



# RARITY REVEALED

The Benjamin K. Miller Collection

Stamps from 1894 to the 1920s

**Curator's Tour**

The Smithsonian National Postal Museum proudly presents “Rarity Revealed: The Benjamin K. Miller Collection,” the first exhibit of the Miller stamp collection of The New York Public Library in almost 30 years. Donated in 1925, this vast holding was the first complete U.S. stamp collection ever assembled. It has been unavailable since a major theft in 1977.

The Miller collection is so large that we are displaying it in two parts. This booklet includes a curator’s tour of the second part, stamps printed during and after 1894—the year the Bureau of Engraving and Printing began printing U.S. postage stamps.

To experience the full range of the Miller collection, be sure to visit all three galleries of the exhibit. The main gallery houses

stamps from major categories, including strong holdings of early stamp coils and vending and affixing machine perforations (VAMPs). The small gems gallery holds other selected rarities. A third gallery offers still more Miller stamps and covers on dozens of panels you can pull out to examine.



## CURATOR'S TOUR

As you explore the exhibit, look beside certain objects for the symbol above. Wilson Hulme, Curator of Philately at the National Postal Museum, chose these special highlights, each of which is described in this booklet. Together, they convey many of the themes of the exhibit.

## PORTRAIT OF A COLLECTOR

Born in 1857, Benjamin Kurtz Miller was the son of a Milwaukee lawyer and grandson of one of the first federal judges in Wisconsin. He joined his father's firm after college, later becoming a partner. Even as a young lawyer, Miller collected fine books and traveled around the world. He also hunted big game, wrote articles on hunting and political economy, and produced legal reference books.

In 1906, Miller retired at 49 to pursue his many interests. He did not take up stamp collecting seriously on a large scale until 1918, when he bought one of the famous inverted "Jenny" stamps. After that, he intensified his collecting, writing articles for stamp journals and working with up to 30 dealers.

Miller transferred his collection to The New York Public Library in 1925, making the unusual decision to do so within his lifetime. He became a Fellow of the Royal Philatelic Society the next year, placing him in the top rank of philatelists worldwide. Benjamin Miller died in Milwaukee in 1928.



*1919 Victory stamps,  
red violet shade,  
Scott #537c*

## RED VIOLET VICTORY STAMPS

Like many collectors, Benjamin Miller enjoyed acquiring different color shades of stamps, which are produced by minor variations in the ink. These 1919 Victory stamps, issued to celebrate the Allied victory in World War I, are red violet, a scarce alternative to the stamp's usual violet color.

These stamps are also a good example of Miller's preference for plate blocks—blocks that include the printing plate number in the margin. Plate blocks of any stamp are more valuable because they are rarer than other blocks, singles, or pairs.



*2¢ 1917 booklet,  
American Expeditionary  
Force (AEF), Scott #499f*



## WORLD WAR I BOOKLET PANE

Stamp booklets first appeared in the U.S. in 1900 and Miller made sure to collect them. The greatest rarity in his booklet collection is this 30-stamp pane of 2¢ stamps. It's from a booklet distributed to army post offices in France during World War I.

Both 1¢ and 2¢ booklets were issued, but the soldiers were soon granted free postage on their letters home, making the booklets scarce. Of the two values, the 2¢ booklet is by far the rarer. Experts believe only about 50 copies of this pane still exist.



*Coil strip, 1909,  
Parkhurst Vending  
Machine Company*



## PARKHURST VENDING STRIP

This used strip of coil stamps is from the little-known Parkhurst Vending Machine Company, one of several firms that produced stamp vending or affixing machines in the early 1900s. Based in Indianapolis, Parkhurst supplied stamp vending machines to the city post office. In all, the machines dispensed no more than 1200 stamps.

As the internal mechanism of a Parkhurst machine moved the stamps forward, it added tiny pin pricks. Experts now use these small marks to help identify the stamps.



*1¢ 1908-10 imperforate  
coil strip with leader,  
Scott #343V*

500  
1¢ STAMPS  
ROLLED LENGTHWISE  
UNPERFORATED



## COLLECTING THE LEADER

The Bureau of Engraving and Printing started manufacturing coil stamps in 1908. This strip is from the second coil issue, 1908-10. Like many coils in the Miller collection, it includes the brown-paper leader from the end of the coil.

Benjamin Miller was ahead of his time in saving such leaders, which most collectors of the day ignored. Today, modern coil collectors value leaders highly, especially when they are still attached to the stamps.



- A- 4¢ 1906-08 coil pair, Schermack Type III perforations, Scott #314A
- B- 2¢ 1908 coil pair, Scott #321
- C- 3¢ 1910-11 "Orangeburg" coil pair, Scott #389

### THREE OUTSTANDING COILS

These extraordinary pairs include some of the 20th century's great philatelic rarities. The 4¢ pair has the slot-shaped Type III perforations of the Schermack Vending Machine Company. Researchers know of only 44 used 4¢ stamps with Schermack Type III perforations.

Rarer still is the vertical 2¢ pair from the Bureau of Engraving and Printing's experimental coils of early 1908. Only five such pairs are known.

The 3¢ pair is from what collectors call an "Orangeburg coil." In 1911, a small number of the coils were sent to one firm, Bell & Company of Orangeburg, New Jersey. Only seven unused Orangeburg pairs are known today.



\$5 1895 stamps,  
imperforate special  
printing, Scott #278P var



## IMPERFORATE 1895 BLOCK

These imperforate 1895 stamps are from an unusual special printing. Their story began a year earlier in 1894, when Gilbert Jones, co-owner of the *New York Times*, provided key technical advice to the Bureau of Engraving and Printing as it began printing postage stamps.

Jones refused any payment, but when asked, he said he would like to have imperforate 1895 stamps for his stamp

collection. The Bureau then printed a very small number of the stamps without perforations, including the ones shown here. It gave the imperforates to Jones in exchange for ordinary stamps of the same face value.



*2¢ 1918-20 stamps,  
missing some horizontal  
perforations,  
Scott #527, #527b*



## PERFORATION ERROR

Benjamin Miller liked to collect oddities and errors, including perforation mistakes. This 2¢ block of the 1918-20 issue is a particularly strange example.

The stamp sheet apparently tore during the printing process and was mended on the back with tape. You can see the tear in the second stamp from the left in the bottom row.

After the repair, the stamps were correctly perforated—but only to the right of the mended tear. No horizontal perforations were added to the left. As a result, perforations are missing above and below the first two stamps of the top row and then present for the rest of the block.



*50¢ 1914 Postage Due stamps, Scott #J58*



## RARE POSTAGE DUES

Miller's passion for completeness led him to collect many "back of the book" stamps—stamps from categories traditionally listed in the backs of catalogues. Unlike many collectors, he also regularly acquired recent and current stamps. This all-inclusive approach produced a collection full of unexpected treasures, including this rare block of Postage Dues.

Postage Due stamps were applied by post offices to show the amount of postage still owed on a mail piece. The 50¢ Postage Due of 1914 is the rarest Postage Due stamp. This plate block of six is extraordinary.



24¢ 1918 airmail stamp,  
invert, Scott #C3a

## THE INVERTED "JENNY"

Perhaps the most famous of all philatelic errors is the inverted "Jenny" airmail stamp of 1918. Only one sheet of 100 stamps was sold with the airplane printed upside down (inverted) relative to the border.

Miller later told the *Milwaukee Journal*, "I got in early and bought one for \$250 and commission." After buying this stamp, he began seriously collecting stamps on a large scale for the first time.

Miller's "Jenny" is position 18 from the original sheet. Stolen in 1977, it was recovered in the early 1980s. By then, someone had trimmed the perforations along the top to disguise it as position 9.



*Imperforate 2¢ 1916-17  
stamps with 5¢ error,  
Scott #482, #485*



## A 5¢ STAMP IN A 2¢ BLOCK

There's a 5¢ stamp in the top row of this imperforate 2¢ block. Miller collected several blocks and panes with this error, each of which is in the exhibit.

Pieces like these all came from a single 400-stamp printing plate that accidentally included three 5¢ stamps. Researchers

believe a Bureau employee mistakenly touched up three places on the plate with a 5¢ transfer roll, a device used to imprint stamp images on a plate. A transfer roll bears the mirror image of a stamp design and the backwards 5 must have looked like a 2.





1¢ 1901 Pan-American  
commemoratives,  
Scott #294

## THE “SINKING SHIP” COMMEMORATIVE

Pullout frame #31

These stamps were issued for the 1901 Pan-American Exposition, also known as the Buffalo world’s fair. They include a variation that has long been a favorite among collectors.

One block shows the *City of Alpena*, a Great Lakes steamship, nicely centered in the stamps. The other shows the same ship much too low, with its bow touching

the lower border. Collectors call it the “sinking ship.”

Miller also collected blocks with the ship too far to the left or right-known to collectors as the “fast” and “slow” versions of the stamp.



1895 Postage Due bisect,  
Jefferson, Iowa,  
Scott #J39 var



## BISECT FROM JEFFERSON, IOWA

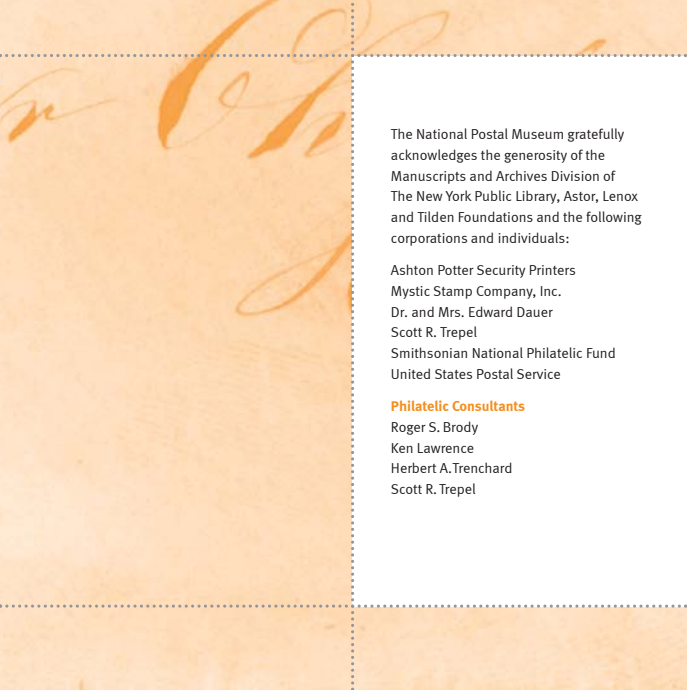
Pullout frame #37

The rare 1895 Postage Due bisect on this letter is one of three in the Miller collection. A bisect is a half-stamp used to indicate half the value of the original stamp. The postmaster of Jefferson, Iowa, issued no more than 20 of these bisects. His handwritten affidavit, which Miller also collected, is on display in the exhibit.

According to the Jefferson postmaster's account, he ran out of 1¢ Postage Dues in October 1895. While awaiting a new supply, he cut some 2¢ Postage Due stamps in half to use in their place. A local printer added the words "Due 1 Cent" to each bisect.

CURATOR'S TOUR

12



The National Postal Museum gratefully acknowledges the generosity of the Manuscripts and Archives Division of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations and the following corporations and individuals:

Ashton Potter Security Printers  
Mystic Stamp Company, Inc.  
Dr. and Mrs. Edward Dauer  
Scott R. Trepel  
Smithsonian National Philatelic Fund  
United States Postal Service

**Philatelic Consultants**

Roger S. Brody  
Ken Lawrence  
Herbert A. Trenchard  
Scott R. Trepel

Access to the Miller-Perry correspondence was provided by the American Philatelic Research Library.

### **Acknowledgments**

Reich+Petch, Exhibit Design  
Esther Ferington, Editorial Consultant

### **Photo Credits**

All images are courtesy of  
The Benjamin K. Miller Stamp Collection,  
The New York Public Library, Astor,  
Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

### **The National Postal Museum**

The National Postal Museum is devoted to presenting the colorful and engaging history of the nation's mail service and showcasing the largest and most comprehensive collection of stamps and philatelic material in the world.

The National Postal Museum is located at 2 Massachusetts Avenue NE in the Old City Post Office Building across from Union Station. The museum is open daily, except December 25, from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Admission is free.

The museum exhibit areas and restrooms accommodate wheelchairs. Sign language and oral interpreters are available for tours offered by the museum and require three weeks advance notice; to make this arrangement for your tour, call 202-633-5535 (voice) or 202-633-9849 (TTY). Tapes of the gallery guide are available for the visually impaired and may be obtained at the National Postal Museum Information Desk.

**For information** on tours, demonstrations, films, and other programs, inquire at the National Postal Museum Information Desk or call 202-633-5555. All tours are subject to docent availability.

**Membership in the National Postal Museum has benefits!**

For more information about the membership program, go to [www.postalmuseum.si.edu](http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu) or write to:

Membership  
National Postal Museum  
P.O. Box 37012  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7012

© 2006 Smithsonian Institution



Smithsonian  
*National Postal Museum*