

GUIDE TO COLLECTING MASONIC-RELATED POSTAGE STAMPS OF THE WORLD



The Masonic Stamp Club of New York, Inc.

Background to this Publication

When our founding brethren met in 1934 to start a stamp club, they were not thinking about a Masonic connection to postage stamps. They were simply a group of Freemasons who were interested in collecting postage stamps. They knew that George Washington, other US Presidents, and Benjamin Franklin were Freemasons, and that they were depicted on postage stamps, but did not give this a lot of thought. As time went on and the Masonic aspects of stamp collection slowly emerged, actual Masonic Philately was born.

Club members were urged (actually entreated) to send in articles about the processes they used for their collections, both Masonic-related and general stamps. Some went to Club meetings and presented their collections.

A few of the Club officers wrote about the hobby, with the bottom line being that Masonic Philately was a sort of personal thing, and as long as one was enjoying his collecting activities that was all that mattered. This is just as true today as it was then.

When I became involved in the Club in the early 1980s and started working on a guide and compendium for Masonic Philately, it was necessary to systemize things a little—basically answer the question, what is a Masonic-related postage stamp?

That there were different types of

stamps and that some types were “more Masonic” than others was very apparent. As a result, I divided stamps with Masonic content into different classifications, creating a sort of hierarchy.

Thirty years later, with the Internet now our main interface with the world, I believe it is necessary to revisit what Masonic Philately is all about and make this available for our website visitors.

Every topical stamp collection specialty has its “rules.” They are not created for any sort of enforcement; they simply define what the specialty is all about, and in our case what to look for.

On this second point, Masonic Philately is definitely different from most other specialties because there is a lot more to it. Original research (sometimes very time-consuming) is needed. There are 196 countries in the world and many different languages. Questions need to be asked, and cooperation is required to get answers.

The Internet has certainly facilitated the research process, so in recent years many more applicable stamps have come to light. As it is said, Masonic Philately is a “labor of love,” and with Freemasons such extends to our time-honored Order and the hope that our labors will bring Freemasonry itself to light in a very troubled world.

CLM

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A. Applicability of Postage Stamps to Freemasonry

The Masonic Order has always attracted men of intelligence, ability, and learning. The design of the institution itself stresses the importance of self-education and the act of bettering oneself at all levels. This, coupled with the age and universality of the Order, has resulted in the fact that many famous men were (and many presently are) Freemasons. Such men settled new countries, led their people, fought for freedom, invented things, and performed a whole host of other tasks for the betterment of society.

Postage stamps, from their inception, have been used as vehicles to commemorate the lives and accomplishments of famous people. Governments realized that the extensive distribution of stamps made them an excellent medium for patriotic expression. There is little wonder, therefore, as to the superb workmanship and quality of postage stamps. Each one is a miniature print with exacting details. This is carried so far that minute deviations in design or composition create “rare varieties” eagerly sought by collectors.

Given the Masonic ingredient and the government’s aims on stamp designs, Freemasonry and postage stamps cross paths; and because of the significant number of famous Masons, it is not a narrow crossing. Specialization, therefore, of stamps that can be tied into Masonry covers a greater field than most or all other stamp collection specialties (i.e., paintings only, ships only, etc.).

To pursue the hobby properly requires considerable research. Masonic membership provides both the knowledge of what to look for, and the pride to start looking in the first place. Also, to obtain some of the necessary information it greatly helps to be a Freemason.

B. Classifications of Relevant Stamps

In the specialization of relevant stamps, the only rule or guideline is that the stamp may somehow be connected with Freemasonry. Just how direct or distant this connection may be is up to the collector. The following rules and classifications are offered as a starting point. The classifications shown are in descending order as to their connection with the Craft.

Masonic-Related Stamp Classifications

Class 1: Stamps that are issued expressly for a Masonic purpose. Such stamps show Masonic symbols or buildings commemorating a Masonic event or undertaking. See Figures 1 and 2.

These are the true Masonic stamps; often referred to as the “government issues.” There are no regular issue USA stamps in this Class. All of the Class 1 stamps issued up to 2014 are featured in *Masonic Postage Stamps of the World* published on the Masonic Stamp Club of New York’s website.



Figure 1: Masonic stamp issued by El Salvador commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the Grand Lodge of Cuscatlán (territory).



Figure 2: Masonic stamp issued by Barbados commemorating the 250th Anniversary of Freemasonry in that country.

Class 2: Stamps that depict a person who is or was a Freemason. See Figures 3 and 4.

On a world-wide basis this Class encompasses several thousand individuals and stamps. A comprehensive list has not been assembled yet that is suitable for publication. However, the Class 2 stamps of the United States are provided in the Masonic Stamp Club of New York’s website publication, *Postage Stamp Check List: Class 2 Masonic-related stamps, USA and Canada*.



Figure 3: George Washington, first President of the United States of America.



Figure 4: John A. Macdonald, first Prime Minister of Canada.

Class 3: Stamps that depict a monument to a person who is or was a Freemason (includes houses); those that show an **object** built, discovered, invented or created by a Freemason, and places named after a Freemason. Please note the emphasis here on the word “object.” It needs to be something physical.



Figure 5: Andrew Jackson’s home



Figure 6: Statue of Liberty, created by Frederic Bartholdi

Class 4: Stamps that commemorate or celebrate a certain event, activity or undertaking in which a Freemason played the main or a major role. It includes the creation of organizations, invention of games, and noted game participation. See Figures 7 and 8.



Figure 7: Boy Scouts of America organized by Daniel Carter Beard



Figure 8: Game of baseball pioneered by Alexander Joy Cartwright

Class 5: Stamps that were designed by a Freemason. See Figure 9.

This Class has never been highly researched. It is believed the noted US stamp designer, Alvin R. Meissner, was a Freemason, but we need to know his lodge to confirm this. He designed many US stamps (seven known). Other than stamps designed by Franklin Roosevelt and Sir Sandford Fleming (but before he became a Freemason) there are no other known examples.



Figure 9: Stamp designed by Franklin D. Roosevelt

Class 6: Stamps that inadvertently show symbols and/or objects associated with the Masonic Order. See Figures 10 and 11.

The extent of this classification is so large that I doubt it will ever be fully documented. When it is taken to the other branches of Freemasonry (Royal Arch, AASR, Knights Templars) the extent is significantly increased.

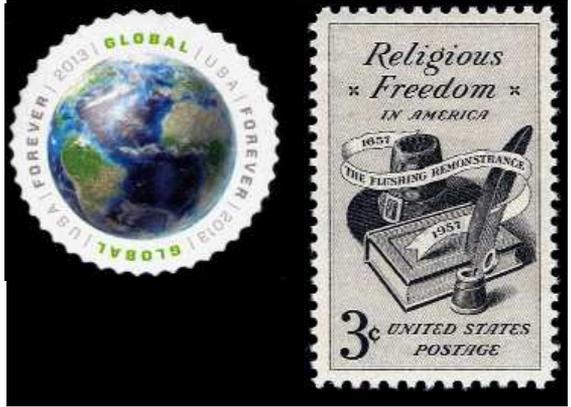


Figure 10: Globe or “terrestrial sphere”—very important in Masonic ritual

Figure 11: Bible, most important symbol in non-Grand Orient Masonry

The Scope of the Masonic Classes

Because the Masonic Order essentially addresses all aspects of human endeavor and uses symbolism to impart its doctrines and philosophy, its association with postage stamps is exceedingly vast. The Order is the largest and oldest fraternal organization in the world, and being so old its famous members date back several hundred years. Postage stamps are primarily about history and the accomplishments of noted people. As so many of these people were Freemasons, Masonic philately is likely the largest stamp speciality. About the only speciality that could challenge this, if it existed, would be Postage Stamps and Christianity, which by the way would include most Freemasons.

With regard to religion, there are two Canadian stamps that feature an urban church and a rural church. These Class 4 stamps can be used for Freemasonry’s “Brothers of the Cloth” (religious leaders of all denominations). This subject is covered in *The Masonic Philatelist*, Volume 53, No. 1, March 1997 (provided on the Club’s website).

Within these classifications, one may again choose to specialize. Class 1 stamps (government issues) were once highly limited. However, in recent years the number has increased to 110 stamps issued by 34 countries.

The most straightforward are the Class 2 stamps, which actually depict the individual Freemasons.

The process for finding applicable stamps is discussed in the next Section. It needs to be noted that certain stamps will meet the conditions for more than one classification. In this case, the highest class applies, with Class 1 being first.

C. Research Processes

Class 1 Research: These stamps are issued by countries other than the USA, Canada, and Great Britain. Canada did issue a stamp honoring the Shriners, which is considered a government issue Masonic stamp; however, as it does not specifically honor Freemasonry, it is at best marginal.

Some Masonic philatelists, such as Bro. Robert Domingue, editor of the *The Philatelic Freemason*, keep a very close eye on up-coming stamp issues by these counties, and all countries, using Internet processes. As a result, we usually hear very quickly that a new Masonic stamp is being issued.

Nevertheless, one can do his own research by either using the Internet or going through the Scott Catalogs, which of course are “after the fact.”

Scott can be several years behind with what I will term “foreign” stamps.

Public libraries usually have the latest Scott Catalogs, and in some cases, they may be borrowed.

Class 2 Research: With these stamps, one can either find a famous Freemason and search for an applicable stamp, or research the person shown on a stamp to determine if he were a Freemason.

There are thousands of Freemasons listed in books—Denslow’s *10,000 Famous Freemasons (1958)* being first and foremost. This book has now been provided on the Internet. Also, the on-line encyclopedia Wikipedia has a direct listing of famous Freemasons including all of the applicable entries in Denslow and carrying on to the current time.

Although the work of Denslow and others in this regard is applauded, there have been millions of Freemasons over the last 300 plus years, and likely many more famous Masons are yet to be discovered. Indeed there could be thousands of these unknown individuals depicted on or associated with postage stamps. The trouble is that their Masonic affiliation was not made a matter of public record. Where is this information? It is hidden away in old Grand Lodge or regular lodge records, although many such records were destroyed in wars, strife and natural catastrophes.

Nevertheless, information does

emerge as a result of research or simply luck. Old lodge records, books, diaries, journals, letters, various documents and so forth are uncovered and provide Masonic information not previously known. Such leads the way to finding an applicable postage stamp.

I will mention here that Grand Lodge libraries have amazing collections of old (very old) books not found in public libraries. Spending time to see what they have and browsing selected titles can be very rewarding.

Even for the famous Freemasons currently known, there could be, and probably are, applicable old stamps not yet found.

For those on the Internet one can “netsearch” a person’s name (i.e., a Freemason) followed by the words “postage stamp” and click “images.” If any one of millions of people worldwide has posted the image of a stamp with the person’s name, then it will appear on the screen.

For those not on the Internet, the process is to get the Scott Catalog for the applicable country and go through the stamp images one-by-one.

To search for the possible Masonic affiliation of a person shown on a stamp, then those on the Internet can netsearch the name followed by the word “Freemason.” Again, if someone has provided information including these “words,” a listing will appear.

For those not on the Internet, one needs to reference Denslow (actual

book) or other works on famous Masons.

Class 3 & 4 Research: Again starting with the name of a famous Mason, one reads his biography and notes his activities—the things that resulted in him being famous. Now a stamp is sought that either directly or indirectly reflects his accomplishment.

For those on the Internet, one can netsearch the accomplishment followed by the words “postage stamp” and see what comes up.

Using the reverse (starting with a stamp), one can netsearch the accomplishment followed by the word “Freemason,” and again see what comes up.

For those not on the Internet, starting with the name, one reviews stamp catalog images for the applicable country to see if there is a stamp for the accomplishment. When starting with the stamp, a physical listing of Freemasons and their accomplishments (biographies) is referenced.

Remarkably, after one does a lot of research, he or she builds up a bit of a memory “inventory” and in browsing through stamp images, things “leap out.”

It is very important to note that the Internet is not the “end all” for information. There is still far more knowledge “out there” than what is provided on the Internet. Pertaining to Freemasonry, I would venture a guess that less than 10% is “on-line.”

Furthermore, keep in mind that

there are numerous “generic” commemorative stamps. In other words stamps that recognize all people associated with an “accomplishment.” Most often these stamps are used if nothing more direct can be found.

thing one sees on a postage stamp that reminds him of Masonic ritual or lodge processes. Examples of specific Masonic-related symbols, items or themes that are on, or might be found on, postage stamps follow:

Class 5 Research: Although the creation of a stamp design actually falls into Class 3 (things created by Freemasons), in this case that created is the stamp itself. The stamp design would not imply/reflect the “accomplishment” because it is the “accomplishment.” One has only to think about the stamp design presented previously by Franklin Roosevelt (Figure 9) to see the meaning here.

The problem with stamp designers is that they are not really considered famous people. I don’t think Denslow would have provided them in his listing of famous Freemasons if he found one, nor would others. As a result, we have to start from scratch with this Class.

The fact that stamp designer Alvin R. Meissner was likely a Freemason is provided in *The Masonic Philatelist*, Vol. 9, No. 7, March 1953. He is shown on the cover of this issue (posted on the Club site). Unfortunately, there is no reference to his lodge. In this case all we have to go on is the credibility of our Club brethren of that time. It needs to be mentioned that Meissner designed the stamp that was petitioned by our Club (Washington Inauguration).

Class 6 Research: The extent of applicability in this Class applies to any-

Acacia	Freedom
All-seeing eye	Geometry
Almond tree	Globe
Altar	Hope
Anchor	Justice
Arithmetic	Lamb skin
Ashlar	Liberty
Beehive	Love
Bible	Lyre
Bricks & cement	Mallet/gavel
Broken Column	Moon face
Charity	Plumb
Circle	Prudence
Columns	Relief
Compasses	Setting maul
Corn	Square
Cornucopia	Sun face
Crossed batons	Temperance
Crossed keys	Triangle
Crossed swords	Truth
Faith	Universe
Five-pointed star	
Fortitude	

Note: A discussion on lodge officer emblems and postage stamps is provided on the Club’s website. There is also a presentation on Masonic symbolism found on the private die proprietary stamps of the United States.

D. The Enjoyment of Stamp Collecting

Without doubt, the main enjoyment of stamp collecting is researching stamps and learning what they are all about. As Masonic Philately is primarily about people and their accomplishments, the background information is extensive and highly interesting. When one shares what he has learned, this provides even greater enjoyment.

In the early years of The Masonic Stamp Club of New York, the main activity of Club members was to go to Club meetings and see presentations provided by other members, or guest speakers. The meetings were held monthly and there were always a couple of presentations. Speakers brought their collections with them for display and discussion.

In reading the summaries of these presentations, it's too bad the technology was not there to record them (video). Had this been so, then we would have an impressive library of talks that could be provided on the Internet (YouTube) and linked with our website.

Our Club no longer has meetings, but we certainly have a platform for sharing things—our website. In the same way I am providing this paper and all the others on the site, we can also provide member presentations.

As philatelists, we all like to look at stamps, research them, and hear what others have to say about them—that's what makes us philatelists. We can do what our early Club brethren did, albeit electronically...

