

Fiscal History of the U.S. \$15 Mortgage Stamp, 1862–1872

Purpose. This exhibit illustrates and explains the range of on-document usages of the U.S. \$15 Mortgage revenue stamp.

Apart from the bicolored \$200, the large size and color variations of the \$15 Mortgage make it the most distinctive of the First Issues. At the same time it was one of the least used. Only 18,358 were sold over the decade of broad Civil War era stamp taxes, 1862–1872, and \$15 was the only First Issue denomination not included in the Second Issues. Today only about twenty have been recorded on document. Remarkably, these few exhibit a diversity unique among the high-denomination First Issues.

Exhibit Plan

1. Imperforate

- 1.1 1862 Mortgage \$15 rate
- 1.2 Silver City, Nevada
- 1.3 Portland, Oregon

2. Perforated, Dark Blue

- 2.1 \$15 Plate Number
- 2.2 Alabama use
- 2.3 With Nevada \$10, \$20

3. \$15 Milky Blue

- 3.1 Combination with Dark Blue!
- 3.2 Milky Blue subshade

4. \$15 Ultramarine

- 4.1 Philippines deed
- 4.2 \$400,000 note
- 4.3 Ultramarine pair

Imperforates Sent West: 1863 Shipment to San Francisco and Portland

In January 1863 the Treasury Dept. made its first shipment of revenue stamps to the West, sending \$750,000 in stamps to San Francisco, of which \$250,000 were transshipped to Portland, Oregon.

Just a month earlier, on December 25, 1862, the government had rescinded the requirement for mandatory matching usage of revenue stamps — Agreement stamps on agreements, Bank Check stamps on checks, and so on. Delays in stamp production had caused the system to collapse under its own weight. As an emergency measure stamps had been delivered with perforation “unfinished,” but to no avail.

Now the detritus of that failed experiment was sent West, a treasure trove of imperforates and part perforates in a dazzling variety and quantity. Dollar-value imperforates were used on Western deeds well into the mid-1860s.

Shown below are \$15 Mortgage imperforates from both San Francisco and Portland branches of this shipment.

\$750K

\$500K S.F.

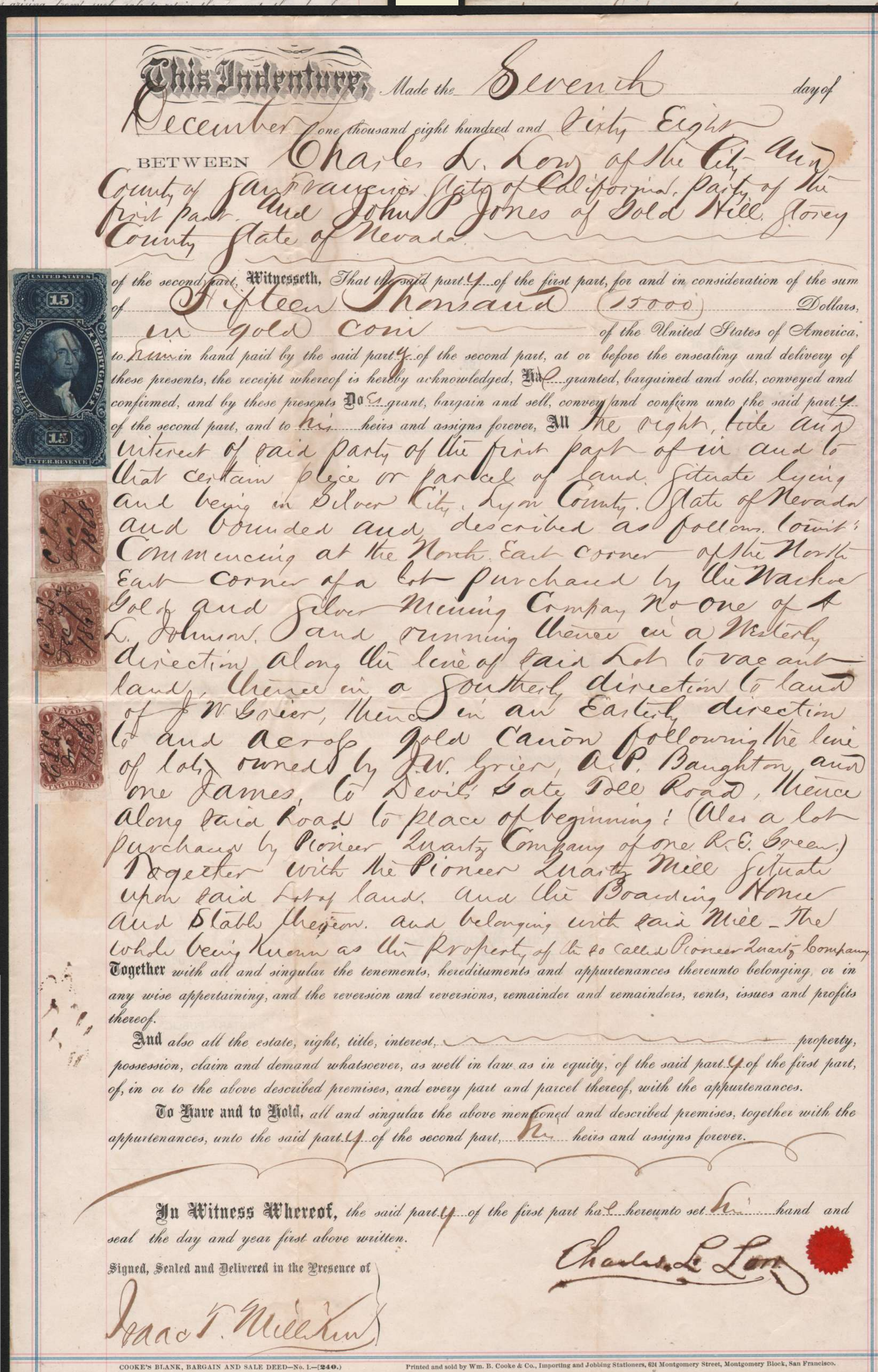
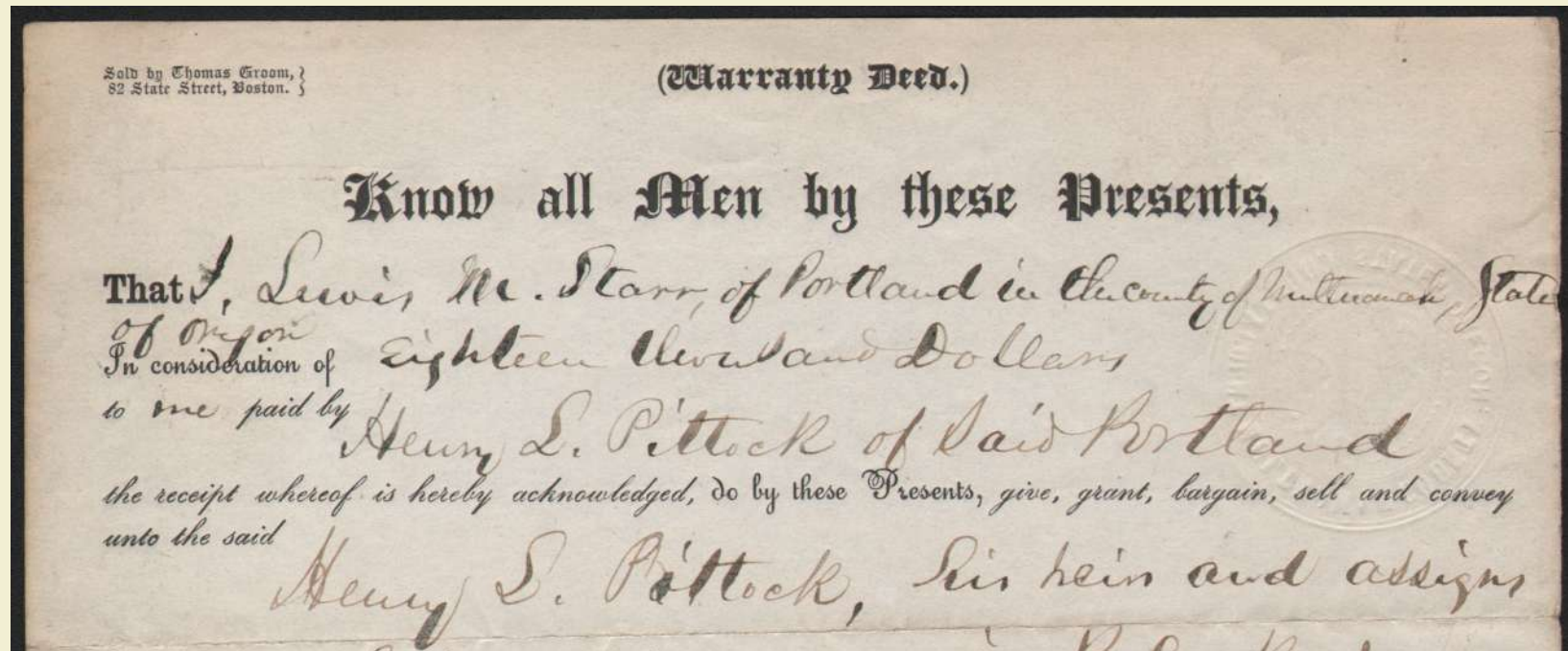
\$250K Portland

1.1 Unique \$15 EMU

1859 mortgage for \$17,006, recorded February 1863, when it was stamped with matching \$15 Mortgage imperforate

Sole recorded \$15 EMU (Early Matching Usage); sole recorded example of \$15 Mortgage rate

The \$15 Mortgage tax was rescinded just ten weeks after the matching \$15 stamp was first delivered!



with the privileges and appurtenances heirs and assigns,

for my self, and my heirs, lawfully seized in fee of the

and Henry S. Pittock with, and my heirs, to the said Henry S. Pittock, claims and demands of all persons. Starr,

day of

Mr. Starr

1.3 \$15 Imperforate, Oregon Use
1866 deed to property in Portland, Oregon, amount \$18,000, tax \$18, stamped with \$15 Mortgage and \$3 Manifest imperforates

Each recorded on only five documents

Both stamps from the huge initial shipment sent to Portland in 1863



The unforgettable Devil's Gate in Gold Canyon enroute to Virginia City, with strategically placed toll gate

1.2 \$15 Imperforate plus Nevada \$5

1868 deed to Pioneer Quartz Mill, Devil's Gate Toll Road, Silver City, Nevada amount \$15,000, taxed by both U.S. and Nevada at \$15 paid by \$15 Mortgage imperforate plus Nevada \$5 (x3)

\$15 Mortgage imperforate recorded on only five documents

Nevada \$5 recorded on twelve documents

Seven Silver City documents recorded bearing Nevada stamps

The \$15 was from the huge initial shipment sent to San Francisco in 1863

The buyer, John P. Jones, became five-time U.S. Senator from Nevada, prominent authority on mining in the Senate; instrumental in development of Panamint mining region in Southern California, which spurred growth of Los Angeles; founded city of Santa Monica. Ex-“Newlands Find.”

2. Perforated \$15 Mortgage, Dark Blue

2.1 The \$15 Plate Number

1867 deed to property in New York City, amount \$20,000, tax \$20, paid by \$15 Mortgage & \$5 Conveyance

\$15 with selva showing partial imprint of printers Butler and Carpenter of Philadelphia plus "Plate No. 150[0]"

Only a handful of First Issue plate numbers have been recorded on document, the others all small denominations, making this a spectacular exception.

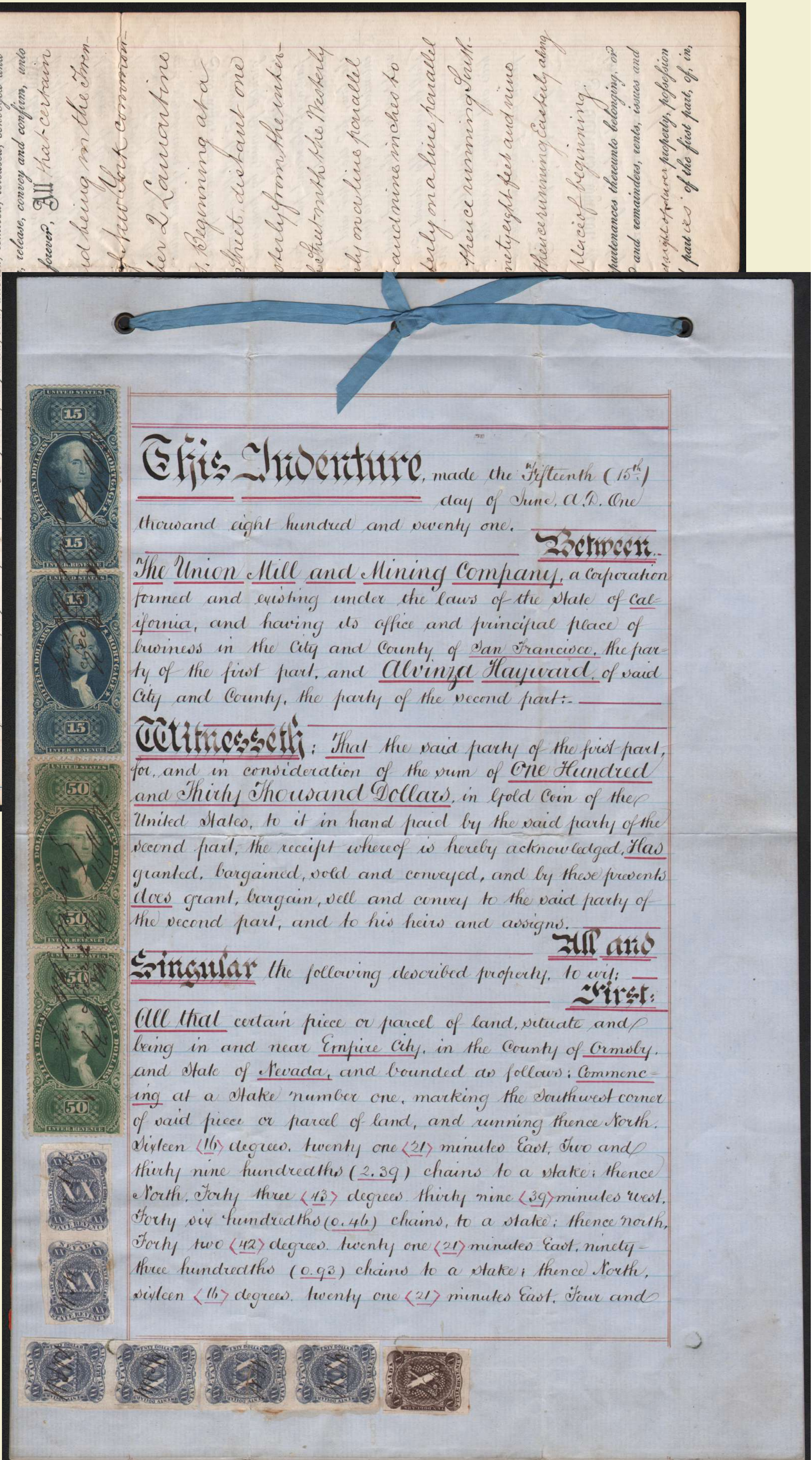
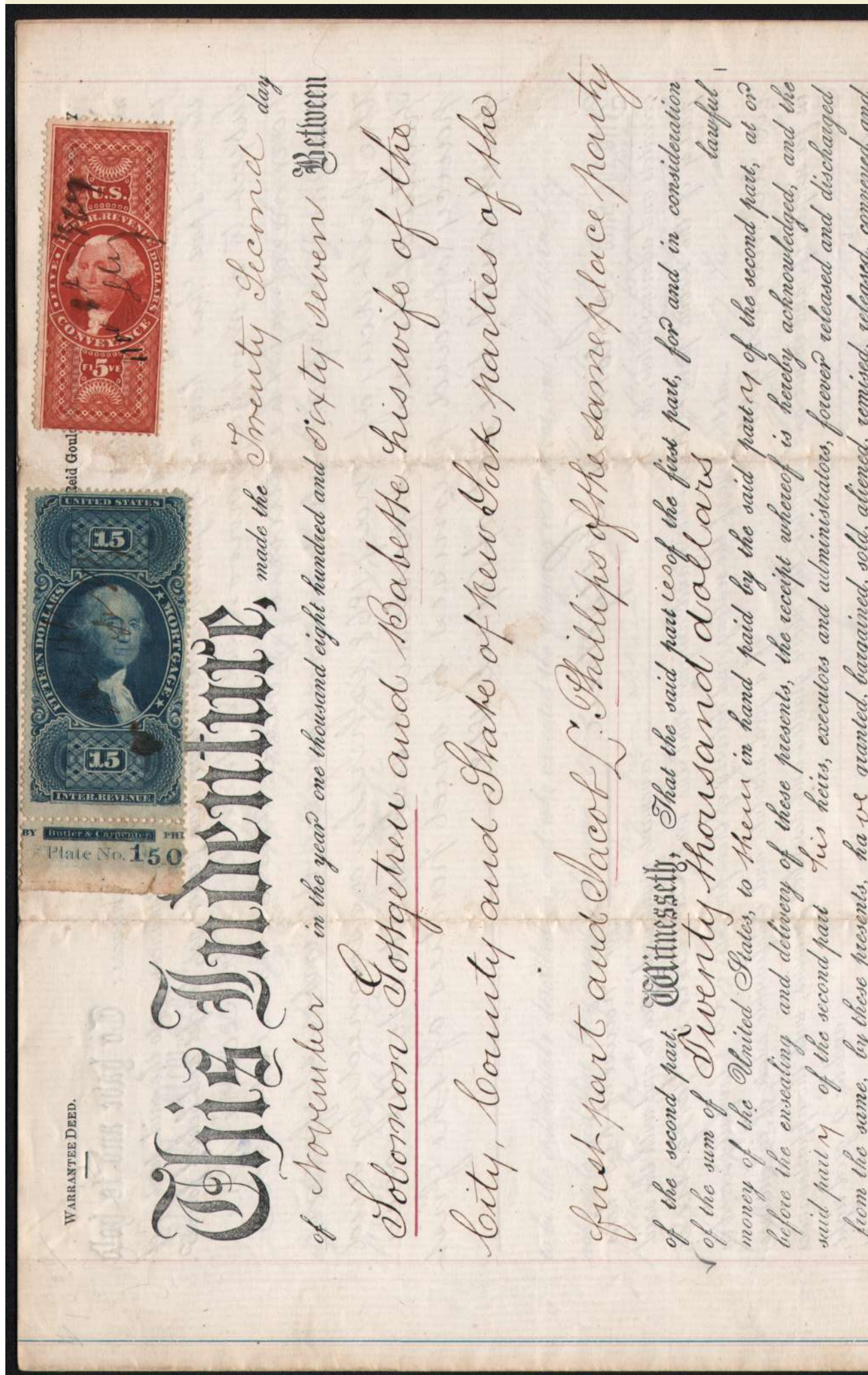


2.2 Used in Alabama

1867 estate administrator's bond, Clarke County, Alabama, amount \$30,000, implying an estate value of \$15,000, Probate of Will \$15 tax paid by \$15 Mortgage

One of three stamps of denomination above \$10 recorded on any Southern document

In the ravaged postwar South, revenue stamp users could not afford the expense of stocking high values. Denominations above \$1 are seldom seen, and of \$5 or higher only rarely. Multiple or "wallpaper" use of lower values are typical.



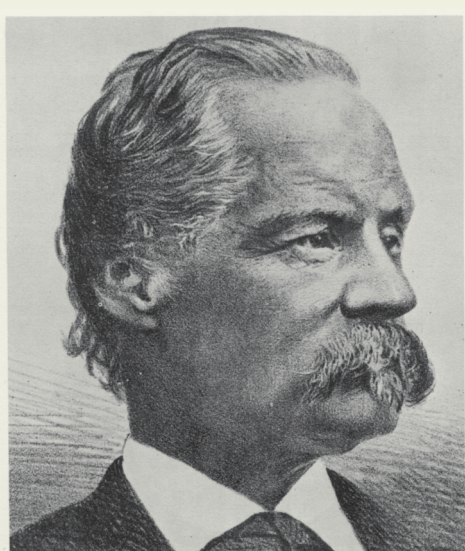
2.3 \$15 plus Nevada \$10 & \$20

1871 deed to Mexican Mill, Carson River, Nevada, amount \$130,000 bearing \$50 USIR (x2), \$15 Mortgage (x2), plus Nevada \$20 (x6) & \$10

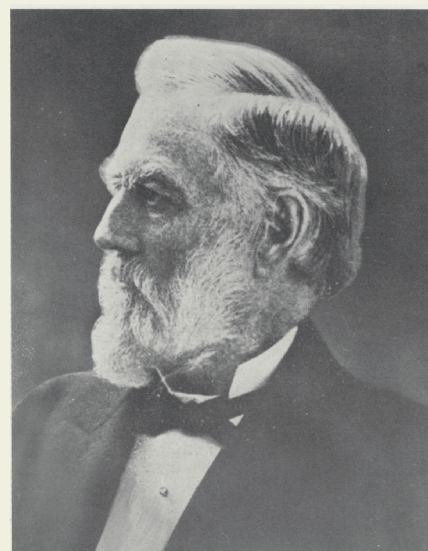
Six documents recorded with the Nevada \$20, six with the \$10; no other bears more than two of the \$20.

From the Union Mill and Mining Co., notorious holding company of the Bank of California, to financial titan Alvinza Hayward (namesake of Hayward, California). From the mid-1860s to the early 1870s the "Bank Ring," masterminded by William Sharon, its Agent in Virginia City, had maintained a virtual stranglehold on mining, milling, and shipping of the fabled Comstock Lode. This deed illustrates the first relaxation of that stranglehold. John P. Jones, trusted superintendent of the Bank-controlled Crown Point mine, discerned that it was verging on bonanza, and enlisted Hayward to finance a quiet, treacherous takeover. When the Crown Point produced some \$30 million, the Jones-Hayward combine, the Nevada Mill and Mining Co., became a Comstock power. With this deed, the Bank sold them the Mexican Mill to crush Crown Point ore, albeit at a whopping price.

The "heart piece" of the "Newlands find," the personal archive of Nevada senator Francis Newlands, which reached philatelic hands in the 1980s. Newlands had been Sharon's son in law and estate executor. Sharon's papers included numerous insider transactions involving important Comstock mills, of which this is the most historically and philatelically important, and visually spectacular.



William Sharon



Alvinza Hayward

3. \$15 Milky Blue

The \$15 Mortgage milky blue is the only Scott-listed shade of any First Issue. Its size and rarity make the \$15 an attention-grabber even in its usual color; the striking difference of the milky blue from the normal dark blue makes it extraordinarily distinctive and memorable.

3.2 \$15 Milky Blue Subshade

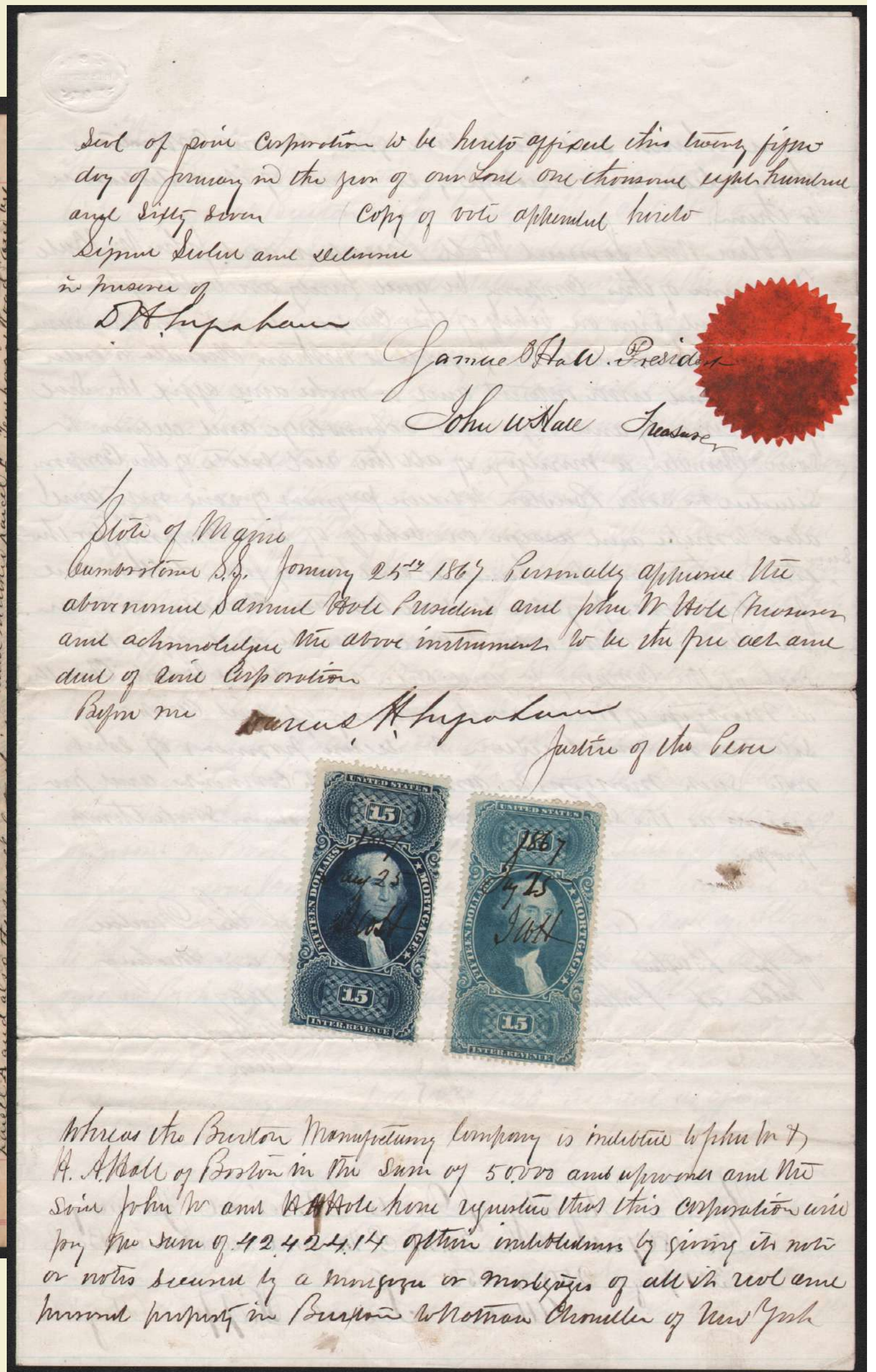
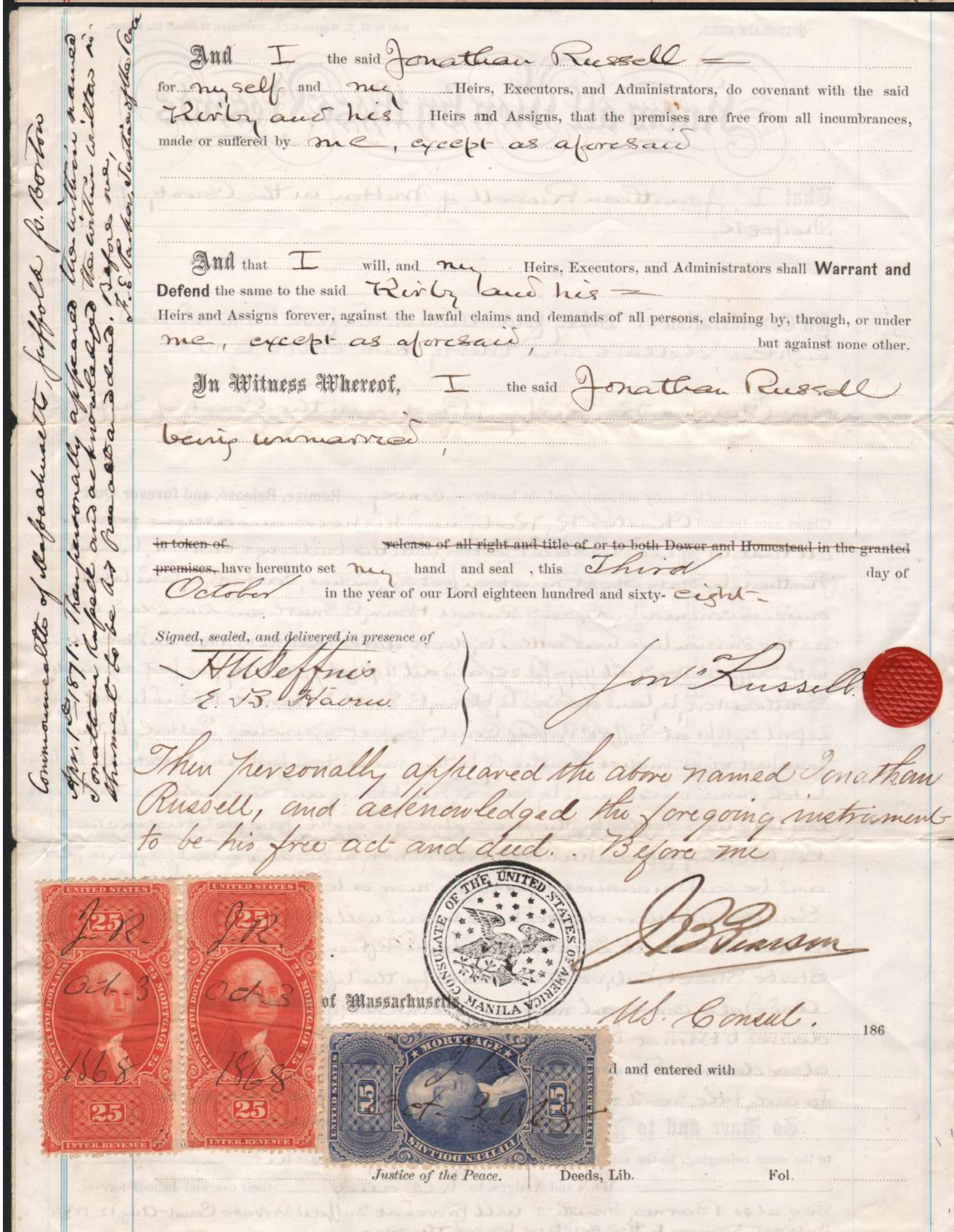
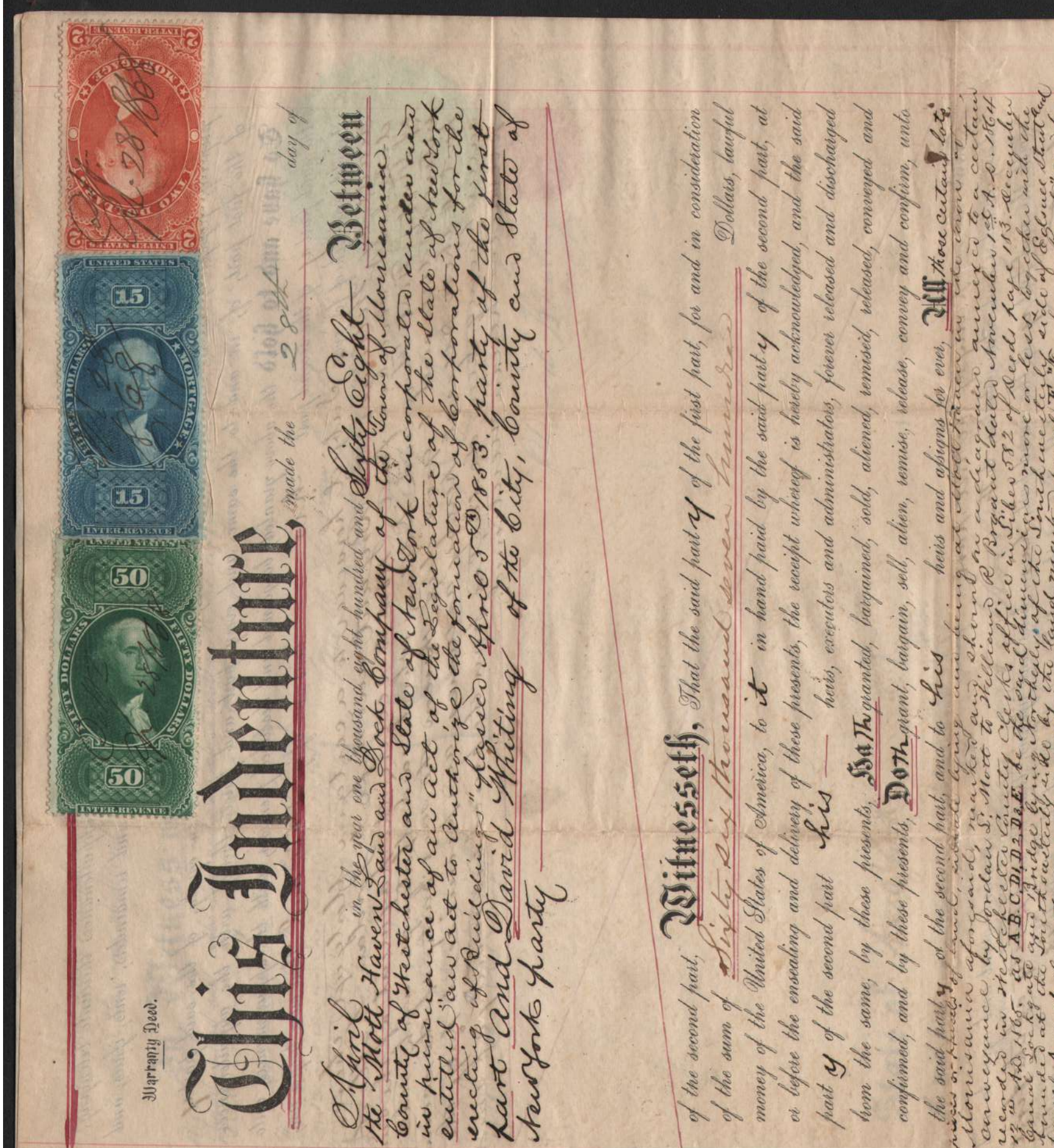
Below, April 1868 deed, amount \$66,700, tax \$67, bearing \$15 Mortgage milky blue in a darker subshade
\$15 Mortgage milky blue recorded on two documents

3.1 "The Blue Boys": \$15 Dark Blue and Milky Blue!

1867 deed stamped with two \$15 Mortgage, in dark blue and milky blue!

\$15 Mortgage milky blue recorded on two documents

The milky blue is typically seen dated from late 1866 to early 1868. Its combination here with the \$15 in a normal shade, especially with no other stamps to distract, is nothing less than a statistical miracle.



4.1 \$15 Ultramarine; \$200 tax

Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Co., \$400,000 promissory note, tax \$200 paid by all four \$15 through \$50 First Issue denominations: \$15, \$20 (x3), \$25 & \$50 (x2)! highlighted by the \$15 Mortgage ultramarine

\$15 Mortgage ultramarine recorded on five documents

Notes or drafts with stamps of \$25 or higher are very seldom seen.

4.2 \$15 Ultramarine; Executed in the Philippines

Deed for property in Boston, sold for \$64,518.32, tax \$65, paid by \$15 Mortgage ultramarine & \$25 Mortgage (x2)

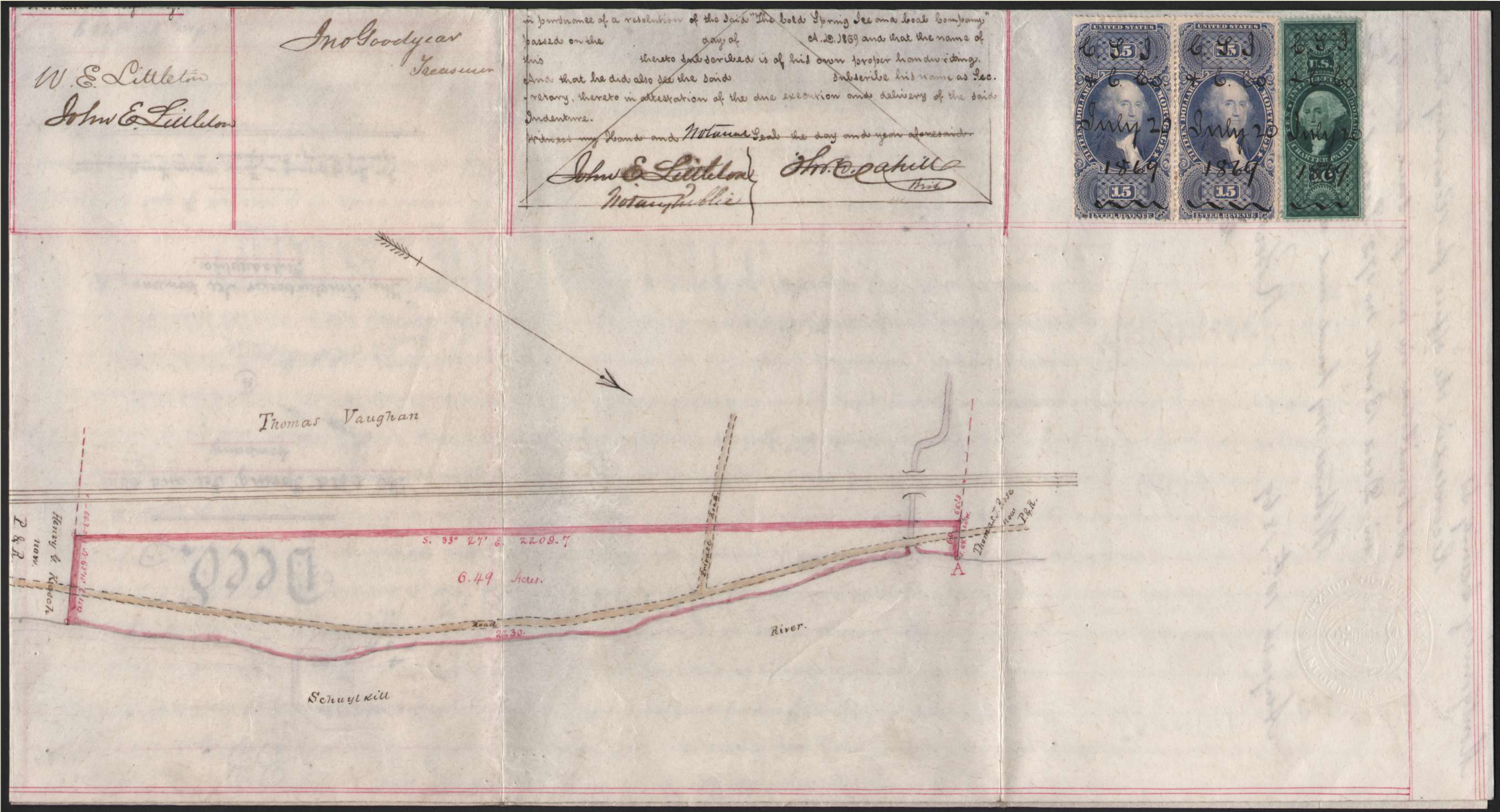
Executed in Manila, the Philippines, by Jonathan Russell, whose residence is listed as Milton, Massachusetts, but for many years a partner in the well known Yankee trading firm Russell and Sturgis in Manila. The place of execution is proved by a statement of the U.S. Consul in Manila, with his handstamped seal.

Executed October 3, 1868, the stamps with manuscript cancels "J. R. Oct. 3 1868," although the hand differs from Russell's and the \$15 ultramarine was not issued until late 1869. The stamps were probably affixed when the deed was recorded in Massachusetts on August 18, 1869.

4. The “Ultramarine Experiment”

For a brief period in late 1869 and early 1870 the printer of U.S. revenue stamps, Joseph Carpenter of Philadelphia, **changed the color of six First Issue stamps** including the **\$15 Mortgage**, from **blue to ultramarine**. The underlying rationale is clear. The Commissioner of Internal Revenue, in his Annual Reports and elsewhere, had expressed concerns about **loss of revenue through washing and reuse of stamps**. Not only were **cancel marks more visible on ultramarine stamps than on blue**, but the **new ink was fugitive**; according to Carpenter **“it cannot be washed without defacing the stamp.”**

Astonishingly, **Carpenter made this change of his own accord**. On October 30, 1869, he wrote new Commissioner Columbus Delano, **“Some months ago we commenced the use of inks of a more fugitive nature than those formerly used, desiring to aid the Bureau in the attempts to arrest the re-washing of stamps. ... I am aware the new colors did not produce as full and clear an impression; but as they could not be readily washed, I directed their use. ... if you direct a return to the more indelible tint, I will of course follow your instructions.”** The observed disappearance of the ultramarines after mid-1870 tells us that such a directive must have been received, bringing the brief **“ultramarine experiment” to an end**.



4.3 \$15 Ultramarine Pair

Deed from Cold Spring Ice and Coal Co. to Knickerbocker Ice Co., Philadelphia, amount \$40,000, \$40 tax paid by \$15 Mortgage ultramarine pair & \$10 Charter Party

Only five multiples of this stamp are known, this the only one on document.

(The Curtis census lists one block of four and four pairs.) Illustrated deeds are very seldom seen. The companies were evidently cutting ice from the Schuylkill River.

Summary: a Fiscal History “Perfect Storm”

The material shown here — documents showing early matching usage, imperforates used East and West, perforated stamps used East, West and South, the plate number, a Scott-listed shade, and one of the unauthorized printings in ultramarine — constitute a **“perfect storm” of fiscal history**.

Of the six spectacular high-denomination large format \$15 through \$200 First Issue revenues — \$15 Mortgage, \$20 Conveyance, \$20 Probate of Will, \$25 Mortgage, \$50 USIR and \$200 USIR — as tabulated below, **only for the \$15 Mortgage** have the stars aligned to allow the **survival of documents in all of these desirable fiscal history categories**.

All six stamps have been recorded both imperforate and perforated on document. And all imperfs but the \$25 have been seen used in the West; even here though, only for the \$15 have usages survived from both branches of the huge 1863 shipment to San Francisco and Portland. For the remaining six categories, except for the \$15 the table is nearly empty.

The diverse range of usages of the \$15 Mortgage shown here could not be duplicated for any of the other spectacular large format First Issues.

	\$15 Mortgage	\$20 Conveyance	\$20 Probate of Will	\$25 Mortgage	\$50 USIR	\$200 USIR
Early Matching Usage	x	x				
Imperf on document	x	x	x	x	x	x
Western Use	x (California, Oregon)	x (Nevada)	x (California)		x (California)	x (California)
Perf on document	x	x	x	x	x	x
Scott-listed shade on document	x (Milky Blue)					
Ultramarine printing	x					
Plate Number on document	x					
Western Use	x (California)				x (California)	
Southern Use	x (Alabama)	x (S. Carolina)				