

Chapter 29

The Fourth Bureau Series

The fourth Bureau series was in use for 16 years from 1922 until 1938. This was the longest running regular issue to date after 14 years of the 3rd Bureau series. The designs are much more ornate than the severe sameness of the Washington-Franklin regular issue. It is interesting to me that the 1st, 3rd, and 5th Bureau issues had designs that seemed (to me) to be simple and cold, while the 2nd, 4th, and 6th designs seemed to have much more variety and warmth. I have always favored the 2nd, 4th, and 6th Bureau issues on basis of the stamps' designs. When plate numbers are made part of the picture, they all get very interesting to me. But the 4th is a real favorite.

The 16 years of this issue saw enormous changes in production methods. The emergence of the rotary press allowed faster production, more efficient use and longer life of printing plates, and a much less labor intensive operation. However, the quality of the centering of the rotary produced stamps, especially in the early years, was very poor. Collectors became more educated about finding partial plate numbers on the rotary press coils and booklets. Numerous overprints exist on some of these plates such as the Kansas and Nebraska, Molly Pitcher and Hawaii commemoratives, and the Canal Zone.

Challenges abound for the plate number collector. Large quantities of flat press plates were used and some had very short runs. The early rotary press plates are sometimes hard to find with many of them seeing their partial use or their entire use as precancels. Coil waste ended early in the life of the 4th Bureau series and many coil plates were undiscovered until collectors learned to look for the partial plate numbers.

Many high value (above 3c) stamp plates went to press in this series, far more than in the 3rd Bureau series. The 10c Monroe used 158 flat and rotary plates! Forty-seven 15c Liberty and eighty 20c Golden Gate plates were used.

The 1/2c Nathan Hale stamp was issued in 1925 and was printed from 61 flat and 12 rotary plates. This stamp is not expensive and none of the plates is really scarce but it will take time to locate all of the numbers. The 1c Franklin stamp appeared in sheet, booklet, and coil form. Some of the early coil plates are known as coil waste. There are still 18 of the 112 coil plates unreported, mostly earlier numbers. The flat plate booklets are not too difficult but the rotary booklet plates can be tough. The 255 flat and 183 rotary sheet plates are a real challenge and the scarce rotary plates seem to be tougher to find than the scarce flat plates. The 1.5c Harding stamp was issued in 1925 with 66 flat plates and 68 rotary plates being used. All of these plates are reported but completion is very difficult. 64 1.5c Harding coil plates were used and nine of these are unreported and most of the rest are scarce to rare.

The biggest challenge of the 4th Bureau series is the 2c Washington stamp. The flat press run of 1363 plates puts this stamp in 3rd place as the stamp requiring the most plates. All 1363 plates are reported but getting close to this total is a lifetime challenge. The rotary version was printed from 674 plates with three of these unreported. An added attraction is that many rotary plates appear on both perforation varieties of this stamp. There were 6 plates used to print the die II variety and these are common, but costly. There were 194 flat booklet plates to press and many of these are easily available. This stamp was the subject of the first rotary press booklet plates (plates 17450-1). 84 rotary booklet plates went to press and these are much more difficult to find than the flat plate booklets. There were 687 2c Washington coil plates to press, plus nine die II coil plates. There are 206 unreported plates in this group plus three unreported die II plates. The unreported total would have been much higher except for the practice of the BEP releasing sheets of coil waste. But the issuance of this coil waste ended in 1924.

The 3c Lincoln stamp was issued in sheet and coil form. There were 44 flat and 44 rotary sheet plates and some plates of both types are rare. The coils are a tough lot with five of the 20 plates being unreported. A 3c Washington stamp was issued in 1932 modeled after the 2c Washington bicentennial stamp. This stamp is known as the "Stuart" Washington stamp and was very popular with matched set plate block collectors. This guaranteed that today we can obtain most of the 206 sheet plates without too much difficulty. Sixteen booklet plates were used and most are easy except for plate 20902. Ninety coil plates were used and the last 24 coil plates had the plate number entered much farther from the design and, as a result, 20 of these wide spaced coils are unreported and the four reported copies are rarities. I do not consider these 20 unreported coil plates to be available to collectors since it took a real production mishap for any of these plates to be found.

The 4c Martha Washington stamp was printed from 36 plates and most are easy except for plate 16369 which is rare. The 16 rotary sheet plates are easy to find, but the eight coil plates are difficult. The 1930 4c Taft stamp sheet and coil plates are easy to find. The 5c Roosevelt stamp was in real demand with 75 flat plates and 51 rotary sheet plates. Again, completion of both is quite difficult. The ten coil plates are hard with one unreported plate.

The 6c Garfield sheet stamp was printed from 22 flat and 20 rotary sheet plates and the coil stamp was printed from two plates. Here is a denomination that can be completed. The 7c McKinley with 61 flat plates and 16 rotary plates likewise is not overly difficult to complete. The 8c Grant was printed from 54 flat and 30 rotary plates and the rare plate 16796 was unknown until a few years ago when a couple of precanceled copies appeared. I remember being somewhat discouraged by the number of plates on this and the 6c stamp since the cost of mint copies is rather high but used plate singles are much more reasonably priced.

The 9c Jefferson stamp is fairly easy to complete, but the 10c Monroe with 103 flat plates, 46 rotary plates and 9 coil plates is a real tough challenge. The last two 10c Monroe flat plates are rare, and two of the coil plates are unreported. The rotary sheet plates are the easiest segment to complete.

The values above the 10c stamp are much easier, mostly due to fewer plate numbers to chase. The big exception is the 20c Golden Gate flat plate stamp. The last four plates (20271-4) are quite rare. I still remember an auction during the late 1960s which featured a large plate number collection. One of the lots was a set of all 76 20c Golden Gate flat plates. I just did not have the money to place a bid and I regret it to this day because I still am missing two of those plates.

There is a lot more to the 4th Bureau series plate numbers than the basic U.S. issues. Many plates were overprinted for use in the Canal Zone. The 2c Washington and 5c Roosevelt stamps were overprinted for the Hawaii commemorative stamps and the 2c alone for the Molly Pitcher commemorative. And we cannot forget the famous Kansas – Nebraska overprints on these stamps. Precancels were becoming widely used and precancelled copies add a lot of interest to a collection. This series saw the production of the star wide gauge plates and plate number pieces with the star are very collectable items.

5,939 plates were assigned to the 4th Bureau series stamps. This total is second only to the 3rd Bureau series among all of the regular issues. 5300 plates went to press and 275 have never been reported. In theory, it would be possible to get close to 5000 plates of this issue but in reality, it would be extremely difficult. The coils present the biggest obstacle and the rotary booklet plates are not too easy. Numerous scarce to rare sheet plates exist but not as many as with the 2nd and 3rd Bureau series. Many more plates were saved toward the end of the series and I think a collection of 75% of these numbers could be assembled before the real struggle would start.

The 4th Bureau series is a beautiful set of stamps and the plates make a fascinating collection which I would highly recommend to anyone looking for a new plate number challenge.

Meanwhile, the 5th Bureau series is ready to take off in the 22000 section and we will next look at that section.

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		4th Bureau Series Totals					
Series	Subject	Plate Type	Assigned	To Press	Available	Unreported	I Have
	(totals)		5939	5300	5280	257	
1925	0.5c Hale	400F	70	49	49	0	
1925	0.5c Hale	400R	16	12	12	0	
1922	1c Franklin	400F	276	255	255	1	
1922	1c Franklin	400R	207	183	183	0	
1922	1c Franklin book	360F	40	20	20	0	
1922	1c Franklin book	360R	22	14	14	0	
1922	1c Franklin coil	150R	14	8	8	0	
1922	1c Franklin coil	170R	117	104	104	18	
1925	1.5c Harding	400F	100	66	66	0	
1925	1.5c Harding	400R	72	68	68	0	
1925	1.5c Harding coil	150R	8	2	2	2	
1925	1.5c Harding coil	170R	72	62	62	7	
1930	1.5c Harding	400R	58	52	52	0	
1930	1.5c Harding coil	150R	6	0	0	0	
1930	1.5c Harding coil	170R	22	20	20	0	
1922	2c Washington	400F	1429	1363	1363	1	
1922	2c Washington	400R	687	674	674	3	
1922	2c Washington book	360F	227	194	194	0	
1922	2c Washington book	360R	90	84	84	2	
1922	2c Washington coil	150R	23	18	18	5	
1922	2c Washington coil	170R	709	687	687	206	
1922	2c Washington Die II	400R	6	6	6	0	
1922	2c Washington Die II coil	170R	10	9	9	3	
1922	3c Lincoln	400F	61	44	44	0	
1922	3c Lincoln	400R	44	44	44	0	
1922	3c Lincoln coil	170R	20	20	20	5	
1932	3c Washington	400R	226	206	206	0	
1932	3c Washington book	360R	16	16	16	0	
1932	3c Washington coil	150R	2	2	2	0	
1932	3c Washington coil	170R	101	88	68	0	
1922	4c M. Washington	400F	50	36	36	0	
1922	4c M. Washington	400R	29	16	16	0	
1922	4c M. Washington coil	170R	17	8	8	0	
1930	4c Taft	400R	18	10	10	0	
1930	4c Taft coil	170R	12	4	4	0	
1922	5c Roosevelt	400F	97	75	75	0	
1922	5c Roosevelt	400R	62	51	51	0	
1922	5c Roosevelt coil	170R	16	10	10	1	
1922	6c Garfield	400F	32	22	22	0	
1922	6c Garfield	400R	26	20	20	0	
1922	6c Garfield coil	170R	2	2	2	0	
1922	7c McKinley	400F	69	61	61	0	
1922	7c McKinley	400R	24	16	16	0	
1922	8c Grant	400F	63	54	54	0	
1922	8c Grant	400R	34	30	30	0	
1922	9c Jefferson	400F	31	16	16	0	
1922	9c Jefferson	400R	22	18	18	0	

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1922	10c Monroe	400F	128	103	103	0
1922	10c Monroe	400R	48	46	46	0
1922	10c Monroe coil	170R	15	9	9	3
1922	11c Hayes	400F	32	28	28	0
1922	11c Hayes	400R	9	5	5	0
1922	12c Cleveland	400F	45	35	35	0
1922	12c Cleveland	400R	7	6	6	0
1925	13c Harrison	400F	20	15	15	0
1925	13c Harrison	400R	5	5	5	0
1922	14c Indian	400F	20	20	20	0
1922	14c Indian	400R	4	2	2	0
1922	15c Statue of Liberty	400F	45	41	41	0
1922	15c Statue of Liberty	400R	6	6	6	0
1925	17c Wilson	400F	20	8	8	0
1925	17c Wilson	400R	4	2	2	0
1922	20c Golden Gate	400F	81	76	76	0
1922	20c Golden Gate	400R	6	4	4	0
1922	25c Niagara Falls	400F	20	12	12	0
1922	25c Niagara Falls	400R	5	4	4	0
1922	30c Bison	400F	28	24	24	0
1922	30c Bison	400R	4	4	4	0
1922	50c Amphitheater	400F	20	16	16	0
1922	50c Amphitheater	400R	4	2	2	0
1922	\$1 Lincoln Memorial	200F	5	5	5	0
1922	\$2 U.S. Capitol	200F	1	1	1	0
1922	\$5 America center	100F	1	1	1	0
1922	\$5 America frame	100F	1	1	1	0