



Lot 14

LOT 14°

This is the unique Bible Block of six—the largest of three recorded unused blocks of the 10¢ 1847 First General Issue—which has been acclaimed an icon of United States philately since its discovery in a bible more than a century ago

ESTIMATE \$500,000-750,000

DESCRIPTION

10¢ Black (2), Positions 71-73/81-83R—**block of six** (three by two) from the first three columns of the eighth and ninth rows of the right pane—original gum, mostly full to large margins except close or touching at left, deep shade on fresh bluish paper

PROVENANCE

Discovered circa 1909-11 in a bible belonging to the Rives of Virginia; 5¢ 1847 block of six and adjoining 10¢ block of four found in the same bible; sold privately to Scott Stamp and Coin Co. before 1912

Philadelphia Stamp Co., Sale 48, 6/28/1912, lot 3, sold to Henry C. Gibson, Sr. (bought from Gibson by Ward in 1942-47)

Philip H. Ward, Jr. (bought from Gibson, estate sold to Weills in 1963)

Benjamin D. Phillips (bought from Weills out of Ward estate, 1964; collection sold privately to Weills, 1968)

Ryohei Ishikawa (bought privately from Weills, circa 1977), Christie's Robson Lowe sale, 9/28-29/1993, lot 52, to William H. Gross

CENSUS, LITERATURE AND EXHIBITION REFERENCES

Dr. Stanley M. Bierman, "Henry C. Gibson, Sr.: The Centennial Philatelist," *Chronicle* 128, November 1985

— "Philip H. Ward, Jr.: An Aristocrat of Philately," *Chronicle* 124, November 1984

Lester G. Brookman, *United States Postage Stamps of the 19th Century*, p. 60

David Lidman, *Treasury of Stamps*, fig. 65, p. 52

John N. Luff, *The Postage Stamps of the United States*, reprint, p. 49

Jonathan W. Rose, *Classic United States Imperforate Stamps*, p. 19

Philip H. Ward, Jr., *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News*, 1935, Vol. 69, p. 265

— "United States Early Unused Blocks 1847-1869," 1960 *Congress Book*, p. 51

National Philatelic Museum, 1956, Vol. III, No. 1, pp. 106, 111

New York International Philatelic Exhibition 1913 (Gibson)

New York International Philatelic Exhibition 1926 (Gibson)

Collectors Club of New York 2/24/1926 (Gibson; Elliott Perry talk)

TIPEX 1936 (Ward)

ANPHILEX 1971 "Aristocrats of Philately" (Weill)

INTERPHIL 1976 "Aristocrats of Philately" (Weill)

ANPHILEX 1996 Invited Exhibits (Gross)

Collectors Club of New York "Aristocrats of United States Philately" exhibit, December 2000 (Gross)

World Stamp Show 2016 Court of Honor (Gross)

CERTIFICATION

The Philatelic Foundation (2018)

CONDITION NOTES

Very Fine; light crease in left vertical pair

HISTORY AND COMMENTARY

The 1847 10¢ Washington First Issue

Following the 1845 postal reforms and the Act of March 3, 1847, which authorized the postmaster general to issue stamps for general use, the first stamps were engraved and printed by Rawdon, Wright, Hatch & Edson, and released on July 1, 1847. The 10¢ Washington vignette is based on the iconic portrait painted by Gilbert Stuart and copied many times. The 5¢ and 10¢ vignette dies used by RWH&E were probably acquired from Durand, Perkins & Co. after that firm was dissolved in 1831.



10¢ 1847 and Gilbert Stuart's portrait of George Washington

Once the designs were approved, RWH&E made the dies and two steel plates of 200 subjects each, arranged in side-by-side panes of 100. The 10¢ block of six offered in this sale comes from the lower rows of the right pane.

The first supplies of 600,000 5¢ and 200,000 10¢ stamps were delivered to the Third Assistant Postmaster General John Marron in New York City on June 29, 1847. On July 1 Marron turned over 60,000 5¢ and 20,000 10¢ stamps to the New York City post office, and they were placed on sale that day. Over the two-year period the 1847 Issue was valid, approximately 4.4 million 5¢ and 1.05 million 10¢ stamps were printed in five printings. Of these, approximately 3.7 million 5¢ and 892,000 10¢ stamps were issued. The remainders on hand in 1851 were destroyed.

Demonetization and Redemption of 1847 Stamps

In anticipation of the new July 1851 rates and stamps, Postmaster General Nathan K. Hall announced on June 11 that the 5¢ and 10¢ postage stamps of 1847 would no longer be accepted as legal postage after June 30, 1851.

Postmaster Hall's demonetization order established a three-month redemption period—from July 1 to September 30, 1851—and instructed the public to present the stamps

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“to the Postmaster of whom they were purchased, or to the nearest Postmaster who has been authorized to sell postage stamps.” Hall specified that only postmasters who had previously received stamps for sale directly from the Post Office Department were authorized to “pay cash for all genuine postage stamps” (Thomas J. Alexander, “Demonetization of the 1847 Issue,” *Chronicle* 174, May 1997).

The procedure for redeeming unused 1847 stamps was cumbersome for the public and for postmasters. In the months following June 30, 1851, there was a degree of tolerance for use of the old stamps, as evidenced by dozens of covers with 1847 stamps used in the post-demonetization period. However, as time passed, the floating supply of old stamps dwindled, and it undoubtedly became more difficult to slip the 1847 stamps into the mails. Furthermore, paying the 3¢ domestic rate with a 5¢ 1847 stamp wasted 2¢. The USPS census of covers with 1847 stamps shows a steep decline by the end of 1852.

5¢ and 10¢ 1847 Blocks Discovered in Rives Family Bible

In an era when 5¢ or 10¢ had considerable purchasing power, failure to redeem unused 1847 stamps represented a significant loss of monetary value. Since no one in 1851 could have anticipated the future collector value attached to such things, one may reasonably assume that unused 1847 stamps owe their survival to forgetfulness or circumstance. In the case of the 10¢ block of six, there are several tantalizing clues as to what occurred. We will attempt to reconstruct the events based on all available and reliable information.

The 10¢ block and a companion 5¢ 1847 block of six were first sold at auction in a sale held by Philadelphia Stamp Co. on June 28, 1912, on Nassau Street in New York City. The Philadelphia Stamp Co., managed by Percival Parrish, was a branch of the New York-based Scott Stamp and Coin Co., Ltd. Nothing in the catalogue or lot descriptions indicates the source of the two blocks. The 5¢ block is probably the one shown below; it was displayed by Ward on the same page as the larger Lord Crawford block (see page 47 for a photograph) until he bought the 10¢ Bible block from Gibson. The page with the 5¢ block of sixteen and 10¢ block of six is shown in the 1960 *Congress Book* in Ward’s article on classic blocks.

In the 1912 Philadelphia Stamp Co. auction, the 5¢ block sold for \$190, and the 10¢ block sold for \$625 to an agent acting on behalf of Henry C. Gibson, Sr. After the sale, the firm ran ads boasting that the realizations were three times catalogue value.



This 5¢ 1847 block of six was found together with the 10¢ block of six in the Rives family bible, sometime between 1909 and 1912

In an article published by Ward in *Mekeel’s Weekly Stamp News* in January 1925 (no. 1766, p. 36), he described Gibson’s 10¢ block of six and stated, “if my memory serves me correctly it was originally found in Washington by the Rives family and from them passed to the Scott [Stamp and Coin Co.] people.” As far as we can determine, this is the first mention of the Rives family in connection with the block’s discovery, but there is no mention of a bible.

In another article by Ward, published in November 1948 (*Mekeel’s Weekly Stamp News*, no. 3018, p. 335), he quotes a letter he received from the recently deceased Walter S. Scott, which recollects the auction of the 5¢ and 10¢ blocks, but errs in some of the details (the firm, year, and size of the 5¢ block). However, Scott’s letter does state that the two blocks had been “sent to a clergyman for a dollar’s subscription to something; that he had placed them in a bible and there they remained for some 60 years...” As far as we can determine, this is the first time anyone wrote that the blocks were found together in a bible.

The year the blocks were sold (1912) and the Rives bible provenience can be tied to the death in 1909 of a direct descendant of William Cabell Rives, which supports the story that both blocks were found inside a bible in the Rives family’s possession since the 1800s.

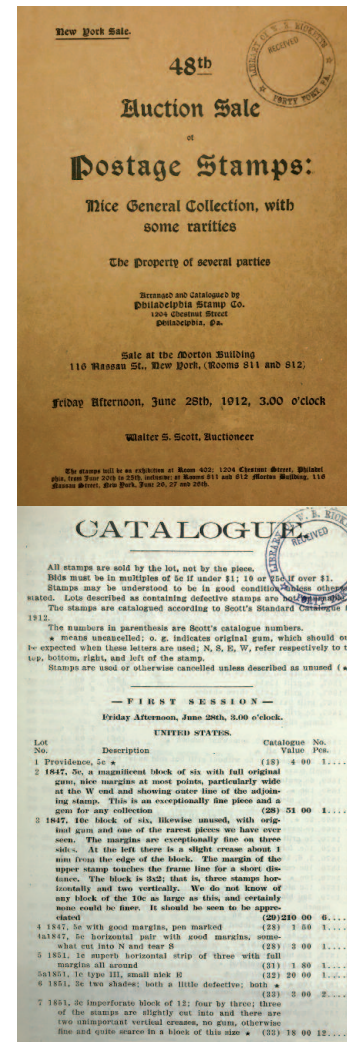


William Cabell Rives
(1793-1868)



Alfred Landon Rives
(1830-1903)

W.C. Rives Photo: Univ. of Virginia Library, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library



5¢ and 10¢ 1847 blocks of six offered in Philadelphia Stamp Co.’s 48th sale on June 28, 1912—lots 2 and 3 realized \$190 and \$625, respectively

William Cabell Rives (1792/1793-1868) was a Virginian who served in the Virginia House of Delegates, U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, and as minister to France in two separate terms—1829-1832 and again in 1849-1852. The last term of service is significant. The Rives family bible was acquired and inscribed by W. C. Rives in January 1825. It is plausible that he placed the two 1847 blocks in the bible before leaving for France in 1849. Then, having failed to redeem the stamps, he simply forgot about them after returning to the United States.

After William's death in 1868, the bible evidently passed to his son, Alfred Landon Rives. Alfred died in 1903, and his wife Sadie died at Castle Hill, the Rives home in Virginia, on October 7, 1909. Their children deposited the bible with the University of Virginia Library in 1948 for study purposes and donated it in 1959, so it was definitely in their possession after their parents' deaths. It is still in the library stacks and available for viewing (Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, MSS 2855).

After their mother's death in 1909, the surviving Rives children would have a reason to go through old family papers and books, including the bible. The reported sale of the blocks to Scott Stamp and Coin Co. neatly dovetails Sadie's death and the 1912 auction.

The 10¢ block buyer in that sale, Henry C. Gibson, Sr., was the scion of a wealthy Philadelphia family and an accomplished banker and businessman in his own right. Gibson began collecting stamps and covers around 1910. His interest in the 1847 Issue and classic multiples developed early, and his acquisition of the famous 10¢ 1847 Rush cover in the 1910 Seybold auction was followed by other major acquisitions, including the purchase of the 10¢ 1847 Bible block. Gibson was only 27 when he owned both of the greatest 10¢ 1847 pieces extant. He exhibited his 1847s, including the 10¢ block, at the New York International Philatelic Exhibition in 1913 and again at the 1926 New York International. The 1926 exhibit catalogue describes the 10¢ multiple as "a perfection mint block of six—the largest and finest known."



Henry C. Gibson, Sr.
(1885-1987)

Although he was unable to attend the meeting, Gibson showed his 1847s at the Collectors Club of New York on February 24, 1926. His proxy speaker was Elliott Perry, an expert with specialized knowledge of the 1847 Issue. An account of the evening's presentation appeared in the *Collectors Club Philatelist* (April 1926, pp. 91-92), in which praise was heaped upon Gibson's collection—"the collection was contained in one Oriel Album but is so choice that it is believed no other collection of these stamps contained in only one volume which could be favorably compared with it has ever been made." Details of the items shown specifically mention the 10¢ block of six, described it as "one of the premier pieces of American philately."



Philip H. Ward, Jr.
(1886-1963)

Two years later, in April 1928, Gibson authorized his dealer friend Ward to sell the 1847s through private transactions. Ward advertised the offering under the massive headline "Gibson Collection of 1847," and he announced that he had "acquired" the collection, which was estimated to be worth "upward of one hundred thousand dollars." Either Ward was stretching the truth, or Gibson decided to pull back much of the collection, because unpublished correspondence in the

Ward files indicate that only about \$33,000 of the 1847s were sold, the proceeds of which were credited against slightly more in purchases made by Gibson, including a large group of Postmasters' Provisionals.

Philip H. Ward, Jr., was born into a wealthy Washington, D.C., family and started collecting stamps as a college student. He emerged to become one of the principal dealers serving an elite class of collectors. More than his professional activity as a dealer and auctioneer, Ward's personal collecting firmly established his philatelic legacy, and, after his death in 1963, the sale of the "Ward stock" to the Weills of New Orleans helped create mystique around the Ward name. The legendary "foot lockers" containing the Ward material were still in the Weills' possession when they sold their own inventory in 1989.

Ward acquired the 5¢ Lord Crawford block from the Ackerman collection in 1931 and displayed it at the 1936 TIPEX exhibition. Gibson retained the 10¢ block until Ward purchased it, sometime between 1942 and 1947. Ward was then able to triumphantly mount the largest mint multiples of the 5¢ and 10¢ 1847 Issue on the same page. He displayed his magnificent collection at CIPEX in 1947.



Benjamin D. Phillips
(1885-1968)

Almost immediately after the Weills acquired the Ward inventory in 1963, they sold significant parts of the holding, including the 5¢ Lord Crawford and 10¢ Bible blocks, to their most important and closely guarded client, Benjamin D. Phillips, scion of the T. W. Phillips family, owners of a large natural gas and oil company in Butler, Pennsylvania. Phillips started collecting in 1946, initially with purchases from Warren H. Colson. Within a few years the Weills had gained Phillips as a client. According to the Phillips inventory, in 1964 he paid the Weills \$22,090 for the 10¢ Bible block. In 1968 the Weills purchased the entire Phillips collection for \$4.07 million, a record for any collection sold up to that time.

Between 1968 and 1976 the 5¢ Lord Crawford and 10¢ Bible blocks remained in the Weills' domain, and not much is known about transactions during that period. However, shortly after Ryohei Ishikawa lost in competition with Louis Grunin at INTERPHIL in 1976, Ishikawa set out to form a Grand Prix award-winning exhibit of United States 1847-1869 issues. In a private sale negotiated with the Weills, Ishikawa purchased the two blocks as pillars of the exhibit collection that eventually won Grand Prix awards in three classes: International at WIPA 1981 (Vienna), National at AMERIPEX 1986 (Chicago), and d'Honneur at CAPEX 1987 (Toronto).



Ryohei Ishikawa

At the 1993 Christie's sale of Ishikawa's collection, Mr. Gross was the winning bidder for the two 1847 blocks, early successes in an auction that marked Mr. Gross's first major foray in the market.



Roger and Raymond Weill (left and right) in their Royal Street store

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Unused 10¢ 1847 Blocks and the Bible Block Revelation

The three recorded unused blocks of the 10¢ 1847 have been known to philatelists for nearly a century, and during that time no additional discoveries of unused blocks have been made. However, one of the blocks (#2 below) was unknown to leading specialists for many years, and its special relationship to the Bible block has only recently been recognized in preparation for the Gross sale.

The three recorded unused blocks are shown here, beginning with the block of six offered in this sale.



1 **Block of six**, Positions 71-73/81-83R, original gum, discovered 1909-11 in Rives family bible, ex Gibson, Ward, Weill, Phillips, Ishikawa, **the block offered in this sale**



2 **Block of four**, Positions 74-75/84-85R, original gum, slightly cut in at right, ex Col. Green, Klein, Kapiloff, Zoellner, Mirsky, currently in the Dr. Woo collection



Photo: Swiss Museum of Communications

3 **Block of four**, Positions 3-4/13-14L with top sheet margin, ex Gibson, Duveen, Hind, Sinkler, Gibson, Picher, Hirzel, currently in the Swiss Museum of Communications, there are conflicting reports as to whether or not this block has gum

Looking at these blocks with the positions identified, it is notable that the block of six and block of four (#2) are adjoining positions in the sheet. This would be an extraordinary coincidence if the blocks came from different original sources and different sheets.

In actual fact, the two blocks form a block of ten, and they were cut from the same sheet. The implications of this are significant. It means that when the Rives family bible yielded its philatelic treasures, it contained a *block of ten* of the 10¢—or the two blocks already separated.

To prove that the two blocks were once an intact unit, a digital reconstruction is shown on the opposite page. The right margin of the block of six and the left margin of the block for four fit together perfectly. The bottom margins are matching width. The top margins are different width.

A question naturally arises. Did the dealer who bought the 5¢ and 10¢ blocks from the Rives family—Scott Stamp and Coin Co.—divide the 10¢ block of ten, or was it already cut into two units?

To some readers it might seem inconceivable that a dealer would cut up a 10¢ 1847 block of ten into two blocks, but one should remember that dealers were (and are) motivated by profit. This profit motivation has often compelled the decision to create more than one saleable unit from a block or sheet. In the early philatelic era when large multiples were being discovered, it was common practice to break them up into smaller units for resale. The record is filled with examples of large blocks and sheets that have been broken up by dealers and sold to clients or to other dealers. Do not forget that the 24¢ Inverted Jenny error sheet—arguably the greatest piece ever found—was separated into singles and blocks for resale soon after its discovery in 1918.

When Scott Stamp and Coin Co. bought the 1847 blocks from the Rives family (circa 1909-1911), the 10¢ block could have been intact as a block of ten. The firm's principals might have decided that more money could be made from dividing it into blocks of six and four—the latter with the right margin slightly cut in. It is also possible that William C. Rives, or whoever put the blocks into the bible in the 1840s, had already cut the 10¢ block into two pieces. We can never know the whole truth.



BLOCK OF SIX (LOT 14)

BLOCK OF FOUR (NOT IN THIS SALE)

The block of six at left (lot 14) comes from Positions 71-73/81-83R, and the block of four at right (not in this sale) comes from the adjoining Positions 74-75/84-85R—in this digital reconstruction, the margins between the blocks fit perfectly, proving that they were once an intact unit from the same sheet

Separated at Birth—The Orphaned Block of Four

Regardless of whether the blocks were found divided by Scott Stamp and Coin Co. or subsequently cut apart, it appears that the decision was made to market the block of six while keeping the existence of the block of four on the hush.

From 1912 until 1946, dealers and specialists were apparently unaware of the block of four with original gum and the margin slightly in at right. When Ward wrote about the number of 10¢ 1847 blocks known and Brookman published his monograph on the 1847 Issue (in 1942), they both stated the conventional wisdom that only two unused 10¢ blocks were known: the block of six (from the Rives bible) and the block of four with the top sheet margin (#3 shown opposite). No mention was made of a third unused block.

Ward reported that Gibson once owned the top-margin block of four, but sold it after he acquired the block of six in 1912. If correct, that establishes the smaller block's discovery prior to 1912. The block passed to Henry J. Duveen, then to Arthur Hind and Wharton Sinkler. Gibson evidently reacquired the block in the 1940 Klein sale of the Sinkler collection—it is listed in the October 1945 inventory of Gibson's 1847 collection. Its next appearance was in the 1946 Ward sale of the Col. Oliver S. Picher collection. Sometime later it was sold to Charles A. Hirzel, a resident of Berne, Switzerland, and New York City. In February 1966, shortly before his death, Hirzel donated his United States and Switzerland collections to the Swiss PTT Museum (later renamed the Museum of Communications). The museum inventory describes the block as having original gum, but other descriptions seem to indicate it did not have gum.

If Ward and Brookman were unaware of the third block's existence before 1946, in that year they certainly learned about it. In the 25th of a series of auctions held to disperse the vast collection formed by Colonel Edward H. R. Green, held by Eugene Costales on February 18-21, 1946—just months after the Allied victory in World War II—lot 12 featured the block of four that was once mated to the Bible block. The description reads:

10c black (29) [*], block of four, fine and fresh, full o.g., large margins all sides except at the upper right where part of the

outer line is cut away but this is of little consequence as only two other unused blocks are known, (only one of which has gum), 4MM scissors cut at bottom into the vertical margin between the stamps. Single copies of this stamp with gum are rare, pairs are far rarer in proportion and a block of four such as this is one of the great rarities of United States. One of the gems of the sale.

* 29 was the old Scott Catalogue number for the 10¢ 1847

There is no record of when Colonel Green purchased the 10¢ block of four. It could have been as early as 1917, one year after his mother Hetty's death, when he started spending lavishly on his collecting interests, but no later than 1936 when Green died. The acquisition was probably closer to 1917, which would explain why no one was aware of the block's existence.

The block of four, with its unrecognized Rives provenance, was acquired by Walter C. Klein in 1970. When his collection was sold by Christie's Robson Lowe in 1988, the block was bought by Dr. Leonard Kapiloff. At the 1992 Kapiloff 1847 sale held by Siegel, Robert Zoellner acquired it. When the Zoellner collection was sold by Siegel in 1998, the successful bidder was Harvey Mirsky. In the 2012 Mirsky sale, also held by Siegel, the block realized \$450,000 hammer, selling to Dr. Arthur K. M. Woo, one of the world's major collectors and exhibitors.

Remarkably, since its appearance in the 1946 Green sale, the block of four's relationship to the block of six has never been recognized by anyone—including, much to his chagrin, this writer on the four different occasions he has described it for auctions. Even Ward, who owned the block of six by the time of the Green sale, did not think to put the two together or make the connection.

This offering of the famous 10¢ Bible block creates the potential to reunite it with the smaller block that was born of the same sheet and found in the same bible more than a century ago. Divided by the scissors-cut between them and unrecognized as two parts of a whole, these two philatelic artifacts may now be called siblings, and a collector with means, determination and patience can bring them together. ■