

From the Stamp Specialist: United States Postal Agency, Shanghai

By Harvey Bounds

(From *The Stamp Specialist Mahogany Book*, published in 1947, with some images added)

Nearly every collector who is at all familiar with United States stamps knows that this country in 1919 and 1922 issued stamps overprinted for use in Shanghai, China, but not nearly so many know the facts leading up to their issuance, nor why they were discontinued after only three years in use.

The writer, in cooperation with the late Robert F. Brinton of West Chester, Penna., made quite a study of this "U.S. Office Abroad," and herewith presents some of the facts uncovered.

Among the most highly prized articles of commerce for many hundreds of years have been the silks, ceramics, tea, and spices of China. As early as the ninth century, the Arabs traded with China, and Marco Polo—that peerless teller of stories—wrote an account of his venture to Cathay (China) in the 13th century that still thrills his readers. Modern European nations entered the picture in 1517 when Portuguese vessels first reached Chinese ports, and the Dutch came later in the same century. In 1684, the British established a "factory" at Canton, and ousted the Dutch. The Chinese government restricted all foreign trade to this city until 1842.

England's monopoly on the China trade was centered in the British East India Company, and, until the Revolutionary War, Americans had to buy all Chinese products (and practically everything else) through the mother country. But once freedom had been guaranteed—even before a stable government had been established for the erstwhile colonists—American merchants and shipping interests laid plans to develop for themselves trade routes to China. These had been denied to them as British colonists. Accordingly, the ship "Empress of Asia" was outfitted, and in 1784-85 became the first American ship to make the round trip to Canton. The voyage was highly successful, and other ships were rapidly put on the "China run." In fact, by 1789, it was reported that at one time there were five American vessels anchored at Canton when eleven more sailed into the harbor.



The 2¢-\$2.00 Offices in China (Sc. K1-K16), tied by "U.S. Postal Agency, Shanghai China, R.D." oval handstamps on a 1919 registered cover to Ellsworth Pa.



"U.S. Consulate General Shanghai Nov 27 1867" black double circle datestamp pressed into service as a postmark prior to delivery of the regular device, on a cover to Iowa, with 10¢ green (Sc. 68) tied by blue wedges cancel, carried on the Pacific Mail Steamer "China", the earliest reported usage of a U.S. adhesive from Shanghai.



The "Empress of Asia," properly identified as the "Empress of China"

goes back to the year 1015, and it has been a District City since 1360. The ancient native city is surrounded by walls three and one-half miles in circumference, with six gates. The Shanghai of commerce lay outside the walls, and was divided into three main districts: The British, French, and American Concessions. Through the Treaty of Nanking, the British had secured the cession of a site of 5362 acres at Shanghai, and

The fact that the first consulate to be opened by the infant American republic was established in Canton in 1786 is not generally known, but such is the case. The super-cargo on the historic voyage of the "Empress of Asia" was Maj. Samuel Shaw, and on his return, he made such a complete and glowing account of the business potentialities that the Congress of the Confederation promptly elected him to look after American interests as Consul at Canton.

The consulate was located in the building housing the offices of Russell & Co., an important American firm, and for many years, after the death of Maj. Shaw, the Consul was usually one of the officers of this company. This was the only consulate this country had in China for fifty-eight years.

Following the "Opium War" of 1840, Great Britain, through the Treaty of Nanking, won the island of Hong Kong and an indemnity of twenty-one million dollars, and forced the opening to foreign trade of the "Treaty Ports" of Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo and Shanghai, in addition to Canton. They opened post offices in Hong Kong and Shanghai in 1844, and the United States opened a consulate in Amoy in the same year. U.S. mail, unless carried by a private ship, was received and dispatched through the British Hong Kong postoffice.

Shanghai, located at the junction of the Wusung River (known to most foreigners as Soochow Creek) and the Huangpu, some twelve miles from where they flow into the mighty Yangtse, soon became the most important commercial city of central China. It is a very old and prosperous city, for its recorded history



2¢-8¢ Offices in China (Sc. K1-K4) tied by "U.S. Pos. Service, Shanghai, China, Jul. 22, 1920" duplex datestamps on cover to San Francisco, also with Chinese, British Offices, Russian, French and Japanese Offices stamps mostly uncanceled.



20¢ Offices in China (K10) tied by "U.S. Pos. Service, Shanghai, China, Dec. 7, 1922" duplex datestamp on front of postcard depicting the Bund, waterfront, area in Shanghai.

in 1847 another treaty ceded 356 acres to the French. The so-called "American Concession" was not really a concession at all, but was the name given to the settlement which grew up around the residence of the American consul.

This was the age of the speedy clipper ships, and the rich cargoes to be found at Shanghai attracted them in numbers. The American Concession, while it did not originate in treaty-right was by far the most desirable from a commercial standpoint, for it lay at the downriver edge of the city, and hence was the first anchorage reached where ships came up the river.

Caleb Lyon was nominated United States Consulate at Shanghai on February 1, 1847, but failed to reach China. It is stated by one source that the "goldbug" hit him when he reached California [on his way to China], and that he resigned from there. But P.M. Hamer, Chief of the Division of Reference, National Archives of the United States, under date of March 21, 1941, wrote Mr. Brinton as follows;

"Prior to the appointment of Caleb Lyon as Consul at Shanghai, it appears that the Acting Commissioner of the United States, James Biddle, under authority conferred upon him, appointed H.G. Wolcott as Acting Consul at Shanghai on March 30, 1846. With reference to Mr. Lyon although he accepted the appointment, it does not appear that he ever went to the post. His letter of resignation was written at Washington, April 17, 1848, addressed to the Department of State. On May 10, 1848, John A. Griswold was appointed Consul. Writing from Shanghai on October 10, 1848, he acknowledged the receipt of his commission and stated that the late Acting Consul, H.G. Wolcott, had turned over the records of the consulate to him."

In 1863 the American district north of Soochow Creek was surveyed, and, for purposes of municipal government, was incorporated with the British settlement. Mr. Hamer states that the first official mention of what was known as the "American Concession" is found in a press-copy of Despatch No. 19, July 7, 1863, from the Consulate at Shanghai to the Secretary of State. This despatch refers to an agreement entered into with the local authorities and gives some details. The original of this despatch and the enclosed agreement have not been found. But, under date of May 28, 1864, the Consul at Shanghai stated in Despatch No. 60 that he was transmitting 'The Municipal Report of the year ending March 31st, 1864,' which comprises a statement of the Municipal affairs of the lately so-called 'British Concession' and of the lately so-called 'American Concession'."

For two decades after the establishment of the American Consulate in Shanghai, postal communication between there and the United States was either very expensive or somewhat uncertain. The "Tables of Postages to Foreign countries" to be effective from and after June 30, 1851," put out by the Postmaster General, N.K. Hall, lists only three routes by which letters could be sent to China:

1. Via Southampton—not exceeding 1/2 ounce, 45 cents. Note—"On all letters between the United States and the countries here named, through the United Kingdom, and by routes specified, the rates here affixed must be prepaid when sent from, and collected when received in, the United States."

Cover to Rev. M.C. White in care of English Consul at Fuh Chau (Fuchow), China, with manuscript "Cardiff July 21" (1852) post mark



(lower left) and "Paid 45" rate, also with sender's routing "Overland via Southampton", red manuscript "24" credit, red "Paid 4 AU 4 1852" transit datestamp, manuscript "4" British P.O. rate, and Hong Kong receiving backstamp (Oct. 10)

2. Via Marseilles—by closed pouch, 1/2 ounce, 65 cents.

"Charges made up as follows:

50 cents—British and sea

10 cents—Foreign

5 cents—United States

65 cents—Total Charges."

3. By private ship from San Francisco, 6 cents.

Folded letter with "New York 42 Sep. 7" debit circular date-stamp to Baring Bros. in London, forwarded to Canton, China, with red "London Paid 24 Sep. 1850" c.d.s., red "VIA MARSEILLES" handstamp, manuscript ratings, and Hong Kong (Nov. 11) backstamp.



“SHIP LETTERS. Letters sent from the United States to Foreign Countries by private vessels are chargeable with inland postage, which must be prepaid from the mailing office to the port of sailing. The Postmaster of San Francisco is specially instructed to make up and dispatch mails to the Sandwich Islands, China, and New South Wales.”

In 1857, Section 124, Regulations and Laws of the Post Office, presents the following ways of getting mail from the United States to China:

1. British mail, via Southampton not over 1/2 oz. 33 cents.
2. British mail, via Marseilles 1/4 oz. 39¢; 1/2 oz. 45 cents.
3. British mail, by Bremen or Hamburg mail, via Trieste, 1/2 oz. 55 cents.
4. British mail, by Bremen or Hamburg mail, via Marseilles or Suez, 1/2 oz. 72 cents.
5. By French mail, 1/4 oz. 30 cents; 1/2 oz. 60 cents.
6. By U. S. mail to San Francisco, thence by private ship, 1/2 oz. 10 cents.

A few pages further in the 1857 laws appears this unusual entry: “Sec. 131—To the Sandwich Islands, etc.

China, New South Wales, Sandwich Islands—10 cents; being the United States postage to San Francisco. Prepayment required.

By mail to San Francisco, thence by private ship.”

It also stated that “in China and New South Wales the ship postage, it is understood, is comparatively trifling.”

P. L. & R. [Postal Laws & Regulations] for 1866, Section 259 shows the rates for Routes 3, 4, and 5 in the 1857 list remained the same, but for Route 1 (Southampton) the rate was raised to 45 cents, and for Route 2 (Marseilles) to 52 cents. Due to the change in United States domestic rates in 1861, the prepaid rate for postage via private ship was only 3 cents per half-ounce to San Francisco. Letters to China could not be registered.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that in this period the rates between the United States and China by established routes of the British, French and German mails ranged from 30 cents to 72 cents per letter, and that mail sent by the cheaper route through San Francisco depended upon private ships for delivery. This was due to the fact

that there were no regularly established mail lines between the United States and China. But by the middle “Sixties,” American interests in the Orient had become so important that the demand for quicker and cheaper postal service caused the Post Office Department to appeal to Congress for authority to



10¢ F. Grill (Sc. 96), one with wide straddle-pane margin, tied by negative mirror-image “20” in circle cancel with “P.O.D. U.S. Con. Genl. Shanghai Mar. 20” c.d.s. on blue 1869 folded letter to Montreal, Canada, also with red “China and Japan Steam Service” double-line oval handstamp and May 8, 1869 Montreal receiving backstamp. The 20¢ postage overpaid by 4¢ the 10¢ transpacific postage and 6¢ U.S.-Canada rate. This cover was carried by branch steamer from Shanghai to Yokohama, where it was placed on board the Pacific Mail Steam Ship “Japan,” which arrived in San Francisco on April 24.



10¢ Yellow (Sc. 116) tied by quartered cork cancels and “San Francisco Cal. Nov. 18” (1870) c.d.s. on cover to Hartford, Conn., also with magenta “China and Japan Steam Service” oval handstamp at left, carried aboard the Pacific Mail Steamship Co.’s “China,” which departed Yokohama on Oct. 23, 1870, and arrived in San Francisco Nov. 17.



6¢ Dull Pink (Sc. 159) tied by circle of wedges cancel, with “U.S. Postal Ag’cy, Shanghai, Feb. 1” circular date stamp on cover to Illinois, also with “San Francisco Cal. Feb. 28” c.d.s.

establish regular steamship mail service to China. The following authorization was given and is reported in P. L. & R., 1866, Section 192 (17 Feb. 1865, S. 1-13 Stat. 430):

“The Postmaster General is hereby authorized to invite proposals by public advertisements, for the period of sixty days, in one or more newspapers published in the following cities: Washington, New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and San Francisco, respectively, for mail steamship service between the port of San Francisco, in the United States, and some port or ports in the Chinese Empire, touching at Honolulu, in the Sandwich Islands, and one or more ports in Japan, by means of a monthly line of first-class American sea-going steamships, to be of not less than three thousand tons burden each, and of sufficient number to perform twelve round trips per annum between said ports, and to contract with the lowest responsible bidder for said service for a term of not more than ten years, to commence from the day the first steamship of the proposed line shall depart from the port of San Francisco with the mails for China;

PROVIDED, That no bid shall be considered which shall amount to more than five hundred thousand dollars for the twelve round trips per annum, nor unless the same is from a citizen or citizens of the United States, and is accompanied by an offer of good and sufficient sureties (also citizens of the United States) for the faithful performance of such contract.”

The report of the Postmaster General, Nov. 15, 1865, reads in part: “The contract for the mail steamship service to Japan and China was awarded on the 28th of August last to the Pacific Mail Steamship Company.”

This company was to construct four ships according to specifications, and start the service on or before the first of January, 1867. The Pacific Mail line was duly established, and led directly to the appointment of a United States Postal Agent in Shanghai. The story of his appointment can best be told by quotations from and references to four official papers:

1. From the Postmaster General’s Journal, No. 63, June 14, 1867: “Appoint the United States Consul at Shanghai, China, subject to approval by the Secretary of State, United States Postal Agent, to receive, distribute, deliver, and dispatch mails conveyed to and from that port by United States mail packets plying between San Francisco and Shanghai, via Kanagawa (Yokohama) Japan.”

2. Instruction No. 17 of the Department of State, June 11, 1867, addressed to the Consul General, George F. Seward, advised the consul of the approval of his appointment as Postal Agent by the Postmaster General. Acknowledgment was made by the Vice-Consul General, October 14, 1867.

3. From the Postmaster General's Report, Nov. 26, 1867: "It was also necessary to employ agents at Kanagawa (Japan) and at Shanghai (China) to receive, deliver, make up, and dispatch the mails conveyed to and from each of these ports; and in the absence of legislation authorizing the establishment of United States Postal Agencies in connection with this service, or any appropriation to pay salaries of officials and other employees incident thereto, the United States Consul General at Shanghai and the United States Consul at Kanagawa were, with the concurrence of the Department of State, designated resident mail agents at those ports respectively, and instructed to act in that capacity in connection with their consular duties, this Department to pay all necessary expenses for clerk hire, etc., incurred in attending to the mails."

4. United States Statutes at Large, Section 7, Volume 15, Act of July 27, 1868: "And be it further enacted, That the Postmaster General be, and he is hereby, authorized to establish in connection with the United States mail steamship service to Japan and China a general postal agency at Shanghai, China, and such branch offices in other ports in China and Japan as shall in his judgment be necessary for the prompt and efficient handling of the postal service in those countries."

Proof that the Consul General was the Postal Agent is furnished by the earliest postmark of the Shanghai Postal Agency. It was a 26mm. circle, black, reading "P.O.D.U.S.CON. GENL." at the top and "SHANGHAI" below, with the month and day in the center (Fig. 1). Mail posted on the ships was marked with a small, double-line oval handstamp, in red, 30-1/2x15-1/2mm., and reading "CHINA AND JAPAN" above and "STEAM SERVICE" below, with conventional designs in the center and at each side (Fig. 2). Such mail was postmarked and the stamps canceled at San Francisco or Shanghai, whichever happened to be the port of arrival. Although a part of the United States postal system, the Shanghai postal agency at this time was regarded with reference to rates as a foreign office. A letter from the United States to the United States Postal Agency in Shanghai required the same rate of postage (10 cents per half-ounce) as was required for a letter to the British postoffice in Shanghai.

In 1878, the Universal Postal Union was formed at the Geneva Convention, and set uniform rates of postage for the member nations. Among these were the United States, Great Britain, France, and Japan, all of which had post offices or postal agencies in Shanghai.

At Geneva, the rates set between member nations, or between a member nation and a non-member which had a postal convention with another member (called an "intermediary") were: "For letters, five cents for each half-ounce or fraction thereof if prepaid; double that rate for each half-ounce or fraction thereof if not prepaid."

Letters to and from the U.S. Postal Agency in Shanghai, therefore, took the U.P.U rate of 5 cents per half-ounce if prepaid after this date, that being the rate between the United States and Great Britain, China not being a member nation but having a convention with the British.

The postmark in use at the Shanghai agency at that time was a 25mm. circle, black, with "U.S. POSTAL AGENCY" above and "SHANGHAI" below, and the month and day in the center (Fig. 3).

This postmark was used until about 1886 when a new type townmark was introduced, a double oval in magenta, 37x23mm., with above "U.S. POSTAL AGENCY" and below "SHANGHAI" with a small star at each side. Inside the smaller oval was the day, month and year in a straight line (Fig. 4). Sometimes, this postmark was applied directly to the stamp, and sometimes, as with the earlier types, the stamp was canceled with a separate cork killer. This double oval was used until 1890, after which the Shanghai agency postmarks followed the pattern of the patent handstamps with killer attached as furnished the postoffices in the United States. A number of these are shown with this article.

Effective as of June 1, 1903, United States domestic mail rates were made applicable to mail from or for delivery through the United States Postal Agency in Shanghai.

2¢ Carmine Type I (Sc. 319) strip of four and a single (paying correct 10¢ registry rate) tied to registered cover to Boston, Mass. by three strikes of black four line "Registered/



Jun 24, 1905/U.S. Postal Agency/Shanghai, China" handstamps with no other Shanghai postal markings.

10¢ Pale red brown, Sc. 307 tied to registered cover to Missouri by violet oval "U.S. Postal Agency/R.D./Shanghai, China" postmark, with matching four line "Registered/Sep



21, 1908/U.S. Postal Agency/Shanghai, China" handstamp at left, Seattle transit and Farmingham arrival c.d.s. on reverse.

To Be Continued



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

From the Stamp Specialist: U.S. Postal Agency, Shanghai, Part 2

By Harvey Bounds

(From *The Stamp Specialist Mahogany Book*, published in 1947, with some images added)

The Shanghai Agency, since its establishment, had been located in the United States Consulate at No. 12 Chinkiang Road, the various Consuls having continued to act also as Postal Agents. On October 1, 1907, the Agency was separated from the Consulate and was moved to No. 16 Whangpoo Road. John M. Darrah was appointed Agent and served until March 1917, when he resigned and was succeeded by Edward H. Everett.

For many years other nations had surcharged their domestic stamps for use in their offices abroad, or had printed separate issues of stamps. But just who or what was the influence that caused our Postoffice Department to decide to surcharge United States stamps for use in the Shanghai Agency is unknown to the writer. However, the following notice made its appearance 51 years after the Agency was established:

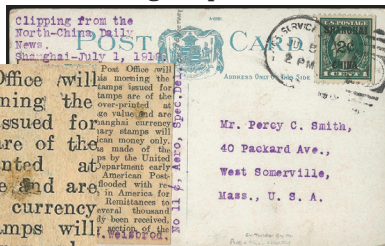
“Postage Stamps Surcharged Shanghai, China.
“Office Third Ass’t P.M. Gen’l.



U.S. 5¢ Parcel Post with Darrah Type I Overprint (Q5 variety, with partial strike of “U.S. Postal Agency, Shanghai, China, R.D.” oval handstamp. In 1913 Darrah applied a handstamp and two different overprints to various U.S. stamps, though not Scott-listed, they are widely regarded as forerunners of the “Shanghai” overprints.

Washington, May 5, 1919.

1. Postage stamps have been issued to the U.S. Postal Agency, Shanghai, China, in denominations of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, 20, 30, 50-cent, and \$1, also 10-cent special-delivery stamps, surcharged “Shanghai, China,” at double their face value. The surcharge is printed in black



THE American Post Office will place on sale this morning the new surcharged stamps issued for that office. The stamps are of the regular issue over-printed at double their postage value, and are to be sold in Shanghai currency only. The ordinary stamps will be sold for American money only. Announcement was made of the sale of these stamps by the United States Postoffice Department early in May and the American Postmaster has been flooded with requests from people in America for these new stamps. Remittances to the amount of several thousand dollars have already been received, coming from every section of the United States.

A postcard with a 2¢ on 1¢ Offices in China (K1) tied by a “U.S. Pos. Service, Shanghai, China Jul. 5, 1919” duplex cancel sent to West Somerville Mass., with an article from the North-

letters on all denominations except 7-cent and \$1, which are surcharged in red ink.

For example, the 1-cent is surcharged as follows:

SHANGHAI
2-cent
China

[Note that it actually was surcharged “2¢,” not “2-cent”. JFD.]

2. These stamps are intended for sale by the Postal Agency at Shanghai at their surcharged value in local currency, and will be valid to the amount of their original values for the prepayment of postage on mail dispatched from the U.S. Postal Agency at Shanghai to addresses in the United States.

3. The Shanghai surcharged stamps will not be issued to postmasters in the United States.



A. M. DOCKERY.
Third Ass’t P. M. Gen’l.”

The stamps surcharged were the unwatermarked, flat-plate, perf 11, issue of 1917-19. It will be noted that these stamps were not to be distributed to domestic post-offices. Apparently, the 10-cent special delivery stamp, if surcharged, was not put into use.

From the Robert Markovits Special Delivery Collection: 1917 10¢ Ultramarine used with 1¢ Washington coil, each tied by



“U.S. Pos. Service, Shanghai, China, Aug 9 '1920” duplex on revalued 2¢ on 3¢ purple entire to Fort Washington Md. An exceptionally rare Special Delivery use from the U.S. Postal Agency at Shanghai, China. Note that the Special Delivery, as with the coils, does not bear a “Shanghai” overprint.

The other stamps were put on sale at Shanghai on July 1, 1919. The surcharge differed somewhat from Dockery’s text as it read “SHANGHAI / 2¢ / CHINA” in three lines. (Fig. 5).

In 1922, the 1-cent flat-plate, perf. 11, and the 2-cent offset-printing U.S. stamps were surcharged in a little smaller type in three lines, “SHANGHAI / 2 Cts. / CHINA” (Fig. 6, page 23).

SHANGHAI
2¢
CHINA
Fig. 5



Sc. K18

SHANGHAI
2 Cts.
CHINA
Fig. 6

The use of these stamps was only short lived, for three and a half years after they first went on sale the Agency was out of existence. The office

of the Third Assistant Postmaster General advises that the stamps were on sale at the agency until its closing.

The reasons for the discontinuance of the Shanghai Agency are set forth very clearly in the following quotation from the Postmaster General's Report for 1922:

"At the Plenary Session of Feb. 1, 1922, of the Conference on Limitation of Armament held in this city, a resolution was adopted calling for the closing not later than Jan. 1, 1923, of all foreign postal agencies in China except in leased territories or as otherwise specifically provided for by treaty, and under this resolution arrangements are now being made to close the United States Postal Agency at Shanghai on Dec. 31, 1922."

The arrangements were carried through as planned, for the P.M.G.'s Order No. 70, of Jan. 17, 1924, states that the United States Postal Agency at Shanghai, China, was closed on December 31, 1922, and (after a period in which to close up its affairs) was declared discontinued, as of January 31, 1924. Col. Clyde S. Ford was the last Postal Agent.

And, with the discontinuance of the United States Agency, international postal rates again became applicable to American mail to and from Shanghai.

40¢ on 20¢ Offices in China (Sc. K13) Plate number single tied by "U.S. Postal Agency, Shanghai, China, R.D." [Registered]



handstamp on cover to Tecumseh Nebraska, with Dec. 30, 1923 origin backstamp, used on the second to last day of service at the post office in Shanghai

2¢ on 1¢ Offices in China (Sc. K1) vertical pair tied by "U.S. Pos. Service, Shanghai, China, Jan. 24 5PM 1923" duplex date-



stamp on Postal Agency in Shanghai printed corner card cover to stamp dealer and writer Philip Ward at Germantown Pa., sent after the office of the U.S. Postal Agency in Shanghai closed on Dec. 31, 1922.



REGISTERED
 JUN 8 1906
 U. S. POSTAL AGENCY.
 SHANGHAI, CHINA.

NOT FOUND



A sampling of the types of postal markings used at the U.S. Postal Agency in China