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 Printing and Engraving. 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 William McKinley 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 stamps. In this article, I am covering some of the issues encountered during perforation of the Prexies.

Probably the most common perforation problems encountered on Prexie stamps are those that 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 issues, the same pattern of missing perforations can be found on different Prexie denominations. For example, the 18¢ and 24¢ values pictured in Figure 1 below both exhibit the same pattern of settings for the missing perforations.

Figure 1. Pairs Exhibiting the Same Perforation Settings

There are a significant number of different settings of missing perforations known to exist, most of which are known on multiple Prexie denominations. Three additional different settings of missing perforations are shown in Figure 2. The 1½¢ Prexie on the left with a “Saint Louis MO.” Pre-cancel is missing all but one perforation. The 11¢ Prexie on the right with “MLI” perforated initials (perfins) is missing a single perforation.

Figure 2. Other Perforation Settings

Larger multiples of Prexies often exhibit multiple different settings of missing perforations. In Figure 3, the block of six of the ½¢ Prexie contains two different settings of missing perforations. The block of six of the 16¢ Prexie shows three different settings of missing perforations.

Figure 3. Multiples With Different Perforation Settings

At times, partially perforated Prexies may even appear to be imperforate pairs. For example, the two pairs of Prexie stamps pictured in Figure 4 both look, at first glance, to be imperforate between but, upon closer examination, have blind perforations that were not punched out by the perforating equipment. In both instances, upon magnification, you can easily see where the perforation pins have left an impression on the stamp.

Figure 4. Missing Perforations and Blind Perforations

Although many instances of purportedly imperforate Prexies are simply partially perforated stamps such as those above, there are a few instances where Prexie stamps exist as imperforate between pairs. Of the Prexies printed on the rotary press, only the 1½¢ and 3¢ Prexie values are known to exist as imperforate between horizontal pairs. No rotary press Prexie issues are known to exist as imperforate between vertical pairs. Of the three flat plate Prexie stamps, the $1 value is known to exist as an imperforate between vertical pair. A pair of the imperforate between 1½¢ Prexies with a “Saint Louis MO.” Pre-cancel is shown in Figure 5. The 1½¢ Prexie is also known as an imperforate between horizontal pair without the pre-cancel.

Figure 5. Imperforate Between Horizontal Pair

In addition to the partially perforated and imperforate Prexies discussed above, there are also numerous instances where Prexie stamps were incorrectly perforated due to improper alignment of the stamp images on the paper web as it was being fed into the perforator. Figure 6 shows examples of this type of perforation problem.

Figure 6. Misperforations Due to Alignment

In addition to the perforation problems discussed above, there are other Prexies exhibiting apparent perforation problems that are actually attributable to different issues such as improperly cut panes or paper fold overs. Those issues will be discussed in future articles, along with other Prexie production problems. 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.