

# Postal Regulations for Perforated Insignia

By Louis E. Repeta (#1481)

A short time after postage stamps were introduced in Great Britain to prepay postal fees, they were recognized as a convenient way to transmit small amounts of money. They could be used to purchase articles from commercial houses. This universal practice continues today.

The British Post Office was authorized to redeem unused postage stamps from individuals who presented them. This situation created a temptation for some employees to supplement their income by reducing the inventory of their employer's postage stamps.

To provide some measure of security, the practice of perforating initials or insignia of private origin in postage stamps for identification was authorized March 13, 1868, in Great Britain. Postage stamps that have been punched with small holes in the form of initials, a design, or some private mark before use are called "Perfins." This is an acronym for PERForated INSignia. The British Post Office would not accept unused perfinned stamps for refund. The security endorsement provided by the perfin was, to a degree, successful.

By 1872 perfins were in use in Belgium; then Denmark, France, Germany and Switzerland allowed their use in 1876. This was followed by perfin use in Austria (1877), Italy (1890), Japan (1902), and the Netherlands (1903).

The use of perfin devices in the United States was authorized by Postmaster General George von L. Meyer's Order No. 1251, dated April 7, 1908. Section 562, paragraph 4, of the Postal Laws and Regulations was to be amended as follows:

*United States postage stamps, to be acceptable for postage, must be absolutely without defacement: Provided, That for the purpose of identification only, and not for advertising, it shall be permissible to puncture or perforate letters, numerals, or other marks or devices in United States postage and special-delivery stamps. The punctures or perforations shall not exceed one sixty-fourth of an inch in diameter, and the whole*

In the July/August *Bulletin*, I said that perfins were authorized for use on U.S. stamps as of May 8, 1908. That was wrong, and Louis E. Repeta was quick to supply the correct information. In addition, Repeta gave permission to reprint an article he wrote for the March 1995 *United States Specialist* concerning the origins and use of perfins. He also supplied photocopies of the pertinent postal regulations.

Floyd A. Walker

# The May 4, 1908, postal regulation authorizing perfins remains unchanged

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space occupied by the identifying device shall not exceed one-third inch square. The puncturing or perforating must be done in such manner as to leave the stamp eas-

ily recognizable as genuine and not previously used. The text of paragraph No. 3 of this Order reaffirmed the maximum diameter hole size and the maximum space occupied as stated in Order No. 1342.

It was never U.S. Post Office Department policy to buy back unused postage stamps. If it were, the discount postage market would dry up.

Permits were never required by perfin users. Instructions to U.S. postal employees that restricted the use of perfined stamps were never issued. A policy that refused to accept private first-class or special delivery mail franked with perfins was never introduced by the POD.

A horizontal strip of four 3¢ Stuarts on the special delivery letter, shown below, carried the perfin of the National City Bank of New York and went through the mails promptly. The security endorsement provided by the perfin did reduce—but didn't stop—the unauthorized use of perfined postage stamps.

The original authorization for perfins on U.S. stamps was published April 7, 1908, but amended less than a month later to increase the size of permissible holes and the overall permissible size of the perfin pattern. The May 4 order is still in effect.

Postal employees have never been authorized to refuse mail with perfins even if the perfins were known to be used by someone other than the perfin owner.

## ORDER OF THE POSTMASTER GENERAL.

OFFICE OF THE POSTMASTER GENERAL,  
WASHINGTON, D. C., Apr. 7, 1908.

ORDER No. 1251.

ORDERED, That the Postal Laws and Regulations be amended as indicated below. Amend Section 562, paragraph 4, to read as follows:

"United States postage stamps, to be acceptable for postage, must be absolutely without defacement: *Provided*, That for the purpose of identification only, and not for advertising, it shall be permissible to puncture or perforate letters, numerals or other marks or devices in United States postage and special-delivery stamps. The punctures or perforations shall not exceed one sixty-fourth of an inch in diameter, and the whole space occupied by the identifying device shall not exceed one-third inch square. The puncturing or perforating must be done in such manner as to leave the stamp easily recognizable as genuine and not previously used. The use of ink or other coloring matter in connection with such puncturing or perforating is prohibited."

Amend Section 562 h - - -  
"A - - -"

## ORDER OF THE POSTMASTER GENERAL.

OFFICE OF THE POSTMASTER GENERAL,  
WASHINGTON, D. C., May 4, 1908.

ORDER No. 1342.

Section 562, paragraph 4, as amended by Postmaster General's Order No. 1251, of April 7, 1908, is hereby further amended to read as follows:

"United States postage stamps, to be acceptable for postage, must be absolutely without defacement: *Provided*, That for the purpose of identification only, and not for advertising, it shall be permissible to puncture or perforate letters, numerals or other marks or devices in United States postage and special-delivery stamps. The punctures or perforations shall not exceed one thirty-second of an inch in diameter, and the whole space occupied by the identifying device shall not exceed one-half inch square. The puncturing or perforating must be done in such manner as to leave the stamp easily recognizable as genuine and not previously used. The use of ink or other coloring matter in connection with such puncturing or perforating is prohibited."

G. V. L. MEYER,  
Postmaster General.

ily recognizable as genuine and not previously used. The use of ink or other coloring matter in connection with such puncturing or perforating is prohibited.

Less than one month later, Postmaster General Meyer issued Order No. 1342, dated May 4, 1908. The maximum permissible hole diameter was increased to one thirty-second of an inch, and the whole space occupied by the identifying device was increased to one-half inch square.

Acting Postmaster General Joseph Stewart issued Order No.

