

## Stamps used as Currency During the Civil War

### Purpose:

Shortly after the beginning of the American Civil War citizens began to hoard gold, silver, and copper which resulted in a shortage of circulating hard currency i.e. coinage. The shortage of coins made it challenging for merchants and vendors to make change for paper money and one solution, approved by the post office, was to use US postage stamps as currency.

### Scope:

This presentation takes look at three different forms stamps were used in place of coins. Specifically Encased Postage, Postage Currency, and Postage Stamp Envelopes.

### Organization:

Needless to say paper stamps did not have the life span of coinage and today all three methods shown here are very difficult to find. The exhibit is organized in the three components that comprise the subject matter:

- *Encased Postage showing stamp values of 1c, 3c, 5c, 10c, and 12c*
- *Postage Stamp Envelopes period stamps that were used to make up the value depicted on envelope include 1c, 3c, 5c, 10c, 12c, and 30c*
- *Postage Currency showing all of the design types including both perforated and imperforated examples*

Stamps used as currency are from the 1861-63 definitives issued during the Civil War  
Shown in this exhibit include the 1c, 3c, 5c, 10c, 12c, and 30c values



Scott 63



Scott 63



Scott 76



Scott 68



Scott 69



Scott 71

## *Encased Postage*

**John Gault was an American inventor who came up with the idea of encasing United States postage stamps in a "coin" made of brass and mica. His idea filled a need due to a shortage of coins during the Civil War.**

**The Scott catalog lists over 30 different businesses that used encased postage coins custom made by Gault. The businesses that used encased postage were located in Northern cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, (and a couple others), and were good only for merchandise in their store. Each business used the reverse for advertising while the front had the value of the coin by use of a stamp.**



**1c Blue Franklin  
"Ayers Sarsaparilla - To purify the Blood"  
(Scott EP13)**



*Slightly enlarged photo of reverse showing the business advertisement*

## Encased Postage

The 3c rose Washington stamp



"Burnetts Cocaine Kalliston - Toilet Sets &c &c"  
(Scott EP45)



"Take Ayer's Pills"  
(Scott EP9)

***Encased Postage***

**The 5c brown Jefferson stamp**



**"Tremont House Chicago – Gage Brothers & Drake"  
(Scott EP90)**



*Slightly enlarged photo of reverse*

***Encased Postage***

**The 10c green Washington stamp**



***"Irving House New York - Hunt & Nash Propt."  
(Scott EPI 09a - Ribbed Frame)***



*Slightly enlarged photo of reverse*

## *Encased Postage*

**The 12c black Washington stamp**



**"J. Gault – Pat Aug 12, 1862"  
(Scott EP98)**



*Slightly enlarged photo of reverse*

## ***Postage Stamp Envelopes***

Postage Stamp Envelopes, or Civil War Stamp Envelopes, came about as a way to organize stamps that were being used as currency, and also as an effort to keep stamps in reasonably good condition. At that time postage stamps were shoved in pockets and purses and the wear and tear would render them unsuitable for postage, the very reason stamps were accepted as currency.

Each envelope shows the value on the front of the stamps contained within. Some envelopes were printed with business advertisements while others are generic. The most common value is .25 cents.

The next six pages contain seven different Postage Stamp Envelopes, five of which are exhibited with stamps that would have been used to make up the value shown on the front.

*Oyster Bay House with \$.25 cents in stamps  
Issued by: Oyster Bay House*



**OYSTER BAY HOUSE,  
533 Broadway,  
25 cents.  
United States Stamps.**

**THERE ARE ONLY 2 TO 4 KNOWN EXAMPLES OF THIS ENVELOPE**

## *Postage Stamp Envelopes*

*50 Cents Blue Eagle  
Issued by: J. Leach Nassau St. New York*



*Blue "Eagle and U.S."  
50 cents.  
Postage Stamps.*

**Contains one \$.30, six \$.3, and two \$.1 cent stamps = \$.50 cents monetary value**



## *Postage Stamp Envelopes*

*"30" Blue in White Diamond  
Issued by: J. Leach Nassau St. New York*



*"Postage Stamps"  
"U. 30 S."  
"J. Leach 86 Nassau St. N.Y. Stationery, Cheap."*

**Contains one \$0.30 stamp = \$0.30 cents envelope value**

## ***Postage Stamp Envelopes***

***"25 Cents" Black Eagle and ornate "STAMPS"  
Issued by: Unknown***



***"U.S. POSTAGE"  
"25 Cents"  
"STAMPS"***

***One \$.12, four \$.3, and one \$.1cent stamp make up the \$.25 cents envelope value***

***Postage Stamp Envelopes***



***"U.S. Postage Stamps 25 Cts"  
T.R. Dawley Stationer and Printer***



***"U.S. 50 POSTAGE STAMPS"  
H. Smith Envelope Manufacturer***

## *Postage Stamp Envelopes*

Here is the final example of the Postage Stamp Envelopes section of the exhibit. This red envelope is by the J. Leach company and the \$.75 cents value is the highest of the exhibit.



**"POSTAGE STAMPS"**

**"U. 75 S."**

**"J. LEACH 86 NASSAU ST. N.Y. STATIONERY, CHEAP."**

## *Postage Currency*

Unlike real stamps used for encased postage and postage stamp envelopes the third method of stamps as currency are not actually real stamps, they just look like them. That's because they were printed using the designs of the 5c green Jefferson and the 10c brown Washington.

Appropriately named *Postage Currency* there are only four denominations: 5 cents, 10 cents, 25 cents, and 50 cents. All four values are exhibited here. Additionally both green and brown varieties are shown, as well as examples of imperforate and perforated notes.



**The 5c brown Bust of Jefferson (Scott PCS)**

***Postage Currency***

**10 Cents**



**The 10c green Bust of Washington (Scott PC14)**

## *Postage Currency*

**25 Cents**



**The 25c brown Bust of Jefferson (Scott PC11)**

## *Postage Currency*

**50 Cents**



**The 50c green Bust of Washington (Scott PC12)**

### *References*

*The Standard Catalogue of Encased Postage Stamps*  
By Michael J. Hodder and Q. David Bowers – 1989

*Civil War Stamp Envelopes – The Issuers & Their Times*  
By Fred L. Reed III – 2013

*Scott Specialized Catalogue of United Stamps & Covers*  
By Scott Publishing Co. - 2023