



# The Golden Era of Philatelic Geegaws

Tiny souvenir cotton bales, mailbags, Indian artifacts and teddy bears mailed worldwide

MARJORY J. SENTÉ



Figure 1. A miniature bale of cotton from the 1907 Jamestown Exposition and the back of the mailing tag.

**A** geegaw is a showy thing, especially one that is useless or worthless. Many souvenir mailers — mailing tags with a souvenir attached — can be classified as geegaws because the souvenirs are hats and shoes you can't wear, pillows not made for sleeping and mailbags that don't carry letters or packages.

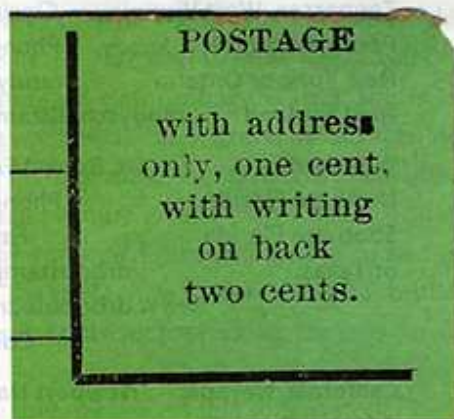


Figure 2. A detail from an unused mailing tag confirming the 1-cent rate.





Figure 3. A bag of photographs mailed from Pikes Peak in 1920. The cogwheel handstamp confirms the time of mailing.

However, souvenir mailers or philatelic geegaws are popular to collect, especially the ones that were mailed to friends and family. They represent a niche of postal history that is not fully documented from the perspective of rates. The earliest ones date from the 1907 Jamestown Exposition. An inscription on a toy cotton bale attached to a tag (Figure 1) states, "It is a souvenir miniature cotton bale of Jamestown Exposition, April 26 to November 30, 1907." The tag is franked with the 2-cent Jamestown commemorative which overpaid the mailing fee by a penny.

After March 1, 1907, postcards and souvenir mailers could be sent for 1 cent until the rate for souvenir mailers changed in 1925. An unused souvenir mailer from this period (Figure 2) has the instructions, "Postage with address only, one cent, with writing on back two cents."

A souvenir mailbag from Pikes Peak containing miniature postcards was mailed for a penny (Figure 3). Although the cancel is a smudge, a cog wheel handstamp on the back of the tag reads "Summit of Pikes Peak Sep 13, 1920." A second Pikes Peak miniature mailbag from 1925 that contains photographs (Figure 4) has an attractive tag that reads, "This Novelty can be mailed anywhere as it is without wrapping or folding. Postage 1 cent."

For those who could afford more than a postcard and its postage, philatelic geegaws were popular souvenirs frequently sold at and mailed from



Figure 4. Bag of photographs mailed from Pikes Peak in 1925 with the text on the tag indicating the 1-cent rate.



Figure 5. A bag containing 12 photographs mailed from the Grand Canyon and a photograph showing Phantom Ranch.







Figure 6. A bag of photographs mailed in 1925 from the Grand Canyon to Germany. A 20-cent Golden Gate stamp was needed to meet the rate.



Figure 7. An unused postcard with a miniature salt bag attached. The inscription at the stamp locator indicates the proper rates.



Figure 8. A miniature mailbag of photographs from Yellowstone Park.

National Parks. Among the most popular of the souvenir mailers were miniature mailbags filled with photographs. A Fred Harvey souvenir mailbag containing a set of 12 photos and attached to a tag franked with a 2-cent carmine Washington that overpaid the rate by a penny (Figure 5) was mailed at the Grand Canyon Post Office sometime after 1922. Phantom Ranch opened in November 1922 and a photograph in the set shows the ranch and identifies it by name.

The surface letter rate was charged when a souvenir mailbag was mailed to Germany. A Fred Harvey souvenir mailbag posted in 1925 at the Grand Canyon Post Office to Germany contained only five photographs (Figure 6). I have observed that the earlier the mailbag, the more photographs it contained. The earliest contained up to 12 different photos and as time went on, the number dwindled to four. The mailing tag was franked with a 20-cent Golden Gate stamp that paid the 6-ounce international surface letter rate to Germany. The rate was 5 cents for the first ounce and 3 cents for each additional ounce.

On April 15, 1925 the Post Office Department introduced third class mail. Souvenir mailers fell into the third class sample rate of 1½ cents per each 2 ounces (Figure 7). An unused postcard from the Great Salt Lake with a bag of salt attached confirmed the rate by stating, "Postage If Salt Bag Attached With Message 3¢ Without Message 1½¢."

Two souvenir mail mailbags each with four photographs were mailed from the Yellowstone Park. One of the tags was correctly franked with the 1½-cent Harding and has a rectangular Yellowstone Park, Wyoming hand cancel (Figure 8). The Yellowstone Park Post Office existed from January 30, 1902 until August 31, 1962. Its predecessor was called Mammoth Hot Springs; its successor is Yellowstone National Park, and remains as such today.

Another Yellowstone Park tag with a bag of photos was franked with a pair of the 1-cent Washington stamps from the 1938 Presidential series (the Prexies) and mailed from Canyon Station which operated at Canyon Village from 1928 through 1958 (Figure 9).

Children were not forgotten by the souvenir makers. A jointed teddy bear was a souvenir from Lake Geneva, Wisconsin (Figure 10). The mailing tag, franked with a 1½-cent Martha Washington from the Prexies, was canceled with a rectangular "Lake Geneva, Wis." hand cancel. Also franked with a 1½-cent Martha Washington and mailed from the Grand Canyon is a tag attached to a "Skookum," a Native American-themed doll made for the tourist trade (Figure 11). This doll is printed on paper attached to cardboard and wrapped with suede cloth and string. On the back of the tag is a poem. "Enjoying trip and feeling fine. Have had no time to write a line, But this papoose I send to you, to bring good luck and greetings, too." A much more robust Skookum (Figure 12) also was mailed from the Grand Canyon. The mailing tag is again franked with a 1½-cent Martha Washington, while Native American-themed sketches decorate the back.





Figure 9. A mini mailbag with photographs from Yellowstone Park, posted at Canyon Station.

Another geegaw was mailed from Glacier National Park (Figure 13). Shaped like a tepee, the mailing tag is franked with a 3-cent purple Washington by Stuart, which overpaid the postal rate by 1½ cents when the souvenir was mailed in 1935 from Glacier, Montana.

In addition to souvenir mailbags of photos, a satin pillow, complete with a mailing tag, was sold at the Statue of Liberty National Monument (Figure 14). No permanent post office or station has ever existed on Liberty Island in New York Harbor. Mail deposited in a drop box in the 1930s and '40s was taken back to New York City's Church Street Annex in lower Manhattan to be processed. Franked with a pair of the 1-cent Defense (Statue of Liberty) stamps that were canceled with an oval Church Street hand cancel, the mail tag also has a circular rubber stamp showing Miss Liberty and stating "Mailed at Statue of Liberty New York."

A souvenir mailer from Carlsbad Caverns, New Mexico, took the form of the "sole" of a shoe (Figure 15). The tag attached to the sole was correctly franked with another 1½-cent Prexie that was canceled by a Roswell, New Mex roller postmark. No permanent post office or station has ever existed at the caverns, so these souvenirs and postcards were mailed from nearby post offices, such as Carlsbad or Whites City. The sole is actually a blotter. A sole was selected because it rhymed with hole. The inscription reads "Upon my Sole - This is certainly some 'hole'."

The St. Louis Cardinals were a baseball powerhouse in the 1940s, playing in the 1942, '43, '44 and '46 World Series and winning all but the 1943 match-up. A World Series souvenir bat with a Cardinals pennant was mailed from St. Louis (Figure 16). The mailing tag was franked with a 4½-cent White House Prexie, which correctly paid the rate for the attachments weighing 6 ounces.

Leather cards attached to mailing tags were popular, too.



Figure 10. A teddy bear mailed from Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.



Figure 11. A Native American "Skookum" mailed from the Grand Canyon.



Figure 12. A Skookum mailed from the Grand Canyon.





Figure 13. A Skookum and both sides of the tepee-shaped mailer posted from Glacier National Park.



Figure 14. A miniature pillow sold and "mailed" at the Statue of Liberty then put into the post in New York City.



Figure 15. A Carlsbad sole mailed from Roswell, New Mexico.



Figure 16. A miniature souvenir World Series baseball bat and St Louis Cardinals pennant mailed from St. Louis.





Figure 17. A comic leather card with a mailing tag from Tahoe.

First Day of Rate	Rate
March 1, 1907	1 cent
April 15, 1925	1½ cents per each 2 ounces
January 1, 1949	3 cents
August 1, 1958	6 cents
September 4, 1958	3 cents
May 12, 1959	6 cents
June 23, 1959 to January 7, 1963	3½ cents

#### Notes

Tags considered post cards

Considered third class mail and rated as a sample

This humorous one (Figure 17) was mailed in 1942 from Tahoe Valley. It again was mailed with a Martha Washington stamp. Instead of photographs, sometimes a mailbag contained a puzzle, like this one from Franconia Notch, New Hampshire (Figure 18). The text on the tag states: "You'll see where I've been without a doubt, As soon as you figure this puzzle out." Another mailbag sent from Camp Shelby, Mississippi, contained a handkerchief (Figure 19). Both the bag and the handkerchief were generic U.S. Army souvenirs. The mailing tag was franked with a 1½-cent Martha Washington.

On January 1, 1949, the rate for an odd-sized or -shaped piece of mail doubled to 3 cents. The 3-cent charge included the 1½ cents for a single piece of third class mail plus a 1½-cent surcharge. The surcharge applied to items exceeding 9 inches wide or 12 inches long, or less than 3 inches wide and less than 4 inches long, and irregular-shaped pieces. Rather than reprint the mailing tags' attached souvenirs, some manufacturers elected to black out the "1½" and add a numeral "3." Shown (Figure 20) is an example on a souvenir tag that was not mailed.

Doubling the mailing cost for these souvenir mailers did not lessen their popularity. Cowboy hats were the rage at Yellowstone (Figure 21). A bright yellow 10-gallon hat as well as much more refined copper one were sold at Yellowstone Park. Attached to the yellow hat is a mailing tag franked with a 3-cent Thomas Jefferson booklet stamp, while the other mailing tag is franked with the 3-cent Liberty booklet adhesive. Both stamps were canceled with a "Yellowstone Park, Wyo" roller cancel.

Two Native American figurines were sown into a leather carrier accompanied by a special mailing tag (Figure 22) replete with a poem: "Chief Smiling Face and Squaw so true, Tucked in a Carrier built for two. They come to say, 'How do



Figure 18. A mailbag containing a puzzle.



Figure 19. A mailbag from Camp Shelby containing a handkerchief.





Figure 20. An unused mailing tag with a "3" overprinting the original 1½-cent rate.



Figure 21. A mini 10-gallon hat and a copper hat mailed from Yellowstone Park.



Figure 22. Native American figurines mailed from Pocono Pines, Pennsylvania.

you do?" Best Wishes and good luck to you." The 3-cent Jefferson on the tag was canceled in 1950 at Pocono Pines, Pennsylvania.

Mailed in 1951 from Mount Vernon, Illinois, was a wooden fish (Figure 23) with the notation, "Only One Got Away in Mt. Vernon, Ill." The tag was franked with a 3-cent Jefferson. A 1- and 2-cent Prexie franked a mailing tag attached to a pair of wooden shoes. This souvenir (Figure 24) was mailed at Holland, Michigan. Beginning in the 1950s, souvenir photo viewers were found at most tourist spots. These single-image souvenirs guaranteed that you had at least one good photograph of your visit. Most are attached by a small chain to a mailing tag (Figure 25). This viewer features a picture of the California's Corona Del Mar beach. Franked with the 3-cent Liberty issue, it was mailed in 1955 from Pomona, California.

As the mid-20th century moved toward the 21st, the popularity of souvenir mailers began to wane. One issue was confusion as to the cost to mail them. On August 1, 1958, the price to send souvenir mailers doubled to 6 cents. The rate was in effect until September 4, 1958, when it was reduced back to 3 cents. On May 12, 1959, it went back to 6 cents and on June 23, 1959, it fell to 3½ cents. This last rate was in effect until January 7, 1963.

The mailing tag attached to a Native American doll (Figure 26) mailed from Yosemite National Park was franked with a 4-cent Abraham Lincoln stamp and a "Postage Due 2 Cents" handstamp as well. It could have been mailed from August 1 to September 3, 1958, or from May 12 to June 22, 1959.

The quality of the souvenirs diminished as more foreign-made goods flooded the souvenir marketplace. However, the die was cast in 1979, when the U.S. Postal Service introduced regulations restricting non-standard mail as well as adding surcharges to non-complying items, and the heyday of philatelic geegaws passed.



Figure 23. A wooden fish mailed from Mt. Vernon, Illinois.



## Bibliography

- Beecher, Henry W. and Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz. *U.S. Domestic Postal Rates, 1872-1993* (The Traditions Press, 1994).
- Groton, Arthur H. "The Paraphilately Page: Post Cards with a Little Something Extra," *The American Stamp Dealer & Collector* (September 2011): 52-55.
- Hotchner, John M. "Philately: Objects Once Seen No Longer Welcome Through the Mail," *The American Stamp Dealer & Collector* (June 2019): 16-19.
- "Large Attached Objects — Readers Respond," *The American Stamp Dealer & Collector* (January 2020): 30-33.
- Lee II, Paul R. Parks, *Postmarks and Postmasters, Post Offices within the National Park System*. (Rocky Mountain Philatelic Library, 2014).
- Post Office Department. *The Postal Bulletin*, March 5, 1925, No. 13714.
- Post Office Department. *The Postal Bulletin*, December 2, 1948, No. 19187.
- Post Office Department. *The Postal Bulletin*, May 29, 1958, No. 20087.
- Post Office Department. *The Postal Bulletin*, September 4, 1958, No. 20104.

## The Author

An avid collector and postal historian, Marjory J. Sente has collected stamps since the fourth grade. Marj has concentrated most of her energy on collecting and studying 20th century United States material. The items featured in this article are the result of a research question. She was asked how to find souvenirs that were sent through the mail on eBay. By the time she figured out a good search string, she was hooked on such souvenirs.



Figure 24. A miniature pair of wooden shoes mailed from Holland, Michigan.



Figure 25. A viewer with a beach scene and its mailing tag sent from Pomona, California.

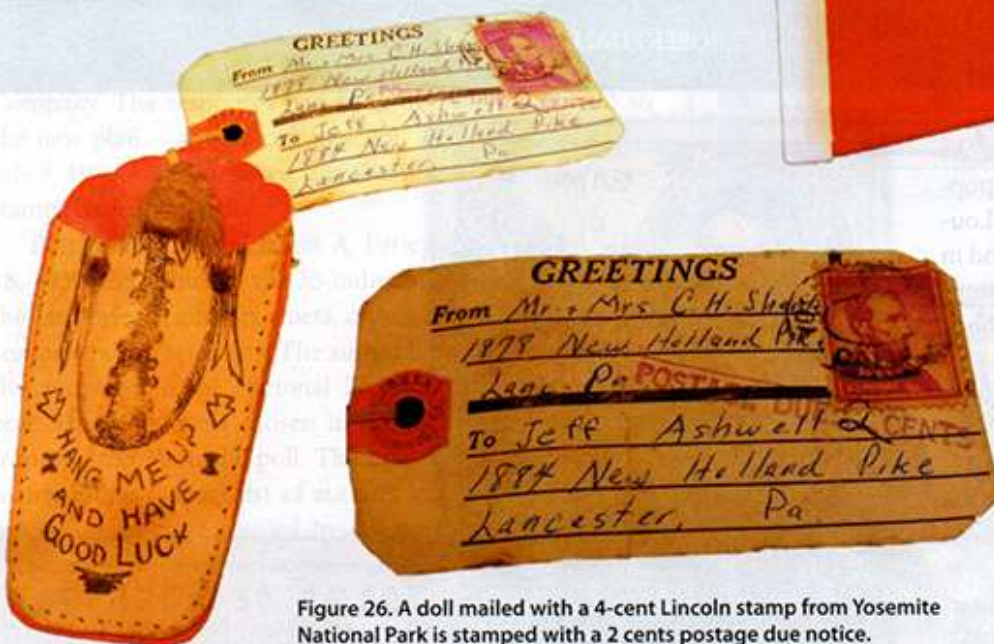


Figure 26. A doll mailed with a 4-cent Lincoln stamp from Yosemite National Park is stamped with a 2 cents postage due notice.