

Chapter X

The Five Cent Stamp of 1856

(Scott #12) Draft by Richard Frajola, Feb 2012

The 5-cent Jefferson stamp of 1856 is one of the stepchildren of the United States imperforate classic issues as it was not issued to prepay a specific postal rate. The Act of March 12, 1855 (see page xxx) required the prepayment of postage on letter mail commencing April 1, 1855, and prepayment with postage stamps, or stamped envelopes, commencing January 1, 1856. A 10-cent denomination was added to the previously issued 1-cent, 3-cent and 12-cent stamp series of 1851 to facilitate prepayment of the new rate for letters carried over 3,000 miles. However, there was no compelling reason for the issuance in 1856 of the 5-cent stamp. Before looking into why the stamp was issued, an examination of when the stamp was issued might help put the matter in perspective.

When was the 5-Cent Stamp Issued?

On October 19, 1855 the Philadelphia printers, Toppan Carpenter & Company, forwarded impressions of a new 5-cent Thomas Jefferson design stamp to the Third Assistant Postmaster General John Marron for approval. On October 24, 1855 Marron's return letter ordered the printing of 600,000 stamps. Although the printing was likely completed before January 1, 1856, the earliest reported use of the stamp on cover is not until March 24, 1856.

While individual postmasters were usually informed in advance about the release of new stamps, no advance announcement is known for this denomination. Only after learning of the availability of the new stamps could postmasters place an order to the Third Assistant Postmaster General. After processing in Washington, the order was then transmitted to Jesse Johnson, the stamp agent in Philadelphia, for fulfillment. The stamp agent maintained a stock of the current stamps that were delivered to him directly from the printer, who was also located in Philadelphia. As a result, there was certainly a delay between the delivery of the 5-cent stamps to the stamp agent and their delivery to the individual postmasters.

Although it is certainly possible that the 5-cent stamps were delivered to the stamp agent at the beginning of January 1856, it also seems probable that they were not available at post offices until March. The pattern of early uses of the stamp on cover seems to support the notion that distribution was not immediate. The March 24, 1856 earliest-reported use is from Philadelphia. Despite the fact that New Orleans was by far the largest user of the stamp, the earliest known use from New Orleans is not until July 1856. This slow distribution and use of the 5-cent stamp confirms the fact that there was no immediate or pressing reason for the issuance of the stamp.

Why was the 5-Cent Jefferson Issued?

The earliest reported mention of the 5-cent stamp in the press is found in the (New Hampshire) *Farmer's Cabinet* of May 1, 1856. The notice states that: "A neat specimen of the five cents stamps, for postage on foreign letters, has recently been issued.

They bear the likeness of Jefferson ...” This statement is confirmed by the actual uses of the stamp on covers. Although some early authors thought the stamp was issued to pay the five cent registration fee that was introduced with the Act of 1855, such is not the case. Postal fees, including the new registry fee, were always to be paid in cash and were accounted for as cash by the postmasters.

Another reason that has been put forth for the issuance of the 5-cent denomination is that the stamp was issued to prepay the 5-cent open mail rate for mails carried by British packets. This service was most often employed for carriage of mail to France as well as other destinations principally served by British steamers at this time. The most plausible reason for the issuance of a 5-cent stamp is that the Post Office Department felt a desire to have a stamp between the 3-cent and 10-cent denominations that would serve multiple uses. The denomination could be used for the payment of assorted multiple domestic rates as well as for foreign rates including the 5-cent open mail rate.

The Stamp Production of the 5-Cent Jefferson

Unfortunately little is known about the designer of the 5-cent stamp, and no design essays survive. As Toppan Carpenter also was engaged in the printing for the 10-cent stamp issued in 1855, it is possible that the “E Pitcher” which appears in pencil on two surviving essays for the 10-cent stamp represents the name of the designer of the 5-cent stamp as well.

After the Jefferson design for the 5-cent stamp was approved by the Post Office Department, the next step was the engraving of a master die. One of the two surviving master die proofs in black, the only example that shows the full extent of die sinkage (47mm by 73mm), is shown in Figure X-1. This proof is endorsed in pencil with a “91” at lower left. This notation represents the die number assigned by the Treasury Department.



Figure X-1. A die proof in black on india paper, with original card backing and penciled “91” die number. The image at right is an enlargement to show details.

Note in the enlargement in Figure X-1 that the full design as shown in the master die is not identical to any of the issued stamps. In addition to the guide lines that are

present on the impressions from the master die, the colorless oval surrounding the portrait shows impingements at top left, top right and bottom right that were largely removed from the reliefs on the transfer roll. As a result, only small remnants of the impingements are readily apparent on the issued stamps.

The Plate Production

After the master die was approved, the next production step was the making of the plates required to print the stamps. All the Toppan Carpenter stamp plates had 200 stamps, arranged in two side-by-side panes of 100, each pane being ten by ten stamps. After all 200 positions were entered into the soft steel plate, a vertical center line was scribed between the two panes, and the imprints were added at the sides. The imprint included the “Toppan, Carpenter, Casilear & Co. BANK NOTE ENGRAVERS, Phila., New York, Boston & Cincinnati” text and the plate “No. 1” below it.

Although no examples are known of the imperforate 5-cent showing the plate number, there is a marginal strip of the perforated stamps which shows the actual plate number "1." After the imprints were added, and some plate finishing steps were completed, the plate was ready for use.

Four reliefs were used to produce the 5-cent stamp plate. However, the positive identification of reliefs for individual stamps is difficult or impossible if a cancel interferes with distinguishing characteristics, or if the stamp was not clearly printed.

The 5-cent stamps were produced in a single production run from a single plate (plate number 1). Examples of the imperforate 5-cent stamp show very little discernable difference in color or shade beyond that which can be attributed to preservation. In fact, the uniformity in color is convincing when only unused and on cover examples are compared.

The Issued Stamps

It is estimated that fewer than 50 examples of the 5-cent imperforate stamps survive in unused condition. The largest reported unused multiple, shown in Figure X-2, is the only block of four in private hands and is currently in the William Gross collection. This block previously graced the collections of several notable philatelists including Henry Duveen, Arthur Ward, Wharton Sinkler, Ryohei Ishikawa and Frederick Mayer.



Figure X-2. The largest reported unused multiple of the 5-cent imperforate stamp.

Used Multiples

The largest used block remaining intact is a horizontal block of six on a letter to Germany. That block is the largest intact multiple, in any form, of the imperforate 5-cent stamp. Unfortunately, an irregular block of eleven with manuscript cancels that previously existed, and was illustrated in the previous edition of Brookman, was cut apart in the 1970s. Frederick Mayer managed to re-unite the two severed blocks of four and the reconstruction is shown in Figure X-3.



Figure X-3. Two rejoined blocks of four that were originally part of a larger multiple.

Printing Varieties

Two recognized constant varieties are found on the imperforate 5-cent stamp. One is quite prominent and the other is minor. These varieties occur on every stamp printed from the position noted. They are called “constant” varieties to differentiate them from “non-constant” varieties that occur only on a single sheet of stamps. Stamps printed from position 23R show a major defect, which has been termed a “damaged transfer,” at the right of the portrait. The cause of this defect is unknown. An enlarged image is shown in Figure X-4. This variety has been determined to be from position 23R as proved by

examination of perforated multiples which were printed from the same plate.



Figure X-4. Enlargement of central area of stamp showing damaged transfer variety (position 23R).

The second constant variety found on the 5-cent stamp is the partial double transfer found at sheet position 40R. An enlargement showing the affected area is illustrated in Figure X-5. The stamp is from the strip of four, positions 37-40R, and bears a partial imprint. This faint double transfer is most noticeable in the “N” of “CENTS” and shows as an additional diagonal line.



Figure X-5. Enlargement of base of stamp showing double transfer in “CENTS” (position 40R).

The 5-Cent Used on Cover

Because the 5-cent imperforate was only in use for about a year and a half and saw minimal use in domestic mail, uses on cover are relatively rare. It is estimated that fewer than 1,000 covers exist. Uses are reported to fewer than 30 countries including the following: France, Canada, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Tuscany, Sardinia, Bavaria, Hanover, Prussia, Saxony, Württemberg, Hesse-Kassel, Bremen, Hamburg, Switzerland, China, India, Great Britain, Greece, Belgium, Bermuda, Cape Verde, Cuba, Denmark, Austria, Java, and Mexico.

The vast majority of those uses are single frankings used to prepay the 5-cent open mail rate by British service to foreign destinations. The 5-cent postage prepaid only the United States inland charges for a letter to one-half ounce, plus an allowance for delivery to the British ships that departed from Boston or New York. The additional postal charges for ocean carriage by British ships to Great Britain, transit charges across Great Britain, and additional postal charges beyond to destination were collected from the recipient.

A typical example of the 5-cent used to prepay the open mail rate to France is shown in Figure X-6. This cover, sent in the first month of use of the stamp, was prepaid in New Bedford, Massachusetts on March 31, 1856. The five cents prepaid the United States inland postage component of the open mail rate, as established by the United States-Great Britain postal treaty; the balance was collected from the addressee. It will be discussed in detail as a typical example.

After carriage from New Bedford to New York to catch the next sailing of the British Cunard Line steamer it was marked with a red New York British packet exchange datestamp of April 2. These exchange markings generally were dated for the departure date of the steamer and struck in red ink for prepaid letters. The cover was placed in a closed bag for France and carried by the Cunard Line steamer *Persia*, which departed New York on that date and arrived at Liverpool April 12. It arrived at Calais, France, April 14 and bears an “ETATS-UNIS PAQ. BRIT. A. CALAIS I” entry datestamp. This datestamp signifies that the cover was received from the United States (ETATS-UNIS) and was carried by a British packet (PAQ. BRIT.) to Liverpool and then entered French mails through Calais (CALAIS). It was processed on the railway cars (A = ambulant). The final letter in the postmark is a clerk designation. On a single rate cover such as this, less than 7.5 grams in weight, 13 decimes postage was collected from recipient in France as shown by the “13” handstamp (a combination of sea postage, British transit and French inland postage).



Figure X-6. This cover shows the 5-cent British open mail rate to Paris, France. It was sent March 31, 1856, from New Bedford, Massachusetts.

The cover shown in Figure X-7 is a stunning combination of visual beauty and postal history interest rarely found in a postal artifact of this vintage. It is a letter from New Orleans to France that was prepaid with a bottom right corner margin horizontal pair of the 5-cent stamp. The double rate letter was carried on the last steamer leaving the United States prior to the change in mail handling procedures that marked the commencement of the “Three Months Period” in January 1857. The cover was handstamped in error in France for a single rate of 13 decimes due which was corrected

in manuscript to 26 decimes (approximately 50 cents), the amount due for a letter weighing between 7.5 and 15 grams.



Figure X-7. The 5-cent open mail rate to Paris is prepaid with a 5-cent stamp on this cover sent September 14, 1856, from New Orleans.

A similar open mail service to destinations beyond Great Britain but utilizing the less reliable sailings of American packets was also available. This 21-cent open mail by American packets of the Collins Line from New York was infrequently used.

An example of such a use, from the same correspondence to France as the cover in Figure X-6, is shown in Figure X-8. The amount prepaid the United States inland postage as well as the sea carriage leaving only the British transit and French inland charges to be collected from recipient. The exchange marking shows American Packet abbreviation at foot and was carried by a Collins Line steamer. The total amount of postage due was 8 decimes as designated on the cover by handstamp.



Figure X-8. Cover showing the 21-cent open mail rate by an American packet to Paris, France. The cover is prepaid with a 5-cent stamp, two copies of the 3-cent 1851 issue and a 10-cent 1855 issue, type II. It was sent March 27, 1856, from New Bedford, Massachusetts.

During the period before March 31, 1857 there was also a 20-cent rate to France for carriage by American packets of the Havre Line operating direct between New York and Le Havre. Many senders prepaid 21 cents so their letters could be carried in the open mail by the Collins Line or the Havre Line, whichever had the earlier departure. In fact, many of the covers that were prepaid 21 cents were actually carried by the Havre Line. A rare exception, correctly prepaid 20 cents for Havre Line service, is the cover shown in Figure X-9. Notice that the red French entry postmark says “Le Havre” at foot. Upon arrival in Le Havre, the letters were treated as equivalent to letters received from private ships. The ship letter rate for letters directed beyond the port of Le Havre was 6 decimes per 7.5 grams and the postage due charge of that amount is shown on the cover.



Figure X-9. The 20-cent direct mail rate, by American packet, to Pontay, France, is correctly prepaid here with strip of three and a single of the 5-cent stamp. The cover originated November 8, 1856, in New Orleans.

The so-called “Three Months Period” began when the Anglo-French convention became effective on January 1, 1857. This agreement changed the accounting procedures for mails between Great Britain and France, including mails transiting England. A variety of interesting bulk mail accountancy markings were used during this period that ended when a postal convention between the United States and France became effective on April 1, 1857.

An April 1857 convention between the United States and France ended the “Three Months Period” and established a uniform postal rate of 15 cents per quarter-ounce for mail sent from the United States to France. This rate was a completely prepaid from the United States to any destination in France or Algeria. It should also be noted that the 5-cent imperforate stamps were replaced by the 5-cent perforated issue very shortly after the treaty became effective. As a result this 15 cent treaty rate prepaid by the imperforate issue is very scarce.

An example of such a use is the letter exchanged through the Boston office shown in Figure X-10. It is a single weight letter that originated at New Orleans on June 23, 1857. This letter was processed at the Boston exchange office for carriage on the Cunard Line steamer *Europa* that departed on July 1. Note that no postage due was accessed.



Figure X-10. This cover with the 15-cent convention rate sent via British packet to Brest is prepaid with a strip of three of the 5-cent, used June 23, 1857, from New Orleans.

Figure X-11 shows an unexpected rarity to a common destination of the era. It is the only known full cover with the 5-cent imperforate stamp used to Great Britain. This may be partially due to the fact that the larger offices that would have received the 5-cent stamps also would have received supplies of the 12-cent stamps that would be more convenient to use for the 24-cent rate. This cover originated in Albany, New York on April 9, 1857 and is addressed to Alex Chivas at Aberdeen, Scotland. The 24-cent U.S. - Great Britain treaty rate was prepaid using two large-margined pairs of the 5-cent stamp and singles of the 1-cent and 3-cent 1851 issue. The cover departed New York on April 11 on the steamship *Alps*, operating under an American mail contract for this sailing. The cover arrived at Liverpool on April 24 and received the "America Paid Liverpool" datestamp and was marked with a red "3 cents" credit to England for its portion of the postage.



Figure X-11. On this cover the 24-cent rate to Aberdeen, Scotland, is prepaid by two pairs of the 5-cent stamp, a 1-cent 1851 issue, type IV, and a single 3-cent 1851 issue. The cover originated at Albany, New York, April 9, 1857.

Domestic uses of the 5-cent stamp are relatively uncommon. There are several known covers with pairs used to pay the 10 cent rate for a letter sent over 3,000 miles. Also, a few covers are known paying multiples of the 3 cent letter rate.

One of the most unusual domestic use covers is the eight-times letter-rate use shown in Figure X-12. It is not the typical long envelope usually associated with multiple-rate usages and likely contained daguerreotypes. These were photographs on silvered copper plates and had considerable weight for their size. Section No. 15 of the September 1854 instructions issued by Postmaster General James Campbell states: "Daguerreotypes when sent in the mail should be rated and charged with letter postage by weight." However, few covers that may have contained daguerreotypes have survived.



Figure 4-9. The 24-cent octuple rate on this cover is prepaid with four copies of the 5-cent stamp in combination with a 1-cent 1857 issue, type II, and a 3-cent 1857 issue, used March 25, 1858, from Philadelphia to New York City.

Summary

Essays: None known

Proofs: Master die proof in black on india (2 known), in orange brown on india (1 known), in red brown on wove for the 1902 "Roosevelt" albums (85 printed), in red brown on mesh wove paper for 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition (2 reported, toned paper)

Plate Proofs: sharp impression in black on stamp-like paper with manuscript black cross-hatching (2 known, one with manuscript cancel lightened)

Trail Color Plate Proofs: mottled impression on stamp-like paper. Six colors exist in multiple examples (red brown, pale brown, rose brown, olive green, olive bistre and orange) while only example is known in black. Beware of the trail color proof in red brown being offered as an original, unused, issued stamp.

Shades: Red Brown only (from a single printing)

Varieties: Defective transfer (position 23R) and double transfer (position 40R)

Cancel colors: Black, red, magenta (Mobile, Alabama), blue

Cancel types: Steamship, paid, numerals, foreign transits, Wells Fargo Express, Railway Route Agent, Waterway Route Agent, year dated

Quantity issued: unknown (600,000 total printed, a portion of which were perforated)

Bibliography

Frajola, Richard C., Mayer, Frederick R. *The United States Five Cent Stamp of 1856*. New York: Collectors Club, 2005

Hill, Henry W. *The United States Five Cent Stamps of 1856-1861*. n.p.: Henry Hill. 1955