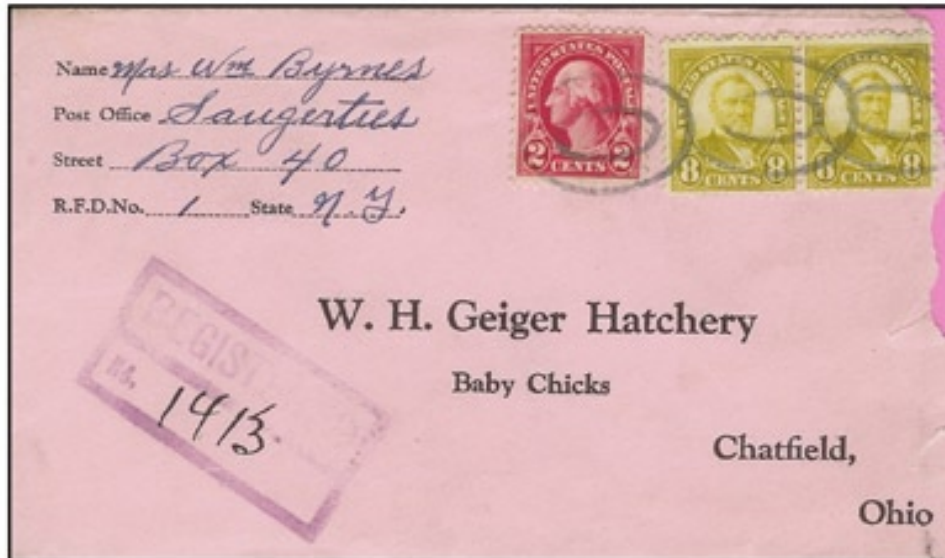




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REGISTERED MAIL POSTMARKS

By Maris Tirums

Did you ever notice that registered covers mailed in the United States during the 1920s and until quite recently bear mute killer handstamps on the stamps and dated oval or circular postmarks on the backside?

Illustrated here is a registered letter mailed from Saugerties (Ulster County) to the W. H. Geiger Hatchery in Chatfield, Ohio. A boxed registry hand stamp is in the lower left corner of the envelope. The postmarks on the reverse reveal that the letter was mailed on March 9, 1938, and received in Chatfield two days later on March 11.

Why was this postmarking convention used? The answer lies in the Post Office Department's requirement that all registered letters be securely sealed, and that they remain so until delivered. The dated postmarks were applied to the back of the envelope to compel the postal clerk to turn over the letter so that they could check for proper closure. The stamps on the front merely had to be canceled to prevent reuse, and mute cancellers, usually oval and without the post office name or date, were used for this purpose.

Upon arrival at the addressee's post office, the receiving postmark was also applied to the reverse side of the letter and again, a postal clerk was forced to observe the back side to make sure the envelope had not been opened since it had been mailed.