

Common Stamp – Extraordinary Cover

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The 2¢ Washington Head stamp of the Washington-Franklin Series of 1908-1922 was produced by the billions for use on first class letter mail, and most examples of its use are prosaic and hardly worth keeping. Occasionally, however, significant historical examples of use turn up, such as the cover illustrated in Figure 1.

The cover was mailed at Dixon, Illinois on July 30, 1915. The cornercard of the cover (Figure 1) shows the logo of the Lincoln Highway, which had been dedicated on October 31, 1913. The Lincoln Highway, like Route 66, was well known to Americans in the last century. While not universally known as the subject of a popular song like *Route 66*, the Lincoln Highway was the first prominent highway to cross the continent, from New York City



Figure 1. Cover mailed during the First “Water Wagon” Tour at Dixon, Illinois, July 30, 1915.



Figure 2. Modern route signs along the Lincoln Highway near Joliet, Illinois. (http://top-of-the-arch.blogspot.com/2011_07_01_archive.html)

to San Francisco. The Lincoln Highway and Route 66 crossed just west of Joliet, Illinois, and, to this day, travel together along a short stretch of roadway (Figure 2).



Figure 3. A muddy Lincoln Highway, between Nevada and Colo, Iowa, after a good rain in May, 1919. (Image from the Iowa Department of Transportation; http://www.iowadot.gov/virtual_museum/artifacts/OriginLincolnHighway.html)

By the second decade of the 20th century, automobiles were proliferating, and “touring” was becoming a national sport. The “Good Roads” movement was advocating improved inter-city roads, and prominent citizens were advocating for a road to cross the country. That cross-country road became a reality with the dedication of the Lincoln Highway, with many celebrations in cities and towns along the highway. Parts of the highway, particularly west of the Mississippi River, were unpaved and turned into mud in rainy weather (Figure 3), turning the fun of touring into an ordeal. During the early years of the highway, organized tours along the route became a popular enterprise.

One of the organizers of an early Lincoln Highway tour — called the “First ‘Water Wagon’ Tour” of 1915 — was Howard Hyde Russell (1855-1946; Figure 4), founder of the Anti-Saloon League and advocate for prohibition. The itinerary for the tour was described in detail in a contemporary newspaper account from a town along the proposed tour route:¹

**LINCOLN HIGHWAY
ROUTE FOR FIRST
WATER WAGON TOUR**

Latest Crusade of Temperance War will Follow Road on Coast to Coast Trip--Will Pass Through Gettysburg--Meeting in St. James

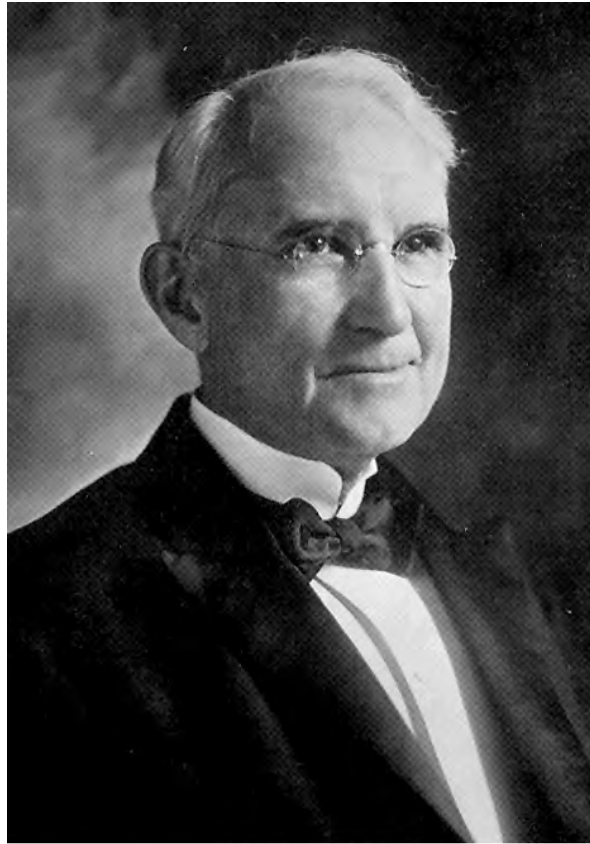
A unique feature of the temperance war is the transcontinental crusade now under way. The “Water Wagon” Tour over the Lincoln Highway which was begun at New York on July 4th, will continue from ocean to ocean, ending in San Francisco on September 5th. Doctor Howard H. Russell, Founder of the Anti-Saloon League and Lincoln-Lee Legion, will be the speaker. He will be accompanied by his specialists in song, the “Rail Splitter” Quartette, college men from Ohio Wesleyan University.

To provide comfort in travel and insure the prompt keeping of appointments, two high-powered automobiles have been chosen to transport the “Water Wagon” party and their baggage. An experienced chauffeur has charge of each machine. More than one hundred “Round-Ups” will be held on the way. The subject of Doctor Russell’s address will be “What Would Lincoln Do?” The quartette will sing from a fine repertoire of patriotic concert selections, including Abraham Lincoln’s favorite song and selections of war songs and other melodies of Lincoln’s time, often heard and much loved by Lincoln.

To these “Round-Up” rallies, young people, men, women—everybody is invited. With eloquence and song, Secretary Russell and his “Rail Splitters” will advocate and agitate sobriety for the individual and prohibition for the Nation. A special campaign will be started to enroll a million new abstainers upon the Lincoln pledge in the counties on the Lincoln Highway.

The “Round-Up” for this locality will be held in St. James Lutheran church on Monday, July 12th, at 12.30 p. m.

The Figure 1 cover was mailed by Dr. Russell to his wife in Berkeley, California, who may have been vacationing on the West Coast at the time. Russell wrote “Westerville, Ohio” as his return address, which was his home. The Water Wagon tour was nearly four weeks along when Dr. Russell mailed this letter, with nearly six weeks to go if he maintained his schedule. Our



REV. HOWARD HYDE RUSSEL
FOUNDER OF THE ANTI-SALOON LEAGUE
AND ONE OF THE PRESIDENTS OF THE WORLD LEAGUE AGAINST ALCOHOLISM

Figure 4. Rev. Howard Hyde Russel, who mailed the Figure 1 cover. (<http://www.westervillelibrary.org/antisaloon-russel>)

modern Interstate system and modern automobile technology has certainly reduced touring time along this route. A scrapbook of the tour is preserved in the Howard H. Russell Papers, 1840-1946, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

While picture postcards from along the Lincoln Highway were commonplace from about the 1930s on, postal artifacts from the earliest years of the Highway, such as this cover, are comparatively rare.

Reference

1. *The Star and Sentinel*, Gettysburg, Pa., July 8, 1915, p. 1.

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