

COLLECTING PRECANCELED POSTAL CARDS

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Wow! Now you've picked a tough one!

Perhaps the first thing to consider is the time frame in which precanceled postal cards can be found. Beginning in 1961, the government started printing three lines or bars over the indicium on postal cards to indicate that they were precanceled. The first of these was the purple statue of liberty card, UX46d (S65). This practice continued with each change in postal card mailing rates through the 14¢ George Wythe card of 1985 (UX 108, S125). These Bureau-printed cards are not very exciting; they are quite common; they seem to have been used for various purposes; and many are found post-canceled as well, even though the usage would seem to be in a bulk mailing.

The real fun in collecting precanceled postal cards comes from those used before 1961, and goes back all the way to 1874. I would have to categorize most of these precanceled cards as scarce, so finding them is going to be mostly luck—checking closely on the internet sites such as eBay and keeping up with what is being offered in regular auctions as well.

So what constitutes a precanceled postal card? First, it would have to have a usage that would suggest a bulk mailing. After all, precanceling was designed to help out postal clerks when they were obliged to cancel multiple similar pieces of mail. Examples of this kind of mailing include business offerings to a local or regional area, meeting notices, public events, mutual aid assessments, charity requests, and so forth. Precanceling might be printed and also might be rubber-stamped. The precancel must be unique to the particular kind of mailing and should not be found on other, general mail.

Now, if you find one (some) of these cards, how much should you pay for them? Hard to say, except to say that they are not inexpensive. The last two cards I recall seeing at auction sold for \$137.50 in one case and \$1,000.00 in another. The general range would probably be somewhere in between.

The real fun in these cards will be found on the backs, since there is where we find the reason for their use. "Celebrating 66 years of service to the nation..." (Sears), "Bone Grown Hay Shows in the Milk Pail," "Grow 50 Bushels More Corn Per Acre," "Join Our Christmas Savings Club," "Special Sale on Carney Chicks," "Vote Democratic," "Premiums for Dead Stock," "This Coupon Worth 15¢," and so on.

So start hunting, and enjoy the search and then the fun.

In 2010 Josh Furman published his research in *Precanceled Postal Cards, 1874–1961, A Handbook and Album*. The 181-page book, with color illustrations and printed on 8½ by 11-inch paper is available from many precancel dealers who stock literature.