

Chapter 63

A Look At The Plate Number Galaxy

The BEP's postage stamp plate number series consists of 41,303 printing plates assigned over a period of 91 years. We have split this immense number of plates into various categories for easier examination in the prior chapters and now it is time to look at the entire series to see what is available to the collector. 35,166 of the 41,303 plates went to press (85.14%) with 32,426 plates (92.21%) available to collectors. The 32,426 available plates consist of 31,354 plates with real plate numbers and 1,072 plates with code numbers representing real plate numbers. 1,334 (4.11%) plate numbers are unreported so there is ample opportunity for new discoveries. There are also hundreds of scarce to rare to unique plate numbers among the 32,426 available plates and most collectors who collect long enough will have an opportunity to obtain some of the scarce to unreported plates.

Plate number collectors today may wonder if anyone tackles the entire run of 32,426 plates that are available and, if so, how successful can one be? Many collectors have attempted the quest for as many different plate numbers as possible and the hard working and ambitious collectors have been remarkably successful. During the 1950's and the 1960's, the BIA's SPECIALIST journal plate number column regularly published 'standings' showing how well participating collectors were doing. Today, the consecutive number collector population has declined quite a bit. Starting with the 28000 section of plates, the number of available plates declined sharply. The difficulties of obtaining booklet and coil plate numbers seemed to discourage many collectors. But I know of two collections today that are at or above the 90% level and there may be others. The consecutive plate number collector who has 'completionitis' will be an unhappy hobbyist. Although many issues can be completed, some are impossible, and the collector will need to be satisfied with attainable goals. Such a goal for a beginning collector might be 25% of all available plates. This would be 8000 plate numbers, a very impressive accumulation. Once a goal is reached, it is time to extend the goal or to select a new quest. The BEP's postage stamp plate number series offers many lifetimes of challenges and fun.

How does one mount or store a consecutive plate number collection? There seem to be two basic ways to mount such a collection. The plates could be mounted in order by stamp issue, then by plate number. A collection of the 5th Bureau series would start with the 1/2c Franklin stamp. The display could consist of mint or used plate singles, plate blocks, or matched sets of plate blocks. Adding interest would be the inclusion of precancelled plates, the plates overprinted for use in the Canal Zone, or covers with plate numbers. The 1c Washington stamp in sheet, booklet and coil form would be next. My personal preference is to mount plates in order by plate number and I have done this starting with plate number 1. Part of this book is the scan of my album pages displaying more than 30,000 different plate numbers in BEP order. I favor plate number singles for my collection and I am able to display up to 25 on a page. Turning

these album pages is interesting because most pages show a variety of stamps and it also provides a chronological record of plate number usage.

When I first started seriously collecting plate numbers, I was only interested in plates from sheet stamps. I thought that the partial plate numbers on booklets and coils were only for advanced collectors. I mentioned this to a dealer who then showed me a stockbook of these partial plate numbers and he said I would regret it one day if I passed these items by. I changed my mind about the booklets and coils in about a microsecond and have never regretted the decision. After 50 years of collecting plate numbers, it is still a thrill to add a new plate number, to cross it off my want list, and to see my overall completion percentage rise by another 0.003083945%!

I mentioned in the first chapter that these 41,303 plate numbers have provided collecting fun for thousands of collectors for over 100 years. There are almost an infinite number of ways the plate number enthusiast can collect these numbers. I hope this narrative has given the reader a clearer understanding of the BEP's postage stamp plate numbers. And I hope some new collecting possibilities have presented themselves. It is time to set some goals and to jump in - there are plate number discoveries yet to be made and you can be the one to find the next previously unreported plate number!

This completes our brief look at this immense galaxy of 41,303 plate numbers but I want to let the reader know that there are other galaxies to explore. The last chapter will take just a peek at what else might be of interest to the plate number collector.

Chapter 63-SumBySeries

Summary of Plate Numbers 1-41303						
Series	Assigned	To Press	Available Real P#	Available Code P#	Unreported	I Have
Totals	41303	35166	31354	1072	1334	
1st Bureau Series	1126	1090	1090		0	
2nd Bureau Series	3148	3081	3081		42	
3rd Bureau Series	8678	7900	7900		329	
4th Bureau Series	5939	5300	5280		257	
5th Bureau Series - Presidentials	1641	1440	1440		11	
6th Bureau Series - Liberty	1924	1784	1769		300	
7th Bureau Series - Prominent American	1649	1427	1224		249	
8th Bureau Series - Americana	745	517	387		62	
Great Americans	140	79	2	77	0	
Flag Definitives	3323	2266	1138	36	39	
Special Definitives	262	175	66	63	20	
Transportation Coils	155	111		111	0	
Commemoratives	9824	7936	6286	747	7	
Air Mail	1418	1049	921	27	17	
Special Delivery	300	228	228		0	
Postage Due	323	265	265		0	
Parcel Post	214	143	142		0	
Miscellaneous	494	375	135	11	1	

Chapter 63-SumBy1000

Summary of Plate Numbers 1-41303						
Series	Assigned	To Press	Available Real P#	Available Code P#	Unreported	I Have
Totals	41303	35166	31354	1072	1334	
0	999	946	934		0	
1000	1000	955	955		4	
2000	1000	992	992		2	
3000	1000	982	982		25	
4000	1000	952	952		12	
5000	1000	926	912		3	
6000	1000	911	902		8	
7000	1000	975	975		129	
8000	1000	890	890		86	
9000	1000	829	829		9	
10000	1000	920	920		15	
11000	1000	867	867		16	
12000	1000	882	882		22	
13000	1000	893	893		40	
14000	1000	973	973		5	
15000	1000	963	963		43	
16000	1000	869	869		69	
17000	1000	872	872		73	
18000	1000	784	784		44	
19000	1000	894	894		26	
20000	1000	780	780		0	
21000	1000	858	838		1	
22000	1000	849	849		5	
23000	1000	910	882		1	
24000	1000	848	848		3	
25000	1000	874	846		9	
26000	1000	847	847		88	
27000	1000	851	851		172	
28000	1000	799	705		69	
29000	1000	774	616		61	
30000	1000	839	624		43	
31000	1000	824	514		19	
32000	1000	865	514		17	
33000	1000	782	470		23	
34000	1000	812	535		9	
35000	1000	757	488		40	
36000	1000	553	409		13	
37000	1000	738	588		28	
38000	1000	661	511		42	
39000	1000	772	374	285	56	
40000	1000	688	23	605	4	
41000	304	210	2	182	0	