



# The Prexie Era

Newsletter of the USSS 1938 Presidential-Era Committee

No. 70 Summer 2015

Louis Fiset, Editor/Publisher  
fiset@uw.edu

## Twilight of the Prexies - Certified Mail

by Stephen L. Suffet



Figure 1: 10-cent Prexie pays 3-cent first class letter rate + 7-cent return receipt fee.

Certified mail service was on its way in at the same time the U.S. Presidential Series was on its way out.

Originally conceived by Assistant Postmaster General Joseph Cooper as a less expensive alternative to domestic registered mail when neither indemnification for loss nor high security handling was required, Postmaster General Arthur E. Summerfield first officially proposed certified mail service on February 15, 1955. After the Post Office Department (P.O.D.) held hearings and promulgated the necessary regulations, the service came into

### *Inside*

<b>Resumption of Parcel Post Service to Finland, 1945</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Second Class Mail</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Certificate of Mailing Fees</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>The Famous Americans Issue in Wartime, 1940-1941</b>	<b>9</b>

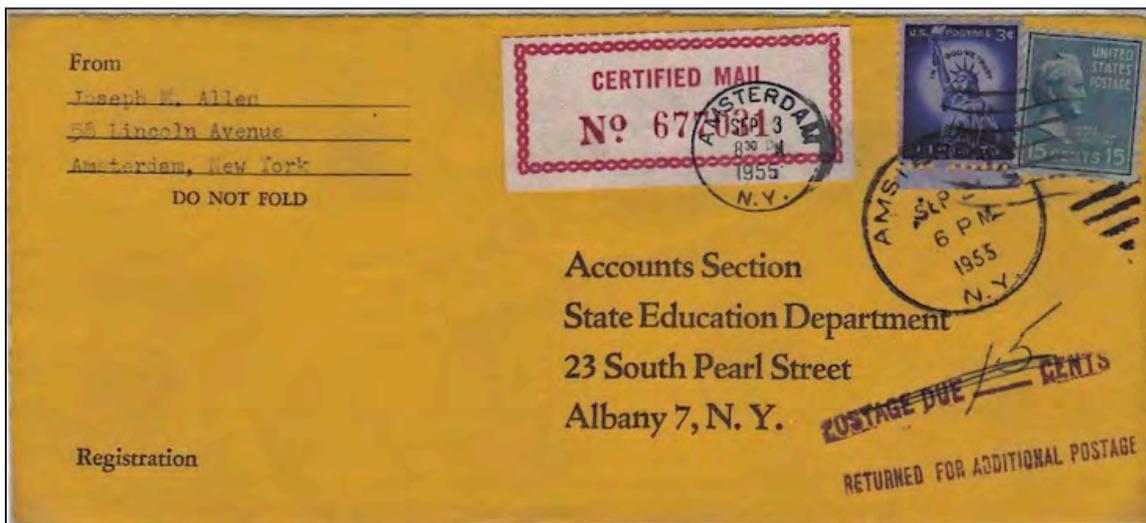


Figure 2: A 15-cent Prexie added to pay the certified mail fee after the article had been returned. 3-cent Liberty paid the first class letter rate.

effect on June 6, 1955, in Washington, D.C., and on the following day throughout the rest of the United States. The initial fee for certified mail was 15 cents in addition to the postage, either surface or air mail. The zero indemnity registered mail fee, which was then discontinued, had been 30 cents in addition to the postage, so the launching of this new service amounted to an immediate fee reduction of 50 per cent.

Meanwhile, P.O.D. had begun to phase in the Liberty Series with the release of the 8-cent value on April 9, 1954. Unlike 1938-1939, when P.O.D. issued all the basic denominations and formats of the Prexies within a nine-month period,\* it took P.O.D. 11 years to do the same for the Liberty Series. During the first six or seven of those 11 years, a significant number of Prexies were still in current use. It is thus not difficult to find certified mail covers where one or more Presidential Series stamps paid at least part of the postage and fees.

Among the most common examples are covers like the one in Figure 1, used from Blissfield, Michigan, on December 19, 1956. It shows a 10-cent Prexie paying the 3-cent one-ounce first class letter rate plus the 7-cent return receipt

fee, while a 15-cent certified mail stamp (Scott no. FA1) paid the fee for that service.

Nearly as common are covers where a solo 25-cent Prexie paid for everything: 3 cents first class postage + 7 cents return receipt fee + 15 cents certified mail fee. Also plentiful are covers where either a 3-cent Liberty Series stamp or a 3-cent stamped envelope paid the first class letter rate, a 15-cent certified mail stamp paid the certified mail fee, and a 7-cent Prexie paid the return receipt fee.

By contrast, the cover in Figure 2 is relatively uncommon and for two reasons. First, a 15-cent Prexie rather than a certified mail stamp paid the certified mail fee. P.O.D. strongly encouraged use of the specially designed stamp rather than an ordinary definitive throughout the 1955-1957 period when the original 15-cent certified mail fee was in effect.

Second, the mailer initially neglected to pay the certified mail fee at all, depositing the article into the mail with only a 3-cent Liberty Series stamp. The post office in Amsterdam, New York, canceled that stamp with a steel duplex hand stamp on September 2, 1955, and then returned the item to the sender for the missing

15 cents. The mailer then added the 15-cent Prexie in a space in the upper right corner of the cover where he might have intended to put a stamp in the first place. He then crossed out the **POSTAGE DUE 15 CENTS** marking and posted the item again. On September 3, 1955, the Amsterdam post office applied a machine cancellation and sent it on its way to the Accounts Section of the State Education Department in Albany, about 40 miles to the southeast.

It is worth noting that the 7-cent, 10-cent, 15-cent, and 25-cent values were among the Liberty Series stamps that had not yet been issued at the time certified mail service went into effect in 1955. The Bureau of Engraving and Printing was still producing and P.O.D. distributing the Presidential Series stamps in those denominations, along with many others.

Along with many other fees for special postal service, the certified mail fee increased to 20 cents on July 1, 1957. By that time the transition for the Presidential Series to the Liberty Series was two years farther along, and certified mail covers showing Prexies paying part or all of the postage and fees are not at all scarce, but a little harder to find.

The cover in Figure 3, with a September 13, 1957, machine cancellation from Narberth,

Pennsylvania, is one typical example. The 20-cent Prexie paid the certified mail fee, while the 3-cent stamped envelope accounted for the first class letter rate postage. The 20-cent Liberty Series stamp had already been issued in 1956, but 20-cent Prexies were still being distributed to post offices in Fiscal Year 1958, which ran from July 1, 1957 through June 30, 1958. The 20-cent Prexie was therefore still a current issue when this item was mailed.

The next change in the certified mail fee occurred on March 26, 1966 when it rose to 30 cents. Do certified mail covers with Prexies exist from that 30-cent rate period or later? Undoubtedly they do. However, by that time the transition to the Liberty Series was complete, and introduction of the subsequent Prominent Americans Series, which began in 1965, was well underway.

Although exceptions can be found, it is the author's experience that the vast majority of Prexie covers from the end of 1962 onward appear to be to or from philatelists. So, while it is somewhat arbitrary, December 31, 1962 is as good a point in time as any to mark the end of the Prexie era.

-----  
\* Even if we consider the two stamps overprinted CANAL ZONE, the entire process of releasing the Prexies took less than seventeen months.

Figure 3: A 20-cent Prexie paid the certified mail fee on a 3-cent stamped envelope.



## Resumption of Parcel Post Mail to Finland, 1945

by Louis Fiset



Figure: \$1.40 pays the 10 pound parcel post rate to Finland. Resumption of parcel post service began September 17, 1945.

The parcel tag shown here documents the restart of parcel post mail to Finland at the end of World War II. It is postmarked East Willston, NY, December 13, 1945, three months after the Postmaster General's September 17, 1945 order authorizing the resumption of parcel post mail. A second order, published in the same *Postal Bulletin* (PB 18859), authorizes postal clerks to accept all classes of mail to Finland -- post cards, letter mail, air mail, and mail with registry and special delivery service

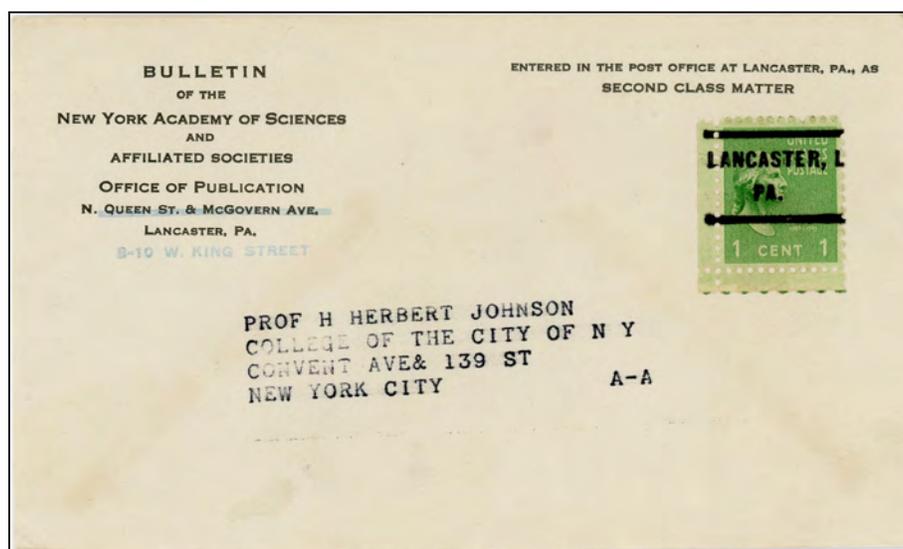
The \$1.40 franking affixed to the tag correctly paid the postage for a package weighing up to 10 pounds (14 cents per pound), per *The U.S. Official Postal Guide*. The PMG imposed an initial 11 pound weight limit (prewar weight limit was 44 pounds.) Postage for parcel post and all other classes of resumed mail was payable at the international rates in effect at the beginning of the war.

On June 15, 1940 parcel post service had been suspended to Finland and 29 other countries owing to disruptions in transportation resulting in the early days of the war. On December 11, 1941, following Germany's declaration of war on the U.S. (PB 18343), all mail service to Finland was suspended. Having gone to war in 1940 against the Soviet Union, a U.S. ally, Finland became a belligerent nation on the side of the Axis.

Resumption of parcel post service to countries in Europe occurred as soon as shipping became available and infrastructure -- post offices, rail lines, harbor facilities, personnel, etc., restored. Packages containing food and comfort items became lifelines to people living in destitution in countries ravaged by the war. In the case of Finland, correspondents in the U.S. could send one 11-pound package per week.

## Second Class Mail

by Bob Hohertz



*Figure 1:* Sent out of state, this mailing can only be an example of the transient second class rate. [In Beecher & Wawrukiewicz, p. 107.]

One of the more difficult areas to get our heads around for us Prexie era collectors is second class mail. Conventional wisdom is that we don't need to worry about it, since very little of it used stamps to pay the postage. There is a lot of truth in this, but there are those occasional instances where stamps were used to send second class materials, and some of these are not easy to fit into our generalization.

The most prominent exception to the no-stamps rule is the transient second class rate. In the 1940 Postal Laws and Regulations one can find a fleeting reference to the transient rate:

The rate of postage on publications entered as second-class-matter, when sent by others than the publisher or news agent, shall be 1 cent for each 2 ounces or fraction thereof, except when the rates prescribed for fourth-class matter is lower, in which case the latter rate will apply: Provided, that these rates shall also apply to sample copies of publications entered as second-class matter mailed in excess of the quantity entitled by law to be sent at the pound rates, and to copies mailed by

publishers to other than subscribers or to persons who are not properly includable in the legitimate list of subscribers required by law.

Note – The transient second-class rate above referred to is to be computed on each individually addressed copy, or package of unaddressed copies, and not on the bulk weight of separately addressed copies, including those intended for delivery to boxholders. See sec. 579 as to mailings without stamps affixed.

Section 579 deals primarily with meters and permits, and need not concern us here. But note that this section contemplates stamps being affixed.

A classic cover sent from Pennsylvania to New York and appearing on the second page of The Transient Second-Class Rate chapter in Beecher and Wawrukiewicz, is shown in Figure 1. It isn't immediately clear why this mailing wasn't made in bulk, as it was mailed by the Philadelphia Office of Publication of the New York Academy of Sciences. Perhaps Professor Johnson wasn't a member of the group that would normally receive the letter, or the fact



Figure 2: Magazine sent in 1942. Weight of 13.1 ounces, rounded to 14, results in seven cents postage at one cent per two ounces.

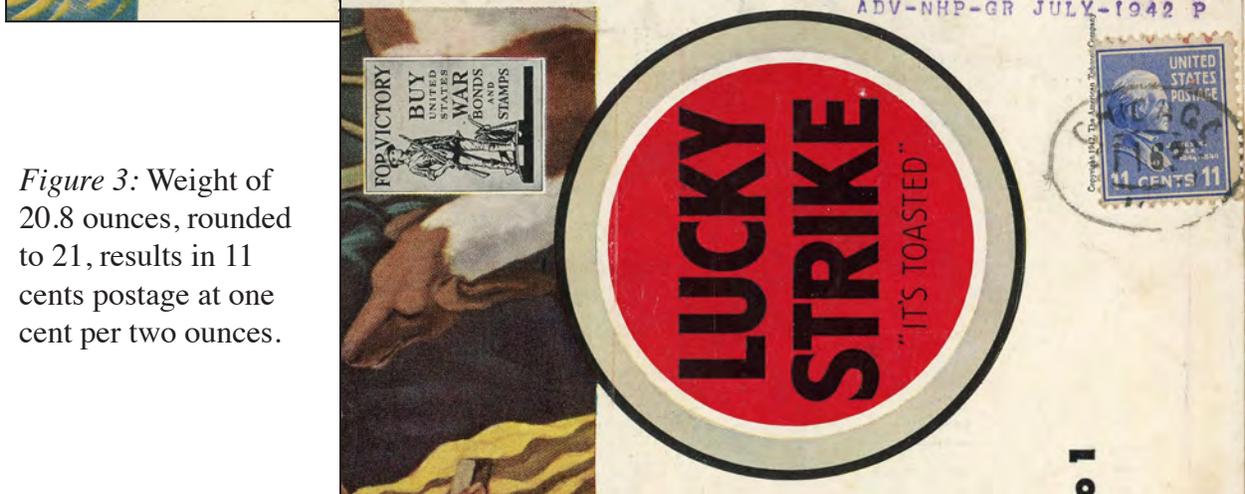


Figure 3: Weight of 20.8 ounces, rounded to 21, results in 11 cents postage at one cent per two ounces.

it was being mailed from a different address in Lancaster than that on file with the Post Office (new address is handstamped) caused a technical difficulty.

My other examples of the transient second-class rate are a series of *Life* magazines sent from Chicago to Wichita over a period in the 1940's. Two examples are shown in Figures 2 and 3. These magazines are too heavy to have been sent as third class, and the transient rate used was less than the Zone 4 fourth class rates.

*Life* was entered as second class matter in Chicago. However, it is unlikely the sender

was an agent of *Life* rather than a secondary provider, or there would not have been any reason not to include these mailings in the regular shipments in bulk.

Not all second class uses bearing stamps fit into the transient rate schedule. Section 543 of the 1940 PL&Rs provides another such use.

Publications of the second class, one copy to each actual subscriber residing in the county where the same are printed, in whole or in part, and published, shall go free through the mails; but the same shall not be delivered at letter carrier offices,



Figure 4: Cropped from the cover of a 5-ounce *Science and Mechanics* magazine. Sent for two cents with a weight over four ounces, this cannot be a transient rate.

or distributed by carriers unless postage is paid thereon at \* \* \* (the cent-a-pound rate). The rate of postage on newspapers, excepting weeklies, and periodicals not exceeding two ounces in weight, when the same are deposited in a letter-carrier office for delivery by its carriers, shall be uniform at one cent each; periodicals weighing more than two ounces shall be subject, when delivered by such carriers, to a postage of two cents each, and these rates shall be prepaid by stamps affixed (except as provided in sec. 579).

The important part of that section for our purposes is the bit about 1- and 2-cent rates,

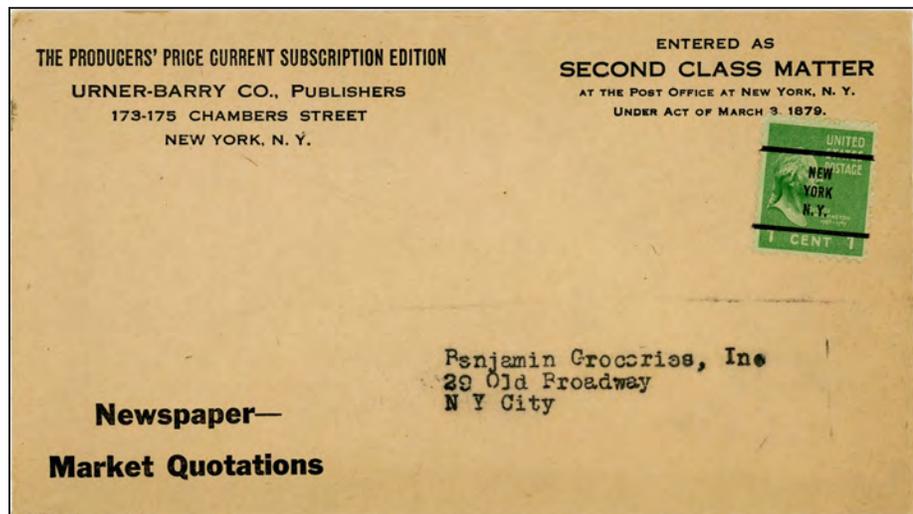
to be prepaid by stamps. This explains several other second class publications in my collection that bear stamps, but do not fall under the transient rate schedule.

Figure 4 shows an example of this rate on a five ounce October, 1945 copy of *Science and Mechanics*, a bi-monthly magazine entered as second class material at Chicago, and mailed to a local subscriber for two cents. It would have cost three cents if mailed under the transient rate of 1-cent per two ounces or fraction thereof. But it was in-county, so the mailer could take advantage of the 2-cent maximum.

Figure 5 is interesting in that it could have been sent under the transient rate schedule since it probably weighed less than two ounces, or under the in-county schedule since both sender and addressee were in New York City. For all practical purposes, for four ounces or under, the rates are the same, and both normally would be paid using stamps or meters.

If anyone has a different slant on how these second class items came to be sent using stamps, or the rates used on them, please let me know.

Figure 5: Sent in-county for one cent, this mailing could fit under either the transient or in-county rate schedules.



## Certificate of Mailing Fees

by Robert Schlesinger

The last issue of *The Prexie Era* included a discussion of precanceled stamps on Post Office Department Form 3817, the Certificate of Mailing form used as proof of mailing, but not to provide indemnity of any kind.

Originally instituted for parcel post use in 1915, its use expanded on July 1, 1929 to include all classes of mail. The fee had been set at 1 cent per piece of mail.

Form 3817 was to be used as proof of mailing for individual pieces, whereas the sheet sized Form 3817a, popular among Prexie collectors, was for multiple pieces of mail up to 15, with a stamp affixed corresponding to the total number of pieces rated at 1 cent per item.

On February 1, 1954 the 1-cent fee on Form 3817 was raised to 3 cents. The figure shows the 3-cent rate with a precanceled stamp affixed.

## The Famous Americans Issue in Wartime, 1940-1941

by Louis Fiset

The Famous Americans issue consists of 35 commemorative stamps issued over the course of 1940, with the 1-cent Washington Irving stamp coming first, on January 29th, and the 10-cent Alexander Graham Bell stamp the last, on October 28th. The series remained in popular use until the end of 1941 when the U.S. entered the war against Germany and its allies.

During this two year period war was raging in Europe, North Africa, and the USSR. But at home the war was far off in a distant place, and the America First movement was active trying to keep the nation out of the conflict.

Some cover collectors have noted an apparent schizophrenic existence for this series. Domestic correspondence rarely reveals a reference to the war. Patriotic covers are uncommon, and even labels on mail promoting America First are difficult to come by. A close examination of domestic mail involving the Famous Americans might lead one to think there was no war going on at all.

International correspondence, on the other hand, shows an entirely different picture. All outgoing mail was subject to British, French, and German censorship, with most

Figure 1: Up-rated government issued postal card paying the international post card rate to Germany, Postmarked January 4, 1941. Censored at Bermuda showing a scarce censor marking. Examined by German censors at Frankfurt. No receiving date.



Figure 2: Transatlantic airmail to Lisbon, with onward air connection to England intended. Inadvertently sent on Ala Littoria from Lisbon to Rome where the contents were examined by Italian censorship. The letter was then returned to the writer, likely by surface route.

other countries in Europe and beyond in various stages of examining the mail. As a result, correspondents could expect delays in transmission caused by censorship, rerouting, and even suspension of their mail, altogether.

Shown above are two international covers bearing the Famous Americans issue that

illustrate the impact of the war on transmission of the mail prior to the U.S. involvement.

The next page shows two third-class single piece items requiring fractional postage to correctly pay the rate. Since no fractional values exist for this issue, convenience franking or mixed franking often becomes necessary.

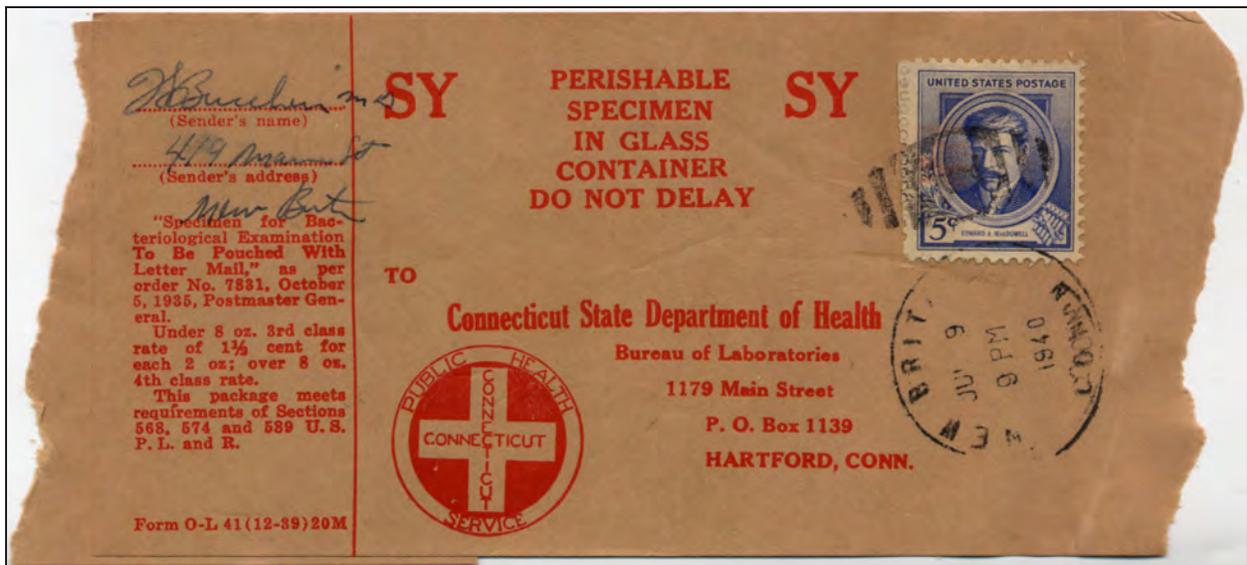


Figure 3: Specimen bottle with contents for bacteriological examination of suspected syphilus (SY). Six-ounce weight required 4.5 cents (1.5 x 3) postage. Half-cent convenience franking paid.



Figure 4: Third-class correspondence (Christmas card) accepted, then re-mailed via third class. Half-cent convenience franking paid.