

## STAMP STORIES

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As some of you may know, I was raised on a small dairy farm in central Ohio. Not long ago while at my day job, I was discussing a frustrating business matter with some colleagues when I mentioned that the circumstances did not pass the “Ohio Farm Boy Common Sense Test.” I have found that usually when this is the case, something is haywire. Someone asked me what I meant by this test, so I told them a couple simple examples.

As I thought more about this, I decided it might make an interesting subject for a Stamp Story. After all, farming and agriculture have traditionally been topics we have included in *Biophilately*. So, I decided to present a few examples in this article. I should also point out that this common sense applies equally well to Ohio Farm Girls.

Living and working on a farm or ranch requires a pragmatic outlook and lots of flexibility. Agriculture and animal husbandry, especially at the family farm level, is precarious, being reliant on the vagaries of the weather, disease, market forces, and other factors mainly outside the control of the individual farmer. Over the years, I have discovered that most of the lessons I learned while growing up on the farm have held true. And, if you really think about them, they provide principles that can guide you in many other areas of life. Here are some of those lessons and I hope they may help you as they have helped me.

- **Farming does not stop just because it is raining, or snowing, or hailing. However, tornados are another matter.**

Life is full of obstacles. It reminds me of Gilda Radner’s autobiography, *It’s Always Something*. Most of the time, we only need to put on our rain jacket and rubber boots and get on with our chores. But sometimes the situation is serious enough we need to head to the root cellar. We must be able to recognize the difference and take appropriate action.

On 4 October 2004, the U.S. issued a miniature sheet of 15 stamps (Sc#3878) depicting various cloud formations to commemorate National Stamp Collecting Month. The stamp in the lower right-hand corner shows a cumulonimbus cloud with a tornado funnel. Nimbus is a modifier for cloud types that indicates precipitation. The image is from a photograph by Edi Ann Otto of Osnabrock, North Dakota. The designs also appeared on 23c postal cards.



Tornado over farmland  
U.S. Sc#3878o

The US Postal Service allied with The Weather Channel, the American Meteorological Society, and the National Weather Service to use this issue as part of an educational outreach. The designer was Howard Paine. The stamps were printed on self-adhesive paper by Avery Dennison using the gravure process and die cut 11.

Tornadoes vary in intensity regardless of shape or size. One method of measurement uses the Fujita scale that assigns categories based on wind speeds from F0 (40–72 mph) to F5 (261–318 mph). Each year in the U.S., tornados cause human and livestock deaths and damages to crops and structures totaling in the billions of dollars.



Tractor plowing a field  
Afghanistan Sc#1388

- **It takes a mighty powerful tractor to pull a six-bottom plow.**

If you want to build a database (or a health care website) that deals with hundreds of millions of entries and terabytes of data, Microsoft Office is not going to work for you. You need to employ some more serious horsepower.

Traveling back and forth from one end of a field to the other, I have driven a plow-pulling tractor many miles. I found it a pleasant, fairly mindless exercise that allowed me to enjoy the fresh air and cogitate on the events of life (in other words daydream). We always used our most powerful tractor and put it in low gear with the throttle open in order to overcome the drag of the plow with its multiple plowshares as it tried to anchor the tractor to the earth.

On 21 March 2003, Afghanistan issued a set of two stamps to commemorate Farmer’s Day. The 6af stamp (Sc#1389) shows a team of two oxen pulling one plowshare and the 3af stamp shows a rather crude drawing of a tractor performing the same operation pulling what appears to be a four-bottom plow. These stamps were printed by lithography in sheets of 36 and perforated 12½×13.

- **If you are going to cut down a locust tree, you had better bring a pretty sharp saw.**

Some things are tougher than they look. You can try to tackle these things with brute force, but you will undoubtedly work up a lot of sweat and expend a lot of time and energy unless you use the right tool in an effective manner.

The Black Locust tree (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) is native to the eastern United States, especially the Appalachian region. It can grow to a height of seventy feet and diameter of up to four feet, but trees of this size are unusual. The flowers are a major contributor to honey production, and the wood is very useful in farming. It is extremely hard, resistant to rot, and durable. This makes it prized for furniture, flooring, paneling, fence posts, and small watercraft. In fact, it is one of the heaviest and hardest woods in North America. The rails and fence posts that Abraham Lincoln spent his youth splitting were locust wood.

On our farm, we used locust poles for fence posts and I can personally attest to its toughness, having dulled many axes and broken much sweat working with it.

On 14 January 2012, Ukraine issued a set of four stamps (Sc#854–57) depicting trees. The lowest denomination in this set shows the seed pods and leaves of a black locust. The stamps were printed by Ukraine Integrated Printing Plant in sheets of 90 using the offset method. They measure 22×26mm and are perforated 13¾. The artist for this issue was Volodymyr Taran. The billet under coat of arms luminesces under UV-light and the stamps also include micro printing of the year of issue and the scientific name of the plant.



Locust leaves & seeds  
Ukraine Sc#854

- **Do not try to harvest wheat with a hay baler. The best you will end up with is a bale of wheat.**

My father, who was a professional mechanic in addition to being a farmer, used to say, “Use the proper tool for the proper job.” Sometimes we take shortcuts to try to “save time.” Although I spent a lot of time in the Army forced by combat or emergency and lack of the proper item to use what are known as “field expedients,” I have typically found that shortcuts result in wasting time. Often they are even unsafe and ultimately, because they do not adequately fix the problem, require us to do the job over again the right way.

Wheat and other grains were originally reaped (cut and gathered) by hand. Although the Romans had some simple mechanical reapers, Obed Hussey and Cyrus McCormick created the first modern reapers in the 1830s. These evolved into reaper-binders that bound the grain stalks into sheaves. Workers then fed these sheaves into a threshing machine that separated the grain kernels from the stalks. Eventually the reaper and the thresher were “combined” into the modern combine that performs the harvesting and threshing in one operation.

On 6 January 1929, Royal Mail Canada issued a definitive stamp depicting farmers harvesting wheat with a horse- or mule-drawn reaper-binder. One farmer, mounted on the machine, is driving the team while the other farmer at left and behind is collecting the sheaves. One sheaf lies on the ground apparently having just been produced by the reaper. A stack of sheaves stands in the foreground presumably waiting to be hauled to the thresher. It is difficult to see, but there also is a railroad train short of the mountains in the distant background.

This stamp was part of the 1928 definitive series that was the first to contain bilingual inscriptions. The lower values (Sc#150–54) bore a portrait of King George V in uniform, taken from a photograph by Lafayette of London. The higher values (Sc#155–59) depicted scenes from the various Canadian regions.

The stamp was printed by the Canadian Banknote Company using the intaglio process and perforated 12. Because Canada changed printers in 1929, this issue had a relative short life and covers (including FDC) are scarce.



Harvesting wheat with a reaper  
Canada Sc#157

- **It does not matter if you raised her from a calf. If it costs \$10 per day to feed and care for Elsie, but she only produces \$9 worth of milk, she is heading to the auction house.**

I expect I may receive some critical comments from pet owners regarding this observation, but nevertheless it applies to almost all business dealings and many other aspects of life. If you can afford to keep Elsie for sentimental reasons, that is fine. However, sometimes we hold on to a cherished object or idea in contradiction to sound economics and in spite of all logic and reason.

Based on my observations, it appears that much of the intelligence has been bred out of most domestic animals. Some may no longer be able to thrive without human assistance. I think dairy cows fall somewhere in the middle of the domestic animal intelligence spectrum, but that is not saying much.

Domestic cattle are members of the Bovidae family and are currently classified in one species, *Bos primigenius taurus*. Cattle have been domesticated for at least 10,500 years and there are about 1.3 billion of them on Earth today. On our farm, we used the Jersey breed exclusively and sold our milk to a dairy that specialized in “All-Jersey” milk. The Jersey is one of the smallest dairy breeds and originates from the Isle of Jersey in the English Channel. They do not produce the volume of milk that other breeds do, but they make up for that by producing milk with the highest butterfat content of all breeds. Our herd averaged well over 5 percent butterfat by volume.

On 20 March 2012, Australia Post issued a set of five stamps (Sc#3670–74) to commemorate farming. The lowest value shows the head of a Jersey cow with other cows on a farm in the background. The other stamps in the set show a pineapple field (20c), vineyard (\$1), field of sunflowers (\$3), and an apple orchard (\$5). The designer and illustrator was Jo Mure. The stamps were printed by McKellar Renown using lithography. The two lower values measure 30×25mm and are perforated 14×14.4. The higher values measure 50×30mm and are perforated 14.6×14.



Jersey cow  
Australia Sc#3670

- **When you tinker with moving machinery, be prepared to lose some appendages.**

As Roy Hobbs said in *The Natural*, “There are some mistakes you just never stop paying for.” Placing your hand in a running machine is one of these. Farm machinery can cause serious injuries even when it is just sitting there. It is especially dangerous when it is in motion. Most farm machinery is designed to perform operations that are inherently hazardous such as cutting, crushing, compacting, and shredding. The human body does not tolerate any of these actions very well.

Our neighbor on the farm next to ours wore a prosthetic right arm. He lost his arm in an accident involving a corn picker when he was young. This disability hardly slowed him down. He worked in his fields and with his livestock all the time that I knew him. He could drive tractors, load hay, and was one of the toughest men I ever knew. Along the way, he raised a family of ten children.

On 5 April 2004, New Zealand Post issued a set of five stamps (Sc#1930–34) showing historic farm equipment. The second highest denomination shows a threshing machine. As mentioned earlier, this machine separated the grain from the stalks. The designer was Ross Jones. The stamps were printed in sheets of 50 by Southern Colour Print using lithography. The stamps measure 40×30mm and are perforated 14. New Zealand Post also produced a prestige booklet containing six miniature sheets incorporating all the stamps from this issue.



Threshing Mill  
New Zealand Sc#1933

*[Ed. note. While researching this article, I noticed to my surprise that there are many stamp issues depicting tractors and other types of farm implements. I am eager to receive, and would be greatly interested in reading and publishing, an article about these issues from one of our readers. Please contact me if you can submit one.]*