

QUERIES AND COMMENT.

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Our readers are cordially invited to ask the editor for *any* information desired concerning stamp collecting. Should a personal reply be desired kindly enclose postage. This department is for the beginner as well as the advanced collector. Address C. E. SEVERN, 820 Oxford Bdg., Chicago, Ill.

E. J. E.—This correspondent writes: "I have some stamps of New South Wales, perforated O. S., N. S. W. and would like to know if they were perforated officially or are they a private mark?" The stamps referred to are regular government issues and they are used as official stamps. The advent of these perforated official stamps has developed a philatelic problem whose solution has been variously given. The collectibility of these stamps has been discussed from different view-points and there is no consensus of opinion on the subject. As the question is one of importance and is enlarging in scope we take space enough to give an opinion on "Punctured Official Stamps" from the *London Philatelist*, May 1905. After reading the following, the thinking collector may draw his own conclusions: "Among the hybrid issues and postal abortions which now, generally speaking, do duty as the postage stamps of Australia, the current long stamps of South Australia take a prominent place, alike for their abnormal size, their mean and colourless design, and the large number of varieties caused by alterations in the inscriptions and perforations. The specialist in the stamps of this country, which in its early issues affords so many philatelic delights, must surely find that he has enough and to spare, of varieties in this ungainly set, but now he is face-to-face with the announcement that the whole set up to 5s has been supplied to the government departments, punctured for official use with the letters 'S. A.' Should this list be extended up to the 20 pound (postal?) value, with prospective changes of die or perforation, a delightful vista is opened up. The question of the value of these 'punctured surcharges,' if we may coin a somewhat anomalous definition, is, however, one that, in reply to several queries that we have received, is not easily soluble. The main question as to the real status of all official stamps is one that has already been raised in these columns and may—especially in view of the interest and scarcity now attached to many of the English official stamps—be for the moment relegated but it is inevitably a point that will have to be much debated hereafter. The substitution, however, of a definite overprint for an indefinite puncturation is, on a postage stamp, so striking an alteration that it may well give pause to the specialist as to whether he should not draw the line at the former. Opinions

hereon will differ, and we cannot, for instance, agree with the *Australian Philatelist*, e. g.: 'A collector has asked us what the status is of the O. S. punctured stamps as compared to the stamps that were surcharged O. S. After mature consideration we give it as our opinion that both stand on the same plane. It does not matter what methods are employed to distinguish stamps used for official from those used for private service. We admit that the punching or perforation of the letters somewhat detracts from the appearance of a stamp, but this does not make the stamp less collectible.' MEKEEL'S WEEKLY holds a somewhat similar opinion, and considers that it is 'simply a distinguishing mark, and that if "official" in one case, the same rule must apply to the other one. If surcharges are to be listed, one cannot escape when the same thing is perforated in the stamp instead of printed on it, with the same object in view.' Our contemporaries, however, overlook one or two very important features. . . . These two classes of official stamps may have equal 'value,' i. e., both possessing an official notification on the stamp that they are not available for ordinary postage, but in one case their appearance is not materially damaged by the surcharge, while their philatelic interest is frequently heightened in the case of varieties; in the other case the stamp is badly mutilated, and portions of the design being cut away, the stamp is greatly disfigured and, in fact, damaged. To any real philatelist this must be a strongly deterring feature. A second and even more important feature is the practical impossibility of knowing whether a 'punctured surcharge' is genuine or not. The case of the official West Australian stamps with the round holes (formerly believed to be convict stamps!) is to the point. Their collection today is confined to but very few, nor would any collector appraise any stamp thus punctured at the same price as the specimen without the puncture. This must evidently be the case with punctured surcharges, as no one would be able to decide whether they were official or officious. For these cogent reasons we believe that the class of philatelists who affect official stamps will very generally confine their collections to those specimens that were surcharged only.

Several collectors who have written describing or submitting United States stamps of the earlier issues with one side imperforate and showing a margin so wide sometimes as to include part of the colored design of the next stamp are referred to the following explanation of the cause of the vagary. Many of the stamps in question were printed in sheets of two hundred stamps consisting of two panes of one hundred stamps ranged side by side. An imperforate, a blank margin separated the two panes and the center of this blank divisional space was indicated by a line or arrow for the guidance of the cutter who divided the original sheet of two hundred stamps into the sheets, as sold, of one hundred stamps. In cutting the sheets in twain, the knife sometimes veered to one side, even to the extent of striking the stamps at one of the sides. Consequently, one stamp along the margin had an abnormal width, even to the extent of showing the next stamp, as we have said. In view of this erratic tendency, a single United States stamp with a wide margin at side by no means is proof of original imperforation at side and the well informed collector does not recognize imperforation of this kind unless the condition is confirmed by the visible evidence of a pair of the stamps showing the variation.

It should be said that some United States stamps were perforated so much out of line that freak varieties of startling kind were the result. In cases, the perforations on three sides could be removed by scissors, leaving four ample margins, counting the one at the side that was regularly imperforate. Singly this stamp could stand as one that was originally imperforate if one were not acquainted with the possibilities of manipulation. Again, the stamp was sometimes perforated so that no more than two-thirds of the printed design was left. Such curiosities or oddities in the past were esteemed more highly than they are at present and they were sought after by a number of collectors, with the consequence that the varieties, as described, had a decided added value over the prices of the ordinary specimens; nowadays, the tendency is to consign them to an unimportant berth and there is no demand worthy of attention, for them.