Color Error or a Freak? An Update
Charles Neyhart

In the November 2009 issue of Book Reports, I told the story about how my colleague, Steve Chown, acquired two identical plate number coil strips of five of the 29-cent Flag Over White House, Scott 2609, in which the intended blue color on these stamps looked very dark and very wrong! He traded me one of those strips in exchange for some other stamps with the understanding that I would investigate the color difference. Was this an error resulting from using the wrong color ink or a freak involving an irregularity? Despite presenting what I believed was a strong case for treating this as a catalog-worthy color variety, a subsequent 2008 APEX certificate on my strip stated that the irregular color was probably due to ink contamination in an ink fountain; thus, it was simply a freak.

As I wrote back in 2009, “Errors arguably have more philatelic prestige than freaks; yet there is often a fine line between them.” So, after some initial disappointment, Steve and I put the matter behind us and moved onto other things. But, we didn’t forget and, as it turned out, we weren’t done with this quite yet.

SCOTT 2609

Scott 2609 was part of the American Flag Series started in 1968 and printed by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. The basic design in each showed the American flag in the upper portion of the stamp and a noteworthy building or geographic feature in the lower portion. Scott 2609, issued in 1992, was printed in two colors: blue [Pantone 295] and red [Pantone 185]. The red appears only in the stripes of the flag. The stamp was intaglio printed on the C and D presses using interchangeable seamless printing “sleeves” rather than two paired curved plates that had been used earlier on the Stickney and Cottrell presses. Scott 2609 was issued only in coil format, being finished into rolls of 100, 500, and 3,000 stamps. The initial printing order was 7,035,928,000 stamps; 17 printing sleeves were used to print the stamps.
A normal coil strip is on top; my subject color strip is below, both from printing sleeve 8.

The presses used to print Scott 2609 used an ‘inking-in’ roller system, whereby each color in a stamp design had a dedicated inking roller that was cut-out to deliver only that color ink to the part of the stamp design calling for that color. Each inking roller had a companion ink fountain, usually a trough mounted above the roller that mechanically fed ink to the roller [the respective ink fountains were in a vertical alignment]. This explains why multiple colors could be printed during a single revolution of the printing sleeve.

COLOR PROBLEMS WITH THE FLAG SERIES

The American Flag series produced four color errors from using the wrong color ink, with each receiving catalog recognition as a minor variety: Flag Over Supreme Court, Flag Over Capitol Dome, Flag Over Yosemite, and Flag Over Mt. Rushmore.

Our particular subject strips of Scott 2609 were not the first to show this irregular darker color, which collectors had earlier dubbed “indigo blue,” described as being blacker than blue. That color had generated interest among coil collectors in *The Plate Number* and in *Coil Line* in the mid-1990s. Indigo blue had been reported at that time from printing sleeves 6 and 7 and, inasmuch as sleeve 8 shared some 1993 press time with sleeves 6 and 7, we thought it possible that that our subjects could also exhibit the same color. We eventually did determine that our color compared favorably to other known examples. Even so, at that time, indigo blue was not catalog-listed.

In my November 2009 article, I offered five “plausible” reasons to explain how the irregular color of our subject coil strips could have resulted. Two of these I subsequently judged as unlikely, one I deemed impractical, and a fourth, despite having strong intuitive appeal, really couldn’t be reliably tested. That left the fifth reason – ink contamination. As I explained it then,

… a gravity transfer from too much ink in the fountain, an improperly timed ink release mechanism, or a leaky fountain could have caused the red ink to mix with the blue ink in the fountain immediately below.
This, ultimately, was the APEX position on my subject strip. All of that notwithstanding, there were still things about this that just didn’t seem to add up.

A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

The 2012 Scott catalog includes a new minor color variety, 2609c, indigo blue. Both Steve and I were quite surprised to note its existence, and equally perplexed because we didn’t know what brought about this change after all these years.

I resubmitted my subject strip of five for certification as the color variety. The APEX opinion, dated May 18, 2012, states, in part, that the strip was Scott 2609c, indigo blue and red.

Of course I was pleased to add this newly-minted “color variety” to my collection as more than something that was just “interesting;” yet, the question still remains: What caused the irregular indigo blue color?

The Bureau of Engraving and Printing stopped producing U.S. postage stamps in 1995 and its Office of Research and Technical Service, to my knowledge, never did take a position on the indigo blue claims. Early discussions in the philatelic literature tried to answer this question, but interest faded in the late 1990s with no consensus. Collector interest flared again in 2008 with most observers questioning the validity of the then prevalent theory that red ink contaminated the blue ink in its fountain. While that discussion was lively and mostly informative, no single explanatory answer emerged from it. Nonetheless, this is a question that ought to be explored more fully and transparently.

American Philatelic Society

Expert Committee Report

Members of the American Philatelic Expertizing Service have examined the item submitted and it is their opinion that it is:

United States, Scott No. 2609c, indigo blue and red, FNC strip of 5, Plate 8, unused, full original gum, never hinged, genuine in all respects.

American Philatelic Expertizing Service

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New on our Shelves

Recently the NPL acquired a large selection of catalogs to enhance our resources available to members and other collectors. These included a number of Michel catalogs as a result of a successful bid in Harmer Schau’s auction at PIPEX.

2013 Scott Catalogue Vol. 1, 2, & 3

2012 Brookman Catalogue

2005 World Factbook (see review on page 4)

Follansbee, Nicholas, The Stamps of the Mexican Revolution 1913-1916, Chicago, the Collectors Club of Chicago, 1996

Michel Europa-Katalog 2006/2007, Volumes 1, 2, 4, 5, and 7. [If anybody can donate Volumes 3 and 6, they would be appreciated.]

Michel Ubersee-Katalog, Mittel und Nordamerica 1991

Michel Ubersee-Katalog, Mittel und Ostasien 2006


Michel Ubersee-Katalog, Süd und Zentralafrika 2007

Michel Ubersee-Katalog, Westafrika 2007

Michel Ubersee-Katalog, Südamerika 2005

Michel Ubersee-Katalog, Asien (A-J) 1994

Michel Ubersee-Katalog, Asien (K-Z) 1994

Michel Ubersee-Katalog, Süd und Südostasien 2003

Michel Ubersee-Katalog, Nord und Ostafrika 1997

Gulf States Catalogue 2006

Handbuch Katalog Deutsche Feldpost 1937-1945

Deutschland-Spezial 2007, Volumes 1 & 2

I believe this is the only book in our collection authored by the CIA. The book contains no philatelic information regarding the countries, just information to provide the reader a detailed background.

Factbook begins with twenty eight pages of “Notes and Definitions,” explaining the terms used throughout. The book contains facts about every country in the world plus other territories and jurisdictions; there is an entry for Israel, with separate entries for Gaza Strip and West Bank.

Each of these 272 entries includes a map, as well as information regarding geography, people, government, economy, communications, transportation, military, and transnational issues. How many of you know where Akrotiri is? I had never heard of it before. It is located in south Cyprus. When the UK gave Cyprus its independence it retained full sovereignty of this 123 square kilometer portion of land on the southern coast of Cyprus as the “Sovereign Base Area” also referred to as the “Western Sovereign Base Area.”

The book also includes a “Political Map of the World, April 2005” and a “Physical Map of the World, April 2005.”

Need some quick information about a country? Stop by the Library bookshelf next to the catalogs and spend a few minutes looking through The World Factbook 2005.
Lembke Literature Donation

Collectors of British North America should be thrilled to learn that, in addition to the new acquisitions above, the NPL received a significant literature donation from the Robert Lembke collection, primarily covering Canadian topics. Included are several rare titles and a great many useful references.


Bradley, Whitney, The Canadian Map Stamp of 1898 – A Plating Study, British North America Philatelic Society and Saskatoon Stamp Centre Ltd., Saskatoon, 1999


Campbell, Frank W., Canada Post Offices – 1755/1895, Quarterman Publications, Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1972

Charles G. Firby Auction, Canadian Postal History of the Victorian Era: The S. J. Menich Collection, 2000

Christie’s Auction, British North America Stamps and Covers, 1993

Christie’s Robson Lowe Auction, The American Bank Note Archives, United States Possessions, 1990

Christie’s Robson Lowe Auction, the American Bank Note Archives, British North America, 1990


Hillson, John, *Canada Small Queens Re-Appraised*, the Canadian Philatelic Society of Great Britain, 1999


Milos, Michael, *Canadian Stamp Handbooks*, Unitrade Press, 1982


Negus, James, Philatelic Literature: Compilation Techniques and Reference Sources, James Bendon, Limassol, Cyprus 1991

Numerical Cancellations of British North America, Jim Hennock Collections, Easter Auctions, October 28, 2005


Postage Stamps of the United States 1847-1957, United States Post Office Department, Washington, D.C., 1957


Reiche, Hans, Admiral Colour Identification, Fretz Brothers, Zurich

Reiche, Hans, Canada: Steel Engraved Constant Plate Varieties, Unitrade Press, Toronto, 1982

Reiche, Hans, Constant Plate Varieties of the Canada Small Queens, Unitrade Press, Toronto, 1981


Ribler, Ronald E., Canada’s Three Cents Small Queen, 1870-1897, Reflections of a Generation, Philatelics Unlimited, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, 2000


Shaw, T. P. G., Catalogue of Canadian Railroad Cancellation, Canada, 1944


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LIBRARY NOTES
Orlie Trier, NPL President

Northwest Philatelic Library at PIPEX
PIPEX was held May 11-13 at the Lloyd Center Doubletree. The Northwest Philatelic Library had a table in the entry way and we had the opportunity to meet a number of stamp collectors – a few found treasures at our table. I also want to thank the Library board members for their time and assistance in making the show a success, with a special thanks to those who helped me with the frames.

American Philatelic Research Library visit
Tara Murray, the Director of APRL, was in Portland for PIPEX. I had the privilege of spending some time with her and inviting her wisdom regarding our library. We discussed our joining Union Catalog, which presently includes a number of philatelic libraries from around the world. We will keep you posted as we attempt to move in that direction.

Sharing your philatelic experiences
We are always looking for articles (from a short paragraph to multiple pages) to include in Book Reports. If you have ever researched a stamp, a cover, or a philatelic topic, here is a great opportunity to share this with our readers. Maybe there’s a great book from our shelves that you’d like to review for the benefit of other collectors. Often times when I read an article it provides me with a new thought or idea and leads me to research a new area.

IN APPRECIATION
To those generous individuals listed below who have made recent donations of literature and other consideration to NPL, we thank you for your generosity and want to assure you that we will make good use of these resources for our fellow philatelists and collectors.

Jerry Lobb        Jack Tremblay
Michael Dixon   Anthony Rocha
Kari Lackstrom  Helen Williams
Toni Wawrukiewicz

THANK YOU all for your support!