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Twilight of the Prexies - Rate Changes of August 1, 1958

by Stephen L. Suffet

POSTER

NEW POSTAGE RATES	
EFFECTIVE AUGUST 1, 1958	
FIRST CLASS LETTERS.....	4¢ AN OUNCE
POST AND POSTAL CARDS.....	3¢ EACH
AIRMAIL (NOT EXCEEDING 8 OUNCES).....	7¢ AN OUNCE
AIR POST AND POSTAL CARDS.....	5¢ EACH
THIRD CLASS MAIL (Including unsealed printed greeting cards).....	3¢ FIRST 2 OUNCES 1½¢ EACH ADDITIONAL OUNCE
WEIGHT LIMIT FOR THIRD-CLASS MAIL IS INCREASED UP TO BUT NOT INCLUDING 16 OUNCES	
CONSULT POSTMASTER CONCERNING OTHER CHANGES	

Figure 1: Rate chart poster from the June 19, 1958, *Postal Bulletin*.

This fourth article in a five-part series looks at usages of the Presidential Series (Prexie) stamps after the Post Office Department (P.O.D.) began to introduce the Liberty Series with the release of the 8-cent value on April 9, 1954.

At the request of the P.O.D., Congress passed Public Law 85-426 on May 27, 1958, which among other things increased many postal rates. President Eisenhower signed the act into law right away, and the first notice of the new rates appeared in a special issue of *The Postal Bulletin*, just two days later, on May 29 (PB 20087). Most of the new rates were scheduled to go into effect on August 1, 1958,

while others would be phased in over time between January 1, 1959, and January 1, 1961. This article looks at covers and cards showing examples of the most common new rates that went in effect August 1, 1958. A poster

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Figure 2: 1-cent Prexie and 3-cent Liberty Series stamps, both singles from booklet panes, paid the new 4-cent letter rate on its first day, August 1, 1958.



Figure 3: Complete booklet pane of six 1-cent Prexies, including the tab, helped pay the 7 cents per ounce airmail letter rate.

summarizing those rates appeared in the June 19 *Postal Bulletin* (PB 20090). See Figure 1. By mid-1958, stamps of the Liberty Series had been in use for four years. However, as noted in previous articles, the P.O.D. took 11 years to phase in the Liberty Series, not counting tagging and gum varieties. During the first seven or eight years of that period many Prexie stamps remained in use.

Figure 2 shows a remarkable cover, postmarked on August 1, 1958, the very day the basic first

class domestic surface letter rate increased from 3 to 4 cents per ounce. A 1-cent Prexie and 3-cent Liberty Series stamp teamed up to pay the new rate. The straight edge along the left side of each stamp tells us that both stamps are singles from booklet panes. This is significant since the 1-cent Liberty Series stamp was never issued in booklet format, so whatever 1-cent booklet stamps were still in use were Prexies.

The last 1-cent Prexie booklets were distributed to post offices during Fiscal Year 1956, which

Figure 4: 7-cent
 Prexie paid the 7
 cents per ounce
 airmail letter
 rate.

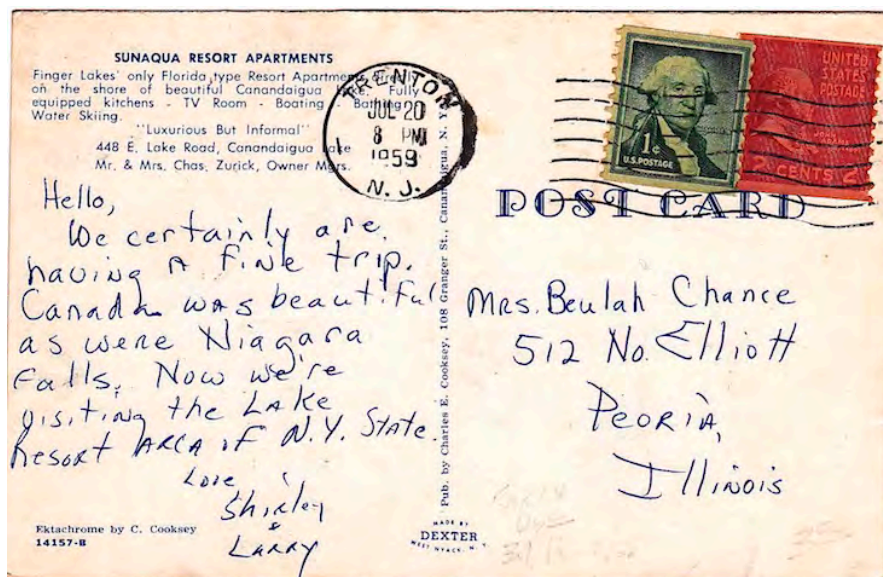
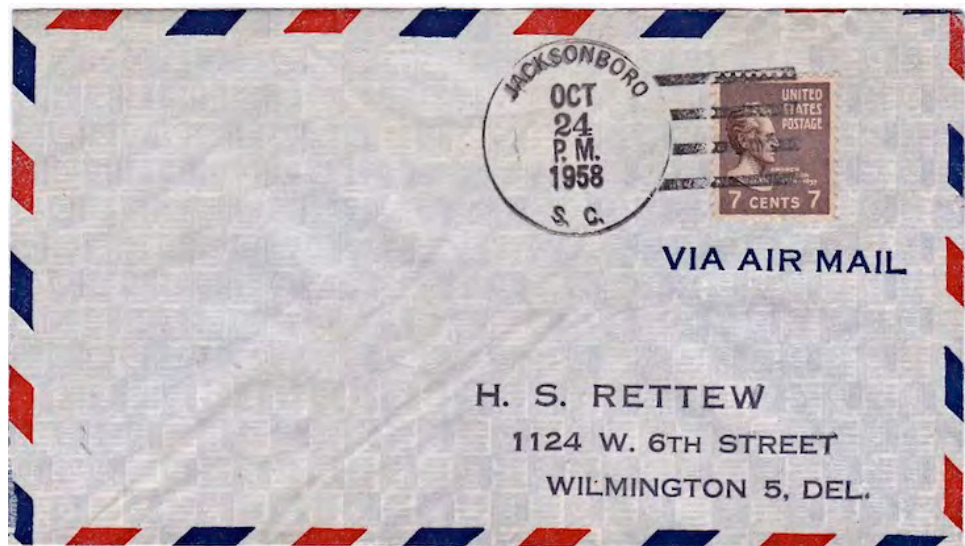


Figure 5: 2-cent
 Prexie horizontal
 coil stamp helped
 pay the 3-cent
 post and postal
 card rate.

Figure 6: 1-cent
 Prexie vertical
 coil stamp helped
 make up 5-cent
 airmail post/
 postal card rate.

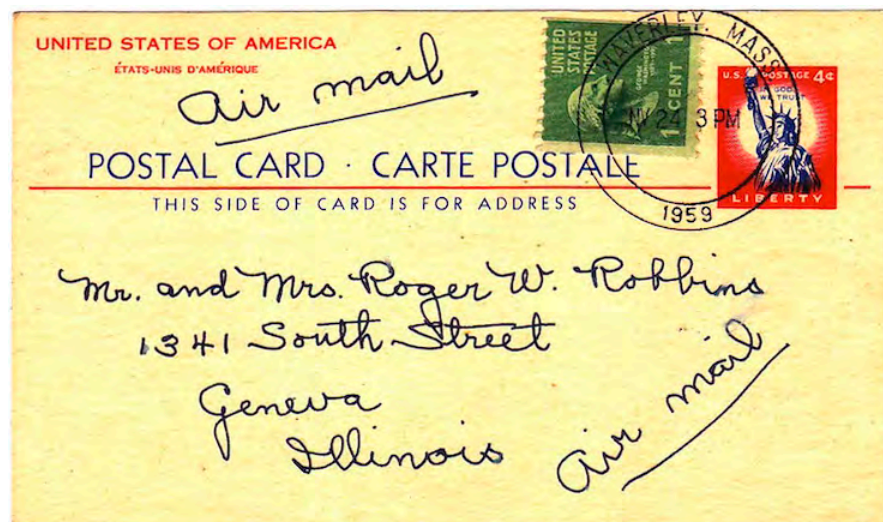




Figure 7: 4½-cent Prexie sheet stamp paid the single piece third class rate for three ounces.

ended June 30 that year. (Prior to 1976, the Federal Fiscal Year ran from July 1 through June 30.) Nevertheless, such booklet stamps, even complete panes of six 1-cent stamps, are not difficult to find used on cover for the next several years. The cover pictured in Figure 3 shows a complete booklet pane of 1-cent Prexies, including the tab, used along with a 1-cent Liberty Series sheet stamp to pay the domestic air mail letter rate that increased from 6 cents to 7 cents per ounce on August 1, 1958. The cover is postmarked September 12, 1961, more than three years after the rate change. The presence of the tab is evidence, but not conclusive proof, that the cover was from a philatelist. Removing the complete pane from the booklet required some effort, and it is unlikely anyone except a person with knowledge of stamp collecting would bother doing so.

Figure 4 shows another example of the 7 cents per ounce air mail letter rate, this one paid with a solo 7-cent Prexie, only issued in sheet format. The postmark date is October 24, 1958, not

quite three months after the new rate went into effect. The 7-cent value in the Liberty Series had been released in early 1956. However, 7-cent Prexies were still being distributed to post offices in Fiscal Year 1958, so there is no shortage of 7-cent Prexie usages from 1958 and beyond.

Figures 5 and 6 show examples of the two domestic post and postal card rates that went into effect on August 1, 1958. In Figure 5, a 2-cent Prexie horizontal coil stamp paid part of the 3-cent surface rate on a picture post card postmarked July 20, 1959. In Figure 6, a 1-cent Prexie vertical coil helped make up the 5-cent airmail rate on a 4-cent postal card postmarked November 24, 1959. Prior to the 1958 rate increases, the two rates had been 2 cents and 4 cents, respectively.

A 2-cent Liberty Series horizontal coil stamp had been issued in 1954, and the last shipment of 2-cent Prexie coils of either format were shipped to post offices in Fiscal Year 1955. So, the post card in Figure 5 represents a late

usage. The 1-cent Liberty Series stamp was never issued as a vertical coil, so whatever 1-cent vertical coils were still in use had to be Prexies. The last shipment to post offices of 1-cent Prexie coils, in either horizontal or vertical format, took place in Fiscal Year 1958. It undoubtedly took at least a year of two for post offices to sell all those stamps, so the usage in Figure 6 can be considered current.

Figure 7 pictures a 9-by-6-inch manila cover with a solo 4½-cent Prexie sheet stamp paying the single piece third class postage for three ounces. Effective August 1, 1958, the single piece third class rate, which applied to miscellaneous printed matter and merchandise, rose from 2 cents for the first two ounce plus 1 cent per additional ounce to 3 cents for the first two ounces plus 1½ cents per additional ounce. At the same time the weight limit for third class mail, which had been eight ounces, increased up to but not including sixteen ounces. Heavier pieces were considered fourth class mail and were charged parcel post rates. The machine postmark contains only a 1961 year date, so the precise date of mailing cannot be determined.

In 1959 the P.O.D. added 4½-cent stamps, both sheet stamps and coils, to the Liberty Series to pay postage on three-ounce third class articles, such as this one. The last 4½-cent

Prexie sheet stamps were printed in 1954, and the final distribution to post offices took place during fiscal year 1957, so this is a late usage. In addition, it has a philatelic connection, as many late usages do. Shelron Company, the mailer, was a New York City based stamp firm that advertised approvals in non-philatelic publications such as *Popular Mechanics*.

The July 10, 1958, edition of *The Postal Bulletin* (Issue 20094) announced that in addition to the foregoing domestic rate increases, certain international rates would also go up on August 1 of that year. Among them were the letter and post/postal card rates to Canada and Mexico, both surface and air mail, which were at the time identical to the equivalent domestic rates.

Another rate included in that announcement was the surface post/postal card rate to foreign countries other than Canada and Mexico. That rate rose from 4 to 5 cents. Figure 8 shows a pair of 1-cent Prexie sheet stamps used to make up the new 5-cent rate on a 3-cent postal card to West Germany, postmarked April 7, 1961.

Because the 1-cent Liberty Series stamps, both sheet and coil, were released in 1954, and the last 1-cent Prexie sheet stamps distributed to post offices during Fiscal Year 1955, this is certainly a late usage. However, it was mailed

Figure 8: Two 1-cent Prexie sheet stamps helped make up 5-cent international post/postal card rate, in this case to West Germany.



from the University of California at Los Angeles Medical School, and used to inform a German physician that reprints of a journal article he had requested were no longer available. The usage, therefore, appears to be non-philatelic. The seven items used to illustrate this article

are only a handful of the many this author has found with Presidential Series stamps paying in whole or in part U.S. postal rates that went into effect on August 1, 1958. By that time the Liberty Series had been in use for four years, but the Prexies were clearly not yet obsolete.

Third Class Mail Forwarded to Japan

by Louis Fiset



This envelope, from a Nassau Street stamp dealer addressed to a local Japanese national, clearly dates to the months or weeks leading up to the attack on Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entry into World War II.

The cover contained third class material, probably a small catalog, thus making it eligible for the 1 cent per ounce rate for books, catalogs, and material for planting. This rate remained in effect from April 15, 1925 until January 1, 1949.

The piece was sent to an upscale address in upper Manhattan and subsequently forwarded to two other addresses in affluent neighborhoods of the city. A final attempt to forward the mail to

Japan failed because of the onset of war. A New York November 13, 1941 back stamp appears on the reverse. The Japanese writing to the left indicates a forwarding address to Osaka. Mr. Kichijiro Tanaka was likely a businessman returning to Japan in anticipation of the coming conflict between the U.S. and Japan.

An additional 1½ cents postage was added to pay the international printed matter rate then in effect. Likely, Mr. Tanaka provided his Osaka address and funds to pay the cost of forwarding his mail. By November 1941, however, surface mail to Japan had virtually stopped for lack of shipping. And on December 11, 1941, the U.S. formally suspended mail service, altogether.

A Modern Turned Cover

by Albert "Chip" Briggs



Figure 1: Exploded cover to Hungary, postmarked January 29, 1946 and received March 30, 1946.

Postal historians of the Civil War era have long known about turned covers. This is a cover that, after initial use is turned inside out and postally used again. Turned covers have a sender and destination and evidence of payment of postage on the inside and the outside of the envelope or wrapper. The driving force in the creation of turned covers in the Civil War years was the paper shortage faced mainly in the Southern states. If similar social or economic circumstances exist in other time periods it

should be no great surprise to find covers used in a similar manner.

Figure 1 illustrates a cover (opened for display) mailed from Westport, Connecticut to Hungary on January 29, 1946. It has a 5-cent James Monroe stamp of the Presidential Series paying the Universal Postal Union surface mail rate. The letter was received in Budapest on March 30, 1946. The recipient turned the envelope inside out and mailed it back to the original

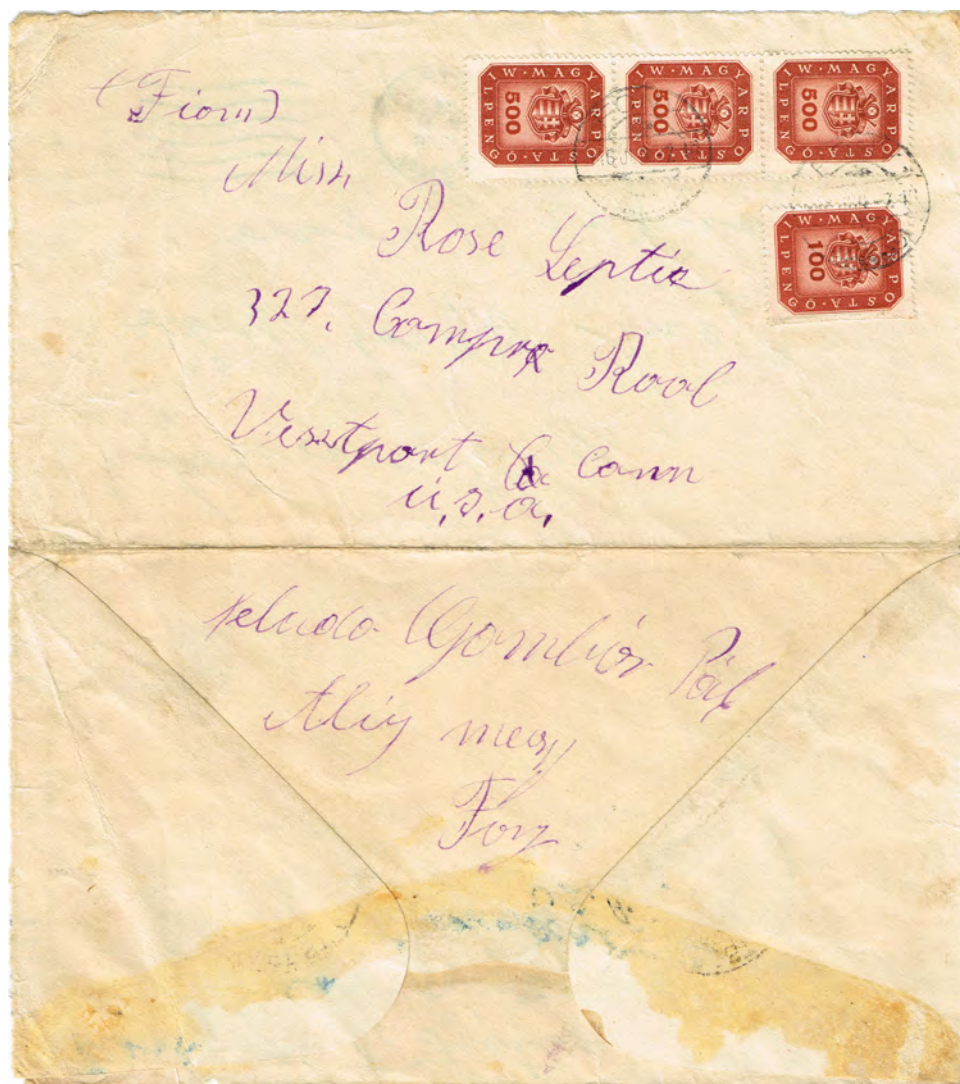


Figure 2: Reverse of the same cover illustrating a modern turned cover used during Hungary's hyperinflation period in 1946.

sender, Mrs. Rose Leptice, in Westport, Connecticut on June 2, 1946.

The return voyage use shown in Figure 2 was franked with three copies of the 500 mil pengos and one copy of the 100 mil pengos Hungarian Coat of Arms Issue paying the 1,600 mil UPU rate in effect from June 1-10, 1946 during Hungary's hyperinflation period,

Apparently paper and envelopes were in short supply or perhaps unavailable in certain times and places in early post-war Europe. That shortage prompted the Hungarian recipient of this letter to reuse the envelope for mail back to the United States, thereby producing this modern era turned cover.

International Sample Post

by Robert Schlesinger



Figure 1: Undated sample mail likely posted some time after August 1, 1958, when the rate rose to 4 cents for the first 2 ounces, and 2 cents for each additional 2 ounces.

The ability to send samples (patterns) of merchandise through the international mail stream went back to the 1874 General Postal Convention held in Berne, Switzerland. Effective July 1, 1875, the rate was set at 1 cent per 2 ounces (50 grams), with a maximum weight of ten ounces (250 grams).

After two rate changes, in 1932 and 1953, on August 1, 1958 the rate for the first 2 ounces was again raised, this time to 4 cents for the first ounce, with 2 cents for each added 2 ounces (PB 20094). Figure 1 shows a tag with 50 cents postage paid to send a package weighing 25 ounces (4 cents + 2 cents x 23).

This samples category remained viable until the Tokyo Postal Convention of November 1969, which discontinued it as a separate category. Effective July 1, 1971, samples could be sent under other categories, such as single packets, letter-packets, or parcel post.¹

There would never be any airmail rates for international sample post. Air service for "Other Articles" did begin on May 1, 1949, and would expand to only a limited number of countries.² This does not mean, however, that samples could not be flown. Figure 2 shows a sample addressed to Belgium utilizing airmail rates for letter mail. No restrictions applied so



Figure 2: Sample mail sent at the international airmail letter rate.

long as the mailer was willing to pay the higher rates that prevailed. In this example the \$1.80 postage represented a rate of 15 cents per half ounce, for a total weight of six ounces. The letter inside, of course, required no additional postage

There was an interesting anomaly in the “Other Articles” airmail rates. Like all other non-letter mail categories, such as books and printed matter, (with the exception of parcel post), the airmail rates for other articles were



Figure 3: “Other Articles” mail sent at the international airmail letter rate, which was less expensive.

based on 2 ounce increments (50 grams). The airmail letter rates were based on half-ounce increments. The cover shown in Figure 3 contained samples going to Switzerland, and weighed less than one full ounce (prepaid at 15 cents per half ounce). The 2 ounce “Other Articles” rate was 43 cents. In this case, it was cheaper to send these samples via letter mail than pay the “Other Articles” rate!

- 1 Wawrukiewicz and Beecher, *U.S. International Postal Rates, 1872-1996*, pg. 94.
2. *Ibid*, pg. 211.