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Yesterday in STAMPS: U.S. Proofs & Essays, Part 1

by Clarence W. Brazer

(From STAMPS Magazine, March 13-June 5, 1937, with images added, many from www.SiegelAuctions.com)

General Interest

The various designs submitted, experiments with patents of different kinds to prevent using stamps over again, and for other purposes, and the numerous trial colors submitted for official approval are extremely interesting and historically valuable as showing the origin of the designs.

The joy of collecting die and plate proofs, which are the very finest impressions possible to obtain of a stamp design made with the greatest of care and with the most expensive and brilliant inks with the die or plate wiped



Experimental essays, left to right: a Re-Use Prevention Essay, Sc. 79-E2a, with S-shaped slits that made the stamp too fragile for reuse. Eventually grills were adopted for the Bank Note issues; right, a National Bank Note 3¢ Liberty Rainbow Plate Essay (Sc. 79-E30r); 1¢ scarlet Bowsby Patent Coupon Die Essay on India (Sc. 63-E13a) on card; 1¢ blue, Bowsby Patent Coupon Plate Essay, perforated all around (Sc. 63-E13f), showing how the coupon would be detached from the stamp.

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scrupulously clean, is only known to those fortunate enough to have seen them. They are valuable to the student as any difference in the design found on a stamp that is not on the die proofs is an indication of a plate variety.

Specialists must have a dark colored die proof with which to compare their stamps and most of the fine collections include as many essays and proofs as possible arranged chronologically to show the historical development. Most of the prize winning collections in the International Exhibit [TIPEX, 1936] began with the essays and followed through to die and plate proofs prior to the printing of the stamps. The late Earl of Crawford about 50 years ago established this high standard of collecting which has since been extensively followed in Europe and by the best collections exhibited in this country and it is lately becoming more popular here.

By knowledge of the proofs and experimental essays one gets a better knowledge of the stamp which protects him from imposition as some unscrupulous European dealers have faked proofs with gum and perforation which have been sold to the uninitiated as stamps.

A superficial knowledge of proofs is all that is necessary to prevent such imposition. In some cases, however, the proofs are so rare that they are much more valuable than the stamps and in other cases varieties, such as the inverted proofs, exist that are not found in the stamps.

[Essays and proofs also are evidence of the stamp production process and the progressive steps in that process. See page 3. JFD.]



1¢ blue Type I Large Die Proof on India (Sc. 5P1) on card, showing the complete 1¢ Blue design and clear layout lines from the die. It is believed that this die proof was made some time after the 1857 contract was extended, and possibly from a die made for the 1875 Reprint.



This invert of the 90¢ 1869 Pictorial does not exist in issued stamp form, but can be collected as a Proof, Sc. 122aP4.



Steps along the way to a stamp, left to right, top row first: George T. Jones Essay on India (Sc. 112-E1b) depicting Ulysses S. Grant; [1¢] black Die Essay of Vignette on India paper (Sc. 112-E2) cut to shape and mounted on card; 1¢ black Die Essay on White Ivory (Sc. 112-E5b) for a vignette that was not accepted; Small Numeral "1" Plate Essay on stamp paper (Sc. 112-E4b) imperforate block of four in orange brown; 1¢ buff Plate Proof on India (Sc. 112P3) left margin block of 16; 1¢ buff Large Die Proof on India (Sc. 112P1) die sunk on card; 1¢ buff Plate Proof on India (Sc. 112P3) horizontal straddle pane strip of six, showing two plate numbers and line at top, one stamp with double transfer (arrow); and the stamp as issued (Sc. 112) with large numeral 1. Note: for a closer look, use your pdf magnifier tool.

For many years proofs have been unappreciated in this country because of lack of information available. The great rarity of some of the essays and die proofs is gradually becoming known and since their listing in the *U.S. Specialized Catalog* the demand has greatly increased. As more information becomes available to collectors the popularity is bound to grow and as the supply is strictly limited, values are bound to increase.

Bibliographical

The earliest catalog published in the United States included all the then known essays and proofs as well as the stamps and they were generally collected though frequently with inaccurate information. The first individual listing of U.S. essays was made by John K. Tiffany in 1887 and several other chapters on post cards, etc., were added when it was reproduced later in French. He also published a list in the *American Journal of Philately*, second series, Volume 2, 1889. The next listing was a check list of *U.S. Adhesive, Postage and Revenue* stamps by George Toppan, published in 1904, which included the private Proprietary Issues. In 1911 Edward H. Mason, the great essay and proof collector, published a handbook entitled *Essays for U.S. Postage Stamps* followed by a supplement entitled *More Essays* in 1912. Mason also wrote a series of articles for the *Philatelic Gazette*, then published by J. M. Bartels Company, which were reprinted in booklet form and covered proofs of U.S. Adhesives and Envelope Stamps. In this check list he attempted to list largely from his own collection, papers and colors then known to exist as well as a description of the design and he gave some historical information, some of which has since been found incorrect. None of these articles, however, could be illustrated. In 1911, Paul Kohl of Chemnitz, Germany, published an illustrated catalog of U.S. Proofs and Essays written in German which, however, is far from complete and contains little historic, accurate information. All of the U.S. lists to this time have not clearly distinguished between the postage, envelope and revenue essays. The late Henry G. Mandel, expert for the American Bank Note Company,

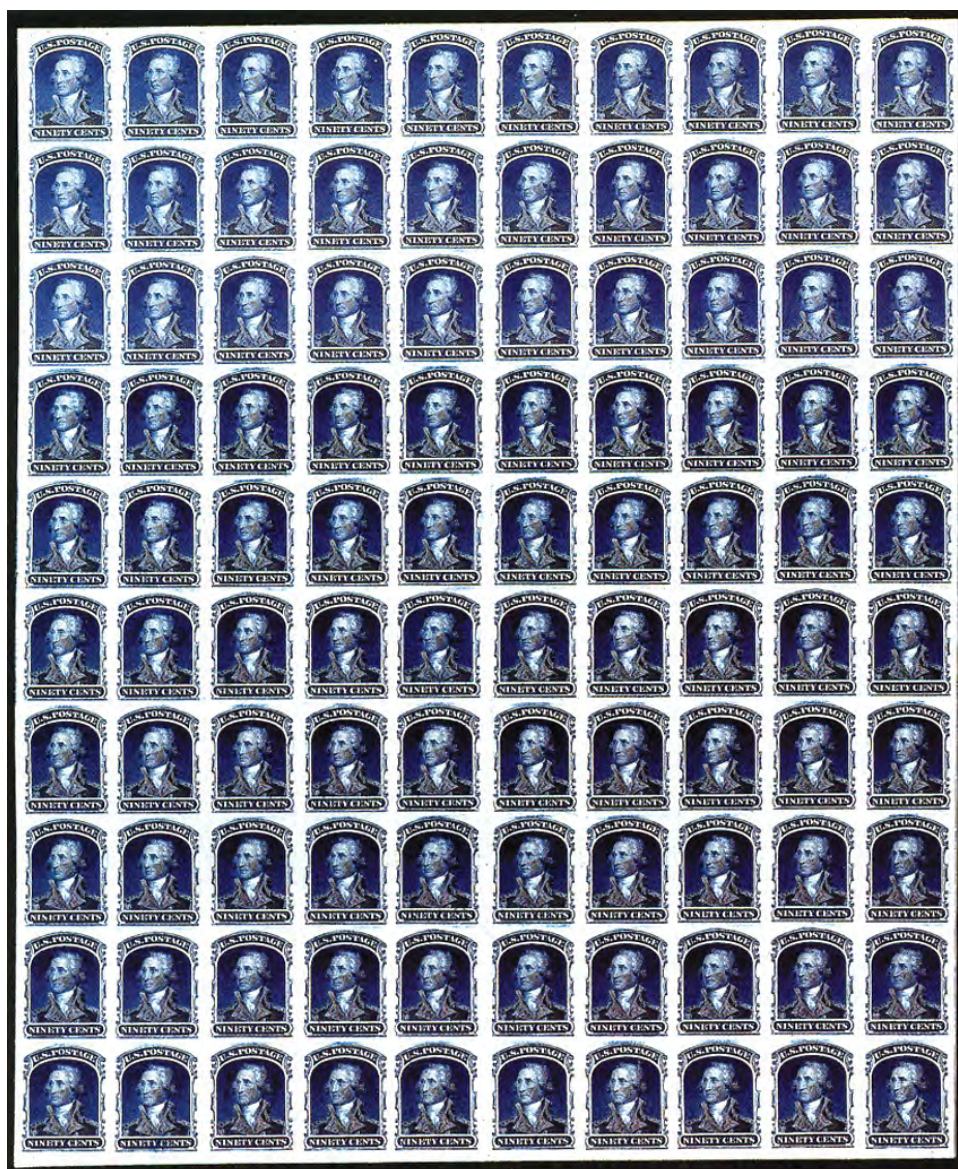


Plate Proof of the 1857-60 Reprint, Sc. 47P3, in a complete pane of 100 on India paper, Ex Henry Mandel.

who died about 1903, had a great collection of Essays and Proofs largely obtained from the designers and engravers with whom he was intimately acquainted. He sold a great many to the Earl of Crawford and apparently furnished the latter much historical information.

The Earl of Crawford had the most complete and historically annotated U.S. collection that it will never be possible to duplicate. This was broken up after the World War. The author has endeavored to gather all such histori-

cal information from it as possible but many of the pages have been destroyed and the essays and proofs disbursed throughout American and foreign collections. (See page 29, part 2, for pieces from the Crawford Collection.)

Clarence Eagle had a most exhaustive collection of U.S. Revenues, Essays and Proofs, most of which he gave to the Congressional Library where they can be seen upon application to the Print Department. Proofs may also be seen in the Smithsonian collection at Washington, D.C.... and the Taping Collection in the British Museum. Many unique U.S. items are no doubt, still in collections formed from 20 to 40 years ago when the Mandel, Mason, Eagle, Worthington and Crawford collections were dispersed.

Students have generally referred to and sometimes have listed, the known varieties of essays and proofs when writing on individual stamps. Dr. Carroll Chase has done this consistently in all his writings on the U.S. 1847 and 1851 issues as did the late A. B. Slater, John N. Luff, Joseph S. Rich, Sir Edward D. Bacon, Elliott Perry, Stanley B. Ashbrook and many others.

Historical

From 1847 to 1894 all United States stamps were, and to date in most foreign countries are, made by private Bank Note Companies. The general procedure was for the Government to advertise for proposals to be accompanied by essays or examples of the quality of stamps proposed to be furnished. After the bids were opened, and the low bidder known, an Expert Committee was sometimes appointed to pass upon the design, the color and the paper.

Changes to the essays submitted with the successful bid

5¢ brown First Design (Sc. 57) cancelled by "Providence R.I. Jun. 22 ?? PM" circular datestamp—the only postally used example of the 5¢ 1861 issue First Design. National Bank Note are thought to have submitted gummed and perforated samples of their designs, that a small supply of these "Premiere Gravures" and First Colors reached philatelic hands, and that it was probably mailed by a philatelist or stamp dealer.





1¢ blue “C” Grill Essay with (Sc. 79-E15i) with 11 x 16mm male grill impressed points down on face of stamp, the only recorded example. This male grill differs from the issued “C” Grill, which was made by a female grill surface of embossed depressions. When applied to the sheet, fac-

ing toward the depressions, the female “C” Grill created raised bosses on the face of each stamp. The various experimental grilled stamps come from the archive of papers and stamps retained by Charles F. Steel, who patented the grilling device.

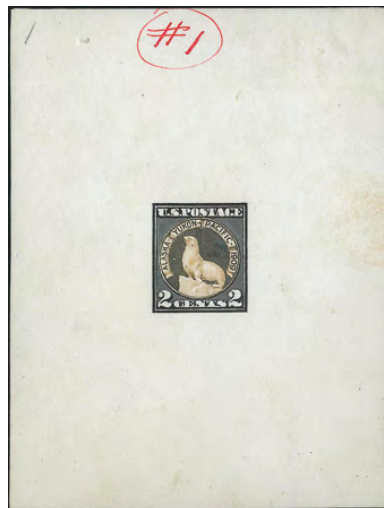
were sometimes requested in plate form of finished essays when, after correction and final approvals, a contract was awarded and printing of the stamps begun. Even when stamps are produced by Governments the procedure is somewhat similar for engraved stamps as described in this article, though it may vary for other processes of printing.

Models

Frequently for essays of the early issues the vignette of the stamp design was taken from a prior engraving or photograph, which would be mounted upon a card, and about this the designer would draw in pencil or wash, sometimes colored, the suggested design for the frame and lettering of the borders. These built-up combinations are called models, and are generally at the exact size of the proposed stamp.

[Shown here and on page 8 is a series of models for the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Expo issue, Sc. 370. JFD.]

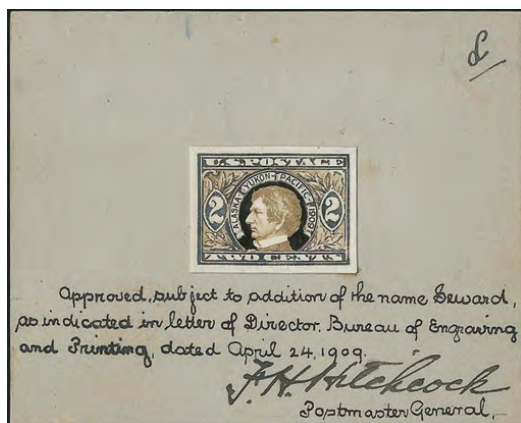
2¢ Alaska-Yukon, Model Essay (Sc. 370-E1) card with black and white wash drawing of frame and pasted on photo of seal on an ice block—the first model for the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition created in March 1909 by Bureau designer Clair Aubrey Huston, based on his circular seal on ice essay for an abandoned commemorative envelope project.





Alaska-Yukon Model Essay (Sc. 370-E2) card with black-and-white ink wash frame with William Seward engraved portrait inset—a die proof of a Snuff stamp portrait. The seal in Model Essay 1 was objected to as too much of a reminder of the cold Alaska-Yukon weather for a stamp and Exposition that was intended to promote more positive aspects.

Model Essay (Sc. 370-E3) card with photo of seal on iceberg as originally approved and with hand-drawn frame as approved, also with engraved portrait of Seward at the bottom and typed “Approved, April 3, 1909, Postmaster-General” and signed by F. H. Hitchcock.



Model Essay (Sc. 370-E4) card with wash drawing of frame similar to that adopted with seal essay cut out and mounted over Seward vignette from an 1876 bond, vignette background retouched with black wash, card also with “Approved subject to addition of the name Seward, as indicated in letter of Director, Bureau of Engraving and Printing, dated April 24, 1909” and signed by F. H. Hitchcock, “Postmaster General.”

Model Essay (Sc. 370-E5) card with close to adopted frame and seal on iceberg vignette, “William H. Seward” name added below seal, also with “April 26/09 Approved J.E.R.” (J. E. Ralph, Director of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing).



The stamp as issued, Sc. 370



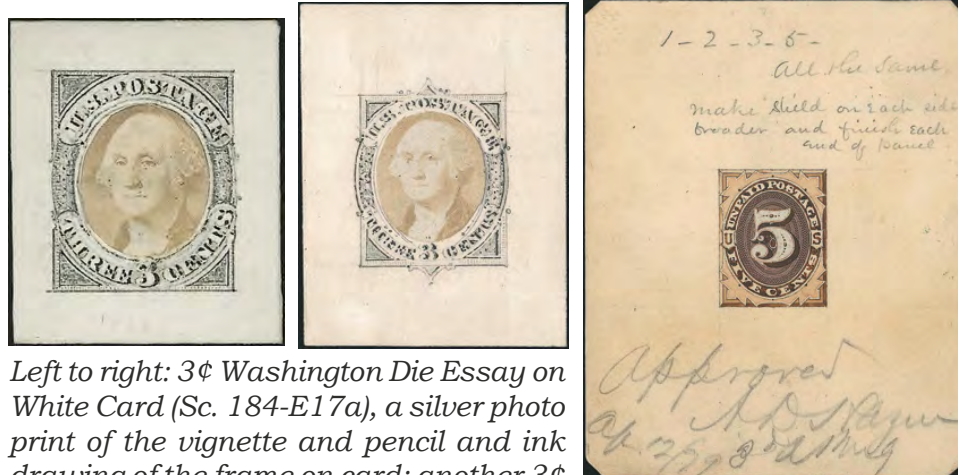
Designer's model mounted on card for the 1¢ Panama-Pacific (Sc. 397E-1) consisting of two photos brought together, one for the outer frame and one for the vignette, overlaid to make a composite design, with a wash drawing of the palm trees and drawn in "1



Cent 1" in white wash. It is inscribed on the card "Approved July 16, 1912/Frank H. Hitchcock/Postmaster General".

Original Drawings

Sometimes the designer prepares an entire drawing in



Left to right: 3¢ Washington Die Essay on White Card (Sc. 184-E17a), a silver photo print of the vignette and pencil and ink drawing of the frame on card; another 3¢ Washington Die Essay on White Card (Sc. 184-E17b), a silver print of the vignette and pencil and ink drawing of the frame; 5¢ 1879 "Unpaid Postage" Die Essay of Engraved Vignette with Wash Drawing (Sc. J4-E2) on card, the frame with pencil and wash drawing, the vignette engraved, cut to shape and pasted into place, the central numeral also engraved, cut to shape and pasted on top of the engraved vignette, the card also with pencil notation "1-2-3-5 All the same, make shield on each side broader and finish each end of panel" at top and "Approved A. D. Haven 3rd Asst. PMG Ap. 12/99" at bottom—a unique essay for the unadopted "Unpaid Postage" Postage Due issue.

pencil and wash which, in the olden days, was usually at the same size as the proposed stamp, but since the use of photography, is more generally several times the proposed size of the stamp, which is reduced to the stamp size photographically. Today the design may be photographed directly upon the steel die. Sometimes the models are photographed and submitted as essays for approval and in some cases the photographs are retouched with wash.

Essays

An essay is a design for a stamp submitted to a Government for approval and is generally in the form of models, original drawings or large die proofs, though in a number of cases finished plate essays fully gummed and perforated and sometimes grilled were submitted for approval. (See page 7 for a Grill essay.)

Proofs

Upon final approval of an engraved design from which stamps are issued, those approved essays become proofs. Anything not a stamp sold by the Government, printed from an approved stamp design die or plate is a proof no matter in what color or material upon which it may be printed for experimental purposes.



5¢ Jamestown large die proof on India, Sc. 330P1, approved and signed by Postmaster General George von L. Meyer on April 17, 1907

Reprints

Reprints of stamps previously issued, sold by the Government are not classed as proofs though they may have been sold for collectors' purposes only.

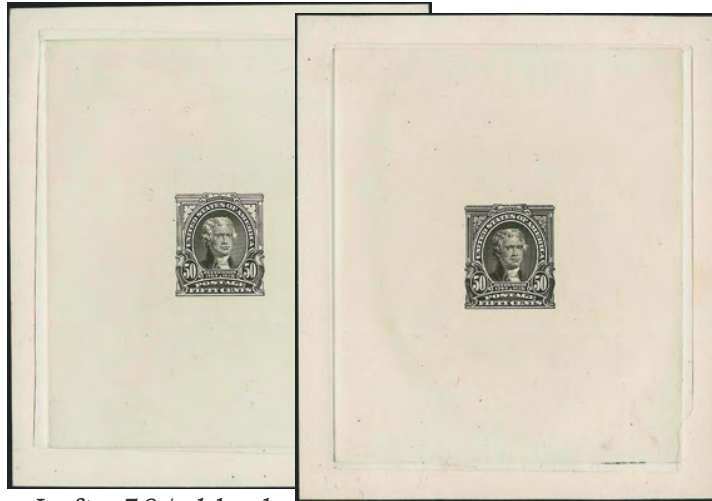
90¢ Deep Blue Reprint (Sc. 47), reprinted by the Continental Bank Note Company from the original plate of 200 subjects. Of the 10,000 printed only 454 were sold and the remaining 9,546 were destroyed.



Artists' or Engravers' Proofs

Upon approval of the design, the vignette is generally engraved by an artist highly skilled in this kind of engraving and the engraver may have proofs taken from the die to show the progress of his work. Upon completion of the engraving of the vignette another engraver, or engravers, complete the engraving of the frame and lettering and they may also have progress die proofs made from time to time.

(See page 12 for additional progressive proofs from Canada.)



Left, 50¢ black

Large Die Essay on India (Sc. 310-E1) incomplete engraving die sunk on card with many lines missing in vignette, frame and portrait; right, the only other known progressive die essays for the 50¢ 1902 Issue, die sunk on card, almost complete—with a few shortened shading lines in the upper corner leaf ornaments.



Large Die Essays on

India paper for the 30¢ 1869 Pictorial. Above the frame die (Sc. 121-E2) has a very light impression of the vignette, not visible in the photo. Right, the vignette Die Essay (Sc. 121-E3)



Progressive Die Proofs for the 1898 Canada Penny Postage Map stamp, Sc. 85, left to right: in black, with carmine added, and with very dark blue added.

Large Die Proofs

Upon completion of the engraving the steel die, which is generally about 2 x 2-1/2 inches in size, or larger, and before hardening, is carefully inked and the surface of the die scrupulously wiped clean.



*1869 30¢ ultramarine and carmine
Large Die Proof on*

India (Sc. 121P1), die sunk on card with full die sinkage, plus magnified views of the India paper portion and the die sunk image portion of the complete piece.

The die is then placed on the bed of the press and covered with a piece of dampened India paper generally trimmed to the same size as the steel die. The paper may be lightly dusted with flour to make a thin paste and is then covered for protection with a thin white, more or less soft, cardboard about 6 x 8 inches in size and passed under the heavy roller of the hand press. When it comes out with the ink adhering to the India paper and India paper adhering to the card which has a sinkage full size of the steel die block pressed in it, the product is a large die proof.

Left, the original hand-engraved steel die for an essay for the 1851 3¢ Issues, Sc. 10 and 11, and right, one of 16 prints that were made from the die. This die was discovered on eBay. It was purchased by a group of 13 philatelists, who donated it to the National Postal Museum. It is attributed to Rawdon, Wright, Hatch and Edson,



the printers who produced the first regular-issue U.S. stamps in 1847. The lettering on the die is similar to that on the 1847 issue.

Only nine copies of the original essay from this die are known to exist. Designated No. 11-E2 in the Scott Specialized Catalogue, the die essays were printed on India paper, or proof paper on card.

Michael Bean, a plate printer at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, created 16 prints from the essay die on old India paper, and die-sunk them on cards. The 16 new prints, which reflect a later stage of the die known as Stage II, were numbered. One was marked as a “printer’s proof.” Print No. 1 was donated along with the die to the museum, print No. 15 was given to Bean, the “printer’s proof” was given to the Philatelic Foundation and each of the 13 donors received one print.

Large die proofs may be in several trial colors submitted for approval. When the design is approved the die is hardened and additional large die proofs may be taken, generally



5¢ blue and scarlet Trial Color Plate Proofs on Bond paper for the New York Postmaster’s Provisional (Sc. 9X1TC5a, 9X1TC5d), and the stamp as issued in black (Sc. 9X1).

in the approved color, and submitted for final approval.

H. G. Mandell had large die proofs in his collection autographed by the engravers then living. The engraver of the frame and letters usually signed in pencil in the lower left hand corner and the engraver of the vignette signed in the lower right. If the designer signed, his autograph usually appeared at the top. These are known as autographed

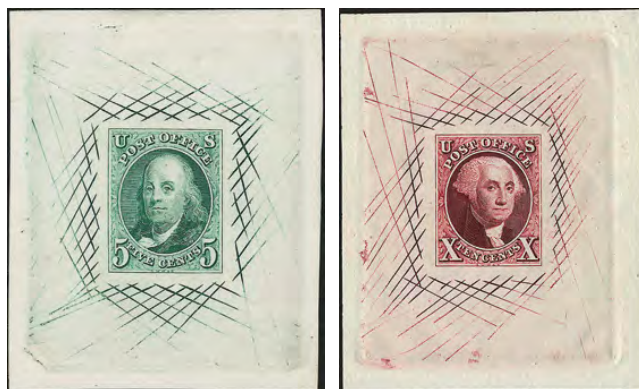
large die proofs. It was formerly the custom to permit each engraver to retain die proofs of his own work as well as the work of others which he admired.

An old discolored photograph of two pages with a complete set of Columbians with signatures of the engravers above and below the proofs (Sc. 230P4-245P4).



Reprinted Die Proofs

Some large die proofs of the U.S. 1847 issue, which had been declared no longer usable for postage in 1851, were reprinted about 1893 to 1895 on thick white India paper, bond paper, colored bond



Large Die Trial Color Proofs on India of the 5¢ in blue green (Sc. 1TC1) with crosshatching; and the 10¢ rose lake (Sc. 2TC1)

paper and bluish laid paper, in ten or twelve colors, perhaps from a duplicate die as I have found no official record of the destruction of the official transfer roll which may have been inherited from Rawdon, Wright, Hatch and Edson by the American Bank Note Company when it was formed in 1857. Die proofs in red, brown, green, blue and black of this issue also exist on India paper and on thin white bond paper and were probably made about 1875.



*5¢ orange brown and 10¢ black
1875 Reproduction Small Die Proofs
on Wove (Sc. 3P2-4P2)*



*30¢ Hamilton, "Goodall"
Small Die Trial
Color Proof on India*



*and \$2 scarlet and black "Goodall"
Trial Color Small Die Proof on India (Sc. O68TC2c),
from a set of small die proofs ordered for display
in 1879 by President Albert G. Goodall of the
American Bank Note Company.*

Perhaps about 1875 there were made some of the Postage, Department and Newspaper stamps in five colors: a gray blue, gray green, dull red, grayish brown and gray black on a thicker India paper than that found with cardboard backing which are known as Goodall die proofs, probably

named after the President of the Bank Note Company at the time.

The Continental Bank Note Company reprinted complete sets of large die proofs on large cards of all the U.S. stamps issued under their contract, including Postage, Departments and Newspaper stamps. (See photo, page 16).

Continental Bank Note Company Presentation Album containing 161 large die proofs representing every U.S. stamp issued from 1847 through the Continental Bank Note period, and a Large Die proof of the \$60.00 Violet 1875 Newspaper Issue (Sc. PR32P1).



The U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing issued complete sets of large die proofs of the 1894 Postage, Postage Dues and Newspapers and in 1898 about 50 sets of large die proofs of the Trans-Mississippi Issue in normal colors and about 150 sets with black centers in which the 2¢ and \$2 centers are interchanged, thereby making them Essays. Perhaps about fifty sets of large die proofs of the Pan-American 1901 Issue were also distributed.



A bi-color Trial Color Die Proof, Sc. 292-E6, of the \$1 Trans-Mississippi issue.



Left, an Essay for the \$2 Trans-Mississippi issue, Sc. 293E7, shows the vignette eventually used for the 2¢ value; and, right, Die Proof, Sc. 293-P2a, shows the Mississippi River Bridge design used on the \$2 stamp.

With the exception of these sets and a few others, which I believe generally to be reprints, most all other U.S. die proofs known are original die proofs. The originals may probably be told from the Reprints by the great care with which they were made and the brilliance of the colors.

To Be Continued

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