

Save the seals, they're free at last

United States Christmas Seals have been a popular collectible for decades. They are commonly encountered and have a special status in many collections. This is due, in part, to the fact they are one of only a very few Cinderella-type items listed in the Scott catalogue. This month's featured giveaway item, thanks to Betsy and Chuck Berry of State College, Pa., is a set of six Christmas Seals ranging from the 1930s to the present. This set includes experimental, as well as standard-issue seals.

United States Christmas Seals were developed in 1907 by Emily Bissell, based on charity seals being used in Denmark since 1904. They were sold in post offices for a penny apiece, with the proceeds going to the Delaware chapter of the American National Red Cross. By the following year, Christmas Seals went national and were distributed through the American National Red Cross. This continued through 1919. In 1920, distribution of seals was done through the National Tuberculosis Association, a practice that continued through 1967. From 1968-72, seals were available through the National Tuberculosis and Respiratory Disease Association. The American Lung Association has produced and distributed Christmas Seals since 1973. For more information on Christmas Seals and how to collect them, please turn to the feature that begins on page 71.

What will you receive in your Free for all packet? First, you'll find three U.S. Christmas Seals from the 1930s. You also will receive an unadopted experimental Christmas Seal design from 1993, which depicts a unicorn. A second unadopted experimental Christmas Seal design will be included, as will a Spanish-text Christmas Seal from Puerto Rico. The set should provide an excellent start or supplement to a beginning Christmas Seal collection. Since Christmas Seal sheets contain naturally occurring straight edges, you should expect to see them from time to time.

As with all Free for all items, the set of six Christmas Seals is free to subscribers who send a stamped, addressed envelope with proper postage affixed. Since the stamps will fit in a standard-sized envelope, you will need only a stamped, addressed envelope bearing 32¢ return postage. You may also wish

to provide some form of stiffener to keep the set from becoming creased during mail handling.

Please send requests to Free For All, Christmas Seals, Box 828, Sidney, OH 45365-0828. Single requests from subscribers will be filled while supplies last, or until Jan. 15. Foreign subscribers are exempt from the deadline.



A set of six different Christmas Seals, ranging from the 1930s through modern experimental and Puerto Rico seals, is this month's featured Free for all giveaway item.





Get stuck on Christmas Seals

by Betsy and Chuck Berry

Looking for a new and inexpensive collecting interest? How about a collection that costs nothing to start and very little to add to? All you have to do is get out all those old Christmas Seals that you have tucked away in the back closet. You've been accumulating them for years, right? If you ask your friends and relatives to search through their Christmas boxes for the old sheets that they have put aside, you'll soon have a ready-made collection that just needs a little organization.

The first United States Christmas Seal was issued in 1907, at a time when tuberculosis was a dreaded disease. Emily Bissell (remember seeing her picture with the double-barred Lorraine Cross on a 15¢ U.S. stamp, Scott 1823, a few years ago? designed a simple red and white seal to raise money to save a local tuberculosis sanatorium. She had heard about the success of Christmas Seal sales for TB



Early covers or postcards with Christmas Seals tied by cancels are scarce and often fairly valuable. The illustrated example, from 1907, bears the first U.S. seal, Scott WX1.



Christmas Seal bonds, issued in amounts ranging from \$5 to \$1,000, are a related form of collectible.

This 1992 American Lung Association bookmark reproduces the design of that year's seal.

AMERICAN LUNG ASSOCIATION
The Christmas Seal People®

Christmas Seals.
The #1 hope for the #3 killer:
LUNG DISEASE.



research and care in Denmark in 1904 and thought the idea was worth trying. Bissell was so successful that the following year (1908) the American Red Cross ran the campaign on a national basis. The Red Cross issued seals every year through 1919, when the National Tuberculosis Association (now the American Lung Association) took over.

How to organize your collection

First, you'll want to sort your seals by year. You aren't too likely to find one of the very early seals in your attic, but you might find that you have a few or even a full sheet from several of the past 50 years. A word of warning here: If you do have full sheets of seals, don't separate them yet. Some seal varieties are distinguishable only in full sheets.

Now for the fun part. Get out your Scott *Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps* and look in the far back of the book for the listing of Christmas Seals (page 559 in the 1996 edition). You'll find pictures of the seals through 1979 (more about that later), as well as perforation and design varieties. Check your seals carefully. You might find something interesting. Perhaps you'll find one with "USA" omitted. A valuable error? Sorry, that's a Canadian or British Seal that resembles the U.S. design, an early joint issue. These items



At left is the 1944 Christmas Seal; below is a milk bottle cap (the original pog) that reproduced the same design. At bottom is a milk bottle collar featuring the 1945 Christmas Seal.



Fight Lung Disease With Christmas Seals®

1907-1994



When You Can't Breathe, Nothing Else Matters®

AMERICAN LUNG ASSOCIATION

This collectible placemat, from 1994, features examples of all seals from 1907-94.

may not be worth a fortune, but they are highly collectible.

You'll also notice information in the Scott catalogue about printers' marks. What are these? Since 1924, several printers around the country were employed to print the seals each year. To distinguish his seals, each printer placed a secret mark somewhere on the sheet. To find early printers' marks, you may find yourself counting dots and looking for spurs. But since 1936, the printer's mark has been a tiny letter on a seal, near the center of the sheet. For example, to find it on most sheets of 100, look on the sixth stamp in the sixth row for a small letter B, C, D, E, F, I, M, N, R, S, U or W. These are the printers' marks. You will usually see the letter in a corner of the seal or under an arm of a figure.



Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and those which suffer adversity as being yourselves... —Hebrews 13:3.

Christmas Seal collectibles from 1940 include the above church bulletin and the reminder postcard at left (printed on the back of Scott UX27).

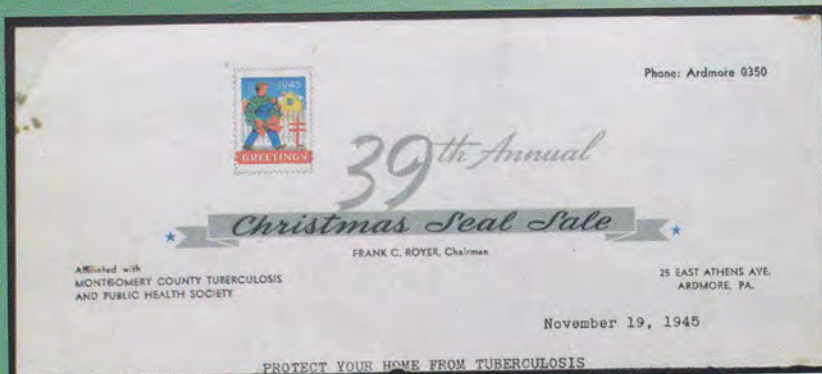
Would you be willing to take a minute and check up on the Christmas Seals that we sent you November 25?

Unless we are mistaken we haven't heard from you and we are wondering if our letter or your reply could have gone astray. We desire your interest in this life-saving work and hope for your contribution.



Mr. Herbert F. Smith, Treasurer
CHESTER COUNTY TUBERCULOSIS SOCIETY
Fremont Building
21 E. Market Street
West Chester, Penn.





The 1945 Christmas Seal was reproduced in full color on this local letterhead from Ardmore, Pa.



Although there was no official first day of issue for many years of U.S. Christmas Seals some, such as this 1956 example, featured cacheted first-day covers.

Now, check your catalogue for the name of the printer. Eureka Specialty Printing in Scranton, Pa., had the longest printing history (1911-92). That firm used "E" (for Eureka) until 1974, then changed to "S" (for Specialty) in 1975. An "S" on older sheets (until 1958) was used by Strobridge Lithographing Company in Cincinnati, Ohio, which began printing seals in 1909. In 1957 and 1958, sheets by eight different printers exist, and some are fairly scarce. For example, in 1958 Berlin ("B") is tough to locate, particularly if it is perforated 11 rather than 10 1/2 by 11. Maybe you'll find one! Some collectors like to collect full sheets, which are easier to keep than U.S. postage stamps because they fit into 8 1/2- by 11-inch page protectors. Other collectors save the printers' marks as singles or centered in a block of nine. If you would like a checklist to help you keep track of which printers exist for which years, send us a stamped, addressed envelope (Betsy & Chuck, Box 8134, State College, PA 16803).

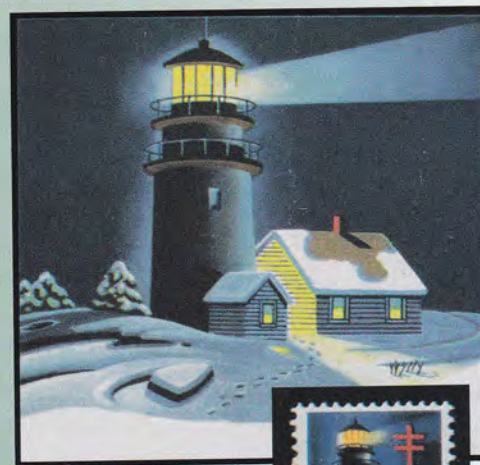
Although Christmas Seals do not have plate numbers, some collectors save corner blocks with the oval Union Label on the selvage. This marginal inscription contains the insignia and number of the local printers' union that printed the seals and the name of the city where they were printed. Unless your eyes are great, you will need a magnifier to read the city name!

A popular way to collect seals is used on card or cover. Christmas Seals are not

postage, of course, but are sometimes affixed to envelopes near the stamp so they are "tied" by a postmark. In the early days, seals were sometimes used (mistakenly or otherwise) instead of postage. Some early seals are scarce tied to cover because they were not supposed to be placed on the front of an envelope. Since the first seals were sold in the lobby of the Wilmington, Del., post office for a penny each, it is easy to see how customers might have assumed them to be a new kind of stamp. More recently, seals tied to cacheted covers and postmarked in places like Santa Claus, Ind., have flourished.

Seals of the world

Ready to move on? You'll need a copy of *Green's Catalog of the Tuberculosis Seals of the World*. This volume lists seals of the world, as well as a detailed listing of U.S. Seals. Now you can really get into varieties! Seals were not printed under the same security as stamps, so look carefully. Perhaps you'll find a brown bird on the mailbox on seal 22 of a 1935 sheet. Or a long coat on one of the men on seal 29 in 1933. You also will find progressive color proofs listed here. Unlike stamp proofs, these spectacular examples of the printing process often sell for about a dollar per set. Imperforate seals also were issued for most years. Even printers' waste, misperfs and other errors and oddities are available at relatively low prices.



Shown above is an example of what the original artwork for the 1941 Christmas Seal looked like, as well as the finished seal (right).



For a fascinating sideline, let's move on to Christmas Seal collateral material. You can find Christmas Seals used as the design for milk-bottle collars (remember the old days, when glass bottles of milk were delivered to your door?) or milk-bottle caps (the first pogs). There are paper napkins and placemats, church program covers, postcards and buttons used for advertising the Christmas Seal campaign. Each of these items pictures its respective year's Christmas Seal. How about envelope stuffers or bookmarks? You might even want to collect Christmas Seal Bonds in denominations of \$5, \$10, \$50 or more . . . right up to \$1,000. These fun additions, with their enlarged seal designs, will really dress up your collection.

If we seem to be covering too much territory, maybe it is time to slow down. How about collecting and specializing in just one year? Maybe the year you were born, or another meaningful year. Perhaps you could specialize in your favorite seal. If you like black and orange, you'll love the 1933 seal. Are you a topical collector? Ship lovers will enjoy the 1928 seal. And, for the lighthouse collector, check out the 1941 seal. Train collectors will go for the 1967 seal. And, almost anyone can find a favorite topic on one of the all-different childrens' drawings seals of the 1975-80 era.

Having chosen your year, now you can really specialize. Besides the printers' marks, perforation varieties, progressive color proofs, plate flaws, errors and collateral material we mentioned earlier, you can add die proofs, negative makers' proofs, gutter pairs, essays, signed artists' proofs and sheets signed by the designer or a noted celebrity. And there's more . . .

You may wonder why the Christmas Seal listing in Scott ends with 1979. Up to that year, the American Lung Association issued just one type of Christmas

Seal sheet each year. The design of each of the 50 seals in the sheet might be different, and the sheets might be manufactured by different printers, but everyone who received a sheet of Christmas Seals saw about the same design. In 1979, the ALA embarked on a new strategy to promote and test market its seals. While most people received the 1979 national seal, people in certain areas were sent one of three alternate seals. The seal that received the most favorable response (that is, the most contributions) became the national seal of the following year. Presumably, the 50 different children's drawings drew the most dollars and so were repeated in 1980. You can follow the enchanting story of these "experimentals" in Green's catalogue from test seal in one year to national seal the next year. Yet modern seals offer even more collecting possibilities than the three or four experimentals each year. There also are varying sheet sizes, different numbers of gift tags in different locations, Spanish-language seals, seals with blue, dry gum, self-adhesive variations, silver' and gold-foil seals, and more.

If collecting U.S. seals whets your appetite, you might want to move on to local Christmas Seals, issued by a number of charitable institutions throughout the United States. Many of these offer challenge, but few are costly. Or perhaps you may wish to collect foreign Christmas Seals, issued by countries from Aden to Zambia. Both local and foreign seals are listed in Green's catalogue. Many seals from Canada, Bermuda, Puerto Rico and Great Britain closely resemble the U.S. seal of the same year. The Ryukyu Islands even overprinted the 1952 U.S. seals with Japanese characters.

How should you save your seals? Some people save sheets in mint sheet files or plastic sleeves. Others save singles or

blocks. White Ace makes a basic album with spaces for seals from each year. Several more specialized albums are available. One of the joys of many Christmas Seal collectors is making their own albums.

Finally, if you are really interested in seals, you will want to join the Christmas Seal and Charity Stamp Society. Contact Richard Roberts, Secretary, Box 39696, Minneapolis, MN 55439. Annual dues are \$8. The Christmas Philatelic Club also exists to serve the seal collector. It may be reached by writing to: Vaughn Augustin, 6900 W. Quincey Ave., No. 9E, Littleton, CO 80123. Annual dues are \$10.

But, please, don't be overwhelmed by this escalating list of possibilities. As we said at the beginning, you can start by digging out the seals you already have and playing with them until you see what you enjoy. Have fun! ☒



At top are examples of a few Christmas Seals from various years. Above is an experimental pane of self-adhesives from 1990 and at left is a 1964 pane autographed by Betsy Palmer, the designer.

Christmas Seals have been reproduced on napkins, such as the 1961 example above.