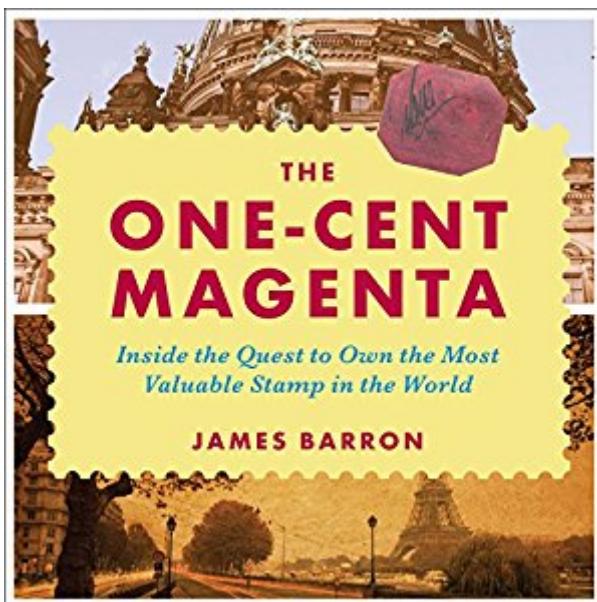


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# The One-Cent Magenta: Inside The Quest To Own The Most Valuable Stamp In The World



## **Synopsis**

When it was issued in 1856, it cost a penny. In 2014 this tiny square of faded red paper sold at Sotheby's for nearly \$10 million, the largest amount ever paid for a postage stamp at auction. Through the stories of the eccentric characters who have bought, owned, and sold the One-Cent Magenta in the years in between, James Barron delivers a fascinating tale of global history and immense wealth, and of the human desire to collect. One-cent magentas were provisional stamps, printed quickly when a shipment of official stamps from London did not arrive in British Guiana. They were mostly thrown out with the newspapers; one stamp survived. The singular One-Cent Magenta has had nine owners since a 12-year-old boy rediscovered it in 1873. He soon sold it for what would be \$17 today. Among later owners was a wealthy French nobleman who hid the stamp from almost everyone; a businessman who traveled with the stamp in a briefcase handcuffed to his wrist; and John E. du Pont, who died while serving a 30-year sentence for the murder of Olympic wrestler Dave Schultz. The One-Cent Magenta explores the intersection of obsessive pursuits and great affluence and asks why we want most what is most rare.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

His latest, "The Once-Cent Magenta: Inside the Quest to Own the Most Valuable Stamp in the World" ---like James Barron's previous book "Piano: the Making of a Steinway Grand"--- reads like a non-fiction drama. While reviewing world events and technology impacts over the past two

centuries, the reader follows the erratic meanderings of one small piece of paper, blown through world events and technology development like a will-of-the-wisp leaf, blown from location to location, sometimes hidden, sometimes lost, sometimes in danger of deterioration or even destruction. Impeccably researched, the book covers the development of philately, and vividly describes the various individuals whose lives intersect with the stamp's passage from its printing to current location. The book is replete with beautiful turns of phrase, complementing exemplary, faultless prose. "Ann was the daughter of a harness maker who went to work in a textile mill---not Hind's---as the horse-and-buggy days disappeared in rear-view mirrors." And, "a book about a stamp, the part that another book about another stamp described as "philatelic fact, which are usually dry." But nothing like a good martini." In an Internet age, we learn how the term emerged and about the collection obsession that attends philately ("... there was something about philately---the near obsessive joy of inquiring about obscure stamps and acquiring them"), how the advent of steam ships speeded the transmission of information and news across the oceans in the mid-1800's, coupled with the plethora of newspapers in Great Britain and the United States disseminating that information, albeit at a much slower speed than now. As we follow the history of the one-cent magenta, Barron treats us to a treasure trove of relevant information (including 29 pages of "Notes"): how the British postal system evolved to its modern state (e.g., distance-free, flat-rate charge, paid by the sender), and resulting impact on U.S.P.S., how the postage stamp came to be, and an engaging story that illuminates collecting at a general level: "... about what makes something collectible, valuable, and enduring." And we come to understand the obsession of the various owners, including Weitzman the current owner with the one-cent magenta: "He did not care about the paper it was printed on, the celebrity factor that came with it, or the money that he spent to get it. What he wanted was the thing that no one else could have." James Barron's "The One-Cent Magenta" is an odyssey twice over: Barron travels extensively, an odyssey of discovery, tracing the history of the magenta; his odyssey of discovery is about a prior odyssey, the travels and travails of this unique stamp.

What a delightful read! This book will appeal to both philatelists and casual readers of detective novels, travelogues, history -- and eccentric behavior. The style is smooth and gripping, as one would expect from a veteran journalist. To borrow an expression from the world of collectors, this book is one-of-a-kind. Carroll Brown

From the very first chapter, I was enthralled, delighted and entertained. And I don't even collect

stamps. The characters are vivid and colorful. From the owner who found it and sold it for next to nothing to the glamor this small piece of paper enjoys today. The history tour with the stamp is engaging and well-researched. I love the writing style. The author had with the topic and it shows. A wonderful read that I can't recommend enough.

I've followed James Barron's work for the New York Times through the years and absolutely love his writing and way of telling a story. He brings intimate, clever and lyrical tales to everything. Including this wonderful gem of a book. It's a great, entertaining read. I never knew the stamp world could be so fascinating and fun

An excellent, fun and informative book on the history of what is probably one of the world's most famous stamps. The other being the inverted Jenny. But what could possibly have possessed the author and publisher to include not a single photograph of the stamp itself, the other beautiful stamps discussed in the book or any of the people who played such a large role in the history of the stamp? This was, to be blunt, a really stupid decision.

Even if you're not a stamp collector, the history of this unique stamp and its chain of ownership is fascinating. The author has a great sense of humor and his writing is pleasantly straight forward. Would recommend!

Arrived in excellent condition. I really liked this interesting story. If one likes stamp collecting and thing they will find it facinating.

Very interesting and engaging read. Would recommend to anyone.

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