He was also a con artist and a thief.

In 1888, he moved to Chicago and built a three-story hotel, which he called the "Murder Castle" (see below). The hotel was designed with secret passages, trapdoors, and rooms that could be locked from the outside. The "Murder Castle", advertised as the "World's Fair Hotel", was located in the Englewood neighborhood, a few miles west of the fairgrounds.



The World's Fair was a perfect place for Holmes to operate. The crowds and chaos provided him with perfect cover, and he was able to lure and murder his victims with impunity. The hotel was designed with secret passages, trapdoors, and rooms that could be locked from the outside. Holmes lured his victims to the hotel, often by posing as a doctor or a businessman. He would then murder them and dispose of their bodies in a variety of ways, including burning them, dissecting them, or burying them in the basement.

The exact number of Holmes's victims is unknown, but it is estimated to be between 20 and 200. He was eventually caught and convicted of the murders of Benjamin Pitezel and his three children. Holmes was hung in 1896.

The Murder Castle was demolished in 1938, replaced by the Englewood Post Office Branch in 1939. The post office is still standing today at 611 West 63rd Street, Zip 60621 (see below), and is said to be haunted by ghosts of Holmes's victims.



There are a few different theories about why the post office was built on the site of the Murder Castle. One theory is that the city wanted to erase the memory of Holmes and his crimes. Another theory is that the city wanted to take advantage of the location, which was close to the World's Fair grounds.

Whatever the reason, the post office is now a reminder of one of the most infamous serial killers in American history. It is also a reminder of the dark side of human nature.

Murder Castle and the post office are both important parts of Chicago's history. They are a reminder of the city's dark past, but they are also a reminder of the city's resilience. The post office stands on the site of one of the most horrific crimes in American history, but it is also a place where people can go to send and receive mail. It is a symbol of hope and renewal in the face of tragedy.

References:

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J. W. Westcott

Michael Swope

For more than a century, the J.W. Westcott Company has operated one of the most unusual postal outposts in America: a floating post office that delivers mail to ships while they're still underway. The company, founded in 1874 by Captain John Ward Westcott, began by ferrying supplies to passing vessels and added mail delivery by 1895.



Post card published by Laura N. Goldberg, Hazel Park, MI. Event cover, celebrating the 1975 season opening of the Detroit River Mail Boat Service. The Energy Conservation Issue postage stamp (Scott #1547) was cancelled on April 7, 1975.

The star of this operation is the J.W. Westcott II, a 45-foot mail boat built in 1949 and still in service today. It holds the distinction of being the only floating ZIP code in the United States - 48222, a detail that delights philatelists and postal historians alike. Any letter addressed to a crew member on a Great Lakes freighter can be sent to: Vessel Name, Marine Post Office Detroit, Michigan 48222. From there, the Westcott crew takes over, racing alongside the moving ship to deliver mail using the famous “mail-in-the-pail” method: a rope and bucket lowered from the freighter to the mail boat below.

The Westcott story hasn't been without hardship. On October 23, 2001, the J.W. Westcott II capsized in the wake of a passing tanker, resulting in the loss of two crew members. The vessel was later salvaged, refurbished, and returned to service - an act that speaks to the company's resilience and the importance of its role on the river.

For stamp and postal history enthusiasts, the Westcott operation offers several points of fascination: A unique ZIP code—a rarity in postal operations; A living example of maritime mail delivery, echoing the era of sea post offices and ship letters; and Special cancellations and covers often sought by collectors of Great Lakes or Michigan postal history.

Today, the Westcott Company not only continues its mail service but also offers river tours that let visitors experience the process up close - watching freighters glide by, seeing the pail drop, and feeling the rhythm of a working river. For anyone with an interest in postal history, it's a rare chance to see a living tradition in action.

Ref: Post card from Author's collection; Wikipedia.org