



Lot 95

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One of two extant plate number blocks of the 8¢ Trans-Mississippi error from the only pane ever discovered without horizontal perforations

ESTIMATE \$100,000-150,000

DESCRIPTION

8¢ Trans-Mississippi, Vertical Pair, Imperforate Horizontally (289a), bottom margin block of four with “**BUREAU, ENGRAVING & PRINTING**” imprint and plate number 609, block containing two error pairs, original gum, deep rich color, detailed impression, choice centering

PROVENANCE

Pane of 50 (as discovered):

Robert Watts (discoverer), sold privately to Herman Lewis for \$8

Sold privately to William S. F. Pierce (Pierce divided the pane into three units—he kept block of 20 with top and bottom plate blocks)

Block of 20 with plate blocks: Sold by Pierce to New England Stamp Co.

Bottom plate number block (offered in this sale):

Col. Edward H. R. Green, Part 26, Harmer, Rooke sale, 3/25-29/1946, lot 236, to Eno

Amos Eno, Harmer, Rooke sale, 5/18/1954, lot 125

H. R. Harmer 1000th Sale, 4/11/1956, lot 589, to Cole

Arthur Hetherington, “Quality” collection, H. R. Harmer sale, 10/27/1983, lot 22, to Weills for Kobacker

Arthur J. Kobacker, Christie’s Robson Lowe sale, 9/25/1991, lot 531, to Hagendorf/Columbian (sold privately to William H. Gross)

CENSUS, LITERATURE AND EXHIBITION REFERENCES

Donna O’Keefe, *Linn’s Philatelic Gems* 4, p. 144

World Stamp Show 2016 Court of Honor (Gross)

CERTIFICATION

The Philatelic Foundation (1957 and 1983)

CONDITION NOTES

Very Fine; a few natural gum wrinkles as usual



Federal Troops Convoying a Wagon Train, wash drawing by Frederic Remington

HISTORY AND COMMENTARY

The Great Western Wagon Train Error

The Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition was held in Omaha, Nebraska, from June 1 through November 1, 1898. Over 154 days the Exposition drew an estimated 2.6 million visitors, who came to see more than 4,000 exhibits and attractions housed in 21 main buildings and hundreds of smaller structures erected on the 180-acre fairgrounds. The Exposition promoted the theme of economic and social development west of the Mississippi River. During the last three months of the Exposition, it was also the site of the Indian Congress, the largest gathering of Native American Indians in the ten years following the end of the Indian Wars.

On January 13, 1898, the Post Office announced that a set of nine stamps would be issued, from 1¢ to \$2.00 values. The announcement listed the initial design choices, six of which were eventually used. The decision to issue another commemorative set, with a face value of \$3.80, aroused protests from the stamp collecting community, which still harbored resentment over the Columbian Issue five years earlier. Within days the newspapers reported philatelic groups’ objections to costly stamps honoring what was perceived as a commercial enterprise, but postal officials were undeterred. Work on the stamps began immediately at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

The image chosen for the 8¢ was based on a wash drawing by Frederic Remington titled *Federal Troops Convoying a Wagon Train*. This is one of the two Trans-Mississippi vignettes based on the work of Remington, a hugely popular artist of the time who created romantic depictions of life on the western frontier (the other is the 50¢). This image of U.S. troops defending a wagon train—the soldier in the foreground at right actually takes aim—was placed on a stamp in the aftermath of the Indian Wars and the defeat of the last tribes.

One error pane of 50 without horizontal perforations was discovered by Robert Watts, a stamp clerk at one of the sales windows at the Philadelphia General Post Office, who found it between the wrapping paper of a bundle of stamps. He sold it for double face value (\$8) to Herman Lewis, a locksmith in Philadelphia. Lewis soon sold it to William S. F. Pierce, who broke it into three pieces: a vertical strip of ten with sheet margin and full arrow at right, a vertical block of 20 containing both plate blocks, and a vertical block of 20 with natural straight edge at left.

The block of ten was reportedly sold for \$15 and was taken to Europe when the owner moved there. It returned to the U.S. in the 1930s, when it was broken. The vertical block of 20 with straight edge at left was sold to Arthur E. Tuttle, a Philadelphia stamp dealer, who retailed them for \$10 per pair. The block of 20 with both plate numbers was retained by Pierce, who later sold the top and bottom plate blocks to the New England Stamp Co. for \$175. The bottom plate number block was sold to Colonel Green. ■