



U.S. Philatelic Classics Society

Volume: 46 Number: 4 Year: 1994 Chronicle: 164

Article: The Special Printings of the 1¢ Agriculture and Executive Departmental Stamps

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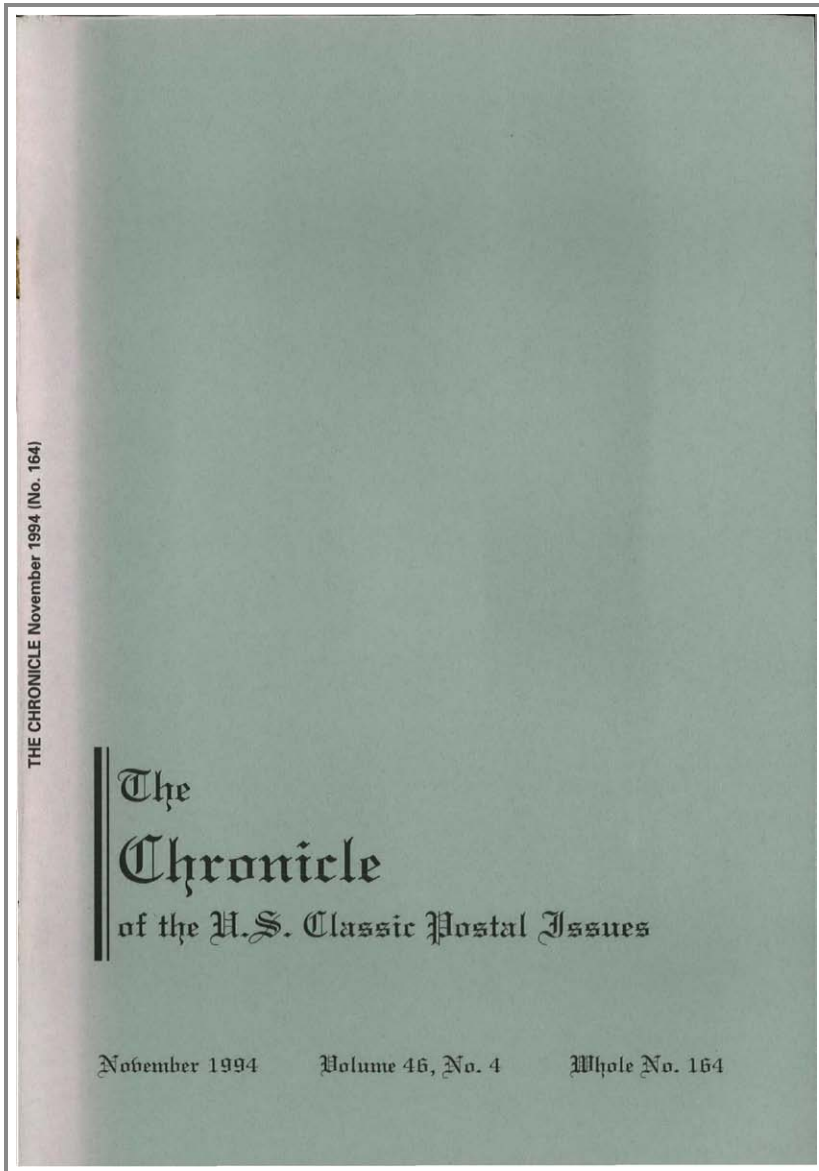


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**THE SPECIAL PRINTINGS OF THE 1¢ AGRICULTURE AND
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTAL STAMPS
WILLIAM E. MOOZ**

This article continues the series of articles which deal with the special printing program begun in 1875 and terminated in 1884. The purpose of these articles is to bring together data from several sources in a way that builds a story about these elusive stamps, and which determines how many of the stamps there were, who printed them, when the printings were made, and how the printings differ from each other.

This article focuses on the special printing of the 1¢ Agriculture and Executive Departmental (or Official) stamps, often called Departmental Specimens. These stamps were printed and available to the public at the same time as the regular Departmental (or Official) issue was in use, although the postal regulations in force at the time did not allow the legal ownership of unused regular Departmental stamps by the general public. Both of the stamps described in this article had an initial printing of 10,000, consistent with other stamps in this series. There was, however, the problem of assuring that the public could not use these special printings for postal purposes. To assure that this was not done, these Departmental special printings were overprinted with the word "SPECIMEN." This word was probably chosen because the Post Office Department described all of these special printings as "SPECIMENS," and all correspondence relating to them uses this wording.

The subject of these stamps has been previously treated in an exhaustive study by Rear Admiral W. V. Combs, USN (retired).¹ This article does not try to in any way restate the excellent and pioneering Combs study, except to use some of its data and illustrations to provide support for the text. The article attempts to expand upon some facets of the history of these stamps that were not easily studied before the advent of popularly available computers. In a very real way, I am standing on the shoulders of the Admiral and carrying his work a bit further.

The 1¢ Agriculture

The records of the Post Office Department indicate the following purchases of the 1¢ Agriculture stamp:

Purchased from Continental Bank Note Company, 7/21/75	10,000
Purchased from Continental Bank Note Company, 12/31/75	10,000
Purchased from American Bank Note Company, 12/31/83	5,000
Total	25,000

Copies of the payment records for these purchases appear in Figs. 1, 2, and 3.²

There are no surviving sales records until May 1879, when we are fortunate to have press copies of the invoices of the sales of these special printings by the office of the 3rd Assistant Post Master General.³ These records cover the period from May 1879 to July 1882. The program of sales continued beyond that date until July 16, 1884, when it was

¹W.V. Combs, *U. S. Departmental Specimen Stamps* (State College, Pa.: American Philatelic Society, 1965).

²Records of the Post Office Department, Record Group 28, Bill Book #3, entries for June 30, 1875, December 31, 1875, and December 31, 1883

³Records of the Post Office Department, Record Group 28, Press copies of Invoices, 1879, GSA, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D. C.

Specimens

June 30, 1875.

Official stamps, (with word "specimen" imprinted on face) furnished for sale as specimens by the Department to Stamp-gatherers. - Continental Bank Note Co., contractors. - Bill approved July 6, 75.

Nominations	Post Office	Treasury	Interior	War	Navy	Agriculture	Justice	States	Insular	Total
1. cent	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	90,000
2. "	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	90,000
3. "	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	90,000
6. "	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	90,000
7. "	-	10,000	-	10,000	10,000	-	-	10,000	-	40,000
10. "	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	90,000
12. "	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	-	80,000
15. "	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	-	80,000
14. "	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	-	80,000
20. "	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	-	80,000
40. "	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	-	10,000	10,000	-	70,000
2. dollar	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,000	-	1,000
5. "	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,000	-	1,000
10. "	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,000	-	1,000
10: "	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,000	-	1,000
Total	100,000	110,000	110,000	110,000	110,000	90,000	100,000	114,000	50,000	984,000

984,000 stamps in all, at 80 cents per thousand. \$ 707. 20

No extra charge made for printing the word "specimen" on above stamps.

Figure 1. Bill Book record of June 30, 1875, for initial purchase of 1¢ Departmental specimens from Continental Bank Note Company.

terminated.⁴ We are also fortunate to know the total number of copies sold, since we know the total number delivered, and we also know that 4,766 copies were destroyed at the end of the program.⁵ The number sold was 25,000 less 4,766, or 20,234 copies.

Sales during the period from May 1879 and July 1882 are recorded in the "Press Copies of the Invoices," and are tabulated in Table 1. During this period, there was a total of 4,604 individual 1¢ stamps sold, and there were an additional 67 1¢ stamps sold as part of complete sets. The total number of the 1¢ stamp sold during this period was thus 4,671

⁴John Luff, *The Postage Stamps of the United States* (New York: Scott Stamp & Coin Co., Ltd., 1902), page 357.

⁵*Ibid.*

December 31, 1875.

Specimen Postage Stamps of various issues furnished for sale as specimens to stamp-gatherers during the quarter ending as above. Continental Bank Note Co. Contractors. - Bills rendered separately - Rec'd Jan. 6, 1876 Jan. 10, 76

Issue of 1850 (Current)	10,000	Two-cent (vermillion)	
	10,000	Five-cent	
	20,000	Stamps, at 14.99 each per thousand	\$ 3.00
Issue of 74-cent. Abolished	10,000		
	10,000		
	20,000	Stamps, at \$1 per thousand	\$ 20.00
Issue of 1851	10,000		
	10,000		
	20,000	Stamps, at 80 cents per thousand	\$ 16.00
Issue of 1873 (Officials)	10,000		
	10,000		
	10,000		
	10,000		
	40,000	Stamps, at 80 cents per thousand	\$ 32.00

Figure 2. Bill Book record of December 31, 1875, for purchase of 1¢ Departmental specimens from Continental Bank Note Company.

31st December 1883.

Specimen Postage Stamps furnished during month ending as above by The American Bank Note Company of New York

Number	Denomination & Issue	
5,000	1 Cent - Executive	
5,000	1 " - Agriculture	
2,000	2 " - Washington (1883)	
2,000	4 " - Jackson. (")	
14,000	\$ 15.00	

allow fifteen dollars @ charge to appropriation for the manufacture of Postage Stamps for fiscal year ending 30 June 1884. These articles, not provided for by contract were purchased in open market the exigencies of the service requiring their immediate delivery.

Figure 3. Bill Book record of December 31, 1883, for purchase of 1¢ Executive and Agriculture specimens from American Bank Note Company.

Table 1 - Sales of 1¢ Agriculture Stamp			
Date	Singles	Sets	Total
May-79	0	2	2
Jun-79	1	3	4
Jul-79	1	3	4
Aug-79	17	7	24
Sep-79	67	9	76
Oct-79	68	9	77
Nov-79	143	11	154
Dec-79	353	12	365
Jan-80	353	15	368
Feb-80	353	19	372
Mar-80	665	21	686
Apr-80	715	24	739
May-80	915	26	941
Jun-80	915	26	941
Jul-80	1316	27	1343
Aug-80	1321	28	1349
Sep-80	1321	28	1349
Oct-80	1323	28	1351
Nov-80	1344	31	1375
Dec-80	1723	31	1754
Jan-81	1724	31	1755
Feb-81	2026	32	2058
Mar-81	2560	34	2594
Apr-81	2660	45	2705
May-81	2986	49	3035
Jun-81	3212	50	3262
Jul-81	3213	50	3263
Aug-81	3214	50	3264
Sep-81	3719	51	3770
Oct-81	3756	51	3807
Nov-81	3756	53	3809
Dec-81	3770	54	3824
Jan-82	4092	55	4147
Feb-82	4092	55	4147
Mar-82	4592	56	4648
Apr-82	4602	61	4663
May-82	4602	62	4664
Jun-82	4603	64	4667

Table 2 - Sales of 1¢ Executive Stamp			
Date	Singles	Sets	Total
May-79	0	14	14
Jun-79	0	25	25
Jul-79	0	29	29
Aug-79	15	45	60
Sep-79	15	50	65
Oct-79	16	62	78
Nov-79	266	70	336
Dec-79	521	93	614
Jan-80	721	133	854
Feb-80	721	147	868
Mar-80	734	166	900
Apr-80	834	177	1011
May-80	834	189	1023
Jun-80	835	200	1035
Jul-80	1235	203	1438
Aug-80	1237	207	1444
Sep-80	1237	210	1447
Oct-80	1239	219	1458
Nov-80	1260	233	1493
Dec-80	1660	274	1934
Jan-81	1661	279	1940
Feb-81	1962	287	2249
Mar-81	2482	310	2792
Apr-81	2582	349	2931
May-81	2896	428	3324
Jun-81	3601	470	4071
Jul-81	3611	526	4137
Aug-81	3614	530	4144
Sep-81	4019	544	4563
Oct-81	4060	550	4610
Nov-81	4260	581	4841
Dec-81	4280	588	4868
Jan-82	4601	590	5191
Feb-82	4602	614	5216
Mar-82	4602	659	5261
Apr-82	4602	708	5310
May-82	4602	751	5353
Jun-82	4803	778	5581

Tables 1 and 2

Tabulations of monthly sales, 1¢ Agriculture and Executive special printings

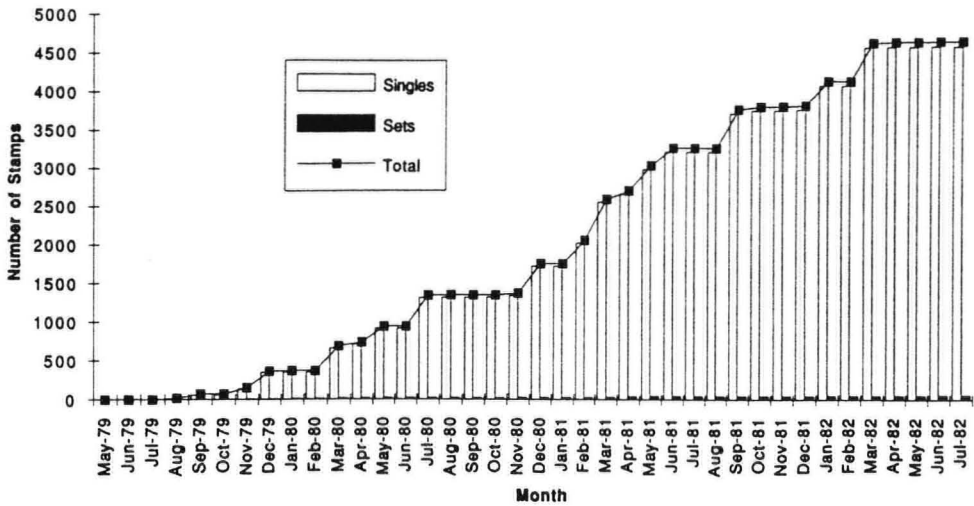


Figure 4. Sales of Agriculture special printing sets and 1¢ singles.

stamps. A chart showing the pace of the sales appears in Figure 4.

As in previous articles in this series, these data from the invoices may be combined with data about the receipt of the stamps, and the known total quantity sold, to produce a simulation of the sales over the entire program. This chart is shown in Figure 5, and demonstrates reasonably brisk sales at the beginning of the program, followed by a relatively moderate pace, and then a modest upward trend to the sale of the stamps towards the end of the program. Probably most of these were made to dealers. The records show the following sales to dealers during the period covered by the invoices:

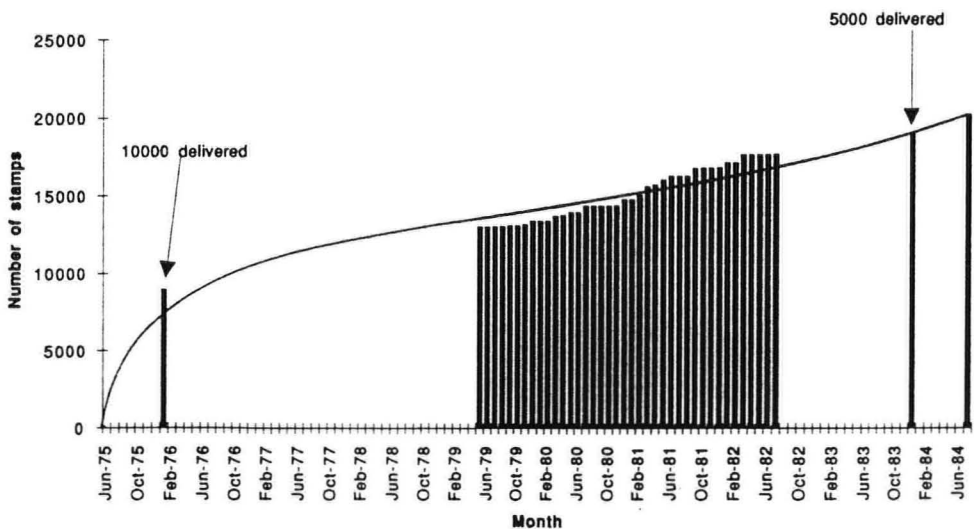


Figure 5. Total 1¢ Agriculture special printing stamps sold.

Whitfield, King, & Co.	1,319
Stanley Gibbons	700
C. N. Butler	500
Edward Peck & Co.	400
E. A. Holton	200
R. R. Bogert	150
C. W. Campbell	100
W. A. Trider	100
Paul Lietzow	100
National Stamp Co.	100
William W. Phair	100
N. F. Seebeck	25
Total	3,794

This is slightly more than 82% of the total number of 1¢ stamps sold during this period, without being part of complete sets. If the sale of sets to dealers, and the sale of smaller quantities of the 1¢ stamps to dealers are added, probably over 85% of the sales were to dealers. This is consistent with what has been found for the other 1875 special printings examined in earlier articles. It has been thought that the sales to dealers were for the purpose of using these stamps in packets. These low value stamps were ideal for packets, since the regular official stamps could not be obtained, and therefore the persons who bought the packets would receive stamps that they could not otherwise get. Whether this is true or not, we will later see that as this special printing program drew to a close, the sales of these stamps accelerated. We have no records of who purchased these stamps at the end of the program, but it appears safe to assume that most of them were bought by dealers, and that their purchases commonly included one or more full sheets. This concentration of full sheets in dealers' hands led to an interesting phenomenon. Despite the relatively small number of these stamps sold, it is not uncommon to find multiples of various sizes, and even intact full sheets. The number of these multiples is out of proportion with what might be expected from the number of stamps sold. It is not the purpose of these articles to make a listing of the various sizes and numbers of multiples which are known to exist, but rather to suggest that they are more common than might be thought.

The identification of the first two of the three printings was established by Admiral Combs. The first printing is on hard white paper, and the second printing is on horizontally ribbed paper. These are illustrated in Figures 6 and 7, and to emphasize that the identification is correct, the SEPCIMEN error is shown for the first printing, and the lower case "i" SPECiMEN error is shown for the second printing. The SEPCIMEN error resulted from an incorrect setting of the type during the first printing in position 21. Part way through the printing of these official stamps, the error was discovered and corrected. The error only exists on the first printing, and is proof of that printing.

When the overprint plate for the second printing was typeset, an error was made in position 7 and position 26, where a lower case "i" was used instead of an upper case "I." Again, this only existed on the second printing, and it is proof of that printing. There are more multiples of the second printing than of the first, which is what might be expected from the pattern of sales. Various sized blocks are known, as are strips, and a full sheet. The second printing is on horizontally ribbed paper, and the ribbing appears either on the face of the stamp or the reverse, depending upon the way that the blank sheets were stacked and the way that the printer put them into the press. About $\frac{2}{3}$ of the second printing was made on paper on which the ribs appear on the back, and $\frac{1}{3}$ have the ribbing on the front.



Figure 6. 1¢ Agriculture special printing, first printing (with “SEPCIMEN” error).

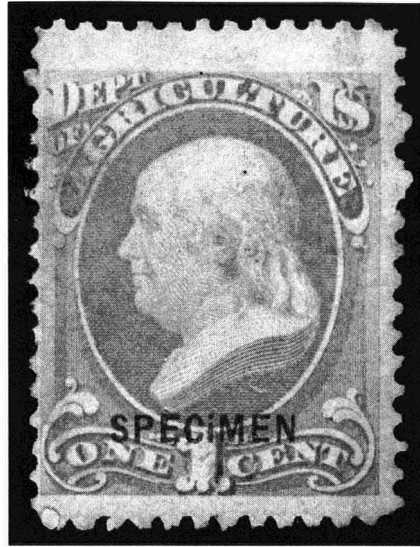


Figure 7. 1¢ Agriculture special printing, second printing (with “SPECiMEN” error).

Positive identification of the American Bank Note Company fifth printing* has yet to be made, and scholars are divided into two camps. The first camp alleges that the fifth printing is on soft paper but did not have the SPECIMEN overprint. The stamp is known, and appears in the Scott catalog as number O94. It is perhaps the result of the delivery of 65 stamps to the Agriculture Department by the Stamp Agent in 1883, and the delivery of 150 stamps in 1884.⁶ Why these stamps were delivered is an unsolved mystery, since the number of 1¢ Agriculture stamps on hand was far more than was needed at the time. Further contributing to the confusion is the fact that the stamp was ungummed.

The second camp notes that the 1¢ Agriculture stamp with SPECIMEN overprint exists on an intermediate soft paper, and alleges that this may be the fifth printing. An intermediate soft paper example is shown in Figure 8. Much has been written about the subject, and those interested in further details may find them in the reference listed below.⁷ Suffice it to say that a positive identification has yet to be made, and that only approximately 234 of this fifth printing were sold.

The Scott catalog lists the first and second printings, but does not distinguish between them other than to refer to the differences in paper. The first printing is identified

*The convention established by Admiral Combs is used here. There was a total of five printings of the 1¢ official stamps. The first printing included all stamps in the series. The second printing consisted of the 1¢ stamps of the Agriculture, Executive, Justice and State Departments. The third printing included the 1¢ Executive, Navy and War stamps. The fourth printing consisted of the 1¢ State Department stamp. The fifth printing consisted of the 1¢ Agriculture, 1¢ Executive and 1¢ War Department stamps.

⁶*Ibid.*, page 280.

⁷W.E. Mooz, “The 1¢ Agriculture Stamp of 1879,” *The American Philatelist*, Vol. 101, No. 11, November 1987.

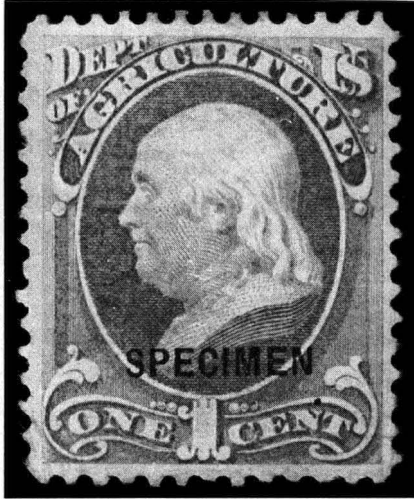


Figure 8. 1¢ Agriculture special printing, on intermediate soft paper.

as O1SD, and the second printing is referred to as O1SDc. This is a rather peculiar designation, since it follows O1SDb, which is the small dotted “i” error which only appears on O1SDc. Scott does not mention the fifth printing, and they correctly list the total number of stamps sold as 20,234. They have not broken these down into the 10,000 which were sold from the first printing, the 10,000 from the second, and the 234 from the fifth.

A more correct catalog listing for this stamp would be as follows:

1875 (July) SPECIAL PRINTING
 Overprinted in Block Letters **SPECIMEN**
 Produced by the Continental Bank Note Company
 Perf. 12
 Hard white paper, issued without gum
 Type D
 Carmine Overprint

OIS D 1¢ yellow (10,000)
 Block of four
 a. “SEPCIMEN” error

1875 (December) Horizontally Ribbed Paper

OIS D c. 1¢ yellow (10,000)
 Block of four
 b. Small dotted “i” in “SPECiMEN”

1883 Produced by the American Bank Note Company

OIS D d. 1¢ yellow (234)
 Positive identifying characteristics of this stamp have not yet been determined.

This latter listing should appear after the 1875 listings, and under the 1883 heading. This is in accord with the convention for the regular issue stamps.

The 1¢ Executive

The records of the Post Office Department indicate the following purchases of the 1¢ Executive stamp:

Purchased from Continental Bank Note Company, 7/21/75	10,000
Purchased from Continental Bank Note Company, 12/31/75	10,000
Purchased from American Bank Note Company, 2/28/81	5,000
Purchased from American Bank Note Company, 12/31/83	5,000
Total	30,000

Copies of the payment records for these purchases have already been shown in Fig. 1, 2, and 3 except for the 1881 purchase. A copy of this record appears in Fig. 9.⁸

February 28th 1881.

Specimen postage stamps furnished during the month ending as above to the American Bank Note Company of New York, Contractors.

<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Denomination</i>	<i>Particulars</i>
<i>10000</i>	<i>1c</i>	<i>Spec. 1851. Eagle.</i>
<i>5000</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>" 1851. Franklin.</i>
<i>5000</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>" 1865. A & P.</i>
<i>5000</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Navy Department</i>
<i>5000</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Mad "</i>
<i>5000</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Executive "</i>
<i>35000</i>		<i>\$ 50.00</i>

The above articles not provided for by contracts, were purchased in open markets—the exigencies of the service requiring their immediate delivery.

Figure 9. Bill Book record of February 28, 1881, for purchase of 1¢ Executive specimens from American Bank Note Company.

We know that 5,348 copies were destroyed at the end of the program, and thus the number sold was 30,000 less 5,348, or 24,652 copies.⁹ Note that the number of copies destroyed exceeds the 5,000 copies supplied on 12/31/83, and thus we assume that the entire 5,000 copies of this fifth printing were destroyed.

Sales during the period from May 1879 and July 1882 are recorded in the "Press Copies of the Invoices," and are tabulated in Table 2. During this period, there was a total of 4,804 individual 1¢ stamps sold, and there were an additional 780 1¢ stamps sold as part of complete sets. The total number of 1¢ stamps sold during this period was thus 5,584 stamps. A chart showing the pace of the sales appears in Figure 10.

As shown above, these data from the invoices may be combined with data about the receipt of the stamps, and the known total quantity sold to produce a simulation of the sales over the entire program. This chart is shown in Figure 11. The records show the following sales to dealers during the period covered by the invoices:

⁸Records of the Post Office Department, Record Group 28, Bill Book #3, entry for February 28, 1881.

⁹Luff, *op. cit.*, page 357.

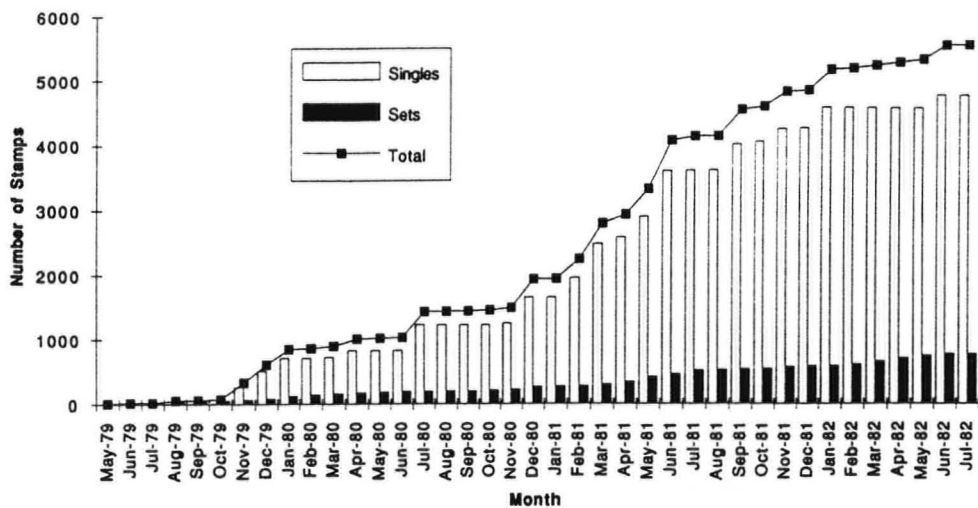


Figure 10. Sales of Executive special printing sets and 1c singles.

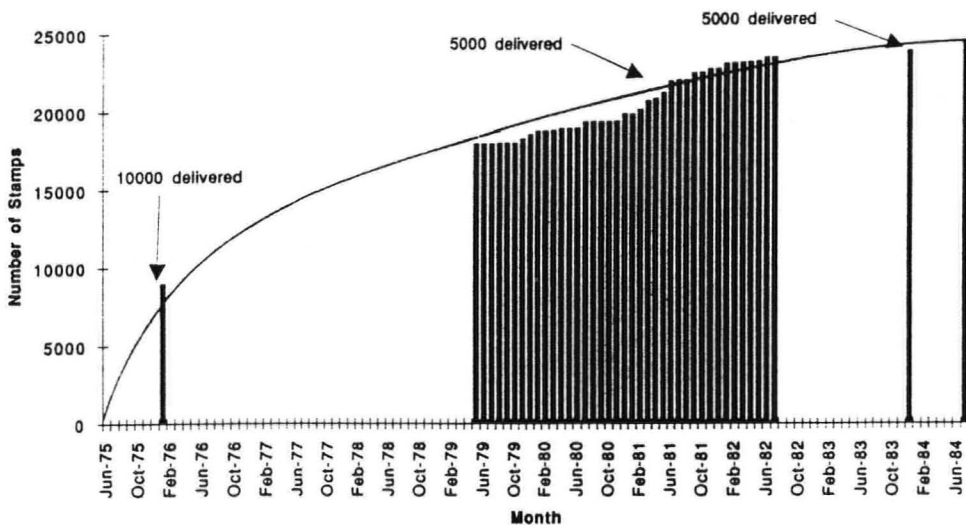


Figure 11. Total 1c Executive special printing stamps sold.

Whitfield, King, & Co.	1,500
Stanley Gibbons	700
C. N. Butler	500
Edward Peck & Co.	400
Paul Lietzow	345
Julius Goldner	300
E. A. Holton	200
R. R. Bogert	150
National Stamp Co.	104
W. A. Trider	100
J. T. Handford	100
William W. Phair	100

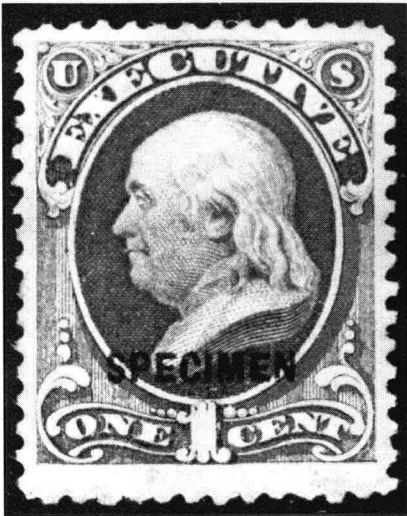


Figure 12. 1¢ Executive special printing, first printing.

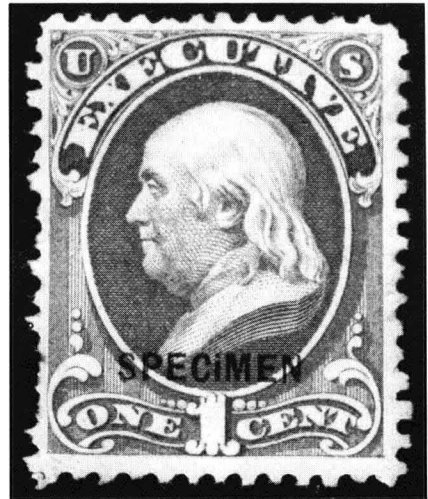


Figure 13. 1¢ Executive special printing, second printing.

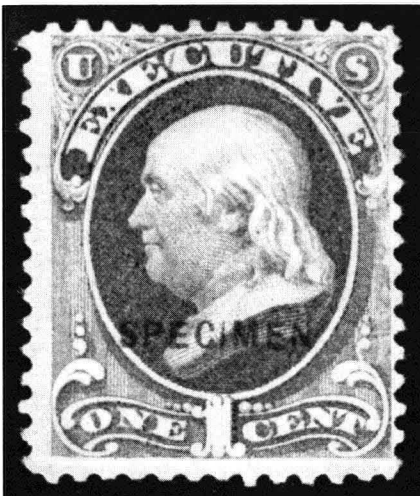


Figure 14. 1¢ Executive special printing, third printing.

W. Leckie	70
G. B. Coleman	50
F. T. Iceberger	40
Ernst Petritz	40
Collins & Mills	35
Total	4,734

Dealer sales represent over 98% of the total sales of individual 1¢ stamps, and it is easily seen that this stamp was more popular than the Agriculture 1¢ stamp. As with the Agriculture stamp, the concentration of sheets in the hands of dealers resulted in the availability of multiples.

There is little trouble in identifying the various printings. Like the Agriculture 1¢ stamp, the first and second printings of the Executive 1¢ stamp are on hard white paper and horizontally ribbed paper, respectively. The third printing is on the soft paper used by the American Bank Note Company. The fifth printing was presumably destroyed in its entirety, and no copies are known to exist. Illustrations of the three existing printings appear in Figures 12, 13 and 14. Note that the illustration of the first printing is not of a "SEPCIMEN" error, as the mistake which resulted in this error was discovered and corrected before the 1¢ Executive stamp was printed. The first printing exists in pairs, strips of four, and blocks of four and larger. The illustration of the second printing, like that of the Agriculture department, is of the lower case "i" error. The second printing is known in pairs, strips of four, and blocks of four and larger. About 60% of the second printing is on paper which is ribbed on back, and the balance of 40% is ribbed on front. The third printing is known in strips of three and four, and blocks up to the size of twenty. The plates for all three of these printings display an unusual feature, described by Combs. The plate number, which was originally plate number 81, is crossed out, and a new number 82 has been entered. Plate number 81 had apparently been assigned to the 30¢ War Department stamp.

The Scott catalog listing of these stamps could be improved, and a suggestion of a more logical listing is as follows:

1875 (July) **SPECIAL PRINTING**
Overprinted in Block Letters **SPECIMEN**
Produced by the Continental Bank Note Company
Perf. 12
Hard white paper, issued without gum
Type D
Blue Overprint

O10S D 1¢ carmine (10,000)
Block of four

1875 (December)
Horizontally Ribbed Paper
O10S D b. 1¢ carmine (10,000)
Block of four
a. Small dotted "i" in "SPECiMEN"

1881 Produced by the American Bank Note Company
Soft porous paper
O10XS D 1¢ violet rose (4,652)
Block of four
a. Broken "I" in "SPECIMEN"

The 1881 issue should be appropriately listed in chronological order for these stamps. □