

The 1893 Columbian Exposition Stamps

THEIR SUBJECTS AND USAGE

COLUMBIAN ISSUE BACKGROUND

The 1893 Columbian Issue of postage stamps was printed for the Chicago World's Fair and to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's landing in the Americas. Sixteen different values were issued, some of which had no specific postage use, as they were primarily intended to be collector items.

The series was designed and printed by the American Bank Note Company. As part of the negotiations to print the Columbian issue, the ABNCo. was awarded an extension to their contract with the U.S. Post Office Department. The contract, signed in 1890 and scheduled to end in December of 1893 was given an extra six months to account for the use of additional equipment needed for the larger sized stamps. This would be the last U.S. stamp issue printed by the ABNCo. before the Bureau of Engraving and Printing took over production of postage stamps for the U.S.

Most of the stamps were printed from plates one hundred subjects. Some of the 1¢ and 2¢ stamps were printed from plates of two hundred subjects. They were perforated at gauge 12. All of the stamps (except for the 8¢ value) were "officially" issued on January 1st 1893; because this was a Sunday, the stamps were not actually sold to the public until the post offices opened on the 2nd. The 8¢ stamp was issued two months later, on March 2nd.

COLUMBIAN ISSUE STAMP SUBJECTS

The president of the American Bank Note Company, James MacDonough, worked with Postmaster General John Wanamaker to select artwork for the subjects. Except for the \$4 and \$5 portrait stamps, the stamp subjects featured key events in the story of Columbus's voyage.

If you viewed the story from lowest to highest value, however, you'd be looking at a story where Columbus and his crew landed in the Americas before they even left. This is because Postmaster General Wanamaker believed that the most familiar aspects of Columbus's story should be featured on the most commonly used (lower value) stamps. In chronological order of subjects (excluding the portrait stamps), the values would be arranged **30¢, 5¢, 50¢, \$1, 3¢, 4¢, 1¢, 2¢, 6¢, 15¢, 10¢, \$2, \$3.**

1¢ - "COLUMBUS IN SIGHT OF LAND"

based on a painting of the same name by American artist George William Henry Powell



Image: The Swedish Tiger (<http://www.theswedishtiger.com/>)

The stamp engraving differs from the painting that inspired it in several ways. On the stamp, the monk is positioned closer to Columbus and is depicted with either more hair or a larger hat to cover his forehead.

In addition to the central design of Columbus on his ship, the image was flanked by images of Native Americans – a woman and child on the left, and a man on the right.

The 1¢ stamp paid the domestic postal card rate. As one of the cheaper stamps, it was also popular as a World's Fair souvenir. Thirty plates were produced to print the 440,195,550 stamps issued.



Scott #230

2¢ - “LANDING OF COLUMBUS”

based on the painting *Columbus Landing at Guanahani* by John Vanderlyn



Image: Architect of the Capitol (<https://www.aoc.gov/>)

Columbus is clean shaven in the 1¢ stamp, but is depicted with a full beard in the 2¢ stamp. When the stamps were issued, this “continuity error” became a joke for critics of the series.

The 2¢ stamp paid the domestic postage rate and was the “workhorse” of the issue. In addition, its low value made it an affordable souvenir of the fair. One hundred and thirty-five plates were produced to print the 1,464,588,750 stamps issued.



Scott #231

The National Bank Note Company used their own engraving of Columbus Landing at Guanahani as the subject for the 15¢ stamp in the bi-colored 1869 Pictorial issue.



3¢ - “FLAG SHIP OF COLUMBUS”

based on an unknown source



Image: Historic Ship Models (<http://www.finemodelships.com/>)

Philatelist Charles Brazer reported that the source for the image on the 3¢ stamp was a wash drawing published in L'Amérique Française magazine. The Smithsonian National Postal Museum suggests that the image is based design on models of 15th century ships that were held in the Smithsonian Institute collection. A third suggestion offered by several online postal history websites claims that the subject is from a Spanish engraving that was lost after the 1938 Spanish Civil War.

The 3¢ value did not represent any official postal rate. It was intended to be used in conjunction with other stamps, or as a collector's item. Four plates were produced to print the 11,501,250 stamps issued.



Scott #232

In 1897, this stamp image was used for a 10¢ stamp from Newfoundland, as part of a commemorative series celebrating the explorer John Cabot. Because there were no paintings of Cabot's ship Matthew, the American Bank Note Company used the Santa Maria design and labeled it "Cabot's Ship The 'Matthew' - Leaving the Avon-".



4¢ - "FLEET OF COLUMBUS"

based on *Die Schiffe des Columbus* by German artist Gustav Adolf Closs



Image: Wikimedia Commons (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/>)

The three ships used by Christopher Columbus on his first journey to the Americas were the *Santa María*, the *Pinta**, and the *Santa Clara* (more commonly known as the *Niña*). In this image, the *Niña* is pictured as the center ship in the painting that inspired the 4¢ stamp's design.

The 4¢ stamp paid the postage rate of double-weight domestic letters. Five plates were produced to print the 19,181,550 stamps issued.



Scott #233

*At the time, Spanish ships were traditionally named after women saints. The original name of the *Pinta* is unknown – it is known today by its nickname, which translates to “The Painted One”. The *Niña* translates to “The Little Girl”.

5¢ - “COLUMBUS SOLICITING AID OF ISABELLA”

based on *Columbus at the Court of Ferdinand and Isabella* by Czech painter Václav Brožík



Image: Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. [LC-DIG-pga-03133]

The painting that inspired the 5¢ design depicted Columbus requesting funding for his voyage. At the time the stamps were engraved, the painting was owned by The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Today it hangs in the Richelieu Ballroom of the Hotel Manoir Richelieu in Quebec, Canada.

The 5¢ stamp paid the international letter rate for ½oz mail. Five plates were produced to print the 35,248,250 stamps issued.



Scott #234

In 1923 and 1926, this same image was used for the 10¢ stamps of Costa Rica. The American Bank Note Company re-engraved the design for the stamps, printed in red brown (1923) or carmine rose (1926).



6¢ - “COLUMBUS WELCOMED AT BARCELONA”

based on a panel from the Columbus Doors designed by Randolph Rogers



Image: Architect of the Capitol (<https://www.aoc.gov/>)

The Columbus Doors are located at the main entrance to the U.S. Capitol Building. The panel that inspired the 6¢ stamp, titled *The Entry of Columbus into Barcelona*, is the second panel on the right door. The Columbus Doors, much like the Columbian Issue of stamps, tell the story of Columbus’s voyage to the Americas. The door is arranged to start at the bottom of the left door and read clockwise. This panel is the 7th in sequence, including the tympanum.

The 6¢ stamp paid the rate for a triple-weight domestic letter. It could also be used in conjunction with other values to pay the registered mail rate. Only one plate (Z104) was produced to print the 4,707,550 stamps issued.



Scott #235

8¢ - “COLUMBUS RESTORED TO FAVOR”

based on *The Affectionate Reception of Columbus by Ferdinand and Isabella* by Francisco Jover y Casanova



Image: The Swedish Tiger (<http://www.theswedishtiger.com/>)

The 8¢ stamp was issued two months after the other stamps in the series. It was made to accommodate the recently reduced rate for registered mail. It was the first 8¢ value stamp issued by the United States.

The painting chosen for the design depicted a scene in which Columbus was pardoned from his crime of administrative misconduct during his third voyage (his arrest was featured on the \$2 stamp). The painting is currently located at Valladolid University in Valladolid, Spain.

The 8¢ stamp paid the registered mail fee. Five plates were produced to print the 10,656,550 stamps issued.



Scott #236

10¢ - "COLUMBUS PRESENTING NATIVES"

based on *Return of Columbus and Reception at Court* by Luigi Gregori



Image: U.S. Philatelic Classics Society (<https://www.uspcs.org/>)

The design for this stamp was based on one of several murals commissioned for Notre Dame University. This mural was created between 1880 and 1884. It currently hangs in the campus's Administration Building.

The 10¢ stamp paid the combined rate for both domestic mail and registration fee. Five plates were produced to print the 16,516,950 stamps issued.



Scott #237

15¢ - "COLUMBUS ANNOUNCING HIS DISCOVERY"

based on the painting *Columbus Announces His Discovery* by Ricardo Baloca y Cancico



Image: The Swedish Tiger (<http://www.theswedishtiger.com>)

The painting that inspired the design of this stamp was destroyed during the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s.

The 15¢ stamp was not intended to pay any specific postage rate. It could be used to pay the postage for foreign mail at triple weight, or used in conjunction with other stamps to pay expensive rates for mailing heavyweight items. Only one plate (M58) was produced to print the 1,576,950 stamps issued.



Scott #238

30¢ - "COLUMBUS AT LA RABIDA"

based on the painting *Columbus Before the Franciscans at La Rabida* by Felipe Maso



Image: The Columbus Gallery - Columbus Monuments Pages (<http://columbus.vanderkrogt.net>)

The Spanish monarchy initially turned down Columbus's request for funding his voyage. After his initial rejection, Columbus set out toward France to appeal to the French court. This painting shows Columbus at the La Rabida monastery where he rested on during this trip. The monks there offered encouragement for Columbus.

No specific postage rate was paid by the 30¢ stamp value. It was intended to pay charges for heavyweight mail matter, or to serve as a collector's item. Only one plate (N59) was produced to print the 617,250 stamps issued.



Scott #239

50¢ - "RECALL OF COLUMBUS"

based on a painting of the same name by A.G. Heaton



Image: Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A._G._Heaton)

The subject for the 50¢ stamp shows Columbus traveling by mule, on his way to seek funding for his voyage in France. He is stopped by a messenger with a request to return to the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand II and Isabella, who were convinced sponsor him.

American artist A.G. Heaton painted *The Recall of Columbus* in 1882 and was purchased by the United States Senate. It was displayed at the 1893 World's Fair before being displayed in the Senate Wing of the U.S. Capitol where it hangs today. Heaton also painted another scene used for a postage stamp: his *Hardships of Emigration* was used as the subject for the 10¢ stamp of the 1898 Trans-Mississippi issue.

No specific postage rate was paid by the 50¢ stamp value. It was intended to pay charges for heavyweight mail matter, and serve as a collector's item. Only one plate (S77) was produced to print the 243,750 stamps issued.



Scott #240

\$1 - "ISABELLA PLEDGING HER JEWELS"

based on a painting by Spanish artist Antonio Muñoz Degrain

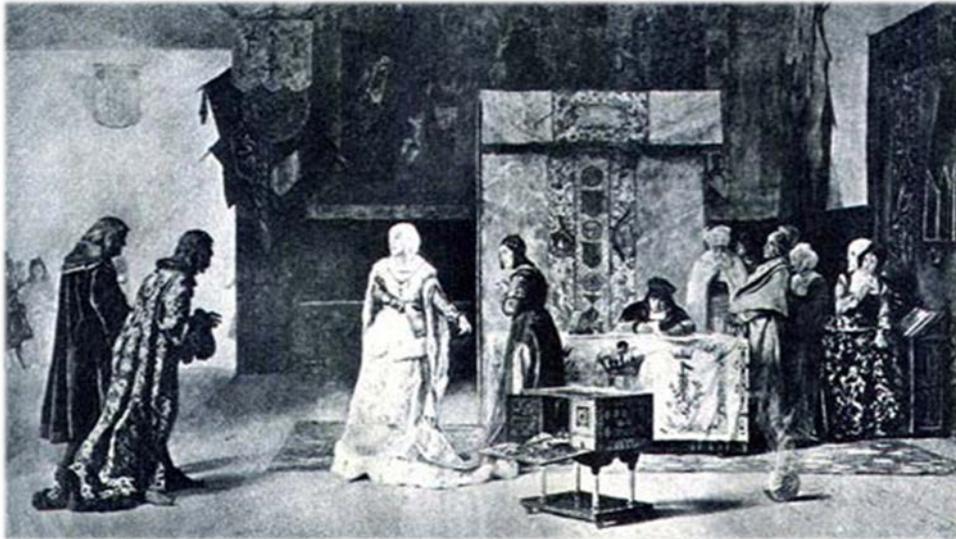


Image: The Swedish Tiger (<http://www.theswedishtiger.com>)

Although the idea of Queen Isabella pledging her jewels in support for Columbus's journey is an interesting story, in reality there was no need for her to do this. Isabella originally turned down Columbus's request for funding, but she was eventually convinced to support the journey by the monarchy's finance minister, Luis de St. Angel. By this time, St. Angel had already secured the funds for Columbus.

The \$1 stamp paid no specific postage rate, it was produced as a collector's item. Only one plate (W93) was used to print the 55,050 stamps issued.



Scott #241

\$2 - "COLUMBUS IN CHAINS"

based on the painting *The Return of Columbus in Chains to Cadiz* by Emanuel Leutze



Image: Gary Hendershott (<http://garyhendershott.net/>)

After his third voyage to the Americas, Columbus's mismanagement and cruelty lead to a rebellion of the colonists under his rule. When Spain sent a new governor to rule, Columbus refused to give up his command and was arrested. This painting by German-American painter Emanuel Leutze depicts Columbus's return to Spain in chains. (Emanuel Leutze is most famous for his painting *Washington Crossing the Delaware*.)

The \$2 stamp was created as a collector's item and paid no specific postal rate. One plate (AA105) was produced to print the 45,550 stamps issued.



Scott #242

\$3 - "COLUMBUS DESCRIBING THIRD VOYAGE"

based on the painting *Columbus Before the Catholic Kings* by Frances Jover



Image: U.S. Philatelic Classics Society (<https://www.uspcs.org/>)

Columbus's third journey was intended to explore landmasses believed to exist southwest of the islands Columbus had already found. It was during this voyage that Columbus first landed on the mainland of the South American continent. It was on this voyage that Columbus was arrested. This painting by Frances Jover shows Columbus telling his story to the Spanish monarchs.

The \$3 stamp was intended to be a collector's item. It paid no specific postal rate. Only one plate (BB106) was produced to print the roughly 27,650 stamps issued.



Scott #243

\$4 - "ISABELLA - COLUMBUS"

based on portraits by Bartolomé Bermejo and Lorenzo Lotto



Images: The Swedish Tiger (<http://www.theswedishtiger.com>) & The Columbus Gallery (<http://columbus.vanderkrogt.net>)

The portrait of Isabella used to design this stamp is supposedly based on a painting by Bartolomé Bermejo. The original painting was reproduced and recreated by different artists throughout the years until it transformed into the stylized portrait used in this stamp design.

Queen Isabella is the first recognizable woman to be featured on a U.S. postage stamp.

The \$4 stamp was intended as a collector's item and did not pay any specific postal rate. Only one plate (CC107) was used to print the 26,350 stamps issued. After the issue was pulled from sale in 1894, postmasters were asked to return their remaining stamps to the Post Office Department. At least 3,000 of the \$4 stamps were destroyed by the department in 1899.



Scott #244



The portrait of Columbus was based on a portrait by Lorenzo Lotto. In 1905, the American Bank Note Company used this design again when they printed a set of postage stamps for Chile.



\$5 - "COLUMBUS"

based on a medal by Olin L. Warner



Image: The Swedish Tiger (<http://www.theswedishtiger.com>)

A commemorative half-dollar coin was struck by the U.S. Treasury Department for the Columbian Exposition. This coin (shown above) was based on a medal originally struck in Madrid by Olin L. Warner. The portrait was used by the American Bank Note Company for both the center image of the \$5 stamp and for souvenir tickets to the fair.

The central portrait of the stamp is surrounded by figures of "Liberty" and "America". The design of the Liberty figure can be traced back to a Hungarian bank note from 1852.

The \$5 stamp was intended as a collector's item and did not pay any specific postage rate. Adjusted for inflation, the \$5 in 1893 would be equivalent to over \$135 today. Only one plate was used to print the 27,350 stamps issued. Over 5,000 of these stamps were destroyed by the Post Office Department after the stamps were pulled from sale.



Scott #45

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