



from the 1938 Presidential-Era Committee

Searching for the 10¢ Coil of the 1938 Presidential Series

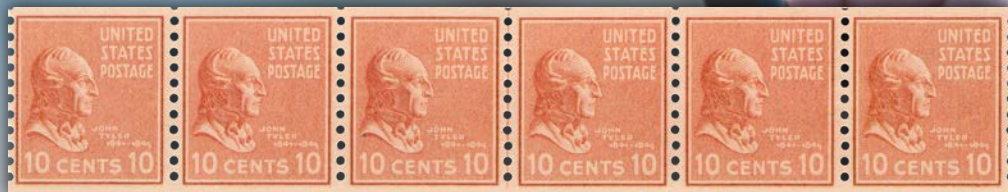


Figure 1. A six-stamp strip of the vertically perforated 10¢ value from the Presidential Series of 1932 (Scott #847).

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The Presidential Series of 1938 is one of the more popular collecting areas of modern philately, particularly for postal history. Though first issued eighty years ago, in 1938/39, the Prexies are still considered “modern” in the philatelic world. In the series were 48 different stamps comprising 32 denominations with thirteen of these stamps in the coil format. One of those stamps was a vertically perforated 10¢ value (Figure 1).

The 10¢ coil with the profile of John Tyler, 10th President of the United States, was issued on January 20, 1939 and was available in rolls of 500 and 1,000. The design for the stamp was by William Schrage and engraving was executed by C. T. Arlt and James Vail. The three were involved with the creation of several Prexie denominations. Overall, the production of all coils of the series was boilerplate on the rotary press with nothing particularly distinctive about the 10¢ value.¹ Other than miscuts exposing the



Figure 2. As shown by this line pair of pink changelings, environmentally-influenced color shifts are especially common with the orange-brown color of the John Tyler issue.



Figure 3. Only four cities are known for precancelled examples of Scott #847, including St. Paul, Minnesota shown in this gap pair.

plate number, there are no known varieties. It should be noted that the orange-brown color of the stamp is particularly susceptible to environmental factors altering the original color (Figure 2).

Because of the small number of stamps printed, only four plates were used – 22100, 22101, 22102 and 22103. As with most of the Prexie series, there is little trouble finding high-quality, non-hinged mint pairs and line pairs of the stamp. Longer strips, as shown in Figure 1, are not as abundant, particularly line strips. What are exceedingly difficult to locate are mint or used precancels. Though Scott specifies eight cities precanceled the 10¢ coil, only four cities are known – Boston, Minneapolis, St. Paul and New York (Figure 3). A 10¢ precancelled coil on cover would be a modern rarity.

Among the collecting community, the intense interest in the Presidential Series lies in postal history. For those collectors of the

Prexies, one of the most elusive usages is the coil format of the 10¢ value, used either alone or in combination with other values. What is the lure of the 10¢ coil? Why so eagerly sought compared to other stamps of the series? Why so difficult to find? There is no doubt that it is scarce, though not particularly rare. To evaluate the rarity/scarcity of a stamp or its postal history, there are four fundamental factors to be evaluated.

The first is availability; how long was this stamp available for purchase? Second comes opportunity; how many ways could this stamp be used during its life cycle. Third is quantity; how many stamps were printed? Last, demand; do collectors want it?

After decades of study of this stamp and applying the criteria listed above and comparing it to other Prexie values, here's the conclusion. The scarcity and pricing of 10¢ coil usages are fueled primarily by collector demand powered by the aura of rarity. There is no doubt that, under any circumstances, usages of this stamp are hard to come by, but there are other Prexie values that would rate higher on the postal history rarity scale. However, without the same collector demand, these other Prexies are more readily found in dealer boxes and at substantially lower prices. These other values seem to lack the reputation of the 10¢ coil. To develop the argument using a manageable volume of information, we'll examine the criteria listed above primarily in the context of the other Prexie coil stamps. There are nine coil values in the Prexie series perforated horizontally plus four of the lower values perforated vertically.

Beginning with availability, the coil stamps, as well as the entire Prexie series, were available for more than twenty years. Coils, including the 10¢, were first printed in early 1939 and their plates canceled in late 1959. Though plates were canceled in 1959,



Figure 4. The John Tyler coil Prexie is known to have been available for purchase into the early 1960's, as evidenced by this Idlewild Airport cancel on a 10¢ coil from 1961.

shipments to post offices could stop before or after that date. In the case of the 10¢ value, a 10¢ denomination of the Liberty series was issued July 4, 1956, but there was no coil. It is known that 10¢ coils were still being sold into the early 60s as evidenced by stamps used that were bought from a vending machine at Idlewild Airport in New York City (Figure 4). With the easy obtainability of mint stamps today, we know there were plenty of stamps available in the hands of the public. In terms of availability then, the 10¢ coil, as the other coil values, could be readily purchased and used for over two decades. Plenty of time to foster reasonably plentiful usages. Compare this to the half-life of most commemoratives at about one year.

Now for opportunity. Were there enough ways to use this stamp so that extant examples would be plentiful? A particular craving of Prexie postal historians is the solo use (Figure 5). The nature of the Prexie series provided us with several denominations for which there was no apparent rate. Finding solo uses of these stamps normally requires seldom found rate combinations. This is not the case for the 10¢ coil. Coil stamps were produced for volume users and vending machines, and, as such, represented frequently used rates.² There were multiple opportunities for solo use of the 10¢ Prexie, which would obviously include the coil. They are listed in the following table.



Figure 5. A spectacular solo use of the coil paying special delivery charge for official mail. Among postal historians, the solo use of Scott #847 is a highly sought prize. Cover image courtesy of Gordon Eubanks.

Table 1: Rate Opportunities for use of the 10¢ Prexie

RATE	EFFECTIVE DATES
Airmail to Jamaica	11/15/30—06/30/61
Airmail to Bermuda	02/14/38—06/30/61
Airmail to Cuba	12/01/32—06/28/45 & 08/01/54—06/30/61
Airmail to Canal Zone	04/01/45—09/30/46
Airmail from Guam to Philippines	11/01/46—06/30/61
Airmail from American Samoa to W. Samoa	11/01/46—06/30/61
Airmail to South America	11/01/46—06/30/61
Airmail to Central America, Caribbean islands, Caracas	04/01/45—06/30/61
Airmail to Dominican Republic	03/21/29—06/30/61
Airmail to Newfoundland (direct service)	06/05/39—09/25/39 & 11/01/46—03/31/49
Airmail to Mexico	12/01/32—06/10/45
Airmail International Postcard	06/01/54—06/30/61
Commercial Papers, Surface to UPU Countries	11/01/53—06/30/61
Small Packet, Surface to UPU Countries	07/01/30—06/30/40
Special Delivery on Penalty Envelopes	10/01/1885—/10/31/44
Private International Aerogramme	04/06/47—06/30/61
Supplementary Mail to UPU Country	10/01/07—1941?
Surface to Australia + air surcharge in Australia	10/15/35—10/31/46
Cancellation or Alteration of COD Charges	11/01/44—07/24/68
Penalty for Early Redemption of Postal Savings Certificate	10/01/53—10/30/55
Customs Clearance Fee	05/01/31—05/14/57
Return Receipt, Mailed from Washington, DC Executive Branch Departments.	07/01/57 – 07/13/69
POD Form 3606 – Senders Statement and Certificate of Bulk Mailing (up to 200 pieces)	07/01/29—06/30/57

When it comes to solo uses, there are no other Prexie values that have more possibilities than the 10¢ denomination. Certainly, the bottom half of this table outlines some esoteric uses that would be considered stellar with any 10¢ stamp, but the airmail rates, when taken in their totality, are reasonably common. But solo usages are not the only opportunity for a stamp to show itself. There was myriad ways the 10¢ value could easily be used in combination with other stamps (Figure 6). In fact, the 10¢ value is one of the most ubiquitous in Prexie postal history. The many opportunities to use this stamp provided the rationale for producing a coil, yet it is so seldom found. Even covers with a philatelic purpose or connection prove elusive.

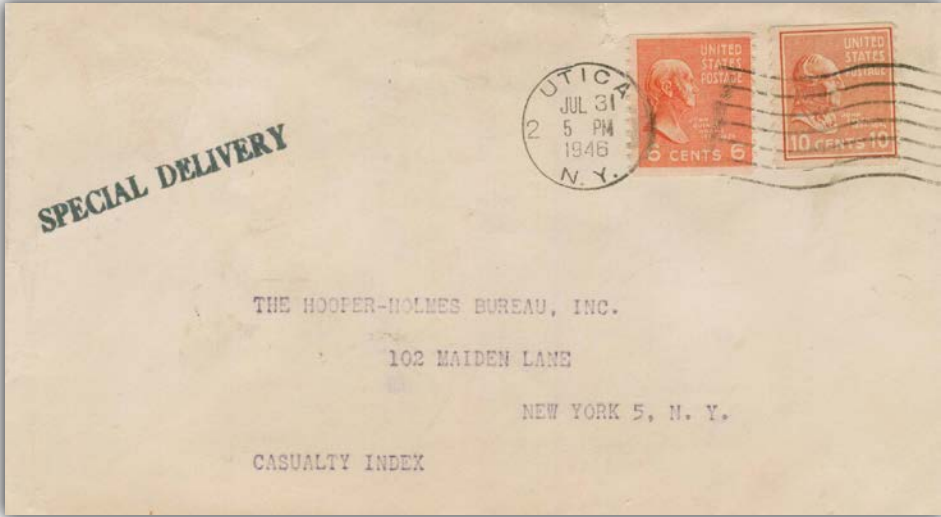


Figure 6. Mailed from Utica, NY, July 31, 1946, a 10¢ coil is used to pay for special delivery with a 6¢ coil paying 2x first class.

An obvious factor for rarity is the quantity produced. The scarcity of the 10¢ coil might easily lead one to believe that it was produced in limited quantities, which it was, but no less than other values. The table below positions the 10¢ value against other coil denominations with low printing volumes.³ Compare these quantities to the 28 billion 3¢ horizontal coils printed.

Table 2: Comparison of Print Volumes Among Low Quantity Prexies		
STAMP	QUANTITY PRINTED	PERCENTAGE TOTAL PRINTED for DENOMINATION
1½¢ Vertical	8,710,775	0.04
4½¢ Horizontal	16,235,000	5.57
2¢ Vertical	21,680,00	0.07
10¢ Horizontal	22,065,000	0.57
3¢ Vertical	32,760,000	0.0002
5¢ Horizontal	40,301,000	1.54
4¢ Horizontal	41,040,000	4.34

If we start doing the math based on production quantities, there are some interesting results.

- There should be 3 times more usages of the 10¢ coil than the 1½¢ vertical.
- A 2¢ vertical or 4½¢ solo usage should be as difficult to find as a 10¢ solo.
- One would have to search 2,500 covers with 1½¢ Prexies to find a vertical coil.
- One would have to search 175 covers with 10¢ Prexies to find a coil.

Since the volume of third class mail was so great during this period, the argument can be made that there were far more covers sent with a 1½¢ stamp than that with a 10¢ stamp. This may be true, but these third class covers were considered junk mail and far more likely to be thrown away than those more attractive covers with more complicated rates that would include the 10¢ stamp. The table shows that there are three other coil values that should be more difficult to secure than the 10¢ value with the 1½¢ the most elusive.

The last criterion is collector demand. An item is either rare or it is not. That is not determined by collectors. Scarcity, however, is another matter. An item may be reasonably plentiful, yet difficult to locate or purchase. This scarcity could very well be caused by collector demand. It is not news in philately that many rare items go unsold at bargain prices because collectors either don't know or, more likely, don't care. The collecting world also knows that popularity and collector demand can make the plentiful scarce and drive up prices. As an example, an on-cover 10¢ coil precancel would be rare (if one does exist). There just aren't any out there. A regular 10¢ coil on cover is scarce. They exist in some reasonable quantity, but can't be found, most likely because of collector demand.

With all the evidence, it becomes obvious that there are at least four different coils in the Presidential Series that score quite high on the Prexie scarcity scale in terms of numbers. One can argue the relative position of that scarcity. Rather than that argument, let's assume equality for those four values. Why then should a solo use of the 10¢ coil, without philatelic connection, sell at approximately 100 times more than solo uses of the other denominations? It certainly is not 100 times rarer. It is true that 10¢ coils in dealer boxes are few and far between, while the other denominations, if not plentiful, are available with a diligent search, sometimes in junk boxes. It becomes evident that collector demand is an important contributor to the scarcity and pricing of 10¢ coil covers. Collectors want the 10¢ coil. Because of the reputation of the stamp for scarcity, it is quickly snapped up and stashed away in collectors' albums and off the market, while less interesting but equally limited usages are left in dealer inventories. This is in no way to suggest that the 10¢ coil on cover is overvalued, but rather, for the Prexie collector, there is postal history available that is significantly under priced based on rarity. If you collect Prexie postal history, one has only to look to personal experience. How many 10¢ coils paying the international airmail postcard rate have been seen versus a 1½¢ vertical coil paying international printed matter or even domestic third class? The experience of this collector is that the 10¢ coil is not the most difficult to locate. It is, by a wide margin, the most expensive to buy.

There is another circumstance that might contribute to the paucity of the 10¢ coil. The most frequently used solo opportunities as well as opportunities for multiple uses

were for overseas airmail cards and letters (Figure 7). It is very likely many of these covers were destroyed or retained in various countries around the world. A common destination for a 10¢ rate was to the tropics, where paper preservation is always a problem.



Figure 6. Covers bound for destinations overseas were likely opportunities for both solo and multiple uses of the 10¢ John Tyler Prexie. Here, three 10¢ coils pay the 30¢ air rate in effect at the time to Sweden.

Even so, it is still a mystery why there are not more examples of the 10¢ coil in solo, multiple or mixed denominations. Even philatelic use on flight and event covers are in scarce supply. There was plenty of availability and opportunity to use the stamp. Its production quantities, while not great, exceeded other Prexies and were in line with many commemoratives of the period.

Where are you, 10¢ coil?

With thanks to Bob Hohertz for his review and comments.

Endnotes

1. For more detailed information of Prexie coil production refer to DiPaolo, William, "Production Characteristics of Prexie Coils," *The Prexie Era* pp. 51-62.
2. Two coil values, the 4¢ and 4½¢ had no singular rate at the time of issue. Later the 4¢ Prexie did pay the domestic air postcard rate.
3. It should be noted that the \$2 and \$5 denominations also had lower printing quantities than the 10¢ coil.

References

- Fiset, Louis, Editor, *The Prexie Era*, American Philatelic Society, Bellefonte, PA, 2017.
 Rustad, Roland, *The Prexies*, Bureau Issues Association, Belleville, IL, 1994.