

**Field Guide to Postal Uses of
the Americana Series**

by Ronald Blanks

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“Field Guide to Postal Uses of the Prominent Americans Series”

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Preface

Following the positive reception and reviews my first book *Field Guide to Postal Uses of the Prominent Americans Series* received, there was little doubt the second guide should be about perhaps my favorite U.S. stamp series, the 1975 – 1983 Americanas. To me, both series really merit attention and study “together”, as they served pretty much during the same time period of American postal history following the initial ten years of only Prominent Americans stamps.

Both of these guides arose as a result of challenges I was facing in keeping a lot of facts together at the same time while looking for U.S. postal history examples. Postal rate tables are necessary to understand much about why a piece of mail required a given postage amount. But I was also interested in the stamps issued for postage needs, including formats and varieties that usually interest those who collect just the stamps.

It was difficult, constantly cross-referencing in my mind the dates that a stamp variety was generally available for use, and various postal rates it might have been used for. For the Americana series especially, a lot of production varieties exist that do not get the same attention in the catalogs as the ones that received U.S. Postal Service “first-day” treatment. In fact, my first “e-book” project, never completed, was about the Americana stamps – I had a color scheme for the various gum types, and tables to highlight all of the production varieties such as precancel types. But that effort did not address usage history.

As with the Prominent Americans guide, this book is not just about the stamps, but also their usages. I tried to bring together different facts from several sources that might affect the possibility that a postal use example exists. I also wanted to somehow visually show the comparisons between a given stamp’s availability at post offices and the timeframes of various rates it might have been used for.

When I designed the first guide, I had to consider all sorts of possibilities to graphically display these comparisons. For that Prominent Americans book, I chose a simple approach that I hoped was just as effective as a fancier method might be. As reviews noted, it was effective in bringing to light interesting postal usages that readers likely considered as unusual and challenging as I did. (I could have highlighted the rare scenarios, but readers would better enjoy coming across and recognizing short-lived usages in reading at their own pace.) For this Americanas guide, I “tweaked” the Usage Graph template a bit and added color (or shading if color is not present in your printed edition) to improve the graphs.

This guide is not meant as the “definitive” reference to the Americana series, with all the accompanying background information possible for their conception, development, and production. This history would make interesting reading for

some collectors but requires much research and time to produce. (It would also expand the present guide to unwieldy size without adding usage information.)

Except for some production results, most of the stamps' development stories don't have direct bearing on actual uses. Since usage is the guide's focus, I tried to add information which did impact use (mainly issues of printing and format). But where possible, as with the first guide, I also tucked in historical tidbits here and there.

Several areas could likely be improved, and some mistakes are likely present (in spite of my going over the material many times). But I hope you will agree that this second guide is very useful for those interested in the Americana series as a specialized collecting area. As for me, I discovered several more interesting aspects of the series in putting this together. It still amazes me that so few rate periods coincided -- once one moves beyond familiar first-class eras, it turns out many mail classes and fees had their own timetables for when they went into effect. Also fascinating are how many truly brief timeframes exist for a given stamp to be used for a given purpose. I hope you find information very useful in your own collecting pursuits, and welcome your feedback and suggestions.

Ronald Blanks
July 31, 2009

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I express my appreciation to those who patiently answered my questions and/or loaned me material for the preparation of this guide. It would have taken me much longer to complete if it were not for their generous assistance. I hope I did not leave anyone unacknowledged: Roland Austin, Jim Callis, W. Wallace Cleland, John Deboo, David Giles, Neal Lamb, Richard Matta, Joann Lenz, and Arnold Selengut.

I also acknowledge the extensive work of the late Henry Beecher, and his partner in modern postal history Tony Wawrukiewicz. They combed through decades of Postal Bulletins and other materials to produce various books on postal rates. We postal-history aficionados have come to rely on these as needful time-saving references.

Additional information about the Beecher and Wawrukiewicz postal rate reference works can be found at the website: <http://www.spiritone.com/~tonywaw/index.html>.

Unless credited otherwise, all illustrations are by me and are based on material which I solely owned at the time of writing. It seems that I misplaced my attribution notes for at least one picture, and I apologize. I will appreciate being informed of any omission for future correction.

Note that several Prominent Americans values continued to serve alongside the Americana series until their replacement by Great Americans. This was primarily a result of the denominations chosen for the Americana series -- unlike prior series, they were mainly set to meet specific postage rates. Less were used as "make-up" values (only 1¢, 2¢, 3¢, 4¢ at the low end), and workhorse high values (30¢, 50¢, \$1, \$2, and \$5). Practically all of the values in-between, and all coils except 1¢, were set for specific rates. The net effect is that various Prominent Americans continued life right alongside the Americanas, as make-up values (3¢ coil, 5¢ sheet and coil), high values (20¢, 25¢, 40¢, \$1 coil), and even for specific rates (7¢, and 15¢ sheet, booklet and coil).

Note that this guide is not a substitute for a good reference book on postal rates, such as "U.S. Domestic Postal Rates, 1872-1996" (second edition) by Beecher and Wawrukiewicz. While much of the rate data I used came from either the domestic rate reference or international rate reference by Beecher and Wawrukiewicz, in some cases there is more to say about a specific rate than was necessary to mention in the usage graphs. (For example, this guide does not provide "maximum weights" for a given rate increment.) Also, there are likely several mistakes in attribution or understanding some rates, so an additional source should be consulted before relaying any details based on this guide.

Speaking of the rate reference used, the domestic version presented a problem, because at least two editions exist (the first one is titled "U.S. Domestic Postal Rates, 1872-1993"). Besides the usual corrections, the second version also contains later rates (not applicable to the Americana series due to their time period), but also inserts a new Table-20 (Controlled Circulation Periodicals), throwing off the numbering of subsequent tables by one from the first edition. On the premise that a significant number of readers have the first edition rather than the second, the citations refer to table numbers in the first edition, but above table number 19, for both editions (e.g., [t36/t37]). Citations to rates in the international reference take the form of page number (e.g., [p.99]) to tell them apart.

To keep the size to a manageable one, the guide omits most "theoretical" usages (which a postal clerk would likely not use, but a stamp collector might). However, it does include some interesting possibilities which, although rare, would otherwise be straightforward usages. For brevity, many of these are shown as notes.

Likewise, the guide highlights some late usages, in cases where the weight was the initial (most common) increment and a solo or multiple use would suffice (especially where no other stamp was available in that denomination).

Back to the stamp designs section (Chapters 1 - 26) for a moment, its intent is to spotlight all of the production varieties and formats for which postal uses might be found. For each stamp design, the guide lists issued formats and varieties along with their initial dates of availability. Collectors will differ on the kinds and types of

varieties that interest them to collect on-cover, so these lists serve to show the range of possibilities. The “dry gum” entries will raise some eyebrows, since conventional wisdom says they cannot be told apart from shiny-gum types. However, as will be noted for some cases, some can be told apart if one is fortunate to have a given plate number still attached in the margin.

To eliminate any inadvertent copying or undue influence in writing this guide (and, as with my earlier unfinished effort at an e-book on Americana stamps, circa 2002), I purposely avoided access to an earlier reference work about the series that readers might be aware of: “The Americana Series Reference Manual” by Art Maniker. From what little I know about its contents (some of which I learned from Allen Bohart’s articles on the series in *U.S. Stamp News* circa 2007), it does not document several production varieties, and it does not distinguish between the concept of “production” varieties versus the many errors, freaks, and oddities (EFOs) that can be found (an open-ended list, by definition).

Where available, the guide lists initial Bureau precancels per design, drawing heavily from Horace Trout’s long-running “Bureau Precancel New Issues and Shipments” columns in *The United States Specialist* monthly journal. Collecting precancels on-cover is very challenging because so few items remain intact -- most were advertising mail of the day (since discarded) and bulky parcels. Much more work is possible to compile information from the precancel specialty literature.

The stamp design chapters show the initial printing and/or shipping time period for the initial cities which received precancels. However, the guide avoids repeating information that is readily available elsewhere, such as from the Precancel Stamp Society’s *Catalog of United States Bureau Precancels* and from the Durland Plate Number Catalog. Cover specialists seriously needing lists of all precancel cities or plate numbers involved in a stamp’s production will undoubtedly already have access to these respective resources.

For brevity, the guide only includes usage graphs for precancel coils used in high-volume letter mailings, examples of which are likely to have been saved for finding today. “Local” precancels, prepared by any postmaster or his/her agent for local use, can possibly be found for both commercial as well as hobby use on all stamp varieties and so are not covered here except sporadically.

The sequence of the stamp design chapters simply follows the chronology of the issues in the 1970’s and 1980’s as the stamps appeared. Color is used in the production-variety icons for each design to denote the gum type used in producing the stamps: Light blue (to suggest “water”) denotes shiny gum; light yellow denotes the dull- or dry-gum paper; light green denotes the use of both. (Some readers without use of computers might be reading this as a grayscale hardcopy edition; all color schemes including those in the Usage Graphs are backed up by notations or shading schemes to convey the same information.)

Speaking of color, one convention regarding it arose in this guide, peculiar to the Americana series due to its extensive use of tinted papers. For continuity with the Scott catalogs that most U.S. collectors use, references to a specific tinted-paper color are in *italics*, and references to a specific ink color are underlined. Note that other references to ink and paper colors are not so-treated, when they are part of reasoning or speculation and not specific to a Scott-listed variety.

With almost as many ways to collect postal uses as there are collectors, the guide's usage information attempts to cover a broad range of interests. In addition to the popular "solo" use concept, where a cover has only one stamp which correctly pays a single rate or combination of rates and fees, other kinds of stamp use are supported. These are mainly "add-on" uses and "multi" uses. (Because the guide's terms might not coincide with definitions held elsewhere in the hobby, following this introduction is a short glossary of the guide's usage-related terms.)

This guide provides additional usage graphs specifically for multiple uses in the form of pairs. Again, for brevity the guide does not list all possibilities but tries to spotlight cases where only partial stamp availability existed (potentially leading to scarcer items to seek), or the paired value matched no existing stamp (below \$5).

Multiples for combined-rate usages are not included as graphs due to space considerations, although most high-value multiples are listed in notes. (Also, the spreadsheets on the accompanying compact disk [CD] show rate combinations that match either a double or triple value in the Americana series. In many cases, a solo usage shown nearby allows one to aptly find the relevant usage graph for the stamp's availability.)

For those who have read the previous volume in the field guide set on the Prominent Americans series, the following notes might be of interest:

Unlike the first guide whose source files were in grayscale to keep them small and the marketed hardcopy price reasonable, this guide uses color throughout – the covers are shown in color where color source images were available (only one example, a reproduction from another publication, is grayscale). Interestingly, the gum-type color scheme was taken directly from my earlier unfinished Americana series e-book.

For references to the rate books' tables (domestic rates) or pages (international rates), I dispensed with footnotes and endnotes as unwieldy, and added them nearby or directly inline where a footnote number would usually go, as appropriate. For production varieties' availability dates that are currently unknown past estimates, I denote estimated dates by using *italics*.

Hopefully, one day in the not too-distant future, I would like to publish a revised edition of the Prominent Americans series field guide to incorporate the changes adopted for this Americana series guide. Not only will some minor errors be

corrected and the illustrated covers refreshed with color versions, but the Usage Graphs will be upgraded to the revised scheme used in this Chapter 27. However, I have an obstacle to this revised-edition plan: Creation of the next new guide in the set for another popular U.S. definitive series. Your "vote" on which series to tackle next would be most welcome (see the contact information in front of the table of contents).

Glossary

"Bureau-precanceled" -- stamps overprinted by the Bureau of Engraving & Printing (BEP) with two parallel bars (and often with city and state) for use by authorized mailers. Stamps are not phosphor-tagged unless otherwise noted (13¢, 30¢, 50¢, and \$1 sheet stamp are the only precancels here also tagged).

"dry gum" -- dull-finish gum on pregummed paper, first introduced with the "experimental" 6¢ Eisenhower booklet in March 1971.

"horizontal", "vertical" -- oriented as one normally views the stamp design.

"label" -- as in booklet label, non-stamp design in place of one or more stamps in a booklet pane; all labels are non-corner, meaning they have exactly one straight edge and three perforated edges. With this fact and whether a pane layout is "horizontal" or "vertical", the pane descriptions indicate what stamp positions are in each pane type.

"tagged" -- coated with a nearly invisible varnish containing a suspended phosphorescent mineral compound, used to activate post office facer-canceler equipment. "Tagging" in general can mean any luminescent material has been applied to a stamp or postal stationery item, either as a varnish spot or overcoat, or being mixed with a color ink or in the paper itself. In the U.S., all stamps and postal stationery purposely tagged have had phosphorescent compounds used, which can be detected by shortwave ultraviolet light only. "Tagged" metered ink is an example of fluorescent tagging, detectable by longwave UV light. Most tagged Americana stamps were overcoated with a varnish while on-press by the BEP. (Tagging specialists like to investigate the exact method of on-press taggant application, a topic well beyond the simple "Is it tagged or not?" covered here, except for the few cases where a block of varnish smaller than the stamp was applied instead.)

Usage: add-on -- one or more of a given stamp that has been added to a cover already bearing a different stamp denomination. Noted by "[add]".

Usage: first-increment -- a stamp paying the postage required for the first weight increment in the rate class. Noted by “[first]”.

Usage: make-up -- Definition 1: A stamp added to a cover with a different stamp value which previously paid a postage rate now obsolete, thus requiring additional postage (also known as “uprating”); this guide has examples of this meaning. Definition 2: A stamp added to a cover with a different stamp value, in order to pay for an extra weight increment in the same rate class; this meaning for “make-up” is not used in this guide since “add-on” is used instead. Definition 3: A stamp added to a cover with a different stamp value that could pay for one rate class, whose combined value pays for a different rate class. This is a specialized definition serving as an example of the kinds of covers a collector might concentrate on -- intra-series “combo” covers where few usage possibilities exist. First-class stamps uprated to airmail use are the most common examples. This guide also has examples of this meaning. Noted by “[up]”.

Usage: multiple -- two or more stamps of the same variety without any other stamps present. Noted by “[mult]”.

Usage: solo -- a single stamp whose value pays all postage and fees required for the given rate class weight and any services for a given mailpiece. Noted by “[solo]”.