

Collecting Used Federal Duck Stamps – Part One

In the last post, we saw one approach to collecting federal duck stamps, in mint graded condition. Thanks again, to Bob Budesá for sharing his fabulous collection of jumbo stamps with all of us. Today we begin a new “show and tell series” that focuses on the opposite end of the duck stamp spectrum – used stamps, signed by hunters.

By searching for used stamps with small, unobtrusive signatures, you can still experience an exciting thrill of the hunt adventure that is quite challenging and yet surprisingly affordable. The vast majority of these stamps can be acquired for \$5 to \$15 on Ebay or from just about any dealer in U.S. stamps. There are hundreds of thousands of used federal duck stamps out there and some (admittedly small, depending on the time period) percentage of them can be found with very small signatures.

As we will see, these used stamps can still be very pleasing to the eye – if not downright impressive. Often, when a hunter took such care to neatly sign his / her name, they carried the stamp without it being affixed to their license. Therefore, in addition to an unobtrusive signature, the stamps may also retain their full original gum. Collectors who choose this path truly get a lot of “bang for their buck.”

Michael Jaffe and I have joined together to present this series which features some of the very best examples from our combined collections of these little gems. We will see used singles, plate number singles, stamps used on license by themselves and also used in combination with various state and local fish and game stamps.

For those who are not already familiar with all the possibilities for hours upon hours of escapism and great fun in 2020 (and beyond), this series may be an eye-opener and, perhaps, even the start of something new!

Introduction

The federal duck stamps are the longest running series in U.S. stamp history. On March 16, 1934, Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act into law and the first stamps were placed on sale to the public on August 24, 1934. The 1934-35 issue, commonly known by its Scott Catalog number as RW1 – for Revenue Waterfowl [Stamp No.] 1 – were *not* required to be signed by hunters.

Although government officials were worried that hunters might share stamps, the current law stated that no federal waterfowl stamp could be sold unless immediately affixed to the hunter’s license or (in cases when the hunter was exempt from buying a license by state law or no hunting license was otherwise present) a special blue card prepared for this purpose, labeled “Form 3333.”

In either case, the stamps would be affixed to a government-issued document that was signed by the hunter or stamp owner and thus deter the sharing of stamps (see Figures 1-3).

\$2.00 **1934 No. 9486**

STATE OF COLORADO
DEPARTMENT OF GAME AND FISH

Resident Combined Fishing and Small Game Hunting License

This certifies that C. C. Buttle
 whose signature appears hereon and who represents himself to
 be a resident of Booth, Colorado,
 is entitled to fish and to hunt small game in the State of Colo-
 rado, in conformity with law, during the season of 1934.
 This license is not good after December 31, 1934, is not
 transferable, and does not give any protection except to the
 person to whom issued and herein named and while in his actual
 possession.

Date 7-24-34 1934
 Issued by R. G. Parvin
 At Denver Commissioner.

DESCRIPTION OF LICENSEE:

Age 44 Height 5-11 Weight 175 Sex Male
 Color of eyes B Color of hair Gray

C. C. Buttle
 Signature of Licensee.

transportation or sale.
 authorized to make such demand
 produced and an opportunity
 d copy the same.
 its of game or fish within the
 conspicuously attached (Do
 s for Transportation Permits,
 out of the State, communicate
 R. G. PARVIN,
 oner, State Capitol, Denver, Colo.


U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
 VOID AFTER JUNE 30, 1935

ONE DOLLAR **ONE DOLLAR**
MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING STAMP

FIGURE 1. UNSIGNED 1934-35 FEDERAL DUCK STAMP AFFIXED TO A 1934 COLORADO
 RESIDENT COMBINED FISHING AND SMALL GAME HUNTING LICENSE.
 NOTE THE LICENSE IS SIGNED BY THE HUNTER IN INK.



FIGURE 2. UNSIGNED 1934-35 FEDERAL DUCK STAMP ON FORM 3333, CANCELLED OCTOBER 1 AT SOUTH HAVEN, MICHIGAN.

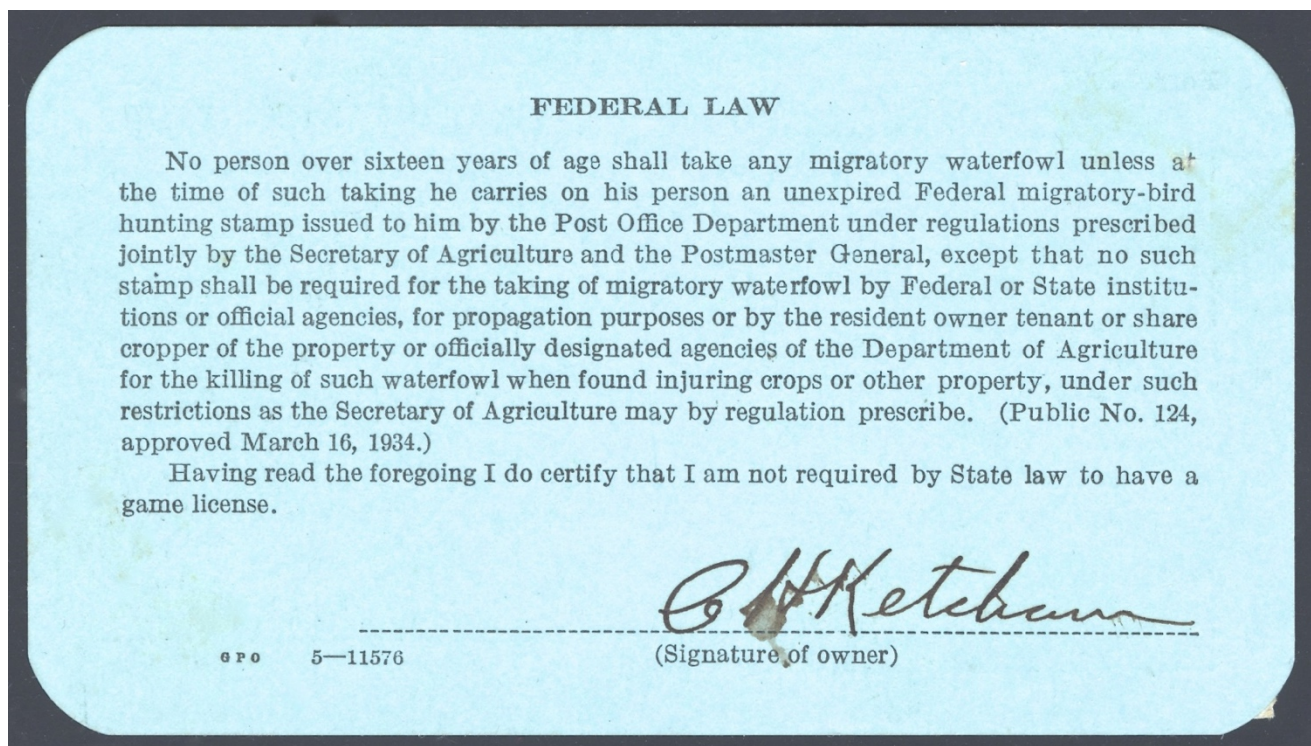


FIGURE 3. OWNERS SIGNATURE ON THE BACK OF THE FORM 3333 SHOWN ABOVE.

This law was in effect until two weeks prior to the stamps being taken off sale and destroyed in 1935. It seems that stamp collectors had taken a strong liking to the new oversized stamps that featured artwork by famed cartoonist (and current Director of the Bureau of Biological Survey) Jay N. Darling. Collectors were buying a lot of stamps affixed to form 3333's and wanted to buy unused stamps too (see Figures 4-6).



FIGURE 4. OFFICIALS HOLDING JAY N. "DING" DARLING'S ORIGINAL ARTWORK FOR THE FIRST FEDERAL DUCK STAMP.

Bird Hunt Stamps Being Sold in N. D.

Federal migratory bird hunting stamps are now being sold in North Dakota, according to M. O. Steen of Bismarck, secretary of the North Dakota division of the Izaak Walton League.

Steen received the first stamp issued in Bismarck, he said Saturday. He pointed out that the monies derived from this stamp goes into a fund to be used for acquiring and maintaining federally-owned nesting areas and sanctuaries.

The stamps may be obtained in the postoffices at all county seats, and are affixed to the applicant's state hunting license, or to a special card provided for the purpose.

Steen reported many stamp collectors are buying the stamps and said a person may purchase as many of them as he wishes.

FIGURE 5. ARTICLE WHICH APPEARED IN THE BISMARCK TRIBUNE ON SEPTEMBER 1, 1934. NOTE THE LAST PARAGRAPH.

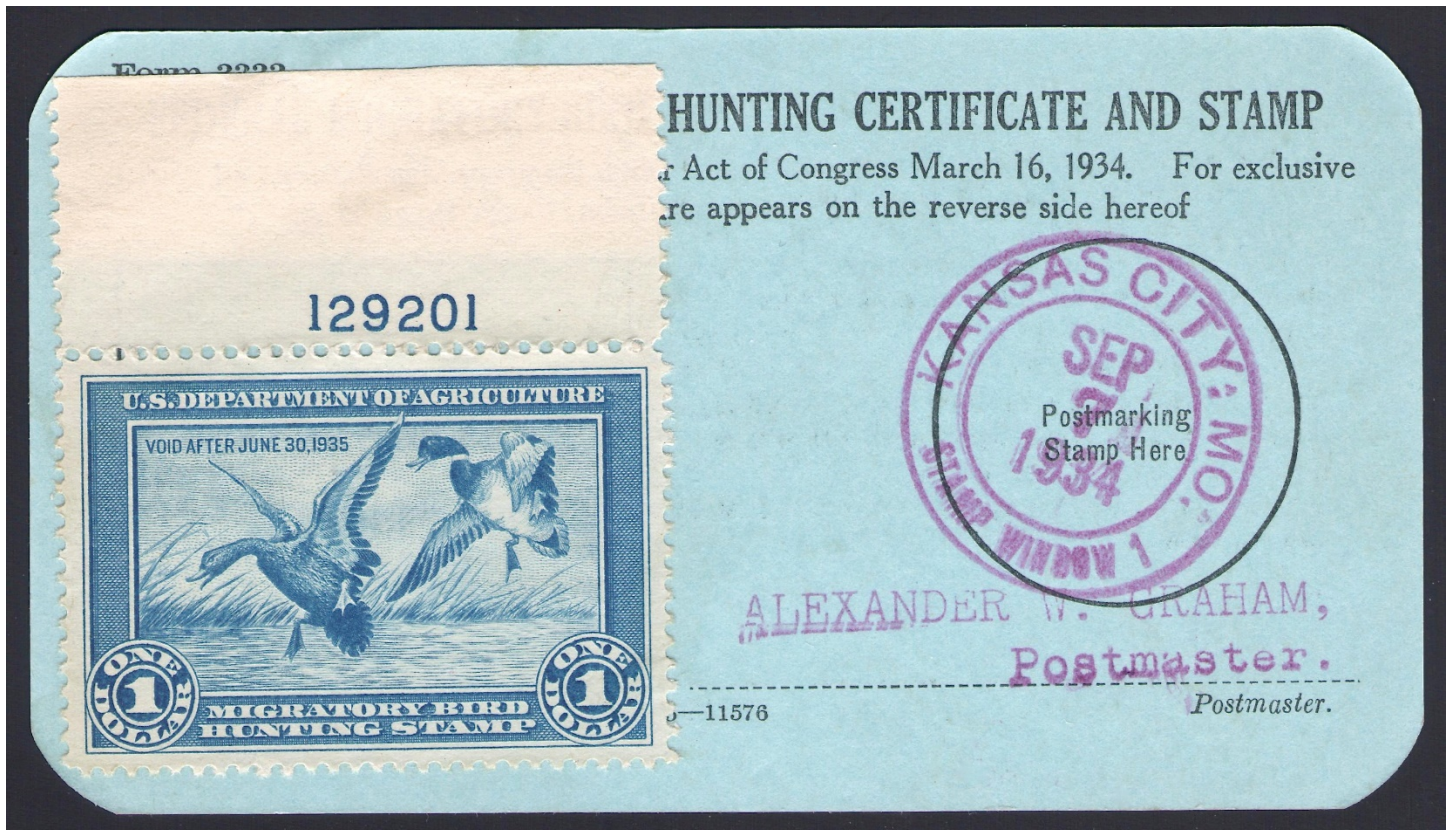


FIGURE 6. 1934-35 FEDERAL DUCK STAMP ON FORM 3333, CANCELLED SEPTEMBER 7 AT KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI. YOU CAN BET THIS SUPERB TOP PLATE NUMBER SINGLE WITH JUMBO MARGINS WAS PURCHASED BY A STAMP COLLECTOR!

As the primary purpose of the duck stamps was to raise badly needed revenue to fund migratory bird conservation and restoration programs, the government was not about to turn a deaf ear to stamp collectors and their dollars. When the law was lifted on June 17, 1935, many collectors and dealers purchased plate number blocks and complete panes of the beautiful stamp (see Figure 7).



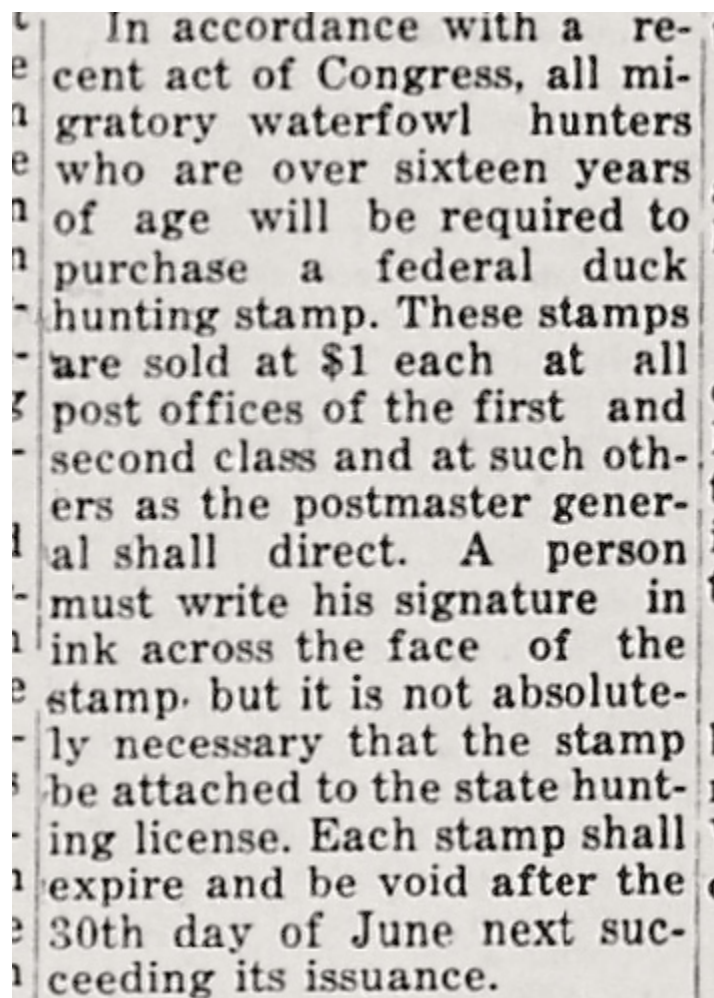
FIGURE 7. 1934-35 FEDERAL DUCK STAMP (RW1), COMPLETE PANE OF 28 UNUSED STAMPS FROM THE LOWER LEFT (LL) OF A SHEET. PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD PRAGER.

This was all well and good; however, it created a new problem for the Bureau of Biological Survey (later to become the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service). If unused stamps were allowed to be sold to the general public – what would prevent unscrupulous hunters from sharing stamps?

The answer was an amendment to the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act made on June 15, 1935 (two days before the unused stamps went on sale). This amendment would have a profound effect on the future hobby of fish and game stamp collecting and read:

*“Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress Assembled, That no person over the age of sixteen years of age shall take any migratory waterfowl unless at the time of such taking he carries on his person an unexpired Federal Migratory-bird hunting stamp **validated by his signature written by himself in ink across the face of the stamp** [my emphasis] prior to his taking such birds...”*

At this point the stamp was not required to be affixed to a license or card, just as long as it was signed by the hunter (see figure 8).



In accordance with a recent act of Congress, all migratory waterfowl hunters who are over sixteen years of age will be required to purchase a federal duck hunting stamp. These stamps are sold at \$1 each at all post offices of the first and second class and at such others as the postmaster general shall direct. A person must write his signature in ink across the face of the stamp, but it is not absolutely necessary that the stamp be attached to the state hunting license. Each stamp shall expire and be void after the 30th day of June next succeeding its issuance.

FIGURE 8. ARTICLE WHICH APPEARED IN THE SEPTEMBER 27, 1935 ISSUE OF THE COOLIDGE EXAMINER.

The Early Period: 1935 – 1945

Although hunters were not required to sign their stamps for the 1934-35 season, both Michael and I have seen a number of signed examples. Michael has a RW1 that is signed and dated 11-6-34, during the hunting season and – well before the law went into effect (see Figure 9).



FIGURE 9. USED RW1, DATED NOVEMBER 6, 1934.

For the purpose of organizing this series of posts, we have divided the set into several different time periods. The first or **Early Period** extends from the time the law went into effect, on June 15, 1935, through the 1945-46 season. This division is not arbitrary and was based on the following:

First, the twelve duck stamps issued from 1934-35 through 1945-46 (RW1-12) were the only ones printed on a flat bed press without an inscription on the back, so it makes sense to discuss them together. They were produced in large sheets of 112 subjects, which were subsequently cut down into four individual panes consisting of 28 stamps each. This was to facilitate distribution (shipping) to Post Offices and then, upon their arrival, storage and handling on the part of postal clerks.

The cutting process resulted in every stamp located along two adjacent sides of each pane having straight edges. This represents over one-third of the stamps and while a natural straight edge is not a defect per se, most collectors think it detracts from an aesthetic perspective (see Figure 7) and are not so interested in them when trying to put together a set with small signatures.

Duck stamp sales remained relatively low until the end of WWII, when servicemen returned to the states. They had now been trained to use guns and gravitated toward recreational or “sport” hunting. Sales of the 1946-47 stamp (RW13) surpassed the two million mark for the first time (2,016,841).

In fact, duck stamp *collecting* was not really “a thing” prior to the end of WWII. In the early period, the pretty oversized stamps attracted a lot of attention from collectors and wildlife enthusiasts, but until there was a dozen or so – there was not really enough different stamps to interest very many people in forming a collection.

The nascent duck stamp hobby was helped along by the promotion and collecting of limited edition prints by the artists who created the designs for the vignettes. However, in the beginning, neither Ding Darling nor Frank Benson produced prints from their artwork, which had been selected by a committee within the Bureau of Biological Survey.

Richard Bishop was the first artist to offer a duck stamp print, copied from his original art that was selected for the 1936-37 vignette (see Figure 10). Benson did not do the same until 1942 and Darling waited a couple of more years, finally making it possible to collect a complete set in 1944.



FIGURE 10. 1936 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP PRINT (MATTED), BY RICHARD BISHOP.

For all the reasons above, there were fewer duck stamps sold prior to the end of WWII and, more to the point, people did not view them in the same way as they would come to do so after the war. Therefore, in the early period as defined herein, fewer people took the time to carefully sign their stamps and they are accordingly more difficult to find with small signatures today (see Figure 11).



FIGURE 11. RW2 ON FORM 3333, CANCELLED NOVEMBER 27 AT BENJAMIN FRANKLIN STATION, WASHINGTON, D.C. NOTE THIS LARGE RANDOMLY PLACED SIGNATURE WAS TYPICAL (OR BETTER) FOR THE PERIOD.

Even when a collector took great care to pick out a nice stamp and carefully signed it, often little attention was given to placement of the signature (see Figure 12). At this point, duck stamps were not generally accepted as miniature works of art.



**FIGURE 12. USED RW2 TOP PLATE NUMBER SINGLE
WITH SIGNATURE OBSCURING THE ARTWORK.**

That is not to say that this was always the case. In the following examples, the hunter took care not to obscure the artwork (see Figures 13, 14 and 15).

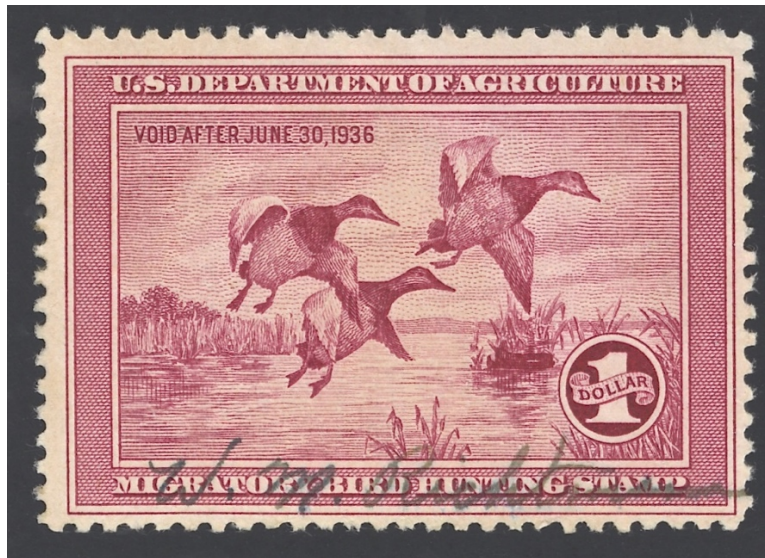


FIGURE 13. USED RW2 WITH A CAREFULLY PLACED, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.



FIGURE 14. RW2 ON FORM 3333 CANCELLED OCTOBER 31 (HALLOWEEN) AT POPLAR BRANCH, NORTH CAROLINA.



FIGURE 15. RW3 ON FORM 3333 CANCELLED OCTOBER 9 AT DENTON, MONTANA.

Retail prices for early period sound (no faults) used stamps with neat signatures typically run \$20 to \$75 and if you are fortunate enough to locate a nice RW2, it could easily run \$100 or more. Small or very small signatures like some of those shown below would likely be priced at a hefty premium.

However, part of the fun in collecting this area is that a lot of sellers on Ebay – and even many general U.S. stamp dealers – do not really differentiate when it comes to pricing used federal duck stamps with small signatures, so there are lots of opportunities to acquire eye-catching stamps for reasonable prices!

In his fabulous collection of federal duck stamps with small signatures, Michael Jaffe has all the stamps from the early period with very small, unobtrusive signatures by the same hunter we believe was named C.H. Bry. The first initial is stylized, so we can't be certain (see Figures 16 and 17).



FIGURE 16. RW3 WITH SMALL SIGNATURE BY C.H. BRY.



FIGURE 17. RW4 WITH SMALL SIGNATURE BY C.H. BRY.

Next we have an RW4 top plate number single used on an Iowa hunting license. The stamp has been carefully signed and dated 10-16-37 by the hunter, during the season (see Figure 18).



FIGURE 18. RW4 TOP PLATE NUMBER SINGLE USED ON AN IOWA RESIDENT HUNTING LICENSE.

Next, three more stamps signed by C.H. Bry and a RW6 bottom plate number single; the latter with a small, unobtrusive signature (see Figures 19-22).



FIGURE 19. RW5 SMALL SIGNATURE GEM BY C.H. BRY.



FIGURE 20. RW6 WITH SMALL SIGNATURE BY C.H. BRY.



FIGURE 21. RW6 BOTTOM PLATE NUMBER SINGLE WITH SMALL SIGNATURE.



FIGURE 22. RW7 SMALL SIGNATURE GEM BY C.H. BRY.

Next, we have a 1940-41 California Citizen (Resident) Hunting License with a stamp signed by the pioneer fish and game collector **E.L. Vanderford**. Van told me he always carried his federal stamp loose while hunting and did not affix or sign it unless stopped by a game warden.

He bought his first hunting license when he was only ten years old and purchased federal duck stamps from 1934 – 1987. In all the years, he only had to sign his stamp four times – at the end of every other season, he added another carefully preserved mint stamp to his fish and game collection (see Figures 23, 24 and 25).

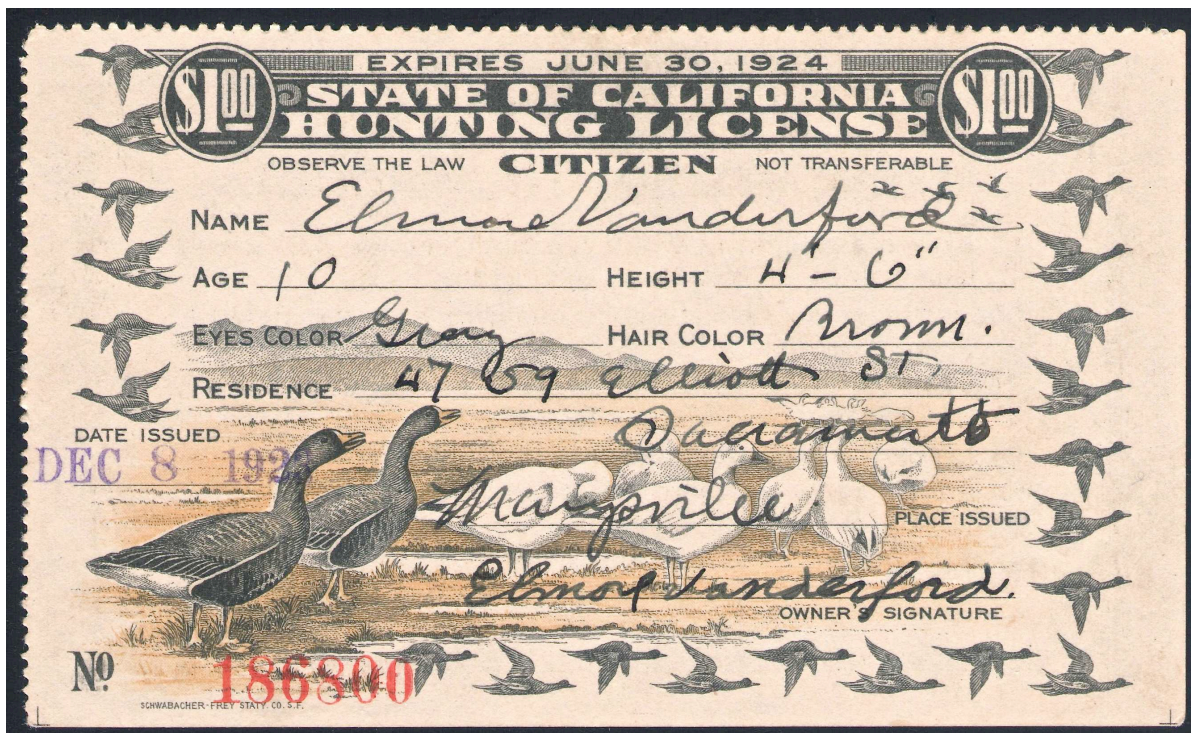


FIGURE 23. E.L. VANDERFORD'S FIRST HUNTING LICENSE – AGE 10.



Next, we have two examples of my favorite federal duck stamp, the 1941-42 issue (RW8) whose charming Ruddy Duck artwork was created by E.R. Kalmbach. First, a used single with a small signature that largely fits in the lower border, between the edge of the design and the perforations. The second is a top plate number single (see Figures 26 and 27).



FIGURE 26. RW8 WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE.



FIGURE 27. RW8 TOP PLATE NUMBER SINGLE.

Next we have an RW8 with a very small signature *and* a very unusual usage – before signing his stamp the hunter affixed it to the inside of a **1941 Federal Migratory Bird Hunting Regulations!** (see Figure 28).

Remember, we saw above that “it was not absolutely necessary for the duck stamp to be affixed to a state hunting license.”

SYNOPSIS OF OPEN SEASONS					SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION	
STATE	WOOD DUCK	OTHER DUCKS, GOOSE, BRANT, COOT	RAIL, GALLINULE	WOODCOCK	DOVE	
Alabama	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Nov. 20-Jan. 31		Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
Alaska						Alaska.—Duck, goose, brant, coot, in Fur Districts 1 and 3, Oct. 1-Nov. 29; in remainder of Territory, Sept. 1-Oct. 30.
Arizona	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Sept. 1-Nov. 30	Dec. 1-Dec. 15	Sept. 1-Oct. 12 ¹	Arizona.—White-winged dove, Sept. 1-Sept. 15. Band-tailed pigeon, Sept. 16-Sept. 30.
Arkansas					Sept. 1-Oct. 12	
California	Oct. 16-Dec. 14	Oct. 16-Dec. 14	Sept. 1-Nov. 30	Oct. 15-Oct. 29	Sept. 16-Oct. 27	California.—Band-tailed pigeon, Dec. 1-Dec. 15.
Colorado					Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
Connecticut	Oct. 16-Dec. 14	Oct. 16-Dec. 14	Sept. 1-Nov. 30	Nov. 15-Nov. 29	Sept. 16-Oct. 27	Connecticut.—Scoter (sea coot), in open coastal waters only, beyond harbor lines, Sept. 15-Oct. 15; thereafter, from land or water, Oct. 16-Dec. 14.
Delaware					Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
Florida	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Sept. 1-Nov. 30		Sept. 16-Oct. 27	Maine.—Scoter (sea coot), in open coastal waters only, beyond harbor lines, Sept. 15-Sept. 30; thereafter, from land or water, Oct. 1-Nov. 29.
Georgia	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Sept. 1-Nov. 30		Dec. 1-Jan. 11	Scoter (sea coot), in open coastal waters only, beyond harbor lines, Sept. 15-Sept. 30; thereafter, from land or water, Oct. 1-Nov. 29.
Hawaii					Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
Idaho					Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
Illinois					Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
Indiana					Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
Iowa					Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
Kansas					Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
Kentucky	Oct. 16-Dec. 14	Oct. 16-Dec. 14	Sept. 1-Nov. 30		Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
Louisiana	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Sept. 1-Nov. 30		Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
Maine					Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
Maryland	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Sept. 1-Nov. 30		Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
Massachusetts					Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
Michigan					Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
Minnesota					Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
Mississippi	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Sept. 1-Nov. 30		Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
Missouri	Oct. 16-Dec. 14	Oct. 16-Dec. 14	Sept. 1-Nov. 30		Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
Montana					Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
Nebraska					Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
Nevada					Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
New Hampshire					Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
New Jersey					Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
New Mexico					Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
New York					Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
North Carolina	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Sept. 1-Nov. 30		Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
North Dakota					Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
Ohio					Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
Oklahoma					Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
Oregon					Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
Pennsylvania	Oct. 16-Dec. 14	Oct. 16-Dec. 14	Sept. 1-Nov. 30		Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
Puerto Rico					Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
Rhode Island					Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
South Carolina	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Sept. 1-Nov. 30		Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
South Dakota					Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
Tennessee	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Sept. 1-Nov. 30		Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
Texas	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Sept. 1-Nov. 30		Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
Utah					Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
Vermont					Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
Virginia	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Nov. 2-Dec. 31	Sept. 1-Nov. 30		Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
Washington					Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
West Virginia					Sept. 16-Oct. 27	
Wisconsin					Dec. 1-Jan. 11	
Wyoming					Sept. 16-Oct. 27	

OPEN SEASONS

Alaska.—Duck, goose, brant, coot, in Fur Districts 1 and 3, Oct. 1-Nov. 29; in remainder of Territory, Sept. 1-Oct. 30.

Arizona.—White-winged dove, Sept. 1-Sept. 15. Band-tailed pigeon, Sept. 16-Sept. 30.

California.—Band-tailed pigeon, Dec. 1-Dec. 15.

Connecticut.—Scoter (sea coot), in open coastal waters only, beyond harbor lines, Sept. 15-Oct. 15; thereafter, from land or water, Oct. 16-Dec. 14.

Maine.—Scoter (sea coot), in open coastal waters only, beyond harbor lines, Sept. 15-Sept. 30; thereafter, from land or water, Oct. 1-Nov. 29.

Scoter (sea coot), in open coastal waters only, beyond harbor lines, Sept. 15-Sept. 30; thereafter, from land or water, Oct. 1-Nov. 29.

Band-tailed pigeon, Sept. 16-Sept. 30.

Woodcock, in that part of State north of main line of New York Central Railroad extending from Buffalo to Albany, and north of main line of Boston & Albany Railroad extending from Albany to the Massachusetts line, Oct. 1-Oct. 15; in rest of State (except Long Island), Oct. 15-Oct. 29; on Long Island, Nov. 1-Nov. 15. Scoter (sea coot), in open coastal waters only, beyond harbor lines, Sept. 15-Oct. 15; thereafter, from land or water, Oct. 16-Dec. 14.

Oregon.—Band-tailed pigeon, Sept. 1-Sept. 15.

Rhode Island.—Scoter (sea coot), in open coastal waters only, beyond harbor lines, Sept. 15-Oct. 15; thereafter, from land or water, Oct. 16-Dec. 14.

Texas.—Mourning dove, north zone, Sept. 1-Oct. 12; south zone, Sept. 16-Oct. 27. White-winged dove, Sept. 16-Sept. 25.

Washington.—Band-tailed pigeon, Sept. 16-Sept. 30.

NO OPEN SEASON

Shorebirds (except woodcock), crane, swan, wood duck (except as noted), Ross' goose, snow goose in Idaho, and snow goose and brant in States bordering on the Atlantic Ocean.

DAILY BAG, POSSESSION, AND SHIPMENT LIMITS

Ducks, 10 in the aggregate (including only 1 wood duck), except that the daily bag limit may not include more than 3 of either or both of reared or buffheads. (Note: Scoters (sea coots) are ducks. Geese (including brant), 3 in the aggregate; 3 additional blue geese only, or a total of not more than 6 blue geese if no other geese are taken. Not more than 3 geese in the aggregate of all kinds in any 7 consecutive days in the following counties: Siskiyou, Calif.; Alexander, Ill.; and Hyde, N. C. Rails and gallinules (except snipe and coot), 15 in the aggregate; snipe, 15; coot, 25. Woodcock, 4. Mourning dove and white-winged dove, 12 in the aggregate. Band-tailed pigeon, 10.

Not more than 2 days' bag limit of ducks (including only 1 wood duck), geese (including brant), nor more than 12 blue geese only if no other kinds are held, and woodcock, and 1 day's limit of other migratory game birds may be possessed at one time. Possession of migratory game birds is permitted for not more than 20 days following the close of the open season in the State where taken.

Not more than 2 days' bag limit of ducks (including only 1 wood duck), geese, brant, or woodcock, or more than 1 day's limit of other migratory game birds may be transported out of a State in any one calendar week. When shipped the packages must be marked on outside to indicate the numbers and kinds therein and names and addresses of shippers and consignees.

HUNTING METHODS

Permitted: Shotgun, not larger than No. 10 gauge, fired from the shoulder; bow and arrow; dog; blind or floating device other than a sinkbox.

Prohibited: Automobile; aircraft, sinkbox (battery); powerboat, sailboat, or any device towed by powerboat or sailboat; rifle; automatic-loading or hand-operated repeating shotgun of more than 3-shell capacity in the magazine and chamber combined; live duck or goose decoys; the hunting of waterfowl by means, aid, or use of cattle, horses, or mules (as blinds or in enabling the hunter to approach the birds), or the hunting of waterfowl and doves by means, aid, or use, directly or indirectly, of corn, wheat, oats, or other grain or product thereof, salt, or any kind of feed whatsoever, placed, deposited, distributed, scattered, or otherwise put out.

SHOOTING HOURS

Duck, goose, brant, coot: Sunrise to 4 p. m.
Dove, rail, gallinule, woodcock, band-tailed pigeon: Sunrise to sunset.

¹ See Supplementary Information.

FIGURE 28. RW8 USED ON A 1941 A COPY OF THE 1941 FEDERAL MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING REGULATIONS (CLICK TO ENLARGE).

Next, we have a 1942-43 stamp (RW9) signed in a color of ink that closely blends into the design, followed by two more by C.H. Bry (see Figures 29, 30 and 31). The placement of Bry's signature on the RW11 shows that he willfully sought to contribute to the overall aesthetic – to stunning effect!



FIGURE 29. RW9 WITH AN UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.

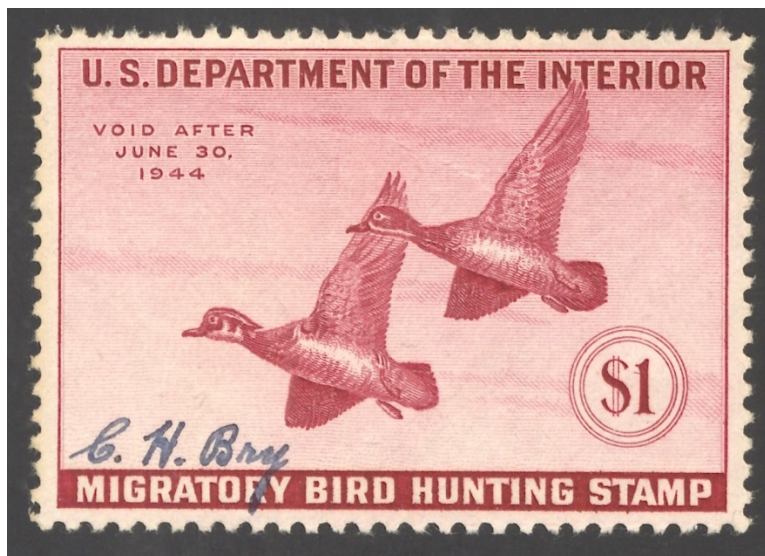


FIGURE 30. RW10 WITH SMALL SIGNATURE BY C.H. BRY.

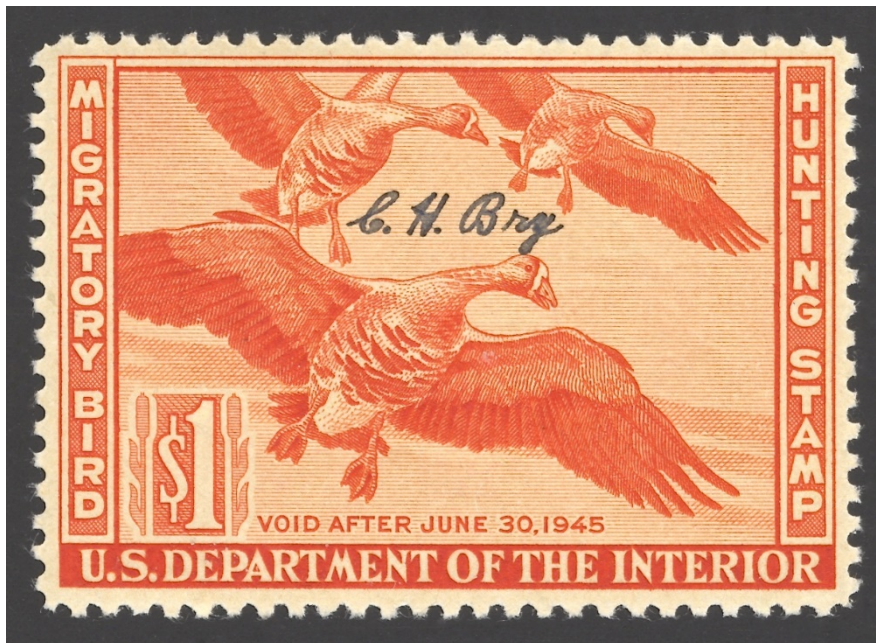


FIGURE 31. RW6 WITH SMALL SIGNATURE BY C.H. BRY.

To close the early period, we have a 1945-46 stamp (RW12) signed by the noted duck stamp collector **Alvin C. Broholm**. Alvin collected and exhibited artist signed federal duck stamps. His real passion was for top plate number singles and in 1953, eight years after carefully signing this stamp, his exhibit won the Grand Award at the Trans Mississippi Philatelic Exhibition (see Figures 32-34).



FIGURE 32. ALVIN BROHOLM SHOWING HIS EXHIBIT TO JOHN L. COOPER, PAST PRESIDENT OF THE CEDAR VALLEY (IOWA) STAMP CLUB, CIRCA 1943.



FIGURE 33. IN 1953, ALVIN C. BROHOLM RECEIVED THE GRAND AWARD AT THE 20TH TRANS MISSISSIPPI PHILATELIC EXHIBITION.



FIGURE 34. RW12 WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE BY A.C. BROHOLM.

Collecting Used Federal Duck Stamps – Part Two

As we continue our show and tell series, we will look at the 13 federal duck stamps that were used starting after WWII and continuing through 1958-59. This includes the ten-year period (1949 – 1958) we commonly referred to as the “\$2 Ducks”. For a number of reasons, these stamps are much easier to find with small signatures than those from the Early Period we saw in Part One – so collecting them is a little less challenging and a lot more fun!

Introduction

The return of servicemen following the end of WWII ushered in one of the largest hunting booms in modern U.S. history. The average number of federal duck stamps sold during the 13-year period discussed in this post was almost *double* the average for the 12 years covered in Part One (2,144,343 compared to 1,087,536).

And while the stamps were still printed in large sheets of 112 subjects on a flat bed press, perforated gutters (blank space) now bisected the sheets horizontally and vertically so that when cut into four panes – all of the stamps were perforated on all four sides. There were no longer any straight edges (see Figure 1).

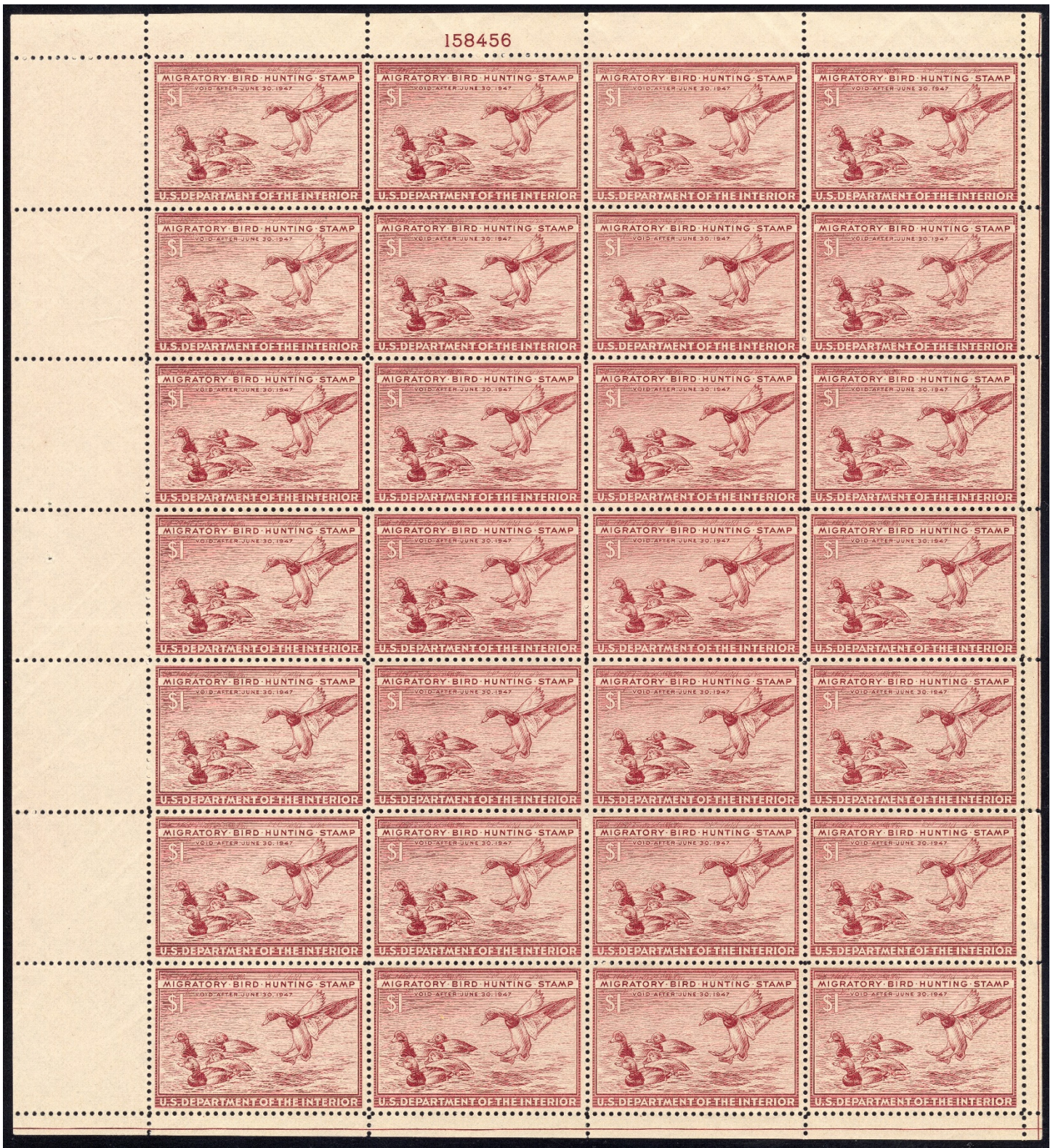


FIGURE 1. 1946-47 FEDERAL DUCK STAMP (RW13), COMPLETE PANE OF 28 UNUSED STAMPS FROM THE UPPER LEFT (UL) OF A SHEET. NOTE THE PERFORATED GUTTERS AT THE RIGHT AND BOTTOM. THE "GUIDE LINES" LOCATED TOWARD THE OUTER EDGES OF THE GUTTERS WERE INTENDED TO FACILITATE ACCURATE CUTS.

A message was now printed on the back of each stamp, informing hunters "IT IS UNLAWFUL TO HUNT WATERFOWL UNLESS YOU SIGN YOUR NAME IN INK ON THE FACE OF THIS STAMP." From 1946-47 through 1953-54 (RW13-20), *offset* plate number 47510 was printed in the selvage on the back of each sheet, next to position 24 on the upper left pane only (see Figure 2).



FIGURE 2. RW13 PANE FROM THE UPPER RIGHT (UR) POSITION ON THE ORIGINAL SHEET SHOWING MESSAGE AND OFFSET PLATE NUMBER. SHOWN COURTESY OF RICHARD PRAGER.

Starting with the 1950-51 issue (RW17), this offset number was intended to be trimmed off. However, a number of “reverse plate number singles” and at least one “reverse plate number block” of six (currently in Michael Jaffe’s collection), have been recorded on RW17 with at least a portion of the number still visible (see Figure 3).

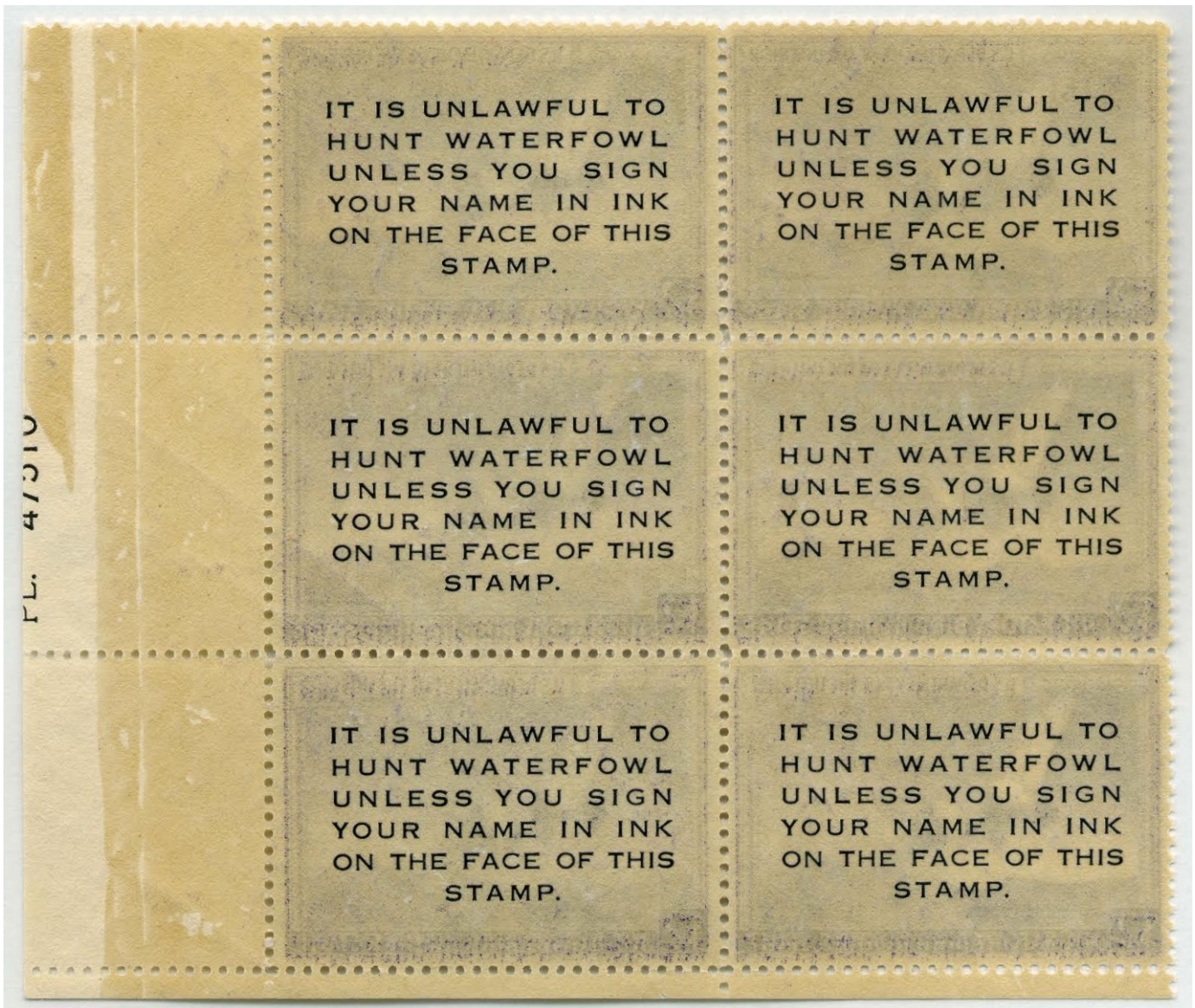


FIGURE 3. REVERSE OFFSET PLATE NUMBER BLOCK OF RW17. NOTE THE PLATE NUMBER (47510) IS ONLY PARTIALLY VISIBLE. FOR THIS ISSUE, THE NUMBER SHOULD HAVE BEEN COMPLETELY REMOVED WHEN THE SELVAGE WAS TRIMMED. COURTESY OF MICHAEL JAFFE.

On rare occasions, the sheets were miscut to such an extent that the full gutter – including the perforations on both sides of the blank space – was still attached to a row of stamps on one of the two bisected panes. This is technically a production error and a stamp with the full gutter still attached is known as a gutter snipe (see Figure 3).



FIGURE 3. 1951-52 FEDERAL DUCK STAMP (RW18) GUTTER SNIPE.

The significance of the production changes outlined above, as they relate to our current series of posts, is that roughly double the number of stamps were printed during the Post WWII Period and *none of them* are excluded from our search for eye catching stamps with small signatures due to unsightly straight edges. Further, the message on the back helped deter hunters from *not* signing their stamps.

In a nutshell, there is a **much larger population** of Post WWII signed duck stamps to choose from today as compared to those from the Early Period.

Birds of a Feather...

As we saw in Part One, once a dozen or so federal duck stamps had been issued, collecting them became *a thing*. Much of this was owing to the innate appeal of the attractive, oversized stamps themselves. However, the nascent hobby of duck stamp collecting also greatly benefitted from the promotion and collecting of **duck stamp prints** – and vice versa.

At this time, duck stamp prints consisted primarily of limited-edition series (plural: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.) of dry point etchings or lithographs made or authorized by the artists whose artwork was *selected* by a special committee, initially set up within the Bureau of Biological Survey and later its successor, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, to appear on a duck stamp.

Bureau of Engraving and Printing employees used the original artwork as a model for the central image or *vignette* around which they designed and engraved the stamps. Subsequently, the artist or (in many cases) a specialist authorized and contracted by the artist – used the *same artwork* as a model to engrave a larger copy onto a metal plate or draw one onto a litho stone. For a detailed explanation of both processes, visit: <https://waterfowlstampsandmore.com/favorite-federal-duck-stamp-part-four/>

In this light, both the stamps and the prints are seen as much the same thing – copies made from the same original artwork (see Figures 4 and 5). One was smaller and fit conveniently in an album; the other was larger and, most often, displayed in a frame on the wall of a home or office.



FIGURE 4. RW9 UNCOMPLETED STAMP DESIGN OR ESSAY. COURTESY OF MICHAEL JAFFE.



FIGURE 5. 1942 FEDERAL DUCK STAMP PRINT (MATTED) – A DRY POINT ETCHING BY AIDEN LASSELL RIPLEY.

After Frank Benson (1942) and Ding Darling (1944) produced copies of their artwork in print form, stamp collectors (along with wildlife art collectors and bird, nature and wildlife enthusiasts) had closely related items to collect and, in many cases, another collection to work toward completing.

By the same token, the wildlife art collectors and bird, nature and wildlife enthusiasts – before having their duck stamp prints framed – usually acceded to convention and sought out a duck stamp to have placed directly below it. Many public and private **museums** were among the earliest collectors and some of them put their collections of framed prints and stamps on display for public viewing.

The recognition engendered by each of these closely related hobbies tended to reinforce and in other ways benefit the other – to great positive effect. Both hobbies were soon to get a tremendous boost in the way of *annual* free publicity from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

The First Duck Stamp Contest

In 1948 **Robert Hines** (whose artwork was selected for the 1946-47 duck stamp) left his position as staff artist for the Ohio Division of Conservation, moved to northern Virginia and went to work as an artist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He worked directly under the legendary Rachel Carlson, for more, visit:

<https://waterfowlstampsandmore.com/john-olin-ding-darling-maynard-reece-king-buck-making-icon-part-three-2/>

After observing the committee's selection process for the annual duck stamp, Hines determined the USFWS *could do better*. He proposed an open contest with stated rules, guidelines and impartial judges – the format that is still used today. For this reason, Robert Hines has become known as the “Father of the Federal Duck Stamp Contest”. For many years, the art contest was judged in private, in a room at the Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C. (see Figure 6).



FIGURE 6. ROBERT HINES, LEFT SIDE OF THE MEN STANDING (RIGHT SIDE LOOKING AT THE PHOTO), PRESIDES OVER AN EARLY DUCK STAMP CONTEST. THE FOUR MEN TO HIS RIGHT (LEFT SIDE OF THE PHOTO) ARE JUDGES. CIRCA LATE 1950S-EARLY 1960S.

Contrary to popular belief – and the current USFWS website – the first federal duck stamp contest was *not* held in 1949, rather, **in 1950**. Walter Webber's artwork featuring a pair of trumpeter swans flying over Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in Montana was chosen by the judges as the first contest winner (see Figure 7).



FIGURE 7. THE ORIGINAL GOUACHE WITH BLACK AND WHITE WASH PAINTING BY WALTER A. WEBER.
COURTESY OF RICHARD PRAGER.

For a detailed explanation of the actual facts surrounding this landmark event, see <https://waterfowlstampsandmore.com/walter-weber-winner-first-federal-duck-stamp-contest-part-three/>

The annual art contest and, more to the point, the tremendous amount of publicity accompanying it (articles and stories carried in newspapers and magazines around the country) brought widespread, unprecedented attention and recognition to both the migratory bird stamp conservation program and the new hobbies that were growing up around it. Over time, the venerable contest would prove to be an uninterrupted stimulus for collecting duck stamps and duck stamp prints.

Duck and Revenue Stamps Earn Accolades

As we saw in Part One, **Alvin C. Broholm** became infatuated with collecting federal duck stamps. He would send unused stamps to the artists and ask if they would sign them for him. After deciding to specialize in artist signed top plate number singles, he exhibited at local, regional and national stamp shows for over ten years.

In 1953, Alvin's exhibit of duck stamps won the Grand Award at one of the largest shows held in the Midwest until that time, the Trans Mississippi Philatelic Exhibition.

Alvin's exhibit introduced many serious philatelists (along with their family members and friends) to the unique set of stamps that was annually designed by one of our country's foremost wildlife artists. He also proved to them that a collector could exhibit this philatelic niche at stamp shows on any level and do very well. Alvin's efforts were invaluable in the development of the duck stamp collecting hobby under the auspices of organized philately. He paved the way for future pioneer fish and game collectors to exhibit their specialty at shows – collectors like Joseph Janousek, Mrs. Powell and Les Lebo.

For another philatelist who specialized in revenue stamps, an even bigger honor was soon to be bestowed. **Morton Dean Joyce** was one of the greatest revenue collectors of all time. He had a tremendous collection of state revenues and aggressively pursued fish and game stamps (for an entire series on Joyce and his contributions to our fish and game hobby, see *Morton Dean Joyce: Fish and Game Hall of Famer – Part One*).

Joyce was also an enthusiastic exhibitor. The Fifth International Stamp Exhibition (FIPEX) was held in New York City from **April 28 through May 6, 1956** (see Figure 8). For this huge event, one of the largest stamp shows ever held in the U.S., Mort entered an exhibit consisting of portions of his now unsurpassed revenue collection – and won the National Grand Award.



FIGURE 8. SOUVENIR SHEET ISSUED FOR THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL STAMP EXHIBITION, HELD IN NYC IN 1956.

This monumental feat would be the equivalent to winning the APS Champion of Champions today and brought an unprecedented amount of positive attention and *respect* to all U.S. revenue stamps, in general.

So now, in the 1950s, not only were federal duck stamps becoming better known across the country – they were also *viewed differently* by large segments of the population, to include many art and stamp collectors, conservationists, nature and wildlife enthusiasts and, yes, hunters.

For many Americans, they were no longer seen merely as utilitarian revenue stamps but also *as art*. As such, they were now deserving of appreciation and care. Following WWII, hunters were more likely to follow the letter of the law and sign their duck stamps across the face – and a steadily increasing number of them took the time to treat these miniature works of art with due respect and *carefully* sign their name in a small (sometimes very small) unobtrusive manner.

From the pristine nature of many examples extant, it is clear that many hunters (and their relatives) also felt it was their responsibility to preserve duck stamps for the enjoyment of future generations. So let us now do our part – and enjoy!

The Post WWII Period

It seems fitting that we begin with the stamp designed by Robert Hines, the 1946-47 issue (RW13). This is followed by the 1947-48 and 1948-49 issues (RW14 and RW15), before we get to the meat of today's post – the \$2 ducks. Note the RW14 is from Michael Jaffe's collection, signed by C.H. Bry and the RW15 has a very tiny signature along the right side – in ink matching the color of the stamp (see Figures 9, 10 and 11).

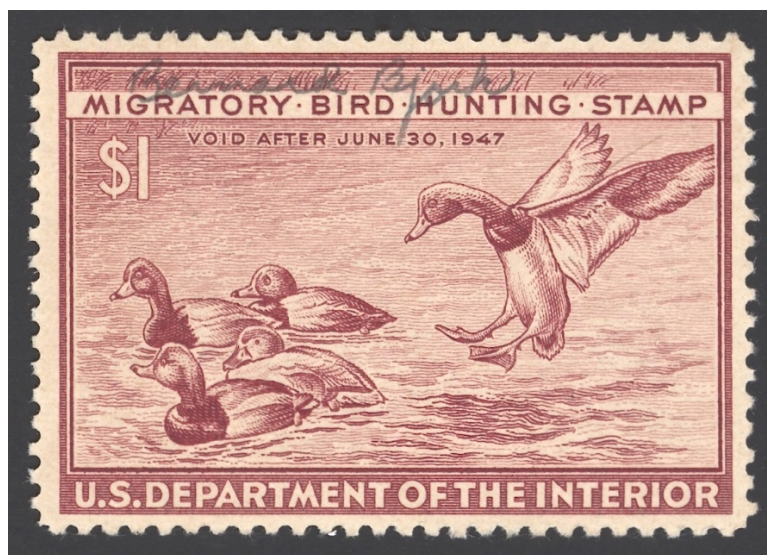


FIGURE 9. RW13 WITH A SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.

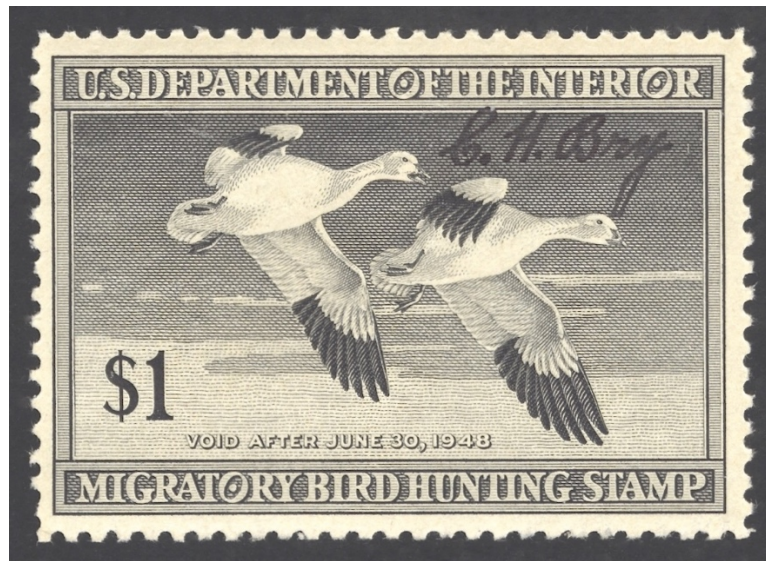


FIGURE 10. RW14 WITH SMALL SIGNATURE BY C.H. BRY.



FIGURE 11. RW15 WITH AN VERY TINY SIGNATURE. COURTESY OF TOM HICKEY.

Now it is time for the \$2 ducks to take center stage. Beginning with the 1949-50 issue (RW16), the last stamp whose artwork was selected by committee within the USFWS before the inauguration of the annual art contest, and ending with the 1958-59 issue (RW25), the last of the monotone stamps – this group represents one the most abundant pools from which to select small signatures.

Starting with the 1951-52 issue (RW18) and continuing through 1958-59, well **over two million** federal duck stamps were sold each and every year – for eight straight years. This is the second longest such streak in the program's history, trailing only the 12-year period from 1969-70 (RW36) through 1980-81 (RW47).

First, we have two examples of RW16, one with a very tiny signature off license and one on license used in combination with the 1949 South Dakota Resident Waterfowl Stamp – the first *state* stamp required to hunt waterfowl statewide (see Figures 12 and 13).



FIGURE 12. RW16 WITH A VERY TINY SIGNATURE.

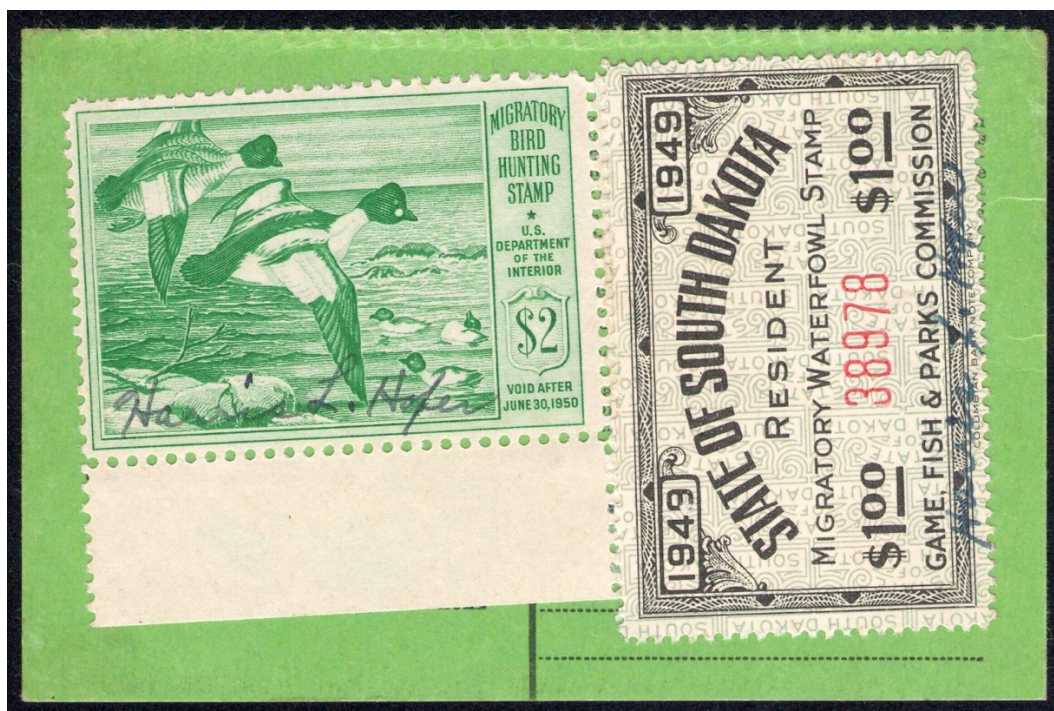


FIGURE 13. RW16 USED WITH A 1949 SOUTH DAKOTA RESIDENT WATERFOWL STAMP.

Next, we have two examples of the 1950-51 issue (RW17), one off license and one on license used in combination with a 1950-51 Virginia Resident Big Game Stamp. Note both stamps on license are signed by the hunter Walter A. Weber – the winner of the first federal duck stamp contest. This is Walter's personal license that he used to hunt with that year (see Figures 14, 15 and 16).

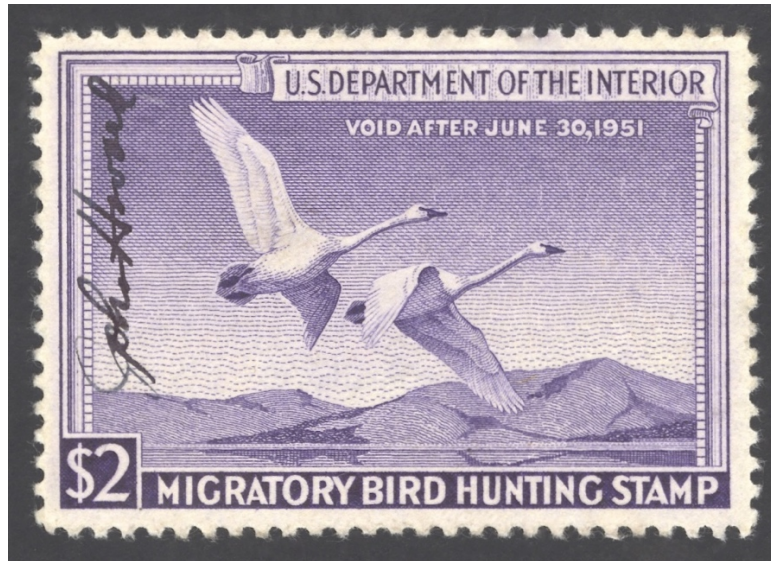


FIGURE 14. RW17 WITH A SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.



FIGURE 15. WALTER WEBBER WORKS ON ONE OF MY FAVORITE PAINTINGS, SNOWY EGRETS, CIRCA 1949.



FIGURE 16. RW17 USED WITH A 1950-51 VIRGINIA BIG GAME STAMP
(WALTER WEBER'S PERSONAL LICENSE).

Next, we have three examples (actually four) of the 1951-52 issue (RW18). The first is a jumbo single with an unobtrusive signature; the second is a top plate number single with a very small signature and the third is actually an intact pair signed by a husband and wife, Owen and Rachel Chelf. Although Owen's signature is somewhat smaller, it is more obtrusive. I believe he signed both names on this pair of stamps and, as we will soon see, he could do better... (see Figures 17,18 and 19).

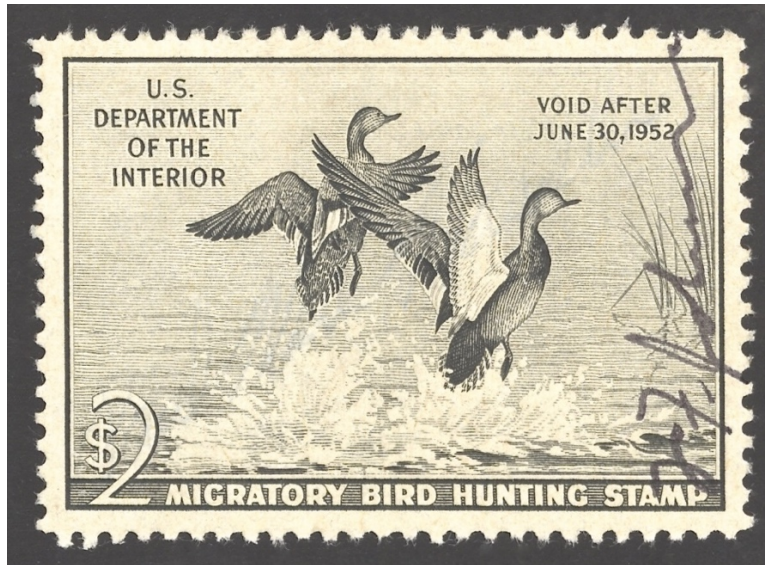


FIGURE 17. RW18 WITH NEAT, UNOBTUSIVE SIGNATURE.



FIGURE 18. RW18 TOP PLATE NUMBER SINGLE WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE.



FIGURE 19. RW18 INTACT PAIR, SIGNED BY A HUSBAND AND WIFE, OWEN AND RACHEL CHELF.

Next, we have two examples of the 1952-53 issue (RW19). Both are off license. The first is signed by Owen in the bottom right corner – in black ink which is hard to see against the dark blue background. The second is also signed in black ink and is even smaller, making it barely visible to the naked eye (see Figures 20 and 21).



FIGURE 20. RW19 WITH A SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.



FIGURE 21. RW19 WITH A VERY SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE

Next, we have an example of the 1953-54 issue (RW20), with probably the tiniest signature we have seen so far (see Figure 22).

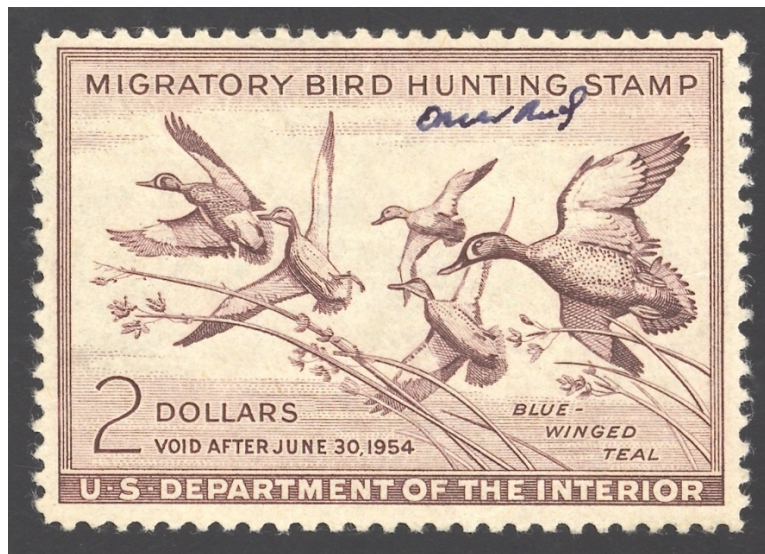


FIGURE 22. RW20 WITH A VERY TINY SIGNATURE.

Next, we have two examples of the 1954-55 issue (RW21). The first has a small signature and the second, while a bit of a cheat, is certainly unobtrusive. The sheet of stamps was misperforated such that the entire printed design is shifted far to the left and **the guideline is actually on the stamp**, itself, instead of the gutter. The hunter chose to take advantage of this error – and neatly signed his signature between the right side of the design and the guideline (see Figures 23 and 24).

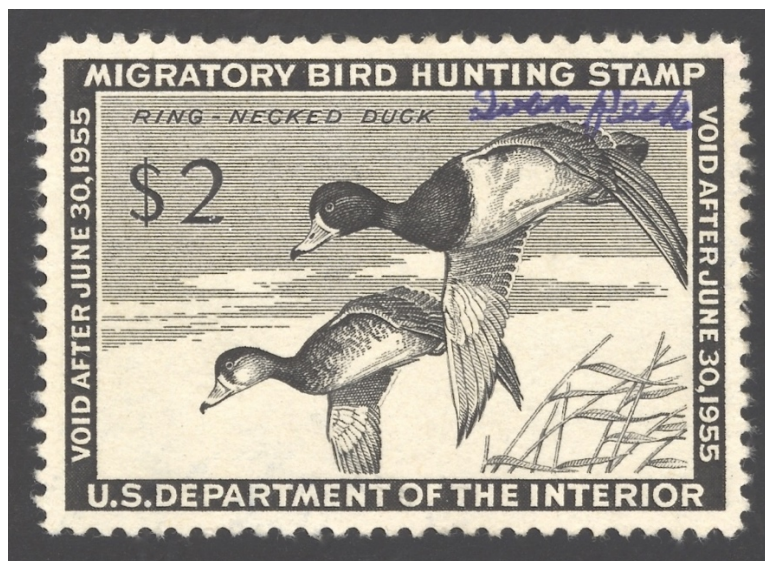


FIGURE 23. RW21 WITH A SMALL SIGNATURE. COURTESY OF TIM HICKEY.

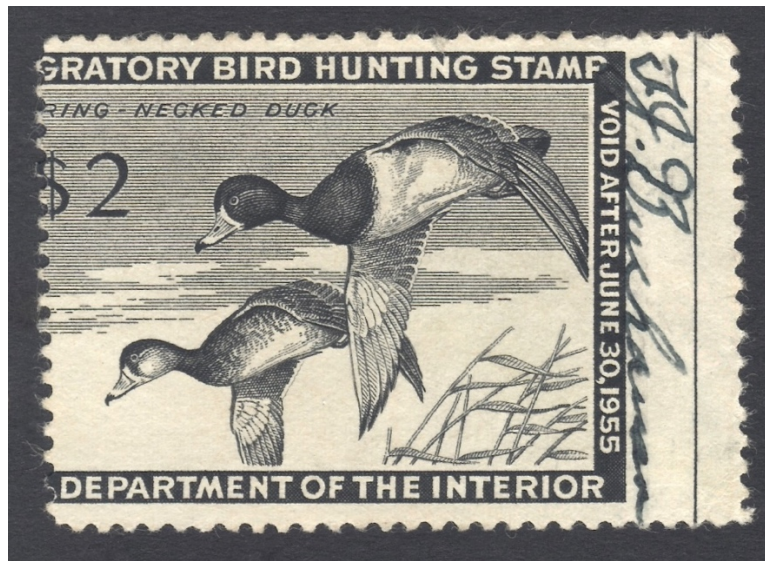


FIGURE 24. RW21 SIGNED BETWEEN THE DESIGN AND THE GUIDELINE.

Next we have two examples of the 1955-56 issue (RW22), one off license signed by C.H. Bry and one on license used in combination with a 1955 Nebraska Pheasant and Quail Stamp, the first year the stamps were issued. For more, see *The Nebraska Pheasant & Quail Stamps – Part Two*. What I like about the second example is that the blue stylized signature appears to compliment and even blend into the wheat (see Figures 25 and 26).



FIGURE 25. RW22 WITH SMALL SIGNATURE BY C.H. BRY.



FIGURE 26. RW22 USED WITH A 1955 NEBRASKA PHEASANT AND QUAIL STAMP.

Next, we have two examples of the 1956-57 issue (RW23), one with a small signature and one used on license in combination with a 1956 Colorado Additional Rod Stamp (see Figures 27, and 28).



FIGURE 27. RW23 WITH A SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.

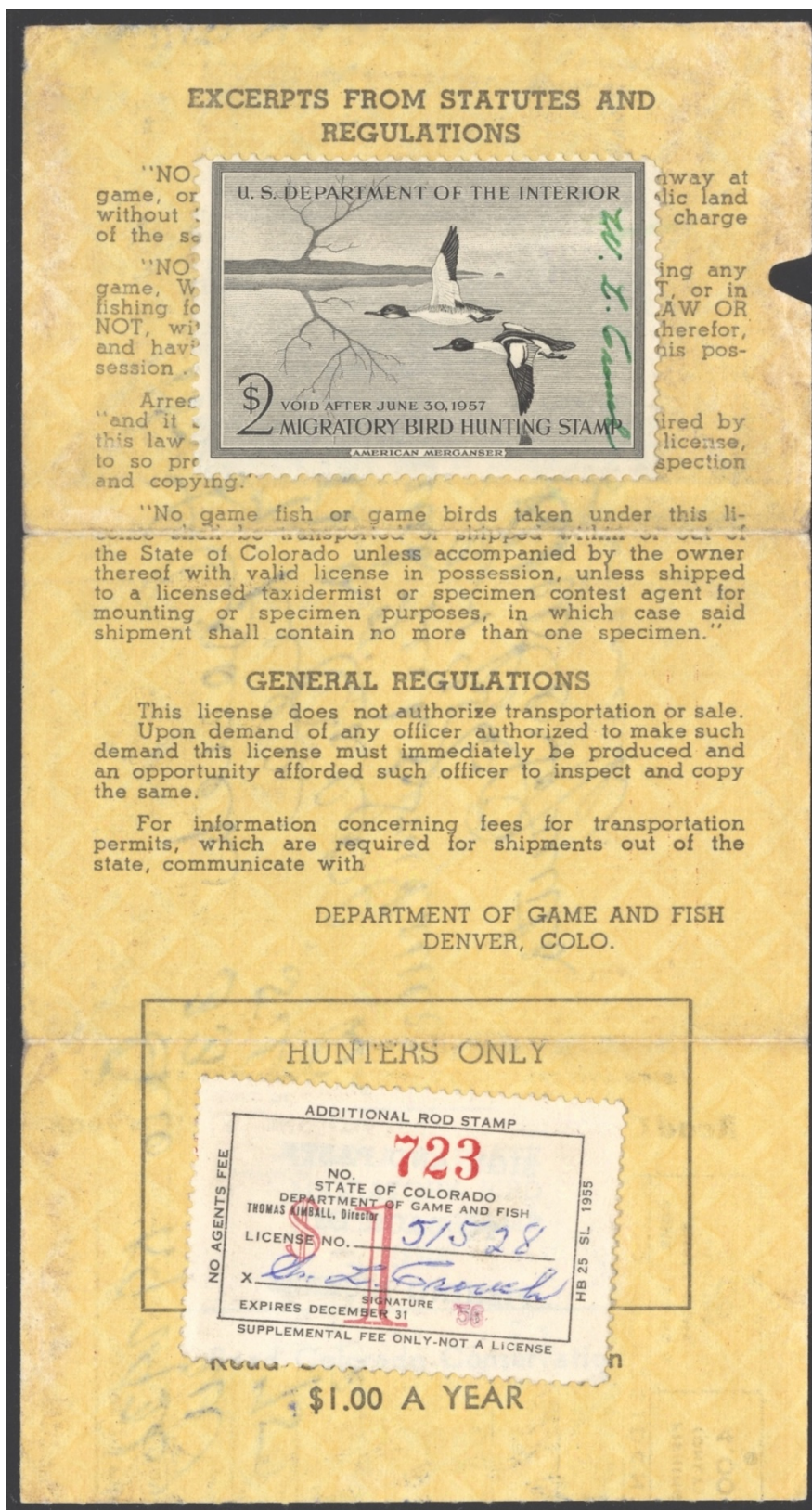


FIGURE 28. RW23 USED WITH A 1956 COLORADO ADDITIONAL ROD STAMP.

To end the Post WWII Period, we have three remarkable used stamps, from 1956-57 and 1957-58 (RW24 and RW25). In one case, the hunter has very nearly succeeded in signing completely in the narrow space between the edge of the design and the perforations (see Figures 29, 30 and 31).



FIGURE 29. RW24 WITH SIGNATURE IN THE BORDER.
COURTESY OF TIM HICKEY.



FIGURE 30. RW24 WITH SIGNATURE 99% IN THE BORDER.

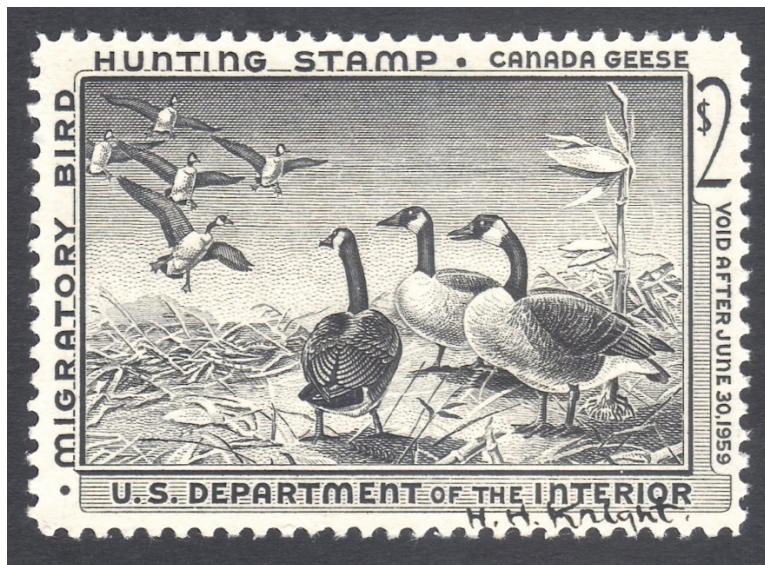


FIGURE. 31. RW25 WITH SIGNATURE IN THE BORDER.

Collecting Used Federal Duck Stamps – Part Three

Today we will look at 13 federal duck stamps that were issued during the Vietnam War, starting with the 1959-60 season and continuing through 1971-72 (RW26 – RW38). They are often referred to as the “\$3 ducks” and are notable for several reasons. Aside from the one-dollar fee increase, perhaps the most defining thing about them is that they were **printed in glorious multicolor**.

Surprisingly, the number of duck stamps sold dropped significantly starting with the first multicolor issue (RW26), to below the two million mark for the first time in eight years and then stayed below that benchmark for nine more years, until the 1969-70 issue (RW36). During the 1962-63 season, the number came close to dropping below the *one million* mark for the first time in 25 years.

We shall start by exploring the reasons for this and then, thankfully, learn that despite the relatively low number of stamps sold – there are actually more possibilities for acquiring \$3 duck stamps with small or very small, unobtrusive signatures today than for the two previous periods combined!

Introduction

The 1959-60 hunting seasons saw revenue from duck stamp sales fall by 25%. This was the result of an **extended drought** during the previous few years which adversely affected breeding grounds and led to a sharp decline in many species of waterfowl. Seasons needed to be shortened and bag limits reduced. Many hunters decided not to participate.

Drought continued to be a problem for waterfowl into the 1960s. Especially hard hit were states in the northeastern part of the country, extending from New York south to Virginia (lasting 4-5 years), certain states the Midwest and California. Therefore, three of the four U.S. flyways were impacted (see Figures 1 and 2).

For a detailed explanation of Frederick Lincoln's flyway concept, visit:
<https://waterfowlstampsandmore.com/the-honey-lake-waterfowl-stamps/4/>

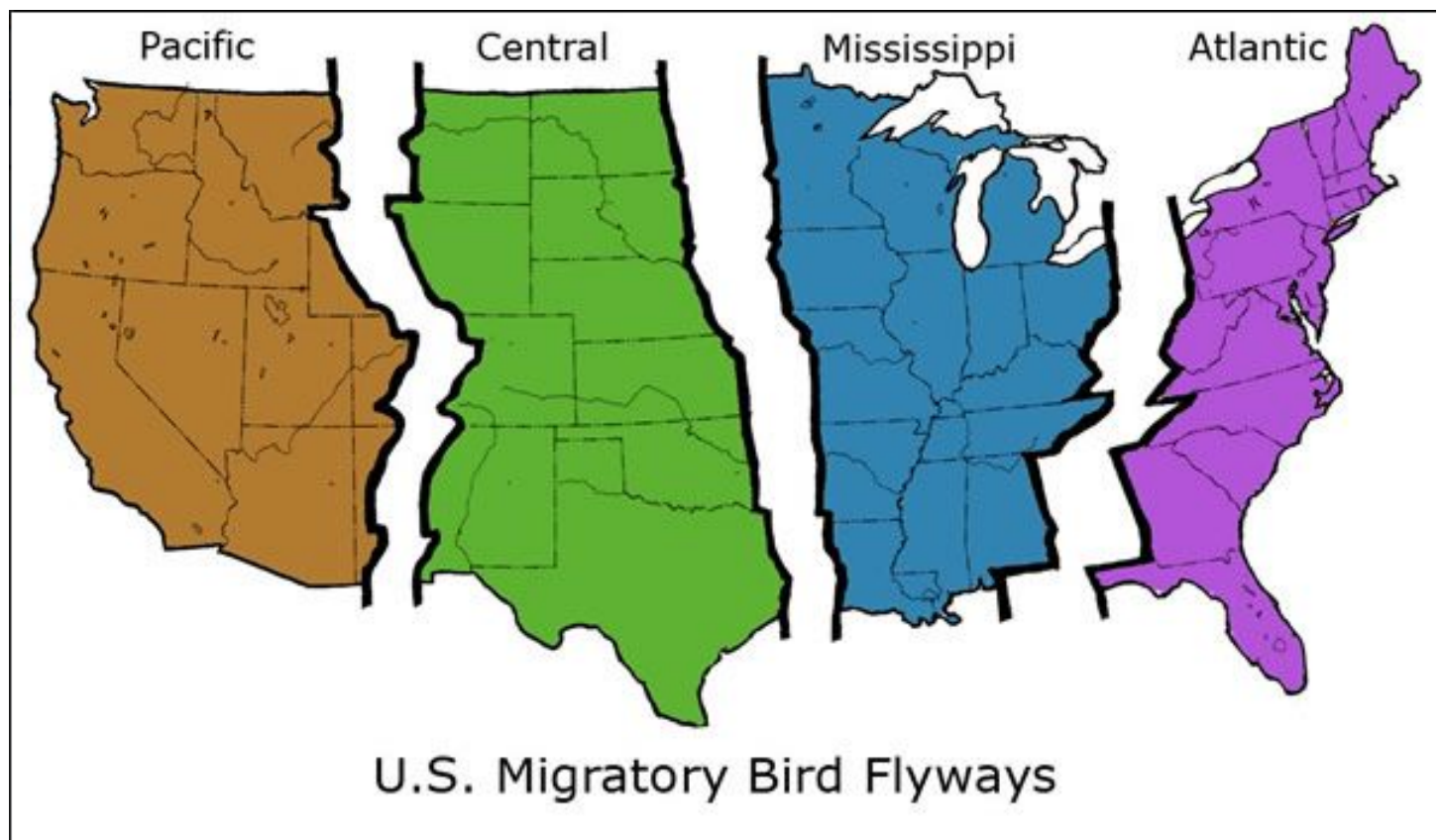


FIGURE 1. THE FOUR U.S. MIGRATORY BIRD FLYWAYS.

Annual Precipitation over Catskill Mountains

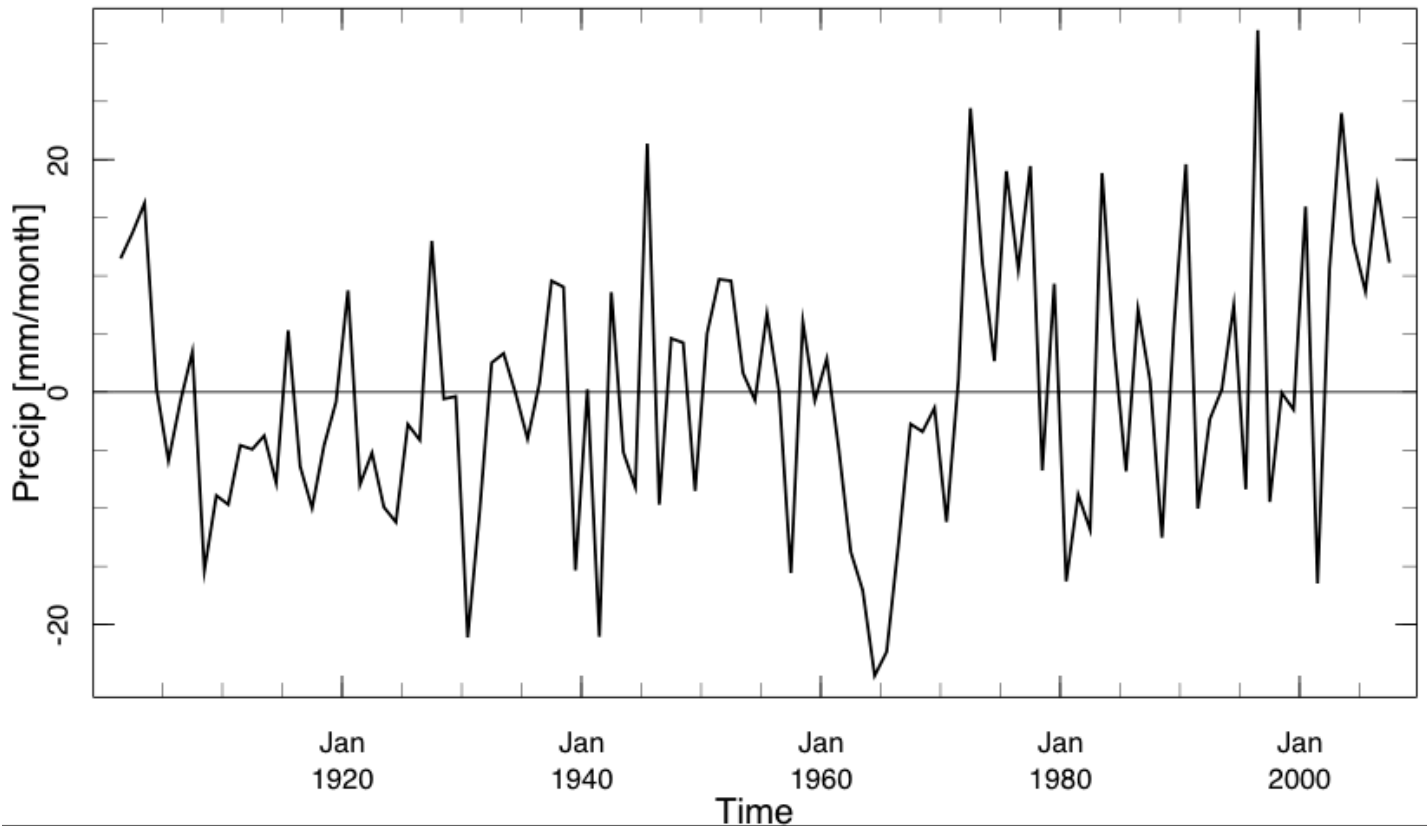


FIGURE 2. NOTE THE DROP IN ANNUAL PRECIPITATION OVER THE CATSKILLS (SOUTHEASTERN NEW YORK STATE) DURING THE 1960S IS THE LARGEST RECORDED DURING THE 20TH CENTURY.
GRAPH COURTESY OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY.

In addition to the droughts, the number of stamps sold was negatively impacted by escalating U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. From 1959 to 1964, the number of American advisers increased from 1,000 to 23,000. In August of 1964, after the Gulf of Tonkin Incident involving an attack on a U.S. destroyer, Congress authorized President Johnson to deploy the first 184,000 combat troops.

The number of combat troops deployed to Vietnam increased every year over the next four years, reaching a peak of 543,400 in April of 1968. During the war, August 5, 1964 – March 28, 1973, 8,744,000 American military personnel served on active duty and **2,709,918 were sent to Vietnam** (see Figure 3).

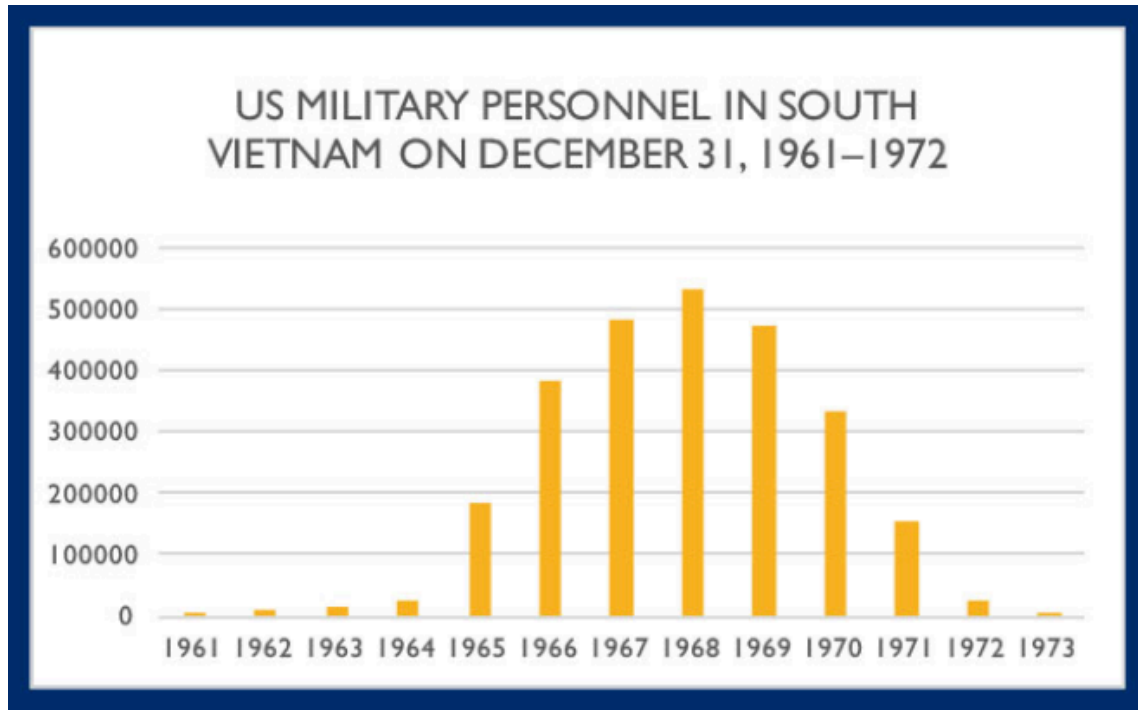


FIGURE 3. U.S. MILITARY DEPLOYMENT TO VIETNAM. GRAPH COURTESY OF THE MILLER CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA.

If we compare the number sold for the last four \$3 ducks, issued during the systematic withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam...

1968-69 (RW35).....1,837,139
 1969-70 (RW36).....2,072,108
 1970-71 (RW37).....2,420,244
 1971-72 (RW38).....2,445,977

...with Figure 3, we find a direct correlation between the *withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam* and the *increasing number of duck stamps sold back in the states*. As was the case following the end of WWII (visit: <https://waterfowlstampsandmore.com/collecting-used-federal-duck-stamps-part-two/>), the return of U.S. troops precipitated a surge in recreational or “sport” hunting.

In fact, the number of federal duck stamps sold during the 1971-72 season was the highest in in the program’s 86-year history to date (2020).

Dazzling Duck Stamp Art

Fortunately for our pursuit of used examples with small signatures on the \$3 ducks – the combined negative impact of all the droughts and the Vietnam War was more than offset by, arguably, the best period of duck stamp art up until that time and (keep in mind I may be biased because these were the ones being issued when my dad started me collecting stamps as a kid), quite possibly, *ever* – with two iconic pieces by Maynard Reece (RW26 and RW38) for bookends.

Of the 13, a strong case can be made for **over half of the stamps and/or prints** being one of the most attractive, popular (and highly sought after), seminal or *quintessential* in the history of the federal duck stamp program.

The first stamp, issued for 1959-60 (RW26), was based on artwork by Maynard Reece, designed by Bob Hines and Victor S. McCloskey Jr., engraved by Arthur W. Dintaman and Howard F. Sharpless – and is a masterpiece of wildlife art. The King Buck image with a Mallard in his mouth stands with Ding Darling's Mallards alighting as the two most recognizable – and the most popular – waterfowl stamps of all time.

The image is truly *iconic* and has been reproduced on everything from coffee mugs to T-shirts to license plate holders – you name it. The composition, colors – everything – is pleasing to the eye (see Figure 4).



FIGURE 4. 1959-60 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP (RW26), ARTWORK BY MAYNARD REECE.

The 1959-60 stamp is known for many firsts: 1) The printed fee was raised from two to three dollars; 2) it was the first multicolored duck stamp; 3) the printing press changed from a flatbed to a Giorgi rotary press; 4) the sheet size changed from 112 subjects to 120, therefore, each individual pane consisted of 30 (fully perforated) stamps and 5) the plate number moved to the corner of the panes, now creating plate number blocks of *four* as compared to plate blocks of six on the previous issues (see Figure 5).

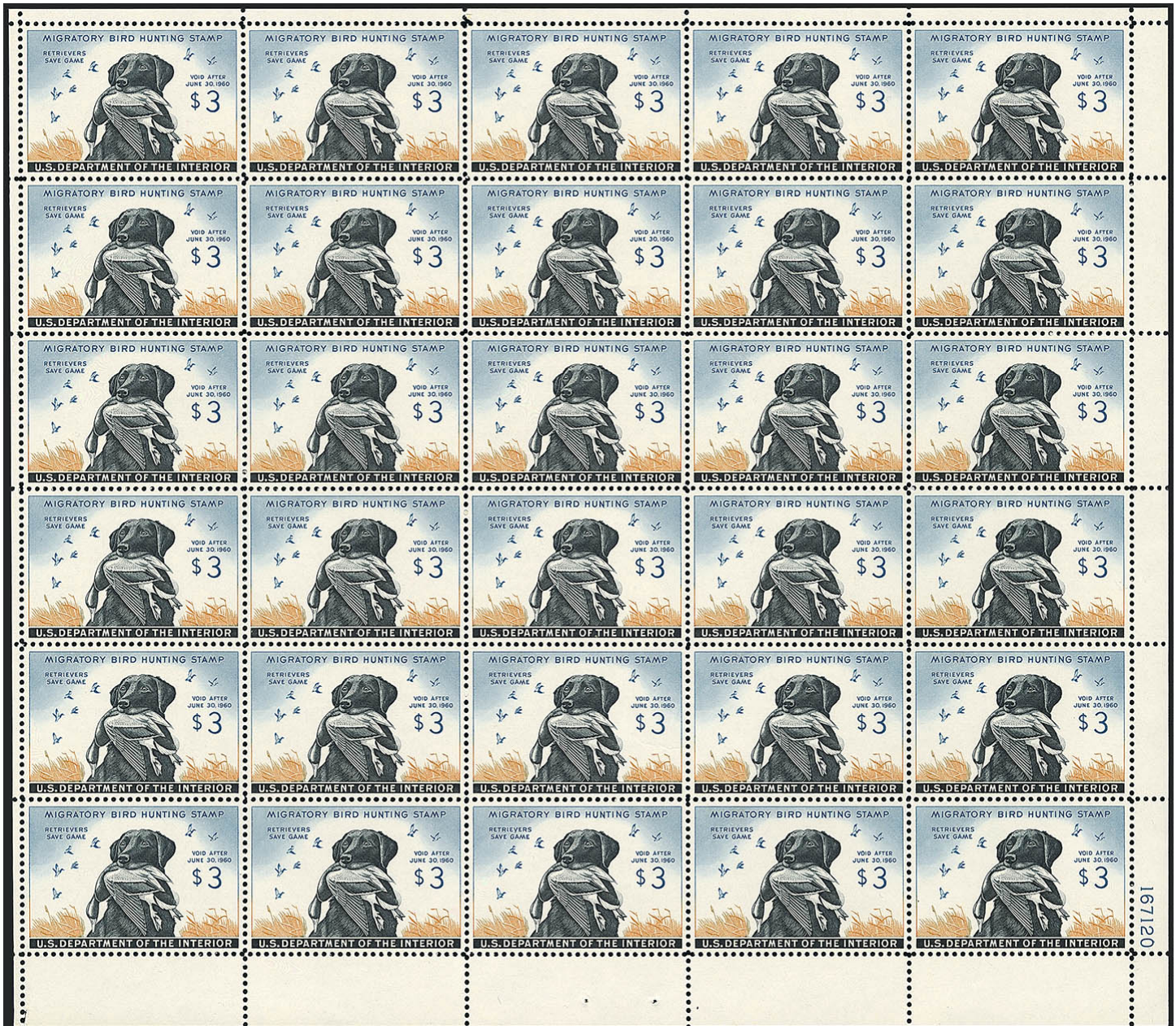


FIGURE 5. THE FIRST MULTICOLOR FEDERAL DUCK STAMP, RW26, COMPLETE PANE OF 30 CUT FROM THE LOWER RIGHT (LR) OF A SHEET.

Known affectionately as “the dog”, limited edition prints made from Maynard’s original artwork rank as the most popular duck stamp prints, ever. There have been five editions to date, with the first being the most sought after (see Figure 6). For a comprehensive account of the 1959-60 duck stamp story, see *John Olin, Ding Darling, Maynard Reece & King Buck: The Making of an Icon*.



Labrador Retriever - 1959

Maynard Reece

FIGURE 6. 1959 FEDERAL DUCK STAMP PRINT, FIRST EDITION (MATTED).

The 1961-62 and 1962-63 issues (RW28 and RW29), based on artwork by Les C. Kouba and Edward A. Morris (for more on this, see *The Dean of Minnesota's Wildlife Artists – Part Three*), were both huge hits – with RW28 being one of the favorite duck stamps among women and children and RW29 one of the all-time favorites among duck stamp collectors and hunters (see Figures 7 and 8).



FIGURE 7. 1961-62 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP (RW28),
ARTWORK BY LES C. KOUBA AND EDWARD. A MORRIS.

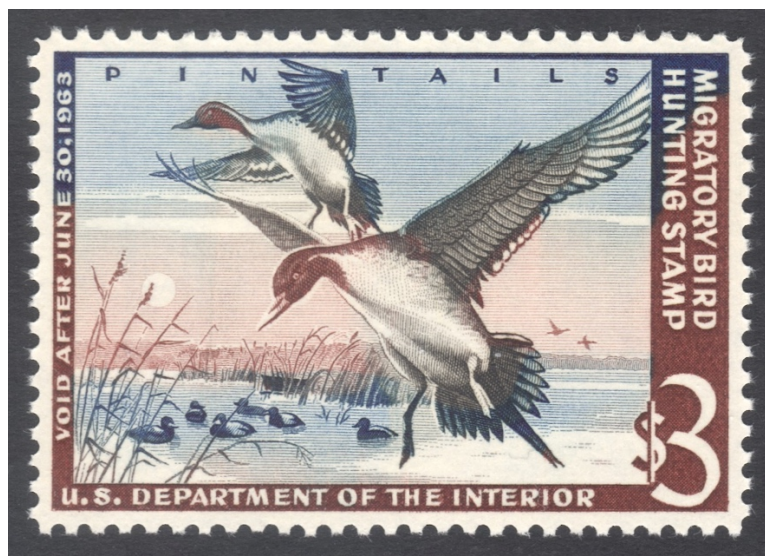


FIGURE 8. 1962-63 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP (RW29),
ARTWORK BY EDWARD. A MORRIS.

The stamp issued for the 1964-65 season (RW31) was based on artwork by Stanley Stearns and featured Hawaii's majestic Nene Geese. It was designed by Robert Miller and engraved by Arthur W. Dintaman and William R. Burnell. The stamp was another masterpiece and is a consensus favorite among stamp collectors. Aside from the arresting artwork, RW31 holds a fascination for collectors in that the serial number was moved inward one position (adjacent the second stamp) thereby creating a plate number block of six (see Figures 9 and 10). With the following issue, the plate number moved back to the corner.



FIGURE 9. 1964-65 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP (RW31),
ARTWORK BY STANLEY STEARNS.



FIGURE 10. RW31 PLATE NUMBER BLOCK OF SIX.

Both the stamps and the prints from the 1966-67 issue (RW33) are greatly admired and the first edition print, featuring Stanley Stearns' pair of Whistling Swans, is especially sought after by those who appreciate exquisite wildlife art (see Figure 11).



FIGURE 11. 1966 FEDERAL DUCK STAMP PRINT, FIRST EDITION (MATTED).

The 1970-71 issue (RW37) was Edward Bierly's third win and featured a pair of Ross Geese. The textured image was achieved by designer Leonard E. Buckley and engravers Joseph S. Creamer and Robert G. Culin. It is, in a word, truly *sublime*. Appropriately, it was **the first federal duck stamp print to be produced in multicolor**.

For obvious reasons, this was extremely popular with stamp collectors, wildlife art collectors and both conservationists and hunters. It gave both hobbies (stamps and prints) a huge boost and set the stage for what was soon to come (see Figures 12 and 13).



FIGURE 12. 1970-71 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP (RW37),
ARTWORK BY EDWARD BIERLEY. COURTESY OF GORDON WRUBEL.



FIGURE 13. 1970 FEDERAL DUCK STAMP PRINT, FIRST EDITION.

For the 1971-72 issue (RW38), Maynard Reece's fifth and final contribution to the federal duck stamp series, he produced an elegant piece featuring a trio of Cinnamon Teal. As stated above, the stamp was the biggest seller in the program's long history. However, the real buzz was generated when he and other members of the Reece family (all adept artists), **colored all 950 prints by hand** (see Figures 14 and 15).



FIGURE 14. 1971-72 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP (RW38),
ARTWORK BY MAYNARD REECE.



FIGURE 15. 1971 FEDERAL DUCK STAMP PRINT,
FIRST EDITION.

Altogether, the duck stamp art from the period starting in 1959-60 and extending through 1971-72 was unprecedented in the program's history and, with all due respect to all the artists who followed, we have not seen such a *sustained period* of inspired pieces like it since then.

There are a couple of reasons for this; obviously producing first the duck stamps and then the prints in color had a lot to do with it. The Giorgi Rotary Press had a mesmerizing effect on the engraver's art – much as Technicolor did for Hollywood cinematographers. The stamps now beckoned "look at me" and then it was hard to take your eyes off them. However, I believe there was more going on here.

There have been many articles, books and exhibitions dedicated to how the Vietnam War affected art in the U.S. and a discussion of this absorbing topic is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this post. Suffice to say that artists working in all mediums were galvanized to take their work to *another level*.

I believe that the talented duck stamp artists, designers and engravers were not immune to this calling – a collective effort to help preserve the American spirit. To succeed (when things were pretty dismal), they needed to be **really good**.

In acknowledgement, more hunters than ever before took great care when signing their stamps, lessening their impact on the ameliorative artwork. This means there are plenty of stamps with small, unobtrusive signatures to go around from this antithetical period – defined by a protracted conflict that produced superlative duck stamp art.

The Vietnam War Period

To begin, we have an example of the 1959-60 issue (RW26), artwork by Maynard Reece, followed by an example of the 1960-61 issue (RW27), artwork by John Ruthven. Both stamps have small, unobtrusive signatures (see Figures 16 and 17).



FIGURE 16. RW26 WITH A SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.



FIGURE 17. RW27 WITH A SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.

Next, we have two examples of the 1960-61 issue (RW28), artwork by Les C. Kouba and Edward A. Morris. One is off license with an unobtrusive signature and one on license used in combination with a 1961-62 Iowa Trout Stamp – the first year of issue for the Iowa series. (See Figures 18 and 19).



FIGURE 18. RW28 WITH AN UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.



FIGURE 19. RW28 USED WITH A 1961-62 IOWA TROUT STAMP.

Next, we have a poorly centered example of the 1962-63 issue (RW29), artwork by Edward A Morris. In this case, the hunter, **Andrew Colella**, took advantage of the larger space at the top and came the closest, so far, to signing his name completely within the border (see Figure 20). We shall be seeing more of Andrew's stamps in this and the following post.

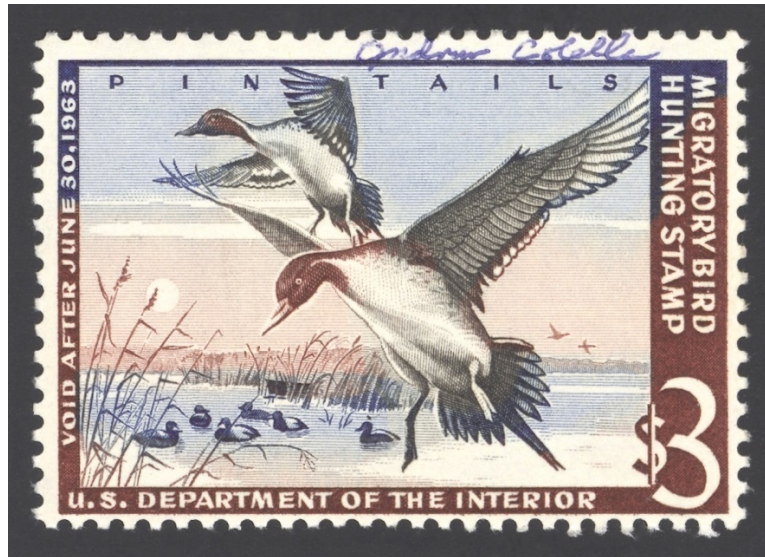


FIGURE 20. RW29 WITH SIGNATURE 99.9% IN THE BORDER.

Next, we have an example of the 1963-64 issue (RW30), with a very small, unobtrusive signature in the lower right corner. In addition, someone wrote the number "3" neatly in the upper left corner in a different color of ink (see Figure 21).



FIGURE 21. RW30 WITH A SMALL, UNOBTUSIVE SIGNATURE AND THE NUMBER "3".

Next, we have two examples of the 1964-65 issue (RW31), artwork by Stanley Stearns. One is off license with a very small signature and the other is on license, used in combination with a 1964-65 California Resident Hunting License Validation Stamp (see Figures 22 and 23).



FIGURE 22. RW31 WITH A VERY SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.

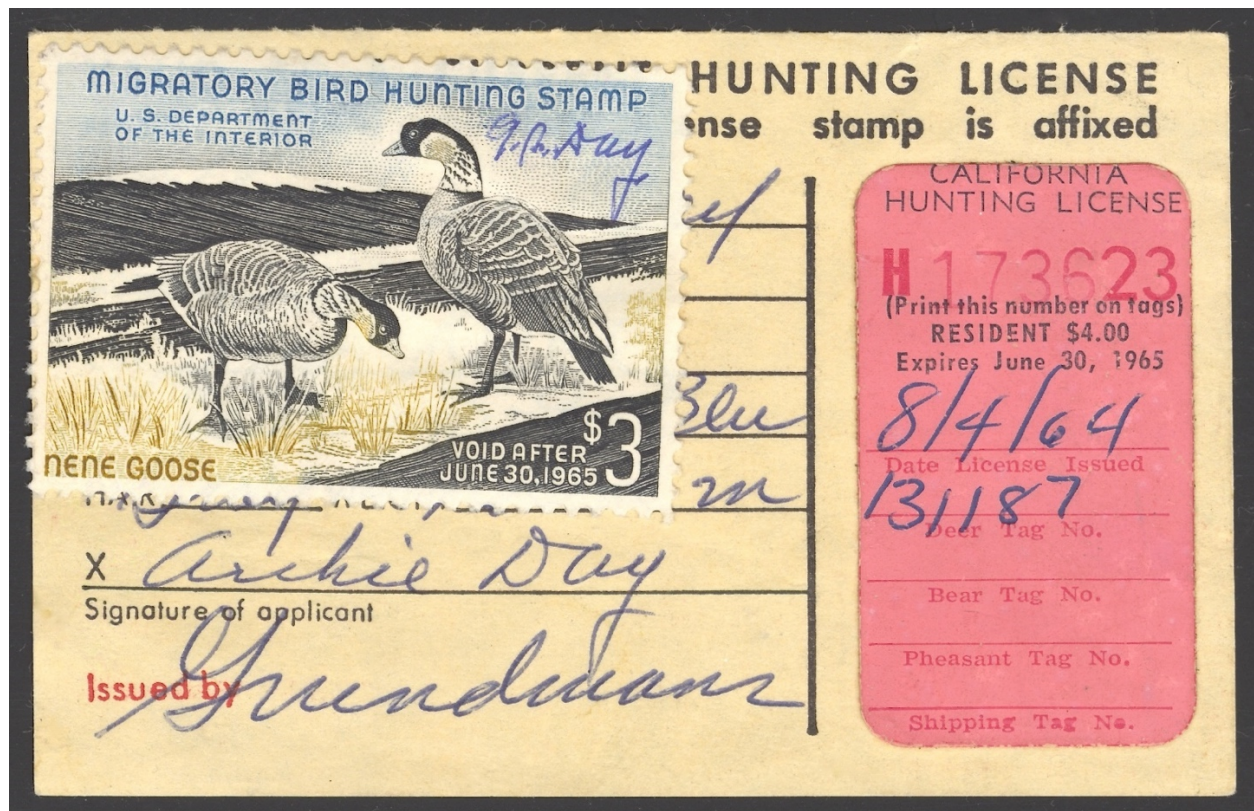


FIGURE 23. RW31 USED WITH A 1964-65 CALIFORNIA RESIDENT HUNTING LICENSE VALIDATION STAMP.

Next, we have three examples of the 1965-66 issue (RW32), artwork by Ron Jenkins. Two are off license with very small signatures on opposite sides of the artwork and the other is on license, used in combination with a 1965 Kansas Upland Game Bird Stamp (see Figures 24, 24a and 25).

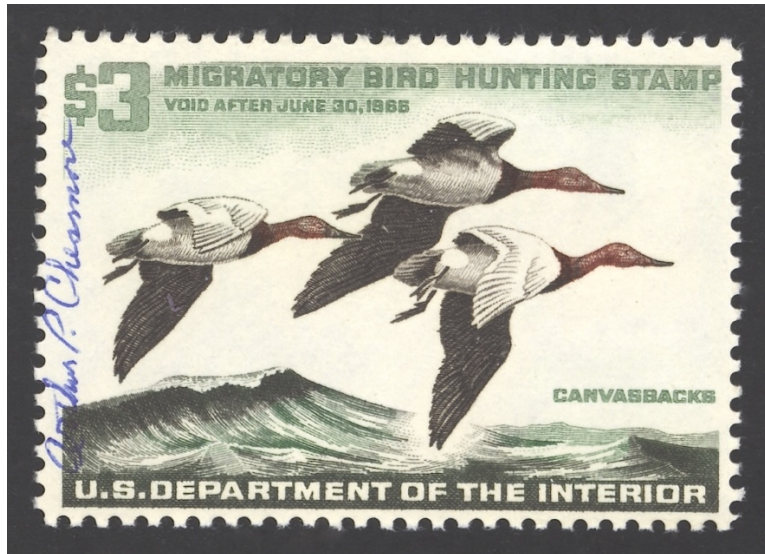


FIGURE 24. RW32 WITH A VERY SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.



FIGURE 24A. RW32 WITH A VERY SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.

STATE OF KANSAS FORESTRY, FISH AND GAME COMMISSION No 511087

Name Earl Winkley Date of Issuance Mo. Jan. Day 25 Yr 1965

Address _____ County Clerk Signature Pauline Dyer

City Stafford State Kansas County Stafford

Age 58 Wght. 170 Hght. 6" County Dealer Name County Clerk

Eyes brown Hair brown Sex male

Driver License No. 218061 State Kansas

I certify that the description and above matters stated are true and correct.

How long a bona fide resident of Kansas 58 yrs

Signature X Earl Winkley

30-4683-12-S-J69-70 8-64-670M

LICENSE EXPIRES ON DECEMBER 31, 1965.
TRIP FISHING LICENSE EXPIRES ON DATE SHOWN

NOT TRANSFERABLE

ENTER KANSAS UPLAND GAME BIRD STAMP

Code 128642

VOID AFTER DECEMBER 31, 1965

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Handing Fee not to exceed \$1.00

Cancel stamp by writing your name in ink across face of stamp.

AFFIX UPLAND GAME BIRD STAMP HERE

RESIDENT			
Trap \$1.50	Comb. Fish and Hunt \$6.00	Fish \$3.00	Hunt \$3.00
(A)		(C)	(D)

Fish \$5.00	Fish \$15.00	Shoot Area \$3.00	to buy Trip Fishing thru (H)
(E)	(F)	(G)	

FIGURE 25. RW32 USED WITH A 1965 KANSAS UPLAND GAME BIRD STAMP.

Next, we have two singles of the 1966-67 issue (RW33), artwork by Stanley Stearns. One is the last entry signed by C.H. Bry and the other is a plate number single with a very small, delicate signature (see Figures 26 and 27).



FIGURE 26. RW33 WITH SMALL SIGNATURE BY C.H. BRY.



FIGURE 27. RW33 PLATE NUMBER SINGLE WITH SMALL, DELICATE SIGNATURE.

Next, we have an example of the 1967-68 issue (RW34), artwork by Les C. Kouba, with a very small signature (see Figure 28).



FIGURE. RW34 WITH A VERY SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.

Next, we have three 1968-69 stamps (RW35) that play a prominent supporting role in today's post. First, we have two examples signed nice and neat by Andrew and Ed Colella. I assume that Ed was Andrew's son. Then we have a plate number single signed in tiny print by Raymond W Peterman (see Figures 29-31). While Raymond's signature is pretty impressive, we shall soon see he was just getting warmed up...



FIGURE 29. RW35 SIGNED BY ANDREW COLELLA.



FIGURE 30. RW35 SIGNED BY ED COLELLA.



FIGURE 31. RW35 SIGNED IN TINY PRINT BY RAYMOND W PETERMAN.

Next, we have four examples of the 1969-70 issue (RW36). In the first two, Ed and Andrew Colella decided to go to extremes to avoid impacting the artwork on their stamps; Ed signed in the lower selvage attached to his stamp and Andrew took it a step farther – signing on the back. Of course, neither of these were legal and they subsequently thought better of it (see Figures 32 and 33).



FIGURE 32. RW36 WITH ED'S SMALL SIGNATURE IN THE SELVAGE.



FIGURE 33. RW33 WITH ANDREW'S SIGNATURE ON THE BACK.

In most years, the following stamp would be the best Michael and I could come up with, having a fairly small, unobtrusive signature in the lower left corner. However, in 1969 John D Christian finally became the first hunter (whose stamp is included in this blog) to completely sign his name within the border and Raymond Peterman followed up his previous year's effort with a lilliputian signature that must be seen to be believed (see Figures 34, 35 and 36).



FIGURE 34. RW36 WITH A SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.



FIGURE 35. RW36 WITH SIGNATURE COMPLETELY IN THE BORDER.



FIGURE 36. RW36 WITH A VERY IMPRESSIVE, VERY TINY SIGNATURE.

Next, we have an example with a very small signature used on a Colorado Resident Small Game Hunting and Fishing License (see Figure 37).

RESIDENT Small Game Hunting and Fishing License 1969 No. **11-015420**

PLEASE PRINT

NAME	FIRST	MIDDLE	LAST	SEX	WEIGHT	HEIGHT	HAIR
Lloyd E. Johnson				M	160	5'6"	Blk
ADDRESS	STREET	CITY	STATE	ZIP	EYES	AGE	
1923 S Dexter Denver			CO		Brn. H	41	
DRIVER'S LICENSE	NUMBER	STATE	DATE OF BIRTH				
U 511479	CO		7/19/27				
LENGTH OF RESIDENCY IN STATE	YEARS	MONTHS					
41							
DATE AND HOUR OF ISSUE	MONTH	DAY	A.M.	P.M.			
12/31/68							4:05
AGENCY	NUMBER	NAME	TOWN	CLERK'S INITIALS			
472		Gail Brew. Denver	WA				

COLORADO

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
\$3 VOID AFTER JUNE 30, 1970

Lloyd E. Johnson
MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING STAMP

AUTHORIZED BY THE COLORADO GAME, FISH AND PARKS COMMISSION.

FEE \$7.50

THIS LICENSE EXPIRES DEC. 31, 1969. IT IS NOT TRANSFERABLE AND NO REFUND MAY BE MADE ON ANY LICENSE SOLD.

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THE ABOVE AND FOREGOING STATEMENTS ARE TRUE AND CORRECT AND I FURTHER AGREE TO FISH IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS PRESCRIBED BY LAW AND THE GAME, FISH AND PARKS COMMISSION.

SIGNATURE *Lloyd E. Johnson*

FIGURE 37. RW36 USED ON A COLORADO RESIDENT SMALL GAME HUNTING AND FISHING LICENSE.

Next, we have two examples of the 1970-71 issue (RW37). In the first, we see that Andrew Colella has decided to, rather than violate the spirit of the law, simply sign much smaller (see Figure 38). The second is used on license in combination with 1970-71 California Hunting License Validation and Pheasant Stamps.

This was the 100th Anniversary of the California Department of Fish and Game. To commemorate this centennial, special hunting licenses were printed with the Department seal in the background and, for the only time in the series' history, the (resident only) validation stamps were semi-pictorial – featuring an image of the California Golden Bear.

This was E.L. Vanderford's personal hunting license and the RW35 is very neatly signed by him at the bottom (see Figure 39).



FIGURE 38. RW37 WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE BY ANDREW COLELLA.

1870 CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME 1970
A Century of Preserving Wildlife and Providing Recreation

PRINT:
NAME E. L. VANDERFORD

ADDRESS 532 SAN MIGUEL WAY

CITY SACRAMENTO

YEAR OF
BIRTH 1913 HEIGHT 6'-2" EYES GRAY

HAIR DARK WEIGHT 195 SEX M

Have you resided in California continuously for the past six months? ☒ Yes ☐ No
Are you either on active military duty with the U.S. Armed Forces or a Job Corps enrollee? ☐ Yes ☒ No

X E. L. Vanderford
Signature of applicant

CALIFORNIA HUNTING LICENSE
H 3834-01
(Print this number on tags)
RESIDENT \$4.00
Expires June 30, 1971

10-30
Date License Issued

Deer Tag No. _____
Bear Tag No. _____
Lion Tag No. _____
Shipping Tag No. _____

CALIFORNIA PHEASANT LICENSE STAMP
1970-71
\$2.00
P 24957-04

MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING STAMP
\$3
ROSS' GEESSE
VOID AFTER JUNE 30, 1971
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

FIGURE 39. RW37 USED WITH CALIFORNIA RESIDENT HUNTING LICENSE VALIDATION AND PHEASANT STAMPS. THE DUCK STAMP IS SIGNED BY E.L. VANDERFORD.

To end this post on the Vietnam War Period, we have two examples of the 1971-72 issue (RW38), artwork by Maynard Reece. The first has a very small signature by Andrew J. Collela and the second is a top plate number single with a signature of nearly identical size (see Figures 40 and 41).



FIGURE 40. RW38 WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE BY ANDREW COLELLA.



FIGURE 41. RW38 TOP PLATE NUMBER SINGLE WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE,

Collecting Used Federal Duck Stamps – Part Four

In today's post we will look at the 12 federal duck stamps that were issued from 1972-73 through 1983-84 (RW39 – RW50). This period saw the collecting of duck stamps and prints really take flight. We will explore some of the reasons behind this phenomenon and discover why even more hunters than before would make the effort to sign their stamps in a small, unobtrusive manner.

More to the point, why it became an *unofficial contest* to see who could sign their name the smallest. During this same period, more hunters would save their expired licenses *intact* instead of attempting to remove and save just the duck stamp. They were no longer viewed simply as a hunting memento – as the used licenses now possessed tangible monetary value as well.

For collectors of duck stamps and prints (both then and now) this time period represents the ultimate fish and game candy shop, stocked with enough treats as to make even the au fait lightheaded.

Regarding used federal duck stamps, they can often be found in abundance (off or on license). This, combined with some all-time favorite designs and lots of small signatures, can make for an inexpensive (usually under \$10), rewarding and *superfun* collecting experience.

Introduction

Following the end of the Vietnam War (1973-1975), there occurred one of the deepest recessions in U.S. history. This recession was precipitated by many factors, including excessive spending on the war, **the quadrupling of oil prices by OPEC** and the stock market crash of 1973-74 (see Figure 1).

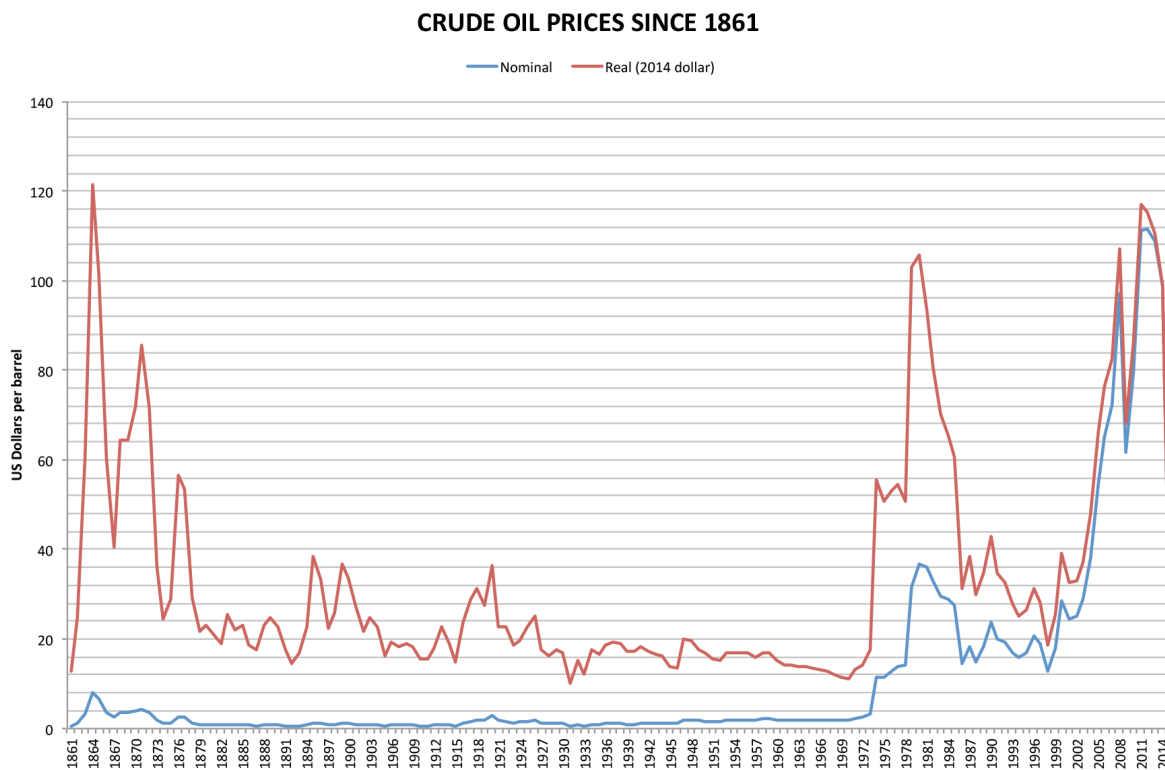


FIGURE 1. OPEC QUADRUPLED THE PRICE OF OIL AFTER THE VIETNAM WAR.

Despite this fact, the annual sale of federal duck stamps remained very strong, adding nine more seasons of two million plus to the three seasons at the end of the Vietnam War Period. Altogether, this streak of 12 straight seasons (1969-70 through 1980-81) where over two million duck stamps were sold to hunters, collectors, wildlife art enthusiasts and conservation-minded citizens would set a record which would never be broken in the history of the program.

More Great Duck Stamp Art

Although not approaching the sustained genius of the previous period, there were a number of exceptional pieces issued during the post Vietnam period. Fortuitously for our hobby, three of these were issued in a row, early in the period, from 1974-75 through 1976-77 (RW41 – RW43).

The artwork for the 1974-75 issue (RW41) was created by talented Minnesota artist **David Maass**. His winning entry at the 1973 federal duck stamp art contest was an oil painting featuring a pair of wood ducks in flight (see Figure 2).



FIGURE 2. ORIGINAL ENTRY AND 1973 CONTEST WINNER BY DAVID MAASS. COURTESY OF RICHARD PRAGER.

As we shall see, David's art would serve as a major influence on the development of a new market for buying and selling duck stamps and prints in the U.S. First, the winning artwork was sent to the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP), where the stamp was designed by Frank J. Waslick and engraved by Joseph J. Creamer and James L. Goodbody (see Figure 3).

After receiving the artwork back from the BEP, David brought it to his good friend **Bill Webster**, a collector and dealer in duck stamps and related wildlife art who had recently launched Wild Wings, Inc., a wildlife art gallery and mail order business based in Lake City Minnesota.

Bill and his company would serve as the publisher for the 1974 duck stamp prints. Johnson Printing, located across the Mississippi River in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, then produced a gorgeous print from David's original art (see (figure 4)).



FIGURE 3. 1974-75 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP (RW41),
ARTWORK BY DAVID MAASS.



© 1974

FIGURE 4. 1974 FEDERAL DUCK STAMP PRINT, FIRST EDITION.

However, Bill did more than simply publish the print. He was the first print dealer and publisher to *actively promote the sale of the prints*. Using every resource available, Bill advertised and promoted the heck out of it. Although the edition size was not numbered, he told me it was “about 4,000”.

We may never know *exactly* how many 1974 prints Bill sold over the years. However, just a few years ago, when I purchased the remainder of Wild Wings duck stamp print inventory at auction – there were only 21 prints that remained unsold (see *The Bill Webster Sale art Siegel’s – Part One*).

Bill licensed the image to be reproduced on everything under the sun; coffee mugs, key chains, plates, place mats – and anything else you can think of. It was a remarkable job of promotion and one that raised the public consciousness for duck stamps and duck stamp prints to new heights.

In 1973, wildlife artist **James Fisher** made a visit to the Elkton, Maryland Decoy Show. James had long been an admirer of hand-carved, wooden decoys. According to his bio in *Duck Stamp Prints* by Stearns and Fink, there he met the passionate decoy collector R.G. Biddle III:

“...who, after seeing some of the paintings Jim had done of decoys, offered to let him borrow decoys from his collection. Jim was attracted to one decoy in particular, a weathered old Mason Canvasback drake. He then decided to paint it for his first and only entry in the annual duck stamp contest. When the judging was finished, he had captured one of the most coveted awards in the wildlife art world.”

This was not the only thing that James would capture with his provocative duck stamp art – he would capture the imagination of people from all walks of life in a way previously not possible.

That *yet another iconic piece of duck stamp art* would follow so closely on not just the heels of the insanely popular Maass piece – but all the stunning duck stamp pieces that were produced all through the Vietnam War was, for the American public, like being struck by lightning... repeatedly. They were gazing in rapt attention.

Thanks to James and the judges who had the courage to vote for it, "the decoy" now made it an easy choice on the part of people around the country to become duck stamp and/or print collectors. At this same time, many *decoy collectors* decided that a complete set of duck stamps, framed around this print, would make a nice addition to their home or office decoy display (see Figures 5 and 6).



FIGURE 5. 1975-76 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP (RW42), ARTWORK BY FAMES FISHER.



FIGURE 6. 1975 FEDERAL DUCK STAMP PRINT, FIRST EDITION.

Among the people whose imaginations were captured by “the decoy”, as well as the recent run of amazing duck stamp art, were two young kids (still in high school) on the west coast. One worked part time for a local stamp dealer in California who had a big interest in the duck stamps himself, Greg Nelson, and the other worked part time in his dad’s sporting goods store in Washington state.

Within a couple of years, each of them independently made the decision to try and make a living buying and selling duck stamps. Their names were **David Torre** and **Michael Jaffe**, respectively.

The Rise of an Industry

Prior to the mid-1970s, most duck stamps and duck stamp prints were sold in the U.S. by either a large wildlife art dealer like Abercrombie & Fitch in New York or Beverly Hills, Bill's Wild Wings (founded in 1968), Burnett Harshman's Sport' N' Art (1972), Russell Fink's Gallery (1972) or a large U.S. stamp dealer like Robert Siegel, Leo Scarlet or Metro Stamp Co. (all located in New York City).

Out in California, E.L. Vanderford had been selling a fair number of federal duck stamps for years and his involvement intensified after publishing his *Handbook of Fish and Game Stamps* in 1973. However, Van's main line of work was managing an auto parts warehouse and his time was limited.

Then, within a stretch of five or six years during the 1970s, a number of individuals would enter into and help develop the nascent market for duck stamps and prints. After myself and Michael, followed Robert Dumaine, Carlo Vecchiarelli, Bob Cornett, Barry Porter, David Curtis, Richard Houk, Phil Gigante and Tom De Luca (see Figure 7).



FIGURE 7. ROBERT DUMAINE, COAUTHOR OF THE DUCK STAMP STORY.

By the end of the 1970s, amid the feverish market for all U.S. stamps, in general, we were all attending shows and advertising to buy and sell duck stamps and prints. It was a fun, competitive environment and as a result – the items came to have real value. This was not lost on hunters.

A Spotlight on Duck Stamp Prints

The artwork chosen by the judges for the 1976-77 duck stamp (RW43), was another exciting, unique piece – a family of Canadian geese executed by Alderson Magee in the *scratchboard* medium. Also known as “scrapboard”, the medium originated in England and France during the 19th century.

The artist uses a sharp tool to engrave or “scratch off” (dark) ink on a board to reveal lighter tones underneath and create a design comprised of a series of straight lines against a dark background (see Figure 8).



FIGURE 8. 1976 FEDERAL DUCK STAMP PRINT, FIRST EDITION WITH COMPANION PIECE.

As Russell Fink points out in his book, “Although the print appears to be [in] black and white... it is actually in three colors; warm black, cool black and sepia. The softness and dimension achieved in the print would not have been possible in a one-color black printing process.”

The effect was superb and the demand, likewise. At this point in 1976, five of the last seven federal duck stamp prints had been (to coin a phrase that is not *entirely* applicable) **real barnburners**. In order, we had the first print to be produced in color (1970), a print whose entire edition was *hand-colored* by the legendary Maynard Reece or a member of his family (1971), David Maass’ wood ducks (1974), “the decoy” (1975) and now the elegant and sophisticated scratchboard by Magee (1976).

Very simply, the collecting of duck stamp prints *exploded*. From 1970 through 1973, the edition size numbered 950-1000. By the end of the decade, it was up to 8,500 (1979).

The 1980-81 issue (RW47) was another real crowd-pleaser. Artwork by Richard Plasschaert, the pair of flying mallards was in constant demand for over a decade – a demand that frequently outstripped its availability on the market, despite **an edition size of 12,950** (see Figures 9 and 10).



FIGURE 9. 1980-81 FEDERAL WATERFOWL STAMP (RW47), ARTWORK BY RICHARD PLASSCHAERT. COURTESY OF GORDON WRUBEL.



© 1980 Richard W. Plasschaert

FIGURE 10. 1980 FEDERAL DUCK STAMP PRINT, FIRST EDITION.

By now, the federal duck stamp had gained tremendous nationwide recognition and prestige. The artist was able to sell so many prints that it became known as **the million dollar duck** and, in fact, within a few short years artists were realizing as much as \$2,000,000. We were all selling duck stamp prints like they were going out of style – and, as we shall see in Part Five, they nearly did.

It seemed like every American artist wanted a shot at the brass ring, so it did not come as a terribly big surprise when I learned the 1981 duck stamp contest drew a record number of entries (2,099).

The winner, David Maass, came back with another stunning piece of artwork to be used as the vignette for the 1982-83 issue (RW49), a trio of Canvasbacks flying across a windy Minnesota lake. Once again, Bill Webster published the print and had it produced by Johnson Lithographics in Eau Claire. The number of prints in the first edition dwarfed the record-setter from just two years prior – coming in at 22,500 (see Figure 11).



10,027/22,500

David A. Maass

© 1982 David A. Maass

FIGURE 11. 1982 FEDERAL DUCK STAMP PRINT, FIRST EDITION.

The 1983-84 issue (RW50), featured a pair of pintails by artist Phil Scholer. The last stamp to be included in this period was another pleasing piece and the print was even better. In yet another first for this memorable period – as the stamp was the 50th in the series, there was a separate print edition accompanied by a round, gold-colored medallion. Labeled the *Golden Edition*, it was very popular with collectors (see Figure 12).

The regular edition numbered 17,400 prints, plus 6,700 in the medallion edition – for a total of 24,100. As recently as 1973-74 (10 years earlier), the total edition size had only been 1,000.



FIGURE 12. 1983 FEDERAL DUCK STAMP PRINT, MEDALLION EDITION.

Hunters Take Notice

Due, in large part, to the burgeoning market for duck stamp prints (now ubiquitous and prominently displayed on the walls of many American homes and offices), you would have to be living under a rock to *not know* what a duck stamp was in the 1970s and 1980s.

Furthermore, the friendly competition waged by this new breed of stamp dealers who specialized in duck stamps and (to a greater or lesser extent) other kinds of fish and game stamps – commonly referred to as **duck stamp dealers** – was played out in print *not just* within the confines of collectibles publications but also within hunting and fishing magazines, Ducks Unlimited Magazine, California Waterfowl Association Magazine and the classified sections of newspapers in “promising” locations.

We were selling sets of framed stamps in all different grades to hunters with all different budgets. The least expensive option was *used*. Within this price point, the most bang for your buck could be had by putting together a set of used stamps with no gum (the hunter affixed the stamp to his/her license but did not sign it – in violation of the law) or a set of stamps with nice, neat signatures.

Someone, I believe it was Bob Dumaine, realized we could get a premium for used stamps with small, unobtrusive signatures. Therefore, we made it clear in our advertising, at shows and through word of mouth that we would pay *extra money* for such stamps – especially from the Early Period.

Not to put too fine a point on it – but just about everyone soon came to think that *all* duck stamps were worth big \$\$\$\$. For this reason, more and more hunters took extra care in signing their stamps – some obviously thinking *the smaller the better*. It almost became a **separate duck stamp contest**, to see who could sign their name the smallest (see Figure 13).



FIGURE 13. I FOUND THIS IN GOOGLE IMAGES – AND COULD NOT RESIST!

More collectors, including the pioneer fish and game exhibitors, began requesting stamps still affixed to the hunter’s license – showing their “usage”. So, then we let everyone know we would pay extra \$ for these, too. As a result, many hunters signed their name quite *small* and also saved their licenses to pass on to a collector friend or relative or, perhaps, to sell to a duck stamp dealer for big \$\$\$.

Although the money seldom matched their lofty expectations, we did manage to bring a relatively large number of these little treasures into the collector market during this time and most of the hunters were, really, quite happy. So now, let's see – who could actually sign their name the smallest?

The Heyday Period

To start with, we have two examples of the 1972-73 issue (RW39), one off license with a small signature by **Andrew Colella** and one used on license in combination with a 1972 Iowa Migratory Waterfowl Stamp.

The artwork for the Iowa stamp was created by Maynard Reece. It was the first Iowa duck stamp, the second state duck stamp overall (after California in 1971), and the first state duck stamp to be printed in color. In this case, the hunter has signed the federal stamp primarily in the selvage (see Figures 14 and 15).



FIGURE 14. RW39 WITH A SMALL SIGNATURE BY ANDREW COLELLA.



FIGURE 15. RW39 USED WITH A 1972 IOWA WATERFOWL STAMP.

Next, we have two examples of the 1973-74 issue (RW40). One is off license with a very small signature by Andrew Colella and one is used on license in combination with a 1973 Kansas Upland Game Bird Stamp and 1973 Marion County Duck and Fishing Stamps.

The Marion County Duck Stamp is one of the last five stamps sold, to Parks and Lake Supervisor John Waner. John's signature on the federal is very small and unobtrusive (see Figures 16-18).



FIGURE 16. RW40 WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE BY ANDREW COLELLA.

STATE OF KANSAS FORESTRY, FISH AND GAME COMMISSION

No 483754

No 110701 KANSAS UPLAND GAME BIRD STAMP

Name John Waner Date of Issuance Mo. Jan Day 5 Yr. 1973

Address RFD # 1 County MARION

City Marion State Kansas County Clerk Signature Barney C. Paine

Age 56 Wght. 175 Hght. 5'9" County Dealer Name Wade Snelling

Eyes Blue Hair Brown Sex M

Driver License No. 92B945 State Kansas

I certify that the description and above matters stated are true and correct.

How long a bona fide resident of Kansas 56

Signature X John Waner

LICENSE EXPIRES ON DECEMBER 31, 1973

TRIP FISHING LICENSE EXPIRES ON DATE SHOWN.

NOT TRANSFERABLE

ENTER CODE LETTER AND CLASS OF LICENSE ISSUED

Code B Class Comb.

An additional charge of 25¢ must be collected for county general fund on each license

PUNCH LETTER FOR TYPE OF LICENSE ISSUED—NO LICENSE VALID IF PUNCHED MORE THAN ONCE

RESIDENT				NON RESIDENT			
Trap \$1.50	Combination Fish and Hunt \$6.00	Fish \$3.00	Hunt \$3.00	Fish \$5.00	Hunt \$15.00	Controlled Shoot Area \$3.00	10 Day Trip Fishing \$3.00 thru
(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)	(H)

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Stellar's Eider

VOID AFTER JUNE 30, 1974

MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING STAMP

50c RESIDENT 1973 Duck Permit Marion County Park and Lake 50c

50c RESIDENT 1973 Fishing Permit Marion County Park and Lake 50c

FIGURE 17. RW40 USED WITH A 1973 KANSAS UPLAND GAME BIRD STAMP AND 1973 MARION COUNTY DUCK AND FISHING STAMPS ON A LICENSE ISSUED TO JOHN WANER (SEE ENLARGEMENT BELOW).



FIGURE 18. RW40 WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE BY JOHN WANER.

Next, we have two examples of the 1974-75 issue (RW41), one off license with a very tiny signature by Andrew Colella and one on license used in combination with 1974-75 California Hunting License Validation and Duck Stamps (on opposite side) and a 1974-75 Vandenberg Air Force Base (VAFB) Hunting Stamp (see Figures 19 and 20).



FIGURE 19. RW41 WITH A VERY TINY SIGNATURE BY ANDREW COLELLA.



FIGURE 20. RW41 USED WITH 1974-75 CALIFORNIA HUNTING LICENSE VALIDATION AND DUCK STAMPS (OTHER SIDE) AND A 1974-75 VAFB HUNTING STAMP. NOTE THE RUBBER STAMPS AT THE TOP INDICATE THE HUNTER CHECKED INTO TWO DIFFERENT STATE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS DURING THE SEASON.

Next, we have two examples of the 1975-76 issue (RW42). One is off license with a very small signature by Andrew Colella and one is used on license in combination with a 1975-76 Florida Management Area Hunting Stamp (see Figures 21 and 22).



FIGURE 21. RW42 WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE BY ANDREW COLELLA.



FIGURE 22. RW42 USED WITH A 1975-76 FLORIDA MANAGEMENT AREA HUNTING STAMP.

Next, we have two examples of the 1976-77 issue (RW43). One is off license with a very small signature by Andrew Colella and one is used on license in combination with a 1976-77 California Duck Stamp. The federal has a very small signature by **E.L. Vanderford** (see Figures 23 and 24).



FIGURE 23. RW43 WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE BY ANDREW COLELLA.



FIGURE 24. RW43 USED ON LICENSE IN COMBINATION WITH A 1976-77 CALIFORNIA DUCK STAMP. NOTE THE FEDERAL IS SIGNED BY E.L. VANDERFORD.

To change things up a bit, I am now going to show two examples of the 1977-78 issue (RW44) off license – and neither is signed by Andrew Colella. The reason being, I appreciate the thought and effort on the part of each of these hunters.

In the first case, the hunter's signature, while not especially small, was very carefully placed and arranged in a complimentary color of ink. In the second, the signature is very tiny and almost completely located within the upper border. This hunter used a color of ink that is nearly identical to the background – therefore, portions of the signature that overlap the design are not readily visible to the naked eye (see Figures 25 and 26).

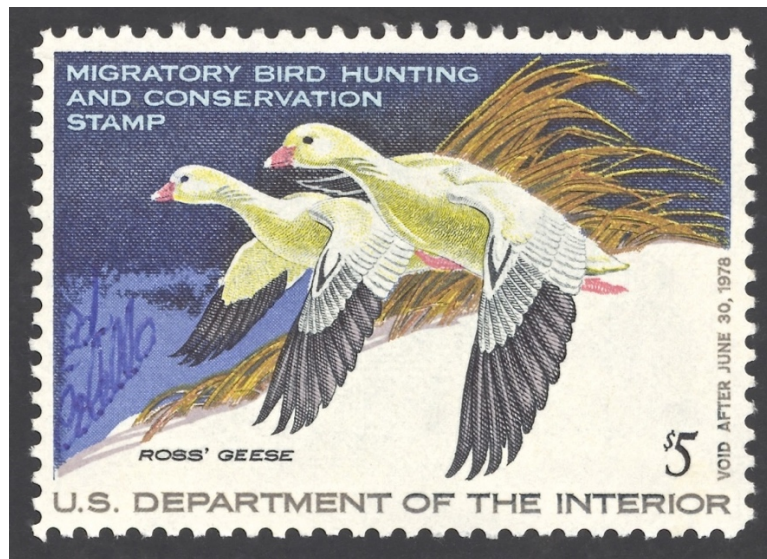


FIGURE 25. RW44 WITH A SMALL, COMPLIMENTARY SIGNATURE.

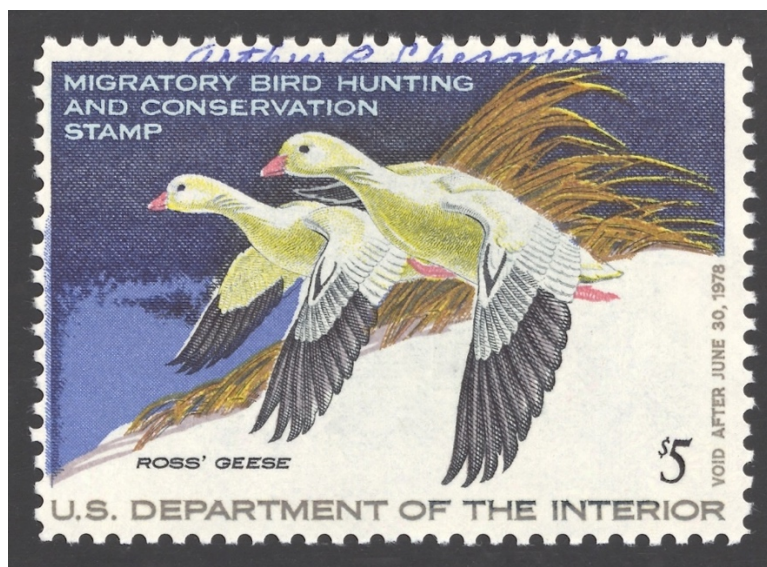


FIGURE 26. RW44 WITH A SIGNATURE IN THE BORDER.

Next, we have two examples of the 1978-79 issue (RW45). One is off license with a very small signature by Andrew Colella and one is used on license in combination with a 1978-79 California Duck Stamp. The federal has a very small signature by **E.L. Vanderford** (see Figures 23 and 24).



FIGURE 27. RW45 WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE BY ANDREW COLELLA.



FIGURE 28. RW45 USED ON LICENSE IN COMBINATION WITH A 1978-79 CALIFORNIA DUCK STAMP. THE FEDERAL STAMP IS SIGNED BY E.L. VANDERFORD.

For the 1979-80 issue (RW46), we have one off license and two still affixed. The first example has a small, unobtrusive signature by Ken Fee (see Figure 29). Recently passed, Ken had many hobbies. In addition to being an avid hunter, he was a life-long collector of antique bottles, picture postcards, postal history and stamps of all kinds – to include fish and game.

The first example on license is used in combination with a 1979 Missouri (first of state) Waterfowl Stamp. Note that while the signature is not very small, the color of ink used by the hunter and its placement makes it quite unobtrusive (see Figure 30).

The second is used in combination with a 1979-80 California Hunting License Validation Stamp (opposite side) and a 1979-80 California Duck Stamp. The federal stamp is signed by E.L. Vanderford (see Figure 31).



FIGURE 29. RW46 WITH A SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE BY KEN FEE.



FIGURE 30. RW46 USED WITH A 1979 MISSOURI WATERFOWL STAMP.



FIGURE 31. RW46 USED ON LICENSE IN COMBINATION WITH A 1979-80 CALIFORNIA DUCK STAMP. THE FEDERAL STAMP IS THE LAST ONE SIGNED BY E.L. VANDERFORD.

Next, we have two examples of the 1980-81 issue (RW47), both off license. Once again, the first has a very small signature by Andrew Colella and the second is a plate number single, signed in a similar manner (see Figures 32 and 33).



FIGURE 32. RW47 WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE BY ANDREW COLELLA.



FIGURE 33. RW47 PLATE NUMBER SINGLE WITH A SMALL SIGNATURE.

Next, we have two examples of the 1981-82 issue (RW48). One is off license with a very small signature by Andrew Colella and one is used on license in combination with 1981 Wisconsin Waterfowl and 1982 Wisconsin Great Lakes Salmon & Trout Stamps (see Figures 34 and 35).



FIGURE 34. RW48 WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE BY ANDREW COLELLA.

**SPORTS LICENSE
1981-82**

This license hereby provides all the combined rights and privileges conferred by resident fishing license, resident small game and deer hunting licenses as provided in Wisconsin Statutes 29.147 during the open seasons subject to all regulations prescribed by Wisconsin Statutes and by Wisconsin Administrative Code.

This license shall be carried on the person of the licensee while fishing or hunting and shown to any conservation warden on demand.

HUNTERS ORANGE IS REQUIRED

FIGURE 35. RW48 USED WITH 1981 WISCONSIN WATERFOWL AND 1982 WISCONSIN GREAT LAKES SALMON & TROUT STAMPS.

Next, we have two examples of the 1982-83 issue (RW49), one off license with a very tiny signature and one on license in combination with a 1982 Kentucky Trout Stamp. Note the federal stamp has a small signature by **Owen Chelf**, who we first encountered in Part Two with the 1951-52 attached husband and wife pair (see Figures 36 and 37).



FIGURE 36. RW49 WITH A VERY TINY SIGNATURE.



FIGURE 37. RW49 USED WITH A 1982 KENTUCKY TROUT STAMP. NOTE THE FEDERAL IS SIGNED BY OWEN CHELF.

To end the Heyday Period, we now pay tribute to two men who **respected the art** and took the time to very carefully sign their stamps in a small, unobtrusive manner – starting long before there was any consideration of a financial return.

We have two examples of the 1983-84 issue (RW50), both off license. One is signed by Owen Chelf and the other by Andrew Colella. This is the last time we will see a stamp from Owen Chelf in this series of posts (see Figures 38 and 39).



FIGURE 38. RW50 WITH A SMALL SIGNATURE BY OWEN CHELF.



FIGURE 39. RW50 WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE BY ANDREW COLELLA.

Collecting Used Federal Duck Stamps – Part Five

In today's post we will look at the 14 federal duck stamps that were issued from 1984-85 through 1997-98 (RW51 – RW64). In 1998, U.S. Post Offices were supplied with new style, self-adhesive stamps (commonly known as *peel and stick*) to sell hunters. Gummed stamps were still produced; however, these were sold by the United States Postal Service via mail order, at philatelic windows and through stamp dealers.

So, while it is still possible to find traditional style duck stamps used on licenses from the last 20 years or so, it is the exception to the norm.

Once placed on a license, the self-adhesive duck stamps may be difficult to remove. Therefore, collecting used stamps from 1998 on poses an additional challenge for collectors. As Michael and I do not have examples of all the stamps after RW64 with a small signature in our collections, we have decided this would be a good place to end this series for now and we will return to it down the road.

As explained in Part Four, following the 1980-81 season (RW47), the number of duck stamps sold dipped below the two million mark. Sales remained relatively strong through the 1984-85 season (RW51), averaging 1,903,808, before entering into a period of steady decline that saw them drop below 1.5 million for seven straight years (1988-89 through 1994-95, RW55 – RW61).

Starting in 1995, federal duck stamp sales began to pull out of their extended funk and steadily increased in each of the three seasons prior to the debut of the new style stamps – to a respectable 1,697,590 during the 1997-98 (RW64) season. We shall explore the reasons for this and see why, in retrospect, it is actually quite understandable and *not* the dire straits some have made it out to be.

As it affects the pursuit of used duck stamps with small signatures, however, one should expect them to be somewhat more difficult to acquire from this – the **Post Heyday Period**.

Another Day in the Sun

Although the seeds for decline had already been planted, the hobby blissfully enjoyed one more day in the sun. The Department of Interior decided to celebrate the **50th Anniversary** of the first federal duck stamp with the 1984-85 issue (RW51). The 1983 art contest judges selected William C. Morris' watercolor featuring a pair of American Wigeons to serve as the vignette (See Figure 1).



FIGURE 1. ORIGINAL ENTRY AND 1983 CONTEST WINNER BY WILLIAM MORRIS. COURTESY OF RICHARD PRAGER.

As part of the official hoopla surrounding the occasion, Congress authorized a rare *special printing* consisting of **15 uncut sheets** of 120 duck stamps to be prepared with a commemorative inscription in the selvage. The intact sheets, including a unique cross gutter block in the center (see Figure 2), were to be auctioned for the benefit of the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund.

One sheet was donated to the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum and the remaining 14 sheets were eventually sold in two separate auctions.



FIGURE 2. RW51 SPECIAL PRINTING CROSS GUTTER BLOCK OF FOUR, EX CSAPLAR.

Although many believed the honor should have remained solely with Phil Scholer, it was decided to market the 1984 print (and 51st stamp) as the official 50th Anniversary Duck Stamp. By this point, the momentum for marketing, buying & selling and collecting duck stamp prints had been building up ever since Bill Webster published the 1974 wood ducks print by David Maass – *unabated*.

Since the 1983 Golden Edition medallion was such a success, it was decided that William Morris should also have a separate medallion edition in 1984. Instead of being round, it was square with approximately the same proportions of the stamp (see Figures 3 and 4).



FIGURE 3. 1984 50TH ANNIVERSARY FEDERAL DUCK STAMP PRINT IN ITS ORIGINAL FOLDER WITH MEDALLION AT BOTTOM.



FIGURE 4. 1984 50TH ANNIVERSARY FEDERAL DUCK STAMP PRINT.

Something resembling mass hysteria pervaded the marketing for the 1984 print. Probably, much of the demand stemmed from the “investment potential” of the piece. I, too, was caught up in the fervor – selling no less than 275 medallion edition prints to collectors, investors, friends and even relatives.

When the final number of pre-orders was tallied, it was decided to make the medallion edition size, alone, 11,500 – or more than the total edition size of any federal duck stamp print published prior to 1980. The “regular” edition numbered 20,400 for a **grand total of 31,900 prints**.

This was not only more than for any other print in the program's history to date – but more than the total for every edition of every duck stamp print published through 1974 (figuring Maass at 4,000), combined!

This would prove to be the apex of the duck stamp print market and, in retrospect, many of the prints that were published after 1976 were “overachievers” fueled by a very favorable economic climate, unprecedented promotion, continued momentum and, probably, some wishful thinking.

Keep in mind that when an artist or publisher is deciding on the edition size (the number of prints), they must consider “future demand”. This can be a tricky thing to gauge, in the moment, either during a period when things are going really well or when they are not going well but you believe they will once again – at some point. Hindsight has shown us that some did a better job than others. But hey, we are all human.

Falling Back to Earth

Over the years, much has been made about the decline in not just duck stamp and print collecting – but stamp collecting, in general. Everyone has a favorite theory concerning this “predicament”. Well, I am here to tell you, things are not so bad – really – and, in fact, were it not for one brief period when everything was truly grand, it is likely we could be fairly content with things the way they are.

Those who are old enough (and have a good memory) are still able to recall the relatively brief period from 1977-1980, the pinnacle of the U.S. stamp market, and may be inclined to make (in my opinion) unfair comparisons between then and every period that has since followed. It occurs to me that they have, perhaps, forgotten some important details.

For those who don't have a great memory or were not involved in the hobby then – and have just heard or read about the **heyday** second hand – knowledge of these details can make a significant difference in the way you view the trajectory of the hobby and even the way you judge it today.

Therefore, by way of explaining the relative difficulty in obtaining used federal duck stamps with small, unobtrusive signatures following the Heyday Period, I thought it may be useful for our frame of reference to examine *the facts* pertaining to the rapid “rise and fall” of the market for duck stamps and prints.

Rapid Rise of the Market. As we saw in the last post, the market for duck stamps and, especially, duck stamp prints, rose rapidly following the end of the Vietnam War. Although the great and *varied* art was invaluable in first drawing attention to our “product” and then creating an atmosphere of excitement around it (today they would call it “buzz”) – there was more going on here than meets the eye.

You see, the rising market for duck stamps and prints mirrored an increased interest and spending in *a wide variety of collectibles* – not just U.S. stamps (to include duck stamps and prints). Every hobby I am familiar with (Hawaiiana, Native American art, old bottles, postcards, etc.) experienced a huge surge in spending during the late 1970s.

Among all the various collectible markets, those for venerable stamps and coins may have benefited the most from a **unique set of economic circumstances** that made it easier for people to choose to become collectors and/or investors during this time.

Many people have pointed to the Nixon Administration taking the U.S. off the gold standard in 1971 for setting these circumstances in motion. I am not an economist; however, my research suggests it is likely somewhat more “complicated”. Nevertheless, the dollar’s purchasing power rapidly eroded throughout the remainder of the 1970s and culminated in upwards of 13% consumer price inflation by the end of the decade (see Figure 5).



FIGURE 5. IN 1971, THE U.S. WAS TAKEN OFF THE GOLD STANDARD.

In terms of gold, in 1971 one ounce could be purchased for \$35. By the end of the decade, it was \$350 and headed toward \$850 in January of 1980. At this time, many Americans were motivated to invest in gold as a **hedge against inflation**. For a similar reason, during this same time the market for collectibles, including duck stamps and prints, benefitted from an unprecedented influx of spending.

A Relatively Unknown Fact Today. Facilitating this unprecedented flow of money on the part of both collectors and investors into stamps, coins and other collectibles – is the fact that citizens could spend money taken from their individual retirement accounts (IRAs) on collectibles without penalty.

In other words, during this period **you could include duck stamps and prints in your IRA or Keough plan** much as you can bank savings accounts and stocks today.

The Rules Changed. In fact, *so much money* flowed into stamps and other collectibles that in 1981, under the Reagan Administration, Congress addressed it in the **Economic Recovery Tax Act**. According to the official explanation prepared by the Staff of the Joint Committee on Taxation:

Reasons for Change

In recent years, there had been increasing interest in investing retirement savings in collectibles (coins, antiques, art, stamp collections, etc.) under IRAs and individually directed accounts in qualified plans. The Congress concluded that investments in collectibles do not contribute to productive capital formation. There was also concern that the present-law rules regarding self-dealing under qualified plans and IRAs are not adequate to prevent personal use of collectibles.

The new tax law took effect on January 1, 1982. Since that time, the purchase of stamps or other collectibles by a retirement plan is deemed as **a distribution for tax purposes**. The change had a profound effect on the market for stamps and other collectibles, as one of the primary motivations for purchase “vanished, literally overnight.”

The Double Dip Recession. In 1979, under the Administration of Jimmy Carter, Paul Volker was appointed Chairman of the Federal Reserve and tasked with getting inflation under control. Volker succeeded in rapidly slowing inflation by raising rates and, in so doing, the rate of growth in the U.S. However, a side effect was the notorious double dip recession of 1980-82 (see Figure 6).

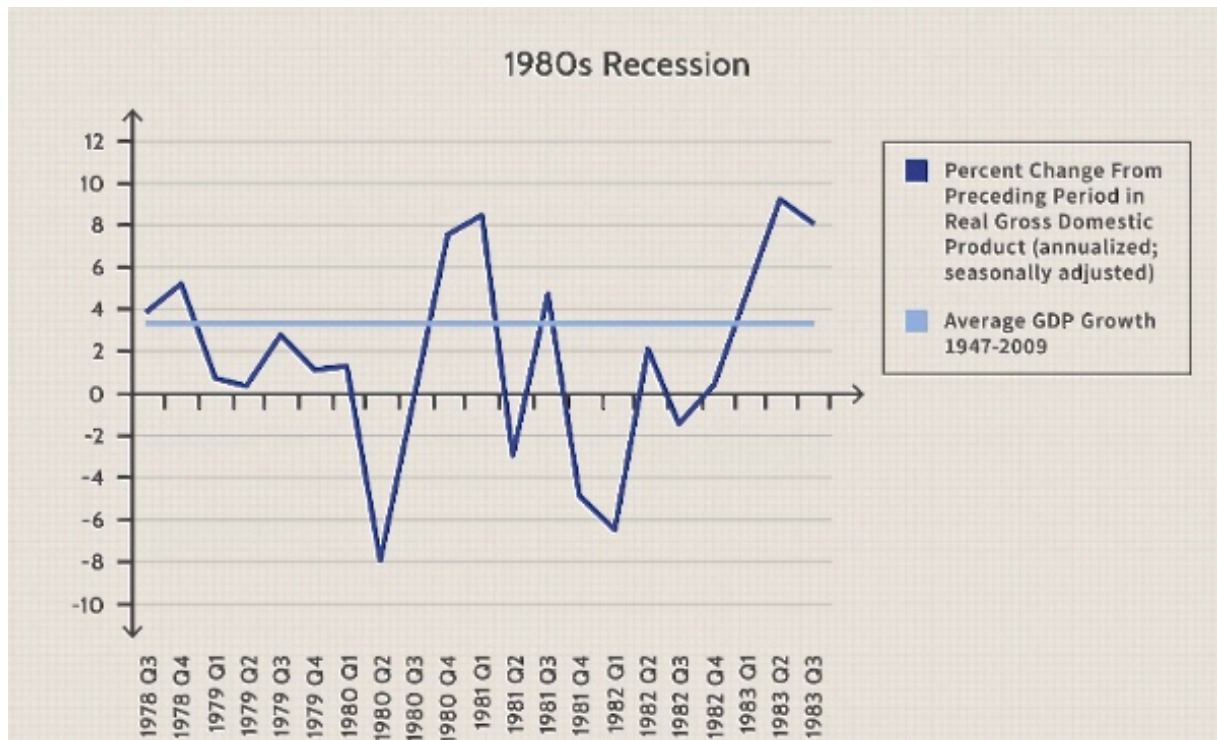


FIGURE 6. THE DOUBLE DIP RECESSION OF THE EARLY 1980S. CHART COURTESY OF INVESTOPEDIA.

U.S. unemployment increased 50% from the summer of 1980 to the end of 1982 – hitting 10.8%. This was the highest in U.S. history since the Great Depression, until 2020 (see Figure 7).

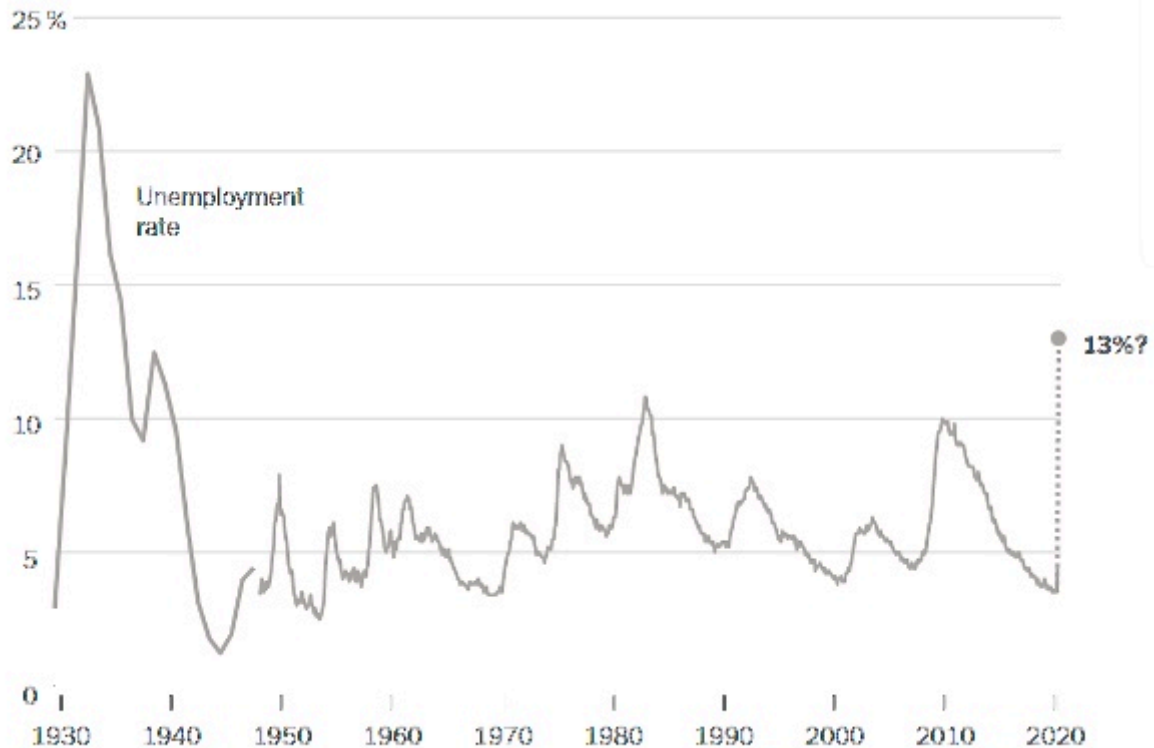


FIGURE 7. U.S. UNEMPLOYMENT. CHART COURTESY OF THE NEW YORK TIMES.

A Powerful One, Two Punch. Between the tax code change and the double dip recession, most collectibles, to include duck stamps and prints, suffered a powerful combination blow from which it would take many years to adequately recover.

Since the U.S stamp market, in particular, benefitted *so greatly* from the previous tax laws (In the late 1970s, I can remember people literally walking the streets of Manhattan with suitcases full of cash – desperately looking for quality stamps to invest in), quite understandably, it was never again able to reach the exalted heights it attained from 1977-81.

At this point I would like to introduce and discuss the Linn's U.S. Stamp Market Index. When we take a narrow view, we can immediately see a direct correlation between the unique set of economic circumstances outlined above and the stamp market – a classic inverted “V”.

First, the market rose rapidly during the late 1970s, when people were looking for a hedge against inflation and the current tax laws rewarded investment in stamps, prints and other kinds of collectibles. Then, during the double dip recession (1980-82), the market sputtered. Finally, after the new tax law took effect in January of 1982, it entered a period of steep decline (see Figure 8).



FIGURE 8. U.S. STAMP MARKET INDEX (1977-1985).
COURTESY OF LINN'S STAMP NEWS.

Now, let us take a wider view of the stamp market. After falling for a number of years, the stamp market was able to correct itself to a great extent – without the benefit of runaway inflation and favorable tax laws (see Figures 9 and 10).

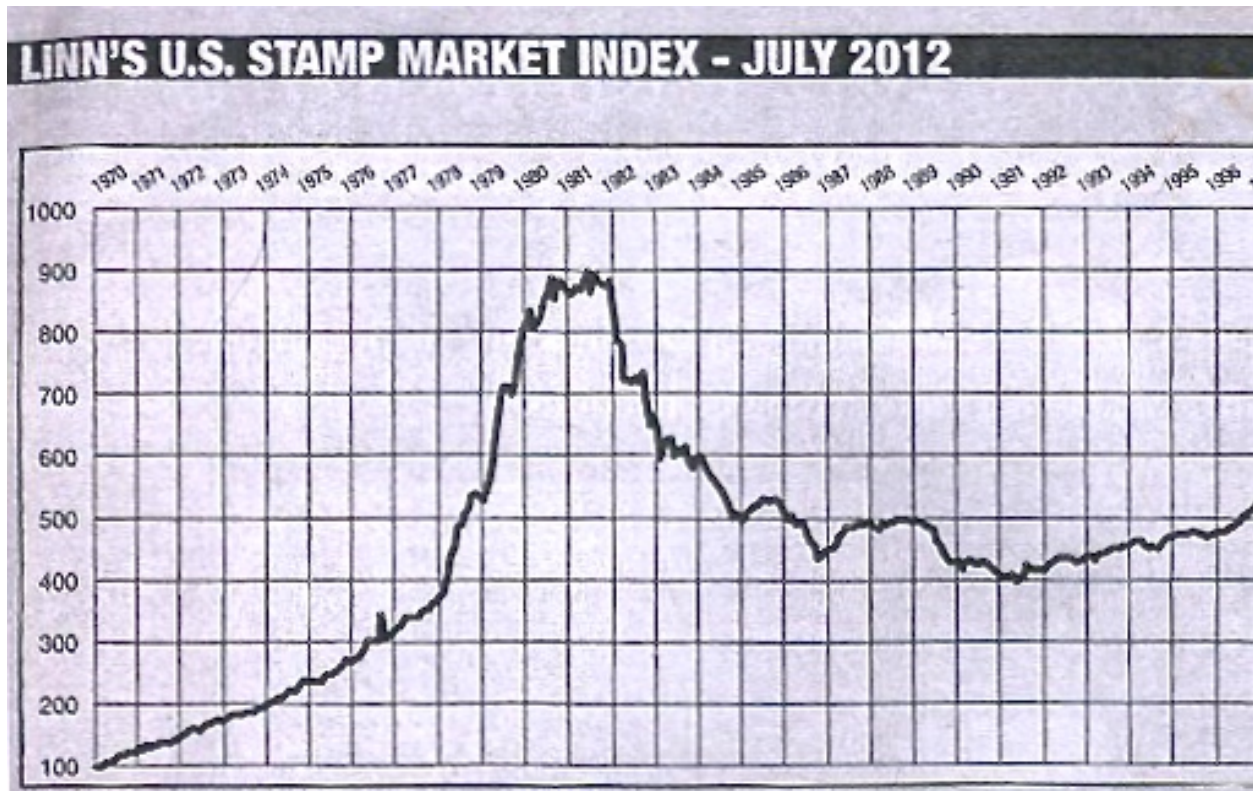


FIGURE 9. U.S. STAMP MARKET INDEX (1970-1997).

As stated at the beginning of this post, following the 1980-81 season (RW47), duck stamp sales dipped below the two million mark for the first time in 12 years. Although hunters accounted for the majority of duck stamp sales, the buying habits of many of them were affected in much the same way as collectors and investors.

In fact, by this point in time, many hunters had become collectors and/or investors on some level, themselves. They bought extra unused stamps for their collections, to save for their kids or to be framed with prints in their home or office. In addition, an untold number of hunters supported their local Ducks Unlimited or California Waterfowl Association Chapters by buying framed stamps and prints at fund-raising dinners and auctions.

Furthermore, If we compare the graph in Figure 9 to the number of duck stamp sold for the years 1980-81 through 1997-98 (RW51 – RW64):

1980-81 (RW47)	2,045,114
1981-82 (RW48)	1,907,120
1982-83 (RW49)	1,926,253
1983-84 (RW50)	1,867,998
1984-85 (RW51)	1,913,861
1985-86 (RW52)	1,780,636
1986-87 (RW53)	1,794,484
1987-88 (RW54)	1,663,270
1988-89 (RW55)	1,402,096
1989-90 (RW56)	1,415,882
1990-91 (RW57)	1,408,373
1991-92 (RW58)	1,423,374
1992-93 (RW59)	1,347,393
1993-94 (RW60)	1,402,569
1994-95 (RW61)	1,471,751
1995-96 (RW62)	1,539,622
1996-97 (RW63)	1,560,123
1997-98 (RW64)	1,697,590

We can see that the post-1981 decline and gradual resurgence in duck stamp sales almost perfectly mirrors the U.S. stamp market index. This suggests that either more hunters were collectors or that collectors were buying more duck stamps than we thought – or both.

As the stamp market index correlates almost perfectly with the factors discussed above, the comparison also shows that the drop in duck stamp sales following the 1980-81 season was primarily due to economic factors and *not* due to a waning interest in duck stamps per se.

One More Observation. The face value of federal duck stamps was raised three times in four years, starting with the 1987-88 issue (RW54). This amounted to a 50% increase (from \$10 to \$15) and likely contributed to the all-time low sales recorded for the 1992-93 issue (RW59). Much as when a restaurant owner feels the need to raise prices when things are slow in order to maintain a desired gross revenue – Catch 22 often ensues.

In Figure 10, the years along the top of the chart are so small they hard to read. However, I included this even wider view to show the stamp market continued to improve well beyond 1997 and, if we do not consider the unusual rise from 1977-1980 and subsequent fall, it progressed in a steady upward direction for decades – starting in 1970 and continuing until the **The Great Recession** in 2008.

US Stamps

Linn's U.S. Stamp Market Index – April 2014

Apr 24, 2014, 2 AM



FIGURE 10. U.S. STAMP MARKET INDEX (1970-2014).

If we could let go of our unrealistic yearning to return to a stamp market that lasted for but a very brief period (1977-81) and accept it for what it is – unattainable pie in the sky – we could be content with the fact the market for U.S. stamps, to include duck stamps and prints, is **much better today** than it ever was before that admittedly exciting interlude – and realize it is, in fact, a testament to everything the stamp collecting hobby *will always offer us* that we are doing as well as we are today.

Alternatively, if we want to remember the period 1977-81 in a positive way, we can now take solace in the fact that the stamp hobby was able to rebound (to a great extent) from one of the biggest one, two punches in modern history.

As many Americans still fight to regain their financial footing following The Great Recession, a spate of natural disasters and now the virus, that knowledge can provide us with hope and confidence going forward.

As I write this, every stamp dealer I have spoken with has reported their business is up 25 – 33% during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The impetus is truly regrettable; however, the fact is that people are reconnecting with their stamp collections in higher numbers than at any time in recent memory.

When we come through the other side of this, there is no question that a healthy percentage of them will continue to enjoy this wonderful hobby. Dire Straits? Almost certainly, *not*.

The Post Heyday Period

To start with, we have two used examples of the 1984-85 issue (RW51). Both are off license; the first has a very small signature and the second is signed almost completely in the left border. It seems that a portion of the signature stayed on the license when the stamp was soaked off (see Figures 11 and 12).



FIGURE 11. RW51 WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE.
COURTESY OF TIM HICKEY.



FIGURE 12. RW51 WITH A SIGNATURE MAINLY IN THE BORDER.

Next, we have two examples of the 1985-86 issue (RW52). One is off license with a very small signature by **Andrew Colella** and one is used on license in combination with a 1985-86 California Duck Stamp (see Figures 13 and 14).

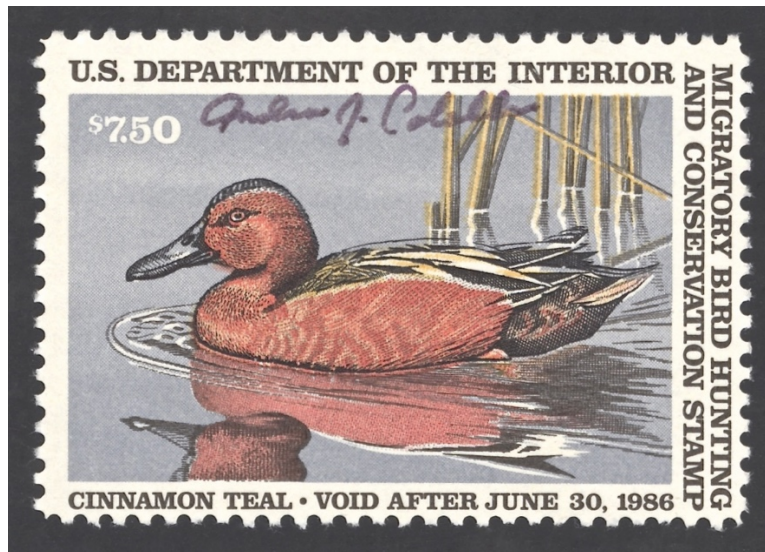


FIGURE 13. RW52 WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE BY ANDREW COLELLA.



FIGURE 14. RW52 USED ON LICENSE IN COMBINATION WITH A 1985-86 CALIFORNIA DUCK STAMP.

Next, we have two examples of the 1986-87 issue (RW53). One is off license with a very small signature by **Andrew Colella** and one is used on license in combination with 1986-87 Iowa Habitat and Migratory Waterfowl Stamps. This is the last time we will see a stamp from Andrew Colella in this series of posts (see Figures 15 and 16).



FIGURE 15. RW53 WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE BY ANDREW COLELLA.



FIGURE 16. RW53 USED WITH 1886-87 IOWA HABITAT AND WATERFOWL STAMPS.

Next, we have two examples of the 1987-88 issue (RW54). The first is a truly amazing used stamp with a neat signature completely within the lower border and the second is used on license in combination with 1987-88 California Duck Stamp. Note this is the last time **E.L. Vanderford** bought duck stamps to go hunting (see Figures 15, 16 and 17).



FIGURE 17. RW54 WITH A SIGNATURE COMPLETELY WITHIN THE BORDER.

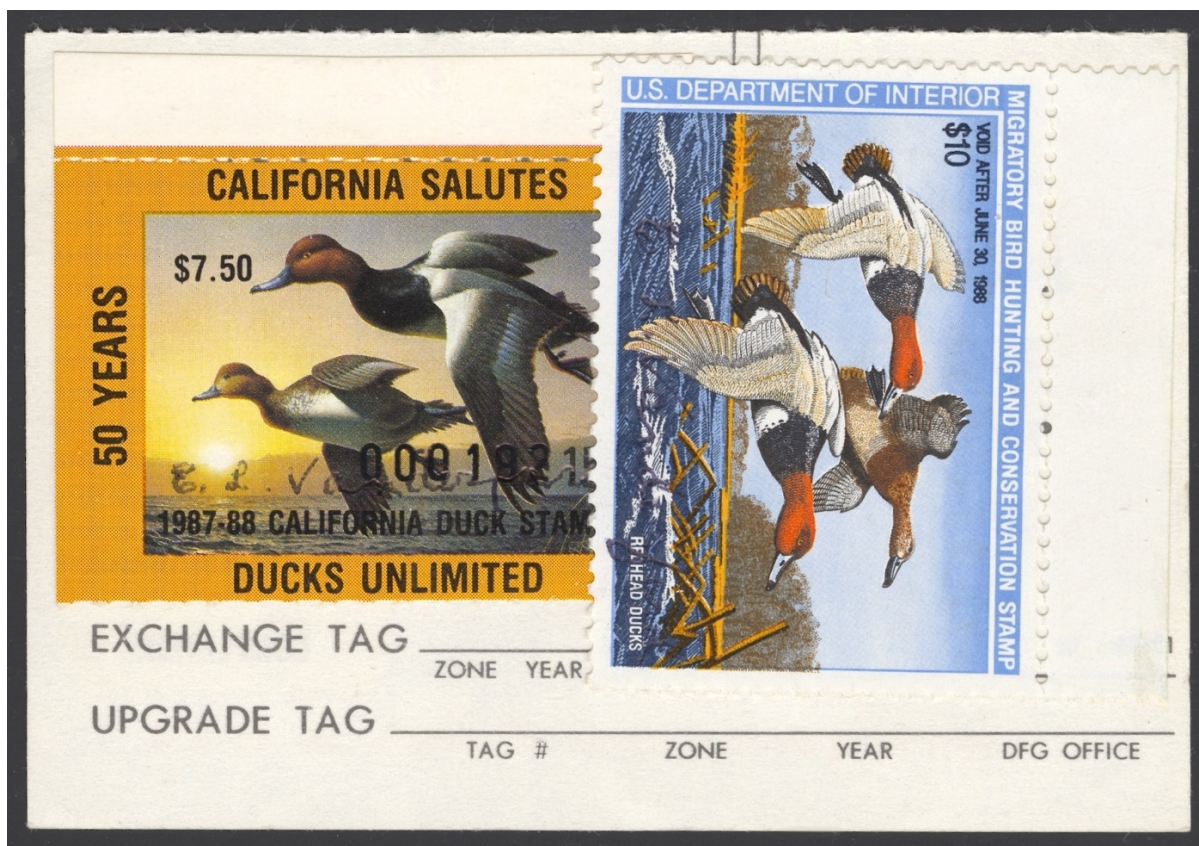


FIGURE 18. RW54 USED ON LICENSE IN COMBINATION WITH A 1987-88 CALIFORNIA DUCK STAMP. NOTE THIS WOULD BE THE LAST TIME E.L. VANDERFORD WENT DUCK HUNTING.



FIGURE 19. RW54 SIGNED BY E.L. VANDERFORD.

Next, we have a used example of the 1988-89 issue (RW55) with a very small, unobtrusive signature (see Figure 20).



FIGURE 20. RW55 WITH A VERY SMALL UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.

Next, we have two examples of the 1989-90 issue (RW56). One is off license with a very small, fine signature and one is used on license in combination with a 1989 Wisconsin Waterfowl Stamp. Both of the stamps on license have very tiny signatures (see Figures 21 and 22).



FIGURE 21. RW56 WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE.



FIGURE 22. RW56 USED WITH A 1989 WISCONSIN WATERFOWL STAMP.

Next, we have an example of the 1990-91 issue (RW57) off license with a small, unobtrusive signature (see Figure 23).



FIGURE 23. RW57 WITH A SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.

Next, we have two used examples of the 1991-92 issue (RW58), presented by the father and son collecting team of Tom and Tim Hickey. Tom's has a neat, unobtrusive signature and Tim's has a very small signature, much of which is within the left margin (see Figures 24 and 25).

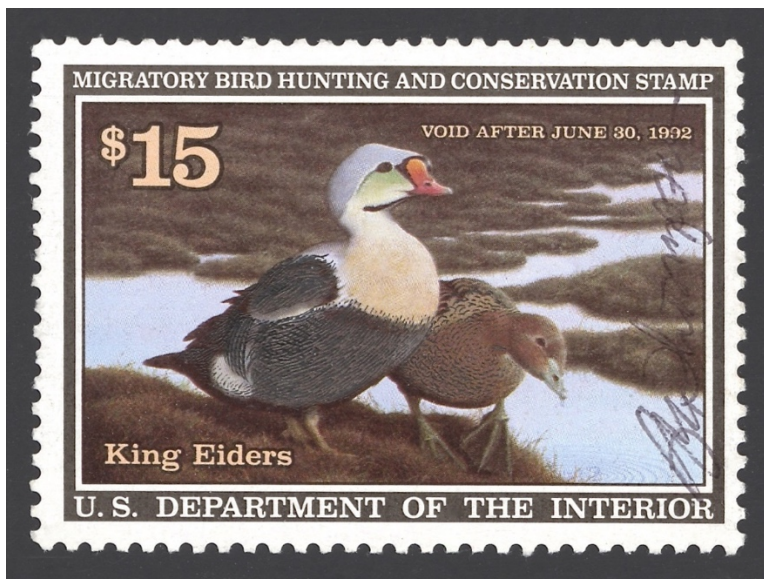


FIGURE 24. RW58 WITH A NEAT, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.
COURTESY OF TOM HICKEY.



FIGURE 25. RW58 WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE.
COURTESY OF TIM HICKEY.

Next, we have two examples of the 1992-93 issue (RW59). One is off license with a small signature and one is used on license in combination with a 1992 Texas Waterfowl Stamp. For the stamp off license, the hunter selected a color of ink that blends into the mountains in the background. Both of the stamps on license have signatures in the lower border (see Figures 26, 27 and 28).



FIGURE 26. RW59 WITH A SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.

<p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16</p> <p>TURKEY TAG (FALL SEASON ONLY) EXPIRES 8-31-93</p> <p>Turkey killed on _____ Ranch Located in _____ County</p> <p>← Attach tag to turkey BEFORE MOVING carcass. Tag must remain with carcass until final disposition.</p> <p>17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16</p> <p>TURKEY TAG (FALL OR SPRING) EXPIRES 8-31-93</p> <p>Turkey killed on _____ Ranch Located in _____ County</p> <p>← Attach tag to turkey BEFORE MOVING carcass. Tag must remain with carcass until final disposition.</p> <p>17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16</p> <p>BUCK OR ANTLERLESS MULE DEER TAG EXPIRES 8-31-93</p> <p>Deer killed on _____ Ranch Located in _____ County</p> <p>← Attach tag to deer BEFORE MOVING carcass. Tag must remain with carcass until final disposition.</p> <p>17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16</p> <p>TURKEY TAG (SPRING SEASON ONLY) EXPIRES 8-31-93</p> <p>Turkey killed on _____ Ranch Located in _____ County</p> <p>← Attach tag to turkey BEFORE MOVING carcass. Tag must remain with carcass until final disposition.</p> <p>17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31</p>
<p>HELP STOP POACHING! Operation Game Thief rewards citizens who report game law violations resulting in convictions. To report a violation call this toll-free number: 1-800-792-GAME</p> <p>Tax deductible donations from individual sportsmen, businesses, and organizations are the only source of funds for Operation Game Thief.</p>			
<p>\$15 VOID AFTER JUNE 30, 1993</p> <p>MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING AND CONSERVATION STAMP</p> <p>SPECTACLED EIDER</p> <p>U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR</p> <p><i>John M. Caravan II</i></p>	<p>139-092910-3</p> <p>Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept.</p> <p>1992</p> <p>Waterfowl Stamp \$7.00</p> <p><i>John M. Caravan II</i></p> <p>LICENSE WILL FOLD BEST ON PERFORATIONS</p>	<p>THIS SPACE RESERVED FOR CURRENT TEXAS ARCHERY STAMP</p>	<p>THIS SPACE RESERVED FOR CURRENT TEXAS WHITE-WINGED DOVE STAMP</p>
<p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16</p> <p>BUCK OR ANTLERLESS WHITE-TAILED DEER TAG EXPIRES 8-31-93</p> <p>This tag is valid ONLY in counties having 2 BUCK BAG LIMITS.</p> <p>Deer killed on _____ Ranch Located in _____ County</p> <p>← Attach tag to deer BEFORE MOVING carcass. Tag must remain with carcass until final disposition.</p> <p>17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16</p> <p>ANTLERLESS MULE OR WHITE-TAILED DEER TAG EXPIRES 8-31-93</p> <p>Deer killed on _____ Ranch Located in _____ County</p> <p>← Attach tag to deer BEFORE MOVING carcass. Tag must remain with carcass until final disposition.</p> <p>17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16</p> <p>ANTLERLESS WHITE-TAILED DEER TAG EXPIRES 8-31-93</p> <p>Deer killed on _____ Ranch Located in _____ County</p> <p>← Attach tag to deer BEFORE MOVING carcass. Tag must remain with carcass until final disposition.</p> <p>17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31</p>	<p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16</p> <p>BUCK* OR ANTLERLESS**** WHITE-TAILED DEER TAG EXPIRES 8-31-93</p> <p>When used on a BUCK white-tailed deer, this tag is valid in counties having EITHER 1 or 2 BUCK BAG LIMITS. ****When used on an ANTLERLESS white-tailed deer, this tag is valid ONLY in counties having 4 DEER BAG LIMITS.</p> <p>Deer killed on _____ Ranch Located in _____ County</p> <p>← Attach tag to deer BEFORE MOVING carcass. Tag must remain with carcass until final disposition.</p> <p>17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31</p>

FIGURE 27. RW59 USED WITH A 1992 TEXAS WATERFOWL STAMP.

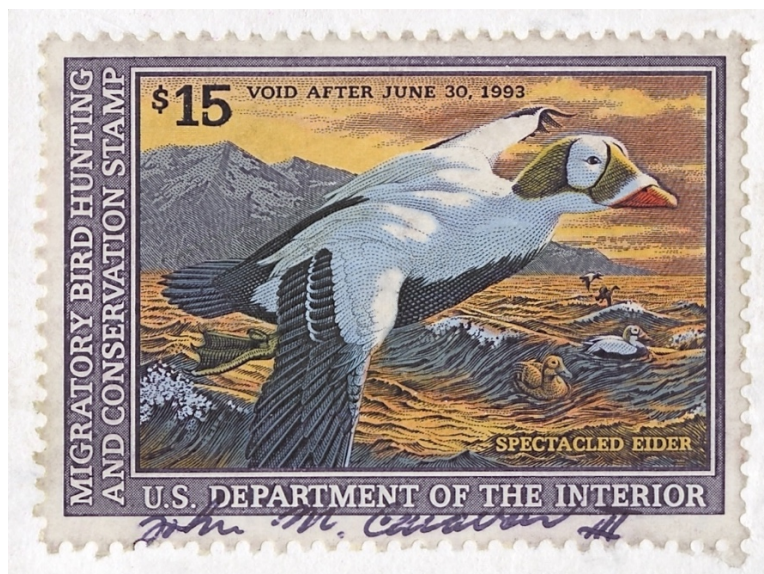


FIGURE 28. RW59 SIGNED IN THE LOWER BORDER. (ENLARGED)

Next, we have two examples of the 1993-94 issue (RW60). One is off license with a small signature, and one is used on license in combination with three North Dakota stamps: 1993 Non Resident Waterfowl and 1993-94 Non Resident Small Game and General Game (see Figures 29 and 30).



FIGURE 29. RW60 WITH A SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.


<p>Expires March 31, 1994</p> <p>1993-94 Non-Resident Fishing License</p> <p>(place stamp here)</p> <p>VALIDATE BY SIGNING IN INK</p>		<p>Expires March 31, 1994</p> <p>1993-94 Trout & Salmon License</p> <p>(place stamp here)</p> <p>VALIDATE BY SIGNING IN INK</p>	<p>Expires June 30, 1994</p> <p><i>Michael A. McDaniel</i></p> <p>State of North Dakota Non-Resident Small Game License - \$75.00</p> <p>No 7085</p> <p>Expires June 30, 1994 N.D. Game and Fish Dept. NON-TRANSFERABLE</p>
<p>Expires June 30, 1994</p> <p><i>Michael A. McDaniel</i></p> <p>State of North Dakota Non-Resident General Game and Habitat License - \$6.00</p> <p>No 7085</p> <p>Expires June 30, 1994 N.D. Game and Fish Dept. NON-TRANSFERABLE</p>	<p>U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR \$15 CANYASBACKS • VOID AFTER JUNE 30, 1994 MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING AND CONSERVATION STAMP</p> 	<p>Expires Sept. 1, 1994</p> <p>1993-94 Non-Resident Furbearer & Non-Game License</p> <p>(place stamp here)</p> <p>VALIDATE BY SIGNING IN INK</p>	
<p>Non-Resident Deer Bow License</p> <p>(place stamp here)</p> <p>VALIDATE BY SIGNING IN INK</p>	<p>Non-Resident Antelope Bow License</p> <p>(place stamp here)</p> <p>VALIDATE BY SIGNING IN INK</p>	<p>Non-Resident Non-Game License: Required for non-residents to hunt any non-game species.</p> <p>(place stamp here)</p> <p>VALIDATE BY SIGNING IN INK</p>	
<p>Valid for 1993 Season</p>			
<p>Non-Resident Deer Gun License/Special Unit Deer Permit Those under age 14 are not eligible to purchase this license.</p> <p>(place stamp here)</p> <p>VALIDATE BY SIGNING IN INK.</p>			
<p>N. DAK. GAME & FISH DEPARTMENT</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> SEPT. 1993-ZONE _____ \$10.00-1993</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCT. State of N. Dak.</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NOV. NR. Waterfowl Stamp No 7085</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> DEC. NON-TRANSFERABLE</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31</p>			

FIGURE 30. RW60 USED WITH THREE NORTH DAKOTA STAMPS REQUIRED TO HUNT WATERFOWL.

To finish the Post Heyday Period (and our series of posts), we have examples of the 1994-5 through 1997-98 issues (RW61 – RW64). Each of the stamps is off license and have small, unobtrusive signatures (see Figures 31-34).



FIGURE 31. RW61 WITH A SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.

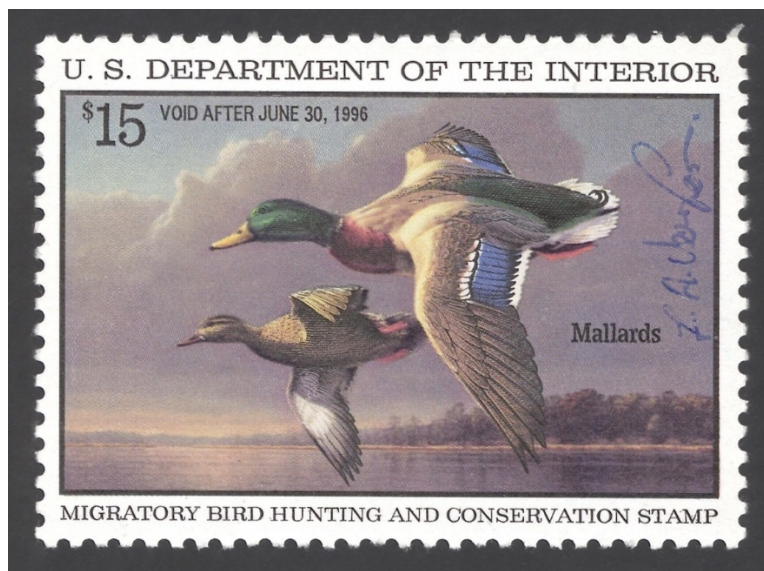


FIGURE 32. RW62 WITH A SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.

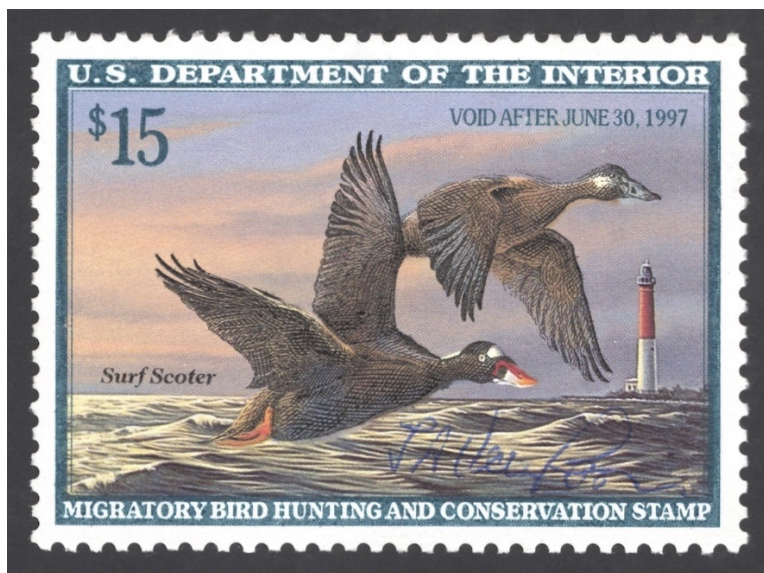


FIGURE 33. RW63 WITH A SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.



FIGURE 34. RW64 WITH A SMALL, UNOBTRUSIVE SIGNATURE.

Series Summary

The federal duck stamps are the longest running series in U.S. stamp history. When the first stamps were placed on sale to the public in 1934, they were not required to be signed by the hunter. Although government officials were concerned hunters might share stamps, they were required to be affixed directly to either a license or a Form 3333 immediately upon purchase (see Figure 35).



FIGURE 35. RW1 ON FORM 3333, SIGNED IN THE SELVAGE "YOURS TRULY J.N. DARLING, ALIAS DING".

The beautiful blue, oversized stamp designed by J.N. 'Ding Darling proved to be very popular with collectors and they wished to purchase unused singles and multiples for their collections. Therefore, two weeks before the stamps were taken off sale in 1935, Congress amended the Migratory Bird Stamp Act to allow the purchase of unused stamps.

A fundamental section of the amendment mandated that starting with the 1935-35 season (RW2), duck hunters were now required to **sign their name across the face of their stamps in ink** to validate them for hunting.

The early stamps featured artwork by the country's leading wildlife artists, including Frank Benson, Francis Lee Jaques and Lynn Bogue Hunt and were greatly admired by stamp collectors and wildlife enthusiasts for their beauty. However, relatively few hunters had an appreciation for the art at this time and they were generally not careful when signing the stamps. There were, of course, exceptions such as C.H. Bry and E. L. Vanderford (see Figure 36).



FIGURE 36. RW7 WITH CLASSIC ARTWORK BY FRANCIS L. JAQUES, ON LICENSE AND SIGNED BY THE LEGENDARY HUNTER AND COLLECTOR E.L. VANDERFORD.

After a dozen or so years, there were enough stamps to attract people to join such early adopters as Alvin C. Broholm and enjoy the new hobby of duck stamp collecting. Frank Benson and Ding Darling made etchings from their original artwork available to collectors in 1942 and 1944, respectively, and a sister hobby was born – collecting limited edition duck stamp prints.

Robert Hines proposed the first federal duck stamp art contest in 1950 and then the nascent hobbies started to receive a lot of annual publicity. Alvin Broholm and Morton Dean Joyce received organized philately's highest honors in the 1950s and brought national recognition, respect and more publicity to the hobbies of duck and revenue stamp collecting.

Hunters started to take notice, and many began taking extra time, carefully signing their stamps in a small, unobtrusive manner. In addition, more hunters saved their expired license and stamps – preserving them for future generations.

The Vietnam War years saw artists working in all mediums, including duck stamp artists, designers and engravers, elevate their craft to unprecedented levels in a collective effort to preserve the American spirit.

During this period, some of the all-time great duck stamps and prints were created, including one that is affectionately referred to as “the dog” – a riveting rendition of King Buck by Maynard Reece and the BEP design team (see Figure 37). Also, the first duck stamp prints were published in full color.



FIGURE 37. RW26 FEATURING KING BUCK BY MAYNARD REECE.

In 1974 Minnesota artist David Maass joined forces with Wild Wing’s Bill Webster to mass-market David’s winning wood duck design and change the duck stamp print business and hobby forever. The very next year, James Fischer visited a decoy show and was inspired by a canvasback decoy to submit a provocative entry that judges voted in as yet another iconic piece in the duck stamp annals.

In the mid to late 1970s, a new breed of “duck stamp dealer” emerged to facilitate the collecting of duck stamps and prints and, very quickly, stamps in all conditions came to have real value. Some dealers started charging a premium for the stamps with small, unobtrusive signatures. These were often framed together as a set in the homes, offices and duck clubs of hunters.

By now, a fairly large percentage of hunters were carefully signing their name (see Figure 38) and ever-increasing numbers carried their stamps loose (carefully protected) while hunting. Those who did affix their stamps now made a habit of saving them for collector friends and relatives or to sell to duck stamp dealers – and the hobby of collecting duck stamps and prints really took flight.



FIGURE 38. RW44 WITH A VERY SMALL SIGNATURE BY ANDREW COLELLA.

As explained above, this brief period of collectibles buying frenzy, including duck stamps and prints, was facilitated by **a unique set of economic circumstances** – one best understood in retrospect – and was unsustainable at that pace.

The number of duck stamps sold dropped for a number of years – falling after a potent one, two economic punch. For this reason, finding stamps with small signatures in the Post Heyday Period is a little more challenging – but still very doable.

Our venerable stamp hobby has endured the test of time and is, even now, perhaps experiencing the initial stages of a renaissance. As many people reconnect with their hobbies and pastimes in 2020, collecting federal duck stamps with small signatures offers tremendous ameliorative possibilities for buoying our spirit at a very reasonable cost – a truly impressive “bang for your buck”.

And you know what else? It is a blast – a real thrill-of-the-hunt adventure! To see a gallery with examples of the 1934-35 through 1997-98 issues (RW1 – RW64) with small signatures, visit:

<https://waterfowlstampsandmore.com/galleries/federal-waterfowl-stamps-with-small-signatures/>

We hope you have enjoyed learning more about the federal duck stamps and the possibilities for collecting them with small signatures. We would like to thank Michael Jaffe for helping the idea for this series of posts to coalesce and for contributing so many cool stamps, especially the early ones signed by C.H. Bry.

To Scott Marsden for contributing the incredible group of stamps signed by Andrew and Ed Colella; Tom and Tim Hickey for kindly filling in better examples from their great collections where needed; Richie Prager for sharing his original duck stamp art and checking my economic facts and, especially, hunters like C.H. Bry, E.L. Vanderford, Owen Chelf, Raymond Peterman and the Colellas – who appreciated and respected the duck stamp art, took extra time to carefully sign their stamps and then saved and preserved them for our future enjoyment. Stay safe, everyone.

