

The Prexies at Work

At the suggestion of President Franklin Roosevelt, an avid stamp collector, the United States Post Office introduced a new series of definitive stamps in 1938. Technically known as the Fifth Bureau Issue or the Presidential Series of 1938, over the years the stamps have become known simply as the "Prexies".

The Prexies consists of thirty-two face different designs issued in a variety of colors and formats, including sheets, booklet panes as well as horizontal and vertical coils. In addition, two stamps were overprinted for emergency use in the Canal Zone.

Because Federal Law prohibits the image of a living person to be portrayed on a postage stamp, the Series pictures the likenesses of the twenty-nine Presidents who had died before 1938.

The Series also depicts the first Postmaster General, Benjamin Franklin, the first First Lady, Martha Washington, and the Presidential residence, the White House.

The Prexie Series can be seen as a mini-history lesson. From George Washington on the 1 cent stamp to Calvin Coolidge on the \$5 denomination, the Presidents appear in order of ascendancy. In fact, until the 22 cent value depicting Grover Cleveland, because of his split terms, the denomination of the stamp matches the numerical order of the pictured President.

The Prexies were in use from the late Thirties until they were replaced by the Liberty Series in the late Fifties, a period which offered a rich mixture of postal rates and fees. Some Prexies were issued to pay specific rates while others paid rates formulated years after the stamps were issued. Others had only complex combinations of rates and fees associated with them.

The following ten frames show the 1938 Presidential Series by denomination in ascending face value order. Non-philatelic, commercial usages have been chosen to show the wide range of domestic and international rates and fees from 1938 through 1959.