

The "Open Door" Variety of the 1928 Beacon Air Mail - the Full Story

by John Walter

Though it isn't listed in catalogs and consequently doesn't possess the "price tag" favor for items they seek for their albums, the so-called "Open Door" variety of the 5¢ "Beacon" air mail (Scott's US No. C11) is striking enough to attract notice. The stamps showing the "Open Door" are by no means plentiful.

Henry M. Goodkind, whose study of the "Beacon" air mail stamp was published as a handbook by the Theodore E. Steinway Memorial Publications Fund of the Collectors Club in the 1960s.

Plate wear created the "Open Door" variety, Mr. Goodkind explains in his study of the "Beacon" air mail which also appeared serially in *The Aero Philatelist Annals*.



Both of these used "Open Door" varieties were mounted on an album page and donated to the NSSS.

The bicolored 5¢ air mail stamp picturing an air mail beacon at Sherman Hill, Wyoming, was issued July 25, 1928 in anticipation of a reduction in the domestic US air mail rate to 5¢ per ounce or fraction, effective Aug. 1, 1928.

The stamp was in use for about two years and just less than 107 million copies were produced at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing and sold in postal installations.



Normal stamp

It was produced on flat plate presses at the Bureau with a total of 55 plates being used to print the red frames and 40 plates required for the printing of the blue vignette which featured a view of the Sherman Hill airline beacon.

Many plates were needed to produce the stamp, partly because flat plate presses can't turn out as many stamps in a day as rotary presses can and partly because plates deteriorated during use necessitating replacement of plates so badly worn that printing quality was affected.

On certain of the vignette plates the wear occurred at the point where the door to the storehouse at the base of the beacon was located. Because of the wear there was a white area on the printed stamps giving the effect of an open door. This variety occurs on late printings of the "Beacon" air mail and is rather scarce, but demand for examples has never been great enough to give it anything like a stable value.

The engraved details of the beacon tower also showed wear as plates were used and consequently there are examples of the "Beacon" air mail on which the tower isn't as clearly printed as it might be and examples of this variety merit philatelic attention.

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