

# America's Archives

Often enchanting stories of historic documents and artifacts (including sometimes ones that are postally related)—and how things that may have once seemed rather ordinary can turn out to be important treasures. On other occasions, they immediately become artifacts of history the minute they were created.

## Envelopes show off popular culture

Recently, we encountered a collector who had accumulated covers like the ones shown below by scouting around garage and estate sales. Though direct mail is still very much a form of advertising and promotion for all kinds of products, the true "golden age" of America's most popular products being promoted by featuring them on business envelopes was back in the 1880-1950 era.

Whenever you find yourself looking at a grouping of old mail, never think for a minute that any sort of unusual envelope (with or without its contents) is something ordinary. When in doubt, take a minute and ask an expert. The covers shown here were literally rescued from certain consignment to a trash can. Obviously, there can be "gold" in a common trash heap! "Popular culture" has to do with things human beings take for granted—items in ordinary daily use. Take a look...

Back in the 1950s, one could mail almost any kind of object. This drink coaster (below) from a tavern in Los Angeles was sent to someone with a block of 4 of the four-cent Lincoln definitive as franking. The 16 cents postage obviously overpaid the simple 4-cent letter rate, but it certainly did make for a pretty looking piece. Value: \$100 or more.



The cover shown below is a rare piece of American soda pop cultural history—and quite a find at that! Not only was the cover sent via airmail, but to a foreign destination. But the topper is that it's an advertising cover for the famous Nehi Beverage Company, one of the soda pop brands most popular with collectors. Value over \$100!



A mailing label from a shipment of bees—obviously damaged by the bees, themselves—not to mention honey stains. A unique item worth \$100.



Elaborate advertising actually began in the second half of the 19th century. Even when a stamp on an old cover looks awful, always check to see what else may turn up—like this interesting ad for trusses, braces, supporters and elastic stockings from the 1880s when the piece is unfolded.

At left is what is called a folded letter. In the mid-1800s, envelopes had not come into general use—so when a business or an individual wished to send an advertising circular, one would simply fold up the sheet of paper into a handy size, put the recipient's address on the outside, along

with a stamp, and place it into the mails. At the very least, it saved the cost of an envelope.

It also saved on postage—for a business could send an advertising circular weighing up to one full ounce for only a penny. This kind of postage rate greatly encouraged American entrepreneurs to use the United States mails to promote their products—and because of this low rate, the great tradition of direct marketing by mail was born and prospered.

Fred Schmitt's

## PERSPECTIVE

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Of course, back in the early part of the last century, stamp dealers from across the country fanned out to visit homes and farmsteads owned by families whose ancestors built them in the early 1800s. Some of America's most important old covers were found in this manner. In fact, the largest known group of covers of America's 1847 first issues came from such a property in New Orleans.

The situation can be somewhat similar today. The really old material (pre-1900) is largely gone—but correspondences and family papers and mail from the mid-20th century can still exist. Decent finds of World War I and II era covers are continually turning up.

Such discoveries, I should add, are made by people just like you. Not long ago, two college age young men stopped at a farm, their car having incurred a flat tire nearby. While chatting with the farmer, they learned the latter had some original V-Mail from World War II. One of the college boys being a stamp collector, he asked to see them—and before long, the cache of V-Mail was on the market and both the boy and the farmer were able to pocket a decent amount of cash. That was a serendipitous experience—and such instances happen all the time.

If it ever does with you, by all means, **Call us! You'll be glad you did.**