

COLLECTING POSTAL STATIONERY

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It is hard for us to appreciate that it was in the latter years of last century the collecting of postal stationery was more popular than the collecting of adhesive stamps. When New Zealand's first lettercard was issued, in 1895, collectors and the general public rushed to purchase this "novelty" item. Supplies were soon exhausted and more printings were required. In fact so many printings were required that the Government Printer ran out of the pale green card he had been using and, in order to maintain supplies, resorted to using card in varying shades and grades of buff, blue, pale yellow, and even pink. Early stamp albums contained printed squares for postal stationery, and detailed catalogues were available. This situation, however, was not destined to continue. By about 1900 collectors were losing interest in postal stationery. This interest was not to return until fairly recent times.

In its strictest sense "postal stationery" is defined as: *postal items* (postcards, lettercards, newspaper wrappers, envelopes, registered envelopes, aerogrammes, etc) *which bear a directly printed stamp.*

There would be few collectors who would wish now to embark upon a complete collection of New Zealand postal stationery. The field is simply too large and much of the material is extremely difficult to acquire. If you are interested in collecting postal stationery then I would suggest you tackle the issues of some smaller postal administration. But it would be possible to form a very good collection of, for instance, the King George VI issues of New Zealand. Even this would be quite a challenge. Although much of the material is priced very moderately it was issued at the time when the collecting of postal stationery was really in the doldrums. Another approach would be to form a collection of just one type of item; I met a collector not so long ago who was forming a collection of wrappers, in used condition, which for a cent or so had carried a newspaper from one side of the globe to another. Yet another approach would be to form a collection of various items of postal stationery stamped with the same die. The 1d King George V "Field Marshall" die was used on postcards, lettercards, and newspaper wrappers. This subject would make for a very interesting little collection.

Many beginner collectors find the cost of collecting nineteenth century material quite prohibitive. Yet many items of nineteenth century postal stationery - particularly postcards in mint condition - are readily obtainable. If you have given up on stamps, but still like the thought of collecting Victoriana, then I suggest you turn your attention to this area of philately. How about collecting nineteenth century postcards of the British (as it was then) Empire? Generally speaking envelopes are harder to acquire than other postal stationery items but mint envelopes

stamped with the embossed portrait of Queen Victoria have a truly classic appearance, and used envelopes are an embodiment of both postal history and philately. I am not saying that postal stationery is a cheap form of philately - far from it - but it is certainly an area where the beginner collector can form an interesting and quite extensive collection at a modest cost.

If you are working on a collection of stamps, traditional or thematic, it is of interest to include a few relevant items of postal stationery. Exhibition judges, in particular, like to see items of postal stationery (but not too many) in a thematic exhibit. I was certainly impressed to see, in the Ameripex gold medal collection of "Elephants," examples of the world's first postal stationery items, the Mulready envelope and lettersheet - which feature an elephant. If you are forming a specialised collection of the 1d Dominion stamp of New Zealand then a section devoted to the postal stationery stamped with this design would add much to the interest of your collection.

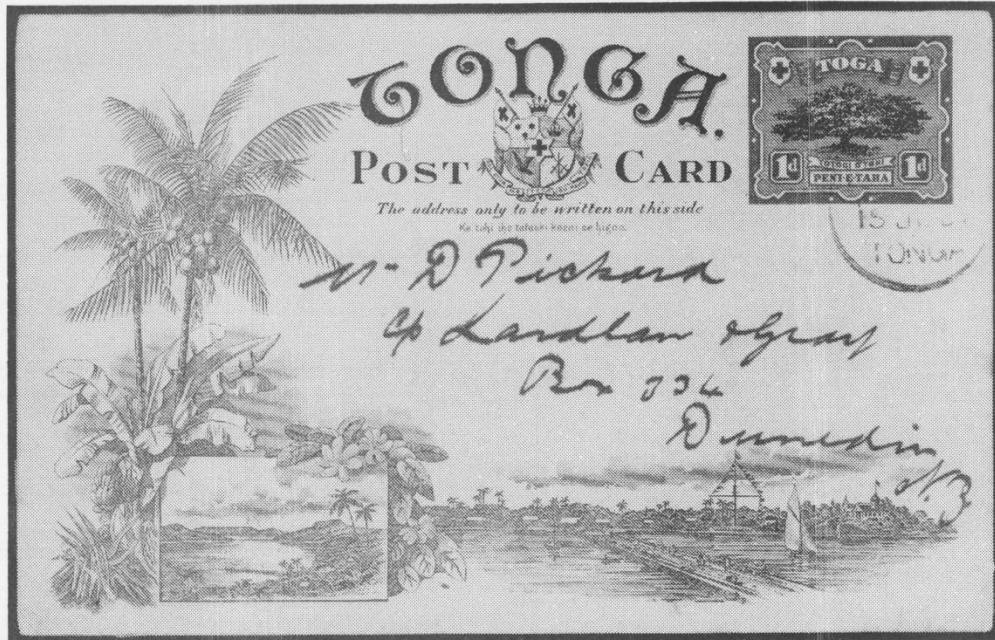
The main problem with postal stationery is that many of the items are too large to fit comfortably, if at all, on a standard size album page. I keep my collection on pages which are much larger than normal but, for successful exhibition work, I find it necessary to use the smaller pages. This is difficult, it means that some items just cannot be displayed at all, or I am required to overlap material (which some judges, myself included, feel is a real "no no"), or I have to spread an item, or items, over two pages. However, these problems should not worry the collector whose interest is restricted to the more normal items — standard size envelopes, postcards, and lettercards.

Besides items which were issued by the Post office it was common for business firms to send supplies of their own pre-printed envelopes to the Post Office for stamping with a postal stationery die. Such items are known as "stamped to order" or "private" postal stationery. In recent years the Post Office has abandoned this service - but has continued to make the service available to the organisers of national stamp exhibitions. The postcards issued for Stampex 83, Stampex 85, and Stampex 87 come into this category.

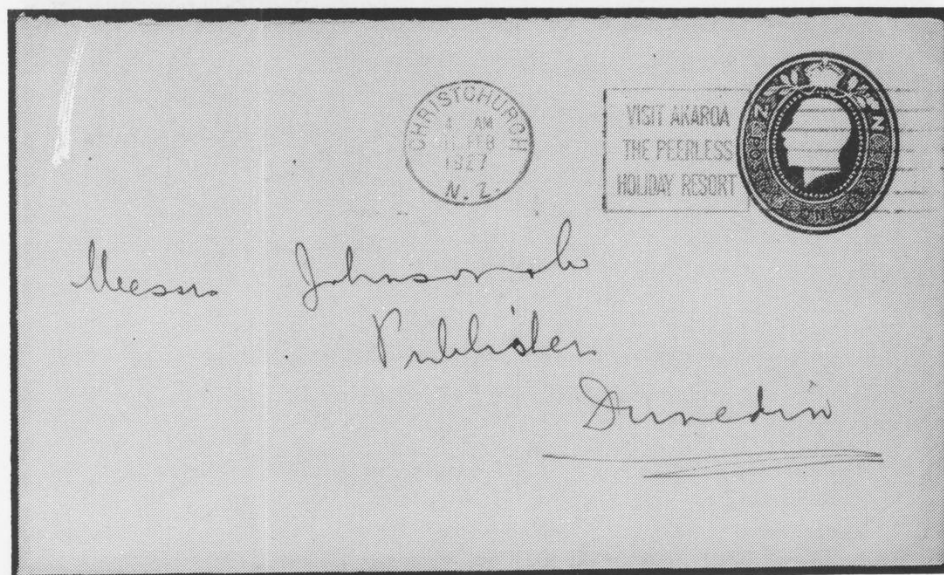
The modern postal stationery collector is interested in complete items. In the early years of postal stationery collecting it was common to cut the printed stamp from the item and old collections are apt to contain a selection of postal stationery "cut-out." While they may not have much value and will not yet win you an exhibition medal a collection of cut-outs could be formed very cheaply and will serve to increase your knowledge of this aspect of philately. Cut outs are vastly inferior to complete items though. *Never cut stationery yourself.*

Postal stationery is an area which should not be overlooked by any collector. It is a field which contains much interest and, because it has been overlooked for so long, there is always the chance of making a new discovery or picking up the odd bargain.

Just four of the thousands of stationery items available to satisfy any collecting interest.



Postcards from Tonga and Belgian Congo.



New Zealand Pre-stamped Envelope.