

# THE 1928 U.S. BEACON AIRMAIL

A STUDY OF ONE OF AMERICA'S MOST IMPORTANT AIRMAIL STAMPS

AEROPHILATELY 2014

BELLEFONTE, PA

SEPTEMBER 12-14, 2014



**Espécimen (1926-1931 style)**  
Overprinted U.P.U. specimen stamp from the Portuguese colonial archives. This is one of only two surviving Beacon U.P.U. specimens. (ex-Bizé)

This exhibit is a study in how one of the most popular and important stamps in modern United States postal history, the 5¢ Beacon Airmail stamp of 1928, was produced and used. Hoping to promote the growing airmail service, on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1928 the U.S. Post Office Department drastically reduced the airmail rate from 10¢ to 5¢ for the first ounce. To draw attention to the new rate it was decided that a bi-color stamp was in order. The first die proofs of the new stamp were approved on June 19<sup>th</sup> and the final stamp issued on July 25<sup>th</sup>. The design by A.R. Meissner of the U.S. B.E.P. is based upon a composite photograph of airmail beacon towers in Nebraska and Wyoming, representing the commitment of the country to trans-continental airmail service.

Although the exhibit may contain more first day uses than usually seen in a Traditional Exhibit, it should not be viewed as a FDC exhibit and *while rates and routes are discussed when appropriate, this is not an in-depth study of such* — it is a look at how this wonderful stamp was produced and used from its' issue until the end of the 5¢ domestic rate. ■

## Exhibit Notes

### Production

The exhibit starts with the June 19, 1928 official Post Office Department announcement of the upcoming Beacon issue. While these announcements are common for stamps issued after the Beacon, *this is one of only two examples outside of institutional archives seen by this Exhibitor in over fifteen years of research.*

A large die proof (ex-Matthews, ex-Goodkind) follows with the signature of Postmaster General Harry S. New and initialed by Michael L. Eidsness, the Superintendent of the Division of Stamps. *This is one of only nine documented large die proofs in private hands.*

Due to an interpretation by Goodkind in his monograph, it is a misconception that there were three distinct printings of the Beacon. Instead there are three "groups" of plates that were used throughout the continual printing process. These groups are loosely related plates based upon marginal mark-

ings — ranging from the addition of the word "TOP" to both frame and vignette plates — to Siderographer and Plate Finisher initials — to registration markings.

The chapter continues with the examination of problems that occurred during production. First, problems that were common among all stamp production of the time are shown. Foreign objects on the printing plates, plate scratches, excess inking, improper plate wiping, perforation inconsistencies and pre-perforating paper-folds are displayed.

Problems that were challenges to the Beacon are examined next. The most widely known of these occurred due to inaccurate vignette registration. The frame was printed first and the resulting mis-registration produced "fast & slow" as well as "high & low" flying planes.

Other problems include plate wear that resulted in the "Open Door" and "Worn Tower" varieties, as well as wear that occurred due to the increased acidity of the red ink.

Examples on the so-called "Special Paper" are described and shown. This aspect of production is usually overlooked by Beacon specialists. The printing of Beacons on this paper, that had been used for booklet panes until 1926, resulted in Beacons that were noticeably wider than those produced on "normal" paper.

A highlight of the Production chapter is a

scarce UPU Specimen of the Beacon (ex-Bizé). Only two surviving specimens are known, including the one shown here from the Portuguese Colonial archives — originally from Angola or Mozambique.

Concluding the chapter is the **unique Posthumous Hybrid large die proof** (ex-FDR, ex-Bizé). Created for President Franklin Roosevelt in 1933, it consists of a die proof trimmed to size and mounted on a die-sunk card.

### Early Use

The chapter begins with the **Earliest Documented Use** of the Beacon (ex-Berkun). It is one of eight surviving and documented

### Special Items of Interest

- FDR Posthumous Large Die Proof (Unique)
- U.P.U. Specimen (1 of 2 documented)
- Large Die Proof (1 of 9 documented)
- Pre-Date / Earliest Documented Use (1 of 8 documented)
- First Day Use with 11 Beacons (2<sup>nd</sup> largest first day use)
- Insured Use (1 of 2 documented)
- Beacon uses originating from Tahiti, Hong Kong and Papua

## Exhibit Plan

1. Production
2. Early Use
3. Domestic Use
4. Foreign Use
5. End of the Beacon



(Continued from page 1)

covers prepared the day before its release by Denver stamp dealer Maitland Milliken.

Continuing the exhibit is the second-largest documented Beacon first-day use. Research by the 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 postal procedures that were in place. Included is an example of a difficult to find machine-cancelled first-day use from Washington, D.C.

The official first-day city for the Beacon was Washington D.C. on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1928 and only one cachet-

maker prepared a cover in advance specifically for the of the Beacon. This cachet prepared by Milton Mauch is shown in this exhibit.

A difficult form of first-day covers to find are uses from Unofficial Cities (UOs) and the exhibit displays several — including FDC 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. Uses from five of the six days from this period are known to exist, but there are no documented uses of the Beacon from Sunday July 30<sup>th</sup>.

Collectors took time to prepare



April 1930 use of the Beacon to the Federated Malay States.

covers to mark the rate change on August 1<sup>st</sup>, so there are many philatelic examples available, but it is a challenge to find commercial uses from this date—such as the one shown. A FDOR use from the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba is also a part of this chapter.

**Domestic Use**

The Domestic Use chapter starts with the largest use of Beacons the exhibitor has seen — 32 Beacons plus a 15c Map Stamp paid for a 34oz cover (*ex-Brett*) to be shipped by air from Florida to Michigan. Even though two of the Beacons are severely damaged, the extremely large and scarce rate-multiple required that it be included in the exhibit.

At the time of the Beacon's issuance, airmail stamps were only to be used to pay for airmail service — however a cover with Beacons being used to pay the Special Delivery fee before this order was rescinded is included in the exhibit. Registered letters are included with

examples of additional payment for increased indemnity.

Use of a penalty envelope is included in this chapter. While penalty envelopes could be used to pay the surface rate for official business, additional services such as airmail and special delivery, required additional postage.

A highlight of this chapter is the use of a December 1928 insured cover with a block of 20 Beacons. Insurance was historically only available for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> class mail, but it was available for airmail up to a value of \$100. *This is one of only two surviving documented Beacon uses on Insured Mail.*

Paquebot uses of the Beacon are difficult to find but the exhibit contains two; one from a ship docked in Havana enroute to Miami; and one from Australia to Ohio, via Honolulu. Later correspondence between the sender and recipient prove that the letter was posted at the port in Sydney. While not a true domestic use, they are included in this chapter.



One of Two Known Beacon Uses on Insured Mail.

December 1928 insured cover posted from Los Angeles to New York City with a block of 20 Beacons for a total franking of \$1.

**IS THIS A FIRST DAY COVER EXHIBIT ?**

Is this a first day cover exhibit ? Well, no — but it does include more First Day and First Day Of Rate covers than most traditional exhibits. While the day of issuance for any stamp is important, the USPOD's promotion of the airmail rate reduction make Beacon covers, both the first day of use and the first day of the 5¢ rate, more important than usual. For this reason the Exhibitor has included more of these covers than traditional exhibits usually display.

**Selected Bibliography**

Goodkind Henry M.; <i>The 5¢ Beacon Air Mail Stamp of 1928-1965.</i>	Kobersteen, Kent. J.; <i>Beacon Airmail Rates to Foreign Destinations; Via Airmail, 1992.</i>
Bize, David and Ken Lawrence; <i>The F.D.R. Die Proof of the 1928 Bicolor 5¢ Beacon Air Mail Stamp; The U.S. Specialist; June 2005, pg. 276.</i>	Silver, Philip, <i>U.S. The Beacon Air Mail Stamp of 1928 Revisited, Collector's Club Philatelist; Parts 1 &amp; 2, March-April 1983, May-June 1983.</i>
Kirker Joe; <i>U.S. Airmail Issues, 1918-1935: The UPU Specimens, Airpost Journal, January 2011 (Vol 80, No.1), pg. 10.</i>	Cleland, Wallace, <i>The 'Special Paper' Printings of 1928; The U.S. Specialist, September 2000, pg. 397.</i>

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

Several postmasters around the country authorized the precanceling of the Beacon during its 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 cover.

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

While development of Contract

Air Mail (CAM) routes is not a part of this exhibit, an examination of a dubious scheme some airlines used to increase their profits by sending postcards themselves to take advantage of the difference between the cost of sending the mail and what they were receiving for flying the mail is shown.

**Foreign Use**

Use of the Beacon to foreign destinations was primarily to pay for airmail service within the U.S. and letters to foreign destinations could receive airmail service within the U.S. — at a reduced rate of an additional 4¢ for the 1<sup>st</sup> ounce. A letter posted from the west coast could be sent via surface mail to France for 5¢/oz. Payment of an additional 4¢ provided airmail service to the Exchange Office before being placed on a steamer for surface transport to Europe.



**Pre-Date use from July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1928, the day before the Beacon was officially issued in Washington, D.C.**

This cover to LaPorte, Indiana is one of eight known uses of the Beacon before the issue date of July 25<sup>th</sup> — all 8 are from Denver on the 24<sup>th</sup>. (AFDCS: #1078) (ex-Berkun)

Some of the most interesting covers included in this chapter are uses to the Federated Malay States, the Dutch East Indies, and Burma — all uncommon destinations for the Beacon. Included is one of the

scarcest uses of the Beacon, only 5 covers are known to exist to the Belgian Congo.

Covers of foreign origin with (Continued on page 4)

# WHY INCLUDE THESE?

**Philatelic or not, some items deserve to be included regardless of their origin.**

Since the exhibit's inception there are two items in the exhibit that have tended to provoke a reaction from some viewers. Two 1930 covers posted from Papua — each with a Beacon and each paying a different internal surface/airmail rate — draws a reaction from some people as that they were prepared by noted New Jersey stamp dealer Albert C. Roessler (also known as A.C. Roe). Because of this they are considered philatelic uses and these viewers are of the opinion that they should not be included in an Exhibit.

Both covers used the Beacon to provide air service upon reaching the United States. The first cover posted from Port Moresby is franked with a 3d Papua adhesive paying the surface rate from Sydney to the U.S. The second cover from Samarai is also franked with a 3d Papua airmail stamp paying the internal airmail rate to Port Moresby. A second 3d stamp paid the surface rate to the U.S. via Brisbane and Sydney. As the Beacon only prepaid 5¢, both covers received handstamps indicating insufficient postage for airmail from Sydney.

Since these covers can be considered philatelic in nature, why display these examples? Why not find true commercial examples of these two rates? Well the answer is quite simple: There are only 15 covers in total for these two rates in existence — **and all were prepared by Roessler.** ■



If Roessler did not prepare these covers there would be no examples left to history of these rates -- and because of this, the Exhibitor believes that philatelic or not, they rightfully belong in the Exhibit.

*Although philatelic in nature, these covers are two of only fifteen known examples of this combination airmail service from Papua — all serviced by Roessler.*

# Almost a Complete Puzzle — Just One Missing Piece

There are two items in the exhibit whose existence is connected, but due to their respective roles in the Beacon's history, occupy different places in the exhibit — so the connection isn't obvious.

The first item has the second-largest number of Beacons used on a first day cover — eleven. The cover from the Philatelic Agency to noted Detroit cover servicer Ward Chapin contained his order of the new Beacon stamps. Unfortunately the details of the order are not known.

However it is known that Chapin prepared the second cover, a scarce example of Beacon used during the short period (July 25-31, 1928) of the Beacon's life when the 10¢ rate was in effect. This second cover addressed to the Postmaster in Louisville contained covers that Chapin wanted serviced in Louisville on August 1<sup>st</sup> — the first day of the new 5¢ rate.

The Exhibitor is still searching for one of these Chapin FDOR covers from Louisville to complete the puzzle. ■



The 2<sup>nd</sup>-largest number of Beacons used on the first day. Addressed to Chapin (above) and Chapin's cover to Louisville with FDOR covers for servicing.



(Continued from page 3)

mixed franking are another uncommon use of the Beacon. Senders from other countries would sometimes add a Beacon stamp to assure

airmail service upon arrival in the U.S. The scarcest of these uses are the two Beacon covers that were sent from Papua showing two different internal rates; surface and airmail — with the Beacon provid-

ing airmail service within the U.S. There are only a combined total of 15 examples of these two rates — not all have Beacons on them. Each of these covers were the creation of stamp dealer A.C. Roessler, *and while these uses are philatelic, without him there would no examples of this rate left to history.*

## End of the Beacon

Production of the Beacon was expensive and the P.O.D. replaced the Beacon with a smaller, single color stamp on February 10, 1930, but the Beacon was in use until the end of the 5¢ domestic airmail rate on July 5, 1932. ■



Large hybrid die proof on wove paper, mounted on die sunk card. Control number 333301 stamped on reverse and defaced in pencil. Noted in pencil on reverse "333179 Frame, 333331 Picture". (APEX: #138646) (ex-Franklin D. Roosevelt, ex-Bizé)

## WHAT'S NOT HERE...

### C11a — Vertical Imperforate Pair

Scott Editors have assigned a minor number (C11a) to a vertical imperforate pair. This unique vertical strip of 3 is believed to be printers' waste.

### Essay

There are no essays outside of the B.E.P. archives available for the Beacon. The design was

based upon the composite photograph shown in the exhibit, and a painted model exists in the B.E.P. archives.

### Blue Moon Variety

The "Blue Moon" variety is an elusive find for a Beacon collector. The exhibitor knows that the exhibit should have one, but unfortunately does not. ■