

NEW JERSEY'S MOST VALUABLE COVER

By Robert G. Rose

The recent auction of a portion of the famed William H. Gross collection included the most valuable cover in all of New Jersey postal history.¹ Illustrated below is the cover on which is affixed a 4¢ brown imperforate stamp with Schermack Type III perforations, Scott 314A. Against a pre-sale estimate of \$100-150,000 it sold for a hammer price of \$130,000 plus an 18% buyer's fee of \$23,400 for a record total of \$153,400.



(Courtesy Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc.)

Fig. 1. Scott 314A on cover tied by Sicklerville, N.J handstamp postmark dated April 8, 1909.

The issuance of this imperforate stamp in 1908, its modification for use on an affixing machine for commercial mailings, the purchase of a number of unused examples by a collector, and its use by the collector on a few covers, makes for an interesting story. That story, as provided in the Gross catalog's description includes details concerning the stamp's production and purpose.

With the rising popularity of vending and affixing machines, numerous requests were made by manufacturers for supplies of imperforate stamps, which could then be privately perforated to conform to each firm's machine. In May 1908, a supply of 25 sheets (400 stamps per sheet) of the 4¢ 1902 Issue, without perforations, was delivered to the Schermack Mailing Machine Co. in Detroit. The entire supply was cut into coils with Schermack Type III perforations, designed for the firm's patented affixing machine and delivered to the Winfield Printing Co. for use on mass mailings of advertising material. Approximately 6,000 were used on a mailing for Hamilton Carhartt Manufacturer, and almost all of the 4,000 balance were used on a mailing for Burroughs Adding Machine Co.²

A Detroit stamp collector, Karl Koslowski, was the only person who purchased some of the unused 4¢ stamps from the Winfield Printing Company, which he first noticed at the plant while visiting a friend there prior to a trip to his native Latvia.³ In a 1910 article, Koslowski stated that he purchased 50 stamps and expected to be able to buy more, but the supply was destroyed when he returned the next day.⁴

The census of this rare stamp as researched and compiled by the Siegel organization accounts for 34 of the 50 stamps Koslowski is stated to have purchased. This includes 21 unused stamps currently in the Siegel census, all of which must have been purchased by him. As further detailed in the Gross catalog's description:

[Koslowski] used at least 13 stamps on mail to friends, including a strip of three on a Koslowski cover, two used strips of three off cover (the mass mailings were all singles), a used pair, and two singles on separate Koslowski covers. The earliest known cover is dated at Detroit on May 27, 1908, from Koslowski to a friend in Austria, and the latest is dated April 8, 1909⁵

In addition to the stamps Koslowski used, there is one recorded commercial cover (June 2, 1908) and 32 used single stamps, most of which were presumably removed from the mass mailing of the commercial covers.

How was it that his rarity found its way to Sicklerville, New Jersey where it was destined to be used on a cover which has become the most valuable piece of New Jersey postal history? According to its Gross catalog description, the single 4¢ stamp "was affixed by Koslowski to a self-addressed envelope and sent inside a parcel to his brother in Sicklerville, N.J. The parcel bore a strip of three of the 4¢ stamp, with instructions to return the cancelled strip of three in the envelope bearing the single."⁶ Koslowski's brother dutifully followed the instructions, and mailed the enclosed cover back to Detroit, at which time the cover was hand stamped at the Sicklerville post office with its April 8, 1909 postmark.⁷

ENDNOTES:

¹ Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc., "United States Stamp Treasures: The William H. Gross Sale," Sale No. 1188, October 3, 2018, Lot 103 (Hard copy version available on-line). See https://siegelauctions.com/lot_lkp.php, search Sale 1188, Lot # 103.

² *Ibid.*, p. 227.

³ Johl, Max G. *United States Stamps 1902-1935* (Quarterman Publications, Inc., Lawrence, Mass. 1976) p. 43.

⁴ Gross Sale Catalog description at p. 227

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.* Further details concerning this stamp and its postal history, see Ken Lawrence's article, *The Scarce Imperforate 4¢ Ulysses S. Grant Stamp of 1908*, Linn's Stamp News, August 21, 2017, pp. 18, 65-66 (on-line).

⁷ Sicklerville is located in Winslow Township, Camden County. It was, in 1910, a small rural community with a population of 600. Its post office was established in 1873.