

Chapter Eight: Special Delivery Stamp Issues

The Development of Special Delivery Service

While the Parcel Post stamps were in use for less than one year, the Special Delivery series had a much longer run, from 1885 until 1997. Special Delivery was a service that insured much faster mail delivery than provided by the standard delivery service. At first restricted solely to post offices in urban areas, Special Delivery was extended to all 4,000 U.S. post offices on October 1, 1886. In order to be valid, a Special Delivery item required an additional special stamp indicating that the service had been purchased along with regular postage. Special Delivery service consisted of a single attempt at delivery of an item to the intended recipient. If that recipient was unavailable at the time of the delivery attempt, the item would automatically revert to regular mail instead. Priority Mail and Express Mail permanently replaced the Special Delivery system in June of 1997.



Figure 8.1. Special delivery, circa 1924. Courtesy The Library of Congress, LC-DIG-npcc-26292.

The Running Messenger Series: Scott #E1-E5

The first series of Special Delivery stamps featured a messenger running out of a post office with a letter, earning these stamps the nickname of “Speedies”. Young men between the 13 and 16 were paid eight cents per hand-delivered letter. In some cities, these boys maintained an average delivery time of only six minutes!

The first stamp in the series (Scott #E1) bears the words, “Secures immediate delivery at a special delivery office,” reminding the user that Special Delivery was originally limited to only 555 urban post offices in the U.S., all in cities of over 4,000 inhabitants. On later stamps in the series, the text was replaced with “Secures immediate delivery at any post office.”



Figure 8.2. Boston Special delivery messenger, 1917. Courtesy The Library of Congress, LC-DIG-nclc-03986.

Scott #E1: 10¢ Blue Running Messenger with “Special Delivery Office”



Figure 8.3. 10¢ Running Messenger with “Special Delivery Office”, 1885.

Released in 1885, this first Special Delivery stamp was engraved and printed by the American Bank Note Company of New York. It is the one most sought-after by Special Delivery stamp collectors today; about 6,634,450 were issued. The 1885 Ten Cent Blue Running Messenger was recently ranked #34 in a book on the

100 greatest American stamps.

Scott #E2: 10¢ Blue Running Messenger with “Any Post Office”



Figure 8.4. 10¢ blue Running Messenger with “Any Post Office”, 1888.

Three years later, in 1888, the same stamp was re-printed by the American Bank Note Company, with the wording changed to reflect the availability of this Special Delivery service at all U.S. post offices.

Scott #E3: 10¢ Orange Running Messenger



Figure 8.5. 10¢ orange Running Messenger with “Any Post Office”, 1893.

The last Special Delivery stamp by the American Bank Note Company, Scott #E3 was a re-printing of Scott #E2 in orange instead of ultramarine. It was issued in February, 1893. The purpose of this color change was to enable it to be distinguished more easily from the one-cent blue Columbian recently issued.

Scott #E4: Running Messenger 10¢ Ultramarine (Bureau of Engraving and Printing)



Figure 8.6. 10¢ blue Running Messenger, Bureau of Engraving and Printing issue, 1894.

In 1894, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing issued its first Special Delivery stamp, nearly identical to Scott #E2 except for a thin line beneath the words “ten cents”.

Scott #E5: Running Messenger 10¢ Blue (Watermarked)



Figure 8.7. 10¢ blue Running Messenger, double-line watermarked, 1895.

In 1895, the Scott #E4 stamp was re-printed on paper watermarked with “USPS” in a double line. In 1911, this double-line watermark was replaced with a single-line one.

The Bicycle Messenger Series, Part One: Scott #E6



Figure 8.8. 10¢ Bicycle Messenger, 1902.

As a step up in technology, Scott #E6 (issued December 9, 1902) featured a messenger on a bicycle, based upon a photograph of the stamp’s designer, Raymond Ostrander Smith. The inscription “Series 1902” was retained on all stamps in this series for twenty years, until a new design was released in 1922 (Scott #E12).

The “Merry Widow”: Scott #E7



Figure 8.9. 10¢ “Merry Widow”, 1908.

Released on December 12, 1908, the “Merry Widow” had the shortest lifespan of any Special Delivery stamp ever printed. Designed by New York architect Whitney Warren, the vignette featured Mercury’s winged hat with an intertwined olive branch. Because the stamp’s design was reminiscent of



a popular ladies’ hat, it became known as the

Figure 8.10. Merry Widow Hat, 1908. Drawing by Kathleen Notman.

“Merry Widow.” A change in shape, design, and color from earlier Special Delivery issues, it did not stand out well from regular postage stamps, prompting complaints from postal clerks and the public. When Frank Hitchcock took office as Postmaster General on March 6, 1909, his first act was to discontinue its use and reinstate the original Bicycle Messenger (Scott #E6). Because it was so unusual, it attracted many collectors, and is less rare today than its brief period of use might suggest.

The Bicycle Messenger Series, Part Two: Scott #E8-E11

Scott #E8: 10¢ Bicycle Messenger with Single-Line Watermark



This stamp is identical to Scott #E6, except printed on paper with a single-line watermark.

Figure 8.11. 10¢ Bicycle Messenger, single-line watermarked, 1902.

Scott #E9: 10¢ Bicycle Messenger (Perf 10)



This 1914 issue of the Bicycle Messenger is perf 10 instead of the earlier perf 12.

Figure 8.12. 10¢ Bicycle Messenger, perf 10, 1914.

Scott #E10: 10¢ Bicycle Messenger (Perf 10, Unwatermarked)



Issued in November, 1916, this stamp is identical to Scott #E9 except that it was printed on unwatermarked paper.

watermark,

Scott #E11: 10¢ Bicycle Messenger (Perf 11)



Figure 8.14. 10¢ Bicycle Messenger, perf 11, 1917.

In 1917, the Bicycle Messenger stamp was changed from perf 10 to perf 11.

The Motorcycle Messenger Series, Part One: Scott #E12, 12a, and 13

Another step up in technology for speed and efficiency, the motorcycle, figures prominently on the next Special Delivery stamp series. The design also features the first image of a special delivery carrier hand-delivering a letter to a customer. The first stamp to be issued in this series, #E12, was also the first new postage stamp issued under the administration of President Warren G. Harding. It was released with much fanfare, and has been popular with collectors ever since.



Figure 8.15. Mailman with motorcycle, circa 1909-1940. Courtesy The Library of Congress, LC-DIG-npcc-28020.

Scott #E12 and #12A: 10¢ Motorcycle Messenger (Ultramarine and Deep Ultramarine)



Figure 8.16. 10¢ Motorcycle Messenger, deep ultramarine (Scott #12A), 1922.

Released on July 12, 1922, this stamp was printed in ultramarine (E12), with a limited number that are slightly darker in color (E12A). Over 330 million of these stamps were issued.

Scott #E13: 15¢ Motorcycle Messenger



Figure 8.17. 15¢ Motorcycle Messenger, 1925.

After forty years of Special Delivery service, rates were finally raised in 1925. Rates for parcels less than two pounds remained at ten cents, but the price for parcels from two to ten pounds went up to fifteen cents, and the rate for the heaviest parcels rose to twenty cents. While the twenty-cent price could be paid with two ten cent stamps,

a new fifteen cent stamp was required. The result was a new release of the Motorcycle Messenger stamp, in a different denomination and color, on April 11, 1925. Over seventeen million copies were ultimately issued.

The Postal Truck Stamps, Part One

Scott #E14: 20¢ Postal Truck



Figure 8.18. 20¢ Postal Truck, 1925.

Released on April 25, 1925, Scott #E14 was the third U.S. stamp to feature an automobile – this time, a postal delivery truck. Initially intended to pay for the new rate for Special Delivery packages over ten pounds, it was used to pay the adjusted fee for packages between two and eight pounds after rates were raised again in 1928. The design was

based on a photograph of a Pierce Arrow truck in front of the old City Post Office in Washington, D.C. More than thirty million of these stamps were issued.



Figure 8.19. Postal truck in holiday garb, 1921. Courtesy The Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-94269.

The Motorcycle Messenger Series, Part Two: Scott #E15-E18

Scott #E15: 10¢ Motorcycle Messenger (Rotary Press)



To lower printing costs, the Postal Department switched to rotary press printing in 1927. The ten cent Motorcycle Messenger was printed in gray violet, perforated 11 by 10 ½. Some were printed in red lilac instead, and are designated as Scott #15a.

Figure 8.20. 10¢ Motorcycle Messenger (rotary press), Scott #E15, 1927.

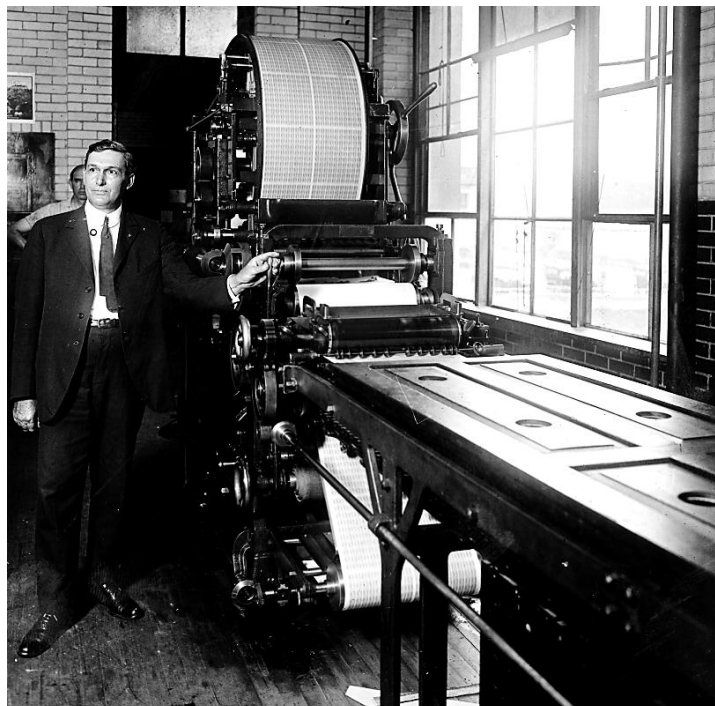


Figure 8.21. Benjamin Stickney, Bureau of Printing & Engraving, beside a rotary press; no date. Courtesy The Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-118828.

Scott #E16: 15¢ Motorcycle Messenger (Rotary Press)



The fifteen cent Motorcycle Messenger was released as a rotary press stamp (perf 11 by 10 ½) on August 13, 1931. The rotary press issue can be distinguished from the earlier one (#E13) by its lighter shade of orange and gum breaker ridges.

Figure 8.22. 15¢ Motorcycle Messenger (rotary press), 1931.

Scott #E17: 13¢ Motorcycle Messenger



In November, 1944, Special Delivery rates rose to 13¢ for parcels under two pounds, prompting release of a 13¢ Motorcycle Messenger stamp on October 30th.

Figure 8.23. 13¢ Motorcycle Messenger, 1944.

Scott #E18: 17¢ Motorcycle Messenger



Figure 8.24. 17¢ Motorcycle Messenger, 1944.

In November, 1944, Special Delivery rates rose to 17¢ for parcels under two pounds, leading to the release of a 17¢ Motorcycle Messenger stamp on October 30th.

The Postal Truck Stamps, Part Two

Scott #E19: 20¢ Postal Truck (Rotary Press)



Figure 8.25. 20¢ Postal Truck (rotary press), 1951.

On November 30, 1951, the twenty cent Postal Truck stamp was released as a rotary press printing, perf 11 by 10 ½. It paid the revised Special Delivery fee of ten cents for packages weighing up to two pounds.

The Hand to Hand Issues: Scott #E20 and E21

Scott #E20: 20¢ Hand to Hand



Figure 8.26. 20¢ Hand to Hand, 1954.

In 1954, a new Special Delivery stamp design was released, featuring a postal carrier handing a letter to a customer. What makes this image intriguing is that the stamp itself is pictured affixed to the envelope. The second stamp on the envelope is a three cent Liberty stamp that had been issued a few months earlier. Appropriately, the address on the envelope is “1954 Liberty St.”

Scott #E21: 30¢ Hand to Hand



Figure 8.27. 30¢ Hand to Hand, 1957.

An increase in Special Delivery rates prompted the issue of a new stamp on September 3, 1957. The Hand to Hand stamp design was reused, with the denomination increased to thirty cents and the color changed to lake.

The Arrows Issues: Scott #E22 and E23

The last two Special Delivery stamps ever produced featured a red, white, and blue design by Norman Ives, showing two arrows pointing in opposite directions.



Scott #E22: 45¢ Arrows

The forty-five cent Arrows stamp was released on November 21, 1969, marking the implementation of a new Special Delivery rate.

Figure 8.28. 45¢ Arrows, 1969.

Scott #E23: 60¢ Arrows



The last Special Delivery stamp was the sixty cent Arrows, issued in 1971. To make it more distinct from the forty-five cent one, blue and red were reversed. The arrow pointing to the right was now in

Figure 8.29. 60¢ Arrows, 1971.