

Yesterday in Mekeel's:

The United States One Cent 1861 Issue

by E. Tudor Gross (From *Mekeel's Weekly*, April 21, 1941, with images added)

(This is a rather lengthy article, so I will break it up over a series of USSN issues and trim out less relevant sections. It is one man's approach to collecting one specific issue and can be emulated for this or any number of less expensive and/or more recent issues. JFD.)

Introductory

For some years I have threatened to write a paper or a monograph, if you please, on the one cent stamp of 1861, the Civil War Issue. For several reasons I have hesitated to do this. I have neither the time, knowledge, nor inclination to write a complete history of this stamp. Statistics, while interesting to the student who wants a reference book, are to me rather boring, and furthermore they require study of government records and previously published articles which calls for endless research....

The facts are, however, that up to the present time very little has been written about the one cent stamp of 1861....Take a strong reading glass, and examine the workmanship of our early issues. With all due respect, I maintain that in the period before 1900 no finer piece of engraving was ever put out by our government than that shown on the one cent of 1861.

This brings me to the question of why I ever started to specialize in this particular stamp. For many years collectors had sought the stamps of the 1847 issue, the 1¢ and 3¢ of 1851-7, as well as others which are listed at high figures in Scott's Catalogue....The stamps of the 1869 issue were also popular, but to my knowledge, no one around 1920 had given any particular thought or study to the 1¢ of 1861. Neither had I, seriously. Like many collectors, I like all United States stamps, and tried to make my collection as complete as possible. At first I sought only unused copies, in singles, of course, but when it came to the earlier issues, the pocketbook simply couldn't stand the strain. So I had to be satisfied, as far as these earlier issues were concerned, with used specimens, which, in most cases, were cheaper and easier to pick up.

A piece of advice from a friend of mine, Mr. Frank M. Mason, a collector of many years standing, was invaluable at this time. He cautioned me that condition was a paramount factor, and that I should not be too hasty in filling the vacant spaces in my printed album with copies that were off-center or too heavily cancelled. This advice I have never forgotten, and I pass it on to other collectors who may not have given the question serious consideration.

Some 25 years ago, when dealers got the names of U.S. collectors, they sent out albums or approval books containing U.S. stamps from 1847 to 1900. These dealers were not particularly concerned at this period with rare cancellations, but simply offered selections of the "run of the mine". About this time I had come to admire the 1¢ of 1861, not with any idea of specializing in the stamp, but simply because it appealed to me as a beautiful stamp and as a fine example of early U.S. engraving. Secondly, I noticed that superb copies, whether unused or used, were few and far between. The result was that as fine copies were offered, irrespective of the cancellation, I acquired the habit of "salting them away", feeling that they were "good property". Unfortunately, at this time I was not interested in covers, and consequently passed up many choice items which went to other collections.



At the time of the A.P.S. Convention in Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1922, I had accumulated about six pages of this stamp in my single, loose-leaf 19th Century album. The copies were all selected for centering and condition, but were not segregated into types of cancellation, design, shade or rarity.

A chance remark by one of America's leading philatelists, the late Daniel Hammatt of Topeka, Kansas, 'started all the trouble'. He attended the Springfield convention, and one evening dropped into my room in the hotel to look over my very limited holdings, which I had brought over from Providence. After he had looked at my six pages of the 1¢ 1861, he remarked, "Do you realize that

you have the best lot of that stamp in the country? With this as a nucleus, why don't you specialize in the stamp and see what you can do with it?" That suggestion got me started, and since then my major interest has been in the one cent of 1861.

Some collectors before me had evidently liked this stamp. Men like Sprague, Brandenberry, Stevenson and Ackerman had apparently been impressed with its appearance and attractiveness, for they each had accumulated numerous fine copies. Their interest, however, did not extend to serious specialization. Senator Ackerman, to be sure, seems to have particularly liked the stamp, for his collection contained, by purchase, the cream of the other three collectors whose names I have mentioned. When he decided, before his decease, to dispose of much of his vast stamp holdings, I was fortunate to acquire his entire volume of off-cover copies of the 1¢ 1861. Consequently, the choice items of this stamp from all these four collections are now in my possession.

Why is this stamp, so hard to secure in fine to superb condition? When we consider that there were approximately one hundred and thirty million copies issued (without grill), it would seem that there should be plenty of marketable copies in dealers' hands....We must bear in mind that this stamp, as well as the rest of the series, was issued during the stress of Civil War and that it replaced the 1857 issue which had been generally distributed throughout the country, South as well as North.

The war began in April, 1861, and naturally the new series could not be engraved, printed and issued at once. The government at this time did not print its own stamps. The contract was let out, in this case, to the National Bank Note Company of New York, and to avoid any confusion between the issue already current and the proposed series, entirely new designs were prescribed. The accepted designs of the 1¢ denomination, as finished stamps, were finally delivered by the contractor to



The earliest documented usage of the 1861 1¢.

Washington on the 16th day of August, 1861, and were first used at the Baltimore Post Office on August 17th. As all postmasters were required to turn in their supply of the 1857 issue in exchange for the new issue, speed in printing was, of course, a necessity. Furthermore, as time went on and the war continued, the printing of the new stamps was "stepped up", so that it is not surprising that "centering", which we feature so much today, was a minor factor. The essential thing was to get the stamps out for use in all the North-

One of the five recorded earliest documented usages on cover of the 1861 1¢ blue on August 21, 1861 used from Philadelphia, Pa., and Pittsburgh, Pa., used with a 3¢ rose



(Sc. 65) tied by circled grid cancellations on cover to Academia, Pa., with matching "Philadelphia Pa Aug 21 1861" octagonal date stamp, prepaying the 1¢ carrier fee plus 3¢ domestic rate, also with a manuscript verse at left that reads, "The day is past and gone when you and I were one."

ern States, and "condition", so dear to 20th Century collectors, was not even thought of. The result is that the vast majority of these stamps (I am referring principally to the 1¢), were not what would be described today as superb or even fine copies.

Some years ago...a Midwestern dealer acquired a wholesale lot of this stamp, totaling 1,400 copies. He examined these for condition (not rare cancels) and found only twenty that he rated as first class. These he sent to me on approval, and of the twenty, I took twelve which I considered prime copies. At this time I was not concerned with rare cancellations, but simply with fine copies, and twelve were all that I could secure from a find of 1,400!

For years, when I have visited dealers in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and other large cities, I have asked them to show me what they had in used 1¢ 1861. The result has been amazing. I have seen numerous copies of the 1¢ 1851 and 1857, both on and off cover, but the offerings of 1¢ 1861 have been so small as to be negligible, or the condition so poor that no serious collector would want them.

I should, however, qualify the above statement by referring to three accumulations which I have seen in the last few years, two of them within the last two months. Dealers are sometimes collectors, and while they sell stamps, generally, they also occasionally put aside certain stamps which particularly appeal to them and seek no market for the time being. Some five years ago a dealer in the Middle West formed a collection of this stamp in one volume. The condition throughout was excellent. When he decided to sell, he sent the entire lot to me and I bought it intact, although I retained only a portion of it.

The second case was quite similar. A Boston collector, who had always admired the 1¢ 1861, accumulated about two hundred nice copies, and when he decided not long ago to become a dealer, I was given "first pick". Naturally, I did not need them all, but I secured a number of choice items.

These two lots, however, were really private collections and should not be classed as dealers' stock.

The third accumulation was somewhat different...Only recently I called on a prominent out-of-town dealer, and saw more 1¢ 1861s than I ever believed existed in professional hands. This particular dealer has for years been an accumulator of early U.S. stamps, in used condition, and while he presumably has "played no favorites", he has amassed many hundreds of the 1¢ 1861. Leaving out the straight edge and damaged copies, which he had segregated in glassine envelopes, he had one entire album of what the catalogue would call "marketable copies". I examined them all, and found a great variety of cancellations. Condition, however, is a paramount factor with collectors, and well centered copies were none too plentiful in this lot.

A variety of cancellations is always a treat to find, but if the stamp itself is not well centered, one hesitates to add it to one's collection unless the cancellation is very unusual. All of which goes to prove that quantity, except for research, proves

nothing, and that quality, after all, is the prime factor in stamp collecting.

This brings me to a theory of mine which may be all wrong, but which nevertheless seems to fit the case. In the days of the 1851 issue, and even the 1857 issue, the use of envelopes had not come into general practice. Before the Civil War much correspondence was handled by folding the writing paper and using a wafer or sticker to keep it closed in the mails. The stamp was affixed to the space containing the address, and if the receiver desired to preserve the letter, he filed it away with the stamp still adhering to the outside. In other words, there were, as a general rule, no envelopes to throw away. This accounts for the fact that when "finds" of old correspondence have been made in the period before the Civil War, the stamps are still in place, adhering to the letters filed away for reference. Had there been envelopes, the letters would still have been filed, but the envelopes bearing the stamps would have been discarded in most instances. The same thing applies today. We open our mail, take out the contents and throw the envelopes into the waste basket, stamp and all.

What was the situation in 1861-7? While envelopes had been in use for some years (the government itself having put them out as early as 1853 with embossed stamps), they had not become the general custom until the period of the Civil War. At that time, printing concerns, advertisers, and political and patriotic propagandists, featured specially prepared envelopes for general distribution. Thus the public, as never before, came to realize that their letters could be mailed in "containers" without resorting to wafers which might easily be pried open. Naturally, the all important thing was the letter, and the envelope, with its stamp, was discarded. Hence many of the 1¢ 1861, as well as the 3¢ of the same issue, were thrown away and destroyed.

Single copies of the 1¢ on cover were used in two ways. Drop letters (correspondence not going outside the place of mailing) required only one cent postage, until 1863 and after July 1, 1865, in places of 50,000 or less.

A fabulous cover showing the intended 1¢ local usage in Chicago, the 1¢ stamp not only showing the plate 10 and partial imprint—but it also is imperforate between the bottom of the stamp and the margin!



Circulars or printed matter, unsealed, took the same rate, even though mailed to a distance. In the latter case the subject matter was not usually of importance, so the stamps disappeared when the waste basket was handy. To a certain extent the same fate met the stamps on drop letters. Business houses were interested only in the letters inside the envelopes, and it was mostly in the case of private correspondence that the envelope, with its stamp, was preserved. Letters from a distance required the 3¢ rate, and frequently this rate was paid by three of the 1¢ stamp, either in a strip or by single copies.

Cover to Philadelphia with the 1861 1¢ Blue in a strip of four tied by circle of wedges and a "New-York 22 Jan. 1863" double-circle date stamp, the four cents paying the 3¢ domestic postage plus the then-current 1¢ carrier fee.



Although this cover, to New York City, shows the intended use of the 1861 1¢ Blue to pay the carrier fee to the Philadelphia post office and a 3¢ Rose (Sc. 65) to pay the postage, the stamps are tied by a “Philadelphia Pa. Jul. 1, 1863” circular datestamp—the first day of the free carrier service, so the 1¢ stamp was no longer necessary.



The demonetization applied to all mail, not just that from the Southern states. Here we see a cover from Philadelphia to Chapinville, Conn.



with two 1861 1¢ Blues (63), but also with a demonetized 1857 1¢ Blue Type V (24), the cover with an “OLD STAMPS/NOT RECOGNIZED” two-line handstamp that ties all three stamps and a “Due 1 Ct” handstamp.

In my opinion, most of the used 1¢ stamps that have survived came from this latter usage. Eighty years ago the receiving of correspondence from a distance was somewhat of an event, and people were prone to preserve “the whole works”, which they might not do in connection with local mail.

The general use of the envelope, therefore, and the fact that so many were thrown away, accounts, in my opinion, for the relative scarcity of this stamp...I concede that many dealers prefer to stock higher priced stamps...But even so, why is it that more professionals have not a fair supply of a stamp like the one under discussion, when, as a rule, they can offer hundreds of copies of the 3¢ of the same issue and, generally, some nice copies of the earlier issues. I am forced to the conclusion that they simply do not exist in quantity, at least in fine condition....

...I realize that I am particular and that, having many copies of the stamp, off and on cover, I cannot expect to find much to enhance my collection. But the fact that impresses me most is that superb copies are extremely scarce....In the old days, a stamp was a stamp, and if it filled the vacant space in the album it fulfilled all that was required. Not so today, off center copies, or those heavily cancelled, do not appeal to collectors, much less specialists, and when you try to sell, condition is the paramount consideration. There is this exception, however. Specialists are always looking for the unusual, either in cancellation or shade, and when a “rara avis” turns up, even if the condition is not perfect, it cannot be passed by. In my collection, I have some cancelled items which I believe unique. They are not superb copies, but they are the only ones I have ever seen or heard of. Under such circumstances, the specialist can't be too fussy. To attempt to form a specialized collection of only superb specimens would be an Herculean task and would lead nowhere.

In closing this phase of the subject, I would again emphasize the fact that fine to superb copies of this stamp are scarce and that only by new finds can the supply be improved. Not all the attics of our country have been ransacked. Every now and then some estate is settled and old correspondence, long thought worthless, comes to light. In this way, the stock of old stamps is increased and occasionally we find items that we thought did not exist. As a general rule, however, I think I may state with confidence that dealers generally have very little good material to offer in the 1¢ of 1861, and that the stamp in superb condition is far scarcer than most of us realize.

History

Let us now look for a moment into the history of this, one of the finest of United States stamps. When the Civil War broke out in April, 1861, the North and the South became divided. All stamps throughout the country had been supplied from Washington and postmasters in the South as well as in the North, had on hand supplies of our 1857 issue. Naturally, the Federal Government did not wish the Southern States, which had seceded, to use the same stamps that were current north of the Mason and Dixon line. So it called in the existing issue and set a date at which these stamps were to be demonetized.

This meant that a new issue was necessary, and the 1861 series was the result. I do not propose to go at length into the question of the “premiere gravures”, or August issue, as they were erroneously called, but some statements along this line should be made.

The first printings of the new issue varied slightly from those actually put into use, and in the case of the one cent stamp, certain marked differences should be noted. To begin with, the color was: a special shade of indigo, not found in the stamps later delivered to postmasters, and certain lines or dashes were lacking as compared with the stamps ultimately distributed.



Scott 63-E11a, formerly Sc. 55. Left, unused; right, with full original gum and target cancel, one of only two known with cancellations, believed to be a sample control marking, not a postally used marking.



Left, Die proof of the 1¢ sample design, Sc. 63-E11a; Right, Die proof of the issued stamp, Sc. 63P3. A dash was added under the tip of the ornament at right of the “1” in upper left corner, and various other parts of the design were retouched.

Modern scholars, notably Stanley B. Ashbrook and Elliott Perry, have shown that the early printings were more or less in the line of samples, and, as far as the one cent stamp is concerned, no genuinely used copy on cover has ever been found. For many years it was thought that the regular issue did not appear until September and that, consequently, the printings of August, 1861, constituted a separate emission which was entitled to special rank in the catalogue. As a matter of fact, we know that the regular issue appeared as early as August 17th, and there is a cover in my collection cancelled August 21st. So the distinction of “August” and “September” issues is fallacious.

It might be nearer the truth to say that the first printings were in the line of proofs, and that the accepted designs, which were used throughout the country, were the ones we recognize today as the September issue.

Luff, in his monumental work on United States stamps, says that there were five plates used to produce the one cent denomination, not including Plate 1, which was for the "first printing", or "August" issue, so called. He lists for the period from 1861 to April, 1866, the following plate numbers, to wit: 9, 10, 22, 25 and 27.



One of two known National Bank Note No. 9 Plate blocks, and one of only eight known in total of any Plate No.

He also calls attention to the fact that the earliest date that these stamps were delivered to the Stamp Agent (at Washington, of course) was August 16th. So August 17th is undoubtedly the earliest day that we should expect to find cancelled copies. No cover mailed on that day has ever been found, although an off cover copy, cancelled August 17th, from Baltimore, is known to exist (photo, p. 32). At the present writing, the earliest covers found, at least to my knowledge, bear date of August 21st (photo, p. 33). I know of only two of these, one of which is in my own collection. I might add that I have a cover cancelled August 20th (no year date) and the stamp has the dot in "U", hence from the first plate. Possibly this is the earliest known cover, but the letter inside, which would have proved the exact date, is missing. Therefore it might have been mailed on August 20, 1862, a very late date for the printings from the first plate, which would probably have been exhausted by August of 1862. So, while this may be the earliest cover found, it cannot be authenticated.

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