

# Gibbons Stamp Monthly

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## Stamps USA

Michael Mills provides a helpful introduction to the 1870–88 ‘Bank Note’ issues and discusses the collecting of US classics with Wilson Hulme

### Wilson Hulme

Stamp societies are the living institutions of philately, where you’ll find philatelists researching and sharing knowledge about their field of collecting. Of these, the US Philatelic Classics Society is a gem. Its purpose is to promote interest and knowledge about the classic issues of stamps and postal history of the United States, through research and the exchange of information with other groups and USPCS members.

The president of the USPCS is Wilson Hulme. He graduated from the US Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland, and went on to study for degrees at both Michigan State University and Harvard Business School. He served as a captain in the navy before entering civilian life in 1976 and served a tour of duty as chief engineer aboard a ballistic missile submarine. As a corporate executive in the food industry he last served as a vice-president of Nabisco Int.

Hulme has a unique perspective to view the American stamp scene, so I thought we’d let him let us in on what’s going on in world of US philatelic classics.

*Wilson, tell us about your philatelic background and how you came to focus on US classics?*

I have collected stamps since my childhood and have been a serious collector and philatelic researcher for 30 years. I initially collected worldwide stamps, but later focused on stamps from the Confederacy and from the United States. While living in Charleston, South Carolina, a collector sold several Confederate era covers mailed with US stamps to me, along with a copy of the book written by Dr Carroll Chase on the 3c. stamp of the US 1851–57 issue. From that point I became increasingly hooked on US classics.

In addition to my involvement with The US Philatelic Classics Society, I maintain broad contact with collectors and actively participate in a number of societies. Since August 2002 I have been Curator of Philately at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum.

*What areas of US classics are you pursuing these days?*

Despite my active collecting interests, I consider myself primarily a philatelic researcher and historian. My focus over the years has been to find original source documents and material that will shed new light on stamp production or related events that are important to philatelists.

Most of these documents have never previously been available to collectors. They are hard to locate and frequently require travel to obtain access. As a result of this inaccessibility, most philatelic writers have relied on what they could observe by examining stamps and covers, not by examining documents. Writers used their observations to draw conclusions and sometimes these conclusions were not correct, as they did not have all the facts they needed. Additional errors were caused by writers who used the documents that had been reported, but without personally verifying that they had been reported correctly.

To date, the most significant original documents to be located are the early post office records that I am honored to be compiling with Thomas J Alexander and George W Brett. It consists primarily of original correspondence between the US Post Office and the companies that produced US stamps from 1847 to 1910. Supplementing this correspondence are records compiled by Arthur M Travers, who served as Acting Third Assistant Postmaster General in the early 1900s. Travers was compiling records for publication when he was fired



from the Post Office in 1911. His records and working papers immediately disappeared and were not rediscovered until 1993. They will be included in a multi-volume work.

*Can you give up a brief sketch of the USPCS?*

The US Philatelic Classics Society is the successor of The Three Cent 1851-57 Unit (Unit Number 11) of the American Philatelic Society. It was founded in 1948 by a group of '51 to '57 specialists that included Dr Carroll Chase, Stanley B Ashbrook, and Leo J Shaughnessy. Since its founding, the Society has broadened its scope to include postal issues and postal history from the stampless era up to the Bureau Issues (1893). The Society has grown to around 1000 members, currently.

*What made the biggest news in US classic circles last year?*

I think the important news is that philatelic research on classic era stamps and postal history is alive and well.

Great discoveries have been made on the US 1847 Issue. It has been less than ten years since the original correspondence between the US Post Office and the engravers/printers of the issue were unearthed. Not too long after that proof panes of these first stamps were discovered in a salesman's sample book.

A die used to print an early essay (Scott 11-E-2) was auctioned on eBay last year and purchased by a group of collectors for the US National Postal Museum. Subsequent research by the purchasers found that almost everything we knew during the last 50 years about this essay was wrong, including who made the die. During the course of studying this essay, much new information has also been uncovered about other early US essays. The book is continuing to be rewritten.

The submitting of the Grinnell Missionary stamps to the Expert Committee of the Royal Philatelic Society, London has been a plus for US classics. My purpose in mentioning this is not to focus on the controversial aspects of the Grinnells, which have been known since the 1920s, but to emphasize that there has been a positive impact. Their study has sparked renewed interest in early Hawaiian stamps, techniques used in printing, and a host of related issues.

*What's ahead for the UPCS later this year and next?*

Our Board held a special meeting in August 2004 at Stampshow in Sacramento to discuss member needs and to develop a clear strategy to guide our priorities and decisions. Supporting each of our strategy elements is a series of projects and tasks.

The first element is to share information and knowledge on classic-era US stamps and postal history. *The Chronicle* is the cornerstone of this effort, but there is tremendous amount of knowledge we can share with future publications and information that can and will be made available to members via the Internet. We will be pursuing each of these while ensuring that *The Chronicle* remains 'sacred' in terms of sustaining its quality and content.

Next, build relationships with our members and with the philatelic community. *The Chatter* has always been our primary means of communicating news and information of interest to our members, and it will continue to be so. However we have the opportunity to create a stronger 'sense of belonging' by strengthening our presence at shows and increasing our use of email.

And we want to sustain excellence in all respects of managing the society. We are setting up key indicators to help us monitor progress and looking closely at key staff openings that may arise in the future, and we have some financial issues we must address due to trends in the hobby and the impact of the economy during the last few years.

*What advice would you give to a collector whose been bitten by the US classics bug?*

Above all find something that is of interest and will be fun to explore. One easy way to do this is through the Society's website ([www.uspcs.org](http://www.uspcs.org)). A visitor to our site will quickly see an overview of the areas covered by our Society. If one clicks on the images, say of the 1c. 1861 stamp, he or she will get a description of that stamp and related postal history items, written by a knowledgeable collector of that issue. It is a quick way to overview information that is otherwise contained in multiple publications.

I recommend, of course, that someone so bitten join The US Philatelic Classics Society, read our quarterly journal, and use our meetings to facilitate finding other collectors with similar interests and to share information.

*Is there anything US classicists in the UK should be aware of?*

There are tremendous similarities between the US and the UK in terms of the development of stamp production methods plus considerable overlap in their postal systems and how they evolved. Any student of classic era UK stamps will most assuredly find important parallels by studying classic era US stamps and postal history.

For example, Jacob Perkins invented the process used to engrave and print in the UK the world's first postage stamps. Perkins was an American and was well connected with US engraving and printing firms, which adopted his methods for security against counterfeiting banknotes (and later stamps). Perkins went to London in 1819 and started the firm that became Perkins, Bacon. When he first went there he took with him a group of skilled helpers from the Philadelphia area. Two of the individuals in this group were Charles Toppan and Samuel H Carpenter, who later started the firm of Toppan and Carpenter and printed all US stamps from 1851 to 1861.

The postal systems between our two countries were similar for a variety of reasons including Benjamin Franklin who served, not only as a Deputy Postmaster General for the Colonies, but later as the first US Postmaster General (under the Articles of Confederation).

These are but two of the many areas where students of the UK and the US can mutually benefit from studying one another's stamps and history.