

United States Official Special Printings

In March 1875 the Post Office Department initiated a program to make reproductions, reprints, re-issues and special printings of all past and present issues available for purchase at face value through the office of the Third Assistant Postmaster General in Washington, D.C.

Among the stamps to be recreated were the then-current Official issues, which were used by nine executive branch government departments on official mail. Since Official stamps were not intended for public use, the USPOD announcement of the stamp program stated:

“The official stamps cannot be used except for the official business of the particular Department for which provided... All of the specimens will be *ungummed*; and the official stamps will have printed across the face the word ‘Specimen,’ in small type. It will be useless to apply for *gummed* stamps, or for official stamps with the word ‘Specimen’ omitted.” (March 27, 1875)

The 1¢ to 90¢ Official Special Printings were intended to be purchased in sets (with face value up to \$2), and the dollar-value State Department stamps were available individually. Other individual Official stamps could be purchased, subject to a minimum order of \$2.

To prepare for sales fulfillment the USPOD ordered and received 100 sheets of each of the 92 different Official stamps from the Continental Bank Note Company. The values from 1¢ through 90¢ were provided in sheets of 100 (10,000 total of each). The dollar-value State Department stamps were printed in sheets of ten (1,000 total of each). All of the stamps from this initial order were printed on hard white paper with a smooth surface, and they were sold without gum. With the exception of at least one set of imperforate sheets, the stamps were perforated.

Continental made a second printing of the Agriculture, Executive, Justice and State Department 1¢ stamps, using ribbed paper (100 sheets—10,000 stamps—of each). Additional printings of certain 1¢ departmental stamps were made by the American Bank Note Company, some of which were sold and survive as evidence that American used soft porous paper (1¢ Executive—O10xS, Navy—O35xS, and State—O57xS).

USPOD records show that additional 1¢ Agriculture and War Department stamps were also ordered, but the sale and destruction records indicate that only 234 of the

1¢ Agriculture stamps were needed in addition to the 20,000 from the two earlier Continental printings, and that none of the 5,000 1¢ War Department stamps printed by American were necessary to fill orders. Without examples of these two Official Special Printings, specialists can only speculate about the type of paper used or what they looked like.

An incomplete record of sales has been located in the government archives, dating from May 1879 through July 1882. The great majority of orders came from stamp dealers. Large quantities of the 1¢ and 2¢ values of all departments were purchased, including complete sheets. Orders of full sets, including the 3¢ to 90¢ values, were much more limited. The Executive Department stamps were the most numerous (the smallest number sold was 3,461 of the 10¢). The Treasury Department stamps drew the fewest orders among the 1¢-90¢ sets (only 72 of the 90¢ were sold). The State Department dollar values were evidently too expensive for most budgets, and sales were extremely small (only seven of the \$20 were sold).

The stamp program was discontinued on July 16, 1884. For many of the 130 years since the program ended the Official Special Printings were second cousins to their special-printing counterparts without the “Specimen” overprint, because stamps marked “Specimen” were usually discounted or given away. That was *not* the case with the Officials. As awareness of this fact has spread and appreciation of their significance has increased, the Official stamps have finally started to achieve equal status with special printings of the 1847 to 1883 regular postage, Postage Due and Newspapers & Periodicals issues.

Rear Admiral W. V. Combs published his important treatise on Official Special Printings in 1965 and lamented the lack of appreciation of the stamps. Around the same time, David Golden—who was always enamored with under-appreciated avenues of philately—formed the collection presented in this sale catalogue.

In 1994 and 1995, William E. Mooz published a series of articles on Official Special Printings in the U.S. Classics Society’s *Chronicle* (Nos. 154, 166 and 168). We appreciate his contributions and guidance in this subject area, as well as the assistance of Lester Lanphear, a respected specialist, exhibitor and author on Officials.

The table that follows provides statistics for the manufacture and sale of Official Special Printings. The lot descriptions in this catalogue refer to the quantities sold and relative scarcity, based on the information in this table.

Department	Den ¢	Sc. No.	Plate # (Size)	1st CBNC		2nd CBNC		3rd ABNC		4th ABNC		5th ABNC		Total	Destroyed	Sold
				Hard	Ribbed	Soft	Soft	Soft(?)								
Agriculture	1	O1S	65 (100)	10,000	10,000	0	0	0	0	5,000	25,000	4,766	20,234			
Agriculture	2	O2S	64 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	10,000	5,808	4,192				
Agriculture	3	O3S	57 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,611	389				
Agriculture	6	O4S	72 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,627	373				
Agriculture	10	O5S	114 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,610	390				
Agriculture	12	O6S	73 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,621	379				
Agriculture	15	O7S	105 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,630	370				
Agriculture	24	O8S	145 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,648	352				
Agriculture	30	O9S	100 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,646	354				
Executive	1	O10S,O10xS	82 (100)	10,000	10,000	5,000	0	5,000	30,000	5,348	24,652					
Executive	2	O11S	75 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	2,570	7,430					
Executive	3	O12S	63 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	6,265	3,735					
Executive	6	O13S	76 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	6,515	3,485					
Executive	10	O14S	111 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	6,539	3,461					
Interior	1	O15S	52 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	2,806	7,194					
Interior	2	O16S	45 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	8,737	1,263					
Interior	3	O17S	27 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,912	88					
Interior	6	O18S	56 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,917	83					
Interior	10	O19S	109 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,918	82					

Department	Den ¢	Sc. No.	Plate # (Size)	1st CBNC Hard	2nd CBNC Ribbed	3rd ABNC Soft	4th ABNC Soft	5th ABNC Soft(?)	Total	Destroyed	Sold
Interior	12	O20S	49 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,925	75
Interior	15	O21S	93 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,922	78
Interior	24	O22S	104 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,923	77
Interior	30	O23S	95 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,925	75
Interior	90	O24S	108 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,923	77
Justice	1	O25S	85 (100)	10,000	10,000	0	0	0	20,000	271	19,729
Justice	2	O26S	90 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	6,605	3,395
Justice	3	O27S	28 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,822	178
Justice	6	O28S	77 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,837	163
Justice	10	O29S	97 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,837	163
Justice	12	O30S	91 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,846	154
Justice	15	O31S	99 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,843	157
Justice	24	O32S	115 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,850	150
Justice	30	O33S	110 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,850	150
Justice	90	O34S	113 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,848	152
Navy	1	O35S,O35xS	80 (100)	10,000	0	5,000	0	0	15,000	818	14,182
Navy	2	O36S	50 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	8,252	1,748
Navy	3	O37S	34 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,874	126
Navy	6	O38S	53 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,884	116
Navy	7	O39S	119 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,499	501
Navy	10	O40S	101 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,888	112
Navy	12	O41S	92 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,893	107
Navy	15	O42S	94 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,893	107
Navy	24	O43S	107 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,894	106
Navy	30	O44S	96 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,896	104
Navy	90	O45S	106 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,898	102
Post Office	1	O47S	43 (200)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	3,985	6,015
Post Office	2	O48S	37 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,410	590
Post Office	3	O49S	36 (200)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,909	91
Post Office	6	O50S	47 (200)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,913	87
Post Office	10	O51S	62 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,823	177
Post Office	12	O52S	71 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,907	93
Post Office	15	O53S	66 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,918	82
Post Office	24	O54S	74 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,916	84
Post Office	30	O55S	68 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,919	81
Post Office	90	O56S	88 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,918	82
State	1	O57S,O57xS	55 (100)	10,000	10,000	0	5,000	0	25,000	3,328	21,672
State	2	O58S	59 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	4,855	5,145
State	3	O59S	70 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,207	793
State	6	O60S	83 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,533	467
State	7	O61S	112 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,209	791
State	10	O62S	98 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,654	346
State	12	O63S	78 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,720	280
State	15	O64S	118 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,743	257
State	24	O65S	117 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,747	253
State	30	O66S	116 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,751	249
State	90	O67S	67 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,755	245
State	\$2	O68S	121 (10)	1,000	0	0	0	0	1,000	968	32
State	\$5	O69S	120 (10)	1,000	0	0	0	0	1,000	988	12
State	\$10	O70S	122 (10)	1,000	0	0	0	0	1,000	992	8
State	\$20	O71S	124 (10)	1,000	0	0	0	0	1,000	993	7
Treasury	1	O72S	44 (200)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	7,815	2,185
Treasury	2	O73S	42 (200)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,691	309
Treasury	3	O74S	29 or 33 (200)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,916	84
Treasury	6	O75S	51 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,915	85
Treasury	7	O76S	103 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,802	198
Treasury	10	O77S	58 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,918	82
Treasury	12	O78S	46 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,925	75
Treasury	15	O79S	84 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,925	75
Treasury	24	O80S	134 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,901	99
Treasury	30	O81S	69 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,926	74
Treasury	90	O82S	61 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,928	72
War	1	O83S	48 (100)	10,000	0	5,000	0	0	15,000	5,390	9,610
War	2	O84S	35 (200)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	8,382	1,618
War	3	O85S	32 (200)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,882	118
War	6	O86S	60 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,889	111
War	7	O87S	102 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,461	539
War	10	O88S	79 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,881	119
War	12	O89S	54 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,895	105
War	15	O90S	87 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,895	105
War	24	O91S	86 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,894	106
War	30	O92S	81 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,896	104
War	90	O93S	89 (100)	10,000	0	0	0	0	10,000	9,894	106