
Letters to the Stars!

Fan mail to Hollywood movie stars is known from 1918 to the present day, from every corner of the globe. During this time, an extensive network of fan mail logistics has been developed by Hollywood studios, by private firms, and by fan clubs. This five frame exhibit traces the social, philatelic, and entertainment history illustrated by “Letters to the Stars”.

Purpose

To chronicle the importance and postal history of Hollywood fan mail.

Scope

Surveys the development of fan mail during the silent film era to the modern day and concludes with it being replaced by Internet communication with the stars. This exhibit is the result of a 30-year study of over 40,000 fan mail covers.

Plan

- ★ Frame 1—Definition of fan mail and why it was important to the stars, to the studios, to the fans and to movie history.
- ★ Frame 2—Illustration of sixteen different routes a letter could take from a movie fan to a movie star.
- ★ Frame 3 & 4—Shows a wide array of auxiliary markings used by the studios and other organizations to re-direct fan mail to the proper address.
- ★ Frame 5—Fan mail from extreme and unusual places including soldiers during WWI, WWII and the Falklands campaign.

Rarity/Research

Key items have the caption boxed in **blue**. All references to “Discovery copy” are from articles published by the exhibitor.

Letters to the Stars—Synopsis

Minnesota Stamp Expo 2026

Introduction

This 5 frame exhibit traces the social, philatelic, and entertainment history illustrated by “Letters to the Stars”, letters written by movie fans to their favorite movie stars.

Changes since last exhibited at a WSP show

1. Completely re-done for Boston 2026
2. Inclusion of additional material including the first recorded example of a forwarding mark to Pickford Studios and the first recorded Monogram Studio auxiliary marking. Also, the purpose of an elusive “Member S.P.S. Club” label recorded on only 7 fan covers is explained supported by new research.
3. A concluding piece showing a fan mail letter with a marking asking the sender to contact the movie star via a website signifying the end of written fan mail.

Treatment and Philatelic Importance

There are four main goals of the exhibit:

1. Demonstrate how fan mail was important to the fan, to the studios, to the stars and as a documentation of movie history.
2. Chronicle the routes fan mail letters took to reach the intended star.
3. Illustrate fan mail auxiliary markings to explain fan mail logistics.
4. Document fan mail from extreme and unusual locations.

Fan mail was important to the movie-viewing public, as fans believed they could communicate with their favorite stars. The studios actively cultivated the illusion that the stars read their fan mail; however, the sheer volume of fan mail made this impossible.

Studios valued fan mail – the content of fan mail was monitored by the studios to assess a star’s popularity and perhaps even re-brand the star. Hollywood studios kept accurate records of fan mail received by each star.

Fan mail was important to the stars, as stars that received large quantities of fan mail could negotiate for better roles and greater salary.

Fan mail is historically important as it preserves the memory of long-defunct movie studios and stars.

Many items in the exhibit are important postal history items in their own right.

Philatelic and Related Knowledge, Personal Study and Research

This exhibit is based on a 30-year study of over 40,000 fan mail covers spanning the time period of the silent film era to the modern day. From this study, important items that explain or highlight the development of fan mail were selected for the exhibit. Personal research is published in several *Congress Book* articles and in *The American Philatelist*.

The latter reference is a good short summary of the topic and is available on-line.

[1] “The Golden Age of Hollywood”, Regis Hoffman and Thomas Richards. *Congress Book* 2018.

[2] “The Growth of the United States Movie Industry During the Silent Film Era”, Regis Hoffman and Thomas Richards. *Congress Book* 2016.

[3] “I Am Your Biggest Fan – How Private Auxiliary Markings Directed Letters from Movie Fans to Movie Stars”. Regis Hoffman and Thomas Richards. *The American Philatelist*, December, 2022.

<https://stamps.org/news/news-archives/c/collecting-insights/cat/stamps-in-history/post/i-am-your-biggest-fan>

Exhibit Structure

Frame 1: Significance of Fan Mail

The first section illustrates how fan mail was important to fans, the studios and the stars. Key items are:

- **The only recorded fan mail cover from a member of the American Expeditionary Force in WWI.**
- **An inter-office memo from the Paramount Pictures Fan Mail Department to actress Betty Hutton, listing the amount of fan mail received during the week of February 17, 1945.**
- **Two of the seven recorded covers bearing a “Member – S.P.S. – Club” label - used on fan mail from members of the Screen Players Syndicate to gain attention for their fan letters.**

The second section illustrates how fan mail is an important record of many of the studios from the silent era that no longer exist – examples are a cover **addressed to Charlie Chaplin at Chaplain Studios**, a cover **addressed to silent film actress Mildred Harris (wife of Charlie Chaplain) at Jewel Productions in New York City and forwarded to the Universal Film Manufacturing Company (now Universal Studios)** and covers sent to long-forgotten Sunset and Bunton Studios.

Frame 2: Addressing Fan Mail

Getting a letter to a star was not always easy, but resourceful fans found a way. Illustrated are at least 16 ways fan letters could be routed to a star including:

- To cinema trade publications
- To casting companies
- To New York City offices of the movie studios
- To United Kingdom offices of US studios

Key items showing the routes fan letters travelled include:

- **A WWI “I Am Well” British Field Post Card to Charlie Chaplin at Essanay Studios in Chicago and forwarded to Hollywood.**
- **An envelope addressed to actress Lotus Long while she was filming on location in Tahiti.**

- **An envelope to a French silent film actress’s residence in Hollywood, but she had returned to France and the letter was forwarded to her home in Paris.**

Frames 3-4: Fan Mail Private Auxiliary Markings

Fans addressed their letters to a star at a particular studio, often guessing at the studio. If the guess was incorrect, the letter was forwarded, sometimes with a studio marking (reading “Not At ...”, or “Uncalled for At ...”). Examples of such markings are:

**UNCALLED FOR AT NOT AT UNIVERSAL STUDIO
METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER**

Examples of auxiliary markings used by the Hollywood studios

Only about 1-2% of fan mail bears these markings. **Shown are the earliest recorded Fox studio marking** (“Not At Fox” applied in 1920), and numerous other markings—**many the only recorded or discovery copies** from firms such as Pathe Studios, Metropolitan Studios, M.G.M., Warner Brothers and United Artists. **A spectacular piece is a postal stationery card from Yugoslavia to actor Farley Granger with three studio markings.**

A proving piece is a **USPO Form 4416 Forwarding Packet of Mail from actress Paula Raymond to her home address, illustrating how fan mail was bundled together before forwarding.**

Recent additions are the **only recorded Pickford-Fairbanks Studio auxiliary marking** and the **only recorded Not at Monogram marking.**

Frame 5: Unusual Usages + Conclusion

Fan mail was sent from extreme locations and this frame chronicles movie fans’ devotion to their favorite stars regardless of the circumstances.

This frame includes items that are postal history in their own right and made more exclusive by their being sent to movie stars. Examples of interest:

- Fan mail from a French soldier in WWI to silent film actress Mary Pickford
- Envelope from a Russian Jewish immigrant in the French Quarter of Shanghai to Deanna Durbin
- Post card from a WWII soldier stationed on Ascension Island to Maria Montez
- Card to the Andrews Sisters from a Japanese-American internee
- Airmail letter to actress Doris Day from a British soldier serving in the Falkland Islands after its liberation from Argentina

The exhibit concludes with an envelope to TV star John Wells with a handstamp reading “Refused – Return to Sender – Please correspond with Warner Bros. shows and stars at www.warnerbros.com”. Fan mail is now replaced by fan email.