

The Alaskan Philatelist

The Journal of the Alaska Collectors Club • American Philatelic Society Affiliate No. 218



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The Journal of the Alaska Collectors Club

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All Alaska Collectors Club business, including editorial matters for this journal, should be directed to the Secretary/Treasurer and Editor:

Eric Knapp
4201 Folker St., Unit C102
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eknapp@gci.com or *eknapp@gci.net*

Membership information and sample issues of this journal are available from the Secretary/Treasurer. Price of a sample issue is \$2.00 (stamps OK). Membership levels are as follows:

Regular Membership	\$15.00
Contributing Membership	\$20.00
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The Alaskan Philatelist is published four times a year by the Alaska Collectors Club, a society dedicated to developing a wider interest in the study and preservation of Alaska's Postal History. Submissions for publication are always welcome.

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AWARDS

Colopex 2000—Silver-Bronze
Colopex 2002—Silver-Bronze
STaMpsHOW 03—Silver-Bronze





HELP WANTED: I am looking for information about the Anchorage Contract Station 11. I never found anything about it and I do have the numbers 10 and 12 and the existence of Number 11 is then logical. Dirk van Gelderen, Voorkade 74, 2771 ZB Boskoop, Netherlands. Email: info@esveld.nl

WANTED: Any old postal cards or covers from the Chitna, McCarthy, Kennecott area, 1890 - 1950. Please send list to: Thomas Kinzer, P.O. Box 107, Chitna, AK 99566-0107

HELP WANTED: I am looking for mint and used postcards depicting ALASKA LIGHTHOUSES. Russell Bartlett, 5 Saint Clare Street, Braintree, MA 02184-8239

WANTED: Any era postal cards (government preprinted stamps, not picture) used in Alaska. No philatelic, please. Don Glickstein, 1300 University St. #9G, Seattle WA 98101. Email: glickwolf@earthlink.net

WANTED: Censored civilian mail from Alaska and Western Canada from World War II. Eric Knapp, 4201 Folker Street, Unit C102, Anchorage, AK 99508. Email: eknapp@gci.com

HELP WANTED: We are looking for covers and other information on Wells Fargo & Company in Alaska during the 19th and early 20th century. We are specifically looking for any information on the location and history of the various offices in Alaska. George Hall, 13124 Stephenson, Anchorage, AK 99515.

TAP DEADLINES

ISSUE	DEADLINE
1st Quarter	February 1
2nd Quarter	May 1
3rd Quarter	August 1
4th Quarter	November 1

Alaska Philatelic Cover Catalog Volume 1 & 2

Volume 2 of the Alaska Philatelic Cover Catalog, covering the Alaska Collectors Club, the Gastineau Philatelic Society and the Northern Lights Stamp Club is now available.

The catalog features illustrations of all major and minor covers issued by the three clubs.

The catalog is 8 ½ x 11 loose-leaf format punched for a three ring binder.

Prices:

Volume 2:

\$25.00

Volume 1, Revised Edition:

\$25.00

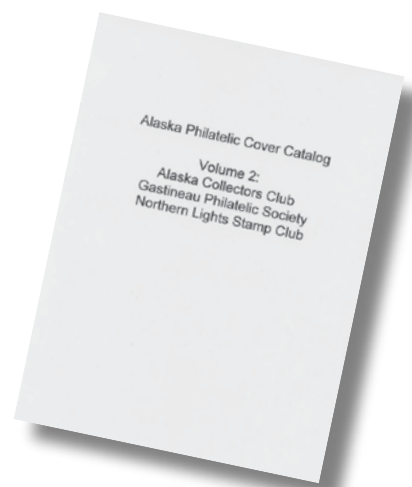
Original Volume 1 Update:

\$3.00

(All prices are postpaid)

For orders or more information, contact:

Eric Knapp
4201 Folker St., Unit C102
Anchorage, AK 99508



Vice President's Message

by Angela Watson (bleumoon@charter.net)

Editor's Note: President Jim is letting VP Angela write this edition's column, as he has been really busy around Phoenix the last month.

Like all of you, Hurricane Katrina prompted me to reflect on what it would be like to lose everything. And I mean *everything*: your furniture, your books and movies, your electronics, and yes, your stamps.

I looked around my house and tried to imagine what I could possibly salvage if I had water up to six feet high inside my house. Not much; maybe a few knick knacks, my rather impressive TupperWare collection and the few pieces of art that hang high enough to escape the water. But certainly not my stamps.

Of course, the people of the Gulf States have suffered losses more tragic and severe than most of us can imagine. We are bombarded with images every night on the TV. And yet, I know that as soon as it ceases to be melodramatic and sensational, the reporters will move on to the next white woman to disappear or Anglo child abduction, and cover that story to death.

So, like nearly everyone else, I would suggest that if you have not already donated, please consider donating to The Salvation Army (www.salvationarmyusa.org), The United Way (www.national.unitedway.org) or even Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals (www.aspca.org) or any of the fine other relief and rescue organizations.

My other suggestion would be get insurance. Yes, especially for your stamps. Most homeowner's policies do not cover any additional funds for things of any value (such as stamp or coins), a special rider is required and is usually expensive through a traditional insurance company. There are a couple of insurance agencies that offer special coverage for stamp collectors (you can find them by doing a Google search for "insurance for stamp collections."). Many of these policies require a simple signed declaration of the estimated value of your stamps, and no detailed inventory is required.

I know that I would be hard pressed to come up with the money to replace my many prized philatelic items out of pocket. So get insurance today; nobody in New Orleans or Gulfport or Biloxi or Birmingham thought they would need it, either.

Secretary- Treasurer's Report

by Eric Knapp

Work, Stamps, TAP, Tired.

I must admit this was a hard issue of TAP to sit down and put together. Work has been very busy lately. We have been putting in a new billing system and it has been wearing out the whole IT department. Well it is in now and once everyone gets comfortable with the new system it should make our lives easier. But right now I feel very tired.

For the same reason the club election will be put off until the next issue. I just didn't have the time or motivation to get it together. Sorry about this. It will be in the next issue.

On the club front things are going well, aside from my not being able to get the election put together on time. We had a very good rate of renewals for 2005. The auctions have been well received and TAP has gotten a couple of favorable notices.

We have 2 new members; please join me in welcoming them to the club.

Member # 681	Member # 682
Ned Harris	Richard Bennett
PMB 303	1280 Cambridge Dr.
120 S. Houghton, #138	Venice, FL 34293-2807
Tucson, AZ 85748	

The following member made a donation above her normal dues level, Bea Shepherd. Thank you for the donation.

I will be at SESCAL in Los Angeles in October so if you are going to be there let me know.

*Club members want to hear
YOUR story (don't be shy!)*

Take the form on page 9 and fill it out. Send it along with a photo and a color copy of your favorite philatelic piece to Angela Watson, 5519 E. Mezzanine Way, Long Beach, CA 90808.

Book of Note

Editor's Note: I received this book notice and thought our members might be interested.

Harvey M. Karlen, Philatelic Writers "Hall of Fame" author, describes his latest book, CHICAGO'S GREAT WHITE CITY: A POSTAL HISTORY PANORAMA OF THE 1893 WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION.

This is a study noting appropriate postal history items associated with the planning and operating the World's Fair. Some 480 illustrations enhance the presentation of what transpired in such matters as the competition by contesting cities to host the fair, of the many different communications used to advertise and finance the fair, house its visitors in a city rebuilt from a disastrous fire, and to note the administrative details in running this large—scale enterprise. The Introduction of innovative Columbian postage stamps and postal stationery by the U.S. Post Office Department along with the privately produced post cards, stationery, and trade cards is described. The activities on the financially profitable Midway, the efforts to produce safety and comfort for visitors, combined with the output of exhibitors both foreign and domestic, reveal a pattern of unique activities. The emergence of women as an active and political force and the presentations of leading

intellectuals in the face of the worst economic depression in the nation to that time provides an heroic picture. The years covered by this study include the pre—fair period and run to the post—fair celebrations during the following century that reveal the fair's impact.

*Limited 150 edition • Clothbound
288 Pages • 488 illustrations*

Order from:
BERK-HILL PUBLISHERS
P.O. BOX 833
OAK PARK, IL 60303
SPECIAL CLOSEOUT PRICE
\$35 plus \$4 SHIPPING

Richard Graham writes: *"Karlen covers the aspects of the planning and financing the exposition and the construction of the buildings and grounds on Chicago's Lake Michigan waterfront.... Using the cards and covers of the exposition, postal history is nicely meshed with the overall history of the fair."*

Leonard Hartmann notes: *"The text, the context, wording and printing are excellent and invaluable to any collector. This is a major work."*

Ken Wukasch comments: *"The scope and depth of the research has been greatly needed in our collecting field."*

Back Issues of TAP

1959 - 1973 Computer scanned and edited copies

1976 - 1984 quality photocopies

1984 - 2001 originals and quality photocopies

\$10.00 for six issues or calendar year.

\$2.00 for single issue

Shipping charges: \$2.00 for first 6 issues, \$1.00 for each additional six issues or portion thereafter, \$5.00 maximum on any order. Limited quantities available. Refunds for those not available. Donations of back issues appreciated.



How to Get Published

Dick Sine, dick_sine@fmtc.net

If the Alaska Collectors Club has or expects monograph or book-length manuscripts that you either do not have the people or funds to produce, I have solutions for you.

By way of background, I have been involved in philatelic publishing for nearly 30 years ... as editor of *The American Philatelist* (including publishing more than a dozen books), stamp columnist for the *New York Times*, editorial director at Scott Publishing Co, owner of my own publishing firm with nearly 15 titles published, author of the CD-ROM *Encyclopedia of United States Postage Stamps*, and author of *Stamp Collecting for Dummies*. I developed (in 1999) and continue as webmaster of *AskPhil.Org*. More recently, I have handled pre-press work for books published by the Collector's Club of Chicago and the United Postal Stationery Society.

Because not all specialty philatelic organizations have the same publishing issues, I have two different types of solutions.

1. Electronic Pre-Press... you have control of the manuscript until it is sent to the printer ready for the press.

In this approach, I will work with the manuscript and illustrations provided by the author/society. Depending on individual arrangements, final copyediting can be included in the package. The manuscript is re-formatted into pages, with illustrations and captions inserted, etc., and sent back for proofing. This process continues until the author/society signs off as ready for printing.

I then am prepared to send to the commercial printer of your choice (I will help here, if necessary) for production. I can send electronic files that dramatically reduce the price a printer normally charges for a book; or, I can send a printer high-quality laser printouts that can be photographed. The former is, by far, preferred when it comes to final quality.

There is a fee for my role in the project, as well as for

printing and shipping. This is the traditional approach.

2. For smaller press runs (that render normal book publishing prohibitively expensive), or for societies without funds to pre-pay for book production before there is anything to sell, I have a very contemporary approach that requires no payment by the society itself. That is, I will take the risk.

I will prepare the book for printing as outlined above, including the normal proofing. Instead of sending the manuscript to a commercial printer, I will produce the monograph (or book, or specialty album) "on demand" and ship against payment for individual copies. Quality remains high, and the society is not saddled with worries about how to recoup the cost of production.

Financially, here are the specifics: 1) A written agreement will outline all of the arrangements; 2) Included in the agreement is how much is due me—if sales warrant—for my work; 3) I receive all sales income until that amount is reached; and, then 4) the society and I share (again, per the written agreement) all income from sales thereafter. I will handle the shipping, allowing production/shipping to take place quickly after receipt of order and payment and an address. Retail price of the book is part of our written agreement, along with any member-only and/or review copies.

The society will be responsible for cost of copyright and ISBN registration (both are optional), marketing the book, and handling orders (which will be sent to me either individually or in groups ... your choice).

Stamp collecting, by far, is the richest hobby there is when it comes to literature. High current commercial production costs should not be the reason why a continued flow of such good literature is restricted. I am prepared to begin working with you immediately. Please contact me via e-mail or at 803-547-0906 if you have questions or projects.

Call for Nominations

2005 is an election year for the Alaska Collectors Club. All offices with the exception of Secretary/Treasurer will be up for election. If you would like to run for an office, please contact the Secretary/Treasurer. I will also be contacting people and asking them to run.

Thank you,

Eric Knapp (eknapp@gci.com)

4201 Folker St., #C102 • Anchorage, AK 99508

Gold Nugget

Stampeters and their Mail

Alaska's mail carriers were courageous souls. They trekked over the winter trails when no one else dared to step outside to keep their schedules. When the weather was warm and the rivers ice-free, steamboats and canoes carried the mail. But, until airplanes were put into common use, dog sleds were used by most Alaskan carriers during the long, harsh winters.

January 24, 1902, from Dawson

"Many lives have been lost [on the unsafe ice]. Two mail carriers were drowned and mail lost. . . . I have sent out about 17 letters this winter had replies from none, that is the worst feature of the country. It is not right and I do not think necessary. American mail comes as far as White Horse I am told and many times it is left there until the boats come in."

—Julia Musgrave, in a letter to her friend Ellen Hazard. (From the collections of the University of Alaska, Anchorage.)

Dog sleds loads were not to exceed 400 pounds, but the weight varied greatly. Postmasters and carriers usually held firm to their rules of no newspaper or magazine mail during the winter months. The enormous loads of first class mail was enough to tax the dogs' strength.

Of course, the Americans in Dawson, often desperately awaiting word from home, had little respect of, or regard for, weight limitations. For most Americans in Dawson, griping about mail was second only to discussing possible new and exciting gold strikes.

Hotel Ballard, Dyea, April 1st 1898

"Dear Clara, I hurried your other letter off thinking it would go out that night, but I think it has not gone yet. Mail here is very uncertain. For instance, a letter from Skaguay to Dyea goes back to Juneau, a hundred miles, and then is returned to Dyea. Distance from Skaguay to Dyea-five miles. Much of the mail is "ac-

commodation" that is brought in or out by the boats without pay. Uncle Sam has not yet found out that there are two lively towns up here. In another year he may have his attention drawn to the fact.

—Mac"

Stampeters routinely chastised the inadequate mail service in their letters home. Even worse than no mail sleds or steamers was to wait in line for hours just to hear the words, "nothing for you."

Lake Bennett May 8, 1898

"My Dear Clara, At last I have been rewarded for my trip after mail. When I reach camp again this will have been a forty mile one but I have seven letters to show and a few supplies which I picked up. One each from Sara and Miss Kellogg and five from you so it is all right. I got up at three this morning (it was daylight) and started while the ice was good. In the morning I shall start by four for my twenty mile walk. Think of me doing forty miles on foot when a two and a half mile trip downtown on foot was quite a consideration.

"I have not paid \$1.75 with as much pleasure since leaving home. I hope more will come for I think I shall be able to get them in a couple or three weeks again.

"I will write soon again and get it started out, and I think now the Canadian government has established offices at two or three places below here where we can mail letters.

"Now I must say good night for it is late. Love to all and more kisses for the children.

Yours, Mac"

Gold strikes continued to be made across Alaska over the next several years. Each new strike brought hundreds to thousands of miners into the area. And each time the miners found themselves lined up once again in hours-long lines at new post offices.

State Postal History Registry

The National Postal Museum's State Postal History Registry is up and running. The Alaska Collectors Club is listed as primary contact for the Alaska part of the site. The registry is located at: <http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/statepostalhistory/index.html>

ACC Sustaining Members Cover

This year's sustaining member cover honors the 75th anniversary of Merrill Field in Anchorage. The cachet is the official logo of the celebration. The cover was laid out and printed by Eric Knapp, the insert was written by David Schwantes. David also stamped, canceled and mailed the covers for us. Thank you and thank you to all of our sustaining members for their support.

The insert for the cover is as follows:

75th Anniversary of Merrill Field

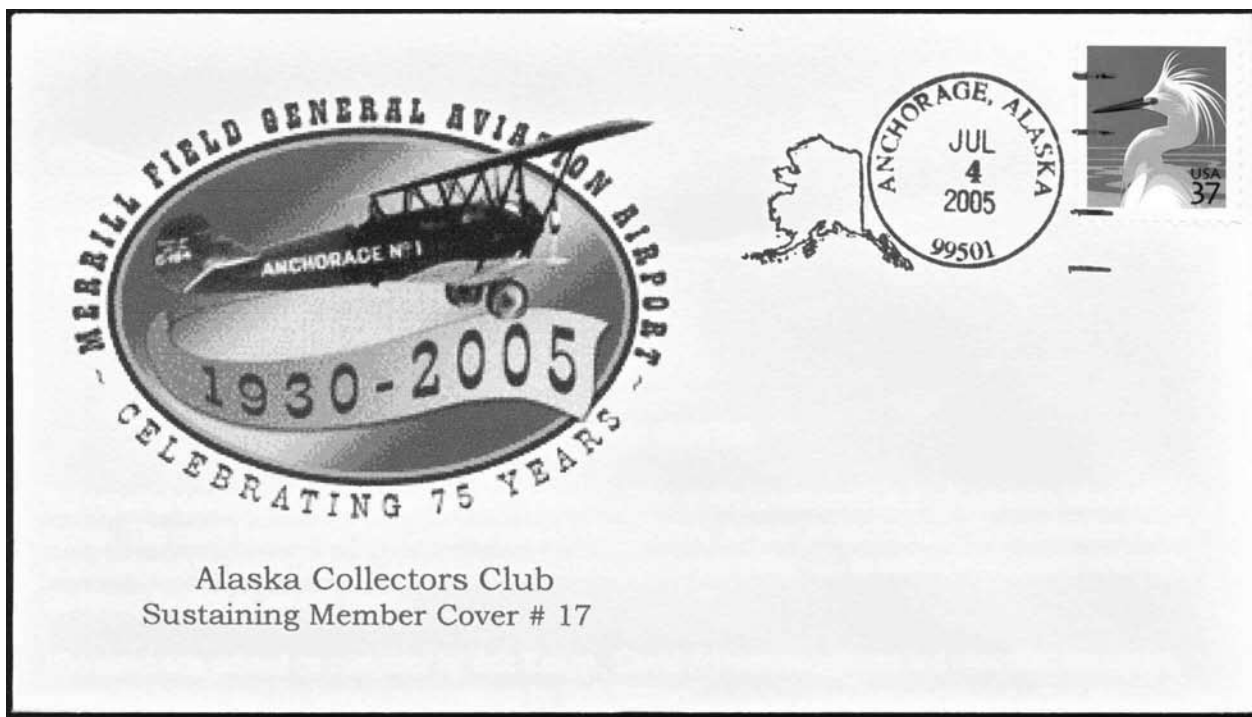
The first airfield in Anchorage was on what is now the downtown park strip. As the city grew, it became unsafe to continue to land there and the area that is now Merrill Field was designated as the new airfield. That was in August of 1929. At that time it was called "Aviation Field". In the spring of 1930, the Anchorage Women's Club presented a resolution to the Anchorage City Council to name the new airfield after Russell Hyde Merrill. He was an Anchorage pilot who had lost his life the year before while operating out of Aviation Field. After the council approved the resolution, Matt Nieminnen took the honor of making the first landing on the newly 'flowed field on July 4, 1930. It was

not actually dedicated as Merrill Field until 1932.

Russell Hyde Merrill was born in Des Moines, Iowa, on April 8, 1894. "Russ" as he became known served as a United States Navy aviator during World War I. He first came to Alaska in 1925, and two years later he moved his family here. He flew passengers and cargo to many bush villages. Russ Merrill was on one of these flights to a remote village across Cook Inlet on September 16, 1929, when he lost his life. Very little evidence of the accident was found.

From its beginning, Merrill Field was destined to take a prominent position within the aviation community, not only in Alaska, but also in the United States. It eventually became one of the busiest general aviation facilities in the nation, and continues to hold that destination today.

A huge 75th Anniversary celebration will be held on July 16, 2005. The celebration will include a ceremony honoring Mr. Merrill, with his son, Robert MacLean Merrill and ten other family members in attendance: the introduction of dignitaries and pioneer pilots who flew out of Merrill Field; displays of many of the older aircrafts; a photo display of Merrill Field history by the Anchorage Museum; and displays by other Anchorage organizations.



The cachet is the official logo of the 75th anniversary celebration. The logo depicts Merrill's Travelair 7000 J-4 biplane "Anchorage No. 1." Merrill was flying this plane when he vanished in 1929. This year's cover features the handsome bi-plane on field of blue. The vignette, ringed by gold and navy, commemorates the 75th Anniversary of Merrill Field.

Member Questionnaire for Newsletter Article

We're going to try a different tack with this feature. Here is the questionnaire, so now everyone can fill it out and send it in for publication in the newsletter. Please take a few minutes and send this in. We'd love to feature all our members in the newsletter. This is an especially important feature in a club with no regularly scheduled meetings. We will need three things from you:

- 1) this sheet with you filled in answers (add other sheets as necessary),
- 2) a recent photo of you (prefer clear, well- focused and good contrast photos), and
- 3) a color photocopy of your favorite piece of Alaskan Postal History.

Please drop all those things in the mail back to me at: Angela Watson • 5519 E. Mezzanine Way • Long Beach, CA 90808.
Thanks!

1. Please list your name place of residence and age: _____

2. What is your occupation? _____

3. How did you become a stamp collector? _____

4. What about Alaska Philately interests you the most? _____

5. What specialties within Alaska Philately do you collect? _____

6. What other countries or areas do you collect? _____

7. What other philatelic study groups or organizations are you a member of? _____

8. Tell us about your favorite piece of Alaskan Postal History (include the color copy so we can scan and add to your article).

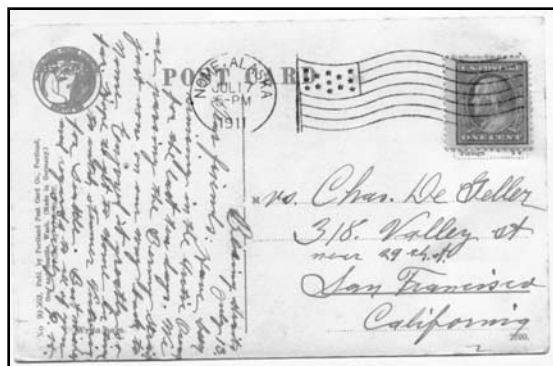
9. Anything else you want to tell us about yourself (other hobbies, interests, favorite curse word, etc?)

Interesting & Miscellaneous

Four Interesting Items from George Hall

A few months before he died, George Hall gave me copies of the following items.

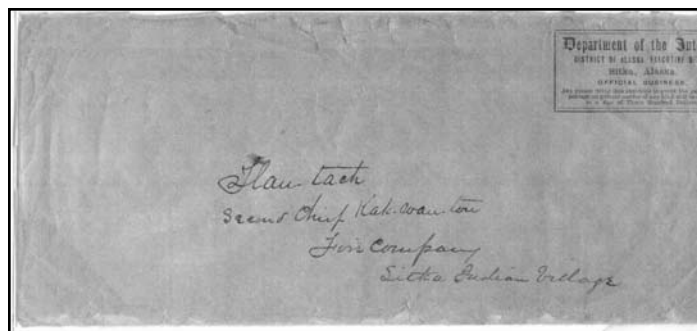
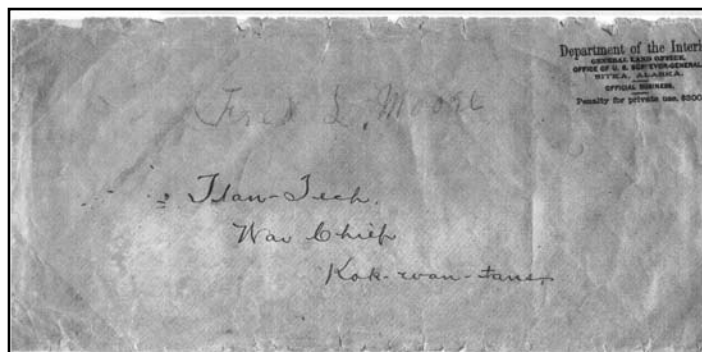
The first is a postal card mailed from Nome in 1911. The picture on the card is it Bering Sea Patrol of the Coast Guard.



The second is a photograph of the early Anchorage tent city. The photo has taken by Sidney Laurence. George asked, with a smile on his face, which one was the post office?



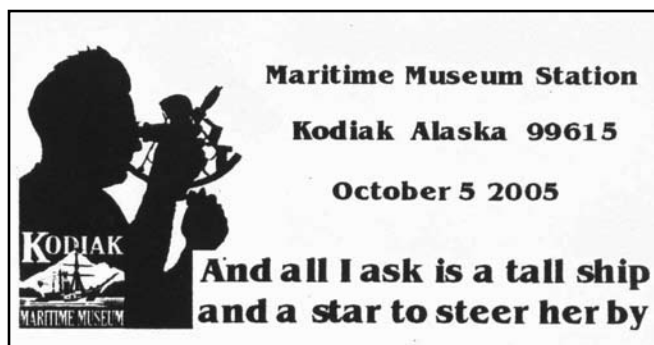
The last two items are oversized envelopes from the Department of the Interior offices in Sitka, AK when Sitka was the capital of the District of Alaska. One is from the general Land Office and the other is from the Executive Office.



Kodiak Special Cancel Honors Museum

The United States Postal Service will issue a special cancel in Kodiak to honor the Kodiak Maritime Museum. The cancel will be dated October 5, 2005 and will be available for use for 30 days thereafter.

Requests for this cancel may be sent to:
 Maritime Museum Station
 Postmaster
 PO Box 9998
 Kodiak, AK 99615-9998



Member Spotlight

Name, age and residence: Peter D. Tompkins, age 48, Japan

Occupation: English teacher

How did you become a stamp collector? See accompanying story.

What specialties within Alaska philately do you collect? Yukon Quest, FDCs, hand drawn/colored cachets, postcards.

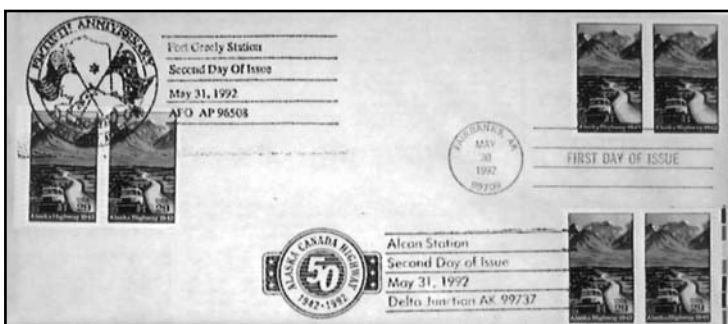
What other countries do you collect? Japan, USA. I also collect hand drawn covers, mint sheets, singles, FDCs and postcards.

What other philatelic organizations are you a member of? Japan Philatelic Society.

Tell us about your favorite Alaska Postal History piece: These Alaska Highway FDCs were created by me. These were cancelled at the second New Issue Release Ceremony that I attended, for a grand total of three ceremonies for this stamp, all in Alaska. Perhaps in the photograph you can see that the "USA 29" is slightly color shifted in the pair of stamps affixed to the upper right (those cancelled "First Day of Issue"). I was sold five panes of these color shifted stamps at the ceremony. The next day I had gone to Delta Junction for the 2nd Day Ceremony.

Anything else you want to tell us about yourself:

I pray for a rare major error to come to me, by way of the USPS Fulfillment Center that I can sell and at least help to pay for my collecting expenses.



My name is Peter D. Tompkins and I marked my 48th birthday in November 2004. I'm married and have a 9-year-old daughter. We live in my wife's hometown, a relatively small agriculturally-based (although quickly becoming suburbanized) town called Kouhoku. It is located in the middle of the southern most main island of Kyusu, Japan (at about the same latitude as that of Southern California).

For the past seven years now I have been acting as an English teacher to an average annual case load of about 100 kindergarten and elementary school children. I am employed by the town and classes are held at the town hall after school. This is interesting as I am (was) a registered nurse, having worked in hospitals the better part of 20 years prior to magically becoming an English teach. (I confide to you that English was my worst subject all throughout school; but shhhh, please don't tell anyone!).

As a young child, I realized the power of stamps. The ability of special, small pieces of paper when moistened (at least they were back in those days) and stuck to an envelope could send and have delivered to your mailbox all sorts of wonderful things from cereal box top offers and comic book merchandise to birthday cards containing money, and much more.

While my father had a small stash of stamps and coins, he wasn't an active collector. It was my mother who instilled the concept of philately in me by giving me a few 1976 Bicentennial pieces and instructing me to "save these." But it wasn't until 1981 when the USPS issued the Space Achievements pane that I became interested in saving stamps. That was my first mint sheet and the beginning of my collection. WOW! It is only now as I am writing this that I am recalling and putting those events into perspective.

At that same time in my life, I was thirsting for adventure. While I had a very comfortable lifestyle at our family home, I wanted something new...something different. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, job opportunities for nurses were more than abundant as I considered my options. I had my pick from thousands of jobs all around the country.

I had looked at National Geographic magazines all throughout my life, but actually read an article in the January 1979 (I think) issue. It was about Alaska, and I was inspired!

And so, I packed up my old rusted GMC pickup truck and drove from Fishkill, NY to Fairbanks, AK in just over

Member Spotlight, continued

a week (taking a few wrong turns along the way). Initially, I had only planned on a one year stay, and then moving on to Hawaii, but that one year quickly stretched into 15 years in Fairbanks and I never did make it to Hawaii (which is still on my “Thing to do List” which seems to get longer and longer with each passing year).

By now I suspect that I am writing out of egocentricity more perhaps than anything else... Yes, I AM a collector! But I fear I have little intellectually with respect to philately to contribute to the club. And while I have a voluminous collection, I am at a loss to describe any one piece as greatly interesting or valuable. My collection is like me: mediocre at best. But I do have a true tale from my own personal accounts of legend and glory that you might find entertaining.

After having rented in town the initial few years in Fairbanks, I was able to close on a post-pipeline-boom, run-down, over-grown, sled-dog-chewed, fixer-upper A-Frame in the hills about 20 minutes drive from town. I had been working the night shift at Fairbanks Memorial Hospital and taking carpentry/house building classes at Hutchinsons Career Center each morning after work.

Having plenty to do, I set out to apply my newly learned skills. At one point, I was opening up the magnificent view of the Goldstream Valley by dropping a few dozen large poplar trees with my trusty Husquavarna 44 chainsaw. It was during those years in the latter 1980s that the interior saw record snowfalls.

Now, some might question the wisdom in falling large trees in chest deep snow and rightly so. But then again, most activities have some sort of inherent risk, I would argue.

I went out every other day or so for a couple of hours to expand the view.

Then one day to my bewilderment, there lay a large florescent orange sack half buried in a foot of freshly fallen powder snow. More curiously, there were absolutely no footprints or tracks around the bundle. This was only a few yards away from where I had been working only a couple of days earlier.

Upon cautiously approaching, then examining the strange object, I learned it was a bag of First Class Mail bound for Kivalina, AK. “Hmmm,” I thought, “it won’t get there very fast like this.” The other thought that crossed my mind was that I had better start wearing a hard helmet out here.

But most curiously of all was the seemingly scant reaction by the post office upon the return of the sack. “Oh, the carrier could be fined,” was about the extent of the response. To this day, I wonder just what ever did happen; how did that bag of mail come to have been dropped and if the carrier was ever fined. More importantly, how many other bags of mail are still out there?

I invite any/all sorts of feedback. I promise to answer all letters. Please use interesting stamps on your envelope to me (I will do the same). By the way, I collect just about anything... my wife says that I’m crazy and like always, she’s right about that!

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This is a photograph of my daughter Aiko (literally means “Love Child”) and me taken at the Saga International Hot Air Balloon Festival this past November.

It is one of my favorite annual events here in Japan. Every autumn, balloonists from around the world come to participate in the festival. A small tent city pops up to accommodate the hundreds of vendors and various events. In its twenty-third year, the festival grows larger with each passing year.

It has a state fair kind of feeling except there are lots of hot air balloons. Usually around 125 balloons and 300,000 people are present on any given day during the five days of the festival. Good weather permitting, all the balloons might take off at the same time (at dawn) in a race to a designated spot in a nearby town... this is truly magnificent! 125 brightly colored hot air balloons all ascending at the same time right above your head. Kind of like witnessing an exceptional aura – breathtaking!

Then later that day, there would be an afternoon show and at night some of the balloons would put on a light show of sorts, lighting up the balloons with their propane burners while tethered at 40+ feet, usually to live music.

OK, OK: as you can see in the photograph, the real reason that I go is to personally hand cancel the hand drawn and colored covers and postcards that I prepare using the Saga International Hot Air Balloon stamp that was issued a few years ago. My wife is on to me, as well. The first few years I was able to conceal this under the guise that it was the balloons that drew me to the festival each year, but anymore, it is no secret.



What Is It?

Editor's note: If you have seen the PBS program Ask This Old House then you know they have a feature on the program called "What Is It?" The segment is about odd or obscure tools. Well, not being one to avoid trying new things, we are going to try out a "what is it" column. My aim is for this to be a place for people to present and write about items that puzzle them. With any luck there are readers out there who will have the answer or a plausible theory and will respond with follow up articles. I have two items for this issue.

An RF overprint on an Alaska APO Cover

The cover shown here is from Attu, AK and was mailed in October 1944. It is from a Private First Class with an engineer company. It is franked with a U.S. Airmail, Scott C25. The cover is typical of covers of the time with one exception. There is an overprint "RF" on the stamp.

Now, there are RF overprints known on C25 stamps. There is even a section in the "Scott Specialized Catalogue of the U.S." But these were a very special usage and this cover does not qualify.

The Scott Catalogue describes the overprints as follows:

"Authorized as a control mark by the United States Fleet Post Office during 1944-45 for the accommodation of and exclusive use by French naval personnel on airmail correspondence to the United States and Canada. All "R.F." mail had to be posted on board French ships or at one of their western Mediterranean or northwest African naval bases and had to bear the return address, rank, and/or serial number of a French officer of seaman.

The catalog further states:

"All "R.F." overprints were handstamped by the French naval authorities after the stamps were affixed for mailing. The stamps had to be cancelled by a special French naval cancellation"

By this description, the only thing that relates to these overprints is the stamp it is on. The overprint is similar to but no the same as the overprints pictured in the catalogue.

I don't see how this could be a French "RF" overprint. But then, what is it? Is it a clumsy forgery? Is it a "tribute" by a soldier on Attu? Is it something else entirely? This is the only one like this I have seen. Has anyone else seen anything like this before?



What Is It?

Arctic Air Mercy Flight

This is the great mystery of Alaska Cinderella labels. They have appeared in the philatelic press frequently over the years with the same question. Where did they come from? And what flight were they for? But nobody seems to know.

Several people over the years have speculated that they were printed to raise money for an airplane flight to Nome in 1925 during the diphtheria epidemic.

There are several problems with this theory. The first is time. The time from when news of the epidemic reached the world to when the serum was dispatched to Nenana for the first leg of the "Serum Run" to Nome was less than a week.



Additionally, the option of using an airplane was seen as not being viable early in the week. At the time there were only two airplanes in the territory and they were disassembled and packed away for the winter. Unpacking and assembling one of these would have taken considerable time. Both of the planes were also open cockpit biplanes, not suited for flying in an Alaska winter over difficult terrain.

These issues make me think that these labels were not made for this crisis, unless they were made after the fact. The time is just too short. I have also done some research in the newspaper archives and can find no mention of these stamps during the events of the serum run or for several months after.

As airplanes came into wider use in Alaska there were more flights that could qualify as a "mercy flight." The search for Carl Ben Eielson is an example. It lasted long enough for some sort of fund raiser to have occurred.

It is also possible that they were created for a "scheduled" mercy flight of some sort. It is also quite possible that they were created to make money that there was never a "mercy flight."

I plan to continue digging into this, time permitting.

Now, it is your turn. Do you have any information on these two items? If you do, write it up and send it in.

Also, you know you have items like this. Items that puzzle you for some reason. Take a copy of the item, write up what you know and what you want to know and send it into *TAP*.

Gold Nugget

Mail & Mail Carriers

When mail has to travel by dog sled, weight is critical. Carriers would bring first-class mail, but newspapers, magazines and packages were left behind. Sometimes correspondents slid newspaper clippings and gifts into letters, but if the package was too thick, suspicious carriers would leave it behind for the spring steamboats.

Winter mail was precious to the lonesome populations in the far north and they were quick to shower their wrath on carriers or postmasters who moved too slowly.

The struggle to get to the gold fields was too great for many of the green stampedes. After they lost their goods when their ship was swamped on the way to Dyea, Mr. and Mrs. Rowley went to work packing freight to raise enough money to keep going. When Mrs. Rowley received a letter from her brother which referenced \$100.00 that he had sent (and which she had not received), it was enough to send her into a rage. She grabbed a pistol and set out to shoot the postmaster at Dyea, shouting that he had stolen her money. Although she did not shoot the postmaster, she was still arrested for attempted murder.

Stars of the Trail

At Valdez, Alaska, mail piled up for several months because it could not be taken further north. The local postmaster (only recently appointed by postal inspector John Clum) could not handle the pressure of the ever growing sacks of mail. He panicked and fled both the post office and the territory.

The flood of correspondence overwhelmed Canadians and Americans alike. Faced with similar circumstances--huge piles of mail and no way of sending them on--the postmaster at Gelnora, Canada tried to solve the problem by burning sacks of mail. He was rushed out of town with a mob hot on his heels.

Editor's Request

I know it seems like a broken record (how long will this phrase still be useful?) but the file of original articles for *The Alaskan Philatelist* is, once again, empty. I have some material we can reprint from other sources, but reprints do not a successful journal make. We need members to write about their studies, or the interesting items in their collections. Thank you.

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