

3.5 1931 Story of the Shark

The swimming postmen risked their lives in the shark-infested seas around Niuafo'ou

Examples of shark teeth



In 1987 a set of four pictorial shark stamps was issued

Hammerhead

Tiger

Gray Nurse

Great White



The 60s value from 1996 commemorating Tin Can Mail pioneers. Charles Ramsay swimming among sharks.

with SPECIMEN overprint

Monochrome Bromide Proof



Postman Among Sharks.

Mr. Ramsay is leaving his job as the swimming postman of the South Seas. For 11 years, he says his job has been to swim out to ships from the Island of Niuafo'ou, in the Tonga group, and tow back letters for the island in a 45-pound biscuit tin, while sharks swam alongside.

His "route" was about a mile. He explained that swells beat against the rocky shores of the island with such force that it was "impossible" to take out or bring back any sort of craft. When asked if he had not feared the sharks, he replied: "They always seemed playful, but never molested me."

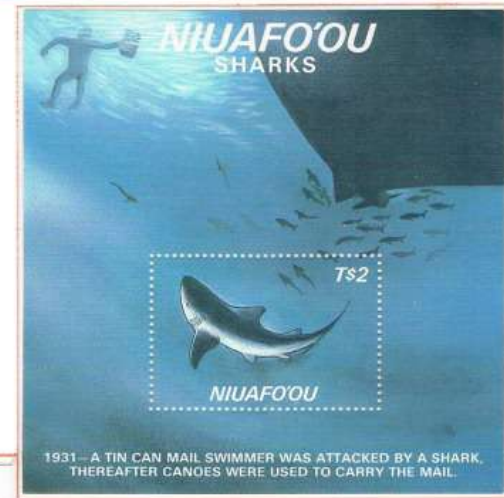
In 2012 a set of four pictorial zebra shark stamps was issued



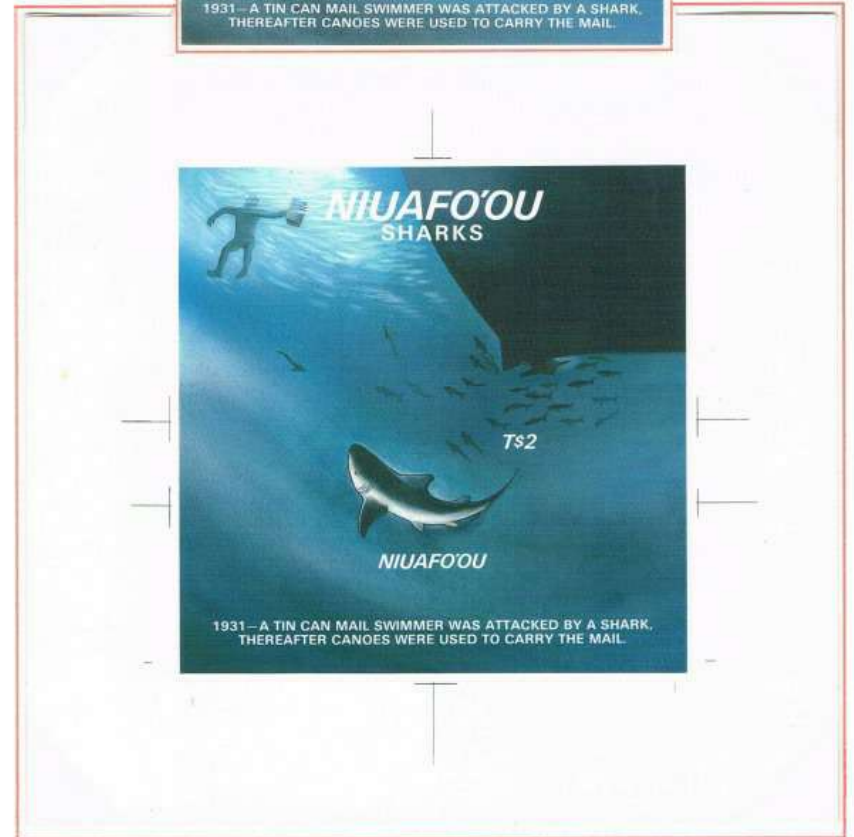
3.5 1931 Story of the Shark

The bravery of a Tin Can Mail swimmer among sharks

1987 miniature sheet



Shark and a Tin Can Mail swimmer

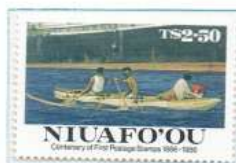


Cramlain proof of which no more than five were produced

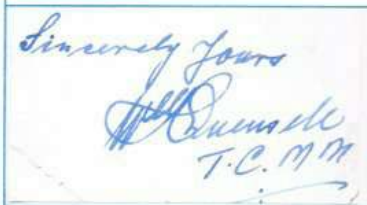
3.5 1931 Story of the Shark

In 1931, a swimmer was killed by a shark, so Queen Salote decreed that all future mail was to be carried by outrigger canoes, but some swimmers continued to "swim" the Mail.

The 57s and T\$2.50 stamps from the 1986 set to commemorate the centenary of first Tongan stamps which show use of outrigger canoes collecting Tin Can Mail



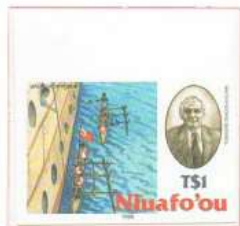
Early 1930s photograph showing Tin Can Mail collection, and signed on the reverse by W. G. Quensell T.C.M.M.



T\$1 stamp from the 1996 set of Tin Can Mail pioneers. Walter Quensell and transferring mail from canoes to ship.



Imperf plate proof



Monochrome Bromide Proof



with SPECIMEN overprint



In the philatelic press, it had been reported (*unsubstantiated, but believed to be true*) that because of the change in their working conditions, the swimmers threatened to go on strike. (or did go on strike) unless, or until they were paid \$10 (\$2) per swim. There was another report that Tin Can Mail had been discontinued (*untrue*) as the surviving postmen asked for a rise and got the sack.

3.6 Walter Quensell's promotion of Tin Can Mail

Walter Quensell publicised and promoted Tin Can Mail in philatelic magazines and newspapers

Promotional articles appeared in many philatelic magazines including *The Australian Stamp Journal* and *The American Philatelist*, where in the latter for October 1934 it was reported "*The Tin Can Mail which has been widely publicised in the stamp and daily newspapers, has grown to tremendous proportions, and that the mail dropped at Niuafo'ou on 27th July [1934] totalled over 16,000 letters*". People from all over the world wrote, enclosing 6d and a self-addressed envelope. For £1 they could receive the entire set of definitives.

Lawrence S Clark (*bibliography - sheet 1*) records that in 1946, Walter Quensell in writing to an Anne Skinner, said "*during my 27 years on the old rock Tin Can, I've landed between 750 and 900 mails....only two were lost but found later. I've sent about 1,500,000 covers into the world to some 148 different nations or states*".

3.6.1 Examples of covers involving money

A 1938 cover from Melbourne, Australia believed to contain coin

This cover was addressed to W. G. Quensell, T.C.C.M.M [Tin Can Canoe Mail Man], with a Melbourne postmark for 23rd April 1938,



The cover almost certainly contained a letter requesting a Tin Can Mail cover or covers, together with coin hence the reason why it was registered. A rectangular mauve boxed rubber hand stamp has been applied reading -

OFFICIALLY REGISTERED SUPPOSED TO CONTAIN COIN

The cover also had a good example of "Inward" mis-spelt as "Inwarb"

3.6.1 Examples of covers involving money

A 1935 cover from Walter Quensell to Christchurch, New Zealand about non-payment of fees for Tin Can Mail servicing

A cover to New Zealand, which was self-addressed by a Mr R. Congdon from Christchurch, has postmarks for Niuafou'ou for 12th and 13th February 1935



Reference 2

Mr Congdon wrote to Mr Quensell enclosing two self-addressed covers for Tin Can Mail servicing, but he did not enclose the fee of 6d per cover (2½d. for postage and 3½d. for servicing). However, Walter Quensell did service the covers, but enclosed a letter explaining the charges. (see next page)



The reverse of the cover (reduced)

The cachet on the reverse is-

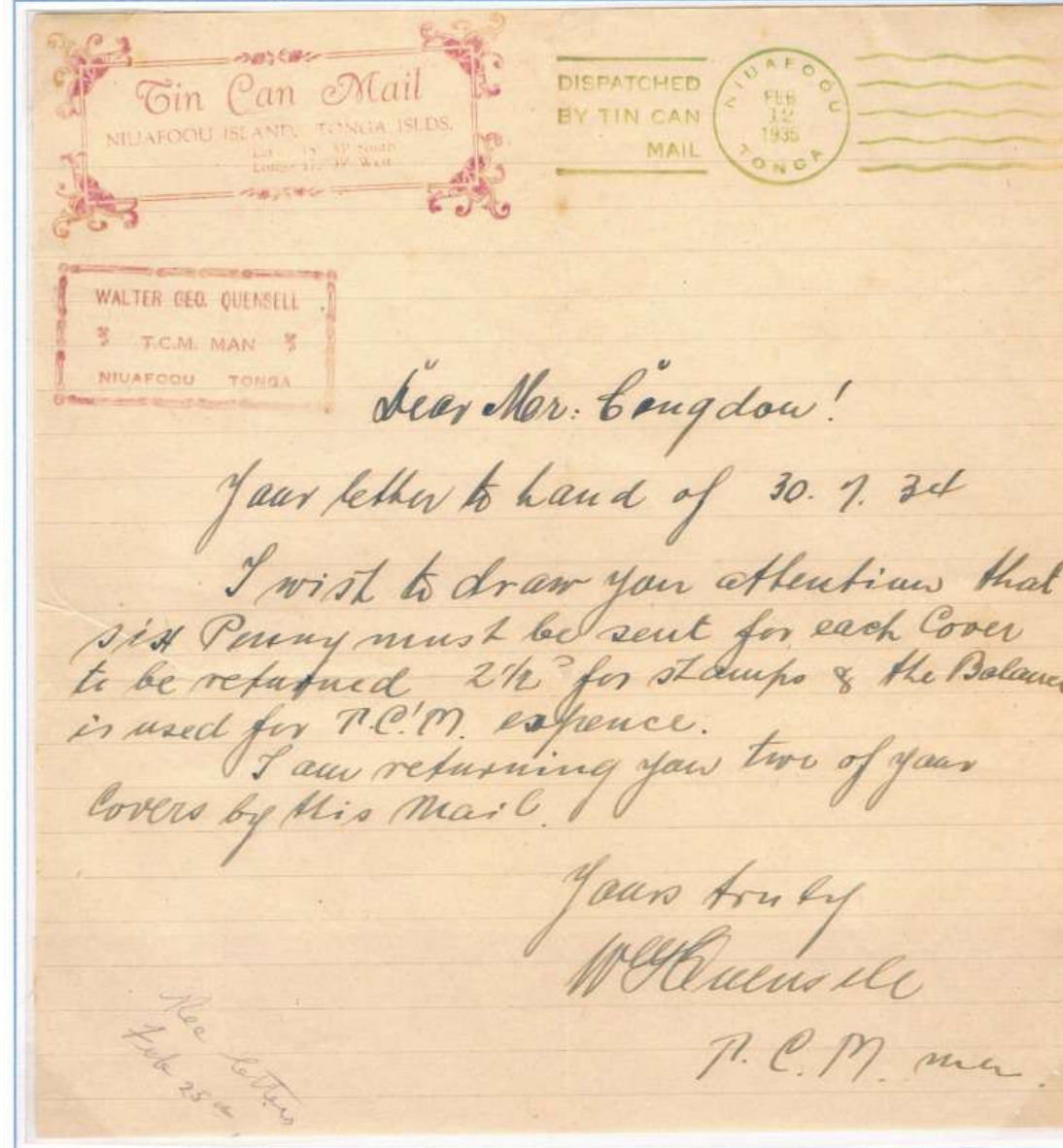
Reference 1. B-21 Rarity DD

3.6.1 Examples of covers involving money

The letter written by Walter Quensell to Mr Congdon about non-payment of servicing fees

In the letter dated 12th February 1935, Walter Quensell explained that the fee for each cover was 6d, 2½d. for postage and 3½d. for expenses. Nevertheless, he returned the two covers, both serviced.

It is not known if Mr Congdon subsequently obliged Mr Quensell with 1/- to cover the fee for the two covers.



3.6.1 Examples of covers involving money

A 1936 cover to Australia from Mr J Nete, Postmaster of Niuafu'ou about the cost of Tin Can Mail cacheting

Mr Hendrie wrote to the Postmaster (Mr Nete) of Niuafu'ou requesting a Tin Can Mail cover, but failed to enclose any money. Mr Nete therefore replied to Mr Hendrie saying that he should write direct to Mr Quensell and enclose 6d for the cost of Tin Can Mail cacheting.



Reference 2

On the face of the cover, the Niuafu'ou postmark is for 22nd September 1936, with a Mosman N.S.W receiving mark for 8th December 1936

The reverse of the cover (reduced)



On the reverse is a Paquebot Sydney mark and a note from Mr Nete saying that the fee for cachet is 3d.

[it was actually 3½d. plus 2½d. for postage]

22.9.36
Tin Can Co.

Dear Sir,
Please notify that the fee for the cacheting of ~~one~~ cover with the all the tin can mail is 6d. If you want it to be marked in that way you write direct to Mr. W. G. Quensell the Tin Can mail man. Very sincerely
J Nete
Postmaster

3.6.2 Innovative covers routed via Niuafu'ou

Two covers to the USA that were routed via Niuafu'ou to obtain Tin Can Mail cachets

This 4th August 1934 "Late Fee" cover from New Zealand to USA was sent via Niuafu'ou to receive Tin Can Mail cachets



The Tongan 2½d. stamp, was applied either in New Zealand or Niuafu'ou for the privilege of getting the cover back on board a ship, or perhaps to cover the postage for the whole journey from Niuafu'ou to USA.

This 1st December 1939 cover was addressed by Mr Rudy to the Post Office, Niuafu'ou, Tonga Per "TIN CAN MAIL" with his own return address typed on the cover. The intention was for the cover to be carried by Tin Can Mail and receive a number of Tin Can Mail cachets. It arrived in Niuafu'ou, was duly serviced and mailed back to Mr Rudy on 1st March 1940.



The Tongan 2½d. stamp, possibly applied in USA, covered the postage from Niuafu'ou back to Mr Rudy in America

3.6.2 Innovative covers routed via Niuafo'ou

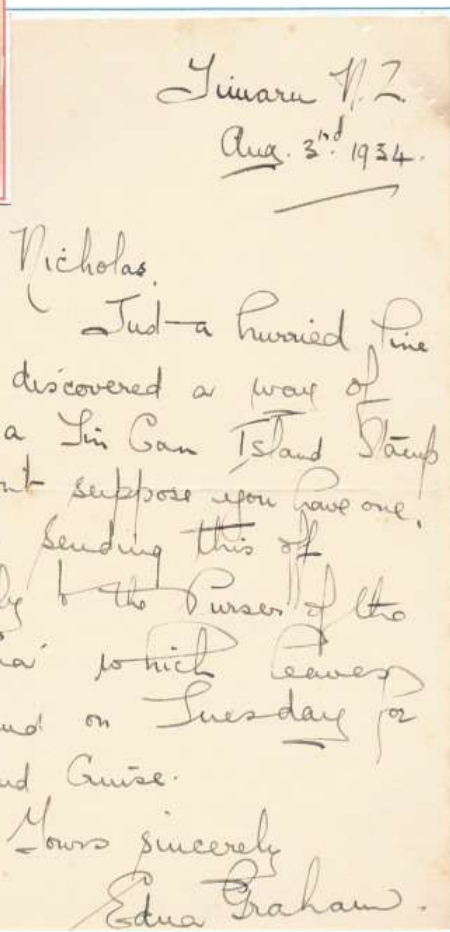
A 1934 cover from New Zealand to China routed via Niuafo'ou to obtain Tin Can Mail cachets



The Niuafo'ou postmark is indistinct, but the enclosed letter from Timaru, New Zealand is dated 3rd August 1934

After receiving the Tin Can Mail cachets, the cover then continued its journey to China via Hong Kong.

The boxed manuscript mark reads "kwan" short for "Hoi kwan" meaning "Customs".



The reverse of the cover (reduced)



On the reverse of the cover is a receiving mark for Victoria, Hong Kong for 3rd November 1934, and a Chinese receiving mark which translates to 8th November.

3.7 1934 South Seas Exploration Cruises

The S. S. City of Los Angeles made two South Seas Exploration Cruises in 1934. Charles Ramsay, after a two year absence, returned for his last two "swims" on both cruises.

The duration of the first cruise from 12th January 1934 was 40 days and over 12,000 miles, the ship returning to Los Angeles on 21st February. The images below from the Cruise publicity brochure appear courtesy The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.



Passenger prices, including shore excursions and entertainment, ranged from \$400 for an inside cabin on C deck, sharing a public bath, up to \$2,000 for a de-luxe suite on A deck, with private bath tub and toilet. The pre-advertised itinerary was for the ship to call at Nukahiva - Marquesas Islands - French Polynesia (20th January), Tahiti - French Polynesia (22nd), Raratonga - Cook Islands (26th), Nuku'alofa - Tonga (29th), Noumea - New Caledonia (2nd February), Suva - Fiji (5th), Apia - British Samoa (6th), Pago Pago - American Samoa (7th), Honolulu - Hawaii (14th), Hilo - Hawaii (15th) and Los Angeles (21st). Charles Ramsay joined the S.S. Los Angeles as Assistant Cruise Director.

When approaching Niuafo'ou, over 2,000 items of mail were sealed into two 40lb biscuit tins, and thrown overboard and "swam" to Niuafo'ou by Ramsay and the native swimmers.

40 days-Over 12,000 miles'
... from **\$400** including
entertainment and shore excursions

PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENT
Complete illustrated prospectus on request

SOUTH SEAS EXPLORATION CRUISE

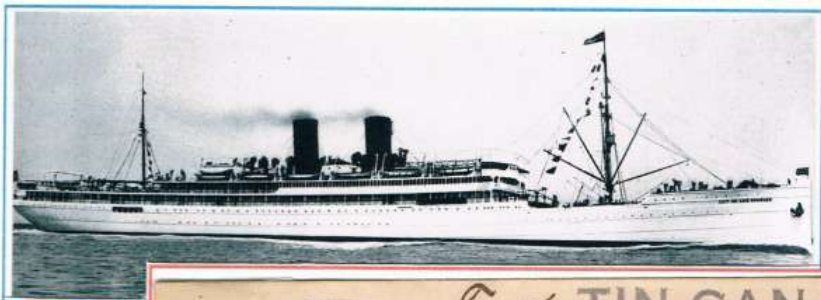
Nukahiva - Marquesas Is. - Tahiti - Raratonga - Nuku'alofa -
Noumea - Suva - Apia - Pago Pago - Honolulu - Hilo

One ship designed for tropical trading: the
S. S. CITY OF LOS ANGELES

3.7 1934 South Seas Exploration Cruises

A photograph of the S. S. City of Los Angeles and two first South Seas Exploration Cruise covers for 7th February and 16th April 1934 respectively

This first cruise itinerary did not include Niuafou'ou (only Nuku'alofa, the capital of the Kingdom of Tonga). However, Charles Ramsay persuaded Captain E.R. Johanson to anchor off-shore at Niuafou'ou to deliver the mail



A rarer cover to Paul Diefenderfer in American Samoa with manuscript "First [Day] per S.S. City of Los Angeles"

Reference 1. ML-31 Rarity D with a circular Tin Can Mail cachet dated 7th February 1934,

Reference 1. C-17 Rarity D On the reverse is a receiving backstamp for Pago Pago 9th February.



It is not known why the other type of cruise covers, such as this one, did not receive a Niuafo'ou postmark, but instead, they have Honolulu machine cancels for 16th April 1934, nearly two months after the end of the cruise.



3.7 1934 South Seas Exploration Cruises

Another South Seas Exploration Cruise cover to Green Bay, Wisconsin postmarked for 16th April 1934. Covering letter and original Wisconsin newspaper cutting about Tin Can Island



The letter continues in manuscript on the reverse -
 "When white people get here they get so lazy they don't even want to write, so our letters are written for us, pretty snappy. It is Wed Jan 17, but this letter won't be mailed until Feb 7....." Mabel



S.S. CITY OF LOS ANGELES
 SOUTH SEAS EXPLORATION CRUISE

At Sea,
 February 7th. 1934.

Dear Gen

I am mailing this letter from the ship and instead of it being put on the deck for the postal authorities in the regular way, it will be placed in a sealed tin can and thrown overboard when we reach the island of Niuafo'ou. Mail has always been sent ashore in this manner; and by the way, it is also known as Tin Can Island for this reason. If the weather is suitable, a Mr. Ramsay on the "City of Los Angeles" will swim the can ashore.

It certainly is an extraordinary island. One of the officers of the ship told me that it is circular in shape and has a fresh water lake in the center. From above it must look like a large doughnut. He also informed me that Futu was the largest village on the island but that in 1829 it was totally destroyed by an active volcano. Only the front of the little white church is the entire remaining evidence. Its largest village now is Angaha and less than half a dozen white people live there. I am certainly looking forward to seeing it.

Must leave you for now, but shall tell you more about it when I see you.

(over)

3.7 1934 South Seas Exploration Cruises

The second S.S. City of Los Angeles 1934 South Seas Exploration cruise carried 15,000 letters destined for Tin can Island

The second 1934 cruise left San Francisco on 27th June, and "Tin Can Island" was, this time, included in the planned itinerary, arriving there on 24th July. The 44-day cruise arrived back in San Francisco on 10th August.



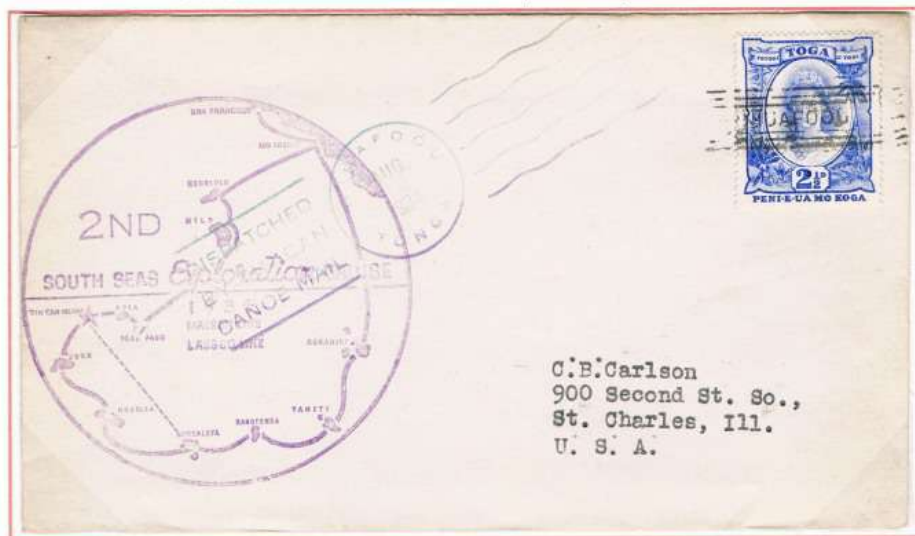
When the Matson cruise liner City of Los Angeles leaves here soon, its holds will carry 15,000 letters, pictured with Miss Velma Anderson at top, to be delivered to Tin Can Island, Niaufo, by swimming messengers. Stamp collectors wishing to have rare Niaufo stamps on return mail, have dispatched this mail.

The text on this postcard -

When the Matson cruise liner City of Los Angeles leaves here soon, its holds will carry 15,000 letters pictured with Miss Velma Anderson at top, to be delivered to Tin Can Island, Niaufo (sic) by swimming messengers. Stamp Collectors wishing to have rare Niaufo (sic) stamp on return mail have dispatched this mail.

Newspaper clipping dated 22nd June 1934

A 2nd 1934 Exploration cruise cover with a circular cachet, similar to the one on the 1st cruise, but now with "2ND" added. The Niuafou'ou date stamp is for August 13th 1934.



Reference 2

The circular cachet with "2ND" added is Reference 1. C - 19a Rarity DD

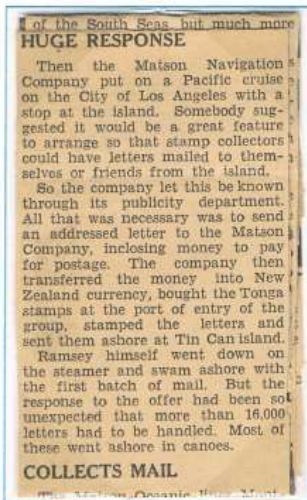
3.7 1934 South Seas Exploration Cruises

The second S.S. City of Los Angeles 1934 South Seas Exploration cruise

On the second cruise, the itinerary included Tin Can Island as listed in the cachet showing the planned route. A typical cruise cover to Rochester, New York with the more common postmark written as 13 AUG 1934.



Original U.S.A. newspaper reports from 5th and 12th September 1934 (part only of the latter is shown) about the second City of Los Angeles South Seas Exploration cruise



It was reported that 16,000 (or was it 15,000?) items of mail from Tin Can Island are en route back to America

Mail From Tin Can Isle On Way Back to America

Matson Line Rush Order for 16,000 Stamps Exhausts Old Issue

The much-discussed and widely publicized philatelist mail from Niuafou (Tin Can Island), some 16,000 letters of which were sent out on the South Seas exploration cruise liner City of Los Angeles last June is en route back to America, according to information received by the Matson Line.

A very few of these letters have already arrived. The balance will be picked up when and if passing ships are able to make connections with the swimming mailmen at Niuafou. All covers should not be expected, however, for a period of several months.

Philatelists who sent mail by the first cruise last January, as well as collectors who mailed covers on the June cruise will be interested in knowing that a new series of stamps was apparently required for the June cruise, which will immensely enhance the value of the first cruise covers, as those stamps are now apparently obsolete.

The original 2-cent stamp was a two-color imprint of the image of Queen Salote in black overlaid on a dark blue ground. The new stamp is the same design but is a single color, it being printed in a rather bright purple.

Whether the single color new series is a temporary job required by the Matson Line's rush order for 16,000 stamps is not known, but there is a possibility that this is true. If so, this second cruise series will also carry a very high valuation from the philatelist's standpoint.



THE SWIMMING MAIL-MAN OF THE SOUTH SEAS IS GREETED BY SHIP'S OFFICERS AND PASSENGERS AFTER SWIMMING HIS WATERY MAIL ROUTE

Charles Ramsay boarding the S.S. Los Angeles on its second cruise

3.7 1934 South Seas Exploration Cruises

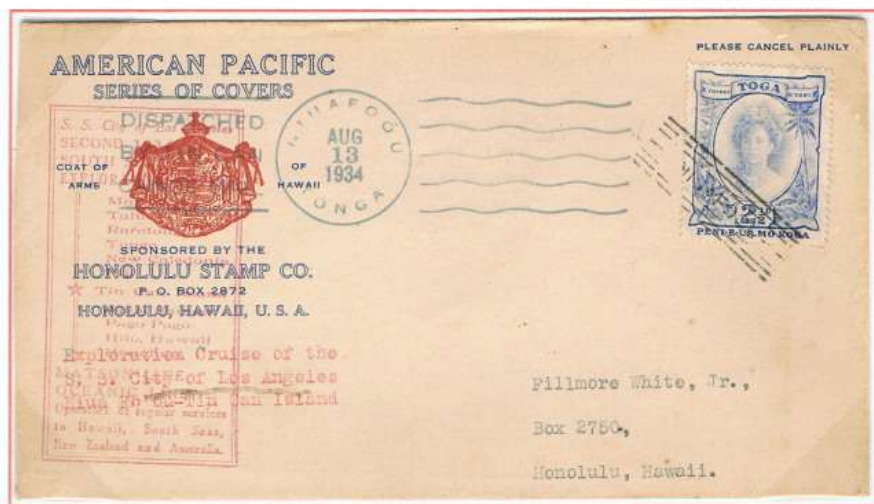
Two covers posted on board the S.S. City of Los Angeles on its second 1934 South Seas Exploration cruise with the postmark date type as AUG 13 1934 instead of 13 Aug 1934

These two different covers are the only examples known to the author

A cover to Arverne, New York, with the itinerary cachet on the right. All others seen by the author have it on the left



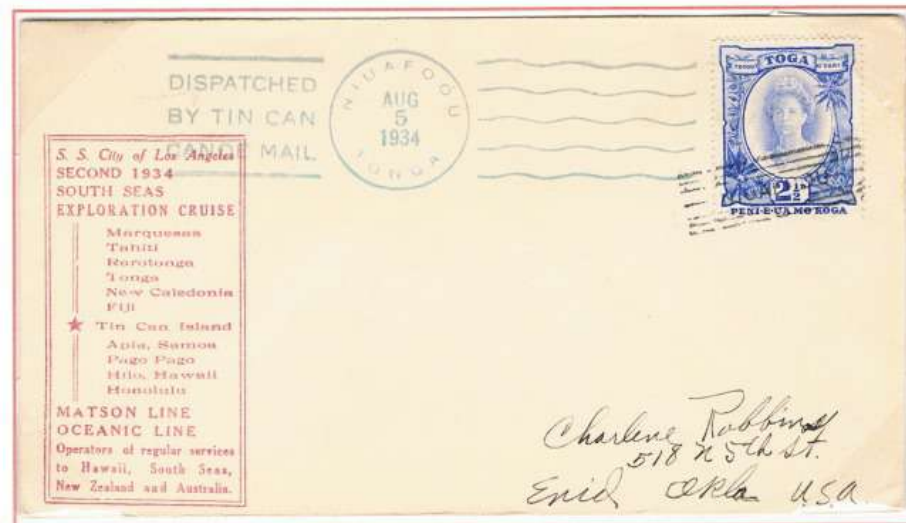
A cover to Honolulu, Hawaii, has the cruise itinerary cachet applied to a cover especially printed for the American Pacific series of covers, sponsored by the Honolulu Stamp Co., Hawaii. The only one of its kind known to the author.



3.7 1934 South Seas Exploration Cruises

Two further covers posted on board the S. S. City of Los Angeles on its second 1934 South Seas Exploration cruise

The second 1934 cruise covers are either dated 1st or 13th August, the former being the rarer of the two. However, this cover to Enid, Oklahoma, is dated 5th August, and is the only cruise cover known to the author with this date, and is not recorded by Janet Klug.



Another similar cover to Upper Montclair, New Jersey, but with only the year 1934 in the postmark.

