

# THE "ICE HOUSE" COVER

Sale 973A • Saturday, June 13, 2009

Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc.



# THE "ICE HOUSE" COVER

Offered at public auction by order of  
the Dorothy Jean Baker Revocable Trust



Rarities of the World • Sale 973 (lot 130)  
Saturday, June 13, 2009, no earlier than 3:00 p.m.

*The "Ice House" Cover will be available for viewing  
on the morning of the sale or by appointment.*

*A 15% buyer's premium will be added to the hammer price.*

*Robert A. Siegel*

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The front and back of the Ice House cover (shown at 80% of original size)

## **The “Ice House” Cover: Discovery, Loss and Recovery**

**by Michael Laurence and Scott R. Trepel**

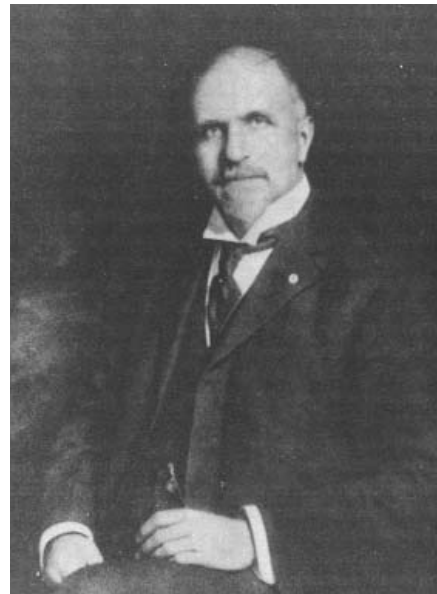
*“I hold little hope that this unique cover survives today. To survive over a century and be lost in this manner is a sad fate for such a marvelous cover.” — Dr. Richard Searing (The Chronicle of the U.S. Classic Postal Issues, May 1980)*

AS THE ONLY COVER KNOWN BEARING THE 90¢ 1869 stamp, the Ice House cover has long stirred the imaginations of postal historians. The existence of the cover was fantasized for years before it was found. Then, four decades after its discovery, it was stolen and thought lost forever. Then, after another four decades, it resurfaced almost magically, only to spend several more years in a legal limbo. Now, with this sale, it will finally rejoin the collector community in which it has so long been celebrated.

As with other great stamp rarities, the history of the Ice House cover is shrouded in myth and speculation. Especially for the early years, it is sometimes difficult to separate fact from fiction. What follows is the most accurate background that can be assembled.

At the end of the 19th century, when attention first focused on stamps on their original envelopes, some collectors sought covers to show every face-different United States stamp. By the end of World War I, after the dispersal of the Seybold collection (the first great U.S. cover collection to be sold at public auction), it was clear, at least to more sophisticated collectors, that some stamps, common enough as loose singles, were scarce or even rare on cover. The high-value 1869 stamps, in use for less than a year, were recognized as key items. The 24¢ and 30¢ 1869 values, while very difficult on cover, were at least available. But a 90¢ 1869 cover was not known.

A keen early cover collector was Ernest R. Ackerman of Plainfield, New Jersey. Ackerman prospered in the cement business but he was also a capable politician.



Ernest R. Ackerman  
*The collector who purchased the Ice House cover from J. M. Bartels in 1926.*



When Woodrow Wilson was governor of New Jersey, Ackerman served in the New Jersey state senate. Thereafter, until his death, he served in the U.S. congress, where he led the ultimately successful effort to legalize the photographic illustration of United States postage stamps.

Sometime during World War I, Ackerman set out to assemble a one-of-each cover collection showing classic U.S. stamps. He was as keen on the Officials as he was on the regular issues. And he soon came to recognize the key items in both areas.

In the early 1920's or perhaps even earlier, Ackerman issued a standing offer to the Nassau Street stamp trade: he would pay \$1,000 for a genuine 90¢ 1869 cover. Ackerman's public reputation (and the magnitude of his offer) served to focus collector attention on this legendary object even before it was known to exist. It became the subject of a mythical quest, like Atlantis or the Seven Cities of Gold.

Now known to be the only genuine on-cover use of the 90¢ 1869 stamp, the Ice House cover was acquired on March 19, 1926, by J. Murray Bartels, a Nassau Street stamp dealer who had a well-deserved reputation for making major cover finds. In 1912, via an ad campaign in the *Boston Evening Transcript*, Bartels had acquired the Bissell correspondence, 200 covers from Boston to India, franked with high-value 1869 and Bank Note stamps. The Bissell find contained at least two 30¢ 1869 covers, but no 90¢.

Curiously, like the Bissell covers, the Ice House cover was also sent from Boston to India. Bartels spied it, unmounted, in the back of a neglected album belonging to a long-time casual customer named Grant Squires. Squires had toured India in 1914 and acquired the cover there. The envelope was torn and Squires had no great interest in keeping it. Knowing Ackerman would be a buyer, Bartels purchased the item for \$50 or \$100 (accounts vary) and sent it off to be repaired, possibly by the legendary Sam Singer. A missing 10¢ stamp was replaced and the tear was repaired. After the work was done, Bartels sold the cover to Ackerman for \$400.



J. Murray Bartels

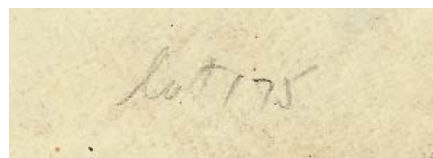
*The dealer who purchased the Ice House cover from its discoverer, Grant Squires, for \$50 (or \$100) in 1926. Shortly after, Bartels sold the Ice House cover to Ernest R. Ackerman for \$400.*

Ackerman must have been pleased with his acquisition, which after all cost him less than the \$1,000 he had long been willing to pay. He exhibited his U.S. collection at international shows in Antwerp and Berlin in 1930, and the Ice House cover was celebrated as one of the stars.

Ackerman died the next year, but his collections remained with his family throughout the Depression and into World War II. Only his fabulous U.S. Officials collection was sold at a “name” auction. The rest of the Ackerman material was dispersed through various New York dealers and auction houses. Elliot Perry sold the U.S. locals. The Harmer Rooke firm sold many of Ackerman’s better-known U.S. and foreign items in the mid 1940’s. Some Ackerman covers went to Norman Serphos, who was then the major owner of Scott Stamp and Coin Company, which also owned the J. C. Morgenthau auction firm. That accounts for the Ice House cover appearing in an important sale held by Morgenthau on April 12, 1943. The pencilled notation “lot 175,” still visible on the reverse of the cover, dates from that sale.

The 1943 sale was billed as “the Philip B. Philip collection” but that was a fairly minor collection and the Morgenthau sale was loaded with other material. In the same sale, as examples, were a sheet-margin block of ten of the New York Postmaster Provisional stamp, a reprint sheet of nine New York provisionals, and blocks of both the 5¢ and 10¢ 1847 stamps. These items had been recently discovered and written up in *The New York Times*. Serphos worked closely (critics said self-interestedly) with The New York Public Library on the famous Benjamin K. Miller collection. He convinced the library to acquire the provisional blocks and the 1847 blocks. These were added to the Miller display and were among the items stolen from the Library in a bold 1977 theft. Images of the blocks from the Morgenthau catalog sparked the investigation that ultimately led to the partial recovery of the stolen material.

Estimated in the Morgenthau sale at \$1,000, the Ice House cover sold for \$380 to noted cover collector Emmerson Krug of Birmingham, Alabama. Krug was



“lot 175”

*The Ice House cover was last offered at auction in April 1943, as lot 175 in the J. C. Morgenthau sale that contained some of the Ackerman collection. The lot number is written in pencil on the back of the cover.*



then well along in assembling one of the great survey collections of United States covers. The Krug collection was sold by the Siegel firm in May 1958.

For reasons that are not clear, Krug returned the cover to Serphos, who then placed it anonymously with G. V. Luerssen, a Reading, Pennsylvania, metallurgical engineer whose primary collecting interest was Switzerland. The cover remained unheralded until 1961, when E. D. Warshauer wrote about it (and named Luerssen as the owner) in *Stamps* magazine. After reading the *Stamps* article, Robert A. Siegel and Ezra Cole approached Luerssen and acquired the cover. In 1964 they sold it to J. David Baker for \$6,500, according to Baker's own inventory.



J. David Baker

*The collector and well-respected philatelic author, from whom the Ice House cover was stolen in 1967.*

J. David Baker was a steel manufacturer from Indianapolis. Born in 1916, he was educated at Principia College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Dave and his brother Hugh both collected stamps. Dave's collecting evolution was typical. His interest in stamps began at age 10, and his first collections were 20th century United States stamps and first day covers. Then he turned to 19th century stamps and postal history. Between 1962 and 1968, Dave and his brother wrote a weekly *Stamps* column on the subject of classic U.S. philately. This was at the time the Classics Society was being transformed from a study group of 3¢ 1851 platers into a much broader affinity group of collectors of 19th century U.S. stamps and postal history. Dave was an early activist in the Classics Society. He helped launch the *Chronicle* and get the group on its feet.

Baker's major interest was in Indianapolis and Indiana postal history, and his two-volume work on that subject will remain the primary reference for decades to come. Along the way he formed a superb survey collection of classic U.S. covers, in which the Ice House cover was one of the cornerstones. In preparation for one final exhibition, he had winnowed his holding down to 250 of his "best" 19th century U.S. covers. On the evening of December 9, 1967, while he and his wife were attending a social event, this collection (including the Ice House cover) was stolen from his home by burglars.

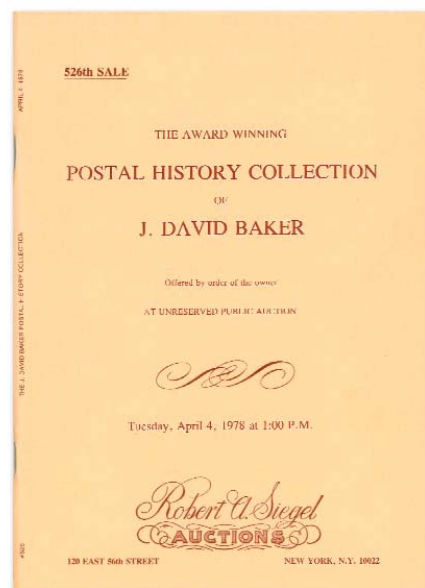
The theft was highly publicized but it went unsolved, and Baker ultimately received insurance compensation for his loss. Baker was a shrewd businessman and nobody's fool. Presciently, he negotiated a settlement that would allow him to re-establish ownership of the stolen material, if ever it should reappear, by returning his insurance compensation.

The theft of the Baker covers came at a time when the market for scarce classic covers was beginning to boom. During the period the Baker covers were missing, collector interest in postal history generally—and in 1869 Pictorial Issue stamps and covers particularly—increased greatly. The insurance settlement Baker received for his stolen covers in 1968 was \$86,892.44, a figure based upon his cost. The estimated value of the stolen covers at the time was nearly \$150,000.

In November 1974 the Baker collection (excluding the Ice House cover) was recovered by the FBI in Chicago from a man named Vincent J. Coletti, who was indicted for selling stolen property (the case was dismissed). Baker subsequently sued his insurance company when they refused to accept \$86,892.44 in exchange for the collection. The court ultimately entered a judgment awarding Baker ownership if he paid the insurance company the sum of \$143,650, which included interest. When the recovered Baker covers were sold at public auction (Siegel Sale 526, April 4, 1978), they realized \$771,862 hammer.

When the Baker covers were recovered in 1974, the Ice House cover was missing. The stamp world assumed the 90¢ Lincoln stamp had been soaked off and the cover discarded. The Ice House cover returned to the world of myth and fantasy from which it had earlier emerged. A year after the Siegel sale, J. David Baker died of a heart attack at age 63.

Almost 30 years later, on a winter day in early 2006, an elderly couple appeared at the Stamp King stamp shop in northwest Chicago with three covers. They said they had found them cleaning out the residence of a recently deceased friend. Two of the covers were valueless, but the third was quickly recognized as the Ice House cover.



J. David Baker Catalogue  
*The covers recovered in 1974 realized a record-setting \$771,862 hammer in this 1978 Siegel auction.*

The FBI took possession of the cover and after investigation filed no charges. During several years of legal machinations, Baker's widow and daughter used the settlement documents with the original insurer to successfully establish their ownership of the cover. In May 2009, experts at The Philatelic Foundation examined the Ice House cover for the first time, and declared "it is a genuine usage" of the 90¢ 1869 stamp.

#### CHRONOLOGY OF ICE HOUSE COVER

- 1873 August 8—Mailed from Boston by the Tudor Co. to James H. Bancroft at the firm's icehouse in Calcutta, India, with \$1.12 postage, including a 90¢ 1869.
- 1873 August 9—Carried on either the NGL steamer *Rhein* or the White Star Line steamer *Baltic* from New York, arriving in London on August 19.
- 1873 August 25—Carried on P&O steamer *Poonah* from Brindisi, arriving in Alexandria, Egypt, on August 28. Carried by canal to Suez.
- 1873 August 29—Carried on P&O steamer *Orissa* from Suez to Bombay, arriving on September 11, then by rail to Calcutta, arriving on September 15.
- 1914—New York collector Grant Squires acquires the Ice House cover in India.
- 1926 March 19—Nassau Street dealer J. Murray Bartels spies the cover, neglected in Squires' collection, and purchases it for \$50 or \$100 (accounts differ).
- 1926—Bartels has the cover repaired (probably by Sam Singer) and sells it to New Jersey congressman Ernest R. Ackerman for \$400.
- 1930—On a European tour, Ackerman exhibits his U.S. cover collection in Berlin and Antwerp. The Ice House cover is one of the stars.
- 1931 October 18—Ackerman dies. The Ice House cover and much else remain in his estate for years.
- 1943 April 12—the Ice House cover reappears as lot 175 in J. C. Morgenthau sale in New York City. Estimated at \$1,000, the cover sells for \$380 to Emmerson C. Krug. Krug subsequently returns the cover and it is acquired anonymously by G. V. Luerksen, a metallurgical engineer from Reading, Pennsylvania.
- 1961 July 15—Luerksen is named as the owner of the cover in an article in *Stamps* magazine. Soon after, Ezra Cole and Robert A. Siegel acquire the cover.
- 1964—J. David Baker buys the cover from Siegel and Cole for \$6,500.
- 1967 December 9—Baker's collection of 250 "best" 19th century U.S. covers is stolen from his Indianapolis home. Three Indianapolis stamp thefts that same night induce the American Philatelic Society (at strong FBI urging) to stop publishing a geographical directory showing member names and addresses.
- 1968 March—Baker receives \$86,892.44 insurance compensation for the theft, after executing an agreement to permit him to buy the stolen covers back, if ever they reappear, by repaying his compensation.
- 1974 July—Two stolen Baker covers are found in the possession of a man arrested in Boston, who is suspected of dealing in stolen fine arts.
- 1974 November—The Baker collection is recovered by the FBI in Chicago from a man named Vincent J. Coletti (the case against Coletti is later dismissed). The Ice House cover is missing.
- 1977 November 16—A court enters a judgment awarding Baker ownership of the stolen collection in exchange for paying the insurance company \$143,650. Baker takes possession of his long-lost collection, excluding the Ice House cover, on December 20, 1977.
- 1978 April 4—Recovered Baker covers sold by Siegel Auction Galleries for \$771,862 hammer. The Ice House cover is presumed lost forever.
- 1979 April 26—J. David Baker dies of a heart attack, age 63.
- 2006 January 4—Elderly couple appears at Stamp King stamp shop in northwest Chicago with three covers they say they found cleaning the residence of a recently deceased friend. Two of the covers are worthless. The third is the Ice House cover. FBI takes possession. No charges are filed.
- 2007-2008—In court the Baker estate uses original insurance claim documents to establish its ownership of the cover over competing claims.
- 2009 May 5—The Philatelic Foundation certifies the cover as genuine (certificate number 476371).
- 2009 June 13—Ice House cover offered at public auction by the Siegel firm for the benefit of Baker's widow and daughter.



## The Rate

THE ICE HOUSE COVER WAS PREPAID \$1.12 FOR four times the 28¢ rate to India via the Brindisi route in the British international mail system. The proper credit of  $4 \times 24¢ = 96¢$  was marked in red crayon by the Boston exchange office clerk. All the rate markings are consistent with a quadruple-rate letter.

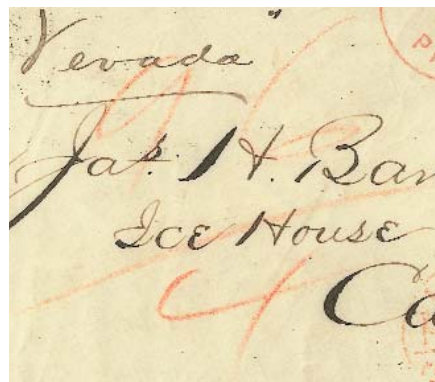
### *The British International Mails*

The liberal principles of Rowland Hill, which England embraced so successfully in 1840, did not initially extend beyond the British Isles. Despite the manifest success of postal reform at home, as late as 1847 the British government still treated its extensive overseas mail operation as a source of tax revenue—or at least, as a form of tariff that could be manipulated to favor British mercantile interests.

This was the attitude that underlay the “discriminatory” transatlantic rates of 1847 (designed to favor the British-backed Cunard line), which provoked the “retaliatory” U.S. rates of 1848. The chaos that followed was finally resolved in high-level negotiations between George Bancroft, the U.S. ambassador in London who is today better remembered as an historian, and the British postmaster general, Lord Clanricarde.

These complex negotiations are well described in George Hargest’s book. The outcome was the U.S.-British postal convention of 1848. This was the first postal treaty between the United States and England. It ended the retaliatory era, and set the stage for greatly increased transatlantic correspondence. Almost as an afterthought, it linked the U.S. mails with the British overseas mail service.

In article XII of the 1848 treaty, Britain pledged to carry letters from the U.S., once they reached England, at the same rates paid by British citizens. The U.S. inland and transatlantic postage would be additional. From this extension of the worldwide British mail network the British gained nothing, other than greater volume in a mail system that required substantial and continuing subsidy. The British had to be nudged into



Boston Credit Notation

The “96/4” indicates  $4 \times 24¢ = 96¢$  credit, which is consistent with a \$1.12 quadruple-rate letter to India via Brindisi route.



George Bancroft (1800-1891)

Bancroft was Polk’s Secretary of the Navy and later minister to Great Britain. He was responsible for negotiating the U.S.-British postal treaty in 1848.

this initially by Bancroft's diplomacy. But from hindsight the foreign-mail provisions of the 1848 treaty can be seen as an important first step in the liberal internationalist movement that a quarter-century later would lead to the Universal Postal Union, the first and most enduring world-governing body.

At the outset of the U.S.-British treaty relationship, the British charge for carriage beyond England was one shilling per half ounce. Until the 1870's, this was the maximum letter rate in the British international mails. Between 1871 and 1875, the one-shilling charge (represented by U.S. credits to Britain of 24¢) applied to covers via the British mails from the U.S. to India. The total postage required in the U.S. was the sum of the British overseas postage plus the cost of getting the cover across the Atlantic to England.

Prior to 1868, the U.S. kept a 5¢ "inland" fee. An additional 16¢ transatlantic sea postage was credited either to the U.S. or to England according to which nation paid the steamship line that carried the letter. Under this arrangement, covers were frequently sent from the U.S. in the British open mails partly paid, with either 5¢ or 21¢ prepaid by stamps and the remaining British overseas postage collected from the recipient.

#### ***Transatlantic Rate Reductions of 1868 and 1870***

Beginning in 1868, this complicated bookkeeping was consolidated, another simplifying step on the road toward the UPU. After the bookkeeping consolidation, partial payment was still possible but much less frequently used. The official announcement of the bookkeeping consolidation reads in part: "The United States inland and Atlantic sea postage...on and after the 1st of January, 1868, is 10¢ the single rate." Since both countries had agreed to provide transatlantic mail service, accounting for the nationality of the steamship became a needless step that could be eliminated. The underlying assumption was that correspondence in each direction would be approximately equal. Advocates of Universal Postal Union called this "the reciprocal nature of postal correspondence." Each letter sent was expected

to generate a reply. If each sending nation required prepayment and then kept all the money, assuming the transportation costs were approximately equal, elaborate individual accounting would no longer be necessary, resulting in a huge cost savings.

Excellent background on the thinking that led to the bookkeeping consolidation can be found in Postmaster General Alexander Randall's 1868 letter to Anthony Trollope, the novelist and postal bureaucrat who handled the British end of the negotiations that led to this important decision: "Each office thus undertaking to provide the means for the dispatch of the outward mails, the Postmaster General would propose that the dispatching office should retain all the postage charged on international correspondence, and that the office to which the mails are sent should make no charge on the delivery of such correspondence."

Thus, entering the 1869 era, the U.S. transatlantic sea postage under this relatively recent arrangement was 10¢ per half ounce, replacing the former 5¢ inland and 16¢ transatlantic fees. Almost instantly, and not surprisingly, the lower charges produced increased volume, which in turn brought increased revenue. As the transatlantic service prospered, it became apparent to both governments that the steamer lines could carry letters for even less than they were receiving under the new arrangement. Accordingly, on the first day of 1870, the transatlantic sea postage was further reduced, from 10¢ to 4¢. This 4¢ transatlantic sea postage, plus the 24¢ (one shilling) British postage for carrying the cover beyond England, was the source of the 28¢ single rate to India via British mails. The Ice House cover, weighing between 1½ and 2 ounces, was prepaid at four times this rate. That is the significance of the "96/4" crayon marking applied by the Boston foreign-mail exchange office on the front of the cover.

### ***Via Southampton***

Throughout the classic stamp era, letters in the British mails to India could travel two routes. The slower and cheaper route was via Southampton. After travelling



from New York to London, covers in this category traveled by train to Southampton, then via ship around the Iberian peninsula, through Gibraltar, across the Mediterranean, across Suez by train, and then via a ship of the Peninsular and Oriental (P&O) line eastward to India and the Orient.

### ***Via Marseilles***

A faster and more expensive route was via Marseilles. Instead of boarding the British steamer at Southampton, letters could be sent from London across the channel, to transit France by train to Marseilles, joining the Southampton ship in the Mediterranean. The China steamer from Southampton stopped at Malta and took on mail there. Letters could be sent from England via Marseilles as many as six days after the P&O steamer left Southampton and still catch up with it at Malta. In effect, this fast transit of Europe meant that an American businessman could post from New York almost a week later, and still have a letter reach India in the same mail that brought the via-Southampton correspondence which had earlier left New York.

### ***Via Brindisi***

Commencing July 1870, the Franco-Prussian War wreaked havoc with communications across France. As a consequence of the disruptions of war, sometime during the fall of 1870 the British stopped using the fast-transit route via Marseilles and substituted an overland route that avoided France altogether, going by way of Belgium and Germany across the Alps through the Brenner Pass into Italy, then down to Brindisi, at the Italian boot-heel. The trans-alpine route followed a highway built by Napoleon's invading army over a path originally constructed by Hannibal for his elephants. Once established, the via-Brindisi route was found to be quicker than the via-Marseilles route, so it was maintained after the war ended, at a rate of 28¢ per half ounce. This 28¢ rate via Brindisi, as depicted on the Ice House cover, continued until 1875.

## The Route

ABOVE THE ADDRESS, THE ICE HOUSE COVER IS marked “Nevada.” That is the name of a transatlantic steamer then doing service for the Guion Line. But the *Nevada* was off the Irish coast when the Ice House cover was posted, having departed New York on July 30, 1873 (its next New York departure was on September 10).

The “BOSTON PAID AUG 8” marking indicates a New York departure of Saturday, August 9. During this era, all mail-carrying transatlantic steamships departed from New York. Boston mails destined for transatlantic carriage were made up and marked one day in advance. Thus, a Boston exchange-office marking dated August 8 indicates a steamship departing from New York on August 9.

While we know that the Ice House cover did not cross the Atlantic on the *Nevada*, we cannot be certain which of two transatlantic steamers actually carried it when they left New York on Saturday, August 9, 1873. As maritime commerce improved after the Civil War, the transatlantic sea lanes became more congested. Saturday was always a favored departure day. By the mid 1870’s, it is not uncommon to find two or even three Saturday steamer departures carrying British mails.

On Saturday, August 9, 1873, two mail-carrying steamships left New York bound for England. Both carried British mails. The Ice House cover could have crossed on either. The Inman Line steamer *City of Paris* also departed New York that same day, but Inman was not carrying Saturday mails in 1873.

The most likely candidate, the North German Lloyd steamship *Rhein*, departed New York City August 9 and arrived Southampton August 19. Both transatlantic markings on the Ice House cover (Boston August 8 and London August 19) would be appropriate for this sailing. However, the *Baltic* of the White Star Line also left New York on Saturday, August 9, arriving at Queenstown (Ireland) on August 18. The markings on the Ice House cover would be appropriate for this sailing, too. Pending the appearance of more covers with this



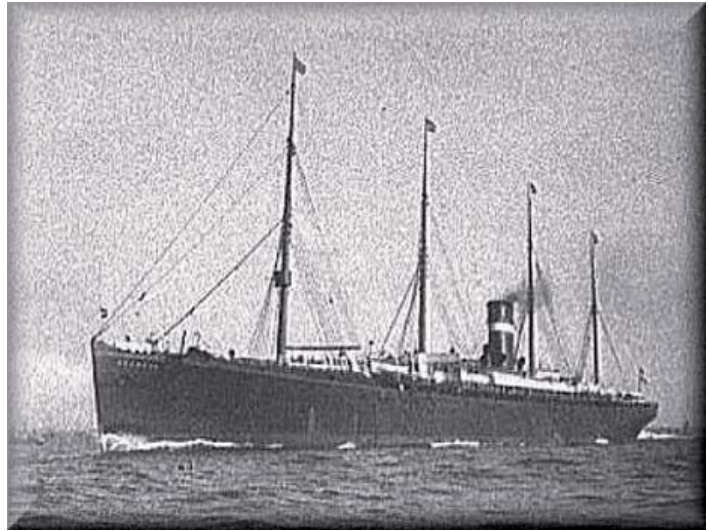
Boston August 8 Postmark

*The foreign-mail exchange office postmarked the Ice House cover on Friday, August 8, one day before the regular Saturday steamship departure from New York.*



North German Lloyd *Rhein* (left)  
and White Star Line *Baltic* (right)

*Both of these steamships left New York on August 9, 1873, and could have carried the Ice House cover on its transatlantic journey to England.*



same dating sequence, we cannot say which of these transatlantic steamers carried the Ice House cover.

Whichever steamer carried it across the Atlantic, the Ice House cover then left London in the British mails, crossed the English Channel and travelled by rail to the port of Brindisi, at the bottom of the Italian bootheel. This train trip took no more than two or three days. At Brindisi the cover boarded the P&O steamer *Poonah*, which departed Brindisi on August 25, and arrived at Alexandria on August 28. The *Poonah's* mail was then carried by canal to Suez and placed on board the P&O steamer *Orissa* for the trip onward to Bombay. This mail was sorted on board and received the oval “SEA POST OFFICE” datestamp of the mail set “B,” showing the departure date from Suez on August 29. This sorting postmark was used on the Bombay Line. The mail for Calcutta was put off at Bombay on September 11, 1873 (probably in a closed mail bag because the cover shows no Bombay marking) and carried across India by train to Calcutta, where it arrived four days later.

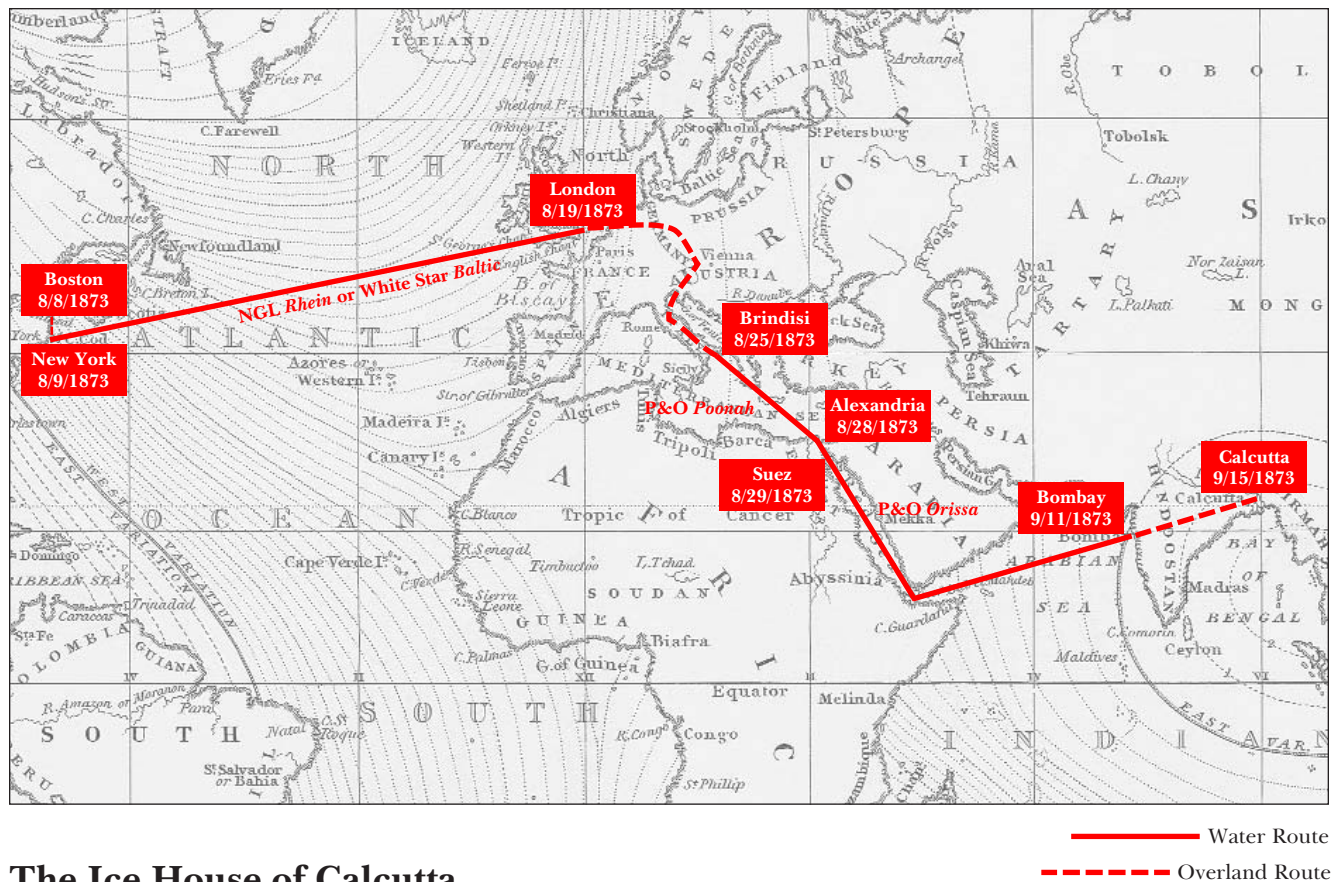
#### Indian Transit Markings

*The Sea Post Office oval dated August 29 represents the date of departure from Suez, and the Calcutta receiving postmark is dated September 15 (1873).*





## The Ice House Cover's Journey from Boston to Calcutta



## The Ice House of Calcutta

THE ICE HOUSE LOCATED IN CALCUTTA WAS one of several such structures built in tropical cities by Frederic Tudor of Boston (1783-1864), founder of the Tudor Ice Company and popularly known as “the Ice King.” The double-oval business cachet of his firm “TUDOR COMPANY, BOSTON, AUG. 8, 1873” appears dead center on the back of the Ice House cover.

After a youthful and financially unsuccessful effort to send a schooner full of ice to Martinique, Tudor perfected his marketing techniques and his logistics, and made a great fortune shipping pure New England ice first to the Caribbean and later to India.

To store his precious commodity in the tropics, Tudor built ice houses in India’s three major coastal cities. These structures evolved over the years until they were finally transformed, in the 1890s, by steam-driven ice-manufacturing technology. But the Ice House to which the unique 90¢ 1869 cover was sent in 1873 was still a



Frederic Tudor (1783-1864)  
The “Ice King” started exporting ice from Massachusetts to the Caribbean in 1805. In 1833 his company carried its first shipment of ice to Calcutta.



The Ice House, Calcutta

*A hand-coloured photographic print of Ice House, Calcutta, from the Fiebig Collection: Views of Calcutta and Surrounding Districts, taken by Frederick Fiebig in 1851.*

Photo © The British Library

storage facility, not a factory. The structure is now gone, but its memory survives in a Kolkata street name, Ice Factory Lane. Of the three facilities the Ice King built in India, only the ice house in Madras still stands.

Tudor initially harvested Massachusetts ice from Fresh Pond in Cambridge and Walden Pond in Concord. Roughing it at Walden in the winter of 1846-47, Henry David Thoreau watched a Tudor crew sawing ice blocks from Walden Pond and penned these notes in his famous journal: "The sweltering inhabitants of... Madras and Bombay and Calcutta drink at my well... The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges."

The photo above shows the Ice House in Calcutta as it appeared in the middle of the 19th century. This reproduces a hand-colored calotype print created in 1851 by Frederick Fiebig, a pioneer photographer who was then based in Calcutta.



## The 90¢ 1869 Pictorial Issue

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ICE HOUSE COVER is that it is the only fully documented and authenticated example of the 90¢ 1869 stamp used on cover. There are other stamp issues that are extremely rare on cover—for example, the 90¢ 1868 Grilled Issue (Scott 101) and 90¢ 1870 Issue (Scott 155)—but those are not *face-different* stamps. In other words, Scott numbers 101 and 155 are classified as distinctive issues by philatelists using the *Scott Catalogue*, but to anyone else, including the 19th century public, these stamps and their counterparts (Scott numbers 72 and 166) are identical. On the other hand, the 90¢ 1869's bicolored design and full-face portrait of Lincoln are so distinctive, this stamp is immediately recognizable and has no similar counterpart, except for the 1875 Re-Issue, which is not known on cover. The 90¢ 1869's special character is probably the reason it is so rare on cover—19th century stamp collectors soaked them off covers and packages.

The 1869 Pictorials were a significant departure from traditional U.S. stamp design. They were produced by



The 90¢ 1869 Pictorial Issue

*The distinctive bicolored design with a full-face portrait of Abraham Lincoln was issued in 1869. The stamp used on the Ice House cover in 1873 was probably from a supply of high-denomination stamps kept by the Tudor Co. in Boston.*



The 1869 Pictorial Issue

*The other nine values of the 1869 Pictorial Issue present images of mail transportation and American history. The bicolored designs were a first for U.S. postage stamps.*





#### Rejected Design Essays

*These essays produced during the design phase of the 1869 Issue show Lincoln's portrait on the 10¢, an image of Burgoyne's surrender on the 30¢, and Washington's portrait on the 90¢.*

the National Bank Note Co., which won renewal of its contract after a fierce contest with another security printer, Butler, Carpenter & Co. The contract was signed by the Postmaster General in President Johnson's cabinet. However, by the time the stamps were issued in March 1869, the Grant administration was in office, and a new Postmaster General was in charge.

While preceding issues had been current for seven to ten years and the 1870 portrait issue lasted eighteen years, the 1869 Pictorial Issue did not survive even one year. Looking back today, the artistry and themes of the 1869 Pictorials seem elegant and dignified. However, contemporary critical review was unexpectedly negative. Perhaps the general attitude was opposed to anything related to the old Johnson administration. It could also be that Butler, Carpenter & Co.'s vocal admonishments over the poor quality and excessive cost of the 1869 Pictorials influenced postal officials.

Unlike their predecessors, the ten 1869 stamps were designed in an almost square format. Three of the ten 1869 stamps, including the 90¢, had traditional portraits, and reaction to those stamps was generally positive. The other values represented a radical departure from the portraiture of all previous issues.

The theme of fast communication was chosen for three values: the 2¢ postal carrier on horseback, the 3¢ locomotive train, and the 12¢ S.S. *Adriatic*, a symbol of fast ocean navigation.

The final 10¢ design had a patriotic motif represented by an eagle with outstretched wings perched on a shield. This eagle-and-shield design was also adapted for the 30¢ bicolored stamp with the addition of draped flags. Originally, the 10¢ was intended to portray Lincoln (another essay shows the vignette from the 24¢). The 30¢ was originally designed with a picture of Burgoyne's surrender, but postal officials decided against it to avoid offending England.

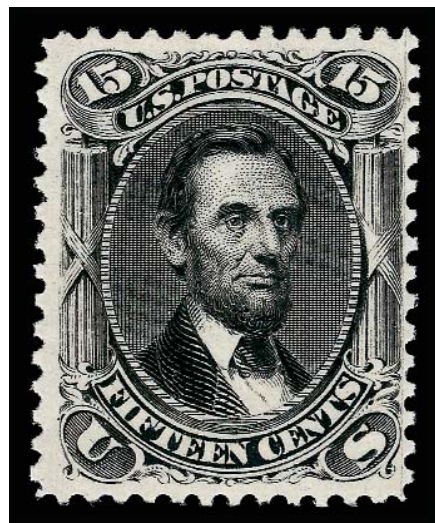
The 90¢ was intended to bear Washington's portrait, but ultimately the Lincoln portrait was used. The vignette was engraved by Joseph Prosper Ourdan (1828-1881) and first used on the 15¢ 1866 Issue. Ourdan was

a highly-skilled engraver who later became chief of the Engraving Division of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. The vignette was adapted from photographs of Lincoln taken by C. S. German in 1861 and Matthew Brady in 1862.

The bicolored 15¢ and 24¢ had the most dramatically different designs. The 15¢ stamp's blue vignette was a miniature engraving based on an 1839 oil painting entitled *Landing of Columbus* by John Vanderlyn. The 24¢ vignette was engraved from John Trumbull's oil painting, *Signing of the Declaration of Independence*.

National made every effort to ensure its success in obtaining the 1869 stamp contract by producing a set of stamps under the watchful and talented supervision of its foremost artists and engravers. Nevertheless, once the stamps were in the public domain, it became clear that artistic innovation was unwelcome. The 1869's received a barrage of negative daily editorials.

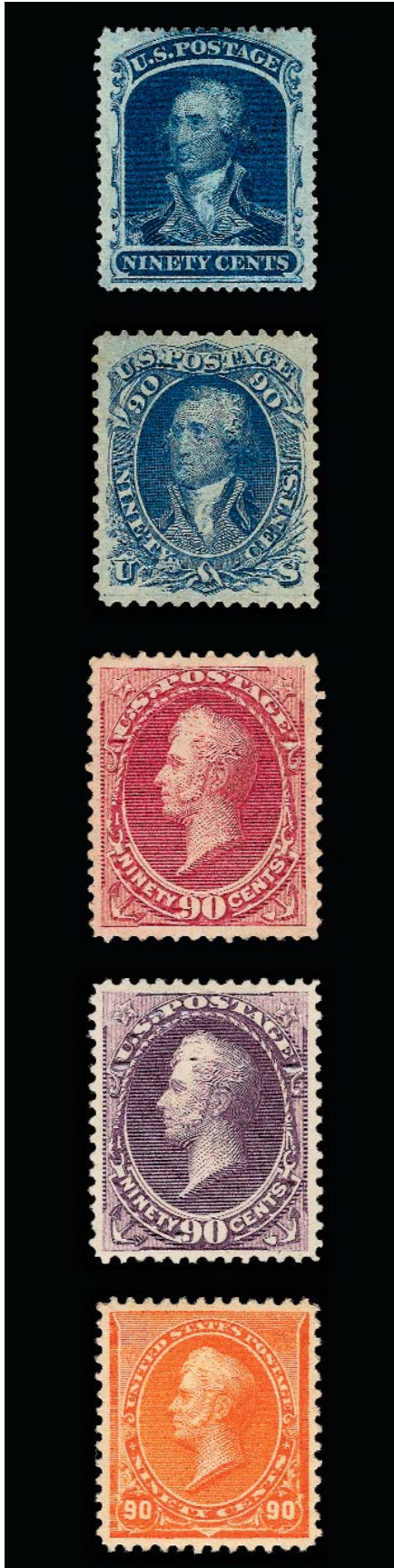
The 1¢ Franklin was described as marred by the "No. 1 court plaster fixed upon the left breast [that] gives to the head an appearance similar to that of a policeman, or fireman." The 2¢ horse and rider was described as "Booth's death ride into Maryland." The meaning of the locomotive on the 3¢ was surmised "to represent how Congressmen make money." The 6¢ Washington escaped the public's wrath. Not so the orange-yellow color of the 10¢: "This stamp would be beautiful if the color were any other than orange." Praise was actually bestowed on James Smillie's depiction of the S.S. *Adriatic*. Although the intricacy of the 15¢ engraving was admired, its place on a postage stamp was criticized: "As a postage stamp we consider the 15 cent article a failure; as a pretty picture for an illuminated ABC book, a decided success." A sarcastic thumbs-down was also given to the 24¢: "Strangers, especially foreigners, would stare at the group of stately looking Quakers, and wonder whether they were enjoying a peep of Congress or gazing into the President's House." Of the bicolored 30¢, one reviewer wrote "...the meanest looking stamp we have ever seen, reminds us more of a bunch of rags hung out of a junk shop than anything else."



The Lincoln Vignette

*The Lincoln portrait was engraved by Joseph Prosper Ourdan (1828-1881) and first used on a postage stamp issued in 1866, one year after Lincoln's assassination. The engraving is based on photographs of Lincoln taken by C. S. German in 1861 and Matthew Brady in 1862.*





National's 1870 portrait series was a direct consequence of changing presidential administrations and the unpopularity of the 1869 Pictorials. Perhaps in an effort to distance the Grant administration from blame for the 1869's, Postmaster General Creswell arranged for National to issue new stamps in the traditional portrait style. In his 1870 report Creswell states that "The adhesive stamps adopted by my predecessor in 1869, having failed to give satisfaction to the public, on account of their small size, their unshapely form [will now require the P.O. Dept.] to issue new stamps of larger size, superior quality of gum and new sizes...and to adopt for designs the heads, in profile, of distinguished deceased Americans..."

### 90¢ Stamps on Cover

**D**UE TO THE SHORT LIFE OF THE 1869 PICTORIAL Issue, very few 90¢ stamps circulated. The stamp agent's records show that 47,360 90¢ 1869 stamps were printed and delivered to the government stamp agent. However, there is evidence that nearly half of these were redeemed for the new 1870 Issue, leaving as few as 25,000 that might have been used on mail. Applying the standard survival rate for classic stamps on covers, we would expect no more than five 90¢ 1869 covers to exist.

The fact that only one cover has been documented and authenticated is perhaps attributable to the 90¢ Lincoln stamp's distinctive design. Stamp collectors were active in the mid-19th century, and no attention was given to stamps used on full covers. The large number of off-cover 90¢ 1869 stamps is thanks to the soaking efforts of these early collectors.

All 90¢ stamps were issued between 1860 and 1893. Counting the 90¢ 1869, there were six face-different designs (including one significant color variation). These high-denomination stamps are generally very rare on cover, the most common being the 90¢ 1861.

#### 90¢ Stamps

*In addition to the 90¢ 1869, there are four 90¢ designs and one color variation. The issues (top to bottom) are 1860, 1861, 1870, 1888 and 1893.*



The most valuable U.S. 90¢ cover sold to date is the 90¢ 1860 Issue cover addressed to Barcelona, Spain, which figured prominently in the collections formed by Alfred H. Caspary, Philip G. Rust and Dr. Leonard Kapiloff. It realized \$500,000 hammer when it was last sold in the Siegel firm's auction of the Kapiloff collection (Siegel Sale 745, October 3, 1992, lot 193). There are six authenticated covers bearing the 90¢ 1860.

Since the domestic rate was only 3¢ per half-ounce until October 1883 and 2¢ thereafter, domestic covers with 90¢ stamps are very few in number and tend to be large envelopes that contained court documents. The 90¢ covers to foreign countries during the pre-UPU period (before July 1875) are generally stamped with postage paying multiple rates. After the UPU rate took hold—5¢ per half-ounce—the need for 90¢ stamps on small covers vanished. 90¢ covers during the UPU period tend to be heavy parcel envelopes or wrappers, or they were stamped as favors to philatelists.

*The 90¢ 1860 Cover to Spain*

*This cover is one of six recorded examples of the 90¢ 1860 stamp on cover. It realized \$500,000 hammer in the 1992 Siegel sale of the Kapiloff collection.*





John F. Seybold

*Considered by many to be the “Father of Postal History,” Seybold was one of the first collectors to appreciate stamps used on their original covers. He was never able to locate a 90¢ 1869 cover.*



90¢ 1869 on Piece

*This is the only documented example of the 90¢ genuinely used on a piece of cover. The “N.YORK STEAMSHIP” circular date stamp was applied to mail off-loaded from arriving steamships.*

Photo courtesy of Spink/Shreves

The importance of a 90¢ 1869 on cover has been known to stamp collectors since the late 19th century, when collecting covers first started to gain a following. John F. Seybold (1858-1909) was one of the first collectors to actively seek covers, starting in the 1880's and 1890's. Some of Seybold's best covers were pictured in a series of articles published in *The Perforator* from 1902 to 1905. Although Seybold was able to acquire a large number of outstanding covers, the 90¢ 1869 eluded him.

The point of mentioning Seybold is to emphasize that for more than 125 years collectors have been searching for the 90¢ 1869 on cover, and to date only the Ice House cover has been found. There is also one small piece of a cover bearing a 90¢ 1869, which is tied by the “N.YORK STEAMSHIP” postmark.

Rumors have circulated for years about other 90¢ 1869 covers and package wrappers, but no real evidence of their existence has been produced. At one time it was thought that the Gomez correspondence to Spain, some of which came into collector hands during the 1980's, contained a 90¢ 1869 cover. In recent years there has been talk of two package labels from Portland, Maine, which have 90¢ 1869's on them, but strenuous efforts to gain access to these pieces, if only to verify their existence, have failed. In this Photoshop era, we would need to examine the actual item before we could believe another 90¢ 1869 cover has been found after 140 years.

### Valuing the Ice House Cover

THE ICE HOUSE COVER'S ABSENCE FROM THE auction market during the period from its last appearance in 1943 until this offering creates a huge void in its pricing history. During this time, the market for the most outstanding worldwide philatelic items has routinely produced auction realizations ranging from one million to several million dollars. In several reports of the Ice House cover's recovery, knowledgeable philatelists have estimated its value at the million-dollar figure. However, we (and the owners) have decided to establish a very conservative estimate of \$300,000 to \$400,000.

## Acknowledgments and Sources

We are grateful to Richard F. Winter and The Philatelic Foundation for their cooperation in providing information and certain images.

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- Kapiloff, Leonard A., *Collection of U.S. 1851-57 Issue Covers*, Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc., Sale 745, October 3, 1992  
Rarities of the World, Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc., 1964-2008  
Seybold, John F., *Stamp Collection*, J. C. Morgenthau, Sale 29, March 15-16, 1910

### **Internet Resources (by subject):**

- [The Ice House, Calcutta] <http://www.bl.uk>  
[Frederic Tudor] <http://www.iceharvestingusa.com>



LOT 130  
The Ice House cover (shown at 100% of original size)

**Lot 130°**

**THE “ICE HOUSE” COVER**

**United States 1869 Pictorial Issue  
90¢ Carmine and Black (122)**

90¢ 1869 tied by segmented cork cancel, used with 1870 12¢ Dull Violet (151), tied by same cork cancel, a missing 10¢ 1870 has been replaced by a stamp with a similar cancel, the three paying the \$1.12 quadruple 28¢ British Mail via Brindisi rate on legal-size cover addressed to “*Mr. Jas. H. Bancroft, Ice House, Calcutta, E. Indies*” with sender’s routing “*via Brindisi*” and “*Nevada*” ship designation, the cover was actually carried on either the North German Lloyd *Rhein* or the White Star Line *Baltic*, both of which departed from New York on Saturday, August 9, 1873, sender’s blue oval datestamp on back “TUDOR COMPANY, BOSTON, AUG. 8, 1873”, red “BOSTON PAID AUG. 8” circular datestamp on front, red “4” in crayon indicates quadruple rate, red crayon “96/4” indicates quadruple credit to Great Britain, red “LONDON PAID 19 AU 73” datestamp applied in transit, carried overland to Brindisi, then by the Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company’s (P&O) steamer *Poonah*, departing Brindisi on August 25 and arriving at Alexandria on August 28, carried overland to Suez, “SEA POST OFFICE B 29 8 73” (August 29) oval datestamp on back indicates departure date from Suez on the P&O steamer *Orissa* (Bombay Line), red “CALCUTTA 15 SEP” receiving datestamp, there is a large sealed tear that passes through the upper left quadrant of the 90¢ stamp, severing it into two pieces, the stamp has been repaired and the tear in the cover is slightly discolored from sealing adhesive, the 12¢ stamp has minor faults, the cover’s overall appearance is very attractive, and some modest work by a skillful paper restorer could remove the discoloration from the tear in the cover

THE UNIQUE AND FAMOUS “ICE HOUSE” COVER. THIS IS THE ONLY DOCUMENTED AND AUTHENTICATED EXAMPLE OF THE 90-CENT 1869 PICTORIAL ISSUE USED ON COVER. DISCOVERED IN 1914, LAST OFFERED AT PUBLIC AUCTION IN 1943 AND LOST TO PHILATELY BETWEEN 1967 AND 2006, THE “ICE HOUSE” COVER NOW RETURNS TO THE COLLECTOR MARKET TO TAKE ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE ALONGSIDE THE WORLD’S MOST IMPORTANT PHILATELIC RARITIES.

Illustrated in “Great Stamps Make Greater Covers”, Richard B. Graham, *The American Philatelist*, October 1977.

Ex Squires, Ackerman, Krug, Luerssen and Baker.

With 2009 Philatelic Foundation certificate (number 476371).

**Estimate \$300,000-400,000**



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## 1 Registering with Stamp Auction Network and Siegel Auction Galleries

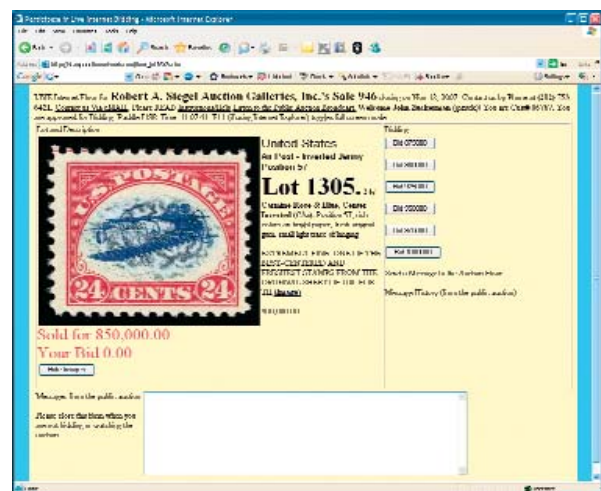
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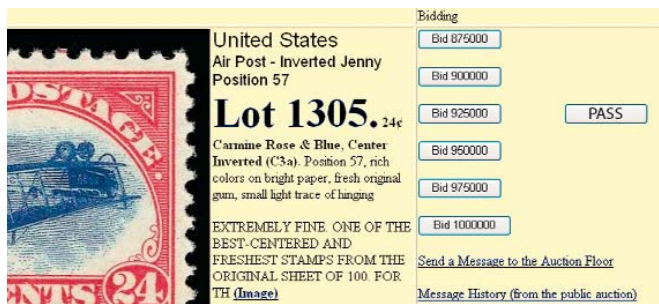
## 2 Using your browser for Live Internet Bidding and understanding the way it works.

Live Internet Bidding works by providing an audio feed of the auction (for anyone using Internet Explorer) and by allowing registered bidders to observe and place bids. The bidding interface shows a photo and description of the lot, the current bid (and your bidding status), and options for placing competitive bids. To join the auction, go to [stampauctionnetwork.com/siegel](http://stampauctionnetwork.com/siegel). You can also log on at [siegelauctions.com](http://siegelauctions.com)

The visual interface will work with any browser on both PC and Mac operating systems. However, the audio feed only works with Internet Explorer on a PC with ActiveX software installed. If ActiveX is not on your computer, you will have the option to install it.

Before bidding by internet for the first time, we recommend finding a sale in progress and listening to the public broadcast or logging in as a registered bidder. This will help you develop a feel for the sale tempo and bidding interface.

"System down" or "lost connection" events do occasionally happen. If you have any problems with Live Internet Bidding, please call 212-753-6421 for immediate assistance.



## 3 Using Live Internet Bidding to bid, track results and communicate with the auctioneer.

When you're logged on as a Live Internet Bidder, the screen will display buttons with bid increments. After you click on a bid amount, the auctioneer is immediately notified of your bid. Retracting a bid is usually not acceptable, so please bid carefully.

If you bid, then decide to stop, please use the "Pass" button, which appears once you've started bidding. This tells the auctioneer not to wait for another bid from you.

You can send messages to the auctioneer (for example, a request for extension). You can also track prior realizations from the bidding screen.

Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc.  
Prices Realized for  
Sale 973A June 13, 2009 The Ice House Cover

Lot#	Realized
130	375,000