

**The 1908 US Christmas Seal**

**The First National Issue**



# The 1908 US Christmas Seal – The First National Issue

The concept of selling seals at Christmas time in support of charity found its way to American shores in 1907. It was then that Emily Bissell copied the pattern that had been set by three Scandinavian countries in 1904. She founded the drive by the Delaware Chapter of the American Red Cross to raise funds in support of a local tuberculosis hospital. The seals were sold in post office lobbies in her home state in Wilmington and also in Philadelphia. The seals quickly sold out and a second order of seals with the added words "Happy New Year" was rushed into print. The sale was such a success that the American National Red Cross took the sale of seals nationwide the following year, thus the 1908 seal is the first truly national Christmas Seal.

1907 Christmas Seals



Type I





Type II

The most prominent design elements of the 1907 seal were copied in the 1908 seal, an open wreath of holly leaves in green surrounding the words "Merry Christmas" and a prominent red cross with "Happy New Year" just below the wreath. These central design elements were in turn surrounded by "American National Red Cross" reading from the left side across the top and ending to the right with "1908" at the bottom.

There are two known printers of the 1908 seals. Those lithographed by Theodore Leonhardt and Son are distinguished by a square frame line and leaves printed in green only. These are known as type I. There are two subtypes. Type IA has the ear of the numeral '8' separate from the body of the figure. Type IB seals have an '8' with an attached ear. Type II seals, lithographed by the American Bank Note Company, have frame lines with rounded corners and red veins in their leaves. It has been reported that Charles L. Story & Co. was also a printer of 1908 seals, but which type may have been printed by Story is unknown. There are also four types of seals that were produced by typography by unknown printers. It is believed that these seals were produced by local tuberculosis associations to supplement supplies when nationally issued seals ran short, but the possibility exists that some were produced illegitimately to defraud the public.

In addition to the differences in design types there is also a range of formats in which the seals were produced. There are large sheets with 250 seals plus two blank spaces, booklets containing three panes of three seals, and also booklets containing either four or eight panes of six seals. Some type II seals were produced on watermarked paper. Some seals were produced with smooth gum, others with square broken gum. Additionally, the seals produced by unknown printers may have compound perforations of 14 by 12 or may be rouletted.

**Exhibit Scope** - This exhibit contains examples of all known 1908 Christmas seal types, the majority are also shown used on cover or postcard. For items of note a **red**  double line border is used. The standard border is a black single line. 

## Exhibit Plan

### Die Proofs

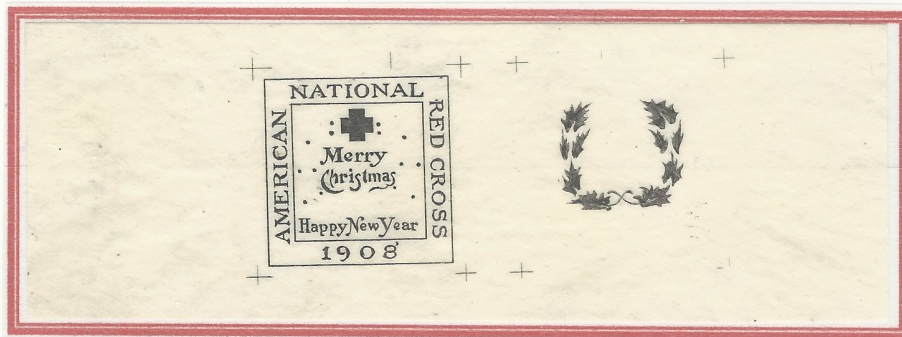
Type IA seals and tied-on usages

Type IB seals and tied-on usages

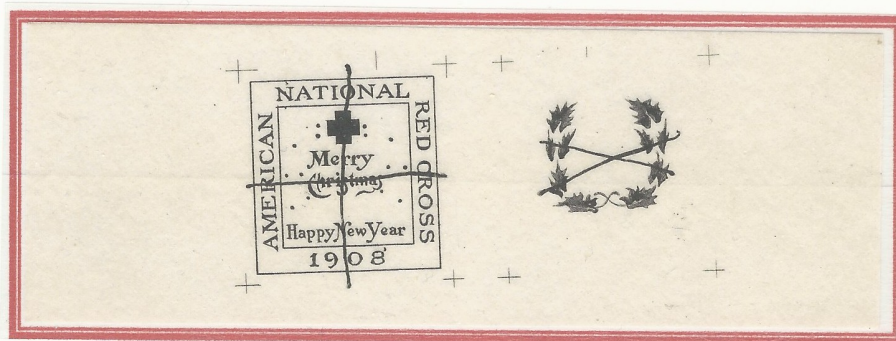
Type II seals and tied-on usages

Seals produced by unknown printers

**Type IA Die Proofs**  
Lithographed by Theodore Leonhardt and Son



Die proofs from the lithographic stone



Die proofs from the defaced lithographic stone

Die proofs of the red plate and green plate. Printed se-tenant in black with cross guide lines at the four corners of both designs. On thin white watermarked paper. Imperforate with no gum.

The litho stone was defaced sometime prior to 1934 and erased in 1938.  
It is probable that five or fewer die proof pairs exist.  
There are no proofs known for any of the other 1908 Christmas seal types.

## Type IA

Lithographed by Theodore Leonhardt and Son

Distinguishing characteristics: square corned frame, holly leaves printed in green only, ear of '8' separated from body of figure.



Smooth gum



Square broken gum

Perforated 12



Close-up of square broken gum magnified 4 times



Perforated 14

Each of these seals are perforated on all four sides indicating origination from a sheet format. The sheets have 252 spaces, 250 seals and two blank spaces.



Booklet pane of 3, perforated 14, in original booklet.

Perhaps a dozen intact panes are known, fewer still in original booklets



Error:  
Vertical pair  
imperforate horizontally.  
Perforated 14 vertically.  
From booklet stock.



Perforated 12 seal  
Extraordinary color shift

**Type IA  
Booklet Panes**



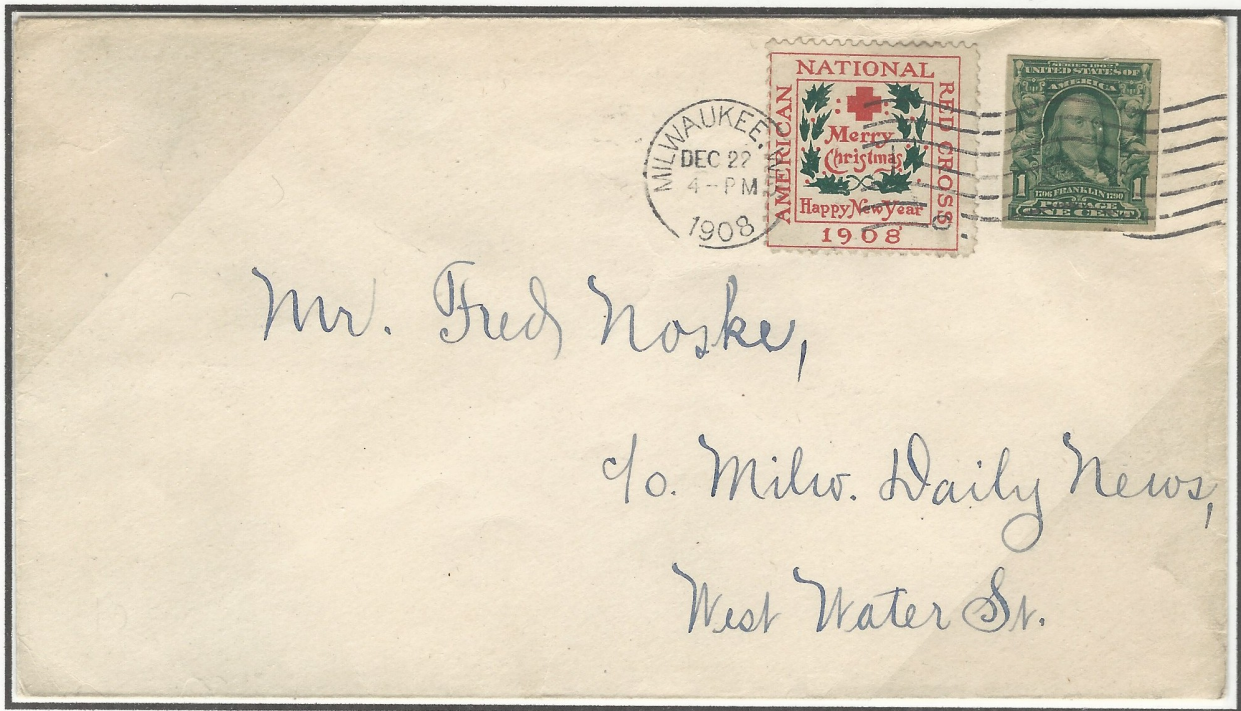
Booklet pane of 6 perforated 14, smooth gum  
It is probable that only a few dozen of this pane exist.



Booklet pane of 6 perforated 14, square broken gum  
It is probable that only about one dozen of this pane exist.

Type IA  
Tied-on uses  
Perforated 12

Perforated on four sides from sheet of 250 seals and two blank spaces

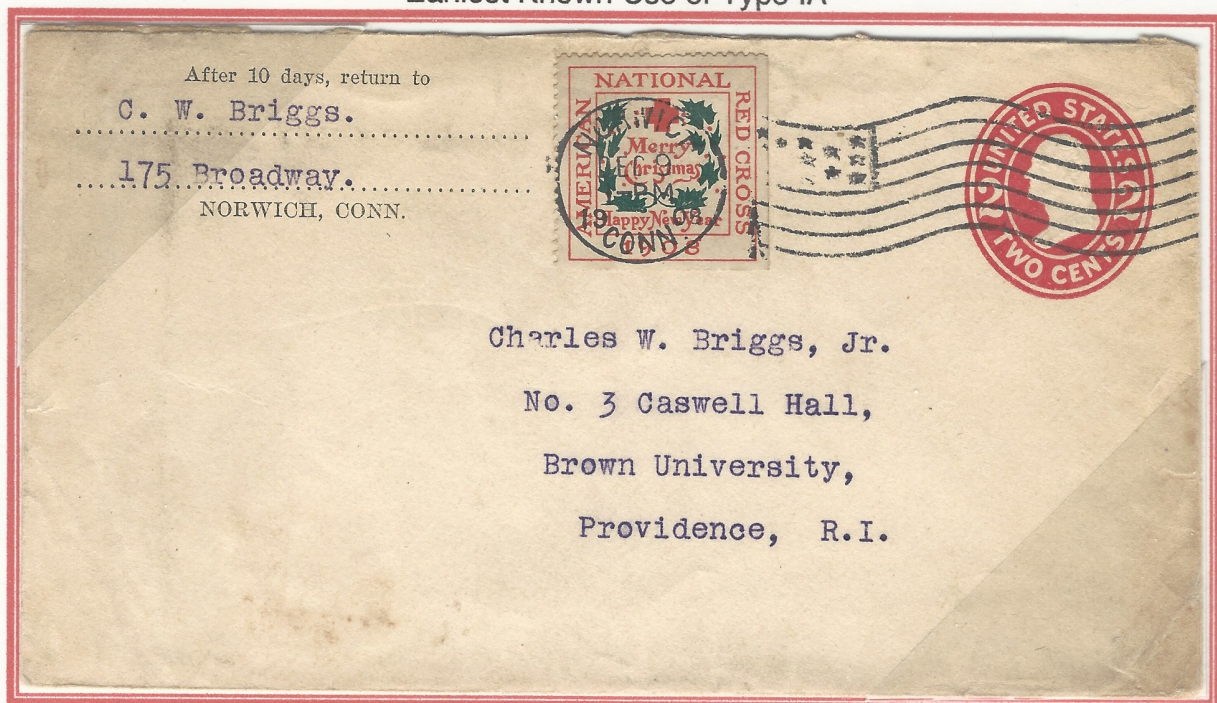


One cent rate on unsealed envelope. - Dec 22, 1908 - Milwaukee, Wis.

Tied-on usages of 1908 seals are fairly common, however, most were used on postcards.

Those used on envelopes are far less common.

Perforated 14  
Earliest Known Use of Type IA



Two cent rate on sealed stamped envelope - Dec 9, 1908, Norwich, Conn

**Type IA  
Tied-on uses**

Straight edge top and bottom, from booklet pane of three

Two cards sent on the same day, Christmas Eve, from one person in San Francisco to another in China. The routing of the cards was via Peking (Beijing) to Tsingtao (now known as Qingdao), which was a city under German occupation during that time.

A translation from the French reveals why there were two cards. The first postcard is an apology for not writing sooner, and the second is a Happy New Year card.



Both cards: Two cent rate on postcard. - Dec 24, 1908,  
San Francisco, Cal. to Tsingtao, China via Peking.

Tied-on uses from booklet panes of three are scarce, moreso to a foreign destination.

The card fronts reveal why these two particular postcards were chosen from among the six in the National Santa Claus Series by artist Charles Twelvetrees. The first card, labeled "France", is indicative of the sender's background. The second, "Scotland", suggests the recipient's origins.



Card fronts - reduced

## Type IB

Lithographed by Theodore Leonhardt and Son

Distinguishing characteristics: square cornered frame, holly leaves printed in green only, ear of '8' attached to body of figure.



Square broken gum



Perforated 12



Perforated 14

Smooth gum



Perforated 12



Perforated 14



Perforated 14  
Broken frame line at top left



Error: vertical strip of three imperforate between.  
Perforated 12 vertically. From booklet stock.  
Unusual in that no booklets of type IB were issued



**Type IB**  
Tied-on uses

Early use of type IB

Perforated 12 four sides from sheet of 250 seals and two blank spaces.



On postcard - one cent rate - Dec 4, 1908 – Milwaukee, Wis; EKV is Dec 3, 1908

Seal accepted as postage

Perforated 14 on four sides from sheet of 250 seals and two blank spaces.



Dec 24, 1908 - York, Pa

When Christmas Seals were first put on sale they were offered as “Christmas stamps” and sold by the Red Cross in Post Office lobbies. This led to occasional confusion, and the seals were sometimes placed, and accepted, as postage on mail pieces.

## Type II

Lithographed by The American Bank Note Company

Distinguishing characteristics: round cornered frames, holly leaves printed in green with red veining

### Specimen Overprint

Some Type II seals were overprinted "SPECIMEN" in red and also punched with a 2 1/2 mm hole.



Booklet pane of 3



Booklet covers



Perforated 12 from sheet of 100



Booklet pane of 6 with perforated margin at left



Booklet pane of 6 with margin at right.  
Imperforate between margin and first row of seals.  
Discovery example of this error.



Perforated 12 on all four sides  
From sheet of 100 seals

### Type II



Booklet Pane of 6, perforated 12



Pane of 3, perforated 12,  
from booklet of 3 panes

### Watermarked Paper



Booklet Pane of 6, perforated 12

It is likely that fewer than two dozen of this pane exist.



“Record Bond” watermark  
Reduced scan of back of booklet pane

Type II  
Complete Booklets



Booklet of 9 seals, 3 panes of 3 seals each



Booklet of 24 seals, 4 panes of 6 seals each

**Type II  
Tied-on uses**

Perforated 12 on four sides from sheet of 100 seals



On sealed envelope - two cent rate  
New Year's Eve 11PM cancellation - Dec 31, 1908; New York. NY Sta. W

**Earliest Known Use of Type II Seal**



One cent rate on postcard - Dec 2 1908; Cleveland, Ohio; Cleveland Circuit RPO

## Type II

From booklet pane of 3 as denoted by straight edge on left and right



One cent rate on post card. - Dec 29, 1908 - Easton, Pa

Pair from booklet pane of 6 as denoted by straight edge at top and bottom of pair



Only known example tied on - discovered by exhibitor  
On postcard - one cent rate - Dec 23, 1908, Binghamton, NY

## Typographed By Unknown Printers

These seals were made by a photographic process. Most are known to exist in both mint and used condition. It is not known whether they were produced legitimately by local TB associations to supplement the national supply, or whether they were fraudulently produced to bilk the public. K.L. Kinkead, the founder and first president of the Christmas Seal and Charity Stamp Society, believed that some of these seals were produced under contract of the American Red Cross by Charles L. Story and Co. Which ones is not clear. These seals are most readily distinguished from the national seals by unusual perforations in the case of type 1A and 1B seals, and by the lack of red veins in the leaves of type 2 seals. All are scarce to rare.

### Type IA



Ear of '8' detached



Perforated 14 x 12



Perforated 14 x 12  
Dented '8' plate flaw.  
Unlisted variety.



Dented '8'



Roulette 6 3/4

### Type IB



Ear of '8' attached



Perforated 14 x 12



Roulette 6 3/4

### Type II



Perforated 12  
No veins in the leaves

The type II seals are believed to have been produced in Washington state in 1924 for the Washington Tuberculosis Association in order to fill a gap in their own collection.

Typographed by Unknown Printers

Type 1A - Perforated 14 x 12



One cent rate on postcard - Dec 23, 1908, Antigo, Wis  
Approximately 6 examples of this seal are known tied-on.

Type 1A - Roulette 6 3/4



One cent rate on postcard. - Dec 24, 1908, Pittsburg, PA.  
Only five examples of this seal are known tied on.  
Three of these bear a Cincinnati, Ohio postmark thereby suggesting the locale of their origin.



## Typographed by Unknown Printers

Type 1B - Roulette 6 ¾



One cent rate on postcard. - Dec 22, 1908, Portland, Ore.

Just 19 examples of this seal are known tied-on.

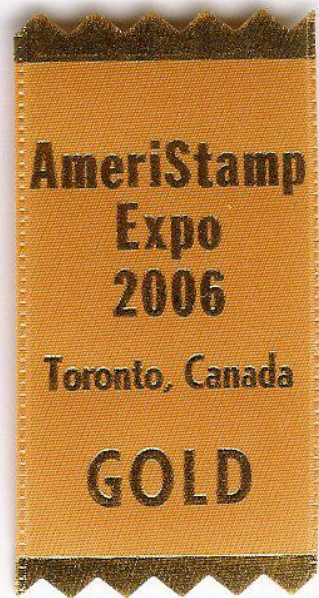
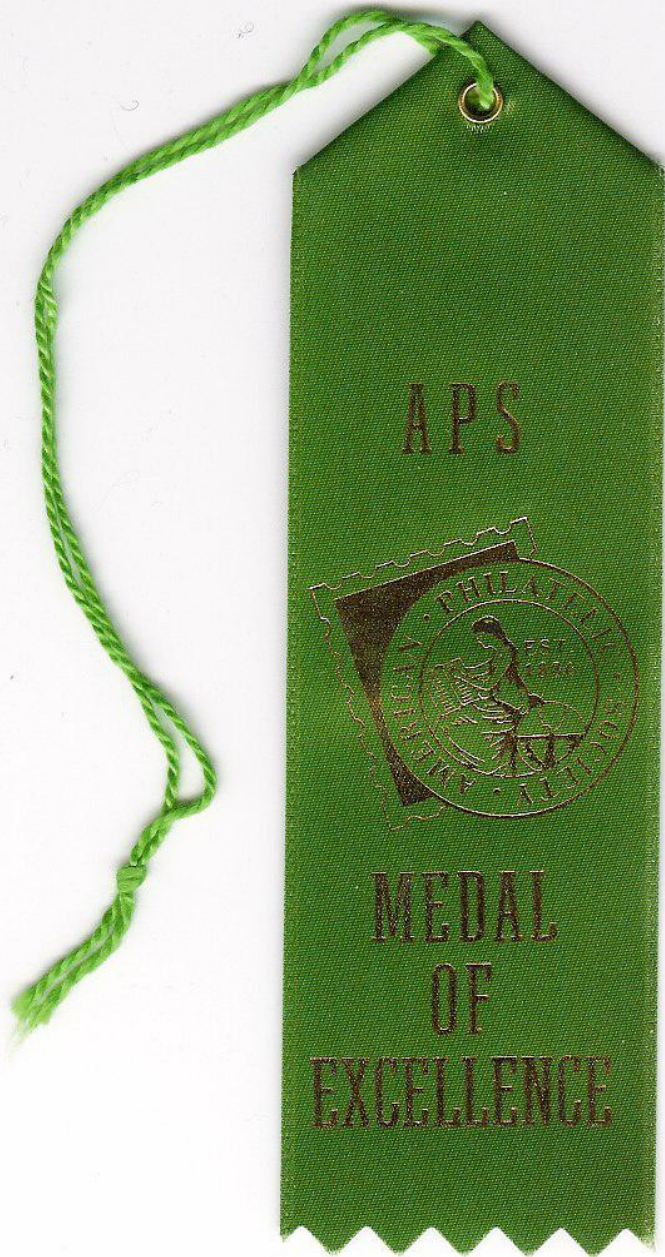
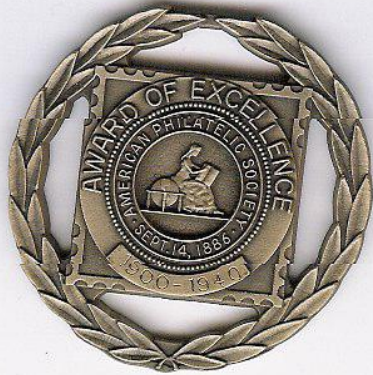
The majority of these bear a Portland, Oregon postmark thereby suggesting the locale of their origin.

### Type II

Because these seals were likely produced in 1924 for the Washington Tuberculosis Association it is probable that none exist used on a 1908 cover.

### Going Forward

The extension of Christmas Seal sales nationwide in 1908 proved to be a major success. Seal sales climbed from \$3000 on the sales limited to the Delaware Chapter of the American Red Cross in 1907 to \$135,000 in nationwide sales in 1908. Sales continued to climb, nearly doubling to \$250,000 in 1909. Christmas Seals became a common sight, adorning Christmas and New Years postcards and envelopes for many years. Although their use has fallen off in recent years new designs are produced and sold each year by the American Lung Association well more than 100 years after their inception.





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AWARD