

Plate Number Coils

Stamp Collectors and the general public have seen printing plate numbers in the margins of panes of U.S. stamps for a long time. Early coils were made from stamp panes that were cut in strips the width of the pane and then glued together into continuous strips for coiling. The plate numbers were meant to be trimmed off the finished product.

U. S. coil stamps changed in 1981 when the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) began deliberately printing plate numbers at fixed intervals on coil stamps.



To celebrate **25 years** of PNC's, the PNC³, founded in 1988, has designed this logo.

The central part of its design is the 18c Flag (... from sea to shining sea) issued **April 24th 1981**.

This was the first coil to have a plate number intentionally printed as part of its design. Look closely and you will see a **"1"** centered at bottom just below the design.

PNC³, a club dedicated to identification and study of plate number coils, brings you this one frame exhibit on the 25th anniversary of this exciting collecting specialty. The pages that follow will expose you to the many facets of this still young specialty.

Just for fun:

A printing error exists on a stamp in this exhibit which is not described on its designated page. Correctly identify it and claim a prize at our booth!

Plate Number Coils have been collected in different lengths:

Virtually since their debut, coil stamps were collected as singles or, to spice up a collection, as a guide-line pair on flat press issues, and later on the joint line on rotary press issues was sought after to show a position piece:



Guide-line pair



Joint-line pair

On April 24, 1981, the 18¢ Flag coil was released. This issue featured a tiny plate number on the bottom of every 52nd stamp. Within a short time, collectors had 7 different numbers to find on this stamp:



Soon after, on May 18, 1981, the 18¢ Surrey coil was released. This was the first Transportation Coil and the beginning of a series that contains the bulk of the PNC's issued during the 1980's. This issue had 18 different plate numbers:



Interested collectors adopted a basic premise that **a stamp with a plate number was collectibly different from a stamp without such a number, or a stamp with a different number.** This created an insatiable desire to collect plated stamps, and plate number collecting was born!

PNC collectors quickly developed a nomenclature. A single stamp was a PS1. Larger strips were PS2, PS3, PS4, etc.



A period of confusion and uncertainty existed on a decision as to how many stamps should be collected on a multiple strip. The Transportation Series was printed on the Cottrell press, which produced a joint line, while the Flag issues were printed on other presses which did not.

Should the center of symmetry, the "position pieces" for strips, be the joint line or the plated stamp?



The traditional way to collect coils would have the joint line in the middle of a pair of stamps.



Some early collectors preferred 2 stamps on either side of the joint line. Both of these formats soon fell from favor.

The **plated stamp** eventually became the central focal point:



Strips of 3 or 5 began to be collected. To this day, some collectors still favor the PS3. However, the PS5 became the dominant choice. There are several reasons for this. A primary factor was the Precancel Gap, explained further in frame #6.

Printers and Printer Plate Number Prefixes:

We are now in the 3rd decade of the plated coil stamp. The Bureau of Engraving and Printing has printed the vast majority of these issues. However, contracted private printers increasingly began to provide PNC's until the BEP finally ceased printing for the postal service in 2005.

As you pass by these pages, you'll notice how the plate numbers have evolved.

The **BEP** used only numerals for their plates. However, there are exceptions where they used an "A" after the numerals when an unusually large number of plates were used to print an issue.



Private printers use a different format.

They have a letter as a prefix before the numerals. This can get complicated because some contractors print their own stamps, some contract out, and some do both!

Regardless of who prints and who contracts, it is the contractor's letter that is used.

Note that both Sennett Security Products and Stamp Venturers use the letter "S".

Avery Dennison for Self



Avery Dennison for
Dittler Brothers



Sennett Security Products for Self



Guilford Gravure for Self



Guilford Gravure for
Banknote Corporation Of America



Guilford Gravure for
American Bank Note Company



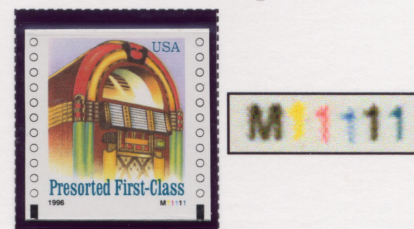
J.W. Ferguson & Sons for
Ashton Potter



J.W. Ferguson & Sons for
Stamp Venturers



J.W. Ferguson & Sons for
Stamp Venturers for
3M Corp.



Collecting Used Plate Number Coils:

When the Postal Service began to print plate numbers on coil stamps in 1981, the emphasis was to collect them as mint strips.

However, many collectors also began to collect used PNC's as:

Singles



Pairs



Strips



They are also collected **on cover**, as shown on pages 14 & 15.

Some collectors sought **slogan cancellations**:



Others looked for singles and strips that showed the **year date**:



At the end of 1981 the Postal Service experimented with **purple cancellations**. Because it was easy to bleach them, this was soon discontinued. However, they now sell at a premium:



Precanceled and **service inscribed** coil stamps were collected as uncanceled singles:



With the introduction of self-adhesives around 1992, die cut separations began to replace perforations, which prevented the collecting of pairs or strips.

Some coils are designed for a specific purpose, which the general population would not use:



Service Designated

An inscription is included in the design of the stamp to indicate the category of postal service to be rendered. The service designated stamp does not normally receive any additional cancellation when used for the indicated service. The mailer must obtain a permit to be able to use these stamps.



Computer Vended Variable Denomination

Available only at a few test sites, these were produced for use in Postage and Mailing Center (PMC) machines, which originally could produce denominations from 1¢ to \$99.99. Produced blank, the denomination was printed by the computer as the stamps were dispensed.



Official Mail

For exclusive use of U.S. Government agencies. These are available to collectors through the Philatelic Fulfillment Service Center in Kansas City, Mo. Bearing the notice of a fine if used on regular mail, they are sometimes referred to as "Penalty Mail Stamps".



Test Coils

These were developed to test printing processes and coiling equipment, and to set tension chocks in coil vending machines and stamp affixing machines. They are also used for training purposes and for mailing demonstrations at postal forums. Usually obtained through the secondary market, as they are not available through any Post Office or through the Philatelic Fulfillment Service Center.



For Use by Mass Mailers

Produced in large rolls of 500, 3,000 or 10,000 for use by mass mailers whose stamp affixing equipment requires spacing between the individual stamps. These frequently have counting numbers on the backing paper to quickly determine how many stamps remain in a roll.

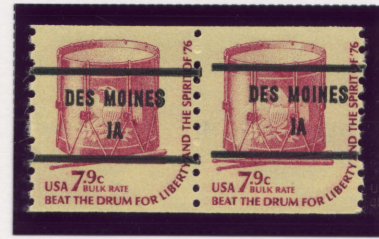


Collector Coils

These were only available to collectors through the Philatelic Fulfillment Service Center. Their purpose was to provide evenly spaced stamps, which normally came as convertible booklets, for use in special affixing machines to provide First Day Covers and Souvenir Pages.

Bureau printed precancel gap positions:

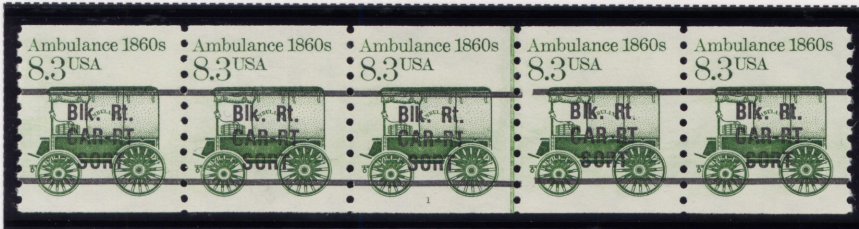
Prior to the advent of the PNC, the Cottrell press was printing stamps that were precanceled with 2 horizontal lines which produced gaps at 12 stamp intervals. Electrotypes plates on rotary presses printed the lines, and gaps are a result of the space between where these plates meet each other end-to-end on the press. These gaps held little significance.



Precancel Gap Pair

With the plate number added to the stamp, collectors noticed a relationship between the plated stamp and the gap. This relationship developed into a new collectible unique to the PNC: **Precancel Gap Positions**

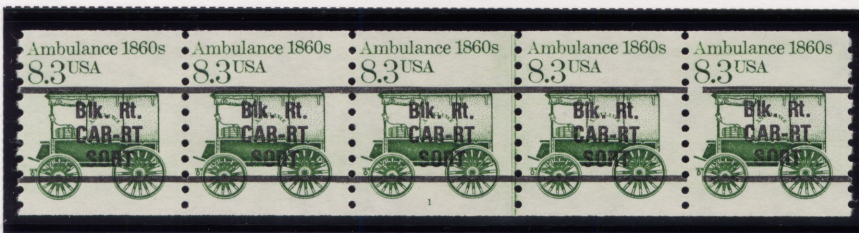
PS5 Line Gap



A new type of nomenclature was developed:

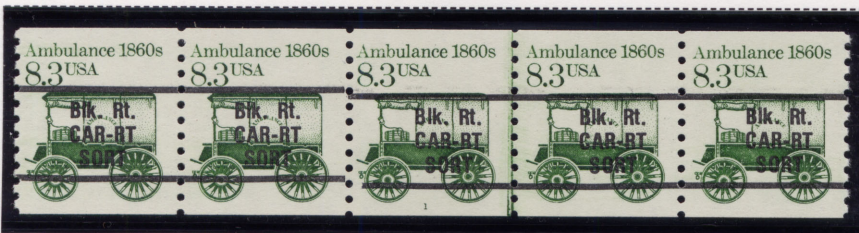
Gaps falling on the joint line are **Line Gaps**.

PS5 GAP 1R



Other gaps are named by the closest perforation, either to the right or to the left, and are designated as **1R, 1L, 2R, 2L, etc.**

PS5 GAP 1L

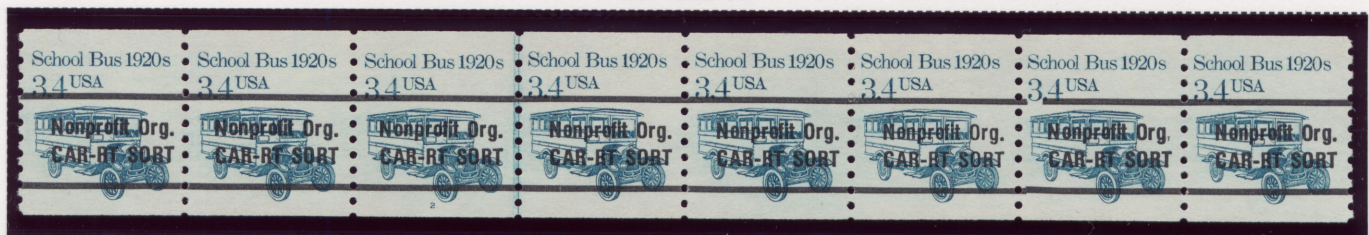


Gaps 2L to 2R are typically saved in strips of 5 as **PS5's**.

It should be noted that the precancel gap was instrumental in the PNC collector favoring a PS5 over a PS3. Quite simply, **more gaps could be shown on the PS5.**

To preserve gap positions **beyond 2L or 2R**, however, longer strips are necessary. A standard procedure was developed in which **2 stamps were saved beyond the gap and 2 stamps beyond the plate number.** Each issue varied as to the amount of gaps printed. Research has shown some gaps to be common, while others have proven to be quite scarce.

PS8 GAP 3R



What about the gaps not printed on the Cottrell press?

An imaginary line is drawn on the perforation that is right of the plate number, and the naming remains the same as on the Cottrell issues.

The Transportation Issue 1981-1995: changing rates for specific classes of mail

This popular series as shown on these two pages comprises 51 **face-different** stamps and additional varieties to meet the extant postal rates. Some of the service-inscribed and precanceled stamps were issued without these markings and were available to collectors only through the Philatelic Fulfillment Service Center in Kansas City, MO.

These are indicated by an asterisk (*):



Make up postage, vending machine changemaker
8/29/83



Make up postage, vending machine changemaker
5/29/82



Make up postage
3/25/83



Make up postage
3/29/88



* Carrier route sorted non-profit rate
6/8/85



* 5-digit presorted non-profit rate
8/18/82



* Make up postage
1/25/91



* 5-digit presorted non-profit bulk rate
6/21/85



Make up postage
10/10/83



Vending machine changemaker
9/25/87



Make up postage
8/31/90



Additional non-profit postage rate
5/28/91



* Bulk presorted non-profit rate
3/21/83



Carrier route presorted non-profit bulk rate
9/16/88



* Carrier route presorted non-profit rate
11/1/86



* Bulk presorted non-profit rate
2/17/82



* Bulk non-profit rate
5/6/85



* Bulk presorted non-profit rate
2/6/87



* Carrier route presorted bulk rate
4/7/84



Bulk presorted non-profit rate
8/30/88



* Carrier presorted bulk rate
6/21/85



Presorted non-profit rate
8/12/88



* Non-profit presort rate
1/24/87



* Bulk 5-digit presort rate
12/15/81



Make-up postage and
special services
4/11/87



Non-profit additional
postage rate
5/21/91



* Bulk presorted rate
4/18/85



* Bulk presorted rate
3/26/82



* Bulk rate
2/4/84



Make-up postage for
vending machines
6/11/85



* Postcard presort rate
4/2/85



* Postcard presort rate
4/18/85



Postcard presort rate
10/29/88



Presorted 3rd class bulk rate
7/19/88



Postcard rate
3/23/85



Postcard rate
7/12/88



Presorted 3rd class bulk rate
7/2/88



* 1st class additional ounce and
presorted 1st class rate
6/25/81



1st class additional ounce rate
8/20/86



* 1st class presorted rate
9/25/87



1st class 1st ounce rate
5/18/81



1st class 1st ounce rate
12/19/81



1st class additional ounce rate
10/28/88



Postcard and
1st class additional ounce rate
6/9/95



1st class sorted to
9-digit ZIP rate
9/28/88



Presorted 1st class rate
8/16/89



Postcard and
1st class additional ounce rate
6/12/91



Unsorted ZIP+4 rate
10/26/88



1st class 1st ounce rate
11/22/86



1st class 1st ounce rate
6/2/95



Special services, parcels
8/12/88

Color varieties in Plate Number Coils result from many factors, including:



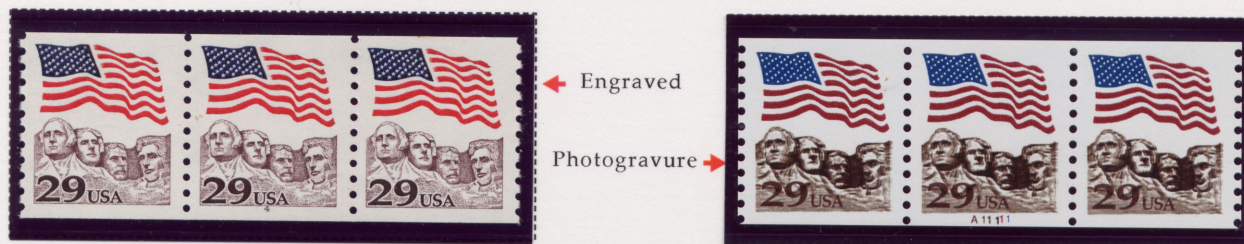
Incorrect color of ink was used:



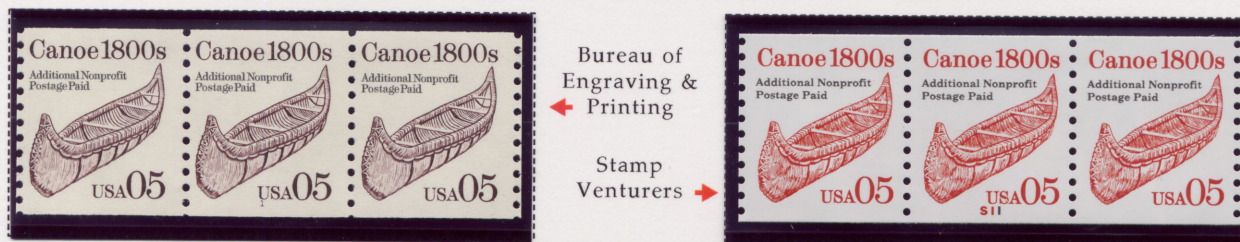
Differing production runs:



Differing methods of production:



Differing printing contractors:



Differing indicated services and rates:



Some coil issues were produced with Accounting Numbers on their reverse side:

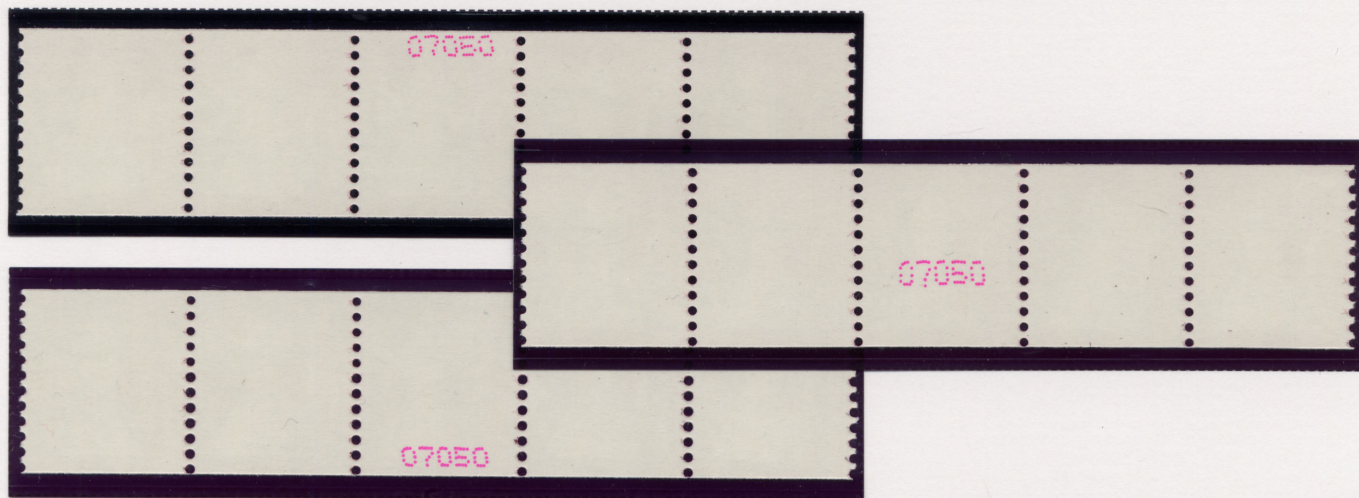
Accounting numbers are also known as “**Back Numbers**”. The numbers first appeared in December, 1994 on rolls of 3,000 and 10,000 of the water-activated red “G” stamp issued by Stamp Venturers. The numbers were found at the top, middle or bottom of the stamp.

On the early coils the accounting number was used to tell how many stamps in a roll had been used or sold. The numbers increased as you reached the middle of a roll.

On the later coils the accounting numbers tell how many stamps are left on the roll. These numbers decrease as you reach the middle of the roll.

Some collectors pursue the same number on each position of a stamp. Some collect strips where the back number is on the plate number stamp, which is known as a **#on#** strip.

Others collect a matched set of numbers in all 3 locations, top, middle and bottom:



The numbers are found in various colors:

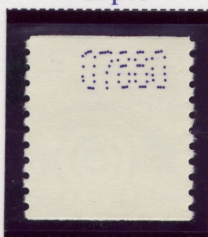
Black



Pink



Purple



Aqua



Blue



The number of digits usually, but not always, indicates the size of the coil roll:

A 3-digit number comes from a roll of 500:



A 4-digit number comes from a roll of 3000:



A 5-digit number comes from a roll of 10,000:



On the water activated stamps the number is printed on the gum; whereas on the self-adhesives, on the liner.

The non-denominated (5¢) Mountain self-adhesive coil is the only coil with counting numbers to appear on the back of each stamp in the roll:



Errors do occur on back numbers. Numbers have been printed **upside down** in relation to the face of the stamp. Also, possibly due to not resetting the counter during setup, **all zeros** have erroneously appeared throughout a roll, which should indicate the last stamp on the roll.

Self-adhesive coil stamps exist with many differing die cut varieties:

In order to separate individual self-adhesive stamps from the coil roll, it is necessary to cut the stamps apart without cutting the backing paper on which they are placed. This is accomplished using a cutting die located in the finishing equipment. The design of the die varies with the producer of the stamps, with some producers using multiple die designs.

Die varieties are the modern day equivalent of perforation varieties. As with perforation varieties, most are quite common, but some are extremely rare, with only a few examples known for a given plate numbered coil issue.

The task of distinguishing between the various dies ranges from simple to complex. The U.S.P.S. determined that self-adhesive stamps should appear similar to traditional stamps having perforations, so cutting dies were constructed to produce a serpentine shape, resulting in "peaks" and "valleys" on each side of a coil stamp. The most obvious distinction is the count of those peaks and valleys. Descriptive shortcuts have been developed to identify the dies. One may see the descriptor such as "11/10 PP/VV" used. This means that there are 11 peaks on the left side of the stamp and 10 on the right side. The left side has a peak at the top of the stamp and at the bottom, and the right side a valley at top and bottom. Some die varieties of the 32¢ Flag Over Porch series produced by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are shown below:



11/10 PP/VV



10/10 VP/PV



12/12 VP/PV



9/10 VV/PP

Other manufacturers may use their own die designs. Though similar in appearance, in that most employ the familiar serpentine shape, the peak and valley count is usually different. More subtle differences also occur, and add more thrills to the chase. These may include:



9/10 VV/PP from
Banknote Corp. of America



13/12 PP/VV from
Stamp Venturers



15/15 PP/PP from
Sennett Security Printers



4-Sided Serpentine Die
from Ashton Potter

When the stamp is incorrectly aligned with respect to finishing equipment, some interesting die cut conditions can occur. Given whimsical names by discoverers, the anomalies, though not rare, can form an interesting collecting sideline. The following examples are encountered on issues produced by Avery Dennison and Sennett Security Printers:



"Bell" @ bottom right
(Avery Dennison)



"Knoll" @ bottom left
(Avery Dennison)



"Thimble" @ bottom right
(Avery Dennison)



"Cobra" @ bottom right
(Sennett Security Printers)

The observed preferences of the mailing public for self-adhesive stamps (both for 1st class usage as well as special-rate postage) dictates that the majority of the stamps of the future will be die cut. Knowledge of the die cut varieties (and the rarities) will benefit the collector of United States stamps.

How one stamp can become a specialty: the Flag Over Porch issue:

The 32¢ Flag Over Porch (FOP) basic stamp design was truly a “workhorse”, serving as the basis for seven different coil stamp issues, as well as booklet and sheet varieties. Issued during 1995, 1996 and 1997, they remained in use until the 1st class rate increased to 33¢ in 1999.

The coils were manufactured by the Bureau of Engraving & Printing (BEP), as well as three private manufacturers:



BEP version



3M version



Avery Dennison version



Stamp Venturers version

The period of use for these issues saw the popularity (and, therefore, production) of self-adhesive stamps soar. Much experimentation was accomplished with the various FOP self-adhesive issues.

3M, Stamp Venturers and Avery Dennison produced self-adhesives under contract, with 3M producing a linerless version.

The BEP produced by far the largest quantity of FOP coil stamps. Traditional gummed stamps (issued 1995) were found having 14 different plate numbers. The innovative self-adhesives (issued 1996) were found in coils of 100 having 32 different plate numbers, each having one to five distinct die varieties.

The 1997 version in larger coils had one plate number with two distinct die varieties:



1995 BEP Issue



1996 BEP Issue



1997 BEP Issue

Some self-adhesive Flag Over Porch plate/die combinations are **extremely rare**. At this time there are three varieties that have **never been found in mint condition**, each of which have fewer than 25 used examples known in collector hands.

They are Pl# 66666 with 10/11 VV/PP die, Pl# 66666 with 12/11 PP/VV die, and Pl# 88888 with 12/11 PP/VV die.

Other rare combinations exist; the Pl# 78777 10/10 PV/VP die has only 4 **known mint plate strips of 5**, and Pl# 13231A with 10/10 VP/PV die has 8 **known mint plate strips of 5** and 6 known mint plate singles.

A used example (58 known copies; 44 used singles and 14 on cover) of this rare plate/die combination is shown below:



Extremely Rare FOP Plate # 13231A 10/10 VP/PV

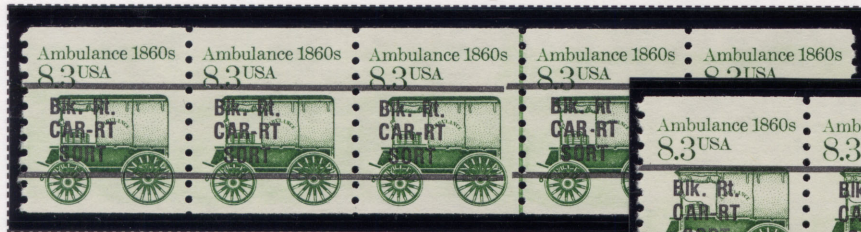
The Flag Over Porch issues comprise the most extensive combination of PNC issues of a single basic design to date. There are well **over 100 collectable varieties** to be found among the products of the various printers. Specialists continue to make new discoveries, having not encountered the rare BEP-issued #88888 11/12 VV/PP variety (1996 issue) until early 2003.

It is entirely possible that there are still more varieties yet unknown.

Plate Number Coils + Murphy's Law = EFO's Errors

The designer said 1 plate number:

Freaks
Oddities



2 Plate #'s ▼

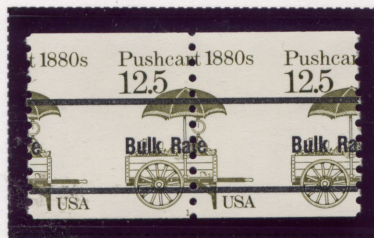


No plate # ▲

To perforate or not to perforate?



Where oh where to perforate?



Going... going going



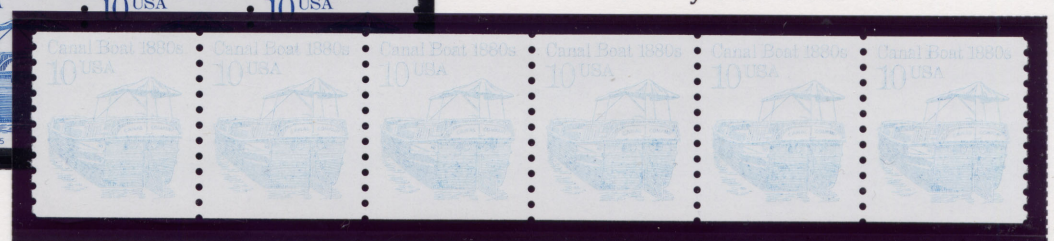
Gone!!



Now you see it...



Now you don't?



▲ Normal stamps?

P.U.I. Printing Under the Influence

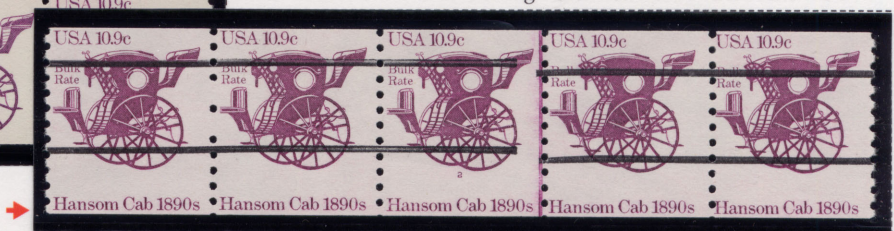
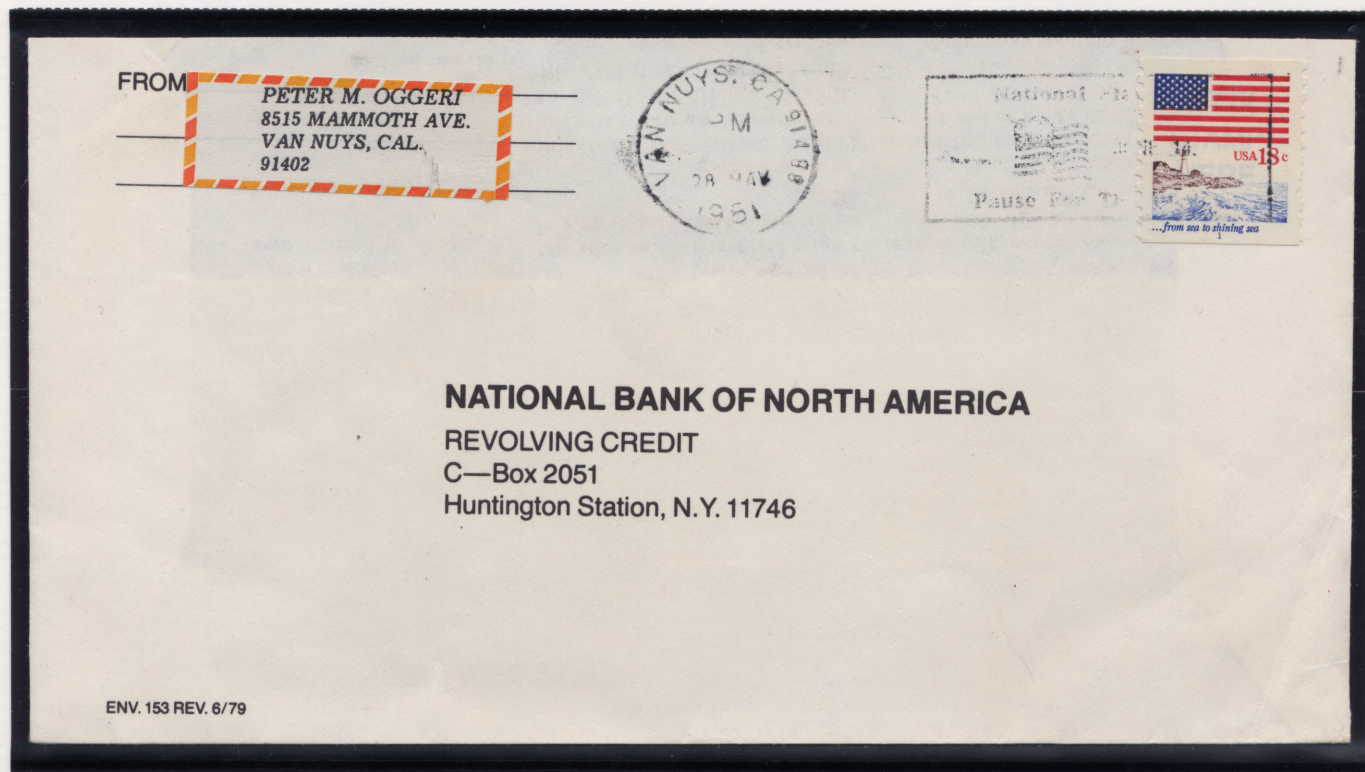


Plate number coils saved on cover make an interesting specialty:

As examples of modern postal history, many collectors seek PNC's intact on cover showing different usages.

Some interesting examples follow:



18¢ Flag #1 (the very first PNC) on commercial cover dated 5/28/81, a fairly early usage.



5.2¢ Sleigh #2 PS3 on cacheted First Day Cover.

5¢ Butte #S333 junk mail cover (3rd Class Non-profit usage) that managed to get a 3/26/97 ink-jet spray cancel. Junk mail seldom gets canceled, nor is it supposed to:



TRENTON, NJ 08650
The Statue of Liberty-
Ellis Island Foundation, Inc.



14:06 032637



B. Ducker
3845 Regal Ave
Law. Ga 52802



Thank You

Rare combo PNC commercial cover - 20¢ Flag #10 plus 1¢ Omnibus #1. The odds are against it, as there is only 1 PNC every 24 stamps in a roll for the Omnibus, and only 1 PNC in 48 for the Flag.

PO Box 840
Skowhegan, ME USA
04976



PERMIT #100

RETOUR
Zbog rata u Bosni i Hercegovini za
ovu poštu promet u prekidu
A CAUSE DE LA GUERRE EN BOSNIE
HERZEGOVINE LE TRAFIC POSTALE EST
INTERROMPU AVEC CE BUREAU DE POSTE
Bureau d'échange
41003 ZAGREB
JUGOSLAVIA

10¢ Eagle and Shield #11111 sent to Yugoslavia and returned due to the war in Bosnia.

On the preceding pages you have been given a taste of U.S. Plate Number Coil collecting.
The search continues for varieties of plate number coils.

A recent plate number on a U.S. coil stamp is shown below:

The Plate Number Coil Collectors Club
(PNC³) is staffing a booth
(# 2847) at Washington 2006.

At our booth you can learn more
about PNCs and pick up a
membership application.

Dues within the U.S. are \$12 annually.
Dues for Canada and Mexico are \$17
annually, and \$22 annually
for all other countries.

Junior memberships
(under 18 years of age) cost just \$5.

Applications may also be found
on our website.



Benefits to membership
include Coil Line, our monthly
newsletter, and participation
(buy or sell) in PNC³ mail auctions
currently held twice per year.
Membership also entitles you to
purchase, at favorable club prices,
catalog pages about PNCs
and Values lists showing current
PNC market prices,
as well as a weekly on-line
chat session, courtesy discounts from
participating PNC³ dealers,
and exhibit expense supplementation.

PNC³ meets annually at STAMPSHOW, sponsored by the American Philatelic Society (APS),
and is held in a different U.S. city every year.

The next STAMPSHOW is in Chicago, Illinois August 24-27, 2006.

PNC³ also hosts regional meetings at various U.S. cities during the year.

Throughout Washington 2006, PNC³ will be offering classes on different aspects of PNC collecting.
Consult your show program or stop by our PNC³ booth at the show to learn more.

Send inquiries, remittances and applications to:

Andy Jakes, PNC³ Treasurer
2303 Horseshoe Ct.
Grayslake, IL 60030-9327

After you leave the show, you can stay in touch with what's happening in the PNC world by
frequently visiting our award winning website:

www.pnc3.org