

Sloane's Column:

U.S. Playing Cards Stamps

by George B. Sloane (From STAMPS Magazine, 1946 // 1958 with images added)

Sept. 8, 1951

The Playing Card Error of 1894

An interesting stamp, and very low in price, which will serve to illustrate a designing or an engraver's error is the U.S., 2¢ lake Playing Card stamp of 1894, the "On Hand" variety, Scott's No. RF1.

An examination of this design will reveal that the four playing cards as reproduced in the stamp are somewhat peculiar in that they show the characters identifying the suits only at the tops of the cards with none in the lower corners. The foremost card pictured is, in addition, blank in the center and shows another remarkable and glaring error. In this card the "spade" marking

at the upper right corner is inverted. (Arrows)

It would seem that whoever designed the stamp or engraved the die had little knowledge of playing cards. The errors should have been noted when the die proof was approved. We must conclude that because of the haste in which the stamp had to be made ready for issue, there was insufficient time to properly complete the design, and the inaccuracies were allowed to stand.

The blue stamp, Scott's RF2, with the inscription, "Act of 1894," was ready and in issue a week later, but the design had been worked over, the missing characters added to the cards and the error in the spade corrected.

The Bureau of Engraving and Printing produced these stamps, but they had too little time to do the initial work of engraving a die and preparing plates for printing. Christopher West, in his booklet, *United States Revenue Stamps*, reports that the tariff bill providing this 2¢ tax on playing cards was placed on the desk of President Cleveland on August 15, 1894. Having previously denounced many of its provisions, the President did not return it to Congress but permitted it to become law without his signature. *The Boston Revenue Book*, by Deats, Toppan and Holland, chronicles the first issue of the lake stamps as of August 23rd, a lapse of only eight days after the bill first reached the Executive's desk, indicating that the Bureau had to get into action fast to have plates finished and a printing made. Five plates were made for this stamp, 5091, 5098, 5105, 5106, and 5108, each of 200 subjects.

Plates for the blue stamps in the revised and corrected design were at press within a short time and these were issued August 30, 1894. These new plates were Nos. 5109 and 5110, the first of many that were to follow. This blue design, with the exception of a short



Scott RF1



Scott RF2

interruption, was to remain in steady usage for nearly twenty-five years. *The Boston Book* indicates that the lake stamps remained in use about a year, with a total issue of 13,400,000.

March 22, 1958

Playing Cards Stamps—Notes

...The 2¢ lake "On Hand" stamp (Scott's RF1), was issued under the Act of August 27, 1894, but the tax was to be effective back to August 1st.

It was probably the only Playing Card issue that was sold to anyone who applied for it, others being restricted to manufacturers and bona-fide dealers. All stocks of cards then in stores and in the hands of manufacturers had to be stamped with the new stamp which was to be cancelled with initials and the date when affixed to the deck of cards. The ultramarine 2¢ (RF2) issued soon thereafter was for use on newly manufactured cards. [Previously referred to as "blue," Scott lists ultramarine as RF2 and blue as RF2a. JFD.]

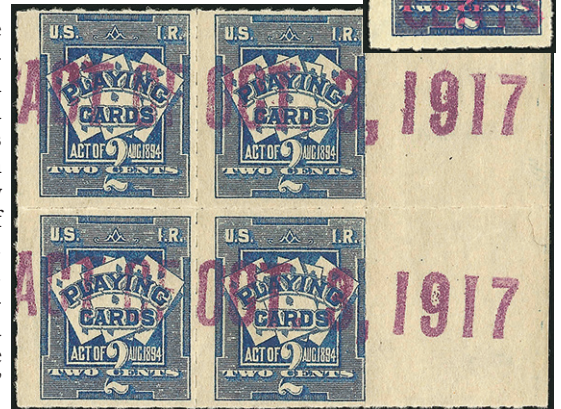
Under the Act of October 3, 1917, effective the following day, October 4th, the 2¢ tax was advanced to 7¢ but since no 7¢ stamps were available, the Commissioner of Internal Revenue instructed field offices of the Internal Revenue service to surcharge their 2¢ stamps and to sell and account for them at 7¢ each. Thus, Scott's RF5, which is believed to have been made at New York. A variant of this overprint, made at another office, reads, "Act of 1917," in two lines, and there are others.

Right, RF5, NY

Below, RF5, overprinted in Los Angeles

The larger producers used printed overprints of their own to show payment of the 7¢ tax. The N.Y. Consolidated Card Co. used the black "17" (RF6) indicating tax paid, Act of 1917. The black "7" (RF7), was used by the Standard Playing Card Co., for a while. The Russell P.C. Co. used the small "7 Cts.," (RF8), rarities which come press-printed in red and handstamped in violet. Later, Russell also used the red "7¢," (RF10). Scott's RF9, the "7 Cents" being part of a three-line press-overprint, comes in three major varieties, each a different color, U.S. Playing Card Co. in black, and its subsidiaries, A. Dougherty, in red and Standard, in violet.

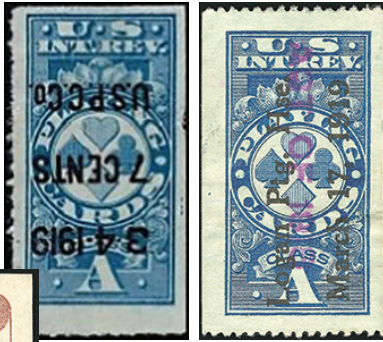
The long "Class A" stamps (RF13) come with a somewhat similar



Scott RF9

"7 Cents" overprint by the same three companies in the same color arrangement as before.

RF13a, overprint inverted; and RF13 Act of 1918/Logan Ptg. Hse March 17, 1919



RF14 block of four and single on Austria pack

When the Act of 1918 advanced the tax to 8¢, revenue offices again handstamped the old 2¢ stamps. Scott's RF14 is an example, most of which were used on decks of cards imported from Italy and Austria. A variant of this from another office reads, "Act of 1918, 8¢" in two lines. The large red "Sc" (RF15), was a press-printed variety by the Russell Co. The smaller "Se" (RF18), press-printed in three colors, was used by the Pyramid P.C. Co. The Magic Novelty Co. handstamped some copies of RF11 "8 Cents." The "8 Cts." (RF16), made at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, was a general issue.

April 20, 1946

Playing Cards Stamps—Russell's

The Russell Playing Card Co., before it merged with the "trust" and became a division of the U.S. Playing Card Co., issued some of the scarcest items among the playing card stamps, all provisionals originating in tax measures resulting from our participation in World War I.

The rarest Russell is the "7 CTS." surcharge, Scott's No. RF8, listed as overprinted in red or in violet. The red surcharge is a printed overprint, "10-4-'17 7 CTS. R.P.C. Co." in three lines, reading up. The violet variety I have not seen but I understand it is a handstamped surcharge. These 7¢ stamps appeared when Congress, under the Act of 1917, increased the tax on cards from 2¢ to 7¢. After a few months, the small Russell "7 CTS." was succeeded in January, 1918, by a new 7¢ variety, Scott's No. RF10, a red printed surcharge reading, "7¢ R.P.C. Co. 1-25-'18." The government at this time was furnishing stamps of the old 2¢ design, but the manufacturers paid for them at the new rates and applied their surcharges to show the new value.

When, under the Act of 1918, the tax was advanced to 8¢, Scott's No. RF15 was used by the Russell Co., a new overprint reading, "& R.P.C. Co. 4-1-'19." This, too, is a scarce variety, though it is frequently found used as a cancellation to overprint copies of RF16, with the small "8 cts." surcharge printed and issued by the Bureau. Copies of the RF15 overprint as a cancellation, on the 8¢, RF16, are often used by collectors as space fillers for the rare RF15, although



many collectors and dealers confuse them with the RF15 variety.

May 11, 1946

Playing Cards—"Class A" 1918-19

The large "Class A" Playing Card stamp, Scott's No. RF11, appeared in 1918 and before it was retired, it had served both as a 7¢ and an 8¢ stamp, though Scott designates it, through several listings, as a 7¢ denomination. When it was issued, the Act of 1917, advancing the tax rate from 2¢ to 7¢ was in effect and the stamp bore no face value, possibly because it was expected that the rate would again be increased, and it was under the Act of 1918, boosted to 8¢, effective April 1, 1919. [Scott now explains in a footnote that RF11 and RF12 were used as 7¢ before April 1, 1919 and as 8¢ thereafter. JFD.]

Examples used as 7¢ stamps would readily be identified by dated cancellations while those used by the three big companies in the U.S. Playing Card Co. combine are overprinted, "7 Cents,"—in black by the U.S.P.C. Co.; in violet by the Standard P.C. Co.; and in red by Andrew Daugherty. These are listed as No. RF13.

Copies of the RF11 stamp dated after April 1, 1919, were used as 8¢ stamps and in one instance, at least, privately surcharged with the new value by the card manufacturers. This was the Magic Novelty Co., who handstamped their stamps with their initials, "M.N. Co., 1919, 8 Cents." Another company, the Logan Printing House, handstamped theirs, "Act of 1918."

The stamps were, as usual, printed at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing and where previous Playing Card stamps were issued rouletted, these "Class A's" were issued imperforate. Many of the manufacturers used them as received, while others applied private roulettes and perforations for convenience in separation.

In imperforate form the stamps were used as previously noted, by the Magic Novelty Co., while another frequent user of imperforates was the New York Consolidated Card Co., whose stamps are dated, "1919" and may have been used for 7¢ or 8¢, though likely at the latter rate. The New York Consolidated also used, during 1919, a private roulette gauging 14, Scott's No. RF12. A variation of RF12 is a hyphen-hole form of roulette, measuring about 6, used by the Russell Playing Card Co., as an 8¢ stamp, with printed dating, "April 28, 1919." Another Russell variety, with the same printed date, used as an 8¢ stamp, is rouletted in red, Scott's RF12a. This red roulette was part of the overprinting plate, applied simultaneously with the company's overprint in the same color.



Sc. RF12

Copies are seen perforated 12 at top and bottom, imperforate at the sides, Scott's RF12b, used by the Logan Printing House, and another Logan variety, used as 8¢, is perforated 12 on all four sides and often handstamped, "Act of 1918." This should be listed as RF12c.

April 26, 1958

Playing Cards Item Non-Existent?

John Boynton Kaiser is interested in learning whether the Playing Card stamp, "8 cts." on 2¢ blue, issued in 1919, actually exists with inverted surcharge. The error is listed by Scott as No. RF16a, priced at \$100, and has been in the Catalog for many years. This "8 cts." overprint was made at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, produced under their usual conditions, carefully supervised against errors. Most of the other overprints in the Playing Card stamps were privately printed and are found in numerous forms of varieties and errors.



RF16a, red "8 cts." overprint inverted

Personally I have never seen a copy of the RF16a invert and Mr.

Kaiser has been unsuccessful in his search to locate an example in any collection. It may well be a non-existent variety. [As can be seen in the photo on page 14, Scott 16a does in fact exist. It is valued at \$3,000 by Scott. JFD.]

November 29, 1947

Playing Card Stamps, "1 Pack"

There are four varieties of the Playing Card stamps, inscribed, "1 Pack," issues of which began in 1940, and these are listed by Scott as Nos. RF26, 27, 28 and 29. Only the first three are current issues, the RF29 variety having been out of use for several years and, in consequence, the rarest of the lot. I'll discuss them in the order of Scott's listings.

RF26 is the small design, issued in horizontal coil form, perforated 10 at the sides and printed on the rotary presses. It is a common stamp, seemingly used by only two manufacturers of playing cards. They are precanceled at the Bureau of Engraving & Printing, "A.P.C. CO.," for the Arrco Playing Card Co., and "W.P.L. CO.," for the Western Printing & Lithographing Co. They are delivered from the Bureau in coils of 3,000 stamps each and the issue to date mounts into many millions. These manufacturers affix the stamps by machinery and it is probable that the small design is made purposely to accommodate their mechanical requirements.



Scott RF26

RF27 is the long design, issued in vertical coil form, perforated 10 at the top and bottom, printed on rotary presses. It is the commonest variety of the four stamps issued and is used chiefly by the U.S. Playing Card Co., which, with its many affiliated companies constitutes "The Trust," and dominates the market for playing cards. These stamps, also, are precanceled at the Bureau, even to the red seal device incorporating "U.S.P.C. Co.," and so frequently seen on the stamps. Other cancellations are, "E.E.F. Corp.," (Fairchild), "C.D.C. Co., Div. U.S.P.C. Co." (Consolidated Dougherty), both branches of the trust, and "B & B," Brown & Bigelow, an independent company, all precanceled at the Bureau. The stamps are delivered in coils of 1,000 and 3,000 stamps each, and four plates, Nos. 143948-49-50-51, had produced, up until the early part of this year (1947), over 370 million stamps. These stamps are also affixed by machinery as the finished decks come off the production lines.



Scott RF27

RF28 is the only one in the group printed from flat bed presses, and is perforated 11 all around on the perforators used for flat plate printings. It is not a common variety, although deliveries to this date would be about five million, and the largest user is the Kem Plastic Playing Card Co., manufacturers of expensive cards. Their red printed, "K.P.P.C. CO." precancellation resembles Bureau work but is done elsewhere. The stamp is issued in sheet form, none precanceled at the Bureau, and was the last of



Scott RF28

in sheet form, none precanceled at the Bureau, and was the last of

the four to appear (August, 1940). They are issued in sheets to accommodate Kem and other small companies who apply the stamps by hand. The story of RF29 will be told in an early column.

February 2, 1957

Playing Card Stamps—No. RF29

In 1940, the United States Internal Revenue Bureau issued new Playing Card stamps in two designs, each inscribed, "1 Pack." Collectors recognize these stamps in four varieties, listed by Scott, in major numbers, RF26, 27, 28 and 29, three of which are still in current use. The RF29 variety is the rarity in the group with an unusual history, which I have published before and repeat because so many collectors ask about it under the impression that it is a "current issue," and are baffled by their failure to find copies. Actually it has been obsolete for seventeen years.



Scott RF29

The stamp was printed on the rotary presses, perforated 10 x 11, and issued in sheet form as a result of urgent circumstances. The rotary press production was intended solely for playing card stamps in coils, but some stamps in sheet form were needed at once to fill emergency requests from the Bureau of Internal Revenue.

The flat plates, which the Bureau of Engraving and Printing later completed and used for printings of RF28 in sheet form, were not yet ready and to fill these emergency orders for sheets a quantity of stamps was removed from the stock of rotary press coil printings of RF27. This stock, already perforated 10 at top and bottom, not yet stripped into coils, was trimmed into sheet form and the stamps then perforated 11 at the sides to complete them. These coil plates were each of 102 subjects, hence sheets were in the same size.

First delivery of the rotary printed stamps in sheet form, No. RF29, was made June 28, 1940, a small lot of 18,054 stamps (177 sheets), and soon thereafter another lot of 94,146 stamps was delivered making a total of 112,200 stamps, or 1100 sheets in all. No further deliveries of the RF29 stamps were ever made and all future deliveries of the 1 pack Playing Card stamps required in sheet form were from flat plate printings, RF28, the first delivery made on August, 2, 1940.

This entire, though small, rotary press printing of RF29, with the exception of one sheet retained at the Bureau for specimen purposes, was quickly exhausted before collectors even knew of the existence of the special variety. I believe I recall seeing one copy mint, but all others I have seen were used by the Kem Plastic Playing Card Co., precanceled with their customary red overprint, "K.P.P.C.CO.," set between two horizontal bars. It is possible some were also used by other smaller companies all of whom, including Kem, were applying their stamps to decks of cards by hand. The stamps will never be found on cards that were manufactured by the big companies of the industry, who used the coils, RF26 and RF27, since they affixed their stamps by mechanical means and the coils in the new "1 pack" designs were available to them immediately upon first issue, in 1940.

January 26, 1952

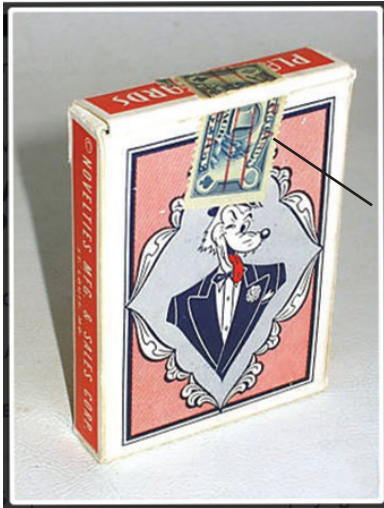
Playing Card Coil Users

In a recent column I noted that the Bureau is now furnishing the "1 Pack" Playing Card coils (Scott's RF27) without precancellation. Previously all Playing Card coils were supplied only with Bureau precancellation for the larger firms in the industry. I noted handstamped cancellations, "B & B A," and "Q P A" with a query for information as to who these users might be.

Some interesting information has resulted. W.T. Fuller writes that the "B & B A" is a Brown & Bigelow handstamp, and the "Q P A" — "Quality Park," another of Brown & Bigelow's, St. Paul, Minn. Brown & Bigelow are the world's largest manufacturers of calendars and advertising novelties, and one of the largest producers of play-

ing cards which they market under their own name, and also manufacture for other companies, even (so I am told by Mr. Fuller) for the great U.S. Playing Card Co.

But the "A"? Herman Herst, Jr., has done some research for me and advises that the "A" is for "Art." The two handstamped varieties noted are found on decks marketed in the past two years or so, displaying female models in various nude poses. The cards are marketed from St. Louis, as "Art Studies," and just incidentally, as playing cards, and appear to be getting a wide distribution as novelties. They were made by Brown & Bigelow on a special order, but I am told by Mr. Herst that B & B had some misgivings as to whether the cards might stir up a rumpus. The "A" was added to the handstamps to identify them as a special order, "Art," in the event of a kick-back.



Sc. RF27 "Q P A" (arrow points to the "A"; the "P" also is visible above the "A")

May 31, 1958

Rare Playing Cards Stamps

If collectors were to go in search in the hope of finding the rarer Playing Cards stamps issued during 1917-1919, the stamps obviously would have to be on decks that were manufactured and packaged for sale forty years ago. With great luck some such packages might be located in stores in outlying villages here and there around the country. But the stocks of cards in modern stores will yield nothing but the commoner current varieties with, on some decks, the scarcer No. RF28, and then usually on a more expensive card.

The old dyed-in-the-wool Match and Medicine stamp collectors never gave up hope and in the late "nineties" and in the early twentieth century, constantly prowled ancient drug stores and often succeeded in finding old preparations still on the shelves with the rare proprietary stamps

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