

Production of the 1928 U.S. Beacon Airmail

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EXHIBIT PLAN

- Design

- Printings

- Marginal Markings

- Production Problems

A Single-Frame Study in the Production of this Popular Stamp

This exhibit is a look at how the U.S. 5¢ Beacon Airmail stamp of 1928, one of the most popular stamps in United States postal history, was produced.

Nebraska and Wyoming, representing the commitment of the country to trans-continental airmail service. This stamp has commonly become known as the Beacon airmail.



The 1928 U.S. Beacon Airmail Stamp

On August 1st, 1928 the Post Office Department drastically reduced the airmail rate from 10¢ to 5¢ for the first ounce. Hoping to promote the growing airmail service and in order to draw attention to the new rate, it was decided that a bi-color stamp was in order.

Due to the bi-color nature of the Beacon, problems plagued the production process throughout the Beacon's lifetime. These included alignment between the vignette and frame as well as perforation differences due to paper shrinkage. Plate wear was also a factor and was strikingly evident as production continued.

The design by A.R. Meissner of the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing is based upon photographs of the air mail beacon towers in

Problems that weren't unique to the Beacon also occurred during the production process. These

include plate scratches, pre-printing paper creases, and improper inking.

Marginal markings, as could be expected, played an important part of the production process. These markings included more than just the vignette and frame plate numbers. Siderographer and Plate Finisher initials as well as "TOP" markings were an integral part of producing the Beacon

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Double and Missing "TOP" Marginal Markings*
- *Reversed "TOP"*
- *Improper Plate Wiping*
- *Open Door and Worn Tower Varieties*
- *Plate Scratches*
- *"19605" Plate Blocks*

Exhibit Notes

The exhibit starts with the best produced Beacon that the exhibitor has seen during his inspection and examination of thousands of copies. Due to production problems (described later in the exhibit), few Beacons were produced with such good results.

Due to an interpretation by Goodkind in his Beacon monograph it is a common misconception that there were three distinct printings of the Beacon. Instead there are three "groups" of plates that were used throughout the continual printing

process. These groups are a loosely related plates based upon marginal markings.

A large part of the exhibit details the various marginal markings that oc-

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Exhibit Notes

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curred during Beacon production. These range from the addition of the word "TOP" to both frame and vignette plates to Siderographer and Plate Finisher initials to registration markings. Problems with the marginal markings include a corrected plate number, finishing marks that were punched too deep into the plate and the infamous missing and double "TOP" examples.

The second half of the exhibit examines problems that occurred during

production. First, problems that were common among all stamp production of the time are shown. Foreign objects on the printing plates, plate scratches, excess inking, improper plate wiping, perforation inconsistencies and pre-printing paper creases are displayed.

Completing the exhibit are examples of production problems that were unique to the Beacon. The most widely known of these are the problems that occurred due to inaccurate vignette registration. The frame was printed first and the resulting misregistration produced "fast and slow" flying planes as well as "high

and low" flying planes and just about everything in between.

Other problems include plate wear that resulted in the "Open Door" and "Worn

Tower" varieties, as well as wear that occurred due to the increased acidity of the red ink.



The last digit on frame plate #19626 was corrected resulting in a red disc appearing under the last "6" due to plate wear.



Double "TOP" marginal markings appeared only on vignette plate #19597.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Silver, Philip, "U.S. The Beacon Air Mail Stamp of 1928 Revisited", *Collector's Club Philatelist*, Parts One & Two, March-April 1938, May-June 1938.

Kobersteen, Kent J., *The Beacon Air Mail Stamp of 1928 Production and Usage*, 1989.

Johl, Max G., *U.S. Postage Stamps 1902-1935*, 1935, 1937, 1941, 1972.

Moorhead, Harley G., "Source of the Photograph Used on the Beacon Air Mail Stamp", *The Bureau Specialist*, October 1937.

What's Not Here...

Usage. While traditional exhibits are expected to examine the use of the studied stamp, showing the use of the Beacon is well beyond the scope of a one-frame exhibit. In fact, this exhibitor has a multi-frame exhibit devoted exclusively to the use of the Beacon.

Essay. There are no traditional essays available for the Beacon. The engraving was done from the composite photograph shown in the exhibit.

Proof. There are six known pre-production proofs in existence. While the exhibitor knows the whereabouts of all these, he has yet been able acquire one for exhibition.

Specimen. There are two documented Beacon specimens, and the exhibitor has not been able to acquire one for exhibition.

C11a. Scott editors assigned a number (C11a) to a horizontal imperfo-

rate pair. This is a unique vertical strip of three that is believed to be printers' waste.

Blue Moon Variety. A Blue Moon variety is an elusive find for a Beacon collector. The exhibitor knows that he should have one for display, but does not at this time—and is truly embarrassed and ashamed that he doesn't.