

# Yesterday in Mekeel's, National Issue: The U.S. Postage Stamp, 1870-1900, Part 14

by Lowell S. Newman & Peter T. Rohrbach (From Mekeel's, May 24-June 21, 1991 with images added)

On July 21, 1875, the Post Office issued a circular which stated that the new 5¢ stamp was now available. This stamp—which became known as the “5¢ Taylor”—had an enormous practical and symbolic significance at the time because the Zachary Taylor stamp represented the final fulfillment of something which had been sought for many decades: an inexpensive and mutually agreed upon international rate of postage between the major nations.



The amount of American mail sent to foreign countries and received from foreign countries had been increasing throughout the 19th Century. There was a marked improvement in carrying transatlantic mails in the 1840s, as more ships began to carry international correspondence. The major element in this increase was the growing use of the steam engine in transoceanic crossings, replacing the old sailing packets.

In the 1840s the Cunard steamers began to take over from the British sailing packets and the transit time decreased dramatically. During that changing epoch the crossing from America to Europe on a sailing ship took from 20 to 24 days, while the Cunarders made it in from 14 to 16 days. The crossing from Europe to America which was made against the wind took from 30 to 36 days for the sailing ships, but only 16 to 17 days for the Cunard steamships.

These steamships began to carry a growing amount of mail, and by 1859 post offices were provided on some Cunard Steamships for sorting, postmarking and rating mail while in transit. In 1865 the Pacific Mail Steamship Company inaugurated transpacific mail service under a U.S. contract.

This folded cover to Gand, Belgium demonstrates the complexity of rates in the 1840s. It bears an 1847 5¢ and a 10¢ strip of 3, originating at Charleston S.C. on October 28,



1848, sender's route instructions *pr Mail to Boston for Steamer 'Niagara'*, conveyed by steamer to New York City, then posted to Boston, from which port it was carried by the Cunarder Niagara, departing November 1 and arriving at Liverpool on November 13, with corresponding British “1/8” manuscript debit marking, red rectangular accountancy handstamp (with rates in blue ink) “DEBOURS ETRANGERS 1/8 / TAXE REDUITE 20 / PORT BELGE 4” representing postage of 1sh8p British, re-stated 20 decimes in Belgian currency, plus 4 decimes internal rate, large blue “24” decimes manuscript marking for total amount due from addressee. To further complicate matters, this was carried during the so-called Retaliatory Period when Great Britain tried to maintain its monopoly on transatlantic mail carriage through the subsidized Cunard steamship line, treated prepaid American packet letters arriving in England as if they had been sent unpaid, and the U.S. retaliated.

Notice that the steamer left New York on November 1 and arrived 12 days later, November 13, in Liverpool.

Originally, this transoceanic mail was carried under the old “ship letter” rates in which a fee was paid directly to the shipping company for carrying mail just as it would any other piece of cargo, but as the volume of this international mail was increasing, so was the bureaucracy of the many nations involved that wanted to exercise growing and eventually complete control of every aspect of correspondence, both domestic and foreign.

However, it was one thing for a nation to establish postage rates within its own borders, but it was a quite complex matter to arrange rates of postage for mail which passed between several countries.

By the middle of the 19th century the amount of foreign-bound mail had increased to the extent that necessitated some more formal arrangements and this was achieved by individual postal treaties worked out independently between two nations.

The United States signed its first transatlantic postal treaty with the German state of Bremen in 1847, which was followed by a series of other international treaties, so that by 1862 eight different American arrangements were in effect.

These treaties between the U.S. and various nations were able to accomplish a number of basic postal arrangements: rates were fixed, accounts with a number of foreign countries were kept, and the postage collected was distributed between the two countries in proportions fixed in the agreements.

In these early postal treaties the rates were generally determined according to a number of variables, such as the domestic postage applicable in the country of origin, the rate for the sea voyage—called “sea postage”—the transit rate through various countries en route, and finally by the domestic rate of the recipient country.

These attempts to codify international rates were a step in the right direction, but they still left a complex array of various postal charges. The “sea postage” and the intermediary transit charges varied according to the nationality of the shipping company or the number of possible routes along which the mail could be sent. At that time, a letter sent to Australia could be sent from the United States along six different routes, and the postage might be either 5¢, or 33¢, or 45¢, or 55¢, or 60¢, or \$1.02 per half ounce, depending on the route selected and what portion of the fees were paid by the sender.

1851 12¢, Sc. 17, horizontal strip of three, used with 1¢ Blue Type II, Sc. 7, tied by grid cancels and “Oxford O. Jul. 20, 1857” date stamp on cover to



Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, and forwarded to Mount Korong, addressed to James W. Messler and directed in another hand “By British Packet via England”, prepaid 37¢ for a non-applicable rate but credited “12” cents for 33¢ British Mail via Southampton rate by American Packet—this was not carried on a British steamer; it was carried on the Inman Line City of Washington, departing New York on July 23, 1857, and arriving at Liverpool August 5, Melbourne rimless oval backstamp (October 15).

In 1872, an American sending a half ounce letter to Spain, which was a fairly direct passage across the Atlantic, had a number of routes

to choose from and, therefore, a number of different rates. If the letter was sent to Britain and then via France the rate was 16¢. If it went by American shipping from New Orleans it was 10¢. And if it went via the North German Union it cost 12¢.

1873 12¢, Sc. 162, tied by New York Foreign Mail Geometric cancel, red "New York 5 Apr. ?" credit datestamp on 1875 folded letter to Yviza, Spain, red "PD" and "Wfr" handstamps, 12¢



North German Union Closed Mail rate via England, the destination is in the Balearic Islands off the eastern coast of Spain, probably carried aboard the Cunarder Bothnia

In addition to these varied route charges there was an incredibly complex method of bookkeeping based on the weight computations of the nations involved. The basic standard weights of the various nations had to be computed, and so there was an intricate evaluation of the correlation between the English ounce, the French gram, and the German "loth". As a result, a letter could be charged a single weight fee at its origin point while it was treated as a double weight letter in transit or at its destination.

Thus by the 1870s Americans were encountering an almost bewildering array of international postage rates. Coupled with this was the fact that American international mail was also beginning to increase significantly, not only because of America's growing internationalism in business and commerce, but also because of the fact that the great migrations from Europe to America during the second half of the 19th century were underway and many of these new Americans wanted to "write home."

What was needed, then, was some type of basic and simple international postage agreement among the nations.

The dream of some type of internationalism in postal rates started back in the 1840s, but the people of the 19th century learned the same hard lesson that the people of the 20th century were to experience later, namely that international agreements were difficult and time consuming to achieve.

In 1841, the German economist J. Von Herrfeldt began arguing for some type of cooperation in the pan-Germanic world, which called for faster transportation, a shortening of routes, and lower and simplified rates. This led in 1850 to the formation of the Austro-German Postal Union between Prussia and Austria, which eventually included all 15 Germanic postal administrations. The main features of this Union were the adoption of a common rate for the whole territory and a modest charge based on the distance involved.

This first Union created stirrings for an even larger linkage of nations. In 1851, a major European conference was held in Berlin, which called for a general European Postal Union. That same year there was founded the International and Colonial Postage Association, a private organization that collapsed after a few years, but which did much to publicize the need for some type of international postal solution.



Sc. C66

However, it was an American who laid the groundwork for what would eventually become the first effective international postal agreement. In 1863, during the hard days of the Civil War, Montgomery Blair, Lincoln's Postmaster General, wrote to the major postal administrations of the

world, suggesting a meeting to discuss the question of international rates. His proposal was greeted favorably, and in May of 1863 a Congress of

15 nations assembled in Paris to discuss the matter.

These 15 nations represented 90 percent of the world's commerce in the middle of the 19th century, and included such countries as Great Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Holland, Belgium, Austria, Prussia, and Italian territories. The delegates from these nations had no authority to enter into any binding agreements, but they did establish broad outlines for the development of mutual agreements between nations.

These agreements centered on the three fundamental questions of international postal exchange: a uniformity of rate, a simplification of accounting, and a uniformity of weight for ordinary letters, which was established at 15 grammes.

Within two years after the Paris Conference of 1863 the United States renegotiated nine postal conventions with other nations along the guidelines established at Paris. And in 1865 the International Telegraph Union was created among 20 European nations for the regulation of telegraphic communications. But a decade would pass before the concepts of the Paris Congress were finally adopted universally.

In 1868, Heinrich Von Stephan, Director of Posts of the North German Confederation, began to make arrangements for calling together an international postal conference, but the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 disrupted the necessary diplomatic maneuvering. After the war, the Swiss took up the initiative and issued an invitation to the major nations of the world to meet in Berne, Switzerland, on September 15, 1874.

7¢ Vermilion (149) on registered cover to Wurttemberg, Germany, rectangular "Recomandirt" ties one stamp, red "New York Registered Dec. 4" (1873) double-circle datestamp, "DI-



RECT SERV/PAID ALL" boxed handstamp, an unusual registered cover paying the 6¢ North German Union Direct rate plus 8¢ registration fee.

Surprisingly, after so many years of delay, the historic Berne Congress took only three weeks to complete its work successfully. Twenty countries, including the United States, signed the international postal agreement on October 9, which would become effective the following year. It established a permanent organization that was first known as the General Postal Union, until its name was changed to Universal Postal Union in 1878. France, one of the delegates, did not join the Union until the following year. There were three key elements in the agreement of 1874. A uniform weight for letters was established at 15 grammes, the weight suggested at Paris a decade earlier. Then, a uniform rate was determined, and it was decided to use the French monetary system as a standard; this rate was 25 centimes at the prevailing rate of exchange. (There was also a provision for an optional higher rate, not to exceed 32 centimes, for unusually long distances.)

Finally, and most important, there would be no division of postage among countries, but the nation of origin would retain all fees collected. The rate of 25 centimes was considered a very low rate, but it was argued at the Congress that these low and simplified rates would stimulate a greater amount of international mail and reduce the costs entailed in the complex system then being used, which proved to be the case over the ensuing decades.

The General Postal Union went into effect on July 1, 1875, and it proved an immediate success. During the next three years a growing number of other nations joined the Union.

These are the nations that joined during those first years when it was still known by its original name:

**July 1, 1875:** Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, including Faroe Islands and Iceland, Germany, Great Britain, including Gibraltar and Malta, Greece, Egypt, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, including Madeira Islands and Azores Islands, Roumania, Russia, including

1873 3¢ (158) tied by cork cancel on 3¢ entire to Munich, Germany, with "Philad'a Pa. Jun. 19" c.d.s., red "New York Br. Transit Jun. 20" (1875) c.d.s. also ties stamp, receiving



backstamp (Jul. 3), carried on the Cunarder Scythia, departing New York Jun. 23 and arriving Queenstown Jul. 2. The G.P.U. postal treaty became effective July 1, while this was at sea, so it was one of the last pre-treaty pieces of mail.

Finland, Serv(b)ia, Spain, including Balearic and Canary Islands, Spanish North Africa and Morocco, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United States.

**January 1, 1876:** France.

**July 1, 1876:** French Colonies: In America: French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Miquelon, St. Pierre; In Africa: Senegal, Gabon, Reunion, Mayotte, Madagascar; In Asia: French establishments in India (Pondicherry, Chandemagor, Karikal, Mahe, Yanaon), Cochin China; In Oceania: New Caledonia; Marquesas Islands, Tahiti, French Archipelagos, British India,, Hindostan, British Burma, Aden.

**April 1, 1877:** Bermuda, British Guiana, Ceylon, Hong Kong, Jamaica, Labuan, Mauritius, Seychelles Islands, Straits, Settlements, Trinidad.

**May 1, 1877:** Spanish Colonies: Fernando Po, Corisco, Cuba, Porto Rico, Marianas Islands, Caroline Islands, Philippine Islands; Netherlands Colonies: Borneo, Sumatra, Java, Celebes, Moluccas, Papua, Surinam, Curacao, St. Martin, St. Eustatius.

**June 1, 1877:** Japan, Portuguese Colonies: Goa, Macao, Timor, Cape Verde Islands, Mozambique, Angola.

**July 1, 1877:** Brazil

**September 1, 1877:** Danish Colonies: St. Thomas, St. Croix, St. John, Greenland, Persia.

In the following years a number of other nations joined, including Mexico, Hawaii, Australia, and a number of African and South American

## A Sampling of "Before & After" 1875 Treaty Rate Covers

5¢ Blue (179) tied by segmented cork cancel, "Lake George N.Y. Jun. 30" c.d.s. on illustrated hotel advertising cover to Olmitz, Austria, red "New York Br. Transit Jul. 1" c.d.s., receiving backstamp, year date unknown but probably 1876.



5¢ Blue (179) tied by quartered cork and "Montrose Pa. Oct. 31" c.d.s. on cover to Beirut, Syria, unusual calligraphic address includes routing instructions "Via London".



countries. By 1885, there were 54 countries in the Union, and by 1906 there were 71.

In 1875, according to the exchange rate between the U.S. dollar and the French franc, the equivalent of 100 centimes was 19¢. Thus the 25 centimes international rate was rounded off as 5¢ for U.S. postage sent to members of the Union. The allowable weight for this fee was a half ounce.

When the Post Office announced the "5¢ Taylor" in 1875 for international mail it also said it was discontinuing the production of the 7¢, 12¢, and 24¢ stamps, since they had been used mostly in international mail in the former complex rate structure. However, the Post Office stated that those three stamps would still remain valid, and it encouraged postmasters to continue to sell and use them wherever possible.

The new 5¢ stamp, representing inexpensive postage, became an instant success in the United and in those first six months of the issue almost 10 million 5¢ stamps were delivered to the U.S. Stamp agent. James Tyner, who was Grant's last Postmaster General, wrote in 1876 in his final report:

"The General Postal Union Treaty concluded at Berne, October 9, 1874, has been in operation since July 1, 1875, with the most satisfactory results. Our people have enjoyed the advantages of the cheap and uniform postage rates which have been established to all parts of the civilized world, and the Post Office Department has also been financially benefited by the greater simplicity of postal operations under its provisions..."

The American people had therefore received two major inexpensive postal benefits during the dark economic days of the mid 1870s—the 1¢ post card of 1873, and the 5¢ international rate of 1875—and the sending of mail remained one of the few bargains of that depression era.

5¢ Blue (179) tied by "San Antonio Tex. Jul. 20, 1878" circular datestamp on cover to Japan, "Yokohama Japan Aug. 20, 1878" datestamp.



6¢ Dull Pink (159) used with 3¢ Green (158) on corner card cover to Pont-d'Aid, France, both tied by New York Foreign Mail Geometric cancel, red "New York Paid Apr. 10" (1875) c.d.s. carried by steamer Neckar, arriving Southampton Apr. 21, boxed "P.D." handstamp. The new U.S.-France treaty effective Aug. 1, 1874 set the reciprocal prepaid rate at 9¢ per 15 grams, so no accounting of postage from either country to the other was necessary.



5¢ Blue (179) tied by New York Foreign Mail cancel, red "New York Dec. 6" c.d.s. on back of 1876 folded letter to France.



15c Brown & Blue, Type I (118) tied by segmented cork cancel on folded letter to Zurich, Switzerland, red "New York Paid All Br. Transit Aug. 12" (1869) c.d.s., merchant's blue oval datestamp, Basel and Zurich backstamps, choice 15¢ Type I cover to Switzerland by Closed Mail via England.



7¢ Vermilion (149) tied by New York Foreign Mail Propeller cancel on buff cover to Zurich, Switzerland, stamp also cancelled by "Insufficiently Paid" straightline handstamp, second strike at left, red "New York Paid All Feb. 12" c.d.s./ and black "Via Ostende" straightline handstamp, four 1873 transit and receiving backstamps.



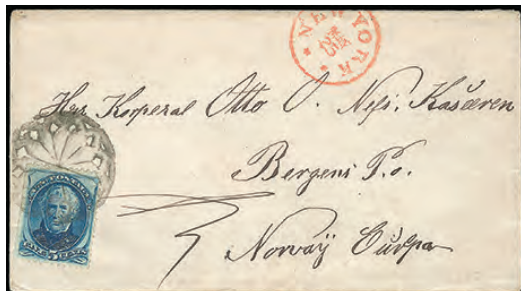
5¢ Blue (179) tied by cork, "Middleborough Mass. Jul. 26" (1875) c.d.s. on cover to Zurich, Switzerland, red New York transit, receiving backstamp, early use of 5¢ Taylor (earliest known is Jul 10, 1875).



7¢ Orange Vermilion (160) used with three 3¢ Green (147), tied by segmented cork cancels, "Chicago Ill. Sep. 27" c.d.s. on cover to Skien, Norway, red New York 5¢ credit datestamp, red "2" (silbergroschen) credit handstamp, receiving backstamp, an unusual franking paying the 16¢ rate by North German Union Mail



5¢ Blue (179) tied by well-struck New York Foreign Mail Geometric cancel, red "New York May 25" c.d.s. on cover to Norway.



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# Yesterday in Mekeel's, National Issue:

## The U.S. Postage Stamp, 1870-1900, Part 15

by Lowell S. Newman & Peter T. Rohrbach (From Mekeel's, July 16-Aug. 9, 1991 with images added)

*(Editor's Note: All of these designs having been printed here previously, we refer readers to previous editions in this series, or your favorite catalog, for photos. Instead, we will present some postal uses at the end of this article)*

The stamps of the Issue of 1879 are as follows:

**One Cent.** The same Benjamin Franklin design printed in the same blue color, bearing the secret mark of the one cent Continental. It is identical to the Franklin of 1873, except that it is printed on soft paper.

*(Editor's Note: All of these designs having been printed here previously, we refer readers to previous editions in this series, or your favorite catalog, for photos. Instead, we will present some postal uses at the end of this article)*

**Two Cent.** This Andrew Jackson stamp was printed from two of the plates made by Continental and from American plates made through the use of Continental transfer rolls; and thus they show the secret marks of the Issue of 1873. It was printed in shades of vermilion and orange vermilion. Like the earlier issues, it was used at the time in a bisected manner to make two 1¢ stamps.

**Three Cent.** The George Washington in the familiar shades of green was still the regular stamp for first class mail, and this version is the same as the 1873 stamp, secret marks and all, except for the soft paper.

**Five Cent.** The 5¢ Taylor, even more popular now as international mail was increasing, and printed in the same shades of blue.

**Six Cent.** Abraham Lincoln again, with secret marks, printed in shades of pink.

**Ten Cent.** The Thomas Jefferson stamp in shades of brown. Some of this issue bear the secret mark, and some of them do not, which has given rise to a number of philatelic theories—either a variety of National and Continental plates were used, or there was some variation in the printing process.

**Fifteen Cent.** Daniel Webster, identical to the Continental version, in shades of orange.

**Thirty Cent.** The Alexander Hamilton stamp was first printed from a National plate and printed in the original full black of 1870. Later, American made a new plate, and printed this stamp in an orange-brown.

**Ninety Cent.** Only the old National plate was used for the Matthew Perry stamp, but it was printed first in shades of carmine and then later in purple.

The use of postage stamps at the end of the decade continued to increase, and the table below shows the numbers of stamps in varying denominations delivered by the Stamp Agent to deputy postmasters between July 1, 1879 and June 30, 1880:

However, these figures do not indicate how many of those stamps were actually of the new Issue of 1879, since the Stamp Agent distrib-

uted stamps on hand from earlier issues as well as the new issue. The 3¢ stamp was used for first class postage and was therefore the most popular stamp. During the two years that the 3¢ stamp of the Issue of 1879 was produced some 1.3 billion of them were issued, whereas in the two previous years some 976 million 3¢ stamps were issued.

Postmaster General Key's most innovative improvement in postal service during his term in office—was the creation in 1879 of a new class of mail—fourth class mail, which he said would be an inexpensive “catch-all” category.

Under the new classification system, first class mail would still include ordinary letters and post cards; second class matter consisted of newspapers and magazines; and third class included circulars miscellaneous printed matter, and books. But the new fourth class would now include anything not defined in the other three classes, such as larger packages. There was a limit of four pounds for this fourth class mail, and the payment was one cent per ounce. This was a modest charge for sending bulkier material through the postal system, and it provided yet another inexpensive service for the people.

David Key was, in fact, a vocal spokesman for the service aspect of the postal system, rather than the tax revenue aspect. This was the same theme that Rowland Hill, the father of modern postal reform, was advocating in England back in the last 1830s. Prior to that time, the post was regarded in England and elsewhere as an important and large part of the nation's tax revenue system, and therefore postage was expensive. Hill said that the postal system should be regarded primarily as a service to the people and that therefore rates should be low so that all people could

**United States Post Office Statistics, 1875-1895**

Year	# of P.O.s	Revenues	Expenditures	Annual Miles	
				Railroad	Total
1875	35,547	\$26,791,314	\$33,611,309	75,154,910	133,822,216
1880	42,989	33,315,479	36,543,804	96,497,463	178,236,996
1885	51,252	42,560,844	50,046,235	151,910,845	238,478,773
1890	62,401	60,882,098	66,259,548	215,715,680	327,409,493
1895	70,064	76,983,128	87,179,551	267,177,737	402,606,058

avail themselves of this basic system of communications in the 19th Century. Key echoed those themes to Congress in the late 1870s when he said “it was not expected that the Post Office Department should be self-sustaining, but that the deficiencies in its revenues should be met by appropriations from the general treasury.”

This is what indeed happened for the remainder of the century—postal route miles were extended, and revenues increased, but they were exceeded by expenditures, as the above chart shows.

During that twenty-year period from 1875 to 1895 expenditures exceeded revenues in all but the two years 1882-1883. Nevertheless, even though expenditures were rising, the revenues continued to increase and they covered from 80 to 90 percent of the postal expense. Thus, in 1880 for instance the net cost out of the treasury for the U.S. postal system was about \$3 million.

The key postal item in this service at that time was, of course, the 3¢ first class rate stamp, the most commonly used stamp, and its long history shows dramatically just how much the service aspect rather than the tax revenue aspect was U.S. postal policy. In 1880 the cost of first class postage was 3¢ as it had been for almost thirty years. It was never to rise above that until after World War II in the next century; and in fact from 1883 to 1917 it was reduced to 2¢.

It was only in 1958 that first class postage was finally raised to 4¢. That 2¢ to 3¢ first class rate held all during that time of increasing costs in

**Stamp Deliveries, July 1, 1879 through June 30, 1880**

	Sept. 30, 1879	Dec. 31, 1879	Mch. 31, 1880	June 30, 1880	Total
1 cent	42,968,000	54,511,200	66,025,900	62,944,700	226,449,800
2 cents	16,289,750	18,865,550	23,080,900	18,349,500	76,585,700
3 cents	128,951,300	129,452,900	148,615,700	134,583,700	541,603,600
5 cents	2,606,180	3,021,100	3,847,340	3,297,160	12,771,780
6 cents	1,496,150	1,329,200	1,850,000	1,689,350	6,364,700
10 cents	2,209,580	2,266,220	3,194,350	2,679,780	10,349,930
15 cents	266,120	243,140	307,440	298,420	1,115,120
30 cents	84,640	95,280	134,010	101,620	415,550
90 cents	7,700	7,080	5,620	5,390	25,790
<b>Whole number of stamps 875,681,970.00 Face Value \$22,414,928.00.</b>					

both products and labor, and while everything else was escalating in price the first class rate stamp, the workhorse of the postal system, continued to serve as the medium for regular mail. That 2¢ or 3¢ stamp—and even its higher priced descendants of the second half of the 20th century—provided a lot of services for an unbelievably low price: the individual piece of mail was gathered, sorted, transported any place in the country, and then delivered directly to either home or business. The first class service of the 19th century therefore represented the fulfillment of the early postal reformer’s dream—inexpensive and efficient postage, partly subsidized by the government, which would sustain the nation’s communications system.

In 1880 Rutherford Hayes was firm in his resolution that he would not run again. His administration had been respected for its basic honesty and probity, and Hayes had presided over a time of healing: a healing of the wounds between north and south, and a healing of the ailing economy. And there had been none of the blatant patronage of the Grant administration, although Hayes had not solved the ongoing problem of the unqualified people who inhabited the government civil service system. Civil service

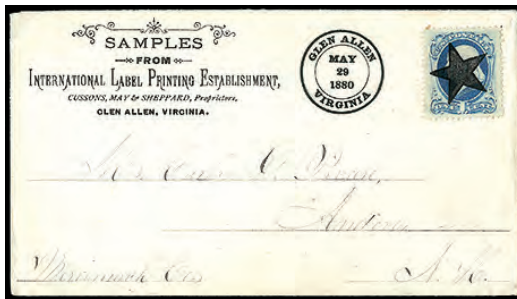
reform would have to be the work of another administration.

In that last year of the Hayes administration Postmaster General Key let it be known that he intended to return to the practice of law in Tennessee, and accordingly in May of 1880 Hayes appointed him a U.S. District judge for the eastern district of Tennessee, a position he was to occupy for the next 14 years.

To complete the term of postmaster general for the remaining months of the administration, Hayes asked Thomas James to take the job. James was the respected postmaster of New York and he had acquired a deserved international reputation for running one of the best post office systems in the nation. But Thomas James declined, saying he preferred to remain in New York, although he would later have a role in Washington in a celebrated postal scandal, as we shall see. Finally, Hayes appointed to the job Horace Maynard, a 66 year old former congressman and foreign diplomat who would serve as a caretaker Postmaster General for the next 10 months as the last office of his long career in public service.

*(To Be Continued)*

1¢ Dark Ultramarine (182) with Glen Allen Star precancel and “Glen Allen Virginia April 7, 1881” printed datestamp, on International Label Printing Establishment corner card cover to Erie Penn.



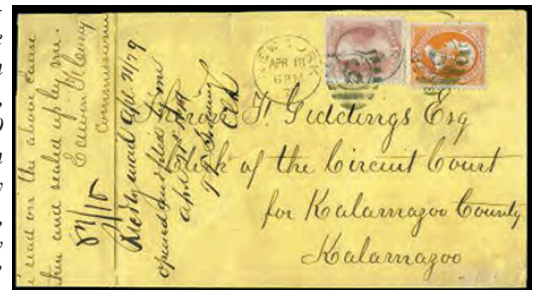
The foreign rate being five cents, here we see the 5¢ blue (185) faintly tied by a Colorado duplex datestamp on an 1879 mining scene overall illustrated cover to Bridge of Allan, Scotland, receiving backstamp of Nov. 8, 1879.



2¢ Vermilion, Attempted Use of Diagonal Half as 1¢ (183 var) single and diagonal bisect tied by violet target, matching “Sellersville Penna. Jan. 11, 1883” cogwheel datestamp on Undertaker’s yellow advertising corner card cover to Reading Pa., the bisected stamp was not accepted as postage, 1¢ Red Brown Postage Due (J1) tied by “Reading Pa. Jan. 11 Rec’d” circular datestamp (c.d.s.), receiving backstamp. (I found this cover at SiegelAuctions.com, where the lot describer added “one cannot help wondering if this mortician limited his attempts to use parts of things to stamps only”.)



The Earliest Documented Use of the 1879 American Bank Note (186), tied to an 1879 court cover from New York City to Kalamazoo, Mich., by “New York/Apr 18 79” duplex cancels.



Being the workhorse issue, the 3¢ Green (184) is an important source for Fancy cancels and advertising covers. Here we see a combination of both, the stamp, straight edge at left, tied by a bold fancy negative “H” cancel with “Boston Mass. Jul. 17” duplex c.d.s. on “The Herald” newspaper illustrated advertising cover to Middleboro Mass.



Left, Scott 187, no secret mark; right, Scott 188, the secret mark being a small semi-circle in the ball at the right end of the frame around U.S. Postage (red arrow).

*Continued on page 16*

15¢ Red Orange (189) on registered cover to Italy cancelled by multiple pen-strokes, with purple "Hot Springs Ark., I.W. Carhart, P.M., May 22, 1884" double-circle datestamp, paying the 5¢ foreign rate plus 10¢ registration fee.



30¢ Full Black (190), intense shade, tied by New York registry oval on registered postage stamp dealer's corner card cover to Paris, France, with purple "Registered Dec. 14, 1888 Branch D New York P.O." boxed datestamp, transit and receiving backstamps.



Rare cover with a single 90¢ Carmine (191) 1879 American Bank Note, bright color, straight edge at right, couple sealed tears at left into design, tied by "Boston Mass." oval cancel, also with purple framed "Boston, Mass. Feb. 16, 1888 Reg. No." registry datestamp with pencil "13478" registry number (crossed out) on legal-size cover to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, sender's ship-name directive "Per S. S. Advance", New York registry label, "New York, N.Y. Reg'y Div. 2-17 1888" oval backstamp, blue Rio de Janeiro (March 22) receiving datestamp on back, the stamp pays the 10¢ registry fee plus 16-times the 5¢ Universal Postal Union rate.



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## *Yesterday in Mekeel's, National Issue:*

# The U.S. Postage Stamp, 1870-1900, Part 16

by Lowell S. Newman & Peter T. Rohrbach (*From Mekeel's, Aug. 16-Oct. 4, 1991 with images added*)

The year of 1880 was a bright and promising one in America, because it finally seemed that the worst days of the dark Depression of the 1870s were over. Prosperity seemed at hand again, and the mood was upbeat in the nation.

American industry was forging ahead, as the country was entering wholeheartedly into the productivity of the Industrial Revolution. The country was changing because instead of a people who were predominantly individual self-employed craftsmen, we were becoming largely a nation of wage earners. But there were jobs, and the economy was good.

The 1870s had been a drab decade, which was reflected in all aspects of American life, but the 1880s would be a more lively and expansive era. The Civil War and the Depression were behind, and promising new things loomed ahead. This would also be reflected in the area of postal history where there would be new stamps, new designs, and new projects.

Marshall Jewell who had been fired as Postmaster General by Ulysses Grant in 1876 returned to national prominence in 1880. The wealthy industrialist had remained active in politics after being dismissed from Grant's cabinet and in June of 1880 when the Republican National Convention convened in Chicago he was serving as the Chairman of the Republican National Committee. The leading candidate for the nomination that year was, amazingly, Ulysses Grant, who was trying to make a comeback and run for a third term. After leaving the White House, Grant had gone on his triumphal international tour during which he was hailed everywhere in Napoleonic proportions, and this new international acclaim for the Civil War hero had re-ignited old enthusiasms.

One person who did not share that enthusiasm was Grant's old Postmaster General, now in his new powerful position, who was determined to block the nomination. On the first ballot in Chicago, Grant received 304 votes, but another 284 votes were cast for Marshall Jewell's candidate, Senator James Blaine from Maine. Through succeeding ballots those votes held, deadlocking the convention, until a compromise candidate was finally nominated, James Garfield from Ohio.

James Abram Garfield, 48, had been the president of Hiram College in Ohio and an Ohio State legislator when he joined the Ohio Volunteers in the Civil War, eventually becoming one of the youngest generals in the Union Army and fighting in the Battle of Shiloh. After the war he became an eight-term member of the U.S. House of Representatives. Tall and handsome and deeply religious, Garfield was regarded as one of the bright young men in American politics. His Democratic opponent in 1880 was General Winfield Hancock, a career military officer who had fought at Gettysburg. Garfield was the victor, winning both the electoral and popular votes.

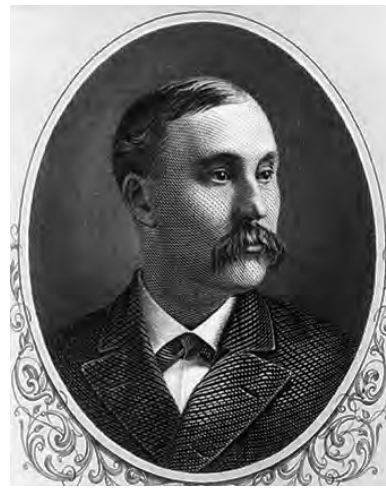
One of Garfield's pledges during the campaign was a reformation of the civil service in Washington, and even before his inauguration he made strides in that direction.

In January of 1881, Senator James G. Blaine quietly tipped off the president-elect that there was a corruption problem in one branch of the postal system. Blaine was an old Washington hand with impeccable sources, and he told Garfield that there was "a nest of unclean birds" in one bureau of the Post Office. He was referring to the Star Route contracts.

At that time most mail was carried to its destination by trains or ships, but there were still large numbers of places inaccessible to those means of mail transportation, particularly in the vast and expanding West. To service those areas, the Post Office awarded private contracts to various organizations which would carry the mail to these

more remote places in wagons or on horseback. These routes were known as "Star Routes" because the emblem of this type of mail transportation was a cluster of three stars—which clerks had begun to use as shorthand for the current postal motto "certainty, celerity, and security." By the 1880s the Post Office was awarding millions of dollars a year to various Star Route contractors.

The problem was that many of the routes were fraudulent and had been created by bribes and artifice. The trick was for a contractor to obtain a Star Route and then begin to increase the lengths and frequency of service. For instance, one contract for carrying the mail between Phoenix and Prescott in Arizona, a distance of 140 miles, was originally let for \$700, but a short while later additional services along the route raised the contract to over \$32,000. In actuality, many of these additional routes and services never existed, and some contractors were pocketing great sums of money.



*Thomas James*

To help him assess the situation, Garfield invited Thomas James, the respected postmaster of New York, to come to Washington for a discussion of the matter. James told the president-elect that, yes, he had heard of the problem. Garfield then asked him if he would join in attempting to stamp out this corruption by becoming Postmaster General. James, who had turned down the same job the previous year, felt he could not refuse this honest and earnest man, and he accepted.

Thomas James, 49, was the perfect man to clean up the scandal-ridden Post Office Department. A career civil servant, he had been postmaster of New York since 1873, and he had developed such an efficient system there that some European countries had sent delegations to study it. James, an insider, knew how the system should work: He assumed the office of Postmaster General in March, 1881 shortly after Garfield's inauguration, and his very first order of business was the Star Route problem.

With ruthless efficiency, Thomas James immediately began to clean up the problem. His first action was to fire Thomas Brady, who was the post office official in charge of awarding the Star Route contracts. Then James reviewed all Star Route contracts, canceling most of the add-on contracts where the main fraud against the post office had been committed.

He then instituted a system of close supervision of the Star Routes and the contracts for them. There was nothing quiet about Thomas James' vulture-like swoop on the Star Route system, and his activities were widely reported in the press during 1881. It was called the "Star Route Frauds," one more among many Washington scandals, but Thomas James received high marks in the press, and it was viewed as a triumph for the new Garfield administration which had pledged Washington reform.

Unfortunately, it was Garfield's only large triumph because on July 2, 1881, he was shot and seriously wounded in a Washington railway depot by one Charles Guiteau, an eccentric lawyer who had sought a civil service position in the Garfield administration but who had been turned down a number of times. Garfield, grievously wounded, lingered through the long hot summer of 1881, but he finally died on September 19, the

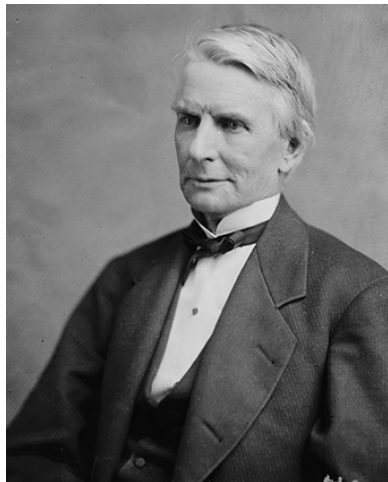
second U.S. president to be assassinated.

Ironically, Garfield may have achieved in death what he did not have a chance to do in his presidency; his assassination by a disappointed job-seeker shocked the nation and brought this whole problem into sharp focus, resulting two years later in the Pendleton Civil Service Act. This established the Civil Service Commission and provided for many open examinations for civil servants with jobs awarded to those making the highest grades.

Chester A. Arthur, 50, the incumbent vice president took the Presidential oath at his home in New York the day following Garfield's death. A lawyer, he had been the political party boss of the Republicans in New York, and he had been added to the ticket in 1880 to placate the eastern Republicans and to give balance to the ticket. Despite these unimpressive credentials, Arthur ran an efficient and honest administration, attempting to live up to the ideals which Garfield had stated. He pushed for Civil Service reform, and he pressed for indictments against the people Thomas James had uncovered in the Star Routes Frauds.

Thomas James felt that with the death of Garfield and his successful expose of the Star Route Frauds he had completed the task in Washington that Garfield had requested of him. Late in 1881 he resigned as Postmaster General, having served less than a year, and he retired permanently from public life.

In his place, Chester Arthur appointed the 65-year old Timothy Howe, a veteran U.S. Senator from Wisconsin, who during the next few years would be a vigorous Postmaster General in a time of fast-moving postal advances.



Timothy Howe

\*\*\*\*\*

During those early years of the decade the need for postage stamps was of course on-going, and the American Bank Note Company still had the printing contract. In fact, American would continue to have this contract until 1894 when the government began to print its own stamps.

There would be new designs and new stamps during the decade, but to supply the immediate need American Bank Note had to produce rather quickly yet more stamps of the same designs that had been produced during all of the 1870s. The problem was that those old plates were beginning to wear out and render poor impressions.

As a stop-gap measure in 1881 and 1882, American decided to do some repair work on the plates and dies used for making four of the most commonly used stamps: the 1¢, 3¢, 6¢, and 10¢, described as the "Re-engraved Issue of 1881-1882."

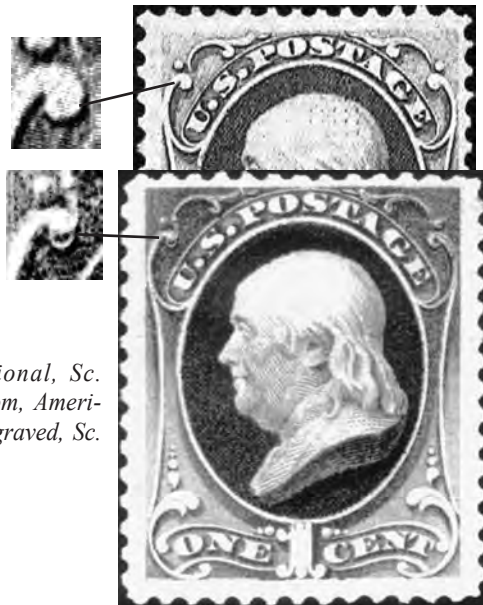
That term is not technically correct because part of the work on these stamps consisted of retouching the old dies, while part of it consisted of new engravings. Neither of these two processes improved the appearance of these stamps because the delicacy and clearness of the impression was diminished, and the impressions from the altered designs are somewhat heavy and uneven.

The stamps of the Re-engraved Issue of 1881-1882 are:

**One cent (Scott 206).** On the Benjamin Franklin stamp the vertical lines outside of the medallion were deepened to such an extent that they appear quite solid; and lines of shading were added inside the arabesques in the upper corners. This stamp was put into use in August of 1881. Overall, there were 3.3 billion of these 1¢ stamps produced.

On this 1¢ stamp there was yet another experiment in embossing on some of them as a hindrance to the re-use of stamps—the "Douglas Patent," which punched eight indentations in a circular formation on the stamp, similar to the cogwheel punch of some years earlier.

Black & white illustrations are from Mekeel's Reference Manual, Bank Notes, Part 2, See page 16, order form page 36.



Top, National, Sc. 134, bottom, American re-engraved, Sc. 206

There were only 10,000 of these punched stamps produced and they were sold mainly in the post office in Washington, D.C. This experiment was then discontinued, particularly since the use of machine canceling was coming into greater use in the 1880s, as we shall see. Obviously, the fact that there was such a short run of these 1881 Franklin 1¢ stamps with the Douglas Patent has made them a valuable collector's item today. (Right, a one cent with the punch configuration drawn in.)



**Three cent (Scott 207).** The workhorse green 3¢ Washington was changed by a shading line that surrounds the oval of the portrait, plus vertical lines that were added to the medallion. All of this shading makes the design a nearly solid color. These stamps were all produced from new plates—made with new transfer rolls that were created from a re-engraved secondary die.



Tight stamp, National, Sc. 136; left stamp, American, re-engraved, Sc. 207

From the edge of the panel to the outside of the stamp the number of vertical lines was reduced from four to three on the Re-engraved stamp.

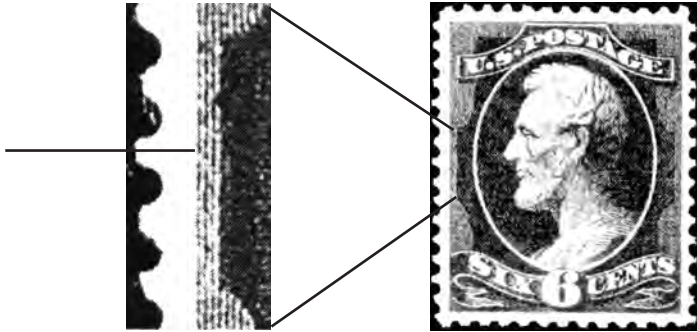
The stamp first appeared in July of 1881, and like the 1¢ Franklin, a limited amount of 10,000 of these were sold with the punched Douglas Patent process. These two punched stamps of 1881 are avidly-sought collector's items because they are not just experiments, but actually are used stamp varieties of a very limited quantity out of a mass general issue.

This 3¢ stamp was again produced in a vermilion color in 1887, using the re-engraved design of 1881. By that time it was no longer the

stamp of first class mail and it saw little use except in conjunction with other stamps, and on fourth class mail where the rate was 1¢ per ounce.

**Six cent (Scott 208).** This 6¢ Lincoln was issued in June of 1882. The horizontal lines of the panel were re-engraved, giving it a solid appearance, and the vertical lines of the background have also been re-engraved.

The simplest identification is by counting the vertical lines from the edge of the panel to the outside of the stamp. On Scott 208, shown, there are three; on the Nationals there are four.

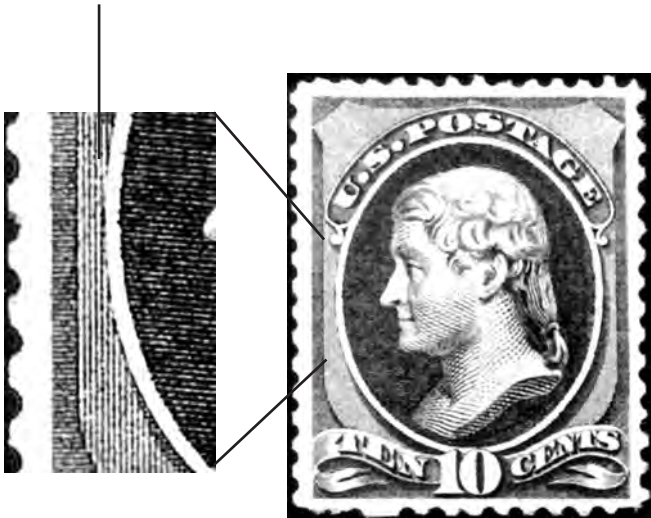


This stamp was probably produced by re-working the old dies and then producing a new transfer roll which was used to make new plates.

**Ten cent (Scott 209).** The 10¢ Jefferson was first issued in April of 1882, and it was produced in a wide range of shades of brown. This stamp used a re-engraved die from a transfer roll of the old National die, and it resulted in a number of changes, such as a new frame, a deepening of many lines, and a respacing. Jefferson's portrait was also slightly retouched.

The primary test for the Re-engraved 10¢ is to count the number of full lines between the left edge of the portrait oval and the left edge of the shield. There are four full vertical lines in this area (a fifth line being broken by the oval). The other 10¢ Bank Notes show five full lines.

The horizontal lines of the background also were strengthened.



(To Be Continued)



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