

# “Hawaiian Headache: Is This Stamp a Genuine Imperf?”

## Part One of Two

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A scan of the Scott Catalogue suggests that regularly issued US definitives before 1890, printed either by the National Bank Note Company or the American Bank Note Company, have an imperforate variety existing about one in eight instances. If this ratio should also be valid for the Hawaiian Bank Note issues before 1890, and printed by the same companies, then about three issues might be expected to have imperforate varieties. Surprisingly this is very nearly the case. At least two instances are verified in this study. The principal difference between the imperforate varieties may be that the US imperforate stamps were recognized as collectable, hence they exist primarily unused and often in pairs. Thus identification is greatly facilitated. In Hawaii (with one exception) there was little concern regarding missing perforations. The imperforate sheets were distributed to post offices and the stamps incuriously used for postal purposes. Thus identification of imperforate Hawaiian issues can lead to many a headache for philatelists. Few pairs exist and one must look for and study used single copies. These invariably prove to be stamps that have had the perforations trimmed away.



**Figure 1.** A partial sheet reconstruction of the 2c carmine rose issue. Both left and right panes are represented. Shown is the wide placement of the perforation combs at the sheet edges and the wide straight edges of LAYOUT V.

Much of the headache derives from the fact that both companies, for some unexplained reason, set the perforation combs at the edges of the sheets much farther apart than normally. Thus stamps along the edges of every sheet usually contained at least one very wide margin (Figure 1). Many collectors,

confronted with stamps having a very large margin (often this is the wide straight edge margin characteristic of LAYOUT V) have succumbed to the temptation to trim the perforations. Having done so they believe they have contrived a convincingly imperforate stamp. Thus in almost every case, used imperforate Hawaiian stamps have this telltale wide margin.

Besides wide margins the National Bank Note Company (and to a lesser extent the American Bank Note Company) placed plate layout dots within these wide margins and close to the outside perimeter of the stamp. These dots may be located at the corners or at the mid-perimeter of the stamp. The presence then of a wide margin and the layout dots, or even the dots with the margin trimmed, is strongly suggestive of a stamp from which the perforations have been trimmed. But this in itself does not negate the validity of a stamp suspected to be imperforate. The frequency of such stamps, however, should be only about 50% since for each sheet of 50 stamps, 26 stamps lie on the edges. In actual fact *every* suspected imperf examined by the author has had the margin and the dots. This frequency is much too high and thus becomes a criterion for the rejection of such imperforate copies.

The Scott Catalogue does not list imperforate varieties of the Hawaiian Bank Note issues. The "Detailed List" in the Meyer-Harris book on the stamps of Hawaii lists five possible such varieties. As will be shown, the evidence for several of these remains inconclusive.

### 2c Vermilion (Scott No. 31)

The official records of the Hawaiian Post Office Department contain no information on this variety. No reference to it appears in the letterbooks of the Postmaster General or the Daily Journals of the Post Office. Nor does the philatelic literature refer to it. Yet this variety does exist, confirmed by the existence of a vertical pair (Figure 2). This pair is the rosy vermilion shade, thus it dates from the late 1860's or early 1870's. It was originally in the Frank C. Atherton collection and is now in the Honolulu Advertiser Collection. The paper measures 0.0035 inches thick. This distinguishes it from the proofs on India which are 0.0025 inches thick. It is the only known example. The remaining 48 copies from that sheet may have been used on mail and now are lost.



Figure 2. A genuine pair of the 2c vermilion issue imperforate variety. Honolulu Advertiser Collection.

In the tenth edition of the *Kohl Priced Catalogue* there was entered a listing and price for an imperforate pair identified as being from one of the later printings of the 1880's. No verification of the existence of this item has occurred in the years since then.

Two interesting imperforate varieties are a part of the Tapling Collection of the British Museum. There they are identified as "[plate] proofs on card." One bears what appears to be the Meyer-Harris Handbook listed cancellation M-H #171, a target divided into four sections enclosing the letters PO. This cancellation is considered to date from the 1880's. Plate proofs were distributed to public officials in the 1860's and conceivably some could have been used for postage. However, usage of a proof in the 1880's must be considered extremely unusual. A critical examination of these proofs should be made.

An interesting example of a fraudulent imperforate 2¢ vermilion stamp is presented in Figure 3. Note the presence of a wide margin as seen on the left and the layout dot close to the mid-perimeter of the stamp within that margin. The cover in itself possesses sufficient reason to brand it counterfeit. As so there can be no question as to the fraudulent nature of the 2¢ stamp. For example, it lacks a Honolulu CDS and the San Francisco CDS is improper for the year 1870. Also its color is anomalous. The cancellation on the 5¢ stamp does not actually tie to the cover or to the 2¢ stamp. The extensions of that cancellation appear to have been drawn in suggesting that neither stamp is original to the envelope. The trimmed corner of the 2¢ stamp is also very suspect.



**Figure 3.** A forgery of a six cent rate bisect cover of 1870 now in The Philatelic Foundation Reference Collection. The perforations of the 2¢ vermilion stamp have been trimmed away. Note also the presence of a wide margin.

### 6c Green (Scott No. 33)

This variety is verified by full documentation. Furthermore the copies known to exist have an impeccable pedigree. The story of its discovery is interesting and is presented here in detail because it has never been accurately reported before.

Postmasters of outlying post offices in the Hawaiian Postal System submitted requisitions for their stamp supplies to the Honolulu Post Office. These supplies included the stamps needed to frank letters destined to a foreign country such as the United States. Such letters were forwarded to the Honolulu Post

Office where the stamps were canceled and the letter placed on the appropriate outgoing ship. Thus the postmaster of Wailuku on the island of Maui received a shipment of 6¢ stamps from Honolulu in June 1878. One of the sheets of 6¢ stamps lacked perforations. Soon thereafter Postmaster General Brickwood in Honolulu began noticing letters addressed to the United States from Wailuku franked with imperforate 6¢ stamps. He was aware that foreign-made forgeries of earlier Hawaiian stamps existed. Seeing these imperforate stamps he became concerned that chicanery might have come to the Hawaiian Islands. On June 28 he wrote to William P. Mossman, the Wailuku postmaster:

*Pr "Kamoi" this morning, a letter was rec'd at this office directed to Wm A. Coutts, Galveston News Office, Galveston, Texas, on which were two, six cent Hawaiian Stamps, **which had never been perforated**. I have never noticed any stamps of late issues, sold from this office **without** perforations, and have now examined the balance of my package — over 200 sheets, & find where these stamps were procured, as it is the 2d or 3d time it has occurred.*

*I wish you would take pains to try and explain this matter, as in other respects besides perforation, the stamps seem perfect.*

*Should they have come from this office by any oversight, please return, to be replaced by perfect ones, and do not accept letters for the mail unless with perfect stamps.*

Evidently no reply was received to this letter. Now extremely perturbed, PMG Brickwood sent this letter to Postmaster Mossman on July 2:

**CONFIDENTIAL**

*Since writing on the 28th inst. there have been rec'd from your office several other letters with 6¢ stamps not perforated.*

*I wish you to give me any information you can of this, **without letting anyone know we are seeking an investigation** — and if possible reply by return of the "Kalama Hou."-*

*Please do not receive any doubtful stamps in payment of postage, unless you can explain satisfactorily their origin.*

*These stamps from the addresses on the letters probably came from the family of Dr. Enders -*

And again on July 15 he wrote to Mossman:

*In mine of June 28 I asked you to return any of the 6¢ stamps not perforated to this office to be replaced by me with perfect ones — Will you please attend to this —*

Assured that he would not be charged for those stamps, Mossman returned the remaining imperforate 6¢ stamps sometime after July 15. How many there were is not known. In the meantime the Postmaster General sent this letter to the National Bank Note Company July 8:

*I do myself the honor to call your attention to the fact, recently there have been found in this Kingdom six cent Hawaiian postage stamps **not perforated**, but evidently from the die belonging to this office.*

*I enclose these stamps which look to be a facimile [sic] of the genuine —*

*If you can give me any informatin of this matter, or if there has been any wrong doing, assist me to detect it, you will confer a great favor.*

Unfortunately there is no record of the reply to this letter.

It is evident that PMG Brickwood removed at least some of the imperforate stamps from their envelopes and replaced them with normal stamps. The imperforate stamps sent to the National Bank Note Co. were some that had been removed. An intriguing question thus arises. Do these stamps still repose in the files of the American Bank Note Co. (successor to the National Bank Note Co.)? If by chance they do they should be deposited with the Hawaiian collection of the Smithsonian Institution.

The story was augmented years later upon the sale in 1899 of the Thomas G. Thrum collection to Mr. Charles Bishop of Honolulu. The newspaper story reporting this sale stated that after the broken sheet was returned, PMG Brickwood, himself a stamp collector, divided the stamps among his stamp collector friends in Honolulu. Thomas G. Thrum was a friend and a leading collector in the city. He received his copy directly from PMG Brickwood. Today that stamp is part of the collection of the Bishop Museum

(Figure 4a). It does possess the layout dots of a sheet edge copy, but it has without question a pedigree that guarantees authenticity.

In addition a pair exists in the Honolulu Advertiser collection identified as having formerly been in Brickwood's personal collection (Figure 4b). The authenticity in this case is guaranteed by the fact that it is a pair. It too has an impeccable pedigree.

Both the Bishop Museum copy and the Advertiser pair are the bluish-green shade of the last National Bank Note Co. printing. Again the thickness of the paper differs from that of the India proofs. The most obvious difference between the imperforate variety and the proofs is the obvious plate wear evidenced by the imperforate variety. *(To be continued next issue.)*



**Figure 4a (Left).** A genuine single copy of the 6¢ green issue imperforate variety, position 5 from the sheet. Bishop Museum Collection.

**Figure 4b (Bottom).** A genuine pair of the 6¢ green issue imperforate variety. Honolulu Advertiser Collection.

