

Plate Number Collecting.

BY CHARLES A. NAST.

As I am an enthusiastic plate number collector myself, I beg to say that these thoughts and suggestions must be considered as my own individual views and gathered rather from my own experience, with my own collection as a basis for opinions. Recently in a dealer's shop in this city (Denver, Colorado,) the question arose over a two-cent brown (Jackson), whether it was printed at the National or the Continental Co., on examination with powerful glasses failing to reveal any of the secret marks illustrated in the catalogue. Now if a strip had been preserved with imprint and plate number, or even only a single stamp with the number, as the two concerns used different notations in this color, the question would have been settled upon the face of it.

And this calls to my mind the story I once heard, that a similar contention in the establishment of the father of philately in this country was only settled by Mr. Scott's producing the remainder of the entire sheet from which the stamps in dispute had been removed, showing imprint and plate number, thereby proving his side of the argument. And this I am informed led to plate number collecting. However the value of plate numbers is not, in our time the same, its chief charms lie in the gradations of tone, and variations and shade of colors, sometimes indeed, the differences are quite beyond the range of tint, and assume the dignity of different colors in fact.

I have only words of praise for Bartel's catalogue, but it must be apparent to any one who has studied the matter only a little, that no catalogue could include every variety of ink. In a general way an issue is listed in its official color, or as blue and ultramarine for the one-cent denomination, and as pink and carmine for the two-cent in the unwatermarked series. But this does not nearly cover the field. It was my privilege to see a collection of top strips only, of the first fifty numbers ever printed in the 2c red. We have here carmine, pink, rose, dull red, claret, salmon, light and dark red, brownish red and bronze red, this latter was from plate number 9. It was a strikingly peculiar red. No two strips were exactly alike in color, the whole making a beautiful tone-picture. The expense of collecting all four sides of a given plate is what appals the average collector, but I claim it is not necessary to collect in this manner, though I do it myself. Let me suggest to those who are inclined in this direction, to collect only a certain side and stick to it, reserving other positions for exchange; or choose the top, this is invariably cleaner and prettier, has always large margins, and is oftenest free from ink smudge. The bottom strip is the most difficult of all. The margin is sometimes barely sufficient to permit the number to show.

As in all other stamp matters, the bottom strip being the least likely to be perfect, it is generally higher price-

ed. The quantity of any position on the market, regulating the price. But whatever is decided upon, let it be thoroughly understood that a plate number strip in its accepted form must be perfect as to the centering of each stamp, nor must the perforations be allowed to go through the imprint and the number itself. It means a strip of absolute perfect stamps to the minutest detail of any given number, and not merely anything with a certain number attached; because we are not collecting numbers, but perfect stamps of a number.

Recently the Omaha Exposition series and the surcharging of the current issues, has created a new interest in this specialty. While it is true the Omahas require only the top and bottom strips, it is equally true that out of a dozen strips taken at random, only two will be found perfectly centered. It seems a most difficult matter to get the perforations just right on all sides of these stamps.

With two kinds of surcharges besides the inverted surcharge, and the printing of some of the plates in both green and blue inks, it is quite possible to get three, four and five different sets of strips of the same number; therefore I advise a blank book as a plate number album. The pages can be divided by ruling two or three horizontal lines across the page, thus allowing a full page for various sets of the same number, or for different numbers on the same page. But I hope my suggestion of collecting only one position will not go unheeded. Let us have collectors of lefts or rights only, or tops or bottom strips only. This will increase the interest and add new recruits to our ranks. Then in the future we may have a plate number society with its attendant department, just as is now done in postal cards.

In the watermarked series we have but one shade of blue listed, but it is quite possible to find the same number in three or four shades differing greatly, from 98 to 122 inclusive.

Just before the Government issued the 1c green, all plates running from 443 to 496 were printed in a very dark blue in extra heavy ink. The difference over the ordinary blue is apparent to anyone. In passing it should be mentioned that the different shades are not due to any chemical action of light or air, but are so just as they came from the press.

It was a long time before a uniform color for the present 2c red was adopted. From No. 80 or thereabouts the ink seems to have been pretty generally the same, but latterly the Government has started on an economical streak. It will be remembered how last spring the Postmaster General suggested that a saving of \$12,000 per annum might be made by using some less expensive color, but finding that the International Postal Union prescribed red they began, to cheapen the ink by the addition of less lake madder. The change was soon apparent and a reference to my collection shows pale reds, and salmon pinks, besides the rose color in all numbers from 501 to 525. Some very pale shades obtain in numbers ranging from 499 to 517. Some of the latter look as though they

had been washed out. A very pretty page consists of the 5c numbers in both blue and brown. And finally in this day of errors, let me not forget that we have one in plate Nos. also. I refer to the 2c Postage Due issue of '79 to '94. By some inadvertence the figure 5 was omitted from certain parts of the plate in No. 315, making it read 31 instead. In conclusion let me add that the letters which precede the figures in the catalogue are very essential to a perfect strip, these are printed sometimes quite apart from the number and the imprint, but they are very desirable to a complete plate number.—Weekly Philatelic Era.

Local Happenings.

Several booksellers here have added stamp albums to their stock and they are taking well. The boy trade is booming, and the dealers are doing a good business.

Mr. Jas. F. Irwin, previous to his leaving the city, has sold his entire stock of stamps.

Mr. T. H. Caldwell, of Brantford, spent his Easter holidays here with his aunt.

During the past week a large number of "Stamps," (New York), and a few Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News, (Brooklyn Special), were received as samples. Collectors are therefore enjoying some outside news.

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