



The Prexie Era

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Louis Fiset, Editor/Publisher
fiset@uw.edu

\$5 Prexie Covers Meet Again

by Leonard Piskiewicz



Figure 1: Heavily franked Prexie covers with 71 \$5 Prexies (above – should be 72) and 48 \$5 Prexies (below) mailed together in 1946.



The last issue of *The Prexie Era* (No. 73) brought to light a \$5 Prexie cover that I last saw about 30 years ago. When I saw Ed Field's article titled "Cover Surfaces with 71 Copies of the \$5 Prexie," it prompted me to exclaim, "Holy Cow! There's that \$5 Prexie cover again!"

Ed describes another cover, which I owned and exhibited until 2005, as follows:

A close cousin to my cover is illustrated on the front of US Domestic Postal Rates, 1872-1999 by Beecher and Wawrukiewicz. Same sender, same recipient, same mailing date. The main difference is that the Beecher &

Wawrukiewicz cover has "only" 40 five-dollar Prexies on the reverse, and the indemnity was "only" \$2,008,000. These two examples may well represent the largest known number of five-dollar Prexies on cover.

The two covers aren't cousins, they're brothers – "fraternal twins." Both covers are illustrated, front and back, in Figure 1.

As Ed notes, both covers were postmarked the same day. Also, the covers bear consecutive registry numbers 734706 and 734707. The covers were obviously mailed together.

On Ed's cover, as he states, "Note that the

two-dollar stamp is a replacement; the original was cut out decades ago by a prior owner who apparently valued the off-cover stamp more highly than the intact cover.” He does not indicate who replaced the missing stamp, which was replaced, as he notes, with a \$2 Harding Prexie that did not have a Wells Fargo & Union Trust Co. perfin (WF/U) as all of the other stamps on the cover have. The \$2 stamp looks like it belongs, with the cancel nicely matching the cover. But the \$2 stamp is wrong, apparently placed there by someone who had a \$2 with a cancel that “fit” the hole. What’s missing is a \$5 stamp.

Ed’s analysis of the rating of the cover concluded that the contents had a declared value of \$2,987,000. However, he also noted that my former cover as described in the Beecher-Wawrukiewicz book contained a declared value of \$2,008,000. If the space occupied by the \$2 stamp had been filled with a \$5 stamp, then

the declared value would have calculated out to \$3,012,000. The missing stamp must have been a \$5 Coolidge Prexie. And whatever was contained in the covers, my cover with \$240 in \$5 Prexies (I call it the “\$240 cover”) contained two of them and Ed’s cover contained three of them. This is corroborated by the regular postage and registry fees on the covers. The registry fee was the 20-cent minimum in both cases. The “\$240 cover” shows 3 cents first class postage, indicating that it weighed no more than one ounce, but the “\$360 cover” has two 3-cent stamps, indicating it weighed more than one ounce.

As stated in the Beecher-Wawrukiewicz book, I speculated that the cover “probably contained negotiable, interest bearing securities valued at \$2,000,000 with \$8,000 accrued interest to the date of mailing.” Ed has provided further analysis for the extra \$8,000 and \$12,000 value of the two covers:

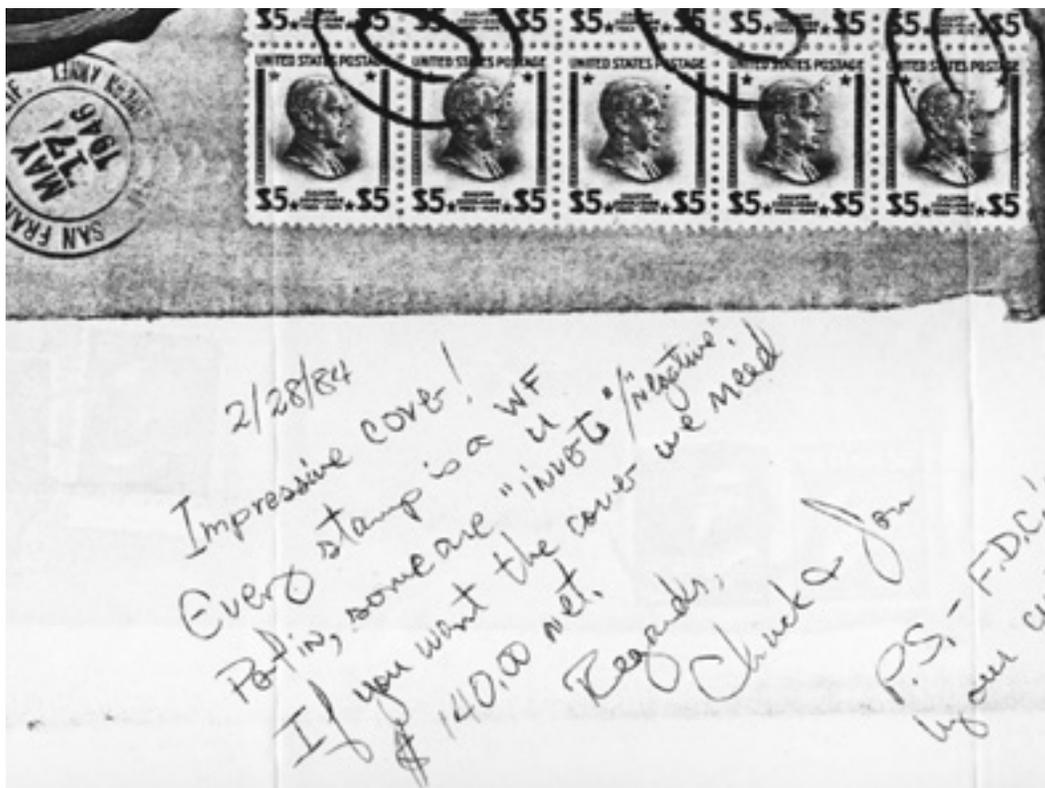


Figure 2: Part of a photocopy offering the “\$240” cover in 1984.



Figure 3: Wells Fargo parcel tag offered recently on ebay.

Len's 1994 conclusion that each bond was insured for \$4000 extra to cover accrued interest is consistent with interest rates that prevailed in 1946; namely about 2.5 per cent and 1.6 per cent (\$12,500 and \$8000 for each semi-annual coupon) for investment quality corporate or muni bonds, respectively. Nonetheless, I am skeptical that the extra \$4000 indemnity was solely for accrued interest.

By 1946 interest rates had been in steady decline for years. During such periods, quality bonds sell at a premium over par value and approach par only at maturity. Why would the bank

insure the bonds at par value rather than the higher market value? The answer might lie in the fact that issuers usually reserved the right to "call" bonds before maturity in order to get out from under previous high rates and refinance at lower rates. Such forced redemptions were generally made at a small premium over par – a tiny bone for reluctant callees. I have no idea when the subject bonds were issued or were to mature, but my best guess is that the extra \$4000 per bond was a call premium ... in 1947 interest rates started a decades long rise. Whatever entity called the bonds timed it right.

Now that we have thoroughly explored the ratings of these covers, what of their origin? As I suggested above, I bought the “\$240 cover” in 1984, when almost nobody cared about Prexie postal history. I had begun accumulating interesting and unusual Prexie covers with the idea of eventually putting together an exhibit of Prexie usages. Being aware of my interest, postal history dealer Chuck McFarlane (Ausdenmoore-McFarlane Stamps) sent me copies of both sides of the \$5 cover, offering the cover for \$140 (see Figure 2). I bought the cover. Chuck related the history of the cover as he knew it, which I recall as follows.

The Prexie cover had been “homeless” for a while. The Sacramento Philatelic Society, which is now over 100 years old and which still holds weekly meetings, used to have auctions at their meetings once a quarter. In the early 1980s, the cover went through their auction three times before finding a buyer, when Chuck happened to attend a meeting (he wasn’t a member) and bought the cover for his sales stock. As I said, back then nobody cared about Prexie covers and nobody wanted it. But I was happy to have it – to be an “anchor” for a future exhibit. (The cover now resides in the collection of a Prexie Era Committee member and is exhibited periodically.)

Then, several months after I bought my cover, itinerant vest-pocket dealer John Gonzales offered me the Field cover for \$200, which I didn’t buy (my cover cost me less than that). I may have been aware of the cover before that time, but I don’t remember that specifically. I later learned he sold it to Dick Searing. While I wasn’t acquainted with Dick Searing, I was aware that he was the Section Editor of The Bank Note Period of the USPCS *Chronicle* and had a particular interest in on-cover uses of high value Bank Note stamps. I figured that interest extended into the 20th century and the

Prexies.

When my old cover went through the Sacramento Philatelic Society auction, Chuck didn’t know about the other cover, which Ed Field now owns. It wasn’t offered at the same time, but it was apparently lurking in the shadows, since it showed up in our area and was offered to me some months later (less than a year, as I recall). When the single \$5 stamp was cut out of the envelope is not known. The seller of the cover at the auction has since passed on, so the previous source of the cover appears to be unrecorded history.

What about the future of the cover with the incorrect \$2 Prexie? The missing \$5 stamp should be fairly easy to replace. Wells Fargo most likely made perfins of many more \$5 stamps that were used on these two covers. Many or most of those were probably saved. It shouldn’t be terribly difficult to find – even the stamp that was removed from this cover should be out there somewhere. In fact, as this account is being written, a parcel tag from Wells Fargo in San Francisco with their perfined Prexies is being offered on ebay – see Figure 3. There must be a good supply of Wells Fargo perfined Prexies available in collections and dealers’ stocks.

One final note: The two \$5 covers and the parcel tag all have a penciled “X” next to the registry number. The “X” was unwritten Post Office code for valuable contents, perhaps to encourage postal employees to be “eXtra” careful to protect the letter or parcel from being “lost.”

This account may not be all of “the rest of the story,” but is presented here to record the rise to greater appreciation of these highly franked covers.

Prexie Movie Prop

by Thomas Matthiesen



Figure: This brief close up of covers occurs at about 65 minutes into the movie, “Portrait of Jennie.” The film is currently posted on YouTube.

I suppose part of the fun achieved through philatelic knowledge is the satisfaction of once in awhile discovering that somebody else has made an obvious mistake. This often happens when we encounter stamp collecting in novels, short stories and film. There seem to be varying degrees of awareness of philately among authors and editors, directors, art directors and property masters. We have all cringed when we have seen a movie where a valuable rare stamp (often described as “unique”) is carelessly held between greasy fingers by a so called expert philatelist. These are simple gaffs clearly done through ignorance.

But some novels and films show at least some respect and awareness of the historical importance of getting these little paper objects right. Sometimes a property master (the person in charge of obtaining the props in a movie) does a pretty good job, tries hard to make a letter shown in a close-up look very real. Some

of the studios had convincing prop stamps just for that purpose. But more often than not something slips by them, usually something any average collector would be able to catch.

In the 1948 film, “Portrait of Jennie”, directed by William Dieterle and starring Jennifer Jones and Joseph Cotton, the head nun of a convent (played by Lillian Gish) shows the Cotton character some letters written “many years ago.” They look quite good in their brief close-up, a nice bundle of letters franked with what appear to be Prexies (or prop stamps designed to look just like Prexies). Unfortunately the story takes place in the “winter of ‘34” and it is further implied that the old letters predate that year, supposedly from the 1920’s, long before the Prexies were issued.

The film is interesting though, a strange and somewhat surreal story of time and afterlife adapted from the best selling novel by Robert

Nathan. It is something of a trivia gold mine with lots of Hollywood history there for those who search. Two major things do stand out from a cinema standpoint. Curiously, there are no conventional titles at the beginning of

the film and then the final scenes of this black and white movie are suddenly tinted in over all color as it builds up to the final concluding shot of the painting of Jennie, the title character, in full Technicolor.

Early Use of the 10-Cent Prexie Coil

by Robert Schlesinger



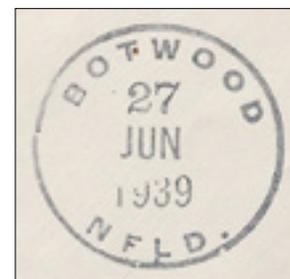
The 10-cent Prexie coil stamp, perforated 10 vertically, was issued on January 20, 1939, in Washington, D.C., along with the rest of the vertically perforated coils. Unlike the others, it was issued not in rolls of 100, but in rolls of 500. This may help explain why this stamp saw limited use.

I recently purchased the cover illustrated here, which shows an interesting early use of a short lived rate.

Postal Bulletin 17706, dated June 5, 1939, announced changes in F.A.M. 18. There would be stops in Shediac, New Brunswick; Botwood, Newfoundland; and Foynes, Ireland. The air mail postage rate for the Newfoundland portion of the flight would be 10 cents per half ounce. The announcement further stated, "Although

the exact date of inauguration of service cannot be announced at this time, it is expected that service will be inaugurated over the North Atlantic portion of F.A.M. 18 on June 24."

The cover was indeed postmarked on June 24, 1939. It arrived in Botwood, Newfoundland on June 27, as shown on the backstamp.



Per *Postal Bulletin* 17784, dated September 25, 1939, air service was to be discontinued for the winter season with the last flight from New York scheduled for September 30. This rate would not be renewed.

Seaman's Special Handling Christmas Parcel Returned to Sender

by Dan Pagter



Illustrated is a three pound zone 4 parcel post item mailed from Los Angeles to San Francisco on September 15, 1944. The rating from March 26, 1944 through December 31, 1948, is 10 cents for the first pound, 3.5 cents per pound for the next two pounds (7 cents) for a total of 17 cents postage. An additional postage surcharge of 3 percent was required, adding 1 cent (0.51 cents rounded up) for a total parcel post postage of 18 cents. It was paid by an 18-cent Prexie, properly tied by an undated parcel post roller cancel.

A 15-cent Prexie paid the special handling

fee on this parcel (greater than 2 pounds up to 10 pounds), a rate in effect from July 1, 1928 through December 31, 1948.

Special handling was introduced to expedite the parcel as if it was first class matter, from office of acceptance to office of delivery and requiring a dated cancellation. In this case a manuscript time was written over the cancel reading 11:00 AM. So this item was received at 11:00 AM Sept. 15, 1944 to be included with the next first class dispatch to San Francisco, the office of delivery. In San Francisco the parcel was "delivered" to a naval FPO. While the parcel

post postage was adequate for the package to be carried to any naval location served by that FPO or for forwarding as necessary, the special handling service stopped there as the military did not provide, that service.

The Christmas theme mailing label and Frosty's sticker add eye appeal and inform us this was a Christmas parcel for J. P Goggin C.B.M.. serving aboard a naval warship. The package was posted for timely Christmas delivery. But the boxed auxiliary marking on the upper right tells us the package went from San Francisco to Washington D.C. where it was returned to the sender in Los Angeles as unclaimed. Without additional markings there is no way to determine how far west this package may have traveled into the Pacific -- Hawaii, Guam, or all the way to Purvis Bay, Florida Islands group of the Solomon Islands, the local command base for J.P. Goggin C.B.M.

The return from Washington, D.C. went by regular postal service. Parcel post regulations normally required additional postage when forwarding or returning parcel post matter. However, an exemption existed for military personnel and civil servants whose change of address was caused by official orders. The parcel should have been returned to Los Angeles with special handling service.

The foregoing is not a story but a recitation of facts and deduction found on or derived from the items and markings on the parcel wrapper as presented. A little digging explains that John Goggin was a chief boatswain's mate (C.B.M.). Generally, boatswain's mates oversee work parties in maintenance of a ship's external structure, direct damage control parties, and supervise maintenance of abandon-ship equipment and abandon-ship training. In short boatswain's mates were charged with keeping the ship and its equipment floating and functioning at all times, period. John Goggin was so charged on the destroyer, USS *Hoel*

(DD-533). The *Hoel* was commissioned July 29, 1943 and, following shakedown and final alterations, left San Francisco on October 26, 1943, later to gather five battle stars, a Presidential Unit Citation -- and to never return.

At 6:45 am the Battle off Samar began, the centermost action of the four-day Battle of Layte Gulf (October 23-26, 1944), largest naval battle of World War II and perhaps in history. Operating as Taffy 3, *Hoel*, two other destroyers, including the USS *Johnston*, six escort carriers, including USS *Gambier Bay* and USS *St. Lo*, and four destroyer escorts including the USS *Samuel B. Roberts*, were operating off Samar. Admiral Halsey, having left his position to chase a decoy fleet, Taffy 3 remained unprotected to the north, backlit by breaking dawn and completely surprised by the arrival of the Japanese Central Force consisting of the *Yamato* and three other battleships, six heavy cruisers, two light cruisers and eleven destroyers. Naval historians consider the Battle off Samar one of the largest naval mismatches in history. *Yamato's*, displacement alone exceeded the combined total of all Taffy 3's ships.

After ordering the launch of all aircraft and hiding the carriers in a squall, the Admiral of Taffy 3 ordered the three destroyers to attack the Japanese battle group. At 7:14 Commander E. E. Evans of the *Johnston* had already given his crew the order to attack. That and subsequent command action while seriously wounded earned Evans a posthumous Medal of Honor.

While screening the carriers *Hoel* began firing at the enemy with the *Yamato* returning fire, hitting the bridge and taking out all voice radio communication, killing four, wounding Commander Kintberger (Navy Cross awardee for the day's actions) and the flag officer. At 7:16 *Hoel* initiated a torpedo attack, steering straight towards and engaging the much larger enemy ships. At 7:27 *Hoel* launched five torpedoes against the heavy cruiser *Haguro*

causing it to turn away and lose its attack position against the carriers. Moments later *Hoel* was struck by multiple shells, losing mechanical steering and reducing its speed to 17 knots. *Hoel* immediately targeted another ship in order to fire its five remaining torpedoes before being incapacitated. The *Yamato* was in the line of fire, but in a defensive maneuver turned and successfully outran the torpedoes.

Now surrounded, *Hoel* continued firing, but at 8:30 was overwhelmed. The enemy continued fire as the crew abandoned ship, stopping at 8:55 when it finally rolled over and sank. *Hoel* lost 253 of her 339 man crew, including John P. Goggin C.B.M. The *Johnston* went dead in the water at 9:40 am and sank at 10:10 with a loss of 186 hands, including its Commander Evans. The carrier *Gambier Bay* was sunk by naval fire and *St. Lo* by a single kamikaze plane from the first kamikaze unit attack of the war

coming at the end of the sea battle. The *Samuel B. Roberts*, “destroyer escort that fought like a battleship,” fired with deadly accuracy more than 92 percent of its available shells before going to the bottom.

Admiral Kurita, commander of the Central Force, withdrew his ships after the attacks had broken up his formations and lost tactical control. This was the only engagement of *Yamato* in a ship to ship sea battle. She recorded hitting three ships contributing to their sinking, *Gambier Bay*, *Johnston* and *Hoel*.

USS *Hoel's* Commander Kintberger said of his men, including J.P. Goggin C.B.M., “Fully cognizant of the inevitable result of engaging such vastly superior forces, these men performed their assigned duties coolly and efficiently until their ship was shot from under them.”

Third-Class Materials for Planting

by Louis Fiset



Shown are both sides of a tag attached to a package containing four different plants, itemized at the left. The package falls under “third-class materials for planting” rated at 1 cent per two ounces (in effect April 15, 1925 - December 31, 1948.) The tag bears 4 cents postage, paying the maximum 8 ounces allowed for third-class mail. The text on the address side certifies the plants from the nursery stock of A. B. Kathamler to be free of disease, and “. . . This certificate is valid until Oct. 1, 1940.” To further narrow the postmark date on this MAILED ON RURAL ROUTE tag, the Sousa stamp first went on sale May 3, 1940.



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fiset@uw.edu

Thomas Jefferson Stamp of 1938

by Albert “Chip” Briggs

Part 1: Design and Production



Figure 1: Photograph used by Carl T. Arlt to engrave the portrait on the die.

The subject of the third whole number denomination of the Presidential Series, issued on June 16, 1938, was the third president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson. In this series, the denomination of each stamp corresponds to the order of the administration of each president, through the 22-cent value. The stamp was designed by William K. Schrage and conformed to the original design produced by

Elaine Rawlinson. The central element shows Thomas Jefferson in profile, facing to the right, a visage modeled from a photograph of the reproduction of the bust of Jefferson by Jean Antoine Houdon in the Library of Congress (Figure 1). Carl T. Arlt, an engraver at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing from 1932 until 1951, engraved the portrait. James T. Vail engraved the lettering, done in modernized



Figure 2: Large die proof and detail on the reverse.

gothic, as well as the numerals. The color of the ink selected was purple (number P-246-R).

In a letter to Ramsey S. Black, Third Assistant Postmaster General, dated April 7, 1938, A. W. Hall, Director of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing submitted a model of the three-cent stamp. The model for the issue was approved on April 18, 1938 both by Postmaster General James A. Farley and President Franklin D. Roosevelt, himself.

Die number 966 was completed and hardened on April 26, 1938 and the first printing plate was certified on May 18, 1938. A limited number of die proofs were prepared. Three numbered die proofs were prepared and submitted as follows: 552194 for Engraving Division, 552195 for the Director, and 552196 for the Post Office. Three

large die proofs currently reside in the archives of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. A fourth, proof number 550805, produced on May 17, 1938 is shown in Figure 2. Carl Arlt requested this proof be produced. Small die proofs such as the one shown in Figure 3 were produced in very small quantities, although the exact number of small die proof impressions remains unknown.

The Post Office Department operated the busiest mail service in the world when the Presidential Series was first being issued, transmitting over 14 billion pieces of first class mail in 1938. The postage rate for first class mail was 3 cents per ounce in 1938 and remained that for the production life of the Thomas Jefferson stamp. This adhesive was destined to become one of the most massively produced and heavily used stamps in history. When production ceased, over 130 billion stamps in all formats had been printed.

The 3-cent stamp was one of only three denominations (including the 1-cent and 2-cent values) to be produced in every printing format (sheet, booklet, sidewise coil and endwise coil.) All formats were printed on the Stickney rotary press. The sheet stamps were printed from plates of 400 subjects divided into panes of 100 stamps. Prior to use of electric eye perforating equipment the plates contained a dash in the top, bottom, and side margins between the panes and a cross in the center.



Figure 3: Small die proof



Figure 4: Pre-electric eye marginal markings. Plate number adjacent to stamp #1 from the upper left pane; dash in left margin between upper and lower left panes between upper left stamp #91 and lower left stamp #1; and cross in center of plate between all four panes, in this case adjacent to stamp #1 from the lower right pane and residue of stamp #10 from lower left pane.



Figure 5: Matched set of plate number blocks from the first pre-electric eye plate to go to press.



Figure 6: Booklet pane from first pre-electric eye plate used to print booklet pane stamps.

The plate numbers appeared in each corner of the plate. These pre-electric eye marginal markings assisted with separation of the panes after printing. Figure 4 shows three examples of the pre-electric eye marginal markings, commonly referred to as pre-electric eye plates.

The first pre-electric eye plate, plate number 21925, went to press on May 17, 1938 and was

cancelled on March 12, 1940 after 1,277,945 impressions. Figure 5 shows a matched set of plate number blocks from the first pre-electric eye plate. Pre-electric eye plates were also used to produce booklet pane stamps. These plates were laid out in six horizontal rows of 10 booklet panes in each row. The first plate, plate number 21995, went to press December 7, 1938 and was cancelled on Sept. 1, 1944 after 1,222,509 impressions. Figure 6 shows a booklet pane from this first plate.

With the development of electric eye technology to guide the perforating process more precisely to assure better centering of stamps, new markings were required on the printing plates. The initial “Experimental Model”, designed and built by the BEP in 1935 required a series of vertical dashes down the center of the plate. The corner plate numbers were also moved adjacent to the third stamp from the corner to prevent interference with the electric eye. This new plate layout became known as Type I electric eye plate. Figures 7a and 7b illustrate dashes to the center of the plates and the new arrangement of plate numbers, respectively.

In response to an improved machine known as the “Pilot Model” developed in 1939, plate markings were modified to include a series of horizontal “frame bars” in the left margin, elimination of the right margin line and return of the plate numbers to the corner. This

Figure 7a: A cross gutter block with vertical dashes for Type I electric eye plates.





constituted the Type II electric eye plate. No three-cent stamps were produced from this plate configuration, however.

Another plate, however, known as the Type III, or convertible electric eye plate, was created for use with both types of electric eye equipment. The plate markings on this plate were identical to the Type II plate but with reintroduction of a right margin line in the same position as on Type I plates. Figure 8 illustrates the arrangement of marginal markings on the Type III, or convertible electric eye plate.

The first convertible electric eye companion plates (two different plates, each curved halfway around the printing drum), plate numbers 22361 and 22362 went to press on September 14, 1939. Plate 22361 was cancelled July 31, 1941 after 796,847 impressions and plate number 22362, July 2, 1942 after 822,857 impressions. Figure 9 shows a matched set of plate blocks from these first convertible electric eye plates.

A 360 subject plate was used with electric eye equipment for booklet pane stamps. This plate design contained the vertical gutter with dashes and frame bars in the left margin with the plate number in the corner similar to the sheet stamps produced on Type III plates. Figure 10 shows the retained plate markings on miscut booklet panes from the convertible electric eye plates.



Figure 8: Examples of marginal markings on Type III, or convertible electric eye plates. Horizontal “frame bars” in left margin adjacent to stamp #11 in upper left pane; vertical dashes in center gutter between stamps #100 in lower left and #91 in lower right pane; and plate number adjacent to stamp #100 in lower right pane.



Figure 9: Matched set of plate blocks from the first convertible electric eye plates to go to press.

Two varieties of coil stamps were produced by the Bureau in 1939. A sidewise coil with vertical perforations and an endwise coil with horizontal perforations. The sidewise coil was printed from plates with 170 subjects in 10 x 17 rows. Two plates were curved around the printing drum. The plates, absent side borders, met to form a continuous printing surface. The seam where the plates joined produced a joint line every 17 impressions, created by ink filling this tiny space between the two plates. The only other markings are a plate number and hollow five pointed star adjacent to stamp number one and a plate number next to stamp number 170. Sidewise coils were produced in rolls of 500, 1000, and 3000 stamps. The first plates went to press December 5, 1938 and the last plates were cancelled on May 16, 1956. Before rolling the coils, a paper tape was inserted

between the rolls to produce a starting and a finishing tape. Figure 11 shows examples of the brown paper tape used on the various sized rolls. Figure 12 shows the captured marginal markings including the hollow five pointed star and plate number as well as the joint line.

In the early 1950's the brown paper tape was replaced with white gummed paper. Municipalities could order precancelled stamps from the Bureau as well. Figure 13 shows a white paper tape from a roll of 500 sidewise coil stamps precancelled by the Bureau for Jackson, Mississippi.

The last variety of stamps produced were the vertical coil stamps. Although printed in the smallest numbers, their plates remained in service over the greatest time span. The last



Figure 10: Retained plate markings on miscut booklet panes from the convertible electric eye plates.



Figure 11: Brown paper tapes used on the various sized rolls.

vertical coil printing plate was not cancelled until late 1959. Endwise or vertical coils were printed from plates containing 15 subjects arranged in 15 x 10 rows. A plate number lay adjacent to stamp number 10 and a star and plate number next to stamp number 141. In the vertical format the joint line occurred every 15

impressions. Only two plates were used for the 3-cent endwise coil stamps, producing just over 181,000 impressions. Sent to press December 14, 1938, they were cancelled November 17, 1959. Figure 14 illustrates the starting and finishing tape used with endwise coil stamps.



Figure 12: Marginal markings on miscut coil strip including the hollow five pointed star and plate number, as well as the joint line.



Figure 13: White paper tape from a roll of 500 sidewise coil stamps precancelled by the Bureau for Jackson, Mississippi.



Figure 14: Starting and finishing tape used with endwise coil stamps.