

US Postal Laws & Regulations

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Year: 1887

Stamped envelopes



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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-

nomination, which have been or may be issued under any act of Congress. (R. S., § 5413.) No portrait shall be placed upon any of the bonds, securities, notes, fractional or postal currency of the United States while the original of such portrait is living. (R. S., § 3576.)

And it is made a penal offense to design, engrave, print, or in any manner make, execute, or utter any business or professional card or advertisement on any security of the United States.

STAMP SUPPLIES TO POSTMASTERS.

Sec. 162. To be Furnished and Sold.—Postage stamps and stamped envelopes shall be furnished by the Postmaster-General to all postmasters, and shall be kept for sale at all post-offices; and each postmaster shall be held accountable for all such stamps and envelopes furnished to him. (R. S., § 3918.)

Sec. 163. Postmasters not Supplied until Commissioned nor when Delinquent.—No postmaster will be supplied with stamps or stamped paper until his commission shall have been duly issued; and no postmaster who has failed to render any quarterly returns to the Auditor will be supplied until all delinquent returns shall have been received.

Sec. 164. Postmasters must Keep Themselves Supplied.—Postmasters must, by timely requisitions in anticipation of their necessities, to be made at any time when so required, keep their offices supplied with adhesive stamps of every kind, with stamped envelopes, newspaper wrappers, and postal cards in sufficient quantity to meet the public demand upon them, generally calculating for at least three months in advance. A failure to do so is reprehensible; but, should it occur, temporary supplies may be purchased from some other post-office. Supplies so purchased they are not required to include in their quarterly returns, nor will the amount of them be reckoned in calculating the business of their offices. On the other hand, if a postmaster lends or transfers stamps or stamped paper to another, without the special order of the Department, he will continue responsible for them and be allowed no credit, nor will the borrower, in case of their loss by fire or otherwise, be allowed credit for them.

Sec. 165. Requisitions.—Requisitions for adhesive stamps of all kinds, for stamped envelopes, newspaper wrappers, and postal cards, must be made upon forms (No. 3201-2-3 and 3285), which will be furnished by the First Assistant Postmaster-General through the Division of Post-Office Supplies. Especial care must be taken to fill the blank form with the names of the post-office, county, and State, the date of the order, the number and amount of each of the several kinds wanted, and also the number and amount of each on hand, together with the average monthly

requirement. The requisition must be signed with ink by the postmaster himself; except that, if he be sick or absent, the assistant may sign the postmaster's name, adding his own as assistant, thus:

RICHARD ROE, *P. M.*,

By JOHN DOE, *Assistant P. M.*

Unless the blank be so properly filled out and signed the requisition will not be honored, but returned for correction, whereby delay will ensue. The requisition must be forwarded to the Third Assistant Postmaster-General (Stamp Division).

Sec. 166. First Requisitions for Newspaper Stamps.—When newspaper and periodical stamps are for the first time ordered, the requisition should be accompanied with a copy of the publication for the mailing of which the stamps are desired, to enable the Department to determine its admissibility to the mails at second-class rates. Unless such a requisition is so made for stamps, as soon as the first newspaper or periodical published to be mailed at the office is presented for mailing, the postmaster will be held for the difference in postage if the publication be adjudged inadmissible at second-class rates.

NOTE.—As to the duty of the postmaster respecting the entry of new publications as second-class matter, see sections 333-336.

Sec. 167. Requisitions for Special-Request Envelopes.—Requisitions for special-request envelopes must be made by postmasters immediately upon receiving orders from parties wanting them, at whatever time in the quarter it may be, and upon the blank form (No. 3202) furnished by the Department for the purpose.

When money, which has been paid to a post-office upon an order for special-request envelopes, is lost or embezzled, the envelopes will be furnished according to the order, and the postmaster held for the money if the loss be chargeable to the fault of himself, his clerks, or employés.

See Sausser's case, 9 Ct. Claims R., 338; Bank of Boston v. U. S., 10 Id., 519; Garfide v. U. S., 11 Id., 601; McCollum v. U. S., 17 Id., 102; Pierce v. U. S., 7 Id., 65; The Floyd Acceptances, 7 Wall., 666.

Sec. 168. Rules Governing the Supply of Special-Request Envelopes.—The following rules will be strictly adhered to in connection with the supply of special-request envelopes:

1. Neither superscriptions nor special devices of any kind will be printed.
2. The printing of cards and requests across the end has been discontinued. In future they will be printed on the upper left-hand corner only.
3. Business avocations or employments will be excluded from cards and requests.

4. Cards and requests must be limited to the following matter, or so much thereof as may be desired, to-wit: First, the name of the writer, whether individual, firm, company, or corporation. Second, the post-office address, including number and name of street, name of city or town, county, and State. The name of the post-office as given for printing must correspond in spelling with that given in the Official Guide. Third, a request to return if not delivered within a given or blank number of days.

5. Should it be desired to leave in blank the post-office address of the party to whom the envelopes are to be made returnable, it must be so stated.

6. When the name and post-office address only are desired, without a request to return, the order must so specify; in which case, by law, the letter will be returnable, if not delivered within thirty days. (See section 592.)

7. No variations will be made in the style of type, the color of ink, or the form of request adopted by the Department; neither will cards or requests be surrounded by borders of any kind.

8. If possible, a printed card should always accompany the order; if not, the matter desired to be printed must be plainly written, in order that mistakes may be avoided.

9. Cards or requests will not be printed on newspaper wrappers, or envelopes for covering circulars.

10. Requests making envelopes returnable to another post-office than that of the postmaster who makes requisition for them will not be printed, unless the party for whose use they are intended is accustomed to receive mail at both places, or some other sufficient reason is given with the postmaster's requisition or plainly written thereon.

Sec. 169. Postmasters to Count Supplies when Received.—Upon receiving any supplies of stamps or stamped paper postmasters are required to count them in the presence of a disinterested witness, to date and sign the receipt, and transmit the same to the Third Assistant Postmaster-General (Stamp Division). In case of any deficiency the affidavit of the postmaster and that of the witness, stating the amount of such deficiency, with all the facts in the case, will be necessary in order to obtain credit therefor; and in every such case the wrapper, label, and box, or wooden case in which the supplies were received should also be transmitted with such affidavit and a letter making the claim to the Third Assistant Postmaster-General, and a record kept by the postmaster of the number, date, address, and all other marks on the same. Receipts must be signed in the same manner as requisitions.

Sec. 170. Damaged Supplies, how Treated.—If any portion of a parcel

of stamps, received upon requisition, be found to be damaged, the postmaster will sign the receipt for the whole amount of the parcel, and, having written across the face of the receipt the number and amount of stamps, envelopes, wrappers, or cards unfit for use, he will return the same, together with the receipt, to the Third Assistant Postmaster-General (Stamp Division), who will give credit for the amount returned. But if the damage be total, the entire number should be returned with the receipt not signed, in order that others may be supplied in their place. The package must be registered, and the postmaster must be able to prove the act of mailing it by a disinterested witness. Postmasters failing to register such packages will not receive credit for the amount alleged to have been returned, in case the same fails to reach the Department. When supplies are damaged by fire or other casualty after they are received, they will be returned to the Third Assistant Postmaster-General (Stamp Division), who will allow credit for the amount thus returned, upon satisfactory evidence that the stamps returned were those with which the postmaster returning them was charged.

Sec. 171. Mistakes in Printing Special-Request Envelopes.—Special-request envelopes which may be refused by the parties ordering them, on account of misprinting or other mistake, should be sent registered to the Third Assistant Postmaster-General (Stamp Division), with a letter of advice. If the mistake occurred through the fault of the Department, or of the manufacturer of the envelopes, credit for their full value will be given in the postmaster's account, and the requisition will be re-filled; if otherwise, credit for the postage value only of the envelopes will be given, and the postmaster should forward a new and correct requisition. The postmaster must not dispose of special-request envelopes to any other than the party for whose use they were ordered.

FOR RULES GOVERNING THE ENTRY OF SUPPLIES on account and returns, see sections 238, 240-243, 244, *et seq.*

DISPOSITION OF STAMPS, ETC.

Sec. 172. Postage Stamps Sold at Discount to Designated Agents.—Postage stamps and stamped envelopes may be sold at a discount to certain designated agents, who will agree to sell again without discount, under rules to be prescribed by the Postmaster-General; but the quantities of each sold to any one agent at any one time shall not exceed one hundred dollars in value, and the discount shall not exceed five per centum on the face value of the stamps, nor the same per centum on the current price of the envelopes when sold in less quantities. (R. S., § 3919.)

This system of selling has been some time since wholly discontinued. No such agents exist or will be appointed; no stamps or stamped paper will be sold at a discount, and no percentage on sales will be allowed under any circumstances.

In the larger cities agencies for the sale of stamps and other post-office service are provided through the postmaster.

Sec. 173. Stamped Envelopes, &c., to be Sold at Cost.—No stamped envelopes or newspaper wrappers shall be sold by the Post-Office Department at less (in addition to the legal postage) than the cost, including all salaries, clerk-hire, and other expenses connected therewith. (Act of July 12, 1876, § 14, 19 Stats., 82.)

Sec. 174. Irregular Sales and Misuse Forbidden.—Postage stamps shall not be sold for any larger sum than the value indicated on their face, nor stamped envelopes for more than is charged therefor by the Post-Office Department for like quantities. Any person connected with the postal service who shall violate this provision shall be punishable by a fine of not less than ten dollars nor more than five hundred. (R. S., § 3920.) And no postmaster of any class, or other person connected with the postal service, entrusted with the sale or custody of postage stamps, stamped envelopes, or postal cards, shall use or dispose of them in the payment of debts or in the purchase of merchandise or other salable articles, or pledge or hypothecate the same, or sell or dispose of them except for cash, or sell or dispose of postage stamps or postal cards for any larger or less sum than the values indicated on their faces, or sell or dispose of stamped envelopes for a larger or less sum than is charged therefor by the Post-Office Department for like quantities, or sell or dispose of postage stamps, stamped envelopes, or postal cards otherwise than as provided by law and the regulations of the Post-Office Department; and any postmaster, or other person connected with the postal service, who shall violate any of these provisions shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and, on conviction thereof, shall be fined in any sum not less than fifty nor more than five hundred dollars, or be imprisoned for a term not exceeding one year. (Act of June 17, 1873, 20 Stats., 141.)

Sec. 175. Price of Stamped and Letter-Sheet Envelopes.—The Postmaster-General fixes by order, from time to time, the prices at which letter-sheet envelopes, and the various sizes, qualities, and denominations of stamped envelopes and newspaper wrappers will be sold to the public, singly or in parcels of different numbers, depending upon the cost of production; and information of these prices is furnished to postmasters and the public by circulars from the Department. The prices so fixed, must, without change, govern their sale by postmasters and all persons intrusted with their sale or custody.