

# Usages of the 7¢ Stanton Official Stamps

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## Introduction

The 7¢ Stanton large Banknote stamp had a difficult birth and a short life. It was prepared in anticipation of the new rate for direct mail to the North German Union (Prussia, Austria and the German States), but when the treaty went into effect on July 1, 1870, steamer service had been suspended. When it was finally restored, the stamp was released to postmasters on March 6, 1871 (almost a year after the rest of the series). Soon after the rate was reduced to 6¢, and for a brief period the 7¢ stamp served no purpose. Fortunately, in October, 1871 the Prussian closed mail rate (service to Germany and Austria via England) was reduced from 10¢ to 7¢, and this is the rate for which the stamps were chiefly used. While the rate to Denmark was made 7¢ on January 1, 1872 and the 7¢ rate was extended to Hungary and Luxembourg in 1873, Prussian closed mail covers to Germany and Austria are far more common. When the 5¢ U. P. U. rate went into effect on July 1, 1875, there was no further need for 7¢ stamps and thereafter none were supplied to postmasters. In anticipation of this rate change, the distinctive vermilion color was appropriated for the 2¢ stamp in June in order to eliminate the potential for confusion between the brown 2¢ and 10¢ stamps. Aside from the standard destinations listed above, the 7¢ stamp was also used in multiples to pay the 28¢ rate to India, or in combination with other stamps to make up complex foreign rates. Domestic usages are much less common, as this value did not immediately spring to the public's mind as combining expediently with others to pay any of the standard rates.<sup>1</sup>

In the spring of 1873, when the Continental Bank Note Company was preparing to take over the printing contract, it was decided in the end that four Executive departments - State, Treasury, War, and Navy - would be posting enough mail to Germany and Austria to warrant having their own 7¢ official stamps. In the future, I hope to do research in the archives to discover some documentation - perhaps in the letters of the Third Assistant Postmaster General - for the reasoning behind assigning different values to each department. The only explanation I have ever seen for the 7¢ official stamps comes from a man with a name straight out of a W. C. Fields movie: Eustace B. Power.

*The next thing that attracts our attention is the addition of a new value - 7 cents - which was the single letter rate to Continental Europe. This explains why it is found, only, on certain departments and the reason therefore - 7¢ Navy for our naval officers in foreign waters, 7¢ State for our diplomatic Attachés, 7¢ Treasury for our Consular force in European cities and 7¢ war (sic) for our Military Atachés. Agriculture, Executive, Interior, Justice and Post Office departments required no foreign representatives, hence no 7¢ stamps stamps.<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Lester C. Brookman, *The United States Postage Stamps of the 19th Century*, 1966, Vol. II, p. 189, 202, 225, 249, 261-263.

<sup>2</sup> Eustace B. Power, *The Departmental Stamps of the United States*, a booklet published by Stanley Gibbons, Inc., 1922, p. 12.

It seems possible that in the early planning stages, 7¢ stamps might have been considered worthwhile for more than just four departments. I have been in conversation with the current owner of the bound volume of signed and dated official large die proofs, from which Elliott Perry was first able to report the sequence of die production.<sup>3</sup> I am told that for three departments (Interior, Agriculture, and Executive), there are blank pages between the 6¢ and 10¢ values, and that there are an additional four blank pages after the 10¢ Executive. Furthermore, the die sinkage on the blank Interior page shows glue residue from a proof having been removed. One possible explanation is that three additional 7¢ values, as well as high value Executive stamps, were originally contemplated. Was a die for a 7¢ Interior stamp actually engraved and a proof pulled and herein mounted, only to be ripped out after it was decided not to issue such a stamp? It is a tantalizing notion, although if such a die ever existed, one would have thought essays would have been printed from it along with the portrait head Post Office dies in 1879 and 1895. Perhaps someone simply included a die proof of the 7¢ vermilion Banknote regular issue by mistake.

These stamps were first issued to the departments on July 1, 1873. We have previously illustrated here the regressive die proof of the Stanton portrait vignette and value tablet, derived from a mother transfer roll of the original 7¢ National die on which the frame had been burnished off.<sup>4</sup> Four new dies were laid down and the distinctive frames for each department engraved around the common vignette. *Remarkably, not a single 7¢ official cover has survived demonstrating the rate for which these four stamps were intended.* Only one off-cover 7¢ official stamp with a New York foreign mail cancellation has been reported, although this is not too surprising, since official covers destined for Europe typically originated in the departmental headquarters in Washington, D. C. and were posted and canceled at the main post office there, before being routed through New York and receiving red New York transit markings. In a survey I conducted some years back, it was determined that all four 7¢ official stamps were scarcer used than unused, except for the 7¢ Treasury.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of this article is to analyze from surviving covers the creative ways in which mailroom clerks actually made use of the 7¢ official stamps. The attrition rate for official covers is terribly high, and surely some 7¢ stamps were used for their intended purpose in that narrow two year time span, July 1, 1873 to July 1, 1875. We can even dream that such a cover survives somewhere in a dusty old European collection. Yet whereas the 7¢ regular issue was immediately discontinued with the introduction of the 5¢ U. P. U. rate, the 7¢ official stamps continued to be requisitioned by all four departments after the fiscal year 1875, in sufficient quantities to suggest that some improvised usefulness had been found for them.

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<sup>3</sup> Elliott Perry, *Pat Paragraphs*, compiled and arranged by George T. Turner and Thomas E. Stanton (Takoma Park, Md.: Bureau Issues Association, Inc., 1981), p. 496.

<sup>4</sup> Alan C. Campbell, "The Design Evolution of the United States Official Stamps", *Chronicle*, Vol. 48, No. 1, (Whole No. 169) (February, 1996), p. 50.

<sup>5</sup> Alan C. Campbell, "The Scarcity of Used United States Official Stamps", *Chronicle*, Vol. 47, No. 1, (Whole No. 165) (February, 1995), p. 38-52.

## The 7¢ Treasury Department Stamp

Far more of these were issued than for the other three 7¢ departmental stamps combined. In the fiscal years 1874, 1875, and 1877 a total of 220,000 were requisitioned. As official stamps go, this is not a rare one, but consider for a moment that over 5,000,000 were issued of the 7¢ large Banknote regular stamp as printed by both National and Continental! Demand apparently dictates a current catalogue value used of \$85.00 for #149 and \$75 for #160, while a used O76, ten times scarcer, checks in at a humble \$22.50. For the 7¢ Treasury stamp, we do not have an accurate count of covers. My assistant section editor, Lester C. Lanphear III, has long been maintaining the census of rare official covers begun by Charles Starnes, but the ground rules in the beginning were that if more than ten covers existed of a particular stamp, it was not worth tracking. From a quick survey of auction catalogues of important sales of official covers (going back to Congressman Ackerman in 1933, and including Hughes in 1953, Ehrenberg in 1981, and Stone in 1990), and by reviewing photocopies of three other active exhibit collections, I have located fourteen 7¢ Treasury covers, and believe that perhaps another six are out there somewhere, for a total of twenty. Of these fourteen 7¢ Treasury covers recorded, not one is a single usage. Seven are 2¢, 7¢ combination paying triple the domestic rate (typically on legal covers). One in combination with two 1¢ stamps also pays the triple domestic rate. Two 3¢, 7¢ combinations from the Conant correspondence paying double the U. P. U. rate are known, and two 3¢, 7¢ combinations are known paying the 10¢ registry fee on legal penalty envelopes. There is also a registered cover from San Francisco to Antioch, California with a 7¢ and two 3¢ stamps, paying a single domestic rate plus the supplemental registry fee. In Figure 1, courtesy of Lester C. Lanphear III, we illustrate easily the most spectacular of all the 7¢ Treasury covers, this one in clever combination with a 12¢ stamp to pay triple domestic rate plus the registry fee. This cover, from the well-known Warren R. Taylor (alias "Count Diablo" or "Quincy Quiverly") correspondence to Plymouth Union, Vermont, has an unusual rimless Boston registry postmark, and was formerly in the collection of Rae Ehrenberg.<sup>6</sup>

This is the only one of the fourteen covers not posted in Washington, D. C. Still, from surviving off-cover used stamps with attributable cancellations, it is clear that 7¢ Treasury stamps were distributed to offices in many other cities. Any 7¢ Treasury stamps paying the Prussian closed mail rate would most likely have originated in the Office of the Secretary and have been posted in Washington, D. C. But the documented pattern of usage there, where the 7¢ stamps were used in combination with other values to pay domestic rates, was apparently well-established enough that 7¢ stamps were furnished to field offices of the U. S. Assessor and Internal Revenue for the same purpose. In Figure 2, we illustrate a few Washington, D. C. cancellations on the 7¢ Treasury. In Figure 3, we show cancellations from other cities, some of whose precise origin cannot be established. I regret that the black-and-white format of the photographs makes these cancellations virtually illegible, but in real life black ink on brown stamps is rarely sexy. Most of these stamps were used in the period 1873-1878. The Treasury Department converted early to the exclusive use of penalty envelopes, and except for the 10¢

<sup>6</sup> Robert A. Siegel, "The Crystal Collection", 577th Sale, April 10, 1981, lot #388.

value needed to pay the supplemental registry fee, no more stamps were requisitioned after July 1, 1879. Occasionally, though, the department would run out of 10¢ stamps, and would then use leftover 3¢ and 7¢ stamps to make up the rate. In one case, they even used 3¢ and 7¢ *Banknote* stamps to pay the fee.<sup>7</sup> The largest known used multiple of the 7¢ Treasury stamp is a horizontal block of ten, previously illustrated here by Lester C. Lanphear III.<sup>8</sup> Two other used blocks, one of four and the other of six, are also known.

### The 7¢ War Department Stamp

A total of 55,728 7¢ War stamps were issued from 1874-1884, with requisitions every year. The peculiar number of 53 stamps supplied in 1880 suggests that at times, 7¢ stamps were ordered to fill in sets distributed as a favor to stamp collectors, either unused or demonetized with presentation handstamps. Incredibly, only one cover, ex-Knapp, has ever been found.<sup>9</sup> A 2¢, 7¢ combination paying triple the domestic rate, it was posted in Washington, D. C. and is illustrated in Figure 4, courtesy of Dr. David H. Lobdell. My sense is that the attrition rate for War covers is probably higher than for any other department except Agriculture, whereas the survival rate for Executive and State covers is proportionally much higher. Of course, we would expect people to hold onto mail from the White House, while most of the surviving State covers are diplomatic pouch mail, essentially private correspondence that warranted being saved for personal reasons. Since foreign mail covers from the War Department are quite rare, presumably most of the 7¢ War stamps were used in combination with other values to pay domestic rates, in a pattern similar to the Treasury Department. The 7¢ War stamp is much scarcer used than unused, and examples with distinctive cancellations are especially hard to find. In Figure 5, we illustrate a few cancellations on the 7¢ War. This stamp was distributed all across the country, but the only example I know of with a legible Fort cancellation is from Fort Huachuca, Arizona Territory. The specialized catalogue lists premiums for Fort cancellations on all values of the War hard paper and soft paper printings, *except for the 7¢*. In Figure 6, we show the unique strike of the Port Townsend, W. T. “kicking mule” on this stamp, ex-Cornell and Morrison Waud, courtesy of Dr. David H. Lobdell. In Figure 7, we show a small piece (ex-Weill) with three singles and a used pair, posted in Newport, Rhode Island.<sup>10</sup> In Figure 8, courtesy of Robert L. Markovits, we depict another piece of a package front with nine 7¢ War stamps, a 30¢, and a 90¢.

<sup>7</sup> Alan C. Campbell, “Foreign and Domestic Use of Ordinary Stamps for Official Correspondence by the Treasury Department”, *Chronicle*, Vol. 43, No. 2, (Whole No. 150), (May, 1991) Figure 3, p. 125.

<sup>8</sup> Lester C. Lanphear III, “Departmental Used Blocks”, *Chronicle*, Vol. 47, No. 2, (Whole N. 166) (May, 1995), p. 122.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce Daniels, “The Grand Award Collection of Mr. James E. Hughes”, November 5, 1953, Lot #275, where described as “unique”. Purchased by its current owner at the Harmer Rooke Sale of the H. G. Duckworth Collection of Officials on March 7, 1963 for \$120. Dr. Lobdell, an eminent pathologist, was under subpoena to testify in a homicide trial, and was represented at the sale by a 6’6” NYU law student, Robert L. Markovits.

<sup>10</sup> Christie’s, December 15, 1989, Lot #857.

## **The 7¢ Department of State Stamp**

In the fiscal years 1874-1877, 37,800 copies of this stamp were requisitioned. While this department probably generated more foreign correspondence than all the others combined, most of it would have been carried outside the regular mail stream via diplomatic pouch. Hence Department of State covers to foreign destinations franked with official stamps are actually scarcer than for some other departments, particularly Treasury. As with the 7¢ Treasury stamp, the 7¢ State on cover did not make the cut for the Starnes/Lanphear survey of rare official covers. My informal survey turned up nine covers, eight of which are single domestic usages overpaying the double domestic rate by 1¢. All were posted in Washington, D. C. Most of these are incoming diplomatic pouch mail from various legations and consulates overseas, with the stamp added in Washington, D. C. in order to enter the regular mail stream. One cover is a small mourning cover addressed to St. Louis; another has the oval handstamp of the London dispatch agent B. F. Stevens. This pattern of casual overfranking seems to have been unique to the Department of State, in as much as all the other 7¢ official covers demonstrate scrupulous accounting for the rates in question. In Figure 9 we illustrate the only recorded example of the 7¢ used in combination with another value, a 2¢ stamp to pay the triple domestic rate. This cover, ex-Hughes and Ehrenberg, has the blue Department of State handstamp typical for incoming diplomatic pouch mail, but the identity of the originating consulate is illegible.<sup>11</sup>

Department of State stamps were used only in Washington, D. C. and by the dispatch agent in New York. In Figure 10, we illustrate a variety of Washington, D. C. cancellations on the 7¢ State, and in Figure 11, we show characteristic New York cancellations on the 7¢ State. Typically, these would have originated on foreign mail covers posted in Washington, D. C. and sent postage-free to New York with a penalty handstamp. The official stamps were added by the dispatch agent to make up the proper foreign postage. None of these would have been Prussian closed mail covers, however, since the standard U. P. U. rates of 1875 preceded the use of penalty envelopes and penalty handstamps by several years. As I have previously noted, the dispatch agent in New York seems to have ignored the U. P. U. prohibition against using official stamps on foreign mail which went into effect on April 1, 1879. In Figure 12, courtesy of Ralph Ebner, we illustrate a 7¢ State stamp with a New York foreign mail cancellation, a six bar circular grid (Weiss Type TR-G10) used into July, 1873. Discovered in Germany, this stamp may well have been lifted from a Prussian closed mail cover. Since almost every Department of State letter presumably originated in Washington, D. C., in order to receive a NYFM cancellation it would have to have been carried there either outside the mail by diplomatic courier or in a heavy dispatch bag with a mailing tag franked with dollar value State stamps! No used multiple of the 7¢ State stamp has ever been reported.

## **The 7¢ Navy Department Stamp**

The 7¢ Navy is easily the rarest of the four 7¢ official stamps with only 16,000 issued,

<sup>11</sup> Bruce G. Daniels, op. cit., Lot #249; Siegel, 577th Sate, Lot #349.

with requisitions in fiscal years 1874, 1875, 1877, and 1879. Three covers are known. In Figure 13, courtesy of Lester C. Lanphear III, we illustrate a fascinating example, ex-Stone, of a Navy official stamp used to forward private mail addressed to Navy personnel.<sup>12</sup> This cover was posted in Huntington, N. Y. with a 3¢ green Banknote, addressed to a Marine captain on the U. S. Steamer Hartford at the Navy Yard in Norfolk, Virginia. Since the vessel had already left port, the letter was carried outside the mails to Washington, D. C., where it was determined that the U. S. Hartford was then in Rio de Janeiro. Accordingly, a 7¢ Navy stamp was added to make up the correct 10¢ treaty rate to Brazil, and the cover reentered the mails, receiving a red London transit marking en route. The star-in-circle obliterator is a Washington, D. C. foreign mail cancel rarely encountered, and this distinctive type of 1877 postmark - the first Washington, D. C. circular datestamp to incorporate the year date - is seldom seen on official covers. The Robert L. Markovits exhibit collection has two similar covers forwarded to the U. S. Flagship Hartford in Rio de Janeiro in 1878, one with the supplemental postage paid with a 7¢ Navy, the other with a 1¢ and 6¢ Navy. The third known 7¢ Navy cover, also in the Robert L. Markovits collection, is a 2¢, 7¢ combination paying the triple domestic rate on a legal-size envelope.

In Figure 14, we illustrate a variety of Washington, D. C. cancellations on the 7¢ Navy stamp, and in Figure 15, a selection of cancellations from outside the capital. In all likelihood, 7¢ Navy stamps were disbursed to all the major naval bases along the Eastern seaboard, so with time and patience - for this is quite a scarce stamp used - it should be possible to locate examples canceled in Boston and Philadelphia. No used multiples of the 7¢ Navy have been reported.

## Conclusion

The four 7¢ official stamps were issued on July 1, 1873 specifically for the Prussian closed mail rate, which would expire exactly two years later. As with many of the official stamps, their usage was wildly overestimated in the beginning. In the case of the 7¢ Treasury and 7¢ State, the initial printings by Continental in 1873 were sufficient to meet the cumulative demand over the entire eleven year life span of these stamps. No covers have survived with official stamps used to pay the Prussian closed mail rate, either with the 7¢ stamps or any combination of lower values. Since the survival rate for 7¢ Banknote covers to Germany and Austria has been relatively high, had any significant number been franked with official stamps, at least a few examples ought to have come down to us. When the 5¢ U. P. U. rate went into effect on July 1, 1875, the regular 7¢ Banknote stamps expired immediately, but the 7¢ official stamps enjoyed a strange afterlife. Departmental mailroom clerks had always had surplus 7¢ stamps lying around, and typically had used them in combination with 2¢ stamps to pay the 9¢ triple domestic rate. No more effort was expended, and by so doing they kept from depleting their stocks of the more useful 3¢ and 6¢ values. What began as an exercise in trying to use up these inconvenient stamps gradually evolved into a perceived need to have some small supply of them always on hand. How else to explain requisitions for all four 7¢ official stamps after the end of the Prussian closed mail rate, with the War Department ordering a

<sup>12</sup> Robert A. Siegel, 728th Sale, September 14, 1990, Lot #96.

thousand more as late as 1884? I spoke recently with the widow of a long-time San Diego stamp collector, who has been finding his stockbooks of obsolete mint commemoratives infinitely useful in making up whatever new rate the Postal Service throws at her. Who could have anticipated the need for 7¢ Navy stamps to be added as forwarding postage to pay the 10¢ treaty rate to Brazil? Who would have guessed that the most expedient way to pay the 19¢ for a registered triple rate domestic Treasury cover would be with 7¢ and 12¢ stamps?

The 24¢ Winfield Scott stamps prepared for seven departments also exemplify a value derived from a foreign rate which found its usage exclusively in the domestic market, so to speak.<sup>13</sup> Exactly two 24¢ official covers going overseas has ever been discovered: a remarkable 24¢ Navy to Uruguay overpaying the 23¢/half ounce rate (this was stolen with the Starnes collection in 1983<sup>14</sup>) and a 24¢ War pair on cover to Yokohama, Japan, ex-Ackerman, long owned by Dr. David H.Lobdell.<sup>15</sup> The obvious advantage of the 24¢ values lay in their being divisible by 3, the incremental rate for first class postage. But 24¢ official stamps on cover are so extremely rare that a systemic analysis of their usage is simply impossible: there is one 24¢ Agriculture parcel label, five 24¢ Interior covers, two 24¢ Justice covers, one 24¢ Navy parcel label, one 24¢ State cover, two 24¢ War labels in addition to the cover mentioned above, and nothing from Post Office or Treasury.

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<sup>13</sup> General Winfield Scott made a cameo appearance sixty-three years later on the 2¢ Army issue of 1936 opposite Major General Andrew Jackson, Scott #786. Despite his impressive beard, the fame of Edwin Stanton, Lincoln's Secretary of War, did not endure, and he was never honored on another postage stamp.

<sup>14</sup> Charles J. Starnes, "Universal Postal Union Mail to Non-Member Countries", *Chronicle*, Vol. 26, No. 1, (February, 1974), p. 40-41.

<sup>15</sup> J. C. Morgenthau & Co., 317th Sate, December 5, 1933, lot #282, where it realized \$20.00. Dr. Lobdell purchased the cover from the Harmer Rooke Sale of the Duckworth Collection on March 7, 1963, where it realized \$42.00.

## Figure Captions

1. 7¢, 12¢ Treasury triple domestic rate registered letter, courtesy of Lester C. Lanphear III.
2. Washington, D. C. cancellations on 7¢ Treasury. Left, red local (1873-1875); right, registry double oval, 1882-1884.
3. 7¢ Treasury cancellations. Row 1: Boston negative "A" (1878-1883); Brooklyn geometric; Chicago blue bars (1876-1877); Chicago blue star (1875); Cincinnati blue target (1873-1876). Row 2: New Orleans geometric (1873-1879); Jack-o-lantern; letter "F"; leaf; violet negative star in circle. Row 3: orange-brown grid; green; large grid of bars on pair.
4. 2¢, 7¢ War triple domestic rate cover, courtesy of Dr. David H. Lobdell.
5. 7¢ War cancellations. Washington, D. C. red local (1873-1875); Washington, D. C. fancy crossroads; crossroads; "S" in "U" (probably Jefferson Barracks, Mo.); blue geometric.
6. The unique 7¢ War "Kicking Mule", courtesy of Dr. David H. Lobdell.
7. Five 7¢ War on piece from Newport, Rhode Island.
8. Nine 7¢ War on piece, plus 30¢ and 90¢, courtesy of Robert L. Markovits.
9. 2¢, 7¢ State triple domestic rate diplomatic pouch mail.
10. Washington, D. C. cancellations on 7¢ State: red local (1873-1875); violet (1878); indigo (1879-1880); numeral "6" in target (1880-1884); third class double oval (1880-1884).
11. New York cancellations on 7¢ State: left, third class foreign mail double oval (1879 on); right, foreign mail "2" in vertically barred ellipse (1877 on).
12. New York foreign mail cancellation on 7¢ State, courtesy of Ralph Ebner.
13. 7¢ Navy mixed franking cover forwarded to Brazil, courtesy of Lester C. Lanphear, III.
14. Washington, D. C. cancellations on 7¢ Navy: red local (1873-1875); violet (1878); "FORWARDED".
15. Cancellation on 7¢ Navy: New York negative "2" (1873-1876); New York numerals "1" and "16" in barred ellipse (1876-1884); anchor; blue blob.