



U.S. Philatelic Classics Society

Volume: 33 Number: 4 Year: 1981 Chronicle: 112

Article: Paper and Gum Used for the New York Postmaster's Provisional Stamps

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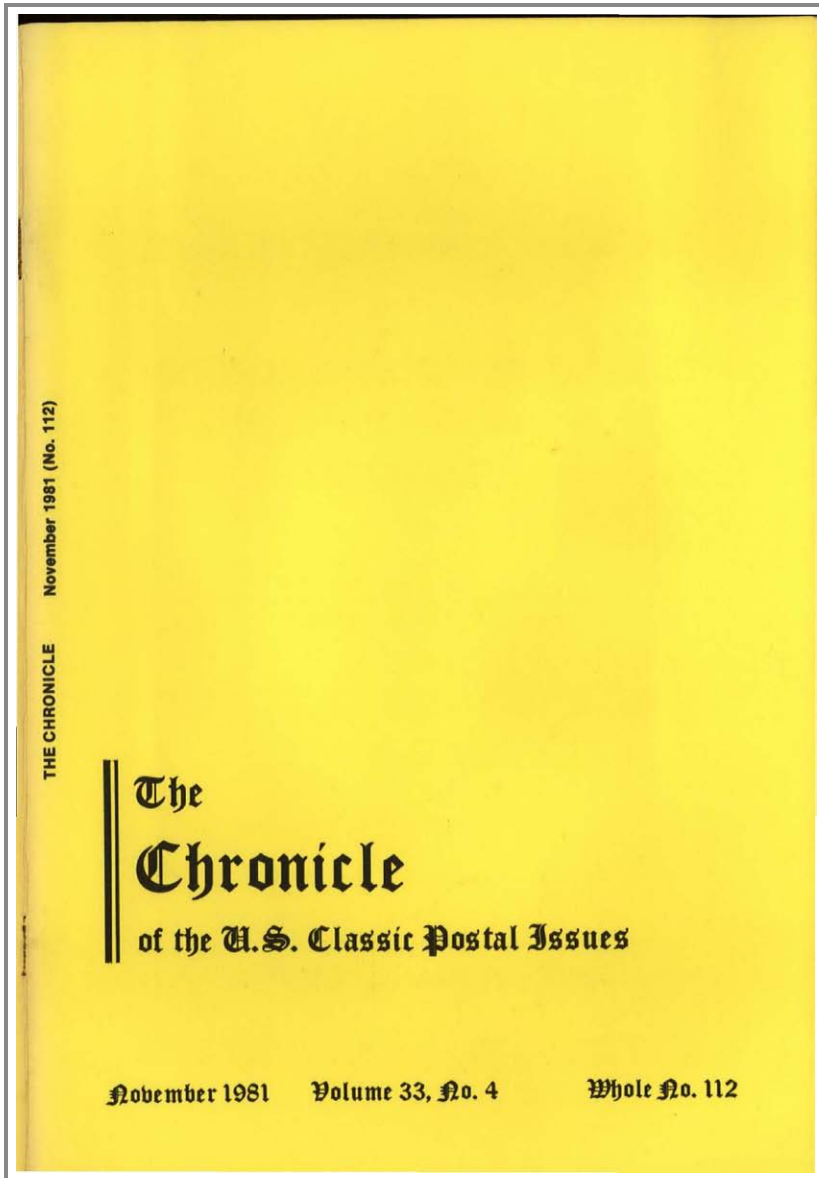


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GUEST PRIVILEGE

PAPER AND GUM USED FOR THE NEW YORK POSTMASTER'S PROVISIONAL STAMPS

PHILIP T. WALL

In many instances a photograph does the job of a thousand words; but in writing on such technical aspects as paper and gum, photographs, no matter how clear they may be or how much they may be enlarged, are of limited value.

ORIGINAL GUM

Probably no subject matter in the history of philately is so controversial as "original gum." It sometimes appears that collectors are all too eager to pay more for the original gum on the back of a stamp than they are for the stamp itself. To each his own, but of one thing I am absolutely certain: original gum on New York Postmaster's Provisional Stamps constitutes a definite hazard to the health of the stamps.

The same firm that printed the U.S. 1847 issue printed the 5c New Yorks — Rawdon, Wright and Hatch (Edson was made a partner sometime prior to July 1, 1847) — and the same types of gum were used for both issues. One type of gum used was thickly applied and has a definite yellowish brown tint. This type tends to permeate the paper and to leave the front of the stamp aged looking and sometimes with a yellow, or buff, appearance. The other type of gum used was whitish, or almost transparent, and was usually thinly applied but may be of a medium thickness. This second type appears to have originally been of a harder type of compound and usually feels slightly slick to the touch. Both types were applied by hand and as a result of this are usually somewhat uneven.

After 135 years both types of gum have crystallized and cracked with the whitish or transparent gum tending to form smaller crystals than the thicker, yellowish brown gum. Upon removal of both types of gum, owners will discover the paper fibers of their stamps have tiny gum cracks. This condition will only become worse with the passing of time. In concluding these comments on original gum, I have two suggestions to make: First, those collectors and dealers owning 9X1s with original gum should soak off the gum immediately before the physical condition of your stamps becomes terminal, and Second, never pay a premium price for any 5c New York that is described as having original gum. I have removed the gum from all of my unused stamps except for two copies that I am keeping for study purposes.

PAPER USED IN PRINTING THE STAMPS

Winthrop S. Boggs, a well known professional who was a recognized authority on U.S. and British North American stamps, wrote an informative article entitled "The New York Postmaster's Provisional" in the September 1952 issue of the *Collectors Club Philatelist* (Vol. XXXI, No. 5). In this article Boggs tells us the paper used by Rawdon, Wright and Hatch was manufactured at the Wilcox Ivey Mill in Chester, Pennsylvania, and that it was handmade from linen rags being properly seasoned before use.

COLORS OF PAPER ON WHICH THE STAMPS WERE PRINTED

In the front of the sales catalog of the O.S. Hart Collection of 5c New Yorks sold by the Nassau Stamp Company on October 2, 1913, there appears a table breaking down the 400 stamps in the Hart auction by types of paper and number of stamps on each paper. A recap of that table is as follows: (1) Yellowish white pelure - 31, (2) Yellowish white - 82, (3) Bluish white - 88, (4) Bluish white pelure - 50, (5) Gray blue - 92, (6) Gray - 19, (7) Blue - 7, (8) Ribbed - 31, for a total of 400 stamps. This classification system is apparently that of

Mr. Hart who was the recognized authority on 5c New Yorks during the first two decades of this century.

At about the time of the Hart Sale, Abraham Hatfield, Jr., a well-to-do textile manufacturer, became interested in the 5c New Yorks. It was Hatfield who first correctly ascertained that the stamps were printed on a plate of forty positions. In 1921 Mr. Hatfield wrote and the Scott Stamp and Coin Company published in an edition of 100 copies a book entitled *The New York Postmaster's Stamp*. While the book deals primarily with the plating of the stamp, Mr. Hatfield discusses on page 12 the different kinds of colored paper used in printing the stamps and concludes by writing as follows: "Personally I am inclined to the opinion that time and conditions have had a large part in the making of many of these varieties [by this he is referring to the listings in the catalog of the Hart sale], and would reduce the varieties to Blue, Gray and Bluish. The bluish tint could easily have faded, and time would assist in the so-called yellowish tints. I do not think the so-called white paper was ever used and think it but a thoroughly bleached bluish paper. The stamps on blue and gray paper seem to have a distinctive quality that differs strongly from the others in the grain of the paper."

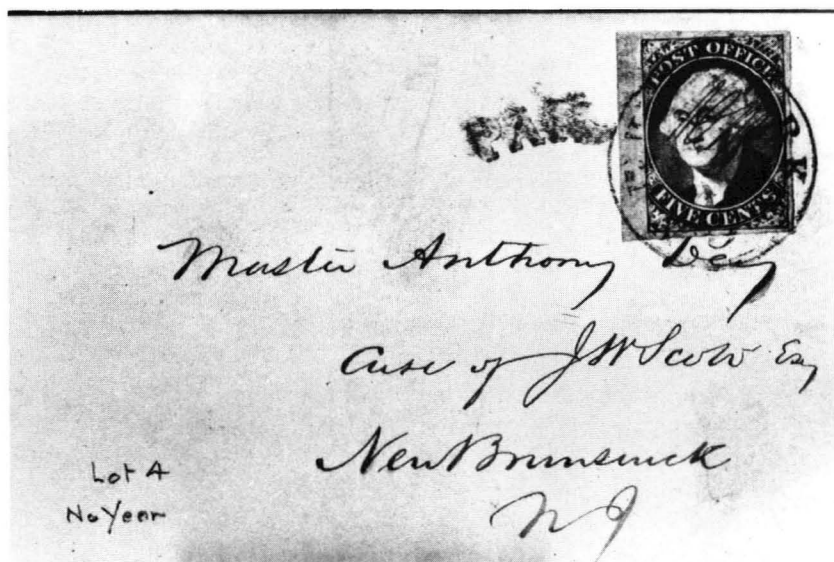


Figure A. Cover with 5c New York on blue or bluish paper, although erroneously described in 1981 Rarities Sale as "grayish blue."

In the MacGuffin (Ashbrook) article entitled "The New York Postmaster's Provisional" that appeared in the May 1936 issue of *The American Philatelist*, the writers took a position somewhat in between Hart and Hatfield and described the colors of the paper on which the stamps were printed as blue, gray, gray-blue, bluish-white and white. As far as I have been able to determine, Ashbrook did not discuss this subject matter again until 1953 when in the July 1, 1953, issue of his *Special Service* at pages 201-203 he discussed a certain 9X1 cover (Figure A) that had been submitted to him for his opinion as to the stamp's being printed on true blue paper. In discussing this cover, Ashbrook states that in his opinion none of the stamps were printed on white paper and that the blue and bluish papers are two distinctly different papers. He does not comment on the gray paper. He concludes that the stamp on the cover shown in Figure A was printed on bluish rather than blue paper. The cover in question was in the Weill stock when I visited New Orleans several years ago; and while time did not permit an extensive examination, my preliminary opinion was that the stamp was printed on the true blue paper rather than on the more common bluish paper. This cover was lot 12 in the 1981 Robert A. Siegel Rarities of the World sale

and realized a hammer price of \$8,500. The stamp was described as being "on Grayish Blue paper (9X1a)" which I consider to be a misnomer as it should have been described as on either Blue Paper (9X1a) or bluish paper (9X1). There was no evidence of any gray paper in the stamp when I examined it in 1974.

As far as I have been able to determine, no other collector or dealer has written anything in the past 28 years about the colors of the paper on which the 5c New Yorks were printed. The stamps printed on gray paper were listed in the *Scott Specialized Catalog of United States Stamps* for several decades up until the early 1970s at which time this listing was deleted. In recent editions the gray paper variety has been mentioned in the narrative preamble prior to the individual listings but has not been listed separately. Today the stamps printed on the usual bluish paper are cataloged as 9X1 and those printed on blue paper are listed as 9X1a.

I have examined several hundred copies of the 5c New York in the past decade and feel that Hatfield reached the correct conclusion sixty years ago when he wrote that the true paper colors are blue, bluish and gray. The vast majority — probably 97 percent to 98 percent — of the stamps were printed on a tightly woven paper with a slightly bluish cast. Some and perhaps all British Expert Committees refer to this paper as grayish.

John N. Luff in his *Postmasters' Provisional Stamps* tells us that the last printing of the stamps took place on January 7, 1847, when 4,000 copies were printed. Inasmuch as all of the known covers with both blue and gray paper stamps are postmarked subsequent to that date, it is my belief that most if not all of the stamps printed on both gray and blue paper are from the last printing.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to accurately put into words how to describe the blue paper and gray paper varieties, but I shall give this my best effort. The easiest method is to compare your stamps with other stamps that have been expertized, but in all likelihood the material needed for comparison purposes will not be readily available. Stamps printed on both blue and gray paper will probably have red grid cancels but may have any of the cancellations used in 1845-47.

The blue paper stamps are usually — but not always — found on a tough, hard paper of medium thickness with a consistency that is a lot like the "kraft" type of paper bag found in your local supermarket. Occasionally blue paper varieties are found on a softer paper much like that used for the normal stamps and this always presents a problem to the uninformed. The only true test lies in the amount of blue pigmentation found in the paper fibers. All 9X1s have a certain quantity of blue pigment in the paper including those printed on gray paper. Those with the least amount of blue are what we refer to as the normal bluish paper stamps, and those with the heaviest concentration of blue that causes the paper to have a decidedly darker blue appearance are what Scott calls 9X1a. If you contemplate buying a stamp that is described to you as a blue paper variety, you should have this stamp expertized before it is purchased.

The gray paper variety is always found on a tough, hard paper that is either thin or medium in thickness. These stamps have a decidedly gray appearance much like the color found on warships. If the paper appears whitish, gray-white or grayish, then it is not a gray paper stamp. In my judgement collectors should never purchase a 5c New York that is described as being on gray paper unless the stamp has a fresh appearance and the cancellation is clear and distinct.

Hatfield described the stamps printed on gray paper as being more rare than those printed on blue paper, whereas all other writers have found the blue paper variety to be more rare. From my own experience I have found unused blue paper stamps to be more rare than unused gray paper stamps. I have found more used gray paper singles than used blue paper singles but more used blue paper pairs than gray paper pairs. Covers with single blue paper stamps are more common than covers with single gray paper stamps. By contrast I

record more gray paper pairs on cover than I do blue paper pairs on cover. It should be understood that while some of my findings are based on the stamps in my own collection, the majority of my records are from auction catalog descriptions of items that I have never examined. I can only assume that the auction describers were correct in their descriptions.

OTHER PAPER VARIETIES

At one time the *Scott U.S. Specialized Catalog* had separate listings (with premium prices) for stamps printed on pelure paper as well as those printed on so-called ribbed paper. The thickness of the papers grades gradually from pelure to thin to medium to thick, and I have seen many stamps described as being on pelure paper which I would consider as being on thin paper. For those who would like to know if they have a 9X1 in their collection that is printed on pelure paper, I have devised a simple test that is about 80 percent accurate: When you look at the stamp from the reverse side with a good glass and in good light, Washington's eye in the center of the stamp appears much darker than his eye that is farther to the right. Sometimes you get the same effect from stamps printed on what I would describe as thin paper, and of course there is always the possibility the stamp may be thinned at that spot. I think the Scott editors were correct in deleting this listing.

In his *American Philatelic Dictionary* (1947 edition), Harry M. Konwiser defines stamps printed on ribbed paper as having fine parallel ridges. L. N. and M. Williams in Section One of *Fundamentals of Philately* describe ribbed paper as paper having an uneven corrugated surface rather like exaggerated laid lines caused by the passing of the paper between ridged rollers. I have never found a 9X1 that fitted either of these descriptions. I have found a few copies wherein the paper has a faint mesh appearance as if someone had pressed the paper firmly against a finely woven screen wire. In my judgement such copies should command no premium, and I think the listing for the ribbed paper variety was properly deleted from the *Scott Catalog*. I have never seen a 5c New York on paper that is at all like that used to print the Canadian 3d Beaver stamps on ribbed paper that Rawdon, Wright, Hatch and Edson printed in 1857.

In the October 18, 1926, issue of *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News*, Philip H. Ward, Jr., wrote that he had recently been shown a 5c New York with a stitch watermark which was the first such copy he had ever seen. This is the only reference to such a variety that I have ever read about, and I wonder what has happened to this stamp in the intervening 55 years. Stamps with stitch watermarks are scarce but not rare on our 1847 issue, and there should be additional copies of 9X1 with this paper variety since the same firm printed both issues.

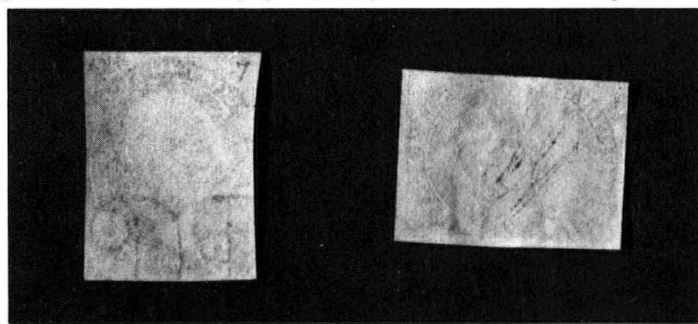


Figure C. Watermarked New York 5c with parts of two upright letters, one of which may be "J."

Figure B. New York 5c showing side-wise watermark - may be part of letter "J."

Copies of the 5c New York with the double line watermark are scarce if not rare. In the MacGuffin (Ashbrook) article, it is reported that out of over two thousand copies examined, only six copies were found to have a double-lined large capital letter watermark and the only letter positively identified was J. Parts of what appeared to be either the letter "E" or "F" had also been seen, and in his book Luff wrote that he had seen upright strokes which might belong to a variety of letters.

I have three stamps with a double lined watermark in my collection. One (Figure B) has a sideways watermark that could be part of the letter "J", another (Figure C) has parts of two upright letters, one of which might be "J", and the third stamp has such a small part of an upright letter that I would not begin to attempt to identify the letter.

I have seen a fairly good attempt to fake a double-lined watermark. The stamp in question was a defective copy of Position 31 (bottom frame line recut) with an indistinct red cancel. When I first examined the stamp it appeared genuine, but when I looked a second time it did not look right. Further examination revealed that someone had taken an emery board type of device and had thinned the fibers of the paper in an effort to imitate a double-lined letter. In doing this, various parts of the stamp had been thinned. However, the workmanship was good enough to fool the describers at two of our leading auction houses in New York and Boston as I have a record of this particular copy dating back several years. The stamp I have just referred to is not the copy from Position 31 that was uncanceled and sold for \$900 + 10 percent as lot 5 in the 1979 Siegel Rarities of the World Sale. I never saw the stamp in the 1979 Siegel Sale, but it was described as showing the papermaker's watermark.

Scott mentions the double lined watermark variety in the narrative preamble to the individual listings in the *U.S. Specialized Catalog*, but makes no mention of a stitch watermark variety. I think this is as it should be as I do not find stitch watermark varieties listed for any of our provisional or early general U.S. issues in the current (1981) catalog.

I would like to hear from other collectors who have 9X1s with either type of watermark in their collections.

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