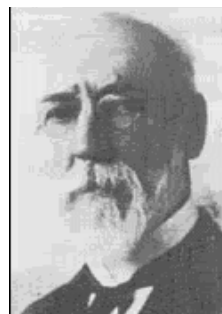


John W. Scott and the Evolution of the Scott Catalogue

by Jim Pettway

Most of us seem to take for granted the one piece of philatelic literature we use most often - the Scott catalogues. Few really wonder or maybe even care how this great reference ever came to be. When and how did it get started? Where has it been and where is it going? Well, let's see.

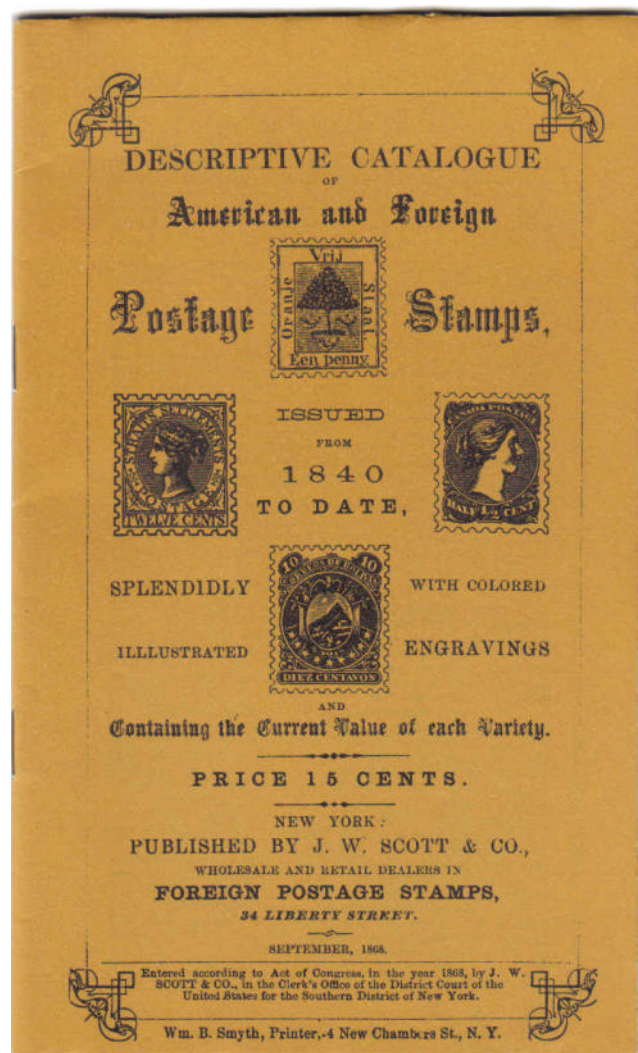
I would like to introduce you to the man most recognized for his many philatelic contributions, including the Scott catalogues - John Walter Scott. John was born in England in 1845 and became involved in stamp collecting at the age of 9. From stamp collecting he graduated into dealing in stamps as a way to obtain pocket money. At the age of 18 he moved from England to New York City and while in New York he enjoyed buying and selling stamps and found he could do quite well in this business. But being an eager and impatient young man, and the idea of fast money awaiting him in the California gold mines, he gave up his stamp business and set out for California.



In 1867 when John discovered that California did not offer him the answer to riches, he returned to New York City. Here he resumed stamp trading and a business that had served him well in the past.

Upon his return and at the age of 21 Scott issued, in June 1867, his first "J.W. Scott & Co.'s Monthly Price List." This one sided, single page price list measured 7-1/2 by 17 inches and, by its size, was apparently meant to be used as a flyer or broadside. This was the first of 15 monthly price lists issued through August 1868 and was the beginning of the Scott catalogue. No complete set of these price lists exists today and only 4 issues - (3) August

1867, (4) September 1867, (9) February 1868, and (11) April 1868 are known to exist. Copies are held by the British Library, the National Postal Museum, the American Philatelic Research Library, and private owners; only the British Library possesses all four.

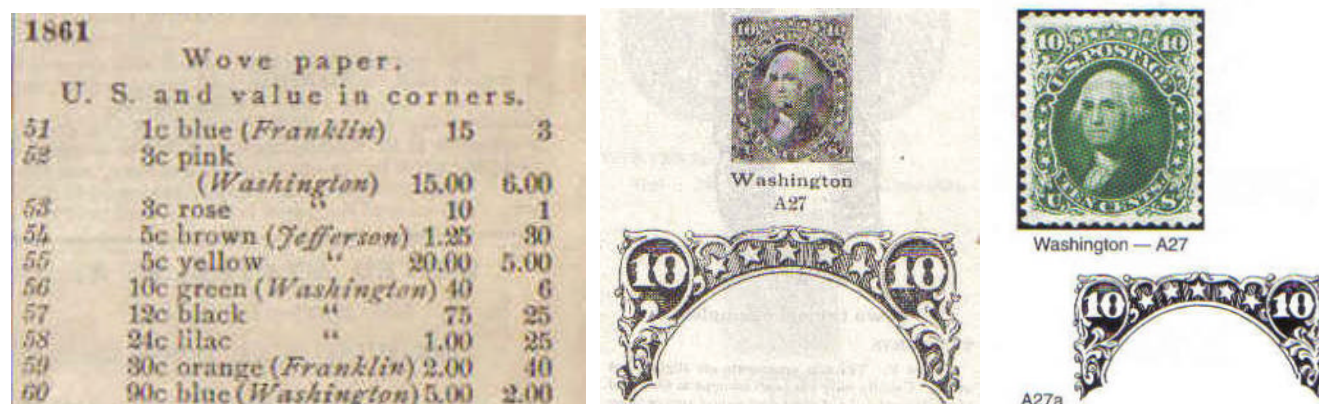


The Scott catalogue began to take its present form with the 16th edition (September 1868) (shown at left). This 24 page *Descriptive Catalogue of American and Foreign Postage Stamps* was bound and illustrated with 4 stamps on the cover and 11 inside. Of particular note are the stamps illustrated on the inside shown in single colors. The price? Just 15¢! At the time of the 16th edition John Scott introduced his line of stamp albums and advertised them on the back cover of his catalogue. In the preface to this catalogue he wrote that although he had probably the largest stamp inventory in the world, it was impossible to have every item listed in his catalogue. It is also important to note that the prices Scott published up to and including this time were retail prices he was asking for his stamps and/or prices that he knew other dealers were asking. John Scott established the stamp market in America.

Over the years 1868 to 1893 Scott catalogues grew in size as well as arrangement and format as Mr. Scott experimented. During this time Scott published and introduced to the philatelic community the *American Journal of Philately*. This started in 1868 as a monthly journal and then in 1879 changed to a quarterly journal, ceasing publication in 1886. Within just a few years, Scott introduced the *Scott catalogue*, the *Scott American Album* and the *American Journal*.

By 1886 (different sources indicate years 1885 and 1887 as well) Scott had achieved the financial success that he worked to obtain and sold his stamp business and his title to the *Scott Catalogue*. As his business passed to the newly formed Scott Stamp and Coin Co., Scott headed to Wall Street to try his hand in the stock market. He soon learned that he knew more about stamps than he did about stocks and returned to the stamp business in 1889 as "J.W. Scott Co., Ltd.," much to the dislike of the Scott Stamp and Coin Co. John Scott was taken to court for attempting to use his name in conjunction with the stamp business that he had supposedly sold to that company. The Supreme Court found in favor of Scott stating that no matter what the contract, no man can sign away his right to make a living by the only means available to him. Over the next 26 years and until his retirement a few years prior to his death in 1919, John W. Scott prospered in the stamp business.

One of the most noticeable changes in the Scott Catalogue under the Scott Stamp and Coin Co. was the assigning of a number to each stamp. Until this time, individual numbers were not assigned to stamps. The stamps were just listed by country with year and description. With Scott Edition 46 in 1888 the new owners assigned an individual catalog number to each stamp.



Compare the different generations of descriptions and illustrations in the Scott Catalogue. At left is all the information provided – no picture – in the listing of the 1895 catalogue (note the 6 cent price for a used 10c green!). In the middle is the rather poor quality image seen in the 1939 volume, typical of many of the 20th century illustrations. At right is the new look in full color from the 2005 catalogue. Many improvements have taken place over the history of the Scott Catalogues, and numbers have changed – this stamp, number 56 in 1895, is now number 68.

In 1922 the Scott Stamp and Coin Company introduced the *United States Stamps Specialized Catalogue*. There had been a printing overrun of United States pages for the regular 78th Scott edition, and there were enough extra sets of pages to make up 400 special catalogues – each bound in leather. This catalogue was so well accepted that *Scott's United States Stamp Catalogue Specialized* was offered officially as a first edition in 1923, also leather bound with pages printed on only one side.

In 1938 the owners of Scott Stamp & Coin Company sold the publishing portion of the business to Scott Publications, Inc. Since 1938 the two companies have been totally independent of each other, Scott Stamp & Coin Company selling stamps and coins, and Scott Publications, Inc. publishing catalogues and other stamp collecting items. Today Scott Publishing Company in Sidney, Ohio, is a division of Amos Press, Inc.

And so the Scott catalogue continues to change with the times. From a one page black and white flyer published in 1867 to today's 8 bound volumes with stamp pictures in color and in digital format in CD ROM packages. Could John W. Scott have ever dreamed that what he started nearly 140 years ago would have evolved into what it is today?

Scott Catalogue Highlights

1867 - first J.W. Scott & Co. Monthly Price List

1868 - first bound and illustrated edition of the *Descriptive Catalogue of American and Foreign Postage Stamps*

1888 - 46th Edition of the Scott catalogue assigns a number to each stamp listed.

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