



U.S. in Focus

Rodney Juell

Crazy Rates

The various rates that have been applied to mail by the United States Post Office Department and U.S. Postal Service through the years are so numerous that they could fill volumes!

In fact, come to think if it, they have filled volumes! Undoubtedly, the two best and most useful rate books are those compiled by Henry W. Beecher and Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz: *U.S. Domestic Postal Rates, 1872-2011*, and *U.S. International Postal Rates, 1872-1996*. I highly recommend them to anyone who has even a passing interest in postal history. One could take almost any one of the rates listed in these books and use it to launch an interesting collection or exhibit.

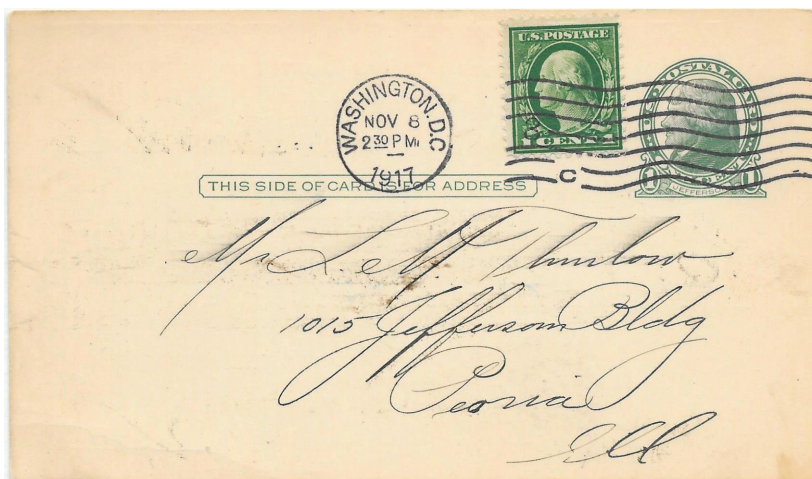
This month we will explore three 20th century domestic rates applied to postcards and postal cards that I call “crazy rates,” which I find particularly fascinating. One was driven by tax policy. The second was driven by a unique postal policy and doesn’t make much sense to me, and the third was driven by inflationary pressures.

However, let’s begin with a couple of basic definitions. Recall that a postal card is one issued by governmental authority, with the postage already affixed, by virtue of having been printed on the card. All one needs to do is fill it out and drop it in the mail. A postcard, on the other hand, is privately produced, with no postage affixed. One needs to add postage before mailing.

World War I was financed, in part, by a 1¢ tax on both postcards and postal cards, which was in effect from Nov. 2, 1917, until June 30, 1919. Though postal patrons paid 2¢ to mail a post card or postal card during this period,

half of it was a tax, not an increase in postage, although that distinction may have been lost on the public then and on many collectors today. The rate reverted to 1¢ on July 1, 1919. Figure 1 shows a 1¢ postal card mailed Nov. 8, 1917, to which the sender correctly added a 1¢ stamp. Figure 2 features a postcard sent in 1918 with only 1¢ in postage affixed. It was correctly charged 1¢ postage due. Figure 3 depicts a postcard sent at Christmas-time, 1917, properly paid with a 2¢ stamp.

Two distinguishable 2¢ postal cards featuring Thomas Jefferson were issued for the 2¢ “war tax”



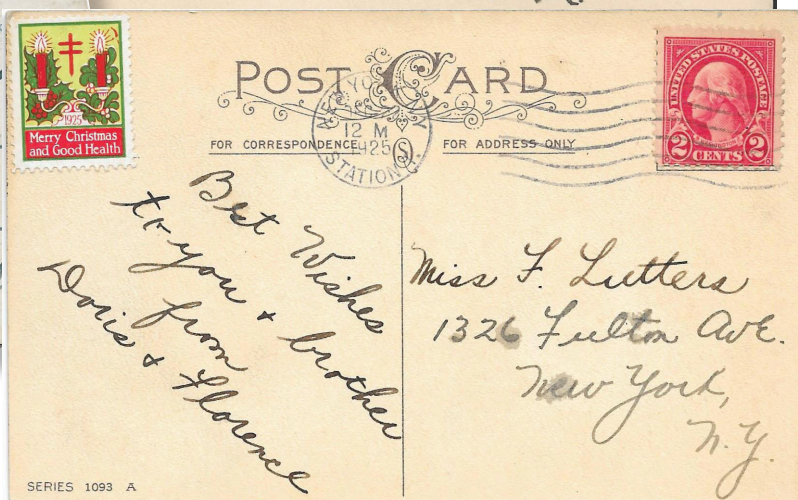
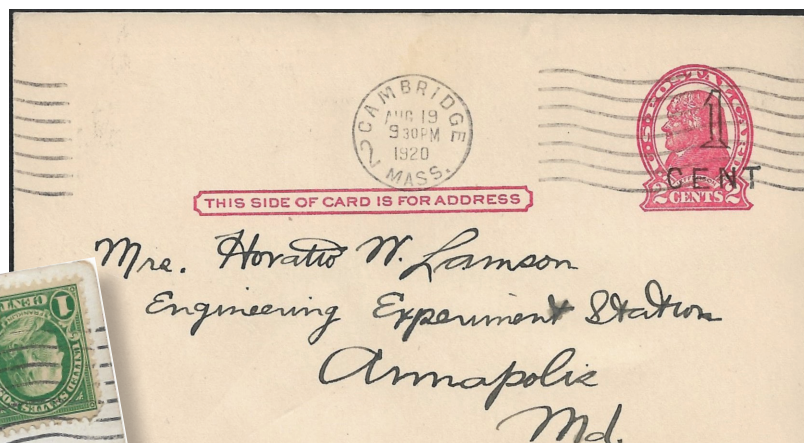
rate. The one shown in Figure 4 (Scott UX29) was issued on Oct. 22, 1917, and was used the following year on Aug. 18. The other postal card, shown in Figure 5 (Scott UX30), was issued on Jan. 23, 1918, and used Jan. 4, 1919. The most obvious difference between the two cards may be observed where Jefferson's "pony tail" (aka "queue") touches the frame-line of the oval, just to the left of the "D" in "CARD." These details are shown enlarged in both images.

When the rate reverted to 1¢ on July 1, 1919, the post office had on hand approximately 160 million of these 2¢ Jefferson cards (both varieties). The demand for them was limited (they could be used as postal cards to foreign destinations), so they were revalued and sold for 1¢. An example of this value-lowering surcharge is shown in Figure 6.

Our next "crazy rate" was in effect from April 15, 1925, until June 30, 1928. During this period the rate for postcards (but not postal cards) was 2¢. Postal cards remained at 1¢. This was the only time in history when the rates for postal cards and postcards were not the same. The postcard shown in Figure 7 was mailed with only 1¢ in postage attached and was correctly assessed 1¢ postage due. The sender of the postcard pictured in Figure 8 correctly affixed a 2¢ stamp.

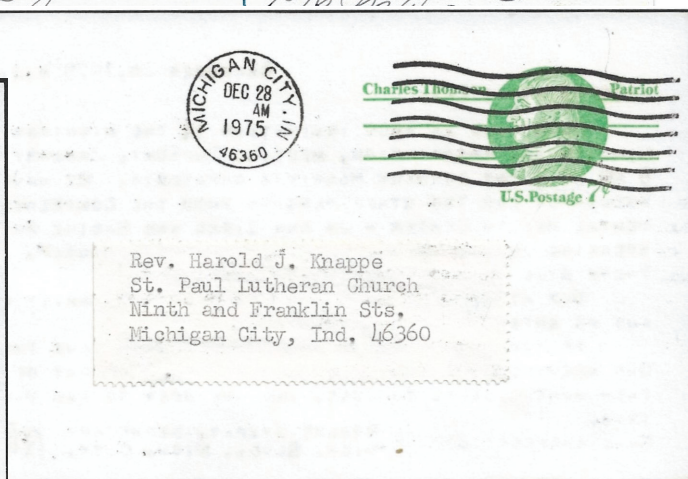
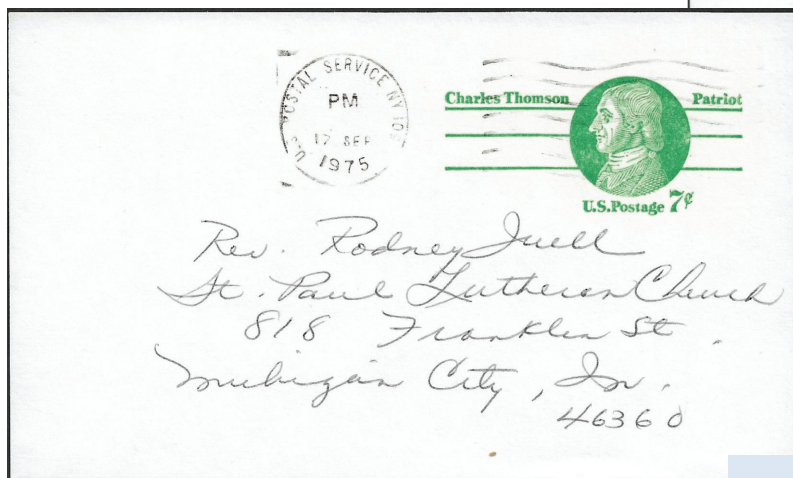
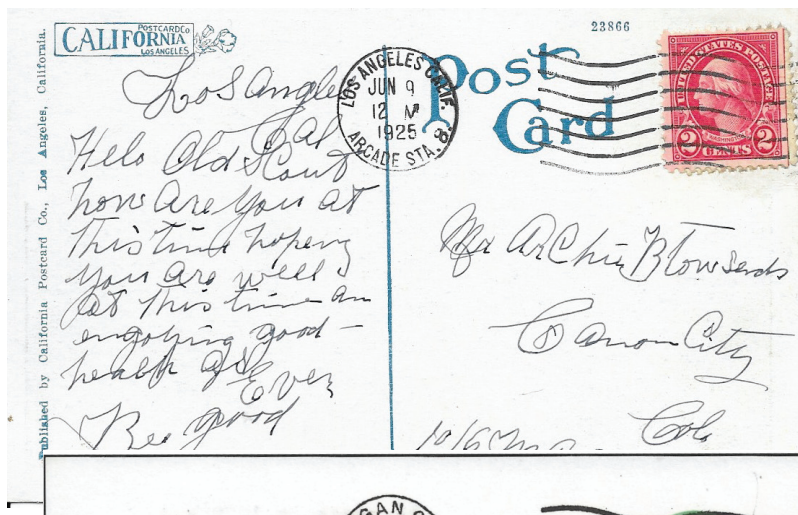
Our final "crazy rate" is the 7¢ rate for postal cards and postcards that was in effect only a short time, from Sept. 14, 1975, until Dec. 30 of that year. The 1970s were years of high inflation and the rate for postcards and postal cards was increased five times during the decade.

- Figure 4 (top). In effect for only about three and
 Figure 5 (above right). one-half months, the 7¢ rate was
 Figure 6 (right). the shortest-lived of those rates.
 Figure 7 (below). A postal card to meet
 Figure 8 (below right).



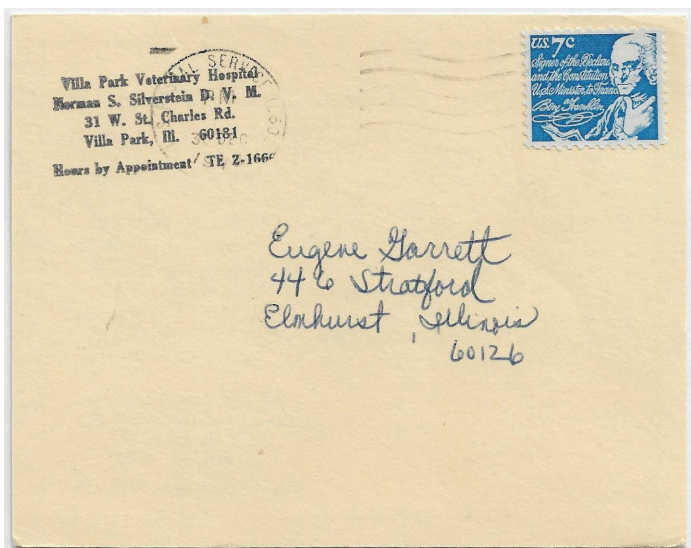
the rate was issued the day the rate went into effect, honoring Charles Thomson, who served as secretary to the Continental Congress. Figure 9 shows an example of this postal card mailed to a younger me on Sept. 16, just two days after the rate went into effect. (Could this be an "earliest known" use?) The example pictured in Figure 10 was sent to a colleague just two days before the end of the rate. There was a 7¢ stamp available to pay this rate, although it had been issued in 1972, and intended for a different purpose. Figure 12 shows this stamp, featuring Benjamin Franklin, used on a postcard on the last day of the rate.

Figure 9 (right).
Figure 10 (below).
Figure 11
(below right).
Figure 12 (bottom).



Collecting suggestion: find a rate that interests you and build a collection based on it. Your choices range from really easy to virtually impossible. The rates we have discussed this month probably fall somewhere in the middle between the two extremes.

Next month we will resume our more-or-less chronological overview of the 20th century as we turn our attention to the year 1915. I would enjoy hearing from you at rajuell2@gmail.com.





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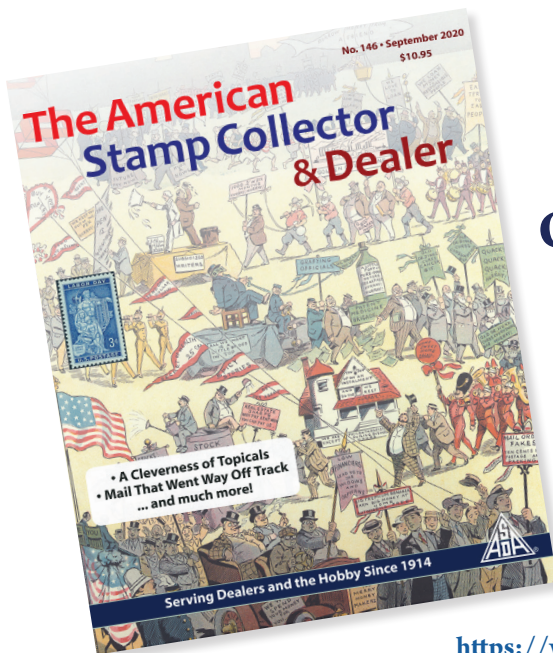
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