

Fall 2008



Whole No.43

The Prexie Era

The Newsletter of the USSS 1938 Presidential Era Study Group

Published Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall

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2009 Subscriptions Payable Now

The Fall 2008 issue is the last in the quartet of *The Prexie Era* for 2008. This means it is time for readers to renew your subscriptions. Rates for 2009 remain the same as for last year: \$5 for the electronic version, \$10 for the “snail-mail” version and if you subscribe to both versions, well, you do the math. Please send payments and questions to Jeff Shapiro directly:

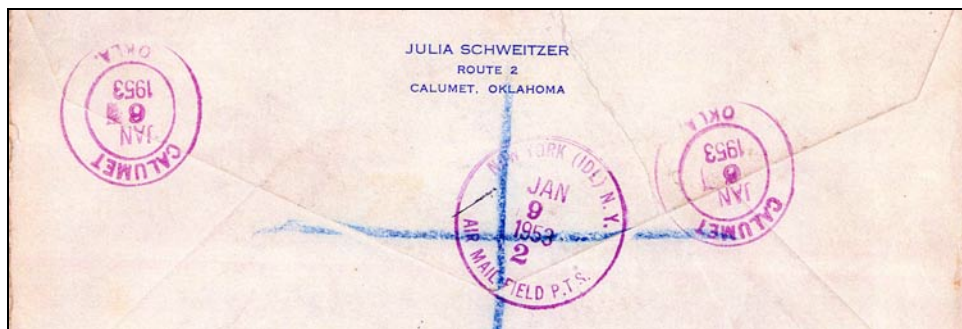
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If your subscription is not current by the time the next issue comes out this will be the last one you receive.

17-cent Prexie Multi-franking on Foreign Airmail/Registered Mail

by

Jim Felton



This 85-cent cover to Great Britain, postmarked January 6, 1953, is franked with five 17-cent Prexies, which paid the triple (1.5-ounce) airmail rate to Europe (15 cents x 3), effective November 1, 1946, plus the 40-cent international registration fee, effective September 1, 1952.

\$5 Prexie Bank-To-Bank Correspondence

by

Bill Helbock

This multi-franked \$5 Prexie cover illustrates inter-bank correspondence, likely containing negotiable securities. The postmarks indicate it was sent from Wilmington, Delaware on June 14, 1944, arriving at Philadelphia the same day. The total distance between the cities by road was no more than 25-30 miles.



Calculating the indemnity amount is a bit of a mystery. Note the faint pencil sums on the cover “ $175 \times 4 = 700$ ” and “ $16 \times 30 = 480$ ” for a total of “1180.” It’s tempting to think those numbers might refer to more than one million dollars in negotiable securities.

But, according to Beecher and Wawrukiewicz’s book on domestic postal rates, in Table 35-2 the registry supplemental charges for one zone in June 1944 should have been 11 cents per thousand. For \$1,180,000 in value, at this rate \$129.80 postage should have been assessed. The total postage paid however, comes to \$141.36, leaving the \$11.56 difference only partially accounted for by first class postage and normal registration fee.

Additionally, Beecher and Wawrukiewicz indicate that the 1944 rate changes were announced in the PMG Order of July 17, 1944 and *The Postal Bulletin* dated July 17th. Would the Wilmington post office clerk been aware of the impending new rates or would he have still be calculating on the 1932 basis of 8 cents per thousand value?

I don’t know the answer to this question, and it’s too damned hot here today in Australia to run simulations and come up with a precise accounting of the franking. I will leave that task to interested readers.

5c DC-4 Skymaster Crash Cover

by

Steve B. Davis

This crash cover, bearing two 5-cent Skymasters, paying the 10-cent per half-ounce international airmail rate to countries in the Western Hemisphere, recently appeared on eBay. I tried to obtain it, but the bidding got too pricey for my budget. I did do the research on it before I bid, however, which proved to be an interesting exercise.



The key to the cover is the purple markings applied by the Post Office indicating a crash near Baltimore, Maryland on May 30, 1947. Using the date and location I searched for plane crashes. Below I provide an itemization of pertinent accident details to help us understand the cover and humanize the event. [Source: www.planecrashinfo.com copyright: Richard Kebabjian]

Date: May 30, 1947
 Time: 17:41 hrs (5:41 p.m.)
 Operator: Eastern Air Lines
 Flight: 605
 Route: Newark-Baltimore-Miami
 Aircraft Type: Douglas C-54B-15-DO
 Registration: NC88814
 Aboard: 53 (passengers: 49, crew: 4)
 Fatalities: 53 (no survivors)
 Ground: 0 injuries or fatalities
 Summary of accident:
 While on approach to Baltimore at 4,000 feet, the plane suddenly went into a nosedive, inverted and crashed. Possible problems with the elevator. The official cause was never determined.

I also browsed the years 1946 through 1948 for other air crashes and found a number of them listed. This suggests more crash covers with Skymaster franking out there to be had. I am still looking for one to include in my exhibit. This particular cover sold for well over \$100.

Air-Surface-Air Postcard Rate(s?) Revisited

by

Bob Hohertz



In Issue 41 (Spring 2008) I asked if readers could provide an example of an air-surface-air postcard mailed for 8 cents. This was a rather ignorant query since 3 cents plus 3 cents plus 3 cents equal 9 cents. Someone who made his living as an actuary really ought to know this but then, there is quite a difference between mathematics and arithmetic.

Regardless, soon after the article appeared the postcard illustrated here, sent from New Orleans to Sweden on February 4, 1947, turned up on eBay. It is clearly marked “Via Air Mail in U.S.A.” Since 9 cents franking would otherwise have represented an unnecessary and significant overpayment, presumably air service was also provided after it reached Europe. This therefore appears to be an example of a postcard rated 3 cents for air in the US, 3 cents for surface transport across the Atlantic, and 3 cents for air in Europe.

I have thus presented postcards provided with the same air-surface-air service, postmarked during a similar time frame but franked at two different rates. Barring a rate change I am currently unaware of, it appears the rate for air-surface-air postcard service was either 9 or 11 cents depending on the whim of the postal clerk working behind the counter on any particular day. Does anyone have another idea?

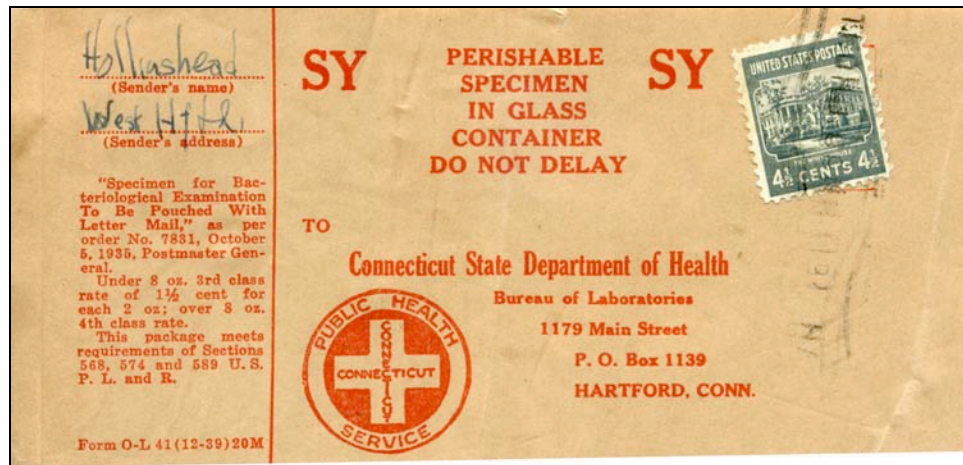
Entry In *The Postal Bulletin* for February 4, 1947

EXTENSION OF RESTRICTED MAIL SERVICE TO JAPAN
ORDER No. 33886; DATED JANUARY 31, 1947.
 Effective at once, the territory of Japan to which mail for civilian addressees may be sent is extended to include the islands listed in the first column below. Civilian mail service has not been authorized to the places listed in the second column.

Third-Class, Single Piece: Syphilis Specimen

by

Howard Lee



The mailing label shown here identifies medical contents contained within -- a glass vile specimen (blood) sent for analysis to the Connecticut State Department of Health for a suspected case of syphilis (SY). The sender, likely a West Hartford, Connecticut private physician, used a typical glass-protected mailer box provided by the health department.

The 4 1/2-cent Prexie pays the third-class single-piece, 1.5-cent per 2-ounce rate in effect from April 15, 1925, as modified October 5, 1935. The contents weighted ≤ 6 ounces. As the mailing instruction at the left side of the mailer states, the specimen for bacteriological examination was to be pouched with letter mail as per a Postmaster General order implemented to expedite delivery of time-sensitive biological material. This rate remained in effect until January 1, 1949 when the 6-ounce rate was reduced to 4 cents (2 cents for the first 2 ounces, plus 1 cent for each additional 2 ounces.) Absence of a postal zone in the HARTFORD, CONN. address line sets the time period around 1943 or earlier.

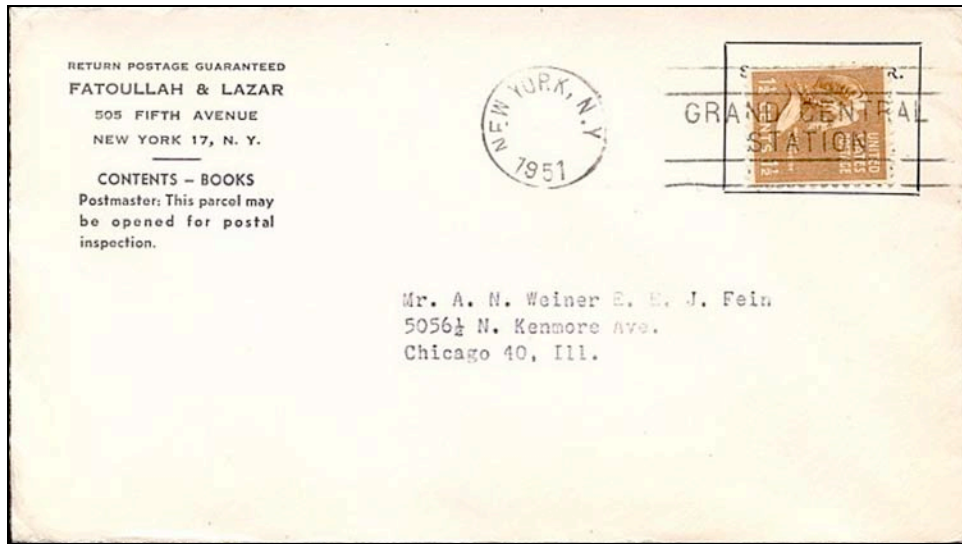
Third-Class, Books, Catalogs, and Material for Planting

by

Bob Hohertz

At various times, from June 8, 1872 through July 31, 1958 a special third-class rate category existed for "Books, Catalogs and Material for Planting" because the rates per ounce differed from other third-class rate items. Covered in this category in addition to books and catalogs were seeds, cuttings, bulbs, roots, and scions, all designated for propagation, but not consumption. On January 1, 1949 both the rate per ounce for books and catalogs, and the rate per two ounces for material for planting was raised to 1 1/2 cents. These rates, adjusted on January 1, 1952 to accommodate authorized nonprofit organizations only, remained in effect until August 1, 1958.

In the cover shown here, postmarked in 1951, the 1 1/2 cents paid is far too late for it to be a regular third class or a fourth class rate. It therefore pays the books and catalogs rate of 1 1/2 cents per ounce, effective January 1, 1949.



These rates provide opportunities for collectors of both third-class mail and the 1 1/2-cent Martha Washington Prexie definitive. I have not yet seen a solo 1 1/2-cent stamp from the Prexie era on a two-ounce mailer for seeds, cuttings, or other planting material and would like to know if anyone owns or has seen one and can provide an illustration for the newsletter.

Tales from the Other Side – Part V: The Wandering Heads

by

Francis Ferguson
 ferg@FloridaStampShows.com

The three Prexie high value stamps had the good fortune to each be produced in two colors. With a standard black vignette and, in the case of the \$1 value a frame with an especially lovely shade of purple, the design creates a nice containment for the busts of the three presidents. A printing total of 309.4 million for the dollar value, 13.6 million for the \$2, and 9.3 million for the \$5 value, makes for a good deal of material in which to look for treasures.



While one expects to find inking variations on this issue, during the last five years I have been accumulating this material I have yet to see any. But hope always exists. And how about an inverted vignette? So far none have appeared in the market place or even been rumored to exist. But wouldn't that be a find!

What we do find with some frequency is a misalignment of the black portraits within the frames. Given enough examples lined up on the page, one could lay out a “round-the-clock” movement of the central portrait with varying degrees of encroachment on the frames. Modest movements of the portrait are no more than minor curiosities and command little premium, if any. However, a severe misalignment that results in the vignette moving significantly into the frame is highly uncommon and commands a hefty premium. The examples shown here are but a few of the ones known to exist. No doubt cover collectors have examples in their own holdings. Can anyone provide an example for the newsletter?

While checking through accumulations that most of us run across during the course of collecting, in addition to the wandering heads collectors should be on the lookout for the USIR watermark error on the \$1 value, the subject of a future article.

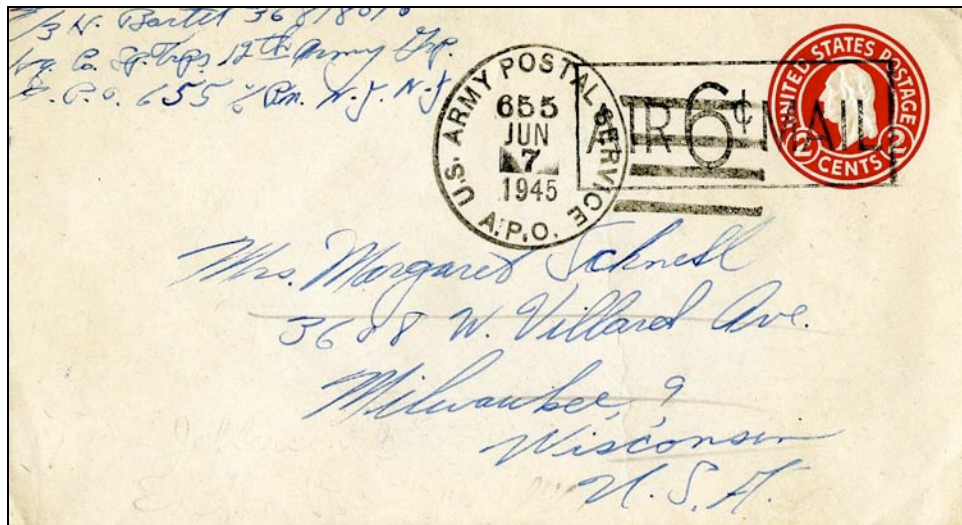
UC8 and the Prexie Issue (and A Little Postal History)

by

Bill Geijsbeek

In an effort to reduce the growing shortfall of airmail stamped envelopes for overseas Army and Navy post offices, in 1945 POD devised a plan to convert useless 2-cent stamped envelopes into 6-cent airmail concession rate envelopes.

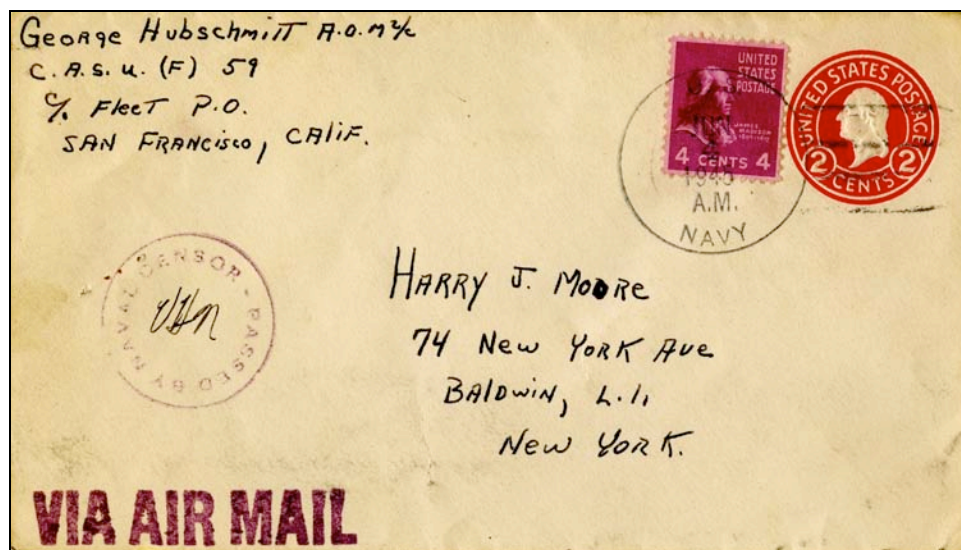
Earlier in June 1944, in a first attempt to curtail the growing shortage, POD halted domestic distribution of all airmail stamped envelopes – plain ones to civilian post offices and special request corner card orders for individual customers. Simultaneously they eliminated the red and blue borders on newly produced airmail stamped envelopes. These efforts were only partially successful in keeping up with the demand.



In the same year POD eliminated the first class intra-city rate of 2 cents per ounce forcing those users to pay 3 cents. This affected all first class mailers except those in towns without local carrier service where patrons qualified for the local drop letter first-class rate of 1 cent per ounce. Discontinuance of the intra-city rate left POD with a surplus of 50 million 2-cent stamped envelopes.

Given the rising demand for airmail stamped envelopes and the surplus of 2-cent envelopes, New York postmaster, Albert Goldman, was directed to convert the unusable envelopes into airmail stock for use by US armed forces overseas. He set up ten canceling machines outfitted with slugs reading **AIR 6¢ MAIL** inside a rectangular border. POD then requested that postmasters forward full cases of 2-cent stamped envelopes (in P.O. sizes 5 and 13, either standard or extra quality white paper.) Colored paper (amber and blue) and window envelopes were specifically excluded.

The cover shown above illustrates a typical example of the up rated 2-cent envelope, posted on June 7, 1945 at XII Army Group Headquarters, Wiesbaden, Germany (APO 655). With the war in Europe now ended, so has censorship of the mail there.



By mid-June 1945 the conversion was complete. However, during the “cancellation” process occasionally multiple envelopes got fed into the machine together, resulting in the bottom ones receiving no impression – known as “skips.” Goldman was ordered to affix 4-cent stamps to any stock returned to him by APO/FPO post offices and to return them as 6-cent airmail envelopes.

The second cover shows an example of such a “skip,” with a 4-cent Prexie applied to make up the short franking. It is postmarked June 4, 1945 with a U.S. Navy 4-bar cancel, at Honolulu (Navy 59). Military post offices, having no use for them, did not carry 2-cent stamped envelopes. Thus this cover must have resulted as a “skip” that was caught at the APO/FPO level and up rated locally. Who knows how they accounted for the loss of a 4-cent stamp. It is not clear whether APO/FPO post offices routinely stocked the 4-cent Prexie definitive. A second possibility exists, that the Honolulu post office (which had stocked 2-cent stamped envelopes for the intra-city rate), decided to convert their unusable envelopes into a more usable stamped envelopes. Since Honolulu certainly had 4-cent Prexies in stock, these could easily have been up rated and transferred to a military post office.

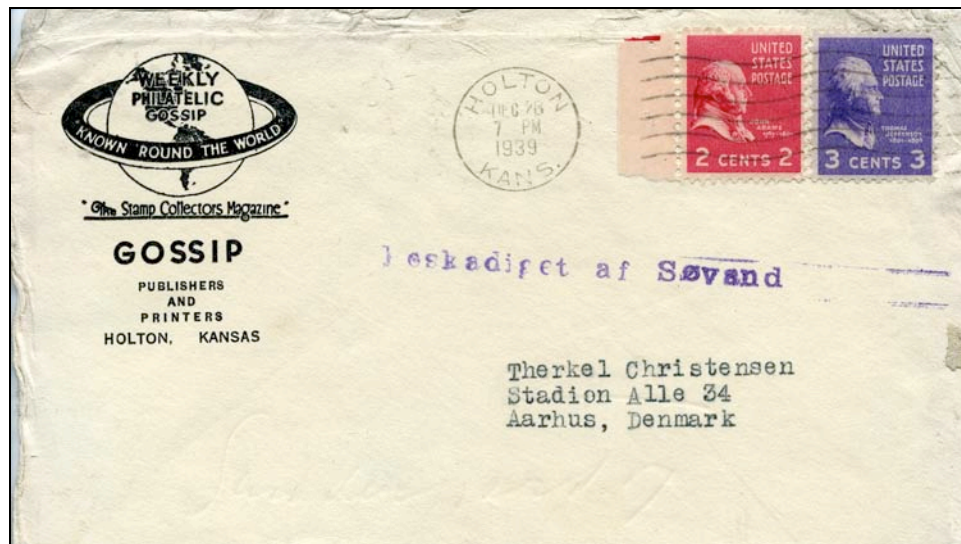
The 6-cent airmail concession rate per half-ounce remained in effect until October 1, 1946 when airmail between *any* two U.S. post offices was charged the new uniform rate of 5 cents per ounce.

[Ed. Note: Bill Geijsbeek writes a column on 20th-century postal stationery for *Postal Stationery*, the journal of the United Postal Stationary Society.]

**John Adams and Thomas Jefferson Survive Sinking
Of Their Ship by A German Submarine**

by

Lawrence Sherman



The Danish steamship *Vidar* has the distinction of being the first vessel sunk in World War II to have any of its mail salvaged. The cover shown here, with its straight line Danish-language hand stamp translated as “Damaged by Seawater,” was originally carried in one of the ship’s mail sacks. The hand stamp barely hints at the unfortunate fate of the steamship, its crew, and its postal cargo.

Vidar left New York in early January 1940 carrying 134 sacks of letters, prints, registered articles, and parcels from the United States, together with 11 sacks of foreign closed transit mail, all destined for delivery to Denmark. While crossing the North Sea from England to Denmark on January 31, 1940, the ship was bombed and damaged by a Luftwaffe plane. The next day, the German submarine U-21 torpedoed and sank *Vidar*. Sixteen of *Vidar*’s crew were killed in the attacks; eight survivors on a raft were rescued by a Danish ship and taken to Stavanger, Denmark.

About six weeks later, three sacks of mail from the sunken ship washed ashore on the east coast of England. British postal authorities dried the mail and forwarded it to Copenhagen. Much of the salvaged mail was undeliverable as addresses had become illegible or had simply washed away.

Not so with the cover shown here. Its printed corner card and typed name and address of the intended recipient are clearly preserved. The two Prexies, 2-cent John Adams and 3-cent Thomas Jefferson, paid the 5-cent international surface rate from the United States, but floated off the envelope and were hinged back into place. There they sit today after their interrupted journey, “damaged by seawater,” but survivors of the brutal business of war.

[Ed. Note: Lawrence Sherman is editor of the award winning book *The United States Post Office In World War II.*]