

Naval Cover Fakes, Forgeries and Frauds Part I

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Whether you collect Roman gold coins, genuine dinosaur bones or Army, Navy or Marine Corps medals, you will find that there are people out there willing to separate you from your money by pedaling bogus items for the real thing. After all, caveat emptor did not become part of our lexicon without good cause.

And, sadly, down through the ages, philatelists have not been exempt from shady characters. According to *Wikipedia* and other sources, Rowland Hill introduced the first postage stamp, the penny black, to the United Kingdom in May 1840. The stamp allowed the sender rather than the recipient to pay to send a letter, although prepayment was not then required. Other countries soon followed the UK and began issuing stamps and soon people began collecting these little bits of colored paper. And it was not long before those without scruples began to fabricate or fake copies of scarcer or more valuable stamps for the gullible to purchase. In fact, some forgers became very well known and proudly acknowledged their considerable efforts.

The practice even goes on today. The 12 November issue of *Linn's Stamp News* discussed a forged 41¢ flag coil stamp which is a remarkably good counterfeit. If an eBay source offers current flag stamps in volume at a steep discount, pass the offer by. You don't need the grief that would come from USPS postal inspectors if you are discovered using counterfeit stamps.

Societies quickly fought back to counter deceptive stamp practices by establishing services to examine valuable stamps and certify authenticity or declare them fakes, whichever applied. The services are not free, but are the only way that a collector can protect him or herself from paying good money for a faked stamp.

What about covers?

You are wondering by now what all that has to do with our hobby, naval covers. Well, deceptive practices are known with covers, too. Some years back, when I was *Log* Editor, a member sent me for a *Log* auction several 19th century covers with "Steam" or "Steam boat" markings such as were used on river and canal boats with mail contracts. I had read about fraudulent markings on that type of mail - a faker would apply a rubber stamp marking copied from a reference publication to an otherwise undistinguished letter thus increasing its value by many fold. I sent the covers to a friend who was a member of the American Philatelic Society (APS) Expertizing Service and told him that I would pay the fee if there was any chance that the items were genuine. If not, I said to put them in the

APES reference collection. The covers ended up in the reference collection, not surprisingly.

But what about modern material, post 1908? Well, that's the purpose of this article. Sad to report, but both USCS and non-USCS members have been involved in producing fraudulent naval covers, fortunately not many, just a handful. Whenever information of fraud came to light, USCS directors have invariably expelled the member and publicized non-member fraud. But memories fade and newer members don't always know what has gone before.

In recent months, the directors have had extensive discussions about the sale of fraudulent material to a member. The upshot has been a decision to run a series of eight or more monthly articles this year about fakes, forgeries and fraudulent naval covers. The individual articles will be authored by several of our expert members, along with contributions from those who also have knowledge in a particular subject. To the best of our ability, the articles will be factual, not rumor or dark suspicion. The series will then be collated into one volume so that the information is available in the future to members and non-members alike.

Some of the information to be presented in subsequent articles has been documented in previous *Logs*, the USCS *Catalog of U.S. Naval Postmarks* or the USCS *Naval Cover Cachet Makers' Catalog*. However, not every member has a run of the *Log* or a copy of those volumes and certainly few non-members do. So, we will include that information at the start of the series then proceed to questionable material which is relatively unknown to the vast majority of our membership.

Definitions

For this series, the following definitions taken from the USCS *Catalog of United States Naval Postmarks* apply:

Fake - a complete fabrication of a device that looks like a postmark but which was never used in the ship's post office. It is noted that not all fakes listed in the above mentioned Catalog were deliberately made to defraud collectors. However, they will be listed in this series of articles simply for record purposes.

Forgery - a privately made reproduction of a genuine postmark. A forgery must be traceable to the original postmark from which it was made.

Conclusion

We believe this series of articles is an important service to our members and to all of philately. As we go along, if you have factual information to add, please do not hesitate to contribute that. We want the collective information on naval cover fakes, forgeries and frauds to be as complete and as accurate as possible.

Look for Part II of the series next month.

Check out the USCS website:

<http://www.uscs.org>