

Chapter 56

The Great Americans Series

The Great Americans regular issue of 1980 replaced the short-lived Americana series of 1975. This issue marked a radical departure in that no longer did one unified issue of stamps cover all regular issue formats. The Great Americans appeared as sheet stamps only, at least as long as the BEP's postage stamp plate number series existed. The Great Americans, along with the Transportation coils, is also the longest running regular issue, now in its 18th year as this is being written. Multiple designs have appeared on many of the denominations and we find three different 20c stamps before the end of the BEP's plate number series. Only one stamp, the 19c Sequoyah, was issued with the real 5 digit plate numbers since it was issued in late 1980 just before the new plate numbering system went into effect. All other Great Americans stamps were printed from plates that used the plate code numbers. This discussion covers only stamps and plate numbers used up until the end of the BEP's postage stamp plate number series.

The 1c Dix stamp originally had plates assigned for use on the Cottrell press, but the stamp was finally printed on the A press with one printing cylinder assigned and used in the BEP's postage stamp plate number series.

The Cottrell press was used to print the initial 2c, 3c, 4c, and 5c stamps. Six plates were used to print the 2c Stravinsky, two plates printed the 3c Clay, and four plates printed both the 4c Schurz and the 5c Buck stamps. All of these plates are easy to find.

The A press was used to print the 7c Baldwin, the 9c Thayer, the 10c Russell, and the 14c Lewis stamps with one cylinder used to print each stamp. Four Giori press plates printed the 11c Baldwin stamp and four Cottrell press plates printed the 13c Crazy Horse stamp. None of these plates present any difficulty for the collector.

The 17c Carson stamp was printed from eight Cottrell press plates and the last four are quite a bit more difficult than the first four. The 18c Mason stamp was also printed on the Cottrell press using six plates and all are easy to find.

The 20c Bunche stamp was printed on the Cottrell press using eleven plates and all are easy to find. The 20c Bunche stamp was replaced by the 20c Gallaudet stamp which was also printed on the Cottrell press using six plates. Plates 8 and 9, the last two plates, went to press near the time of the rate change to 22c with the result being a small printing. These two plates are quite difficult to find. Be careful in identifying plate 9 since it is easy to confuse with plate 6. You can properly identify a plate single or block by rotating the item 90 degrees counter-clockwise. The 20c Truman appeared later and was printed by the A press using one printing cylinder.

The 22c Audubon, the 30c Laubach, and 40c Gilbreth stamps were all printed on the A press from one printing cylinder each. The 35c Drew stamp was printed on the

Cottrell press from four plates and plates 3 and 4 are much scarcer than plates 1 and 2, but plates 3 and 4 are much easier to find than the 20c Gallaudet plates 8 and 9. The final Great Americans stamp in the BEP's postage stamp plate number series is the 50c Nimitz which was printed from four Giori press plates.

All of the A press printings featured the 'floating' plate numbers which resulted from the fact that a complete revolution of the printing cylinder produced 920 stamps, 20 stamps wide and 46 stamps long. The printing web was cut vertically and horizontally so that the finished sheets had straight edges on three sides and one side had a tab which contained the plate numbers and marginal markings. The horizontal cuts produced 4.6 panes per cylinder revolution so the cylinder had the plate number entered six times each in the left and right margins. The finished post office panes would have either one or two plate numbers per pane and the position of the numbers would change on successive sheets. There are 23 possible combinations of marginal markings on full pane strips. Most collectors seem to feel that a block of six, with the plate number on the center stamp tab, is the most pleasing configuration to collect.

The Great Americans series is one of the few plate number groups where 100% completion is very possible. There are only 79 plates available and only a few of the plates are scarce enough to present a bit of a challenge. I would suggest to the plate number collector to use this group as a basis to collect the entire Great Americans series. There are many more stamps, but not too many plates, and many of these can still be found in the post office.

The 1980 coil regular issue is the famous Transportation Coils and we will next look at this group.

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		Great Americans Series Totals						
Series	Subject	Plate	Assigned	To Press	Available	Available	Unreported	I Have
		Type			Real P#	Code P#		
	(totals)		140	79	2	77	0	
1980	1c Dorthea Dix	400R	5	0		0		
1980	1c Dorthea Dix	920S	1	1		1	0	
1980	2c Igor Stravinsky	400R	7	6		6	0	
1980	3c Henry Clay	400R	9	2		2	0	
1980	4c Carl Schurz	400R	6	4		4	0	
1980	5c Pearl Buck	400R	4	4		4	0	
1980	7c Abraham Baldwin	920S	1	1		1	0	
1980	8c Henry Knox	400R	1	0		0		
1980	9c Sylvanus Thayer	920S	1	1		1	0	
1980	10c Richard Russell	920S	1	1		1	0	
1980	11c Allen Partridge	400R	13	4		4	0	
1980	13c Crazy Horse	400R	6	4		4	0	
1980	14c Sinclair Lewis	920S	1	1		1	0	
1980	17c Rachel Carson	400R	17	8		8	0	
1980	18c George Mason	400R	10	6		6	0	
1980	19c Sequoyah	400R	4	2	2		0	
1980	20c Ralph Bunche	400R	16	11		11	0	
1980	20c Thomas Gallaudet	400R	11	6		6	0	
1980	20c Harry Truman	920S	1	1		1	0	
1980	22c John Audubon	920S	1	1		1	0	
1980	30c Frank Lauback	920S	1	1		1	0	
1980	35c Charles Drew	400R	4	4		4	0	
1980	37c Robert Millikan	400R	6	4		4	0	
1980	39c Grenville Clark	920S	1	1		1	0	
1980	40c Lillian Gilbreth	920S	1	1		1	0	
1980	50c Chester Nimitz	400R	11	4		4	0	