

Fake Columbia, South Carolina, Five-Cent Handstamped Provisionals

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This article is based on new information and research concerning Columbia, South Carolina, provisionals. It illustrates how such information can affect long-standing opinions of items of Confederate postal history.

In March 2014, the Confederate Stamp Alliance Authentication Service received for examination the cover illustrated in figures 1 and 2, and hereafter referred to as the “subject cover.” The envelope bears a Columbia, South Carolina, five-cent black, handstamped provisional but has no postmark. A Columbia five-cent black provisional marking is listed in the *Scott Specialized Catalog* (18XU2), but it is not listed in the *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*.¹ The marking, if authentic, would provide proof of the elusive black marking.

It was quickly determined that the marking was consistent with the listed blue marking of the same design. Further, it did not resemble any of the recorded fakes. At this point, attention turned to the color of the marking

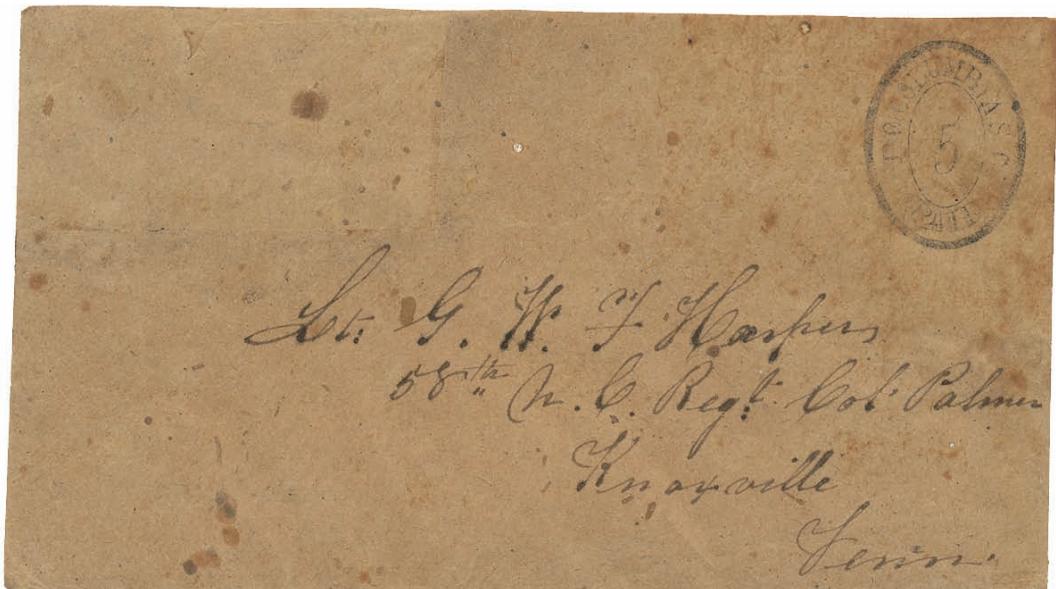


Figure 1. Columbia, South Carolina, black five-cent handstamp provisional on cover with upper left portion of cover cut out. Courtesy Confederate Stamp Alliance Authentication Service

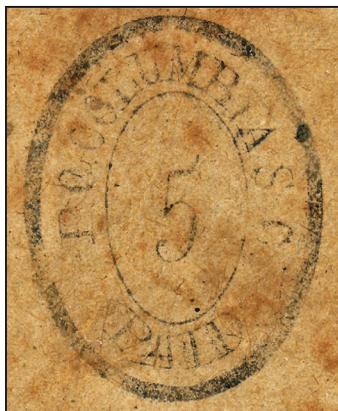


Figure 2. Enlargement of the black marking on the subject cover.

as this was the most important aspect of the cover. For this reason, the cover was sent to Harry Brittain for analysis. The results of his tests showed that the ink of the marking was carbon black with no other components that would result in a blue color.

Attention next turned to the address on the cover. Information obtained from the University of North Carolina confirmed that Lt. G. W. F. Harper was George Washington Finley Harper, who enlisted in Company H, 58th North Carolina Infantry, in 1862. He was promoted First Lieutenant in July 1862 and Captain in 1863. The 58th North Carolina Infantry Regiment was deployed north of Knoxville, Tennessee, in the Cumberland Gap area. The Knoxville address fits the general location of Lt. Harper in 1862–63. The envelope has no postmark, but the upper left corner is cut away. Originally there may have been a postmark in the cut away area. There is also a possibility that the cover was a leftover provisional carried outside the mail. Either use in 1862 or 1863 is plausible.

Researching auction catalogs and literature revealed that the cover was previously owned by Albert Leon Adutt. Next, it appeared in the John A. Kaufmann sale of the David Kohn collection in 1973.² Coincidentally, a second example was in the March 10–12, 2014, Schuyler Rumsey Sale (fig. 3).³

The Charles Phillips census of Confederate provisionals listed no five-cent black Columbia markings, but Frank Hart's census listed four as follows:

- No date; to Mrs. James C. Wetmore, Box 618, PO. (Frank Hart)
- No date; to Lt. Harper, Knoxville, Tenn. (David Kohn)
- Aug 26, 1861; to I. A. Brice, Esq., Zongriesville [sic], S. C. (Philip Silver)
- July 15; to Mr. Ralph Gorrell, Greensboro, N. C. (Earl Weatherly)⁴

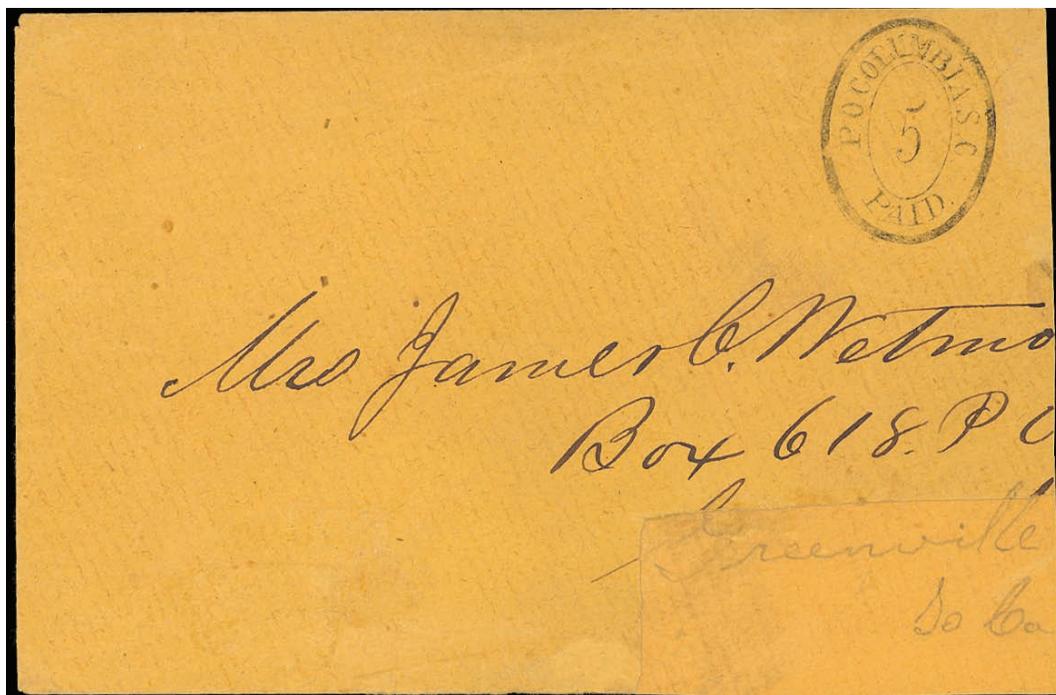


Figure 3. Black Columbia, South Carolina, five-cent handstamp provisional on cover, which is reduced on the right side. Courtesy Schuyler Rumsey Auctions

The first two, with no date, are the subject cover and the cover in the Rumsey sale. As noted earlier, the subject cover has a portion of the upper left corner removed, and the Rumsey cover is reduced at the right. Were these alterations purposely made to remove postmarks? We will never know. The second two covers with dates were not located.

Based on the available evidence, the examiners concluded that the black provisional marking was authentic. On March 24, 2014, certificate 05879 was issued with the opinion that the subject cover was a genuine Columbia five-cent black provisional *Scott Catalog* 18XU2.

Jump forward three years. Recently, I came across a James A. Petrie price list that included two five-cent Columbia provisionals: one described as “5c blue env., brown paper,” and one as “5c black env., brown paper.”⁵ The one listed as black caused me to recall the subject cover described above. Was Petrie’s five-cent black a fake? Could the cover in figure 1 be one of his products?

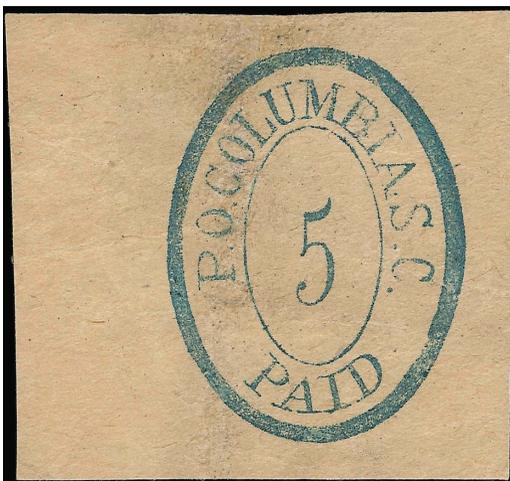
My first step in answering the question was to review the authentication file on the subject cover. The review revealed the information stated above. I then decided to look in detail at the black marking on the subject



Figure 4. *Left*: genuine five-cent blue marking; *right*: fake five-cent black marking

cover. Fortunately, the authentication file included enlargements of the provisional marking. A comparison of the two types is shown in figure 4. They looked the same at first glance, but a more detailed examination revealed significant differences between the two. The “U” in “COLUMBIA” is very narrow on the genuine blue marking, but wider on the black marking. The base of the “L” in “COLUMBIA” has a very short serif on the blue marking, but a high serif on the black marking. The flag of the numeral “5” is also distinctly different on both markings. There was no doubt that they were different markings.

To insure the difference in the images was not an anomaly, I compared the subject cover to images of other covers bearing the five-cent blue Columbia marking. Each example examined showed the same characteristics as the genuine five-cent blue in figure 4. My conclusion was



that the black marking is a fake and can be attributed to Petrie. To validate my findings, I sent the image comparisons to two Authentication Service members who originally examined the subject cover and asked for their comments. They concurred that the black marking is a fake.

Figure 5. Columbia five-cent blue hand-stamp provisional, cut square. Courtesy Robert A. Siegel Auctions



Figure 6. *Left: genuine five-cent blue marking; right: fake five-cent blue marking*

In the process of looking for images of the five-cent blue marking on cover, I ran across one that was cut square (fig. 5).⁶ The strike was so clear I took the time to compare it with the 5-cent black marking. To my surprise, they appeared to be the same. On closer examination, I found the cut square marking was different from the black marking. I also compared it with the genuine five-cent blue marking on covers. They were not the same. The marking on the cut square is a fake. Like the five-cent black fake, the five-cent blue fake has a much wider “U” in “COLUMBIA” and the base of the “L” has a much taller serif. The flag of the “5” is also different. Unlike the genuine five-cent blue and the fake five-cent black, the “PAID” at the bottom is centered between the inner and outer ovals (fig. 6).

This caused me to broaden my search for additional examples of the five-cent blue. The search uncovered two other examples with characteristics that matched the 5-cent blue cut square. Surprisingly, they were also cut square. The marking on the cut squares is different from the genuine five-cent blue marking and is not one of the recorded fake markings.⁷ Based on the blue marking listed in the Petrie price list, the blue marking on the cut squares is probably one of his products. Why he used two very similar but different designs for his fakes of the Columbia five-cent handstamped provisional marking is a mystery.

The five-cent blue fakes (all cut square) found in this study are listed below:



Figure 7. *Left*: genuine 5-cent blue; *center*: fake 5-cent blue; *right*: fake 5-cent black

- Confederate Stamp Alliance Authentication Service certificate 00718
- Philatelic Foundation certificate 213585
- Robert A. Siegel Auctions, Sale 927 (20 Dec 2006), lot 1580

The genuine and fake Columbia provisionals are illustrated in figure 7. The distinguishing characteristics of each are described as follows:

Genuine five-cent blue (left):

- a. The serif on the base of the "L" of "COLUMBIA" is short
- b. The width of the "U" in "COLUMBIA" is very narrow
- c. The "A" in "COLUMBIA" is smaller than on the fake of five-cent blue
- d. There is a period after "PAID"
- e. "PAID" is closer to the inner oval than the outer oval
- f. The ball on the "5" is large
- g. The flag on the "5" curves straight up compared to the fakes

Fake five-cent blue (center)

- a. The serif on the base of the "L" of "COLUMBIA" is tall
- b. The width of the "U" in "COLUMBIA" is wider than the genuine
- c. The "A" in "COLUMBIA" is larger than the genuine five-cent blue or fake five-cent black
- d. There is no period after "PAID"
- e. "PAID" is centered between the outer and inner ovals
- f. The ball on the "5" is small
- g. The flag on the "5" is thicker than the genuine

Fake five-cent black (right):

- a. The serif on the base of the "L" of "COLUMBIA" is tall
- b. The width of the "U" in "COLUMBIA" is wider than the genuine
- c. The "A" in "COLUMBIA" is very close to the same size as the genuine five-cent blue
- d. There is a period after "PAID" (this may not be true in all cases)
- e. "PAID" is closer to the inner oval than the outer oval
- f. The ball on the "5" is small
- g. The upward curve on the flag of the "5" is not as great compared to the genuine

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NOTES

1. Charles Snee, ed., *Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps and Covers* (Sidney, OH: Scott Publishing, 2013), 953; Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown, Jr., and Jerry S. Palazolo, eds., *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History* (n.p.: Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012), 260–61.
2. Albert Leon Adutt, "The Confederate States of America: Notes on the Postmaster's Provisional Hand Stamps on Envelopes and Wrappers," *London Philatelist*, vol. 31, no. 367 (July 1922): 169–72, 5 plates; John W. Kaufmann, *Confederate States of America, Sale 10* (Bogota, NJ: John W. Kaufmann, June 30, 1973), lot 22.
3. Schuyler J. Rumsey, *United States Postal History, Sale 55* (San Francisco: Schuyler J. Rumsey Auction Galleries, March 10–12, 2014), lot 2241.
4. Francis J. Crown, Jr., *Surveys of the Confederate Postmasters' Provisionals* (Lawrence, MA: Quarterman Publications, 1982), 79–80, 409.
5. J. A. Petrie, *List of United States, Confederate, and Foreign Stamps on Hand and for Sale by J. A. Petrie, Phillipsburg, New Jersey* (n. p.: James A. Petrie, 1889), 3.
6. Robert A. Siegel Auctions, *United States and Confederate States Postal History, Sale 927* (New York: Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, December 20, 2006), lot 1580.
7. Peter W. W. Powell and John L. Kimbrough, *Confederate States of America: Philatelic Fakes, Forgeries, and Fantasies of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (n.p.: Peter W. W. Powell and John L. Kimbrough, 2015), 156.