

The Prominent Americana

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Newsletter of the *Prominent Americans – Americana*
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Ideas for the Newsletter

* Some collectors adopt the challenge (and fun) of picking a favorite stamp and then specializing in it. It seems that's a very small minority of the hobby community, however. More often, one hears of a vote taken, "What's your favorite stamp?" as a popularity poll, nothing more. What say you? Do you have a favorite stamp in either of these series? And if so, were you drawn to specialize in it? Curious minds want to know.

* The Americana series was launched in a turbulent period of U.S. postal history – the last months of the 10¢ letter rate when the USPS was fighting for raising rates before the Christmas mailing rush. We want to survey known covers with 1975 postmarks *not hobby-contrived*. Please report in! (See related story, page 4.)

Don't forget–
Your articles, feedback welcome!

Welcome to issue no. 4

- * PA 50¢ + Am24¢ X 2 for COD... pages 1, 3
- * Am13¢ Booklet 50 years old! ... pages 1, 4-8
- * Am10¢ Color Error... pages 2, 3

A Henry W. Beecher Cover

In March and April 2024, I started noticing some odd Prominent American and Americana series stamp uses on-cover offered by one of eBay's "high volume" cover sellers.

(The four or so high-volume cover sellers on eBay I label as such because they start all of their covers at \$1 or less, add no descriptions, at least two seem to reach a minimum of 1,500 U.S. covers at 7-day auctions at any given time in the "Postal History" category, and judging from the item titles I've seen them used for about ten years now, they are not, oddly enough, philatelists.)

I realized some time ago I could not keep on top of browsing their covers so I only do so under limits. That means I miss seeing at least 95%. So it was fortuitous to even see this item.)

(please see page 3)

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Only Americana series cover acquired by editor mailed before 13¢ letter rate began on Dec. 31, 1975. Four 13¢ Liberty Bell stamps paid for one-ounce airmail letter (26¢ / ½ oz.) to Hungary, postmarked Dec. 22, 1975.

Starting a Roll Call of Little-Known Varieties

by Ron Blanks



close-up, original image



close-up, high brightness



enlarged, violet type
(original image)



enlarged, "bluish" type
(original image)



enlarged, violet type
(high-bright image)



enlarged, "bluish" type
(high-bright image)

Am10¢ PBs cropped images, at various sizes and brightness. To readers: Enlarging display image also changes perception. (Con't next page)

I'm writing this on the eve of two major anniversaries concerning our pair of regular stamp series: 60th anniversary of the Prominent Americans launch in November 1965, and 50th anniversary of the Americana series launch October 31, 1975. Something for any collector, whether of mint, used, or postal history covers.

I was hoping by the time you read this that a series of articles in the *U.S. Specialist* would be well underway, each focusing on a stamp issue and timed before its 50th or 60th anniversary (depending on its series). Since those stories will unfold much slower and belatedly over a longer period of time, I thought we could start here and now a list of unheralded varieties (mainly of PAs) that run the risk of being neglected or even forgotten.

Top of the list should be what might be the most obscure of all, and it's one of the very few from the Americana series. Neil Lamb brought it to my attention, of the 10¢ "Contemplation of Justice" (design of the "Freedom to Petition for Redress" issue as part of the "Freedom" set on gray paper).

It was normally issued in violet ink was found in a few cases printed with a bluish ink. The subject was probably discussed to death in my Americana series field guide ebook over fifteen years ago. (The one takeaway bearing repeating is that specimens must be viewed with much magnification.)

But no finds have been reported since. Neal shared more of this finds we present here for the first time, in case some readers are able to see some color distinction, in spite of the trouble trying to copy and show colors accurately.

In working with a cellphone image Neal made in 2021 of two plate blocks side by side, the thought arose to experiment with image editing to see if not only enlargement was needed, but would adding brightness improve telling colors apart. Some interim outcomes and final result are shown nearby. At least in this case of a mint plate block, it is possible that the "bluish" case is really one of the "bluish violet" shades that specialist Gene Pacquette listed in his catalog 25 years ago. (Note: Cellphones make poor philatelic images, mainly because of dimensional distortion. Scanners are always preferred.)



Am10¢ PBs image by cellphone, "violet" ink at left, "bluish" at right.

▶ **10¢ Justice colors study** (con't from page 2)

▶ **Henry Beecher cover** (con't from page 1)

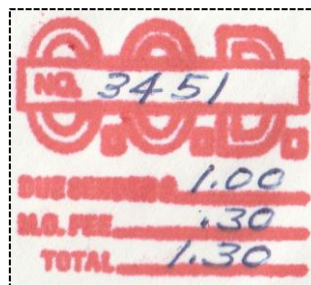
In reviewing other images submitted in 2021, I chose one that appears to me to be of the “bluish ink” type. Shown below, it is notable since it came from an “Auction 103,” of which I have no further information. As the auction catalog’s image page contained a completely varied mix of EFO material across decades, I am guessing the description for this “Lot 43” notes that its ink color is “bluish” in error.

As before, the original image is included to convey the challenge of discovering this ink type, followed by enlargement of the plate # single with a high brightness edit applied. (To help viewing, the close-ups have a yellow background since yellow and blue are complementary colors. Regrettably, the catalog image does not include a “control” case of the normal violet ink. I’ve copied the violet example from page 2.)



What was unusual to me is that these covers, most addressed from the late postal historian Henry W. Beecher, wound up in one of these online “dollar boxes.” It was sad to me in a way, because I always assumed the holdings of great philatelists like Henry, and Tony W. his co-author of the U.S. rate books among others, would be dispersed in more curated settings. I only saw about a dozen covers, so perhaps these were possible remainders or even being re-sold.

I acquired one of these, documenting the 85¢ COD rate effective April 18, 1976. With one-ounce letter rate of 13¢, total postage was 98¢. – Editor



Do You Look for the 10¢ Justice “blue” Ink Error?

Finding the variety offered in an auction was a surprise to me. I wonder how many readers keep it in mind when browsing Americana series material, or actively look for it. What is your experience? Please let us know.
– Editor



Figure 1. Americana series designs in contrast to previous definitive series.

Postal History Challenge of Americana 13¢ Liberty Bell Booklets

Introduction

by Ron Blanks

2025 brings intriguing dual anniversaries regarding two United States mail-use postage stamp series. The Prominent Americans series and the Americana series were launched in 1965 and 1975, respectively, sixty years ago and fifty years ago this year. When compared to their predecessors and even later series, for various reasons the two series seem to have garnered the least attention among stamp collectors and postal history students.

Recent educational efforts in these pages honored the 100th anniversaries of the Fourth Bureau series (2022) and the Third Bureau series (2009). Centennial of the “Prexies”, favorite among many, are due next (but not until 2038). So while we can, we draw attention to postal history challenges of the Prominent Americans and Americanas in hopes of reader finds to report.

It’s usually remarkable to learn of an unheard-of usage some sixty or fifty years after a stamp’s issuance. Part of the “least attention” for the 1960s and 1970s series is understandably the general preoccupation by hobbyists of that era with ongoing study of earlier periods. As for postal history as a worthy subject, the small numbers of enthusiasts it attracted had their hands full in the voluminous vagaries of 19th century mails, we might generously say.

A few philatelists did take their stand for contemporaneous postage stamps, including Henry Beecher. He dared to poke fun with this sub-heading to his April 1976 article in the *Specialist* on postal rates, “Many ‘postal historians’ feel that history ended about 1875.” In that vein 50 years later, we are hopeful that fewer think, “postal history ended about 1925.”

These occasional articles will follow the calendar sequence releases in both series interleaved; e.g., the first issues of “Series 1965” or of “Series 1975” can be discussed before the respective second issues and so on. The scope of each article will vary, depending on how the actual first days of issue were staggered and any complexity of a stamp’s formats.

The first Americana stamp is the 13¢ Liberty Bell (Scott 1595), issued on October 31, 1975 in booklet panes, and is our first subject. Its 50th anniversary leads by about three weeks the 60th anniversary of the first Prominent Americans stamp, the 4¢ Lincoln (Scott 1282), issued on November 19, 1965.

Our intent is to inform readers of one or more stamp usages unknown to us that readers might already know of, or can hunt for. In addition, readers can help by alerting us to any undescribed use that one would think is known, but is not. Reports are welcome as fodder for follow-up articles near or after upcoming anniversary dates. *(continued on next page)*

Recap: The Americana Series

The stamp images in the Scott catalog give a strong impression of the “Americana” moniker, even more so once Scott began publishing them in color. Between patriotic and historic symbols and the Colonial Williamsburg-like paper and ink tints, the series imagery is in stark contrast to the conventional portraiture of historical figures in past series (Figure 1).

Intentionally launched in 1975 at the eve of the nation’s bicentennial, the series’ timing roughly followed by ten years the previous Prominent Americans’ launch, which in 1965 was about eleven years after the Liberty series start in 1954. (Noting this pacing ignores the short-lived “Series 1961” of four stamp designs, Scott 1209-1299 and UX48, UY18.)

For an excellent in-depth treatment of the series stamps (showing many interesting, including scarce, uses), readers are referred to Ken Lawrence’s article published in *The American Philatelist*, May 1995. Some additional aspects deserve attention, with a few future elaborations to come.

The Americanas are the only ordinary postage series since the 19th century instituted as a tie-in to a whole far beyond itself; namely, celebrating the nation’s Bicentennial. (We note that the Civil War instigated a demonetization of postage supplies and the Union’s issuance of replacement stamps in 1861.)

The series is also the first one launched after the Post Office Dept. was transformed into the so-called “quasi-independent” federal agency, the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) in 1971. Part of the overhaul included moving most of the postal rate-setting process from the hands of the U.S. Congress to a new adversarial partnership between a new federal agency (the Postal Rates Commission, PRC) and the USPS.

While that progression meant the politics of the past was essentially ended, rate-setting became more complex than ever. Two processes could now proceed at times in parallel: USPS-set temporary rates in effect, and PRC proceedings that within statutory deadline might override any of them. (See Beecher’s article cited above, for robust treatment of this history.) This impacted 1975 planning for the new Americanas, not to mention timing of their first stamps in relation to the next broad rates change.

While the hobby generally thinks of the Americana series as replacing the Prominent Americans series, this was not so much the case in practice (whether by intention or not). Conventional thinking has the Americana series “taking the lead” in this duo of ordinary series for mail use in the late 1970s and early 1980s. But if so, the Prominent Americans should get more respect in additionally serving as adjunct to its successor series. Arguments for this case will unfold in later articles.

13¢ Liberty Bell booklet launches Americana series

The first Americana series stamps comprised 13¢ Liberty Bell booklet panes of six, seven, and eight, issued Oct. 31, 1975 in a counter book and a book for vending machines only. Figure 2 is a cropped image from the inside right page of the first day ceremony program, showing each of the three pane types with first-day cancel. They represented another first for the series – one launched with its first denomination and its format aimed at the most common postal use of stamps (one-ounce letters) and in the most convenient format for a casual mailer’s storage and use away from the post office.

The seven-stamp pane had a slogan label instead of an eighth stamp. This provided for one slogan pane and two eight-stamp panes packaged into a 23-stamp horizontal \$2.99 booklet for counter sales. Note that any of these stamps will bear a straight edge along either its top or bottom edge. In addition, the rightmost column of two stamps (at opposite end of pane from its binding or tab at left) have a second straight edge at right.

The booklet pane of six, oriented vertically unlike counter panes, was paired with a similar vertical pane of six Prominent American 2¢ Wright stamps to form a 90¢ vending machine book. It is significant that five of the 13¢ stamps here (denoted by arrows in Figure 2) have straight-edge traits not found among horizontal pane stamps. (And 22 of the 23 horizontal-pane stamps have traits not found in vended ones.) The “lower-right” single of any 13¢ booklet pane (design normally oriented) has both its right side and bottom straight-edged. It is the only such stamp once separated that cannot show whether it was vended or not. (*continued on next page*)

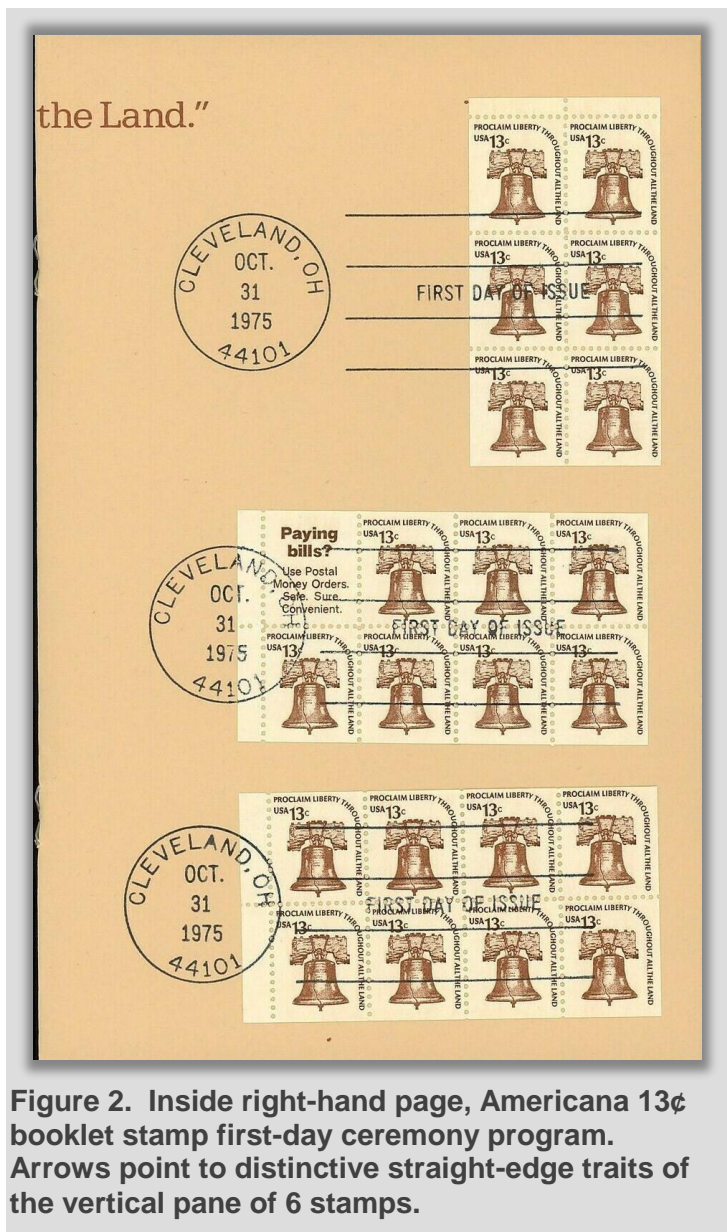


Figure 2. Inside right-hand page, Americana 13¢ booklet stamp first-day ceremony program. Arrows point to distinctive straight-edge traits of the vertical pane of 6 stamps.

The USPS issued the books in anticipation of an imminent 3¢ rise in the first-class letter rate from 10¢. They and other new stamps to be issued for new letter and post card rates are described in the Oct. 9, 1975 *Postal Bulletin* (PB 21060), introduced with a note, "... which will become effective December 28, 1975" [a Sunday, a day of the week most post offices were closed]. But legal wrangling pushed the start to Wednesday the 31st, New Year's Eve.

Postal history implications in the 13¢ letter era

With a denomination at the first-class one-ounce letter rate in effect 29 months from December 31, 1975 through May 28, 1978, at a cost of \$2.99 for a post-office counter booklet (versus \$13 for a roll of 100), it's not surprising that the 13¢ Liberty Bell was among the most common stamps used on 13¢ letters. Its counter-book format had no competition design-wise; the USPS policy of offering a "pretty" stamp versus a "patriotic" choice wouldn't start until the 15¢ letter era.

Rates-and-fees-wise, no other 13¢ use example besides a letter would ordinarily be expected in consumer originated mail. On the other hand, certain organization originated mail where a 13¢ stamp paid an unusual rate, might find a 13¢ booklet single or multiple affixed. Ordinarily, businesses and nonprofit firms are expected to stock rolls for office use. But smaller offices and/or thriftiness (with modest outgoing mail volume) could see booklet use. Thus, 13¢ booklet stamp uses in **Table 1** are quite unexpected but possible.

But don't riffle through ordinary looking covers with 13¢ booklet singles too quickly. Of course, finding a bill payment or greeting card envelope with the "Paying Bills?" slogan still attached is a fun challenge; who besides collectors would affix it? But those five distinguishable singles from a vended book are also an overlooked real challenge. They reflect a socio-economic choice of a mailer who, perhaps after-hours (or during long lines at the counter), chose to visit a post office vending machine for the 90¢ booklet. (Finding uses of those 2¢ Wright booklet singles can be part of the fun, too.)

The postcard in Figure 3 has the lower-left stamp from a vended book postmarked Jan. 27, 1978. I've acquired less than a half-dozen vended 13¢ stamp covers. And that's in spite of the fact that a second vended booklet with two panes of five was released on April 2, 1976 (which will be covered in a future article).

Postal history implications in the 10¢ letter era

In 1988 and again in 1995, the USPS methodically issued a commemorative stamp with a denomination that became obsolete almost overnight. Hobby publicity alerted some to prepare "proper use" covers in time, but finding a true typical use before rates changed in each case is difficult. What hasn't been publicized much are those briefest windows of use that existed between certain ordinary stamps' (*continued on next page*)

(c) by Oct. 31, 13¢ didn't match any commonly used rate or service fee, as if postal clerks were often selling 13¢ stamps. But they had been in one case: the domestic airmail letter (per ounce). Airmail as a separate domestic service ended effective Oct. 11, 1975, "Upon implementation of the Service Improvement Program..." as *PB 21060* stated it. As we're creatures of habit (and many still held 13¢ airmail stamps), it's not unusual to find airmail-rate letters through Dec. 1975.

(This "category" of mail remained on the rates classification books until April 1977, with higher rates set for Dec. 31, 1975, to support both mailing to Canada or Mexico and domestic mailing of merchandise *in order to obtain insurance*; e.g., of stamps, coins, gems and the like. Starting in April 1977, matter in first-class mail could officially be insured.)

With clerks busy handling Christmas stamps demand in addition to usual sales in 10¢ booklets, only a determined informed patron (e.g., collector) would ask for a 13¢ booklet ahead of when the public started scrambling to get 3¢ and 13¢ stamps (a week or so before Dec. 31).

Table 2 shows 13¢ rates in effect that ended on Dec. 30, 1975. Between my postal history friends and I after over ten years, to date we have found only two 13¢ Liberty Bell booklet stamp postal-duty uses from the period. Figure 4 illustrates a block of four, the right-half of a counter pane, postmarked Dec. 22, 1975 that paid for a one-ounce airmail letter to Hungary (26¢/½ oz.). (Interestingly, *international* rates of the time did not end until new rates began Jan. 3, 1976.)

We are hoping readers will share finds of other Americana series-franked covers dated 1975. (The other stamps issued in 1975 will be featured in later installments. Spoiler alert: Of the other stamps, we've acquired *only one other cover*, and another is illustrated in the May, 1976 issue of the *Specialist*.) My thanks to Roland Austin for his review of the manuscript.

Resources

Henry W. Beecher, "Postal Rate Changes in 1975 and January 1976 and Their Philatelic Implications," *The United States Specialist*, April, 1976, pp. 153-159.

Ken Lawrence, "Americana Series 1975-83" *The American Philatelist*, May 1995, pp. 438-468.

Postal Bulletin 21060, Oct. 9, 1975, pp. 3-6 (stamps), 8-14 (rates).

Table 2.

13¢ rates already in effect when first Americana 13¢ booklets issued.

 Airmail letter (USA, Mexico, Canada)*, 13¢/oz.	
Mar 2 '74/Sa 0000000000 0000000000	<u>Oct 31 '75/F</u> ●● Dec 30 '75/Tu
13¢ bkl sgl	2 mos.
13¢ bkl sgl, vended	
*– int'l rates ended 3 days later than domestic rates, Jan 2 '76/F.	
 4th-Class Library Rate 3 lb, 13¢ (7¢ 1st lb, 3¢/addl lb).	
Jul 6 '75/Su 0000	<u>Oct 31 '75/F</u> ●● Dec 30 '75/Tu
13¢ bkl sgl	2 mos.
13¢ bkl sgl, vended	
Key: Each open O is a rate month before stamp issued; solid dots (●) are months of sales during rate. Underlined dates are first known dates of sales. Right-most dates are last day of rate.	