

Synopsis

Airmail Special Delivery Bi-color Issue of 1936

The United States reused the design of the 1934 air mail special delivery issue on 1936, when it issued the 16¢ airmail special delivery stamp this time in two colors, red for airmail and blue for special delivery. Numerous printings took place for this stamp for over five years.

The stamp provides a most interesting plate number study, even though eight plates were assigned to print the issue. The panes of 50 each bore one plate number in the top position. The left side plate block did not have plate maker Frank Marti's "F" in front of the numbers but the right side plates did. There are four main types of plate number layouts, with and without arrows, and with different guide line combinations.

Type I, the first printing, has five margin types, including the words "TOP" which were placed near the plate numbers to prevent another inverted air mail stamp (this word was eventually added to the 1918 24¢ airmail after the discovery of the inverted design). The first type has the word "TOP" fully printed; the second type has the word "TOP" scooped out (apparently the plate did not receive sufficient ink). Three other line varieties are known and illustrated.

The second printing is the rarest. This is distinguished by thick red and thin blue guidelines. The Ralph Sloat book printing information is wrong as is shown by the research which appeared in the 1998 U.S. Specialist journal. The third printing, which has no arrows but a blue dotted line previously was thought to be the rarest design.

To the best of the author's knowledge, no collector has completed all type II and type III numbers in all positions (64 different of each). Type IV, the last printing, can be found with and without the complete word "TOP". In all, there are six possible matched sets of 64 plates each to collect, plus additional plates if one could obtain all of the types of the type IA, B and C plates, or a grand total of 330. This makes for quite a challenge.

Covers to and from abroad are difficult to obtain. Interesting domestic usages are not easy either. One small die proof existss. No trial color proofs are known. The stamp has one great rarity - one sheet of 50 was found and eventually broken up in the 1940s by Henry E. Harris of Boston, after marking each of the stamps with the position number on the lower left hand corner.

Title page, synopsis page and an award history may be accessed on the worldwide web:
<http://www.franadams.com>