

## Plating the Official Stamps

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In previous articles on Departmental plate varieties, our assistant section editor, Lester C. Lanphear III, has been able to assign specific positions by referring to a set of photographs of plate proof sheets. These photographs, contact prints prepared for Elliot Perry in 1967, are full size, so it requires two prints to show the entire plate, with each print showing the top or bottom imprint and 6 1/3 rows of stamps. The 8" x 10" negatives are currently in the possession of our previous section editor, Alfred E. Staubus. The singular and frustrating absence of the 15¢ Interior plate (O21) has been taken as a good clue that these were photographs of the Earl of Crawford proof sheets on card, which for some reason lacked this plate, as opposed to the Mandel proof sheets on India paper, which did not.

Dr. Stanley Bierman did a thorough job of tracking the provenance of these two famous sets of sheets, of which the official stamps comprise only a portion.<sup>1</sup> Both sets were owned by Senator Ernest R. Ackerman, Josiah K. Lilly Jr., and the Raymond H. Weill Company. In 1972, half sheets from both sets were sold to the proof dealer Richard Taylor and subsequently broken, while the other halves of the sheets were kept intact in the collection of Stephen Bechtel Sr. This holding was sold prior to 1990, and its whereabouts have remained a mystery.

To our collective amazement and delight, the Bechtel half sheets resurfaced intact at Pacific '97 in San Francisco, sumptuously bound in six morocco folios, at the booth of Columbian Stamp Company. As word of this discovery spread across the floor, every official specialist in attendance scurried over to take advantage of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to personally examine them. To his credit, Harry Hagendorf, the president of the firm, was magnanimous and endlessly patient in allowing us to peruse this priceless reference material, even though none of us were likely buyers as the collection was being sold intact. He even went so far as to provide us with an itemized breakdown of which official plates the collection contained.

With respect to plate proofs on card, this holding consisted of top half sheets of 50 of O1-O45 (less O21), bottom half sheets of O47-O67 and O72-O93, and full sheets of the State dollar values (O68-O71). As the marginal inscriptions were intact, here at last was to be seen the elusive imprint of the American Bank Note Company on plate #428, the 1¢ Post Office plate recreated by American to continue printing proof sheets on card after the original Continental plate #43 was damaged and could not be included in the 1881 Atlanta trial color proofs.<sup>2</sup> This one hundred subject plate was the only official plate prepared by the American Bank Note Company. These

Stanley M. Bierman, M. D., *The World's Great Stamp Collectors*, Linn's, 1990, p. 231-232.

For stamps with multiple plates, this holding included 2¢ Post Office #285, 3¢ Post Office #141, 6¢ Post Office #249, and 3¢ Treasury #74 (in all cases the final plate). For stamps with 200-subject plates, the 3¢ and 6¢ Post Offices were right panes, the 1¢ Treasury left, the 2¢ and 3¢ Treasury right, the 2¢ War left (plate # trimmed off), and the 3¢ War right (plate # trimmed off).

proof sheets were at one time thought to have come from the fifth printing of May, 1893,<sup>3</sup> but the most recent scholarship attributes them to a little known sixth printing for the Atlanta Exposition of 1895.<sup>4</sup> The colorful “Dr.” James A. Petrie, who had earlier been able to acquire full proof sheets of the 1869 inverts, the State dollar value inverts, and the 1881 Atlanta trial colors, somehow obtained them at the close of the exposition. Petrie’s circular of 1903 offering 208 proof sheets boasted that the collection was complete for all U. S. stamps from 1847 to 1893, except for the 1¢ 1890 and the 15¢ Department of the Interior.<sup>5</sup> This proof sheet, however, must have been in the original display, because when the plates were destroyed in 1897 by order of the Postmaster General, the plate for this value was still intact.<sup>6</sup> In 1905, Petrie traveled to England and sold his proof sheets to James Ludovic Lindsay, the 26th Earl of Crawford, along with sheets of the 1869 and State dollar value inverts.

As for the plate proofs on India paper, this holding consisted of top half sheets of O1-O13, bottom half sheets of O14-O67 and O72-O93, full sheets of the State dollar values O68-O71, full sheets of O68-O71 mounted on card, an extra sheet of O71, as well as half sheets and imprint blocks of O68 and O71. Although the imprints had been trimmed off all but the State dollar values, it was possible to determine the top or bottom of the plate based on the wider selvage. Ralph Ebner from Germany, with the eagle eyes of youth, quickly noted that in this run, the 1¢ Post Office plate lacked everywhere the position dot in the blank oval (to the left of the numeral, close to the frame) typical of every 1¢ Post Office stamp printed by Continental. This half sheet, therefore, must also have come from American Bank Note Company plate #428, which along with the deep plum shade on the War Department (so typical of the later plate proofs on cards) convinced us that these proof sheets on India paper could not have been printed as a quality control measure by Continental in 1873, but must have been prepared as a presentation set at American.<sup>7</sup> This is not surprising, since the original owner of these sheets was Henry G. Mandel, a seminal essay and proof collector, who in his position as the official counterfeit and color expert for the American Bank Note Company enjoyed a unique advantage.

*It has been claimed that Mandel had his own private printing equipment assembled in his office. When in need of material for his own collection, he would instruct one of his associates to bring up a particular plate from the vaults of the American Bank Note Company to*

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Dr. Howard S. Friedman, “United States Plate Proofs on Cardboard”, *The Essay-Proof Journal*, No. 120, Fall, 1973, p. 161.

Don L. Evans, *The United State 1¢ Franklin 1861-67*, Linn’s, 1997, p. 79.

Bierman, op. cit., p. 191.

National Archives, Report of the Committee to Oversee Destruction of the Plates and Transfer Rolls, August 7, 1897, courtesy Lester C. Lanphear III.

In fact, most of the plate proofs on India paper in collector hands may come from later American printings. But at least some of the original 1873 Continental proof sheets got out, as exemplified by the imprint block of the 10¢ Navy without plate scratch at position 3 previously illustrated here (Rollin C. Huggins, “That Elusive Crack,” *Chronicle*, Vol. 43, No. 3, Whole No. 155 (August, 1992, p. 206.)

*reprint a special essay or proof.* <sup>8</sup>

These very sheets are believed to be the ones loaned to John Luff while he was preparing his magnum opus. Possibly the selvages were intact at that time, allowing Luff to compile his listing of official plate numbers, and were later trimmed off.<sup>9</sup>

Not wanting to look a proverbial gift horse in the mouth, it is regrettable that when the two sets of sheets were split, it was not deemed important to do so in a systematic way, in order to preserve for posterity a reference collection documenting every position of every value. As it now stands, this holding contains duplication on most values, and completeness only for the Interior (excepting the 15¢), Justice and Navy Departments, and the Department of State dollar values. Perhaps it was hoped that for plating purposes, the aforementioned photographs of the intact sheets would be adequate. Nevertheless, I feel confident that in future articles in this section, students will share the discoveries they were able to make in their fleeting opportunity to examine the actual proofs. I also pray that the collection remains intact and will become available for more thorough study in the future.

Returning to the photographs, while these are generally of excellent quality, the shallow faint lines in certain well-known double transfers and plate scratches simply cannot be discerned, even under magnification. This limits their usefulness, so that the photographs have been utilized mainly to verify the position of previously discovered plate varieties, rather than as a mother source from which a theoretical master list of possible double transfers, short transfers, foreign entries, plate scratches and layout lines could be generated. Such a listing, if it were prepared through close examination of the actual proof sheets, could provide us all an ideal starting point in knowing what to look out for on the actual stamps.

An example of the limitation of the photographs is the 2¢ Executive foreign entry of the 6¢ Agriculture. Charles J. Phillips, studying a top half proof sheet of this value, noted this variety at position 40, and described it as "a major re-entry".<sup>10</sup> Soon after, in the tenth edition of the specialized catalog (1933), a double transfer variety was listed but unpriced for the regularly issued stamp (O11), either by a leap of editorial logic (a plate flaw of this type would have to occur on the issued stamps) or because someone following Phillips' lead had reported finding a copy. Thirty years later, Admiral Combs, studying a plate proof of this position, was able to identify the surplus lines for what they truly were, an insufficiently burnished out entry from

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Bierman, op. cit., p. 175.

The fourteen faulty imprint and plate number blocks of twelve sold at auction in 1982 (Quality Auctions, Ltd., May 24-25, 1982, lots 698-712) must not have derived from Richard Taylor's portion of the sheets, since the five Agriculture values offered (2¢, 12¢-24¢) were all from the top of the sheet.

Charles J. Phillips, "U. S. Department Stamps - Plate Varieties", *Collectors Club Philatelist*, Vol. 10, #3, July, 1931, p. 243.

the 6¢ Agriculture transfer roll. <sup>11</sup> In writing up this discovery, he described this variety as a “double entry” and was able to identify it as position 40, either by following Phillips’ description or by examining the actual proof sheets then in the possession of Josiah K. Lilly, Jr. He later postulated that this variety must exist on the special printings, but apparently had not yet found a copy. <sup>12</sup> However, by the time his collection was sold in 1981, he had acquired one.<sup>13</sup> In the meantime, there was no change in the catalog listings. Plate varieties have never been listed for proofs of the official stamps, and for the special printings, from 1956 on the only one included was the 30¢ Treasury (O81S var.) short transfer at top right, until 1992, when the 30¢ Navy (O44S var.) double transfer appeared, to be followed in 1995 by the 12¢ Navy (O41S var.) and 1¢ Treasury (O72 var.) double transfers and the 10¢ State (O61 var.) short transfer. Consultants to the Scott’s catalog have for some time been urging that the 2¢ Executive foreign entry be properly listed, but the delay cannot be attributed to a generalized apathy towards back-of-the-book stamps. It came as a shock to discover that for the only two other recorded foreign entries on U. S. postage stamps, 62B var. was not described as a foreign entry until 1995, and 332 var. until 1997! Previously, they had been inadequately listed as “double transfers” (although the underlying 1¢ value was mentioned on 332 var.). Incidentally, according to the definition of “foreign entry” which first appeared in 1996 - “When original transfers are erased incompletely from a plate, they can appear with new transfers of a different design which are entered subsequently on the plate.” - the famous 5¢ carmine error-of-color (467, 485, 505) is not technically a foreign entry.

A copy of this variety on the issued stamp was displayed at Pacific ‘97 in the exhibit collection of Lester C. Lanphear III, and is illustrated in Figure 1. An example of this variety on the special printing was also shown by Robert L. Markovits. Additional copies of each were offered for sale at a dealer’s booth. Since only 1% of the issued stamps (9,100) and special printings (7,430) will be this variety, in both cases it is a very rare stamp. Now on the photographs taken of the Earl of Crawford proof sheet, the only portion of the foreign entry legible is the diagonal line through the “N” of “CENTS”: the fine vertical lines at the top center from the original 6¢ Agriculture entry (1 mm. above and 2 mm. to the right of the final 2¢ Executive entry) simply do not show. But in examining the actual proof sheets on card and India paper, the position of this foreign entry could be readily confirmed. This variety has now been reported in all its possible manifestations, except for the unique Atlanta trial color proofs, which may still languish unrecognized in someone’s collection. No other conventional double transfers have been reported on the 2¢ Executive stamp. In Figure 2, we illustrate an unused 2¢ Executive with a horizontal preprinting paper crease. Several vertical lines extend through the value lettering and continue on the other side of the crease well down into the bottom

W. V. Combs, “2¢ Executive Official: A New Double Entry”, *The American Philatelist*, September, 1962, Vol. 75, No. 12, pp. 900-901.

W. V. Combs, “U. S. Departmental Specimen Stamps”, *The American Philatelist*, Vol. 78, No. 3, December, 1964, p. 196.

Robert A. Siegel, Sale #574, January 14, 1981, Lot # 1656.

margin, giving the appearance of a double transfer. But a confirmation copy has not been found, nor do the proof photographs show anything similar, so we must assume that when the stamp paper buckled and creased under the impression cylinder, this movement caused the surface ink to smear, - indeed, under high magnification, these surplus lines do appear slightly fuzzy. So all along, the 2¢ Executive “double transfer” catalog listing has in fact been describing the position 40 foreign entry. As one of only three reported foreign entries on U. S. postage stamps, it is high time for this important variety to be properly described in the catalog.<sup>14</sup>

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At least three revenue stamps are now also listed with foreign entry varieties.