

# Neopost Report:

## USPS Error Online Proofs

by John Ryskamp

There are at least three reasons images of stamps at USPS websites appear there with a bar through the FOREVER or the denomination: first, prints of such images are clearly reproductions. Second, it is difficult to make forgeries from barred images.

Third, prints of the images without the bar—either from the website or directly from the downloaded image—are listable error proofs at any time before USPS applies the bar. For these reasons, collectors look for any USPS online releases of stamp images which lack the bar. USPS does not release proof material. There's no precedent for online proofs, but I will put it to Scott, since USPS tells me it considers them proofs....clearly USPS considered it an error. What kind? I think a proof error.

According to USPS, prior to the three stamps discussed here, all previous stamp images on USPS websites, although not other websites, have had the bar. Unbarred releases were accidents waiting to happen.

The first such accidents occurred simultaneously in March 2012. According to USPS, this was an "honest mistake." It confirmed that prints made from the images before USPS applied the bar (including varieties) are indeed proofs. USPS was quite alarmed by having error images on its own websites, and I suspect it regards prints of these images to be stamps released in error, rather like downloadable internet postage. We are at the stage in computer stamp production at which an error release of a stamp image is a stamp released by mistake, just as if it had been sold over the counter.

The stamps are the 1-cent Bobcat stamp (which appeared at the USPS Stamp of Approval blog site and the Beyond the Perf website) and the Girl Scout Forever stamp (which appeared on the "Newsroom" section of the USPS website). The unbarred images appeared approximately March 9 through March 26. The images were also released with bars, but the postings discussed here somehow slipped through—USPS did not respond to my inquiry as to how this occurred.

USPS was not in a position to forbid printing, but did request that I delete the images after I had done so. I did not have much time, because once I informed USPS of the images, it said the bars would be inserted immediately, so before deleting the images from my system, I made the following items:

### GIRL SCOUT

The first proofs I made were two from the website. (Figure 1).



Figure 1



Figure 2

are the rarest proofs). I also printed envelopes with each of the images (1 each), and one envelope with both images (Figure 3). I printed a sheet of the Scout stamp with "FOREVER" inverted (Figure 4). I also printed the following sheets (sheet of 20)—in color: 5 (white paper), 3 (green),



Figure 3

3 (yellow), 3 (orange), 3 (pink); in black and white: 5 (white), 2 (green), 2 (yellow), (2) orange, (2) pink. Finally, I printed one Scout stamp which is 8.5 x 5.75



Figure 4

inches; this and the Bobcat stamp mentioned below, are the largest U.S. stamps of any kind (not illustrated).

I call these printings—and those I describe later—"proofs" because, they are internal working images, which if printed by USPS, would be considered part of their proof material, and I'm sure there are printed versions of them by USPS. Again, they considered what I printed to be proofs, from an image they released in error. With the bar, I think they are simply illustrations when printed.

**BOBCAT A**

This is the stamp which appeared at the Stamp of Approval blog. I printed one Bobcat A stamp which is 8 x 7 inches, and the following examples on paper (sheet of 30)—in color: 5 (white paper), 3 (green), 3 (yellow), 3 (orange), 3 (pink); in black and white: 2 (green), 2 (yellow), (2) orange, (2) pink. Scout (sheet of 20)—in color: 5 (white paper), 3 (green), 3 (yellow), 3 (orange), 3 (pink); in black and white: 5 (white), 2 (green), 2 (yellow), (2) orange, (2) pink.

**BOBCAT B**



Figure 5

Then USPS informed me that it had located another version of the Bobcat on another of its sites, the Beyond the Perf site (Figure 5). The two versions had the bar placed through them on March 26. Bobcat B is slightly darker than Bobcat A. I made three examples of Bobcat B from the website, one on paper, one on label paper, and one in black and white on paper. I slightly enlarged Bobcat B images so this version could be more easily identified. My template was three rows of five, in which Bobcat A and Bobcat B alternate. There are four sheets of this in black and white. There is one sheet in color with the template reversed and doubled (Figure 6). There are four proofs of the template trebled on each of the following colors: red, orange, blue and green. The second template is the first, with the addition, in row four, of five examples of



Figure 6, with the templates overlapped to save space

Bobcat B and below it, five examples of Bobcat A. There is one example in black and white, and eight sheets of this five-row template doubled, one inverted, on each of the following colors: white, pink, red, green, orange, yellow, salmon and lemon.

The Bobcat stamp is to be released as a coil, and in the online proof, USPS provided a coil perforation-like frame for the stamp. I made a sheet of 30 with this version and varieties and made one sheet on each of the following colored label papers: white (Figure 6), orange, red, pink, green. I also printed four examples of the template in black and white on white paper (Figure 7).



Figure 7. A portion of the sheet printed on white label paper

I asked USPS to inform me of other downloads from its sites; they did not report any others to me; however, I'm delighted to be able to report as I write this that unbarred images of the planned Holy Family 2012 stamp are available at the following sites:

<http://www.virtualstampclub.com/2012usnew.html>  
[http://www.stampcommunity.org/topic.asp?TOPIC\\_ID=20775](http://www.stampcommunity.org/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=20775)  
 [Note: As time passes, these links may no longer be active. JFD.]

Apparently this stamp appeared for a while on Beyond the Perf without the bar, which is how these websites were able to obtain unbarred images. If the editors were intelligent enough to save the image and make prints (documented before the bar was applied), then they have the first online proofs; the image is barred now on all USPS websites.

Images, even unbarred ones, taken from websites other than USPS websites cannot be considered proofs, because the image is much more grainy than a print from an image taken directly from a USPS website, and prints made from USPS website images cannot be considered proofs after USPS applies the bar to its website image, or if the image never appears on the USPS website without a bar. That is why it is such a rare and important occurrence when a stamp image appears on a USPS website without the bar and is downloaded and printed while the image is still on a USPS website without the bar. In my opinion, as long as the stamp image appears on the USPS website without a bar, it is there with USPS's permission to take a proof from it. The USPS considers them proofs; that's why I consider them proofs.

Let's hope there are many more such mistakes. I am glad I was able to get these historic proofs from USPS website images before the application of the bar. If you happened to download these images from USPS websites and print them, please let me know (philneo2001@yahoo.com).

[I would remind anyone who does download and print such images that there are laws against reproducing U.S. stamps. Even if you paid full postage without such a printing and just added it to an envelope to create a collectible or "for the fun of it", you may be asking for trouble. JFD.]