

WILLAMETTE STAMP & TONGS

THE NEWSLETTER OF SALEM STAMP SOCIETY



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CELEBRATING 92 YEARS 1933-2025

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WEBSITE www.salemstampsociety.org

September 17th Meeting

Peter Gatehouse gave a really interesting and entertaining program on “Tin Can Mail” at the meeting. He told the story of how the mails were first delivered to and from a remote Tongan island that had no easy access. Mail was carried in waterproof containers by swimmers out to passing ships. Enterprising traders turned this necessary curiosity into a profitable philatelic business that was good for the individuals and the island. Eventually cruise ships made special trips to the island to send and collect mail with the special Tin Can Mail cachets. Swimmers were replaced by canoes for reasons of safety after one was killed by a shark. Peter said that over 1 million pieces of mail were delivered this way. A volcanic eruption in the 1940’s led to the evacuation of the island and ended this method of delivering the mails.

There seemed to be strong interest in the 60 lot Bid Board assembled by Bob Reynolds with many lots attracting multiple bids.

Danny Bisgaard is seeking your

nominations for the election of Board members at the November AGM. David Morrison encouraged members to consider coming forward to help the society. Danny is also organizing the 2025-26 agenda and looking for programs and Show & Tell items from members, please see Danny if you would like to present next year. Program presenters are rewarded by payment of Society Dues for the year—surely this an offer that is difficult to refuse!

October 15th Meeting.

The main event of the evening is the Members’ Swap & Trade. Be sure to bring along your surplus stamps and collections to sell or exchange. It is also a great opportunity for members to learn about the philatelic interests of their friends and fellow collectors.

There will be a “Buy-it-Now” table with various items, box lots and collections available on a first come-first served basis. Bob Reynolds says that there will be real bargains on offer so come early! These are also mystery items-no lists or images available for the newsletter.

November 19th Meeting.

As well as the AGM there will be a special club auction with many good box lots and collections. Doors open early for viewing.

Lucien Klein.

Several club members attended the funeral service for Lucien at the First Presbyterian Church of Woodburn on September 6th. He was given a very nice send-off by his family and friends.

Salem Stamp Society

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That's Interesting!

Bob Grosch

What is a postage stamp? This is not an easy question. The standard definition used to be something along the lines of “an adhesive label issued to indicate the payment of postal service.” There are a number of problems with this definition. Souvenir sheets, for instance, are printed primarily for their value to collectors, not for the payment of postage. At times adhesive labels we consider U.S. postage stamps were not published for the prepayment of postage, as there were no applicable postage rates at the time e.g. when the U.S. issued a \$5.00 Columbian in 1893. And then there are the anomalies issued by the so-called sand dune countries that are printed in New York, often with pre-printed cancellations, and never even arrive in the country that authorized their publication.

And then there are the families of “postage stamps” from countries that do not have postal service, or in some cases may not even be considered to be legitimate countries. Stamps from White Russia fall into this category. White Russia was a Soviet Socialist Republic proclaimed on January 1, 1919. It did not have a postal system and these stamps which were issued in perforated and imperforate format (see below) are not known to have ever carried mail. If you find one on cover it would be absolutely unique.



Another example are stamps issued by eccentric individuals who purchase cheap land in the California desert and then declare their land holdings to be a sovereign nation and entitled to issue their own postage stamps. The fictitious Kingdom of Ourania lies in the California desert near Las Ve-

gas. It has no airport. (See example cover below)



“What is a postage stamp?” is a difficult question to answer, but its an interesting one!

Post Offices in the News.

We are all familiar with the problems facing the USPS and other postal administrations worldwide. However the recent announcement in Linn’s Stamp News that USPS posted a \$3.1 billion loss in the third quarter of 2025 fiscal year was alarming. This loss was higher than the \$2.6 bn in the same quarter of 2024 although the Post Master General Steiner and Chief Financial Officer Grossmann believed that they had the correct strategy and were on the right path back to financial sustainability.

A non-profit advocacy group named “Keep us Posted” has urged a change of approach from the previous PMG De Joy’s “Delivering for America” plan. This included twice-annual price hikes at above inflation rates, postal service delays and a focus on packages over mails despite letters being the largest revenue generator. It is not clear what an alternative strategy might look like. The combination of a statutory requirement to deliver mail to all addresses 6 days per week with a continually shrinking volume of mail is not an easy problem for any business. Recent announcements suggest that matters will get worse before any improvements are realized.

Postal administrations across Europe and elsewhere are suspending shipments to the US because of confusion about tariff rules. The expiration of the exemption of duties on low value packages (*de minimus*) has major implications for USPS and its customers—including stamp collectors hoping to receive items in the mail. Loss of revenue and the switch to commercial carriers that are already geared up to make arrangements for international shipping are bound to adversely affect USPS.

Post Offices in the News (contd.).

Postal deliveries in the UK have also experienced similar problems to the US but recent changes have led to some improvements in finances.

Royal Mail is responsible for collecting and delivering letters and parcels to all parts of the UK. For most of its history Royal Mail has operated either as a government department or public corporation. Over the past 20 years there have been many changes trying to cope with a large and complex business where volumes and revenues are in steep decline. The Post Office is now a wholly state owned retail business whilst the Royal Mail is an independent publicly owned company.

In April of this year, Royal Mail was taken over by the EP Group and, for the first time in 400 years, is under foreign ownership. (EP Group is owned by Czech billionaire Daniel Kretinsky.) What would Henry VIII have to say about this?

The new strategy for the business sounds similar to that proposed in the US by De Joy. Delivery targets have been lowered especially for Second Class Mail and business focus has shifted towards parcel deliveries and pick up. It is early days for this approach but for the first time in 3 years Royal Mail returned an annual **profit of £12 million**. A very modest sum but at least it is still providing a service (compare Denmark) and making money.

Royal Mail's parcel deliveries have increased 6% whilst letter volumes are down by 4% in the last year and down 50% from 2015 to 2024. Their statutory obligation to deliver mail everywhere in the UK 6 days a week might be an advantage for the Royal Mail parcel service over commercial carriers in remote sparsely populated areas.

The pick up of parcels by Royal Mail has typically meant a trip to the local Post Office. Now, new solar powered pillar boxes adapted for postal small

packages are being installed across the UK. Postage can be prepaid at home using the Royal Mail app to generate a barcode. This can be read by the new powered postboxes which then opens the door for the package. It has been described as the "biggest re-design in the 175 year history of the pillar box." It will be interesting to see how this innovation works out and whether it further improves the fortunes of Royal Mail.

Japan's "Missing Post Office"

The Washington Post from 2/8/2025 ran a very interesting and moving story about a post office on Awashima Island in Japan. This is a remote island in the Seto Inland Sea between Japan's main southern islands. Loss of industry and declining population led to the closing and abandonment of the local post office in 1991.

The building was used in a month-long contemporary art festival in 2013 in which people could send letters to the post office or write and read ones there. The project attracted more than 31,000 visitors and 400 letters over the month. The letters were for lost friends and pets, past and future selves and, most frequently, the dead.

The building was meant to be demolished after the festival but Katsushita Nakata, the owner of the building and retired postmaster wanted to keep the project going. He is now aged 90 and still manages the Missing Post Office which opens every Saturday. It receives from 10 to 20 letters per day, most of which are anonymous with no return address and are mostly written to the deceased.

Nakata reads each letter and processes them as if official mail. About 60,000 letters and cards are kept there in cubbies for anyone to access. Visitors from all over Japan make the journey to the post office to write and read letters. Many Japanese keep some form of connection to those who have died as part of their spiritual and cultural beliefs.

The letters seem to help in this context and provide some relief and a means of coping with grief.

The article provides many moving examples of this correspondence which clearly has some cathartic benefits for both the writers and the readers. There are now a growing number of places in Japan for this practice.



Salem Stamp Society

P.O. Box 202

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Meetings

**All meetings held at the Scottish Rite
Masonic Temple,
4090 Commercial St. SE, Salem, OR.**

Wednesday 15th October 2025.

**Starts at 7pm, Doors open at 6pm.
Members' Swap & Trade Night
Bid Board**

Wednesday 19th November 2025.

**Starts at 7pm, Doors open at 5 pm.
AGM & Club Auction**

Wednesday 3rd December 2025

Christmas Party, Starts 6pm

Pacific NW Stamp Shows and Bourses 2025-6

Local Events

Central Oregon Stamp Show, Redmond, Sept. 27

**Salem Coin & Stamp Show, December 20-21
Polk County Fairgrounds, Rickreall, OR**

Repetitive Events:

**Oregon Stamp Society: Rose City Stamp Fair -
2nd Saturday of the month at OSS clubhouse
4828 NE 33rd Ave., Portland 9:00am-3:00 pm
Collectors Corner - 4th Saturday of the month
at OSS clubhouse 9:00 am.- 3:00 pm**

2025-2026 Major Shows:

PIPEX 2026, May 1-3 2026, Monarch Hotel, Clackamas, OR

**BOSTON 2026 World Expo, May 28-30 2026 at the Boston
Convention Center**