

Match & Medicine Stamp (M&M) Revenue Stamps EFOs

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In the 1860's, the U.S. Government looked to numerous industries to collect revenue to meet the ever-growing expenses of the Civil War. One candidate was the proprietary medicines business. The U.S. drug catalogs listed over 400 different proprietary medicines in the 1850s. There were plenty of other industries that would be taxed: Matches, playing cards, perfumes, canned fruits.

U.S. Private Die Proprietary Revenues stamps, also called Match & Medicine stamps, were glued or fastened on the packaging in such a manner that, when the item was opened for consumption, the stamp was destroyed. Figure 1 depicts a medicine box with the revenue stamp fastened to the top of the box. Figure 2 shows how such a stamp might be attached to a bottle, in this case Swaim's Panacea. It's probably better not to ask what made up the Panacea. Opening the bottle destroyed the stamp, ensuring that it would not be reused to avoid payment of the tax.



Figure 1: Original, unopened box of McLane's Celebrated Liver Pills, sealed with Scott RS90 medicine stamp, ca. 1875. Dimensions: 63x43x20 mm.



Figure 2: Facsimile of a Swaim's Panacea Bottle with Draper label & 8c Stamp adhered as Cork Seal.



Figure 3: Medicine strip stamp for Swaim's Panacea (Scott RS235).

The revenue stamps were printed by government printers (e.g., Butler & Carpenter), but the designs were provided by the company that would be using them on its products. Manufacturers of "proprietary articles" saw these as a way to advertise their wares and had quite elaborate designs created. Figure 3 depicts a revenue stamp used for Swaim's panacea.

These revenue stamps represent a well-recognized branch of philately and are listed in Scott's Specialized Catalogue with numbers prefixed by RO for Match stamps, RP for Canned Fruit stamps, RS for Medicine stamps, RT for Perfume stamps and RU for Playing Card stamps. The use of these stamps ceased in July 1883 when the proprietary taxes were rescinded.

As you can imagine, whenever one prints stamps on sheets of paper, that are then separated into stamp-sized pieces before use, something will go wrong and some "defective" copies will be created. Stamp collectors, particularly members of the EFOCC, appreciate such defects and call them EFOs and avidly collect them.

Thus, we present here a few EFOs on Match & Medicine stamps.

Extra Perforations

The H. Stanton Match Company's revenue stamp (Figure 4), RO171a, has an extra set of vertical perforations on the right

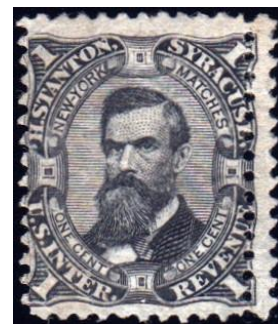


Figure 4: H. Stanton private die proprietary match stamp (Scott RO171a).



Figure 5: A.L. Scovill private die proprietary stamp (Scott RS220a).

side. The A.L. Scovill & Co. stamp RS220a (Figure 5) has extra vertical perforations on both sides. Incidentally, the company manufactured hair products, including “Circassian Hair Oil” which, their ads stated, “reverted white hair to its original color” and was not a “die” [1].



Figure 6: A.L. Scovill private die proprietary stamps (both Scott RS220b).

Paper Creases

The two A.L. Scoville stamps in Figure 6 have pre-printing paper creases (PPC), the top one a major oblique and the bottom one, a minor oblique PPC. This leaves an unprinted area that becomes visible when the finished stamp is straightened.



Figure 7: Helmbold's Genuine Preparations private die proprietary medicine stamp (Scott RS109b).



Figure 8: Dr. J.H. McLean, St. Louis, MO, private die proprietary medicine stamp (Scott RS170b).

Figure 7 depicts a revenue stamp (Scott RS109b) used for Helmbold's Genuine Preparations. It has a fairly large PPC that affects the stamp diagonally, sloping down from the left to the right. Figure 8, used for a proprietary product manufactured by the company with the name Dr. J.H. McLean of St. Louis, MO, has also a PPC sloping up diagonally from the left to the right of the stamp Scott RS170b.



Figure 9: Private die proprietary stamp used by D.S. Barnes; Left: Normal example, right: example with PPC.

Our last example is the vermilion 2¢ stamp used by the D.S. Barnes Company of New York (Figure 9). It has an almost horizontal PPC right above the legend “TWO CENT”. D.S. Barnes apparently used these stamps for several products

they manufactured with exotic names such as *Mexican Mustang Liniment*, *Lyon's Magnetic Powder* and *Hagan's Magnolia Balm*.

Conclusion

We have just scratched the surface of the fascinating collecting area of Match & Medicine revenue stamps. Similar to other areas of philately, there are many angles that can be studied, such as paper varieties and re-entry errors. Studying manufacturers' histories and products is also fascinating and teaches a lot about the era when these stamps were used. Today, most of these products would fall into the "snake oil" category, but at the time they were serious business. They could be helpful in curing or mitigating a condition, but often were ineffective or even dangerous. After learning about these companies and their products, one appreciates more the existence of today's FDA. Finally, like other stamps, M&M stamps also have EFOs and varieties, which makes them even more interesting. 🌱

About the Author

Charles is a lifelong philatelist, postal historian & award-winning author. He enjoys researching, restoring, writing, publishing & presenting on a broad array of philatelic & postal history topics. He is President of the Philatelic Society of Lancaster County (PA); President of the Empire State Postal History Society (NY), Editor-in-Chief of the U.S. Philatelic Classics Society award-winning *The Chairman's Chatter* and Life Member, on the Board of the Pennsylvania Postal History Society (PaPHS) and an emeritus member of the Council of Philatelists of the Smithsonian National Postal Museum. A native New Yorker, he resides in Lancaster, PA with his wife Kathleen and their two daughters, McKenna & Mia.

Charles has written many articles on M&M stamps and other subjects, some of which are posted on the website of the Lancaster County Philatelic Society ([2]). Of particular interest to EFO collectors are [3] describing a double transfer (or re-entry) discovery, [4] describing a new plate flaw on the U.S. 3 Cent 1851 Stamp.

References

- [1] <http://www.hairraisingstories.com/Proprietors/SCOVILLE.html>
- [2] <https://lcps-stamps.org/member-spotlight/>
- [3] <https://lcps-stamps.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2Q2022TAR-DICOMO-Warner-RS258dt-ARTICLE.pdf>
- [4] <http://www.dicomo.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/DiComo-3-Cent-1851-New-Plate-Flaw-Chronicle-259-2018-08.pdf>

