The 1895 Provisional and Bisect Postage Due Stamps: 
A Result of the Transfer of Stamp Production to the BEP?

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- BEP Produces Postage Due Stamps
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Introduction

As reported by Noll (at this Symposium three years ago) there was significant controversy surrounding the awarding of the contract for postage stamp production in FY 1895 to the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) rather than one of the Bank Note Companies which had produced US stamps from 1847.

The BEP had little or no experience in stamp making and lacked the gumming machines (in short supply) to engage in volume production.

It is highly probable that the BEP had trouble gearing up to meet the stamp demand (nominally 3 billion stamps annually), thus leading to stamp shortages.

Even if the BEP could generate sufficient supplies in Washington, DC, it did not mean that they were delivered efficiently and when needed by Postmasters throughout the country.

Prior to the BEP takeover, the American Bank Note Company (ABNCo.) was responsible for stamp production and maintaining sufficient inventory to satisfy the national postage stamp demand as presented by the Post Office Department Stamp Agent.
Introduction

- The Stamp Agent and his staff took care of filling orders from the various post offices, but the ABNCo. was responsible for keeping stamps available.
- The BEP not only had to learn how to make stamps, but they also had to learn how to build and maintain sufficient inventory to meet Post Office Department demand.
- The United States Postal Stamp Agent (U.S.P.S.A.) and his staff originally resided at the ABNCo. in New York.
- When the BEP took over, he was moved to Washington and his staff was reduced.
- Thus, it is quite reasonable to believe that the distribution of newly printed BEP stamps might not have been as efficient as it was at the banknote company, especially in the beginning years.
- In the following we will trace early postage due stamp production at the BEP, determine the remaining inventory of ABNCo. dues, project the demand for postage dues in FY 1895, and examine the postmasters’ response to shortages - the use of Provisional and Bisected postage due stamps.
First BEP Postage Dues:
2-cent Small Numeral Postage Due

BEP Dark Claret
Small Numeral J 32

ABNCo. Claret
Large Numeral J 23
First BEP Postage Dues: 2-cent Deep Claret Proofs

J 32P1 Large Die Proof  J 32P4 Plate Proof on Card
First BEP Postage Dues:
10-cent Deep Claret Signed Die Proof

Signed by Wesley R. Davis, United States Postage Stamp Agent (U.S.P.S.A.)
First BEP Postage Dues: 50-cent Deep Claret Signed Die Proof

Mr. Davis’ Signature was applied by his Clerk, William H. Stewart
First BEP Postage Dues:
3-cent Deep Claret Signed Die Proof

Proof Signed by Kerr Craige, Third Assistant Postmaster General
## Postage Due Production-BEP

**Die Numbers and Approval, Hardening, and Issue Dates for the First Postage Due Stamps Produced at the BEP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scott No.</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Die No.</th>
<th>Die Approval 1894</th>
<th>Die Hardening 1894</th>
<th>Plate No.</th>
<th>Certification Date 1894</th>
<th>Issue Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J31</td>
<td>1¢</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>8/ 10</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>8/ 11</td>
<td>8/ 14/ 1894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J32</td>
<td>2¢</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>7/ 13</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7/ 14</td>
<td>7/ 20/ 1894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>3¢</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>8/ 18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J33</td>
<td>3¢</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>8/ 23</td>
<td>8/ 28</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4/ 27/ 1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J34</td>
<td>5¢</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>8/ 30</td>
<td>8/ 29</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4/ 27/ 1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J35</td>
<td>10¢</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>8/ 30</td>
<td>8/ 29</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>9/ 24/ 1894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J36</td>
<td>30¢</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>8/ 23</td>
<td>8/ 30</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4/ 27/ 1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J37</td>
<td>50¢</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>9/ 1</td>
<td>9/ 4</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>10/ 4</td>
<td>4/ 27/ 1895</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Postage Due Forecast-BEP**

- BEP Forecast of Postage Due Need in FY 1895 Compared with Actual Shipments by the ABNCo. in FY 1893 and FY 1894

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Johnson's Forecast for Fiscal Year 1895</th>
<th>ABNCo Shipment in Fiscal Year 1893</th>
<th>ABNCo Shipment in Fiscal Year 1894</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1¢</td>
<td>9,000,000</td>
<td>8,967,456</td>
<td>8,441,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2¢</td>
<td>6,600,000</td>
<td>6,598,500</td>
<td>7,131,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3¢</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>198,955</td>
<td>242,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5¢</td>
<td>800,000</td>
<td>808,510</td>
<td>603,780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10¢</td>
<td>1,520,000</td>
<td>1,525,550</td>
<td>1,608,470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30¢</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>6,650</td>
<td>6,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50¢</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>2,350</td>
<td>3,106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18,200,000</td>
<td>18,101,950</td>
<td>18,038,146</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BEP Shipment of ABNCo. Dues

ABNCo. Large Numeral Postage Dues Transferred to the BEP and Subsequently Distributed by the BEP in FY 1885.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>ABNCo Shipment</th>
<th>BEP Distribution</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1¢</td>
<td>1,350,369</td>
<td>1,350,369</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2¢</td>
<td>50,164</td>
<td>50,164</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3¢</td>
<td>294,783</td>
<td>190,300</td>
<td>104,483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5¢</td>
<td>670,148</td>
<td>604,320</td>
<td>65,823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10¢</td>
<td>277,794</td>
<td>277,780</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30¢</td>
<td>96,502</td>
<td>23,430</td>
<td>73,072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50¢</td>
<td>56,783</td>
<td>15,030</td>
<td>41,753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,796,543</td>
<td>2,511,393</td>
<td>285,150 c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

c Excess scraped. See References 6, 7, and 8.
Postage Due Inventory Shortages

- By comparing the previous tables, it is quite clear that the excess inventory supplied to the BEP by the ABNCo. was insufficient to meet demand.
- The 2¢ postage dues supplied represented only about a 3 days supply.
- The 1¢ supply represented only about 15% of the estimated need or about 55 days worth.
- The 10¢ large numeral dues on hand could satisfy the demand for about 70 days.
- Even the 5¢ supply was only good for 10 months.
- Only the 30¢ and 50¢ were in sufficient supply to last multiple years and the actual demand for these values was very low.
- If the production and distribution of 1¢ and 2¢ Bureau dues were delayed by even a few days there would have been shortages of both values, especially the 2¢ dues.
BEP Production Problems

- J33 Cracked Die: The original die (Die I-No. 54) for J33 cracked upon hardening. A transfer roll was made and the crack burnished out. The modified transfer roll then was used to make a new three-cent die (Die II-No. 64).

Die 54 Essay

Die 54 Proof (with Die in Clamp)

Die I Strong Frame Lines
BEP Production Problems

- J33 Cracked Die: The original die (Die I-No. 54) for J33 cracked upon hardening. A transfer roll was made and the crack burnished out. The modified transfer roll then was used to make a new three-cent die (Die II-No. 64).

Enlargement of 3-cent Approved Die Proof
Die II - No. 64 Very Weak or Missing Frame Lines
J 37 Fifty cent “Claw”: Five little marks in ball of five. Taken off on the transfer roll used to make the printing plate. The die was never corrected (due to production pressures). Thus when a new plate was made years later, the claw mark was re-introduced, because the die was never fixed.
Postmasters’ Solutions

- When Postmasters ran out of certain stamp values of postage due stamps, they would substitute others, e.g. use two one-cent stamps for a two, two two-cent dues plus a one-cent for a five, and so forth.

- But when they were out of either 1¢ or 2¢ values or both they had a problem - they had to improvise.

- Clever postmasters came up with two solutions:
  - Use other stamps suitably marked as “Due” or some variant thereof (Provisionals)
  - Bisect higher value postage due stamps to achieve the desired value (Bisects) Postage due bisects could either be used plain or also have some form of “Due” overprint or surcharge.

- Provisionals from Detroit are the most famous. They addressed shortages of both 1¢ and 2¢ postage dues. There are other Provisionals.

- The most famous bisects are those of Jefferson, Iowa. They addressed a shortage of 1¢ postage dues. There are several other 2¢ postage due bisects used during the last few years of the 19th Century.
# Postmasters’ Solution - Provisionals

## Postage Due Provisionals of the 1895 Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stamp (Value)</th>
<th>Town/ City</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number Known</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Provisional Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-- (1-cent)</td>
<td>Winside</td>
<td>NE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>July 20, 1895 August 6, 1895</td>
<td>&quot;Due 1&quot; surcharged on 1¢ regular issue newspaper wrappers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>246 (1-cent)</td>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>MI</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>June 23, 1895</td>
<td>&quot;Due 1&quot; hand stamped on 1¢ ultramarine regular issue stamp. Pair on cover to make up 2¢ deficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250 (2-cent)</td>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>MI</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>June 23, 1895</td>
<td>&quot;Due 2&quot; hand stamped on 2¢ carmine regular issue stamp. Single on cover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>267 (2-cent)</td>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>MI</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>&quot;Due 2&quot; hand stamped on 2¢ carmine regular issue stamp. Four overprints for &quot;Due 8¢&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>264 (1-cent)</td>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>MI</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>June 26, 1895</td>
<td>&quot;Due 1&quot; hand stamped on 1¢ blue regular issue stamp. Pair on cover to make up 2¢ deficiency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Provisional Postage Dues:
Detroit Provisional 1-cent: Dated June 23, 1895

Scott No. 246, One cent Ultramarine
Overprinted “Due 1” in Black Ink
Provisional Postage Dues: Detroit Provisional 1-cent: Dated June 23, 1895

Scott No. 264, One cent Blue
Overprinted “Due 1” in Black Ink

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Provisional Postage Dues:
Detroit Provisional 1-cent: Dated June 23, 1895

Scott No. 246, One cent Ultramarine & Scott No.264 Blue
Overprinted “Due 1” in Black Ink

Ultramarine

Blue
Provisional Postage Dues:
Detroit Provisional 2-cent: Dated June 23, 1895

Scott No. 267 Two cent carmine
Overprinted Due 2 in Black Ink
Provisional Postage Dues:
Detroit Provisional 2-cent: Dated June 23, 1895

Scott No. 267  Two cent Carmine
Overprinted “Due 2” in Black Ink
1895 Gainesville, TX, Duplex Cancel

Illustration Courtesy HR Harmer Nutmeg
## Postmasters’ Solution - Bisects

### Postage Due Bisects of the 1895 Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stamp (Value)</th>
<th>Town/ City</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number Known</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Bisect Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J23 (2-cent)</td>
<td>Thompson</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Oct. 2, 1898</td>
<td>Diagonal, (2) vertical and (2) Horizontal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J39 (2-cent)</td>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>IA</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Oct. 11-13, 1895</td>
<td>Vertical, &quot;Due 1 cent&quot; overprint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J39 (2-cent)</td>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>IA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Feb. 14, 1896</td>
<td>Diagonal, &quot;Due 1&quot; Hand stamp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J39 (2-cent)</td>
<td>Riverside</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>unknown*</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- (2¢ &amp; 10¢)</td>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dec 1895</td>
<td>2¢ and 10¢ each bisected to make 6¢ Postage Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- (2-cent)</td>
<td>North Branch</td>
<td>NJ</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>June 1895</td>
<td>Diagonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- (2-cent)</td>
<td>Warwick</td>
<td>RI</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>August 7, 1897</td>
<td>Vertical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-- (2-cent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sept 11, 1897</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Assumed to be during the 1895 Period*
Bisect Postage Dues:
Bisect Types: J23 Example

Diagonal Bisects

- UL-LR: Left-Right (Unknown)
- UR-LL: Right-Left

Vertical Bisect

- Left-Right

Horizontal Bisect

- Top-Bottom
Bisect Postage Dues: Bisect Types: J39 Example

Diagonal Bisects

- UL-LR (Unknown)
- UR-LL
- Vertical Bisect
- Horizontal Bisect
Bisect Postage Dues:
Bisect Types: J39 Jefferson, Iowa
Bisect Postage Dues:
Bisect Types: J39 Jefferson, Iowa
Bisect Postage Dues:
Bisect Types: J39 Jefferson, Iowa
Bisect Postage Dues:
Bisect Types: J39 Jefferson, Iowa
Bisect Postage Dues:
Bisect Types: J39 Clinton, Iowa

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Summary

- The BEP took over the production of US postage stamps in FY 1895 (July 1, 1894-June 30, 1895).
- They were ill-prepared for the task (lack of equipment, little experience with postage stamp production, insufficient carry-over inventory, and a greatly reduced distribution infrastructure).
- Spot shortages in stamps occurred at post offices around the country, especially in rural areas and small towns (occasionally shortages were also experienced in cities).
- In certain instances, Postmasters responded to these shortages by creating provisionals and bisects.
- The postage due bisects and provisionals of the 1895 period were created in direct response to the lack of certain postage due values.
- Being few in number, these postage due varieties represent some of the scarcest and least-known United States stamp usages and are worthy of further study.