

The *Prominent Americana*

Newsletter of the *Prominent Americans – Americana*
Series Study Group of the United States Stamp Society
(usstamps.org)

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Ideas for the Newsletter

* Some collectors adopt the challenge (and fun) of picking a favorite stamp and then specializing in it. It seems that's a very small minority of the hobby community, however. More often, one hears of a vote taken, "What's your favorite stamp?" as a popularity poll, nothing more. What say you? Do you have favorite stamp in either of these series? And if so, were you drawn to specialize in it? Curious minds want to know!

* The Americana series was launched in a turbulent period of U.S. postal history – the last months of the 10¢ letter rate when the USPS was fighting for raising rates before the Christmas mailing rush. We want to survey known covers with 1975 postmarks not hobby-contrived. Please report in!

Welcome to the Premiere Issue

* Catalog recognition! Every specialist expects it for each member of a favorite "mail use" series. Are they treated OK? ... page 1

* Tagging Types on PA Series... page 3

* "The Prominent Americana" is a tentative title... see "Editor's Education" ... page 4

* 9¢ Capitol Precancels... page 5

Making a Case for Catalog Recognition

At the core of our collecting interests are the postage stamps themselves, in our case those of two regular-issue series from the latter half of the 20th century. But how do hobbyists know "which" stamps belong in a series?

For most North American collectors, the standard reference of what members are in each set of the respective series is the *Scott Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps and Covers*.

Herein are found four levels of collectible candidates listed under various stamps series' names. A "major numbered" entry, is the highest form of "catalog recognition," ostensibly reflecting the hobby's recognition of a stamp in the set unquestionably considered separate and distinct from others.

(And with only a slight bit of conflict of interest, the Scott publisher is saying these comprise the "set" for hobby dealers to market to the broadest group of collectors. The publisher is in the business of making stamp albums as well.)

In other words, for all general collectors but for the most junior, the major-numbered stamps listed in a set comprise the set, for purposes of printed albums, completeness, and dealing with other collectors in buying or selling.

At the second level of possible set members are the "minor numbered" entries. These constitute a variety of a respective major numbered stamp, usually but not always looking like the major stamp but with some production variant, either intended or unintended, that is definitely determinable by hobby established guidelines (most often not requiring any equipment besides the occasional magnifying glass).

Now at this point we should delve a little deeper into the distinction between major and minor numbered stamps. This will help make it easier to later explain the third level, or "unnumbered" or "unlettered" entry. We're not going to review the Scott catalog introductory explanation on the subject, but rather editorialize. ► (*please see page 3*)

Tagging Types on PA Series

Rob Loeffler earlier this year brought up one of his research projects he's been working on in recent years: Which of the overcoating tagging methods that were in use after 1963 on the Huck-Cottrell presses, were employed on which Prominent Americans printings, and what were their timeframes or plate numbers?

It should be noted that this question is about a sub-specialty of the phosphorescent tagging specialty. When the first PA issue was tagged, Huck-Cottrell printed stamps were tagged on-press at the press unit that previously was employed only for precanceling. The unit's impression roll-mounted device applied an overcoating that completely covered the stamps themselves. This "overall" was the first type among main tagging types.

By examining selvage, collectors of 1963-1965 tagged adhesives found differences among what would be documented as three devices that the BEP tried (before later adding a fourth, "Type III"). The BEP happened to try different tagging unit setups to apply the same overall tagging. Except for scarce misalignment cases, overcoated individual stamps of the PA and Americana series all look the same under SW-UV. But because so many at the time saved plateblocks, it was easy to collect overall method examples by their margin appearances.

The April 1966 issue of the *Specialist* appears to be the first entry in the journal of these types illustrated, using pane plate number singles (with corner margins attached) of 1963's gray 5¢ Washington (Scott 1213b). (See Fig. 1.) It took me quite awhile to realize why author William H. Bayless chose the sequence of cases shown, starting at the top with Type IIa, then II, then I. They are in order of decreasing overcoating extent on the margins: Type IIa was applied by a long re-faced silicon roller that covers all of the horizontal and vertical margins; Type II is from an unmodified narrower roller than IIa that left the plate # margin partially uncoated; Type I is of the original device, four almost-pane-size rubber mats like those in precanceling, wrapped around a cylinder. The mats' raised-surface edges along the axis did not abut each other, leaving an untagged horizontal seam. A mat's width was narrower than a full pane's width across finished margins, so vertical margins were left partially uncoated.

I believe Rob pointed out to me that, with only a mild misalignment, one could have a corner margin of one type that appears as another. This possibility can be imagined between Types II and I shown at right: The horizontal seam on the bottom single (plate 27518) is narrow enough that a slight turn of the mat cylinder one way, while the printed paper web aligns just a hair the other way, leaves the overcoating essentially "moved up" relative to covering all of the top selvage. (While at the opposite end or "bottom," a sheet's bottom row would show an untagged seam, possibly extending up past the bottom perforation row into the final stamp row's bottom edge.)

However, this possibility of confusing Types I and II will not exist in the PA series and later, because the Type I mat was replaced with the easier roller types before the PA 4¢ Lincoln was issued in Nov. 1965. That leaves the possible confusion of Types II and IIa (and IIa with Type III, which we get to later.) However, that involves the mountings themselves of cylinders on the press units (printing or overprinting), something which has basically no "play" I would think.

Yet the paper web weaving through can certainly shift sideways. But enough to have the narrower Type II roller coat an entire plate # margin? And while avoiding any problems that such a slippage would cause elsewhere, leading to obvious recognition and excisement of that part of the web? I do not know that answer. ► (please see page 4)

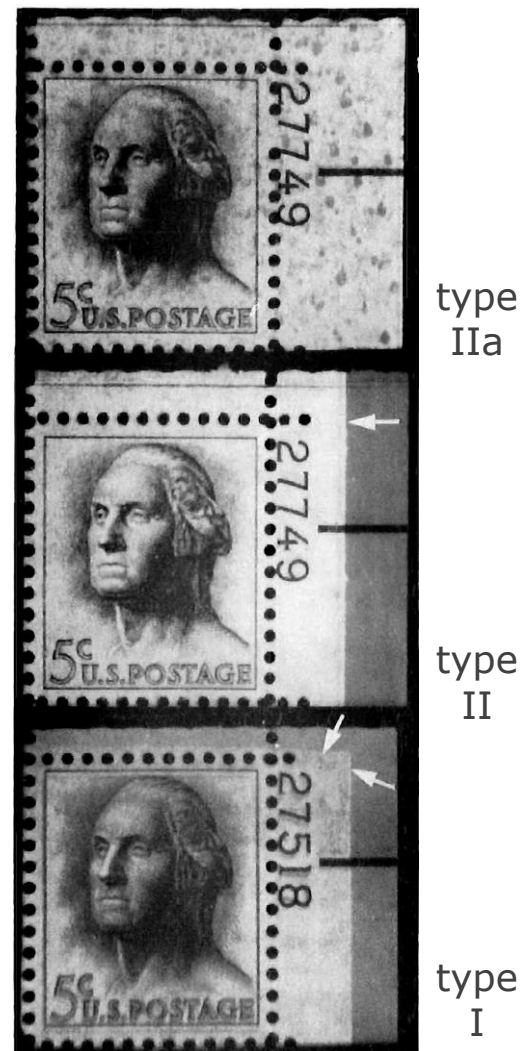


Fig. 1. Evidence of three devices used to apply overall tagging in 1960s. White arrows show tagging edge. (Image copied from United States Specialist, April 1966 page 130.)

► Catalog Recognition (*con't from front page*)

It seems the general aim of Scott over many decades is to walk a fine line between major and minor members in a set. On one side are the “basic entries” as already described, which shouldn’t tax or strain the general collector to tell apart. (As an aside, note the hue and cry in some quarters since the late 1990s over the “dizzying array” of die cut gauges... The need for a “perforation” gauge lives on!)

On the other side lay the minor-numbered entrants that, let’s be frank, “take work” to identify. So as a crude summarization, Scott has a theoretical point at which if the patience of the average general collector would be taxed too much, it cannot be a truly distinct and separate stamp variety worthy of the same major number status as its “look-alike”. To be fair, this imagined point is mostly determined by precedent. Or to state another way, collective hobby sentiment in the past... and input from specialists who make a good case.

Now, it must be acknowledged that practicality dictates this sort of coarse division amongst a trait’s *variations* found “along a continuum.” Where defining discrete points of demarcation are problematic; required patience notwithstanding. The obvious example is the trait of color. Glances at the several entries in the catalog of the lowest value workhorse stamps in the 1890s and early 1900s show the challenge here. (And then one learns, usually later in hobby experience, that the catalog’s color names do not necessarily hold as “equivalent” across different stamps!)

To get to our point, over the decades as printing technology changed, the nature of what constitutes an “intended production variety” and possible variations also influenced editors and collectors. Here, invisible “tagging” of stamps with phosphorescence was eventually recognized. Yet even here limits eventually arose in the stride of the self-adhesive era. In the 37¢ letter period, some minor-numbered assignments later were demoted to footnotes, stating when a certain paper making method resulted in two output types, each reacting differently under shortwave ultraviolet light. (It was deemed, they no longer warranted separate identifiers.)

On the other hand, the “small hole” trait in the Liberty series took a long time to be listed. The types are given unlettered listings with market values. By the time printing began of the Prominent Americans, the expected traits of intended production *variations* seemed to be a settled small group: color, precanceling, master dies and tagging. (A traditional trait of variation, perforation, was quiet after the Fourth Bureau series but made a brief reappearance in 1977. See related sidebar.) Yet in a few years, a new variation in an old trait would be added: “dull” vs. shiny gum.

So the question to my fellow specialists is simply this: Do you think all of the “intended production varieties” in the Prominent Americans series, or the Americana series, have been well-represented in the Scott specialized? In other words, is there a variety you believe has not gotten its full due in catalog treatment? Please weigh in with your case to be made, if you think so.

Perforation Varieties: Abeyant Trait in mid-20th-century Definitives

True or False: No PA or Americana (Am) issue has perforation varieties listed in the Scott catalog.

In one sense, if the question were carefully worded, the answer would seem to be true: No Scott number was added for any PA issue *solely* because its perforation differed from another variety. (Is this true for Am too?)

All coils of the period have the same gauge. And whether or not a sheet or booklet pane has the same gauge, coils get their own major number. (Think about that a moment. We come full circle to the early 20th century collector sentiment to shun imperforate or “perf 12” coils, just as those today still shun booklet singles that don’t have a separate Scott number *because their perforations match their counterpart sheet format*. Hmm, an unintentional plug for the “catalog recognition” story in this newsletter.)

Interestingly, coil perforations alone serve duty in support of mechanical materials handling: A roll cannot fall apart in its role in an affixing machine or vending machine. (As for 100-count rolls for individuals, separation resistance is stronger than for panes. But it’s only a quick “fold” at the perfs to make it easier.) It seems “perf 10” for coils and “11 by 10-1/2” for panes was the rule for regular series since the late 1920s. So much so that we sometimes forget exceptions: Flat-plate or multi-color issues. Then along came a new mechanical marvel in the mid-1970s, the Goebel booklet-making machine. The 9¢ Capitol booklet single (and its sister seven 13¢ Flag stamps in \$1 vending booklets) came from that machine in March 1977 in two different perforation types, unnoticed by anyone until April! Meanwhile, “off-press” perforating was taking off in commemoratives. Its later spread gave perforation varieties to a future regular series, the Great Americans.

► Tagging Types on PA Series (*con't from page 2*)

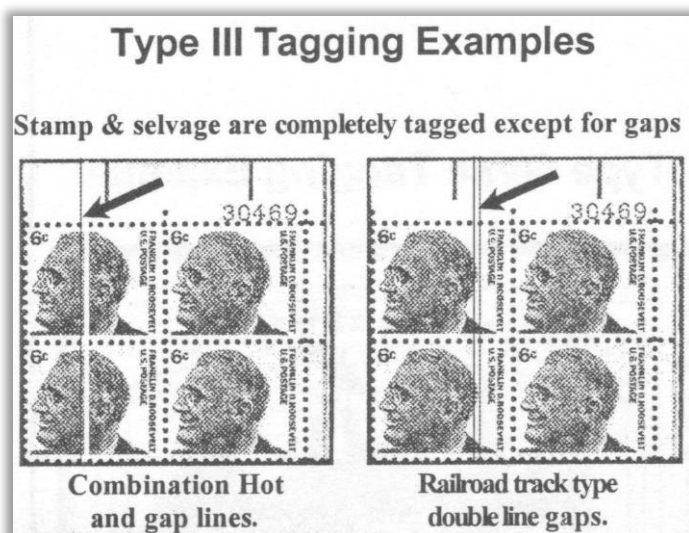
Interestingly, Bayless recorded the first PA 4¢ output, of plates 28247-48, as type IIa. But what are the overall-tagging types even represented in the PA series? And what about this “Type III,” not even mentioned in my *US Specialist* notes until those made of the April 1972 issue? This issue kicked off an article series summarizing each of the phosphor-tagged stamps for stamps initially released in plain format. In that issue is the 3¢ Statue of Liberty sheet stamp, for which it notes, all four plates used to tag 3¢ show types II, IIa, and III tagging. I added from somewhere else, “type III from two curved [steel] plates, with seam line showing as either untagged OR ‘hot-tagged’ (extra taggant buildup).”

This recall surprise for an issue up to the doorstep of the PA series led me to think long and hard for a resource published much later, for a comprehensive “look back.” You might be thinking of an excellent source, USSS Reprint Series No. 4 “Luminescent Tagging on United States Stamps.” For some new recruits to our group, this is a compilation of articles by Gene Paquette that defines just about everything on the title subject. It covers in detail the Type III overall result. For our purposes, the main point is that in most examples you will not tell it is Type III because they look just like IIa. It is only in some cases where specific Type III traits are present, that you can tell. (See illustration inset nearby of two 6¢ Roosevelt plate blocks.)

Mr. Paquette ended his discussion on Type III with his findings of known examples. (For sake of completeness, realizing some collectors also enjoy “nearby” regular issues like the 10¢ Memorial concurrent with the PA series, his remarks are copied verbatim.)

“There were only a very few sheet stamps and even fewer booklet panes that were issued with type III tagging. This narrows the classifying of possible items nicely. The stamps that were issued with type III tagging are as follows: sheet stamps #1035b, 1044b, 1046a, 1209a, 1280, 1282a, 1283a, 1283B, 1284a, 1285a, 1286, 1287; booklet panes #1213c III, 1395c (white and yellow gum), 1395d IV (white gum), 1510c; no coils were issued with type III tagging.”

With the difficulty in finding Type III, readers are invited to report at this time any **III** PA finds. More later.



Editor's Education

A column for a newsletter editor's reflections needs a name. So I considered what would usually make up its content: reflections as noted, and maybe some request, comment, or highlighting an article. But most of all, “what I've learned,” as it seems learning really does not end. And sharing what we know is part of what enriches our hobby. Writing a hobby newsletter, one sometimes learns even more than expected.

Growing older, as some of you are finding as I, means learning to change expectations. At first the newsletter publishing schedule wasn't to be locked in, but expected as monthly or bi-monthly depending on reader participation. As May 2022 slipped into history, this first issue in-process was initially called June/July. But it seems the cares of this world, plus a loved one's medical needs, can sap one's time and energy faster than the forever youthful mind estimates.

Now to the newsletter's name. “Prominent Americana” is only my initial stab, a place-holder if you will. If you have suggestions, by all means send them in. We will put the suggestions to a vote, hopefully in next quarter's issue. ► (*please see page 5*)



► Editor's Education (*con't from page 4*)

By way of disclosure I have to admit to no small part in the delay in getting out this premiere issue. You recall that expression, “biting off more than one can chew”? A column to rant and rave about Scott’s catalog treatment of some of our favorite definitives sounded like it could have it all: Pertinence (I think this is the first time I used that word), controversy, intrigue, debated, call to action, etc.

Then I hit “writer’s block.” Not that I didn’t have anything to “finish” with, but I wanted it to be *perfect*. As I failed to meet more of my imposed deadlines, the solution finally came: Why spill the beans on my “perfectly stated” case; invite the readers to chime in first. So, you do have an assignment to help me.

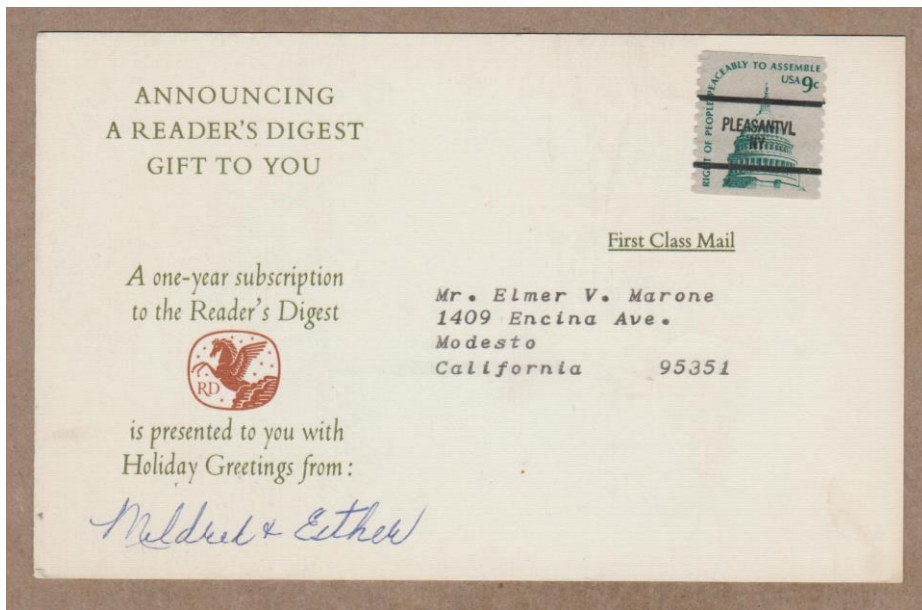
Another article has also turned out to be a bit substantial to pull off in one issue: Tagging Types on PA Series. The toughest part did get included, bringing up the need to know who has found what Type III tagged items in the PA series. It would be better, however, in context of what is known so far about the PA Type II and Iia tagged issues. Those are easy to spot. We’ll publish checklists next time.

9¢ Capitol Precancels Checklist

- Chicago IL, **sheet**
- Dallas TX, **sheet**
- Richmond VA, **sheet**
- lines only, **sheet**

coils

- Chicago IL
- Mount Vernon NY
- Pleasantvl NY (wide)
- Pleasantvl NY (narrow)
- lines only
- First-Class (wide gap)
- First-Class (narrow)



A Research Candidate: 9¢ Capitol Precancels

At upper right is a checklist for those collecting the Americana series. Innocuous-looking, isn't it? But it belies an interesting history of the USPS efforts to supply “mail use” stamps to direct mail marketers in the late 1970s to early 1980s. And, it gives no hint of the relative scarcity of finding one each of these artifacts as used singles or on-cover. (“Mint” isn't included as a “finding” activity only because it is traditionally the most supported collecting format among dealers. On second thought, mint precancels were not extensively traded or stocked “back in the day” like plain stamps, so perhaps I’m wrong to exclude them. But you know what I mean, it’s easier to “order up” a mint example of scarce items; it’s either in stock or not when ordered.)

OK, so we have an impromptu research project on our hands – please consider a “census” of your holdings of any of these, whether Used or On-Cover, and send in the results. I’ve counted at my end, and learned that the *Field Guide to Postal Uses of the Americana Series* e-book failed to mention the “narrow gap” version of the Pleasantvl NY city/state precancel (illustrated on-cover above). This version, the Precancel Stamp Society’s style 87, is the scarcest to collect as a used single, according to the society. *To be continued...*