

MERIT BADGE SERIES



STAMP COLLECTING



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA®

BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA
MERIT BADGE SERIES

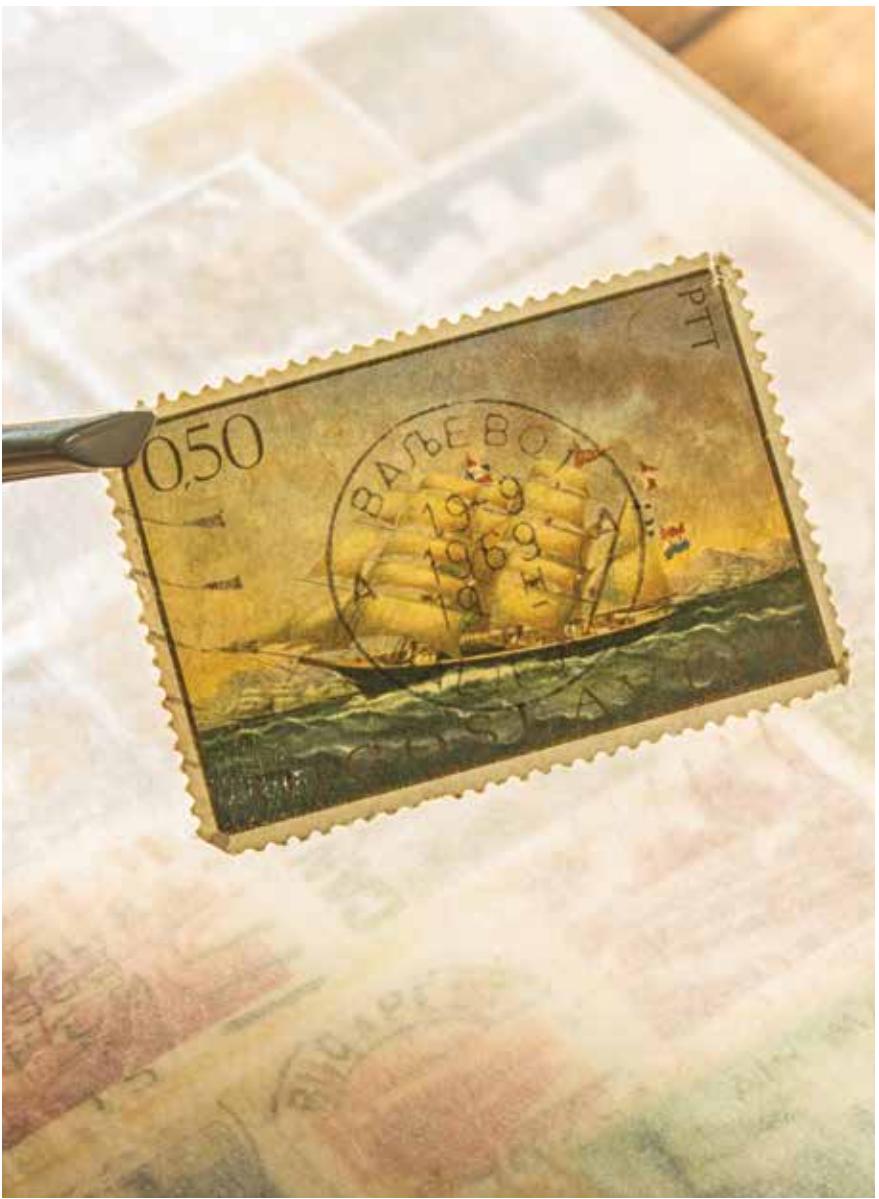
STAMP COLLECTING



"Enhancing our youths' competitive edge through merit badges"



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA®



35955
ISBN 978-0-8395-3296-5
©2024 Boy Scouts of America
2024 Printing



Requirements

Always check www.scouting.org for the latest requirements.

1. Do the following:
 - a. Discuss how you can better understand people, places, institutions, history, and geography as a result of collecting stamps.
 - b. Briefly describe some aspects of the history, growth, and development of the United States postal system. Tell how it is different from postal systems in other countries.
2. Define topical stamp collecting. Name and describe three other types of stamp collections.
3. Show at least ONE example of each of the following:
 - a. Perforated and imperforate stamps
 - b. Mint and used stamps
 - c. Sheet, booklet, and coil stamps
 - d. Numbers on plate block, booklet, or coil, or marginal markings
 - e. Overprint and surcharge
 - f. Metered mail
 - g. Definitive, commemorative, semipostal, and airmail stamps
 - h. Cancellation and postmark
 - i. First day cover
 - j. Postal stationery (aerogramme, stamped envelope, and postal card)



- 
4. Do the following:
 - a. Demonstrate the use of ONE standard catalog for several different stamp issues. Explain why catalog value can vary from the corresponding purchase price.
 - b. Explain the meaning of the term *condition* as used to describe a stamp. Show examples that illustrate the different factors that affect a stamp's value.
 5. Demonstrate the use of at least THREE of the following stamp collector's tools:
 - a. Stamp tongs
 - b. Water and tray
 - c. Magnifiers
 - d. Hinges and stamp mounts
 - e. Perforation gauge
 - f. Glassine envelopes and cover sleeves
 - g. Watermark fluid
 6. Do the following:
 - a. Show a stamp album and how to mount stamps with or without hinges. Show at least ONE page that displays several stamps.
 - b. Discuss at least THREE ways you can help to preserve stamps, covers, and albums in first-class condition.
 7. Do at least TWO of the following:
 - a. Design a stamp, cancellation, or cachet.
 - b. Visit a post office, stamp club, or stamp show with an experienced collector. Explain what you saw and learned.
 - c. Write a review of an interesting article from a stamp newspaper, magazine, book, or website (with your parent's permission).

- d. Research and report on a famous stamp-related personality or the history behind a particular stamp.
 - e. Describe the steps taken to produce a stamp. Include the methods of printing, types of paper, perforation styles, and how they are gummed.
 - f. Prepare a two- to three-page display involving stamps. Using ingenuity, as well as clippings, drawings, etc., tell a story about the stamps and how they relate to history, geography, or a favorite topic of yours.
8. Mount and show, in a purchased or homemade album, ONE of the following:
- a. A collection of 250 or more different stamps from at least 15 countries.
 - b. A collection of a stamp from each of 50 different countries, mounted on maps to show the location of each.
 - c. A collection of 100 or more different stamps from either one country or a group of closely related countries.
 - d. A collection of 75 or more different stamps on a single topic. (Some interesting topics are Scouting, birds, insects, the Olympics, sports, flowers, animals, ships, holidays, trains, famous people, space, and medicine.) Stamps may be from different countries.
 - e. A collection of postal items discovered in your mail by monitoring it over a period of 30 days. Include at least five different types listed in requirement 3.





Contents

Introduction to Stamp Collecting	9
Types of Stamp Collecting	19
The Language of Stamp Collecting.....	27
The Design and Production of Stamps	39
Catalogs, Equipment, and Procedures	47
Displaying Your Collection.....	57
Fun Projects	61
The U.S. Postal Service From Past to Present	65
Interesting Stories About Stamps	69
Stamp Collecting Resources	73



Introduction to Stamp Collecting

The world's most popular hobby, stamp collecting is enjoyed by millions throughout the world. It is known as "the hobby of kings and kids." Many lasting friendships have begun as a result of stamp collecting.

Through this hobby you can experience history, from the Pony Express to man's first landing on the moon. You can meet presidents from George Washington to Ronald Reagan. For most countries, postage stamps are like tiny windows that introduce the people of the world to the country's leaders, customs, history, products, and environment.

Many stamps honor famous people—statesmen, educators, inventors, royalty, and leaders of various movements or services. Others recognize the achievements of organizations such as Scouting, the Red Cross, or 4-H, and still others mark holidays such as Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and Easter.



Philately is the collection and study of stamps and other postal materials. A person who collects and studies stamps is called a *philatelist*.

Great art and artists are represented on stamps. A stamp is a masterpiece of art in miniature. Every line, every hair must be painstakingly carved on a metal die before an engraved stamp is printed.

Some *philatelists* collect stamps from one or a few countries—the United States or the former British Commonwealth, for example. Others collect stamps from all over the world. This type of collection is called a *general collection*. Some general collectors collect stamps issued during specific years or periods—from the time they were born to the present, for example, or only those issued during World War II.

Topical collectors concentrate on what is shown on the design of the stamp—outer space, historical figures, horses, dogs, flowers, trains, sports or athletes, and so on.

The way you collect and what you collect should be based upon your personal interests. Collect what you enjoy—and enjoy learning about what you collect.





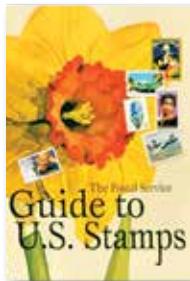
Understanding People, Places, and History

Over the decades since Great Britain issued the first adhesive postage stamp, the Penny Black, in 1840, more than 700 geographical or political entities have issued stamps of their own. As of 2021, more than 220 postal administrations around the world continue to issue stamps. There are far too many stamps for any one person to collect them all—so you need to concentrate your collection in some way.

Let's begin by looking at the many different possibilities a beginning stamp collector can pursue. In order to fulfill the requirements of this merit badge, you must choose one or two areas of concentration. You might decide to concentrate on stamps issued by the United States or stamps issued by other countries.



The Penny Black

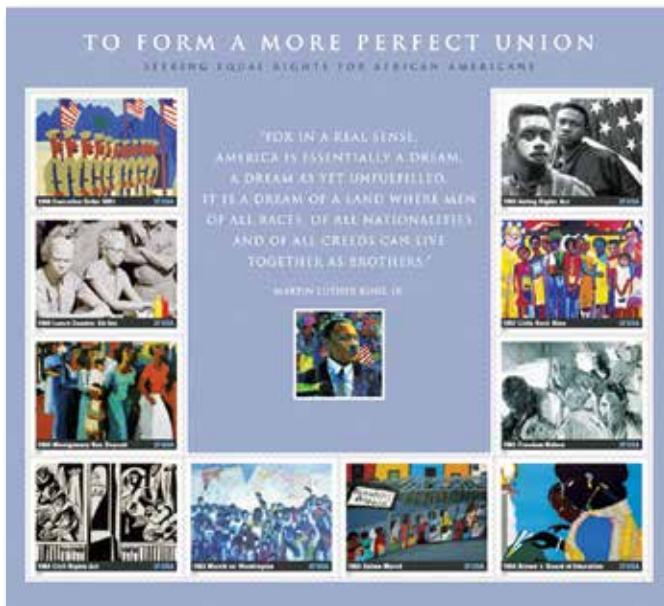


For more information about U.S. stamps, visit the U.S. Postal Service website (with your parent's permission) at www.usps.com, or check out the *Postal Service Guide to U.S. Stamps*, available at many post offices and bookstores.

United States Stamps

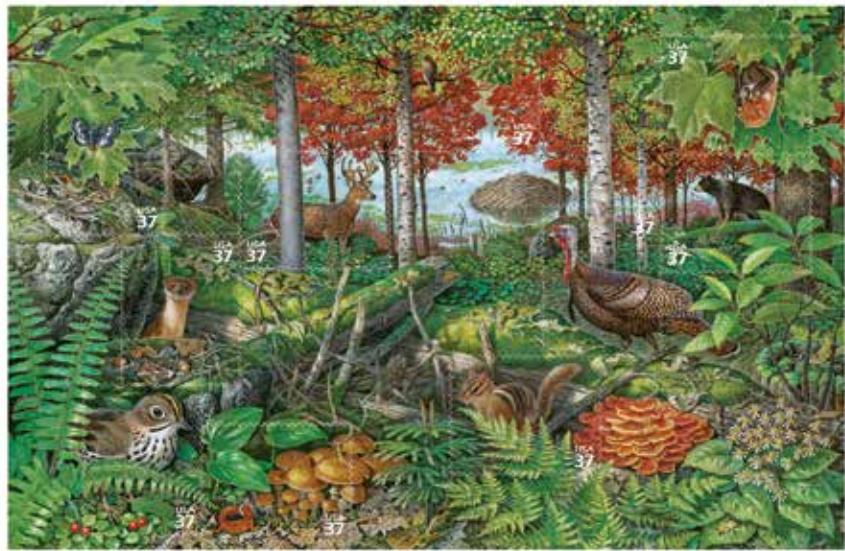
The United States Postal Service prints 13.7 billion stamps per year. In 2020, the USPS produced 31 new postal issues that included 105 separate designs (some issues involve numerous different stamps). Among the subjects were prominent Americans such as President Ronald Reagan, architectural works, noted American scientists, tennis star Arthur Ashe, four distinguished United States Marines, and the man behind the Muppets, Jim Henson.

Stamps also commemorated key moments of the Civil Rights movement and showcased spring flowers, constellations, architecture, airplanes and jets, sporty cars of the 1950s, and such Disney characters as Mickey Mouse, Ariel, the Mad Hatter, and Snow White. The USPS also issued the Northeast Deciduous Forest souvenir stamp sheet (with 10 separate stamp designs). This was the seventh in its "Nature of America" series that promotes appreciation of major plant and animal communities in the United States. (Meet the artist who painted the series of stamp sheets in the chapter "The Design and Production of Stamps.") These are typical subjects for stamps—which honor events, persons, and themes of widespread national appeal.



NORTHEAST DECIDUOUS FOREST

SEVENTH IN A SERIES



NATURE OF AMERICA

Northeast Deciduous Forest stamp sheet

To learn more about the stamps shown here, you can turn to a stamp catalog. Take the Northeast Deciduous Forest stamp sheet from the Nature of America series, for example. If a catalog is not available at home, your local library should have a copy of the *Scott* or *Minkus* catalogs, or the *Postal Service Guide to U.S. Stamps*. From the catalog we learn that these stamps were issued on March 3, 2005. The pane has 10 37-cent stamps depicting the eastern buckmoth, red-shouldered hawk, eastern red bat, white-tailed deer, black bear, long-tailed weasel, wild turkey, ovenbird, red eft (a type of salamander), and eastern chipmunk.

These stamps were printed by a process known as photogravure, in which the design of the stamp is photographed through a fine screen. The screen breaks the design up into tiny dots that are etched into a plate that holds the ink. The ink is lifted onto stamp paper when it is pressed against the plate. Other stamps are printed using lithography and offset printing techniques.

For more information on stamp printing processes, see the introduction section of the *Scott Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue*.

Stamps From Other Countries

You may want to collect a foreign country's stamps because you are interested in learning more about that country. Countries often picture their own geographical and historical landmarks on stamps. Some picture animals or birds native to their land.

The U.S. Postal Service has strict rules about what events or people shall be shown on stamps. Until 2012, a living person or someone who had died less than five years ago (except for an American president) could not be shown on a U.S. stamp.

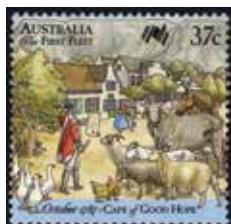


Another reason people collect foreign stamps is that many countries issue stamps about current popular culture, such as movies, musicians, and celebrities. In October 2005, for example, New Zealand issued stamps depicting the giant ape and other characters from the movie "King Kong," which was filmed in that country and released in 2005. In January 2006, the Austrian Postal Service issued a stamp commemorating still-living American boxing legend Muhammad Ali. Also in January 2006, the Canada Post commemorated Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom. The image on the stamp came from a photograph of the Queen taken during her visit to Canada in 2002. None of these subjects could have appeared on a U.S. stamp before 2012.

Some countries have very little or no need for stamps in their postal system and will print stamps—especially stamps with high value—only for the income they produce. Sometimes a stamp is purchased already canceled. These stamps are called

CTO, or *canceled-to-order*. Typically, CTOs have a very neat cancellation that just touches one corner of the stamp. When you turn the stamp over, you will find that it still has its original gum on the back.

CTO stamp



Friendships Around the World

Making friends doesn't have to happen in your own neighborhood. Make new and lasting friendships by finding a pen pal. Having a pen pal—someone you may never meet in person but whom you become friends with by exchanging letters—is a fun learning experience.

Aside from getting envelopes with interesting stamps and postmarks, you could exchange stamps *and* get to know someone. You might also learn about a foreign language or another culture. Imagine having a pal halfway around the world. Pretty cool.

First, get your parent's consent and assistance. To find a pen friend, search the Web (with your parent's permission), and ask your teachers or librarian if they know of a reputable pen pal service. Some services are free; others charge a small fee. You may need to complete an application with some general information about yourself—your age, country, and hobbies, among other things. Again, be sure you have your

parent's permission and help with finding a pen pal.

Your family may want to rent a post office box so that you don't have to use your street address. Have your parent read your letter to make sure you don't give out information that should not be shared (such as your phone number and daily schedule). Also, find out how much postage the letter needs; mailing a letter to a foreign country costs more than mailing one in the United States or its territories (such as Puerto Rico and Guam).

Here are some tips when it is time to start writing.

- A neat, handwritten letter is always the most personal.
- Open and close your letter with an upbeat message ("I hope you are doing well," "I'm looking forward to hearing from you soon").
- Ask about hobbies, interests, family life, pets, and customs. You can share the same type of information and, if your parent says it is OK, exchange photos, too.
- If you receive any gifts from your pen pal, be sure to let your parent know, especially if it is a food item. Let your parent check it out.
- For safety reasons, never agree to meet your friend without your parent's knowledge and permission. And, if your pen pal ever discusses anything that makes you feel uncomfortable, tell your parent right away.

Finally, respond to your pen pal promptly—and have fun!





Plastic stamp

Most stamps are printed on paper, although sometimes, to further interest collectors, they are printed on other material, such as foil or plastic. Plastic stamps issued to satisfy collectors' interests are not used to mail letters. Sometimes called *labels*, they are not highly regarded by stamp collectors. Plastic stamps that are issued to meet postal needs—such as sale through postal machines, as in areas where humidity is a problem—are used to mail letters, and are of interest to collectors.

The more research you put into the stamps you choose to collect, the more you will learn and the more fun you will have. You will learn how to recognize foreign countries by the names on the stamps while learning about their history and customs.



Many of the space exploration flights by NASA have been pictured on stamps issued by other countries. Depicting events of other countries is a way to show friendship with those countries.

Identifying Stamps

Stamps from Great Britain show no identifying name (see figure 1). The names of other areas like Canada and New Zealand are plainly inscribed on the stamps in figures 2 and 7. Identifying most stamps is usually just this easy, although sometimes the foreign names of the countries may be different from their English names. For example, on the stamps in figures 4 and 5, one can easily figure out that *España* means Spain and that *Danmark* means Denmark.

The stamp in figure 6 shows a map of India and is obviously an Indian stamp. The stamp in figure 3 with the inscription *Magyar Posta* is more difficult, since there is no phonetic similarity between *Magyar* and its English equivalent, *Hungary*. With experience, collectors can learn to recognize the foreign-language names of such countries. Stamp identifier books are also available to help identify inscriptions on stamps.



Figure 1



Figure 5



Figure 2



Figure 6



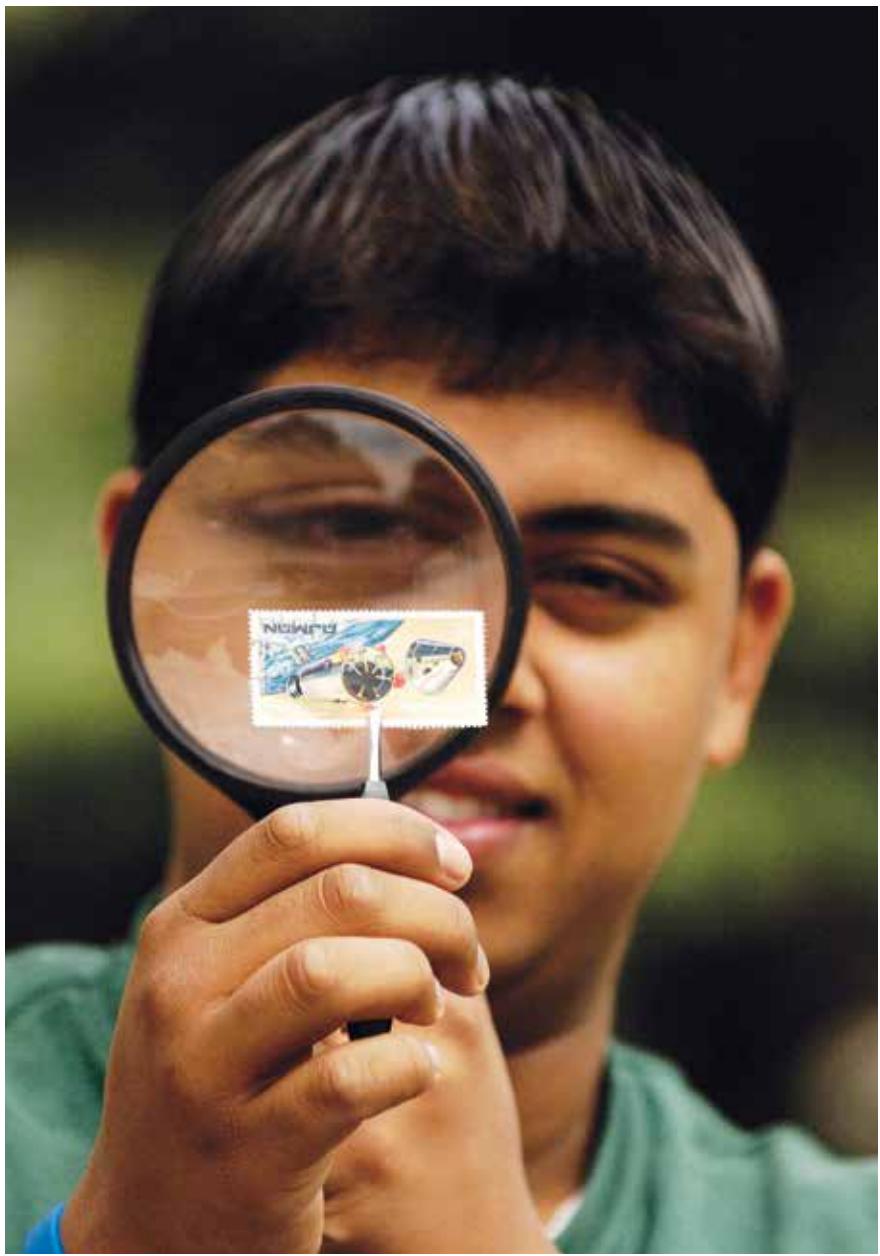
Figure 3



Figure 7



Figure 4



Types of Stamp Collecting

For many years, stamp specialists tried to collect all the stamps issued by a specific country. In spite of the great number of stamps that a country can issue and the expense associated with collecting so many, some collectors still pursue this type of collection. Stamp collecting today, though, is very flexible.

Topical Collections

Topical stamp collecting is one of the most interesting and versatile forms of the hobby. A topical collection focuses on the subject pictured on the stamp, not on the country issuing the stamp. The collector picks the focus or topic and develops it to fit personal taste.

Collectors can choose from an unlimited number of topics. For some topics, a limited number of stamps will be available, while for others, there may be hundreds to choose from. The collector should pick a topic that is neither too broad nor too narrow in scope, that fits the collector's interest, and that reflects his or her ability to obtain the stamps.

A collector interested generally in sports might focus on stamps related to the Olympics or to a favorite sport, such as track, soccer, or baseball. Some collectors focus on art, music, or religion. Others might collect birds, butterflies, insects, maps, or railroads. Topical collecting is fun because it can link two or more interests into a single hobby.



Scouts sometimes collect Scouts on stamps like the ones shown here. More than 135 countries have issued stamps related to Scouting.

Another fun aspect of topical stamp collecting is the arrangement and display of the collection in albums. Collectors can creatively mount the stamps in a way that appeals to their personal taste. Some collectors use computers to design special pages for a collection, but printing by hand or typing a page can serve just as well.



Topical collecting can be fun to share with others who do not collect stamps. While a specialized collection of a single set of stamps, such as the 1938 United States presidential definitives, may interest only a limited number of advanced stamp collectors, featuring aviation, baseball players, or Disney characters on stamps appeals to many people.

Topical stamps can be obtained in several ways. The most convenient and inexpensive source is your own daily mail. Also ask friends and neighbors to save stamps on the topic of your collection. If you have a family friend who owns a business, ask him or her to save pieces of mail as well.

You may also want to buy packets of stamps on major topics at stamp shops, at stamp shows, or through advertisements in magazines. Stamps in packets are often inexpensive because they are fairly common. This is an excellent way to start a stamp collection without spending a lot of money. Additional stamps can be added to the basic collection as your interest in and knowledge of the collection grow.

Other Types of Collections

Most experienced collectors have more than one interest in stamps. A collector can, for example, focus on stamps of the United States while specializing in trains as a topical collection.

A variety of definitive and commemorative stamps and postal stationery can make an interesting and inexpensive type of collection. *Covers*—or envelopes—showing different postal rates and classes make a challenging collection. Even advertising covers used to promote different products can be collected. Without spending a cent, you can easily collect 50 to a hundred items that reflect the complexity of the modern mail system, from your family's mail.

Some collectors specialize in meter imprints and labels. These can be collected historically, going back to the many types used since the 1920s or focusing on current use alone. Some companies use interesting slogans with the postmark. Even the design of the meter imprint can be the focus of a collection.

Postmarks and cancellations can also be interesting to collect. Some people collect postmarks that have their names in them. Others seek old postmarks from towns where they live. Some collect special cancellations, such as those that picture flags or fancy designs.

A special type of stamp, such as an airmail or postage-due stamp, can be the focus of a collection. Unusual shapes—triangles, diamonds, even banana shapes—can be the basis for a very attractive collection.

The USPS made history on March 13, 1997, when it issued—for the first time ever—the triangular-shaped Pacific '97 stagecoach and clipper ship stamps.



Still other forms of collecting are based on postal history. Collectors keep the entire cover so that the postmarks and auxiliary marks will show how the envelope went through the mail. In an election year, covers mailed by political candidates can make a colorful collection. Some people specialize in covers associated with a significant historical event—a war or a presidential inauguration, for example. Advertising covers related to a special interest—envelopes from hardware stores that show tools, envelopes from zoos that show animals, etc.—can also make an enjoyable collection.



These first day
covers pay tribute
to Scouting
around the world.



First day covers are very popular collectibles. On the first day that a stamp is released for sale, a ceremony is held, and a special cancellation marking the release of the stamp is made available to cancel the mail. Collectors buy or prepare their own envelopes, which usually have *cachets*—pictures or words that relate to the new stamp. The envelope and the new stamp then receive the special cancellation. The USPS now allows an extended period of time after the first day to cancel and obtain these covers.

Some collectors try to get a cover for each new stamp. Others specialize in a single stamp and collect as many different cachets as possible. Contact an experienced collector or your local post office for instructions on how to obtain such cancellations. A collection of first day covers with cachets drawn by the collector can be a truly creative achievement.

A Tale of Two Collectors

Stamp collecting can be a lifelong adventure. James Chenevert, of Peoria, Ill., began his adventure when he discovered his dad's old leather briefcase buried deep within a closet. Inside was an album stuffed with pages of colorful postage stamps showing presidents and America's national parks. James says, "I was fascinated by these miniature works of art and the stories they could tell."

His first collection was a complete set of the 1938

Presidential Series, or "Prexies." From there he went on to collect diesel and steam locomotives on worldwide stamps and later collected stamps and first day covers showing Boy Scouts around the world. When James became interested in space and space exploration, he started a collection of stamps that depicted rockets, astronauts, and cosmic phenomena. That collection later became the core of his first award-winning philatelic exhibit, "Exploring the Universe."



James Chenevert

In 2009, James was selected to be one of the first three Fellows of the Young Philatelic Leaders Fellowship. During his yearlong fellowship, he built a gold medal-winning philatelic exhibit telling the story of security features on modern U.S. postage stamps. He also attended several national stamp shows around the country and visited the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C., and the American Philatelic Society's national headquarters in Bellefonte, Pa.

Says James, "Stamp collecting has been an adventure for me."

What is her
collection worth?
"I have no idea,"
Nancy Clark says.
"My motivation
isn't the money
but the thrill of
the hunt."



Nancy Clark

Nancy Clark, of Cape Cod, Mass., has been collecting for decades. Her collection is so big that she has a 20-by-40-foot room in her house called the "stamp room," that she shares with her husband, a fellow collector. It is lined with floor-to-ceiling shelves filled with books, catalogs, and other research materials, as well as copies of her stamps and covers. She keeps the actual stamps in a vault at a local bank.

Her hunt for stamps and other postal collectibles takes her to at least five shows a year—sometimes in other countries. Nancy also corresponds with other stamp collectors all over the world—mostly via the internet. They ask each other's opinions about recent acquisitions by sending scans—computerized pictures—of their latest finds. "Before email, it used to take a month to exchange letters with someone overseas. Now it can be done almost instantaneously," Clark says.

Like James, Nancy started her stamp collection while in elementary school. She first focused on collecting boat stamps. Later, as a young adult, she broadened her collection to include sports stamps, particularly Olympic stamps, and mail postmarked in her favorite state, Maine.

Her reputation grew. She served as president and judge for the international stamp show held at the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia, where people from around the world entered their collections in competition.

"The winning collection always tells a story," Clark says. "It's not just a group of rare stamps."

Thousands of listeners around the world tune in to the American Philatelic Society's weekly podcast, "StampChats," a live chat that explores a variety of aspects of the hobby. Tune in to the program at stamps.org/news/sc/stampchats/p/1 or download the programs for later listening. Be sure to get your parent or guardian's permission first.



American Philatelic Society

[About](#) | [Contact](#) | [Join](#) |

[+ Member Benefits](#) [+ Services](#) [+ Learn](#) [+ Community](#) [+ Shop](#) [+ Events](#)

All

[All](#) [News](#) [Videos](#) [Collecting Insights](#) [Start Collecting](#)

Upcoming StampChats

APS hosts series of live Stamp Chats exploring a variety of aspects of the hobby. We offer a platform for experts and enthusiasts alike to share their expertise & to build community among members and friends around the world.



Tuesday, October 24, 7:00-8:00 EDT

Stamp Collecting 101: Part 2

Ken Martin

[Register](#)



Tuesday, October 31, 7:00-8:00 EDT

The Philately and Deontology of Walpurgisnacht and the Hexentanzplatz with Ron Breznay

Ron Breznay

[Register](#)

StampChat Archive



Stamp Chat: Behind the Scenes at USPS First Day of Issue Ceremonies



Stamp Chat: The Synagogue and the Stamp



Stamp Chat: The Philately of the 1920 Antwerp Olympics

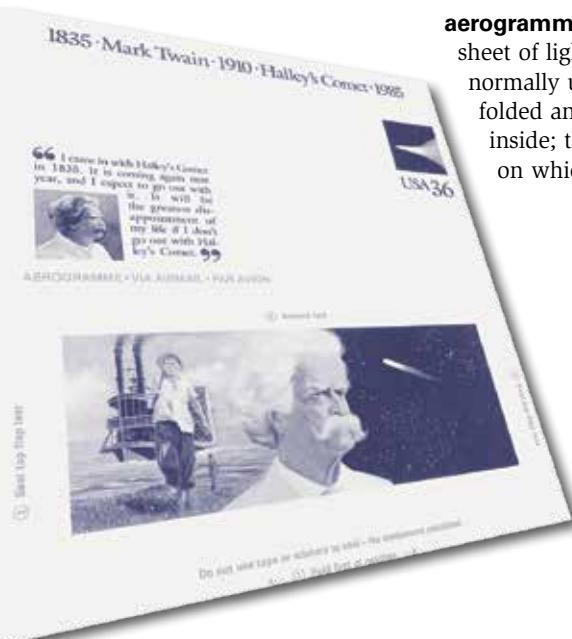


The Language of Stamp Collecting

Like many hobbies and fields of study, stamp collecting has its own language, or terminology. You will find it easier to collect stamps when you know the hobby's special terms. As your interest and knowledge of stamp collecting grow, your stamp vocabulary will grow accordingly.

The glossary below lists some of the special terms used by stamp collectors. Additional terms and definitions can be found in stamp catalogs and other reference materials available in local libraries.

aerogramme. A letter sheet made of a single sheet of lightweight paper with gummed flaps, normally used for international airmail. When folded and sealed, the message is on the inside; the outside resembles an envelope on which a stamp has been printed.



Aerogramme



Airmail stamp

airmail stamp. A stamp formerly issued to prepay airmail postage rates, especially for foreign or overseas mail, which were usually more expensive than surface mail. Since 1977, the United States mail has been carried by air, when appropriate, at no extra charge.

approval. A convenient method by which a dealer sends selections of stamps to the prospective buyer. From these stamps the collector chooses items to purchase and returns the balance with payment.

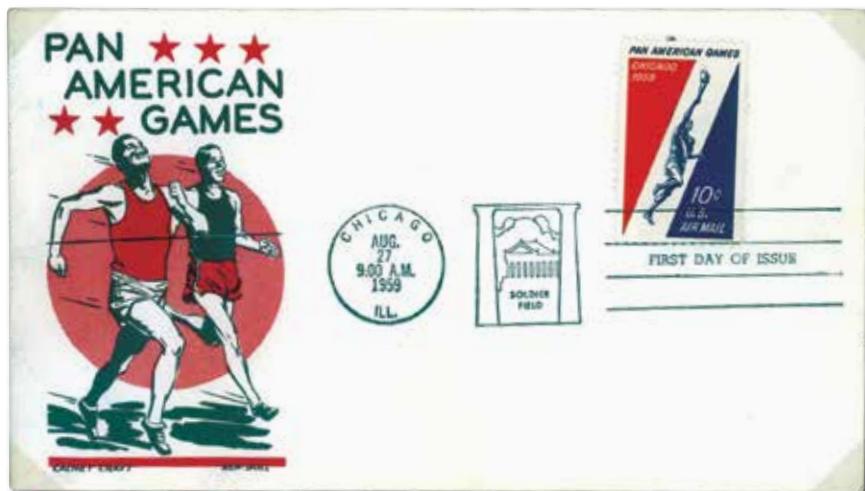
When purchasing stamps on approval, be sure to return all the ones you don't want to keep so that you won't be charged for them.



Blocks of stamps

block. A unit of four or more unseparated stamps. A block of four stamps is two stamps high and two stamps wide. A plate number block shows the number of the plate used to imprint the stamp.

booklet. A small sheet of stamps specially cut to be sold in booklets. A booklet can be a self-adhesive sheet designed to be folded by the customer.



Cachet

cachet. A design printed on an envelope to commemorate a special event such as the issuance of a new stamp, the president's birthday, or a stamp show.

cancellation. A marking put on a stamp by a postal authority that shows the stamp has been used and can't be reused.



catalog value. The value that is printed in a specific catalog indicating a price for purchasing the stamp from a dealer.

coil stamp. A stamp issued in a long, rolled strip—with the stamps connected endways or sideways—generally for use by stamp-dispensing machines.



On this strip of stamps from a coil, note the plate number near the bottom of the stamp, to the far right.

PLATE NUMBER

commemorative stamp. A stamp issued to honor an important person, place, event, or other aspect of our national culture. These stamps are usually available for sale only for a limited time at the post office.



Commemorative stamp

cover. An envelope that has been sent through the mail.



Definitive stamp

definitive stamp. A common stamp, usually small and printed in large quantities, in regular use over a period of years (until the next increase in postage rates). Also called a “regular” stamp. In contrast, commemorative stamps usually stay on sale less than a year after their issue.

error. A mistake in the production of a postage stamp that was not caught before the stamp’s release to the public. These include inverted centers and mistakes in color, paper, etc.

face value. The value, or denomination, of a stamp, as it appears on the stamp.

fake. A real stamp that has been changed in some way to make it more desirable to collectors. For example, it may have been repaired or regummed.

first day cover. An envelope with a stamp affixed that has been canceled on the first official sale date of the stamp.



First day cover

Forever stamps. In 2007, the U.S. Postal Service introduced Forever stamps. These stamps are always equal in value to the current first-class mail rate for a one-ounce letter, no matter what you originally paid for them. This means you can use any Forever stamp—no matter how old it is—to mail a letter. Rather than having a particular denomination on them, these stamps say “Forever.”

hinge. A small strip of paper gummed on one side and used by collectors to put their stamps in albums or on pages. Today, collectors store mint stamps with full gum or expensive stamps in a mount or a stockbook, not hinged.

hologram. An image that looks three dimensional. Holograms have appeared on some modern stamps.

imperforate stamp. A stamp issued without perforations.

mint stamp. A stamp that was never postally used. If a mint stamp still has all its original gum intact with no disturbances (such as a hinge mark), it is classified as mint never hinged (MNH).



Mint condition

mount. A clear, thin plastic holder in which a stamp is placed in an album. Mounts protect stamps by reducing handling and eliminating hinge marks. Mounts are usually used for more valuable stamps.

overprinted stamp.

A stamp that has printing applied to it after original production.

Overprinting may indicate the stamp has been used in more than one country or to recognize a special event, to change a stamp's value, or for other than postal use.

packet. A container full of assorted, unmounted stamps, offering an inexpensive way to begin a stamp collection.

perforations. Small holes or slits around the perimeter of a stamp that enable one stamp to be separated from another.

philately. The collection, study, and enjoyment of postage stamps and other postal materials.

plate number block (PNB) or coil (PNC). A block or coil of stamps bearing the number of the plate used in printing.



Overprinted stamps



Plate block

postage meter stamps and labels.

Meters are used by businesses and other organizations with large mailings. They can be set for varying amounts of postage, and include a form of a precancel that may have special slogans or marks.



Postage meter stamp

*Yorkshire*

Black Ball Line
packet ship,
circa 1850

© USPS 1988

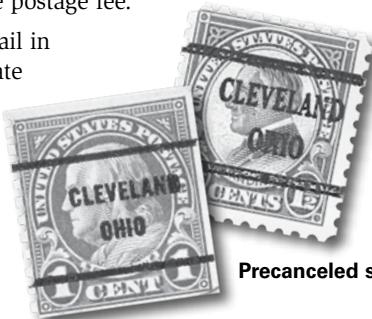
Postal card

postal card. A government-produced card, usually with a stamp imprinted in the upper right-hand corner that pays the postage fee. Also called a “stamped postal card.”

postcard. A privately produced card with a picture or information on one side and a space for a message and address on the other. A stamp must be affixed to pay the postage fee.

postmark. An official mark applied to mail in the postal system; usually includes the date and place of the mailing.

precanceled stamp. A stamp canceled before it is placed in the mail, usually by a mechanized printing process. Normally produced by heavy users of mail, these require a special-use permit from the postal service.



Precanceled stamps

regular or definitive stamp. A common stamp, usually small, in regular use over a period of years.



Regular, or
definitive, stamp

se-tenant stamps. Stamps joined together as in the original sheet but differing in design, denomination, overprint, or color. Sometimes, by combining a series of connected stamps, a picture is created (see the Northeast Deciduous Forest stamp sheet in "Introduction to Stamp Collecting").



Se-tenant stamps

self-adhesive stamp. A stamp backed with pressure-sensitive glue.

selvage. The paper margin around panes of stamps.

semipostal stamp. Postal authorities sometimes issue special stamps for which an amount is charged in addition to the regular postage. This extra fee or surcharge is designated for some special purpose that benefits special groups such as child-care and special-education agencies.

series. A number of individual stamps or sets of stamps having a common purpose or theme issued over a long period of time.

sheet. As printed, this is a complete unit consisting of four or more panes of stamps, each of which is cut apart when the stamps are sent to the post office. The size and design of the stamp affects the size of the pane and sheet.

souvenir sheet. A sheet of one or more postage stamp designs that usually has a commemorative inscription or artwork in the border.

special stamp. A stamp that may be reprinted and is used for periods longer than commemoratives but shorter than definitives. Love, Christmas, and Express Mail stamps are examples.



Special stamps

stamped envelope. A mailable envelope on which the post office has printed or embossed a stamp.



Stamped envelope

tagging. The chemical marking of postal items to help prevent mail fraud and allow them to be read by mail-sorting machines.

unused stamp. A stamp that has no cancellation or other sign of use.

used (canceled) stamp. A stamp that has been canceled so that it cannot be used again.

watermark. A design sometimes pressed into stamp paper while it is being made.



Used, or canceled, stamp

Assessing a Stamp's Value

Stamps are described in terms of their “grade” and “condition,” and both affect their price.

Stamp Grade Definitions

Grade has to do with how well the stamp design is centered. Condition addresses factors other than centering.



Extremely Fine. The stamp appears to be almost perfectly centered.

Very Fine. The design is very well-centered, with the four margins between 50 percent and 100 percent equal. That is, the widest margin is not more than twice the width of the narrowest margin. A stamp with the perforation barely clearing the design on any side does not qualify as Very Fine.

Fine—Very Fine. The design is well-centered. Either the vertical margins or the horizontal margins qualify as at least Very Fine (the wider margin is not more than twice the width of the narrower), while the other margins qualify as at least Fine (the perforations visibly clear the stamp design).

Fine. The perforations visibly clear the stamp design on all four sides.

Average. The perforations cut slightly into the design on one side.

Stamp Condition Definitions

Many factors, such as margins, color, and condition of the gum, are important in the valuation of the stamp. The more perfect the stamp, the higher the price. Here are some of the words used in assessing the value of a stamp:

Original Gum. Gum as applied to the stamp when it was manufactured.

Regummed. A stamp that for some reason has lost its gum and to which new gum has been applied.

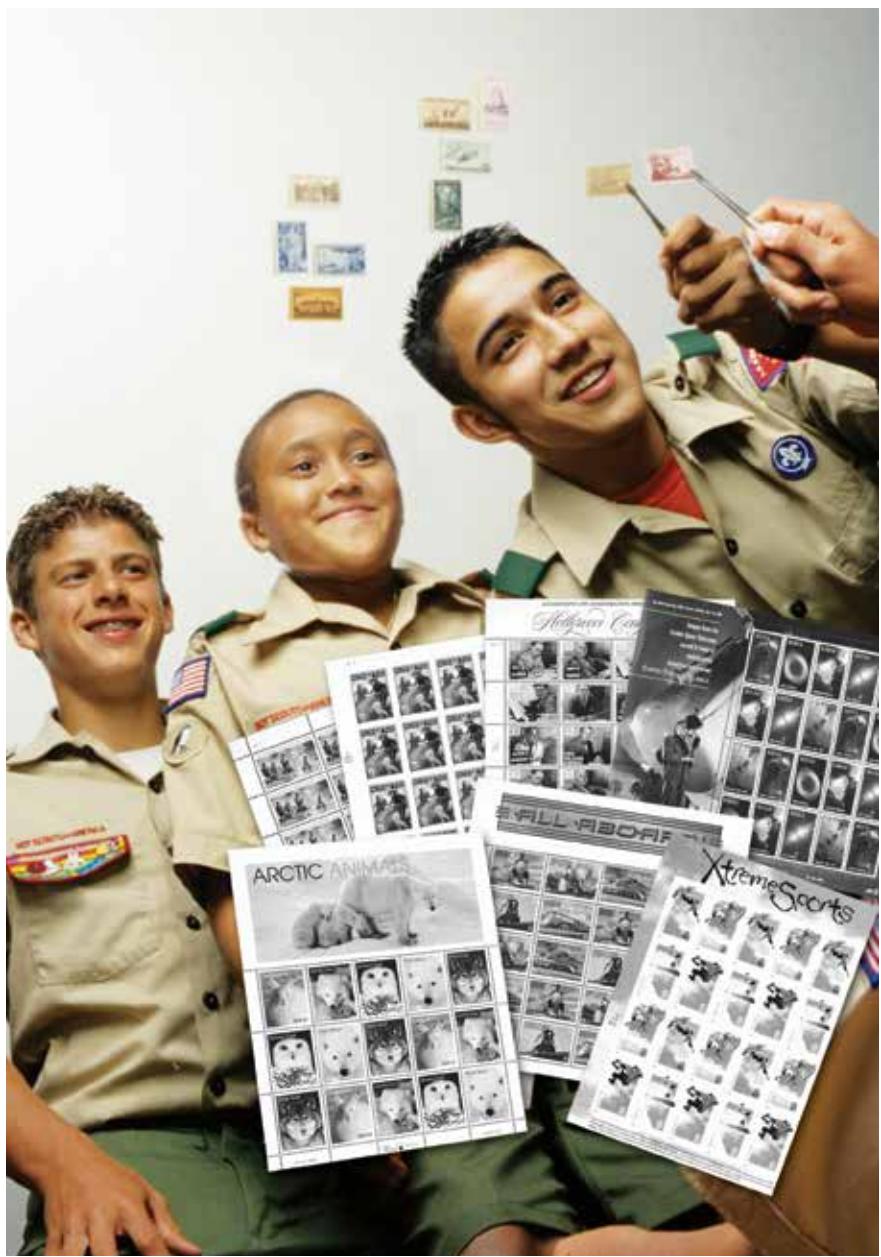
No Gum. Stamps sent through the mail and removed from envelopes by soaking have no gum. Some mint stamps are issued without gum.

Never Hinged. Stamps that have never been hinged and whose gum shows no evidence of disturbance. With the development of good mounts, many collectors demand stamps that are classed as mint never hinged (MNH).

Lightly Hinged. A stamp showing a faint trace of a gum disturbance where the hinge has been removed.

Heavily Hinged. A stamp showing a hinge remnant on the back, or evidence of missing gum.

Other faults that affect the grading of stamps are missing perforations, tears, thin spots, pinholes, creases, etc. These flaws can cause a stamp to lose all or most of its value.



The Design and Production of Stamps

Many steps happen between the design of a stamp and the finished product used by consumers.

Birth of a Stamp Design

For U.S. stamps, the design process begins with the Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee. Each year this group of volunteers sifts through some 50,000 ideas for new stamps submitted to the Postal Service. The committee members decide on a limited number of subjects that will actually be made into stamps. Their goal is to pick stamp subjects that depict a broad range of people, places, and events that have affected our culture. Then the committee works with stamp designers, subject experts, and artists to come up with the finished designs.

The designs can be quite elaborate. Take the “Nature of America” series of U.S. stamps sheets, issued in panes of 10. Together, the 10 stamps, along with additional space between the stamps, form a single natural scene full of plants and animals. The first pane depicted the Sonoran Desert in the American Southwest. The last pane in the series, issued in 2010, showed the Hawaiian Rainforest.

All the panes in the series were painted by artist John Dawson of Hilo, Hawaii. For each pane, the committee supplied Dawson with a list of plant and animal species from which to choose. “Then I made rough sketches of the critters for them to look at,” he said. Subject experts reviewed his sketches and suggested improvements, making a beak longer here, for example, or a tail wider there.





Southern Florida Wetland stamp sheet, designed by artist John Dawson

One challenge John Dawson faced was showing animals of vastly different sizes—say, a Florida panther and a sparrow—in the same scene without distorting their proportions. “I did it with a careful use of perspective,” Dawson said, “putting the big critters in the background and the small critters up front.”



Once the design was approved, Dawson rendered the final painting. He managed to cram 27 different species into his scene. He painted on an illustration board roughly twice the size of the 5-by-7-inch stamp pane. The image was later reduced for printing.

The Nature of America stamp sheets—12 different ones—were wildly popular, selling up to 10 million copies each and making Dawson a celebrity among stamp collectors. “In March 2005, the Northeast Deciduous Forest sheet was unveiled at a ceremony during a stamp show in New York City,” he recalled. “So many people were in line, I signed autographs for two whole days.”

The Manufacturing Process

Once a design has been approved, an appropriate printing method is selected; then the stamps are printed; and finally, the stamps are “finished,” or processed into a particular format, such as sheets, books, or coils, using a particular type of separation.

Stamp Printing Methods

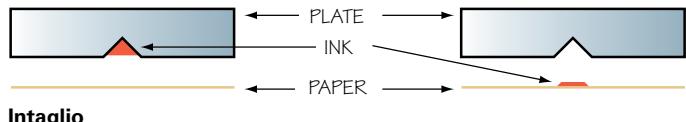
Stamps throughout the world are printed in three basic ways: with the design (1) above the surface of the printing plate, (2) level with the surface, or (3) below the surface.

Letterpress or Typography. In this printing method, the design is inked above the surface of the plate. In a rotary letterpress, the plate is a cylinder that revolves as the paper passes under it. In typography, the plate is flat, and the printing is done on a flatbed press. Most overprinted, surcharged, and precanceled stamps are typographed.

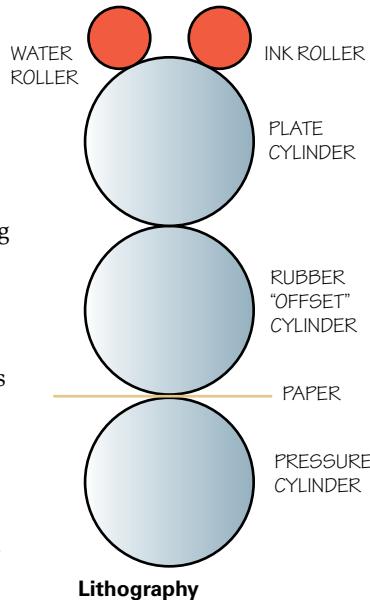
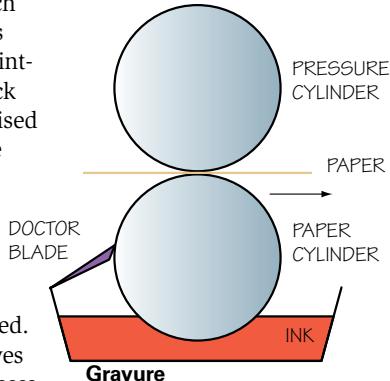
Each year,
collectors spend
up to \$200 million
on U.S. stamps
like Dawson’s that
may never be
used for postage,
but only for
collecting and
display. That
added revenue
helps the Postal
Service offset
costs in
other areas.



Letterpress

**Intaglio**

Engraving and Gravure. Both are *intaglio* processes, which means that the design stays below the surface of the printing plate. In engraving, thick ink that remains slightly raised is used, whereas in gravure printing, a thinner ink that pours like water is used. When the plate is inked, the excess ink on top is wiped clean before the paper is impressed. The gravure cylinder revolves in a tray of ink, and the excess ink on the surface of the cylinder is scraped clean by a metal blade. The etched “wells” fill with ink, and the paper, pressed against the wiped cylinder, actually pulls the ink by suction from the plate.



Lithography or Offset

Lithography. In this printing method, the design is level with the printing plate surface. Because the oil-based ink does not mix with the water that moistens the blank area of the plate, an impression of just the design results. In offset lithography, the design is printed from the metal plate to a rubber-covered cylinder and then to the paper.

Modern presses in all processes print several colors at the same time (except in engraving, where each color must be printed separately). Many stamps listed in catalogs as multicolored were made from four different color-process plates. By using screens of three basic colors—red, yellow, and blue—plus black, every color can be reproduced in printing.

Separations

Perforated Stamps. Perforations make it possible to separate stamps from one another with ease. Before self-adhesive stamps became common, most stamps were perforated with small holes by machines that remove the paper from the holes.

Pane stamps are perforated on all four sides; booklet pane stamps are perforated on one, two, or three sides; and coil stamps are printed in strips and perforated on just two sides.



Perforated

Imperforate Stamps. The early United States stamp issues had to be cut apart with scissors and are referred to as *imperf* stamps. Most imperf stamps today are issued by countries in the hope that collectors will buy the stamps, thereby generating revenue, but not use them except in their collections, thereby saving the cost of providing postal services.



Imperforate stamps and souvenir sheet

Die-Cut Stamps. A cutter, or die, cuts the stamp paper into the desired shape. This form of separation is used for self-adhesive stamps. Die-cuts can give stamps straight edges, shapes, or imitation perforations.



Self-adhesive die-cut stamps make stamp-licking a thing of the past.

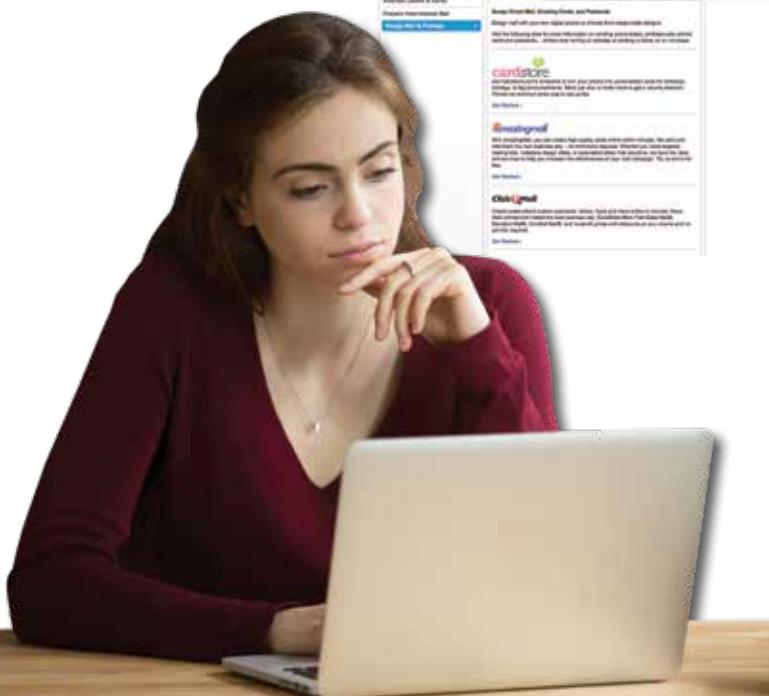
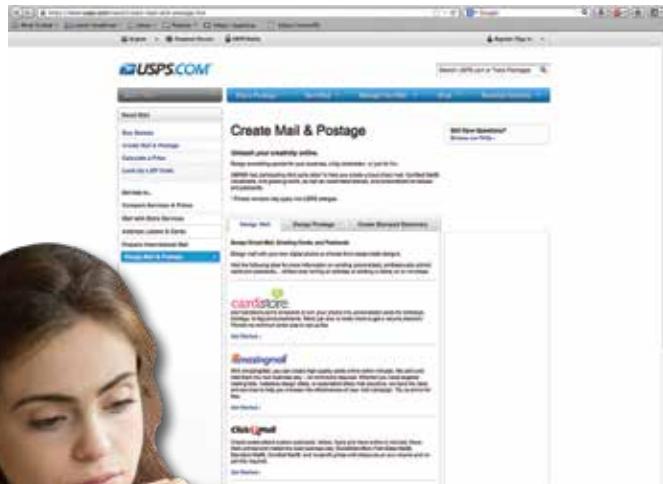
Types of Paper and Adhesive

Most stamps are printed on paper. Many are still printed with a gummed backing that you moisten for adhesion. Due to popular demand, however, more and more stamps are being made with a pressure-sensitive adhesive that requires no moistening. These stamps come with a protective backing that you peel off the stamp before affixing the stamp to an envelope.

In rare cases, paper is not used. Plastic sheets are sometimes used so that the stamps can be sold more easily in vending machines. Holographic and three-dimensional stamps also require a special printing surface.

Because gum reacts with high humidity (causing stamps to stick together), countries have experimented with different types of gum. Stamps issued without gum or pressure-sensitive adhesive must have an adhesive applied by the sender.

Nearly all of
today's U.S.
postage stamps
use pressure-
sensitive adhesive.



Online Postage

In recent years, the USPS has let people print their own postage and mailing labels at home, using personal computers and printers. The Postal Service has also licensed outside companies, or vendors, to provide online postage products. These companies allow you to upload a photograph of your own choosing that will be made into a sheet of postage stamps that you can use in the regular mail. So it is now possible to put your own picture, or that of, say, your dog, on a real postage stamp.



photo.stamps.com/

PhotoStamps
Turn your photos into postage stamps!

How much do they cost?
A sheet of 20 PhotoStamps is just \$2-\$10 plus postage.
[Learn More](#)

Special Postage Collections
[View the Anne Geddes Collection](#)

Is this real U.S. postage?
An approved licensed vendor
U.S. POSTAL SERVICE®
PC Postage
Your PhotoStamps is officially authorized by the US Postal Service.
Use them like regular postage.
[Learn More](#)

company info | privacy policy | terms & conditions | offices | info-a-friend | contact us

An authorized licensee
U.S. POSTAL SERVICE®
PC Postage

© 1998-2012 Barns & Associates

TRUSTe
www.truste.org

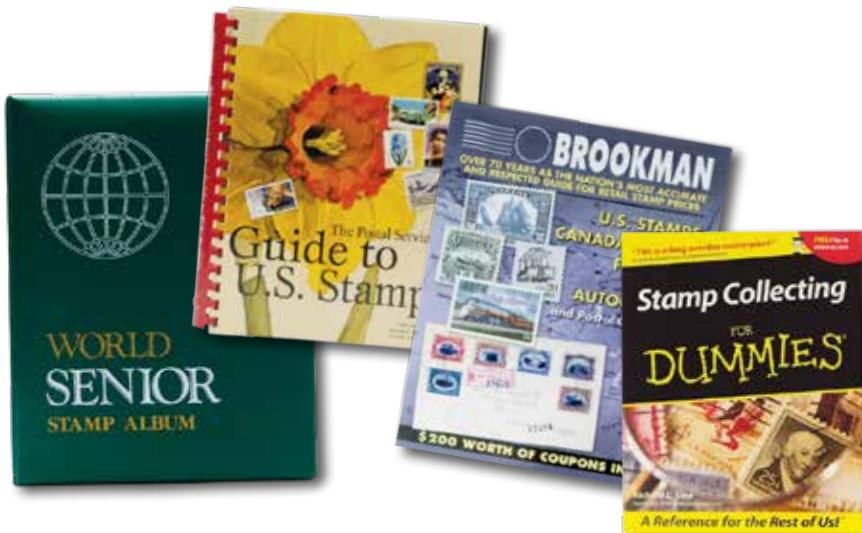


Catalogs, Equipment, and Procedures

As you learn more about collecting stamps, you will discover the resources that are most helpful to you for the type of collection you want to build.

Stamp Catalogs

The catalog published by Scott Publishing Company is used by most stamp collectors in the United States. Other catalogs are also useful, especially those covering special topics. The American Topical Association, for example, publishes several topical handbooks and checklists. Many public libraries have stamp catalogs or can borrow them from other libraries.



To look up a stamp in a catalog, first determine the country that issued the stamp. Then compare its design with the stamp illustrations in the catalog. Time to identify the stamp can be saved by looking at it for clues. For example, if you find a picture of President Kennedy on a stamp, it must have been printed after 1960, the year he was elected. If there are several stamps with the same design but different identifying numbers, you might have to check the perforations, color, paper, or watermark to identify the exact stamp.

The *Scott catalog value* is a retail price that reflects recent selling prices. The value of stamps also depends on supply and demand. Common stamps often sell for less than catalog value. Values also rise and fall as conditions in the stamp market change.

Because there are so many factors in the value of stamps, it is best to collect what you can afford and what you enjoy. If you buy stamps simply in the hope that their value will rise, you might be disappointed. You might also miss the pleasure of collecting other stamps that may be more fun to acquire and display.

Places to Visit

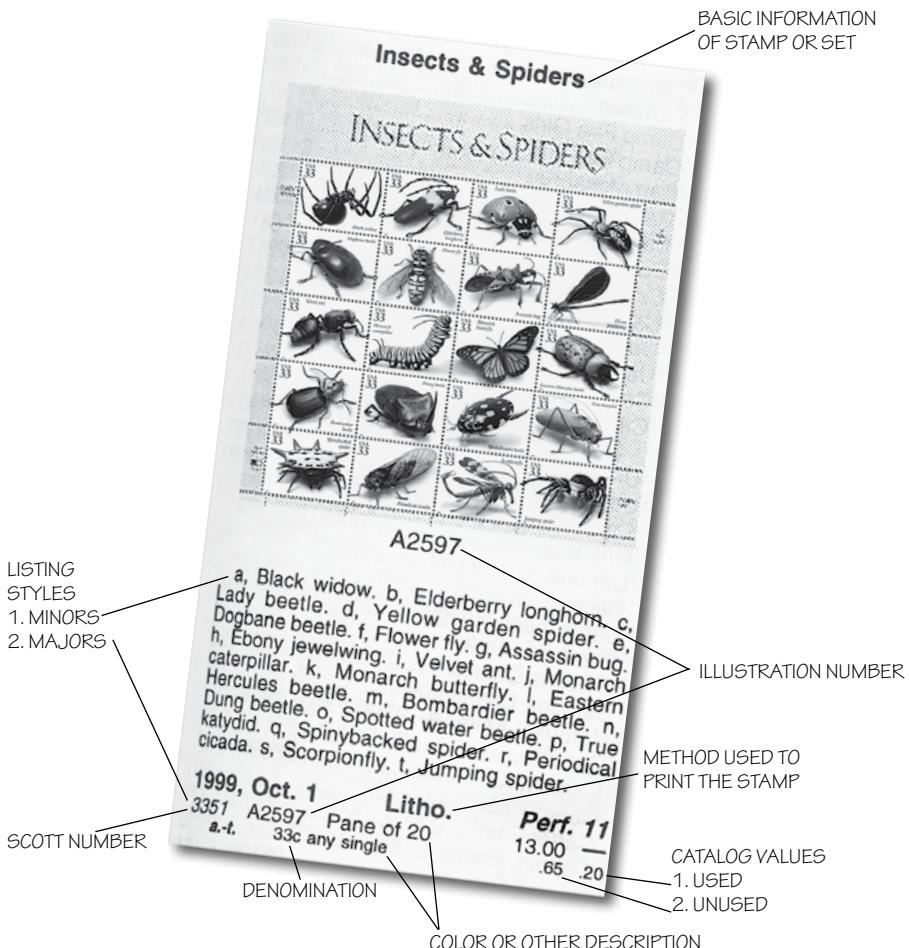
Visit a post office, stamp club, stamp store, or stamp show with an experienced collector, parent, or friend, or with your merit badge counselor. Your local library might have stamp newspapers, magazines, books, or other materials that will be helpful in your research.

Tip: Call in advance and make an appointment before you visit your local post office. Be sure you plan your visit during business hours when the post office is less likely to be very busy, such as midmorning or midafternoon.



Equipment and Procedures

An important part of any stamp collection is the album in which the stamps are stored. An album helps to organize the collection in a logical order and protects the stamps from damage. You can make your own or purchase one of the many types of albums for stamps and covers on the market. A printed album with spaces for specific stamps can serve as a stamp identifier and can make mounting your stamps easier.



Reference: *Scott 2001 Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue*, Volume 1

Although most printed albums are organized by country, topical albums are available for special interests.

However, as a beginning stamp collector, you might not know which topic or country you want to collect. To avoid spending a great deal of money on an album that could later be of little use, you might start with a three-ring binder and some graph paper (craft-weight). You can buy blank pages with or without borders and headings, or you can generate your own pages using a computer. This type of album makes the mixed mounting of stamps and covers easy and avoids empty spaces that make the collection look incomplete.

Tip: Do not use a “magnetic” type photograph album for your stamp collection. The adhesive used on the pages will ruin your stamps.



Another option for your three-ring binder is to use stock sheets, which are heavy pages with strips that form pockets to hold the stamps. They come with pre-punched holes that fit your binder. Stock books are volumes with the stock pages bound in. In a stock book, the pages cannot be removed or rearranged.

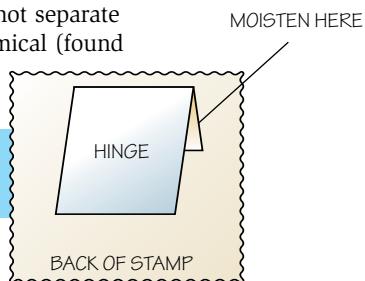
Your albums, binders, or stock books should be stored in an upright position away from heat, moisture, and light. If stored in a damp basement or near a window, the stamps can collect moisture and be damaged. Also, avoid eating or drinking while working with your collection.

Tip: Store your stamps away from heat, moisture, light, food, drinks, and young brothers and sisters, too.

Stamps are soaked in cool water to remove them from the paper they are attached to. Once the paper and stamps have separated, place the stamps into rinse water to remove any additional paper particles; remove the stamps from the rinse water; and place them facedown on an absorbent surface. If the stamps curl while drying, flatten them under a heavy weight. New self-adhesive stamps sometimes will not separate from the envelope using only water. A special chemical (found at stamp supply stores) may be needed to remove such stamps.

Tip: Use only cool—never hot—water to loosen a stamp from paper

A stamp *hinge* is a piece of specially gummed, translucent paper that is usually horizontally prefolded to make a hinge. First affix the short portion of the hinge to the back of an inexpensive stamp just below the top. The bottom of the hinge (the longer side) is attached to the page of the album. Apply moisture to the short side by gently touching it with the tip of your tongue and blotting it lightly on your lower lip before placing it correctly on the back of the stamp.



Tip: Steam or hot water may cause colors to run; soak separately any stamps that have colored cancellations or are on colored paper.

Never attempt to remove a hinge from a freshly hinged stamp until it has dried thoroughly.

The amount of moisture you apply is important—the smallest amount will make the hinge stick to the stamp. Next, apply only a small amount of moisture to the bottom portion of the hinge to be attached to the page. You want to keep the stamp free to lift so you can view the backing.

To remove a hinged stamp from an album, carefully grip the stamp and the attached hinge with tongs and gently pull down to release both from the album. The hinged stamp then can be placed facedown and the hinge pulled away slowly from the stamp. If the hinge appears to tear or pull paper fibers from the stamp, stop and soak it off with water.

Stamp mounts are small, transparent pockets into which a stamp can be slipped and mounted on a page. Stamp mounts are usually preferred for mounting mint stamps, rare stamps, and fragile stamps. The back of the mount has a special gum that, when moistened at the top, can be placed on your album page. By using this type of mount, you do not disturb the gum of mint stamps.



Stamp mounts come in a variety of sizes to suit the collector's different needs.

Several different types of mounts are available. One type is a sleeve that covers the stamp; another consists of two pieces that form a “track” for the stamp to sit in. As you become more familiar with working with stamps, you can decide which type best suits you. Why not use stamp mounts for all of your stamps? Many collectors don’t, because stamp mounts are more expensive than hinges and must be purchased in various sizes to fit stamps of different sizes. With hinges, one size fits all.

Envelopes can be attached to a page with corner mounts, triangular “pockets” with gummed backs. To protect covers, a transparent protective material such as polyester film can be put over the envelope first. Both the sheet protector and the cover can then be attached safely to the album page with the corner mounts.

Tip: Do not use any type of tape, rubber cement, or glue to affix your stamps or envelopes in an album. The chemicals in these materials can quickly migrate into your collection and cause permanent damage and staining.



Stamp tongs



All the special tools you will need as a stamp collector can be found at stamp shows or hobby shops that specialize in stamp collecting, through mail order, and on the internet (only with your parent's permission and assistance).

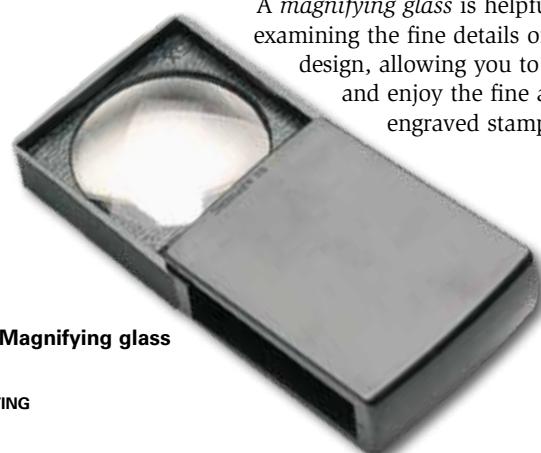
Store excess stamps that you haven't had time to sort yet in semitransparent glassine envelopes, which come in various sizes, or polyethylene sleeves made for storing covers (envelopes and postcards). The polyethylene sleeves are clear, allowing you to see their contents at a glance.

In addition to mounts, hinges, and albums, there are other tools you will need.



Stamp tongs look like tweezers but have rounded tips for grasping. They are approximately 5 inches long and make handling stamps much easier. Tongs also help protect stamps from soil and damage. Even when your fingertips appear to be clean and dry, they can still contain body oils and perspiration that can damage stamps.

A *magnifying glass* is helpful for examining the fine details of a stamp's design, allowing you to recognize and enjoy the fine art of an engraved stamp.



Magnifying glass

Perforation gauges are used to measure the number of holes within a 2-centimeter length on a stamp. The perforation gauge was developed to allow a collector to identify stamps by distinguishing among the many types of perforations that have been used over the years.

One type of *watermark detector* is a shallow, black or dark-colored dish in which the stamp in question is exposed to a nonflammable watermark detector fluid that is used to detect a watermark design in the stamp's paper. When the paper is manufactured, raised areas on the rollers transfer a subtle design, called a *watermark*, to the paper pulp.

An *ultraviolet (UV) light* is a basic tool used by stamp collectors to detect and identify luminescent stamps, stamps coated with "invisible" fluorescent ink. A UV light also will help the collector determine whether or not repairs have been made to a stamp.

Tip: Ultraviolet lights are harmful to the eyes. Before using such a device, consult with your qualified merit badge counselor to learn how to take the necessary precautions.



Perforation gauges

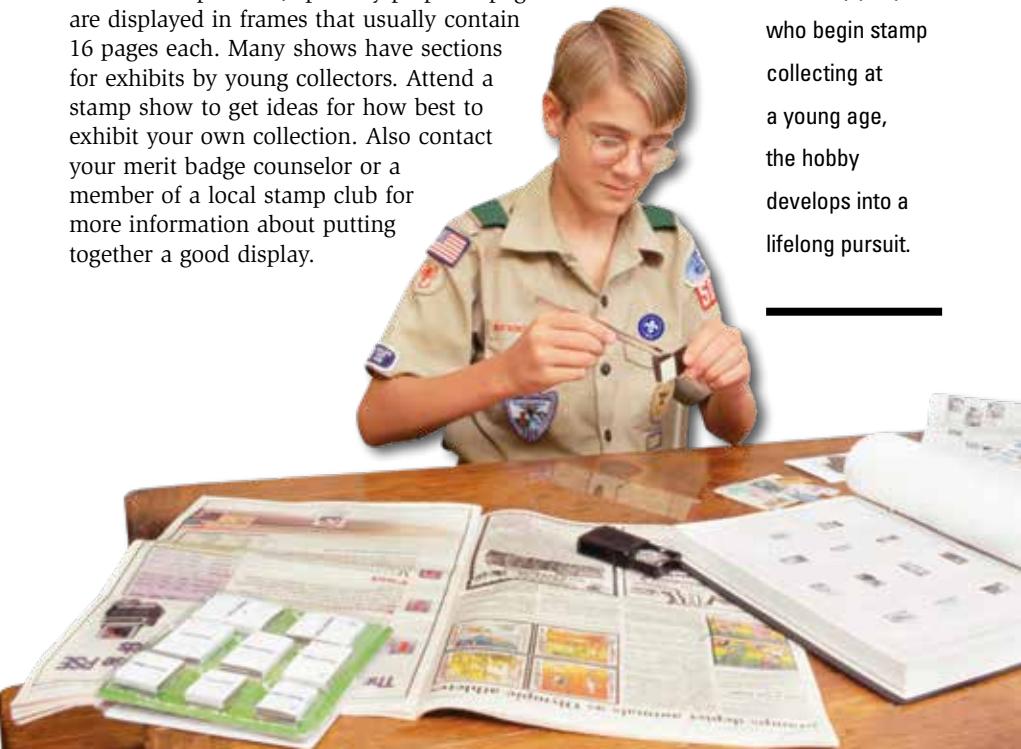


Displaying Your Collection

Part of the fun of stamp collecting is sharing it with others, whether just family and friends or the general public, say, at a stamp show. You might just pull prepared album pages from your loose-leaf notebook to display part or all of your collection. Your display should have a theme, which can be broad—such as all foreign stamps—or narrower, such as stamps from a particular country. Topical collections also make for good displays. No matter what the theme, try to arrange your collection so that it tells a story. You may wish to add a title page that explains what will follow.

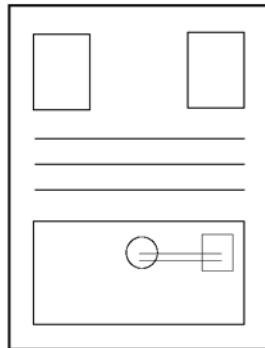
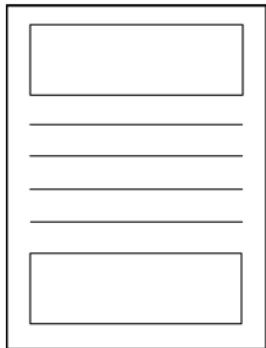
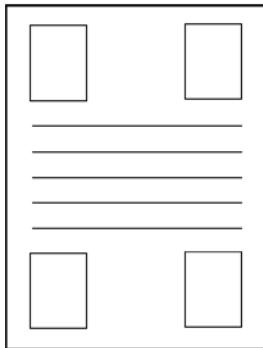
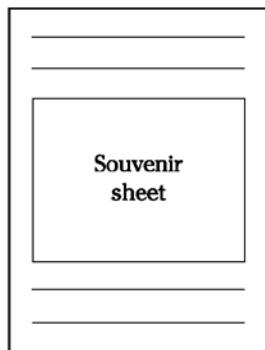
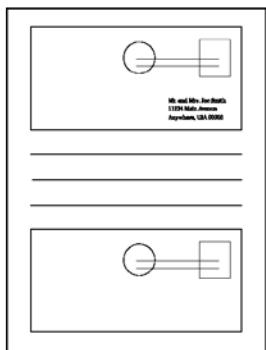
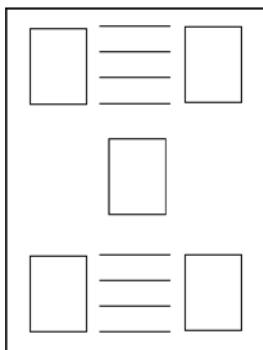
At stamp shows, specially prepared pages are displayed in frames that usually contain 16 pages each. Many shows have sections for exhibits by young collectors. Attend a stamp show to get ideas for how best to exhibit your own collection. Also contact your merit badge counselor or a member of a local stamp club for more information about putting together a good display.

For many people who begin stamp collecting at a young age, the hobby develops into a lifelong pursuit.



Ideas for Laying Out Pages

The following illustrations show some simple layouts for display pages. Remember that the layout of your collection is up to you—use your creativity.



UNITED STATES

1969

AMERICAN LEGION



Commemorating the 20th anniversary (1918-1938) of the American Legion.

GRANDMA MOSES



1969-1971 Series from "Old Paints", by the art of the age of 81.

APOLLO 8



A tribute to the success of the dramatic Apollo 8 flight around the moon.

CALIFORNIA SETTLEMENT



The 200th anniversary of the state's first permanent colony.

BOTANICAL CONGRESS



WESTERN U.S.—SEATTLE '69



A postal issue to the 15th International Botanical Congress, depicting flora from the four corners of the United States.



SOUTHEAST—JACKSONVILLE



NO. 1 PHASE — JACKSONVILLE



NO. 2 PHASE — PHILADELPHIA

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE CASE



A legal case of 1819, won by David Wethers in the Supreme Court.

INTERCOLLEGiate FOOTBALL

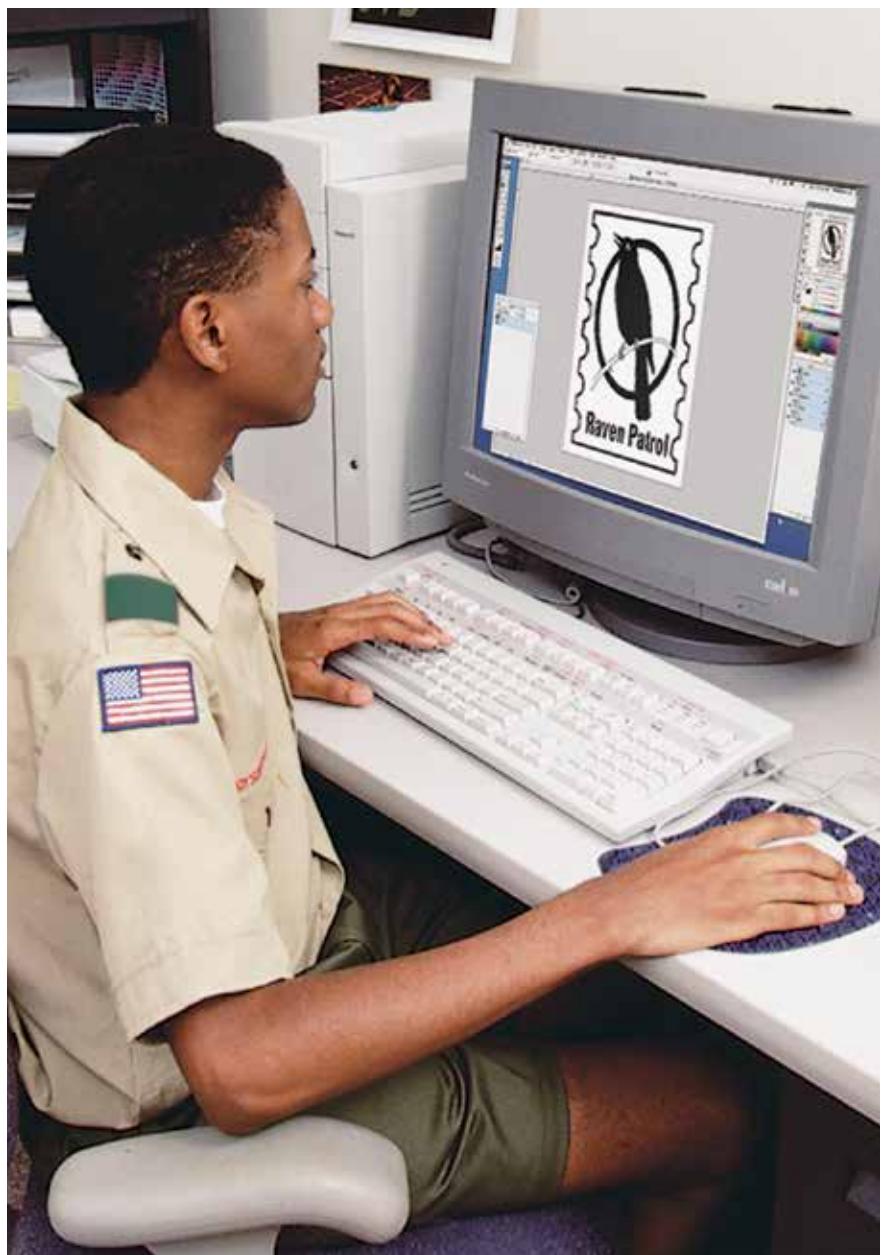


Anniversary of the 1st intercollegiate game in 1869 at New Brunswick, New Jersey; Rutgers -- 6, Princeton -- 8.

CRIPPLED CHILDREN



Funded to forestall all the need for rehabilitation of the handicapped.



Fun Projects

There are many fun and rewarding projects that you could do to fulfill requirement 7. Here are a few suggestions.

Designing a Stamp

First determine what you would like your stamp to depict. Will it commemorate a person, place, or thing? Are there printed stamps you could use as references? Here are some examples of different stamp designs.

As you design your stamp, keep in mind that it does not need to be an illustration. Use a favorite photo along with your own design elements.



Designing a Cancellation

Special cancellations usually focus on a special event, cause, or theme. They can have simple designs or have complex and detailed ones that relate to a stamp, cachet, or special event. You will need to check the *Domestic Mail Manual* at your local post office or on the internet for requirements on designing a cancellation.

With your parent's permission, visit the U.S. Postal Service online at www.usps.com.

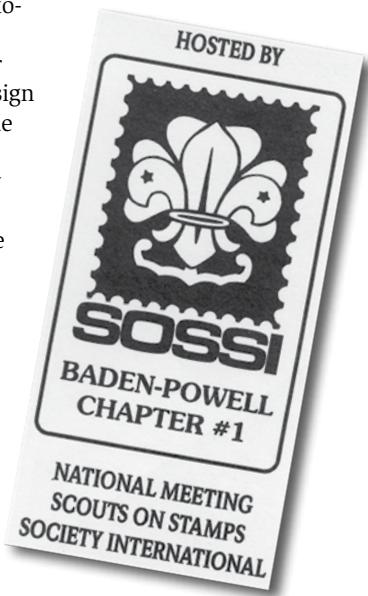


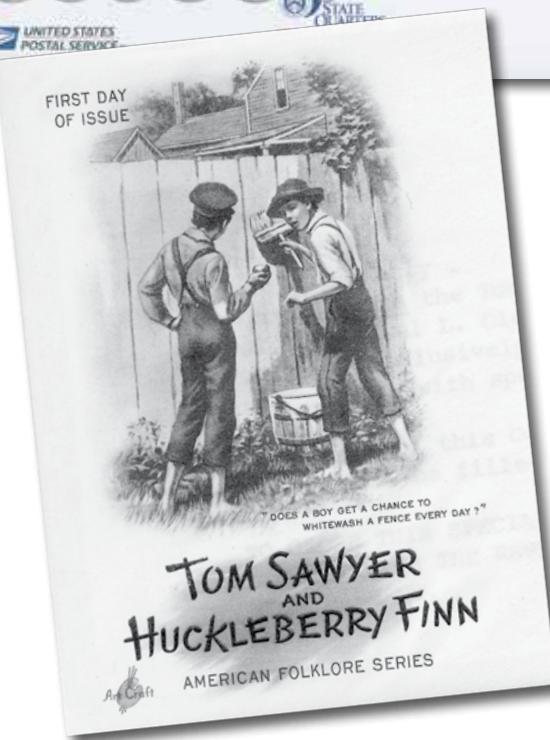
Designing a Cachet

A *cachet* is a design that is usually hand-drawn, rubber-stamped, or printed on the left side of an envelope. Cachets are usually created to draw attention to the stamp on the envelope or to an event you are promoting.

To make a cachet on a photocopier machine, open a 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch envelope completely. Using your imagination, draw your own design or select a picture to place on the open envelope. Make as many copies as desired. Cut each copy to envelope size, fold, and glue together to simulate an envelope (a filler card might be added before closing). Address the envelope, attach the correct postage, and have the envelope canceled by mailing it to yourself.

Your stamp design can be as simple or as complex as you desire.





Use cachets like these
for inspiration as you
design your own.

You can easily make a cachet using your computer and printer. Design the cachet using your own software, use the "page setup" to indicate the print specifications (size, format, and so on) of the envelope, and send it to print.



The U.S. Postal Service From Past to Present

The United States Postal Service is a descendant of the oldest department in the U.S. government. That department was formed by action of the Continental Congress in 1775, and Benjamin Franklin was named the first postmaster general. When the U.S. Constitution was adopted in 1789, all postal services came under the control of the federal government. The present system still reflects the many plans and methods devised by Franklin.

The means of transporting the mail progressed along with the country—from on foot, to horseback, stagecoaches, steamboats, railways, and eventually, aircraft. More recently, the USPS has been building up the world's largest fleet of alternative-fuel vehicles that use clean fuels such as ethanol and electricity.

One of the most significant changes in the postal system was the adoption of postage stamps as the method of payment for carrying the mail. Following the British innovation in 1840, the first U.S. stamps were issued on July 1, 1847. This new system required the sender to prepay the fee instead of the receiver paying it. Through the years, the system has been modified and the equipment improved to keep up with the increase in quantity of mail processed.

In the early 1960s, it became obvious that there was a great need for a system that would process mail mechanically or electronically. A system using the now-familiar zip (zone improvement plan) code was installed on July 1, 1963. On September 13, 1978, the USPS announced a plan to assign an additional four-digit code to further assist in the sorting of mail.





Because of many difficulties, both financial and organizational, the U.S. Congress passed the Postal Reorganization Act, which was signed into law by President Richard Nixon on August 12, 1970. On July 1, 1971, the Post Office Department became the U.S. Postal Service, an independent agency dedicated to providing affordable and efficient mail service to everyone in the country, no matter where they live.



Handling the Mail Is a Big Job

We have all seen letter carriers delivering mail to houses. But few of us realize how big a job that really is. As of 2020, the USPS:

- Delivered 129 billion pieces of mail to 161.4 million delivery addresses
- Operated more than 31,000 post offices
- Took in \$73.1 billion a year in revenue
- Employed more than 644,000 people

If we look at some of the major steps that must take place to get the letter from where it was mailed to the mailbox at your door, we can better understand and appreciate the United States Postal Service.

Let's suppose that someone places a letter to you in a mailbox in a city 200 miles from your house. Later that same day, all the letters that have accumulated in the mailbox are picked up by a letter carrier and taken to the local post office, where they are placed in trays.

The trays are then carried by truck to an area processing station, where they are further sorted by zip code. In a process called *dispositioning*, the mail is *faced*, or arranged, so that the stamp is in the same position on each piece, allowing the letters to be canceled by a clerk or a machine. The trays of letters are then picked up by postal employees and loaded into trucks for distribution to local post offices or loaded onto airplanes for delivery to more distant places.

The destination post office must then sort the mail and distribute it to the proper mail carrier, who will make one final sort before delivering the mail to the appropriate address along his or her route.

This is a simplified description of the USPS's complex procedures. Many special machines have been developed to streamline and automate the process. Advancing technology continually improves the way we get our mail.



BADEN-POWELL'S "FIRST" BOY SCOUT...

... WAS PICTURED ON A POSTAGE STAMP DURING THE SIEGE OF MAFEKING, SOUTH AFRICA.

FORMED INTO A CADET CORPS, ALL BOYS FROM NINE YEARS OF AGE WERE LED BY A YOUTH "CADET-SERGEANT-MAJOR" WARNER GOODYEAR. "B-P" WAS GREATLY IMPRESSED BY THEIR EFFICIENCY...



"UNCLE DAN" BEARD HONORED ON A POSTAGE STAMP OF THE AFRICAN NATION OF TOGO



OUR FIRST NATIONAL SCOUT COMMISSIONER OF THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA, AND ONE OF SCOUTING'S FOUNDERS, DAN BEARD WAS LOVED BY AMERICAN BOYS FOR HIS MANY BOOKS AND ARTICLES IN BOYS' LIFE MAGAZINE ON CAMPING, COOKING, WOODCRAFT, PIONEERING AND NATURE.

1961

Interesting Stories About Stamps

Some stamps have interesting stories behind them. One such stamp is known as the First Scout stamp. During the South African War in the late 1800s, the British commander was Robert S.S. Baden-Powell. To help communications, Baden-Powell formed a cadet corps of boys, who served as uniformed messengers, carrying messages from the commander to his outposts.

During the long siege of Mafeking, the officers began producing postage stamps, mostly for their own amusement. When Baden-Powell discovered what they were doing, he suggested that his messenger, Cadet Sgt. Maj. Goodyear, be pictured on one of the stamps. These stamps were recognized as real postage stamps when the war ended in 1902.

In 1907, Baden-Powell formed the Scouting movement. In later years, he called young Goodyear his “first Scout,” because Baden-Powell’s ideas for Scouting had been forming during the siege of Mafeking.

The first stamp, known throughout the world as the Penny Black and depicting Queen Victoria, was introduced in England in May 1840. The stamp’s use on an envelope indicated that postage had been paid. On July 1, 1847, the United States started issuing postage stamps featuring George Washington and Benjamin Franklin.





The stamp shown here is one of the world's most valuable stamps. In 2021, it was sold at auction for \$8,300,000, and its *face value*, or original value, was 1 cent. This stamp was printed in 1856 in the British colony of British Guiana, now the independent country of Guyana.

British Guiana's stamps normally were printed in England. This one, however, was printed in the colony as part of a temporary stock, because supplies were slow in arriving from England.

Seventeen years after it was printed, the stamp was found by a 12-year-old boy, L. Vernon Vaughan, in the attic of his home in British Guiana. He soaked it off the envelope and put it in his album, but later sold it to a local collector. It was sold many times, each time for a higher price, until 1980, when it brought the then-world's record price for a single stamp. As you can see, the corners have been clipped and the surface has been badly rubbed. But it is the only known stamp from this rare issue, and so its poor condition does not detract from its value.

In 1918, a 24-cent airmail stamp was issued honoring the Curtiss JN-4 "Jenny," a World War I biplane that became an airmail plane. About 700 of the stamps were misprinted with the plane upside down. Postal authorities destroyed 600 of the mistakes, printed in sheets of 100 each, before they were circulated. The remaining sheet was inadvertently sold to a collector in Washington, D.C., and was later resold as single stamps and panes. In 2005, a block of four "inverted Jenny" stamps sold at auction for \$2.7 million.

A stamp collection sometimes becomes valuable not so much because of the stamps in it but because of who collected them. In 2005, the Smithsonian Institution's National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C., paid \$53,000 for the boyhood stamp collection of John Lennon, a member of The Beatles, the most famous rock-and-roll band of all time.



John Lennon's album from childhood

To help build his collection, Lennon, who lived in Liverpool, England, saved stamps off of letters from relatives in New Zealand. His collection consists of 565 stamps in a single album. Pages of the album can be viewed at the museum's website (see the resources section).

John Lennon, who wasn't all that serious about his collection, sketched beards and mustaches on the likenesses of Queen Victoria and King George VI on his stamp album's title page.





Stamp Collecting Resources

Scouting Literature

Collections merit badge pamphlet

With your parent's permission, visit the Boy Scouts of America's official retail website, www.scoutshop.org, for a complete listing of all merit badge pamphlets and other helpful Scouting materials and supplies.

Books

Adams, Charles F. *Stamp Collecting: The Complete, Easy Guide to the World's Most Popular Hobby*. Dell Publishing, 1992.

Baadke, Michael. *Linn's Complete Stamp Collecting Basics*. Linn's Stamp News, 2004.

Bierman, Stanley. *More of the World's Greatest Stamp Collectors*. Linn's Stamp News, 1990.

Cabeen, Richard M. *Standard Handbook of Stamp Collecting*, new revised ed. Random House Value Publishing, 1986.

Carlton, R. Scott. *International Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Philately*. Krause Publications, 1997.

Datz, Stephen R. *Official Stamp Collector's Bible*. House of Collectibles, 2002.

———. *Stamp Collecting: Discover the Fun of the World's Most Popular Hobby!* General Trade Corporation, 2009.

Dyer Sr., David O. *Is Stamp Collecting the Hobby for You?* Truman Publishing Company, 1998.

Eisenberg, Ronald L. *The Jewish World in Stamps: 4,000 Years of Jewish Civilization on Postal Stamps*. Schreiber Publishing Inc., 2002.

Giffenhagen, George and Jerome Husak. *Adventures in Topical Stamp Collecting*. American Topical Association, 1997.

Herst Jr., Herman. *Fun and Profit in Stamp Collecting*. Amos Press, 1988.

Hudgeons Jr., Thomas E. *The Official Blackbook Price Guide to U.S. Postage Stamps 2013*. House of Collectibles, 2012.

Jonath, Leslie. *Postmark Paris: A Story in Stamps*. Chronicle Books, 2005.

———. *Stamp It!: The Ultimate Stamp Collecting Activity Book*. Chronicle Books, 2002.

Kloetzel, James E., ed. *Scott Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue 2014*. Scott Publishing Company, 2013.

MacKay, James. *The World Encyclopedia of Stamps and Stamp Collecting: The Ultimate Illustrated Reference to Over 3,000 of the World's Best Stamps*. Lorenz Books, 2005.

O'Keefe, Donna, ed. *Linn's Stamp Identifier*. Linn's Stamp News, 2004.

Sine, Richard L. *Stamp Collecting for Dummies*. For Dummies, 2001.

United States Postal Service.
Postal Service Guide to U.S. Stamps.
Published yearly.

Williams, L. N. *Fundamentals of Philately*. American Philatelic Society, 1990.

Youngblood, Wayne L. *All About Stamps: An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Philatelic Terms*. Krause Publications, 2000.

Periodicals

Linn's Stamp News
P.O. Box 926
Sidney, OH 45365-0926
www.linns.com

Mekeel's & Stamps Magazine
42 Sentry Way
Merrimack, NH 03054
www.stampnewsnow.com

Organizations and Websites

American Air Mail Society
P.O. Box 110
Mineola, NY 11501-0110
www.americanairmailsociety.org

American Association of Philatelic Exhibitors
www.aape.org

American First Day Cover Society
P.O. Box 16277
Tucson, AZ 85732-6277
www.afdcs.org



American Philatelic Society**American Philatelic Research Library**

100 Match Factory Place
Bellefonte, PA 16823
www.stamps.org

American Stamp Dealers Association

P.O. Box 692
Leesport, PA 19533
www.asdaonline.com

American Topical Association

P.O. Box 8
Carterville, IL 62918-0008
www.americantopicalassn.org

Ebony Society of Philatelic Events and Reflections

P.O. Box 1757
Lincolnton Station
New York, NY 10037-1757
esperstamps.org

International Machine Cancel Society

3097 Trobisher Ave.
Dublin, OH 43017-1652
www.machinecancel.org

Museum of Postal History

339 N. Main St.
Delphos, OH 45833-1575
www.postalhistorymuseum.org

National Postal Museum

2 Massachusetts Ave. NE
Washington, DC 20002
www.postalmuseum.si.edu

Philatelic Foundation

341 W. 38th St., 5th Floor
New York, NY 10018
www.philatelicfoundation.org

Post Mark Collectors Club

www.postmarks.org

The Postal History Foundation

920 N. First Ave.
Tucson, AZ 85719
www.postalhistoryfoundation.org

Postal History Society

P.O. Box 468101
Atlanta, GA 31146
www.postalhistorysociety.org

Precancel Stamp Society

P.O. Box 1013
Fenton, MO 63026-1013
www.precancels.org

Scott Publishing Company

P.O. Box 828
Sidney, OH 45365-0828
www.linns.com

If you are requesting information from any of these organizations, be sure to include a self-addressed, stamped (first class) envelope.

Scouts on Stamps Society International Inc.

P.O. Box 6228
Kennewick, WA 99336
www.sossi.org

Spellman Museum of Stamps and Postal History

Regis College
235 Wellesley St.
Weston, MA 02493
www.spellman.org

United Postal Stationery Society Central Office

P.O. Box 3982
Chester, VA 23831
www.upss.org

Universal Ship Cancellation Society

747 Shard Court
Fremont, CA 94539-7419
www.uscs.org

The Washington Press

2 Vreeland Road
Florham Park, NJ 07932
www.washpress.com

Wineburgh Philatelic

Research Library

The University of Texas at Dallas
P.O. Box 830643
Richardson, TX 75083-0643
library.utdallas.edu/special-collections-and-archives/philatelic-collection

Young Stamp Collectors of America

100 Match Factory Place
Bellefonte, PA 16823
stamps.org/learn/youth-in-philately

Foreign Postal Administrations

Australia Post

www.auspost.com.au

Austrian Post

www.post.at/en

Bulgarian Posts

www.bgpost.bg/en?cid=3

Canada Post

www.canadapost.ca

Czech Post

www.ceskaposta.cz/en

Post Danmark (Denmark)

www.postnord.dk/en

La Poste (France)

www.laposte.fr

An Post (Ireland)

www.anpost.ie

Israel Postal Company Ltd.

www.israelpost.co.il

Poste Italiane (Italy)

www.poste.it

Japan Post

www.post.japanpost.jp/english

Latvijas Pasts (Latvia)

www.pasts.lv/en

P & T Luxembourg

www.post.lu

TNT Post (Netherlands)

www.postnl.nl/en

New Zealand Post

stamps.nzpost.co.nz

Norway Post

www.posten.no/en

Poczta Polska (Poland)

znaczki.pocztapolska.pl

Philatelic Center of French Polynesia

www.fenuamarket.pf/en

CTT Correios (Portugal)

www.ctt.pt

Singapore Post

www.singpost.com

Posta Slovenije (Slovenia)

www.posta.si/home

South Africa Post Office

www.postoffice.co.za

Swiss Post (Switzerland)

www.swisspost.ch

United Kingdom Royal Mail

www.royalmail.com

United Nations Postal Administration

unstamps.org

From the USPS

Postal Facts

facts.usps.com

The United States Postal Service also offers a free guide called “The Art of Stamp Collecting” (publication 225). Visit your local post office or download it from about.usps.com/publications/pub225/welcome.htm.

In addition, the USPS has a special program for first day covers. The USPS gives postal customers 30 days to obtain a first day of issue postmark by mail. Buy the new stamp at a local post office, affix the stamp to an envelope addressed to yourself (or someone else you designate), and send it in a larger envelope to the USPS. (The address appears at the bottom of each stamp release; check with your local post office.) Individual first day covers can be ordered by writing to the USPS, Stamp Fulfillment Services, P.O. Box 7247, Philadelphia, PA 19101-7097; or call toll-free 800-STAMP-24; or visit store.usps.com.

Acknowledgments

The Boy Scouts of America is grateful to the following individuals for their assistance with updating the *Stamp Collecting* merit badge pamphlet: United States Postal Service, in particular Mark Saunders (senior community relations specialist), Cindy L. Tackett (manager, Stamp Products and Exhibitions), and with special thanks to Courtney Loy (Rights and Permissions Program); Janet Houser, program coordinator, American Philatelic Society; Wilson Hulme, curator of philately, and Allison Gallaway, public affairs officer, the Smithsonian Institution’s National Postal Museum; artist John Dawson; and Scott S. Stuckey, National Science Teachers Association.

The Boy Scouts of America thanks the following people and organizations in the preparation of this and/or previous editions of the *Stamp Collecting* merit badge pamphlet: American Philatelic Research Library; American Philatelic Society; American Stamp Dealers; American Topical Association; Brookman Stamp Company; Kim Kowalczyk; *Linn's Stamp News*; *Mekeel's & Stamps Magazine*; John Murray; Scott Publishing Company; and Scouts on Stamps Society International Inc., Baden-Powell Chapter 1.

The Boy Scouts of America is grateful to the men and women serving on the National Merit Badge Subcommittee for the improvements made in updating this pamphlet.

Photo and Illustration Credits

Berries stamp image ©1999 United States Postal Service. All rights reserved. Used with permission.—page 30 (*top*)

Donald Chenevert III, courtesy—page 23

Nancy Clark, courtesy—page 24

Cloudscapes stamp series ©2004 United States Postal Service. All rights reserved. Used with permission.—page 61 (*top right*)

Extreme Sports stamp image ©1999 United States Postal Service. All rights reserved. Used with permission.—page 43 (*bottom*)

HAAP Media Ltd., courtesy—cover (*stamps at top left and bottom center, postcards*)

Hanukkah stamp image ©1996 United States Postal Service. All rights reserved. Used with permission.—page 61

Houser, Janet, courtesy—page 59

Love stamp image ©1999 United States Postal Service. All rights reserved. Used with permission.—page 61

Mark Twain stamp image ©1985 United States Postal Service. All rights reserved. Used with permission.—page 27

Mary Lyon stamp image ©1987 United States Postal Service. All rights reserved. Used with permission.—page 9

Northeast Deciduous Forest stamp series ©2005 United States Postal Service. All rights reserved. Used with permission.—page 13

Dennis Oda, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, courtesy—page 40 (*bottom*)

Old Glory stamped envelope ©1995 United States Postal Service. All rights reserved. Used with permission.—page 35 (*center*)

Pacific Stagecoach stamp image ©1997 United States Postal Service. All rights reserved. Used with permission.—page 21 (*bottom*)

The Postal Service Guide to U.S. Stamps™ cover. ©2005 United States Postal Service. All rights reserved. Used with permission.—pages 12 and 47 (*top left center*)

Red Cloud stamp image ©1987 United States Postal Service. All rights reserved. Used with permission.—page 30 (*bottom*)

Roger Maris stamp image ©1999 United States Postal Service. All rights reserved. Used with permission.—page 31 (*bottom*)

Smithsonian National Postal Museum, courtesy—page 71 (*both*)

Southern Florida Wetlands stamp series ©2006 United States Postal Service. All rights reserved. Used with permission.—pages 39 (*both*) and 40 (*both top*)

Yorkshire post card ©1988 United States Postal Service. All rights reserved. Used with permission.—page 33 (*center*)

All other photos and illustrations not mentioned above are the property of or are protected by the Boy Scouts of America.

Jennifer Horn—page 15

John McDearmon—all illustrations on pages 41–42 and 51

Stamp Honors Scouting's Centennial

In celebration of the Boy Scouts of America's 100th Anniversary in 2010, the U.S. Postal Service issued a "Scouting" stamp. The stamp, which portrays the outdoor adventure aspect of Scouting, was designed by illustrator Craig Frazier. The depiction of a Scout atop the summit of a mountain, with the silhouette of a Scout viewing the distance through binoculars, conveys a nostalgic sentiment for Scouting's now more than century-long history in the United States.





UP YOUR MERIT BADGE GAME



Get ahead in Scouting with *Scout Life* magazine. It's loaded with the latest news on merit badges and other advancement tools. Plus, it's got outdoor adventure, games and comics, leadership tips, life skills, stories about other Scouts and more. It's just what you need to succeed.

Subscribe today at go.scoutlife.org/subscribe

Use promo code **SLMBP15** to get a special print + digital bundle offer priced just for Scouts.