WASHINGTON/FRANKLIN STAMPS OF 1908-1922

The "Washington/Franklin" series of United States postage stamps of 1908-1922, also known as the "Third Bureau Issues", are perhaps the most difficult US stamps to identify. In addition to new techniques for printing (i.e. rotary press, offset) and ways of offering stamps to the public (coil stamps) a new watermark (single-line USPS) was used for the first time. Additionally, an odd type of paper, known as "bluish" paper, was used for a brief period in 1909.

There are four major elements that need to be understood to conclusively identify Washington Franklin stamps:

1. **Design:** Five designs—A138, A139, A140, A148 & A149. See **Section 1** below.
2. **Perforations:** Imperforate, perforated, and both horizontally and vertically perforated coil stamps. See **Section 2** below.
3. **Watermarks:** Single line, double line, or unwatermarked. See **Section 3** below.
4. **Press Type:** Flat plate, rotary or offset. See **Section 4** below.

There are four minor elements that also need to be understood:

1. **Paper:** Two varieties—wood pulp and "bluish" paper. See **Section 5** below.
2. **"2 CENTS 2" Types:** Nine types—I, Ia, II, III, IV, V, Va, VI and VII. See **Section 6** below.
3. **"3 CENTS 3" Types:** Four types—I, II, III and IV. See **Section 7** below.
4. **Design Size:** 19½ to 20mm X 22mm—only important in identifying two rotary press stamps, Scott 545 & 546. See row 8 of **Identification Table** at bottom of page.

Following are explanations and illustrations of all these variables, and at the bottom of this page is a table that can be used to easily identify individual Washington/Franklin stamps.

Section 1: The Designs

Washington Franklin stamps come in five different designs:

- **A138:** Franklin, "ONE CENT" spelled out below portrait. Only one value.
- **A139:** Washington, "TWO CENTS" spelled out below portrait. Only one value.
- **A140:** Washington, value in "2 CENTS 2" format below portrait. Values from 1 cent through 1 dollar.
- **A148:** Franklin, U.S. POSTAGE in curved label above portrait. Values from 8 cents through 1 dollar.
- **A149:** Franklin, landscape format, two colors, only two values; 2 dollars and 5 dollars.

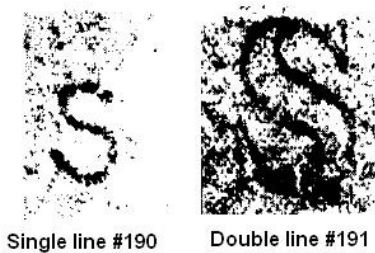See below for illustrations of each design.

A138
Only one value:
"ONE CENT"

A139
Only one value:
"TWO CENTS"

A140
Values from 1 cent
through 1 dollar

A148
Values from 8 cents
through 1 dollar

A149
2 dollars & 5 dollars

Section 2: Coil Stamps

Coil stamps were designed for use in dispensers and vending machines that could supply stamps one at a time. The first Washington/Franklin coils were issued in 1908, in strips of 100 that were perforated either 12 horizontally or 12 vertically. See image below.
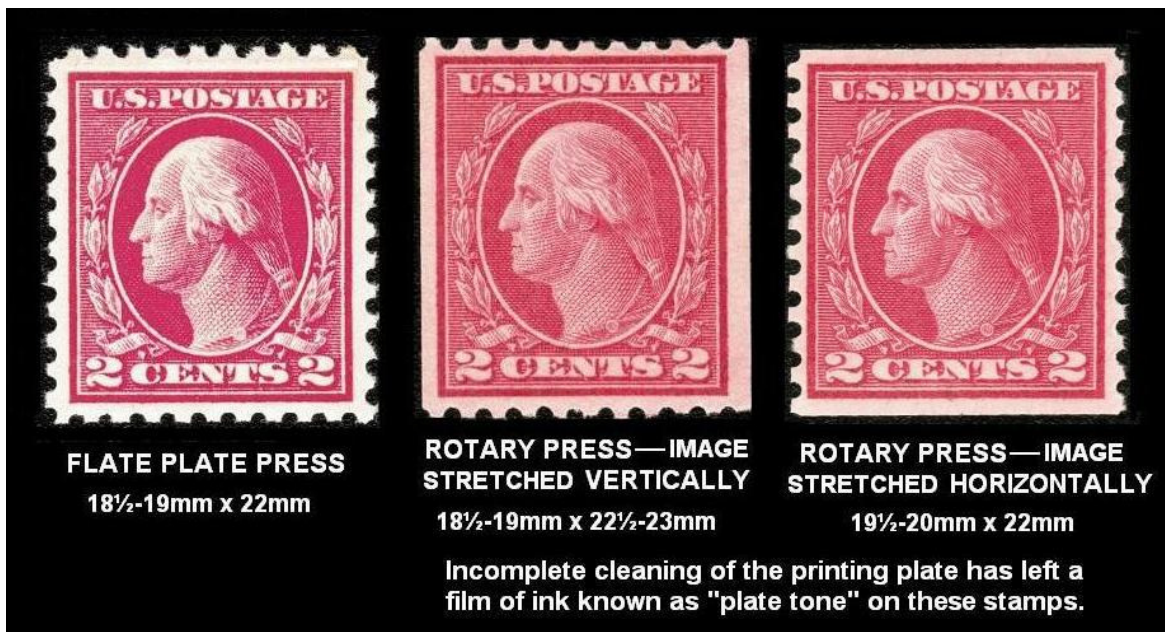

COIL STAMP
Perforated horizontally

COIL STAMP
Perforated vertically

Section 3: Watermarks

Washington/Franklins were printed on paper that was marked with single line watermark (190), double line watermark (191), or unwatermarked.

Single line #190   Double line #191

Section 4: Press types: Intaglio—Flat Plate & Rotary

Intaglio printing, also known as "recess printing", is done from a plate that has lines etched or carved into it. When ink is applied to the plate, it collects in these lines and grooves, then after the surface of the plate is wiped clean it is run through a press under pressure. The pressure forces the ink from the grooves in the plate onto the paper, which form tiny ridges that, when dry, can be felt with a fingernail drawn lightly across them. A flat plate press, as its name suggests, utilizes a flat printing plate that is run through a press, then re-inked, wiped, and run through the press again. A rotary press utilizes a printing plate that has been formed into a cylinder, which allows for faster feeding of the printing sheets through the press—the plate is inked, wiped and impressed into the paper in one continuous action. Because a rotary press plate has been rounded, the image will be somewhat distorted. For stamps this means that the design will be slightly higher or wider than it would have been on a flat plate press. Also, the difficulty inherent in inking and wiping a rotary press plate while it was in motion meant that early rotary press stamps usually show a considerable amount of "plate tone", a sheen of ink that would transfer from the incompletely cleaned plate onto the stamp. See illustration below.

FLATE PLATE PRESS
18½-19mm x 22mm

ROTARY PRESS—IMAGE STRETCHED VERTICALLY
18½-19mm x 22½-23mm

ROTARY PRESS—IMAGE STRETCHED HORIZONTALLY
19½-20mm x 22mm

Incomplete cleaning of the printing plate has left a film of ink known as "plate tone" on these stamps.

Press types: Offset

Offset printing is a fast, reliable and efficient method for printing. It was first used for printing stamps during the World War I as a cost-cutting measure, however the stamps, which lacked the fine detail of intaglio printed stamps, were unpopular with the public, who considered them ugly and cheap-looking. The use of offset presses to print stamps was discontinued in 1919, although offset was later re-introduced for printing stamps with marked success.
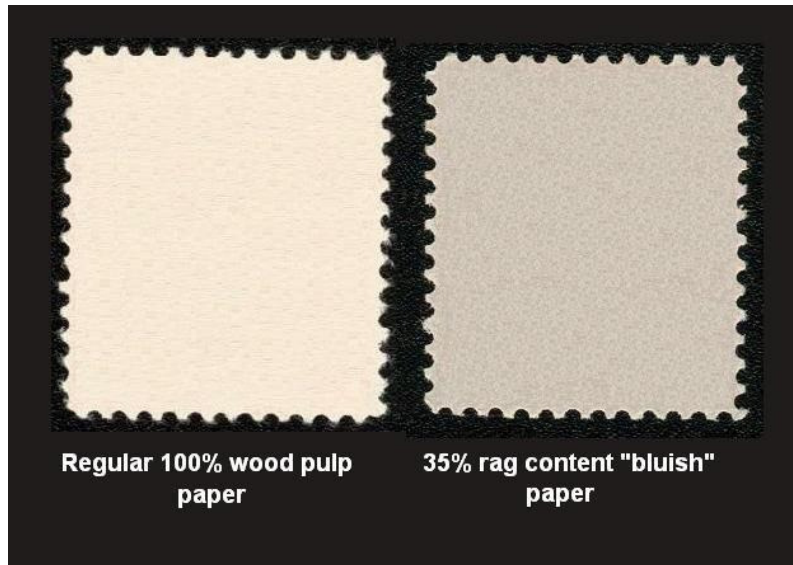
The image of an offset-printed Washington stamp is coarser and less detailed than an intaglio (i.e., flat or rotary press) printed stamp. Also, the ink lies flat on the surface of an offset printed stamp, while intaglio printing leaves a fine ridge of ink on the paper. In addition, some of the colors in the offset Washingtons are sharp and even garish. See below for general characteristics of offset printed stamps.

INTAGLIO PRESS PRINTING

OFFSET PRESS PRINTING

Details in laurel leaves and
hair consists of fine lines—
eyebrow and area above eye show
considerable detail.

Fine lines in laurel leaves and hair
replaced by thick lines or dots.
Lines in eyebrow and above eye
merge into area of solid color.

Color and detail on an intaglio printed
stamp.

Color and detail on an offset printed
stamp.

Section 5: Bluish paper

For a short period in 1909, some US stamps were printed on paper that had a 35% rag content rather than 100% wood pulp as usual, giving the paper a

somewhat grayish hue. These are known as "bluish" paper stamps, and can best be distinguished by comparing the backs of the stamps against those of known 100% wood-pulp content. See comparison below. These stamps were printed in 10 denominations: 1 cent, 2 cents, 3 cents, 4 cents, 5 cents, 6 cents, 8 cents, 10 cents, 13 cents and 15 cents. All are uncommon to very rare. Stamps were only issued in Washington DC, so any used specimens must bear contemporaneous Washington DC cancels.

Regular 100% wood pulp paper

35% rag content "bluish" paper

Section 6: Types of the 2 cent Washington (A140)

Several minor variations in the design of the A140 2 cent Washington stamp exist, and they have been given Roman numerals to distinguish them. The best website I have ever seen about these types is run by **1847**usa.com (© 2002-2005 All rights reserved). Click on the thumbnails below to go right to the webpage that deals with the stamp you are trying to identify.

You may want to check out **1847**usa.com's entire website, which can be found here, for a treasure trove of information on stamps of the United States. They also have a wealth of philatelic literature for sale here.

Flat Plate & Rotary Press Stamps TYPES I, Ia, II & III

Offset Press Stamps TYPES IV, V, Va, VI & VII

Section 7: Types of the 3 cent Washington (A140)

In addition, several minor variations in the design of the A140 3 cent Washington stamp exist, and they have likewise been given Roman numerals to distinguish them. Again, I can't improve on the job **1847**usa.com has done in explaining them. Click on the thumbnails below to go right to the webpage that deals with the stamp you are trying to identify.

Flat Plate & Rotary Press Stamps — TYPES I & II

Offset Press Stamps — TYPES III & IV

Identification Table

In using the table below, you first need to identify your stamp in the rows to the left, in blue, in this sequence—

- Press Type
- Watermark
- Design, where applicable. (Not always necessary—for instance, knowing the design type is unimportant in finding the catalog number of any unwatermarked flat plate stamp.)
- Size of Image. (Only important on perf 11 rotary press stamps.)
- Paper Type. (Only necessary for double-line watermark, perf 12 flate plate stamps.)

Once you have found the correct row at left, follow it to the right to find the appropriate perforation type—i.e. imperforate, perf 11, coil perf 10 vertically, etc. Under the correct red header you will find either a single number or a range of numbers reflecting different denominations or types (such as those of the 2-cent and 3-cent Washingtons). Consult the Scott catalog to find the number, within that range, of your specific stamp.

Press Type	Water mark	Design	Size of Image	Paper Type	IMPERF	PERF 12.5	PERF 12	PERF 12x10	PERF 10x12	PERF 11	PERF 10	PERF 11x10	PERF 10x11	COIL HORIZ. PERF 12	COIL HORIZ. PERF 10	COIL HORIZ. PERF 8.5	COIL VERT. PERF 12	COIL VERT. PERF 10	COIL VERT. PERF 8.5
Flat Plate	None	—	—	—	481-485					498-518 523-524 547	462-478								
"	Single line	A138 A139	—	—	383-384		374-375							385-386		390-391	387-388		392-393
"	"	A140	—	—	408-409		376-382 405-407	423A-C	423D	461	424-430				441-442	410-411	389	443-447	394-396 412-413
"	"	A148	—	—			414-421				431-440								
"	Double line	—	—	wood pulp	343-347		331-342 422-423			519	460			348-351			352-356		
"	"	—	—	bluish			357-366												
Rotary	None	—	—	—						544	543	538-541	542		486-489			490-497	
"	"	—	19½-20mm X 22mm	—						545-546									
"	Single line	—	—	—	459										448-450			452-458	
Offset	None	—	—	—	531-535	536				525-530									

Here are a few examples of how to use the table.

- Press Type: Flate Plate
- Watermark: Single line
- Design Type: A139
- Perforation type: Imperforate

The correct cell (below) shows the numbers 383-384.
The catalog reveals that 383 is a one cent stamp and 384
is a two cent stamp, therefore the number we want is **384**.

Press Type	Water mark	Design	Size of Image	Paper Type	IMPERF
Flat Plate	None	—	—	—	481-485
"	Single line	A138 A139	—	—	383-384

Another example—

- Press Type: Flate Plate
- Watermark: Double line
- Paper Type: Bluish
- Perforation type: 12

The correct cell in the table shows the numbers 357-366; this stamp is **#358**.

Another example—

- Press Type: Flate Plate
- Watermark: Double line
- Paper Type: Wood pulp
- Perforation type: Coil, perforated 12 horizontally

Range is 348-351, catalog number of this stamp is **351**.

Another example—

- Press Type: Flate Plate
  - Watermark: none
  - Perforation type: 11
  - 2 cent variety: TYPE I

Range is 498-518, catalog number of this stamp is **499**.