

Masonic Philately (Masonry on Postage Stamps)

By definition, philately is the in-depth research and study of postage stamps. By example, it is making the observation that in a pile of postage stamps that all appear to be the same type; closer examination will reveal different kinds of paper, different watermarks embedded in the paper, different cancellations, variations in color shades, or a different gauge of perforations around the edge of the stamps. It follows that Masonic Philately involves any Masonic related image or event that is celebrated by the issuance of that particular stamp.

It was on the 6th May 1840, that the first adhesive backed postage stamp in the world was issued in Great Britain. At first glance there is no overt Masonic tie to this stamp, but upon some in-depth research we find that it was in fact printed by an engraver named Jacob Perkins, who was also an American Freemason.



The Penny Black stamp, printed by a Freemason

Other countries quickly followed suit, and within a few years the first serious stamp collectors appeared on the scene. The objective of Masonic Philately was the furtherance of Masonic research via the media of postage stamps, the dissemination of knowledge gained and the quiet enjoyment of this interesting hobby. The area of study now includes special event and First Day of Issue covers (FDC's) postcards and postal seals related to the Fraternity, Masonic cancellations, Famous Masons on stamps, as well as Anti-Masonic themes on stamps.



Modern Masonic
First day cover

Topical collections can include envelopes, called ‘covers’, that have newly issued stamps postmarked on the first day of use, or older stamps with postmarks from a significant city, such as Truth, Oregon, Wisdom, Montana, or Temperance, Alabama.

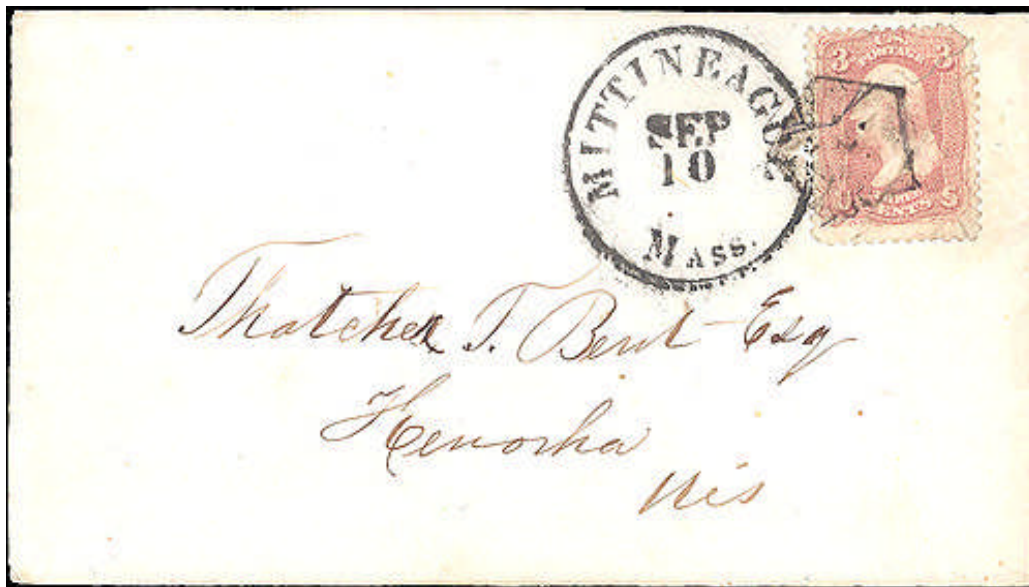


Many of those cities and towns have ceased to exist, and are referred to in the hobby as dead post offices (DPO's). In a search for topical material finding covers with those old postmarks is difficult, to say the least, but when you do, it's an exciting discovery!

From the 1850's through the late 1930's, many small town postmasters across the U.S. were members of the craft. While Postal Service management in D.C. looked the other way some postmasters took the opportunity to use personalized hand canceling devices that showed a square & compasses, a setting mall, and even a representation of Jachin and Boaz, the pillars that adorned the outer porch of King Solomon's Temple.



Masonic cancel on cover



Masonic Keystone
Cancel

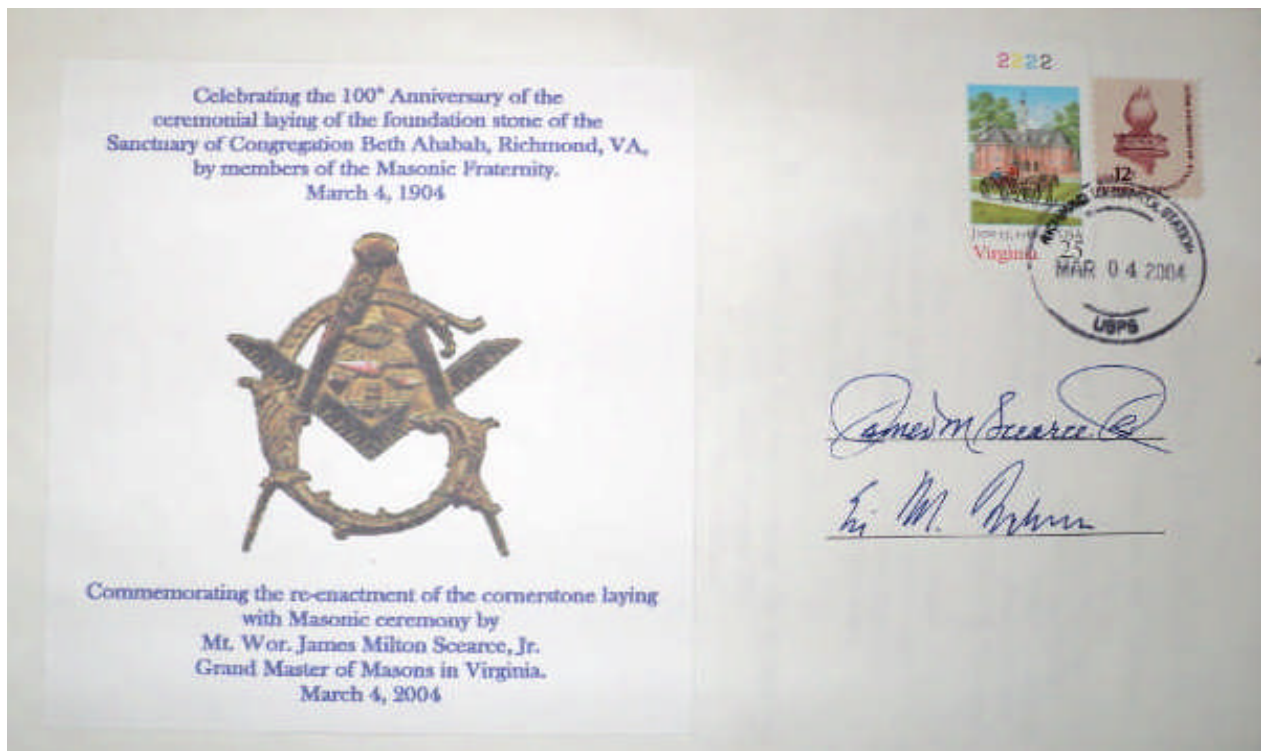


Masonic Square &
Compasses cancels

Many years ago I was given an old cover that has a beautiful green cancellation depicting a Past Master's jewel. Green color cancels are quite rare, and very few covers remain today. Then there's the postmaster with a strange sense of humor who tried to perpetuate the legend of 'riding the goat' in a Masonic Lodge by using a cancel with a small square & compasses emblazoned on the side of a running goat as his local postmark. I've only ever seen one cancel like that, and the value, in 1975, was enough to buy a small foreign car. There is a special reference catalogue (Skinner & Enos) issued for the very serious student/collector that shows over 325 different Masonic cancels used from the late 1850's to about 1929 from post offices over the entire U.S.

On several occasions I have prepared covers for significant Masonic events, such as the anniversary of the founding of a Lodge, or the re-enactment of a cornerstone laying ceremony such as the one shown below. This example was signed by the Master of the Lodge and the Grand Master of Mason's in Virginia, both of whom took part in the public ceremony.

The signatures add a special significance to the cover, as only 4 of the 10 covers that were prepared for the event were signed. Signed covers were given to the signatories, one to the Lodge for its archives, and one resides in my personal collection.



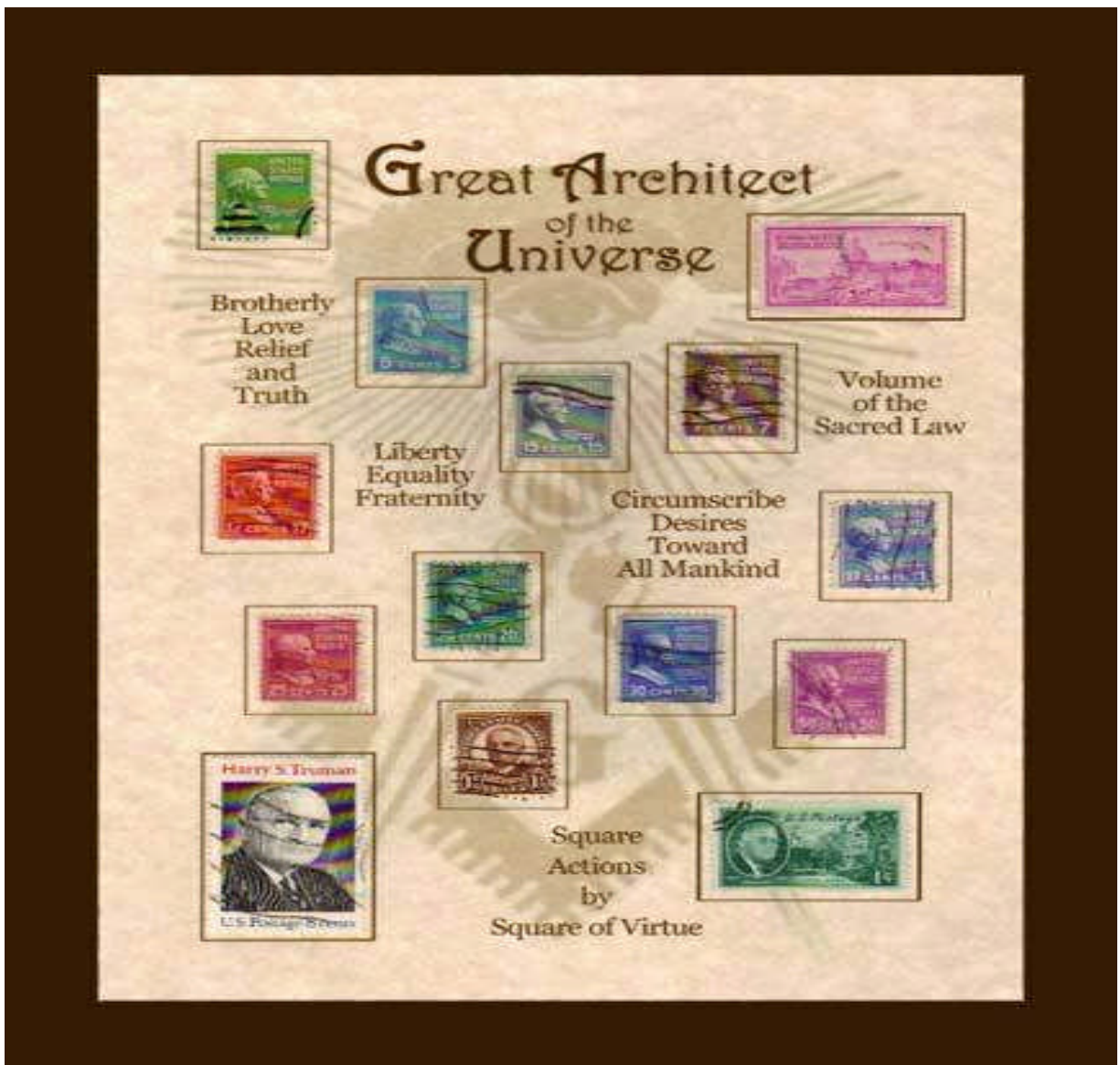
The cover below was prepared for the installation of the Master of a Masonic Lodge, and was canceled on the date of the ceremony.



There are many Masonic related items to collect in the stamp hobby, and in preparing Masonic event covers you're limited only by your creativity.

Famous Masons on stamps

The most often collected area of Masonic Philately is that of the images famous Masons on stamps issued by various countries. Recent counts indicate that well over 1250 Masons have appeared on stamps from over 83 countries. Fourteen US Presidents were Master Masons and one, Lyndon B. Johnson, received his Entered Apprentice degree, but never finished the remaining Blue Lodge degrees.



Masonic Symbols on stamps

The second most popular way to collect and study Masonic related material is stamps and covers that show Masonic symbols, such as the ubiquitous square & compasses.

The British Peace Stamp Issue of 1946 (Scott No. 265) contains two obvious Masonic symbols, and because of that many Freemasons are led to believe it is a true Masonic stamp.



Because the stamp was not issued for a Masonic purpose, I must quickly correct this belief. I have classified this stamp as one that inadvertently shows symbols that are associated with the Masonic order. Officially, I am correct. The Scott Catalog shows that the stamp was issued to commemorate the return to peace at the close of World War II, and Freemasonry is not mentioned.

Upon close examination there is, however, more to this stamp than meets the eye. In my research I obtained a copy of a newsletter from the Grand Lodge of British Columbia & Yukon dated 1977. I was quite surprised by the information the article contained. Just how "Masonic" is this stamp? I offer the information here for your consideration:

1. This stamp shows King George VI who was a Freemason. He was a member of Navy Lodge No. 2612, London, England.
2. The stamp was actually designed by King George, VI himself.
3. The stamp was released in 1946; the year King George was the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England.
4. The stamp shows the square and compasses and a trowel, which are Masonic symbols; also a brick wall showing cement, which also has Masonic meaning.
5. The stamp has a curious ribbon that ties the King and the various symbols much like the cable-tow referenced in Masonic ritual.
6. The ribbon can be said to form five figures. The numbers three and five are very significant numbers in Freemasonry.
7. The position of the square and compasses indicate the Fellow-Craft Degree. This was the King's favorite degree.
8. If the top of the stamp is considered north, King George is situated in the east.
9. The square depicted is an older form of the instrument (the arms are not equal in length). This form of the square is often portrayed on the jewel worn by the Master of an English Lodge. Also, the form represents the Greek letter "G" or "Gamma" denoting God or the Great Architect of the Universe.

A further comment has been made about the dove carrying a sprig of acacia. However, I have difficulty with this statement. Acacia is quite different in appearance and the branch shown on the stamp has berries or "fruit" which would indicate the traditional olive branch, which ties into the 'Peace' theme of the stamp. To me, the evidence appears overwhelming that King George had Freemasonry in mind when he designed this stamp. But, we will never know for certain as the secret is now safely stored in the archives of the Celestial Lodge above.

It is not general knowledge, but General Nikolai Yudenich, Commander of the Russian Caucasus armies in 1919, issued the only Russian stamps that had an overt reference to Masonry. There were originally 5 stamps issued with values of 5, 10, 15, 20 and 50 kopecks, two of which are shown below, bearing symbols of the Craft. Each shows a square, and the words in Russian, 'Are you a Mason?'



Below are two examples of Masonic ‘did you know’ stamps. The first is from Canada Post. When sold the center of the stamp is blank in which the purchaser can insert a design of their own. This example is from a Mason who used a self stick Square & Compasses to show some creative and great advertising for the fraternity. Canada Post discontinued the use of this blank center issue less than three months after it went on sale because of the abuse by postal patrons who placed many visual images on the stamps that were, at best, questionable.

The second stamp is from Great Britain, and specifically was used on official mail from the United Grand Lodge of England. The stamp is called a ‘perfin’ because the letters U, G (just visible in the word revenue at the right margin) and the L at the bottom are punched into the face of the stamp. This process allowed the Grand Lodge to track postage use, and prevented other individuals or organizations from using their postage.



Where Lodges Meet

This stamp below was issued in 1970 to celebrate the 350th anniversary of the Bermuda Parliament. Originally the state house was purchased by the Masonic Craft in 1815, and is still in use today as the Masonic Temple in St. Georges.



The Masonic Temple in Tegucigalpa, Republic of Honduras is shown on this 1935 stamp.



This is not a stamp, but a ‘label’, sometimes referred to in our hobby as a ‘Cinderella issue’, and as such is not valid to pay postage. The Grand Lodge of Costa Rica issued it to honor its Temple and one of its founders, Dr. Francesco Calvo, A Catholic Priest, who was initiated in Peru.



Stamps for Masonic Occasions

The second of three issues, this stamp honors the 125th anniversary of Masonry in Bulgaria. The stamp bears the date of 1879, but Henderson & Pope, in 'Freemasonry Universal', gives the date as 1871 when the Grand Lodge of Bulgaria at Sofia was founded by French warranted Lodges.



This Aruba stamp, issued in 1976, commemorates the 75th anniversary of Lodge El Sol Naciente.



This stamp was issued to mark the centenary of the founding of the Grand Lodge of Turkey.



The stamp shown below was used by Kempsville Lodge No. 195 in Virginia Beach to mail invitations to their 'Father & Son' night in 2009. The image is from a late 1920's Masonic art print by Sam Brown entitled 'The Proud Father' and features a Mason instructing his son in the proper way to wear his new Masonic apron.



Even though the United States and Canada have never issued postage stamps honoring the Masonic fraternity, with the introduction of customized postage by private companies such as Zazzle, Masonic images now appear on a wide variety of stamps.



In 2009 the Grand Lodge of New Zealand had a series of Masonic stamps designed showing the fraternity's involvement in medicine, science, the arts, and family life of New Zealand Masons. The stamps proved to be very popular and sold out quickly.



Anti-Masonic Stamps

Now we set the stage for a look at some rather unique 'Anti-Masonic' stamps. Here you will see a series of stamps issued by Serbia in 1942. This commemorated a very well publicized "Anti-Masonic" conference in the capital of Belgrade late in 1941.

The problem which bedeviled and split the Masonic Order in war torn Germany for years on end was the so-called "Jewish question". In its original form it referred to religious rather than racial prejudice. The three "Old Prussian" Grand Lodges had always refused to accept Jews for initiation because their Craft degrees were followed by higher ones of a Christian character. Thus, as far as the "Old Prussian's" were concerned, one brief but important passage in the Ancient Charges was totally ignored. It read:

"Let a man's religion or mode of worship be what it may, he is not excluded from the order provided he believes in the glorious architect of heaven and earth and practices the sacred duties of morality".

As time passed, the “Old Prussian” Grand Lodges reduced their relationship with the “Humanitarian” Lodges to “unavoidable routine business”. Later, when the “Humanitarian” Lodges exchanged representatives with the Grand Lodge of England, the “Old Prussian” Lodges withdrew theirs with the comment, “we can offer no fraternal hand to our Fatherland’s enemy.... we know that our enemies sit in English Lodges”.

On January 1st of 1942 Serbia issued four postage stamps to commemorate the Grand Anti-Masonic Exhibition, which opened in Belgrade on October 22nd of 1941. These stamps depict a strong, victorious Serbia crushing the ‘evil Masonic-Communist-Jewish plot for world domination’.

First, notice the face value, or cost of the stamps. It shows the regular cost of the stamp, in Serbian Dinar’s, the national currency of the time, followed by a plus sign and a second denomination. The second cost, or surtax on this stamp issue, was used to pay for the printing and distribution of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Communist, and Anti-Jewish propaganda. Each stamp bears the opening date 22x1941, ‘x’ in this case indicating the month of October, and was labeled as an "Anti-Masonic Exhibition" and "Serbia" in Cyrillic letters.

These stamps, with their combination of Masonic, Communist, Jewish and Serbian symbols (and notice that Nazi symbols do not appear anywhere in the designs) provide a remarkable view into the Serbian wartime view of the world. Even after the Communist takeover of Yugoslavia in May 1945 Masons were regarded with great suspicion and contempt by the Serbian dominated Yugoslav authorities.

The first stamp shows Masonry, allegorically clad as a hooded figure wearing an apron and Star of David upon its chest. This hooded figure is shown cringing from a strong ray of light, which emanates from a circular design apparently representing the forces of Anti-Masonry.



Nowhere in Masonry does a hooded figure appear. Also any Mason can readily see the fallacy of "Cringing from Light" because Masons ask for light at least three times as they progress through the degrees of the Blue Lodge. Then too, the attempt to link the Jewish faith with Freemasonry is very evident by the Star of David emblazoned on the figure's chest.

The second stamp in the series shows a hand emanating from a silvery light and grasping the neck of a huge serpent whose head rests upon a square and compasses. Note that this reptile is covered with Stars of David rather than scales. Biblically, the snake represents the perceived forces of evil (here reported to be Jews and Masons) and is symbolically being stopped by the hand of Nazism.



The third stamp shows another Masonic symbol, a sheaf of wheat, superimposed upon a cross, which has a pointed lower leg together with the hammer and cycle, all resting upon and splitting a star in half, that star symbolizes Serbia. This attempts to show that the Jew, Mason, and Communist are alike in their ideals, if not one and the same.



The last stamp in the series shows a Star of David upon the curved surface of the earth located between two pillars, which are being torn asunder by a very zealous 'Sampson', of obvious Serbian descent. Masons will recognize the pillars as the two brazen pillars placed within the outer porch of King Solomon's Temple; that on your right, Jachin, and that on your left, Boaz.



Un-cancelled sets of these four stamps were offered free to stamp collectors in the 1950's and 60's by several US stamp companies as an incentive to order other 'interesting world wide topical stamps'. Used copies, and especially the first day of issue cover shown below, are very scarce and highly prized by Masonic stamp collectors today.



Serbian FDC

Like most European Grand Lodges, the Grand Lodge in Serbia ceased to exist within a matter of days after the start of World War II. Sadly, after the liberation in 1945, the new communist government was not favorable towards the Craft, and it took another 45 years for Masonic light to start shining again. In 2009 the Grand Lodge of Serbia issued their first Masonic stamp.

Today, Masonic stamps are being issued by many countries, including Tadjikistan, one of the new entities that emerged from the breakup of the old Soviet Union. Many collectors consider these to be labels rather than postage stamps, as there is little evidence that they have been used to pay postal fees in that country.



Below is a well designed 2004 issue from Brazil proudly displaying Masonic symbols. This commemorative set of four stamps was sold out in less than three weeks.



Many of the world's well established countries issue Masonic related postage stamps. Shown here is an Austria Post mini-sheet of 20 different stamps, referred to in the philatelic hobby as a 'souvenir sheet', honoring Brother Wolfgang Mozart and Freemasonry.



Another nugget from the Quarry...

Excerpted from various sources, including:
 The Encyclopedia Judaica, Keter Publishing
 Excerpts quoted from Mein Kampf,
 Grand Lodge of British Columbia & Yukon
 Grand Lodge of Serbia - <http://www.rglserbia.org/>
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