



## OFFICIALS

THE FREE-FRANKING PRIVILEGE, ALLOWING delegates of the Continental Congress to send mail free of charge, was first extended on November 8, 1775. This was almost seven months before the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Through subsequent enactments the privilege was expanded to include a large number of government officials. The system was open to abuse, as there was no way to distinguish between official and personal mail. Philip Ward noted that by 1869 some 31,933 people enjoyed franking privileges, which cost the Post Office Department approximately \$5 million a year.

In an effort by the Grant administration to stem the tide of postal abuse, stamps were issued in 1873 for the nine departments of the Executive branch. They include the Agriculture, Executive, Interior, Justice, Navy, Post Office, State, Treasury and War Departments. Stamps were issued to the various departments by the Post Office as needed, and an accounting was kept for budgeting purposes and for reimbursement of the Post Office Department.

In an article by Morrison Waud in the Feb. 1875 *Chronicle*, he quotes Third Asst. Postmaster General W. H. H. Terrell's report to Postmaster General A. J. Creswell: "The abolition of the franking privilege, to take effect July 1, 1873, renders it necessary that stamps, somewhat different in appearance from the ordinary adhesive postage stamps now in public use, should be adopted... we consulted with the officers of the "Continental" and were gratified to find them ready and willing to meet our wishes to the fullest extent. Within two or three days they submitted new designs for all of the Departments

embracing the eleven denominations now in use..."

Four new, large-size bicolor stamps were added for the State Department, in \$2, \$5, \$10 and \$20 denominations, all bearing William H. Seward's portrait. It has been surmised that these higher values were prepared for use on consular mail, which was often sent out in large parcels and would have been charged a high postage rate.

In 1875 a set of Officials was released as part of the Special Printings program. These were overprinted "Specimen", because, unlike the regular-issue Special Printings, the Officials were not valid for postage. Like the 1875 Bank Note Special Printings, most of the Official Special Printings were scissors-separated, often cutting into the design.

In December 1878 Continental merged with American Bank Note Company, who assumed production for United States stamps early in 1879, including the Officials. As with the regular Bank Note issues, the Officials printed by American can be distinguished by the use of soft, porous paper. There is, however, an intermediate paper used by Continental just before American took over, and these should not be confused with the American printings.

American Bank Note Co. printed stamps only as the available Continental supply became depleted. The American printings were few in number, because, for the most part, existing supplies of Continental stamps were sufficient to meet demand.

On July 5, 1884, the Official stamps became obsolete with the universal adoption of the Official Penalty envelope.



\$20.00 State Department, Scott number O71

# 1873 STATE DEPARTMENT ISSUE

THE FREE-FRANKING PRIVILEGE, ALLOWING DELEGATES OF THE CONTINENTAL Congress to send mail free of charge, was first extended on November 8, 1775. This was eight months before the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Through subsequent enactments the privilege was expanded to include a large number of government officials. The system was open to abuse, as there was no way to distinguish between official and personal mail.

In an effort to stem the tide of postal abuse during the Grant administration, Congress abolished franking privileges for the Executive branch and authorized the use of special stamps on official mail. The Act of Congress signed on March 3, 1873 (effective July 3), stated: "...the Postmaster General shall cause to be prepared a special stamp or stamped envelope, to be used only for official mail matter for each of the executive departments..." These nine departments were the Agriculture, Executive, Interior, Justice, Navy, Post Office, State, Treasury and War Departments. Stamps would be provided to each department by the Post Office, and an accounting would be kept for budgeting purposes and for reimbursement to the Post Office Department.

Postal officials moved quickly to produce the new Official stamps. Third Assistant Postmaster General W. H. H. Terrell reported to Postmaster General A. J. Creswell:

"The abolition of the franking privilege, to take effect July 1, 1873, renders it necessary that stamps, somewhat different in appearance from the ordinary adhesive postage stamps now in public use, should be adopted... we consulted with the officers of the 'Continental' and were gratified to find them ready and willing to meet our wishes to the fullest extent. Within two or three days they submitted new designs for all of the Departments embracing the eleven denominations now in use..."

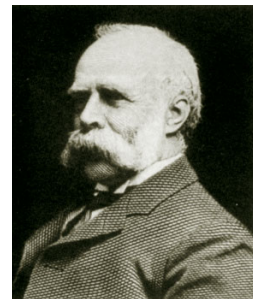
The 1¢ to 90¢ Official stamps were engraved and printed by the Continental Bank Note Company. With the exception of the Post Office Department stamps with numerals, the Officials followed a portrait design format that was similar in size and appearance to the regular postage stamps then in circulation. They were designed by Joseph Claxton.

The four dollar-value stamps were created exclusively for the State Department. These higher values were needed for use on consular mail, which was often sent out in large parcels and required a high postage rate. The large-size, bicolored State Department stamps were issued with \$2, \$5, \$10 and \$20 denominations, each bearing William H. Seward's portrait. The Seward vignette was engraved by Charles F. Skinner, one of Continental's premier engravers.

The dollar-value frames and lettering are believed to be the work of David J. Smillie (1833-1909), the son of James Smillie, another well-known security engraver. Douglas S. Ronaldson might also have been involved. The dollar frame plates were made from the frame die used for the \$2. On the \$5, \$10 and \$20 frame plates, the \$2 value tablets were burnished out and secondary transfers of each of the other denominations were made in the blank spaces. A composite die proof of the \$2 frame and value tablets is offered in lot 227.

The dollar-value State Department stamps were printed in sheets of ten with imprints and plate numbers for each plate in the top and bottom margins. Vignette plate number 123 was used to print all four values. The frame plates were numbered 120 (\$5), 121 (\$2), 122 (\$10) and 124 (\$20). These were the last in the first sequence of Official plates. Only 4,597 State Department dollar values were issued over the entire period Official stamps were available from 1873 to 1884.

In 1875 a set of Officials was released as part of the Special Printings program. These were overprinted "Specimen," because, unlike the regular-issue Special Printings, the Officials were neither valid for postage nor intended for public distribution.



Charles F. Skinner  
(1841-1932)



Dollar-value State Department Issues