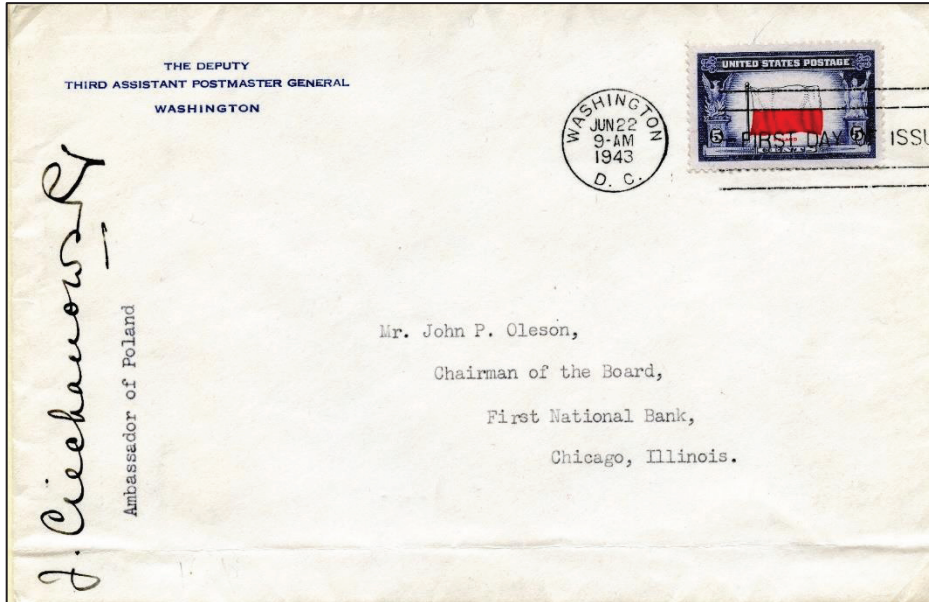


# An Unusual First Day Cover

By Howard Grenzebach

First day covers have been collectibles for many years and are reasonably common. This one is a little different. It was sent to the Chairman of the Board of the First National Bank in Chicago. It was sent by Roy North, the Third Assistant Postmaster General whose duties at the time included selecting the designs to be used on postage stamps.



The stamp was issued on June 22, 1943. It shows the Polish flag, the flag of the first country to be overrun by the German army at the onset of World War II. It was also the first stamp of the "Overrun Countries" series. And the autograph on the side of the envelope? It is from the Polish (government in exile) Ambassador to America, Jan Ciechanowski.

Here is a copy of the enclosed letter:

**THE DEPUTY THIRD ASSISTANT POSTMASTER GENERAL  
WASHINGTON**

June 22, 1943.

Mr. John P. Oleson,  
Chairman of the Board,  
First National Bank, Chicago, Illinois.

My dear Mr. Oleson:

The stamp on this letter, honoring the courage and valor of the Polish people, is the first in a series of postage stamps to be issued paying tribute to the overrun and occupied countries of Europe.

This is the first time that a postage stamp has been issued by this Government bearing a foreign flag as the central subject. To the right of the flag appears the "Phoenix," a mythological bird, signifying renewal of life; to the left is a figure of a kneeling woman with shackles falling from outstretched arms, symbolizing liberation.

It is a pleasure for me to send this first day cover to you.

*Press release for the First Day ceremony:*

For Release on Receipt,  
Tuesday, June 22, 1943.

INFORMATION SERVICE  
POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT

Postmaster General Frank C. Walker, the Ambassador of Poland, Mr. Jan Ciechanowski, and the Deputy Third Assistant Postmaster General, Mr. Roy M. North, took part today in ceremonies in Chicago and Washington on the occasion of the first sales of the new five-cent stamp in honor of Poland. The stamp is the first of a series paying tribute to the overrun and occupied countries for their resistance to Nazi aggression.

In Chicago, Mr. Walker made a brief address (the text of which has been made public) in tribute to Poland, in connection with the sale of the first sheet of the new stamps there. Philatelic societies conducted ceremonies in the main lobby of the post office. Demand for the new stamps was so heavy that Chicago was forced to order a second million when the first million was near exhaustion.

At the Washington Post Office, Ambassador Ciechanowski received the first sheet of the Poland stamp sold at that office, presented to him by Mr. North, whose Bureau is in charge of stamp issues. At the presentation ceremony in the post office, the Ambassador made public the following cable which he had received from Poland's Finance Minister Strasburger, who is also in charge of Poland's postal and telegraph services:

As Minister acting for Polish posts and telegraph, request you kindly to transmit to United States postal authorities the deep-felt thanks of the Polish Government for their friendly gesture in issuing a Polish postal stamp. The Polish people welcome this manifestation as yet another evidence of America's great friendliness to Poland and also as an expression of the inexorable desire to build the future world on the basis of justice and equality which form the framework of American ideals."





The following is the second page of the First Day ceremony program:

Mr. North's statement on presenting the sheet of stamps to the Ambassador follows:

"Mr. Ambassador:

"Of all the countries in Europe that have been subjected to the wrath of the Axis aggressor, none has suffered more grievously than your native land which, at great odds, has given unstintingly of its life blood in resisting the forces whose objective is to destroy and enslave.

"The special issue of postage stamps which we are placing on sale today will carry a message of encouragement and hope from America to your countrymen that the shackles of oppression are about to be broken and from the ashes of destruction Poland will arise again to take its place among the Nations of the World.

"Your Excellency, I count it one of the highest honors that has come to me to have the privilege of presenting to you the first sheet of Poland stamps offered for sale through the Washington, D. C. post office on this date."

The reply of the Ambassador of Poland follows:

"It is most gratifying for the Polish Government and the Polish Nation that Poland has been chosen as first in the series of those countries in honor of which the Postmaster General of the United States is issuing special stamps.

"The Polish people will interpret this gesture, so friendly to my country, as a recognition that Poland was the first to take up arms against wanton aggression and imperialism, and in defense of the principles which the United Nations have inscribed upon their banner.

"It will serve as a precious encouragement to the people of Poland in their indomitable resistance to the invader.

"On behalf of the Polish Government and the Polish Nation, and in my own behalf, I wish to express the warmest gratitude for this new proof of American understanding and friendship."

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**Howard Grenzebach** is currently a Director of NSSS and collects Worldwide pre-1950, early Grenada, and Swiss standing Helvetia.