

The Presidential Issue

By Richard Pederson

When I first started collecting stamps, one of the issues that attracted my eye was the Presidential issue of 1938. Figure 1, Used 13¢ Presidential, pictures the value from the set containing the bust of our 13th president, Millard Fillmore. In those days, you could readily purchase inexpensive packets of stamps that contained sets or portions of sets of used stamps. Those packets of stamps, which were usually priced from 10¢ to \$1, were available from a variety of suppliers, including H. E. Harris. I usually, confined myself to the 10¢ and 25¢ packets, because a dollar was a big investment for me in the mid to late 1950s. I would make regular trips to the local hobby shop and to the Woolworth's five and dime store, which had a hobby area that sold stamps and coins. Whenever one of those stores got in a new supply of stamp packets, it was like Christmas for me. You never knew what treasures might show up in one of those packets. The larger packets displayed some items in the front behind a plastic film and had additional unseen stamps in the back of the envelope that contained the remaining stamps. Although the better items were always displayed in the front, I always believed I was going to be the lucky one to discover some rare treasure in the back of the packet.



Figure 1. Used 13¢ Presidential

As a child, my first stamp album was “The Premier World Stamp Album” sold by the Grossman Stamp Company of New York. For the most part, the Premier stamp album contained lower value and lower denomination stamps, but it did contain the entire Presidential set, excluding the coils. As I started filling up spaces in the United States section of my album, I quickly became consumed with the task of completing the Presidential issue. I went to every store I could find that sold stamp packets and if a given packet had just one of the more elusive values I needed, I would purchase the packet in an attempt to close in on my quest of completing the set. I remember the 11 cent through the 14 cent and the 16 cent through the 19 cent values being particularly difficult to acquire. Finally, after much searching and trading with friends, I was able to obtain every item in the set with the exception of the two and five dollar values containing Warren G. Harding and Calvin Coolidge (see Figure 2, Mint \$5 Presidential), respectively. To my disappointment, the packets that I was able to afford just did not contain those two stamps. Fortunately, after showing my Great Uncle Walter

(who had started me on my journey of collecting stamps) my almost complete set, he came to my rescue and presented me used copies of the two missing stamps as my reward for diligently pursuing the other values. Now I was able to sit back and admire, what seemed to me, a wonderful set of stamps that was not only extremely attractive, but displayed all deceased Presidents in the order they served. In addition, the set included Benjamin Franklin, the first Postmaster General along with the first First Lady, Martha Washington, and the home of the Presidents, the White House.

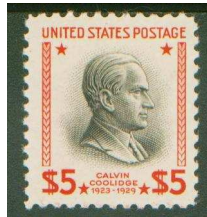


Figure 2. Mint \$5 Presidential

Although the engraved designs of the Presidential issue are simple, containing a bust of each President along with the President's name, years in office, the stamp's denomination, and the words "United States Postage", the issue is strikingly attractive when viewed as a whole. The beautifully engraved designs accompanied by the myriad of different yet contrasting colors makes this a set that continues to fascinate me as much as it did as a small child. My childhood odyssey to complete the Presidential set has expanded into a much broader interest as I have gotten older. I first replaced my used copies with mint stamps and then added plate blocks, horizontal and vertical coils, first day covers, varieties (e.g., partially perforated copies), and postal history (see Figure 3, Use of 50¢ Presidential to Foreign Destination). I still have a long way to go on my journey of collecting this one fascinating series that grabbed my attention as a child and has further fueled my interest in stamp collecting as an adult.

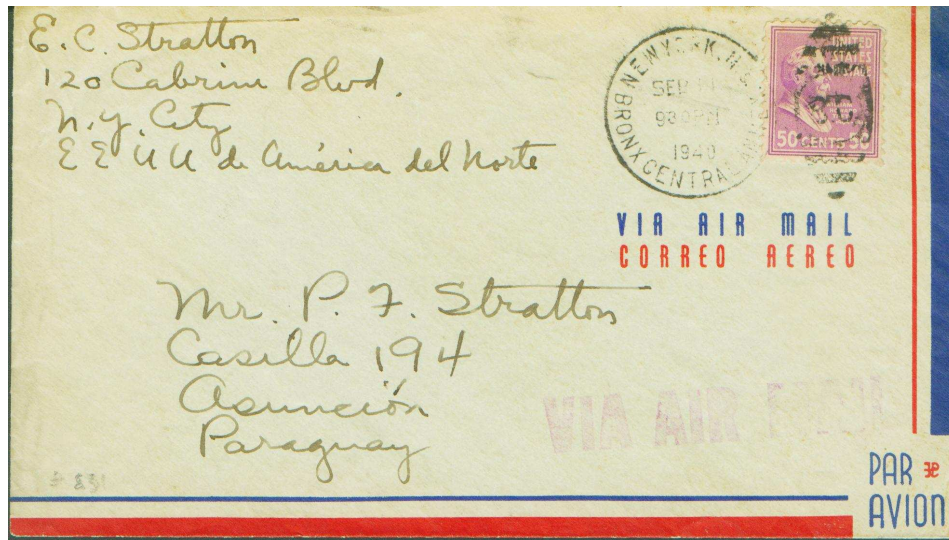


Figure 3. Use of 50¢ Presidential to Foreign Destination