

Impromptu Postal History

New stamp issues can result in interesting items of postal history. While the Postal Service has made creating First Day Covers as easy as mailing a letter; discoveries are possible, both past and present.

Background

The 19th and Early 20th Century. During its early years, the U.S. Postal Service typically issued stamps nationwide on the first day of sale. No announcements were made when stamps went on sale, therefore examples postmarked on the first day of issue are often unknown, and an “Earliest Documented Use” of the stamp is sought. U.S. commemorative stamps were the first to be announced to the public and First Day Covers are known for most of these issues.

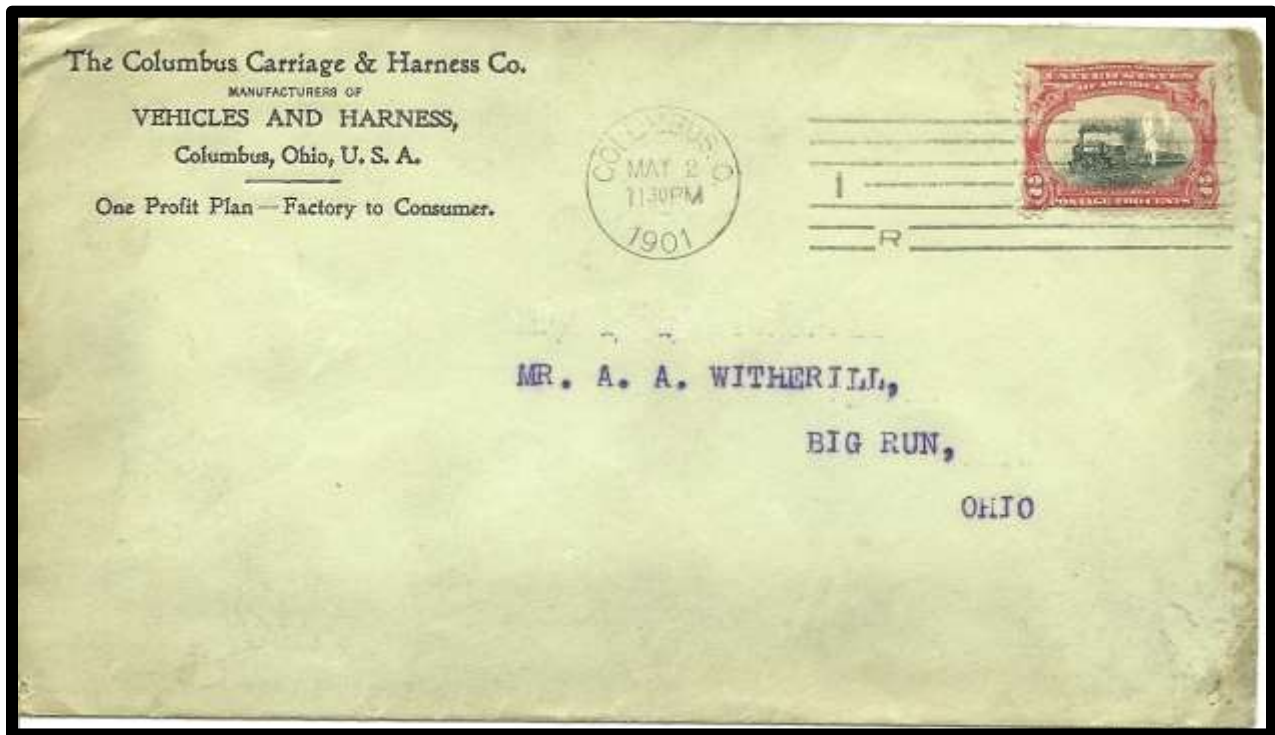
Post Office Philatelic Agency Established. With the establishment of the Philatelic Agency in 1921, an official First Day date and city were announced for new issues and the era of modern First Day Covers began. The first announcement was for the 11-cent stamp of the Fourth Bureau Series, issued in Fremont, Ohio, on October 4, 1922.

Timeline - 1922 to the Present.

- Up to 1977, individuals could send their envelopes to the official First Day City in advance of the First Day of Issue with payment for the stamps, which were affixed by postal employees, cancelled, and returned by mail to the customer.
- After 1977, collectors and dealers are given a 30-day grace period after the official release date to buy stamps, affix to covers, and send to the official city for a First Day cancel.
- Since 2007, stamps are put on sale nationwide on the First Day.

Another Category – Second Day Covers

Covers postmarked on the day after the official First Day of Issue (FDOI) are interesting for a variety of reasons, including constituting early commercial (non-philatelic) uses of the issue.



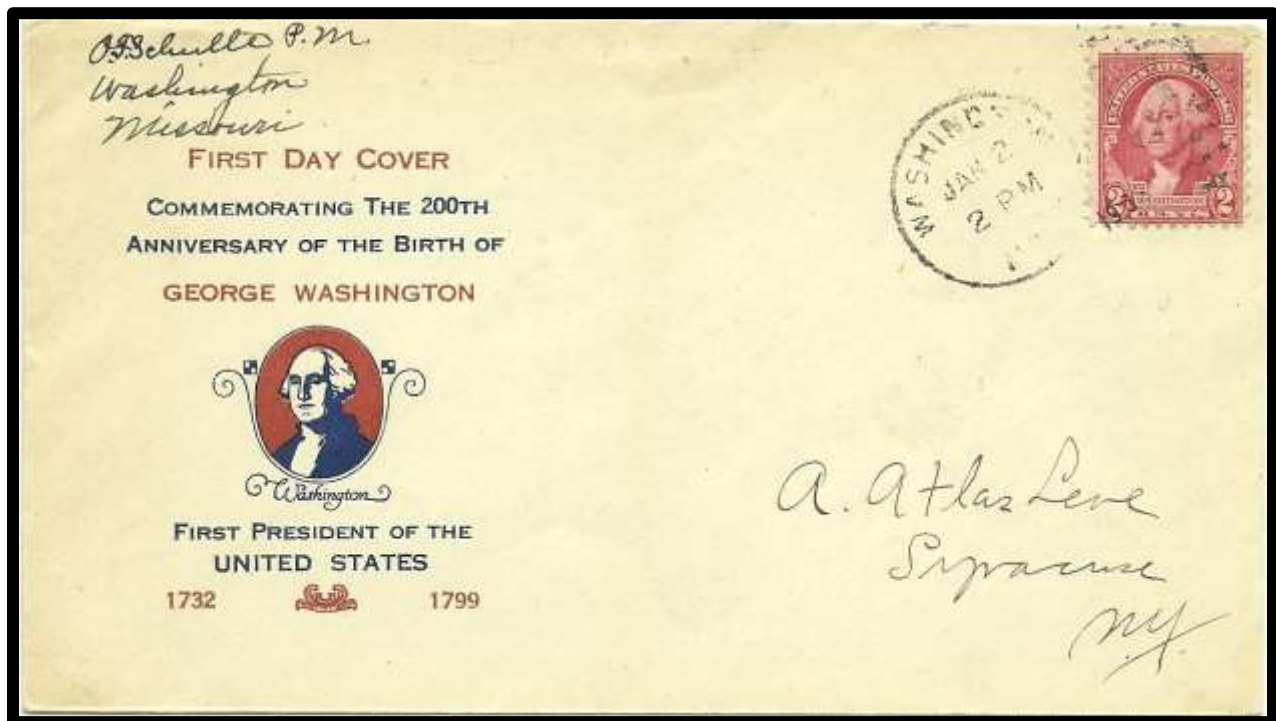
Scott No. 295 on cover, May 2, 1901, Columbus, Ohio, postmark

Scott No. 295 was issued May 1, 1901, to commemorate the Pan American Exposition, Buffalo, N.Y.; there was no official First Day City.

Second Day Covers Contribute to Stamp Observance

Americans always rise to the occasion when a celebration is called for, and new stamp issues are no exception. Often, celebrations for new stamp issues were planned to take place on the Second Day, when stamps were available nationwide.

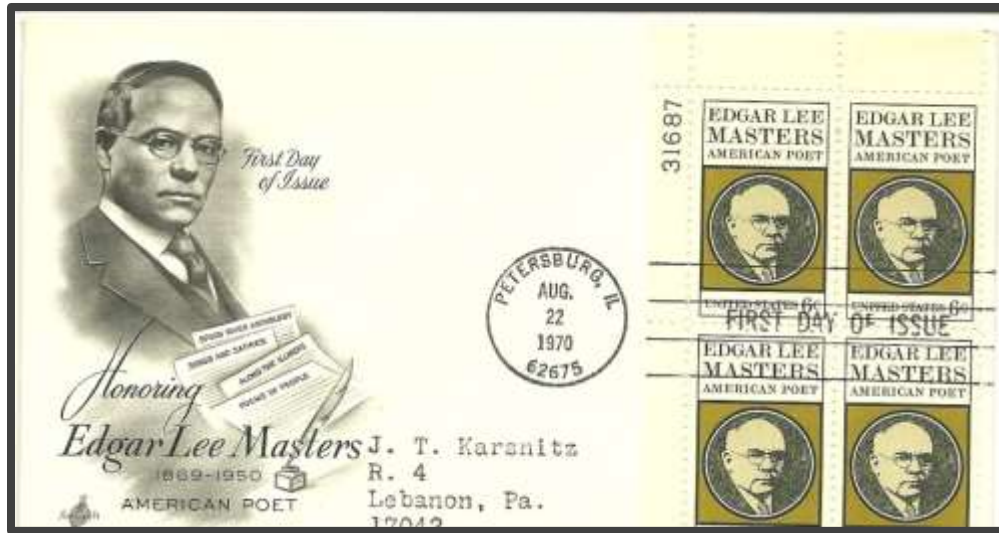
The bicentennial year of George Washington's birth was marked with a series of twelve stamps issued January 1, 1932, in Washington, D.C. It was, and still is, the largest U.S. commemorative issue ever.



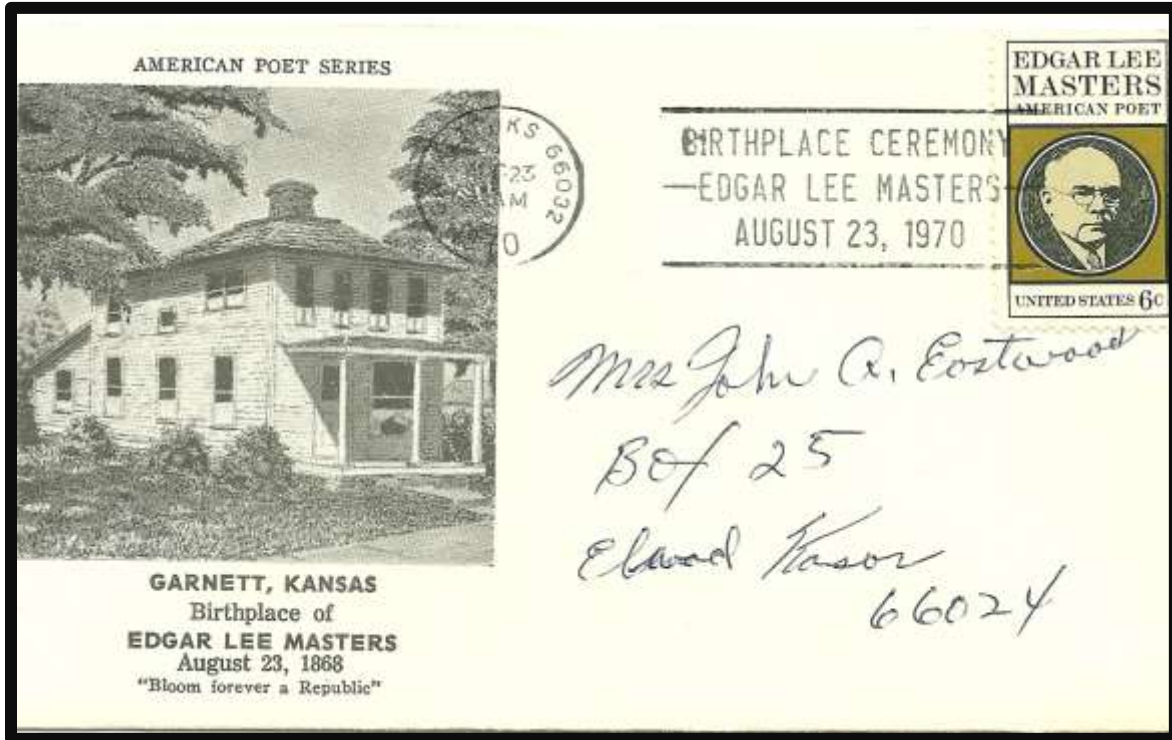
Scott No. 707 Second Day cover, Jan 2, 1932, Washington, Missouri, postmark

1932 was a year-long celebration of all aspects of Washington's life and career, with many commemorative covers being produced.

The Post Office chose August 22, 1970, for the release of the Edgar Lee Masters commemorative. The date was an odd choice since Masters was actually born on August 23rd. His birth date was celebrated with a Second Day ceremony at his birthplace of Garnett, Kansas.



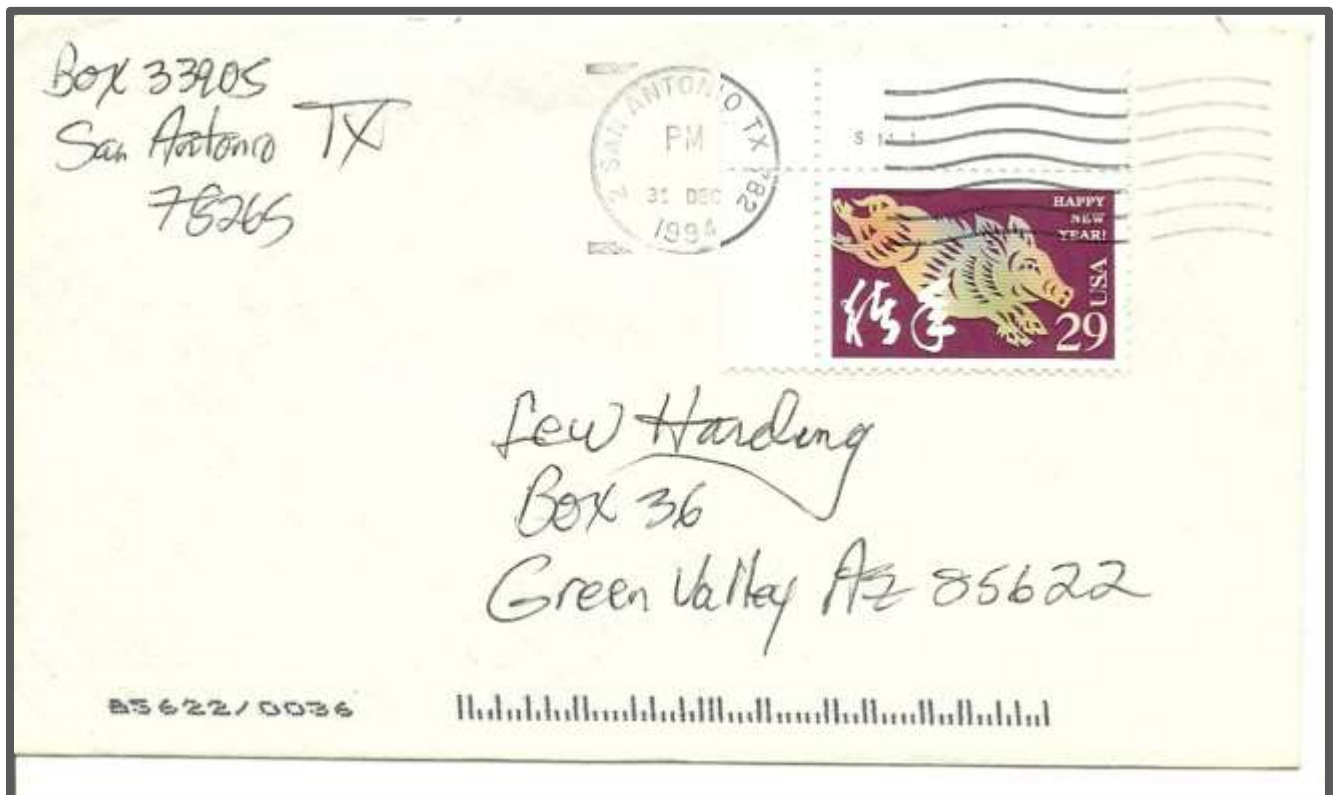
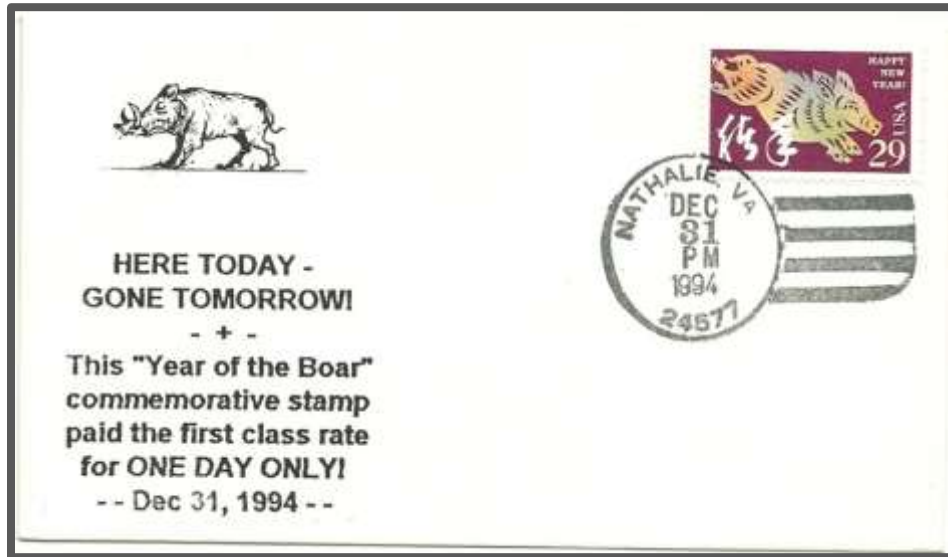
Scott No. 1405 First Day Cover



Scott No. 1405 Second Day Cover postmarked on Edgar Lee Masters' birth date, August 23rd, at his birthplace, Garnett, Kansas

Second Day Cover Makes Postal Rate History

The 29-cent "Year of the Boar" stamp, issued December 30, 1994, for the Chinese New Year, paid the first class rate for only one day, December 31st, before the rate increased on January 1, 1995.



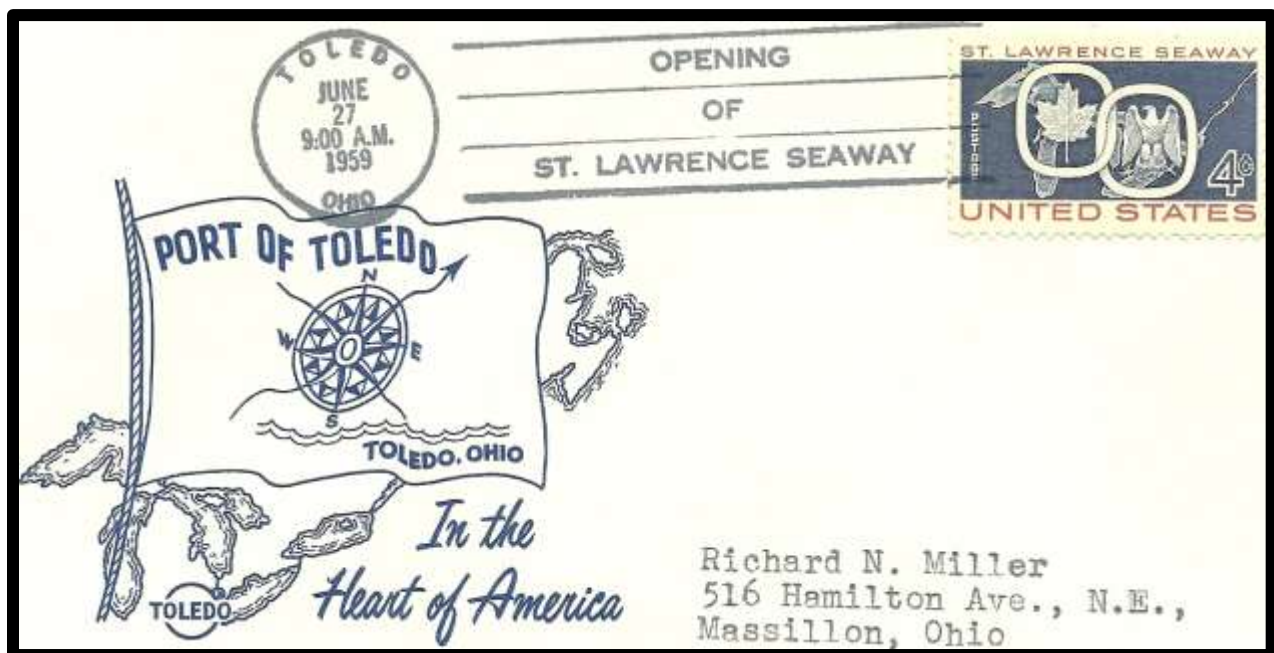
Scott No. 2876 Second Day Covers, philatelic and commercial usages

Second Day Cover Required by Post Office

For the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, the number of dignitaries present from Canada, Great Britain, and the United States did not permit a First Day ceremony to take place for the commemorative stamp Scott No. 1131, therefore, the Post Office authorized a “second day issue on a first day basis” in conjunction with the ceremony, which took place on the Second Day of issue. None of the dignitaries attended the Second Day ceremony. The official memo reads in part as follows:

“Authorization for a second-day issue, on a first-day basis, of the new St. Lawrence Seaway postage stamp has been given the Toledo Post Office by the Postmaster General’s office.

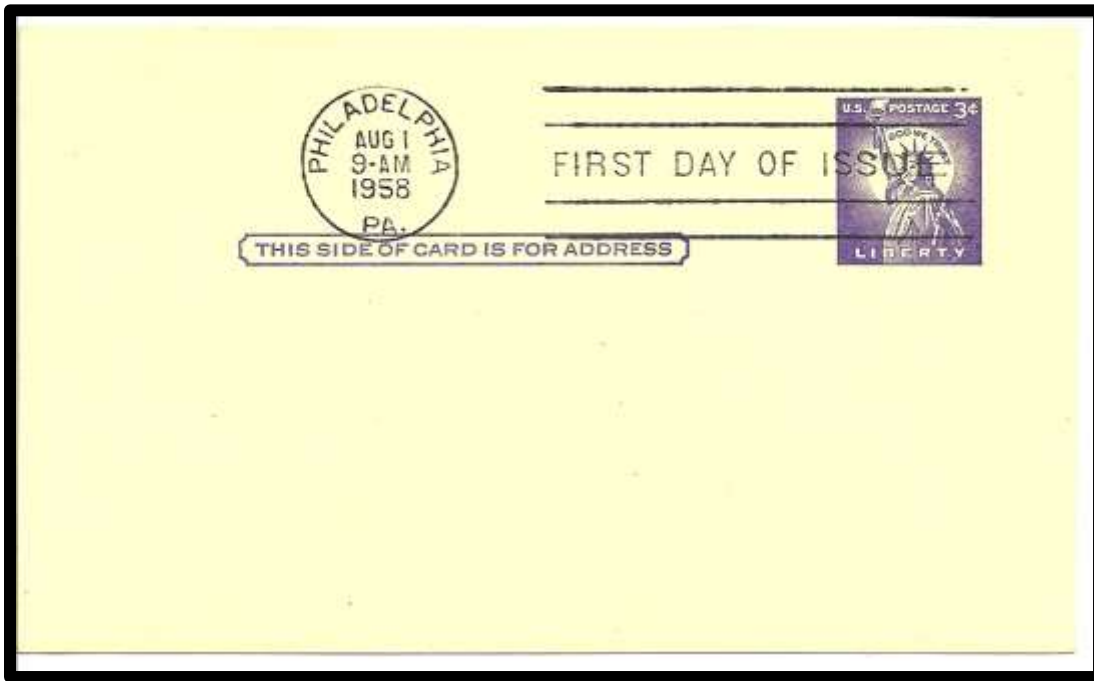
The second-day issue, on a first-day basis will include a special cachet for envelopes and a Toledo cancellation. ”



Scott No. 1131 Second Day Cover with U.S. Postal Service cachet, dated to reflect ceremony that took place on the Second Day, see explanation

Varieties Seen on First Day Covers

Varieties that occur in stamp production are sometimes used to create first day covers, see below.



Scott No. UX46a, "N God We Trust" on First Day Cover, above, and an enlarged image of an uncanceled UX46a indicium, below



1936 Christmas Seal on First and Second Day Covers

Beginning in 1936, First Day Covers for each Christmas Seal issue have been sent out from Santa Claus, Indiana. In the first year, though, the Santa Claus, Indiana, Postmaster would not allow seals to be affixed to the front of the envelope, and only five examples are known with the 1936 seal tied-on First Day Covers. Below is the front of a cover with seal affixed on back as prescribed by the Postmaster.



1936 Christmas Seal on First and Second Day Covers

Below is an example of a 1936 Christmas Seal tied on a Second Day Cover postmarked in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

