

**NEW PLATE FLAW DISCOVERY:
“DASH AND INK TRAIL” ON 3¢ 1851 STAMP**

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A new plate flaw has been discovered on Position 97R11 of the 3¢ 1851 stamp (Scott 10A). It appears as a small vertical dash of color in the white space between the “U.S. POSTAGE” label and the upper right diamond block (URDB). A faint “ink trail” (or line) extends upward from the dash, heading past the URDB and into the lower right diamond block on the stamp above it, Position 87.

I noticed this variety while examining the cover illustrated in Figure 1, a recent acquisition for my research studies on Dutchess and Putnam Counties in New York State. The stamp is a single imperforate Scott 10A in a reddish orange brown shade, cancelled with an “X” and mailed from Patterson in Putnam County, probably in 1851. The postmaster at the time was Hervey Crosby. He most likely applied the two-line “Patterson NY Oct 4” manuscript postmark at lower left.

I plated the stamp as 97R11 (Position 97 from the intermediate state of the right pane of Plate 1) by comparing the on-cover copy to my plate reconstruction, and to the Smithsonian National Postal Museum photographs of Carroll Chase’s reconstruction. The stamp is a Relief B example from the bottom or 10th row, with inner line recut at right only. It shows a faint to missing top outer frame line above the “E” in “POSTAGE.”



Figure 1. Cover from Patterson, New York, dated 4 Oct (1851) and sent to Haverstraw, New York. The stamp is Scott 10A and shows a newly discovered plate flaw variety.



Figure 2. Enlargement of the stamp from the Figure 1 cover. The stamp is a clear, crisp impression, which the author had little difficulty plating to Position 97R11.

It was fairly easy to identify the position due to the excellent early impression and pen cancel that did not obscure salient details of the stamp. It was only upon closer inspection of the upper right quadrant that I noticed that these extra markings were not as obvious on Chase's plate reconstruction photo—but they are there, proving this was not some random inking variety.

However, Chase does not appear to have recorded this variety in either his book or along the left edge of his R11 plate reconstruction. This might be because his example of 97R11 had a cancel covering this part of the stamp.

Figure 2 shows the discovery stamp enlarged six times. The plate flaw can be seen at the upper right. Figure 3 is an even bigger enlargement of the upper right corner area. The

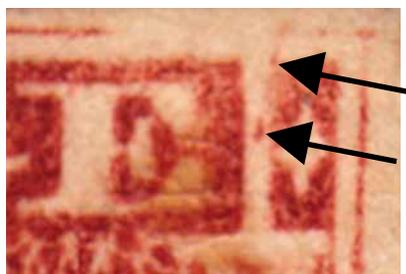


Figure 3. Upper right corner of the Figure 2 stamp, enlarged. Arrows highlight the dash and its follow-on ink trail. The break above "E" in the outer frameline shows clearly.

lower arrow points to the dash and the upper arrow to a portion of the ink trail. I have called this the “Dash and Ink Trail” variety.

As with any new plate variety, one wants to confirm that extra dots, dashes and lines are constant plating marks, not merely stray ink spots unique to one particular stamp. At this juncture I contacted colleagues in the U.S. Classics Study Group and shared a high-resolution scan of my stamp, seeking more information: Had anyone come across this variety before and could they check their holdings for other examples of 97R1I? I’m pleased to report that camaraderie is alive: my outreach paid off.

The enlargements in Figure 4 show the corner area in the three different states of position 97R1: the early state (97R1E) which does not show the flaw; the discovery copy of 97R1I and an additional example confirming that the plate flaw is constant; and the late state (97R1L) which shows a faint dash, likely a remnant of the variety, but no ink trail.

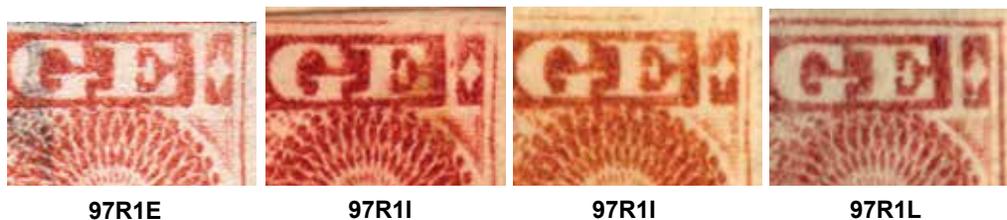


Figure 4. Enlargements of the upper right corner of Position 97R1 in its three states. At left: Position 97R1E (the early state) does not show the flaw. The two center images show the discovery copy and an additional 97R1I stamp confirming that the “Dash and Ink Trail” flaw is constant in the intermediate state. At right, Position 97R1L (the late state) shows a faint dash even after re-entry, but no longer shows the ink trail.

So what could have caused this variety? Might this be a “slip” while the engraver was strengthening the frame line? Research has revealed that there was no strengthening of the frame lines during the re-entry on Plate 1 Early (which created Plate 1 Intermediate). Might this be a “glancing blow” by some unknown implement? The dash to the left of the URDB may have been caused by a major strike and the ink trail by a deflection. Keep in mind that the plate had not been hardened yet. We do not know just when this damage to the plate occurred. The assumption is that it happened when Plate 1E was reentered (creating Plate 1I) early in July 1851. But the damage could have occurred earlier or later. None of the 97R1E examples examined show the plate flaw, and all of the 97R1I examples examined show it, but the sample sizes are small. If readers can offer additional thoughts, they would be welcome.

We will never know the true cause of the “Dash and Ink Trail” plate flaw on 97R1I. However, it is satisfying that after more than a century of study by the most astute students of philately, a new constant plate variety can be identified on the 3¢ 1851 stamp.

Special thanks to Richard Celler, whose critical review, insights and expertise on the 3¢ 1851 stamps informed this work. Additional thanks to Elliot H. Omiya, Bryan O’Doherty, Robert J. Lampert and Don Getzin for sharing digital scans and hypotheses on the possible causes for this plate variety. Finally, I would like to thank the other affiliates of U.S. Classics Study Group, who consistently share their research in an open forum with this ever-learning postal historian and plater. ■