

## LESSON 3: CATALOGUES

Objective: To introduce stamp catalogues, how to read and get the most from them; essential stamp terms; stamp identifiers; and other specialized resources.

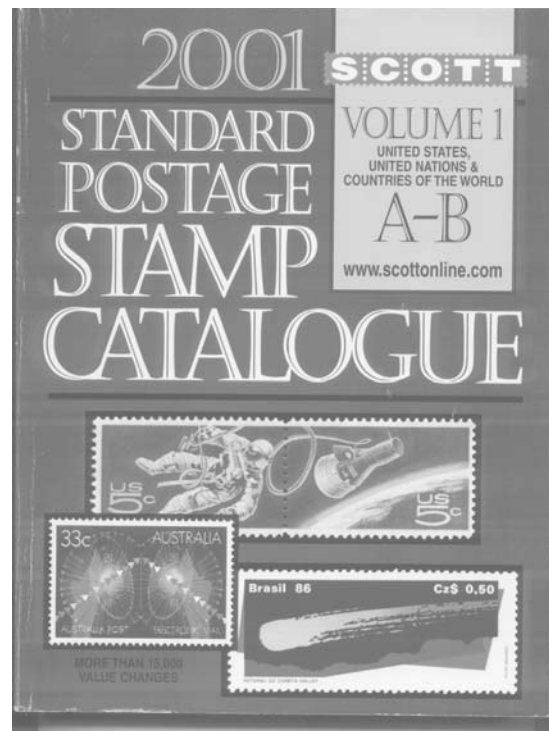
**S**tamp catalogues provide an enormous amount of information not available from any other source. In a catalogue you can find out where, when, and often why a stamp was issued, what process was used to print it, and approximately what it is worth. Introductory pages often give detailed information about such things as how to interpret a catalogue listing, methods of stamp production, and philatelic vocabulary.

### Which Catalogue?

In the United States, most collectors use the Scott Catalogues for their U.S. and general collections. Collectors use many other catalogues, including the Krause-Minkus U.S. catalogue, which is also published in this country. Specialists in German stamps usually rely on Michel, and collectors of British stamps may prefer Stanley Gibbons. There are other catalogues for advanced collectors of the stamps of other nations, usually available only in the language of the issuing nation. In addition, special catalogues exist for postal stationery, revenue stamps, and other collecting areas. Each of these catalogues has its own numbering system, which makes it much harder for two people to communicate if they are using different catalogues.

**Kim's Personal Tip:** For the beginner living in North America, it is best to start with the Scott Catalogues, although an alternative using the same numbers is available for the collector who is only interested in U.S. stamps. The U.S. Postal Service publishes a simplified catalogue of U.S. stamps that uses Scott numbers and, unlike Scott's own catalogues, has color illustrations. You can order *The Postal Service Guide to U.S. Stamps* and the USPS' free mail-order catalogue, *USA Philatelic*, from Stamp Fulfillment Services, USPS, P.O. Box 219424, Kansas City, MO 64121-9424; 800-STAMP-24; [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com). These two publications are also available in most post offices as well — no waiting, no sales tax, no shipping and handling.

Scott Catalogues cover the world in six volumes, with the countries arranged alphabetically with one exception. Stamps of the United States appear at the beginning of Volume 1, before the countries that begin with the letter "A." Scott also publishes two other catalogues: *The Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps* lists every stamp that is in the regular Volume 1, but it also lists first day covers, plate blocks, trial color proofs, and many other



poor centering or even very minor flaws or an unusually heavy cancellation will sell for a small fraction of what a perfect stamp with extremely fine centering will fetch.

#### FACTORS THAT AFFECT PRICES

**1. Centering:** This term refers to the stamp design relative to its surrounding borders (sometimes called margins) and perforated edges. Many older stamp issues have very narrow borders, and are considered “centered” if the design is not cut into on one of its sides. More modern issues have larger borders. On a perfectly centered stamp, the margins should be equal at least on the sides; ideally top and bottom margins are equal or there is more space in the bottom of the stamp margin. Stamps may be downgraded for poor design centering, but if perforation holes cut into a stamp’s design, it is considered a defect with a definite impact on value.



Very Fine (VF): Equal margins on all four sides, perfect centering.



Fine to Very Fine (F-VF): Slightly off centered but still presentable.



Fine (F): Design of the stamp close to margins.



Average (Avg.): Margins touch or cut stamp design.

The examples are courtesy of the American Philatelic Expertizing Service and APEX Director Mercer Bristow. Note these terms refer to centering only.

Other terms include the following but are used mainly as marketing descriptions.

Superb (usually spelled out): denotes jumbo (equal) margins

Extremely Fine (XF): large (equal) margins

Very Fine for This Issue: means off centered but that is how the majority were printed.

**2. Gum:** Prices listed in the catalogue for recent mint stamps will be for stamps with all the original gum on the back. Even a slight disturbance of the gum from applying a stamp hinge will significantly lower the price of the stamp. Very few stamps from the nineteenth

## Lesson One

Look at the USPS publication “History of the United States Postal Service” before attempting to do the homework questions. Submit all lessons directly to your instructor, Ada Prill, 130 Trafalgar Street, Rochester, NY 14619-1224.

1. Order the U.S. Postal Service’s free stamp catalog, *USA Philatelic* (available from 800-STAMP-24 or <http://www.usps.com>) and then look at the issues currently profiled on the site. Choose a favorite item from among the current issues and explain why it appeals to you. \_\_\_\_\_

2. On September 26, 1789, George Washington appointed \_\_\_\_\_ of Massachusetts as the first Postmaster General under the Constitution.

3. What is a post road? \_\_\_\_\_

4. American transportation pioneer William H. Russell created the Poney Express route to carry mail between the westernmost point reached by the railroad and telegraph \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

That service operated from April \_\_\_\_\_ through June \_\_\_\_\_.

5. Although postage stamps became available in the United States in 1847, mailers had the option of sending their letters and having the recipients pay the postage until \_\_\_\_\_, when prepayment became mandatory.

6. What does ZIP stand for? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Name several ways the Postal Reorganization Act changed the U.S. postal system.

8. U.S. Postmaster General John Wanamaker stirred up quite a controversy when he issued the nation’s first commemorative postage stamps, the \_\_\_\_\_ issue.