

Doubling of Plate Finishers' Initials

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Two people are involved in making a printing plate from the master die. The siderographer uses a press to make the transfer roll from the master die and then lays out the images on the plate using the transfer roll. Then the plate finisher smooths out any marks from the transfer roll and burnishes any scratches. Starting in 1906 with Scott 319 up to Scott 650 in 1928 it was the practice for both the siderographer and plate finisher to put their initials on the plate. This was done only on flat plates and on most, but not all of them. The initials appear once on each plate, so they are rarer than plate numbers which could occur up to eight times on a plate.

The siderographer had a press available to impress his initials but the plate finisher did not and so had to use a hand-held punch. He may have hit the punch more than once in order to make a good impression and it is possible that the punch 'bounced' between hammer blows resulting in the doubling of the initials seen on the illustrated stamp. I don't know how common doubled initials were, but I suspect their survival rate is low as collectors did not save them like they did plate numbers.

W.E.S. are the initials of plate finisher Walter E. Spring. ★

Reference: Initials of Siderographers and Plate Finishers by John S. Meek, The United States Specialist, October 1968.