

Yesterday in USSN:

Political Cartoonist Designed First U.S. Migratory Waterfowl Stamp

by Brian C. Baur (From USSN July 2004)

Ask any waterfowl hunter what the most important piece of equipment is when he is out in the fields and sloughs hunting duck and other waterfowl, and the majority will answer their shotgun. Others may answer their decoys or duck calls, and others will swear it is their camouflage clothing.

But in the opinion of this waterfowl hunter, the most important piece of equipment is the Federal Waterfowl stamp, perhaps better known as the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp.

The Federal Waterfowl stamp, as well as the individual State Waterfowl stamps, help provide for the well being of the nation's waterfowl, by providing bird refuge areas, nesting sites, and reserves throughout the nation.

On Friday, March 16, 1934, the United States Congress approved the licensing of migratory bird hunters in the United States. For a fee of \$1, hunters would receive a Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp issued by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to be carried on their person while waterfowl hunting. All receipts collected from the sale of these stamps would be used to secure an abundance of waterfowl for hunters for years to come through the use of conservation.

The law enacted by Congress declared that a waterfowl hunter must have and produce the waterfowl stamp upon the demand of a wildlife officer, and that the stamp must not be defaced in any manner.

When the Agriculture Department set to work to design such a waterfowl stamp, they took the unusual step



Figure 1. Political cartoonist Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling.

of requesting the artistic talents of political cartoonist Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling to do the honors. Figure 1.

The selection of Darling was unusual because the Republican Darling was a bitter foe of Democratic President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and virulently anti-New Deal. After a brief honeymoon of goodwill following Roosevelt's inauguration in March of 1933, Darling began in earnest attacking the New Deal and Roosevelt in his editorial cartoons for the New York Herald Tribune Syndicate, often depicting the President as a tyrant who bullied Congress and forced unwanted and unneeded legislation upon the people of the United States.

Shortly after the passage of legislation for the waterfowl stamp, Darling was approached by the Secretary of Agriculture, Henry A. Wallace, who asked him to become the chief of the United States Bureau of Biological Survey. There was naturally much speculation and criticism that the administration was simply trying to buy off one of its severest critics, but in reality, Darling was an avowed advocate of conservation in the United States. He had served on the Iowa Fish and Game Commission in 1928, headed the Iowa Conservation Association, and served on the President's committee on Wildlife Restoration, having adopted his own personal motto: "A puddle for every duck."

Darling would put everything he had into the Biological Survey, often saying that Americans were ruining the finest country in the world by wasting its national resources. Within a short time after taking the helm, he was able to obtain the largest appropriation in the survey's history.

Darling was next asked to submit a design for the upcoming waterfowl stamp. His submission featured a striking rendition of two mallards landing in a reedy pond and was immediately selected to be the artwork for the first stamp. The new \$1 stamp was engraved and printed in blue by flat plate printing in panes of 28 stamps. The stamp was unwatermarked, perforated 11, and contained a plate number in each pane. (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Ding Darling's rendition of Mallards landing in a pond made a perfect first waterfowl stamp in 1934.

The stamp was valid for one year, and was inscribed, "Void after June 30, 1935." It is known to exist as an im-

perforate pair, and as a vertical pair imperforate (RW1a, Figure 3) and imperf horizontally between (Sc. RW1b).

Unlike subsequent waterfowl stamps down to this day, it was illegal to deface the first issue. Today a stamp is not considered legal unless the waterfowl hunter signs it across the face of the stamp. Therefore, the first waterfowl stamp is the only one collectors will find in used condition that has not been signed by the owner. (Figure 4.)

But hunters were not the only people with an interest in the new waterfowl stamp. Collec-



Figure 3



Figure 4. While the stamps were not usually signed, this particular example is the very first Duck Stamp sold, and was signed by J. N. Darling.

tors began to show interest in including the new stamp in their collection. As the June 30, 1935 deadline for usage of the stamp neared, it was announced that the stamp would be made available to collectors beginning on June 15, 1935.

The first waterfowl stamp was very successful, and 625,001 of the stamps were sold. Since many of the stamps wound up in stamp collections, Scott gave it a category and number of its own: RW1.

Ding Darling resigned his position with the biological Survey in November of 1935, and worked on the government sponsored North American Wildlife Conference in 1936, eventually being elected president of that body, and reelected in 1938. During that time, and until Roosevelt's death in 1945, Darling remained an outspoken critic of FDR and the New Deal.

Ding Darling died in Des Moines, Iowa, on February 12, 1962, at the age of 65. In the 1980s, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of various New Deal legislation, Darling's rendition of the Mallards from the first waterfowl stamp, was reproduced by Donald M. McDowell and used to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1934 Waterfowl Preservation Act on July 2, 1984. The 1984 commemorative (Figure 5), was engraved like the original and produced in the same blue color as the 1934 stamp. It was issued in panes of 50 stamps, perforated 11, and is



Figure 5, Sc. 2092 on an Artcraft First Day Cover known to exist as a horizontal pair imperforate vertically between. Figure 6.



Figure 6, Sc. 2092a, horizontal pair, imperf vertically

Even though Ding Darling was a true conservationist who took pride in designing the first waterfowl stamp in 1934, one can't help wondering what the man would have thought of his waterfowl design being used 50 years later to honor a New Deal legislation.

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