

M8.7 - Use by Colgan Stamp Company, Update

William C. Allen (#629)

Blame it on the Korean War!

In the May 1995 issue of *The Perfin Bulletin*, p. 74, there was an article on the State of Michigan perfin (M8.7) being used on a Colgan Stamp Company envelope. The article and the conjecture that it incorporated was basically correct; however, I thought I would add the facts that lead up to the use of the stamps.

Now for the real story . . .

Kalamazoo, Michigan was at one time known as the paper making city of Michigan due to its many paper mills. Kalamazoo was also the home of many, many weekend stamp dealers. Fred Farnam, Bill Foy, Larry Edmunds, Jack Wierick, the Chamber Brothers (who published *Chambers Stamp Magazine*), and others whose names I have forgotten. Growing up in Kalamazoo in the 1950's, I attended the Kalamazoo Stamp Club meetings for many years. I rubbed shoulders with these fine collectors who taught me how to collect and respect the classic stamps of the world.

Many of the older collectors had made contact with the ladies who sorted paper in the paper mills. The ladies used to fill shopping bags full of stampless and classic covers as well as with stamps they tore off of the tons of envelopes and documents they sorted for the pulping process. The ladies sold the shopping bags to the weekend dealers for a couple of dollars a bag. I sure wish they were still around as I would like to by a couple of bags full. Early covers weren't readily collected then and not many people liked manuscript cancels. I remember one older collector who soaked off all 1847 issue stamps with manuscript cancels. He had several small stockbooks full of the 5 and 10 cent stamps with manuscript cancels.

One collector/dealer, Jack Wierick, managed to buy a box car full of postal note stubs that were in very large bales. These stubs contained the various postal note stamps that were almost impossible to obtain. He bought them from one of the paper companies who had purchased them as scrap paper from the Post Office Department. For years Jack advertised these at \$4.25 a set in *Chambers Stamp Magazine* under the trade name of Brown. Jack owned Brown's Tailor Shop. When he passed away in the 70's he still had a bale of the stubs in his garage. I don't know what ever happened to them.

Now this leads us to the subject at hand, the use of perfin pattern M8.7 on the Colgan cover.

One day, one of the ladies brought in a shopping bag half filled with sheets of the 1922 series 2 cent stamp. All the sheets were perforated with the circle M. Some of the sheets had the top row not perforated and some of the sheets were stuck together. It was obvious that some of the sheets had been subject to water damage. Jack asked where they came from. The lady responded that the paper mill had received a large amount of fire damaged scrap paper from a Lansing source. Of course, Jack bought the stamps at the usual price because there were damaged by water and were full of holes (M's).

Initially, Jack used the unperfected ones for correspondence. Stamp dealers then as now take unused stamps in payment for stamps. Jack bought many stamps from a number of sources. Finally, he started to use the perforated stamps to pay for the stamps he purchased.

One day, he was visited by a Michigan State Trooper and a Postal Inspector. The officer had a letter from a stamp dealer written to the Governor of Michigan asking if the State was so poor that they had to sell their stamps. The letter was passed to the Michigan State Police to investigate how Jack came into the position of the stamps.

Jack explained how he got them. The trooper asked Jack if he would give the stamps back. Jack replied in no way. The trooper said that they were the property of Michigan. Jack argued that they were not as the state threw them away with lots of other scrap paper. The trooper turned to the Postal Inspector, who offered the opinion that while the perfin with the circle M inferred that they were the property of the State of Michigan, in this case it was not clear that they were still state property, since the state had disposed of them. Much discussion ensued, Jack held his ground and told the authorities to take what ever legal action they desired. He would hold the perforated stamps pending any legal decision. The matter was eventually dropped and Jack continued to use the stamps.

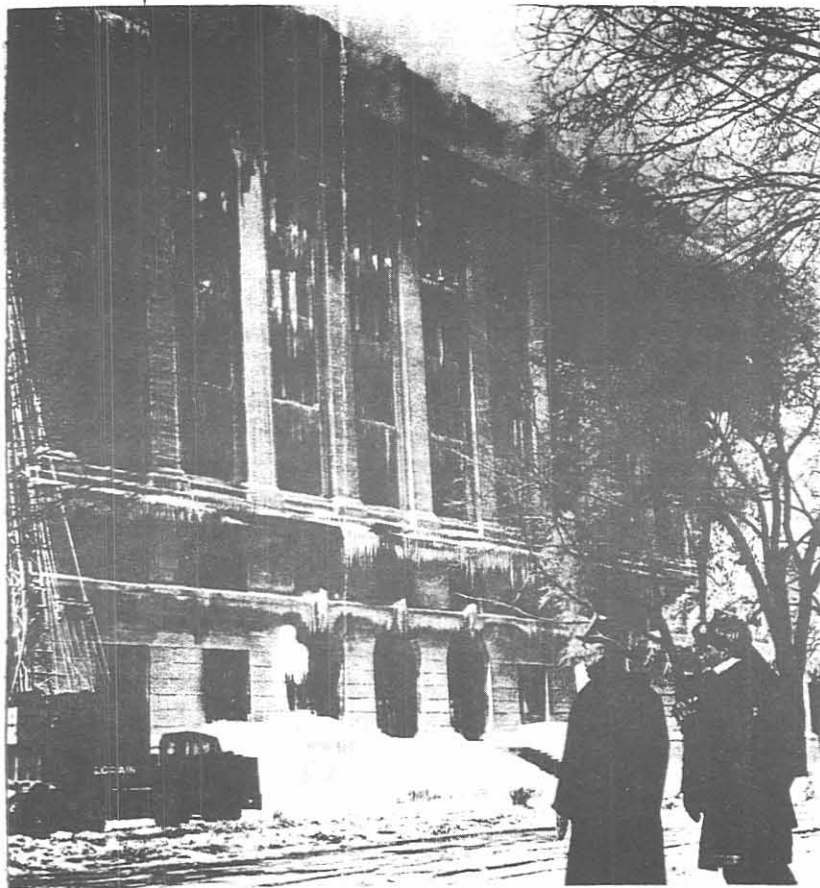
How did they get that way?

How did a large quantity of stamps get to the mill? Guess that you can blame it on the Korean War, as I said earlier. A 19-year old State Highway Department employee thought a small criminal record might keep him out of the draft. He worked in the state office building (now called the Lewis Cass Building) in Lansing. The top floors of this building that occupied half a block was filled with tons of state records dating back to the 1830's.

During his lunch hour on February 8, 1951, he set a small fire to the maps in his office. The fire, got out of control, and spread to the top floors where all the records were stored and burned for a week. The fire department had to literally rip the top floor off the building to get at the fire. The water and later ice from the water destroyed tons of state records. The damage was estimated at over \$8 million dollars. The resulting mess of soggy paper was sent to the paper mills in Kalamazoo.

As you can see from the photograph on page 94 the building was a mess.

Yes, this criminal act did result in the subject not being drafted as was sent to prison for arson.



I know these facts to be true, as I personally knew Jack Wierick and retired from the Michigan State Police after serving for over 26 years. I have a few of the 2 cent sheets somewhere in my perfin files. For years, I have been unsuccessful in my attempt to obtain a cover using a perfin from this event.