

Esrati's 'Maximum PNCs' too high, USPS data show

By Ken Lawrence

For the past six years, Steve Esrati has striven to publish figures that collectors can use as a guide to relative availability of different PNCs by projecting the maximum number that could theoretically exist for each plate number.

His technique has been to multiply the total number of impressions reported in the USPS' "monthly" plate-activity reports (compiled from raw Bureau of Engraving and Printing data) by the number of PNCs per impression. This yields the number of PNCs printed, assuming the data are accurate, but the actual numbers

are always much smaller, owing to spoilage and overproduction, and sometimes to test printings.

For many PNCs it is possible to

Tagged decimal fractions could reach the price levels of 19th- and early 20th-century commemoratives by the end of this decade.

project much more accurate figures—in some cases even when

plate-activity data have not been reported.

In an appendix to my book (*The Linn's Plate Number Coil Handbook*), I have compiled the total number of each stamp shipped by BEP to USPS through the end of Fiscal Year 1989 (ended Sept. 22, 1989), derived from the annual Stamps Division fiscal-year reports. In every instance where the totals are entirely accounted for by a single intaglio sleeve or one pair of Cottrell Press plates, total PNCs can be calculated by ordinary division to

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TPN Exposé

USPS curbs press rights as dealers get inside info

By Stephen G. Esrati

Dr. Robert Rabinowitz, a prominent PNC dealer and publisher of *Coil Exposé*, has provided a glimpse into the methods used by dealers to obtain information from the Postal Service that is denied to collectors by being denied to journalists.

It is an established principle in American constitutional law that the Freedom of the Press afforded under the First Amendment to the Constitution stems not from any special rights reserved to the press but because the press disseminates information to the public. Thus, curbs

against philatelic journalists are unconstitutional curbs against collectors, denying the latter information to which they are entitled.

The shutting down of information occurred about two years ago when orders were given to Linda Foster in the Stamps Division that she could no longer answer questions from journalists.

"I'm not allowed to talk to you," she told me in answer to a question about plate-activity reports, which she edits.

In an article submitted to *TPN* for publication, Dr. Rabinowitz, outlined the history of Plate 3 of the 7.6¢ Carreta.

The stamp was first reported last summer on a cover to Ron Maifeld,

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Ken opens 'Pandora's Box'

In 1984, George V. H. Godin warned that collectors of PNCs should not depend on printing totals as a measure of scarcity. Godin noticed then that Plate 7 of the 18¢ Flag was much harder to find than Plate 6 because case after case of the former had been shredded at the time of the rate change to 20¢. That, of course, was before the Rev. Kenneth M. Opat found a large supply of Plate 7.

Having no other measure, those totals were all we had. Now, in his forthcoming book, Ken Lawrence introduces a better, though incomplete measure: the number of stamps shipped by BEP to USPS. I welcome the new information and look forward to the book (which will be published right after *Linn's 1989 U.S. Stamp Yearbook*).

I have not seen the book and Lawrence did not even reveal its name (*Linn's Plate Number Coil Handbook*) when he wrote the lead article for this issue. Lawrence did not want to be accused of plugging his own book. I had to ask him its name.

The book promises to change many of our ideas about PNCs, although Lawrence would not reveal them, saying he did not want to scoop his own book by telling me. Among other things, one result will be that many of us (especially I) will have egg on our faces for being oh! so very wrong on so many premises.

The Plate Number

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That's good. Mistakes honestly made are no disgrace. It is better to err than to stand mute in the face of slowly evolving bits of information.

Lawrence is an investigative reporter who brings his professional skills to his hobby. The blending of the two makes for excitement seldom found in philately.

It is possible that Lawrence's book may cause a wholesale re-evaluation of many of our ideas. That's great, too.

sgc

LETTERS:

Readers add to list of cachets on Honeybee FDCs

I've been servicing hand-painted PNC FDCs for some time. I usually service about 75 regular-size envelopes and about 10 small or miniature ones that measure 2 1/2 x 4 inches. I started this to have something to trade with others.

Here are the covers I serviced for the Honeybee:

Plate	Size	Cachet	No. serviced
1	PS/3	Rose (Rowe's)	33
1	PS/3	No cachet	10
1	PS/5	Ellis	3
2*	PS/3	Rose	4
1 and 2*	Both PS/3	Rose	40
1 and 2*	Both PS/3	Ellis	3
1 and 2*	Both PS/3	ArtCraft	4
1 and 2*	Both PS/3	Artmaster	4
1 and 2*	Both PS/3	Gamm	4
1 and 2*	Both PS/3	Gilli	4
1	PS/2	Rose miniature	19

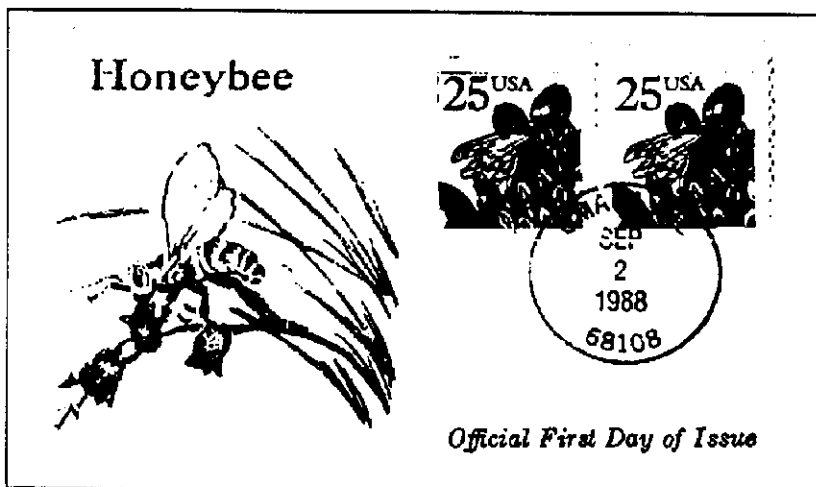
* All Plate 2 stamps are high, about 50% into the frame.

Both plates, 1 and 2, were available in Nashville on the day of issue. The postal clerk said he had two boxes, but that one box had no plate numbers. The 2 was so high, he did not see it.

Plate 1 had the small rectangular tagging, but measured 16 1/2 x 22mm, which is a little larger than the specifications on Page 4 of *TPN*.

I guess there are more than 100 other cachet makers who service their own cachets as I do.

The short [truncated] full serif "1"s that could be found here were mostly poorly inked so that they could be easily



MINIATURE FDC—Robert Rowe's miniature FDC, shown full size, of two Plate 1 Honeybees with hand-colored Rose (Rowe's) cachet.

missed. I do have strips of the full serif (9R) in plate numbered strips of 16 for trade.

Robert S. Rowe
P.O. Box 150863
Nashville, Tenn. 37215

Bazaar FDCs exist, too

First-day covers of Honeybee Plate 2 exist with a Bazaar cachet.

Charles Teschemacher
Buffalo, N.Y.

No offer to buy it back

The only discrepancy I found with the facts is the statement that Mr. Koepp offered to buy back the strip from me as you report. I understand your editorial duty of double checking before publication and I respect you for being true to it. I thought this had already been done at the time you sent me the article.

(Editor's note: Dr. Ortegón is referring

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to a first draft of the article reporting his purchase of a forged precancel at World Stamp Expo. The draft was written before *TPN* reached Jerry Koepp at Expo for comment.]

I have scrupulously avoided making any judgments, either verbally or in writing, that might in any way be construed as doubting Mr. Koepp's honesty, reputation, good intentions and rectitude, and I have heard nothing but praise for his behavior as an individual and a dealer from people, respectable all of them, with whom I have discussed this deplorable subject. "Honest as the day is long," is the way one of his fellow dealers described him. However, I prize my own reputation for honesty as much as I do his.

With this clarification, I hope this subject, entertaining at the beginning, but now becoming boring and sometimes downright worrisome, will be finally put to rest. If anything, it will never amount to more than a footnote in a future history of PNC collecting.

Thanks for publishing this note. May the next one to you be on a more strictly philatelic subject.

Pedro R. Ortegon, M.D.
Bedford, Ind.

Jerry Koepp replies: 'Offer still stands'

As always, I stand behind each of my sales and if the customer isn't happy, I will always be pleased to take it back as I don't make a living at this and it is still a hobby with me.

When I was informed of the fake in the 5.9¢ strip, I said to Dr. Ortegon that it looked good to me as I don't deal in gaps and at that point I offered a refund on the strip. Dr. Ortegon stated that he would like to keep it in his collection. There were other PNC collectors present at the time. After Dr. Ortegon left, we talked, wondering why he would want to keep it.

The offer still stands today or next year if he wishes to return it. All he has to do is send it back and cash will be on the way. I will donate the strip to PNC if it gets back here.

Jerry Koepp
Stamps 'n' Stuff
West Des Moines, Iowa

Big game, little game

I've been busy with the business and big-game hunting trips, so I haven't been going through mixtures the last

three months. Two mixtures I finished going through in October produced the most PNCs per pound of any I've gone through.

I had 25 pounds from Swan that produced 666 PNCs and 25 pounds from Bob's Stamp Room that resulted in 718 PNCs.

My observations on checking for damage are that approximately half will have some type of damage or will have killer cancels. What are other searchers finding as to damage?

In the above mixtures I found Honeybee Plate 1 and 2 with the Bee out of its cage ("Flying Bee") and an undenominated "E"s with the plate number given as 22 2 (third digit missing).

Carl R. Ditsch
Leavenworth, Kan.

Don't halve two stamps

I think the one "i" on the 25¢ Yosemite (as per Alan Thomson) is fine.

On half gaps, do not list. I can't see halving two strips of the same strip.

The first printing should be listed first.
Keith Ott
Acampo, Calif.

In reply: There seems to be a misconception here. Half gaps are those in which the precancel is at the vertical midpoint of a stamp. Thus a 1R stamp with the gap in the middle could be a Line gap displaced half a stamp to the right or a Gap 1R displaced left. No need to halve the strip.

LP40 and LP53, one and the same

To clarify what appeared in January's *TPN* about the distinctions between BEP's paper-grade designations LP40 and LP53, I have been assured by all of the companies supplying these grades of paper to BEP since 1981 that the only difference in the two designations is the width of the paper rolls as delivered to BEP. (LP40 is 18½ inches wide and LP 53 is 22 inches wide; each is in rolls 21,000 feet in length.)

If LP40 and LP53 were supplied to BEP by the same company/manufacturer, there would be no distinctions to identify the different grades once the stamps were processed into USPS formats: sheets, coils, and booklets.

The report from BEP was current and did not relate to BEP paper grades for the extinct Coutrell presses.

Also in January's *TPN*, David Barrie-LaVergne suggested using "coil stock" as a new term for "paper types."

"Coil stock" may work well in differ-

entiating the characteristics of stamp papers, but I believe it creates more problems than solutions.

The paper type designations (I, II, and III) were developed to refer easily to manufacturer-related differences between uncoated (for intaglio use), dry-gummed papers that were used by BEP since 1981.

(BEP's paper grades LP40 and LP53 are the only paper grades involved in the discussions of paper types.)

Although my paper-type study has been publicly focused only on PNCs, BEP has also produced sheet and booklets stamps from LP40 and LP53.

In fact, several non-coil, dry gum, intaglio-produced issues exist with different paper types. For example, I have found the 20¢ Flag, dull gum, sheet stamp to exist on both Type I and Type II papers. The continuing Great Americans sheet stamps have been produced using all three paper types. Even the 22¢ Sea Shell booklets exist on Type I and Type II papers.

Because the same paper varieties exist on the sheet, coil, and booklet formats it would be wrong to begin referring to paper-type designations as "coil stock."

Richard J. Nazar
Somerset, N.J.

The right stuff

The description for the variety listed as 13.2¢ Coal Car b on Page 97 is incorrect. It should read something like this:

Diagonal plate scratch extending out of both top and bottom of the leg of the "7" of "1870s." About 1mm long at a 45° angle to the top of the "7." Constant at 23R.

I think you just retyped part of the description for "a."

Scott Adams
Mechanicsville, N.Y.

In reply: You're absolutely right.

The (curbed) right of reply

It seems incredible that you published several letters attacking me, most of which misrepresented my point of view, and then refused to allow me an opportunity to reply. (My letter was eight triple-spaced pages, thus substantially shorter than the attacks on me you published.)

Your summary further distorted my views. I do not regard high-bright paper as a "sub-type" of low-bright paper, nor does any philatelic authority. Richard Nazar disregards a quarter century of scholarship on this, which is his right, but your task should be to publish infor-

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yield a precise figure—once the stamp has been withdrawn from sale. (These totals do include the stamps stored in the USPS underground vault at Kansas City, and in the various Stamp Distribution Offices and Accountable Paper Depositories.)

I had to return to the original fiscal-year reports for the tagged 12.5¢ Pushcart figures, because in my book I published only the total, but the fiscal-year reports break them down by roll length. For that stamp, Sleeve 1 exists on all coils of 500, and Sleeve 2 on all 3,000s.

Based on quantities shipped, the accompanying table lists the total PNCs that could exist for selected issues.

Even though these figures omit all the high flyers and the most unusual performers in the marketplace, we can learn some interesting things from them.

Comparing the 3.4¢ School Bus and the 7.4¢ Baby Buggy figures with those Esрати calculated, we can see that the numbers actually in circulation are about half the number he calculated; in the case of the "D" officials, they are less

of the 19th- and early 20th-century commemoratives by the end of this decade, even though the steep slope of early growth is now behind us.

Many other calculations are worthwhile, even when they cannot be broken down to individual plate numbers. For example, for all the 18¢ Flag stamps shipped, the total number of PNCs is 70,833,173, less than 40% of Esрати's maximums.

The actual numbers of 9.3¢ Mail Wag-

on PNCs are 970,833 tagged and 36,040,666 precanceled, about half the Esрати maximums. Suppose the numbers of each tagged PNC distribute approximately according to the price ratios; that would mean there are roughly 18,000 each of Plate 5 and 6. However, since the prices don't seek their level until the number of collectors approximates the floating supply, the scarce numbers may be in shorter supply than that.

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Quantities of PNCs shipped to USPS

Stamp	Plate	Type	Total PNCs	Max. PNCs
3.4¢ School Bus	1 or 2	Tagged	327,083	
	1 or 2	Precanceled	<u>2,544,667</u>	
Total for	1 or 2		2,871,750	5,000,292
4.9¢ Buckboard	3 or 4	Tagged	404,167	
	3 or 4	Tagged and PC		3,956,832
Buggy Whip	4	Tagged	22,454	
5.5¢ Star Route Truck	1	Tagged	325,000	Unreported
5.9¢ Bicycle	3 or 4	Tagged	394,271	
	3 or 4	Tagged and PC		10,485,954
6¢ Tricycle	1	Tagged	460,096	
	1	Tagged and PC		7,058,844
7.1¢ Tractor	1	Tagged	359,615	521,262
	1	Nonprofit Org.	6,633,615	Unreported
7.4¢ Baby Buggy	2	Tagged	395,192	
	2	Precanceled	<u>4,650,461</u>	
Total for	2	Tagged and PC	5,045,653	8,599,194
8.3¢ Ambulance	1 or 2	Tagged	395,313	
	1 or 2	Tagged and PC		8,947,602
8.5¢ Tow Truck	1	Tagged	338,461	
	1	Tagged and PC		1,282,500
10.9¢ Hansom Cab	1 or 2	Tagged	390,625	
	1 or 2	Tagged and PC		1,944,000
11¢ Caboose	1	Tagged	468,269	
	1	Precanceled	<u>9,859,230</u>	
Total for	1	Tagged and PC	10,327,499	Unreported
Brake Shoe*	1	Tagged	26,015	
Brake Shoe**	1	Precanceled	547,735	
12¢ Steamer	1 or 2	Tagged	673,438	
	1 or 2	Precanceled	<u>2,224,833</u>	
Total for	1 or 2	Tagged and PC	2,898,271	6,741,468
12¢ Steamer (B Press)	1	Precanceled	1,768,615	Unreported
12.5¢ Pushcart	1	Tagged	414,423	
	1	Tagged and PC		1,812,056
Total for	2	Tagged	129,230	Unreported
14¢ Iceboat (B Press)	2	Tagged	3,765,154	Unreported
20¢ Flag	14	Precanceled	841,538	
	14	Tagged and PC		27,152,559
22¢ Flag (Test)	T1	Pretagged paper	384,615	2,412,000
20¢ Official	1		1,162,308	Unreported
(22¢) "D" Official	1		522,308	1,656,000

* Or other plate varieties found on tagged Caboose.

** Or other plate varieties found on precanceled Caboose.

The number of [some] PNCs available about equal the number of Baby Zepps

than one-third; for the 22¢ Flag Test coil, 18%.

The Cottrill Press 12¢ Stanley Steamers are comparable to the Baby Buggy and School Bus ratios. For the rest, there is no direct comparison, but it should be clear that maximums derived from plate-activity reports are greatly exaggerated.

Most of the stamps in the list at the right are collector editions (i.e., tagged versions printed for collectors of stamps postally needed only as precancels). The number of PNCs available is about equal to the number of Baby Zepps issued (the 50¢ Century of Progress stamp of 1933); some of the best-known varieties—tagged Buggy Whips and tagged Brake Shoes—are significantly scarcer than the original 1930 U.S. Zeppelin sets.

These quantities are sufficient to keep prices manageable for the short term, but if the trend of collectors regarding PNCs as separate stamps continues to grow, even at a modest rate, tagged decimal fractionals could reach the price levels

USPS introduces rolls of 10,000, some (about 1 in 28, we believe) with splices

Coils for use in stamp-affixing machines are now available in rolls of 10,000, the Postal Service announced. Some of the rolls, all to be printed on the B Press, will have splices, USPS said.

Kim Cuniberti and Richard Nazar estimate that on average there will be one splice in each 28 rolls of 10,000. This is based on an average length of paper for the B Press of 21,000 feet.

According to a USPS announcement in the waning days of 1989, the new coils were created in response to a survey

among business mailers. The coils to be provided in the new format, USPS said, were:

- 10.1¢ Oil Wagon at \$1,010
- 13.2¢ Coal Car at \$1,320
- 16.7¢ Popcorn Wagon at \$1,670
- 25¢ Flag over Yosemite at \$2,500

Ken Lawrence, in his PNC column in the Jan. 15 issue of *Linn's*, reported that the annual report of USPS showed the shipment of 758 rolls of 10,000 of the 2¢ Locomotive in fiscal 1989. No 2¢ Locomotives were mentioned in the original

USPS announcement about jumbo rolls. Lawrence's Feb 19 column added the information that the 2¢ jumbo rolls were used by the *Reader's Digest*. All show plate number 1, he wrote.

According to the USPS announcement, the jumbo coils bear the same plate numbers as coils of 500 and 3,000. (Most of these are also printed on the B Press, but, of late, some have come from narrower 18-row plates prepared for the C or D Press.)

However, some PNC collectors believe it possible that Plate 12 of the 25¢ Yosemite, which has not surfaced, may have been intended for the B Press and may have seen service to print rolls of 10,000.

The only difference between jumbo rolls and other rolls will be the splice. USPS said, "The splice does not affect the adhesive and will not jam stamp-affixing equipment." What that means is that the material used to splice two rolls of paper together to create jumbo rolls would have to be gummed on the side away from the stamps.

USPS warned that it cannot guarantee that specific rolls would contain splices. It said the rolls of 10,000 would be sold only in their entirety and added that exchanges would not be permitted.

The three fractional values are known only from the B Press. On the 25¢ Flag, only Plates 1, 2, and 3 were printed on the B Press.

The first report of the plate number on a jumbo roll of the Yosemite is of phosphored 3, found by Dr. Robert Rabinowitz.

And Al Haake found jumbo rolls of the 16.7¢ Popcorn Wagon from plate 2 in St. Louis. □

1990 PNC Catalog to include 'Total PNC' data

The 1990 *Plate Number Coil Catalog* will use Ken Lawrence's findings by indicating "Total PNCs" on those stamps where Lawrence has been able to calculate totals from BEP shipping data.

He could do this only when the figures could be broken down by plate number, not on coils with multiple numbers.

"Total PNCs" is still a maximum for the number of PNCs that could be available because USPS does not report destructions. Thus, although the "Total PNCs" figure for all 18¢ Flags is 70.8 million, we know that huge quantities of these stamps were destroyed after the first-class rate went to 20 cents.

"Max. PNCs" will be retained only for stamps where "Total PNCs" could not be determined.

This is true for all values where there was more than one plate, as on the 20¢ Fire Pumper, where USPS data reflect the total of all plates shipped.

Other changes in the catalog will include listings of purple machine cancels, tagging gaps, second and subsequent press runs, additional illustrated varie-

ties, additional scarcity tables, and a slight revision of the numbering to conform with views expressed by readers.

The greatest changes are to be found in the section on the 25¢ Honeybee. The first known printing, the stamps from Plate 1 with an untruncated "1," will be listed as 25M1. All stamps from Plate 1 with a truncated number will be listed as 25M1i.

There will be separate prices for the 25M1i with a serif according to the press on which they were printed. Indications are that D Press stamps with a serif will have a higher price estimate.

Work on the new catalog began shortly after the New Year, when the first draft was sent to members of the Plate Number Coil Study Group.

Indications are that the catalog will contain more than 70 pages. As this will increase costs, a small price increase to \$17.50 could not be avoided.

For the first time, the catalog will seek classified advertising at 25 cents a word (not counting the address). □

Esрати's 'Max. PNC' figures are too high


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The actual number of tagged 5.2¢ Sleigh PNCs shipped is 73% of Esрати's total. Using a similar guesstimate to the previous example, there are approximately 66,000 each of Plates 3 and 5 tagged. In philatelic terms these are small quantities, especially when measured against other purely philatelic U.S. issues, such as Zeps or souvenir sheets.

Definitions are everything, however. As George Godin pointed out in the

March 1986 *TPN*, only 750 impressions were printed from Plates 23445 and 23446 of the 1/2¢ Presidential Series sheet stamp, yet a matched set of all eight plate blocks sold for \$13 at auction. By that standard, a supply of 66,000 ought to be discount postage. The difference is that PNCs really are collected as the different stamps they are, whereas far fewer collectors are concerned about the specific scarcity of certain selva markings. □

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Preliminary study of PNC colors

Stamp	Scott color	1st	2nd	3rd	Final	USPS
1¢ Omnibus	Violet	273U	272U	272U	272U	
2¢ Locomotive	Black	426U	448U	532U	432U	Black
3¢ Handcar	Dark green	348U	576U	361U	576U	
3¢ Conestoga Wagon	Claret	506U	506U	499U	506U	Maroon 209
3.4¢ School Bus	Dark bluish green	3268U	3248U	339U	339U	
4¢ Stagecoach	Reddish brown	471U	471U	471U	471U	
4.9¢ Buckboard	Brown black	405U	450U	450U	450U	
5¢ Motorcycle	Gray green	556U	5555U	576U	556U	
5¢ Milk Wagon	Black	445U	437U	437U	437U	Gray 425U
5.2¢ Sleigh	Carmine	213U	212U	191U	213U	
5.3¢ Elevator	Black	449U	438U	554U	438U	Black
Service indicator						Red 185
5.5¢ Star Route Truck	Deep magenta	233U	233U	214U	233U	
5.9¢ Bicycle	Blue	292U	292U	291U	292U	
6¢ Tricycle	Red brown	471U	471U	471U	471U	
7.1¢ Tractor	Lake	200U	214U	214U	214U	Dark red
Service indicator						Black
7.4¢ Baby Buggy	Brown	4645U	4655U	465U	4645U	
7.6¢ Carreta	Brown	4655U	465U	465U	465U	Brown 168
Service indicator						Red 186
8.3¢ Ambulance	Green	362U	3268U	361U	362U	
8.4¢ Wheel Chair	Brown	4995U	479U	507U	4995U	Maroon 209
Service indicator						Red 186
8.5¢ Tow Truck	Dark prussian green	5425U	444U	5425U	5425U	
9.3¢ Mail Wagon	Brownish rose	200U	214U	214U	214U	
10¢ Canal Boat	Sky blue	291U	297U	291U	291U	Blue
10.1¢ Oil Wagon (tagged)	Slate blue	5473U	5463U	554U	554U	
10.1¢ Oil Wagon (P/C)	Slate blue	555U	5473U	555U	555U	Blue
Red precancel						Red
10.9¢ Hansom cab	Reddish purple	513U	513U	258U	513U	
11¢ Caboose	Red	192U	199U	198U	192U	
11¢ Stutz Bearcat	Dark green	5478U	444U	444U	444U	
12¢ Stanley Steamer	Dark blue	549U	549U	5425U	549U	
12.5¢ Pushcart	Olive Green	581U	5767U	5763U	581U	
13¢ Patrol Wagon	Black	553U	533U	5477U	553U	Black
Service indicator						Red 185
13.2¢ Coal Car	Slate Green	5545U	5555U	5483U	554U	Dark green 330
Service indicator						Red 185
14¢ Iceboat	Sky blue	297U	305U	291U	297U	
15¢ Tugboat	Violet	292U	284U	292U	292U	Purple 267
16.7¢ Popcorn Wagon	Rose	212U	212U	198U	212U	Red 186U
Service indicator						Black 7019
17¢ Electric Auto	Ultramarine	292U	284U	292U	292U	
17¢ Dog Sled	Sky blue	299U	299U	284U	299U	
17.5¢ Racing Car	Dark violet	520U	2665U	2578U	2587U	Puple 268U
Service indicator						Red 186U
18¢ Surrey	Dark brown	4635U	4705U	464U	464U	
20¢ Consumer Education	Sky blue	298U	306U	291U	184U	
20¢ Fire Pumper	Vermillion	178U	1785U	184U	178U	
20¢ Cable Car	Blue violet	5205U	5205U	5275U	5205U	
20.5¢ Fire Engine	Red	184U	191U	212U	184U	Red 185U
Service indicator						Black
21¢ Railroad Mail Car	Dark green	5767U	5763U	5767U	5767U	Green 455
Service indicator						Red 186
24.1¢ Tandem Bicycle	Blue	541U	293U	548U	541U	Blue 295
Service indicator						Red 186
25¢ Bread Wagon	Orange brown	472U	152U	472U	472U	
(22¢) "D"	Green	338U	326U	338U	338U	
(22¢) "D" Official	Blue	300U	285U	285U	285U	
25¢ Flag Over Yosemite	Red					Red 185U
	Blue					Blue 295U
	Green					562U

By Philip F. Rose

I have examined the solid, single-color coil strips from the standpoint of identifying the Pantone color swatch that best resembled the stamp.

Using a Pantone Color Products Selector from Letraset, I held the color swatch rectangle, approximately 10x20mm, over the stamp. The swatches vary in hue and intensity throughout the set and are arranged on heavy paper leaves with seven samples per leaf. They are numbered, roughly, from 100U to 600U.

The swatches are arranged in a somewhat orderly sequence of primary colors.

There are three-digit and four-digit U numbers in which the four-digit identifier is a gradation between three-digit identifiers.

An identification is difficult since the stamps are engraved, with the cross-hatching affecting the hue, and the swatches are pure color. I have attempted to sense the full-color impression rather than match a small solid section of the printed stamp. Lighting certainly affects the choice.

I do not have a list of the "official" Pantone colors used for printing the stamps on the accompanying table, but I would assume that if the match (with the official Pantone number) is reasonably close, it has probably been reported correctly. I have noted enough variation in my own choices to know that the matching process is far from perfect. The arrangement of the stamp pattern in printing affects the color sensation.

The table is my estimate of the Pantone identifications. For each stamp value I have done three separate and independent evaluations of the Pantone identification.

The first evaluation was made in daylight. The second in artificial light; the third in mixed lighting. Finally, I made a fourth and final evaluation in which I compared all previous evaluations and made a final choice with all the evidence in. I also include the Scott Catalogue color [also used in the PNC Catalog, ed.].

It is my best belief that the Pantone colors I have selected represent the color adequately, but they may not be the actual ink colors used. This would be particularly true of the gray and green hues. The reds and purples would probably be

...and the problems of color in philately

By Stephen G. Esrati

Phil Rose, a member of the Plate Number Coil Study Group, had an awful time working up the table that accompanies his article. As he states, the values he obtained varied according to the type of light used.

It has long been known in philately that fluorescent light gives wrong results for color. But so does incandescent light, although not as bad. In fluorescent light, the light source contains varying amounts of blue. That's why the General Electric Co. names its fluorescent lamps, including what GE calls "daylight."

Incandescent light, no matter the wattage of the bulb, contains some yellow.

Daylight varies with cloud cover, time of day, and even northern latitude.

Ideally, collectors should do color work under low-voltage, high-intensity lamps, which yield the best color results. But even these vary from lamp to lamp.

So how does the Scott Publishing Co. determine whether a particular stamp should be described as "blue," "sky blue," "ultramarine," or "light blue?" To find out, I called Richard S. Sine, editorial director of Scott.

Sine said Scott's color determinations are made by comparing a stamp against a reference collection in which the stamps have known colors.

The question this raises is how the stamps in the reference collection were assigned their color names.

In the 1930s, the Scott catalog used to refer collectors to a color chart published in Merriam-Webster's unabridged dictionary. As I recall, it was almost impossible to use in philately.

Various album publishers have produced color swatch books. Most of these have a hole in the middle of a swatch. One lays the stamp under the swatch and slides the stamp along from swatch to swatch to try to match the color. Theoretically, this will allow one to match a color variety in that company's catalog.

Again, the light used will affect the result. Furthermore, as Rose notes, it is difficult to compare solid blocks of color to fine, cross-hatched lines on a stamp.

Which brings us to the hard work Rose did. I have added to his table the "official" BEP Pantone colors where they were announced by the Postal Service. These appear in the rightmost column.

I do not know why BEP sometimes uses the "U" suffix, and sometimes

omits it. And, since the colors in the Pantone Color Products Selector rarely have names, I do not know whose color name the stamps have been given. It could be BEP's, or it could be the Postal Service's. The names may also be from the Pantone Library of Color, a book I have been unable to obtain. It is unlikely that the ink at BEP had any color name, only a Pantone color number.

On those stamps where a color is given without a name, this may refer to a primary Pantone color, which, as the table at the lower left shows, have no numbers at all.

I have also added the BEP information for service indicators.

Two things are almost immediately obvious in Rose's table:

- When Scott used the same color name for two or more stamps, Rose invariably found the colors to differ. "Sky blue," for example, is used by Scott for the 10¢ Canal Boat, both printings of the 14¢ Iceboat, and the 17¢ Dog Sled, even though we have found that the Cottrell Iceboat's color varies markedly from that of the B Press Iceboat.

- BEP does not differentiate among blacks; Pantone does. (As does Rose.)

Also, and this is new to me, Rose found that the color of the tagged 10.1¢ Oil Wagon differed slightly from the precancels.

Another Rose finding is that although BEP said the color was the same on the 3¢ Conestoga Wagon and the 8.4¢ Wheel Chair, he found the Wagon to be

about one shade more red than the Chair.

Also a surprise is that Rose's final determination assigned the same color to the 9.3¢ Mail Wagon and the 7.1¢ Tractor.

Rose did not attempt to track down the known color varieties of the 9.3¢ Mail Wagon or 10.9¢ Hansom Cab.

So what all this amounts to is that what Scott may call one thing, BEP terms something quite different.

It needs to be noted that the original USPS announcement for the 20¢ Cable Car was purple and was changed for technical reasons. We list the color that was printed.

USPS did not report color according to the Pantone Numbering System before late 1988. When PNS numbers were introduced, USPS said the colors were taken from a color catalog widely used in printing and publishing, possibly the Pantone Library of Color.

Some collectors may be interested in duplicating or expanding on Rose's work. The Pantone Color Products Selector sells for about \$8.50 in most art-supply stores. (I'd be happy to send one to anyone at cost plus shipping.) In any event, it is a handy item to use, much better than any philatelic product available for comparing colors. □

Colors that have names in the Pantone System

The Pantone designation "U" refers to an uncoated color paper. This list is arranged in ascending order for all colors that are assigned names by Pantone. Many basic colors have no numbers (indicated by "NONE").

Name	Number
Orange	021U
Red	032U
Blue	072U
Super Warm Red U	None
Extra Black U	None
Black Plus U	None
Black on Black U	None
Process Yellow U	None
Process Magenta U	None
Process Cyan U	None
Process Black U	None
Yellow U	Between 102U and 103U
Warm Red U	Between 178U and 179U
Rubine Red U	Between 219U and 220U
Rhododendron Red U	Between 232U and 233U
Purple U	Between 252U and 263U
Reflex Blue	Between 279U and 280U
Process Blue U	Between 306U and 307U
Green U	Between 333U and 334U
Black U	After 405U
Warm Gray 1U to 10U	None
Cool Gray 1U to 10U	None

Preliminary study of PNC colors

Continued from Page 28

different by a few swatch intervals on either side of my choice.

At this point, the actual Pantone color is not too crucial and the official colors reported by USPS should be quoted where available.

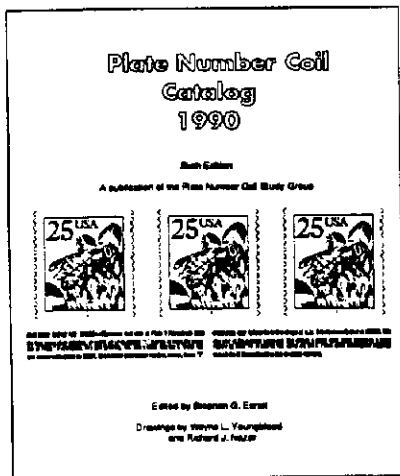
But in the case of color varieties, the Pantone color could become useful. As for now, there are a few minor shades in the 5¢ Motorcycle and 8.3¢ Ambulance that are interesting.

There also appear to be some striking color varieties on the Flag Over the White House, but I have not examined these yet. □

Pre-Publication Offer

The 1990 *Plate Number Coil Catalog* will be published in May. The catalog will be bigger and better. New features include:

- Additional information, such as tagging gaps, dates plates were sent back to press, new scarcity tables for paper types, existence of purple machine cancels.
- Improved typography.
- Latest estimates of price for mint and used singles, pairs, strips of 3 and 5, precancel gaps, varieties.
- Comprehensive treatment of the 25¢ Honeybee, with pricing.



The catalog's price this year is \$17.50 postpaid (\$18.73 in Ohio). But you can reserve your pre-publication copy at \$16 postpaid (\$17.12 in Ohio) by sending in the coupon below. (Sorry, no added discount for PNC³.)

Every known fact about all PNCs!
Some call it an encyclopædia.

You can't collect PNCs without one.

Save \$1.50!



Please reserve one copy of the 1990 PNC Catalog for:

Name: _____

Address: _____

State: _____ ZIP: _____

I enclose \$16 (\$17.12 if I live in Ohio).

Offer valid for *TPN* readers only. Offer expires April 15. Orders postmarked after April 15 will be returned.

Linn's 'Trends' reflects prices above market

Asked at World Stamp Expo how he prepares Linn's "Trends" for PNCs, since he himself does not deal in PNCs, Greg Manning said the listing was entirely the work of Dale Hendricks.

In Hendricks' column published Dec. 25, some prices rose, mainly for used singles (compiled by Ken Lawrence). None fell.

Here is an example of one easy-to-spot inconsistency: The prices for PS/5 of Plates 12 and 14 of the 20¢ Fire Pumper remained at \$20. The price of used singles climbed to \$10.

Assuming that the prices quoted are for F-VF (which is what most dealers use), those prices are way too high.

In TPN's latest survey of dealer prices, the PS/5 is just under \$11.00. The used single hovers around \$7.00. The TPN survey includes only very recent price lists in preparation for the 1990 PNC Catalog.

On these stamps, condition is a major factor. Some dealers who advertise F-VF usually supply F, judging by strips collectors have submitted to TPN. True VF should get a premium.

So let's look at the prices charged by Al Haake, who grades F and FV separately. He charges \$7 for F and \$15 for VF. Or, turning to Jerry Koepp, who

All PNC collectors need UV lamps from Lighthouse

Short wave for tagging, \$29.95
Long wave for paper types, \$13.95

My prices: 20% off, plus shipping

Special: \$33 plus shipping for both lamps

Shipping is direct from Lighthouse. Shipping charge depends on distance.

Order now, I'll bill you when shipping charges are known.

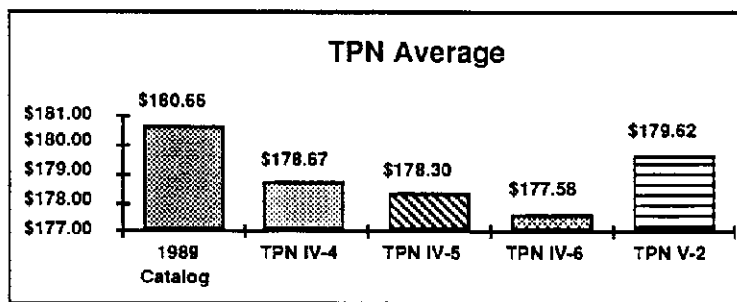
(New Jersey orders subject to sales taxes)

Stephen G. Esrati

P.O. Box 20130

Shaker Heights, OH 44120

(216) 561-9393



UP A BIT—The average rose from \$177.58 in November, the last time it was compiled. The increase would have been more except for a decline in retail prices for Plate 4 of the 10.9¢ Hansom Cab and Plate 6 of the 5.9¢ Bicycle.

grades F and VF-XF, an F strip was \$7 and a VF-XF strip was \$15. Ed Denson's F-VF was \$5.60; his VF was \$8.40, and his XF was \$11.20. Where did Hendricks get his \$20 "average dealer's price"?

On these Pumper stamps, where XF is really hard to find, Haake's "XF" price is \$25, Koepp's for "XF-S" is also \$25.

Many examples of such problems may be found in *The PNC Catalog*, which warns of strips in which condition is a determining factor.

The TPN Average makes adjustments for dealer's lists in which "F-VF" is used. The average is based on VF prices. So is the catalog.

PNC prices, except for some of the scarcer items, have been falling for more than a year. That's why the TPN Average has hovered near the same level all year while the mass of PNCs have declined. The average includes the "Dirty Dozen," the strips that have been climbing.

The question that needs to be asked of Dale Hendricks is this: "How many dealers' lists are being averaged for 'Trends'?"

For the record, TPN's current survey includes:

A.S. Cibulskas, Dale Hendricks of Dale Enterprises, Ed Denson, H&H Stamps & Coins, Al Haake, Max Hickox, Michael Karen, Joe Lane, Michael Lipson, M&M/Southwest, Tom Maeder, Miller's Mint, Dr. Robert Rabinowitz, Rasdale Stamp Co., Craig Sellig and Stamps 'n' Stuff.

The average price for a strip of five of Plate 3 of the 22¢ Flag is around \$50. Haake's (\$60 for VF) and Hendricks' own (\$75 for F-VF) prices are the only ones over \$50. Koepp shows it at \$50 as does Dr. Robert Rabinowitz. Yet "Trends" shows it at \$70.

Collectors who take "Trends" along when they go shopping may do well to treat "Trends" with a grain of salt by buying only at a discount from "Trends" prices. They're simply too high.

Meanwhile, TPN is stymied on finding the true market price for Plate 4 of the 20¢ Flag. Haake's latest list does not quote it at all. Other dealers quote it, but have no stock.

Denson and Haake needed some to fill orders. Many dealers they called were out of stock, although they continued to quote the strip in their lists. Said Haake, "This one may be on its way up in price."

Haake also discovered another anomaly. Many dealers who advertise very low prices for scarce (but inexpensive) strips, have retail prices lower than Haake's wholesale price. But when Haake sought to buy, say, 100 strips, he could sometimes obtain only 1 or 10. Sometimes he could get none, yet their ads kept offering "unreal low-ball prices," Haake said.

One such strip, Haake said, was the B Press version of the 14¢ Iceboat.

The average this month climbed a hair from the level of November. The rise was affected, however, by a sizable decline in Plate 6 of the 5.9¢ Bicycle and Plate 4 of the 10.9¢ Hansom Cab.

While it is known that new supplies of the Bicycle have turned up, the fall of the Hansom Cab seems to indicate the same thing.

Writing in the February *Coil Line*, Tom Maeder said: "There is some suspicion about 10.9¢ 3/4. While certainly not common, some believe that one accumulator has an unknown quantity 'sandbagged.'"

One of the pervasive mysteries of PNC collecting has always been that the "Maximum PNC" figure for tagged and precanceled Plates 1 and 2 of the 10.9¢ is about 40% of the figure for Plates 3 and 4.

From Ken Lawrence's front-page article, we now know the exact tagged quantity. But we still don't know why Plates 3 and 4 are so scarce. □

Youngblood and Lawrence bowing as authors at Amos

Books by two members of the Plate Number Coil Study Group are being published by Amos Press, publisher of *Linn's* and the Scott catalogs.

First off the mark is Wayne L. Youngblood's "Stamps That Glow," a compendium of his *Linn's* columns of the same name, which deal with the basics of tagging.

Somewhat later (after a pause caused by publication of *Linn's U.S. Stamp Yearbook*) will come Ken Lawrence's *The Linn's Plate Number Coil Handbook*.

Lawrence's book was originally to be published by *Stamp Collector*, based on Lawrence's PNC columns in that stamp weekly. He switched to *Linn's* in 1987, where the format of his column changed.

Previously, Lawrence had written about one PNC at a time, the 18¢ Surrey for example, compiling in each column all that was then known about that basic PNC design. A compilation of all those columns was to be published in book form.

HELP WANTED: The Plate Number Coil Study Group has a gap in its data.

We know, for example, that Plate 2 of the 18¢ Surrey was paired with Plate 1 before being paired with Plate 8. Our earliest BEP reports, however, are those dated in July 1981. Can someone lend us earlier 1981 reports? We did borrow earlier reports to make up our data, but we then ignored second dates to press. Now, we need that information.

Replies to *TPN*, please.

World Stamp Expo was a "swell show," said Jerry Koepf, owner of Stamps 'n' Stuff in West Des Moines, Iowa, "especially in the first days when all the PNC collectors were there.

"Our coil books were out on the counters all the time and there were people waiting for them. In those first days, I sold more than \$17,000 in plate number coils. It was a real good show."

Koepf said he sold a few copies of Plates 3 and 4 of the 9.3¢ Mail Wagon and Plate 1 of the 18¢ Flag, but most of the strips sold were under \$25.

Scott F. Smith showed his PNC collection at Socopex in Colorado Springs last year and won the Bureau Issues As-

All the PNC news

sociation's award plus awards for the best exhibit by a novice and the best exhibit by a member of the Colorado Springs Stamp Club. But the show rated his exhibit only as worthy of a silver medal.

Henry W. Beecher, writing in *Stamp Collector*, noticed that when USPS revised Section 143 of the *Domestic Mail Manual* about the legality of the sale of precancels, it did not fall in line with what had been announced in *The Postal Bulletin* of Jan. 5, 1989.

The announcement had said the prohibition against the sale of precanceled stamps was "unnecessary and impossible to administer. It has been deleted."

But when Beecher examined the new §143, he found that §143.32 still said: "Permit holders may not sell unused precanceled stamps obtained under their permit."

Beecher apparently did not see the most recent update of the *DMM*. That section now reads:

§143.32 Permit holders

Collectors who have a permit to mail matter bearing precanceled postage at the post office where their mail is presented may buy precanceled postage for philatelic purposes or for the purpose of paying postage. Precanceled stamps may be purchased for the purpose of paying postage or for philatelic purposes.

The phrase banning precancel sales has been deleted.

But if Beecher's post office did not have the updated version of the *DMM*, that might also have happened in other post offices, possibly explaining why collectors are still finding difficulties in using precancels on their mail.

Put Cincinnati on your travel plans for this summer. That's where PNC³ will have its annual meeting during this year's STAmPsHOW. It's scheduled from Aug. 23 to 26 in the the Cincinnati Civic Center.

Joe R. Lane reprinted the editorial from our November issue in one of his mail sales saying: "Thought I might get you a few new subscriptions." Thank you, Joe. □

GAPS

All in strips of five. VF or better unless stated.
Last ad using 1989 catalog prices!

4T3, 4	2L	PS/5	2.85
	2L	PS/3	2.25
	1L	PS/5	3.50
	LN	PS/5	7.00
4T5, 6	2L, 1L	PS/5	2.85
	LN	F PS/5	8.00
4.9T1, 2	1R, NO	PS/5	2.25
4.9T3,4	NO	PS/5	4.00
	LN	F PS/5	2.10
	2L, 1L	PS/5	2.10
4.9T4V1	2L, 1L	Buggy whip	15.00
	LN	Buggy whip	16.00
	NO	F Buggy whip	14.00
4.9T5, 6	2L	PS/5	2.00
	1R	PS/5	8.50
	LN	PS/5	7.00
	3L	PS/8	8.50
4.9T6V2	NO	Buggy rein	35.00
5.2T1, 2	NO	PS/5	11.50
5.2T3, 5	NO	PS/5	15.00
5.2T4, 6	2L, NO	PS/5	11.75
5.9T3, 4	NO	PS/5	18.00
5.9T5, 6	LN	PS/5	73.00
8.3T1, 2	All	PS/5	2.65
8.3T3, 4	1R	PS/5	5.00
	NO	PS/8 (Gap 2R)	11.00
9.3T1	NO	PS/5	21.00
		PS/3	15.50
	2L	PS/5	21.00
9.3T2	NO, 2L	PS/5	25.00
9.3T3, 4	NO, 1R	PS/8	40.00
9.3T4	2L	PS/5	24.00
	LN	PS/5	22.00
9.3T5, 6	NO, 2L	PS/5	2.50
9.3T8	2L	F PS/6	110—
10.9T1, 2	LN	PS/5	25.00
12T1, 2	NO, LN	PS/5	3.25
17T1, 2C	LN	F PS/5	7.50
17T3, 4A	NO,		
	2L, 1L	PS/5	6.25
	LN	F PS/5	35.00
17T3, 4B	NO	PS/5	35.00
17T3, 4C	NO, LN,		
	1R	PS/5	12.50
17T5A	NO, 2L	PS/5	5.50
	1L	PS/5	6.00
17T5, 6B	LN, 1L	PS/5	12.00
17T5C	NO	PS/5	30.00
17T5, 7C	4L	PS/10	35.00
17T6A	NO	PS/5	30.00
	2L	PS/5	10.00
	1L	PS	15.00

Many strips on hand in PS/6. If you like them that way, ask for them, no added charge if available. Unless separately priced here, take off 10% for PS/3. Many 17¢ se-tenant strips on hand as long strips. Priced according to the 1989 catalog. 25% off on orders of \$100 or more. 15% off on orders of \$50 or more. PNC3 members get an added 5% off.

Complete 1988 Lighthouse PNC album, in 2 binders, \$300 net.

I provide many happy customers with PNCs with new numbers as they appear.

I also supply House of Farnam FDCs on subscription.

Steve Esrati

P.O. Box 20130
Shaker Heights, OH 44120
(216) 561-9393

1989

Was it the Year of the



By Stephen G. Esrati

In 1981, the first year of PNCs, USPS issued five face-different PNCs: 18F, 20F, 9.3T, 17T, 18T, and 20T.

In 1982, it added 2T, 4T, 5.9T, 10.9T, and 20M. That year, the Plate Number Coil Study Group was formed with three members, Dennis Chamberlain became the first PNC dealer, and joined.

In 1983 the change-makers—1T, 3T, 5T—were issued, as were 5.2T and the 20¢ official.

On January 9, 1984, the study group went public for the first time, when I wrote about PNCs in *Linn's*. By then the group had a dozen members, one of whom, George V. H. Godin, has devised a checklist for PNCs that appeared occasionally in *The United States Specialist*. The December 1983 table appeared with my article and listed a total of 102 face-different tagged and precanceled stamps.

Still unreported by collectors at that time were: 5.2T3 and 5.2T5; 9.3T5, 9.3T6, 9.3T1P, 9.3T2P, and 9.3T8P; 17T5, 17T6, and 17T7.

The article pointed out some of the pitfalls of early PNC collecting. You could not get rid of waste precancels. You could not obtain up-to-date BEP information (which was then only two months late but now goes as long as eight months).

And Godin was quoted as saying that it was not really meaningful for collectors to assume that the total number of impressions is a clue to scarcity. He cited 18F6 and 18F7 as examples. "The 7 is far more difficult to obtain than the 6 although printed with almost two-and-a-half times the quantity. I know of one sectional center that shredded case after case of No. 7 when the rates changed to 20¢ from 18¢. Check collectors' want lists and virtually everybody needs 7 but has 6. ... Quantities printed should not be the sole criterion ... of philately."

That article was illustrated by a numbered strip of three of 18F5 for which my editor, Donna O'Keefe, wrote this cutline: "The plate number appears at the bottom of the center stamp...." See how far we have progressed?

Of course things have changed since that article appeared. In one 1983 round-robin newsletter I had averaged out deal-

er prices for the study group. In addition to Chamberlain, Vern Kraus, Al Hagen, Dr. E. V. Smith, Dr. Robert Rabinowitz, D. John Shultz, and Al Haake were dealers whose prices were included.

Myron G. Hill, Jr., suggested that I do this again and publish it as a catalog. The first 1985 printing was 100 copies. A second printing added 150 more, but 50 were unsold.

Hill also fathered the idea of *TPN* when he suggested making the round-robin available to people who did not belong to the study group.

In 1985, *Linn's* editor, Michael Laurence, then a member of the study group, launched a monthly PNC column,

or the Year of the

which I wrote. In 1986, I publicized the legal way for collectors to use up their precancel waste by obtaining a free permit.

Other dealers joined the ranks. Dale Hendricks probably did more to popularize PNCs with his comprehensive, two-color price lists than any other dealer.

And then came 1989! No new face-different PNCs were issued. Tom Maeder, writing in *Coil Line*, called 1989 the "slow time."

But Ed Denson, writing in *The Point*, his house organ, found 1989 exhilarating after 25F2 was found on phosphored paper.

The reprint complicates what is already well on the way to being a very interesting stamp. I

or a Year of accomplishment?

have to say that each Flag issue has its own feeling. The 18¢ Flag has the charm of rarity about it. It feels almost classical. The 20¢ issue is dull, if the truth be told. The 22¢ issue has the scarce numbers, and a run of plate varieties such as the broken 8, the three positions of the 13, and the smudged 11 to keep it interesting, not to mention the Test Coil.

Now the 25¢ Yosemite issue comes along with the fruition of the Test Coil—the tagged and phosphored papers. The FDCs are the most interesting aspect of this stamp with three or four numbers among the rarest known. Not since the Fire Pumper have we seen such a run of numbers on FDCs—although I have to admit that this time it is partly because we have what USPS has treated as two stamps here: the one on tagged paper and the one on phosphored.

Denson would make 1989 the Year of the Yosemite. And, judging by the number of news items that appeared here in 1989 about the stamp, he is not far off

the mark. But in my view, 1989 was the Year of the Honeybee.

Never in my experience in PNC collecting (and I am first of all a collector) have I seen so many dealers get interested in obscure aspects of a PNC. First they advertised the truncated "1" with and without a serif. Later, when the untruncated "1" was found, that became a feature in many ads and price lists. Finally, there has been an outpouring of ads (obviously to meet interest from collectors) for various positions of D Press seam lines. And this stamp has only two plate numbers!

1989 was also when new ideas entered the hobby, while older ideas changed.



Kim Cumiberti suggested that, maybe, precancel gaps moved one

space each time the press was stopped. From that, I proposed that, maybe, tagging gaps also moved each time the presses stopped.

In another sphere, Cumiberti wondered about two colors and two papers on the 12.5T. In almost no time, Lee Warzala came up with answers, resulting in two precancel styles, two UV colors, and a whole new area of exploration, which is still being investigated.

On yet another front, Ed Denson wondered whether an 18F7 existed with a purple machine cancel, a stamp he said

would have a very large premium. Since then, the stamp has been reported with such a cancel, as have other stamps that saw only limited use during the experimental period of purple ink, and, strangely, 22F5, which was issued after purple ink had been discontinued by USPS.

To bring the year to a dramatic close, almost 100 people were packed tightly into the tiny meeting room provided to PNC³ at World Stamp Expo for the first annual meeting of the club. It ended its first year with 369 members.

1990 may be another year in which no face-different PNCs will be issued. If 1989 is any indication, that may be good. It should certainly not discourage us from new findings and finds. □

LETTERS: *Readers may obtain letter TPN would not print*

Continued from Page 25

mation, not to suppress it. In the wake of your refusal, my letter seems to have become a popular piece of PNC *samizdat*. Those who haven't seen it yet may acquire a copy by sending me 45 cents in postage.

Ken Lawrence
P.O. Box 3568
Jackson, MS 39207

World Stamp Expo exhibit

The PNC³ exhibit at World Stamp Expo has been returned. Along with the exhibit was a nice letter from Dickey B. Rustin, director of WSE, stating that he is sure that many potential new members will be contacting us as a result of seeing our PNC frame.

I also received a letter from John Hotchner, coordinator of the club frames. He mentioned one individual who was particularly impressed by the club frames, Richard Drews, executive director of World Columbian Stamp Expo, who told John of his hope that the exhibit might be kept intact for that show, to be held in Chicago in May 1992.

Gene Trinks
Founding President, PNC³

There's never too much data

Another great issue. The coverage of the Bee is remarkable. While most collectors I've talked to hate them, the public loves them. However, the basic problem remains: How was the printing done?

As to the comment "too much data." Data is important. When one realizes the printing experiments that have taken place since 1981 in the quest for speed, these bits and pieces of data are important. Imagine someone looking back at this period 50 years from now and not having data to complete a study.

Frank Norulak
Torrance, Calif.

In praise of TPN

[*Editor's note: TPN does not usually publish letters praising this publication, but to allay suspicion that all the letters we get are critical of our efforts, here are two exceptions:*]

TPN has proven to be an excellent source for PNC information. For the information I receive, the subscription rate is a bargain.

David Martin
Greensboro, N.C.

Enclosed is my renewal. Keep up the good work.

The Plate Number is an outstanding

contribution to our hobby. In fact, it's rather difficult to conceive of PNC collecting without it—and that, I think, is a real tribute to your hard work and dedication.

Conrad Keydel
Detroit

In reply: Thank you, and other readers who have commented similarly.

And a contrary view

Your January issue was dominated by a huge amount of detail on the Honeybee. What fraction of your readers read through it all? You may lose readers if you continue to publish highly technical articles which combine fact with a tremendous amount of speculation.

Dr. Robert Rabinowitz
Stamford, Conn.

In reply: TPN's renewals exceed 75%.

ADLETS

Classified ads are 15 cents a word. There is no charge for your address. Members of PNC³ are entitled to one 25-word free ad-let each year.

PNC FDCs: Hand-colored, numbered, 50 or less of each made; list for SASE to Anagram, 6301 Poindexter, Rockville, MD 20852. (2-90)

UNTAGGED ERRORS: Breadwagon, Yosemite, others for trade or sale. Untagged coils on commercial covers on approval. Buying tag varieties. TAG SHIFT HARRY Mueggengberg, 3525 Bluff Court, Carmichael, CA 95608. (5-90)

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BEST BUY! 80 different used plate number coils \$21; 17 different PNCs on #6 commercial covers \$11.50. Rahn, 6316 LaSalle Rd., Delray Beach, FL 33484. (2-90)

BUYING PNC FDCs. Write first. Thomas Gill, 19959 Haviland Ave., Bronx, NY 10472. (4-90)

MICHEL 1989 Specialized U.S. Catalog, in German. \$39.50. Special to TPN readers: \$30.00. Includes 8-page guide in English to its use. Prices all PNCs in PS/3 and PS/5, including all precancel. Also prices U.S. se-tenant issues. Order now, before they sell out again! Complete Lighthouse PNC album in 2 binders, \$300. Steve Esrali, P.O. Box 20130, Shaker Heights, OH 44120.

LIGHTHOUSE PNC album supplements are due soon. Please let me have your order (and for other Lighthouse supplements) to let me gauge the size of my order. All supplements are 15% off list price. Steve Esrali, P.O. Box 20130, Shaker Heights, OH 44120.

GERMANY, WEST BERLIN new issues at about 10% over face on subscription, including horizontal pairs from coils, coil strips of five, booklets, combinations, first-day sheetlets, annual collections. Steve Esrali, P.O. Box 20130, Shaker Heights, OH 44120.

Constant plate varieties (and an inking)—Part XXVI

By A.S. Cibulskas

7.4¢ Baby Buggy

a. Mat variety. Two black ink splatters; one dot and one slash near the bottom edge of the stamp at 1R of the gap. Position relative to the plate number is being defined. Constant. (Marrelli)

7.6¢ Carreta

a. Inking variety. Although the name of this column technically excludes items such as this, it is being reported because it appears to be desired by collectors of varieties. Plate 2. Apparently some rolls were printed in a dramatically lighter shade of brown sometime during the press run. When found, entire rolls are affected. (Multiple reports)

10.1¢ Oil Wagon

a. Mat variety, Plate 2, red overprint. "Broken C" in "Carrier." The bottom part of the loop in the letter is missing. Constant at 33R. (Anon.)

11¢ Caboose

Mat variety. "Flying wrench." Appears as a 1.5mm "v" on its side near the right peris about 3-4mm from the bottom of the stamp. Constant at 4L. (Lenz)

25¢ Flag over Yosemite

Plate 2, phosphored. Anywhere from half to three-quarters of the plate number is missing, leaving only the top loop. (Cuniberti)

[*Editor's note: Coil Line* reports that this is not a plate variety, but an inking flaw. "since the missing part of the plate number is raised on the stamp's surface." *Coil Line's* find was by Edward Gould.]

25¢ Honeybee

a. Additional information on the "Blade of Grass" reported in the last issue. Described as green lines, they are actually blue. The initial examples provided were all within the stamp design, mostly on top of the yellow. More examples have since been provided, which showed the line extending into the white edges at both the top and bottom. All were unequivocally cyan. Additional examples of different positions have not been reported since the last write-up.

b. "Green Bee" color variety. Areas of magenta ink are missing. The uninked area is isolated in the body of the bee, resulting in the appearance of a green bee. Found randomly in several rolls. (Anon.)

c. Color shift of the background (process) yellow results in about 1.5mm of yellow outside the left design area and completely uninked (white) areas inside the frame. (Hamrick). □

Washburn books now illustrated

PNCs on Cover by Robert M. Washburn, available from the author at \$7.50 postpaid (P.O. Box 840, Skowhegan, Maine 04976)

PNC Varieties by Robert M. Washburn, available from the author at \$12.50 postpaid (P.O. Box 840, Skowhegan, Maine 04976)

The good news first: This year's *PNCs on Cover* is illustrated with many nice examples of PNCs on commercial cover. But the bad news is this: Many of the earliest known usages (EKUs) are still very, very late, indicating how difficult it is to track down early usage.

An example: The earliest date on Plate 2 of the tagged 5.2¢ Sleigh is Feb 10, 1986, and even this one is philatelically inspired. The stamp was issued March 31, 1983.

One would have hoped that in the year since the first edition was published, Robert Washburn would have been flooded by reports from collectors with news saying, "I have an earlier cover."

In fact, someone did move the date of 5.2T2 up from Sept. 21, 1986, but that's only seven months. There just have to be earlier covers, even if assuredly philatelic. But it takes alert collectors.

[*TPN* received EKU updates from only two readers last year after publication of the 1989 *PNC Catalog*, which incorporated many of Washburn's EKUs. And one of the "finds," when inspected by Washburn, turned out to be in error.]

Washburn has set himself a difficult task. Since legitimately used precancels are not tied to cover and bear no cancels, it is almost impossible to determine the date of mailing. It is not surprising, therefore, that some precanceled stamps still have no earliest known usage.

But Washburn has tracked some down by their contents or by dated slogans on the envelopes.

In the February issue of *Coil Line*, Washburn details a find of several precanceled PNCs on commercial covers, all of them fakes. Be careful.

As in the previous edition, Washburn has assigned scarcity ratings to covers. A new twist is a note telling if the covers exist on unofficial FDCs.

There are some nice surprises in the book, such as an illustration of the first known PNC on commercial cover, an 18¢ Flag from Plate 1 canceled May 6, 1981. That's only 12 days after the day of issue, but chances are an earlier EKU may yet come to light.

One flaw of the book is that by nature it is only a listing. This leaves no room for text. But one would dearly love to know the story behind one illustrated

TPN Reviews

cover that shows a 10.9¢ Hansom Cab precancel from Plate 2 with what Washburn calls a "so-called postmaster's provisional" from Redwood City, Calif., of 0.1¢. This made the item into an 11¢ mailing, possibly to meet the 11¢ rate that began on Nov. 1, 1989.

The catch is that under postal regulations, the 10.9¢ stamp could be used to pay the new rate for some time after the rate hike. The mailer would have paid the difference with his mailing certificate. Yet Washburn does not indicate that this was philatelic. Nor does he say anything else.

There's a story here waiting to be told.

Washburn's second book, *PNC Varieties*, is also illustrated this year, using clear photocopies of the varieties. Each entry that is illustrated is annotated to guide the reader to the pictures, which are grouped at the end of the book.

The usefulness of the book is immense because it pulls together every known variety and arranges them for each stamp by plate number. Thus, if you get a letter bearing a particular stamp, numbered or not, it is relatively easy to search through Washburn's list of known varieties and compare to see whether your letter had one.

In almost all cases, Washburn has provided the location of the variety in the strip.

Washburn's list includes everything, from plate cracks to tagging varieties. A very useful book. *sgc*

The Plate Number Single Album. *S&S Stamps* (P.O. Box 6205, West Palm Beach, Fla. 334-5-6205). 14 pages. \$5, plus \$1 postage and handling.

This inexpensive set of album pages for mint or used singles, including one space for every PNC and each precancel, has just one flaw.

The pages have been prepared for a three-ring binder, but somebody forgot about what happens to pages in a three-ring binder unless additional space is given at the left edge. Thus, there is precious little room for safety at the left edge of the page when stamps are mounted five across.

The publishers, Ken Simon and Ed Susman, promise annual supplements. Perhaps when they go back to the drawing boards, they'll give the pages a slight jog to the right to add space at the left. *sgc*

⊗ symbol enters catalog for purple machine cancels

Before Ed Denson collected PNCs, he collected stamps with purple machine cancels. These cancels were originally experimental to try to meet a problem.

Canceling machines at bulk mail centers were being slowed by black ink that gummed up the works. The new ink was intended to flow more freely and speed up the machines.

In 1981, USPS decided to go with the new ink for special canceling machines in large bulk-mail centers.

That same year, USPS had to bite the bullet. It found that the ink could be removed from stamps with a "common household product." Denson thinks it might be Windex.

USPS sent out word to the post offices authorized to use the machines to cease and desist. Slowly, the machines made their way to smaller offices, where the postmasters had not been informed to stop using the purple ink. So the practice continued until April 1984 at just one post office, Trenton, N.J.

Then *Linn's* asked Trenton why. Trenton stopped. That was the end of the purple machine cancel (PMC).

This year's *Plate Number Coil Catalog* will indicate each PNC known with a PMC by placing a ⊗ next to its catalog number.

Most of the PNCs known with PMCs are on stamps used to meet the first-class postal rate. But there are three exceptions, all quite rare: a 4¢ Stagecoach (probably from a strip of five to make up the 20¢ rate); a 5.9¢ Bicycle, and a 10.9¢ Hansom Cab.

The catalog assigns no premiums to PMCs, but Denson estimates a price of \$500 on Plate 7 of the 18¢ Flag.

Thanks to Denson, Tom Maeder, and Wayne L. Youngblood, we know of the following:

- 18¢ Flag: 1-7 (all)
- 20¢ Flag: 1 through 9
- 20¢ Consumer Education: 1-4 (all)
- 22¢ Flag: 5 (from Trenton)
- 4¢ Stagecoach: 2
- 5.9¢ Bicycle: 4
- 10.9¢ Hansom Cab: 2
- 17¢ Electric Auto: 1, 2
- 18¢ Surrey: 1 through 16
- 20¢ Fire Pumper: 1-16 (all)

Some of these are from unauthorized machines into which postmasters had put the purple ink.

Denson warns: "These are purple, not violet." □

USPS curbs press rights as dealers get inside information

Continued from Page 23

a Cincinnati magician and PNC collector, from the Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Ill., close to dealer Al Haake's home town. Later shipments to that office were all Plate 2.

"We were beginning to doubt the authenticity of the original report," Dr. Rabinowitz wrote. "Could it have been a hoax?"

At World Stamp Expo in November, Maifeld ended that speculation by telling the Plate Number Coil Collectors Club (PNC³): "I want to say that Plate 3 of the 7.6¢ Carreta is alive and living in Cincinnati."

After the PNC collectors had left Expo, but while the show was still open, D. John Shultz of Kansas found rolls of 3,000 and offered them to dealers. Shultz would not disclose where he had found the rolls, but told *TPN* that they had been available since summer.

Many dealers bought from Shultz, but Dr. Rabinowitz resisted because he did not want to pay "30% over face."

"I asked Haake to pinpoint the date the 3s arrived at Belleville. He learned that they arrived on June 12, and had been shipped from Washington on June 8," Dr. Rabinowitz wrote.

Armed with that information, Dr. Rabinowitz contacted the Stamps Division and was given a list of cities that had shipments around June 8.

The remarkable thing about that is that Dr. Rabinowitz, who is a philatelic journalist as well as a dealer, was provided that information despite the policy forbidding talk to journalists.

James B. Murphy, a senior philatelic programs specialist in the Stamp Support Branch, which has exclusive jurisdiction for dealing with journalists, said: "We [the Postal Service] try to channel all our inquiries to a central office so we get a unified response, so we give accurate information to all members of the press or general public. The policy is that inquiries should go through the Stamp Support Branch."

The list obtained by Dr. Rabinowitz led him to the conclusion that Shultz had bought his rolls in Kansas City, Mo.

Haake called Kansas City and confirmed "that Shultz had bought 7.6¢ rolls there," Dr. Rabinowitz wrote. "However, that batch, according to the accountable-paper person, was gone. We looked elsewhere, still frustrated that

Shultz had the only source."

Just before Christmas, Dr. Rabinowitz said, he called Kansas City and learned that all that was there was Plate 2.

Dr. Rabinowitz wrote that he then called Shultz who said he would not be able to provide rolls until the following week. "Thus," he wrote, "John could get more 3s, but Kansas City had only 2s."

In *Coil Exposé* style, Dr. Rabinowitz then wondered whether Shultz was still getting his supply there, but then undercut the suspicion he himself had planted: "That's hard to believe."

Rabinowitz and Haake called Baltimore, Decatur, Ill., and New Brunswick, N.J. All were out of 3s.

"Eventually," Rabinowitz wrote, "a city was located where several cases of rolls of 3,000 from the June shipment were sitting." These, he said, were the source for most of the 3s now stocked by dealers. He did not name the city, although his article was offered for publication in *TPN*.

Dr. Rabinowitz said he wondered if Plate 3 might not be scarce because all shipments after those of June apparently were from Plate 2. Another angle that raised his suspicions about the scarcity of the stamp was the discovery in Texas by Joe Lane of rolls of 500 of Plate 3.

Again Dr. Rabinowitz called the Stamps Division and again he was given information denied to philatelic journalists and collectors. "The Stamps Division confirms producing rolls of 500 during the time Plate 3 was to press."

[We lack all data on plate activity after April 1989, stalling work on the *PNC Catalog*.]

According to Charles Yeager, he is provided information by Foster for quantities of stamps ordered and quantities shipped, information needed for *Linn's U.S. Stamp Yearbook*. He said she must work a half day or more to provide that information, but he asks no other data from her.

The difference, of course, is that Yeager gets no economic advantage from his information and the information he gathers is published for all to see.

That is not the case with the information Dr. Rabinowitz gets. He does not name cities where he finds supplies. He does not reveal quantities. He does not

solicit the information as a journalist—to disseminate to collectors—but as a dealer, to make a profit.

TPN knows of the following incidents:

- When Plate 2 of the B Press 8.3¢ Ambulance was first reported, a collector in Buffalo told of the outrage of a postal official there who had been called first thing in the morning by Dr. Rabinowitz, who ordered rolls of the stamps. The postal official had not yet unpacked the shipment from Washington and was upset that a dealer would know what stock he was receiving before he, himself, knew.

- When Plate 2 of the tagged 12.5¢ Pushcart was found by Dr. Rabinowitz in Hartford, he charged \$4.50 a strip wholesale. That is considerably more than the 30% markup asked by Shultz on the Carretas.

Dr. Rabinowitz knew the 12.5s were to go off sale in a few days, on April 30, leaving him a monopoly on the supply.

By accident, the Postal Service switched *TPN's* call to inquire about this to Foster. Foster said dealers had complained about the situation and she had canceled the destruction order that was to have gone into effect.

Jon Denney of M&M/Southwest told Tom Maeder of *Coil Line* that he had been the complaining dealer. After a day of hurried consultation, Foster ordered the stamp to remain on sale indefinitely. (The stamp is still available through the *Philatelic Catalog*.)

But, on the opposite side of the coin, *TPN* has made several requests for information to the Stamp Support Branch. One such request was mailed Sept. 6, 1989. On Sept. 20, Murphy promised a response soon. No reply has yet been received.

Later, *TPN* asked for quantities of withdrawn stamps remaining in the vaults to update information released by Assistant Postmaster General Gordon Morison in January 1989. No reply was received.

The requests went to the Stamp Support Branch, the agency designated to provide a "unified response," in Murphy's words.

Said Wayne L. Youngblood, a reporter for *Linn's*, "They've not been forthcoming on anything of late." □

TPN Exposé

BEP denies textured tagging

By Stephen G. Esrati

The Bureau of Engraving and Printing has denied that the new style of tagging found on the 25¢ Honeybee is caused by any texture in the tagging mat.

The Plate Number Coil Study Group had assumed that this tagging, which looks as if composed of many evenly spaced dots and has edges looking like tiny perforations, was the result of the use of a screen in making the tagging plate or mat.

Not so, BEP told Wayne L. Youngblood, the study group's expert on tagging, when he visited the bureau.

No one at the bureau could explain the effect, and Youngblood said he would submit examples of the tagging, also found on Plates 1, 2, and 3 of the block-tagged 25¢ Flag Over Yosemite, to BEP for examination.

Meanwhile, Youngblood has found a third stamp that shows texture, although not in the tagging: the 10.1¢ Oil Wagon with the red overprint has texture in the red. This is seen under magnification as white dots in the red.

Even though this texture is not in the tagging, this finding is significant because the overprint was made from a flexographic mat (like the old, black, two-line precancels) that was normally exchanged with a tagging mat to print tagged stamps.

Youngblood's finding that the flexographic mat used for the overprint is textured reinforces the belief that the tagging mat is also textured.

The 1990 *PNC Catalog* will list the textured tagging on the Bee, which appears as rectangular block tagging, not tagging with rounded corners.

But meanwhile, we have some new evidence for what looks like a screen.

Late last year, Richard J. Nazar obtained the Daily Production Equipment Operational Summary for the C and D (and other) presses from BEP under the Freedom of Information Act for about eight days in September 1989.

These summaries show, minute-by-minute, everything that happened on a press, such as web breaks, mechanical problems, sleeve changes, splices, and many other phenomena that neither Nazar nor I understand.

During the night shifts on Sept. 12-13, for example, foreman J. W. Smith on the C Press recorded a sleeve change at 9

p.m. and again at 4:45 a.m. while printing phosphored 25¢ Yosemite which, he carefully noted, were 20 rows wide.

On the morning shift of Sept. 19, the press was switched over to production of Honeybees.

None of that helped us with the texture problem.

However, a notation in Smith's summary for the D Press on the day shift of Sept. 14 is tantalizing. It said: "Fiber roller being cut." This happened during printing of Christmas booklets. Neither the secular nor the religious booklet shows textured tagging.

Again, when production shifted to Christmas sheet stamps on Sept. 19, Smith noted everything being placed on the press: "4 offset plates on (new blankets yellow 184230, pink 184231, red 184232, blue 184233); fiber roller, wiper 9W4, sleeve, phosphor mat."

Again, there is a fiber roller. A fiber roller, if used in any conjunction with the tagging, would create a screen-like effect that would match the warp and the woof in the fabric.

New tagged precancels found

Proving that searching and examining are still the basics of PNC collecting, Scott F. Smith of Colorado Springs has been having some might happy hunting.

And what he has found is news.

First, Smith found tagging on Plate 33333 of the service-inscribed 18¢ Washington Monument on paper with shiny gum. This variety had not been reported previously, although the same stamp with dull gum had been found with tagging.

Then, Smith noticed the note about plate 111121 of the service-inscribed 21.1¢ Letters in the *PNC Catalog*. It said no stamps with that plate number had ever been found untagged. So Smith checked his inscribed stamps from Plate 111111. All of his were tagged! He quickly traded a tagged duplicate for one without tagging. Now, Smith said, he's trying to find an untagged copy of 111121.

That adds two more precanceled stamps with tagging to the list of such "not supposed to exist" stamps.

In all cases, the Plate Number Coil Study Group believes that these tagging errors are the result of taggant contami-

But there's a catch. We mustn't jump to conclusions. The secular (Sleigh) stamp has overall tagging and the religious stamp has block tagging with rounded corners and shows no texture.

But we also found a "new fiber roller" notation by foreman D. Gallagher on the B Press on Sept. 18. And on that day the B Press was printing Yosemite. And it has been only Yosemite off the B Press that have shown the textured tagging.

The problem is an old one in philately. Official information does not always support what collectors observe on the stamps. Sometimes bureaucracy is wrong. For us, it is nice when we can get official explanations, but from our viewpoint, what matters is what the stamps say. If bureaucrats cannot explain what we are told by the stamps, the last word comes from the stamps, not from the bureaucrats.

After all, BEP once told us it precanceled 5¢ Motorcycles from Plates 3 and 4, but USPS never sold them. That, too is official information. But the information was wrong. □

Catalog updates

nating the lacquer used on these stamps.

Just to complete his list of finds, Smith also found the 8.4¢ Wheel Chair from Plate 1 on Type II paper. It had been known previously only on Type III paper.

Other new stamps include:

16.7T2P—Plate 2 of the 16.7¢ Popcorn Wagon, in rolls of 10,000 (B Press) at St. Louis. (Haake)

25F3H—Plate 3 of the 25¢ Flag Over Yosemite, on phosphored paper, in rolls of 3,000 (B Press). Early January. (Haake)

25F14H—Plate 14 of the 25¢ Flag Over Yosemite, on phosphored paper, in rolls of 100 (C or D Press). Feb. 6. (Lipson)

PNC³ to meet in April

A regional meeting of the Plate Number Coil Collectors Club (PNC³), will take place at the Plymouth (Mich.) Show at 1 p.m., April 28. The show, at the Plymouth Central School, is part of the World Series of Philately of the American Philatelic Society. □

'Holes' found in Yosemite tagging

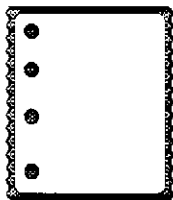
There are "holes" in the block tagging of Plates 7 and 9 of the 25¢ Flag Over Yosemite. The tagging has curved corners and covers most of the stamp.

Myron G. Hill, Jr., of the Plate Number Coil Study Group noticed the oddity when checking his stamps' tagging. On some stamps from Plate 7, there were two circular untagged areas along the left side of the stamp. On some strips

from Plate 7 there were four dots. In one case there were three.

All the dots were identical and were in the same location throughout the strip of five.

Later, Edward Kroll of Michigan sub-



mitted a cover canceled July 5, 1989, (without a plate number) that also showed the untagged "holes," which Kroll termed "screw heads."

When Steve Esrati checked his stock to compare his own stamps, it was found that the dots were not on all strips, but when the dots appeared on one stamp in the strip, they appeared on all.

In addition, some of the stamps showing the "holes" appear to be from the top section of a tagging plate or mat because a horizontal untagged line runs through all the stamps of the strip. It is not known if the tagging mats used for these stamps were in two sections.

Tentative conclusions drawn from these observations led to the hypotheses that these stamps all came off the C Press (very wide block tagging, covering almost the whole stamp), that the stamps were printed on plates 18 rows wide (because they were among the last block-tagged Yosemite printed) and that the tagging mat or plate measured 9x48 (the untagged horizontal line).

We have no BEP plate-activity reports covering these stamps. The last report issued covered activity through April, up to Plate 9 of the Yosemite. We lack all data on Plates 10, 11, 12 (unreported at the time of writing), and 13. □

Some phosphored 2s wider than normal

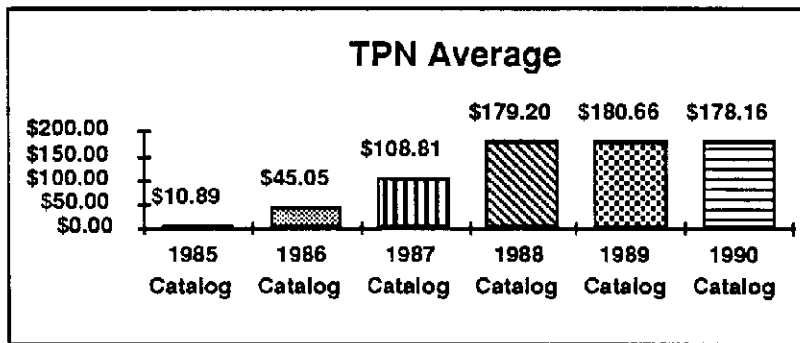
Something strange is going on with the phosphored Plate 2 of the 25¢ Flag, but we cannot explain it.

Kim Cuniberti has a gauge on his work table that is 50 stamps wide. He uses it to count stamps. It has worked without a hitch for several years. But when he broke down rolls of 3,000 of the phosphored 2s, stamps went beyond the mark by about one-third of a stamp.

At first, he suspected that the sleeve of Plate 2 had somehow been changed, but then he measured phosphored 2s from rolls of 500 he had obtained earlier and found them to have the normal widths.

If BEP had changed the dimensions of the plate, the plate would have a different plate number (or would it?)

Writing in the January Coil Line, Kenn Roman reported wide strips from Plate 10 of the Yosemite. He measured a strip of five at 22.1x25.4mm, 1mm longer than a normal strip. □



Prices off in 1990 catalog

For the first time in its six-year history, the *PNC Catalog* shows a decline in prices, according to preliminary price data. A revision will be made next month, based on later prices.

The chart, which tracks price movements of strips of five of some of the more expensive PNCs, actually distorts the drop, in part because the prices of the scarcer PNCs have not declined as much as the nickel-and-dime, garden-variety PNC.

What's more, there has been an erosion in prices of varieties, sometimes by as much as 50%.

The prices of scarce precancel gap strips appear to have gone up, sometimes quite strongly; but pricing these strips is not much better than guesswork because there are less than six dealers who price precancel gaps.

Further, one dealer who does price them, Tom Maeder, cut many of his prices drastically in his most recent list. This helped make the pricing of precancel gaps for the catalog somewhat chaotic.

On common PNCs, several factors contributed to the general decline. Greatest among these is added competition by dealers, who have sometimes cut their price by a nickel to keep it "lowest."

But these nickels add up.

Also distorting the price picture this year are discounts offered by many dealers on volume purchases.

That meant that *TPN* had to adjust advertised prices upward to bring "F-VF" prices up to "VF." But after doing that, *TPN* had to adjust them down again to factor in the widely available discounts.

At the conclusion of these mental gymnastics, the average of selected prices in the 1990 catalog is down a hair from 1989.

But there's a silver lining to the storm clouds. The supply of many of the scarcer PNC strips is way down. Many dealers are unable to supply quantities of the strips they advertise at these low prices. (See related story on Page 31.)

So the prospect is for a resumption of the trend we saw in the first four years of the catalog. It is, of course, impossible to state whether the climb will be as steep; but it is possible to state without reservation that the shake-out is almost over and the advance is ready to resume.

One strip almost guaranteed to soar is Plate 4 of the 20¢ Flag in strips of five, unless someone sends imperfs to be perforated. Imperfs appear more common than the real McCoy. □

USPS gets tough on stamp washing

Although the figure cannot possibly be ascertained, the Postal Service claims it is losing \$50 million a year from re-use of washed stamps.

The claim was reported in a story by Fred W. Baumann in the Feb. 12 issue of *Linn's*. The article outlined USPS efforts to have charities stop collecting common stamps clipped from letters by volunteers. Such stamps were later sold to mixture makers.

When *TPN* reported in May 1989 that the real reason for producing the 22¢ Flag Test Coil was to test a new way to prevent stamp re-use, a USPS spokesman also floated the \$50 million figure, but immediately cast doubt on it, adding that "obviously nobody really knows how many stamps are being re-used. How could anyone tell?"

TPN did not report the \$50 million figure, believing as he did that the number had simply been pulled out of the air.

But *TPN* was aware that USPS was extremely concerned about stamp washing and re-use. Here are the key points in the trail:

- USPS introduces the Test Coil. On these stamps there is no varnish over the printing that holds the taggant because the tagging is in the paper. The varnish was suspected of being soluble, allowing the washing off of cancels.

- USPS announces that all future stamp production would be on phosphored paper. Introduction of the 25¢ Yosemite on phosphored paper inaugurates the new policy.

- Ken Lawrence reports that BEP had to destroy 25¢ Honeybees printed on phosphored paper because the stamps did not exhibit enough tagging for postal machinery. The main point here is that when the lacquer (used on gravure stamps instead of the varnish on intaglio plates) carried the taggant, the tagging was atop the stamp, not under the inks used to print the stamps. But when the ink covered the taggant, tagging proved insufficient.

It became a matter of judging what cost more: extra costs of mail handling because mechanization was being defeated or the risk of stamp washing.

And here is where the \$50-million

figure comes under a cloud. USPS obviously stuck to its standards for tagging. BEP had to destroy the Honeybees.

If USPS had reduced its standards, the Honeybees would have passed muster even if they would have been unable to activate facer-cancelers, which are activated by the taggant. This would have raised mail-handling costs.

It is unlikely that such added costs would have been \$50 million a year.

But there's another part of the equation. USPS may be a corporation bound by law to show a profit, but USPS also needs to provide fast, efficient service. The danger in allowing thousands of letters to be rejected all over the country by the facer-cancelers, was that this would slow the mail-handling process while USPS mail volume continues to grow. If left unchecked such a retrogressive step could end up in logjams such as the one that once backed up Chicago mail to the extent that soldiers had to be sent in to help the Postal Service catch up.

Thus, the \$50-million figure, though suspect, may not be the only motivator of USPS policy on stamp washing. □

Stephen G. Esrati
P. O. Box 20130
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