

# thomasedison&thebulb

Scott 654, 655, 656



## SYNOPSIS

This is the story of the stamps (one design, three stamps) issued to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the invention of the light bulb or “Electric Light’s Golden Jubilee.” How they came to be, how they were used by commercial interests, how it became more identified with Thomas Edison rather than the light bulb or the Golden Jubilee, and, most importantly, how the stamp was used, both philatelically and commercially.

This is an experimental exhibit with a primary focus on usages of the stamp (“the bulb,” as the stamp is often referred to by collectors), both philatelic and commercial, with a secondary focus on Edison. It does this through a combination of stamps, postcards, cinderellas, first day and other philatelic covers and postal history. Since emphasis is on the bulb and its usage, **there is little concern with cachets** since they do not further the story. The covers are selected for interest, not cachet. **Nor is there detailed focus on production.** This is generic information that applies to any stamp and is not part of this story. There are no known errors or major varieties of the bulb.

There are 4 parts to the exhibit. The first deals with the stamps – their origins and introduction. The second is the evolution and implementation of the Golden Jubilee event, which the stamps commemorate. Part 3 is the stamps’ usage, and part 4 is the ending with Edison’s death and the issue of the “real” Edison commemorative.

The stamp was promoted by the commercial interests of General Electric, joined by Westinghouse, to promote their electricity-oriented businesses and the “Golden Jubilee” convention to be held by the National Electric Light Association in Atlantic City. The stamp is unusual in several ways:

1. It was instigated by corporate interests to promote a commercial event.

2. From a public perspective, the stamp commemorated Thomas Edison, though he was still alive. Even the post office, in its announcements, referred to the stamp as “the Edison commemorative,” overshadowing the light bulb and the Golden Jubilee.
3. First commemorative issued as a coil.
4. For philatelic purposes, there are four 1929 celebration dates – June 5, first day flat plate printing; June 6, opening day of Atlantic City Golden Jubilee Convention; June 11, first day of rotary press and coil; Edison Day, October 21, 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the invention of the bulb.
5. Two of the stamps (rotary and coil) were printed after the start of the event they commemorated.

There has been little serious study of this stamp and very little written. For this exhibit the Bureau of Engraving & Printing and Smithsonian were contacted for research assistance as well as APL. All were helpful and that information along with material from this exhibit and additional personal research will serve as the basis of a detailed monograph to appear in the 2021 Congress Book. As far as can be determined, this is the first detailed exhibit study of this commemorative.

Like most modern commemoratives, the half-life of usage is short, usually 6 months to a year when most are used. This means that commercial usages other than first class are difficult to come by. This exhibit represents a 12-year effort to assemble diverse commercial usages. A count over time shows that over 98% of the covers available are either first class or philatelically oriented. Care has been taken to have a representative sampling of all three stamps among the diverse usages, and they are identified on most pieces.

Rare and/or interesting pieces are outlined in red. Most red-boxed items represent the only usage ever seen using the bulb.