

Stamp Identification: **Identifying the 3¢ Bank Notes**

(This study, from our United States Reference Manual, is based on an article by Charles C. Gill, M.D., from Stamps Magazine, July 17-24, 1937. See page 13 for more information on the United States Reference Manual.)

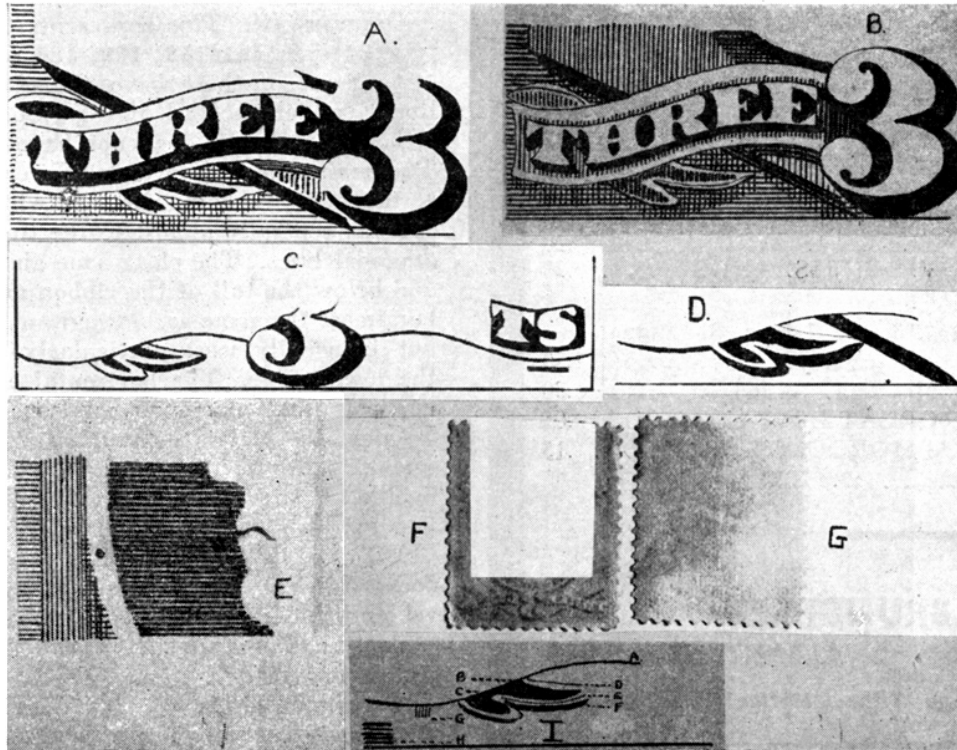


Diagram I—Showing A, B, C, D, E, F and G Classifications mentioned in this article.

The specialized catalog of United States stamps lists and describes seven main types of the 3¢ green, printed by the various Bank Note companies, between 1870 and 1882. The plates used in printing were of 200 subjects, twenty sidewise and ten endwise, with a top and bottom arrow between the 10th and 11th vertical rows. The sheets were cut into post office panes of 100 stamps, along the line of the arrows, with straight edges resulting on the right side of ten stamps and on the left side of ten stamps out of each 200.

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These seven main types are namely:

1. Scott #136, 1870-71, National Banknote Co., grilled, type of paper not mentioned.

2. #147, 1870-71, National Bank Note Co., no grill, type of paper not mentioned. (These two are presumably on the same type of paper, and from the same engraving, the only difference being in that a grill was supplied to the paper of the first and not to the second.)

3. #158, 1873, Continental Bank Note Co., no grill, type of paper not specified, except for a minor variety of ribbed paper, and a very rare variety with a grill. The tip of the ribbon is shaded. (Full details of the shading are given above).



Sc. 169

4. #169, 1875. Special printing, on hard white wove paper, without gum, from the same plate as that used for #158. These stamps were perforated but usually separated by cutting with a scissors.

5. #184, 1879, American Bank Note Co., the paper is listed as a soft porous paper. Some plates of the Continental Bank Note Co., were used by this company, and the same engraving used as with #158.

6. #194, 1880, special printing, on soft porous paper without gum. The same plate was used as with 3, 4 and 5 above.

The total number of #169 and #194 was 267 stamps sold to the public.

7. #207, 1882, type of paper not specified. This is from an entirely different engraving, differing from that used on #1 and 2 above, and having different secret marks from that used on 3, 4, 5 and 6.



Sc. 194

This summary may make it appear easy to place all of these stamps correctly, but one so frequently sees them misplaced, even by advanced collectors, that there must still be considerable confusion in the mind of the average phi-

latelist. Two of these seven main varieties can be excluded at the start, #169 and #194, both of the special printings, of which authentic copies are very rare.



Sc. 136

Number 136 has a readily distinguishing grill, which makes it easy to set aside, and #207 has the easily noted border around the head of Washington, as well as the horizontal dash under the word "CENTS," (arrow)



Sc. 207

and the special shading under the tail of the ribbon. This leaves, by elimination, three main and common varieties, that are more or less puzzling, to classify, #147, 158 and 184. The catalog tells nothing of the type of paper of the first two, but states that 184 is on a soft porous paper. This leads us to assume, and experience shows us to be correct, that #147 and 158 are on a relatively hard, non-porous paper. [The 2010 Specialized now states #147 is on white wove paper, thin to medium thick and #158 is on white wove, thin to thick paper. JFD.] To summarize, the main features of these three, which have no grills:

#147—no shading under the tail of the ribbon; hard, non-porous paper.

#158—shading present under the tail of the ribbon; hard, non-porous paper.

#184—shading as of 158; soft porous paper.

Number 136 and 147 are from one engraving; 158, 169, 184 and 194 are from a different engraving with secret marks in the shading; and 207 is from a still different engraving having additional secret marks.

This would still leave a relatively simple problem to correctly sort these three from a mixed lot, if the above classification could be strictly followed, but it cannot. There are some plates of #147 that can scarcely be told from #158, because of indistinctness in the engravings, or heavy cancellations, or other causes that partly obliterate or obscure

the fine details in the markings of the tail of the ribbon. One finds the paper of 147 quite constant as a hard, non-porous paper, but 158, while predominantly of this same type, has some paper that is a little thicker, softer and more porous.

This could still be readily told from 184, if all of its paper was constant, but it is not, as some is thick and some thin, and the thin type is only a little thicker and softer than the thick variety of paper of 158. In other words, some types of paper used on 158 and on 184 are neither hard nor soft, and shade into each other, so that satisfactory sorting is very disconcerting. One just has to draw his own conclusion as to where the dividing line will be, or accept someone else's word. This I know to be a fact, as I have recently sorted out about a thousand 3¢ green, which brings the total up to nearly 10,000 closely examined for paper differences, types, shades, cancellations and position marks. Most were easy to classify but a few were difficult, and to aid me in this study, diagrams of the secret marks in the shadings were made.

These drawings were made...to about ten times the original size....This clearly showed the differences in the three varieties of plates used in printing the 3¢ green.

Diagram I (page 1) shows in outline form some of the landmarks to be kept in mind.

A: the lower border of the ribbon on the left side.

B: upper and longer tail or tip of the ribbon.

C: lower and shorter tip of the ribbon.

D: lower line of cross-markings between A and B.

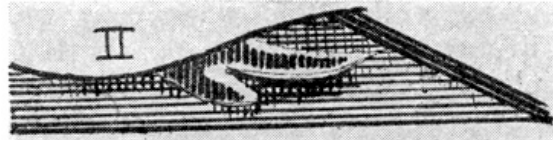
E: fine hair line between tail of ribbon and shaded line.

F: shaded line, also the upper border of cross-markings below the tail of the ribbon.

G: vertical cross-markings for shading purposes.

H: horizontal cross-markings.

Diagram II (page 5) shows the type of lines as found in #136 and 147. In this the vertical cross markings are rather prominent and there is a distinct clear zone above and below the upper tail of the ribbon, with line E show-



ing clearly. The clear space extends almost to the three diagonal lines.

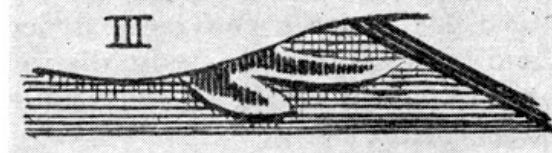


Diagram III is from another stamp, 147 type, but with slight differences, no fine line E below the tail of the ribbon, and a heavier line F below the tail of the ribbon, heavy enough so that it looks almost like the shaded line in diagram IV. The vertical cross markings are less prominent.

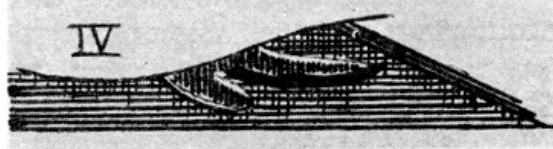


Diagram IV represents the type of lines in #158, 169, 184 and 194. Some of these have a distinct line E under the tail of the ribbon, although this one does not have it. The main and significant difference is the heavy shading line F, which extends centrally almost to the three diagonal lines. The clear zone above and below the tail of the ribbon may be almost the same as in diagram II, but is usually less, particularly on the lower edge. The horizontal and vertical cross markings are usually heavier, especially the vertical lines under the tip of the ribbon, which makes the shading look heavier than it actually is.



Diagram V, same as IV, except for still heavier markings of horizontal and vertical cross markings and with a smaller clear zone around the tail of the ribbon.

Diagram VI (page 6) is of #207. This does not correctly represent the horizontal and vertical cross markings, which



are indicated by the dotted area. These cross markings are so heavy and with such a small space between that they were too difficult to accurately draw and still give the correct impression. The line F of shading (see page 1) extends to the three diagonal lines, and there is no clear space around the tail of the ribbon. Between line A and D the cross markings do not occur as in the others; instead, there are two heavy short horizontal lines on a background of other horizontal lines of lesser density. This same configuration appears in the corresponding area on the right hand side of the figure "3," in the center of the stamp, which makes it different from the other two main types, in that the differential point is limited to the lower left part of the stamp.

Diagram A was made by retouching an enlarged photograph of #136...

Diagram B was made from a copy of A, with details filled in, as revealed when a clear-cut stamp was studied under a microscope, showing many more engraved lines than those photographed. Although this is more accurate than A, A gives a better impression of what is seen by the eye without the aid of a magnifying glass.

Diagram C is that of #207, inking in the enlarged photograph, showing the horizontal dash under TS of CENTS, and the casual impression of the shading of the ribbon on the left, more clearly depicted in Diagram VI.

Diagram D is from the inking in of an enlarged photograph of stamp #184, giving a rough impression of its appearance, more clearly shown in detail in diagrams IV and V.

Diagram E is from the middle of the left side of the stamp and shows the ink dot in the center of the colorless border around the head of Washington. This is from 136 and 147.

Photo F is of the back of a stamp, 147, showing how

the design comes through on the back of the paper. (1937 Editor's Note: Owing to the illustrations law, however, we are obliged to cover most of the design which shows through.)

Photo G is of stamp 184, thick soft porous paper, showing how the design does not come through, and giving some impression of the elevations and depressions on the paper.

Detailed Study of #147

Glancing at a page on which are mounted nearly a hundred copies of this stamp, the general impression of color is that the green tends to be of the lighter shades, although there are several of a deep, dark green. Some of the lighter greens appear to be almost "washed out" in appearance, quite pale, with a strong yellow component, but apparently not due to fading, as the paper is bright. Close examination of the pale colored stamps shows good inking in most of them. Inspection of the paper shows a preponderance of a whitish, hard, fine grain paper, thin, with the engraved design showing through on the back with a fair degree of detail.



The paper has horizontal markings from the exceedingly fine mesh of the paper-making machine, rows of nine markings with very shallow depressions between the ridges. Some of the paper has lines of even finer size, of such fineness as to be almost indistinguishable, with a color a little whiter than the average. Looking at the stamp from the inked side it appears hard and the design is clear-cut, while the perforation edges show very little fraying.

There is one other distinguishing mark, not present in all copies of this stamp, but found in over half of those examined. This is a small dot of color in the clear border encircling the head of Washington, occurring at the left, opposite the 5th line below the level of the lips. This is also just about at the upper end of the shaded circle on the left side. Although not constant on all stamps, it is in the same place in those in which it occurs, was found on both 136

and 147, and on only two copies of 158. One stamp, with a straight edge at the right and the upper arrow, shows this, as do one or two with straight edges at the right or left. Other than this there is no identifying its position on the plate, or identity of the plate. From someone who may have complete sheets or parts of sheets of these, further identification might be made as to which stamps in the plate have this mark. Diagram E (page 1) illustrates the relative position....

Detailed Study of 158

The color of the stamps is a deeper green than the general average of 147. There are fewer of the light green, and there is a type of green that is entirely different, giving an impression of a hard, metallic color, deep green, yet with a bit more yellow than some which have a larger proportion of blue. The shade with a bit more blue is a much softer color than this metallic variety.



The texture of the paper used on this stamp is more variable than that of 147. It tends to be predominantly a hard whitish thin paper, with fine horizontal markings, as the other, and some have such a smooth surface that the minute elevations and depressions appear not to exist. However, there are some on paper just a little thicker and softer, with larger ridges, elevations and depressions, that border on an actual soft porous variety. Yet the engraving shows on the reverse with a fair degree of clearness, and along the perforations there is a little more fraying of paper fibers and the impression is less clear and distinct. The shading under the upper tail of the ribbon is the main distinguishing feature, the secret mark introduced by the Continental Bank Note Company, as described in diagrams I, IV and V.

This one point must be kept clearly in mind, though, in deciding on the shading under the tail of the ribbon, that in #136 and 147 there may be a fairly heavy upper limit of the cross-markings, so heavy as to look like a shaded line,

if the inking happens to be a little heavy or the impression not distinct. If this happens, the accentuated markings do not extend to the right as far as the three diagonal lines.

In his book on United States stamps [The Postage Stamps of the United States], Luff tells of the contracts with the various printers. The Post Office Department awarded the new contract to the Continental Bank Note Company, to start May 1, 1873, for a period of four years, specifying that the same design was to be used. This put them at a disadvantage, for there was criticism of the quality of the product of the National Bank Note company, their predecessor, and if some of their product was rejected as being poor, the new company did not want to have to make it good. As a result, a secret mark was made on the original engraving of each denomination up to the 30¢ value [Today it is accepted that the secret marks were only made up to the 15¢ value. JFD.], which resulted in each stamp having this mark. This would permit the new company to identify their product, but the mark was very inconspicuous and not noted for years.

The first completed plate was ready three weeks before the contract was to be effective, and a plate of all varieties up to the 30¢ was ready, so that when printing actually started, they did not use any plates other than those of their own manufacture.

At the end of four years the contract was renewed and on February 4, 1879, this company merged with the American Bank Note Company. A short time before this the Continental changed the paper to a semi-soft, semi-porous variety and used it for a short time, printing several million stamps on it. Then an actual soft, porous paper was used and continued in use by the new combined firm. The only way the Continental can be told from the American on the soft, porous paper is from a sheet on which the imprint remains, otherwise, all of these are classified under the catalog number of #184. The American Bank Note Company made some plates of its own, but used many of those of the Continental and even a few of the National on the 30¢ and 90¢.

The small dot of color as described in Diagram E, has been found on only two of a group of 200 of #158. There is a dot present in about half of these, but it is out in the vertical lines, varying from the 5th to the 9th line from the left, but at the same level as the dot in diagram E. Again, having only single copies, with nothing to denote their position in the original plates, it is impossible to tell its significance or its constancy. Cancellations consist more of the town and dated postmarks, with fancy cork designs very prevalent, with frequent blue-ink markings. Varieties of circles occur, single and in concentric series.

Detailed Study of #184

The average run of color of a page on which 200 of these are mounted, is of a dark green, with very few pale shades. Some paper appears to have a washing of pale green color. There are only one or two of the metallic type of green color seen on #158.



The paper of this stamp is soft and porous, not clear white like the others, but with a cream or straw color, and the design is not sharp and clear cut as on #158. It gives the same impression of clearness as the printed advertisements on blotting paper, and from the back the design does not show through, or has only a faint suggestion. In flipping the paper with the finger some of it makes a sharp crackle, like 158 or 147, but most of it has a decidedly softer sound. There are horizontal ridges on the paper with elevations and depressions, and among the perforations there is quite a bit of fraying of paper fibers. For full thickness soft paper there should be no trouble at all in telling it from thin hard paper, if one keeps in mind the difference between newspaper or mimeograph paper, and a good grade of hard bond typing paper. The difficulty is in telling the varieties of this from the varieties of 158, and apparently most of the variety belong to 158. The small dot of color as shown in diagram E was not found in any of these, and there were very few with a dot as found on 158. The shading of the under part of the upper tail of the

ribbon is the same as on 158, but it may appear a little heavier due to the softness of the impression....

Detailed Study of #207

The general color tone is of a green ink with a distinct predominance of blue, with relatively few pale colors. There is less distinctness of the design and the engraved background appears in some to be almost a solid color rather than lined.



The paper is soft and porous, but less so than on 184, and is of a little whiter color. On most of them the design is seen from the back of the stamp with only slight clarity, yet enough to tell that it is a 3¢ green. This does not show as clearly as 147 on the back. The secret marks are very distinct, the shaded border, outside the clear zone surrounding the head of Washington, is only half the width of that in the others. There is a horizontal dash as shown in Diagram C, and shading and additional lines as in diagram VI, including the small area above the tail of the ribbon. The dot of color as shown in diagram E does not occur in any of the 200 copies before me, and no other dots as found on 158 at the same level, although there are occasional localized increases in the thickness of one of the vertical lines, but this appears to be accidental, infrequent and not at all constant in relative position.

The 3¢ greens were printed on plates with the following numbers:

National Bank Note Company, 26 plates: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 25, 29 31, 32, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 54, 55.

Continental Bank Note Company 112 plates: 1, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 135, 136, 138, 139 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 231, 232, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264,

265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279 280, 281, 282, 283, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 309, 310.

American Bank Note Company, 26 plates: 311, 312, 321, 322, 323, 324, 329, 330, 334, 335, 340, 341, 341A, 342, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 350A, 351, 352, 357, 358.

Re-engraved by the American Bank Note Company, 34 plates: 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 395, 396, 397, 398, 408, 409, 410, 411, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421.

3¢ Vermillion. Plate number 421 only.

(Note: This table is taken from John N. Luff's book, *The Postage Stamps of the United States*, published by Scott Stamp & Coin Co.)

Stanley Gibbons booklet, on the Bank Note issues, states that the secret marks were not discovered until 20 years after the stamps were issued. At that late date most of them were no longer on sale and procuring of mint sheets not so easy. The following totals were given of the four issues:

#136 and 147, 1,250,000,000;

#158, 2,610,000,000;

#184, 1,335,000,000;

#207, 1,475,000,000;

This large number issued explains the very large stocks of used copies among the old collectors and dealers.

See page 13 for information on the United States Reference Manual



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