World War I Savings Stamp and Liberty Bond Auxiliary Markings

This exhibit presents handstamp auxiliary markings affiliated with the sale of War Savings Stamps, Thrift Stamps, and Liberty Bonds during World War I. The “Great War” required massive public financing. The United States Post Office Department financially supported the war effort in two significant ways.

First, post offices, letter carriers, and rural carriers sold two types of Savings Stamps. The War Savings Stamp was a form of bond; it was sold at a discount that varied by month and could be redeemed for its $5 face value in 5 years. The 25-cent “Thrift Stamp” was saved on a card; 16 Thrift Stamps, plus a small amount of cash, could be redeemed for a War Savings Stamp.

Second, the Post Office Department solicited and promoted the sale of “Liberty Bonds.” Although Liberty Bonds were not sold over the post office counter, smaller post offices twice received government-authorized rubber handstamps that were required to be used on mail received at their offices during the first and second “Liberty Loan Drives.”

Other handstamps promoting the sale of Thrift Stamps, War Savings Stamps and Liberty Bonds exist for which clear government authority cannot be found. They may have been used by sending receiving post offices or may have been privately used by some senders of mail. Regardless of their source, each of these markings is a reminder of the intense public and private pressure placed on private citizens to financially contribute to the World War I effort.
Official Markings – “Do your bit!”

Jun. 4, 1917.
Middleboro, MA.

Use from USS Delaware

Jun. 15, 1917.
Parksville, NY.

Last Day of First Liberty Loan.

A handstamp reading “Do your bit! / BUY A LIBERTY LOAN BOND / Inquire at any bank or post office” was distributed to 2nd, 3rd, and 4th class post offices for use during the First Liberty Loan on mail received by such offices. Use of the marking was dictated by the Postal Bulletin of May 21, 1917 (#11352a). A notice in the June 15 Postal Bulletin (#11373) - the last day of the First Liberty Loan - directed discontinuance of use.
Official Markings – “Do your bit!”

Jun. 11, 1917.
Hanover, PA.
Red ink.

Oct. 9, 1917.
Delaware, OH.
Incorrect use of marking during Second Liberty Loan.

Jun. 11, 1917.
Mechanicville, NY.
Blue ink.

The *Postal Bulletin* specified that red ink was to be used (or black, if red was not available), but most examples are purple. Late use of the marking (during the Second Liberty Loan) exists.
Official Markings – “Back the Boys in the Trenches”

Oct. 17, 1917, Centredale, RI.
*Use on forwarded cover.*

Oct. 25, 1917.
Penn Yan, NY.
*Drop rate usage.*

Oct. 27, 1917
Flemington, NJ.
*Last Day of Second Liberty Loan.*

A second handstamp was distributed to 2nd, 3rd, and 4th class post offices for use during the Second Liberty Loan (October 1—October 27, 1917) on received mail, as indicated in the Postal Bulletin of September 27, 1917 (#11460).
A variation of the “Back the Boys” marking, with the top line of the marking appearing at bottom, was used by at least one post office, as seen in the cover above.

The Postal Bulletin required that the marking be used by the receiving post office, but the requirement was sometimes disregarded.
Use on incoming international mail—fewer than ten reported—demonstrates use of these markings at the receiving post office.
Unofficial Markings— “Buy Liberty Bonds To-Day”

Houston, TX Logan Branch to East Dedham, MA.

Oct. 16, 1917.
Boston, MA Hyde Park Station to Norfolk, NE.

Hillsgrove, RI to Worcester, MA.

A double-line boxed marking reading “Buy Liberty Bonds To-Day / At Any Bank and Save and Pay” also appears to have been used by several post offices. Reported examples were sent to or from Massachusetts.
Unofficial Markings— Liberty Bonds

“A variety of other Liberty Bond related markings exist from during the first, second, and third Liberty Loan drives.”
Unofficial Markings—“Your Patriotic Duty”

A variety of different markings reading “Your Patriotic Duty—Buy a Liberty Loan Bond” appear on mail originating from federal government offices. The markings appear to have been mostly used during the First Liberty Loan (May and June 1917) and the Second Liberty Loan (October 1917) but also exist during the Third Liberty Loan.
Unofficial Markings—Other Liberty Bond Markings

Jun. 9, 1917
Washington, DC to Match, TN
“DO YOUR BIT! BUY A LIBERTY LOAN BOND / Inquire at any Bank or Post Office”

Mimic of official handstamp

Sep. 20, 1917
St. Louis, MO to Healdton, OK
“Don’t let the SON go down / 4th Liberty Bonds”

Apr. 3, 1918
Berkeley, CA
“BUY BONDS BUY IN BERKELEY”

Apr. 26, 1918
“BACK UP OUR BOYS / BUY LIBERTY BONDS / NOW”

Oct. 10, 1917
Cincinnati, OH to Seymour, CT

Oct. 23, 1917
Marion, IN to La Porte, IN
“SAVE YOUR MONEY / OWN U.S. LIBERTY BONDS”

Some Liberty Bond markings were local in scope or included pictorial elements.
Unofficial Markings—Thrifty Stamps

Jul. 1, 1918
Olympia, WA to Urbana, IL
“THRIVE BY THRIFT / Buy War Savings Stamps”

Feb. 8, 1918
Washington, DC to Appleton, WI
“THRIVE BY THRIFT / Buy War Savings Stamps”

Apr. 5, 1918
Elmira, NY to Syracuse, NY
“A Quarter a Day / Keeps the Kaiser Away / (Buy 25¢ Thrift Stamps)”

Jan. 10, 1919
New York, NY to Chicago, IL
“Buy Thrift Stamps / from your carrier”

Jan. 24, 1918
Washington, DC to Philadelphia, PA
“THRIVE BY THRIFT / Buy War Savings Stamps”

Jan. 11, 1918
Washington, DC to Hartford, CT
“THRIVE BY THRIFT / Buy War Savings Stamps.”

A different group of markings were sporadically used to promote the sale of Thrift Stamps and War Savings Stamps instead of the much more expensive Liberty Bonds.
A few markings explicitly promoted the sale of the low-denomination (25-cent) Thrift Stamps instead of the more expensive ($5) War Savings Stamps.
Unofficial Markings—Thrift Stamps and War Savings Stamps

Dec. 15, 1917
Waukesha, WI to Milwaukee, WI

“WAR SAVINGS STAMPS / WISCONSIN SAVES & SERVES”

Jul. 15, 1918
Intervale, NH to Derry, NH, forwarded to York Beach, ME

“BUY WAR STAMPS / FROM YOUR / LETTER CARRIER”

Some markings are local in scope or appear to have been locally produced.