



Lot 90



Lot 90
Detail of Stamp

Providence, Rhode Island

Lot 90

5c Gray Black (10X1). Position 9 (the only position with just two pearls above the oval), full to large margins, cancelled by usual manuscript check mark, **tied by red “Paid” handstamp**, matching “Providence R.I. Sep. 4” circular datestamp and “5” rate handstamp on folded letter datelined September 3, 1846, from H. L. Kendall, agent for the New England Iron Company, to Thomas J. Coggeshall in Wareham Mass., light file folds clear of stamp

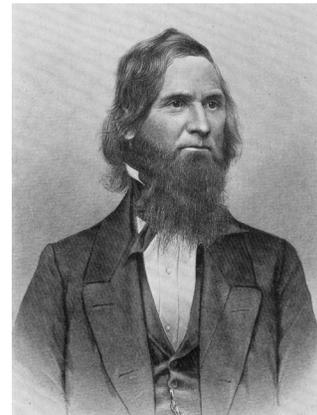
EXTREMELY FINE. A MAGNIFICENT EXAMPLE OF THE PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND, POSTMASTER’S 5-CENT PROVISIONAL TIED BY A HANDSTAMPED MARKING ON COVER. VERY FEW ARE KNOWN TIED IN THIS MANNER. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THIS COVER HAS BEEN OFFERED AT AUCTION SINCE ITS DISCOVERY IN 1926.

Ex Slater (No. 6 in his book) and Lapham. With 2011 P.F. certificate. Scott value for 10X1 tied by handstamp on cover is \$21,500.00. Estimate \$15,000-20,000

The Providence Postmaster

The history of the Providence postmaster’s provisional issue is extensively documented in *The Stamps of the Providence, R.I. Postmaster 1846-47*, published in 1930 by Alpheus B. Slater Jr. (1860-1936). Very little new information has come to light since Slater published his book.

Welcome B. Sayles (1812-1862) was appointed postmaster of Providence in December 1845 by President James K. Polk, the successful Democratic candidate in the election of 1844. Before Polk made the appointment, he received a cautionary letter from Edward J. Mallett, the Providence postmaster from 1831 to November 1845. Mallett expressed concerns over Sayles’ strong ties to the Dorr Rebellion in 1842. The armed rebellion on May 19, 1842, was the climax to a longstanding conflict in Rhode Island between the Dorrites, led by Thomas Dorr, and the Charterites. The Dorrites wanted voting rights in Rhode Island for all men, including those who were not landowners. The Charterites did not want the original Rhode Island charter amended to eliminate the voting requirement of land ownership. After the legislative conflict escalated into armed conflict, the Dorrite militia tried without success to take control of the Providence arsenal. In the aftermath, Thomas Dorr was arrested, and Sayles left the state for two years, returning in 1845 (*Correspondence of James K. Polk: January-June 1845*, James Knox Polk, Robert G. Hall, available from Google Books).



Welcome B. Sayles (1812-1862)
Providence Postmaster

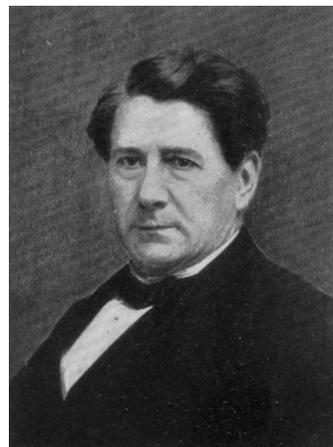


The Union Buildings, in which the Providence post office was located

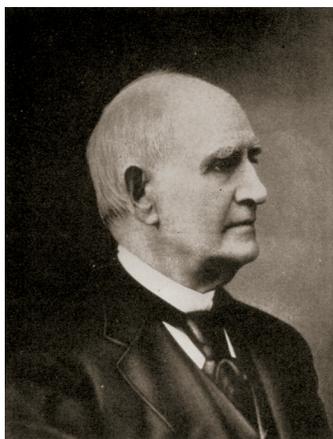
Despite his role in the Rhode Island suffrage movement, Sayles received his commission and served four years under the Polk administration. He was succeeded by Henry L. Bowen, who served from 1849 to 1853. Sayles was reappointed by President Franklin Pierce and served another four years until 1857. He went on to publish the *Providence Daily Post* newspaper and later served as a lieutenant-colonel in the Civil War. Lieutenant-Colonel Sayles was killed on December 13, 1862, in the Battle of Fredericksburg.

The Providence Provisional Stamps

Postmaster Sayles was aware of the success of Great Britain's postal reforms, including the use of postage stamps. In the summer of 1846, Sayles secured permission from the Postmaster General to issue stamps for local use. He ordered an engraved copper plate from a local engraver named George W. Babcock. The plate was originally intended to comprise sixteen subjects, arranged four by four, including twelve 5c and four 10c denominations. The total face value of a sheet printed from the plate in this original format would have been one dollar. After the layout lines were etched into the copper surface, the decision was made to reduce the number of subjects to twelve, comprising eleven 5c denominations and one 10c subject at the top right of the printed sheet. The engraving was accomplished entirely by hand, and no two subjects are exactly alike,



George W. Babcock
Providence engraver



Henry A. Hidden
Providence printer

although the similarity between the 5c and 10c denominated stamps caused confusion. The differences in engraving between one 5c subject and another can best be observed in the pearls above the oval and detail of the acanthus leaves along the bottom.

The finished plate and order for printing was given to Henry A. Hidden & Company, a large commercial printer of bank notes, located in the Turks Head building in Providence. The stamps were printed in grayish black on a crisp grayish white paper used in bank note production. It is reported that five bundles of 100 sheets, for a total of 500 sheets (5,500 5c stamps and 500 10c stamps), together with the copper plate, were delivered to the post office on Friday, August 21, 1846.

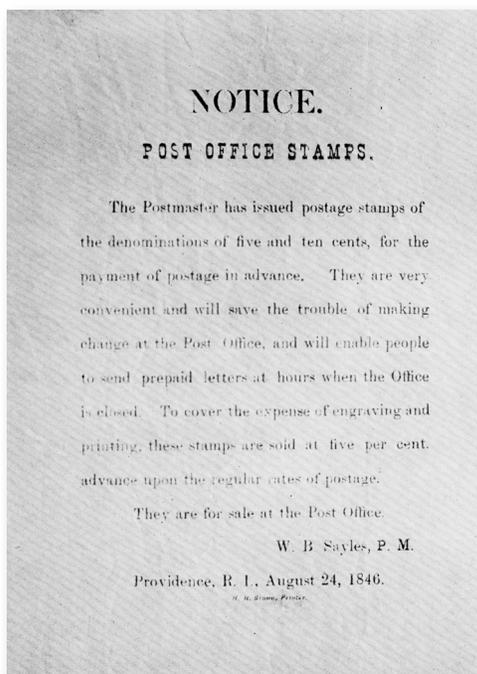
The sheets furnished by the printer were not gummed, so the assistant postmaster, Robert H. Barton, spent Sunday applying gum to the backs of the sheets from two bundles (200 sheets). Two more bundles were subsequently gummed in a similar manner. Thus, 400 of the 500 sheets were gummed at the post office, and the balance of 100 sheets were left ungummed.

A postmaster's handbill announcing the availability of the new stamps is dated August 24, 1846. On the same day, Monday, August 24, this announcement was published in the *Providence Daily Journal*, and the stamps were placed on sale at the post office. Sales were discontinued when the first General Issue stamps (Scott 1 and 2) were received on July 31, 1847. The cashier, F. C. Gardiner, reported that the demand for the provisional stamps tapered off significantly after the first day, and sales were generally weak during the year that the provisional stamps were available.



The Turks Head Building, where the Hidden & Co. printing firm was located

The information and testimony gathered by Slater led him to surmise that most of the four bundles of gummed sheets were sold to the public (his estimate was 3,973 5c and 347 10c stamps). The remainders of post-office gummed sheets, along with the copper plate, were in the possession of Postmaster Sayles until he gifted them to his nephew, Lycurges Sayles, sometime around 1857.



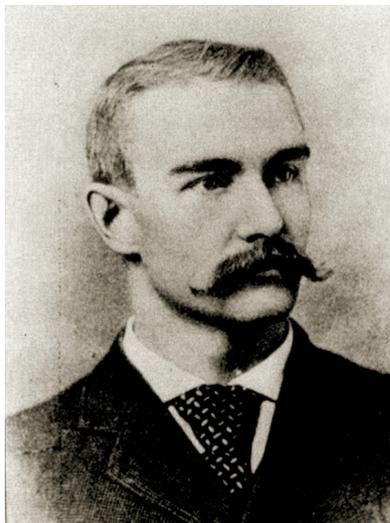
Post office announcement of provisional stamps dated August 24, 1846

The fifth bundle of 100 ungummed sheets was left in the cellar of the old Post Office building until the time the office was relocated to the What Cheer Building. In the process of cleaning out the basement, a janitor put the bundle in the pile for incineration, but a letter carrier, John Hagan, noticed the stamps and asked if he could have them, since they no longer had postal value. Over years the sheets in Hagan's possession — the quantity reported by different sources ranges from 60 to 100 — were dispersed in various ways, and many of them were gummed by Hagan to make them more desirable to collectors. The gum Hagan used was thick, lumpy and brown, unlike the smoother, lighter-colored gum applied at the

post office. Today, unused Providence stamps can be found with original post-office gum, with Hagan's brown "collector" gum, without gum but stained from Hagan's gum, and without gum but relatively free of staining.

In 1893 the copper plate and Postmaster Sayles' remainders were sold for \$2,500 by Lycurges Sayles to E. B. Hanes, a partner in the Philadelphia stamp firm of Bogert & Durbin. The new owners sold the original stamps, and they also used the plate over the next 20 years to make proof impressions on cards (so-called "trial colors") and reprints on paper similar to the original issue. The reprint sheets on stamp paper were made with and without the Bogert & Durbin name printed on the back. In 1917 the plate was acquired by Slater, who donated it to the Rhode Island Historical Society (www.rihs.org).

The Slater book has a photographic census of 50 Providence covers. A few of the covers listed by Slater are stampless covers with Providence provisional stamps fraudulently added, thus reducing the count of genuine covers. However, the count must also be increased by adding genuine covers that were not in the Slater census. We have not conducted a thorough census, but our estimate of covers known is 50 to 60 of the 5c, and one certified 10c cover (last sold in the Weills Brothers Stock auction by Christie's Robson Lowe in October 1989). Another 10c is known, but it has not been certified due to inconclusive physical evidence. We estimate that no more than six covers exist with the Providence stamp tied by a handstamped marking (either the datestamp, "Paid" or "5" numeral).



Alpheus B. Slater Jr. (1860-1936)

The Mystery of the Slater Collection

The collection formed by Slater and donated to the Rhode Island Historical Society in 1930 has a tangled history which is virtually impossible to unravel 80 years after the events. Slater's biography and the story of the "missing" Providence covers were told by Dr. Stanley M. Bierman in a two-part article published in the *Chronicle* ("Alpheus B. Slater, Jr. and Stamps of the Providence, R.I., Postmaster," No. 136, November 1987, and "The Slater Providence Collection and the Writ of Replevin," No. 137, February 1988).

To briefly summarize, Slater built his collection with several acquisitions. Among them was his discovery of five stamped covers addressed to Thomas J. Coggeshall in correspondence that was in the files of the Tremont Nail Company (see page 65 of the Slater book). Slater's company, the Eastern Nail Company, bought the Tremont Nail Company and its plant in 1926. According to his own account, he "found in the attic of the office all the old correspondence of 1846-58" and "the stamped covers and many of the stampless went directly into the Providence collection." Slater identified the stamped covers as "Nos. 6, 9, 15, 20 and 42" in his book. Slater No. 6 is the cover offered here.

In July 1930 Slater acquired the George Anthony collection of Providence provisional stamps on covers, then reputed to be largest holding of its kind. A few months later, in October 1930, Slater made his generous bequest to the Rhode Island Historical Society, endowing them with his entire collection, with the provision that "he shall retain full control of the said collection and may personally take it from the Society's custody temporarily for purpose of study, exhibition or its improvement." Slater died from pneumonia on September 9, 1936.

When Dr. Bierman visited the RIHS after publishing his first article in 1987, he examined the two leatherbound albums in which the "Slater Postal History Collection" is contained. In the second volume he was surprised to find that many of the pages displayed photographs, rather than the actual covers. Inside the album were documents and published articles referring to a legal action brought against RIHS in October 1931 to recover valuable stamps worth \$12,000 that were found in an attic of a house in Massachusetts and sold to Slater by owners who were ignorant of their true value. The

lawsuit was brought on behalf of the Tremont Nail Company, the same company Slater had purchased in 1926. The writ of replevin was apparently awarded to the plaintiffs, and the Coggeshall covers were returned to them in 1931. They subsequently reached the marketplace, and the cover offered here (No. 6 in the Slater book) was acquired by Henry G. Lapham and then sold to Frelinghuysen when the Lapham collection was sold privately by Warren H. Colson after Lapham's death in 1939.

The story of the Slater bequest does not end with the removal of the five Coggeshall covers. Seventeen other covers in the album were represented by photographs, not the original covers. None of these other "missing" covers involved the Coggeshall correspondence or Tremont Nail Company. Therefore, the reason for their removal was not evident in any of the papers accompanying the album. Dr. Bierman was unsuccessful in locating any further information in court records or newspapers. At least one of the "missing" covers listed by Dr. Bierman was, by Slater's own account, sold to Alfred H. Caspary and was never owned by Slater (No. 17 in the Slater book, lot 121 in the Caspary sale). Why Slater would mount a photograph in the album is not known.

The Coggeshall Correspondence

Thomas J. Coggeshall, to whom this letter is addressed, was the treasurer of the Parker Mill in Wareham, Massachusetts. The letter is related to an accounting discrepancy involving the iron casting business, and it is signed "*N. E. Iron Co., H. L. Kendall Agt., pr. Wm. H. Henderson.*" H. L. Kendall is listed as the owner of a soap manufactory in Providence in 1844, and William H. Henderson was the treasurer of the New England Iron Company (he later served as treasurer of the American Screw Company). The Coggeshall family was well-known throughout New England.