

CHICAGOPEX 2025 / AAPE AmeriStamp Expo, IL - DISPLAY

Finding Antarctica - Then Finding More Of It

This exhibit presents material documenting the major phases of Antarctic exploration during the Heroic Age (from the beginning of polar history up to 1924), focusing on the discovery of the so-called "Unknown Southern Land" — Antarctica. It follows the course of successive expeditions that pushed into the southernmost regions of the Earth, seeking and charting new straits, islands, bays, and uncharted coasts.

The exhibit combines philatelic and non-philatelic material to illustrate the historical, scientific, and human dimensions of early Antarctic expeditions. Included are postal items such as letters, postcards, and telegrams sent or received during these journeys, along with non-philatelic items in accordance with the principles of Open Philately — such as expedition maps, menus, medals, contemporary photographs, and other artefacts. Many of these items are rare or unique, often preserved as single known examples.

While the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration is generally considered to extend until 1924, **this exhibit concludes in 1922**, with the **Shackleton–Rowett Antarctic Expedition**, during which Sir **Ernest Shackleton** died. His death is widely regarded as a symbolic end to the Heroic Era of exploration. The exhibit thus covers the formative and most dramatic decades of Antarctic discovery — a period during which explorers not only expanded geographical knowledge but also laid the foundations for future scientific research in the polar regions.

Exceptional items of the exhibit

While the majority of items presented in this exhibit are rare or historically significant — as is typical for material from the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration (up to 1924) — the most exceptional items are marked by red-coloured explanatory text within the exhibit.

Highlights include:

- The **earliest known mail from the Antarctic region**, a letter from Captain Benjamin Winship (1821);
- Mail associated with the **discovery of the South Orkney Islands**, both in geographic and philatelic terms, including a letter from Captain Benjamin Pendleton (1822);
- A letter from the **Ross Antarctic Expedition** (1843);
- Several covers from the **Belgian Antarctic Expedition** (1897–1899), the first to overwinter in Antarctica;
- The **only preserved photographic postcards** of the Antarctic region from the **German Deep-Sea Expedition** (1899);
- A unique letter sent from aboard a vessel of the **First German Antarctic Expedition** (1901);
- Exceptionally rare original mail from leading explorers of the Heroic Age, including **Robert Falcon Scott**, **Ernest Shackleton**, **Roald Amundsen**, and others.

These items reflect not only extreme postal rarity but also high documentary and thematic value, providing direct insight into the key figures and milestones of early Antarctic exploration.

Research I needed to do in order to prepare this exhibit

The preparation of this exhibit required extensive research in order to accurately identify and verify postal items associated with specific Antarctic expeditions — particularly those where postal provenance is not immediately evident. Much of this work involved consulting international philatelic and historical literature, specialized polar publications, and expert references provided by recognised authorities in polar philately.

A significant component of the research focused on establishing the historical authenticity and temporal relevance of non-philatelic materials. Each item was evaluated to confirm that it corresponds accurately to the date and context of the expedition or event it represents.

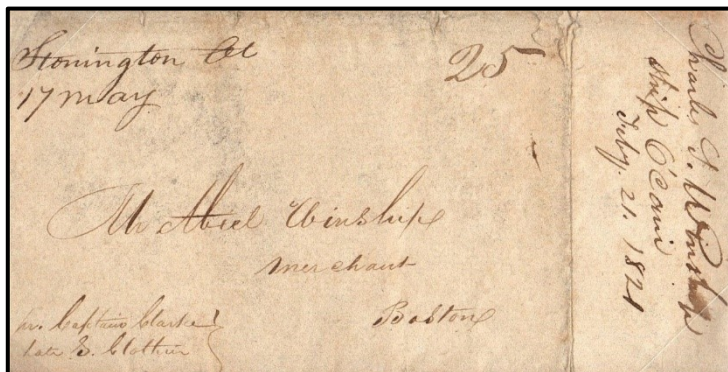
The exhibitor has also contributed to the body of polar philatelic knowledge through published articles in philatelic journals, covering expedition routes, postal rates, and mailing practices from various waypoints used by crew members en route to and from Antarctica.

Several items included in this exhibit have been cited or illustrated in major reference works on polar philately, such as *Ahead of the Pack* and *Essence of Polar Philately*, underscoring their significance and the depth of philatelic documentation involved.

Examples of some unique items of polar history in this exhibit

The first mail from Antarctica related to the study of the Antarctic region

Captain Charles Jonathan Winship writes to his father (manuscript) from Potter Cove on 21 February 1821, the South Shetlands that he arrived at **O'Cain** Harbor (named after his ship) earlier to begin sealing.



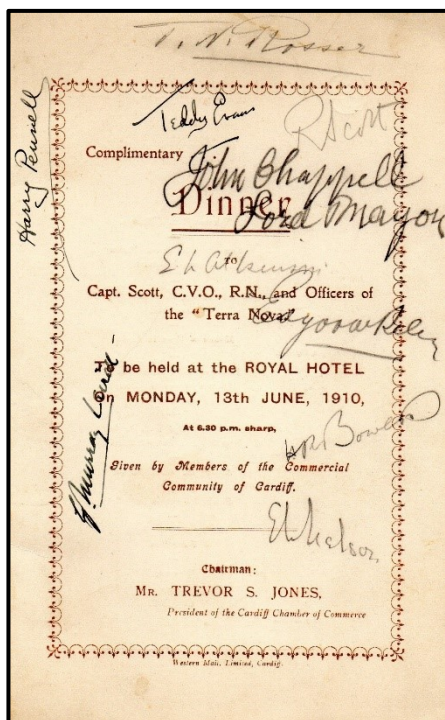
Double-weight rated ($12\frac{1}{2}c \times 2 = 25c$) for a distance between 80 and 150 miles (1816-45). Either a returning tender did not submit for a SHIP fee or it was delivered by a US Navy vessel that was not authorized the SHIP fee.

Below is the earliest known concessionary letter from the Falkland Islands and one of the earliest known letters from Antarctic expeditions

Headed **H.M.Ship Erebus** letter sent by **Richard Wall** from Port Louis, the Falkland Islands, to his wife in England. Concessionary Soldier's and Seamen's 1d prepaid rate to Great Britain (1795-1850). London General Post single ring Paid 11 FE 1843 marking + octagonal PD FE 11 1843 marking.



One of the few preserved menus celebrating the departure of Scott's expedition to Antarctica



Dockmaster **Thomas Newland Rosser** hosted **Captain Scott** and the **Terra Nova** before setting off on their Antarctic expedition. Expedition 1910 signed menu from a farewell dinner to **Capt. Robert Falcon Scott** C.V.O. RN and Officers of the **Terra Nova**, held at the Royal Hotel on Monday, 13th June 1910 (two days before sailing), by members of the commercial community of Cardiff.

One of the few known commemorative bronze Cook medals, by **L. Pingo** in London, in 1779. Recto with profile bust of **Cook** facing left within the words. Reverse (scan) with figure of **Fortune** leaning against a naval column with rudder on globe within the letters. This medal was struck in commemoration of **Captain Cook** by fellow members of the Royal Society of London. Some 577 in bronze were issued, 322 in silver and 20 in gold.



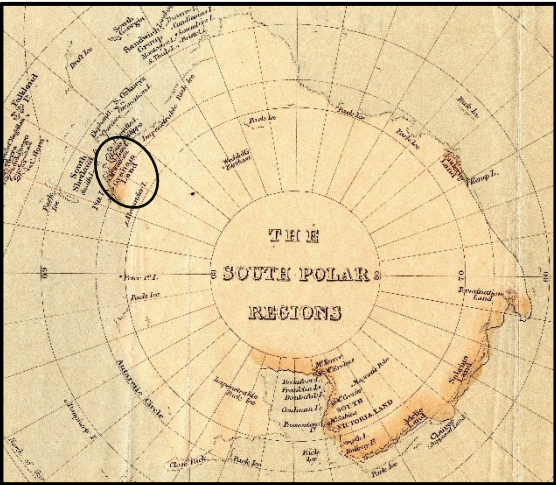
Finding Antarctica-Then Finding More Of It

Purpose: The purpose of this exhibit is to present philatelic (postal) and non-philatelic (collateral) material that documents the initial discovery and confirmation of the Antarctic continent, followed by the further discovery of its land mass and environment.

Background: Though timidly approached for hundreds of years, it was not until the early 19th C. that human beings could approach Antarctica close enough actually to discover, then begin probing it for a greater understanding. It was a strange, dangerous and exciting geography for scientists and explorers. They gradually gained knowledge of this place, what it contained and what it could offer, during what now is called the *Heroic Age* of Antarctic history (up to 1924). First there was revelation, followed by gradual exploration along its edges, culminating in bold advances inland. Uniquely inquisitive, courageous, bold individuals produced these achievements - and its mail whose character is equally elusive and often also unique.

Importance: The *Heroic Age* is the first and most significant in the three periods of polar history. This is paralleled by its postal documentation that represents most of the gems in polar postal history.

Map of Antarctica from 1874



First to cross the Antarctic Circle

Captain James Cook, RN (7 November 1728-14 February 1779) became the first to *cross the Antarctic Circle on 17 January 1773*, when he did so on his second exploratory world cruise (1772-75), supported by the Royal Society in 1772. He did not sight the Antarctic continent, but came the closest to doing so at that time. Cook later claimed Antarctica's South Georgia for Great Britain.

One of the few known commemorative bronze Cook medals, by L. Pingo in London, in 1779. Recto with profile bust of Cook facing right within the words. Reverse (scan) with figure of Fortune leaning against a naval column with rudder on globe within the letters. This medal was struck in commemoration of Captain Cook by fellow members of the Royal Society of London. Some 577 in bronze were issued, 322 in silver and 20 in gold.



References:

A Chronology of Antarctic Exploration-Robert Keith Headland,
Essence of Polar Philately-Hal Vogel,
Deutsche Südpolar-Expeditionen vor 1948-Gerhard Trögel,
Ahead of the pack-Hal Vogel and Serge Kahn,
German explores at the poles-Siegfried Nicklas,
The Swedish South Polar Expedition 1901-1904 - Stefan Heijtz, F. Goldberg,
Postcards of Antarctic Expeditions, a catalogue: 1898-1958 - Margery Wharton

(NOTE: Scanned and photocopied ancillary images [maps, portraits, paintings, etc.] are from publicly sharable sources and are only for illustrative or decorative purposes).

Plan of the Exhibit

Penetrating the Unknown - pages 1-29

This section covers the earliest phase of Antarctic exploration, when the continent was still largely unknown. It begins with the **first recorded mail from Antarctic waters** by **Captain Winship** (1820–21) and the **discovery of the South Orkney Islands** by Pendleton (1821–22). Key exploratory milestones followed with the **Ross Expedition (1839–43)**, which charted much of the Antarctic coastline, and the **Wilkes** and **d'Urville expeditions**, which contributed to early mapping and territorial claims. The **Belgian Antarctic Expedition (1897–99)** marked the first overwintering on the continent, while the **German Deep-Sea Expedition (1898–99)** provided new scientific knowledge, particularly regarding the ocean environment of the region. This period laid the foundations for the next era of Antarctic exploration, which followed soon after.

Edging Beyond the Edge - pages 30-68

This period saw the start of coordinated scientific expeditions into Antarctica. The **British National Antarctic Expedition (1901–04)** set the standard for inland travel and research. The **German**, **Swedish**, **Scottish**, and **French** expeditions followed, expanding knowledge of the continent. From **1904**, **Argentina** began regular missions and established the first permanent postal station in Antarctica.

Pushing Inland - pages 69-128

This stage marks the deepest penetration into the Antarctic interior during the Heroic Age. The **Nimrod Expedition (1907–09)** under **Shackleton** reached a new southern record, followed by **Amundsen's Fram Expedition (1910–12)**-the first to reach the South Pole. **Scott's Terra Nova Expedition (1910–13)** arrived shortly after but ended tragically. Major scientific efforts were also carried out by **German**, **French**, **Japanese**, **Australasian** and **Swedish** teams. **The Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition (1914–17)** became a symbol of **Endurance**, and the **Shackleton-Rowett Expedition (1921–22)** closed the Heroic Age with Shackleton's death.

First Sighting of Antarctica

The youngest ship captain in the Stonington, Connecticut, USA, sealing fleet (**Nathaniel Brown Palmer**) barely saw land off the Antarctic continent on 16 November 1820 while looking for new sealing grounds. It was not realized until much later that he and two other sightings around this same time (by an Englishman and a Imperial Russian explorer) had found "**Palmer Land**" at the tip of the 7th continent (see map above-marked with black ellipse).



No mail related to **Palmer** exists from his earliest time, though some is known to him later as his fame grew, such as this New Haven, CT., 30 August posting to him in Stonington. This style postmark was used there between 1847 and 1851.

Exceptional items of the exhibit

Although most of the displayed pieces are exceptional, as would be most from the "Heroic Age" (polar exploration until 1924), the more exceptional ones are highlighted with **red-colored explanatory text**. I would like to draw your attention mainly to: The first mail from the Antarctic region from **Captain Winship (1821)**, South Orkneys "discovery" (both in geographic, and philatelic terms) mail from **B. Pendleton** in 1822, a mail from the **Ross Antarctic Expedition** from 1843, covers from the **Belgian Antarctic Expedition** from 1897-99, the only preserved photo postcards of the Antarctic region from the **German Deep-Sea Expedition** from 1899, a unique letter sent from aboard a ship of the **First German Antarctic Expedition** from 1901, unique mail from **R. F. Scott**, **E. Shackleton**, **R. Amundsen** and other world-famous polar explorers.