

The Circuit

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STAMPS — THE NEXT DINOSAURS ?

by Tom Fortunato (# 379)

Are stamps as we've known them for the past 150 years soon to become an endangered species? Meters clearly dominate business mail, but other non-traditional forms of postage stamps have been tried and are growing in popularity with postal administrations.

The first unusual stamps were the 1963 gold foil issues of Tonga celebrating the gold coinage of Polynesia. These round self-adhesive stamps were followed by die-cut free forms in shapes ranging from bananas to oil rigs. Novel designs continued for 20 years, issued in long sets with excessive face values which eventually decreased interest in them from collectors. The idea of self-stick stamps did catch on.

Another country straying from the norm was Bhutan. Most of their stamps from 1966 to 1974 have only gained "For The Record" status in worldwide catalogs. Like Tonga, they started out with foil coin stamps but it didn't stop there. Next came relief printed stamps with a textured surface depicting paintings. Then came 3-D stamps, followed by designs on steel foil and mini-sculptures in plastic bas-relief. Most unique perhaps were stamps from 1973 which could be played on a record player allowing the listener to hear native folk songs. Admittedly most of these unusual issues were primarily for philatelic consumption with very few ever found on cover, lightly validating their legitimacy.

So much for the gimmicks of philately.

A serious attempt to experiment with self-stick stamps was the USA's Christmas die cut issue of 1974, depicting a weather vane from Mt. Vernon. As a precancelled stamp it was untagged, having crossed slashes through the design to prevent their removal for reuse. It was very expensive to produce and only received limited distribution but was well liked by the public who had access to them. There were two major problems for collectors. First, soaking used stamps in water did not separate the envelope paper from the stamp itself. The glue also caused problems to mint examples as the glue over time migrated through the paper and stamp design, discoloring it with brown patches.

More and more postal administrations today are turning to the self-stick alternative, mostly in booklet form or sheetlets. Canada, Australia, Japan and Finland are among others. While customers like their convenience they sometimes have to pay a premium above the face value to support their production costs.

This was the case of the US's second self-stick eagle stamp. Each booklet of 18-25¢ stamps sold for \$5.00, about a 12% premium over face value. The more recent 25¢ and "F" flag stamp sheetlets of 12 sold at face value and were designed to be sold through bank ATM machines. A plastic laminated stamp of more than fifteen layers was developed, as a stiffer substitute to paper was needed to be compatible with the ATMs. Environmentalists were the first to

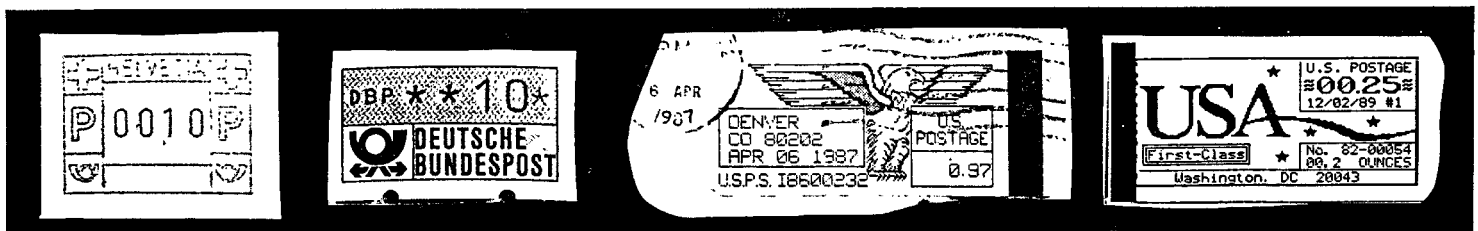
note the plastic stamps inability to be recycled, so for now future production will revert to paper.

Perforated stamps with their "glutinous wash" may become the prized antiques of the past with the emerging acceptance of die cut self-stick stamps.

A newer threat to traditional stamps are vending labels. Closely related to meters, they are imprinted on demand by computer driven machines found at post offices or throughout a community. They are known generically as "Framas," but Frama actually refers to the name of one of the major manufacturers of these labels and machines. Inside these machines are preprinted rolls of security paper with a continuous design of various symbols about 1-1/2 inches wide. For example, Australia has used a multiple Kangaroo background, Belgium uses their postal emblem, and Switzerland uses an intricate intertwined pattern of lines. After putting money into the machine, the purchaser selects the denomination of the label, red fluorescent ink is used to imprint the country name, denomination, postal code, etc., onto the paper roll which is cut and dispensed by the machine.

Two other companies in the business are Klussendorf of Germany and Amiel/Pitney Bowes. Both also use their own preprinted security paper, but not in a continuous design, which also vary from country to country. Black ink is used to

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DINOSAURS (Continued)

imprint the appropriate info onto the label. Klussendorf labels can be identified by two notches found on the top and bottom of each label. They have most recently been tested in Mexico. Ireland ran a three month trial ending in January 1991, testing all three companies' machines and labels mentioned here. They are reviewing each and will select one version to be used nationwide.

Countries have conducted such tests on a small scale before expending their use, creating valuable collectables along the way. An early example in the USA is from Denver, Colorado, in 1987, which later evolved into Autopost labels, tested by the USPS in 1989. Two Autopost machines were posted at both the Martin Luther King, Jr., Postal Station in Washington, D.C., and at a second site in Kensington, Maryland. An additional machine was in use for delegates of the UPU Congress held in October-November 1989 in Washington, D.C. This machine was not accessible to the general public, and labels and covers from it now auction for thousands of dollars.

Autopost machines were meant to be self-service in nature. While attending World Stamp Expo '89, I visited the Washington station. It was only four blocks away from the convention center. The two

machines were located just inside the large post office about twenty feet away from the clerk's counter. The machine was a bit confusing to use, as it first weighed the item to be posted; offered a variety of postal services in addition to regular first class rates and accepted your money before dispensing the label. According to the postal clerks on duty, customers preferred to make their purchases from them rather than fuss with the machines. First day labels from the four public machines were produced in quantities up to 12,000 each. Most labels with slogan labels and matching purchase receipt (which was also ejected at the time of transaction) command a premium. These machines were only in service for a couple of months then withdrawn.

For now, postal administrations still produce the perforated paper postage stamps we have all grown to love. The day may soon come when self-sticks and vending labels are the only available forms of stamps. Perhaps by that time even printed stamps will be obsolete, leaving only computer generated labels as proof of payment. In the meantime, watch your mail for your own examples of modern postal history! ...

LIQUIDATING COLLECTION

Due to ill health, a long-time collector & friend has asked me to liquidate his collection. His material is in fine condition and prices run between 30 & 50% of 1991 catalogue. Lists now ready covering worldwide singles, sets, S/S & lots. Should you desire to receive sales lists please write to:

**Willy Dow (# 418)
3337 Cesery Blvd
Jacksonville, FL 32211**

PHOTOGRAPHY ANNIVERSARY STAMPS

Joe Palko (# 421) has submitted the following Letter to the Editor published in the July 1991 issue of *Petersen's Photographic* magazine. He thought some of you might be able to help. Joe has already advised him of the ATS, but didn't know about the photography unit. Are there any ISWSC members who are ATS members interested in the topic of photography? If so, perhaps you could direct him to the right person to contact.

I have been trying to obtain lists of postage stamps to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of Photography and wonder if you or your readers could help. Les Brener, Director of Australian Activities, Photo Marketing Association, PO Box 150, Edgecliff, NSW, 2027, Australia ...

Saxony joined the Austro-German Postal Union in July 1850. The first stamps issued were for the newspaper rate of 3 pfennig.

MAIL SALE # 4 REPORT

Mail Sale # 4 has concluded. Approximately 60% of lots sold. Prices realized totalled just over \$1000, providing over \$200 for the treasury. There were 39 bidders, from three countries, but all but one were from the USA and Canada. The average lot sold for around \$7.25. All sold lots have been sent out. Unsold lots will be returned to owners soon. Disbursements to owners will probably be around the end of July.

On a negative note, I found it necessary to reject all bids on 19 lots. On all of these, the top bid did not exceed 10% of 1991 catalog. I don't consider a bid of 2% of 1991 catalog reasonable, and took this action to protect the consignors, and avoid alienation. It is perhaps a sad commentary on our hobby to have such bids, given the situation in other collectibles such as antiques and baseball cards. Likewise, for the owner of two fine lots of USA plate blocks to receive less than face value for them is bothersome. If the best advice to him is "Lick 'em 'n stick 'em," we're in trouble. To try to avert these problems, I've modified the rules slightly for Mail Sale # 5.

Lot #39, the withdrawn lot, was sent to me as "About 50 early US seconds, used, all with faults" — an ugly duckling description if there ever was one. On looking over the lot, I thought it contained a # 104, with catalog value of \$4250, though with a small tear. I returned it to the owner, who is now considering having it expertized. I cannot guarantee this kind of outcome, and consider this very fortuitous. ... Wallace D. Johnson, MD, Auction Chairman (# 212)

LIGHTHOUSE POST OFFICE

This postmark is from the only Canadian post office located in a lighthouse. The lighthouse is located at Peggy's Cove, Nova Scotia. Our thanks to Irving C. Whynot (# 490) for sharing this information with us.

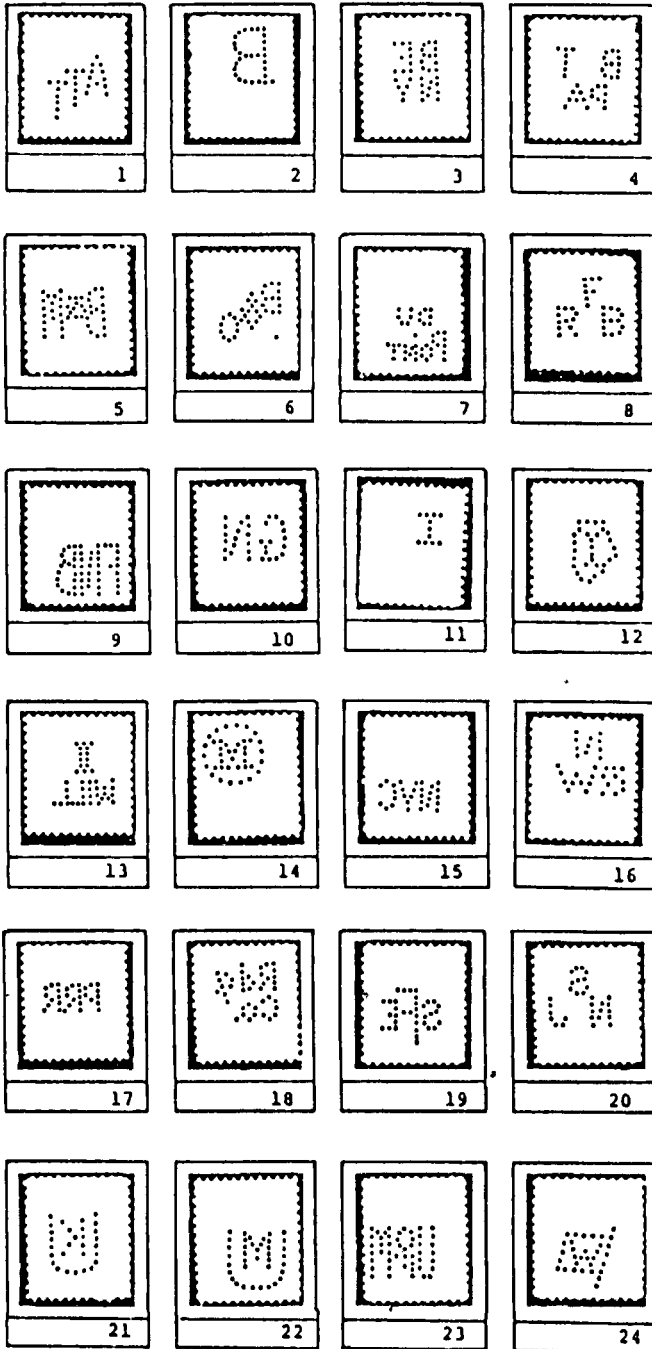


WHY NOT COLLECT PERFINS?

(Reprinted from The Perfins Club Brochure with permission from Kurt Ottenheimer, Promotion Chairman.)

CAN YOU IDENTIFY THESE U.S. PERFINS?

Answers on Page 4.



If you're tired of "routine" stamp collecting — the rut that has you filling up the same blank spots in the same printed albums as everybody else — why not collect perfins ?

Perfins are stamps that have been perforated with designs, initials, or numerals by private businesses and government agencies to discourage theft and misuse. The word perfin come from PERFORated INSIGNIA. Perfins originated in Great Britain in the 1860's and were authorized for use on U.S. stamps on May 8, 1908.

Perfins have appeared on postal paper of more than 100 nations. In the U.S. alone, more than 6,000 patterns are known to have been used. Estimates of the number of patterns used around the world range as high as 40,000.

These stamps offer a fertile field for philatelic investigation. It is a field almost unlimited in scope, and it is richly rewarding to the collector who is not satisfied to collect by the catalog or merely with filling up blank spaces in a printed album. Perfins collecting is largely unexplored; there is so much that is not known about perfins that almost every mixture or box of covers is likely to yield a new chapter in the literature of perfins.

It is easy to obtain perfins. Many of your collector friends will give you their perfins rather than throw them away. To many collectors, a perfin is a damaged stamp or at best a space filler to be discarded when a "whole" stamp is found. Dealers often will toss perfins into a box under the counter and sell them to the first collector who will make any decent offer.

But before you begin collecting perfins, you must face the fact that you will, in general, be collecting for fun and not for profit. A collector who looks on perfins as an investment is bound to be disappointed. While some fine perfins command a premium, this is the exception rather than the rule. Perfins collectors collect stamps and study them; they do not consider their stamps financial ventures.

There are many ways to collect perfins. One can collect by type; that is, one can arrange to get one example of each perfin pattern without regard to the face value of the stamp. Or one can collect by issue — trying to get an example of each pattern on each stamp. However, considering the number of stamps that have been issued in the U.S. since 1908 and the fact that there are about 6,000 U.S. perfins patterns, one best have a large supply of binders to hold an issue collection.

Many perfins collectors collect only covers. It is possible to trace the entire financial history of a business firm by watching the change in corner cards during the years a perfins was in use.

Some collectors collect by topic: perfins issued by banks, by automobile companies, by schools, or by insurance companies. For example, nearly 200 U.S. railroads used perfins and railroad perfins is a popular topic.

Once you have a few perfins on hand, you must identify and mount them in a collection. Identification can be challenging. Suppose you have a perfins with "PSC" on it. Does that stand for Public Service Commission or does it stand for Penn State College or Pratt Printing and Supply Company or even Pressed Steel Car Company? It could be any one of these since all these firms have used "PSC" to mark their stamps.

That's where the Perfins Club comes in. The Perfins Club is an
(Continued Page 4)

COVER ART: The lovely parrot design on the front of this issue was done by our talented Australian Secretary, Karl F. Steinberg. The editor and other ISWSC members have been fortunate to receive one of Karl's colorful hand-decorated covers. Only wish you all could see the colors. Thanks, Karl.

Classified Ads

BEAUTIFUL QUALITY WORLD-WIDE Commercial Registered/Airmail Clipping Mixtture on Single Paper. Many Exotic Countries including BwI, Papua, Europe, Etc. Commemoratives, Pictorials, High Values Galore. Unconditional Moneyback Guarantee. Lots offered through Linns and Stamp Collector for 5 years with many regular customers. APS Member. Trial lot \$10, Better lot \$25, Half pound \$40, LB. \$75. James Paton, 547 Elm Street, El Cerrito, CA 94530 (4/2)

USA, CANADA, AND WORLDWIDE! I need serious exchanges. I offer Brazil + Others. Only mint complete sets. Prompt reply. (ISWSC #518) Geraldo Jose Volpon, Cx. Postal 223, Paranagua' PR, 83200 BRAZIL (2/2)

PRODIGY SUBSCRIBER WANTS 2 hear from others. Do U? Forming list of those wanting 2 B included. S. T. Ginsberg (#70) • Prodigy XMRW93A (1/1)

WORLDWIDE PERSONALIZED APPROVALS. Bargain prices. An example you can order now is USA \$5.00 Lamp (#1612), used (worth \$2.25) only \$1.00. ABSP, INC., Box 155, Warminster, PA 18974 ISWSC member # 94) (3/1)

WORLDWIDE MYSTERY LOTS. Over the years (Since 1973) I've bought others. There are honestly better. Only \$25.00. ABSP, INC., Box 155, Warminster, PA 18974 (ISWSC member # 94) (3/1)

Stamp Collecting is not only fun, but is a very educational hobby.

PERFINS (Continued)

organization of than than 800 collectors of perfins who have compiled a massive amount of information about U.S. and foreign perfins.

(The Perfins Club was founded in 1943 and has very reasonable annual dues. Members receive the club bulletin with many interesting articles on perfins, and are eligible to use the club library which has thousands of articles on both U.S. & foreign perfins. Printed catalogue/albums are available to members, also. Mr. Ottenheimer will be very happy to provide you with membership information and a packet of 100 perfins if you will enclose a # 10 SASE. Write: Kurt Ottenheimer, Promotion Chairman, The Perfins Club, 462 West Walnut St., Long Beach, NY 11561 — Be sure to tell him, you're a member of ISWSC. ••• the Editor)

U. S. PERFINS IDENTIFICATION:

1. American Telephone & Telegraph Co.
2. City of Boston
3. Board of Education, New York City
4. Bell Telephone Co. of Pennsylvania
5. Boston & Maine Railroad
6. Baltimore & Ohio Railroad
7. E. I. DuPont deNemours Company
8. Federal Reserve Bank
9. First National Bank, Boston
10. Great Northern Railway
11. State of Illinois (New Design)
12. State of Illinois (Old Design)
13. City of Chicago
14. State of Michigan
15. New York Central System
16. Norfolk and Western Railroad
17. Pennsylvania Railroad
18. Reading Company
19. Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway
20. State of New Jersey
21. University of Kansas
22. University of Missouri
23. University of Michigan
24. Wabash Railroad

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