

SYNOPSIS: THE UNITED STATES OFFICIAL STAMPS OF 1873-1884

Commencing July 1, 1873, official mail delivered by United States government officials was required to bear specially designed and issued postage stamps, printed initially by the Continental Bank Note Company of New York, and subsequently after the merger by the American Bank Note Company, after the February 4, 1879.

Philately recognizes two states of paper for these issues, hard white paper for the Continental issues (93 stamps) and soft porous paper for the American (25 stamps). The overlapping of printing was caused by the need for additional supplies of stamps by five (5) different departments.

The collection is traditionally organized. Each of the nine separate government departments (Executive has been deemed a department but it is really mail from the President), is represented by one full frame; however, the State Department, because of the requirement of higher denomination postage, contains two frames -- the first showing the values expressed in cents (1c through the 90c) and the Dollar values, in a separate frame. Certain values were consistent in each of the issues, ie., one, two, three, six, 10, 12, 15, 24 and 30 cent. Because there was need for international mail, certain departments utilized a 7c denomination (Navy, Treasury, State and War). Executive required only five (1, 2, 3, 6 and 10 cent) denominations, while Agriculture, alone, did not need a 90 cent stamp. The State Department utilized \$2, \$5, \$10 and \$20 stamps.

Special Printings of 1875, are un gummed and overprinted Specimen, although the one cent Agriculture on soft paper, without gum, may have been inadvertently issued without the overprint. Ribbed and soft porous papers are found on a few special printings. A variety is reported on 53 of the special printings, from sheet position 21, where two cliches were reversed allowing an error in printing to show, to wit: SEPCIMEN. It is believed that the error was discovered when the two cent Interior was so misprinted and only two copies have survived. Each department with these varieties is represented and Agriculture is complete. No showing of the State Department has ever been this complete. Dollar State Department specimens were sold in very limited numbers (32, 12, 8 and 7 respectively) and it is only three sets survive. A small dotted "i" and a broken "i" in Specimen are found on a few one cent denominations. "Specimen" can be found inverted on the one cent Post Office.

The collection contains mint and used singles of all issues except the one cent Agriculture on soft paper (not known used), as well as the most complete section of blocks of four known. Space limitations dictate that some blocks, mint singles and used material be omitted. The one cent Executive appears in a block of six which is the only block reported. Several used blocks are shown.

All known officially submitted sketches are displayed. Post Office department material is particularly rich in essay material and includes the envelope on which the Assistant postmaster general showed the designers what he felt the post office issue should look like; this design, naturally, was adopted. Virtually all trial color and signed die proofs are shown. Selections from a complete set of Atlanta 1881 Exhibition Proofs and examples from the only complete surviving set of American Bank Note Company President Goodall proofs, are shown as space allows.

Most stamps are shown on cover. The only surviving example of the State Department dollar stamps (The Two Dollar) is shown on the parcel front to the library in Germany. The 90 cent State department cover shows that Mexico charged, in postage due, 8 for the 8 mile trip across the border, over three times what Washington paid to send the parcel to Mexico, via Brownsville, Texas.

The State Department inverted center errors, source unknown, illustrate that there were two sets of sheets of both the \$5 and \$20 values (full sheet of former, block of four of latter) but my records indicate, contrary to published claims, that there was only one sheet of the \$2 denomination. No \$10 invert was ever located. Therefore, but ten complete sets can be collected; at present, only five sets can be obtained due to the configuration of the surviving pieces. Varieties within the respective departments include double printings, plate scratches, double perforations and pre-printing paper folds.

Cancellations are studied on a department basis, including colors, shields, stars, New York foreign mails (the only surviving cover); the first day of issue of the 3 cent Treasury is displayed. A pre-1873 free frank is illustrated to show the transition into the Officials, including the only examples from President Ulysses S. Grant written at his summer home in Long Branch, N.J. probably prior to the issuance of the new stamps.

While the Officials spanned four Presidencies, the Grant administration was the major user of these issues since President Rutherford B. Hayes stopped using the Executive stamps on his inauguration which occurred on the day (March 3, 1876) when Congress passed the penalty clause requirements for official mail -- Hayes took it to mean that executive official mail should all be sent under penalty.

Foreign destinations under rules of the General Postal Union (July 1, 1875 except in France, January 1, 1876) and sometimes under rules of the Universal Postal Union from April 1, 1878 at various rates are included.

Special attention has been paid to cancellations in the War Department where more than 30 fort cancellations are exhibited. In addition, two examples of the imperforate varieties are illustrated, the only known block of four and a strip of three. These imperforates appear on the regular issues, but no one has reported their source.

The controversial Two cent Navy stamp in Green and Black is exhibited in various formats. I believe there were several trial color sheets obtained from American Bank Note Company vaults probably by Henry G. Mandel, two sheets of green imperforates: one perforated surreptitiously by enterprising dealers of the period, who may have had some of the second sheet so altered; one sheet on laid paper which was perforated and then another sheet on pinkish vertically laid paper likewise perforated. About 1916, a black sheet appeared and at least a portion of that sheet was perforated. While at least three (3) of the 2 cent Navy green perforated stamps have been certified as used by the Philatelic Foundations, it is my belief that they were favor canceled at the New York Post Office and deserve condemnation. Cancellation does not make these genuine stamp color errors as others espouse.

The Official stamps were almost entirely printed from plates of 100 subjects, but eight different issues were printed in panes of 200, cut into post office sheets of 100. The State department sheets were printed in panes of 10 as can be seen from both the India and Cardboard sheets, as well as the \$5 inverted center sheet shown. There is no way to distinguish between the printings of 100 and 200 subjects except by plate numbers.

It is most intriguing to find bisects on an official issue and especially where the user was the Post Office Department itself; while not officially sanctioned, more than a dozen exist on cover and several are shown here illustrating that many different Cities and towns used this expedient measure when they were out of 3 cent stamps. Two 12 cent bisects (six cents) are in a museum collection.

The imperforate 15 cent post office pair is one of three reported and listed in the Scott catalogue. While I believe it is printed on either stand and/or bond paper and could possibly be classified as an essay, it is my belief that it is a true imperforate stamp since it may have been an experiment -- nothing is known except it exists.

Combinations of Officials and regular U.S. postage are most unusual. I particularly wish to point out a Treasury cover addressed to Warren R. Taylor, a man of many names and addresses who apparently made a career of returning mutilated currency to the Treasury of the United States and obtaining spanking clean money in return, causing the Treasury to register the envelopes back to him and his family without charge (per statute). At least six different names have been found on envelopes to Mr. Taylor in different Vermont towns.

Several envelopes illustrate private and/or late uses of the officials on personal mail, most often by government employees with rankings as high as presidential secretaries.

The Agriculture Department is shown last as it did not become a full government department until 1882 when its Director achieved cabinet status.

Many rarities in this collection have been traced to Andreini, Ackerman, Wolcott, Slater, Sinkler, Wood, Emerson, Ward, Philipps, Souren, Weill, Lilly, Korff, Hughes, Pope, Brazer and of course, the late Mrs. Rae D. Ehrenberg and Morrison Waud, dean of official collectors.

(A tribute is extended to my dearest friend Robert A. Siegel, who unfortunately passed away months before he could view the exhibit that he helped develop.)

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