

1/2¢ Prexie Postal History

by Richard Pederson

The ½¢ stamp, from the Presidential Issue of 1938 (i.e., the Prexies), is one of three Prexie stamps, along with the 1½¢ and 4½¢, that does not depict a U.S. President. The ½¢ depicts Benjamin Franklin, who was appointed Postmaster General by the Continental Congress.

Franklin had many talents including scientist, publisher, writer, politician, and diplomat. Some of his numerous accomplishments include publishing the *Philadelphia Gazette* and *Poor Richard's Almanac*, serving as Postmaster of Philadelphia and Deputy Postmaster General of the American Colonies, inventing the lightning rod and Franklin stove, charting movement of the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic Ocean, helping to draft the Declaration of Independence, obtaining an alliance with France during the Revolutionary War, helping to draft the Treaty of Paris, and serving as part of the Constitutional Convention. Franklin appears on more regular issue U.S. stamps than any individual except George Washington.

The ½¢ Prexie, which is pictured in Figure 1, appears only in sheet format. During the Prexie period lasting until about 1962, there was no postal rate or fee that could be paid by a single ½¢ Prexie. Despite that fact, there were a few instances where a letter with a solo ½¢ Prexie successfully passed through the mail. Figure 2 shows a solo ½¢ Prexie on a letter sent on November 11, 1951 from Newport, Rhode Island to Georgetown, Massachusetts. One reason that may have aided the letter in arriving at the destination without postage due is the similarity in color between the ½¢ stamp and the 6¢ Prexie, since the 6¢ would have exactly paid the rate for a double weight first-class letter. Uses such as this are quite scarce as I am only aware of three others that successfully passed through the mail.

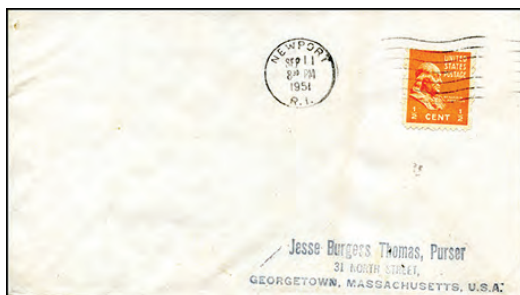


Figure 2

The only possible way for a ½¢ Prexie to have been the only adhesive postage stamp on a mail piece would have required the ½¢ stamp to be added to a stamped envelope, air letter sheet, metered envelope, or postal card. Figure 3 pictures a 1¢ Thomas Jefferson postal card uprated with a ½¢ Prexie to pay the 1½¢ UPU printed matter rate for up to two ounces that was in effect until November 1, 1953. The postal card, which has a pre-printed advertisement for a technical report on the reverse, was mailed to London, England from New York City in 1951.



Figure 3

Figure 4 shows an envelope with a 1¢ meter sent by musical instrument manufacturer G. C. Conn in New York City to an address in Williamson, West, Virginia. A pre-cancelled ½¢

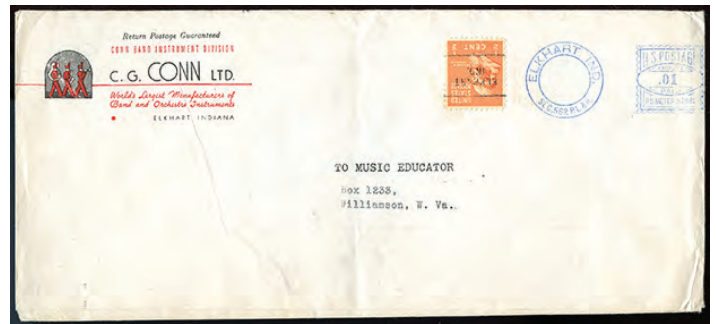


Figure 4

Prexie is added to the envelope to pay the 1½¢ third-class single piece rate that was in effect until January 1, 1949.



Figure 5

Another example with a ½¢ Prexie added to a metered envelope is pictured in Figure 5. In this instance, the pre-cancelled ½¢ stamp is added to a 1½¢ meter to pay the 2¢ third-class single piece printed matter rate in effect from January 1, 1949 until August 1, 1958.

Although there were no postal rates that could be paid with a single ½¢ Prexie, multiples could be used to pay many rates. The only limiting factor was the number of ½¢ stamps that could fit on a post card, envelope, or parcel. Figure 6 shows two ½¢ stamps combining to pay the 1¢ domestic surface post card rate in effect until January 1, 1952.



Figure 6

A previous example (see Figure 4) showed the ½¢ Prexie combined with a 1¢ meter to pay the 1½¢ third-class printed matter rate. Figure 7 pictures an envelope mailed in 1942 from St. Joseph, Missouri to McCook, Nebraska, with three ½¢ stamps paying that same rate.

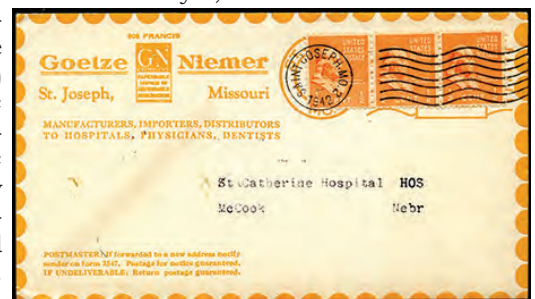


Figure 7

The cover shown in Figure 8, page 24, has two pre-cancelled ½¢ stamps that paid the 1¢ minimum per piece third-class circular rate that was in effect until July 1, 1952. The circular was

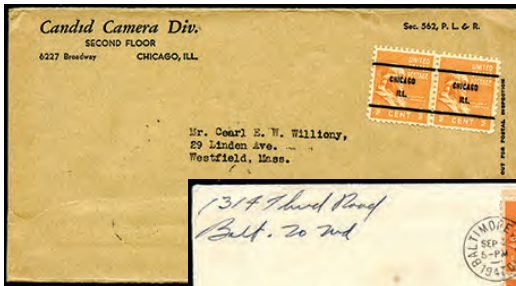


Figure 8

Figure 9 pictures a letter mailed on September 2, 1947 from Baltimore, Maryland to Elysburg, Pennsylvania. The six 1/2¢ stamps paid the 3¢ first-class rate in effect until August 1, 1958. Another example of 1/2¢ Prexies paying the 3¢ first-class rate is shown in Figure 10.



Figure 9

The letter was posted on February 19, 1957, with four 1/2¢ stamps and was returned for additional postage. Two more 1/2¢ stamps were added beside the address and the letter was sent on from Stockton, California to Emporia, Kansas.

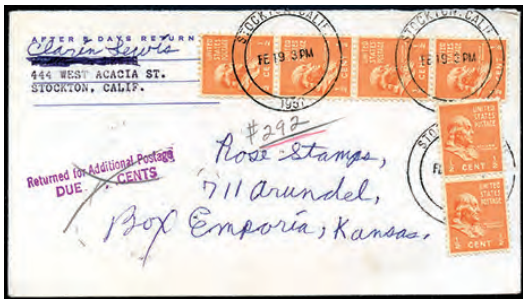


Figure 10

The letter pictured in Figure 11 had four 1/2¢ stamps attached to pay the third-class single piece rate for up to two ounces that was in effect from January 1, 1949 until October 1, 1958. The letter from Maynard, Massachusetts, which was addressed to Stewart Air Force Base in Newburgh, New York, had the address crossed out and a forwarding address of APO 81 written in and a hand stamp applied saying "CHANGE OF ADDRESS DUE TO OFFICIAL ORDERS". Instead, the letter was returned to the sender because the forwarding order had expired as indicated by the "DISPATCH PROHIBITED SEE P. M. 157.4B" handstamp. Two cents postage due was charged to the sender for the returned letter.



Figure 11

From the beginning of the Prexie period until March 26, 1944, the air mail rate within the continental U. S. was 6¢. The envelope shown in Figure 12, which was mailed on February 20, 1939 from Camden, New Jersey to Indianapolis, Indiana, contains 12 1/2¢ Prexies exactly paying the 6¢ rate.



Figure 12

sent from the Candid Camera Division in Chicago, Illinois to Westfield, Massachusetts.

Although multiples of the 1/2¢ Prexie are most often found on domestic mail, they were also used to pay various international rates. Up until November 1, 1953, the UPU surface letter rate was 5¢ for the first ounce. Figure 13 shows a surface letter to France from Beverly Hills, California mailed on November 21, 1949 with ten 1/2¢ Prexies paying the UPU surface letter rate.



Figure 13

Another international example is pictured in Figure 14. In this instance, a mail piece containing printed matter was sent from Boonsboro, Maryland to Istanbul, Turkey. Like the postal card previously shown in Figure 3, three of the 1/2¢ Prexies were used to pay the 1 1/2¢ UPU printed matter rate for up to two ounces that was in effect until November 1, 1953.



Figure 14

The letter shown in Figure 15 was posted on the high seas on board the U.S. ship S. S. African Patriot. Under the UPU convention of July 4, 1891, mail posted at sea was required to use the stamps and postal rates of the country to which the ship belonged. Therefore, the letter addressed to Katontown, New Jersey was mailed at the U. S. first-class rate of 3¢ using six 1/2¢ Prexies. Upon docking in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, the letter was placed in the mail to the U. S. on June 7, 1952.

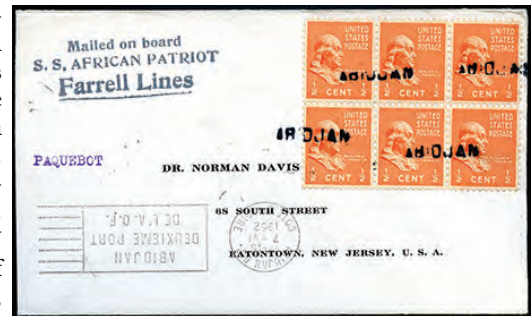


Figure 15

At times, the 1/2¢ stamp was also used to pay various post office fees. Figure 16 pictures a Certificate of Mailing form used to document the sending of a piece of mail from Germania, Mississippi to Shreveport, Louisiana on December 31, 1953. Four 1/2¢ Prexies were applied to the form to pay the 2¢ Certificate of Mailing fee.



Figure 16

The 1/2¢ Prexie was also often used, in combination with other stamps, to pay a variety of rates and fees. Following are a couple of striking examples of such uses. The first, shown in Figure 17, page 25, is an attractive cover with a patriotic theme displaying an

American flag at the left. The philatelic cover was mailed from Stockton, New York to Meadville, Pennsylvania on December 14, 1946. The right side contains a single 1¢ Prexie surrounded by nine ½¢ stamps. Since the first-class rate at the time was 3¢, the envelope was overpaid by 1½¢.



Figure 17

The final example (Figure 18) is a spectacular international use with 30 of the ½¢ stamp combined with the 17¢ Prexie on a letter from Anchorage, Kentucky to Heidelberg, Germany.



Figure 18

The air mail rate to Germany, per 1/2 ounce, was 15¢. The 30 ½¢ stamps correctly paid the 1/2 ounce rate. Evidently, the letter weighed more than 1/2 ounce and less than or equal to an ounce, as an additional 15¢ was required. That was satisfied by the 17¢ Prexie, which resulted in a 2¢ overpayment. The 30 ½¢ Prexies on a single piece is the second largest multiple of that stamp known (the largest known has 32 ½¢ stamps).

Any comments or questions may be addressed to Richard Pederson, P.O. Box 662, Clemson, SC 29633 or sent via E-mail to rich@pedersonstamps.com.

References:

1. Roland E. Rustad, *The Prexies*, Bureau Issues Association, pp. 309-318, 1994.
2. Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz and Henry W. Beecher, *U.S. International Postal Rates, 1872-1996*, CAMA Publishing Company, 1996.
3. Henry W. Beecher and Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz, *U.S. Domestic Postal Rates, 1872-2011 Third Edition*, American Philatelic Society, 2011.

Yesterday in Mekeel's: Viewing the Jennings "Half" Collection

by John F. Dunn (From *Mekeel's & Stamps*, October 19, 2007)

Richard Pederson's article on the 1/2 Cent Prexie reminded me of this article that I did more than a decade ago, a "Viewing" of a collection assembled by the late Clyde Jennings and auctioned off by Nutmeg Stamp Sales in 2006. That collection encompassed all of the 1/2-cent issues, but my viewing focused on the 1922 Nathan Hale issue, so I felt it would make a nice adjunct to Richard's article. The catalog from which I was working was in black and white. Fortunately, my archives still contained that catalog and I was able to rescan a few pieces that had not come out well in 2007. I did not update any of the values given in the article. JFD.)

While searching through our catalog stacks for something totally different I came across an auction that I somehow overlooked last year, but which is nonetheless deserving of a viewing, not only because it is deserving on its merits, but also because it was assembled by one of the most memorable collectors of our era, the late Clyde Jennings.

To say the least, Clyde was a character, with a great sense of humor. An award-winning exhibitor, he had a friendly running battle with judges and the judging system. He also was not afraid to do things his own way, which is exemplified in one of his collections. Entitled "The Half," it is a magnificent study of some very ordinary stamps, the United States and Canal Zone 1/2 cent issues (Sc. 551, et al, including Postage Dues.) For added appeal, there are a number of items that reflect Clyde's great sense of humor.

The first lot in the auction was an unfinished large die essay of this stamp on cardboard signed "Approved by [Postmaster General] Harry S. New". Cropped down here to just show how the essay lacked the "Nathan Hale" name in the tablet, it is listed in Scott as 551E1, SCV \$3,000.

Also shown here cropped down is a portion of a full sheet



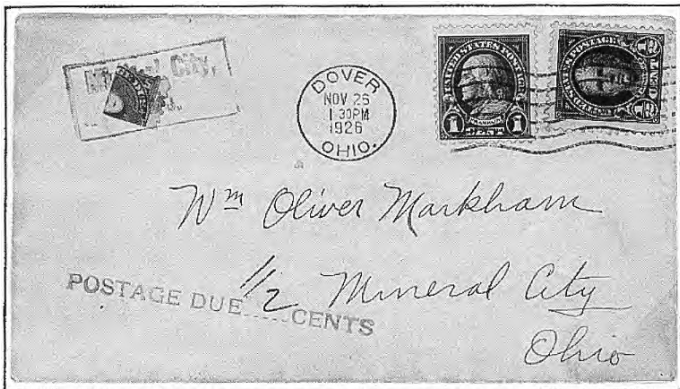
of the 1/2¢ initialed on the April 4, 1925 First Day of Issue in Washington D.C. by Harry S. New.

Next is one of many freaks and errors in "The Half." It shows a misperf caused by a paper foldover after printing and before perforating.

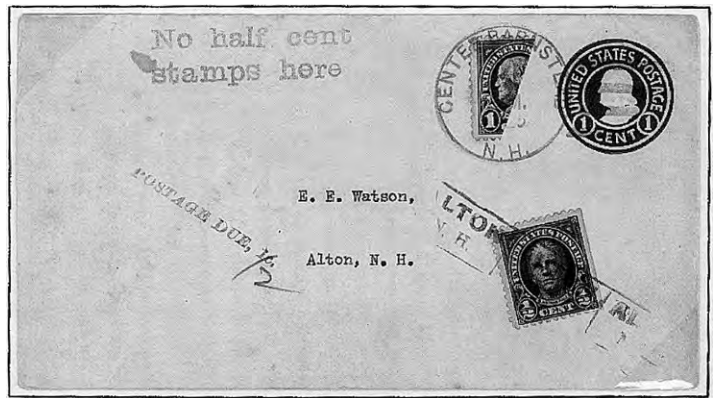


Next we view three variations on the same theme—uprated Postal Stationery. As explained on the Jennings exhibit page, “1925. Fractional rate change found stocks of entires with insufficient indicia. The new half-cent stamps [were] used to salvage them. Top shows former .01 third class envelope uprated to new .01-1/2 rate, no date in cancel required. At middle revalued .01-1/2 used for first class with addition of half-cent franking; bottom .01-1/2 used for first class with addition of half-cent franking, 1925 stock still being used for uprating in 1929.”

Here’s a real oddity, a quadrisect, left of cover, of the 2¢, Sc. J62, to serve as a 1/2¢. The usage was described by Clyde as follows: “With no half-cent postage due stamps on hand in Mineral City (no heavy demand in a small office, population still only 950 in 1990) clerk improvised by cutting a two cent due stamp into four parts, thereby keeping his accounts straight.”



At the top of the next column we see an example of a 1/2¢ used as a postage due, explained as follows: “On May 8, 1925 merchant in Center Barnstead prepared ads for mailing by using up one cent envelopes intending to add half-cent more at P.O. First supply not received, so postmaster bisected one cent stamps and applied rubber stamp at left [stating “No half cent stamps here.”] Alton postmaster on instructions from D.C., held each one for 1/2 cent due, but not having new postage due half-cent used his regular half-cent stock.” (We have to wonder



if he also sent some of his 1/2-centers to Center Barnstead.)

Still another purpose served by the 1/2¢: as change. As 1/2¢ was lacking when this card was mailed with 1-1/2¢ postage (instead of the required 2¢), when the postal clerk received 1¢ in payment, lacking any 1/2¢ coins, he lightly affixed a 1/2¢ stamp as change. (Notice the message to the addressee, Master Ellis: “Be a good boy so your Mother won’t have to whip you. I’m sure you will.”)



Also included in “The Half” were many usages to foreign destinations, one of which was this 1925 cover to Sierra Leone.



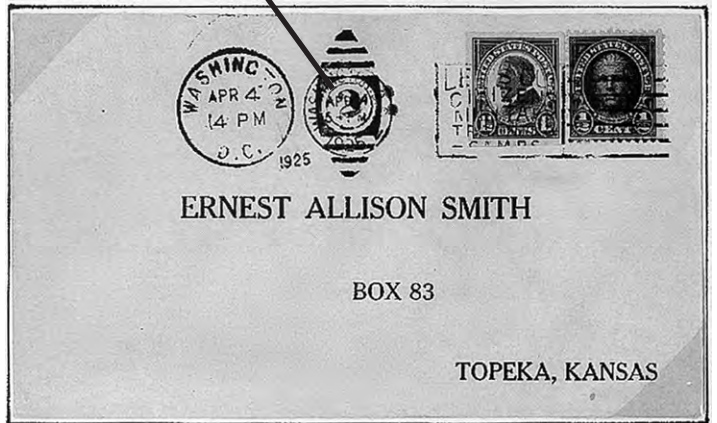
And in a Fancy Cancels section we see (at the top of the next column) a block of four with a “Purple Cow”—color cancels having been another favorite of Clyde’s. [Unfortunately, all I had to work with was a black & white catalog.] Also included in this section was a cover with a Bug Fancy Cancel—tied by a Sep 14 1929 Bug, KY cancellation. [Try as I might, the catalog photo was too dark for me to bring out the bug. The lower right stamp in the computer enhanced block shows some traces of a bug design, but not much.]

For First Day Covers, there was a New Haven cover—that being the other official city in addition to Washington, D.C.



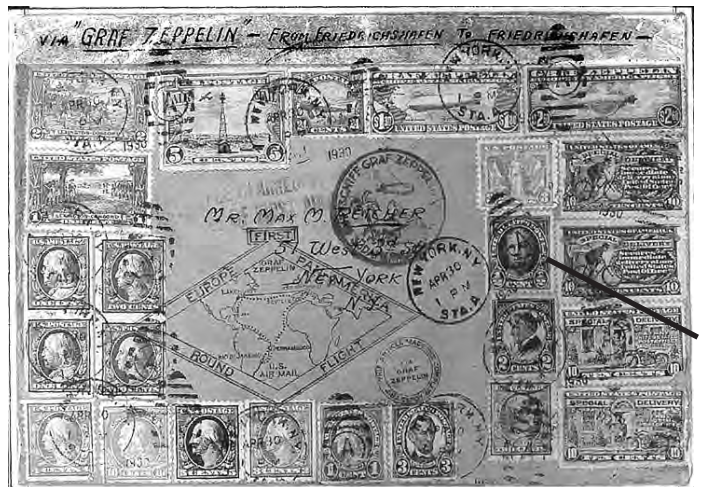
Also shown below the New Haven FDC is still another FDC, this one with a block of four tied by Dover, Del. Apr 4 cancellation. Clyde speculated, "Stamps likely bought in D.C. and taken to Dover for use same day. (Note that the cover is addressed to dealer C. E. Nickles in Washington, D.C.)"

The next FDC was cancelled in Washington, D.C., but on April 14. You have to look closely to see the April 14 c.d.s. (arrow). That April 14 date was placed in the machine canceler in error, so the correct date was applied, with an oval grid placed directly over the incorrect cancel to obliterate it. It was



described by Clyde as "a well documented postal service error" with an additional notation that it has been certified as genuine by the American First Day Cover Society.

Now for a blockbuster of a cover on which the 1/2¢ stamp (arrow) did not even matter.

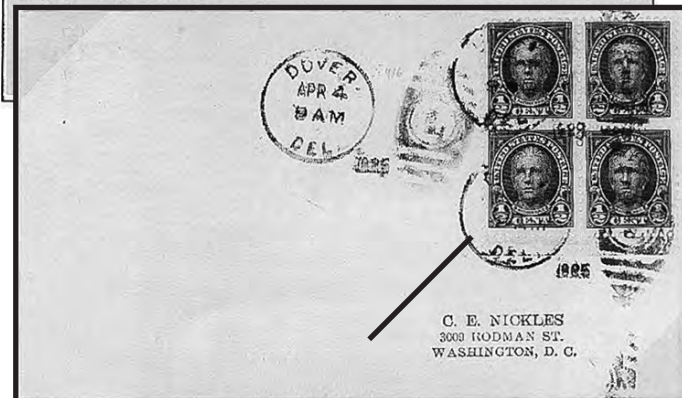
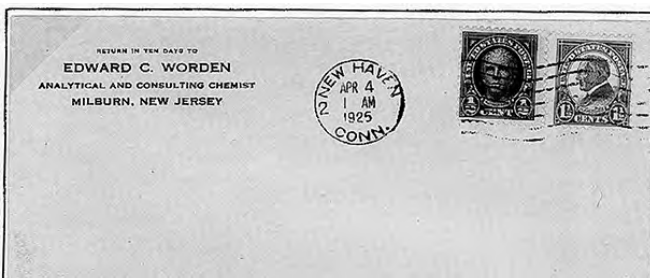


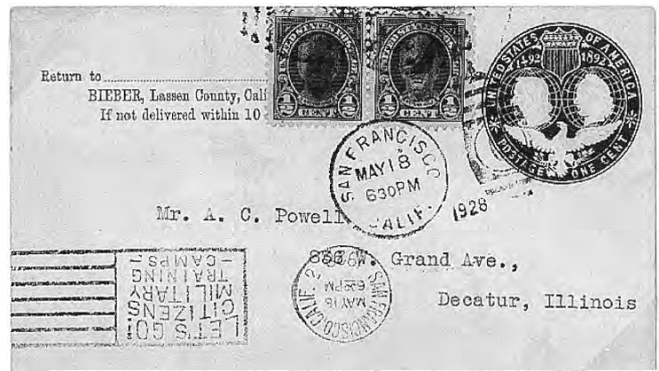
As explained by Clyde on his page, "Graf Zeppelin 1930 Pan-American Flight. Round trip Friedrichshafen-to-Friedrichshafen. Round trip rate was \$3.90 up to one ounce, as paid by the two stamps at upper right. Returned to the U.S. by surface mail, only one of the special delivery stamps would have sufficed for that service for a total of \$4.00. Balance of the \$5.01-1/2 total was superfluous, a gross overpayment. Obviously philatelic, but a genuine flown cover."

Speaking of Special Deliveries, the top cover on page 28 uses twenty-two 1/2¢ stamps for a total of 11¢, but the rates were 2¢ first class postage and 10¢ special delivery fee. But no postage due was collected.

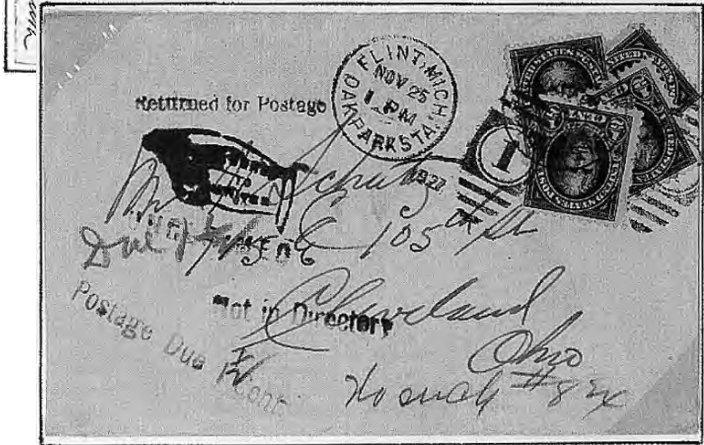
Clyde also pointed out "Note 'Run Postman Run'." (top center of cover)

We showed a foreign destination earlier; now also on page 28, let's look at this incoming cover from a foreign destination. Clyde stated, "Originated St. Johns, New Brunswick, Canada via Boston to New York on CAM First Flight #153. Fourteen cents Canadian franking for postage and registry, ten cents U.S. additional for air from Boston to New York."





along with four Sc. 803 half-centers. Adding to its collectibility, addressed to Paris, France, it was returned as mail service had been suspended due to World War II.



Among Illegal Frankings, after showing the top card that got through, The Half included the bottom cover, also with four overlapping half-centers. The page description notes, "Postal regulations forbid overlapping stamps to prevent fraud by covering up prior cancels."

The bottom cover was described as "caught by alert postal employee, returned to sender (address on back) for postage due of .01-1/2 to make .02 first class rate, credit given for only one of the half-cent stamps."

Finally, at the top of the next column we see a couple of late usages, first with a late use of the 1893 Columbian envelope, with a May 18, 1928 cancellation and two 1/2¢ stamps, and then a late use of the 1925 1/2¢, used August 13, 1940,

Mint Souvenir Sheet Excess Stock Blowout!

730 1933 APS 1¢	17.50	3183 Celebrate 1910s	7.75
731 1933 APS 3¢	17.00	3184 Celebrate 1920s	7.75
1686-89 Bicent (4)	12.95	3185 Celebrate 1930s	7.75
1757 CAPEX	1.35	3186 Celebrate 1940s	8.25
2216-19 Ameripex Presidents	11.00	3187 Celebrate 1950s	8.25
2559 1941 WW II half-pane	5.75	3188 Celebrate 1960s	8.25
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2765 1943 WW II "	5.75	3190 Celebrate 1980s	8.25
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