

A Synopsis: The World's Capital – The United Nations Headquarters



TREATMENT

Purpose:

This Display Class exhibit is a historical study of the development of the United Nations (UN) Headquarters as told through the use of philatelic and non-philatelic material germane to the subject.

Organization:

The exhibit is organized in a chronological fashion starting with a look Turtle Bay, the area of East Manhattan that would eventually become the permanent location for the United Nations Headquarters. The exhibit then flows through the major activities associated with the founding of the UN starting in San Francisco where the topic of establishing a permanent headquarters was already being mulled by delegates and civic leaders. We then transition into the early days of the UN Organization with the General Assembly meetings in London and Paris. These meetings served as the genesis of the UN Headquarters search committees and planning commissions. We continue with a look at the early days of the UN in multiple temporary headquarters around New York City and the hardships of operating a world organization in such transient conditions.

The next chapters focus on the site selection activities where many dreams took flight with the development of elaborate invitations to make the Permanent Headquarters in many potential host cities, and the elaborate activities that led to the final select of New York City. The exhibit then transitions into the design and construction of the UN Headquarters and the grand cornerstone ceremony. We end with the opening of the UN complex, the grand celebrations that ensued, and the inaugural UN General Assembly meeting at the Permanent UN Headquarters in 1952.

Within each chapter, the main topics are discussed and relevant historical facts are woven into the fabric of the story line when they played a significant role in the Headquarters "story."

Exhibit Flow and Balance:

The exhibit is mounted on massive 24" x 36" pages to maximize the real estate available for presentation of the various philatelic elements (stamps, post cards, and covers) and non-philatelic elements (photographs, drawings, letters, brochures, tickets, and buttons) and to deliver a "museum quality" presentation of the material. The observer should plan to read the exhibit in a left to right fashion and from top to bottom for each page. Each topic and sub-topics are listed in the exhibit plan on the title page, and throughout the exhibit these topics and sub-topics are further distinguished with those titles and sub-titles. Discrete lines are used to further separate topics that share real estate on each page.

The use of both philatelic and non-philatelic material strengthens the visual appeal and in depth knowledge of the subject. Because some of the non-philatelic elements are large and often dark in appearance (such as press photographs), special emphasis has been given to the philatelic material through the use of a subtle brown border on all such philatelic items. The exhibit is currently comprised of 205 items, of which 140 (68 percent) reflect philatelic material.

IMPORTANCE

The United Nations is considered the preeminent international civil service organization worldwide. The United Nations Headquarters in New York City is actually considered international territory and the United Nations is the only such organization to issue and use its own postage stamps. The iconic Headquarters complex is an international architectural achievement and the postal history that documents its origins, construction, and operation are literally historical artifacts of this grand achievement of mankind.

KNOWLEDGE AND PERSONAL STUDY

This exhibit was first conceived in 2015 when I was fortunate to acquire some outstanding material from the estate of Richard "Dick" Powers. Dick had been a good friend and long time editor of our club publication, "The Journal of the United Nations Philatelists," and had written extensively on the subject of the United Nations. Given the acquisition of Dick's material, I began to assemble additional items, including ephemera, which would tell the definitive story of the making of the UN Headquarters. The exhibit represents a significant amount of personal study on the history of the UN organization, and the activities that led to the selection of the Permanent UN Headquarters its design, construction, and operation.

CONDITION and RARITY

This exhibit is comprised of arguably the largest single collection of UN service mail and historic ephemera documenting the creation of the Permanent UN Headquarters. This collector has spent nearly 40 years acquiring, studying, and documenting United Nations postal history. As an officer in the United Nations Philatelists (UNPI) for several decades, I have befriended and corresponded with almost all of the influential philatelists worldwide with interest in the United Nations. The material presented in this exhibit has been extraordinarily difficult to acquire as most of the early UN activities were not well documented, and very few specimens of early UN service mail or ephemera from the period exist and have actually survived.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Service cover from United Nations Conference Committee, San Francisco, CA (page 1)
- Hand-painted Cachet honoring the UN Conference - Dorothy Knapp 1945 (page 1)
- Service cover and Letter, Adlai Stevenson, United Nations General Assembly 1946 (page 1)
- Shuttle service mail UN Lake Success office (page 2)
- UN service cover bearing Long Island City meter impression (page 2)
- UN Hunter College service cover bearing Great Neck meter impression (page 2)
- Original topographic Map from Site Selection Committee (page 3)
- Original invitation from Black Hills Country (page 3)
- Incoming mail United Nations Site Selection Committee Boston, MA (page 4)
- Hand-painted Cachet honoring the FDR Hyde Park - Dorothy Knapp 1945 (page 4)
- Service mail from the French Delegation at the UNCIO (page 5)
- Original Invitations from the Chicago and Philadelphia Site Committees (page 5)
- Hand-painted Cachet honoring the FDR Citizen of the World - D. Knapp 1945 (page 5)
- Letter addressed to John D. Rockefeller, Esq., bearing German Ship cancel (page 6)
- US Congressional Record 1947 (page 6)
- Service cover from UN Planning Office (page 7)

- Remnant from original architectural drawing for the UN Secretariat ceiling plan (page 7)
- Early photographs from UN site demolition (page 8)
- Service badge worn by steel workers at UN construction site (page 8)
- Printers proof - Imperforate vertical pair showing the UN Building complex for 6c 1968 United Nations definitive issue (page 9)
- Artist drawing for Artcraft cachet commemorating the Chagall Window issue (page 10)
- Signature of President Truman on US "Towards United Nations" commemorative issue (page 11)
- Draft letter from Secretary-General, Trygve Lie, to Harry S. Truman, President of the United States, inviting him to attend the Cornerstone ceremony at the Permanent United Nations Headquarters (page 11)
- Free frank service cover from Anna Eleanor Roosevelt as United States Representative to the UN General Assembly (page 12)
- Service cover posted at the United Nations during the inaugural 7th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (page 12)

KEY REFERENCES

- Gaines, Arleigh, "United Nations Philately," United Nations Forerunner Section, 1983-1998.
- Mires, Charlene, "Capital of the World, the race to host the United Nations," NYU Press, 2013.
- South Dakota Historical Society, "South Dakota History," Volume 5, No.2, Spring 1975.
- Dudley, George, A., "A Workshop for Peace, Designing the United Nations Headquarters," The Architectural History Foundation and MIT Press, 1994.
- Le Corbusier, "UN Headquarters," Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1947.

