

*FROM THE JEROME S. WAGSHAL COLLECTION:*

**THE CHASE-CARD PLATING**

**of the**

**UNITED STATES**

**THREE CENT 1851 STAMP**

BEING A COMPLETE PLATING OF  
ALL 1000 POSITIONS OF THE ORANGE BROWN STAMP  
FROM ALL FIVE PLATES: 1 early, 1 intermediate, 2 early, 5 early, and Zero  
AND ALSO A COMPLETE PLATING OF  
ALL 1,600 POSITIONS OF THE SO-CALLED DULL RED STAMP  
FROM ALL EIGHT PLATES: 1 late, 2 late, 3, 4, 5 late, 6, 7, and 8

*AS ORIGINALLY ASSEMBLED BY CARROLL CHASE, MD., AND THEREAFTER IMPROVED OVER A PERIOD OF FORTY YEARS BY DeVERE CARD WITH MINOR ADDITIONAL IMPROVEMENTS BY JEROME S. WAGSHAL*

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## Glossary

The THREE CENTS stamp - Out of respect for the stamp under discussion it will be referred to by its full denomination spelled out as it appears on the stamp itself.

The Chase book - All references to the Chase book are to Dr. Carroll Chase's original edition: Carroll Chase, THE 3c STAMP of THE UNITED STATES 1851-1857 ISSUE (New York, J.O. Moore, Inc. 1929), unless the 1942 revised edition is specifically indicated.

## INTRODUCTION

One of life's interesting mysteries is that occasionally people undertake massive efforts which have no clear purpose other than the fact that accomplishing them presents an irresistible challenge. The famous reply by George L. Mallory comes to mind: "Because it is there," he answered when asked why he wanted to climb Mr. Everest. History is filled with innumerable examples of staggeringly difficult, yet apparently useless undertakings many of which have turned out to be of value. So it is with the plating of the U.S. 1851 THREE CENTS stamp.

The memorable comment by John Luff, who was in his time the undisputed doyen of philatelic scholarship, was the best known challenge of plating this stamp. Speaking of all 28 plates used for the imperforate and perforated THREE CENTS stamps, he wrote:

*[W]hen we remember that there were twenty-eight plates of this value, each containing two hundred stamps, the hopelessness of finding or correctly placing all the varieties is at once apparent, to say nothing of the lack of interest or value in such a restoration.<sup>1</sup>*

Dr. Carroll Chase never directly responded to this statement, but he surely must have known of it. Indeed, Dr. Chase described the beginning of his plating work as being an idle-time activity considered ludicrous by others, that is, in a way implicitly accepting Luff's statement.

According to Dr. Chase, he began plating the THREE CENTS stamp in 1907 when he was, "confined to the house because of some minor ailment."<sup>2</sup> He examined a group of copies of the stamp he had put aside years earlier and became intrigued by the frameline varieties of the "three rows." After assembling that section of Plate 3, Chase began to acquire multiples of the stamp in order to plate other areas. Dr. Chase acknowledged that one dealer from whom he acquired THREE CENTS plating material considered him, "a harmless lunatic to whom he had best sell all the 3's possible before I became violent."

Dr. Chase first published an APS handbook about the THREE CENTS stamp in 1909. The first edition of his., book was published 20 years later, in 1929, having been preceded by a series of articles in the APS journal, the American Philatelist. In his first edition in 1929, Dr. Chase announced that he had, "finally reconstructed the entire thirteen plates, each of 200 stamps, and, though a very few stamps on some of the rarest plates are not absolutely tied in by overlapping pairs, etc., it is probable that all are correctly plated." Accordingly, Dr. Chase stated in 1929 that, "all single copies in reasonably good condition may now be plated...."<sup>3</sup>

## THE SPREAD OF PLATING IN THE PHILATELIC COMMUNITY

Dr. Chase recognized that his plating accomplishment would likely be embraced by others, stating that, "I dislike to prophesy, but I feel that the time is coming when many collectors of United States stamps will wish to reconstruct at least the three commonest plates."<sup>4</sup> He went on to state that, "When there is sufficient demand for it, I hope to present a series of the 2600 illustrations necessary to show the characteristics of each stamp on all thirteen plates."

The demand did come, but Dr. Chase never quite fulfilled his intention. Philatelic acolytes joined in an informal group around Dr. Chase, and thus began The 3c '51-'57 Unit No. 11 of the American Philatelic Society, the forerunner of the present U.S. Philatelic Classics Society. The more accomplished of these THREE CENTS philatelic students, including such pioneers as Bill Hicks, Leo Shaughnessy, and Dr. Gerald B. Smith, sought to emulate Dr. Chase by assembling their own platings. A few, very few, replicated his accomplishment of creating platings of all 2,600 positions. Bill Hicks, whom I knew, was one.

To aid these students, Dr. Chase carried out his intention of showing all 2,600 positions by using photography to illustrate them. It was only partially successful. Two sets of such photographs were made, one being approximately twice actual size, and the other consisting of large sheets containing actual-size black and white photographs of Dr. Chase's full plates.<sup>5</sup> The two sets of photographs are essentially of the same plating; there being only a few different stamps between the two sets. The enlarged set is far more rare, an unfortunate circumstance since that enlarged photo set is the better one because it is easier to work with for plating purposes. Although I have both sets I have never been able to establish which came first. Many years ago the negatives of the one-to-one set were donated to the Smithsonian Institution, which continues to sell prints. I am told that in recent years demand for these one-to-one prints has pretty much tailed off. The reason for this merits some discussion.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF A COMPLETE PLATING OF THE THREE CENTS STAMP**

The importance of this plating is somewhat muted by current philatelic fashion. It is an undeniable fact that for many past decades the principal thrust of philatelic scholarship has been directed to postal history subjects. Collectors who are drawn to the stamp itself have been made to feel that nothing more in the way of creative stamp study is even possible, and have largely been relegated to the role of attempting to accumulate singles in exquisite condition. Auction prices reflect this trend. For example, enormous swings in value turn on whether there is the lightest hinge mark on the gum of an unused stamp.

Probably never in the history of the world has so much treasure been allocated on the basis of the existence or not of a barely discernible disturbance on a coating of mucilage. Expert committees solemnly pontificate on this issue, auctioneers proclaim their wares in terms of the state of mucilage which is not and cannot be illustrated in their auction catalogues, and publishers who conceive it to be their responsibility to base their assigned values on the realities of the philatelic market assign enormously varying values which depend on the state of the mucilage coating. None of these worthies--experts, auctioneers, or catalogue publishers--fully disclose the fact that a covert but massive activity in mucilage-monkeying is being carried on, and much of this fakery cannot be detected by even the most eminent of experts.

Meanwhile the type of - philatelic scholarship directed at what can be seen 'On the face of the stamp, as exemplified by Dr. Chase's plating of the THREE CENTS stamp, is largely ignored by the philatelic community and is carried on in relative obscurity by a few obsessive diehards with magnifying glasses.

It may be argued that once the THREE CENTS stamp was completely plated, and the glow of that accomplishment had faded, there was nothing more to do in this area and collectors with a bent for scholarship of necessity had to turn to postal history subjects, such as cancellations and usages. Not so.

There is ongoing significance to plating study. The usefulness of a plating such as the one embedded on this disk is manifold. For example, it is a tool to distinguish Orange Brown stamps from those from the more common dull red plates, a necessity which repeatedly presents itself. Conversely it is a tool to distinguish the dull red stamps from the Orange Browns, a need which occasionally presents itself, as when a stamp is a color rarity by being in the orange-brown color but nevertheless was manufactured from one of the eight dull red plates. This issue presents itself from time to time.

Even more important, this assembly makes it possible for the dedicated collector to engage in the intellectual challenge of what I define as second-level plating work, that is, the identification of unplated examples of stamps working by comparison with stamps which have been previously plated. To explain this point further: the first, or most superficial plating level is the assembly of previously plated examples, which have been identified by being marked on the back. This is of course intellectually akin to filling out a BINGO card. It is fun for a while, and there may be a minor feeling of accomplishment when a full row is covered, but the intellectual challenge is less than awesome. The highest level, the third level, is of course the working-out of an original plating where no one has previously done so. This is what Dr. Chase accomplished.

Second level plating work, however, does present something of a challenge, which is both enjoyable and occasionally rewarding. It is this level of plating in which Card excelled.

However, in present times collectors who might value the pleasant challenge of second level plating of the THREE CENTS

stamp have been unduly impeded because of the inadequate resources available up to now, namely the text and few illustrations of the Chase book and the small black and white photographic representations of the Chase plating offered in the face of decreasing customer demand by the Smithsonian.

Now, for the first time, collectors interested in undertaking the challenge of second-level plating of unplated copies of the THREE CENTS stamp have a high resolution, detailed plating of excellent plating examples as a working tool. This is something heretofore available only to a few collectors, and now it is being made available to all. Hopefully it will make a difference in collector enthusiasm for second-level plating.

### **CARD'S EXQUISITE IMPROVEMENT OF THE CHASE PLATING**

The Chase plating, that is, the one which was photographed both in enlarged and actual-size format, was purchased by De Vere A Card, a collector in upstate New York, probably some time in the 1930's. Card, an early 3— Unit member, was RA 238. A somewhat reclusive gentleman, his two consuming interests were the THREE CENTS stamp and a major collection of carved hunting

horns. Card's plating work in replicating the Chase plating was so intense and dedicated that he was considered to be more skilled at establishing the position of an unplated THREE CENTS stamp (second level plating) than Dr. Chase himself.'

After purchasing Chase's plating, Card spent a full 40 years studying, and, where possible, improving each position. On the back of many of the stiff boards on which this plating was mounted, Card wrote this statement:

This plate reconstruction Is a combination of the personal plate of Dr. Carroll Chase and the plate assembled, over some 40 years, by D. A. Card. Both plates were cross-checked for accuracy and the best [sic] copy for each position retained.

Card's emphasis on accuracy is important. I have on occasion seen platings assembled by less than meticulous collectors whose overriding priority was obviously completion and who, as a result, created platings with errors which few experts are sufficiently knowledgeable to correct. These are philatelic time bombs which contain the threat of great future mischief.

### **MY ACQUISITION OF THE CHASECARD PLATING**

The purchaser of these scans may wish to know how I came to own the Chase-Card full plating of the THREE CENTS stamp, and I think it is a good enough story to tell here.

Since Mr. Card lived in a somewhat remote area of upstate New York, our contacts over the years were by telephone. I had initiated these contacts by calling him for advice and information about some THREE CENTS stamps I was working on, and he was gracious and informative. He certainly impressed me, and I believe he valued me as a good student. A long-distance friendship developed between the two of us, and we use to speak with one another from time to time. One day I called him and I was saddened to have a strange lady answer and inform me that "Cardy" had been moved to a nursing home because of deteriorating health. I was given his number, and we continued our phone friendship with occasional calls.

One day I received more sad news, namely, the lady who had originally informed me of "Cardy's" move to a nursing home, called again, and informed me that he had passed away. She said that she and her husband were "Cardy's" closest friends, that he had left his entire estate to her and her husband since he had no relatives to whom he wished to leave it. She went on to say that "Cardy" had suggested that when he passed away she should contact me to see if I was interested in buying his stamp collection. I was very gratified for my friend's designation, and I took a flight to see her. When I met her, she and her husband turned out to be pleasant folk, and worthy heirs of "Cardy's" munificence. She told me that "Cardy" had left her an estimate of the worth of his collection, an amount she did not tell me, and she wanted me to appraise it for myself and make an offer. I spent a full day doing so, and after this effort I made an offer which turned out to be on the mark, that is, slightly higher than the estimate he had been given her. They therefore accepted it, and the sale was agreed upon.

Now came the difficult problem of getting this historic plating home. Not being a dealer and therefore not used to handling this kind of situation, such arrangements were all new to me. Card

had housed his collection in a beautifully paneled, hand-crafted wooden case which I was told he had made himself, and which was large enough to contain his albums, that is, somewhat over one foot square and about four and a half feet long, with a door hinged like a large flap along one of the long sides. The door had an old-fashioned key and keyhole. Because by now it was late in the day, I took a room at a nearby motel, and slept with the wooden case standing by my bed--and the door to the room double locked. (The lock on the case was essentially decorative.)

The next morning, lugging Card's beautiful wooden case, I arrived at the airport to make arrangements for my return trip. I refused to check Card's wooden case for obvious reasons, and after some negotiation I was told I could be given a seat with an adjoining empty seat on which I could strap in the case. Boarding was a bit of a tussle, the case being heavy and unwieldy, but finally I sat strapped in, and with the case strapped in, in the adjoining seat.

The flight home was uneventful, but I shall never forget one incident. One of the stewardesses could not restrain her curiosity, and asked me what was in this large beautifully made wooden case about which I was showing such care. Not wishing to tell her and others who might be listening that it contained a valuable stamp collection, I told her it was my dog. Pointing

10 to the relatively tiny keyhole, she asked, "Can he get enough air through there?" "He doesn't need to," I answered, sadly lowering my head. "Oh," she said softly, and nothing more was said during the flight. When we landed, she expressed sympathy at my loss. I thanked her with a straight face.

I still have the case in my stamp room. In our home it is referred to as the doggy coffin.

### **THE RARITY OF COMPLETE THREE CENTS PLATINGS**

I believe complete THREE CENTS platings are assemblies of the greatest rarity. I have not seen in recent years any public sale of a complete THREE CENTS plating. In addition to the plating pictured in these discs there may be three others of the THREE CENTS stamp in existence, but I doubt there are more than that.

It is noteworthy that neither of the two largest THREE CENTS collections to come on the market in recent years included a complete plating. The Piller collection, sold by Siegel on March 25, 1993, offered no platings at all. As I recall, Piller had previously exhibited a complete No. 11 plating, but, despite his extensive THREE CENTS collection, which was formed using all the advantages which are available to a full-time dealer, I have no record of his owning the far more rare Orange Brown plating. Likewise in the Amonette collection, sold by the same house on October 29-31, 1996, no platings were offered. It is my belief that Dr. Amonette, although having decided to sell the preponderant portion of his holding could not bring himself to part with his plating and thereby divorce himself completely from the stamp about which he had become so knowledgeable.

Of course partial assemblies come on the market from time to time. As Dr. Chase suggested would be the case, these are generally of the more common plates. Unless their provenance is known, the accuracy of these platings must be viewed with caution. Moreover, the quality of the

stamps in such partial platings is frequently low, both in terms of plating quality as well as by traditional standards. The market recognizes this, as these platings frequently sell at a discount from the price of the individual stamps. That discounted price level is a familiar phenomenon of partial platings. However, it should not be regarded as applicable to complete platings.

In my opinion, complete platings with solid provenance insuring accuracy should be valued at many multiples of catalogue value for the individual stamps.

### **THE SPECIAL CONDITION STANDARDS FOR PLATING**

Dr. Chase succinctly summarized the condition standard to be applied to platings when he stated that, "stamps showing fine impressions, good margins and light cancellations are much easier to plate than those not in good condition."<sup>7</sup> These three factors--good impression, margins, and cancellation--are the key factors distinguishing a stamp desirable for plating. Two points should be kept in mind: First, these characteristics are not immediately apparent. Judging the quality of a plating requires spending some time looking at the individual stamps under magnification. Of course margins are easily observable, but quality of impression, and the issue of whether the cancellation obscures important plating marks are not factors which leap from the face of the stamp, but require study.

Second, these three factors differ in important ways from condition standards generally applied in the philatelic market. Each therefore merits brief comment:

**Fine impressions:** a detailed, sharp impression is the most important requirement for a stamp to be used in a plating. They are not easy to find, and it is remarkable how the factor of impression is so little appreciated in philately. Orange Brown stamps generally have better impressions than No. 11's. However, even in the case of Orange Brown's, a significant percentage have less than really sharp impressions. In the case of No. 11's, the issue of impression becomes even more critical. Plate wear, and less than high-grade printing techniques combined with the use of inks which created fuzzy lines resulted in many impressions of THREE CENTS stamps which are not suitable for plating use. I estimate that fewer than one-third of all No. 11's have good enough impressions to be useful for plating.

**Good margins:** over the years the philatelic market has culled out most poor margined THREE CENTS stamps, so that collectors now have a distorted view of the margins on the average stamp. However if one inspects an extensive correspondence from a number of sources to a single recipient, or otherwise reviews a relatively unpicked lot, an unusual occurrence nowadays, the fact emerges that the frame lines of most THREE CENTS stamps were cut in to some extent. Clear four-margin copies are truly scarce, possibly amounting to a percentage lower than 10% of all surviving THREE CENTS stamps.

**Light cancellations:** Here the standard for an acceptable plating copy differs markedly from the general philatelic standard. The latter prizes clarity and completeness of strike of a handstamp, and the extent to which it falls on the stamp itself. However, for plating, the better example has a very light cancel, the less the better. And although the philatelic market generally discounts a manuscript cancel, for plating, a neat pen cancel, or even a multiple stroke which does not hide the



key elements of the design, is far more preferable than the most striking socked-on-the-nose handstamp.

It is important to note that Dr. Chase chose not to mention certain other condition factors when he identified the three factors of impression, margin, and cancellation. These unmentioned factors include thins, creases, and back defects generally. In the same way that it may be difficult for a collector raised in the standard philatelic tradition to accept a pen-canceled stamp as desirable, a collector must learn to disregard those other usually recognized defects which do not impact on plating utility. A stain on the back of an otherwise acceptable copy can be ignored. Similarly a stamp with a crease, even a broken crease that is evident on its face, but which nevertheless has a good impression, four good margins, and a light cancel is preferable to an uncreased, sound copy with a fuzzy impression, a strong handstamp cancel, and one or more margins even slightly impinged by the separating scissors. All things being equal, it is of course preferable that such defects not be present, but the point is that when they are they should not disqualify a stamp for plating service.

### **THE REMARKABLE QUALITY OF THE CHASECARD PLATING**

Those seeking to use this electronic reproduction of the Chase-Card assembly for actual plating should appreciate the plating quality of this assembly.

When the Chase-Card plating is judged by the standards elucidated in the preceding section, and employed in a second-level plating effort, the remarkable quality of each position stands out. I note again that this quality is not as easily observed as when one looks at a jumbo-margined single with a SON cancel. However when the 'actual work of plating is done with the Chase-Card plating, and the need for exquisite detail under magnification becomes paramount, the exceptional quality of this plating emerges. Just about every one of the 2,600 positions is represented by a stamp with an uncommonly sharp impression, four margins, and a non-obstructing cancel.

The provenance of this plating, particularly the two men who were its two principal sources, Chase and Card, gives support to the conclusion that it is exceptional. As previously stated, the basic source was the trove of THREE CENTS stamps accumulated by Dr. Chase. Dr. Chase wrote that he accumulated, "upward of 5,000 imperforate 3's in pairs and better, practically cleaning the floating supply off the market." In the course of that effort he doubtless also gathered an even greater number of singles, and his original plating of singles and a few pairs were the best picks from this trove. After Chase's plating was sold to Card, the new owner spent, as noted above, some 40 years, laboriously improving many of the positions with copies selected from his own personal plating. The end result of these decades of meticulous selection would have to be an outstanding plating assembly. And it is.

### **CONCLUSION**

It is a source of considerable gratification that I am able to make this extraordinary plating available to the collecting public by electronic scans which will be almost as useful as working with the originals. Hopefully this technique will be a forerunner of similar scans of other platable classic

stamps, thereby enlarging the resources available to all collectors which used to be available only to a privileged few.

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Written In the first year of The Third Millennium  
Rockville, Maryland

### ENDNOTES

1. John N. Luff, *The Postage Stamps of the United States* (New York: The Scott Stamp & Coin Co. Ltd., 1902) p. 69.
2. *The Chase Book* at 75. The history of Dr. Chase's work is taken largely from pages 75-76 of this reference.
3. *Ibid* at 74. Dr. Chase not only completely plated all of the imperforate plates but also plated most of the positions of the plates which exclusively produced perforated stamps, that is, plates 9 through 28.
4. *Ibid*.
5. According to Dr. Chase's book, his original reconstruction was accomplished principally by the use of overlapping multiples. See p. 75. Such a reconstruction proved by overlapping multiples would be a holding of the greatest interest. I have never been able to learn the whereabouts of that reconstruction, other than a partial set consisting of Plates 1 late, 2 late, 3, and 4, which was referred to in the *Centennial Book* as having been exhibited by Dr. Chase. Chase's original plating may have been broken up for the value of these multiples. The two photographed platings are mostly single stamps with only a few pairs.
6. Card also had a major interest in the colors of the THREE CENT stamp. See, Card, "Some Thoughts About the Colors of the 3— 1851 (S1 and S2) Stamp," *October 1864 Chronicle*, No. 48, 6.
7. *The Chase book* at 74.