

# Collecting United States Bureau Precancels

Facts and Information about  
U.S. Bureau Precancels



By Curtis E. Gidding

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## Introduction

Every book has a reason for being written. This booklet is being written because there was a booklet produced by Mr. George Klein about the U.S. Bureau Precancels. His booklet was produced in several editions ranging from 1954-1981. Mr. Klein was an active precancel dealer and decided that a booklet on U.S. Precancels was needed to (1) educate the reader about the U.S. Precancels; (2) provide information about collecting them; and (3) to show collectors how collecting U.S. Bureau Precancels was a mere extension to their U.S. collections.

This booklet is designed to be an informational publication which will show the U.S. stamp collector that the U.S. Bureau Precancels are but an extension to his current collection. The collecting of precancels in general has always been somewhat of an enigma to the U.S. collector. In many cases, the U.S. collector and dealer have frowned upon the precancels. The booklet will show facts and information that would indicate that the collection of precancels in general and especially the Bureau precancels can supplement and provide important stamp issues to a collector's collection. The booklet will provide information for the reader:

- The history of Bureau precancels and their usage
- The importance of Bureau precancels
- All of the various forms of Bureau Precancels
- How to collect them
- Suggested albums and precancel activities

Collecting U.S. Bureau Precancels can add a lot of enjoyment to your collecting activities at a modest cost. You can build a nice and sizable collection of the Bureau precancels for a small amount of money compared to some of the normal collecting areas.

I hope that you will enjoy reading about the U.S. Bureau precancels and decide to collect them. If you have already started to collect them, I hope that this booklet will enhance your enjoyment and increase your knowledge about the U.S. Bureau precancels.

*Curtis Gidding*

## Chapter 1

### Precancels - Historical Perspective

The concept of precanceling stamps has been in use from the 19th century and is still used by the United States Postal Service. The word precanceled means that the stamp was cancelled before being used in postal duty. Hence the name “precancel” was coined and was used to refer to stamps handled in this manner. This practice was initiated to save time and labor on mailing large quantities of mailed items and was first used at Christmas to speed the handling of Christmas mail. The additional use of the mails for commercial use or the mailing of newspapers, advertisements and public announcements also justified the use of precancels.

The early precancels were applied locally by the mailing post office as early as 1844 with the Hale local issue. Various offices used precancels from then until 1907. These early precancels took the form of pen strokes ruled across the sheet of stamps, bars, and some attractive precancel designs which were produced locally. The practice of using local precancels continued to be in use until July 2007. These precancels are



*Figure 1*

often referred to as “Town & Type precancels.” Collecting these types is an entirely separate collecting specialty that is available to the collector. Just a few examples of these types are shown in Figure 1.

The development of the Bureau precancel, which is the subject of this pamphlet, was started in 1917 by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. These early precancels were termed experimental because they were just that -- an “experiment.” The cost of local precanceling was paid for by the post office and the costs were varied in various cities. Because the use of precancels was increasing rapidly, the cost became a concern with the post office. Information about the experimental precancels will be provided in more depth in a later chapter.

## Chapter 2

### The Lure of the Bureau Precancel

**T**he Bureau Precancels are a very nice extension to the collecting of United States stamp issues. They can be considered an extension to the normal U.S. collection because they are all issues produced by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. If a collector becomes bored with their normal collecting activities and wants to find a way to expand their collection, the U.S. Bureau stamps provide an ideal solution. The collecting of the Bureau precancels can be very economical and most issues are very reasonable in price. The various Bureau Types are easily identified and the collection can be specialized by a collector's favorite states if they do not want to collect all of the Bureau issues. On a different note, the Bureau collector has a lot of choices as to how he collects the Bureau issues. He can collect them as singles, blocks of four, coil pairs, and varieties. Albums such as the K&P Bureau album are readily available to make the building of a collection much easier. The PSS Bureau Catalog or the computer version makes it easy to categorize your collection and develop want lists.

As a collector of U.S. issues, it must be kept in mind that the Bureau precancels were created for only one purpose, to improve the speed and delivery of third class mail. They were not created for collectors. The Bureau issues were not available to collectors from the U.S. Postal Service, and had to be obtained by the normal mails. Their availability was controlled but some issues after the 1938 Presidential issues were available from precancel new issue dealers. Collectors today no longer can enjoy the excitement of the collectors of the early 1920s and later in watching for new issues of the Bureaus to emerge. However, they can enjoy the process of finding Bureau issues to add to their collections.

Because the Bureau precancels were used in postal service, there is not the concern for the condition of the gum. Most Bureau precancels have no gum; however, some collectors continue to look for those issues in mint never hinged condition. The beauty of the hobby is that you can decide to collect issues in normal condition or in the MNH condition.

Collectors who become overwhelmed by the number of Bureau precancels available may decide to limit their collecting their collecting activity to a specific state or U.S. stamp issue -- as example, Presidential issues, Liberty, and etc.

## Chapter 3

### The Experimental Precancels

As a result of the increased usage of precancels within the United States postal system and the increased cost of the post office providing local precancel devices, it was decided that the Bureau of Engraving and Printing would investigate the production of precancels by the Bureau. It was determined that the Bureau would produce precancels for three cities: Augusta, Maine, New Orleans, Louisiana, and Springfield, Massachusetts (see Figure 2).



*Figure 2*

The cities and denominations, quantities are as follows:

AUGUSTA, MAINE	SPRINGFIELD, MASS.
1¢     4,000,000	1¢     3,000,000
	2¢     600,000
NEW ORLEANS, LA	3¢     30,000
1¢     3,600,000	4¢     30,000
2¢     50,000	5¢     30,000
3¢     50,000	6¢     20,000
6¢     10,000	7¢     30,000
1¢ Due 20,000	8¢     50,000
2¢ Due 270,000	9¢     50,000
	10¢    20,000
	11¢    10,000
	12¢    20,000
	15¢    20,000
	20¢    30,000

From these quantities, you can determine that most of the experimental issues are hard to find and command a high price. Most are very scarce. A collector should require certificates on any of these that were issued in low quantities. The experimentals are the classics of the Bureau Precancel issues.

## Chapter 4

### Old Style Precancels of 1923 & 1927

There was a six year lapse before any additional precancels were produced by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. The experiment with the previous precancels proved that there were indeed a need for precancels to be produced by the Bureau. It showed that the economies of precancels were valid. During this period there were a lot of precancels produced locally by both “handstamp” and “electroplate” methods. The demand for precancels was continuing to increase. It was obvious to the Bureau that the stamps could be precanceled at the same time that they were produced, thus eliminating costs and gaining productivity. The first Bureau precancel of this type was produced in May, 1923 for New York City. The stamp was the perforation 10 issue of the current sheet stamp of 1922-26 (shown in Figure 3).

This stamp was precanceled during the same process that it was printed. It was produced on the Stickney Web Intaglio Press. It was the first time a precancel and stamp were produced in the same printing process. The process was successful and there were precancels produced for an additional 52 cities and they were supplied in January 1924. The first coil stamp Bureau issue was supplied to New York City, also during January 1924.



*Figure 3*

From that date forward, there were orders issued and printed for all cities that made an application for not less than 500,000 sheet stamps or 250,000 coil stamps. This was the beginning of the “Old Style” issue generation of precancels. During the “life cycle” of the Old Style Issues there were several types used. Type styles were varied to allow the city and state to be shown on the stamp. Old Style Types are shown in Figure 4. Perforation 10 sheet stamps were produced in denominations of 1¢ through 10¢ for various cities, with a total of 437 stamps. The coil issues were produced for these denominations plus the 1½¢ Harding Full Face issue because it was introduced while the Old Style type was still in use. The coil issues total 306 stamps.

Please note that Types 41-45 (shown in Figure 4, next page) are produced in Cheltenham type font, and Types 51-52 are in Franklin Gothic. These types were used on both the 10x10 sheet stamps and also the coil stamps perforated 10 vertically. The perforation of 10x10 on the sheet stamps made them hard to cleanly separate. Beginning in 1926, all of the denominations were changed to a perforation of 11x10½. This change created an additional group of Old Style Bureau Issues.

PERU IND.	LANSING MICH.	SAINT LOUIS MO.	New Orleans La.	San Francisco Calif.
41	42	43	44	45
PORTLAND ME.	Schenectady N. Y.			
51	52			

*Figure 4*

Most of the Old Style Types are very inexpensive. Due to the production of these issues, many were off-center and would not be considered VF. About 10-12% of these issues can be found in VF condition with regard to centering. These will command a higher price than the catalogs indicate. Some of the scarcer and more expensive issues in this series are:

- Batavia, IL, 1½¢ Sheet Stamp
- Tonawanda, NY, 1½¢ Sheet Stamp & Coil
  - Watseka, IL, 1½¢ Coil Stamp
  - Kokomo, IN, 1½¢ Sheet Stamp
  - Liberty, MO, 1¢ Coil Stamp
  - Liberty, MO, 1½¢ Coil Stamp
- Pawtucket, RI, 1½¢ Sheet Stamp
- Oklahoma, OK, 1¢ Sheet Stamp
  - Girard, KS, 1¢ Sheet Stamp



## Chapter 5

### 1927-32 Standard Types

In October 1927, The Bureau of Engraving and Printing changed the type style for Bureau Precancels. The new issue of definitive stamps which were issued in 1926 and perforated 11 x 10½ consisted of an 8 point clean-cut style of type as shown in Figure 5. These new precancels were identified with precancel types as 61-63 (see Figure 6). In the new Standard Style of precancels, we now see this type in the coil issues as shown in Figure 7 (next page). These precancel styles were also expanded to the coil issues of the Harding, Stuart, and Taft issues as shown in Figure 8 (next page). These issues can provide a nice specialized collection. The 1½¢ Harding Full Face issue was issued before all of the Old Style Precancel Types were retired and some issues are in that style also.

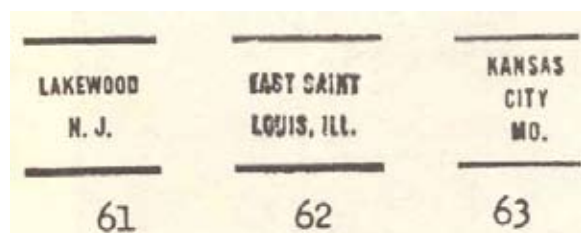
In the 1927-32 issues, the 20¢-50¢ issues were produced in a horizontal format unlike the other issues of that series of definitive stamps. The normal position for the Bureau precancel was “reading down.” However, on three issues of the 20¢ Golden Gate issue, the direction of the wording was reversed and produced precancels “reading up.” These are the only Bureau inverts that were produced (See Figure 9, next page). During this time period there were three regular U.S. stamps which were produced with Bureau overprints that were not precancels: the Molly Pitcher, Hawaii, and the Kansas- Nebraska issues.

The Standard Style Bureau precancels are very affordable and are reasonable in price for most collectors. The centering on these issues is much better than the Old Style pre-



*Figure 5*

cancels. A complete collection of the Standard Precancel Styles consists of 1,387 sheet stamps and 638 coil stamps.



*Figure 6*

In 1929, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing changed the method of producing die plates. In the process, some plates were retouched and created the Die II issues. These were not known by the philatelic public until 1932. As a result, there were precancels produced on Die II plates for

both sheet and coil issues. Die II coil stamps were produced for Boston and Detroit. Sheet stamps were produced for Hartford, Connecticut, Kansas City, Missouri, Cincinnati, and Memphis (see Figure 10). For information on the features of the Die II variety, consult the *Scott Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue*.



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

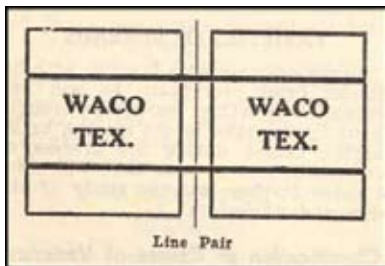


Figure 10

## Chapter 6 Bureau Coil Issues

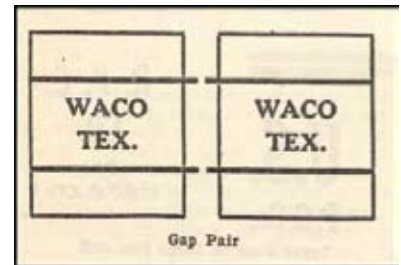
The operation for producing the Bureau Coil Issues is the same as that used for the production of sheet stamps. A narrower strip of paper is used to produce the coils and the precanceling plates consist of a smaller number of subjects. The finished sheet has 10 rows of stamps. The sheets then go through operations to perforate the stamps on two of the opposite sides and then are cut into strips to produce the coil rolls. Each sheet produces 10 separate coil strips. The manner of production and paper shrinkage causes the length of the inscription to be either increased or decreased compared to the same precancel on a sheet issue. The hand adjustment of the electroplate rolls may also alter the spacing of the lettering.

Many Bureau collectors prefer to collect the Bureau coils in pairs. The collecting of pairs is another area that you may choose to expand your collection. Bureau coil pairs offer the opportunity to collect other pair varieties in addition to a normal plain pair. These varieties are produced by the precancel operation and the also the printing process for the stamps themselves.



*Figure 11*

A line pair (Figure 11, left) is produced as a result of the production of the stamp itself. This line occurs between every 17th space on the coil strip.

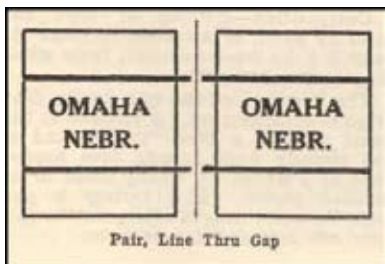


*Figure 12*

A gap pair (Figure 12, right) is produced by the position of the key in the printing roll. There will be a gap produced every

12th stamp on the roll. Gap pairs are actually more common than the other varieties.

The combination of a line and gap will be present every 204th space on a coil roll (Figure 13, below). This will provide the reason why this pair combination is scarce. From these examples, you can see that it is possible to build a collection of each variety of the coil issues. Many of these varieties are very scarce because the coil rolls were heavily used and were broken apart for usage in the mailing process. These varieties can be found on all of the Bureau precancel issues from the Old Style and through the Liberty issues.



*Figure 13*

Another interesting variety for coil issues occurs when the cutting of the coils on the part of sheet which shows a plate number is not normal. This allows the coil pair or even single issues to show a partial plate number. Figure 14, next page, is an example of a Park Ridge, Illinois issue showing a partial plate number.

The coil issue from Park Ridge, Illinois has a very interesting history and is a very hard issue to find both as a single and also as pairs. The Park Ridge Post Office was robbed. The thieves took only uncanceled stamps but broke the precancel coil rolls open and threw them all over the post office. The remainder of the coils, 172 rolls of 500, was returned to Washington for credit in 1935. Only 200 rolls had been used since 1932. Hence, this issue became much scarcer and hard to find.



*Figure 14*

A very similar set of circumstances occurred in Liberty, Missouri with the 1¢ and 1½¢ coil issues. These two are the real “gems” of the Bureau precancels. There are only a few known pairs to exist.

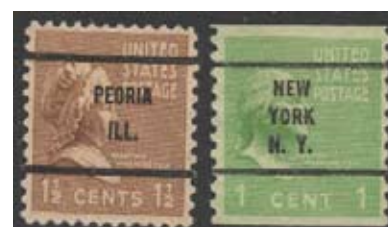
Bureau coil pairs (Figure 15) can provide a real interesting area. They consist of both cheap coil varieties and also some of the scarcest varieties. A collector can have a lot of fun building a collection of the Bureau pairs.



*Figure 15*

## Chapter 7 Presidential Issues

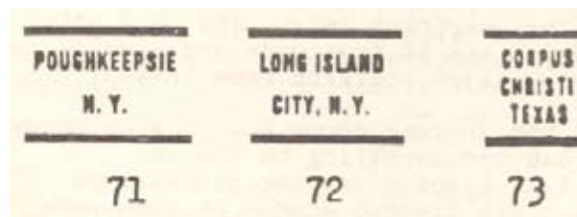
In 1938, the United States Post Office issued a set of stamps called the “Presidential issues.” This set of stamps was in use from 1938 and until 1954. The Presidential issues from the ½¢ through the 50¢ were precanceled by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. It included the sheet stamps and the coil issues for that series. The first issues to appear were the 1½¢ denomination for Peoria, Illinois and the 1¢ coil for New York City (Figure 16). The initial precancel styles were the Styles 61-63 which are shown previously (Figure 6). These are referred to as the “wide” prexie” issues by collectors.



*Figure 16*

Orders for Bureau precancels were placed with the Bureau and the new issue presidential issues were supplied as denominations of the previous issues were depleted. Hence, there was no systematic replacement of the previous series with the presidential issues. There are a total of 674 sheet stamps issued with the “wide” precancels and 629 sidewise coil issues. The “wide” Bureau presidential issues were issued for a short period of time and therefore are much harder to find than the subsequent “narrow” issues.

In July 1938, a new postal regulation was placed in effect which stated that all precancel denominations above 6¢ were required to have an additional printed or hand-stamped cancel to be added to the face of the stamp. This regulation applied to all precancels whether Bureau or local issue. The “wide” precancel setting did not allow these dated precancels to be clearly shown and so the space between the lines of the precancel was reduced, thus producing the “narrow” precancel. These new precancel types are shown as Types 71-73 (Figure 17).



*Figure 17*



*Figure 18*

These new regulations forced precancel users to apply another cancel to the current Bureau issues. These were applied by both a printed method and a handstamped method. The printed dated precancels are much more attractive than those of the handstamped counterparts. Nevertheless, precancels with a dated cancel are considered less valuable than an issue without a date applied. Shown in Figure 18 are some various dated cancels.

The dated cancels on the upper row were done by Montgomery Wards and Alden’s. On the lower row there is a

printed cancel from Spiegel and also two handstamped cancels from Sears Roebuck and Lane Bryant. All of these merchants are large mail order companies who used precancels for mailing sales brochures and catalogs. The collecting of the dated and handstamped cancels is a specialty for many precancel collectors. There are separate catalogs for each of these areas.

Other collecting areas that are popular for the Bureau Presidential issues are coil pairs and blocks of four. Details about the different formats for coil pairs have been covered in Chapter 7. A complete collection of the Presidential issues consists of 2,206 sheet stamps and 629 coil stamps. Most of the “Prexie” issues are very reasonable in price, with most under \$1.00 each.

The key rarities among the “Prexie” issues are:

- 1¢ Ventura, California
- 1½¢ Macon, Georgia Coil
- 30¢ Memphis, Tennessee
- 1½¢ Waco, Texas Coil

These stamps are missing from many collections.

One of the major errors that occurred in Bureau issues is the Ventura, California error (Figure 19). The error was produced when the composition slug in the 50 stamp sheet was transposed on the 23rd subject of the sheet. The “CA-



**Figure 19**  
*The Ventura, California error.*  
*The error stamp is the center stamp in the second row.*

LIF” was placed

above the “VENTURA,” thus creating the error. The errors were created on the top and bottom half of the sheet.



**Figure 20**  
*The “missing period” of Wichita, Kansas.*  
*The error stamp is the lower right one.*

The Bureau issues offer the opportunity to study many additional types of errors which occur as a result of the make-up of the precancel plates. These errors and varieties are well documented in the *Specialist’s Guide to Bureau Print Precancels*, Third Edition, by Horace Q. Trout. The latest edition was produced in 1980 and can be obtained from dealers in precancel literature.

Shown at left (Figure 20) is an example of Wichita, Kansas which is missing the “period” after Kansas on the lower right stamp in the block. Many errors such as this exist and can provide a challenge to the collector wanting to look for the “flyspeck” type of varieties. Many of this type of error can be found in precancel mixtures and collections. They have escaped the casual collector. If this type of variety is interesting to you, there are opportunities to find them.

## Chapter 8

### War & Defense Issues

In 1940, the United States was busy building up its military defenses. They issued three denominations (1¢, 2¢, and 3¢), which have been referred to as the Defense issues. The Defense issues were being used in the time period when the Bureau of Engraving and Printing was producing precancels with either the wide or narrow settings. The first wide defense issue was produced for San Diego, California (1¢) in November 1940. The first narrow setting defense issue was produced for Louisville, Kentucky (2¢) in March 1941.

These issues provide a very easy way in which to start your Bureau collection. They are readily available and are very cheap. The top row in Figure 21 shows examples of the Defense issue and the second row shows examples of the War issues. There are 363 different stamps for the Defense series and 48 different stamps for the War series. The complete collection of these issues can be formed for less than \$100.



*Figure 21*

There were a couple of shade varieties among the War issues. The one shown in Figure 22 is the normal violet shade. This is the normal shade for all of this War issue. The stamp in Figure 23 shows the purple shade variety. This shade occurs for only the Los Angeles and Fremont, Ohio issues. These shade varieties are listed in the *PSS Bureau Precancel Catalogue*.



*Figure 22*



*Figure 23*

## Chapter 9 Liberty Issues

In 1954, the United States Post Office started issuing a new set of definitive stamps to replace the Presidential Series. The first stamp to be issued was the 8¢ bi-color issue featuring the Statue of Liberty. As a result collectors started to referring to this new series as the Liberty Series. The series was issued from 1954-1960. There were seven denominations issued in 1954; six issues in 1956; two issues in 1958; three in 1959; and one in 1960.

The first issues of Bureau precancels in this series were issued in August 1954. These were printed on the Stickney press and were formatted with the narrow setting, type 70. The first precancels were 3¢ denominations for Chicago and Kansas City. Liberty coil issues were not produced until October 1954. The spacing on these coil issues was not changed and were produced in the wide setting, types 62, 62, and 63. Coils were produced for the 1¢, 2¢, 3¢, and 4¢ denominations.



*Figure 24*

Wide-setting Liberty Bureau Coils are shown in Figure 24.

During the time that this series was released, the Bureau was replacing the old Stickney presses with the newer Huck presses. The previous presses used the wet-printing system and the newer presses used a dry process. Hence, you can find some of the Liberty issues in both the wet and dry printing issues. The changes in the presses produced several variations among the Liberty Bureau issues. Examples of the Liberty Coil issues with the narrow setting are shown in Figure 25.



*Figure 25*

Other changes to the Liberty series were the conversion to rubber plates in place of the original steel plates. The left stamp in Figure 26 was produced by a rubber plate. With the change to the rubber plates, there was also a change in the frequency of the coil varieties from previous issues. Coil lines appeared every 24th stamp and the gap lines every 12th stamp.



*Figure 26*



Therefore, in the Liberty series there only exist as normal pairs and pairs showing a line-gap combination. There are no only line pairs.

Denominations from ½¢ to 50¢ were routinely precanceled. The first \$1 denomination was precanceled for Los Angeles in June 1956. There were a total of five cities that precanceled this denomination.

In January 1955, there were requests from two cities for the 8¢ to be precanceled. Due to the nature of these bi-color issues, a new method of applying the precancel had to be developed. These issues were precanceled after being printed. The precancel was applied to fully gummed and perforated issues. The type face used was identical to the 60 and 70 series. However, the spacing between the lines of the precancel is 2mm closer together than the 70 series issues. Due to this fact, the new precancels were assigned new series designations, 75 and 76. The 8¢ denominations were only supplied to eight cities.

When the precancels were produced for St. Louis, it was found that the gum was defective. These issues were withdrawn from sale and destroyed. However, there were a small number of copies that did reach the collector's hands (Figure 27). This issue although not scarce is much harder to find for this reason.



**Figure 27**

From the previous picture of the Liberty issues, you can see that some of the horizontal formatted issues have the precancel reading up on the face of the stamp. There were no errors in this issue as reported in the 1922-26 horizontal issues.



**Figure 28**

Shown on the left (Figure 28) is the Cincinnati "OIHO" error. This occurred when an inversion of the rubber plate occurred, creating the "OIHO" instead of "OHIO." This was produced on six subjects of the 100 subject plate. It was produced on the ½¢, 1¢, 1½¢, 2¢, 3¢ and 4¢ denominations.

The Liberty Series is responsible for gaining the interest of collectors and many started collecting precancels with this issue. This issue contains a total of 1,029 sheet stamps and 775 coil stamp issues. Also, just as the previous Prexie issues many are found with dated cancels.

## Chapter 10

### Playing Card Coil Stamps

Not only were precancels used on regular postal issues, they were also applied to revenue stamps used for playing cards. These issues are generally collected and studied by the revenue collector but have a definite place in the Bureau collection. Spaces for these issues have always been included in the albums for Bureau precancels. They were produced in coil format to make it easy to affix them to the packs of playing cards.

Shown here (Figure 29) are the four varieties of playing card stamps which were precanceled. The issues themselves are extensively covered in the *Scott Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps & Covers*. The precancels have assigned types that appear in the *Precancel Stamp Society Bureau Precancel Catalogue*.



*Figure 29*

Initials on playing cards are:

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| • A.D.        | A. Daugherty                           |
| • A.P.C. Co   | Arco Playing Card Company              |
| • A.W.G.      | Artists and Writers Guild              |
| • B&B         | Brown & Bigelow                        |
| • C.D.C. Co   | Consolidated Dougherty Card Company    |
| • C.P.C. Co.  | Criterion Playing Card Company         |
| • E.E.F. CORP | E.E.F. Fairchild Corporation           |
| • G.A. Co     | Gibson Art Company                     |
| • G.P.C. Co.  | Gibson Playing Card Company            |
| • H.M.C.      | Hallmark Cards, Inc.                   |
| • N.A.S.Co    | National American Silver Company       |
| • N.Y.C.C. Co | New York Consolidated Card Company     |
| • R.P.C. Co   | Russell Playing Card Company           |
| • S.P.C. Co   | Standard Playing Card Company          |
| • U.S.P.C. Co | United States Playing Card Company     |
| • W.P.L. Co   | Western Printing & Lithography Company |

These interesting issues can expand your collection and most are not high priced. Only five of the issues catalog over \$25.00 at the current market.

## Chapter 11

### Prominent American Issues

In 1965, the United States Post Office began replacing the Liberty Series with a new group of definitive issues, the Prominent American Series. These issues featured as the subjects selected individuals who have played an important role in the country. The first bureau precancels to appear in this series were the 4¢ Lincoln issue. Los Angeles was the first city to issue a precancel in March 1966. Precancels on this issue continued through 1977. A representative group of these issues is shown in Figure 30.

The Prominent American issues saw a much more limited usage than the previous Liberty issues. The volume of commercial mail was being reduced to a greater extent. Although most of them are not scarce, they are much harder to find. Many of the higher values were dated and are discounted in price. The Prominent American Bureau series contains 374 sheet stamps and 304 coil issues. Also included in this series is the 6.3¢ fractional coil which will be shown later.

In 1971, the 11¢ airmail stamp was precanceled in Washington, D.C. (Figure 31). This was done because of a request by members of Congress for a precanceled airmail for use on the mailing of the *Congressional Record*. They did have the privilege of “free franking” their mail but wanted the opportunity to use airmail services for some of their mailings. During 1971-74, there were three different airmail precancels produced and they are referred to as the Congressional issues. These were the only airmail issues that were ever Bureau precanceled. You will also find one issue with a “local” Washington, D.C. precancel.



*Figure 30*



*Figure 31*

## Chapter 12 Americana Precancels

In 1971, when the United States Postal Service was formed, they issued a new series of definitive issues called the “Americana” issues. These stamps were designed by the private firm in Philadelphia. These issues were Bureau precanceled for 18 cities in sheet stamps and 16 cities in coil issues. Also included in the Americana Issues were three additional fractional coil issues.

Shown in Figure 32 are the fractional coil issues which also include the 6.3¢ Bell issue which was mentioned in the Prominent American Series. These new issues gained a great deal of interest among collectors and have helped to encourage the collecting of Bureau issues. They are attractive and a complete collection of each of them is very reasonable in cost. The complete collection of these fractional issues consists of 541 stamps. They can also be collected in pairs, line pairs, and gap pairs.



*Figure 32*

In 1978, the USPS eliminated the use of City and State format and decided to use a “Lines Only” format for all precancels (Figures 33, 34). From this point forward the nature of the precancel changed and by some collectors declared the end of the precancel as most collectors have known it. This change has taken the aspect of the using city away from precancel usage.



*Figure 33*



*Figure 34*

## Chapter 13

### A New Era for Precancels

In 1981, the United States Postal Service issued a new coil issue, the Transportation Series. With the introduction of these coil issues, there was a new characteristic that was added to their production. This was the addition of a coil plate number for each printing of the coil issue. The practice actually started a completely new area of collecting, Plate Number Coil Collecting. In addition to regular coils, there were issues that had precancels applied to these coil issues (see Figure 35). However, the main reason for collecting the Transportation issues was the element of plate numbers and not precancels. The information of these issues is very detailed and is covered in philatelic catalogs and publications not traditionally related to precancels.



*Figure 35*

There are spaces in the K&P Bureau Album for these issues and listings in the PSS Bureau catalog for them. However, most precancel collectors settle for one copy of the issue without regard to the plate numbers. There are 39 coil issues in this series with precancels applied to them.

Late in the 20th Century, the United States Postal Service made drastic changes in the manner in which they do business. They began to have the production of some stamps produced by private firms and the usage of the self-adhesive stamp became prevalent. There were significant changes in the rates and classifications of bulk and business mail. The USPS initiated the practice of surface printing the rate classification directly on the stamp and eliminated the usage of printed lines on the stamp to indicate a precancel (See Figure 36).



*Figure 36*

All of these modern issues still hold the interest of the collector of modern issues because of the plate numbers but has reduced the interest of the traditional precancel collector.

The collecting of the Transportation and Surface Printed precancels has been followed more by a “modern” issue collector than the precancel enthusiast.

## Chapter 14

### Collecting Bureau Precancels

There are many ways that you can collect Bureau Precancels. You can collect them by state or by issue. Your method of collecting can be whatever method is acceptable by you. You have many choices with regard to albums. The best and most complete album is the K&P Bureau Album which can be obtained from the Precancel Stamp Society. This album provides a space with the stamp image for every Bureau precancel that is listed. Many of the older albums are still available as you purchase collections which were produced Noble and Whiteborough. These albums can provide a solid base to build you collection. There are albums available on the internet via [www.stampalbums.com](http://www.stampalbums.com) for precancels. These albums are organized by stamp denomination and are not favorable to many collectors. You may elect to build your own albums using word processor or publisher formats.

As a word of advice, the easiest way to build your collection is to obtain a normal album such as the K&P Bureau Album. This album provides spaces for all of the Bureau issues and requires the least amount of labor to build an attractive collection.

When you begin to the collect Bureaus, you will need to find sources for your collection. Most regular stamp dealers do not handle much in these issues and you would be best to find a source of specialized Bureau dealers to help you build your collection. You can find material which includes mixtures and collections offered on eBay on the internet but a solid precancel dealer will be able to provide the issues you are looking for without lot of duplication. Sorting mixtures can be a lot of fun and help you to learn the basics but will not help you to build a solid collection.

You will also need a catalog to help you build the collection. You should buy the *PSS Bureau Catalog*, Fifth Edition which is available from the Precancel Stamp Society. This catalog is now available in both the normal print version and the computer version. If you are oriented to using a computer, this version will offer you a great deal of benefit over the print version of the catalog. It allows you to inventory your collection and print pages for your album if you do not have the K&P album.

## Chapter 15

### The Precancel Stamp Society

**S**tamp collectors interested in precancels have formed organizations or societies for their specialty since 1910. Because precancels are a specialized form of philately, it has been beneficial to have a society where collectors can exchange information about precancels and obtain material for their collections by buying or trading. The Precancel Stamp Society was formed in 1923 and now has a membership of over 750 members in the United States and many foreign countries. The PSS has held annual conventions every year since 1922. These conventions are a great event to meet other collectors, obtain material for your collection, and just enjoy the fellowship of other collectors.

In addition, the PSS is active in producing a monthly publication, *The Precancel Forum*. This monthly publication is available both in a print version and now in an electronic version. It contains excellent articles on various aspects of collecting precancels and advertisements for precancel dealers. The PSS also produced a yearbook every two years which lists all of the members and their collecting interests. This is very helpful in contacting other members for trading and gaining additional information.

There are several other state organizations which can be joined for nominal annual dues. They also hold several meetings where you can go and meet other collectors, trade, or buy material for your collection. You will find these affairs very informal and a lot of fun to attend.

So, if you develop an interest in Bureau precancels or precancels in general, be sure to consider joining the PSS. It will be well worth your time to join.



## Conclusion

Hopefully, you have learned more about Bureau Precancels by reading this booklet. Of course, there is a lot more information about Bureau Precancels that could have been written but this information was not within the booklets scope. If you start to collect Bureau Precancels after reading this booklet, the writing of the booklet would be worthwhile and well worth my time to prepare it. After collecting precancels, you will also find that there are many other areas i.e. Town & Types, Dated Precancels, and Classic precancels that can gain your interest and add to your collecting pleasure.

Also, be sure that you investigate and hopefully join the Precancel Stamp Society. Because, the ability to meet and talk with other precancel collectors is one of the great benefits.

So long for now! Good Bureau Precancel Collecting!