



Lot 99

LOT 99°

The unique 50¢ Trans-Mississippi cover postmarked on the First Day of Issue—
one of the most outstanding of all United States First Day covers

ESTIMATE \$50,000-75,000

DESCRIPTION

50¢ Trans-Mississippi (291), left straight edge margin with centerline, rich color, tied by “collector friendly” lightly struck Washington, D.C. oval cancel, five-line purple “**REGISTERED/JUN 17 1898/WASHINGTON, D.C./Sub-Station No. 29/No. 768**” registry datestamp with manuscript number struck on **June 17, 1898, First Day of Trans-Mississippi Issue** cover, manuscript return address “*J. M. Bartels, Washington*”, typewriter address to “Herrn Hermann August Kah., Baden-Baden, Germany”, red “23679” handstamped registry number, New York “Exchange” registry label (number 59442), backstamped with “New York, N.Y., Regy. Div. 6-18 1898” double-oval datestamp and purple “6/18/98” in circle registry datestamp over flap, Baden-Baden receiving backstamp (Jun. 26, 1898), blue crayon “337” on flap

PROVENANCE

Fred Langford, Schuyler Rumsey Philatelic Auctions, 1/24-27/2012, Sale 45, lot 1377, to William H. Gross

CENSUS, LITERATURE AND EXHIBITION REFERENCES

Henry Scheuer, “The King of First Day Covers,” Virtual Stamp Club http://www.virtualstampclub.com/king_fdc.html

CERTIFICATION

The Philatelic Foundation (2011)

CONDITION NOTES

Very Fine

HISTORY AND COMMENTARY

The Bartels Trans-Mississippi First Day Covers

The weather in the District of Columbia was cloudy and cool on Friday, June 17, 1898, when a 26-year old German-born stamp dealer named John Murray Bartels walked the half mile from his office on 14th Street N.W. to the post office sub-station number 29 at 9th and F Streets, carrying three small envelopes addressed to Germany.



J. Murray Bartels
(1871-1944)

Even at his youthful age, Bartels was a rising star in the philatelic world. He advertised regularly in local newspapers, looking to buy “old postage stamps” and suggesting that people “look up old correspondence” for valuable stamps. The previous year, he and a few local collectors founded the Washington Collectors Club, with their office at the same address Bartels used in his ads. He would go on to build a name for himself and a lasting legacy as an expert in postal stationery. For now, however, his Friday morning task

was to buy the new “Omaha” stamps and put them on three envelopes he had carefully addressed with his typewriter.

When Bartels arrived at the post office, he was ready to buy the stamps, place them on the three envelopes, and, most important, instruct the clerk to lightly apply the cancels and clearly postmark the envelopes. On the envelope to Hermann Appel in Metz, Germany, he neatly arranged one each of the six values from the 1¢ through the 10¢. The two other envelopes were addressed to Hermann August Kah in Baden-Baden. On one he affixed the 50¢ Mining Prospector stamp, and on the other the beautifully engraved \$1 Cattle in the Storm. We cannot be sure Bartels did not have other covers prepared for the first day of the Trans-Mississippi issue—perhaps one with the \$2 Eads Bridge—but the three with eight of the nine values have survived to tell us that he spent at least \$1.80 that day to create a unique trio of First Day of Issue covers.

The Bartels covers went separate ways, but two of them were reunited by Fred Langford (1916-2010), who owned the 50¢ when he spotted the \$1 in a 1962 catalogue for an auction in Switzerland. Half of the envelope—the important half with the postmark date—was covered up in the photo, but Langford saw the addressee’s name and sequential registration number, and he took a chance. It paid off. Langford had both covers in his collection until he died. When they were offered in a Rumsey auction in 2012, the 50¢ sold to Mr. Gross for \$100,000 hammer, and the \$1 First Day brought \$150,000 hammer—Langford had paid \$125 for his \$1 cover in the 1962 Swiss auction. ■