

Detecting Reperforated Stamps

The perforating of U.S. postage stamps

Fake Perforating or Reperforating a stamp is widely accepted as an unethical manipulation of the stamp. It is done sometimes to improve appearance and other times to change the stamp to appear as a different stamp of much higher value. In almost all cases, adding fake perforations is seen as chicanery, fakery, and fraud. This exhibit will show how and why United States issued postage stamps have fake reperforations added and how this change in the appearance can be detected.

History: The United States issued its first stamps in 1847 and for the first ten years they were issued in sheets in which scissors were used to separate a stamp out of the sheet of stamps. Over-all, this was very inconvenient and time consuming for postal clerks, large businesses, and postal customers. A solution to this was implemented in 1857. A line of PERFORATIONS between the stamps was added to make the separation of stamps from sheets easier and more efficient. This process removed small circular pieces of paper in the rows and columns between stamps. This weakened the paper but did not cause the sheet of stamps to fall apart. When a person was ready to remove a stamp, this could now be easily done with just the fingers.

The rotary perforating principle was patented by William and Henry Bemrose of Derby, England in 1854. Toppan & Carpenter of Philadelphia, the company that printed all the stamps for the U.S. Post Office during the 1850s, purchased a machine from Bemrose & Co. in 1855. This was the common method of perforating U.S. Postage stamps up until the U.S. Post Office started using die-cutting in 1997.



Close-up of the National Postal Museum's perforating machine, showing matching sets of pins and holes



1857 (Left) First perforated issue of the United States
1997 (Right) First Die Cut perforated issue of the United States

Detecting Reperforated Stamps

Fake perforating or Reperforating a stamp is widely accepted as unethical manipulation of a stamp. It is done sometimes to improve the appearance of a stamp and other times to change the stamp to make it appear as a different stamp of greater value. In almost all cases, adding fake perforations is seen as chicanery, fakery and fraud. This single frame exhibit will show how and why United States postage stamps have fake perforations added and how this change in appearance can be detected.

Judges Critique:

In 1847 the United States issued its first general issue stamp. It was not perforated and the stamps had to be separated with cutting or scissors. In 1854 experimentation was done to add perforations to assist postal clerks and postage users to separate the stamps. The first perforated general issue postage stamp was issued in 1857.

With the advent of perforating and differences in these perforations, different "stamp issues" were developed and the range of values of these may be dramatic.

Purpose of the exhibit: This exhibit and its contents have been published in several magazines including (the latest) Kelleher Connections and the Philatelic Book of Secrets Volumes 1-3 as well as the Stamp Show Here Today podcast as well as several lectures at past stamp shows. This exhibit shows the items, not in a print format but in an actual format viewable "up close and personal".

Introduction: The exhibit shows how perforating was done and how reperforating is done. In the past, showing how reperforating is done has been a taboo subject. If people know how it is done then anyone can do it. This is widely seen as foolish as the knowledge of how reperforating is done is INSTRUMENTAL in detecting the fakery. Hiding this information serves very well to protect the fakers as they can maintain a monopoly on their knowledge, a protection that most philatelists should find as unacceptable.

Importance: The money involved in this chicanery is very significant. If just a handful of viewers who see this exhibit stop buying reperforated stamps, that will benefit them and the hobby at large.

Personal/Study/Research/knowledge: Being and Expert at Professional Stamp Experts, this is the culmination of over two decades of information collected from the actual review of thousands of stamp. Sharing this information with actual stamps to view is the goal of this exhibit.

Rarity: I do not Forsee that many points are on offer for rarity as the items shown are not legitimate. I ask the Judge's discretion on this.

General Presentation: The exhibit is organized as History, Technology and then the various detection "flags". It is meant to have a flow which will result in the average viewer having a fair handle on what to look for.

Notable Items: As stated above, the items are not notable but instead are "notorious". Again, I ask the judge's discretion.