

Chapter 44

The Special Deliveries

Special Delivery service was put into operation on October 1, 1885. The first special delivery stamp was issued at that time. Initially, special delivery service was limited to the larger post offices that were designated as special delivery offices. The initial stamp bore the inscription "secures immediate delivery at a special delivery office". Special delivery service was expanded to all post offices on August 4, 1886 and the second special delivery stamp had the same design, that of a running messenger, with the inscription "secures immediate delivery at any post office". This stamp was withheld until September 6, 1888 when supplies of the first stamp were exhausted. The color of the stamp was changed to orange on January 24, 1893 until January 5, 1894 when the color reverted to blue. The reason for the color change was to distinguish this stamp from the Columbian Exposition stamps.

The BEP assumed production of stamps in 1894 and the same design was used except a line was placed under the "TEN CENTS" to identify this stamp as a BEP product. Plate number 77 was used to print this stamp on unwatermarked paper and plate number copies are scarce and expensive. The stamp appeared on double line watermarked paper in 1895 with plate number 77 still in use. This stamp was used until the issue of 1902 and a total of 12 plates was used. Plate 77 is the most common and the next three plates are easy. The middle four plates, 880-3 are tougher, and the last four, 1257-60, are scarce. Plate 492 was overprinted for use in Cuba, and plates 880-3 were overprinted for use in Guam and the Philippines. The overprints are scarce but certainly add a lot to a collection.

The special delivery stamp of 1902 was issued on December 9, 1902 and the design now featured a messenger on a bicycle. This stamp was current for almost 20 years except for the year the 1908 issue was used. 56 plates were used to print the 1902 stamp. 12 plates were used on the double line watermarked version of the stamp. Plate 1774 was used for the Philippines special printing overprint. The last four double line watermark issue plates (5240, 5243-5), went to press in 1909 to replace the issue of 1908 stamp. After a few months, a "-09" was added after each of the plate numbers to indicate that this was a re-issue of the 1902 stamp. This was unnecessary since the plate numbers were sufficient to indicate the re-issue. But it makes an interesting variety. These four plates are much scarcer without the "-09".

The change to the third Bureau series in 1908 also brought a new special delivery stamp. The 1908 design featured the helmet of Mercury and was a smaller stamp issued in panes of 70 stamps. This stamp was not popular and only four plates were used.

In 1911, a new printing of special delivery stamps was required. The single line watermarked paper was now in use and nine plates were used for this variety. Plate 5520 is scarce on this variety. This plate is of real interest because it apparently lasted a

long time and is known on the following four varieties: single line watermark perf 12, single line watermark perf 10, no watermark perf 10, and no watermark perf 11! The last four plates used, 13816-19, are a bit scarcer than the others, but there are no rarities among the 56 plates used to print this stamp.

The introduction of the 4th Bureau series in 1922 also saw a new special delivery stamp. The design features motorcycle delivery. 69 flat press plates were used to print this stamp. This is, by far, the toughest stamp in the entire special delivery series if the goal is to find all of the plate numbers. Many of the plates are scarce and some are rare. Plate 14579 is rare with 2903 impressions printed and only 5 reported in the BIA's plate number survey. Plates 17641, 17642, and 17644 each printed less than 7500 impressions and are rare plates. Plate 18685 is tough with 2250 impressions and the last plate, 18686, is the rarest of the issue with only 350 impressions printed and 2 reports in the plate number survey.

1925 saw two new stamps, a 15c featuring motorcycle delivery and a 20c depicting a post office truck. All were printed by flat plates and only the last four 20c plates are scarce. The rotary press took over printing of the special delivery stamps in 1927 and the 10c design appeared followed by the 15c in 1931. None of the rotary press plates is scarce on these or subsequent issues. In 1944, 13c and 17c values appeared using the 10c design. The rate increased to 20c in 1951 and the 20c design reappeared using the rotary press.

A new design appeared in 1954, a 20c value showing hand to hand delivery of a letter. The rate increase to 30c in 1957 saw a 30c value of the same design as the 1954 20c stamp. The final design of special delivery stamps appeared in 1969 with the multi-color 45c special delivery stamp depicting arrows. The final stamp was the 60c issue using the 45c design with the colors swapped.

A total of 300 plates was assigned for special delivery stamps from 1894 until the last issue in 1971. 228 of these plates went to press and all are reported. The special deliveries are a fascinating series of stamps. The 228 plates succinctly tell the story of technological progress at the BEP. Completing these plate numbers is a real challenge but most of the plates can be found without undue difficulty. A high percentage of completion is possible. The special delivery series would be ideal for a collector who wants a real challenge, but with a scope small enough to be easily manageable. Give this series a try, and you just might get hooked.

The 34000 series will be examined in the next chapter. Could another rate change be imminent? It hardly seems possible!

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		Special Delivery Series Totals					
Series	Subject	Plate Type	Assigned	To Press	Available	Unreported	I Have
	(totals)		300	228	228	0	
1894	10c Special Delivery	100F	13	12	12	0	
1902	10c Special Delivery	100F	22	12	12	0	
1902	10c Special Delivery	200F	46	44	44	0	
1908	10c Special Delivery	280F	8	4	4	0	
1922	10c Special Delivery	200F	71	69	69	0	
1922	10c Special Delivery	200R	25	16	16	0	
1922	15c Special Delivery	200F	36	8	8	0	
1922	20c Special Delivery	200F	24	16	16	0	
1925	15c Special Delivery	200R	4	2	2	0	
1925	15c Special Delivery	200R	4	2	2	0	
1944	13c Special Delivery	200R	6	6	6	0	
1944	17c Special Delivery	200R	2	2	2	0	
1951	20c Special Delivery	200R	4	4	4	0	
1954	20c Special Delivery	200R	7	6	6	0	
1954	30c Special Delivery	200R	8	8	8	0	
1969	45c Special Delivery	200R	10	9	9	0	
1971	60c Special Delivery	200R	10	8	8	0	