

Finding Treasures

Attics are full of “plain as day” items that look worthless until...

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At first glance, these covers are “plain janes,” as described by the author below. In actuality, they are important pieces of U.S. postal history—found in someone’s attic where such old envelopes had been stored for many years.

It is sadder to think of the “plain janes” that have been lost to philately over the years. By “plain janes” I mean postally-used covers that get tossed out of the places where they have been stored for decades because they look rather mundane to the finder—and after all, most finders are not philatelists.

The covers above are a good case in point. Aside from the fact that one of them is franked with a \$2.00 and a \$5.00 value from the 1938 Presidential Series, there is nothing especially attractive about them. They came from separate sources, but both of them were found in storage boxes kept in someone’s attic since the World War II era.

When the owners of the registered cover to Schenectady, New York, were contacted, they remarked that they had a neighbor who had thrown out hundreds of covers very similar in nature to the one shown here. When someone had

told that neighbor what a mistake they may have made, the owner of the Schenectady cover decided to search their own attic and basement. The result was a cache of covers, many of which were important pieces of mid-20th century postal history.

We can be thankful for such people. The Schenectady cover was eventually sold at auction for over \$450. What made it particularly valuable was the fact that it was franked with both a \$2.00 and a \$5.00 stamp, not just one or the other. Such a franking is considered rare by specialists in this form of postal history.

Take a look at the other cover—one that looks very common (a simple franking of three of the lowest values of the Presidential Series) at first glance. But look again!

Most people are familiar with the tiny south Pacific island of Pitcairn where, in the late 1700s, the *HMS Bounty* mutineers finally found a home. Their descendants can be found there today—for the island has been inhabited ever since then, and it

even has a post office. It’s always been difficult for people to send and receive mail to or from Pitcairn Island because its coast is so rocky and there is no true harbor. So outgoing mail in the 1940s was precariously placed on a motorboat that made it out to ships standing off the island by several hundred yards. Such mail was posted at sea and labeled with the “Paquebot” marking.

We have here a nice outgoing piece of mail addressed to Dexter, Maine, in the early days of 1940. The sender or his agent was able to frank the cover with U.S. stamps so it would be placed into the regular U.S. mails upon arrival on the West Coast.

The lesson for every philatelist reading this article is uncomplicated: Even though you, as a philatelist, know what you’re seeing when confronted with such material, it would pay you well to admonish your relatives and friends never to throw away old envelopes! ✉