

Philatelic “Gifts” to Members of the 1897 Fifth Congress of the Universal Postal Union

Synopsis

This exhibit displays the array of special specimen stamps, envelopes, and postal cards issued in 1897 and given to “members” to celebrate the Fifth Congress of the Universal Postal Union (UPU). The Congress took place between May 5 and June 15, 1897 in Washington, D.C. Members were countries; and were represented at the Universal Postal Congress (UPC) by delegates, called Plenipotentiaries. Souvenir packets of “complimentary postage stamps and postal stationery” from the host postal administration – the United States Post Office Department (POD) – were sent to members and delegates. Records shows that 125 sets were prepared – no more, no fewer. No evidence of extras or remainders exist.

The UPU was founded in 1874, became a United Nations specialized agency in 1948, and is now the UN agency for the postal sector.

All 34 stamps, 53 envelopes, two wrappers, and four postal cards are presented. This includes 14 stamps of the 1895 regular issue, seven of the 1895 to 1897 postage due issue, and 12 of the 1895 to 1897 newspaper and periodical issue. The postal stationery set includes the 53 envelopes (not 57 as listed in earlier publications) in four denominations, five paper colors, and numerous sizes; 2 manila wrappers; two postal cards; and 2 paid reply postal cards. Please see the amber-manila paper note.

The outline of the exhibit follows:

- The Congress & Its Post Office Branch
- 1897 UPC “Gifts”: Stamps, Postal Stationery, & the Box
- Timeline of Events
- UPC Overprints on “Ordinary” or Regular Stamps
 - Note on \$1 Perry Stamps
- UPC Overprints on Postage Due Stamps
- UPC Overprints on a Special Delivery Stamp
- UPC Overprints on Newspaper & Periodical Stamps
- UPC Overprints on Postal Stationery
 - Watermarks
 - Cutting Knives
 - Listing of UPC Stationery
 - Note on Amber-Manila Envelopes
- UPC One-Cent Envelopes
- UPC Two-Cents Envelopes
- UPC Four-Cents Envelopes
- UPC Five-Cents Envelopes
- UPC Postal & Paid Reply Cards
- UPC Overprint Variations
 - UPC Stamp Overprint Varieties
 - ✓ Tier I Variations
 - ✓ Tier II Variations
 - ✓ Combinations of Tiers I & II Variations
 - UPC Postal Stationery Overprint Varieties
 - ✓ Envelope Overprint Types A & B Examples
 - ✓ Overprint Plate Break Example
- Summary

Since the 125 sets were distributed worldwide to 60 plus countries, presumably to both governments and delegates, complete sets of stamps and envelopes are rather uncommon. Of particular interest is the cardboard box in which the postal stationery items were packaged. This box is (or rather is planned to be) displayed as an exterior attachment to the exhibit – understanding that the box is not officially part of exhibit judging.

The conditions of stamps and postal stationery varies – particularly shades of various envelope colors. To the best of the exhibitor’s efforts and using the *Stanley Gibbons, Inc. U. S. Envelope Paper Guide* and the United Postal Stationery Society publications, the envelopes are thought to be as described.

Of particular note in the exhibit are the variations of overprints found on the “UNIVERSAL POSTAL CONGRESS” overprint on both stamps and envelopes. Most of these have not been reported previously in print. Detailed study of the nuances of these items is difficult because no multiples exist and few copies are available for study.