

## The Most Beautiful and Expensive U.S. Stamp?

By Dr. Roberto M. Rosende

No doubt a U.S. \$5,000 revenue stamp prepared for issue in 1872 would have been the most expensive stamp ever released by the United States, but the most beautiful?

As a result of the recent auction of the revenue collections of the late Morton Joyce Dean, the firm of Daniel F. Kelleher submitted a large die proof of this stamp to The Philatelic Foundation for expertization.

For those of us on the Expert Committee who had the opportunity to examine this item (certificate No. 240,000 was issued for this proof), this question was easily answered. The intricate design of its background coupled with the selection of the most appropriate colors--light green, yellow, and black--places this item in a class by itself.

Having no doubt of its authenticity, we also wanted to know as much as possible about its production. Of course, it is recorded in George T. Turner's *Essays and Proofs of United States Internal Revenue Stamps* on page 63 under the heading "Essay 110," and described in these words:

"Largest Design (68 x 113 mm.) and highest denomination of a revenue stamp was approved by the Commissioner June 14, 1872, just 3 1/2 months prior to repeal of all documentary taxes, except for the 2¢ Bank Check. The usual imprints--'CARPENTER' on right (reading up) and the

'WILCOX'S' and 'JONES'" on left (reading down)--are on one of the two frame plates which include portions of the inner pattern. 'No. ' panel contemplated serially numbering each stamp. The impression is on India paper and mounted on cardboard measuring 122 x 166 mm."



Phillip H. Ward, Jr., in his article about this item published in *The American Revenuer*, November 1962, page 132, copied from an earlier version published in *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News*, lets us know that he considers this proof to be one of the rarest and scarcest of all. A careful check made over a period of years by the philatelist Samuel W. Comstock brought to light only 17 copies, including the eight in the Clarence Eagle collection in the Library of Congress. Therefore, only nine copies have been available to collectors. Only four copies are recorded as being

light green, yellow and black.

An act of Congress, approved by President Lincoln on July 1, 1862, authorized a tax on a variety of documents and articles to help pay the cost of the Civil War then being fought between northern and southern states, and tax stamps to show payment. Each stamp was specifically designated for a special usage. The highest stamp in this first revenue issue had a \$200 value.

A second issue, released in 1871, included a \$500 value. In early 1872 the Internal Revenue Division of the Treasury Department believed that a higher denomination would soon be necessary and ordered the engraver Joseph R. Carpenter to prepare the \$5,000 denomination. Then on June 14, 1872, the design and colors were approved; but as the Boston Philatelic Society book on *Revenue Stamps of the United States* by Toppan, Deats and Holland tells us, "there was evidently no call for it and the books prove beyond any question that it was never even *printed* except in proof form."

When the records of the Carpenter firm were bought by Hiram E. Deats, a letter from Joseph Carpenter to Edwin Lamasure, his plant superintendent, dated July 14, 1872, was found. It included this statement:

"I send you the \$5000 stamp approved in the colors in which it is to be printed in case we have an order for this stamp--a very improbable contingency."

George B. Sloane, in his columns in *Stamps*, gives us some light on why a stamp with such a high denomination was ever contemplated and, more than that, even prepared. He reports that Hugh C. Barr, a New York auctioneer, showed him a document--an 11-page, \$5 million mortgage--that bore 10 copies of the \$500 second issue revenue (Scott No. R133) and a single copy of the 25-cent blue and black revenue, a total tax of \$5,000.25. The document was found by a stockbroker in New Jersey who held it for many years. This indicates that at least on some occasions there were transactions of such magnitude that a \$5,000 stamp could have been used.

Unfortunately, all we have is this \$5,000 proof. Since we assume that very few collectors have seen it in all its beauty, we are reproducing it in "living colors" on the cover of this *PF Quarterly*. ❖