

Perforating the Prexies

by Richard Pederson

This is the first of a series of columns on the Presidential issue of 1938, commonly called the Prexies, that I will be writing for *U.S. Stamp News*. I intend to cover both the stamps and their postal history.

The Prexies are the fifth definitive series of stamps printed by the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing. They were a long-running series with some of the stamps having in-period uses running from 1938 until the last delivery of stamps to post offices in 1960. The series included 32 face different stamps picturing each U.S. President up through Calvin Coolidge along with Benjamin Franklin on the ½¢ value, Martha Washington on the 1½¢ value, and the White House on the 4½¢ value. In addition, selected Prexie denominations were issued in booklet pane, horizontal coil, and vertical coil formats. There are booklet panes issued of the 1¢, 2¢, and 3¢ denominations. Horizontal coil versions were printed of the 1¢, 1½¢, 2¢, 3¢, 4¢, 5¢, 6¢, and 10¢ Prexies. Vertical coils were created of the 1¢, 1½¢, 2¢, and 3¢ values.

With well over 200 billion Prexie stamps printed, there are numerous production varieties, including those exhibiting problems with inking, perforating, and cutting of the printed sheets of stamps into post office formats. In this article, I am covering some of the problems encountered during perforating of the Prexies.

Although many instances of purportedly imperforate Prexies are simply partially perforated stamps (discussed below) or stamps with blind perforations (i.e., those where the perforation pins failed to completely penetrate the paper), there are a few instances where Prexie stamps exist as imperforate between pairs. Of the Prexies printed on the rotary press (i.e., the ½¢ through the 50¢), only the 1½¢ (Scott 805b) and 3¢ (Scott 807b) Prexie values are known to exist with imperforate between horizontal pairs. A pair and a block containing the imperforate between 1½¢ Prexies, with “Saint Louis MO.” pre-cancels, are shown in Figure 1.

The block contains both an imperforate between horizontal pair and two partially perforated horizontal pairs. The 1½¢ Prexie is also known as an imperforate between horizontal pair without the pre-cancel and is much scarcer than the version with the pre-cancel. In addition, the *Scott Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps & Covers* lists an unique imperforate between vertical pair of the 3¢ Prexie (Scott 807d), but notes that its authenticity has been questioned by some Prexie specialists. No other rotary press Prexie issues are known as imperforate between vertical pairs. The 3¢ Prexie is the only Prexie value known to exist as a fully imperforate pair (Scott 807c). Since there

are imperforate postal counterfeits of the 3¢ Prexie that are close in appearance to the genuine ones, all imperforate examples should be expertized.

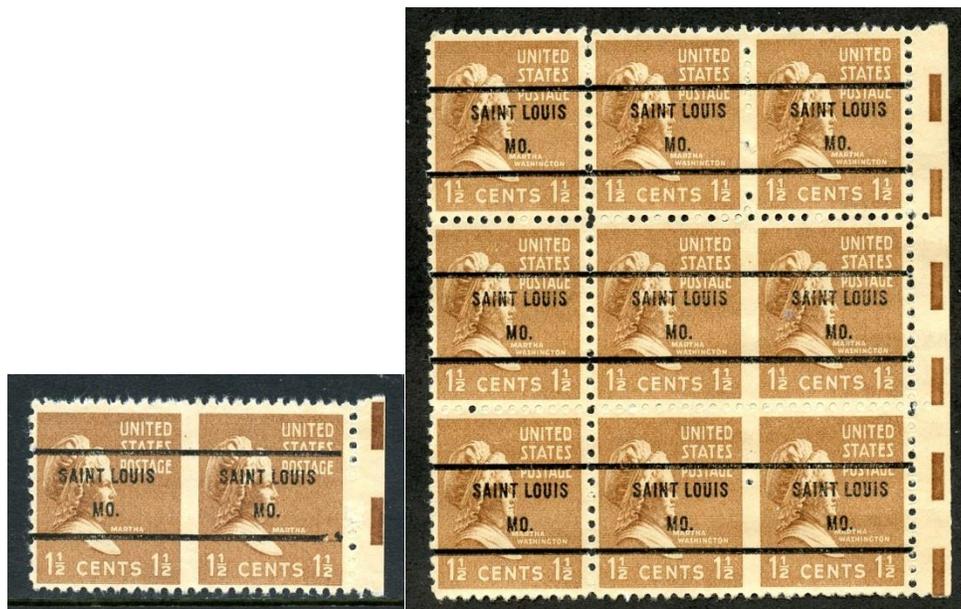


Figure 1. Imperforate between horizontal pair.

Of the three dollar-value flat plate Prexie stamps, only the \$1 value, showing Woodrow Wilson, is known to exist as horizontally imperforate on the purple and black version (Scott 832a). That variety also is known as a plate number block of eight. A 1954 printing in red violet and black exists as an imperforate between vertical pair (Scott 832c).

Another perforation problem encountered on Prexie stamps is where the stamps exhibit partial perforations on one or more sides. The partial perforations most frequently occurred during the World War II period on the rotary press issues and result from worn or broken perforating pins. Since the same perforating equipment was used to perforate multiple Prexie stamps of the set (and certain other stamps of the era), constant patterns of missing horizontal perforations can be found on different Prexie denominations. For example, the 18¢ and 24¢ values pictured in Figure 2 below both exhibit the same pattern of settings for the missing perforations.



Figure 2. Pairs exhibiting type 2 constant perforation settings.

According to Roland Rustad in his book, *The Prexies*, based on the research of our editor, John Hotchner, there are seven different types of constant settings of missing horizontal perforations that have been plated. Most of the constant setting types are known on multiple Prexie denominations. In addition, there are a number of other un-plated varieties of missing horizontal and vertical perforations.

According to Rustad, it is not possible to plate settings of missing vertical perforations because “The vertical perforating wheels were not synchronized with the stamp designs as were the horizontal perforating wheels, resulting in the pattern of missing perforations ‘floating’ up and down the length of the printed sheets.” The two Figure 2 pairs are examples of constant horizontal setting type 2 and the 13¢ block in Figure 3 displays constant horizontal setting type 1 missing perforations. Figure 4 shows two horizontal pairs having un-plated missing vertical perforations. The 1½¢ Prexie pair on the left, with a “Saint Louis MO.” pre-cancel, is missing all but one perforation and the 11¢ Prexie on the right, with “MLI” perforated initials (perfin), is missing a single perforation.



Figure 3. Constant setting type 1.



Figure 4. Pairs exhibiting un-plated missing vertical perforations.

Larger multiples of Prexies sometimes exhibit multiple different examples of missing perforations. In Figure 5, the block of six of the 1/2¢ Prexie contains two different instances of missing perforations. The Figure 6 block of six of the 16¢ Prexie shows three different examples of missing perforations. The Figure 5 and 6 blocks show multiple instances where random perforating pins were bent or broken, leading to missing perforations. According to John Hotchner, since these patterns are not seen in the constant settings that have been documented, it is likely that the pin problems were repaired rapidly.



Figure 5. Multiple with two instances of missing perforations.



Figure 6. Multiple with three instances of missing perforations.

At times, partially perforated Prexies may even appear to be imperforate pairs. For example, the two pairs of Prexie stamps pictured in Figure 7 both look, at first glance, to be imperforate between but, upon closer examination, have one or more blind perforations that were not punched out by the perforating equipment. In both instances, upon magnification, these are type 1 pairs with the perforation holes still filled because they were not cleanly punched out.



Figure 7. Missing perforations and blind perforations.

In addition to the imperforate and partially perforated Prexies discussed above, there are also numerous instances where Prexie stamps were incorrectly perforated for a variety of reasons including improper alignment of the perforating wheels where one or more wheels is out of line, usually at the start of a run. There are also paper fold overs, and, on rare occasions, pre-printing paper creases that open before or after perforation. Figure 8 provides examples of stamps perforated when the perforating wheels were improperly aligned. Figure 9 shows how a pre-printing paper crease can, upon opening, cause stamps to be improperly perforated.



Figure 8. Improper perforations due to incorrect alignment of the rotary perforators.



Figure 9. Mis-spacing of vertical perforations due to a pre-printing paper crease that was opened before perforating.

The final perforation problem, to be covered is what is known by terms such as crazy perforations, wild perforations, or freak perforations. According to L. N. Williams in his book, *Fundamentals of Philately*, wild perforations are caused by perforating paper that is “folded or creased and subsequently straightened, or caused by slipping of the paper” while it passes through the perforating machine.

Figure 10 shows an example of crazy perforations on a plate block of the 3¢ value picturing Thomas Jefferson that were caused by the outer marginal paper of the web ‘catching’ on the equipment that sliced off excess paper. This resulted in the paper being torn and folded over before the perforations were applied. As can be seen, the perforations are wildly irregular with perforations that crisscross, go through the stamp design, and are missing in places between the stamps.

In addition to the perforation problems discussed above, there are other production problems exhibited by Prexies, such as inking and cutting problems, that will be discussed in future articles. I will also cover Prexie postal history, first day and event covers, and collateral material related to the Prexies. I welcome reader’s comments, corrections, additions, or any suggestions for future columns. [Author’s note: Thanks to John Hotchner for providing the examples shown in Figures 9 and 10 and for his helping me to better understand the perforating process.]



Figure 10. Crazy or wild perforations.

References:

1. Roland E. Rustad, *The Prexies*, Bureau Issues Association, pp. 44-49, 1994.
2. L. N. Williams, *Fundamentals of Philately*, American Philatelic Society, p. 769, 1990.
3. Charles Snee (Editor), *Scott Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps & Covers*, Scott Publishing Co., pp. 87-89, 2015.

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