

Finding Treasures

To the delight of the Christmas seal collector.

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The collecting of Christmas seals in America began almost simultaneously with the issuance of the first Christmas seal in the U.S. by the Delaware Chapter of the American Red Cross in 1907. After all, what could be more collectable to philatelists than a colorful stamp-like creation, the use of which was intended for, among other things, affixing onto envelopes and packages?

The specialty within the stamp hobby of collecting Christmas seals dates back to over 100 years ago. In fact, the Christmas Seal and Charity Stamp Society (www.xmassealsociety.noadsfree.com) was founded as far back as 1931. This end of the hobby is much like any other: in seal collecting, one can pursue not only the seals themselves, but essays, proofs, plate and production varieties and, best of all, seals used on legitimate

commercial mail (not favor covers, like cacheted covers, but honest-to-goodness letter mail). It's the latter subject we will deal with in this installment of "Finding Treasures."

One will find it quite easy to locate postal covers with Christmas seals affixed, but placed nowhere near where the postage stamp is placed—these are easily found from all eras, including the earliest pre-1910 seals. These, of course, are collectable, but even the older ones are not very valuable. Most of the time, not much more than a few cents or, at most, a few dollars.

But there are some really special forms of covers with Christmas seals affixed and these are the ones that show the seal sitting there right next to the postage stamp(s) and with the postmark and/or cancel neatly tying *both* the stamp(s) and the seal(s) to the cover. This means a cover with a truly "postally-used" Christmas seal. Specialists

in the seal field are in continual pursuit of these kinds of covers.

What is surprising, though, is how truly rare such "tied to cover" seal uses are. We have a couple of friends who have pursued 1930s era U.S. Christmas seals for over two decades and they tell us that, for instance, with the 1931 seal, they have managed to find fewer than 30 "tied" uses over those 20 years. Now that's true rarity, friends!

But what is even more surprising is the fact that such "tied" uses are valuable, but not necessarily expensive. We have rarely seen any priced over \$50. Every now and then, a true beauty appears on the market—like a pristine copy of the 1907 seal tied to a colorful postcard—priced at more than \$100, but that's only occasionally. If you find seals tied to covers, keep them as a minor investment. You'll be glad. ✉