

ST. LOUIS "BEARS" POSTMASTER'S PROVISIONAL

After the July 1845 postal reforms paved the way for adhesive stamp use by simplifying the rate structure, the postmaster in St. Louis, John M. Wimer, had his own provisional stamps printed. Wimer served the midwestern gateway city of St. Louis as postmaster, alderman and mayor. The basic design of the St. Louis provisional stamps—two bears holding the state coat of arms—was chosen to symbolize Missourians' rugged durability. The "Bears" engraving is one of the most elaborate of all United States Postmasters' Provisionals.

The *Missouri Republican*, November 5, 1845, contained the following notice:

LETTER STAMPS. Mr. Wimer, the postmaster, has prepared a set of letter stamps, or rather marks, to be put upon letters, indicating that the postage has been paid. In this he has copied after the plan adopted by the postmaster of New York and other cities. These stamps are engraved to represent the Missouri Coat of Arms, and are five and ten cents. They are so prepared that they may be stuck upon a letter like a wafer and will prove a great convenience to merchants and all those having many letters to send post paid, as it saves all trouble of paying at the post-office. They will be sold as they are sold in the East, viz.: Sixteen five-cent stamps and eight ten-cent stamps for a dollar. We would recommend merchants and others to give them a trial.

In the same paper one week later (November 12, 1845) a follow-up announcement appeared:

POST-OFFICE STAMPS. Mr. Wimer, the postmaster, requests us to say that he will furnish nine ten-cent stamps and eighteen five-cent stamps for one dollar, the difference being required to pay for the printing of the stamps.

It seems likely that the second, more abbreviated announcement was published to amend the number of stamps sold for a dollar from "sixteen" to "eighteen" for the 5c and "eight" to "nine" for the 10c, which corresponds to 90 cents in stamps for one dollar in money. The earlier 80 cents for a dollar exchange rate might have been too high for the public to bear. The ambiguous wording of the announcements does not tell us if the stamps were available when the first announcement was made (November 5) or at the time of the second announcement (November 12). However, the earliest documented use of any St. Louis "Bears" stamp is the cover offered in this sale (lot 6), postmarked November 13 (1845) on a letter dated November 12.

The "Bears" were printed from an engraved copper plate comprising six subjects arranged in two vertical rows of three. The original plate was made by a local engraver, J. M. Kershaw, and it was altered twice. The states of the plate (1, 2 and 3) roughly correspond to the papers used (Greenish, Gray Lilac and Bluish Pelure), so philatelists say there were three printings (First, Second and Third). The three states of the plate are shown and described below.



State 1 (Original State)

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Pos. 1: 5c Ty. I | Pos. 2: 10c Ty. I |
| Pos. 3: 5c Ty. II | Pos. 4: 10c Ty. II |
| Pos. 5: 5c Ty. III | Pos. 6: 10c Ty. III |

The types are assigned to each position of the same value. They can be identified by the bears' positions and other minor differences.

State 2 (First Alteration)

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|---------------------|---------------------|
| Pos. 1: 20c Ty. I | Pos. 2: 10c Ty. I |
| Pos. 3: 20c Ty. II | Pos. 4: 10c Ty. II |
| Pos. 5: 5c Ty. III* | Pos. 6: 10c Ty. III |

* On this state of the plate, there is no large dot in the bottom ball of "5"

State 3 (Second Alteration)

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|----------------------|---------------------|
| Pos. 1: 5c Ty. IV* | Pos. 2: 10c Ty. I |
| Pos. 3: 5c Ty. V* | Pos. 4: 10c Ty. II |
| Pos. 5: 5c Ty. III** | Pos. 6: 10c Ty. III |

* The two "5" numerals are re-engraved
 ** On this state of the plate, a dot has been engraved in the bottom ball of "5"