

# EFOs: Errors, Freaks and Oddities

by Scott A. Shaulis

Anyone 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

#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 invert (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

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