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# *The Prexie Era*

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## Editor's Notes

### Richard W. "Bill" Helbock 1938 – 2011



I recently received word from Bill Helbock's wife, Cath, that on 15 May 2011 Bill died of a heart attack at his home in Australia. Collectors of 20th century U.S. postal history will know him as publisher of the bi-monthly journal, *La Posta*, in continuous publication since 1969. He authored over twenty postal history books and monographs, and served as editor of the *American Philatelic Congress Book* from 1999-2005. In 1991 he was granted the Distinguished Philatelists Award by the U.S. Philatelic Classics Society. Later, in 2003 the Northwest Federation of Stamp Clubs selected him as Distinguished Philatelist.

Bill was a frequent contributor to *The Prexie Era*, both as author and behind-the-scenes advisor. Often your editor sought him out for fact checking, consultation on an individual cover, or more broadly, on an area of airmail philately or military postal history. His responses were frequently publishable. As a memoriam, this issue contains one such response, to a query on airmail service to Australia after the trans-Pacific airmail routes were shut down following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. It appears verbatim, edited only for spelling and formatting.

On a personal note, last fall the Collectors Club of Chicago published my book on World War II postal history. I dedicated the book to Bill because, a mentor, he inspired me to write down my philatelic thoughts. Earlier, I had asked him to serve as co-author because of my uncertainty in pulling off a major philatelic project on my own. Later, when that confidence came, Bill graciously stepped aside, supporting me throughout the long process with guidance, illustrations, and enough content to warrant his name on one of the chapters.

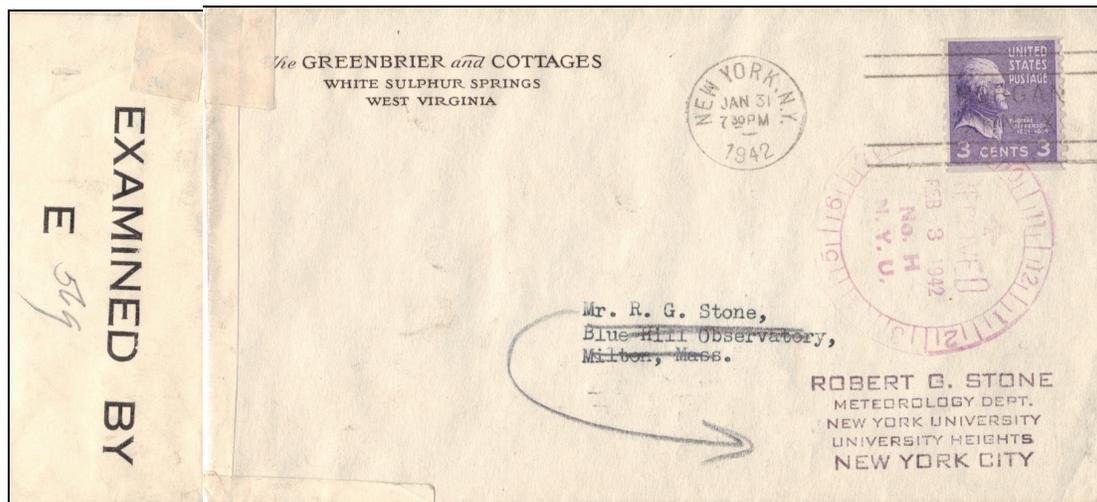
Bill's quiet graciousness of spirit and uninflated ego will outlive him, for they reside between the lines in his writing and editing, as well as in the writing of many whom he touched and who early on needed a guiding hand as we ventured into territory he knew so well.

## Censorship of Axis Diplomats' Mail in World War II

by

Albert “Chip” Briggs

Shortly after war was declared between the United States and Germany, Japan, and their allies, the Federal Bureau of Investigation closed the embassies of the warring parties. At first, the occupants who included diplomats as well as their staffs were restricted to their residences. After several days into the war, however, two luxurious east coast hotels were appropriated for the purpose of housing affected personnel. Eventually, ten hotels held diplomats and their families prior to repatriation.



The Greenbrier Hotel, located at White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia was the first to receive detainees when on 19 December 1941 the diplomats of the German embassy, their families, and support staff were moved there. The initial group contained 435 people. Soon, similar personnel from the Italian, Bulgarian, and Romanian embassies in Washington, D.C. were relocated to the Greenbrier. The number detained at the Greenbrier eventually swelled to 672 individuals.

On 29 December 1941 409 personnel from the Japanese embassy were moved to The Homestead, a sprawling resort hotel at Hot Springs, Virginia.

Few postal artifacts of the detention period have survived. One example of censored diplomatic mail from the Greenbrier Hotel is shown here. This cover with *The GREENBRIER and COTTAGES* corner card was carried by pouch to New York where it was examined at the Office of Censorship's field station. Following censorship the envelope was resealed with censor tape preprinted with "EXAMINED BY E" and manuscript 569. It was placed in the mails on 21 January 1942 receiving a New York machine cancel and sent to Milton, Massachusetts where it was forwarded back to New York City.

The addressee, Robert G. Stone, was an influential meteorologist and editor of the *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* from 1934 until 1955. Unfortunately, nothing is known about the political status of the Greenbrier detainee, whether diplomat, staff, or family.

More information about the detained diplomatic corps of Axis nations may be found in Louis Fiset's new book, *Detained, Interned, Incarcerated: U.S. Enemy Noncombatant Mail in World War II*, available from the editor.

## Quintuple Rate Prexies to the Dornier Airplane Manufacturer

by

Jeffrey Shapiro



The 3-cent Jefferson adhesive was the workhorse during the Prexie era, with 130 billion sheet, coil and pane stamps printed, from 1938 through 1955. Fifty sheet stamps were plastered on the front and back of the overstuffed October 28, 1939 cover shown here that was sent from an aircraft publication in New York City to the arms manufacturer, Dornier in Germany. (Note: Germany invaded Poland September 1, 1939, but this correspondence was uncensored)

The stamps paid five times the 30 cents per half-ounce rate on the recently established trans-Atlantic air route to Europe (FAM-18). This rate to Germany was in effect from April 1939 until service was suspended December 12, 1941.

The addressee, Dornier, was a leader in airplane manufacturing. The German company circumvented Treaty of Versailles' regulations by building many of its aircraft outside of German borders. Production included the Do-X (1929), the largest, most powerful long distance flying boat made prior to introduction of the Pan Am Clippers.

Other notable aircraft manufactured by Dornier included the Do-17, a passenger airplane turned bomber, used with great success in the Spanish Civil War. A prototype, the Do-217, was used extensively by the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain and was refined to defend Germany from Royal Air Force night bombings during World War II.



## “Undeliverable” to Dutch New Guinea

by

Louis Fiset



The bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 brought immediate suspension of airmail service to countries in the Pacific region served by FAM-14 and FAM-19. Throughout the war, airmail letters from North America bound for New Zealand, Australia, and beyond, were sent by ship, or military transport (Air Transport Command, Navy Air Transport Command) on a space available basis. Some POD patrons, however, continued to frank their mail with 70-cent airmail postage in hope this would expedite service to locations so far away.

The cover shown here, addressed to Madang on the northwest coast of Dutch New Guinea, was postmarked 30 March 1942 long after suspension of airmail service. It went by ship, likely from San Francisco, to Australia where it was censored at Sidney -- from there, by ship to Port Moresby, located on the southeast coast of Papua. A faint Australia Field Post Office receiving mark dated 10 August 1942 visible on the back confirms the latter. A member of the New Guinea Forces has written “Undeliverable” in red ink, with the same date. The letter got no farther than Port Moresby where it began a slow return voyage to the U.S. as low priority mail.

Why was this letter undeliverable? Japanese forces had been encroaching on the region since January 1942 with their attack on Rabaul, and by May had secured beachheads on the northwest coast of New Guinea as far west as Lae and Salamaua. Port Moresby, Papua, remained under Allied control thanks to a hard fought victory in the week-long Battle of the Coral Sea, in May. This enabled the letter to get as far as Papua. Although Madang was not yet occupied, the Japanese presence blocked mail between Port Moresby and post offices on the northwest coast of New Guinea west of Salamaua.

The addressee, Lutheran missionary Walter Krebs, did not survive the war. By December 1942 Madang was under occupation. At first, members of the Madang Mission were allowed to continue their work. However, soon they were ill-treated, forced to perform manual labor, and several times moved to more western locations. In February 1944, the 19 missionaries from Madang, accompanied by a large contingent of other detained westerners, boarded the *Dorish Maru* bound for Wewak, further west. En route the ship was repeatedly strafed by U.S. planes. After limping into port, one hundred dead and dying were taken ashore, including Walter Krebs.

## Airmail To and From Australia After 8 December 1941

by

Bill Helbock

June 9, 2010

Good morning Louis:

You ask tough questions, mate. This subject of airmail to and from Australia after 8 December 1941 is quite vague.

There was a brief period when airmail addressed to Australia from the U.S. appears to have been routed through Miami and onward to Africa in order to link up with the Horseshoe route. But that connection was terminated after the bombing raid on Broome in northwestern Australia on 3 March 1942. Fifteen flying boats were in Roebuck Bay and completely destroyed. Some were loaded with passengers ready to depart. After that, the Horseshoe route extended only from Durban to Calcutta. Any onward mail to Australia would have travelled by ship.



Figure 1

Figure 1, above, shows a cover that could have traveled via the FAM 22-Horseshoe Route link to Australia, but my guess is that it did not. The circular PASSED BY/CENSOR marking was applied in San Francisco suggesting that the cover went from New York to California and then onward either by ship or on a space available basis with Navy air. (See my *La Posta* article on trans-Pacific airmail carried by the army and navy.)

Figure 2 shows a cover to Port Moresby mailed from Santa Barbara on 23 March 1942. Too late for the FAM 22-Horseshoe connection, it too made the trans-Pacific trip by sea or courtesy of the Army/Navy.



Figure 2

Figure 3, illustrated both front and back, shows a cover that definitely traveled by air from the US (Hawaii) to Brisbane by military air. [Ed. Note: Postmarked 11 June 1943; received 22 June 1943. Transit time: 12 days.]



Figure 3

In short, I believe that unless there is evidence of a Miami censor tape/handstamp, it's impossible to tell if a cover was carried by the FAM 22-Horseshoe connection during the brief, December 1941-February 1942 window.

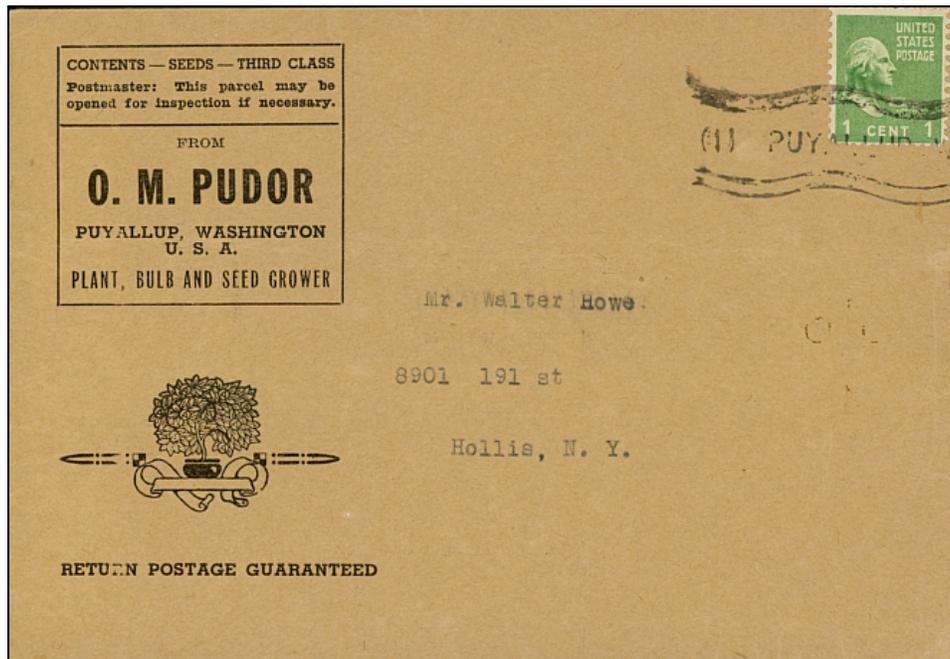
For your 1944 piece, I think it pretty well suggests ship or space-available air by the Army or Navy.

Hope this is of assistance, Bill.

### Third Class One-Cent Rate for Seeds

by

Bob Hohertz



In the Fall 2008 issue (No. 43) I asked subscribers if anyone had knowledge of a solo 1.5-cent Prexie stamp used on a 2-ounce mailer conveying seeds, cuttings, or other planting material. I received no response. Since then I've found a cover of the right type, but early enough to have proper use of a 1-cent stamp.

From the beginning of the Prexie period until January 1, 1949 the single-piece third class rate was 1.5 cents for each two ounces or fraction thereof, up to and including eight ounces. Exceptions were provided for books, catalogs, seeds, cuttings, bulbs, roots, scions and plants, which were charged 1 cent per two ounces or fraction thereof. This cover could not have been sent third class for one cent without falling into the group of exceptions.

I am still on the hunt for a 1.5-cent Prexie used for mailing seeds.

## Circular AIR TRANSIT Marking, Hong Kong

by

Louis Fiset



The cover shown here has at least two points of interest to collectors, three for collectors of the Famous American series on cover. First, it was addressed to a Jewish refugee living in Shanghai at the outbreak of the war. Shanghai was an important safe-haven for Jewish refugees during the Holocaust, since it was one of the few places in the world where one did not need a visa to enter. The Japanese, who controlled the city, refused to submit to the demands of the Third Reich to exterminate them. By 1941, nearly 20,000 European Jews had found shelter there, and many would eventually find their way to Israel.

Of philatelic interest is the green **AIR TRANSIT** circular marking with the boxed **21** of the same color tying the Hong Kong resealing tape. All known markings were applied at Hong Kong, and most will be found on mail to and from Shanghai. The earliest reported date is 9 September 1940 and the latest, 4 December 1941 shortly before the occupation of Hong Kong by Japanese forces. Also notable is a missing Hong Kong receiving postmark.

These two-circle markings, all with a number in the center ranging from 1 to 10, and variable in color, remain scarce and, to date are not entirely understood. Originally the marking was thought to be an OAT forerunner applied at the Hong Kong exchange office to indicate onward transmissions by air. It is now believed to be related to censorship of transit mail and not a marking applied by postal authorities. The color of ink used to strike the Air Transit marking usually matches the boxed censor number often tying the Hong Kong resealing tape, as shown in the example. Some speculation exists that the marks were used by senior censors handling mail referred to them and that they brought attention that the item should be treated as airmail in transit. Covers bearing these markings rarely have Hong Kong receiving (transit) dates, typical of most transit mail arriving in the colony.

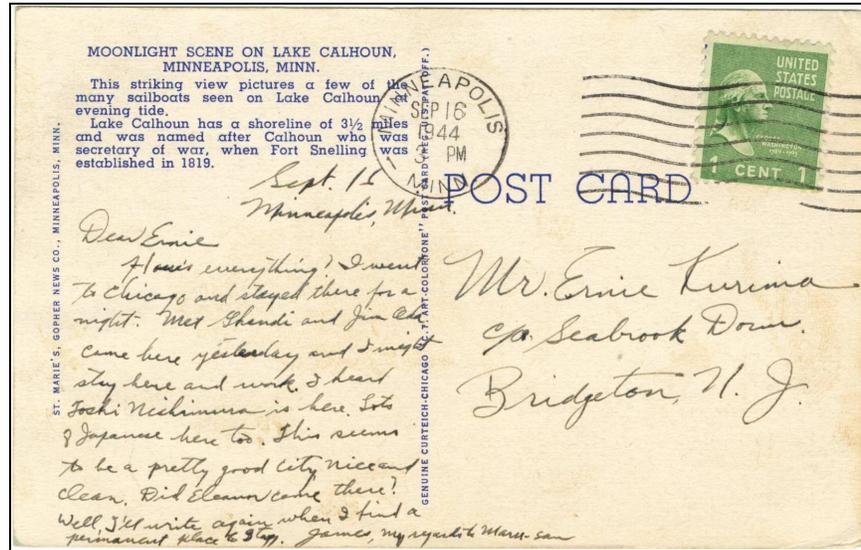
Of the 164 covers recorded with the Air Transit marking, only 14 bear the number “5”, making it one of the scarcer numbers.

- Source: Murray Heifetz. *O.A.T. and A.V. 2 Markings*. (Mineola, NY: AAPS, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.)

## Japanese American Farm Workers At Seabrook Farms

by

Jeffrey Shapiro



This September 1944 postcard, addressed to Bridgeton, New Jersey, has a story to tell. It was sent from a Japanese American on his way to Chicago, to another, at “Seabrook Dorm.”

Charles Seabrook and his three sons built Seabrook Farms into one of the major frozen food producers in the country and helped established a Japanese American community there that still exists today. Located in Bridgeton, Cumberland County, New Jersey, Seabrook Farms covered nine square miles and was the largest farm in New Jersey. Radishes, squashes, peppers, peas, beans, and asparagus were grown there. Dozens of greenhouses on the property grew cucumbers, lettuce, and tomatoes. The property included 6000 cultivated acres, 30 miles of improved roads, a canning and freezing plant, and a railroad and truck loading facility.

While the business prospered because of pioneering methods of irrigation and quick-freezing of fresh vegetables, success of the operation depended on the availability of a large, inexpensive labor force. The needs of the nation meant large demands for vegetables, but with labor shortages caused by the War, Seabrook found it difficult to recruit the approximately 2,000 farm hands and packing plant workers needed to keep the huge agribusiness operating.

Seeking relief, late in 1943 Seabrook Farm's management approached the War Relocation Authority to see if incarcerated Japanese residents at the ten relocation centers established in the aftermath of President Roosevelt's 1942 Executive Order 9066 could be "paroled" to work at the Seabrook Farms' facilities. Within a year, nearly 1000 internees relocated to Seabrook as farm hands, a number that grew to 2,800 by war's end. Workers lived in concrete block barracks with communal sanitary facilities. They worked 12-hour days (with one day off every two weeks) at wages ranging from 35 to 50 cents per hour.

In 1949 1,200 Japanese Americans were still working at Seabrook Farms. Today, 500 still call Bridgeton, New Jersey home.