

# Why Collect Bermuda?

DAVID ROBINSON

“Come to Bermuda, the Isles of Rest.” This is the wording of a Bermuda machine slogan cancellation that was used off and on from 1926 through the mid-1990s. It reflects the peaceful feeling associated with this parliamentary self-governing overseas territory of the United Kingdom, first settled in 1609 by British colonists who were shipwrecked off the coast while on their way to Virginia.

The philatelic history of the islands is closely linked to both the commercial trade routes between Europe and North America and Bermuda’s strategically important location, about 600 miles due east of Charleston, South Carolina.

Bermuda has always followed a very modest and practical approach to the issuance of postage stamps and postal items. The *Scott Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue* didn’t reach number 1000 until 2009. Across the islands, there were no more than 19 active post offices handling mail at any one time. This makes collecting Bermuda a very fun and adventuresome undertaking for those who want to delve into the exciting possibilities that only Bermuda provides.

## Postmaster stamps

The local government formally created a post office in 1812, with a paid position of postmaster. The most famous of Bermuda’s postmasters is William Benet Perot (tenure 1818-1862), who created prepaid sheets to allow for payment of postage, starting in 1848. He did so to ensure that customers actually paid for the inland letters that were left at the post office.

Although it is thought that at least several hundred of these stamps may have been used during the period from 1848 to 1856, only 11 of these postmaster stamps are known to have survived, with three in the Royal Collection (Figure

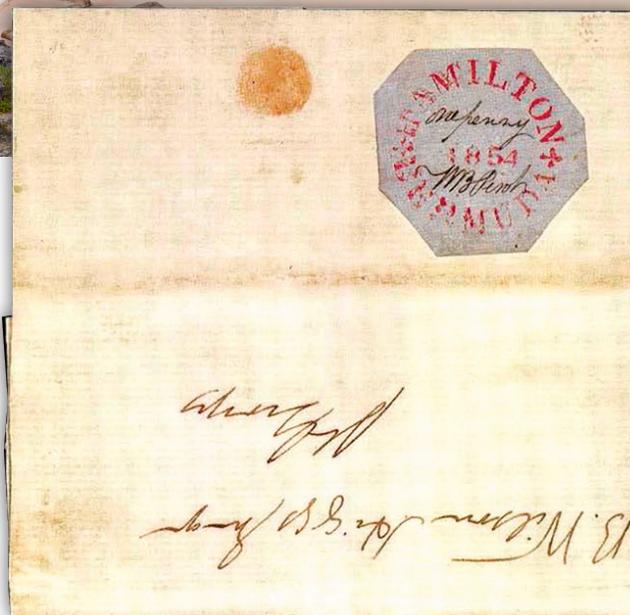


Figure 1. Bermuda Postmaster William Benet Perot, who served from 1818 to 1862, starting in 1848 created prepaid sheets to pay for postage. (Image courtesy of Siegel Auction Galleries.)



Figure 2. The first official postage stamp for Bermuda, Scott 1.



Figure 3. An 1875 one-penny overprint on a Queen Victoria stamp, Scott 14.



Figure 4. The 1906 Dock issue, Scott 34.

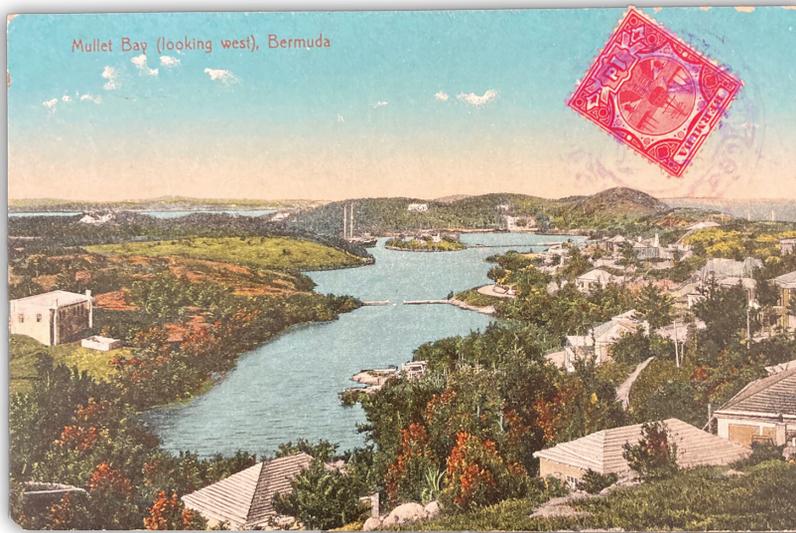


Figure 5. An image of a chromolithography postcard bearing Scott 35, published by Wm. Weiss & Co, Photographers. The circular date stamp is smeared, but appears to be St. Georges.



Figure 6. A 1910 Caravel Issue, Scott 47.

1). Postmaster stamps also can be found for the post office at St. Georges.

## Adhesive stamps

The governor of Bermuda made arrangements early in 1865 for the preparation of adhesive stamps (Figure 1). The firm of Thomas De La Rue and Company was chosen to produce the stamps, which feature a profile of Queen Victoria (Figure 2). The one-penny denomination kept its same design from 1865 to 1901, with variations for watermark and subtle color differences. Given the longevity of this issue, there are numerous flaws that can be collected.

There were several locally overprinted stamps produced in 1874 and 1875 to deal with shortages (Figure 3). Authentic copies of these overprints are highly desirable but be aware that forgeries exist.

Stamps issued during the reign of Edward VII (1901-1910) are commonly referred to as the Dock Issue (Figure 4). The design, also by De La Rue, features three naval ships and replicates the Seal of Bermuda. Bermuda was the first of a number of colonies to adopt a design incorporating the badge of arms of the colony instead of the king's head during the reign of Edward VII.

It should also be noted that this was the period that began the golden age of picture postcards from Bermuda, from plain monochrome postcards to hand-tinted and lithograph examples of later years. Collectors can find many different publishers of Bermuda postcards and see the beautiful images that exist across the islands (Figure 5).

Definitive stamps issued during the reign of George V (1910-1936) are commonly referred to as the Caravel issues, a stylized representation of the type of a ship that was shipwrecked in 1609 (Figure 6).

This period also saw the issuance of the first commemorative stamps, showing two different designs that celebrated the Tercentenary of Representative Institutions. High value

stamps were of the keyplate type (Figure 7), sometimes also called keytype. Keytype stamps show uniform design using the same design die, with just the denomination and name of country changed with the use of a second die called a headplate.

These interesting stamps allow for an extensive study of the multiple varieties. A postal-fiscal stamp of the keyplate variety was issued in 1936 that was allowed to have a very limited postal usage in 1937 when supplies of the 12 shilling 6 pence value was exhausted (Figure 8). The higher values of the keyplates were principally used for revenue (fiscal) purposes, chiefly the payment of a "head tax" on every person leaving Bermuda.

Stamps issued during the reign of George VI (1936-1952) were generally pictorial definitive or commemorative (Figure 9). The high value definitive stamps continued with the keyplate design, which further created exhaustive paper, color, printing, perforation and flaw differences for the specialist collector.



Figure 7. A 1932 Postage and Revenue Key Plate, Scott 97.



Figure 8. The original keyplate stamp shown in Figure 7 has been adapted for use as a revenue stamp. The word "postage" at left on Scott 97 has been replaced with the word "revenue," creating a revenue-only stamp, Scott AR1.



Figure 9. St. David's Lighthouse and King George VI appear on a 1939 pictorial definitive stamp, Scott 121. A commemorative marked the 100th anniversary of the Hamilton postmaster's stamp and pays homage to Postmaster William Bennett Perot, Scott 137.



Figure 10. A stamp from a 1983 set commemorates the 1925 visit by the airship USS Los Angeles, Scott 444. Queen Elizabeth II graces a high value Express Postage stamp from 1996, Scott 732.



Figure 11. Two covers show the vital role Bermuda played during wartime. At top, a WWI-era cover with a red handstamp along with 1-penny Caravel, Scott 42, and two War Tax overprints of the same stamp, Scott MR1; and a WWII censored and registered letter bearing a violet censor handstamp and franked with two pictorials, Scott 121A and 121D.

Stamps issued during the reign of Elizabeth II (since 1952) continued the practice of being either pictorial definitive or commemorative (Figure 10). Bermuda's postal authorities have been very careful not to over-produce stamps and ensure that every stamp value produced has a postal purpose.

## Postal history

Examples of very early postal history for Bermuda can be very difficult to obtain. Postal history with adhesive stamps issued during the Victorian years are more readily available than covers dated prior to 1865. For example, starting in 1901, Bermuda was a Boer War prisoner of war location and therefore collectors have the opportunity to collect early censored covers to or from the approximately 5,000 prisoners interred there.

The two World Wars brought additional philatelic variety to Bermuda (Figure 11). During World War I, all mail (incoming, outgoing and local) was subject to censorship. Nine different handstamped varieties of censor markings were used, the most common with designations CM13 and CM15 (from *Bermuda Specialized Catalogue*).

One of the greatest contributions from Bermuda during World War II was the effort to censor mail incoming, outgoing and in transit through Bermuda. With the introduction of new airmail routes between Europe and North America in 1939 that included a stop in Bermuda, British censors were able to control virtually all the mail crossing the Atlantic. Approximately 1,500 censors were in Bermuda during the six years of operation (1939-1945). Bermuda censorship could examine 200,000 letters per day, with a great number of these surviving today for the collector. Both handstamps and labels were used, some of which are considered very desirable by collectors.

The philatelic study of Bermuda also is interwoven with its maritime history. The Royal Navy established a post office at the Ireland Island Dockyards in 1842. Numerous warships frequently paid a visit to the islands and evidence of these visits can be found in covers and postcards from their sailors (Figure 12). As Bermuda emerged as a tourist destination, postal history from passenger cruise liners showed the world the beauty of the islands.

Another aspect of the passenger cruise connection was the use of paquebot cancellations (Figure 13.). Universal Postal Union regulations require that mail posted on a ship travelling on the high seas be franked with the postage stamps of the ship's registry, or if at anchor in a port-of-call, mail must be franked with the postage stamps of the host country. Bermuda paquebot markings are known from as early as 1902. As a result, there are a large variety of covers, with many interesting markings from different ship lines, available to collectors today.

Knowing the tendency for people to wait until the absolute last minute to do anything, the ever-practical colonial authorities established a post office at the Hamilton Docks from 1933 until 1939. This post office was only open on days when ships were in port and would charge a double rate to ensure that the mailed item would make it to one of the ships.

Early air pioneers viewed Bermuda as both a challenge and an opportunity. The earliest recorded flights were inter-island flights in 1919 and 1920. The airship USS *Los Angeles* made trips to Bermuda in February and April 1925 (Figure 14). Covers are only known from the U.S. for the February trip, since weather prevented an exchange of mail.

As airplane technology improved, so did attempts to establish airmail routes to Bermuda. In 1937, Imperial Airways established a route between Bermuda and New York and from Baltimore a few months later. Routes between North America and Europe, which leveraged Bermuda's geographical location, were in place by 1939 and created the conditions for censorship previously discussed.

The build-up to WWII and the Lend-Lease program also created diverse philatelic material for Bermuda collectors (Figure 15). The Army Post Office (aka Kindley Field) set up services as APO 802 until mid-April 1942, when it was changed to APO 856, and later to ZIP code 09856. The Navy FPO number was 138, was changed to ZIP code 10958 and further changed to 09560 and 09727.

The United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) opened up a tracking facility at Kindley Field starting in 1962. Cachets were created for all NASA flights and some space-related events. The tracking station was closed for a period starting in 1998, but reopened in 2018.

## Postal stationery

Postal cards, registration envelopes, newspaper wrappers, and air letters make up this subset of postal stationery. Postal cards were first introduced in 1880 and postally used items generally command more demand than unused items. One of the scarcer items is a 1½ -penny card intended for foreign destinations that was surcharged locally in 1893 (Figure 16).

## Postal history extensions

Like all countries, Bermuda's post offices serve their customers with extra oversight (for a registration fee). Registration of mail was denoted by a handstamp until 1909 when registration labels were introduced. Registration labels of different varieties can be found from each of the 33 different post offices that operated between 1909 and 2020.

Official Mail envelopes first appeared during Queen Victoria's reign and continue to be used today. There are more than 170 official government departments that have been allowed the use of OHMS (On His, or Her, Majesty's Service) designation.



Figure 12. A commemorative naval visitation cover from the cruiser HMS *Dragon*, which visited Bermuda in 1936 and is franked with two recently issued contemporary commemoratives (Scott 105 and 107).



Figure 13. A paquebot cancellation on a 1931 cover franked with Seal and King George V stamp, Scott 56, that shows a machine cancel ("Come to Bermuda / the Isles of Rest") and carries a tax mark ("Due 8 Cents" in circle above name), indicating postage due. The cover was posted by a passenger on the Holland American Line S.S. *Veendam*, which operated from 1923 to 1953.

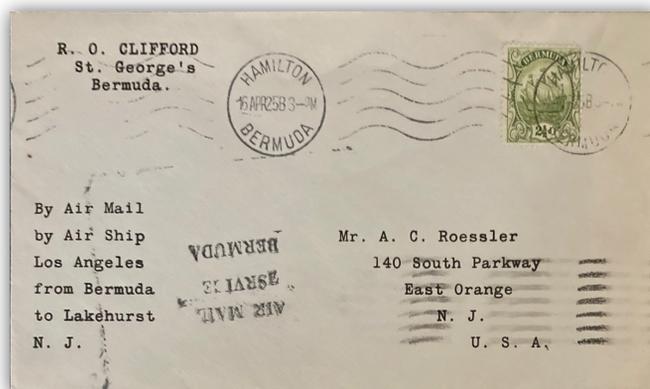


Figure 14. A first flight cover carried by the USS *Los Angeles*, with auxiliary marking inverted and reversed.

Auxiliary or miscellaneous markings such as postage due, forwarded, and damaged items create another challenging area for collectors (Figure 17). More than 350 markings have been identified by collectors.

Charity seals were first introduced in Bermuda in 1931. Postal usage of the earliest labels is rarely seen, but material from 1946 to the present can be located with some searching (Figure 18).



Figure 15. A philatelic cover originating from Army Post Office (APO) 802, linking the opening of military bases in Bermuda and other Commonwealth countries to the Lend-Lease Act.

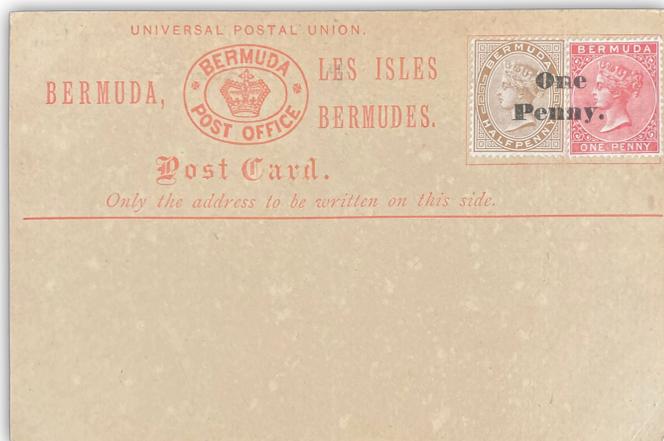


Figure 16. A Higgs & Gage foreign card with provisional surcharge applied locally in 1893.

The Bermuda Post Office consists of a network of sub-post offices, with the main office in the capital, Hamilton. Over the years, sub-post offices have come and gone. Collectors who visit the islands on holiday often find it fun to take a motorized scooter around the islands to the various post offices to visit with workers and to obtain special souvenirs of their visit.

Cancellations on mail originating from Bermuda can take many forms. Each active post office has its own circular date stamp applied by hand. Additionally, there may be machine cancellation capability at each site.

Historically, the main post office in Hamilton has been the primary source of machine cancellations that also include some interesting slogans. To date, more than 100 different machine cancels have been used across the islands.

To make it easier for collectors there are several companies that publish single-country Bermuda stamp albums that have spaces for every major stamp catalog number assigned by Stanley Gibbons or Scott.

## Last thoughts

As you can tell, there are many facets of collecting Bermuda stamps and postal history. This article just touches the surface of the possibilities and illustrates how detailed or expansive a collection could become.

You can find more about collecting the country of Bermuda by accessing the Bermuda Collectors Society website at <https://bermudacollectorsociety.com>. The Bermuda Collectors Society is an APS affiliate and has numerous resources available to both members and non-members interested in collecting Bermuda and all of its possibilities. We invite you to visit our website, ask questions, and get to know us better. The dedicated society email is [hello@bermudacollectorsociety.com](mailto:hello@bermudacollectorsociety.com). We look forward to hearing from you!



Figure 17. A cover franked with a 1-shilling Grape Bay, Scott 122, with a "Come to Bermuda" cancellation. The 1-shilling postage was insufficient to pay the airmail fee of 1 shilling, 3 pence, so the cover was sent by surface mail instead.

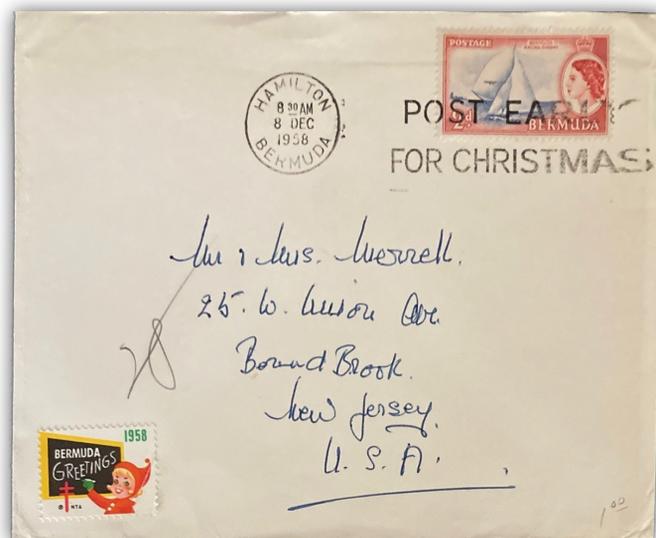


Figure 18. A 1958 cover franked with a 2-pence Racing Dinghy stamp, Scott 146, and a "Post Early for Christmas" cancellation, which first appeared in 1948. It also shows carries a Christmas seal. Bermuda's Christmas seal designs starting from 1946 are virtually the same as the U.S. designs.

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## The Author

Dave Robinson is an APS life member, a member of the Greater Cincinnati Philatelic Society, and serves as one of the directors of the Bermuda Collectors Society. Dave's interest in Bermuda started in 1978 while he was a freshman in high school. His Bermuda collecting interests have flourished since visiting the islands several times and have taken many wonderful turns under the guidance of and suggestions from members of the BCS and the society's quarterly journal, *Bermuda Post*.

## FOR FURTHER LEARNING

Recommendations from the APRL research staff:

*Bermuda Specialized Catalog* by Robert W. Dickgiesser, Robert H. Ingalls, David I. Cordon & Michel Forand. (n.l.: Sheridan Books, 2012). [G9120 .A1 B517b 2012]

*Bermuda, Crossroads of the Atlantic* by Arthur H. Groten & David R. Pitts. (Bellefonte, PA: American Philatelic Society, 2017). [G9121 .P856 G881b 2017]

*Bermuda, the Post Office, Postal Markings and Adhesive*

*Stamps* by M.H. Ludington. (London: Robson Lowe Ltd., 1962). G9120 .L944bp

*Supplement to Bermuda: The Post Office, Postal Markings and Adhesive Stamps* by M.H. Ludington. (London: Robson Lowe Ltd., 1968). [G9120 .L944bp Suppl. 1968]

*The Postage Stamps of Bermuda* by Bertram W.H. Poole. (London: D. Field 1911). [G9120 .P822p 1911]

*The Postal History and Stamps of Bermuda* by M.H. Ludington. (Lawrence, MA: Quarterman Publications, Inc., 1978). [G9120 .L944bp 1978]

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