Introduction

Hello, I am Tony Wawrukiewicz, and welcome to my presentation on “The Domestic Postal History of Postal, Reply-Postal, and Post Cards

If you are confused at any time in this presentation remember (a) there is a Q and A after it, (b) it is being recorded, (c) there is a handout that repeats some of the important rules, and (d) my book *Insights into U.S. Postal History, 1855 – 2016* discusses the rules in great detail. This book is available from the American Philatelic Society at a special price to APS members.

Unmailable Domestic Postal and Post Cards are chronologically classified as follows:

(a) Misdirected Cards – with inadequate address. None known before 1887, as of 1887 until the present, all handled the same (Returned for Better Address).

(b) Cards Returned for Postage (RFP) – paid less than one rate. Only from July, 1, 1898 as true mainly for post cards, after 1974 only unpaid cards RFP.

(c) Cards with excess writing on address side, letter postage required. As of May 1881. At first RTW, after vertical line introduced (1907), letter rate required.

(d) Cards with Other Substances Attached – coated with material that could damage mail handling machines. Must be placed in an envelope at letter rate. As of March 4, 1907.

(e) Cards with Address Tags Before 1876 except that I have never seen any.

(f) Cards with pasted-on matter. From 1876 until Oct. 1, 1913, only address label allowed, after this date, thin pasted-on matter also allowed.

(g) Cards with Obscene or Scurrilous Content – these were never RTW - only to the DLO. From introduction.

(a) Undeliverable (RTW) Domestic Postal and Post Cards are chronologically classified as follows:

(a) Until the publication of the 1887 *PL&R*, there should be no undeliverable postal cards.

(b) From 1887 to 1893 PL&Rs, RTW of undeliverable postal cards allowed. The reason for the return (on letters) was not required until 1893.

(c) From 1893 until 1902 PL&R, undeliverable postal cards could no longer be RTW. This was also true of Private Mailing Cards (Post Cards) when they were introduced on July 1, 1898.

(d) From 1902 until 1913 PL&Rs, only undeliverable reply-paid postal cards could be RTW.

(e) From 1913 until 1924 PL&Rs, only undeliverable reply-paid postal cards and all local cards could be RTW.

(f) From 1924 PL&R until 1941 Postal Bulltin announcement, only undeliverable local cards (all htree types) could be RTW. Non-local undeliverable cards' returns (all types) had to be guaranteed at card rate (really rare).

(b) (g) From 1941 until 1955, ALL undeliverable cards (all three types) RTW had to be guaranteed at post card rate of the time (1¢ or 2¢).

(h) From 1955 to 1970 no change from last period, except reply-paid card RTW was free.

(i) From 1970 until 1979 DMM, too complicated to list (RTW policy depended on return comment in return address, and examples extremely rare). Details in Wawrukiewicz book.

(d) From 1902 until 1913 PL&Rs, only undeliverable reply-paid postal cards could be RTW.

(e) As of Feb. 17, 1985 all undeliverable card reurns free.

Page 4 – Introduction to the types of Unmailable cards
I've already gone over the list on the PowerPoint presentation and it's on the handout.

From 1887 until the present, Misdirected Unmailable Card Rules

This first category of RTW cards comprises cards that were unmailable because the postal and private mailing cards were "misdirected" – incorrectly, poorly, or incompletely addressed so that postal clerks did not know where to send them. Such unmailable handling occurred at the offices of mailing and transit.

No RTW allowed before 1887, but we have an 1882 illegal use.

As of the 1887 *Postal Laws and Regulations (PL&R),* though: "Misdirected matter of the first class, if it bear the card or request of the sender, should be withdrawn and returned to him with the words written or stamped thereon, "RETURNED FOR BETTER DIRECTION." it is still true even today.

Cards Returned for Postage – paid less than one rate – next chronologically, beginning on July 1, 1898 because only true, at first, for post cards.

Second category of unmailable RTW card returned (RFP) because it was paid less than one rate. At first, only as of July 1, 1898 as postal cards prepaid, only unpaid and insufficiently private mailing cards (post cards) were lawfully returned to the sender for collection and payment of the short paid postage.

Later (after 1952 when card rate increased to 2¢), postal cards could be short paid.

As of 1974, only unpaid cards could be RFP.

BTW As of the 1902 PL&R, even if there was no return address (especially true for post cards): "if the sender he be known to or can be conveniently ascertained by the postmaster, and is within the delivery of the office, the letter or package will at once be returned to him for proper postage."

Cards with Excess Writing on Address Side – because excess writing obscurred the address. Not allowed from May 1881 until the present, but I haven't seen any pre-1909 examples.

At first RTW, but as of 1907, when the vertical line was added to cards, the left side was only for the message, such cards required the letter postage.

Cards with Other Substances Attached – coated with material that could damage mail handling machines.

The March 4, 1907 *Postal Bulletin No. 8233* stated as Section 5:

"(5) Cards bearing glass, metal, mica, sand, tinsel, or other similar substances, are unmailable, except when enclosed in envelopes." (at letter rate).

Page 31 – Cards with pasted-on matter:

From their introduction until the 1913 *PL&R* (Oct. 1, 1913), anything pasted on a postal card or private mailing card, except an address on a postal card (after 1876), rendered it unmailable except at the letter rate. As of 1913 *PL&R*, very thin matter could be pasted on a card. Otherwise, they still would require a letter rate for postage.

Page 34 – Obscene or scurrilous cards:

From their introduction until the 1913 *PL&R* (Oct. 1, 1913), anything pasted on a postal card or private mailing card, except an address on a postal card (after 1876), rendered it unmailable except at the letter rate. As of 1913 *PL&R*, very thin matter could be pasted on a card. Otherwise, they still would require a letter rate for postage.

Page 36 – UNDELIVERABLE DOMESTIC CARDS

Earlier, the categories of Undeliverable items were listed. We now discuss them in detail with associated cards that were RTW.

– 1887-1902 Undeliverable-mail card rules:

Until the publication of the 1887 *PL&R*, there should be no undeliverable postal cards.

From 1887 to 1893 PL&Rs, RTW of undeliverable postal cards allowed. The reason for the return (on letters) was not required until 1893.

As of the 1893 *PL&R*, undeliverable postal cards could no longer be RTW. This was also true of Private Mailing Cards (Post Cards) when they were introduced on July 1, 1898.

1902-1913 Undeliverable Card Rules

Changes again occurred as of Section 673 of the 1902 *PL&R,* as it stated: 2. *Double postal cards*, when unclaimed, will be returned to sender when the address of the sender can be ascertained; otherwise they will be sent to the Dead Letter Office. Care must be taken in indorsing (sic) and returning double cards not to deface or destroy the unused half.

So only double (reply-paid) undeliverable cards could now be RTW.

Page 41 – 1913-1924 Undeliverable-mail card rules:

Another significant change in how the return of undeliverable domestic postal and post cards was handled occurred with the publication of the 1913 *PL&R*. Sec. 634 of that document stated:

Sec. 634. New was that unpaid, misdirected, unmailable, and unclaimed domestic postal and post cards deposited for ***local*** **delivery** shall be returned to the sender when they bear his card address. Also, **double postal cards**, when unclaimed, shall be returned to sender when the address of the sender can be ascertained

Page 45 – 1924-1941 Undeliverable-mail card rules:

Further important changes occurred in the handling of undeliverable postal and post cards as of the 1924 *PL&R*, Section 611, which stated:

Per Section 611. So now only *local* undeliverable cards (all the three types) could be RTW without additional postage being paid. All other types (all undeliverable non-local cards (all the three types)) could only be RTW if the writer guaranteed that they would pay a return charge (the card postage rate) for their return. These guaranteed returns before 1941 are, in the opinion of the presenter, rarely seen.

Page 49 – 1941-1955 Undeliverable-mail card rules:

The next major change in how these undeliverable cards were handled was announced in *Postal Bulletin No. 18327* (November 18, 1941) that corresponded to the Order of the Postmaster General No. 16411 (dated November 6, 1941), that amended Section 802 of the 1940 *PL&R*, where we find:

“Unpaid, misdirected, unmailable, and unclaimed domestic postal cards and post cards, whether single or double and whether addressed for local delivery or otherwise, shall be returned to the sender only when they bear his return card in the upper left corner of the address side, together with a pledge to pay return postage (the card rate of the time).

Page 54 – 1955-1970 Undeliverable-mail card rules:

Frequent changes in how undeliverable cards were handled continued. In 1955 most of the new 1941 rules concerning the return of undeliverable cards remained the same, with one exception. This was found in *Postal Procedures Transmittal letter 3*, dated Aug. 1, 1955 where the following was found in new Section 345.22b:

Undeliverable double cards were again to be RTW without collection of postage. I have no examples of this type to show.

Page 56 – 1970-1979 Undeliverable-mail card rules:

Further major changes occurred as 1970 approached. These first announcements were incomplete and were more completely announced in the *Postal Service Manual*, in its *Transmittal Letter-1* of October 1, 1970 (now Section 159.212).

Too complicated to list (RTW policy depended on return comment in return address, and examples extremely rare). Details in Wawrukiewicz book.

Page 58 – 1979-1985 Undeliverable-mail card rules:

Yet another set of laws and regulations concerning the return of undeliverable as addressed cards was stated in *Domestic Mail Manual* Issue 1 of July 30, 1979 (Section 159.151). 'Return Postage Guaranteed' was still part of the card return process.

Again, too complicated to list (RTW policy depended on return comment in return address, and examples extremely rare). Details in Wawrukiewicz book.

Page 60 – 1985-present Undeliverable-mail card rules:

As of *Postal Bulletin No. 21500* of February 14, 1985, Section 159.151 of the *Domestic Mail Manual* was amended, effective February 17, 1985. With this amendment in the *Domestic Mail Manual*, for the first time since 1893, all undeliverable cards could be returned, and returned free of charge, whether or not there was any endorsement. All three card typed returnable free.

Page 63 – A few miscellaneous card uses:

I end my presentation with these two miscellaneous uses. For one reason or another these uses do not easily fit into any category so-far presented.

After 1904, the first card in this miscellaneous section would have been unmailable because (a) it contained the phrase “United States of America” or the words “Postal Card,” either which was not allowed because it made the private mailing card then look too much like an official postal card.

THE END

Thank you for attending this presentation. I hope that it was a useful introduction to what I consider an important and exciting but complex postal history story about unmailable and undeliverable domestic cards.

A Repeat Comment

If you were confused at any time in this presentation remember (a) there is a Q and A now, (b) it is being recorded, (c) there is a handout that repeats some of the important rules, and (d) my book *Insights into U.S. Postal History, 1855 – 2016* discusses the rules in great detail. This book is available from the American Philatelic Society at a special price to APS members.