

# The United Nations Precancel, 1952-1958

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 U.N. publications from September 1952 until the rate changed on January 1, 1959.

## 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 on the major bulk mailings reported by the U.N. The exhibit includes a section on the forgeries of the overprint as they are a significant part of this stamp's story.

## Organization & Presentation

The exhibit is divided into the following sections:

- I The Base Stamp
- II The Precancel
- III Fakes & Forgeries
- IV The Mailings

Section I: To correctly identify authentic U.N. precancel stamps, a thorough understanding of the base stamp is necessary. While there were five printings of the 1½¢ stamp of the First Issue, only the first printing was used in creating the service stamp. Additionally, knowledge of the plate varieties of the base stamps is invaluable in plating the overprint.

Section II: The overprinted stamp is given a traditional treatment showing mint and used multiples, as well as showing varieties of the overprint.

Section III: The precancel was extensively forged and faked. Some estimates place the ratio of fake to authentic precancel stamps as high as 9 to 1. Section 3 gives details about separating the wheat from the chaff.

Section IV: The precancel stamp was created to frank 3rd-class bulk rate mailings promoting various U.N. publications. Since the publishers were not on U.N. property, the use of precancelled stamps facilitated the processing of those mailings.

This section fully covers all eight mailings reported by the U.N. There is a strong emphasis on the contents and the envelopes used in these mailings. Being 3rd-class bulk rate mail, very few pieces

received postal marks. The contents then become critical in dating when a cover was mailed. The stationary can also be mapped to specific mailings. Ron Ginns (a.k.a. Arleigh Gaines) assigned letters to each stationary type and those designations are used in this exhibit. Specialists attempt to collect each type and sub-type. All are shown in this exhibit.

## 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 precancelled stamps to the public. Nevertheless, a small number, totaling no more than five or six panes made it into collector hands.

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 recent census of Pony Express covers reports about 250 surviving pieces giving an approximate ratio of 1 in 125 – more than 5 times higher!

## Highlights

Compiled over 25 years, 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
- One of three known uses to a foreign destination
- Only recorded Type K2 cover

This exhibit uses pages with dimensions 11" by 11¼" as the majority of the material are business size envelopes. The Title Page, shown above, is shrunk down to fit on this 8½" by 11" page for distribution to the jury.