

Collins Studio Illustrators Synopsis

Fred Collins' first day covers (FDCs) are primarily designed and hand-painted by **Fred G. Collins**, an award-winning cachet artist who founded his studio in 1978. Each cover is a "miniature work of art," individually hand-painted with watercolors. The covers carry the studio logo "*Collins*". Many of the covers also contain his signature in the cover's white space.

While many Fred Collins cachets are hand-painted by Fred G. Collins himself, some of the specific brushwork is often executed by family members or long term staff. He has collaborated with a small team of illustrators over several decades to create his cachets.:

Key Studio Illustrators (Identifiable by Initials)

- **J.E.D. (Joseph (József) Ordog):** A long-standing professional illustrator for the studio whose work dates back to at least 1998. He has illustrated high-profile covers including the *Sesame Street* pane (2019), the 2021 Presidential Inauguration, and *World War I: Turning the Tide* (2018). His initials are most common non-Collins mark. The stylized "J" and "D" in his signature are occasionally misidentified as other letter combinations.
- **B.F.P. (Bonnie Porter):** Bonnie is responsible for many of the studio's hand-painted watercolor cachets, particularly those featuring nature, animals, and delicate thematic designs that include the 1996 *Endangered Species* series, the 2019 *Sesame Street* "Burt" stamp, the 2023-2024 *Federal Duck Stamp FDC* and the *Year of the Rabbit* (2023) issue.
- **Ellen Collins:** Fred's wife, who has been an integral part of the hand-painting process since the business began. She is a studio artist responsible for the individual hand-painting of watercolor cachets; while her husband, Fred, is the primary designer and lead artist. Ellen's work ensures the production of these "miniature works of art" for every United States stamp cachet cover issued. Collectors sometimes can distinguish her specific hand-painting by the delicate application of watercolors on certain floral or "Love" theme issues.
- **Scott Collins:** Fred Collins grandson at age 6 contributed the cachet's base illustration content of the "*Stampin' the Future Children's Stamp Design Contest Winners*" stamp set.
- **Bob Varela (R.V.):** Bob Varela is a professional artist who has contributed to the Fred Collins studio, maintaining the brand's signature hand-painted watercolor style. His work is identifiable by the initials R.V., which are typically found on the front of the first day cover (FDC) near the bottom of the cachet or the Collins logo (The handwritten "R.V." can sometimes be mistaken for other characters if the script is stylized). Varela has illustrated various contemporary issues for the studio, including several from the "*Celebrate The Century*" series and specific thematic issues like the 2004 *Art of the American Indian* stamps.
- **Bob Fazzari (R.F.):** Bob Fazzari is an artist who has produced hand-painted cachets for the Fred Collins studio during the 1990s and 2000s issues. His work is identified by the handwritten "R.F." or sometimes "R. Fazzari" on the face of the first day cover (FDC).

Fazzari is a well-known figure in the cachet-making community. Beyond his work for Collins, he has been linked to other prominent makers and organizations, such as Geri Art and ABC Printers.

- **Bob Patterson (J.P.):** Bob Patterson is a professional artist who has frequently illustrated hand-painted watercolor cachets for the Fred Collins studio. His work is identifiable by the handwritten "J.P." (standing for James Robert Patterson or commonly cited as J. Patterson) or sometimes simply "Bob" near the Collins logo. Patterson is responsible for the artwork on several popular contemporary issues, including *Wild and Scenic Rivers* (2019), specifically the *Flathead River/Timber Wolf* cover and various nature and wildlife-themed cachets that align with the studio's "miniature work of art" style.

These illustrators are primary "helper" artists alongside other studio staff who allowed the studio to produce hand-painted covers for United States stamp issues.

Fred Collins officially announced his retirement in late 2024, concluding over 45 years of continuous production for new U.S. stamp issues. For a comprehensive history of the studio's early years, collectors often refer to the book *Collins Hand Painted First Day Covers: The First Twenty Years 1978-1997*.