

Lot 13



Lot 13
Detail of Stamp

Brattleboro, Vermont

Lot 13

5c Black on Buff (5X1). Position 2, cancelled by red “Paid” handstamp, “Brattleboro Vt. Feb. 17” (184?) circular datestamp on buff cover to Messrs. Chas. Smith & Co. in Saxton’s River, Vermont, very slight edge wear

VERY FINE. A REMARKABLY FRESH AND ATTRACTIVE EXAMPLE OF THE BRATTLEBORO PROVISIONAL ON COVER. ONLY NINETEEN COVERS ARE RECORDED.

The unpublished Brattleboro census by Philip T. Wall lists a total of 52 stamps, including 20 stamps on 19 covers.

With 2011 P.F. certificate. Scott value \$32,500.00.

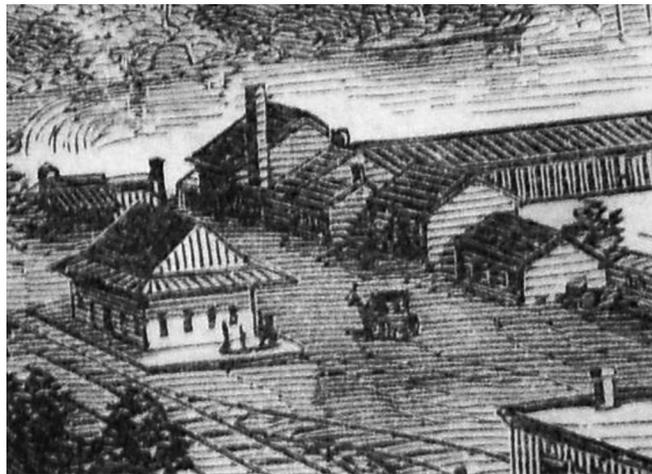
Estimate \$15,000-20,000

The Brattleboro Postmaster

The Brattleboro postmaster responsible for issuing the engraved adhesive provisional stamp is Dr. Frederick N. Palmer, whose autograph initials “F.N.P.” are the stamp’s central design element. Born in Belfast, Maine, in 1815, Palmer came to Brattleboro as a 21-year old piano and music teacher in 1836. He studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1841. Dr. Palmer received his postmaster’s appointment on July 3, 1845, from President James K. Polk, the Democrat elected in 1844. Dr. Palmer served nearly four years under the Polk administration, but was replaced by Henry Smith on November 22, 1848, after the election of the Whig candidate, Zachary Taylor. Soon after leaving the post office Dr. Palmer and his family moved to Bangor, Maine, where he studied dentistry and homeopathy (*Annals of Brattleboro, 1681-1895*, Volume 1).

The Brattleboro Provisional Stamp

The Brattleboro provisional’s history is known from interviews with the postmaster, Dr. Palmer (two separate interviews in 1868 and 1884), and with the engraver/printer, Thomas Chubbuck, also of Brattleboro (interviewed in 1870). The information was published in contemporary philatelic journals and reprinted in Luff’s book. These accounts were given many years after the events and contain some inaccurate or conflicting information. For example, Chubbuck recollected that the copper plate and sheets each comprised eight stamps, but there is no question that the plate comprised ten subjects. Neither one could remember exactly



First railroad station in Brattleboro, built in Winter 1849—
detail from an engraving by Thomas Chubbuck

Source: www.brattleborohistory.com



The reconstruction above shows the ten different engraved positions in their respective positions—all but Position 4 come from the sheet retained by the engraver and printer, Thomas Chubbuck, whose imprint appears below Position 8

when the stamps were issued, but it seems likely they were released during the summer of 1846. This issue date is supported by a folded letter dated August 27, 1846, bearing a Brattleboro stamp and the comment “I pay this just to shew you the stamp. It is against my principles, you know.” (Siegel Sale 824, lot 15).

The stamp itself is small and rectangular in shape. The central design element is Palmer’s autograph initials “F.N.P.” At top is the post office name, at sides the letters “P.O.,” and at bottom the denomination “5 Cents.” The plate of ten subjects was arranged in two horizontal rows of five. Directly below the center stamp of the bottom row is the imprint “Engd. by Thos. Chubbuck, Bratto.” The stamps were printed in black on a thick buff paper. The soft, porous quality of this paper makes it extremely susceptible to thinning, and almost every Brattleboro copy known shows surface scuffs or thins of varying severity.

Dr. Palmer went to considerable expense to produce his provisional stamp. Considering that this small Vermont post office had revenues of \$1,748 in 1847, the \$9 paid by Dr. Palmer for engraving and printing his stamps was a relatively large expense. There are conflicting reports regarding the quantity of stamps printed. Dr. Palmer was interviewed twice, and both times he said it was 500 *stamps*. Chubbuck offered corroborating testimony that he was paid \$1.50 for printing 500 stamps (about 3¢ per sheet of ten). However, shortly after the Chubbuck interview was published, the accuracy of these statements was challenged in a letter written by Dr. J. A. Petrie, an early provisional-stamp hunter (and forger). Dr. Petrie claimed that the print quantity must have been 500 *impressions* from the so-called “eight-subject” plate, for a total of 4,000 stamps.

The plate of ten subjects was probably impressed multiple times on a sheet of standard folio-size paper (about 14 by 17 inches). A quantity of 500 stamps would require a total of 50 impressions on two or three sheets of paper. The \$1.50 printing charge by Chubbuck for 50 impressions (500 stamps) is appropriate, and the 500-stamp quantity is certainly enough to have met the needs of the Brattleboro post office at this early stage of adhesive postage use (see Calvet M. Hahn, “The Plating of the Brattleboro,” *Collectors Club Philatelist*, Vol. 67, No. 1, January-February 1988).

The 52 stamps recorded by Philip T. Wall reflect an unusually high survival rate. By comparison, for the 1847 Issue, of which the Brattleboro post office received 3,600 5c and 300 10c stamps, there are only twelve 5c 1847 covers and no 10c 1847 covers recorded in the Alexander census.