



# The Overprint

## **Newsletter of the Reading Stamp Collectors' Club**

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## **Issue: February 2020**

### **DIRECTIONS**

**Most Meetings Held the first Tuesday of Every Month at 7:00 p.m.**

**Meeting Site: Berkshire Commons, 5485 Perkiomen Avenue (Route 422)**

**Turn North on Lincoln opposite of the Dairy Queen.**

Proceed 300 feet, turn left on Washington and look right of center at the stop sign. There are two buildings, proceed past the first building and then turn right into the parking area after you have passed the end of the second building. The building entrance is where the two blocks join. Take elevator to the second floor, make a left. and the entrance to the meeting room is round the corner on your right.

## **Tuesday February 4th Program**

### **Cinderella's by Dick Colberg**

Dick is a member of The Philatelic Society of Lancaster County, and spends approximately half the year in France. He has kindly agreed to kick off our year with a program on Cinderella's.

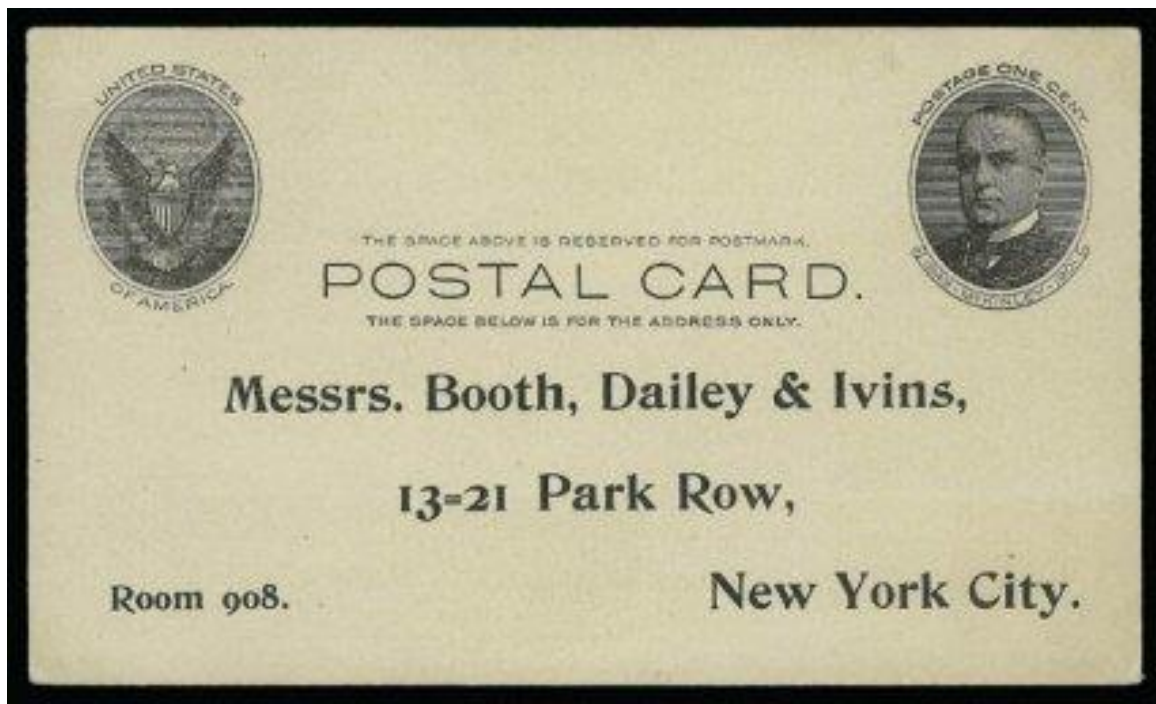
As Dick has given us no further description of what he is going to present and as this is a vast topic with examples found in many countries around the world who knows what we will get to see.

**Come and join us on February 4<sup>th</sup> when the mystery will be revealed.**

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### **MARCH PROGRAM: SPRING AUCTION**

**Start looking in those old stamp storage boxes that you have. You never know, it may be something another club member wants!**



Above is a “full face” UX17 postal card, valued in the thousands, and possibly to be found in a dealer’s junk box. It was issued in 1902 after the assassination.

## “Garbage Card” is a Prize

Following the assassination of President McKinley, the Post Office decided to issue a commemorative postal card, as shown above.

The design was withdrawn due to an inferior impression and replaced with a profile image of the murdered President. That card runs from minimal catalog value to under \$20.

Over a million and a half of the original undesirable cards were to be destroyed—however a box of 500 were imprinted and sent to “Messrs. Booth, Dailey & Irvin” to be used by their company.

Booth and company were contractors paid to dispose garbage from New York City by means of scows (ships), hence

the nickname of “garbage cards” for this issue.

Variations exist of the stories surrounding what happened to the cards once the garbage company received them. The intended purpose was to enable ship captains to report their trips. Even serious sources contain errors, discrepancies.

In any case, keep your eye out for this full-bust (or three quarters-bust) of McKinley. It is very possible some are floating around in dealer junk boxes. Maybe you have one now!

## Treasurer's Report

### 2019 A Year in Review

Opening Balance 01/01	\$ 2,170.39
Income	\$ 4,380.15
Expenses	<u>\$(5,229.60)</u>
Closing Balance 12/31	<u>\$ 1,320.94</u>
CD Value at 12/31	<u>\$ 3,095.59</u>
Cash on Hand	<u>\$ 30.00</u>
Attendance Drawing	<u>\$ 5.00</u>

The 19<sup>th</sup> RSCC Show in November made only \$70.48. We had higher than planned advertising cost and three dealers did not show. Combined this reduced the profit on this event by approximately \$ 500.00.

Our Christmas Luncheon on December 14<sup>th</sup> Was enjoyed by over 30 club members and spouses. The club supported financially supported 50% of the cost of this event.

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## WE NEED YOU!

**We have a number of slots still open  
this year for Programs**

**If you would like to share part of your  
collection that you are passionate  
about, then contact:**

**Mike Matus:**

**[Michael.Matus@verizon.net](mailto:Michael.Matus@verizon.net)**

**or**

**Dave Hunt:**

**[Dhhunt@ptdprolog.net](mailto:Dhhunt@ptdprolog.net)**

## THE MARKET PLACE

**We are opening this up again in 2020.  
If you have something to sell the send an  
email to me with pictures (if possible).**

**This offer is open to members of other  
area clubs**

**Bear in mind The Overprint is sent to  
members of over 5 other area clubs.**

**Send details to Michael Bach**

**[mbach1@comcast.net](mailto:mbach1@comcast.net)**

## WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE!

**Are you missing a stamp in  
your collection?**

**You can list it for free giving item  
detail and your contact  
information.**

**Maybe a member of another club  
has one to sell you.**

# A Different Kind of First Day Cover

1/16/2020 - Member Only Exclusive

As a retired naval officer and now a civilian employee of the federal government, I enjoy collecting covers that were free-franked by government officials during the first century of the republic. This article is about two such covers, each franked by a different man serving as U.S. Secretary of the Navy. The two are linked by an odd fact of the sort that fascinates collectors: both covers were written on their first day in office, making them First Day Covers of a sort!

First, a little background about free-franked American mail. A free-frank cover is one in which an authorized government official mails a first-class letter without paying postage simply by signing the cover and annotating his official position. (In this article, I use the male pronoun because nearly everyone who had the privilege was male, with the very notable exception of presidential widows.) These covers are not only sought after by philatelists, but by autograph collectors and those who collect government and military history.

In addition to themselves, Congresses have provided certain high-ranking officials in the executive branch with the franking privilege from the founding through June 30, 1873. On that date, the signature frank was replaced by U.S. departmental Official stamps, prefixed by an "O" in the back-of-the-book listings in the Scott catalog. Figure 1 shows Scott O37, the 3¢ ultramarine Navy Department stamp of 1873.



*Figure 1. Signed by authorized officeholders within federal departments, free-franked covers were sent without postage on government business, until their proliferation led to their replacement with Official*

*stamps in 1873. Among these was this 3¢ Navy Department Official stamp, Scott O37.*

The number of officeholders who enjoyed the franking privilege only grew with the increasing complexity of the federal government over time. In the Navy Department, for example, not only did the Secretary of the Navy have the franking privilege, but it eventually extended to accountants, clerks, senior naval officers and the chiefs and chief clerks of the various naval bureaus.

I first discovered free-franked naval covers when I stumbled across one franked by Commodore John Rodgers, the first of four generations of Rodgers who served the U.S. Navy with distinction. Figure 2 shows a painting of the commodore at about age 40 towards the end of his service in the War of 1812. I served in USS John Rodgers (DD-983), pictured below the Rodgers portrait, during my active military duty and it was exciting to possess something that had been written by the ship's namesake.







Figure 2. Portrait of Commodore John Rodgers, circa 1814, by John Wesley Jarvis, National Gallery of Art, and the Spruance-class Destroyer USS John Rodgers (DD-983) on which the author served — named for four generations of the Rodgers family.

Figure 3 shows that item, a December 19, 1833, stampless folded letter from Rodgers to Commodore James Barron who was commanding the naval yard in Philadelphia, providing instructions about paying for shipyard workers.



Figure 3. A December 19, 1833, stampless folded letter from Commodore Rodgers to Commodore James Barron, who was then commanding the naval yard in Philadelphia.

Figure 4 displays the first of my Navy Department first day covers. It was franked by Abel Parker Upshur as Secretary of the Navy, but the letter does not identify his position as required by postal regulations. It is postmarked October 12, 1841, with a matching red “FREE” handstamp. The cover is addressed to Oscar T. Keeler, Esquire, of New York. It did not contain the letter, but docketing on the reverse says “from A.P. Upshur, Oct 11, 1841, Washington City.” Keeler was known to be an autograph collector and that may have been the purpose of the correspondence. The letter was penned on Upshur’s first day as Secretary of the Navy.



Figure 4. This first day as Secretary of the Navy covers was franked by Abel Parker Upshur and postmarked October 12, 1841, with a matching red “FREE” handstamp. Docketing on the back (not illustrated) confirms it as penned on October 11, Upshur’s first day in that position.

Pictured in Figure 5, Abel Parker Upshur was a lawyer from Virginia and served as a member of the Virginia House of Delegates. After being expelled from Princeton University for participating in a riot against the faculty, he apprenticed for a lawyer, and served briefly in the Army during the War of 1812. After the war, he opened a law practice in Richmond, became the city’s attorney and served on the city council, later serving as a state representative and a judge. President Tyler, a family friend, nominated Upshur to be Secretary of the Navy and he was confirmed in October 1841, serving until July 1843.

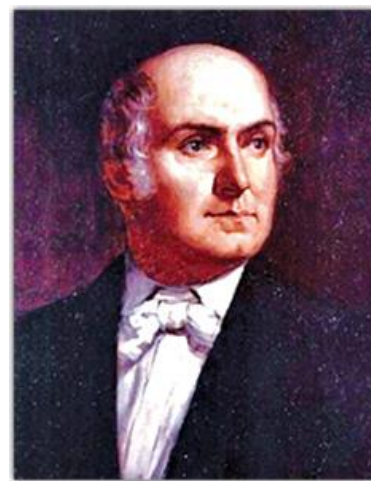


Figure 5. A portrait by A.G. Heaton of Upshur, a soldier, lawyer and successful politician and judge

from Virginia and served President John Tyler constructively as Secretary of the Navy.

Finding naval leaders to be indecisive and resistant to new ideas, Upshur solicited the advice of junior officers and outsiders who were supporters of reform. During his tenure he reorganized the Navy, replacing the Board of Naval Commissioners with the bureau system, remnants of which remain to this day. He expanded the rank structure which had been capped at the rank of captain and he had published a set of regulations for the organization and administration of the Navy. He accelerated the transition to steam-powered, screw-driven, and ironclad ships, and grew the Navy to support increased international transoceanic trade.

Upshur was asked to serve as Secretary of State and reluctantly gave up the Secretary of the Navy position to his successor, David Henshaw. Upshur's tenure in the State Department was busy with the annexation of Texas.

Upshur, 15th Secretary of the Navy Thomas Gilmer, and five others were killed on February 28, 1844 on the Potomac River. As many as 400 people were on board the recently built screw steam warship USS *Princeton*, including President John Tyler. One of the ship's massive new 12-inch cannons called "The Peacemaker" exploded, after being fired several times. *Princeton's* Captain Robert Stockton, Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton and as many as 20 others were injured. President Tyler was below deck and escaped injury.

Figure 6 shows the Currier & Ives lithograph recreating the ghastly disaster, which is now chiefly attributed to inept gun design directed by Stockton.



Figure 6. A Currier & Ives lithograph recreates the ghastly disaster on February 28, 1844, on the new screw steam warship USS *Princeton* when the thick

breech of its 16,700-pound 12-inch gun "Peacemaker" exploded on a cruise, killing at least six and wounding up to 20. .

Figure 7 shows the second of my two first day covers, written by David Henshaw on his first day as Secretary of the Navy to Eliphalet Case, a publisher in Maine. The envelope is stamped "NAVY DEPARTMENT," dated and postmarked July 24, 1843, Henshaw's first day in office after replacing Upshur. It has a "FREE" handstamp in ink matching the postmark.



Figure 7. The author's second first-day-on-the-job cover was written and dated by David Henshaw and postmarked July 24, 1843 – Henshaw's first day as Secretary of the Navy – in reply to a letter he received from Eliphalet Case, a Democrat newspaper editor in Maine.

David Henshaw was a druggist, banker, transportation executive and politician from Massachusetts. He was a key founder of the Democratic party in Massachusetts, served in the state Senate and was the Collector of the Port of Boston. His portrait appears in Figure 8.



*Figure 8. A portrait of Secretary of the Navy David Henshaw by U.D. Tenney and N.M. Horn.*

A recess appointment under President Tyler as 14th Secretary of the Navy, Henshaw was never confirmed by the Senate and therefore only served six months in the role, but he made full use of those months. He persuaded Congress to give him the authority to move funds between appropriations so that he could finish some innovative shipbuilding designs that had been underfunded. He designed a school for midshipmen that would be a precursor to the Naval Academy, although his successor canceled the plan. He improved accountability for stores and efficiency at naval yards. And he furthered the establishment of the bureau-system of organization of the Navy started under Upshur.

Perhaps Henshaw was lucky to not be confirmed by the Senate. It was his immediate successor, Thomas Gilmore, who was killed in the explosion on the Princeton only 10 days after taking office.

In the letter that accompanied his first day on the job cover, Henshaw replies to correspondence he had received from Case. He thanked Case for his suggestions, and said he was “too recently here to know” what naval policies he would change. Case published newspapers strongly supporting the Democratic Party, but Henshaw wrote that he would not disqualify political opponents from serving in his administration, stressing the need for political tolerance, moderation and “harmony in our ranks.” If only modern politicians were so open-minded!

One of the joys of our hobby is learning about the history of our nation and those who governed it through their correspondence. And sometimes along the way we find little surprises that amuse, entertain and educate us — such as a different kind of first day cover.

## References & Resources

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David G. Phillips, ed., *American Stampless Cover Catalog, Volume II, Fourth Edition*, North Miami, Florida: David G. Phillips Publishing Co., Inc., 1987.

*The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, Volume VI*, New York: James T. White & Co., 1896.

Website of the [Naval History and Heritage Command](#)

## Philip J. Candreva

Philip J. Candreva is a retired Navy commander and professor of public policy, and author of the 2017 book *National Defense Budgeting and Financial Management: Policy & Practice*. His collecting interests include free franks of executive branch officials, department Official stamps, U.S. stamps of the classic era and the postal history of Monterey, California.

## Courtesy of the APS Website