



THE PHILLY PHILATELIST

Award-Winning Newsletter of the Greater Philadelphia Stamp & Collectors Club

Founded 1904

American Philatelic Society – Chapter 18

November 2025

www.GPSCC.org

Volume 13, Issue 10

NEXT MEETING

November 18, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.

Community Rooms
GIANT Supermarket
315 N. York Rd., Willow Grove, PA

Dinner:

For those who would like to join us for dinner beforehand, we will meet at The W Tavern, about a block from GIANT, at 5:00 p.m. for cocktails followed by dinner at 5:30 p.m.

210 York Rd., Willow Grove, PA



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Paul F. Miller

I hope you did not miss out. In case you did not know, October was National Stamp Collecting Month. Each year, October is set aside to celebrate one of the most popular hobbies in the world – stamp collecting.

The United States Postal Service (USPS) initiated the first National Stamp Collecting Month effective October 1, 1981. The idea for this celebration was jointly created by the USPS and the Council of Philatelic Organizations. William F. Bolger was the Postmaster General back in 1981, and he helped to kick off the inaugural celebration. When he spoke about the National Stamp Collecting Month as an annual event, he encouraged “employees and customers alike to discover the joy of stamp collecting – the hobby of a lifetime.”

National Stamp Collecting Month is a great way to super-charge your stamp collecting interests. Whether you pick up your stamp albums and marvel at what you have accumulated, or decide to embark

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on another avenue of collecting, the choice is always yours.

I will also point out that the joy of stamp collecting is a year-long and life-long hobby. Although we have October to specifically celebrate National Stamp Collecting Month, you can and should enjoy this great hobby every day that you choose.

A terrific way to share the social aspects of stamp collecting is to be involved in a club. That is where the Greater Philadelphia Stamp and Collectors Club (GPSCC) comes in. Not only do we have an award-winning club newsletter, but we have enjoyable monthly meetings where we encourage participation and camaraderie. Since we are in the membership renewal season for GPSCC, I encourage everyone to renew their membership again for 2026 and to remain active in the club.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE (CONTINUED)

We have a good number of members who have already renewed for 2026. I thank you for that. Hopefully, the remaining members will soon renew, too.

Since we are nearing the end of the year, another great way to extend the benefits of your membership in GPSCC is to attend the annual **Holiday Dinner, scheduled this year for December 16.** Each December, rather than having a regular club meeting,

we celebrate the holidays, our friendships, and our love for stamp collecting during a sit-down dinner at a local restaurant. The food is always great; the conversations are lively and upbeat with the backdrop of the holidays. If you can, plan on attending. Information about the plans for the Holiday Dinner will be provided via email soon.

In the meantime, continue enjoying one of the best hobbies in the world!

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PROGRAM FOR NOVEMBER 18, 2025:

"THE GOLDEN AGE OF FLIGHT AND A POSTAL THIEF!" WITH MICHAEL L. WILSON

GPSCC member **Michael L. Wilson** will present "The Golden Age of Flight and a Postal Thief!" The presentation is based on a set of airmail covers amassed by two kids in Milwaukee in the late 1920s and early 1930s named Willard Roberts and his older sister Milo. The covers were sent to them by their uncle, Herman Pietsch and Peter Piasecki, assistant postmaster and postmaster of Milwaukee, respectively. The twist in the story is that the flow of covers abruptly stopped when Uncle Herman was arrested for stealing money from the mail!

Uncle
Herman
Pietsch



Willard
Roberts



PM
Piasecki
(Far
Right)



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UPCOMING CLUB MEETINGS FOR 2025 & EARLY 2026

Dec. 16 (Holiday Dinner) – Jan. 20 – Feb. 17 – Mar. 17 – Apr. 21 – May 19

UPCOMING EVENTS**November 15** – [Philatelic Gathering](#), 10:00 a.m.-noon, Chester County History Center, 225 N. High St., West Chester PA.**November 22** – [Burlington Masons Lodge Stamp Show](#) (Bourse Only), 8:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m., 2308 Burlington-Mt. Holly Road, Burlington, NJ.**December 20-21** – [K2 Lancaster Stamp Show](#) (Bourse Only), Farm and Home Center, 1383 Arcadia Road, Lancaster, PA.**SPEAKERS AND TOPICS FOR 2026 REQUESTED: UPDATE**

For 2026, we have four great speakers lined up for the January, February, March and June meetings. May (instead of February) will be the all show-and-tell meeting.

So that leaves open April, August, September, October, and November. Any takers? Any topics you would like to see covered in a meeting?

Drop me a note at vpprograms@gpscc.org!

Thanks, Mike Wilson

HAVE SOMETHING PHILATELIC YOU WANT TO SHARE?

The Philly Philatelist is always interested in publishing articles by our members or other collectors.

Articles of any length are welcome. An article that is 750 words long with two or three images will fill two pages. Just email the text in a Word file and the images as separate files to newsletter@gpscc.org.

Looking for a topic? How about why you collect, or what got you hooked on stamp collecting? Easy-peasy, mac-and-cheesy!

MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 21, 2025, GPSCC MEETING

President Paul Miller called the meeting to order promptly at 7:00 p.m.

Paul was pleased to announce that as of this meeting date, the club had a 62% affirmative response rate for 2026 club renewals, which is a good start. Dues notices were sent out earlier in October, and those efforts are paying off. Fifteen lucky GPSCC members were randomly selected to be part of the 2026 Membership Dues Sweepstakes. This means that they were not obligated to pay dues for the 2026 year.

In other news, paperwork has been submitted for the GPSCC to become an affiliate chapter of both the International Society of Worldwide Stamp Collectors and the American Topical Association, since we have enough members of both organizations.

Secretary Robert Cohen indicated that there are presently 61 members in GPSCC, which is about the same as last year. We added 10 new members, which was noted in the latest issue of *The Philly Philatelist*.

In terms of the reservation request for the continuation of using the Giant Supermarket Community Room, there has been no response. Just before the meeting, Robert met with a Giant Supermarket representative, and she informed him that the person responsible has been on sick leave. The representative will leave a note for the person temporarily filling in and will get back to Robert. *(Note: After the meeting, Robert received word that our meeting dates for 2026 are confirmed. The meeting dates through May are listed at the top of page 3 of this newsletter.)*

Robert also provided an update on Grouper. Grouper partners with Medicare Advantage Health Plans and offers their members rewards for participating in social activities. Last year, members of these plans who signed up received a \$50 annual check and a periodic \$20 wellness payment just for being active in the American Philatelic Society (APS) and local philatelic clubs. Apparently, the format of Grouper has completely changed, and members no longer

receive any monetary rewards for being affiliated with the APS. When speaking to a spokesperson for the organization, she stated that Grouper and APS are currently in negotiations. In any event, Grouper does have a variety of activities for those who have eligible Medicare Advantage Health Plans. If there are any changes, members of GPSCC will be informed at monthly meetings.

Mike Wilson is looking for anyone interested in making a presentation at one of next year's meetings. Also, *The Philly Philatelist* is always interested in publishing articles by our members or other collectors.

Mike will be taking care of reservations for the December 16 Holiday Dinner. He will send out an email to all members shortly.

Past GPSCC Vice President Phil Russell then presented his collection of "Colonial Ship Letters" from the Samuel and William Vernon Merchant Company. This company was located in Newport, Rhode Island from the 1740s to the 1770s. Phil purchased the majority of the covers from Edward J. Craig, and he spoke about how he met him.

We learned a lot about the interesting life of Edward Craig and his wife Valentine Vernon Craig. Many of the stampless covers have the captain and ship name. Some of the letters were personal and others were merchant. It was also interesting to hear Phil read some of the letters. Phil has spent a tremendous amount of time and research into the postage rates of the time.

After a few questions for Phil, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Robert Cohen



PHILATELIC GATHERING MEETS NOVEMBER 15, 2025

The November 15 Philatelic Gathering will feature Paul Pitcher presenting “Seated Britannia Variants Produced by Perkins, Bacon & Co.”

You can read a summary of the October 18 meeting on the Philatelic Gathering’s [web page](#).

November is the final gathering for 2025. In 2026, the Philatelic Gathering will meet quarterly, and *The Philly Philatelist* will list the meetings dates. The meetings take place at the Chester County History Center, 225 N. High Street, West Chester, from 10:00 a.m. to noon. There is free on street parking and free coffee and donuts. After the meeting, whoever wants to join the group for a Dutch treat luncheon at a nearby restaurant in West Chester is welcome.

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The Stamp

It travels through the countryside,
And over water too,
To do its special duty
For the Inland Revenue.
Commemoratives and Definitives
Works of Art in miniature –
The Stamp, the true Ambassador
Whether of Britain or Tuvalu.

It gives pleasure to the thousands
Who collect it as a hobby.
It’s instrumental in providing
Business ventures in the lobby
Of hotel, in exhibition,
Where the people flock to see it.
It’s a source of inspiration
For the Student and the Poet.

Illustrations they are endless,
From the simple to the exquisite.
Competitions are provided
To find out who’s best to do it.
From the Lord who sits in Parliament,
To the gypsy in his camp,
For them both to post a letter,
They have first to lick the stamp.



Poem sourced by Alan Warren with the original attribution “This contribution is from Joseph Carey of Caversham, Reading. Could he be the new McGonagall?”

U.S. RAILWAY MAIL SERVICE AND THE RAILWAY POST OFFICE

Paul F. Miller

In the United States, the Railway Mail Service (RMS) was a significant mail transportation system that used the country's vast railroad network from 1869 to 1977. Managed by the United States Post Office Department, the RMS, and its successor the Postal Transportation Service, played a critical role in the expansion of mail delivery, including speed and accuracy in the movement of mail and commerce.

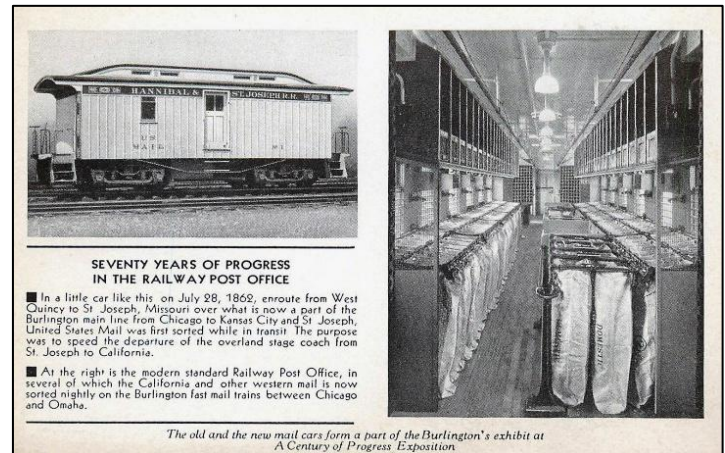
Although the RMS had been officially inaugurated in 1869, the idea of transporting and sorting mail on trains had begun many years earlier. The world's first official transporting of mail by rail was by the United Kingdom's General Post Office in November 1830, using adapted railway carriages on the Liverpool and Manchester Railway.

In the United States, the idea caught on, it is believed, when the first shipment of mail was carried on a train in 1831 by the South Carolina Railroad Company. Subsequently, the first official contract to regularly carry mail on a train was made with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in either 1834 or 1835. During this time, the mail was carried in locked pouches aboard trains, but there was no organized system of sorting mail en route, or to have mail prepared for delivery when the mail pouches reached their destination city. Rather, the mail was simply carried on the train with other baggage. The mail sorting occurred only at the endpoint of the train line.

George B. Armstrong, the manager of the Chicago Post Office, is generally credited with being the founder of the concept of mail sorting aboard trains while it moved from station to station. In response to Armstrong's idea, the Railway Post Office (RPO) was created. The RPO was a separate railroad car that was specifically used only by highly trained postal clerks to sort mail throughout the journey of high-speed passenger trains.

The RPO was introduced on July 28, 1862, using converted baggage cars on the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad in Missouri. This service lasted approximately one year. Subsequently, the first

permanent RPO route was established on August 28, 1864, between Chicago, Illinois and Clinton, Iowa via the Chicago and Northwestern Railway. The RPO idea was so successful, it was expanded to other railroads including the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, the Chicago and Rock Island Pacific Railroad, the Pennsylvania Railroad, and the Erie Railroad.



Exterior and interior of a RPO car.

By 1869 when the RMS was officially inaugurated, the system had expanded to virtually every major railroad in the United States. The country was divided into six operating divisions, each with its own superintendent. George B. Armstrong was promoted to the General Superintendent of the entire RMS.

Armstrong's successor, George Bangs, was appointed as the second General Superintendent of the RMS. Bangs encouraged the use of fast mail trains made up entirely of mail cars traveling on expedited schedules designed to accommodate the needs of the Post Office rather than the needs of the traveling public.

RPO car interiors, which at first consisted of solid wood furniture and fixtures, were soon redesigned to support their new purpose. In 1879, an RMS employee named Charles R. Harrison developed a new set of fixtures that soon gained widespread use. Harrison's design consisted of hinged, cast-iron fixtures that could be unfolded and set up in a number of configurations to hold mail pouches, racks and a

U.S. RAILWAY MAIL SERVICE AND THE RAILWAY POST OFFICE (CONTINUED)

sorting table as needed for specific routes. The fixtures were also designed so they could be folded away completely to provide an open space to carry general baggage and express shipments as needed by the railroads.

An interesting feature of most RPO cars was a hook that could be used to snatch a leather or canvas pouch of outgoing mail hanging on a track-side mail crane at smaller towns where the train did not stop.

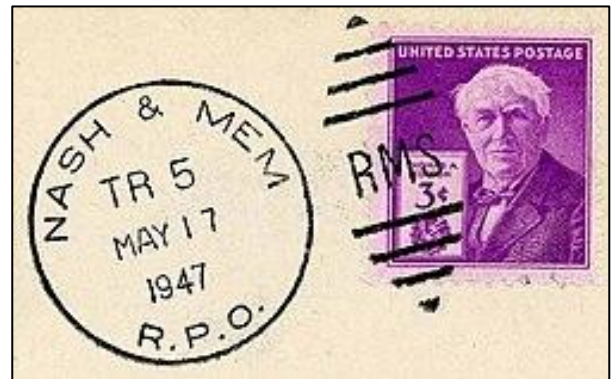


Track-side mail crane.

Here is a description of how that operation worked:

With the train often operating at 70 mph or more, a postal clerk would have a pouch of mail ready to be dispatched as the train passed the station. In a coordinated movement, the catcher arm was swung out to catch the hanging mail pouch while the clerk stood in the open doorway. The mail pouch had a strap around the middle, and the strap was tightened in preparation for pickup with an approximately equivalent weight of mail in either end of the pouch to prevent the heavier end from pulling the lighter end off the catcher arm. As the inbound pouch slammed into the catcher arm, the clerk kicked the outbound mail pouch out of the car, making certain to kick it far enough that it was not sucked back under the train. Outbound pouches of first-class mail were sealed with a locked strap for security. Larger sacks with optional provisions for locking were used for newspapers, magazines, and parcel post. An employee of the local post office would retrieve the pouches and sacks and deliver them to the post office.

In 1890, 5,800 railway postal clerks provided service over 154,800 miles of railroad. By 1907, over 14,000 railway postal clerks were providing service over 203,000 miles of railroad. The majority of the railway mail service consisted of one or more RPO cars at the end of a passenger train. However, many railways operated solid mail trains between major cities. These solid mail trains would often carry 300 tons of mail daily.



R.P.O. postal cancellation with "RMS" notation.

RPO clerks were a special breed. They were considered the elite of the postal service's employees. They were treated like hero figures, as they had to endure dangerous railroad travels and sometimes ward off train robbers. Their jobs were exhausting and had to be performed in cramped quarters. An RPO clerk had to be familiar with thousands of towns and instantly know the best mail routings to them. On tests, 97 percent was the passing score. On the job, accuracy and honesty were well over 99 percent. They were required to sort 600 pieces of mail an hour. To ensure that the clerks' skills did not rust, they were tested from time to time to ensure they could maintain that pace.

The tight quarters and time pressures of the RMS were not for everyone, but for those who did work on RPOs, they shared a unique camaraderie. As one retired clerk put it, "Nobody sat down until everyone was finished."

Beginning in 1948, the RMS network began to decline. Eventually, the post office made a controversial policy

U.S. RAILWAY MAIL SERVICE AND THE RAILWAY POST OFFICE (CONTINUED)

change to process mail in large regional "sectional centers." That required mail to be sorted by large machines, not by people. The RPO cars and clerks were simply phased out over time.

After more than 100 years of railway post office operation, the last surviving railway post office running on rails between New York and Washington, D.C. was discontinued on June 30, 1977.

One final note: The Smithsonian National Postal Museum (NPM), in Washington, D.C., has a permanent exhibit called "[Mail by Rail](#)," which provides details about the RMS and its RPO cars. It includes a replica of the exterior of a RPO car. The inside has actual interior fixtures from a decommissioned RPO car.

Editor's note: The NPM link above includes a "Mail by Rail" video that can also be viewed on [YouTube](#).



Left: View inside a RPO car.

Below: Cover carried on final RPO run.



A TRAIN WRECK: RUNNING THE GAUNTLET UNSUCCESSFULLY

Michael L. Wilson

According to the Smithsonian National Postal Museum, train wrecks were a common threat to U.S. mail clerks in the 1890s. There were over 6,000 accidents during that decade that claimed the lives of more than 80 mail clerks and injured nearly 2,100.

One of those accidents occurred in the early morning hours of October 16, 1891, near Mingo Junction, about four miles west of Steubenville, Ohio. The accident killed two – a brakeman and an express messenger – and injured three postal clerks and a baggage master. According to the Bowling Green *Daily Sentinel-Tribune* of October 17, 1891, "The crash was terrific, completely demolishing the engines, telescoping the postal and baggage cars." The wreck caught fire, and out of 300 sacks of mail on board and 100 pouches of locked registered mail, only two covers are known to have survived, one of which is depicted in Figure 1 (next page).

This cover was postmarked in Cincinnati, Ohio on October 15, 1891. It's a 2-cent stamped envelope issued between 1887 and 1894. The enclosure no longer exists, but it was a letter weighing one ounce or less. The sender is unknown, but the cover was addressed to Alsberg, Piebes & Jacobson, a manufacturer of apparel located in Manhattan's SoHo neighborhood.

The cover has two markings showing that it was in a crash. The most prominent is the label attached to the front that reads:

Post Office, New York, N.Y. October 19, 1891

This piece of mail matter was damaged in an accident on the P.C.C. & St. L. Railway, near Steubenville, Ohio, on the morning of October 16, 1891.

Cornelius Van Cott, Postmaster

A TRAIN WRECK: RUNNING THE GAUNTLET UNSUCCESSFULLY (CONTINUED)

The other marking is a “Received in Bad Order/N.Y.P.O. 3^D DIV” circular handstamp (Figure 2). That appears under the label, which is attached to the cover on the left side.

Today, accident investigations can take months, if not years, to decide a cause. Not so in 1891. Less than a week after the crash, the coroner of Jefferson County, Ohio, gave his verdict, as reported in the *Wheeling (W. Va.) Register* of October 22, 1891. He found that brakeman William Marshall, age 40, and express messenger Joseph Vestner, age unknown, both of Columbus, Ohio, perished from injuries received in a collision between the Pittsburg, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad Limited No. 2 traveling eastbound (the train on which this cover was traveling) and a freight train, identified as No. 129, traveling westbound.

The two trains collided on a notorious strip near Mingo Junction where the railway bed narrows. To keep train traffic moving along this strip, a gauntlet track, also known as an interlaced track, was installed (Figure 3). While this arrangement can keep train traffic flowing, only one train can run the gauntlet at a time, and that requires attentive engineers and an alert operator of the tower overseeing traffic approaching the gauntlet.

On that fateful morning, the coroner found that the tower operator was asleep – no doubt due to the fact that he had been on duty for nearly 35 hours, doing a favor for a co-worker – and did not notice that the tail end of the westbound freight train was still in the gauntlet. At the same time, the engineer of the eastbound Limited No. 2 was running at full throttle and did not notice and obey a red light west of the gauntlet. The engineer of the freight train was found blameless.

The three postal clerks – Abel R. Keyes, Frederick A. Stanley, and William S. Davis – were sent home to recuperate from their injuries. All recovered and returned to service. (Each earned around \$1,000 per year. Had they been killed in this accident, their next of kin would have received a payment of \$2,000.) The baggage master, Robert McPherson, sustained minor injuries and would continue east on the next train.

Amazingly, no passengers on the Limited No. 2 were injured, and only a single passenger car derailed.

Being a railway mail clerk was no cakewalk – it was a challenging, high-paced job with significant dangers. But it was a job the postal clerks loved. Everyday was an adventure, and they developed close friendships with their fellow clerks. No wonder Messrs. Keyes, Stanley and Davis did not hesitate to return to work when they were able.

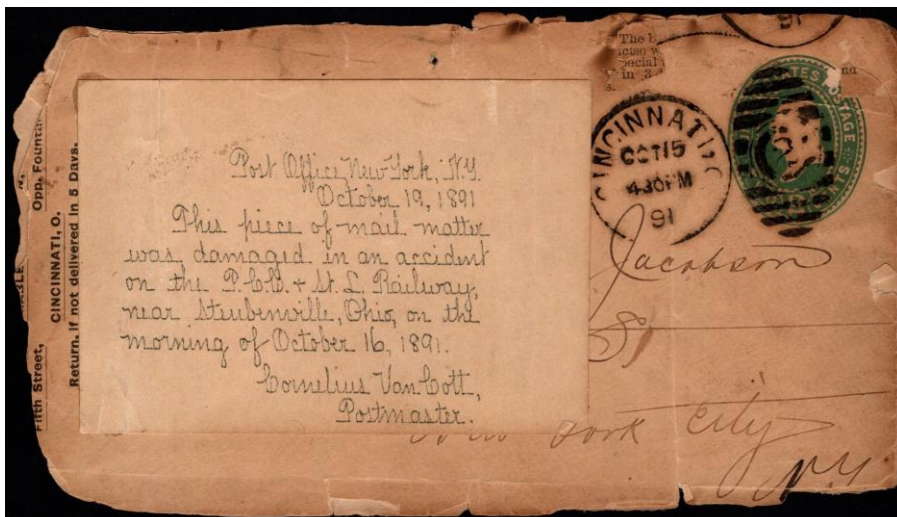


Figure 1

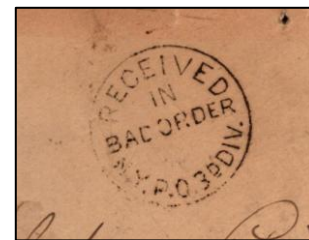


Figure 2

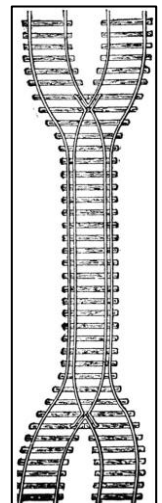


Figure 3

AWARDS AND HONORS

Alan Warren

GPSCC member **Mark Schwartz** continues his record of research with a wonderful article in the November issue of *The Chronicle of the U.S. Classic Postal Issues*, published by the U.S. Philatelic Classics Society (USPCS). This time he studies the "Railroad Route Agent Markings on Covers Bearing the New York Postmaster Provisionals." One image from Mark's article is shown to the right. Mark is a member of the society's board of directors, as are GPSCC members **Vernon Morris** and **Bill Schultz**. If you collect classic U.S. stamps and are not a member of the USPCS, check out its [website](#) for more information.

Bruce Marsden co-authored an article titled, "Tariffs, Taxes and Fees" that appears in *The American Philatelist* for November 2025. His co-author was Matt Liebson.

Mike Wilson was recently elected to the board of directors of the American Air Mail Society. Mike also

was named secretary of the Pennsylvania Postal History Society, joined the planning committee for MILCOPEX 2026, and was named the new editor of the *Yule Log*, the official journal of the Christmas Philatelic Club. Interesting fact: He doesn't collect Christmas stamps or covers.



New York Postmaster Provisional tied by a New York & Erie RR datestamp.

DID YOU KNOW?

Paul F. Miller

Warning: This may cause a desire to run to your local bakery!

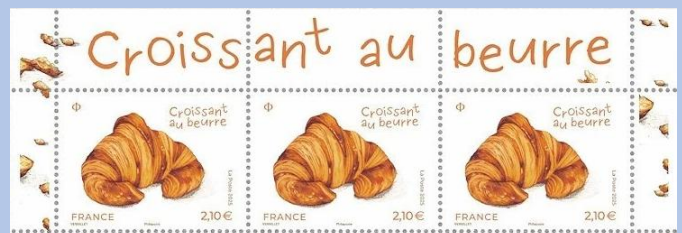
On October 7, 2025, La Poste, France's postal service, issued a stamp honoring the croissant. The croissant, as most of us already know, is the crisp golden pastry that is an iconic symbol of the French baking industry.

The croissant is believed to be a variation of the Austrian [kipferl](#) (or kifli) pastry. Although they are similar in shape, the French croissant uses a yeast-leavened laminated dough.

Croissants are named for the way that their dough rises when baked, derived from the French verb "croître," which means "to grow." The dough is layered with butter, rolled and folded several times in succession, then rolled into a thin sheet, in a

technique called [laminating](#). The process results in a layered, flaky texture, similar to a [puff pastry](#).

La Poste has issued this stamp in a very special, limited edition. If you are lucky enough to purchase this stamp, you will be surprised to learn that it smells like a freshly baked croissant! The stamp is printed with a special ink that contains tiny scent capsules. When you rub the surface, those capsules break and release the smell.



Strip of three from top of La Poste's mini-sheet