

THE TWILIGHT OF THE PREXIES: 1954-1962

Synopsis

First a little bragging. This exhibit served as the basis for my series of five articles that appeared in *The United States Specialist* between September 2015 and October 2016. It later served as the basis for one of my essays in *Prexie Era Postal History and Stamp Production, 1938-1962*, an anthology edited by Louis Fiset and published by the American Philatelic Society in 2017.

What is this exhibit all about? My exhibit focuses on usages of the U.S. Presidential Series stamps (“Prexies”) after the Post Office Department began to introduce the Liberty Series with the release of the 8¢ value on April 9, 1954. Except for the two **CANAL ZONE** overprinted stamps that are beyond the scope of the exhibit, the U.S. Post Office Department issued all the denominations and formats of the Presidential Series in a nine month period during 1938-1939. By contrast, it took eleven years to do the same for the Liberty Series. Even ignoring the 25¢ Liberty Series coil stamp of 1965, which had no equivalent in the Presidential Series, it still took seven years to phase in the Liberty Series. Either way, the Prexie-to-Liberty transitional period was a long one.

Why are there so many items with philatelic connections? I have been collecting Prexie postal history in earnest since the early 1980s, and while I have not done a scientific study, it is my personal experience that after 1954 the proportion of Prexie covers (including cards, parcel wrappers, tags, mailing labels, etc.) with philatelic connections continuously increased, while the proportion of those apparently without philatelic connections shrank. As the next few years passed, this trend rapidly accelerated, and by 1959-1960 the majority of mail pieces bearing one or more Prexies were addressed to or from stamp dealers, philatelic organizations, philatelic publications, or well known stamp collectors.

Organization. I organized the exhibit in roughly chronological order, with each year beginning a new chapter in the transition from the Prexies to the Liberty Series. Why? Because the story is essentially a chronological one, so that is the best way to present it.

The end of the era. We all know that the Prexie era began on April 25, 1938, with the official release of the 1¢ sheet stamp. But when did it end? Except for the two items on the epilogue page, I use the end of 1962 as the cutoff date. My choice is not entirely arbitrary. The last shipments of Prexies had been sent to post offices during Fiscal Year 1960, which ended June 30 that year. The 11¢ Liberty Series stamp, the final one that had an equivalent in the Presidential Series, was issued June 15, 1961. Furthermore, after the end of 1962, nearly all the Prexie covers that I have seen have some sort of philatelic connection. While exceptions do exist, it is entirely reasonable to consider December 31, 1962, as the end of the Prexie Era. *The Twilight of the Prexies* thus runs from April 9, 1954, through December 31, 1962.

Postal history discovery. The July 27, 1959, cover on page 62 shows two 25¢ Prexies paying two times the 25¢ per half ounce air mail rate to Pitcairn Island via New Zealand, a rate that went into effect in 1949. The rate does not appear in *U.S. International Postal Rates, 1872-1996*, by Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz and Henry W. Beecher. However, my own research found official documentation of it, which I present in the exhibit and which I reported in *The United States Specialist*.

Exhibit history. I have shown *The Twilight of the Prexies* only three times before, always at national level shows. The first time was at Chicagopex in 2015, where it won a Vermeil medal. The second time was at Aripex in 2016, where it won a Silver medal as well as the Women Exhibitors’ Sterling Award. The third time was at Nojex in 2017, where the exhibit again won a Vermeil medal. Since that time, I have acquired and mounted enough additional material to expand the exhibit from five to six frames.