



NPL Research POSTAGE PAYMENT PUZZLER

Buzz Oerding

I'm sure everyone has seen one of these. But, really, what is it? Since it is found at post office counters throughout the country is it a postage stamp, a permit or just a label? Postal clerks apply them to any and all mail pieces that they can. They are a lot easier than licking stamps, affixing the correct amount of postage and sometimes finding a place to stick the stamps. Then there is the daily accounting of remaining stamp stock. It is a computerized strip that has taken the place of the old Pitney-Bowes and other style meter tapes. These computerized PVIs, Postage Validation Imprinters, were introduced to the public on 16 April 1992 in California in the towns of Escondido, Solana Beach, San Marcos and the Tierrasanta Postal Store in San Jose. This was the start of the installation of some 50,000 plus little desk top machines at a post office near you.



There are three basic types:



1. without any POSTNET bar code used for any class of mail.

2. with UPC (Universal Product code) for Fourth class mail (parcel post) of the destination and numerically printed below the UPC code.

3a. with POSTNET bar codes where the destination ZIP code is numerically printed and bar coded as well. The POSTNET bar code can be 35mm for the normal 5 digit ZIP codes.

3b. 56mm for a 9 digit code



3c. 67mm for an 11 digit code. This means there are three collectable positions for any one location.

4. This type “label” (sticker) stamp is used for parcels ready for mailing with correct postage already affixed. There is no postage value and serves as identification that the package came in over the counter and this is eligible for air lift.

(Shadow of the Unabomber still is with us)

You will note that the old Postal logo is at the left of the PVI. In 1995 the United States Post Office determined that it needed a streamlined logo so the PVI logo was changed from a stationary eagle to a swift rendition of an eagle. Now remember there were 50 to 60 thousand of these Integrated Retail Terminals distributed in 1992.

A little arithmetic here reveals a doubling of collectables from all possible postal locations equals 100,000 plus times the five types. Selectivity is most probable in making a collection of these “meter subjects”.

A collection of oddities and errors could start with the color of the fluorescent stripe across the top of the PVI which can be red, orange or pink and may even be found on the bottom or missing altogether. Another quite noticeable error is “Unit City, St” in place of a proper town and state designation with “00000” in place of the ZIP code.

My local postal clerk tells me that this error comes with the unit as clerks only have a key to turn the unit on or off. They cannot enter nor delete any of the computerized data.

To my knowledge, no catalog has been published for PVI's. A web site was available but is no longer found active. Linn's Stamp News publishes PVI articles now and again. The United States Postage Stamp Meter Catalog lists the Postage Validation Imprints (PVI) with only one variety listed: the ‘Unit City’ error:



In a February 2002 Linn’s article, Mr. Doug Kelsey reviewed PVI's as an inexpensive collecting experience with one exception: First Day Covers. Since only one type of a PVI is for any mail piece and the other types used mostly on ‘flats’, Mr. Kelsey states, “sets of types 1, 2, and 3 are some of the rarest of all 20th century US FDCs. They sell for many hundreds of dollars when they appear on the market.”

Another common but glaring production/distribution error is the doubling of the state designation:



I can confirm that 31 states and one territory are known doubled. Some cities appear with ST, PH or an incorrect state abbreviation and some states are tied to a non-town or oddly abbreviated locations such as PRP for “Pleasure Ridge Park”, KY, “Y”, WA, “U P BR”, NM or “USAFA”, CO for “United States Air Force Academy”. This is, of course, due to space availability and the current computer short hand, no doubt. APOs and United States territories also use PVIs for general mail services.



One final collecting PVI item would be test strips. Few of these are available as the waste from the machine is closely guarded though I have seen blank strips used as “tape” and as postage due payments. A final note of caution: the adhesive used on PVIs is more like package label glue in strength and thus it is best to collect on piece.

With so many new postal technologies in postal collectable materials there is a reasonable question raised: “How long with their product last?” Already there is fading of the printing on older PVIs. Older? How long ago was 1992?



“The Machine Cancel Forum” the Journal of The Machine Cancel Society. Editor: A. J. Savakis, 141 E. Market, Box 609, Warren, OH 44482-0609 also has PVI features every so often.

“Meter Stamp Society Quarterly Bulletin” David Crotty, PO Box 123, New Hudson, MN 48165-0123 contains PVI updates as they are reported.

United States Postage Stamp Meter Catalog 2nd Edition, 1994 by Joel A. Hawkins and Richard Stambaugh

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IN APPRECIATION

These generous individuals have made significant recent donations to the Northwest Philatelic Library

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Congratulations Salem Stamp Society!

At their February meeting, the Salem Stamp Society, an NPL affiliate, celebrated 75 years as a continuing organization. Their newsletter, *Willamette Stamp and Tong* (newly named, by the way) will feature for member enjoyment 1933 ads from *STAMPS* magazine.

Presidents and presidential contenders being much in the news these days, this tidbit seemed appropriate. It's also a nice reminder that often libraries are relevant for more than just their books. This is a letter from the holdings of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library in Hyde Park, NY, administered by the National Archives. In 1935, after hearing that the nine-year-old son of the U.S. Ambassador to England was a budding philatelist, FDR sent him a packet of stamps from his own collection. This is the thank-you note he received...

HYANNISPORT
 MASSACHUSETTS
 July 4, 1935

Dear Mr. President,
 I liked the stamps you sent me very much and the little book is very useful. I am just starting my collection and it would be great fun to see yours which mother says you have had for a long time

I am going to frame your letter and I am going to keep it always in my room.
 Daddy's mother and all my brothers and sisters want to be remembered to you.
 Bobby Kennedy
 Son of Joseph P. Kennedy