

# 4½¢ Prexie Postal History

by Richard Pederson

The 4½¢ value in the Presidential Series of 1938 (see Figure 1), hereinafter called the Prexies, pictures the residence of the U.S. President, the White House. It is one of only three denominations in the set that does not picture a U.S. President.

The White House was designed by Irish-born architect James Hoban and was constructed between 1792 and 1800. It was first occupied by the second President, John Adams, during his last year in office in 1800. The White House was set fire by the British in 1814, during the latter part of the War of 1812, and the interior was destroyed, with much of the exterior also damaged. Reconstruction started shortly after the war, and President James Monroe was able to occupy it in 1817, although construction continued after that date. Numerous internal and external changes were made over the years, including addition of the north and south porticoes in the 1820s and the east and west wings during the twentieth century, to give the White House its present look.

The 4½¢ Prexie was issued in both sheet (July 11, 1938) and coil (January 20, 1939) formats and was in use until after 1957, when the last delivery of 4½¢ stamps was made to post offices. An electric eye version of the 4½¢ value was also issued on October 28, 1941. Examples of the coil and electric eye sheet stamp are shown in Figure 2. The 4½¢ Prexie was not replaced by another 4½¢ stamp until the 4½¢ Liberty series stamp was issued on March 16, 1959.

When the 4½¢ was issued, the third-class single-piece rate was 1½¢ for a piece of mail weighing up to two ounces, a period that lasted from April 25, 1925, through December 31, 1948. The 4½¢ Prexie would have paid triple that rate for a piece of mail weighing over four ounces and not more than six ounces, likely the most common use for a solo 4½¢ during its period of use.

Figure 3 pictures a third-class envelope, mailed in 1945 from New York City to New Haven, Connecticut, with a single 4½¢ stamp paying for a piece of mail weighing up to six ounces.

Figure 4 shows a second example, mailed from Parkersburg, West Virginia to Elizabeth, West Virginia, during the rate period, containing developed photos.

Another, and far scarcer use, of the 4½¢ Prexie, was for payment of the minimum insurance fee of 3¢ plus 1½¢ for a third-class mail piece weighing two ounces or less.

Figure 5 shows a mail piece, that was sent from Glen Burnie, Maryland to Miami Beach, Florida, on December 6, 1944, paying this rate and fee combination, which was only in effect from November 1,



Figure 1. 4½¢ sheet stamp, Sc. 809



Figure 2. 4½¢ coil stamp line pair (Sc. 844) and the electric eye sheet stamp on a First Day Cover (FDC).



Figure 3. 4½¢ solo sheet stamp paying three times the single piece third-class rate.

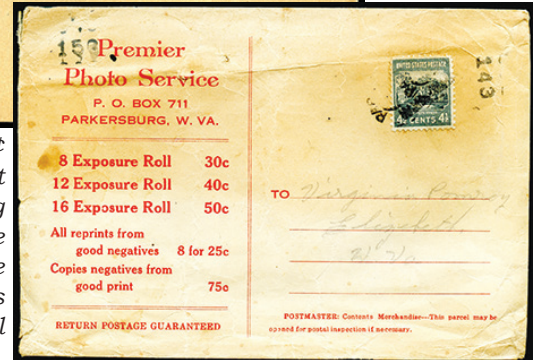


Figure 4. 4½¢ solo sheet stamp paying three times the single piece third-class rate, to mail photos.

1944, through December 31, 1948. The example shown is particularly scarce as, for the first eight months of the 3¢ minimum insurance fee period, insured items were required to be numbered. The item pictured was mailed on December 6, 1944, during that eight-month period.

The mail piece pictured in Figure 6, with a solo 4½¢ Prexie coil paying the third-class rate and minimum insurance fee, was sent after use of the oval "INSURED MINIMUM FEE" marking was put in place. The envelope was mailed by H. E. Harris & Co. in Boston, Massachusetts to a customer in Madison, Wisconsin on March 12, 1947.

Although I have not encountered one, a solo use of the 4½¢ is also possible, paying triple the fourth-class book rate of 1½¢ per pound that was in effect from November 1, 1938, through June 30, 1942. In addition, from July 1, 1939, through March 25, 1944, there was a fourth-class bound printed matter rate in effect of 4¢ for the first pound and ½¢ for each additional pound. Thus, a book or catalog weighing between one and two pounds could have been mailed with a single 4½¢ stamp, although such uses would have normally been sent

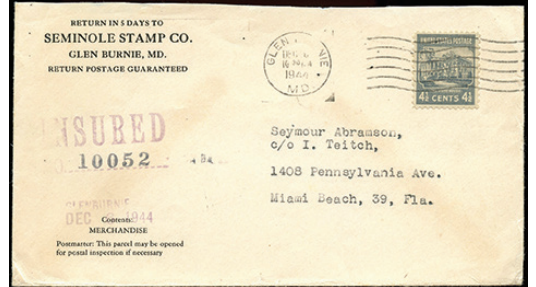


Figure 5. 4½¢ solo sheet stamp paying the single piece third-class rate and minimum insurance fee with control number.



Figure 6. 4½¢ solo sheet stamp paying the single piece third-class rate and minimum insurance fee with "INSURED MINIMUM FEE" marking.

using a meter or permit imprint. During that rate period, books or catalogs weighing less than eight ounces were mailed at the third-class single piece rate of 1½¢ per two ounces, an example of which is shown in Figure 7.

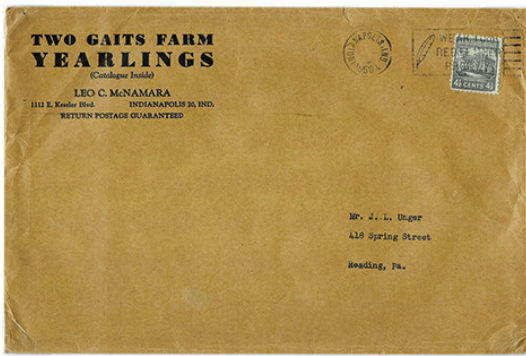


Figure 7. 4½¢ solo sheet stamp paying three times the single piece third-class rate for a book or catalog.

Figure 8 shows a final solo use example. In this case, the 4½¢ pays the third-class single piece rate for up to six ounces. At the time it was mailed, third-class regulations did not allow for enclosed first-class mail, so a first-class letter was attached and paid for by a separate 3¢ WIN THE WAR stamp.



Figure 8. Third-class item with attached first-class letter.

After the third-class rates increased on January 1, 1949, there was no rate in effect during the remainder of the Prexie era, where a solo 4½¢ stamp would exactly pay the rate. From that time on, 4½¢ Prexies were either typically used as multiples or in combination with other stamps to pay postal rates and fees. In some instances, 4½¢ solos can be found overpaying the first-class rate, an example of which is pictured in Figure 9.

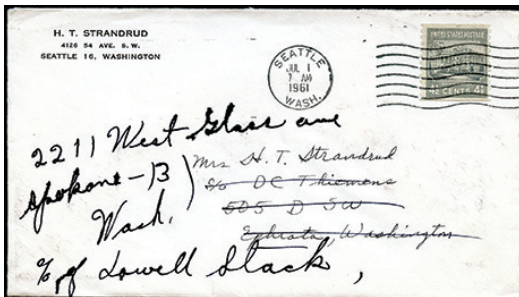


Figure 9. 4½¢ solo coil stamp making a convenience ½¢ overpayment of the then-current first-class rate.

The cover was mailed on July 1, 1961, from Seattle, Washington to Ephrata, Washington using a 4½¢ horizontal coil that makes a ½¢ convenience overpayment of the 4¢ first-class rate in effect from August 1, 1958, through January 6, 1963.

An instance where multiples of the 4½¢ paid a rate and fee combination is shown front and reverse in Figure 10. The envelope mailed from Tamaqua, Pennsylvania to Millersville, Pennsylvania on December 27, 1943, contains four of the 4½¢ paying the 18¢ required to satisfy the 3¢ first-class rate and 15¢ registration fee for an item having an indemnity value up to \$5. This rate/fee combination was in effect up through March 25, 1944.

Figure 11 pictures another cover where a multiple of the 4½¢ pays the postal rate. In this case, a pair of 4½¢ Prexie coils pays the 9¢ required for a triple weight first-class letter. The envelope was mailed, in 1956, from Encino, California to Mayfield, Ohio.

Examples of the 4½¢ are much easier to find, than those described above, when used in combination with other stamps. The cover, pictured front and reverse in Figure 12, has a strip of six 4½¢

Figure 10. 4½¢ sheet stamps paying first-class rate and registration fee.



Figure 11. Pair of 4½¢ coil stamps paying triple the first-class rate.



coils along with a 1¢ Prexie sheet stamp, 2¢ Prexie horizontal coil, and 5¢ Roosevelt from the fourth Bureau issue. The 35¢ in postage exactly paid the total required for a double weight first-class letter (6¢), 4¢ return receipt fee, and 25¢ registration fee for an item having an



Figure 12. Registered return receipt letter with six of the 4½¢ coil.

indemnity value from \$25.01 to \$50. This cover, which was mailed from New York City to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on November 15, 1945, also has the added benefit that only two other covers have been reported containing a greater number of the 4½¢ coil.

Another registered return receipt cover is pictured, front and reverse, in Figure 13. In this instance, a block of four 4½¢ sheet stamps pay the 15¢ registration fee and 3¢ return receipt fee, and



Figure 13. Registered return receipt letter with four of the 4½¢ sheet stamp.

the 3¢ Prexie pays the first-class rate. The letter was mailed from Detroit, Michigan to St. Ignace, Michigan on December 22, 1938, and received the next day.

Figure 14 shows an insured third-class mail piece that was sent from Brooklyn, New York to Maywood, New Jersey on September 13, 1957, and has an endorsement that it contains a first-class letter. The 46¢ in postage paid by six 4½¢



Figure 14. Insured third-class item with enclosed first-class letter containing six of the 4½¢ sheet stamp along with other postage.

Prexies and seven other stamps pays 3¢ for an up to 3-ounce third-class item, 3¢ for the enclosed first-class letter, and 40¢ insurance for an item having an indemnity value from \$50.01 to \$100.

A 5¢ domestic air mail rate was in effect for a relatively short period, from October 1, 1946, through December 31, 1948. On the Figure 15 cover, 4½¢ and ½¢ Prexies combine to pay the 5¢ rate for a letter mailed from Oakland, California to Evanston, Illinois on February 19, 1947.



Figure 15. Air mail letter with 4½¢ and ½¢ Prexies.

The air mail rate increased to 6¢ on January 1, 1949. Pictured in Figure 16 is an air mail letter mailed on April 5, 1950, from Phoenix, Arizona to Sacramento, California. The 6¢ air mail rate that was in effect through July 31, 1958, was paid by single 4½¢ and 1½¢ Prexies.



Figure 16. Air mail letter with 4½¢ and 1½¢ Prexies.

The envelope in Figure 17, which was examined by a U.S. Army Censor, was mailed from APO 636 in Honington, England to Sacramento, California, on June 15, 1944. Once again, 4½¢ and 1½¢ Prexies combine to pay the 6¢ concession air mail rate to the U.S.



Figure 17. Censored concession APO air mail letter from England with 4½¢ and 1½¢ Prexies.

It'll conclude with several items sent in the international mail. The first, pictured in Figure 18, has a ½¢ Prexie added to the 4½¢,

to make up the 5¢ surface rate to Europe that was in effect from October 1, 1907, through October 31, 1953. The cover was mailed from Portland, Oregon to Copenhagen, Denmark on November 24, 1941, short-



Figure 18. Surface letter to Denmark that was returned to sender due to suspension of service.

prior to the U.S. entry into World War II. It was censored and held in New York City until July 28, 1942, when it was marked "RETURN TO SENDER SERVICE SUSPENDED." Next, shown front and reverse in Figure 19, is a registered air mail cover sent on April 23, 1945, from Los Angeles, California to Trinidad Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. The censored letter is franked with four of the 4½¢ Prexie along with four of the 3¢ Florida Centennial stamp. The 30¢ in postage exactly paid the 10¢ Foreign Air Mail (FAM) rate from Miami (inclusive of postage in the U.S.) and 20¢ international registration fee for an item with an indemnity value of \$9.65 or less.



Figure 19. Registered FAM letter to the Dominican Republic.

Finally, is an air mail letter to Roskilde, Denmark from New York City (Figure 20) that was mailed on August 1, 1949. Two of the 4½¢, along with two 3¢ Prexies paid the 15¢ air mail rate to Europe that was in effect from November 1, 1946, through July 30, 1971.



Figure 20. Air mail letter to Denmark.

My thanks to John Hotchner for providing scans of several covers used in this article. Comments or corrections may be sent to Richard Pederson at 15312 Gammon Green Walk, Midlothian, Virginia 23112 or, via E-mail to rich@pedersonstamps.com.

References:

1. *The Prexies*; Roland E. Rustad, ed. Leonard Piszkiwicz; Bureau Issues Association, Inc.; 1994; pages 296-302.
2. *U.S. Domestic Postal Rates, 1872-2011, Third Edition*; Henry W. Beecher and Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz; American Philatelic Society; 2011.
3. *U.S. International Postal Rates, 1872-1996*; Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz and Henry W. Beecher; CAMA Publishing Company; 1996.
4. White House; Wikipedia; 2022.
5. Census showing "Largest Number of a Given Prexie on Cover, Tag, or Parcel Piece"; <https://www.pedersonstamps.com/most-on-cover-parcel-or-piece>.