

US Postal Laws & Regulations

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Year: 1887

Postal cards



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Sec. 153. Postage Stamps: Kinds and Denominations.—Of postage stamps, three kinds, each consisting of various denominations, are provided, viz: Ordinary stamps, which are used to prepay postage on ordinary mail matter of the first, second, third, and fourth classes and registration fees; postage-due stamps, which are used for the collection of unpaid postage; newspaper and periodical stamps, which are used to pay postage on second-class matter which is entitled to pound rates.

Authoritative description of these stamps, when changes are made, is furnished through the Official Guide.

Sec. 154. Special Delivery Stamps, of the denomination of ten cents, are provided under the act of March 3, 1885 (see section 665); and, except that no commissions are allowed on their cancellation, they are supplied, sold, and accounted for as revenues in the same manner as other stamps; the amount allowed the postmaster for delivery being chargeable as expenditure.

Sec. 155. Stamped Envelopes.—The Postmaster-General shall provide suitable letter and newspaper envelopes, with such water-marks or other guards against counterfeits as he may deem expedient, and with postage stamps with such device and of such suitable denominations as he may direct, impressed thereon; and such envelopes shall be known as "stamped envelopes," and shall be sold, as nearly as may be, at the cost of procuring them, with the addition of the value of the postage stamps impressed thereon; but no stamped envelope furnished by the Government shall contain any lithographing or engraving, nor any printing except a printed request to return the letter to the writer. Letters and papers inclosed in such stamped envelopes shall, if the postage stamp is of a denomination sufficient to cover the postage properly chargeable thereon, pass in the mail as prepaid matter. (R. S., § 3915.) (See section 415.)

Sec. 156. Kinds of Stamped Envelopes.—Of stamped envelopes, two kinds, each consisting of various sizes, qualities of paper, and denominations, are provided, viz: Ordinary, which may be either plain or bear a blank request to return; and special request, which bear a printed request for the return of unclaimed letters, with the name and post-office address printed in full, and which are furnished by the Department without extra charge for such printing.

Sec. 157. Postal Cards.—To facilitate letter correspondence, and to provide for the transmission in the mails, at a reduced rate of postage, of messages, orders, notices, and other short communications, either printed or written in pencil or ink, the Postmaster-General is authorized and directed to furnish and issue to the public, with postage stamps impressed upon them, "postal cards," manufactured of good

stiff paper, of such quality, form, and size as he shall deem best adapted for general use; which cards shall be used as a means of postal intercourse, under rules and regulations to be prescribed by the Postmaster-General, and when so used shall be transmitted through the mails at a postage charge of one cent each, including the cost of their manufacture. (R. S., § 3916.)

For regulations governing their mailability see section 324.

Sec. 158. Postal Cards for Foreign Use.—And the Postmaster-General is hereby authorized to furnish and issue to the public postal cards with postage stamps impressed upon them, for circulation in the mails exchanged with foreign countries under the provisions of the Universal Postal Union Convention of June first, eighteen hundred and seventy-eight, at a postage charge of two cents each, including the cost of their manufacture. (Act of March 3, 1879, § 1, 20 Stats., 357.)

The ordinary postal card may, by affixing an additional one cent adhesive postage stamp, be used for such purpose.

Sec. 159. Letter-sheet Envelopes, and Double Postal Cards.—That the Postmaster-General is hereby authorized to take the necessary steps to introduce and furnish for public use a letter-sheet envelope, on which postage stamps of the denominations now in use on ordinary envelopes shall be placed. And the Postmaster-General is also authorized to introduce and furnish for public use a double postal card, on which shall be placed two one-cent stamps, and said card to be so arranged for the address that it may be forwarded and returned, said cards to be sold for two cents apiece; and also to introduce and furnish for public use a double-letter envelope, on which stamps of the denominations now in use may be placed, and with the arrangement for the address similar to the double postal card; said letter-sheet and double postal card and double envelope to be issued under such regulations as the Postmaster-General may prescribe. * * * *And provided,* that no money shall be paid for royalty or patent on any of the articles named. (Act of March 3, 1879, § 32, 20 Stats., 362.)

A letter-sheet envelope has been provided of one denomination with a two-cent stamp impressed thereon, but is furnished only to presidential offices for sale.

Sec. 160. Improvements in Stamps and Envelopes.—The Postmaster-General may, from time to time, adopt such improvements in postage stamps and stamped envelopes as he may deem advisable; and when any such improvement is adopted, it shall be subject to all the provisions herein respecting postage stamps or stamped envelopes. (R. S., § 3917.)

Sec. 161. Other Provisions Affecting Stamps, &c.—The words, "obligation or other security of the United States" shall be held to mean * * * stamps and other representatives of value, of whatever de-

must be plainly marked "Soldier's Letter," "Sailor's Letter," or Marine's Letter," as the case may be, and signed thereunder with his name and official designation by a field or staff officer, post or detachment commander to whose command the soldier belongs, or by a surgeon or chaplain at a hospital where he may be; and in the navy and marine service, by the officer in command of the vessel, or surgeon on board, or officer commanding a naval hospital or detachment on shore. Letters so certified will be forwarded charged with postage due at single rates only, to be collected on delivery.

Sec. 324. Postal Cards cannot be issued by private parties. Cards, other than those issued by the Department, containing any writing, are subject to letter postage; but if they contain only printed matter, so as to constitute a circular, but one cent is required on each.

No printing or writing other than the address is allowable upon the address side, nor may anything except an address label be pasted or attached to any postal card. The words "to be called for," or any proper description of the person or place addressed, may be written thereon as part of the address. Any other writing, mark, or seal placed on the address side, or the splitting of the card and writing on the inside, renders it unmailable, except at letter rates. A postal card once delivered cannot be remailed as such.

Postal cards are first-class matter, and may be forwarded on request, and they should be returned to the writer from the office of address when unclaimed; but no request for such return should be placed on the address side.

Postmasters must treat postal cards as sealed letters, and refrain from reading the messages written thereon, except in order to return the cards to the writer when unclaimed, and except that their contents may be read if they appear to be unmailable because they contain obscene matter or relate to lotteries. (See sections 379 and 380.)

Sec. 325. Addresses, how made.—And addresses upon postal cards and unsealed circulars may be either written, printed, or affixed thereto at the option of the sender. (Act of July 12, 1876, from § 15, 19 Stats., 82.)

Sec. 326. Drop Letters.— * * * But in large cities and adjacent districts of dense population, having two or more post-offices within a distance of three miles of each other, any letter mailed at one of such offices and addressed to a locality within the delivery of another of such offices, which shall have been inadvertently prepaid at the drop or local-letter rate of postage only, may be forwarded to its destination through the proper office, charged with the amount of the deficient postage, to be collected on delivery. (R. S., § 3937, second sentence.)

A "drop letter" is one addressed for delivery to a person within the

Sec. 392. Consuls to pay Foreign Postage in certain Cases.—The Postmaster-General or the Secretary of State is hereby authorized to empower the consuls of the United States to pay the foreign postage on such letters destined for the United States as may be detained at the ports of foreign countries for the non-payment of postage, which postage shall be by the consul marked as paid by him, and the amount thereof shall be collected in the United States as other postage, on the delivery of the letters, and repaid to said consul, or credited on his account at the State Department. (R. S., 4014.)

MAILS WITH THE UNIVERSAL POSTAL UNION COUNTRIES.

Sec. 393. Classification of Mail Matter.—Mail matter within the Universal Postal Union is classified as follows :

1. Letters.
2. Postal cards, and postal cards with paid reply.
3. Commercial papers.
4. Printed matter of every kind.
5. Samples of merchandise.

Sec. 394. Postal Cards cannot exceed $5\frac{3}{8}$ inches in length and $3\frac{3}{8}$ inches in width. They must be mailed without cover. On the address side must be nothing but the address, except that the sender may place on that side his name and address by means of a stamp, a stamp facsimile of his signature, or by any other typographical process. Nothing must be joined or attached to the card.

Postal cards with paid reply are in two parts; one must bear the printed label "Postal card with paid reply," the other "Reply postal card," and be folded together, but not in any manner stuck or closed against inspection. On the address side of the reply part the sender may write his name and address; but return will be made only to an address in the country where it originated.

Postal cards issued by private persons are not admissible to international mails except when entirely in print and properly stamped at foreign rates of postage.

Domestic postal cards may be used by the addition of a one-cent stamp.

Sec. 395. Commercial Papers include all instruments or documents, written or drawn wholly or partly by hand, which have not the character of *an actual and personal correspondence*, such as papers of legal procedure, deeds of all kinds drawn up by public functionaries, way bills or bills of lading, invoices, the various documents of insurance companies, copies or extracts of deeds under private seal written on

All official matter sent under penalty envelopes or labels, or the frank of Senators or Members of Congress, will be treated as card matter, and, if unclaimed, returned to the office of mailing, if known.

A request upon a drop letter for its return to the writer at some other post-office, if unclaimed, cannot be respected unless it has been prepaid with one full rate (two cents) of postage.

Unclaimed letters bearing the card of a hotel, a school, college, or other public institution, which has evidently been printed upon the envelopes to serve as a mere advertisement, should not be returned to the place designated in the cards, unless there is also a request therefor, indicating the writer to whom they should be returned.

A letter which has been opened inadvertently, or upon a wrong delivery, may be returned to the writer without additional charge, when it contains a card or return request. The postmaster must not open letters to ascertain the writer.

Unclaimed card and request letters, prepaid one full rate, but not wholly prepaid, are to be returned to mailing office for delivery to the writer, who will be required to pay the amount originally due. If payment be refused the matter will be indorsed REFUSED, and treated as such. (See section 602.)

Sec. 595. Postal Cards.—When the message upon an unclaimed postal card is wholly or partly written, and the name and address of the writer is disclosed, the same shall be returned to writer after thirty days from date of its receipt, with the words "RETURNED TO WRITER," stamped thereon, and his name and address written underneath across the face of the card. If the message be wholly printed, it will be treated as printed matter. (See section 593.)

Sec. 596. Return of Other than First Class and Request Matter.—All matter, other than first class, may be returned, but is subject to an additional charge for postage for returning the same. When the sender of matter which would be subject to return postage shall, by indorsement upon the wrapper or otherwise, request its return, postmasters should comply with such request within the time fixed by the sender—if no time is fixed, then at the end of thirty days—first charging such matter, however, with the necessary return postage, and indorse the same "RETURN POSTAGE DUE — CENTS;" and the postmaster at the office to which such matter is returned must affix thereto postage-due stamps sufficient to cover the return postage, and collect the same from the sender before delivering such returned matter. If the sender should refuse to pay return postage, the matter must be disposed of as "REFUSED." If the matter be unclaimed, it will be treated as other unclaimed matter. If postage stamps or money sufficient to pay the return