

Chapter 52

The Americana Series

The Americana series of regular issue stamps began to appear in 1975 as a replacement for the 1965 Prominent Americans stamps. As had become typical, this was not a complete replacement of the 1965 issue since some of the 1965 stamps remained in use through the life of the Americanas. The Americana stamps were designed to be issued in groups of four stamps involving a central theme. Each stamp had an object as the central part of the design and explanatory text in an arc along two sides. When the four stamps of a group were placed together in a block of four format, the text made a unified frame surrounding the four objects depicted in the stamps. Only the 1c through the 4c stamp group was released at the same time. There was a gap of almost 6 years before one of the groups was completed. Production techniques were also used to unify some of the groups. The high value stamps were produced by the offset-intaglio method. This regular issue may qualify as the shortest lived of the regular issues. Some factors probably bringing about its demise were the design constraints, the complex production techniques, and the new plate numbering system of 1981.

The low value Americana stamps consisted of the 1c, 2c, 3c, and 4c values. The central theme of this group was the 'roots of democracy' and depicted were objects representing the freedoms of speech, voting, reading, and writing. These four stamps were printed on tinted paper in an attempt to add an extra dimension of color. These lowly stamps have a lot of interest for the plate number collector. There are no rare or scarce plate numbers but production varieties add a lot of interest for the collector. The 1c stamp had ten plates used and three distinct varieties exist. The stamp was issued first with shiny gum, then a switch was made to pregummed paper (known as dull gum). Four of these plates exist with both gum varieties. The BEP also printed a small amount of the 1c stamp on white paper using plates 38257-8 and these are scarce items. The 1c stamp was issued in a coil format with six plates used and all are reported. This coil can be found with shiny and dull gum. The plate numbers on the coils are scarce. The 2c stamp required 14 plates and this stamp is also available in the same three varieties but this time the white paper variety is quite common. The dull gum tinted paper variety is the scarcest but it is nowhere near as difficult as the 1c white paper stamp. The 3c stamp had 16 plates to press and the first four are available with both shiny and dull gum. The 4c stamp exists with 12 plate numbers and only plate 38284 is available in both shiny and dull gum.

The next group of Americana stamps consists of the 9c, 10c, 11, and 12c stamps. The 9c and 11c stamps were issued in 1975, the 10c stamp in 1977, and it was 1981 before the 12c stamp appeared. The central themes of this group are people's rights to assemble and to justice, and freedom of conscience and the press. These four stamps were printed on gray tinted paper to add more color. Twelve plates were used to print the 9c stamp and the last four appear with dull gum. The 9c dull gum variety is much

scarcer than the shiny gum variety. 9c plates 38348-9 appear with both shiny and dull gum. The 9c stamp was also issued in coil form and ten plates went to press with three of these being unreported. The 9c stamp also appeared in an unusual booklet format which consisted of one 9c stamp and seven 13c flag stamps. These 9c/13c stamps were printed on white paper with two perf varieties. Two printing cylinders were used for this booklet and the plate numbers are not available. The coil plates are scarce. The 10c stamp also required 12 plates for the issue and four of these appear with both shiny and dull gum. None of these varieties is scarce. The 10c stamp was issued as a coil with eight plates to press. Two of these are unreported and the remainder are scarce. The 11c stamp appears only with shiny gum and eight plates were used with all being easy to find. The 12c is available only with dull gum and six plates were used with none being scarce. The 12c coil was printed from six plates with four scarce and two unreported.

The next Americana group consisted of the primary letter rate stamps. The central theme was the nation and this group did not have a unified production method.. The 13c eagle and shield sheet stamp was printed by the gravure method and was quite colorful. It also become a very challenging stamp due to the number of plate number combinations. A total of 55 gravure cylinders were used to print the stamp and 29 plate number combinations resulted. Some of these combinations are very scarce. A small supply of one combination was produced with a 10.9 x 10.9 perforation instead of the normal 11.2 x 11.2 perforation and these plates are very scarce. The 13c Liberty Bell booklet appeared in four formats. Booklet panes of six stamps and panes of five stamps plus a label were produced from 360 subject plates. 22 of these plates went to press and seven are unreported. Plate 37345 is an interesting item in that the lower left position plate number was entered much closer than normal to the stamp design and most copies show 100% of the plate number. This is a scarce and desirable item. The BEP used 400 subject plates to produce booklet panes with eight stamps and seven stamps plus a label. 58 of these plates went to press and 48 are unreported. I am surprised that ten of these plates have been found. These plates are very scarce to rare. The 13c Liberty Bell stamp also appeared in coil format with 64 plates to press and 28 unreported. These are tough plates to locate. The 15c flag stamp was an intaglio produced item and was issued in sheet, coil, and booklet formats. Five sheet cylinders went to press and plate 39047 is very rare. The two booklet plates are unreported and eight of the nine coil plates are unreported. The one coil found must be a rare item. The 16c Liberty sheet stamp had six plates to press and none is really scarce. The 16c coils are available from 432 subject plates and four of the six used have been found. The 16c coil was also produced from two B press cylinders and these are not available.

The 4th group of Americana stamps, with denominations of 24c, 28c, 29c, and 30c, are probably the easiest for the plate number collector. The theme of these stamps is early American structures and all four of these are printed on blue tinted paper and the results look quite nice. Four to six plates were used on each of these stamps and all are easily found.

The high values comprise the 5th group of Americana stamps and the common theme is antique lamps. These stamps were produced by the offset-intaglio method and printed on the Giori press. The 50c Iron Lamp stamp was printed from six plates and all

are easy to find. The \$1 Candle Holder is famous because of the inverted flame variety. A paper foldover produced a rare offset plate number on the \$1 stamp and the copy of offset plate 39079 is probably unique. Fourteen plates were used to print the \$1 stamp and none are scarce but plate 41125 is noteworthy as the last 5 digit or 'real' plate number generally available to collectors in the BEP's postage stamp plate number series. The \$2 Kerosene Lamp was printed from five plates and the \$5 Railroad Lantern was printed from eight plates. Four of the \$5 plates are scarce and when this issue was current, I talked to the man in charge of accountable paper in the Dallas office to see if he had any of these scarce \$5 numbers in his stock. He said he did not and I was surprised when he called me back a few days later and asked me how many of these plates I wanted. He had called his colleagues around the country and located all four positions of these plate numbers! So I was able to get copies for me and my trading partners. It is too bad so few are willing to take the time to help out plate number fanatics. The help this fellow gave supplied many dollars to the USPS and enabled many matched set collectors to complete this difficult issue.

The 6th and final group actually appears to be two half groups although all four of the coil stamps feature musical instruments as the common theme. The 3.1c Guitar and the 7.7c Saxhorns have text on the bottom right and bottom left while the 7.9c Drum and the 8.4c Piano stamps have text also on the bottom right and the bottom left. In any event, these coils are a tough group when plate numbers are concerned. Two of the four 3.1c plates are unreported, four of the eight 7.7c plates are unreported, three of the ten 7.9c plates are unreported, and seven of the sixteen 8.4c plates are unreported. And the reported plates are tough to find.

The Americana series is an interesting group of stamps that presents real difficulties for the plate number collector. The sheet plates are easy unless one wants to collect all the varieties on each plate number and/or all of the plate number combinations on the 13c Eagle and Shield. The coil stamp plates are a really tough group and the booklet plates are even more difficult because of the 400 subject booklet plates. This regular issue had only 517 plates to press with 387 available to collectors. A whopping 62 plates (16%!) are unreported, a record number for a regular issue.

We will next examine the 39000 series of plate numbers and during this time collectors learn of the most significant change in plate numbers since the BEP began printing stamps in 1894.

Chapter 52-Americana

		Americana Series Totals					
Series	Subject	Plate Type	Assigned	To Press	Available	Unreported	I Have
	(totals)		745	517	387	62	
1975	1c Ability to Write	400R	20	10	10	0	
1975	1c Ability to Write coil	432R	14	6	6	0	
1975	2c Freedom to Speak	400R	14	14	14	0	
1975	3c Free Ballot	400R	18	17	17	0	
1975	3c Free Ballot coil	432R	8	0	0		
1975	3.1c Guitar coil	432R	4	4	4	2	
1975	3.5c Violin coil	432R	9	6	6	2	
1975	4c Public that Reads	400R	13	12	12	0	
1975	4c Public that Reads coil	432R	6	0	0		
1975	7.7c Sax Horns coil	432R	10	8	8	4	
1975	7.9c Drum coil	432R	14	10	10	3	
1975	8.4c Piano coil	432R	17	16	16	7	
1975	9c Freedom to Assemble	400R	12	12	12	0	
1975	9c Freedom to Assemble coil	432R	10	10	10	3	
1975	10c Right to Petition	400R	15	12	12	0	
1975	10c Right to Petition coil	432R	8	8	8	2	
1975	11c Eagle (not issued)	400C	2	0	0		
1975	11c Freedom of the Press	400R	8	8	8	0	
1975	11c Freedom of the Press book	360R	8	0	0		
1975	11c Freedom of the Press coil	432R	6	0	0		
1975	12c Eagle (not issued)	400C	2	0	0		
1975	12c Freedom of Conscience	400R	7	6	6	0	
1975	12c Freedom of Conscience book	360R	6	0	0		
1975	12c Freedom of Conscience coil	432R	12	6	6	2	
1975	12c/13c Eagle (not issued)	400C	12	0	0		
1975	13c Eagle and Shield	400C	64	55	55	0	
1975	9c/13c Combo book	832S	2	2	0		
1975	13c Liberty Bell book	288R	13	0	0		
1975	13c Liberty Bell book	360R	35	22	22	7	
1975	13c Liberty Bell book	400R	75	58	10	0	
1975	13c Liberty Bell coil	432R	68	64	64	28	
1975	15c Flag	920S	5	5	5	0	
1975	15c Flag book	832S	2	2	0		
1975	15c Flag coil	936S	10	9	1	0	
1975	16c Liberty Head	400R	23	6	6	0	
1975	16c Liberty Head	400C	8	0	0		
1975	16c Liberty Head coil	432R	22	6	6	2	
1975	16c Liberty Head coil	936S	2	1	0		
1975	21c Ordinary (not issued)	400R	8	0	0		
1975	24c Old North Church	400R	8	6	6	0	
1975	26c Ordinary (not issued)	400R	8	0	0		
1975	28c Fort Nisqually	400R	4	4	4	0	
1975	29c Lighthouse	400R	6	4	4	0	
1975	30c Schoolhouse	400R	8	5	5	0	
1975	50c Iron Lamp	400R	8	6	6	0	
1975	50c Iron Lamp offset	400L	22	19	0		
1975	\$1 Candle Holder	400R	16	14	14	0	

Chapter 52-Americana

1975	\$1 Candle Holder offset	400L	33	29	1	0	
1975	\$2 Kerosene Lamp	400R	7	5	5	0	
1975	\$2 Kerosene Lamp offset	400L	13	13	0		
1975	\$5 Railroad Lantern	400R	11	8	8	0	
1975	\$5 Railroad Lantern offset	400L	9	9	0		