

Special Items of Interest:

- Earliest Documented Use
- Second Largest Multiple First Day Use
- Scarce Rate Use from Papua
- Scarce Use of Beacon Pre-Cancels
- Use on Penalty Envelopes
- Fancy Cancels & Perfins
- Special Delivery to Foreign Destinations

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Usage of the 1928 U.S. Beacon Airmail

A Study in the Use of One of America's Most Popular Stamps

This exhibit is a study in how one of the most popular and important stamps in U.S. postal history, the 5¢ Beacon Airmail stamp of 1928, was used.



On August 1st, 1928 the Post Office Department drastically reduced the airmail rate from 10¢ to 5¢ for the first ounce. Hoping to promote the growing airmail service and in order to draw attention to the new rate, it was decided that a bi-color stamp was in order.

The design by A.R. Meissner of the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing is based upon photographs of the air mail beacon towers in Nebraska and Wyoming, representing the commitment of the country to trans-continental airmail service. This stamp is commonly known as the Beacon airmail.

The development of airmail service proceeded at a quick pace throughout the Beacon's lifetime and many experiments were attempted. While some were successful and others were not, the Beacon played a part in almost all of them. Examples of the Beacon's use in catapult, airship and glider flights are shown throughout this exhibit.

While rates and routes are discussed when appropriate, this is not an in-depth study of such. Rather it is a look at how this wonderful stamp was used from its date of issue until the end of the 5¢ domestic rate. †

Exhibit Notes

Exhibit Plan

- Early Use
- Domestic Use
- Foreign Use
- Foreign Origin
- End of the Beacon

Early Use

The exhibit begins with the **Earliest Documented Use** of the Beacon. It is one of seven surviving covers prepared the day before its release by Denver stamp dealer Maitland Milliken.

Continuing the exhibit is the **second-largest documented multiple Beacon first-day use**. Research by this Exhibitor has yielded only one first-day use with more than eleven Beacons.

Almost all first day uses of the Beacon from Washington, D.C. were hand-cancelled due to procedures

that were in place at the time. This exhibit includes two examples of rare machine-cancelled first day uses from two different Washington, D.C. dies.

The official first day city for the Beacon was Washington D.C. on July 25th, 1928 and only one cachet maker prepared a cover specifically for the issuance of the Beacon. This cachet prepared by Milton Mauch is shown in this exhibit.

Another difficult form of first day covers to find are uses from Unofficial cities. This exhibit displays examples from as far away as Denver.

With the Beacon being issued only one week before the rate reduction took effect, it is difficult to find non-philatelic uses at the 10¢ rate, but there are several uses from this short-lived period in the exhibit.

Many stamp collectors took time to prepare covers to mark the rate change on August 1st, so

there are many philatelic examples available. It was a challenge to this Exhibitor to find commercial uses from this date.

Domestic Use

The Domestic Use chapter starts with uses at multiple weights. As air mail service had a limited capacity, the rate for subsequent ounces was double that of the first. This led to confusion among the public with many overpaid and underpaid letters. A selection of these misfranked covers are shown. Large packages were rarely sent by airmail, but a package piece is included in the exhibit. *While it would be optimal to have the entire package, it is rare to find a Beacon on a package piece of this size.*

Important Dates in the Beacon's Lifetime

July 25, 1928	Beacon issued in Washington, D.C.
Aug. 1, 1928	Airmail rate reduced to 5¢ for the 1 st ounce
Feb. 10, 1930	Beacon replaced with single-color 5¢ Winged Globe
July 6, 1932	Airmail rate increased to 8¢ for the 1 st ounce

There was much confusion about using airmail stamps to pay for additional services under existing postal regulations when the Beacon was issued. At that time airmail stamps could only be used to pay for airmail service. A cover with Beacons being used to pay the Special Delivery fee before this order was rescinded is included in the exhibit. A selection of Registered letters is included, including several examples of additional payment for increased indemnity.

Scarce uses of a penalty envelopes are included in this chapter. While penalty envelopes could be used to pay the

for their business customers who needed to ship time sensitive packages. Air Express was a private service and as such, did not require the use of U.S. postage stamps. However, this exhibit includes one such item that includes a Beacon.

Fancy cancels were allowed by postal regulations of the time and several examples of these difficult to find Beacon covers are included in this chapter. Although they are mostly philatelic, without these creations, almost none would be available today.

While development of Contract Air Mail (CAM) routes is not a



A Scarce Mixed Franking of Foreign Origin with the Beacon from Papua. There are only 15 documented examples of this rate, all of which were sent by A.C. Roessler, a known U.S. stamp dealer.

example, a letter posted from the west coast could be sent via surface mail to England for 5¢ per ounce. Payment of an additional 4¢ would provide airmail service from the west coast to New York before being placed on a steamer to England. As was the case with domestic rates, there was often confusion about the rates to other countries.

Foreign Origin

Covers of foreign origin with mixed franking are another uncommon use of the Beacon. Senders from countries outside the United States would sometimes add a Beacon stamp to assure airmail service within the U.S.

The scarcest of the uses are the two Beacon covers that were sent from Papua. They show two different internal rates; surface and airmail (with the Beacon providing airmail service within the U.S.). There are only a combined total of 15 examples of these two rates, and not all have Beacons on them. Each of these covers were the creation of stamp dealer A.C. Roessler, and while they may be considered philatelic, without him there would no examples of this rate left to history.

Another unusual example in

this exhibit is a cover with a Beacon posted from Cuba that had a final destination of Germany.

End of the Beacon

Production of the Beacon was expensive and the Post Office Department decided the best way to reduce the cost was to issue a smaller, single color stamp to replace the Beacon. This happened on February 10, 1930. But the Beacon continued in use, although declining, until the end of the 5¢ domestic airmail rate on July 5, 1932. Commercial Beacon uses from this 27 month period, especially commercial ones, are difficult to unearth, but are included in this exhibit. †

Selected Bibliography	
Goodkind Henry M.; <i>The 5¢ Beacon Air Mail Stamp of 1928</i> ; 1965.	Kobersteen, Kent. J.; <i>Beacon Airmail Rates to Foreign Destinations</i> ; Via Air-
Silver, Philip; <i>There's Not Always Agreement</i> , <i>American Philatelist</i> , April 1981, pg. 429.	Graue, James W.; <i>Origins and Rates of the North Atlantic German Catapult Airmail</i> ; Via Airmail , 1992.
Kobersteen, Kent J.; <i>The Beacon Air Mail Stamp of 1928 Production and Usage</i> ; 1989.	Wawrukiewicz, A. & Beecher, H.; <i>U.S. International Postal Rates, 1872-1996</i> ; 1996.

surface rate for official business, any additional services such as airmail and special delivery, needed to be paid with additional postage.

Several postmasters around the country authorized the precanceling of the Beacon during it lifetime. Examples are shown both on and off cover. It should be noted that one of the precancels is a roller cancel that was applied to an entire sheet before the single stamp was used on the cover.

Perforated Insignias (Perfins), common among many Bureau Issues of the time, are difficult to find on the Beacon. Scarce examples on cover are shown.

Air Express was an ancillary service offered by some airlines

part of this exhibit, the economics of CAM routes are examined. Examples of cards and letters that some airlines sent in order to take advantage of the discrepancy between the cost of sending the mail and what they were receiving for carrying the mail are shown. Sixteen one ounce cards could be mailed for 80¢ while the airline received \$3 per pound — a \$2.20 per pound profit.

Foreign Use

Use of the Beacon to foreign destinations was primarily to pay for airmail service within the United States. During the Beacon's lifetime, letters to foreign destinations could receive airmail service within the U.S. at a reduced rate of an additional 4¢ per ounce. For

What's Not Here...

Production
This exhibit is intended to showcase the **use** of the Beacon — not how it was produced. Therefore there are no proofs, specimens or any other production-related item in this exhibit.

Insured Mail
There is only one known surviving use of a Beacon used on an insured package. Unfortunately, it is not in this Exhibitor's collection—yet! †