

This Day in History... March 30, 1908

Scarce Imperforate 1908 Lincoln Stamp

On March 30, 1908, the US Post Office issued an imperforate 5¢ Lincoln stamp that nearly went unnoticed by collectors. It was never intended for public sale and could have been lost to time if not for a group of quick-acting collectors.



*Scarce imperforate
5¢ Lincoln stamp*

The stamp was part of the series of 1902, the first series to be completely designed by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. The designs in this new series were markedly different from previous issues. They had far more ornate designs. Each stamp's border was different and highly detailed. Plus, each stamp also included the name of the person pictured and their dates of birth and death – a first for US postage. Additionally, "Series of 1902" was included on each stamp. The Lincoln stamp shows two female figures holding US flags and palm fronds, representing the reunification of the North and South.



*Imperforate Franklin
stamp from the same
series, also issued
for use in vending
machines.*

On March 30, 1908, the Post Office issued 10,000 imperforate 5¢ Lincoln stamps to the Indianapolis Post Office. This stamp, along with the 1¢ green Franklin, were issued imperforate specifically for use by vending machines. They were intended for sale only to private companies, who would create a special perforated variety for use in their own coil vending machines. The stamps, which had been printed in full sheets of 400 subjects, were divided into panes of 100 by horizontal and vertical guide lines. These lines appeared on the private coils every 20 stamps.

The 5¢ Lincoln is especially rare and might have been lost to collectors forever if not for the quick-acting members of the Detroit Philatelic Society. When a member of the Detroit Philatelic Society discovered the stamps were on sale to the public in imperforate form at the Indianapolis Post Office, he notified the club's president of the Post Office's mistake. Members of the club rushed to the post office and purchased 825 of the scarce mint stamps. Collectors also purchased approximately 350 stamps at the Washington Post Office, and a full sheet of 400 in New York.



*1903 perforate stamp
with the same design*

Experts believe that these 1,575 stamps saved by collectors were the only mint imperforate 5¢ Lincoln stamps to survive. Some additional stamps were purchased (by non-collectors) and used for postage. The total number of known #315 stamps, including both mint and postally used stamps, is about 4,000 stamps. All the rest of the stamps received private perforations. It's estimated that in all, just 13,500 stamps were issued, with the vast majority of them being perforated.

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