

The PhilateliKid

The newsletter for Stamp Collecting Clubs for Kids (SCCFK)

Collect Stamps (The Most Educational Hobby)

www.stampcollectingclubsforkids.org

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George Washington

George Washington has appeared on more stamps of the United States than any other person. His image also appears on every one-dollar bill and every 25 cent piece (quarter.) The first two stamps issued by the United States went on sale on July 1, 1847. They were a 5-cent, brown colored stamp featuring Benjamin Franklin, and a 10-cent stamp featuring George Washington. The Scott Catalogue lists the stamps as number 1 and number 2. In all, Scott Catalogue lists at least 265 different U.S. stamps that feature George Washington.



An interesting feature of the first two stamps is that not only did they identify the issuing country (U S POST OFFICE) but also stated the cost (face value) of the stamp. Well, sort of. The Benjamin Franklin stamp clearly states its value at “five cents,” and has the number 5 in each of the two bottom corners of the stamp.

<< **Scott 2 from author's collection with a red cancellation.**

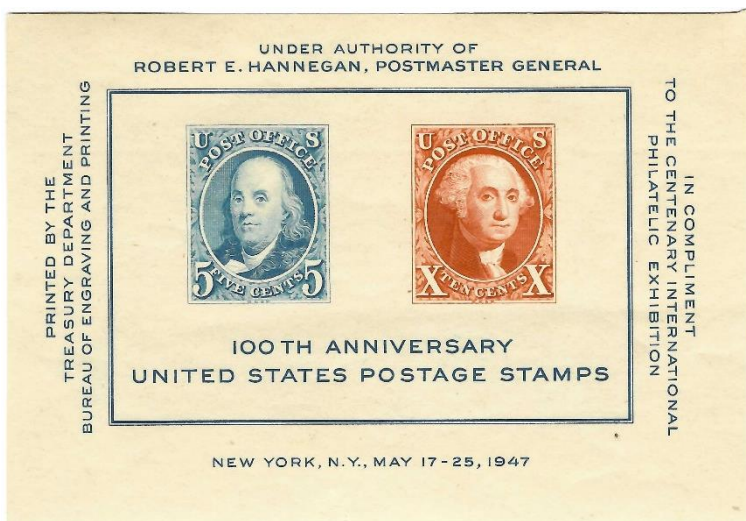
However, the George Washington stamps said “ten cents” but instead of the number 10 appearing anywhere on the stamp, there were just two capital “X’s” in the bottom corners. Nowhere does the number 10 appear on the stamp.

There is an international organization called the Universal Postal Union. One of its main functions is to regulate prices of mail (the amount of pre-paid postage required) that originates in one country and is delivered to another country. The UPU was organized in 1874. Prior to that, any mail between two countries required the postage that those two countries agreed upon in a treaty. This created a need for every country to have a separate treaty with every other country, and if no such treaty existed, the mail had to go through an intermediary country that had treaties with the two countries.

One of the requirements the UPU had for over a century was that international mail had to have postage stamps on the mail that stated the value of the stamp **RIGHT ON THE STAMP ITSELF**. A stamp that did not state its value in currency would be valid only for mail sent and received within the same country (called “domestic mail.”)

So... that 10 cent stamp, although it said “ten cents” did not state the value in numerals, but instead used the letter “X.” Fortunately, in 1847, the UPU was not around to complain about that!

So why an “X” on the stamp? We are taught in algebra that “X” stands for “the unknown.” The “X” on the George Washington stamp could not possibly stand for an unknown, because it says right on the stamp “TEN CENTS” – all in capital letters.



The answer is that “X” in the Roman Numeral System is 10. The UPU did not accept Roman numerals, so after 1874, no stamp issued by the US used Roman numerals. Well...almost none. 100 years after the first stamps were issued in 1847, in the year 1947, the U.S. issued a souvenir sheet containing a reproduction of the first two stamps.

Scott 948 from author’s collection.

The George Washington stamp (now in brown - a different color than the original black) again using the Roman numeral “X.” That souvenir sheet was issued to commemorate the Fourth International Philatelic Exhibition in the U.S. – called the “Centenary International Philatelic Exhibition.” Scott number 948.



Here is a postally used ten-cent stamp from 1947, used for domestic mail. I have never seen this stamp, a part of the souvenir sheet, used on international mail. It might not have been accepted as valid postage.

Scott number 948b postally used, from author’s collection.

The same image of George Washington was used on a 60-cent stamp issued in 1997, Scott number 3140. However, because the value was 60 cents, the words “ten cents” were completely covered up and the two Roman numeral “X’s” were partially covered up by the number 60.

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