

In search of the world's prettiest stamp

US Ships and Boats on Stamps

I'll keep my text to a minimum in this essay so that I can share a maximum number of illustrations. Most of the stamps are pretty great. Is the world's prettiest stamp among them? Read on to find out.



The U.S. post office got off to a strong start with this pair of engraved beauties from the Columbian Exposition set of 1892. The graceful design balance in the 4-cent stamp of Columbus's fleet is wonderful. They are a bit pale and flat. No pop.



These bi-color engravings of steamers were part of the transportation series of 1901. Pretty? Sure. Stunningly beautiful? Uh, no.



These ships on the Hudson River make a chaotic scene in this 1909 commemorative.



There is no escaping the similarities between these stamps celebrating the 300th anniversary of the arrival of the Pilgrims (left) and the Huguenot/Walloons (right). It must be intentional for some patriotic or protocol reason. The colors are bright, the engravings well done; but how can one stamp stand out from the other?



This delicious set honors the Norwegians who arrived on the sloop Restaurationen in 1825 (left), and a replica of a Viking longboat that sailed to America in 1893 — flying the Stars and Stripes. The stamps may not be strong contenders for the top prize, but the colors are good enough to eat: cherry on the left, blueberry on the right.



Magnificent sailing ships are flanked by our nation's early Naval heroes in this partial set from the 1930s. Neither element gets top billing, which I consider a design flaw.



Here's a grab bag of ships on stamps from America's "middle years." Each one has strengths and weaknesses. Particularly striking — and busy — is the Dutch galleon, left, before a ghostly Manhattan skyline.



OK engraved rendering of a great painting by Winslow Homer. No prize here.

Ships in Tokyo Bay or a nostalgic scene from the Old South? Confusing.



Tugboat 1900s
USA 15



Aren't these lovely? The long definitive series (59 stamps total) from the 1980s and 1990s celebrated early modes of transportation, including the watercraft (and ice-craft) shown above. The engravings are crisp and pleasing. The whole set may be worth another look ... **TO BE CONTINUED**

