

Chapter 59

Special Purpose Definitives

US postage stamps prior to 1963 were easy to categorize. The regular issue stamps had common themes or design elements and the other stamps were either commemoratives or were designated for special services such as air mail or special delivery. In 1963, the post office department issued a 1c Jackson stamp, a 5c Washington stamp, and a 5c flag stamp which were regular issue stamps but were not really part of the Liberty series, the regular issue stamps in use at that time. I decided, for my own collecting purposes, to put the new 1c and 5c stamps in with the Liberty series and when more flag stamps were issued, I started a 'flags' category. But, as time passed, it became evident that the post office would be issuing more and more stamps that did not appear to be part of any clearly defined category. I then decided to lump all of these stand-alone items into a category I call 'special purpose definitives'.

The first of these stamps is the 6.3c Bell coil stamp. This stamp was printed on the Cottrell press using four 432 subject plates. All four of these plates have been found and all four are scarce items.

The rate change to 13c in 1975 caused a lot of problems for the post office because the amount of the new rate was not known until almost the last minute and the BEP had to make provisions for the new rate being 11c, 12c, or 13c. Someone in the post office had an idea to print stamps without a value, but with a designation that would represent the new first class rate. Thus were born the A, B, C, etc. stamps. The post office was very secretive about these stamps and most were printed far in advance of their actual use. The A, B, and C stamps came to represent values of 15c, 18c, and 20c and all of these stamps were printed in sheet, booklet, and coil formats. The A, B, and C sheet stamps were all printed on the gravure press and all ten plates used are easy to find. The booklet plates had numbers positioned so that they were trimmed and none have been found. The coils were printed from 432 subject plates and nine of the ten A coils are reported with most being scarce. The B coils were printed from 15 plates and one of these is unreported. The C coils appear to be the toughest with 23 plates to press and 18 of these are unreported. Most of the reported coil plates are scarce to rare.

A 15c Bald Eagle stamp was planned and plates were assigned but the stamp was never issued. 15c Roses and 15c Windmills booklets were issued but all plate numbers were trimmed. Production errors caused 2 plate numbers to be found on both the Roses and Windmills booklets.

The new plate numbering system appeared in 1981 and the first booklet stamp was the 18c Wildlife with 16 plates going to press. Collectors seemed to be slow to warm up to these early booklets in the new plate numbering system and therefore some of the early numbers are scarce and expensive. A 20c Sheep booklet was issued and printed

from 26 plates and a number of these are scarce and expensive. The size of the plate number shrank drastically on the 20c Sheep booklet.

The D sheet stamp was printed from four gravure cylinders and all are easy to find as are the two coil cylinders that were used. Four D stamp booklet cylinders went to press but most collectors only found three and it was thought that booklet plate number 2 was not used. But someone obviously found copies without spreading the word and long after the issue was obsolete, a copy of the D booklet with plate number 2 appeared in an auction. This is a scarce plate unless someone has a hoard that may someday be released.

The 1983 \$9.35 stamp, whose primary use was on express mail, was issued in booklet form with four gravure cylinders being required with the resulting plate code number being 1111. The 1985 \$10.75 stamp was also issued in booklet form, this time with five gravure cylinders required to print the panes. The \$10.75 stamp had a second set of gravure cylinders used but the underlying real plate numbers on this second set were now in the BEP's miscellaneous series. The 1985 22c Seashells booklet had its first two intaglio cylinders assigned and plate code number 2 has the distinction of being from plate 41303, the last plate number in the BEP's postage stamp plate number series.

These special definitives in the BEP's postage stamp plate number series form a diverse and interesting group. There are 126 plate numbers available with 27 unreported, and the 432 subject coil plates on the A, B, and C stamps make this a difficult group in which to obtain a high percentage of completion. But, at the very least, get a copy of the 22c Seashells booklet with plate code number 2 and you can claim to own a copy of the 'last' plate number.

The next chapter will discuss the group that is probably the overall favorite among stamp collectors and that is the huge group of commemorative stamps.

Chapter 59-SpecialDefinitives

| | | Special Definitives Series Totals | | | | | | |
|--------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|------------|--------|
| Series | Subject | Plate | Assigned | To Press | Available | Available | Unreported | I Have |
| | | Type | | | Real P# | Code P# | | |
| | (totals) | | 262 | 175 | 66 | 63 | 20 | |
| 1974 | 6.3c Bell coil | 432R | 4 | 4 | 4 | | 0 | |
| 1975 | A | 400C | 4 | 4 | 4 | | 0 | |
| 1975 | A book | 360R | 4 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| 1975 | A book | 400R | 9 | 6 | 0 | | | |
| 1975 | A coil | 432R | 20 | 10 | 10 | | 1 | |
| 1975 | A coil | 936S | 3 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| 1975 | B | 400C | 4 | 3 | 3 | | 0 | |
| 1975 | B book | 288R | 10 | 10 | 0 | | | |
| 1975 | B book | 400R | 4 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| 1975 | B coil | 432R | 21 | 15 | 15 | | 1 | |
| 1975 | C | 400C | 3 | 3 | 3 | | 0 | |
| 1975 | C book | 1040 | 2 | 2 | 0 | | | |
| 1975 | C coil | 432R | 25 | 23 | 23 | | 18 | |
| 1975 | 15c Bald Eagle | 400C | 15 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| 1975 | 15c Roses book | 832S | 3 | 3 | 2 | | | |
| 1980 | 15c Windmills book | 480R | 40 | 29 | 2 | | | |
| 1981 | 18c Wildlife book | 480R | 20 | 16 | | 16 | 0 | |
| 1981 | 20c Sheep book | 480R | 33 | 25 | | 25 | 0 | |
| 1981 | 20c Sheep book | 1040 | 2 | 1 | | 1 | 0 | |
| 1981 | D | 460C | 4 | 4 | | 4 | 0 | |
| 1981 | D book | 480R | 4 | 0 | | 0 | | |
| 1981 | D book | 760C | 2 | 0 | | 0 | | |
| 1981 | D book | 1040+ | 4 | 4 | | 4 | 0 | |
| 1981 | D coil | 432R | 7 | 0 | | 0 | | |
| 1981 | D coil | 468C | 2 | 0 | | 0 | | |
| 1981 | D coil | 760C | 2 | 2 | | 2 | 0 | |
| 1983 | \$9.35 Express Mail book | 78C | 4 | 4 | | 4 | 0 | |
| 1985 | 22c Seashell book | 960S | 2 | 2 | | 2 | 0 | |
| 1985 | \$10.75 Express Mail book | 78C | 5 | 5 | | 5 | 0 | |