

**The U.S. 3¢ 1851-57 Stamp: The “Dot and Ink Trail” Plate Flaw, a New Discovery.
Charles J. DiComo, Ph.D.**

A new plate flaw has been discovered on position 97R1i of the 1851 3¢ stamp (Scott #10A). It appears as a prominent “dot” of color in the white space between the “U.S. POSTAGE” top label and the upper right diamond block (URDB). There is also a faint “ink trail” (or line) extending from the dot, and heading NNE past the URDB and possibly into the margin between 87R and 97R.

I noted this variety while examining the small Ladies 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, tied by a manuscript line, cancelled with an “X” and mailed from Patterson, NY in Putnam County (in all probability in 1851). The postmaster at the time was Hervey Crosby and he most likely marked in pen at lower left the two-line “Patterson NY Oct 4” postmark. The cover is addressed to “Mrs. G.J. Foote, Haverstraw, Rockland Co. N.Y.”. There are no contents, or notations on the reverse.



Figure 1. Ladies cover, Patterson, New York dated 4 Oct (1851) to Haverstraw, New York with new plate flaw variety on Scott #10A, position 97 from the right pane of Plate 1 intermediate (97R1i).

I subsequently plated the stamp as 97R1i by comparing the on-cover copy to my plate reconstruction, as well as the Smithsonian National Postal Museum photographs of Dr. Chase's plate reconstructions. The stamp is a Relief B from the bottom or 10th row, with inner line recut at right only, and shows a very faint to missing top outer frame line from the middle of the “E” in “POSTAGE” to the top left of the URDB. It was fairly easy to identify the position due to the excellent impression and light cancel that did not obscure details of the stamp.

It was only upon closer inspection of the upper right quadrant that I noticed these extra markings were not as obvious on Dr. Chase’s plate reconstruction photo, but they were there, proving this was not some random inking variety.

However, Dr. Chase does not appear to have recorded this variety in either his book or along the left edge of his R1i plate reconstruction. It has been suggested that this might be because when Dr. Chase wrote his book his copy of 97R1i had a cancel covering this part of the stamp.

Figure 2 illustrates the discovery copy in which the plate flaw can be seen at the upper right. Figure 3 is a blow-up of that quadrant, allowing us to further dissect what I shall term the 97R1i “Dot and Ink Trail” variety.



Figure 2. An enlarged image of the 97R1i stamp from the Patterson, New York Ladies cover clearly showing the previously unlisted “Dot and Ink Trail” plate flaw variety at upper right.



Figure 3. Blow-up of the upper right quadrant of the 97R1i illustrating the large “Dot and Ink Trail” between the top label and the URDB (white arrows). Note the gap or absence of ink missing from the outer frame line above the “E” of “POSTAGE” eastward to the URDB (white bracket).

As with any new discovery, one wants to confirm that extra “dots”, “dashes”, and/or “lines” are constant plating marks, and not merely stray ink unique to that particular stamp. It was at this juncture that I contacted via email my stamp and postal history colleagues from the U.S. Classics Study Group and shared a 1200 dpi digital scan of my copy requesting more information – had anyone come across this variety before and could they check their holdings for examples of 97R1i. As it would have it, camaraderie is alive as my outreach paid off.

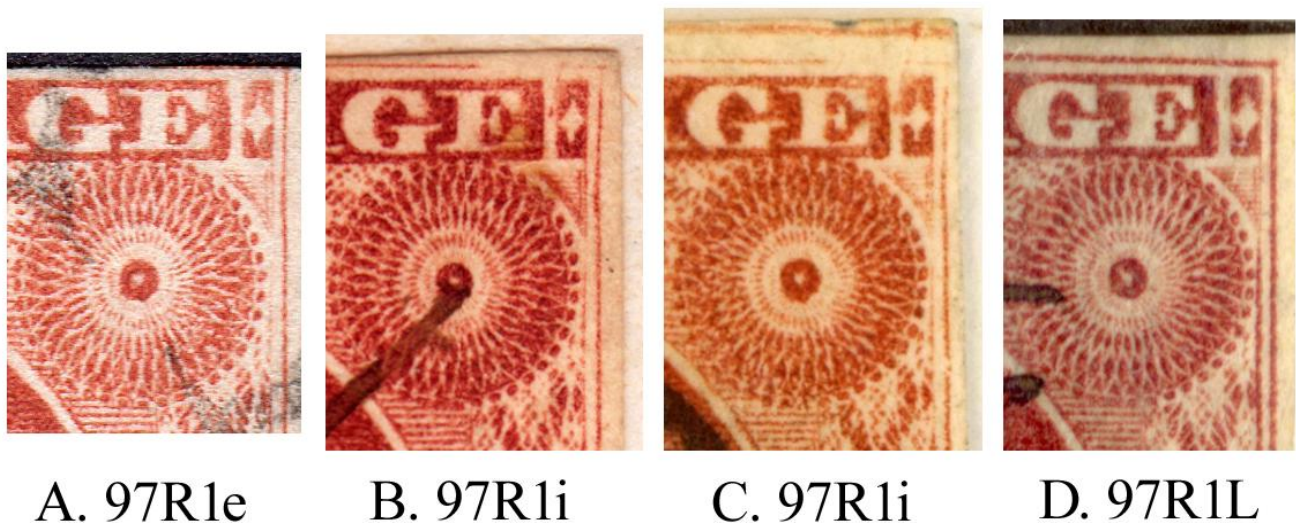


Figure 4. (A) 97R1E (early state) which does not show the flaw. (B) The discovery “Dot and Ink Trail” copy. (C) An additional 97R1i illustrating that the flaw is constant. (D) 97R1L (late state) showing a faint “Dot” (or dash), even after re-entry, but not the “Ink Trail”.

Figure 4 illustrates the three states of position 97R1: the early state which does not show the flaw (4A); the discovery copy of 97R1i (4B); an additional example of 97R1i showing the plate flaw is constant (4C); and the late state which shows a faint “Dot” (or dash), likely a remnant of the variety, but not the “Ink Trail” (4D).

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 large “Dot” to the left of the URDB may be caused by a major “strike” and the NNE “Ink Trail” may be caused by a deflection. It is important to 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 upon (creating Plate 1i) early in July 1851. However, the damage could have happened earlier or later. While none of the 97R1E examples examined has the plate flaw, and all of the 97R1i examples examined do have it, the sample size is small. If the reader has an additional theory, the author welcomes a reply.

We will never know the true cause of the “Dot and Ink Trail” plate flaw on 97R1i. However, it is satisfying that after over a century of study and hundreds of published pages by the most astute students of philately and postal history, that a new constant plate variety can be identified on the 3¢ 1851 stamp.

Acknowledgements

The author specifically wishes to thank Richard Celler for his critical review, insight and expertise on the U.S. 3¢ 1851-57 Issue that informed this work. Additionally, appreciation goes to Elliot H. Omiya, Bryan O’Doherty, Robert J. Lampert, and Don Getzin for sharing their digital scans of stamps and diverse 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. Any errors or an omission is the author’s responsibility; I can be reached at charlesdicomo@gmail.com.

Endnotes

1. Chase, MD, Carroll, *The Three Cent United States Stamp of the Issue of 1851*, American Philatelic Society, Boston, Massachusetts, 1909.
2. Chase, Carroll, *The 3¢ Stamp of the United States, 1851-57 Issue*, J.O. Moore, Inc., New York, 1929.
3. Chase, Carroll, *The 3¢ Stamp of the United States, 1851-57, Revised*, Tatham Stamp and Coin, Co., Springfield, Massachusetts, 1942.
4. Chase, Carroll B., *The 3¢ Stamp of the United States, 1851-1857 Issue, rev. ed.*, Quarterman Publications, Inc., Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1975.
5. Chase, Dr. Carroll, *1851-1857 U.S. Issues*, National Philatelic Museum, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1951.
6. Chase, Carroll, *U.S. Perforation Centennial 1857-1957*, National Philatelic Museum, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1957.
7. *The 1851 Issue of United States Stamps: A Sesquicentennial Retrospective*, edited by Hubert Skinner and Charles Peterson, The U.S. Philatelic Classics Society, Inc., New Orleans, Louisiana, 2006.
8. U.S. 3¢ 1851-1857 Plate Reconstructions, as prepared by Dr. Carroll Chase, twenty-six 11”x14” black and white photographic reproductions, Smithsonian Institution, National Postal Museum, Photographic Services, Washington, DC.