

U. S. Special Handling 1925-1959: *The Stamps and the Service*

Revision: This presentation includes the complete unique set of 15 known trial color large die proofs, a “16th” of which is the in original approved deep-green color. Two colors in the trial color set constitute new discoveries, and are now catalog-listed in the 2016 *Scott Specialized*. The unique FDR Presentation Proofs of 1933 are also shown. The exhibitor’s discovery that the first printing of the 10, 15 and 20¢ wet-print stamps in 1928 started on, and was run entirely on “Special Booklet Paper” is highlighted on a new series of pages.

Purpose: This exhibit unravels the complexity of a poorly understood category of U. S. stamps. Unfortunately, these stamps are frequently misidentified. Research studies conducted over the past 13 years, accompanied by the accumulation and examination of thousands of Special Handling stamps have led to unexpected conclusions for what had been considered by many collectors, dealers and philatelic writers, a mundane area of U.S. stamp activity. Mint stamps shown are among the highest quality certified and graded.

Background: The United States’ Special Handling service was authorized by the Postal Service Act of February 28, 1925. It is significant in historic context as the forerunner of Air Parcel Post, and ultimately, today’s Priority Mail service. Special Handling continues today, recharacterized in June 2015 as Special Handling - FRAGILE. Restricted service adhesives were issued on April 11, 1925 and the service commenced April 15, 1925. The dedicated stamps were withdrawn from Post Offices on October 24, 1957 and removed from the Philatelic Agency on September 11, 1959, at which time the commercial use of dedicated stamps was essentially ended. The exhibit title reflects the year of stamp withdrawal, and the last date for which an “in-period” cover with a service-inscribed stamp is shown. The exhibitor’s research was the subject of a series of three articles in 2007 for *The United States Specialist*, and was awarded the “United States Stamp Society Walter W. Hopkinson Literature Award.” In June 2008, the exhibitor discovered a new plate variety, the “Dot on the T,” and a previously unreported location of the “T-A” variety, subsequently confirmed on the plate proof. The only recorded dry-print on cover was discovered in 2010, the only known 25¢ yellow-green printing on cover in 2011, and similarly, in 2013, the two trial color proofs cited above. These findings have all been reported in *The United States Specialist* and *The Collectors Club Philatelist*. The exhibit won the USSS Hopkinson Trophy in 2010, four Reserve Grands, the Frohlich Joy of Philately PNSE Grand Award in April, 2013, the NOJEX 2014 Stamp Exhibition and St. Louis Stamp Expo 2015 Grand Awards.

Challenge Factor: This exhibit contains the most comprehensive collection of this material ever assembled. The fact that new discoveries are still being made reveals the lack of serious attention ever given to the issue.

1. Nomenclature – The *Scott Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps & Covers* reassigned the numbering for all four denominations of these stamps based on research performed for this exhibit. The catalog now also employs illustrations from stamps supplied by the exhibitor - all three major plate varieties, the “A-T,” the “T-A,” and the “Dot on the T,” the latter discovered and named by the exhibitor. The 2009 and subsequent editions of the catalog incorporate “dashes” to reflect the absence in the marketplace of scarce dry-printing varieties. Earliest Documented Uses (EDU) for dry-printed stamps on and off-cover are now listed in the *Scott Specialized* for the first time.
2. Paper varieties – The exhibitor’s studies confirm the differentiation of two paper varieties of the 10, 15 and 20¢ wet-print stamps, “Special (booklet) Paper” of 1928, and regular paper, 1940 and later. Stamps of late-1955 were “dry-printed” on low moisture-content paper, and exhibit two entirely different shades of green. Research at the USPS library, BEP and the APRL uncovered records which help explain these varieties, and allow the estimation of printing quantities for these varieties, by denomination.
3. Dry-printings – Based on the exhibitor’s original research, production quantities are now reported for the first time for the stamps run in late-1955 on low moisture content, or “dry” paper. These printings are much scarcer than the wet printings, and only one in-period cover has been reported, discovered by the exhibitor; only ten used examples with contemporary cancels are recorded, to-date, four of which are in this exhibit. A 20¢ stamp with a contemporary cancel was discovered by the exhibitor in April, 2013.
4. Scarce used 25¢ second printing stamps – Because of the low printing numbers and the fact that they were only in stock at post offices for seven months, the 25¢ yellow-green stamps are scarce in used condition. Only one is recorded on a contemporary cover, discovered by the exhibitor.

Highlights:

- 1) The complete set of 15 of the 1925 trial color proofs – unique.
- 2) A complete set of four of the 1925 (25¢) and 1928 (10, 15 & 20¢) large die proofs – one of six known.
- 3) The complete set of FDR Presentation Proofs of 1933 – unique.
- 4) A full pane, upper left, of the 25¢ deep-green stamp from the first printing, Plate No. 17103. No census.
- 5) A full pane, lower left, of the 25¢ yellow-green stamp from the second printing, Plate 17095, three known.
- 6) The EDU for the 25¢ yellow-green stamp from the second printing – a dated Parcel Post cancel on an off-cover in-period single, May 1928; the same issue on cover, the discovery and only recorded copy.
- 7) The EDU for the 10¢ dry-print stamp – a dated cancel on an off-cover single, February 26, 1958.
- 8) The only recorded 1955 experimental dry-print on commercial cover – the 15¢ on a 1957 airmail FDC.
- 9) The used 20¢ dry-printed stamp with contemporary cancel is unique. A used 15¢ dry-printed stamp – one of only five recorded copies with a contemporary cancel, including the stamp on cover in 8) above; two of the four recorded 10¢ dry-printed stamps, used, all of which have been discovered by the exhibitor.
- 10) The only recorded and certified error for the issue – a 20¢ margin example, imperforate horizontally.
- 11) One of three recorded First Day of Issue covers with the single “A-T” variety. The other major transfer roll break varieties, “T-A,” and “Dot on the T,” have not been reported on cover.
- 12) Properly tied and rated in-period commercial covers, tags and/or wrappers are shown with special handling stamps for most associated services and rate periods for all four denominations; these include all three categories promulgated by regulation – live chicks, live bees and live alligators – all are scarce.
- 12) 1936 Chicago Press cover is the only commercial piece recorded with an international destination.
- 13) A military cover showing a censored third party attempt to ship books to a POW is believed to be unique.

The exhibit features a number of stamps, covers and “pieces” which are either scarce or the only recorded examples. Most significant items are shown with a **bold red** border.

Missing: There is nothing missing which is known to exist. By the nature of the intended service, most Special Handling stamps on cover or wrapper were lost to consumption and disposal.

Example not known to exist - A commercial example of a 25¢ Special Handling stamp on cover for which the service was established, *i.e.*, day-old chicks, bees or baby alligators.

There are no forerunners, artists’ drawings, essays, or forgeries known.

Partial List of References – Available at www.SpecialHandling.weebly.com The exhibit: <http://tinyurl.com/jbsmvsa>

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