

Yesterday in Mekeel's:

The St. Louis Bear Stamps

by B. W. H. Poole (From Mekeel's Weekly, July 18, 1938, with photos added)

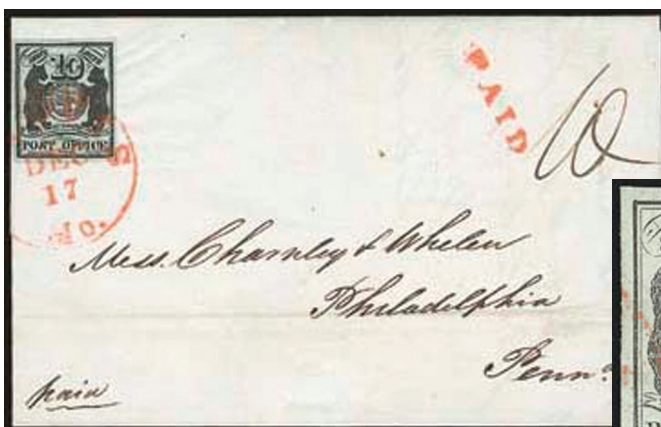


11X1, 1845 5¢ black on greenish paper

By an Act passed by the U.S. Congress March 3, 1845, uniform rates of postage were established for the whole of the country in place of the varied and, at times, excessive charges which had hitherto been in force. No provision seems to have been made for the issue of adhesive postage stamps for the prepayment of the new rates until more than two years later, for the first Government issue of our stamps did not make its appearance until July 1, 1847.

Some of the postmasters in various cities, however, anticipated matters by issuing postal labels on their own initiative. Most of these semi-official stamps appeared in 1846 but in the cities of New York, St. Louis and Baltimore stamps or stamped envelopes were issued in 1845 within a few months of the passing of the postal reform Act. The majority of these Postmasters' stamps are rare, some exceedingly so, and in this latter category must be included the 20¢ value of the St. Louis series.

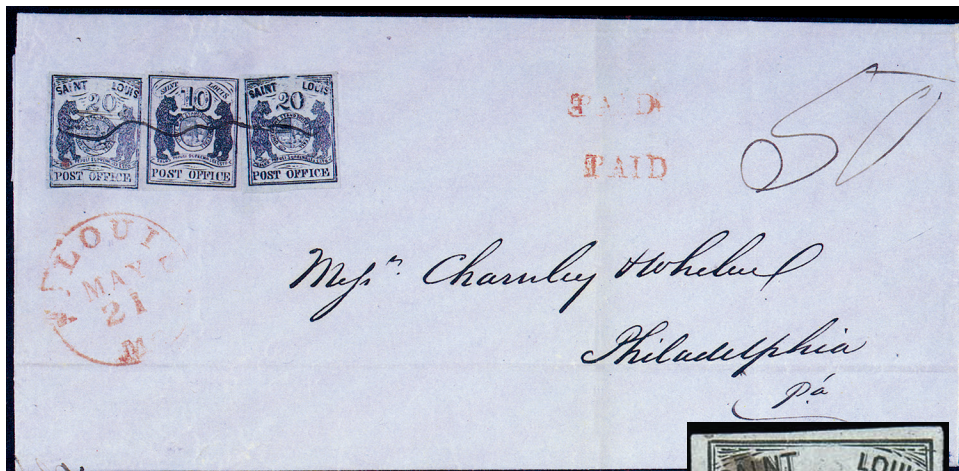
The 5¢ and 10¢ seem to have been known to philatelists at an early date, though the first reference to them we can trace in the literature of our hobby appears in the first volume of the *Stamp Collectors' Magazine* (1863) in which the 10¢ is included in an addenda to Mount Brown's catalogue. For a considerable period opinion as to their authenticity was very divided in philatelic circles, and in 1869 they were the subject of lengthy argumentative articles in the stamp journals of that day. The leading American and British philatelists seem to have been quite satisfied as to their bona-fides, but many of the most prominent



11X2, 1845 10¢ black on greenish tied by "St. Louis Mo. Dec. 17" circular datestamp on 1845 folded letter to Charnley & Whelen in Philadelphia, with matching "Paid" handstamp and manuscript "10" rate upper right. Above 11X2 single.

Continental collectors were just as confident that they were bogus.

About 1870 a 20¢ St. Louis stamp was discovered and the storm broke with redoubled fury, the general opinion being that the new variety was a fraud concocted from a genuine 5¢ stamp. In the following year the late E. L. Pemberton—one of the most brilliant students our hobby has known—with the aid of twenty-eight stamps he had gathered together—contributed a valuable



11X3, 1845, 20¢ black on greenish, two copies used with 10¢ black on gray lilac, Sc. 11X5, on cover with manuscript cancel, red May 21 [1846] c.d.s., two "Paid" handstamps, and manuscript "50" rate mark. Right, 11x3 single.



investigation of these stamps in the columns of the *Stamp Collectors' Magazine*. Beginning with a somewhat skeptical opinion of the 20¢ and certain of the papers he concluded with an unqualified belief in their genuineness. From the very small number of specimens at his command he correctly described the three states of the plate, the correct order of issue of the three papers, the retouching of type III of the 5¢ and the re-engraving of the other two types. This brilliant piece of philatelic deduction was corroborated almost entirely some twenty-four years later when a find of St. Louis stamps—to which we will refer later—made

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11X4, 1845 5¢ black on gray lilac



11X5, 1845 10¢ black on gray lilac



11X6, 1845 20¢ black on gray lilac



11X7, 1846 5¢ black on bluish



11X8, 1846 10¢ black on bluish



11X5, 10¢ vertical strip of three, the right half of a sheet, tied by red "St. Louis Mo. Mar. 7" [1846] c.d.s., from the Charnley & Whelen correspondence.



11X7, two 5¢ singles from the third printing, replacing the 5¢ values where the two 20¢ values had been placed for the second printing. A manuscript cancel on the stamps has been removed. The addressee is Thomas H. Benton, one of the first two Missouri Senators and a great uncle of the artist, Thomas Hart Benton.

possible the complete reconstruction of the plate in all its three stages. In spite of Pemberton's great reputation many of the leading philatelists were still skeptical as to the genuineness of the 20¢ and absolutely ignored the reengraved and retouched 5¢.

The status of these stamps remained more or less in doubt until the early nineties when the late John K. Tiffany—one of America's leading philatelic students—made a thorough investigation of the situation and published his findings in the *Philatelic Journal of America* for December, 1894. Although, like Mr. Pemberton, this famous writer was, at the commencement of his studies, extremely doubtful as to the genuineness of the 20¢ value, he finally proved quite conclusively that this denomination was a perfectly legitimate as well as an extremely rare stamp. Not only was he able to prove the 20¢ a genuine variety but he showed that, instead of being a copy of the 5¢ as was presumed by some collectors, that this value was really printed from the same plate as the other denominations, two of the types of the 5¢ having been altered for this purpose. Mr. Tiffany was also able to show that there were three types each of the 5¢ and 10¢ stamps and that the plate was altered, twice in all—the second time the 20¢ were restored to their original value of 5¢ while the unaltered 5¢ stamp was also retouched. Both Mr. Pemberton's and Mr. Tiffany's theories and deductions received remarkable confirmation in 1895 when a find of 137 of these St. Louis stamps was made during a "clearing-up" of certain rooms in the Louisville Court House.

The find consisted of 75 of the 5¢, 46 the 10¢, and 16 of the 20¢. As many of these were in strips and pairs their proper positions in the various states of the plate were

definitely established.

According to a writer in the *Stamp Collectors' Magazine* in 1863, the Act of March, 1845 abolished "the previous dear rates, as well as the annoying scale of varying distances; and, whilst substituting the weight standard, reduced at the same time, the rate for a single letter to 5¢ for any distance under 3,000 miles, and 10¢ for any distance over 3,000 miles."

At the time of the passing of this Act Mr. John M. Wimer was postmaster of the rising commercial city of St. Louis and the idea of issuing adhesive labels for the prepayment of postage occurred to him. In the *Missouri Republican* for November 5, 1845, the following paragraph appeared relating to the issue of these stamps:—

"LETTER STAMPS:—Mr. Wimer, postmaster, has prepared a set of stamps, or rather marks, to put upon letters, indicating that the postage has been paid. In this he has copied after the plans adopted by the postmasters in New York and other cities. These stamps are engraved to represent the Missouri coat-of-arms, and are for five and ten cents. They are so prepared that they may be stuck upon a letter, like a wafer, and will prove a great convenience to merchants and all those having many letters to send postpaid, as it saves all trouble of paying at the post office. They will be sold at the same rate they are sold in the East, viz.: sixteen 5¢ stamps and 10¢ stamps for a dollar. We should recommend merchants and others to them a trial."

A later notice stated the price of the stamps would be eigh-



The design of the St. Louis Bear stamps

teen 5¢ or nine 10¢ for a dollar. At the same time it was stated that no official value, was intended to be placed on these labels as they merely represented the amount of postage paid by the sender to the postmaster. All letters were still marked "paid" as in the pre-stamp days and this fact seems to have formed one of the principal arguments against their authenticity by the skeptics of 1863-69. There is, however, not the slightest doubt that they were adhesive postage stamps in every acceptable sense of the term though their use seems to have been quite optional.

The design consists of an armorial circle surrounded by the motto "United We Stand, Divided We Fall." As supporters there is a bear on each side and underneath is "Salus Populi Supremalexesto." the whole forming the Arms of the State of Missouri. Numerals denoting the values appear above the central device, the name "Saint Louis" is shown at the top, while across the bottom are the words "Post Office." Mr. Wimer engaged J. M. Kershaw, proprietor of the Western Card and Seal Engraving establishment in St. Louis, to engrave these labels and on the original plate there were six stamps arranged as follows:—

5¢	10¢
5¢	10¢
5¢	10¢

These were engraved on a small copper plate about the size of that used for visiting cards, and as each was separately engraved there are three types of each value differing in small details. Soon after the issue of these stamps the necessity for a higher denomination to prepay the charges on heavy letters became apparent. A new plate was not made but the two upper 5¢ stamps were altered to 20¢, making the arrangement:—

5¢	10¢
5¢	10¢
5¢	10¢



Two strips of three showing the construction of the plate after the replacement of two 5¢ stamps by two 20¢ stamps: Left, a vertical strip of three containing the entire left vertical row on the plate, positions 1/3/5, top two stamps 20¢ (Sc. 11X6, Types I/II), bottom stamp 5¢ (Sc. 11X4, Type III). They are shown on a piece from the "Louisville" find (the Tyler & Rutherford correspondence), then rotated and placed side by side with a vertical strip of three 5¢ (Sc. 11X5) containing all three positions from the right vertical row of the plate, positions 2/4/6, top two cancelled by a single penstroke, bottom stamp cancelled by a red St. Louis c.d.s.



The alteration was probably made by laying the little plate face downwards on a hard flat surface and hammering the back, where the alteration was desired, until the surface was flush, and the new numerals were then engraved on these spaces. Mr. Kershaw, the engraver of the original plate, denied making this alteration, so that the work was evidently done by some other and less skilled worker for it is much inferior, the figures being very crude compared with the Kershaw productions. Apparently the demand for the 20¢ value was a little over-estimated for, early in 1847, the plate was again altered to its original arrangement. It is presumed that 500 impressions were taken from the plate in each of its three states which would give a total of 3,500 5¢, 4,500 10¢, and 1,000 20¢.

Until the time of the Louisville find only four copies of the 20¢ were known while there were probably about 100 5¢ and 150 10¢ in existence. Another important find was made in Philadelphia in 1912 [the Charnley & Whelen find, see 11X2 covers, pages 17 and 18] but so far as we have been able to discover, no definite statement as to exactly what stamps were in this find has ever been made. This find was made by Edw. Hemingway in December, 1912, and from a talk we had with him about four years later we gathered the impression that there were at least twenty of the 20¢ in this lot, about sixty 10¢ and very few 5¢. While an occasional copy of the 5¢ and 10¢ has been reported on various occasions since that date we have never heard of the find of another 20¢.