



Lot 94

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The finest of the 4¢ Columbian Blue color error plate number multiples—  
one of the greatest United States commemorative rarities extant

ESTIMATE \$100,000-150,000

DESCRIPTION

4¢ Columbian, Blue Error of Color (233a), strip of four from the lower right of the plate of 200 with “AMERICAN BANKNOTE COMPANY.” imprint, plate “No. 17” and plate letter “D”, original gum, very deep shade of the Blue color, which resulted from an ink mixture error and exists in lighter and darker shades

PROVENANCE

Benjamin D. Phillips (bought in H. R. Harmer sale, 10/4/1966; collection sold privately to Weills, 1968)

Bought by William H. Gross privately from Hagendorf/Columbian

CENSUS, LITERATURE AND EXHIBITION REFERENCES

David Lidman, *Treasury of Stamps: 1,200 Rare and Beautiful Stamps in Color*, fig. 137, p. 79

CERTIFICATION

The Philatelic Foundation (1998)

CONDITION NOTES

Extremely Fine; right stamp has negligible small thin spot at center



Comparison of 4¢ Blue Color Error at left with normal Ultramarine

HISTORY AND COMMENTARY

A Cleveland Tycoon Discovers Blue Gold

The World’s Columbian Exposition was held in Chicago in 1893 to promote industry, commerce, technology, the arts and social causes. Over 183 days, from May 1 to October 30, the Columbian Exposition attracted nearly 27 million visitors to the specially constructed “White City.” They came to see a spectacular array of exhibits, amusements and demonstrations, and to ride on the original Ferris Wheel.

The Columbian Exposition also provided the Post Office Department with its first opportunity to capitalize on the increasingly popular hobby of stamp collecting with the country’s first commemorative postage stamps. Postmaster General John Wanamaker, a successful businessman and department store owner, sensed an opportunity to profit from stamp collectors by creating a special Columbian commemorative set. The sixteen Columbian stamps, commemorating the 400th anniversary of Columbus’s voyage to America, were issued in denominations ranging from 1¢ to \$5.00, for a total face value of \$16.34—about \$411 in today’s dollars.

More than 19 million 4¢ stamps were issued. Within a year or two, a small group turned up in Ohio that were a distinctive color. They were found by John Vickers Painter, a wealthy railroad man, banker and partner with a fellow stamp collector, George H. Worthington, in the Cleveland Stone Company. Painter recognized the 4¢ stamps as being blue versus ultramarine and reported his discovery to leading stamp experts. The first announcement of the error was published in the *Philatelic Journal of America* in January 1895. Painter sold a half sheet to his friend, Worthington, and sold others through various channels, but kept some tucked away. A few used copies turned up later.



John Vickers Painter (1835-1903)

The error was the result of an ink mixture error at the American Bank Note Company during printing. Spectrographic analysis, which only became available much later, confirmed what early philatelists suspected—the blue inks of the 4¢ error and 1¢ Columbian have the same components. The photo at left shows the relative difference between the normal Ultramarine and Blue error.

This imprint and plate number strip is from the lower right pane in the sheet of 200 printed from Plate D17, the plate number on the first stamps sold by Painter. The other known plate number multiples are a strip of four (lower left pane, Plate D18) and a plate block of 16 (lower right pane, Plate D18). ■