

## The First Fish and Game Stamp – Part One

On March 16, 1934 President Franklin Roosevelt signed the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act into law. The primary purpose of this Act was to generate badly needed funding for waterfowl restoration and conservation purposes. The main feature of the Act produced colorful historical artifacts directly tied to waterfowl conservation (the stamps themselves) and provided the origin for the hobby that we enjoy today – the collecting of waterfowl stamps and fish and game stamps in general.

Earlier in the year, Roosevelt had selected Jay Norwood Darling to head up the U.S. Biological Survey, forerunner of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Now Darling was picked to design the first federal waterfowl stamp, to be issued for the 1934-35 seasons. The stamp, featuring a pair of mallards in flight, is commonly known to collectors as RW1. This is due to the stamp having been assigned that catalog number in the 1935 Scott Specialized Catalog of United States Stamps, for *Revenue Waterfowl #1*.

It seems appropriate to use Darling's stamp to illustrate an overview for the collecting possibilities for federal waterfowl stamps, so here we go. First the *artist*, in this case Darling, executes a series of pencil sketches until he is satisfied with his design. At this point, a more "finished product" is developed. In the case of Darling, he chose brush and ink for his medium. The next step is for a *designer* to take the original artwork and incorporate it into the actual stamp design, including borders, lettering and denominations (commonly known as face values).

Through 1958-59, all federal stamps were engraved. Therefore, the next step would require one to three *engravers* to take the completed design and etch it into a metal plate. Often the artwork was done by one engraver and the lettering and denominations were done by different engravers. During the engraving process, die proofs were made periodically for approval by officials at the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing. In the early days of the federal waterfowl stamp program, it was common practice to allow each engraver to each take home one proof as a sample of his work and a memento.

This is how virtually all of the federal waterfowl stamp die proofs have entered the collector market. Eventually, the engraver himself or a family member subsequently sold them to a collector or dealer to generate some extra income. This was perfectly legal. There are two kinds of die proofs, large and small. Both types feature a single impression made from the engraved metal plate.

The difference is basically the size of the white paper margins surrounding the stamp design. Large die proofs have large margins and small die proofs have small margins, rarely exceeding 5-6 mm. One can generalize and say that in addition, most large die proofs were mounted on a larger piece of card stock and small die proofs were not mounted. However, some large die proofs were not mounted and some small die proofs were.

Knowing that the proofs may eventually be sold, most (but not all) of the large die proofs in collector's hands today have been defaced by a small punch mark intended to prevent their use for reproduction. Small die proofs exist in smaller numbers than large die proofs (with each having only one or two examples recorded) so it is more difficult to generalize. However, I am unaware of any federal small die proof with a punch. Small die proofs are known for their intense, vibrant color (see Figures 1 and 2).





FIGURE 1. LARGE DIE PROOF FOR THE 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP. NOTE THIS PROOF IS SIGNED BY THE LETTER ENGRAVER AND DOES NOT BEAR A PUNCH MARK. FORMERLY IN THE JEANNETTE RUDY COLLECTION, THE BLUE BORDER INDICATES IT IS ONE OF THE FEATURED ITEMS IN THE STAMP EXHIBIT BELONGING TO WILL AND ABBY CSAPLAR.



FIGURE 2. SMALL DIE PROOF FOR THE 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP. NOTE THIS PROOF HAS BEEN MOUNTED ON CARD STOCK. FORMERLY IN THE RUDY COLLECTION.

Once the the final die proofs were approved, the die was multiplied to create large plates of 112 subjects. There would have then been an imperforate plate proof made, consisting of 112 subjects with even smaller margins than the small die proofs (similar to the spacing on a perforated pane).

Once the sheet of plate proofs was approved, regular sheets of 112 stamps were printed, gummed and perforated. The large sheets were then cut into four panes of 28 for easy distribution to post offices. The first federal waterfowl stamps were to be put on sale to the general public on August 24, 1934.

Two days prior, on August 22nd, Darling was allowed to purchase stamps from a pane that was released early. The occasion served to publicize the new stamps and photographs were made of Darling purchasing the first stamp from the pane. I have heard from several different sources that he purchased 25 of the 28 stamps on August 22, 1934 and that most were affixed to federal Form 3333 and signed by him on the reverse.

Federal officials were worried that hunters would share stamps and Form 3333 was devised to help prevent this from happening. For 1934-35, the law stated that no federal waterfowl stamp could be sold unless immediately affixed to the hunter's license or (in cases when no hunting license was present) the blue card. This law was in effect until two weeks prior to the stamps being taken off sale and destroyed in 1935. Less than half of the Form 3333s from Aug 22, 1934 can be accounted for today (see Figures 3 and 4).



FIGURE 3. OBVERSE OF ONE OF THE FORM 3333S BEARING ONE OF THE FIRST FEDERAL STAMPS SOLD TO JAY N. DARLING.

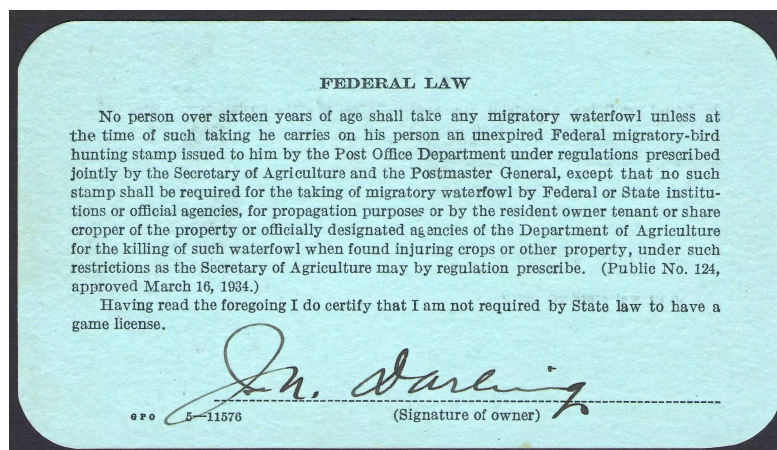


FIGURE 4. REVERSE OF THE FORM 3333 ISSUED TO DARLING ON AUGUST 22ND. NOTE HIS SIGNATURE, J. N. DARLING AT THE BOTTOM



In the early 1930s, A. C. Roessler was one of the biggest promoters of first day covers in the U.S. A first day cover is an envelope, often bearing a related design at the left known as a cache, with a stamp affixed and bearing a cancellation from the first day it is available to the general public. For decades first day covers, thanks in large part to Roessler's efforts, were avidly collected. Upon learning of the new federal waterfowl stamp, Roessler sent in an unknown quantity of covers and asked that they be cancelled on August 24th. Unfortunately, this did not happen. The covers were cancelled on August 27th – three days late (see Figure 5).



FIGURE 5. ATTEMPTED FIRST DAY COVER FOR THE 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP BY A.C. ROESSLER. NOTE THE STAMPS WERE CANCELLED AUGUST 27T

However, at least one 1934-35 federal waterfowl stamp exists on a Form 3333 with a August 24th cancellation. This is considered one of the most historic and important items in the waterfowl stamp hobby (see Figure 6).

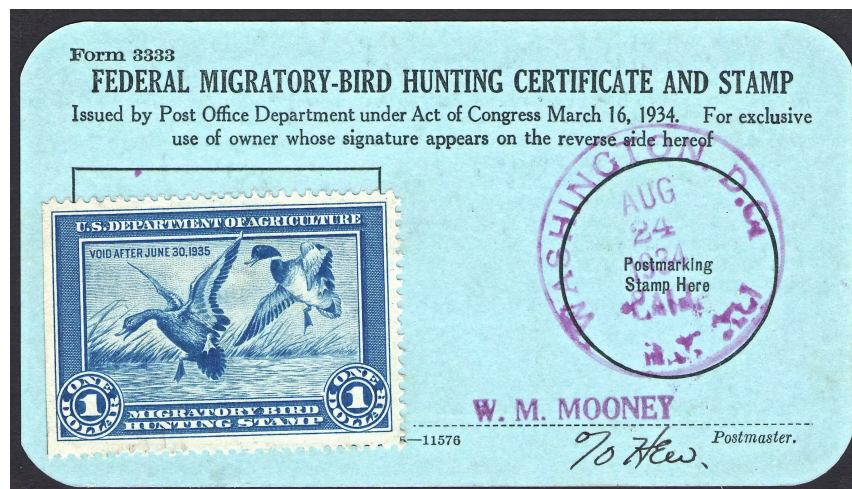


FIGURE 6. FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED TO FORM 3333 CANCELLED AUG 24, 1934.

## The First Fish and Game Stamp – Part Two

While archival material and stamps affixed to documents from August can be difficult to acquire, there are many other options for collecting the 1934-35 federal waterfowl stamp. This is due to the law prohibiting the sale of unused stamps being changed. For a two week period prior to the stamps being withdrawn from sale and destroyed, June 30, 1935, anyone was allowed to buy unused 1934-35 federal waterfowl stamps in singles, blocks, plate blocks or sheets.

The main reason for this shift in policy is that it had already been decided that starting with the 1935-36 issue (RW2), all hunters would be required to sign their federal waterfowl stamp across the face after affixing it to their license. This alleviated concerns that hunters would share stamps. It also made the use of Form 3333 obsolete, although the practice of affixing federal waterfowl stamps to the blue card would continue for years in remote areas of the country and in places where the Postmaster simply did not understand the new regulations. This will be the subject of a future blog post.

## Collecting Single Stamps

For every other year except 1934-35, collectors have the option to search for either signed or unsigned stamps. Since hunters were not required to sign their stamp the first year, very few signed examples have been recorded. Collecting signed stamps is a very affordable, popular option. Many collectors like the fact the stamp was actually used for it's intended purpose. It also allows for hunters to put together a collection of their own stamps and allows others a chance to include stamps that were used by friends or relatives. This often provides more meaning to the collection. In general, when collecting signed stamps, the smaller, neater and more unobtrusive signatures are considered more desirable.

In a strict philatelic sense, an *unsigned* stamp implies that the stamp has been removed from a license and has no gum on the reverse. Collecting unsigned stamps is also popular, especially with people who want to put the set in a frame and don't see the need to pay extra for the gum that will never be seen. With unsigned stamps, small faults (especially those not visible from the front – like small thin spots) are usually not so important. One should be on the lookout, however, for stamps where a signature has been chemically removed as this process may alter the original color of the stamp.

This leaves us with by far and away the most popular form of collecting unused federal stamps, unused with full original gum. In other words, in the same condition as the stamps were originally issued. Over the years, the hobby has developed standards for grading unused stamps and for the last few years, some philatelists are literally having their stamps *graded* in the same way coins have been for decades. For the purposes of this blog post, I need to simplify this portion of the discussion. Therefore, I want to make a generalized statement that the better centered the stamp and the more pristine the gum – the more desirable and more highly valued the stamp.

Centering is the most important criteria and I would like to offer this analogy; think of the centering of the stamp design within the perforations as you would a photograph or piece of art in a picture frame. You probably would not enjoy seeing the object on your wall with five inches of mat board on two or three sides and only two inches on the other(s) as this would look unbalanced to your eye, perhaps to the point of some distraction. In much the same way, collectors strive to have the stamp design centered within the perforations in such a way that all four margins (analogous to the mat board) are as close to equal as possible (see Figure 1).



**FIGURE 1. UNUSED 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP WITH LARGE, BALANCED MARGINS. WHEN THE MARGINS GET REALLY BIG, AS ON THIS STAMP, COLLECTORS REFER TO THEM AS "JUMBO". THIS ADDS MORE DESIRABILITY AND VALUE TO THE STAMP.**

The other main factor when collecting unused stamps concerns the gum on the reverse. Purists attempt to obtain stamps with untouched, virtually perfect gum and such stamps are referred to as "mint, never hinged". A hinge is a small piece of gummed, folded paper that traditionally has been used to affix stamps in a collectors album. One moistens the smaller folded flap and pushes it directly onto the stamp; then moistens the larger flap and presses the stamp into the album.

When a stamp is removed from the album, the hinge can usually be removed in its entirety, however, not without removing some portion of the stamp's original gum. Such stamps are referred to as "hinged". As with grading centering, there are several grades of hinging; ranging from lightly hinged to still bearing a remnant of the hinge itself. Again, I want to be brief and say that if the reverse of the stamp is not so important to you, it is possible to save a tremendous amount of money by accepting a stamp with a hinge mark. On the other hand, you should realize that when the time comes to sell, there are not as many buyers for hinged stamps.

One thing to look out for is that the stamp was not *thinned* when the hinge was removed. A thin is caused when a shallow layer of the stamp paper is pulled away with the gum when a persistent hinged is forcibly removed. On scarce to rare fish and game stamps (where the numbers available are relatively small), a small fault such a thin may not effect the stamp's value to a great degree. This is not the case on unused federal waterfowl stamps, where the number of stamps available is relatively large. A thin seriously affects the stamp's value.



## Collecting Plate Number Singles

When the large sheets of 112 subjects are printed, a number designating the actual metal plate used to print the sheet is printed in the selvage in four different places; the upper left, upper right, lower left and lower right. The selvage is the excess blank white paper that runs around the outside of the entire sheet and the numbers are referred to as *plate numbers*. In the case of the 1934-35 stamp, four different metal plates were used: numbers 129199, 129200, 129201 and 129202. Once the sheets were cut into panes, each pane included one plate number.

Many collectors enjoy plate number singles as they feel the number adds a bit of glamour, if you will, to the otherwise single stamp. It is possible to collect signed (used) plate number singles and this can be a fun and challenging pursuit. By far and away the most popular avenue for collecting plate number singles is unused. Since plate numbers were printed on the upper and lower portions of each sheet, it is possible to have a plate number single with the number above the stamp (top) or below (bottom). Some collectors prefer bottoms, however, it seems most prefer tops (see Figure 2).



FIGURE 2. TOP PLATE NUMBER SINGLE OF THE 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP.



## Collecting Plate Number Blocks

Since the earliest days of stamp collecting, plate number blocks have been very popular. This is basically a “leveling up” of the glamour associated with plate number singles. Plate number blocks of the 1934-35 federal waterfowl stamp have a higher level of difficulty of acquisition than one might expect. This is due to the fact that all of the 1934-35 plate blocks in collectors hands today could only have been obtained during that two week period at the end of June, 1935.

Starting in 1934-35 and continuing through 1958-59, the plate numbers were printed in the selvage of a stamp *one position removed from the corner*. Therefore, by long standing philatelic convention, all of the single color federal waterfowl stamps were collected in plate blocks of six (see Figure 3).



FIGURE 3. 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP PLATE NUMBER BLOCK OF SIX FROM THE LOWER RIGHT POSITION.

Some advanced collectors try to acquire a plate block from each position (UL, UR, LL and LR). More challenging is to attempt to put together a *matched set* of plate blocks from all four positions bearing the same number. A few people, most recently Jeanette Rudy, have attempted to put together matched sets of all four numbers for the 1934-35 stamp. This may be considered the ultimate challenge, and I am unaware that anyone has yet to accomplished the feat.

As with plate number singles, most collectors prefer tops and therefore there is often a premium attached to early federal plate blocks from the upper left or right positions. When purchasing early federal plate blocks one should be careful the selvage has not been trimmed. Obtaining a certificate of authenticity from a professional philatelic expertization service is advised.

## Collecting Errors

Over the years there have been many federal waterfowl stamp errors. When it comes to the 1934-35 issue, there are only two. The two are really one and in fact, they are not errors at all but printers waste. Let me explain. Since at least as far back as the 1950s when my father acquired a vertical strip of three that was completely imperforate of the 1934-35 federal waterfowl stamp, there has existed in the collector market two “major errors”. On what I shall refer to as Type I, vertical pairs, strips and blocks exist that are perforated vertically but imperforate horizontally. On Type II, there exists vertical pairs and strips, only, that are completely imperforate (see Figure 4).



FIGURE 4. 1934-35 PRINTER'S WASTE IMPERFORATE PAIRS. TYPE I (LEFT) AND TYPE II (RIGHT).

For decades I had heard rumors that all of the “errors” were from the same pane of 28 stamps that was fished out of the trash by an employee at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing and later sold to a stamp dealer “way back when”. As I started to analyze the errors I noticed that virtually every piece was faulty, with creases or thins or both – consistent with the trash can rumors. Then I began to notice that all of the pieces that retained vertical perforations had relatively small margins between the perforations and the designs. Further, there were no blocks that were completely imperforate – or even any horizontal pairs. To top it all off, some pieces had gum on the front.

This led me to conclude that not only were the errors indeed printers waste, but that at one time all were Type I. Someone a long time ago had taken the pairs and strips that were perforated vertically with the widest margins and trimmed them to create a second variety (Type II) to sell their customers. It was at this point I had the following statement printed in the Scott Specialized Catalogue:

***It is almost certain that No. RW1a (Type II) is No. RW1b (Type I) with vertical perfs trimmed off. No horizontal pairs of No. RW1a are known. All recorded pairs are vertical, with narrow side margins. Both varieties probably are printer's waste since examples exist with gum on front or without gum***



Having done that, guess what? Collectors and dealers don't seem to care that they are printer's waste because everyone unanimously agrees they are the coolest thing ever! I am fairly sure this consensus would not be possible if it involved printer's waste on any other issue besides 1934-35. Basically, these stamps designed by Ding Darling are so ridiculously popular with collectors that demand and values have continued to increase on these "errors" since I published the notice in Scott.

This is underscored by the recent auction realization for perhaps the worst condition piece from the pane, a vertical strip of three with very visible creases and thins at \$30,000.00. This occurred in March, 2016 at the Siegel Auction Galleries sale of the Bill Webster collection. I know the price was real as I was the underbidder and had a total of four strong bids in my book.

I would like to point out, however, that no matter how *cool* collectors and dealers seem to think they are, there is no place for printer's waste in a philatelic exhibit at the National or International level. The judges would not look too kindly upon it. So sometimes it is best to hold your emotions in check.

## The First Fish and Game Stamp – Part Three

One of the biggest trends over the last twenty years is to collect federal waterfowl stamps used on license. The motivation behind this method of collecting is the desire to document the role the stamps have played in the license and stamp system. Federal waterfowl stamps fall under the umbrella of *revenue* stamps. Their primary purpose is to generate a *fee* from hunters. Once the fee has been paid, the stamp itself serves as a colorful receipt that conveys the rights to hunt waterfowl (within the rules and regulations established for that particular year and sometimes for a specific area).

In 1934, the receipt was required to be affixed to a hunting license of some kind (usually state issued) or, in lieu of a hunting license, the blue stamp holder better known as Form 3333. When hunting, this receipt was required to be carried on the hunter and be readily available for inspection by a game warden. When a game warden asked to see the receipt during waterfowl seasons, he was verifying the fee had been paid. This is essentially the purpose of the federal waterfowl stamp in the license and stamp system. In subsequent years, this model would be adopted by other levels of government, including state, local, military and tribal.

The fees generated through the sale of the 1934-35 federal waterfowl stamps to hunters (and to a lesser extent collectors and conservation donors for two weeks in mid 1935) went to restore and preserve wetlands and funded a myriad of related waterfowl conservation efforts. In this way, waterfowl populations could be kept in a perpetual state of equilibrium for future generations to enjoy.

The ideology behind the license and stamp program is that the segment of the population who stood to benefit the most from waterfowl conservation – the hunters – should contribute a big share of the cost to administer the conservation programs. Historically waterfowl hunters have acknowledged the importance of the program and have been almost unanimously supportive of its accompanying fee requirements.

Today, the early years of the waterfowl conservation program and the integral license and stamp system are seen as conservation history. Within this context, the licenses with stamps affixed are viewed as historical artifacts and are highly sought by advanced collectors, exhibitors and all of those with an appreciation for waterfowl conservation. The collecting of such stamp *usages* offers many choices as the subject is diverse and nuanced. In this post, we shall examine some of the possibilities.

## Collecting on License

By far and away the most common form of early federal waterfowl stamp usage is on state licenses. The reason for this is because it was the right of the state governments – not the federal government – to license hunters. This right, in fact, prevented the first federal waterfowl stamp from being issued all through the 1920s and up until 1934, as the states were worried that a federal stamp would infringe upon their right to license hunters. Many attempts to get a National hunting stamp passed through Congress failed until the need became absolutely necessary following the terrible drought and subsequent dust bowl years across the Great Plains in the early 1930s.

There are many types of state hunting licenses. There are resident hunting licenses, resident combination hunting and fishing licenses (see Figure 1) and non-resident licenses. It should be noted that if a non resident hunter already possessed a valid license with a federal stamp affixed from his own state – he was only required to purchase a new license in the visited state and did not have to purchase a second stamp. He then needed to carry both state licenses while hunting.



FIGURE 1. COLORADO RESIDENT COMBINED FISHING AND SMALL GAME HUNTING LICENSE WITH 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED.



One of the more fascinating types of state license usages occurred when the hunter lost his license. Some states had preprinted "DUPLICATE" licenses that were available to hunter's at a reduced fee upon proof of original purchase. At this point the hunter was required to purchase a second federal stamp (at full price) and affix it to the duplicate license (see Figures 2 and 3).

1934 WISCONSIN CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT  
RESIDENT HUNTING LICENSE 1752

(License Fee \$1.00) Deer Tag \_\_\_\_\_  
(Deer Tag \$1.00)

County of Wash.

Name Fred Dickman

Residence Campbellsport

Age 43 Weight 200 Height 6-0 Eyes gray Hair Br

**DUPLICATE**

Licensee's Signature \_\_\_\_\_


31, 1935, subject to Wisconsin Fish and Game while hunting. To be shown to any conservation all banded birds to U. S. Biological Survey,

Issued by me \_\_\_\_\_  
this 1 day of Oct, 1934  
M. W. Monroe  
County Clerk.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
VOID AFTER JUNE 30, 1935  
MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING STAMP

FIGURE 2. WISCONSIN DUPLICATE LICENSE WITH 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED.





STATE OF MONTANA  
**Department Fish and Game**  
CERTIFICATE OF IDENTIFICATION

This is to certify that E. L. Crook has filed with me an affidavit to the effect that the Game Bird and Fishing License which he purchased for the year 1934 has been lost. The description of the licensee as it appears on the license stub on file in this office is as follows:

Name E. L. Crook; Residence Conrad, Mont.

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_; Business Oil Jobber

Age 24; Height 6'1½"; Weight 175 lbs

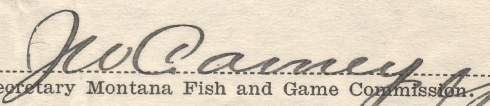
Color of Eyes Brown; Color of Hair Dark

Signature of Licensee E. L. Crook

License Issued June 30, 1934 License No. 49173

By Don McLean

In accordance with an order made by the Montana Fish and Game Commission, this certificate is to be accepted by all Deputy Game Wardens in lieu of the lost license.

  
 Secretary Montana Fish and Game Commission.

1M-10-32. INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING CO.

FIGURE 3. STATE OF MONTANA CERTIFICATE OF IDENTIFICATION WITH 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED. THE CERTIFICATE SERVED AS A DUPLICATE HUNTING LICENSE.

Often, the state did not have preprinted duplicate licenses or the loss occurred in a remote area where the licenses were not available. At this point duplicate licenses were created as needed and these account for some of the most interesting waterfowl stamp usages (see Figures 4a and b).





FIGURE 4A. OUTSIDE OF FOLDED DUPLICATE LICENSE CREATED BY A COURT CLERK IN BALTIMORE COUNTY, MARYLAND WITH 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED. NOTE THE INSCRIPTION PERTAINING TO THE HUNTER'S DEATH IN WWII. A FASCINATING DOCUMENT PERTAINING TO CONSERVATION AND WATERFOWL STAMP HISTORY.



CLERK'S OFFICE  
CIRCUIT COURT FOR BALTIMORE COUNTY  
TOWSON, MD.

C. WILLING BROWNE, JR.  
CLERK

J. HOWARD CASSIDY  
CHIEF DEPUTY CLERK

State of Maryland Baltimore County to wit:

I hereby certify that there was issued out of the office  
of the Clerk of the Circuit Court for Baltimore County  
the following Resident State Hunting License.

No	972
Name	Richard M Janney
age	19 yrs
occupation	Student
P O	Garrison
Color	white
color hair	light
color eyes	blue
Height	5 ft 10 inc
date of issue	August 27 1934.

In Testimony whereof I hereto set  
my hand and affix the seal of the  
Circuit Court for Baltimore County  
this 4th day of January 1935.

*C. Willing Browne, Jr.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Clerk of the Circuit Court for  
Baltimore County




FIGURE 4B. INSIDE OF REPLACEMENT LICENSE ABOVE.



For the 1934-35 seasons, a state license was not always required to hunt on private property. Sometimes an enterprising farmer or rancher would charge the hunter and create handmade private licenses. In these cases, if the hunter wished to shoot waterfowl, a federal stamp was still required (see Figure 5).

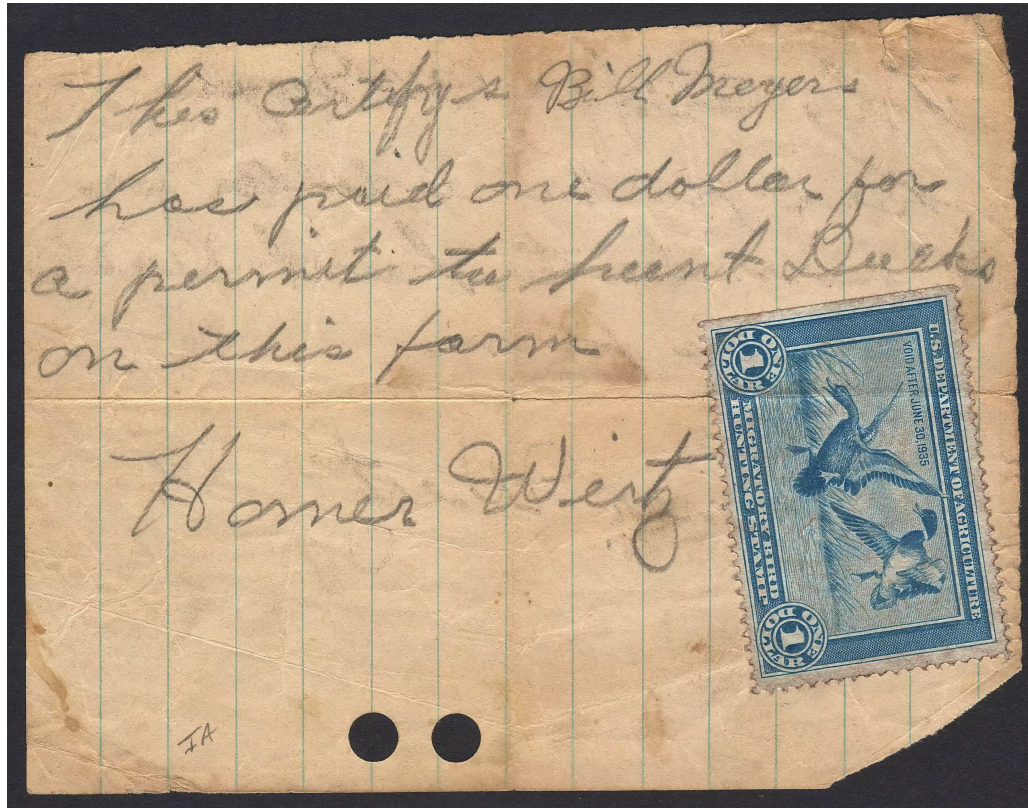


FIGURE 5. HANDMADE LICENSE CREATED BY A FARMER IN IOWA WITH A 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED.

In many states, licensing was handled at the county level. Perhaps the most highly sought after of all county usages were recorded in Hawaii from 1934 through 1936 (after which time waterfowl hunting was no longer permitted). Each of the main Hawaiian Islands was also a county and printed and issued separate hunting licenses. For the 1934-35 seasons, only 137 federal waterfowl stamps were issued in all of the Hawaiian Islands *combined*. At least one example of a 1934-35 federal waterfowl stamp has been recorded used on a Hawaiian hunting license (see Figure 6).



FIGURE 6. REVERSE OF COUNTY OF HAWAII HUNTING LICENSE WITH 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED.



When the federal waterfowl stamp program originated, many military bases and reservations did not print their own licenses. In subsequent years, most installations would print licenses and a few printed and issued their own fish and game stamps. For the 1934-35 seasons, most bases still used state licenses (see Figure 7).

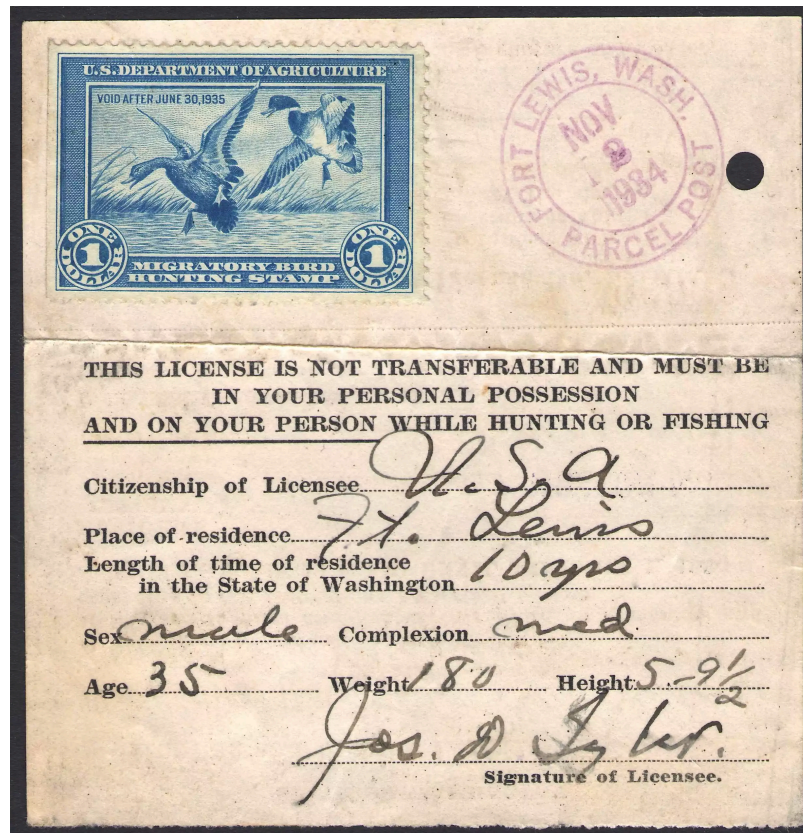


FIGURE 7. REVERSE OF WASHINGTON STATE HUNTING LICENSE  
WITH A 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED,  
CANCELLED "FORT LEWIS WASH. PARCEL POST".

## The First Fish and Game Stamp – Part Four

One of the most popular methods of collecting federal waterfowl stamp usages is to collect stamps affixed to Form 3333. By far and away the most readily available are from 1934-35, as this was the only year the card was actually required to be used. I would estimate there are more 1934-35 Form 3333 usages in collections today than all other years combined. One collector who specializes in 1934-35 Form 3333 usages has told me he has over 200 alone. Although the intended use of Form 3333 became obsolete starting with the 1935-36 issue (when hunters were required to sign their stamp across the face), a surprisingly large number of Post Offices continued to use the form in subsequent years. The latest known usage of a federal waterfowl stamp on Form 3333 is from 1955-56.

There have been many theories proposed for why this occurred. Those most often heard suggest that either 1) Postmasters in remote locations were simply “out of touch” and were not aware that use of the form had been discontinued and 2) that some Postmasters were not very diligent and did not bother to read all of their official correspondence. Either way, it is possible to generalize and state that seldom did later usages originate from Post Offices in highly populated cities or towns.

## Collecting on Form 3333

There are many ways to approach collecting usages on Form 3333. Many collectors are satisfied with owning one example from the state in which they were born or the state in which they currently live. Other collectors find themselves captivated by the blue card and develop bigger ambitions. Perhaps the most common pursuit involves attempting to acquire one Form 3333 with a federal waterfowl stamp affixed from as many different states and territories as possible – ideally every state and territory that issued one.

Such collections usually consist predominantly of 1934-35 usages, either because they are more easily obtainable or because so many collectors favor Darling’s stamp. It is also a fact that later usages command a (sometimes substantial) premium. When attempting to acquire one example from every state and territory, one quickly discovers that about half of the collection can be readily acquired and the other half can be quite difficult. In general, the smaller the physical size of the state or territory in square miles and more specifically – the smaller the population at the time of issue – the more difficult a Form 3333 usage is to acquire.

Three of the keys to this type of collection are the Territories of Alaska and Hawaii and the state of Nevada (see Figures 1, 2 and 3). Alaska and Nevada had the smallest populations during 1934-35, with both being under 100,000. Hawaii is small in both size and population and as I have previously stated, only 137 federal waterfowl stamps were sold there during the 1934-35 season. The Hawaii usage is considered the Holy Grail for collectors of federal waterfowl stamps on Form 3333.



FIGURE 1. 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED TO FORM 3333, CANCELLED WRANGELL, TERRITORY OF ALASKA.





FIGURE 2. 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED TO FORM 3333  
CANCELLED HONOLULU, TERRITORY OF HAWAII.



FIGURE 3. 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED TO FORM 3333,  
CANCELLED BOULDER CITY, NEVADA.



Collectors always seek Form 3333 usages from states that are small in size, such as Connecticut, Delaware and Rhode Island (see Figures 4, 5 and 6). It should be noted that Form 3333 usages from southern states are also very desirable and can be very difficult to acquire. I have heard from many long time collectors that hunters in southern states often did not bother to purchase a stamp (or a license for that matter) prior to hunting for waterfowl.



FIGURE 4. 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED TO FORM 3333, CANCELLED HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT.



FIGURE 5. 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED TO FORM 3333, CANCELLED WILMINGTON, DELAWARE.





FIGURE 6. 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED TO FORM 3333, CANCELLED BARRINGTON, RHODE ISLAND.

Another method of collecting Form 3333 usages is to attempt to acquire as many different types of *cancellations* on the card as possible. Some of the more difficult cancellations are Division of Finance (see Figure 7), General Delivery, and Stamp Section and Stamp Window (see Figures 8 and 9).



FIGURE 7. 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED TO FORM 3333, CANCELLED DIVISION OF FINANCE.





FIGURE 8. 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED TO FORM 3333, CANCELLED STAMP SECTION.



FIGURE 9. 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED TO FORM 3333, CANCELLED STAMP WINDOW.

Perhaps the next most popular method of collecting Form 3333 usages is to attempt to acquire an example from as many different years as possible. This is also the most challenging, as there are relatively few Form 3333 usages in collections today that were issued after 1934-35. Remember, the form was by then obsolete and should not have been used at all. A fair number have been recorded, however, and I am aware of at least one example from every year through 1948-49 as well as 1955-56. In general, the farther removed from 1934-35 (the later the usage), the more difficult to acquire and the greater the premium.

## The First Fish and Game Stamp – Part Five

One of the more intriguing ways of collecting federal waterfowl stamps is to acquire stamps signed by the artist who designed the original artwork. In this way, the miniature piece of art is signed like a larger painting or print. Some advanced collectors attempt to acquire the larger signed original sketches and paintings and a much greater number collect what are commonly known as signed limited edition prints. In any form, a piece bearing a signature done by the artist's own hand has the ability to transcend the inanimate and provide an intimate connection for the collector.

### Collecting Artist Signed Stamps

Most collectors attempt to acquire the artist signature directly on a single stamp itself. This appears to be a result of personal preference coupled with the fact that artist signed plate number singles and artist signed multiples such as plate blocks and sheets are significantly more difficult to acquire and more expensive. When it comes to collecting the signature of Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling, there are several variations to consider. Perhaps the most frequently encountered is "J.N. Darling" (see Figure 1).



FIGURE 1. 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP SIGNED J.N. DARLING.  
NOTE THAT THIS PLATE NUMBER SINGLE IS SIGNED ON THE STAMP ITSELF.

To his friends and those he worked with, Darling was better known by the nickname “Ding”. The nickname was self given and originates from when he worked as a cartoonist at the *Des Moines Register* newspaper in Iowa. At this time he began signing his cartoons Ding, which he made up from the first and last three letters of his last name. Later, when signing stamps for friends and those who requested it, he signed “Ding Darling” (see Figure 2) or simply “Ding” with a flourish and a heart on either side of Ding.



FIGURE 2. 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP SIGNED DING DARLING.  
NOTE THIS TOP PLATE NUMBER SINGLE IS SIGNED IN THE SELVAGE.



The most desirable and intimate form of Darling's signature is known as the *alias*, which combines everything above. This is the most difficult to acquire and was likely done only for those close to him or as a special favor. In this case, the signature is "J. N. Darling alias Ding" with a flourish and a heart surrounding the nickname Ding. On rare occasions, this signature was further personalized by adding "Yours Truly" (see Figure 3).



FIGURE 3. 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP AFFIXED TO FORM 3333  
SIGNED YOURS TRULY J. N. DARLING ALIAS DING.  
NOTE THAT THE STAMP WAS SPECIFICALLY SELECTED WITH  
SELVAGE AT THE RIGHT TO ACCOMMODATE THE ELABORATE SIGNATURE.

## Collecting Original Art And Prints

Over the years a number of advanced collectors have attempted to collect original artwork pertaining to the federal waterfowl stamps. The original art ranges from pencil sketches to the actual piece submitted in the design contest. While of historic importance and possessing tremendous eye appeal, these treasures are complicated to collect and require tremendous patience and persistence. For those who are up for it, the reward in terms of accomplishment can be immense.

The basic problem is that it is often difficult to know when the piece was actually executed by the artist. Pencil sketches are a necessary part of the preliminary design process. However, after the design was selected to be on a stamp – the artist would often receive requests for a copy that was quick and relatively inexpensive. Unless specifically labeled, it is often difficult to distinguish between preliminary sketches and sketches that were done subsequent to the stamp being issued.

To a lesser extent, the same applies to the more finished original art, including pieces that were ostensibly the actual contest entry. Often the artist received requests for copies of the submitted entry and almost as often they would comply with the requests. I am familiar with some *originals* where there are up to four similar copies. In some instances a different medium was used for a copy and that is far less confusing. In many cases the best opinion is rendered by provenance – the paper trail of prior ownership.

I plan to discuss the collecting of both original art and prints in depth in future blog posts. Since there is no original art for the 1934-35 issue in collector's hands, let's move on and talk a little about prints. Prints are essentially copies of the original art that are produced by the artist (later print publishers) in a limited number for sale to collectors, conservationists and wildlife enthusiasts.

The collecting of federal waterfowl stamp prints was at one time a huge part of the hobby and if the results from the recent Siegel auction of the Bill Webster (founder of Wild Wings) collection are any indication, it may be poised for a comeback. A surprisingly large number of serious collectors aggressively competed for the earlier black and white prints and realizations were very strong for most pieces into the early 1970s.

Prior to the 1974-75 issue by David Maass, the number of prints produced and sold by the artists were truly *limited*. Seldom did the number of prints in any one edition for one year exceed 500 and ranges of 100 to 250 was the norm for decades. Starting with the Maass issue, print publishers became more involved and began actively promoting the prints. This led to much larger edition sizes and removed the element of challenge from the mix.

The medium chosen to create the 1934-35 prints was etching, whereby the design was *etched* into a copper plate. Ultimately, the finished plate is inked and pressed into a piece of high quality paper. The ink is transferred to the paper, creating the copied design. Outside the edges of the image the paper is left with a mark indicating the edge of the metal plate. This mark is a combination of a depression that transitions into a slight raised or embossed roll. Beyond the roll extends blank paper in all four directions that originally (when pulled) ranged from two to ten inches.

Over the years, many of the early prints have been reframed, often many times. This has usually resulted in the blank margin being repeatedly trimmed to rid the print of unsightly glue or tape residue. It is important to note that if the existing blank border is less than one inch at the top, either side or below the signature (not the bottom of the image), the print is considered to be defective and its value is significantly reduced.

In the early days of federal print production, there often was not a preset edition size. The artist would *pull* prints on demand – maybe five one day, twenty the next and none for two weeks when twelve more were created. The result is that although some artists kept excellent records and the *known* edition sizes are fairly accurate – some of these known sizes are in fact only estimates that have been handed down from generation to generation of wildlife art dealers. In my opinion, some of these estimates are too low and some are too high.

For example, large numbers of prints for the 1936-37 issue were made over a long period of time and there are *a lot* of them around. How many, is very difficult to say. If I had to guess, I would say between 750 and 1,000. On the other hand, the first edition size for the 1952-53 print is estimated to be 250. I would be surprised if it was even half of that figure. In my experience, the 1952-53 print is very difficult to acquire.

With regard to the 1934-35 issue, the figure tossed around is usually 300 or so. I believe that is on the low side. Regardless, the image has always been extremely popular and the demand has always exceeded the supply. I have noticed that there are two different versions of the 1934-35 print and I do not believe this is common knowledge. In fact, there may have been more than one plate created.

The most common version of the print has a quarter inch space all around between the edge of the image and the edge of the plate – indicated by the depression/roll. Further, on all such prints that I have examined (over a hundred) Darling penciled the title and his signature between the lower (slanted) image edge and the plate mark (see Figures 4 and 5).



**FIGURE 4. MATTED AND FRAMED 1934-35 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP PRINT WITH A PLATE NUMBER SINGLE SIGNED DING DARLING. BOTH THE PRINT AND THE STAMP WERE ORIGINALLY PURCHASED AND THEN SUBSEQUENTLY DEACCESSIONED BY A WILDLIFE MUSEUM ON MARYLAND'S EASTERN SHORE.**





FIGURE 5. ENLARGEMENT CLEARLY SHOWING THE SPACE BETWEEN THE IMAGE EDGES AND THE PLATE MARK.  
NOTE THAT THE PLATE MARK ALSO HAS A SLIGHT RADIUS IN THE CORNERS.

The second version of this print (much less common) has virtually no space between the image edges and the plate mark. This necessitated that Darling title and sign the prints *below the plate mark* (see Figure 6).



**FIGURE 6. ENLARGEMENT OF MATTED AND FRAMED SECOND VERSION  
SHOWING NO SPACE BETWEEN THE EDGE OF THE IMAGE AND THE PLATE MARK.  
NOTE THE CORNERS OF THE PLATE MARK LACK THE RADIUS FOUND ON THE MORE COMMON VERSION.**



Because they they were usually pulled on many different days over a period of many years – even decades, there are many interesting varieties to be found on the early (black and white) federal prints. Over time I shall present and discuss these varieties and welcome input from other collectors who feel they may have something different or “odd”. This is a field that is ripe for study and discussion.

## **The First Fish and Game Stamp – Conclusion**

As we have seen in this five part series of posts, there are practically limitless possibilities for collecting federal waterfowl stamps. There are proofs, singles, plate number singles, plate number blocks, errors and varieties, different types of usages including on license and Form 3333, artist signed, original art and limited edition prints. It is even possible to spend a lifetime collecting, researching and exhibiting a single issue such as the 1934-35 Darling. I know several collectors who have done just that.

Although I used the 1934-35 issue to to present an illustrious overview for the hobby, another federal waterfowl stamp is my personal favorite. Chances are many of you feel the same way as there are so many marvelous stamps to choose from. I will share with you my favorite federal in a future post.

I felt like it was important to pay respect to Darling’s stamp before posting on other fish and game stamps. *For without the first fish and game stamp – we would have no hobby to enjoy.* Now that we have finished this homage, we can move on to what I hope you will find to be a truly exciting experience...