Lot 94

St. Louis, Missouri

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St. Louis, Missouri, 10c Black on Greenish (11X2). Type III, Position 6, large part original gum, enormous **bottom right corner sheet margins** and large margins on other two sides, sharp impression on bright greenish paper, faint diagonal crease at lower right in sheet margin (4mm clear of printed design), small translucent spot touches bottom frameline, these trivial imperfections are mentioned only to emphasize the sound and superb condition of this stamp

EXTREMELY FINE GEM. A REMARKABLE ORIGINAL-GUM CORNER SHEET-MARGIN EXAMPLE OF THE ST. LOUIS 10-CENT "BEARS" POSTMASTER'S PROVISIONAL. WITHOUT QUESTION THE FINEST EXAMPLE OF THIS RARITY IN EXISTENCE, AND COMPLETELY ABSENT FROM THE RECORDS OF ST. LOUIS "BEARS" MAINTAINED BY SPECIALISTS OVER THE YEARS. THIS IS THE FIRST ORIGINAL-GUM EXAMPLE OF ANY ST. LOUIS PROVISIONAL EVER ENCOUNTERED OR NOTED IN THE RECORDS.

With 2011 P.F. certificate which states "It is genuine, unused, with part O.G. and a tiny translucent spot at bottom" (the margin crease is not mentioned on certificate, because it lies so far from the printed stamp).   Estimate $30,000-40,000
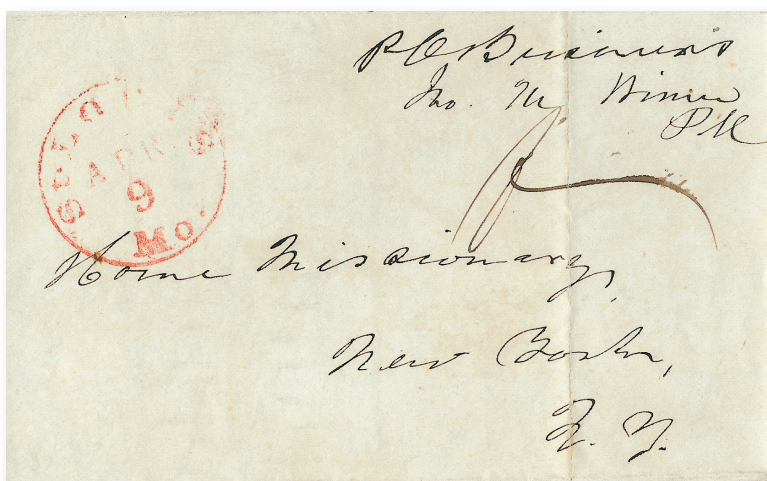
The St. Louis Postmaster

John M. Wimer was born in Virginia in 1810 and settled in St. Louis in 1828. He served two terms as mayor (1843-1844 and 1857-1858). Between terms he received his postmaster's appointment on June 14, 1845, after President James K. Polk entered office and just 17 days before the effective date of the 1845 postal reforms, which paved the way for adhesive stamp use by simplifying the rate structure. Wimer was replaced as postmaster in 1850.

John M. Wimer (1810-1863)
Str. Louis Postmaster 1845-1850

When the Civil War began, Wimer joined the Confederate army in defense of his native state of Virginia. In 1862 he was arrested and held at Gratiot Street Military Prison and Alton Penitentiary, but Wimer escaped in December 1862 and reached southwest Missouri where he joined the command of General Emmet McDonald. Colonel Wimer and General McDonald were killed at Hartsville, Missouri, on January 11, 1863. It is reported that Wimer was shot through the eye, and after he died that "the yankee Provost Marshall (Franklin Dick) managed to steal his body during the wake, and buried him in an unknown potters field as a final act of desecration. After the war his body was moved to Bellefontaine Cemetery."

Free frank of St. Louis Postmaster John M. Wimer

The St. Louis "Bears" Provisional Issue

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 postmarked November 13 (1845) on a letter dated November 12 (Siegel Sale 993, lot 6).

The "Bears" Printing Plate

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.

Three States of the St. Louis "Bears" Plate

State 1 (Original State)

Pos. 1: 5c Ty. I
Pos. 3: 5c Ty. II
Pos. 5: 5c Ty. III
Pos. 2: 10c Ty. I
Pos. 4: 10c Ty. II
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)

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

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