



Superman: Summary of Presentation to PSSC by Zoom 16 Sept 2020 by Derwin Mak

I am both a comics fan and philatelist, so I combined my two interests in an exhibit about Superman, the comic book superhero and one of the most famous fictional characters of all time. I exhibited it at the Virtual Stamp Show, the online replacement for the cancelled Great American Stamp Show.

At one time, it was near-impossible to collect stamps, much less develop an exhibit, on pop culture themes because stamps tended to show serious historical or political subjects or their countries' natural beauties, such as geography, animals, and plants. However, since mid-1990's, the U.S., Canada, and other countries have been increasing their number of pop culture themes on stamps. Hence, Superman has appeared on the stamps of Canada, the U.S., Australia, and Portugal.

Some interesting points from the exhibit:

1. In a thematic or display exhibit, not all items need to depict the subject

Not every stamp, cover, or object needs to depict the subject. For example, the history of Superman includes artist Joe Shuster's childhood in Toronto and how it influenced the Superman character. To represent Toronto, I included the 1982 Ontario Street Scene 60-cent definitive, which depicts a Toronto neighbourhood. His creative partner, the writer Jerry Siegel, was a writer for the U.S. military newspaper *Stars and Stripes*; to show this part of Siegel's career, I included a patriotic cover postmarked at Fort George Meade, Maryland, where Jerry Siegel got his military training (figure 1).

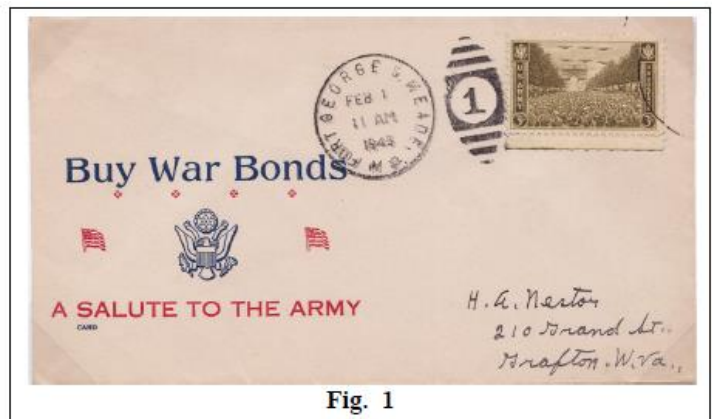


Fig. 1

2. Modern Postmarks of Small Towns Can Be Challenging to Research

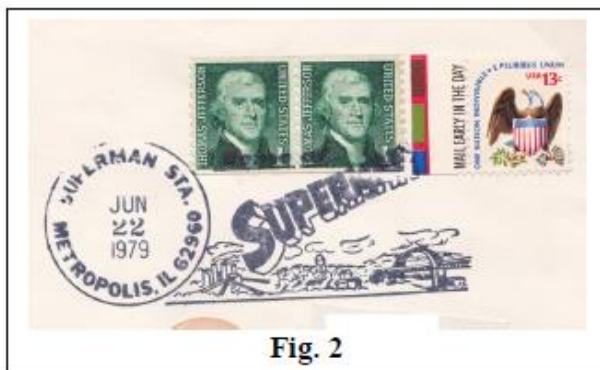


Fig. 2

The town of Metropolis, Illinois (population 6,537) holds an annual Superman Celebration in June. Since at least 1979, the Metropolis post office has used a pictorial cancel during the Superman Celebration (figure 2). This series of cancels lasted to at least 2006. However, finding the actual start and end date of the series and information on the cancels can be challenging because modern pictorial cancels from small towns are not always well-documented. The older ones might not be mentioned in the USPS Postal Bulletin, current postal staff often don't reply to letters



asking for information (and possibly might not know what happened in the past), and most modern pictorial cancels are considered "philatelic" by serious philatelists and don't get the amount of research that, say, Maltese Cross cancellations on Penny Reds. My fellow comic book fans didn't know anything about these cancels because they concentrate on comic books and movies, not on stamps.

However, what philatelic specialist would turn down the challenge? My next steps are to expand the lines of inquiry on the Metropolis Superman cancels, possibly by inquiring with local newspapers and the APS library.

3. The 2013 Canada Superman Issue Is More Complicated Than It Seems



Fig. 3

The United States isn't the country that has issued the most Superman stamps and postal stationery; that honour belongs to Canada. In 2013, Canada issued stamps and prepaid postal cards for the 75th anniversary of Superman. At first glance, the issue consists of a souvenir sheet of 5 stamps depicting Superman (figure 3), a booklet using the same 5 designs, 5 postal cards with indicia using the same 5

designs, and a coil stamp using a 6th design, which depicts the Superman logo under Clark Kent's shirt.

However, a closer look at the issue shows that there are varieties of the coil stamp, booklets, and postal cards. First, the coil stamp, which is self-adhesive, exists with a backing paper variety. The coil stamps sold at post offices have a message in the Kryptonian language printed on the back of the backing paper. The coil stamps sold in the Quarterly Pack and Annual Collection by Canada Post do not have the printing on the backing paper. Canada Post did not announce this variety. Of course, once you remove the coil stamp from the backing paper, you can't tell which variety of backing paper it once had.

At first glance, there is just one booklet, but there are actually five. Each booklet has the same 5 stamps twice (for 10 stamps per booklet) in the same configuration. They were issued with 5 different booklet covers, each depicting a different comic book cover from Superman's history. But it's not just the covers that are different. Below the stamps are 4 non-postal stickers showing the Superman logo or the Daily Planet logo. The combination of stickers differs with each of the 5 booklet covers. So hence, there are actually 5 booklets, and each has received its own catalogue number in the *Unitrade Specialized Catalogue of Canadian Stamps*.

The postal cards' indicia use the same 5 designs from the booklet stamps and souvenir sheet. However, there are not just 5 cards; Canada Post issued two sets of cards, which differ on the picture side. One set of cards, called the "stamp images" set, has picture sides that match the picture on the indicium. The other set, called the "cover images" set, has picture sides that depict different comic book covers through the decades. Interestingly, only two of the "cover images" cards, the ones depicting *Superman*, vol. 1, #1



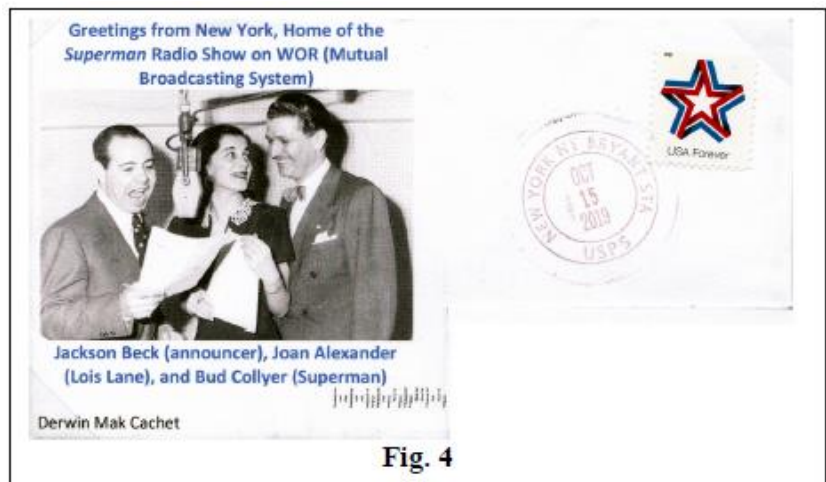
(1939) and *Superman Annual*, vol. 3, #1 (2012), have postal indicium that are based on the covers shown on the picture side.

Strangely, the "cover image" card showing Jim Lee's artwork of Superman standing defiantly over Metropolis (cover for *Superman*, vol. 2 #204, from 2004) was not paired with the postage indicium drawn by Jim Lee (i.e., Superman flying over the Daily Planet Building, interior art from *Superman*, vol. 2, #204), which would have been a logical pairing of the picture side and the indicium. Instead, that cover image was paired with a postage indicium based on Neal Adams art showing Superman breaking chains (*Superman*, vol. 1 #233, from 1971).

That same Jim Lee artwork showing Superman flying over the Daily Planet Building was also used as a postage indicium and paired with John Byrne's cover for *Man of Steel* #1 (1986) on the picture side. I don't know why Canada Post didn't pair the picture side and postage indicium by Jim Lee together on the same card.

4. Americans Have a Do-It-Yourself Approach to Philately

Stamp collectors have been creating their own covers possibly since the Penny Black first appeared, but serious Canadian and European philatelists tend to view collector-made covers as "philatelic" and somewhat lesser than "legitimate" postal history. However, American philatelists have a much larger and enthusiastic "do-it-yourself" culture, where they make souvenir covers and first day covers on their own. I've adopted some American customs, including making souvenir covers of



the places that I visit and sending them to myself. One example is a cover I made to commemorate the Superman radio show of 1940-1951, sent when I was on vacation in New York City (figure 4). It has a double-ring circular date handstamp cancel from Bryant Station, New York City.

5. Canada Post Has Used Fictional Cities for First Day of Issue Cancels



Every stamp has an official first day of issue city, whose name appears on the first day of issue cancel. Usually, the city is a real one, but on two occasions, Canada Post has created a postmark for a fictional city and used it to cancel first day covers. The first was for Avonlea, Prince Edward Island, the fictional town of Anne of Green Gables, for the Anne issue of 2008. That postmark was always paired with a postmark from real-life Cavendish, PEI. The second occasion was Metropolis, Superman's city, used on first day covers of the 2013 Superman coil stamp (figure 5). This time, the Metropolis cancel was not paired with a cancel from a real city. The first day covers of the souvenir sheet received a Toronto postmark.



Note: Subsequent to giving the presentation, I received the Superman collectors sheet from the Portuguese CTT (postal service). I had thought that the Portuguese CTT's concept of a collectors sheet would be the same as the U.K. Royal Mail's. The Royal Mail's collectors sheet is a pane of stamps. The Portuguese collectors sheet is not a pane of stamps. Instead, it is a large poster of Superman (or another character in the series) with the stamps affixed. It is not an item that will get a catalogue number, since it is the stamps that are the actual philatelic item.