

The Rarest Modern Day Covers? **By Robert G. Rufe**

In October of 1955 the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) produced Special Handling stamps on an experimental, low moisture-content paper. This "dry" paper has led to the terminology "dry-prints" for these stamps to differentiate them from their previous wet-print counterparts. The October run produced fewer than a million stamps of each denomination, compared to about 40 million each of the 10, 15 and 20¢ denominations of the wet-prints. Accordingly, mint "dry-prints" are much harder to find than the readily available wet prints.

Just to eliminate confusion, the 25¢ stamps are not part of this discussion, since they were only made by the wet-printing process during two production runs, one in 1925, the deep-green first printing, and another in 1928, the yellow-green second printing.

For the past five years I have quietly been trying to find the dry-printed variety of Special Handling stamps on an in-period cover – without success. In parallel with this search, and presumably an easier challenge, I have also tried to find study examples of used stamps – again, the dry printed variety - only to find out that these are rare (10 and 15¢ stamps) or non-existent, as is the current status for the 20¢ stamp! As recently as two years ago, the *Scott Specialized Catalogue of U.S. Stamps and Covers* listed both wet- and dry-prints, used, at the same price level! No one had apparently studied this issue to realize how rare these dry-printed stamps are – USED! Now, the dry-printed stamps, used, are priced with a dash, indicating they do not trade frequently enough to be priced accurately. I contend they do not trade at all, are rare to nonexistent, and have no demand... there are no album spaces for them, and their rarity is not known, nor appreciated. There is no demand – there is no supply! One ponders "If there were a supply, would there be a demand?" Complicating this situation is the fact that used stamps are difficult to identify. Add to this the possibility that fake cancels could be added to mint stamps to deceive collectors, and my direction has been to find – even one – of these dry-prints on cover.

So – I challenge readers to find one of these covers, franked with a Special Handling dry-print, used commercially during the period from October, 1955 through late-1959 when all these stamps were withdrawn from both the post offices and philatelic centers. The author is backing up this challenge with a cash reward for the first certifiable example submitted. Technical details may be found at the author's website: <http://rgrufe.synthasite.com> and questions are welcomed at the email address rrufe1@aol.com.

And, by the way, the 25¢ yellow-green from 1928 is also not known on cover; therefore, I contend: "That neither QE1a, QE2a, QE3a, nor QE4a is known on an in-period commercial cover!" Prove me wrong!