

Stamp Identification: **The 3¢ Pink of 1861**

Elliott Perry

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With this issue we inaugurate a new Stamp News Online feature, in the form of guides to help identify specific stamps or issues.

This article was published in STAMPS Magazine when color reproduction of U.S. stamps was forbidden. Even today, precise color reproduction on offset stock paper is not economically feasible. While an online publication is our best option, we still cannot be certain the colors shown here will be exact—only that the variations and relationships will support the point Elliott Perry was making.

By way of explanation, the current Scott catalogue numbers for the 3¢ stamps of 1861 are: Sc. 64, pink; Sc. 64a, pigeon blood pink; 64b, rose pink; 65, rose (including color varieties that are priced but not given a minor letter, not to mention shades that are not even listed). JFD.

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It may be claimed that one man's opinion is as good as another's, but my position on this stamp is not based on mere opinion. Here's the story. Way back in the old days a deep pink stamp was known and someone called it "pigeon-blood" long before my time. I have used that name but had nothing to do with selecting it. I must have seen it in print at least 85 years ago and have always believed it was old then. It sounds like that prolific user of euphemistic philatelic phrases such as "gem of purest ray serene"—the late B. L. Drew.

What color was that pink 3¢ stamp of olden days? The evidence shows definitely that it must have been, (1) distinctive, (2) appealing, (3) scarce to rare. Also there were other color variations which could be mistaken for it (by the name) by those who did not know what this particular color was.

All we have to do then, to find out what color a “pigeon-blood” pink was, is to find a stamp that will meet those requirements by fitting that description. Only one color variety will meet ALL of those requirements. That is the color which I maintain should be accepted as U.S. No. 64 [now Sc. 64a]. None of the other “early birds,” i.e., 3¢ stamps printed before a darker color sometimes called “carmine” appeared before the end of 1861, are distinctive enough, or appealing enough, or were known to be scarce enough to have been classed as “pigeon-blood” pink in the early days.

Perhaps, as has been suggested, this particular pink should be quoted at \$100 instead of \$20, but that is not my point. I am not considering stamp values and frankly admit that some of the other “early birds” may be considerably scarcer than the average good “pigeon-blood.” The point is that I have not selected a color arbitrarily as “pink,” but that anyone who studies the subject will reach the conclusion at which I have arrived, because no other conclusion will agree with the facts.

Probably many collectors and dealers have never seen a “pigeon blood.” The stamp which Stevenson called “catalog pink” and another he called his “best pink” I still have. Neither of them agree with my conclusion regarding No. 64. In order to supply collectors with a definite standard a color sample for “pigeon blood” pink was included in Pat Paragraphs No. 84, but I am obliged to say that this attempt to supplant theory with fact did not meet with universal approval. Perhaps it trod on tender corns although there was no such motive.

The Luff copy cancelled “Nashua” N.H.—Aug. 18, 1861 is, of course, an early bird, but if it belongs in the pigeon-blood group at all it is way out at what friend Beck calls “the limit of tolerance.” Years ago when I showed Mr. Luff a copy of my own he said, “Why, that’s a much better pink than mine” and I presented him with that copy. It was a real pigeon blood and quite different from his Nashua copy. I do not know where that old stamp of mine is now, nor of any pigeon-blood cancelled or used as early as August

18, 1861, although the Scott catalog still lists that date on No. 64. On one of Stanley Ashbrook's lists of early dates I believe the Nashua copy of Luff's appears as "rose pink."

Sometimes I am asked to supply a "rose pink" but have no idea what the Scott catalog listing of that color means. There seem to be at least half a dozen different early birds, some of which are more or less pinkish, and Stevenson's "pastel scarlet" also comes before December, 1861. I maintain that it is possible to say definitely that a stamp is or is not No. 64, but who knows what the Scott Co. sells for the "rose pink" that is listed in the Scott catalog? Is it the so-called "1863 pink" which comes in that year—certainly is not an early bird—but does somewhat resemble No. 64? Or is rose pink any early bird that is not No. 64? Frankly, I would like to know.

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[1941] EDITOR'S NOTE: The subject of the 3¢ pink has always been a controversial one. There are so many degrees of pink in these stamps that it is almost impossible to select one shade as a standard and say that this is *the* pink. Each stamp must necessarily stand on its own merits, and to anyone who has studied the stamps it is very clear that they fall into three general classifications: 1st, pigeon blood; 2nd, pink; 3rd, near-pink. In each classification there are variations, and the plan adopted by Stanley B. Ashbrook some years ago seems to be a step in the right direction. He takes all of the 3¢ stamps that he has and classifies them into the following six divisions:

1st, Deep pigeon blood. 2nd, Pale pigeon blood. 3rd, the real pink. 4th, the near pink. 5th, the rose pink (meaning it has more pink than rose). 6th, the pinkish rose (meaning it has more rose than pink). The stamps used in his chart are changed from time to time as new copies, more nearly fitting the definition, are secured. When a stamp is submitted for classification, it is a comparatively simple matter to compare it with the reference copies, and classify it as one of the six degrees of shade. It is quite possible that a stamp submitted may be a much deeper pigeon blood than even the finest in Mr. Ashbrook's collection,

or others may vary considerably, but the chart enables a comparative classification that is useful and sufficiently accurate for all practical purposes.

Attaching special values for certain shades in stamps is always a dangerous practice, for light, heat and chemicals can change almost any color and qualified chemists have stated that they can match almost any given color within a group of shades emanating from the same pigment.

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2011 EDITOR'S NOTE: As explained earlier, while Elliott Perry had in his mind's eye the stamps and shades about which he was writing, he could not picture them—nor can we as those specific examples are not available.

What follows (on page 5 so that they can all be displayed together) is not an attempt to identify the precise stamp(s) that match the shades. Instead, in an online search I attempted to find such stamps, only to confirm the point that there is a wide variety of shades that are identified under one specific color.

Scott 64, pink

(2012 SCV \$14,000 unused / \$1,000 used:



Scott 64a: pigeon blood pink

(2012 SCV \$50,000 unused / \$5,000 used:

Pigeon blood pink has been explained as having a bluish tint.



Scott 64b: rose pink

(2012 SCV \$600 unused / \$160 used:



Scott 65: rose

(2012 SCV \$125 unused / \$3 used:



The third stamp from the left is described as rose with a pinkish hue.

See page 6 for one final color ID consideration.

When I started reworking this article, my first question was “what is pigeon blood pink”.

Most likely that description must have been used by someone “way back in the old days”—as stated in Elliott Perry’s first paragraph—and we have to think that person



or persons had seen actual pigeon blood. Try as I might, I could not find much of an image in my internet searches. Here is the best I could find when I searched. I show it, while noting that I would not rely on it as a color guide.

I also discovered there is a species known as a bleeding heart pigeon, for its distinctive coloring, shown at right. Might that be the origin of “pigeon blood pink”?



No surprise, what I did find in my “pigeon blood pink” Google search was plenty of merchandise for sale—in this case, rubies. Again, it was difficult to find a reliable color ID for a “pigeon blood pink” ruby, this being the best. The area within the triangle would be their “truest” example of



the pigeon blood pink ruby color—and it is very different from the color identified as a pigeon blood pink stamp.

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Where does this leave us? When you have a stamp that might be a valuable shade—that is, anything but the 3¢ rose pink (Sc. 64b) or the 3¢ rose, Sc. 65, you would be well advised to submit it to an expertizing service. If nothing else, they will be able to match your stamp with reference copies that have been identified as a specific color. But as you can see on page 5, while technological progress has been made, color identification still is not an exact science. JFD.