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LIBERIA

The First Pictorial Issue

By C. W. WICKERSHAM

The picturesque stamps of Liberia's First Pictorial Issue were engraved by Waterlow in London and issued in 1892. These were the first Liberian stamps that were printed by the line-engraved process, the earlier issues all having been lithographed. While the "Scott Standard Postage Stamp Catalog" describes the issue as that of 1892-96, this includes certain stamps of different denominations, but of similar designs, that came out in 1896 or 1897. These latter were the 10c, 15c, 20c, 25c, and 30c denominations that were unknown to the 1892 issue, with which alone this article treats.

The 1892 stamps were of various designs and colors, were perforated 15 with the exceptions hereafter noted, were all engraved and included a number of minor varieties. With a few exceptions, the outstanding minor varieties are not listed in leading catalogs, which indeed are not at all consistent in their listings. For instance, the variety of the \$1 imperforate between (horizontal pair) is catalogued, while similar varieties known in all other denominations, including both the higher dollar values, are not mentioned.

For this reason it seems worth while to describe the stamps and to list all known varieties, including those of color, printing and separation. All are included in the writer's collection and have been shown at the Collectors Club.

Preliminarily it may be mentioned that all twelve denominations are known imperforate. All are also known imperforate between (vertical pairs) with one possible exception, and as already stated all are known imperforate between (horizontal pairs), but only the \$1 being listed in catalogs in this condition of separation.

The color errors or varieties are confined in one catalog to the 1c and 2c, although two other catalogs each list a total of four.

Let us describe the individual stamps and their varieties.

1c and 2c

The design is the same for both these denominations. The star is doubtless a symbol similar to that in the Liberian flag. (See Fig. 1).

The colors are vermilion for the 1c and blue for the 2c. However, each is known in the color of the other. The varieties are as follows:

1c vermilion; 1c blue (error; both perf. 15); a. imperforate; b. vertical pair imperforate between; c. horizontal pair imperforate between.



Fig. 1. 1c and 2c, horizontal pairs imperforate between.

2c blue; 2c vermilion (error; both perf. 15); a. imperforate; b. vertical pair imperforate between; c. horizontal pair imperforate between.

Imperforate plate proofs of both denominations are known — the 1c in red brown and the 2c in orange vermilion.

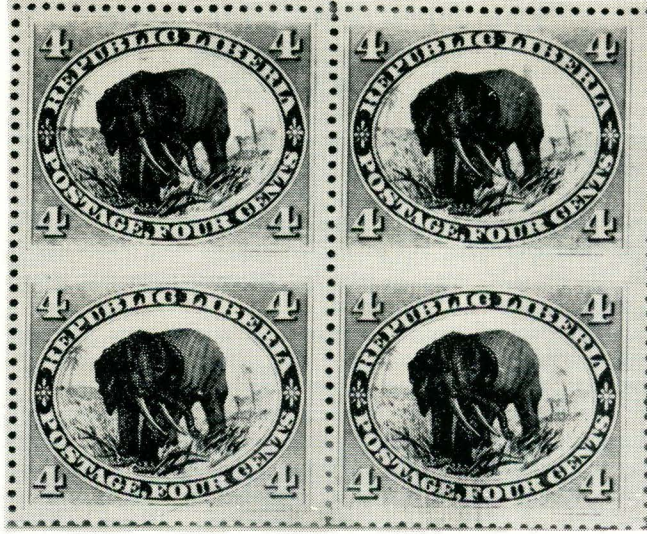


Fig. 2. 4c Block of four imperforate between (vertical pairs).

4c green and black

This stamp pictures an African elephant in black against a white and black oval. The rest of the stamp is green except for the white lettering and decorations. (See Fig. 2). Incidentally, the African elephant is larger than the Indian elephant, usually seen in the circus and carries far heavier ivory. However, there are a number of sub-species of the African elephant, some of which, especially in West Africa, are smaller than the great animal of Central and Eastern Africa. The source of this portrayal appears to be unknown.

The 4c is one of the three denominations of this issue that is also found with the center inverted (See Fig. 3), the others being the 8c and the \$5. There is one other bi-colored 1892 stamp, namely the \$1., but it is not known with inverted center so far as the writer has been able to ascertain.

The varieties of the 4c are as follows:

4c green & black, perf. 15; a. center inverted; b. imperforate; c. vertical pair imperforate



Fig. 3. 4c with inverted center

between; d. horizontal pair imperforate between. Bi-colored plate proofs are known in black and maroon. They are imperforate.



Fig. 4. Block of vertical pairs of the 6c imperforate between.

6c blue green

Here the design is a palm tree, supposed to be an oil palm (*borassus*), in a framed oval (See Fig. 4).

Palm oil is one of the Liberian products that is important as an export. It is said that the design of this stamp, as well as the 8c and 12c, are taken from Buttikofer's book on Liberia. Buttikofer was a Swiss who travelled in Liberia in the 1880's. The book appeared in 1890.¹

1. See Stamps, May 8, 1943 (Article by Ben Hamilton, Jr.).



Fig. 5. Horizontal pair of the 8c imperforate between.



Fig. 6. 8c with center inverted and 8c with center sideways.

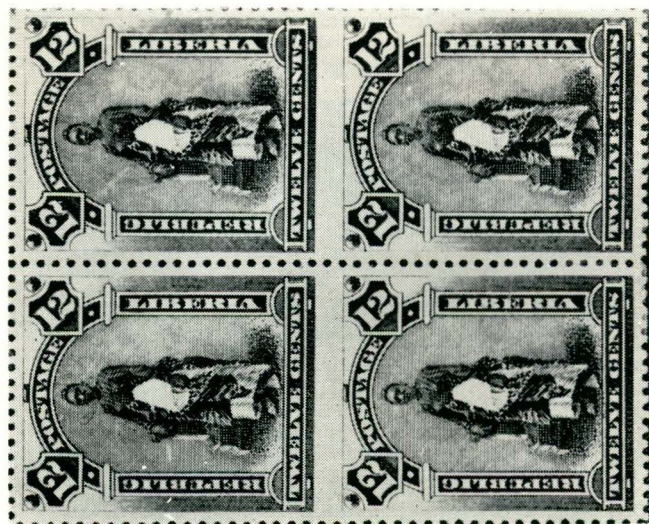


Fig. 7. Block of the 12c consisting of two vertical pairs imperforate between. Shown vertically.

The varieties of the 6c are, 6c blue green, perf. 15; a, imperforate; b, vertical pairs imperforate between; c, horizontal pair, imperforate between. A lighter shade of color than normal is also known, as well as an imperforate plate proof in brown.

8c brown and black

The design of this interesting stamp consists of a portrait of President Johnson in black in an oval on a large brown shield and panels (See Fig 5). The small letters are dates of the inauguration and termination of the Presidency of Mr. Johnson, i. e. "1884" and "1892". President H. R. W. Johnson is said to have been the son of one of the early settlers, and the first native born Liberian to become president.

Mr. Johnson had served in several positions in Government before becoming president. He was first elected in 1884 and continued in office by re-election until 1892. His portrait appears again on the \$5 denomination of this issue.

Two especially interesting varieties of this stamp occur (See Fig. 6). One is the inverted center already referred to and the other is with the center portrait sideways. Singles of the former, one unused and the other used, with a Monrovia cancellation, are in the writer's collection together with a single and pair showing the center portrait sideways—certainly a somewhat unusual error of printing. This latter is not listed in any of the three leading catalogs.

Hence the varieties of this stamp are as follows:

8c brown and black, perf. 15; a. center inverted; b. center sideways; c. imperforate; d. vertical pair imperforate between; e. horizontal pair imperforate between. The variety with center sideways is extremely rare. Imperforate bi-colored plate proofs of the normal stamp in green and black are known.

12c rose red

The design is a full length picture of a native woman, stated to be in "full dress",² a mode of dress not permitted in New York or London, even Paris. This native woman is probably a Kruwoman or one of the Vai tribe. Hamilton^{1a} says that while comely in youth,

1a. Ibid.

2. See Scott's Catalog, 1958, Vol. II, p. 683.



Fig. 8. (Top) Block of the 16c imperforate.

Fig. 9. (Bottom) Pair of the 16c greenish blue error.



Fig. 10. Vertical pair of the 24c imperforate between.

they are not so sightly generally, have unrefined costumes and tend to exhibit steatopygy (steatopygia), a word which most of us will have to look up in the dictionary.

And there is another variety, this time a shade or color. Of the two full sheets of 20 in the writer's collection, one is the catalogued rose red, but the other is a plain rose, a quite different shade.

The varieties of the 12c are therefore as follows:

12c rose red, perf. 15; 12c rose, perf. 15; . imperforate; b. vertical pair imperforate between; c. horizontal pair, imperforate between. Imperforate plate proofs in purple or reddish violet are known.

16c lilac

The main design of the 16c is a coat of arms, surmounted by an elephant, with the flags of Liberia projecting from each upper corner of the shield (See Fig. 8). In very small capital letters in color on the ribbons under the shield appears the inscription "The love of liberty brought us here." This is the national Liberian motto. Doubtless it is a reference to

the colonization of Liberia by freed slaves from the United States in the 1820's. There is some question whether the design shows the official coat-of-arms or seal of the country which was adopted when Liberia became independent over a hundred years ago. The elephant may or may not have been in the original. Also there is a question whether the dove should carry a scroll or a letter in its bill. This is a point of minor interest considering the small size of the bird as portrayed.³

This stamp is also found in a greenish blue color, an error of color which is not mentioned in the Scott catalog.⁴

One catalog also lists the 16c in dull purple, a shade which has not been seen by the writer.⁵

The varieties are therefore the following:

16c lilac, perf. 15; 16c dull purple; 16c greenish blue (both perf. 15); a, imperforate; b, vertical pair imperforate between; c, horizontal pair imperforate between. The separation varieties in the writer's collection are all in the lilac color. A plate proof imperforate in darkish olive green is known.

24c deep green on yellowish paper

Here the design goes back to the star as the central *motif*, but with different surroundings than those of the 1c and 2c. (See Fig. 10).

Aside from the usual separation varieties it may be noted that the stamp is found in a lighter shade of green. This is the color of a full sheet of 20 in the writer's collection. The paper appears to be the same shade of yellowish or cream as that of several stamps including blocks and pairs in the dark green color also in the collection.⁶

To sum up, the varieties of this stamp may be listed thus, i. e. 24c deep green on yellowish (both perf. 15); a, imperforate; b, vertical pair imperforate between; c, horizontal pair imperforate between. Plate proofs imperforate in dark bluish green on light yellowish or cream are known.

32c greenish blue

The design is similar to that of the 16c, with the coat-of-arms being the principal motif. The lettering and panels are somewhat differently arranged. (See Fig. 11). Here again, as in the case of the 16c, we have a color error which is not listed in the Scott catalog. While the ordinary color of this stamp is greenish blue, the error is in lilac. The shade of the latter is practically the same as that of the 16c lilac, while the greenish blue stamp is of practically the same shade as the 16c error. Moreover, there is a further variety of the 32c, namely the bluish green, entirely distinct from the ordinary greenish blue, as is shown by a full sheet of 15 in the writer's collection.⁷

Once more we find the usual three varieties of separation. All that have been seen are in the ordinary greenish blue color. We should therefore list these stamps thus, i. e. 32c greenish blue, 32c bluish green, 32c lilac (error of color), all three perf. 15; a. imperforate; b. vertical pair imperforate between; c. horizontal pair imperforate between.

Imperforate plate proofs in deep blue are known. (See Fig. 13).

3. For a more detailed account, see Stamps, May 8, 1943 p. 187-88, by Ben Hamilton, Jr.
4. In Stanley-Gibbons Catalog, Part III, 1954, the color is stated to be greyish blue (p. 405); and in Minkus, 1958, it is described as slate blue green (p. 1036).
5. Stanley-Gibbons, no. 79a.
6. Stanley-Gibbons Catalog refers to green on yellow and deep green on pale yellow, *idem*.
7. The Stanley-Gibbons catalog describes these as 32e greyish blue, 32e greenish blue (separate varieties) and 32e dull purple (error of color), *idem*. In Minkus they are given as slate blue green and turquoise blue (varieties) and as lilac (error), *idem*.

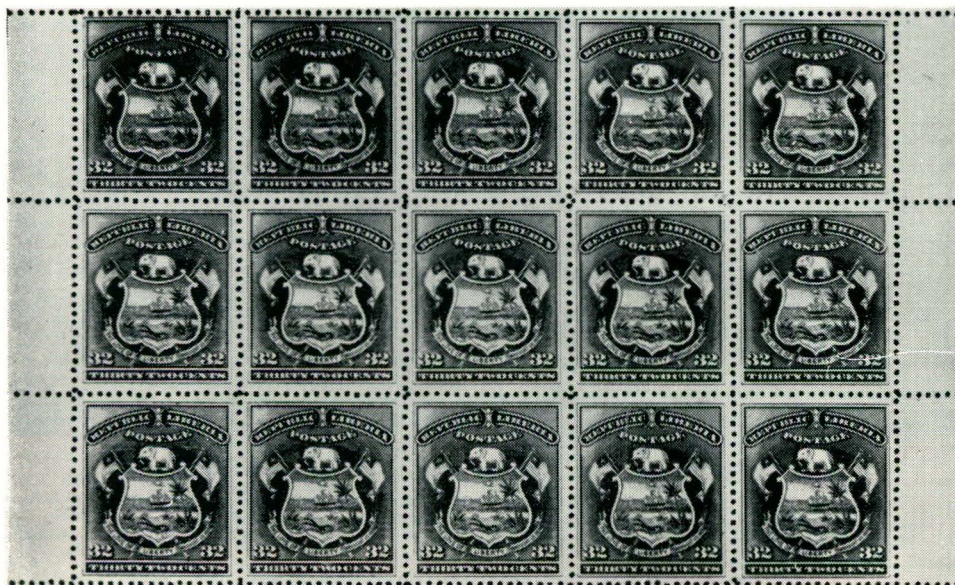
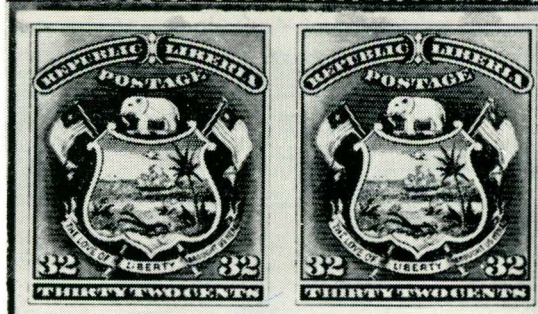


Fig. 11. Full sheet of the 32c bluish green variety.

Fig. 12. (Top) Horizontal pair of the 32c imperforate between.



Fig. 13. (Bottom) Pair of plate proofs of the 32c.



\$1 blue and black

This striking stamp shows a hippopotamus coming out of the water to feed. As he is in black and the rest of the stamp partly white and partly a shaded blue, the hippo is given striking prominence. Leviathan seems to be coming out of the depths, but one may suspect that he is in fact the smaller hippo of the African West Coast, rather than the much larger animal of Victoria Nyanza or the Zambesi River.

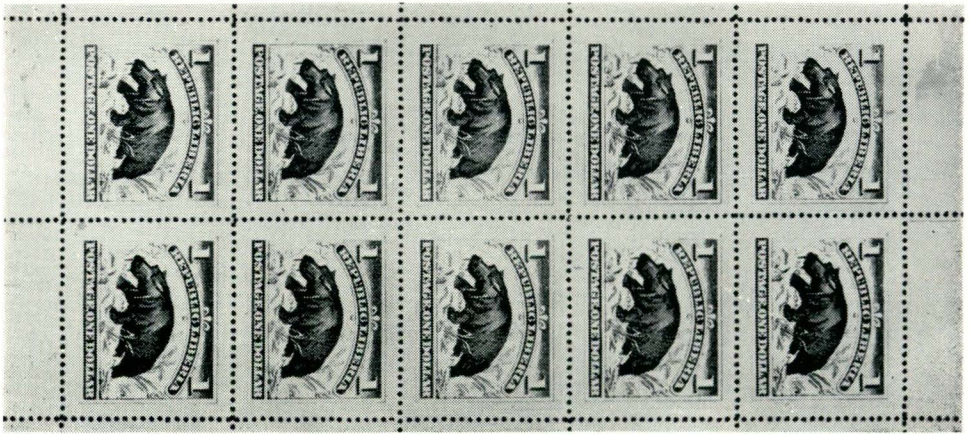


Fig. 14. Full sheet of 10 of the \$1. Shown vertically.

This Liberian animal is known to science as the Pigmy Hippopotamus, and weighs about 300 pounds when mature. The big hippos weigh fourteen times as much.⁸ The artist, however, has apparently given the animal, which is largely a nocturnal feeder, two small tusks protruding downward, whereas a hippo's tusks point outward or upward. Close examination of the design shows that these "tusks" are really the stems of trees beyond the hippo.

The figure "1" appears against the blue background in each upper corner. (See Fig. 14).

This stamp is also found in a different color, namely ultramarine and black. In fact the latter may be as common or even more common than the blue. The separation varieties color in the writer's collection are all ultramarine, as are two more full sheets.

At last we have reached a stamp, the only one of the whole issue, where catalogs have listed a separation variety, namely a horizontal pair, imperforate between. As this and the other two separation varieties, i. e. the imperforate and the vertical pair imperforate between are found in all the other denominations of this 1892 issue, it is certainly worth while to record their existence here.

The \$1 has not been seen by the writer in a vertical pair imperforate between. It is the only exception and there is no particular reason to think that it does not exist. The evidence is simply negative.

The writer inclines to list the varieties of this stamp accordingly, viz. \$1 ultramarine and black, perf. 15; \$1 blue and black, perf. 15; a. imperforate; b. vertical pair imperforate between (possible); c. horizontal pair imperforate between (a and c ultramarine and black; b not seen or examined). Imperforate plate proofs are known in brownish maroon, a color closely like that of the plate proofs of the 6c mentioned above, but with a little more maroon.

\$2 brown on yellowish

The design of the \$2 is much like that of the 24c, but with an outer frame or panel decorated with scrolls at the four outer corners. The star is again the central and outstanding theme. A similar background of decorative network, and similar inscriptions except for the denomination appear. The paper is slightly different in color than the 24c, being almost a light buff, rather than yellowish or cream. No varieties are known to the writer other than those of separation.

8. Cf. *Wild Animals of the World* (Baker and Bridges), Garden City, p. 128.



Fig. 15. Block of four of the \$1 ultramarine and black, imperforate.

It was doubtless the very small group of educated negroes, a fraction only of the total population, whose ideas were expressed in most of the functions of government, including the postal system, the design and use of stamps. The great bulk of the population was composed of uncivilized native tribes. Most of the educated negroes were descendants of the American freed men. Undoubtedly they influenced both artists and printers in this connection and Messrs. Waterlow in London engraved the stamps accordingly. The star, whether of Hope, Freedom or Liberty, would have a real meaning to them as a symbol of their country and its history. In any event, as we have seen, four out of the twelve values have the star, the central and most outstanding feature of the design.

The varieties of the \$2 are these, namely: \$2 brown on yellowish (or light buff) paper, perf. 15; a. imperforate; b. vertical pair imperforate between; c. horizontal pair imperforate between. An imperforate plate proof in green on the same yellowish or light buff paper is known.

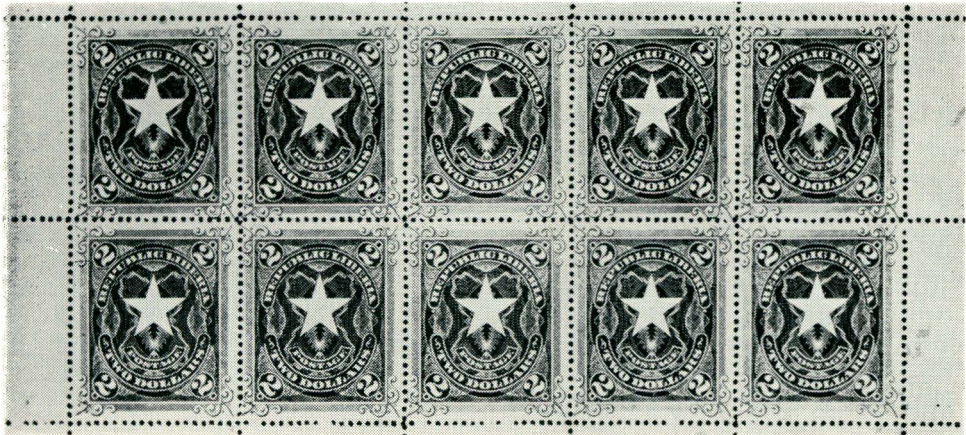


Fig. 16. Full sheet of 10 of the \$2.

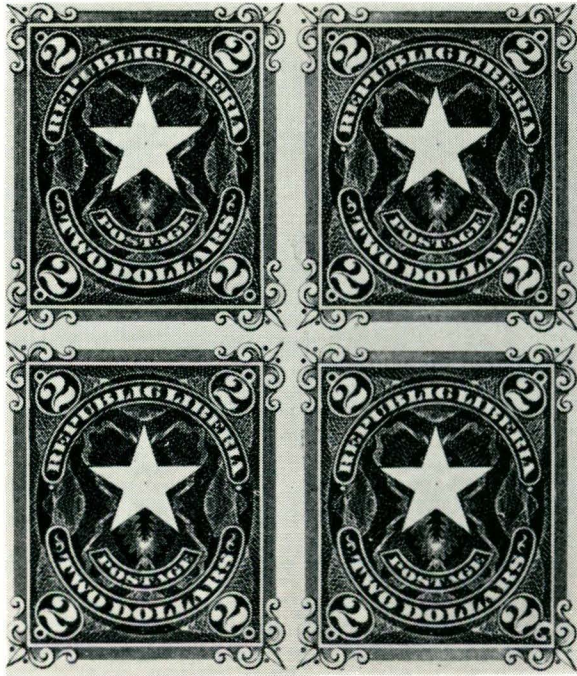


Fig. 17. Block of four of the \$2 imperforate.

\$5 carmine and black

This stamp, which is the highest value of the issue, is probably also the rarest, certainly in blocks. The design is featured by a portrait of President Johnson, as in the case of the 8c, and while frame arrangement and details are somewhat different, in addition to the difference in color, the words of the inscription are the same, except for the value. (See Fig. 18).



Fig. 18. Full sheet of 10 of the \$5.

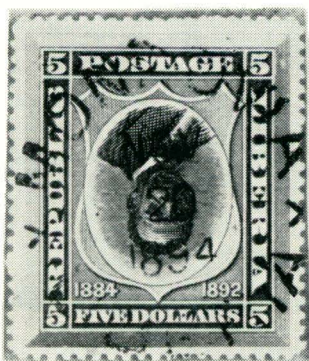


Fig. 19. \$5 with inverted center and Monrovia cancellation.

This stamp also gives us the third inverted center of the issue. We have already noted the inverted centers of the 4c and the 8c. An unused and a used copy of the \$5 with center inverted are in the writer's collection. Fig. 19 is cancelled with a black Monrovia postmark.



Fig. 20. Engraver's proof of the vignette of the \$5.

The portrait of President Johnson was undoubtedly engraved from a photograph. The writer has the engraver's proof of the vignette. It is on a fairly thick cream woven paper. (Fig. 20).

This high denomination, the last of the issue, can be listed as follows, namely: \$5 carmine and black, perf. 15; a. inverted center; b. imperforate; c. vertical pair imperforate between; d. horizontal pair imperforate between. Bi-colored plate proofs in blue and black, imperforate, are also known.

We can sum up our conclusions on this issue by saying first that while the 10, 15, 20, 25 and 30 cents denominations are listed in the Scott catalog as part of a so-called 1892-96 issue, because of the similarity of design to the 8, 12, 16, 24 and 32 cents values, they were not part of the 1892 issue with which we are dealing here.⁹

9. The Stanley-Gibbons catalog lists them as part of their 1897 issue; *idem*, Minkus under his 1896-1905 heading. Scott gives 1896.



Fig. 21. Block of four of the \$5 imperforate.

Secondly, the catalogs neglect the separation varieties with only one exception out of 35 or possibly 36. No reason known to the writer supports this discrimination. The true rule would seem to be to include all or eliminate all, rather than to list only one. The method adopted naturally leads one who consults the catalog to believe that only the \$1 exists imperforate between and then only in a horizontal pair, the fact being that all are known in this condition, just as all are known imperforate and all imperforate between in vertical pairs with one and only one possible exception.

Finally, more errors and varieties of color are known to exist than appears in catalogs.

The size of the full sheets seems to have been misunderstood by some previous authors in the past or there have been printings not known to the writer. Full sheets of all denominations in the writer's collection show the following:

1c, 2c	Full sheet of	60	(6 x 10)
4c	" "	60	(10 x 6)
6c	" "	40	(5 x 8)
8c	" "	30	(5 x 6)
12c, 24c	" "	20	(4 x 5)
16c, 32c	" "	15	(3 x 5)
\$1	" "	10	(5 x 2)
\$2, \$5	" "	10	(2 x 5) ¹⁰

The writer hopes that these notes may serve to attract attention to the interesting and beautiful stamps of the issue, as well as to correct some errors of the past and give an accurate list of the known varieties, which the standard catalogs should use if consistency is their rule.

10. The stamps of the 1892 and 1894 issues with the "official" and "O.S." overprints are in full sheets of the same size as the corresponding denominations of the issue described in this article, with two possible exceptions in each. These are the 32c and \$1 of the 1892 officials, and the 1c and \$5 of the 1894 officials, which I have not been able to check.