



ICE HOUSE COVER – Part II.

In March 2006 we discussed this cover that was recovered in Chicago.

Now three years later, Dr. Arthur K. M. Woo paid a total of \$431,250 (including the Siegel Auction Galleries buyer's commission) for the Ice House Cover, the envelope, which traveled from Boston to India, is the only one collectors have found still bearing the red and black stamp with Lincoln on it.

The cover, with a Lincoln stamp from 1869 (Scott 122), was mailed to India in 1873, last traded publicly in 1943 and was stolen in 1967 and thought lost to philately. The cover was seized by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 2006 and returned, after a court battle, to the heirs of J. David Baker, its last owner.

The envelope, which traveled by ship, train, post dispatch from Boston to Calcutta, is the only one collectors have found still bearing the red and black stamp with Lincoln on it. The letter was sent from a New England ice merchant to one of his ice warehouses in Calcutta, then part of Britain's Raj. It was franked with a total of \$1.12, which paid the two-ounce foreign letter rate.

Markings on the envelope reveal that it traveled across the Atlantic, by train through Germany and Italy, by ship to Egypt and again from Suez to Bombay, and then, finally, by train across the Indian states. This was before the Mr. Blair's Universal Postal Union established 1874, the sum reflected rates negotiated between the United States and Great Britain to encourage growing international trade; yes, shipping ice from winter ponds in Massachusetts to the sweltering cities of India was a commercial success, was part of this ongoing commercial effort.

This rarity is the result of collectors habits changing over time - early collectors mainly sought to fill their albums with stamps that had been soaked off envelopes - like this Lincoln stamp (fewer than 50,000 issued), would have been no exception. When, late in the 19th century, collectors began saving entire envelopes — on account of the fascinating tales they revealed about their trips through the world's postal systems — it became apparent that covers with this Lincoln stamp were probably no longer to be found.

However, in 1914, a New York collector traveling in India did come across one. He sold it to a dealer in New York for \$100. The cover was privately sold to Mr. Baker, a steel executive and prominent collector in Indianapolis, for \$6,500 in the early 1960's.

One night in 1967, a prized group of about 250 rare covers, including the Ice House Cover, was stolen from his home. The F.B.I. found most of those covers in the late 1970's but the Ice House Cover was not among them.

In the spring of 2006, however, an elderly couple walked into Berg's Stamp King shop to ask about the value of some old envelopes they had found while cleaning the home of a deceased friend. Berg recognized the Ice House Cover and had James Lee alert the Chicago police. After an investigation by the F.B.I. cleared the couple, the cover was returned by court order to Mr. Baker's widow and daughter. In May, the Philatelic Foundation, a nonprofit organization in New York, examined the cover and declared it genuine.



Scott 122 (proof)

We probably will not face this problem of 'soaking' stamps off of a cover again as our USPS continues to find even better non-water soluble adhesives for stamps.