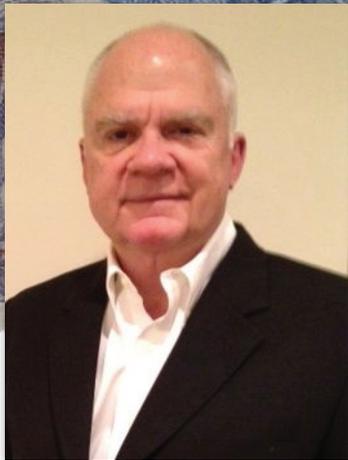


The

Expert's Corner

A New Column By
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Stamp images courtesy of Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc.

If I had one thing to learn really well, I would pick the most basic part of a stamp...the perforation hole. While this seems relatively simple, intense study is needed to become adept at expertizing and the role of the hole. Determination of the genuineness of the perforations is considered a fine art and the more you learn about this subject, the better philatelist you will become.

To the beginner, this seems pretty simple. Hey, holes...what can possibly be the big deal? You separate stamps this way and what else? You get a perforation gauge, compare it to a bunch of dots and voila, you know the perforations and the gauge. Easy, right? In a word, No! Studying the production of holes and their structure will open your eyes to a fascinating bit of research and knowledge that very few collectors possess whether beginner, advanced or even professional dealers.

As in all areas of philately, you begin with assembling references, an array of genuine examples of what you are studying. Then you find fakes, counterfeits and abnormal examples of the same thing to widen the value of your reference collection. This is where we start with perforation holes.

Since the foremost thing you need is genuine perforation holes, I suggest you purchase some blocks of four of the cheapest value in a set in which you wish to concentrate. The internal perforation holes are almost by definition genuine. However, some low denomination stamps are available imperforate, so these can possibly be fraudulently perforated. Usually Fine to Very Fine centered blocks are genuine. Reperforators want to make well-centered items that would sell for much more so the likelihood of off-centered blocks being bad is slim. So, the first thing to do is locate and purchase a genuine block of an inexpensive reference stamp. For example, you are collecting Washington-Franklin heads and are concentrating on the 1914-16 set of Perforated 10 issues. Buy a nice fresh



Figure 1.

block of 4, F-VF centered that has original gum and lightly hinged. That will provide you with almost everything you need to tell if the perforations are genuine on a stamp of that issue. Remember, reference material pays for itself a hundred fold! In other words, make this part of your collecting habit. Knowledge is valuable and you will enjoy the hobby much more when you feel more comfortable in your own expertise.

Look at Figure 1. This is a nicely centered block of U.S. Scott No. 463 with original gum, lightly hinged and a couple small thin spots. When studying perforation holes, a thin or two means nothing to the value of the reference piece, it just makes it less expensive. Try however to get blocks with full intact perforations. That is important to seeing the structure of the hole. With this block, we have great examples of genuine perforations not only internally for study, but also the peripheral perforations for direct comparison to stamps under examination.

Now examine an enlargement of the internal perforations, Figure 2. See how the vertical row of perforation holes are somewhat



Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.

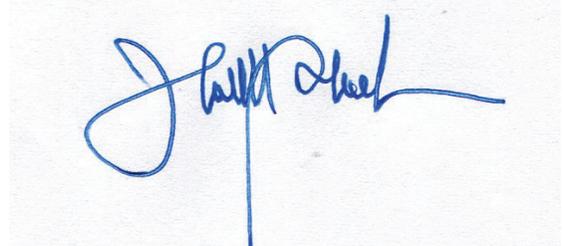
The author's website is full of tips and tools to help the collector grade his stamps as well as offering a full scale expertizing service. It's at www.stampauthentication.com

elongated vertically and the top of each hole has a small ridge at the top of the hole. I refer to this as a 'pressure ridge' which develops during the government perforating process. The roll of paper is passing through the perforating machine at some speed. As the perforating pin goes into the paper to make the hole, for a fraction of a second, the speed of the paper causes the paper to bunch up a bit and form a little ridge. These ridges are very important to be able to see on genuine perforations. Study your reference holes carefully under magnification, about 4-8x in a dark room with a single light source, preferably an Ott-Lite. Look at the holes at a shallow angle with the light passing by making it easier to see these pressure ridges. With a little experience, you will be able to see them very clearly. This is the first step in evaluating genuineness. Now, look at the bottom of each of these vertical holes. Notice the paper feathers up a bit from the hole disc being removed. This is another important characteristic of genuine holes. Perf. 10 issues almost always show this clearly. Also, check out the general size of each hole. When you see a stamp with holes a bit smaller and very round, you almost always have a loser in your hand. Comparison with a known genuine example will help you immensely.

Figure 3 is the right side perforations of our reference block. Remember the pressure ridges at the top of the vertical perforation holes in Fig. 2. If you look closely, you can see that the top of each hole has part (one half since it has been separated on that side) of the pressure ridge. Also note the slightly oval holes and the slightly irregular edge to the holes. All these are classic genuine characteristics for Perf. 10 stamps.

Figure 4 shows the horizontal perforations of the reference block. If you study your block, you can also see a slight pressure ridge on the right side of horizontal rows. If you now examine these holes as described in the paragraph regarding Figure 2 examination, you can see this ridge on the right side of each hole in the horizontal perforations.

With a little study, you can become better at identifying bad perforations on stamps in your collection. Appropriately, everything in your stamp collection becomes a reference piece. The same theory holds true in looking at all perforations. Get references and compare! While I have given the basics in this column, there is no substitute for getting things expertized professionally, especially if it is any item over \$200. Protect yourself when the situation warrants.



[Editor's Note: Readers should feel free to contact Mr. Shoemaker with questions or info regarding this column and/or his company, Philatelic Stamp Authentication and Grading, Inc., at P.O. Box 37-2460, Satellite Beach, FL 32937. He will be pleased to hear from you.]