

Mourning Covers-Early Uses & Expansion Thru Early 20th Century

Purpose: The purpose of this exhibit is to trace the early use of mourning covers and their expanded use in Europe and beyond until the early 20th century. The exhibit, a general class in the postal history division, is organized on a chronological/geographical basis, with mourning covers from all parts of the world.

Background: Use of mourning covers dates back to the mid 1700s, but widespread use did not develop until the mid 1800s. They are usually readily identifiable by a black edge on the folded letter sheet or edge of the envelope. They were used to send death announcements and continued to be used during the mourning period by grieving family members, generally about a year. However, some widows used mourning envelopes and stationary for many years, sometimes the rest of their lives. Although still used in parts of Europe today, generally France, Germany & Austria, by the 1930s their popularity declined significantly, and their peak usage was approximately 1910. Initially, they were only used in Europe by royalty or upper class families. During the mid 1800s with the development of machines that could mass produce cheap envelopes along with dramatic reductions in postage rates, their use expanded rapidly in Europe and America. Eventually, their use spread to many parts of the world, usually taken there by emigrating Europeans and Americans. There are over 265 countries that have recorded examples of mourning covers, many of whom no longer exist. They come in many sizes and styles, some with narrow black edging and some with quite wide outlines. Recent scholarship has shown that the size of the black edging does not reflect the relationship to the deceased as much as country of origin. Often mourning covers contained black edged stationary or cards. Collecting mourning covers offers the collector a wide variety of items and are a marvelous link to our history and how our ancestors dealt with life's inevitable ending.

Exhibit Outline

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|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| I. European Uses | V. Pacific & Asian Uses |
| II. United States & Canadian | VI. African Uses |
| III. Canadian Uses | VII. Middle Eastern Uses |
| IV. Latin American & Caribbean Uses | VIII. Epilogue-Extremes |

***Featured Items are matted blue.**



Abraham Lincoln mourning cover used Sept. 25 (1865), New York City to Gainesville, New York. Postage paid with 1861 series rose three cent stamp, envelope style is Milgram AL 362. ex Jarrett

I. European Uses

Second Oldest Recorded Mourning Cover Carried Via a Formal Postal System



Amsterdam (November 11, 1776), Netherlands to Rotterdam, Netherlands. "6" crayon marking representing 6 stuiver postage rate, which was approximately 30 cents.

This cover is a very early example of a mourning letter, which consisted of a letter sheet which had a black edge printed on the outer sides. It was then folded and closed with a black wax seal which is virtually intact. The letter is written in Dutch and is relatively easy to read.

I. European Uses



Oval number cancel (XX5, first two numbers illegible) used in England proper. Franked with pair of 1841 series penny reds on bluish paper, Derby Nov. 9. 1849 backstamp. Letter was double rate.

By 1849 envelopes were being produced by machines and had become much more affordable to the general public. Also, the British Postal Reforms of 1840 had greatly reduced the postal rates.

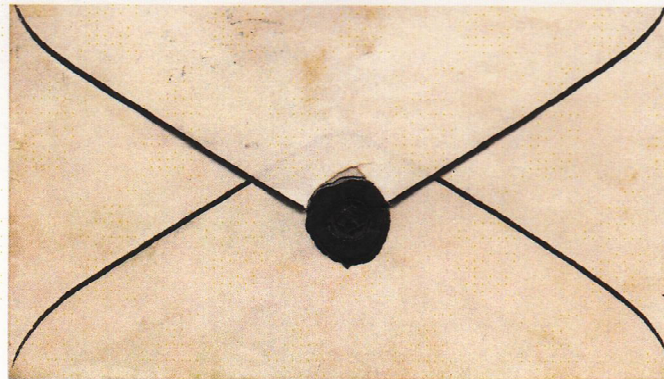


Charing Cross (an area of London), May 20, 1859 postmark to Boston, Massachusetts, United States, Boston Jun 3 (1859) 24 receiving mark. Letter was carried on a British Packet ship, unpaid, 24 cents due.

This letter, which went via Liverpool as indicated by the L A MY 21 marking, was a typical single rate transcontinental letter traveling by a British contract mail vessel, the Cunard Line "America".

II. United States Uses

1847 Series Five Cent Postmarked Louisville, Kentucky



Louisville, Kentucky, April 5 circa 1848 to Cincinnati, Ohio.
Postage rate for letter weighing $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce or less sent less than 300 miles was five cents so this letter was fully prepaid by the stamp.
This small cover with the mourning edging entirely on the back is an uncommon use, and a rare type of mourning cover.
This is also a fairly early use of an envelope rather than a folded letter sheet. A reduced scan of the reverse is shown just below the cover itself.



Boston Nov 17 (1868) to Fountenay, France, franked with 15 cents Lincoln 1866 series stamp. Red Boston exchange office mark indicates that the letter was full paid to destination.

The 15 cent 1866 series Lincoln stamp, printed with black ink, was the first mourning stamp printed in the world. It was mainly used on mail to France, other foreign destinations and to pay the registration fee rate in the US at that time. It was forwarded from Boston to New York and placed on the Cunard Line "Java". **Very few mourning covers are known franked with the Lincoln mourning stamp, no more than 10 to 15.**



Providence RI, Jan 16 (1868) red circular date stamp to Paris, France. Franked with 1861 series thirty cent stamp, tied with cork cross roads type killer. Red New York Jan. 18 (1868) with numeral 12 exchange office stamp indicating full payment of double rate. This letter was evidently heavy enough to require a double rate, and was carried on the Inman Line "City of Baltimore" which left New York on January 18, 1868, arriving at Liverpool on January 29. The letter was then sent across the English Channel to France and arrived in Paris Jan. 30.

III. Canadian Uses



Thornhill, C.W. (Ontario), March 23, 1866 to Indianapolis, Indiana, stamps tied with bulls eye cancels, Mar 28 receiving mark. Franked with two five cent 1859 series five cent stamps paying single rate to US. Mourning covers from Canada to US were regularly used during 1800s.



Montreal, C.E. (Quebec) Oct. 19, (18)65 PM to Buffalo, N.Y., postage paid with ten cent brown Prince Albert 1859 series stamp. This mourning cover has a cross hatched black border which was a design found on some Canadian mourning covers, occasionally on US covers and rarely in a handful of other countries.



Correos Guatemala, Aug. 26, 1899 via Puerto Barrios to Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland. Postage paid with ten centavos 1886 series stamp. Swiss receiving mark on back dated Sept. 16, 1899. Mourning covers use in Latin American countries became popular in the 1890s, and wide borders on squarish covers are often seen. This cover was sent via Puerto Barrios, which is a coastal port city on the Gulf of Honduras.



Cardenas, Matanzas (Cuba) Jan. 20, 1917 11 P.M. to Springfield, Mass. Received Feb. 2, 1917 marking ties stamp. Postage paid with 1914-15 series map of Cuba two centavos stamp. This mourning cover has an unusual top right corner angle mark, These are not common in Latin America and this cover was also sent by a commercial firm in Cardenas, Cuba.



Yokohama, Japan to Albany, New York, via San Francisco, Oct. 9, 1880, postage paid with pair of 1876 series five sen Japanese stamps. Stamps canceled with distinctive cork killer with serified "Y", along an English circular date stamp which was only used on outgoing mail to Western countries.

Mourning covers were not used by the Japanese and any example is rare.

There are fewer than 12 recorded copies of these postal markings.



Hong Kong, China which at the time was a British Colony to Cheltenham, England. Postmarked April 26, 1906. May 19th receiving mark on back.

Postage paid with four cent 1904 series stamp.

This almost square cover with medium black border was very similar to those used in Great Britain and other colonies.

VI. African Uses



Ladysmith, Natal to Broad Bottom Camp, St. Helena island, Nov. 15, 1901. Franked with one penny Orange Free State 1868-1900 series stamp overprinted "V.R.I. 1d" in 1900. This mourning letter was sent to a Boer prisoner of war being held on St. Helena Island, which was also the last exile locale of Napoleon. Boers, as European immigrants, adopted mourning cover use by the 1870s.



Pietermaritzburg, Natal to Harrismith, ORC (Orange River Colony), Oct. 29, 1901. Franked with one penny rose 1882 series stamp. Since the letter was addressed to a Boer, it went through military censoring, as indicated by the "PASSED CENSOR" purple oval hand stamp. Mourning covers with a Natal cancellation are very unusual.