The Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Issue of 1909

"Many persons incline to the view that the Seattle fair monstrosity is the ugliest thing that has yet been forced on the public"—New York Sun

Reviled as artistic monstrosities when issued, Scott #370 and its imperforate twin Scott #371 remain the least popular U.S. commemorative stamps of the first decade of the twentieth century.

This exhibit shows how political pressure interfered with the design process, leading to replacement of a handsome seal by a politician with big ears and a big nose. A selection of covers mailed on June 1, 1909, the first day of issue, is presented, as well as a complete showing of proprietary coils prepared from sheets of the imperforate stamp. Representative usages of the issue on cover, extending into the 1920s, are included.

Items of special interest include:

- The series of essays prepared by Bureau designer C. A. Huston
- The large die proof of the final design approved by the P.M.G.
- The only U.P.U. specimens of the stamp outside official archives
- A postcard mailed from the Exposition on the first day of issue
- A 280-subject press sheet of the imperforate stamp
- Early demonstration airmail covers
First Design

March 1909, Bureau designer Clair Aubrey Huston’s first model for the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamp was based on his circular seal-on-ice essay for an abandoned commemorative envelope project.

Photograph of essay for the stamped envelope

Black and white wash drawing of frame with pasted photo of seal vignette. Unique (ex-Johl)
Second Design

Huston's second design was for a larger stamp, also incorporating the seal-on-ice vignette. This essay was approved for production by the new Postmaster-General, Frank H. Hitchcock, on April 3, 1909.

The approved essay:
black, white and gray
wash drawing of frame
with pasted photo of seal
vignette (cut-out of
Seward profile was placed
on backing card later).
Ex-Johl.
Third Design

A strongly adverse reaction from the Exhibition's backers to a stamp which would emphasize the more frigid aspects of Northern life sent Huston back to his drawing board to prepare a pair of essays which replaced the seal with William H. Seward, the Secretary of State who bought Alaska from the Russians.

(Above) Small Seward essay with ink-on-wash inscription of the dates 1870 and 1909 in the ribbons of a definitive series frame. The vignette of a snuff stamp die proof appears behind a central cut-out. Unique (ex-Johl).

(Below) 1/2 ounce snuff stamp, Series of 1891
Fourth Design

Huston's second and larger Seward essay, combining the frame of the previously approved seal-on-ice design with a retouched vignette of Seward derived from an 1876 bond, was approved by the Postmaster-General on April 24, 1909, with the proviso that Seward's name be added.

The approved Seward essay.
Photo of wash drawing of frame and arched ribbon of approved seal essay with vignette cut out, mounted over photo of engraved Seward vignette (Bureau die number 2373).
Vignette background retouched with black wash.
Unique (ex-Brazer).
On April 26, 1909, Bureau Director Joseph E. Ralph approved the lettering of William H. Seward’s name on a new essay. Incredibly, Seward’s name appeared below a vignette of...the seal! A Seward vignette may at one time have been loosely stuck over the seal and subsequently dropped off, or perhaps the seal vignette was used purposely to elicit a chuckle from Director Ralph.

Retouched photo of adopted frame with pencilled WILLIAM H. SEWARD on white wash ribbon below seal vignette. Unique (ex-Johl).
The framing and lettering already having been engraved by Robert Ponickau and Edward Hall, Marcus W. Baldwin began engraving Seward's portrait on the die the day after Director Ralph's approval. Engraver Baldwin pulled progress proofs during his work on the die vignette. Two survive (they are listed as "die essays" by Brazer and as essays by Scott).

(Above). Small progress proof of die. Face and collar lightly engraved, no shading lines on ribbon, background shows horizontal lines only.

Compare with small proof of completed die (Below).

Unique (ex-Johl).
Postmaster-General Hitchcock approved the completed die for production on May 6, 1909.

Approved, May 6, 1909.

F.W. Hitchcock
Postmaster General.

*Large proof on india paper, die sunk on card. Unique (ex Lilly).*
The first plate (#5142) was certified on May 11, 1909. There were 280 subjects, divided into four panes of 70 stamps each.

Plate number block from the first plate certified

In late May, 1909 specimen stamps were sent to member countries of the Universal Postal Union.

Specimens overprinted "Ultramar" (overseas) by Portuguese colonial authorities. These are the only known specimen stamps outside official archives.
Twenty plates were used in May 1909 for the press run of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific commemoratives. Over 150,000,000 perforation 12 stamps were printed on double-line USPS-watermarked paper.

Plate number singles from the twenty plates used to produce the stamp. Later, nine of these plates will be used to print its imperforate twin.
Siderographer and Pressmen Initials

The Bureau siderographers transferred the design of the stamp from the die to a transfer roll, which was then used to enter 280 impressions, in 4 panes of 70, on each steel printing plate. Upon completion of a plate, the siderographer entered his initials in the margin of the lower left plate.

Pressmen were required to punch their initials into the margin of the plate every time they removed it from the vault for printing.

Siderographer John A. Mooney entered his initials in the corner of the left lower pane of plate 5144 upon completion of the transfer process. Various pressmen punched their initials in the upper corner of the pane before putting it to press.
Incomplete Right Inner Frame Line

Scratched Plate
Transfer Roll Relief Break, Plate 5237

A relief break in the transfer roll at the right lower edge of the Seward name riband developed after the first two rows of plate 5247 had been rocked in

Normal

Relief Break

A transfer relief break is present on all 5 examples of this vertical strip of the imperforate Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamp
Double Transfer, Plate 5249

The only Scott-listed double transfer, located in position 8 (the first stamp in the second row) from the upper left pane of plate 5249
Paper Inclusion

“Earmuff”

Paper Folds

Overinking

Freak Perforations
Imperforate Sheets

The Alaska-Yukon-Pacific issue was printed from plates of 280 subjects. Perforated sheets were cut along horizontal and vertical guide lines into four panes each containing 70 stamps before being distributed to post offices. The imperforate stamps were supplied to vending machine manufacturers in entire 280 subject sheets, accounting for the existence of centerline and arrow blocks.
Five manufacturers of stamp affixing or vending machines made coils from imperforate sheets of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific issue. The Attleboro and Brinkerhoff products were actually used in their machines. However, because of the size of the stamp, the coils made by Shermack and Mail-O-Meter could not fit into the narrow dispensing channels of the machines made by these companies, and should be considered favor items. The coils prepared by the U.S. Automatic Vending Machine Company likewise did not fit their stamp vending machines, but were successfully dispensed by their ticket vending machines at the Alaska-Yukon Exposition when placed in ticket-shaped manila pockets.

The Attleboro Stamp Company

The company used an affixing machine to frank its first-class mail with the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamp during the Summer and Fall of 1909.
The Brinkerhoff Company

Type I perforations, coiled sideways

Type II perforations, coiled endwise
Type II perforations, coiled endwise (line pair)
Type II perforations, coiled endwise

Type II perforations, coiled sideways ("double hole" variety)
Type II perforations, coiled sideways (line pair)

Type IIa perforations, coiled sideways
Type IIa perforations, coiled sideways (line pair)

The knife cuts in Type IIa coils were made by the Brinkerhoff machine as it dispensed the stamps at the Alaska-Yukon Exposition.
Proprietary Vending and Affixing Machine Coils

The Mail-O-Meter Company

Type I perforations, coiled sideways

Type II perforations, coiled sideways

Type III perforations, coiled sideways

Type IV perforations, coiled sideways (block)

Type IV perforations, coiled sideways
The Shermack Company

Type III perforations, coiled sideways

Type III perforations, coiled sideways (pasteup pair)

Types I and II Shermack perforations are not found on this stamp

The U.S. Automatic Vending Company

Type I perforations, coiled sideways

Type I perforations, coiled sideways (line pair)

Type II perforations, coiled sideways

Type II perforations, coiled sideways (line pair)

Type III perforations, coiled sideways

Type III perforations, coiled sideways (line pair)
Type I perforations (top and bottom margins trimmed in an attempt to make the coils narrow enough to fit USAV machines at the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition)

Type 2-1 pocket (Sc. 371+343)

Type 2-3 pocket (Sc. 371+343 USAV Type I)

Type 4-3 pocket (Sc. 371+343); no printing on front

The pockets were dispensed from USAV ticket-vending machines at the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition
Cleveland “Sewing Machine” Perforations

Probably unique plate block with provisional “sewing machine” perforations applied by the Cleveland postmaster during a Christmas shortage of stamps in 1914 (ex Wampler)
"Private" Perforations

St. Louis "Sewing Machine" Perforations

Brunswig Drug Co.,
Los Angeles, Calif.

W. A. Sisson,
314 Pine St.
St. Louis, Mo.

Sheets of imperforate stamps excess to the needs of the St. Louis branch of the Mailometer Co. were purchased by a stamp broker in 1910 and perforated by sewing machine for his commercial customers
Precancels

Only a few precancels are known on the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific issue--- Benton Harbor, Michigan on both the perforated and imperforate stamp, New York, Chicago, and Maywood, Illinois. The Chicago precancel has not been seen in recent times. The Maywood precancel is a recent discovery.

Full left margin imprint and plate 5257 block of six with the Benton Harbor precancel

Inverted Benton Harbor precancel

New York City precancel

Maywood, Ill. precancels (discovery copies)
Perfins

Compared with other countries, the United States was late in authorizing the use by companies of stamps perforated with control initials to reduce employee pilferage—the enabling regulation was not issued until 1908. Very few firms chose to perfin a large commemorative.

_W. M. Hoyt Company_

_W. M. HOYT COMPANY,_
_Importers, Manufacturers,_
_WHOLESALE GROCERS._
_Corner Michigan Avenue and River Street,_
_CHICAGO, ILLS._

"HOYT"
S. Anagyros Trading Corporation

A. T. C.

Remien & Kuhnert Company

R & K
Louisville Hotel (Ross Paris Hotel Company)

“LH” and “RP” intertwined

Washburn-Crosby Company

“W-C/ Co”
The Liquid Carbonic Company

Return in 5 Days to
Liquid Carbonic Company
Wells and Michigan Streets
CHICAGO

Brand Brewing Co.,
Elston Ave. & Snow St.,
Chicago,

"LC/Co"

(punched from back)
Imperforate Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamp with perfin (WERNER, in two lines) on late 1909 cover. The Werner Co. perfin is the only one recorded on Scott #371.

Imperforate Perfin: The Werner Company

THE WERNER COMPANY,
PUBLISHERS AND MANUFACTURERS,
AKRON,
OHIO.

Imperforate Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamp with perfin (WERNER, in two lines) on late 1909 cover. The Werner Co. perfin is the only one recorded on Scott #371.
The Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamp was officially issued on June 1, 1909, opening day of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition which it commemorated. Sixty first day covers and cards have been recorded.

First Day Cover: Personal Letter

Personal correspondence mailed at Cambridge, Massachusetts on the first day of issue
First Day Card: Memento of Opening Day

Picture postcard mailed at the Exposition Station on June 1, 1909, describing the opening day events

"June 1st, 1909.
Opening day of the A.Y.P.E. Grounds
opened 8:30, military parade 9:30--Official opening by Pres.
Wm. Taft. Pressed a gold key at Wash.
D.C."
First Day Cover:
Commercial Letter

One of 5 recorded first day covers franked with more than one stamp
Cut-down, triple-weight first day cover mailed at Moravia NY

Cover from the private bank which Seward’s son operated in Auburn NY (hometown of the Seward clan) to a bank in Syracuse. The typed “First Day Cover” was probably added later.
Earliest Documented Usage

Meekel's Weekly for June 5, 1909 reported that the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamp was first seen in Boston on May 29, three days before the official first day of issue. One Boston cover is known from that date; two later pre-issue covers (May 30 and 31) are known from Santa Cruz, Cal.

Personal correspondence mailed at Boston on May 29, 1909---the earliest known usage
The official date of issue for the imperforate stamp is not known. This June 7, 1909 cover is its EDU.
First Class Letter Rate

July, 1909 cover from Seattle to Nome, Alaska

August, 1909 cover from Seattle to Boston, with Exposition seal
First Class Letter Rate: Telegrams

The Postal Telegraph-Cable Company provided sheets of Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamps to its offices for franking telegrams received in the evening for morning mail delivery to local addresses. These were used well into the 1920s.
Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Stamps on Cover

Special Delivery Rate

Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamps used with 10 cent Special Delivery stamps on 1909 covers to pay 12 cent rate.
Beginning in 1907, regular stamps could be used in place of a Special Delivery stamp if the item bore a "Special Delivery" endorsement, as on this 1909 cover bearing an Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition station "C" cancellation. The two cents deficiency in postage was evidently overlooked.
An 8 cent registry fee was in force during the first five months of use of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamp, both for domestic and international mail. The cover to Germany was sent at the 2 cent/oz treaty rate for regular mail.
The island possession of Puerto Rico enjoyed domestic postal rates. October 30, 1909 registered letter from Mayagüez to San Juan, mailed just before the registry rate increased from 8 cents to 10 cents.
Eight Cent Registry Rate ((Transition Cover))

Registered cover mailed to Canada just before the 8 cent registry service rate expired. It was received the day after the 10 cent rate came into effect. The reverse side of the envelope bears additional stamps paying six times the 2 cent/ounce treaty rate to Canada.
First Day, 10 Cent Registry Rate

On November 1, 1909 the rate for registry service increased from 8 cents to 10 cents. Registered letter from New York City to Utica, franked with Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamp and 10 cent regular issue.
10 Cent Registry Rate

1915 registered covers to and from Wisconsin towns franked with plate blocks of imperforate Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamps to pay the 10 cents registry fee, plus 2 cents first class letter rate.
Circular Rate

One cent rate for unsealed circular paid by diagonally-bisected Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamp on 1909 cover.
Early Demonstration Airmail

Pioneer barnstormers carried airmail on short hops during aviation’s early years, generally from a fairgrounds to a nearby post office. On July 18, 1912, aviator Lincoln Beachey transported this cover in his Curtiss pusher biplane from the State Fairgrounds in Benton Harbor on officially-authorized route #637,001 to the east lawn of the post office about two miles away.
Early Demonstration Airmail

In September 1912 aviator Horace Kearney flew mail from the substation at the Columbia, Tennessee fairgrounds approximately one and one-half miles to a drop point near the post office (official mail route #627,001). This was the first airmail service in the State of Tennessee.
A series of coast-to-coast test flights was made on August 21, 1923 to prove the feasibility of a transcontinental airmail service. This cover was relayed from Chicago to Cleveland, where pilot C. Eugene Johnson, who had flown Chicago-bound mail from Long Island to Cleveland earlier in the day, took it on the return trip to New York on a DeHavilland biplane. The 2 cent stamped envelope is franked with three additional Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamps. The experimental 8 cent rate for the New York-Chicago zone was made permanent on July 1, 1924 when the transcontinental air mail service was officially established.
U. S. Naval Mail

Mr. F. G. Jensen
1410 N. Tripp Ave.
Chicago, Illinois.
U. S. A.

July 1914 cover posted on the U.S.S. Monterey, an obsolete 4000 ton monitor then in active reserve at Olangapo, Philippines. Mail posted aboard Navy ships was carried at domestic rates to the mainland.
Cover (which probably contained a circular from a drug company) mailed on an American ship with an Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamp to pay the postage. The purser applied a handstamp reading “POSTED ON THE HIGH SEAS” and delivered the letter to the post-office at the ship's first port of call: Hamilton, Bermuda. Here it was postmarked and entered the international mail stream. By treaty, mail to and from Bermuda was carried at the domestic rate.
U. S. Postal Agency in Vera Cruz

United States Marines and Naval personnel seized the Mexican port of Vera Cruz in April 1914, departing in November 1914. U.S. domestic rates prevailed at the postal agency set up shortly after the occupation.

Domestic letter rate covers mailed from Vera Cruz in 1914
U. S. Postal Agency in Vera Cruz

Registered letter (2 ounce rate) from the German Consulate in Vera Cruz to St. Louis
Covers overfranked with imperforate Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamps undoubtedly were collector-inspired
Covers to the United States mailed at the U.S. Postal Agency in Shanghai. Domestic rates applied to mail from this Office. The Special Delivery cover is overfranked, possibly because the sender thought it required the international mail rate.
Discount Treaty Rate with Germany

In 1909, the rate for letter mail conveyed directly from the United States to Germany became two cents/ounce, as opposed to the standard five cents/ounce U.P.U. rate. Registered letter, sent to Germany in 1912 on the North German Lloyd liner “George Washington,” franked with Registration stamp F1 and three Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamps to pay the treaty rate for a three-ounce letter.
Discount Treaty Rate with Germany

Covers (one registered) which travelled to Germany on German ships, thus qualifying for the two cents/ounce treaty rate.
Wartime Treaty Rate to Cuba

Censored 1918 registered cover from New York City to Santiago de Cuba. Sixteen cents postage paid the wartime treaty rate for a 2 oz. registered letter (2x3c+10c).
Overseas Letter Rate

1909 cover from Illinois to Germany. If it had been carried directly to Germany (not via England or France), the treaty rate would have been only two cents.

Cover from Newark to Sweden (no year on cds or backstamp). Overfranked by one cent.
Overseas Postcard Rate

Seattle to Japan, 1909

Massachusetts to Egypt, 1910
Overseas Postcard Rate

Virginia to Bohemia, 1909

California to Guatemala, 1909
Overseas Postcard Rate

A Hoboken steamship ticket agent sent postcards to his clients by U.S.-German Seapost, to be delivered at their first European port-of-call.
Overseas Postcard Rate

Brooklyn to New Zealand, 1910

Connecticut to Sweden, 1909
Overseas Postcard Rate

Indiana to Cochin China, 1909
International Printed Matter Rate

Wrapper for printed matter, sent to the Aland Islands (Finland) at the special international rate of one cent/two ounces

Wrapper for printed matter sent to Switzerland at the same rate
1909 registered letter from New Hampshire to Malta. The postage applied was more than sufficient to pay the 8 cent registry fee then extent and the 5 cent overseas letter rate, but fell short of paying the 5 cent fee for the demanded return receipt for registered mail sent abroad.
International Postage Due

December 1909 cover from Santa Barbara CA to Brig. Gen. Quinton in Pacific Grove CA, franked with an Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamp. The letter was forwarded (without additional postage) to Paris, where a strip of French postage due stamps was affixed, then forwarded for a second time to Florence, where yet another strip of postage due stamps was added—totalling (as U.P.U. regulations required) twice the three cents deficiency in postage.
A 1909 “Around-the-Circle” card sent to proponents of Ido (a simplified version of Esperanto). It originated in Switzerland and then travelled to Japan, Philadelphia (where an Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamp was affixed and tied by a machine cancel), Uruguay, Western Australia, Egypt, and then back to Switzerland. Usages such as these were banned by the U.P.U. in 1924 because they were confusing to postal clerks.
Letter sent from Paris to the Yokohama agent of the Chargeurs Réunis steamship line, for a passenger aboard the Amiral Fourichon. The passenger sailed for San Francisco before it arrived in Japan, and had left for home by the time it reached the United States. The forwarding postage from San Francisco to France includes an Alaska-Yukon-Pacific stamp.
Exposition Station Cancellations

Letter and over-franked postcard mailed at post office on Alaska-Yukon-Pacific exposition grounds.
Exposition Station Cancellations

The bottom card is franked with an imperforate stamp from one of the U. S. Automatic Vending Company machines on the Exposition grounds.
Railroad Post Office Cancellations

R.P.O. cancellations on covers with foreign destinations. The Boundary Line and Grand Forks cover was sent at the Canadian treaty rate for letters.
Railroad Post Office Cancellations

R. P. O. cancellations on domestic covers
A 1909 philatelic extravaganza, correctly franked for registered special delivery of a double-weight letter