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Certified Mail: First Day of Rate Covers

by Stephen L. Suffet

Ed. Note: This is the first in a series of articles exploring the first and/or last day of postal rates during the Prexie Era. The author is well-known for collecting, exhibiting, and writing about 20th century U.S. postal history. The examples he will discuss come from his own extensive collection.



Fig. 1: A typical 15-cent certified mail stamp first day cover. The 3-cent commemorative paid the letter rate postage. Washington, D.C. June 6, 1955.

Certified mail service began in Washington, D.C., on June 6, 1955, as a less costly alternative to registered mail when neither high security handling nor indemnification for loss was needed. The following day it became available throughout the rest of the United States, its military post offices, and possessions. The initial certified mail fee was 15 cents in addition to the surface or air mail postage. Certified mail was, and still is, strictly a domestic service, although on January 1, 1991, the United States

began recorded delivery service, pretty much equivalent to certified mail service, to certain foreign destinations.

Covers showing the first day of certified mail service used from Washington, D.C., are common because the 15-cent certified mail stamp (Scott no. FA1) was issued in that city on June 6, 1955. There is no shortage of first day covers. Figure 1 shows a typical example.

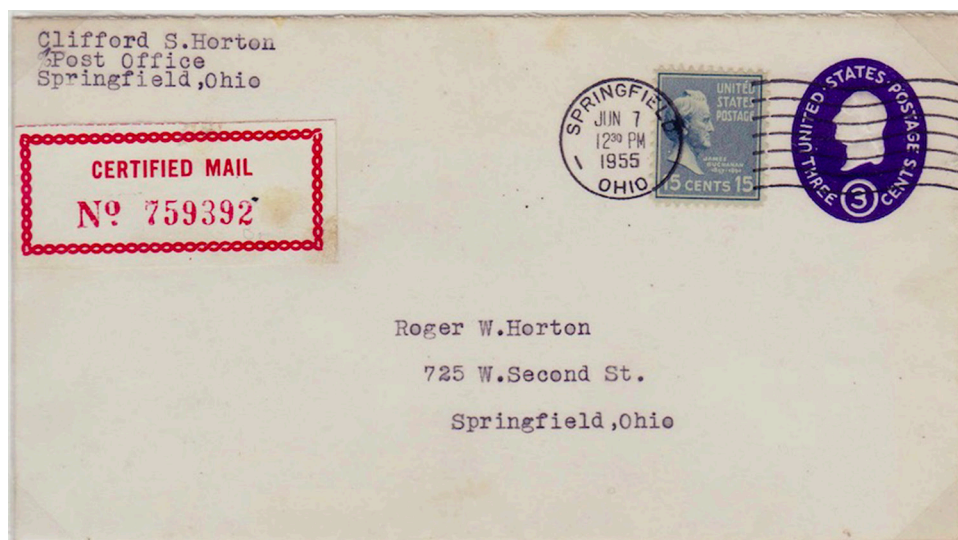


Fig. 2: First day of certified mail service outside Washington, D.C. The 15-cent Prexie paid the certified mail fee while the 3-cent stamped envelope paid the letter rate postage. Springfield, Ohio. June 7, 1955.

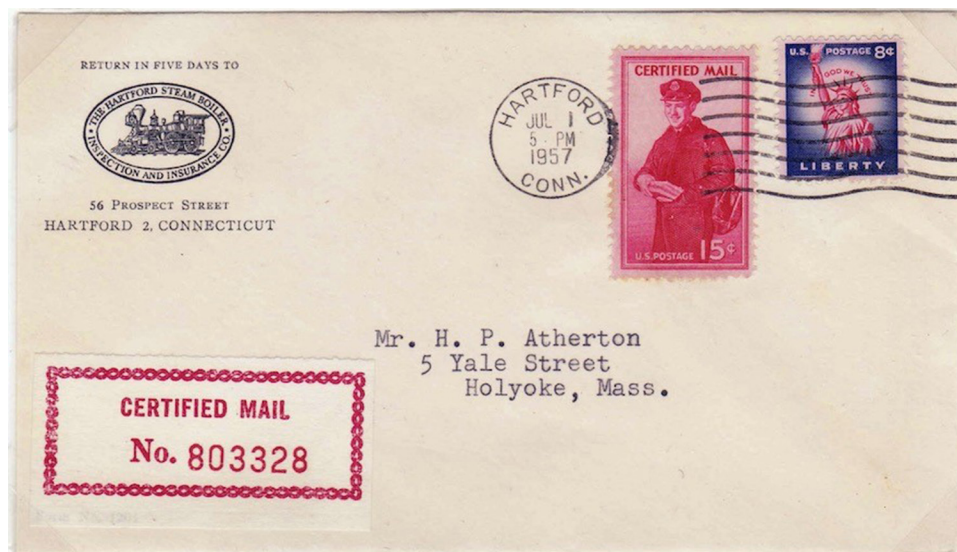


Fig. 3: First day of 20-cent certified mail fee. Letter rate postage was still 3 cents, so the two stamps paid a total of 23 cents. Hartford, Connecticut. July 1, 1957.

Covers showing the first day of certified mail service from elsewhere are decidedly scarce. The cover pictured in Figure 2 is an example. It was used locally within Springfield, Ohio, and postmarked on June 7, 1955. The 15-cent Prexie paid the certified mail fee while the 3-cent stamped envelope paid the one-ounce surface letter rate, for a total of 18 cents.

While the Liberty Series began to supplant the Prexies in 1954, the new 15-cent stamp did not

appear until late 1958. Meanwhile, the 15-cent Prexie remained in production and continued to be shipped to post offices into Fiscal Year 1960, which ran through June 30 of that year. It was, therefore, the only current 15-cent definitive stamp available when certified mail service began.

That was still the case when the certified mail fee rose to 20 cents on July 1, 1957. Figure 3 pictures a cover postmarked on that date.

However, instead of a 15-cent Prexie, a 15-cent certified mail stamp paid three-quarters of the new certified mail fee, while an 8-cent Liberty Series stamp paid the remaining 5 cents of the fee plus the 3-cent letter rate for a total of 23 cents.

The certified mail fee next changed on March 26, 1966, when it increased to 30 cents. That, however, was after the Prexie Era had come to an end. Certified mail covers do exist with Prexies paying some or all of the 30-cent fee, but they are almost always from stamp dealers, or have some other philatelic connections.

Complementary Prexie Local Letter Rate Usages

by Richard Martorelli



The article by Albert “Chip” Briggs in the Spring 2021 issue of *The Prexie Era* was a wonderfully written explanation of the local letter rate and differences between carrier and non-carrier services. Following are two additional usages complementary to those shown.

The first usage is a small (4 inch by 2 5/8s inch) envelope postmarked at Toledo, OH in 1941, and addressed locally. It is franked with a 1½-cent Prexie in attempt to use the third class printed material/no writing “greeting card” rate. However, the sender licked the envelope flap, thereby sealing it and rendering it not “open for inspection.” It therefore became unacceptable for the third class rate. The POD assessed the envelope ½ cent postage due to equal the 2-cent first class local carrier rate, then delivered the item.

The second usage is a greeting-card sized envelope postmarked at Fishers Island, NY in 1951, and addressed “Local”. It is franked 1 cent for the first class local non-carrier rate. Fishers Island is located at the eastern entrance to Long Island Sound, approximately two miles off the southeastern coast of Connecticut, opposite Stonington. Although Fishers Island is geographically close to the Connecticut coast, it is politically a hamlet of the Town of Southold, NY, at the eastern end of Long Island, 10 miles to the southwest. This situation can be traced to the Duke of York’s 1664 land patent, which overrode Connecticut’s prior claims to the island. The bitterly disputed boundary line was finally settled in 1879/80.

Today, regular passenger and auto ferry service connects the Island with New London, CT via a 45-minute boat ride. The only way for New



York state troopers to get to Fishers Island is to travel through Connecticut and take the ferry from New London. As a seasonal resort, the Island's population fluctuates greatly. In 1950, there were about 500 residents, while today there are about 125. The off-season number increases to several thousand during peak summer periods. The illustrated cover indirectly indicates that the "non-carrier" status

where mail is picked up by residents at the post office. Currently, Fishers Island's zip code of 06390 corresponds to Connecticut zip codes that begin with "06", while other residential zip codes in New York State begin with "1". On the USPS website, the Fishers Island Post Office instructs customers to "Please address all mail completely, including the box number of the addressee and Fishers Island, NY 06390."

Privately Cancelled Prexie Puzzle Revisited

by Richard Matta

In the Winter 2021 issue of *The Prexie Era* I outlined a theory for the existence of a privately canceled Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) envelope with \$2.34 in various Prexie denominations. The note that came with the item indicated it was "to account for postage on 78 bills left in customers' mailboxes by PG&E meter readers (no charge on hand over bills) these customers not at home." I noted this explanation was inconsistent with postal regulations regarding "out of mails" usages in several respects.

In response, Dan Pagter suggested that from his own personal experience the quoted language was likely accurate. He wrote the following:

The bills handed directly to the customer were not in an envelope, thus did not constitute first class matter any more than the invoice received at a plumbing store was first class matter. The employee of PG&E had every right to be on the property and conduct business with a customer. They would even hand them to little kids like me.



Pagter thought these were past-due reminders, rather than original bills (which likely were mailed). Ones not delivered by hand would be put in the customer's mailbox, and subject to payment of postage to be paid later, in bulk. Pagter went on to explain that he had once seen "stacks" of these bulk-cancelled covers, and that his father, a career postal employee in that time period, confirmed this was common practice.

In effect, he suggests that the local postal authorities were more interested in following the spirit of the law than its letter. I note that the private express statutes in 1954 did not contain any exception for bills or any other matter handed over without an envelope – and in fact were explicit that utility bills were letters (they

give an example of a water bill), whether in or out of envelopes, and even if hand delivered to the recipient and not placed in a mailbox. Sometime later, perhaps as a nod to common practice, the PES were amended to allow full-time employees of a business to deliver and hand over bills to customers, if the employees were not specifically hired for that purpose.

Another reader, Wout Janse of the Netherlands, shared a scan of a similar item he found in the U.S. more than 20 years ago. While it confirms the Merced item is not a one-off example, it raises an additional mystery as to why the \$1.91 postage is not divisible by 3 cents per ounce postage.

Prexie EFO Booklet Panes - Plate 22009

by Francis Ferguson



This article started off as a simple presentation of Prexie EFO material showing booklet panes with plate numbers. But soon it morphed into a more in-depth consideration of why this specific type of error occurred. Expecting to find documentation to help clarify the scarcity of plate numbers on the right side of booklet panes, instead I found nothing that officially explains it. Perhaps this article will spark some dialogue, and maybe a definitive explanation of the cause will result.

Plate numbers on booklet panes are both interesting and at times frustrating beyond measure. The simple fact is that if you find a plate number on a booklet pane it is because of a failure in the production finishing process.

After nearly 15 years of collecting this

material, I show here my only complete set, from plate 22009. Plate 22009 was sent to press on December 13, 1939 and cancelled on September 1, 1944 after 554,560 impressions. The number of impressions represents the highest total for any of the plates used for the 1-cent booklet. The ever-elusive lower right position always seems to be the sticking point to completing a set of four.

The other two interesting pieces related to #22009 in my collection I found on eBay. The used booklet pane shown was used in period and has 100% of the plate number in upper left corner. The fact that the tab is missing from the top of the pane suggests the pane was used on a private or commercial cover rather than philatelically inspired. This is an unusual piece but not rare.



The booklet pane with the “bump out” is visually striking. This oddity was created by a fold descending from the left side of middle stamp and bisecting the lower left stamp. A secondary fold runs through the first ‘0’ of the plate number, again moving from top to bottom across the stamp. This is a very unusual piece and, I dare say, unique.

According to the Durland catalog, most Prexie pane plates can be found with good percentages (65 per cent or more) of the number showing in the UL and LL positions. Right pane positions appear infrequently, and percentages often are too small for plate number identification. In fact, only five examples have been reported at 50 percent or more; eight from 30-50 per cent; and all others less than 30 per cent measurement.

With a total of 83 plate numbers recorded for the 1-cent pane, 26 have not yet had UR or LR positions reported. In contrast, all 83 numbers have been recorded at the UL position, all but two numbers for the lower LL.

So, why are UR and LR plate number panes so scarce? John Hotchner and Ken Lawrence have offered a possible explanation. Assembling and finishing booklets was the least mechanized stamp production system during the Prexie

era. The stacked piles of stamp prints, glassine interleaves, and cardboard covers would have shifted left/right during the finishing process resulting in progressively more misplaced cuts and greater percentage of the plate numbers showing.

The natural tendency for materials to “creep” with applied pressure would give some credence to the appearance of fewer plate numbers on the right side of the pane. This area would experience the least amount of “creep” since the cutting process moved from right to left.

EFO material can be expensive to acquire. The total investment in these six pieces was about \$120. As a general guide, full plate numbers on the left side showing 100% will command \$50 to \$100. Any numbers on the right side will start around \$25 and escalate rapidly in accordance with the percentage of the number present.

I’ve been a life-long collector who went down the Prexie EFO rabbit-hole about 15 years ago. Any additional insight as to the scarcity of right-side plate numbers on Prexie booklet panes will be deeply appreciated. Please e-mail me at: ferg@FloridaStampShows.com

One More Prexie Private Precancellation

by Stephen L. Suffet

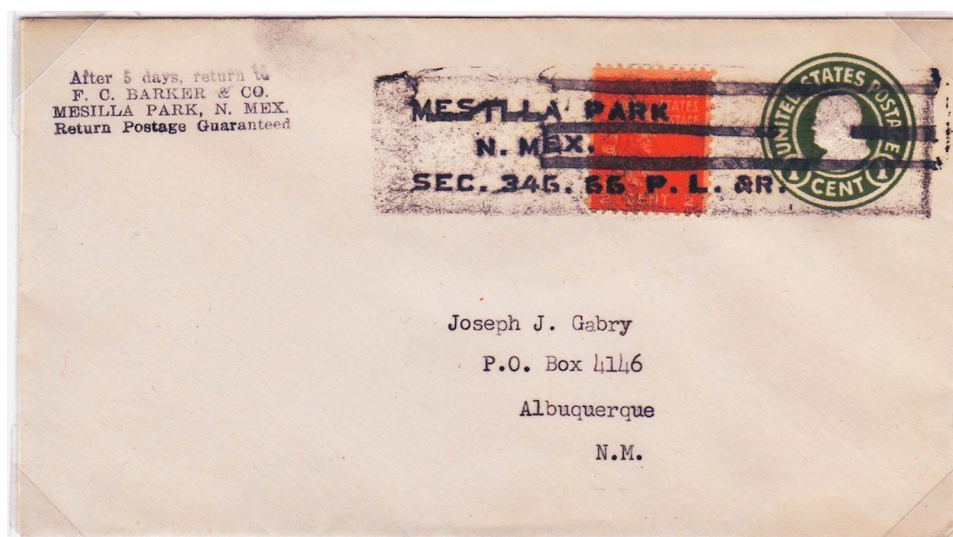


Fig. 1: Private precancellation on bulk cover created with stencil process duplicating machine. Note the erroneous citation of the non-existent Section 346.66 (should be Section 34.66) of the Postal Laws and Regulations.

Although an order from the United States Postmaster General dating back to 1911 explicitly states, “Stamps may be precanceled only under the supervision of the postmaster or other sworn employee of the post office,”¹ I have previously written about how the Chem-Alpha corporation of Marlboro, New Jersey, precanceled 1-cent Prexie stamps with its own nonstandard device.² Whether or not this was done under proper supervision is not known.

Several other examples exist of Prexies precanceled with what appear to be privately produced devices. The best known are those mailed by or on behalf of the American Philatelic Society. On-cover examples of such APS precancels are relatively common. By contrast, the cover shown in Figure 1 is much scarcer. It is a 1-cent Circular Die stamped envelope with a ½-cent Prexie added to make up the minimum third class bulk rate of 1½-cents per piece that went into effect on July 1, 1952. The Mesilla Park, New Mexico, precancellation appears to have been created with a stencil process

duplicating machine; it mimics the standard government precancellation used on stamped envelopes at the time.

Of particular note is the erroneous bulk rate endorsement that is an integral part of the precancellation. Instead of properly citing Section 34.66 of the current Postal Laws and Regulations, the precancellation cites the non-existent Section 346.66. This conspicuous mistake is evidence that the precancellation was created privately by or on behalf of the mailer, F.C. Barker & Company, rather than by the Mesilla Park post office itself.

The firm of F.C. Barker & Company dates back to the 1890s. While its holdings included some farm land near Mesilla Park, its primary business was as a wholesale commission merchant that sold and shipped produce from many farms in the region. The company still exists today as Barker Produce, Inc., and is still owned by the same family that started it before the beginning of the last century.

Mesilla Park was originally a small community in Doña Ana County just south of Las Cruces and just east of Mesilla. Its post office opened in 1892. As a consequence of post-World War II urban expansion and consolidation, in 1964 Mesilla Park became a district within the City of Las Cruces. Nevertheless, it still has its own separate post office, Mesilla Park NM 88047. Several questions arise from this cover:

- Did the Mesilla Park postmaster or some other sworn employee of the Post Office Department authorize the use of this precancellation? If so, who was it, and when did he or she give the authorization? Or was this precancellation unauthorized but nevertheless tolerated?
- Why did the mailer use this design rather than the standard mailer's permit postmark design that had been authorized for use on postal stationery since 1925? See Figure 2.
- When exactly was this precancellation used? Do any covers exist with dated contents? Were any covers docketed upon receipt? Are there any that were forwarded or returned to sender with dated postmarks?

What we do know is that the 1½-cent bulk rate remained in effect through December 31,

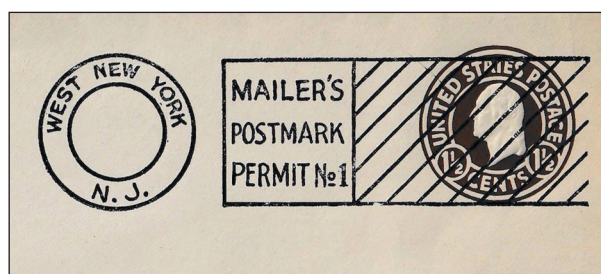


Fig. 2: Standard design mailer's permit postmark authorized for postal stationery beginning in 1925.

1958. However, by the end of 1954, the bulk rate endorsement had changed to the words "BULK RATE" or an abbreviation of the same. Meanwhile, the new Oval Dies series began to replace the Circular Die stamped envelopes in 1950, so I suspect the usage was most likely no later than 1955. That is the year when the ½-cent Liberty Series stamp began to supplant the Prexie. Of course, this is only an educated guess, and usage any time prior to January 1, 1959, is possible.

If you have answers to any of these questions, please e-mail me at: ssuffet@nyc.rr.com

Endnotes:

1. *The Postal Bulletin*. December 6, 1911 (9689), p. 1.
2. *The Prexie Era*. Winter 2021 (No. 92), pp. 7-8.

Prexie Era Now Online, Searchable by Key Word

The Prexie Era has been updated to the current issue on the USSS website. The entire run may now be searched by keyword and has been book marked for title and author. Each new issue will be uploaded after being sent out to subscribers. Individual issues and the entire run can be downloaded to your desktop. You need not be a USSS member to access *The Prexie Era*. Open the USSS website, click on RESOURCES and scroll down to The Prexie Era.

Unauthorized Use of Special Delivery/Airmail Stamp

by Louis Fiset



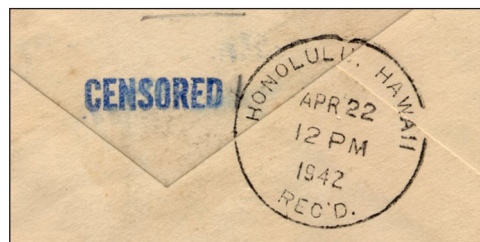
On February 10, 1936 a bicolored stamp was issued for the prepayment in one stamp of domestic airmail postage and the special delivery fee. It replaced a similar, blue adhesive issued 18 months earlier.

As transpacific airmail use increased, postal patrons misused the combination stamp, using the entire 16 cents to pay part of the transpacific airmail rates then in effect. The rate from the mainland to Hawaii was lowered from 25 cent to 20 cents, effective April 21, 1937.

The *U.S. Postal Bulletin* of March 10, 1937 (No. 17138) clarified the authorized use of the just issued 20 and 50 cent airmail stamps for transpacific dispatch and specifically noted the following in relation to the combination stamp:

Special-delivery stamps, including 10 cents of the combination 16-cent airmail special delivery stamp, can be used only for payment of special delivery fees.

Thus, only 6 cents of the 16-cent face value of the combination stamp could be applied to airmail postage rates.



The example shown here illustrates one such unauthorized use, on civilian internee mail from Camp McCoy, Wisc. to the writers wife, also an internee, at Sand Island, Hawaii. The face value of the stamps affixed was to pay the 20-cent airmail rate, since no special delivery service was demanded. The transit time from San Francisco to Honolulu was two days, confirming that airmail service was provided. But note also the special delivery fee claimed stamp applied by the receiving post office.

Hideo Yokota, dean of the two airmail/special delivery stamps, advises me that, in his experience, rarely was mail returned to senders for additional 10 cents airmail postage or assessed postage due at the receiving end. The cover shown here and several others in the same correspondence are consistent with Yokota's experience.