

# Historic Alexandria Quarterly



Spring 1999



## Remembering Alexandria's Bicentennial— Philately

by  
Timothy J. Dennée

"The Alexandria airmail of 1949 is a most peculiar item. Not only does this stamp commemorate a trivial event, but it may be the only United States adhesive picturing a saloon." To see ourselves as others see us! Such was the recent comment of a columnist for the authoritative *Linn's Stamp News*.

Stamps have been issued for other U.S. cities, of course. New York City, Chicago and Pittsburgh are a few examples. Alexandria has to be the smallest municipality so honored.

And why an airmail? I'm unaware of any historical connection between Alexandria and aviation. Politics must be the answer. I imagine there's a tale of political maneuvering behind this red adhesive.<sup>1</sup>

The writer's uncharitable comments on the importance of the subject matter and the relevance of Alexandria to the history of flight are debatable.<sup>2</sup> Crediting politics for the stamp's creation, however, hits the nail on the head. Why an airmail and not a domestic, first-class stamp? Probably because it was the more attainable.

As Alexandria's two-hundredth birthday approached, community leaders organized a calendar of events suitable to celebrate and mark this important milestone. Planning was coordinated by a huge Alexandria Bicentennial Commission, consisting of scores of political, business and civic leaders. In addition to an executive committee, there were committees on programming, finance, publicity and history. Each of the proposed special events — parades, balls, nationwide radio broadcasts, an historical pageant — had its own committee responsible for implementation. All were successful. Realizing that an event is not a

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commemoration without souvenirs, the Commission also created a variety of tasteful keepsakes, including a silver spoon, a medallion, and a watch fob.<sup>3</sup>

The Commission had a still grander idea for spreading the word of Alexandria's birthday, an idea which combined truly global reach with the tangibility and sentimental interest of a souvenir. The mission of one of the fifteen committees created in early 1948 was to advocate and help design a U.S. postage stamp to commemorate Alexandria's founding. The Philatelic Committee was among the smallest of the committees, with only five members. It included Judge Harry B. Caton, Alexandria postmaster Elmore Mudd, and William Cunningham, a postal clerk. Worth Bailey, a member of the Old and Historic Alexandria District Board of Architectural Review and research associate at Mount Vernon, was also appointed for both his historical knowledge and his drafting skills. Howard Worth Smith, Jr., son of the Democratic Congressman from the Eighth District was asked to serve as chairman.<sup>4</sup> Smith's father was one of the "sponsors" of the bicentennial, and would prove instrumental in making the stamp a reality.

The committee first sounded out the Post Office Department about the possibility of an Alexandria stamp, without success. Howard Smith, Sr. and third-term Senator (and former Virginia governor) Harry Flood Byrd, Jr. introduced concurrent legislation to the House and Senate in May 1948.<sup>5</sup>

The bills were referred to the respective Committees on the Post Office and Civil Service for study. Members of these committees and other interested Congressmen contacted the Post Office Department to inquire about the feasibility of producing an Alexandria stamp and, apparently, to put a little pressure on the agency.

The Post Office's response was polite, but cold. In a letter to Virginia Senator A. Willis Robertson, Third Assistant Postmaster General Joseph Lawler wrote that "it has not been our policy to issue

commemorative stamps for...[the] extensive character of the category.... The establishment of a precedent in this regard would result in a steady procession of commemorative issues in which the interest would be strictly local." The Postmaster General, Jesse M. Donaldson, repeated this argument to Congressman Edward Rees (R-Kansas), noting that within the previous two years, the department had denied stamps to honor Brooklyn, Flushing, Yonkers, Cleveland, Milwaukee, and Fort Benton, Montana. The Post Office's interest was put clearly in Lawler's letter to the department's solicitor. Commemorating municipal anniversaries "would lead to an endless procession of such requests requiring discriminatory decisions provoking criticism and possible embarrassment." In short, it was a matter of scarcity; there were only so many stamps to go around, but hundreds of cities. The department could only handle approximately twelve new issues a year, and it could not afford to market small runs of stamps tailored for each city or be left with unsold stock. Postal officials wanted to avoid the politically dangerous decision of which cities were worthy to be honored. And clearly, the Post Office did not appreciate Congress's meddling. The Postmaster General informed William Langer (R-North Dakota), Chairman of the Senate Committee on the Post Office and Civil Service, that special legislation was not required for the creation of a commemorative stamp—in other words, please stay out of internal Post Office matters.<sup>6</sup>

There was a final objection from the Post Office. The stamp bill had been a little too specific, authorizing the Postmaster General "to issue, during 1949, a special 5-cent air mail postage stamp...in commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the city of Alexandria, Va." Postal officials were expecting an imminent airmail rate increase to six cents and argued that, under the circumstances, a new five-cent stamp would have "nuisance value only." Inexplicably, Congress forged ahead in spite of this problem.

As the Post Office correspondence makes clear, it

officials had managed to hold the line against the issuance of municipal commemoratives for years in the face of mounting requests. The first American city to be expressly honored on U.S. postage stamps was Chicago, in a series of three stamps issued in 1933. But these were also issued to commemorate a contemporary event, the "Century of Progress" exposition which was celebrated during the centennial of the city's incorporation. Stamps had been previously created for similar events, such as the Pan-American Exposition, the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, the Panama-Pacific Exposition, etc. It was not until 1948 that the 80<sup>th</sup> Congress had approved the creation of a five-cent airmail for the fiftieth anniversary of the consolidation of the five boroughs of New York City — the first true municipal commemorative.<sup>8</sup>

Members of this same 80<sup>th</sup> Congress were now pressing for a number of stamps, and the political pressure was hard to resist. The House and Senate committees returned favorable reports on the Alexandria airmail. These reports detailed the history of the city and relayed Post Office data on the profits returned from selling commemorative stamps to collectors.<sup>9</sup> It is doubtful, however, that the issue was decided on merit alone. The Post Office Department was powerless against those who appropriated its funds, particularly while the agency was hoping for support for a rate hike on airmail. With a power broker like Senator Byrd behind it and no apparent Congressional opposition, the Department did a turnabout, and the Postmaster General ultimately testified favorably before the Senate.<sup>10</sup>

Both houses approved the matter by unanimous consent in June. It appears that no one on Capitol Hill would stand in the way of such an uncontroversial matter. Legislators have traditionally tended to support issues which they consider of local interest to a colleague, with the expectation that they will be accorded the same courtesy on a matter of parochial interest to them. Indeed, there was plenty of evidence to suggest that other members of Congress wanted stamps for

their constituents. Municipal commemoratives only constituted about one third of the proposals. In its second session, the 80<sup>th</sup> Congress introduced bills to honor at least fifteen other cities and counties, including 300-year-old Annapolis, Maryland. As it happened, a three-cent Annapolis stamp did pass, and the Post Office soon also commemorated the founding or incorporation of Kansas City, Missouri (1950), Washington, D.C. (1950), Detroit (1951), and New York City again (1953). Even Congress recognized the Post Office's difficult position. According to Senator Olin Johnston (D-South Carolina), "Every Senator wants [a stamp] for his State. Probably every Representative wants one for his Congressional district." Johnston referred a report of the Senate Committee on the Post Office and Civil Service which recommended that decisions on the pictorial subjects of postage stamps thereafter be left to the Postmaster General, as had been the tradition since 1892.<sup>11</sup>

The Postmaster General had promised to begin work on the Alexandria stamp design even before final passage because of the limited time before the bicentennial celebration. It was expected that the final product would not be available until July 1949.<sup>12</sup>

Possibly from indifference, the Post Office gave Alexandrians a remarkably free hand in selecting the image to put on the stamp. The Bicentennial Commission added another member to the Philatelic Committee in late 1948 to lend technical assistance to the design process. Dr. Forrest M. Swisher had moved to Alexandria with his wife in 1946. An orthopedic surgeon at Arlington's National Orthopedic Recovery Center, Dr. Swisher was an avid stamp collector and, in his few years in Alexandria, he had accumulated a significant collection of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century envelopes with Alexandria postal cancellations. Swisher's contribution was especially important; he knew how a stamp should look. And it was Swisher, as Philatelic Committee co-chairman, who would be the driving force behind the bicentennial stamp's design effort. In fact, a Post Office internal



*Dr. Forrest Swisher, 1950. Photo Courtesy of Myron Swisher*

memo credited him with “handling” the design.<sup>13</sup>

The Philatelic Committee discussed a number of possible subjects, but could not agree on one, largely because the city retained no buildings or landmarks known to date to 1749. One suggested motif was the reproduction of the very rare Alexandria Postmaster’s Provisional stamp of 1846. Affixed as certification that correspondents had pre-paid their postage, this Provisional was used years before the federal government established a nationwide system of adhesive stamps. The Alexandria Postmaster’s Provisional remains one of this country’s most valuable philatelic rarities. Probably led by Swisher, the Bicentennial Commission approved a scheme using the City seal as a central motif flanked by landmark buildings, and the Philatelic Committee began the selection of appropriate colonial-period buildings.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Swisher took the first crack at putting a concept on paper. He began nearly from scratch because, at the time, he could not be certain even of the stamp’s denomination. Congress had approved the 1948 bills for a five-cent stamp and then passed the air mail rate increase as expected. Swisher’s design was in a three-cent denomination because the Committee hoped that, with the airmail rate confusion, the stamp might, after all, be issued as a domestic first-class stamp, the most commonly used and numerous denomination.<sup>15</sup> The Post

Office rejected this idea, for it was not interested in printing hundreds of millions of Alexandria stamps. Senator Byrd and Congressman Smith introduced new bills to amend the law to provide for a six-cent stamp. The bills passed in February 1949.<sup>16</sup>

Swisher’s pencil sketch featured the city seal as its centerpiece, flanked on the left by the *ca.* 1770 Gadsby’s Tavern building. Gadsby’s was perhaps the most recognized and revered local site, one of the city’s first historical “shrines” and a place known to have been frequented by George Washington. At the time, the tavern was thought to have been constructed in the early 1750s.<sup>17</sup> Swisher provided no third subject to balance his composition, reflecting the abiding uncertainty of the Committee.

As a pictorial subject for a stamp, each of Alexandria’s other eighteenth-century landmarks had its drawbacks. One of the earliest structures in the city, Ramsay House — home of founder, merchant and honorary mayor, William Ramsay— was probably not depicted because of its heavily altered and dilapidated condition at the time.<sup>18</sup> The venerable Christ Episcopal Church, completed in 1773, was supposedly passed over because it is a religious structure; at the very least, a stamp depicting the church could have been expected to draw some opposition from the congregation of the Presbyterian Meeting House.<sup>19</sup> And the 1752 Carlyle House, the town’s first mansion, was still largely concealed behind a century-old hotel structure.<sup>20</sup>

In the end, the Committee was willing to overlook the fact that the original facade of Carlyle House was not visible *and* altered. The building was still a landmark; the rear elevation had always been visible from Lee Street, and the importance of the structure was undeniable. Home to “merchant prince” John Carlyle, a founder of Alexandria, it had been the site of a 1755 conference of royal governors with General Edward Braddock prior to the latter’s disastrous expedition against the French and their Indian allies in the Ohio Valley. As for providing the Post Office with a picture of the hidden facade, the Committee simply turned over a

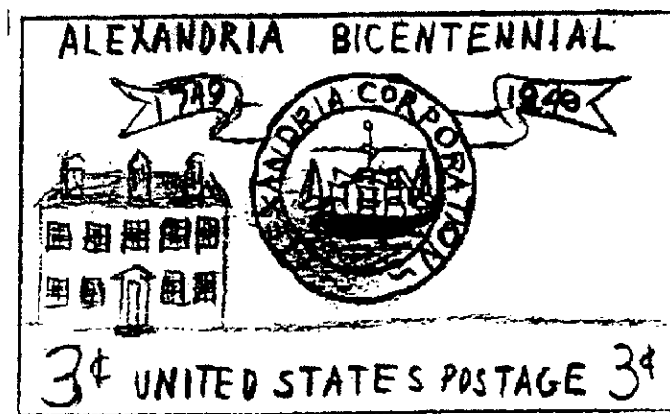
copy of Deering Davis's Alexandria Houses, 1750-1830. A rendering in Davis's book was based on a drawing in Thomas Tileston Waterman's The Mansions of Virginia which, in turn, drew from a plate in William Adam's Vitruvius Scoticus, the eighteenth-century pattern book which likely inspired the house.<sup>21</sup>

Philatelic Committee member Worth Bailey, an illustrator as well as an architectural historian, fleshed out the Swisher design. He added the Carlyle House, plus a pair of stylized "airmail" wings — and a central compass and star "purely for artistic unity [with] no specific historical or allegorical significance."<sup>22</sup>

From the graphics supplied by the Philatelic Committee, Charles R. Chickering of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing came up with two "models" by the end of February 1949. These were given to Dr. Swisher and the rest of the Committee for review, but the members were asked to keep the matter confidential.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, a total of four designs were created, with relatively minor alterations within the larger motif. One was finally selected by the Post Office, with the assistance of the Philatelic Committee, on March 17. Bureau engravers Charles A. Brooks and Axel W. Christensen created the dies, the proofs were approved by the Postmaster General April 8, and the stamps were rushed into production. A printing of 70,000,000 was authorized.<sup>24</sup>

The Post Office released to the public details about the stamp on March 30. A photographic reproduction appeared in the *Alexandria Gazette* the next day. The paper reported that the first day of issue would actually be two months earlier than originally expected, on May 11, the 200th anniversary of the approval of the town's charter by the Virginia Assembly.<sup>25</sup>

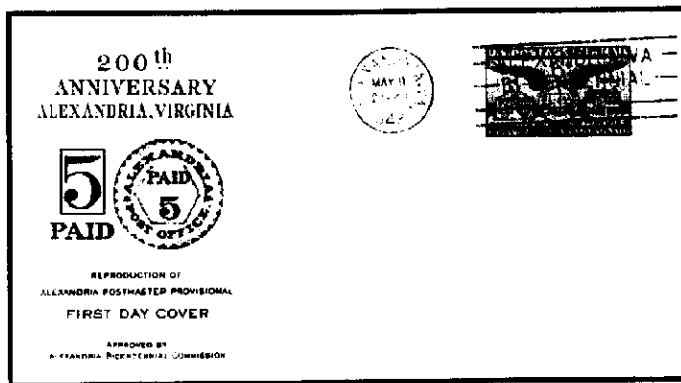
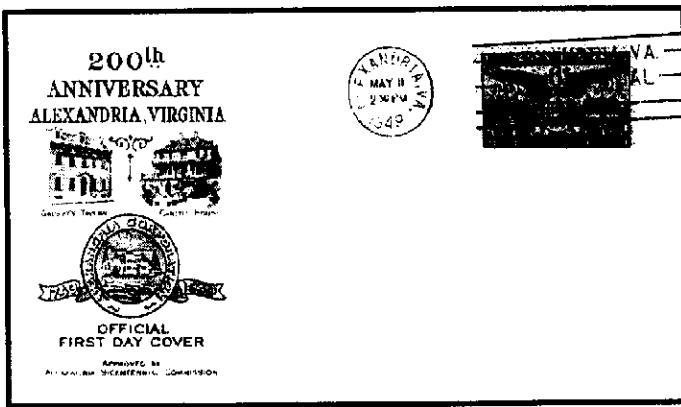
To attract the philatelist and sentimental Alexandrian alike, the Bicentennial Commission announced that it was printing two commemorative "cachets" for the stamp's first day of issue. Cachets are souvenir envelopes printed with images



*Dr. Swisher's first sketch.*

appropriate to the issue of a commemorative stamp. With the new stamp affixed and canceled on the first day, the envelopes would become collectible "first-day covers." It was decided that one cachet would carry a design similar to the stamp itself plus the legend "200th Anniversary." The other would be a reproduction of the 1846 Alexandria Postmaster's Provisional. These went on sale early at Bicentennial Headquarters so that collectors would have a chance to pre-order first-day cancellations. Other nonprofit and for-profit organizations got into the act, producing their own cachets. About fifty printed examples were created, ranging from a reproduction of the Charles Magnus's 1864 bird's-eye view of the city to Masonic themes to a generic, signing of the Declaration of Independence image. Others featured Christ Church, the Marshall House, the Friendship Firehouse, the George Washington Masonic National Memorial, The Lyceum, the Alexandria Academy, etc. Many of these were sold in Alexandria shops.<sup>26</sup>

But collectors already had reason to take notice of their letters from Alexandria. In late 1948, the Post Office Department authorized Alexandria Postmaster Elmore Mudd to use a special canceling machine bearing the slogan "Alexandria Bicentennial 1949." In the first two months of 1949, 200,000 first-class letters a week were leaving the post office with this mark. The *Alexandria Gazette* credited the cancellation for drawing attention to the celebration. In the wake of the annual George Washington Birthday parade and



*The Bicentennial Commission's official cachets.*

festivities, one writer opined that "perhaps the cancellation dye, which has drawn self-addressed requests from stamp collectors all over the world, had a lot to do with the more than usual number of out-of-state license plates seen in the city over the past two days." It is unclear whether the Philatelic Committee had been responsible for securing the special cancellation, but Dr. Swisher was the first to announce its use in a press release at the end of 1948.<sup>27</sup>

As May drew nearer, the Bicentennial Commission announced that it was cooperating with the Post Office in planning an appropriate first-day ceremony. Senator Byrd and Congressman Smith, the sponsors of the stamp bills, were expected to appear with representatives of Alexandria's civic clubs. Attendance was limited, through ticket sales, to civic leaders and members of the Commission. For the purposes of this ceremonial presentation, Deputy Third Assistant Postmaster General Robert E. Fellers asked the director of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing to provide to Byrd, Smith

and "the citizens of Alexandria" special albums to hold one sheet each of the new stamps. Six other albums were prepared for Post Office officials. According to the *Alexandria Gazette*, a tenth album was sent to the city of Richmond. And one was made up at the last minute for Dr. Swisher.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, the Post Office made preparations for a flood of purchases by collectors. Naturally, the Alexandria branch was to have the exclusive right to sell the stamps on the first day. Individuals could order in advance up to ten stamps with first-day cancellations by submitting a money order to cover their face value and self-addressed envelopes. By May 10, 200,000 orders had been received. An "emergency" team of sixty postal clerks were handling the pre-orders. But Post Office officials forecast first-day sales of an additional 250,000 to 300,000. Extra staff had been taken on since Christmas, two clerks were added in April, and up to 25 more were detailed as the issue date arrived. Two extra canceling machines and five rubber hand stamps reading "FIRST DAY OF ISSUE" were dispatched to handle the rush. Local postmaster Elmore Mudd was instructed to use the canceling machines as much as possible and to discourage collectors expecting hand cancellations. Philatelic



*Presentation of Commemorative stamp albums at the first day of issue ceremony at the Old Club. From left to right: Robert E. Fellers, third Deputy Assistant Postmaster General; Rep. Howard W. Smith; Mayor William T. Wilkins; and Alexandria Postmaster Elmore Mudd. Photo courtesy of Smithsonian Institution Libraries, Post Office Department Stamp Files.*

Agent Raymond F. Miller arrived to help Postmaster Mudd supervise sales and cancellations.<sup>29</sup>

The Alexandria airmail went on sale as scheduled on May 11. Collectors came in droves and were lined up at the Washington Street post office before the 8:00 a.m. opening. Those waiting in line could view a small exhibit of items from Dr. Swisher's collection consisting mainly of Alexandria mail dating between 1790 and the end of the Civil War. The extremely rare 1846 postmaster's provisional appeared, of course, but only in the form of a reproduction.<sup>30</sup>

The first-day luncheon commenced at noon at "The Old Club" tea room, with Dr. Swisher presiding. Virginia Senators Byrd and Robertson had sent their regrets. Deputy Third Assistant Postmaster General Robert Fellers attended on behalf of the Postmaster General and presented to Congressman Smith and Mayor William Wilkins the special commemorative albums containing the stamp sheets.<sup>31</sup>

Fellers delivered the keynote speech to the eighty guests.

We are here today celebrating the 200th anniversary of the establishment of the city of Alexandria, Virginia. Situated as it is along the beautiful Potomac River and within sight of the Nation's capitol, it is one of the most interesting cities in America. It is fairly replete with history and romance. If we are Americans at heart we cannot help but thrill as we wander through the time-worn buildings which thoughtful people have preserved for us.

He went on to give a detailed account of the founding of the town, based on information, not entirely accurate, which had been furnished by Rebecca Ramsay Reese, Chairwoman of the Bicentennial Commission's History Committee.<sup>32</sup>

More than 800,000 stamps were sold that day, and 386,717 covers were canceled, far exceeding expectations. Local sales totaled \$5,157.48. These figures presumably did not include the 200,000 advance orders from dealers or first-day covers affixed before the first day of sale. Sales exceeded those for several other 1949 issues, including the three-cent Edgar Allan Poe and Puerto Rico commemoratives. There were the usual problems, such as unhappy customers later complaining of not receiving the first-day cancellation because of their failure to follow the proper ordering procedures.<sup>33</sup>

As still occasionally happens today, there were also a few mistakes of the sort which sometimes prove a bonanza to the astute collector. Needing to have the stamps available for sale nationwide on May 12, the Post Office began shipping them to its branches April 26. Presumably, many branches had them prior to the first day of issue and, as a consequence, some were sold prematurely. Although there were no festivities in Sparks, Nevada, the desert town inadvertently shared with Alexandria the May 11 issue date. The stamps were released still earlier in the Tennessee panhandle, where Christopher Ritts of the Citizens' Bank of Elizabethton purchased a number for his family and friends on May 9 and forwarded them to the Post Office for cancellations.<sup>34</sup>

While everyone was celebrating Alexandria's past, the airmail stamp made at least one observer think of the future. An editorial columnist for the *Alexandria Gazette* mused on the importance, real or potential, of Alexandria to air transport and *vice versa*.

Sure, it is the Washington National Airport, but at the same time it is also the "Alexandria" National Airport.

We have the headquarters for a large segment of the personnel at the airport. We have the headquarters for the supplies, and warehousing with large aviation supply houses located within the city. We can be an aviation hot-spot if we should so

choose to be.... We need only to ask the major airlines coming into National Airport to put us on all of their maps and time-tables. We need only to recognize that every plane passing over is not a disturbance but a symbol of great business opportunities.

If Alexandria as a city would give the airlines only a portion of the support that they gave the railroads in their infancy and throughout the years, it will regain the glories of the past in the airways of today and tomorrow.<sup>35</sup>

Others looked ahead in different ways. As the bicentennial observances continued, copies of the stamps were buried in a time capsule at George Washington Middle School, and the stamp design was published in a book of Alexandria's history.<sup>36</sup>

Ultimately, the Post Office's fears for the success of the Alexandria air mail stamp seem unjustified. In early 1952, Assistant Postmaster General Osborne A. Pearson wrote to Alexandria's new postmaster, requesting that he "submit a requisition for the maximum quantity of these stamps which your office can dispose of in a reasonable time." After four years, the Department still had 700,000 on hand. True, that was a lot of stamps, but the number represented only one percent of what had been printed, and fewer than what had sold on the first day of issue.<sup>37</sup>



A half-century after the Alexandria commemorative was issued, the city is celebrating another milestone anniversary. It is assuredly more difficult today for a municipality to obtain its own stamp than it was during the halcyon days of the 80<sup>th</sup> Congress. In 1999, however, citizens can purchase a newly produced souvenir cachet,

available through the Office of Historic Alexandria (OHA). To complement the cachet, The Lyceum is celebrating Alexandria's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary and honoring the work of the Philatelic Committee through the recreation of Dr. Swisher's 1949 display of historic Alexandria mail alongside examples from his bicentennial airmail stamp collection.

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#### **Author's Note:**

I would like to thank the Smithsonian Institution Libraries and particularly National Postal Museum Librarian Timothy Carr for permitting access to the Post Office Department Stamp Files. I would also like to thank Myron Swisher for providing biographical information on his father, Dr. Forrest M. Swisher, and for furnishing copies of his father's papers relating to the Alexandria bicentennial stamp.

#### **About the Author**

Timothy J. Dennée is an urban planner with the Alexandria Department of Planning and Zoning. Prior to working in the Planning Department, he was on staff at Alexandria Archaeology. He received a bachelor of arts degree in political science from Fordham University in 1987 and a master of arts in international affairs from the George Washington University in 1990. He also completed a master's degree in urban planning and historic preservation at the University of Maryland in 1994. He has written two previous articles for the *Historic Alexandria Quarterly*.

#### **Endnotes**

- 1) Allison Cusick, "Collecting FDCs: Cachets on 1949 Alexandria airmail FDCs" in *Linn's Stamp News*, June 8, 1972, p. 22.
- 2) The author shall not attempt to debate Alexandria's relative importance. With regard to the city's ties to aviation, it is the immediate neighbor of National Airport (and not far north of the old Hybla Valley Airport or far south of the former Washington-Hoover Airport) and, for short time periods, was home to several airplane factories in the early twentieth century and a rocket manufacturer in the mid twentieth century. Wilbur and Orville Wright conducted an early flight between nearby Fort Myer and Alexandria's Shuter's Hill, and Professor Langley performed flight experiments on the Potomac River shortly after the Wrights' flight at Kitty Hawk. For additional information on Alexandria's role in early aviation, see T. Michael Miller, "Wings of Flight: Alexandria and the Aircraft Industry" Parts 1 and 2, in *Friends of Alexandria Archaeology*.



*Volunteer News*, July and August 1997, Vol. 15, Nos. 7 and 8; and Kris Lloyd, "Flying the Capital Way" Parts I and II in the *Historic Alexandria Quarterly*, Winter 1997 and Spring 1998. Finally, what's wrong with depicting a tavern on a stamp?

3) Alexandria Bicentennial Commission, *Souvenir Program, Alexandria Bicentennial*, 1949, pp. 13-16; "Anniversary Stamp Okayed By President," *Alexandria Gazette*, June 30, 1948.

4) *Souvenir Program, Alexandria Bicentennial*, p. 16; Hill Directory Co., Inc., Hill's Alexandria, Virginia City Directory, 1947-48, (Richmond: Hill Directory Co., Inc. 1947); "Worth Bailey Conducts Research Into History Of Whitehall, Home Of Governor Sharpe Of Maryland," *Alexandria Gazette*, July 28, 1951; personal communication with Peter H. Smith, Ph.D., Alexandria Department of Planning and Zoning, December 4, 1998; "History of Alexandria Told By Bi-centennial Commission Official; Outlines Plans For '49," *Alexandria Gazette*, February 7, 1948.

5) *Journal of the House of Representatives*, 80th Congress, 2nd Session, 1948, p. 416; *Congressional Record*, 80th Congress, 2nd Session.

6) Letter from Joseph J. Lawler to Hon. A. Willis Robertson, April 28, 1948 and letter from Jesse M. Donaldson to Hon. Edward H. Rees, June 21, 1948, Smithsonian Institution Libraries (National Postal Museum), Records of the Post Office Department, Stamp Files; *Congressional Record*, 81st Congress, 1st Session, Vol. 95, Part 4, p. 5093; and letter from Jesse M. Donaldson to Hon. William Langer, June 18, 1948, Post Office Department Stamp Files.

7) *Congressional Record*, 80th Congress, 2nd Session, Vol. 94, Part 7, p. 8838; letter from Joseph J. Lawler to Post Office Department Solicitor, June 23, 1948.

8) Scott Publishing Co., Scott Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps, 1999, (New York: Scott Publishing Co., 1998).

9) 80th Congress, 2nd Session, Calendar No. 1639, Senate Report No. 1582.

10) Post Office Department Stamp Files.

11) Munroe, Frank A., "The 81st Congress at Work" in *Stamps*, Vol. 67, No. 7, May 14, 1949, p. 285; *Congressional Record*, 81st Congress, 1st Session, Index, Vol. 95, Part 17, pp. 517-518; *Congressional Record*, 81st Congress, 2nd Session, Index, Vol. 96, Part 19, p. 488; Scott Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps, 1999; *Congressional Record*, 81st Congress, 1st Session, Vol. 95, Part 4, p. 5093.

12) Post Office Department Stamp Files; "Bicentennial Dye Cast On 200,000 Letters Per Week," *Alexandria Gazette*, February 23, 1949.

13) "25 Years Ago," *Alexandria Gazette*, January 14, 1974; memorandum from Joseph J. Lawler, n.d., Post Office Department Stamp Files; personal communication with Myron Swisher, January 15, 1999.

14) Scott Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps, 1999; Swisher Papers.

15) Letter from Forrest M. Swisher to Sol Glass, November 22, 1949, Swisher Papers.

16) 81st Congress, 1st Session, H.R. 1432; 81st Congress, 1st Session, S. 492; *Congressional Record*, 81st Congress, 1st Session, Vol. 95, Part 2.

17) Letter from Rebecca Ramsay Reese to Joseph J. Lawler,

March 19, 1949, Post Office Department Stamp Files. As Alexandrians know, Gadsby's Tavern took its name from a later owner, John Gadsby, who operated the establishment from 1796 to 1808. T. Michael Miller, Artisans and Merchants of Alexandria, 1784-1820, (Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, 1991), p. 154.

18) Local groups were, however, attempting to restore this important building at the time of the bicentennial. See Peter Smith, "The Saga of Saving and Reconstructing Ramsay House," *The Alexandria Chronicle*, Winter 1999.

19) Swisher Papers; personal communication with Myron Swisher, September 8, 1998. The Presbyterian Meeting House was then thought to have been a contemporary of Christ Church, but the original ca. 1775 structure was largely destroyed by fire and rebuilt in the 1830s. Shirley Maxwell and James C. Massey, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Old Presbyterian Meeting House*, December 18, 1996.

20) James Green's mid-nineteenth-century Mansion House Hotel, later known as the Braddock House. The George Washington Masonic National Memorial was briefly considered as a subject because of its instant landmark status, but the idea was discarded because, in the 1940s, the Memorial was nearly new.

21) Deering Davis, Stephen P. Dorsey and Ralph Cole Hall, Alexandria Houses, 1750-1830 (New York: Bonanza Books, 1946); Thomas Tileston Waterman, The Mansions of Virginia (New York: Bonanza Books, 1945), p. 249; William Adam, Vitruvius Scoticus (Edinburgh: Adam Black and J.J. Robinson, 1750). The City seal was lifted from the letterhead of the Bicentennial Commission, and a photo of Gadsby's was taken from Willard C. Benson's booklet *41 Places and Subjects in Alexandria, Virginia* (Alexandria: Bicentennial Press, 1932). Glass, pp. 120-121; letter from Director of Bureau of Engraving and Printing Alvin W. Hall to Joseph J. Lawler, April 27, 1949, Post Office Department Stamp Files. For additional information on John Carlyle and his home, see James D. Munson, Col<sup>o</sup>. John Carlyle, Gent., 1720-1780, (Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, 1986).

22) Letter from Dr. Forrest M. Swisher to Sol Glass, November 22, 1949, Swisher Papers.

23) Letter from Joseph J. Lawler to Dr. Forrest M. Swisher, February 28, 1949, Swisher Papers; letter from Long, Acting Director of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, February 28, 1949, Post Office Department Stamp Files. Charles Chickering also modeled the Annapolis Tercentenary stamp which was issued only twelve days after Alexandria's stamp. The request for confidentiality was to prevent embarrassment to the Postmaster General from the premature release of details of the design.

24) Letter from Joseph J. Lawler to A.W. Hall, April 27, 1949, Post Office Department Stamp Files; Glass, pp. 124-125; letter from Joseph J. Lawler to A.W. Hall, April 8, 1949, Post Office Department Stamp Files.

25) "Postmaster General announces design of 6-cent Alexandria air mail stamp," Post Office Department Information Service press release, May 30, 1949. Post Office

Department Stamp Files; "Commemorative Covers To Go With Airmail Stamp To Be Issued By PO Department On May 11," *Alexandria Gazette*, March 31, 1949.

26) "Commemorative Covers To Go With Airmail Stamp To Be Issued By PO Department On May 11," *Alexandria Gazette*, March 31, 1949; Cusick, p. 22; Swisher Papers: letter from Kristen Maher of James T. McCusker, Inc. to Timothy Dennée, August 28, 1998; "25 Years Ago," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 6, 1974. In addition, there were several generic cachets with "Alexandria" overprints and several which were essentially rubber stamped images.

27) "Bicentennial Dye Cast On 200,000 Letters Per Week," *Alexandria Gazette*, February 23, 1949; Joseph J. Lawler to Fourth Assistant Postmaster General, April 6, 1949, Post Office Department Stamp Files; *The Washington Post*, n.d., in Swisher Papers. The mark was mentioned in *The Washington Post* and *The Western Stamp Collector* with instructions to collectors on how to send for the cancellation.

28) "Commemorative Covers To Go With Airmail Stamp To Be Issued By PO Department On May 11," *Alexandria Gazette*, March 31, 1949; "Byrd, Smith And Wilkins To Receive Stamp Albums," *Alexandria Gazette*, May 4, 1949; letters from Joseph J. Lawler to Alvin W. Hall, Director of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, April 29, 1949 and May 4, 1949, Post Office Department Stamp Files; "25 Years Ago," *Alexandria Gazette*, May 15, 1974.

29) "Post Office Issues Stamp Honoring City," *Alexandria Gazette*, May 11, 1949; "25 Years Ago," *Alexandria Gazette*, May 15, 1974; "Stamp Will Honor Alexandria," *Alexandria Gazette*, May 10, 1949; letter from V.C. Burke to Joseph J. Lawler, April 6, 1949 and letter from Joseph J. Lawler to V.C. Burke, April 19, 1949, Post Office Department Stamp Files; "Byrd, Smith And Wilkins To Receive Stamp Albums," *Alexandria Gazette*, May 4, 1949.

30) "Commemorative Stamps Presented," *Alexandria Gazette*, May 12, 1949; "Post Office Issues Stamp Honoring City," *Alexandria Gazette*, May 11, 1949; "Stamp Will Honor Alexandria," *Alexandria Gazette*, May 10, 1949.

31) "Post Office Issues Stamp Honoring City," *Alexandria Gazette*, May 11, 1949; "25 Years Ago," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 6, 1974; Glass, p. 121; *Program, First Day of Issue of the Commemorative Stamp Honoring the Founding of the City of Alexandria, Virginia, 1749-1949*; Swisher Papers

32) Letter from Rebecca Ramsay Reese to Joseph J. Lawler, March 19, 1949, Post Office Department Stamp Files. The inaccuracies consisted of the retelling of mythic stories which are unsupported by evidence and quite dubious, including the story that George Washington had helped perform the initial survey for the town, claims that (the supposedly ca. 1752) Gadsby's Tavern had served as the military headquarters for Washington several times, and that the tavern had been the site of a meeting of John Paul Jones, the Marquis de Lafayette and the Baron Kalb.

33) There were over a million stamps available for sale the first day. *Stamps*, Vol. 67, No. 13, June 25, 1949, p. 529; Glass, p. 125; letter from Assistant Postmaster General V.C. Burke to Elmore Mudd, January 17, 1950, and memorandum from Joseph J. Lawler to Post Office Department Press

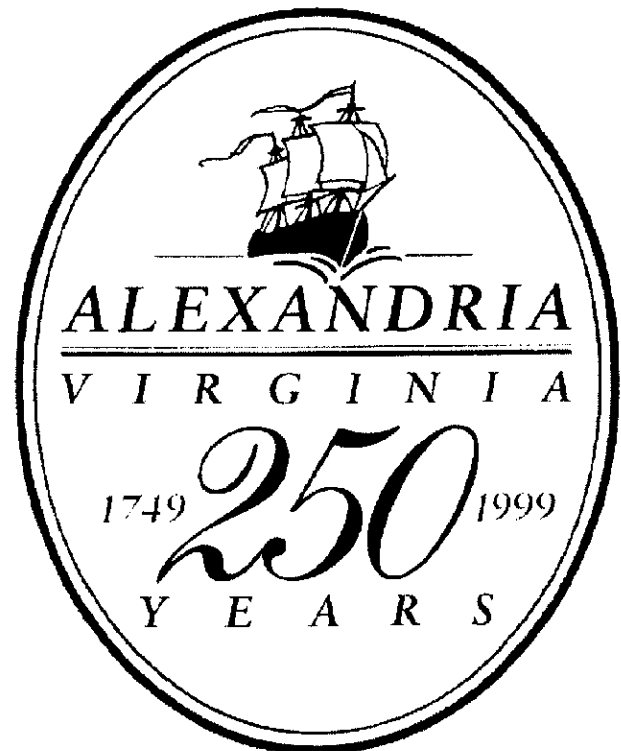
Relations Division, June 2, 1949, and memorandum, February 1, 1950, Post Office Department Stamp Files.

34) Letter from Postal Inspector Anthony D. Zeni to Inspector in Charge, San Francisco, May 23, 1949, and letter from Christopher Ritts to Alexandria Postmaster, May 9, 1949, and letter from Elmore Mudd to Joseph J. Lawler, May 13, 1949, Post Office Department Stamp Files.

35) Alexander, Virginius, "It Seems to Me," *Alexandria Gazette*, May 12, 1949.

36) Dorothy Holcombe Kabler was a member of the Bicentennial Commission's History Committee. She wrote Robert Fellers asking for a drawing or photograph of the stamp prior to its release in order to reproduce it in her upcoming book *Alexandria: Port on the Potomac* (Alexandria: Weadon Printing Service, 1949, p. 4). Letter from Dorothy Holcombe Kabler to Robert F. Fellers, April 30, 1949, Post Office Department Stamp Files.

37) Letter from Assistant Postmaster General Osborne A. Pearson to Alexandria Postmaster, March 14, 1952, Post Office Department Stamp Files. There were a large enough number issues that today the stamp is of little monetary value.



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# Office of Historic Alexandria

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