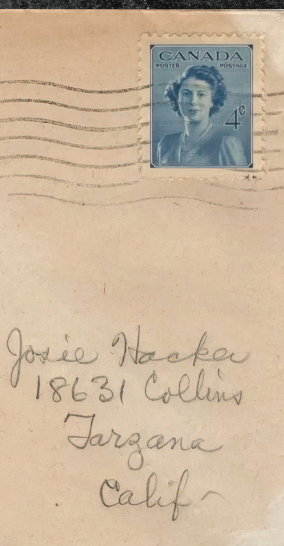
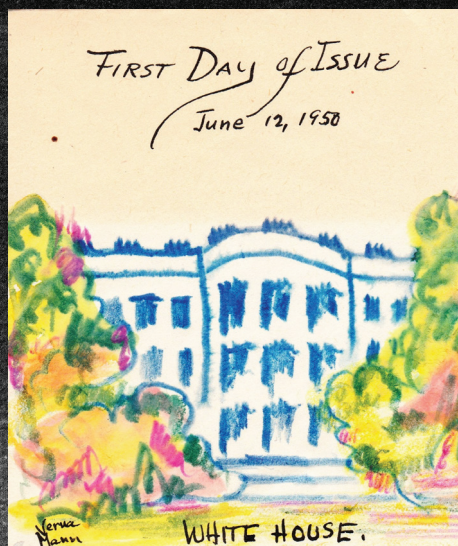


# FIRST DAYS

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2023 — NO. 468



PROFILES  
Verna  
Mann  
That Cover  
Artist  
page 26



WWII  
Patriotic  
Covers  
of Victory,  
Vermont  
page 49



the journal of the



American First Day Cover Society





CACHETMAKER

## Verna Mann – *That Cover Artist*

by Patrick J. Morgan



Figure 1. The author's first Verna Mann cover.

In late 2018, as I was preparing to retire, I returned to philately. Through this process, I ran across a cover in the Greater Mound City Stamp Club's cover collection. At some point in time, someone had donated a cover to the club that caught my eye. It was an oak leaf painted on a cover canceled from Greenleaf, Oregon, in 1951 and distinctively signed "Verna Mann." Only familiar with first day covers, I asked my fellow club members and a few dealers about this cover and learned that it was an event cover. Showing it to my wife, we both asked who "Verna Mann" was and if she was famous for painting covers. Unaware of the American Philatelic Research Library (APRL) at this time, I set off to eBay.com and Ancestry.com to find out what I could about Miss Verna Mann. After about 4 or 5 months of genealogical research, I had a pretty good handle on Verna's life and had developed a presentation to give at our club meeting. Just before the presentation, I reached out to the APRL and found that the late David Zubatsky, formerly from St. Louis, had already written an article on Verna in *First Days*.<sup>1</sup> All this led me to write this updated article with Mr. Zubatsky's encouragement.<sup>2</sup> As you read on, you will find this is a story about Verna



**Figure 2.** *Verna Mann at six months.*

Mann's life **and** her contributions to philately. I know you will find her life story as interesting as I do.

The story starts in rural Marion, Indiana, near Fort Wayne, on September 9, 1888, when Verna was born to George Washington Mann, 33, and Elizabeth Valentine Mann, 24. The 1900 census records<sup>3</sup> show that the family moved and lived at 34 West Washington, Fort Wayne, Indiana, and that George, her father, was working as a nurse. She has a younger sister, Myrtle, who was born in 1895.

In 1905, George moved to St. Helena, California,<sup>4</sup> and worked as a nurse at the St. Helena Sanitarium (Figure 3), originally known as the Rural Health Retreat.<sup>5</sup> The facility was operated for

over 130 years, making it the oldest Seventh-Day Adventist hospital. In 1891, the hospital opened a training school for nurses and was the second nursing school to be established on the west coast. Students that did not wish to pay for their education by working had to pay tuition of \$2.50 per month. Near the end of the training, they received a wage of about \$20.00 per month. In 1914, the nursing school earned its accreditation. It is thought that George moved there to train other nurses while Elizabeth, her mother, and Verna remained in Fort Wayne, Indiana. This is important to note as it explains how and why Verna and Elizabeth ended up in California.



**Figure 3.** *The St. Helena Sanitarium (Photo from geocaching.com).*

Verna married Claude William Kelly (22) on November 21, 1908, in Marion, Indiana, when she was 20. The marriage license confirmed that her mother still lived in Fort Wayne, Indiana, while her father was in St. Helena, California, working as a nurse.<sup>6</sup> The 1910 census record<sup>7</sup> and the Fort Wayne phone directory confirm Claude and Verna's marriage. Claude was reported to be a blacksmith at an automobile company which would likely be in this area of Indiana where the Auburn, Cole, Cord, Duesenberg, Marmon and Stutz were being built. At that time, Indiana ranked second only to Henry Ford's Michigan in the number of cars produced.<sup>8</sup> Verna was working as a seamstress.

Verna's story had been typical up to that point but then it began to take a few twists and turns. Many of the events to come were likely influenced by the beliefs and rituals of the Seventh-Day Adventist faith, of which they were a part.

Without any record of a divorce from Verna, Claude Kelly married (his 2nd wife) Gertrude May Kelly in Allen County, Indiana, on July 12, 1918. During this time, with George W. Mann in California, Verna and Elizabeth both started nursing in Fort Wayne.

The *St. Helena Star* reported on December 6, 1918, that G. W. Mann went to San Francisco the previous week to meet Verna, Elizabeth and Elizabeth's Mother, Sophia Valentine, who arrived from Fort Wayne.<sup>9</sup> After having been away from his family for the past 13 years, the paper reported it as a "joyous event" to have his family reunited. This reunion was short-lived. Less than a year later, on January 4, 1919, George W. Mann passed away from heart failure. At the time of George's death, *The Fort Wayne Sentinel* reported that Verna's sister, Myrtle (going by the name Ruth), was living in Bloomfield, New Jersey.<sup>10</sup>

On October 4, 1919, Verna's mom, Elizabeth, married Ulysses Grant Mann (54) of Corte Madera, California.<sup>11</sup> Ulysses was George's brother and Verna's Uncle. There is no evidence that Elizabeth and Ulysses Grant Mann ever lived together. The author believes that this marriage was based on the religious teaching of the Seventh Day Adventist and Deuteronomy 25:5, "If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger."

On October 17, 1919, the *St. Helena Star* reported that Verna was going to San Francisco to enter the Hopkins Art School.<sup>12</sup> This is the only record of Verna specifically having any artistic training or talent.

The 1920 Census<sup>13</sup> records show some interesting changes to the facts of Verna's life. Elizabeth and Verna were still living in St. Helena. Elizabeth was listed as the head of household, married, along with Verna, who was now strangely only 25, not her actual age of 32 years old. She was also listed as single rather than divorced. Both Verna and her mom were working as nurses at the sanitarium. They had several "roomers" listed as living at their residence but no indication of Elizabeth's new husband, Ulysses "Grant" Mann, living there.



Figure 5. Verna Mann's high school graduation photo.

In 1921 Verna was living in San Francisco and had an ad in the *San Francisco Chronicle*<sup>14</sup> for her services as an electrologist, by which she would "permanently shape your brows" as well as "remove superfluous hair, moles and warts." While in San Francisco, Verna lived with Mrs. J.C. Packard on Powell Street. She attended and graduated

#### HAPPY FAMILY REUNION.

G. W. Mann went to San Francisco last week and met his wife, Mrs. L. V. Mann, and their daughter, Miss Verna Mann, and Mrs. Mann's mother, Mrs. S. Valentine, who reached that city from Fort Wayne, Indiana. After a day in the metropolis the reunited family came to St. Helena and have established their home in the former Warren residence, corner Main and Adams streets. It is some thirteen years since Mr. Mann came West and to have his family with him once more has been a very joyous event. Both Mrs. Mann and Miss Mann are trained nurses and have been devoting much of their time of late years to their profession.

• • •

Figure 4. The *St. Helena Star* report on the Mann family reuniting.

#### VERNA MANN

Transferred from Fort Wayne, Indiana, '23; Music Club, '23, '24; Biology Club, '23, '24; Glee Club, '24.

Figure 6. Verna Mann's high school superlatives as listed in the 1924 Lowell High School yearbook.



from Lowell High School in 1924.<sup>15</sup> Her yearbook (Figures 5 and 6) shows her interest in music, singing and biology, as demonstrated by her club memberships.

After graduating from Lowell High School, she taught in the area until 1926. During this time, her mom, Elizabeth, continued to live and work in St. Helena, California.

In 1926, Verna moved to North Shelton Street in Burbank, California, and taught at William McKinley Elementary School, a short walk from her home. Records have yet to be found of what subjects or classes she might have taught that would help us determine her reason for starting to be a cachet artist. A local phone directory from 1928 showed that Elizabeth had moved from St. Helena and was again living with Verna in Burbank.

The 1930 Census<sup>16</sup> shows us more creative facts of life for Verna, as she had only aged three years since the 1920 census and was listed as 28 years old and never divorced. Elizabeth was shown as widowed as both George and Ulysses, who died in 1929, had passed away—throughout the '30s, little changed for both Verna and her mother. It was interesting to find that Verna was a member of the Burbank Choral Club and sang in the 1932 Olympic Chorus open and closing ceremonies.<sup>17</sup> She must have had a good voice as there is a report of her singing a solo at a minstrel show in December 1932 at the Burbank High School.<sup>18</sup> During the early '30s, she attended worship at the First Congregational Church: Glenoaks and Amherst.<sup>19</sup> The rest of the 1930s pass with no changes or additional details.

On the 1940 census,<sup>20</sup> Verna was listed as ten years older than in the 1930 census, 38, but is, in reality, 52. Surprisingly, the record shows her as divorced for the first time. In 1943, her divorced husband, Claude Kelly, passed away, likely without her having heard. Verna started a new interest and became a San Fernando Valley Mineral Society member. In late 1943, Verna was elected as the Secretary of the organization.<sup>21</sup> It is unclear what spurred her interest in this topic.

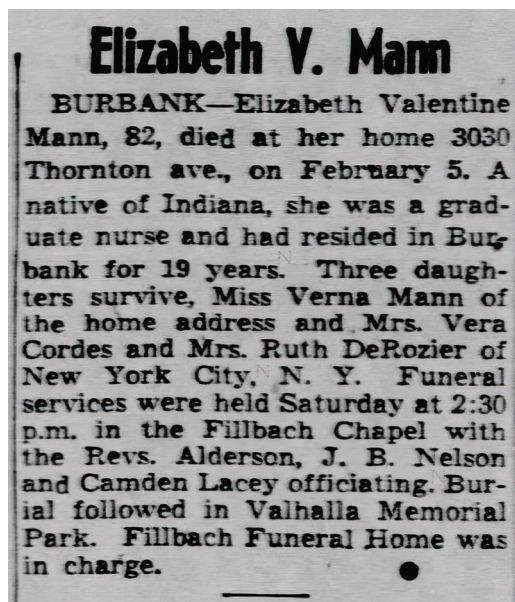


Figure 7. The February 1946 obituary for Elizabeth Mann, Verna's mother.

On February 5, 1946, Elizabeth Valentine Mann passed away at age 82 after having lived with Verna for the last 19 years of her life.<sup>22</sup> It is clear that mother and daughter had a very close bond throughout their lives based on their similar careers and time spent together. Ruth, Myrtle, is now reported in New York. For the first time, there is a mention of a third daughter, Vera Cordes. Little has been found about Vera, and it still requires research. Elizabeth was buried in Valhalla Memorial Park in North Hollywood, as was the actor Oliver Hardy. Shortly after Elizabeth's passing, Verna retired from her job as a school teacher, although an exact date has yet to be found.

In 1947, Verna started to create cachets. It is unclear what led to this new

endeavor. It is possible that due to her desire to attend art school in 1919, she still considered herself an artist, and covers would be a means to generate some income in retirement. Her earliest confirmed cover is a Scott 945 Thomas Edison FDC (February 11, 1947) with a cachet of a light bulb (Mark Goodson, owner). There is a Scott 932 Roosevelt and Whitehouse FDC from 1945 painted by Verna, but it was likely an add-on cover rather than an original FDC cachet. Verna created more than 40 covers through the remainder of the 1940s.

When Verna's talents are compared to other artists of the time (Adler, Knapp, Weigand, etc.), the aesthetic is simple, elementary and uncomplicated. In some examples, it is difficult to determine what was being depicted. While the artistry of her work is less than that of other artists of the time, her story more than makes up for the lack of talent. The figures below are some examples of her work during the 1940s.

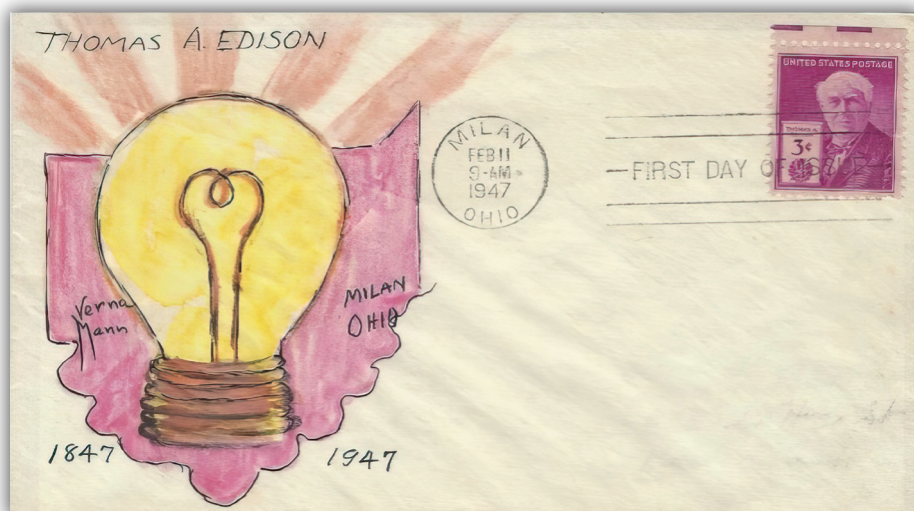


Figure 8. Verna Mann's first cachet for a first day cover.

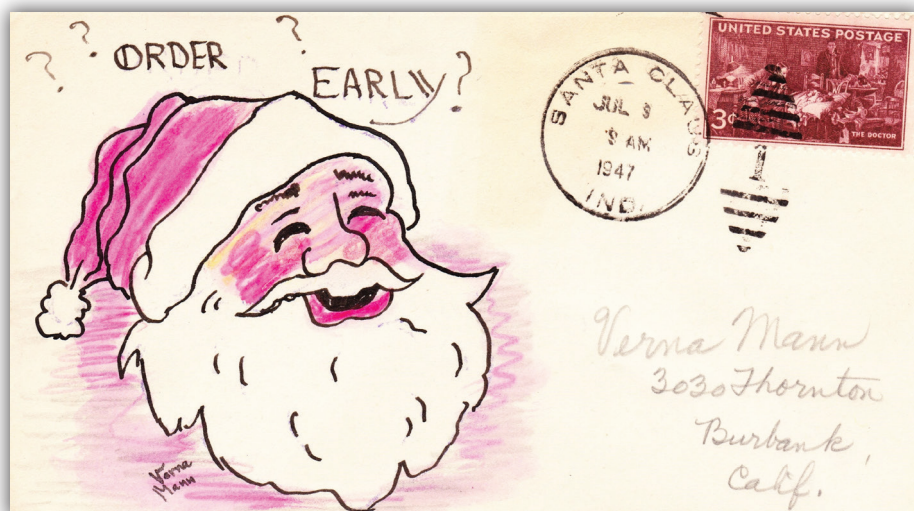


Figure 9. Verna Mann's first event cover.





Figure 10. Verna Mann's only known cover for a foreign issue.



Figure 11. A rubber stamp that Mann used on many covers.

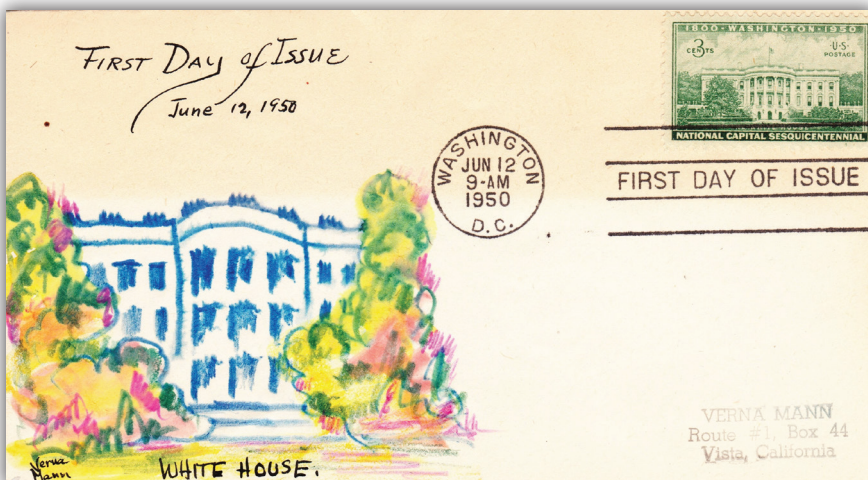


Figure 12. This is Verna's first cover after she relocated to Vista, California.

On September 26, 1949, according to a marriage license, Verna, at the age of 47 (actually 61), was married for the second time. Her new husband, James Wayne Sumner (67), lived in Tarzana, California.<sup>23, 24</sup> James was a retired mechanical engineer who had been widowed once and divorced twice. Much like her mother's marriage to Ulysses, there is no evidence that they ever lived together or that she took his name. No divorce records have been located, but it is clear that this marriage only lasted for a short time as Verna left Tarzana and was living at Route #1, Box 44, Vista, California, by June of 1950. James died in 1964, having never left the Los Angeles area.

In the early 1950s, Verna created more than 125 covers over a five-year period. Based on the addresses from the covers, she was selling FDC and event cachets across the United States to many collectors. How much she was selling them for is still unknown. If any readers have or know of any records of the sales price, please share that information. The following figures are examples of her efforts from the 50s.

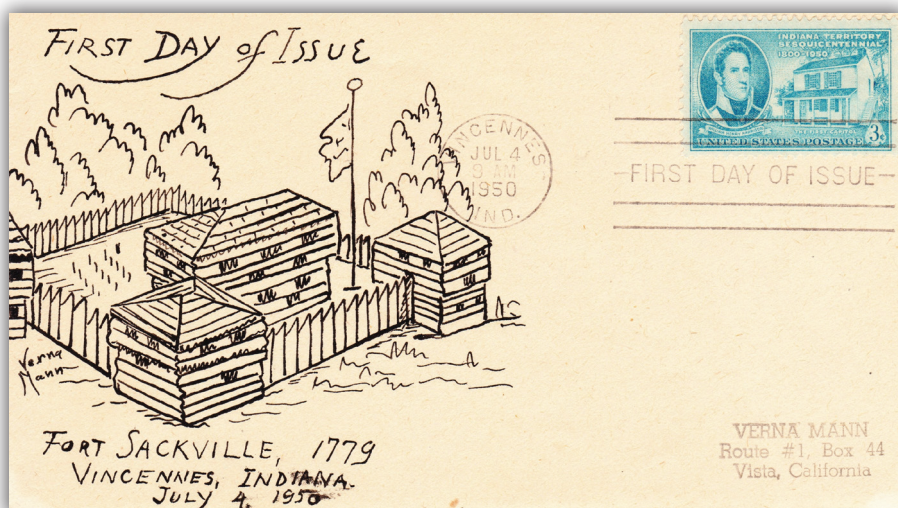


Figure 13. Pen and ink FDC for the Indiana Territory Sesquicentennial, Scott 966.



Figure 14. FDC for Kansas City Centennial, Scott 994.





Figure 15. FDC for the Landing of Cadillac at Detroit, Scott 1000.



Figure 16. Event cover labeled "Igloo, Alaska." canceled in Keller, Alaska. Scott 1005.

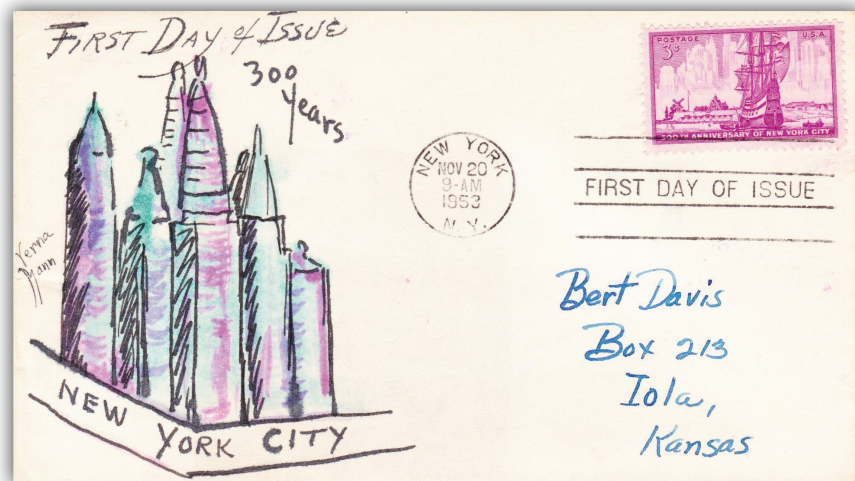


Figure 17. FDC for Scott 1027, 300th Anniversary of New York City.



Figure 18. Event cover canceled in Crosses, Arkansas, Scott 1016.

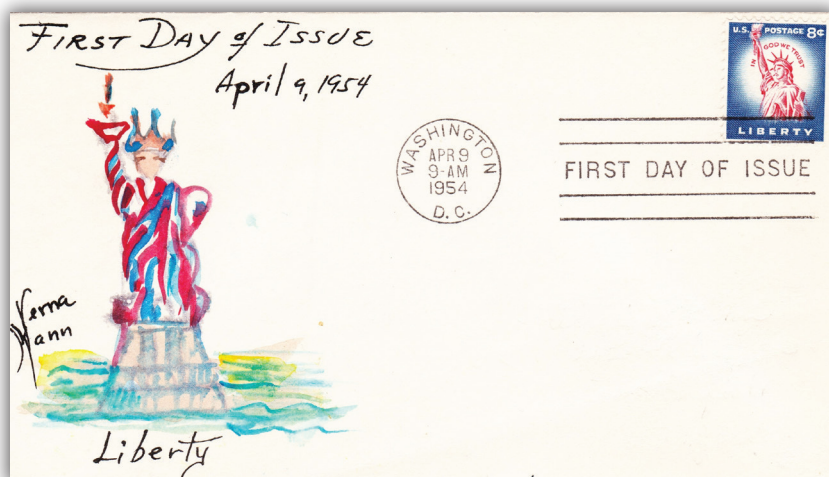


Figure 19. FDC for the 1954 8¢ Statue of Liberty issue, Scott 1041.

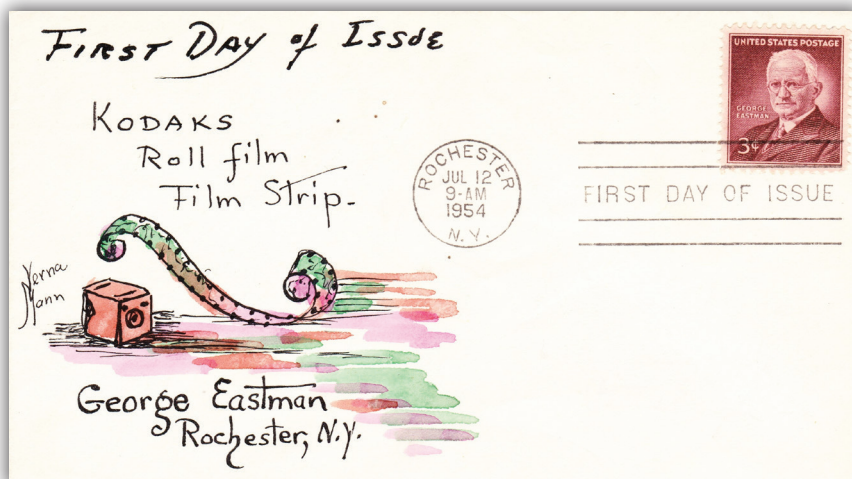


Figure 20. FDC for the George Eastman stamp, Scott 1062.



From 1950 to sometime in 1953, Verna lived at Route #1, Box 44, which the post office changed to a street address of 751 Lemon Avenue, Vista, California. A gentleman, George Isadore Stone, nine years her senior, lived in a house caddy corner to Verna at 654 Hillside Terrace. While no marriage certificate has been located, by October 1953, Verna's address had changed to 654 Hillside. In 1953 the neighbors became close and were married, her third marriage. George Stone passed away in 1962.

MISS VERNA MANN  
THAT COVER ARTIST  
654 Hillside Drive  
VISTA, CALIFORNIA

Figure 21. Verna Mann's printed label bearing a trade name, "That Cover Artist."

On a cover dated October 27, 1953, is the first use of the address label on Hillside and, more importantly, that she called herself "That Cover Artist." The fact that she took the time and effort to have a label printed certainly indicates that she was serious about her role and title of cachet artist.

It is reported that "Verna Kelly Stone" died in Sonoma, California, on August 24, 1954, at the age of 66.<sup>25</sup> There are no details regarding the events, location or cause of Verna's death or why the name Kelly is referenced in this record. She was undoubtedly deceased as George I. Stone was the administrator of the "Verna Mann Stone" estate and issued the notice to creditors on October 4, 1954.<sup>26</sup>

There were at least two covers (Figures 22 and 23) that she had completed and were in the process of being canceled at the time of her death, as they are dated after the date of her death. Her career as "That Cover Artist" concludes, her album closed, with her last known cover being a Scott C48 FDC, dated September 3, 1954.

In closing, I hope that you have found the life of Verna "That Cover Artist" Mann interesting. Her life followed an unusual path with a few twists and turns. As any life goes, she found hardships and heartache along the way — the need to hide a divorce, attend High School as an adult, and spend a good portion of her life teaching young children. All of this during some very hard times in American history and while never having any children of her own.

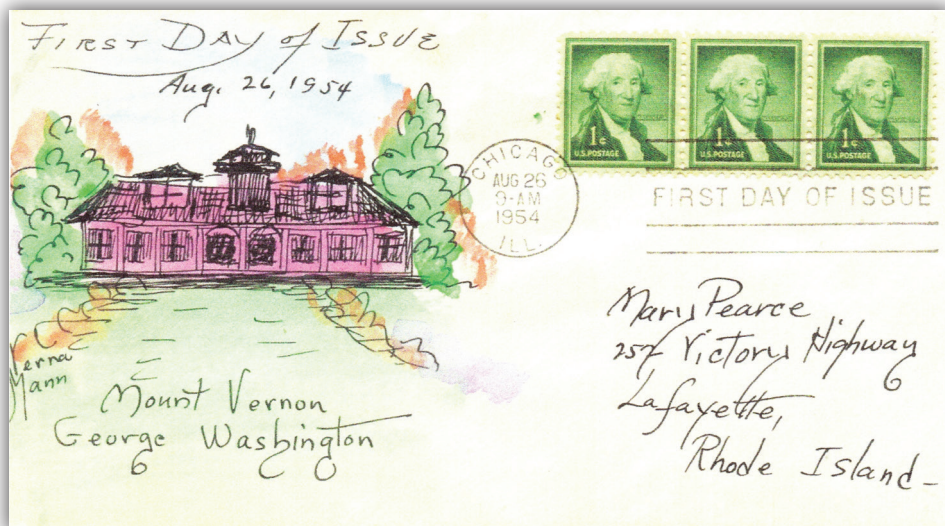


Figure 22. Mann's design for a FDC of the 1954 George Washington 1¢ issue (Scott 1031) was canceled on the day she reportedly passed away.

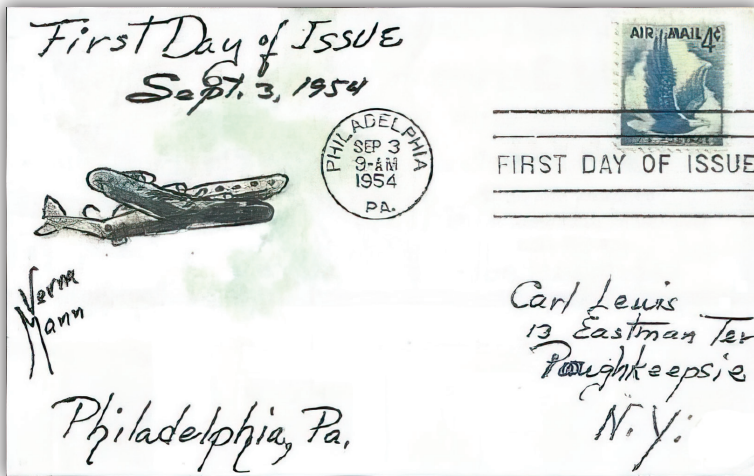


Figure 23. Verna Mann's last known cover, for Scott C48, was canceled after her passing.

With all this information, we are still left to ask, what led her to become a cachet artist? Almost 75 years since she created her first covers, at least a few of us still wonder why she started and what motivated her to paint covers and share them with people. Was it a passion for stamps? A passion for art? Or was it purely to make extra money to help pay the bills? Hopefully, during her life's journey, Verna found joy in painting the covers she left for us to collect, observe and ponder. While the story of Verna Mann leaves unanswered questions, it also motivates us to tell her story. In part so that others will continue to pursue the questions.

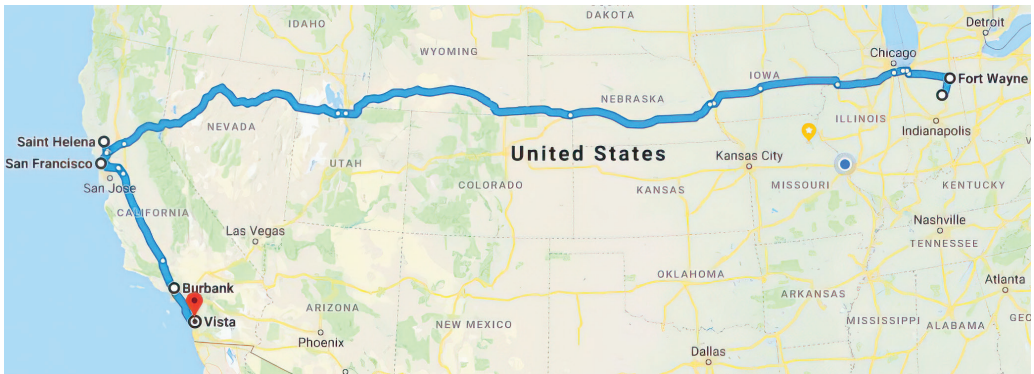


Figure 23. The journey of Verna Mann's life carried her 2,865 actual miles.

I am grateful to David Zubatsky for his counsel, expertise and encouragement in writing this update. He is greatly missed. I also want to thank my wife, Lesa, my in-house editor and cheerleader.

If you have any information that helps answer the lingering questions surrounding Verna Mann or if this work needs correction, please feel free to reach out to the author. If you have covers not included in Appendix A, please send a scanned image to [pjmorgan622@gmail.com](mailto:pjmorgan622@gmail.com) so they can be added. In exchange for the addition to the database, you will be provided read access to the Verna Mann inventory database. ☺



## Appendix A: Inventory of Known Works by Verna Mann

*Census by Scott Catalog Number*

Country of Issue	Scott No.	FDC	Cover Type		Total
			Add-On	Event	
<b>Canada</b>	276	–	–	1	1
<b>USA</b>	802	–	–	1	1
	803	–	–	4	4
	804	–	–	6	6
	806	–	–	4	4
	807	–	–	1	1
	932	–	1	–	1
	945	1	–	–	1
	947	–	–	1	1
	949	1	–	1	2
	952	1	–	2	3
	954	–	–	1	1
	955	2	–	1	3
	957	2	–	–	2
	961	2	–	–	2
	962	1	–	–	1
	964	1	–	–	1
	966	1	–	–	1
	969	1	–	1	2
	970	2	–	1	3
	977		–	4	4
	980	1	–	–	1
	981	2	–	–	2
	982	1	–	–	1
	983	2	–	–	2
	984	1	–	–	1
	985	1	–	–	1
	987	1	–	–	1
	988	1	–	1	2
	989	3	–	2	5
	990	2	–	–	2
	991	2	–	–	2
	992	3	–	1	4
	993	4	–	1	5
	994	3	–	–	3
	995	4	–	–	4
	996	8	–	–	8

# Appendix A: Inventory of Known Works by Verna Mann (continued)

Census by Scott Catalog Number

Country of Issue	Scott No.	FDC	Cover Type		Total
			Add-On	Event	
USA	997	2	–	–	2
	998	1	–	2	3
	999	1	–	1	2
	1000	6	–	–	6
	1001	3	–	–	3
	1002	2	–	1	3
	1003	1	–	–	1
	1004	3	–	–	3
	1005	–	–	3	3
	1007	1	–	–	1
	1009	2	–	–	2
	1010	1	–	–	1
	1014	2	–	–	2
	1016		–	1	1
	1017	1	–	–	1
	1018	1	–	–	1
	1019	1	–	–	1
	1020	1	–	–	1
	1021	1	–	–	1
	1022	1	–	–	1
	1023	1	–	–	1
	1024	1	–	–	1
	1025	1	–	–	1
	1026	3	–	–	3
	1027	2	–	–	2
	1028	5	–	–	5
	1029	5	–	–	5
	1031	1	–	–	1
	1035	2	–	–	2
	1060	1	–	–	1
	1061	4	–	–	4
	1062	3	–	–	3
	1063	2	–	–	2
	1337	–	1	–	1



## Appendix A: Inventory of Known Works by Verna Mann (continued)

Census by Scott Catalog Number

Country of Issue	Scott No.	FDC	Cover Type		
			Add-On	Event	Total
USA	1041B	4	–	–	4
	803, 804	–	–	1	1
	C38	1	–	–	1
	C39	1	–	–	1
	C40	1	–	–	1
	C41	3	–	–	3
	C45	4	–	–	4
	C47	1	–	–	1
	C48	1	–	–	1
	PC17	–	–	1	1
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>132</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>178</b>

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