



Did You Know?

Bluish Paper Stamps

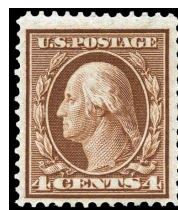
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In the early 1900s, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (B.E.P.) discovered that the common definitive stamps of the time, the Washington-Franklin stamps were the victim of paper shrinkage after being wet printed and dried. As a result, it was not uncommon for large amounts of wasted stamps to have off center perforations. It is estimated that approximately 20% of printed stock was discarded. In 1909, the United States Post Office Department decided to conduct an experiment to find ways to reduce waste and create higher quality stamps. Today, these stamps are known as the Bluish Paper stamps (United States Scott 357-366) and remain quite popular with philatelists.

In response, the B.E.P. tested a new variety of paper that consisted of cloth. For comparison, the original paper consisted of 100% wood pulp whereas the new paper consisted of wood pulp, but with 35% wool rag added. To save money, old rags were added during the paper production process. As a trial, more than 3 million 1-cent and 2-cent stamps printed on the experimental paper were distributed to post offices throughout the country for sale. After the new stamps were printed on the new paper, then acting Third Assistant Postmaster General, A.M. Travers created controversy when his office requested a sheet of 400 stamps of each bluish paper denomination (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 13, and 15-cents) for the Post Office Archives. Although the stamps were intended to be placed in the Post Office archives, the Postmaster General sold a portion of the stamps to dealers for prices exceeding face value. When discovered, he was fired and later indicted. It is estimated that he sold 200 stamps of the 1 and 2-cent denominations, and approximately 200 stamps of other remaining denominations to stamp dealers and collectors. Unfortunately, the Post Office did not adopt the new paper as they found the addition of rag content in the paper made little difference in the printing process and the experiment was abandoned.

Unfortunately for philatelists, when issued the Bluish Paper stamps treated as experiments and not considered a new variety by the Post Office Department. As a result, most of the stamps were treated as ordinary stamps to be used on mail and have been lost to collectors. Today, the Blush Stamps are desirable amongst philatelists for their scarcity. While the 1- and 2-cent denominations are the most common, the remaining values are more elusive. Of the values issued, the 5-cent denomination is the rarest followed by the 13-, 15-, 10- and 3-cent values. The rarest overall are the 4 and 8-cent issues as they were neither sold or distributed to the public.

While the stamps feature the same designs as their wood pulp paper counterparts, there are several key characteristics used to identify item. All the bluish paper stamps are perforated 12 but feature a heavy double line "USPS" watermark. They also appear darker giving a faint bluish or blue-gray tone compared to their wood pulp counterparts. It is helpful to have genuine examples of the bluish paper stamps to compare. Moreover, in some cases bluish paper stamps still contain some of the rag fibers which can be visible under a microscope. For bluish paper stamps to successfully sell at auction it is highly recommended to seek certification as bluish paper stamps are easily misidentified for regular stamps that have been tinted or toned over time.



US Scott 360

(unissued on Bluish Paper)



US Scott 361

(unissued on Bluish Paper)