

The Lexington-Concord Stamps of 1925

by Patrick Crosby

Postmaster General Harry Stewart New was not happy. The United States Congress had mandated the issuance of postage stamps for the 150th (sesquicentennial) anniversary of the Revolutionary War battles of Lexington-Concord. At the time a postmaster general was a powerful member of the U.S. President's cabinet. He was also in charge of his political party's patronage (deciding to whom the party would grant favors). Postmaster General New explained in a letter that "...the postal service can have too many varieties of postage stamps" and the Post Office Department "...discourages such legislation." Sounds like "Mind your own business!" to me. The Lexington-Concord stamps were only the third set of commemoratives issued in over three years, 9 stamps total.

The first battles in our Revolutionary War for independence from the British were in the Lexington and Concord area of Massachusetts and certainly deserved postal recognition. A set of three commemorative stamps was issued April 4, 1925, shown below.



The 1¢ green Washington at Cambridge (Sc. 617) shows George Washington taking command of the American volunteers on July 3, 1775, the place now referred to as the birthplace of the U.S. Army. However, the battles had already taken place on April 19, 1775. The stamp paid the 1¢ rate for postcards and third-class mail (printed matter) for 11 days, then not really needed. On April 15, 1925, the U.S. Post Office Department (with P.G. Harry New) dealt a blow to the picture postcard industry by doubling the domestic postcard rate to 2¢ (the current letter rate) while keeping the rate at 1¢ for government postal cards. This unexplained inequality lasted for over three years. Also on April 15, 1925, the third-class rate jumped to 1½¢. So, finding a single 1¢ stamp on cover in the first 11 days would be a score.

The 2¢ red "The Birth of Liberty" (Sc. 618) is from a mural by Henry Sandham of the Battle of Lexington (also on a 1975 10¢ U.S. bicentennial issue, Sc. 1563). The stamp paid the 2¢ domestic letter rate and, beginning April 15, 1925, the postcard rate. Until October 1, 1925, it also paid the 2¢ Universal Postal Union (UPU) card rate. Oddly, during this time the domestic and UPU international rates for postcards were the same.

The 5¢ blue "The Minute Man" (Sc. 619) shows a statue sculpted in 1874 by Daniel Chester French that is in Concord, MA. The minutemen were trained and outfitted colonial militia, composing about 25% of America's trained soldiers and among the first to fight in the American Revolutionary War. On the base of the monument and on the stamp is the first verse of the poem *Concord Hymn* by Ralph Waldo Emerson (Sc. 861 in the Famous Americans issue) with the famous patriotic line "the shot heard round the world". The stamp paid the 5¢ UPU international letter rate.

The three stamp designs' common features include on the sides a pair of muskets and a powder horn hanging from a strap. Very romantic, but it is reported that both the British and the Americans used previously prepared paper cartridges for loading their muskets because of speed—three to four rounds per minute could be fired as opposed to one round using a powder horn.

These attractive stamps are easy to find with good centering, and I recently paid \$6 from the APS StampStore for the lightly-hinged mint set shown above.

Uses of the 1¢ and 2¢ stamps on post cards.



The detached pair of 1¢ Sc. 617 has an Aurora, IL, May 13, 1925 Universal machine cancel.

The 2¢ Sc. 618 has an Excelsior, MN, July 6, 1925 duplex handstamp.

First day covers for all three denominations were prepared in Boston, Lexington, Cambridge, Concord and Concord Junction, all MA. My 2019 Scott Specialized values the 1¢, 2¢ and 5¢ first day covers, any town, respectively at \$30, \$40 and \$75 (with one minor exception). A collection of covers of the stamps' most common usages mentioned above could be supplemented with usages for other postal services like registry or special delivery, but these would be difficult to find. I'll be keeping an eye out for a single 1¢ stamp being used on a postcard to Canada or Mexico—while the U.S. domestic rate for postcards jumped to 2¢ on April 15, 1925, the treaty rates to these countries remained at 1¢ until October 1, 1925.



Shown above is a related pioneer postcard, "Greetings from Historic Battle Fields," produced by the American Souvenir Co. and postmarked in Boston on June 19, 1900. The multi-view side includes the Concord Minute Man, the Battle Bridge (Old North Bridge), the Lexington Soldiers Monument, and a couple of powder horns. The address side did not include the required UPU inscription "Post Card" (in any language) so it was treated as a letter. It was also oversized for international card rates. The 5¢ letter rate was required. Shortpaid 3¢, it was marked in Boston as the equivalent 15 French centimes due ("T 15" in circle, French is the official language of the UPU). In Germany the deficient amount was properly doubled which equaled 30 centimes and converts to 25 German pfennig, as marked by the "25" in blue crayon. Once reaching the addressed Bremen, the card was forwarded within Germany to Schlangenbad.

References:

- Rodney A. Jewell, Lynn R. Batdorf, Steven J. Rods, eds. Encyclopedia of United States Stamps and Stamp Collecting, 2nd ed. (Katy, Texas: United States Stamp Society, 2016) p.195.
- Scott 2019 Specialized Catalog of United States Stamps and Covers (Sidney, OH: Amos Media, 2018).
- Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz and Henry W. Beecher, U.S. Domestic Postal Rates, 1872-2011 (Bellefonte, PA: American Philatelic Society, 2011) [Available from APS].
- Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz and Henry W. Beecher, U.S. International Postal Rates, 1872-1996 (Portland, OR: CAMA Publishing Co. 1996) esp. pp.102, 103 and 142 [available from APS].
- [En.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org); search "Battles of Lexington and Concord" if you'd like to read about the history of the battles.

Patrick Crosby is a member of the Nevada Stamp Study Society and collects U.S. postal stationery, stamps, and postcards with an emphasis on postal history.