

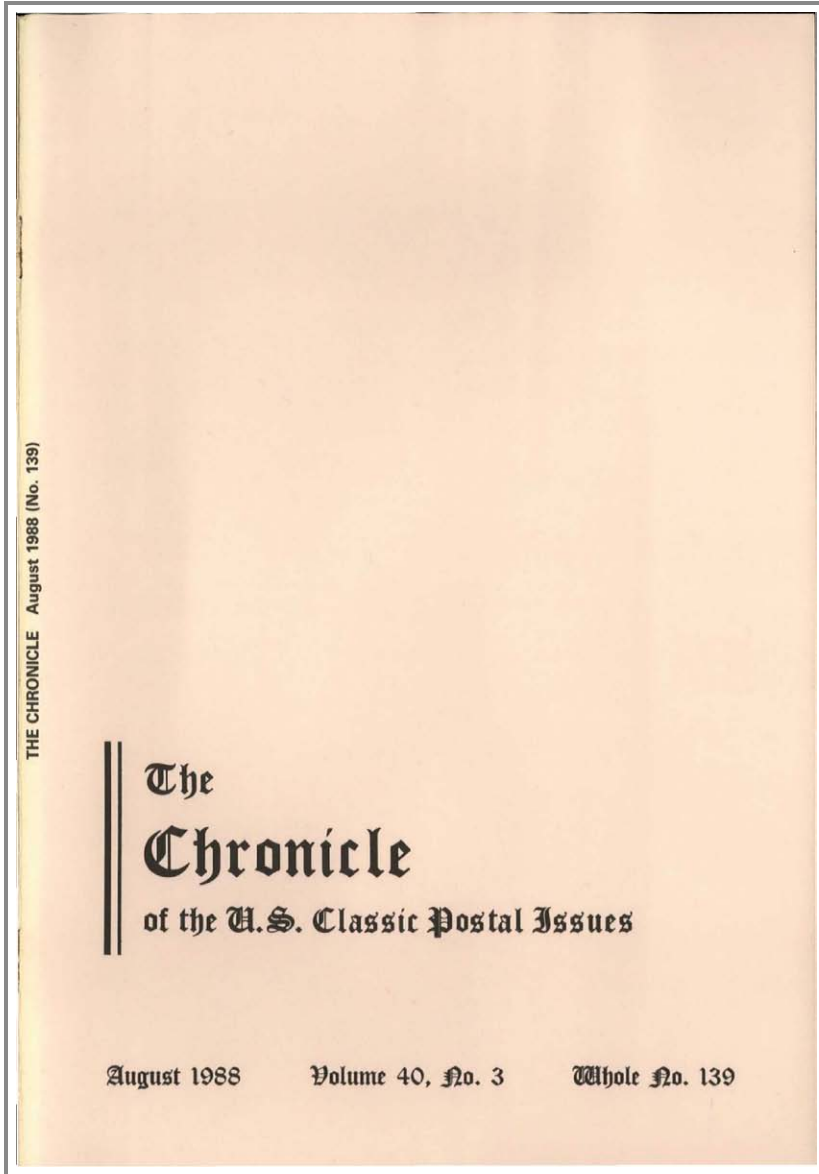


# U.S. Philatelic Classics Society

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Article: The Five Cent Columbian Stamp

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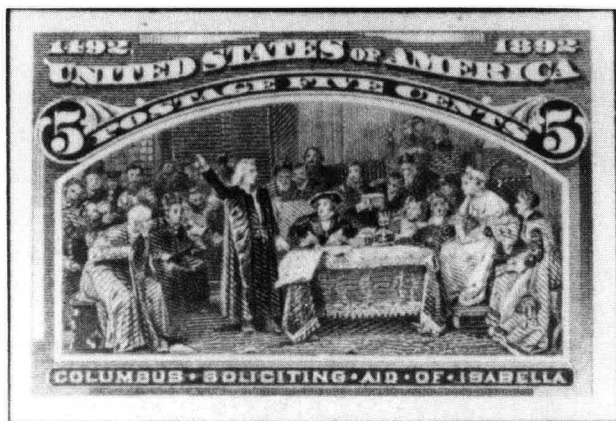
**THE FIVE CENT COLUMBIAN STAMP**

**GEORGE B. ARFKEN**

Postmaster General Wanamaker's December 5, 1892, Circular<sup>1</sup> described the 5¢ Columbian as "Columbus Soliciting Aid of Isabella after a painting by Brozik, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Color, Chocolate brown." Unlike the source of the 4¢ Columbian, the source of the 5¢ Columbian can be identified positively. The painting was painted in 1884 by a Czech artist, Vaclav Brozik. It was entitled "Columbus at the Court of Ferdinand and Isabella." In Wanamaker's time the painting was indeed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art but since 1929 it has been in the Hotel Manoir Richelieu, Murray Bay, Quebec.<sup>2</sup> (Murray Bay has been renamed La Malbaie.)

The assignment of a chronological position to the 5¢ Columbian is ambiguous. Columbus solicited aid from Queen Isabella twice: both before visiting the La Rabida monastery (30¢ Columbian) and after visiting the monastery. Davis, drawing upon Samuel Eliot Morison's book, *Christopher Columbus, Mariner*, places the 5¢ Columbian first among the Columbians chronologically and interprets the \$1.00 Columbian as illustrating the second visit.<sup>3</sup> Other authors have the 30¢ Columbian first and the 5¢ Columbian second, interpreting Brozik's painting as depicting the second meeting of Columbus and Queen Isabella.<sup>4</sup>

Even more scarce than the lower value essays, the full 5¢ Columbian design is known only with the issued design vignette engraving surrounded by a water color in black brown of an elongated frame essay on thick artist cardboard. Essays of the vignette alone exist on india paper die sunk on card, but they are considered rare.



**Figure 1. A plate proof of the final design.**

A plate proof of the final design is presented in Figure 1. The vignette was engraved by Charles Skinner, the frame and lettering by D. S. Ronaldson.<sup>5</sup> The American Bank Note Co. liked this vignette so much that they used it again on the Costa Rican 10 centimo stamp of

1. These official descriptions of the U.S. Columbians were repeated in the 1893 *Report of the Postmaster General*, p. 555.

2. John F. O'Brien, "Basis of the Design of the U.S. Columbian Issue of 1893," *The American Philatelist*, vol. 98, pp. 895-900, September 1984.

3. Henry F. Davis, "The Stamp of Approval," *The United States Specialist*, vol. 37, pp. 334-339, August 1966.

4. Stephen G. Esrati, "Oh Columbus," *The American Philatelist*, vol. 95, p. 616, July 1981.

5. Craig J. Turner, "The Early United States Bank Note Companies," *The American Philatelic Congress*, vol. 38, pp. 11-47, 1972.

**Figure 2. A plate imprint block of the issued stamp.**



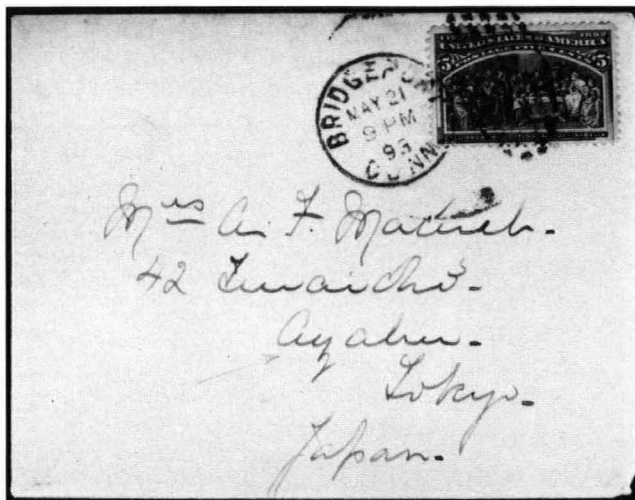
1923-26.<sup>6</sup>

In his 1894 *Report* (p. 472) the Postmaster General gave the number of 5¢ Columbians issued to postmasters as 35,248,250. While outnumbered by the 2¢ Columbians almost 42 to 1, the 5¢ Columbians were still the most numerous of all the Columbians beyond the 2¢ value. Figure 2 exhibits a plate imprint block of the issued stamp.

Five 100 subject plates were used to print the 5¢ Columbian: B6, B7, B8, B9, and B10.<sup>7</sup>

There are double transfers on the 5¢ Columbian; Brookman listed the color as varying from dark chocolate to yellow brown. But there is no variety comparable to the 2¢ imperforate or the 4¢ "error of color."

**Figure 3. UPU rate, 5¢ per ½ oz., to Tokyo, Japan. Via San Francisco. BRIDGEPORT, CONN., MAY 21, 1893.**



The 5¢ Columbian met a very specific and important need. It paid the 5¢ per half ounce Universal Postal Union rate for almost all overseas letter mail. Figure 3 displays a cover to Tokyo, Japan, from Bridgeport, Conn., May 21, 1893. There are San Francisco transit and Japanese receiving backstamps.

At this time, 1893, U.S. letters franked with U.S. Columbians were going to countries all over the world. Trans Pacific mail service to Japan had been inaugurated in January 1867 by the Pacific Mail Steamship Line.<sup>8</sup> A Postal Convention between the United States and the Empire of Japan set the letter rate at 5¢ per half ounce effective April 1, 1876.<sup>9</sup> On June 1, 1877, Japan joined the General Postal Union (UPU in 1878) becoming the second independent nation to join after the charter members.<sup>10</sup> The letter rate became the 5¢ UPU rate.

6. A. A. Lauzon, *The United States Columbian Issue, 1893*, 1942, p. 26.

7. F. L. Ellis, "Columbian Plate Numbers," *The Bureau Specialist*, vol. 35, pp. 232-234, June 1964.

8. H. E. Lobdell, "1867, The Beginnings of Scheduled Trans-Pacific Mail," *American Philatelic Congress*, vol. 12, pp. 12-42, 1946.

9. Charles J. Starnes, *United States Letter Rates to Foreign Destinations 1847 to GPU-UPU*, 1982.

10. Montenegro was invited to attend the initial Postal Union Congress but was unable to do so. Montenegro adhered to the GPU on July 1, 1875, the date the Union became effective.

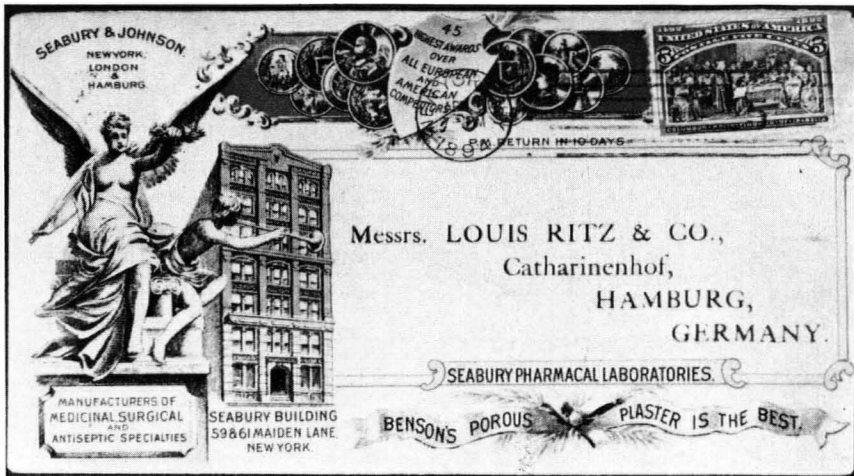


Figure 4. A red, green, and gold advertising cover to Germany. NEW YORK, N.Y., APR 6 1894.

If the cover to Japan is perfectly plain, the cover of Figure 4 to Germany is just the opposite. Printed in red, green and gold, this cover is a candidate for the most spectacular Columbian advertising cover in overseas use. From New York, N.Y., April 6, 1894, the cover bears a printed address to Hamburg, Germany. There is a Hamburg receiving backstamp. Again the 5¢ Columbian paid the 5¢ UPU rate.



Figure 5. A 5¢ Columbian on a private German post card mailed aboard the German steamship *Havel*. U.S.-GERMAN SEA POST, SEP 6 93.

Figure 5 shows a private German post card franked with a 5¢ Columbian. The card was posted aboard the German fast steamer *Havel* on September 6, 1893, while the *Havel* was passing through the English Channel heading toward Germany. The illustrated message side of the card is displayed in Figure 6. This German postkarte, franked with a 5¢ Columbian, raises two questions: 1) Why the U.S. stamp? and 2) Why 5¢? (The UPU post card rate was 2¢.)

The answer to the first question, "Why the U.S. stamp?" is indicated by the cds U.S.-GERMAN SEA POST. Under terms of an agreement signed December 24, 1890, the U.S. and Germany agreed to each put a postal clerk aboard the German steamers of the North German Lloyd Steamship Co. and the Hamburg American Packet Co. to sort mail. The 5¢ Columbian German postkarte was deposited in the U.S. mail stream of the U.S.-German Sea Post and therefore required a U.S. stamp.

Why 5¢? The U.S. did not recognize private U.S. post cards in 1893. U.S. private post cards were permitted in the U.S. domestic mail July 1, 1898, and in international mail

Figure 6. The message side of the post card of Figure 5.



December 1, 1898.<sup>11</sup> To go through the U.S. mail in 1893 with a U.S. stamp, this private post card had to be paid the U.S. 5¢ overseas letter rate.

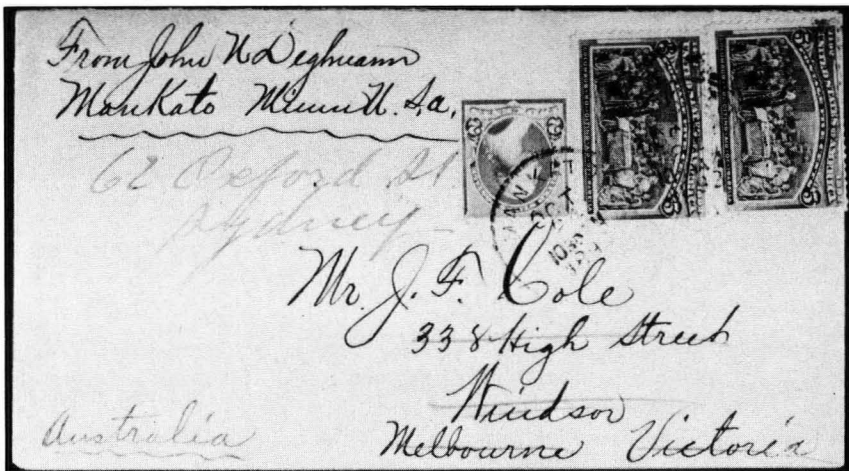


Figure 7. An obsolete pre-UPU 12¢ rate to Australia. MANKATO, MINN., OCT 24, 1893. Overpaid 7¢.

Finally an example of multiple use (two) of the 5¢ Columbian and mixed franking. Figure 7 offers a cover from Mankato, Minn., October 24, 1893, to Melbourne, Victoria, forwarded to Sydney, New South Wales. Like all U.S. mail to the eastern Australian colonies, the cover went via San Francisco. The two 5¢ Columbians and the 2¢ red 1890 issue paid a 12¢ per half ounce pre-UPU rate. Actually the Australian colonies had joined the UPU October 1, 1891, two years earlier. The correct rate in October 1893 was the UPU 5¢ per half ounce.

11. Insert No. 137.B for 1893 *Postal Laws and Regulations*.

**PATRONIZE OUR ADVERTISERS**