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# *Stamp Identification:* **The New York Postmaster Provisional Initials**

John F. Dunn

*This article is part of our United States Reference Manual Back-of-Book pages for the New York Postmaster Provisionals (see page 7). In researching that project, we drew upon the resources of the American Philatelic Research Library. Also incorporated in this study were the findings of Philip H. Ward, Jr. (writing in Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News); Hugh J. Baker and David J. Baker (whose "U.S. Classics" columns first appeared in STAMPS magazine and are now found in Baker's U.S. Classics ('the Baker book') published by the U.S. Philatelic Classics Society; Paul MacGuffin (whose summary article appeared in the May 1936 American Philatelist); John N. Luff (The Postage Stamps of the United States, 19th Century, published in 1902); Harry M. Konwiser (STAMPS Magazine, circa 1949); and Sir N.E. Waterhouse ("The New York Postmaster's Provisional, 5 Cents, 1845", London Philatelist, February 1921).*

*Photos were found primarily in auction catalogs, including the October 12, 1989 Christie's auction of the Weill Brothers' Stock of Postmasters' Provisionals.*

\* \* \* \* \*

On July 15, 1845, the first Postmasters' Provisionals were issued in New York City.

Paul MacGuffin provided the finest introduction to the Provisionals, as follows:

"...The introduction of uniform rates of postage with the use of adhesive stamps in Europe, beginning with the famous 'Penny Black' of Great Britain in 1840, stimulated a strong public demand for similar postal reforms in the United States and this finally brought about the Act of Congress of March 3rd, 1845.... The Government considered postage stamps at this time but legislative action

was slow and ponderous...and it was left to the enterprise of local carriers and postmasters to lead the way with innovation.

“Adhesive stamps had already proven their usefulness in Europe and local letter carriers in the United States, beginning with ‘Greig’s (City Despatch) Post’ in January 1, 1842, adopted them and established their value in this country. Progressive postmasters in various cities quickly saw their value in both service and accounting and in 1845 the postmaster in New York City issued the first of the City stamps which were then rapidly adopted by other postmasters.”

Among the sources credited by MacGuffin was John N. Luff. In 1902, Luff quoted a New York Express, July 8, 1845, editorial, captioned “Free Stamped Envelopes,” as follows:

“When the bill for cheap postage was before Congress, it contained a clause authorizing the sale of stamps on the English plan. The provision was, however, stricken out, leaving the public only the old method of prepaying letters during the business hours of the post office.

“A suggestion was made to our new postmaster, Mr. Morris, that the public convenience would be very much promoted if he would sell envelopes which would pass free in his office. By this measure letters could be sent at any hour of the night to the post office, and the postage paid, where the writer desired it, by enclosing it in a free envelope.

“The postmaster proposed to sell stamps at five cents each, but this not having been sanctioned by Congress, we should think would not be the best way; and as the public convenience demands something of the kind, we are glad to learn that he has prepared envelopes of the kind referred to, some of which we have seen.”

Despite this editorial, there is no evidence that a New York Provisional envelope ever was issued, and the stamps are today recorded as having first been issued on July 15, 1845.

The Baker book fills in some of the events immediately



Sc. 9X1e, no initial



Earliest recorded use of a New York Postmaster's Provisional without signature, Sc. 9X1e, on a cover to Germany with a New York 5cts July 15, 1845 circular date stamp.

preceding the issuance of the N.Y. Provisional stamp:

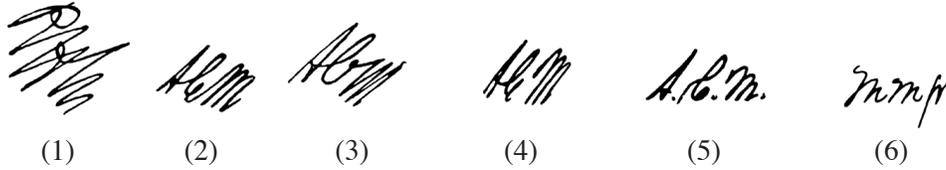
“...Robert Hunter Morris was appointed Postmaster of New York, May 21, 1845, by President Polk. At that time, the New York post office had just moved from the rotunda in the northeast corner of the City Hall Park to the former Dutch Reform Church building at Liberty and Cedar Streets. Mr. Morris quickly carried out his plan to issue an adhesive postage stamp, as the first stamps were available for sale July 14, less than two months after he became postmaster. The stamps were issued both at the general post office and the branch in the Merchants Exchange Building on Wall Street, the same building in which Rawdon, Wright & Hatch had their plant and printed them.”

MacGuffin differs on the date of availability, noting that “On July 12, 1845, Postmaster Morris wrote the postmasters at Boston, Philadelphia, Albany and Washington, that he had adopted a stamp which he sold at 5¢ and he enclosed a copy of the stamp...”

### **The Initials**

One of the distinctive features of the New York Postmaster Provisionals is the manner in which they were marked to prevent re-use in the mails.

Writing in *Mekeel's* (U.S. Notes and Comments, September 29, 1950), Philip H. Ward, Jr. states: “...From the dates of use we can see that the earlier sheets were sold



for the first two or three days without initials. The postmaster, himself, then started this initialing with his own 'R.H.M.'

"Postmaster Morris and his assistant A. C. Monson, must have been most careful with the distribution and use of these stamps for they not only initialed the stamps 'R.H.M.' or 'ACM' but they canceled and signed their stamps exceedingly well."

There are any number of studies of the various forms the initials took. Figures 1-6 on page 4 and reproduced below were taken from the catalog for the Ivy, Shreve & Mader 1992 auction of the Jeremiah Farrington N.Y. Postmaster Provisionals Collection. We have matched up these illustrations with one of the better descriptive texts we have found. It was written by Sir N.E. Waterhouse for the *London Philatelist*, February 1921, and follows.

"...The large majority of specimens are endorsed with the initials A.C.M. in red manuscript. These are the initials of Alonzo Castle Monson, brother-in-law and assistant, to Postmaster Morris, who instructed him to initial each stamp on the sheet before they were sold as a further safeguard against counterfeiting.

"Postmaster Morris himself signed some of the stamps with his own initials, R.H.M. He however apparently soon tired of the work and handed it on to his assistant, who in turn coerced his brother, Marciana Monson, and probably some of the other clerks at the New York post office, into the tedious job.



1



Sc. 9X1d

“Besides the few copies bearing the initials R.H.M., which are of great rarity, there appear to be at least four distinctive varieties of the initials A.C.M. They may conveniently be described as follows: With the letters all joined.

2

2

3

3



Sc. 9X1

This type may perhaps be further sub-divided into two classes: having a pronounced loop between the C & M (Fig. 2) and with little, if any, loop and usually the top strokes of the M sharp and pointed instead of somewhat curved (3); with the A and C joined, but the M separated (4); with all three letters separated (not shown); and all letters separated and a dot between each letter (5).

4

4



Sc. 9X1a

“Figure 1 [page 4] is the initialing of Postmaster Robert H. Morris (Sc. 9X1d); 2, 3 are attributed to Alonzo Castle Monson with ACM ini-

5

5



Sc. 9X1b

tials connected (Sc. 9X1); 4 also is Alonzo Castle Monson but with AC connected and M not connected (Sc. 9X1a); 5 is the work of Marcena Monson, Jr. with A.C.M. separated by periods (Sc. 9X1c).

[Not mentioned by Waterhouse, Figure 6 shows MMJr, another form of initialing by Marcena

MMJr

6



Sc. 9X1d

Monson (Sc. 9X1d). And as mentioned on page 3. Sc. 9X1e is the stamp without any initials. JFD.]

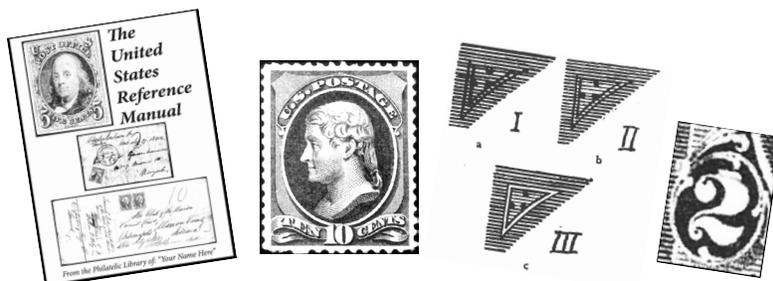
“...As to cancellations, most copies that I have seen either with or without initials are obliterated by pen usually in dark blue, but sometimes in red or black inks. Those cancelled by the red “circular,” “grid” and “Paid” hand-stamps are considerably scarcer. I have not yet seen a specimen hand-stamped in black.”

By far the scarcest of all the forms is “MM Jr.”, of which only four used copies are known. While the initial is not discernible in the photo shown here, this is the only full cover with “MM Jr.” initialing on the stamp.



Next scarcest is the rare “R.H.M.” initialing. According to Paul MacGuffin (*The American Philatelist*, May 1936), “It is believed that the Postmaster only initialed two sheets, one of which is initialed ‘R.H.M.’ from top to bottom of stamp in a slightly diagonal line. On the other sheet, the direction of the endorsement is reversed and read from bottom to top.”

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