

The 1851 Half-Cent Bisect

OFFERED ON BEHALF OF ROLAND H. CIPOLLA II



SALE 1040A — LOT 1179A

TUESDAY, MARCH 26, 2013

Robert A. Siegel

AUCTION GALLERIES, INC.

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The 1851 Half-Cent Bisect

OFFERED ON BEHALF OF ROLAND H. CIPOLLA II



Sale 1040A

Tuesday, March 26, 2013, at 1:30 p.m.

Lot 1179A

A 15% buyer's premium will be added to the hammer price.

Please see Conditions of Sale on inside back cover of this catalogue.

*This lot will be available for viewing on Monday, March 25, from 10-4,
and by appointment (please call 212-753-6421).*

Robert A. Siegel

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Lot 1179A



Detail

The Newly Discovered and Only Recorded Example of The 1851 Half-Cent Bisect

Lot 1179A

1851 Issue, 1¢ Blue, Type IV, Diagonal Half Used as Half-Cent (Scott 9 bisect). Upper right diagonal half of stamp from Plate One Late tied across two sides by “New Haven Conn. Jun. 29” (1853) circular datestamp on blue folded printed advertising circular from Alfred J. Works, a New Haven attorney, addressed to “Mrs. Julia A. Goff, Hartford, Conn.,” the notice is dated “A.D., 1853” (see illustration on the following page), the bisect has two full margins and rich color, some minor splits along folds of notice

EXTREMELY FINE. THIS RECENT DISCOVERY IS THE FIRST AND ONLY RECORDED BISECTIONAL USE OF THE ONE-CENT 1851 ISSUE. THE SENDER APPLIED THE BISECT TO THIS PRINTED CIRCULAR TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SPECIAL HALF-CENT RATE FOR NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS ADDRESSED WITHIN A STATE, AND IT WAS ACCEPTED BY THE NEW HAVEN AND HARTFORD POST OFFICES. A PRINTED CIRCULAR—AS DEFINED BY LAW—WAS NOT ENTITLED TO THE DISCOUNT FOR IN-STATE NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS, BUT THE SENDER—A LAWYER WHO WOULD BE CONVICTED OF GOVERNMENT FRAUD JUST TWO MONTHS LATER—SUCCEEDED IN “WORKING THE SYSTEM.” AN IMPORTANT AND SINGULAR PHILATELIC RARITY WAS CREATED IN THE PROCESS.

The 1¢ 1851 Issue is one of the most widely collected and studied United States stamps. This 1851 Half-Cent Bisect and the 6¢ 1869 bisect are **the only two unique bisected United States stamps**, and this is **the only example of a bisected 1¢ stamp** among all United States 19th Century issues.

With 2012 Philatelic Foundation certificate.

Estimate \$50,000-75,000

The Half-Cent Rate for Newspapers and Periodicals

The 1851 Half-Cent Bisect owes its existence to an obscure rate concession in the Act of August 30, 1852 (32nd Congress, Session I, Ch. 98), which states (boldface added):

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That from and after the thirtieth day of September, eighteen hundred and fifty-two, the postage upon all printed matter passing through the mail of the United States, instead of the rates now charged, shall be as follows, to wit: Each newspaper, periodical, unsealed circular, or other article of printed matter, not exceeding three ounces in weight, shall be sent to any part of the United States for one cent, and for every additional ounce, or fraction of an ounce, one cent additional shall be charged; and when the postage upon any newspaper or periodical is paid quarterly or yearly in advance at the office where the said periodical or newspaper is delivered, or is paid yearly or quarterly in advance at the office where the same is mailed, and evidence of such payment is furnished to the office of delivery in such manner as the Post-Office Department shall by general regulations prescribe, one half of said rates only shall be charged. **Newspapers and periodicals, not weighing over one ounce and a half, when circulated in the State where published, shall be charged one half of the rates before mentioned:** Provided, That small newspapers and periodicals, published monthly or oftener, and pamphlets not containing more than sixteen octavo pages each, when sent in single packages, weighing at least eight ounces, to one address, and prepaid by affixing postage-stamps thereto, shall be charged only half of a cent for each ounce, or fraction of an ounce, notwithstanding the postage calculated on each separate article of such package would exceed that amount. The postage on all transient matter shall be prepaid by stamps or otherwise, or shall be charged double the rates first above mentioned.*

continued

**GENERAL LAND AND PENSION AGENCY,
OFFICE FOR CLAIMS AGAINST THE UNITED STATES.**

DEAR SIR:—Fishing it impossible to answer as promptly as I desire the thousands of letters received at this office making inquiries relative to Bounty Land, Pensions, &c., and wishing also to increase business, and convey a general idea of the principal laws governing these subjects, I have hastily collected hereby most of the principal acts of Congress under which claims can now be made by soldiers, their widows, or heirs-at-law. There are volumes of laws, old and new, growing out of the different wars, but only a small portion of the old enactments taken effect at this day. First in order are those relating to the

War of the Revolution.

- 1.—All officers who served till discharged, and all privates who enlisted for during the war, and served till the close, were entitled to warrants; but very few such rights now exist. In except the following cases, however, I can recover claims for the heirs-at-law, if the soldier or his widow lived till the different times mentioned, and did not get what was their due.
- 2.—All officers and privates who lived till after 1792.
- 3.—All widows of officers and privates who were married before the close of their husband's services, and lived till after 1850.
- 4.—All such widows as were married before 1794, and lived till after 1852.
- 5.—Also, all such widows as married Revolutionaries before 1800, and lived till 1843. Many who drew did not get all they were entitled to.
- 6.—No services in the Revolution, less than six months, entitles to anything; but proof of more service may probably be found, in most cases, by further examination.

War of 1812.

- 7.—All soldiers who enlisted for five years, or during the last War with England, were entitled to 160 acres, being twice as much as the other soldiers, the nearest heirs-at-law may obtain the land.
- 8.—All widows of children of those who enlisted for any less time than above-mentioned, and were killed or died in service, may recover five years half-pay pension, and all survivors of pay the time at the death.

War with Mexico.

Law of 1850.

- 9.—All soldiers serving, or entitled to serve, in the War, are entitled to land. If they were killed, or died in service, the near heirs are entitled to it; and also the widow or children of such can draw a pension.
- 10.—By this Law, all persons who have served, or were out at least one month in any war of the United States since 1790—Mexican War, Florida War, War of 1812, &c.—are entitled to land; forty acres for service of one month; eighty acres for four months, and 160 acres for nine months. By a later act, if the time falls a little short for either amount, we are allowed to add one day for every twenty miles to and from the place of enlistment. In many cases, I am then enabled to increase the amount of land for those who have already received warrants. Those wounded while on duty receive 160 acres, without regard to time.

- 11.—When the soldier has died, leaving a widow, she is entitled—and it makes no difference how many times she may have been since married, provided she be a widow at the time of making application—but if there be no soldier or widow, then the children under twenty-one years of age only, are entitled to the land.
- 12.—Persons who lost property by the enemy or Indians, or had it taken by our Government, can recover the value of it.

Navy Pensions.

- 13.—All widows or children of persons killed or dying in the United States Naval Service, may receive pensions

Invalid Pensions.

- 14.—In every case where a person is injured in any war in the Navy, or of the Regular Army, Militia, or Volunteers, whether in time of peace or war, I can procure a pension for him during life.

Illinois and Ohio Lands.

15.—Many officers and soldiers of the Revolution who were entitled to land as above said, had it located in Ohio, and never sold it. About 30,000, acres of the soldiers of the last war with England had their land set out to them in Illinois and never conveyed to. Now, in such cases, I can find cash sales for these rights. In all cases where the soldier has been bound to speak of such land, or has left any writing whatever respecting it, the heirs will do well to write me on the subject, as I have the names and particulars of all who had land in Illinois, and the means of ascertaining about the other. I will also find sale for such titles as are now in second or third hands. In such cases, all papers having a bearing, and such information as can be had, should be sent to me, as it will materially aid us in the business. Letters should be Per-paid.

NEW LAW—PENSIONS FOR WIDOWS!

16.—By this Law, just passed, I am able to obtain pensions for all Widows, now living, of Revolutionary Soldiers, no matter when they were married. I can also procure pensions for the widows or minor children of all those soldiers who died in any war since the Revolution; or who have since died by reason of any accident or wound incurred in any service. Again—all widows or children who have drawn five years' pension, may now have it continued for another term of five years. Another marriage does not defeat the claim, if there be now a widow or minor children, or if there were such for a short time after the last drawing. Let all who think they have a claim, write me, stating all the circumstances of the case.

In all cases where I return this circular in answer to letters of inquiry, I will draw lines under those parts which are intended as an answer, and refer to the subject inquired about.

When writing me, I request you to send me, at the same time, all letters, deeds or other papers of writing, and all the information they have, or can give, in regard to their business. And it is especially necessary to give me names of officers, time of service, marriages, and death of parties, &c., &c.

Persons receiving this, will be able to judge whether they have a good claim; and if so, I will draft and send them at once, on request, the proper papers to be executed, in order that it may be obtained.

Those not having claims, who may expect this, are respectfully requested to act as correspondents, and they shall receive a fair proportion of the results of all foregoing laws.

Having personally examined, lately, the public books in the West, I am able to locate land warrants on choice tracts, next my horses and riders, within, for years to come, it must rise rapidly in value. By my plan, it costs the owner nothing to locate his land, and he chooses for merchandise, and is, by far, the best disposition that can be made of warrants by soldiers and other holders of merchandise, and is, by far, the best disposition that can be made of warrants.

I will, at any time, buy of the owners all lands located by me, refunding the first cost or price of them and 10 per cent. interest in addition.

I will buy land warrants, and pay cash, the highest market price.

I have the Government forms, and will draw up for others, assignments of warrants, powers to locate, or any documents whatever.

Let it be understood, that I make no charge for services in any claim, unless the claimant is benefited, and then only a reasonable per centage of the sum recovered, which per centage should be regulated by the amount of time, money, and labor I expend in getting up the case.

From years of experience in this business, and intimate acquaintance with the Government officers, I think I can present to those who may contract to use their business, a fair prospect of success, and prompt attention to their several claims.

A. D., 1833. } ALFRED J. WORKS, *General Agent*,

ADLPHI BUILDING, NEW HAVEN, CONN.

* From the Mr. Woods' long experience in such matters, and his former business habits, we recommend Mr. W. to those having claims before employing attorneys. New Haven Journal, Oct. 17, 1833.
We are pleased to see his business in so flourishing a state, and wish the successful success in this business (where he made for himself all competitors, by the way) to the untiring energy, unswerving business talents, and a thorough knowledge of the beneficiary results of advertising. Mr. Woods, are superior to those of any one else in the same line, and we confidently recommend him to any persons as a man of entire integrity, and to every object of accomplishing any thing he may undertake.—New Haven Journal, Nov. 13, 1833.

The half-cent rate was intended by Congress to be applied exclusively to newspapers and periodicals as a sub-category of the full range of printed matter covered by this act. Newspapers and periodicals were defined by postal laws over many years; by 1852 it was well-established that they had to be published with a certain minimum rate of frequency and mailed to subscribers. A *circular* containing information or advertising, which was mailed to non-subscribers, did not qualify as a newspaper or periodical and was not entitled to the half-cent rate concession.

However, the language in the legislative act and the postal guide published for postmasters was prone to misinterpretation. In the case of the Half-Cent Bisect cover, the discounted rate was erroneously applied to printed matter other than a newspaper or periodical. How might this happen? The 1852 “Table of Postages” shown below lists the rates for “Each newspaper, periodical, unsealed circular, or other article of printed matter (except books,) when sent to any part of the United States*” with the asterisk pointing to a note at the bottom of the table. This note reads, “Each newspaper, or periodical not exceeding one ounce and a half in weight, where circulated in the State where published, is subject to a postage of one half cent only.” A postal patron, postmaster or clerk could easily have been misled into thinking that the “one half cent” rate applied to the entire category before the asterisk, including circulars.

In June 1853 an attorney in New Haven, Connecticut, accustomed to squeezing profit from the laws of Congress and known to bend the rules for his own financial benefit, used the Act of August 30, 1852, to save money on a bulk mailing of advertising circulars to residents of his home state. His name was Alfred J. Works.

continued

Rates of Postage to be charged upon each Newspaper, Periodical, Book, unsealed Circular, and every other article of Printed Matter, transient or otherwise, from and after 30th September, 1852.

	Weighing 1 ounce, or under.	Over 1 ounce, and not over 2 ounces.	Over 2 ounces, and not over 3 ounces.	Over 3 ounces, and not over 4 ounces.	Over 4 ounces, and not over 5 ounces.	Over 5 ounces, and not over 6 ounces.	Over 6 ounces, and not over 7 ounces.	Over 7 ounces, and not over 8 ounces.	When weighing at least 8 ounces.	Over 8 ounces, and not over 9 ounces.	Over 9 ounces, and not over 10 ounces.	Over 10 ounces, and not over 11 ounces.	Over 11 ounces, and not over 12 ounces.	Over 12 ounces, and not over 13 ounces.	Over 13 ounces, and not over 14 ounces.	Over 14 ounces, and not over 15 ounces.	Over 15 ounces, and not over 16 ounces.
	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.
Each newspaper, periodical, unsealed circular, or other article of printed matter, (except books,) when sent to any part of the United States*.....	1	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	.	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Transient newspapers, periodicals, &c., sent to any part of the United States, not prepaid.....	2	2	2	4	6	8	10	12	.	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28
Packages of small newspapers published monthly or oftener, and pamphlets not containing more than sixteen octavo pages, when sent to one address, in packages weighing at least eight ounces, and prepaid by postage stamp.....	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	4	4½	5	5½	6	6½	7	7½	8
Books, bound or unbound, not weighing over four pounds, for any distance under 3,000 miles, when prepaid.....	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	.	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
The same when not prepaid.....	1½	3	4½	6	7½	9	10½	12	.	13½	15	16½	18	19½	21	22½	24
The same for any distance over 3,000 miles, when prepaid.....	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	.	18	20	22	24	26	28	30	32
The same when not prepaid.....	3	6	9	12	15	18	21	24	.	27	30	33	36	39	42	45	48

*Notes.—Each newspaper, or periodical not exceeding one ounce and a half in weight, when circulated in the State where published, is subject to a postage of one half cent only.
[Small newspapers, &c., when sent in packets of less than eight ounces, or to more than one address, must be rated singly.]

“Table of Postages” issued by Postmaster General S. D. Hubbard on October 13, 1852.

Alfred J. Works—New Haven Attorney and Convicted Felon

We would probably know very little about the life of Alfred J. Works if he had not run afoul of the law in 1853. Just two months after sending the Half-Cent Bisect circular, Works and his young legal clerk, James H. Conklin, were tried and convicted of attempting to obtain \$4,000 through a fraudulent Revolutionary War pension claim submitted to the Pension Bureau on behalf of a soldier's widow. Works was sentenced to two years in a Connecticut state prison. Newspapers reported the conviction as part of a government crackdown on fraudulent pension claims, exactly the type of legal work solicited by Works in the circular he mailed to Mrs. Julia A. Goff.



Advertising cover for the "Western Land Agency. Bounty Land" legal practice of Alfred J. Works, addressed in the same hand as Half-Cent Bisect cover and postmarked at New Haven on June 25 (ca. 1853), correctly prepaid for 3¢ letter rate.

A fascinating account of Works' life is given in his obituary in the *New Haven Register* (March 16, 1885—shown opposite). According to the biographer, Works left his position as a schoolteacher in East Haven, Connecticut, to become a pension agent in New Haven. He ran into trouble as a consequence of an underhanded ploy to avoid losing money in an ill-conceived wager. As the election of 1852 approached, Works bet \$100 with a local Democrat that General Winfield Scott would win. When defeat seemed probable, Works finagled his way out of the loss, thus inciting the wrath of his betting opponent. Suspicious of Works, the wronged man contacted the commissioner of pensions, Loren C. Waldo, and persuaded him to investigate claims submitted by Works. The investigator assigned to the case discovered that Works had inserted false information into an affidavit after it had been signed by the widow of a Revolutionary War soldier named John Lillie. The forged document was incriminating evidence that resulted in a fraud conviction for Works and Conklin, his apparently unwitting accomplice. They were sentenced to two years in prison, but Conklin was pardoned. While in prison, Works defied the rules again by secretly obtaining copies of a New York newspaper, and he served some of his time in a darkened cell as punishment.

The trial of Messrs. Alfred J. Works and James H. Conklin, whose trial commenced a few days since before the United States Court on a charge of fraud, &c., in attempting to obtain a pension for the heirs of Col. John Lillie, has just terminated with a most sad result to them—the Jury having found them guilty.—Mr. Works has been engaged in the practice of law here for two or three years, and been highly esteemed for his kindness of heart and other excellent qualities. His many friends feel shocked at this result of his trial—neither he or they believing for a moment that he could be convicted. Young Conklin has also stood well among his friends, and had as we learn no special interest in the success of the pension case in which he was engaged as the clerk of Mr. Works. Mr. Works has an interesting family, who will never believe him guilty of any criminal intent, whatever the world may say or think—neither do we.—*N. H. Palladium.*

New London Chronicle, August 26, 1853, reporting the conviction of Alfred J. Works and his legal clerk, James H. Conklin, for pension fraud.

After his release from prison, Works moved to New York City and, according to his biographer, engaged in “peculiar real estate transactions which again got him into trouble, but his shrewdness was sufficient to carry him through various troublesome affairs.”

Obviously, Alfred Works was not above finding an obscure legislative act that provided a fifty-percent discount on certain kinds of bulk mailings, and then twisting the law a bit for his own pecuniary interest. His success at the post office was no doubt aided by the inexperienced, newly-appointed postmaster of New Haven, Lucius A. Thomas.

continued

DEATH OF ALFRED J. WORKS.

A Reminiscence of a Trial For Forgery Which Grew Out of a Transaction Connected With the Campaign of General Winfield Scott. An Ingenious Scheme to Get Money From the Government.

The death of Alfred J. Works, formerly of this city, but recently of Washington, D. C., recalls somewhat of his career in New Haven. He was at one time a school teacher in East Haven and gave up the business to adopt that of a pension agent, having his office in the Adelphi building. He was in politics a republican and a transaction connected with the Scott campaign brought him into serious trouble with the government. He had made a bet of \$100 with a prominent democrat here, that General Winfield Scott would be elected to the presidency. Just before election day, it appearing to him that he would lose his money, he procured a friend, under the name of Hathaway, to factorize on E. S. Rowland, the stakeholder for an alleged debt due Hathaway, the plan being to get the money out of the stakeholder's hand into his own. The ruse was successful, but the suit did not come to trial. The democrat who had made the bet in good faith, was indignant at the trick. He assumed that a man who could do as had Works, could not be very honest. He wrote a letter to the commissioner of pensions, Loren C. Waldo, asking if the pension business of Mr. Works was honestly done. The commissioner inquired of Congressman Ingersoll what he knew of Works.

Not getting any particular information about the man, the commissioner employed a detective in his department to examine the pension claims sent to the department by Mr. Works. The detective chanced to fall

upon the case of the widow of John Lillie, entitled, as it appeared to about \$3,000 back pay and a pension, as the widow of a Revolutionary soldier. The Lillies lived in Massachusetts. The detective went to that state. He found that an affidavit had been made to a falsehood. The applicant stated in her petition “that she had never married again,” when in fact she had been again married, thus debarring herself from all just claims on the government.

In the office of Mr. Works, as an assistant, was a cheerful, good natured young fellow named Conklin. He prepared the applications. One day, while writing the application for the Lillies his employer, Mr. Works, directed him to leave a certain space in one of the lines, blank. The papers were then sent to Massachusetts where the parties interested signed them and the necessary certificate of the resident notary was affixed.

Before being sent to Washington, Mr. Works persuaded his clerk to insert in the application where the blank space had been left the words “and she never married again.”

The insertion of the lie, after the papers had all been duly sworn to, constitute a forgery by which the government was to suffer.

Works was very influential in republican circles. His arrest by the government detective was followed by other legal proceedings, and much effort was made to have the whole matter drop. These did not prevail, and the case against Works and his clerk was tried before the late Judge Charles A. Ingersoll of the United States district court, then sitting in the old state house. For the defense appeared Hon. Ralph L. Ingersoll, a brother of the judge. He endeavored to have Works and his clerk tried upon separate indictments, claiming that one might not be so guilty as the other, but in this was unsuccessful. Conklin, from a mistaken but chivalrous sense of duty to his employer, positively refused to turn state evidence. It was believed that he had been simply the dupe

of Alfred J. Works, and it was hoped that he might escape being punished.

The two, on being tried together, were convicted of the forgery. The mother and sister of Conklin paid a visit to the judge to beg for a light sentence. Other efforts were made in his behalf. Works was sentenced for a longer term to the Connecticut state prison than Conklin, the latter getting two years only. He was afterward pardoned through the intercession of the late James F. Babcock and others, while Works, who was not a favorite with his keepers, served the full term of years.

On getting out of prison Works went to New York and was there engaged in peculiar real estate transactions which again got him into trouble, but his shrewdness was sufficient to carry him through various troublesome affairs.

His clerk was, on coming to New Haven, after his release, visited by the late James Brewster, who made him his trusted clerk. He was afterward a bookkeeper for the late O. F. Winchester and later for the Hooker Carriage company, he representing, also, Mr. Brewster's stock in that concern. He is at present in the west, engaged in the lumber business.

The deceased Mr. Works leaves two sons and a daughter. One of the sons resides in Washington, the other in New York.

A feature of the trial of Works and Conklin was the appearance on the witness stand of the then very venerable pastor Todd of the East Haven Congregational church.

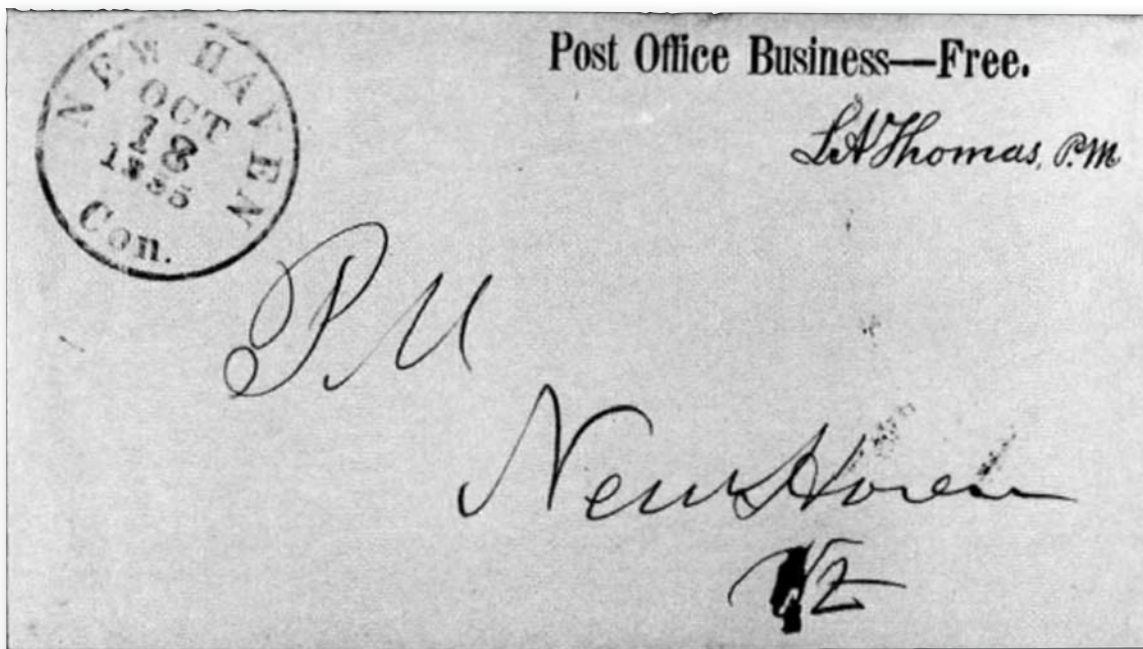
While in state prison the friends of the prisoners made a secret arrangement whereby they received copies of the New York Tribune, through the connivance of one of the keepers. For this, Works was subjected to the punishment of a dark cell. He, while in durance, wrote a novel, founded upon incidents of the revolutionary war, but it was probably never published.

New Haven Register, March 16, 1885, obituary of Alfred J. Works with details of his criminal conviction in 1853.

Lucius A. Thomas—New Haven's New Postmaster in June 1853

The 1852 election ushered into the White House a little-known former U.S. senator from New Hampshire named Franklin Pierce. The Democratic ticket of Pierce and King won by a huge margin over the Whig candidate, General Winfield Scott (who was nominated instead of the incumbent Millard Fillmore), and the Free Soil candidate, John P. Hale (also from New Hampshire). The change in administrations, from Whig to Democratic, resulted in a large number of new politically-motivated postmaster appointments. In June 1853, New Haven got a new postmaster—Lucius A. Thomas.

Thomas' predecessor, John B. Robertson, had been appointed postmaster of New Haven on June 14, 1849, replacing the philatelically-renowned Edward A. Mitchell, producer of the New Haven provisional stamps. Robertson, a Whig advocate, was appointed by Zachary Taylor, the successful Whig candidate in 1848. Taylor died in office and was succeeded by his vice president, Millard Fillmore. Following the shift from Whigs to Democrats in 1852 and Pierce's inauguration in 1853, Robertson was replaced with Thomas, a local Democratic supporter. The salary records show that Robertson's last day was May 31, 1853, and Thomas officially started on June 1, four weeks before Alfred Works brought his half-cent circulars to the office for mailing.



Free frank envelope from Lucius A. Thomas (1806-1879), New Haven's postmaster when the 1851 Half-Cent Bisect was mailed by Alfred J. Works. Thomas was appointed April 22, 1853, and his salary started on June 1 (photo courtesy of Frank Mandel).

Alfred Works' office and the post office's temporary quarters were both located in the Adelphi Building. The original post office, situated in Brewster's Hall across the street from the Adelphi Building, was being rebuilt when Thomas assumed his duties as postmaster. Thomas continued as postmaster under President Buchanan, and the post office was moved to Church Street in 1860 (source: E. E. Atwater, *History of the City of New Haven to the Present Time*). Thomas was succeeded by Nehemiah D. Sperry in April 1861 after Lincoln's election.

The half-cent rate and the use of a bisectonal one-cent stamp might have been viewed with skepticism by a more seasoned postmaster. However, Lucius Thomas was one month into his new job when the half-cent circulars were brought to the post office by Works. It is not difficult to visualize Works presenting a bundle of printed circulars, each stamped with half of a one-cent stamp, and explaining the 1852 regulations that provided a fifty-percent discount for in-state “printed matter.” Without a directive from the Post Office Department forbidding bisectonal stamps—that would not come for at least another ten weeks—and reading the postal guide as a non-lawyer and inexperienced postal administrator, Postmaster Thomas might have felt assured by the local lawyer’s ostensibly sound explanation.

So, the blue printed advertising notices were postmarked on June 29 and sent on their way. The one addressed to Hartford was carried in the locked pouch on the mail car travelling on Post Office Route 687 from New Haven to Hartford on the Hartford & New Haven Rail Road. The Hartford postmaster, William J. Hamersley, was equally obliging (or confused), and his office did not mark the Works notice postage due. The addressee probably would have refused to pay the postage due anyway. Julia Alvira Goff was born in Connecticut around 1799 and married a farm laborer from Middlesex named Sarsfield Gilmore. Julia turns up in later records as a housekeeper with children and very little means to support them. She was on Works’ mailing list, so he must have found her on a list of potential needy cases.

19th Century United States Bisected Stamps

The use of a fraction of a stamp to pay the corresponding rate seems quite natural and acceptable. At certain points in different postal systems—Mexico, for example—bisects were accepted without question. However, U.S. postal officials had an exaggerated fear that re-used stamps—possibly in the form of bisects—were costing the system revenue. For decades after the introduction of stamps for general use in July 1847, postal officials claimed that re-use of stamps was a serious problem. During the 1860’s, Charles F. Steel, a security printer and holder of the stamp-grilling patent capitalized on the hysteria over stamp cleaning to make the grilling process a money-making (for him) part of the government contract for producing postage stamps.

Cleaning off the cancellation was one way to use a stamp twice. Another way was to take the uncanceled parts of two different stamps and piece them together to make what appeared to be a whole stamp. Realistically, stamp re-use was probably quite limited and had no serious impact on postal revenues. We know that young women at boarding schools had a penchant for decorating the four corners of an envelope with the corners of a stamp, and affixing the cut-out vignette in the middle. Close examination of these “decorative” covers reveals that some were made by naughty girls who used uncanceled parts of different stamps to stretch their school allowance.

Postal officials feared that if a stamp were cancelled across less than half of its design, then an unscrupulous individual could cut off the cancelled half and use the remaining uncanceled half as postage. The potential for bisectonal fraud is what led the Post Office Department to issue notices prohibiting postmasters from accepting bisects, and to eventually incorporate an official ban on “fractional parts of postage stamps” into the general rules of the Postal Laws & Regulations in 1876. *continued*

continued from previous page

The use of bisected stamps is found on covers dating back to the origins of adhesive postage in the United States. The cover at right was carried to Detroit in 1844 by Independent Mail companies. It bears a horizontal bisect of the Wells' Letter Express 10¢ stamp used as 5¢. The bisect was applied by one of the three private mail companies involved in transporting the letter, as a means of crediting one of the other companies for its share of the express fee.



Half of Wells' Letter Express 10¢ stamp used with American Letter Mail Co. stamps in September 1844—an early bisect.

There are no recorded examples of a Postmaster's Provisional stamp bisected for a lesser rate, although such an item could exist in theory. For example, the St. Louis provisional stamps were issued in 5¢, 10¢ and 20¢ denominations. A 10¢ stamp could have been bisected for the 5¢ under-300 miles rate, or half of a 20¢ stamp could have been used for one of the 10¢ rates based on distance and weight.

Widespread use of bisects occurred between July 1847 and July 1851, when the 5¢ and 10¢ 1847 General Issue stamps were valid for postage. There were 2¢ and 2½¢ rates that could be prepaid by a 5¢ bisect, but no such form of prepayment has been discovered. However, the 5¢ under-300 miles rate was prepaid by a 10¢ 1847 bisect in numerous instances, as evidenced by approximately 100 genuine covers recorded in the Alexander census, a statistically significant number of examples.

The two letters shown at left and below come from the J. M. Lewis correspondence. They originated in New Haven in June 1851, during Postmaster Robertson's term.



Two 10¢ 1847 bisects used on folded letters mailed from New Haven in June 1851.



In fact, ten of the 98 recorded 10¢ 1847 bisect covers were used at New Haven by five different senders. This multi-user pattern of bisect stamp use at New Haven shows a precedent established during Postmaster Robertson's term that certainly would have made his successor, Lucius Thomas, more receptive to the use of bisects when he took over in June 1853. The absence of any recorded 3¢ or 12¢ 1851 Issue bisects from New Haven reflects the lack of need, not a prohibition against their use.

The most pressing need for 1851 Issue bisects arose in California, where a shortage of 3¢ stamps for the 6¢ transcontinental rate resulted in the prolific use of 12¢ bisects. According to Jim Allen, who has maintained the census of 12¢ 1851 bisect covers started by Thomas J. Alexander, 70% of the 128 imperforate 12¢ bisect covers originated in San Francisco or nearby post offices. According to Allen, 75% of 12¢ 1851 bisect covers were accepted as prepaid without any postage due marked on the cover. Allen also records 16 3¢ 1851 bisect covers, all of which were accepted.

Examples of 3¢ and 12¢ 1851 bisects used from California and accepted for postage are shown below. The 3¢ bisect pays the rate for a printed circular, and the two 12¢ bisects pay the 6¢ transcontinental rate.



3¢ and 12¢ 1851 Issue bisects paying the rates for printed matter and regular mail from California in 1852 and 1853.



12¢ 1851 bisects from the same stamp on two different folded covers sent by the same forwarder in New York City in August 1851 (ex Wagshal collection).

Use of 1851 Issue bisects was not limited to the West Coast. The earliest recorded 1851 bisects are found on a pair of covers sent from New York City to Quebec, Canada, on August 21, 1851. The two halves of the same stamp were affixed by the same forwarding agent to two letters with additional 1¢ stamps to pay the 10¢ rate. Other bisect covers are known from major post offices, proving that postmasters tolerated bisect stamp use, at least until the Post Office Department issued directives in 1853 that specifically banned post offices from accepting bisects.

continued

During the 1851 Issue period, bisected stamps were used and accepted on a variety of mail. Shown below are examples of bisects paying different rates. The cover at top is quite remarkable, since it bears a strip of four 3¢ 1851 bisects. Obviously, the stamps had been cut into strips of bisects in preparation for use on printed matter. In this case, a heavier envelope was stamped with four halves. It is not possible to determine if the rate was 6¢ (double regular mail) or 4¢ (quadruple printed matter). Whatever it was, the post offices at Milton and Medway, Massachusetts, accepted the payment.



3¢ and 12¢ 1851 bisects showing a variety of rates, including a strip of four 3¢ bisects (4¢ or 6¢ rate), and 12¢ bisects used with other 1851 Issue stamps for the 9¢ triple rate and 10¢ rate to British North America.

Research by Jim Allen has uncovered the earliest official public notice from the Post Office Department disallowing bisectational stamps. 1st Assistant PMG Selah R. Hobbie's directive was published on September 12, 1853, and various newspapers included similar notices during the following weeks (an example is shown below). He has also found other significant documentation related to bisect use, including a reference to the use of 1¢ 1851 bisects for a half-cent rate. Allen's complete findings will be published in *Chronicle* 239 in August 2013.

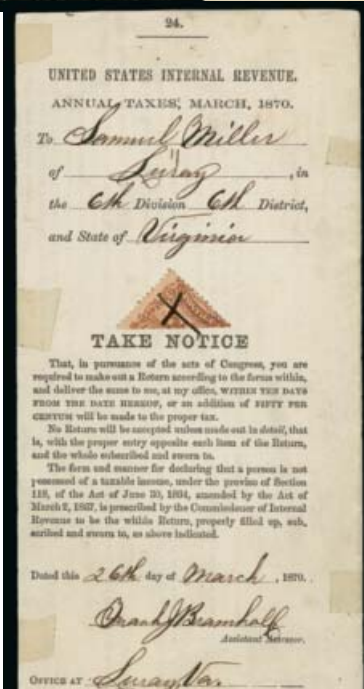


The Postmaster General has decided that half of a 12 cent Stamp, placed upon letters for double postage, is not to be regarded as payment.

Pittsfield Mass. Sun, September 22, 1853, notice that the Postmaster General specifically prohibited use of bisected 12¢ stamps. The letter at left from San Francisco arrived at New York City on October 10 and was treated as unpaid.



Bisected stamps from the 1863 and 1869 Pictorial Issues used to pay a variety of rates, including 1¢ drop letter, 2¢ printed matter and 3¢ regular domestic mail.



The September 1853 ban on bisecting stamp use did not have the force of law, but it certainly affected how post offices treated letters prepaid with anything less than a full stamp. At the same time, the use of embossed stamps cut from postal stationery envelopes was prohibited, despite a public outcry that cut-out embossed stamps should be treated as valid postage.

Use of bisects dropped significantly after September 1853, if the number of recorded covers is any indication. No 10¢ 1855 or 5¢ 1856 bisects are known. The entire perforated 1857-60 Issue is represented by only four 12¢ bisect covers.

During the Civil War there was a resurgence of bisecting stamp use, especially at small post offices. The 2¢ Black Jack, with and without grill, is found bisected for the 1¢ drop-letter rate or in combination with a complete 2¢ for the 3¢ rate (other rates are recorded). No other denominations of the 1861-68 Issue are known in bisected form, but the subsequent 1869 Pictorial Issue is represented by fractional use of three different denominations: 2¢ (half), 3¢ (one-third and two-third fractions) and 6¢ (half).

Use of 2¢ and 6¢ bisects continued into the 1870-75 Bank Note Issue period, but generally ceased after the General Rules of the Postal Laws & Regulations were amended in 1876 with a specific declaration that "Fractional parts of postage stamps will not be recognized in prepayment of postage" *continued*

Discovery of the 1851 Half-Cent Bisect

There are really no true *first discoveries* in philately. From the moment an item is created—a printed stamp, a postal marking or a piece of mail—it has been “discovered.” The period between creation and entry into the appreciative circle of philatelists is when an item lies unrecognized for its significance and value. Previously unrecorded examples of known (or catalogued) items are still found with some frequency. However, the emergence of a completely new category of item—such as the 1851 Half-Cent Bisect—is an unusual event. Such discoveries not only change the tally of items, but they create a new type of item to count. They also have the potential to change our view of postal history or stamp production.

Covers usually spend the dormant period before discovery with non-collectors, such as businesses and families in possession of archival correspondence. When a previously unknown cover enters the philatelic arena, it becomes *recorded* for the first time. The 1851 Half-Cent Bisect is a remarkable discovery in many ways, but the first is provenance. It was not found in an old trunk owned by Julia Goff’s descendants, but had actually been in philatelic/numismatic hands for decades.

The cover was acquired by a collector several years ago from a midwestern stamp and coin dealer who had been in business since just after World War II and had purchased numerous collections from various owners and estates. When the dealer was more or less retired, he began to sort through many dozens of cartons of accumulated material. As he sorted items he put aside the covers for further study.

Eventually the dealer agreed to let his collector friend help him sort through the boxes of covers and choose items to purchase. During this lengthy process, the collector bought a number of interesting items, and then came across the 1851 Half-Cent Bisect cover. The dealer offered it for a very reasonable price, remarking “too bad it wasn’t tied or it would be a great item.” His comment reflects the mindset that bisects must be tied by a cancel across the cut, even though such ties occur purely by coincidence.

In 2007 the collector posted an image of his acquisition on the Frajola internet chat board, asking for information about the peculiar half-cent bisect. One of the board followers, Roland H. Cipolla II, immediately recognized the item as an in-state circular prepaid for the half-cent rate applicable to newspapers and periodicals. The next day Cipolla succeeded in buying the cover, “as is” and based entirely on the scanned image.

The cover’s journey from Julia Goff in Connecticut to an old-time collection, then to a midwest dealer, followed by his lucky collector friend, and, finally, to Ron Cipolla, leads to the starting point of the effort to verify the item’s genuineness.

Expertizing the 1851 Half-Cent Bisect

The upper right diagonal half of the 1¢ Type IV imperforate stamp from Plate 1 Late was affixed to the upper left corner of the folded notice. When the New Haven post office employee struck the June 29 datestamp on the stamp and the address side of the notice, he missed the edge of the cut by millimeters. Therefore, the stamp is tied along two sides, but the datestamp does not overlap the cut and the underlying paper on the other side. The absence of a “tie” is what led the coin dealer to denigrate his own item. It also created the need for special authentication procedures to ensure that the stamp and cover had never been altered or manipulated to create a bisect from a whole stamp.

In August 2010 the cover was brought to the Smithsonian National Postal Museum in Washington D.C. where tests were performed by Ron Cipolla and Thomas Lera (NPM Blount Chair) on a piece of equipment called the VSC 6000. The initials stand for Video Spectral Comparator, a digital imaging system designed to detect irregularities in altered or counterfeit documents. Under various forms of illumination, from ultraviolet through visible to infrared wavelengths, the cover showed no signs of manipulation, such as a shadow of the other half of the stamp, residue of gum outside the boundary of the bisect, or an erased postage due marking.

A second round of testing was performed in May 2012, using X-ray fluorescence (XRF) on a Bruker Tracer III machine and infrared spectroscopy on a FTIR spectrometer. These tests reveal the chemical composition of documents, including paper, ink and chemical residue. The results of the XRF and FTIR tests confirmed that all of the elements of the cover—the stamp, postmark and paper—were original and unaltered, and that nothing was missing or had been removed from the cover, such as another stamp (or half stamp) or due marking.

Ron Cipolla submitted the 1851 Half-Cent Bisect cover for examination and certification by The Philatelic Foundation, and on October 23, 2012, certificate 507181 was issued, stating that the cover was a genuine use of the bisect. His article documenting the discovery and the details of the expertizing process was published in *Chronicle* 237 (February 2013).



We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of James Allen (for information regarding 1851 Issue bisects), John Barwis (for the 1852 postage table), William Duffney (for information regarding New Haven's postmasters) and Hugh Feldman (for information on the railroad route).

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