



Lot 43

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This 12¢ 1851 bisect used on a dual green-and-red cameo cover with the “Via Nicaragua” and “Steam Ship” markings is uniquely spectacular

ESTIMATE \$20,000-30,000

DESCRIPTION

12¢ Black, Diagonal Half Used as 6¢ (17a), top right diagonal half, large margins, affixed by sender with sealing wax for security, tied across the cut by clear “**STEAM/SHIP**” two-line handstamp applied at the New York City post office on buff cover to Major Daniel Hudson on Shelter Island, New York, **green cameo corner card on front and red cameo card on backflap**, the green card on front reads “George Hudson, Counsellor at Law, San Francisco, Cal.” and the red on back reads “George Hudson, Counsellor at Law & Commission of Deeds, 13 Beekman St., New York”, sender’s manuscript “Paid” notation, bold oily red strike of “**VIA NICARAGUA/AHEAD OF THE MAILS.**” two-line framed handstamp, undated but probably originated in San Francisco in August 1853 since the bisect was accepted by New York post office, which started marking covers with bisects postage due with the mail no later than on September 25

PROVENANCE

John McKnight Storrow (collection sold privately to Colonel Edward H. R. Green for \$77,500, circa 1920)

Col. Edward H. R. Green (Storrow collection), Harmer, Rooke sale, 5/26-28/1943, lot 105

William L. Moody III, H. R. Harmer sale, 11/27/1950, lot 183, to Jessup Edgar B. Jessup (inherited by Pearce)

Basil C. Pearce (Jessup’s son-in-law; inherited and sold privately)

Dr. W. Scott Polland (bought privately from Pearce; sold privately to Haas, 1969)

Marc Haas (bought privately from Dr. Polland, September 1969; collection sold privately to Stanley Gibbons International, 1979; the cover sold privately to Grunin, 1980)

Louis Grunin, Christie’s Robson Lowe sale, Part One, 3/25/1987, lot 74, to Ishikawa

Ryohei Ishikawa, Christie’s Robson Lowe sale, 9/28-29/1993, lot 203, to Hackmey

Joseph Hackmey (collection sold privately to William H. Gross, 2010)

CENSUS, LITERATURE AND EXHIBITION REFERENCES

Lester G. Brookman, *United States Postage Stamps of the 19th Century*, Vol. I, p. 180

Jesse L. Coburn, *Letters of Gold*, p. 112

Richard B. Graham, “Postal History and Stamps: A Colorful Combination, 1847-1861,” *American Philatelist*, November 1978

Jonathan W. Rose, *Classic United States Imperforate Stamps*, p. 88

Scott R. Trepel, “United States Classic Covers” (special color feature for AMERIPEX 1986), *Chronicle* 130, May 1986

CERTIFICATION

The Philatelic Foundation (1993)

CONDITION NOTES

Extremely Fine; cover with sealed tear in return address on backflap

HISTORY AND COMMENTARY

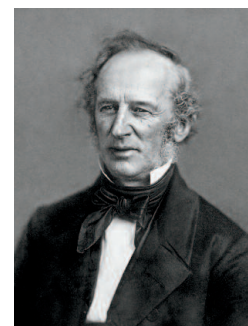
Half Stamps via Nicaragua

The “Via Nicaragua/Ahead of the Mails” marking refers to the shipping and mail route across Nicaragua, which was started in 1849 by Cornelius Vanderbilt to compete directly with William Henry Aspinwall and the Pacific Mail Steamship Company route across the Isthmus of Panama. It was Vanderbilt vs. Aspinwall—titan vs. titan—in a contest to control the lucrative shipping business between California and the East Coast. America was manifesting its destiny, and there was money to be made moving people and product.

The Nicaragua route, on its westbound course, took passengers and mail by steamer from New York to San Juan del Norte on the Caribbean (or Mosquito Coast) side of Nicaragua. From there, they traveled up the Rio San Juan to Lake Nicaragua, crossing the lake to the town of Rivas. A stagecoach then crossed the narrow isthmus to San Juan del Sur, where another steamer traveled to San Francisco.

Beginning on July 1, 1851, the rate for a letter to cross Nicaragua was 6¢ prepaid, 10¢ collect—the same as a letter sent via Panama. If surviving covers are an accurate indication, there were ample supplies of 3¢ 1851 stamps in California in 1852, which were used in pairs for the 6¢ rate, but by the spring of 1853, the use of a 12¢ stamp cut in half started in San Francisco. According to research by James Allen (*Chronicle* 239), the first official U.S. Post Office Department notice to postmasters that bisected stamps were invalid was published on September 12, 1853. Before the announcement, letters with 12¢ bisects arriving from California by steamer were treated as prepaid. However, a letter arriving in New York on September 25, about one month after leaving San Francisco, was treated as unpaid and marked due. The absence of a due marking on the cover offered here, together with other factors, indicates it was mailed in August 1853 and arrived in New York before mid-September.

The long list of major collectors at left, all of whom have owned this cover, is proof of its significant and alluring qualities. Although bisected 12¢ stamps on covers from San Francisco are encountered with some frequency, examples of bisects that were *accepted* are much scarcer, and only a few have any of the “Via Nicaragua” markings. Among the recorded 12¢ bisect covers, only this one combines a corner card on the envelope, acceptance of the bisect for postage, the “Via Nicaragua” marking and the “Steam Ship” cancel. It is a unique artifact of the Gold rush era. ■



Cornelius Vanderbilt
(1794-1877)