VOLUME 84, NO. 10
OCTOBER, 2013

(ISSN 0164-923X)
(USPS 620-200)

The United States Specialist

FOR THE COLLECTOR OF POSTAGE AND REVENUE
STAMP ISSUES OF THE UNITED STATES

Updated Information on the 29¢ Eagle Linerless Self-Adhesive Test Coil Stamp.
See p. 453.

Updated Information on the 29¢ Eagle Linerless Self-Adhesive Test Coil Stamp

By **Richard J. Nazar**
USSS #11033, 65 Windsor Way, Berkeley Heights, NJ 07922-1858
<Richard.Nazar@USAstamps.com>

Recently uncovered information has provided a clearer understanding of the production of the 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive imperforate test coil stamp (Scott TD123; Figure 1).

Figure 1. Pair of 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive imperforate test coil stamps, which were only produced with stricken value and "TEST SPECIMEN."

The May, 2001 issue of *The United States Specialist* included an article entitled "The 29¢ Eagle Linerless Test Coil" by John Larson.[1] The article was a thorough overview of this stamp, which included information about the stamp that did not appear in earlier articles in the philatelic press and club journals. Larson's article also included an estimate of the number of these stamps and plate-numbered stamps that were reported in the possession of stamp dealers and collectors at that time.

Now, more than a decade later, most of the information in Larson's article is still valid. However, several key points concerning the production and the quantity of these stamps that are in collectors' holdings have changed.

Production Correction

Larson's article — like all previously published information about this stamp — incorrectly attributed the production of this linerless self-adhesive test coil stamp to the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP). Actually, this stamp was printed by National Label Company of Lafayette Hill, Pennsylvania, under a United States Postal Service (USPS) contract with 3M Corporation (Research and Development contract number 104230-92-0-3129).

Figure 2. The small plate number combination (1111) that appears at 27-stamp intervals on rolls of the 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive imperforate test coil stamp does not include a letter prefix despite being produced under a contract with 3M Corporation and printed by National Label Company.

The origin of the association of this stamp with the BEP is cited in Larson's article. It states, "The lack of a prefix on the plate number indicates that the linerless test coils were produced by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP)" (see Figure 2). This was the common understanding of stamp collectors, which was based on USPS plate number policies that had been in effect since 1981. Since that time, small plate number codes (instead of the actual plate number) have been printed on the faces of most coil stamps at regular intervals throughout a coil of stamps.

According to the USPS conventions regarding the new style of plate numbering instituted in 1981, plate numbers of stamps printed outside the BEP feature a single letter prefix to identify the vendor that was contracted to produce the stamps for the USPS. For example, the plate numbers of stamps produced under contacts with American Banknote Company were preceded by an "A" and stamps produced under contacts with Guilford Gravure were preceded by a "G." It is important to note that the prefix identified the holder of the contract to produce the stamps, not the actual printer of the stamps.

Stamps produced under contracts with 3M are supposed to include an "M" as a plate number prefix. This identification was properly employed on the convertible booklet of 18 29¢ Eagle stamps produced under a contract with 3M Corporation and printed by National Label Company. The peelable horizontal strip between the two blocks of nine stamps on the convertible booklet shows plate number M111. In contrast, the two self-adhesive coil stamps that were also produced under a contract with 3M and printed by National Label Company did not include the "M" prefix in the plate numbers (Figure 3).

Similar Designs, But Different Stamps

The 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive test stamp (Scott #TD123) shares a similar design with the following two self-adhesive postage stamps issued on February 4, 1994 (Figure 4):

- 29¢ Eagle Self-adhesive Convertible Booklet produced by 3M Corporation (printed by National Label Company) in a convertible booklet of 18 stamps (two blocks of nine stamps with a peelable horizontal strip between the blocks) with straight die cutting (Scott #2598).
- 29¢ Eagle Self-adhesive Coil produced by 3M Corporation (printed by National Label Company) in coils of 5,004 stamps [ed. note: 5,004 is correct] with straight die cutting and spaces between the stamps (Scott #2598b).

Figure 3. 3M was contracted by the USPS to produce stamps using the 29¢ Eagle design in three formats: self-adhesive convertible booklets of 18 stamps with straight die cutting (top–back and front shown); self-adhesive coil stamps with straight die cutting and spaces between the stamps (middle); and linerless self-adhesive imperforate coils (bottom).

Figure 4. Comparison of single 29¢ Eagle self-adhesive stamps from a convertible booklet (left), a linerless test coil (center), and a coil with spaces between the stamps and paper backing (right).

Although a single 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive test stamp appears to be an overprinted version of either of the two stamps listed above, it is actually a distinct stamp design that incorporates the horizontal black line through the "29" denomination in the upper-right corner, the "TEST SPECIMEN" text and lines, the rectangular cutting guide marks, and the faux perforation outlines as printed components of the stamp design.

None of the three 29¢ eagle stamps share the same printing cylinders because they each had different printing surface layouts:

- The 29¢ Eagle self-adhesive convertible booklet stamps used a set of three gravure printing cylinders with 486 subjects (18 rows of 27 subjects around).
- The 29¢ Eagle self-adhesive self-adhesive coil stamps (with the paper backing) used a set of three gravure printing cylinders with 126 subjects (seven rows of 18 subjects around).
- The 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive coil stamps used a set of four gravure printing cylinders with 486 subjects (18 rows of 27 subjects around).

Each of the gravure printing cylinders in the sets mentioned above printed one of the spot colors of the overall stamp design. All three of the stamps used red (PMS 485), putty (PMS 453), and blue (PMS 286) inks, but the 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive coil stamps had a fourth printing cylinder for the black ink.

Original Source for Collectors

In late 1996, a single partial roll of 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive test stamps was acquired by Steve Unkrich from an anonymous source. According to an article entitled "New linerless U.S. test coil features 1994 stamp design" by Wayne L. Youngblood in the April 14, 1997 issue of *Stamp Collector*, "The mailer had the coil for testing a new form of stamp affixer created for use on linerless coils."[2] This one coil is reportedly the source of the 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive test stamps that have been available to stamp dealers and collectors.

Larson's 2001 article estimated that the partial coil had about 1,500 stamps remaining on the roll when it was found. Larson's article also included an image of the coil with a detailed description of the dimensions of the coil and the cardboard core. A label on the inside of the core can be partially viewed in the image from Larson's article (Figure 5). The entire label is shown in Figure 6, having been removed from the cardboard core of the coil.

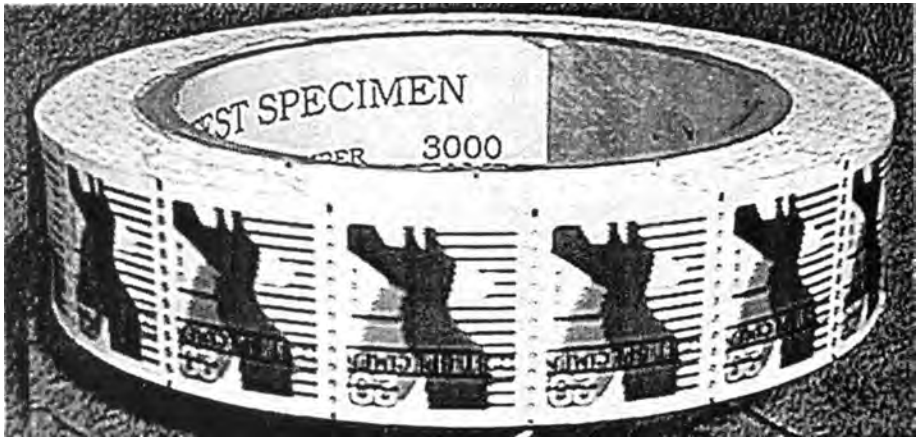

Figure 5. Image from John Larson's 2001 article of the partial roll of 3,000 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive imperforate test coil stamps originally acquired by Steve Unkrich in late 1996.

Figure 6. Label from the inside of the cardboard core of the discovery roll, which was originally produced with 3,000 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive imperforate test coil stamps.

The contract number that appears on the core label from the original partial roll (104230-92-0-3129) refers to a USPS contract. This same contract number is cited in a report from the 1995 TAPPI Conference.[3] (TAPPI — Technical Association of the Pulp and Paper Industry — is an international not-for-profit organization of engineers, scientists, managers, academics and others involved in the areas of pulp, paper, packaging and converting industries.) The 1995 TAPPI report states, "This study was supported by R&D contract number 104230-92-0-3129 in cooperation with the 3M-Postal Service Systems awarded in April 1992." It also provides the following information about the stamps that were tested in the study:

> The USPS supplied eight rolls of PSA linerless stamps for the trials: seven rolls with adhesive and one roll without adhesive. The stamps consisted of the stamp paper, printing ink, pressure-sensitive adhesive, and release coating. The purpose of the release coating is to prevent the stamps from adhering to underlying stamps in the linerless coil. All rolls were shredded upon receipt into 6.4-mm (0.25-in.) width by feeding random lengths (about 30 to 38 cm [12 to 15 in.]) into a heavy-duty shredder. Commercial business envelopes with one stamp each were similarly shredded in a post-consumer-use trial.

Figure 7. One of two full 10,000-stamp coils of the 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive imperforate test coil stamp, which is in the possession of an anonymous collector.

Figure 8. Second of two full 10,000-stamp coils of the 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive imperforate test coil stamp, which is in the possession of an anonymous collector.

Although the partial roll of 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive test stamps acquired by Unkrich in late 1996 was not from the TAPPI study, the contract number on the core label indicates it was produced under the same USPS research and development (R&D) contract.

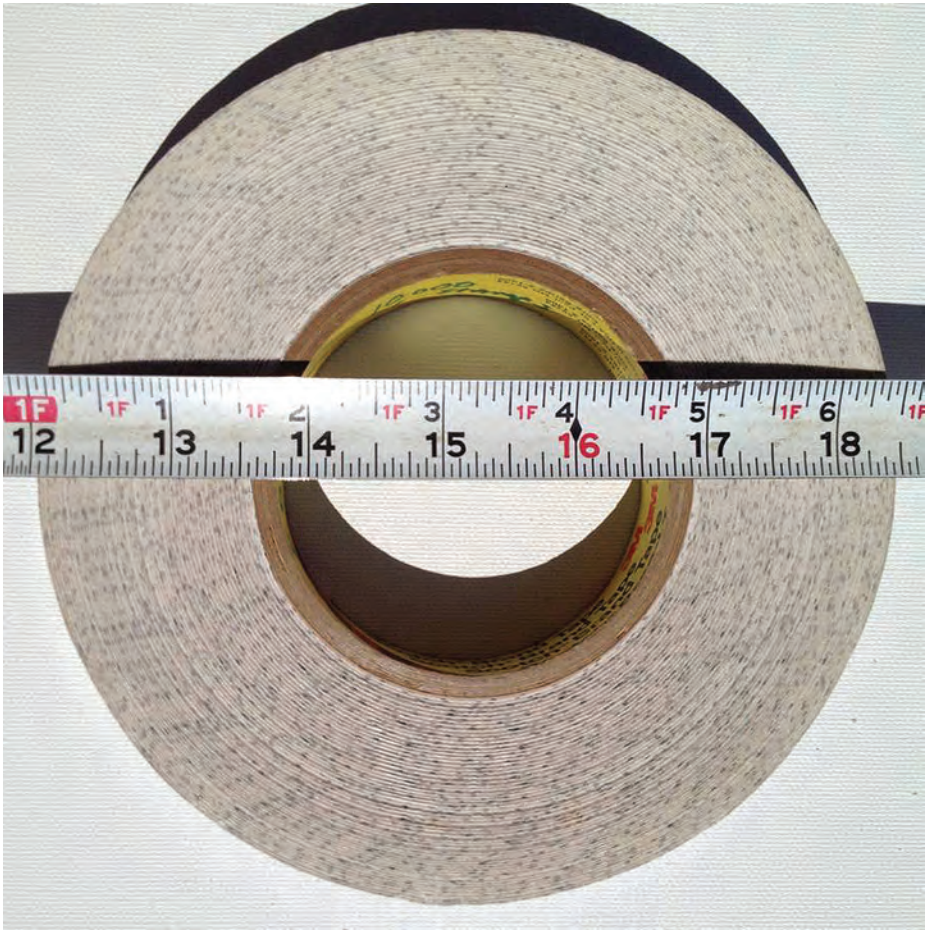

Figure 9. The diameter of the full 10,000-stamp coils of a 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive imperforate test coil stamp is approximately 6½ inches.

Reports of Linerless Coils of 10,000 and 30,000 Stamps

In March, 1997, at the Spring Postage Stamp Mega Event at the New York Coliseum in New York City, representatives from the USPS showed a 10,000-stamp coil of the 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive test stamps to attendees of a small presentation about recent advancements in stamp production.[4] Some attendees were allowed to hold the 10,000-stamp coil briefly and examine it closely. The large roll of stamps was not sealed with plastic or wrapped in cellophane, but the linerless nature of the stamps prevented the coil from unrolling or telescoping out. No stamps, however, were distributed to any of the attendees during this presentation.

Even though the USPS presentation revealed the 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive test stamps to several members of the philatelic press, the event did not receive much attention in philatelic publications. Instead, in the following weeks, the new stamp was highlighted by the acquisition of the single partial coil of 3,000 stamps by Steve Unkrich and stamps being made

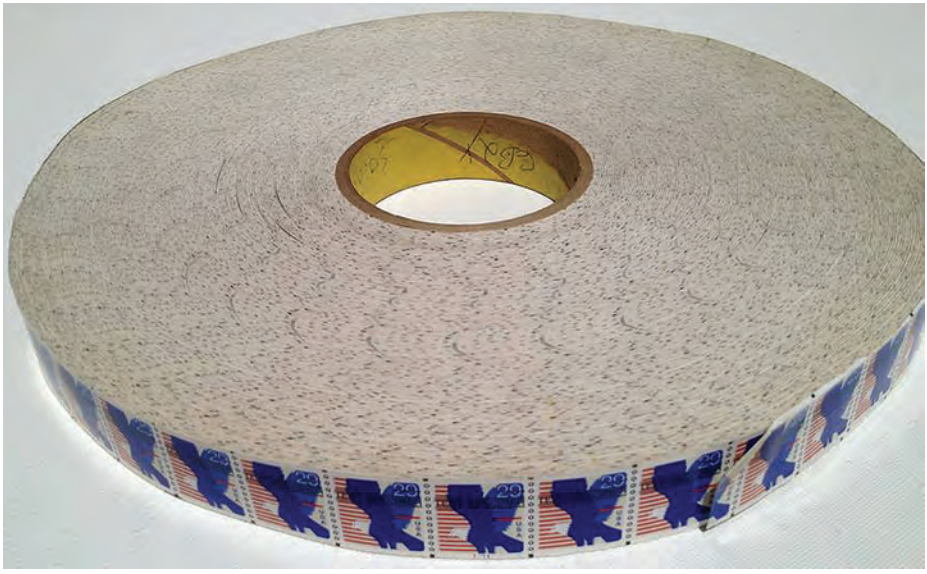

Figure 10. Only reported full 30,000-stamp coil of the 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive imperforate test coil stamp, which is in the possession of an anonymous collector.

available to collectors. There was no mention of the 10,000-stamp coil that was shown by the USPS.

The existence of the 10,000-stamp coil of the 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive test stamp was recently affirmed by photos provided by an anonymous collector. Photos of two intact separate rolls of 10,000 stamps were provided (Figures 7, 8 and 9). Surprisingly, the same collector also provided photos of a 30,000-stamp coil of the 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive test stamp (Figures 10 and 11). The owner says that all three of the large coils are intact with no stamps removed. The owner also states that the plan is to keep the coils as full rolls of 10,000 and 30,000 stamps without removing any stamps.

None of the three coils in the photographs are wrapped in cellophane or shrink-wrap plastic. This is similar to the 10,000 stamp coil that was shown by the USPS at the stamp show in 1997.

All of the coils have a 3-inch (inside dimension) cardboard core. However, unlike the original partial roll of 3,000 stamps acquired by Unkrich in late 1996, none of the newly reported coils of 10,000 and 30,000 stamps have labels stuck to the inside of the cores. Instead, each of the new coils have handwritten notations on the inside of the cardboard core.

The first of the two 10,000-stamp coils has had part of the printed part of the paper lining removed from the inside of the cardboard core. By comparing this core to the cores of the other coils, it is clear that the missing part of the paper layer of the core was printed with “Scotch Tape” labeling and branding in red and black. On the yellow paper that remains, someone has written “6B2X” and “10,000” with a black ballpoint pen.

The second of the two 10,000-stamp coils still has all of the “Scotch Tape” printed layer on the inside of the paper core. In the yellow area of the core, “6B2X” and “10,000 stamps” was written with a greenish-blue felt-tip marker.

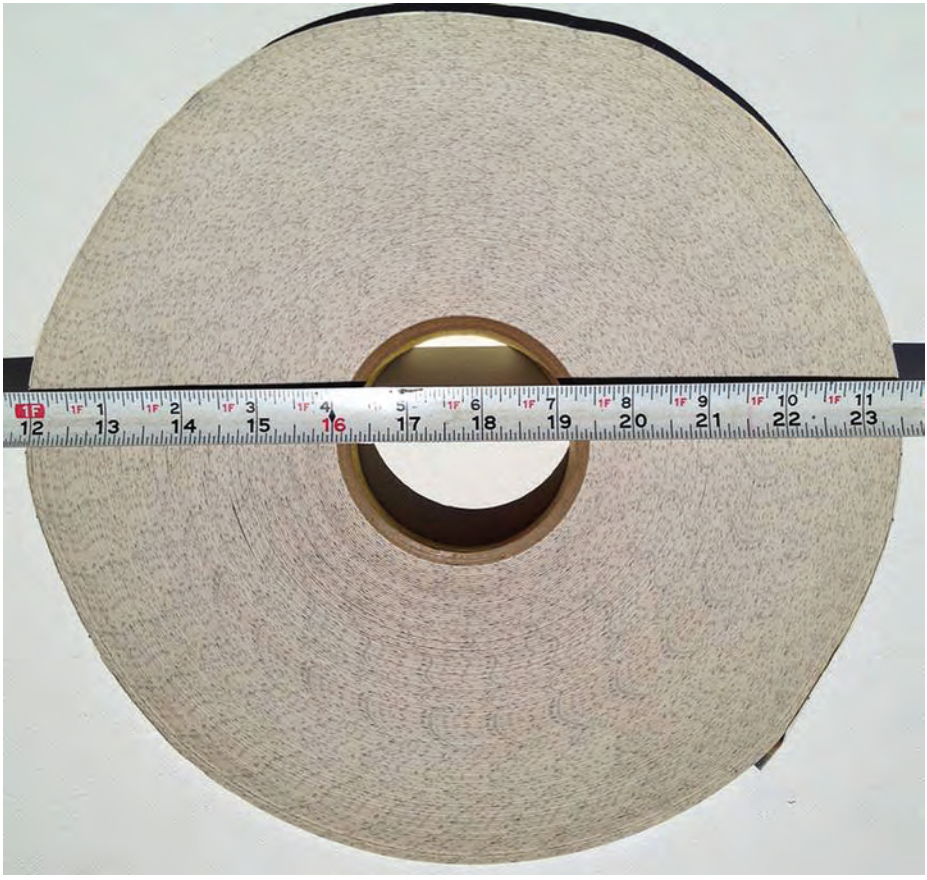

Figure 11. The diameter of the full 30,000-stamp coils of the 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive imperforate test coil stamp is approximately 11⅜ inches.

The 30,000-stamp coil had all of the "Scotch Tape" printed layer removed from the inside of the paper core. On the part of the unprinted yellow area of the core that remains, "6B2X" and "30,000" were written with a black ballpoint pen. The 30,000-stamp coil is not perfectly round. It appears that the original round shape of the large roll was slightly deformed from being stored vertically on its edge instead of lying flat.

Printer's Waste

Figure 12 shows a carefully trimmed portion of the printed web of the 29¢ Eagle linerless self-adhesive test coil stamp recently sold through an online auction. The item is considered "printer's waste" by collectors because it is not in an intended finished format of the stamp. The piece includes a vertical pair of the stamps that were only produced in horizontal coils. Below the stamps is a portion of the selvage from the printed web, which is normally trimmed off and discarded during the processing of the printed web into individual coils. The wide bottom selvage shows a "cross register line" printed in black.

Figure 12. Vertical pair from printer's waste showing the cross registry line in the bottom selvage of the web. (A better image is not available at this time.)

Acknowledgements

The author would like to cite the following people for their assistance and generous contributions of information, research, philatelic material and images used in this article: Michael Perry, Terry Scott, Alan Thomson and Steve Unkrich.

References

1. John L. Larson, "The 29¢ Eagle Linerless Test Coil, " *The United States Specialist*, Vol. 72, No. 5 (May, 2001), pp. 227–231.

2. Wayne L. Youngblood, "New linerless U. S. test coil features 1994 stamp design," *Stamp Collector*, April l4, 1997, pp. 1, 24.

3. Said AbuBakr, Gary M. Scott, Alim A. Fatah, Rajendra Kumar, Timothy V. Stagg, Paul R. LaBrosse, "Recyclability of Linerless PSA stamps," *Proceedings of the 1995 TAPPI Pulping Conference* (October 1-5, 1995), TAPPI PRESS, Book 1, pp. 109-114.

4. Harold Brown, "Linerless test coils take a step backward, " *Coil Line*, Vol. 10, No. 5, (May l, 1997), p. 67.