

Stamp Tax on Nevada Territory Stock Certificates: the "35¢ Blaze of Glory"

This exhibit demonstrates, analyzes and explains the remarkable stamping of stock certificates in Nevada Territory. Stock certificates were subject to a 35¢ Civil War stamp tax. During the speculative "silver fever" of 1862-4 in the West, they were generated in such prodigious numbers that the entire supply of 35¢ stamps was consumed in a few months in a figurative "35¢ blaze of glory," necessitating an emergency shipment to replenish the supply.

Imperforates and/or Part Perforates in All Eight 35¢ Titles Were Used!

Why "glorious"? All eight 35¢ titles (Bond, Certificate, etc.), listed at left, in the scarce early imperforate and/or part perforate states, can be found on Nevada certificates. The only perforated 35¢ soon after the 35¢ Insurance (rare) and the 35¢ Power of Attorney (frequently).

In the absence of 35¢ stamps the 20¢ Foreign Exchange imperforate or 20¢ Inland Exchange part perforate were occasionally pressed into service.

The exhibit first shows examples of all these usages, as listed in the Exhibit Plan.

More months earlier this would have been doubly impossible. As illustrated below, use of the "matching" 35¢ Certificate had been required by law, and in any case stamps were not yet available in the West. The final page describes the unexpected events that made the "blaze" possible, in fact inevitable. Finally, timelines of stamp use are presented which pinpoint the duration of the "blaze" and the arrival of the 35¢ replenishment. The latter is shown to have consisted exclusively of the perforated 35¢ Power of Attorney.



December 1863 stock certificate, Philadelphia, from the period of obligatory matching usage, duly stamped with 35¢ Certificate imperforate

"The Story Within the Story"

This is primarily a stamp story, but until the analysis on the final page, that story consists simply in noting the stamp(s) affixed to the certificates, and the dates.

However, the certificates themselves tell a fascinating story. They are typically quaintly typeset, often in color and usually illustrated, charming in their variety of fanciful names; replete with historical connections, highly prized by collectors of Western Americana, and some of the top pieces in the field are included here.

Captions here accordingly include references to historical, geographical, printing and design aspects. These portions are italicized. Hopefully they convey a sense of the excitement of Nevada "silver fever" that complements the overarching stamp story.

The map at left provides geographical context. Nevada Territory was created in 1861 after rich silver strikes on the Comstock Lode in 1859 triggered a massive rush to the region. From there prospectors radiated in all directions, and rushes to the Esmeralda, Humboldt and Reese River regions occurred in 1860-2. Certificates from the 13 origins mapped are included in the exhibit.

25c Bond Part Perforate (R43b)

The "Emma," Signed Suro

35c Bond part perforate, April 1863, Dayton, N.T.

Named for his daughter Emma (age six) by Adolph Suro, builder of the famed Suro Tunnel that drained the deep levels of the Comstock Lode, signed by Suro as president. Shares \$5,000 each. One of the most highly prized "territorial."

Sole recorded revenue-stamped example of the "Emma"

While the "Emma" is not directly Tunnel-related, it is indirectly so, for it was during his period of mining and milling ventures in the early to mid-1860s that Suro became intimately familiar with the Comstock and its environs. It is almost certainly no accident that the site he selected to begin his tunnel was only about two miles from Dayton, his base of operations during this time.

Adolph Suro

25c Certificate part perforate (R44b)

The "Fly By Night"

35c Certificate part perforate, May 1863, Carson City, N.T.

The quintessential Nevada Territory mining stock; two examples recorded. Only a tiny percentage of Nevada Territory mining ventures were profitable. A large majority never produced any ore, and many never had actual works! Yet they were routinely snapped up by eager public. Even so, this company name, even if brutally honest, is breathtakingly brazen.

The Name Game (1)

The beehive vignette adds a delightful irony. Presumably it was the printer's best attempt to match the company name using his stock "cut" (fly, bee, not the most terrible match). But the beehive, normally a symbol of industry and thrift, could scarcely be more incongruous than it is here!

"A New Mine" (Mark Twain's Roasting?)

25c Entry of Goods imperforate (R45a)

Sunbeam Gold and Silver Mining Co.

Capital Stock, \$180,000. 1,800 Shares, \$100 Each.

Incorporated February 24th, 1864.

This certifies that [Name] is entitled to [Number] Shares in the Capital Stock of the Sunbeam Gold and Silver Mining Company, transferable on the Books of the Company, by endorsement hereon and surrender of this Certificate.

25c Entry of Goods Imperforate, April 1863, Aurora, "Mono County, Cal."

Aurora, "Mono County, Cal." was in Nevada! The Esmeralda region, 80 miles south of the Comstock, the site of Nevada's second mining "rush," with commercial center at Aurora.

With the California-Nevada boundary uncertain, both claimed it; Aurora was declared the county seat of Mono County, California, and Esmeralda County, Nevada Territory. Most residents—or at least most mining developers—evidently preferred to be part of California, for virtually all surviving stock certificates have place of issue "Aurora, Mono County, Cal."

In the fall of 1863, with a boundary survey team approaching but the question of jurisdiction still unsettled, Aurora held its famous joint elections, with two slates of candidates for each office, one for California, the other for Nevada.

Three weeks later, on September 23, 1863, it was established that Aurora was in Nevada by some four miles.

Name Game (2)

A perfect match of vignette to company name!

"1 Share to 1 Foot."

AURORA votes 'em both (Pioneer Nevada, 1931)

25c Life Insurance imperforate (R47a)

Pilot Mining Company

Capital Stock, \$600,000. 600 Shares, \$1,000 Each.

Incorporated Oct. 8, 63.

This certifies that [Name] is entitled to [Number] Shares in the Capital Stock of the Pilot Mining Company, transferable on the Books of the Company, by endorsement hereon and surrender of this Certificate.

25c Insurance part perforate, January 1864, Virginia (City), N.T.

Petit Gold and Silver Mining Company

Capital Stock, \$600,000. 600 Shares, \$1,000 Each.

Incorporated Oct. 8, 63.

This certifies that [Name] is entitled to [Number] Shares in the Capital Stock of the Petit Gold and Silver Mining Company, transferable on the Books of the Company, by endorsement hereon and surrender of this Certificate.

TOP, 25c Insurance part perforate, January 1864, Virginia (City), N.T.

Imprint "ENTERPRISE BOOK AND JOB PRINTING HOUSE, C. ST." of the famed Territorial Enterprise

Name Game (3): A commendable effort to match the name "Pilot"

Bottom, 25c Life Insurance Imperforate, October 1863, Dayton, N.T.

This stamp recorded on just five certificates (and seven examples). Certificate No. 1 of the "Petit." It's \$6,000 capitalization is the smallest recorded.

25c Power of Attorney imperforate (R48a)

The Yellow Jacket Silver Mining Company

Capital Stock, \$1,200,000. 1,200 Shares, \$1,000 Each.

Incorporated Feb. 1864.

This certifies that [Name] is entitled to [Number] Shares in the Capital Stock of the Yellow Jacket Silver Mining Company, transferable on the Books of the Company, by endorsement hereon and surrender of this Certificate.

Rich Mine, Lithographed Certificate

25c Power of Attorney Imperforate, August 1863, Gold Hill, N.T.

Of the more than 300 companies for which Nevada-issued certificates have been recorded, only the Yellow Jacket was profitable! No statement better describes the speculative nature of these ventures.

The Yellow Jacket struck a fine ore body in 1863 that produced \$6 million in bullion over the next few years, and by 1868 had yielded some \$15.5 million.

The mine is said to have been named for wasps ("yellow jackets") encountered when the claim was located in 1859.

Relatively few Territorial certificates were lithographed, not typeset. This more expensive method was usually employed to impress potential investors.

Some companies had no bullion, no ore, no mine, but certificates that bespoke prosperity. The Yellow Jacket had no need to create the illusion of prosperity; it was already prosperous. Nevertheless, a lithographed certificate contributed to a positive public image, and this company could certainly afford it.

Angel, History of Nevada (1881)

25c Protest imperforate (R49a)

Gideon's Band Gold and Silver Mining Co.

Capital Stock, \$195,000. 1,950 Shares, \$100 Each.

Incorporated June 12, 1863.

This certifies that [Name] is entitled to [Number] Shares in the Capital Stock of the Gideon's Band Gold and Silver Mining Company, transferable on the Books of the Company, by endorsement hereon and surrender of this Certificate.

35c Protest imperforate, August 1863, Unionville, N.T.

The "Gideon's Band" unique matched pair

The Humboldt Range, some 120 miles northeast of the Comstock, was the site of Nevada's third mining rush. Unionville was its chief camp but soon declined and is today a "working ghost."

For those a bit rusty on Biblical references, Gideon's band was a strangely chosen fighting force of 300 Israelites, whose torches and blaring trumpets sent a far larger Midianite army into disarray and flight.

Ruins at Unionville

25c Warehouse Receipt part perforate (R50b)

Ragtown Gold & Silver Mining Company

Capital Stock, \$980,000. 980 Shares, \$1,000 Each.

Incorporated June 12, 1863.

This certifies that [Name] is entitled to [Number] Shares in the Capital Stock of the Ragtown Gold & Silver Mining Company, transferable on the Books of the Company, by endorsement hereon and surrender of this Certificate.

The "Ragtown"

35c Warehouse Receipt part perforate, December 1863, Humboldt City, N.T.

An extraordinary combination of rare stamp usage and a rare certificate

Just two usages of this very rare part perforate in Nevada have been recorded; despite the small imperforate margins at top and bottom here, there is no doubt the stamp is the part perforate, as the fully perforated variety was not included in the initial shipment of stamps to the West.

Sole recorded document from Humboldt City, soon deserted after nearby mines proved unproductive

"Ragtown" was a rest stop on the Overland Trail on the Carson River, first water after the crossing of the Forty Mile Desert, named for the laundry draped over virtually every bush; evidently it lingered in the memory of the officers here.

Ruins at Humboldt City

20c Foreign Exchange imperforate (R41a)

Sprague Silver Mining Company

Capital Stock, \$100,000. 1,000 Shares, \$100 Each.

Incorporated June 12, 1863.

This certifies that [Name] is entitled to [Number] Shares in the Capital Stock of the Sprague Silver Mining Company, transferable on the Books of the Company, by endorsement hereon and surrender of this Certificate.

20c Inland Exchange part perforate (R42b)

Cumberland Coal Mining Company

Capital Stock, \$174,000. 1,740 Shares, \$100 Each.

Incorporated March 6, 64.

This certifies that [Name] is entitled to [Number] Shares in the Capital Stock of the Cumberland Coal Mining Company, transferable on the Books of the Company, by endorsement hereon and surrender of this Certificate.

TOP, 20c Foreign Exchange Imperforate, 3c Telegraph, 3c Bank Check blue, June 1864, Austin, N.T.

20c Foreign Exchange imperforate recorded on certificates of just three companies

The "Cumberland Coal"

Bottom, 20c Inland Exchange part perforate, 5c Agreement, March 1864, Virginia, N.T. One of two recorded territorial coal mining certificates; two examples known "ENTERPRISE PRINT." The job printing office used a solid block of color on the reverse to produce overall coloration of the front, the only recorded example of this primitive method. Note also the misspelling of the company name at top!

25c Insurance perforated (R46c)

Free State Tunneling Co.

Capital Stock, \$800,000. 8,000 Shares, \$100 Each.

Incorporated March 6, 64.

This certifies that [Name] is entitled to [Number] Shares in the Capital Stock of the Free State Tunneling Company, transferable on the Books of the Company, by endorsement hereon and surrender of this Certificate.

Santa Clara: the "Free State"

Top, 25c Insurance perforated, September 1863, Santa Clara, N.T.

An extraordinary combination of rare stamp usage with a rare certificate

This stamp recorded on just four Nevada certificates. A survey of surviving documents suggests that it was the only fully perforated 25c stamp included in the first shipment of revenues to the West. This is satisfyingly consistent with what is known independently about this stamp. It was the earliest 35c title delivered by the printers (on October 21, 1863, nearly a month before the Power of Attorney and Protest, on November 15), and the only one delivered before the order of November 7, 1863, directing printers Butler and Carpenter to "fill all orders for stamps with utmost despatch without perforating."

This suggests that it was the only 35c title first delivered fully perforated, a hypothesis confirmed by surviving documents: the earliest recorded usages on document are indeed fully perforated; for all other 35c titles the earliest are all part perforate (Bond, Entry of Goods) or imperforate (all others).

Sole recorded document from Santa Clara, a Humboldt Range camp with an eyeblink-brief existence

Name Game (4)

Vignettes evocative of a "free state"; the central one reproduces the Great Seal of Nevada Territory.

Ruins at Santa Clara

25c Power of Attorney perforated (R48b)

Norcross Gold and Silver Mining Company

Capital Stock, \$180,000. 1,800 Shares, \$100 Each.

Incorporated Nov. 5, 1863.

This certifies that [Name] is entitled to [Number] Shares in the Capital Stock of the Norcross Gold and Silver Mining Company, transferable on the Books of the Company, by endorsement hereon and surrender of this Certificate.

Central Mill: the "Norcross"

25c Power of Attorney perforated, December 1863, Central Mill (Virginia City)

Of the eleven different 25c stamps recorded on Nevada Territory certificates, this is the one most frequently seen, accounting for fully a third of all usages.

Sole recorded certificate and example issued at the Central Mill "GOLD HILL NEWS PRINT," recorded on only four certificates

Sole recorded Nevada-printed three-color certificate

There is no mention of the Norcross Gold and Silver Mining Co. anywhere in the literature on early Nevada; the name appears to be a "sound alike" scam playing on the success of the Comstock's Hale and Norcross.

Timelines of Stamp Usage

Summarized at right are timelines of stamp usage recorded over four decades on some 450 Nevada Territory certificates. A remarkable bimodal distribution emerges:

"35c Blaze" Pinpointed

The earliest certificates, dated from March to October 1863, nearly all bear imperforate or part perforate 35c stamps, in all eight titles.

The inclusion of the perforated 35c Insurance here is neatly explained by the fact that this was its earliest state; it was the only 35c title issued before the order to deliver without perforating.

Emergency Replenishment Pinpointed

The latest certificates, though, dated from January to October 1864, nearly all bear the same stamp, the perforated 35c Power of Attorney.

A transition between these two modes occurred in November and December 1863. In all periods there was a smattering of usages of smaller-denomination stamps, mostly involving the 20c Inland Exchange part perforate, or rarely the 20c Foreign Exchange imperforate.

The Impossible Becomes Inevitable

Under the original tax schedule the "blaze" would have been impossible: Certificate stamps were required. Three events intervened:

- Rescinding of the requirement for matching usage on December 25, 1862.
- Shipment of 5750 to stamps to San Francisco in February 1863, the first to reach the West (exhibitor's research). This was a huge supply relative to the needs of the region, probably enough for 5-10 years. Included were imperforates and part perforates in a dazzling variety and quantity, the grand total of recorded surviving stamped stocks is a mere five; for Nevada it is nearly 500!

As summarized in 1865, "from October 1862 until March 1864 speculation ran riot, and the Territory of Nevada was converted into one vast swindling stock exchange." For the other nine Territories extant during the era of Civil War taxes, the grand total of recorded surviving stamped stocks is a mere five; for Nevada it is nearly 500!

"Blaze" Unique to 25c and to the West

For all other denominations, the imperforate and part perforate stamps were sent West in the "Esmeralda Shipment of 1863" listed well into the 1860s; a spectacular 1869 usage is shown at left. Not so for the 35c! Thanks to "silver fever," its supply lasted months instead of years. Moreover, nothing approaching this variety is seen on Eastern stocks.

The "blaze of glory" was unique to the 35c and to the West!

Imperforate 5c Charter Party (x10) & 5c Manifest (x3) used May 1869, Lyon County, Nevada

Extraordinarily late use of imperforates!