

21¢ Prexie Postal History

by Richard Pederson

The 21¢ value in the Presidential Series of 1938 (see Figure 1), hereinafter called the Prexies, depicts the twenty-first President of the United States (1881-1885), Chester A. Arthur. Victor S. McCloskey Jr. designed the stamp based on an Augustus Saint Gaudens bust of Arthur in the United States Senate Gallery in Washington, D.C.

Prior to becoming President, Arthur was Vice President, elected on a ticket with James A. Garfield. He became President on September 19, 1881, following Garfield's assassination. Prior to being elected Vice President, Arthur was Chairman of the New York Republican party and was Tax Collector for the Port of New York.

One of the most significant accomplishments during his term in office was enactment of the 1883 Civil Service Act, which helped make the Civil Service non-partisan by curtailing the spoils system where government jobs were handed out to friends and fellow political party members. Arthur did not run for reelection as he was unable to secure his party's nomination.

Domestic uses of the 21¢ Prexie are relatively easy to locate on registered covers or parcels as a solo or in combination with other stamps. International uses or non-registered solo uses are relatively scarce. It was issued in sheet format on November 22, 1938 (Figure 2) and was in continuous use until after 1957, when the last delivery of 21¢ stamps was made to post offices.

An electric eye version of the 4¢ was released on January 7, 1942 (Figure 3). There was no 21¢ value in the Liberty series that replaced the Prexies.

Prior to the first day of issue, the Post Office Department sent out announcements to prospective purchasers of First Day Covers (FDCs), an example of which is pictured in Figure 4.

During the time it was in use, possible solo rate and rate/fee combinations for the 21¢ Prexie included the following:



Figure 1. 21¢ Prexie sheet stamp.

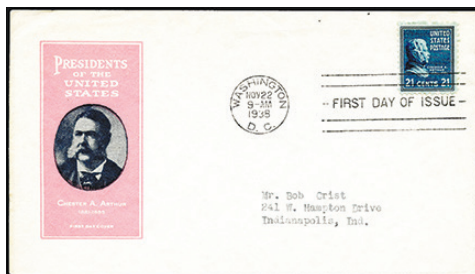


Figure 2. First Day Cover (FDC) for 21¢ Prexie with Harry Ioor cachet.



Figure 3. Electric eye FDC with Fidelity cachet.

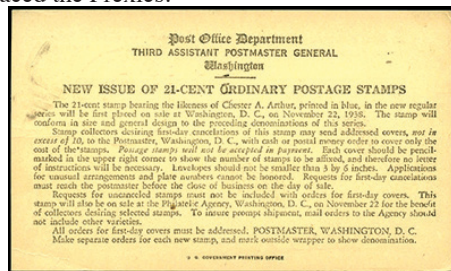


Figure 4. 21¢ announcement card.

1. A first-class registered letter, with an indemnity value up to \$25, a rate and fee combination (3¢ first-class rate and 18¢ registration fee) that was in effect through March 25, 1944 (Figures 5 and 6).

2. A double weight registered first-class domestic surface letter weighing up to 2 ounces, with an indemnity value of \$5 or less, a rate and fee combination (6¢ first-class rate and 15¢ registration fee) in effect through March 25, 1944 (Figures 5 and 6).

3. An air mail registered letter with an indemnity value of \$5 or less, a rate and fee combination (6¢ air mail rate and 15¢ registration fee) in effect through March 25, 1944 (Figure 7).

4. A first-class registered letter, with return receipt requested, and an indemnity value of \$5 or less, a rate and fee combination (3¢ first-class rate, 3¢ return receipt fee and 15¢ registration fee) in effect through March 25, 1944 (Figure 8).

5. An air mail special delivery letter, a rate and fee combination (6¢ air mail rate and 15¢ special delivery fee) in effect from November 1, 1944, through September 30, 1946.

6. An air mail special delivery letter, a rate and fee combination (8¢ air mail rate and 13¢ special delivery fee) a rate in effect from January 1, 1949, through December 31, 1951 (Figure 9).

7. A triple weight air mail letter, a rate in effect from August 1, 1958, through the end of the Prexie period.

8. A seven times weight first-class letter, a rate in effect through July 31, 1958 (Figure 10).

9. The third-class single piece rate of 3¢ per two ounces for items weighing more than 12 ounces and less than or equal to 14 ounces, a rate in effect starting on August 1, 1958.

10. The Domestic rate for a fourth-class local parcel weighing more than 30 pounds and less than or equal to 32 pounds (5¢ for the first pound and 1¢ for each of 16 2-pound increments above the first pound), a rate in effect through December 31, 1948.

11. The Domestic rate for a fourth-class zone 1 or zone 2 parcel weighing more than 30 pounds and less than or equal to 32 pounds (8¢ for the first pound and 1.1¢ for each of 11 1-pound increments above the first pound – resulting 20.1¢ rate is rounded up to 21¢), a rate in effect through December 31, 1948.

12. The Domestic rate for a fourth-class zone 3 parcel weighing more than 30 pounds and less than or equal to 32 pounds (9¢ for the first pound and 2¢ for each of 12 1-pound increments above the first), a rate in effect through December 31, 1948.

13. The Domestic rate for a fourth-class zone 4 parcel weighing more than 30 pounds and less than or equal to 32 pounds (10¢ for the first pound and 3.5¢ for each of 3 1-pound increments above the first pound – resulting 20.5¢ rate is rounded up to 21¢), a rate in effect through December 31, 1948.

14. The Domestic rate for a fourth-class local parcel weighing more than 11 pounds and less than or equal to 12 pounds (10¢ for the first pound and 1¢ for each of 11 1-pound increments above the first pound), a rate in effect from January 1, 1949, through September 30, 1951.

15. The Domestic rate for a fourth-class zone 1 or zone 2 parcel weighing more than 4 pounds and less than or equal to 5 pounds (12¢ for the first pound and 2.1¢ for each of 4 1-pound increments above the first pound – resulting 20.4¢ rate is rounded up to 21¢), a rate in effect from January 1, 1949, through September 30, 1951.

16. The Domestic rate for a fourth-class zone 5 parcel weighing more than 1 pound and less than or equal to 2 pounds (15¢ for the first pound and 6¢ for an additional 1-pound), a rate in effect from January 1, 1949, through September 30, 1951.

17. The Domestic rate for a fourth-class zone 3 parcel weighing more than 1 pound and less than or equal to 2 pounds (17¢ for the first pound and 3.5¢ for an additional 1-pound – resulting 20.5¢ rate is rounded up to 21¢), a rate in effect from October 1, 1951, through September 30, 1953.

18. The Domestic rate for a fourth-class local parcel weighing more than 2 pounds and less than or equal to 3 pounds (18¢ for the first pound and 1.45¢ for each additional 1-pound – resulting 20.9¢ rate is rounded up to 21¢), a rate in effect from October 1, 1953, through January 31, 1960.

19. The domestic fourth-class library rate for an item weighing more than 18 pounds and less than or equal to 19 pounds (3¢ for the first pound and 1¢ for each additional pound), a rate in effect through December 31, 1948.

20. The domestic fourth-class library rate for an item weighing more than 17 pounds and less than or equal to 18 pounds (4¢ for the first pound and 1¢ for each additional pound), a rate in effect from January 1, 1949, through the end of the Prexie period.

21. The domestic fourth-class book rate for an item weighing more than 13 pounds and less than or equal to 14 pounds (1.5¢ for each pound), a rate in effect from November 1, 1938, through June 30, 1942.

22. The domestic fourth-class book rate for an item weighing more than 6 pounds and less than or equal to 7 pounds (3¢ for each pound), a rate in effect from July 1, 1942, through December 31, 1948.

23. UPU printed matter or samples of merchandise weighing more than 26 ounces and less than or equal to 28 ounces (1.5¢ per 2-ounces), a rate in effect from October 1, 1951, through September 30, 1953.

24. UPU surface rate for small packets weighing more than 12 ounces and less than or equal to 14 ounces (3¢ per 2 ounces), a rate in effect through June 30, 1940.

25. UPU surface rate for small packets weighing more than 18 ounces and less than or equal to 20 ounces (3¢ for first 2 ounces and 2¢ for each additional 2 ounces), a rate in effect through July 31, 1958.

26. Triple the treaty air mail rate to Mexico (7¢ per ounce), a rate in effect from August 1, 1958, through the end of the Prexie period.

27. A double weight registered surface letter to Spain, Cuba, Canada, Mexico, South America and Central America (6¢ postage and 15¢ registration fee), a rate and fee combination in effect through January 31, 1945.

[Note: for the purposes of this article, I will consider the Prexie period to last until the end of 1962. Deliveries of some Prexies were made to post offices until 1959 and many post offices still had some Prexies in stock into the early 1960s, so they are frequently found on non-philatelic mail until then.]

Unlike most Prexies that do not satisfy one of the domestic or international surface or air mail rates, the 21¢ is unusual in that it is easier to find as a solo use than it is to locate in combination with other stamps. The reason for this is that the 21¢ exactly satisfies several rate and fee combinations on registered mail.

The first solo uses that I'll show pays one of two possible rate and fee combinations: 3¢ for a single weight domestic surface letter and an 18¢ registration fee for an item with an indemnity value up to \$25; or 6¢ for a double weight domestic surface letter and 15¢ registration fee for an item with an indemnity value of \$5 or less. Without the envelope contents, it is impossible to be sure which of those rate/fee combinations was paid. The Figure 5 cover, shown front and reverse, was mailed on July 3, 1943, from Union City, New Jersey to Providence, Rhode Island where it was received the next day, on the 4th of July. It was mailed in a number 6 size envelope and shows no evidence of heavy contents, so was likely a single weight letter with an up to \$25 indemnity value. The cover pictured front and reverse in Fig-

ure 6 is more likely to be a double weight cover as it is a larger number 10 envelope. It was mailed on December 18, 1939, from Bergenfield, New Jersey to Newark, New Jersey, where it was received the following day.

Next, shown front and reverse in Figure 7, is a solo 21¢ on a registered air mail cover sent



Figure 5. Front and reverse of a registered number 6 first-class envelope with a 21¢ solo.



Figure 6. Front and reverse of a registered number 10 first-class envelope with a 21¢ solo.

on November 27, 1943, from Seattle, Washington, to Los Angeles, California, where it was received the next day and then delivered to the intended recipient's post office on November 29th. The 21¢ in postage paid the 6¢ air mail rate and 15¢ registration fee that were in effect for an item with an indemnity value of \$5 or less.



Figure 7. Front and reverse of a registered domestic air mail cover with a 21¢ solo.

Another registered solo use is pictured front and reverse in Figure 8, page 31. The cover was mailed on January 26, 1939, from Benton Harbor, Michigan, to Niles, Michigan, where it was received the following day. The cover has a "CANNOT BE FOUND" marking and a pointing finger "RETURN TO WRITER UNCLAIMED FROM NILES, MICHIGAN" marking on the front. The reverse shows that it was received back in Benton Harbor on February 7th. The 21¢ stamp paid the 3¢ first-class rate, 3¢ return receipt fee and 15¢ registration fee for an item with an indemnity value of \$5 or less.

Figure 9 pictures the front and reverse of an air mail special delivery cover mailed from an FBI office in Detroit, Michigan to another FBI office in New York City, where it was received the same day. The

solo 21¢ paid the 6¢ air mail rate and 15¢ special delivery fee.

Figure 10 shows a scarce solo use of the 21¢ Prexie. The large envelope, which is marked "FIRST CLASS," was mailed from a Fleet Post Office and entered the mail at Portland, Oregon on May 3, 1945, where it was sent on to its destination in Bay City, Michigan. The 21¢ Prexie paid the rate for a seven-times weight first-class envelope.



Figure 8. 21¢ solo on a registered domestic first-class letter, shown front and reverse, with return receipt requested that was returned to the writer.



Figure 9. Front and reverse of an air mail special delivery cover with a 21¢ solo.

The final solo use I'll show is pictured in Figure 11, next column, and is also likely a scarce use. The envelope, which likely contained a proof or mint set of coins, is marked as insured fourth-class mail and was sent on March 14, 1956, from the Treasury



Figure 10. 21¢ solo on a seven times weight first-class cover.

Department in Washington, D.C. to Seneca, Kansas. Although marked as fourth-class, parcels weighing up to eight ounces were treated as third-class mail. Therefore, the 21¢ stamp paid for a 6-ounce package with an indemnity value of more than \$10 but less than or equal to \$25. The third-class rate for an item weighing more than two ounces but less than or equal to eight ounces was 1¢ per ounce, or 6¢ and the insurance fee would have been 15¢, a total of 21¢.

Next, I'll show examples of the 21¢ Prexie used in combination with other stamps. The Figure 12 parcel front contains 10 of the 21¢ Prexie along with a pair of 24¢ Prexies and a single 16¢ Prexie, totaling \$2.74 in postage. The registered parcel was mailed from the Post Of-

fice Department's Philatelic Agency in Washington, D.C. to an address in Altoona, Pennsylvania. The insurance cost was likely between 15¢ and 65¢ depending on the indemnity value and the time period the package was sent

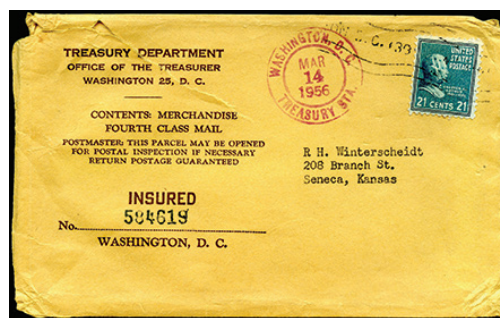


Figure 11. 21¢ solo on insured third-class parcel (fourth-class mail weighing up to eight ounces was handled as third-class) mailed from the U.S. Treasury Department.



Figure 12. The largest reported multiple of the 21¢ Prexie on a parcel front mailed from the Post Office Department's Philatelic Agency.

with fourth-class postage accounting for the rest. Altoona was a zone 2 destination but determining the exact postage and insurance costs is difficult as there are likely multiple possible answers depending upon the time frame in which the package was sent. Nevertheless, this is a significant item as it is, so far, the largest reported multiple of the 21¢ on a mail piece of any type.

Figure 13 pictures another 21¢ multiple, this time on a registered



Figure 13. Front and reverse of a registered air mail cover with five of the 21¢ Prexie.

air mail cover. The cover contains an irregular block of five of the 21¢, along with a single 9¢ Liberty issue picturing the Alamo. The cover, which was mailed near the end of the Prexie period on November 16, 1961, by the Friedl Expert Committee in New York City to Daly City, California where it was received on November 18th, likely contained a philatelic item that was submitted for expertizing, along with a certificate indicating the results. The Friedel Expertizing Committee was founded in 1948 and specialized in the authentication of European stamps. The \$1.14 in postage likely paid 14¢ in postage for a double weight air mail letter and \$1.00 in registration fees for an item with a declared indemnity value that was over \$100 and less than or equal to \$200.

The somewhat battered Figure 14 registered air mail cover, shown front and reverse, also contains five of the 21¢ Prexie along with four of the 22¢ Prexie and a recently issued 8¢ Liberty picturing the Statue of Liberty. It was mailed on May 14, 1954, by a stamp dealer in Mahopac, New



Figure 14. Front and reverse of registered air mail cover with five of the 21¢ Prexie and block of four of the 22¢ Prexie.

York to an address in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, where it arrived on the 16th. Despite the philatelic connection, this is still a very nice franking as the 21¢ and 22¢ Prexies are two of the more difficult Prexies to find as a multiple on cover. The \$2.03 in postage appears to break down as follows: 12¢ for a double weight air mail letter; \$1.75 for indemnity up to \$1,000; and 14¢ because the declared value exceeds the maximum indemnity.

The registered Figure 15 cover, shown front and reverse, was mailed on June 2, 1955, from New York City to Manhasset, New York, where it was received on June 3rd. The 46¢ in postage is made up by a pair of 21¢ Prexies and a 4¢ Liberty issue picturing Abraham Lincoln. The postage paid 6¢ for a double weight first-class letter and a 42¢ registration fee for an item with an indemnity value up to \$5.

Figure 16 pictures the front and reverse of a registered air mail letter



Figure 15. Front and reverse of a registered first-class cover with a pair of the 21¢.

with return receipt requested that was sent on October 20, 1943, from Long Beach, California to Los Angeles, California, where it was received on October 21st. A 6¢ Transport air mail stamp pays the 6¢ air mail rate and a 21¢ Prexie pays the 3¢ return receipt fee and 18¢ registration fee for an item with an indemnity value up to \$25.

The registered cover with return receipt requested, that is

shown front and reverse in Figure 17, was mailed on July 6, 1942, from Mackinac Island, Michigan to Saint Ignace, Michigan, where it was received on July 12th. The 29¢ in postage is paid with single 21¢ and 8¢ Prexies covering the 6¢ first-class rate for a double weight letter, 3¢ return receipt fee and 20¢ registration fee for an item having an indemnity value up to \$50.

I'll conclude with a relatively scarce use of the 21¢ Prexie on international mail. The Figure 18 cover, which is ex-Suffet from his "Twilight of the Prexies" exhibit, shows a pair of the 21¢ Prexie up-rating a 3¢ stamped envelope sent via air mail from New York City to Switzerland on December 18, 1956. The 45¢ in postage pays the UPU rate for a triple weight air letter to Switzerland.

If you have any interesting 21¢ Prexie usages you would like to share or have any comments, clarifications, or corrections, please send them to me at rich@pedersonstamps.com or by mail at 15312 Gammon Green Walk, Midlothian, VA 23112.

References:

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Figure 16. Front and reverse of registered air mail cover with the 21¢ paying return receipt and registration fees.



Figure 17. Front and reverse of a registered first-class cover with 21¢ and 8¢ Prexies paying the first-class rate, return receipt fee and registration fee.



Figure 18. 3¢ stamped envelope uprated with a pair of the 21¢ Prexie to pay for a three times weight cover to Switzerland (ex-Suffet).