

Washington D.C.
Nov. 15. 1917.

Elliott Perry.

Box 333.

Westfield N. J.

Dear Sir:

In reply to yours of 12th inst. I
try to say you may send the 6¢
Executive to me upon approval also.
3¢ Carmine Executive unused O.G.
if you have one.

My address is 1420 Harvard St.
N.W. Washington. D. C.

Your not re lost stamps. I was
just wondering if this were lost in mail
or sent to some irresponsible party.

If you want any reference. May I
ask that you drop a line to Mr
Wudrow Deafus. Hudson. N.Y. with
whom I have been doing business
for sometime.

Do you handle the Postage due
stamps in unused form?
Yours very truly
H. J. Robey

11/16-17

⊕

Ex + post	net	63-	} 3 Sheets
		3.82	
Int		12.55	
Agriculture		<hr/>	
Total "		79.37	

Washington D. C.
Nov 19-1917.

Elliott Perry, Esq.
Westfield, N. J.
Dear Sir:

I enclose my check herewith for \$12.50 to cover the 64 Executives taken from your approvals. I am sorry I could not use more of them but I am nearly complete in the Departmentals. My only wants in these are 1 cent. Agriculture 1879, and 24 cent. Interior 1879.

The Postage due stamps wanted are Scotts nos. 1204, ~~1247~~, 1254-1257 and 1258

Would also like Scotts 330 b. if you have same. of course all are to be unused. O. G.

Yours very truly
H. J. Robey

1420 Harvard St N W
Washington D. C.

Washington, D. C.

November 30, 1917.

Elliott Perry, Esq.

Hotfield, N. J.

Dear Sir:

Have not heard from you in regard to the Departmental Specimens as requested in my letter of the 24th inst

I am just dropping this note so as to be sure same reached you

Yours very truly
~~Elliott~~

M. J. Robey

1420 Harvard St NW

Wash DC

173-17 Bank

Sat April 1892

1892

1st Inst. Town R.O.

+ State @ 17th Oct - 20th

173-17

Washington D.C.
Dec. 7-1917.

Elliott H. Perry Esq.

Box 333

Horsfield, N.J.

Dear Sir

Enclosed please find check for \$18⁵⁰
for enclosure of yours of the 3rd.

Can you furnish me a price list on
Reveries. if so please forward same.

Let me know when you have
more specimens and will let you
know what ones to send

Yours very truly
H. J. Robey

1420 Howard St NW
Wash DC

GK.
EP

W. T. ROBEY
1420 HARVARD STREET, N. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

Dec. 31 1917.

Elliott Perry Esq.

Box 333

Westfield N. J.

Dear Sir:

Happy New Year! Please send following
U. S. in o. g. blocks of 4 with your
best price on approval

452, 453, 454, 455, 380, 349, 350, 350 a, 351, 352, 352a
353, 354, 357, 361, 355, 315, 316, 301, 302, 302a, 303
and 305,

Please mark catalogue number on
each block.

Yours very truly
W. T. Robey

W. T. ROBEY
1420 HARVARD STREET, N. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

July 21-1918

Elliott Perry Esq.
Box 333. Westfield
N. J.

Dear Sir:

I wish to thank you for your consideration of me in regard to the durs. I am sorry but your approvals of the 18" do not include the ones I need. My wants in this connection are Nos 1211, 1214, 1254 and 1257 all unused. In regards to H. F. C. I have been home sick during the past week. But wrote to him and he told me what ones he had were out on approval but as soon as they were returned, that is if they were, he would send them to me. This fellow Dunkhorst. you speak of. Who is he, what is his name and where does he live. If you can give me this information I will try and get a hold of him.

6/10
1/26-16

W. T. ROBEY
1420 HARVARD STREET, N. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

February, 2 - 1918.

Elliott Perry, Esq.

Box 333.

Westfield, N. J.

Dear Sir:

Have not heard from you in regard to the list of wants in Revenues mailed you a week ago. Please let me hear from you in regard to same.

Yours very truly

W. T. Robey

Dec 10-19

W. T. ROBEY
1420 HARVARD STREET, N. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

Feb 16 - 1918

Elliott Perry Esq.

Box 333.

Westfield N. J.

Since writing my last letter to you, I
have received yours of the 15th. Will you
please not send the newspaper stamps
as requested, but wait and send the
block collection you speak of.

Yours very truly
W. T. Robey

W. T. ROBEY
1420 HARVARD STREET, N. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

Feb. 16-1918.

Elliott Pray, Esq.

Box 333.

Westfield, N. J.

Dear Sir:

If you have not got the Revenues as yet and have any of the newspaper stamps on hand unused. Will you send same along on approval. Any except the 1st issue and the Government Reprints.

Yours very truly
W. T. Robey

W. T. ROBEY
1420 HARVARD STREET, N. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

March 4-1918.

Elliott Perry, Esq.

Box 333.

Hartfield, N. J.

Dear Mr Perry,

Through circumstances over which I have control, I am forced to return the stamps you sent me in your favor of the 27th ulto. I have kept same this long hoping that I might see my way clear to take them but cannot. May I ask you also to kindly not send the blocks of 4 I selected. I trust that in a short while I may again call on you for some of my numerous wants.

Yours very truly
W. T. Robey

Ans 3/6-18.

6/18

Mr. Oswald

W. T. ROBEY
1420 HARVARD STREET, N. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

Dear Sir,

Since writing the above have
succeeded in selling some of your
approvals. I enclose check of \$38⁸⁵
to cover those sold. This party's
check is O.K. you may have no fear
about it not being good.

Yours Truly

W. T. Robey

The Story Of The Discovery Of The 24-Cent Inverted Center Airmail Stamps

Told by the actual finder, W. T. Robey

FOR years the newspapers and the philatelic press of this and foreign countries have told many stories of the discovery of the sheet of one hundred twenty-four cent Air Mail stamps with the center inverted. At this time these stamps are considered one of the rarest items of all stamps that have been issued by the United States as well as foreign countries. The last price seen by the writer was \$3,900.00 for a single copy. During all of these years that have passed since I purchased these stamps I do not recall having seen an article that has given all of the details connected with the purchase and sale of the sheet.

I have often thought that I would like to write all of these details in order that many of the present and all future generations of philatelists may know these facts. At the request of GOSSIP, I have decided to acquaint the philatelic world with the details.

Nearly twenty years have passed since that memorable Tuesday of May 14, 1918, when the sheet of one hundred of the twenty-four cent Airmail stamps with the center inverted were passed over the window to me here in Washington, D. C.

About two years prior to that date, through the efforts of a fellow worker in the office of W. B. Hibbs & Co., stock brokers and bankers where I was at that time employed, I became interested in the collection of postage stamps, especially those of the United States. At that time there were only about three stamp dealers in Washington, the most widely known being the late H. F. Colman, whose office was in the Second National Bank Building. Here was wont to gather nearly everyone interested in the collection of stamps. Among those were the late Jos. B. Leavy, the first curator of the Government exhibit in the Smithsonian Institute, and the present curator, Mrs. Catherine Manning, who at that time was a clerk in Mr. Colman's office and known to everyone as "Miss Kate."

In those days the issuance of a new stamp was a rarity and the cause of much comment in philatelic circles. It had been announced that the new stamp would be in two colors and the possibility of an invert was the cause of much widespread discussion. Just a short time previous to this the famous five-cent error had been discovered and the possibility of an invert

slipping past the watchful eyes of the inspectors in both the Bureau of Engraving and Printing and the post office led us collectors to feel that such a possibility was greater than ever. This country at that time was in the World War and the Bureau of Engraving and Printing was working twenty-four hours a day printing Liberty Bonds and new currency, besides stamps.

Through correspondence, I had made arrangements with collectors in both New York and Philadelphia for the exchange of first day covers. New York, Philadelphia and Washington were the only stops on this, the first authorized airmail route. Early on the morning of May 14, I went to the branch post office nearest my employment to purchase some of the new twenty-four cent airmail stamps to be used to send covers to my friends in New York and Philadelphia. This office was located at 1317 New York Avenue, N. W., and was known as the New York Avenue Branch. Upon referring to the official notice of the placing of these stamps on sale we read in part: "The stamps for mail service will be on sale at the main office and the New York Avenue, F Street, Eleventh Street and the Pennsylvania Avenue stations."

Upon asking for these stamps, the clerk on duty told me that he only had a very few of them but was expecting another consignment about noon of that day. I examined the stamps that he had on hand but due to the poor centering decided to wait until noon before making my purchase. Promptly at noon, I returned to the post office

with \$30.00, which I had previously withdrawn from the bank. The same clerk was on duty at the stamp window and upon inquiring as to whether he had received any additional copies of the Air Mail stamps, he reached down under the counter and brought forth a full sheet and my heart stood still. It was the sheet of inverts. It was what you might call a "Thrill that comes once in a lifetime." Without any comment, I paid for the sheet and then asked the clerk if he had any more sheets. He again reached under the counter and brought up three additional sheets which he said were all he had. An examination showed these sheets to be normal. Had they been otherwise, I wonder how I would have paid for them with only \$6.00 in my pocket? I handed these three sheets back to the clerk and then

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After nearly twenty years the man who found the sheet of 24-cent Air Mail stamps with inverted centers has finally consented to write the complete story of his lucky find, and GOSSIP is fortunate in being selected as the medium through which it is first told to the public.
★



showed him the sheet that I had purchased and drew his attention to the fact that the airplane was upside down. Without any comment he left the window and ran for a telephone. Needless to say, I left that office in a hurry with my sheet of inverts tucked safely under my arm.

The thought then struck me that possibly there might be more of these stamps in some other branch office and I hurried to the Eleventh Street branch, about six blocks away. An examination was made of all of the stock on hand, but failed to reveal any inverts.

Feeling highly elated, I returned to my office to show my fellow worker and collector what I had discovered. He immediately left to make a search of the other branch offices. Then telegrams were sent to friends in both New York and Philadelphia apprising them of my find and giving them the plate number of the sheet. Next I called the office of Mr. Colman on the phone. He was not in, so I told Mrs. Manning what I had discovered, but for some unknown reason she would not believe me.

In all of the conversation had with the clerks in the different offices, I never gave my name, yet, within one hour after my return to work, two postal inspectors called to see me. Upon investigation, I found that my fellow worker had given my name and address during his visits to the different branch offices.

THE VISIT of the postal inspectors proved to be a very interesting one. At first they wanted to know if I had purchased the sheet of the twenty-four cent Air Mail stamps with a purported inverted center. Upon informing that I had, they asked me to let them see it, which I refused to do. Well, the conversation was hot and furious from then on and ended in their making the statement that the Government would confiscate the sheet. This in no way intimidated me and I informed them that they had said enough. Also, I said that "****Before they tried to confiscate the sheet which I had purchased at the face value from the post office, they had better start confiscating the 1869 inverts, the Pan-American inverts, and all of the five-cent errors. After securing them, it was then time to talk about confiscating my property." No doubt, a novice might have been scared into relinquishing the sheet.

Later that afternoon Mr. Colman came to my office to see the sheet and offered me \$500.00 for it. I refused to sell and he informed me that he did not blame me. After work, I took my precious sheet and went to Mr. Colman's office.

Present at that time were Mrs. Manning, Mr. Colman, Mr. Leavy, besides other collectors. All examined the sheet but no one would place a possible value upon it. Mr. Leavy stated that as the stamps were printed in sheets of 400 subjects, it was apparent that there were at least three other similar sheets. History tells us that three more sheets of these stamps were found in the Bureau and promptly destroyed.

At that time, the late Percy Mann, of Philadelphia, was conducting the new issue column of *Mekeel's Weekly*. A telegram was sent him about the find; requesting him to give proper notice of same in his column.

The next day, a reply was received from Mr. Mann, in which he stated that he was coming to Washington that day and would call on me that evening. After making an examination of the sheet, Mr. Mann stated that he was prepared to offer me \$10,000.00 for same and would I accept that sum? I told him that I had made up my mind to go to New York and see what I might possibly get for the sheet there. He then requested that if, in the event his offer was equalled, or bettered, by anyone in New York, that I inform him of such either by phone or telegraph and give him the opportunity to make a further bid for the sheet. This I promised to do. During the course of my conversation with Mr. Mann, I learned that the sale of these stamps was stopped in both New York and Philadelphia for over two hours on the previous day and that collectors and dealers were at a loss to understand why. After the receipt of my telegram he said that he readily understood why the sale had been temporarily stopped.

The next day was Friday, and as previously arranged, I left for New York that afternoon, arriving about 9 P. M. Awaiting me at my hotel were Percy Doane, the well known dealer, and Elliott Perry, "Himself." My fame had preceded me and naturally they wished to see the sheet. I was asked by them if any offer had been made for the sheet, and I informed them that I had refused \$10,000.00.

Bright and early the next morning, I started out to try my luck in disposing of the sheet. My first stop was at the office of the ultimate buyer, Col. E. H. R. Green at 111 Broadway, where I was informed that he was out of the city. Next, I went to the office of Stanley Gibbons, which was at that time managed by Mr. Eustace B. Power, who has frequently condemned all Twentieth Century issues of stamps. At that time Mr. Power was a great humorist. Imagine him offering \$250.00 for \$24.00 face value of "Twentieth Century trash." He also

stated that he knew of three other sheets of these stamps and was negotiating for the purchase of same at that time. Wonder why he never bought them? Later, I went to the office of the Scott Stamp & Coin Co., who only wanted to dispose of the sheet on a commission basis, refusing to make a cash offer.

Feeling rather low and disgusted with my failure to secure a decent offer for the sheet, I returned to my hotel and found waiting for me, Mr. John J. Klemann, who after examining the sheet offered me \$2,500.00 for it. When I told him that I had already refused \$10,000.00 for it, he stated that I was crazy and anyone offering such a price was also crazy.

That evening I phoned Mr. Mann in Philadelphia and told him that I was returning to Washington the next day, that while his price had not been equalled in New York, I had decided not to sell the sheet at that time. He asked me if, on my return to Washington, I would mind stopping off at Philadelphia and have a further talk with him. This I agreed to do.

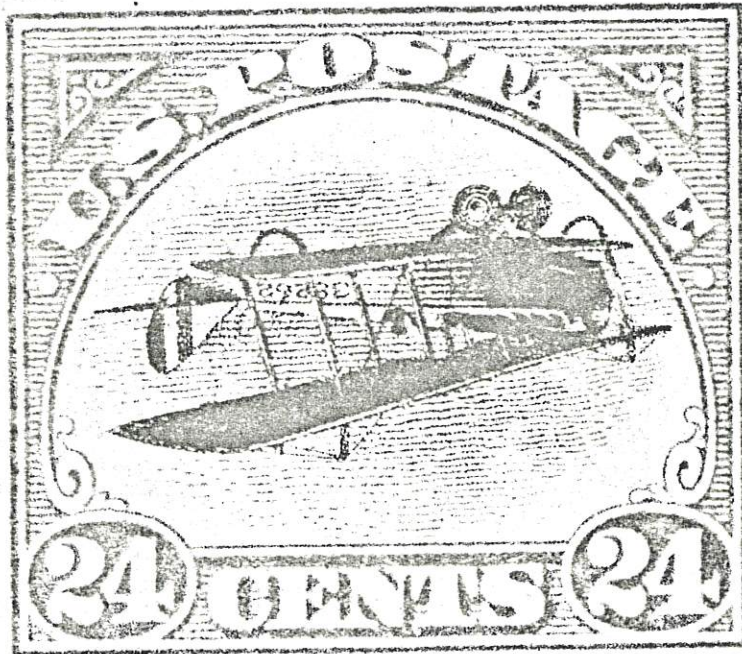
Upon my arrival in Philadelphia, I was met at the station by Mr. Mann and was immediately taken to the home of Mr. Eugene Klein. Mr. Klein, after looking at the sheet, asked me to set a price on it and I told him I would not accept less than \$15,000.00 for it. After a consultation with Mr. Mann, Mr. Klein requested me to give him an option on it at \$15,000.00 until 3 P. M. Monday, which was the next day. To this I agreed and then left for home.

Bright and early the next morning, I received a phone call from Mr. Colman, who asked me if I would accept \$18,000.00 for the sheet. I told him that I had given Mr. Klein an option on it until 3 P. M. and if he did not exercise same by that time I would get in touch with him. Shortly before the expiration of the option, I received a phone call from Mr. Klein agreeing to purchase the sheet at the agreed price, namely \$15,000.00. He asked me to deliver it to his office as soon as possible.

Promptly at noon the next day, Tuesday, the sheet was delivered to Mr. Klein at his office in Philadelphia, receiving a certified check in payment. Thus, within one week, stamps that originally cost \$24.00 were sold for a profit of \$14,976.00.

Later, the entire sheet was sold to Col. E. H. R. Green, the first party I tried to contact in New York, for \$20,000.00, who at the request of Mr. Klein decided to have compassion on his fellow stamp collectors and give them an opportunity to also obtain some of these stamps. He realized that by keeping the entire sheet it prob-

from Glines "The Saga of the Air Mail"



The 24c Air Mail Inverted Center of 1918. The sheet of 100 of these stamps was sold for \$15,000.

air mail that still arouses attention from magazine and newspaper writers. It concerns the case of "The 24¢ Air Mail Inverted Center of 1918."

The story began with a routine Post Office press release stating that new 24-cent air mail postage stamps would be issued in Washington on May 13, 1918, and the next day in Philadelphia and New York and would be available for use in connection with the first and subsequent air mail flights. W. T. Robey, an ardent stamp collector, went to the window of the Post Office located on New York Avenue in downtown Washington and was issued a full sheet of 100 of the new stamps for which he had just withdrawn money from his savings account. Robey took one look as the clerk

THE SAGA OF THE AIR MAIL

68
slid the sheet toward him "and my heart stood still." For a stamp collector he was experiencing the thrill of a lifetime. The entire sheet of stamps had the engraving of the airplane *upside down!*

Without comment, Robey paid for the sheet and left. He made attempts later in the day to find similar sheets in other branch post offices but was unsuccessful. No other such sheet was ever printed. His inquiries, however, caused him to be visited by postal inspectors who offered him a sheet of "good" stamps for his sheet of inverts. Robey refused. He knew he had a valuable find, and there was no law that said he had to give his sheet back. The only thing that he didn't know was just how valuable his acquisition was.

Robey went to New York and made the rounds of the stamp collectors. He received offers varying from \$2,500 to \$15,000 for the entire sheet and finally sold it for the latter figure to Eugene Klein of Philadelphia for a profit of \$14,976.

The sheet of 100 stamps was eventually broken up and today the whereabouts of only 81 of the stamps is known. The value of each of these stamps has escalated over the years. A block of four (there are seven of these known to exist), which is the largest multiple of this stamp, was recently purchased for the record sum of \$100,000. Single stamps have been sold for more than \$4,000 each.

As with priceless paintings, money, and other man-made items that have a high value, counterfeiters have made copies of this famous philatelic mistake. Stamp dealers and collectors, however, are wary of such efforts and have been able to spot these fakes so far without difficulty.

The Post Office Department did not enjoy the publicity given their most notorious printing error. The remaining sheets in the three post offices were called in and the printing plate was altered so that the word "top" was added for the benefit of the printers, who had to run the stamp through both a red and blue printing. Only a limited printing of this stamp was ever made. In July,

S. AIR MAIL BEGINS

1918, the price of the stamp was lowered to 16 cents and a green stamp was issued. In December, a six-cent orange stamp was issued as the air mail postage was further lowered.

While the stamps commemorating the first experimental air mail caused more attention than the flights themselves, the Air Service pilots proved that they could maintain regular schedules in spite of the risks which only they knew or understood. Mail *could* be moved by air from one place to another if a proper system were set up, the airplanes properly maintained, and the pilots trained.

On August 12, 1918, the air mail experiment ended. The Post Office Department bought its own planes, hired its own pilots, and continued the air mail service. Captain Ben Lipsner stayed on the job directing the operation until he was permitted to resign. When he was released from the Army, he became the first man to hold the title of "Superintendent of the United States Aerial Mail Service."

The Army Air Service had added another "first" to its credit while attempting to build an air force to fight the war in Europe. The air mail was an unplanned sideline which had to be undertaken in a hurry, without adequate time to prepare for the task. Twenty-six years later it was destined to fly the mails again but with even less warning and with tragic results.

From the point of view of philately, the hobby of stamp collecting, the original 24-cent air mail stamp of 1918 is the outstanding air mail stamp of all time. Not only was it the first definitive air stamp of the world, but it was the first showing an airplane, the first to be printed in two colors, and the first to be printed with a mistake.*

* Italy issued air mail stamps in 1917 and Austria in 1918, but these issues were "provisional" and not "definitive." Neither was used with or based upon a regularly scheduled air mail service.

Reminiscences of the Veterans

By CHARLES J. PHILLIPS.

The U. S. 24c. Air-Mail With the Inverted Center.

Eugene Klein gave a very interesting account of his connection with this famous and rare stamp:

"The 24c was specially printed to be used in the first flight between Washington, Philadelphia and New York on May 15, 1918.

Jos. A. Steinmetz was President of the Aero Club of Pennsylvania and Chairman of the Committee of Arrangements. I went with him to the meeting and Percy Mann was with us. Percy was then the New Issue Editor of *Mekeel's Weekly*. A few days later Mann received a notice from a Washington stamp collector named Robey, who was a clerk in Rigg's Bank. Robey told Mann that he had found a sheet of the 24c stamps with inverted aeroplane and he wanted it chronicled in *Mekeel's*. Mann phoned Robey to give him first refusal of the sheet and then went to see Jos. Steinmetz and they came on together to see me. The three agreed to go in together.

Robey went to New York and secured various offers. From New York he telegraphed me, "If you will pay \$15,000.00 for the sheet I will stop off at Philadelphia on my return home." We decided to telegraph him to stop. Steinmetz tried to bargain but Robey said that he had got \$12,000.00 offered and would not take less than \$15,000.00. Eventually we decided to purchase at his price and a certified check was given to him.

After this I went up to New York and sold the sheet to Col. Green for \$20,000.00. When I delivered it, he said, "How will that fit in my books." I said, "Col., I was told that when I turned the sheet over to you I should request you to have compassion on your fellow stamp collectors and give them an opportunity to also obtain a few of these stamps. If you keep the whole sheet it will probably never be worth much more than you are paying for it. If you break it up it will enhance the value of the stamps and you could get your money out of it in time." Col. Green replied, "Well, that is reasonable," and agreed to keep a block of eight as being the largest block in existence, that is a block with the plate number at the bottom. He also kept the centre line block and two arrow blocks, twenty in all.

Before I broke up the sheet I numbered each stamp lightly on the back. It was agreed I should advertise the stamps at \$250.00 per stamp for perfect copies and \$175.00 each for straight edges. I was to get \$25.00 on each stamp that I sold. In a short time I sold ten copies, drew a check for \$2,250.00 and took it to Col. Green. He was much amused at the way things were going and said, "We are selling those stamps too cheap. Let us make the price \$350.00." This was agreed to and I sold the next ten at this price and took the Colonel another \$3,250.00. He said, "What is that for? How many did you sell?" I said, "Ten." He said, "I told you I wanted \$225.00 each." I said, "Yes, but since then you told me to sell them at \$350.00." The Colonel replied, "Oh, yes, but I wanted you to keep the difference." I therefore made out a new check.

Then he said, "John Klemann wanted some of these stamps. Let him have some of them at the original price."

The next week the price was raised to \$500.00 and shortly after that to \$650.00.

By that time there were mostly those with the straight edges left and only a few odd copies, and Col. Green said to me, "You know my blocks are up in my collection and I want some downtown. I want to show some of them to a friend who said that such things cannot exist." I sent him some of the straight edges and the next time I went to New York, Col. Green said, "Do you know what happened to those stamps you sent. They disappeared. I had them here on this desk and I think they must have fallen into the waste paper basket. There were thirteen copies which were apparently lost and possibly there were four or five others that he had that were also lost at the same time.

Eventually Jos. Steinmetz, Percy Mann and I got together to share up the profit. Steinmetz said, "Klein ought not to have one-third but he ought to have half the amount because he did the whole of the buying, the selling and the financing and we did not put up a cent." This was agreed to. Percy Mann took three copies at the original price, and Steinmetz took a pair which ten years later he broke and sold one of them, which is now in the collection of Insley Blair. With the proceeds of that stamp he purchased his wife a grand piano. That piano is known in Germantown as the "Proceeds of one little stamp."

SIP

February 19, 1938



By ALBERT F. KUNZE

that perforation holes will not mar the plate numbers.

This continued activity along lines of improving the general appearance of United States postage stamps follows distinctly along the lines generally suggested at the National Stamp Conference last summer. Experimental work at the Bureau with a view to accomplishing better centering, however, is nothing new. Many years ago the expedient of narrow and wide spacing between the vertical rows of stamps was given a serious trial, but failed to accomplish the results desired. Later it was hoped that the experimental paper, now referred to as "blue paper," would result in diminishing the expansion and shrinkage of paper, but this likewise failed to accomplish the desired result.

After full success has been attained with the present Electric Eye perforator, the Bureau will no doubt expand its use to the other values. At present attention is being centered on the two cent stamps, since the red color most readily affects the operation of the photo-electric cell.

Alvin W. Hall

The Director of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing is to be given high praise and credit for his continued efforts in the direction of accomplishing better centering. This is one of the most difficult problems which he and his staff face in the production of postage stamps. The perforation of postage stamps must be accomplished under the mass production system with a process of printing that renders perfect centering all but impossible. He has, nevertheless, kept his attention fixed on that knotty problem and has never acknowledged that he was licked. The Government is indeed fortunate in having Mr. Hall on its staff, since his long period of familiarity with this problem, among many others, makes him an invaluable asset to the United States.

While Alvin W. Hall's greatest interest in life centers about the produc-