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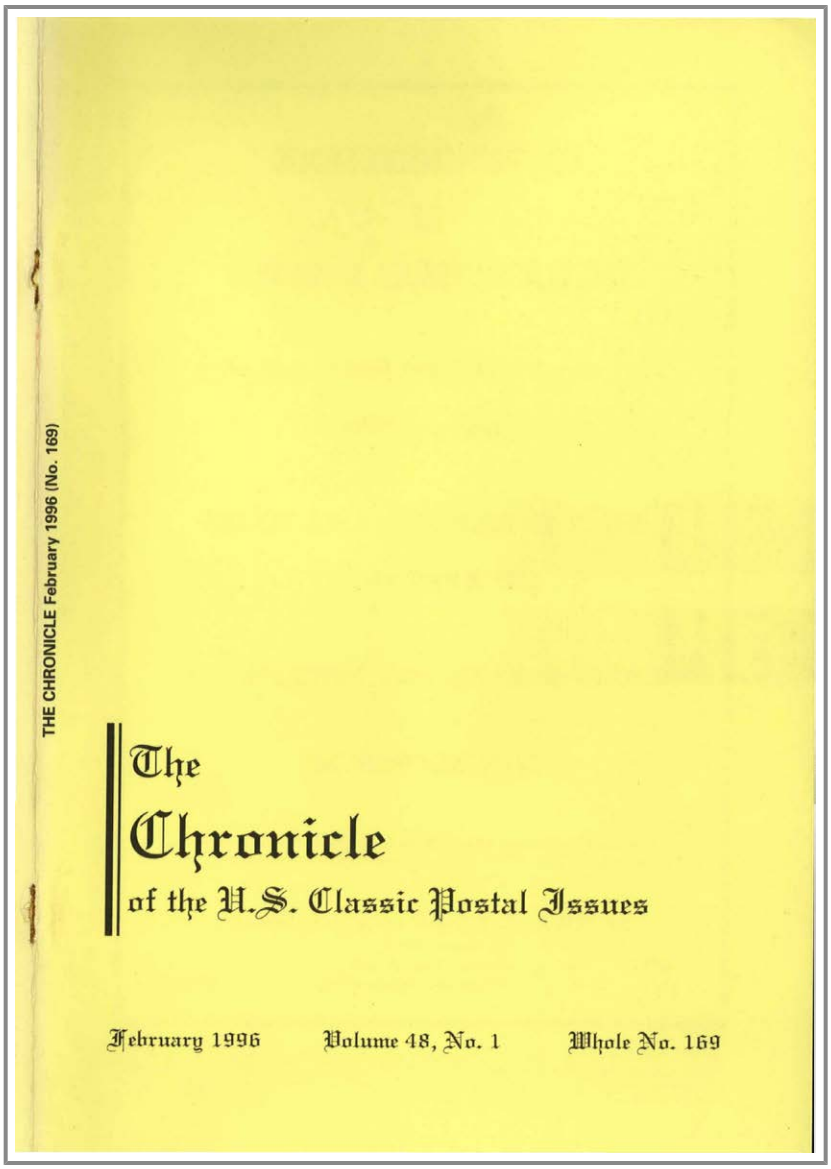

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THE DESIGN EVOLUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OFFICIAL STAMPS

ALAN C. CAMPBELL

(continued from *Chronicle* 168; 271)

Thus we see that Congress was determined to hold the Cabinet members entrusted with the disbursement of official stamps strictly accountable for their legitimate use. As we saw earlier in the case of South Australia, departmental stamps were deemed preferable to a generic all-purpose set of official stamps because it would make the source of misuse easier to locate and correct. It is this feature of added control Congress was after when it initially specified separate stamps for each department.

The Post Office Department, which for years had been protesting the large annual deficits in its budgets caused by the franking privilege, had a direct financial interest in seeing that the official stamps were not used inappropriately. The best way to insure against this was to make these special new stamps radically different in appearance from regular postage stamps, so that postal clerks would be immediately alerted to check for the confirming "Official Business" imprint on the envelope. The expedient options of overprinting or perforating initials onto regular postage stamps would have met this need, but probably never got serious consideration for aesthetic reasons, despite the time constraints on production. The only solution left then was to prepare a special set of stamps for each department, adapted from the regular issue designs. The heightened contrast needed to distinguish official stamps from the regular issues would be achieved by the innovation of assigning one characteristic color to all values of each department. In this concept, later employed for such special services as postage due, parcel post and parcel post postage due, primary emphasis is placed on making the type of stamp distinct and unmistakable, while the ease of distinguishing one value from another by virtue of color is sacrificed. That this was a radical notion in 1873 is born out by the fact that two years later, when the 7¢ stamp was withdrawn after the rate change and the color vermilion became available, the color of the 2¢ regular issue was immediately changed to prevent further confusion with the brown 10¢ stamp.

In his circular to postmasters dated May 15, 1873, the newly appointed Third Assistant Postmaster General, Edward W. Barber, discussing the numerals on the Post Office stamps, stated: "These, printed in black, and resting on an oval-shaped white background, render the stamps especially distinctive, and leave no good excuse for confounding them with other stamps." Had the original portrait vignettes been retained, it is hard to imagine any postal clerk (other than a profoundly color-blind one) from mixing up black official stamps with the brightly colored regular issues (except possibly for the 30¢ value). It seems likely that Barber, taking a dim view of his charges' powers of discrimination, realized that a set of all black stamps with unobtrusive numerals would cause a rash of misfrankings. Therefore, in a last minute act of enlightened self-interest, he had the portrait vignettes replaced with bold bullseye numerals. Mercifully, there wasn't time to apply this type of safeguard to the stamps of the other departments, whose designs had been approved by his predecessor, W. H. H. Terrell. If there had been, the unrelieved ugliness would have repelled all but the most determined collectors.

It is worth considering, from the surviving covers posted with official stamps, whether the extra measure of control and security provided by issuing separate departmental stamps was in fact warranted. The vast majority of covers encountered do bear an imprinted corner card which confirms the legitimacy of the use. Even in the event imprinted envelopes were temporarily unavailable, most authorized users scrupulously added a

handwritten official business designation, sometimes as simple as the initials "O.B." Because this practice was so standardized, collectors of official covers are suspicious of any cover lacking a corner card. Though a mute envelope is automatically suspect, in truth they are seldom encountered, and among those that are, some are certainly legitimate usages where the official was guilty only of oversight. Confirmed illegitimate usages are in fact quite scarce. There exist several fascinating covers from a private correspondence out of New Orleans franked with 3¢ Navy stamps, where the illegitimate usage was detected by a sharp-eyed clerk and marked "INSUFFICIENTLY PAID." There also exists a large correspondence from Washington, D.C. to a Marine in Philadelphia, again franked with 3¢ Navy stamps, where the docketing on the covers clearly indicates that the writer, the Marine's sister, was blithely using official stamps on her personal mail (see Figure 5). Had postal inspectors tried to intercede and apprehend the guilty party, the fact that Navy Department stamps were being used, instead of generic official stamps, would have certainly helped them narrow the focus of their investigation. Incorrect private usages as revealed by the docketing are also known from the State Department and the Executive Office. President Hayes, whose inauguration coincided with the introduction of penalty envelopes on March 3, 1877, immediately converted to using penalty envelopes for official business, while at the same time using up the remaining stock of Executive stamps on his personal mail.[11] The fact that we don't encounter many obviously illegitimate usages does not necessarily demonstrate that the extra precaution was unwarranted, since the improved odds of detection may well have served as a deterrent.

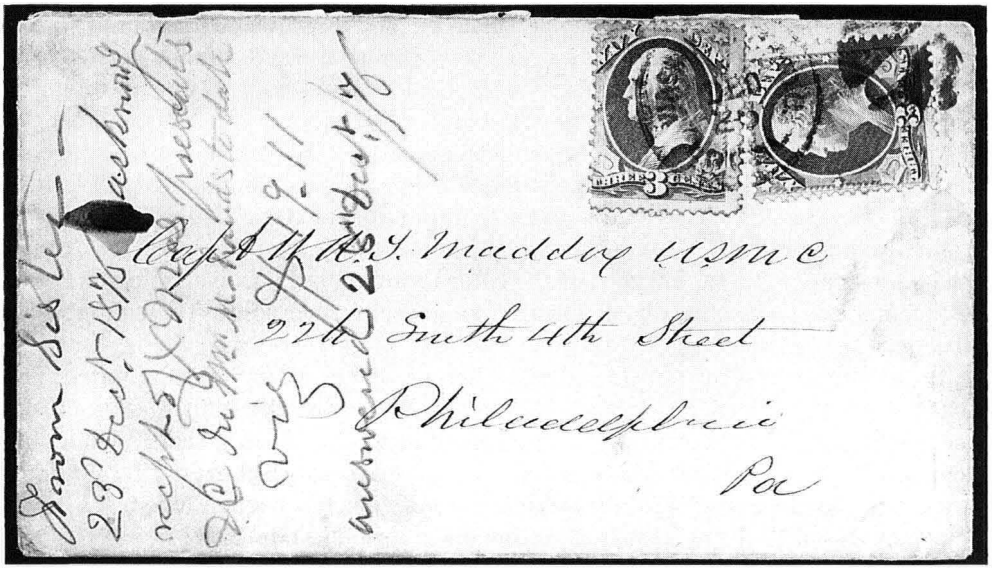

Figure 5. Double domestic rate, Washington, D. C. to Philadelphia, December 26, 1876. Docketing indicates that in the enclosed letter, the Marine's sister acknowledged receipt of Christmas presents. Note incorrect use of "LOCAL" date stamp.

The 1869 regular issue, put out under a contract signed by the Postmaster General during the disgraced administration of President Andrew Johnson, had received much adverse criticism. It was therefore announced that a new stamp issue—a Grant administration issue—would replace the unpopular 1869s.[12] Grant's Postmaster General, John Angel James Creswell, wrote in his annual report, dated November 15, 1870:

[11]Unpublished research by Alfred E. Staubus.

[12]Calvet M. Hahn, "The National Bank Note Issues," *Collectors Club Philatelist*, Vol. 68, No. 5 (September-October 1989), p. 297.

> The adhesive postage stamps adopted by my predecessor in 1869 having failed to give satisfaction to the public, on account of their small size, their unshapely form, the inappropriateness of their designs, the difficulty of canceling them effectually, and the inferior gum used in their manufacture, I found it necessary, in April last, to issue new stamps, of larger size, superior quality of gum and improved designs . . . one-third larger in size, and to adopt for designs the heads, in profile, of distinguished deceased Americans. This style was deemed the most eligible because it not only afforded the best opportunity for the exercise of the highest grade of artistic skill in composition and execution, but also appeared to be the most difficult to counterfeit. The designs were selected from marble busts of acknowledged excellence . . . .[13]

In light of these political considerations, it seems obvious that the new official stamps to be disbursed by the members of President Grant's cabinet would be modeled after the new regular issues for more than just pragmatic reasons of simple expedience. The official stamps would be perceived as a Grant issue too, and despite all history has taught us about the corruption in his administration, the care with which they were conceived and prepared suggests a keen awareness of their symbolic and ceremonial purpose. These special stamps would convey dignity and importance upon any official communication, from the Executive Mansion and the lofty Department of State down to the humble, user-friendly Agriculture Commission, with its popular mailings of free seeds to farmers. Postmaster General Creswell, who had long regarded the franking privilege as "the mother of frauds" and had urged its repeal for years, in his annual report dated November 14, 1873 proudly stated:

> Section 4 of the Act of March 3, 1873, making it the duty of the Postmaster General to provide official stamps and stamped envelopes for the several Executive Departments, has been strictly complied with. The stamps and envelopes furnished have been executed in the highest style of art, and will compare favorably with those of any other country.[14]

As we shall shortly see, the Continental Bank Note Company, having just taken over the contract for stamp production from the National Bank Company, made a heroic effort to have 90 of the new official stamps ready for use by July 11, 1873 when for the first time, postage would be required on government mail. The scope of this enterprise is summarized in the following chronology:

Jan. 27, 1873	By act of Congress, the franking privilege was abolished effective July 1, 1873
March 3, 1873	By act of Congress, money appropriated for purchase of special stamps for use of the executive departments
April 1, 1873	Dies, transfer rolls, and plates used by National turned over to Continental
April 4, 1873	Postmaster General Creswell orders Continental to design and engrave the new official stamps
April 18, 1873	Die proofs for the first official stamps (3¢ Interior, 3¢ Navy, 3¢ War) approved in their issued colors
May 24, 1873	Official stamps first issued by Continental
June 13, 1873	Last die proof (7¢ Navy) for the original series of 90 official stamps approved
July 1, 1873	Effective date for abolition of the franking privilege; first day of usage for official stamps; all values except the supplemental 24¢ Agriculture and 24¢ Treasury available for use in Washington, D. C.
Sept. 30, 1873	24¢ Agriculture and 24¢ Treasury issued by this date

[13]U. S. Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster General of the United States for the Fiscal Year 1870,* p. 33.

[14]*Executive Documents*, 43rd Congress, 1st Session, 1873-74, Doc. 1, Part 4, p. xix.

In the month that elapsed between March 3, when Congress authorized the official stamps, and April 4, when Postmaster General Creswell ordered Continental to begin work on them, the basic planning for these issues must have been undertaken at the Post Office Department. The departments would have been consulted about their specific mailing needs, in order to determine a schedule of values and also to decide which departments would need stamped envelopes in addition to adhesives. The concept of assigning a single distinctive color to the stamps of each department would have been settled upon, and even some preliminary thought given to which colors might be appropriate. Even at this early stage, it was probably apparent that the designs for the new issues would have to be adapted from the regular issues then in use, in order to afford the manufacturer any chance of meeting the July 1 deadline. National's contract to manufacture stamps was to have expired on January 31, but it was extended for three months to May 1, possibly because Continental had not been able to locate suitable fireproof premises.[15] Then, just three days after taking possession of the National dies and setting to work making new plates for the regular issues, Continental was handed the enormous job of producing all the new official stamps in less than three months!

Design Evolution

The regular issue of 1870, with portrait vignettes all of a uniform size, all left-facing, and all adapted from classical style marble busts, began a new trend in United States stamp production towards consistency of design among all values of a single issue. However, in order to prevent the images from becoming too monotonous, subtle variations were introduced into the frame designs, affecting most noticeably the value tablets or ribbons. In two instances, symbolic elements were also incorporated into the frame design to commemorate the accomplishments of the individual depicted: a flag, field artillery, shells and muskets for General Winfield Scott; bits of rope with eyehook fittings and anchors for Commodore Oliver Perry. Otherwise, the enlivening variations were undertaken for strictly artistic reasons.

When it came time to adapt these designs for the new official stamps, the portrait vignettes were retained intact for several obvious reasons. First and most importantly, the accelerated schedule of production did not allow for the laborious effort of new portrait engraving. Also, the pantheon of great Americans depicted, who had all distinguished themselves in government service, was eminently suitable to be featured on stamps franking mail from the Executive departments. Moreover, since the different denominations would not be distinguishable by color alone, preserving the portraits from the regular issue would afford mail room and postal clerks alike a familiar visual clue to prevent and detect misfrankings.

However, when it came time to design the frames for the new official stamps, the original principle of artistic and iconographic variation developed by designer Butler Packard at National was respectfully followed by designer Joseph Claxton at Continental, resulting in a single distinctive, consistent frame design for the stamps of each department, but with predictable changes between denominations in the design of the value tablet. If the official stamps are arrayed in a matrix by value and department, the pattern becomes obvious, as does the fact that the frame designs for all 92 stamps are different and distinct. In order to avoid the laborious reengraving of elements that repeat from one stamp to another, a more efficient design would have retained most of the original National frames intact and created a blank tablet at the top, in which the names of the departments could have been entered from a set of small master dies. A similar trick was in fact employed in the production of the plates for the State $5, $10, and $20 stamps, where the legend "TWO DOLLARS" was burnished out and the correct value reentered at each position. However,

[15]Hahn, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

to apply such a technique to all the official stamps would have rendered them depressingly uniform in appearance, and would have forfeited the opportunity to create appropriate and distinctive frame designs for each department, incorporating such symbolic elements as the nautical rope for the Navy set and the national shield for the War set.

While Claxton's design instincts were correct, they were not fiscally prudent, considering the enormous labor of engraving they would entail, quite disproportionate to the insignificant quantities in which most of these stamps would be issued. We are told that the talented Charles Skinner, here early in his career, spent three to four weeks laboriously engraving the portrait head of Seward alone, at a cost of over $500;[16] yet only 4,597 copies of the four State Department dollar values were ever issued. During the life of their contract for stamp production, National had been compensated at the rate of 27.5¢ per thousand. Continental had won the new contract with a bid of 14.99¢ per thousand (obviously anticipating a competing bid of 15¢ per thousand) based on the understanding that they would inherit National's dies and would not incur any new costs for design and engraving. Upon being asked to produce the new official stamps in less than three months, Continental's first reaction was to declare the task an impossibility, yet they quickly rolled up their sleeves and set to work. The entire work force was mobilized to concentrate on this project, and all other outside orders were put aside. Employees worked double time and were paid accordingly.[17] All this work was undertaken without prior negotiation as to proper compensation. At the prevailing rate of 15¢ per thousand stamps, Continental could expect to earn back on stamps like the 90¢ Justice (10,000 printed and delivered to the Stamp Agent in 1873, but only 3,200 issued in total, 1873-1879) the pathetic sum of $1.50! Figuring the minimum cost of producing a plate at $180 (the rate at which Butler and Carpenter had been compensated for revenue stamps), Continental would need to print at least 1,200,000 of each value in order to break even. A cynical interpretation of these events would have Homer H. Stuart, the President of Continental, rubbing his hands in glee at the prospect of all this extra work being added to his contract in a non-competitive situation, with enormous time pressure rendering effective cost control impossible. It was a calculated risk worth taking. Claxton's designs would be beautiful and expensive to produce, but ultimately the government would have to pay for the folly of commissioning such an elaborate series of stamps.

We know from surviving essays that the frame designs of the National regular issues were developed by creating models, using a proof of the portrait vignette pasted down around which the frame design was painted with watercolor washes. This same technique was used by Joseph Claxton in developing the frame designs for the official stamps, except that in addition to the portrait vignette the engraved numeral and value tablet from a regular issue proof was also pasted down. Claxton, a talented independent engraver, had been hired by Continental in 1872, and eventually worked his way up to head the Design Department. He was given the task of designing the official stamps because Continental's chief designer, James Macdonough, was still in disfavor from his 1869 fiasco at National.[18] From his initial set of design studies, the following models, all signed by Claxton and all in the collection of Robert L. Markovits, survive: 2¢ Agriculture, 3¢ Executive, 3¢ Interior, 3¢ Justice, 3¢ Navy, 3¢ Post Office (three different designs), 3¢ and $2 State, and 3¢ War. Since a model of the 3¢ Treasury stamp must have been prepared and has since been lost, it is possible that other models depicting alternate rejected frame designs were lost too. It is unlikely, though, that there was any need to develop models of values other

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[16]Alfred J. Barcan, "United States: Official Stamps and the Just Petition," *Collectors Club Philatelist*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (May 1960), p. 118.

[17]*Ibid.*

[18]Craig J. Turner, "The Postmaster General's Postage Stamp—VI," *S.P.A. Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 11 (July 1973), p. 665.

than the 3¢ since the necessary variations in the value tablets and ribbons would be self evident.

Because this was not a competitive bidding situation in which Continental needed to prove the skill of its engravers, and also because of the accelerated time schedule, it is most likely that the models described above were reviewed and approved directly by Third Assistant Postmaster General Terrell, who was in New York early in April overseeing the transition from National to Continental.[19] There would have been no time to send the models to Washington, D. C. so that Postmaster General Creswell, as a courtesy to his fellow cabinet members, could give them a peek at their new special stamps. After receiving the National dies on April 1, Continental had immediately made a set of transfer rolls and put them to use in laying down the new plates for the regular issues (Continental plates #1-#26, #31, 1¢ through 15¢ values: following National's lead, these were prepared in the order of anticipated need, with the 3¢ plates coming first). The first of these plates was ready on April 7. In the meantime, a second set of transfer rolls was made, to be used in producing the dies for the official stamps.

Elliott Perry once wrote that "neither in Luff's book nor in any other publication can one learn how the department stamps were made."[20] On this second set of transfer rolls, most of the frame portions were burnished away, and multiple new impressions from each master relief (the number varying according to how many departments had been assigned that value) were then laid down. Then, working from Claxton's approved models for the new frame designs, the work of engraving the new frames around the portrait vignettes could begin.

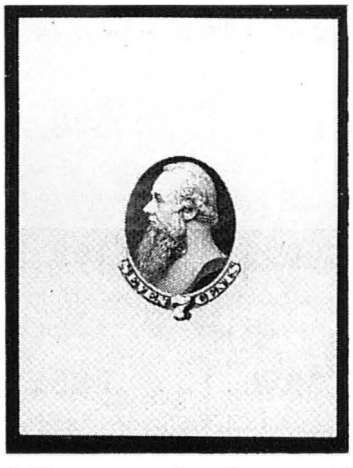

Figure 6. 7¢ Bank Note regressive die essay (Scott #149-E5b).

As we have seen, Claxton's models had utilized the numerals and value wording off the original National dies, and it appears that these elements were also preserved, in addition to the portrait vignettes, on the new transfer rolls. There exist incomplete die essays for the 1¢, 2¢, 3¢, 6¢, 7¢ and 12¢ Bank Note stamps showing the head, numeral and value wording, as well as essays for the 15¢ and 30¢ stamps showing the head and numeral only (see Figure 6). These were originally identified by Brazer as being products of the National Bank Note Company. However, John Donnes, a specialist in the 12¢ Bank Note stamp, noticed that on the essay for this stamp (151-E10), the lobes of the numeral "2" in

[19]Hahn, *op. cit.*, pp. 308-09.

[20]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.

"12" contain the secret marks, and that these marks had been strengthened in retouching the dies for the official stamps.[21] Since the secret marks were added when the dies were turned over to Continental in 1873, this 12¢ essay must have been produced then, rather than in 1870. Therefore, we must conclude that these essays were not in fact progressive proofs, taken as the dies were originally worked up by National, but regressive proofs, taken after the rest of the frame had been burnished away on the transfer rolls, by Continental. Moreover, in engraving the frames of the original National dies, we would not have expected to see the numeral and value wording entered first; however, we *would* have expected to see these elements preserved on the new official dies, in order to save much repetitive and unnecessary labor. The listings for these essays in the catalogue have recently been supplemented with the note, "May be essay for Official stamps," and include a date in parentheses (1873).

Following this theory, one would expect to find the numeral and value wording to be identical from one department to the next, but in actuality small variations can be detected under magnification. These variations do not affect the size, shape or placement of the letters, and were probably caused by selective retouching and strengthening as the ribbons forming the value tablets were subsequently added. As one would expect, greater variation is found on the 15¢ and 30¢ values, where the essays suggest the value wording had been inexplicably burnished off the transfer rolls. With the exception of the redesigned Post Office stamps, which were reengraved in their entirety, the preponderance of evidence and logic points towards the numeral and value wording on the rest of the official stamps as having been preserved from the original National dies. Ultimately, it will require a detailed, well-illustrated analysis, beyond the scope of this article, to confirm this theory.

In general, the first set of dies produced consisted of the 3¢ values for each department. The reasons for this are obvious: first, because the anticipated need for this value was greatest, and second, because it was desirable to receive approval as soon as possible for at least one die of each department, which could then serve as a prototype for engraving subsequent values. Because demand for the 3¢ Post Office stamp would far exceed that for all the other official stamps combined, there is no doubt that a die for this stamp, based on one of Claxton's three models utilizing the portrait vignette of Washington, was among the first produced. Since dies for the 2¢, 3¢ and 90¢ values with portrait vignettes were also produced (and the 6¢ was well in progress too), and since it seems unlikely Continental would have proceeded impatiently on their own initiative, the most likely explanation is that a proof from at least the 3¢ die was initially approved by W. H. H. Terrell. Certainly Terrell must have approved the model for this stamp, since it (unlike the other two rejected frames designs) was signed by Claxton. The design change occurred in late April, reflecting fresh thinking on the part of the newly-appointed E. W. Barber after he replaced Terrell.

Once the decision was made to replace the portrait vignette with a large numeral on the Post Office stamps, new models were prepared (presumably also by Joseph Claxton) in which the vignette was cut out from proofs of the 3¢ die and the numeral "3" was painted inside a lathework collar overlaid with the words "OFFICIAL STAMP." Two different unsigned versions survive, one in the collection of Robert L. Markovits, the other belonging to Rollin C. Huggins, Jr. Neither model was satisfactory, and the final design is credited to a postal clerk who produced a crude model of his own, consisting of a 1¢ regular issue stamp stuck to an envelope with the vignette cut out and "OFFICIAL STAMP," a numeral "3" and two little stars all drawn clumsily in pencil. There are two blue pencil notations on the backing envelope, "1st design of official stamp for P O D" and "Design drawn by xxxx (sic) Joseph Barber for P O D Official." (The catalogue repeats Brazer's transcription of the scrawling cursive as Mr. J. Barber). In the final design, the stars were

[21]Personal communication with Mr. Donnes.

eliminated and a period was ungrammatically added after the word "STAMP." Although the completed dies with portrait vignettes already existed for four values, the option of burnishing out the portraits and reentering the numerals was rejected, for all these dies were reengraved in their entirety. This is most obvious in comparing the die essay and die proof for the 2¢ value, where the ends of the value tablet ribbon, instead of curling under, now float up and overlap the circles containing the initials "U" and "S" (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. 2¢ Post Office die essay on proof paper (Scott #O48-E1b) and large die trial color proof (Scott O48TC1).

Aside from the redesign of the Post Office stamps, the only other major revision in the dies occurred when the first 3¢ Executive die, following Claxton's model, was discovered to bear the wording "EXECUTIVE DEPT." Since the Executive office was not in fact a department (nor, technically, was Agriculture), a new die was engraved stating simply "EXECUTIVE."

Choice of Colors

The distinctive colors chosen for the different departments bear a vague resemblance to the regular issue stamps (with the exception of the "cochineal red" used for War and the "straw" used for Agriculture) but the exact shades and inks employed are different. The colors were assigned partly for symbolic reasons, and the following list employs the designation of the colors used in Barber's announcement of May 15, 1873: Executive, *carmine*—the color of the livery of English royalty; State, *green*—a color associated with civility and sensitivity to social customs; Treasury, *velvet brown*—the color of doctorate hoods for graduates in economics, business and accounting; War, *cochineal red*—a shade of the color of shed blood, long symbolizing war; Navy, *blue*—the color of the sea and of naval dress uniforms; Interior, *vermilion*—a miscellaneous department not easily characterized; Justice, *purple*—the color of a doctorate hood for a degree in law; Agriculture, *straw*—the color of the principal grains, and of the doctorate hood worn for a graduate in agriculture; Post Office, *black*—by default, providing the greatest visual contrast with the regular issues. Unfortunately, consulting with several collectors who specialize in single departments did not yield any further insights into whether these color associations were actually based on long-standing tradition. Another factor in the choice of colors was the need to minimize potential confusion with the regular issue stamps, and especially the 3¢ green. Clearly, it would have made no sense to have assigned this color to a department generating a large volume of mail, such as Interior, Post Office, War or Treasury, because postal clerks might then have easily overlooked illegitimate usages.

One would naturally hope to be able to learn something about how the final choice of colors was decided by studying the surviving trial color proofs. In analyzing these, the Goodall die proofs of 1879 and the Atlanta plate proofs of 1881 are clearly irrelevant because they were produced after the fact. The choice of the final colors was clearly resolved early on, since from evidence to be presented later, we have at least one dated die proof in the issued color for each department by April 23. With respect to trial color plate proofs, we find 17 assorted values from various departments having been printed in black

on India paper, presumably to inspect the quality of the plates. The only plate proofs taken in color were the 2¢ Executive in brown carmine (listed but never seen by the author, possibly a changeling), the 2¢ Navy in green on wove paper (still a controversial item, long listed as a genuine error of color for the issued stamp, of which three copies have been authenticated as postally used), and the 3¢ Justice in bistre yellow, dull orange and black violet. Again, we would have expected yellow to have been reserved for Agriculture, while the blackish violet approximates the color of the 12¢ regular issue. Although the 3¢ Justice die was among the first engraved, the notion that the plate was laid down and trial color proofs taken prior to April 19 contradicts evidence to be presented later that there was at least a two week delay between die and color approval and plate production.

Large die trial color proofs exist for all 3¢ values, all 2¢ values except Justice, three 1¢ values and various higher values of Agriculture and Treasury. The latter proofs are all printed in black and were presumably taken for internal purposes to inspect the quality of the engraving, quite understandable for Agriculture where the yellow ink is so hard to read. If we set aside all the die proofs printed in black, virtually all of the rest were printed not in a rainbow of experimental hues but in approximately the same colors as the regular issue stamps: 1¢ light ultramarine (State, Treasury, War); 2¢ deep brown (Executive, Interior, Navy, Post Office, State, War); 3¢ deep green (Agriculture, Executive, Interior, Justice, Navy, Post Office, Treasury, War); 6¢ brown carmine (Post Office). From this pattern, one might at first conclude that in the beginning, it was planned to print the official stamps in the same colors as the regular issues, thereby preserving the use of color as a means to distinguish between values. However, as we shall soon see, three die proofs in their final issued colors had already been approved on April 18. The documented evidence of the sequence of die approval and plate production has a clear logic of its own which explains the delay caused by the redesign of the Post Office stamps but which does not allow for all 18 of these dies (including the redesigned 1¢-6¢ Post Office) being produced prior to April 18. One plausible explanation is that the die trial color proofs were printed in this pattern for the purpose of comparing side-by-side, in the same color, the regular issue and official stamps, to verify that the new designs would be clear and legible when printed in typical stamp colors. One example of the 3¢ Justice die proof in green is inscribed "Justice" and "Good Shade of Purple," a perplexing comment unless one accepts that the color of the proof had nothing whatsoever to do with the final color of the stamps.[22]

With respect to die trial color proofs for the 1¢, 2¢, 3¢ and 90¢ Post Office with portrait vignettes, those printed on proof paper exist in the same five colors used for the Goodall proofs of 1879 and should be considered a part of that production. The die proofs on white ivory printed in orange red, blue, gray black and brownish black (the current catalogue listings are woefully incomplete) may possibly represent mediating attempts to arrive at the final color for this department, although the use of blue is problematical, since this color ought to have been reserved for Navy. The catalogue lists a 3¢ Post Office with revised numeral design printed in brown, but this seems an anomaly since the color for this department must have been determined before the design was altered. There exist in the collection of Robert L. Markovits two unlisted die proofs, a 3¢ War printed in brown with pencil notations "Chocolate" and "Executive," and a 3¢ Interior in orange brown, and in the collection of Lester C. Lanphear a 3¢ Justice printed in brown, all of which could well be true experimental colors. From this overview of the trial color proofs, we must conclude that most of them were either printed later for display purposes or were printed earlier as a quality control measure during the production of the dies and plates. In general, there is little to be learned from them about the process undergone to determine the final colors for the issued stamps.

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[22]Robert A. Siegel, 597th Sale, May 14, 1982, Lot #1618.

Table l. Sequence of Die Approval for the Official Stamps

Date	Values
April 18	3¢ Interior, 3¢ Navy, 3¢ War
April 19	3¢ Justice, 3¢ Treasury
April 21	3¢ Agriculture, 3¢ State
April 23	3¢ Executive, 2¢ War
April 28	2¢ Navy, 2¢ State, 2¢ Treasury, 90¢ Treasury
April 29	2¢ Interior, 1¢ Treasury, 1¢ War
May 1	10¢ Treasury
May 3	3¢ Post Office, 12¢ Treasury
May 8	90¢ State
May 9	2¢ Executive, 2¢ Post Office, 6¢ Post Office
May 12	1¢ State
May 14	1¢ Post Office
May 15	10¢ Post Office, 30¢ Post Office
May 16	1¢ Interior, 6¢ Treasury
May 17	6¢ Interior, 12¢ Interior, 6¢ Navy, 12¢ War
May 19	6¢ Agriculture
May 20	1¢ Agriculture, 2¢ Agriculture, 12¢ Agriculture, 6¢ War
May 21	6¢ Justice
May 22	15¢ Post Office, 30¢ Treasury
May 23	1¢ Executive, 12¢ State
May 24	6¢ Executive, 12¢ Navy, 12¢ Post Office, 24¢ Post Office
May 26	6¢ State, 15¢ Treasury, 10¢ War
May 27	1¢ Justice
May 28	2¢ Justice, 12¢ Justice, 15¢ War*, 24¢ War, 90¢ War
May 29	90¢ Post Office
May 30	15¢ Interior*, 15¢ Navy*, 30¢ War
June 2	30¢ Interior*, 30¢ Navy*
June 3	15¢ Agriculture*, 10¢ Navy*, 24¢ Navy*,10¢ State, 7¢Treasury*
June 4	24¢ Interior*, 90¢ Interior*, 90¢ Navy*, 7¢ War*
June 5	30¢ Agriculture*, 10¢ Justice*, 15¢ Justice*
June 6	24¢ Justice*
June 7	10¢ Agriculture*, 10¢ Interior*, 30¢ Justice*, 7¢ State
June 9	10¢ Executive
June 10	90¢ Justice*, 15¢ State, 24¢ State*, 30¢ State*
June 13	7¢ Navy*
July 12	24¢ Treasury
September 17	24¢ Agriculture

*Bears the initials of William M. Ireland, Acting Third Assistant Postmaster General

Note: proofs in the bound album for the 1¢ Navy and the State dollar values are undated.

Table 2. Sequence of Plate Production for the Official Stamps

Plate No.	Value	Date Die Approved	Plate No.	Value	Date Die Approved	Plate No.	Value	Date Die Approved
27	3¢ Interior	4/18	62	10¢ Post Office	5/15	97	10¢ Justice	6/5
28	3¢ Justice	4/19	63	3¢ Executive	4/23	98	10¢ State	6/3
29	3¢ Treasury	4/19	64	2¢ Agriculture	5/20	99	15¢ Justice	6/5
30	3¢ Post Office	5/3	65	1¢ Agriculture	5/20	100	30¢ Agriculture	6/5
31	(15¢ Regular)	—	66	15¢ Post Office	5/22	101	10¢ Navy	6/3
32	3¢ War	4/18	67	90¢ State	5/8	102	7¢ War	6/4
33	3¢ Treasury	4/19	68	30¢ Post Office	5/15	103	7¢ Treasury	6/3
34	3¢ Navy	4/18	69	30¢ Treasury	5/22	104	24¢ Interior	6/4
35	2¢ War	4/23	70	3¢ State	4/21	105	15¢ Agriculture	6/3
36	3¢ Post Office	5/3	71	12¢ Post Office	5/24	106	90¢ Navy	6/4
37	2¢ Post Office	5/9	72	6¢ Agriculture	5/19	107	24¢ Navy	6/3
38	2¢ Post Office	5/9	73	12¢ Agriculture	5/20	108	90¢ Interior	6/4
39	6¢ Post Office	5/9	74	24¢ Post Office	5/24	109	10¢ Interior	6/7
40	3¢ Post Office	5/3	75	2¢ Executive	5/9	110	30¢ Justice	6/7
41	3¢ Post Office	5/3	76	6¢ Executive	5/24	111	10¢ Executive	6/9
42	2¢ Treasury	4/28	77	6¢ Justice	5/21	112	7¢ State	6/7
43	1¢ Post Office	5/14	78	12¢ State	5/23	113	90¢ Justice	6/10
44	1¢ Treasury	4/29	79	10¢ War	5/26	114	10¢ Agriculture	6/7
45	2¢ Interior	4/29	80	1¢ Navy	—	115	24¢ Justice	6/6
46	12¢ Treasury	5/3	81	30¢ War	5/30	116	30¢ State	6/10
47	6¢ Post Office	5/9	82	1¢ Executive	5/23	117	24¢ State	6/10
48	1¢ War	4/29	83	6¢ State	5/26	118	15¢ State	6/10
49	12¢ Interior	5/17	84	15¢ Treasury	5/26	119	7¢ Navy	6/13
50	2¢ Navy	4/28	85	1¢ Justice	5/27	120	$5 State frame	—
51	6¢ Treasury	5/16	86	24¢ War	5/28	121	$2 State frame	—
52	1¢ Interior	5/16	87	15¢ War	5/28	122	$10 State frame	—
53	6¢ Navy	5/17	88	90¢ Post Office	5/29	123	Seward portrait	—
54	12¢ War	5/17	89	90¢ War	5/28	124	$20 State frame	—
55	1¢ State	5/12	90	2¢ Justice	5/28	134	24¢ Treasury	7/12
56	6¢ Interior	5/17	91	12¢ Justice	5/28	140	3¢ Post Office	5/20
57	3¢ Agriculture	4/21	92	12¢ Navy	5/24	141	3¢ Post Office	5/3
58	10¢ Treasury	5/1	93	15¢ Interior	5/30	145	24¢ Agriculture	9/17
59	2¢ State	4/28	94	15¢ Navy	5/30	249	6¢ Post Office	5/9
60	6¢ War	5/20	95	30¢ Interior	6/2	285	2¢ Post Office	5/9
61	90¢ Treasury	4/28	96	30¢ Navy	6/2			

Sequence of Die and Plate Production

In 1965, Elliott Perry published a listing of the dates on which the dies for the official stamps were approved.[23] His data were clearly derived from a leather bound album of large die proofs, printed in the issued colors, which resurfaced at public auction in 1994.[24] In this album, there are penciled dates on all the proofs except for the 1¢ Navy (erased) and the four State dollar values. Twenty-four of the proofs, dated between May 28 and June 13, bear the initials of William M. Ireland, a chief clerk in the Post Office Department who had been deputized Acting Third Assistant Postmaster General and dispatched to New York to oversee the final production of the official stamps. Perry's transcription of the dates was correct except for the 10¢ Treasury and War stamps. The data are repeated here in two different forms. Table 1 shows a chronological listing of the dates on which the die proofs in their issued colors were approved. Table 2 shows a sequential listing of the official plate numbers with the dates the corresponding dies were approved shown adjacent. Since plate number multiples are not known for many of the official stamps, Luff may have needed access to the complete set of plate proof sheets once owned by the Earl of Crawford in order to complete his list of plate numbers.

Assuming that the numbers engraved on the Continental plates accurately reflect the chronological order in which they were produced (and not some predetermined order which was artificially respected), the sequence of the plate production in general corresponds logically to the sequence in which approval was obtained for the dies. The most notable exceptions are of course the dies for the redesigned 1¢ - 6¢ Post Office stamps. During the two week delay in which the Post Office stamps were being redesigned and reengraved, the dies for 14 other official stamps—whose plates were all ultimately prepared after plate #30, the first 3¢ Post Office plate—all received approval. Had plate production started the moment the first dies were approved, in order to avoid delay the low value Post Office stamps would have been taken out of the predetermined sequence based on anticipated need and produced later. At the time the first official dies were approved on April 18, the Continental siderographers would have still been working on the plates for the regular issue stamps. Therefore, it can safely be concluded that plate production for the official stamps was not begun when the first dies were begun, but some two weeks later, around the time the new die for the redesigned 3¢ Post Office was approved (May 3) and its transfer roll put to use.

The dies for about ten official stamps were prepared prematurely, that is, out of sequence with respect to the final order of plate production. For the 3¢ Agriculture, 3¢ Executive and 3¢ State, these dies would have been needed early to serve as prototypes for the engravers. For the other values, though, we can only assume that either the order of anticipated need—obviously a very inexact science for these unprecedented issues—was subject to constant revision, or that it was impossible to coordinate a team of engravers working at different speeds so that their output would be completed in the precise order needed. The first 45 dies approved included all nine 3¢ values, eight 2¢ values, seven 1¢ values, seven 6¢ values and six 12¢ values, exactly what one would expect. Predictably, the very last plates produced were the State dollar values. The proofs for these stamps included in the bound album are actually hybrids (plate proofs mounted on India paper and die sunk), understandable since no dies *per se* existed at this time for the $5, $10 and $20 values. Unfortunately, these hybrid proofs are not dated; however, the die proof for the last plate produced before the State dollar values, the 7¢ Navy (plate #119), bears a date of June 13.

July 1, 1873 was the announced date on which the franking privilege was to be abolished, and four covers bearing official stamps and postmarked in Washington, D. C. on

[23]Perry, *op. cit.*, pp. 495-96.

[24]Weiss Philatelics, Sale No. 123, Ocotober 18, 1994, Lot #385.

this date have survived. The most famous of these is a 3¢ State cover carried by diplomatic pouch to Washington, D. C. containing a letter from the U. S. Consulate at Malta dated June 10, 1873.[25] The contents are of special importance in this case because the circular date stamps used in Washington, D. C. up until 1877 did not contain the year date. On the basis of this single proven example, the other three covers can be confirmed as first day usages because they bear the same distinctive 24 mm. diameter date stamp, which was only in use during 1873. Due to the overall scarcity of official covers (less than ten examples survive for most values, so any cover from 1873 is considered an early usage), there is simply not enough material to develop in a meaningful way the concept of earliest known usage for most of these stamps. Barcan stated that the stamps were ready for distribution on May 24;[26] although some distribution began on this date, only a fraction of the stamps could have been available, if we trust the evidence of the dated die proofs. However, from other documentation it can be proven that all but two of the 92 official stamps issued were available for use in Washington, D. C. by July 1.

The report of the Postmaster General dated November 14, 1873 noted that between July 1 and September 30, the State Department had been issued 60,495 total stamps in 14 [*sic*] different denominations.[27] But in a report dated October 20, 1873 in the appendix, Third Assistant Postmaster General E. W. Barber indicates that these same 60,495 stamps were in fact distributed prior to the close of the fiscal year, for use after July 1.[28] Since the final plates produced were the State dollar values, and since the State Department had received all 15 values before July 1, it can safely be concluded that the other departments had received all values also, since if the plates for their stamps were finished earlier, they had presumably gone to press earlier also.

Two die proofs in the bound album bear an approval date later than July 1: the 24¢ Treasury (July 12) and the 24¢ Agriculture (August 17). In light of Continental's heroic and successful effort to have all the other official stamps printed in time to be distributed and available for use by July 1, the delay in producing these two stamps should not be blamed on the contractor. Instead, it is more likely that the original schedule of denominations for each department as specified by the Postmaster General simply did not include these two stamps. The 24¢ stamp was originally issued for the U.S./U.K. rate, but when the rate was reduced to 12¢ in January 1868, the demand for this value fell off. It is unclear how the Post Office foresaw the 24¢ official stamps being used. In hindsight, their initial reluctance to produce 24¢ stamps for Treasury and Agriculture seems correct, since after the initial order for the fiscal year 1874, the 24¢ Treasury was never reordered, and the 24¢ Agriculture was not reordered after the fiscal year 1875 (except for a mysterious requisition of 50 stamps in 1883). In fact, all the high value Agriculture stamps (10¢, 12¢, 15¢, 24¢ and 30¢) were rendered obsolete by a new postal regulation effective March 3, 1875, by which the Commission was now able to send seeds and reports through the mail free of postage.[29] When the 24¢ Agriculture plate was produced, the plate number was entered in error to the left of the Continental Bank Note Company's imprint (see Figure 8). On the only two official plates produced after the 24¢ Agriculture, the supplemental 2¢ Post Office (Plate #249) and 6¢ Post Office (Plate #285), the numbers were engraved in large florid italics instead of following the previous standard of small Arabic numerals.

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[25]Robert A. Siegel, 577th Sale, April 10, 1981, Lot #335.

[26]Barcan, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

[27]*Annual Report of the Postmaster General of the United States for the Fiscal Year 1870*, p. xix. Since there are actually 15 denominations in the State set, the number "14" is probably a misprint.

[28]*Ibid.*, Appendix, p. 9.

[29]United States, Post Office Department, *Postage Rates 1789-1930* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1930), Act of March 3, 1875, p. 44.

Figure 8. 24¢ Agriculture plate proof on India paper multiple, showing misplaced plate number.

As Admiral Combs demonstrated from analyzing the tables in Luff, for 58 of the 92 different official stamps, the quantity of stamps printed by Continental and delivered to the Stamp Agent for the calender years 1873-1876 exceeded the total quantity requisitioned by the departments during the entire period of usage, July 1, 1873 to June 30, 1884.[30] This diminished usage and resultant oversupply of stamps is due in part to various minor changes in the postal regulations (such as the one regarding Agriculture stamps mentioned above), but mainly to the introduction of penalty envelopes in 1877. But for 34 of these 58—the 6¢ Agriculture; all values of Executive except the 3¢; all values of Justice except the 3¢ and 6¢; the 10¢, 12¢ and 15¢ Post Office; all values of State except the 3¢, 6¢ and 10¢; and the 1¢, 2¢, 7¢, 12¢, 15¢ and 24¢ Treasury—the initial supplies furnished to the Stamp Agent in the calender year 1873 exceeded the total requisitions over the 11 year period of usage, to the extent that for many of these stamps, the quantity of unissued stamps taken from the vaults of the American Bank Note Company in 1884 and burned actually exceeds the total quantity issued. This demonstrates that the original projected need for many values was badly overestimated. In October 1873, E. W. Barber projected that 50,000,000 official stamps would be issued in the fiscal year 1875, but in actuality only 18,500,000 were distributed.[31]

Eccentricities in the Die Engraving

From the progressive die essay for the 6¢ Post Office stamp with portrait vignette, we can see that after starting with the head, numeral and value wording retained from the original National die, the rest of the design elements—including the department lettering and its tablet, the value ribbon, and the devices bearing the initials "U" and "S"—were all outlined first before being shaded in. (See Figure 9).

Regrettably, I have not been able to accurately attribute the work of Continental's engravers for the official stamps, with the exception of the Seward portrait by Charles Skinner. The die history cards in the archives of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are mute, and Les Schriber's *Encyclopedia of Designs, Designers, Engravers, and Artists of United States Postage Stamps* does not cover these issues. Turner reported that Claxton en-

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[30]W.V. Combs, "United States: Departmentals—Quantities Issued," *Collectors Club Philatelist,* Vol. 43, No. 6 (November 1964), p. 345.

[31]*Annual Report of the Postmaster General of the United States for the Fiscal Year 1870,* Appendix, p. 9.

graved the frames for all the 90¢ values.[32] There exists a large die proof of the 3¢ Post Office stamps signed by one C. A. Koehler.[33] David J. Smillie, nephew of the famous engraver James Smillie, has been identified as the letter engraver for the State dollar values, partly on the evidence of a $2.00 die proof signed by both him and Charles Skinner.[34] Douglas S. Ronaldson in the course of his career worked for all three Bank Note companies and was the frame and letter engraver for most of the 1869s, the large Bank Notes, the small Bank Notes and the Columbians. He is credited as the letter and frame engraver for the 5¢ Taylor of 1875, but it is unclear if he transferred to Continental early enough to work on the official stamps.[35]

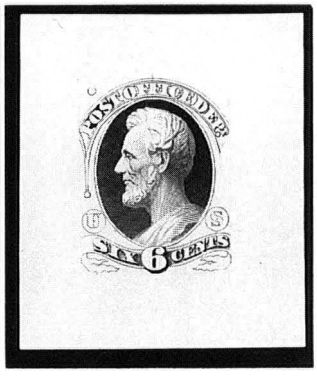

Figure 9. 6¢ Post Office incomplete die essay (Scott #O50E1), courtesy Lester C. Lanphear.

Since we are told that Continental concentrated their entire work force on this project, surely a team of engravers would have been needed to put out this volume of work in an eight week time span. Considering the time pressure under which they were working, it is not surprising that certain design elements which were intended to remain constant from one value to another within each set of stamps, in actuality betray certain small differences in their final engraved state. Admiral Combs has already done a thorough, well-illustrated analysis of these "errors" which typically manifest themselves in the inconsistent rendering of tiny scrollwork details or erratic shading techniques in larger ornaments.[36] To the naked eye, there are also some sizable and distracting variations in the letter engraving.

In Figure 10, comparing the 2¢ and 10¢ Interior stamps, note on the 2¢ that the words "of the" in the departmental title, instead of following the curve of the scrolling ribbon, slant sharply upwards. On the 10¢, the shields containing the initials "U" and "S" are drawn with graceful swelling sides instead of the sharp concave curves typical for the other values. In Figure 11, comparing the 3¢ and 90¢ Justice stamps, note that on the 3¢, the six-pointed stars containing the initials "U" and "S" are large, but the sans-serif initials are very sparingly rendered. On the 90¢, attenuated shields inexplicably replace the stars, while the initials "U" and "S" are now robust serif letters. (Since Claxton created the model for the 3¢ Justice, and according to Turner also engraved the 90¢ Justice, one can only

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[32]Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 668.

[33]Personal communication with Robert L. Markovits.

[34]Clarence W. Brazer, "A Historical Catalog of U.S. Stamp Essays and Proofs," *Collectors Club Philatelist,* Vol. XXIII, No. 3 (July 1944), p. 110.

[35]Dealer William S. Langs showed me copies of the 2¢ and 12¢ Bank Note progressive die essays (#146-E10 and 151-E10), both bearing Ronaldson's signature. It is unclear whether he signed these when he first engraved the dies for National, or later when he was working at Continental.

[36]W.V. Combs, "Designs of the U.S. Departmentals," *American Philatelist,* Vol. 72, No. 12 (Whole No. 704)(September 1959), pp. 891-97.

Figure 10. Plate proofs on card of 2¢ and 10¢ Interior.

Figure II. Plate proofs on card of 3¢ and 90¢ Justice.

Figure 12. Plate proofs on card of 6¢ and 30¢ Post Office.

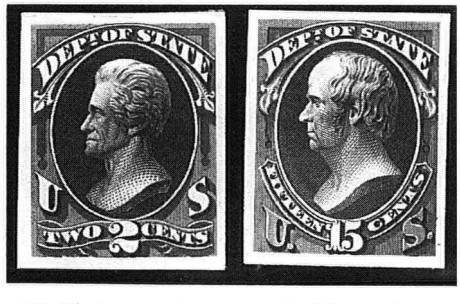

Figure 13. Plate proofs on card of 2¢ and 15¢ State.

assume, as my grandmother used to say, that "even Homer nods!") As Combs pointed out, the six-pointed stars in the upper corners of the 15¢ Navy stamp are unshaded, unlike all other values of this set. In Figure 12, comparing the 6¢ and 30¢ Post Office stamps, note that the words "OFFICIAL" and "STAMP." curve gracefully around the large numeral "6." On the 30¢, the numeral is too wide to permit this, so the words are pushed to the top and bottom of the vignette oval and the numeral is reduced in height from 8 mm. to 6.5 mm. in order to be accommodated. In Figure 13, comparing the 2¢ and 15¢ State, note that on the 2¢ there are no periods after the initials "U" and "S" (as in three other values of this set) and the initials are unshaded. On the 15¢, the initials, here followed by periods, are now heavily shaded.

In some cases, these inconsistencies are glaring enough to make us pause and wonder if the engravers might have forgotten to refer back to the prototypical 3¢ die engraved for each department. The obvious explanation for these mistakes is that since the dies were prepared in the sequence of anticipated need, the engravers were forced to jump from department to department and value to value, instead of proceeding in an artistically logical way through their work. The deviations described above would have been minimized if one engraver had been assigned all values of a single department, but apparently the whirlwind pace of production, with up to five dies being completed in a single day, did not allow for this luxury.

The Cost of Production

Basking in the warm afterglow of having accomplished on schedule the herculean labor assigned to Continental, President Stuart sent a bill to Postmaster General Creswell on July 1. In his petition, he asked to have the original contract "adjusted on principles of equity, justice, and law," arguing that since the official stamps "were unknown to the law when the contract was made . . . and cannot be regarded as coming within the contract . . . your petitioner is entitled to a fair and just remuneration for the materials and for the work performed in furnishing your department with the special stamps." Stuart claimed that the dies, rolls and plates alone for the official stamps were worth $50,000. He asked to be reimbursed for these costs, and suggested two alternatives for modifying the original contract for stamp production: furnish regular issue and official stamps alike at a rate of 25¢ per thousand, or leave the original contract intact, and furnish official stamps at a special rate of $1.00 per thousand. He illustrated his argument with the example of furnishing stamps to more than 23,000 fifth class post offices, where the cost of the envelope for each order (approximately 2¢) would actually exceed what the company would be paid under the prevailing rates by filling it with the quarterly requisition of one hundred stamps (1.5¢). Besides the overtime costs associated with the accelerated schedule of production, Continental had incurred the inconvenience and expense of remodeling its vault at the new premises on William Street (superintended by Charles F. Steel, the same individual who held the grilling patent) and dividing it into over one hundred apartments, instead of the eleven required for the regular issues. Postmaster General Creswell, in a letter to Congress dated January 20, 1874, reported:

> The manufacturers have asked an extra allowance, on the ground that the act to which I have referred (authorizing preparation of the official stamps), requiring special designs for each department, entailed upon them, in the preparation of dies, rolls, plates &c, &c, a considerable expense, which, they allege, was not contemplated by their contract for manufacturing the ordinary stamps. This claim has not been adjusted, but is the subject of an examination now pending.[37]

The Assistant Attorney General for the Post Office Department established an investigating committee to ascertain the normal cost of manufacturing plates, which sought in

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[37] *Executive Documents,* 43rd Congress, 1st Session, 1873-74, Vol. 9, #1607.

put from Continental's principal competitors, American and National. This committee found that the cost claimed for plate production was fair, and that the compensation for printing the official stamps should also be adjusted, since due to the small volume, the output of each printer was sharply reduced; also, because it was costly to separate the work of each printer in segregated gumming and drying rooms. In the end, Postmaster General J. W. Marshall approved the committee's recommendations on July 17, 1874. Continental was reimbursed $50,000 for the cost of producing the dies, rolls and plates, and had their compensation for manufacturing and distributing official stamps raised to a rate of 80¢ per thousand.[38]

While this may have been fair to Continental, the ultimate loser in the elaborate and costly production of the official stamps was surely the Post Office Department. If one considers the five values produced for the Executive stamps, the cost of the plates ($2,618) and printing 62,500 stamps ($52) actually exceeded the face value of the 50,050 stamps issued ($1,800), meaning that all mail from the Executive mansion was in effect carried free and the Post Office Department was still out of pocket.

Conclusion

The production of the United States official stamps—involving the engraving of new dies for all values, laying down the plates, and printing, gumming and perforating the stamps—was accomplished in less than three months by the Continental Bank Note Company, at the same time they were beginning their new contract to print regular issue postage stamps. Looking back on this remarkable achievement, it seems amazing that the quality of the stamps produced was so consistently high. This article, based on widely available references and a close examination of the stamps, has resulted in the following conclusions, which to the author's knowledge have not been previously formulated in print:

1. Congress specified and the Post Office had produced departmental stamps instead of a generic set of official stamps as a security measure, to make it easier to identify the source of stamps misappropriated for private use. Special colors were used to make these stamps distinctive, so postal clerks would be alerted to check that they had been legitimately used for official business.

2. New dies—in which only the portrait vignette, numeral and value wording were retained from the original National dies—were engraved for all values by Continental. The dies for the redesigned Post Office stamps were reengraved in their entirety. The dies were prepared in the order of anticipated need, since there was considerable doubt whether this mammoth undertaking could be completed by July 1. This sequence of die production, not artistically logical, resulted in certain minor but amusing inconsistencies in the engraving.

3. Approval of the Post Office dies with portrait vignettes was rescinded after four dies had been completed. The new Third Assistant Postmaster General, E. W. Barber, intervened and had these stamps redesigned partly to make it easier for postal clerks handling an all black set of stamps to distinguish one value from another.

4. The vast majority of the surviving large die trial color proofs were printed for internal purposes, to inspect and compare the quality of the engraving, and were not instrumental in determining the final colors chosen for the issued stamps.

5. All of the official stamps (with the exception of the 24¢ Agriculture and 24¢ Treasury, which were not included in the original schedule of values) were available for use in Washington, D. C. by July l, 1873.

With this improved understanding of why and how the United States official stamps were prepared, it can be hoped that they will gradually come to be appreciated as the most ambitious and artistic issue ever devised by any postal administration to regulate the carriage of official mail. □

[38]Barcan, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-20.