This Day in History… June 6, 1955

U.S. Issues Its Only Certified Mail Stamp

On June 6, 1955, the US Post Office issued its first and only Certified Mail stamp, US #FA1. The stamp gave mail special protection and provided the sender with proof of delivery.

The US first implemented a registered letter system on July 1, 1855. For the next 56 years, mailers could pay the registration fee, which ranged from five to twenty cents over these years, with cash or stamps.

Though there wasn't a Registered Mail stamp issued during this time, there were Post Office Seals, also known as Official Seals. They had no franking power, meaning they didn't pay for the delivery of mail, but they did serve an important purpose. The first official seals had one specific role: to seal large "registered packages" containing registered letters that were being transported, thereby preventing tampering with this very secure class of mail.

Certified Mail stamp pictures a letter carrier.

Then on December 1, 1911, the Post Office issued US #F1, America's first and only Registration stamp for the prepayment of registry fees. This new stamp could only be used to pay the registry fee and was not valid for regular postage. When used in addition to regular postage, this stamp provided special care and handling for an extra fee for a letter or package. Upon receiving the item, the addressee was required to sign a receipt.

1872 Registry Seal

There was some confusion among users and postal clerks around these stamps, which led to their misuse. As a result, the postmaster general abolished the Registration stamp in 1913, but allowed the remaining stock to be used up. After that, the registration fee could be paid by using regular postage stamps.

Then in 1955 the US Post Office announced that it would issue a new Certified Mail stamp. According to the postmaster general at the time, "Certified Mail, a new service of the Post Office Department [was] designed to give mail patrons most of the advantages of registered mail but at a lower cost and less trouble."

Certified Mail service officially began on June 6, 1955 with the issue of #FA1. It could be used on first class mail for which the sender claimed no insurance, but wanted proof of delivery. Certified Mail is a form of registration – it gives mail special protection and provides the sender with proof of delivery. This was used in addition to the regular postage and required the recipient to sign for his letter or package upon delivery.

Registration Stamp

No additional Certified Mail stamps were ever issued after #FA1, but regular definitive stamps were often used to pay the fee.

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