

## OKLAHOMA'S PHILATELIC YEAR

*By George H. Shirk*

The year 1957, the Semi-Centennial of Statehood for Oklahoma, was a big year in the Sooner State for stamp collectors.<sup>1</sup> Most of the philatelic activity was centered around the Semi-Centennial celebration, and it is to the credit of the Oklahoma Philatelic Society, the local postmasters and the many co-operating civic groups that both the Semi-Centennial and other aspects of Oklahoma history received such wide philatelic coverage.

The major event was the Oklahoma Statehood stamp. This stamp carried the theme of the Semi-Centennial "Arrows to Atoms" to all parts of the world, and probably no other publicity medium received such wide distribution as this message appearing on the postage stamp. In addition to the commemorative stamp, many local postmasters used special slogan cancellations in their cancelling machines. The special exhibits at the Semi-Centennial Exposition also received much attention.

*Oklahoma Statehood Stamp*

On November 2, 1956, Postmaster General Arthur E. Summerfield announced that included in the 1957 stamp program would be a special stamp to commemorate the Fiftieth anniversary of Oklahoma Statehood. Further details of the design were made known on March 18, 1957; and on that date announcement was made that the first day of issue would be in Oklahoma City on June 14th, the opening date of the Oklahoma Semi-Centennial Exposition. On April 16 the color, blue, was released.

Four designs, prepared by William K. Schrage, of the Bureau of Engraving, were submitted to the Post Office Department; and the accepted design was approved by the Postmaster General on February 9, 1957. The engraving of the central figure was done by Matthew D. Fenton, and George L. Huber engraved the lettering and numerals. The Postmaster General approved the die proof on April 5th. The center design of the stamp is a horizontal arrow superimposed upon a solid outline of the State. The arrow pierces a symbolic orbit of atoms, the usual symbol for atomic energy. Across the top of the stamp are the words "1907. Arrows to Atoms. 1957."

<sup>1</sup> Grateful acknowledgement is made to *The Bureau Specialist*, R. A. Bryant, Editor, for permission to use the illustrations of the Oklahoma Statehood stamp and designs, and to Hugh Monroe, M. D. who furnished much of the information regarding the various slogan cancels.

In five lines upon the map of the State are the words "50th Anniversary of Oklahoma Statehood".

The first printing order was placed on April 8, 1957, for 112 million copies. Four plates were used in printing the issue, and the first press run was on May 17 at the Bureau of Engraving.

The official ceremonies honoring the stamp were held at Oklahoma City on June 14, 1957. The Postmaster General was represented by the Hon. Abe McG. Goff, General Counsel for the Post Office Department, who delivered the principal address. The Honorable H. B. Groh, President of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, acted as master of ceremonies. Mr. Goff presented souvenir albums, each containing a sheet of stamps autographed by Postmaster General Summerfield, to Governor Gary, Senator Kerr, Senator Monroney, Congressman John Jarman, Ross Rizley, United States District Judge, Allen Street, Mayor of Oklahoma City, Fred Shaw, Oklahoma City Postmaster, Lou Allard, Chairman of the Semi-Centennial Commission, D. A. McGee, James C. Burge, Stanley C. Draper, Don S. Kennedy, R. J. Spradling, all of the Exposition Committee, Mr. E. K. Gaylord, and Mr. H. B. Groh.

On the first day sale at Oklahoma City 328,772 covers received the first day cancellation and 1,048,081 stamps were sold. Of this number, 87,585 stamps were sold at the Boomtown Post Office at the Semi-Centennial Exposition Grounds.

### *Oklahoma City*

The Post Office at Oklahoma City gave attention to the Semi-Centennial Exposition by placing in use on 1 January 1957 a special cancellation publicizing the event. The cancel was retired from use on 7 July 1957, and during that period of service the approximate number of impressions was 25,390,926. This special cancel is of course different than the special "First Day of Issue" cancellation applied on June 14 to all envelopes bearing the Oklahoma Semi-Centennial stamp.

As a feature of the Exposition a branch post office operated at Boomtown. The post office was a replica of an early day frontier office, and did a lively business, providing regular postal service for all Fair patrons. The Oklahoma Philatelic Society arranged a special exhibit of early day covers, Indian Territory mail and related exhibits. The Society applied, upon request of the sender, a non-official "Boomtown, U.S.A." cancel in red ink to letters mailed at the Boomtown Post Office.

Two other special postmarks available at the Exposition should be mentioned. The Post Office Department provided

as special exhibits a railway mail car and a highway mail bus. Both were complete in every detail, and the equipment was on loan from regular duties in transporting the mails by rail or by highway. Visitors were permitted to dispatch mail at either facility, and an attractive colored cancellation was applied to all mail deposited in either the mail bus or the railway mail car. At the mail bus, the cancellation contained the letters HPO for "Highway Post Office" and at the mail car the letters RPO for "Railway Post Office" were used. The initials PTS in the cancellation represent "Postal Transportation Service."

### *Tulsa*

Tulsa paid tribute to the Golden Jubilee Celebration "Tul-sarama" held at the Tulsa Fairgrounds. A special cancellation was placed in use at the Tulsa main Post Office on April 23, 1957 and was in continuous service until June 8th. Chauncey O. Moore, acting Postmaster, reports a total of 4,074,500 impressions.

### *Butterfield Trail*

By Act of March 3, 1857, the Congress authorized the Postmaster General to contract for mail service from an agreed point on the Mississippi River to San Francisco. The Act required the successful contractor to establish stations not closer than 10 miles apart, with service to be in actual operation within 12 months after the signing of the contract, and with not more than 25 days required for each trip. Bids were opened in June 1857. John Butterfield and his associates, including William G. Fargo, were the successful bidders. The contract was signed by the Postmaster General on 16 September 1857. The route established by Butterfield entered Oklahoma at Fort Smith and crossed the State in a southwesterly direction, leaving Oklahoma at Colbert's Ferry, a famous crossing on the Red River at a site a short distance below the old bridge (now abandoned) on U. S. Highway 69.

Four of the principal post offices now located along the old route, Spiro, Wilburton, Atoka and Durant, placed in service on June 1, 1957 a special slogan cancellation commemorating the Butterfield Trail. Approximately 500 pieces of mail for collectors were awaiting at each city for a first day cancellation of the new slogan. Spiro retired its cancel on November 30th, and the other three cities continued their respective cancellations in use until December 31st. The postmaster at each city has reported the following approximate number of impressions:

Spiro .....	160,000	Wilburton .....	255,500
Atoka .....	658,000	Durant .....	1,161,550

### *Stagecoach Mail*

To Commemorate the Centennial of the signing of the Butterfield Overland Mail contract, Atoka and Durant staged a centennial celebration during the weekend of September 13th. Elaborate and exciting ceremonies were held, and the highlight of the entire event was a re-run by an actual stagecoach of the route from Atoka to Durant. Sponsored by the Oklahoma Overland Mail Centennial Committee, the stagecoach<sup>2</sup> of Mr. John D. Frizzell loaded the mail at Atoka at 11:00 a. m. on Sept. 13th. With an assist from a flatbed trailer, the stagecoach, complete with two teams of horses, called at Boggy Depot at 1:00 p. m., and arrived with the mail at Durant at 6:00 p. m. The mail pouch weighed 44 pounds, 3 ounces, and was marked authentically for "Durant, Fisher Station, Choctaw Nation." On the stagecoach 3,870 pieces of mail were actually transported by stage from Atoka to Durant.<sup>3</sup> All covers carried are postmarked "Atoka Sept. 13, 1957, 10:30 a. m." and are back stamped "Durant Sept. 14, 1957, 9:00 a. m." Two types of special cachets were applied by the Committee and both are here illustrated. Mail received across the window at the Atoka Post Office for dispatch on the stagecoach received an additional one line cancel in red reading "Via Stagecoach".

### *Pauls Valley*

Pauls Valley and Garvin County celebrated a centennial of their own; and their motto of "From Bluestem to Golden Trend" was the theme of a fine historical tribute to the locality. The Pauls Valley Centennial cancellation was placed in use on March 11, 1957 and was retired on June 15, 1957. There were approximately 386,800 impressions.

<sup>2</sup> The Concord Coach owned by Mr. Frizzell has had a long and thrilling life. It was built for Western mail and passenger service by J. S. Abbot & Sons, Concord, New Hampshire. With the advent of modern transportation it was relegated to the junk heap at Lancaster, Missouri. Major "Pawnee Bill" Lillie purchased the coach for his show where it entered upon a new kind of life. With the retirement of Pawnee Bill he had the coach hauled out into the south pasture at Pawnee, Oklahoma, where it soon rotted down into the tall grass. This coach had a charmed life however, for a second time it was salvaged from oblivion when Mr. Frizzell purchased its badly deteriorated carcass. After more than ten years of research, rebuilding and refinishing the coach has been restored to its once stately form. This twelve passenger coach cost \$1500 when new and weighed about 2,000 pounds. It required two entire steer hides to make the endless leather straps on which the coach body is suspended. A total of 250 feet of 2¼ inch leather straps were necessary to make 16 complete loops, or 32 spans for both sides. The Butterfield line used coaches made by James Gould Company of Albany, N. Y. and by the Eaton, Gilbert & Co. of Troy, N. Y. in addition to the Abbott product.

<sup>3</sup> The Butterfield Centennial cancellations for the four present Oklahoma post offices on the Overland Mail Route were sponsored by the Oklahoma Committee Butterfield Overland Mail Centennial, Vernon H. Brown of Tulsa, Chairman.

*Tishomingo*

The post office at Tishomingo, Chickasaw Nation, was established June 29, 1857, Aaron Harlan, first Postmaster. The circumstance of a post office centennial the same year of the State's Fiftieth Birthday warranted a special cancellation; and, giving recognition to both events, the Tishomingo slogan links both nicely into one. The cancel was first in use on June 17, 1957 and was last used July 7, 1957. Only about 11,000 impressions were counted, and a neat cover bearing a clear impression should be scarce.

*Enid*

Enid used a special slogan cancel to commemorate the Fiftieth Anniversary of Phillips University. On October 11, 1906 a charter was granted to Oklahoma Christian University. Its location in Enid had been assured by a grant of land and other benefits from civic leaders. Classes opened September 17, 1907 with 256 students. In 1913 the name was changed to Phillips University in honor of T. W. Phillips of Newcastle, Pennsylvania, who from the beginning had been a steady benefactor. Thus by circumstance 1957 was also the Semi-Centennial of the first instruction at Phillips University. The special postmark was placed in use July 1, 1957 and was retired December 31st. Approximately 3,250,000 impressions were applied to mail during the use.

*Guthrie*

On Statehood Day, November 16th, Guthrie applied a special slogan cancel to commemorate the exact birthdate of Oklahoma. Being in use for only one day, the cancel will be uncommon. Lorraine Fogarty, Postmaster, reports only 10,370 impressions.