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Article: The "Knapp Shift" as Told to Me by Elliott Perry

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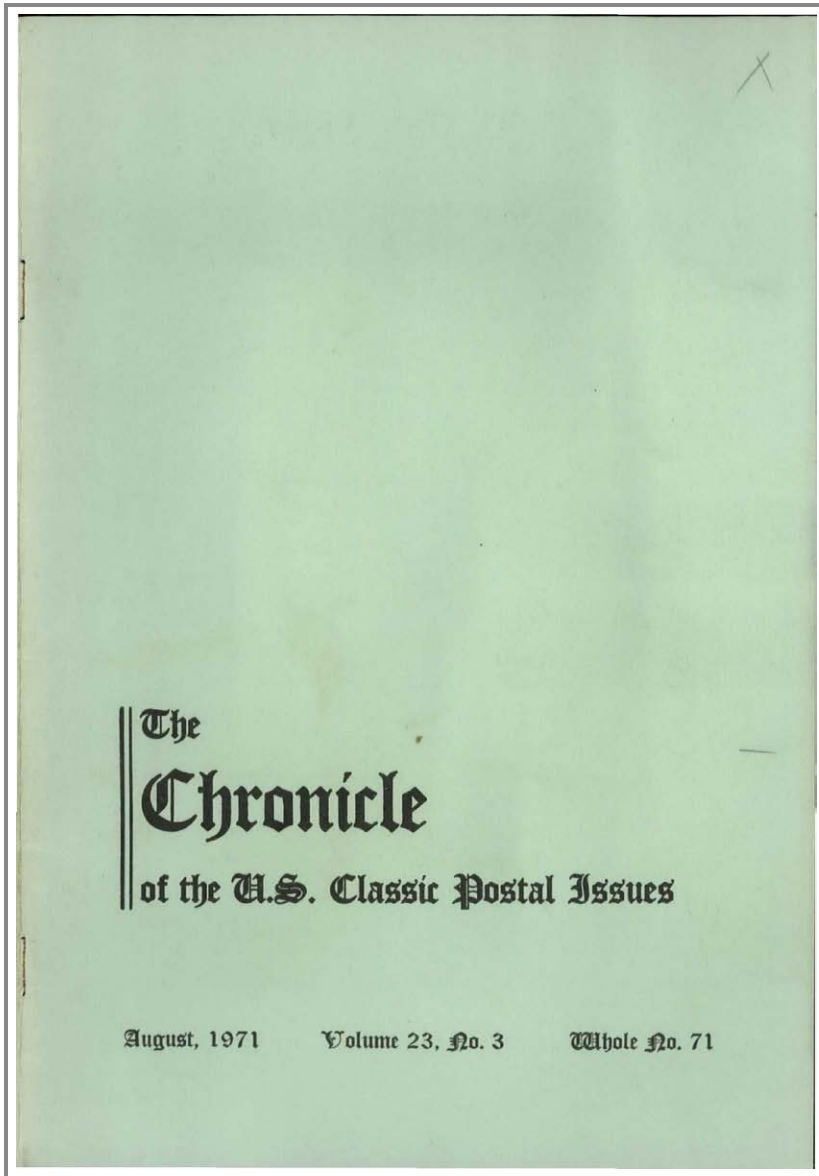


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THE 1847-'51 PERIOD

CREIGHTON C. HART, Editor

THE "KNAPP SHIFT" AS TOLD TO ME BY ELLIOTT PERRY

CREIGHTON C. HART

Ever since Elliott Perry successfully plated¹ the 10c 1847 stamp in 1923, collectors have given special attention to plate varieties which include double transfers, short transfers, plate scratches, re-engraved lines and other constant markings. Of all the various plate varieties none is more conspicuous than position 31R (Figure 1). Here the doubling in "Post Office" is clearly evident even to the non-collector. There is nothing special about position 23L, yet this position is the subject of this article. One stamp from position 23L has a much larger and more distinct doubling of "Post Office" than does 31R and this stamp is known as the "Knapp shift" (Figure 2). The diagrams in Figures 3 and 4 show the lines involved and the areas in which doubling occurs.

Of course, there are many copies known of 31R all with the same double transfer. There is only one copy of 23L with the even larger doubling in "Post Office"; none of the other examples of 23L have this doubling. Something mysterious happened to this one 23L that at first glance seems to make it more desirable than 31R. Edward Knapp first brought this stamp to the attention of philatelists in the late 1930's. Knapp was a respected, knowledgeable collector and this particular stamp has been known ever since then as the "Knapp shift".

The Knapp stamp created quite a sensation for a few years. Specialists were asking, "Is the Knapp stamp a genuine plate variety or is the doubling painted in to fool collectors?" "If it is genuine had Elliott Perry incorrectly plated the ten cent stamp?" "If it is a paint job who did it?" "What can it be if it's not a paint job?" "Where did it come from?"

Elliott's opinions about the Knapp stamp are here presented for the first time in the philatelic press. Because of his successful plating of the 10c stamp, he has more experience with plate and ink varieties of this stamp than any other professional or collector. For this reason his statements deserve special consideration. Although I have never seen the actual stamp it is my privilege to publish Perry's conclusions in the *Chronicle* for the benefit of our members.

This article has been read by Perry before publication, and on February 22, 1971, he wrote me, "I approve of your article and you may say I do. Nothing has happened to change my opinion as expressed in my letters to you."

What Perry has written me about the Knapp stamp are his conclusions after giving the "double transfer (or shift) on a copper plate" theory, and the "off-set from a slip sheet" possibility, his considerate thoughts for many years. In addition to his letters Perry sent me three blue prints of the 10c 1847 stamp made by Stanley B. Ashbrook and with Ashbrook's line drawings and comments on the prints. These are included as part of this article.

Here are several paragraphs from Perry's letters which I have consolidated to make one continuous revelation.²

"Somewhere a stranger came to me and told me Knapp had purchased the 'shift' stamp from him. I think his name was Albertis or Altertus. I have not seen or heard of him since but suppose he was a dealer in New York—or had been. He did not give me the idea that Knapp had paid a fancy price for an unknown rarity. Probably this is the first time I have told this to anyone.

"Frank Sweet was one of the first to whom Knapp showed the stamp. He immediately pronounced it to be a paint job and to the best of my knowledge, never changed his mind.

"I agree with Frank Sweet and with you at this writing. One thing I have always been certain about—there was no such shift on the 10c 1847 plate at any time. And that all the blah-blah about copper plates

was for one object—to validate the Knapp shift. If genuine it had to come from a copper plate.

"Knapp showed his 'shift' 10c 1847 to some American Bank Note Co. fellows at the 1936 International—or 1926. They were the chief of the transferring Dept. and the operator of a transfer press. They were told 'the truth and nothing but the truth'—but not 'the whole truth'. They were not told about other 10c (stamps) from the same plate position on which no trace of a shift appeared. I lost a 50c bet with Eddie Stern—and paid it.

"When I showed the copies which had no duplication of the 10c design A.B.N. Co. men said 'Oh, the Knapp copy has an offset from a slip sheet'. They told me that the offset lines could not be distinguished from the original lines of the engraving. Meaning that they would be raised from the surface of the paper, and possibly depressed on the back, as is common with intaglio lines.

"I cannot say whether a 'paint job' could be distinguished from the lines of an offset, and think it would probably depend upon the thickness of whatever was used to make the paint job. By a bit of experimenting with india ink, or some other matter, you may be able to determine if painted lines can be made indistinguishable from offset or from intaglio lines.

"I have been inclined to believe that Frank Sweet was right—that the shift was a paint job. I was—and still am—confident that it was not a shift on a plate, caused by two differing positions of a transfer roll. I did not—and do not—believe it to be a kiss. With all respect to the knowledge, experience and ability of the A.B.N. fellows, there are facts about the Knapp stamp which, in my opinion, agree better with 'paint job' than they do with 'offset'.

"The American Bank Note fellows treated me fine and I was not willing to have them pestered. That is why I refused to say where my info came from or mention 'slipsheet'. Stan *et al* could have found about slip sheet offsets as easily as I did. All the arguments about copper plates and kiss impressions were intended, in my opinion, for one and the same purpose—to validate the Knapp 'shift'.

"Altho I had done the work on the 10c stamp and completed the reconstruction of the plate, with proof that it was a double-pane plate of 200 and not two 100 subject panes of 100, as Chase believed, Knapp never showed me his alleged shift. He showed it to Percy Doane and others and, as I now recall, got them to say it was what he claimed it to be.

"Stan Ashbrook came to see me, bringing Knapp's stamp, believing it would not plate. I handed it to John Sherron to see if he could identify the position on the photographs of all 200 positions. In a few minutes he told us the position, (23L). John's plating has never been questioned, by Stan at the time, or by anyone else since.

"Stan left the stamp for me to return to Knapp. Thru an accident instead of being properly registered and insured, Knapp received it by ordinary first class mail. He was very angry, as if the stamp had been mailed that way to show contempt for it. I do not know who mailed the letter, or why it was not registered etc..

"I knew Knapp quite well, liked him, knew something of his history, and never felt unkindly toward him—nor had occasion so to do. But I never understood his attitude about that 10c stamp. For several years my hands were tied because Knapp threatened to sue me if I printed anything derogatory to his 'shift'.

"The last I heard was a few years ago when somebody told me the stamp had been declared to be a paint job—and the painter was known. However, more recently (I have been told) it has been sold for \$ * * * * to somebody who has more confidence in its authenticity than I have ever had."

Figure 1.

This diagram by Stanley B. Ashbrook outlines the double transfer in 31R, known as the big shift in "Post Office". 31R was formerly Scott's "C" and is now Scott's "B".

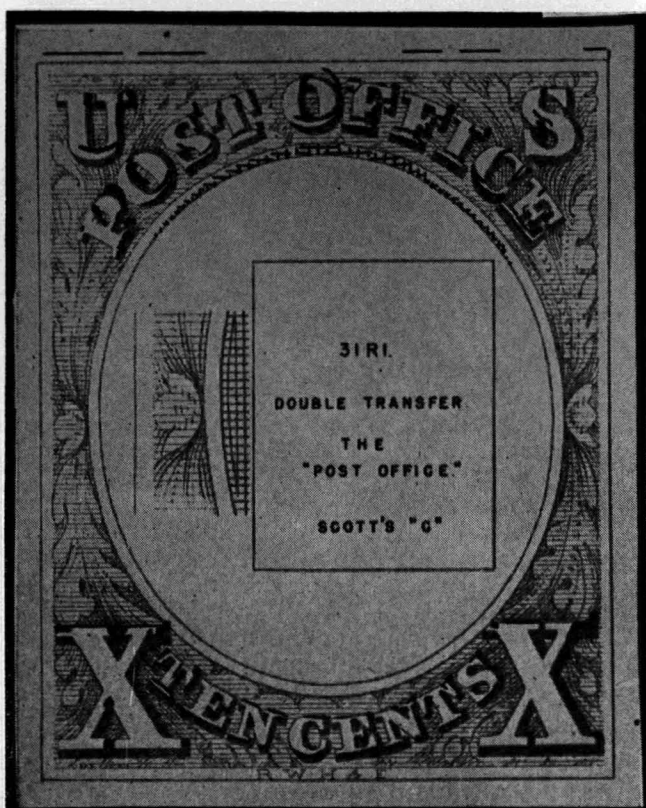


Figure 2.

This Ashbrook's blue print of the "Knapp shift" was sent to Elliott Perry with "Exhibit A" and "Exhibit B".



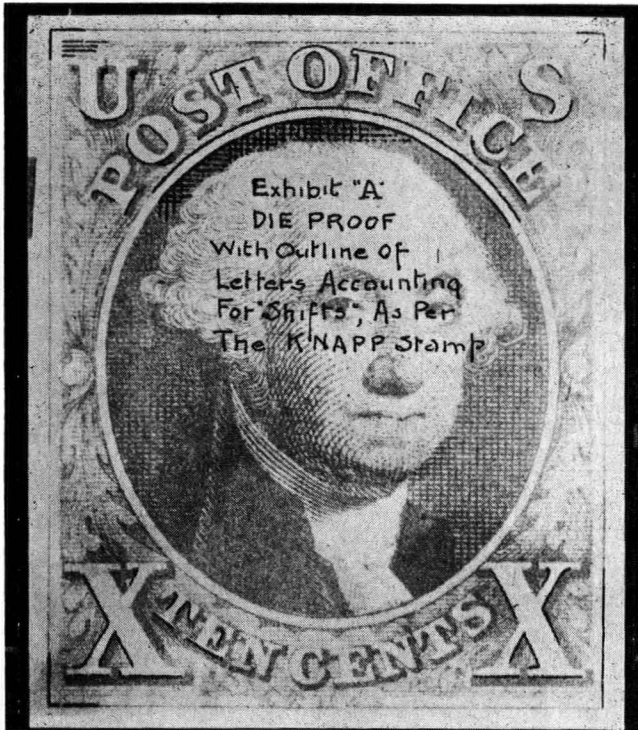


Figure 3.

These next two diagrams were made by Ashbrook and sent to Elliott Perry. "Exhibit A" in his diagram with those items and positions of design which are doubled in "Knapp shift" and are outlined heavily in normal position. The date of these diagrams is not known nor are they accompanied by any text except the lettering on them.

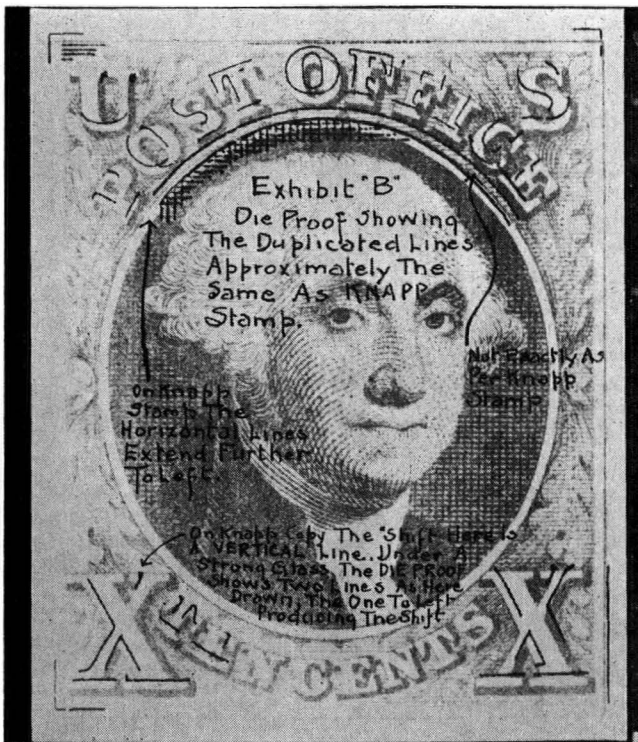


Figure 4.

"Exhibit B" is a diagram by Ashbrook with these same lines to produce doubling. Note areas differing in appearance from "Knapp shift", especially in upper right stroke of the left "X". The apparent implication is that a shifted transfer of the areas outlined in "Exhibit A" should have produced the results in "Exhibit B", rather than the "Knapp shift".

(The wording on the print reads:—Top—Exhibit "B" Die Proof Showing The Duplicated Lines Approximately The Same As KNAPP Stamp. Right—Not Exactly As Per Knapp Stamp. Bottom—On Knapp Copy The "Shift Here Is A VERTICAL Line. Under A Strong Glass The Die Proof Shows Two Lines As Here Drawn, The One To Left Producing The Shift. Left—On Knapp Stamp The Horizontal Lines Extend Further To Left.)

The Knapp shift certainly is not a plate variety as are the big "Post Office" shift (31R), the three minor double transfers listed by Scott's, and the four other double transfers plated by Perry but not listed in Scott's. The theory that this stamp represents a genuine plate variety occurring only in a very late printing is dependent on the use of copper for the plate. One of the principal disagreements between experts in the past has been whether the 1847 plates were steel or copper. Stanley Ashbrook was the first to state that the 1847 plates were copper or "a composition in which copper was the principal part". For several years many specialists accepted his convincing theory. When the Knapp collection was dispersed in 1941, the short-lived Philatelic Research Laboratories, Inc. had the following to say about the Knapp stamp which sold as lot 2248 for \$1,100.00:

"10c black, the tremendous shift, #23L, discovered by Edward S. Knapp, and known to philately as the "Knapp Shift," superb. This stamp was the subject of controversy between students for several years after the discovery, with the claim advanced that it was not a genuine shift. Independent research by the late Mr. Knapp in collaboration with Stanley B. Ashbrook served to indicate that a shift of this character could exist if the plate was made of copper. The stamp was submitted to the Philatelic Research Laboratories for intensive examination and study, the results of which were published in Volume II of "Philately of Tomorrow". The genuineness of the shift has been fully substantiated and conclusive proof adduced that the plates were made of copper. This is the only known example of this tremendous double transfer."⁴

By 1947 the controversy finally was resolved in favor of the steel plates by the discovery by Mrs. Catherine L. Manning of the Smithsonian Institution of a proposal to the Post Office Department dated March 20, 1847 as follows:

"The undersigned propose to Engrave Steel Dies, and to provide Steel plates for Five and Ten cents Stamps for the U. S. Post Office Department, without charge for the same, or for keeping them in repair, and to furnish Stamps from the same on suitable paper, of the best quality, prepared for use with gum, at the rate of Twenty-five Cents per One Thousand Stamps—The Stamps are to be executed in the best style of line Engraving, and the Dies and plates to belong to, and to be held for the exclusive use of the Post Office Department.

Rawdon, Wright, Hatch & Edson

A second proposal was made by Rawdon, Wright, Hatch & Edson on March 31, 1847. It offered "in addition to our former proposal" to print the numerals of value in red ink at the same price mentioned in the first proposal, and continued with the alternative:

We will furnish them printed in one color, (the "Five and "Ten" Stamps each in a different color, if desired, by way of readily distinguishing them,) at the rate of Twenty Cents per one Thousand Stamps." Beside this final paragraph is the notation "This bid Accepted."

The question narrows to whether the Knapp stamp is an offset from a slip sheet, or paint job. As of now no one has shown whether the paint or ink on the Knapp stamp came from a substance on a slip sheet or came from paint or ink from a paint brush. If the ink came from a slip sheet, it is the only United States stamp known to receive a second impression in this manner. If the paint came from a brush, this stamp is only one of many to be so altered. Common types of the 5c and 10c values of the 1851 and 1856 issues have been expertly changed with a hair brush so as to pass as the higher priced types.

Because the term "slip sheet" is rarely encountered in philately, you may be asking yourself, as I did, what is a "slip sheet" as used by the printing and engraving profession? In answer to a letter of mine, the American Bank Note Company wrote me January 22, 1969—

"In this instance, Webster's Dictionary gives the best answer:

'a slip sheet—a sheet of paper placed between newly printed sheets to prevent offsetting,

'to slip-sheet—to interleave (as printed sheets) with slip sheets'."

For many years, due to the nature of engraved (intaglio) printing, it was necessary to slip-sheet in order to keep one printed sheet from offsetting to another as they came off the press and were piled one next to the other.

Generally the industry used rough-textured paper to interleave at the press as each printed sheet came off or, as in our case, a sheet of wax paper was used. In the early 1930's interleaving was discontinued at our Plant with the development of a paraffin roll, into which the printed sheets were placed and subsequently removed after the inks had dried. The Bureau of Engraving & Printing and others similarly developed their own special programs for discontinuing the use of slip sheets, but one can still go into many countries where they are still used. They are probably still utilized in most places throughout the world.

Yours very truly,
AMERICAN BANK NOTE COMPANY"

It is easy to understand how a slight movement of the slip sheet while the ink was still wet could cause transfer of ink on the slipped sheet back to a different place on the sheet of stamps. What is quite hard to understand is how such an occurrence could affect just a single stamp out of 200, and, most remarkably, without any evidence of blurring or smearing.

Although the sole purpose of this article is to present Perry's opinions, I will also take this opportunity to tell our members that the Knapp stamp was submitted to the Philatelic Foundation in the fall of 1951. After an extensive scientific examination the Foundation issued a certificate that the doubling on the Knapp stamp is "not a genuine shift". Among the numerous letters received at that time from professionals and collectors, is one from Hugh M. Clark then publisher of Scott's "United States Stamp Catalogue Specialized". In his letter Clark writes seemingly with certain knowledge, that Knapp bought the stamp thinking it was the "regular well known shift". The conclusion from this is that an attempt was made by some one to copy the big "Post Office" shift and although the job was exceedingly well done the doubling was made too prominent—and on a stamp that it is possible to assign to a position different from 31R.

Where did the Knapp stamp come from? Knapp was one of the most active collectors of United States stamps in the early part of the 20th Century. He undoubtedly bought stamps from many sources, from established reputable dealers as well as from dealers whose lack of knowledge excuses them for selling questionable stamps. Perry thinks the stamp was bought from a dealer by the name of "Albertis"—no one is positive where it was bought. Some professionals to whom I've talked, think it found its way to this country from Europe, probably Spain.

Perry's plating of the 10c stamp remains the basic proof that the "Knapp shift" is a "Knapp-something-else" than a shift. Elliott Perry's remarkable plating achievement was completed in 1923 and two years all 1847 specialists will celebrate the golden anniversary of his great accomplishment.

References

¹ *Collectors Club Philatelist*, serially beginning April 1924.

² Personal correspondence December 13, 1968, February 11, 1969 and December 1, 1969.

³ Stanley B. Ashbrook "The 5c 1847 Double Transfers", *Stamp Specialist* (yellow), p. 11.

⁴ "The Edward S. Knapp Collection" Part one, May 10, 1941, lot 2248, p. 274.

NEXT ISSUE: "1847 Covers from Indian Territory" and "Invisible Ties".

1972 International Exhibition in Belgium

Dr. Robert de Wasserman, RA 383, has asked that Classic Society members be reminded that *BELGICA* 72 is to be held in Brussels June 24 to July 9, 1972.

Dr. de Wasserman was one of several Europeans receiving awards at Olympia in 1970 for exhibits of U. S. covers of the classic period.

Inquiries should be directed to,

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