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The Prexie Era

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Robert Schlesinger Sale of Prexie Postal History

by Albert “Chip” Briggs

Substantial collections of Presidential Series postal history have made infrequent appearances in the philatelic marketplace. Prior to this year, the last significant collection to be dispersed was Dickson Preston’s wonderful exhibit collection which was handled by dealer David Grossblat of Phoenix, Arizona in 2015. One would have to go back to 2010 when Larry Paige’s accumulation was sold (also by Grossblat) and well before then, to the early to mid-2000’s when Randy Neil’s (auction), Leonard Piskiewicz’s (net price and ebay), and Steve Suffet’s (auction) collections were dispersed to find other large exhibit level collection sales.

Current collectors have been fortunate to have two collections sold at public auction in the past year; the Richard Levy collection by the Kelleher firm, and the Robert Schlesinger collection in 84 lots by Rumsey Auctions of San Francisco this past June (Sale 92).

Like most postal historians, Bob began by collecting stamps. He first developed an interest in postal history in the early 1980’s. The intellectual challenge of “having to know what you are looking at” ignited his passion and prompted his first foray into exhibiting, at the Rockford, Illinois show in 1980. His first exhibit was on United States parcel post,

which, by his own admission, was “not very good.” He continued to hone his exhibiting skills, looking forward to participating in Ameripex 86, the large international show held in Chicago.

In the mid-1990’s Bob gravitated to collecting the Presidential Series with an emphasis on rates. His early collecting benefitted from Richard Drews’ purchase of the Roland Rustad collection sold by the Siegel firm. The single lot was resold as individual items, and the collection widely dispersed. Bob became a more serious buyer around the time of Pacific 97, the large international show he attended in San Francisco. While most people trade or sell items during their collecting career, a number of interesting and scarce pieces have resided in his collection for almost the entire duration of his interest in the Prexies. Some of the items that Bob has kept since his early days of collecting include 11-cent, 17-cent, 19-cent, and 22-cent solo uses he obtained out of the Rustad collection as well as the 10-cent insured Grace Coolidge free frank, which he purchased in a Kelleher auction in 2001.

Mentorship played an important role in Schlesinger’s success. Bob (as most all Prexie collectors) benefitted from the knowledge and advice of other authors, collectors, and

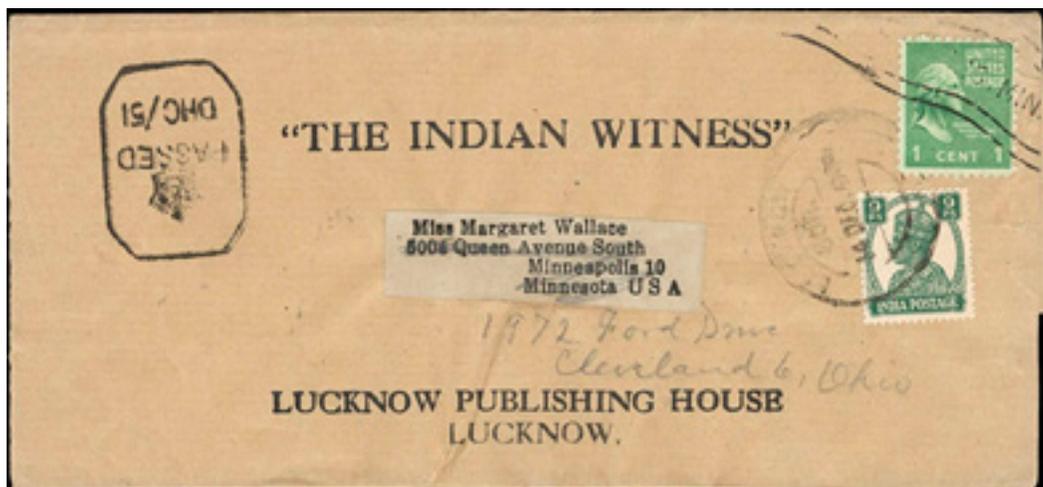


Figure 1: Second class transient rate to remail a newspaper wrapper initially mailed in India. Lot 1370, realized \$525.

exhibitors such as Steve Suffet, Dickson Preston, and Louis Fiset. With perseverance and an eye for important and high quality material, Bob created a 10 frame rate study exhibit that has garnered numerous gold medals and special awards. He has also shared his knowledge and experience by writing numerous articles appearing in *The Prexie Era*, *United States Specialist*, and *The American Philatelist*.

Exhibit fatigue set in after more than two decades of collecting, writing, and exhibiting. Remounting a gold medal display demands a lot of time, so with a planned a move from Chicago to Denver area to be near family, the time seemed right to sell.

A number of options exist for selling a substantial exhibit collection, and Bob considered all of them. He felt that selling individual items on eBay would be too time consuming. He considered selling to a nationally known dealer but ultimately settled on public auction. After consulting with friends in the Chicago collecting community he selected Rumsey Auctions. Even after the decision was made it was difficult to part with what had provided so many rewards over the years. On the way to FedEx to ship his collection to San Francisco he asked himself "should I really do this?"

Scheduled to be held at WESTPEX 2020 in April, the sale was postponed until the second week of June due to the coronavirus pandemic. The delay did not dampen enthusiasm nor, in the end, realizations.

Presented in 84 lots, with an estimate ranging between \$42,725.00 and \$57,250.00, the sale realized 74,565.00. Only four lots remained unsold -- a sale rate of over 95 percent.

The sale started with a bang. Lot 1370 (Figure 1), a one-cent Prexie tied by a Minneapolis, Minnesota roller cancel used to pay the second class transient rate of one cent per two ounces to remail a wrapper on a newspaper initially mailed in Lucknow, India to Cleveland, Ohio, realized \$525.00. It had been estimated at \$100.00 to \$150.00. Second class transient rate uses are uncommon, and this one is exceptionally rare.

Covers mailed to or from undercover addresses related to the Manhattan Project did exceptionally well. Lot 1375, franked with a three cent Presidential and mailed to P.O. Box 1663, Sante Fe, New Mexico realized \$700.00 against an estimate of \$200.00 to \$300.00. Another undercover address use was knocked down two lots later for \$2,100.00. This one,

franked with five 3-cent Prexies plus a 1 cent Prexie, paid the 16-cent air mail special delivery rate on an outbound cover from P.O. Box 1539, Sante Fe, New Mexico in August 1943. While none of the Manhattan Project undercover addresses can be considered common or easy to find, an outbound use from P.O. Box 1539 is rare. While incoming mail typically has evidence of censorship, mail originating from employees, scientists or family members of people working on the Manhattan Project was submitted unsealed to censors and bore no

cancel markings. Lot 1377 is a prime example of a cover with a rather mundane appearance representing a true postal history gem.

An early opportunity for collectors of solo uses came with a number of 11 cent covers, beginning with Lot 1391. This lot, shown in Figure 2, as well as the next four, were all single stamp uses of the James Polk definitive. The first offering, an August 22, 1939 use to Poland, paid the scarce air mail surcharge in the United States of three cents, five cents surface



Figure 2: An 11-cent James Polk solo use paying combination air-surface-air rate to Poland in 1939. Lot 1391, realized \$1,200.



Figure 3: An 11-cent single stamp use illustrated on the cover of Roland Rustad's *The Prexies*. Lot 1393, realized \$1,050.

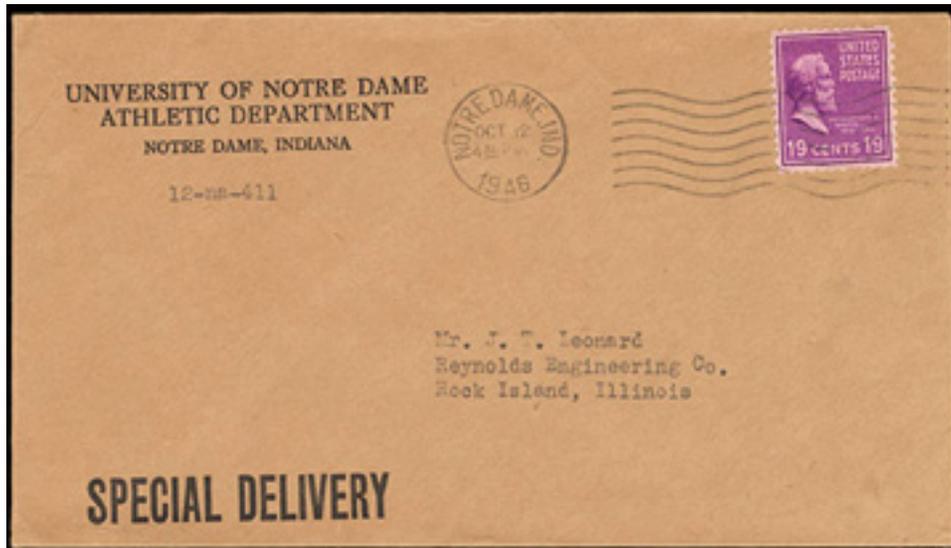


Figure 4: A 19-cent solo use, ex-Roland Rustad. Lot 1407, realized \$1,900.

carriage across the Atlantic and three cents surcharge for air mail service in Europe. It had the added attraction of a receiving stamp on the reverse applied the day Germany invaded Poland. Estimated at \$1000.00 to \$1500.00, it was hammered down for \$1,200.

Lot 1392 featured an 11 cent solo triple UPU surface rate to England in 1943. This cover realized \$525.00 following an estimate of \$750.00 to \$1000.00.

While not noted in the catalog, close observers will recognize Lot 1393 (Figure 3) as one of the items illustrated in color on the front cover of Roland Rustad's *The Prexies*. From Denver stamp dealer A. E. Pade to a collector in Czechoslovakia, the cover pays the air-surface-air rate very early in the Prexie era. The cover has very clear hand stamp endorsements of AIR MAIL TO NEW YORK and VIA AIR MAIL IN EUROPE (partial manuscript) and PER S/S *Europa* making it a very attractive and eye-appealing cover. It realized \$1,050.00 against an estimate of \$750.00 to \$1,000.00.

Lots 1394 and 1395 provided scarce uses of the Polk definitive, as well. The first was on an uprated four-cent air mail post card to Berlin in

1949 realizing \$270.00. The second was a solo use on an air mail post card to Sweden in 1962. It realized \$190.00.

Most specialists recognize as solo uses single stamps uprating postal cards and postal stationery. A key attraction of Lot 1395 was the fact that, despite late use, it paid the exact rate for air mail post card service to Europe; the 11-cent Polk stamp had yet to be replaced by the same denomination of the Liberty Series.

Solo uses of the 19-cent value also did well in the auction. As long time collectors will attest, none are easy to find. Lot 1407 showed another ex-Rustad cover (not described as such), illustrated on page 261 of *The Prexies*. See Figure 4. This is a beautiful 1946 use from the University of Notre Dame Athletic Department paying double the three-cent first class postage rate plus 13 cents special delivery fee to Rock Island, Illinois. This cover realized \$1,900.00, estimated earlier at \$1,500.00 to \$2,000.00.

Another super scarce 19-cent use was Lot 1408, a 1953 insured cover from stamp dealer H. E. Harris. The stamp paid 4 cents for third class postage and a 15-cent insurance fee. That this cover was commercial stamp dealer mail did

not prevent (nor should it have) from realizing \$750.00, five times its low estimate.

Other outstanding solo use realizations resulted. A single one-dollar stamp on a Postal Form 3547 used to notify a change of address

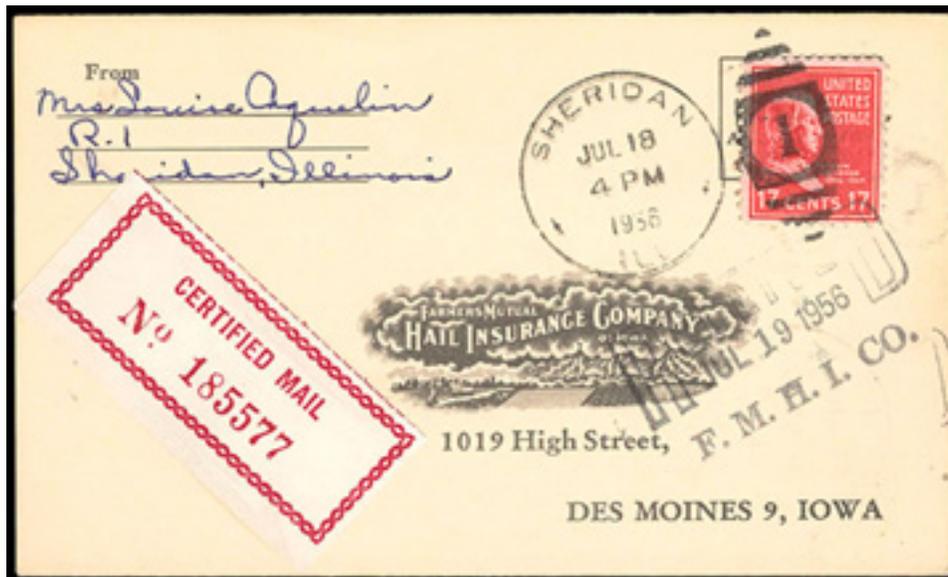


Figure 5: A 17-cent certified post card use. Lot 1406, realized \$2,200.00.



Figure 6: A 1941 registered reply card to German occupied Poland, held by the British until after the war. Lot 1422, realized \$1,450.00.

fetched a whopping \$2,200.00 (Lot 1436). A 2-dollar solo air mail registered use to French Cameroons, West Africa went for \$1,600.00 (Lot 1438), while a domestic, 2-dollar solo registered cover addressed to Robert A. Siegel sold for \$1,450.00 (Lot 1440).

Two other stellar solo performers are notable. Brisk bidding on a post card with a 17-cent definitive paying certified mail fee of 15 cents in addition to the current domestic post card rate (Figure 5) was not done until it hit \$2,200.00.

Similarly, bidding on a 10-cent solo coil use did not stop until reaching \$2,800.00 (Lot 1451). The coil use is listed in Scott Specialized at a current value of \$1,200.00.

Covers with strong historical connections also did very well. In addition to the aforementioned Manhattan Project covers, Lot 1422, a registered reply card to German occupied Poland, intercepted by the British and held for the duration of the war, found a buyer at \$1,450.00 (Figure 6). A two ocean registered cover mailed from Hawaii less than a week after Pearl Harbor was bombed found a new home at \$1,250.00.

Finally, a cover carried on the last pre-war westbound flight of the *Anzac Clipper* franked with \$2.80 was hammered down for \$7,500.00, the highest single item realization of the sale (Lot 1437).

Only four lots went unsold. Lots 1404 and 1413, both illustrated in *The Prexies*, did not find buyers. In my opinion, Lot 1404 failed to sell due to an overly optimistic estimate. Lot 1413, while a rare use, has a lot of markings on the front, some of them reducing eye appeal.

This sale represents the most significant sale of Prexie postal history in several years as reflected in strong realizations and high percentage of lots sold. Scott Catalog editors will no doubt be busy re-evaluating values for on-cover uses for the next edition.

While Bob felt some of the covers in the balance lot could have been individually lotted, perhaps boosting overall realization, he was very pleased with the results. Reflecting on the second thoughts he was having on the way to FedEx to ship the collection to San Francisco, he said “but now I’m glad I did.”

Complete Run of *The Prexie Era* Available Again

Subscribers wishing to have a complete run of *The Prexie Era* can obtain it from your editor via the file transfer protocol, WeTransfer. Send Jeff Shapiro \$10, then send me your current email address. The folder you receive will be fairly large and may take a couple of minutes to download. Just open the email from WeTransfer and follow the instructions.

You can pay via Paypal (**dirtyoldcovers@aol.com**). If you use this payment method, add a 50-cent surcharge.

Honolulu to Corregidor 1942, Delivered Australia

by Joe Bock



“Rec’d Melb (Melbourne) Aust 8/24 from
OPNAV (Naval Operations) Washington”

The cover illustrated here was postmarked January 13, 1942 and sent from Honolulu to Corregidor, Philippine Islands correctly franked with 30 cents postage for airmail to Manila. It bears the typical “RELEASED/BY ICB” Honolulu censor marking on the reverse. Airmail service was suspended since Pearl Harbor. Thus delayed in transmission, the addressee was no longer at Corregidor (blue pencil strike). Ordinarily, such mail would be returned. However, a pencil docketing on the reverse states “Rec’d Melb (Melbourne) Aust 8/24 from OPNAV (Naval Operations) Washington”. Thus, we know the correspondence was delivered, although it was eight months in transit.

Chief Yeoman Victor J Knutson was part of the 75 man Fleet Radio unit on Corregidor that escaped to Australia before Corregidor fell to the Japanese in May 1942. Prior to coming to Australia, these were the U.S. Navy code breakers that had moved from Cavite Naval Station to a tunnel on Corregidor after the Japanese began their attacks in the Philippines.

When the situation became desperate, again they were evacuated, this time by submarine. Knutson was part of the second group evacuated by the submarine USS *Permit* on the night of 15-16 March 1942.

This unit was part of the joint RAN/USN Fleet Radio Unit, Melbourne and one of two Allied Sigint organizations in the South West Pacific area (SWPA), code named “Ultra”. “Sigint” (signal intelligence) operations were so secret that they were given their own special classification of “Ultra Secret”. The word “Ultra” was used as a code name for intelligence derived from interception and decoding of Japanese military and naval messages, which proved pivotal only three months later in the Battle of Midway.

Unclear is how this correspondence reached Knutson, by military air transport or surface. Likely it was transported among an accumulation of letters that had been held and released (sent to Melbourne) in late July 1942.

Cover To A German Jewish Refugee Interned In Canada

by Stephen L. Suffet



Figure: 3-cents per ounce U.S. letter rate to Canada. The Base Army Post Office address in Ottawa served as a central address for routing mail to the various civilian internment camps. Camp N was actually located in Sherbrooke, Quebec.

As any serious collector of postal history quickly learns, a seemingly ordinary cover often has a fascinating back story. Such is the case with the cover shown here. The 1-cent Prexie and 2-cent National Defense Issue stamps teamed up to pay the exceptionally common 3-cents per ounce U.S. letter rate to Canada. Since the postmark date is November 3, 1941, and Canada was then at war, the cover was subject to censorship upon arrival in that country. There is nothing unusual about that.

Look, however, at the address:

Mr. Joseph Bachrach
Camp "N"
Base Army Post-Office
Ottawa, Canada

Camp N was one of more than two dozen facilities established throughout Canada to house civilian internees of war. A number of those camps later housed military prisoners of war as well.

The Ottawa address is misleading. The Base Army Post Office, located in the Canadian capital, merely served as a central address for routing mail to the various camps. Camp N, which opened in October 1940, was actually located in Sherbrooke, Quebec, about 300 kilometers to the east. Among its earliest residents were German merchant seamen who had been in Canada or elsewhere in the British Commonwealth or Empire at the time the Second World War broke out.

Other internees would arrive later, including Joseph Bachrach, who was among approximately 2,300 German and Austrian Jews living in the United Kingdom whom the British government detained in 1940 and sent to Canada. About 1,000 of those 2,300 went to Camp N.

At first, other internees, including some actual Nazis and many Nazi sympathizers, taunted and threatened the Jews. After several fights broke out, the camp commandant ordered the guards,

many of them veterans of the First World War, to keep the two groups apart.

By July 1941, both British and Canadian authorities came to realize that the Jewish camp population posed no serious security threat, and their status was changed from civilian internees (i.e., civilian prisoners of war) to refugees. As refugees they could be released to work or to go to school, provided they could find Canadian sponsors. All eventually did.

Born in Papenburg, Germany, on February 9, 1918, Joseph Bachrach came of age as the Nazis gained and consolidated their power. Fearing that worse was yet to come, his parents, Moritz and Flora Bachrach, sent him to England in 1934 to complete his education and to keep him safe from the rising anti-Semitism of Nazi German society.

Moritz Bachrach, M.D., was the person who sent the cover. He, his wife, and their 16-year old daughter Ruth managed to escape Nazi Germany in 1937. They made their way to South Bend, Indiana, where Moritz set up a medical practice while Joseph remained in England.

Joseph Bachrach was a 22-year old university student in 1940 when the British government took him into custody and sent him to Canada.

Some time after the cover arrived in late 1941, the Canadian authorities permitted Joseph Bachrach to leave Camp N, by now redesignated Camp 42, and attend Queen's College in Kingston, Ontario. He graduated

from there in 1944 with a bachelor's degree in chemistry. He then received a master's degree in the same subject from Queen's College in 1945.

In 1946, after the war ended, Joseph Bachrach migrated to the United States to complete his graduate studies at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, where he received his Ph.D. in chemistry in 1950. He then pursued an academic career, eventually becoming the chairman of the chemistry department at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago. By that time Professor Bachrach had become a U.S. citizen.

After retiring from Northeastern Illinois University, Joseph Bachrach continued to teach part-time at Loyola University, also in Chicago. He passed away from a heart attack on December 3, 1998, at the age of 80, leaving behind his sister Ruth, a wife also named Ruth, two grown children, and four grandchildren.

Camp 42, formerly Camp N, finally closed in July 1946. All of its approximately 1,000 Jewish internees/refugees had been released by the end of 1943. So had all of the other German and Austrian Jews that the U.K. had sent to Canada in 1940. Many of these former internees remained in Canada after the war and made important contributions to Canadian society.

Joseph Bachrach, however, made his own life in the United States, as did his parents and his sister.

2021 Sarasota National Stamp Exhibition Dates Have Changed

Prexie era collectors planning to attend and/or exhibit at SNSE 2021 should note that the dates have changed. The show will take place **January 22-24** rather than the usual first weekend in February. SNSE will be hosting the Prexie Era study group and has therefore reserved frames for exhibitors. The prospectus and entry form are available on the website.

Fifty-Five \$1 Prexies Help Declare \$630,000 Value

by Ed Field



Ordinarily I do not collect \$1 Prexies, but I could not resist the item shown here. Posted May 24 1941, the cover bears fifty-five \$1 Prexies, along with other assorted values, for a total franking of \$63.27. The Zone 3 supplemental fee was 10 cents per ounce; assumed weight is 3 ounces.

The inferred declared value is \$630,000, equivalent to around \$9 million (give or take) today. The relatively small envelope indicates it contained cash rather than, say, bearer bonds. Sixty-three \$1,000 bills would have weighed approximately 2.2 ounces and would have fit. Other combinations of bills are also possible.