Bureau of Engraving & Printing Repairs on U.S. Stamp Production 1914 – The Presidential Era

Objective: The object of this one frame exhibit it to illustrate with rare/scarce material all the ways in which the Treasury Department's Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) repaired incomplete/flawed product in the period presented, so that sheets could be completed (if flat plate-printed), or if rotary press web-printed, could continue without lengthy interruption.

Context: Incomplete/flawed product is a part of every printing operation no matter how sophisticated. The printer's goal is to keep it from leaving the printing plant.

Repairs were made to defective product in process to enable completion of production. Repairs were important on sheet-fed product because stamp paper was expensive, and damage to a single pane or even two panes of a 400-subject (4 pane) sheet triggered an effort to repair the sheet so that the remainder could be salvaged. Even if the sheet could not be salvaged, every sheet had to be accounted for at the end of production..

Repairs became even more important as the BEP switched to rotary press printing on paper in the form of a roll, or "web"; using a succession of paper-mill rolls spliced together at the BEP as the press ran. Repairs were also done when a roll tore during printing or split during perforating. Repairs prevented the time-consuming process of having to rethread the web through the press.

It was expected that repairs would be identified at quality control at the end of production, excised and destroyed. For the most part they were, but we are lucky to have a small amount of material that made it to post office counters that give us the opportunity to understand how this important aspect of the Bureau's operations functioned in the early days up to roughly mid-century.

Scope: Why 1914 as the starting point? The BEP began to produce U.S. stamps in 1894. Sheet-fed presses produced sheets of 400 definitive stamps, in four post office panes of 100 stamps each. Production staff handled every single sheet multiple times; so readily identified problem material for destruction.

The first repaired material to escape the BEP is found on the 1914 flat plate coils. By then, quantities of stamps required by the American public were rising every year, and increasing automation and speed of production made detection of repairs more difficult. It is possible that earlier material exists; but this exhibitor has been searching for over 50 years, and none has come to light.

Rarity/Scarcity/Research: Excepting standard Prexie-era web splices and coil splices from the making of coil rolls, the BEP did an exceptional job of identifying and destroying repaired sheets. **This exhibitor's census lists only 96 non-Prexie splice repairs; a stunning figure, since the BEP produced hundreds of millions of stamps per year, and billions starting in the 1930s.** The exhibitor has been seeking and studying repairs for over 50 years, and owns 52 the 96 known pieces for this time period. 36 are shown in this exhibit; many unique and others one of only a fewexamples known..

A reasonable question the reader might ask at various points is: "How does the exhibitor know the production information?" All statements are authoritative. Some of the information in the exhibit comes from the writings of contemporary students. Add to this that the exhibitor was able to observe presses in operation at the Bureau in the '70s and '80s; talking in-person to the pressmen and getting their comments on items they were shown..

Organization of the Exhibit: The exhibit begins with the 1914 and 1915 coil repairs and continues roughly chronologically through the Prexie era, which extended into the 1950s. The sections are divided by definitive series (The 3rd Bureau Issue, 4th BI, Presidentials) with the few commemorative issues that exist included in their proper time period. This allows showing how different methods evolved and were used or discarded over time. Some methods have had long periods of use while others have been very short.

Completion: Every method known to have been used in the time period is included in this frame. .

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(Synopsis 8/25)

Treatment: The exhibit tells the story in chronological order of the means by which the BEP **repaired** faulty material in sheet form from the process of producing U.S. stamps in the stated period. It begins in 1914 when the first such material is known, and proceeds through the Presidential era. It fits neatly into a single frame, and every major method of repair is included. NOTE: For those judges who saw my LG five frame exhibit of this material (then from 1917 to 2003) five years ago, please note that additional material and new research is included in this exhibit.

Importance: The processes aimed at allowing completion of production were of primary importance to the Bureau. They saved time and resources, promoted proper accountability, and were highly reliable, Relatively few examples were missed at quality control, sold to the public and saved for philately. They are gathered here and give us a window on how the Bureau dealt with the problems of damaged material and keeping production humming along. While seldom seen, it represents an important aspect of production, and is worthy of study to understand where it occurred in production, and why.

Some of the repair types shown in this exhibit can be duplicated on additional items, but the breadth of the exhibit cannot be duplicated both because some of the material is unique, but also because it has taken over 50 years to assemble.

Philatelic Knowledge and Research: This exhibit documents processes that are little known because so little evidence of them has escaped into philatelic hands. This testifies to the extraordinary success of the Bureau in destroying the significant amounts of waste – as high as 20% of production in the early years – thus keeping it from reaching the public. To do this exhibit required, in addition to an in-depth knowledge of stamps, an in-depth knowledge of production methods and the machinery used. Some of this is available in the works of George Brett, printed in the *United States Specialist* of the US Stamp Society in the 1940s to 1970s.

Much additional information was gained from study of the material itself, and from visits to the BEP in the 1970s and 1980s, where the exhibitor had the opportunity to see the presses in action, and to show the pressmen repaired material and get their comments. Their thoughts on methods used have been invaluable, and enabled the exhibitor to write the five-part series noted below under References. While there had been articles in the philatelic press about individual finds, never before had a detailed overview of this field been published, and this exhibit takes the story further with additional material.

Rarity/Condition: As noted elsewhere, the exhibitor owns 52 of the 96 examples known beyond the relatively common Prexie-era web and coil splices. That material must be shown as it is part of the story. But the examples shown here are not routine versions. For example, basic Prexie web splices of the high-volume values are common. Precancels, commemoratives and postage dues are not common. By its nature, some of the material is a bit beaten up. It is what exists.

Presentation: Many of the pieces shown must be shown both back and front. This and the size of many pieces presented a challenge. Double pages have intentionally not been used as the exhibitor intends to send the exhibit to several shows, and double pages make that difficult.

References: "Philatelic Royalty of the 20th Century: Rejections and Repairs in the Bureau of Engraving and Printing – Parts I-IV", *Kelleher's Collectors Connection*, May-June, 2016 (pp 30-35), July-August, 2016 (pp 42-49), September-October, 2016 (pp 42-49), November-December, 2016 (pp 42-47); and Part V in *Kelleher's Stamp Collector's Quarterly*, First Quarter, 2017 (pp 48- 54).