

The National Parks Issue

By Richard Pederson

One of the most attractive and popular issues created by the United States Post Office Department is the National Parks set issued during James A. Farley's tenure as Postmaster General. For many of those who grew up after the Great Depression, the National Parks set was at least partially responsible for attracting them to the stamp collecting hobby. The basic set consists of ten stamps and is denominated from 1¢ to 10¢ (Scott # 740 through 749), with each value depicting a characteristic scene from the portrayed national park (see Figure 1, National Parks Set, below). The scenes are based on publicity photos taken by park service employees. Harold L. Ickes, the Secretary of the Interior, came up with the idea for the set, with the purpose of making the public aware of the parks so that they would visit them. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt endorsed the idea and, once final proofs were approved, personally selected the colors for the 10 stamp designs. With the ten different contrasting colors and beautiful engraved designs, the National Parks set is one of the most striking sets ever issued by the U.S. Post Office Department/Postal Service. Table 1, National Parks Issue Summary, lists the 10 face different stamps that make up the basic National Parks set. For each of the 10 stamp designs, there are at least 2 stamp emissions having different major Scott catalog numbers and incorporating the same basic design. The Scott catalog number for each of those separate emissions is listed in the table. All of the designs exist as both regular perforated and imperforate (Scott #s 756 through 765) stamps, with 3 of the designs (the 1¢, 3¢, and 10¢) also incorporated in souvenir sheets that are not formally part of the National Parks set.



Figure 1. National Parks Set

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Table 1. National Parks Issue Summary

Subject	Description	Scott #	Format	Issue Date & Location	Quantity Issued	Plate Number(s)	Color
1¢ Yosemite National Park in California	Park scene with El Capitan at right	740	perf. 11	7/16/34-Yosemite, AZ	84,896,350	21246-21253	green
		756	imperf.	3/15/35-Washington, DC	3,217,636	21246-21249	green
		751a	imperf. SS	10/10/34-Omaha, NE	4,761,306	21341	green
		769	imperf. SS	3/15/35- Washington, DC	279,960	21341	green
2¢ Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona	Canyon views incl. Bright Angel Canyon	741	perf. 11	7/24/34-Grand Canyon, AZ	74,400,200	21254-21261	red
		757	imperf.	3/15/35- Washington, DC	2,746,640	21254-21257	red
3¢ Mount Ranier National Park in Washington	Park view with Mt. Ranier in back	742	perf. 11	8/3/34-Longmire, WA	95,089,000	21262-21625, 21274-21277, 21332	deep violet
		758	imperf.	3/15/35- Washington, DC	2,168,088	21262-21265	deep violet
		750a	imperf. SS	8/28/34-Atlantic City, NJ	3,068,346	21303	deep violet
		770	imperf. SS	3/15/35- Washington, DC	215,920	21303	deep violet
4¢ Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado	View of Cliff Palace cliff dweller ruin	743	perf. 11	9/25/34-Mesa Verde, CO	19,178,650	21328-21331	brown
		759	imperf.	3/15/35- Washington, DC	1,822,684	21328-21331	brown
5¢ Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming, Idaho and Montana	View of Old Faithful geyser	744	perf. 11	7/30/34-Yellowstone, WY	30,980,100	21278-21281	blue
		760	imperf.	3/15/35- Washington, DC	1,724,576	21278-21281	blue
6¢ Crater Lake National Park in Oregon	View of Crater Lake	745	perf. 11	9/5/34-Crater Lake, OR	16,923,350	21320-21323	dark blue
		761	imperf.	3/15/35- Washington, DC	1,647,696	21320-21323	dark blue
7¢ Acadia National Park in Maine	View of Great Head rocky promontory	746	perf. 11	10/2/34-Bar Harbor, ME	15,988,250	21333-21336	black
		762	imperf.	3/15/35- Washington, DC	1,682,948	21333-21336	black
8¢ Zion National Park in Utah	View of Great White Throne rock formation	747	perf. 11	9/18/34-Zion, UT	15,288,700	21324-21327	sage green
		763	imperf.	3/15/35- Washington, DC	1,638,224	21324-21327	sage green
9¢ Glacier National Park in Montana	View of Mt. Rockwell and Two Medicine Lake	748	perf. 11	8/27/34-Glacier Park, MT	17,472,600	21316-21319	red orange
		764	imperf.	3/15/35- Washington, DC	1,625,224	21316-21319	red orange
10¢ Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina and Tennessee	View of Mt. Le Conte	749	perf. 11	10/8/34-Gatlinburg, TN	18,874,300	21337-21340, 21342	gray black
		765	imperf.	3/15/35- Washington, DC	1,644,900	21337, 21339-21340, 21342	gray black
		797	imperf. SS	8/26/37-Asheville, NC	5,277,445	21695-21696	blue green

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All of the designs for the National Parks set and associated souvenir sheets were created by Bureau of Printing and Engraving artists. The 1¢ through the 9¢ designs were created by Victor S. McCloskey and the 10¢ design, which was also used for the Society of Philatelic Americans (SPA) souvenir sheet (Scott # 797), was created by Esther A. Richards. The souvenir sheets incorporating the 1¢ (Scott #s 751 and 769) and 3¢ (Scott #s 750 and 770) designs were also created by Victor S. McCloskey.

All of the stamps and souvenir sheets depicting national parks, discussed in this article, were printed on flat plat printing presses. The 10 stamps in both perforated and imperforate formats were printed as sheets of 200 stamps made up of 4 panes of 50 stamps, with the 4 panes separated by guidelines. The APS and Trans-Mississippi souvenir sheets (both regular and special printings) were printed in sheets of 120 stamps made up of 20 panes of 6 stamps, with the panes separated by gutters. The SPA souvenir sheets were printed in sheets of 36 panes, with each pane consisting of a single, one stamp souvenir sheet.

Although the National Parks issue is still readily attainable at an affordable price, it is a set that offers some fun and challenge for either a beginning collector or a specialist. Postmaster General Farley decided to create special versions of a number of stamps, including those in the National Parks set, for distribution to friends and dignitaries. These special printings included un-gummed imperforate press sheets that could be broken down to create a number of different collectible varieties such as imperforate singles, vertical and horizontal line pairs, and center line blocks. In addition, there are gummed souvenir sheets (see Figure 2, APS and Trans-Mississippi Souvenir Sheets) that were created to commemorate the American Philatelic Society (APS) and the Trans-Mississippi Philatelic Exposition and integrate the 3¢ and 1¢ National Parks values, respectively, into their designs. The APS and Trans-Mississippi souvenir sheets also exist as special printings that were sold as full press sheets containing multiple un-gummed souvenir sheets.

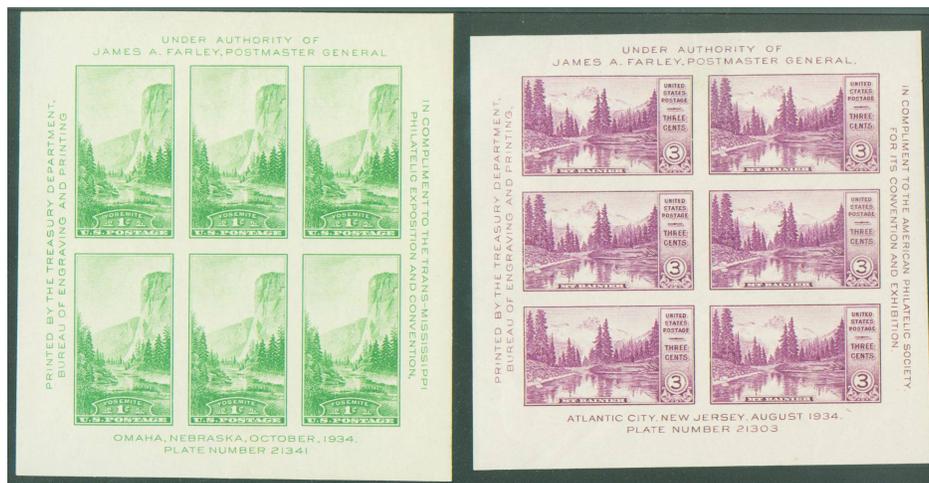


Figure 2. APS and Trans-Mississippi Souvenir Sheets

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There is also a souvenir sheet issued for the 43rd annual convention of the SPA that employed the design of the 10¢ parks issue, although in a different color (blue green versus gray black). Figure 3, below, shows the SPA souvenir sheet. The SPA souvenir sheet is the last one that was issued while James A. Farley was Postmaster General. It is also the only souvenir sheet issued under Farley that does not have multiple stamps incorporated in the design.

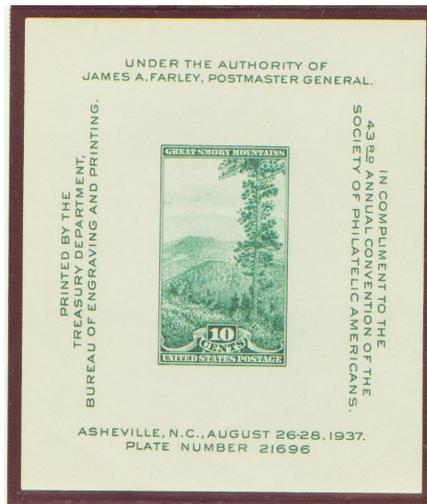


Figure 3. SPA Souvenir Sheet

The special printing press sheets, of the souvenir sheets, have wide gutters between individual panes of stamps (or souvenir sheets) and could be subdivided to allow horizontal and vertical gutter pairs/blocks and cross gutter blocks. Individual souvenir sheets from the special printings are not distinguishable from the regularly issued souvenir sheets, other than by the gum. Individual stamps from the souvenir sheets (regular and special printings) are also not distinguishable from individual stamps from the 1¢ and 3¢ National Parks imperforate special printings. Since the Post Office Department, at a later date (after 1940), offered to (at no charge) add gum to purchased press sheets of the special printings, the gum is not a way of proving that a given 1¢ or 3¢ stamp or a single souvenir sheet is not a special printing. To clearly distinguish special printings from the regular printings, it is necessary to collect the special printings in a format (e.g., horizontal or vertical gutter pairs, cross gutter blocks) that includes the wide gutter from the special printings.

Whether or not you choose to include the APS, Trans-Mississippi, or SPA souvenir sheets in your National Parks collection, there are numerous opportunities for specialization available for those with either deep pockets or rather limited budgets. You can start by collecting the 10 individual values in both perforate and imperforate formats. Plate blocks and in-period postal history usages of each value can then be added. It is also relatively easy to locate first day covers, having a variety of cachets, for all of the National Parks regular and special printings. First day cancels for the regular printings were serviced at the

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park location or the event being commemorated (for the souvenir sheets). First day servicing of the special printings was handled at Washington, DC. Each of the first day issues can be found autographed by James A. Farley (see Figure 3, 10¢ First Day Autographed by Farley).



Figure 3. 10¢ First Day Autographed by Farley

For those who can afford it, the one through five cent and seven cent values of the regular perforated 11 printings exist as errors missing either the horizontal or vertical perforations. The two and seven cent perforated issues also exist with double transfers and the one and three cent values have re-cut versions of the design. No matter what stamps you include and which approach you take to collecting the National Parks issue, it is an interesting, attractive, and fun set to collect.

Glossary

Center Line Block – a block of four or more stamps with two guide lines (see Guide Line) intersecting at the center of the block. The stamps are from four different panes in a press sheet.

Cross Gutter Block – blocks made up of the corner stamp from four souvenir sheets separated by gutters (see Gutter below).

Double Transfer – a constant variety in a printing plate where a portion of the design is doubled (repeated).

Guide Line – a printed line on a press sheet between two or more panes of stamps. The line serves as a guide showing where to cut the press sheet to separate it into individual panes of stamps.

Gutter – the space between adjacent panes (see Pane below) of stamps in a press sheet. Gutters are normally free of printing and are of sufficient width to allow clean separation of the adjacent panes of stamps.

Gutter Block – a multiple containing two or more stamps from each of two adjacent panes/souvenir sheets with the gutter between them (see Gutter above).

Gutter Pair – a multiple containing one stamp from each of two adjacent panes/souvenir sheets with the gutter between them (see Gutter above). A *vertical gutter pair* has the gutter running vertically (up and down) between the adjoining stamps. A *horizontal gutter pair* has the gutter running horizontally (sideways) between the adjoining stamps.

Imperforate – a stamp that, when issued, has no perforations, die cuts, roulettes, or other means of separating the stamp from any adjoining stamps.

Line Block – a multiple containing two or more stamps from each of two adjacent panes (see Pane below) with a guide line dividing the block (i.e., separating the stamps from the adjacent panes).

Pane – the unit of stamps delivered to post offices for sale to the public. A pane is a subdivision of a sheet/press sheet (see Press Sheet below) and typically (but not always) contains multiple copies of a stamp. Booklet panes (i.e., a single page in a stamp booklet) and souvenir sheets are examples of panes. What are often erroneously called “sheets” of regular issue or commemorative stamps are, in fact, panes.

Press Sheet – the unit of stamps that comes off the printing press. A press sheet normally consists of multiple panes of stamps. Once printing is complete, the press sheet is cut apart into individual panes (see Pane above) of stamps for sale to the public. Occasionally, as with the National Parks special printings, press sheets are left intact (not sub-divided into panes) for sale to collectors.

Re-cut Design – an altered design resulting from a printing plate that has been modified/re-engraved.

Souvenir Sheet – a small sheet containing one or more stamps that has been issued to commemorate a specific person, thing, or event. Souvenir sheets are typically printed as panes on a press sheet.

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Special Printing – a re-issue of a stamp for a special purpose. The stamp typically differs from the original in some way (e.g., paper, perforations). The re-printings of the National Parks set as imperforate press sheets are examples.