

Our 25th Year

PNC³



www.pnc3.org

Coil Line

Journal of the PNC³
Plate Number Coil Collectors Club

American Philatelic Society Affiliate # 185

Vol. 25, No. 6



June 2012

Whole No. 288



5501 Patterson Ave, Suite 100
Richmond, VA 23226

Antwon Richmond
226 Rich Rd
Richmond VA 23226

(“wide” strip at top;
narrow strip at bottom)

▲

◀

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another rare coil...
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◀ This rare coil
joined by first
PNC found...
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Coil Line

Journal of the Plate Number Coil Collectors Club

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For mail delivery problems, contact the mailer below.

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President's Message

from the PNC³ president ...

To borrow a phrase... Is this a great hobby, or what??

Elsewhere in this issue is a report of finding the phosphor-tagged variety of the (10¢) Lion non-denominated PNC having plate number S66666. It's amazing that, some 12 years after the Lion was introduced, we are just now coming across this PNC that identifies the plate from which an earlier reported tagged Lion probably originated. Once again, we have proof that the PNC specialty is an important part of modern US philately. Fully tagged examples of the Lion are quite scarce, and now we know from which plate it originates.

Does it matter? Of course it does. One must keep in mind that taggant is an ink, though not visible to the naked eye under normal light. Thus, having an example of a tagged stamp that is not supposed to be tagged is a major color error.

Editor Ron Blanks authored articles in 2006, published in *The United States Specialist* and *Mekeel's and Stamps*, reporting the discovery of a non-numbered example of the (10¢) Lion and went on to comprehensively list and illustrate other coils that should not be tagged, but he could not always identify the plates from which these errors were printed. I'm sure he'd be happy to summarize these coils in a future *Coil Line* article for interested PNCers.

The likelihood is that the error occurred because a partial roll of pre-phosphored paper was erroneously and inadvertently spliced onto the end of a non-phosphored paper roll to complete a print run for the S66666 printing. There's no telling how many of the stamps were printed on this paper, but it could not have been many. The Scott U.S. Specialized catalog lists it as number 3447b, but leaves it unpriced. So far the newly reported plate number single, S66666, is the only reported PNC copy. But now that we know where to look, it is hoped that confirming copies will come to light in the near future.

Good hunting. I'll be listing this new discovery in the periodic "Reporting the Rarities" column, and I await confirming reports. — *Gene Trinks*

Welcome!

If you are a new reader, PNC³ is in its 25th year. We are a community of stamp collectors specializing in the plate numbered coil issues of the USA. The first PNCs were issued in 1981 and, in February 1988, a network of PNC specialists established our club. *Coil Line* was launched in May, 1988 and serves (along with other club literature) to inform collectors on the many aspects of PNCs. Studies include scarce numbers, varieties, printing methods, market values, PNCs on mail, and more. Thank you for visiting, and we hope you'll join us!

PNC³ Regional Meetings

(no announcements received of future meetings)

May 5th Southern California Club Meeting Report

by John Himes

On Saturday, May 5th, thirteen PNC³ club members and guests got together for a Southern California regional meeting at the Yorba Linda Public Library. The weather was great, the facility was spacious, and everyone had an absolutely great time. Following a welcome by hosts John Himes and Jeff Haas, everyone introduced themselves and provided some background on their collecting history and current interests. Participants shared some incredible stories as we went around the room.

Discussions commenced about the new coils that were issued since the last meeting. Consensus arose that it's getting harder and harder to find philatelic outlets that will break down strips from the larger rolls of 3,000 and 10,000 stamps. For most collectors, the only recourse is to order them from Kansas City.

Everyone who has tried to order the (25¢) Spectrum Eagles and 45¢ Weather Vanes from Kansas City has gotten strips that are folded in such a way as to preclude collecting the desired strips of 13 and 11 in length, respectively. (*please see page 68*)

PNC³ Regional Meetings

(from page 67, So. Cal. regional meeting report)

Even if the collectors were only looking for a plate strip of 7 of the Eagles, the folds still were generally too close to the plate number stamp to get a good strip without a fold line.

Club member Joan Porter had recently sent back two strips of the Eagles to Kansas City and requested that they replace them with strips that had the plate number in the center, and that they send her rolled up strips, not folded strips. She mentioned that they had arrived that very morning, and were in her car, so she went out and retrieved them, and we opened the envelope right there in the meeting.

Even though the instructions clearly stated that she wanted the strips replaced with rolled strips, and the plate number in the middle of the strip, they just sent the same old packaged strips with folds two-left of the plate number. The club members were very vocal in suggesting that the PNC³ leadership find some way to convey to “the Cave” that they need to take more care when preparing these multi-image strips for shipment.

Then followed a discussion about the (5¢) Art Deco Bird stamps with plate #P2222. No one has reportedly found them mint, but a few used ones have been found. John Himes brought along four copies he received from a mixture sorter in southern Pennsylvania to show; they were the first copies that most of the members had seen. All agreed that if they should find these mint, they would share the information with others in the club.

The electronic version of *Coil Line* was demonstrated for everyone on a normal-size laptop. Everyone agreed that the color was outstanding, the print was large and very readable (even though it was just a laptop screen, not a larger monitor), and that the PNC³ Team had done a great job producing this version of the journal. Three different attendees indicated that they would ask for a sample electronic copy, and probably would switch over to the electronic version in order to save the added fee needed to mail them hard copies each month.

Next came a nice round of sharing prized collection items. We were treated to examples of a 29¢ Rushmore Flag “brick red” variety (a non-plate-number used single), (please see page 74)

Novel (10¢) Lion PNC Found

by Gene Trink

PNC³ Life Member Bob Murrin has been searching mixtures for years now, and has frequently been rewarded with finds of less common PNCs. He offers these premium used singles to members via a price list that is updated nearly every day, and holds significant inventory on all but the rarest of PNC items.

Bob now lives in Florida, but grew up in Boston, having attended the same high school (though not at the same time) as PNC pioneer Steve Esrati. He’s a Navy veteran, and a diligent mixture sorter. Bob claims to have sorted over 6,000 pounds of mission mixtures, as well as numerous lots from private transactions and eBay sources.

He recently reported finding a **previously unreported fully phosphor-tagged variety of the self-adhesive (10¢) Lion plate S66666**. This variety has no similarity to the previously known lightly tagged versions of the Lion stamps. It does compare to the extremely rare fully tagged version of the (10¢) Atlas V21211, of which there are only 6 reported to date in the “Reporting the Rarities” census published periodically in *Coil Line*.

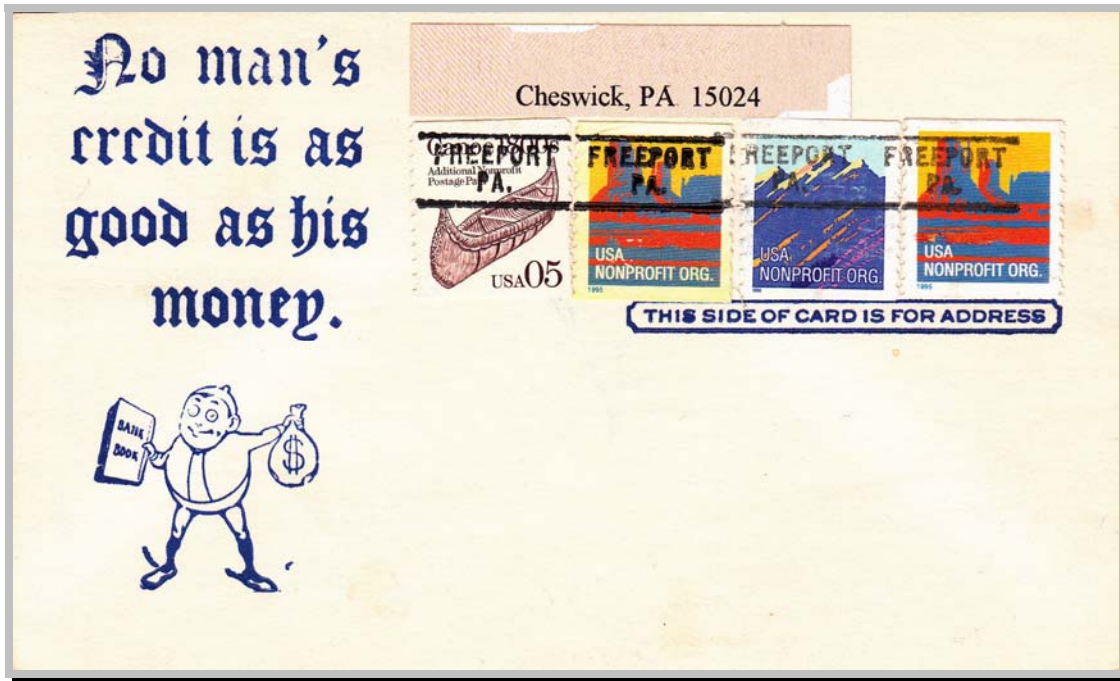
This (so far) unique piece has been sent to Scott for verification, and it is anticipated that the plate number will be listed in a future edition of the Scott Specialized U.S. catalog for Scott 3447b. Scott assigned this number to the tagged version of Scott 3447 when member Ron Blanks discovered an unnumbered example on-cover. (After this find was reported in the June 9, 2006 *Mekeel’s and Stamps* and the December 2006 issue of *The United States Specialist*, Ron found only one more, the on-piece coil shown below.) The census of PNC Rarities will be updated to include this PNC, and it is hoped that all members will get out their shortwave ultraviolet lamps and search for additional copies.

Unnumbered fully tagged (10¢) Lion (2000) under shortwave UV light, similar to recently found first PNC example #S66666.

(Note: “Hi-brite” envelope paper’s strong glow obscures viewing the stamp paper’s glow.)



Readers' Forum



Postcard with four nonprofit presort-rate coils, including two (5¢) Buttes. The first Butte shows tagging, apparently the first example reported for this issue. (A precancel device from the Freeport, PA post office was used to cancel the coils.)

I found this postcard (shown above) at the Chicagopex stamp exhibition held last November 2011 in a dealer's box for \$3.50. I was using my old Scott shortwave ultraviolet light, looking for a find. I sent it to the American Philatelic Expertizing Service for a certificate. I have attached an image of the postcard under UV light, and a copy of the certificate. It states "United States, Scott No. 2902 (second stamp on card with UL corner crease), tagged under shortwave light, used on postcard with others, genuine."

– Kurt Albrecht #2117



Tagged (5¢) Butte, at left of normal untagged coils (closeup of area cropped from postcard image at top of page).

American Philatelic Society

Expert Committee Report

Members of the American Philatelic Expertizing Service have examined the item submitted and it is their opinion that it is:

United States, Scott No. 2902 (second stamp on card with UL corner crease), tagged under shortwave light, used on postcard with others, genuine.

No. 199408

Date: 3/7/2012

The American Philatelic Expertizing Service
A Service to Philately Since 1903
100 Match Factory Place, Bellefonte, PA 16823 USA
Phone: 814-933-3803 • Fax: 814-933-6128
Website: www.stamps.org

A cooperative service offered by the American Philatelic Society (APS) and the American Stamp Dealers Association (ASDA).

Direct Mail Sightings

by Ron Blanks

Come along as we take a tour of one household's incoming direct-mail covers bearing stamps. Saved from the period of November 2008 through March 2009, this small cache illustrates some of the interesting aspects of modern postal history. Since most stamped advertising mail uses coils, the likelihood and frequency of obtaining PNC examples is of interest. Along the way, these covers also show aspects of mail use intriguing to collectors.

Our tour shows subjects of past research and a few springboards to future elaboration in which collectors can delve to enliven their PNC hobby.

First stop: The mail that looks most like ordinary "personal" mail, as one might expect from relatives mailing greetings. Figure 1 shows the medley of full-rate first-class advertising mail received over the five-month period. Of the eight covers, two are PNCs; *(please see next page)*



Two 42¢ Flag coils from self-adhesive affixer rolls are PNC #V2222 (next two below).
▼
▼

Figure 1. One household's 5-month direct-mail appeals using first-class coils for postage (cropped images of upper-right corners).

(from previous page, *Direct Mail Sightings*)



Figure 2. Closeups from Figure 1 of 42¢ Flag affixer coil PNC #V2222 with hand-affixed 17¢ Bighorn Sheep; and 41¢ Flag affixer coil paired with 1¢ Tiffany Lamp (2008; right).

42¢ Flag designs from self-adhesive large rolls were machine-affixed to seven, and a large-roll 41¢ Flag self-adhesive was machine-affixed to one cover.

One cover is notable for requiring more postage than the first-ounce 42¢ rate. (See closeup at left in Figure 2.) Besides the fact that these heavier mailings are seldom made in comparison to one-ounce direct-mail pieces, they offer collecting options for the choices of additional postage affixed. PNCers will note, of course, the seldom-seen chance that a second coil is a PNC as well as the first one.

The 41¢ + 1¢ cover (closeup at right in Figure 2) can't be considered postmarked; only a few streaks of ink are noticeable. Assigning a date to such a cover when a collector receives it secondhand is normally the challenge of covers franked with presort-rate coils that typically are undated. The canceler missed applying a readable date for this otherwise desirable cover. The coincidence points up an ongoing challenge that is often faced: to seek better examples of a given aspect of postal history.

Direct mail marketers have long used multiple stamps at times to help their mailings stand apart and hopefully get opened instead of discarded. In the past, lettershops using a combination of values like 41¢ and 1¢ required an affixing machine for water-activated-gum rolls since ordinary low-value coils only came in that format. But on June 1, the new 1¢ Bobcat issue becomes the first low-value denomination available in self-adhesive large rolls for affixing equipment. (The stamps are spaced slightly apart on a liner roll, so they can be "tipped" onto envelopes as self-stick labels have been applied over decades.) This means a new type of full-rate first-class cover will soon be available to find: One with

all self-adhesives including a low-value one, and especially a cover like this with all PNCs.

Observant readers will also note in the Figure 1 examples another aspect that distinguishes the covers. Space here does not permit pursuing this any further, except to note that the kind of postmark sought in direct-mail covers with PNCs offers another option for a challenging specialty to research.

Next on our tour: undenominated presort coil covers (bearing the kind of coils we normally expect on stamped advertising mail).

Figure 3 indicates the covers in the five-month cache mailed at reduced first-class rates. Since the self-stick 2003-2005 (25¢) Eagle issues were not replaced by the "Spectrum" Eagle until this year, it's not surprising that the November 2008 – March 2009 sample has only 2003-dated (rolls of 10,000) Eagles. Little more can be noted besides the one S3333333 PNC found in this small sample. (*please see page 76*)



Figure 3. Cropped images from covers with (25¢) Eagle (2003) coils (at upper-right is PNC S3333333)

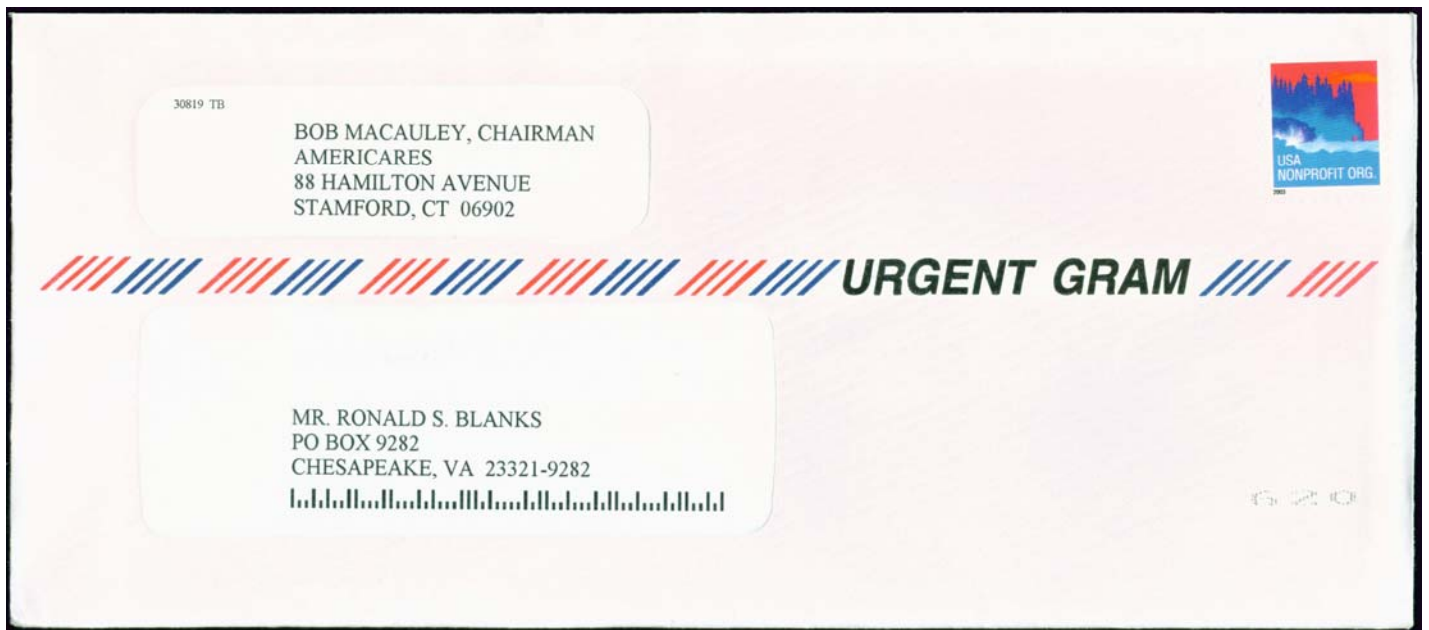


Figure 1. A mailpiece with a MERLIN number. ▲

A strange-looking, smudgy marking appeared on a scattered handful of advertising mailpieces several years ago. Then in the past few years, they seemed to have disappeared. But suddenly (at least in my experience) a couple of examples showed up again in recent mail. What are these marks? Why are they seen so sporadically?

It turns out that the cover marks are part of the U.S. Postal Service's compliance testing of presort mailings at discounted postage rates.

The Mail Evaluation Readability Lookup INstrument (MERLIN) is an automated tool that the USPS uses to verify that bulk presort mailings conform to the Domestic Mail Manual standards. MERLIN includes the printing of counting numbers on tested mail pieces.

Figure 1 shows a mailing I received in May 2004 that shows a MERLIN counting number "620" at lower right. It was sent by a non-profit firm and bears an undenominated service-inscribed (5¢) Sea Coast stamp (Scott 3785). (Recall that the USPS considers presort-rate coil stamps as precanceled, which alleviates the need for post-office postmarking. Presort-rate mailers can also use unprecanceled stamps, but they have to apply their own USPS-permitted postmark in preparing a mailing.)

According to a USPS website, "MERLIN can perform presort verification, weigh verification computations for permit imprint mailings, First-Class shortpaid meter sampling, and barcode analysis.

"In addition, it can check the address accuracy of the mailing address used, perform mail characteristics analysis including the height, weight, thickness and aspect ratio in the sample.

"MERLIN can read the meter dates to ensure that mail is properly dated. It can also read meter serial numbers."

When MERLIN processes sampled mail, it prints a three-digit counting number either at the left or right side of the mailpieces. This allows a USPS clerk to locate any piece indicated on a diagnostic report.

The numbers are often hard to read. Admittedly the few examples I've received are a very small sample, but the inkjet-printed digits are often poorly formed. The left unedited image in Figure 2 shows a narrow portion of a cover with a MERLIN number that is hardly readable (especially by the time it is rendered in print at top of next page.) The image at right in Figure 2 was digitally altered to try to improve its readability.

(please see next page)

(from previous page, MERLIN numbers)



Figure 2. Hard-to-read MERLIN number
(unedited, left; enhanced, right)

Since the maximum sampling size currently used is 1000, it is logical to assume that the printed values range from 000 to 999. For mailings of 10,000 pieces or more, 1000 pieces are sampled. For over 500 and less than 10,000 pieces, 500 items are sampled. For mailings of 500 or less, the entire mailing is tested.

Does MERLIN actually print only three-digit numbers, as several mail design analysts I checked with in May 2004 affirmed? Figure 3 shows cropped images of seven covers with MERLIN numbers. One of the more readable cases near the center at top is a four-digit example from a metered presorted first-class mailing dated May 21, 2003. (It occurs to me now that it might have come from an installed field-test unit that was allowed to remain in service, an occasional practice of the USPS with some vendors' equipment not chosen as the final version.)

MERLIN is installed at Business

Mail Entry Units, where permit holders present mailings to be entered into the mailstream. In 2004, I was informed that all mailings of 10,000 or more pieces and one in six smaller mailings are subject to MERLIN testing.

Introduced in 2001, changes to MERLIN effective January 2004 added stricter tests that mailings must meet.

According to the January 2004 USPS Memo to Mailers, "... the equipment had only been used to verify that barcodes were readable by automated sorting equipment. Now, it also will check for blatant ZIP Code errors as represented in the barcode."

The 2004 change was part of a series of tests to be phased-in for MERLIN to conduct, to help ensure mailers are paying correct postage. (The practice of introducing a procedure or technology, and then gradually adding further steps or functionality, is common with many USPS changes. The mailing industry often sees such changes as impositions and the two parties have ongoing challenges to work together.) The website www.usps.com/merlin gives more information about the verifications conducted.

A manual inspection, more common in the past, can disqualify a mailing from receiving the best postage discounts claimed. With MERLIN, an error rate of more than one percent can also disqualify a mailing from receiving automation discounts.

I started noticing these odd-looking three-digit numbers on mail in the summer of 2003. Until May 2004, I had associated covers with these numbers only to permit-imprint mail.

So while I was curious, I didn't pursue them further as I didn't think they were USPS marks. By coincidence, in mid-2004 some of the incoming mail franked with service-inscribed coils I was checking (please see next page)

Figure 3. Sampling of MERLIN numbers
(note 4-digit number near top-center)



(from previous page, MERLIN numbers)

for PNCs now had the counting numbers.

PNC collectors who are postal history enthusiasts can also consider MERLIN numbers when collecting covers. If my experience is any indication, the odds of finding a MERLIN number on a PNC cover are very, very low. In nine years, I've received only two such items. (See table below for mail logged.)

Interestingly, given the fuzzy nature of MERLIN's printing, someone could experimentally arrive at the right set of factors using a computer printer to make a convincing reproduction on a PNC cover without a MERLIN number. Microscopic forensics examination can be expected to detect attempts to fake a rare PNC substitution on a cover. However, with low-quality MERLIN printing, it's likely that virtually no attribute can mark its printing apart from a post-delivery printing applied elsewhere.

I wonder if any reader has a cover with a four-digit MERLIN number, to add to the only report of one so far. I would welcome reader reports of any MERLIN-printed numbers on PNC covers, sent or emailed (preferably with a picture) using the editor's contact information on page 66.

MERLIN Cover Counts for a Multi-Year Presort Mail Cache

	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	*	'12
MERLIN covers	2	6	3	6	6	1	0	2
All covers	245	549	578	700	811	611	1283	26

* – No MERLIN numbers noticed on 2009, 2010, 2011 covers. (Note: Covers involve presort coils.)

(from page 68, So. Cal. meeting report) and a pre-canceled 17¢ Electric Car, where most of the overprint was missing on one stamp. A wonderful stock page housed various errors on the 33¢ Hat coil issue. This "show and tell" portion was followed by the awarding of door prizes, and everyone who attended went away with a nice item to add to their collection.

Rounding out the meeting was a vigorous round of buying, selling, and trading amongst the members. Overall, it was a fantastic meeting, and everyone agreed it would be great to have a Southern California regional meeting in the Library again in the future.

Membership

New Applicants

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(507) 261-6050
Ddaann47@gmail.com

Names of applicants are published for review. A member who questions the suitability of a prospective member should contact the Membership Committee c/o Robert Thompson with the objection (see page 66 for contact choices.) Applicants are accepted as members one month after publication if no objection is made.

Reinstated

Robert Read (387)
Ike Lee (396)
Helmut Neumann (399)
George F. Stephenson (482)
Raymond Benzinger (555)
John Bensko (599)
Joseph Papaj (716)
Jim Haislet (985)
Wayne Hise (1016)
Daniel Hein (1422)
Richard Peluso (1455)
John Grover (1510)
Thomas Mizak (1589)
John T. Bodley (1686)
Stephen Hopper (1702)
Carl Moore, Jr. (1856)

(please see next page)

Classified Ads

PNC used singles, used strips, MNH PS5s. Great prices! Guaranteed quality! No hassles! Visit <http://www.angelfire.com/ca5/HimesPNCs> or send LSASE for lists to John Himes, PO Box 453, Cypress, CA 90630-0453. Please specify what you collect. Or e-mail johnwhimes@yahoo.com. Member 957L

CLASSIFIED AD rates are 6¢ per word, with a minimum cost of \$3.00 per insertion.

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• Color Ad - Electronic Version	Add \$ 25.00

(Discounts available for multiple insertions.)

44¢ Quill & Inkwell Going Off-Sale June 30



The 2012 Qtr 2 edition of *USA Philatelic* (the USPS sales catalog, Vol. 17), notes all formats (3,000- and 10,000-count rolls) of the 44¢ Quill & Inkwell affixer coil go off-sale after June 30, 2012.



Address Changing?



Change of Address forms and membership applications are available from Harvey Wales, Secretary, 13 Birmingham Place, Vernon Hills, IL 60061. Email: Secretary@pnc3.org. Membership form is also on our website at: www.pnc3.org.

(from page 74, Membership)

(Reinstated, continued)

- Nello Christiano (1880)
- Alvin Golub (1891)
- Richard Steele (1906)
- Doug Walker (1914)
- Henry Gitner (1945)
- Janet Fuller (1969)
- Charles E. Nelson (2099)
- Thomas Barrett (2100)
- David Kleinman (2182)
- Paul Kaufman (2185)

Dropped – Non-Payment

- Gary Hendren (291)
- Justin Gordon (1309)

Deceased

- James B Doyle, III (1064-L)
- Penfield, NY

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New Members	3
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Deceased	(1)
Dropped or Resigned	(2)
Membership Count	about 583

Residential addresses and barcodes on covers shown in *Coil Line* are digitally modified for privacy.

(from page 71, *Direct Mail Sightings*)

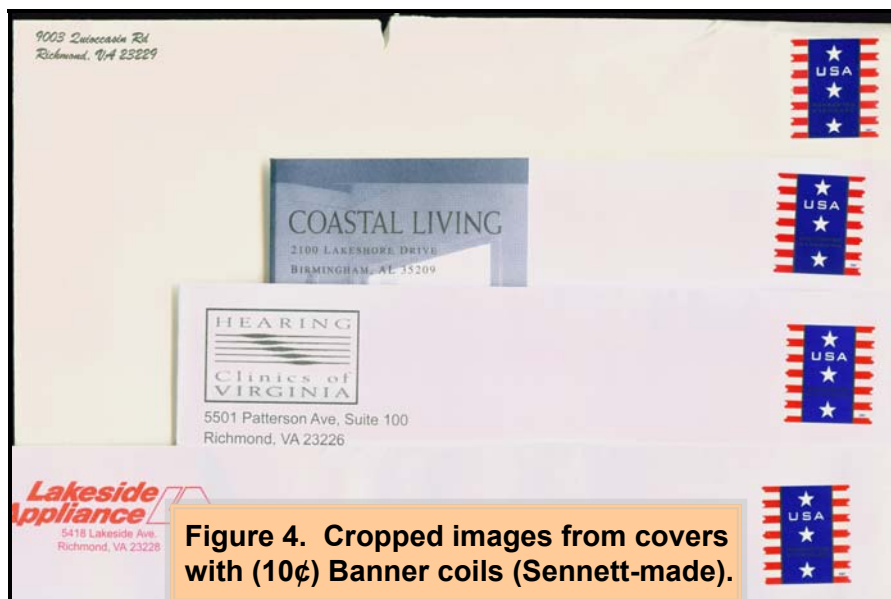


Figure 4. Cropped images from covers with (10¢) Banner coils (Sennett-made).

Next stop on our tour is today’s “standard class” of mail as the USPS calls it (yesteryear’s “third class”), that for-profit businesses mailed. This household cache of Nov. 2008–March 2009 shows only (10¢) Banners used, supplied by the two private printers as noted in captions of Figures 4 and 5. The cover treatments in this category appear conventional; no examples of “extreme” franking for excitement.

However, even with these 11 covers, some aspects bear noting. The “Hearing Clinics of Virginia” cover partly shown in Figure 4 has something seldom seen and currently being phased out. That’s why it is featured on the front cover. The barcode above the address is a PLANET code that, combined with the older POSTNET code below, provided the mailer with tracking data from the USPS for an extra fee. “Intelligent Mail” barcodes are now replacing the two codes.

Among the few Avery Banner coils in Figure 5, an oddity appeared: One of the designs is shifted so that its top red stripe is broader than average (and the bottom one is skinnier). Has anyone seen a more extreme example, where the top or bottom strip is only a thin slice, or even absent?

Interestingly, at this point in the tour the first Mailer’s Postmark Permit (MPP) cancel is seen (in Figure 5) among all of the first-class and standard-class mail sampled. MPP covers offer another PNC study area. Next time, Part Two of our tour will show more MPP variety among nonprofit mailings.

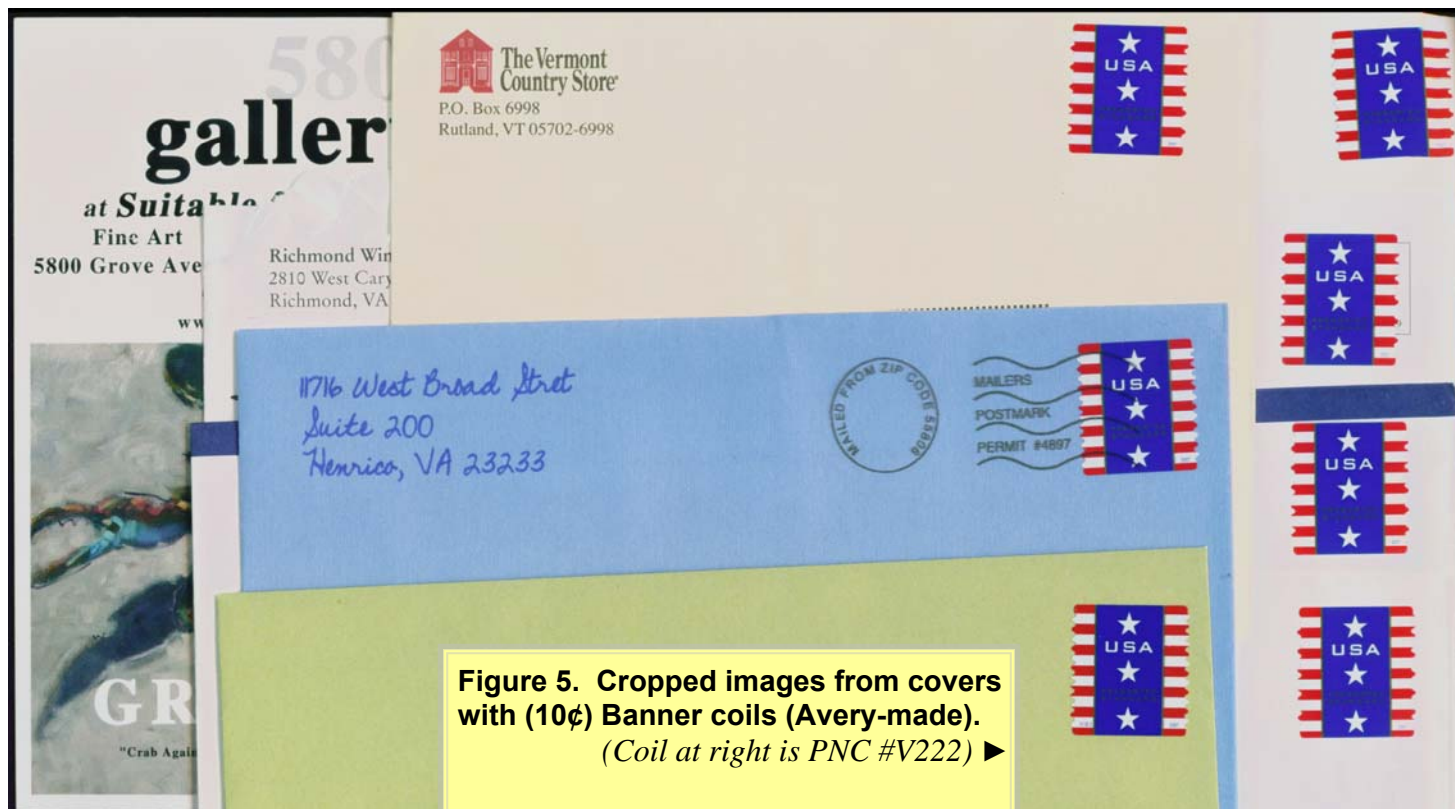


Figure 5. Cropped images from covers with (10¢) Banner coils (Avery-made).
(Coil at right is PNC #V222) ▶