

The United Nations Precancel, 1952-1958

SYNOPSIS FOR: UNEXPO 2023

The only service stamp issued by the United Nations was created by overprinting the 1½¢ stamp of the First Issue. It was used to frank third-class bulk rate mailings promoting various UN publications from September 1952 until the rate changed on January 1, 1959. The United Nations reported eight mailings using these stamps.

Purpose

This exhibit explores all aspects of the UN Precancel, starting with the production and properties of the base stamp through properties and varieties of the overprint and its usage. The exhibit includes a section on the forgeries of the overprint as they are a significant part of this stamp's story.

Organization & Presentation

A comprehensive display of the UN Precancel stamp reflecting the way that most specialists collect and study it, does not fit neatly into either a Traditional or a Postal History exhibit. Indeed, a strict Traditional approach would yield little more than 16 pages. Likewise, an exhibit adhering to the rules for a Postal History exhibit would need little more.

This study of the UN Precancel incorporates aspects of both Traditional and Postal History exhibits, as well as traits from Illustrated Mail and Display type exhibits. In addition to the varieties of the overprint, specialists concentrate on the usage.

Since there was only the one rate, attention is paid to differentiating between the eight mailings reported by the UN. Over time, collectors were able to identify a number of different envelopes used and mapped them to the mailings. This exhibit identifies the envelopes using the cover Types designated by Ron Ginns [see References.] as expanded upon and updated by the exhibitor.

The exhibit is divided into the following sections:

I The Base Stamp

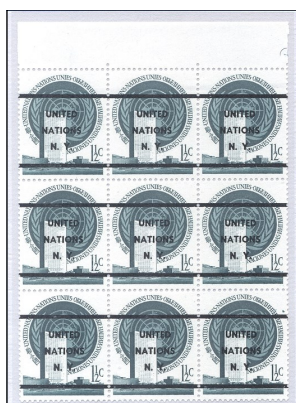
II The Overprint
III Forgeries
IV Usages/Mailings

Note that an understanding of the base stamp is essential to a study of the precancel. A thorough knowledge of the base stamp is needed to identify the numerous forgeries.

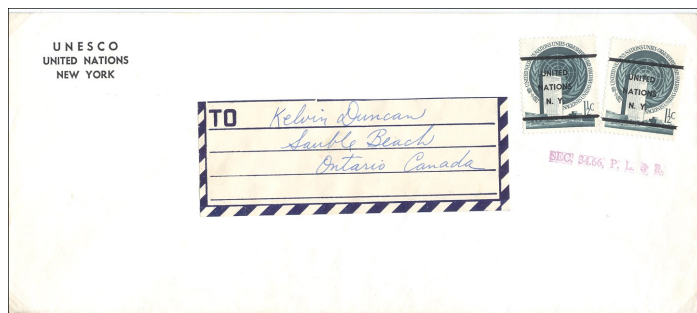
Challenge

500,000 stamps (10,000 panes) of the first printing of the 1½¢ First Issue stamp were overprinted by Dennison and Sons, Long Island City, New York (Queens). The UNPA reports that 361,700 were used with the remainder destroyed in 1964 or 1965. This is an extremely small production run for a modern utility stamp.

Postal laws and regulations forbade the sale or distribution of unused precanceled stamps to the public. Nevertheless, a small number, totaling no more than five or six panes made it into collector hands.



Largest Mint Block



One of three known covers to foreign destination

With virtually all of the stamps used singularly to frank third-class bulk mail (a.k.a. "junk" mail) few entire covers were saved. **Just over 600 covers are recorded in a census conducted since 1993 by this collector, yielding an approximate survival ratio of just 1 in 650.** A census of Pony Express covers reports about 250 surviving pieces giving an approximate ratio of 1 in 125 – more than 5 times higher!

The sale of the UN archives conducted in 2003 by Greg Manning contained no precancel material. All archival material related to the precancel is held by the UN at its philatelic museum in Geneva, Switzerland.



Largest Known Used Block (ex Gaines)

Highlights

Compiled over 25 years, this is without doubt the largest collection of the UN Precancel extant. This exhibit includes many significant items including:

- Original drawing of base stamp
- Color trials & Proof of Base stamp
- Largest recorded shifts (up, down, left) for overprint
- Largest known mint block in public hands
- Largest known used block
- Earliest reported usage
- Only recorded Type K2 cover

Research

Since 1993 this collector has conducted a census of the UN Precancel covers. This study has produced a number of significant discoveries, changed the mapping of covers to mailings, and greatly added to the knowledge of this material.

The Type I covers, which comprise almost 40% of the census, were mailed to people who provided a gummed address label in response to a promotion for the magazine *UNESCO Courier*. Information gathered by the census indicated that four different envelopes were used in this mailing, instead of the one commonly acknowledged at the time.

For many years the Type J covers were considered part of the 5th mailing in the belief that a couple of collectors sent the addressed Art Craft cacheted envelopes in lieu of a mailing label.

These have now been shown to be part of a special official mailing to college administrators and others within the scope of UNESCO. Recent finds have shown that the Types G and H covers were used in two separate mailings, not the same mailing as believed for so long.

References

United Nation Philately

Arleigh Gaines, ed.

1980 R&D Publications, Inc., w/supplements (3 times per year until October 1997)

A massive UN catalog in loose-leaf format. Some information is out of date. (Information in the exhibit write-up represents the exhibitor's research and supersedes this catalog.) However, this catalog provides a good summary of the cover Types as defined by Arleigh Gaines (a.k.a. Ron Ginns). The pages pertaining to the Precancel are: 6.3, 6-C through 6-F.

The Journal of the United Nations Philatelists
UNP, Inc. (Issued 6 times per year)

Articles of interest are:

“New Discoveries and Mysteries for UN Tenth Anniversary Precancel Covers” by Anthony F. Dewey. August 2004: Volume 28, No. 4, Whole No. 161, pp. 4-9.

“New Varieties of Type I Covers Discovered” by Anthony F. Dewey. June 1993. Volume 17, No. 3, Whole No. 94, pp. 30-35.

“The 1½¢ Precancel” [Part 3] by R.L. Ginns and Paul J. Kravits. March 1978: Volume 1, No. 4, Whole No. 4, pp. 8-11.

“The 1½¢ Precancel” [Part 2] by R.L. Ginns and Paul J. Kravits. October 1977: Volume 1, No. 2, Whole No. 2, pp. 7-10.

“The 1½¢ Precancel” [Part 1] by R.L. Ginns and Paul J. Kravits. August 1977: Volume 1, No. 1, Whole No. 1, pp. 8-12.