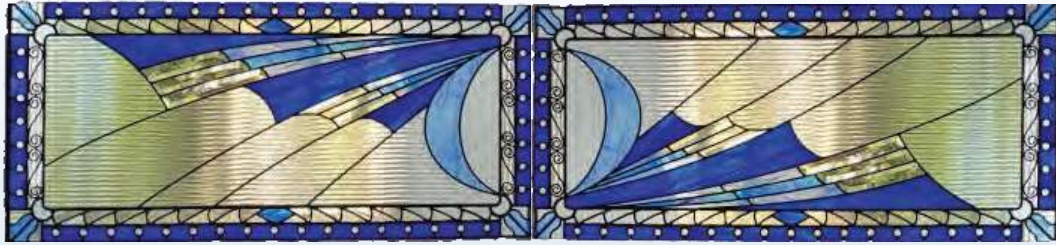




BUY CHRISTMAS SEALS



# Rockwell Kent's Striking Art Deco Angel In The 1939 U.S. Christmas Seal



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Figure 18



Figure 1.

The year 1939 saw the issuance of the 33rd annual Christmas seal by the National Tuberculosis Association (N.T.A.). The importance of this seal is esthetic. (Figure 1) It was designed by Rockwell Kent, arguably the most important American artist of the 20th century, and is generally considered to be the finest seal ever produced by the N.T.A.. No other artist of such worldwide acclaim has designed an N.T.A. seal, before or since.

In building the collection upon which the article is based, access to the Archives of American Art in Washington, DC has given me the opportunity to research more detailed data than has appeared previously, particularly as concerns dating.

Based on my examination of numerous full sheets and multiples, I have been able to do a much more detailed analysis of plate flaws, shown here for the first time.

I have approached the collection as a classic philatelic study. Much of the pre-production material is unique and is, fortunately, virtually complete, allowing me to tell the entire story. That is what this article traces.

**The story begins in mid-July 1937 when Charles L. Newcomb, director of the N.T.A. Christmas Seal program, wrote to Rockwell Kent** asking if he would be interested in designing the 1939 seal. He was a noted artist who studied under Arthur Wesley Dow, William Merritt Chase, and Edward Hopper and had a lengthy career as a painter and print maker.

On July 23, Kent replied that "I would be delighted to design a Christmas seal for the National Tuberculosis



Booklet Pane

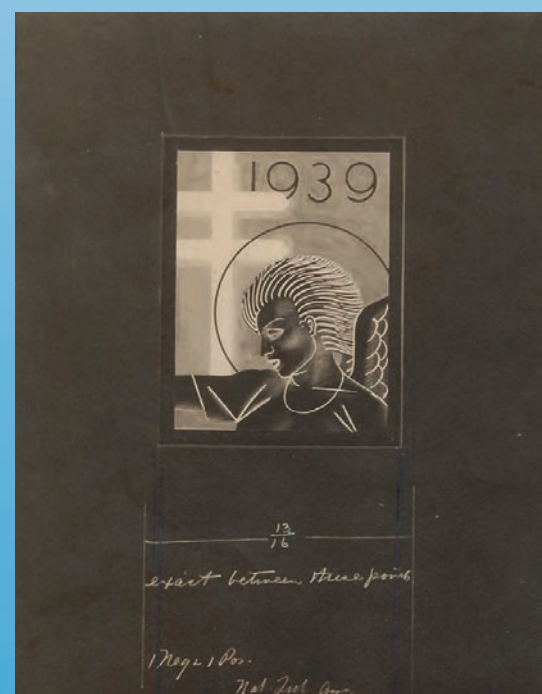


Figure 7.



Figure 2.

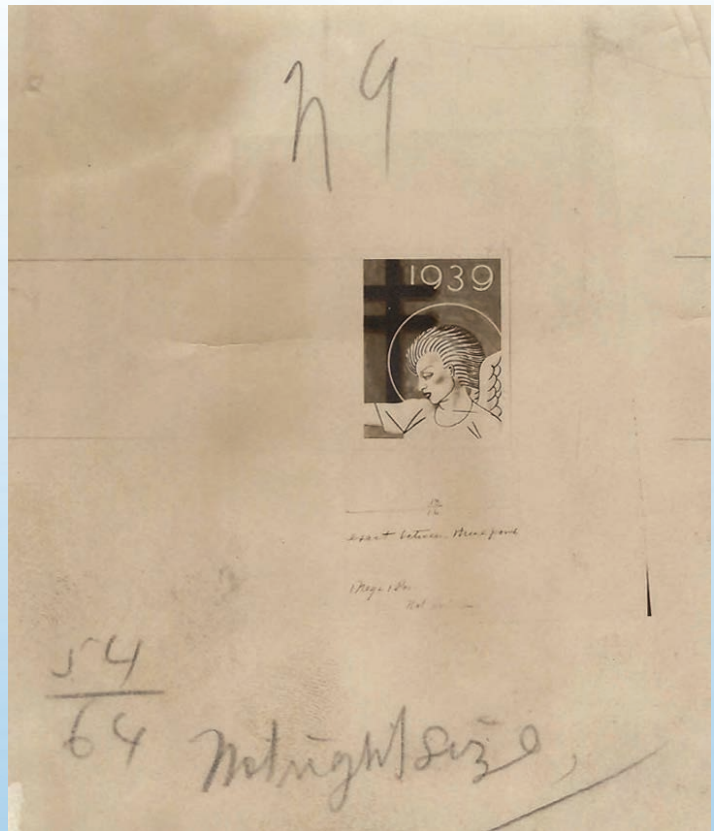


Figure 8.



Figure 12.



Figure 6b.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.



Figure 6a.



Figure 3.



1938—Final Proof  
October 17

Association and I'll start thinking about it right off." On September 1, details of the \$1,000 remuneration were sent to Kent and agreed to. Kent submitted his first design in January of 1938. (Figure 2)

Normally, the N.T.A. had a competition but this year they did not. Nevertheless, several artists, accustomed to offering designs, sent unsolicited essays. One of the pioneers of Christmas seal collecting was Charles Lorenz. He was given access to the N.T.A. archives and took black and white photographs of all the entry essays from 1919 to 1946. He noted their various colors. Thus, we have a record of the essays made for the 1939 seal. There were originally ten in all but the whereabouts of only six is currently known. Hans Axel Walleen submitted three of the ten (Figure 3); the other artists are unknown. As a matter of course, all original artwork was returned to the artists. Kent's was ultimately returned to him and its current whereabouts is unknown.

In addition, the N.T.A. itself had two essays made using Kent's design. One was embossed by M.M. Gottlieb of Allentown, PA, date unknown. (Figure 4) The second, with a silver background rather than white, was later sent to Kent on December 17 for review and about which he made no comment. (Figure 5) Two other unsolicited embossed offerings were made and not considered. (Figures 6a & b)

Work began in earnest after Kent sent his initial design to Newcomb, who acknowledged its receipt on January 7. It used the date "1938" as a space holder (see above). The background color was black. Newcomb suggested blue in his reply of the same day. On January 9, Kent said that was his intention and that the black was merely to show use of a dark color. In addition, "...in my final design I should like to enlarge the numerals of the date, bringing the "1" down to be overlapped by the arm of the cross. The numerals are somewhat drifting and lost at present." In response to another comment, Kent revised the proportions of the cross (February 16).

**On February 21, Newcomb sent the drawing to the maker of the negatives from which the offset plates would be made.** The original drawing was photographically reduced. The black on white photograph of the drawing is slightly smaller, 47/64" (Figure 7), than the final size 52/64", (Figure 8). The 54/64" size in the white on black photo includes the extra marginal space between the seals. The maker of these negatives, which were used to make the single die proofs, was the United States Printing and Lithography Co., Brooklyn, NY. From this die, the Negative Maker's Proofs (NMP) were made which would be used by the three other printers discussed later.

Newcomb received the First NM Die Proof on slick paper (technically, these are essays) in February. (Fig-

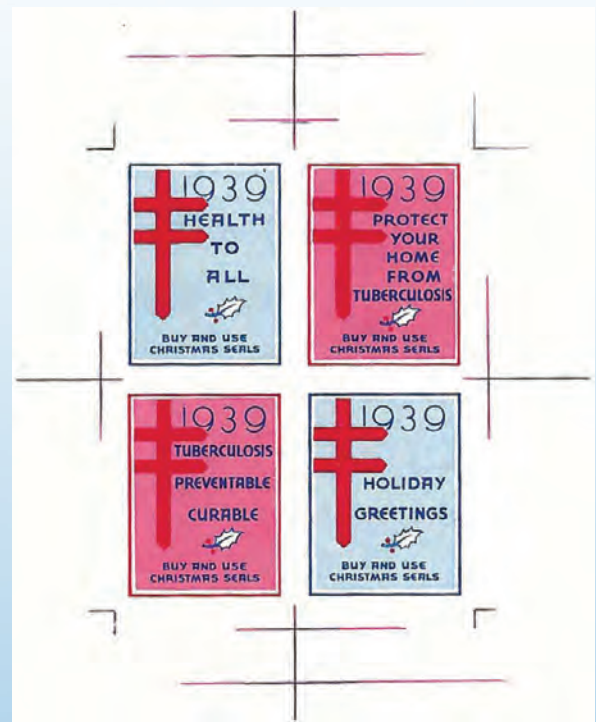


Figure 15a.

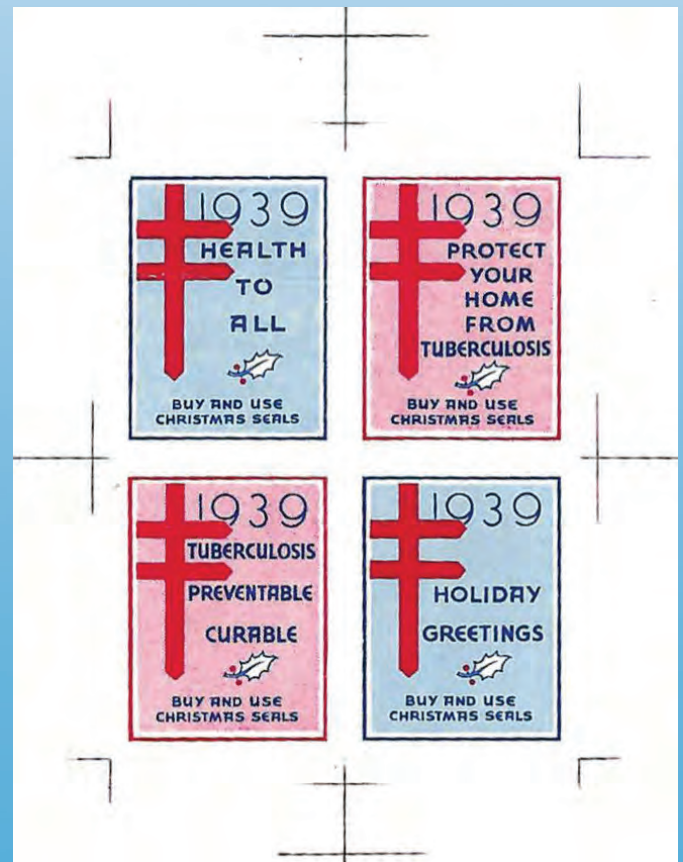


Figure 15b.



Figure 9.



Figure 11.



Figure 14.



Figure 10.



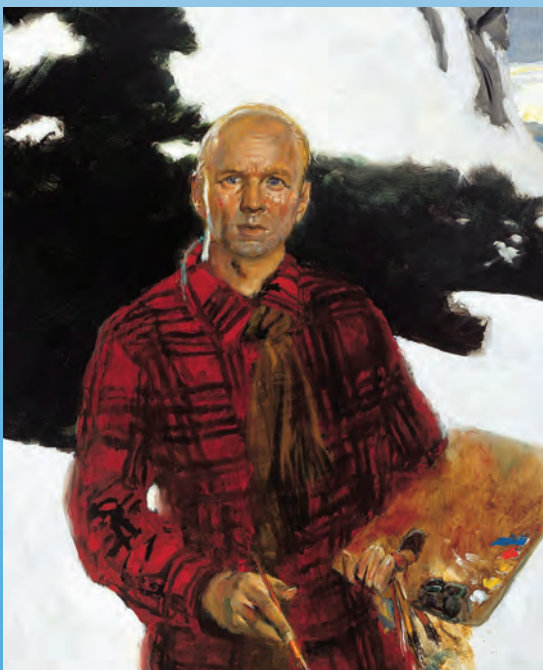
Figure 13a.



Figure 13b.



Figure 13c.



Jamie Wyeth's portrait of Rockwell Kent



Progressive proofs

ure 9) On March 1, he made handwritten comments as follows: 1) registration of the cross needs improvement, 2) add a frame line in red or blue and 3) change background color to different shade of blue. He did not note that the eye was almost solid blue. It was this proof that was sent to Kent on March 7.

Kent's 1938 sketch and the earlier photo reductions had the first right sleeve line fully crossing the arm. For some reason on this first proof it extended only halfway, readily seen in Figure 9. This was corrected in the Second NM Die Proof made in March. (Figure 10)

On May 18, Kent received his original drawings for some minor changes. There was some controversy within the N.T.A. committee concerning the representation of an angel in a modern guise rather than a traditional one, lest there be some religious objection. In response to the complaint, Kent replied that he had never seen an angel and, if he did, this is the one he'd like to meet, elegant and serene. The final design was accepted on June 19 at a meeting in Los Angeles.

**The First Die Proof of the Final Design in actual size was made on October 17, 1938.** For unknown reasons, they used the older design with thick numerals and halo. (Figure 11) Color separation plates were made of this die. We will see two examples of the thick numerals and halo in sheets produced by Eureka. Why this would have happened is unclear since such a cliché error is not present on the NPMs sent by United to the other printers.

On October 19, two days later, Newcomb noted that the first experimental printing "...has not turned out so successfully." The facial details are unclear and the eye is solid blue.

A Second Die Proof of the Final Design was made October 27 returning to the thinner numerals and halo and clearer rendition of facial features, although the eye still remained mostly solid. (Figure 12) Again, color separation plates were made. A set in black examined the plate outlines for sharpness. (Figure Figures 13a, red; 13b blue & 13c, pink) An all-black proof, on gummed paper, from the blue plate confirmed the final size and overall contrast. (Figure 13d)

**A second important feature of the sheet was a central block of four slogan seals.** On July 26, Newcomb wrote that because holiday lettering would be too small on the angel seal, he suggests the central block, which was the final decision. Kent subcontracted Mrs. Frank (Juliet) Smith of New York to do the lettering. She did so for a single solid block. Newcomb advised that such a layout can't be used because "...to avoid perforating through the enter block would entail a tremendous expense, since our perforating is done on a rotary perforator developed for our use."



Figure 16.



Figure 17.



Figure 23.



Figure 25a.



Figure 19.



Figure 24.



President Franklin D. Roosevelt receiving seal photo from Rockwell Kent

Figure 27a.



Figure 20.

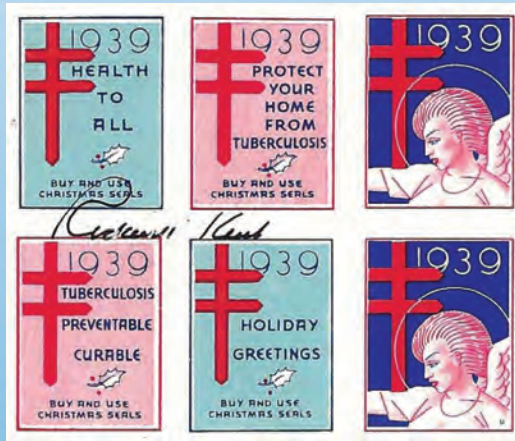


Figure 21.



Figure 27b.



Figure 25b.



Figure 26.





In late November, Newcomb hired Earl Hoffman to design the slogan block. His original artwork was on pelure paper, lightly mounted on card. (Figure 14) He used Smith's lettering. There were proofs of two versions on gummed paper. The first, in December, had a solid colored background for all the seals. (Figures 15a) The second, on January 4, changed the background for the pink seals, using a 200-mesh Ben-Day screen. (Figure 15b) Newcomb commented that 1) the white margin is not even, 2) the pink tint is not even all around and 3) the larger cross must not run over the edge and be even with the background. None of these changes were made.

The first imperforate NMP sheets of 100, including the slogan block, were made in early January. The eye still remained mostly solid. The maker's mark at position #57 had not yet been added. (Figure 16)

In the second NMP, the printing error of the eye was corrected on January 20, 1939 and sent to Kent. (Figure 17) Pencil note at the bottom says "Second proof - OK'd by Kent - Jan. 20, 1939 - U.S. Litho. - Experimental Proof." This proof is characterized by guidelines in the margins and in all four corners of each seal. (Figure 18)

**The first perforated plate proof sheet was made February 27, gauged 12½ x 12½. One of the early proof pulls had very wide margins.** (Figure 19) Again, no printer's mark is present. Newcomb sent at least two of these perforated sheets to Kent on February 27 with a request to sign them for himself and his wife (right-hand sheet). This one is signed "To/Mrs. Newcomb/O.K. -- and How/Rockwell Kent." (Figure 20)

By May 24, the printer's mark at pos. 57 had been added, U for United States Printing and Lithography Co.. An imperforate plate proof sheet was made, initially showing the marginal guidelines. These final proof sheets were trimmed to proper size. 100 of them were signed by Kent, numbered on the back, for radio auction as a fund-raiser, expected to sell for \$3-\$10+. (Figure 21)

The actual production perforated sheets followed from these imperforate proofs. Progressive color proofs were made by both United and Eureka. A set is shown in the Eureka section.

The final NMPs were now ready for distribution to the other three printers: Edwards and Deutsch Lithography Co., (D) of Chicago Ill., Strobridge Lithographing Company (S) of Cincinnati, Ohio and Eureka Specialty Printing Company (E) of Scranton, Penn. Each printer will be discussed individually. The simplest way to identify a particular printer is by their mark at pos. 57. E can be determined by its perforations. Otherwise, single seal printers can only be identified by constant flaws.

On Nov 20, 1939, President Roosevelt bought his an-

Rockwell Kent and his wife, Frances Lee, Ca. 1939

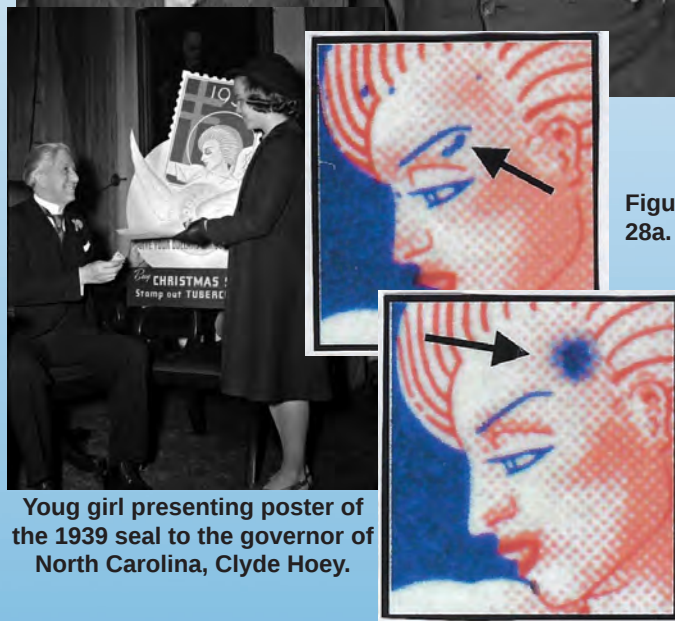


Figure 28a.

Young girl presenting poster of the 1939 seal to the governor of North Carolina, Clyde Hoey.

Figure 28b.

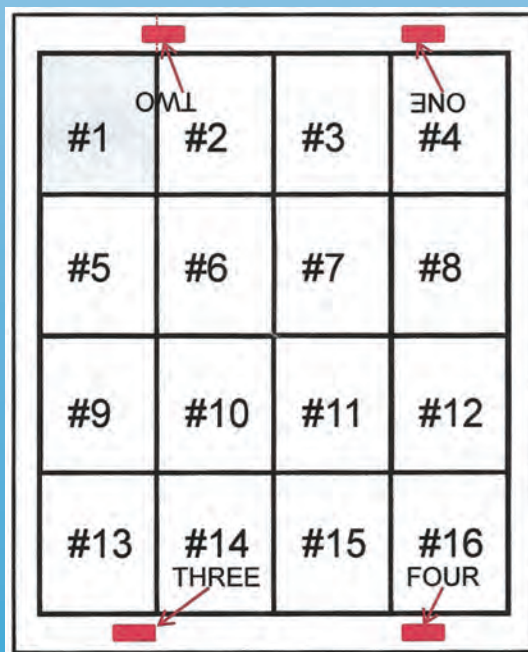


Figure 32.

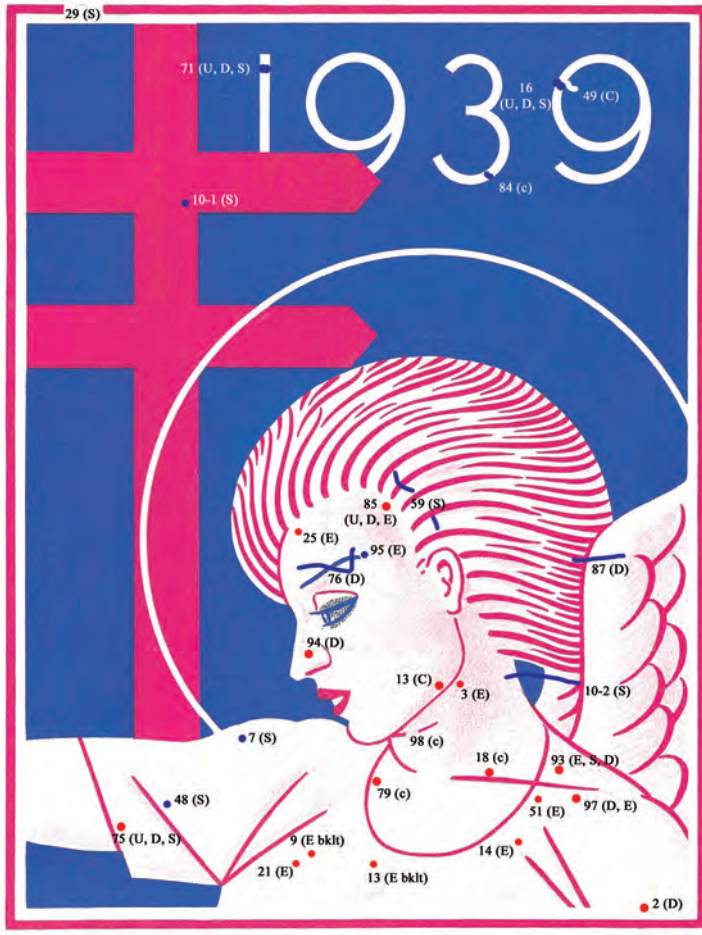


Figure 29.



Figure 30.



Figure 29.



Figure 33.



Figure 34.



Figure 37.

Figure 36.



Figure 35.



Figure 38.



Figure 39.

nual supply of Christmas Seals. (Figure 22) Presenting them to him is the artist Rockwell Kent, who had been commissioned to design the seal depicting Kent's conception of a "modern" angel. Also present was Cora Grant, managing director of the District of Columbia Tuberculosis Association, who had been part of the annual presentation since the Coolidge Administration.

The first day of issue was December 1, 1939. However, there are a number of pre-first day covers, the earliest date being November 18 used from Manila, Philippines. (Figure 23) I suspect the seals were sent there well ahead of the official first day to make sure they were available as there is another pre-first day cover dated November 25, also from Manila but from a different sender.

It is presumed that the seals of all four printers were all issued on December 1. However, to date one can only be certain for those with a printer's mark or E comb perfs. I have seen only those from U. The vast majority of FDCs are philatelic. To find a commercial one is difficult. (Figure 24)

Having discussed the pre-production material at length, it is time to look at the seals themselves.

**Certain characteristics are common to all seals and stamps: paper, gum, color and perforations:** 1) the paper is uniformly 3.0-3.5 microns; 2) The gum can be either light or dark, particularly those of E, which used both types; 3) The blue color is found in a lighter shade in E and S. U tends to be the darkest. On the later printings of E, the blue has an iridescent quality; 4) The perforations of U, D & S are all line perf. 12½ x 12½. E is comb perf. 12½ x 12¼.

As with any stamp, there are both printing errors and plate flaws. Errors include double impression (Figure 25a, double U and 25b, doubling of red creating the "red head" variety, the only one seen to date); mis-registration (Figure 26), perforation errors (Figures 27a & b) as well as random ones such as blotches (Figures 28a & b) and fingerprints (Figure 29).

Short entries may be found. I know of one that occurs on more than one seal. (Figure 30, at pos. 39 above flaw at pos. 49, noted below) Occasionally, there is an error so remarkable and specific to one printer that I describe it with the printer.

There are three types of flaws: 1) common to all printers; 2) shared by more than one printer and 3) unique to a given printer. The enlarged image shows all the flaws together with their plate position number. (Figure 31) The printers' initials appear in parentheses. C indicates flaws common to all. Descriptions of these flaws are found in the relevant text section.

Close examination of many sheets indicates that seven constant flaws appear on all printings at positions 13 (dot above jaw line), 18 (dot over left clavicle), 49

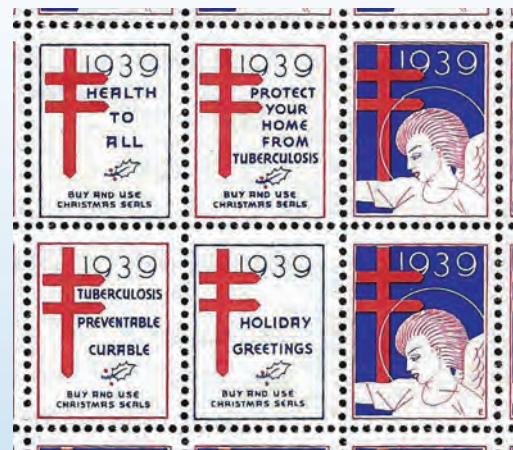


Figure 40.



Figure 41a.



Figure 41b.



Figure 42.

1939 **33rd ANNUAL Christmas Seal Sale** PRICE \$2.00

200 CHRISTMAS SEALS IN A CONVENIENT BOOKLET. PURCHASED AND USED GENEROUSLY THEY WILL HELP PROTECT YOUR HOME FROM TUBERCULOSIS.

*Let's Eradicate Tuberculosis*

FROM NOW TO CHRISTMAS **ONE ON EVERY LETTER**

Figure 44.

Figure 43a & 43b.



Figure 45.

Ask your local tuberculosis association for any of these pamphlets:

- TUBERCULOSIS FROM FIVE TO TWENTY
- WHY DOES TUBERCULOSIS RUN IN FAMILIES?
- WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT TUBERCULOSIS



Figure 46.



Figure 47.

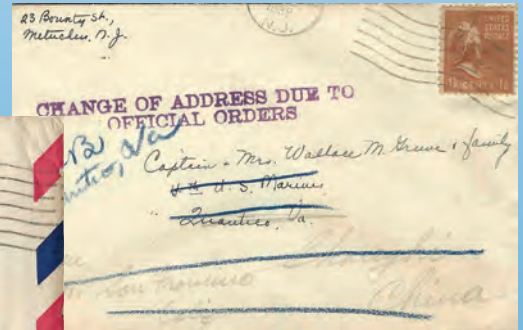


Figure 48a.



Figure 49.

Figure 50.

Figure 48b.



(curved white line in second 9), 79 (pearl upper right necklace), 84 (dot in base of 3), 88 (cracked lip) and 98 (break in line below chin), as illustrated in Figure 31. They were, then, present on the final NPM plate distributed to the printers.

**I**nterestingly, some flaws are constant on more than one printer but not all. I call these “shared” flaws. A few are shown in the composite image. How that could have occurred is a mystery to me. How could the identical flaw appear on seals of more than one printer considering they all started with the same NMP?

Those flaws unique to a given printer are noted in the discussion of those printers.

Let us now look at the four individual printers. The press sheets for all four printers were 16 panes of 100 seals each with the four corners numbered as in Figure 32. Guide lines were present along all the margins, trimmed away before final distribution. Cutting across panes resulted in inter-panneau examples.

**The United States Printing and Lithography Co., (U), Brooklyn, N.Y.**

The seals are line perf. 12½ x 12½.

As noted above, the first day of issue was December 1, 1939. The first day cover in Figure 33 is signed by Rockwell Kent and is the only one I have seen that is identifiable as from a specific printer, identified by the printer’s mark U.

Other than an inconstant double U at pos. 57 (see Figure 25a), I have found no unique flaws. A few of the shared flaws have been shown above.

The unique and remarkable “spoon” error resulted from a transient piece of paper caught in the press during the printing of the red and blue colors. It was not present in the pink printing. (Figure 34)

The principal error is the absence of the pink color seen in both imperforate and perforated sheets. (Figure 35, note printer’s mark at pos. 57) It is known from both printers U and E (q.v.). The cover in Figure 36 is dated November 23, the earliest use of any error of the 1939 seal. Note that it is an imperf. cross-gutter block with pos. 98-99 on top and 8-9 below. There is the constant flaw at pos. 98 (break in line below chin) but no other flaw or perforations to aid in distinguishing whether it is printer U or E.

**Edwards and Deutsch Lithography Co., (D), Chicago, Illinois.**

The seals are also line perf. 12½ x 12½.

I have identified four unique flaws at pos. 2 (lower right corner dot), 76 (the eyebrow flaw), 87 (blue line behind head) and 94 (dot in mid nose), shown in the composite diagram. The cross-gutter block shows wider horizontal spacing between the panes. (Fig. 36) Pos. 84-95 are at the top with pos. 4-8 below. The unique



Figure 51.

Figure 53a.



Figure 54.



Figure 52a



Figure 55b



Figure 55a.



Figure 52b.

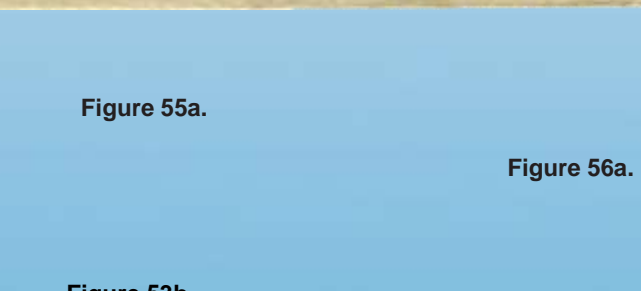


Figure 56a.



Figure 53b



Figure 56b.

flaw at pos. 94 identifies this as printer D. Thus, use of flaws and/or perfs. (in the case of E) can help in making printer designations.

Perfined Christmas seals are very rarely seen. The example in Figure 37 is perfin "BLC", Bankers Life Company of Des Moines, IA. Since perfins were used to discourage unauthorized use, it seems odd that they would appear on these seals.

### **Strobridge Lithography Co., (S), Cincinnati, Ohio.**

Three printings from this company are distinguishable by a unique flaw at pos. 29 (UL frame break, see composite) which went through one repair before being fully corrected. (Figure 38) All are line perf.  $12\frac{1}{2} \times 12\frac{1}{2}$ .

There are six unique flaws at pos. 7 (blue dot right shoulder), 10-1 (blue dot upper cross), 10-2 (blue scratch at nape of neck), 29 (UL frame break), 48 (blue dot left sleeve) and 59 (blue dots in hair), illustrated in the composite illustration.

### **Eureka Specialty Printing Co., (E), Scranton, Penn.**

This is the only printer to use a comb perforating machine, gauge  $12\frac{1}{2} \times 12\frac{1}{4}$ . The other printers had horizontal perfs.  $12\frac{1}{2} \times 12\frac{1}{2}$ . E can range from 12 to  $12\frac{1}{2}$ , usually closer to  $12\frac{1}{4}$ . As mentioned, progressive color proofs were made. This set shown includes the constant flaw at pos. 49. (Figure 39)

The error of color, missing pink, is found in E printings as it is in printer U. In Figure 40, we see the printer's mark, E, at pos. 57.

There are six flaws unique to E printings at pos. 14 (just above left axilla), 21 (right mid-breast), 25 (dot in forehead), 51 (large dot above left axilla), 70 (dot below angle of jaw) and 95 (blue dot end of eyebrow), as illustrated.

As noted above, the First Die Proof of the Final Design in actual size, made on October 17, 1938, contained a cliché error that had large numerals. There are two examples in E sheets, which were quickly replaced: pos. 37 (Figure 41a, one known) and 70 (Figure 41b, three recorded). As expected, the unique flaw at pos. 70 noted above is not seen in the cliché error.

Eureka was charged with making booklet panes of 20 (4x5). They are perf.  $11\frac{3}{4} \times 12$ . Each booklet contains 10 panes (Figure 42, this one signed by Kent in green ink) with inter-leavings, un-gummed in proofs but issued gummed. There are two constant flaws at pos. 9 (dot right breast up and out) and 13 (dot right breast upper, closer to necklace), as shown above. The front and back covers have promotional information. (Figures 43a & b)

### **The Italian Plagiarisms**

They say plagiarism is the sincerest form of flattery. In 1950, the Italian anti-TB organization issued this one. It is only plagiarism of this seal that the author is aware of. It comes in a booklet of one pane of six with five seals

and an advertising label for sale at L. 50. (Figure 44) The seal comes with three perforation gauges:  $10 \times 10$ ,  $11\frac{1}{4} \times 11\frac{1}{4}$  and  $11\frac{1}{2} \times 11\frac{1}{2}$ . They are very difficult to find on cover. (Figure 45)

### **Usages of the Seal**

**These seals may be found on myriad covers. I will show a few of the more unusual ones.** A specific printer cannot be assigned to any of them. Most common are 2¢ unsealed drop letters and regular 3¢ first class.

The seal used without postage might have passed through the postal service either without (Figure 46) or with postage due charges. (Figure 47)

An unsealed letter, c. December 19, franked  $1\frac{1}{2}\text{¢}$ , was sent to Captain Greene 4th U.S. Marines, Quantico, VA (backstamped First Marine Brigade, Fleet Marine Force), purple straight-line "Change of Address due to/Official Orders" requiring no 3rd Class forwarding fee, thence to Shanghai, China "via/P.M. San Francisco/Calif." where he was on Yangtze River patrol duty and returned from "4th Regt. U.S.M.C. Shanghai, China" (hand stamp), to Quantico, February 9, 1940. (Figures 48a & b)

The use of an airmail envelope required airmail postage of 6¢. This cover (Figure 49) is a top-of-the-pile for 16 covers, each with 3¢ due.

This cover was sent from New York to Selma, Ala. by airmail special delivery, properly franked and hand stamped. (Figure 50)

The surface rate to Mexico was 3¢, paid with a pair of  $1\frac{1}{2}\text{¢}$  prexy coils sent from St. Louis to Tacubaya, December 21,  $1\frac{1}{2}\text{¢}$ , and returned to sender with all appropriate hand stamps on February 2. (Figure 51)

Multiples on cover are uncommon. This pre-first day cover, November 30, was sent from Burlington, N.J. to Denmark at the 5¢ international surface rate (convenience overpaid 1¢) and returned, with numerous hand stamps. (Figures 52a & b)

Perhaps the most remarkable cover I have encountered is this one (Figures 53a & b) to Tonga utilizing Tin Can Mail with all the proper hand stamps applied by Postmaster Walt. Geo. Quensall.

A very late used (December 11, 1945) by international registry to France, franked properly 25¢ for double 5¢ surface rate + 15¢ registry fee, with four commemoratives and a 13¢ prexy. This is, no doubt, a private philatelic cover but quite striking. (Figure 54)

Seals used on international airmail covers are most unusual. Regulations did not permit the use of seals on the front so they appear on the back as in these two examples, December 18 to Brazil at the  $40\text{¢}/\frac{1}{2}$  oz. rate (Figure 55a & b) and December 22 to Germany at the  $30\text{¢}/\frac{1}{2}$  oz. rate. (Figure 56a & b)