

INTRODUCTION

Exhibiting perfin involves more than showing selected pages of a perfin collection. It requires the exhibitor to arrange the material to be displayed according to a plan with a theme or story to tell. The scope of a perfin collection is based on the personal preferences of the collector. A stamp exhibit is subject to evaluation by a committee of philatelic judges in accordance with judging standards.

It is important for philatelic judges and viewers to understand the plan before studying the exhibit. This is accomplished with the use of a title page. When completing the prospectus to enter a stamp show competition, it is customary for the exhibitor to submit the title page or a more comprehensive synopsis of the exhibit with the application to exhibit.

PERFINS

The term perfin is an acronym derived from the words **Perforated Insignias** (or **Initials**). Perfins are perforated letters, numerals, or symbols in postage stamps that originally were utilized by companies and organizations to restrict usage of their stamps to authorized individuals. The use of perfins expanded to personal and government usage. In some instances extra holes ("control" holes) were added to the perfin design to designate specific offices within the same organization.

Guide To Perfin Exhibiting

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Occasionally documents and envelopes were perforated directly with similar perforating machines. These, too, are not defined as perfins, but may be exhibited following perfin exhibit guidelines.

In the United States the use of perfins was authorized by Postal Law and Regulation on May 8, 1908. Two restrictions were imposed: that the perfin design be limited to 1/2 inch on each side, and that the holes be no more than 1/32 in diameter.

There is a wide range of year of authorization of perfins in various countries. Since stamps issued prior to the authorization date often were still valid for postage, many perfin users perforated all stamps in their possession. Therefore, unless these early stamp issues appear on cover or are postmarked with a readable date, they can not be used to extend the known period of usage of a perfin design. Also, a retired perfin device may be acquired by a collector who then uses it to prepare perfins for personal use. The exhibitor must be wary of this usage and document it in the exhibit.

Some authorization dates for perfin use are:

1869	Great Britain
1870's	Malaya, Ceylon
1875	Netherlands
1876	Switzerland, France
1877	Hungary, Austria, Australian States
1880's	Italy
1883	New Zealand
1884	Portugal
1887	Canada

With the advent of precancels and postal meters, perfin utilization in the United States has declined although some private firms, government offices, universities and individuals continue to use them. Philatelic and individual perfins have been used in connection with stamp exhibitions and commemorations, to encourage perfin collecting, to identify company salespeople, and to advertise a business or event. For a short period of time each officer of the U.S. Perfins Club had his own perfinned stamps, each individual identified by the placement of an additional code hole.

Other holes punched in stamps such as those used as canceling devices and those used to demonetize stamps are not perfins. On the other hand, early French star and triangular holes were perfin forerunners and fit the security purpose for which perfins were utilized. Underprints as used by the Oxford Union Society in London are another example of a perfin forerunner; but advertising on the gum side of a stamp is not.

Some stamps have been punch-perforated with the word SPECIMEN (Spanish - MUESTRA, Italian SAGGIO, German - MUSTER), or letters OS and OHMS. Specimen perforations are initial printings of new issues that were supplied to the Universal Postal Union for distribution to the postal officials of member countries for the purpose of identification and for their archives. (In addition to punch-perforations, the word SPECIMEN may be found overprinted or handstamped on stamps.) Although these punch-perforations were produced with the same type of perforating machines as perfins, they do not fulfill the original role of perfins as a means of security from the theft of a business's or organization's postage stamps. Specimen stamps initially were not intended for use as valid postage, perfins were. Although of different intent than perfins, an exhibit of specimen stamps, punched or printed, may be prepared and judged in the same manner as a perfin exhibit.

Prime factors in the preparation of an exhibit are organization and design, research and knowledge, and creativity and originality. The exhibitor should define in the introduction the significance and scope of the exhibit. The title page may include an outline of the exhibit contents, a method for the reviewer to recognize significant material, and evidence of research. To assist the philatelic judges to prepare for evaluating the exhibit, a synopsis and a list of suggested reference material are recommended adjuncts to the application to exhibit.

MATERIAL

The material selected tells the story. Individual perfins, multiples and covers may be used. Forgeries and counterfeit stamps, and unauthorized users must be identified. Small, uncluttered maps that show transportation routes particularly in an exhibit of railroad perfins may enhance an exhibit. In general, display of photographs, the picture side of a postcard without a perfin or identifying information about the perfin user, and non-philatelic or irrelevant material should be restricted.

Not only the condition of the stamps and covers should be the best available, but complete, well-centered perfin patterns are preferable. Missing and misaligned holes in the perfin design that resulted from missing or damaged pins illustrate the deterioration and repair of a perforating die or carelessness on the part of the person preparing the perfins. Plating differences of a multi-headed perfin device also occur. Explanation of the cause of these perfin variations is evidence of knowledge and research.

1890's	Spain
1891	Romania
1902	Australian State officials
1907	Sweden
1908	United States
1918	Czechoslovakia
1922	Ireland

It has been estimated that there are perfins in stamps from two hundred countries with a total of about 40,000 perfin designs. In the United States about 6000 perfin designs have been found.

In England the term SPIFS has been applied to perfins. The acronym stands for Stamps Printed with Initials of Firms or Societies. Another interpretation is Stamps Perforated for Insurance against Fraud.

THE EXHIBIT

The theme and scope of an exhibit may limit the level of award. A logical story, clearly told with brevity of words and completeness of thought is necessary. Narrow scope requires greater depth than does broad coverage. Types of perfin exhibits include:

- Geographic: country, region, state (U.S.A.), city
- Commemorate an event or honor a person
- Topical design or subject: stamp or perfin
- Type of stamp: airmail, special delivery, fiscal, revenue
- Single issue or set
- Precancel-perfins
- Multi-country usage of same perfin design
- Multiple or branch offices of the same firm or institution
- Specimens

PRESENTATION

Presentation refers to the general appearance of an exhibit and the exhibitor's skill in selecting and organizing the material. References for techniques of designing the pages are readily available. General guidelines include such recommendations as avoid overcrowding the pages, select the best quality stamps and covers available, and let the material exhibited tell the story with a minimum but sufficient write-up. Be sure to establish a method of illustrating the perfin design. Whether a stamp is mounted on a dark background gum side up or whether the design is drawn or photographed, be consistent throughout the exhibit.

Mounting perfins face-up or face-down is the prerogative of the exhibitor. Black or colored backing often reveals the perfin design better than a white background but the colored mount should be small enough not to detract from the stamp itself. Showing the face of less commonly used stamps adds philatelic value to an exhibit. Face-up stamps with dated cancellations show the period of use of the perfin design. In some instances the postmark may extend the known period of usage of the design.

The perfin design may occur in any of eight positions when the stamp is viewed from the front. Sheets of stamps may have been folded prior to insert into the perforating device and the sheet may have been inserted top, bottom or side first. Strips or blocks of stamps with the perfin in varying positions illustrate the method of perforation and add interest to an exhibit.

JUDGING CRITERIA

Once the exhibitor has established the theme, scope, and organization of the exhibit, the

responsibility of the committee of philatelic judges is to determine how well the exhibitor has met the defined goals and objectives.

In traditional exhibits importance of the material is a major criterion in determining the award level. Since few philatelic rarities are found among perfined stamps, treatment of the theme and balance and "representativeness" of the material become important characteristics to be judged. Periods of usage of the perfin, die varieties, postal rates and other perfin and general philatelic knowledge should be demonstrated.

Since little has been written about the source of the perforating devices, and few manufacturers or former users have archival information regarding perfins, evidence of research in this area is encouraged.

Recognition of postmarks to extend a period of usage from that previously documented, identification of new perfin designs, or confirmation and identification of users are major contributions to perfin collecting. It has only been about twenty-five years since perfin catalogs have been available. Research in the identification of perfin users is ongoing. Knowledgeable perfin catalogers estimate that one third to one half of the users of perfin devices have not been identified yet.

In a traditional exhibit the study of the stamp is the central theme of the exhibit. Shifts, missing elements of a design, broken letters and other errors and oddities are elements of the study and exhibit of a stamp issue.

In a perfin exhibit, the central theme is the perfin, its usage and variations. Incomplete perfin patterns, missing holes, split designs, etc., illustrate the difficulty of making a "perfect" perfin and may indicate the type of die head (single or multiple,

hand operated or mechanized) and condition of the perforating machine. The care taken by the person assigned the duty of creating the perfinned stamps is also shown. Multiples that indicate the type of die head or fold of the sheet of stamps add interest and value to an exhibit.

Difficulty in finding unusual material should be recognized. For many years perfinns were considered to be damaged goods and often discarded. Much useful collectable material was lost. The majority of perfinned mail with low value postage was used for billings, notice of receipt of items, and advertising. With the exception of bank usage, few high denomination, special delivery and airmail stamps were perfinned. High denomination stamps used for mailing packages were seldom perfinned since heavy packages were probably taken to the post office for mailing. High denomination perfinns that have been found probably were soaked off wrappers and are exhibited as single and multiple stamps.

Minimal perfin usage on international mail occurred. Holiday greeting postcards were frequently sent by businesses to their customers. Railroad lines and other travel-related industries often gave their patrons perfinned stamps to use on their picture postcards.

Some perfinns were prepared in large quantities, had wide use, and are found in most perfin collections. Others were prepared in smaller numbers, had limited use, and are difficult to find. Inventories of large perfin collections have made it possible to include a rarity scale in the U.S. perfin catalogs. It is not recommended that the exhibitor note this scale for every U.S. perfin exhibited, but difficult to acquire stamps should be identified. Rare (less than five known copies) and scarce (less than fifty copies) which are rated as A and B perfinns, may be identified as such in a perfin exhibit.

It is also recognized that the philatelic value of the stamp or cover contributes to the value of the perfin and therefore to the importance of the exhibit.

LEVEL OF AWARDS FOR CONSIDERATION

Well-documented material, neatly presented in an original manner is the aim of the exhibitor. The range of level of award and other recognition should apply to perfin exhibits in the same manner as other exhibits.

The level of award achieved is based on the philatelic judging committee's consensus on how well the exhibitor has achieved the goals set for the exhibit and the following factors:

1. Treatment

- Plan
- Development
- Originality

2. Philatelic Elements

- Perfin and general philatelic knowledge
- Research
- Contents

3. Presentation

REFERENCES FOR PERFIN COLLECTING

NOTES

The Perfins Bulletin, the official publication of The Perfins Club, APS affiliate #57, publisher: Helen Q. Ratzer, 1700 Beaver Ridge Drive, Kettering, OH 45429; editor: John F. Lyding, P.O. Box 3342, Crofton, MD 21114-3342.

Cumulative Index to The Perfins Bulletin, issues 1-453 (1945-1992); available from the Catalog Sales Department: Jackie Ryan, 301 South Hine Ave., Waukesha, WI 53188, The Perfins Club Library: Marvin Mech, Librarian, 119A West Ash, Lombard, IL 60148 or the American Philatelic Research Library, State College, PA.

The following perfin catalogs are available from the Catalog Sales Department or The Perfins Club Library:

U.S. Perfins Catalog, editor John M. Randall
U.S. Railroad Catalog, editor Irvin Holloway
Foreign Catalogs, editor Robert J. Schwerdt

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