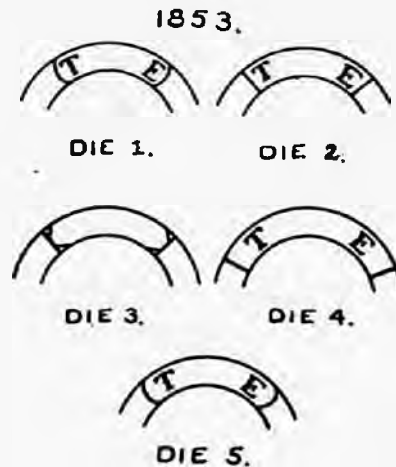


UNITED STATES ENVELOPE DIES.

By C. A. HOWES.

In the first issue of stamped envelopes, which appeared July 1, 1853, there are five well-marked dies which are, perhaps, more familiar to collectors than those of later issues. These are numbered in the catalogues instead of being lettered like the more recent issues—why, I cannot say, for Horner lettered them in his history.



The outline illustrations show the differences between the dies, which are mainly in the lettered labels. Die 1 is often called the "close die," because of the curved ends of the label inclosing THREE coming so close to the initial and final letters. Die 2 is the "narrow, straight" die, the ends of the label being straight and near the word THREE. Die 3 is generally known as the "K die." It is very similar to the last, but a short, diagonal line has been drawn in each corner of the label, making octagonal ends rather than "K ends." Die 4 is the "wide, straight" die. Not only is the label much wider than any other, but the letters of THREE are much farther apart. The ends are straight like Die 2. Die 5 is the common one, the label being narrow with curved ends which do not come so close to the word as in the case of Die 1.

Of the 6 cent there was but one die like Die 2, but of the 10 cent there were two, the narrow straight, Die 2, and the wide straight, Die 4.

With the issue of 1860, with stars at the sides, there is no difficulty as there is but one die of each value, except the 1 cent. The only difference between the dies of the latter is that Die 1 has a period after POSTAGE, while Die 2 has none, and is slightly larger. Both the 1 cent and the 3 cent however appear with many minor varieties such as have already been alluded to, but which are not important enough to notice here.

In the issue of 1861 there are no die varieties except in the 3-cent value, and these again are of the minor type, though two are distinct enough to have special mention in Mr. Toppan's list. The first one has a broken circle containing the numeral at the left, and the second has a broken circle at the right, which runs into the outside border line of the stamp.

When we reach the 2-cent value of 1863-4, we find a number of differences. The first dies used in 1863 are lettered U. S. POSTAGE, and though there are a number of varieties only two are important enough to list.



The illustration shows the difference between them which is most marked in the figures 2. In February, 1864, new

dies appeared of the same general design, but inscribed U. S. POST. above. Again, there are many varieties due to carelessness in engraving, but these are grouped into two divisions following the width of the stamped impressions. These run from 23½ mm. to 26½ mm. The dividing line is taken at 26 mm., and all impressions having this width or over, are assigned to Die 1, while all under 26 mm. are assigned to Die 2.

For the other values of the 1864 issue there are only single dies, except for the 3 cent and 6 cent, which are again only minor.

We now come to the most puzzling of all issues for the majority of collectors. These are the so-called "Reay issue" of 1870, and the "Plimpton issue" of 1874. When G. H. Reay was awarded the contract for the stamped envelope series of 1870, he produced an artistic and beautifully engraved set of dies in which we find no varieties except a slight difference in the form of Franklin's "choker" on the 1 cent. The contract awarded by the Post-Office Department as most of us know, runs for four years. At the end of this period the Plimpton Manufacturing Company of Hartford, Conn., were the successful competitors. Mr. Reay tried by every means possible to prevent the new parties from carrying out their contract, refusing to deliver the dies to them and even attempting to "buy-up" every competent die sinker that he could obtain. The result was that the Plimpton Company brought out a poorly executed series of copies of the Reay dies, which are readily told from the latter. Some of them were so poor that several attempts were made to improve them, and hence we have a number of dies of these values which were generally those most used and therefore most hurriedly produced in the first place.

There are three general distinguishing features between the two issues; first, the fine engraving and clear printing of the Reay as against the more poorly executed and generally less clear appearance of the Plimpton; second, the horizontal shading lines which appear embossed without color on the numerals, or in the case of the 7 cent on the discs containing them, which are usually quite distinct on the Plimpton dies, but generally hardly noticeable on the Reay dies, and when they are distinct on the latter, seem to be finer than the Plimpton; third, the periods after U and S in the Reay dies are always square, while a majority of the 1, 2 and 3-cent Plimpton dies exhibit periods that are anything but squares.

For other differences between the two issues and the various dies of the Plimpton series we had best take up the issues together, value by value.

1 CENT. 1870: 1874

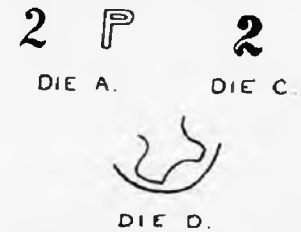


1 cent. *Reay*. Bust evenly placed in oval and end points to N of ONE. All the scallops between the lettering and outer frame have dots in them.

Plimpton Die A. Bust comes to a corner at the back, very close to the frame. Lettering small and scroll-work very poorly done.

Die B. Bust evenly placed in oval like Reay, and end points between N and E of ONE. Back line of bust straight.

2 CENT PLIMPTON



2 cent. *Reay*. Well-formed thick numerals in circles.

Plimpton Die A. Poorly formed thin numerals in circles; no ball at bottom of 2.

Die B. Thick numerals in ovals; O in TWO has a solid center of color.

Die B2. A variety of B in which the tail of the 2 at the left touches the oval.

Die B3. Another variety of B in which the center of the O in TWO has a couple of crossed lines in it.

Die C. The tail of the 2 is entirely clear of the down stroke, while in the previous dies it is connected with the down stroke for some distance above the "ball" numerals in ovals. This is the common die of the red 2 cent.

Die D. Numerals similar to C, but bust is cut away in a pronounced arc of a small circle, though nearer a quarter-circle than a semicircle as usually described.

3 CENT PLIMPTON



3 cent. *Reay*. Thick numerals in circles; (all ovals in Plimpton).

Plimpton. Die A. Tall, thin numerals in large ovals; small lettering.

Die B. Shorter, thick numerals in smaller ovals; large lettering; base of bust ½ mm. from bottom of frame.

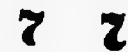
Die C. Similar to B but base of bust 1 mm. from frame and knot of queue quite prominent.

6 CENT. 1870: 1874



6 cent. *Reay*. Neck long at the back. *Plimpton*. Neck short at the back and hair comes over the forehead in a hook—upside down.

7 CENT. 1870: 1874



7 cent. *Reay*. The figures 7 do not curve up at the bottom.

Plimpton. The figures have an upward curve at the bottom forming a hook.

10 CENT. 1870: 1874



10 cent. *Reay*. Knot of queue almost unnoticeable.

Plimpton. Die A. Known as the "Booby die." The head is very

large, filling up the oval and coming very close to the frame.

— Die B. Very similar to the Reay die, but the knot of the queue stands out quite prominently.

12 cent. *Reay*. G of POSTAGE has no cross bar; point of bust cut off square.

Plimpton. G of POSTAGE has a cross bar; point of bust is rounded.

15 cent. *Reay*. Head shows side whiskers.

Plimpton. No side whiskers—only a single lock of hair in front of ear.

24 CENT 1870:1874



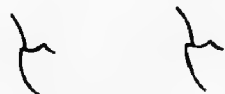
24 cent. *Reay*. Ornaments following border of oval end in little squares

Plimpton. The ornaments end in lines.

30 cent. *Reay*. A straight edge placed against both bottoms of the labels containing numerals will show them to be parallel.

Plimpton. A straight edge placed in the same manner will show plainly that the labels are not parallel.

30 CENT 1870:1874

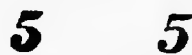


REAY. PLIMPTON.

50 cent. *Reay*. The upper corners of the shields containing the numerals stop practically at the edge of the oval containing the head.

Plimpton. The corners of the shields project noticeably into the oval, making a good hook.

5 CENT 1875



DIE A. DIE B.

In 1875 a new value was engraved by the Plimpton Company, viz., 5 cents, which comes in two dies. Their distinctive features is the shape of the numeral which in Die A has a thick "flag," and in Die B a thin one. There is a third intermediate variety of numeral which is not listed in the Standard catalogue.

The Centennial envelopes are known to all. They were struck from two dies, one at the Hartford works of the Plimpton Company and the other in the Government Building at the Exposition. The latter, commonly called the Philadelphia Die, was damaged, and shows a double or split white line beneath POSTAGE, where the Hartford Die shows but a single one.

We have now described the varieties up to the time when letter postage was reduced to 2 cents on October 1, 1883. For this event a new 2-cent die was engraved of the same general design as the 3-cent Die B which was in use so long. The large colored letters on the engine turned ground will distinguish it from the succeeding 2-cent dies. It is generally known as the "October Die."

At the same time a 4-cent envelope was issued, but in a much neater and better-engraved design. There are two dies of this, differing mainly in the numerals, those of Die A measuring 2¾ mm across their widest part, and those of Die B measuring 3¼ mm. The former also come to a point at the left angle of the left figure 4, while the latter are blunted there.

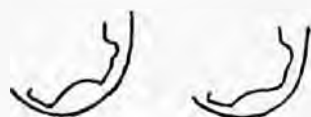
The 2-cent die was unsatisfactory, and in November a new one appeared of the same general design as the 4-cent.

Between the labels containing the lettering and the white frame lines will be found four wavy lines—two next the outer frame line and two next the inner one—which serves as its distinguishing feature. This is called the November die, but it did not prove much better than the previous one. The impressions were printed in red until May, 1884, when the color was changed to a muddy brown. This ink did not print as well and the dies deteriorated under its use much faster than before. The result was that in June the impressions showed the dies had been retouched, the white lines of the design having been thickened and the whole design having a coarse and blotched appearance which is very noticeable—in fact, more resembling the coarse impressions of the next (July) die than the original November die. Some of the differences, however are so marked that they must be ascribed to different dies though they are only listed as varieties of the "June" or "retouched" die, as it is called; yet they are as worthy of being given a "letter" under this design as the different dies of the 2-cent Plimpton, for instance.

There are three of these varieties, viz.: the "Two-link" variety, which has only two diamonds or "links" between the right oval containing the figure and the end of the label beneath, instead of two and a half as in the normal design; the "3½-link" variety, which has this number of diamonds between the left oval and the end of the label above it, instead of 2½ as in the normal design; and the "round-O" variety in which the O in TWO is a perfect circle.

There is one variety known as the "spread die," which seems to be a hybrid between the November and the retouched dies, as the left half of design shows the evidences of retouching in the wider lines and larger figures, while the right half has not been altered.

2 CENT JULY 1884



DIE A. DIE B.

In July, 1884, another design appeared, which followed the last one very closely, but is distinguished by having only *one* wavy line between the inscribed labels and the white frame lines. The white lines of the design are also heavier than the November (1883) die which is the reason the retouched (June) die somewhat resembles it. This is known as the "Kellogg Die," and it became very familiar and very monotonous to us all during its thirteen years of service. There are two varieties, Die A having the bust come to a point below the queue and Die B having it rounded off there, which makes the bust a little thicker at the back.

We now come to the issue of 1887, in which the uniform design, adopted for the four common values, is known as the "Tiffany Die." In the 1 cent there are two well-marked dies, which are not noted in the Standard catalogue, as well as several minor varieties. These two dies are distinguished A, by a larger bust inclined forward, no cross-bar on G of POSTAGE, and the side ornaments 4½ mm. long; B, by a smaller but more upright, G has the cross-bar, and the ornaments only 3 mm. long. The latter is the common one.

2 CENT 1887



DIE A. DIE B.

The 2 cents also has two well-marked dies. Die A, commonly known as the "rejected die," has the point of the bust directed toward the *third* white tooth of the inner serrated line. (In the drawing the teeth are represented in black, for the drawing shows the *design* and the latter is given by the *white* lines in the solid color of the stamped impression.) There is no cross-bar to the G of POSTAGE. Die B has the point of the bust directed toward the *second* white tooth of the inner serrated line, which does not tilt the head back as before, and the G now has a cross-bar. There are several minor varieties, but the most noticeable is perhaps the "capped 2" variety, where the figure has a white cap very similar to that found on the capped varieties of the 2-cent adhesive of 1890.

5 CENT 1887



DIE A. DIE B.

The 5-cent had but one die until 1894 when Purell of Holyoke, had the contract. A new die then appeared which was distinguished from the previous one by the fact that there appeared to be no neck to the bust in front. Die A shows the neck between the coat and the chin, and also a button on the lapel in front of the shoulder strap. Die B has no button, and the coat comes directly up to the chin. This is called the "Holyoke Die."

In the meantime the Columbian series was issued, and in this design we find four varieties, though they are not listed in the Standard catalogue. As they are quite plain we give them in case any one is interested:

Var. 1. Period after CENTS; meridian back of Columbus' head.

Var. 2. Period after CENTS; no meridian back of Columbus' head.

Var. 3. No period after CENTS; meridian back of Columbus' head.

Var. 4. No period after CENTS; no meridian back of Columbus' head.

The 1-cent occurs in varieties 1, 2, 3; the 2-cent and 5-cent in all four varieties; the 10-cent in variety 3 only.

2 CENT 1899



DIE A. DIE B.

We now come to the current issue, which made its appearance in 1899. In the 2-cent value we again find a "rejected die." This time, instead of being tipped too far back, the bust was tipped forward, so that in Die A the point of the bust comes down almost to the left upper corner of the shield containing the figure. In Die B the point of the bust is sharper and is directed between the first and second white teeth of the inner serrated line. (See remarks concerning the drawing under the 2-cent of 1887.)

The 4-cents has three dies which can be as well described as illustrated. Die A has a long, thin neck, with the "Adam's apple" showing; there is no draping in the bust, which ends in a point. Die B has a shorter, thicker neck, with no "Adam's apple," and the bust has draping on it with something in front resembling a necktie; the bust is not pointed, but blunt. Die C is unmistakable, as the head is large instead of quite small as in the other two, and there is *no* inner serrated line at all, thus departing from the original design.