

# The Plate Number

## PNC Collectors Reject Change in Terminology

By Steve Esrati\*\*

Articles in the last issue of *TPN* reported calls for change in the terms used to describe PNCs.

Ken Lawrence\*\* reported that Jiri Chytil, the collector who pioneered the collection of long strips, objected to the way we designate the se-tenant precancel styles on the 17¢ Electric Auto. Chytil did not like the idea of calling the se-tenants AB merely because the A Style was left of the precancel gap. He wanted the A to refer to the style shown on the numbered stamp.

That idea was opposed by Dennis Chamberlain\*\*, the man who originally designated the precancel se-tenant styles. Here is his response:

I strongly disagree with Jiri Chytil's opinion on renaming se-tenants!

The AB and BA identifications were given to designate the two different types of se-tenant gap styles that alternate throughout every coil roll that has two different overprint styles. There is no inconsistency in this system whether you collect plate strips of three or strips of 3,000.

When a long plate number strip has both AB and BA gaps, the variety is simply identified by the gap type that is closest to the plate number. This system would never fail even if the Cottrell presses were still putting out additional combination varieties. It is impossible to have the AB and the BA gaps the same distance from the plate number stamp. For example, if the AB gap were 6L, the BA gap would be at 6R. But this would be an AB variety because 6L is six perforation rows from the plate number while 6R is seven perforation rows away.

There has been no spontaneous acceptance of a new system. In the recent discoveries from Plates 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, the gap locations are at 4R and 5R. These are correctly identified in the 1986 *Catalog of Plate Number Coils*. The glaring inconsistency of the Chytil suggestion only shows up when the gap is left of the joint line and this is the reason he proposes to change the name of a BA gap that is at 1L (on the numbered stamp) and call it A.

The 17¢ combination precancels from Plates 5 and 6 (line gap and gap 1L) show the exact identical gap types. It would be terribly confusing and inconsistent to give them different designations.

Here is another problem. I sell se-tenant varieties to some customers who are not interested in plate numbers. If I send off an AB strip and a BA strip, I challenge anyone to classify these se-tenant strips using the Chytil system.

Under the Chytil system, because these gap strips come from the same coil, these two different gap strips would have

the same name. However, since no plate number is visible, they could not be identified at all.

The small number of collectors who save long strips and use the Chytil system may not want to change. However, when they ask the whole PNC collecting fraternity to change to conform with their views, isn't the tail wagging the dog?

Similarly, there was opposition to the proposal by Eugene Y. Liu to change the way we refer to stamps.

Liu pointed out that it is plate numbers that we collect, not joint lines (if present). Yet we have been referring to the stamps with the plate number as 1L, one stamp left of the joint line (if present).

The problem, of course, is compounded when there is no joint line. This puts us in the embarrassing situation of using a nonexistent line as the reference point from which we count.

So far, collector response has been to leave things as they are, even though Liu's proposal is eminently reasonable.

So we will continue to count stamps the same way we count precancel gaps, from the line. But to make things a bit more reasonable, the next edition of *The Catalog of Plate Number Coils* will refer to the stamps with the plate number as the numbered stamp, not 1L. The stamp to its left will be 2L.

Finally, there was a proposal by Ken Lawrence\*\* to adopt new names for precancels, especially those that are applied by the same plate that prints the stamps.

That one has received just a bit of support. Larry G. Haynes\*\*, for example, says this would put PNC collectors into agreement with precancel collectors.

But we are under one huge handicap. Just as grammarians have been unable to banish such redundant terms as "foreign imports" or "IRA accounts," what we do makes little difference because the big kid on the block is gonna hit us over the head with a baseball bat if we don't conform.

The big kid is the Postal Service. It is continuing to refer to the special use stamps as precancels.

### The Plate Number

MARCH 1987 VOLUME II NO. 2

Published at least six times a year by Stephen G. Esrati, P. O. Box 20130, Shaker Heights, Ohio 44120-0130. Subscription price is \$10 a year.

Entire contents Copyright © 1987 by Stephen G. Esrati.

Advertising rates: \$25 a quarter page (vertically or horizontally); \$45 a half page; \$80 a page. Classified ads are 15 cents a word with no charge for your address.

A two-star symbol behind a name indicates membership in the Plate Number Coil Study Group.

# All the News of PNCs That's Fit to Print

When the 1968 *Catalog of Plate Number Coils* appeared, it contained several warnings. One was about Plate 2 of the 20¢ Fire Pumper.

The warning said: "20¢ Fire Pumper stamps are still available at USPS. Prices [are] subject to release of large stocks of stamps."

The theory was that the earliest stamps printed would be at the bottom of the pile in Postal Service stocks and would be the last sold.

In January, a roll of 500 from the elusive Plates 1 and 2 was sold at the L'Enfant Plaza philatelic store. According to **Ken Lawrence\*\***, the find immediately started a search, but no more rolls were found.

Still, a roll of 500 yields about 10 strips of each plate number. So the buyer, who paid \$100, did pretty well for himself. A superb strip of five from Plate 2 was offered in the Feb. 22 auction of Sam Houston Philatelics and carried an estimate of \$200-\$225. The same sale included a F-VF strip from Plate 1 estimated at \$50-\$75.

That means the roll would fetch \$2,500 if it sold at the lowest estimate!

\*\*\*

A collector tried to buy a strip of the re-engraved 1¢ Omnibus at the post office in Elyria, Ohio. He couldn't do it.

"To get those stamps in," he was told, "we have to order 200 rolls."

\*\*\*

Reports out of Washington, not yet confirmed by plate activity reports, indicate that the 22¢ Flag has gone as high as Plate 17 (possibly Plate 19), even though collectors had found nothing higher than Plate 14 as of Feb. 15.

\*\*\*

Dealer **Dave Kaplan** has placed strict limits on orders from his wholesale list. You can buy some items by plate number only if these items total less than 25% of the total order. His reason for this is to try to save some of the scarcer items for his regular wholesale customers.

\*\*\*

**Dave Hackley** says he found the blue Capitol on the 22¢ Flag long before it was found by **Eugene Kiehlmeier** in Erie, Pa. Hackley says he found a strip of four used in a mission mixture. It had been canceled Dec. 6, 1985, at Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

Hackley says he submitted the item to Bill Hatton, then doing the "Basics and Beyond" column in *Linn's* and Hatton mentioned the find in his column of May 19, 1986.

**James T. Stark** says he has found a blue Capitol on a letter postmarked Nov. 5, 1985 in Palm Springs, Calif.

**Daniel T. Trabke** (who lives at North Pole, Alaska) reports finding covers with blue Capitols from Anderson (Oct. 5, 1985), Healy (Dec. 5, 1985), and Fairbanks (Sept. 16 and 30, 1985). All these post offices are in Alaska.

Meanwhile, **Kiehlmeier** has found the 22¢ Flag imperforate from Plate 8 and with a missing Statue of Freedom (plate number unknown).

Some people just keep finding things! **Kiehlmeier**, who also found Plates 3 and 4 of the 1¢ Omnibus and was the first to report the slate-blue Capitol on the 22¢ Flag has found Plate 14 of the current Flag stamp.

\*\*\*

**Thomas E. Gift** and **Glenn Estus\*\*** are working on a compilation of cachets found on first day covers with PNCs.

Meanwhile, **Ken Lawrence**, then writing on PNCs for *Stamp Collector*, has compiled a scarcity table for some FDCs bearing PNCs.

One problem for FDC collectors is that many preparers did not have any idea about how PNCs should be affixed to cover. There are pairs with the number on the right-hand stamp. There are triplets with the number on either end of the strip. There are strips of four with the joint line almost anywhere but in the middle.

Even worse, many of the strips are simply terrible as to condition. As we all know, superb is hard to find, but it is a real mystery where they found these dogs.

\*\*\*

The Postal Service no longer sends out the plate activity reports to everyone on its mailing list. In what may be a move to end distribution of the report entirely, USPS asks those who are interested to request the report from:

Plate Number Report  
Stamp Information Branch  
Room 5800  
U.S. Postal Service Headquarters  
Washington, D.C. 20260-6352

\*\*\*

Dealer **Bob Dumaine** (Sam Houston Philatelics) has raised the price of the 10.9¢ Hansom Cab from Plate 4 above what he charges for Plate 3. Dumaine says he has seen parts of rolls in which the 3 is clear of the bottom edge while the 4 is cut.

That is the first such report since a similar thing was found on Plate 1 of the Cottrell version of the 8.3¢ Ambulance.

\*\*\*

In a recent issue of *TPN*, **Tom Maeder\*\*** was quoted as saying that line gaps of Plate 3 and 4 of the 17¢ Electric Auto were the scarcest 17¢ strips. Maeder said only one collector had these.

During preparation of the article in this issue of *TPN* by **Larry G. Haynes\*\*** on relative scarcity of precancel gaps it was found that two other collectors also had managed to find these elusive Style A strips.

\*\*\*

**Kim Cuniberti** has found something that looks like a flying hyphen on a 5.2¢ Sleigh from Plate 2. The mark, a diagonal slash about one millimeter long, occurs near the "t" of "Nonprofit" at 3R.

\*\*\*

The most recent plate activity report from the Bureau of Engraving and Printing indicated that there had been 55,100 impressions from Plate 1 of the 7.4¢ Baby Buggy.

**Joe Brockert** of the Postal Service checked with the BEP and was told that no such stamps ever went into the vaults or went out to post offices. While that is not quite a guarantee that all were destroyed, it may be the closest thing to it that we'll ever get.

Previously, USPS' **Linda Foster** had said that it is BEP policy to destroy any stamp of which there had been fewer than 30,000 impressions.

Incidentally, there have been no collector finds of the 7.4¢ "blown tire" variety reported in *Linn's U.S. Stamp Yearbook 1984*. That variety is being dropped from the 1987 PNC catalog.

## Time to Renew?

If the symbol "2-87" appears after your name on the mailing label, this will be the last issue of *The Plate Number* that you will receive. To avoid interruption, rush \$10 for a one year subscription to the address shown in the box on the first page of this issue.

Back issues of *TPN* are available at \$1 each to cover postage, copying and handling. Volume I included seven issues.

# A Question of Ethics

By Steve Esrati\*\*

When I started writing the PNC column in *Linn's* issue of Nov. 18, 1985, I was not yet a dealer.

By the time I wrote the December column, however, I had become a dealer. So I said so.

Inevitably, there have been conflicts of interest between my journalistic efforts and my business. And, although I have been accused of all sorts of things, I have always put the journalism first.

When the blue Capitol was discovered on a 22¢ Flag in Erie, Pa., I said it had been found in Erie, Pa., even though it would have been to my financial best interest to keep that fact a secret.

At about that same time, another *Linn's* writer reported a discovery he had made in "a large post office east of the Mississippi."

When D. John Shultz\*\* discovered that the Postal Service had issued 4¢ Stagecoach stamps from Plates 5 and 6 without precancel, nobody except Shultz knew where the stamps had popped up.

But Shultz was under no obligation to tell anyone else. At that time, he was a dealer and no one could blame him for buying a few rolls of 3,000 and stripping out the numbers for profit.

In my *Linn's* column of March 17, 1986, I said there were rumors of the existence of these stamps. That was before Shultz's stamps hit the market at prices ranging from \$1.85 to \$7.50.

The checklist accompanying my April 21 column indicated the existence of these new stamps.

Finally, in May, *Linn's* ran a report by me on these stamps as an "Editor's Choice" column. It was now revealed that the stamps had been especially printed for use by the Disabled American Veterans in Cincinnati.

But when other dealers found the stamps, they learned that each roll of 3,000 stamps had only half a dozen strips (out of 62 strips in the roll) that were Very Fine or better. Most were terrible.

[Shultz is convinced that there were two printings of the DAV stamps. An early printing (probably mostly used up by the DAV) included some rolls with better centering. He obtained some of those. But the later stock was all bad, Shultz reports.]

Similarly, dealer Al Haake found that it was hard to find good examples of the DAV stamps.

So it came as a distinct shock when ads appeared in *Linn's* from a dealer who asked: "Is Esrati right about the scarcity of the 4¢ Stagecoach, Plates 5 and 6?"

It is not clear whether his ads were attempting to indicate that my report on scarcity was untrue or whether they were attempting to stir up panic buying by indicating that I had said that those two plates were rare irrespective of condition.

Time has proven that I was right. Prices on these stamps are up for good copies. The poorly centered copies are abundant.

As a journalist, I reported all this. As a dealer, I had a hard time finding copies I could sell. And my most recent price for a superb strip of five on these was \$5.50. The dealer who ran those ads is selling them at \$3 but charges an added 40% for VF-S. That makes his VF-S cost \$4.20.

But my VF price is \$4, my XF price is \$4.50. And, incidentally, I do not know what VF-S means.

When I describe a stamp as superb, that means the line is exactly centered inside the perfs.

Finally, I was criticized in print because the 1986 PNC catalog priced some mint pairs at higher prices than used singles. In fact, this was intentional in the case of Official stamps and for Plates 17 and 18 of the 18¢ Surrey. Those prices reflected the market. The catalog also had several typographical errors, all of which were noted in *TPN*.

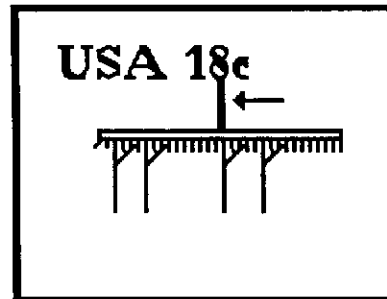
My conscience is clear. I do not regret reporting that USPS was selling "\$70 strips" of the 18¢ Surrey at 90 cents face. I do not regret saying in print that the 18¢ Flag from Plate 7 had suddenly taken a

price dive. I do regret being stuck with a large number of 20¢ Flags from Plate 11 for which I paid way too much, but I reported their sudden appearance in print.

Still, although I practiced journalism in my PNC column, leaning over backwards not to serve my own interests, *Linn's* has had to ask Ken Lawrence to take over the column because it sought to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest. I wish him well.

Knowing that Ken has been a major contributor to this publication, I sincerely hope that he will still find it possible to contribute to *TPN*.

And, of course, I promise to keep on reporting all PNC news right here in *TPN*, which has just had a facelift. Isn't it snazzy?



**CB ANTENNA** — Thomas Lipari of Corona, Calif., found this new plate crack (shown schematically here) on the numbered stamp of Plate 5 of the 18¢ Surrey.

## PNC COLLECTORS

I edit the *TPN* column on varieties. Please report constant plate varieties and mat varieties to me, including plate cracks, missing periods or letters. Also, miscuts resulting in at least full numbers at the top or numberless line pairs, plate flaws, hashmarks, guidelines, ink blobs, etc.

Any information is appreciated.

Free trade lists (PS/3 or PS/5) are available to collectors interested in trading.

I also buy and sell. I especially need 20¢ Consumers and 20¢ Flags in PS/5. Ask for current quotes.

**A.S. CIBULSKAS**  
28 Westwood Rd.  
Stamford, CT 06902

# Some Precancel Gaps Are Scarcer

By Larry G. Haynes\*\* and Steve Esrati\*\*

The Precancel Gap Committee of the Plate Number Coil Study Group has been attempting to find which gaps are scarcer for a stamp of the same face value and plate number.

Our method has been to start with the prices given in the PNC catalog and factor into them the prices given in recent price lists issued by Al Haake\*\* and Steve Esrati\*\*.

We then sent out questionnaires to members of the study group and others.

The results are — at best — preliminary.

Listed below are only those strips where there is a difference. The ratings are as follows: Rare, very high scarcity, high scarcity, medium scarcity, low scarcity.

**4¢ Stagecoach, 3-4:** Line gap is scarcer (high scarcity) as opposed to 1L and 2L (low scarcity). Good quality strips are scarce for the line gap.

**Same, 5-6:** Line gap is scarcer (high scarcity) as opposed to 1L and 2L (low scarcity).

**5.2¢ Sleigh, 1-2:** These are all "no gap" for those who collect in strips of five. Gap 5L has high scarcity; 3R and 5R have medium scarcity and Gap 6L/6R has low scarcity.

**Same, 3-5:** Gap 4L is rare, with only one find known. The line gap is also rare, with the longest known strip being only four stamps wide. Gap 1L has high scarcity. Gap 3L is of medium scarcity. But Gap 5L is pretty easy to find, with low scarcity.

**5.9¢ Bicycle, 3-4:** Gap 5L is of high scarcity on this stamp, all of whose precancels from Plates 3 and 4 are scarce. Gap 5R and Gap 6R/6L show medium scarcity while Gap 4L and line gap are of low scarcity.

**9.3¢ Mall Wagon, 1-2:** Gap 2L and 4R are of very high scarcity. Only one roll of 3,000 of 2L has been found. Gap 4L and 3L are of high scarcity, with several finds of 4L and at least two finds of 3L. The least scarce of these strips has the gap at 5R, and it is of medium scarcity.

**Same, 2-4:** Gap 2L is of medium scarcity for strips with plate number 2, but is of low scarcity for strips from Plate 4. Both numbers are of medium scarcity for Gap 4R.

**Same, 3-4:** Only one find is known of the rare Gap 4L. Rated at very high scarcity is Gap 5L. Gap 2R has high scarcity while 1R has medium scarcity. The line gap and Gap 6R/6L are of low scarcity.

**Same, 5-6:** Gap 1R and 3R have very high scarcity here, with only two finds known of 1R. Gap 6R/6L, 5L and 4L are of medium scarcity, while 3L, 2L and 5R have low scarcity.

**10.9¢ Hansom Cab, 1-2:** Gap 3R has high scarcity, 1R and 4R have medium, and line gap and 2R have low scarcity.

**Same, 3-4:** Prices are usually in excess of \$200 on these, so all are rare to start with. But the line gap is the most common of these, rating only very high scarcity (Line pairs are reported selling at \$40.). Only one find is known of 4L, 3L, 1R. Only two strips are known of 4R.

**17¢ Electric Auto, 3-4, Style A:** Line gaps have very high scarcity although there were several 1986 finds, mostly with the numbers at the top of the strip. But some strips have surfaced with the numbers at the bottom and clear. Gap 5R and 6R/6L have medium scarcity. Gap 5L, 4L, 2L and 1L are all of low scarcity.

**Same, 5-6, Style A:** Gap 5R, which had limited geographical distribution, has high scarcity. Gap 2L is medium while 1L is of low scarcity.

**Same, 5-7, Style A:** All medium.

**Same, 5-6, Style B:** One roll of 3,000 of Gap 4R has been found, giving it high scarcity, even though its numbers are at the

top. Gap 1L and line gap are rated medium.

**Same, 5-6, Style AB:** These have high scarcity, with only six rolls of 500 known to have been found.

**Same, 5-6, Style BA:** The ones to find are line gap and 5R, both rated very high. Only one roll of 3,000 is known of Gap 5R and its numbers were cut.

**Same, 3-4, Style C:** Line gap and Gap 1R are rated medium while Gap 3L is of low scarcity.

**Same, 5-7, Style C:** Gap 6R/6L may be rare since only one find is known. We rate it very high as of now. All other strips of these plates rate medium.

This is, as we said, a preliminary report. Any information is always welcome. Write me (Larry Haynes) at 2213 Mockingbird Lane, Baytown, TX 77520.

**IMPORTANT POSTSCRIPT:** The above covers scarcity of long strips, not strips of five. This distorts scarcity for No Gap strips collected as strips of five. For that reason, work is going ahead to determine scarcity for those strips, too. Even so, if a gap that does appear in the strip of five is very rare as a long strip, it will be difficult as a strip of five as well.

## New Blue Supreme Court Is Reported

A. S. Cibulskas\*\* reports the existence of the slate-blue Supreme Court on a 20¢ Flag from Plate 3. The reported find was in a strip of three.

Previous reports of this color variety have been on Plates 5 and 8.

## Back in Stock

An opportunity to trace the growth of a plate crack.

Six **SUPERB** strips of the 4.9¢ "Buggy Whip" ready to be exhibited. Each set includes:

- Short crack, unprecanceled, 1.5mm
- Long crack, unprecanceled, 2.25mm (second crack starts on the right)
- 2.5mm on No Gap, (second crack now faint under back seat)
- 3.75mm on Gap 2L (third crack faint at left; main crack reaches "o")
- 4mm on Line Gap (the "a" now has a tail)
- 5mm on Gap 2L (main crack now above the "o")

**Each set \$250**

Only two superb sets available  
(VF sets on hand for \$175)

**Steve Esrati**

**P.O. Box 20130**

**Shaker Helghs, OH 44120**

**(216) 561-9393**

# How Do You Spell Relief?

By Ken Lawrence\*\*

Andrew Jackson is supposed to have said, in response to the "Johnny Can't Spell" doomsayers of his day, that he didn't think a man was very creative if he could figure only one way to spell his name. Today's USPS has evidently taken its cue from Old Hickory.

How do you spell precancel? Easy, you say. OK, how do you spell its

past participle? The Postal Service has two answers. Checking the labels from coil rolls that are at hand, 5.2¢, 5.5¢, and 17¢ coils are "precanceled," but 4.9¢, 8.3¢ and 11¢ coils are "precancelled."

I have a "Permit to Use Precanceled Stamps or Envelopes," but on my last bulk mailing I used "precancelled" stamps. Was that legal?

*The Domestic Mail Manual* has it both ways. A portion of §143.11 reads: "Since postage due stamps are not accepted as postage in advance of mailing, they are not precancelled. The use of precanceled postage reduces the time and costs of mail handling."

Maybe this is just another example of those bureaucrats in Washington trying to please everybody, but which is the correct spelling? (I leave aside the question of which labels are the errors, a discussion that properly belongs in an EFO publication.)

A general rule is that we Americans are more efficient than our English counterparts, and usually we don't clutter our words with redundant letters. Thus, the awesome *Oxford English Dictionary* approves only the double-L spelling, while the handy *Oxford American Dictionary*, my favorite, insists the word is "precanceled."

Readers of my own award-winning newsletter know that I enjoy periodically poking fun at Scott Publishing Co. for its stout refusal

to spell "catalog" correctly. Perhaps Scott is an example of slavish adherence to the OED's authority as *The Standard* which, after all, is what the Scott "catalogue" also purports to be.

Well, in the discussion at hand, Scott would have a pretty persuasive comeback: "At least the *OED* is consistent. The upstart *OAD* is to dictionaries what *The Catalog of Plate Number Coils* is to catalogues. Take a look at how your stupid book spells the noun-ified back formations of cancel and precancel."

True, true. The *OAD* is a fickle American. In the first instance the word is "cancellation," as it should be, but then, when the prefix is added, a superfluous L is tossed in, too: "precancellation." Ugh!

Let's hope that PRECANCELLATION is never the tie breaker in a national spelling bee, or, if it is, that the young prodigy challenged to spell it isn't a stamp collector. Otherwise, he or she would undoubtedly spell the word correctly, and lose.

As I wrote two issues ago in *TPN*, we collectors should stop calling them precancels. USPS should stop calling them precancels.

Note to readers: Nearly every philatelic editor in the United States systematically misspells one or more of the words that are the subject of this essay.

[Editor's Note: As some of you may have noticed, *TPN* spells them "precanceled," "precancellation," and "precanceling." But you'll often find goofs here, too. The computer uses Merriam-Webster and it picked the long form as correct.]

**Precanceled  
Precancelled**

**Precancellation  
Precancelation**

## Constant Plate and Mat Varieties — Part V

By Al Cibulskas\*\*

### 1¢ Omnibus

a. Plate gouge on Plate 1 of the Cottrell press, constant plate variety at 2L. The gouge, which is about 1mm long vertically, is at the far right of the stamp, just below the third perf. (Anon.)

b. Plate number partly missing on the re-engraved B Press version (Plate 1). The bottom half is missing on five strips in a roll of 3,000. (Cibulskas)

### 10.1¢ Oil Wagon

a. "Dot" variety (constant) at 8L of the plate number above (and at about 1 o'clock in relation to) the leftmost of the three hatches. (Anon.)

### 11¢ Caboose

a. "Sitting Duck" variety, constant plate flaw at 9R of the plate number found only on the precancel. The flaw looks like a duck floating on water and facing to the right. The flaw is in the upper right quadrant and is constant. (Anon.)

### 18¢ Flag

a. Partly missing design. The tip of the lighthouse is missing 1L of plate number 4. Constancy is uncertain, but multiple examples exist, probably as a result of an inking problem because the amount of missing design varies throughout the available strips. (Anon.)

### 20¢ Fire Pumper

a. Partial doubling of the plate number 5 on a used single. The top bar of the "5" is doubled. Reports sought on other such occurrences. (Youngblood)

### 20¢ Flag

a. Doctor blade lines show throughout strips of five on roll of 100 on Plate 10 but are absent from other rolls from same board of bubble packs.

### 22¢ Flag

a. Partly missing Statue of Freedom atop dome on Plate 12, probably an inking flaw. (Anon.)

b. Flying saucer on numbered stamp from Plate 12. The flaw is left of the dome at about 11 o'clock. Found in a roll of 100. (Boland)

c. Vertical blue line above third top star from the left going to edge of stamp. Constant on 23rd stamp left of numbered stamp from Plate 7. Finder has dubbed it the "blue apostrophe." (Ebersole)

### Gap Table Correction

Several corrections should be made in the precancel gap table published on Page 12 of the last issue.

Add Plates 5/6 of the 4.9¢ Buckboard at 3R.

Remove reported gap at 3R for Plates 3/5 on the 5.2¢ Sleigh.

**DON'T FORGET TO RENEW**

# PNC Prices Remain on an Escalator

*TPN* does not report on prices from the perspective of giving "hot tips" for "investment." We leave such business to people who send out tip sheets.

But we feel it necessary to keep abreast of price trends for a different reason. The catalog (ours as well as the new Scott *Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps*) cannot possibly remain up to date when things move as rapidly as PNC prices. Meanwhile, what's a collector to do? Does he put his money into that costly strip of the 18¢ Flag from Plate 6 or does he put an equal amount of money into a handful of other strips that are showing rapid increases in price?

Similarly, what price should one accept from a dealer for a roll that has just been found in one of the secret hutches of Uncle Bill's Governor Winthrop desk? Not many dealers send out their buying lists, but several indicate what they are looking for and offer a percentage of their selling price. Dennis C. Chamberlain, on the other hand, includes his buying list with his selling prices.

It needs to be emphasized, however, that no inference should be drawn from what follows about any dealer's pricing. Neither inclusion nor omission should be taken as criticism. *TPN* does not attempt to set prices or to determine what the correct price is. What follows is straight reportage.

But it needs to be said here that dealer Dale Hendricks (Dale Enterprises, Emmaus, Pa.) has been quoted in *Stamp Wholesaler* as saying that the day of the specialist dealers (Chamberlain was the first, followed by Vern Kraus, Al Hagen and Al Haake) is coming to an end because of the advent of the big guns, like himself, with big advertising budgets and heavy promotion.

In his February 1987 list, Hagen (H&H Stamps and Coins, Addison, Ill.) has increased the price for PS/5 of the 10.9¢ unprecanceled from \$6 to \$7.50 from his December list. Hagen now has some 20¢ Flags from Plate 4 and they go for — hold on to your hat! — \$125 (\$45 for PS/3). His price for Plate 11 fell from \$45 to \$25 as supplies of this stamp suddenly popped up all over.

The biggest discernible jump came in Plates 7 and 8 of the 20¢ Fire Pumper, up from \$8.50 (PS/3) to \$30 and from \$12.50 (PS/5) to \$50.

Hagen does not describe the condition of his stamps but charges an extra 25 percent for VF.

Dr. Robert Rabinowitz, who claims to have "the largest stock in the world" advertised his prices in a half-page ad in *Linn's* of Feb. 2. Rabinowitz describes his stamps as F-VF NH but asks 40% more for VF-S.

Some of his key prices for unprecanceled strips of five include 5.2¢ Sleigh, Plates 3 and 5, at \$35, 9.3¢ Mail Wagon, Plates 5 and 6, at \$69 (and \$68 for PS/3), Plate 6 of the 18¢ Flag at \$560 (\$425 for PS/3) and \$125 for Plates 1 and 2 of the Consumer Education (\$16 for PS/3).

His prices for Plates 7 and 8 of the 20¢ Fire Pumper are \$18 (PS/3) and \$20 (PS/5).

On Plate 4 of the 20¢ Flag, Rabinowitz charges \$35 for strips of three, \$115 for strips of five. On Plate 11, his price for five is \$15.

One of the oddities in Rabinowitz's ad is that on the new B Press stamps, he charges almost the same price for PS/3 as for PS/5. Thus, five 25¢ stamps cost you \$4.25, but a strip of three costs \$4, just a quarter less.

Al Haake (Germantown, Ill.) in his spring list gives prices for F, VF and XF, for strips of five only. The following prices are his VF quotations.

On the unprecanceled 5.2¢ Sleigh from Plates 3 and 5, the price is \$30.

Haake charges more for the unprecanceled 7.4¢ Baby Buggy

(\$5.00) than for the precancel (\$3.00). Hagen charges \$5.50 for the tagged buggy, \$7.50 for the precancel. The trend, however, is to price the unprecanceled stamps higher.

Haake charges \$55 for Plates 5 and 6 of the 9.3¢ tagged.

Like Hagen, he is looking for Plates 17 and 18 of the 18¢ Surrey. Many of the dealers whose lists, even though not quoted here, were perused for this survey are hunting for Official stamps of both denominations. Haake prices neither. Hagen asks \$12.50 for the 20¢, \$15 for the "D" Official. Rabinowitz offers no official stamps at all.

Haake's price on Plates 7 and 8 of the 20¢ Fire Pumper is \$25, or half of the H&H price.

Dennis Chamberlain, in his December-March list, says, "The 9.3¢ Mail Wagon #5 and #6 has the fastest rising price tag as dealers search in vain to replenish their stocks. Other items that are vanishing are the Officials, the Consumer Educations and 5.2¢ Sleigh #3 and #5."

Chamberlain's prices are for F-VF strips of five. He asks 20 percent more for VF and 50 percent more for XF.

He asks \$20 on the 5.2¢ strips, but is out of PS/5 on the 9.3s. He does have the latter as strips of three at \$45.

Chamberlain's sole strips of five of the Consumers are from Plate 2, at \$50.

Chamberlain is the first dealer to offer items according to the paper types described by Richard Nazar in *Linn's*.

An indication of something that is happening is Chamberlain's offer to buy first day covers. His offer is this: He'll pay \$20 for 18¢ Flags; \$15 for 18¢ Surreys and 20¢ Fire Pumpers; \$10 for other 1981 or 1982 issues; \$5 for issues dating from 1983 and 1984; and \$1.50 for stamps issued since 1985.

Chamberlain also is offering \$60 for XF strips of five of the 20¢ Flag from Plate 4 and \$40 for Plates 5 and 6 of the 9.3s he does not have in stock.

Hagen, meanwhile, is the first PNC dealer to issue a list for FDCs. He has based his prices on charts compiled by Ken Lawrence, Glenn Estus and Tom Gift in *Stamp Collector*.

According to those charts, the hardest FDCs to find, with less than 50 covers estimated to exist, are:

The re-engraved 4¢ Stagecoach (see *TPN* Vol. II, No. 1, for a report of more than 200 covers prepared by ArtCraft); 5.2¢ precancel, Plates 1-2; 18¢ Surrey, Plates 3-4, 18¢ Flag, Plates 4 and 5.

Meanwhile, Tom Maeder (San Pedro, Calif.) has become the first superspecialist dealer. He deals only in the 17¢ Electric Auto and carries every conceivable variety of precancel.

## Report on Work in Progress

Dozens of *TPN* readers have submitted reports on a variety of the 4.9¢ Buckboard in which there are breaks in the precancel line just to the left of the gap, giving the appearance of a double gap. This variety exists in both precancel lines or in only the top or bottom line.

But in studying this variety, the Plate Number Coil Study Group also found that there was a low entry of one of the stamps. The location of this low entry in the plate could not be determined from coil strips, so attempts were made to examine the proofs in Washington.

This has taken longer than expected. It is not known when this report will be ready. But at least this should serve as notice to look for low entries on Plates 5 and 6.

Also in the works is a report on FDCs bearing plate number coils, not only by cachet but also by relative scarcity.

Letters to *TPN*

## Frustration About Precancels

I seem to detect a lot of frustration surfacing about the PNC precancel issues. I hope you get input and comment from the Plate Number Coil Study Group before trying to change anything.

We may cause more trouble with some of the changes — e.g., if we were to change the method of describing gap locations or the positions of EFOs (errors, freaks and oddities) to be relative to the plate number rather than relative to the joint line or the imaginary joint line. More confusion!?

We might help ourselves if we can remove the "rejection" by the "old time" precancel collectors, who call PNCs "anonymous precancels." We might do this by renaming all precancels [since the city/state era] as Special Use Bureau Overprints, or SUBOs. This might allow those old-timers to begin a new era of collecting without losing face!

Larry G. Haynes  
Baytown, TX

Reply by Steve Esrati: Nothing is being changed as yet. Because USPS is still calling the new style of special use indicator a precancel, we would be like someone trying to reverse the tides in making an effort to have a new name adopted. Further, it seems easy to call the stamp with the plate number "the numbered stamp" but if one does, what is the stamp to its left called? So we have to leave well enough alone.

## 4¢ Stagecoach FDCs

Even though the covers (shown on Page 16 of the January *TPN*) are cacheted, that doesn't mean that the cachets were applied before the stamp and cancel were. On the 1962 John Glenn stamp, there are many cachets and we all know that none of the stamps were released until late in the day (after Glenn's orbital space flight). It could be that canceled re-engraved Stagecoach covers were put through a printing press later to have a cachet applied.

Some FDC collectors are in a "tizzy" about these re-engraved issues and the covers prepared by Charles Yeager. My feelings are that collectors cannot have their cake and eat it, too. Everyone complains

about the mass-produced FDCs and the "official cancellations" that are applied month afterwards.

But it was announced in *Linn's* on July 28 that these stamps were coming down the pike. At least Yeager made the effort to go to the Philatelic Window every day to check on these matters. It seems that both the USPS and the large servicers underestimated the appeal of these stamps to collectors.

We finally have some FDCs (at least Yeager's and possibly those 200 or 300 prepared by ArtCraft) that are true FDCs. All this reminds me of the unannounced rotary press printings that were released in the early 1930s. They were sent out to the post offices as needed and it was only by hit or miss that collectors were able to find out about them and get some FDCs made. (My point is that even in the 1930s, the collectors knew these things were coming and were watching in the larger post offices.)

Glenn Estus  
Westport, NY

## Number on Top Data

I have prepared a preliminary chart showing all stamps with numbers at the top or with no numbers at all. I need further reports.

It is too early to evaluate the response so far, but there is definite interest in this subspecialty. It remains to be seen whether this is limited to a small number of hard-core collectors of EFOs or is more widespread.

A.S. Cibulskas  
Stamford, CT

'I Like *TPN*'

(This isn't really a letter to the editor, but the writer sent a clipping of his stamp column in the St. Paul *Pioneer Press Dispatch* in which the following comments about *TPN* appeared.)

I particularly like the question-and-answer section because each question is answered by the most authoritative source available.

I heartily recommend this publication for plate number coil collectors.

Wayne Hassell  
St. Paul, MN

## Idiots at USPS

I ordered strips of 60 from the Philatelic Sales Division of the 5.5¢ Star Route Truck, both regular and precanceled. The unprecanceled strip had been diligently folded precisely at the plate numbered stamp, as if the clerk made an extra effort to find the number so he could ruin my collectible strip.

I'd really hoped the USPS might have straightened out the mess with its clerks up there. Heaven knows I've written to them about this innumerable times, and have complained to several members of Congress about it to boot.

Doesn't anyone else out there have this problem? Or, possibly, do they have this problem but simply swallow it along with their pride and their loss of money? I simply cannot believe that I'm the only person in this entire country who has this recurring problem with the idiots in Washington.

George Kuhn  
Leesburg, FL

## 1987 PNC Meeting

Several readers have asked whether the Plate Number Coil Study Group would meet again in 1987, as it did so successfully at AMERIPEX last year.

A request was mailed to the American Philatelic Society to permit a meeting in August at STaMpsHOW 87 in Boston, but APS requires groups meeting at its show to be APS affiliates.

The PNC study group is loosely affiliated with the Bureau Issues Association, which is an APS affiliate. But it is not yet clear whether this status will permit us to meet at STaMpsHOW.

The question is expected to be resolved before the next issue of *TPN* appears.

There will definitely be a 1988 meeting.

# Linn's Drops Esrati Column on PNCs

The Plate Number Coils column that appeared in *Linn's* issue dated Feb. 16, 1987, was the last to be written by Steve Esrati. The March column will be prepared by Ken Lawrence, a steady contributor to *TPN*.

*Linn's* made the change because it did not want to give the appearance of a conflict of interest in having a regular column written

## EDITORIAL

by a dealer. Also affected by the new policy is the plate number blocks column written by Dr. Robert Rabinowitz.

Because *TPN* appears only every other month, it is not possible to make the publication as newsy as a column that appeared monthly. But *Linn's* has asked Esrati, who remains a contributing editor of the weekly with his "Stamps and Politics" column, to alert *Linn's* to news of PNCs. Esrati has agreed to do this.

But there was always a difference in approach between what Esrati wrote for *Linn's*, which was by necessity written for non-specialists, and what was destined for publication in *TPN*.

The PNC column in *Linn's* often resulted in correspondence from readers indicating that the level of understanding was of a most rudimentary nature. There were constant reports from readers, for example, that someone had found a coil roll from the Cottrell press in which he found two different plate numbers!

A more recent example was a letter "proving" that Plate 1 of the 7.4¢ Baby Buggy existed by including strips from Plate 1 of the 5.2¢c Sleigh.

On the whole, the *Linn's* column avoided discussion of precancel gaps, EFOs other than constant plate varieties or of complex problems such as the total numbers of stamps produced when the Bureau of Engraving and Printing gave data that was interpreted as false by the Plate Number Coil Study Group.

However, the facet that apparently resulted in the decision by Michael Lawrence, publisher and editor of *Linn's*, to drop the Esrati column was the reportage about prices in the fast-moving PNC market. Esrati was aware in reporting this — as was Lawrence — that this could create problems.

It should be noted that all Esrati columns on PNCs were personally edited by Lawrence.

It is impossible to promise that *TPN* will be able to outdo Ken Lawrence's reporting in *Linn's* but the effort will be made. You can expect *TPN* to continue covering all aspects of the PNC scene. Its pages are open to such PNC authorities as Lawrence, George V.H. Godin, editor of the Durland catalog, Kim Johnson, the BIA's authority on plate activity, and Larry G. Haynes, chairman of the committee keeping tabs on precancel gaps. Further, *TPN* has the support of Glenn Estus, a specialist on FDCs franked with PNCs, and such dealers as Al Haake and Dennis Chamberlain.

You can look forward to good PNC coverage here.

IF BOX IS CHECKED,  
YOUR SUBSCRIPTION IS UP



Forwarding and Address  
Correction Requested

BULK MAIL

Stephen G. Esrati  
P. O. Box 20130  
Shaker Heights, OH 44120-0130

