

The United States Imperforate Issues of 1851 - 1856 and Their Importance in an Expanding Postal System

Purpose: A comprehensive study of the five imperforate stamps issued between 1851 and 1856. It also shows a diverse range of uses including how the stamps were treated by the post office, the innovative uses patrons found for the mails and how the post office addressed their needs in a period of profound change in the country.

History

The 1851-1856 period coincides with the dawn of the postal age, in which society's access to long-distance communication through the mails was expanded and made less costly. It was marked by extensive westward migration, with many families becoming separated by long distances. Commerce was growing, and the importance of reliable and fast mail service became essential to business. For individuals, receiving mail became commonplace. Therefore, moving mail efficiently and reliably was critical. The number of post offices almost doubled, with a large number of new offices established in the West, and a growing network of transportation routes served the postal system. During this period, using stamps on letters became the norm, increasing by a factor of more than 50.

The 1851-1856 Imperforate Issues were a significant part of these historical changes. The reduction of rates in 1851 and growing demand for postage necessitated the production of a new set of stamps to replace the first 1847 Issue. Six years after the 1845 postal reform lowered U.S. postage rates, the Act of 3 March 1851 further reduced rates, effective 1 July. The new basic letter rate was 3¢ per half-ounce up to 3,000 miles and 6¢ over 3,000 miles. The city drop-letter rate and postage on printed matter were also reduced. To give the public an incentive to prepay postage and use stamps, unpaid letters were charged 5¢ and 10¢, a 67% premium over the prepaid 3¢ and 6¢ rates. In April 1855 the rate for over 3,000 was increased to 10¢, and prepayment was made compulsory on domestic mail.

Production

Three stamps were issued in 1851: 1¢, 3¢, and 12¢ values. The 10¢ was issued in 1855, and the 5¢ followed in 1856. The stamps were engraved and produced by the firm of Toppan, Carpenter, Casilear & Co. Sheets were printed from steel plates of 200 stamps, consisting of two side-by-side panes of 100. The original issue was imperforate. In 1857 stamps were produced with perforations for separation. The stamps were valid for postage from 1 July 1851 until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. During this period, stamp production increased from a few million to over one hundred million per year. The 1¢ and 3¢ stamps were the work horses of the issue, while the 12¢ stamp was used less frequently. The 5¢ and 10¢ stamps were issued imperforate only for a brief period of one or two years before perforation were introduced, thus they are scarcer in imperforate form.

Exhibit Organization

Section One: Archival & Production

Essays and proofs followed by stamps in the order they were issued. Major types, varieties, color variations and typical or intended postal uses.

Section Two: Domestic Rates & Postal Markings

Rates, Hawaiian mails, and uses from territories, fancy cancels, forwarding, and illustrated covers.

Section Three: Carriers, Locals & Expresses

Shows local delivery both by the post office and by local private companies including western expresses.

Section Four: Waterways & Railroads

Transportation taking advantage of new technology to move mail faster and more efficiently.

Section Five: International Mails

Mail to international locations meeting business and private needs.

Section Six: Perforations and Demonetization

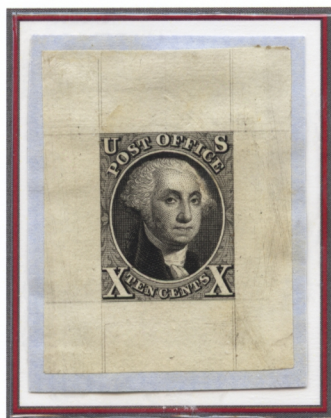
Application of official perforations and the demonetization of the stamps due to the Civil War.

Items accompanied by certificates from expert committees are indicated with a lower case 'e'.
Items of exceptional importance are framed in red. Blue text is used for population data.



The 1847 stamps were line engraved by Rawdon, Wright, Hatch & Edson. The vignettes came from stock images on hand that were used for bank notes.

Only recorded 1847 proof from unfinished die



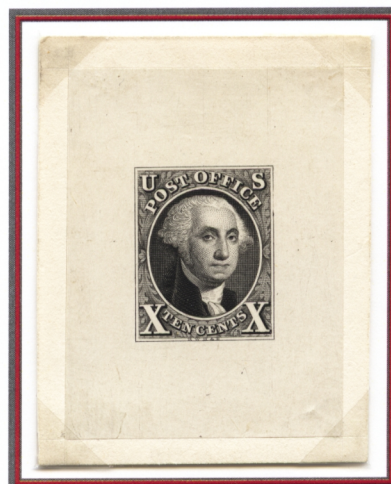
Proof from original 10 cent die in unfinished state. Outer framelines, "RWH&E" initials and some shading lines are missing.

Only recorded 1847 die proofs made prior to issuing the stamps

5 cent proof shows a thin diagonal line through the "C" clearly visible on the 1847 impression.



10 cent proof with same layout lines as the progressive die proof shown above.



Identifying marks on contemporary die proofs are found on post-1851 die impressions often with cross hatching visible. This shows that the original dies existed after 1851 and were not destroyed.



Cross-hatch lines were added to the dies. Proofs from the dies were made in 1858 and in later years in many colors and different papers.

Plate proof sheets of both values were printed in 1847. For each value, two sheets were printed in black, brown and orange. One sheet of each color in each value was printed with a diagonal 'SPECIMEN' overprint, the other without.

Plate Proofs Without Specimen Overprint



Brown



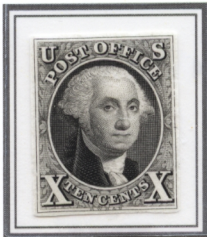
Orange



Orange



Brown



Black



Black

Plate Proofs With Specimen Overprint



Black



e



e



Only recorded copy with manuscript 'X'

Brown

As part of the Post Office special printing program started in 1875, reproductions or imitations of the 1847 stamps were made from new dies and plates produced by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. They were printed in sheets of 50 and sold without gum. The demonetized 1847 designs were not valid for postage in 1875.

Die proofs



e



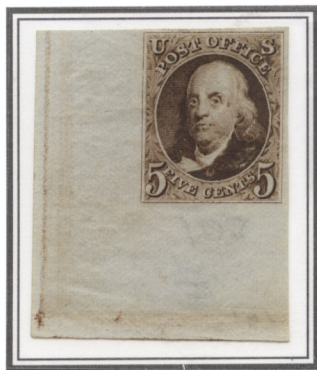
e

Made for 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition

Plate Proofs



Stamps Without Gum As Issued



e

Position 41



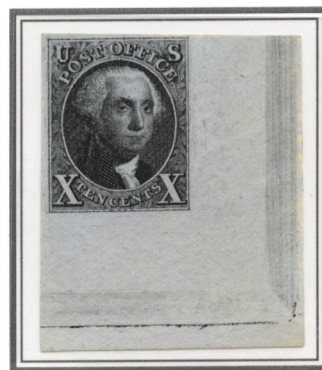
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Positions 5-6/25-26



e

Positions 39-40/49-50



e

Position 50

When the 1847 stamps were demonetized there was a limited time to turn them in for cash. Multiples, representing a significant amount of money, were likely to be redeemed, resulting in their scarcity today.



5 cent deep red brown left pane top right margin block of 8 with original gum. 3rd and 7th stamps dot in 'S'. Positions 7-10/17-20L.

The largest recorded unused block of 10 cent stamps

Found in the Rives family bible and known as the "Bible Block"



10 cent Positions 71-73/81-83R. Original gum.



5 cent dark brown reconstructed left margin block of six with original gum. Top row single and pair, bottom row strip of three.



Red brown



October 1849 folded letter from New York to Oregon IL. Strip of four 5 cent stamps paying double the 10 cent rate.



10 cent strip of four with original gum.



January 1850 folded cover front. Strip of four pay the 40 cent rate from New York to San Francisco CA. The letter traveled on the Steamship *Georgia* leaving New York City on 28 January 1850, stopping in Havana and New Orleans, arriving in Chagres on 18 February. Carried across the Isthmus of Panama to Panama City where it was placed on a Pacific steamer to San Francisco, probably the *California* leaving 2 March.



Left margin strip of 5 with Mobile AL red paint grid cancels.
Positions 41-45L.



Top left corner
Position 1R
Brown orange.



Bottom right corner
Position 100R



Top right corner
Position 10L



Lower left corner margin on partial folded address sheet. Position 91L. Brown orange.



Top left corner
Position 1R
Unused without gum.
Double Transfer type 'A'.



Top right corner
Positions 10R/20R



Top right corner
Position 10L

The two covers below were the discovery copies that proved both stamps were printed from plates with two panes. The stamps on these two covers and single stamp are the only examples that show the straddle margin between the two panes and a part of the stamp from the other pane.

Only recorded examples of straddle-panes



Red Brown stamp clearly showing the partial stamp from right pane.



Cover from Bridgeport to South Britain CT.

In 1924 a collector (Dr. Payne) noticed that a part of the left margin was turned under the stamp. Lifting and unfolding showed a stamp frame line to the left proving that the plates contained two panes of stamps.



April 1850 folded letter from New York City to Evansville IN. Stamp position 1R.
This is the first and only recorded 10 cent straddle-pane stamp, discovered by Elliott Perry.

Earliest recorded use of the 5 cent stamp

The 1847 stamps were delivered by Rawdon, Wright, Hatch & Edson to John Marron, Third Assistant Postmaster General, who traveled from Washington DC to New York City and received the stamps on 30 June 1847. They were placed on sale in New York City on Thursday 1 July. Marron carried a supply of stamps to other principal cities, where they were placed on sale as follows: Boston 2 July, Philadelphia 7 July and Washington 9 July. By the end of July fewer than ten post offices had the new stamps.



7 July 1847 folded letter mailed in New York City to Poultney VT. Letter datelined 'New York July 6th 1847'.
'Slipped' printing on left '5'.

Early printings of both the 5 cent and 10 cent stamps show lines that are sharp and clear. Background shading is strong and intense.

Over time the 5 cent plate wore, producing significantly degraded images while the 10 cent plate continued to produce good impressions. The 10 cent plate was not reworked, while the 5 cent plate was cleaned and some rework occurred.



Orange brown



Medium brown

Red grids.
Positions 10/20R

Two covers from July 1847 - first month of Issue

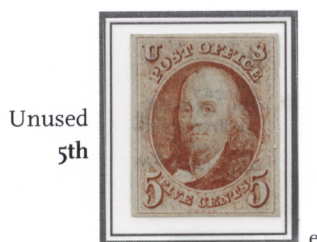


26 July 1847 folded letter
from New York City to
Washington City DC

Red New York City 13 bar
square grid canceling the
stamp. Red town postmark.

16 July 1847 folded address
sheet from New York City to
New Orleans LA

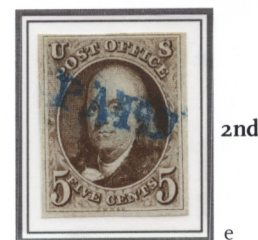
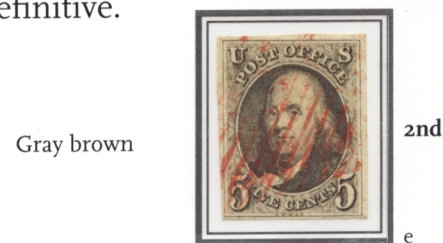




There were 5 printings of the 1847 5 cent stamp.

The plate was cleaned after the third printing. While the color itself is not a guarantee of which printing the stamp came from, it is an indicator.

'Brown' shades on the right tend to be from the first 3 printings. Shades on left with more orange tend to be from the last two printings or early in the first printing. These are guidelines, not definitive.



Brown



Brown

May 1851 folded letter from Havre de Grace MD to Philadelphia PA.



Reddish dark brown



Pecan brown



Bright dark brown



Grayish brown
Crisscrossed 'PAID'



Van Dyke brown



Paler red brown shades



Russet



Darker red brown shades



Dark brown orange



Bright brown orange



True auburn



Dark auburn



Orange brown

Dark pecan brown

October 1847 folded letter from
Baltimore to Frederick MD.



Dark brown



'ADJUTANT'S/MASS/OFFICE'
marking used at the Statehouse in
Boston. MA.
Envelope reduced at right.

Seal brown

August 1847 folded letter
from Baltimore MD to
Philadelphia PA.
Seal brown stamps pay triple
rate under 300 miles.



Walnut



September 1848 folded letter
from Alexandria VA to New
York City.

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Brown orange

April 1851 cover from
New York City to
Lockport NY.



Bright orange brown



December 1847
folded letter from
Philadelphia PA to
New York City.

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Worn Plate and Cleaned Plate Printings



Worn plate
Green town postmark.



Worn plate

'Bootleg' from England

The 5 cent plates wore to the point that the third printing produced very poor impressions with light lines and, in some examples, with uneven ink. Prior to the fourth printing the plate was cleaned, producing better images but with fuzzy lines.

Worn plate.
Folded address
sheet from
Boston to
Monson MA.



Worn and dirty plate.

June 1851 folded letter. Privately carried from Liverpool England to Boston MA where it was placed in the mail.

W. M. Bailey Lang forwarding stamp.

Cleaned plate.

Cover from Philadelphia PA to Paris France. Two 5 cent stamps paid single rate to Boston.

