My Personal Review:
Janet Klug and Donald J Sundman interviewed several dozen stamp collectors, dealers, historians, curators, designers and other philatelists to select the 100 greatest American stamps. This beautifully produced volume does full justice to the candidates that made the final cut.

The authors give a short history of the United States, illustrated with several carefully chosen stamps portraying Mother's Day, Victory in Europe, the Fall of the Berlin Wall and other event portrayed on U.S. stamps. They also provide an excellent overview of stamp collecting and several of the key concepts important in the hobby. They provide a price history of the top 100 -- ranging from $.20 to $450,000, and, in a really generous section, describe several stamps that ranked highly with voters, but just weren't popular enough to make the top 100.

The meat of the book, however, are one or two pages devoted to excellent reproductions of each of the top 100, together with carefully chosen facts about the history of the issue and its importance in American history and in stamp collecting generally.

I became a stamp collector over 50 years ago, starting with a small U.S. collection before specializing in a number of different areas: Scandinavia, Swiss Military, Wisconsin Postal History, etc. My personal favorite was and is the $1.00 "Western Cattle in Storm" issued for the Trans-Mississippi Exposition, ranking number six, one vote behind the 1969 90 cent Abraham Lincoln Pictorial Issue.

The authors devote two pages to the stamp, showing a wonderful copy of a single, a small copy of a full pane (or sheet) of 50 stamps, and a bi-color sheet of nine reprints of the issue. They point out that the beautiful black and white image was originally meant to be black and red, but that red ink
was not available, and that the image is actually based on "The Vanguard", a painting by J. A. MacWhirter, set in the Scottish Highlands.

Despite this "error" -- the caption on the stamp itself is "Western Cattle in Storm" -- the stamp captured my imagination when I was 12 and for over 20 years I dreamed of the day I would be able to buy a copy for myself.

A few days before our first Christmas together, my wife took carefully hoarded funds to the Siegel Auction Galleries near Grand Central Station. New York City was hit with a major blizzard that day; she was the only woman in a room of much older male bidders -- all intrigued with her presence -- and when the best used copy came up, she held her paddle up until, she later told me, "I won the bid or I ran out of money."

In the event, she won the bid and had enough money left to purchase a very pretty used block of the two cent 1863 Black Jack, a beautiful black and white stamp issued by the Union during the Civil War to demonstrate that Andrew Jackson had been a Southerner devoted to the Union. (The Black Jack came 19th in the voting and the page devoted to it points out that it was the first U.S. stamp in which the image bleeds into the stamp's perforations.)

On the way home after the auction, the cab driver urged my wife to get out and walk; "You'll get home much more quickly." But she was worried about the stamps getting wet, and insisted on being delivered to the door of our apartment house. And, she was still so excited, she couldn't wait for Christmas, but gave me both items as soon as I got home.

This beautiful book not only honors my wife's taste in stamps (and her generosity), but is interesting in its own right to anyone who cares about American history. It is a little larger than a Scott or Minkus album, beautifully printed and bound, and full of interesting images and information. Any stamp collector would love to own a copy. I know I do.

Robert C. Ross  2008

PS: Whitman has to date issued three other volumes in this series:

100 Greatest American Currency Notes: The Stories Behind The Most Colonial, Confederate, Federal, Obsolete, and Private American Notes;

100 Greatest American Tokens and Medals; and

100 Greatest Ancient Coins.

All four volume are produced to the same high standard. B.

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