EFOs: Errors, Freaks and Oddities_

by Scott A. Shaulis

nyone can own the normal copy of a stamp. Have you considered expanding your collection to include errors, freaks, and oddities?

Your reaction is probably, "Hold on. I can't fill all of these spaces in my album. How would I ever afford something like Scott

album. How would I ever afford something like Scott Fig. #C3a?" I am going to convince you that collecting errors, freaks, and oddities is interesting, challenging, and more affordable than you thought. Errors, freaks, and oddities are commonly referred to as EFOs.

Let's ask the obvious questions. What are EFOs? When do they occur? Who collects them? Where do you find EFO material? Why do people collect EFOs?

What are EFOs? Defining them is not an easy task and there are differences in opinions in some areas. Here is my brief description.

An "error" is a loosely used term in the philatelic press to describe any stamp that is not normal. To an EFO collector though, an error has a specific meaning. An error occurs when something has gone completely wrong with the stamp production. Examples of errors are inverts (Scott #C3a), stamps with missing colors (Scott #C76a), or stamps that are completely imperforate (Scott #1895a). There are other examples of errors, but a comprehensive discussion is beyond the point of this article. Error stamps usually obtain catalog status.

In my opinion, freaks are stamps that easily catch a collector's eye. Examples of freaks are stamps where the perforations cut through the stamp design or stamps where the colors of ink are not correctly aligned. While often very eye catching, freaks usually do not obtain catalog status.

In my opinion, oddities are less obvious than freaks. Many times, you have to look closely to find oddities. Oddities are things like constant plate varieties or stamps that have a stitch watermark. Early coil stamps and booklet stamps are incorrectly cut and sometimes show traces of the plate numbers that are normally



Figure 1

trimmed away. Oddities also usually do not obtain catalog status.

When do EFOs occur? EFOs can occur at different times. The main cause of EFOs is something going wrong during the stamp production process. The printing plate is damaged, some ink spills on the paper, the paper develops a tear, and

so forth. Many different things can go wrong which leads to the creation of EFO material.

Who collects EFOs? Lots of collectors! Most stamp collectors are likely to encounter at least one EFO in their philatelic travels. It could be something they bought from a dealer at a stamp show or something they discovered while making a purchase at their local post office. If you ask a collector if they have any "EFO" material, they may not know what you're talking about. However, ask a collector if they have any stamps that aren't "normal" and most collectors will be able to show you a stamp they found where the perforations cut through the stamp design or the colors of ink are not aligned. Many collectors have unusual stamps that they kept because they weren't just quite right.

Where do you find EFO material? Almost anywhere! You can find EFOs when purchasing stamps from your post office. You can find EFOs on covers mailed to you.

Some dealers specialize in selling EFO material. Several stamp auction houses offer EFO material in their auctions.

Why do collectors collect EFOs? There are many reasons. One reason is because EFOs, especially freaks and errors, are very eye appealing. A second reason is because



Figure 2

(continued on page 15)



Figure 3

understanding what caused a particular EFO often leads to a more in depth understanding of stamp production. A third reason is that EFOs are a great addition to any traditional exhibit. EFOs can also become an exhibit of their own.

EFOs are interesting, challenging, and more affordable than you thought.

Yes, some errors are very valuable. But there

are several errors that are within the means of many collectors. Freaks and oddities are much more affordable. Many freaks and oddities sell for tens of dollars or less per copy. Collecting EFOs doesn't have to break your stamp budget.

Interesting? Let's look at some specific examples to make my point.

Figure 1 is a true error, Scott #1895d, the 20¢ Flag over the Supreme Court coil stamp. It has a Scott catalog value of \$8 and is easily affordable by most collectors. Another example (not shown) is Scott #2201b. This is the 22¢ Stamp Collecting booklet issued for Ameripex '86 with the black ink omitted. It catalogs a modest \$42.50. Many tagging errors are

also very affordable.

Figure 2 is a misperforated freak of Scott #1542. Or is it? Look closely. Yes, the perforations cut through the stamp design. However, the dark green and black colors are shifted to the left. Look at the bottom half of the stamp and you'll see that the perforations are correctly aligned with the other colors of this issue. Sometimes freaks aren't what they appear to be at first glance.



Figure 4

Figure 3 is a misperforated freak of Scott #1420. This one is especially desirable because it's what EFO collectors term a "change of design." The perforations are shifted to the left causing the vertical text to be on the left side of the stamp. On a normal copy, the vertical text is along the right edge of the stamp.



Figure 5

Figure 4 is a reduced size image of a plate block of Scott #1186. Look closely at the plate number, 27025. It's inverted. This copy is an oddity. All of the lower left corner and lower right corner plate blocks of this issue have the plate number inverted. A normal plate block catalogs \$1 and any plate block with the inverted plate number catalogs \$1.10.

Figure 5 is also an oddity. The Cincinnati, OH precancel was applied by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing on Scott #1055. Look closely and you'll see that the state name is incorrectly spelled "OIHO." This is a constant plate variety. Six subjects of the 100 subject precancel plate have the spelling error.

Challenging? Absolutely! As we saw in Figure 2, what looked like a misperforated stamp was actually a color shift. What makes EFOs so challenging is trying to determine the cause of a particular EFO. How did that blob of green ink appear on that stamp? What causes crazy perforations? What happens when the doctor blade develops a nick? What causes overinked and underinked copies? EFO collectors often aren't satisfied with just collecting the stamp. They also want to understand what caused it.

We only touched the tip of the iceberg about EFOs. Where can you go to learn more? The Errors, Freaks, and Oddities Collectors Club (EFOCC) is an APS affiliate of dedicated EFO collectors organized for the collection and study of EFO material. You can learn a lot more about EFOs by joining the EFOCC. Check out the club website at www.efocc.org or contact the club Secretary: Jim McDevitt, 3561 Country Court North, Mobile, AL 36619-5335.

About the Author: Scott A. Shaulis is a part-time stamp dealer and has been a stamp collector for 36 years. He is a past auction director and is a lifetime member of the EFOCC. He also belongs to the APS, ASDA and numerous other philatelic organizations.