

Collecting Waterfowl Stamps

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Definition

Fish and game license stamps, as defined here, are those stamps required by federal, state, local or tribal law to be purchased by sportsmen and affixed to a license prior to fishing or hunting for various wildlife in the U.S. In most instances, such stamps convey additional rights that are not granted by a basic fishing or hunting license. A fee is generally paid by the sportsman to acquire these additional rights and the stamp serves as a receipt. For this reason, fish and game license stamps fall under the philatelic classification of revenue stamps. Once the stamps have been affixed to the license (and subsequently signed by the licensee in many cases) the license has been validated for harvesting the particular species involved — within the limitations established by a fish and game code.

Waterfowl stamps are a subcategory of fish and game license stamps that have been especially popular with stamp collectors. Much of this popularity is owing to the rich and colorful history of the federal duck stamp program in the U.S. The term “duck stamp” is not entirely accurate when referring to the federal stamps. In fact, the stamps convey the right to hunt for many different species of waterfowl, including ducks, and are therefore waterfowl stamps. This is to distinguish them from the relatively small number of true duck stamps that have been issued in this country. Among those governments to issue duck stamps are Marion County, Kansas and the States of California and Nevada (see Figure 1).

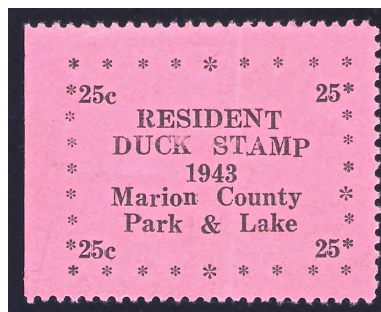


FIGURE 1. MARION COUNTY, KANSAS BECAME THE FIRST GOVERNMENT IN THE WORLD TO ISSUE A DUCK STAMP IN 1943.

Background Information and Historical Context

The federal waterfowl stamps arose out of the need to generate public awareness and funding for waterfowl conservation in the early part of the twentieth century. At this time, overhunting and a series of drought years had reduced North American waterfowl to dangerously low levels. One of the biggest needs was for waterfowl habitat — protected areas where the birds could breed and also rest during their rigorous migrations. On March 16, 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act into law. The first federal waterfowl stamp was designed by J. N. “Ding” Darling, a nationally recognized cartoonist and a conservation leader (see Figure 2). Proceeds from stamp sales went to preserve and restore waterfowl habitat, so that the survival of numerous waterfowl species could be ensured for future generations.



FIGURE 2. SMALL DIE PROOF FOR THE FIRST FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP. THE STAMP WAS DESIGNED BY JAY N. DARLING AND ISSUED IN 1934.

Among the initial federal stamps in the 1930s were those designed by famous wildlife artists such as Frank Benson, Richard Bishop and Roland Clark (see Figure 3). Oversized and depicting engraved waterfowl scenes, these beautiful stamps attracted an immediate following among stamp collectors. The federal waterfowl stamp series has evolved into the longest running series of stamps ever issued by the U.S. government and continues to attract large numbers of new collectors to the hobby of fish and game stamp collecting today.



FIGURE 3. THE FIRST FEDERAL STAMPS WERE DESIGNED BY FAMOUS WILDLIFE ARTISTS. ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR WAS BY ROLAND CLARK AND ISSUED IN 1938.

In addition to habitat, continuing research was necessary to collect data related to annual waterfowl production and harvest. This data plays a significant role in determining conservation policies aimed at keeping the various waterfowl populations in equilibrium. It was necessary to collect much of this data at the state and local level. Soon, state and local governments were issuing waterfowl stamps to generate funding for their own waterfowl conservation programs and also to help regulate the harvest within their own geographical areas. Ohio became the first state government to issue a waterfowl stamp in 1937 (see Figure 4), for Pymatuning Lake, and Marion County, Kansas became the first local government in 1941 (see Figure 5).

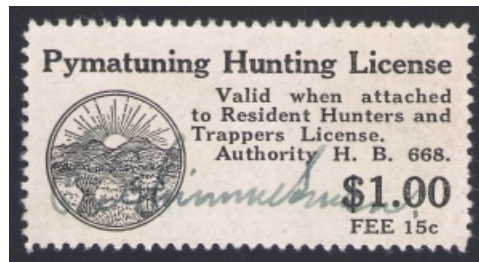
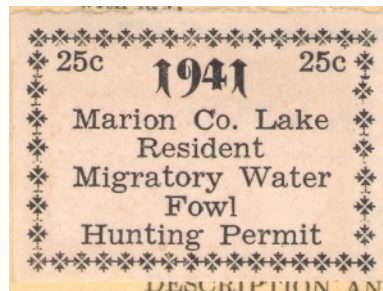


FIGURE 4. OHIO BECAME THE FIRST STATE TO ISSUED A WATERFOWL STAMP IN 1937.



**FIGURE 5. MARION COUNTY, KANSAS BECAME THE FIRST LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO ISSUE A WATERFOWL STAMP IN 1941.
NOTE "WATER FOWL" IS PRINTED IN TWO WORDS.**

Unlike the federal stamps, the early state and local issues were not pretty, usually featuring printed text in lieu of artwork. However, these stamps were attractive to collectors for other reasons. Foremost, they were an integral part of the waterfowl stamp story in the U.S. The history and stories behind the different state and local stamps was varied and frequently quite interesting. Also, the state and local stamps were issued in relatively small quantities solely to meet localized licensing demands, adding a challenge factor to the mix. It was with the advent of state and local waterfowl stamps that E.L. Vanderford and “pioneer” collectors began to form specialized waterfowl stamp collections. Such collections then had much to offer: there was the beauty of the federal stamps, the engaging local history of the stamps issued by Marion County, Kansas, the political and social history connected with the stamps issued for public hunting grounds at Honey Lake, California and Rice Lake, Illinois (see Figures 6 and 7) and the great rarity and status of the legendary Pymatuning Lake, Ohio issues.

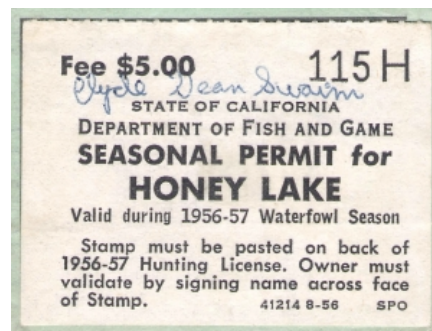


FIGURE 6. FOLLOWING WWII, STAMPS WERE ISSUED FOR THE PUBLIC HUNTING GROUNDS AT HONEY LAKE, CALIFORNIA. STAMPS WERE FIRST PRINTED IN 1956 AND THE SERIES CONTINUED FOR 30 YEARS, THROUGH 1985-86.



FIGURE 7. ILLINOIS WAS THE FIRST STATE TO ISSUE STAMPS FOR HUNTING AT PUBLIC HUNTING GROUNDS IN 1951. DAILY USAGE STAMPS ARE STILL IN USE TODAY.

Starting in the late 1950s, another chapter in the U. S. waterfowl stamp story was written. The Rosebud Sioux Tribe of South Dakota became the first tribal government to issue fish and game license stamps, including a tribal game bird stamp that was required to hunt for waterfowl on their reservation (see Figure 8). The fact that Native American artifacts could now be included in their collections intrigued pioneer waterfowl stamp collectors. The Indian reservation stamps helped to make the hobby even more interesting and added an element of social history.

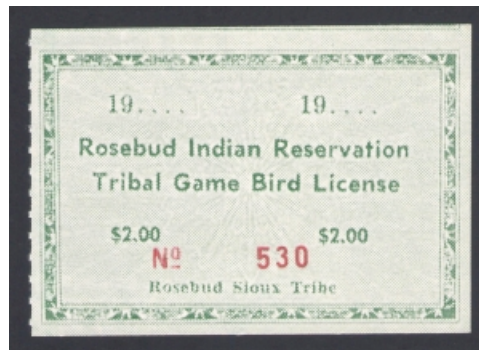


FIGURE 8. THE ROSEBUD SIOUX BECAME THE FIRST TRIBAL GOVERNMENT TO REQUIRE A STAMP TO HUNT WATERFOWL IN 1959.

In 1967, Vandenberg Air Force Base in southern California became the first U. S. military base to print stamps for hunting waterfowl. The vast majority of hunting that takes place on the base is by military personnel and the stamps have always been highly regulated. For these reasons, relatively few have found their way into the hands of collectors (see Figure 9).

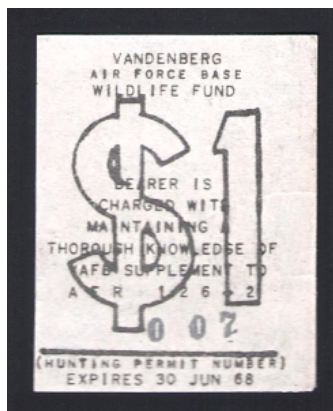


FIGURE 9. IN 1967, VANDENBERG AIR FORCE BASE ISSUED THE FIRST MILITARY ADHESIVES.

In 1971, California issued what is regarded as the first pictorial state waterfowl stamp (see Figure 10). Other states followed and this stimulated a large increase in the number of waterfowl stamp collectors in the 1970s and 1980s (see Figures 11 and 12).



FIGURE 10. CALIFORNIA ISSUED THE FIRST PICTORIAL DUCK STAMP IN 1971. THE STAMP WAS DESIGNED BY STAFF ARTIST PAUL JOHNSON.



FIGURE 11. IN 1973, IOWA ISSUED THE FIRST MULTI-COLORED STATE STAMP. IT WAS DESIGNED BY NATIVE SON MAYNARD REECE, WHO IS FAMOUS FOR DESIGNING FIVE FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMPS.



FIGURE 12. OTHER STATES SOON FOLLOWED WITH THEIR OWN BEAUTIFUL WATERFOWL STAMPS.

Methods of Collecting; On license

Today, waterfowl stamp collecting is a major hobby with thousands of enthusiasts worldwide. There are many options for the prospective new collector. Traditionally, collectors will start out with the federal stamps and then progress onto the state, local and tribal issues. However, one of the enjoyable things about collecting is the high degree of personal choice allowed. Some collectors may wish to collect only federal stamps, or only pictorial federal and state stamps. Some collectors prefer unused stamps and others prefer to collect stamps that have been actually used by hunters and removed from licenses. Many advanced collectors try to acquire stamps that are still affixed to the original license, thereby showing their intended usage (see figures 13 through 16).



FIGURE 13. ADVANCED COLLECTORS SEEK STAMPS AFFIXED TO ORIGINAL LICENSES, SHOWING THEIR USAGE. THE OWNERS OF THESE LICENSES DESIRED TO HUNT AT HONEY LAKE. THEY WERE REQUIRED TO PURCHASE BOTH A FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AND A HONEY LAKE STAMP.

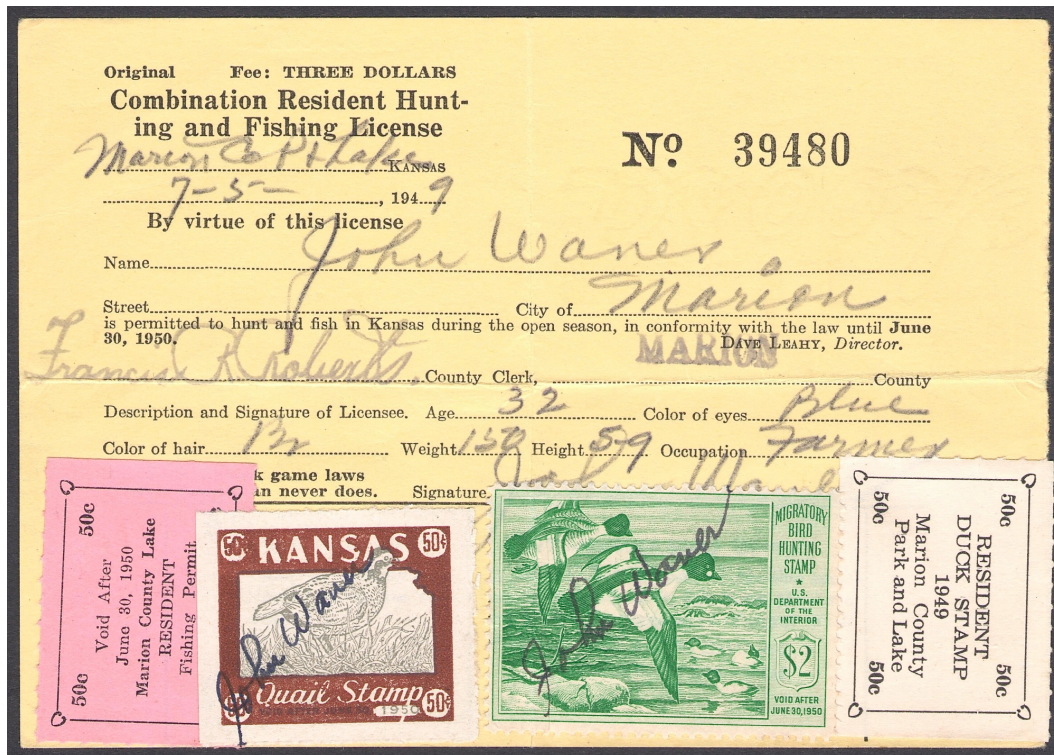


FIGURE 14. THIS LICENSE SHOWS A COMBINATION USAGE WITH FEDERAL, STATE (KANSAS) AND MARION COUNTY STAMPS AFFIXED. LICENSES WITH MULTIPLE STAMPS AFFIXED ARE POPULAR WITH COLLECTORS.



FIGURE 15. 1964-65 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP USED ON LICENSE WITH MARYLAND BIG GAME STAMPS FOR ARCHERY AND FIREARMS.



FIGURE 16. CALIFORNIA LICENSE WITH STAMPS REQUIRED TO HUNT WATERFOWL FROM THREE DIFFERENT GOVERNMENT JURISDICTIONS; VANDENBERG AIR FORCE BASE, FEDERAL AND CALIFORNIA.

A popular speciality area within collecting waterfowl stamps on license is collecting early federal stamps on Form 3333. When the first stamp was issued in 1934 (known as RW1 for Revenue Waterfowl #1), regulations stated a stamp could not leave the post office unless affixed to the hunter's license or the blue stamp holder known more commonly as Form 3333 (see Figure 17). In either case, the piece of paper the stamp was affixed to should bear the hunter's identifying signature. The reasoning behind this is that the government did not want hunters to share stamps and deprive waterfowl conservation efforts of badly needed funding.



FIGURE 17. THE FIRST FEDERAL STAMP USED ON FORM 3333. THE FORM IS CANCELLED "HONOLULU, HAWAII". DUE TO ITS RELATIVELY SMALL POPULATION AND LIMITED WATERFOWL HUNTING, VERY FEW STAMPS WERE SOLD IN HAWAII FROM 1934 – 1936. THEREFORE, FEDERAL STAMPS USED ON HAWAIIAN FORM 3333S ARE DIFFICULT FOR COLLECTORS TO ACQUIRE.

For the 1935-36 seasons, the regulations were amended. Waterfowl hunters were now required to sign the stamp itself across the face in ink. This made the use of Form 3333 obsolete and widespread use of the form was discontinued. For many subsequent years, however, some post offices continued to use the forms for various reasons (see Figures 18 and 19). Often these were smaller post offices or those in remote locations. As you get farther removed from 1934-35, it becomes more challenging for collectors to acquire federal stamps on the blue card. The latest known usage is for 1955-56 (RW22).



FIGURE 18. 1935-36 FEDERAL STAMP USED ON FORM 3333. THE FORM IS CANCELLED "CIRCLE, ALASKA". ALASKAN FORM 3333S ARE VERY POPULAR WITH COLLECTORS.

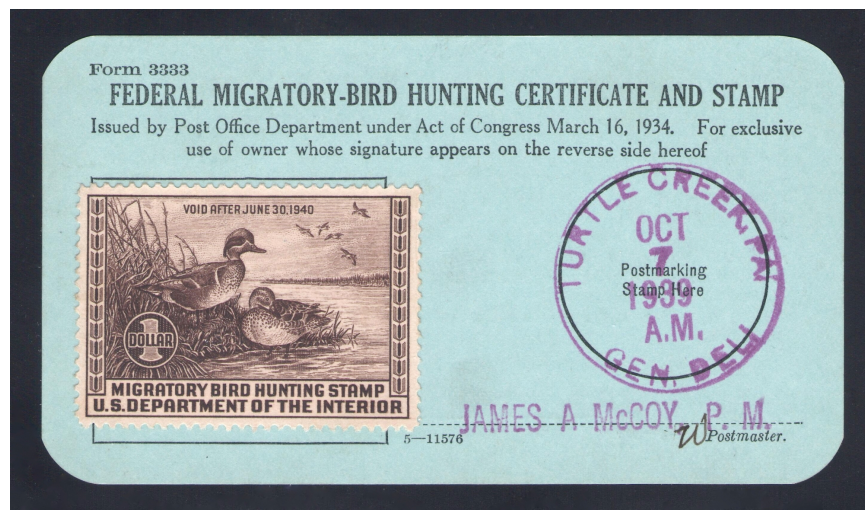


FIGURE 19. 1939-40 FEDERAL STAMP USED ON FORM 3333. THE GENERAL DELIVERY POSTMARK IS RARELY ENCOUNTERED ON THE CARD.

Essays and Proofs

Advanced collectors seek essays, proofs and legitimate errors. Essays and proofs were prepared by the printer for examination and approval by various officials prior to the actual stamps being printed. An essay is a submitted design that differs from the final issued product (see Figure 20). A proof is a submitted design that is identical to the fished product. There are many different types of proofs; the most prevalent being large die, small die and plate.



FIGURE 20. ESSAY FOR 1942-43 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP, MOUNTED ON CARD. NOTE THE DENOMINATION AND LOWER LETTERING ARE NOT INCLUDED ON THE DESIGN.

Die proofs are pulled from the engraved singular image of the stamp on a metal plate. Large die proofs are printed on paper with large margins closer to the size of the block to which the engraved plate is affixed. The paper is often India which is thin and soft and has sometimes been described as “tissue-like”. The large die proofs are then usually mounted on a large card. The back is often numbered and or bears the signatures of officials. The source for the majority of large die proofs to the philatelic market is via the engraver or his family once deceased. The reason for this is that the engraver was allowed to retain one large die proof, ostensibly as a memento. Prior to leaving the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, the large die proofs were punched, often with a “C”, to prevent them from being used to produce stamps. (see Figures 21, 22 and 23).



FIGURE 21. LARGE DIE PROOF FOR THE THE 1936-37 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP (RW3), OBERSE.



FIGURE 22. LARGE DIE PROOF FOR 1936-37 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP (RW3), REVERSE SHOWING VARIOUS MARKINGS AND "C" PUNCH.



FIGURE 23. LARGE DIE PROOF FOR 1948-49 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP. NOTE THIS LARGE DIE PROOF HAS NOT BEEN MOUNTED ON CARD STOCK AND IS RARELY FOUND THUS.

On occasion, unusual types of proofs enter the collector market that do not seem to fit cleanly into a particular classification. The proof below was given to me by an official with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. It appears very much like a traditional large die proof – except that it was not made from an engraved metal plate (see Figure 24).

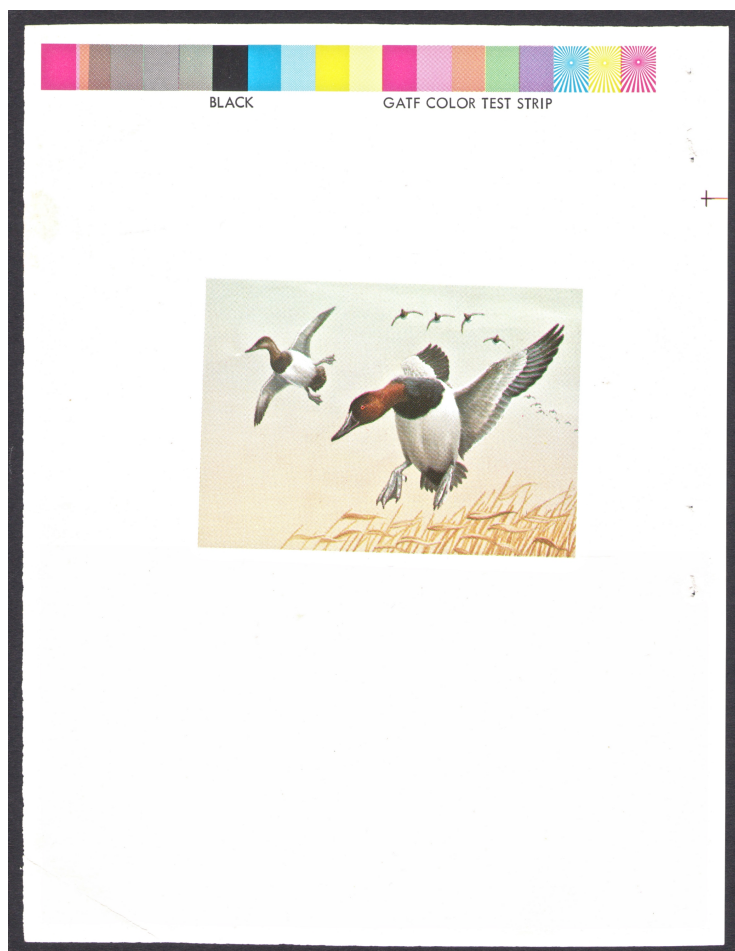


FIGURE 25. 1976-77 MARYLAND WATERFOWL PROOF. CONTEMPORARY SINGLE IMAGE PROOFS ARE SELDOM ENCOUNTERED THE COLLECTOR MARKET.

Small die proofs have smaller margins, 5mm or less and are most often found unmounted. The small die proofs lack punch marks and are known for their sharp impressions and vivid color. For these reasons, they are favored by collectors (see Figures 2 and 24).



FIGURE 24. SMALL DIE PROOF FOR 1935-36 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP, MOUNTED ON CARD.

Plate proofs have even smaller margins as they have been separated from essentially imperforate sheets made from the final printing plate of multiple subjects. On the final printing plates, the die has been multiplied and spaced close together with just enough room between subjects to allow for perforating or rouletting (see Figure 25 and 26).



FIGURE 25. BLOCK OF FOUR 1950 SOUTH DAKOTA WATERFOWL PLATE PROOFS SHOWING SPACING BETWEEN SUBJECTS ON FINAL PLATE.

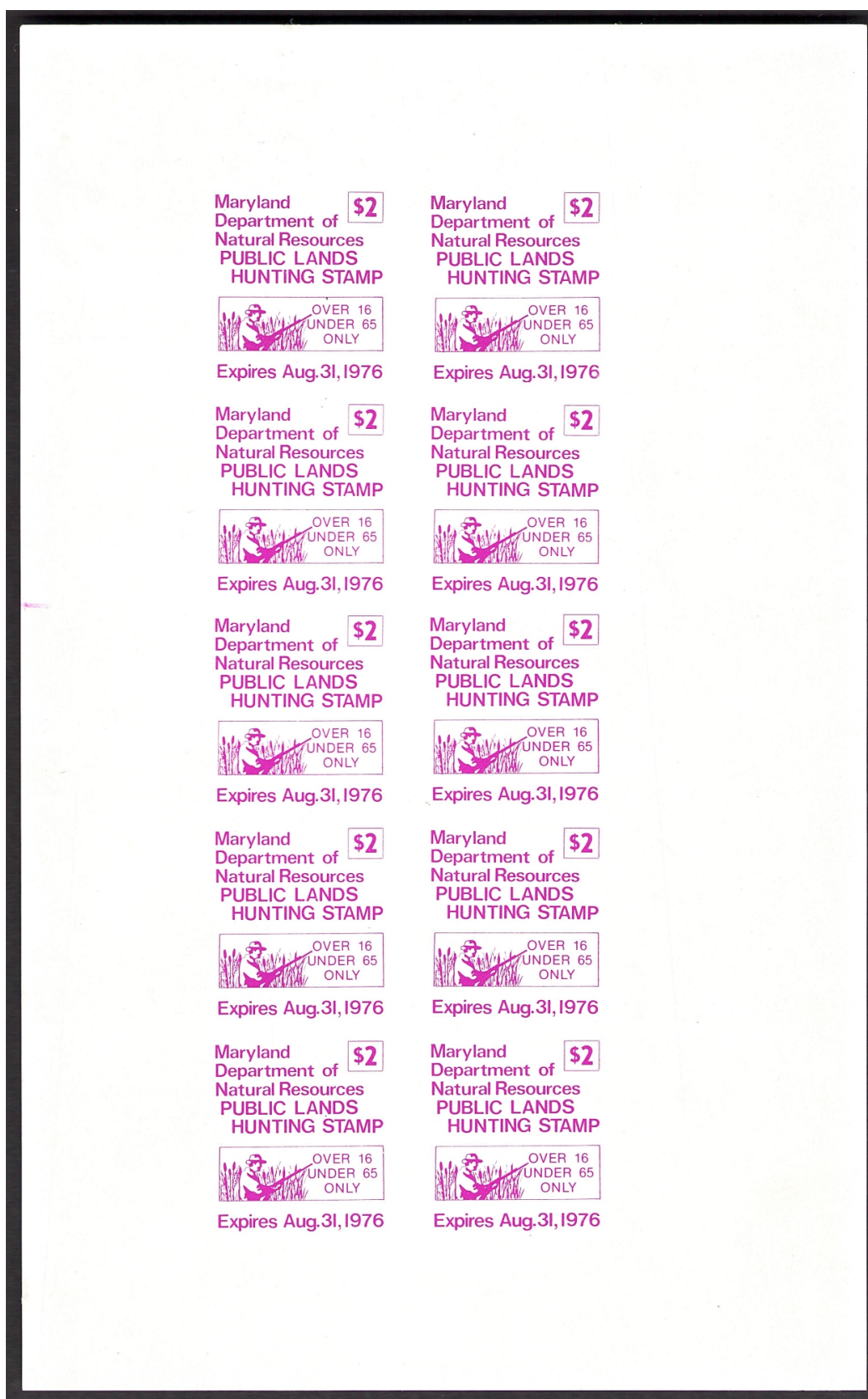


FIGURE 26. COMPLETE SHEET OF PLATE PROOFS FOR THE 1975-76 MARYLAND PUBLIC LANDS STAMP.

Freaks and Errors

Legitimate freaks and errors are always popular with collectors. Unfortunately, a lot of what are represented as such are, in fact, printers waste or items that have left the printers premises “out the back door”. In other words, they were not printed and sold “in error” and one must be careful when acquiring such items. It is recommended that a certificate of “genuineness” is obtained from a professional philatelic expertization service. There is a wide variety of items that fall into this classification and examples can be seen in Figures 27 through 32).



FIGURE 27. ERROR ON 1944-45 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP. THIS STAMP CAME FROM A SHEET THAT WAS FED THROUGH THE GUMMING PROCESS TWICE – ONCE ON THE REVERSE AND ONCE ON THE OBVERSE.

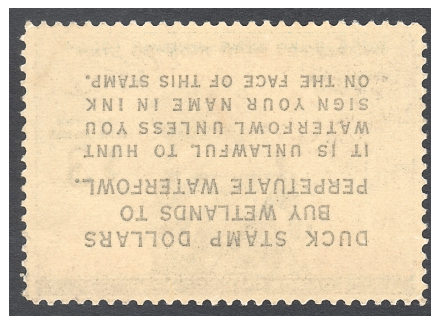


FIGURE 28. ERROR ON 1959-60 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP. THE INSCRIPTION ON THE REVERSE IS INVERTED.



FIGURE 29. ERROR ON 1967-68 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP. THIS WAS CAUSED BY THE PAPER IN THE LOWER LEFT CORNER OF THE SHEET BEING "FOLDED OVER". ARGUABLY THE MOST DRAMATIC ERROR IN THE HOBBY.



FIGURE 30. ERROR ON 1985-86 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP. CAUSED BY MISALIGNMENT OF THE BLACK INK RUN. PHILATELISTS REFER TO THIS AS A COLOR "SHIFT".

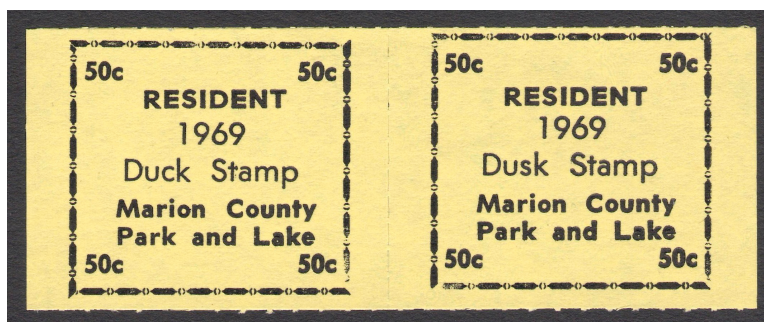


FIGURE 31. PAIR WITH NORMAL (LEFT) AND ERROR (RIGHT) ON 1969 MARION COUNTY DUCK STAMP. STAMPS IN POSITION EIGHT ON THE TEN STAMP PANES WERE TYPESET “DUSK”. THE MOST FAMOUS AND SOUGHT AFTER OF ALL WATERFOWL STAMP ERRORS.



FIGURE 32. ERROR ON 1990 CROW CREEK NON RESIDENT WATERFOWL STAMP. ONE PANE OF FIVE WAS PRINTED WITH THE SERIAL NUMBERS MISSING.

Signed by Artist, Designer or Engraver

Another popular method of collecting is a stamp bearing the signature of the artist, designer or engraver. All three are involved in the stamp production process. In the first step, the chosen or contest winning artist draws a series of sketches which ultimately lead to “original” artwork that is submitted directly to the stamp designer or in the case of a contest, to the selection committee. Ultimately, the original artwork is redrawn by the stamp designer who may or may not crop the image and add the lettering. During the classic period of stamp production, the next step would be for one to three different engravers to reproduce the finished design on a metal plate. Some collectors seek the signatures of all the people involved – from artist to engraver (see Figure 33 through 38).



FIGURE 33. 1934-35 TOP PLATE NUMBER SINGLE SIGNED BY THE ARTIST JAY N “DING” DARLING



FIGURE 34. FORM 3333 WITH 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED SIGNED “... ALIAS DING”



FIGURE 35. 1939-40 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP
SIGNED BY THE ENGRAVER, EARL H. MAGNANT.



FIGURE 36. 1941-42 TOP PLATE NUMBER BLOCK SIGNED BY THE DESIGNER, VICTOR S. MCCLOSKEY JR.



FIGURE 37. 1944-45 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP
SIGNED BY THE DESIGNER AND THE ARTIST.

The signatures of others related to the waterfowl stamp program are also collectible. Shown below are examples signed by Harold Ickes, Secretary of the interior and Director of the WPA under Franklin Roosevelt (see Figures 39 and 40).



FIGURE 39. PAIR OF 1940-41 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMPS SIGNED BY HAROLD ICKES, SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.



FIGURE 40. BLOCK OF FOUR WITH PLATE NUMBER 1945-46 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMPS SIGNED BY HAROLD ICKES, SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.

General Collections and Non Pictorial

As you can see, there are many options for specialization. However, there has been a trend developing that started in the late 1980s and which has become widespread in the 21st Century, whereby comprehensive or “general” waterfowl stamp collections are once again in vogue. In this regard, the hobby has returned to its roots, with contemporary collectors retracing the path of the pioneers. General collectors attempt to add as many different waterfowl stamps to their collections as possible, whether they be federal, state, local or tribal. The common denominator is that the stamps were all required to hunt for waterfowl. This method of collecting may be compared to putting together a large jigsaw puzzle over time. As with a jig-saw puzzle, the order of acquisition of the “pieces” is not particularly important.

It is the general collection that chronicles the waterfowl stamp story in the U.S. in its entirety, and enables the collector to develop an understanding for the interrelated conservation efforts at each level of government. It allows the collector to experience the ultimate “thrill of the hunt” adventure, never knowing what the next addition will be. Also, it frees the collector from the anxiety sometimes associated with striving for completeness — for completeness is simply not possible. A lifetime of enjoyment is the reward for those who choose general waterfowl stamp collecting.

Finally, there is a growing segment of collectors that are specializing solely in non-pictorial state, local and tribal waterfowl stamps. Collectors are drawn to this area for many reasons. Some are drawn by the historical significance of the stamps — each of the first state, local, tribal and military waterfowl stamps in the U.S. were non-pictorial (see Figures 4, 5, 8 and 9). Many are drawn by the integrity of the stamps. Non-pictorial stamps were printed and issued with one purpose in mind — licensing hunters. Since they were not made for collectors, in many cases all known examples have been removed from licenses — no unused copies exist. This level of credibility appeals to many people, especially in today’s society.

Perhaps the most enticing aspect of collecting non-pictorial waterfowl stamps is that the area represents the ultimate challenge. The majority of the stamps are not readily available. In at least one instance, the 1956 stamp issued by California for the public hunting grounds at Madeline Plains, not even a single stamp has been recorded. Desire, intellectual resourcefulness and passionate searching become as important as financial considerations. Collectors who have dreamed of becoming a sleuth or private detective will enjoy this hobby.



FIGURE 17. U.S. NON PICTORIAL WATERFOWL STAMPS REPRESENT THE ULTIMATE COLLECTING CHALLENGE. I SPENT HALF OF MY LIFE SEARCHING FOR THIS ONE STAMP.

How To Get Started

There are many avenues available to the prospective new collector. One is to establish a relationship with one or more stamp dealers who handle or specialize in fish and game stamps. Such dealers can be found at stamp shows and through advertisements placed in philatelic publications. Another way to get started is to make contact with collectors who share the same interest. This can be accomplished by placing a classified ad in *The American Revenuer*, the journal for the American Revenue Association, *The State Revenue Newsletter*, the newsletter for the State Revenue Society or *The American Philatelist*, the journal for the American Philatelic Society. Collectors and dealers that specialize in fish and game stamps may also be found on the internet.

Perhaps the best way to get started — and the most rewarding — is the grass roots approach. Start asking all of your waterfowl hunting friends and relatives if they saved their old licenses. You will be surprised to find that many people initially save their licenses as souvenirs and then lose interest in keeping them over the years. If they can find them, they might be willing to give them to you or else sell them for a nominal fee. Ask current hunters to save their licenses in the future. Garage sales, flea markets, antique shops and estate sales are all good possibilities for locating licenses bearing fish and game stamps, including waterfowl stamps. If you should encounter fishing or other kinds of game stamps, by all means do not pass them up. You may some day find that your interests have broadened to include them. If not, you can always use them to trade for waterfowl stamps.