VOLUME 85, NO. 3
MARCH, 2014

(ISSN 0164-923X)
(USPS 620-200)

The United States Specialist

FOR THE COLLECTOR OF POSTAGE AND REVENUE
STAMP ISSUES OF THE UNITED STATES

Special Handling Stamps on "Special Paper"
See p. 103.

Special Handling Stamps on Special Booklet Paper – "Who Knew?"

By **Robert G. Rufe**
USSS #15298, 119 Meriden Drive, Hockessin, DE 19707
<rrufe1@aol.com >

Introduction

It just keeps getting better. This commonly known back-of-the-book issue again brings a surprising revelation. For years, I have been trying to figure out all the nuances of differentiating wet-printing vs. dry-printing varieties of the Special Handling stamps. Detailed studies now show for the first time that the first printing of the (new rate) 10¢, 15¢ and 20¢ Special Handling stamps of June, 1928 were produced on so-called "Special Booklet Paper."[1] The paper was "special" because it was ordered exclusively for booklet pane production. When booklet pane stamp production transitioned to the rotary press, the leftover "special" paper flat press sheet stock intended for booklet panes was re-purposed to printing sheet stamps rather than being discarded.

This article presents the case that the "leftover" special booklet paper was used in the production of the 1928 Special Handling stamps. Not some, but all of the June/July, 1928 printing of the 10¢, 15¢ and 20¢ Special Handling stamps were wet-printed on this special paper.

Background

Why the special paper? Sheet stamps printed on flat plate presses were printed on paper whose normal grain orientation was vertical (on vertical format stamps, e.g., definitive issues). After stamps were printed on the moistened paper, the designs had a tendency to shrink as the paper dried. Stamp paper shrinks more in the direction perpendicular to the grain—approximately four times as much "across the grain" than "with the grain," meaning that sheet stamps in the conventional vertical format shrink more horizontally than vertically. As a consequence, for producing booklet panes, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) ordered special paper with the grain running horizontally, to assure greater stability in the horizontal dimension (across the stamps). As reported by Ken Lawrence, "This factor aided in keeping the sheets registered when they were interleaved, covered, bound, stapled and trimmed. If they fell out of register at the top and bottom, high or low cuts made little difference..."[2] This special paper was delivered in packages labeled "P.O. Special Paper" so that it would not be confused with paper intended for sheet stamps. The dimension specifications were the same for both regular and special papers, 18½ x 20¾ inch sheets, but envision that the special paper was turned 90 degrees prior to cutting to these final dimensions. To further differentiate the two grades, the special paper sheets also had diagonal corners clipped to a depth of ¼ inch.

Hugh M. Southgate reported in detail on the employment and disposition of much of the leftover "special paper," citing production records of certain denominations of the Fourth Bureau "Ordinaries," the 11¢, 12¢, 15¢, 20¢, 25¢

Table 1. Printings of Sheet Stamps on Special Paper, 1928-1929.

Scott #	Issue	Date range at press
QE1	10¢ Special Handling	June 22, 1928 – July 24, 1928
QE2	15¢ Special Handling	June 22, 1928 – July 18, 1928
QE3	20¢ Special Handling	June 22, 1928 – July 11, 1928
564	12¢ Ordinary	July 27, 1928 – September 24, 1928
566	15¢ Ordinary	July 27, 1928 – October 8, 1928
567	20¢ Ordinary	July 27, 1928 – October 2, 1928
568	25¢ Ordinary	July 27, 1928 – August 17, 1928
E13	15¢ Special Delivery	August 7, 1928 – August 13, 1928
563	11¢ Ordinary	August 13, 1928 – September 24, 1928
569	30¢ Ordinary	August 14, 1928 – September 5, 1928
C11	5¢ Beacon Airmail	October 8, 1928 – February 18, 1929

and 30¢ sheet stamps (Scott #563, 564, 566, 567, 568 and 569, respectively), as well as the 5¢ Beacon airmail (Scott C11) and the 15¢ Special Delivery (Scott E13).[3] To this list can now be added the 10¢, 15¢ and 20¢ Special Handling stamps. A summary of those stamps now identified as having been printed on special paper with dates at press are shown in Table 1.

The Case for Special Handling on Special Paper

Most of Southgate's evidence is empirical, that is, he actually measured stamps with known "at press" dates during the timeframe in which special paper was available. My mentor and correspondent on this subject, the late Wallace Cleland, speculated that horizontally-grained paper, i.e., special paper, was used for some of the early Special Handling stamps.[4] Cleland also reported, "The last production of booklet panes from flat plates was in July, 1926" but that "The 1928 paper specification issue by the Bureau to control their annual contract still provided for part of the paper supplied to have the grain run horizontally,"[5] an indication that the BEP ordered a quantity of "Special Booklet Paper," possibly in error. A key missing piece in Wallace's analysis was the issue of the first airmail booklet pane, the 10¢ Lindbergh *Spirit of St. Louis* issue of May 26, 1928 (Scott C10a). This oversight was addressed in Ken Lawrence's article, cited above. It was also the last of booklet pane production on the flat plate press. Thus, special paper was available, and targeted for consumption, at the very time the new denomination Special Handling stamps were scheduled for production. The new Special Handling rates were to go into effect on July 1, 1928, and the first day of issue for these stamps was set for June 25, 1928.

BEP production records[6] show a single four day press run using only plate numbers 19553 (10¢), 19557 (15¢), and 19541 and 19542 (both 20¢) from June 22 to June 25, 1928. So, for the first day rollout, these stamps were indeed "hot off the press." Comparing these plate numbers with known first day event pieces in either the author's possession or clipping notes confirms the plate numbers as shown in Table 2. All of these first day items show only the plate numbers from this earliest production run, and, conversely, I am not aware of any items in any form dated June 25 showing other plate numbers. To emphasize this point, I neither possess, nor have seen, examples of any of these three first day category pieces with any other plate number. These

Table 2. Plate Numbers on Special Handling Firtst Day Event Pieces.

Item Description	Plate Number		
	10¢	15¢	20¢
Postmaster General signed FDC panes	19553	19557	19541
First day covers with plate numbers	19553	—	—
Plate blocks with first day-dated cancels	19553	19557	19542

categories should be mutually exclusive if the hypothesis presented here is valid. Anyone having additional items showing plate numbers is asked to report, with scanned images.

All of these first day examples also exhibit the special paper properties of wider and shorter dimensions compared to their January, 1928 counterpart, the 25¢ Special Handling second printing.

Considering that special paper was used on the limited four day run cited above, it is possible for special paper to have been used for subsequent press runs to fill Post Office Department order quantities. Specifically, I postulate that the entire 1928 printing of Special Handling stamps was on "Special Booklet Paper!" All of the 10¢, 15¢ and 20¢ stamps characteristic of this short printing period in June and July – the especially "muddy" yellow-green shade – show design measurements reflecting a horizontal grain direction. Conversely, I have found no stamps of this distinctive color variety which do not conform to the wider, shorter dimension characteristics of the special paper, indicating that none of the Special Handling stamps produced in 1928 were on regular paper.

It should be noted here that the color of all the 25¢ Special Handling stamps from the second printing, January, 1928, were of a similar yellow-green color as the June/July 1928 stamps, but exhibit a vertical grain direction. The 25¢ stamps are all dimensionally different from the newer, lower-denomination stamps produced beginning June 22, 1928.

At this juncture, a summary of the five major characterizations of Special Handling stamps will be instructive, each representing a different "generation" of color or paper in the printing evolution. See Table 3. Examples of stamps representing the various printings are illustrated in Figure 1.

Printing records no longer exist to document which actual paper stock was used in the 1928 printings. Shown in Figure 2 are graphic representations corresponding to the stamps illustrated in Figure 1, showing the grain direction of the paper. This is accomplished by showing the direction of paper curl as the pre-moistened paper dries. Paper with vertical grain (Figures 2a, 2b and 2d) will shrink and curl from side-to-side, whereas paper with a horizontal

Table 3. Printing Data for Special Handling Stamps.

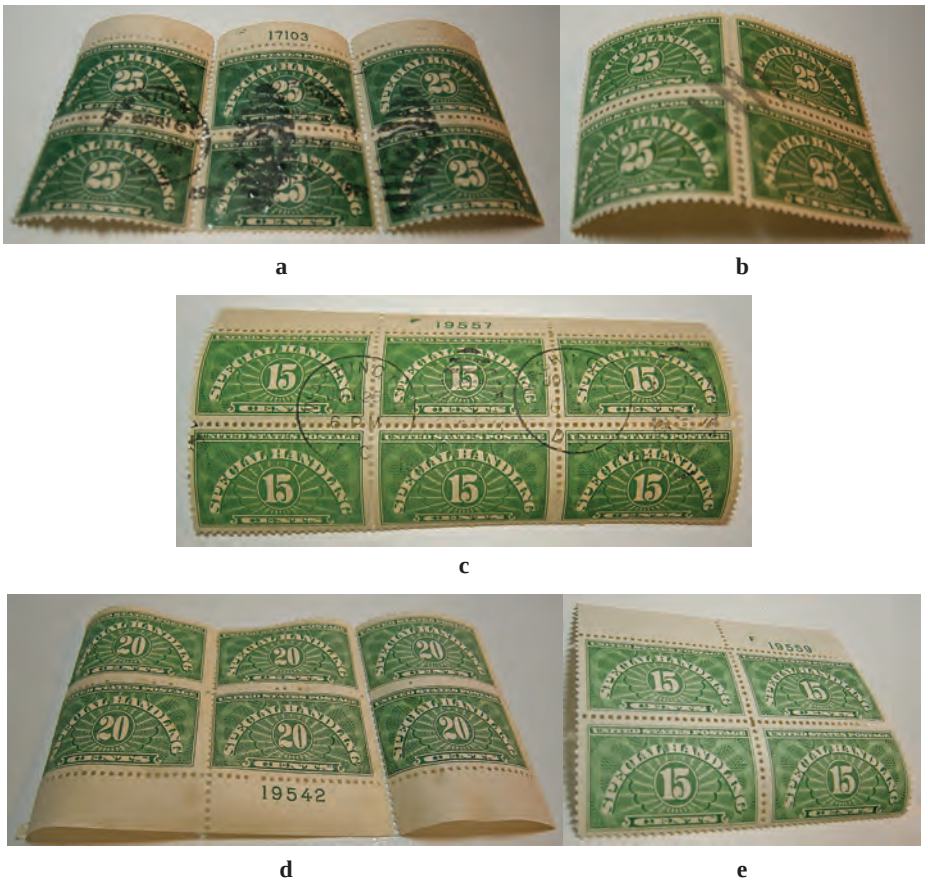
Start date	Value	Scott #	Color	Process	Grain	Example
April, 1925	25¢	QE4	Deep green	Wet	Vertical	Figure 1a
Jan., 1928	25¢	QE4a	Yellow-green	Wet	Vertical	Figure 1b
June, 1928	10/15/20¢	QE1/2/3	Muddy yellow-green	Wet	Horizontal	Figure 1c
July, 1940	10/15/20¢	QE1/2/3	Plain green	Wet	Vertical	Figure 1d
Oct., 1955	10/15/20¢	QE1a/2a/3a	Emerald green	Dry	Horizontal	Figure 1e

Figure 1. Examples of Special Handling stamps from the various printings (see Table 3).

grain will curl top-to-bottom (Figures 2c and 2e). These five figures illustrate the paper types indicated in Table 3.

For uniformity in comparisons in Figure 2, drying and paper shrinkage testing was employed with blocks having no gum, whether used (Figures 2a, 2b and 2c), or unused (Figures 2d and 2e). Blocks were chosen rather than single stamps because the curling effects are more easily seen on these larger pieces. The gum was soaked off the unused blocks (which had gum disturbance) for uniformity of testing. I was familiar with the concept of grain direction from my experience in the paper industry, but demonstrating grain direction without actually tearing up stamps posed a challenge. Shrinkage was the key, and the grain direction is visually apparent by the direction of curl. Using an atomizer, such as a perfume sprayer filled with water, a couple "spritzes" on a dry, flat block of stamps causes the paper to curl almost instantaneously.

In order to illustrate the behavior of the three different paper types used for the lower denomination stamps (represented by Figures 2c, 2d & 2e), sheets with plate number 19557 are superimposed in Figure 3. The different widths of the stamps demonstrate the impact on shrinkage by paper type and



a **b**

c

d **e**

Figure 2. Examples of paper curl directions of Special Handling stamps from the various printings: a, grain vertical; b, grain vertical; c, grain horizontal; d, grain vertical; e, grain horizontal. Shrinkage is greater perpendicular to the grain direction.

grain, and, eventually, printing process, i.e., whether the printing was on "wet" paper (15-35% moisture content) or "dry" paper (5-15% moisture content). The "dry" paper example is included to complete the series; stamps on this 1955 printing did not shrink in either dimension because they were printed on pre-gummed paper that could not be dampened during printing. The moisture content was ambient, not part of a dampen-and-dry cycle.

Figure 3 clearly illustrates sideways design shrinkage as influenced by paper grain and moisture content. All three sheets are full original gum, from plate no. 19557, and easily identified by gum appearance and design dimensions. The stamps' left side frame lines, at the bottom of the photo in Figure 3, are aligned on the three sheets, and the reduced amount of design shrinkage is dramatic as the images are viewed from left to right. Horizontal shrinkage is greatest on conventional paper with vertical grain (bottom row), while "special" paper with horizontal grain (middle row) show less shrinkage; the least amount of shrinkage is seen in the top row—printed on "dry" (low moisture content) paper with horizontal grain.

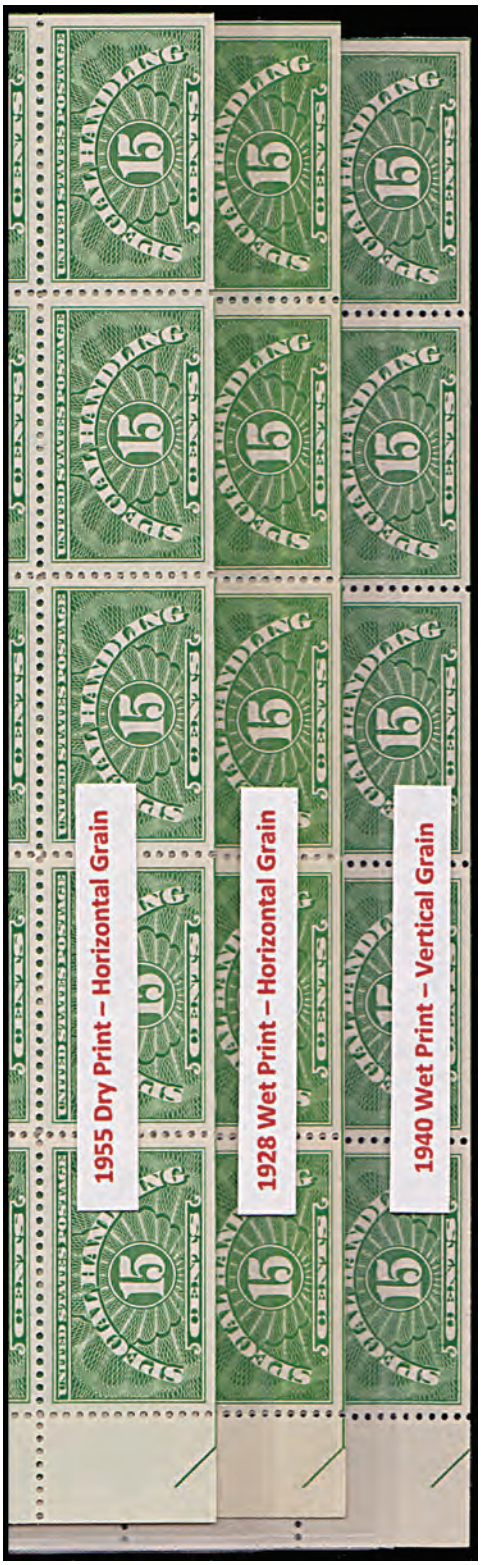


Figure 3. Examples of sheets printed from plate no. 19557 by three different methods illustrating horizontal design shrinkage.

Figure 4. Examples of sheets printed from plate no. 19557 by three different methods illustrating vertical design shrinkage.

Shrinkage comparisons in the vertical direction are shown in Figure 4, using the same sheets shown in Figure 3, to confirm shrinkage is greater across the grain than with the grain. The bottom frame lines on the bottom rows of stamps are now aligned, showing the "special paper" (middle row of stamps) shrinks just slightly more from top-to-bottom than does the regular paper (bottom row). The printing on "dry" paper (top row) shows less shrinkage than either of the wet printings in both directions.

Spacings Between Stamps

The spacings between designs on Special Handling stamps in both rows and columns are a uniform 3.4 mm. ± 0.1 mm. The plate arrangement was never altered for the Special Handling stamps to address shrinkage issues as had been the case for the "Ordinaries," where spacing of internal columns between stamps was adjusted to compensate for shrinkage.[7] Two examples are shown in Figure 5, 11¢ Hayes (Scott #563), plate 19135 on regular paper with 3.0 mm internal spacing vertically, and plate 17617 on special paper with 2.5 mm internal spacing vertically; the internal spacings horizontally are 2.5 mm on both blocks. Figure 5 compares design width and design height.

Other Issues With Early Use of Special Paper

From my first reading of the Southgate article cited in reference 3, I've been troubled by his report that "The Bureau advised, in January, 1929, that between July 11, 1928 and October 27, 1928, 'special' paper had been requisitioned..." From the above studies on the Special Handling stamps, especially the conclusive proof of special paper use on the stamps at press prior to the first day ceremony pieces, I conclude the July 11 date is a decidedly later date than the paper was actually in use.

A question was raised during peer review by Ken Lawrence as to whether Special Handling was the only sheet stamp issue to "start up" using special paper. My initial impression was "Yes." While researching press dates of other issues utilizing special paper, I found one of the earliest Scott C11 Beacon airmail vignette plates, #F19547, is illustrated on special paper in *Durland*,[8] and it was at press as early as July 2, 1928 (with the vignette plate set 19545-19548). The earliest Beacon frame plates were 19549-19552, and the set was at press as early as June 27.[9] *Durland* reports the earliest frame plate at press to be 19571, which went to press on July 12. Southgate's article[10] lists the plates put to press during the period that the special paper was in use for sheet stamps, and he indeed shows frame plates 19549-19552, with a start date of June 22. The Beacon First Day of Issue was July 25, 1928, so it is possible that this issue started up on special paper; however, since all these plate numbers are also known on regular paper, it cannot be said with certainty that the Beacon issue started up on special paper.

Conclusion

The entire print run of Special Handling stamps from June 22 to July 24, 1928 was produced on "Special Booklet Paper." These stamps have a distinctive "muddy" yellow-green color, the horizontal grain representative of this paper, and wider and shorter design measurements that differentiate them from all the other 10¢, 15¢ and 20¢ Special Handling stamps. These stamps were the first sheet stamps to be produced on special paper and may have even been a test run to prove this paper could be used satisfactorily on sheet stamps. Special paper was subsequently used, beginning July 27, 1928, to produce six denominations of the Fourth Bureau "Ordinaries," the 11¢ Beacon Airmail and the 15¢ Special Delivery stamp.

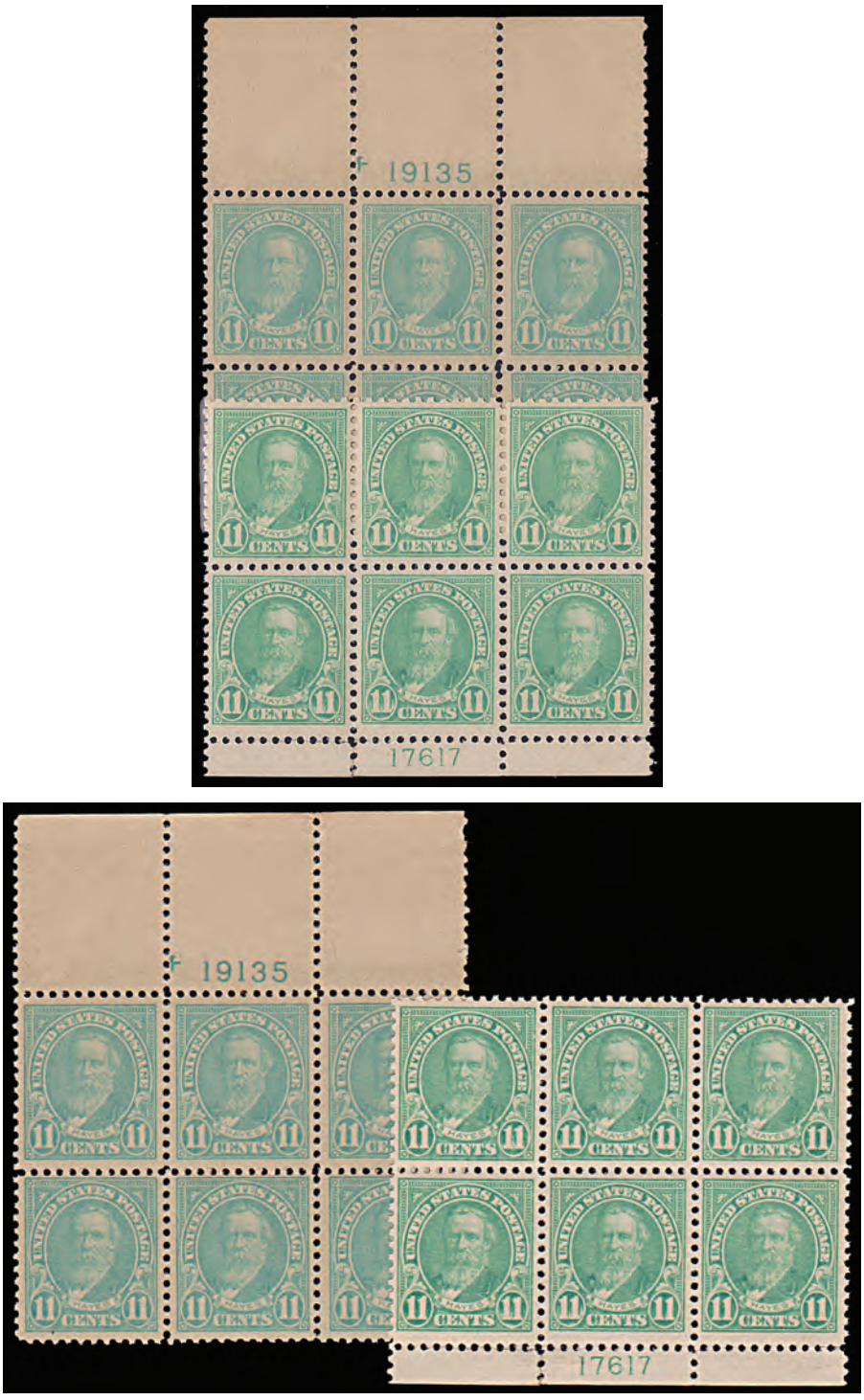


Figure 5. Wide vertical spacing of 3.0 mm on plate 19135 (regular paper) vs. narrow vertical spacing of 2.5 mm on plate 17617 (special paper). Internal horizontal spacing is 2.5 mm for both plate blocks.

Acknowledgement

My thanks, posthumously, to Wallace Cleland for leading me down this path of challenge and discovery.

References

1. W. Wallace Cleland, ed., *2012 Durland Standard Plate Number Catalog*, p. 58.

2. Ken Lawrence, "The Lindbergh Air Mail booklet stamp of 1928," *Scott Stamp Monthly*, September, 2004, p. 14.

3. Hugh M. Southgate, "The 'Special' Paper Printing of 1928," *The Bureau Specialist*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (January, 1940), pp. 12-16.

4. Wallace Cleland, "Size Differences Between Wet and Dry Printings from Flat Plates," *The United States Specialist*, Vol. 74, No. 11 (November, 2003), pp. 519-525; "Wet and Dry Printings of Special Handling Stamps Revisited," *The United States Specialist*, Vol. 75, No. 6 (June, 2004), pp. 283-284.

5. Wallace Cleland, "The 'Special' Paper Printings of 1928," *The United States Specialist*, Vol. 71, No. 9 (September, 2000), pp. 397-401.

6. W. Wallace Cleland, *B. I. A. Plate Number Checklist: Plates 1–20,000, Revised*, 1990.

7. Ref. 1.

8. Ref. 1, p. A2.

9. Ref. 6.

10. Ref. 3, Table IV, p. 14.