

**Alexandria "Blue Boy" Postmasters Provisional  
– By Alex Gill**

The Alexandria "Blue Boy" is one of the great philatelic rarities. Its name comes from its blue color. One of the few surviving stamps from a rare issue – the Postmaster's Provisionals produced in Alexandria D.C. beginning in 1846, only seven of which are known – the Blue Boy is the sole example printed on blue paper (the others were on buff-colored paper). Used, the Blue Boy remains affixed to its original envelope, which last sold in 2019 and retains the record for the highest priced cover of United States Philately.



Alexandria, Virginia was one of eleven municipalities that produced stamps to afford customers a convenient means of prepaying mail at a time before the United States introduced national postage stamps on July 1, 1847. Although provisional ceased after the introduction of a national stamp system, it continued sporadically, including the case of the Blue Boy. During the Alexandria Provisional's period of use, the city of was in the process of being retroceded from the District of Columbia to the State of Virginia, a process finalized on March 13, 1847.

The Alexandria Provisionals were produced under the city's postmaster, Daniel Bryan. The printing organs of the stamp are unknown, but it is believed they originated from equipment at a local newspaper publisher, Edgar Snowden who published the Alexandria Gazette down the street from the Post Office. The Provisionals were printed in pairs from a typeset form that produced two nearly identical images, identified as Type I and Type II. The Blue Boy is one of the four surviving Type I stamps, while only three Type II stamps are known. Both types share a circular design. However, Type I has only forty rosettes, while only thirty-nine appear on type II. Additionally, Type II has wide spacing between letters. The two-at-a-time production suggests at least one Type II Blue Boy stamp must have once existed.

The surviving Blue Boy remains attached to the envelope on which it was mailed, accompanied by a "PAID" handstamp. In 1981, a German collector acquired it through dealer David Feldman for one million dollars. The 2020 Scott catalogue lists the cover for \$1.18 million, which is the last recorded price at a 2019 auction.

According to stamp lore, a romantic story is attached to the stamp, which appeared in a Washington Post article. It is said the cover once held a letter written by James Wallace Hoof on November 24, 1847, sent in secret to his second cousin, Janette H. Brown to whom he was courting against the wishes of her family. Supposedly the letter called for Janette to "burn as usual" for their relationship to remain a secret. However, he and Janette would marry on February 17, 1853.



It is believed Janette ignored James' advice and hid the letter in a sewing box where it stayed until her daughter, also name Janette discovered it in 1907. Sometime later that year, the cover was sold to a collector for \$3000 when three other examples of Alexandria Provisionals were known.