

S.P.I.F.S, Perfins, PIMAPS

—and Punchies!

What to call stamps with holes in them has not always been a matter of agreement.

Toke Norby, who has an impressive home page on the Internet (it can be accessed through a link from the Perfins Club web site) devotes considerable attention to the terminology of perfins collecting.

His curiosity, he says, leads him to wonder about such things as why stamps with holes in them are called *perfins*.

Actually, there are two terms for the stamps we collect: *S.P.I.F.S.* and *perfins*. The former is always used in all caps with periods and the latter, an acronym, is usually lower case without periods.

One term is British, the other is American. Over the years, the American term has been accepted around the world, even in Great Britain.

Which term came first—and who coined each of them—may be open to some disagreement.

Former Perfins Club president Dick Mewhinney says the term *perfin* was first used in print in the early part of 1943 by Hallock Card, the founder of the Perfins Club. Whether Card came up with the term on his own or borrowed it from somebody else may never be known. The Perfins Club's first elected president, Warren Travell, had apparently been collecting perfins since around 1930 so he may have been using the term and suggested it to Card.

In all the earlier literature we have seen, there are references to *stamps perforated with firm's initials* and just *perforated initials*, but no use of the term *perfins*.

I have a copy of an article published over several issues of the *Weekly Philatelic Gossip* in June, July, and August 1936. The article, by George Harnden, is a solid intro-

(Continued on page 176)

The bright side is that Victor Van Lint's term never caught on

(Continued from page 173)

duction to the subject of perfins, but Harnden says he believes the only proper name for them is one he coined: *Private Identification Markings Applied to Postage Stamps*. Harnden didn't take the next step and suggest *PIMAPS*, which may be why the name never caught on.

Apparently Mr. Harnden had not been aware of an earlier work by British collector F. Hugh Vallancey, titled *British Stamps Perforated with Firms' Initials (S.P.I.F.S.)*. That work, published as part of a series called *Stamp Collectors' Handbook*, came out in 1933. Vallancey credits Charles Bein with coining the abbreviation *S.P.I.F.S.*

So, we can credit Bein with *S.P.I.F.S.*, Hallock Card with *perfins*, and George Harnden with *PIMAPS*, although he would likely shudder at the use of the abbreviation.

But just what does the term *perfins* stand for?

There are two versions, and it's up to you to choose the one you prefer. Is *perfins* short for **perforated initials** or **perforated insignia**?

Norby suggests that *insignia* has a somewhat restricted meaning that precludes its use to describe letters punched in stamps.

The downside of *initials*, of course, is that it doesn't cover designs or numerals.

Regardless of its precise etymology, it can safely be said that *perfins* has come into its own as a word. It hasn't made it into the *American Heritage* or *Webster's* yet, but it is an acronym that has been widely accepted in the philatelic literature.

It is the late Victor Van Lint, a member of the Perfins Club and a prolific writer about the subject, who really gives us something to be thankful for, however. He used the term *punchies* to describe stamps with holes perforated in them.

I'm so glad I'm not the editor of the *Punchies Bulletin*!