

Rejections and Repairs in U.S. Stamp Production at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing: The 3rd Bureau Issue (Washington-Franklin) Era Through the Prexie Era

Objective: This one frame exhibit illustrates with rare/scarc material the ways in which the Treasury Department's Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) during the period covered (a) identified and marked defective stamps ("waste") during the production process, (b) in some cases repaired the sheets so production could be completed, and (c) used the markings or repairs to identify, excise and destroy defective material before it could reach postal retail counters.

Context & Definitions: *Waste*, or incomplete/flawed product, is a part of every printing operation no matter how sophisticated. The printer's goal is to keep it from leaving the printing plant.

Rejection Marks, were used to identify waste to be excised and destroyed at the Quality Control (QC) end of production. They were added when flawed material was intentionally created, or discovered during production.

Repairs are made to defective product to enable completion of the production process. Repairs are not made to every rejected item; and not every instance of defective product is rejected. Flawed material can escape detection all the way to and through QC, and wind up in post offices.

This exhibit deals only with material that was marked for rejection and/or repaired; but was not caught at QC.

Scope: The exhibit begins with the Washington-Franklin era because that is where the first known rejection markings and repairs occur. The BEP began to produce U.S. stamps in 1894. Sheet-fed presses produced sheets of 400 flat-plate printed definitive stamps, in four post office panes of 100 stamps each. Production equipment was operated by staff who handled every single sheet multiple times. They readily identified problem material for destruction. But as production quantities increased, personal attention to flawed material decreased.

The first repaired material to escape the BEP is found on a 1917 postage due block. Repairs were important on sheet-fed product as stamp paper was expensive, and damage to a single pane or even two panes of a 400-subject (4 pane) sheet triggered an effort to repair the sheet so that the remainder could be salvaged.

The first rejection markings are on 1919 sheet stamps. By then, quantities required by the Post Office Department were rising every year, and increasing automation and speed of production made detection more difficult. Repairs became even more important as the BEP switched to rotary press printing on paper in the form of a long "web"; using a sequence of paper-mill rolls that were spliced together as the press ran. Roll-to-roll splicing was done on-the-fly to prevent costly stopping and rethreading of the press when a roll ran out, or the web had to be repaired for the same reason when it tore during printing or split during perforating.

This exhibit excludes simple flat plate coil splices done to make early coil rolls. They are not really repairs. s

Rarity/Scarcity/Research: The BEP did an exceptional job of identifying and destroying repaired sheets and other rejected material. In this period, **fewer than 85 reported examples of it exist in collector hands, per this exhibitor's 45-year census; a stunning figure, since the BEP produced billions of stamps per year starting in the 1930s.** This exhibit shows 49 of the known pieces..

A reasonable question the viewer might ask at various points is: "How does the exhibitor know this?" All statements are authoritative. Some of the information in the exhibit is the result of observing presses in operation at the Bureau, talking in-person to the pressmen, or from written inquiries to the Bureau with written responses.

Organization of the Exhibit: The exhibit begins with the 1917 repair, and continues roughly chronologically. Because rate periods were in place for lengthy periods in the early years, the first sections are divided by definitive series (The 3rd Bureau Issue, 4th BI, and Presidential Era). This allows showing how different methods evolved and were used over time. Some methods have had long periods of use while others have been very short.

Completion: Every known method used in this, the period when methods were being established, are displayed..

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at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing
The 3rd Bureau Issue (Washington-Franklin) Era Through the Prexie Era
(Synopsis 5/26)**

Treatment: This one-frame exhibit tells the story in chronological order of the means by which the BEP **rejected** (marked for destruction) and sometimes **repaired** waste from the process of producing U.S. stamps. It begins in 1917 when the first such material is known and proceeds through the Presidentials era; the classic period in which methods of dealing with flawed material were established. Every major method or rejection and repair is included. The exhibitor considered an organization separating rejections and repairs, but many pieces shown include both elements and that did not work.

Importance: The processes for identifying defective stamps for destruction was of primary importance to the Bureau and to the Postal Service. The C3a is an outstanding example of what could happen if the processes did not work as intended and flawed material escaped. Very little does escape, and very little of that bears evidence of repair or rejection. But while seldom seen, it represents an important aspect of production, and is worthy of study to understand where it occurred in production, and why. This is the first exhibit to accomplish this.

Philatelic Knowledge and Research: This exhibit documents processes that are little known because so little evidence of them has escaped into philatelic hands. This testifies to the extraordinary success of the Bureau in destroying the significant amounts of waste – as high as 20% of production in the early years – thus keeping it from reaching the public. To do this exhibit required, in addition to an in-depth knowledge of stamps, an in-depth knowledge of production methods and the machinery used. Some of this is available in the works of George Brett, printed in the *United States Specialist* of the US Stamp Society.

Much additional information was gained from study of the material itself, and from visits to the BEP where the exhibitor had the opportunity to see presses in action, and to show the pressmen rejected and repaired material. Their thoughts on methods used have been invaluable, and enabled the exhibitor to write the five-part series noted below under References. While there had been articles in the philatelic press about individual finds, never before had a detailed overview of the field been published, and this exhibit takes the story further with additional material.

Rarity/Condition: As noted elsewhere, the exhibitor owns 51 of the 89 pieces known beyond the relatively common Prexie-era web and coil splices. That material must be shown. It is part of the story. But the examples shown here are not routine versions. For example, Prexie web splices are common because far more definitives were produced than commemoratives. Commemorative and back-of-the-book examples are also shown here. Some of the effects shown in this exhibit can be duplicated on additional items, but the breadth of the exhibit cannot be duplicated both because a good share of the material is unique, but also because it has taken nearly 50 years to assemble. By its nature, some of the material is a bit beaten up. It is what exists.

Presentation: Many of the pieces shown must be shown both back and front. This and the size of many pieces presented a challenge. Double pages have intentionally not been used as I intend to send the exhibit to several shows, and double pages make that difficult.

References: Hotchner, John M., "Philatelic Royalty of the 20th Century: Rejections and Repairs in the Bureau of Engraving and Printing – Parts I-IV", *Kelleher's Collectors Connection*, May-June, 2016 (pp 30-35), July-August, 2016 (pp 42-49), September-October, 2016 (pp 42-49), November-December, 2016 (pp 42-47); and Part V in *Kelleher's Stamp Collector's Quarterly*, First Quarter, 2017 (pp 48- 54)