

## COUNTERFEIT STAMPS

Presented by Frank Miller on April 15, 2024, to the Dayton Stamp Club

*Counterfeit stamps are a modern-day plague to the philatelist, the general public, and especially to the USPS.*

- Stamp Club “counterfeit” mailing. Example on page 42.
- Scott Specialized Catalogue of United States Counterfeits. Available from Amos Media.
- John Hotchner’s “Talk on Counterfeits”. John is a much-honored philatelic writer, and guru of all knowledge of the “classic to modern period” of counterfeit stamps, 1895-2004. (Pages 2-25).
- Sample bogus email offering counterfeit stamps for sale. Sent to one of our club members. (Page 26).
- “Countering Counterfeits” by Nora Bryson. Nora Bryson is the Digital Editor for the American Philatelic Society. This article was published by her in the new APS digital journal “stampED. (Pages 27-34).
- Dennis Callison’s counterfeit booklet of 20 stamps, Scott #3635CF1. (Page 35).
- The USPS response to the counterfeit plague. (Pages 36-40). Supplied to me by Brian Plants, Revenue Fraud Analyst, USPIS.
- Designing the Stamp Club “counterfeit” mailing. (Pages 41-43).
- Acknowledgements. (Page 44).

## Talk at Rochester Philatelic Assoc. Jan. 12, 2023

By John Hotchner

If I've learned anything in my 70 years of stamp collecting, it's that stamp collectors can be trusted to a far greater extent than the general public. Yet we know that there are a few bad actors in the hobby who forge and alter stamps with the object of making a profit from unsuspecting stamp and cover collectors.

We'll be focusing on a different kind of crook - people who have produced counterfeits of U.S. general issue stamps, which we collectors call definitives, to sell to non-collectors, usually at a discount, for use as US postage.

By and large, these counterfeiters are NOT stamp collectors. In 1895 when the first major case broke, they were garden variety criminals. As time has passed, we have seen more of those types, but also organized crime gets into the counterfeits game, and in more recent years, even foreign governments.

Because postal counterfeits deprive the USG of revenue, the law enforcement community has cared deeply about them from the beginning. No matter who discovers a counterfeit, be it

- local police
- a postal clerk
- the FBI, or

a collector, the case will ultimately become the responsibility of a regional office of the US Postal Inspection Service. In the early years, until the mid- 20<sup>th</sup> century, the US Secret Service also exercised jurisdiction.

Until the era of mass-produced photogravure stamps, they did a remarkable job of investigating incidents, running the perpetrators to ground, putting them out of business, seizing the goods, and putting the bad guys in jail for significant time periods.

For the most part, counterfeits were easy to spot as they had to simulate engraved originals. Also, they tended to be produced by local operations and in relatively small quantities.

For that reason, most US postal counterfeits up until the 37c first class era, roughly 2002, are rarities in any form, but especially in the form of entire sheets, and when successfully used on cover.

These days, the situation is different because of the technology available to even the common criminal, the availability of the Internet to help with nationwide distribution, and the large quantities of counterfeits produced abroad and smuggled into the US.

There is also another factor which has contributed to the problem: In the late 1980s the U.S. Postal Service decided to abandon the use of intaglio engraving in production of postage stamps, moving to the much less secure

photogravure printing process. This was a carefully calculated decision that resulted in a considerable savings in production time and cost.

I believe the Postal Service recognized that they would be giving up some level of security in doing this, but I think they felt that technology would rescue them.

In the 1960s, the US like many other countries including the UK began using tagging on stamps or in stamp paper. It was part of a move to use facer-cancellers to perform a task that formerly required hand labor; again, with a huge savings in time and labor.

The Postal Service calculated that counterfeiters would not go to the expense of adding the proper type of tagging that the facer-cancellers would recognize. The facer-cancellers were set so that they would kick out any letter mail that did not have tagging, or the proper type of tagging.

And the counterfeiters obliged by not adding tagging to almost all of their products. It would have greatly increased their cost to do so.

So far, so good. If the system had worked as designed, the counterfeits would be caught, senders would be interviewed to find out where they had gotten the counterfeits, and the problem would be managed and minimized.

But the USPS made too many assumptions, among them

being that the facer-cancellers would operate with a high degree of accuracy, and that the postal personnel tending them handling the kick-outs would refer them to postal inspectors.

What actually happened is that the facer-cancellers kicked out and continue to kick out not just mail with counterfeit stamps, but also normal properly stamped mail.

Because most of the photogravure counterfeits are a pretty good match for the genuine stamps, the clerks are not able in a high production environment to take the time to try to identify any but the most obvious of counterfeits; so they have responded to the situation by hand cancelling the kicked out mail and sending it on its way.

Bottom line? The USPS opened the door to massive counterfeiting by going from intaglio to photogravure printing. It costs them conservatively hundreds of thousands of dollars (if not millions) EACH year in lost revenue. And there is essentially no way the staff of the Inspection Service can police the result.

They can't even deal with the instances where counterfeits are advertised on the Internet, let alone what is going on in the shadows.

For about 20 years, I've been working with three other collectors, Richard Drews of Chicago, and Joann and Kurt Lenz from Michigan to put together a non-competitive exhibit of all known US postal counterfeits. We got to

about 85-90% of what exists outside of the files of the Postal Inspection Service. This is no mean feat.

When we began this process, we each had our personal collections, and as we compared notes and press clippings we were amazed at what existed that one or more of us didn't know about, and how fragmented the available information was.

We early-on discovered that none of us wanted to sell our holdings, so the only way to bring them together to get a relatively complete picture was to do a single exhibit, which we could put in frames for the collecting community to see, and thus be a focal point for reports of additional material and information about postal counterfeits.

I have included photographs of the exhibit frames. (These photographs start on page 10). I want to note that it has grown from an initial showing of two frames, to what is now five frames, and I've just gotten an additional holding that needs to be integrated to complete a 6<sup>th</sup> frame.

In 2011 it accomplished something I never thought I would see. The Scott Catalogue people approached us asking if we could help put a US postal counterfeits section into the Scott US Specialized Catalogue? That happened in the 2013 Catalogue - together with an introductory essay. I hoped it would result in a bonanza of new reports and new information. Oddly, that has not been the case.

I would like to think that is because we have identified

almost all of what exists, but new ones do pop up, and of course each new modern definitive is counterfeited by multiple groups of crooks. In fact, in the last year we have seen that virtually every US issue is being counterfeited, AND, often the counterfeiters are even adding tagging.

Let me give you a few nuggets of information:

\*\*\*\*\*The first case broke in 1895, with the 2c of the 1st Bureau issue being counterfeited.

\*\*\* Since then, we know of over 55 face-different US stamps though the 37c era, which I call the classic period, that have been counterfeited. (These exhibits are included at the end of this article).

\*\*\*Of those the 55 known, there are 48 examples in philatelic hands; only one of which I don't have.

\*\*\*5 are NOT known in philatelic hands, but are of record in the files of the Postal Inspection Service. Because I have a friend, Howard Petschel, who was an Agent in the Postal Inspection Service, we do have photographic evidence of these counterfeits, which were seized before any distribution was made. Howard has also since his retirement published three books on the stories behind many of the US postal counterfeits.

\*\*\*\*There are an additional number of US stamps which we loosely call postal counterfeits, but are really photocopies rather than mass produced printed counterfeits.

\*\*\*We have made an editorial decision not to include them in the Scott listings as more could easily be manufactured. However, we do include examples in the exhibit.

\*\*\*We also include in the exhibit a number of other ways in which users of the postal system have tried, and often succeeded, to deprive the USPS of revenue. As these are of interest to students of the postal system, we felt they belonged in the exhibit, even though they don't belong in the Scott listings.

\*\*\*Included in the exhibit and in the catalogue listings are postal counterfeits of postal stationery. There are 3 that we know of, though we have only one of them at this time; but in several different versions.

\*\*\*Beginning with the 37c Flag era, the major Flag Over and Liberty Bell Forever designs, all photogravure printed, have all been counterfeited. There are a wide variety of counterfeits, but the major distributions have their origins with organized crime in Russia, in both Chinas, Colombia, and probably the Government of the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea, also known as North Korea; all of which have also been known to counterfeit US currency.

\*\*\* These however are not the first foreign-origin counterfeits. The \$2.60 Zeppelin counterfeits were probably produced in Italy in the 1950s;  
--The 1/2c and 30c stamps from the 1954 Liberty Series were done in North Korea,



--And the World Stamp Expo '89 souvenir sheet is believed to have been done in Latvia.

Each instance of a counterfeit has a fascinating and unique story. The Howard Petschel books are a great source for these stories.

## United States Postal Counterfeits - The classic period to modern times, 1895-2004



1895



1920



1923

Which stamp of each pair is the counterfeit?\*

**Objective** To bring together for the first time in this exhibit a unique and comprehensive showing of the postal counterfeits of U.S. stamps known to exist in philatelic hands.

**Scope** Postal Counterfeits include those stamp look-alikes created to deprive the Post Office of postal revenue. Forged and altered stamps made to fool collectors is a separate field that is not included here. Nor are non-postal counterfeits such as War Savings and Revenue counterfeits.

The first U.S. postal counterfeit was done in 1895. 2004 is the end point so the exhibit can cover all Bureau of Engraving and Printing issues, the negative effects of going from engraved stamps to photogravure printing, and the start of widespread distribution of foreign-produced counterfeits (the 37c Flag issue). It excludes the last 20 years during which the USPS allowed counterfeiting to blossom by failure to enforce relevant statutes; with literally dozens of operations abroad printing subtly different counterfeits of nearly every new U.S. stamp issued.

**Completeness** In its first incarnation, this exhibit brought together the exhibitor's collection and the collections of Rich Drews, and Joanne and Kurt Lenz, in a non-competitive exhibit shown from 2003 to 2018. It was the basis of the Scott U.S. Specialized listings first appearing in 2013; compiled by the exhibitor. The exhibitor now owns it all, and has added the collections of Lewis Kaufman, Steven Roth and retired Postal Inspector Howard Petschel. The result is this exhibit which includes all known Postal Counterfeits in the period that exist in philatelic hands, with five exceptions; two of which have not been seen in over 60 years.

**Rarity** Though all U.S. Postal Counterfeits are scarce, full panes and on-cover use in period are rarities. All known examples of full panes, most unique, are included; as is in-period usage where known. Post Office correspondence about them is also included where appropriate.

**Collectability** Is it legal to collect Counterfeits? Possession is banned by law (18 USC 472). In earlier times it was enforced against dealers and collectors. Currently the law is interpreted to apply to counterfeiters and those who sell counterfeits for use in the mails. Today, we see counterfeits offered, properly described, by well-known auctioneers. And they are occasionally seen in exhibit frames. Neither the Postal Inspection Service nor the Secret Service has objected. This is a positive, as counterfeits are a legitimate aspect of the story of the stamps they replicate, as well as a fascinating area of study to be able to differentiate them from the genuine stamps.

\* For the 1895 issue, the counterfeit is first; for 1920 second; for 1923 first. Note especially print quality, which is inferior when commercial surface printing tries to replicate engraving (1895, 1923), and high-quality offset (1920).

## 1894 Series 2c Washington counterfeits – Type I

Type I triangle, Unwatermarked (Scott #250)

This is the most often seen of the two 1894 Series counterfeits. They were printed from a five-subject copper electrotype litho plate of five subjects. All known examples can be plated to it.



Genuine  
Perf 12x12



Counterfeit  
Perf 11.8x11.8  
Position 1



Imperf proof sheetlet of 5

One of two examples known. The other is in The Philatelic Foundation archives.



**Unique** strip of 5 perforated counterfeits from a production sheet of 25. Compare the spacing and the lips, which match the proof sheetlet. No full sheets of 25 known to exist.

### 1894 Series 2c Washington counterfeits – Type I

The counterfeiting was done in Chicago, but the stamps were distributed by Canadian Novelty Co. of Hamilton, Ontario. They were advertised in the *Chicago Tribune* of March 31, 1895, as "\$115 worth of stamps for \$100". The ad was seen by a stamp dealer who notified the Postal Inspectors. At the same time a tobacconist notified the Secret Service. Working together they seized 40,000 counterfeits, the plates, and partially completed product. Arrests were made in Chicago and Canada, and all involved in the ring were convicted and given jail sentences. After the trials, the great majority of the seized material was destroyed.

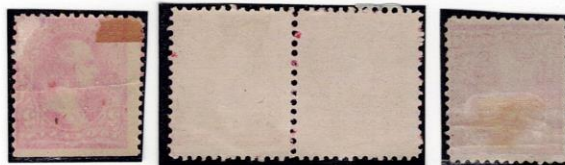
Production of the counterfeits extended over the course of weeks. There are varieties of color, perforation quality, and gum, as seen here:



Color varieties: Light rose carmine at start; later, Rose carmine



Perforation varieties: Course and out of line at start; later, better placed



Gum varieties: Varies through production. White and dark are scarce. Yellowish is most often seen

The next two pages are notification documents from the Post Office Department, created to inform post offices in the Chicago region what to watch for. The first is a draft from POD files. The "c" on the stamps denotes "Counterfeit".

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT  
OFFICE OF THE THIRD ASSISTANT POSTMASTER GENERAL  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

April 10, 1895.

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Postmaster at  
-----  
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Sir:

There are in circulation counterfeit two-cent ordinary postage stamps of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing Design, as described at the bottom of page 940 of the January, 1895, Postal Guide (trigonal ornament in upper corners and pale carmine tint.) This is one of the spurious stamps:



At the first blush, it has the lighter look of more open engraving, but, under a magnifying glass, it will be found that this is attributable to the broken lines, thus ----- instead of the continuous lines, thus ----- of the genuine steel engraving. Thus suggesting a recourse to the photo-lithographic process in securing the counterfeit resemblance and imprint. These counterfeits are, so far as discovered, well perforated and printed in sheets of five stamps, only, wide.

You will impart this information at once to your subordinates who handle stamps, and, more especially, stamped matter received for transmission, and instruct them to scrutinize carefully the stamps thereon, and so far as possible, identify persons mailing any matters with spurious stamps upon them. The attention of yourself and subordinates will not be confined to the Bureau design, but secondarily to the two-cent of 1890 issue which has no ornament in the upper corners.

Upon the discovery of important information under these instructions, you will take active measures, and, having by the most expeditious means advised the nearest Post Office Inspector, notify this office.

This letter, with the attached stamp, will be carefully preserved, as you or your successor may be called upon for it.

Very respectfully,

3d Ass't P.M. General.

(K)

(CIRCULAR I OF 1895.)

COUNTERFEIT POSTAGE STAMPS.

Post Office Department,

OFFICE OF THIRD ASSISTANT POSTMASTER GENERAL,

DIVISION OF POSTAGE STAMPS, STAMPED ENVELOPES, AND POSTAL CARDS,

WASHINGTON, D. C., April 10, 1895.

Postmaster at

*Albuquerque*  
*N. Mex.*

SIR:

There are in circulation counterfeit two-cent ordinary postage stamps of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing design, as described at the bottom of page 940 of the January, 1895, Postal Guide (trigonal ornament in upper corners and pale carmine tint.)

This is one of the spurious stamps:



At the first blush, it has the lighter look of more open engraving, but, under a magnifying glass, it will be found that this is attributable to the broken lines, thus \_\_\_\_\_ instead of the continuous lines, thus \_\_\_\_\_ of the genuine steel engraving; suggesting a recourse to the photo-lithographic process in securing the counterfeit resemblance and imprint. These counterfeits are, so far as discovered, well perforated and printed in sheets of five stamps, only, wide.

You will impart this information at once to your subordinates who handle stamps, more especially stamped matter received for transmission, and instruct them to scrutinize carefully the stamps thereon, and, so far as possible, identify persons mailing any matter with spurious stamps upon it. The attention of yourself and subordinates will not be confined to these stamps of the Bureau design but will extend secondarily to THE TWO-CENT OF THE 1890 ISSUE which has no ornament in the upper corners, and to ALL DENOMINATIONS OF BOTH ISSUES.

Upon the discovery of important information under these instructions, you will take active measures, and, having by the most expeditious means advised the nearest Post Office Inspector, notify this office. [See Secs. 1418 to 1422, inclusive, of the 1893 Regulations.]

This letter, with the attached stamp, will be carefully preserved, as you or your successor may be called upon for it.

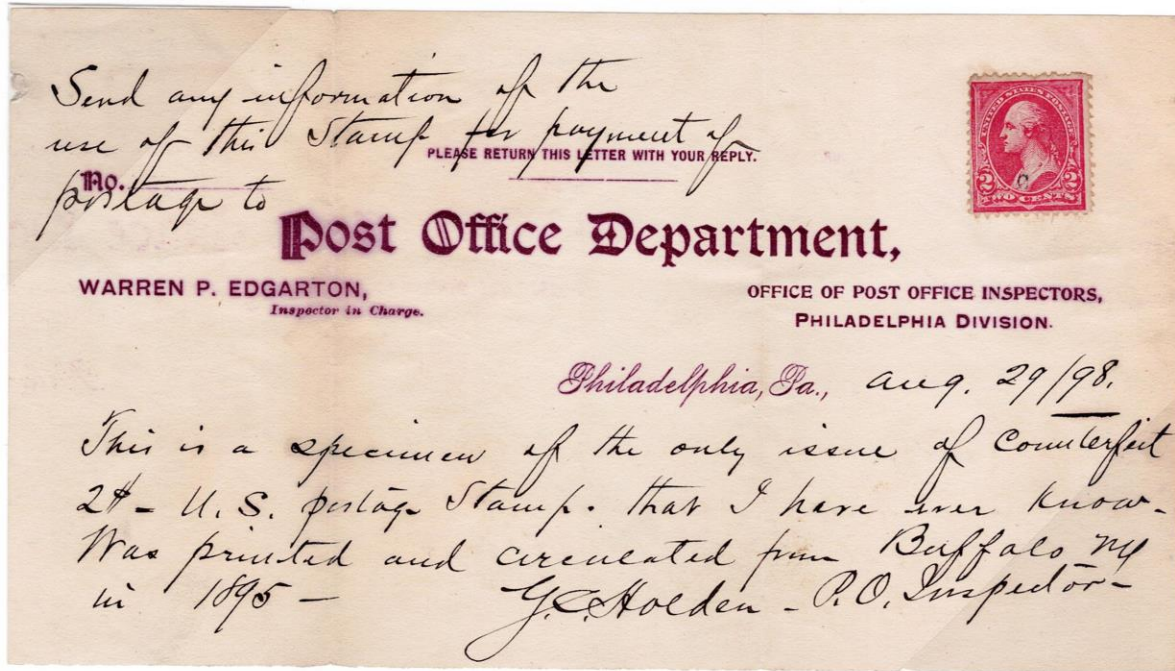
Very respectfully,

KERR CRAIGE,

*Third Assistant Postmaster General.*

1894 Series 2c Washington counterfeits – Type I

Some local postal authorities also notified front line postal staff of the counterfeits.



**Unique.** Dated August 29, 1898, this notice from the Inspector-in-Charge of the Philadelphia Division states, "This is a specimen of the only issue of counterfeit 2c U.S. postage stamp that I have ever known. Was printed and circulated from Buffalo, N.Y." (sic.)

The stamp is triangle Type I, unwatermarked, perf. 11.8

1894 Series 2c Washington counterfeits – Type I

One of only a few known covers bearing the Type I counterfeits. This is the cover used by Lester Brookman to illustrate his article in **The United States Postage Stamp of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Vol. III)**



A pair of the Type Is successfully paying double rate used from Portland, Oregon to Fargo, N.D.  
November 9, 1897



**1894 Series 2c Washington counterfeits – Type III**

Type III triangle. Unwatermarked Issue (Scott #252)

Produced in Chicago in 1896, about two years after the Type Is, about 20,000 were printed and almost all were seized by authorities before there was much circulation. Fewer than ten known.

Printing was on thin white paper with a weak pink impression. The paper has a non-postal watermark; such that it was originally listed as being a counterfeit of Scott #267. .



Genuine  
Perf 12x12



Counterfeit  
Perf 11.9x11.9



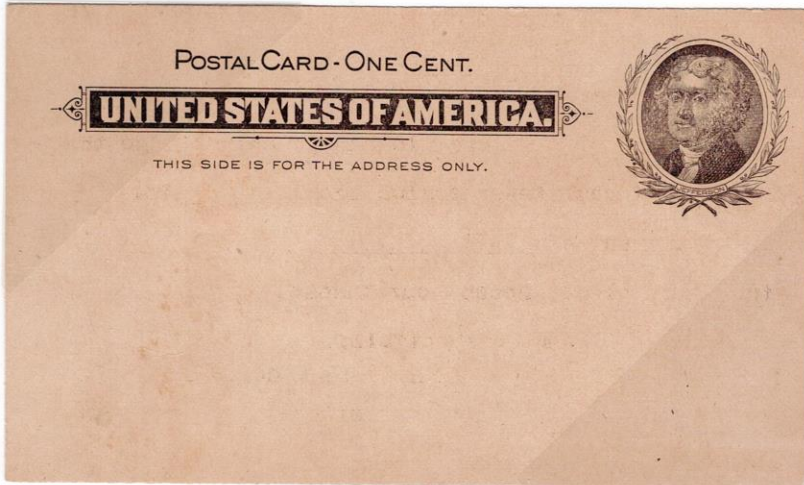
Only known block



Only known usage;  
Philadelphia, Pa., August 17, 1898.

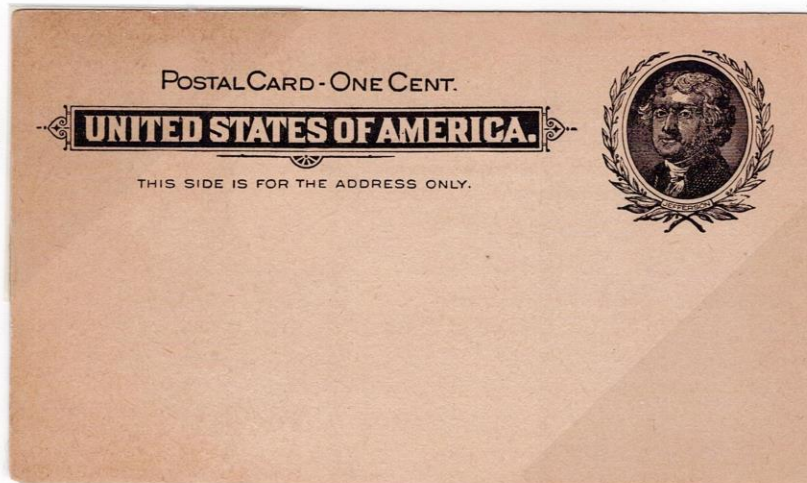
**1897 1c Jefferson Postal Card**

The counterfeit has five varieties. All share two characteristics: Darker than normal card stock, and the serifs are missing at the bottom of the second "T" and "E" of STATES". All are the work of one man in Chicago, who was arrested, convicted, and jailed. He made over two million of the cards, but only about 50 for all varieties are in the current census of cards in philatelic hands.



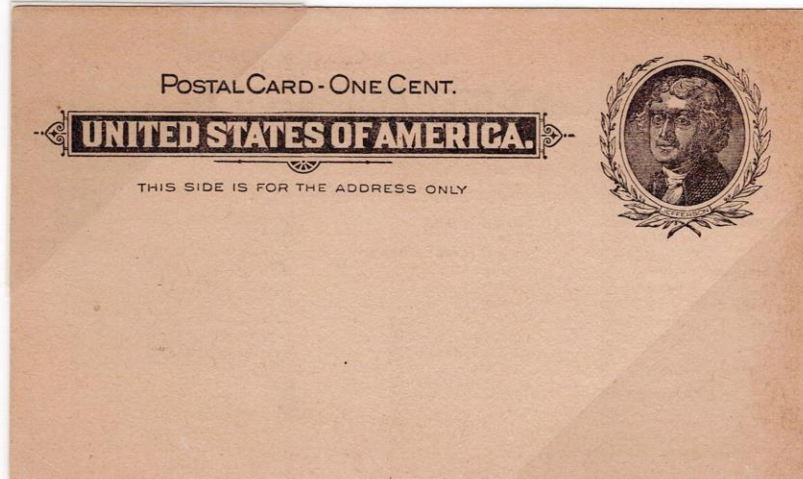
A typical genuine example

**Type 1 Counterfeit**  
**(8 known)**

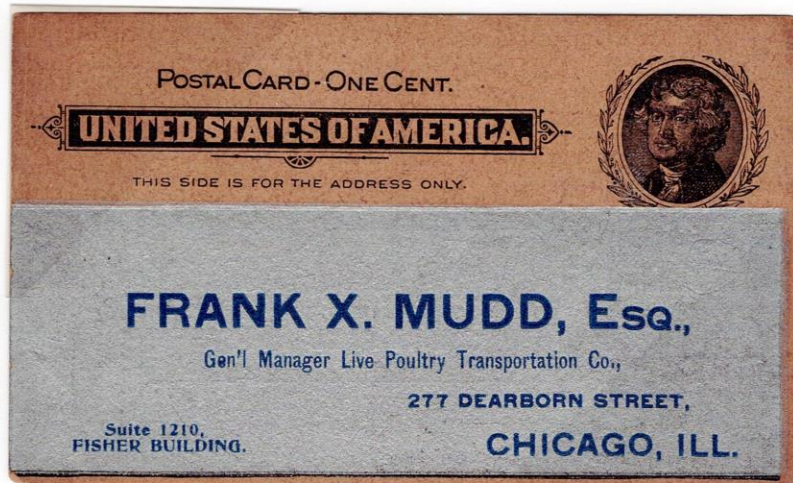


Look for these traits: Border line weak below "E" of "UNITED", Small downward bend or break in border line of inscription directly above center of semi-circular ornament, Short upward extension of dot at extreme right end of inscription panel. Often, on coated reverse, is a printed listing of products available from the Central School Supply House of Chicago.

1897 1c Jefferson Postal Card



**Type 4 Counterfeit (25 known):** The line above the inscription is weak over "TAT" in "STATES". There is a slight doubling of the thin oval frame line around the portrait at left, opposite Jefferson's mouth.



**Type 5 Counterfeit (7 known):** The bottom of the "D" in "UNITED" has an upright dash. The bottom of the "O" in "One" is thickened, with two vertical indentations.

**More of the story:** There are 10 copies of Type 2, and 2 copies of Type 3 known. Only one complete set with all five types exists, and coincidentally it is on display in an exhibit here. Chicagoan E. Louis Smith crafted an ingenious scheme to avoid detection of his counterfeits. He purchased engravings in pieces, and later assembled them in a printing form to simulate the postal card design. One engraver drew Jefferson's portrait, another did the "United States of America" inscription, and so forth, so that no craftsman would guess the real purpose of his engraving. When Smith was arrested in early 1902, he had 800,000 unsold counterfeit cards in his offices, and he estimated that his output had been in the millions! What accounts for the fact that there are so few surviving counterfeits? It seems most advertising then, as today, ended up in garbage cans.

**1922 Offset 2c Washington counterfeits**

The Toledo counterfeit

According to a letter dated Oct. 26, 1927, from the Assistant US Attorney in Cleveland, Ohio (next page), these counterfeits were produced in 1923 to simulate the 1922 Type VI offset issue. They were Printed by A.W. Winter of Toledo, Ohio. He was the hired mailer for the Johnson Coal Co.; printing their envelopes and stamps for them. The stamps were engraved, using copper plates, and are of poor quality.



The only reported on cover example



Genuine  
Perf 11x10.8  
Size: 18.5x21.5mm



Counterfeits  
Perf 11.8  
Size: 19x22mm

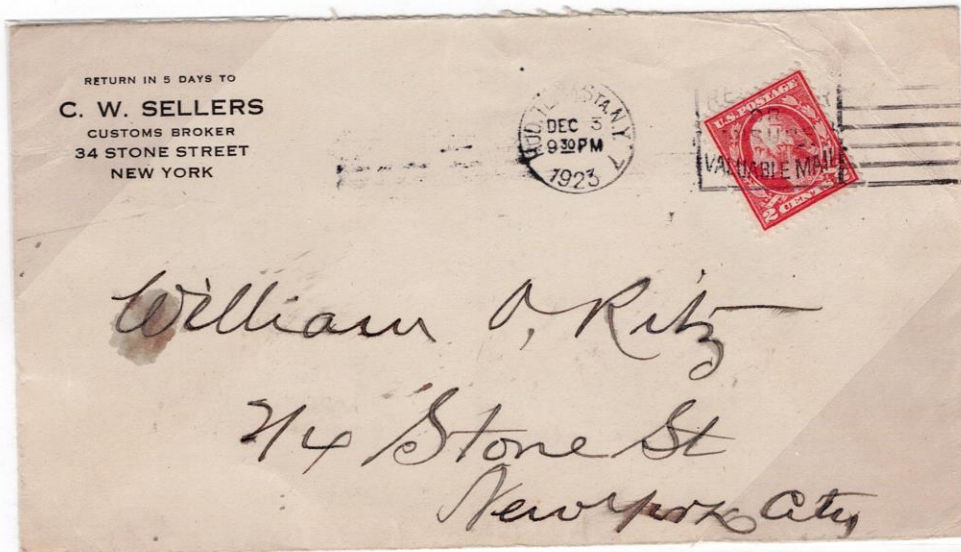
1922 Offset 2c Washington counterfeits

The New York counterfeit

The "2 cents 2" design was first issued in 1912, but counterfeits did not appear in the general mails in New York until 1923 when a Brooklyn, NY dealer noticed and reported them. They are similar to the Toledo counterfeits in terms of perforations and design measurement, but with a bit less quality in the variable impressions; not enough to justify a separate Scott listing. Recent scholarship (Andrew Kelley, *U.S. Specialist*, 2022) confirms that these were a separate Winter printing, produced in mini-sheetlets of ten stamps (5x2), and sent to New York City for retail.



Two versions of the New York counterfeits, with differing print and color quality  
One of four reported production clichés of 10 stamps



From Hudson Terminal Sta., New York City, Dec. 3, 1923



TREASURY DEPARTMENT

FIELD FORCE

DIVISION OF SECRET SERVICE

Cleveland

DISTRICT

Address: P. O. Lock Box No. 164

October 26th, 1927

Hon. D. C. Van Buren  
Assistant U. S. Attorney  
Cleveland, Ohio

Dear Sir:-

A. V. Winter was arrested in Toledo, Ohio on April 18th, 1923 for making and passing counterfeit 2¢ U. S. postage stamps, and was sentenced on April 27th, 1923 by the Hon. John M. Killits to two years in the Federal prison at Atlanta, Ga.

Winter was printing and mailing envelopes for the Johnson Coal Co. of Toledo. He used the counterfeit stamps and pocketed the money given him for good stamps.

Yours very truly,

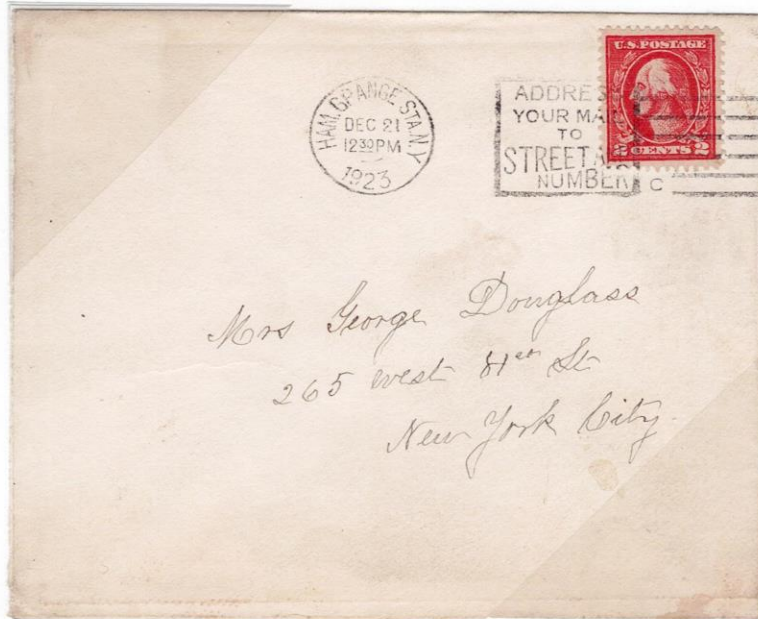
Operative-in-Charge.

WGH:ES

1922 Offset 2c Washington counterfeits

The New York counterfeit

1923-24 covers showing two more source locations in New York City,  
demonstrating wide distribution of the counterfeits



From Hampton Grange Sta., New York, December 21, 1923



From New York, N.Y. Sta. H, January 14, 1924

## \$5 War Savings Stamp, 1919

In 1917, the U.S. Government began to issue War Savings Stamps to help finance the mobilization effort for WWI, and to involve the public in the cause. Bogus copies of the July, 1919 version began to circulate shortly after the genuine second-issue stamp was released; first seen in Newark, New Jersey, and then Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Another version (shown here) was later discovered in San Francisco.



Counterfeit, printed by offset, 26.5mm x 36.4mm. Thin grey paper, irregular gauge 11 perforations. Odd margins, image not centered on perforations. Background lines around Franklin portrait and upper text are lighter than genuine. The white area at the bottom of the “2” in “1924” is in the shape of a wedge. The East Coast Counterfeit can be identified by the dash between “War” and “Savings, which looks more like a period.



Genuine, engraved, 26.8mm x 36.4mm. Sharp image on white paper with blue tint, gauge 11 perforations. The white area at the bottom of the “2” in “1924” is a thin line to the left edge.





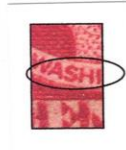
## 1923 Series 2c Washington

### Introduction - Overview

Curiously, no counterfeits are known of the first issued flat plate and early rotary versions of this stamp. Offset-printed counterfeits were first noticed in the mails in 1932. They mimicked the then current rotary press printed engraved 11x10.5 sheet stamp (Scott #634) with gum breakers. Three distinct counterfeit types were eventually identified and are shown here. The first two are relatively scarce, but hundreds of thousands of Type III were distributed and are the most often seen usages in the 1930s.



Genuine – issued 1926  
Perf. 11x10.5  
Gum breakers  
Normal “S” in “Washington”  
Carmine



Type I counterfeit – 1932  
Perf. 11.65  
No gum breakers  
Normal “S” in “Washington”  
Dark carmine



Type II counterfeit  
Perf 14.1  
No gum breakers  
Large “S” in “Washington”  
Medium carmine



Type III counterfeit  
Perf. 11.9  
No gum breakers  
Large “S” in “Washington”  
Medium carmine

The major difference between Types III and IV is the perf. gauge. Secret Service investigations did not bear fruit until 1936 when raids netted 200,000 stamps and distributors. But they were never able to identify the people behind the scheme, organized crime it was presumed, nor did they find the plates or production equipment.

This ends John Hotchner’s presentation on counterfeit stamps. John has most graciously let us use this information in our Stamp Club Counterfeit Presentation.



**STAMPS**  
UP TO 80% OFF  
TO YOUR MAILBOX

**LOVE ♥ HAPPY**  
**FOREVER STAMP**

**SHOP NOW**

We legally purchase our stamps from thousands of supply partners and the public from businesses such as COSTCO and CVS; from bankrupt and liquidated businesses, to wedding organizers and stamp collectors. Because of this, we can acquire a lot of stamps at great prices and give the savings on to our clients. Our processes, product acquisitions and transactions are legally supported by our all-star legal team. All transactions are in compliance with the laws of the United States of America.

USPS is raising stamp prices to 68 cents on January 21, 2024!



2022 U.S. Flag Forever Stamps

Up to 80% off



2019 U.S. Flag Forever Stamps

Up to 80% off



Sparkling Holidays 2018

Up to 80% off



Holiday Elves 2022

Up to 80% off



Sesame Street Forever Stamps 2019

Up to 80% off



Winter Woodland Animals 2023

Up to 80% off



Snowy Beauty Stamps 2022

Up to 80% off

LIMITED TIME DISCOUNT\*

**15% off**

USE CODE: **ST15OFF**



Copy of an email sent to one of our club members. They even used the official USPS logos!



# Countering Counterfeits

By Nora Bryson



America has a counterfeit stamp problem.

Weird, right? It's not something that comes up often, even among collectors, but it's true. There is an ongoing and rapidly worsening crisis, and counterfeit stamps are flooding into the U.S. market via social media, causing devastating losses for the United States Postal Service and eroding an essential public service.

Would you like to know the worst part? This crisis is largely preventable. Unlike counterfeit currency, which can slip into cash registers and wallets with almost no one the wiser, keeping most counterfeit postage out of the mail stream is pretty easy. It's not about knowing where the microprinting is in the design; it's not about training to spot fakes at a glance; and it's not about seizing and searching shipping containers at ports. The easiest way to keep counterfeit stamps out of the mail is not to buy them.

### How did we get here?

Counterfeits are nothing new in philately. Counterfeit stamps have been around almost as long as stamps, and counterfeiters have defrauded postal authorities around the world. Stamp counterfeiting might not be as lucrative or popular as currency counterfeiting, but if people see a chance to steal money from the government, you can bet they're going to try it.

Fortunately, until very recently, postage counterfeiters were usually nipped in the bud. Difficulty replicating complicated designs, inferior paper quality, and bad color matching can be tell-tale signs of phony stamps from the earliest Penny Black counterfeits to the 6-cent Eisenhower counterfeits of the 1970s. You don't need to be an expert or even a philatelist to notice these sorts of flaws, just a decent observer.

Even as counterfeiters got wiser and printing technology became easier to access and replicate, postal authorities could use security features like microprinting, fluorescent and phosphorescent tagging (which makes stamps glow in a particular way under UV light), irregular perforations and iridescent printing to stave off counterfeiters. Slowly but surely, counter-



Older counterfeits are relatively easy to detect with a little knowledge and a magnifying glass. Seen here are the genuine Eisenhower 6-cent stamps (below) and counterfeits of that stamp (above). Note the difference in color, the (slight) difference in perforations, and the more refined detail of the engraving in the genuine stamps. The genuine stamps were engraved and rotary press printed, while the counterfeits were lithographed, resulting in "cruder" and less distinct lines.

## DEEP DIVE

### FAKES, FORGERIES, AND COUNTERFEITS

These terms all refer to phony stamps, but should not be used interchangeably. Fakes are genuine stamps that have been altered to make them seem more valuable than they are, typically to defraud collectors. Forgeries are fabrications of real stamps (usually rare ones), typically from whole cloth, also intended to fool collectors. Counterfeits are fabricated copies of a real stamp created to defraud a postal authority. To take a deeper dive into the various types of fakes and forgeries, check out this article by Wayne Youngblood.

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Can you spot the counterfeit? Zoom in all you want – the new generation of Forever stamp counterfeits are almost impossible to tell from the real deal, even under high magnification. [Counterfeits, above; genuine, below.]

feiters would learn to replicate every security measure thrown at them, but new ones would always be devised.

Then, in 2021, things broke very bad.

Suddenly, U.S. counterfeits were everywhere. The counterfeiters primarily focused their efforts on Forever stamps (which constitute the majority of new stamp releases each year), but counterfeits of other releases have been documented, particularly high value stamps like those for Priority Mail Express. Most U.S. stamps released in 2021 were counterfeited, and this trend continued in subsequent years, leading Amos Media, (publishers of *Linn's Stamp News* and the *Scott Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue*) to create a specialized catalog listing denominated counterfeit issues, Forever stamp counterfeits, and postcard-rate counterfeits.

This wave of counterfeits is different than anything we've experienced before. The new generation of counterfeiters runs faster and jumps higher, and they can turn out extremely high-quality counterfeits of U.S. Forever stamps just weeks after their official issue.

But surely, I hear you protest, philatelists can tell the difference! A decade ago, that might have been true; spotting counterfeits used to be something any sharp-eyed philatelist with a reference guide and a magnifying glass could do, but those times are over.

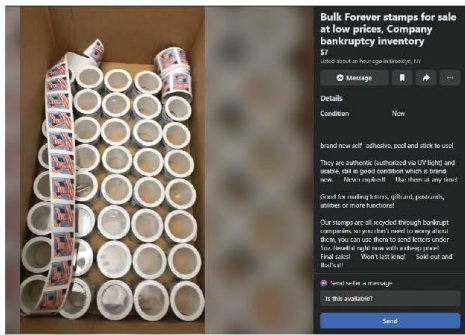


Fake Flag stamps are the most commonly encountered counterfeit U.S. stamp, according to the USPS.

Today's counterfeits are slick. They have clear microprinting. They have bright tagging. The images are high resolution and a perfect color match – some even look better than the real thing. It would be almost impossible to tell one of the new school counterfeits from an original at a glance, even for an experienced counterfeit collector or a postal worker. What's worse is that postal sorting machinery often can't detect them either, so they might just pass right through the system and into your mailbox, defrauding the USPS on the way.

### Where are they coming from?

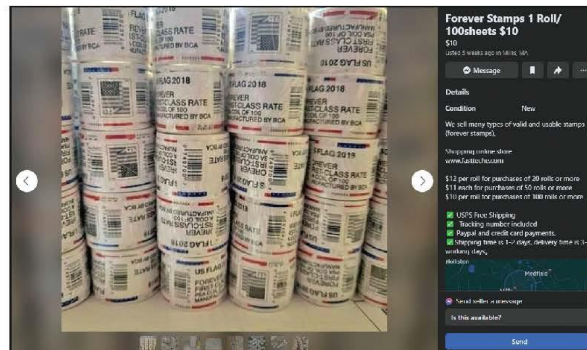
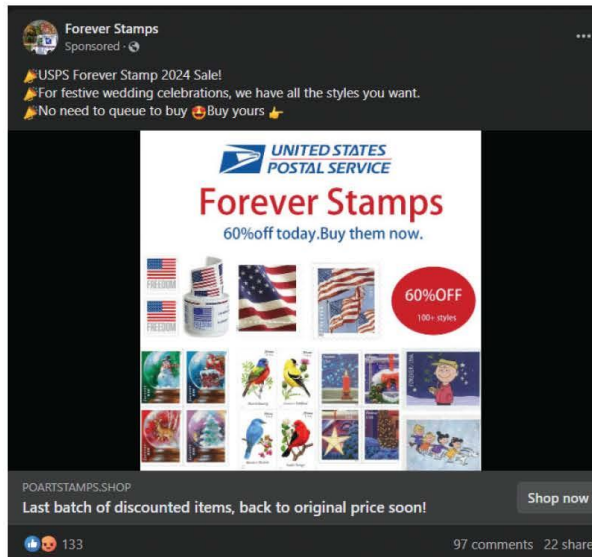
If you spend any time on the internet, you've seen a targeted advertisement. They're ads specific to what Facebook, Instagram, Google, and many other platforms have been able to determine about you from your internet history and use of their apps. If you posted about Christmas cards or collecting stamps online lately, you might be getting targeted ads for counterfeit stamps.



These advertisers won't describe themselves as a counterfeit stamp supplier, of course – you'll just see an ad covered in pictures of recent issues advertising huge discounts on U.S. Forever stamps. We're talking 50 percent off, or even higher. If you click through to their page (usually a Facebook page), you may see a lot of misleading imagery, like USPS trucks or mail carriers, and even testimonials from "customers" who claim to have received their stamps in good order. Those will be the only comments you'll see, typically, because anything negative is hidden by the page owner – though they can't hide the angry emojis of annoyed social media denizens wise to their schemes.

Follow the link to their website (which we don't recommend), and you'll likely be taken to one of thousands of sites with strange URLs and oddly written copy, where you can purchase fraudulent stamps using a credit card or PayPal. When they arrive, they may even look legitimate, and unsuspecting folks will likely slap them on their mail just like they would any other stamp, which is how the USPS is now likely losing upwards of a billion dollars a year to counterfeiting.

You'd be forgiven for believing that Meta and the other digital giants must be doing their due diligence and not allowing fraudsters to sell on their platform, but you'd be wrong. Social media and search engines are now loaded with these targeted ads, which may even seem to be from the USPS. Report a page and it may be taken down, but another will pop up next week. And with social media platforms' apparent ability to ban plenty of other topics, from nudity to firearms, and enforce those bans with automated review processes, it almost defies belief that they couldn't block any ad for Forever stamps other than those coming from a very select and verifiable list of authorized sellers.



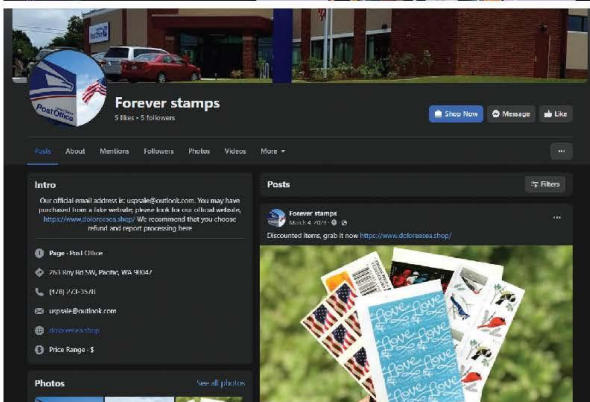
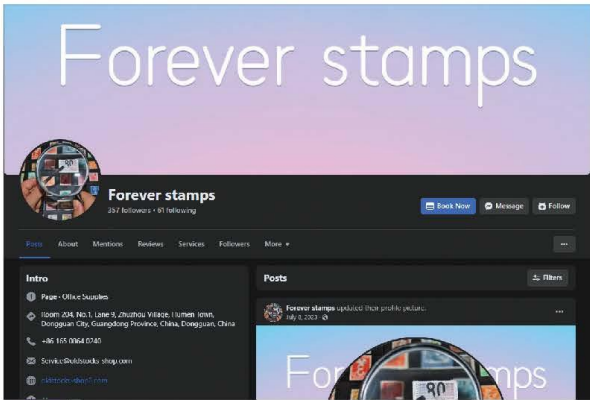
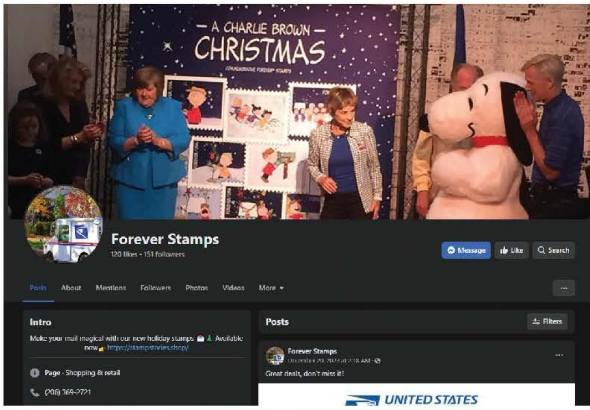
Ads like these frequently appear on social media, tempting unsuspecting scrollers with highly discounted postage that might seem to be legitimate. Social media giants like Meta appear to be doing little to stop this fraud; a recent search found over 3,000 pages purporting to sell legitimate Forever stamps on Facebook alone.

## DEEP DIVE

### THE USPIS

The U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the federal law enforcement arm of the U.S. Postal Service, enforces more than 200 federal statutes related to crimes that involve the postal system, its employees, and its customers. The service – with roots to 1722 – has about 2,500 employees and has jurisdiction focused on more than a dozen areas, including fraud prevention (counterfeit stamps included), illegal narcotics, mail fraud, money laundering, cybercrime, and child exploitation.

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Some fraudulent stamp pages will actually “warn” visitors about potential fake websites, despite being utterly bogus themselves.

The geographical origin of the counterfeits isn't immediately clear from the websites or the stamps themselves, but rumors have been swirling for years on philatelic forums that these new counterfeiters are based in China, and possibly even supported by the Chinese government.

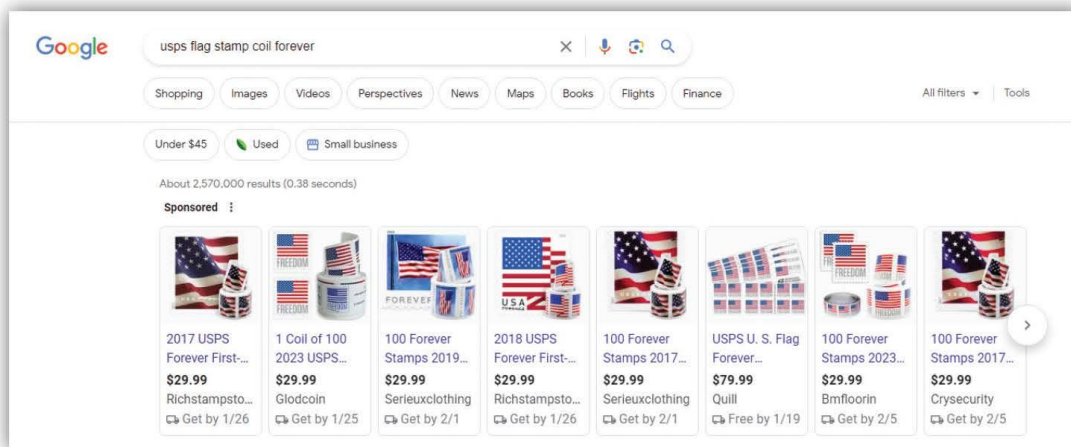
Common wisdom rarely cites sources, but it turns out that this theory can be traced back to research conducted by Wayne Youngblood, philatelic writer, editor, dealer, and counterfeit stamp expert. Wayne doesn't trade in rumors himself, but he does have some confidential sources in the counterfeiting world. They've given him enough information that he can confirm that the vast majority of the new counterfeits are coming from China. That origin tracks with some official statements from the USPS and US Postal Inspection Service (USPIS), which reported a seizure of \$2.5 million worth of counterfeit stamps in a shipment from China in 2023.

Wayne says that a lot of what he knows about these counterfeits is speculation, but it's speculation based on careful observation – he has devoted years to following the thread of the recent counterfeits, tracking the evolution of the faked security measures, sampling the mail of local businesses, and hunting down leads at home and abroad. He also says we shouldn't be too hard on the USPIS for not shutting down the counterfeiters quickly. Virtually all the people selling counterfeit stamps are secondary or tertiary handlers, so when the USPIS tracks them down, there's no real trail to follow back to the mastermind. The organization also has no jurisdiction outside of the U.S., and like many federal law enforcement agencies, they're understaffed and focused on crimes that concern violence against people, like mail bombs and child exploitation. Even revenue losses in the millions and billions of dollars pale in comparison.

**Hurts the economy, helps no one**

What's really so bad about counterfeit stamps anyway? Well, for one thing, it's illegal to knowingly buy or use counterfeit stamps, so there's that. But what does it cost the USPS when you use a counterfeit Forever stamp on a letter? As of January 2024, just 68 cents. You can't even buy a soda for 68 cents. The USPS made \$78.2 billion last year (on an operating budget of \$85.4 billion, but still). If you really, truly, only use one counterfeit stamp, it wouldn't even constitute a blip on their radar. But it's never just one. Chances are that the fraudulent website will have you buy in booklets of 20. Presumably you wouldn't buy just a booklet and

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Counterfeits are insidious – a Google search for USPS flag stamp coils brings up countless sponsored ads that are almost certainly selling counterfeits. Note the deep discounts and the strange store names.

use just one stamp, so call it a \$13.60 loss to the USPS. A loss of \$13.60 would never impact an organization of that size.

The discount is so good, though, and Forever stamps never expire, so maybe you buy enough booklets to send your Christmas cards, too – and what about adding a coil of Flag stamps for your bills and other general use? That \$13.60 becomes \$27.20, and becomes \$95.20 when you add that coil. Not good, clearly, but we’re talking about \$100 spread out over a year or more. The USPS can cope with that. Right? Nope. Because you’re not the only one who saw a post by that store, or the thousands of others that are popping up every day. Not being an employee of Meta, I don’t know how many have, but you can guess it’s up there – and you can see how quickly the losses could spiral out of control.

The USPS and USPIS have understandably kept the lid on just how many counterfeits make it into the mail stream each year, if they even know for certain, but in previous years have given estimates. The last official estimate Wayne was able to get was circa 2018-2019, when the USPS said they were losing about \$350 million a year to counterfeiting. Imagine, then, what the number must be like after this new surge. Or don’t, because we had done a lot of the imagining for you – he estimates, based on reports from his sources and his own research, that the annual loss is now closer to \$1.5 billion. That’s no longer small potatoes, even to a government organization. That’s devastating.

For stamp collectors, there’s another potential danger looming. If the counterfeiting crisis can’t be addressed, there’s a very real danger that postage stamps as we know them may cease to exist. Metered mail is harder to fake and cheaper to produce, and while the USPS clearly wants to serve philatelists as well as the general letter-sending public, ultimately their mission is to provide postal services, not aesthetically pleasing collectibles. It’s not difficult to see the situation evolving in that direction if the counterfeiting crisis isn’t countered, and soon.



Negative comments left on pictures uploaded by the page tend to be hidden, but the counterfeit sellers aren’t able to hide angry emojis, or negative gifs and pictures. Here are a few of my favorites I found while searching Facebook.

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The 68 cents isn't much in the grand scheme of things, but 68 cents multiplies fast. You don't need to be a forensic accountant to see that counterfeiting is hurting the USPS – and that's bad news for everyone. The USPS ensures the regular and secure delivery of everything from ballots and prescription medications to birthday cards. They provide coast-to-coast postal services that are the only option in rural areas and prop up private companies everywhere else. They employ hundreds of thousands of Americans (including many veterans), and they do it all on a shoestring budget already. And if you think 68 cents for a first-class letter is high, just wait until we've spent a few more years devaluing this crucial public service with counterfeits.

#### **What's a collector to do?**

You know how I said that the worst part of all this is the preventability of this crisis? That's also the best part, because that means we can help. Here are some of the simple ways you can do your part to stamp out counterfeits.

#### **Only buy from trusted sources**

The best thing you can do is be sure of the authenticity of your stamps, and the best way to do that is to only purchase your stamps from the USPS, an Approved Postal Provider, or a trusted stamp dealer who sells mint postage (you can check the APS dealer directory for options in your area). The USPS offers stamps for sale in-person, online, phone, mail, and sometimes even by fax, so there's an option for just about everyone. Approved Postal Providers include places like grocery stores and pharmacies; be sure that they're official by checking the Find USPS Locations page on the USPS website (set the Location type to National Retailer).

#### **Be wary of discounts**

Retailers you can trust may offer small discounts on stamps, like stamp dealers who offer older denominated stamps at a discount, but the USPS never will, and you'll never see a legitimate seller offering Forever stamps for a high discount. If it seems too good to be true, it probably is.

### **Collecting Counterfeits**

Because counterfeits found during investigations are usually confiscated and destroyed, confirmed postal counterfeits and postally used counterfeits on cover can be scarce and therefore desirable to certain collectors and postal historians.

Intentionally buying and using counterfeit stamps is a federal offense that carries severe penalties. Historically, however, the USPS has tolerated the collection of counterfeit stamps by philatelists as long as they are not used for mailing and otherwise defrauding the postal service. Some philatelists, like Wayne Youngblood, have even been able to assist the organization in their investigations because of their study of counterfeit stamps.

If you might be interested in starting a collection of counterfeits, check out these resources. Most are available for free online or via the American Philatelic Research Library and the Robert A. Mason Digital Library.

#### **For general information on modern counterfeits:**

*Scott Specialized Catalogue of United States Counterfeits 2023*

Conversations with Philatelists, Episode 79: Debunking Online Stamp Scams (Part 1)

Conversations with Philatelists, Episode 90: Detecting Counterfeit USPS Forever Stamps with Wayne Youngblood

#### **For printing types and security measures:**

"What once was stamp printing is now stamp production" by Fred Baumann, *Linn's Stamp News*, April 2021

"Most postage stamps have security features" by Michael Baadke, *Linn's Stamp News*, April 2021.

"EFOs That are Best When the Lights are Off" by Wayne Youngblood, *The American Philatelist*, August 2017.

#### **For historical counterfeits:**

*Out-Foxing the Fakers* (1993) by Jean-Francois Brun

"Stamp Frauds" Smithsonian National Postal Museum <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibition/behind-the-badge-case-histories-scams-and-schemes/stamp-frauds>

*Stamp Counterfeiting: The Evolution of an Unrecognized Crime* by H.K. Petschel, 2011

*Inked Print: United States Postal Counterfeits Illustrated* by H.K. Petschel, 2014

### Think twice

If you have even an inkling that a stamp might be counterfeit, don't use it. It's not just about defrauding the USPS and the potential penalties for that – in February 2023, the USPS announced that going forward, any piece of mail bearing a counterfeit stamp would be considered abandoned and could be destroyed at their discretion, regardless of the knowledge or intentions of the sender or receiver.

### Report counterfeits and counterfeit sellers

If you come across counterfeits in the wild, whether physical stamps or online stores, report them to the USPS by emailing [PostageFraudReporting@usps.gov](mailto:PostageFraudReporting@usps.gov). You can also report fraudulent activity to individual social media platforms – while a new page will likely pop up soon after, the more are reported, the more likely the platform will pay attention to the problem.

### Get the word out

Tell your friends, your parents, former roommates, anyone who will listen, about the surge in counterfeits, and most importantly about how to spot the scam on social media. Even if they don't buy stamps regularly, the fastest way to stop this fraud is to spread awareness. ■

## DID YOU KNOW?

### BARCODED STAMPS FROM ROYAL MAIL

As of August of 2023, Great Britain's Royal Mail officially instituted a system of new barcoded stamps to be used on mail. The barcodes, which are found on tags attached to the stamp, add a higher level of security meant to stop counterfeiting. Stamps that are considered definitives – such as those with images of King Charles III or international denominated stamps – carry the barcode tags. Special stamps (commemoratives here in the U.S.) – such as the Spice Girls or X-Men stamps – don't carry barcodes, though Christmas stamps do.

Unfortunately, as clever and thorough as the new Royal Mail system is, we've received reports that even these security measures have now been cracked. Keep your head on a swivel!

Nora Bryson is the Digital Editor for the American Philatelic Society. She most graciously allowed us to use her article for our Stamp Club Counterfeit Presentation.

# Dennis Callison's Counterfeit Booklet of 20, Scott #3635CF1

Scott No. 3635CF1 Counterfeit 37C Flag  
Complete booklet of 20

Key characteristic  
lack of "USPS" microprinting that appears at top right edge



Scott No. 3635a booklet of 20  
Regular Issue



# USPS, Inspection Service Continue Nationwide Effort to Crack Down on Postal Crime and Crimes Against Postal Employees

## Monetary Rewards Increased for Information that Leads to the Arrest and Conviction of a Perpetrator of Postal Crime

WASHINGTON, DC — The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) and U.S. Postal Inspection Service (Inspection Service) today provided an update on their [Project Safe Delivery](#) campaign to crack down on postal crimes, including attacks against postal employees. [Announced in May 2023](#), Project Safe Delivery is a USPS initiative to combat the recent rise in threats and attacks on letter carriers and mail theft incidents by protecting Postal employees and the security of the nation's mail and packages. Multiple departments within USPS, including the Inspection Service, the Office of the Chief Information Officer, and the Office of the Chief Retail and Delivery Officer are working together to support the ongoing campaign. To help strengthen this effort, the Inspection Service has also significantly increased monetary rewards for information leading to the arrest or conviction of a perpetrator of postal crimes.

"As our nation continues to address a sustained crime wave, our targeted focus to crack down on postal crime is progressing," said Postmaster General and Chief Executive Officer Louis DeJoy. "The safety of our letter carriers — and all postal employees — is our top priority. We will continue to work steadfastly with our law enforcement partners to increase the safety of our employees and protect the sanctity of the nation's mail."

"We have effectively focused our efforts with USPS on hardening both physical and digital targets to combat threats to postal employees and secure the mail. We continue to turn up the pressure and put potential perpetrators on notice; If you attack Postal employees, steal the mail, or commit other postal crimes, Postal Inspectors will bring you to justice," said Chief Postal Inspector Gary Barksdale. "We ask that the public assist us with our mission. Our rewards for information have increased substantially, highlighting the importance of the safety and security of our employees and the mail. If you see something, say something, and help us bring to justice those that cause harm to postal employees, steal mail, or commit other postal crimes."

### **Project Safe Delivery Progress To Date**

Since the launch of Project Safe Delivery in May 2023, the Postal Service and Inspection Service have taken the following actions to address postal crime nationwide:

- **Law Enforcement Surges Completed In Chicago, San Francisco, Ohio; More than 600 Individuals Arrested for Postal Crimes.** Postal inspectors completed a series of targeted law enforcement surges in Chicago, San Francisco, and cities across Ohio, major metropolitan regions facing significant threats from organized postal crime. Each operation used wide-ranging law enforcement partnerships including with the Department of Justice, Postal Service Office of the Inspector General, other federal agencies, and local law enforcement. Postal Inspectors conducted more than 700 investigative actions, including the execution of arrests and other court authorized law enforcement activities and more than 375 prevention activities, including presentations to postal employees on employee safety and mail theft prevention.

Since May, the Inspection Service has made 109 arrests for robberies and more than 530 arrests for mail theft. The Inspection Service will continue to collaborate with local, state, and federal law enforcement and conduct targeted surge operations focusing on those high postal crime areas.

- **10,000 High-Security Blue Collection Boxes Installed Nationwide.** The Postal Service is installing high-security blue collection boxes making access to their contents more difficult for criminals. Since May, over 10,000 high-security blue boxes have been deployed in high-security risk areas.

The Postal Service will continue to evaluate replacing additional existing blue collection boxes with these enhanced boxes and anticipates installing several thousand more boxes in the near future. In specific locations where a blue box is a repeated crime target and/or mail density is very low, collection boxes may have to be removed entirely when access is not meaningfully diminished due to nearby access points.

- **Ongoing Replacement of Antiquated Arrow Locks with 49,000 Electronic Locks.** There has been an increase in letter carrier robberies nationwide where criminals are targeting letter carriers for their Arrow and Modified Arrow Lock (MAL) Keys. Criminals use Arrow and MAL keys to steal mail from secure mail receptacles to commit financial crimes, including altering checks to commit check fraud. To make Arrow Keys less valuable for criminals, the Postal Service has replaced more than 6,500 antiquated arrow locks with electronic locks in select cities. In coming months, the Postal Service plans to deploy an additional 42,500 electronic locks nationwide. The Postal Service and the Postal Inspection Service are also increasing Arrow Key accountability reviews in select high Postal crime areas.
- **99.3% Reduction In Fraudulent Change of Address Submissions After Implementation of Electronic- and In-Person Authentication Procedures.** The Postal Service processed more than 29 million change of address (COA) transactions in Fiscal Year 2023. Across the globe identity theft is on the rise driven by a financial motive. The Postal Service is not the intended target, however implicated due to the fraudster intercepting financially oriented mail such as credit cards or checks. To combat the rise in fraudulent submissions, the Postal Service has strengthened authentication processes for all methods of COA submissions, electronic and hardcopy submitted in person or through the mail stream.

Since expanding enhanced in-person change of address protocols and implementing additional identity verification services for online change of addresses, fraudulent submissions have decreased by more than 99.3% compared to the same period last year.

- **50% Reduction in Counterfeit Package Postage In Postal Network Due to Increased Controls and Enforcement.** The Postal Service is committed to protecting the integrity and security of the mail system and ensuring that customers receive the service they pay for. Customers are urged to use only authorized and legitimate labels for their packages, and to report any suspicious or fraudulent labels to the USPS or the Inspection Service. Customers who use counterfeit or hijacked labels may face legal consequences and lose their mailing privileges.

The USPS has developed a sophisticated system to identify, intercept and retain counterfeit or hijacked labels on packages, using artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data analysis. Since the start of the interception program, counterfeit package postage in the postal network has significantly reduced by more than 50%.

In May, analysis conducted by the Inspection Service led to the arrest of a Chinese-national in Los Angeles for running an alleged counterfeit postage scheme and shipping more than 9 million pieces of mail with \$60 million in counterfeit postage.

The Inspection Service continues to expand actions to crack down on fraudulent postage including:

- Interdictions of packages with counterfeit labels affixed
- Reviews of shipments on Postal Service docks and during warehouse outreach visits
- Shut down of websites and closure of eCommerce accounts selling counterfeit postage
- Engagement and partnership with eCommerce companies to disrupt activity
- Customs and Border Protection (CBP) collaboration

### **Increased Monetary Rewards**

The Inspection Service is authorized to issue monetary rewards for certain types of offenses against the United States Postal Service. The agency along with its partners has enacted regulatory changes to reflect increased monetary reward amounts for information that leads to the arrest and conviction of a perpetrator of mail crime. Relevant criminal behavior includes homicide, assault, mail fraud, mail theft, counterfeiting and forgery, and destroying, obstructing, or limiting the passage of mail.

In August, the Inspection Service increased monetary rewards for information that leads to the arrest and conviction of a perpetrator of mail crime:

**USPIS MONETARY REWARDS FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO ARREST AND CONVICTION OF A PERPETRATOR OF MAIL CRIME\***

(Effective August 21, 2023)

### Offenses Against USPS Employees/Contractors

<b>Murder or Manslaughter of a Postal Service Employee or Contractor</b>	<b>\$250,000</b>	The unlawful killing of any officer, employee, or contractor of the Postal Service while engaged in or on account of the performance of his or her official duties.
<b>Assault on Postal Employees</b>	<b>\$150,000</b>	Forcibly assaulting any officer or employee of the Postal Service while engaged in or on account of the performance of his or her official duties.
<b>Robbery</b>	<b>\$150,000</b>	Robbery or attempted robbery of any custodian of any mail, money, or other property of the United States under the control and jurisdiction of the Postal Service.

### Offenses Involving Theft of Mail or USPS Property

<b>Burglary Of Post Office</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>	Breaking into, or attempting to break into, a Post Office, station, branch, a building used wholly or partly as a Post Office, or any building or area in a building where the business of the Postal Service is conducted, with intent to commit a larceny or other depredation therein.
<b>Theft Of Mail Or Postal Service Property</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>	Theft or attempted theft of any mail, or the contents thereof, or the theft of money or any other property of USPS under the custody and control of the Postal Service from any custodian, postal vehicle, railroad depot, airport, or other transfer point, Post Office, or station, receptacle, or depository established, approved, or designated by the Postmaster General for the receipt of mail; possession of any item above which was stolen from Postal Service custody; or destroying, obstructing, or retarding the passage of mail, or any carrier or conveyance carrying the mail.
<b>Postage Or Meter Tampering</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>	The unlawful use, reuse, or forgery of postage stamps, postage meter stamps, permit imprints, or other postage; or the use, sale, or possession with intent to use or sell any used, forged, or counterfeited postage stamp or other postage.

\* Reflects select rewards. Read the full list of increased monetary rewards [here](#).

### Action the American Public Can Take To Help Prevent Mail Theft

Customers can take several steps to protect their mail and their letter carriers, including:

- Don't let incoming or outgoing mail sit in your mailbox. You can significantly reduce the chance of being victimized by simply removing your mail from your mailbox every day.
- Deposit outgoing mail through a number of secure manners including inside your local Post Office or at your place of business or by handing it to a letter carrier.
- Sign up for [Informed Delivery](#) and get daily digest emails that preview your mail and packages scheduled to arrive soon.
- Become involved and engaged in your neighborhood via neighborhood watches and local social media groups to spread awareness and share information.
- Keep an eye out for your letter carrier. If you see something that looks suspicious, or you see someone following your carrier, call 911.

Customers are encouraged to report stolen mail as soon as possible by submitting an online complaint to the Postal

Inspection Service at [www.uspis.gov/report](http://www.uspis.gov/report) or calling 877-876-2455. Additionally, individuals are encouraged to report allegations of Postal Service employee misconduct, including attempts to corrupt a Postal Service employee, to the USPS OIG at 1-888-877-7644 or [www.uspsaig.gov](http://www.uspsaig.gov).

###

The United States Postal Service is an independent federal establishment, mandated to be self-financing and to serve every American community through the affordable, reliable and secure delivery of mail and packages to 167 million addresses six and often seven days a week. Overseen by a bipartisan Board of Governors, the Postal Service is implementing a 10-year transformation plan, *Delivering for America*, to modernize the postal network, restore long-term financial sustainability, dramatically improve service across all mail and shipping categories, and maintain the organization as one of America's most valued and trusted brands.

The Postal Service generally receives no tax dollars for operating expenses and relies on the sale of postage, products and services to fund its operations.

For USPS media resources, including broadcast-quality video and audio and photo stills, visit the [USPS Newsroom](#). Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [Pinterest](#) and [LinkedIn](#). Subscribe to the [USPS YouTube Channel](#) and like us on [Facebook](#). For more information about the Postal Service, visit [usps.com](http://usps.com) and [facts.usps.com](http://facts.usps.com).

# Counterfeit Stamps

Last updated 07.27.2023 National

## Don't Get Stuck with Bogus Stamps

Are you looking online for a good deal on postage stamps? Is a substantial discount of up to fifty percent off an order of United States Forever® Stamps too good to pass up? If so, keep scrolling, they're probably counterfeit. To ensure your trusted communication arrives at its destination without delay, the Postal Inspection Service wants you to be aware of—and avoid—phony postage.

The number of counterfeit stamps being sold from online platforms has escalated. Scammers peddle fake stamps on social media marketplaces, e-commerce sites via third party vendors, and other websites. Counterfeit stamps are often sold in bulk quantities at a significant discount—anywhere from 20 to 50 percent of their face value. That's a tell-tale sign they're bogus.

Purchasing stamps from a third-party wholesaler or online websites can be unpredictable. You have no way to verify whether they are genuine or not. The Postal Inspection Service recommends purchasing from [Approved Postal Providers™](#). Approved vendors can include legitimate “big box” or warehouse retailers who do provide very small discounts on postage stamps, but this is through resale agreements with the Postal Service. Learn more about stamps and where to safely buy them at [USPS](#).

[REPORT](#) counterfeit stamps and sellers.

## USPS Fights Counterfeit Postage

USPS is fighting back against counterfeit postage. With new changes to the Domestic Mail Manual, items mailed with counterfeit postage will be considered abandoned and are subject to being opened and disposed of at the Postal Service's discretion. Make sure your postage is legitimate and always purchase from USPS or an authorized retailer.

## Counterfeit Stamps

Don't get stuck by counterfeit stamps.

# PROTECT YOURSELF

## Did you know

The most frequently encountered counterfeit stamp is the Flag Stamp.

## **Be wary**

of significant discounts.

## **Be certain**

you're getting the real thing, purchase your stamps from the U.S. Postal Service at a location near you, or online at [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com)

Thanks to Brian Plants, Revenue Fraud Analyst, USPIIS, Pittsburgh, who provided me with these publications.

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## Dayton Stamp Club “Counterfeit” Mailing

I wanted this presentation to be informative and interactive. So, I created a mailing to go out to all of the Dayton Stamp Club members.

This served 3 purposes. (I am the chairperson of the Membership Committee).

1. To verify the club member’s address.
2. To verify the club member’s email, as I asked them to email or call me to verify that they got the mailing.
3. To invite them to participate in my presentation.

The mailing consisted of a mailing envelope with 2 inserts.

The mailing envelope bears a cachet designed by award-winning cartoonist, Frank Pauer. (Look him up, you’ll be impressed!) His “Freedumb” design was a perfect fit for this mailing.

There are 2 stamps on the envelope. One is a legitimate U.S.P.S. Scott # 5788 Forever Freedom coil stamp. The other is of dubious origin.

Insert #1 outlined why this was mailed to them, and asked them to participate in the Club Meeting by bringing their envelope and present their reasons as to which stamp is real and which is bogus.

Insert #2 was a sheet of 15 “Cinderella” stickers to be used

by them to get the word out about counterfeit stamps.

The design of the “cinderella” sticker was created by our own in-house artist, Steve Bricker. Steve is an award-winning artist and has created many gorgeous aviation paintings, many having been on display at our local National Museum of the U.S. Air Force!

By using these stickers on your mailings, my aim was to start a “grassroots” campaign to make the public more aware of this counterfeit stamp plague.



Don't be a "Freddie Freedumb". Only buy your mailing stamps from the USPS or their authorized agencies.  
BECAUSE...  
"Items mailed with counterfeit postage will be considered abandoned and are subject to being opened and disposed of."  
(United States Postal Inspection Service)

Frank Miller  
65 Prospect Ave.  
Dayton Oh 45415

Mailing Envelope with Cachet

# Envelope Contents



From: Board Member Frank Miller, Membership Chairperson.

Dear Dayton Stamp Club Member,

This notice serves three purposes.

The first is to verify your contact information for Stamp Club mailings.

The second is to verify your email address. Please email me at MILLCLIFF@ATT.NET that your address is correct. Or, if no email, call me at 937/898-6667.

The third is to invite you to the April 15, 2024 Stamp Club Meeting, where I will be giving a presentation on "Counterfeit Stamps".

The envelope that contains this notice has two stamps. One is a legitimate forever stamp and one counterfeit forever stamp. Can you tell the good from the bad?

Bring this envelope with you to the April 15th meeting, and earn a \$20 Stamp Bucks bonus by presenting your reasons as to which is which!

Remember, you get \$20 stamp bucks for just showing up! Also, enclosed is a sheet of "Don't Buy Bogus Stamps" cinderella stickers. Use these on your mailings to help get the word out about the plague of counterfeit U.S. stamps that we are experiencing. Who knows, maybe this grassroots campaign could forestall the next hike in the postage rates!



## Acknowledgements

I want to thank the following people who helped me put together this presentation.

- John Hotchner for allowing me to borrow his wonderful and concise presentation. This information got the ball rolling on counterfeits!
- Nora Bryson for her wonderful article on the subject.
- Brian Plants, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Pittsburgh Division. Brian shared the USPS memos that are included in this document.
- Dennis Callison for lending me his counterfeit stamps and for his assistance in gathering material.
- Steve Bricker for his assistance in putting together the Powerpoint presentation, and his graphic skills in creating our “ Don’t Buy Bogus” stickers.
- Frank Pauer for his creation of the cachet for our envelope mailing to the stamp club members. I gave him an idea, and he made it come alive through his artistic talents!