

## **COLLECTING PLAYING CARD PRECANCELS**

Jim Callis, PSS 150-3780

Precanceled playing card stamps (Scott RF numbers) offer an interesting collection with many easy-to-obtain stamps and a handful of more expensive and more elusive stamps. There are 48 Bureau precancels. There are probably several thousand locals, which are more properly manufacturer cancels. There are both printed and handstamped manufacturer cancels from several dozen companies. Many of the listings in the Scott catalog are of value surcharges and cancels applied to the stamps at the same time. The reason for Scott listing is the value changing surcharge. In fact, the manufacturer information, which Scott tends to screen out, was applied in the same printing operation as the surcharge.

Some of the larger companies are relatively common, others are more elusive; but there are literally hundreds of these that can be obtained for no more than a dollar or so. Most often the cancels include a date – some firms followed the practice of dating stamps with the date of the first day of a week, month or calendar quarter. One firm seems to have dated the stamps on a daily basis – every work day of the year. The first playing card stamps were issued to collect a tax imposed to finance the Spanish American war. The tax remained in the tax code until it was repealed effective June 22, 1965.

A modest collection can probably be assembled easily. An intermediate or advanced collection will take relatively more effort and resources if one chooses to pursue all of the Scott listed items. Fortunately, most of the more expensive items have but a single date, and therefore only require one stamp. The RF collection can be expanded by including civil war era first issue revenues with printed manufacturer cancels and the Playing card stamps from the Match and Medicine section of the Scott catalog. There is even one provisional playing tax stamp on the 10¢ 1917 red documentary stamp. This one could fit into an Olympic topical collection as it was used on decks of cards sold at the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles.

PSS member Tom Sanford created an excellent checklist of the RF manufacturer cancels about ten years ago. It would be a worthy guide to follow. If he no longer has any copies, dealers who sell used literature may be able to supply one.