

## Postscript to “The Design Evolution of United States Official Stamps”

Alan C. Campbell

In this article published over the last two issues, I speculated that the pattern of colors for the surviving large die trial color proofs suggests that it was originally planned to print the new official stamps in the same colors as the regular issues.<sup>1</sup> I am delighted to report that new evidence had just come to light confirming this theory. In a letter dated April 14, 1873 addressed to Postmaster General John A. J. Creswell, Third Assistant Postmaster General W. H. H. Terrell and E. W. Barber reported that in the company of stamp agent D. M. Boyd, they had visited the premises of the National and Continental Bank Note Companies beginning on April 5.

*The abolition of the franking privilege, to take effect July 1, 1873, rendered it necessary that stamps, somewhat different in appearance from the ordinary adhesive postage stamps now in public use, should be adopted to meet the requisitions of the various Departments of the Government. Bearing in mind the views you had expressed to us respecting this matter, we consulted with the officers of the ‘Continental’ and were gratified to find them ready and willing to meet our wishes to the fullest extent. Within two or three days they submitted new designs for all of the Departments embracing the eleven denominations now in use, which, with a few slight changes, we approved. The ‘heads’ as they appear on the present series of stamps remain the same, but different borders with the names of the several Departments are to be engraved.*

*To meet the special requisition of the Department of State, four additional stamps of entirely new designs - \$2., \$5., \$10., and \$20., - are to be engraved. We selected the profile head of the late Hon. William H. Seward for these special stamps, and from the designs submitted (which we approved) we are confident the stamps will prove satisfactory.*

*The regular departmental stamps will correspond in colors with those now in public use; the special stamps for the Department of State will be double the ordinary size and printed in black, velvet brown, milori green, and cochineal red.<sup>2</sup>*

Previously, in the absence of this confirming evidence, I had hedged on my theory, because it seemed to contradict the evidence of the bound volume of large die proofs, which contained several proofs in their final issued colors approved as early as April 18. It is now clear that while the dies may have been completed on this date, the proofs in the album were actually printed and annotated later, after the new color system had been devised. The first proofs pulled from the new dies would have been printed either in black, to inspect the quality of the engraving, or in the same color as the regular issue stamp appropriate for that denomination.

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Alan C. Campbell, “The Design Evolution of the United States Official Stamps”, *Chronicle*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Whole No. 169) (February, 1996), p. 53.

Philip H. Ward, Jr., “Our Bank Note Engravers of the Seventies”, *Mekeel’s Weekly Stamp News*, March 5, 1951, p. 74. Brought to my attention by Theodore Lockyear, a longtime specialist in the stamps of the Department of Justice.

When was the radical decision made, then, to assign a special color to each department so as to make these stamps more readily distinguishable from the regular issues? The last value for which a “trial color proof” was taken in the same color as the regular issue was the 1¢ State in ultramarine, whose die was completed on May 12. (Continuing to call these “trial color proofs” is a matter of respecting cataloging traditions, since they were in no sense experimental colors.) By that date, a total of twenty-four dies had been completed, and trial color proofs survive for all but six. For three of these - 3¢ State, 2¢ Treasury, and 10¢ Treasury - color proofs may exist which have not yet been recognized as such, since for these particular values, the color of the regular issue and departmental stamps are too similar. For the other three values - 90¢ State, 12¢ Treasury, and 90¢ Treasury - no proofs in the expected rose carmine or blackish violet shades have been reported. In the bound volume of date large die proofs, the earliest of the twenty-four proofs bearing the initials of Acting Third Assistant Postmaster General William M. Ireland is the 15¢ War, dated May 28. Therefore, my conclusion is that the decision to change the colors of all the new official stamps was arrived at some time between May 12 and May 28. This is before the dies for the Department of State dollar values were produced, so unfortunately one cannot expect to find proofs of these stamps in the advertised “black, velvet brown, milori green, and cochineal red.”

However, this span of time is after the decision had already been made to change from portrait vignettes to large numerals on the Post Office Department stamps (3¢ numeral die approved May 3), and sheds new light on the reason for that design change. If, as we now know, the Post Office stamps were originally meant to be printed in the same range of colors as the regular issues and would differ only in their frame designs, the potential for confusion by postal clerks handling two sets of nearly identical stamps is obviously much greater than if they had been furnished an all-black set of official stamps. I am at a loss to explain why we encounter die trial color proofs on white ivory paper for for the 1¢, 2¢, 3¢, and 90¢ Post Office portrait vignette essays in orange red, blue, gray black, and brownish black. To be consistent with the proofs taken for other official stamps prior to the across-the-board color change, one would expect to find only the 1¢ printed in ultramarine, the 2¢ in brown, the 3¢ in green, and the 90¢ in rose carmine. I can only conclude that these trial color essays, like the set in five colors on proof paper produced by Albert C. Goodall in 1879, were printed later for display purposes.

In my discussion of Continental’s engravers for the official stamps, a portion of the text was inadvertently omitted. According to Ehrenberg, for all departments except Post Office, A. W. Cunningham engraved the frames and lettering for the 1¢ values, G. H. Seymour the frames for the 6¢ values, and D. S. Ronaldson the frames for the 2¢, 3¢, 7¢, 24¢ and 90¢ values and the lettering on all values except the 1¢. She also identifies Ronaldson as the letter engraver for the 3¢, 10¢, and 12¢ Post Office stamps. No sources are given, and her credibility is a bit undermined when she seems to credit the National portrait engravers (Peace - 1¢, Delnoce 2¢, 10¢, 12¢, 15¢, 90¢; Ourdan - 3¢, 6¢, 7¢, 24¢, 30¢) with having reengraved the vignettes to create the official dies, and by the improbable coincidence that Cunningham and Ronaldson

had engraved the frames for the original National dies.<sup>3</sup> Also, Robert L. Markovits has been able to confirm that C. A. Kohler, whose signature appears on a die proof of the 3¢ Post Office stamp, was employed by Continental as an engraver and worked on the newspaper stamps. Nevertheless, the numerous inconsistencies in the engraving of the official dies provide ample evidence that, as Ehrenberg suggests, the Continental engravers were assigned specific values to prepare, not specific departments.

I am indebted to Calvet Hahn for providing clarification on several matters. Citing evidence that the new Continental regular issue plates were produced with great speed in early April, 1873, he had disputed my speculation that the siderographers might still have been working on the regular issue plates as late as April 18. From the sequence of the official plate numbers, I would still maintain that production of the official plates was held off for whatever reason until after the redesigned 3¢ Post Office die was approved on May 3. Mr. Hahn also pointed out that John Luff was able to verify the plate numbers for the official stamps on the basis of proof sheets furnished to him directly by officers of the American Bank Note Company. He also challenged Barcan's claim that Continental's employees worked double time on this project and were paid accordingly, since as he points out the normal working day then was a staggering twelve hours. I am happy to be able to report that some of the fascinating data given in Barcan's article, "United State Official Stamps and the Just Petition"<sup>4</sup>, was either derived from or is corroborated by an earlier column of Philip H. Ward, Jr.<sup>5</sup> Finally, Rev. Stephen Knapp, a keen student of the regular Bank Note issues, has indicated his support for the idea that the numeral and value wording on the official stamps was retained intact on the transfer rolls made from the original National dies.

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Rae D. Ehrenberg, "Proofs of the U. S. Official Stamps", *The Essay-Proof Journal*, Winter, 1962, Vol. 19, No. 1, Whole NO. 73, p. 4.

The Collector's Club Philatelist, Vol. 39, No. 3, (May, 1960) pp. 117-120.

Philip H. Ward, Jr., "United States Notes and Comments - Mere Chatter", *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News*, January 26, 1948, p. 55.