

Finding Treasures

Black Jack covers are still being discovered after all these years.

Fred Schmitt



When I was a young stamp collector, I was intrigued by the covers used during the Civil War—and most of all, by the striking nature of the two-cent stamp of 1863 that bears the likeness of Andrew Jackson. I don't think there has ever been another United States stamp on which the face of an individual jumps right out at you like the "Black Jack." The nature of this stamp makes it fun to collect and, even here in the early 21st century, it can still be collected by folks with somewhat modest budgets.

Being in the business of buying and selling postal history—especially material from the U.S. in the 19th century—I often come across Black Jack uses sprinkled within the various lots I am offered. These are very "sale-able" covers—there's always a demand for them, and many of them are in the "less than

\$200" range. What this means, of course, is that a seller can always dispose of them for money, and the buyer can obtain them without breaking the bank account into pieces.

But one must be careful and discerning when encountering Black Jack covers. Many of them (most, actually) are really common—simple single-stamp frankings that pay the postage rate for which the stamp was intended: the two cents drop letter rate for letters mailed and picked up/delivered from within the same post office.

The most expensive Black Jack covers are those franking the spectacular kinds of mails: Union patriotic covers (especially Magnus), mixed frankings on covers going overseas, unusual corner cards (like the one on the flap of a cover shown above), ones on which the stamp has been obliterated by one of the better mid-19th century fancy cancellations, and covers bearing multiples (strips, blocks) of the stamp.

Every so often, however, one will find the odd and the unusual—examples of which are shown above—that are not particularly expensive, but fun to collect. There's always a market for these if you have or find some and wish to sell. In fact, I think a wonderful collection could be formed just by assembling a collection of these not-spectacular, but rather fun and intriguing uses.

For instance, take a look at the cover in the center, above. What did the sender mean when she (we assume) put the words, "Crazy Girl" at the top of the cover? And what does the big, thick name, "Myers," mean on the cover at lower left? And isn't that a neat socked-on-the-nose postmark on the cover at the upper left? None of those three covers is worth much more than \$100! ☒