

In March 1876, just months before the exposition was to open, the Postmaster General reported: **"To illustrate the process of manufacturing stamped envelopes, the contractors (the Plimpton and Morgan Companies) proposed to put one of their improved new machines in the space devoted to the Post Office Department in the Government Building in the Centennial Grounds at Philadelphia, and keep it in operation during the continuation of the Exposition. This machine, with the exception of cutting the blanks or patterns, performs the entire operation of manufacturing, folding, stamping, gumming, and, if desired, printing a return request ..."**



U221

The design and dies were "quickly" prepared by Henry Mitchell (Plimpton Manufacturing Company). The design approved by the Post Office Department (in April), featured shield background, a mail carrier on horseback, representing 1776, and an express train, representing 1876, together with the three-cent value.

Plimpton moved one of his new machines to the Post Office set up at the exposition. The Post Office department assigned the production and marketing of the envelopes to Postmaster Fairman. He and his special crew operated the machine in public view and in almost constant operation, during exhibition hours, from the opening on the 10 May to 10 November. The unit was capable of producing about 20K stamped envelopes per day.

There are four Scott varieties of the issue. Three common: U218 (red, single-line [die I] under postage); U219 (green, single-line [die I] under postage), and U221 (green double-line [die II] under postage). These were printed on special watermark 3 [U S C 1876] paper issued produced just for the exposition.



WM 3



WM 2

The fourth variety, the very rare (\$60,000), Scott U220 (red, double-line [die II] under postage) was produced on watermark 2 paper - the same as the current contract envelopes and most likely produced in Hartford from paper on-hand and moved to the exhibition just prior to opening day.

The left over special watermark 3 paper was later used for three-cent and six-cent regular and war department envelopes.

As for the site itself, the Post Office Department was located near the south door of the US Government Building. From an article out of a local paper that described a tour of the exposition:

*"... we give our attention first to the Post-Office Department, which occupies a portion of the southeastern section of the building. It lies east of the transept, but does not reach quite to the nave of the building. The principal portion is taken up with the Post-office of the Centennial Exhibition. ..."*

*The office is a branch of the Philadelphia Post Office, and is in charge of Postmaster Fairman and a special force of clerks. The government has provided a special stamped envelope, which may be purchased here, as a souvenir of the Exhibition, and which is good for postage all over the Union. ..."*

*Around the walls of the space occupied by the Post-Office Department are hung portraits of the postmasters-general of the various periods of our history; and in a glass case is exhibited the ledger used by Benjamin Franklin while postmaster-general of the North American colonies. ..."*

*From the Stamps, Stamped Envelope and Postal Card Division we have a complete exhibit of all the stamps, stamped envelopes and postal cards ever used by the department, and specimens of registered letter envelopes and post-office official envelopes now in use.*



**Here also is a machine in operation which cuts, folds, stamps, gums and counts stamped envelopes, taking the paper in rolls and turning it out in packs of completed and stamped envelopes; and another engaged in the manufacture of postal cards. ..."**

In November 1876, the exhibit was dismantled – and lost.

... history marches on - our the next commemorative event is Chicago 1893 ...

