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Today's Collector
Finding Answers

How to value Postal History



1851 Three cent US Cover to Vermont
Pittsford to Cuttingsville

A few weeks ago, I received a question: *"How do you value a cover? Do you start with the catalog value of the stamp, consider the postage rate in effect at the time, look at the historical value?"* My reply at the time was basically that there are no concise answers to this, and I would bring this good question up in a future message. Well, he did find some answers in the Scott US Specialized Catalog on a two-page spread that show understanding values relating, of course, to USA material. They define what a cover is, discuss catalog values and condition, and, lastly, mention "Factors Enhancing the Value of a Cover". Well, let us assume you know the difference between folded letter sheets, envelopes, fronts, and postal stationery. Once you have this down and can pass up the values you find in any catalog, which are limited to common high-quality items, we can talk about values. With Mexican philatelic material, condition varies widely. So, keep in mind that an old Mexican cover can look beautiful, but most of them have either a lot of wear or missing pieces. In my experience, the interest can outweigh the condition.

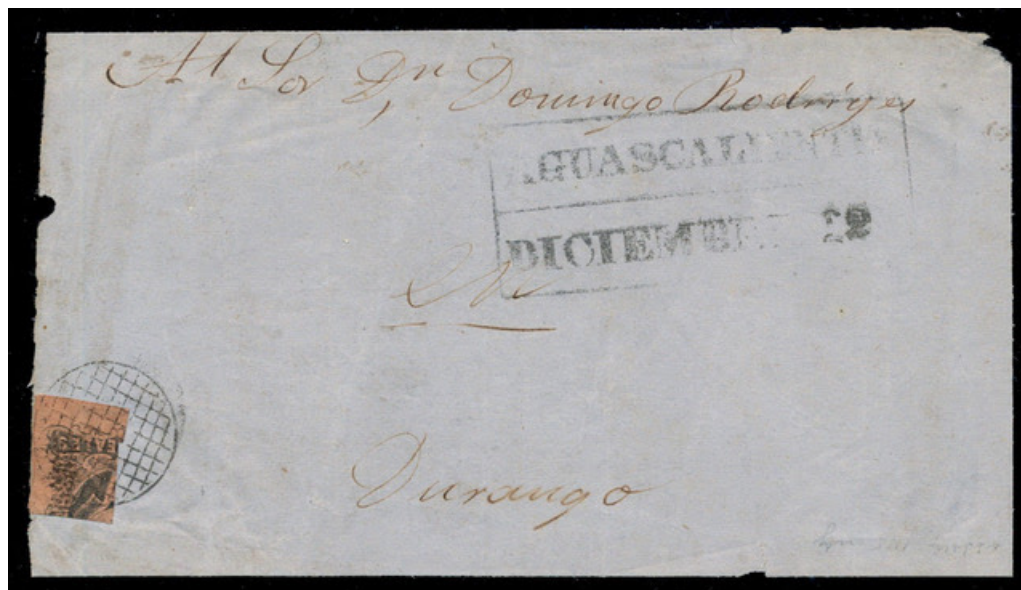


German Zeppelin postcard to California 1923

Scott's list of values is not complete, but it will provide a simple guide to what makes any cover valuable or not.

1. postal markings indicating origin, transit and arrival;
2. postal markings indicating rates paid, which include postage, registration, acknowledgment of receipt, express charges, insurance, postage due, forwarding and many others;
3. postal markings indicating carriers such as stagecoaches, trains, ships, aircraft, etc.;
4. markings applied by censors, other civilian or military authorities and others;
5. scarce or rare destinations or routings;
6. interruptions in the delivery system due to accidents, wars, natural calamities, etc.;
7. unusual combinations of stamps;
8. printed or hand-drawn pictorial, advertising or patriotic cover designs;
9. unusual quality of stamps, postal markings or cover;
10. outside of postal history, particularly noteworthy addressee, sender or contents.

Obviously, the list is generalized, but it covers many of the things that Mexican collectors also value. So, with all these suggestions and anything else we can think of as important in adding value to an otherwise common cover, what is the value of this? If we are talking about common material, just giving a value of 'x' times what the stamp catalog gives for a stamp, say 5x or just 3x what we value a stamp attached might help. In Mexican catalogs on districts and postmarks, especially those of the pre-stamp and classic periods, the value of many of these is due only to the overprint and the postmarks of their origin. You may not like fronts, but if you have the opportunity to get a certified mailing front with some high-value early issues, what a find that would be at the right price, and likely sometime into the thousands of dollars. So, nothing is cut-and-dried in the postal history world. Look at what the market is doing, and if you can find something similar being offered online or at auctions, that would be helpful. But for most of us collectors, the value of anything like postal history often equals our experience in knowing what to look for, understanding the other value these items have, and how the item impresses you, the buyer.



Cover Front w/ Aguascalientes #11 Quartersect for Dos Reales rate.

Rarity is greater than Condition

In my personal collection, I cherish postal history more than I do stamps. This is because most stamps on covers are secondary to the cover's overall value. Why? Because we value a stamp as a single entity, and a cover with the stamp always increases the interest factor. If you have a cover with a normal stamp, a common postmark, and a destination, it still tells the story of what the stamp does, where it is sent, and gives us the whole picture. Adding anything to this cover will proportionately embellish it. I have been working on a collection lately that includes a large number of covers, both old and modern, used in Baja California. Just the sending address from this small town in Mexico will add much greater value than in almost any other place in Mexico, due to the scarcity of these covers. So, I suggest that you really concentrate on everything the cover has to tell you. Each has its own story, and it is up to you to find what that story is.

Collecting postal history, whether it is an old classic item or something as new as modern issues found on a cover, the important thing for you, the buyer, is that you find it at a price you are pleased with. Remember, "Knowledge is King".

Enjoy!

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APS #198784, USPCS #4060,

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