

DETECTING REPERFORATING JOBS FROM A SCAN

Reperforation is a form of stamp alteration in which fraudulent perforations are applied to one or more sides of a perforated stamp. Sometimes it is done to reduce or eliminate some fault in the stamp, for instance a tiny tear or a thin. Sometimes it is done to “improve” the appearance and/or centering on a stamp. Finally, sometimes a stamp is reperforated in an attempt to make it appear to be an expensive variety or an entirely different catalog number.

At the very least, reperforation has to be counted as a major fault, driving the value of a stamp down to a small fraction of what an otherwise equal but sound example would be worth.

Needless to say, it would be nice to be able to detect a reperforating job from a scan. Then one would not bid on a stamp that obviously bore fake perforations. But scans come in all different sizes, resolutions, magnifications, and qualities of image.

Still, it is possible, in many cases to say for sure that a stamp is reperforated simply by manipulating the scan in an image editing program. Here’s how you do it.

1) SNATCH THE SCANNED IMAGE. Place your cursor on the image and right-click with your mouse. (This applies to PC-style mice, since I am clueless as to how you’d do this on a Mac.) A dialog box drops down and offers you several options. Depending on what your image editing program wants you to do, either “copy” the image or “save picture as…” to your hard drive.

2) OPEN THE IMAGE IN YOUR IMAGE EDITING PROGRAM. Windows Paint is more than up to the image manipulations you’ll be doing. In Windows98, click on “Start,” then “Programs,” then “Accessories,” then “Paint.” You might want to put a shortcut on your desktop for this program, since you’ll be using it often. (Once again, I am clueless as to how you’d do this in other flavors of Windows or on a Mac.) You should get something like this image loaded into your image editing program:



Figure A: The raw scan of the stamp to examine, an attractive U.S. 10 cent 1857 type V.

3) SELECT AND COPY THE LEFT-HAND PERFORATIONS. You want to include all of the perforation teeth but select as little of the background as you can. Rather than deskewing the image (straightening it), use a polygonal marking tool. (Deskewing introduces calculated rounding errors, so the image will lose sharpness.) If your image editing software requires it (Windows Paint does), expand the work area for further manipulation.



Figure B: Select the left-hand perforations.

4) PASTE THE COPY OF THE LEFT-HAND PERFORATIONS. Now, move the copy of the left-hand perforations and left side of the stamp so that the first perf hole of the left-hand perforations lines up with the first perf hole of the right-hand perforations:



Figure C: Move and align the left-hand perforations with the right-hand perforations.

5) SEE HOW THE LEFT-HAND AND RIGHT-HAND PERFORATIONS LINE UP. As you can see, they don't line up very well. On Figure D (on the next page) I've drawn horizontal lines from the middles of the right-hand perforation holes through the copy of the left-hand perforations. Some of the lines actually cross the middles of the left-hand perforation holes, but some don't: they cross perf tips instead.



Figure D: Misalignment of left-hand and right-hand perforations.

This is actually a pretty good reperfoming job, insofar as the phony perf holes are about the same size as the real perf holes and the phonies are in a mostly straight line.

You can do this for the horizontal perfs as well. Figure E shows comparison of the top and bottom perforations.



Figure E: Decently aligned top and bottom perforations.

As you can see, the top and bottom perforations align fairly well. The alignments aren't perfect, nor should they be. The limitations of manufacturing in the 1850's was such that each and every perforation wasn't exactly the same distance from its neighbors.

There is one other factor to look for, in addition to perf hole alignment. All regularly-issued 19th century United States stamps were perforated by the line method. That is, the perf wheels on the machine were set to cut all the vertical perforations, and then reset to cut all the horizontal perforations. Fairly often, the sheets were fed through the machine "skee-wumpus," resulting in stamps that were parallelograms rather than rect-

angles. But the perforations on opposite sides (top-and-bottom or side-to-side) *must* be parallel. If they aren't, even though the perf holes match up, the stamp is almost certainly reperfored.

LIMITATIONS: There are some limitations to this method.

1) The scan may be of too poor quality (low resolution or small size). Also, this method doesn't work at all with images from photographs, unless the vendor used a perfectly aligned camera stand and a serious investment in photographic equipment. I have yet to see an eBay vendor using such a setup instead of a simple \$50.00 scanner. If an eBay vendor photographs stamps, the pictures are always at an angle, and the resulting parallax prevents using this method to detect reperforation. It may sound harsh, but it's only prudent to regard *any* stamp with a parallaxed photograph as reperfored and bid accordingly.

I have a customer for well centered but reperfored stamps. There are also three eBay vendors who photograph stamps using such a misaligned camera stand. The images are big and beautiful, but they look like the opening credits for the *Star Wars* movies. I always adjust my bids downwards by 50% to 65% to reflect the fact that those stamps *may* be reperfored. I get about half the stamps I bid on from these three vendors, so many other bidders are bidding low in case the stamps are reperfored. Very few of those stamps are reperfored, so those un-reperfored stamps wind up in my collection or reoffered on eBay. Over the last three years, my net *profit* from those reoffered stamps has exceeded a thousand dollars! I hope no one ever points out to those three vendors the extremely costly error of their ways!

2) Because stamp paper shrinks differently in different directions, you cannot compare top or bottom perforations to side perforations. Even if the stamp has genuine perforations all the way around, there will be slight misalignment, thanks to this differential paper shrinkage. Only compare top-to-bottom or left-to-right. Otherwise, you're comparing apples to oranges.

3) On a single stamp, assuming it's a fairly good reperforing job, there is no way to tell *which* side has been reperfored. To do that, you have to have the actual stamp in hand and use a very accurate perforation gauge (Linn's Multigauge, Stanley Gibbons's expensive model, "anerdman"'s excellent gauges offered on eBay, or -- best yet for 19th century United States -- a Kiusalas gauge).

4) Very good reperforing jobs will pass this test, even with a high-resolution scan. Consequently, you can only use it for eliminating not-so-good reperforing jobs. You still have to examine the stamp "in hand" to see really good jobs.

5) If *both* left and right sides and/or the top and bottom have been skillfully reperfored using the same reperforing template, then obviously the method fails.

6) Certain stamps, notably some early Australian States and New Zealand issues, were perforated using four different perforation gauges. Obviously the method fails in these cases as well.

Despite these limitations, I've found this method a useful way to identify 90% of the reperforing jobs offered on eBay.

I was going to bid on the stamp I've shown in the figures. But before I placed my bid, I performed this simple test and discovered one side was reperfored. I pity the buyer who paid 65% of catalogue value for that stamp, thinking it was sound and unaltered. It's worth 15% of catalogue, at best.

REPERFORATING AND EXPERT COMMITTEES: Of course, if a stamp reperfored along one or more sides is submitted for expertization, the certificate will say "reperfored."

Every so often, you encounter a stamp which has had one or more blind perms punched out. Expert bodies are somewhat inconsistent in this (PSE more so than the PF or APEX), but the tendency is to call reperfored *any* stamp which has had more than one blind perf per side punched out. So, once you get the stamp in hand, carefully examine it for punchouts. You are more than within your rights to return a stamp for misdescription if you find more than one, very expert, punchout per side.