

As with the early postal systems, the first telegraph systems were privately owned. The stamps issued by these private telegraph systems are the equivalent of private and local postage stamps.

Telegraph stamps were service fee stamps that prepaid or showed payment/exemption from payment for delivery of a telegraphic message. This was based on the business model used then by the USPOD for postage stamps, which was to prepay a similar service: delivery of a message through the postal system with the difference between telegraph and postage stamps is the medium of delivery.

This lead, in most nations, to where the telegraph (and later telephone/Internet) networks would fall under government control, often in conjunction with the then existing postal system and as such used regular postage or revenue stamps to show payment of the government telegraphy fee. These stamps used for such fees can usually be distinguished by the cancel. Over time, many governments began to issue separate telegraph stamps.

As practiced in the days before the USPOD, sending a prepaid telegram was quite similar to posting a local letter. The telegraph stamp was applied to a telegraph form containing the message to be sent and dropped into a telegraph collection box. Couriers emptied the boxes and took the forms to the servicing telegraph office from which the message was sent, which in short time was delivered by messenger to the recipient (Express Mail?).

The first private telegraph stamps were issued in 1853 by the English and Irish Magnetic Telegraph Co. with the first government-issued telegraph stamps by Spain on 01 July 1864.



Scott 6T1-6T3 Strip

In the United States (and Canada), the telegraph networks were never owned/operated by the government, so all our telegraph stamps are private/local stamps. The first American telegraph stamps were issued by the New York City and Suburban Printing Telegraph Co. in 1859 (6T1 – 6T3). [This set would cost you about \$2000 for the strip of three]

Even though the US government did not operate the telegraph, that did not mean they were not interested in tapping a new revenue source to fund the Civil War. In October 1862, two documentary Telegraph Tax stamps (R4 and R19) were authorized and used during (and after) the Civil War.



Scott R4



Scott R19

Besides the public fee stamps, complimentary frank stamps (usually non-denominated) and were given to important customers such as railroads, newspapers, and company officials that would grant one free telegram per stamp (with a duplicate stamp usually left in telegraph office receipt book).

In the business world accountability and ease of service has merit - enter the **Collect** stamp, used to show that the telegraph fee had not been paid or paid in full by the sender (forerunner of the government Postage Due stamp).

This followed shortly by another commercial innovation — issuing stamps in **booklets**. The California State Telegraph Co. (5Tx) issued booklets of telegraph stamps in 1870. After that, most US telegraph stamps were issued in booklets. It took a quarter of a century before government postage stamp booklets were first issued (1895 – Luxembourg).

My telegraph stamp collection is a hand-me-down from my great-grandfather, Joseph Crane (1868-1971), a Northern Pacific railroad employee, originally consisting of eleven cigar boxes of odds-n-ends including the booklet and booklet pane below.



\$2.50 Booklet of Scott 16T99-16T103 (1940)



Scott 17T3 Booklet pane and single (1947)