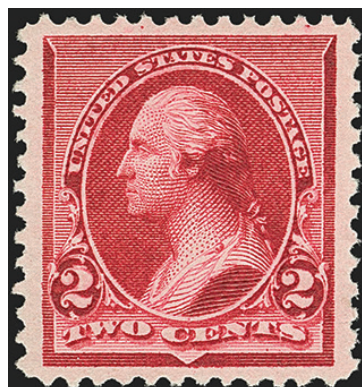


From the Stamp Specialist:

The Capped Relief of The Two Cents 1890

by John H. Latta, C.P.A.

(From *The Stamp Specialist Booke #2, The Blue Book, 1941*)



Sc. 220a, Cap on left 2



Sc. 220c, Cap on both 2s



FOREWORD

The writer wishes to acknowledge the very considerable assistance of George W. Brett, a fellow member of the Bureau Issues Association whose review of early philatelic periodicals in the library of Ralph T. Kimble, kindly made available for the purpose, revealed much information which would not otherwise have been accessible.

Correspondence is invited with serious students interested in the topic of this article and any others who have material or information which would help in clearing up matters still in doubt.

I. EARLY HISTORY

NO minor variety of any United States postage stamp has intrigued the imagination of the average collector more than have the capped varieties of the 2c 1890 issue printed by The American Banknote Company. Unfortunately the more serious students have passed the varieties by as being of little importance and unworthy of intensive study with the result that until recently virtually nothing had been added to the information published shortly after the original discovery of the varieties.

So far as the writer has been able to determine, the earliest announcement of the discovery of the capped varieties appeared in *POST OFFICE* (a philatelic monthly) for March, 1894, and read as follows:

"There is a striking variety, or I might say two of them, in the current small two cent carmine, but as the fact was communicated to me in confidence, I am not as yet at liberty to describe the varieties. I can say that they are considerably scarce, as one collector after looking at over five thousand specimens of the two cent stamp, was rewarded by finding only one of each of the varieties looked for."

Alvah Davison was listed as editor of the publication in which the foregoing appeared, but since the following issue found Crawford Capen succeeding to the editorship, it appears that he was the probable source of the information which Mr. Davison was not at liberty to divulge. This preliminary announcement is notable for the stress it lays on the fact that there were only two varieties known at the time of the announcement.

In the April, 1894 issue of the same magazine (presumably from the pen of Crawford Capen, editor) appears the first published description of the capped varieties, as follows:

"No better illustration can be found of the liability of the un instructed collector to pass as common and valueless what really has worth, than the varieties lately discovered in the current U. S. two cent stamp.

"Late in 1893 these varieties were found. It is understood that quite a number of the stamps were issued before the company printing them discovered the changes from the ordinary type and stopped the printing from the plates in use.



FIG. NO. 1



FIG. NO. 2

"The variety consists in the printing of the "2" which under ordinary circumstances appears as in our fig. 1, but in the newly discovered varieties possesses a white cap as in fig. 2. This white cap appears sometimes on one of the two figures, sometimes on the other, and occasionally on both.

"The figure at the left, capped, is the commonest. Figure at the right, capped, and both capped are two other varieties which are extremely rare.

* * *

"We have examined blocks of the variety capped on the left, in the unused condition. Usually every stamp has the figure capped, but in one instance at least some vertical rows were capped, while others were not. This would make one think it a plate rather than a die variety. It would be interesting to learn from someone familiar with the processes of engraving how this variation could occur. One might think it the result of some hard substance getting into the die during the process of rolling the plate were it found on one figure only, but as it occurs as stated above on either or both figures this explanation will not answer. It will pay collectors to examine stamps used during the latter part of 1893, for this variety."

Aside from being the first published description of the caps, the foregoing introduces a third variety (the right cap) which was apparently unknown the month before. Note that the right cap is stated to be "as in fig. 2" which is an illustration of a normal left cap.

In the May, 1894, issue of the same magazine, in an article signed by the editor, appeared the following :

"Our article in the last issue of the POST OFFICE on the two cent U. S. stamp of 1890 has procured for us several valuable letters from those who are interested in this crowned variety.

"It appears that the attention of the Post Office Department at Washington was called to this variety in the summer of 1893. The reply which was made was that the plate from which it had been printed had been destroyed.

"We have filed our own mail in the original envelopes for many years, and we have just been through it with the idea of discovering all we could concerning the issue and use of this variety. We find the stamp crowned on left 2, or both twos crowned, in every month from Dec., 1892, to Dec., 1893, and we have not examined our 1894 mail yet, which we, however recollect contains some specimens.

"Others report finding the stamp on mail of October, 1892, and as we can find no signs of it in our mail during the previous months of 1892 we shall accept this as the date of first use.

"The discoverer of this variety thinks that the letter he sent to Washington was the occasion of the destruction of the plate. The discoveries in our mail tend to confirm this idea. We find by far the largest number of the stamp in the months from January to June, 1893, with a rapid falling off during the last six months of the year.

"This is just what we should expect were the plate made in the latter part of 1892, used to print for about eight months, and then destroyed, leaving the surplus of stamps in the hands of postmasters to be sold and used gradually in later months.

"Just how rare this variety is, is somewhat difficult to determine.

* * *

"The relative rarity of the three kinds, crown on both two's, crown on left, crown on right, is more easily determined.

"We have found almost an equal quantity of the crown on left and crown on both two's in our mail, and we have not discovered a single specimen of the crown on the right in the many thousands of letters we have examined. The collector then who succeeds in finding this latter variety, which undoubtedly exists, may be certain that he possesses the stamp in its rarest form."

From the foregoing it appears that the discovery was withheld six to nine months before publication *during which time only two varieties were known*, the third variety being conveniently found just prior to the formal announcement of the discovery. The name of the discoverer does not appear in any of the issues of the magazine but would appear from the tone of the original announcement, to have been someone with whom the editor was in personal contact, if not the editor himself.

The following is quoted from the July, 1894 issue of the same magazine :

"Variations which are the result of poor printing are of a simple nature and easily detected * * *.

"A little thought, however, shows one that the crowned 2 cannot be a misprint. The white parts of the stamp in copper plate printing are the raised portions. The white cap on the 2 means the presence of copper, where in the ordinary variety there is a hollow in which the ink lies after the plate has been wiped for the printing.

"If one stamp or a few only were found with this crown, it might be claimed that the ink had been accidentally wiped out of the hollow in the copper plate, although even in that case it would be difficult to account for the regular shape of the crown.

"The stamps are printed in large sheets of four hundred and cut into quarters before being delivered to the post offices. A Portland, Me., correspondent informs us that he

has the whole of the upper left quarter of a sheet printed from plate number 235, one hundred stamps, every one of which has the left 2 crowned. We have ourselves seen strips and blocks with one two or both twos crowned in every stamp, and this is the usual way in which they occur.

"It is inconceivable that the ink should be wiped from the top of every lefthand figure in one hundred stamps printed at once, in a regular form like this little crown.

"These stamps are found in unused condition with crown, side by side with those without the crown. We are informed from an engraver that it sometimes happens that the workman in engraving a plate makes a minute slip which obliges him, in order to retrieve himself, to change his die. *Different dies all made from the one original engraved die by transfer process, are used in engraving the numerous plates.* The possession of the crowned 2 by one or more of these dies will account for the variations which are found in the arrangement of the stamps in the sheets.

"We shall be obliged to any of our readers who possess these stamps in blocks with plate numbers attached, if they will send us the numbers of their plates with a description of the way in which the stamps are crowned and the number of the variety in the blocks."

From the foregoing it is evident that the editor had never heard of the term "transfer roll" and loosely used the term "die" to refer to both the original die and the transfer rolls. It also discloses that the editor had a thorough understanding of the distinction between plate and printing varieties and lends weight to the conclusions he later drew from examination of such varieties.

After a lapse of almost a year during which nothing of interest appeared in either POST OFFICE or any contemporary publications which the writer has had the privilege of examining, the issue for April, 1895 contained the following paragraph :

"Last year we called the attention of the philatelic public to what was certainly a curious variety, that is, the capped varieties in the two cent of 1890. We followed this up until we had discovered all there was to learn about the stamp, *one of our friends being acquainted with the engraver who put the cap on to the two*, from whom also we received information that the Banknote Company destroyed the plates as soon as the error was discovered. * * * "

This apparently refers back to the anonymous discoverer of the varieties referred to in May, 1894, as having obtained information directly from the engraver concerning the manner in which the variety occurred.

In *St. Nicholas* magazine for June, 1909, there appeared after a lapse of fourteen years, the following paragraph :

"The so-called 'cap' on the two cent United States stamp of 1890 was a small square white space appearing above the figure 2 and was put there by one of the engravers without orders from either the government or the engraving company. Just what idea the workman had in doing this has never been shown."

All efforts on the part of the writer of this article to trace the authorship of the *St. Nicholas* paragraph have failed but it appears from the following editorial in POST OFFICE for November, 1895, that Crawford Capen may have been the author :

" * * * The editor of POST OFFICE a few years ago made a contract with the Century Company to conduct a stamp department in the world's foremost juvenile magazine, *St. Nicholas*.

"This he has done ever since. The immediate result was the institution of like departments in many prominent juvenile publications throughout the country and at the

present time no magazine undertakes to enter the juvenile field without announcing as one of its principal attractions a stamp department. * * * "

A search of contemporary philatelic publications available to the writer in the Library of Congress and in other public libraries throughout the country has failed to disclose any further explanation or discussion of these two peculiar statements.

In the issue for September, 1895, we find listed under "United States Stamps; A Comprehensive Catalogue" the following:

"1890-93

"178 2c carmine (Washington)

"179 2c rose (Washington)

A. Figures not capped

B. Left figure capped

C. Right figure capped

D. Both figures capped."

However, in the issue for May, 1897 under "Descriptive Catalogue of United States Postage Stamps", the listing appears as follows with accompanying comments:

"1890-93 Size reduced

"154 2c carmine (Washington)

"155 2c rose (Washington)

A. Figures not capped

B. Left figure capped

C. Both figures capped * * *

"The only stamps found are those in which the cap appears on the left-hand figure or on both figures. *The stamp was supposed, when first listed, to come occasionally with cap on the right hand figure only.* Such stamp is not found in the full sheets and it is probably merely the regular stamp printed defectively. There were a great many poor prints of this issue which appeared toward the close of the contract with the American Company. One or two used specimens, which have been shown us as stamps with right figure only capped, have proved to be of the variety with both capped, the cap on the left-hand figure being concealed by the cancellation. *It is also a very simple matter for the fraudulently inclined to cover the left-hand cap in the variety with the two caps, so as to make one with right-hand figure capped.*

"There seems to be at the present time no sufficient evidence that this stamp exists with right figure only capped."

Luff's famous book on United States stamps dismisses the capped varieties as of minor importance, in the following words:

"There are some minor varieties of the two cent stamps which are of trifling interest. These are colorless marks, commonly called 'caps,' above one or both of the numerals of value. They are caused by damaged transfer rolls. By some means, probably overhardening, a bit of the roll was chipped off. In one instance the break occurred above the right-hand numeral, in another above the left, and in the third above both numerals."

Further on there is another reference to the roll being "damaged". From the foregoing it is apparent that Luff considered the varieties as being almost beneath his notice and it is quite evident from his statement that he had not given the varieties a great deal of attention. And thus the subject has rested for more than forty years.

II DEVELOPMENT OF THE BREAKS

EARLY in 1937 while the writer was sorting through a large accumulation of the normal stamp in a search for relief varieties, two copies were found which seemed to show a large block of metal in the act of breaking away from the top of the left numeral. These appeared to represent a transitional stage of development of the left cap, previously unknown, but definite announcement of the stamps as a legitimate relief variety was withheld pending confirmation. George W. Brett's attention being called to the two stamps he promptly produced a third copy which had been in his possession for some time and, on the strength of the three known copies which appeared identical in all essential respects, a preliminary description of the variety (together with other data) was published by the writer in *STAMPS* for November 27, 1937, under the title "Curious Caps."

Final confirmation of the variety did not come, however, until the announcement appeared in George Sloane's column in *STAMPS* for October 15, 1938, of a plate strip from the upper right pane of plate No. TT 236. The writer immediately wrote to Mr. Sloane and through his cooperation secured the original strip from its owner (C. S. Ernst of Seattle, Washington) for examination. (See footnote). As the result of this examination it was found that every stamp in the strip (UR Nos. 2 to 10 inclusive) bore the characteristic shading streak of the capped relief and were unquestionably produced from the same transfer roll. Stamp No. 9 was identical with the transitional variety described in the preceding paragraph whereas stamp No. 10 was the normal variety of the fully developed left cap.

Inclusive of the eleven copies from nine positions described by R. J. W. Patterson in the *Bureau Specialist* for May, 1940, a total of sixteen copies are now known to the writer and, significantly enough, no straight-edged or arrow copies have been uncovered. This leads to the conclusion that the transitional stage of the left cap first occurred somewhere in the ninth column of the upper right pane from plate No. TT 236, the last entry in this pane being, of course, the position represented in Mr. Ernst's strip. Since a large proportion of the copies, however, show strong evidence of being from the tenth, or outside column of a right-hand pane, the transitional stage of the relief must have continued into the right-hand column of the lower right pane. The complete absence of top or bottom straight edges thus far, indicates a total possibility of nine positions in the upper right pane since position No. 99 must be assumed to be a normal copy. In the lower right pane we also have a maximum possibility of nine positions, all in the outside column at the right, since the absence of arrow copies indicates that position No. 10 was a fully developed left cap.

We are thus limited to a maximum possibility of eighteen positions for the transitional stage of the relief, but this maximum must be reduced somewhat if an early description of a block showing normal stamps in conjunction with normal left caps is to be accepted. I quote:

"We have examined blocks of the variety capped on the left, in the unused condition. Usually every stamp has the figure capped, but in one instance at least some vertical rows were capped, while others were not." (*POST OFFICE*, April, 1894.)

Footnote: Preliminary announcement of the results of the examination were published in the stamp column of *The Detroit News* (conducted by Cecil Betron) under date of November 20, 1938.

On the other hand, the writer of the foregoing may have overlooked the significance of the transitional stage and failed to make mention of it. From "Philatelic Notes" by L. G. Dorpat in *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* for July 25, 1895, I quote:

"Just now a strip of four U. S. 2c 1890 has been heard of, containing one stamp with cap on left 2, two perfect stamps, and one stamp with an imperfect 2, but no cap. This beside the strip of three in the writer's collection, consisting of one stamp with cap on left 2 and two stamps with caps on both 2s, form interesting material for further study."

Thus it appears that the transitional stage of the relief was noticed early but was not understood and allowed to pass without further attention being given to it.

The first appearance of a fully developed left cap would thus seem to have occurred in the right-hand column of the lower right pane from plate No. TT 236 and continuing on through other plates the identity of which was early established. Inclusive of position LR No. 10, a minimum of eleven positions on the initial plate is indicated.

The writer has been unable to trace sources of original publication of identified plate numbers, but it is believed that the following list (based on data published in the booklet "Relief Breaks on the 2c Stamp of 1890" by Stanton, Berresford and Davis together with subsequent researches by the writer) is correct and in the consecutive order in which the plates were probably prepared:

Order of preparation	Plate Number	Size of plate	Original state of relief	Transitional left caps	Normal left caps	Double caps
1.	TT 239	400	400			
	(This is probably the first plate of the series in which the transitional left cap is found and presumably is from the same relief in its original state before the occurrence of the breaks. A plate number strip from this plate is listed by Luff as being in the collection of Mr. Deats, but the strip has not been examined by the writer)					
2.	TT 238	400	400			
	(See remarks above. Also listed by Mr. Luff as being represented in the collection of Mr. Deats)					
3.	TT 237	400	400			
	(See remarks above. No identified plate number strips from this plate to the writer's knowledge)					
4.	TT 236	400	371 (?)	18 (?)	11 (?)	
	(This plate contains many positions from the capped relief in its original state before the occurrence of the break on the left numeral, as evidenced by the normal copies in the Ernst strip from the upper right pane. The strip listed by Mr. Luff as being represented in the collection of Mr. Deats but showing no caps may be either from a left pane or a short strip from a right pane.)					
5.	TT 235	400			400	
6.	VV 249	200			200 (?)	
	(No plate strips have been identified, but it seems probable that if one is ever found it will show all left caps.)					
7.	VV 248	200			200	
8.	VV 247	200			200	
9.	VV 246	200			132	68
	(A complete right pane of 100 stamps from this plate was advertised by Stanley Gibbons, Inc., in STAMPS for May 14, 1938. Photographs of the entire pane were secured by myself and several other members of the <i>Bureau Issues Association</i> , so that the identification of the number of positions of each variety is definitely known.)					
10.	VV 245	200				200

We are thus able to establish the probable relative scarcity of the three known stages of development of the capped relief, as follows:

Original state of the relief with no breaks showing	1571 positions
Transitional stage of the normal left cap	18
Normal left cap	1143
Normal double caps	268
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Total positions from the capped relief	3000 positions

The commonness of the original state of the relief in accumulations examined by the writer would tend to confirm the above conclusions.

Differing sharply from the normal development of the left cap as herein described, the accompanying cap on the right numeral appears suddenly on position No. 73 of the right pane from plate No. VV 246. The position immediately preceding in the order of entry (No. 83) appears from the photograph to show a slight cracking of the metal at the right edge of the pending break but hardly definite enough to establish it as a permanent characteristic of that particular plate position without confirmation by other copies which, so far, is entirely lacking. Is it possible that the story of the engraver "who put the cap on to the two" (POST OFFICE, April, 1895) in reality referred only to the break on the right numeral and through inaccuracy of statement was construed by the editor of POST OFFICE to refer equally to both of the breaks?



2¢ Carmine, Cap on Left "2" (Sc. 220a), used with 10¢ Blue Special Delivery (E2), tied by "Minneapolis, Minn. Sep 9 92" duplex datestamp on legal-size cover to Duluth Minn., docketed at left, the earliest documented use of the cap on left "2" variety. These varieties are affordable, with a catalogue value of \$12.50 for VF used copies off cover. This cover, from a 2020 Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries 2020 Sale, sold for \$212.40

2¢ Carmine, Cap on Both "2"s (220c) tied by "Vine-land N.J. Jul. 7 6:30PM 1892" duplex datestamp on cover to Erminna Pa., Philadelphia transit backstamp, the earliest documented use of the cap on both "2"s variety. This cover realized \$188.80 in a Siegel Galleries 2019 Auction. VF used stamps off cover have a catalogue value of \$35.

