

Christmas Seal Printers

When you get your US national Christmas seals in the mail this year, you might want to identify who printed them. Due to large scale production and distribution, The American Lung Association will again contract a number of printing companies. From the beginning, in 1907, thru the early 20's only one or two companies, on any given year, printed seals. As printing quantity increased and distribution became more of a problem, the number of different printing companies increased and peaked from 1950 thru 1968 with five to eight different printing companies per year. Since 1971 only two to four (usually three) printers have produced seals. Improved distribution has reduced the need for regional production.

Before 1936 the company that printed a sheet of Christmas seals could be identified by secret marks. In 1935 The Strobridge Litho. Co. of Cincinnati placed two vertical brown dashes on seal #100. These secret marks are described in Green's Catalog, the bible of Christmas seal collecting. This catalogue is published by The Christmas Seal and Charity Stamp Society, a non profit organization established in 1931 and an APS affiliate. Since 1936 the printer of a sheet of seals has been easier to identify. The sheets from 1936 thru 1974 have a printer's mark on seal #56 in the form of a tiny letter designating the company that printed it. In 1939 and 1946 the printer's mark (PM) was shifted to seal #57 and #86 respectively. From 1975 thru 1981 the American Lung Association (ALA) went from a sheet of 100 definitive size seals to a sheet of 54 commemorative size seals. During this time the PM shifted from #28 to #32 to #29 to #23. From 1982 to date The ALA changed their sheet format to include package labels. Since 1982 the PM is found on seal #24. In 1990 and 1991 the PM was shifted to seal #27 and #29 respectively.

A total of nineteen different printing companies have produced US Christmas seals, but if you add in proofs, essays and unknown printers the total would be over 25. Seven printing companies produced Christmas seals before 1936, and did not go on to use printer's marks. 1) Leonhardt & Son of Philadelphia, PA. printed 1907 and type one 1908. 2) The American Bank Note Company, NY, NY printed 1908 type two and 1913. 3) Andrew

B. Graham Co. of Washington D.C. printed the 1915 seals. 4) Zeese-Wilkinson Co., Inc. of Long Isl., NY printed the 1921 type three seals. 5) Gugler Litho. Co., Inc. of Milwaukee, WI. printed the 1925 type three seals. 6) R. R. Heywood Co., Inc. of NY. printed the 1929 type four seals. and 7) The Columbian Bank Note Company printed the 1932 type four and the 1933 type four seals.

The meaning of some printer's marks have changed over the years. From 1956 thru 1975 "B" stood for Berlin Litho. Co. of Chicago, then it became Barton-Cotton Co. thru 1985. From 1936 thru 1958 "S" stood for Strobbridge Litho. Co. but in 1975 "E" Eureka Speciality Printing Co. of Scranton became Speciality Printing Co. and changed their printer's mark to "S". The following is a list of the twelve different printing companies who have used printer's marks, in order of the greatest longevity.

"E" Eureka Speciality Printing Co. of Scranton, PA. 75 years of Christmas seal production including the "S" Speciality Printing Co. issues since 1975

"F" Flemming-Potter Co. of Chicago, IL. 42 years beginning in 1950.

"S" Strobbridge Litho. Co. of Cincinnati, OH. 39 years thru 1958.

"D" Edwards and Deutsch Litho. Co. of Chicago, IL. 38 years thru 1968

"U" United States Printing and Litho. Co. of Brooklyn, NY. 32 years thru 1958

"B" Berlin Litho. Co. of Chicago, IL. 19 years, mid 50's thru mid 70's

"W" Western Litho. Co. 18 years, mid 50's thru the early 70's

"B" Barton-Cotton Co., 9 years, 1977 thru 1985

"R" Bradford-Robinson Printing Co. 8 years, 1957 thru 1964

"C" Cyril Scott of Lancaster, OH. 3 years, 1987, 1988, 1990

"N" Niagara Inc. of Buffalo, NY. 1976 only

"M" Midland Litho. Co. 1985 only

Many sheets of Christmas seals do not have a printer's mark. Since 1979 experimental design Christmas seals have been issued in limited areas of the country to determine the popularity of a design different from the national issue; these lack a printer's mark. Also, in 1983, The ALA began experimenting with reduced size sheets, or mini sheets. On some of these issues the printer's mark was shifted closer to the center of the sheet.

Advance samples, proofs, and essays of Christmas seal sheets, often lack a printer's mark.

To identify which printing company produced the 1993 Christmas seal sheet you receive in the mail, first check the sheet format. If you have a sheet of 45 (5 x 9) look on seal #33. If you live in the west your printer's mark will probably be "F", and if you live in the east your printer's mark will probably be "S". For Christmas Seal and Charity Stamp Society membership information, and a list of their publications including Green's Catalog, send me a SASE, John Denune, 234 East Broadway, Granville, Ohio 43023.