

The United States Postal Agency in Shanghai, China

By Patrick Crosby

There was a United States Postal Agency in Shanghai, China, from 1867 to 1922 which was used by U.S. businesses operating in China and by residents who wanted to contact friends and relatives in the U.S. A long ship journey across the Pacific Ocean was the main means of communication and beginning July 1, 1903, U.S. domestic postal rates were allowed for any mail in either direction between the U.S. Postal Agency in Shanghai and the United States or its possessions.

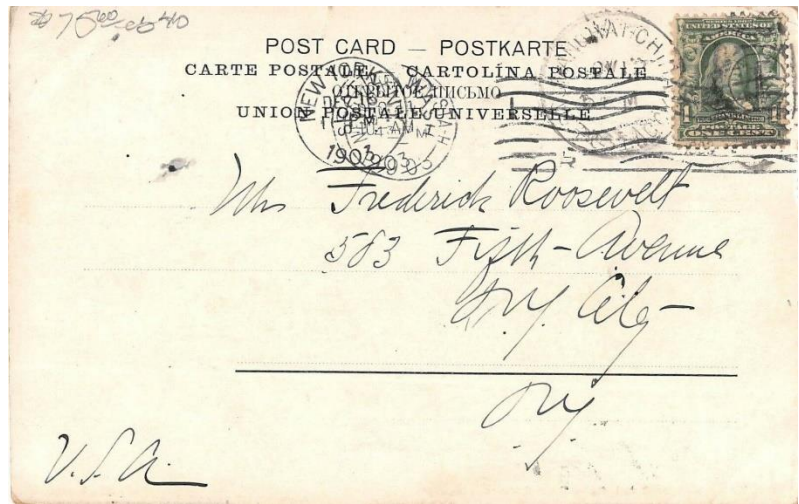
Great Britain was the first country to operate a postal agency in Shanghai and had the most business interests. In 1843 a British settlement was allowed by the Chinese government in Shanghai, which was a port city off the East China Sea/Pacific Ocean and an inlet of the Yangtze River which provides access to the interior of China. The British administered their area and were not subject to local laws. Following were the United States and France, and eventually up to 19 countries had their own “concession” areas in Shanghai, whose land remained under Chinese sovereignty. It is thought the various nations paid a lease fee for their settlements.



The featured postcard was mailed May 25, 1906 in Claremont, NH, to the Institute of St. Joseph in Shanghai. The 2¢ stamp pays the 1¢ U.S. domestic postcard rate and the card probably travelled via Seattle, WA or San Francisco, CA. The U.S. Postal Agency in Shanghai applied a handstamp reading “Shanghai, China U.S. Postal Agency Rec’d JUL 2/6”. Final delivery to another part of Shanghai is evidenced by a double ring handstamp reading “Shanghai Local Post JUL 2/06”. The private Shanghai Local Post was likely due the other 1¢ of the postage paid.

On the postcard’s view side is a scene at Hampton Beach, NH, casino area with trolley cars (Electric Railway) and a bandstand. The sender is part of the postcard craze of the time, and she writes that she would like to receive a similar kind of view and says, “I like them better than faces.” The stamp is folded over the top of the card, and this is probably a quirk of the collector, similar to the French very often placing the postage on their postcards on the view side.

Shown also is the address side of a postcard mailed from the U.S. Postal Agency in Shanghai November 12, 1903, to New York City with a Seattle, WA, and two New York, NY, postmarks at the 1¢ rate with the current 1¢ U.S. stamp.



From 1919 to 1922 the U.S. Postal Agency in Shanghai surcharged 16 different values of the then current Washington and Franklin stamps to be used only at the U.S. Postal Agency in Shanghai for mail to anywhere in the U.S. or its possessions. Each stamp was surcharged at twice the stamp's face value, which reflected its value in local currency. So, a 1¢ green stamp surcharged "Shanghai 2¢ China" paid the corresponding 1¢ U.S. domestic postcard rate. These stamps are listed in Scott's U.S. Specialized catalog as Sc. #K1 to K18.

I found the featured postcard at our July Greater Reno Stamp & Cover Show and paid \$10. I was surprised later when looking at the same period Shanghai items for sale on the internet that sellers were asking more like \$125 to \$350 per item! I look forward to finding out more about the U.S. settlement in Shanghai along with the Shanghai Local Post and Shanghai Municipality Local Post, which issued stamps and postal stationery. It is certainly a fascinating historical era beginning with the First Opium War (1839-1842) after which Shanghai became one of five Treaty Ports in China where foreign merchants could deal with anyone. The era continues into 1922 and the emergence of communism in China, the Japanese invasion of Shanghai in 1932, and by the end of 1941 all foreign settlements had been occupied by the Japanese.

References:

- Scott 2019 Specialized Catalog of United States Stamps and Covers. (Sidney, OH: Amos Media, 2018).
- Scott 1990 Standard Postage Stamp Catalog. (Sidney, OH; Scott Publishing Co., 1989), volume 4, Shanghai.
- Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz and Henry W. Beecher, U.S. Domestic Postal Rates, 1872-2011. (Bellefonte, PA: American Philatelic Society, 2011), p. 9. [Available from APS].
- Kenneth A. Wood, This Is Philately. (Albany, OR: Van Dahl Publications, 1982), esp. Treaty Ports.
- Rodney A. Juell, Lynn R. Batdorf, Steven J. Rod, eds., Encyclopedia of United States Stamps and Stamp Collecting, 2nd ed. (Katy, Texas: United States Stamp Society, 2016), p. 295.
- Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia. (R.R. Donnelley & Sons, 1986) esp. Shanghai and China.
- En.wikipedia.org; search Shanghai, Shanghai International Settlement.

Patrick Crosby is a member of the Nevada Stamp Study Society and collects U.S. postal cards, especially used, including first days; the 1886 Grant Letter Card (or Sheet); UC16, the first U.S. aerogram; and postal history on business or picture post cards.