

Proofs of Overrun Countries stamps in National Postal Museum archive

JAMES E. KLOETZEL

I was somewhat upset with myself following Washington 2006, the hugely successful international stamp exhibition held in Washington D.C., in late May/early June 2006. Perhaps there was just too much to do and too little time.

I already had begun some extensive research on the United States Overrun Countries stamp series of 1943-44 (Scott 909-921), and the Scott catalog had just begun to list some of the obvious reverse printings of vignette colors of these stamps in the 2006 *Scott Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps and Covers*, published in late summer 2005. In fact, I had written a Special Feature article in that volume titled "A Closer Look at the United States 1943 5¢ Greece Stamp (Scott 916)."

How did it escape my attention that the unique sets of large die proofs of this series were on the show floor? These proofs were part of the W. Curtis Livingston collection of United States 20th-century essays and proofs being offered by Shreves Philatelic Galleries of Dallas, Texas, and they were available for viewing at the Shreves booth at the exhibition. They are unique proofs, and were soon to be sold and possibly squirreled away in private collections for who knew how long! But, I failed to examine these proofs at the show, and there was no time for postal viewing between the end of the show and the sale that was held June 16, 2006, in Shreves' New York auction galleries. Was this an opportunity lost for all time?

Sometimes the fates smile upon us. There were five lots of Overrun Countries essays and proofs in the Livingston collection, and it is believed that these lots comprised all such material in private hands. In addition to two lots of large die proofs, there was a lot containing a set of small die proofs, a lot containing a large die essay of the frame only, and a lot of official photographic essays. These final three lots sold to collectors. But, as it turned out, Charles and Tracy Shreve ended up

buying the two lots of large die proofs out of the auction (lots 1265 and 1266), and they proceeded to donate them to the Smithsonian National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C., where they could be admired by all and examined by philatelic scholars. Lot 1265 of the auction was a complete set of large die proofs on wove paper, die sunk on large full-size cards, correctly described as "... being the only approved examples of all thirteen stamps

in private hands." Lot 1266 was a similar set of large die proofs, but without the issues for Greece and Yugoslavia, and without final approval signatures.

It was not until late 2008, when I received my copy of the newsletter *En Route* from the National Postal Museum, that I found out that the Shreves had purchased the Overrun Countries large die proofs and had donated them to the museum. A second opportunity had opened up, and during



my next trip to the museum to do volunteer work as a Council of Philatelists member, I asked to be allowed to examine these proofs closely.

I had two main questions that I hoped could be answered by such an examination. First, I wondered how these proofs were produced. To simply call them "large die proofs" had to be a gross oversimplification, since only the frame was printed from an engraved die, while the vignettes were printed

using an experimental offset letterpress process on a rotary press. There was no die for the vignettes, but rather four separate rotary letterpress plates applying different colors of ink onto a rotary offset blanket, which in turn applied all the colors simultaneously to sheets of pregummed paper already impressed with the frame impressions.

After viewing these proofs, I fear I am not any closer to explaining how they were produced. The simplest ex-

planation I can think of is that the large die frame proofs were carefully placed on the press, and a single vignette impression was made in the center by shielding the surrounding vignette impressions using some sort of mask. How else a single vignette impression could be printed upon a large die proof is beyond me. If any *Scott Stamp Monthly* reader can come up with an alternative explanation, I am all ears.

The second question I hoped to answer by examining these proofs was to determine what order of application of the vignette colors the American Bank Note Co. printers had in mind when they set up their press. In other words, were the terms "normal printing" and "reverse printing" that have come to be used in philatelic circles appropriate, or were the color applications in different order on different stamps, making the currently used terms those of convenience only rather than terms that actually represented what the printers had in mind when they planned the stamps.

On this second question, I had much better luck than on my first question concerning the method of proof production. These proofs clearly were produced very carefully. The clarity of the impressions is impressive, and the resulting vignettes leave no doubt concerning the order in which the colors were applied. In every single case, the color of the flag shading dots, whether in black (or gray) like the flagpole, or in color as on the Greece stamp, was placed on the offset blanket first, followed by the other colors of the flags. The resulting impression on the proof or stamp paper was a colored flag with shading dots on top of the other colors. This is true for every proof, without exception.

As a result of this examination, I feel confident in saying that the current terminology of "normal printing" for vignettes on which the shading dots are on top of the other flag colors, and "reverse printing" for vignettes on which the shading dots are beneath the other flag colors, is entirely appropriate.



While the printers went into this project with certain ideas in mind, once the presses were rolling, difficulties often appeared, and they reacted to such problems as ink contamination on the press by sometimes altering the order of the plates. They found that it was impossible to produce consistent prints as perfect as those they had produced on the large and small die proofs, but by working with inks and plates, they were able to produce stamps that were perfectly acceptable to all concerned.

Four of the approved proofs are shown with this article, and we wish to thank the Smithsonian National Postal Museum and its museum specialist James O'Donnell for supplying these digital scans.

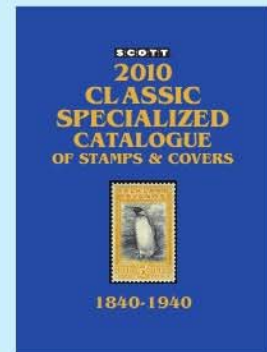
James E. Kloetzel is editor of the Scott catalogs.

WE HAVE A WINNER!

Scott Stamp Monthly readers may remember that when the Scott catalog editors announced their contest to pick a stamp for the cover of the 2010 Scott Classic Specialized Catalogue of Stamps and Covers of the World, 1840-1940, it was indicated that one winner would be selected from voters to receive a copy of the new 2010 Scott Classic catalog.

The contest ended August 31, and from the more than 1,700 readers who voted, our voting program randomly has selected a lucky winner. He is Klaus Yager of Huntsville, Alabama. Congratulations to Mr. Yager. Your catalog will be on its way to you when the 2010 Scott Classic catalog is published in early November.

And thank you to all the contestants who took the time to vote. We were impressed by the number who made the effort. Twice as many voted for the Penguin as for the Peafowl, which should not give the Peafowl an inferiority complex. He, too, makes a beautiful stamp. As it turned out, Mr. Yager voted for the Penguin also, so the book he receives will show the bird he chose. ■



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1439	11.50	1476	11.50
1440-3	11.75	1477	11.50
1446	13.50	1478	11.50
1448-51	12.75	1479	11.50
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1454	22.75	1484	9.00
1456-9	13.50	1485	9.00
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1543-6	17.00	1585	17.50	1732-3	23.50	1824	28.50	1951	29.50
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1549	16.50	1596	38.50	1749-52	20.75	1827-30	32.75	1953A-2002A	
1550	13.50	1622	42.50	1753	15.00	1831	37.50	Perf. 11	52.50
1551	13.50	1629-31	20.75	1754	21.50	1833	23.75	2003	28.50
1552	18.75	1632	18.50	1755	23.50	1834-7	25.00	2006-9	37.50
1553	16.50	1633-82	28.75	1756	26.50	1838-41	24.00	2010	28.50
1554	16.50	1683	21.50	1757	18.50	1846	32.50	2011	28.50
1555	16.50	1684	26.50	1758	16.75	1856	77.50	2012	28.50
1556	16.00	1685	26.50	1759	21.00	1859	77.50	2013	28.75
1557	16.00	1691-4	29.50	1760-3	33.75	1874	21.50	2014	60.00
1558	13.50	1695-8	23.50	1764-7	24.00	1876-9	31.75	2015	28.50
1559	11.50	1699	17.00	1772	23.50	1911	25.00	2016	85.00
1560	16.00	1701	21.50	1775-8	18.00	1912-9	32.50	2017	39.50
1561	16.00	1702	21.50	1779-82	26.50	1920	25.00	2018	28.50
1563	13.00	1703	21.50	1783-6	24.75	1921-4	52.50	2019-22	35.00
1564	13.00	1705	21.50	1787	23.50	1925	25.00	2024	37.50
1565-8	16.00	1706-9	18.75	1788	23.50	1926	28.50	2027-30	41.50
1569-70	8.00	1710	21.50	1789	23.50	1927	60.00	2031	28.50
1571	18.75	1711	21.50	1790	14.50	1928-31	33.50	2032-5	31.50
1572-5	17.50	1712-5	21.50	1791-4	23.50	1932	32.50	2036	28.50
1576	16.00	1716	17.00	1795-8	24.00	1933	47.50	2038	28.50
1577-8	14.50	1717-20	21.50	1801	26.00	1934	38.50	2040	28.50
1579	16.00	1722	15.00	1802	24.00	1935	30.00	2041	28.50
1580c	18.50	1723-4	19.00	1803	23.50	1936	30.00	2042	28.50
1581	7.50	1725	21.50	1804	28.50	1937-8	28.75	2043	29.75
1581v	22.50	1727	21.50	1805-10	36.50	1939	55.00	2044	32.50
1582	9.00	1730	37.50	1821	21.00	1940	27.50		
1584v	22.50	1731	21.50	1823	23.50	1942-5	31.50		



Scott #	Retail	Scott #	Retail
2047	28.50	2074	28.50
2048-51	27.50	2075	28.50
2052	26.50	2076-9	33.75
2053	28.50	2080	28.50
2055-8	35.00	2081	28.50
2059-62	43.50	2082-5	43.50
2063	28.50	2086	30.75
2064	28.50	2087	28.50
2066	28.50	2088	53.50
2067-70	33.75	2089	73.50
2072	28.50	2090	28.50
2073	33.50	2091	28.50

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